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*Ann's Choice Residents and Guests are invited to attend Veterans Group Programs and Events-
(Meetings are open to ALL with no charge)*

NEXT MEETING:

**January 15, 2019 at 7:30 pm,
Ann's Choice PAC**

The first meeting of 2019 will be held on Tuesday, January 15, 2019 at 7:30 pm in the PAC with a program by Michael P. Maguire, President of the Johnsville Centrifuge and Science Museum.



Its mission is to create a world class learning center which will inspire and encourage students to pursue careers in science and technology. The focal point of the museum will be the laboratory research conducted at the Naval Air Development Center.



Astronaut Walter Schirra prepares to enter the centrifuge gondola in 1960.

Averaging over 45 patents per year, the scientists and engineers at NADC helped win the Cold War and were

instrumental in placing Americans on the moon.

Volunteer and Service Opportunities

There is a continuing need for help with the program to drive veterans to the Horsham VA Center. Volunteers do not have to be veterans themselves in order to assist veterans getting to their appointments. Call Judy Wright at 215-674-2328 for information about the program or to schedule a ride.

Volunteers are also needed to help with the Deployable Flags Program. For more information or to volunteer call Jerry Wright at 215-674-2328.

Veterans Group Meeting Tuesday, February 19, 2019 in the PAC

The February meeting of the Ann's Choice Veterans Group will be at 7:30 pm in the PAC on Tuesday, February 19, 2019. Noah Lewis will present a program on the invaluable contributions of African Americans during the Revolutionary War. Mr. Lewis portrays a Continental Army soldier named Edward "Ned" Hector, and African-American teamster/artilleryman who fought in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown.

New Members

A big welcome to Vincent L. Pisacane (US Army, CONUS, 1957 - 1964, active duty and reserves) who recently joined the Ann's Choice Veterans Group.

Battle of Monte Cassino, 1944

The Battle of Monte Cassino was a costly series of four assaults by the Allies against the Winter Line in Italy held by Axis forces during the Italian Campaign of World War II.

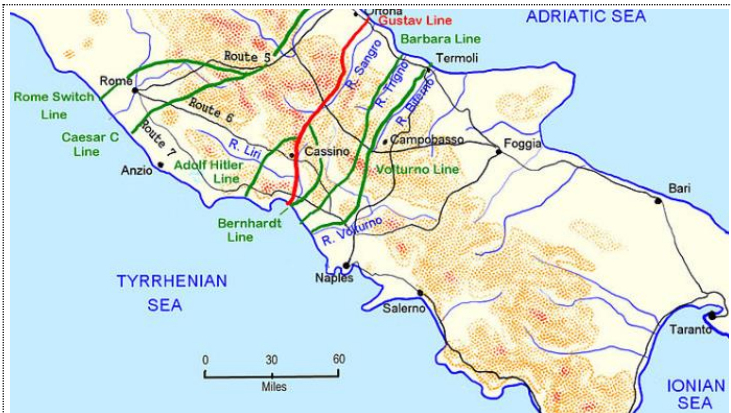
In spite of its potential as an observation post, and because of the 1400 year-old Benedictine abbey's historical significance, the German C-in-C in Italy, Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, ordered German units not to include it in their defensive positions and informed the Vatican and the Allies accordingly in December 1943.

Between January 17 and May 18, Monte Cassino and the Gustav defenses were assaulted four times by Allied troops, the last involving twenty divisions attacking along a twenty-mile front. The German defenders were finally driven from their positions, but at a high cost. The capture of Monte Cassino resulted in 55,000 Allied casualties, with German losses being far

(continued on page 2)

Monte Cassino, continued from page 1

fewer, estimated at around 20,000 killed and wounded.



German-prepared defensive lines south of Rome.

At the beginning of 1944, the western half of the German Winter Line was anchored by the Rapido-Gari, Liri and Garigliano valleys and some of the surrounding peaks and ridges. Together, these features formed the Gustav Line (in red on the map). Monte Cassino, a historic hilltop abbey founded in AD 529 by Benedict of Nursia, dominated the nearby town of Cassino and the entrances to the Liri and Rapido valleys. Lying in a protected historic zone, it had been left unoccupied by the Germans, although they manned some positions set into the steep slopes below the abbey's walls.

With its heavily fortified mountain defenses, difficult river crossings, and valley head flooded by the Germans, Cassino formed a linchpin of the Gustav Line, the most formidable line of the defensive positions making up the Winter Line.

