

SECOND WORLD WAR

60<sup>TH</sup>

ANNIVERSARY

The Battles For Monte Cassino  
Central Italy  
12 January – 5 June 1944



**'Securing the Allies route to Rome'**

# Monte Cassino

MONTE CASSINO, LAZIO REGION, CENTRAL ITALY



Cover image: A British stretcher party carries a casualty out of Cassino after its capture, May 1944

IWM NA 15003



## Foreword by the Under Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans, Ivor Caplin MP

**‘A nation that forgets its past has no future.’** These words by Winston Churchill could not be more apt to describe the purpose of this series of booklets, of which this is the second. As Minister for Veterans I believe that we should continue to remember the bravery of our Armed Forces during the Second World War; without their efforts and sacrifices, our lives today would be very different. These booklets will commemorate various Second World War actions, and aim not only to remember and commemorate those who fought and died, but also to inform future generations of the sacrifices made by those who fought. The inspiration that can be derived from their stories will be invaluable for their future. I want to help those growing up now to be aware of the veterans’ sacrifices, and of the important contributions they made to our security and to the way of life we enjoy today. I hope that this series will have relevance beyond these events, and serve as a memento of the 60th anniversary commemorations.

It has been very difficult to select specific campaigns for these booklets, and for this second booklet we have chosen Monte Cassino to represent the war in Italy. This is in no way intended to diminish the importance of the other battles fought in that theatre. This is a tribute to everyone who took part in the operations of the Eighth Army in Italy.

It is difficult for anyone who was not there to comprehend the true nature of these battles. Some of the greatest confrontations with the enemy during the Second World War were fought during the four battles to secure Monte Cassino, the linchpin of the Germans’ Gustav Line set up to defend their occupation of Rome. In May 2004, veterans of Monte Cassino and Anzio, along with the relations of soldiers who died there, will be travelling to Southern Italy for a remembrance pilgrimage of the region. It will be a particular honour for me to attend these 60th anniversary commemorations at Monte Cassino and meet the survivors of the four battles, which ‘tested the soldiers of every nation and none were found wanting’.

*Ivor Caplin*

## The Background to the Battles for Monte Cassino

The four battles for Monte Cassino in Italy took place between January and May 1944. They saw the Allied Forces involved in some of the most bitter fighting of the Second World War, where steep mountain slopes and winter weather were combined with the German defenders' determination and skill. The battles involved troops from America, Britain, Canada, France, India, New Zealand and Poland in fighting that compared in its intensity and horror with the battles of the Western Front in the First World War.

Hitler was determined to contest every inch of ground and had directed his commander in Italy, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, to construct a defensive line 100 miles south of Rome known as the Gustav Line, which ran across the Apennine mountain chain. It was country that was ideal for defence. The high ground, either side of the Liri Valley through which passed Route 6, the major road from Naples to Rome, barred the Allies' advance northward.

IWM NYP 16163



Smoke from Allied shells covers the town of Cassino, Feb 1944

As the picture shows, the heights were dominated by Monastery Hill, as it was known in 1944, on the south-eastern spur of Monte Cairo. Here stood the sixth-century Benedictine Monastery of Monte Cassino, built as a fortress to guard the route to Rome, overlooking the junction of the Liri and Rapido rivers on the plains below. The Rapido (which becomes the Garigliano River further downstream) was as rapid as its name suggests and, although only 30 feet wide, tended to spill over its banks and flood in the winter months. It was a barrier to the Allied advance, as was the small town of Cassino that nestled at the foot of Monastery Hill and linked to the monastery by a narrow road that zigzagged up the precipitous slopes. Across the Liri Valley towards the coast the Aurunci Mountains presented a similar obstacle preventing any easy bypass. Monte Cassino was a bottleneck that had to be forced if Rome was to be reached. It was the linchpin of the German defence and was the responsibility of General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, who commanded XIV Panzer Corps.

In 1944 the Allied conduct of the Italian Campaign demonstrated all the difficulties and potential failings of coalition warfare. In Italy the two major allies, Britain and the United States, could not agree on the campaign's aim and purpose. Italy was Churchill's 'soft underbelly'. He believed that the Italian Campaign could both tie down German forces and present opportunities to advance through the Alps into Austria and take Vienna before the Russians.

The United States did not want to fight in Italy but reluctantly agreed to British hopes of a rapid advance up the length of the country. They remained worried that it would become an excuse to delay the invasion of North-West Europe. The German defence frustrated hopes for a rapid Allied advance, but it was hoped

### Generals Juin, Leese and Alexander



IWM NA 13511

that the invasion would distract German attention and its forces from France and the Eastern Front. This would then assist in Allied preparations for Operation OVERLORD (the landings in Normandy) and also weaken the Axis forces facing the Soviet Union.

In 1944 General Sir Harold Alexander controlled the Allied Armies in Italy, which consisted of the US Fifth Army commanded by Lieutenant-General Mark W Clark and the British Eighth Army commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese. Outwardly urbane and calm, General Alexander shared General Eisenhower's ability to weld together the very different personalities of his subordinate commanders. It was a skill that was to be sorely needed during the Cassino battles, where he lacked both resources in equipment and manpower needed to achieve a rapid advance. This was not helped by strong differences of opinion between his subordinate commanders.

