

AFTER THE BATTLE



ANZIO

£1.75 US \$3.50

Number 52

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NUMBER 52

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Published by Battle of Britain Prints International Ltd., 3 New Plaistow Road, Stratford, London E15 3JA, England
Telephone: 01-534 8833

Printed in Great Britain by Plaistow Press Magazines Ltd., London E15 3JA

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After the Battle is published quarterly on the 15th of February, May, August and November.

United Kingdom Newsagent Distribution:
Seymour Press Ltd., 334 Brixton Road
London SW9 7AG
Telephone 01-733 4444

United States Distribution and Subscriptions:
Bill Dean Books Ltd.,
151-49 7th Avenue,
Whitestone, New York 11357.
Telephone: 1-212-767-8632

Canadian Distribution and Subscriptions:
Vanwell Publishing Ltd.,
1 Northrup Crescent,
St. Catharines, Ontario, L2M 6P5
Telephone: (416) 937 3100

Australian Distribution:
Technical Book and Magazine Company, Pty. Ltd.,
289-299 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000.
Telephone: 663 3951

Italian Distribution:
Tuttostoria di Ermanno Albertelli
Via Spezia, 83 43100 Parma.
Telephone: 521 94702
Telex 532274 EDIALB I

Dutch Language Edition:
Quo Vadis,
F.C. Kuyperstraat 9, 3761 EG Soest.
Telephone: 02155-18641

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Front Cover: The last pillbox of the Anzio-Nettuno sea-front defences is eliminated in April 1976. Today it has been converted into a memorial dedicated to 'Universal Peace' by the Lions Club of Anzio-Nettuno (see page 2).

Centre pages: 'Anzio Annie', captured at Civitavecchia by American forces in June 1944 (see page 35) was shipped to the United States after the war and is now on display at the US Ordnance Museum at the Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. (D. E. Traub)

Back Cover: The poignant statue unveiled on the 35th anniversary of the landings, to the memory of Angelita of Anzio. (Jean Paul Pallud)

Acknowledgements: Massacre in Rome is based on *Death in Rome* by Robert Katz, published by the Macmillan Company, New York.

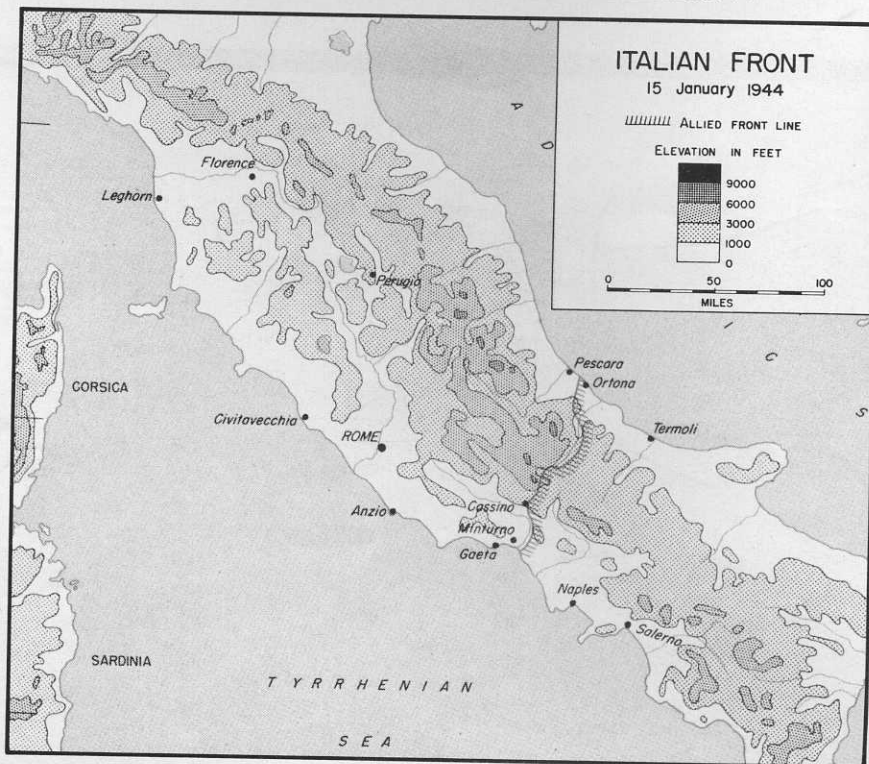
Photographs credited IWM are the copyright of the Imperial War Museum, London.

