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THE OPERATIONS OF THE FIFTH ARMY IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
THE BEACHHEAD AT ANZIO-NETTUNA ITALY, SOUTH OF ROME,
22 JANUARY TO 24 MAY 1944
(ANZIO CAMPAIGN)

Type of operation described: AMPHIBIOUS LANDING
AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A BEACH LODGEMENT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index.	1
Bibliography	2
Introduction	3
The General Situation.5
The Landing Situation.6
Consolidation of The Beachhead7
Analysis and Criticism14
Lessons15

Map A - Landing at Anzio Italy.

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the VI Corps, under the Fifth Army, in the Anzio Campaign from 22 January to 24 May 1944, during the Spring Line Defensive.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to call attention to the Cassino Campaign and give a brief resume of the events leading up to the beachhead operation.

By mid-December it was very obvious to the Allied Commanders in Italy that neither phase one nor phase two of their strategic plan had been completed. The (British) Eighth Army ^{was} still being about 25 miles from Pescara and the (American) Fifth Army some 30 miles from the line which was considered essential for it to reach prior to launching ^{the} an amphibious operation - the line Capistrallo - Priverno - Ferentino. (1)

It was ^{clear} that ^{additional} continued frontal attacks against the Germans in their strongly fortified positions on the Gustave line would continue only to slowly win ground, and ^{too} (this) at a great cost. In ^{the light} (view) of these two considerations ^{it was clear that} a new ^{amphibious} plan (for an amphibious operation) ^{was} (had to be) adopted and Allied strategy was modified to accommodate it. (2)

^{whereas in} (wherein) the first plan ^{the} (set up for an) amphibious attack ^{was} (had been) designed to assist the main part of the Fifth Army when it had reached ^{the} (a) line north of Frosinone, the new plan provided for a much larger ^{operation} (campaign) (which was) to be carried out, regardless of the position of the Fifth Army. (3)

This new plan of attack took a period of two months to formulate during which period the scheduled forces to be used for the Anzio operation had jumped from a tentative figure of 24,000 to a strength of over 110,000. (4)

This new plan of operations was to be carried out in somewhat the following manner:

1. The Fifth Army on the south was to continue to make strong thrusts towards Cassino and Prosinone to insure that the Germans wouldn't be able to divert any of its reserve troops towards the landing at Anzio, and create a breach in his front through which every effort would be made to link up as soon as possible with the sea-borne operation. (5)

2. The Eighth Army was to continue holding its sector of the main front applying somewhat of a holding attack to insure that the Germans would not have an opportunity to transfer any of their division opposed to it to new positions opposite the Fifth Army sector.

3. The Fifth Army would order certain units to prepare to make an amphibious landing on beaches south of Rome. This operation was to be accomplished by the VI Corps with two divisions plus certain attached units. This attack ^{would} be directed on the Colli Laziali, a commanding hill mass astride the vital communication routes ^{supplying} (which supplied) the Germans) right wing on the front opposite the main part of the Fifth Army. The date ^{to fall} (set) for this operation was ^{to fall} between 20 and 31 January, and to be as near the 20th as possible.

The object of this new plan of operations, as expressed by General Alexander, was to compel the enemy to divert troops for the protection of his communication and rear, and advantage must be taken of this opportunity to break through his main defenses and to insure that the two forces operating under the Commander, Fifth Army, join flanks at the earliest possible moment. ^{It was fully anticipated that} The amphibious landing at Anzio combined with the attack by the Fifth Army on the Southern part of the main front would result in driving the enemy north ^{to} (to) the last barrier to the advance ^{on} (of) Rome. (6)

The main objective was Rome, this fact was expressed by Prime Minister Churchill who said "Who ever holds ROME holds the title deeds of Italy". Further with Rome in the hands of the allies Italy would be able to hold her head up once again and start to get her country reorganized. It would, once the allies had possession of Rome, afford them the opportunity to seize the landing grounds to the northward. (7)

(5) A-1 p. 64 (6) A-1 p. 64 (7) A-2 p.4

The Allied plan of operation for the coming amphibious operation on Anzio was divided into four phases. The first to be a naval diversion against the beaches in the vicinity of Civitavecchia. The second to be a holding attack on the enemies extreme left by the British Eighth Army. The third to be a landing by the VI Corps, of the Fifth Army, on the beaches in the vicinity of Anzio, behind the German main line of defense, followed by an advance to try to cut his line of communication leading to his right wing. The fourth and attack by the remainder of the Fifth Army units along the Liri valley linking up with the VI Corps at Anzio, (8).