### KEY FACTS

List of commanders:

#### ALLIED:

##### American

Lieutenant-General Mark W Clark

##### British

General Sir Harold Alexander

Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Hargreaves Leese

Major-General Sir Francis Simms Taker

Brigadier Harry Kenneth Dimoline

##### French

General (Marshal of France) Alphonse-Pierre Juin

##### New Zealand

Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Freyberg

Major-General Howard Karl Kippenberger

##### Polish

Lieutenant-General Wladyslaw Anders

#### AXIS:

##### German

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring

General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin

Major-General Richard Heidrich

IWM NA 10630



Lt-Gen Sir Bernard Freyberg, commander of the Indian and New Zealand Divisions, Jan 1944

## The First Battle of Cassino (12 January – 9 February 1944)

In January 1944 it was hoped that the German defences of the Gustav Line could be rushed by mounting a coordinated attack by the US Fifth Army and an amphibious operation by VI US Corps at Anzio on the coast south of Rome. Operation SHINGLE, as the Anzio landing was called, was aimed at cutting the German lines of communication south of Rome. At the same time the II US Corps with British and French support was expected to break through the Gustav Line. It did not work and the Allied forces within the Anzio beachhead found themselves isolated and under constant counterattack. This added pressure on the forces attacking the Gustav Line to come to their aid. As one British military historian concluded, 'In the event the roles of Anzio and Cassino were reversed. On the Allied side Cassino became the rescuer of Anzio instead of Anzio helping to create conditions for a breakthrough at Cassino.' Instead of a quick breakthrough, the battle for Cassino developed into a long war of attrition.

As the US Fifth Army mounted the attack on Anzio with its VI US Corps, the II US Corps, X British Corps and the French Expeditionary Force, under General Alphonse Juin, attacked the Gustav Line. Monte Cassino was to be bypassed by the French and British, who would attack on either flank followed by a decisive thrust by the Americans up the Liri Valley along Route 6.

In atrocious weather the French crossed the Rapido and advanced through the mountains north of Cassino. It was bitter, bloody fighting with the Moroccan and Algerian soldiers (French Expeditionary Corps) fighting hand to hand against the Germans of 5th Mountain Division. It came close to breaking the German line but failed because there were simply not enough men left to continue the attack, and no further reserves were available. Frostbite and trench foot caused by the wet and cold added to the casualties among the North African soldiers who fought in the ice and snow with one blanket each and no winter equipment.

At the same time on the coastal flank British X Corps assaulted across the Garigliano River. Despite a successful river crossing the attacks slowed to a halt. The Axis troops had cleverly dug-in machine-gun posts protected by anti-personnel minefields and concrete bunkers occupied by soldiers who were prepared to counterattack at every opportunity. The war diary of 10th Royal Berkshire records the difficult conditions under which the attacking British infantry laboured.

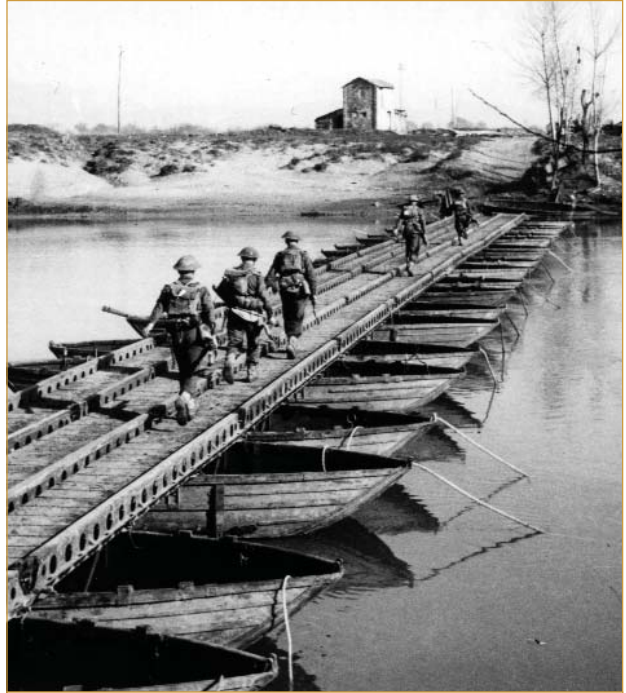
'It took a laden man 4½ hours to climb to the Battalion area. All water, ammunition and rations had to be carried by hand, as the route was impassable to mules.'

It was no easier for II US Corps in its attempt to force a way up the Liri Valley. The Germans had turned the river flats into killing grounds strung with barbed wire and laced with minefields. Over these, machine guns raked the attackers from cleverly concealed pillboxes and bunkers dug into the cellars of the stone houses. The 36th US (Texas) Division was cut to pieces as it attempted to cross the flooded Rapido or 'Bloody River' as they called it on 20–22 January. An American infantry officer reported on the fate of his rifle company after the failed attack.

'I had 184 men... 48 hours later I had 17. If that's not mass murder, I don't know what is.'

The 36th US Division lost some 2000 casualties and by the end of the battle it was effectively down to one-third of its fighting strength. The 34th US Division now attacked across the Rapido and tried to capture Cassino from the north. After grim fighting they pushed to within 1000 yards of the monastery but were stopped by the network of German machine-gun posts. It was the same in the fighting for the town itself where every building had been turned into a strongpoint. The Americans fought their way forward with heavy losses over steep broken ground where any movement or attempt to get supplies and ammunition forward was seen and fired on by the German defenders. Both sides fought to the point of exhaustion. The German defence was carried out by 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, which had fought against Montgomery's Eighth Army in North Africa. It was reinforced by the paratroopers of Major-General Heidrich's 1st Parachute Division, reputedly the 'best Division in the German Army'.

