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The Legacy of Military Necessity in Italy: War and Memory in Cassino and Monte Sole

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Graduate Program in History
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of
Philosophy
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The Legacy of Military Necessity in Italy:
War and Memory in Cassino and Monte Sole

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Cynthia D. Brown

Graduate Program in History

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

The rise of Benito Mussolini's Fascist party and its disastrous alliance with Nazi Germany remains one of the most well-known parts of Italy's Second World War experience, at least in English historical literature. The war did not end when the Italians surrendered to the Allies in September 1943. Military histories of what followed focus on the bitter campaign waged between the Germans and the Allies on the Italian peninsula. Much less is known about the impact of war on the Italian nation and its civilians.

From the Italian perspective, the war was a defining yet difficult period that remains controversial seventy years on. The war ripped the country and its people apart - both figuratively and literally.

This dissertation examines the 1943-45 war and its impact by comparing two Italian regions, Cassino and Monte Sole. Both Cassino and Monte Sole were unfortunate enough to be the sites of the major clashes and protracted battles of the Italian campaign.

The comparative approach reveals how the priority of winning affected respective German and Allied policies toward Italian civilians. The issue of military necessity led both sides to make a number of decisions, sometimes controversial, that affected the Italian people. The most well-known examples are the Allied decision to bomb the Abbey of Montecassino and the German massacre of nearly 800 unarmed women, children, and elderly at Monte Sole. This study reveals that these two events are only a fraction of the story.

The emphasis on these two major events overshadows the plethora of Italian experiences that emerged from the interaction between civilian and soldier in Italy. Allied and German policy toward the Italians – both civilian and soldier – had a tremendous impact on how Italians attach meaning to their war. The comparison and contrast between what happened and the resulting memory in Cassino and Monte Sole offers a more textured look at how Italians experienced and remember their war.

Keywords: war, Second World War, civil war, conflict, military policy toward civilians, interaction between civilian and soldier, bombing, massacres, memory.

Acknowledgements

I first became interested in the plight of the Italian civilian during the Second World War in 2005 when I was asked to be a driver/interpreter on a battlefield study tour of in 2005. The tour was both new and old. Built on the success of the Canadian Battlefields Foundation programs in Normandy, the Italy tour was delivered as part of the University of New Brunswick's Intersession Abroad program. The tour was delivered in May, so when we visited the Commonwealth War Graves sites the wreaths, laid by Italians on 25 April: the *Festa della liberazione*, were still at the Cross of Remembrance. I wondered how these people endured the war and why they found it important to honour the sacrifice of Allied soldiers on their Day of Liberation.

The next year, the tour was offered again but to allay my growing curiosity, we included more about how the Italians suffered. It was then, in 2006, that I first read Jack Olsen's *Silence on Monte Sole* and discovered the horror of what happened in the Apennines, just south of Bologna. We booked hotels and went in to Marzabotto, not knowing what we might find. What we found shook the foundations of everyone. Few of the students, most interested in military issues related to the Canadian Army, understood the extent to which Italian civilians suffered in the war. Their worlds changed on the day we visited Marzabotto and then the hills of Monte Sole.

We were greeted by the town with great fanfare, if not annoyance, because we did not call ahead. In typical Italian style and in spite of my neglect, the mayor, Edoardo Masetti, assembled a staff, some of whom could speak English, and arranged for an English speaking guide, Tiziana, and a survivor, Franco, to meet us at the Scuola di Pace for an afternoon program. We delegates were presented with gifts: a town of Marzabotto flag and a beautiful coffee table book featuring local photographs. It was a sort of kindness that became typical on our future travels and something we tried very hard to reciprocate.

Since that day, we have expanded our program to cover issues of the military campaign in Italy and the impact it had on civilians. My colleague, the co-director of the UNB program, and now my husband, Lee Windsor, covers the campaign side and I cover the impact on civilians. Our work has grown together and informed one another's since. In addition, our combined work has attracted many friends: both Italian and non-Italians. It is not uncommon to have an Italian passerby stop to observe the group of foreigners standing on a beach or in a town square and listen quietly while we finish our lecture. Then they inevitably ask: where do you come from and why are you here? That is usually followed up with: "Why do you speak my language? You must have Italian family?"

Our interest in the war usually prompts an anecdote or personal reflection that adds texture to my understanding of the millions of ways Italians experienced the Second World War. Although our students cannot generally understand the conversation, they listen with baited breath as our new Italian friend describes how he was on the beach when the landing came, was given chocolate from Canadian or American soldiers, or how his or her parents were forced to flee to caves to survive the winter.

First, then, I must thank all of those Italians who stopped and listened and told their stories. They have enriched my understanding of the campaign and given me hope in humanity.

In addition to those nameless Italians I have met since my first tour of the battlefields of Italy in 2005, I have made a number of friends who have directly contributed to my research and my work. My only fear in listing them is that I will miss someone. I met Paolo Vacca, from the town of San Pietro, in 2007 when he was supervising work on the building of the museum at San Pietro. He gathered friends and took our group on a tour of the site, telling us little tidbits of the story we could never know. The last I heard, his mother is still alive. I hope to record her story as well. Kay de Latour Scott, Alberto Fontana, and Roberto Molle from Roccasecca and the Cassino area have helped me and me to sites while we were doing research in the area. Mariella Costanzo, Angela Arnone, and Adriana, Pietro, and Primavera at the Hotel Ideale in Ortona have taken us and our students on as family whenever we are there. We shall remember Orazio always.

Since my first visit to Monte Sole in 2006, Marzia Gigli and Elena Monicelli have become great friends and have helped in my understanding. I value the work being done at the Scuola di Pace. Since 2010, Stefano Merzi has led our students through the site at Monte Sole, enlightening us to the hope that is possible. Anna Salerno at the Monte Sole Historical Park Archives was very helpful and patient with me while I took over her office in the summer of 2010 to carry out my research. Anna introduced me to Reginald Smith, an ex-Coldstream Guardsman, who entered into the Monte Sole area in February 1945 to find the bodies of many dead civilians, including a baby. Reginald and his wife, Vivienne, have become friends and welcomed me as family when I was able to visit them in Bristol in 2010.

I must thank Eric McGeer, Karen Storwick, Ken McLeod and all of my fellow D-Day Dodgers who have accompanied me to Italy over the years. Blake and Ben Seward, who have not yet accompanied us to Italy but who have been to war with us in France and Flanders, I must thank you for your continued encouragement. The Betts-Wilmott family, Tessa, Norm, and Kate, have been champions of my cause and been so kind on my travels. I must thank Marc Milner, Brent Wilson, and Valerie Gallant, from the Gregg Centre, for your continued support as I tackle this project. Professor Peter Kent deserves special thanks. As the supervisor of my Masters at UNB, my mentor, and also the director of UNB's Intersession in Rome study abroad program – your passion for Italian history has been infective.

I have a number of friends who bore the burden of this project along with me. The weight of massacres and civilian casualties does not make for light-hearted conversation. Know that I value your support and love throughout this project.

This study would not have been possible without the support of my History department at Western Ontario. Although I have lived and worked mainly in New Brunswick throughout my PhD, Western University has supported me very well through research grants and administrative support (thanks, Chris Speed). The faculty of the History department, especially my supervisor Professor Jonathan Vance, has made this possible. I would like to specially acknowledge Professors Robert Ventresca and Eli Nathans who have both gone above and beyond the call of duty in their support of this project. Thank you both for your advice throughout. Professors Vance and Ventresca, thank you for the letters that have supported successful applications for Ontario Graduate Scholarships.

Both this study and I have been enriched by the people who have stuck with me and whom I have met throughout this process.

Finally, I must thank my husband, Lee Windsor, whose love and support made it possible to keep going when the dark reality of what happened in Italy in 1943-1945 often became too heavy a burden to bear. I couldn't have done this without you.

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Introduction

Widening the Scope:

The Impact of War on the Italians, 1943-1945

The Second World War continues to be a source of controversy for the Italian nation. Although the Italian experience was not exceptional, there were, as historian Philip Morgan notes, some aspects that made it unique. Benito Mussolini's leading role in the rise of Fascism, his "first" fall in July 1943, the subsequent forty-five days of essentially leaderless chaos, and the fact that Italy was aligned with both the Allies and the Germans at different points in the war combine to differentiate Italy's war experience from those of other European nations.¹ The multifaceted nature of the Italian war experience led to a difficult national memory. For example, Robert Ventresca cites a "selective remembering and wilful forgetting" of the Fascist regime in the post-war period, which as Ventresca notes, is "evidence of an evolving process of confronting the legacy of Italy's recent past."² The emphasis on the Fascist period, however, is at the expense of the difficult two-year period between 1943 and 1945. Morgan notes that many Italians regard the war as beginning for them, not in 1940 when the Fascists declared war, but in 1943 after the signing of the armistice,³ yet less attention has generally been paid to this period. That which *is* remembered about the 1943-45 period, as Rosario Forlenza

¹ Philip Morgan, *The Fall of Mussolini: Italy, the Italians and the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2007), p. 3.

² Robert Ventresca. "Debating the Meaning of Fascism in Contemporary Italy," *Modern Italy* 11(2) (2006), 190.

³ Morgan, *The Fall of Mussolini*, p. 123. Morgan argues that this selective remembering allows Italian soldiers to be remembered as victims of German occupation instead of accomplices in the Fascist war of 1940 to 1943.

reminds us, is very selective. Forlenza writes that “In postwar Italy forgetting and remembering were often inseparable and embedded in the same narrative. Memory, in other words, was not only remembering (or remembering selectively) but also forgetting (and forgetting unconsciously).”⁴ The two-year military campaign that followed the declaration of the armistice ripped apart the nation and its people, both figuratively and literally. The course of the war, the political upheaval that ensued after the armistice, and the role of the partisans in the so-called war of liberation were defining factors in the creation of the Italian Republic after the war.

This dissertation examines the 1943-45 war and its impact by comparing two Italian regions, Cassino and Monte Sole. Both Cassino and Monte Sole were unfortunate enough to be the sites of the major clashes and protracted battles of the Italian campaign.⁵ The examples of Cassino and Monte Sole were chosen for this case study because of their location in the midst of the two major German defensive lines in Italy. In both cases, the land was of critical tactical importance to both sides. Once the major terrain features in both areas fell, German defence in the area became untenable. Moreover, the comparison shows the major differences and similarities between the war in Cassino in southern Italy in the winter of 1943-44 and the war in the north in late 1944. The examples of Cassino and Monte Sole are illustrative of the different stages of the war in Italy and therefore show the evolution of both German and Allied policy toward civilians. Allied and

⁴ Rosario Forlenza, “Sacrificial Memory and Political Legitimacy in Postwar Italy: Reliving and Remembering World War II,” *History and Memory* 24:2 (Fall/Winter 2012), p. 88.

⁵ Cassino is located approximately 140 km south of Rome and was in the middle of the German Gustav Line between November 1943 and May 1944. Monte Sole is located approximately twenty kilometers south of the renaissance city of Bologna and was in the middle of the German Gothic Line between August 1943 and April 1945. As a result, both were subjected to the longest periods of protracted war and the most brutal conditions of all of Italy.

German policy had a significant impact on how the Italians experienced the war. Moreover, the Italian response to the German “occupiers” and Allied “liberators”⁶ had a corresponding impact on the development of German and Allied policy toward the Italians throughout the course of the campaign.

Both the German and Allied armies were fighting to win the war in Italy. The priority of winning the war affected the respective German and Allies policies toward Italian civilians. The issue of military necessity led both sides to make a number of decisions, sometimes controversial, that affected the Italian people. The most well-known examples that relate to this case study are the Allied decision to bomb the Abbey of Montecassino and the German massacre of nearly 800 unarmed women, children, and elderly at Monte Sole. Despite the emphasis on these two events on the local and international stage, the comparison between Monte Sole and Cassino reveal that these two events represent only a fraction of the story.

This study draws from the strengths of two genres of history, military and social, to understand the interaction between civilian and soldier in Italy and how that interaction changes the nature of understanding about the major aspects of Italy’s war. Outside of the Fascist period, it is the resistance,⁷ the civil war,⁸ and massacres in Rome, Tuscany, and

⁶ The author notes that depending on the stance of any one particular Italian, they might not view the Germans as occupiers or the Allies as liberators. For example, anti-fascist Italians may have viewed the Allies as liberators while fascist Italians may have viewed them as invaders. Those Italians who hoped to wait out the war may have regarded both the Germans and the Allies as a threat.

⁷ Select works include Philip Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); Mirco Dondi, “Division and Conflict in the Partisan Resistance,” *Modern Italy* 12:2 (2007), pp. 225-236; Paolo Pezzino, “The Italian Resistance between History and Memory” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 10 (2005), pp. 396-412; Roberto Battaglia, *The Story of the Italian Resistance* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1957).

⁸ Claudio Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile: Saggio storico sulla moralità nelle Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri Editore, 1991).

Emilia-Romagna⁹ that are among the most well documented events in Italy's Second World War and have an influence on the events that led to the declaration of the Republic in 1947.¹⁰

The impact of the military campaign on the Italian experience is left largely unconsidered. While historians of Italy's domestic trials in 1943-45 write of events without much reference to the war being fought in their own country, military histories of the campaign in Sicily and Italy are not much better in their consideration of the Italian situation. In fact, most western military historians make only passing reference to the existence of Italian civilians or soldiers.¹¹ Secondary histories of the military campaign do not acknowledge the thousands of Italian civilians and soldiers who died after September 1943 at the hands of the Germans or of other causes related to the war. This study considers how the choices made by German and Allied commanders in waging the war impacted the Italian people and how they remember the 1943-45 period.

⁹ There has been a wave of research done by historian Paolo Pezzino and his colleagues about the massacres in Italy that has contributed a great deal to an understanding of the truth and placing it within the context of the 1943-45 conflict. These are discussed later in this introduction.

¹⁰ Italian anti-fascist parties virtually took control of the Italian government after June 1944 and were instrumental in the creation of the new Republic by 1946. For more, see Martin Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871 to the Present, Third Edition* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2008), p. 363.

¹¹ In most cases, references made are largely negative about the ineffectiveness of the Italian soldier or the suspicious, backward thinking Italian civilian. The overwhelming sense is that Italians were dirty, different, and dismal. Matthew Parker includes the impressions from a New Zealand medical unit: "Most of the villages passed through were small and filthy, each having its distinctive odor and all united in poverty." Matthew Parker, *Monte Cassino: The Hardest Fought Battle of World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), p. 156. Allied documents and memoirs have a tendency to support this negative view of Italians at first but the opinion generally changes as a relationship develops. Roger Absalom writes about long-term relationships forged between Italian civilians and Allied soldiers. Roger Absalom, "Peasant Memory and the Italian Resistance" in R.J.B. Bosworth, Patrizia Dogliani, eds., *Italian Fascism: History, Memory, and Representation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 31-44.

In January 1943, the Allies made the decision, based on what planners perceived as sound military rationale, to open a second front in Italy.¹² The Germans chose to defend Italy, first in Sicily, then south of Rome, and finally on the Gothic Line, south of Bologna. For the Germans, Italy and especially the industrial north was too important to let go. These decisions on the part of the Allies and the Germans brought the war to Italy and subjected Italian civilians to brutal conditions and months of suffering. In fact, both the military campaign and the civilian policies of the Germans and the Allies shaped the Italian civil war, the resistance, the massacres, the liberation, the reconstruction, and finally how individual Italians remember the war. One must understand the military campaign that was waged in Italy and the choices that commanders were required to make in waging it. But this approach is not one-sided; Italian civilians impacted the choices that German and Allied commanders made. Ultimately, this study looks at how the interaction between civilian and soldier impacted the course of war and how that interaction then contributed to the fractured memory of the war for Italians.¹³

Although the first priority for the German and Allied armies in Italy was to win the war, the interaction between civilian and soldier had a significant impact on the decision-making process of commanders planning for battle. For the Allies, there is a

¹² Planners were well aware that Stalin was concerned that the Soviets were pulling most of weight in the fight against the Germans on the eastern front. Opening a second front in 1943, before the Allies were ready for a landing on the Normandy coast, was essential to the war effort and the success on the Russian front.

¹³ Historian Paolo Pezzino takes this approach in his work on the reconstruction of Italian massacres. “It is only by reconstructing the interaction between these three protagonists (the Germans and Fascists, the Italian partisans, and the civilians as victims) that it will be possible to go beyond the accounts of single episodes (which are always especially tragic for the survivors, for whom every massacre has its own distinctiveness which makes it unique) in order to try to find answers to certain general questions of great interest.” Paolo Pezzino, “The German Military Occupation of Italy and the War against Civilians” in *Modern Italy* 12 (2) (2007), p. 174. This dissertation widens that scope to consider the role Allied soldiers and strategy plays in that interaction.

distinct tension between military necessity and the desire to prevent collateral damage. For example, in pursuit of convincing Italy to quit the alliance with Germany, the Allies implemented Civil Affairs, an administrative structure designed to take care of the needs of the populace. Civil Affairs Italy prepared to address all of the needs of the people, from ensuring that they were properly fed to restoring the Italian administrative structure to its pre-Fascist state. In comparison, the Germans were ruthless in their treatment of what they considered the traitorous Italians. After the September 1943 armistice, the German army scorched the earth, taking what they could use and destroying what they could not. Working-age males were rounded up and forced to choose between service in Mussolini's Republican Army or deportation to forced labour in Germany. Italians who refused were often murdered on the spot.

Early Allied and German policies only exacerbated an already difficult situation. German rage at the Italian turn forced some Italians to seek out the resistance. Benevolent Allied policies drew Italian soldiers and civilians willing to help. Within weeks of September 1943, the Allies were recruiting and training Italian soldiers to facilitate the growing resistance in the north. Allied commanders encouraged the Italian people to rise up against their occupiers. The Germans responded with brutal attempts to deter resistance. Increasingly, Italians were forced to make choices in the context of the German and Allied fight.

In the pursuit of winning the war, the Allied and the German commanders took advantage of all that the people and the nation had to offer. The Allies used partisan manpower to disrupt German transport while the Germans stripped occupied Italy of its resources and factory output. The Italians were not agents without choice; they too made

choices that affected the course of war. Many Italians chose to resist the Germans while others joined Mussolini's Republican Army. For their active role, the Italians suffered.

Central to this study are two events carried out under the guise of military necessity: the Allied bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino and the German massacre of nearly 800 unarmed women, children, and elderly at Monte Sole. The consideration of these two events in the context of the greater Allied and German strategy reveals how the German High Command was far more successful in information operations than the Allies. In fact, the treatment of the bombing and the massacre in German propaganda, documentation, and post-war war crimes trials shapes how Italians and the world remember these two events. Despite the fact that the Allies made long-term provisions to care for Italian civilians and even warned them of the bombing of the monastery¹⁴ before it happened, the German *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) seized the opportunity to issue a press release in which they referred to the Allies as "barbarians who daily bomb the marvellous monuments of art and culture in our old continent of Europe."¹⁵

Secondary literature about the battles of Cassino, including memoirs from Allied commanders such as General Mark Clark, commander of 5th Army, adopts the view that the bombing was a mistake. International and Italian national memory support this view.¹⁶ As this study suggests, the Allies only realized the bombing was a mistake with hindsight.

¹⁴ In Italy, it was common practice for the Allies to drop leaflets on population centres to forewarn civilians of the bombing before it was carried out thereby giving up the element of surprise. At the moment the civilians were warned of the impending bombing, German troops would also be aware.

¹⁵ TNA, FO 371/43817, 17 February 1944, Outline of News and Enemy Propaganda, File No. 32, "1944."

¹⁶ One of the dominant themes in the *Historiale* museum in Cassino, opened in 2006, is that the bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino was needless.

The Allied bombing of Montecassino offers stark contrast to the German massacre at Monte Sole. By the summer of 1944, the Italian resistance was widespread in north Italy. Many of the partisan brigades, supplied by the Allies, had a significant impact on the German war effort. Throughout the spring and summer of 1944, the Stella Rossa brigade, operating in the mountains around Monte Sole, battled German troops, gathered intelligence, and disrupted transport to great effect. In May 1944, at the same time the Allies broke through the Hitler Line at Cassino and advanced toward Rome, the Stella Rossa brigade attacked the German rear. The efforts of the partisan brigade had a direct impact on Allied battles south of Rome. The partisan interference meant the Germans could not turn their full attention to defending against the Allies or even preparing for follow-on defence on the Gothic Line.

The German army, its attention divided, was forced to deal with the partisan threat. The military necessity of dealing with that threat caused the Germans to commit a series of terror operations and massacres against civilian populations in Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna, including the massacre at Monte Sole in which 771 women, children, and elderly people were killed. The debate over the meaning of the massacre continues seventy years after: the partisans are considered either as heroes in the war of liberation or villains responsible for instigating the massacre. German culpability is rarely considered.¹⁷

The impact of the campaign and German and Allied policy on the resulting fractured memory of Italy's war is evident in the comparison between the two examples. The emphasis on Allied bombing in southern Italy through the Cassino example and the

¹⁷ In a post-war European Union environment, this is perhaps understandable. Despite this the debate is bitter; the Italian war continues, seventy years on.

continued debate over how to remember the German massacre at Monte Sole are characteristic of the fractured Italian memory. Moreover, placing the Italian experience in the context of the military campaign shows how Italians both remember and forget elements of their Second World War experience. This study shows there is far more to the story than Allied bombing in the south and German massacres in the north. The contrast between the museums and memorials in Cassino and Monte Sole found in the latter half of this study highlights the ongoing debate over memory and commemoration seventy years later.

The resulting Italian fractured memory over its Second World War is not uncommon. As historian Sarah Farmer writes, commemoration of the “complex and division period” of the war in France is “punctuated as much by conflict as by consensus.”¹⁸ Farmer’s study on the massacre in Oradour-sur-Glane on 10 June 1944 highlights the difficulties in placing the massacre of French civilians in the context of the French experience of occupation, collaboration, and resistance in the Second World War. Farmer notes the tension between the attempt to devise a shared, collective memory and the “possibility of autonomy for the individual in relation to the shared memories of groups to which he or she belongs.”¹⁹ Farmer’s study offers an interesting parallel to the examples of Cassino and Monte Sole.

This study emerges at an important time in the historiography of the Second World War in Italy. First, a major revision of our understanding of the Italian campaign, including its strategies, goals, and outcomes, is being undertaken to stress the importance

¹⁸ Sarah Farmer, *Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 4.

¹⁹ Farmer, *Martyred Village*, p. 3.

of the campaign as the “long right flank” of the Normandy landings and campaign.²⁰ This revisionism and consideration of Allied overall strategy in waging the campaign provide important context for the Italian war experience and demonstrate that the campaign was not a futile waste. Allied strategy, including the bombing of cities and important religious, cultural, and historical monuments, can thus be viewed in a different perspective. The latest research on the Italian campaign shows that it made a significant contribution to Allied victory in Europe. For those who lost loved ones, that is hardly comforting.

In addition to the revised understanding of Allied strategic aims, numerous historical and popular works have emerged in the last fifteen years that grapple with the difficult memory of massacres in Italy. This interest comes after years of “forgetting” and was sparked by the fiftieth anniversary of most of the Italian massacres, the trials of Erich Priebke in 1996-97, and the revisionism of the myth of the “clean Wehrmacht.”²¹ In 2005 and 2007, Italian military tribunals convicted ten former SS soldiers, in absentia, to life sentences for their roles in massacres in Monte Sole and Sant’Anna.²² The

²⁰ Windsor, “Overlord’s Long Right Flank,” pp. 219-237.

²¹ Paolo Pezzino, (Translated by Noor Giovanni Mazhar) *Memory and Massacre: Revisiting Sant’Anna di Stazzema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 1. For more on the revisionism of the myth of the clean Wehrmacht see Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2006); Omer Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²² Barbara McMahon, “10 former Nazis convicted of Tuscan Massacre, *The Guardian*, 23 June 2005 found at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/jun/23/secondworldwar.italy> last accessed 14 March 2013 ; “Italy convicts Nazis massacre,” *BBC News*, 13 January 2007, found at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6259987.stm>, last accessed 14 March 2013.

convictions were largely symbolic but provided closure for the victims and their families. It is unlikely the accused will be extradited from Germany.²³

Despite the judgment of the La Spezia trials and the closure it accorded to the *superstiti*,²⁴ the massacres continue to be steeped in controversy. Movies such as Spike Lee's *The Miracle at St. Anna* (2008) and Giorgi Diritti's *l'uomo che verrà* (2009) have brought the atrocities against Italians into the mainstream media. For example, Lee's movie, based on the book by James McBride about the massacre in Sant'Anna in Stazzema, incorporates most of the myths. The film depicts a traitor partisan and the token "good" German who refused to take part in the massacre, and intimates that the massacre was the fault of the partisans. As a result, the film caused much controversy in Italy. In 2007, when filming started, the *Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia* (ANPI) requested that the script for Lee's film be altered from McBride's book. ANPI argued that there were factual problems with the storyline; there was no proof that the partisan traitor who led German SS troops to Sant'Anna existed.²⁵ Moreover, ANPI argued that the film suggested that the partisans were responsible for the massacre:

It is incredible that in 2007 the presence of Partisans in Sant'Anna should again be proposed as the cause of the massacre of 560 civilians. After the ruling of La Spezia, this doubt, which has for decades clouded the truth about the terrible slaughter, seemed to have been dispelled.²⁶

²³ Historian Paolo Pezzino was called to sit as an expert witness on the La Spezia trial. His reflections on his role in discovering the truth are quite revealing. Paolo Pezzino, "'Experts in truth?': the politics of retribution in Italy and the role of historians," in *Modern Italy*, 15:3 (2010), pp. 349-363.

²⁴ Survivors and the families of survivors of the massacre.

²⁵ McBride's book depicts the traitor leading the SS to Sant'Anna so they could capture the commander of the partisan brigade.

²⁶ Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre*, p. 10.

l'uomo che verrà, about the massacre at Monte Sole, has similar elements that propagate the myths. The films have served to raise awareness about the massacres in Italy but they have also fueled the ongoing debate over what the massacres mean.

In addition to these popular portrayals of the Italian massacres, historical studies of the massacres and the subsequent myths are emerging in both English and Italian. A large body of historical research on the atrocities committed by German troops in Italy is ongoing. Historian Paolo Pezzino and his research group have made a major contribution to the understanding of these atrocities. Pezzino began his research in 1993 when he was asked to investigate the massacre at Guardistallo in the province of Pisa on its fiftieth anniversary. Pezzino was asked to “put an end to the nagging doubts which had divided the community to show once and for all who was to ‘blame’ for the 50 civilians killed following a clash between retreating German troops and the local partisan band.”²⁷ His early work led to him being called as an expert witness for the La Spezia trials in 2005 and 2007.

In his search for historical truth,²⁸ Pezzino recognized the need to place the massacres

... in a more precise historical context by reconstructing the power structures, the logic and the cultural conditioning which made them possible, the behaviour and aims of the various protagonists, the complex evolution of the survivors’ memories and the ways in which the community memory has been taken up, or expunged, by the anti-Fascist paradigm of Republican Italy.²⁹

²⁷ Paolo Pezzino, “‘Experts in truth?’: the politics of retribution in Italy and the role of historians,” in *Modern Italy*, 15:3, p. 351.

²⁸ Pezzino, “Experts in truth,” p. 360.

²⁹ Paolo Pezzino, “The German Military Occupation of Italy and the War against Civilians,” in *Modern Italy* 12 (2) (2007), p. 174.

In other words, the impact of the war on Italians needs to be set in the context of the larger war – or wars – going on in Italy at the time. For example, Pezzino acknowledged the role of the three protagonists for each massacre: the Germans and Fascists (responsible for the action); the civilians (the victims); and the partisans, who must consider the threat of German reprisals in their own actions.³⁰

The research of Pezzino and his colleagues, which has been ongoing since early in the 2000s, has produced a number of monograph case studies including those on Marzabotto³¹ and Sant’Anna.³² The two case studies are carefully researched and detailed and have contributed much to the understanding of how and why the massacres were carried out. Pezzino’s research makes it clear that these were pre-meditated, military operations carried out within the context of a “war against civilians”³³ but it has done little to resolve the debate that rages between the left and right in Italy.

Pezzino’s approach naturally has to deal with a number of competing truths. Each protagonist has a different point of view and perspective on the desired outcome between 1943 and 1945. For the Germans, the massacre became what Pezzino calls an “unpleasant but inevitable result of military operations against the partisans.” The civilians, on the other hand, were trapped between the desire to resist the German and Fascist armies and the desire to survive. The partisans, convinced of the need to resist, were forced to consider the consequences of their military action against the Germans. The surprising

³⁰ Pezzino, “The German Military Occupation of Italy,” p. 174.

³¹ Luca Baldissara e Paolo Pezzino, *Il massacro: Guerra ai civili a Monte Sole* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 2009).

³² Paolo Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre: Revisiting Sant’Anna di Stazzema*, Noor Giovanni Mazhar, trans. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

³³ Pezzino, “The German Military Occupation of Italy and the War against Civilians,” p. 175; Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre*, p.3.

result of Pezzino's research in Tuscany is that "only a minority of the episodes and victims can be linked to 'reprisals.'" ³⁴

The detailed research of Pezzino and his colleagues has not erased the myths or resolved the ongoing debate surrounding the issue of responsibility. In fact, the civil war over the meaning of the massacre continues to rage, especially in areas that suffered the most during the war. This "debate" is fueled by personal experiences and how individuals have incorporated the Italian massacres into their own personal memories. Angelo Portelli's study on the memory of the Ardeatine Caves incident, the most well-known of the Italian massacres, shows that even the counterfactual can be incorporated into individual memory. Portelli wrote about the March 1944 partisan attack on the Bozen SS Police Force in Rome and the subsequent reprisal by the Germans the following day in which 335 Italian men and boys were shot at the Ardeatine Caves. The entrance to the cave was then blown to hide the evidence of the massacre. Portelli's research reveals that there are many Romans who believe that the partisans were responsible for the deaths because they did not respond to the German request to turn themselves in. In addition, many Romans remember a period of days and even weeks between the partisan attack and the reprisal, which would have been enough time for guilty partisans to turn themselves in. Others remember notices demanding that the partisans report to Gestapo headquarters. Yet the murders at the cave were finished within twenty-four hours of the partisan attack. ³⁵ For Portelli, the brutal circumstances of the massacre "prompted countrymen of the victims, citizens of the wounded and victimized country, to go out of

³⁴ Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre*, pp. 2, 7.

³⁵ Alessandro Portelli, *History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome: The Order Has Been Carried Out* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

their way to invent excuses for their oppressors and executioners.”³⁶ It is difficult to find truth in an event for which there is little comprehension of why it happened.

In Italy, the vast historical research done by Italian historians such as Paolo Pezzino and Angelo Portelli has failed to put an end to the public debate about who was responsible for the massacres of civilians in Italy in 1944.³⁷ The massacres are intimately tied into an already contentious resistance literature. In the process of reconstructing the truth about the massacre in Monte Sole, Pezzino and co-author Luca Baldissara revealed that the battle, long believed to have been fought between the Germans and the partisan group on the morning of 29 September, the first day of the massacre, did not happen.³⁸ Unveiling the truth that the partisans did nothing to try to stop the massacre or to provoke it fuels the debate. Partisan survivors do not want to admit they were helpless to stop the massacre after months of battling the Germans so successfully.

This study answers Pezzino’s call to place Italy’s experience between 1943 and 1945 within the larger historical context of the war by widening the scope but also considering how “the war against civilians” led to a difficult memory of Italy’s war. The comparative approach considers the massacre of Monte Sole and the resulting fractured memory but also includes earlier instances of the German war against civilians in Cassino. The long view shows how the policy developed over time and focuses on another protagonist present in the war in Italy: the Allies. The Allies encouraged, armed,

³⁶ Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out*, p. 157.

³⁷ Right wing factions continue to blame the partisans for provoking the massacre. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

³⁸ Despite numerous accounts about a battle that happened between the partisans and the Germans on the first day of the massacre, Baldissara and Pezzino found no evidence to substantiate it ever happened. Their book makes no mention of a battle. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 5.

and assisted the partisans north of Rome in their fight against the Germans. In fact, this study reveals that the partisans were an important part of Allied victory in Italy. The German reaction to the Allied supported resistance and the brutality of the atrocities against civilians bolsters this idea.

Although Pezzino's work does consider massacres and atrocities in southern Italy,³⁹ the primary focus is on the massacres in the north. The massacres in the north are usually associated more closely with partisan activity and are therefore wrapped up in the narrative of the Italian resistance myth that, until the early 1990s at least, was "portrayed as the struggle of an entire population to liberate the country from the German invader and its few Fascist allies." As Pezzino notes, this forced into the shadows many of the stories that did not fit this paradigm.⁴⁰ In 1991, historian Claudio Pavone published *Una Guerra Civile* which declared that the resistance was acting in the context of both a civil war and a war of liberation.⁴¹ *Una Guerra Civile* marked a dramatic change in Italian historiography, making possible a more nuanced view of the two-year period after the fall of Fascism.⁴² Pavone's landmark book arguably opened the door for Pezzino's very important work on massacres in Italy between 1943 and 1945.

³⁹ See Pezzino, "The German Military Occupation of Italy," p. 184. Pezzino distinguishes between massacres in the south, where the period of resistance and war was very short and those in the north. The north experienced a long war, a long period of resistance activity, and life did not return to 'normal' for months.

⁴⁰ Paolo Pezzino, "The Italian Resistance between History and Memory," in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 10 (2005), p. 397.

⁴¹ Claudio Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile: Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri Editore, 1991).

⁴² Pezzino, "The Italian Resistance between History and Memory," 396.

The characterization of the two years between 1943 and 1945 as a civil war *and* a war of liberation, although more inclusive than the simplified idea that all Italy was unified in the fight against Fascism, still misses voices from those, largely in the south, who did not experience the resistance at all. For example, in the Cassino sector, there was little to no active resistance against the German army.⁴³ The comparative approach of this study accounts for the parts of Italy's war overshadowed by the resistance myth. German troops committed atrocities in the south in the absence of any resistance, adding further credence to Pezzino's claim that the majority of German atrocities were not reprisal killings. Massacres committed in the south were more likely committed to facilitate "territorial control" or were acts of revenge.⁴⁴ The German "war against civilians" existed in the south although it does not receive the recognition it does in the north.

Widening the scope to include the campaign in the south reveals much about early German and Allied policy in Italy. Most historians take a negative view when writing about Allied policy toward civilians in Italy. Historian Gabriella Gribaudi's provocative title, *Guerra Totale: Tra bombe alleate e violenze naziste Napoli e il fronte meridionale, 1940-44*, speaks to this. Despite this, Gribaudi's work has contributed to the understanding of the war in the south. The Allies were responsible for the bombing of Italian cities and historic, religious, and cultural monuments. This study reveals that support delivered through Allied Civil Affairs allowed for the rehabilitation of the Italian civil administration and intended to help pick up the pieces after the war. Allied Civil

⁴³ In fact, I have heard anecdotal evidence from survivors who admit that the Germans in the area were not that bad.

⁴⁴ Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre*, p. 7. The Cardito massacre, in the Cassino sector, is an example of this.

Affairs was a vehicle through which Allied planners could solve the problem of the tension between the need to win the war and the desire to prevent collateral damage.

Victoria Belco's *War, Massacre, and Recovery in Central Italy, 1943-1948* is largely critical of the Allies for the destruction caused by bombing and the bungled attempts at Allied Military Government (AMG) and Civil Affairs in Italy.⁴⁵ The Allied Civil Affairs administrative organization was conceived of as a military necessity to take care of at least the minimum needs of a civilian population caught between two warring armies. Despite her generally negative stance on the Allies, Belco does admit that the efforts of the Allied Control Commission "went well beyond basic measures to 'avoid disease and unrest.'"⁴⁶ By contrast, German policy in southern Italy was punitive against the civilians. The German scorched-earth policy encouraged more Italians to join the resistance. Ultimately, as Belco and Gribaudo write, the need to win the war led to brutal and bitter consequences for Italians all over Italy. But nothing the Allies did compares to the massacre perpetrated by the Germans in 1944.

Although the Germans were responsible for scorching the earth, rounding up and deporting or killing Italian men, and massacring civilians for no apparent cause, the predominant memory in the Cassino sector is of Allied bombings of towns and cities.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Victoria C. Belco, *War, Massacre, and Recovery in Central Italy, 1943-1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

⁴⁶ Belco, *War, Massacre, and Recovery*, p. 109. This is not meant as a criticism of Belco, however. It is just illustrative of the lack of secondary literature on the goals and strategy behind the ACC. Chapter 2 contributes to the understanding that the Allies took careful consideration before bombing Italian infrastructure even going so far as to drop leaflets to warn civilians before the bombing took place. This had the effect of not only alerting the civilians but also alerting the German enemy. In this way, the Allies sacrificed the element of surprise in order to avoid unnecessary deaths.

⁴⁷ The official, predominant story in Cassino, expressed in the Historiale museum and at the Abbey of Montecassino is that the Germans were good because they saved the treasures of the monastery. They contrast the "good" German with the Allies who were responsible for the widespread destruction caused by aerial bombardment. As Chapter 2 and 4 explain, the dominant memory does not translate to the

The negative tone adopted by Gribaudo and Belco is supported by secondary literature about the battles, based on Allied documents and memoirs from Allied commanders.

General Mark Clark, commander of American 5th Army and the man ultimately responsible for the bombing, was critical of the decision to bomb the Abbey of Monte Cassino, writing in his memoirs:

Not only was the bombing of the Abbey an unnecessary psychological mistake in the propaganda field, but it was a tactical military mistake of the first magnitude. It only made our job more difficult, more costly in terms of men, machines and time.”⁴⁸

Historians writing about the battle of Cassino cannot help but be influenced by this negative, critical view held by the former commander. Popular writer Matthew Parker argues, in *Monte Cassino: The Hardest Fought Battle of World War II*, “That a treasure of civilization such as Monte Cassino should have to be destroyed reverberated around the world as the culmination of the pity, stupidity, and barbarism of war.”⁴⁹ That message, prevalent throughout secondary literature of the campaign, affects how Italians remember the war. This study explores the Allied decision to bomb the Abbey as well as Allied policy in place to protect religious, cultural, and historical monuments and buildings if military necessity allowed.⁵⁰ In addition, it outlines how the Germans used the bombing of the monastery in propaganda messages vilifying the Allies. The Germans

experiences as expressed in local villages, which in many cases erected monuments and hold annual ceremonies to commemorate the large battle in that area and the losses of Allied soldiers. In many cases, these ceremonies are held in conjunction with an Allied contingent.

⁴⁸ Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1950), p. 312.

⁴⁹ Parker, *Monte Cassino*, p. 175.

⁵⁰ As Chapter 2 describes, Generals Eisenhower and Alexander weighed the lives of their soldiers against the protection of buildings. Both concluded that the lives of their soldiers were of more worth than a building. Despite this, the Allies recognized the value of Italy’s cultural treasures.

were far more effective in information operation campaigns than the Allies when it came to the promotion of the misdeeds of the Allies and excusing their own.

This dissertation compares the experiences in Cassino and Monte Sole to widen the perspective on the German “war against civilians” and to understand how that “war against civilians” led to a fractured memory in the aftermath of war. In addition, this study considers the impact of Allied policy had an impact on the course of the war and on Italian civilians. Although the Allies had a benevolent attitude toward the Italian people, for largely pragmatic reasons, there were cases in which Allied policy had a detrimental outcome. In a general sense, Allied bombing destroyed cities in all parts of the country, killing civilians in the process. Moreover, the Allied decision to encourage and equip Italian partisans and recruit and train former soldiers for the war effort contributed to the escalation of an already brutal German policy toward civilians. The war between the German and Allied armies in Italy and the evolution of their respective policies toward the civilians forced Italians to make a number of impossible choices that led to a fractured and difficult memory in the aftermath.

Chapter 1 sets the Cassino and Monte Sole examples in the context of the greater military campaign. Allied official histories are used to outline strategic decisions behind the choice to bring the war to Italy and the tension between the Allies and the Italians in negotiating the armistice. An examination of the sequence of events that led to the September 1943 armistice and the reactions of the Italians, the Germans, and the Allies to this process reveals the confusion, mistrust, and grey areas that resulted. The primary goal of Chapter 1 is to challenge existing secondary literature about the intentions of the

Allies, the Germans, and the Italians and how each played off the other, resulting in a complicated situation.

Chapter 2 and 4 deal with the Cassino sector from the arrival of war to the contrasts that emerged between the local official memory of the region and the memory found in the small towns and villages in the area. Chapter 2 reveals how varied the experience was in the Cassino sector depending on which armies were stationed in each area. For example, this chapter deals with rapes committed by French Colonial troops and a little-known massacre that happened high in the mountains. Decades later it is still unclear who was responsible for the massacre, although survivors believe it was a German mountain division. Finally, chapter 2 examines the tension between military necessity and the need to prevent collateral damage through the very complicated decision to bomb the Abbey of Montecassino and the resulting propaganda value the Germans gained. Although there were many different experiences in the Cassino sector, Chapter 4 highlights how the official memory centres on and is critical of the bombing of the Abbey. This contrasts with local memory which often honours and commemorates the efforts of those Allied soldiers who are now buried on Italian soil.

Chapter 3 recounts the story of the Stella Rossa partisans, who found their home in the hills of Monte Sole, south of Bologna, and the resultant massacre of almost 800 men, women, and children. Besides journalist Jack Olsen's *Silence on Monte Sole*⁵¹ and a few short references to the massacre in period histories and academic articles, this is the first detailed description of the activities of the partisans and the resulting massacre in

⁵¹ Jack Olsen interviewed a number of survivors in the course of writing *Silence on Monte Sole*. He brought the difficult story to an English audience. This is the first work since to re-assess the massacre and place it in the context of the Second World War in Italy. Jack Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1968).

English, written from primary documents. In the Italian language, Paolo Pezzino and Luca Baldissara published *Il massacro: Guerra ai civili a Monte Sole* in 2009 that focuses on the local resistance, the massacre, and the subsequent trials in the aftermath.⁵²

Chapter 5 reviews the difficult memory that emerged in the local area and argues that the civil war continues in Italy as the local population struggles to find meaning in a brutal massacre. Three stages of memory development are examined from the months immediately following the massacre to the most recent years, marked by the establishment of the Monte Sole Historical Park and the opening of a research centre, *La Scuola di Pace* (School of Peace). The debate continues to rage in the town of Marzabotto,⁵³ as the left primarily focuses on the fact that the partisans deserve respect for their efforts while the right criticises them for abandoning the population to the fate of the Germans.⁵⁴ Personal connections as survivors or as relatives of survivors leave little room for grey in the debate.

The study draws on a variety of sources. In my research, I visited the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington DC, The National Archives in Kew Gardens, United Kingdom, the Monte Sole Park Historical Archive, the Italian State Archives and the Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito, Ufficio Servizi archives, both in Rome. In the process of my work, I also consulted records from Library and Archives Canada and the Directorate of History and Heritage document collection found online. I found a wealth of documents from all archives, but for this study I drew heavily

⁵² Paolo Pezzino, *Il massacro: Guerra ai civili a Monte Sole*.

⁵³ The memory of the Monte Sole massacre resides in two places: the town of Marzabotto and on Monte Sole, where the massacre was carried out. For more details, see Chapter 5.

⁵⁴ Francesco Fabbriani, "Polemica Monte Sole: "Rispettate i partigiani, ne morirono duecento," *il Resto del Carlino*, Sabato, 29 maggio 2010, p. 34.

on Allied Control Commission records from NARA,⁵⁵ political and diplomatic records from The National Archives, and the significant records, including many newspaper clippings at the Monte Sole Park Archives. The newspapers and various collections found here allowed me to piece together what happened in Marzabotto and Monte Sole since the end of the war but to also understand the bitter debate that continues over the meaning of the massacre.

