



50 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

Assault on Anzio

by Dominic J. Caraccilo

Enduring some of the most vicious fighting of WWII, the Allies withstood a life-and-death siege for 125 days in 1944 on the plains of Italy's Pontine Marshes.

Operation Shingle began Jan. 22, 1944, when the U.S. VI Corps and elements of the British 8th Army assaulted the Italian coast 30 miles southwest of Rome at Anzio.

The intent of the landing was to surprise the German Army's 14th Corps from the rear as it defended the formidable Gustav Line near Cassino. The attack on Anzio was designed to allow the U.S. 5th Army, commanded by Gen. Mark Clark, to seize the key city of Rome.

By day's end, 36,000 men had come ashore with minimal casualties (only 13 KIA and 97 WIA mostly from strafing German aircraft). But the Germans cordoned the beachhead, cornering the Allies into a perimeter some 11 miles long and seven miles deep between the Anzio and Nettuno harbors.

For four long months, the Anzio beachhead would become the scene of one of the most courageous and bloody dramas of WWII.

Under Allied Control. "There was no safe place on the Anzio beachhead," recalled Sgt. Reg Clark of the 3rd Bn., 135th Inf. Regt. of the 34th Infantry Division. "With more than 50,000 men on a plot of real estate less than a hundred square miles, chances were that an enemy bul-



A gun crew of the 1st Bn., 133rd Inf. Regt., 34th Div. readies a 37mm pack rifle in the Mt. Belvedere area, Italy. U.S. Army photo. Courtesy of Dominic Caraccilo

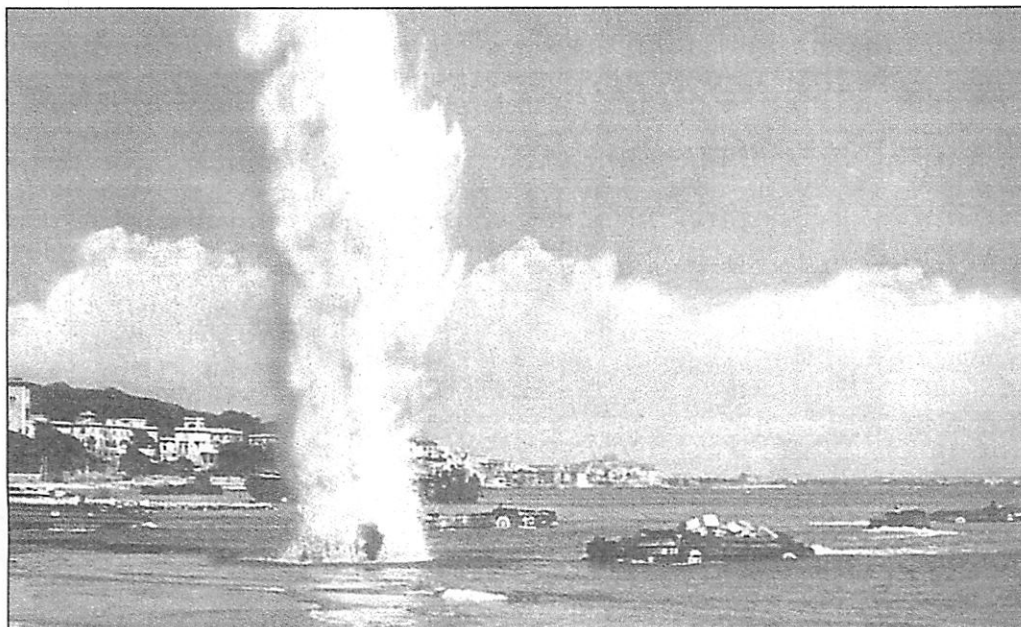
let, shell or bomb would kill one or more of our men. And the Jerries never let up."

Sgt. Allan Rossel of the 306th Air Service Squadron recalled that the Germans had dropped propaganda leaflets with a skull drawn on them and the words: "This is going to be the biggest cemetery for the Allied forces in World War II."

The first wave of the assault forces splashed ashore at three separate points. The British 9th, 43rd Commandos and portions of the 1st Division landed at Peter Beach, six miles northwest of Anzio. The center beach, X-ray Yellow, was seized by the four battalions of the U.S. 6615th Ranger Force, the 509th Parachute Infantry Bn., and the 83rd Chemical Motor Bn.