IWM NA 10942



British Infantry crossing the Garigliano River, 19 Jan 1944

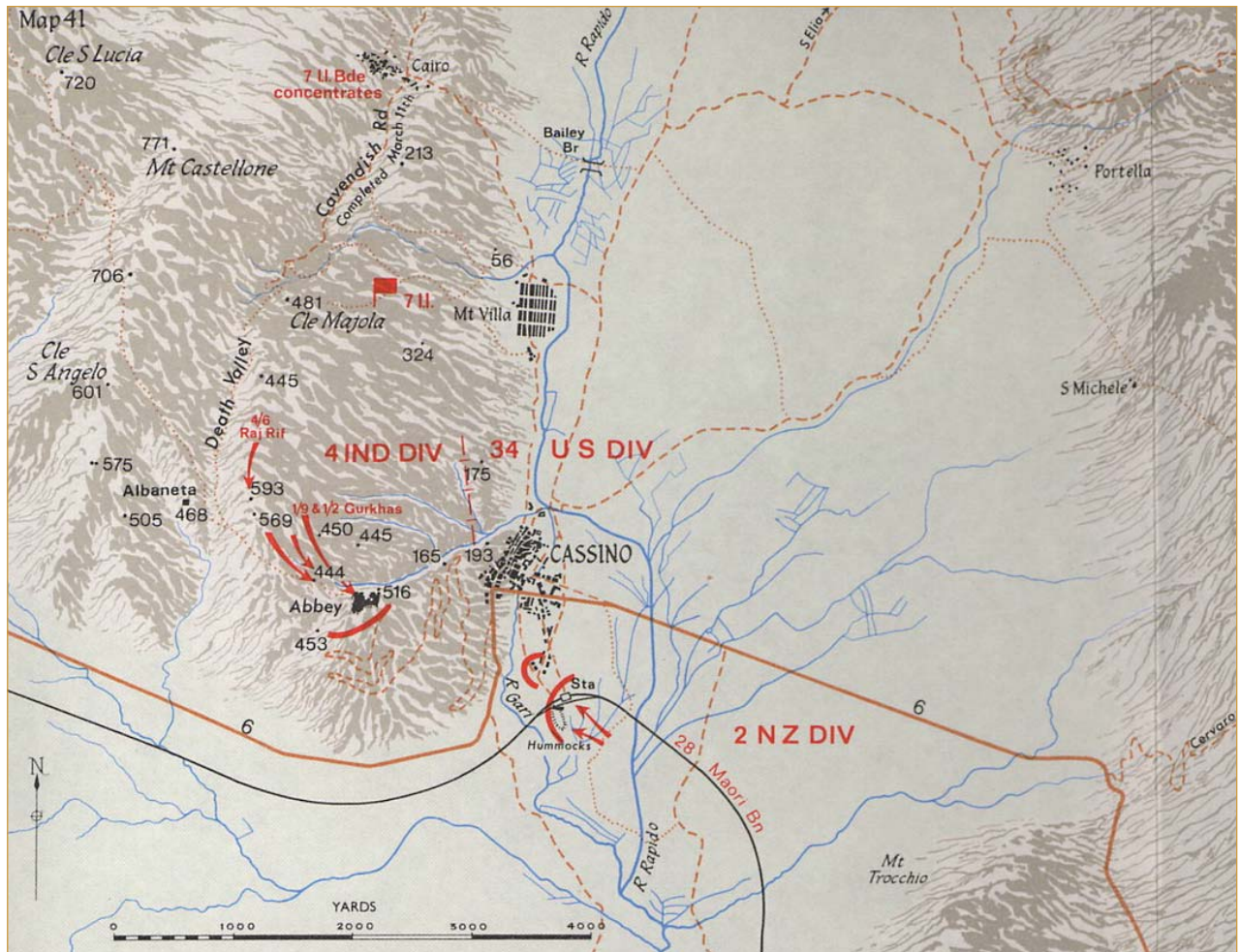
The II US Corps fought themselves to a standstill. Success had been tantalisingly close, but the winter and the steep, mountainous country tipped the balance in favour of the German defenders. The realities of the American effort were evident to the soldiers of the New Zealand Division as they came in to relieve the Americans.

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We came across a pocket-book lying among the rocks, stained notes for a few lire spilling out of it and snapshots of girls and family groups; one taken at Yellowstone Park. Noticing the now familiar smell of rotteness, we looked up to see the late owner of the pocket-book not three yards from us, a Yank, and not much left of him... He was a rarity in this country, a corpse with his boots still on, but they were in such a condition that even the poorest of unshod Italian peasants might have felt a bit squeamish about taking them.

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## Second Battle of Cassino (15–18 February 1944)



New Zealand Corps' plan of attack, 17–18 Feb 1944

The next attempt or Second Battle of Cassino was made by Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Freyberg's newly formed New Zealand Corps, consisting of Major-General Tucker's 4th Indian Division and the 2nd New Zealand Division. These were grouped together in the ad hoc New Zealand Corps, which lacked a proper corps headquarters and which functioned by having the staff of the New Zealand Division carry out both the corps and divisional planning tasks. The New Zealand Corps was attached to the US Fifth Army as it was intended initially that the New Zealand Corps would have a breakout role and capitalise on American success by punching their way out of the Liri Valley. The New Zealand Division with its two infantry and one armoured brigades was

ideally suited for a breakout role. Instead they and the Indian troops were tasked with relieving the exhausted Americans and taking the high ground.

Freyberg initially planned to avoid Cassino and attack from the north in an encircling movement. However, lack of mule transport necessary for resupply in the mountains made that plan impossible. Instead he decided to commit 4th Indian Division to an attack on Monastery Hill while the New Zealanders would attack across the plain, taking the railway station and the town of Cassino itself. It was a repeat of the American attacks on the same approach and in the New Zealand Corps there was pessimism at all levels as to the likelihood of success.



## THE BOMBING OF THE MONASTERY

'The Abbey at Monte Cassino was the creation of one of man's noblest dreams... but this morning the tired infantrymen fighting for their lives near its slopes were to cry for joy as bomb after bomb crumbled it into dust.'

Controversy surrounds many of the decisions made in the battles for Cassino and one that still resonates today is the decision to bomb the sixth-century Benedictine abbey that crowned Monastery Hill. Although it was not occupied by the Germans, to the soldiers struggling to reach it, it seemed inconceivable that it was not defended and in planning for its capture the acting commander of 4th Indian Division, Brigadier H K Dimoline asked that it be bombed as part of his division's attack. The monastery walls were 150 feet high and 10 feet thick and, if defended, would be impossible to breach with the weapons available to the infantry soldier. Freyberg's request was for fighter bombers to blast entrance holes in the monastery's vast outer walls as the infantry fought their way onto the hill.