At the Rome State Archives and the Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito, Ufficio Servizi I found a wealth of documents that I will use in future work. At the State Archives, among other things, I was able to review documents from the *Comitato Liberazione Nazionale* (CLN) organizations set up in provinces like Frosinone. At the Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito archives, I found many documents about the resistance and the Italian army both during the Sicily campaign and beyond. Again, although I do address the partisans briefly in terms of their interactions with Allied personnel, they are not the main focus of this particular study.

It is inevitable that war causes suffering. For centuries this has been the case. Not only were the Italians subjected to war, which arguably has a life of its own, but the armies of many different nations occupied their territory for months at a time. In a general sense, both the German and Allied armies had policies for dealing with Italians, both soldiers and civilians. These policies were drastically different. Allied armies took a benevolent attitude toward the Italian population while the Germans were embittered by the betrayal of the Italian Army and state. That bitterness only grew as the war progressed, having the corresponding effect of turning more and more Italians against the

⁵⁵ Still, there are many documents, thousands of boxes left untouched in the Allied Control Commission collection that I will return to in future studies. Their value for understanding Allied policy toward civilians in Italy and also the situation on the ground after the battle is extraordinary.

German army. The Allies, on the other hand, were keen to maintain a friendly relationship with the Italians and created an elaborate system to administer and provide for the Italians both before and after the armistice.

Ultimately, this is the story of the evolution of German and Allied policy in Italy. Building on the work of historian Paolo Pezzino, it contends that there is a fourth protagonist, the Allies, in addition to the Germans, the civilians, and the partisans, that contributed to the course of war in Italy. The policy both of the Germans and the Allies was influenced by military necessity or the need to fight to win the war. The comparison between Cassino and Monte Sole, the hardest hit regions of Italy, and the Germans and the Allies highlights the tension between the need to win the war and the desire to protect the civilians who occupied the battlefield. Certainly, the Allies and the Germans had drastically different points of view on how this tension should be managed. Italy has a difficult memory of the Second World War; it is my hope that this study will bring understanding about the intentions behind the military campaign waged on Italian soil between 1943 and 1945 as well as the resulting divided memory and as expressed in the monuments and memorials that have been established in Cassino and Monte Sole respectively since the end of the war.

Chapter 1: The Italian Campaign: Bringing the War to Italy

The circumstances of the 1943-45 military campaign in Italy are unique. Initially aligned with the Germans, the Italians became co-belligerents with the Allies after the September 1943 armistice. Thus, the Italians were both enemy and ally to both sides at some point in the war. This naturally shaped the policy of each in regard to the treatment of the Italian Armed Forces, the government, and the people. Ultimately, however, both the German and Allied armies clashed in Italy in pursuit of a larger aim: winning the Second World War. Cassino and Monte Sole were the sites of some of the bitterest fighting of the war in Italy. The Italian people, whose ancestors had lived in these spaces for centuries, were placed squarely in between these two warring armies and were forced to make impossible decisions throughout the two year campaign. The comparative examples of Monte Sole and Cassino are situated within the greater context of the war to provide an understanding of the many grey areas that shaped how the war transpired in Italy. This chapter provides that context for the battles at Cassino and Monte Sole and shows how the policies of the Germans and Allies played off one another and evolved throughout the campaign as a result of the interaction between Italian civilian and soldier.

In January 1943, the Combined Chiefs of Staff made the decision at the Casablanca conference to bring the war to Italy. It was at Casablanca, while the North African campaign continued to rage, that Allied planners turned their attention to future strategy and follow-on operations in Europe. Planners decided that the follow-on operation to Operation *Torch* would be in Sicily with the aim of weakening “Italy by occupying Sicily,” diverting “German attention and resources from the Russian front and

from northwest Europe,” and producing “some military activity in the Western theatres until operations in France could be mounted perhaps late in 1943 or assuredly in 1944.”¹ The Combined Chiefs of Staff hoped that occupying the island would have the effect, not just of weakening Italy, but of knocking it out of the war entirely.² Thirty Italian divisions defended the Mediterranean coast; German high command would be forced to backfill in the event of an Italian capitulation or risk having the defences of Fortress Europe compromised.

The Allies were correct in thinking that Fascism in Italy was vulnerable. In fact, Fascism was already in decline. Although images of throngs of people crowding Piazza Venezia to hear Mussolini speak from the balcony of the palazzo give the impression that Mussolini and Fascism were popular among Italians, support for the *Duce* had waned since the war in Ethiopia in 1936. That war had a heavy financial and diplomatic cost. Mussolini’s pursuit of the African empire alienated the Italian nation from the British and French, aligning it more closely with Nazi Germany.³ Italians, including Mussolini’s closest advisors, did not support Italy’s entrance into the Second World War as an ally in the German-led war.⁴ Mussolini’s commanders optimistically advised that Italy would

¹ C.J.C. Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V: The Campaign in Sicily 1943 and the Campaign in Italy, 3rd September 1943 to 31 March 1944, Official Campaign History, History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Military Series* (Naval and Military Press reprint, 2004), p. 185.

² Michael Howard, *Grand Strategy, Volume IV, August 1942-September 1943*, (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1972), p. 359.

³ In his pursuit of the Italian empire in Africa, Mussolini defied the League of Nations and pushed Britain and France further away from Italy and therefore closer to Nazi Germany. Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796* (London, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2008), p. 507.

⁴ Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini’s son-in-law and Foreign Minister between 1936 and 1943, noted the unpopularity of the Pact of Steel in Italy and spoke out against the alliance with Hitler and the coming war. Ciano was dismissed from the post of Foreign Minister in 1943 and made ambassador to the Holy See. Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy, A Political History* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 402-403. Even Mussolini was not keen on aligning with Hitler but as Sadkovich

not be ready to wage war until at least 1941.⁵ Mussolini himself hoped that the 1939 Pact of Steel might delay war until at least 1943.⁶ In spite of this, Hitler's victories against France and Poland created an illusion that the war would be over quickly. German success pushed Mussolini to declare war on France and Britain on 10 June 1940. The poorly equipped Italian army had little success in its early campaigns. As Martin Clark writes, "By the spring of 1941 the army was used to losing."⁷ The lack of success of the Italian army in Greece, France, and East Africa can be attributed to many causes, among them lack of equipment and poor leadership. By most accounts, Italian units fought well but coordination with the Germans was poor and the Italians were often abandoned while their allies retreated.⁸

Italy was not only militarily weak, but was also vulnerable to Allied attack. In late 1941, the Allies commenced a bombing campaign of Italian cities in an effort to compel Italy to abandon its German allies. Prime Minister Winston Churchill advocated that "the weight of war" should be brought to Italy: "All the industrial centres should be attacked

describes, he felt he had no choice. James Sadkovich, "Understanding Defeat: Reappraising Italy's Role in World War II," in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 24 (1989), p. 36.

⁵ John Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals: The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 471. For example, in a meeting on 8 May 1939, General Alberto Pariani reported, optimistically, that Italy would have enough munitions "for and perhaps six months of war" by 1941. Christopher Duggan writes about shortages on all fronts: naval, air, and infantry. Despite Pariani's optimism, there was a severe shortage of weapons and tanks. Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*, p. 515.

⁶ Sadkovich, "Understanding Defeat," p. 36.

⁷ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871 to the Present, Third Edition* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2008) p. 343.

⁸ The Italians were not inferior soldiers but largely militarily weak due to a lack of resources. Sadkovich notes that this is largely because of inferior Italian equipment and superior British intelligence not because of low Italian morale. In large part, the myth of the weak Italian Armed Forces is perpetuated to the detriment of proper history in which all sides are considered, including the British intent. According to Sadkovich, the British "preferred a hostile Italy over a neutral or Allied Italy." Sadkovich, "Understanding Defeat," pp. 30, 51.

in an intense fashion, every effort being made to render them uninhabitable and to terrorize and paralyze the population.”⁹ Churchill’s strategy worked. On 20 November, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden circulated a memo that outlined the effect that the bombing campaign was having on Italian morale. But Eden acknowledged that the Italians were in a precarious position. In the event of a collapse, it was likely the German army would occupy the nation, making it impossible for the Italians to turn on their former allies. Eden recommended that the heavy bombing of Italy continue but that Allied bombers refrain from a raid on Rome until they were sure the country was on the brink of collapse. He further recommended that the Italians be informed that “having allowed the Fascist regime to link their destinies with Hitler, they would if they continued along the Fascist road ‘undoubtedly suffer all the woes and penalties which fall to the vanquished.’”¹⁰

While Allied bombing had the effect of demoralizing the Italian people, the losses at the Soviet front represented the last straw. As Sergio Luzzatto has determined, public opinion took a major turn in 1942. By the autumn of that year, “Mussolini was seen no longer as bold, honest, and wise but as cowardly, thievish, insane.”¹¹ Rationing on the home front, continued Allied bombing as the front moved closer to Italy after mid-1942,

⁹ Michael Howard, *Grand Strategy, History of the Second World War, Vol. IV*, (London: The Stationery Office Books, 1972), p. 229.

¹⁰ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol. IV*, p. 230.

¹¹ Sergio Luzzatto, *The Body of Il Duce: Mussolini’s Corpse and the Fortunes of Italy*, trans. Frederika Randall, trans (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), p. 32.

and the death of sons, fathers, and brothers in a failing Italian war all contributed to growing dissatisfaction.¹²

The Italian military situation continued to deteriorate in late 1942 and early 1943. By May 1943, the campaign in North Africa was a lost cause and the Axis relationship further strained. The German military high command, *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW), became suspicious of “Italy’s reliability as an ally.”¹³ Hitler made plans to reinforce the Balkans “because he did not know whether the Italians had the will or the resources to continue fighting.”¹⁴ The suspicion was not unfounded. The public did not support the war, they were tiring of Mussolini’s dictatorship, and continued losses and poor equipment hurt the morale of the Italian army. Mussolini was intent on keeping his “common cause” with Hitler but Italian commanders understood that it was only a matter of time before the Allies began an offensive campaign in Italy.

Italian commanders hoped to strike a bargain with the Allies to save their homeland from war and ruin. Since late 1942, Italian diplomats had been sounding out Allied diplomats to see if the Allies might offer an acceptable peace. The word that the Allies would offer a separate, acceptable peace if Fascism was overthrown finally came through Vatican diplomatic channels in May 1943.¹⁵ The early interest shown in a

¹² R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini’s Italy: Life under the Dictatorship, 1915-1945* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), p. 483. Bosworth cites that 18,376 Italian civilians died from air raids between June 1940 and September 1943. The numbers more than doubled after September 1943.

¹³ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 36.

¹⁴ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p.1.

¹⁵ Clark, *Modern Italy*, pp. 356-357. In February 1943, the Americans corresponded with the Vatican, asking for advice on the monarchy and what kind of government should replace Mussolini.

separate peace provided further evidence for Allied planners that the occupation of Sicily would have the desired effect of weakening Italy and possibly knocking it out of the war.

On 10 July 1943, the Allies invaded the island of Sicily. The intent was to offer a final blow to the morale of the Italian people and to demonstrate that the Allies could deliver an amphibious assault and stay on Fortress Europe. Moreover, as long as the Italian people continued to tie their fate to the Germans through support for the Fascist regime, they would suffer the fate of a nation at war. The Allies made it clear they believed the blame rested with the Fascist government and not the people.¹⁶ Allied troops landing on Sicilian shores carried a message from General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Commander-in-Chief of the United States Army,¹⁷ that Allied troops were not enemies of the Italian people, but were invading Sicily to overthrow the German and Italian tyranny, and restore the laws and traditions of the Italian people.¹⁸ In an additional message, Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt placed the burden on the Italian people themselves:

The time has now come for you, the Italian people to consult your own self-respect and your own interests and your own desire for a restoration of national dignity, security and peace. The time has come for you to decide whether Italians shall die for Mussolini and Hitler – or live for Italy and for civilization.¹⁹

¹⁶ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, p. 232.

¹⁷ At this point in the campaign, General Eisenhower was the Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean and responsible for the invasion of Sicily. By December 1943, he was named Supreme Allied Commander in Europe.

¹⁸ C.R.S. Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy, 1943-45* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957), p. 30.

¹⁹ English text of Roosevelt and Churchill's message to the Italian people, which was actually broadcast on 16 July, 1943, found in Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, pp. 31-32.

The Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCOS) recognized that words were not enough to gain the trust of the Italian people, especially considering the potential for German occupation. Plans for the Sicily invasion included an administrative structure, Allied Military Government of Occupied Territory (AMGOT). The overall purpose for Allied Military Government was to support military operations by maintaining peace and order in rear areas. The administration structure was quite sophisticated. Experts, called Civil Affairs officers, were assigned to six separate divisions responsible for the functioning of nearly all parts of civil society from the operation of banks, to Fascist purging, to repairing damage caused by Allied bombs and German defences.²⁰ Lieutenant-Colonel Gerald Wellesley, faced with especially dire circumstances in the city of Catania, Sicily, proclaimed that the primary task of Civil Affairs in Italy was “to bury the dead and to feed the living.”²¹ Allied Military Government in Sicily worked better than expected, mostly due to the positive reception from the Sicilians. They were enthusiastic and cooperated with Civil Affairs officers and soldiers, viewing them as liberators and thereby strengthening the claim that an invasion of Sicily would weaken the Fascist state.

The final blow for the Fascist regime was the 19 July bombing of Rome. With a foothold on Sicily, Allied bombers were able to reach into the heart of Fascist Italy.

Despite the emphasis Churchill placed on making the Italian people suffer, there were

²⁰ In preparations for the military governance of Sicily, six divisions were created: public health, public safety, finance, legal, civilian supply, and enemy property. The principles behind AMG remained the same throughout the Italian campaign but the nature of the administrative body and the divisions evolved throughout. AMG in Sicily and Italy also provided many important lessons learned that would be incorporated into follow-on operations in Northwest Europe.

²¹ Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p. 37.

sound military reasons for bombing Italian cities and industrial centres.²² Extreme Italian terrain dictates that there are only so many areas in which transport lines can be built to easily connect northern and southern regions of the peninsula. An Allied strike against Rome's rail yards hampered the movement of Axis supplies between the north (with direct access to Germany) and the battle in Sicily.

Additionally, a strike at the Eternal City had a powerful effect on Italian morale. The Allies carefully weighed the impact that 1,000 tons of bombs would have on the historic city. The bombings were carried out under "the most stringent guidelines in order to avoid damage to Rome's historical and religious sites." The evening before, RAF Wellingtons dropped hundreds of thousands of leaflets warning Roman civilians of the bombing, effectively giving up the element of surprise.²³ The rail yards and Ciampino airfield were bombed in daylight so bombers could follow the path of the rail line into the city and avoid precious monuments. The mission was deemed a success. Rail traffic was disrupted and there was no damage to "Rome's precious landmarks."²⁴ But many innocent Italians died in this successful operation.²⁵ There is always a cost to actions of

²² This is an interesting study on the difference between strategic intent of Allied planners and what politicians say to the press. Churchill also said that the intent of landing on Sicily was to attack the "soft underbelly" and then drive to Vienna. Anyone who has flown over the Alps knows this is an absurd proposition. Given the difficult time the Allies had attacking (and the Germans defending) at Monte Cassino offers weight to this counterargument to Churchill's assertions.

²³ Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), pp. 428-429.

²⁴ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East*, pp. 126-27.

²⁵ The actual numbers of those who died in the bombing are in dispute. Angelo Portelli claims somewhere around three thousand. Official fascist reports cite 717 dead and 1599 injured. See Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out*, p. 77; Robert Katz, *The Battle for Rome: The Germans, the Allies, The Partisans, and the Pope, September 1943-June 1944* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), p. 12. Katz refers to the official numbers but claims these were reduced to hide the vulnerability of the Eternal City. He cites more reasonable estimations made by the Army and Carabinieri of 2,000 dead and 2,200 wounded.

war and in this case, it was the Italians who had to pay the price. During the bombing, Mussolini was meeting with Hitler at Feltre. Hitler delivered a “rambling monologue” to an exhausted Mussolini, whose only words were to read the telegram that announced the bombing of Rome that morning.²⁶

The combined blows of the successful Allied invasion of Sicily and the bombing of Rome sealed Mussolini’s fate. Fascist statesman Dino Grandi proposed a resolution that called for Mussolini to return control of the armed forces to the King, provoking a meeting of the Fascist Grand Council. On 24 July, the Council convened an all-night meeting that ended with a 19-7 vote in favour of Grandi’s resolution. The following day, Mussolini was arrested and the coup d’état was complete. The *Carabinieri*, the Italian national military police force, assumed control over the radio and telephone systems in Rome²⁷ and Field Marshall Pietro Badoglio was appointed to replace Mussolini. Late on 25 July, Badoglio announced the news of Mussolini’s arrest but promised that the war continued.²⁸

The following day, many Italians celebrated in the streets at the announcement that Mussolini had been removed from power; “in various cities, he was cursed, mocked, and murdered in effigy.” Busts of him were taken down and treated with the passionate

²⁶ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, p. 470.

²⁷ Clark, *Modern Italy*, p. 357.

²⁸ The fall of Mussolini had a significant impact on the German war in Italy. On the morning of 25 July, the Germans were still talking about bringing reinforcements to the island to hold for the winter. The announcement of Mussolini’s arrest triggered the call to evacuate the island altogether. Helmut Heiber and David Glantz, *Hitler and His Generals: Military Conferences, 1942-1945*, (New York: Enigma Books, 2003), pp. 173-175.

disregard of a people who were fed up.²⁹ Most Italians were relieved that after three years of being at war and twenty years of enduring Fascism, the war was now over.³⁰ Lieutenant Sydney Frost, assigned as the town major in Ispica, Sicily, wrote of the reaction in the Sicilian town in his memoirs: “The townsfolk went wild. Shouting and singing, they converged on my headquarters in the piazza, and overwhelmed us with their embraces.”³¹ Joy and jubilation soon faded as the war continued and an Allied invasion of the Italian mainland seemed imminent. Despite Badoglio’s assurances that Italy would continue the war, the German army was suspicious of Italian aims and loyalty after Mussolini’s arrest.

German suspicions about Italian loyalty were not unfounded. On 3 September, General Giuseppe Castellano and General Walter Bedell Smith, Eisenhower’s Chief of Staff at Allied Force Headquarters, signed the armistice document on behalf of Badoglio and Eisenhower. Within the terms of the armistice, the Allies named the Italians co-belligerents. From the Italian perspective, the process of arranging the terms of the armistice is difficult to reconstruct because the Italian documents were burned on 9 September 1943 before the government, *Supremo Comando* of the *Regio Esercito*, and the king fled Rome for Brindisi. As a result, the armistice is surrounded by much debate and has yet to be understood by historians.³² The debate swings from laying the blame

²⁹ Sergio Luzzatto, *The Body of Il Duce: Mussolini’s Corpse and the Fortunes of Italy*, trans. Frederika Randall (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005), pp. 35-37. Italians defecated on, urinated on, and hanged busts of Mussolini. As Luzzatto points out, those who celebrated openly were in the minority.

³⁰ Bosworth, *Mussolini’s Italy*, p. 495.

³¹ Sydney Frost, *Once a Patricia (Memoirs of a Junior Infantry Officer in World War II)* (St.Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 1988), p. 118.

³² Elena Agarossi, *A Nation Collapses: The Italian Surrender of September 1943*, trans. Harvey Fergusson II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. vii.

on the king and the Badoglio government for their abandonment of the Italian people to the fate of the German army, to claims that the Allied armies deceived the Italians by announcing the armistice before the Italian government was ready.³³ Many blame the events that came after – the long war of liberation, the brutality of the German occupation, the destruction, and the civil war from 1943 to 1945 - on how the armistice was bungled. Arguably it was not bungled, but events took control. Moreover, the Italians, the Germans, and the Allies all had competing priorities.

The Germans were convinced, even before Mussolini was arrested, that their Axis allies would betray them. As early as May 1943, the German high command was transmitting orders to Field Marshal Erwin Rommel on the procedure for Operation *Alarich*, the emergency plan for the moment when Italy ceased fighting alongside the Germans. The operation called for the placement of six or seven motorized divisions on the north-eastern and north-western frontiers of Italy, ready to occupy once the order was transmitted. German troops in southern France were to disarm and demand the surrender of Italians stationed there. Operation *Konstantin* was the sister operation in which German soldiers would demand the surrender of Italians stationed in the Balkans the moment the surrender was announced.³⁴

After Mussolini was arrested, Operation *Alarich* and Operation *Konstantin* were abandoned in favour of Operation *Achse* which ensured that all Italian units were forced to surrender arms as soon as news of the armistice came. Hitler was furious at the news and was convinced that any promise that the Italians would continue to fight was

³³ Agarossi, *A Nation Collapses*, p. 5.

³⁴ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, p. 464.

“barefaced treachery.” He was correct in his assumption. German commanders were in a difficult situation about how to proceed. Admiral Karl Dönitz, head of the navy, advised against evacuating Sicily because it would free up Allied units to fight elsewhere and would open the door to the Balkans. Rommel, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, and Dönitz counselled against a *coup d'état* because they understood that the loyalty of the army was with the king and the authority of the new Italian government. A *coup* could result in “civil chaos and inter-Axis war” which would make the German position in Italy difficult.³⁵

For the Italians, it became evident by late summer 1943 that they could not continue their war effort. The military *coup* against Mussolini was the culmination of the belief of Italian high command and Fascist leaders that they could no longer follow the direction of the dictator. Badoglio's assurances that the war would continue even with Mussolini out of the picture was an effort to implement plans to ensure that Italy would not be occupied by the Germans. Despite the fact that the Italian records regarding the armistice were burned before the King and Badoglio's flight from Rome in the early hours of 9 September 1943, much about the confused nature of the armistice is revealed in Allied documents.

Those documents note four major diplomatic efforts launched in August 1943 in an effort to find mutually acceptable terms. Two diplomats, a general from the *Comando Supremo*, and the Chief of the Italian Army Staff, General Giacomo Zanussi, were sent on separate missions to seek terms.³⁶ All four envoys expressed the desire for special

³⁵ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, pp. 472-73.

³⁶ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, pp. 520-528.

consideration because they were fearful of the German reaction to the Italian surrender. The Marchese Lanza d'Ajeta, the counsellor of the Italian Embassy to the Vatican, was the first to make contact through the British embassy in Lisbon. He argued that the Italians were "only making a show of it to prevent a bloodbath."³⁷ In this period of uncertainty, the Allies, the Italians, and the Germans were caught in a difficult situation. Gaining the support of the Italians would be of great benefit but neither side felt they could fully trust the intentions of the Italians.

As declared enemies of the Italians, the Allies were naturally suspicious of Italian efforts toward a diplomatic solution. For the Italians, the Allied requirement of an unconditional surrender was problematic. As Michael Howard notes, the Allies insisted on an unconditional surrender despite the fact that the Italians repeatedly expressed that "they were in no position to surrender whether unconditionally or otherwise."³⁸ The Italians believed the Germans would take control of the armed forces and not allow them to surrender. The number of German divisions flooding into north Italy supported this view. German plans for Operation *Asche*, although confirmed only in hindsight, further bore out the Italian claim. The Italian government wanted an assurance that the Allies would land a force large enough to prevent the German army from seizing control. General Giuseppe Castellano, the final envoy sent to seek terms, said that the Italians were "in no position to make any terms" but expressed the willingness to accept an

³⁷ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, p. 520.

³⁸ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, p. 521.

unconditional surrender should the Italian forces be given the opportunity to fight the Germans alongside the Allies.³⁹

Despite their suspicions, the Allies expected an Italian surrender even before they invaded Sicily in July 1943. In April 1943, the Allies commenced preparations of an Italian surrender document. The original document, created by the British Foreign Office Ministerial Committee on Reconstruction Problems, covered all facets of the Italian surrender including the demobilization of the Italian soldiers, the purging of fascism, the creation of civil laws, and other questions of occupation.⁴⁰ In July, the Allies received reports of friction between Italian and German troops generally and in Sicily of desertion and low morale among Italian troops.⁴¹

Despite scepticism about the sincerity of the Italian diplomats sent to seek terms, the Allied Chiefs of Staff saw much opportunity in an Italian surrender. Italians could facilitate the landings proposed for the south of the Italian mainland by destroying communication networks, releasing Allied prisoners of war, surrendering Italian warships, and fighting with invading Allied soldiers. After Mussolini was deposed in late July, the Allies were even more convinced of the value an allied Italy. On 18 August 1943, Walter Bedell Smith and K.W.D. Strong, both members of General Eisenhower's staff, were sent to communicate terms to General Castellano.⁴² Castellano expressed his

³⁹ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, p. 522.

⁴⁰ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, p. 515.

⁴¹ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, p. 507.

⁴² The short terms of the armistice were signed on 3 September in Cassibile, Sicily and provided for immediate cessation of hostilities. The "long" terms were signed by General Eisenhower and Marshal Badoglio on 29 September in Malta. The long terms gave the Allies complete control over the Italian armed forces and resources of the country to use, "consistent with international law," for the war effort, and "to effect the final destruction of Fascism." Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, pp. 105-109.

desire that Italian sovereignty be preserved. He was concerned that the Germans might retaliate once the armistice was announced. Smith and Strong assured him German retaliation would be countered by Allied retaliation.⁴³ In the terms of the armistice, the Italian government “was responsible for all financial and commercial dealings ... and was to act as the agent of the Allies in carrying out their directions,” in both military and civil matters.⁴⁴

Finalizing the armistice terms was a challenge. The Allies insisted on an unconditional surrender. The Italians insisted that their fate was not their own. By the end of August, German troops occupied nearly the entire Italian peninsula. The Italians were convinced that if the armistice was announced before Rome was secure, then the King, Badoglio, and the new Italian government would be in jeopardy. According to Badoglio, to ensure the safety of the Italian government, the Allies needed to land at least fifteen divisions near Rome.⁴⁵

In spite of the controversy over the armistice, it denotes a turning point for the Italian nation. Whatever it did or did not achieve, the armistice brought war to the Italian nation. Menacing German armies advanced from the north to meet Allied armies advancing from the south. The places where they clashed suffered the wrath of war. At least four major forces factored into the story of Italy’s war after the armistice: the Germans, the Allies, the Italian army, and Italian civilians. Each had a unique point of view and impact upon the others. Even before the armistice was announced, German

⁴³ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, p. 525.

⁴⁴ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol IV*, p. 526.

⁴⁵ Howard, *Grand Strategy, Vol. IV*, p. 528.

troops moved to occupy territory the Italians held in the Balkans and in Italy. For *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* the removal of Mussolini signalled a dangerous change in Italian politics that put their position in Italy and the Mediterranean in danger. Plans to disarm the Italian army once the armistice was finally announced made it clear the Germans did not trust Badoglio.

It was clear to the Allies and the Germans that Badoglio was searching for a way out of the war; the Germans expected a betrayal. The Allies, too, doubted the trustworthiness of the Italians. Since the summer of 1940, the Italian army was an enemy that killed Allied soldiers in battle. Despite this mistrust, the Allies hoped to win the hearts and minds of the people and avoid fighting among a hostile civilian population. Throughout the campaign in Sicily, the Combined Chiefs of Staff reinforced the message that the blame for the war and the continued fighting lay with Mussolini and not the Italian people. Moreover, the implementation of Allied Military Government demonstrated the Allies' benevolent attitude toward the populace. These policies continued as the war moved to the mainland.

Both the Germans and the Allies were intent on winning the war in Italy. The Italians were forced to make impossible choices in the context of that military campaign. The Italian army was underequipped and increasingly disgruntled with its German ally. The myth that the Italian soldier was a weak coward has little basis in fact. As professional soldiers,⁴⁶ the armistice placed them in an awkward position: continue to

⁴⁶ Sadkovich places enough doubt in the myth of the weak Italian soldier with low morale. Sadkovich, "Understanding Defeat." In addition to Sadkovich article, personal research conducted at the Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore Esercito archives in Rome also disproves the myth. The Italian soldier is far more professional than he is given credit for. The author has flagged this area for further research. Of note, war diaries for 54th Napoli Division and the Livorno Division show that the Italians have very good staff work. It is clear the final judgment of the worth of the Italian soldier in the Second World War is not been

fight with their German ally of three years, or change sides. The situation became all the more complicated after Hitler's daring rescue of Mussolini on 12 September 1943.⁴⁷ The Italian people were divided between the need to provide continued support to the Fascist government, rid themselves of Fascism, or just survive to the end of the war. Each interest group had its own ideas on what should happen next in September 1943. Due to circumstances and the pressures from the two invading armies, Italian soldiers and civilians were forced to make difficult choices. Italian soldiers who refused to join the Mussolini's *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (RSI) were deported to Germany or killed. Working-age males faced the same fate. Mothers, wives, and daughters had to live with this reality on a day-to-day basis.

The announcement of the armistice was not a respite the Italians hoped for. In fact, the armistice signalled the beginning of two years of bitter fighting. General Eisenhower's announcement of the armistice on the evening of 8 September 1943 corresponded with an Allied amphibious landing on the Tyrrhenian coast at Salerno, south of Naples, in the early hours of the next day. First Canadian Division and 5th British Division were already making their way up the Italian boot. The two divisions had landed on the toe of Italy at Calabria, meeting minimal resistance, on 3 September. Their advance was delayed largely by German demolitions. German engineers blew every bridge and cratered every junction on the extreme terrain to slow the Allied advance,

given. For example, see l'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore, (SME/US) *54^a Divisione Fanteria 'Napoli'* ; *4^a Divisione Fanteria "Livorno"*; XVI Corpo Armata, 10-18 luglio 43.

⁴⁷ For the rescue, see Greg Annussek, *Hitler's Raid to Save Mussolini: The Most Infamous Commando Operation of World War II* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2005). After Mussolini was rescued and the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (RSI) was set up in North Italy, Italian soldiers were requested to return to their Fascist service. At the same time, the King and Badoglio in Brindisi were calling Italian soldiers to fight with them.

creating “a web of demolition along every road from south to north and from coast to coast.”⁴⁸ As soldiers prepared to land at Salerno, they too expected minimal resistance, especially in light of the Italian surrender. But the German army had different ideas. Suspicious of Italian aims and aware of Allied progress deep in southern Italy, the Germans reinforced possible landing beaches in southern Italy.⁴⁹ Soldiers landing at Salerno had a bloody fight to win their way onto Italian soil.⁵⁰

Confusion over plans to announce the armistice caused a blunder with the Italians and the Allies. In the negotiations for the armistice, Badoglio pleaded with Eisenhower to ensure that Rome was secure at the time or before the armistice was announced. Badoglio was aware that the city and the new government were in jeopardy from the growing German presence in Italy. The Allies were suspicious of Italian intentions and were wary of providing information on proposed landings that might be passed on to the Germans. Eisenhower eventually agreed that he would drop 82nd Airborne Division in Rome “to encourage the Italian army and act as a focus for a general rising.”⁵¹ When the drop was called off at the last minute,⁵² Badoglio felt betrayed and refused to announce the armistice until he could be assured that Rome was safe. Eisenhower forced

⁴⁸ Dominick Graham and Shelford Bidwell, *Tug of War: The Battle for Italy, 1943-45* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Books, Limited, 2004), p. 16.

⁴⁹ Kesselring had picked the Salerno beaches as the overwhelming option and therefore had opportunity to reinforce them. Bidwell and Graham, *Tug of War*, p. 49.

⁵⁰ For details of the battle, see Graham and Bidwell, *Tug of War*, pp. 58-100.

⁵¹ Graham and Bidwell, *Tug of War*, p. 39.

⁵² The reason why the drop was called off at the last minute is not entirely clear. Michael Howard writes that Brigadier General Maxwell Taylor visited Italian generals in Rome on 7 September and “was confronted by a situation as unexpected as it was disagreeable.” The Italians believed that the armistice was impossible and Badoglio sent a message to Eisenhower to the effect. Taylor cancelled the airdrop early on 8 September. Eisenhower refused to cancel the operation, planned for the next day at Salerno. Howard, *Grand Strategy, Volume IV*, p. 531.

Badoglio's hand by announcing the armistice himself on Radio Algiers. This meant that Badoglio had not given terms to Italian soldiers to issue proper orders on how to proceed. The Germans acted quickly to disarm Italian soldiers, preventing them from turning on their former Axis partners.

Tragically, even when forced to act, Badoglio did not transmit clear instructions to the Italian army regarding its role. Badoglio instructed that acts of hostility against the Anglo-American forces must cease and that "they may react to eventual attacks from any other source."⁵³ Officers and soldiers were left without clear instructions on whether they should turn and fight the Germans. For the Germans, the intention behind Badoglio's announcement was clear: the Italians were betraying them. The Italian army was now their enemy. German officers all over Italy, France, and Greece demanded that Italian soldiers maintain the Axis alliance or be disarmed. After 8 September many Italian soldiers were disarmed, arrested, and sent to work camps in Germany or murdered by German soldiers. The most well-known example of German brutality toward the Italian army was at Cephalonia when, on 15 September 1943, the entire Acqui Division of 12,000 men voted to a man to resist being disarmed by the German army. The Germans were so disturbed by the resistance displayed at Cephalonia that they were ordered not to take any prisoners. The Acqui Division held out for a week before they were forced to relent. More than 1000 soldiers and officers from the division were killed in combat. Five thousand more were executed by the Germans after the battle. An additional 3000 more Italians died when their transport ship hit a mine: those not killed immediately were shot

⁵³ Agarossi, *A Nation Collapses*, p. 1.

by German soldiers as they struggled in the water.⁵⁴ The massacre at Cephalonia was only one example of the brutal way in which the German army punished the Italians for their betrayal. It is only one example that belies the myth that all Italian soldiers dropped their weapons and ran home.

The armistice and the subsequent German reaction was only the beginning of the tragedy of September 1943. In the early hours of 9 September King Vittorio Emanuele II, Badoglio, and the Italian government fled Rome to safety behind Allied lines in the south. Three days later, Mussolini was rescued and made the head of the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* in the north. Both the King and Mussolini called for the Italian army to return and fight for the true Italian government. The country was divided under two competing governments, both appealing to the loyalty of the Italian people. Romans especially felt abandoned by the King and new prime minister but took matters into their own hands. Within hours of the flight of the government, German forces attempted to enter Rome but were stalled at the Porto San Paolo by elements of the Italian military and anti-fascists. The Italians, communists, anti-fascists, soldiers, and civilians held on for two days before they succumbed to the massive German force.⁵⁵

For many Italians, the Allied landings on the mainland represented their chance to stand up and fight. Historians criticize this quick transition. Many have spoken of two Italys: the resigned and passive one that existed before 8 September 1943, and “the active one” that participated in the anti-fascist resistance following the armistice.⁵⁶ The

⁵⁴ Charles T. O'Reilly, *Forgotten Battles: Italy's War of Liberation, 1943-1945* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books), pp. 100-101.

⁵⁵ For a recount of the battle for Rome on 8-10 September 1943, see Katz, *The Battle for Rome*, pp. 33-45.

⁵⁶ Agarossi, *A Nation Collapses*,” p. 8.

transition is not that simple. A switch did not just trip on the evening that Eisenhower and Badoglio announced the armistice. Italians did not become anti-fascist just because the new prime minister issued the directive. The story is complicated. Although there were many Italians who made the choice to pick up arms after 8 September 1943 – either as a Fascist or as part of the Resistance – far more were caught in the middle of an impossible situation in which the choice was not theirs to make but the consequences were theirs to bear. The German attitude toward their traitorous Italian allies brought a reaction in which Italians were forced, in one way or another, to resist. For example, the German army ordered working-age males to present themselves in town piazzas with identity cards in an effort to fill the ranks of Mussolini’s Republican army. Those who showed up were given the choice to join the RSI, be deported to Germany for work, or be murdered on the spot.⁵⁷ The contending armies, Mussolini’s rescue, and the flight of the government from Rome plunged Italy into a bitter civil war that continued to the end of the Italian campaign and beyond.⁵⁸

The civil war was a war within a war that divided families at the same time the nation was being divided between two clashing armies and the two Italian governments. Although many Italian civilians became active in the anti-fascist resistance following the armistice, the great majority of Italian civilians were caught between the choices made by the Germans, the Allies, the Italian partisans, and the RSI. The German army made the

⁵⁷ O’Reilly, *Forgotten Battles*, p. 87. In the days following the armistice, about 500,000 Italians “were enlisted or drafted into Mussolini’s new army or German military formations while about 260,000 were used as laborers by the Germans.”

⁵⁸ Claudio Pavone referred to the conflict as a war of liberation, a national war, *and* a civil war in 1991. As the contrast in this study shows, the term civil war does not account for the experiences of those Italians living south of Rome. Claudio Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile: Saggio Storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri Editore, 1991).

choice to reinforce Italy to prevent the Allied armies from advancing up the peninsula and toward the valuable industrial heart of Italy. The Germans might have abandoned Italy outright. The rugged line of the Alps that defined the northern fringe of Italy was easily defensible, and offered the Allies no ready avenue for quick, decisive action. But conceding Italy to the Allies was conceding too much.⁵⁹

The German effort to defend south of Rome included an elaborate plan to destroy everything they left behind in an attempt to slow the Allied advance. Roads leading from Salerno to Naples were “to be destroyed with special thoroughness by concentrated employment of engineers.”⁶⁰ The German scorched-earth policy escalated in intensity and destructiveness as the campaign progressed and as they recognized that Italian civilians were willing to assist the Allied war effort. A September 1943 German document noted: “The Italians are helpful to the invading allied troops and even offer them help in navigating the mountain roads to bypass German positions.”⁶¹

Italian assistance to the Allies reinforced the German sense of betrayal. The Germans punished the Italians by taking what they wanted and destroying what they could not take. In Naples, for example, the Germans set demolition charges to blow up

⁵⁹ Despite Allied concerns that the Germans might abandon Italy and withdraw to the Alps if the Allies put too much pressure on, research indicates that “Italy was a prize worth winning” for its “political, economic, geographic, and military assets.” Timothy Saxon writes that Kesserling was astonished by the amount of stockpiling the Italians had done in the north. The Germans took advantage of northern Italy, benefitting from the “production from the factories and fertile fields of northern Italy.” Saxon notes that the Italian north contributed more than 15 percent “of total German war production during 1944.” Timothy Saxon, “The German Side of the Hill, Nazi Conquest and Exploitation of Italy, 1943-45,” *Faculty Dissertations* (1999). Found at: http://works.bepress.com/tim_saxon/5, last accessed: 4 March 2013.

⁶⁰ “The Campaign in Southern Italy, September to December 1943, Information from German Military Documents,” p. 102, AHQ Report 18, Historical Section, Canadian Military Headquarters, 6 December 1948, found at: <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/ahqrd-drqga-eng.asp?txtType=3&RfId=207>, accessed 27 January 2013.

⁶¹ “The Campaign in Southern Italy,” Appendix E.

aqueducts and the harbour infrastructure, and stripped the factories of supplies and even the workers. A captured German document from September 1943 notes:

In view of the situation existing at the present time, full operation of the factories in the Naples area can no longer be guaranteed ... Managers of plants having a payroll of more than 50 persons are to be ordered by public proclamation to apply to the prefect for transportation of their workers as a unit. If possible the personnel will be employed as a unit.⁶²

The evacuation plan, issued on 22 September 1943, included a list of eighteen factories in the Naples area alone. The Germans issued a list of those things that should be prepared for transport to Germany, including heavy equipment and supplies, metals, telephone equipment, office supplies, signal equipment, and furnaces.⁶³ German troops destroyed all supplies that could not be removed for future use, including food and medicine. About one hundred ships were sunk in the harbor and seventy-three cranes along the quayside were sunk to make the port at Naples unusable. Additional mines were laid and coal dumps were set on fire to make clearing and repairing the port more difficult.⁶⁴ Roads, bridges, and tunnels were also destroyed on the main highways south of Naples to delay the Allied advance. In addition, the Germans demanded that Italians be pressed into service to support their war effort. Those who refused would be convinced through other means: "In case of Italian refusal or hesitation, impressment of workers is to be enforced by the most drastic methods."⁶⁵

⁶² "The Campaign in Southern Italy," AHQ Report 18, p. 104.

⁶³ "The Campaign in Southern Italy," AHQ Report 18, p. 104

⁶⁴ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East: Volume V*, p. 415. Allied engineers, mostly American in the case of Naples, were able to get the port back up and running by the end of October.

⁶⁵ "The Campaign in Southern Italy," AHQ Report 18, p. 104.

The German destruction of the factories and the harbour in Naples supported their war aims. One might argue that the destruction of Naples was a military necessity to delay the Allied advance by denying use of the harbour and access to southern industry. But the Germans took their destruction of Naples a step further in order to punish the Italians. Before withdrawing from Naples, German troops burned the Royal Society's Library at the University of Naples. Soldiers soaked the bookshelves with gasoline and then threw grenades into the room, shooting the Italian guards who attempted to stop them. Before leaving the city, German troops planted a delayed-action bomb in the public post office. The bomb went off days after the Germans left, killing hundreds of civilians and wounding countless others.⁶⁶ The bomb created casualties that Allied Civil Affairs officers had to deal with and became a drain on resources, while the destruction of Naples University library was an instance of pure brutality meant to punish the Italians.⁶⁷

German brutality provoked a negative response from the Italians. The Italian resistance was built and shaped by former Italian soldiers and officers who shed their uniforms and took to the hills to escape the German enemy and the fascist RSI. Hundreds of thousands of other Italian officers and soldiers were killed or captured by the German army. Some 700,000 Italian soldiers were arrested and sent to Germany or Poland because they refused to continue their service to the Axis cause. Thousands more were absorbed into the Allied forces as mule skimmers, stevedores, drivers, and support

⁶⁶ The National Archives (TNA), FO 371/43817, "1944: File no. 32," "Extract from House of Lords Debates, 16 February 1944p, (IMG3684). Secretary of State of War Percy J. Grigg described the destruction the Germans had done in Naples.

⁶⁷ The destruction of the Naples Library provides an interesting contrast to the German effort to save the treasures of the Abbey of Montecassino. When the Allies finally bombed the Abbey in February 1944, the Germans took advantage of the event to use it as a propaganda message, attesting to the brutality of the Allies. See Chapter 2.

troops.⁶⁸ In time, formed units of the Italian army fought as elements of Allies armies. This is a little discussed fact of the Italian campaign. Most histories refer to the lack of leadership after the armistice, the flight of the government and King from Rome, and the complete disintegration of the Italian army.⁶⁹ Certainly, the administrative structure of the army fell apart, and it would be impossible to identify the Italian army or call it up for service.

But the army did not disintegrate after the armistice despite the fact that large numbers of Italian troops were killed or captured by the Germans. In many cases, it was the officers and soldiers of the Italian army who led the resistance. The official history of the Italian military in the partisan war states that the occupation of the northern parts of Italy by the German army and “the heavy pressure of the subordinate Republican government” meant that the only possibility of fighting the invader was in the formation of a resistance army.⁷⁰ As historian Charles O’Reilly writes, Italian officers and soldiers supported the Allied war effort in logistics roles. A striking number of soldiers picked up arms against their former ally and organized and trained ordinary men in the resistance after 8 September. These men and women were loyal to the cause of freeing Italy from fascism and its German occupier. O’Reilly argues that Italian participation in the Italian campaign was crucial to ensuring the war did not drag on for years longer than it actually did. What the Italian military denied the Germans was as important as what it contributed to the Allied cause. More than 1.5 million Italian soldiers did not fight with

⁶⁸ O’Reilly, *Forgotten Battles*, p. 14.

