

COMPANY A, 48th ENGINEERS AT CASSINO

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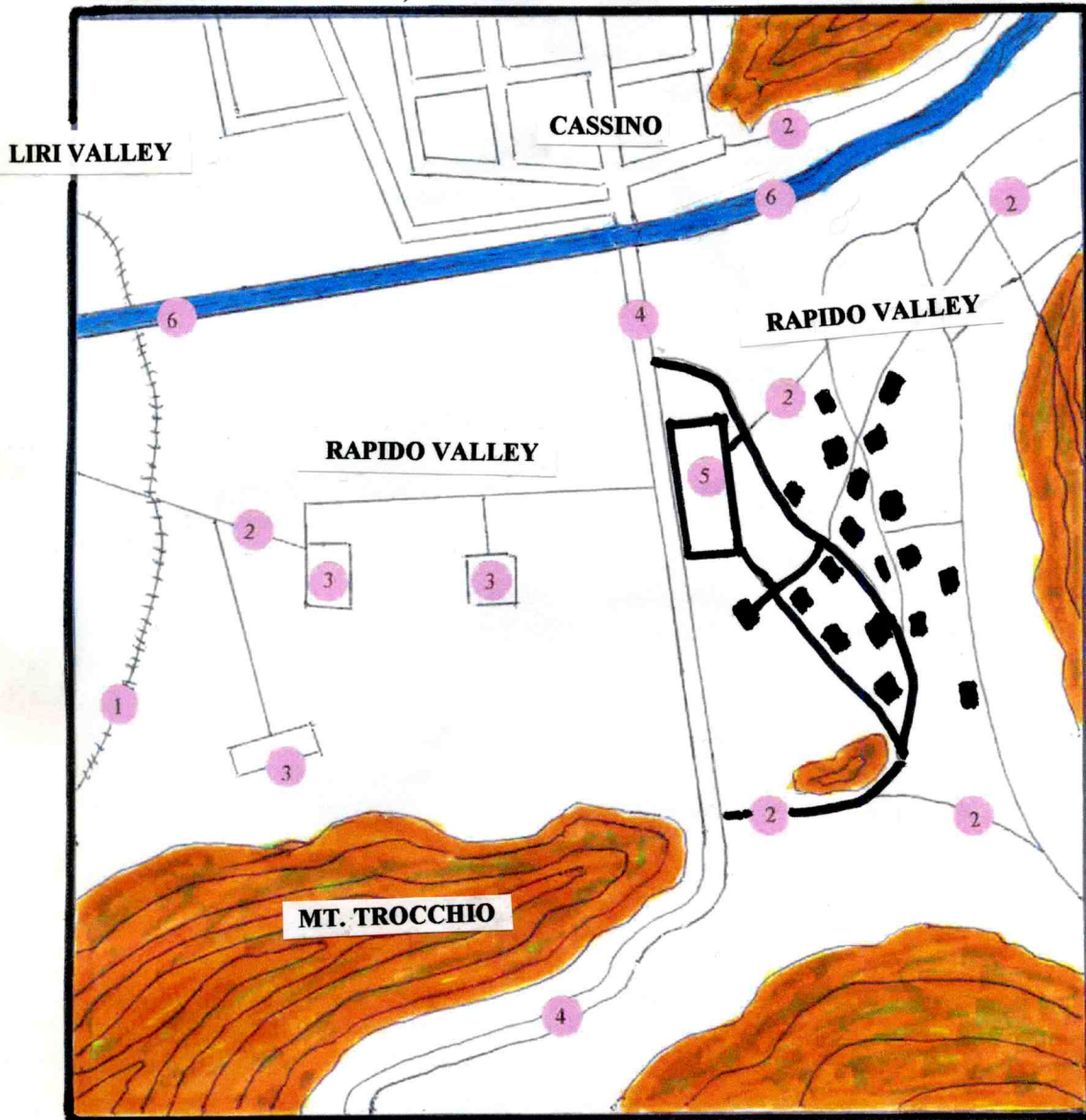
The word Cassino resounds loudly in my memory bank of the war. Just Cassino alone means more to me than any other location or any other period in my life as a soldier. It came along at just the right time for me because I was commanding a company of engineers and our Corps battalion was locked into supporting Infantry units from around the world in an attempt to rid this typical Italian town of German Troops. I loved being a company commander and am truly grateful for the good fortune to have survived the odds. My experiences were next to unbelievable and my survival was being lucky.

To be a successful Company commander, Lieutenants and noncommissioned officers that are loyal team members are needed. Those in key positions have to be dedicated to put their best foot forward. I had just what the doctor ordered -- an outstanding company of men and officers. The men reacted courageously and gave unselfishly. They never asked for anything in return. When I think back, I am disappointed for not spontaneously giving them the total recognition they so justly deserved. When I attempted later on to explain to myself why they did not get more recognition, my explanations were like an excuse.

As a Corps Engineer Battalion in December, we had been a part of the initial battle for Cassino but we were on the west extreme of Mt. Trocchio giving support to the American 36th Infantry and the British 46th Infantry Divisions. Now, just days later I am facing Cassino from the extreme east base of Mt. Trocchio. The battalion's new responsibility is maintaining a portion of the main supply route that feeds units fighting Cassino head on and on the right flank. I remember standing there on highway 6 at the east edge of Mt Trocchio looking directly into Cassino. I was not alone because Pojho my jeep driver, protected by the ominous Mt. Trocchio, was patiently waiting some twenty to thirty paces back down the road. I stood there initially not really believing a small painted sign. It was held in position by a single stake that was driven into the right shoulder of the road. The small sign simply said, "Stop, Front lines." At that moment there were no shells exploding and no dust clouds from churning tanks and halftracks. The calm of the day gave absolutely no indication that large numbers of serious minded men were faced off in crude emplacements for the sole purpose of killing one another. Though I did not see any of them, the mile long Mt. Trocchio had to be well inhabited with friendly troops. It was the Allie's front line directly in front of Cassino. From my vantage point I saw Highway 6 as straight as an arrow as it aimed for the heart of Cassino. I could tell the highway was elevated some two plus feet above the normal ground level, and that the road elevation increased to its maximum of five to six feet as it approached a river that bordered on the southern extreme of the town. Close observation made out man-made banks that contained the narrow river. There also was some visual evidence of previous skirmishes when I took time to focus on the damaged trees that were evenly spaced on the wide shoulders of Highway 6.

(A sketch of the area has been prepared and made a permanent part of this writing to help the reader.)

A CLOSE LOOK AT THE RAPIDO VALLEY IN FRONT OF CASSINO WHERE THE RAPIDO RIVER (6) CROSSES HIGHWAY 6 (4). THE RAPIDO VALLEY RIGHT OF HIGHWAY 6 HAS COVER, SEVERAL DIRT ROADS AND A NUMBER OF HOMES.



- HIGHWAY 48 ----- 1
- DIRT ROADS ----- 2
- FARM HOMES ----- 3
- HIGHWAY 6 ----- 4
- CEMETERY ----- 5
- RAPIDO RIVER ----- 6

Note where Highway 6 rounds Mt. Trocchio for Cassino there is a dirt road (2) that goes to the backside of a small knoll and then turns left. This is the route we used to get into the Rapido Valley to the right of Highway 6 (4). The right valley afforded considerable cover.

