

Part 1: JANUARY 1944: MTO – Mediterranean Theater Imn

A. MTO: Chapters 17 and 18: The Decision and Preliminaries for Anzio; January 1944. MTO: Salerno to Cassino, Blumenson CMH Pub 6-3 xyza

(Comment: The circumstances surrounding D-Day Normandy are best understood after study of Mediterranean Theater developments. The MTO competed with the ETO but kept its own identity with many U.S. divisions that ended WWII in Italy. Beginning in May 1944, the focus of this history is the ETO. The MTO remains “involved” through July 1944 to the TORCH South France invasion as divisions moved to the former Supreme Commander’s new ETO Theater.)

(Brevity, context and comprehension seem better served with a summary of MTO events (January to May 1944) to highlight their impact upon the ETO and OVERLORD. Here 122 pages of Blumenson’s “Salerno to Cassino” is reduced to 13 pages as a background to Gen Dever’s 6th Army Group Southern France invasion in August 1944. Then MTO impacts on the ETO are in the 6th Army Group “official” history, Rivera to the Rhine by Jeffrey J. Clarke and Robert Ross Smith.)

1. The Decision for Anzio. Anzio operations gestated two months until the CCS approved retaining 68 LST’s in the MTO through 15 December. Eisenhower plans for landing near Rome and asked the CCS to retain them mid-January 1944. Gen Alexander plans a landing at Anzio 35 miles south of Rome. Fifth Army planned SHINGLE for a small amphibious force at Anzio to dislocate German defenses. Gen Alexander saw this force rapidly to Rome, but Gen Clark saw as aiding Allied forces south in the Cassino to capture the Alban Hills. Clark saw Anzio as a threat to the German rear forcing to retreat from Cassino, but it was “impractical. The Fifth Army front was much too far from Anzio for a landing to succeed.” On 18 December Clark recommend canceling Anzio and Eisenhower “saw no hope for an immediate realization of this aim ...” Then British Gen Wilson took command with Gen Jacob Devers as his deputy as the “A-Team” of Montgomery, Spaatz, Brereton, Doolittle and Tedder all left for England. Gen Eaker went to Italy while Gen Alexander and Gen Clark remained. FDR and Marshall met Clark heading back from Cairo-Tehran to encourage he capture Rome before Normandy.

An ill Churchill remained in the Mediterranean but was well enough to complain over “Italian stagnation as ‘scandalous’”. British chiefs agreed with Churchill’s amphibious attack for Rome at Anzio but asserted two divisions were needed. Losing on ANVIL, “Mr. Churchill became all the more determined to have Rome” which meant keeping LST’s until 15 February as he cajoled commanders to accept a 20 January invasion. On Christmas he met Cunningham, Eisenhower and Smith who informally agreed on a 2-division Anzio landing for 20 January. Churchill asked FDR to keep the LST’s until 5 February, but Anzio faced grave problems of shipping, forces and distances between the two attacking forces. Gen Clark, anxious, to capture took over the U.S. Fifth Army from Patton 1 January 1944.

Yet, Anzio troops were also the ANVIL troops, thus LST’s would leave ANZIO before beach logistics were built up. Its feasibility was questionable. Then on 2 January new Supreme Commander Eisenhower cut

the number of landing craft to rendered SHINGLE nearly impossible, which Eisenhower's conditions were apparently intended to convey. The LST's had to be released by 3 February with 16 more ships two days later leaving about 5 LST's and 24 LCT's to support the beachhead forces, "hardly enough to make the operation even a reasonable gamble." Yet, "with impossible limitations so placed, Gen Clark proceeded to 'go ahead and plan to land a corps at reduced strength'."