⁶⁹ O’Reilly outlines numerous accounts of how the Italian army ceased to exist following the armistice. O’Reilly, *Forgotten Battles*, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Alfonso Bartolini and Alfredo Terrone, *I Militari Nella Guerra Partigiana in Italia, 1943-1945*, Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito Ufficio Storico (Roma: 1998), p. 1.

the Germans because they were killed, deported to Germany, working with the Allies, or fighting in the Resistance. Moreover, Italy's exit from the war meant that the German army had to backfill those areas in south, central and northern Italy, as well as in the Balkans and Greece, which Italian soldiers had garrisoned.⁷¹

The ranks of the Italian resistance continued to grow as pressure was applied to join the RSI army, to undergo forced labour in Germany, or to work on German defensive structures in Italy. After the armistice, the German army felt justified in exploiting all that Italy had to offer in support of the war effort. A captured German document, dated 22 September 1943, outlines the plans to take advantage of Italy's betrayal and "make the fullest and most drastic use of this country too for the further prosecution of the German cause." The plan outlined German policy towards the Italian male population, including Italian soldiers and officers in the armed forces. All Italian officers and men who were willing to continue to fight with the Germans were to be absorbed into German units. Italian officers and soldiers who refused to fight alongside the Germans, such as at Cephalonia and on Sardinia, were to be interned. Italian civilians who could not or who were not willing to fight alongside the Germans would be pressed into service in construction battalions. All specialized workers and industrial personnel would also be employed to support the German war aims. Conscription replaced voluntary recruitment. Italian drivers, mechanics, and fitters would be used so German soldiers would be free for fighting. Construction detachments (likely to work on the defensive lines around Cassino) were created and filled by Italian soldiers and civilians. These detachments consisted of about 200 Italian men under Italian foremen but German

⁷¹ O'Reilly, *Forgotten Battles*.

supervision. Tools and excavation material to equip these detachments were “to be bought or confiscated locally.”⁷²

Italians born between 1910 and 1925 were called up for labour duty near the end of September. The Germans expected 30,000 to answer the call but only a little over one hundred actually did. The German army issued a proclamation that any Italian male caught after having failed to show up for the call-out was to be shot on the spot. The threat only provoked the Italians further. In Naples, on 28 September, aware that the Allies were near, men and boys came out of the hills and attacked German and fascist troops occupying the city. In the relatively well-known “Four Days of Naples,” the resistance offered such a challenge to the Germans in the narrow Naples streets that Kesselring threatened to shell the city into oblivion before abandoning it on 31 September.⁷³

The Germans took advantage of all things Italian, from labour for the construction detachments, to soldiers, drivers, and mechanics. The policy was clear. German soldiers were instructed to take what they needed to wage war in Italy and to destroy what they could not take. Rations required for construction labourers were to be taken from Italian supplies. “Italian supplies are to be seized freely,” a German order of September 1943 declared:

Confiscation commands and one technical battalion will be set up in the army zone. Their purpose will be confiscation of Italian goods of all sorts in the Italian zone; their transportation to the zone of the interior, as well

⁷² “The Campaign in Southern Italy,” AHQ Report No. 18, Appendix ‘G’ “Exploitation of Italy for the Further Conduct of War,” Historical Section, Canadian Military Headquarters, 22 September 1943, p. 1-2.

⁷³ Tom Behan, *The Italian Resistance: Fascists, Guerrillas and the Allies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 36-38.

as the guarding of the most important technical installations of Italian industry.⁷⁴

Confiscation battalions were set up with the explicit task of seizing and guarding “all raw materials and goods of economic importance to Germany.” Italian forced labourers would be made available if it was decided that certain goods needed to be transported to Germany:⁷⁵

All goods which cannot be removed owing to shortage of transport, but which can be used by the troops without burdening them unnecessarily, are to be issued (e.g. tires, spare parts, ammunition, food, luxuries, clothing, etc.); otherwise (and this includes food dumps) they are to be thoroughly destroyed before evacuation of the area.⁷⁶

The German scorched-earth policy destroyed everything in its path and alienated the Italian people.

That policy extended to all parts of occupied Italy. The industrialized area of north Italy was integrated into the Reich and became instrumental in supporting the German war effort. North Italy became something the Germans were willing to fight fiercely to retain.⁷⁷ Between September 1943 and 10 October 1944, 150,000 tons of “uncategorized commodities” had been shipped from North Italy to Germany. An additional 500,000 tons of foodstuffs were awaiting transport and 700,000 tons of

⁷⁴ “The Campaign in Southern Italy,” AHQ Report No. 18, Appendix ‘G,’ p.3.

⁷⁵ “The Campaign in Southern Italy,” AHQ Report 18, Appendix ‘G’ “Exploitation of Italy for the Further Conduct of War,” 22 September 1943, p. 3.

⁷⁶ “The Campaign in Southern Italy,” AHQ Report 18, Appendix ‘G’ “Exploitation of Italy for the Further Conduct of War,” 22 September 1943, p. 3.

⁷⁷ The growing partisan movement in the industrialized north was met with a more and more brutal reaction as the Allies moved farther up the Italian peninsula and the German hold on the industrialized north was jeopardized.

materials had been collected to support Speer's Ministry of War Production.⁷⁸ The German policy toward the Italian population following the surrender is clear. The Italian betrayal entitled the Germans to take what they wanted. Italy was to be stripped of all resources; those useful to the German war effort would be used while any excess, including food, would be destroyed. It was intended that the Italian people would suffer to the utmost. Those Italians who wished to work alongside the Germans and continue to fight for the cause of Nazi Germany were to be rewarded with food and hard labour. The German Tenth Army stipulated that those officers and soldiers who did fight against the Germans but "influenced by the liberation of the Duce, declare themselves ready to fight for Germany, have no claim to further employment. They are all to be taken prisoner and used as labour in the Reich."⁷⁹

The Allied policy for dealing with civilians in the battlefield offered a stark contrast to that employed by the Germans. Allied Civil Affairs cleaned up after the German scorched-earth policy crippled cities like Naples. In addition, the Allies made provisions to feed the Italian populace. Allied Civil Affairs is hardly written about in military histories of the campaign and when referred to by historians of the Italian experience of war, Civil Affairs is most often viewed in a negative light.⁸⁰ This negativity

⁷⁸ W.F. Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume VI: Victory in the Mediterranean, Part II: June to October 1944*, *Official Campaign History, History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Military Series* (Naval and Military Press reprint, 2004), p. 423.

⁷⁹ "The Campaign in Southern Italy," AHQ Report 18, Appendix 1, "Possibilities of employment of Italian officers and men who are prepared to continue fighting voluntarily on the German side," to A.O.K. 10 Ops, Appendix 'G' "Exploitation of Italy for the Further Conduct of War," 22 September 1943, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Victoria C. Belco, *War, Massacre, and Recovery in Central Italy, 1943-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 109; Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 622-633. D'Este devotes an entire section to American consultation of known mafia gangsters, including Lucky Luciano. He credits the Americans, through Allied Military Government, in restoring the mafia to Sicily. What he does not say is that the Mussolini had not solved the mafia problem in the 1920s as he claimed. Mussolini declared the problem solved in the 1920s, allowing no further

is warranted in some cases but stems from a lack of understanding about the depth of planning and limited resources available for Civil Affairs. Moreover, few historians acknowledge the existing tension between winning a war and providing for the needs of civilians.

In the planning for the campaign in Italy, the Allies understood that effort had to be made to ensure that rear areas were peaceful for military and morale reasons. In addition, the Allies realized that the aftermath of war would inevitably leave destruction and a needy civilian population. The plan for Civil Affairs supported military goals by keeping the divisional rear area peaceful but cleaning up the inevitable mess caused by battle and ensuring Italian civilians had enough to eat.

The war caused widespread destruction in areas of southern Italy. In most cases in Sicily and southern Italy, the civilians abandoned their homes but returned in droves after the city was liberated. On 1 October 1944, the Allies entered the city of Naples. Allied bombing and the German demolition reduced the major Italian port to rubble. According to custom, Civil Affairs officers entered the city to make contact with provincial and municipal authorities and assess the local situation which was, although not as bad as expected, still quite serious. Food and water were short for the reduced population of 500,000.⁸¹ The main aqueduct was damaged by Allied bombing and German sabotage and all but one of the reservoirs were drained.⁸²

conversation. Historian Christopher Duggan notes that the problem only got worse in the 1930s. Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*, pp. 457-458.

⁸¹ About half of the normal population of over one million. Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p. 85.

⁸² One Italian was able to cut the fuse of the demolition charge meant to drain the last remaining reservoir before it blew. Harris, *Allied Military Administration Italy*, p. 85.

Civil Affairs officers began preparations for the cleanup with the most necessary tasks taking priority. Fifth Army engineers set up a water distribution point using distilled water from the bay of Naples. Guards were placed at the water points to ensure everyone could get their fair share. Water from the secondary aqueduct, still functioning, was rationed. Within two weeks, all districts in the city were receiving “a moderate quantity” of water.⁸³ Little food was left in the city, so Civil Affairs officers arranged to bring food ashore. However, the lack of civilian transport exacerbated the problem.⁸⁴

The sewer system and the electrical system were out of service. Civil Affairs officers began an information campaign “to instruct the public in the elementary sanitary precautions” to avoid outbreaks of typhus and dysentery. By the end of October, a rationed but regular supply of electricity was available for the entire city.⁸⁵ The Allies clearly recognized the importance of feeding the civilian population in Italy and ensured even to the point of inhibiting military operations that the needs of the civilians were provided for. General Eisenhower, in December 1943, acknowledged that feeding the population could result in “some sacrifice in military build-up and maintenance.”⁸⁶

The Allies were committed to the necessity of feeding the people and protecting historical, cultural, and religious monuments, buildings, and artefacts in Italy. Italy was, in many ways, a living museum containing priceless artifacts of nearly 3,000 years of western history. These included not only the remnants of ancient Rome, but irreplaceable

⁸³ Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p. 85.

⁸⁴ The Germans had requisitioned or destroyed many available civilian vehicles before they departed. Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p. 88.

⁸⁵ Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p. 85-86.

⁸⁶ Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p. 89.

Christian artefacts and buildings, Renaissance art, music, and culture. It was inevitable that modern war, with its prodigious use of high explosives, would take its toll. The Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Division of the Civil Affairs branch was created to catalogue all important historic, religious, and cultural monuments in Italy. Civil Affairs officers were responsible for providing a situation report for newly liberated areas about the status of the important monuments and buildings in a given town. If required, guards were posted to ensure that Allied army troops did not misuse a building or loot its contents. Assessments were also made regarding the extent of damage and plans were made for repairs.

The issue of respecting Italy's long history of culture remained at the forefront throughout the campaign. General Eisenhower encouraged commanders to ensure that monuments were respected but he also made it clear that military necessity was paramount in a decision. He cautioned commanders to hold to the principle, urging them not to use military necessity "to cloak slackness or indifference."⁸⁷ In late December 1943, Eisenhower distributed this message to all commanders under his authority, imploring them to respect Italy's treasures:

Today we are fighting in a country which has contributed a great deal to our cultural inheritance, a country rich in monuments which by their creation helped and now in their old age illustrate the growth of the civilization which is ours. We are bound to respect those monuments so far as war allows. If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men's lives count infinitely more and the buildings must go. But the choice is not always so clear-cut as that. In many cases the monuments can be spared without any detriment to operational needs. Nothing can stand against the argument of military necessity. That is an accepted principle. But the phrase "military necessity" is sometimes used where it would be more truthful to speak of military convenience or even of

⁸⁷ The National Archives, UK [TNA], FO 371/43817, "Dwight D. Eisenhower to All Commanders," 29 December 1943.

personal convenience. I do not want it to cloak slackness or indifference. It is a responsibility of higher commanders to determine through A.M.G. Officers the locations of historical monuments whether they be immediately ahead of our front lines or in areas occupied by us. This information passed to lower echelons through normal channels places the responsibility on all Commanders of complying with the spirit of this letter. (sic)⁸⁸

The intention behind Allied Civil Affairs was to provide, at least to a minimum standard, for Italian civilians, while protecting the historical, religious, and cultural treasures of Italy. In a campaign already stretched for resources, this added an extra burden. Despite this, Eisenhower's message makes it clear that Civil Affairs was a priority.

As Allied armies pressed further into Italy, the Civil Affairs administrative tail became longer and the burden heavier. Scarce resources and utter destruction caused by war meant that the limited personnel of Allied Civil Affairs was stretched thin. Moreover, Allied planners recognized the need to allow the Italian government, as an Allied co-belligerent, some autonomy. It was therefore decided that the administration of the provinces of Bari, Brindisi (the new 'seat' of the Italian government), Lecce, and Taranto would return to the control of King Vittorio Emanuele III and Badoglio. Allied Civil Affairs personnel continued to act in an advisory role.⁸⁹ As the campaign progressed, only the narrow area behind the Allied armies would remain under jurisdiction of the Allied military government while the rest would be transferred to the King's Italy under the control of the ACC and the Italian government.⁹⁰

Returning control of parts of liberated Italy to the King was not as positive a development as it might appear. Italians felt betrayed by the actions of King Victor

⁸⁸ TNA, FO 371/43817, "Dwight D. Eisenhower to All Commanders."

⁸⁹ Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, pp. 105-110.

⁹⁰ Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p. 74.

Emanuel III. Not only had he asked Mussolini to form the government in 1922, but he had watched, saying nothing, as the Fascist dictator aligned the interests of the Italian nation with Nazi Germany and eventually dragged Italy into a war for which the nation was not ready. The fate of the King was sealed when he, Badoglio, and the rest of the government abandoned Rome in September. On the same day the King fled Rome, the anti-fascist parties created the *Comitato Liberazione Nazionale* (CLN) under a pre-war prime minister, Ivanoe Bonomi. The CLN was comprised of the six anti-fascist parties in Italy, including the communists (PCI), the socialists (PSI), the Action Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberals. Although from varied ideological backgrounds, the parties of the CLN united on two important factors: the need to liberate Italy from the war and the necessity of replacing the King, whom they regarded as personally responsible for Mussolini's rise.⁹¹

The CLN was the major organizational body of the resistance in Italy, inciting revolt among Italians still under German occupation. CLN committees emerged in nearly every town, city, and region in Italy and worked with the Allies in organizing resistance and reconstruction efforts. The *Comitato Liberazione Nazionale per Alta Italia* (CLNAI) was created in occupied Italy on 11 September and organized much of the resistance in the north. The CLN was therefore both a political and military arm of the Italian nation. The CLN and the Allies worked closely together as the campaign progressed, ensuring the success of both Anglo-American and Italian goals.⁹²

⁹¹ Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p. 133.

⁹² The relationship between the Allies and the CLN is an area ripe for further research although it seems clear in both Allied and Italian documents that there was communication and coordination between the CLNs and the Allies throughout Italy. For more see Simona Colarizi, *Storia dei partiti nell'Italia repubblicana* (Roma-Bari, 1996); Ennio Di Nolfo, *Le paure e le speranze degli italiani, 1943-1953* (Milan, 1986); Pietro Scoppola, *La Repubblica dei partiti: Evoluzione e crisi di una sistema politico, 1943-1996*

By the beginning of October, Italy was divided, geographically and politically. In addition to the German and Allied armies, the Fascist RSI, the monarchy, and the CLN all claimed to have legitimate authority in Italy. Much of southern Italy, including the major port of Naples, was liberated and, excepting Naples, was relatively damage-free. Up to that point, there were few instances in which the two armies clashed. Until that time, the campaign was characterized by the Allied pursuit of the retreating German armies. The dynamic changed when *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* made the decision to create a permanent line of defence south of Rome.

The Cassino sector was chosen as the western end of the German Gustav or Winter Line because it was long considered to be highly defensible territory.⁹³ The traditional road to Rome, the ancient via Casilina or highway 6 in modern parlance, was guarded by the mountains of the Apennine range to the north and the Aurunci mountains to the southwest. The Apennines were snow-covered in winter and not easily crossed even in the summer. The Gustav Line traversed the shortest part of the peninsula from east to west, from Gaeta to Ortona, meaning the Germans could defend the line with fewer divisions.⁹⁴ River valleys had natural defensive qualities. The Apennine mountain chain runs the entire length of the Italian peninsula like the backbone of a sleeping lizard.

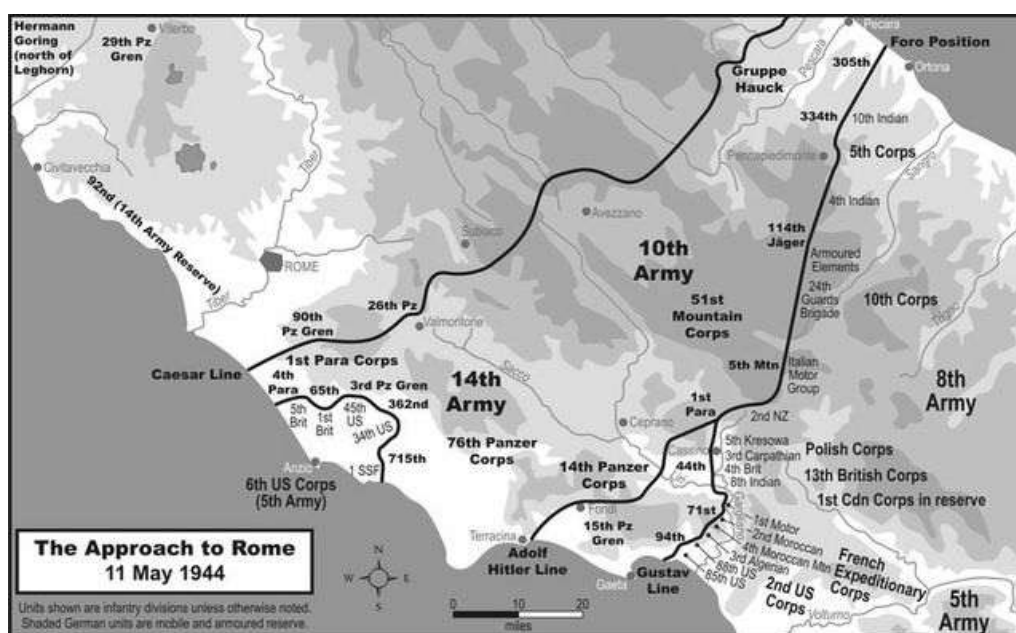
Many rivers, made famous in military literature after the bloody attempt to cross them,

(Bologna, 1996); Angelo Ventrone, *La cittadinanza repubblicana: Forma-Partito e identità nazionale alle origini della democrazia italiana, 1943-1948* (Bologna, 1996).

⁹³ The Italian Military College used Cassino as a classic example of “an impregnable natural defence barrier.” Fred Majdalany, *Cassino: Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., Ltd, 1957), p. 32. Kesselring reportedly chose the location for the Gustav line before the September 1943 landings at Salerno for its “strong, almost impregnable” qualities. Graham and Bidwell, *Tug of War*, p. 49.

⁹⁴ This dissertation focuses on the events on the line on the western end of the Gustav Line because this is where it was decided the final breakthrough would happen, due to terrain constrictions. Additionally, although Ortona suffered destruction it was not wiped out as the towns and villages in the Cassino sector were.

run from the mountains to the Tyrrhenian Sea, dissecting the wide valley floor and creating natural obstacles for an advancing army. The valley leading north was no more than ten miles wide and the ground naturally canalizing. The Liri and Rapido Valleys were surrounded by mountain walls that created a killing zone for the defending army. Attackers would have no choice but to travel in the low ground at the base of the foothills. The ancient Abbey of Monte Cassino sat on the high ground, overlooking all that was below in the valley.



The Gustav and Hitler Lines in May 1944. The natural defensive qualities proved to be impenetrable. The Allies fought to break the position for nearly seven months. Italian civilians who lived in towns and villages around the lines fled to caves in the hills. Map courtesy of Michael Bechthold.

The Abbey of Monte Cassino, the first of St. Benedict's monastic buildings and where he wrote his famous *Rules*, was transformed from a pagan temple into a Christian Church in 529. Monte Cassino has been destroyed multiple times over the centuries by man and nature. The Abbey stands on the high ground at the juncture of the Liri and Gari

valleys and has a commanding view of both.⁹⁵ At the foot of Monte Cassino is the town of Cassino, in 1944 an important hub town of about 25,000 people, halfway between Naples and Rome. Hundreds of smaller towns and villages dot the landscape within view of the Abbey of Monte Cassino. The war, which battered against the Cassino position for months, virtually wiped out towns, villages, and communities that had existed in Frosinone province for centuries under the protective gaze of St. Benedict's monastery. Soldiers from all over the world – Indian, Polish, Moroccan, Algerian, Canadian, British, American, German, Austrian, New Zealand, and more - fought at Cassino. Until Cassino, the war had swept through Italy with comparative ease and little physical destruction. But below Cassino the Germans stood to fight. The destruction of modern war devastated Frosinone province and had a profound effect on its people.

The battles for Cassino were characterized by brutal, First World War-like fighting that culminated in the utter destruction of everything in the area. The Allies are criticized for the fact that it took seven months and four attempts before they finally broke the position at Cassino. In the process, they bombed the Abbey of Monte Cassino and many of the surrounding towns. History is critical of the Allied decision to bomb the Abbey, especially after the Germans pledged they would not use it for military purposes. The German army, on the other hand, is remembered for saving the treasures from the Abbey. A far more complicated story emerges in this study, with its focus on the interaction between civilian and soldier. Moreover, the action of Allied commanders in the greater context of the strategy of the campaign sheds light on why decisions were

⁹⁵ Majdalany, *Cassino*, p. 8.

made. Although it is easy to criticise in hindsight, it is not always useful. Both the Allies and the German armies were attempting to win the war. For the Allies, military necessity led them to the decision to bomb the Abbey and the town of Cassino.

The seven-month battle to break through the Gustav and Hitler lines was costly in terms of the lives of Allied, Italian, and German soldiers, Italian civilians, and Italian infrastructure. Despite the cost, the protracted conflict in the Cassino area supported Allied strategic aims in Italy. At Cassino, the Germans demonstrated the tenacity with which they were determined to hold the area south of Rome. At Cassino, the Allies were convinced that the Germans would continue to fight them in the Italian theatre.⁹⁶ Throughout those battles, German reinforcements poured in to support the effort to hold south of Rome. The German choice to defend south of Rome benefitted Allied plans by drawing German soldiers away from the Normandy coast just in time for D-Day in June 1944.⁹⁷ Therefore, the battles of Cassino satisfied that larger strategic aim. The final big push at Cassino was organized for late May 1944, just days before the landing at Normandy, ensuring that German forces deployed in Italy would not be able to move quickly to meet the landing forces in France.⁹⁸ The result was the liberation of Rome on 5 June 1944, just one day before D-Day in Normandy. The months of suffering endured by Italian civilians supported the larger aim of defeating Nazism in Europe. Perhaps this is

⁹⁶ In the first months of the campaign, the Allies worried the German army would break contact and retreat to the Alps where they could defend indefinitely and with fewer troops. As Lee Windsor states, “having drawn the Germans into battle in Italy, the Allies then had to give them cause to stay.” Windsor, “Overlord’s Long Right Flank,” p. 223.

⁹⁷ For more on this, including the multiple truths that emerge from this narrative, see Windsor, “Overlord’s Long Right Flank.” Windsor discusses how the need for secrecy in plans to draw Germans into Italy and away from the French Norman coast creates competing truths from the perspective of the soldiers and the Allied commander. The bitter truth of the soldier fighting in southern Italy has coloured the narrative of the campaign in Italy.

⁹⁸ Lee Windsor, “Overlord’s Long Right Flank,” p. 221.

little consolation for the Italians whose homes were completely wiped out in the course of the fight to win at Cassino.

The story of the war in Cassino is complicated by the existence of multiple, competing narratives that emerge from the plethora of experiences caused by the interaction between civilian and soldier.⁹⁹ The destruction of the German defensive line at Cassino and the subsequent liberation of Rome came at a heavy cost to Italians. A wide swath of devastation stretched across the landscape south of Rome. The battle for the Winter Line left 300,000 Italians destitute; a third of these were children. Although the Allies continued to fight north of Rome, they did not abandon the hundreds of thousands of Italians in southern Italy. Once the battle moved on, Allied Civil Affairs worked to help the civilians pick up the pieces. Evacuation was not possible, so the most devastated areas were cordoned off and Allied personnel worked with Italian doctors, nurses, and civilians to prevent disease, rebuild essential services, and begin the process of making the towns and villages of the Cassino sector livable again. The story of the aftermath of the battles for Cassino shows the courage and tenacity of the Italian civilians, many of whom refused to abandon their shattered homes. Civilians lived “in smashed houses, shacks made of rubble, caves, and even dugouts, and of course are doubling up with friends lucky enough to have homes still in one piece. There are also a few fortunates with tents.” Food was also a problem. There were virtually no local resources due to the

⁹⁹ These competing narratives are the result of the plethora of different experiences. Depending on where Italians lived, when they were liberated, and whom they interacted with, their experiences differed. For more on the different experiences in Cassino, see Chapter 2.

utter destruction. The fields were full of land mines and had to be cleared before crops could be planted.¹⁰⁰ Although the war had moved on, the struggle to survive continued.

The liberation of Rome was a turning point in the war for the Allies, the Germans, and the Italians. Most notably, the Italian government changed. Under pressure from the *Comitato Nazionale di Liberazione*, King Vittorio Emanuele III announced, on 12 April, his intention to abdicate the throne as soon as Rome was occupied, surrendering his powers to the Crown Prince Umberto.¹⁰¹ Although many members of the CLN wanted an end to the monarchy entirely, it was decided to put all questions of “internal politics” on hold until Italy was liberated.¹⁰² As an advising body, the Allied Control Commission participated in discussions that led to this decision.¹⁰³ The Allies clearly recognized the CLN as a legitimate political body that needed to be consulted. The cooperation between the Allies and the CLN would necessarily continue as the campaign progressed, including in rear areas where local CLN organizations consulted and liaised with ACC personnel regarding conditions in the respective regions.

For the Allies, the second phase of the campaign was marked largely by a closer cooperation and a growing trust between Italian and Allied agencies and organizations like the *Comitato Nazionale di Liberazione*. As the organizing body of the resistance in

¹⁰⁰ NARA, RG 331, The Records of the Allied Control Commission, Italy, 1943-1947, Box 7523, AC Weekly Bulletin No. 32, 6 Nov to 12 Nov 1944, 10901/115/52.

¹⁰¹ Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p. 143.

¹⁰² Hansard, 14 December 1944 found at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1944/dec/14/count-sforza-italian-monarchy#S5CV0406P0_19441214_HOC_176 accessed 28 September 2012. Churchill referred to a letter he had read from Count Sforza in which Sforza agreed that matters of internal politics should not be addressed until a proper election, involving the Italian public, could decide the issues.

¹⁰³ Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, pp. 133-145. Negotiating the politics of Italy in the midst of waging a campaign and trying to restore to the Italian government more territory is a complicated effort that deserves its own study. The differences of opinion between the Italians, the British, and the Americans made the subject of the Italian monarchy a very delicate issue.

northern Italy, the CLN coordinated with Allied agencies to gather intelligence about German movement, defences, the effectiveness of Allied bombing strikes, important targets, conditions of bridges in north Italy, supply dumps, and other relevant matters.¹⁰⁴ For the Allies, the growing resistance, led by Italian officers and soldiers, provided valuable support as the campaign continued through 1944. The American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) recruited soldiers and officers to carry out missions. The value of these missions to the Allied effort is yet unrecognized in the historiography of the campaign. The intelligence network created by the OSS in northern Italy relied heavily on Italian officers and soldiers who were familiar with the area and often had contacts with partisan groups in the north.¹⁰⁵ The first liaison team was dropped in January 1944 but did not start broadcasting messages until mid-February. It was not until June 1944 that a real stream of intelligence started.¹⁰⁶ As a result, the Allies had a great deal more intelligence on Gothic Line defences than they had for the Gustav Line. In addition, partisans, working with recruited Italian soldiers and OSS agents, provided useful intelligence on the economic conditions in the north and how the region was affected by German occupation.

¹⁰⁴ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 303, Italian Division SI Medto, Report for period 15 December – 31 December 1944, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 303, 2677 Regiment OSS, SI Branch, Italian Section, “Report for period 1-15 June 1944,” p. 8. Personnel were mainly being recruited from the Italian army. Once deemed acceptable they were briefed on the type of information required and trained for their specific task. NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 303, 2677 Regiment OSS, SI Branch, Italian Section, “Report for period 1-15 August 1944,” p. 8. This specific report notes that 16 officers were screened to be personnel. Four were deemed qualified and willing.

¹⁰⁶ The “Pear” team, including an Italian air ace from the Italian Air Force, was the first mission to go into north Italy in January 1944. The Pear team was dropped off on the coast of Venice via a submarine. Three teams, all consisting of Italian personnel, were dropped in February and another four in March in areas all over north Italy – Turin, Bologna, Milan, the Lake region. NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 303, 2677 Regiment OSS, NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 303, 2677 Regiment OSS, SI Branch, Italian Section, “Report for period 1-15 June 1944,” pp. 2-3.

After June 1944, the campaign in Italy became a supporting operation to that being carried out in Normandy. To ensure the continued success in Normandy, the Allies had to keep the attention of the German army south of the Alps.¹⁰⁷ With limited resources,¹⁰⁸ the role that the Italian resistance could play in sabotage and intelligence-gathering became crucial to the Allied war effort. As of June 1944, the Allied-supplied partisan force supplied numbered 15,000. With Allied support and encouragement, the force grew nearly five-fold by September 1944.¹⁰⁹ On 6 June, Field Marshal Alexander issued a proclamation to all Italian partisans inciting them to be ready to fight that summer. Alexander appealed to the

... patriots of occupied Italy ... to rise up united against the common enemy ... where the latter tries to withdraw or attenuate the battle of annihilation, I appeal to all of you to strike him with my troops which are advancing. Do all that is in your power to hinder the enemy's movements, to heighten the confusion ... The Liberation of Italy is taking place for your cause; collaborate with me. Together we will attain victory.¹¹⁰

He followed the 6 June message with another on the night of 8-9 June inciting partisans to “Do all that you possibly can to destroy, delay, deceive the enemy with all the means you use ... the order is ... Kill the Germans, destroy their means of transport in every way.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol VI, Part II*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Resources were diverted to Normandy and then in July to Operation Anvil, the landing in the south of France that was intended to draw even more Germans away from the Normandy coast.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, WO 311/28, “Allied Force Headquarters (British Section): Report on German reprisals for Partisan Activity in North Italy,” August 1945, sheet 3.

¹¹⁰ As quoted in Paolo Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre: Revisiting Sant’ Anna di Stazzema*, Noor Giovanni Mazhar, trans., (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 92-93.

¹¹¹ As quoted in Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre*, p. 93.

The use of Italian officers, soldiers, and partisans behind the lines gave Alexander more intelligence on the situation in northern Italy. OSS units working with Italian partisans not only captured maps and documents but were able to report back on the state of German defences and the terrain situation. For example, the OSS Maritime Unit, made up of Italian marines recruited from the San Marco battalion, secured plans for the Adriatic sector of the Gothic Line. The unit, in conjunction with partisans, also sabotaged roads, bridges, and railway lines to inhibit German transport.¹¹² One can never rely completely on intelligence estimates but certainly the amount of intelligence being funnelled through the OSS and partisan organizations made a difference in planning the next steps. A 28 June OSS report described the German defences on the Pisa-Rimini/Gustav Line including the construction of bunkers, car and tank obstacles, gun emplacements, and flooding of areas.¹¹³ An Italian agent, Mario Santini, returned to the 5th Army operating area in early September 1944 with an exact copy of a secret German map of the Gothic Line defences in the Bologna sector, drawn by two Italian engineers. Fifth Army intelligence commented on the accuracy of the map and appreciated it very much.¹¹⁴ Intelligence reports were also received on the state of agriculture and economics in occupied Italy. Corn, legume, and potato production was estimated to be at fifty percent of normal production due to German destruction.¹¹⁵ According to reports,

¹¹² NARA, RG 226, Box 2, OSS E110 Folder 532, "Declassified report on the Maritime Unit in Italy," 26 September 1945.

¹¹³ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 303, Office of Strategic Services report on defenses and patriot activity, 28 June 1944.

¹¹⁴ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 303, OSS, Report of Italian Desk Forward, 15 September 1944. (1613)

¹¹⁵ This kind of data supported plans for Civil Affairs in the area as well.

approximately eighty percent of all Italian production was going to Germany and it was reported that the German army was “systematically looting the country of stocks and machinery.”¹¹⁶ The addition of more and more OSS teams through 1944 and 1945 recruited mainly from Italian personnel speaks to the success of the missions and the value of the intelligence they were able to gather. These OSS missions were risky; many teams did not reach their destination, and were captured by the Germans or by suspicious partisan bands that did not trust their intentions.

The cooperation between the Italians and the Allies was not beneficial to the German defence in Italy. The Germans were intent on maintaining their hold on the valuable northern industrial regions of Italy, especially the agriculturally prosperous Po Valley plain. Historian Timothy Saxon writes:

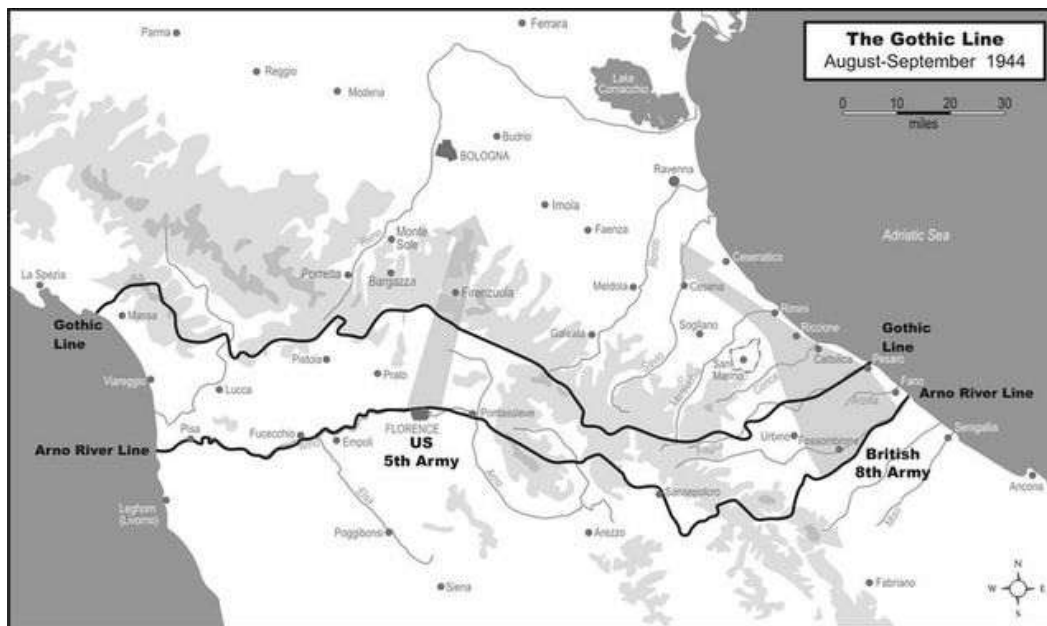
By December 1943, Italian sources had provided 41,500 tons of rice to support the German war economy. In 1944, Italian fields, orchards, and vineyards supplied wheat, rice, corn, oats, rye, potatoes, sugar, fruit, vegetables, meat, fat, fish, and wine for German consumption.¹¹⁷

In order to protect northern assets, Kesselring had to construct a defensive line that would be as difficult to break as the Gustav Line. The next major defensive line was planned for the Pisa-Rimini or the Gothic Line. Kesselring needed to delay the Allied advance because the position was not yet properly fortified. Kesselring set up a series of delay lines north of Rome in an effort to “trade space for time” to allow his “battered and weary divisions” to regroup, reinforce, and rest.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 303, OSS headquarters, SI Branch, Italian section, Report for period 15-30 June 1944, p. 10.

¹¹⁷ Saxon, “The German Side of the Hill,” p. 15.

¹¹⁸ Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol VI, Part II*, p. 10.



The Gothic Line in August-September 1944. In June 1944, the defensive line, meant to protect German interests in north Italy, was deemed inadequate. Kesselring had to delay the Allies in order to buy enough time to properly fortify it. Italian partisans, supplied by the Allies, jeopardized these efforts. (Map courtesy of Michael Bechtold)

In June 1944, the Gothic Line was deemed inadequate.¹¹⁹ In the second phase of the campaign, the Germans concentrated their efforts on using engineers to demolish bridges, roads and everything deemed to be of military value.¹²⁰ In addition, German troops were instructed to compel all Italian civilians between the ages of fifteen and fifty to participate in the construction on the delay lines and the Gothic Line.¹²¹ Although German policy toward the Italian population did not necessarily change in the second half of the campaign – the Germans continued to take what they wanted and destroy what

¹¹⁹ Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol VI, Part II*, p. 60. A report of 28 June 1944 described the line as thin, lacking emplacements for heavy weapons, with fields of fire not cleared and anti-tank obstacles rudimentary.

¹²⁰ Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol VI, Part II*, 20-22.

¹²¹ The Germans began referring to the defensive position as Green Line after Hitler realized that it did not meet German “fortress standards.” He thought the name Gothic Line was too pretentious. Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol VI, Part II*, pp. 21-22.

they could not take – the intensity and brutality increased. After June 1944, the Germans had to deal with a growing insurgency, encouraged, supplied, and in some cases, trained by the Allies, that threatened supplies and movement.

The Allied-supported resistance had a serious impact on German fighting troops, supply lines, war production, and economic potential.¹²² The loss of Rome only exacerbated the problem. On 12 June, General Lemelsen, commander of AOK 14, identified that precious supplies sent from Siena to Grosseto had been disrupted by partisan activities. He wrote to Kesselring to obtain permission to shoot up to ten Italians of military age for every soldier killed or for each proven act of sabotage. Kesselring gave him permission.¹²³ On 17 June, Kesselring issued orders that countered those sent by General Alexander earlier in June. He identified the severity of the partisan threat and instructed his commanders to be harsh: "... Only the most prompt and severe handling is good enough as punitive and deterrent measure to nip in the bud other outrages on a greater scale."¹²⁴

Kesselring issued a follow-on clarification memo to all commanders, the SS, and other police three days later noting that the Italians must not perceive his announcement as an "empty threat." He instructed that all acts of violence against the German army be punished immediately.¹²⁵ The ruthlessness of Kesselring's order and his desire to ensure it was not perceived as an empty edict speaks to the level of threat posed by the partisans.

¹²² Saxon, "The German Side of the Hill."

¹²³ Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol VI, Part II*, p. 22.

¹²⁴ TNA, WO 311/28, "Allied Force Headquarters (British Section): Report on German reprisals for Partisan Activity in North Italy," August 1945, sheet 5.

¹²⁵ TNA, WO 311/28, "Allied Force Headquarters (British Section): Report on German reprisals for Partisan Activity in North Italy," August 1945, sheet 5.

Resistance formations inhibited the German war effort while the Allies were making gains in June and July 1944.

Initially, things seemed to be going very well for the Allies. The Albert Line that ran in the west from Grosseto to Ancona fell in early July. The fortunes of war changed, however. A storm in Normandy in late June had a serious impact on the build-up in France. As a result, it was decided to put plans for a second landing back on the table. Operation *Anvil*, the plan previously tabled in the spring of 1944 due to the success south of Rome, was considered again. *Anvil*, planned for mid to late August 1944, would land Allied forces on the south coast of France, effectively opening another front in France to draw more German reserves away from the Normandy coast. In early July, it was planned that no more than three US and four French divisions would be pulled out of the line to prepare for *Anvil*.¹²⁶ In addition to the loss in troops for *Anvil*, the Allies had to fight for every advance to the Gothic Line, losing more men all the way. And with every day that the Allies fought on a delaying line, the Germans were afforded more time to prepare their defences on the Gothic Line. In addition, more Italians were subjected to brutal German occupation policies.

In an effort to hold up the Allied advance, the Germans held on to two delay lines, the Albert Line in front of Lake Trasimeno and the Heinrich Line on the Arno River, south of Florence. Florence, like Rome, was declared an open city in 1943. By June 1944, the Germans were ready to violate the open city should it become a military necessity. On 30 July, Alexander again appealed for the help of the Italian people. Leaflets were dropped on the city with an appeal from Field Marshal Alexander, asking the Italian

¹²⁶ Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol VI, Part II*, p. 23.

people to send information about the location of mines and demolitions and to clear obstacles and barricades from the streets. On 31 July, Hitler informed Kesselring that he should conduct operations around Florence in an effort to demonstrate that it was the Allies, not the Germans, who led to the destruction of the “irreplaceable treasures” of Florence.¹²⁷ The Germans used the story of the bombing of Montecassino as a propaganda message to show the barbarism of the Allies, and hoped for the same fodder from the fight for Florence.¹²⁸ Hitler gave authorization to engineers of AOK10 to prepare for the demolition of all bridges over the Arno, except the Renaissance Ponte Vecchio.¹²⁹

History remembers the Germans for saving the Ponte Vecchio, another culturally important Italian treasure. Their treatment of local Italians, however, was brutal. The Germans were frustrated at resistance activities that jeopardized their war effort in Italy. Kesselring’s order of 17 June permitted German troops to commit a string of massacres throughout Tuscany, like that at Sant’ Anna di Stazzema on 12 August 1944 in which soldiers of the Sixteenth SS Grenadier Armoured Division surrounded the remote isolated village. Three squads closed the perimeter, killing around 500 civilians, mostly women, children, the elderly, and a number of refugees who had fled to Sant’ Anna for safety. Most of the men had escaped to avoid deportation to Germany.¹³⁰ Between June and

¹²⁷ Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol VI, Part II*, p.94.

¹²⁸ See Chapter 2.

¹²⁹ Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol VI, Part II*, p. 96. Local myth in Florence states that the Ponte Vecchio was saved because Hitler liked it so much but it was not suitable for military traffic anyway and would be of little use to the Allies if it was preserved. Moreover, Hitler’s remarks to Kesselring indicate he hoped the Allies would destroy the irreplaceable treasures of Florence to make the Germans look good.

¹³⁰ For more on the massacre at Sant’ Anna see Paolo Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre*.

October 1944, countless massacres were committed by the Germans in north Italy.¹³¹ In August 1944, Mussolini complained about the atrocities being carried out against innocent civilians. On 21 August, Kesselring sent another memo to his commanders, noting that reprisal activities were only permitted against “actual partisans and not the innocent civilian population.”¹³² Despite this, the massacres did not stop.

So-called reprisal killings did not discourage the Italian resistance. These groups were supplied and supported by the Allies throughout the summer of 1944 and encouraged to continue sabotage activities and intelligence gathering that would assist the Allied liberation of Italy. Allied Armies Italy had been hard hit by the withdrawal of forces for Operation *Anvil* (aka *Dragoon*) set for mid-August. Alexander’s initial plan was for a deception operation on the Adriatic coast, setting up dummy action to make the Germans think the main thrust would be there. That deception operation would be followed by an attack on the Gothic Line north of Florence at Bologna. Doubt in the plan arose when the troops for *Anvil* were withdrawn and it was decided to shift the focus to the Adriatic coast and have 5th Army deliver a supporting effort in the centre. Operation *Olive* was set to be delivered in late August after the *Anvil* landing. Actions on the Adriatic coast, with 1st Canadian Division, were successful and by late September the Gothic Line was breeched on its eastern side.¹³³ However, after the breakthrough, 8th Army was stopped by the weather. Pouring rain on 21 September meant that the fields

¹³¹ Such as: the massacre of Vinca in the Apuan Alps on 24 August 1944, the Bardine incident, and the massacre at Monte Sole, just to name a few.

¹³² TNA, WO 311/28, “Allied Force Headquarters (British Section): Report on German reprisals for Partisan Activity in North Italy,” August 1945, sheet 7.

¹³³ For more on actions on the eastern side of the Gothic Line, see G.W.L. Nicholson, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Volume II: The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1956), pp. 487-521.

had turned to mud and there would be no quick pursuit in the Po Valley.¹³⁴ The countless rivers, canals, and brooks created obstacles in addition to the mud and 5th Army stalled south of Bologna. The offensive would not begin again until the spring.