"The final date chosen for the amphibious landing at Anzio was 22 January, with H-hour at 0200." (9)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The Winter Line along the Cassino front had been held stable by the Germans and the American Fifth and the British Eighth Armies had not reached their respective objectives by mid-December as planned. It was obvious to the Allies that another plan of action had to be executed immediately as further frontal attacks against the Germans' well fortified lines would only result in small ground gains and at a great cost of men and equipment. (10)

A new plan of attack was formulated which was to make amphibious landings at Anzio and Nettuno striking at the Germans rear cutting off his routes of communication. (11)

It was assumed that the assault would be met by heavy enemy resistance on the beaches and strong counter attacks once the extent of our landings was known to the Germans. Therefore ample provisions for follow-up troops and reserves were made by the VI Corps. The 1st Armored and 45th Divisions (more) support (units to) the assaulting units, a portion of each division coming in after the initial landings (were made) (One) regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division (504th) was to land later and be in corps reserve, and the bulk of the British first Division was to (remain aboard their ships and) be a floating reserve. (12)

(8) A-1 p.64; (9) A-1 p. 65; (10,11) A-1 p. 63; (12) p. A-1 p. 68

A seven-mile-deep beachhead, centering on the port of Anzio, was to be made initially by the link up and consolidation of the assault forces. (13)

The assault force, a ~~water movement of~~ 120 miles, consisted of almost 50,000 men and 5,200 vehicles. Its strength of 27 Infantry battalions was comparable in size to the force that landed at Salerno. Air reconnaissance revealed that the enemy apparently knew nothing of these plans. Weather conditions were excellent for the landing. (14)

The plan for the coming amphibious landing was to place two divisions plus certain attached units under the VI Corps, commanded by Major General John P. Lucas. The landing was to be made by three coordinated assaults: The 3rd Division, on the right, would land three of its regiments about four miles east of Anzio; three Ranger battalions would land on the beach adjacent to Anzio harbor with the mission to seize the port and clear out all coastal defense batteries there; and, the British 1st Infantry Division would assault the beaches six miles northwest of Anzio with one brigade group and two commando battalions. The mission of the commandos was to strike east and establish a road block on the main road north of Anzio. (15)

Air protection was to be given by the XII Air Support Command, ~~which~~ unit accomplished their mission in a very excellent manner, flying 841 sorties on D-day. (16)

THE LANDING SITUATION

The landings went off as scheduled with complete surprise having been achieved. Convoys arrived at 0005 hours on 22 January under cover of darkness. The approaches to the beaches had been cleared by mine sweepers and the first assault troops landed at 0200 hours. (17)

Two British submarines, the H. M., Ultor and Uproar, were used for the purpose of beach markers on either side of the port. Points of landing were marked by Naval Scout Parties which had been sent ashore for this purpose. Before moonrise, at 0255 hours, it was planned that our landing program would be well advanced. At 0150 hours a rocket barrage was laid down by two LCT (R)'s which lasted for five minutes, this barrage was directed on the two main divisional beaches. (18)

(13,14) p. A-1 p. 68 (15) A-1 p. 68; (16,17) A-1 p. 69; (18) A-2 p.17

The landing craft had unloaded most of the assault forces by 0445 hours. As only minor opposition was met good progress was made in getting the troops ashore. Anzio and Nettuno were in the hands of the assaulting troops by early afternoon of D-day, and by dark the assault units had advanced to their first intermediate objectives, four miles inland. By midnight 36,034 troops and 3,067 vehicles had been put ashore. (19)

The operation of the VI Corps continued to progress favorably through the 23rd and 24th January and the initial beachhead line, seven miles inland, had been reached against very moderate opposition. The major effort had been devoted to landing supplies and reinforcements. No advance of any strength or speed could be effected until heavy weapons, tanks, and additional supplies could be landed. (20)

CONSOLIDATION OF THE BEACHHEAD

During
(Due) to the (existing) situation on the main front, there was no immediate ^{prospect} (possibility) of quickly linking up the two forces and making a joint attack. It was ^{more} (very) likely that the Germans would be able to ^{bring} (move) up reserves in an ^{attempt} (allout effort) to throw the VI Corps back into the sea. (The reports received from the air forces ^{indications of} indicating heavy ^{troops} movements (of German troops) from north of Rome and from the inactive Eighth Army front, where the expected holding attack had failed to materialize, tended to confirm this view. (21)