Background

The Allied landings in Italy in September 1943 soon after the July landings in Sicily, were followed by an advance northward on two fronts, one on each side of the central mountain range forming the "spine" of Italy. On the western front, the US Fifth Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Clark, which had suffered very heavy casualties during the main landing at Salerno in September, moved from the main base of Naples up the Italian "boot", and on the eastern front the British Eighth Army, commanded by Gen. Sir Bernard Montgomery, advanced up the Adriatic coast.

Clark's Fifth Army made slow progress in the face of difficult terrain, wet weather and skillful German defenses. The Germans were fighting from a series of prepared positions in a manner

designed to inflict maximum damage, then pulling back while buying time for the construction of the Winter Line defensive positions south of the Italian capital of Rome. The original estimates that Rome would fall by October 1943 proved far too optimistic.

Although in the east the German defensive line had been breached on Montgomery's Eighth Army Adriatic front and Ortona was captured, the advance had ground to a halt with the onset of winter blizzards at the end of December, making close air support and movement in the jagged terrain impossible. The route to Rome from the east using Route 5 was thus excluded as a viable option leaving the routes from Naples to Rome, highways 6 and 7, as the only possibilities. Highway 7 (the old Roman Appian Way) followed the west coast but south of Rome ran into the Pontine Marshes, which the Germans had flooded.

With its heavily fortified mountain defenses, difficult river crossings, and valley head flooded by the Germans, Cassino formed a linchpin of the Gustav Line, the most formidable line of the defensive positions making up the Winter Line.

First Battle, January

The plan of the Fifth Army commander, Lt. Gen. Clark, was for the British X Corps on the left of a 20 mile front, to attack on January 17 near the Mediterranean coast. The British 46th Infantry Division was to attack on the night of January 19 in support of the main attack by U.S. II Corps, under Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes, on their right. The main central thrust by the U.S. II Corps would begin on January 20 with the U.S. 36th Infantry Division making an assault across the swollen Gari River five miles downstream of Cassino. Simultaneously the French Expeditionary Corps would continue its "right hook" move towards Monte Cairo, the hinge to the Gustav and Hitler defensive lines. In truth, Clark did not believe there was much chance of an early break-through, but he felt that the attacks would draw German reserves away from Rome in time for the attack on Anzio where the U.S. VI Corps was due to make an amphibious landing on January 22. It was hoped that the Anzio landing, with the benefit of surprise and a rapid move inland to the Alban Hills, might just unsettle the German commanders and cause them to retreat to north of Rome. The Allied intelligence assessment was over-optimistic.

(continued on page 3)

Monte Cassino, continued from page 2

Monte Cassino was not fought in isolation. In addition to assisting with Anzio it was intended to delay or prevent German resources from being moved to support defenses on the Normandy coast. However, success in meeting the objective of taking Monte Cassino and breaking the Gustav Line was hampered by the extremes of the topography and weather. Units were not able to position themselves for assaults in time to resupply and rest; supplies were delayed.

On 11 February, after a final unsuccessful 3-day assault on Monastery Hill and Cassino town, the Americans were withdrawn. U.S. II Corps, after 2 ½ weeks of intense battle, was exhausted. During this there had been occasions when, with more astute use of reserves, promising positions might have been turned into decisive moves. Some historians suggest this failure to capitalize on initial success could be put down to Clark's lack of experience. However, it is more likely that he just had too much to do, being responsible for both the Cassino and Anzio offensives. Withdrawn US units were replaced by the New Zealand Corps commanded by Lt. Gen. Sir Bernard Freyberg, from the Eighth Army on the Adriatic front.

Second Battle

With U.S. VI Corps under heavy threat at Anzio, Freyberg was under equal pressure to launch a relieving action at Cassino. Once again, the battle commenced without the attackers being fully prepared. Also, HQ did not fully appreciate the difficulty in getting replacement units into place in the mountains and supplying them on the ridges and valleys north of Cassino.

Repeated pinpoint artillery attacks on Allied assault troops caused their leaders to conclude the abbey was being used by the Germans as an observation post, at the least. Increasingly, some Allied officers were convinced that the great abbey of Monte Cassino was used as a German artillery observation point – that prevented the breach of the 'Gustav Line'.

The press frequently and convincingly and in (often manufactured) detail wrote of German observation posts and artillery positions inside the abbey. The C-in-C of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker accompanied by Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers (deputy to Gen. Sir Henry M. Wilson, the Supreme Allied Commander of the Mediterranean Theater)

personally observed during a fly-over "a radio mast [...] German uniforms hanging on a clothes-line in the abbey court-yard; machine gun emplacements 50 yards from the abbey walls." Countering this, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes of U.S. II Corps also flew over the monastery several times, reporting to Fifth Army G-2 he had seen no evidence that the Germans were in the abbey. When informed of others' claims of having seen enemy troops there, he stated: "They've been looking so long they're seeing things."