By mid-September, the front line was just short of the last major peaks of the northern edge of the Apennine range before the foothills gradually flattened out into the Po River valley plain. The dominant terrain feature is Monte Sole, from which one can see the valleys of the Setta and Reno rivers and the major rail beds and roads that connect the city of Bologna to Florence. The Monte Sole feature represented the last defensible ground. In the autumn of 1944, it was crucial that Germans hold at Monte Sole or risk losing the industrial north. Moreover, the major transportation hub of Bologna was the last direct line to Germany. Losing Bologna meant losing options for a successful retreat. Monte Sole was crucial terrain the Germans could not afford to let go.

The German hold on the terrain feature of Monte Sole was challenged by the Stella Rossa partisan brigade. The brigade was formed in the autumn of 1943 by a former soldier of the Italian army, Mario Musolesi. Supplied and even trained by an Allied liaison officer, the Stella Rossa jeopardized the German build-up south of Florence to delay the Allied advance. The Stella Rossa brigade lived in the hills of Monte Sole, which was effectively part of the German Gothic Line. After ten months of missions against the Germans, in which there were a number of battles and attempts at round-ups, German troops carried out a counter-partisan operation. Over five days in September and October 1944, elements of four German divisions surrounded the area, set up a cordon, and systematically killed everyone they found. The homes that housed the families of

¹³⁴ Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol VI, Part II*, p. 299.

Monte Sole were then burned to the ground. Like many of the reprisal killings throughout central Italy in the summer of 1944 few partisans were actually killed. The dead were the women, children, and elderly of the village who stayed behind as the men left to hide in the hills, not expecting that the German soldiers would destroy everything in their midst as they cleared the area in order to fortify the depths of the Gothic Line south of Bologna.

Field Marshal Alexander encouraged the Italians to stand up against their German occupiers in June 1944. Allied armies provided weapons and supplies and even planted liaison officers with partisan units to make the most effective use of them. In June 1944, before the Germans proved they would tenaciously hold every mile north of Rome and before troops were withdrawn from Allied Armies Italy, Alexander hoped he might be able to destroy the German army in Italy in advance of the winter of 1944-45. The heavy September rains of the autumn of 1944 meant that another winter of war would pass in Italy. The Germans, the Allies, and the Italians would have to wait for the spring when efforts would be renewed again. In November 1944, Field Marshal Alexander issued a proclamation to the partisans, informing them to stand down for the winter.¹³⁵ The OSS, which arguably had a better handle on the situation of the resistance in Italy, understood that the partisans could not just lay down their arms in November and wait for things to begin again. The OSS urged that the approximately 90,000 partisans who were operating in north Italy needed ongoing moral and material support throughout the winter. The same OSS report acknowledged the support the partisan forces were providing in sabotage activities and intelligence gathering, but they would also be instrumental in

¹³⁵ Richard Lamb, *War in Italy, 1943-45: A Brutal Story* (Da Capo Press, 1993), p. 227.

hampering a German withdrawal.¹³⁶ The Allies clearly recognized the value of the partisans. Using them to disrupt German movement became was an option too attractive to pass up.

The Germans, too, recognized the threat of the resistance to the German war effort. Man and materiel were devoted to counter partisan activity. The threat was great enough that the Germans had to commit resources, “especially in the Apennine area, to protect the consolidation of the Gothic Line.”¹³⁷ German troops could not effectively move anywhere without being under threat from Italian partisans. For the Germans, it became a military necessity to react to the partisan threat. At Monte Sole, it was necessary to clear the area of the partisan threat in order to ensure defences could be built for the coming spring offensive. The new front line became the communities that 16SS Recce division and 1st Parachute had torched in September-October 1944. The hills that used to sustain the people who had lived on Monte Sole were transformed. Construction of defences, continued shelling over the winter, and seven more months of war reduced the already battered communities of Monte Sole to rubble. Those people who survived did not return to live in the hills. The centuries-old communities of Monte Sole were wiped out forever. Bologna was liberated on 21 April 1945, four days before the German army sued for peace in Italy. In that spring offensive, Allied reports estimate that “81,000 Germans surrendered to Partisan Bands, over 3,000 were killed or wounded and there

¹³⁶ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 368, OSS, 27 November 1944.

¹³⁷ Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, G 219247/IF/11/48, Vol. 20432, Luftlotte 2, Ultra decryption documents, From C. in C. South West (Kesselring) to OKW Operations Staff, “General Survey of the partisan situation and its effect on units of the new Italian armed forces,” 23 June 1944, p. 16.

were over 100 attacks on garrisons, ambushes, etc.”¹³⁸ Italy’s liberation had come at a costly price for all involved. And Italy shed her share of blood.

In the end, the Italian people paid a hefty price for twenty years of Fascism. Although the campaign in Italy did not always go as planned for either side, Allied efforts on the Italian peninsula directly supported the defeat of both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in the Second World War. That victory in Italy, however, came at a price for all involved. The German and Allied armies reacted to one another in an effort to win the war in Italy. The Italian people were forced to make impossible decisions in the context of the campaign. These decisions had bitter consequences. Some chose to stand up and fight – either for the Allies or for the Germans,¹³⁹ while others chose to wait out the war. Both the Germans and the Allies had policy for dealing with the civilians in the midst of the battle that evolved as the campaign changed. How that policy was carried out affects how the war is remembered in any one place. The Second World War in Italy was a complicated affair. Within the context of the military campaign between the Allies and the Germans, an Italian civil war raged. Both the Germans and the Allies encouraged elements of that civil war for their own ends. In many cases, the Italians were not cowards but desperate to join in the fight to liberate the country and free themselves from their fascist past. The Allies encouraged this feeling by inciting Italians to assist them through sabotage, intelligence gathering, and general resistance. The Germans, on the

¹³⁸ TNA, WO 311/28, “Allied Force Headquarters (British Section): Report on German reprisals for Partisan Activity in North Italy,” August 1945, sheet 3.

¹³⁹ This is another complicated part of the story. Fighting for the Allies could mean fighting for the partisans or the Italian army while fighting for the Germans could mean opting for labour in Germany, fighting for Mussolini’s RSI or conducting spy operations behind Allied lines.

other hand, did all they could to discourage such behaviour. Every Italian had a unique experience depending on the nature of the war in the particular area.

This project endeavours to shed even a little light on the multitude of ways in which Italians experienced the war through the examples of Cassino and Monte Sole, two communities dissected and torn apart by war.¹⁴⁰ The sum of experiences in these two areas, devastated by war for protracted periods, has had a long-term impact materially, politically, and emotionally from which Italy has not yet recovered.¹⁴¹ Italians are left searching for answers to this impact in the history of the campaign. The state of the historiography leads the reader to believe that the campaign in Italy was a brutal waste for no purpose; Italian towns and families were ripped apart for no apparent reason. This chapter demonstrates that there are more complexities than suggested in the secondary literature; that Italians did not drop their weapons and run home; and that commanders, on both sides, were doing their best to do their jobs, despite the sinister outcome in some cases. War is perpetually grey.

¹⁴⁰ The major, permanent German lines of defence ran through Cassino and Monte Sole. For this reason, the Italians who inhabited this space were most likely to suffer a wide range of experiences from the war in Italy.

¹⁴¹ Most recently, historian Philip Cooke has explored the legacy of the Italian resistance since the end of the war. As this study purports, the military campaign and the policies of the Allied and German armies had a significant impact on how the resistance transpired and carried out its work in Italy. The resistance is only one part of this study, which explores the multitude of ways the Italian people interacted with foreign armies and the result. Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*.

Chapter Two: Fighting for Cassino: Italian Communities on the Front Line

The old town of San Pietro Infine sits nestled at the foot of the mountain, standing watch over new San Pietro, rebuilt in the decades since the whirlwind of destruction that was the Second World War tore through the quiet homes and businesses, forcing many San Pietrese to flee to nearby caves. Visible from across the valley, the damaged Church of San Sebastiano watches over the new town, offering a constant reminder of the devastation caused by war. Sometime in the 1970s, the cupola of the church caved in. The townspeople who survived the war decided not to rebuild on the same spot, but moved the reconstructed town to an area closer to highway 6 and the bottom of the valley. The rubble that was Old San Pietro was left to symbolize the devastating effects of the Second World War. After decades of neglect, the sidewalks and stairs that allowed access to the town became overgrown with weeds and brush, the former houses were taken over by nature, and the basilica became a hangout for local Italian teenagers and cats. The rubble of the town, in varying states of decay, was littered with various types of refuse.

In 2007, the local townspeople began work to arrest the decay and make the site accessible to visitors from around the world. They created a museum to commemorate the winter of destruction in December 1943 that completely wiped out the town and so many others like it. The museum, opened in the summer of 2009, commemorates the ancient history of the town and its people; it recounts how the San Pietrese survived the winter during which their homes, history, and everything they knew was wiped out. San

Pietro Infine was the first town to be completely wiped out by war in the winter of 1943-1944 and it was the only town not rebuilt in the aftermath.

San Pietro is not the only visual testament to the utter destruction; the scars of war are visible in nearly every town decades after the tide of war swept across the valley. The complete destruction of San Pietro Infine and towns like it was the result of the clash between the Allied and German armies. Both sides were desperate to win the war. The harder Allied armies fought to break through the defensive lines, the more the German army worked to build a deeper, stronger line of defence. The effort from both sides transformed physical aspects of the area and also had a significant impact on the civilians lived in these spaces. Choices made by the Germans and the Allies about how to execute the war in Cassino affected the civilians. The length of the battle and the measures taken by both sides to win at all costs had a profound effect on how the Italians experienced the war. Bombardment, the use of mountain troops, and the necessity of attacking or defending ground changed the nature of the landscape, destroyed towns, and impacted the people who lived in the area. The war left a deep and enduring impression on the landscape and the people.

That impression was unique depending on the immediate circumstances and the specific interactions between civilian and soldier. The legacy or memory of the local war in San Pietro differs greatly from that in Cassino town itself, largely because of how the fight in those particular areas played out. Some 400,000 people and eighty-nine communes¹ existed in Frosinone province in 1943.² Nearly every individual had a

¹ The Italian commune is equivalent in English to a municipality. It provides local administration under a mayor (sindaco).

different war experience. This chapter recounts the details of the local fight to highlight the plethora of unique experiences in the area that would forge many different, and often competing, memories of the local war.

Like much of Italy, Frosinone province is layered with history. Many of the towns and villages that dotted the landscape of the eventual site of the Gustav and Hitler lines have origins reaching back to Roman times. The major highway that connects the ancient towns of Frosinone province is built on the ancient Roman road, the via Casilina. Remnants of ancient Rome, including aqueducts, original roads, and temples, are visible throughout the towns. In Cassino,³ a well-preserved amphitheatre sits next to the windy road that leads to the Abbey of Montecassino. Frosinone province contributed much to the Western world after the decline of Rome. Saint Thomas Aquinas, Dominican monk and Christian theologian, was born in the thirteenth century in a castle in Roccasecca. In his early life, Aquinas studied at the Abbey of Montecassino before joining the Dominican order. The Abbey of Montecassino is central to the history of the area and to the local story of the Second World War.

In 529 A.D., San Benedetto di Norcia founded a monastery on the spur that overlooked the Roman town of Casinum. The monastery, built on the site of a Roman fort overlooking the via Casilina, was well protected from invaders and offered Benedict

² *Italy, Volume II: August 1944*, United Kingdom Naval Intelligence Division Geographical Handbook Series, p. 658. This statistic is for the entire province of Frosinone and the war did not affect the region uniformly. The Italian comune is basically equivalent to a municipality.

³ The Romans called the city Casinum. Mark Antony was known to have a villa there. Majdalany, *Cassino: Portrait of a Battle*, p. 5.

and his monks the isolation they were seeking.⁴ In the peace and security of the Abbey of Montecassino, Benedict composed his *Regula Benedicti* or *Rule of Saint Benedict*, the book that would become the guide for Western monasticism. Despite its location and fortress-like structure, Montecassino was still vulnerable. Over its long history, the monastery was completely destroyed four times. In 581, the Lombards seized it to facilitate their defence against the Romans. The abbot and the monks fled to Rome.⁵ After the battle, the remains of the Abbey were abandoned until 717. It was destroyed again in 883 by the Saracens and remained in ruins for the next seventy years. In its third life, the Abbey of Monte Cassino and its Benedictine monks entered a golden period. It was in this time that the monks began “transcribing the great works of ancient literature,” preserving the works of Cicero, Horace, Ovid, Virgil, and many others for future generations. In this time, the Abbot Desiderius refurbished the Abbey in the Baroque tradition and began to build a large cathedral inside the Abbey walls. The monastery was again destroyed in 1349 by an earthquake. Reconstruction began immediately; by the end of the fourteenth century it was fully rebuilt before it fell into a period of decline.⁶ For almost 1500 years, the Abbey existed, overlooking the valleys and communities below. For the people of the surrounding communities, the Benedictine monastery

⁴ For more, see Majdalany, *Cassino: Portrait of a Battle*, p. 8. Arguably Christianity was still new in Benedict’s time and he had to be careful about where he placed his Abbey. He was also considering defence when he picked the spur for the location of his Abbey.

⁵ Majdalany, *Cassino*, p. 9. Papal authorities were so impressed by the ideas behind the Benedictine Order that they were given the apostolate of the Germanic countries. The influence of the Benedictines only grew following such an important gesture.

⁶ Majdalany, *Cassino: Portrait of a Battle*, p. 10-11. Majdalany writes of the fifth time the Abbey was nearly destroyed. In 1503, after the great Spanish General Gonzalo Fernandex de Cordoba defeated the French, he set out to destroy the fortress to prevent future use. On the night before blowing the monastery up with gunpowder, it is said the general had a dream in which St. Benedict reproved him. After the dream, de Cordoba changed his mind and became a devotee of the Benedictine order.

represented law, order, and security. In late 1943, the Germans decided to make the Abbey of Montecassino a central feature of their major defensive lines south of Rome.

The choice of where to defend was not difficult. The Italian Military College had studied the Cassino sector “as an example of an impregnable natural defence barrier” for many years.⁷ Fred Majdalany, a British veteran who fought throughout Sicily and Italy, describes the defensible qualities of the terrain best:

The essence of the position was its situation of a steep mountain massif towering above the angle made by two wide valleys meeting at right angles. To enter the Liri Valley (along which the road to Rome passes) it was necessary to cross the Rapido valley with which it formed an L. Monte Cassino, in the angle of the L, commanded the approach across the first valley, and the entrance to the second. If a force managed to break directly into the second valley away from the immediate vicinity of Cassino, it would still be overlooked as progress. That was the heart of the matter. Monte Cassino and the adjacent heights completely controlled the approach to Cassino and the route past it. From the summit of Monte Cassino an observer could watch every move in either valley. Even in moonlight it is possible from this vantage point to pick out the shapes of hills four miles or more away.⁸

Despite the natural qualities of the area, modern war required modifications to make the German defensive lines impenetrable to the guns of the twentieth century. In an interview after the war, Kesselring outlined the plan:

The sectors of the front which were expected to become involved in decisive engagements, were permanently fortified; for instance: in the Cassino area, the Apennine, the foothills of the Alps, the Alps themselves, and in the most threatened parts of the coast.⁹

To create the defensive stronghold, the German army supervised the building of anti-tank ditches, the laying of mines, the pouring of concrete emplacements, and the setting of

⁷ Majdalany, *Cassino, Portrait of a Battle*, p. 32.

⁸ Majdalany, *Cassino: Portrait of a Battle*, pp. 32-33.

⁹ Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, Vol 2052, File 98150m D144, “Questions regarding the General Strategy During the Italian Campaign by Field Marshal Kesselring and General Westphal of the Cavalry.”

tank turrets on well-built concrete bases with extensive living quarters below. Concrete, ditches, and the diversion of waterways transformed the area making once-lush fields and olive groves unrecognizable.

To transform the area, the Germans used the labour of the Italian civilians. From the German perspective, the Italians had betrayed them allowing for “the fullest and most drastic use of this country for the further prosecution of the German cause.” Initially, the Germans called for volunteers, citing Allied abuse as incentive.¹⁰ When that tactic failed, the Germans tried other means. Civilians, willing or not, were organized into construction battalions. All useful equipment, raw materials, and specialized industrial workers were shipped to Germany or North Italy in working units. Any goods that were not useful or could not be removed, were “thoroughly destroyed” before evacuation of the area. The work was done primarily by Italian forced labourers and with the help of local civilians.¹¹ The German army was intent on exploiting all that south Italy had to offer in man and materiel.

In addition to the exploitation of civilian labour, the Germans carried out forced evacuations that were neither organized nor consistent. As early as September, the Germans began a forced evacuation of the coastal area, near Gaeta. Many of the coastal towns were evacuated to allow for proper defence against an amphibious landing. Several other towns in the interior were evacuated throughout 1943-44. These were violent and

¹⁰ Potential volunteers were told that the Allies were shipping working age males from Sicily to North Africa for labour camps and also devaluing the lira in enemy-occupied territories. AFHQ 018, captured German document, “Exploitation for Italy for the Further Conduct of the War,” Appendix ‘G’, 22 September 1943, AOK 10 Sec Ops, p. 2.

¹¹ “The Campaign in Southern Italy (Sep-Dec 43): Information from German Military Documents, AFHQ Report No. 018, AOK 10 Sec Ops, “Exploitation for Italy for the Further Conduct of the War,” 22 September 1943, Appendix ‘G’, Historical Section, Canadian Military Headquarters, 1 November 1947, p. 2.

forced, yet improvised, evacuations in which German soldiers encircled the town without warning and informed the inhabitants they had to leave at once. Civilians were transported to a location and told to leave. In many cases, civilians chose to return in search of food and a few of their most precious belongings. If their home was not occupied by German soldiers, it was often reduced to rubble from Allied bombing. Those civilians caught by the Germans were accused of being spies and killed or transported to work camps in Germany.¹² Other civilians avoided the forced evacuation. For example, an Italian report of May 1944 revealed that many civilians were hiding in the Aurunci mountains, on the southern flank of the Liri Valley, to avoid the forced evacuation by the Germans. They hoped to be liberated as soon as possible, but until then they were deprived of many necessities of life.

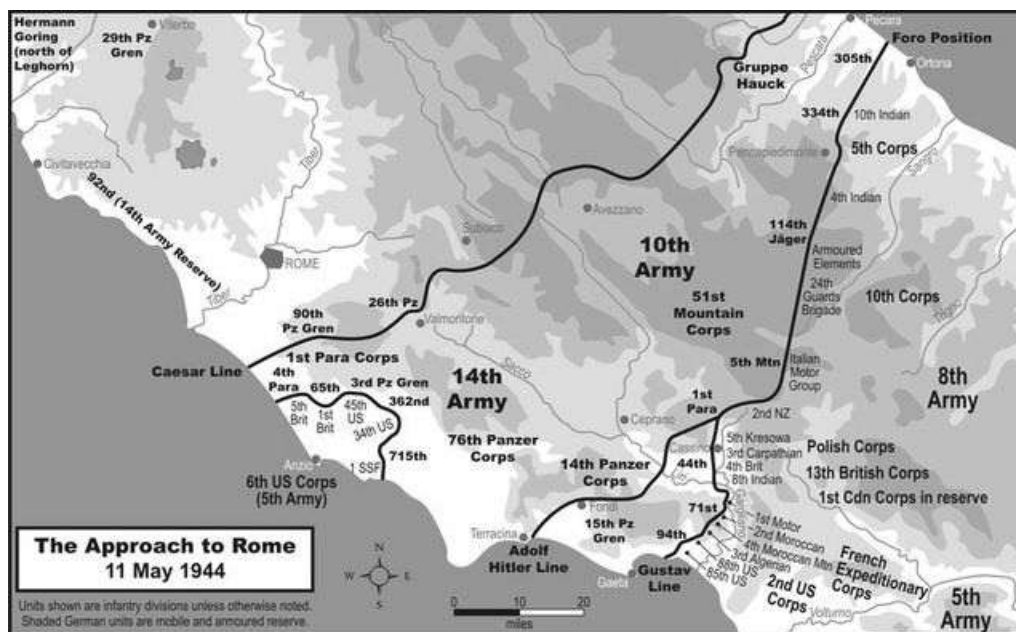
Populations that were not evacuated were subjected to brutal occupation policies by the Germans. In San Pietro, for example, the Germans raided the town, taking all that was useful and leaving little for the *sanpietresi* to eat. The Germans carried out regular *rastrellamenti* to round up working-age males. In early November, the Germans killed seventeen civilians for reasons that are unclear. In addition, the Germans poisoned water cisterns by putting dead animal carcasses in them. The people of San Pietro found only one cistern that the Germans had not poisoned. When they went to gather water there, they were fired upon, presumably by Allied armies across the valley who watched for German movement.¹³

¹² Gribaudi, *Guerra Totale*, p. 481.

¹³ Unpublished history of San Pietro, “*Storia di San Pietro Infine*,” San Pietro museum.

The German army needed time, labour, and resources to construct defences in the Cassino sector. Man-made structures were layered to create a defence in depth. From the Winter Line, which stretched from coast to coast at this narrow point in the peninsula, two switch positions extended off to fortify the low areas in the Liri Valley. The Gustav Line diverted from the Winter Line and ran west of the Garigliano, Gari, and Rapido rivers, including the Cassino mountain range and the town of Cassino in its midst. The Gustav Line was intended to block the entrance to the Liri Valley. In November 1943, Hitler ordered a second switch position in the area. The Hitler Line was built to provide a cushion to the Gustav Line; if the Gustav Line was breached, the Hitler Line would provide another barrier to Allied armies storming north.¹⁴ In the autumn of 1943, the German army still needed time to finish construction. The first battles of Cassino were delaying battles south of the main Gustav and Hitler lines intended to buy time.

¹⁴ The name of the Hitler Line was changed to the Senger line in January 1944 when it seemed clear the Allies would soon break through. Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East*, p. 430.



The Gustav and Hitler lines encompassed many towns around Cassino. The German army poured concrete and diverted rivers to fortify the line. (Map courtesy of Michael Bechtold)

From the moment the decision was made to defend south of Rome, the Germans had a distinct advantage. The Allied and German armies were reasonably well matched, according to reports in October, with eleven Allied divisions standing up against nine German divisions.¹⁵ The Germans had a distinct advantage in their position of defence. Not only were they aware of where and how they were going to defend, the Germans were able to prepare the location carefully. They utilized local resources, including civilians, to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the terrain and discover all possible avenues upon which the Allies might attack. In the rugged mountains that flanked the Liri valley, the Germans destroyed or fortified goat tracks and dirt roads to eliminate them as weak points in the defence. The Allies, on the other hand, were in a state of constant uncertainty about where they might clash with the Germans next. The Germans held a

¹⁵ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 389.

further advantage in that they controlled the industrial regions of the north in addition to the road and rail network north of Rome. The road and rail infrastructure enabled them to keep fourteen divisions ready to move from the north at a moment's notice and the industrial north fueled their war effort. By contrast, the Allies relied on the sea to bring in supplies and soldiers. Furthermore, Allied projections estimated that they would only be able to build up to sixteen or seventeen divisions by January 1944.¹⁶

In October 1943, General Mark Clark's American 5th Army reached the forward edge of the Winter Line. At that point, the defensive position was nine miles deep but was not complete. German commanders had to delay the Allied advance so they could complete construction and guarantee the integrity of the defence until the spring of 1944. While the Allies attacked the position from the south, the rear was deepened and fortified. As autumn progressed into winter, the area was transformed as the German army diverted rivers, blew bridges, poured concrete, and either destroyed roads or fortified them heavily. The fighting to delay the Allied advance to the Bernhardt Line was so brutal that once the position was finally reached, 5th Army was barely able to make the attempt to breach it. Fighting through the difficult terrain in winter weather had exhausted both armies. Between mid-November and the beginning of December, the exhaustion resulted in a stalemate in the fighting.¹⁷ The weather was atrocious with rain churning up mud in the valleys and low ground and snow in the mountains.¹⁸

¹⁶ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 381.

¹⁷ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 447.

¹⁸ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 474.

The lack of resources, the difficult terrain in the Cassino sector, and the inexperience in mountain warfare affected both sides in the winter of 1943. Neither the British nor the Germans were trained for mountain warfare. The British and American commanders “faced the perhaps insoluble problem of adapting their heavily equipped, highly mechanized, road-bound formations to the offensive in wild, lofty, and almost roadless mountains.” Moreover, as official historian C.J.C. Molony states, mountain warfare was extremely demanding on “the initiative, strength, endurance and ‘know how’ of regimental officers and men.”¹⁹ In addition to the hard mountain fighting around Cassino, Allied resources were divided. On the Adriatic coast, British 8th Army was engaged trying to break the Winter Line on its eastern edge. The fight to advance on that coast culminated in the famous Canadian street fight through the buildings in Ortona.²⁰

By December, Kesselring believed that the 5th Army advance toward Rome was more of a threat than that of 8th Army in the Ortona sector.²¹ In order to keep German attention at Cassino, General Mark Clark had to maintain pressure on the attack despite the deteriorating weather and the fact that Allied troops were exhausted. Clark did have some reinforcements to employ that are integral to the story of the people of the Cassino sector and the Italians. Fresh in the line in the early days of December were 2nd Moroccan Division and 1st Italian Motorized. Clark issued orders in late November for an

¹⁹ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 388.

²⁰ This offers an interesting contrast to the fight in the Cassino sector. By the time the New Zealand Corps got into Cassino town they had to fight for pile of rubble to pile of rubble. Cassino, like many towns and villages in that sector, was obliterated.

²¹ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 503.

attack incorporating the two divisions.²² If successful, the attack would unlock the “critical terrain features” of the Monte Camino, Monte La Difesa, and Monte Maggiore hill masses,²³ allowing 5th Army to push further up highway 6 toward the entrance to the Liri Valley. The tactical details of the battle and General Clark’s decision to engage in it in December are best gleaned from the official history.²⁴

The Germans also compensated for their need for mountain troops. In mid-December, Kesselring assigned the fresh 5th Mountain Division to the Cassino sector in response to Allied attacks on Monte Lungo and San Pietro. The addition of Allied French Colonial Troops and 5th Mountain Division had a significant impact on how civilians in the area experienced the war. Moreover, the use of Italian 1st Motorized represented a turning point for the Italian army. The coordinated attacks on Monte Lungo and San Pietro are the first instances in which Italian troops were employed in the fight against the Germans.

History typically records that the Italian army disintegrated after the armistice was announced. For many Italian soldiers, the armistice freed them from a relationship with the Germans that had gone sour. The German army, anticipating the armistice, issued an order that called for the disarmament of Italian soldiers immediately on hearing the news of the betrayal. Many Italian officers and soldiers made the decision to resist being

²² Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 513. 6th US Corps, under Major-General John P. Lucas, took the right flank with 34th and 45th US Divisions, 2nd Moroccan Division. 2nd US Corps, under Major-General Geoffrey Keyes took the centre with 3rd and 36th US Divisions, 1st Special Service Force, and 1st Italian Motorized Group. 10th Corps. Lieutenant-General R. McCreery took the left flank with 46th and 56th Divisions. 1st US Armoured Division was held in reserve.

²³ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 514.

²⁴ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, pp. 513-519; Robert L. Wagner, *The Texas Army: A History of the 36th Division in the Italian Campaign* (Austin, Texas: State House Press, 1972), pp.60-91; Martin Blumenson, *United States Army in World War II, The Mediterranean Theatre of Operations, Salerno to Cassino* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993), pp. 270-289.

disarmed and eventually suffered the consequences.²⁵ Other soldiers, aware of their fate if caught by the Germans, took to the hills and attempted to make their way to Allied lines. For example, ten days after the armistice was announced, 2,000 Italian soldiers and four officers, including a major, a captain, and two second lieutenants, were found by agents of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), hiding in the hills near Terre Gaveta. Despite a lack of clear direction on the part of Badoglio, these men did not drop their weapons and abandon their fellow soldiers. They waited in the hills, fully armed, until making contact with the Allies to offer their assistance in the fight.²⁶

It took time before the Allies could trust their former enemy. The Italians, however, were desperate to get into the fight to assist in the liberation of their country. Out of an army of around 1.7 million, more than 600,000 fought against the Germans or worked in a support role for Allied armies following the armistice. An additional 20,000 volunteered to serve in Italian Service Units (ISU).²⁷ Some were willing to drive trucks for the war effort but others were determined to take revenge against the German army. The King and Badoglio pressed the issue that the Italians should be involved in the fight to liberate their nation. Allied commanders and soldiers were suspicious of the intentions. As the hard slog up the Italian boot stretched Allied resources and exhausted reinforcements, Allied commanders were forced to employ Italian units. When employed in the fight, however, Italian troops proved their worth.

²⁵ For example, the Cephalonia incident as described in Chapter 1.

²⁶ NARA, RG 226, Box 36, OSS, E165, Folder 354, summary of intelligence reports, from Vincent Scamporino to Col. Eddy, 19 September 1943.

²⁷ O'Reilly, *Forgotten Battles*, p. 2.

The first test of the abilities of Italian units came in the early fight for the Gustav Line. In October 1943, *1° Raggruppamento Italiano Motorizzato* was placed under the control of Mark Clark. Under General Vincenzo Dapino, 5,500 men were attached to II Corps in early December and committed to Mignano area.²⁸ The task of Dapino's men was to capture Monte Lungo on the morning of 8 December to relieve a tired 141st Infantry Division on the southern nose of Monte Lungo. In conjunction with *1° Raggruppamento Italiano Motorizzato*'s attack on Monte Lungo, 36th Texas Division was instructed to take San Pietro. Intelligence reports noted that Monte Lungo was lightly defended. The Allies considered the task relatively easy and hoped that the Italians would succeed in their first assignment.

Allied intelligence assessments were wrong, however, and General Dapino and his men failed in their first attack. After-action reports indicate that the issue was not with the ability of the Italian forces, but with coordination and liaison between artillery and infantry. Moreover, Monte Lungo was not lightly held, as first thought. The losses for General Dapino's men were eighty-four killed, 122 wounded, and 170 missing.²⁹ Blumenson, in the American official history, relates the failure to the fact that the assignment was not an easy one:

Under observation from San Pietro and other points on Monte Sammucro³⁰, the steep sides of Monte Lungo made difficult any access to the top, particularly the one along the approaches from the south-eastern nose of the hill. Monte Lungo had been an inappropriate objective for a unit undertaking its initial combat action.³¹

²⁸ Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, p. 253.

²⁹ Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, p. 274-277.

³⁰ The Italians refer to this feature as Monte Sambucaro.

³¹ Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, p. 274-278.

And Blumenson was not mistaken. Following the war, a monument to the members of 1st Motorized who perished in the fight was placed on the south-eastern plateau of the Monte Lungo feature. The sides are steep and rocky. Looking down from the platform of the monument it becomes apparent how difficult taking the position, under fire, would have been. Scaling the crest would have been a difficult enough task for someone not under enemy fire and observation.

While the Italians attacked Monte Lungo in early December, 143rd Infantry Regiment of 36th Texas Division attacked across the valley at the town of San Pietro. San Pietro was the hinge at the outer edge of the Winter Line, the final delay line before the Germans would be forced to fall back into the Gustav Line. The attack by 143rd Infantry was marginally more successful than the Italian attack at Monte Lungo. They captured and held in the face of brutal German counterattacks through 7-10 December. 143rd Infantry surrounded the town and attacked San Pietro simultaneously from the southeast, through the town, and down on the town from the north from the heights of Monte Sambucaro. Second and third battalions, attacking from the southeast, came up against “brilliantly conceived defenses in front of the town,” while 1st Battalion approached the town by first taking the height of Monte Sambucaro from 71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment. First Battalion successfully defended Hill 1205 from German counterattacks and used the high ground to carry out probing attacks but could go no further while the town of San Pietro, and Monte Lungo remained in German hands.³²

³² Wagner, *The Texas Division*, pp. 74-77.

The Allies did not rest long before attacking again. The new operation was launched on 15 December; 143rd Infantry Regiment attacked San Pietro while *1° Raggrupamento Italiano Motorizzato* was instructed to take Monte Lungo from the southeast (Hill 343) and 142nd Infantry Regiment attacked the same hill from the west.³³ By the morning of 16 December, the Americans and the Italians had successfully taken Monte Lungo. With Sambucaro already in the hands of 5th Army, the Germans were forced to abandon San Pietro or risk being surrounded.³⁴ The Allies and the Italians penetrated the Winter Line and forced the Germans to fall back to the permanent defences of the Gustav Line. The hard fighting through October, November, and December had bought Allied Armies, Italy fewer than fifteen kilometres and thousands of casualties. In turn, they inflicted a large number of casualties on the German army. Additionally, the Italians had proven that they were capable of fighting alongside Allied soldiers.

The role of *1° Raggrupamento Italiano Motorizzato* in the battle to break through the Winter Line proved they were worth the investment. The Allies rewarded the Italians by agreeing to equip another Italian division and put it in the fight.³⁵ In January 1944, Eisenhower distributed a memo outlining how further Italian divisions would be utilized in light of the performance of Dapino's troops. One Italian mountain division and 1st Motorized, under General Dapino, were formally placed under the control of Allied Armies, Italy. In addition, the Piceno and Mantova Divisions were stood up and "trained,

³³ Wagner, *The Texas Division*, pp. 79.

³⁴ Wagner, *The Texas Division*, pp. 86.

³⁵ PRO, WO 220/413, December 1943, "Use of the Italian Army."

armed and equipped for combat at a later date” depending on Allied requirements and “the general supply situation.” These two divisions would also be available for use by the Italian government.³⁶ Under the auspices of the Allied Control Commission, monthly reports were kept on the allotment of resources, the development of policy (regarding the Italian army), and major meetings between Italian and Allied personnel. The number of Italians working in formed Italian units steadily increased as the campaign progressed.³⁷

The Allied and Italian success in December 1943 came at a price for Italian civilians who lived in San Pietro and the surrounding area. The battle that liberated their town reduced it to rubble in the process. Like many Italians in the Cassino sector, the people of San Pietro fled to caves in the mountains to get away from the approaching storm. They were forced to flee at a moment’s notice, carrying precious little to survive the winter in the cold, dank caves in the sides of the mountains. Civilians were not immune to the artillery and sniping that was going on in the area. Most strategic and tactical accounts of the battle for San Pietro do not mention the 3,000 civilians who continued to live in the town of San Pietro as the war engulfed them. As the battle continued, the men searched for food, scrounging nuts and whatever could be found in the woods. Women made a daily trek to wells or springs to gather enough water for their family – young and old – back in the caves. A twelve-year-old, Clementina Acciaioli, was one of the hundred or so *sanpietresi* who died in the war. Acciaioli left the security

³⁶ PRO, WO 220/413, “Disposal of Italian Army,” 2 January 1944.

³⁷ PRO, WO 220/413, “Activities during the month of JUNE 1944,” Report No. 7, Army Sub Commission, Allied Control Commission, June 1944. The reports showed a steady increase of Italian officers and other ranks performing service with the Allies. For example, on the mainland in June 1944, there were 6,069 officers and 135,573 other ranks under the command of Allied formations. The absorption of Italian soldiers into Allied units meant their contribution, as Italian soldiers, was not necessarily recognized. However, it is clear, from this data, that the Italians were making a significant contribution to the Allied fight in Italy.

of the cave to find water and did not return. Whether she perished from a German sniper or from Allied bombardment in the midst of the battle is not known.³⁸ Life in the caves was dark, full of fear, and difficult for the civilians. Food was scarce and traversing the mountains in winter to search for nuts and roots was arduous. An anecdote from a soldier of the 36th Texas Division relates difficulty a trained soldier faced traversing the mountains around San Pietro:

It is impossible to describe the hardships of that mountain fighting. It took two men from six to eight hours to carry [a] five gallon can of water up to some of the positions. Four men that long to bring a wounded man down slipping, sliding – under fire most of the way. Hot food was impossible most of the time and some men went 48 days without a hot meal. It rained or snowed all of the time.³⁹

The plight of the soldier, highly trained and disciplined to withstand extreme conditions and stress in battle, offers some insight into what the men, women, and children of San Pietro endured in December 1943.

While surviving soldiers would move on after the battle and eventually even have the luxury of going home after the war, the people of San Pietro did not. In the battle to break the San Pietro position, pre-emptive artillery strikes flattened the town. When the civilians emerged from the caves at the end of December 1943, they found little remaining of the life that had existed for thousands of years. As portrayed in John Huston's film, *The Battle of San Pietro*, the soldiers of the 36th Texas Division who liberated the town were greeted with somber smiles. The *sanpietresi* remember that the

³⁸ *Storia di San Pietro Infine*. According to local history 147 locals died from causes of war, including five women and children who died along with Acciaoioli attempting to get water on the via Roma in the town.

³⁹ Wagner, *The Texas Army*, p. 63

Americans were a generous army, giving the civilians much to eat including canned meat, candies, chocolates, and chewing gum.⁴⁰

For the people of San Pietro, their whole world had been destroyed and would never be the same.⁴¹ And even though their town was liberated in late December, the war was not over for the people of San Pietro. From the belvedere of the old town, there is a clear line of sight to the Abbey of Montecassino, the next objective for Allied Armies, Italy. The artillery could be heard in the distance and resources continued to be scarce. Survivors who decided to stay and pick up the pieces after December were forced to live in caves with little food and faced the danger of mines and disease. And town after town in the Cassino sector would eventually share the same fate as San Pietro.

Hundreds of little towns and villages dotted the landscape in the immediate vicinity of the German Gustav and Hitler Lines. As the clash between the Allied and German armies came closer, the civilians of these towns also fled to the hills or found nearby caves to get out of the way and wait out the war. In October, the Germans arrived at the small village of Cardito⁴², northeast of Cassino, to reinforce that section of their defensive network that was at the junction of the Winter and Gustav Lines. The civilians who lived there were subjected to German occupation and Allied efforts to break through the Winter Line throughout the autumn and winter of 1943. To avoid the coming war, nine families, all related, decided to leave Cardito to seek out a safe place where they

⁴⁰ Undated history, *Storia di San Pietro Infine*.

⁴¹ After the war, the surviving *sanpietrese* decided not to rebuild the town on its original site. The destroyed town was left to decay further. Many from San Pietro decided not to stay in Italy after the war, immigrating to many different points in North America. A large number of them went to Montreal, Canada.

⁴² The village of Cardito is part of the commune of Vallerotonda.

could avoid being in the path of German soldiers and safely wait until peace returned to the area.

The extended Di Mascio family of nine adults and fifteen children under the age of ten left Cardito near the end of October with what they could safely carry for supplies, including goats to provide milk for the children. Angelina Di Mascio, a native of Glasgow, Scotland, had moved to the area to marry a local Italian, Domenico. Angelina and Domenico had three young children and in October 1943 Angelina was carrying their fourth. The group of forty-five refugees set out and walked north for days. They were headed to a farm compound or *masseria* they thought might offer shelter and peace throughout the duration of the war. Unfortunately when they arrived at the *masseria*, it was not possible to stay as the building was already occupied. They continued on the road to Collelungo, following the Chiaro River. Finally, the extended Di Mascio family reached a clearing in the woods, next to the river. The clearing was high in the Mainarde mountain range, where the Chiaro and Varrechia Rivers converged. It was dotted with large boulders that offered some shelter from the November snow and wind. There were also ample chestnuts and beech nuts to gather and the clearing was not far from the river where they could collect fresh water. The Di Mascio family decided to stay in the isolated clearing, building rudimentary shelters to survive the winter. Near the end of November, the pregnant Angelina delivered her baby in the clearing and named him Addolorata.⁴³ The birth of a baby under such circumstances offered the forty-five refugees from Cardito a great deal of hope for the future.

⁴³ Constantino Jadecola, *Vallerotonda 1943: La Strage Dimenticata* (Castrocielo (FR): Philia, s.r.l., 2006), p. 37.

As isolated as they were high in the mountains south of Collelungo, the refugees from Cardito were joined by four Italian soldiers who were traveling in the mountains. Many Allied and Italian soldiers alike travelled through along the rocky spine of the Apennines, which offered safe passage for soldiers trying to navigate their way through German-occupied territory. Many Allied soldiers who had escaped from prisoner-of-war camps in northern Italy also traveled these mountains to try to rejoin their army, helped along the way by Italian peasants with whom they would forge life-long relationships.⁴⁴ One such soldier, Lieutenant Alfred Burnford of the Royal Marines, had escaped through the floor of a train full of prisoners destined for camps in Austria. Burnford traveled on foot for weeks in the rugged terrain. He made his way south, hiding in whatever shelter he could find. By the time he neared the Gustav Line, Burnford was near starvation and covered in open sores. He spotted the makeshift shelter the Cardito refugees had built and stumbled toward it before passing out. Burnford was nursed back to health by the refugees over the next days. He was surprised to find that Angelina spoke English with a thick Scottish accent and they developed a friendship. When he felt well enough to travel again, Burnford knew he had to continue his journey; he was aware the price the Italian civilians would pay for helping an Allied soldier. Before leaving, he promised to visit Angelina's family in Glasgow and let them know she was healthy with a new baby boy.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ For more on how Italian civilians helped escaped prisoners-of-war, see Roger Absalom, *A Strange Alliance: Aspects of Escape and Survival in Italy, 1943-1945* (Florence, Olschki, 1991).

⁴⁵ "The Lost Heroine of Monte Cassino: the Incredible Story of a Girl from Glasgow Who Rescued a Young British Soldier in War-Torn Italy - and How Her Bravery Cost the Lives of an Entire Village," *The Mail on Sunday* (London, England), 12 September 2004, found at: <http://mail-on-sunday.vlex.co.uk/vid/heroine-monte-cassino-torn-bravery-62461799>, last accessed November 2012. Burnford made it to Naples and was able to visit Angelina's family when he returned to the United Kingdom to deliver her message.

As winter deepened into late December, the sounds of the war came closer to the refugees of Cardito. The 85th Regiment of German 5th Mountain Division held the position just south of the Di Mascios' clearing. On 24 December, Major-General John Lucas, commander of American VI Corps, ordered 2nd Moroccan Division to attack and seize the heights north of Cardito and control the town. Extreme weather, including bitter cold that caused the soldiers to experience severe frostbite on their feet, prevented them from carrying out the offensive to seize the high ground. A successful venture would have liberated the clearing in which the Cardito refugees were living. The weather, pure exhaustion, and frostbite casualties prevented 2nd Moroccan from attempting the offensive again. The French Colonial Troops (FEC) would not carry out their offensive in the mountains until January, leaving the Cardito refugees to their fate.⁴⁶

On 27 December in the middle of a violent bout of nearby artillery, the Cardito refugees were visited by a patrol of German soldiers from the Gebirgsjager Division. The refugees offered the patrol a meagre meal. The German soldiers could speak little Italian, but the survivors report that they did seem to convey that the Americans would come the following day. The refugees were hopeful that this meant their war was nearly over and they could return to their homes and recommence their lives. The German patrol departed, leaving the refugees some bread for the children. That night a snowstorm blanketed the mountains with fresh snow. Freezing temperatures accompanied the storm. The refugees of Cardito, sheltered in the clearing, survived the night.