Freyberg made his request that it be bombed to General Alexander, the Army Group Commander, after General Clark initially refused. Alexander agreed. The monastery was bombed on 15 February 1944, not by fighter bombers but by wave after wave of medium and heavy bombers dropping 500 and 1000-lb bombs and incendiaries, leaving it a roofless shell and killing many civilians who were sheltering in it. However, its destruction gave the attackers no advantage. Poor coordination by Freyberg and his staff meant that 4th Indian Division's battalions were not yet in position and the German 1st Parachute Division had time to occupy the ruins before the attack came.

IWM IA 15552



An American B17 Flying Fortress bomber over Monte Cassino during the first Allied air raid on the Monastery, 15 Feb 1944

IWM C 4363



Complete destruction of the Monastery, May 1944

The terrain that the troops were expected to fight and manoeuvre on was an impossible challenge unrealised by the commanders in the valley below. As the American official historian wrote:

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The slopes were shaggy with great boulders, sharp ledges and patches of scrub. These natural hideouts sheltered German spandau teams and bomb squads. Enemy outposts were less than 70 yards distant. The slightest movement drew retaliatory fire... There was no elbow room for deployment, no cover behind which to concentrate effectively, no opportunity to withdraw in order to obtain space for manoeuvre.

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On the night 17/18 February, Indian, Gurkha and British soldiers of 7th Indian Brigade struggled forward against the rocky outcrops protecting the approaches to the monastery. Each battalion in turn attempted to fight its way forward only to be cut down by machine-gun and mortar fire or fall victim to the German 'S' (anti-personnel) mines. By morning they were forced back, clinging on to the little ground that had been won.

On the same night, below them on the plain, two companies of 28 New Zealand (Maori) Battalion advanced in file along the raised railway embankment towards the railway station while engineers behind them bridged gaps to allow tanks to come forward and support the Maori advance. German mortar and artillery fire was zeroed in on this obvious approach forcing the engineers to abandon their work. Despite heavy casualties the Maori troops reached the railway station, but daylight found them isolated and under German tank counterattack with no anti-tank guns to oppose them. They too were forced to withdraw suffering 124 casualties out of the 200 who made the attack. A Maori officer remembered:

IWM NA 12032



Indian stretcher bearers bringing a casualty down a mountain track, 19 Feb 1944

IWM NA 13794



New Zealand infantry engaging enemy positions

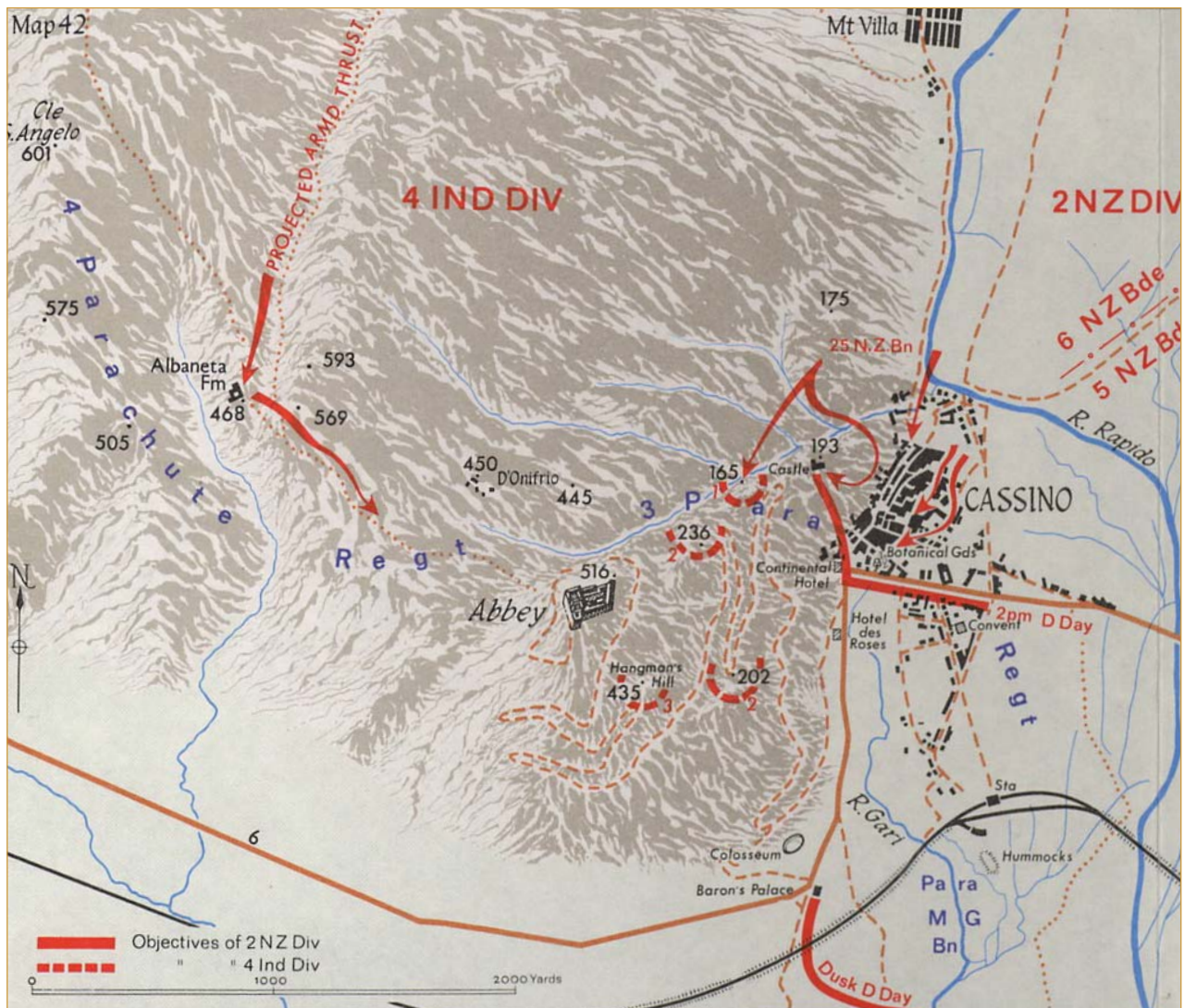
We were scared. All through the war we were scared... The Rapido River was in flood and to get to the railway station we had to follow the railway line... it was very dark – our artillery had been landing smoke screens so you couldn't see who you were shooting at...