He issued orders for the attack using Gen Truscott's 3rd ID, one British division and the 504th AIR ("Airborne Infantry Regiment"). His lack of landing craft made resupply and reinforcement tenuous (*apparently this was the intent of his orders*). Clark met British Gen Alexander "to unfortunately state his superiors failed to grasp the details ...and asked for British help." Alexander enlisted Churchill who skipped straight to Roosevelt and Marshall. Clark had to explain why he had to keep 24 LST's ..." Despite protocol and the odds, a conference convened in Marrakech on 7 January, with Churchill, Cunningham, Wilson, Alexander, Smith, Devers, and others. Devers wondered why the conference was necessary for a simple military decision ... "Yet, ANZIO suddenly was a major project as Churchill informed Roosevelt on the "unanimous agreement for action ... by the responsible officers ..." Churchill won out receiving another 25 LST's for Anzio.

2. The Preliminaries for Anzio. The decision was made without first getting the Fifth Army up the Liri valley to Frosinone. That "way" was barred by the Rapido and Gagliano Rivers and beyond was Monte Cassino. Clark's Fifth Army had to cross the rivers to pin down German forces to assist Anzio. He needed to attract additional German forces the river defenses. The Fifth Army was still eight miles from the river line facing mighty defenses at La Chiaia, Monte Majo, and the fortified village of Cervaro. Beyond were Cedro Hill, Monte Porchia, and Monte Trocchio. These defenses had to go to gain the Liri valley. The battle was continuous from January 1 to 10. British 10 Corps would cross the Garigliano River near Sant'Ambrogio to gain high ground over Liri valley. The French Expeditionary Corps, which had replaced VI Corps, was to cross the high ground at the Rapidlo headwaters near Cassino to overlook the Liri valley from the north. The II Corps in the center would tackle the strongpoints to approaches on Highway 6. When the British and French had the Liri valley walls, II Corps would commit the 1st Armored Division for a drive eventually to Rome. There was urgency in river lines of the Rapidlo and Garigliano. (pp. 293-306)

Yet, 10 Corps reached the lower Garigliano River and patrolled waiting for II Corps. An attack for the 500-foot height of Cedro Hill 4 January failed. Gen McCreery waited. The French Corps relieved the 45th ID but took time to "settle in".

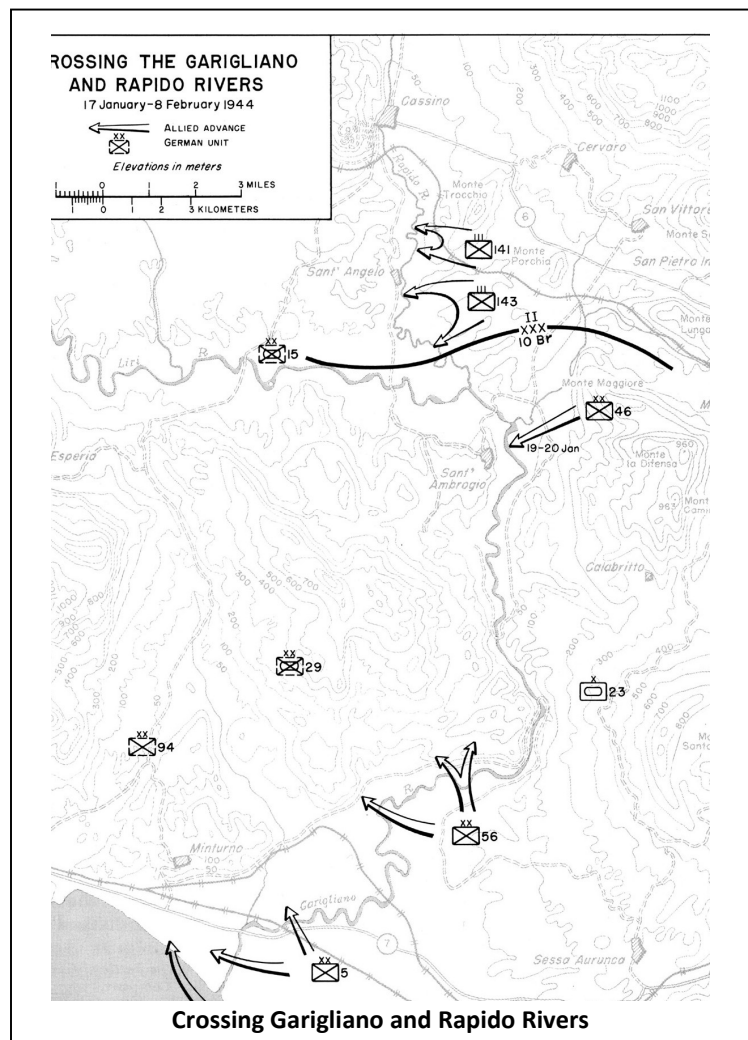
3. Toward the Rapido-Garigliano River Line and German Situation. Gen Keyes planned a pincer movement on Cervaro and a frontal assault on Monte Porchia. The 1st Special Service Force would make an end run to Monte Majo and to the high ground overlooking Cervaro as Gen Ryder's 34th ID was the main effort to Cervaro and as 6th AD captured Monte Porchia. The German 44th Division took delaying actions as Gustav Line defenses were built as *Tenth Army* and *XIV Panzer Corps* avoided losses to have forces to man the new lines. Late 3 January, trained 1st Special Service Force climbed Monte Sammucro to Monte Majo per their training. Frederick attacked the night 6 January from high slopes. Stalled at Hill 1109, they took Hill 1270 and then 1109. U.S. 34th ID hit to be stopped in an ambush. Steady combat to 8 January put the 34th ID on La Chiaia overlooking Cervaro.