Four miles to the southeast, the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division landed three regiments (the 7th, 15th and 30th) at X-ray's Red and Green beaches.

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A German shell splashes dangerously close to a flotilla of DUKWs (amphibious trucks) shuttling in and out of the Anzio beach area. U.S. Navy

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Within hours that morning, all the port facilities at Anzio and Nettuno were under Allied control.

Other U.S. ground combat forces that ultimately participated in the battle at Anzio included: the 1st Armored Division's 6th Armored Infantry Regt., 504th Parachute Infantry Regt., 751st Tank Bn., 1st Special Service Force, 36th Combat Engineer Regt., and the 34th, 36th and 45th Infantry divisions.

Even though the Allies caught the Germans by surprise in the initial landing, they didn't expand the lodgement until Jan. 30. By then, eight German divisions were in place with another five en route. A two-pronged Allied attack toward Campoleone and Cisterna met strong resistance. The British seized Campoleone, but could go no farther.

The next day, the Americans began their attack toward Cisterna and Highway 7 by infiltrating the 1st, 3rd and 4th Ranger battalions, numbering 767 men, through the German lines and attacking en masse with the 3rd Div. and the 504th PIR. All but six of the Rangers were killed or captured. After two days of fierce fighting, the Germans pushed the Brits out of Campoleone, effectively



M-7 self-propelled 105mm howitzers of the 191st Tank Battalion firing on enemy positions. U.S. Army photo. Courtesy of Dominic Caraccilo

halting the attack.

Artillery was destined to play a crucial role at Anzio. For every shell the Germans fired, the Allies fired back 20 to 30. Silver Star recipient Cpl. James Bird of the 45th's 160th Field Artillery Bn., recalled: "At the end of the battle for Anzio, our 105mm howitzers had fired more shells than the rated tube life of each piece."

Annihilation by Artillery. Trapped in a fortress running from the Moletta River in the west to the Mussolini Canal in the east, the Allies were within deadly range and observation of German artillery.

The beachhead, now restricted to some 16 miles in breadth, was a horribly crowded place. There were no rear areas at Anzio. Recuperating soldiers, doctors, nurses and orderlies were all on the front line. Along with the dogfaces they suffered casualties from the German guns.

One of the most destructive German weapons was the Leopold Cannon — a 280mm railway gun capable of fir-

ing a 550 pound shell. Otherwise known as the "Anzio Express" or "Anzio Annie" by the troops, this railed gun was concealed in tunnels in the Alban Hills surrounding the beachhead. Belching forth destruction on the crowded beachhead, it immediately disappeared back into the tunnels hidden on the hillside.

The German 14th Army was ordered to remove the "abscess" [Anzio] from the Italian coast. On Feb. 3, the first of many German assaults on the defending Allies commenced, resulting in the capture of the British-held Factory-Carrocceto area along the Campoleone salient. The U.S. 45th Infantry Division made several unsuccessful counterattacks over the next six days, leaving the Factory in enemy hands.

VI Corps was now poised for a major confrontation. On Feb. 16, the enemy resumed its attack down the Albano road toward the beach with simultaneous assaults along the Allied front.

The 2nd and 3rd Bns., 179th Infantry and the 157th Infantry of the 45th Div. on the night of Feb. 17-18, as well as the 701st Tank Destroyer Bn. on the night of Feb. 19-20, blocked the advance. But the price was steep: 404 KIA, 1,982 WIA and 1,025 MIA.

On Feb. 29, the Germans made their last serious attempt to destroy the beachhead. On March 2, the 12th Air Support Command pulverized the German lines. At the end of March, Allied artillery and the 3rd Division crushed the Germans' last major offensive. For the next two months the front line of the beachhead, with its series of trenches and static defenses, had the look of a WWI battlefield.

By mid-May, there were 105,000 Allied troops at Anzio hemmed in by 120,000 Germans. On May 23, the 1st Special Service Force (Devil's Brigade), followed by the 3rd Division, spearheaded the breakout (code-named *Operation Buffalo*). The allied offensive was called *Diadem*. As one author put it, "VI Corps poured out of the beachhead like water from a bursting Lister bag." On June 4, a unit of the U.S. 88th Infantry Division entered Rome.