Due to the present limited strength of the VI Corps it could not afford to advance too far inland toward the Colli Laziali, as it might be so extended as to risk being cut off by sudden German counterthrust. General Lucas aware of this situation consolidated his positions and awaited reinforcements. During the interim our troops probed along the best two axes of advance. The 3rd Division on the right advanced along the roads leading to Cisterna, while the 1st British Division on the left pushed up along the Albano road on Capoleone. (22)

(19) A-1 p. 69; (20) A-1 p.69; (21,22) A-1 p. 69.

'On the 25th as the VI Corps continued to move inland to deepen its beachhead, enemy resistance continued to be light; but as advance units of the 1st Division neared Campoleone and the 3rd Division approached Cisterna, stronger opposition developed.' Before the two divisions reached their two intermediate objectives they were first slowed down and then on the 28th they were stopped completely. (23)

It had been estimated as early as the 26th that the enemy had moved in three full divisions with four more possibly enroute. 'Constant attack by our air forces on the enemies bridges and motor transport on roads leading towards the beachhead delayed but did not prevent these movements.' During the next three days the defense perimeter was stiffened by the arrival of the advance elements of two enemy divisions. In the meantime the remainder of the 1st Armored and 45th Divisions had landed on the beachhead and strengthened the VI Corps to the equivalent of four divisions, 'this included 68,886 troops, 508 guns and 237 tanks all ashore and backed by a large reserve of supplies.' (24)

'General Lucas ordered the VII Corps on 30 January, to attack and advance in direction of Colli Laziali.' If the attack progressed satisfactorily, the Corps was further ordered to be prepared to push on to Rome. (25)

The 3rd Division, on the right flank, was to straddle highway 7 at Cisterna and advance northwest to seize the high ground about Vellitre. The British 1st Division, in the middle, was to make its drive up to the Albano road to seize the heights above the town - on the southern slope of Colli Laziali. The 1st Armored Division was to swing left around the 1st British Division and seize the high ground above Marino. It was not considered necessary for a preliminary artillery preparation, however, it was planned that extensive supporting fires and a good screen of smoke was to be laid at daylight by aircraft thus giving ample support fire and cover for the attack. (26)

(23) A-1 p. 69; (24) A-1 p. 70; (25,26) A-1 p. 70

An elaborate air support program was prepared by the air force which included special air cover for our armored advances. If the VI Corps could, in this attack, gain the commanding heights of Colli Laziali it would be in a position to cut off the Germans vital communication routes thus cutting off his forces in the south. (27)

The 45th Division, in corps reserve, relieved the 1st British and 3rd Divisions of their positions along the beachhead flanks, between the 28th and 29th of January, so they were able to employ their full strength in the assault. After this change of positions was completed the attack commenced. The 3rd Division, after three days of bitter fighting, had gained up to three miles along the road leading to Cisterna, but was unable to break through the enemies last mile of defenses. Casualties suffered by the 3rd Division since 22 January were 3,131. The British 1st Division on the left had stopped short of Campoleone without a breach in the enemies position which was necessary for an armored assault. (28)

The VI Corps had spent itself on the attack out of the beachhead and against the unexpected strong German defenses. It was believed that the defensive action displayed by the Germans before Cisterna and Campoleone was merely delaying positions, the main line of resistance being back on the high ground of Colli Laziali. However; this was not the case as the German Commander, appreciating the very limited strength of the opposing forces and the value of the two key road junctions, was determined to make his stand in front of them. (29)

The Germans, anticipating a renewal of our drive up the two main axis of advance, had moved in reinforcements in wholly unexpected strength. By their determination to defeat this new threat they had also succeeded in building up a very strong defense system. They utilized every village and house, converting them into strong points, connecting them together with well camouflaged machine-gun nests and rifle pits. These positions were supported by tanks and roving self-propelled guns. In addition massed artillery and mortar fire was encountered by our troops. Each stone house

was a separate operation in which the tanks and tank destroyers had to completely pulverize the building before our infantry could move in. Long after we had seized key points, sniping and infiltration action was continued by small enemy groups and the infantry was continually mopping up by passed pockets of Germans, who fired on them from the rear. (30)