The 135th IR had heavy fighting as at San Vittore gaining one-half of the town on Day 1 and the rest the next day. TF Allen (6th AD Infantry) attacked Monte Porchia after a bitter fight with 35% casualties. The next they made little progress in the mountains where a battalion finally had the crest of Monte Porchia with “only 150 effectives” left. Engineers had to be infantry, but TF Allen held after 10 hard days with 66 dead, 379 wounded and unknown missing. The 6th IR lost 480 men missing (most returned), but 516 men succumbed to trench foot and exposure. Many losses due to inexperience of troops in their first battle. By 9 January the Germans held only two villages before the Rapido-Garigliano river line, but 6th AD was exhausted. The 34th ID crossed Highway 6 on 10 January. An air strike had to Cervaro village to rubble to give the infantry sufficient impetus to capture it.

Before Fifth Army were three rivers: Rapido; Gari and Liri Rivers. Garigliano formed where the Gari and Liri met to run southwest 15 miles to the sea. The Rapido valley (2 - 3 miles wide) opened to the Liri valley northwest, merged with Garigliano valley to be 2 to 12 miles wide at the coast. Every river was flooded. The Rapido was an artificial marsh barring vehicles. The famous “Gustav Line” MLR was begun in November on high ground behind the Garigliano and Rapido Rivers where Germans built pits, bunkers, steel-turreted machine guns pits, barbed wire and *Schu Mines*. Perfect observation from the ancient Benedictine Monte Cassino abbey meant “no concealment.” XIV Panzer Corps had 90,000; I Parachute Corps had 24,000 with reserves in Rome. North Fourteenth Army had 70,000 troops and another 95,000 were in hospitals or other assignments. Kesselring had 19 divisions--8 front and 2 in reserve, seven in various districts equal

in size to the Allies. He “had good reason to believe ... terrain ... gave him an advantage ... (and he had) confidence (of) keeping the Allied armies bogged ... into the summer.” (pp 305-313)

4. Closing to the River Line Garigliano. The Italian east coast was inactive, Gen Alexander shifted British Eighth Army forces east with Gen Clark over the Gustav Line with two goals: 1) pin German forces at Cassino away from Anzio; and 2) quickly breach defenses to make Anzio. Three corps struck in four phases. Right, 12 Jan the French 2d Moroccan Division had Monna Casale heights. The 3rd Algerian had San Elia peak as close-in fighting moved 4 miles to the upper Rapido River Gustav defenses to pause. II



Corps had Cassino and Liri valley entrances, but on 16 January German posts east were empty as they regrouped. British 10 Corps had two hard crossings. Gen McCreery had a night power drive on 17 January against a massive 24,000 river mines. Yet only men in DUKW's and LCT's landed right. Engineers were lost. Mines and blown trucks blocked roads. The "first 24 hours were mayhem" ... but ten battalions crossed." The defense was two Rome divisions Kesselring shifted from the British bridgehead.