Heaven and Hell. From the end of January until the May breakout, casualties at Anzio were heavy. The German 14th Army lost 5,500 KIA, 17,500 WIA and 4,500 taken prisoner.

Allied losses totaled 4,400 KIA, 18,000 WIA and 6,800 MIA. Of this number, U.S. units sustained 2,800 KIA, 11,000 WIA and 2,400 MIA. Another 44,000 Allied troops were hospitalized for non-combat injuries and disease.

As usual, the horror of war brought out the best in many men. Sgt. Reg Clark said, "It was awesome, combat men always protecting their comrades-in-arms, more interested in taking care of their buddies than they were of themselves. Is it any wonder that 22 Medals of Honor were awarded at Anzio, more than at any other battle in history? These were men, real men of character, honor and attitude. And they never complained."

A fitting expression used at Anzio, often spoken by Chaplain William Johnson, a special forces veteran of the battle, to the survivors of the Anzio beachhead, went like this: "Surely all who have survived the assault on Anzio will go to heaven, since they have already served their time in hell." ★

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Details on Ship 'THOMAS STONE'

Thomas Jefferson made four deterrent patrols in each of the following years: 1969, 1970, 1971, and 1972. She also conducted special operations in 1970 and 1971. On 20 October 1972, the Gold Crew was awarded a Meritorious Unit Citation for its special operations of the previous year.

Thomas Jefferson completed two patrols in 1973 before returning to the United States to hold midshipman training from 18 June to 31 August. Her last patrol of the year terminated on 12 December 1973. Her 36th, and final, patrol in the Atlantic lasted from 31 January to 22 March 1974. After calling at Norfolk and Charleston, the submarine returned to New London on 22 May. Thomas Jefferson was then reassigned to the Pacific Fleet with her new homeport at Vallejo, Calif. She stood out of New London on 7 June en route to the west coast and arrived at Mare Island on the 27th.

On 1 July 1974, Thomas Jefferson entered the Mare Island Naval Shipyard for overhaul, refueling, and conversion to the Polaris A-3 missile system. She remained in the yard until 17 November 1975 when she got underway for Bremerton, Wash. The submarine remained in Puget Sound for a month and then moved to San Diego.

During the period January to March 1976, Thomas Jefferson's Blue Crew conducted post-overhaul shakedown operations and then transited the Panama Canal to conduct a Polaris missile firing at Cape Canaveral, Florida. The Gold Crew took over the ship on 4 April and conducted additional post-overhaul shakedown operations which included a missile firing at Cape Canaveral, a transit of the Panama Canal, and a missile loadout at Bangor, Washington, before resuming deterrent patrol operations with the Pacific Fleet on 8 August. Thomas Jefferson continued these operations as a unit of Submarine Squadron 15 throughout 1977 and 1978, at the end of which she completed her 44th deterrent patrol.

Thomas Laundry

(Tr: t. 269; l. 125'4"; b. 22'5"; dr. 12'2"; s. 10 k.; cl. "Castle")

Thomas Laundry—a steel-hulled screw steam trawler built in 1918 at Beverley, England, by Cook, Welton, and Gemmell, Ltd., for the British Admiralty—was leased by the United States Navy for service with the North Sea Minesweeping Detachment. Taken over at Falmouth, England, on 16 May 1919, Thomas Laundry was commissioned the same day, Lt. (jg.) Franz O. Willenbucher in command.

Arriving at Kirkwall, Scotland, the base for the detachment, on 27 May, via Plymouth, England, Thomas Laundry operated locally through June. On 7 July, the trawler departed Kirkwall for the minefields of the North Sea Mine Barrage and joined in the fourth phase of the extensive operations launched to clear the barrage that had once menaced German warships. While sweeping together with Thomas Buckley, a sister ship, Thomas Laundry exploded a mine 75 yards astern at 2005 that evening. From the 8th through the 12th, the trawlers swept mines despite rough weather and frequently parting sweep wires.

