

Campaign

OSPREY  
PUBLISHING

# Anzio 1944

The beleaguered beachhead



Steven J Zaloga • Illustrated by Peter Dennis

© Osprey Publishing • [www.ospreypublishing.com](http://www.ospreypublishing.com)

---

# Anzio 1944

The beleaguered beachhead

Campaign • 155

---

# Anzio 1944

The beleaguered beachhead



Steven J Zaloga • Illustrated by Peter Dennis

*Series editor* Lee Johnson • *Consultant editor* David G Chandler

First published in 2005 by Osprey Publishing  
 Midland House, West Way, Botley, Oxford OX2 0PH, UK  
 443 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016, USA  
 E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

© 2005 Osprey Publishing Limited

All rights reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner. Enquiries should be addressed to the Publishers.

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library

Print ISBN 1 84176 9134  
 PDF e-book ISBN 978 1 84603 676 7

Design: The Black Spot  
 Index by Finline Editorial Services  
 3D bird's-eye views by The Black Spot  
 Battlescene artwork by Peter Dennis  
 Originated by Grasmere Digital Imaging, Leeds, UK  
 Printed in China through World Print Ltd.

05 06 07 08 09 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For a catalog of all books published by Osprey please contact:

**NORTH AMERICA**  
 Osprey Direct, 2427 Bond Street, University Park, IL 60466, USA  
 E-mail: info@ospreydirectusa.com

**ALL OTHER REGIONS**  
 Osprey Direct UK, P.O. Box 140 Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 2FA, UK  
 E-mail: info@ospreydirect.co.uk

[www.ospreypublishing.com](http://www.ospreypublishing.com)

## Author's Note

The author would like to thank the staff of the US Army's Military History Institute (MHI) at the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, PA and the staff of the US National Archive, College Park for their kind assistance in the preparation of this book. Thanks also go to Norman Friedman for help on this project.

For brevity, the traditional conventions have been used when referring to units. In the case of US units, 1/179th Infantry refers to the 1st Battalion, 179th Infantry Regiment. In the case of German units, 1/Panzer Regiment 7 refers to the 1st Battalion, Panzer Regiment 7; GR 725 indicates Grenadier Regiment 725.

Key to military symbols						
<p><b>Key to unit identification</b></p>						

© Osprey Publishing. Access to this book is not digitally restricted. In return, we ask you that you use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. Please don't upload this pdf to a peer-to-peer site, email it to everyone you know, or resell it. Osprey Publishing reserves all rights to its digital content and no part of these products may be copied, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise (except as permitted here), without the written permission of the publisher. Please support our continuing book publishing programme by using this pdf responsibly.

# CONTENTS

<b>ORIGINS OF THE BATTLE</b>	7
<i>The strategic setting</i>	
<b>CHRONOLOGY</b>	10
<b>OPPOSING COMMANDERS</b>	11
<i>German commanders • Allied commanders</i>	
<b>OPPOSING ARMIES</b>	15
<i>German forces • Allied forces</i>	
<b>OPPOSING PLANS</b>	20
<i>The Allied plan • The German plan • Geographic factors</i>	
<b>THE CAMPAIGN</b>	29
<i>Operation <b>Shingle</b> • Containing the beachhead • The Allied offensive The Battle of the Thumb • Operation <b>Fischfang</b> • Operation <b>Seitensprung</b> Stalemate along the beachhead • Operation <b>Buffalo</b> – 23 May 1944</i>	
<b>THE CAMPAIGN IN RETROSPECT</b>	91
<b>THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY</b>	93
<b>FURTHER READING</b>	94
<b>INDEX</b>	95

# STRATEGIC SITUATION IN ITALY, JANUARY 1944



# ORIGINS OF THE BATTLE

The Anzio amphibious landing of 1944 was one of the most controversial Allied operations in Europe in World War II. Although intended to break the stalemate in the Italian theater by making an end run around the German Gustav line defenses near Cassino, instead Anzio itself became a stalemate. Churchill famously remarked, “We hoped to land a wildcat that would tear out the bowels of the Boche. Instead, we have stranded a vast whale.” The Anzio operation presents a classic study of ambitious political objectives doomed by limited military resources. Grim memories of the nearly disastrous Salerno landings haunted the Allied commanders, and instead of a bold advance after the initial landing in January 1944, they consolidated the beachhead to await the inevitable German counter attack. The beachhead survived three violent attacks in February, the largest German counter attacks in the west until the Ardennes offensive ten months later. By March, Anzio had degenerated into an agonizing stalemate. Ironically, an operation that had been launched to redeem the Gustav line operation in the end depended on a successful conclusion of the Cassino breakthrough before the bridgehead could be exploited. To further add to the controversy of the operation, Gen Mark Clark decided to focus the advance out of Anzio in the direction of Rome rather than eastward to trap the German forces retreating from the Cassino sector. Rome fell to the Allies on 4 June 1944, but it was a bitter victory that was quickly forgotten when the main Allied campaign opened in Normandy two days later.