On the morning of 28 December, the storm was over. The Di Mascio families went about their regular routine until a German patrol again came to the clearing. The

⁴⁶ Jadecola, *Vallerotonda 1943*: p. 45-48.

visit was different than the one the night before and the Cardito refugees worried that the Germans would force them to leave the clearing and they would have to search for another suitable place to wait out the war. The German patrol encircled the clearing and set up a machine gun facing the refugees. It became apparent to the Cardito refugees the nature of the visit. Angelina De Mascio held her one month old Addolorata tight to her chest as the realization of what was happening dawned on her. As a last resort, she threw herself at the sergeant in charge, pleading for the lives of her baby, the children, and the other members of the group who had defied odds and survived more than one month in the high mountains of the Italian Apennine range. The sergeant took no pity, kicking her in the face before drawing his pistol and shooting first Addolorata in her arms and then Angelina herself. The soldier manning the machine gun then opened fire on the rest of the refugees. Some tried to throw themselves out of the way and behind boulders. The German soldiers finished the task and covered the evidence with fresh snow and beech branches before leaving the area.⁴⁷

Although it is not well known, the story survives because the soldiers of 85th Battalion were not thorough in the job. Not all of the Cardito refugees were wounded mortally. Three men escaped immediately, making their way down the valley. One was shot when the three came upon a German patrol, becoming the last fatal victim of the massacre. Back at the massacre site, others who were not mortally wounded regained their senses. All around them, and even in some cases on top of them, the survivors saw their loved ones, young and old, sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, dead. Forty-two

⁴⁷ Jadecola, *La Strage Dimenticata*, pp. 50-53.

Italians were massacred by the Germans that day, for no apparent reason.⁴⁸ Local legend suggests that the Cardito refugees were murdered for the help they extended to the escaped Allied prisoner, Alfred Burnford. For decades, Burnford continued to believe it was his fault that Angelina and the others died because of their generosity.⁴⁹

The massacre at Cardito is not well known outside the local area.⁵⁰ In bitter irony, it was the soldiers of 2nd Moroccan Division who could have stopped the massacre. Had the French Colonial troops been successful in their offensive on 27 December, the Cardito refugees would have been saved from German brutality. But in the memory of the Second World War, French Colonial troops are remembered, not for their contributions to the Italian campaign, but for the brutalities they carried out against Italian civilians.⁵¹ In May 1944, an Italian army intelligence report noted that the Moroccan troops violated all women, especially the young (*giovanette*) but did not spare the old (*le vecchie*). Those who attempted to stop the atrocity were killed. But the Moroccan soldiers did not stop at rape. They took the few precious possessions the civilians were able to carry to the mountains with them.⁵²

In the town of Vallerotonda, which has taken on the burden of memory of the Cardito refugees, nineteen civilians were killed by Moroccan troops and forty women

⁴⁸ Jadecola, *La Strage Dimenticata*, p. 53.

⁴⁹ “The Lost Heroine of Monte Cassino.”

⁵⁰ A monument park exists on the site of where the Cardito refugees were killed but it is very isolated and difficult to get to. See Chapter 4 for more.

⁵¹ A popular reference to the brutalities of Moroccan troops was made in Vittorio Di Sica’s *Two Women* or *La ciociara*. Sophia Loren plays a mother who is raped, along with her daughter, by French Colonial Troops. La Ciociaria is the unofficial name for the region of Frosinone.

⁵² USSME, “Situazione della popolazione civile nelle immediate retrovie del fronte,” promemoria, Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito, Ufficio Servizi – Sezione S.M., 30 Maggio 1944, Racc. 199, Cart. No. 3, “Situazione Economica, 1944”

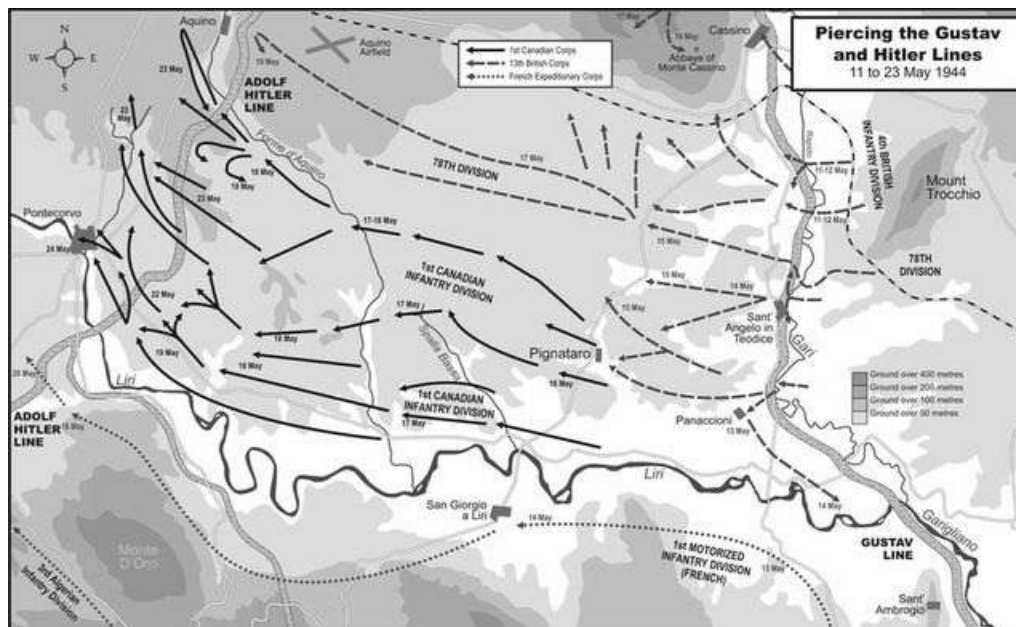
were raped. Vallerotonda, like San Pietro, was nearly flattened by the war. Vallerotonda, Cardito, and the other towns near the Gustav lines were caught between two clashing armies and were subject to the fury of war. Of the 2,000 inhabitants of Vallerotonda, 331 perished for reasons of war. Eighty-five of those were killed by German soldiers.⁵³ For those civilians and soldiers who survived, the war was only beginning; five brutal months followed before the German defences at Cassino were broken. More towns and villages like San Pietro, Vallerotonda, and Cardito, unfortunate enough to exist in the area the Germans chose to make their stand, were destroyed. Local Italians were subjected to five more months of war. Many of them survived from one day to the next waiting until they could begin to pick up the pieces. And the suffering and destruction was not over.

In January 1944, Allied Armies in Italy ran into the powerful fortifications of the Gustav Line. The Germans intended that the Gustav Line be the permanent line of defence, holding the Allied armies south of Rome indefinitely. The extreme terrain was advantageous for the Germans. Two major rivers, the Garigliano and the Liri, added natural terrain features to the already strongly fortified Gustav Line. At the junction between these two rivers, the Gustav line swings northwest through San Angelo and follows the Gari River north to a point just east of the town of Cassino. The Abbey of Monte Cassino offered an observation point over the Liri Valley. General Alexander stressed the importance of the Liri Valley, calling it the “gateway to Rome.”⁵⁴ The fighting between October and December did not compare to what would come in January

⁵³ Vallerotonda claims ownership for the victims of the Cardito massacre and was responsible for erecting a monument to the victims in 1993. Literature claims that Vallerotonda was 95% destroyed. Jadecola, *La Strage Dimenticata*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 598.

1944. The Germans, through the delaying actions on the Winter/Bernhardt Line, had sufficient time to build an impenetrable defence, to which the town of Cassino and the Abbey of Monte Cassino were central. Up to the end of 1943, the battles were ruthless, taking the lives of countless Allied, Italian, and German soldiers. The battles for the Gustav Line were the most bloody and most destructive of the war in Italy.



The Garigliano, Gari, and Liri rivers made natural barriers that enhanced the defensive qualities of the Gustav and Hitler lines. The Abbey of Montecassino, overlooking the town of Cassino, offered the Germans observation over the valleys below. This map only shows a fraction of the communities that existed in the area around the two defensive lines. (Map courtesy of Michael Bechthold.)

The time the Germans bought in delaying the Allies ensured the Gustav Line was a formidable defensive structure. The construction and diversion of rivers caused considerable damage to the area. Rivers were diverted, dams broken, concrete poured, and mines laid. A January 1944 situation report from an intelligence officer of 34th US Division describes the physical transformation of the area by the German army in order to ensure it was defensible:

.... the enemy supplement the excellent natural defensive features with an intricate series of fortifications constructed at key points along the north-south CAIRO – CASSINO Road ... and on the series of hills and ridges that command the river valley. In the Division sector the RAPIDO River⁵⁵ is canalised between stone walls standing four to five feet above the ground level, and while the stream itself is narrow and shallow, it constituted a definite and difficult obstacle to the advance of both infantry and armor. The approaches to the river were extensively mined, with a predominance of the small, wooden, box type “schu-mine,” which is hard to detect since it contains very little metal. Bands of wire, carelessly constructed, but still troublesome, were stretched along the west bank of the stream and more mine fields were laid here also. Near the barracks the river had been breached (sic) and blocked in such a way as to flood extensive areas of low lands in front of and to the north of Cassino.⁵⁶

Not only did the fortification of the area change the nature of the terrain through the flooding of the low-lying areas near Cassino, but the extensive landmines remained after the war. Demining the area was an issue of prime importance for those trying to rebuild.

Allied efforts in January were largely futile but necessary to keep the pressure on the Germans. Fifth Army made coordinated attacks between 17 and 20 January. The French Expeditionary Corps (FEC) attacked in the mountains northwest of Cassino, 2nd US Corps attacked centrally at the Liri valley entrance, and 10th Corps attacked in the high ground on the left flank of the Liri. Second US and 10th Corps both faced assault river crossings. Expecting this, the Germans had opened the sluice gates at irrigation dams up the Liri and Rapido to elevate normal water levels and create a virtual marshland in the valley floors. On 20 January, 36th Texas Division attempted to cross the Gari

⁵⁵ Rapido River is only a short river that becomes known as the Gari River north of Cassino. Near Cassino, the Gari and the Liri rivers converge to become known as the Garigliano. Much secondary literature about the battles for Cassino mis-identify the Rapido for the Gari River, at which the Texas Division had their bloody crossing near San Angelo in Theodice.

⁵⁶ NARA, RG 407, Headquarters Fifth Army, “Report on Cassino Operations.”

River⁵⁷ near S. Angelo and suffered heavy casualties in the attempt.⁵⁸ Commanders were strongly criticized for allowing the attack to go ahead (because it was supposed to come after the attack further south by 10th Corps that also failed) in what would go down in Texas Division lore as the “Bloody River.”⁵⁹ Each major attack, including the river crossings, was preceded by heavy Allied bombardment which further destroyed Italian towns and villages. The air strikes were carried out to attack German gun positions that used the ancient concrete basements of towns like Pontecorvo, Aquino, Sant’ Angelo, and even Cassino as ready-made bunkers. In order to improve the odds of achieving a river crossing, the Allies had to attempt to neutralize such positions before the attempt. It was, after all, a German choice to use Italian houses, basements, and villages as strongpoints in the defence at Cassino. This infrastructure needed to be rebuilt in the aftermath of the war.⁶⁰

After the failed river crossings over the Rapido and upper Garigliano in late January, it became apparent that an attack on the Gustav Line from the southeast would not succeed. The success of the French Expeditionary Corps in the mountains northeast of Cassino made General Clark consider a plan to outflank the Germans through the

⁵⁷ The Texans refer to the river as the Rapido even though, at the point of the crossing, it was actually the Gari River.

⁵⁸ The 36th Texas Division suffered 1,681 casualties, 143 killed, 663 wounded, and 875 missing. Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 620.

⁵⁹ The failed crossing spawned a number of critical monographs in the historical narrative. See Martin Blumenson, *Bloody River, The Real Tragedy of the Rapido* (Texas A&M University Press, 1998).

⁶⁰ In some cases, concrete was poured one and two feet deep to reinforce basements. A friend of the author, Kay de Latour Scott (whose father fought with the New Zealanders at Cassino) bought a house in Caprile, near Roccasecca, and had to remove the extra concrete before the basement units were usable.

brutal terrain north of Cassino which was described as “grimly forbidding.”⁶¹ The Germans, after all, had determined that Highway 6 was the most logical way for Allied armies to direct their attack given the terrain that flanked the Liri Valley. Therefore, the Germans concentrated their heavy defences in the centre of the Liri Valley and on the outer edges of the high ground on either side. Monte Cassino and the town of Cassino were defences of “fortress strength” with steel and concrete positions and heavy weapons dug in.⁶² Clark realized that attacking the position through the Liri Valley southeast of Cassino was futile and turned his attention to attacking from the north and northwest.

In conjunction with the January attacks on the Gustav position, two American divisions of 6th US Corps landed at Anzio. The Anzio landings were intended to help take some of the pressure off at Cassino but also to show the Germans that an amphibious landing on the coast of Italy was possible. The Anzio landing was initially successful, surprising the Germans but also causing them to send reinforcements, some from as far away as France.⁶³ In terms of supporting the projected Normandy landings, both the attacks on the Gustav and at Anzio had the effect of bringing additional German reserves to southern Italy from France and Germany. But in order to prevent German reserves from leaving the Cassino sector to meet the threat at Anzio, the Allies had to keep the pressure on, in spite of the fact that the troops had been fighting in the sector for months, through desperate conditions.⁶⁴ Despite the lack of resources and reinforcements, neither

⁶¹ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 623. The terrain north and northeast of the Abbey of Monte Cassino is cut with steep, rocky ridges, knife-edged ravines, and dotted with huge boulders and un-inviting thorny bushes.

⁶² Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 692.

⁶³ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 662.

⁶⁴ Lee Windsor, *Overlord's Long Right Flank: The Battles for Cassino and Anzio, January-June 1944*.

the Allies nor Germans could afford to relax the pressure. In fact, both sides brought in fresh divisions in February and March. The New Zealand Corps, under General Bernard Freyberg, and 4th Indian Division, under General Francis Tuker, were added to the lines in February and were integral to the following battles for Cassino. Kesselring brought 1st Parachute from the Adriatic Coast in response to attacks in early February.⁶⁵

Central to the second and third battles of Cassino was the capture of Monastery Hill upon which the Abbey of Monte Cassino sat. By October 1943, when it became clear that the Abbey was in the path of a major German defensive line, the issue of its protection was brought up by the Vatican. The Vatican petitioned both the German and Allied armies for the protection of historical and religious buildings in Italy. The German army promised that it would not occupy the Abbey itself.⁶⁶ German reports counselled soldiers not to use the buildings but to construct “defences right up to the exterior wall if necessary.”⁶⁷ The Vatican sent notes to Sir D’Arcy Osborne, British Minister to the Holy See, and the German Ambassador on 29 October with the request that they intervene “to save the monastery from damage in view of its historical and artistic importance.” The Vatican received two additional memos on 7 November and 8 January stressing that “German authorities were doing everything they could to preserve the Abbey from war damage.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 697.

⁶⁶ The Vatican sent telegrams to both the British Minister to the Holy See, Sir D’Arcy Osborne and the German ambassador asking each to ensure the Abbey of Monte Cassino would be protected from war.

⁶⁷ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 695.

⁶⁸ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, “Monte Cassino,” A. Rumbold, 16 February 1944,

Osborne noted that there was no proof that the Germans were not using the monastery. To counter German claims, he wanted a “definite statement authorised by our own Military authorities about the use which the Germans have in fact been making use of the Abbey.”⁶⁹ Reports based on Allied intelligence indicate that the Germans were in fact using the territory right up to the Abbey, even if they were not using the actual buildings. BBC press reports also indicated that the Germans had, in fact, fortified Monastery Hill.⁷⁰

Despite their overtures to the Vatican, the Germans understood that the Abbey was in danger. In the autumn of 1943, Colonel Julius Schlegel supervised the removal of the treasures from the monastery with the blessing of the Abbot Gregorio Diamare. The treasures of Western civilization – Leonardo’s *Leda*, paintings by Raphael, artefacts from ancient Pompeii, the writings of Ovid, Homer, Shelley, Keats, and more - were packed in wooden cases and transported to the Vatican. Two monks were sent with every German truck to ensure the goods made it safely to Rome. Despite this, contention remains about a number of priceless treasures that found their way to Berlin.⁷¹

The Allies, too, believed in the necessity of protecting the treasures of Western civilization. One of the reasons for organizing Allied Civil Affairs was the need to protect the cultural, religious, and historical artefacts, buildings, and monuments of Italy. The Political Warfare Branch of Allied Military Government issued Zone Hand Books that outlined which buildings were of historical, cultural, and artistic importance in each

⁶⁹ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, “Monte Cassino,” A. Rumbold, 16 February 1944.

⁷⁰ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, Telegram from Osborne, “The Abbey of Monte Cassino,” 11 February 1944.

⁷¹ Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), p. 399.

Italian zone. Commanders were directed that none of the buildings found in the handbooks were to be used for military purposes unless authorized by Generals Eisenhower or Alexander. Moreover, all such buildings found in the zone handbook, or deemed to be of historical, cultural, or artistic importance by Allied Military Government officers, were to be put out of bounds of troops. Guards were to be placed if necessary. A December 1943 report reminded commanders “that buildings containing art collections, scientific objects, or those which when used would offend the religious susceptibilities of the people, should not be occupied when alternative accommodations are available.” Finally, commanders were urged to explain the seriousness of “looting, wanton damage and sacrilege of buildings” to all Allied personnel.⁷²

Although they recognized the value of Italy’s treasures, Allied commanders understood there was a fine balance between protecting buildings and putting the lives of their soldiers in danger. In December 1943, Eisenhower issued a directive to all commanders regarding Italy’s cultural and historical assets that have “contributed a great deal to our cultural inheritance . . . and illustrate the growth of the civilization that is ours.” There was a caveat. Although he urged commanders “to respect those monuments” he realized it could only be done within reason in the conditions of war: “If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men’s lives count infinitely more and the buildings must go.”⁷³

By February 1944, the tension between the need to save the Abbey of Montecassino and the wasting of Allied lives became too much. In the second battle for

⁷² PRO, FO 371/ 43817, File No. 32, W. B. Smith, Major General, GSC, Chief of Staff, “General Orders, Number 68, Historical Monuments,” 29 December 1943.

⁷³ TNA, FO 371/ 43817, File No. 32, Dwight D. Eisenhower to All Commanders, 29 December 1943.

Cassino, 4th Indian Division was tasked with attacking Monastery Hill while the New Zealand Corps approached the town of Cassino along the rail line. In planning for the battle, Tucker, commander of 4th Indian Division, refused to order his men to attack Monastery Hill unless the Abbey was saturated with fire. Although Tucker was aware of the German pledge not to use the Abbey, he did not believe German soldiers would stay out of it if it became a necessity for them. Tucker was certain that if the Allies got too close, the Germans would be forced to retreat into the fortress of the Abbey. In Naples, Tucker had discovered a volume that described the buildings of the Abbey as an impenetrable fortress. He believed that German high command could not resist retreating into the building if conditions warranted.⁷⁴

Rightly or wrongly, the Allied choice was to bomb the precious Abbey of Montecassino. They did this on the best available evidence they had at the time. Most of the priceless art and historical treasures had already been taken to Rome by the Germans. Although the bombing became a military necessity for the Allies, they still did not want to endanger the lives of civilians unnecessarily. In addition to the monks, approximately 300 to 400 Italian civilians had taken refuge in the Abbey. To ensure they could escape, bombers dropped special shells the day before the scheduled bombing to ensure that anyone inside could seek refuge elsewhere before the heavy bombs were dropped. The bombers needed a clear day in a winter of extremely bad weather to carry out their mission. The forecast for 15 February was that the weather that would permit such

⁷⁴ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 708.

precision bombing. With Allied troops very close to the Abbey, bombs had to ensure they were on target.⁷⁵

Mid-morning on 15 February 1944, Allied and German soldiers, civilian refugees, and Benedictine monks heard the sounds of heavy bombers as they approached the Abbey of Montecassino. For four hours different classes of bombers dropped their loads on Monastery Hill and the Abbey of Montecassino, pulverizing the sacred monastery for the fourth time in its history. When it was over, the infamous Abbey of Montecassino that had overlooked the people who inhabited the Cassino sector for their entire lives was reduced to a roofless, jagged shell. Bombs penetrated to the basement. One unexploded shell arrived inches from the tomb of Saint Benedict, sparing him the fate of the rest of his monastery. After the bombing stopped, press reports left “no doubt that the abbey was in fact strongly fortified” and that Germans were seen running from it once the bombing stopped.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 713.

⁷⁶ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, “Monte Cassino,” A. Rumbold, 16 February 1944.



The Abbey of Monte Cassino after the bombing. (Photo from the Imperial War Museum)

For the Germans, the Allied bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino was a propaganda coup. On 17 February, Kesselring issued a statement refuting claims the Germans were using the Abbey. He wrote that Allied claims that “the monastery had been converted into ‘the world’s most powerful artillery stronghold’ is an incredible lie for ulterior purposes.” Kesselring claimed that “no German soldier had been inside the monastery since the removal of its cultural treasures” and therefore the previous artillery attack of 15 January and the air attack on 15 February only affected the monks and civilian refugees.

Kesselring’s statement was supported by Abbot Diamare, who wrote: “On request I confirm that no German soldier was or is inside the monastery.”⁷⁷ On the same day, an official statement from the German government described the bombing as “the latest

⁷⁷ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, “Kesselring’s Statement on the Bombing of Monte Cassino and Castel Gandolfo,” Outline of News and Enemy Propaganda, 17 February 1944.

atrocities committed by the British, US gangsters.” The statement continued to play the Nazi party line, arguing that the Americans and British are “barbarians ...”⁷⁸

... who daily bomb the marvellous monuments of art and culture in our old continent of Europe the destruction of one cultural monument more or less makes little difference. But the reduction of this ancient and honourable monastery to ashes is no accident, but the result of an attitude which has made the extermination of the ancient culture of our continent its aim... It is one of the grotesque manifestations of history that British-US youth even risks its life to carry out the Jewish desire to destroy.⁷⁹

Within days, the German telegraph service in Rome issued reports in which they interviewed the monks who had been in the Abbey at the time of the bombing. In two separate reports issued on 21 February, Father Graziosi, the Secretary of the Monte Cassino Diocese, and Diamare emphatically stated that there were no weapons or Germans in or near the Abbey. Graziosi reported that the individuals seen leaving the Abbey after the bombing were actually the civilian refugees and not German soldiers. Diamare’s report indicated that he blamed the American bombings for pushing a flood of refugees toward the Abbey in the first place.⁸⁰ The Allied “crime” was made worse by the fact that the refugees and monks were unable to escape the monastery before the bombing; many civilians perished as a result. Issued from German sources, after the

⁷⁸ Like the barbarians who destroyed the Abbey the first three times. TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, “Kesselring’s Statement on the Bombing of Monte Cassino and Castel Gandolfo,” Outline of News and Enemy Propaganda, 17 February 1944.

⁷⁹ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, “Allied Bombing of Monte Cassino and Castel Gandolfo; Wilhelmstrasse Statement,” 17 February 1944.

⁸⁰ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, “The Secretary of Monte Cassino Diocese: No German Soldiers; No Ammunition nor any other war material in the monastery of Monte Cassino,” German Telegraph Services, 21 February 1944 and “No German Troop Formations Whatsoever in Monte Cassino, Nor Weapons of any kind. Official Statement by Abbot to German Ambassador to Vatican,” German Telegraph Services, 21 February 1944.

Germans ‘helped’ the monks to safety in Rome, it is curious whether these statements were coerced or not.⁸¹

The Allies conducted an investigation into the events that led to the bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino. It is clear that Allied commanders were required to have good reasons to bomb buildings of historical, religious, or cultural importance or to unnecessarily endanger a city. After the bombing and the ensuing German propaganda reaction, considerable effort went into gaining access to the evidence that caused Mark Clark to authorize the bombing. The Foreign Office was getting pressure to provide the evidence so it could be passed along to the Vatican. The Vatican was afraid that if the Allies bombed the Abbey of Montecassino, they would not hesitate to bomb Vatican City. Under the pressure of German propaganda and the Vatican, the Foreign Office issued a request on 4 March to Chief of Staff George Marshall to describe “as precisely as possible the military use which the Germans have, in fact, been making of the Abbey and which led to your decision to attack it.”⁸²

The investigation suggests that the Germans actually baited the Allies to bomb the Abbey so they could use the ruins to their advantage in military defence but also so they could hold the bombing up as an example of Allied brutality for propaganda purposes. Osborne questioned whether German-paid informers reported the presence of German soldiers to Allied military authorities.⁸³ By 22 February, Osborne was quite convinced,

⁸¹ General Frido von Senger und Etterlin, commander of XIV Panzer Corps, writes of how Abbot Diamare refused to sign the document that “bristled with propaganda against the Allies” that Ribbentrop wrote for him. Frido von Senger und Etterlin, *Neither Fear Nor Hope: The Wartime Career of General Frido von Senger und Etterlin, Defender of Cassino* trans. George Malcolm, (Novato, California: Novidia Press, 1989), p. 203.

⁸² TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, From Air Ministry to AFHQ, 4 March 1944.

⁸³ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, Sir D. Osborne to Foreign Office, 20 February 1944.

based on information from what he conceived of as reliable sources, that the Germans were known to stage activity around historic buildings in order to create the impression that soldiers were using the building.⁸⁴ A further memo received by the Foreign Office on 2 March supported this view:

The evidence on which the order to bomb was given is not satisfactory. There is no proof that the Germans were in fact using the monastery but they were firing from sites very close to it ... in the case of Monte Cassino, as stated above, visual reconnaissance showed that the Germans were firing from close by, and this reconnaissance led the Allied officers to believe that the monastery was being used by the enemy.⁸⁵

The Allied investigation into the bombing revealed that by January 1944 the Germans violated their promise to stay 300 metres from the Abbey walls.⁸⁶ Allied commanders issued orders to question the troops, who were fighting on the mountains north of Monastery Hill, about whether they had seen anyone firing from the Abbey. Evidence from soldiers makes it clear that the Germans were using the territory in the vicinity of the Abbey to their advantage, even if they were not inside the Abbey.⁸⁷

General Henry Maitland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean,⁸⁸ issued a statement on 9 March 1944, outlining the available evidence based on visual reconnaissance that proved the Germans were using the Abbey. A

⁸⁴ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, Telegram from D. Osborne, 22 February 1944.

⁸⁵ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, Telegram "Allied Bombing of Cultural Monuments; German propaganda," 2 March 1944.

⁸⁶ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, Telegram from Sir D. Osborne, 25 February 1944.

⁸⁷ Harold Bond, *Return to Cassino: A Memoir of the Fight for Rome* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964) p. 113. Bond, who was stationed in the mountains immediately next to the Abbey paints a vivid picture of living in the mountains, very close to the German enemy and not being able to light a cigarette without drawing targeted machine gun and mortar fire.

⁸⁸ Wilson was appointed as Supreme Allied Commander in the Med (SACMED) in January 1944 after Eisenhower was appointed Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) so he could prepare for Operation Overlord.

battalion commander from 34th US division reported seeing a telescope from a window in the Abbey on 10 February and also spotting German soldiers walking along the Abbey wall. The rest of the evidence relates to the strong resistance coming from Monastery Hill, including heavy mortar fire coming from the vicinity of the Abbey the moment an Allied soldier moved, and intelligence garnered from civilian reports. One civilian report, dated 9 February, provided far more solid evidence. He told Allied intelligence officers that he saw thirty machine guns and approximately eighty soldiers in the Abbey. The civilian had reportedly been in the area of the Abbey until 7 February. Perhaps it was this Italian civilian who was paid to pass false intelligence for the Germans. Wilson ended his report with an emphatic statement:

There is no doubt that the Cassino Abbey was part of the German main defensive position with a commanding position controlling the Liri valley gap. If our attacks were to succeed it was necessary to neutralise this area. In these circumstances and with information available concerning German dispositions in the Abbey locality the air attack was fully justified.⁸⁹

The 5th Army narrative of the battle also supported the contention that there was German activity in the area. Although the reports do not state outright that German soldiers were in the Abbey, they do state that when units attacked Monastery Hill they encountered “stiff enemy resistance.”⁹⁰ This message was repeated as units tried repeatedly to take the hill.

Soldier testimony, 5th Army reports, and Wilson’s report clash with signed statements by the Abbot of Montecassino. Despite soldier testimony, it seems clear that

⁸⁹ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, British Chiefs of Staff, US Chiefs of Staff, Signed Wilson, 9 March 1944.

⁹⁰ NARA, RG 407, Headquarters Fifth Army, Report on Cassino Operations, “Report on Cassino Operations,” 5 June 1944.

Allied commanders doubted the weight of the evidence. A memorandum from the War Cabinet discouraged sharing the information with the Vatican because “definite proof on all points cannot be obtained.”⁹¹ In the time of war it is difficult enough to find truth. The Germans used the bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino to their advantage as propaganda. They reported false conversations between the Abbot and the Pope to support their message,⁹² and plastered the vitriolic message about the barbaric Allied soldiers who bombed the Abbey all over the streets of Rome and Vienna.⁹³

The bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino was a media victory for the Germans. General Alexander responded, quietly, by imploring troops to “behave in a manner which safeguards the good name of our armies and brings credit to their race.” Alexander continued, noting that as the campaign moved further north the “art treasures and monuments are more numerous.” He reminded Allied troops that it is “our responsibility and obligation to preserve and protect these objects to the greatest extent that is possible under operational conditions.”⁹⁴ The statement was later issued with copies of the handbook of “Protected Monuments in Italy.”

Despite Allied efforts to prevent the further destruction of Italian monuments, the Subiaco Monastery in Lazio was the target of Allied bombers in May 1944. The Subiaco Monastery was founded by Saint Scholastica, Benedict’s sister who was buried with him in the crypt at Monte Cassino. The Vatican petitioned to both the Germans and Allies,

⁹¹ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, War Cabinet Offices Memo, 15 March 1944.

⁹² TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, Sir D. Osborne to Foreign Office, 20 February 1944.

⁹³ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, telegram from Sir. D. Osborne, “Allied Bombing of Cultural Monuments; German propaganda,” 22 February 1944.

⁹⁴ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, “Property of Historical and Educational Importance in Italy – Preservation of,” Alexander to Commanders of all Formations and Units, 17 February 1944.

hoping they would save the Subiaco Abbey. After the bombing, minister to the Holy See Osborne expressed his suspicions that the Germans baited the Allies into bombing so they could use the story for propaganda purposes. In a telegram to the Foreign Office, Osborne suggested that the Germans had again spread false information to Allied officials, this time “possibly by wireless sets.” The investigation into the Subiaco bombing also stated that the Germans had “severely punished” civilians in Subiaco for the help they extended to Allied prisoners of war.⁹⁵

While the propaganda battles over the bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino continued, the Allies commenced the third battle for Cassino. This attack failed. Fourth Indian Division was criticized for not being able to move immediately after the bombing, thereby losing any advantage from the bombing of the monastery. Fifth Army’s report, however, noted that 4th Indian Division failed to take Monastery Hill because of the tough terrain that made supply difficult, the German knowledge of that terrain which allowed German units to move quickly to any threatened sector, and German observation. The decision was made to stop trying to take the Cassino position from Monastery Hill.

The New Zealand Corps was tasked with attacking Monastery Hill from the northern section of Cassino town. There were two routes into the town, from the east or from the north. The northern route was chosen because the east was too well protected with Gustav Line defences and was under the observation of Monastery Hill. From the north, however, the ruined buildings of Cassino town offered some cover to the attack. The decision sealed the fate of Cassino town. The Germans were so well dug into the

⁹⁵ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, “From Holy See to Foreign Office,” 25 May 1944.

ruins of the town that the New Zealand Corps ordered an air strike to neutralize German defences.⁹⁶

On 15 March 1944 between 8:30 a.m. and noon, 1,100 tons of bombs were dropped on the already broken town of Cassino. On the night of 15-16 March, heavy rains followed, turning the rubble to the “consistency of ‘dough’” and making it nearly impossible for Allied engineers to move. The rain also filled the craters made by the bombings. The debris of the town and the multitude of non-metallic mines hampered the New Zealand Corps as it tried to attack. In addition, the tanks could not get into the town until the engineers cleared some of the debris. But the engineers could not work without the tanks because the German enemy was so well dug in.⁹⁷ After more than a week of bitter fighting in Cassino town, the offensive was halted. The bombing of 15 March, the rain that followed, and the week of battle further destroyed the town. The problems encountered with the wet debris that turned into dough and the craters, full of water, remained when civilian refugees began trickling in after June 1944. More than two months followed in which the Allies and the Germans battled for the town, further reducing it. The craters full of stagnant water welcomed disease; both malaria and typhoid were rife after the war. The natural terrain, so altered by the effects of artillery and air strikes, never returned to normal. The fight had reduced the area to First World War-like conditions. After the failed third battle, General von Senger Und Etterlin, commander of *XIV Panzerkorps* at Cassino, surveyed the damage:

⁹⁶ NARA, RG 407, Headquarters Fifth Army, Report on Cassino Operations, “Report on Cassino Operations,” 5 June 1944, p. 14.

⁹⁷ NARA, RG 407, Headquarters Fifth Army, Report on Cassino Operations, “New Zealand Corps in Cassino Operations,” p.3.

I crossed a large field full of craters which had been ploughed up more and more by heavy calibre shells although it seemed to be unoccupied. No tree escaped damage, no piece of ground remained green. On my lonely walk the only accompaniment was the jarring explosion of shells, the whistling of splinters, the smell of freshly thrown-up earth and the well-known mixture of smells from glowing iron and burnt powder ... what I saw took me back across twenty-eight years, when I experienced the same loneliness crossing the battlefield of the Somme.⁹⁸

For two more months, the battle for Cassino and beyond raged, subjecting other towns, especially those located on the Hitler switch line, to the same fate as Cassino town.



Cassino town after it was bombed on 15 March 1944. Stagnant water pooled in indentations made in the earth by artillery. When the people returned after the battle moved on, little in their town was recognizable. Cassino was only one example of the hundreds of towns that suffered damage in the seven month battle. (Photo from the Imperial War Museum)

The overwhelming reaction to the Anzio landings in January 1944 made the Allies realize that the German army would fiercely defend their positions south of Rome. With the date for the Normandy landings approaching in the spring of 1944, Alexander's

⁹⁸ Von Senger und Etterlin, *Neither Fear Nor Hope*, p. 215.

headquarters began planning for a spring offensive that concentrated most available forces on the western side of the Apennines. An offensive in mid-May provided the best possible support for the Normandy landings, keeping some of the best German divisions in Italy. In preparations for the spring offensive, 8th Army was transferred from the Adriatic sector. First Italian Motor Group was also put in the line in the central mountains northwest of Cassino.⁹⁹ The offensive, referred to as the fourth battle of Cassino or the battle for Rome, was intended to break through the Gustav Line, capture Monastery Hill, and then break the Hitler Line and proceed to Rome. The operational pause between the end of March and the beginning of May allowed both sides to equip and prepare for the big offensive. The Germans were able to further fortify the Hitler Line. Because it did not have the water barriers that the Gustav Line defence did, the Germans poured steel and concrete in interlocking positions, building anti-tank ditches and deep dugouts.¹⁰⁰ The Hitler Line ran immediately in front of the towns of Piedimonte, Aquino, and Pontecorvo and utilized the deep basements of these towns for defence.

⁹⁹ Little is known about the role that 1st Motor played in this battle although it is featured on the official maps from the battle. See map, Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, Volume II*, p. 398-399.

¹⁰⁰ Nicholson, *The Canadian in Italy, Volume II* p.406.



The town of Pontecorvo before the Canadians broke through in May 1944. Visible bombing damage can be seen. The German army has already blown the bridge across the Liri River. (Photo from the Canadian War Museum Collection).

The fourth and final battle for Cassino was a success. By 13 May, the Allies finally broke through the Gustav Line. All but Monastery Hill had fallen. The high piece of ground upon which the rubble of the Abbey of Montecassino sat was still in the possession of the Germans. By 18 May, however, the Polish standard flew above the rubble and the British 4th Division controlled the devastated town of Cassino. The towns of Piedmonte, Aquino, and Pontecorvo were ruins. On 5 June 1944, the Allies entered Rome, making the Eternal City the first Axis capital to be liberated. For the people who lived in the Cassino sector, their war was not yet over. Those who could return found

only shells or pieces of their houses and communities. For many, after a winter's refuge in caves they emerged to find spring and the end to the constant artillery but no homes to which they could return. For the Italians who had previously lived in the area, their battle to rebuild was only just beginning. And the ugly path of destruction that was the war continued to advance up the Italian peninsula.

The clash between the German and Allied armies in the Cassino sector flattened the towns and villages and recreated conditions found in the Somme and Passchendaele in the First World War. The battle to break the line at Cassino cost the lives of many civilians and soldiers. The Germans and the Allies were both forced to take extreme measures in their fight to win the war that had enduring repercussions for the civilians who lived in the area. The experience in the Cassino sector highlights a major tension between the need to wage war and the need to minimize suffering and destruction. Allied armies clearly struggled with this in their decision to bomb the Abbey of Montecassino. What becomes a military necessity is an issue that both the Germans and the Allies faced throughout the Second World War. For the Germans, for example, it was a military necessity to utilize Italian civilians in the construction of local defences and to destroy local infrastructure to facilitate the fight. For the Allies, it was a military necessity to introduce French Colonial troops to the fight, subjecting Italian women to their brutality. Events in the Cassino sector show how modern war consumes all and puts armies in situations where they are forced to make impossible choices. In the middle, the civilians are subjected to these choices. The result of these choices of military necessity impacts how the Italian civilians remember the war.

Chapter 3 Monte Sole: The German last stand in Italy

Approximately fifteen miles south of the city of Bologna stand the peaks of the northern extension of the Apennine mountain range. Among these peaks is the dominant 2,000-foot tall Monte Sole or mountain of the sun. In the saddles and valleys created by Monte Sole and the peaks of nearby Caprara, Abelle, and Termine a series of communities have existed since before Roman times. The Etruscans established the town of Misa¹ and thrived for centuries “until barbarians destroyed the lower portion ... and took up residence themselves in the lower part.” The communities of Monte Sole were a virtual melting pot; their dialect was virtually unrecognizable to those who lived down the mountain. After visiting the area and interviewing survivors of the massacre, journalist Jack Olsen wrote of the heritage of the people of Monte Sole:

From the time of Christ until the extinction of the mountain civilization in World War II, Monte Sole and its surrounding valleys were washed over by successions of conquering races. Some left their own genetic and linguistic influences behind, and some contributed a few scattered families, who remained to farm the difficult land when the main forces moved away to battle somewhere else. There were the Celts, blond and fair and blue-eyed; the Romans, shorter and darker; the Langobards, another Germanic horde; and in modern times the French and Austrian troops, always on the march in northern and central Italy.²

Although life on Monte Sole was difficult for those who chose to make their existence there, much joy existed in the mountain communities. A life on Monte Sole promised a

¹ Not far from the contemporary town of Marzabotto. The Etruscan site has been developed by the town of Marzabotto and remains a local tourist attraction.

² Jack Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 1. This chapter is dedicated to Jack Olsen who inspired me to first visit and then pursue the story of the people of Monte Sole, not because of the horrible truth of the massacre committed there, but because of the life that existed before September 1944. In the 1960s, Olsen visited the survivors of the Monte Sole massacre and helped them to remember life before the massacre. His book is divided in two sections; “Life” and “Death” and offers a reminder that these people who suffered so much had an identity separate from the massacre.

future of hard work to eke out an existence, but young men and women found love and hope in life. Although the German occupation of northern Italy created tension and fear among the people, the isolation of the mountain communities gave them a sense of security. In fact, family and friends who had moved to Bologna returned to the communities, seeking refuge from a brutal German occupation. By June 1944, however, the Stella Rossa partisan brigade, whose home base was on Monte Sole, was challenging German and Fascist troops. The partisans targeted German lines of communication, gathered intelligence, and when the opportunity arose, battered the Germans outright. As summer turned into autumn, the Germans and Fascists became more desperate to defuse the partisan threat.



A modern photograph of Monte Sole and Monte Caprara taken from the east. The renaissance city of Bologna is to the north. The extreme terrain isolated the communities that existed on Monte Sole and also offered the partisans a safe place to return to after they attacked German convoys. (Author photo)

By June 1944, southern Italy was liberated and the people who lived there began the long, slow process of rebuilding their lives. For the north regions, the worst was yet to come. Nine months of German occupation encouraged the growth of a resistance force in northern Italy. The Allies, with limited resources, recognized the potential role partisans could play in the German rear area and began to encourage, train, and equip the resistance bands.³ The German high command, on the other hand, did its best to deter partisan activity that threatened lines of communications, security, and the lives of German soldiers. The resistance, born in the days after the armistice was announced and before the Allies really recognized its worth,⁴ was not an unwilling agent in the fight. As the example of the Stella Rossa brigade proves, partisans were attacking German troops, in one way or another, long before they captured Allied attention. As the fight became more desperate – for both the Germans and the Allies – dealing with the Italian partisan force became a priority. The partisans jeopardized the German ability to wage war. In some cases, Italian civilians of northern Italy were caught in the middle of this desperate struggle and would pay the price.

In some cases, the old myth that Italian soldiers just dropped weapons and went home was true. The motivation behind this choice varied depending on the individual and his location when the armistice was announced. Italian troops on Cephalonia made the brave choice to resist, leading to the death of more than 9,000 of the Acqui Division at

³ The effort to utilize the Italians began as early as the latter part of 1943 but after Rome was liberated and the division of Allied resources between fronts in Normandy and Italy, the use of Italian partisans to disrupt German movement and gather intelligence became a necessary element of continue to keep German attention in Italy.

⁴ The uncertainty of German intentions meant the Allies were unclear about whether war would continue in Italy. Arguably until the Germans made a stand at Cassino in October 1943, there was little certainty the Germans would stand and fight in Italy. It was only after it became clear that the Germans would hold tenaciously in Italy that the Allies were able to exploit the Italian resistance.

the hands of the Germans.⁵ Many other soldiers found their way behind Allied lines or were in southern regions and waited in the hills until the Allied advance caught up to them. The choice to resist or wait for the Allies was risky. When German troops found Italian soldiers the consequences were dire, usually death or deportation.

Soldiers Mario Musolesi and Gianni Rossi, the founding members of the Stella Rossa partisan brigade, were forced to make the choice. Like many Italian soldiers, they chose to shed their uniforms and go home. Decorated for his service in the Libyan campaign, Musolesi was born in the small village of Vado, on the eastern side of the Monte Sole mountain feature.⁶ The brigade second-in-command, Gianni Rossi, was from Gardeletta. Before the war, both Rossi and Musolesi were mechanics and both enlisted when war was declared in 1940. At war's end, Musolesi was a sergeant major in the Army; Rossi was in the Navy. After the armistice, both returned home, intent on waiting out the war.

After Italy's exit from war in September 1943, soldiers, working-age men, and escaped prisoners of war were driven into the mountains to hide from the draft into Mussolini's new army, German slave labour, or death. Others hid from repeated harassment from the local Fascist organizations. By November 1943, there were a number of disparate groups of men hiding in the Apennines near Monte Sole, scrounging for food and survival. Musolesi, himself subjected to harassment by the local Fascists,

⁵ O'Reilly, *Forgotten Battles*, pp. 100-101.

⁶ No evidence has been found to date supporting where Musolesi was when the armistice was announced or why he shed his uniform. Since he died in the war, some of these questions will likely go unanswered. However, given the situation of the Germans and the evidence supporting his actions fighting in the battle of Rome, 8-9 September, it seems clear he did not shed his uniform because he was an apathetic Italian soldier who wanted to shirk his duties. MSPA, Sezione M, "Biografie," Fasc. #1. Nicola Matteucci, "L'Apocalisse dell'oleografia o del Lupo di Monte Sole," (1996)

called the disparate groups together to organize military activities against the Fascists and Germans. The Stella Rossa partisan brigade was born. The numbers grew quickly. Within days, the entire contingent of *Carabinieri* from nearby Castiglione dei Pepoli joined the brigade. Legend has it that one of the *Carabinieri* officers suggested the name *Stella Rossa* in emulation of Tito's partisans.⁷



Home base for the Stella Rossa brigade is roughly denoted by the boundaries of the modern day Parco Storico di Monte Sole. Vado, where Mario Musolesi was from, is to the east. The peak of Monte Sole is approximately where the marker is. (Google maps)

The Stella Rossa was one of the first partisan brigades to be formed in the Bologna Apennine Mountains. In monthly bulletins issued by the *Comando Militare Unico Emilia-Romagna (CUMER)*⁸ and the *Corpo Volontari Della Libertà* the first

⁷ Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, pp. 131-132.