The view that the abbey was being used by the Germans militarily was not unanimous. Lt. Gen. Clark of Fifth Army and his chief of staff

Maj. Gen. Alfred Gruenther remained unconvinced of the "military necessity". Finally Clark, who did not want the monastery bombed, pinned down the Commander-in-Chief Allied Armies in Italy, General Sir Harold Alexander, to take the responsibility: Clarke said, "You give me a direct order and we'll do it," and he did.

The bombing mission in the morning of February 15 involved mix of 229 heavy and medium Bombers. In all they dropped 1,150 tons of high explosives and incendiary bombs on the abbey, reducing the entire top of Monte Cassino to a smoking mass of rubble. Between bomb runs, the II Corps artillery pounded the mountain. Clark and Gruenther refused to be on the scene and stayed at their headquarters. That same afternoon and the next day an aggressive follow-up wreaked further destruction.

Damningly, the raid had not been coordinated with ground commands and an immediate infantry follow-up failed to materialize. The Air Force regarded it as a separate operation, considering the weather and requirements on other fronts and theaters without reference to ground forces. Many of the troops had only taken over their positions from U.S. II Corps two days previously and besides



A B-17 Flying Fortress over Monte Cassino, February 15

(continued on page 4)

Monte Cassino, continued from page 3

the difficulties in the mountains, preparations in the valley had also been held up by difficulties in supplying the newly installed troops with sufficient material for a full-scale assault because of incessantly foul weather, flooding and water-logged ground.

After the Bombing

Pope Pius XII was silent after the bombing; his Cardinal Secretary of State, Luigi Maglione, bluntly stated to the senior U.S. diplomat to the Vatican, Harold Tittmann, that the bombing was "a colossal blunder...a piece of a gross stupidity."

Final Battles

Three more months were required before Monte Cassino was taken and the march to Rome could begin in earnest. As before, the weather and topography were continual adversaries. Some of the success in finally taking the abbey can be attributed to deception operations to conceal troop movements and to give an impression of an amphibious operation on the coast.

Allied participants in the battles included -

 United Kingdom	 United States	 New Zealand
•  British India	•  Free France	•  South Africa
•  Southern Rhodesia	•  Poland	•  Italian Royalist Army
	•  Canada	• Others
	•  Australia	

The capture of Monte Cassino resulted in 55,000 Allied casualties, with German losses being far fewer, estimated at around 20,000 killed and wounded.

Afterword

During the months in the Italian autumn of 1943, two officers in the Hermann Göring Panzer Division, Captain Maximilian Becker and Lt. Col. Julius Schlegel, proposed the removal of Monte Cassino's treasures to the Vatican and Vatican-owned Castel Sant'Angelo ahead of the approaching front. The officers convinced church authorities and their own senior commanders to use the division's trucks and fuel for the undertaking. They had to find the materials for crates and boxes, carpenters among their troops, recruit local laborers (paid with rations of food plus 20 cigarettes a day) and then manage the "massive job of evacuation of the library and archive. The richness of the abbey's archives, library and

gallery included "800 papal documents, 20,500 volumes in the Old Library, 60,000 in the New Library, 500 incuna-bula, 200 manuscripts on parchment, 100,000 prints and separate collections." The first trucks, carrying paintings by Italian old masters, were ready to go less than a week from the day Becker and Schlegel independently first came to Monte Cassino. Each vehicle carried monks to Rome as escorts; more than 100 truckloads saved the abbey's monastic community. The task was completed in the first days of November 1943. After a mass in the basilica, Abbot Gregorio Diamare formally presented signed parchment scrolls in Latin to Gen. Paul Conrath, to tribuno militum Julio Schlegel and Maximiliano Becker medecinae doctori "for rescuing the monks and treasures of the Abbey of Monte Cassino."

Among the treasures removed and saved were Titians, an El Greco and two Goyas.



Unloading of Monte Cassino property in the Piazza Venezia in Rome.

United States Military History Reviews

The U.S. government's official position on the German occupation of Monte Cassino changed over a quarter-century. The assertion that the German use of the abbey was "irrefutable" was removed from the record in 1961 by the Office of the Chief of Military History. A congressional inquiry to the same office in the 20th anniversary year of the bombing stated: "It appears that no German troops, except a small military police detachment, were actually inside the abbey" before the bombing. The final change to the U.S. Army's official record was made in 1969 and concluded that "the abbey was actually unoccupied by German troops."

[Summarized from a lengthy article on Wikipedia.](#)