## THE STRATEGIC SETTING

---

At the heart of the Anzio controversy was the divergent strategic perspectives of the British and American allies. For Churchill, the Mediterranean was the “carotid artery of Empire”, the key access route to Egypt, the Middle East, and ultimately to India. Military operations in the Mediterranean were historically well suited to British proclivities for a peripheral engagement strategy when dealing with a strong continental power such as France in the early 19th century or Germany in the middle of the 20th century. British power rested on its naval strength and its army was too small on its own to overcome a major land power like Germany in direct confrontation. As a result, Britain preferred to use the leverage of maritime mobility to extract maximum results from modest commitments of ground forces. Britain depended on a coalition strategy for the final end-game against a land power such as Germany, but in the mid-term, a peripheral strategy supported this objective. In the case of the Italian campaign, Churchill saw operations as serving several essential purposes. It drew off German strength from the Russian front, providing

aid and comfort to the beleaguered Red Army. The commitment of army resources was not particularly extensive, and indeed much of the manpower in the Italian campaign came from the colonies, including Canada, South Africa, India, and New Zealand. The Mediterranean theater played on British strengths, especially the well established Royal Navy presence, and exploited Axis weaknesses, especially the vulnerability of the Italians.

The American perspective was significantly different. Since the US was fighting a two-front war in both the Atlantic and the Pacific, American leaders were not keen on wasting resources in secondary theaters. The US Army chief of staff, George C. Marshall, saw the primary aim of the campaign in Europe to be the defeat of Germany. Marshall was unconvinced by Churchill's depiction of the Mediterranean as representing "the soft underbelly of Europe" and considered Churchill's preference for Mediterranean operations to be a "prestige" venture that was strategically unsound. Marshall wanted a direct confrontation with Germany as soon as possible on the most feasible battleground, namely an invasion of northern France. Any other operations were merely distractions from the main goal. From a political perspective, the United States had little reason to support British imperial ambitions, and indeed there was a strong anti-imperial strain in US foreign policy both before and after World War II that was only partly suppressed for the sake of the coalition during the war.

Ultimately, Churchill managed to win over Roosevelt to Mediterranean operations in 1942–43. The Allies were not yet ready to land in France as was all too clear from the performance of the inexperienced US Army in Tunisia in 1942–43. Roosevelt recognized that it was essential to keep Russia in the war on the Allied side, and Stalin was insisting on a second front. The Mediterranean theater offered the prospect of morale-boosting victories on the cheap since Italy was clearly vulnerable. Furthermore, Hitler seemed willing to take the bait and waste significant forces in the theater even if it was a strategic dead end for Germany.

Although Churchill had won Roosevelt's acquiescence to continued Allied operations in the Mediterranean in the winter of 1943–44, the US support was not unconditional. The US was not willing to devote substantial naval or army resources to the theater since critical operations in both Europe and the Pacific were expected in the summer of 1944. At every turn, Allied commanders in Italy would have to beg for every last battalion, every last landing craft, and every last fighter plane. Their only leverage was the prospect of liberating Rome. Both Churchill and Roosevelt recognized the political importance of seizing a major Axis capital, and Rome would certainly do even though Mussolini had been forced out of the war in September 1943 after the Salerno landings. The lure of Rome helped extract a few extra resources for the Italian theater in spite of growing US impatience.

If British and American differences in strategic outlooks set the broad parameters for operations in Italy, combat experiences in 1943 helped shape the operational setting. The Mediterranean theater might seem like the soft underbelly of Europe on a map, but it did not seem that way to Allied army units involved in the fighting in 1943. Campaigns in Italy are inevitably dominated by the Italian geography, especially the

**US infantry practice amphibious landings near Pozzuoli in early January in anticipation of Operation Shingle. (NARA)**



Apennine mountain chain which form the spine of the Italian peninsula in the center. The narrow coastal plains offered the Allies little room to maneuver, and as a result, the fighting in Italy in the autumn and winter of 1943 inevitably involved bitter infantry fighting to overcome determined German defenses in the foothills and mountains. This became all too clear when the Allied advance bogged down along the Gustav defensive line in front of Cassino on the western side of the Apennines and in front of Ortona on the eastern side. The obvious solution to this dilemma was an amphibious operation, exploiting the Allies' naval superiority to shift forces around the German defenses as had been done in September 1943 at Salerno. The US Fifth Army commander, Gen Mark Clark, had set up a special staff within his G-3 (operations) department in October 1943 specifically to look for amphibious landing opportunities.