The second battle of Cassino cost 4th Indian Division 590 casualties and the New Zealand Division 226. Unknown to the Allies the German defenders had suffered 4470 casualties in the first three weeks of February 1944 and were in no position to repel another heavy attack.

# Third Battle of Cassino (19 February – 23 March 1944)

Wet weather delayed the third battle until 15 March 1944. This time Freyberg's Corps attacked Cassino from the north with the Indian troops again attacking the monastery and the New Zealand troops advancing into the town along Route 6. This time the town was flattened by intensive bombing followed by an artillery bombardment of over 1000 guns. However, poor

coordination was again evident as the monastery itself was not included as one of the targets. The bombing devastated the Axis defenders but it created equal problems for the Allied attackers who had difficulty bringing their tanks forward. Vicious house-to-house fighting took place in the ruins of Cassino with often the same building being occupied by both sides.



Progress made by New Zealand Corps on 15 March 1944

National Archives WO 169/1906

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F.S. Regs. Vol. 1. and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

Month and Year MARCH 1944.

WAR DIARY  
or  
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.  
(Erase heading not required).

Unit 1/9th Gurkha Rifles,

Commanding Officer Lt. Col.

Army Form C. 2118.

Map Italy 1/50,000 Sheet No. 160(IV).

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	References to Appendices.
	24/3	0340	<p>Lt. Mallinson 1/4 Essex Regt. arrived at Bn Hq. with verbal orders from Brig. Bateman to the effect that the enemy was all around our positions, in apparently quite considerable strength; that the N.Z.'s had been continuously attacking in Cassino for 9 days and were now played out; that the rest of 4 Ind Div were not in any position or condition to make further attacks. There were therefore two courses open to the Army Comd.; (a) he would put in fresh formations or (b) he would withdraw 1/9 G.R. and call the battle off. A decision would be made in the near future and should the latter course be taken, the fact that that decision had been made would be indicated to 1/9th G.R. by one of the following methods (1) The code word "Roche" on the wireless (2) a series of red red red, green green Verrey lights fired from Ft 193 and MONTE TRUCCHI (3) before firing down Route 6 to the south of HANGMAN'S HILL in bursts of 6 rds., on receipt of any one of those signals 1/9 G.R. would withdraw that night to the outskirts of Cassino by any route the C.O. thought fit. One of those withdrawal signals having been given, the corps would lay on the following diversions to help the Bn. get down safely. From 1900 hrs to 2100 hrs the arty. would fire on the German occupied parts of Cassino, on Ft 165 and along the nullah to the N.W. of Ft 193. From 2100 hrs the arty would lift to MONASTERY HILL (Ft 516) down the ridge to Ft 165; The B.W. Kent Regt. would keep in close physical contact with the enemy around Ft. 165 from 2000 hrs for the whole night; The N.Z.'s in Cassino itself would also keep</p>	

24 March 0340 Lt. Mallinson 1/4 Essex Regiment arrived at Battalion Headquarters with verbal orders from Brigadier Bateman to the effect that the enemy was all around our positions, in apparently quite considerable strength; that the New Zealanders had been continuously attacking in Cassino for 9 days and were now played out; that the rest of 4 Indian Division were not in any position or condition to make further attacks. There were therefore two courses open to the Army Commander; (a) he would put in fresh formations or (b) he would withdraw 1/9 Gurkha Rifles and call the battle off.