⁸ CUMER, formed in late June or early July 1944 is the military organization tasked with the identification and organization of partisan groups in the Emilia-Romagna region.

action of the Stella Rossa was listed as being on 23 November 1943 when a small group from the brigade sabotaged a train on the rail line between Bologna and Florence, near Grizzana. The attack destroyed six railcars of gasoline and four motor vehicles.⁹ The Stella Rossa brigade continued to draw recruits from the working-age males in the area, as well as escaped prisoners of war.¹⁰ Their numbers and range of activities grew throughout the autumn and winter of 1943-44 as local men and their families were harassed by the Germans and Fascists.

The Stella Rossa brigade continued its sabotage and intelligence-gathering activities throughout the winter. The brigade had a serious impact on the logistics of the German war effort; it attacked trains, blew bridges, and watched German movements, carefully planning the next move. The brigade was underequipped to carry out such activities for long. In the first months the partisans were armed with mostly Model 91 rifles and Italian Army machine guns smuggled in by former soldiers. To continue to strike at the German war effort, the Stella Rossa needed supplies and weapons. In late January and early February, the brigade attacked the militia barracks in Monzuno twice and made two additional attacks against German and Fascist units in February. With the additional weapons collected from the February attacks, the Stella Rossa brigade became more daring in its actions, attacking German and Fascist convoys. In the month of February, the brigade reported that its actions inflicted fifty-six casualties on German and

⁹ MSPA, Sezione C: Brigata Stella Rossa, fascicolo no. 1, CUMER: Bolletino del mese di luglio, p. 9.

¹⁰ Olsen notes that nearly a whole battalion of Mongols, captured on the Russian front and forced to wear the German uniform, escaped and joined the Stella Rossa. Caraton, also a Mongol was their battalion commander. Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, p. 68. The German army forced Russian and Polish nationals, among others, to fight with them in Italy. Not all of these soldiers were armed, but they were still expected to fight on the front lines. In many cases, these soldiers deserted whenever possible. PRO, WO 220/436, Report on Conditions in Occupied Italy, 30 March 1944, p. 14

Fascist units. The bold action came with a corresponding price, however. On 18 February, a German SS unit carried out its first mopping up or *rastrellamento* in an effort to round up the partisans. The action led to two enemy and two partisans dead.¹¹

In February and March 1944, the German army was preparing for the spring offensive in the Cassino sector and could not afford to lose precious supplies or troops in north Italy. The Stella Rossa brigade, emboldened by the success in February, continued its efforts targeting German lines of communication and supplies. In March, the partisans sabotaged the Pianoro-Vado railway tunnel, destroying a trainload of ammunition and fuel.¹² The attack had a major impact. The Germans lost valuable supplies and had to commit resources to repairing the tunnel and track. German troops had a difficult time retaliating against the brigade. The zone of operation for the Stella Rossa was wide – somewhere between fifty and one hundred kilometres – and in rugged country. The terrain offered many opportunities for the partisans to hit, run, and disappear into the mountains. With Monte Sole as their home base, the Stella Rossa held the high ground over the rail lines in the valleys below. The partisan brigade had ample opportunity to strike at the heart of German trucks transporting supplies to the front lines south of Rome. Although they were in a zone of great importance for German lines of communication, the Stella Rossa was only one of the partisan brigades operating in north Italy in the months before June 1944. The growing insurgency campaign against the German army in North Italy had an impact on operations south of Rome.

¹¹ MSPA, Sezione C: Brigata Stella Rossa, fascicolo no. 1, CUMER: Bolletino del mese di luglio, p. 9.

¹² MSPA, Sezione C: Brigata Stella Rossa, fascicolo no. 1, CUMER: Bolletino del mese di luglio, p. 9. The report indicates that forty-four ‘wagons’ of ammunition and fuel were destroyed. The brigade “sabota un treno distruggendo 44 vagoni carichi di munizioni e benzina.”

The threat posed by partisans operating all over north Italy impacted German policy toward the civilian population. Allied pressure on the Cassino front, coupled with partisan attacks on supply lines in the rear, jeopardized German efforts to delay the Allies south of Rome. In response to the pressure from the Allies to the south and the partisans to their rear, German policy became more punitive and destructive to local populations. Before abandoning territory, the Germans scorched the earth to ensure that the civilians would have little or nothing to eat and the Allies would have a humanitarian issue to deal with. In February 1944, in the Chieti region, south of the Gustav Line on the Adriatic coast, the Germans cut down the olive trees and vines to destroy the livelihood of the local inhabitants, and shot holes through the vats of wine already produced.¹³ In March 1944, in the Cassino sector, the German army collected all radios from the civilians so they could not listen to the Italian government on Radio Bari or Radio London. After the Allies dropped radios and food supplies to communities in the mountains around Formia, the Germans did a search and reportedly arrested and hung any civilians caught with a radio.¹⁴

The news of such brutality spread quickly and civilians began to learn to hide their possessions from the Germans. In northern regions, the CLN organized the hoarding and hiding of food stores to ensure they could feed the population once the Germans retreated.¹⁵ In addition to the looting and destruction, men became accustomed to the idea that they could not show themselves to the Fascists or Germans or they would be forced

¹³ TNA, WO 220/436, Report on Conditions in Occupied Italy, 30 March 1944.

¹⁴ TNA, WO 220/436, Report on Conditions in Occupied Italy, 30 March 1944, p. 14.

¹⁵ TNA, WO 220/436, Report on Conditions in Occupied Italy, 30 March 1944.

to join the National Republican Guard or be committed to forced labour. In the spring of 1944, Mussolini issued a call for the mandatory conscription of the classes of 1922, 1923, and 1924. The call was not well answered.¹⁶

German and Fascist treatment of local populations only served to draw more civilians and soldiers to the ranks of the resistance, making groups like the Stella Rossa stronger. The strength of the partisan brigades had the corresponding effect of making the Germans more desperate to eliminate the threat. In late May 1944, the Germans arranged another sweep of the Monte Sole region in an effort to eliminate the Stella Rossa brigade. The multi-day operation was planned for an extensive area from the eastern to western side of the Monte Sole massif. This resulted in small battles within a range of twelve to fifteen kilometers over consecutive days. But the Germans were challenging the partisans on their own turf. The partisans scattered easily and melted into the mountains. Their familiarity with the area enabled them to retreat to the ground best suited to hold off the Germans.

The bloodiest fight of the May action happened on the high ground around Monte Sole. From the pinnacle of Monte Sole, the partisans could see German soldiers approaching from all sides. According to the Stella Rossa war diary, the intense fifteen-hour intense battle resulted in 554 enemy dead and 630 wounded. In addition, the partisan brigade seized vehicles and ammunition stashes. Despite high enemy casualties, the partisans reported only two killed and three lightly wounded.¹⁷

¹⁶ Lamb, *War in Italy*, pp.87, 100-101. Only forty percent of those summoned showed up for duty. Of those who showed up for duty, many deserted. The fall of Rome in 1944 only exacerbated the problem.

¹⁷ MSPA, Sezione C: Brigata Stella Rossa, fascicolo no. 1, CUMER: Bolletino del mese di luglio, p. 9.

The futile attempts only made the Germans more desperate. They ordered an aerial bombardment of Monte Sole followed by another sweep of the mountain to kill off any remaining partisans. By the time the Germans did their next sweep, the partisans had left the mountain to a location south of Monte Sole. As usual, the Germans found no able-bodied men left on the mountain when they went from house to house. Habit had assured the women that if their husbands, sons, and brothers were found on the mountain they would be executed or taken away by German and Fascist soldiers. Thus, when news came of an approaching *rastrellamento*, all men and boys of fighting age – partisan or not – disappeared into the woods. If the Germans did suffer such casualties as reported in the Stella Rossa war diary, the frustration at not being able to strike at the culprits had to be maddening. In the small community of Cerpiano,¹⁸ SS soldiers burst into the school with weapons drawn and were “knee-deep in toddlers.” The soldiers took out their frustration by smashing furniture, killing livestock, and burning haylofts before leaving the area.¹⁹

By early June 1944, the Allies had captured Rome and gained a foothold on the Normandy beaches, and German troops were still contending with the threat posed by the Stella Rossa partisans. They were desperate to delay the Allies while they completed construction on the defensive line, which was considered inadequate at that time.²⁰ The Stella Rossa brigade attacked the lines of communications that supplied the delaying

¹⁸ Cerpiano, a few kilometers southeast of Monte Sole, was the location of the school that administered the area.

¹⁹ Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, p. 134.

²⁰ Hitler wanted the name of the Gothic Line changed to the Green Line because he distrusted its defence capabilities. According to Hitler, the Gothic Line fell short of “German fortress standards.” Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol. VI, Part II*, p. 9. In a 28 June 1944 report to Kesselring, it was noted that the Gothic Line was ill-prepared. The “line was without depth, lacked emplacements for heavy weapons, and was little more than a chain of light machine guns.” The preparations were stalled by labour shortages and also partisan sabotage. Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol. VI, Part II*, p. 60.

fight, threatening the German hold in north Italy even more after June 1944. At that time, both the Germans and Allies believed that the Gothic Line was most vulnerable at the centre. In addition, the mountains of Monte Sole protected the approaches to Bologna, which represented the last communications hubs that facilitated German defence (through the acquisition of supplies from north Italy and Germany) and also a German retreat if that became necessary. The Stella Rossa therefore posed a triple threat. The brigade occupied terrain that was critical for the German defence and subsequent retreat from the Gothic Line, it threatened German lines of communications in delaying battles in Tuscany, and it inhibited construction on the Gothic Line and impacted the morale of the soldiers in the area.

The activities of the Stella Rossa in that crucial first week of June prove they posed a continued threat to German activity. On 4 June, the Stella Rossa war diary reported that a detachment of twenty men carried out a sabotage activity of “*grandissima*” importance. The detachment emptied and then destroyed a Todt organization store in the area of the Futa pass at Baragazza, nearly thirty kilometers south of Monte Sole. The war diary reports that the action permanently stopped the work of the Todt organization in that location: “*Con questa azione si è ottenuto lo sciopero generale permanente dei lavoratori della Todt.*”²¹ The attack on the Todt organization facility on 4 June²² may not be significant as a standalone operation. However, with the capture of Rome on 5 June and the Normandy landings one day later, the actions of the Stella Rossa had a direct and serious impact on the German war effort in Italy. In addition, the large

²¹ MSPA, Sezione C: Brigata Stella Rossa, fascicolo no. 1, CUMER: Bolletino del mese di luglio, p. 9. “With this action a permanent general strike was obtained of the Todt work.”

²² The Todt organization was ultimately responsible for the construction of German defensive lines.

area of operations demonstrated the ability of the Stella Rossa to move and strike the Germans far away from its presumed base on Monte Sole. Activities of brigades like the Stella Rossa only served to make German necessity of dealing with the partisan threat more acute.

Throughout the summer of 1944, the Stella Rossa brigade was continuously on the move in a thirty-kilometer radius around Monte Sole, with smaller detachments often striking at the Germans at different locations in the same period. This enabled them to avoid German attempts at *rastrellamenti* but also to take advantage of targets of opportunity. On 6 June, a detachment of the Stella Rossa captured a German staff car. A major, a captain, and two soldiers were taken prisoner. Inside the car, the partisans found some very important documents that they transmitted to CUMER headquarters in Bologna.²³ Throughout June and July the brigade continued its activities, attacking Fascist militia barracks and sabotaging trains. The German and Fascist forces in the area renewed efforts to mop up the Stella Rossa brigade. A 24 June *rastramento* led to the death of 130 German and 230 Fascist troops. Only one partisan died in the action.²⁴

If the numbers presented by the Stella Rossa are consistent, it seems clear that the cost of the German *rastrellamenti* against the partisans was very heavy and the result ineffective. In every mopping up action reported, the Germans and Fascists lost many

²³ MSPA, Sezione C: Brigata Stella Rossa, fascicolo no. 1, CUMER: Bolletino del mese di luglio, p. 9. Jack Olsen describes this differently. In his account, the partisans captured and killed the occupants of the car. When they found the officers were transporting documents relating to Gothic Line defences, they sent these, strapped to the belly of a partisan, to Switzerland. Musolesi knew he could not leave the German command car as evidence, so the partisans called for all of the contadini to come with their shovels to bury the evidence. Five or six dozen contadini dug the hole big enough to put the car and its occupants inside. Allied command reportedly sent a message to confirm receipt of the documents: "Recent dispatches proved to be of extreme importance. Repeat: Extreme." Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, p. 129-131.

²⁴ MSPA, Sezione C: Brigata Stella Rossa, fascicolo no. 1, CUMER: Bolletino del mese di luglio, p. 9.

men against very few partisan casualties. Even if the numbers are inflated, however, the German and Fascist response indicates the threat posed. Repeated efforts to strike at the heart of the Stella Rossa partisan brigade failed. The Germans and Fascists adopted another tactic, however. If they could not attack and eliminate the partisan threat directly, they attempted to deter the partisans by striking at the civilian population. In many cases, the local civilian population consisted of family and friends of the partisans who offered further protection, food, and shelter to the partisan brigade operating in the area.²⁵ In the summer of 1944, the Germans commenced a terror operation against the local population. Throughout the entire Bologna province, the Germans and Fascists burned houses and killed civilians in reprisal for partisan activities.²⁶ The terror only served to make the partisans more determined to eliminate the German threat. Hostility among the civilians grew with every German and Fascist terror operation.

Brute force and the threat of terror were not effective deterrents and only made the situation worse. The Germans and Fascists recruited spies to destroy the brigade from within, and to provide the Germans important intelligence on planned brigade activities and movement. The more information the Germans could gain on movement, the better they could plan the next move to eliminate the threat. And the Stella Rossa brigade was particularly vulnerable to infiltration. Reprisal activity in the area caused more and more men to seek out membership in the partisan brigade. With new recruits being drawn to the partisans on a regular basis, it was nearly impossible to know whether everyone was

²⁵ This is not to say that the civilian population supported the partisans in all cases. In many cases, they did assist the partisans' cause, willingly or not. Regardless of civilian support, the villages and hamlets of Monte Sole and the surrounding area offered cover to the partisans.

²⁶ MSPA, Sezione C: Brigata Stella Rossa, fascicolo no. 1, CUMER: Bolletino del mese di agosto.

trustworthy. As commander of the brigade, however, Musolesi was aware of the threat. Spies were executed on the spot when they were discovered; in July, at least six spies were killed.²⁷ The spy issue, however, illustrates the problem of the Italian civil war: many of the spies were local Italians recruited to the cause by the Germans and Fascists. The Italian civil war pitted Italian against Italian. Those who fought for the cause, on either side, could not trust the intentions of fellow Italians.

Despite the best efforts of the German and Fascist forces, the Stella Rossa brigade continued to operate in the mountains south of Bologna. The brigade had a serious impact on German operations, disrupting supplies and movement as the Allies advanced from the south. As the front moved closer, German lines of communications to support the battle of the Gothic Line became more crucial and the Stella Rossa brigade operated in ground that the Germans could not afford to lose. And the brigade was only one of the many partisan groups that threatened German lines of communications in north Italy. All over north Italy, these partisan groups were providing the Allies with intelligence on German troop movement, the location of German stores, important targets, the conditions of bridges, concentration of troops, traffic in and out of important Italian cities, and specifics on the construction of German defensive lines.²⁸

The exact number of partisans operating in Italy in 1944-45 is nearly impossible to determine. At the height of the movement, in the summer of 1944, estimates range

²⁷ MSPA, Sezione C: Brigata Stella Rossa, fascicolo no. 1, CUMER: Bolletino del mese di agosto.

²⁸ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 303, Italian Division, SI Medto, Report for Period 1-15 December 1944, January 1945. This report is typical of those transmitted through the OSS in 1944 and 1945.

from 100,000 to 250,000 although the actual figure is probably closer to the former.²⁹ In December 1944, the OSS reported the total number of partisans at 120,000.³⁰ At its height, the Stella Rossa is said to have 1,200 armed partisans, although German estimates were closer to 2,000. The more important measure overall, however, is the German and Allied reaction to the partisans. The resources devoted to the partisan movement by both sides indicate the impact of the Italian resistance. From the Allied perspective, in a campaign in which Allied supplies and manpower were limited and then divided as another front opened in France,³¹ the partisans contributed a great deal to diverting German attention. Alexander's encouragement to the Italian people to prevent the German destruction of their country and the resources devoted to recruiting and training liaison teams on the part of the OSS show that the Allies saw value in the resistance. But the Allies understood the need to manage the partisans carefully. They needed supplies and instruction on where and how to strike the Germans.

Throughout the campaign, the Allies committed resources to recruiting, training, and equipping Italian partisans. In late 1943, the Office of Strategic Services began recruiting for teams to carry out liaison and sabotage activities in north Italy. In January 1944, the first of these teams was dropped in Venice, followed by missions to the Lake Region, Turin, and Bologna. The teams, primarily recruited from the Italian army, were

²⁹ O'Reilly, *Forgotten Battles*, pp. 207-208. O'Reilly recounts a number of different sources and their estimates. One of the interesting figures he quotes is that the Rome government received 450,000 requests for partisan certificates in 1947.

³⁰ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 311, "Partisan Forces in Occupied Italy," 1 December 1944. According to the OSS, these are all known partisans operating in north Italy. The list is not necessarily definitive.

³¹ In July 1944, four French and three American divisions were pulled out of action in Italy for Operation Anvil, a second front in France. Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol VI, Part II*, p. 23.

instructed to liaise with local partisan organizations, arrange arms drops for the groups, transmit intelligence back, and instruct the partisans in which sabotage activities to carry out in support of the Allied effort.³² Between January and June 1944, ten OSS teams landed in north Italy³³ under dangerous conditions. The two- to three-man teams, mostly from Italian army personnel,³⁴ were dropped with instructions to establish contact with resistance groups in the north. All OSS personnel sent to liaise with groups in the north were instructed to discourage the partisans from battling with the Germans outright; Allied efforts were best supported by sabotage activities and gathering intelligence. In some cases, the resistance group did not trust the OSS agents and would not allow them to operate. Considering the Stella Rossa's experience with spies, this is not surprising. In the spring of 1944, an OSS agent arrived on Monte Sole and arranged the first supply drop from the Allies.³⁵ Musolesi questioned him and discovered the agent was engaged to a girl from Musolesi's home town of Vado.³⁶

³² NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 303, 2677 Regiment OSS, SI Branch, Italian Section, "Report for period 1-15 June 1944," p. 5.

³³ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165, Folder 303, 1-15 June 1944 report. The teams, named after types of fruit (Raisin, Pear, Apple I and II, Apricot, etc.), were dropped from the air or taken ashore by submarine or boat. One team landed in January, three landed in February, four in March, and one each in April and June.

³⁴ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165, Folder 303, 1-15 June 1944 report, p. 8.

³⁵ NARA, RG 407, 1st Armored Division G-2, report from 6th South African Division, 25 September 1944. Mario sent a request with two pilots – one an RAF and one a SAAF, asking for more supplies in September 1944. In this he noted that the brigade had not been supplied since April 1944. This does not fit with Olsen's account, however. Olsen suggests the Stella Rossa brigade received their first air drop on 20 May 1944. Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, p. 134. Olsen reports that the OSS agent – an Italian dressed in civilian clothing - arrived after being dropped off on the coast of Rimini in a submarine. Although Olsen's book is more of a popular account (although it is based on interviews done with survivors in the 1960s and documents from the period) the evidence he provides is supported by OSS documentation. The 'Raisin' mission was landed by submarine in March and made its way to the Bologna area from where is transmitted "highly rated intelligence" and arranged arms drops for partisans. NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 303, 2677 Regiment OSS, SI Branch, Italian Section, "Report for period 1-15 June 1944," p. 5.

³⁶ Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, p. 134.

The Allied-encouraged and -supplied Italian resistance supported the tactical and strategic Allied aims by forcing the Germans to divide their resources further. The Germans could not just ignore the threat to lines of communications in the peninsula. In addition, the resistance affected the morale of the German soldier. German troops had to consider they would be attacked by partisans in the rear as they prepared to fight forward. Partisan brigades operating in the province of Piedmont reportedly had such an impact that the Germans avoided the area altogether.³⁷ Partisan organizations blocked routes in Italy that were integral to German movement to battlefields in France and out of Italy via the Alps, should the Germans want to abandon their efforts in Italy or move divisions to support the fight in France. After June 1944, the OSS was building an additional thirteen teams to be sent to all points north of Rome.³⁸ Clearly the management and supply of partisan organizations in North Italy was a priority for the Allies.

Although not all Italian teams working with the OSS were successful, some special teams had notable success that directly supported Allied tactical operations. The San Marco battalion was a special unit made up from personnel of the elite Italian Navy San Marco Marines and American troops. This battalion, in operation between June 1944 and March 1945, carried out many operations in conjunction with Italian partisans that materially and significantly supported Allied operations. The most significant achievement of the battalion was to secure photographs and a map, made by a partisan engineer, of eighteen miles of the Gothic Line on the Adriatic coast in the weeks before

³⁷ RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 368, "Report Concerning the Activities of Patriot Groups and Anti-Fascist Parties of North Italy," 26 October 1944.

³⁸ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165, Folder 303, 1-15 June 1944 report, p. 4.

the 8th Army breakthrough in September 1944.³⁹ Italian partisans worked with Italian marines and Allied soldiers to offer significant assistance to Allied efforts in Italy.

Although the story of the Italian resistance is prevalent in Italian history, little is written about the significant contribution that Italian troops made to the OSS and Allied effort in Italy. Thousands of Italian soldiers were absorbed into units like the San Marco battalion as fighting troops or in Allied support roles, but their story rarely figures in resistance or Allied histories of the campaign.⁴⁰

The activities of the Italian partisans, supported and encouraged by the Allies, provoked a German response that had brutal consequences for the partisans and civilians in the north. After the liberation of Rome, the threat to German aims in Italy became so dire that Field Marshal Kesselring had no choice but to act. Not only were partisan activities increasing after June 1944, but the German hold on Italy was slipping. The Gothic Line was the last possible line of defence in Italy and protected the industrial north that contributed to the German war effort. Compared to southern regions, the more industrialized parts of the north had a far more sophisticated road and rail network that facilitated the German war effort. In effect, the roads of north Italy, particularly those leading north from Florence and Bologna, provided a direct connection between North Italy and Germany, facilitating the movement of supplies.⁴¹ The Germans could not

³⁹ NARA, RG 226 OSS E110, Folder 532, Declassified Report on Maritime Unit in Italy, 26 September 1945. The report covered operations of the San Marco Battalion that consisted of the elite Italian Navy San Marco Marines included four American officers, three American enlisted men, and fifty Italian marines.

⁴⁰ O'Reilly, *Forgotten Battles*, p.165. O'Reilly's book outlines the number of different ways Italians contributed to the Allied war effort. Italian sappers and signals units worked to replace bridges and roads, and restore electricity. These were in addition to the countless Italian soldiers who worked with OSS teams in north Italy.

⁴¹ NARA, RG 226 Folder 354, Memo to Colonel W.A. Eddy, USMC, "The lines of communication existing between central Italy and North Italy and their most vulnerable points," 16 October 1943. As

afford to lose their hold on North Italy. The communities of Monte Sole and the Stella Rossa brigade existed in the central part of the defensive line, barring the way to Bologna, which represented the last communication hub in Italy before the Alps. With the loss of Rome, it became very important for the Germans to delay the Allied advance, and hold off the partisan threat until construction on the Gothic Line could be finished.

In June 1944, German commanders were faced with the uncertainty of a growing Italian insurgency and the imminent loss of the industrial north of Italy. The solution was to take ever more brutal action against the traitorous Italians. On 17 June 1944, Kesselring acknowledged the threat of the resistance, issuing an order that gave the German soldier more latitude in dealing with the problem. Kesselring's order stated:

The partisan situation in the Italian theatre, particularly in central Italy, has recently deteriorated to such an extent, that it constitutes a serious danger to the fighting troops and their supply lines as well as to the war industry and economic potential.

The fight against the partisans must be carried on with all means at our disposal and with the utmost severity. *I will protect any commander who exceeds our usual restraint in the choice and severity of the methods he adopts against partisans. In this connection the old principle holds good, that a mistake in the choice of methods in executing one's orders, is better than failure or neglect to act.* Only the most prompt and severe handing is good enough as punitive and deterrent measures to nip in the bud other outrages on a greater scale. All civilians implicated in anti-partisan operations, who are apprehended in the course of reprisals, are to be brought up the Assembly camps which are being erected for this purpose by the Quartermaster General C-in-C SOUTHWEST for ultimate dispatch to the Reich as workers.⁴²

described in Chapter 1, the Germans relied on the industrial regions of North Italy to supply more than fifteen percent of their war effort. For more on this, see Saxon, "The German Side of the Hill," p. 15.

⁴² TNA, WO 31128, "Allied Force Headquarters Report on German Reprisals For Partisan Activity in Italy." This order, especially when Kesselring states "I will protect any commander who exceeds our usual restraint in the choice and severity of the methods he adopts against the partisans" is quoted extensively in the trials of Max Simon and Walter Reder in the 1950s and 1960s. It is argued that the order is mis-translated leading the British prosecution at Kesselring's trial to come to sinister conclusions about its meaning (ie., that it sanctioned the brutal massacre of women and children) when the defence's argument is that it was referring only to military means. Emphasis mine.

The meaning behind Kesselring's order was clear. Resistance was not to be tolerated. Failure to act against the partisans would be punished before German troops were prosecuted for being too harsh. In essence, Kesselring's order gave German troops *carte blanche* to deal with partisans, suspected partisans, and civilians in order to deter further activity against the Germans. Moreover, the severity of the order proves that the partisan networks in the north were having a significant impact on the German war effort in Italy.

A subsequent report, sent on 22 June 1944, provides insight into the types of activities that were affecting the Germans. Kesselring provided some specific punishments to be carried out in the event of partisan activities, stating that the severe measures he had called for must not be considered "an empty threat"; the consequences for partisan sabotage or attack against German troops must be made known public. If German troops were fired at from a village, the entire village "will be burnt down." If considerable partisan activity was discovered in an area, a proportion of the male population must be taken and shot; ringleaders were to be publicly hung. Nearby villages were to be held responsible for sabotage activities and damage to vehicles. "All counter-measures must be hard but just," concluded the directive. "The dignity of the German soldier demands it."⁴³

Kesselring's order, that clearly condones severe measures against partisan activity, was retracted in August 1944 in response to a protest by Mussolini. This was after a string of massacres was committed in central Italy in so-called reprisal activities.⁴⁴

⁴³ TNA, WO 235/586, Trial Documents for Max Simon, "Re: Anti-Partisan Measures," 22 June 1944.

⁴⁴ These massacres include, most famously, Sant Anna di Stazzema. For more see Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre*.

In response to Mussolini's pleas, future orders issued by Kesselring forbade excesses and requested that executions of hostages have "at least an outward appearance of legality."⁴⁵ The retraction is interesting, however, for the impact it had on future reprisal actions, including the one at Monte Sole in September-October 1944. Kesselring recognized the need at least to soften the message that condoned German excesses, in favour of assuring that such excesses had an appearance of legality. After the war, Kesselring testified that when he heard about the "regrettable incidents" from Mussolini, he felt the need to "close the gaps also in writing" and better explain himself. He said he did this "out of duty and deepfelt disgust and not out of the fear of the consequences of a lost war." He excused the excesses previous to his August amendment, saying that his commanders were "overworked and tired out during the large scale moving battle in the six hot summer months, with short nights."⁴⁶

Kesselring's orders regarding the partisan counterinsurgency campaign in North Italy clearly mean that brigades like the Stella Rossa were having an effect on German operations. As theatre commander in Italy, Kesselring had enough to deal with in waging a delaying battle against the Allies. He needed to hold up the Allies long enough to finish construction on the Gothic Line and ensure the Germans could defend in depth south of Bologna, which was instrumental both to German defence and the eventual retreat. The last communications hub that connected Italy to Germany, via the Brenner pass, was at Bologna. The loss of Bologna meant that German troops and equipment would be trapped

⁴⁵ TNA, WO 311/28, "Allied Force Headquarters Report on German Reprisals For Partisan Activity in Italy." Sheet 5.

⁴⁶ TNA, WO 220/11 "Military Courts: Atrocity and War Crimes Trials, Volumes 1 and 2, 1943 Dec – 1945 March," Voluntary Statement by PW LD 1573, Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, "The Partisan War in Italy from 1943 to 1945," p. 11.

in Italy without an easy way to escape. An Allied report from October 1943 identified the best of the asphalt roads that connected the Tuscan plains with the Po Valley plains as the one passing just south of Monte Sole, from Porretta, through Abetone, and then on to Modena.⁴⁷ This road was within the area of operations of the Stella Rossa. The Germans could not afford to have the roads and rail lines of the central Apennines disrupted by partisan activity while trying to hold the Allies south of the Gothic Line. The roads were key to the defence of the area but also instrumental in moving men and supplies south to positions intended to delay the Allied advance so the Gothic Line could be properly fortified. The Allies were clearly aware of the importance of the road and rail network, leading to their encouragement of partisan sabotage activity in that area.

As in the Cassino sector, German defence construction physically transformed the area. Although the treatment of civilians changed after June 1944, the Germans continued their scorched-earth policy in northern regions. Arguably, it became more thorough as German troops punished Italian civilians for allowing the resistance to exist. The intelligence networks active in the north mean that a more complete picture can be formed of what German occupation and construction meant there. As in the Cassino sector, the Germans took what they could carry away and destroyed what they could not. The difference is that in the industrialized north there was far more that could be of benefit to the Germans. In northern regions, German occupation brought the systematic looting of the industrialized stocks and machinery from factories but also from farms.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ NARA, RG 226 Folder 354, Memo to Colonel W.A. Eddy, USMC, "The lines of communication existing between central Italy and North Italy and their most vulnerable points," 16 October 1943.

⁴⁸ NARA, RG 223 OSS E165, Folder 303, SI Branch, Italian Section, "Report for 15-30 June 1944," 2 July 1944.

Permanent defence of the area meant that the terrain was transformed as Todt workers, mostly Italian slave labourers,⁴⁹ poured concrete, built machine gun emplacements, fortified some roads and destroyed others as they prepared for defence of the area. A captured German document outlines priorities in the area:

Orders were given in detail for security measure against armoured attacks in the sectors threatened by tanks; the speeding up of the fortress-like construction work on the main lines of attack (blasting of caves in rock, making of embrasures, etc); extensive mining in adequate depth; evacuation of the civilian population in the forward areas and on the main battle-ground ... thorough destruction or preparations therefor of all traffic routes, installations, shelters, etc. (sic)⁵⁰

In addition, areas north of Bologna, near Parma and Ferrara, were flooded and roads were improved in Reggio Emilia.⁵¹

The same mountainous terrain that enabled the Stella Rossa to strike at the Germans and then disappear into the surrounding countryside cradled the hundreds of communities that existed within the confines of Reno and Setta river valleys. The people who inhabited the mountains south of Bologna spoke their own dialect, worked the land hard to survive, and were generally isolated from communities in the low ground. The few tracks that led up to the mountain communities were not suitable for heavy traffic. Despite the isolation, by all accounts the villages of Monte Sole were vibrant communities in which the people lived, laughed, and loved. As Catholic communities, they were strict with their children, never allowing unmarried children to find time alone

⁴⁹ Armaments Minister, Fritz Todt founded the Organization Todt labour force in the 1930s to work on German roads and later military defences. The Todt organization, mostly under the power of Italian civilians, constructed defences on the Gustav and Hitler Lines and then later the Gothic Line. James Holland, *Italy's Sorrow: A Year of War, 1944-1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), p. 112.

⁵⁰ "The Italian Campaign (4 Jan – 4 Jun 44), Information from German sources," AHQ Report No. 020, Historical Section, Canadian Military Headquarters, p. 139.

⁵¹ NARA, RG 226 OSS E165, Folder 303, 24 June 1944.

with one another. Life was simple but difficult; every family had to fight hard to grow enough food to eat.

A sampling of a few of the communities is enough to gain perspective on local life. San Martino consisted of “a few buildings, a church with a tall, thin steeple, and a walled cemetery” and provided a church for nearby settlements within a two-kilometer radius. The land was the property of the church but the priest, Don Ubaldo Marchioni, returned most of the share of the church to the poor community. The *contadini*⁵² lived in one large, three-story house with the animals living on the first floor.⁵³ Just below the foot of Monte Sole, within sight of the church of San Martino, was another small village, Casaglia. It also had a church but during the war it was without a priest, so Don Ubaldo Marchioni walked to administer religious services to the local inhabitants.⁵⁴ On the dirt track between San Martino and Casaglia was Caprara, which until the 1930s had been the administrative centre of the region of Monte Sole. In the 1930s, that centre had been moved to the town of Marzabotto. At Caprara was the only general store within the whole mountain area. At Cerpiano, located down a steep hill on the south eastern side of Monte Sole, was the only school, for children between the ages of six and twelve after which formal education would end.

Although the communities of Casaglia, Caprara, Cerpiano, and San Martino and the others on Monte Sole were dispersed, the people were familiar with one another. The congregation for the churches at San Martino and Casaglia came from a wide area around

⁵² Translates to peasants or small farmers.

⁵³ Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, p. 120.

⁵⁴ Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, p. 114.

the two communities. The school at Cerpiano and the store at Caprara were the only ones that existed on the mountain and therefore catered to many different population centres. Children from all over attended school in Cerpiano, while the men of the mountain would visit the store at Caprara to play cards, have a drink, or buy non-perishable supplies. During the war, the small communities swelled as families and friends returned to escape Allied bombing and German occupation. The same mountains that offered the Stella Rossa a quick hiding spot from German troops also made the inhabitants and refugees feel safe. In the mountain communities, the people believed they could wait out the war.

Despite the isolation, the communities of Monte Sole were not immune to the impact of war or the Italian civil war. As is typical in civil war, not all Italians who lived in the mountains of Monte Sole supported the partisans. Some local Italians were recruited to Mussolini's RSI, while many of the inhabitants of Monte Sole hoped simply to wait out the war. Even in the Stella Rossa brigade, there was dissension. Aside from the spies planted by the German and Fascists in the summer of 1944, the partisans of the brigade could not agree on politics. Musolesi was determined to keep the brigade as apolitical as possible. He believed that the first goal of the brigade should be to demonstrate that "we are the first, the best soldiers of the new army in a new democratic Italy."⁵⁵ Other members of the Stella Rossa believed in the need to fight for radical change. Sugano, a communist, wanted the brigade to fight for political and social change in the process of the fight to liberate their country. The conflict escalated until Sugano and about one hundred others broke from the Stella Rossa to transfer to another zone.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ MSPA, Sezione C, Brigata Stella Rossa, Fascicolo 1, CUMER: Bolletino Agosto. In August 1944, the Italian government recognized the patriots as equal to that of the regular Italian army.

⁵⁶ Pezzino e Baldissara, *Il massacro*, p. 58.

Like many partisan brigades, the Italian resistance was not uniformly communist. The example of the Stella Rossa brigade clashes with the narrative of the Italian resistance that emerged after the war. Musolesi and some of the other former soldiers were interested in becoming part of the Italian army. Such was an ideal not shared equally by all communist brigades. In addition, the Italian resistance was not all Italian. Many prisoners of war and those forced to wear the German uniform escaped and were integrated into partisan units in Italy.⁵⁷ The Italian resistance was not uniform in its politics or nationality. Nor was it a completely popular movement. Although it drew many people from the general Italian population, it was often organized and led by professional soldiers.

In the autumn of 1944, the partisans and the people who lived in the communities of Monte Sole believed the war would be over for them soon. By 25 September, 8th Army had broken through the Gothic Line on the Adriatic and 5th Army had reached the Futa pass, near Baragazza.⁵⁸ The sound of the guns offered hope that the war might soon be over. The front line was so close; one could leave Monte Sole and reach the front on foot within a day. The Stella Rossa also believed that a breakthrough was imminent. On 25 September, Musolesi sent a message with two Allied air force officers whom the brigade had rescued behind enemy lines urgently requesting munitions and “if possible the following arms: 40 Bren guns, 350 Sten M2 guns and ammo, 100 sticky bombs, 200 Mills bombs.” According to Musolesi’s memo, the brigade was located at Castelnuovo and was in a perfect position to attack the Germans from the flank in an operation that

⁵⁷ For example, the Stella Rossa had a number of Russians within their ranks who had escaped service with the German army.

⁵⁸ The same place the Stella Rossa had attacked, emptied, and shut down the Todt stores in June 1944.

supported the coming Allied breakthrough.⁵⁹ But deteriorating weather and further German reinforcements meant that both 8th and 5th Armies would be stopped in late September 1944. The partisans, the people, and the Allies had to wait for better weather in the spring.

The partisans and the people who lived on Monte Sole did not know the Allies were stalled. For the partisans of the Stella Rossa brigade and those who lived on or were taking refuge on Monte Sole, the proximity of the front line offered hope that the war would soon be over. Since the Germans occupied the area in the spring of 1944, the inhabitants had been subjected to an escalation of terror as the Germans and Fascists attempted to flush out the partisan brigade. As was the case in all of Bologna province, the people were subjected to frequent *rastrellamenti* operations in which the Germans tried to encircle unsuspecting partisans or round up fighting-age males to send to work camps locally, in Italy, or in Germany. The *rastrellamenti* often resulted in property damage but the women, children, and elderly were left relatively unharmed. The constant presence of the Germans in the area meant that what little harvest the inhabitants of Monte Sole had been able to scrounge up was left to rot in the fields in September. But the not-so-distant sound of Allied guns offered hope that the war might be over soon.

For the Germans, the situation was critical by September. American 5th Army had closed up to the centre of the Gothic Line and 8th Army had already broken through on the eastern side of the Apennines. German commanders hoped the winter rains would arrive in time to stall the offensive until spring to give them time to deepen and reinforce the rear areas of the Gothic Line in the centre to hold the Allies into the spring and

⁵⁹ NARA, RG 407, 1st Armored Division G-2, report from 6th South African Division, 25 September 1944.

protect their last stand in Italy. The Stella Rossa brigade and the inhabitants of Monte Sole occupied a space in the mountains that was crucial to the German defence of the area.

In September 1944, Major Walter Reder of 16 SS reconnaissance division was given the task of clearing the area around Monte Sole. In his 1951 testimony, Reder noted the real fear that the Stella Rossa could attack from behind at the same time as the Americans attacked from the front. Moreover, the Germans could not risk having their lines of communications targeted by partisans with the American army so close.⁶⁰ The aim of the operation, carried out under the auspices of German 1st Parachute Division, was effectively twofold: rid the mountains of the partisans and everything that allowed them to exist; and create a cleared twelve-kilometer-deep area that would allow the German army to hold south of Bologna throughout the winter of 1944-45. The operation was part counter-partisan, part evacuation of the area to facilitate German defence. The orders stipulated that all male civilians between the ages of fifteen and forty-five were to be taken prisoner.⁶¹ The operation called for the encirclement of the mountain area, and the complete destruction of everything in it. Houses that offered the partisans a strongpoint, protection, or a place to sleep were to be burned. On the eve of the operation, Reder ordered his troops to “kill all cattle and civilians, regardless whether they are men, women, or children, and to set all buildings on fire.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Pezzino e Baldissara, *Il Massacro*, p. 104.

⁶¹ Pezzino e Baldissarra, *Il massacro*, p. 109.

⁶² MSPA, da: National Archives Washington, Eccidio di Monte Sole, Headquarters Fifth Army, G-2 Section, Interrogation Centre, 1 November 1944, PW Reports.

On the morning of 29 September, elements of Reder's 16 SS Reconnaissance battalion, a Russian Ostbattalion, elements of 35th and 36th Regiments of 16 SS Division, and a group consisting of "various Luftwaffe anti-aircraft units surrounded the area, creating a security cordon through which no one could escape."⁶³ When word arrived that the Germans were coming up the mountain, the inhabitants reacted in the typical fashion. Women sent their brothers, sons, and husbands to escape to the woods for protection against German capture. The men believed the Germans would not harm the women, children, and elderly and complied, hiding in the woods until the *rastrellamento* was over. The German soldiers closed in from all sides and systematically began to round up the women and children they found. The German soldiers were instructed to "retaliate by the indiscriminate shooting of all persons in the vicinity in the event of our meeting with any fire whilst on march."⁶⁴

Private Legoli Julien of the Infantry Gun Platoon, 5 Company of 16th SS PG Recce Unit, deserted from his unit after the events of 29 September. A month after the event, he gave his statement to Allied officers. He recounted the day:

Ammunition was then distributed and we were marched off at about 0600 hours, 29 September 1944. We proceeded, after crossing a road ... up hill for one hour. We came upon a group of three farmhouses; from the cellar of one of which a burst of tommy gun shots was fired, without any casualties resulting. One of the farmhouses was about 50 to 70 yards away from the other two, which were close together and the shot came from the solitary farmhouse. No. 1 Company Recce attacked the other two farmhouses, meeting with no resistance and fetched out the inmates;

⁶³ In testimony, Simon described that Reder would attack from the Reno Valley to the west, 35 and 36 regiments attacked, under Schmidt from the Poretta Valley to the east, the Ostbattalion and the anti-aircraft group would seal off the north and eventually advance southward. TNA, WO 220/11 "Military Courts: Atrocity and War Crimes Trials, Volumes 1 and 2, 1943 Dec – 1945 March," Voluntary Statement by PW LD 1687 Max Simon, "Report regarding the battles of 16 Panzergrenadier-Div 'Reichsfuehrer SS' against the Italian partisans during the period 28 May – 31 October 1944," p. 10.

⁶⁴ TNA, WO 235/538, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Statement of Pte. Legoli Julien, Infantry Gun Platoon, 1 October 1944.

about 30 civilians in all, two of whom were elderly men and the remainder were women and children. These civilians were stood up in front of a wall and killed by a machine gun fire by a private, whose name I cannot remember, on orders of Segelbrecht (commanding officer, no. 1 company). The bodies were left lying where they fell and the buildings set on fire.⁶⁵

Legoli's platoon continued marching. After approximately thirty minutes, they witnessed three women and three or four children fleeing from the advancing troops. These civilians were ordered shot. The German advance into the hills continued. Along the way, two males, thirty to forty women, and three or four more children were shot by the Germans. The unit stopped to burn a Catholic church. When the church would not burn, the platoon commander gave the order to destroy the altar.⁶⁶

In the small village of Casaglia, the inhabitants gathered in the church, hoping they would be safe until the German soldiers left. The priest, Don Ubaldi Marchioni, began reciting the rosary to calm the people. Among the inhabitants who gathered in the church were refugees from other areas and local inhabitants, including an old woman, Nanni Vittorio, who was paralyzed from the waist down. When the Germans burst into the church and demanded all who were inside to vacate, Vittorio could not walk out. When she refused to obey their orders, the German soldiers shot her. The rest were force-marched down to the Casaglia cemetery where they were herded inside. A German soldier fired on them with a machine gun. Grenades were then thrown on the dead to ensure there were no survivors. Testimonial evidence suggests that 147 were killed in the Casaglia incident alone; fifty were babies.

⁶⁵ TNA, WO 235/538, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Statement of Pte. Legoli Julien, Infantry Gun Platoon, 1 October 1944.

⁶⁶ TNA, WO 235/538, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Statement of Pte. Legoli Julien, Infantry Gun Platoon, 1 October 1944.