While there was little question that an amphibious operation was the solution to the stalemate in front of the Gustav line, there was the overriding issue of naval resources. A total of 90 LSTs (landing ship, tank) were available in the Mediterranean in the autumn of 1943 after the Salerno landings and they were being used to move troops and supplies from North Africa and Sicily into Italy. However, in preparation for Operation *Overlord* (Normandy) and Operation *Anvil* (southern France) scheduled for May 1944, 68 of these ships were scheduled to depart in mid-December 1943 for their new assignment. A similar situation affected other necessary equipment for amphibious operations such as landing craft, DUKW amphibious trucks and other equipment. Any amphibious operation in Italy would have to be undertaken soon and with limited resources.

# CHRONOLOGY

- 8 November 1943** – Alexander outlines mission to Clark of an amphibious landing to outflank the Gustav line, starting the planning process
- 25 November 1943** – Plan for Operation *Shingle* is presented to Gen Alexander by Fifth Army G-3
- 10 December 1943** – Clark suggests revision of Operation *Shingle*, enlarging the landing force
- 22 December 1943** – Operation *Shingle* canceled due to failure of Fifth Army to advance past Cassino
- 25 December 1943** – Churchill resurrects Operation *Shingle* as a means to revive the flagging fortunes of the Italian campaign
- 21 January 1944** – Task Force 81 departs ports in Naples area for Anzio
- 0200 hours, 22 January 1944** – Pre-landing bombardment of Anzio beaches begins, first landings follow
- 0500 hours, 22 January 1944** – Kesselring receives first news of landings, activates Case Richard, the reinforcement plan
- 25 January 1944** – First skirmishing along Anzio perimeter, mainly around Aprilia
- Midnight, 30 – 31 January 1944** – Allies begin first attack out of beachhead
- 31 January 1944** – British infantry secure Campoleone, but US advance on Cisterna falters after two Ranger battalions are trapped
- Night, 3 – 4 February 1944** – German 14th Army launches first major counter-offensive aimed at securing Campoleone from the British 1st Division. Attacks force withdrawal to “The Factory”
- Night, 7 – 8 February 1944** – German 14th Army renews attacks down Via Anziate towards “The Factory”, starting a four day battle for Aprilia
- 11 February 1944** – US 45th Division attempts to retake “The Factory” from the Germans but after a see saw battle, “The Factory” remains in German hands
- Dawn, 16 February 1944** – Operation *Fischfang* starts, aimed at dividing the beachhead in two along the Via Anziate. Intense but inconclusive fighting rages for three days
- 19 February 1944** – German attacks peter out, marking the end of Operation *Fischfang*
- 22 February 1944** – Gen John Lucas, VI Corps commander, relieved of command. Gen Lucian Truscott takes over command of the Anzio beachhead
- Dawn, 29 February 1944** – Operation *Seitensprung* begins, a renewed attempt to secure the Via Anziate. The attack quickly falters in the face of withering Allied artillery firepower
- Evening, 1 March 1944** – In the wake of the failure of Operation *Seitensprung*, Kesselring orders 14th Army over to the defensive. Mackensen begins to shift units away from the beachhead for rest and rebuilding
- March – April 1944** – The “Big war of little battles” ensues due to the stalemate on the Anzio beachhead. Both sides stage raids and artillery duels, but no major attacks take place
- 11 May 1944** – Operation *Diadem* starts with a combined assault by the US Fifth Army and the British Eighth Army against the Gustav line
- 17 May 1944** – The monastery at Monte Cassino is finally taken, marking the rupture of the Gustav line. The German 10th Army is in retreat from the Gustav line towards Rome
- Dawn, 23 May 1944** – Operation *Buffalo* is launched from the Anzio beachhead, aimed at the Velletri gap
- 26 May 1944** – With the VI Corps firmly in the foothills of the Alban hills, Clark decides to shift the emphasis from the Cassino–Rome highway to a direct northward assault towards Rome
- Evening, 30 May 1944** – After encountering stiff German resistance along the Caesar line, the 36th Division infiltrates two regiments into the Alban hills, outflanking the German defenses
- Evening, 2 June 1944** – With his forces outflanked by the US penetration through the Alban hills, Mackensen orders a general withdrawal from the Caesar line past Rome.
- Morning, 4 June 1944** – Reconnaissance elements of VI Corps reach suburbs of Rome
- Afternoon, 4 June 1944** – Major units of the VI Corps including the 1st Armored Division and 36th Division enter Rome
- 5 June 1944** – Rome is secured