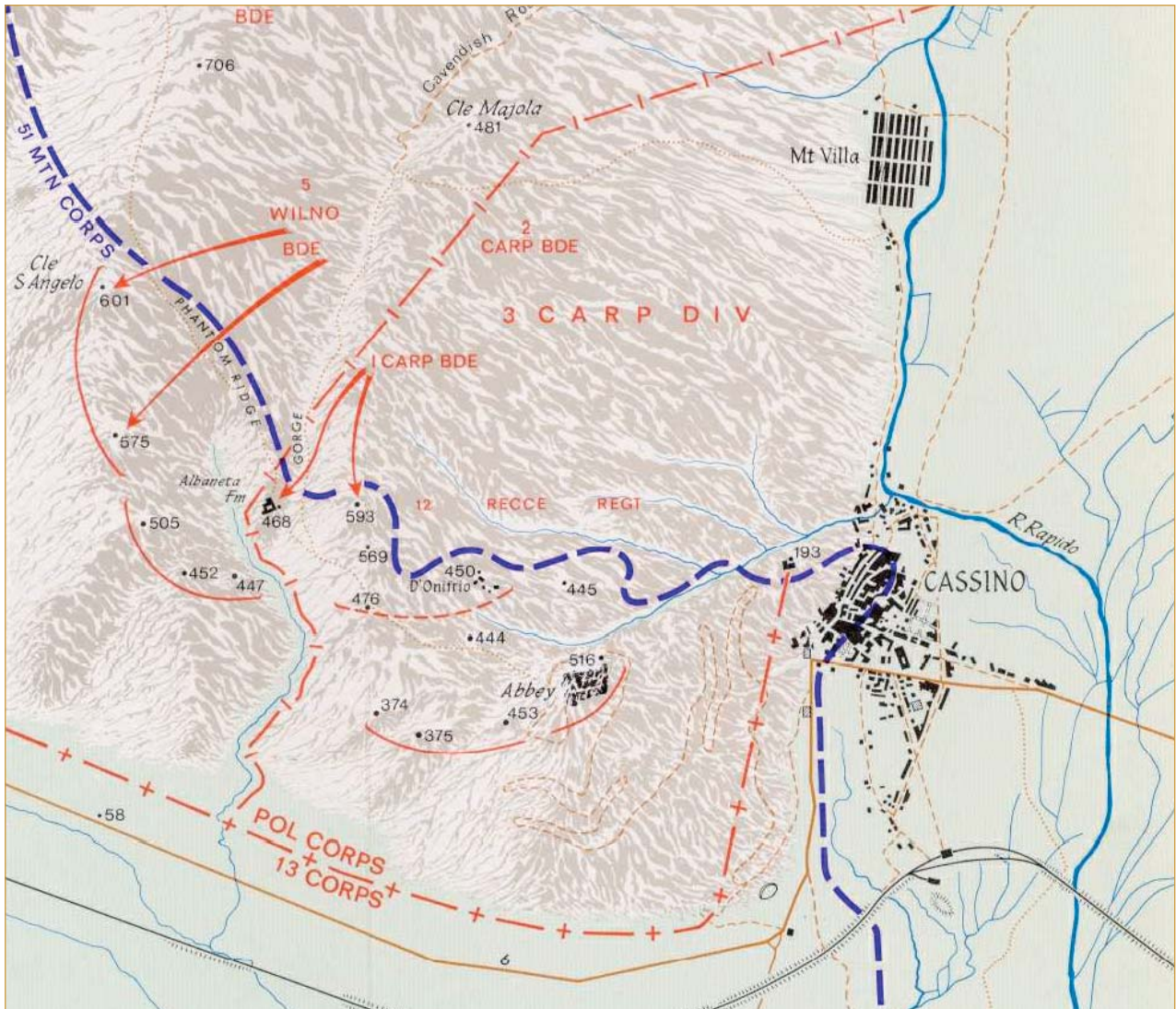
Extract From 1/9th Gurkha Rifles' war diary, 24 Mar 1944

A New Zealand platoon commander wrote of the fighting in the town:

Our four days and nights were absolute hell; mortar bombs continued to rain down; we had a *nebelwerfer* rocket through our roof; and the never-ending smoke shells meant that we were living in a world where there was no day. Our nerves were stretched to breaking point, hands shaking so much that cigarettes were hard to light. Hot meals were impossible, as was washing and shaving. My diary notes, 'it takes all our nerves to move from our position to Company Headquarters 25 yards away'.

The acting New Zealand Divisional commander, Major-General Howard Kippenberger, lost both his legs to a landmine while visiting the forward positions and the pessimism evident in the previous battle continued. Bravery and endurance were displayed by the soldiers such as the 9th Gurkhas, the 1st/4th Essex and the Rajputana Rifles who had fought their way forward and held Hangman's Hill. 24th New Zealand Battalion seized Point 202, a tenacious German defence was stretched to breaking point. The third attempt to break through at Cassino had been halted.

## The Fourth Battle of Cassino (11 May – 5 June 1944)



Operation DIADEM: Polish Corps' plan

The fourth battle of Cassino was incorporated into Operation DIADEM (the code name for the planned spring offensive in Italy 1944). It would be fought and conducted with a level of planning and resources that Freyberg lacked in the two previous battles. No longer would it be uncoordinated attacks on a narrow front. This time Alexander's armies would be employed in a carefully coordinated offensive that would make best use of Allied air power and artillery resources. Both the US Fifth Army and the British Eighth Army would combine in a two-fisted punch while VI US Corps at Anzio would break out and threaten the German rear.

The German defensive line was threatened along a 20-mile front. Kesselring was led to believe that a further amphibious operation was planned, which forced him to hold his reserves back from his overstretched frontline divisions.

The main thrust was to be by Leese's Eighth Army up the Liri Valley along Route 6 with 4th British and 8th Indian Divisions creating a bridgehead for 78th British, 1st Canadian and 5th Canadian Armoured Divisions to exploit and break through. Behind them 6th Armoured Division was held in reserve ready to reinforce success. The two divisions of the II Polish Corps

would tie down the defenders of Monte Cassino on the right flank. On the coastal flank Clark's US Fifth Army would attack, with the French Expeditionary Corps, through the mountain passes on the coastal range. At Anzio VI US Corps would break out and cut communications behind the retreating German forces.

The attack began at 11 pm on 11 May with an artillery barrage along the entire front and an equally savage German response. The Eighth Army divisions fought their way forward in the mist against stubborn defence. Tanks and infantry edged their way forward. In hard fighting the British XIII Corps ruptured the Gustav Line. Tank fought tank as Canadian and British armour broke through.

On the coastal front the Americans and French fought their way forward. By 13 May they had cracked open the German defences on their front by advancing on and breaking into the Hitler Line, the next defensive position across the Aurunci mountains, six miles behind the Gustav Line. Here French troops used their ability to fight in the mountains and provided the key to the breakthrough.

In the north Major-General Richard Heidrich's paratroopers grimly defended Monte Cassino against attacks by General Anders, II Polish Corps. Attacking in a wide encircling right hook from the north, Anders' Polish troops were initially held and driven back in savage fighting. A Polish officer wrote:

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...the German guns blasted us so effectively that we were obliged to throw ourselves flat and crawl around looking for cover... It seemed impossible that men could live in such a holocaust. Breathing a prayer, I groped blindly towards a shellhole. It was filled with bodies, sprawling on top of each other. Most of them were lifeless, but... I clawed frantically at those on top in an effort to burrow deeper.