The men who were in Casaglia on the morning of 29 September also believed that the women would not be harmed by the Germans. As was habit, the men of the local communities, upon hearing the Germans were coming, left their wives, children, mothers, and sisters and hid in the woods. Not all of these men were partisans. Gino Chirici told his wife to go with the other women to the church and he hid in the nearby woods. Chirici listened, powerless, as the Germans machine-gunned his wife and the others of the village. At nightfall, he left the woods to discover the brutal scene of the massacre. He found his dead wife and covered her face “e mi allontanai come pazzo.”⁶⁷ Before he left, Chirici pulled a wounded but alive six-year-old boy out from underneath the dead.⁶⁸

At Cerpiano, the schoolteacher, Antonietta Benni, heard the crackling of gunfire and, like the others, assumed that it was another German *rastrellamento*. She knew things were different when she saw smoke from burning houses in the distance. Again, the men hid in the woods while the women, children, all between the ages of one and thirteen, and two invalid men – one seventy years old with arthritis of the legs, and the other paralyzed - took refuge in the cellar. When the Germans arrived they found the group and declared them all partisans. The group was led to the church and the Germans locked them in. After a few moments, the door opened and the soldiers began to throw bombs in the doors and through the window. Benni crouched up against the altar and passed out. She awoke to the screams of survivors calling for their loved ones who were among the dead. Benni stayed in the church throughout the 29th and until the night of the 30th. She

⁶⁷ “And I walked away like crazy.”

⁶⁸ MSPA, Sezione I: Walter Reder, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, “Requisitoria Scritta dal P.M. Dottore Piero Stellacci al termine dell’istruzione formale del procedimento penale contro Walter Reder, Maggiore delle S.S.,” pp. 79-80.

remembers that the soldiers guarded the door and shot anyone who tried to escape. On the afternoon of the 30th, the soldiers re-entered the church to find that there were still survivors. They said, “Fra 20 minuti tutti caput!”⁶⁹ Not long after, the machine gun fire started again. The soldiers surveyed the dead to ensure the job was finally complete. Luckily, Benni had an injured arm and her hands were cold when the soldier touched them. He took what was in her bag. After removing all valuables from the dead, the soldiers left.⁷⁰

At Caprara and San Martino, the situation was similar. At Caprara, a group of seventy women (two or three of them elderly) and children were taken into one of the houses and hand grenades were thrown into the windows. From the woods, a partisan, Guerrino Avoni, watched. At San Martino, the Germans entered the houses and turned everyone out. They lined them up against the wall and executed them. The men, who had hidden in the woods nearby, watched helplessly as their wives and children were murdered. Armando Moschetti’s house was burned down and seven members of his family killed including his wife, his father, his brother, a cousin, and three nieces and nephews. Many of the male survivors were men who were powerless to stop the massacre. At Cadotto, Medardo Fabbri watched from a cellar as an entire family – the father, mother, five children, and two other men – were forced out of the house and lined

⁶⁹ “In 20 minutes all are dead.”

⁷⁰ MSPA, Sezione I: Walter Reder, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, “Requisitoria Scritta dal P.M. Dottore Piero Stellacci al termine dell’istruzione formale del procedimento penale contro Walter Reder, Maggiore delle S.S.,” pp. 82-83.

up along the wall of the barn. A German soldier shot them one at a time with his rifle while fifty other German soldiers watched. Fabbri could do nothing to stop the horror.⁷¹

The narrative of the massacres is built on statements from German prisoners of war, those who deserted, like Legoli, and survivors of the massacres. Because many of the men were sent to hide in the woods when the Germans started their *rastrellamento* operation, there are many witnesses like Medardo Fabbri, Gino Chirici, and Guerrino Avoni who were able to provide statements after the fact. Other survivors, like Antonietta Benni and Cornelia Paselli, lived to tell their tale after German bullets and bombs missed them as they huddled together with their families and friends. Cornelia, faced with a German MG42 in the Casaglia cemetery,

...felt her legs and her feet rise in the air and her head bump down on the ground. There was a thump-thump as bodies began to fall on her, and she felt a splash of heat on her right side. She pushed her hand through the layers of flesh that surged over her and touched her hip and drew back a handful of blood. Cornelia felt no pain, and she realized that she was being warmed by the blood of others.⁷²

When the firing stopped, Cornelia found herself “under a crisscross of bodies” and heard her mother, Angelina, calling out to each of her children in turn. Cornelia’s twin brother and sister did not answer but her sister Giuseppina was wounded. Lucia Sabbioni, fifteen years old, was also among those who were herded into the cemetery at Casaglia. When the shooting stopped, Lucia was wounded in the hip and had a dozen shrapnel wounds from the machine gun fire.⁷³

⁷¹ MSPA, Sezione I: Walter Reder, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, “Requisitoria Scritta dal P.M. Dottore Piero Stellacci al termine dell’istruzione formale del procedimento penale contro Walter Reder, Maggiore delle S.S.,” p. 89-90.

⁷² Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, p. 192.

⁷³ Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, p. 199-200.

In the process of preparing for Major Walter Reder's 1951 trial in Bologna, nearly seventy survivors were interviewed, including Antonietta Benni, Cornelia and Giuseppina Paselli, Luccia Sabbioni, Medardo Fabbri, Gino Chirici, and Guerrino Avoni. The survivors told similar stories from approximately one hundred different incidents all over the Monte Sole mountains. Testimony from German prisoners of war, like Julian Legoli and the nine 16 SS soldiers captured in late October 1944, all corroborated the story of the massacre and confirmed that they were under orders to shoot civilians and burn down the houses on the mountain.⁷⁴

Testimony after the fact also supported the idea that the massacre was provoked by a pitched battle between the Stella Rossa and the SS at Cadotto in the early hours of 29 September. Olsen, in his account, describes how the new partisan headquarters at Cadotto was surrounded by Germans in the early hours of 29 September, resulting in a battle between the partisans and the Germans in which ten partisans were killed, including Mario Musolesi.⁷⁵ Bruna Musolesi, Mario Musolesi's sister, described in her memoir, *Epoepa Partigiana* how the Stella Rossa defended themselves heroically in the battle before succumbing under the sheer weight of German cannon, tanks, mortars, flame projectors, and machine guns:

Il 29 settembre i tedeschi attaccarono in forza tutta la zona. Avevano cannoni, carri armati, mortai, lanciafiamme, tutte le specie di armi. Erano Quattro divisioni fra S.S., paracadutisti di Goering e Brigata nere. Vennero da tutte le parti, e la montagna si trasformò in un inferno. Gli uomini della <<Stella Rossa>> si difesero eroicamente, e la battaglia durò a lungo, ma poi furono sopraffatti da quell'immensa superiorità di soldati e di mezzi.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ MSPA, da: National Archives Washington, Eccidio di Monte Sole, Headquarters Fifth Army, G-2 Section, Interrogation Centre, 1 November 1944, PW Reports.

⁷⁵ Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, p. 166.

⁷⁶ Bruna Musolesi, *Epoepa Partigiana*, pp. 82-83. found at <http://www.anpipianoro.it/pubblicazioni/epoepa%20partigiana.pdf>, last accessed: 7 March 2013. "On 29

German testimony agreed there was a battle between the partisans and German and Fascist troops, but disagreed on the location. The big partisan battle, from the German perspective, happened at San Martino, which was pinpointed as the headquarters of the Stella Rossa brigade. According to General Max Simon, commander of 16 SS Division, the planned counter-insurgency attack on the partisan brigade advanced first “slowly and haltingly” due to the strength of the partisan position. The position was so strong, in fact, that Simon had to bring up artillery and mortar. Despite many losses and after a day of fighting, the Germans were finally successful in taking the position. In a prisoner of war statement after the war, Simon described the partisan threat on Monte Sole:

On the next day, [after the battle with the partisans] the whole area was then cleared to plan. During this operations proofs fell into our hands of a well led, well organized and well equipped brigade which terrorised the entire population.

Simon did not dispute that women and children had been killed in the operation, but admitted that “soon after the capture of the base and at other places it came to light that women and children had been killed by the artillery and mortar fire.” Further investigation shed light on the fact that “women and children had been extensively misused by the Partisans for their known purposes.”⁷⁷ Witness testimony, including that

September, the Germans attacked the entire zone in force. They had cannons, tanks, mortars, flame throwers, all sorts of weapons. There were four S.S. divisions, parachute divisions (Goering and Black Shirt). They came to all the parts and the mountain was transformed into an inferno. The men of the Stella Rossa defended themselves heroically and the battle was hard and long, but then they were overwhelmed by the immense superiority in soldiers and equipment.”

⁷⁷ TNA, WO 220/11 “Military Courts: Atrocity and War Crimes Trials, Volumes 1 and 2, 1943 Dec – 1945 March,” Voluntary Statement by PW LD 1687 Max Simon, “Report regarding the battles of 16 Panzergrenadier-Div ‘Reichsfuehrer SS’ against the Italian partisans during the period 28 May – 31 October 1944,” p. 10.

of German prisoners of war in the aftermath, counters that given by German commanders after the war ended. It is possible that the true events will never be known with great clarity. What is clear, however, is that the testimony from German commanders, survivors, and German troops do not match.⁷⁸

Despite the mixed testimony, the way in which the German army cleared the entire Monte Sole area and used it in the aftermath indicate that it was more than a simple counter-insurgency operation. Reder's orders were to clear an area twelve kilometers in depth to facilitate German defence.⁷⁹ He was also instructed to destroy all that enabled the Stella Rossa partisan brigade to exist in the mountains around Monte Sole. For Reder and the soldiers assigned to the task, this meant killing everything that lived in the northern Apennine chain, in the Reno and Setta River valleys. The German operation at Monte Sole was the largest Italian massacre of the war; more than seven hundred Italians, mostly women and children, were killed in a three-day period that eliminated the communities of Monte Sole from the face of the earth.

Unlike the other massacres committed by Walter Reder and 16SS in August and September 1944, the massacre at Monte Sole had a tactical component. By September, the ground of Monte Sole became crucial to the German defence south of Bologna. Those who lived on Monte Sole, those from Bologna and other communities who sought refuge, and the partisans of the Stella Rossa brigade stood in the way of the German need to incorporate the mountain terrain into the Gothic Line. The need to use the area resulted in

⁷⁸ This issue will be explored further in Chapter 5.

⁷⁹ Pezzino e Baldissara, *Il massacro*, p. 108.

16SS Recce battalion of the 16SS Panzergrenadier Division clearing the area of all living and non-living things. What they did not shoot and kill, they burned to the ground.

In the days after the massacre, German reports indicated that the operation was a success. According to German records, in the three-day operation, 718 enemy were killed (497 “bandits” and 221 partisan helpers or *fiancheggiatori delle bande*).⁸⁰ German soldier Julian Legoli reported that at the end of the day on the 29th, his company commander congratulated his troops, noting that the operation had been a success. The company commander passed on the news that the operation had resulted in the deaths of 800 of the enemy.⁸¹ According to prisoner of war reports collected in October, 800 civilians were killed in the reprisal action with eighty percent of them being women and children.⁸²

In his post-war testimony, Kesselring downplayed the Monte Sole atrocity while emphasizing the threat to the partisans. He specifically referenced both the Monte Sole incident of 29-30 September⁸³ and the Bardine incident⁸⁴, arguing that both happened in areas that were threatened by partisans. The German army, when it was located in the area, was subjected to “an infinite number of attacks of the most cunning kind, which

⁸⁰ Joachim Staron, *Fosse Ardeatine e Marzabotto: Storia e memoria di due strage tedesche* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), p. 89

⁸¹ TNA, WO 235/538, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Statement of Pte. Legoli Julien, Infantry Gun Platoon, 1 October 1944.

⁸² MSPA, da: National Archives Washington, Eccidio di Monte Sole, Headquarters Fifth Army, G-2 Section, Interrogation Centre, 1 November 1944, PW Reports. The interrogator noted that the prisoners did not seem very bright.

⁸³ In the documents, the massacre is referenced as the San Martino incident. This is part of the problem. As Pezzino and Baldissara state, the massacre of Monte Sole was so widespread, across a wide area, which it was unlike other massacres committed by the Germans. It is because of this that I contend the massacre was one part counterinsurgency and one part effort to clear the area for future defence. In the other massacres, the massacres were committed before a German retreat.

⁸⁴ The Bardine incident happened on 19 August 1944.

were fed from the mountains.” Kesselring expressed his disbelief at the reported 3,000 casualties from the San Martino incident, especially in light of the fact that it happened after his August decree that clarified his 17 June order:

I cannot therefore imagine that these battles under the leadership of older officers and on the responsibility of higher commanding authorities could have taken the course described. That on the occasion of a major operation lasting four days, even if all decrees of the Convention were adhered to, 17 villages suffered and 200 people (read Partisans) perished, I consider possible and tolerable.⁸⁵

Kesselring stated that “the San Martino operation was justified in practice.” He believed that excesses against the civilian population, if they did occur, should be “judged most severely.” Kesselring’s testimony points to a problem in language and description, however. The Monte Sole massacre cannot be described as the San Martino operation or the massacre of Marzabotto, as it would be referred to in the aftermath of war. The problem of language and description comes from the fact that the German army was successful in the Monte Sole operation. The area was completely cleared. Former inhabitants who did survive were not able to return to their homes. Seven more months of war, in which the Germans fortified the position and 5th Army tossed artillery at them, meant that the communities that had existed on Monte Sole were reduced to dust. The Monte Sole operation was meant to clear the area of everything so the Germans could utilize the mountain in defence; the threat of Stella Rossa brigade was only part of the problem that provoked the Monte Sole massacre.

⁸⁵ TNA, WO 220/11 “Military Courts: Atrocity and War Crimes Trials, Volumes 1 and 2, 1943 Dec – 1945 March,” Voluntary Statement by PW LD 1573, Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, “About the atrocities which occurred in the operational area of Army Group C during the fight against the Italian Partisans from 1943 to 1945,” p. 3.

What happened after the massacre, in the autumn of 1944, makes it clear that the massacre was about a counter-insurgency operation but it was also an operation to empty the area to facilitate German defence. After clearing the area of civilians and partisan in late September, the German army fortified the area, constructing bunker positions and gun emplacements.⁸⁶ Both the German high command and Allied armies recognized the value that Monte Sole offered as a defensive position.⁸⁷ Sixth South African Armoured Division, tasked with attacking the position, was immediately south of Monte Sole when the massacre was being carried out. In the first two weeks of October, the South African Armoured Division had taken Monte Stanco,⁸⁸ just south of Grizza Morandi and just under ten kilometers, as the crow flies, from the Monte Sole feature. By 23 October, the 6th South African division captured Monte Salvaro, the high ground south of the small village of Creda and the Reno River and approximately five kilometers from Monte Sole. In response to the South African Armoured Division's attack on Monte Salvaro, the Germans withdrew to ground west of the River Reno and on the Monte Sole feature itself. The planning documents for the attack on Monte Sole, by 6th South African, show the military necessity of clearing the region for the Germans. The importance of the location of Cerpiano, Casaglia, and Caprara to the defence of the area is evident. Planners for the South African attack recognized that these villages barred the approach to the

⁸⁶ The Monte Sole park organization has been carrying out excavations on German bunkers that are located on the Monte Sole feature. This has also been supported by the reports of 6th South African Division that state that the Germans were blasting defensive positions since November 1944. The report also stated that, according to prisoner of war reports, Monte Sole was the German Winter Line. NARA, RG 407, "Limited Objective Attack on Monte Sole by 6th SA Division," II Corps, December 1944-January 1945, p. 5.

⁸⁷ In the 1945 spring attack, Truscott recognized that the Germans had developed their defensive network around "four clearly defined geographic features." The most important of these was identified as Monte Sole. Ernest J. Fisher, *United States Army in World War II: The Mediterranean Theatre of Operations: Cassino to the Alps*, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993), p. 477.

⁸⁸ Fisher, *Cassino to the Alps*, p. 371.

strategic mountain triangle of Abelle-Caprara-Sole. In the intelligence estimates before the attack it was noted that these villages were held and could only be attacked at night, given the ability of the Germans to observe the approaches from Monte Sole.⁸⁹ By January 1945, planners in the South African Armoured Division decided that an attack on Monte Sole, at least in the winter months, was too costly:

Monte Sole would improve the position now held by this division. However, its capture might involve the entire division and seriously interfere with its relief and reorganization. Also it is believed unwise to take this feature and then hold on for a long period as supply of the troops on the feature would be difficult due to lack of roads. Because of the character of the feature, it is considered operations against it would be extremely difficult under present conditions of snow and weather.⁹⁰

The attack on Monte Sole was put on hold until the spring when the weather was more favourable. The Germans occupied Monte Sole and walked among the ghosts of those killed in September and October 1944 throughout the following winter, creating a series of strongpoints in the northern Apennines south of Bologna. The winter and the eradication of all that lived on Monte Sole bought the Germans the time to create a suitable defence for the Allied spring offensive.

In the spring of 1945, the Germans were forced to abandon Monte Sole. The Allied attack came on 15 April and was pre-empted by air strikes that dropped heavy and medium artillery along a fifteen-mile front stretching from the Reno River eastward. In the afternoon, 120 fighter bombers attacked the Monte Sole sector in continuous waves and artillery fired on German positions. The 6th South African Armoured Division and

⁸⁹ NARA, RG 407, "Appreciate of Situation," by Brig. M.D. Erskine, DSO, Commander 24 Guards Brigade, at Rioveggio, 10 November 1944. "Limited Objective Attack on Monte Sole by 6th SA Division," II Corps, December 1944-January 1945.

⁹⁰ NARA, RG 407, "Limited Objective Attack on Monte Sole by 6th SA Division," II Corps, December 1944-January 1945, p. 4.

the 88th Division attacked together soon after dark; 91st and 34th Divisions followed up with operations in the early hours of 16 April. The South African attack was the only one to have success on the 16th; before daylight on 16 April the summit of Monte Sole was captured. Success on the other flanks would come in the following days.⁹¹ On 21 April 1945, Italian and Polish troops marched into the city of Bologna. With the Monte Sole position broken, the rest of the German defences fell quickly and the German surrender in Italy soon followed on 2 May 1945, five days before the general capitulation that finally brought an end to the Third Reich.⁹²

Between the 16 SS Panzergrenadier Division operation that killed more than 700 civilians in September and October 1944 and the succeeding months in which artillery and aerial bombardment further flattened the communities that had existed, the once vibrant communities of Monte Sole disappeared completely. They were not re-settled after the war. Survivors chose to start life elsewhere and even the victims of the Monte Sole massacre were eventually relocated to the town of Marzabotto, in the valley of the Reno River. The memory of the massacre was shifted to Marzabotto, as the administrative centre of the location. To this day, Italians still remember the massacre of Marzabotto and not the massacre of Monte Sole. It is as if the massacre wiped out everything. Post-war trials, in which there was an attempt to assign responsibility for the massacre, only served to confuse the issue further. The defence of those responsible discounted the testimony of survivors. In the aftermath of war, the massacre was couched

⁹¹ Fisher, *Cassino to the Alps*, p. 478-479.

⁹² The history of the Italian surrender is recounted in Bradley F. Smith and Elena Agarossi, *Operation Sunrise: The Secret Surrender* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1979).

in the greater context of the Second World War. The mythical massacre at Marzabotto became yet another battlefield in the Italian civil war between anti-Fascists and Fascists.

The example of Monte Sole, especially compared to the experience in the Cassino sector, shows an evolving policy on the part of the Allies and the Germans as the war continued into 1944. Allied High Command doubted the fealty of the Italians in the early months of the campaign on the mainland. Certainly, given the fact that the Italians were former enemies who had fought against and killed Allied soldiers, this was not surprising. By June 1944, the Allies were committed to waging a war in Italy. The front that was opened in Normandy on 6 June 1944 necessitated a continued offensive in the Mediterranean lest those German divisions in Italy return to France and defeat the Allies there. In addition, the second front in France drew valuable Allied resources away from the Italian campaign. The need to keep German attention in Italy necessitated the use of Italians – both the Armed Forces and a growing resistance - in the war effort. Allied equipment, training, and advice bolstered that growing Italian resistance.

German policy was also shaped by the Italian betrayal. The Germans adopted a brutal, punitive policy toward the Italians the moment the armistice was announced, understandably so. Although German high command was loath to admit it, the Italians were crucial to continued war in the Mediterranean. The fact that the Germans were forced to backfill in Yugoslavia, Albania, and Greece and to fight so tenaciously to hold the national territory of their former ally clearly indicates that the loss of the Italians as an Axis force was felt. By the end of 1943, the Germans had to commit forces to a growing Italian insurgency that impacted their ability to supply and fight the battles south of Rome. German policy evolved as a result, desperate to deter the partisans. As the war

progressed north and the German hold became more tenuous, the German reaction became more brutal. The effect was to draw more partisans to the resistance.

The partisans, too, are important agents in the story. Many groups, like the Stella Rossa brigade, were formed in response to a German and Fascist threat. Musolesi and others like him were forced to make an impossible choice. Musolesi and Rossi both returned home and hoped to wait out the war but they were chased to the hills by the threat of deportation or death. The Stella Rossa became stronger with Allied encouragement and gained fortitude in the face of German retaliation. Their continued successful actions were considered valuable to Allied armies in Italy. Musolesi's request for further arms in late September proved that a relationship had been forged; the partisans themselves believed they were working toward the liberation of the nation. Successful attacks against the trains, vehicles, and troops of the German army gave them the satisfaction of doing something in pursuit of the end of the war in Italy.

Once these three forces – the Germans, the Allies, and the partisans – gained momentum in Italy, little could stop them. They interacted with and affected one another; they all pursued victory in war. The women, children, and the elderly people, such as those killed in September-October 1944 on the hills of Monte Sole were trying to survive in the bitter context of the conflict. The Germans chose to construct defence south of Bologna, the Allies chose to continue to attack those defences, and the partisans chose to continue to strike at the German war effort. The only group unable to choose was the Italians who perished in the massacre at Monte Sole. They were victims of competing Allied and German forces desperate to win a war. The story of the resistance and the

massacre at Monte Sole is a tale of a people caught between two warring armies that were intent on doing all they could to win.

The example of the Stella Rossa and the German reprisal they provoked reveals some interesting facts about the role of Italians in the war. First, the resistance was effective. Allied armies would not have supported it to the extent they did if it was a wasted effort. In the first months after the armistice, the OSS began supplying and supporting partisan organizations. They recruited and trained capable Italian soldiers to carry out dangerous missions behind German lines. If captured, punishment was sure to be death. But Italian soldiers were willing to accept the challenge. In a similar fashion, those soldiers who found themselves in German-occupied zones opted to carry out operations, in a professional way, to support Allied efforts. The Italian army did not just disappear after the armistice. A great portion of it was captured and taken to Germany as prisoners of war but a part was absorbed into Allied units as support staff and into the OSS as intelligence and liaison officers. At that point, they disappeared from the historical record.

The German response to partisan activity also proves that the resistance in Italy was effective. The division of resources in a war in which they were already dividing resources on a territorial scale that endangered their war effort - first between the Eastern Front and Sicily and then between the Eastern Front, Italy, and France – caused the German hold on the important industrial parts of North Italy to be tenuous at best. German historians have confirmed Allied intelligence reports that revealed how important the factories of North Italy were to the Third Reich.

The importance of the Monte Sole terrain feature *after* the massacre, and the testimony of Kesselring and others after the war, lead to the conclusion that the massacre was not just a reprisal against a partisan brigade but an action of military necessity, however brutal the outcome. If the mountain was not cleared, the Germans would not have been able to hold south of Bologna throughout the winter of 1944-45. The partisans and the civilians of Monte Sole made defence untenable. Allied support and encouragement of the partisans was also a military necessity in a war in which Allied resources were being stretched thin as supplies and soldiers were destroyed in battle after battle in France, Russia, and Italy. Supporting the partisans enabled the Allies to stretch their resources a little further. The Germans, on the other hand, committed vast resources to deterring the resistance.

Chapter 4: Muted voices: Reconstruction and survival in Frosinone province, 1944-2006

“The most serious immediate problems were those concerned with public utilities, water, electricity, sanitation and above all refugees – a problem that became increasingly urgent with every advance up to the Winter Line.”¹

On 24 May 1944, the guns stopped firing for the first time in seven months and the people, who had fled to caves in nearby hills to survive the war, began trickling back to their homes. The refugees, kept from their homes since the preceding autumn, discovered that their towns and villages were torn apart; their homes were ruins. The communities closest to the Gustav and Hitler lines were completely destroyed; the degree of devastation became minimally less in towns further away. The once lush valleys and hills dotted with olive trees looked like the Somme and Passchendaele battlefields after the First World War. Aerial photos showed the terrain pock-marked with water holes, skeletons of the remaining buildings protruding like sticks in the mud. What was not obliterated by artillery fire had been so altered by German efforts to construct an impenetrable defensive line that the landscape was unrecognizable. While the artillery obliterated houses and churned fields into mud, it could not touch the concrete buried so deeply and poured so thickly that nothing could move it.²

¹ CRS Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p. 77.

² German pillboxes can still be found on the Hitler Line today.



A series of German tobruks located in Cassino, Italy on the Hitler Line. The concrete, about four feet into the ground below what is visible, is impossible to move. The civilians incorporate it into their landscape. The top one has become a stand for outdoor plants. (Photos courtesy of Raymond Gallant and Ashley Ferguson, study tour participants, *The Second World War in Italy*, 2012 and Eric McGeer, co-author of *The Canadian Battlefields in Italy* guidebook)

The *Historiale* museum³ of Cassino records that the devastation was enormous; many Italian towns ceased to exist. The museum notes that the town of Cassino was 98% destroyed, Pontecorvo was 100% destroyed, Esperia was 92% destroyed, while Roccasecca was only 80% destroyed.⁴ Twenty-three other towns and villages are listed as being between 90 and 100 percent destroyed as a result of the war.⁵ Most of these

³ The *Historiale* museum was opened in the town of Cassino in 2006 to tell the story of the war.

⁴ Roccasecca, the supposed birthplace of St. Thomas Aquinas, was largely spared because of its location nestled in the side of the mountain overlooking highway 6. Roccasecca is also on the northern edge of the battlefield, at the site of the Melfa River crossing, one of the final acts to break the Hitler Line in 1944.

⁵ “Historical Guide to the Poli-Media Staging” for the *Historiale* of Cassino, publisher Literalia, July 2005, first edition, p. 31.

villages are found within the area between the Gustav and Hitler Lines but some, such as the town of San Pietro Infine, listed as 98 percent destroyed, fall outside the triangle of terrain that bordered by the lines. San Pietro Infine was unfortunate enough to be along the approach to the Gustav Line, flanking highway six south of Cassino. The town was battered in the Allied attempt to reach the Gustav Line. Seven months of war left no town or village untouched.



Figure 1: The town of Cassino in the foreground, in its destroyed state. In the background sits the ruins of the castle that sits below the Abbey. (Photo from the Canadian War Museum).

The *Historiale* museum, opened in 2006, conveys the dominant, official memory of the war in the Cassino sector. In the official memory, that most visible to the outsider, the emphasis is placed on the destruction caused by Allied bombing. The museum and other proponents of the official memory are critical of Allied efforts because of the so-called unnecessary bombing of the towns and the monastery. The dominance of this narrative, however, overshadows the tension felt in the Allied decision-making process of what to bomb, when to bomb, and how the military effect was weighed against the cost to the civilian population. The existence of this tension becomes apparent when the efforts of Allied organizations to assist in rebuilding are considered. The Allied Civil Affairs organization was created, in part, to solve the problem of the tension between military necessity and the desire to prevent unnecessary civilian casualties. Civil Affairs is useful for what it tells us about Allied policy toward civilians but it also provides evidence about the extensive problems encountered in the Cassino sector and how these problems were overcome. Moreover, it shows how dedicated Allied personnel were in minimizing the effects of protracted war.

Local memory is shaped by local experiences and differs from the dominant official memory. Most of the small communities in the Cassino sector tend to view the Allied sacrifice in a favourable light despite of widespread aerial bombardment. The variation of armies – both Allied and Axis - that fought in the sector between October 1943 and May 1944 means that the inhabitants from each village have widely disparate memories about the war depending on the nature of the battle in their area and the soldiers with whom they interacted. In some communities, like at Vallerotonda,

inhabitants remember the brutality of German soldiers.⁶ Others remember the brutality of French Colonial Troops. The overwhelming memory in communities throughout the area, especially in those towns most touched by the devastation, is the recognition of the Allied sacrifice in liberation of the area and the local suffering of individuals. At San Pietro, the memory is of the efforts of the 36th Texas Division in liberating the town in December 1943, the widespread destruction, and a winter surviving in caves. These local memories clash with and are muted by the dominant, official memory.

* * *

The Allies attempted to solve the tension between the need to win the war and the desire to prevent collateral damage through the implementation of the Allied Civil Affairs organization. It is clear that the Allies were responsible for the choice to bomb the Abbey of Montecassino⁷ but a little known aspect of Allied policy was their desire to assist locals, after the battle moved on, to restore a level of functionality to communities broken by war. The example of Allied Civil Affairs offers a significant contrast to the German policy toward civilians. While German policy only became more brutal as the campaign progressed, the Allies understood, even before the Italian campaign began, that they had to provide a minimum standard for the local population.⁸ This plan necessarily involved input and assistance from existing Italian administration, institutions, and interested

⁶ Vallerotonda is the region from which the Cardito refugees were from and thus has adopted the memory of the massacre.

⁷ The Allied acceptance of this responsibility is laid out in Chapter 2.

⁸ The genesis of Allied Civil Affairs came at the Casablanca conference in January 1943 and went hand in hand with plans to land on Sicily which planners hoped would provoke the collapse of the Italian Fascist government. Civil Affairs supported that strategy through the creation a benevolent administrative structure that provided for the civilian population. Experts in finance, supply, law, medicine, security, and enemy property were recruited and trained for Civil Affairs.

parties. Incorporating the Italians into this effort had the effect of restoring a level of civic responsibility. Moreover, it ensured that Allied efforts were in support of what the Italian people wanted and not necessarily what Allied personnel thought was best.

In Sicily and southern Italy, the efforts of Civil Affairs were carried out with reasonable success and relative ease. The nature of the German delay withdrawal meant that many parts of Sicily and Italy were liberated without much destruction. There were a few cases, however, that were especially dire. Messina, Sicily, facing the toe of the Italian peninsula, was bombed repeatedly by the Allies throughout the summer of 1943 and was therefore largely destroyed by the time it was liberated in August 1943.

Traditionally, wheat and other foodstuffs were brought in from the mainland, which at the time of liberation was still under the control of the Germans. Allied Civil Affairs had to provide food for the reduced population of 55,000.⁹ Nearly two months of war under strict ration control meant the Allies were also faced with a very hungry population that, if not dealt with carefully, could turn hostile.¹⁰ In Naples, the Germans had sabotaged much of the city. They detonated mines to destroy much of the harbour infrastructure so it would be unusable as a port but they had also destroyed the aqueducts, electricity, and even the library and archives to cause further suffering for the Italians.¹¹ Intelligence reports gathered before Naples was abandoned by the Germans in late September 1943

⁹ The normal population was somewhere around 200,000. Allied bombings and German occupation forced many to flee the city. Typically, once a town was liberated, these populations began to return, inflating an already difficult situation for Allied Civil Affairs.

¹⁰ Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p. 39. Messina was only one town in Sicily that the Allies struggled to feed. By early September 1943, Catania, equally devastated, required upwards of 100 tons of wheat to feed its population. There is evidence of food riots in Palermo and in Catania in October 1943 that caused additional problems for Civil Affairs.

¹¹ TNA, FO 371/48317, "1944: File no. 32," "Extract from House of Lords Debates, 16 February 1944.

indicated that Naples was heavily mined. The German army wanted to ensure that the Allies would find nothing usable when they arrived in Naples, but the evidence is clear that they also wanted to create widespread humanitarian issues for the Allies. The streets downtown, the bank of Naples, the water reservoir, the electric plant, central power, and the gas plant were “thoroughly ransacked by Germans.” The Allied intelligence report, issued before Naples was liberated, continued: “Naples (was) in (a) wild state of confusion.”¹² By the time Frosinone province fell under the administration of Region IV ACC in mid-June 1944, Allied Civil Affairs officers were well versed in issues they might encounter after the front line moved on. They were also well aware, after Naples, of the German desire to leave a scorched earth in their wake.

The situation in Sicily and in Naples prepared Allied Civil Affairs for what they would find in the Cassino sector, if only partially. The scale of devastation at Cassino was multiplied by the construction of the German line of permanent defence in Italy, the efforts of both the Allies and the Germans to attack and defend, respectively, and the months of war. To create the impenetrable defensive network the Germans poured concrete for gun emplacements and pillboxes, diverted rivers and blew dams to flood low lying areas, and destroyed or fortified road infrastructure depending on its usefulness. German construction transformed the basements of civilian houses into German bunkers and put the towns and villages and the people of the Cassino sector into immediate danger as Allied armies fought to break the position.

The Allies were aware that the situation at Cassino was unique and required additional planning and preparation to avoid a humanitarian crisis on a scale yet unseen

¹² NARA, RG 226 OSS E165 Folder 354, 19 September 1943, From Vincent J. Scamporino to Col. Eddy.

in the Second World War. On 3 March 1944, the Provincial Commissioners for Region IV met in Naples to discuss plans for how to proceed in the area once Civil Affairs took over from Allied Military Government detachments. The Public Welfare and Health division of Civil Affairs adopted a phased approach in which emergency issues would be dealt with first. Phase one included feeding the hungry, creating public welfare institutions and examining those Italian institutions that predated the war for suitability, providing care and food for expectant and new mothers, and the provision of housing for normally homeless persons (not refugees or evacuees). The plan included provisions for a simplified reporting system that facilitated the delivery of aid to civilians.¹³

Allied Civil Affairs had a dual purpose, however. In taking care of the populations, Civil Affairs officers ensured that the troops did not succumb to the same diseases from which they were working to protect civilians. In April 1944, the Allied Military Government detachment for 8th Army noted its concern about “the hygienic state of towns” with piles of “refuse and garbage dumps which are potential fly breeding areas.” Conditions were ripe for both malaria and enteric disease which put the fighting troops as well as the civilian populations at risk. Civil Affairs organized, in conjunction with the town mayor, sanitary squads responsible for “street cleaning, rubbish and garbage collection and disposal.” An Italian *Ufficiale Sanitario* was designated to ensure a suitable dumping area was provided. Civil Affairs also ensured that suitable sewage removal was available. In the absence of an adequate system, deep pit latrines were arranged that were cleaned daily and fly-proofed. Civilians caught “dumping their excreta in streets, alleys, back yards, or fields [were] severely punished, according to military

¹³ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, 1 August 1944, ACC 10400/163/29 Public Health Reports, Region IV, “Division of Public Health and Welfare, Report on Operations, 9 June to 31 July, 1944,” p. 2.

law.”¹⁴ Allied Civil Affairs was concerned with both military necessity (allow the fighting forces to continue doing their job) and the protection of civilians.

The requirement to protect civilians and provide humanitarian aid did not end when the battle moved on. Just days after the battle, on 26 May, the Allied Military Government detachment for 8th Army began its assessments of the area. The Civil Affairs detachment would not arrive for two weeks but measures had to be taken to ensure existing and returning civilians were not endangered.¹⁵ Noting the serious destruction of the area, 8th Army Allied Military Government closed off a section that included ten communes. Brigadier John K. Dunlop, commanding officer for the Allied Control Commission in Region IV, acknowledged that the situation in the area was unprecedented: “the general quadrilateral: Roccasecca, Cassino, R. Rapido, R. Gari, and R. Melfa – presents certain problems that may be unique in the Italian campaign.” To facilitate the administration of the area and to prevent further injuries to civilians, Dunlop recommended that the area, which contained around ten communes, be treated as one large area and that an Italian *Commissario Speciale* be appointed to work with Civil Affairs.¹⁶

¹⁴ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, 10400/163/15, “Public Health and Sanitation, Rear AMG Eighth Army,” 2 April 1944

¹⁵ After Italy gained the status of co-belligerent, the Allies made arrangements to return liberated regions of Sicily and southern Italy to the administration of the Italian government. The Allied Control Commission assumed an advisory role in these regions. In areas immediately behind the front line, detachments of Allied Military Government retained control. As the front line progressed north, Allied Military Government transitioned control to the Allied Control Commission.

¹⁶ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, Division of Public Health and Welfare, “Report on Operations, 9 June to 31 July 1944,” 1 August 1944, p. 9.



The town of Cassino, with the shattered Abbey of Montecassino in the background, after the battle moved on. The broken tank in a puddle of water in the foreground is representative of what had to be cleaned up after May 1944. (Photo: Imperial War Museum).

On 10 June, the Allied Control Commission, Region IV, assumed responsibility for the liberated areas. Dunlop's initial assessments confirmed that the damage was unprecedented and devastating: "the military campaign ... had resulted in indescribable damage to a score of towns and villages in that immediate vicinity and as the battle line moved northward, the path of destruction continued." The devastated areas could not possibly support the population that began to return in the days after the battle ended.¹⁷ The damage was extensive; diseases associated with broken infrastructure such as malaria and typhoid were considered a threat. At that early point, locals were just beginning to return. The majority of returning Italians found that their homes no longer

¹⁷ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, Division of Public Health and Welfare, "Report on Operations, 9 June to 31 July 1944," 1 August 1944, p. 7.

existed and they had to locate alternate means of shelter. Housing the thousands of returning refugees was an immediate concern.

To solve the problem of the scores of homeless, the Red Cross and Civil Affairs organized committees to assess the suitability of existing buildings. Committees, designated by the communes and staffed by local Italians, surveyed buildings and assigned families to move into those deemed sufficient. The Red Cross noted that the efforts were being met with much success: "Several instances of achievement have been recorded." Red Cross personnel understood they could only arrange for temporary housing. The Red Cross and Allied Civil Affairs understood that the Italian people needed to take ownership for long-term plans. A June 1944 Red Cross report indicated "that RC personnel can only assist in the temporary phase in these communes almost completely destroyed, and the decision as to the wisdom of rebuilding such towns must be left to the Italian residents."¹⁸ The scale of the problem continued to grow as more locals returned to their towns and villages. By August 1944, 65,000 people were trying to live within the devastated area around Cassino.¹⁹ The recognition that the Italians had to be permitted to plan for their own future was a principle of Allied Civil Affairs throughout Italy. The Italians were willing to cooperate with Civil Affairs and international organizations like the Red Cross. This had a significant impact on minimizing potential crises.

¹⁸ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/59, Red Cross Civilian War Relief, "Field Report No. 10, Period June 15-30, 1944."

¹⁹ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, Division of Public Health and Welfare, "Report on Operations, 9 June to 31 July 1944," 1 August 1944, p. 10.

The unique circumstances in the Cassino sector meant that Civil Affairs officers, working with local Italian administrators, had to be innovative in dealing with new challenges. The destruction and subsequent destitution in the Cassino sector led to the creation of a Social Welfare Department to provide for those in need, especially “dependent, neglected, or delinquent children ... the aged, crippled or infirm.” The department, administered by Civil Affairs and the local prefect, provided “guidance as to and control of other welfare activities for which provinces are or may become responsible.” In addition, a regional welfare officer was appointed under the dual control of the Allied Control Commission and the Italian government. Regional welfare officers were instructed to become acquainted with the scope of regional welfare organizations in Italy and ensure that “the full and best use is made of their resources” while developing and extending “their usefulness in their proper sphere.”²⁰

A number of Italian agencies had experience dealing with the types of issues resulting from seven months of war, including the *Ente Comunale di Assistenza (ECA)*, which provided general relief, either in the form of money or in kind, to the local people; the *Opera Nazionale Maternità ed Infanzia*, which provided consultation for pregnant women, meals for pregnant and nursing mothers, care in maternity institutions, and care for children including extra food and milk, day nurseries, and nursery schools; the *Soccorso Militare*, which provided relief to Italian soldiers and their families; the *Opera Nazionale Orfani di Guerra*, which provided support for war orphans by making grants available for medical emergencies, education, medical care, shelter in approved institutions; and the *Opera Nazionale Invalidi di Guerra*, which provided support for

²⁰ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, Division of Public Health and Welfare, “Report on Operations, 9 June to 31 July 1944,” 1 August 1944, document entitled Social Welfare, p. 1.

disabled veterans and civilians who were disabled as a result of military operations. The *Opera Nazionale Invalidi di Guerra* provided assistance with artificial limbs, hospitalization, drugs, and even loans for the disabled to purchase land.²¹ The assistance and resources available from such organizations were instrumental to ensuring that the multitude of problems in Cassino could be dealt with in an efficient and effective manner.

Assistance provided by Italian organizations was instrumental to avoiding crises but took careful monitoring from Allied officials. The Allies recognized that Italian aid organizations had suffered under Fascism, becoming “inextricably intertwined in the web of Fascist measures.”²² Such organizations needed to be carefully managed and purged of their Fascist influence. The Allies recognized that these organizations were not broken, even though they had spent the last twenty years being administered by Fascist employees. The need to monitor led to “constant visits and inspections” to ensure the organizations were effective. Although Civil Affairs recognized the value provided by Italian relief organizations, there was a need for a hands-on approach, at least in the early months.²³ The extra layer of administrative responsibility allowed Italians to take a role in delivering aid and ensured that any Fascist tendencies were purged, but also drew heavily on Allied resources. Furthermore, although purging these organizations of their fascist tendencies was a noted priority for the Allies, it remains to be seen how successful they actually were in the process.

²¹ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, Division of Public Health and Welfare, “Report on Operations, 9 June to 31 July 1944,” 1 August 1944, Appendix B.

²² Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p. 50.

²³ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, Division of Public Health and Welfare, “Report on Operations, 9 June to 31 July 1944,” 1 August 1944, Exhibit No. 7, p. 2.

In addition to Italian relief organizations, the Red Cross worked under the advisement of Allied Civil Affairs. Red Cross assessments of Region IV are valuable as they describe the scope and scale of the problem in the Cassino sector. Of the four provinces that were under the control of the ACC in June 1944,²⁴ Red Cross agents noted that in Littoria, Frosinone, and Roma there was “general devastation.” In Viterbo, along the coast damage, was “scattered.” The other three provinces of Region IV were Terni, Rieti, and Perugia which had “much less general destruction.” The greatest impact was felt in the area around the major defensive lines. The immediate needs - food, shelter, clothing and medical supplies – were in short supply. The lack of transportation for Civil Affairs detachments meant that food could not be transported in the quantities required. Land mines hindered the planting of annual crops. Normal agricultural activities could not resume until the mines were removed.²⁵

With more refugees returning to the area daily, the problem of how to house and feed them became acute. Although grants were available for those in need, Civil Affairs personnel discovered the “quickest and best public assistance ... [was] employment of all able-bodied persons.” There was plenty of work to be done clearing the streets and

²⁴ Region IV of the Allied Control Commission administration encompassed all of Frosinone province, along with Littoria, Rome, Viterbo, Rieti, Terni and Perugia. The territory that made up Region IV came under the administration of ACC gradually, as the war continued to progress north. Frosinone province and Littoria were the first to come under the control of the ACC while Perugia remained under the auspices of AMG 8th Army until August 1944. Allied Military Government maintained control of the areas immediately between the front, providing aid when possible. NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, Division of Public Health and Welfare, “Report on Operations, 9 June to 31 July 1944,” 1 August 1944, p. 1.