ISSN: 0306-154X

Some four months after the Allied invasion of southern Italy in September 1943, British and American troops of the US VI Corps from Lieutenant-General Mark Clark's Fifth Army landed on January 22, 1944 and established a beachhead at Anzio, south of Rome, about seventy miles behind the German Gustav Line. This was the prelude to one of the most bitter, savage and bloody campaigns of the Second World War. Its story can only be properly understood if it is seen against the preceding four months of the Italian campaign. From September 1943 until the end of the year the US Fifth and British Eighth Armies had been making slow progress up the rugged mountainous peninsula. By the beginning of 1944 both armies came up against the strongest German defensive line in the whole of Italy — the Gustav Line — and it was clear to General Sir Harold Alexander, commanding 15th Army Group, as had been suspected months earlier, that with the limited forces at his disposal at that time there was every possibility of the campaign becoming deadlocked in the winter months ahead.

German reserves would be drawn there to allow the landing at Anzio to be made successfully. When considering the supply problem of the beachhead forces, the Allied commanders agreed to think in terms of a period of twenty-eight days, a gross underestimate as it turned out.

In view of later events, and the controversy they provoked, it might be of interest to recall how the impending operation was regarded by some of those involved. Churchill hoped that 'we were hurling a wild cat on to the shore' while Admiral Sir John Cunningham spoke of 'the lightning thrust by two or three divisions'. General Alexander's Operation Instruction of January 12, 1944 stated in perhaps more soberly fashion: 'The objects of this operation will be to cut the enemy's main communications in the Colli Laziali (Alban Hills) area south-east of Rome, and to threaten the rear of the German 14 Corps' [defending the Cassino/Garigliano sector of the Gustav Line]. General Clark's Field Order of the same date gave the aims as: '(a) To seize and secure a beachhead in the vicinity of Anzio; (b) Advance on Colli Laziali . . .'