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Taking salute after General Alexander invested General Anders with the Order of the Bath in recognition of Polish services at Cassino, 24 May 1944



IWM NA 15352

The Polish Carpathian and Kresowa Divisions attacked again on 16 May. It was savage fighting against a stubborn defence with Heidrich's paratroopers determined to hold onto 'their Monte Cassino'. However, holes had been torn in the Gustav Line in the Liri Valley below and by the US Fifth Army further towards the coast. On 17 May the garrison slipped away and the ruins were abandoned. A Polish officer wrote:

'We hung on grimly until the exciting news arrived that the monastery was in our hands. I shall never forget the pure joy of that moment. We could hardly believe that at long last our task was done.'

Cassino had fallen. It was a victory clouded by Clark's decision to head for Rome instead of cutting off the retreating German Tenth Army as Alexander intended. The fall of Rome took second place to the news of the D-Day landings in Normandy. The Italian theatre would become a backwater.

## Victoria Crosses

The Victoria Cross is the British realm's highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy. It has precedence over any other of our Sovereign's awards or Commonwealth decorations.

The Victoria Cross was founded by Royal Warrant on 29 January 1856. The Cross itself is cast from the bronze of cannons captured at Sevastopol during the Crimean War. The design, chosen by Queen Victoria, consists of a cross with the Royal Crest resting upon a scroll bearing the words 'For Valour'.

Since its inception the Victoria Cross has been awarded 1354 times. The youngest recipient was 15 years old and the eldest was 69 years old. Three cases exist where both father and son have won the Victoria Cross; four pairs of brothers have also been recipients.

Twenty members of the British and Commonwealth forces were awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery in the Italian Campaign. Five of these were awarded in the attempts in the battles for Monte Cassino and the attempts to force the Gustav Line.

### KEY FACTS

About the Victoria Cross:

- It was founded by Royal Warrant on 29 January 1856
- It has been awarded 1354 times
- The youngest recipient was 15 years old and the eldest was 69 years old
- Five Victoria Crosses were awarded following the battles for Monte Cassino.

### CAPTAIN (TEMPORARY MAJOR) WILLIAM PHILIP SIDNEY

Grenadier Guards

Extract from the *London Gazette*, 30 March 1944:

During the period 7 – 8 February 1944 at the Anzio Beach Head, Italy, Major Sidney led a successful attack which drove the enemy out of a gully. Later he led another counter-attack and dashed forward, engaging the enemy with his Tommy gun at point-blank range, forcing a withdrawal. When the attack was renewed, Major Sidney and one guardsman were wounded and another killed, but he would not consent to have his wounds dressed until the enemy had been beaten off and the battalion's position was consolidated. During this time, although extremely weak from loss of blood he continued to encourage and inspire his men.

### FUSILIER FRANCIS ARTHUR JEFFERSON

The Lancashire Fusiliers

Extract from the *London Gazette*, 13 July 1944:

On 16 May 1944 during an attack on the Gustav Line, Monte Cassino, Italy, the leading company of Fusilier Jefferson's battalion had to dig in without protection. The enemy counter-attacked opening fire at short range, and Fusilier Jefferson, on his own initiative, seized a P.I.A.T. gun and, running forward under a hail of bullets, fired on the leading tank. It burst into flames and all the crew were killed. The fusilier then reloaded and went towards the second tank which withdrew before he could get within range. By this time our own tanks had arrived and the enemy counter-attack was smashed.



**LIEUTENANT (TEMPORARY CAPTAIN)  
RICHARD WAKEFORD**

The Hampshire Regiment

Extract from the *London Gazette*, 13 July 1944:

On 13 May 1944 near Cassino, Italy, Captain Wakeford, accompanied only by his orderly and armed with a revolver went forward and killed several of the enemy and took 20 prisoners. When attacking a hill feature the following day his company came under heavy fire, but although wounded in the face and both arms, Captain Wakeford pressed home the attack. He was wounded again, but reached the objective and consolidated the position.

**MAJOR JOHN KEEFER MAHONY**

The Westminster Regiment (Motor)

The Canadian Army

Extract from the *London Gazette*, 13 July 1944:

On 24 May 1944 at the River Melfa, Italy, Major Mahony and his company were ordered to establish the initial bridgehead over the river. This was accomplished and for five hours the company maintained its position in the face of enemy fire and attack until the remaining companies and supporting weapons were able to reinforce them. Early in the action Major Mahony was wounded in the head and twice in the leg, but he refused medical aid and continued to direct the defence of the bridgehead. The enemy saw that this officer was the soul of the defence and consequently made him their particular target.

**SEPOY KAMAL RAM**

8th Punjab Regiment,

Indian Army

Extract from the *London Gazette*, 27 July 1944:

On 12 May 1944 at the River Garigliano, Italy, the company advance was held up by heavy machine-gun fire from four posts on the front and flanks. The capture of the position was essential and Sepoy Kamal Ram volunteered to get round the rear of the right post and silence it. He attacked the first two posts single-handed, killing or taking prisoner the occupants and together with a havildar he then went on and completed the destruction of a third. His outstanding bravery unquestionably saved a difficult situation at a critical period of the battle.



# Monte Cassino today

MONTE CASSINO ABBEY





Cassino War Cemetery with Monte Cassino in the background

### CASSINO WAR CEMETERY

The Cassino War Cemetery lies in the Commune of Cassino, Province of Frosinone, 139 kilometres south-east of Rome. Above it, at a distance of 1 kilometre, is the dominating hill on which stands the Abbey of Monte Cassino.