On 19 January, the British 5th ID was at Minturn, 3 miles beyond the Garigliano, as 56th ID was over Garigliano River at four points with a 20-mile-deep bridgehead. But 10 Corps stalled when its 46th ID failed in three tries at Sant Angelo. Though Germans recovered ground lost to Gen Clark, British crossing the Garigliano River drew Germans away from Anzio beaches and two 3 Corps attacks succeeded -- just the Liri Valley left. (pp.313-321)

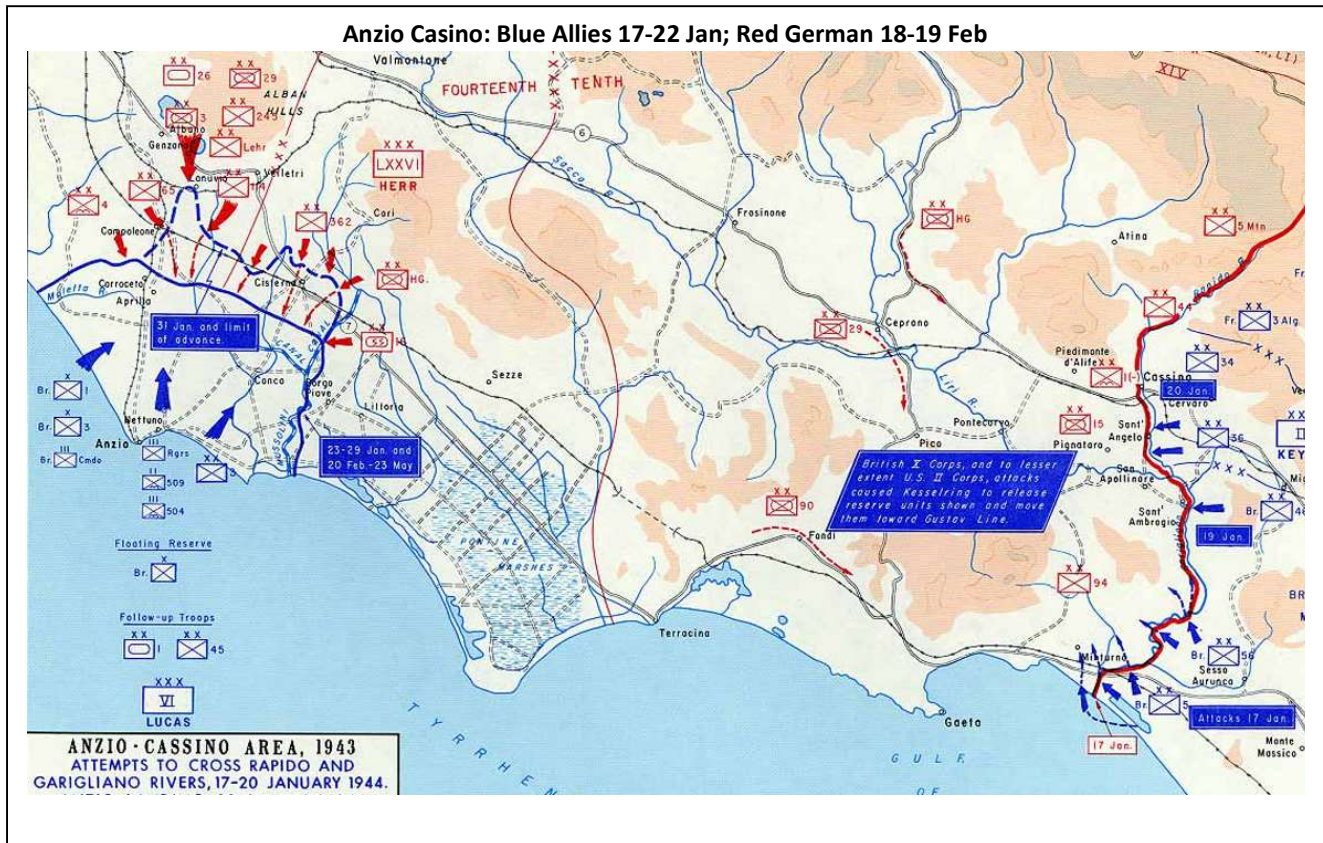
B. MTO Chapter 19: The Rapido River Crossings, January 1944. MTO: Salerno to Cassino, Martin Blumenson CMH Pub 6-3 xyza