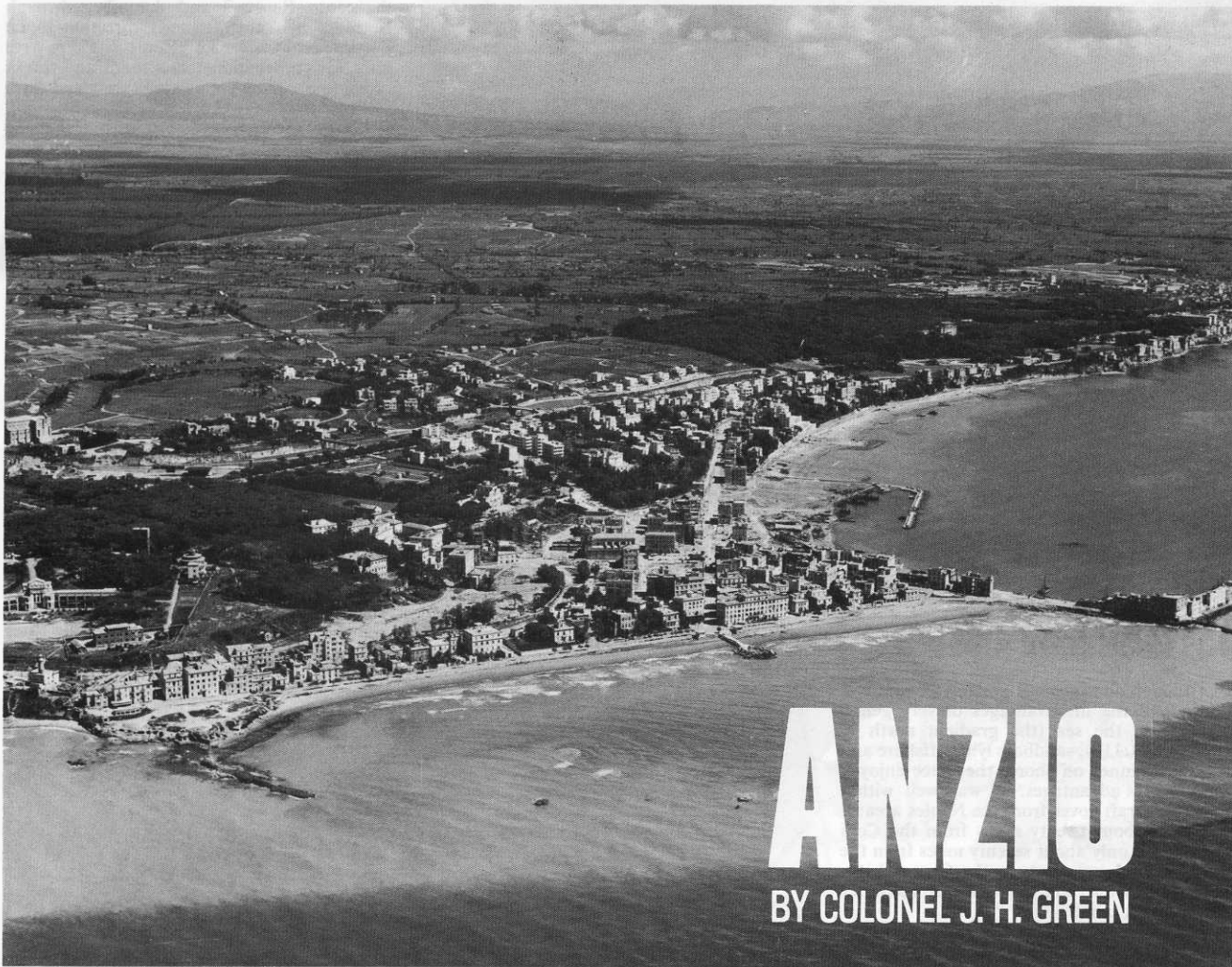


Indeed, from the very start of the Italian campaign, Allied staffs had been examining plans for possible landings on the west coast of the peninsula, in the Gulf of Gaeta, at Anzio south of Rome and Civitavecchia north of the capital. Anzio became the favoured site; a plan for a landing by one division was considered and, in the light of later events, wisely discarded. At Carthage in Tunisia, on Christmas Day 1943, the Allied Commanders-in-Chief agreed that an amphibious landing behind the German main line by not less than two divisions was necessary if the imminent deadlock was to be broken and the Allied advance up the peninsula given a new impetus. The timing was to be about January 20.

The proposed Anzio landing was to be carried out a few days after the beginning of a Fifth Army offensive (later to become known as the First Battle of Cassino) against that part of the Gustav Line between the Cassino Mountains and the Gulf of Gaeta. Thereafter, the Cassino front and the Anzio beachhead became interlocked, each in turn having a direct influence on the other. It was hoped that the strength of the Fifth Army offensive would be such that most of the available

Compared with Alexander, Clark seemed ambiguous. (b) was vague; was VI Corps to advance towards the Colli Laziali or as far as them? It was made clear to Major-General J. P. Lucas, commanding US VI Corps, that his primary objective was to secure, consolidate and hold a beachhead and only then to advance on Colli Laziali with the intention of cutting the German line of communications. It was felt by Fifth Army that he could not do both simultaneously. Lucas, in his Field Order of January 15, introduced a greater degree of ambiguity. VI Corps 'would seize and secure [the] beachhead and advance [in the] direction of Colli Laziali.'

While Clark fully supported an amphibious landing at Anzio, he and Lucas, mindful of the near disaster at Salerno only four months earlier, seemed more cautious and perhaps less optimistic than Headquarters 15th Army Group. It is doubtful if Clark shared the extraordinary optimism of his army Intelligence staff. In retrospect, there can hardly have been a better example of wishful thinking than their final summary issued on January 16: 'Within the last few days there have been increasing indications that enemy



strength on the Fifth Army front is ebbing, due to casualties, exhaustion and possibly lowering of morale. . . . From this it can be deduced that he has no fresh reserves and very few tired ones. In view of the weakening of enemy strength . . . it would appear doubtful if the enemy can hold the organised defensive line through Cassino against a coordinated army attack. Since this attack is to be launched before Shingle [the Anzio landing] it is considered likely that this additional threat [i.e. Anzio] will cause him to withdraw from his defensive position once he has appreciated the magnitude of that operation.'

The more optimistically minded among the Allied commanders seemed to think, firstly, that Fifth Army's offensive would attract German reserves from the Rome/Anzio area and allow a successful landing and, secondly, that the Anzio beachhead would so threaten the rear of the German XIV Corps that they would be forced to withdraw or at least withdraw sufficient troops to contain the beachhead forces and, in so doing, weaken the Gustav Line defences to such an extent that Fifth Army would be able to break through and advance to join up with VI Corps at Anzio. The first of these suppositions proved a more or less accurate forecast. The second, because it failed to take into consideration the role of the German Fourteenth Armee (AOK 14) in central and northern Italy, did not.

The more pessimistically minded, who probably included Clark and certainly Lucas of VI Corps, felt that, as soon as the German High Command realised the danger in which their Tenth Army (AOK 10) would be placed by any Allied advance from Anzio to the Colli Laziali, they would react violently and call on all available resources both in Italy and beyond.

Above: The view north-east from Anzio with its sheltered harbour in the right foreground across the flat coastal plain to the Alban Hills: Colli Laziali in the left background. Nettuno lies on the extreme right of the photo which was taken by Captain J. C. Hatlem in September 1944. (US Army) Below: Anzio in 1985 — now a popular holiday resort just thirty miles from Rome.



The differing views of the optimists and the pessimists were possibly due to two factors. The former pinned greater faith in the power of the Allied air forces to prevent or severely limit German reinforcements reaching Anzio

and at the same time underestimated the strength of the Gustav Line, though it had long been regarded as the strongest natural defensive line in Italy and probably one of the strongest in Europe.