The enemy had all the advantages of the terrain. Because of natural obstacles presented by deep stream gullies and soft ground our armor, on the left flank was useless. On the right flank movement was practically impossible due to the flat scantily covered open fields over which our routes of advance lay. Good fields of fire were provided for our enemy and he took every advantage of it. Continued rains restricted our ground movements and low clouds severely restricted our air support during the most crucial period of our attack. After it was apparent that it was almost impossible to gain the objective necessary to cut off the Germans route of communication, General Alexander conferred with General Clark, after which conference VI Corps was ordered to continue to attack and make every effort to extend the beachhead to the Campoleone-Cisterna line and then organize for defensive action. The beachhead was as large as could be attained with the limited number of troops allotted for the initial landing. But it still was so small that every inch of it was vulnerable to enemy artillery fire, and there was little room for defense in depth. It was a known fact that a breakthrough at any point would bring the Germans almost to the sea. Therefore it was very essential that the beachhead be extended inland as far as possible and anchor it on the strong-points of Cisterna and Campoleone. As the enemy had, on 1 February, built up his strength to the equivalent of five divisions, which was supported by forty two battalions of artillery, it was clear that these objectives could not be immediately attained. The enemy had become so threatening that on 2 February General Clark ordered General Lucas to consolidate the bridgehead and prepare for defensive action.(31)

The strength of our troops were exhausted by the strenuous efforts put forth to obtain their objectives and at this point the initiative in the fighting passed to the enemy. (32)

It was realized by the end of January that the linkup between VI Corps and the Fifth Army, on the main front, was not going to be realized for quite sometime. This was due to situations which existed on both fronts. The British Eighth Army's front had remained static all during the time of the landings on the beachhead and the Fifth Army apparently lacked sufficient strength to make a breakthrough. (33)

It was very essential that the Fifth Army continue its offensive operations on the main front, otherwise it would afford the enemy an opportunity to draw more divisions from that front and place them against the beachhead, which would be calamitous at this time. (34)

In order to keep the enemy occupied the II Corps, on the main front, was ordered to continue its operations against the strong enemy held sector around Cassino. The 34th Division, with the help of the French Corps and Combat Command B (1st Armored Div) was to be prepared to exploit into the Liri Valley when the Cassino bastion fell. (35)

The 34th Division fought desperately during the attack trying to the utmost to carry out its mission, and during the first three days in February did advance several miles into the mountains north of Cassino. Although several commanding peaks had been taken and the outskirts of Cassino reached, the attack again bogged down. (36)

Another attack was planned early in February which provided for heavy air attacks on the Benedictine monastery atop Mount Cassino, this plan of attack, on the monastery, was ordered and carried out as it was determined that the enemy were using its buildings as points of observation and fortification. After moving our troops from the front line to points 1000 yards to the rear, 576 tons of bombs were dropped on and about the monastery. It was so well fortified and manned by such determined defenders that it withstood every attack. (37)

(32,33,34,35,36) A-1 p. 72; (37) A-1 p. 72

During the same period the VI Corps at Anzio was working feverishly to establish and maintain strong defenses against expected strong enemy counter attacks, "Hitler had called the beachhead below Rome an "abscess" and ordered Kesselring to eliminate it." General Mackensen, Commanding General of the 14th German Army, was ordered to carry out this mission. His plan of attack was set up in three phases: First, during the period 3 to 12 February, an attack was to be made to pinch out the British Campoleone salient; Second, during the period 16 to 19 February, an all out attempt would be made to breakthrough to the sea along the axis of the Albano-Anzio road, and, Third, during the period 29 February to 4 March an attack from Cisterna with a similar objective. (38)

The first phase began as scheduled and the Germans were successful in reducing the Campoleone salient. Although the 45th Division made two desperate counter attacks it failed to retake any of the lost ground. The second phase of General Mackensen's attack opened on 16 February, as scheduled, and it was apparent that he fully expected that this assault would eliminate the beachhead. This was not the case though as the allies withstood the attack and did not allow the enemy to breakthrough its lines although they were pushed back and lost ground. The third phase of the plan was put into operation as a secondary attack against the 3rd Division south of Cisterna, which had little success. The Germans maintained their main assault along the Campoleone-Anzio road and by the 19th of February had succeeded in pushing our line back about three miles, but there they were stopped. The enemy had committed three German Infantry Divisions assisted by elements of two additional divisions and supported by sixty tanks in this main effort. On the following day counter attacks were made by the allies during which they regained one mile of the lost ground. This all out attack by the enemy resulted in heavy casualties and he was forced to regroup his forces before another large-scale assault could be attempted. (39)