Later that month, Thomas Laundry's duties assumed a support role as she delivered sweep wire, kites, and weights to minesweepers based at Kirkwall. The trawler also transported men and materiel between the Scottish ports of Inverness and Kirkwall in August before assuming local duties at the latter port again in September, delivering ammunition, guns, sweep wire, and lubricating oil to the ships engaged in the last of the sweeping operations to clear the barrage from the North Sea.

Eventually, Thomas Laundry shifted to Brighton, England, where she supported the deactivation of some of her sister ships. She transported the crews of William Caldwell and Thomas Blackthorne to Harwich

on 6 October and that of Thomas Buckley to that same port on the 7th. At 1535 on 8 October 1919, Thomas Laundry was decommissioned at Brighton and returned to the Admiralty.

Thomas Stone

Thomas Stone—born in 1743 at Poynton Manor in Charles County, Md.—was admitted to the Maryland bar in 1864 and practiced law at Frederick until returning to Charles County about 1771. Stone entered the Continental Congress on 13 May 1775 and, but for a period in 1777, served in that body until October 1778. He won distinction for his work on the committee which drafted the Articles of Confederation. Elected to the Maryland Senate in 1776, Stone represented Charles County in the State legislature until he died at Alexandria, Va., on 5 October 1787.

(AP-59; dp. 14,868; l. 492'; b. 69'6"; dr. 24'8"; s. 16.5 k.; cpl. 379; a. 1 5", 4 3"; cl. President Jackson)

Thomas Stone (AP-59) was laid down under a Maritime Commission contract (MC hull 58) as President Van Buren on 12 August 1941 at Newport News, Va., by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Co.; launched on 1 May 1941; sponsored by Mrs. Alben W. Barkley; and delivered to the American President Lines on 11 September 1941. The passenger liner was acquired by the Navy on 14 January 1942; converted for use as a troop transport; and commissioned on 18 May 1942, Capt. O. R. Bennehoff in command.

Thomas Stone loaded troops at Norfolk and, on 26 September, sailed for Ireland with Convoy AT 23. After calling at Halifax en route, she arrived at Belfast on 6 October. She disembarked her troops and then combat loaded men and equipment of the 9th United States Army Division for amphibious exercises off the coast of Scotland before getting underway for the Clyde River on the 26th to participate in Operation "Torch," the Allied invasion of North Africa.

The transport was assigned the task of carrying troops for the British-controlled assault on Algiers. She transited the Straits of Gibraltar on the night of 5 and 6 November. On the morning of the 7th, she was steaming on the left flank of the convoy, second in line, astern of Samuel Chase (AP-56). At 0535, a torpedo hit the ship's port side, aft, blowing a hole in her bottom; breaking her propeller shaft; and bending her propeller and her rudder to starboard. The convoy continued on, leaving Thomas Stone behind, adrift some 150 miles from Algiers, guarded by only British corvette HMS Spey. After daylight, an inspection of the damage revealed that the ship was in no immediate danger of sinking but was nevertheless unable to move under her own power.

But Capt. Bennehoff and Major Walter M. Oakes, USA—who commanded the battalion landing team embarked in Thomas Stone—were not content to let the transport's troops drift aimlessly in the Mediterranean while others took Algiers. Besides, all on board the damaged ship were in deadly peril from a possible renewal of the submarine attack. To solve both problems, the two officers loaded most of the transport's troops in 24 boats which set out for Algiers Bay under the protection of Spey. However, the weather which had been good when the boats left the transport worsened, and the frail craft began taking on water. Engine trouble forced the boats to be abandoned one by one, and their crews and passengers were transferred to the corvette. When Spey finally reached Algiers before dawn on the 8th, she carried all of the crews of the boats and each of their passengers, for every boat had been scuttled. By the time Spey's troops went ashore that morning, they learned that all French resistance had ended.

Meanwhile, two destroyers, HMS Wishart and HMS Velox, had arrived on the night of the 7th and at-

36th
ENGES
CO "E"
TROOPS
STAYED IN
DOWN AREA
10 DAYS

AIRPLANE
NOT
SUB
CO "E"
STAYED
ABOARD
SHIP FOR
MAINTENANCE
WORK-SHIPPING
UP BLASTED
BACKHEADS

NOTE MAJOR OAKES KIA LEADING
A BAYONET CHARGE IN TUNISIA 1942