Chapter 19 relates the Rapido River Crossing of 36th ID – its 141st and 143rd IRs destroyed. Blumenson devotes 30 pages to the disaster. In sum, Fifth Army's goal was a II Corps crossing of the Rapido River. When 36th ID had a Sant' Angelo bridge, 1st AD CCB would open the Liri valley while 34th ID held Germans at Cassino or reinforced CCB. The 45th ID reserve would join CCB or go to Anzio. The Rapido River was deep with steep banks and Sant Angelo on a 40' river junction bluff -- a *15th Panzer Grenadier Division* strong point. River defenses could be blocked by smoke pots, but the commanding view from Monte Cassino made it impossible to mandate night attacks.

With one regiment in reserve, Gen Walker would cross the Rapido a regiment north and one south of Sant'Angelo. H-hour was to be 2000, 20 January. There were no good alternatives. Armor struggled over poor roads. The best approach was any way that avoided a direct assault up the valley. Gen Harmon, was confident he "could roll right up the valley" so Gen Clark agreed. Gen Walker (36th ID commander) kept quiet, was also very positive. The failure of the 46th ID to cross the Garigliano 19 January was disconcerting after Gen Keyes learned the British postponed an attack. Keyes protested to Gen Clark who refused action. Without the 46th ID attack, the Germans had full observation of the Rapido flats. Gen Clark saw 46th Division's failure as "quite a blow" with his left flank now exposed. Gen Walker found engineers lacked footbridges. While engineers assisted, the approach was too muddy for trucks, so everything, including /boats, was hand carried to the river when DUKW's did not show and "... plans were made and then dropped." "In the end, the attack was a complete disaster. Two of the three regiments were "wiped out". A threat for the cross-Channel Attack. (Comment: It is pointless to continue this thread and disaster for U.S. 36th Division. The import lay in its foretaste of D-day Normandy, which was well on its way to becoming a reality.) (pp. 321-331)

Throughout Blumenson "played both sides" but wrote: "If war is ... a chess game, rules of logic ... (show) the best move ... (was exploiting) the British 10 Corps front by committing the 36th Division ... through the bridgehead already established across the lower Garigliano." It was a "doable maneuver" for divisions in the same army, but not when

... committing an American division in a British zone ... (The) disaster ... was a series of mishaps ... train of misfortune ... (The) near bank of the river was never completely under American control, reconnaissance, mine clearance, and the preparation ... were incomplete ... weight ... of the assault boats, the vulnerability ... (of) floats, ... (no) footbridge equipment, and the reduced effectiveness of artillery ... Supplies were insufficient ... a "lack of co-operation from higher headquarters" and an absence of confident infantry-engineer coordination... darkness, fog, and smoke ... engineers lost their way ... troops accidentally entered mine fields. **The result was a mounting confusion to near hysteria and panic.** (Comment: No comfort for the upcoming Normandy landings!).



Most boats never made the river, men refused. Machine guns took out footbridges. Engineers took shelter, infantry retreated as "confusion reigned" with fog and roads through vineyards, uneven terrain." Many were lost, "nervous uncertainty prevailed--the situation ... (was) out-of-hand ..." "Quite a few infantry tried to cross the river, some refused, others fell into the water deliberately ..." They had no confidence it would succeed. (pp 349-50)

A strange epilogue: 36th Texas National Guard Association demanded a Congressional Investigation of the Rapido River "fiasco." The U.S. House and Senate had "farical" hearings. Secretary of War Patterson found that "the action ... was ... necessary ... (and) Gen Clark exercised sound judgment ..." (Yet not an encouraging event for the OVERLORD invasion!)