The superiority of our air power and artillery and the inability of the enemy to employ his tanks against us, because of unfavorable terrain, were the main causes of his defeat. During the main attack allied bombers dropped about 1100 tons of bombs in close support to the VI Corps. (40)

The British 56th Division from the X Corps of the Fifth Army arrived at the beachhead on the 18th of February. This was a great relief to the allied commanders as they had committed most of their reserve units to hold the defensive perimeter. (41)

The Germans realizing they had failed in their attempts to drive our troops off the beachhead ordered its units, on 4 March, to organize strong defensive positions and prepare to hold their ground. This they did and immediately started to massing their artillery, something which they had not been adept at before. They also became much more lavish with their ammunition than they had been heretofore. As both sides were on the defense the beachhead at this time became an allout artillery war. (42)

The situation of the beachhead from the period 4 March to 22 May remained virtually unchanged as to offensive action by either side and the beachhead line. On 23 May Fifth Army ordered the VI Corps to maintain contact with the enemy. These orders were carried out and contact was made with the enemy which was the initial action under which VI Corps and the Fifth Army's right and left flanks respectively, were linked up and started the allout attack towards Rome. (43)

During the overall period 22 January to 22 May, casualties to both sides were very heavy. "The 3rd Division received 14,165 replacements and the 45th Division, 11,202. In all, 23,860 American and 9,203 British casualties were evacuated during the five-month period that the beachhead held". (44)

During the above cited period the beachhead remained stable except for the changing of certain units, the British Fifth Division replaced the British 56th Division during the second week in March and a week later the (40,41) A-1 p. 73; (42) A-3 p.1; (43) Personal knowledge; (44) A-1 p. 74.

34th American Division arrived. Combat units of the VI Corps now totaled five Infantry divisions and one armored division (less one combat command).(45)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation, it is my opinion that the objective of the VI Corps was too large for the number of units assigned it.

The operation was one of the outstanding operations of the war and will be discussed by military critics for years to come. There will be ideas expressed as to what action should have been undertaken, but none will disagree with the action taken by General Alexander's army group in attempting an amphibious landing inasmuch as the allies controlled the sea. There was no other alternative which could have been taken except to continue the slow process of trying to storm the mountains, on the main Fifth Army front, from one position to another, and this at a costly price as to men and equipment.

Those who are not acquainted with the circumstances which existed on the beachhead will no doubt criticize the Commanding General VI Corps, General Lucas, for not pushing his troops on through and severing the enemies communication routes and making havoc with his rear installations. The uninitiated, unaware that any large scale plan of attack is dependent upon the firm establishment of basis wherefrom great quantities of supplies can be provided and protected against the enemy, will, in all probability continue to criticize.

Any doubt as to the ability and courage of the allies cannot be sustained.

The main objective of the VI Corps was to obtain positions astride the enemy's lines of communication but this attempt failed because of the lack of immediate availability of great troops and supplies. The main reason for the shortage in Italy, we know now, was in order to have the maximum number available for the landings which were to take place in France.

Anyone not fully cognizant of the situations as described above would be unqualified to criticize this decision. The only decision which may be properly questioned would be whether the advanced planning for this operation provided ample troops initially to establish the beachhead. Possibly adequate troops may not have been available due to the existing situation on the main front which then lacked sufficient forces.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons which are emphasized by this operation are:

1. That the element of surprise is a primary factor and through it the beachhead objectives were taken with little resistance.
2. It was found, for the first time, that the enemy can mass his artillery and can lay down extremely heavy concentrations on our troops.
3. A better method of control of units at night must be worked out, in order to insure contact between them.
4. The massing of all small arms fire on targets or in the general direction of the enemy has proved most effective as it tends to keep him down and it is much easier to close with him.
5. That troops who remain in a defensive situation for long periods of time tend to lose the zest for combat and the aggressive spirit required for successful operations.
6. That the immediate availability of great troops and supplies in an operation of this type is of paramount importance to its success.