

III MAY 1944: MTO – Mediterranean Theater abcd lmn

A. Chapter 26: May 1944 Results and Prospects: The Spring Stalemate at Anzio; MTO: Salerno to Cassino, Martin Blumenson CMH Pub 6-3 May 1944 zyza

By March 31 the Cassino and Anzio areas were quiet as Italian commanders contemplated breaking the stalemate. Cassino and Anzio impinged upon South France ANVIL invasion plans for June 1944. The U.S. Chiefs favored ANVIL without regard to Italian progress, but the British Chiefs “vehemently opposed (any troop reductions) until Rome was captured. Gen Clark commanded U.S. Fifth Army for Italy and U.S. Seventh Army preparations for ANVIL. He “was in the middle”. Clark recorded he wanted to keep Fifth Army attacking to capture Rome before he took the 3rd and 45th IDs for ANVIL. Then Italy losses could seemingly quash a south France ANVIL. Clarke was released from ANVIL --- “a great relief to me” he wrote. But British Chiefs insisted ANVIL be cancelled. CCS postponed Southern France until Italy improved or until the Allies joined Cassino and Anzio fronts to take Rome. It delayed the TORCH invasion two months.

(Comment: Next is a fascinating comment on Prof Zuckerman’s transportation bombing plan for France and Belgium.) In March, AAF began STRANGLE, the medium bomber program blasting German rails and roads. They cut up large rail sections south from Pisa-Rimini destroying bridges, tunnels, defiles, and open track, but not marshaling yards. The 601 sorties in 52 missions in March increased to 2,982 sorties in early May. From 5 to 10 May were 1,307 sorties in 115 missions. For 15 March to 10 May 4,807 sorties were flown. Despite this STRANGLE failed. The Germans repaired breaks and rerouted traffic so combat effectiveness suffered little. *(Comment: This “failure” is not mentioned in the ETO histories when Tedder and Zuckerman forced strategic air forces to bomb German railroad systems!).*

The Anzio beachhead forces were under tension, yet 100,000 men ignored shells and a dozen German planes attacking. The horror was constant. The waiting and expectancy produced strains when everywhere was vulnerable to enemy guns and planes. Smoke generators created an oily artificial fog. The arbitrariness of death or wounds was awful. “Poof” and a person was gone. Trenches, foxholes, dugouts, and pits were throughout. Tons of earth from bulldozers made shelter walls. Sandbag revetments were everywhere. Working the port took “quiet courage”. Supplies only came 100 miles from Naples. LST’s made daily shuttles. Liberties unloaded out of range offshore. Plenty of food and ammunition! Anzio became an epic stand, but dogged courage of the men could not dispel disappointment--the amphibious operation had meant a quick capture of Rome. Without Allied command of the sea, Anzio was impossible. Two lessons: an amphibious assault needed more strength in the initial landing and an immediate drive to key points inland. OVERLORD planners learned this. For the Germans, too, Anzio was a failure; they did not eliminate the beachhead. They won a victory only in keeping Rome and the viability of the Gustav Line.

Hitler saw Anzio as a “peripheral” strategy. He had assumed a massive, direct attack across the English Channel, instead. He knew the Allies would not attack Germany from the south through the Alps, so Anzio was a bit bedeviling. He assumed the Allies had adopted a “peripheral” strategy! He expected

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other such attacks before France. Blumenson states Hitler acted aggressively “because he saw the possibility of obtaining political prestige by eliminating at least this beachhead.”

From the Allied view, “the question has often been asked: was the expenditure of lives in the dreadful conditions of terrain and weather justified” vs concentrating Allied forces elsewhere? Blumenson responds with: “elsewhere where?”

It is difficult to see where else Allied forces ... could have fought the Germans. ... To have moved ... the resources to the United Kingdom for OVERLORD would have ... permitted the Germans to displace their own forces to defend against a cross-Channel attack ... (and) r would have relaxed considerable pressure on the enemy.

... The enemy could be permitted no respite, no rest, no opportunity to shift forces ... (But) Allied forces assembled in the Mediterranean theater (could not) afford to remain idle ...

The Allies entered the Italian mainland ... to permit Italy to surrender ... (and for) airfields and perhaps an exaggerated idea of what air power would accomplish ... (to be) carried along by the momentum ... (as) Allied strategy was largely predetermined by what had gone before ... North Africa, Sicily, and Italy reflected the influence that events impose on the will of man.

... (The) Italian campaign was a vast holding action ... to pin down superior German forces ... (But the) Allied command (knowingly sent) ... insufficient resources to provide the men and matériel ... (for a) speedy victory in Italy ...

The cruel, grim campaign of the Allied forces in Italy accomplished much more ... the soldiers ... made a substantial contribution to victory (The) Allied forces secured the Mediterranean to Allied shipping and ... captured airfields ... (for strategic) bombardment ... Most important ... (they ground) down ... the German fighting machine ... (in) a secondary front.

... (It) was a peripheral venture ... OVERLORD delivered the mortal blow. Yet ... Italy had made Germany more vulnerable ... Without ... southern Italy, the decisive action in Europe might ... (have repeated the) frustration ... (of) mud and mountains between Salerno and Cassino.

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