C. MTO: Chapter 20 to 21: The Anzio Landing and Attacks on Cassino, January

1944. MTO: Salerno to Cassino, Martin Blumenson 6-3 xyza

The initial jubilation was optimism the deadlock was over, Gustav Line would fall with quick access to Rome and beyond. Gen Clark would have more landing craft than requested if D-Day was before 25 January, if not it was cancelled.

1. Preparations. VI Corps was lead with 3rd ID, 504th AIR ("Airborne Infantry Regiment"), 509th POB and Ranger Force with British 1st Division and two Commando battalions. Part of the 1st AD and a regiment of the 45th ID were follow-ups. Anzio developed into a major landing deep in the German rear to go from 24,000 to over 110,000 men. The Germans had two reserve divisions at Rome that would be too late to foil the landings. The Anzio force would "cut the enemy's main communications..." and weaken the Gustav Line. Intelligence officers were less optimistic believing the Germans would violently react with a ruthless concentration of forces or they would withdraw from southern Italy. Gen Clark issued vague orders as to VI Corps advance *toward* the Alban Hills. Corps commander, Gen Lucas, worried over lack of ships, men and time to prepare. On 18 January Gen Truscott, 3rd ID wrote "... If this [Anzio operation] is to be a forlorn hope' or a 'suicide sashay' then all I want to know is that fact ... I reserve right (personally) to believe we might deserve a better fate." Gen Clark worried over "mismanagement by the Navy". During rehearsals, his 3rd ID lost 43 DUKWs, 19 – 105-mm fire controls and 9 antitank guns. Gen Lucas was out of sympathy and of touch with the thinking at higher echelons.

Army has gone nuts again ... (thinking) the Germans are licked and are fleeing The Hun has pulled back a bit, but I haven't seen the desperate fighting ... without learning something. We are not (repeat not) in Rome yet.

They will ... (put) me ashore with inadequate forces and get me in a serious jam. Then, who will take the blame?

Fifth Army G-3 reported Gen Clark did not want a risky move on to the hills unless it was warranted, which he doubted. Second, he worried the 504th AIR drop would not capture Alban hills. (pp. 351-356)

2. The 22 January Landing and German Reaction. The Anzio landing was January 22, 1944. The campaign ended 5 June 1944! The assault had 40,000 men and 5,900 vehicles; five cruisers, 24 destroyers, two anti-aircraft gunboats, 23 mine sweepers, 32 sub-chasers, six repair ships, 16 gunned landing craft, four Liberty ships, eight LSI's, 84 LST's, 96 LCI's, and 50 LCT's in U.S. and British task forces beginning at 2:00 AM. There was no activity. It was "certainly one of the most complete surprises in history," Lucas wrote.

The 3rd ID was three miles inland by midmorning to dig-in --- no counterattack. The Rangers seized Anzio port; the 509th AIR ("Airborne Infantry Regiment") had Nettuno; midday British troops were two miles inland; British Commandos cut the Albano Road; engineers cleared the mines and built roads. The beachhead was organized, and the port opened. "In one day, 36,000 men, 3,200 vehicles and 90% of the assault convoys landed. Casualties were light. The beachhead firmly in hand."

3. Kesselring had no reserves. If Allied troops made Valmontone at the head of the Liri valley and cut lines to the German Tenth Army, the Germans would have been forced out of the Gustav Line. If Alban Hills fell, it jeopardized German strategy in Italy. The Gustav Line was defenseless.

