

A Presentation prepared by the Military History Study Group
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Summary of the Landing at Anzio

SITUATION PRIOR TO THE LANDING AT ANZIO

The Allied situation in Italy at the opening of 1944 was disappointing compared with the high hopes that accompanied the landings there in September 1943.

Both the Allied armies, the United States 5th and the British 8th, had lost heavily and become exhausted by their successive frontal attacks up the leg of the Italian peninsula. From the autumn of 1943 onward the most the Allies could hope to achieve was the negative objective of keeping as many German divisions as possible pinned down in Italy and away from the force available to meet the Normandy landings in mid summer 1944.

Kesselring, who had so far defended the Italian peninsula brilliantly with little or no support from the Italian army now out of the war, had fifteen divisions in the 10th Army facing the Allies on the Gustav Line and a further eight divisions in reserve in northern Italy as part of the 14th Army. At full strength a German division (strength about 10,000) was about two thirds the strength of a British division (15,000), however all German divisions in Italy at this time were under full establishment. As the Allies were having great difficulty in breaking through the Gustav line to liberate Rome the obvious solution was to undertake an amphibious landing behind the Gustav Line with a view to unsettling the defenders on the Gustav Line and then later cutting off their retreat from that Line once the Allied break through was achieved.

The outline plan was for General Mark Clark's 5th US Army to start an offensive on the Gustav Line on January 20th. It was assumed this offensive would force Kesselring to commit his reserve formations to the Gustav Line on or about the January 21st. Launching the amphibious operation, code word Operation Shingle, on January 22nd would then force Kesselring to turn his reserve formations about to face the new threat at Anzio in his rear thus making the Gustav Line more vulnerable to penetration.

DATE

22nd January to May 1944

PLACE

About 25 miles south of Rome on the west coast of Italy and about 60 miles north of the German Gustav Line.

COMMANDERS

Major-General John P Lucas US Army

General Mackensen German Army.

ORDER OF BATTLE

6th US Corps

First wave

3rd US Infantry Division

1st British Infantry Division

British Commando, US Ranger and Paratroop Units

Two US tank battalions

Second wave

US 1st Armoured Division

45th US Infantry Division

GERMAN FORCES

14TH Army

76th Panzer Corps

1st Parachute Corps

MISSION

To reach the Alban Hills south east of Rome with a view to cutting the German withdrawal routes north along Routes 6 and 7 thus destroying or capturing the entire German 10th Army.

THE LANDING

The landings, by the British just north of Anzio and the Americans just south of the town, were achieved successfully almost unopposed. But the German's reaction, typical of them, was rapid and resolute. Their forces on the Gustav Line were told to stand fast, on the defensive, while the Herman Goring Division was switched back northward to meet this new threat at Anzio. At the same time, all units available in Rome were rushed south to the Anzio beachhead. Again their high standard of command and staff work ensured a rapid response which surprised the Allies and helped nullify the extent of the threat. Kesselring was further advised that he could call on any of the German divisions located in northern Italy under Rommel's control and that in addition OKW was sending him two infantry divisions, three independent

regiments and two heavy tank battalions. Hitler was anxious to ensure that Kesselring had sufficient strength to see that the Allies received such a bloody nose that never again would the Allies attempt an amphibious operation in Italy. It might also make the Allies think again about the cost of their proposed landings on the coast of France.

Kesselring's re-shuffle of his forces was a remarkable feat. Elements of at least eight German divisions were in the Anzio sector within eight days of the first landings on 22nd January.

Meanwhile US General Paul Lucas, renowned both for his pessimistic views of the operation prior to its launch and his cautious attitude as a commander, concentrated on consolidating his beachhead at Anzio rather than attempting any thrust toward the Alban Hills south east of Rome, which was his mission. In this judgement he was backed by General Clark, Commander 5th Army. Some military commentators however including Liddell Hart thought Lucas's plan, contrary to his orders, could have been a blessing in disguise when one considers the flanking threats to which he would have been exposed by a thrust inland through the unexpected number of German divisions which now opposed him. When one also considers that the Gustav Line was not eventually breached until May gave further credence to Lucas' plan of holding back. He was virtually isolated for four months at Anzio when the original plan was for the American forces to join up after a breakthrough in January or early February. Regardless of the views either way, Lucas was replaced as Commander 6th US Corps.

By mid February General Mackensen began his counter strokes in earnest against the reinforced beachhead which withstood the attacks. Galled at the repulse Hitler ordered a fresh offensive on 28th February. On 4th March Mackensen was compelled by his losses to stop the offensive. Five German divisions were left to hold the ring while the others were withdrawn to rest. While this was going on, the offensive to breach the Gustav Line was unsuccessful. Actually, it was not to be breached, after two more attempts, until 14th May. At last the time had come for the break out from Anzio.

The Americans quickly surrounded Cisterna taking 10,000 prisoners. From here the Americans advanced with three divisions including one armoured division to Vallettri and then on towards Rome. Only one division, the 3rd US Division (presumably on General Mar Clark's instructions) was sent to Valmontone in the Alban Hills where the German withdrawal route along Route 6 could be cut. This was to be the main German escape route from the Gustav Line.

Although Rome would be a great political prize it was more important militarily to destroy the German Army retreating from the south. The Herman Goering Division, responsible for keeping the route open at Valmontone had little difficulty in stopping the single American division from achieving its mission. This failure was directly attributable to General Mark, Commander US 5th Army, Clark who failed to follow General Alexander's (Army Group Commander) specific orders of destroying the German Army rather than being side tracked by the lure of liberating Rome. Whilst one man's ambition resulted in a moment of personal glory it also resulted in the unnecessary loss of thousands of Allied soldiers as they continued to fight their way

up the Italian peninsula, after the fall of Rome, against the German 10th and 14th Armies which were still basically intact. See casualty figures below.

RESULTS.

The primary mission of cutting off the German 10th Army when it withdrew from the Gustav Line was not achieved. Although eventually forced to withdraw, the German commanders and staffs were tactically superior throughout the entire operation and the German soldier lost none of his inbuilt tenacity despite the declining military situation. Allied casualties were 18,000 American, 15,000 British and Polish, 11,000 French. German casualties were estimated at over 38,000. One can estimate that about one third of Allied casualties were killed in action.

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