



Anzio Beachhead of World War II

OPERATION SHINGLE

[The code name for the amphibious landing in the Anzio/Nettuno area on the west coast of Italy, some 30 miles south of Rome. Poster left is a WWII German leaflet dropped on Allied troops fighting for Anzio in Italy]

At 0200 on the 22nd of January 1944, the invasion fleet of 374 ships and landing craft, under the command of Rear Admiral Frank J. Lowry, USN, commenced landing troops of the US VI Corps on the beaches of Anzio and Nettuno. The name of a rather obscure hamlet, ANZIO, a former watering spot where Nero once came to soak his tyrannical bones and where a latter day would be Nero had come to pitch hay, bare-chested for the benefit of the newsreels, was thus destined to become a prominent word in the annals of war. The assault forces under the overall command of Major General John P. Lucas, consisted of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Division, under the command of Major General Lucian K. Truscott, supported by the 1st, 3rd, and 4th 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion--the 1st British Infantry Division, commanded by General W. R. C. Penny, supported by the 2nd special Service Brigade composed of the #9 Commando and #43 Royal Marine Commando met only light resistance upon landing and were soon joined by the 1st Armored Division commanded by Major General Ernest M. Harmon and the 45th U.S. Infantry Division commanded by Major General William W. Eagles.

Before breaking out of the beachhead, the 34th and 36th U.S. Infantry Divisions; the 5th and 56th British Infantry Divisions; and the 1st Special Service Force (an elite force of U.S. and Canadian soldiers under the command of Brigadier General Robert T. Frederick) joined the battle.

The landings had taken the Germans completely by surprise with the only resistance coming in the form of scattered mine fields and random shelling from some 88mm guns in the woods behind the beach, which were quickly silenced by naval gunfire. Some shells from larger German railway guns fell on the beachhead and among the anchored ships with little effect. The only opposition immediately came from two depleted coast

watching Battalions which were overrun quickly. By midnight of landing day, approximately 90% of the invasion force, amounting to 36,000 men 3,200 vehicles and large stores of supplies were ashore.

General Lucas chose to consolidate the beachhead awaiting the arrival of more men, Armor, heavy artillery and supplies before continuing further inland. When on January 30, VI Corps went on the offensive. Field Marshall Kesselring, the German commander of the area, had moved substantial forces into the area and had built them around the beachhead in order to prevent the Allied attempt to move further inland. The primary objective of the landing was to establish a beachhead, quickly drive inland to cut Highway 7, by which the enemy supplied his forces on the Garigliano-Minturno front and eventually cut off Highway 6 at Valmontone, thus trapping the German forces who opposed the bulk of the U. S. Fifth Army on the front at and around Cassino.

Few foresaw the four-month long bitter struggle that was to ensue or the battle for the beachhead which on three separate occasions found the U.S. defenders repulsing fanatic attacks by the Germans who had received orders from Hitler to eliminate the threat by completely destroying its defenders.

The question will never be settled by military critics as to what might have happened if VI Corps had pushed inland without waiting for reinforcements. Would they have been able to cut off the Germans, push on to cut the Highways and shorten the conflict in Italy or would they have been overrun by reinforcing elements of the German forces that were moving rapidly to that area?

It was not until May 25, 124 days after the initial landings that VI Corps broke out of the beachhead and linked up with the U.S. Fifth Army elements coming up from the south. The fighting was hard and bitter, as were the elements that had to be endured--rain and cold. The casualties amounted to over 30,000 including 4,400 killed. The "one hour drive" to Rome was finally completed on June 4, 1944.

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