At 0500, Kesselring ordered the *4th Parachute Division* and the *Hermann Goering Division* to block roads to the Alban Hills. The *715th Division* left south France; the *114th Division* left the Balkans. The *92nd* division in north Italy was activated. Three divisions moved to Anzio. Three divisions leaving the Gustav Line gave British Garigliano. Two more from the Adriatic. Kesselring was calm as "the Allied landing force on 23 January became 'a beached whale'". He knew "a large-scale expansion of the beachhead was no longer imminent." On 24 January, it seven miles deep by 16 miles long, but no attacks as Germans reinforced; the "danger of an Allied breakthrough faded." "German forces raced from Italy, Germany, France, and Yugoslavia per the Allies' plans." With the Alban Mountains untouched "by 24 January, the greatest crisis passed". Kesselring would erase the Allied beachhead on 2 February, but the Allies first launched their attack to "break out". (pp 357—365).

4. Attacks on Cassino (23 to 29 January). On 23 January, Gen Clark urged speed to breach the Gustav Line to meet Anzio forces by attacking the flanks, but Gen McCreery barely beat off the 21 and 22 January counterattacks. On the opposite end, British 10 Corps was exhausted. French Gen Juin had to shift French forces. U.S. 36th ID was depleted; only Ryder's 34th ID was potent. Attack required a two-pronged drive down river to Cassino town under Cassino peaks with Monte Cassino against murderous fire, mined and waterlogged fields (no tanks). Starting 2200 hours, 24 January the attack bogged. Ryder shifted right to expand his bridgehead before 26 January by gaining Hill 213 to end German fire. It stalled in mud; two regiments were stuck. Ryder ordered two battalions across to clear wire and mines behind a one-hour 27 January dawn barrage. Four tanks crossed the Rapido by 0830 -- all were lost, but infantry had Hill 213 by night. After a panic was quelled, the new positions held.

French Gen Juin, right, had Monte Belvedere 25 January and a more rugged peak so the 3rd Algerian ID mountain top hold was reinforced and threatened Gustav Line. Gen Ryder hit with seven tanks as the 765th TB (Tank Battalion) was fired 1,000 75-mm. point-blank rounds at Germans to capture the heights by dawn, 30 January. French Africans ascended Monte Belvedere. The 168th IR had Hills 213 and 56 on 30 January without radios or tanks. South of Cassino, Gen McCreery's Corps hit 27 January – little gain; but 1,035 POWs; less 4,152 casualties and no breakthroughs! Casualties were terrible: 34th and 36th ID had over 14,100 patients that month. The 34th ID was in "the quagmire of the Rapido (River) and ravine-scarred slopes of the Cassino massif." The Germans held Cassino, "... (reaching) the Liri valley was nothing more than a hope." Gen Clark: "[We are] like two boxers in the ring, both about to collapse. I have committed my last reserve, and I am sure the Boche has done the same." "To the combat soldier, the bitter cold ... added to the misery of the mud and water. Wet foxhole, freezing nights the norm, and trench foot were the norm."

In February 1944, the Germans had to eliminate Anzio and hold the Gustav Line, but Allied pressure at Cassino (Liri Valley) kept reinforcements from Anzio. Four German Gustav Line divisions in January were six divisions in February to engage 1st British Division at Anzio, the 5th at Garigliano, the 2nd New Zealand at Cassino and the 4th Indian Division. By 30 January, Alexander a New Zealand division for exploitation and a mountain trained Indian division for Gen Freyberg's corps to join U.S 1st AD, CCB to spearhead the

Anzio beach penetration. Gen Clark put 2nd New Zealand at Sant'Angelo, the 36th ID in reserve and sent 78th British Division to the Fifth Army. Cassino combat "was of the most vicious sort." Tanks fanned out with six soldiers to hit a two-story building. Three men crept to it tossing grenades into lower rooms, to rush inside after they exploded to "clear" the first floor. Soldiers outside grenaded the second story driving Germans downstairs to be killed or captured (pp. 366-378)

(Comment: This ends Chapter XXI. The intent was to provide context for OVERLORD and not detail of the MTO. Chapters XXII, The Opening Battles at Anzio and XXIII, The Bombardment of the Abbey of Monte Cassino, of Blumenson's history are omitted, but their context is revealed in the Blumenson Chapters covered next on mid-February 1944.)