The site for Cassino War Cemetery was originally selected in January 1944, but the development of the battle during the first five months of that year made it impossible to use it until after the German withdrawal. The majority of the 4266 Commonwealth servicemen buried here died in the four battles for Monte Cassino and the 4000 Commonwealth servicemen who took part in the Italian Campaign and whose graves are not known are commemorated by the Cassino Memorial.

### THE ABBEY

Reconstruction and decoration works took more than a decade and were exclusively financed by the Italian State. Many new additions and embellishments were made during reconstruction so that today the Abbey of Monte Cassino has once more acquired the greatness and the imposing appearance it developed after its foundation by St Benedict in about 529AD.

#### KEY FACTS

Cassino War Cemetery is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The Commission maintains over 1,179,000 war graves at 23,203 burial sites in 148 countries around the world. It also commemorates a further 760,193 Commonwealth war dead on memorials to the missing.

Commonwealth governments share the cost of maintenance in proportion to the number of graves of their war dead: UK – 79%; Canada – 10%; Australia – 6%; New Zealand – 2%; South Africa – 2%; India – 1%.

# British, Canadian, Indian, New Zealand and Polish Army Units who fought in the Battles for Cassino

## BRITISH REGIMENTS

The 16th/5th Lancers  
The 17th/21st Lancers  
4th Reconnaissance Regiment  
56th Reconnaissance Regiment  
The Buffs  
The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers  
The Royal Fusiliers  
The King's Regiment  
The Somerset Light Infantry  
The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment  
The Lancashire Fusiliers  
The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers  
The East Surrey Regiment  
The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry  
The Royal Sussex Regiment  
The Royal Hampshire Regiment  
The Black Watch  
The Essex Regiment  
The Northamptonshire Regiment  
The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment  
The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders  
The Royal Irish Fusiliers  
The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders  
The Rifle Brigade

## INDIAN UNITS

6th Duke of Connaught's Own Lancers  
1st/5th Mahratta Light Infantry  
1st/6th Rajputana Rifles  
4th/6th Rajputana Rifles  
3rd/8th Punjab Regiment  
1st/12th Frontier Force Regiment

6th/13th Frontier Force Rifles  
3rd/15th Punjab Regiment  
4th/16th Punjab Regiment  
1st/2nd Gurkha Rifles  
1st/5th Gurkha Rifles  
1st/7th Gurkha Rifles  
1st/9th Gurkha Rifles

## CANADIAN UNITS

1st Canadian Infantry Brigade  
2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade  
3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade  
1st Canadian Armoured Brigade

## NEW ZEALAND UNITS

4th New Zealand Armoured Brigade  
5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade  
6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade

## POLISH UNITS

3rd Carpathian Division  
1st Carpathian Rifle Brigade  
2nd Carpathian Rifle Brigade  
5th Kresowa Division  
5th Wilenska Infantry Brigade  
6th Lwowska Infantry Brigade  
2nd Polish Armoured Brigade

Some of the American and French units that fought in the Battles for Cassino are mentioned within the main text.



50th anniversary of the Battles for Monte Cassino

## Glossary

This booklet is intended to be of interest to young people, as well as veterans. As the former may not be acquainted with basic military terminology, a simple glossary of 1944

British Army terms relating to variously sized commands is included here. These commands are listed in descending order of size with the rank of the commander shown in *italics*.

TERM	DESCRIPTION
Army Group <i>General or Field Marshal</i>	The largest military command deployed by the British Army, comprising two or more armies, and containing 400,000–600,000 troops.
Army <i>Lieutenant-General</i>	A military command controlling several subordinate corps, plus supporting forces, amounting to 100,000–200,000 troops.
Corps <i>Lieutenant-General</i>	A military command controlling two or more divisions, as well as other supporting forces, amounting to 50,000–100,000 troops.
Division <i>Major-General</i>	The standard 1944 British Army formation, an infantry or armoured division, containing 10,000–20,000 personnel.
Brigade <i>Brigadier</i>	A formation that contains several battalions or regiments that amount to 3000–6000 personnel, which exists either independently or else forms part of a division.
Regiment <i>Lieutenant-Colonel</i>	A unit typically of armoured or artillery forces, amounting to 500–900 soldiers, that equates in status and size to an infantry battalion.
Battalion <i>Lieutenant-Colonel</i>	A unit usually comprising 500–900 soldiers (such as an infantry, engineer or signals battalion).
Squadron <i>Major</i>	Typically, a sub-unit of an armoured or recce regiment that equates in status and size to an infantry company.
Company <i>Major</i>	A small sub-unit of a battalion. A typical infantry company could contain around 150–180 soldiers.
Battery <i>Major</i>	A small sub-unit, usually of artillery, that forms part of a battalion.
Unit	A small military grouping that ranges in size from a section (of 10 soldiers) up to a battalion or regiment (500–900 personnel).
Formation	A large military grouping that ranges in size from brigade up to army group.
Amphibious	Operation launched from the sea against an enemy shore.
Attrition	Constant wearing-down to weaken or destroy.
Axis	Alliance of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Japan.
Beachhead	An area on a beach that has been captured from the enemy and on which troops and equipment are landed.
Coalition	An alliance between groups or parties.
Counterattack	An attack in response to an attack.
Panzer	German fast mechanised armoured tanks or vehicles.
Subordinate	Person of a lower rank in the military chain of command.



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'A nation that forgets its past has no future.'  
These words by Winston Churchill could not be more apt to  
describe the purpose of this series of booklets,  
of which this is the second.

These booklets commemorate various Second World War actions,  
and aim not only to remember and commemorate those who  
fought and died, but also to remind future generations of  
the debt they owe to their forebears, and the inspiration that  
can be derived from their stories.

They will help those growing up now to be aware of the veterans'  
sacrifices, and of the contributions they made to our security  
and to the way of life we enjoy today.



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