²⁵ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/59, Red Cross Civilian War Relief, “Field Report No. 10 , Period June 15-30, 1944.”

clearing waterways. Italian workers were hired and paid at established Allied Military Government rates.²⁶

The cooperation between Italian and Allied officials in organizing and delivering aid achieved the goal of providing for civilians and minimizing problems. On 18 July 1944, the *Commissario Special*, a Capitano Bossi, and the Civil Affairs officer appointed to the devastated area, Captain A.H. Salway, called a conference to discuss the situation in the most devastated area. Due to a lack of available infrastructure, the meeting was held at a road junction near Piedimonte S. Germano. The Italians and Allies agreed that in the devastated area, formerly closed by the 8th Army Allied Military Government detachment, it was necessary to allow at least the strongest inhabitants, those “men and women capable of enduring rough living conditions and hard work” to return to begin the rebuilding process. To facilitate this process, those present devised a strategy to create a pool of salvaged building material from destroyed houses to erect temporary structures. Plans were made to use food stores from the rest of Frosinone province to provide for needs in the Cassino sector until cultivation could begin again. The plan created at the meeting accounted for all essentials: “temporary housing, food, medical services, and other essentials the lack of which goes to create welfare problems.”²⁷ Italians and Civil Affairs officers, aware of the dire situation, worked together to establish a livable area and prevent epidemics.

²⁶ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, Division of Public Health and Welfare, “Report on Operations, 9 June to 31 July 1944,” 1 August 1944, p. 8.

²⁷ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, Division of Public Health and Welfare, “Report on Operations, 9 June to 31 July 1944,” 1 August 1944, p. 9.

The careful planning and cooperation between the Allies and the Italians was successful in preventing serious outbreaks in disease, despite the potential problems posed by broken infrastructure and cratered terrain that held stagnant pools of water. In early July 1944, the Public Health sub-commission for the Allied Control Commission noted that “The general health of the civilian populace has been good and no evidence of epidemics has yet been discovered. Food is short but no evidence of starvation has been seen.” The report also observed that statistics were hard to gather because of the lack of transportation, an issue that had plagued Allied Civil Affairs since the landing in Sicily in July 1943. However, typhoid and malaria were still being found among the populace in the provinces of Region IV. Typhoid was especially problematic in Frosinone province.²⁸

It was fortunate that health issues were not too serious because medical facilities and doctors were in short supply. Dealing with the limited number of injured and sick was an ordeal. A June 1944 Red Cross report noted, “in general, the hospitals and orphanages in the region are cheerfully preparing for reoccupancy but are in need of instruments and supplies.”²⁹ But this report was for the entirety of Region IV. The communities around the two defensive lines suffered a great deal more damage. In Frosinone province, those hospitals not destroyed by bombing or battle were stripped of much of their equipment. One Civil Affairs report noted fifteen hospitals in Frosinone, most of which were badly damaged, lacking supplies, or limited in some way. Hospitals in the western section of the province, at Alatri, Fiuggi, and Anagni, were functional with

²⁸ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/59, Public Health Sub-Commission, “Monthly Report for month of June” 7 July 1944, pp.1- 2.

²⁹ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/59, Red Cross Civilian War Relief, “Field Report No. 10 , Period June 15-30, 1944,” p. 1.

adequate staff and room for patients but all lacked electricity. The hospital in Sora, at the northern most part of the province, had 120 beds and was in good condition with an adequate staff. In the most devastated area, Pontecorvo was the only town that had a somewhat functional hospital with thirty beds but a less than adequate staff.³⁰ The lack of transport and the poor condition of the roads made functional hospitals inaccessible for Italian civilians, especially those needing the most critical care. In July, there were no ambulances available in Frosinone province and vehicles of any kind were a precious commodity. The lack of transport limited both assessments and the work of provincial public health officers.³¹

The lack of hospitals was only part of the problem. Doctors were also in short supply. Initial assessments listed that although the doctors in Frosinone at least “seem to be of good calibre and quite capable of carrying on their work,” there was a marked lack of doctors available in the area around Cassino. In the province of Littoria, many of the doctors had fled during the battle and had not returned by July 1944. As a result, “The general professional standard of the doctors in the province is not too high there being too many old men in responsible positions who shirk their responsibilities and too many young men who have not sufficient experience.” Rome province, by contrast, had a sufficient number of doctors.³²

The limited number of functioning hospitals and suitable doctors, coupled with the broken infrastructure and utter devastation, had the potential to pose serious medical

³⁰ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, “Public Health,” 1-31 July 1944, p. 5-6.

³¹ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, “Public Health,” 1-31 July 1944, p. 4.

³² NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, “Public Health,” 1-31 July 1944, pp. 3-4.

problems. Diseases such as typhoid and malaria were a risk because of broken water mains and sewer systems, while sexually transmitted diseases were a major problem in the area.³³ Estimates also suggested that small-pox and diphtheria epidemics were possible. Allied Civil Affairs, working with the Red Cross and Italian aid agencies, monitored these issues and worked to mitigate them by repairing broken infrastructure and ensuring civilians had adequate food and shelter.

Epidemics were largely avoided due to the hard work and cooperation of Allied and Italian personnel. Immunization campaigns for small-pox and diphtheria were initiated throughout the province of Frosinone.³⁴ The craters created by bombing and the diversion of rivers by the Germans meant there was a risk of a malarial epidemic. Steps were taken immediately, in conjunction with Italian officials, to control the mosquito population. In Littoria, between seventy to ninety cases of malaria were being reported in areas along the coast for the month of June. To mitigate further cases, the *Comitato Provinciale Antimalarico* set up squads of 200 men each to carry out larvacidal work. Ditches and canals were cleaned out and work began immediately on clearing obstructions “placed by the Germans in the large canal outlets” to allow the water to move freely and therefore prevent the mosquito population from thriving. There was a risk to the work, however. The Germans had heavily mined ditches, rivers, and canals in the construction of the defensive lines. The mines had to be found and removed before

³³ According to the Civil Affairs documents, some of the sexually transmitted diseases and health welfare problems were caused by rapes committed by French Colonial Troops. The Allies treated the rapes in a sexualized and racialized context. This arguably led to the post-war memory as expressed in De Sica’s *La Ciociara*. For more on the interpretation of the impact of Moroccan troops in Italy, see Robert G. Weisbord and Michael W. Honhart, “A Question of Race: Pope Pius XII and the ‘Coloured Troops’ in Italy,” *The Historian*, December 1, 2002, pp. 403-417.

³⁴ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/59, Public Health Sub-Commission, “Monthly Report for month of June” 7 July 1944, p. 2.

the work could continue. Many of these mines were wooden and undetectable with available equipment. Most areas had to be de-mined by hand. Approximately fifty members of the anti-malaria teams were injured by mines.³⁵

In July 1944, anti-malarial work had progressed substantially but the situation in Frosinone province was described as “endemic.” The problem was contained to the Zona di Garigliano around “the communes of the 5 Saints and Cassino” and the area around Arce, Ceprano, and San Giovanni Incarico. In the first area, which corresponded with the most devastated part of the province, it was noted that work was “impossible to accomplish due to the large number of mines and booby traps.” The area around Arce and Ceprano was considered far easier to deal with. In Region IV, the removal of landmines was considered instrumental to allow for “health, agriculture, and anti-malarial work.”³⁶ Anti-malarial work, normal agricultural activities, and reconstruction were all inhibited by the amount of landmines present in Region IV.

Most medical emergencies and epidemics were controlled by careful planning and administration. One of the more serious and contentious medical issues facing Allied Civil Affairs was sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies resulting from rape by French Colonial troops. The instances of rape and mistreatment were far more widespread than officials had anticipated. Reports from various communes in Region IV, especially in Frosinone and Rome province, indicated “that the number of Italian women raped and boys assaulted by the French Colonial troops is more than at first thought.” The

³⁵ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/59, Public Health Sub-Commission, “Monthly Report for month of June” 7 July 1944, p. 5.

³⁶ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/59, Public Health Sub-Commission, “Monthly Report for month of June” 7 July 1944, p. 5.

assaults resulted in number of unwanted pregnancies, necessitating abortions, and an increase in venereal diseases, including gonorrhea and syphilis. To deal with this problem, the Provincial Public Health Officer for the province of Frosinone recommended the creation of mobile clinic to deal with the problem.³⁷ It was noted that although there was a great deal of need for such mobile clinics, “many of the girls and women who were attacked are ashamed to be examined” and therefore were not be treated at all.³⁸

The efforts to clean up the area and treat the civilian population for disease were inhibited by a critical lack of transport, something that had been an issue for Civil Affairs officers since the Italian campaign began. Cars that had not been requisitioned or looted by the Germans in the Cassino sector were often taken by the fighting forces. A gasoline shortage exacerbated the lack of vehicles.³⁹ Despite the challenges and shortages that faced Allied Control Commission officers and Italian officials, it is important to highlight the cooperation between local Italian organizations, which were able to recruit Italian labour, and the Allied Control Commission.

Massive destruction in Frosinone province meant that progress was slow, despite commitment from Allied and Italian agencies. By December 1944, soup kitchens operated throughout Region IV⁴⁰, clothing was being distributed, diseases were being

³⁷ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/59, Public Health Sub-Commission, “Monthly Report for month of June” 7 July 1944, p. 6.

³⁸ NARA, RG 331, Box 5828, ACC 10400/163/29, “Public Health,” 1-31 July 1944, p. 3.

³⁹ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/59, Public Health Sub-Commission, “Monthly Report for month of June” 7 July 1944, p. 4.

⁴⁰ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/58, January 1945-March 1945, “Divisional Monthly Report, December 1944, Public Welfare,” p. 2.

managed through mobile clinics, and although the lack of housing was still considered a major problem, requests for lodging from the civilian population were slowly being filled. The extent of the homelessness, however, meant that many Italians had to find places to live. Some families moved into schoolhouses that were “badly required for education purposes.” One Allied Control Commission report noted that it did not seem that the problem would be solved anytime soon.⁴¹ Despite the lack of housing and the slow progress on recovery and reconstruction, Civil Affairs officers in the Public Welfare division delivered gifts to 24,000 Italian children in Region IV in December in an attempt to spread some Christmas cheer.⁴²

After seven months, Allied personnel and the Italians were frustrated by the slow progress and the massive amounts of problems caused by seven months of protracted war. The requirement for constant Allied supervision ensured that things went smoothly and avoided corruption but it caused tension between the Allies and the Italians. Once the Italian territory was liberated and conditions stabilized, resentment grew at such close supervision. Ration programs and the slow pace of reconstruction contributed to the sense of frustration. In January 1945, an Allied Control Commission report noted that although the Italians still regarded the Civil Affairs officers favorably, the Italian Press was beginning to print articles that were “anything but friendly.”⁴³

By the end of 1944, the situation was still dire for civilians living in the area. In December 1944, Major L.G. Norman, of the Civil Affairs Public Health Division, wrote

⁴¹ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/58, January 1945-March 1945, “Divisional Monthly Report, December 1944, Public Welfare,” p. 3.

⁴² NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/58, January 1945-March 1945, “Report on special charity xmas parties organized by this office, Appendix 1.”

⁴³ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/58, “Lazio Umbria Region Report,” January 1945, p. 2.

of the conditions in the town of Frosinone, which was not in the most devastated zone.

Norman wrote:

The general hygienic conditions of the town are bad. There is considerable war damage, and the people live in overcrowded, insanitary houses separated only by narrow dark passages often contaminated with human excreta. Three things require attention before any semblance of health can be brought to this town: 1) repairs to water mines 2) repairs to drainage system 3) repairs to houses.⁴⁴

As advisors, Allied Civil Affairs personnel could not assume primary responsibility for fixing such problems and had to deal with issues carefully. In this role, Civil Affairs officers were faced with sensitive issues exacerbated by cultural divides and differences in values. For example, in late January, Civil Affairs officers were sent to “give moral support and advice” to Italian authorities who were responsible for olive oil collection. The Civil Affairs documentation does not specify the true nature of the problem but alludes that the olive oil collection needed supervision because those responsible for the collection were corrupt. Ultimately, the Allies feared there would be no olive oil at all:

The extent of evasion of the law would hardly be believed by anyone who has not actually experienced it. Without those officers collections would have been virtually non-existent and it is more then (sic) likely that incidents of violence would have arisen.⁴⁵

January is two months later than the normal start time for olive oil harvesting and as of 23 January the collected amount was disappointing – only 908 tons. Without Allied supervision there might not have been any oil collected at all.

In their advisory capacity, Allied Civil Affairs officers were forced to stand by while the Italians did things their own way. In many cases, Allied advisors expressed

⁴⁴ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/58, “Note of Visit to Frosinone 29 Dec. 1944), 30 December 1944, p. 2.

⁴⁵ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/58, “Lazio Umbria Region Report,” January 1945, p. 2.

disbelief at how the Italians comported themselves: "... many Prefects are very dubious about the provisions of the law which they are trying to enforce and are reluctant to cooperate." Despite the emphasis on letting the Italians do for themselves, there is a clear frustration conveyed when the Italians made decisions that Allied personnel did not agree with. In January 1945, the Italian government increased the family retention of olive oil, contributing to the already limited amount of oil available. The writer of the report was clearly frustrated: "(the increase of the retention) seemed to answer none of the problems and merely increase (sic) many of them." The same report noted that "the lack of soap is universally grave." Soap was not distributed by the Allied Control Commission but by the Italian government, which the author of the report noted "must bear full responsibility for the delay which seems to be due to a failure to allocate soda."⁴⁶ Despite the frustration conveyed in the matters about olive oil and soap, the Allied Control Commission for region IV had no major crises to report for January 1945. The lack of perceived crises likely made the issues about oil and soap seem more acute. Despite the improved situation, the author acknowledged that it was still difficult for the Italians:

... But behind it all there are two ominous questions. How do they live? How long can they stand it? The ration is not enough, prices are at a tremendous level, many things are unobtainable and, sooner or later, became necessities. The majority must be living on capital or by dishonest means, and those two questions are for over (sic) in the minds of Allied Officers. The answers, insofar as any reaction is concerned, may well depend on future events in the north.⁴⁷

The process of recovering and reconstructing an area as damaged as Region IV could not be completed overnight. For months after the war finally moved on, Italians were subject

⁴⁶ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, Lazio Umbria Region APO 394, January 1945, report, p. 2.

⁴⁷ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/58, "Lazio Umbria Region Report," January 1945, p. 2.

to strict rationing and control; electricity, food, and clothing were all controlled, rationed, and handed out by Allied agencies. And for much of that time it was under the control or supervision of foreign soldiers who were initially regarded as liberators. As immediate concerns and dangers were taken care of, the Italians were anxious to move on with their lives and take back control. But things were still quite dire in the area. In January 1945, the Allies were still supporting many projects to build bridges, restore infrastructure, and demine the landscape.⁴⁸

Despite such tension caused by a difference in values, the cooperation between the Allies and the Italians was instrumental in ensuring that no medical disasters were suffered in the months immediately after the war. Allied Civil Affairs delivered a great deal of resources and personnel to Region IV at a time when Allied Military Government and Allied Forces were penetrating deeper into north Italy. Although AMG and the Allied Forces would not face the complete and utter destruction in the north like at Cassino, they faced similar challenges as they pursued a German army intent on scorching the earth and more and making the Italians suffer. Despite the limited resources and personnel, the cooperation of local populations and Italian administration enabled the Allied Control Commission to provide assistance and resources that enabled the Italians to begin the reconstruction process in the aftermath of war. When the war ended in April 1945, a great deal of work remained to fully rehabilitate the towns and villages in the Cassino sector.

* * *

On 15 March 1945, on the first anniversary of the bombing of the town, Ivanoe Bonomi and the mayor of Cassino presided at a ceremony initiating the rebirth of

⁴⁸ NARA, RG 331, Box 5832, 10400/163/58, "Lazio Umbria Region Report," January 1945, p. 9.

Cassino. Cassino, in its devastated state, was considered a symbol of the reconstruction of Italy.⁴⁹ On the same day, the first stone was laid in the reconstruction of the Abbey of Monte Cassino. By July 1945, a town plan was presented in which the town of Cassino was re-organized. The scheme called for large open green spaces and a complete overhaul. The plan was abandoned, however, when locals preferred to rebuild on the site of their old houses and the local administration was not keen on constructing new streets to fit in the new town plan.⁵⁰ Reconstruction on the Abbey and the town of Cassino endured into the mid-1950s. The Abbey was re-opened in October 1957. In October 1964, Pope Paul VI consecrated the rebuilt Basilica and proclaimed St. Benedict as the patron saint of Europe.

Although Italian civilians in the Cassino sector looked to the future as they rebuilt their towns and communities, the Benedictine community dwelled on the past, keeping the controversy about the bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino at the forefront of the official memory of the war. Visitors to the ruins of the Abbey were provided with a booklet that claimed the Germans only occupied the ruins after it was bombed, concluding that the Allies unnecessarily destroyed it.⁵¹ Harold Tittman, assistant to Myron Taylor,⁵² responded to the booklet by sending a letter to Monsignor Domenico Tardini, Undersecretary of State for the Vatican, noting the voices of both the American Government and the Vatican were missing from the booklet. Tittman attached a rebuttal,

⁴⁹ Assunta Pelliccio e Michela Cigola, *Cassino: Segni e disegni di un passato recente* (Cassino: Francesco Ciolfi Editore, 2010), p. 96.

⁵⁰ “Historical Guide to the Poli-Media Staging” for the *Historiale* of Cassino, p. 68.

⁵¹ TNA, FO 371/60797, Letter to Monsignor Tardini from Harold Tittman, 13 October 1946, Vatican, File #33, 1946.

⁵² Myron Taylor was an American ambassador to the Vatican throughout the 1940s.

reminding Tardini that Kesselring's promise was to keep out of the 300-meter zone around the Abbey. Tittman noted that the Germans were in fact utilizing territory within that zone. Mortars and machine gun emplacements were placed close to the Abbey and ammunition was stored in caves within the zone. Tittman also noted that the Abbot could in no way know that the Germans were not within the 300-meter zone during the battle.⁵³

Despite Tittman's protests, the Benedictine community continued to blame the Allies for the unnecessary bombing of the Abbey. Field Marshal Alexander, whether or not he felt his forces were responsible, offered to provide 100 Catholic German prisoners of war to assist in clearing the debris in late 1945. Polish General Władysław Anders also offered a contingent of Polish soldiers. Allied command in Rome complained they could not get a reply from the Benedictine community about whether they wanted the assistance or not. Abbot Gregorio Diamare was hostile to the request, arguing

... that the destruction of the Monastery was a totally unnecessary piece of vandalism, as the Germans had never occupied the monastery at all previous to its destruction, and that if the Allied Forces thought that if they could repair the harm they had done by just clearing the ruins, they were mistaken.⁵⁴

In addition, the Abbot noted that the Abbey became property of the Italian state in 1878 and therefore the Benedictine community had no right to plan for its reconstruction in the first place. In spite of this, the monks employed local Italian labour to remove the shells, mines, and grenades from the debris. The Abbot was informed that this was dangerous

⁵³ TNA, FO 371/60797, Letter to Monsignor Tardini from Harold Tittman, 13 October 1946, Vatican, File #33, 1946.

⁵⁴ TNA, WO 204/5735, From Lt. Colonel Count de Salis, Advanced Allied Force Headquarters, "Monte Cassino," 7 January 1946, Folder: "Rebuilding of Monte Cassino" de Salis was paraphrasing the comments of the Abbot.

without technical assistance; Allied advisors expressed concern about improper storage of the moved explosives.⁵⁵

In addition to distributing pamphlets blaming the Allies for the act of vandalism, the Abbot also commissioned a monk to write the history of the monastery during the war. The history argued that the Monastery was never occupied by the Germans before 15 February 1944 and “the destruction was therefore not a military necessity, and completely unjustified.” Lieutenant-Colonel Count Peter De Salis expressed his concern that the other side of the story would not be told before the Abbot published his account and he counseled that a full investigation must be undertaken to present to the Abbot before he was able to finish his publication.⁵⁶

In August 1949, the Allies commissioned an inquiry to discover the circumstances that led to the bombing, who ordered it, and whether the Germans were, in fact, using the Abbey for military purposes beforehand. The report established that the Abbey, in addition to other religious buildings in Italy, was on the list of monuments that were to be protected so long as military necessity did not warrant their destruction. The author of the report, Major F. Jones, carried out a detailed study of all evidence he could find in London archives including all of the evidence provided by then British Minister to the Holy See, Sir D’Arcy Osborne. Major Jones found no evidence that the Germans occupied the Abbey before 15 February 1944. In fact, he provided further evidence to support that idea that even Osborne had doubts about the evidence he had argued in

⁵⁵ TNA, WO 204/5735, From Lt. Colonel Count de Salis, Advanced Allied Force Headquarters, “Monte Cassino,” 7 January 1946, Folder: “Rebuilding of Monte Cassino”

⁵⁶ TNA, WO 204/5735, From Lt. Colonel Count de Salis, Advanced Allied Force Headquarters, “Monte Cassino,” 7 January 1946, Folder: “Rebuilding of Monte Cassino.” De Salis asked the Abbot a number of questions that caused him to doubt that the monk knew if the Germans had occupied the Abbey or not.

February 1944.⁵⁷ The Jones report also revealed that there was a clear lack of documentation from high level command, including General Mark Clark and Field Marshal Alexander, to justify the decision to bomb the Abbey. Much of the intelligence gathered in the aftermath of the bombing, including a statement from an Indian observation post report that observed upwards of 200 Germans exiting the Abbey, was not substantiated in the Indian Division's records.⁵⁸

The fact that Jones could not find substantive proof that the Germans had occupied the Abbey does not prove the Germans were not using the Abbey or its surrounding territory for defence. Clearly, the fight to break the Gustav and Hitler Line centered on Monastery Hill. The capture of the Abbey in May 1944 by the Polish Corps made the German position in the Cassino sector untenable and they were forced to withdraw. The breaking of the Gustav and Hitler Lines led to the liberation of Rome and a German delaying withdrawal north of Rome. The Abbey was a key part of the German defence at Cassino regardless of whether they were using the building. The German army made the choice to defend at Cassino, causing much grief and destruction to local inhabitants. Allied Armies, Italy made the choice to bomb the Abbey of Montecassino, rightly or wrongly. Hindsight, and a great deal of investigation in the aftermath, shows that there is no substantive proof that the Germans actually were in the Abbey before 15 February. However, there is little substantive proof that the Germans were *not* in the Abbey. Despite the lack of evidence, the bombing of the monastery is the most prevalent story of the history of the war in the area.

⁵⁷ TNA, CAB 106/699, "Report on the Bombing of Monte Cassino Abbey, 15 February 1944," p. 39.

⁵⁸ TNA, CAB 106/699, "Report on the Bombing of Monte Cassino Abbey, 15 February 1944," p. 30.

For the communities and people who lived in the Cassino sector, the war meant so much more than the destruction of the Abbey.⁵⁹ The towns within the Allied Control Commission devastated area were largely flattened by aerial bombardment; most had to be rebuilt, brick by brick, in the years after the war. Bombing was a fact of life between October 1943 and May 1944; it was not an extraordinary event. The extraordinary events in the Cassino sector include the Allied desire to help pick up the pieces through the Civil Affairs organization, Allied and Italian cooperation to restore a minimum level of subsistence in the most devastated areas, the rape of women by Moroccan troops, and the sacrifice of Allied soldiers in the effort to liberate Italy. These voices, however, are muted by the international controversy surrounding the bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino.

The story of the cooperation between Allied officials and Italian organizations in rebuilding and reconstructing the area is virtually absent from popular memory as are Allied efforts to provide for civilians after the battle moved on. In that case, the German message that the Allies were barbarians⁶⁰ for destroying the Abbey has permeated local memory to an extent. Many different Civil Affairs reports outline complaints from civilians indicating that although they regarded the Allies as liberators, they could not understand why they were bombing their cities. This may be attributed to the inability to

⁵⁹ Anecdotal evidence supports this. The author spoke to many locals on her visits to the Cassino sector. When I asked a local woman, named Adele, from Roccasecca how the bombing affected her and her family, Adele thought I meant the bombing of the Roccasecca train station. Even that was not perceived as a big event for Adele and her family, who escaped the town to live in caves nearby during the winter of 1943-44.

⁶⁰ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, "1944," "Kesselring's Statement on the Bombing of Monte Cassino and Castel Gandolfo," 17 February 1944, Outline of News and Enemy Propaganda. The German propaganda message called the Americans and British "gangsters" and "barbarians" for their cruel and unnecessary bombing of the Abbey.

communicate the higher strategic aims of the military campaign to the civilian population and speaks to the tension between military necessity that led to the bombing and the desire to protect innocent civilians. The frustrations felt by Civil Affairs officers and local Italians at the slow pace of welfare and aid in the last months of 1944 and early 1945 contributes to a less than positive view. However, Allied Civil Affairs documents that draw information from Italian and Allied sources to make assessments indicate that the Allies were doing their best to restore civil society.⁶¹ The tension between helping the people and believing that the Italians would be best served by helping themselves caused frustration.

There are certainly negative stories surrounding Allied intervention in the Cassino sector. In addition to the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino, the other moderately well-known story of the Second World War in the Cassino sector is the atrocities committed by Moroccan troops against local women. The story of the rapes was popularized in Vittorio De Sica's 1960 movie, *La ciociara*,⁶² for which Sophia Loren won the Academy Award for Best Actress. From a local perspective, however, atrocities committed by French Colonial troops against the population do not figure prominently in the memory of the war despite their impact. In fact, many of the localized memories of the war contrast with the official narrative that is critical of Allied forces for bombing and for atrocities committed against Italian women. Local memories, displayed throughout

⁶¹ This dissertation has only skimmed the surface of available documentation regarding the cooperation between Allied Civil Affairs personnel and the Italian people in restoring all facets of society. Thousands of boxes of Civil Affairs documents remain unopened at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington, D.C. Despite this, the documents accessed so far paint a very compelling story about the tension, both positive and negative, that developed between the Italians and Allied personnel.

⁶² In English, the film is known as *Two Women*. *La ciociara* is the name of the town, in the central mountains, that Sophia Loren is from. It is also a local regional name for the hill area in the centre of the peninsula.

the rebuilt towns and villages of the Cassino sector, honour the memory and sacrifice of Allied soldiers in the fight to liberate foreign soil.

There is wide disparity in local memory of the war. Local commemorative activity reflects, not the story of the region as a whole, but the story in the immediate vicinity. The memory of the war varies for each community and in some cases, for each individual. Despite German scorched-earth policy, some Italians remember that German soldiers had the capacity for kindness. Lieutenant-Colonel Julius Schlegel's memory is honoured in the *Historiale* museum for saving the treasures of the Abbey of Montecassino. Yet for most of the communities that exist in the former devastated area, the saving of the treasures and the subsequent bombing of the Abbey is not the most prevalent memory despite the fact that the rebuilt Abbey can be seen from all points from the valley below.

Commemoration activities generally focus on the local story and often this relates to the success or failure of Allied troops in battle. Although the national day of liberation is on 25 April, most communities have designated their own day to commemorate the war experience. For example, at Coreno Ausonio, the local population celebrates the third Sunday in May in honour of the breakthrough of French Colonial troops in that area. The commemoration at San Angelo in Theodice ends with the throwing of a wreath of flowers into the Gari River in memory of those soldiers of the 36th Texas Division who perished in their attempt to cross the river on the night of 20 January but also in memory of the day when American troops finally succeeded in crossing the river.⁶³

⁶³ Daria Frezza, "Cassino 1934-44: la memoria," p. 15 found at http://www.dalvolutornoacassino.it/DOC/Daria_Frezza_La_memoria.pdf last accessed 25 October 2012. Frezza conducted interviews with locals in ongoing research into the war in Cassino.

In Vallerotonda, the memory of the war is closely associated with the massacre of the Cardito refugees in December 1943. For the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre, a local initiative, led by the mayor, raised funds and built a monument on the site of the massacre. The monument is not easy to visit; the road is steep, one lane, and not well signed. At the entrance to the monument park is a French gun. The monument lists the names of the forty-two refugees who were killed in December 1943. Although it is important that the monument exists on the site of the massacre, it is not easily accessible to the public or to tourists who visit the area. The massacre of the Cardito refugees remains a mystery and is not well known in Italian or English literature. It remains a story remembered and commemorated by locals but little evidence has been found in archives to provide further clues to why the massacre was carried out and by whom. It is clear from survivor testimony that it was carried out by German soldiers but no evidence has been found to reveal why. Despite the widespread Allied investigation into German atrocities, reference to the massacre of the Cardito refugees has not been found.



The monument, built in 1993 by the Mayor of Collelungo, in memory of the forty-two Cardito refugees who were killed by German soldiers in December 1943. Inset: plaque with names and poem. (Author photo)

international monument of the Second World War that draws both pilgrims and veterans from Germany, Austria, Canadian, the United Kingdom, the United States, and New Zealand, and others from all over the world. Veterans return to the site of the most difficult and enduring battle of the war and to visit the graves of their dead comrades. Polish pilgrims flock to Montecassino in great numbers to visit the Abbey and attend mass in the Polish cemetery that is laid out on the slope leading up to Snakeshead Ridge. The entire cemetery is built of white stone that shines bright in the afternoon sun. Behind the cemetery is a Polish Amazon Shield in the same stone, flanked on all sides by Polish cedars. After the war, four monuments were built in the high ground where the Polish Corps finally captured Monastery Hill. Permission to build the monuments was reportedly received from the Vatican, although Allied forces were later informed that the

Vatican had no jurisdiction to do this because the Abbey was officially the property of the Italian government.

Despite the fact that the monastery has become an international and national war monument, it seems clear that the Benedictine community remained bitter about its destruction for decades after the war. Less than a decade after it was built, the 5th Kresowa monument, erected by a German prisoner of war work party, was in dire need of repair. The foundation had not been dug properly and was failing. A Monte Cassino Fund was set up to support repairs on the monument but the Polish nationals who were petitioning for the release of the funds could not obtain them from the British Treasury Solicitor. The reasons were mostly due to the Cold War although the Abbot of Montecassino refused to assist in the process.⁶⁴ The Treasury Solicitor required approval for the repairs before he released the funds and the petitioners were hesitant to do this through diplomatic channels lest the Polish Government attempt to seize the funds.⁶⁵ The monument was not repaired in time for the tenth anniversary celebration.

The 5th Kresowa Division monument was only one of the memorials located in ground behind the Abbey. The 3rd Carpathian Division monument, located at Point 593 marks the pinnacle of Snakeshead Ridge. When American veteran Harold Bond returned to Cassino in the early 1960s, he was struck by the state of disrepair of the cemetery and the monument compared to the pristine, newly built Abbey of Montecassino:

(The) road up to the monastery was well paved and had been kept in excellent condition, but the road leading down to the (Polish) cemetery was badly

⁶⁴ The Abbot did not disapprove of the repairs but he offered no positive offer of assistance. His correspondence indicated that he was displeased that there were monuments to the Polish at all.

⁶⁵ TNA, TS 46/143, Zylinski and Co, Solicitors to the Treasury Solicitor, re: Monte Cassino Fund, 9 September 1953.

ruted ... It got even worse as we approached the burial ground. Large rocks had tumbled onto it, and in places earth had been washed away. Parts of it looked impassable ... it must have fallen into ruin shortly after being built. We passed the dead in their neat rows, each grave marked by a simple cross. The whole cemetery was surrounded by a stone wall. The crosses had weathered badly and in most cases it was nearly impossible to read the names. Bushes had started to grow up again in the cleared ground between the graves. In two places the stone wall had broken down, and the rocks lay tumbled in a heap ... (The monument), only ten years ago, must have been impressive: white and clean with simple dignity; but now the stones had cracked and in some places tumbled altogether. Weeds were growing out between the cracks, and loose stones made walking hazardous ...⁶⁶

Although Poland's situation in the Cold War explains some of the lack of attention paid to the Polish monument, it seems apparent that the Benedictine community did not look favorably on those who perished in the attempt to liberate Monastery Hill. Since the end of the Cold War, groups of Polish Catholics have made the pilgrimage to the Abbey and the Polish cemetery. Visible from the Abbey property, the cemetery and its access road are well maintained. The Polish monuments are no longer accessible to the public; visitors require special permission from the monastery to visit them. When the attempt was made to release the funds to repair the Polish monuments, the Abbot of Montecassino was reluctant to offer his assistance but did note that he had no objections to the repair of the monuments.⁶⁷

In the 1960s, the Abbey was still publicly critical of the Allied bombing of the monastery. This attitude may explain why the Abbot was reluctant to offer his assistance

⁶⁶ Bond, *Return to Cassino*, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁷ TNA, TS 46/143, Zylinski and Co, Solicitors to the Treasury Solicitor, re: Monte Cassino Fund, 20 October 1953 (IMGP6340)

to those attempting to repair the Polish monuments.⁶⁸ Peter Stursberg, a Canadian wartime correspondent, visited the Abbey and was struck by the attitude of the monks:

I tried to find the crypt when I visited the monastery of Monte Cassino in the early spring of 1962 ... Dom Luigi, a benevolent, bespectacled monk, was our guide ... Before he led us into the monastery, above whose gates was written in large letters 'PAX', Dom Luigi made it clear that the Benedictine order regarded the bombing as a 'war crime.' He gave us a booklet put out by the order, which asserted that no Germans were in the monastery before the bombing and reprinted a facsimile of a declaration to this effect, signed by the Venerable Gregario Diamare, the abbot at the time.⁶⁹

The booklet implicating the Allies in this “war crime” remained part of the guided tour of the Abbey for decades after the war ended.

The attitude of those who inhabited the valleys below the Abbey of Montecassino toward veteran soldiers and the dead, however, was much different. Harold Bond wrote of his experience with a local Italian who operated a campground. All over the grounds were springs that emptied into craters left into the ground by Allied bombing nearly twenty years ago. The Italian shared some of his personal story, telling Bond and his family that his house had been destroyed and his land pock-marked by nearly one hundred bombs. The Italian expressed no surprise when Bond shared that he had fought at Cassino, “Yes, yes, you all come back.”⁷⁰ Although the stream of veterans slows as time passes, Italian locals continue to greet veterans from all nations enthusiastically, offering to conduct private battlefield tours for them. Many of these Italians display a

⁶⁸ Of course one cannot forget the Cold War that may also make the Abbot reluctant to support nationals from a then Communist country. However, considering the hostile attitude toward the Allies for the bombing, it seems clear that this was at least a factor.

⁶⁹ Peter Stursberg, *The Sound of War: Memoirs of a CBC Correspondent* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, Inc., 1993), p. 168.

⁷⁰ Bond, *Return to Cassino*, p. 6.

great knowledge and interest in the battle but are hesitant to talk about the personal experiences of them and their families.⁷¹

Pope John Paul II shared the view that the Allied, and especially Polish sacrifice, was necessary. In May 1994, for the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the battles, the Pope delivered an address at the Polish cemetery at Montecassino in which he connected Allied sacrifice with the destruction of the Abbey. In his address, he argued that the destruction was a necessary side effect of winning the war and defending Europe. From the ashes created in battle, a new Europe emerged. For the Pope, the battle of Montecassino represented

the clashing of two “projects”: one, both in the East and in the West, aiming at *uprooting Europe from its Christian past* linked to her Patrons, and in particular to St. Benedict, and the other, *striving to defend the Christian tradition of Europe and the “European spirit.”* The fact that the Abbey of Monte Cassino was destroyed has a symbolic value. Christ said: “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit (Jn 12:24). Evidently the ancient Abbey of Monte Cassino had to be destroyed *so that a new life for all of Europe could rise from its ruins.*⁷²

Pope John Paul II’s views are not widely held on an official scale in the Cassino sector. Many of the official projects planned for the sixtieth anniversary, including the opening of a new museum, the *Historiale*, that would tell the whole story, maintained that the bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino was a mistake.

⁷¹ I have met a number of contacts in the Cassino area, both local Italians and children of veterans who study the terrain, the battles, and the secondary literature to provide guided tours for veterans and their families. In many cases now, the visitors are the children of veterans who want to understand the battle of a father who passed away. These Italians collect artifacts from the battlefield and often encounter unexploded ordnance in the hills when on tour. When I have asked these individuals about the personal experiences of their families, they are reluctant to share and sometimes express wonder at why I would be interested.

⁷² Pope John Paul II, “Message of the Holy Father John Paul II for the Fiftieth Anniversary of Monte Cassino,” 5 May 1994, found at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1996/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_05051994_50th-montecassino_en.html last accessed 7 March 2013.

Among the large-scale projects, like the opening of the *Historiale* museum, many local commemorative activities were planned in the Cassino sector for the sixtieth anniversary in 2003, 2004, and 2005. In 2003, one of the first anniversary celebrations commemorated the December 1943 destruction of Mignano-Monte Lungo and San Pietro. San Pietro was awarded the gold medal of military valour from President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi. A few days later, the 36th Texas Division inaugurated its monument at the site and held its first annual ceremony.⁷³ Sixtieth anniversary activities carried on through 2004 and into 2005, with ceremonies held in places on dates significant to the local experience. A ceremony was held in Cassino on 15 February and 15 March, in memory of the bombing of the Abbey and the subsequent destruction of the city. In San Angelo in Theodice, a ceremony was held on 16 May in commemoration of the final fording of the Gari River by Allied troops. A peace bell was unveiled at the same time, depicting the Texas Division's bloody attempt at crossing the river in January 1944 and placed in honour of the soldiers who died there. Ironically, the north side of the bell that faces the Abbey in the distance depicts a ruined town, in the shadow of the restored Abbey. The text, in English and Italian, states that "The sun shines again." The contrast between the rebuild Abbey and the destroyed town on a bell that honours the sacrifice of Allied soldiers is apparent.

Even for the major anniversaries, the ceremonies are based on local experiences and do not commemorate the bombing of the Abbey. The Allies remain, in the eyes of the local people, liberators despite efforts of the Benedictine community of the Abbey of Montecassino. For the local inhabitants, Allied soldiers who fought and died on Italian

⁷³ The ceremony with 36th Texas Division would be repeated year after year in San Pietro.

soil suffered more than they who had the ability to rebuild and live out their lives. The local experience could not be removed from the war. Moreover, most of the local plaques, funded by local Italian money, regard Allied soldiers as liberators and not the “barbarians”⁷⁴ who bombed the Abbey of Montecassino.



The peace bell at San Angelo in Theodice. The other side of the bell depicts the soldiers of the 36th Texas Division dying in the water when they attempted to cross the Bloody River. (Photo courtesy of Ashley Ferguson, 2012).

For the survivors and their families in the Cassino sector, the Second World War was a shared experience. Local Italian commemorations are inclusive, involving Allied veterans, German and Austrian veterans, Italian civilians, and local Italian dignitaries. Many of the monuments, including the monument for the 36th Texas Division at San Pietro and the peace bell at San Angelo in Theodice, were built entirely by or with the assistance of Italian donors. In 2009, for the 65th anniversary, the town of Pontecorvo was the site of a commemorative ceremony that celebrated the Canadian breakthrough on the

⁷⁴ German propaganda named the Allies as barbarians for bombing the monastery. That message seems to have been adopted by the Benedictine community.

Hitler Line. The ceremony centered on the unveiling of a plaque, paid for by Canadian money, that commemorated Canadian efforts to liberate the people of Pontecorvo. Held on a very hot afternoon on 23 May (the anniversary of the Canadian breakthrough), the ceremony was well attended by a contingent of Canadian veterans, locals from Pontecorvo and the Cassino area, and local Italian dignitaries. Roberto Molle, a local lawyer and amateur historian, attended with his Willys Jeep and was instrumental in having the plaque erected in a prominent public space overlooking the Hitler Line.⁷⁵ After the ceremony, Molle and Gianni Blassi, another local amateur historian, took the veterans on a battlefield tour by bus.⁷⁶ The locals are grateful for the Allied sacrifice. Their efforts and activities in helping aged veterans visit old battlefield sites are indicative of this. The local memory that honours the sacrifice of Allied soldiers differs greatly from that portrayed from the perspective of the Abbey of Montecassino and the *Historiale* museum, opened for the 60th anniversary.

In 2005, the *Historiale* museum was opened as part of the anniversary activities. The city of Cassino and the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Heritage and culture collaborated on the museum project with the intention of

... telling the story ... to bring to life the events of the Second World War, to give structure and meaning to a past which remains a living experience in the memory of the local population, to make history topical, and to transform history into a visible and sensory experience which will overcome the usual black and white images which people usually use to imagine these events.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ The author attended the ceremony and was involved in initial drafting of the message in English.

⁷⁶ The effort of the locals to support Allied veterans is astounding. In 2010, Gianni Blassi was involved in constructing a road to take veterans of the Canadian-American First Special Service Force back up Monte Difensa.

⁷⁷ “Historical Guide to the Poli-Media Staging” for the *Historiale* of Cassino, p. 7.

Using the design expertise of Carlo Rambaldi,⁷⁸ the *Historiale* storyline attempted to nationalize and even internationalize the experience of the local war experience by contextualizing it within the greater context of a twentieth-century Europe in crisis. On a local level, the message focused on the Benedictine Abbey and its unnecessary destruction. In the introduction to the museum guidebook, Gianpiero Perri writes:

The Abbey of Montecassino itself was also rebuilt after having been needlessly destroyed – a destruction which is highly symbolic of total war, an emblem of destruction, of chaos, and the crisis which shook the whole of Europe in the last century.⁷⁹

Room 5 in the museum, called “The Symbol Violated,” is devoted to the destruction of the Abbey. The video of the bombing is shown as part of the exhibit and historian Matthew Parker is quoted as saying, “The destruction of a treasure of civilization like Montecassino resounds throughout the world as the height of stupidity and the barbarism of war.”⁸⁰ Also highlighted in the museum is the German effort to save the treasures of the Abbey, “the Anglo-American tactic of carpet bombing (which) razed all towns and villages to the ground,” and the “Testimonies of Hell,” the rapes of women by Moroccan troops.

The German choice to defend the area and the massacre at Cardito are not considered although the storyline does concede that the people suffered because they were caught between a “the anvil of German resistance and the hammer of Allied attacks.” Room 6 refers to German round-ups in the area but does not go into detail about the consequences that Italians suffered for avoiding the round ups. The overall message

⁷⁸ Carlo Rambaldi was an Italian special effects artist who worked on a number of Hollywood films, including *E.T.* He died in August 2012 at the age of 86.

⁷⁹ “Historical Guide to the Poli-Media Staging,” p. 7.

⁸⁰ “Historical Guide to the Poli-Media Staging,” p. 27.

of the *Historiale* supports the Abbey's message that the Allies were barbarians for bombing the Abbey and, in the case of French Colonial Troops at least, for raping Italian women.⁸¹ The last room of the museum highlights the message of "The New Europe" and features an interpretive dance. The museum is guided and professes to be neither a museum nor a traditional war museum with artifacts but a "multimedia artistic and visual presentation."⁸²

In addition to the *Historiale*, a memory route was created for the sixtieth anniversary that attempted to tie together the local bits of history. The *gran percorso della memoria* was marked by an artistic wooden sign that features a broken bicycle that symbolizes the utter destruction of everything in the area. The memory route, also created under the artistic guidance of Carlo Rambaldi, attempts to tie together the experiences of thirty-six different locations and makes the *Historiale* one of its stopping points. At each site, a short word about the specific experience is given and the structure points the visitor to the next point on the route. The signpost at Vallerotonda refers to the massacre of the Cardito refugees and the visitor is led to the Vallerotonda First World War monument. The names of those massacred by the Germans in December 1943 have been added to that monument. No clear reference is made to the memorial site of the actual massacre. The *percorso della memoria* is not consistent. Not all areas are clearly marked and some of the towns named on the wooden sign do not actually have a wooden sign or reference to the *percorso*. In addition, the wooden plaques were not meant to last indefinitely and are already beginning to rot from weather.

⁸¹ The author has not visited the museum for a few years although it was closed for a few different periods since it was opened in 2005. The guides worked from a script.

⁸² "Historical Guide to the Poli-Media Staging," p. 7.



A signpost for the Percorso della Memoria (Memory Lane) (Author photo).

In contrast to the *Historiale* and the *gran percorso della memoria*, the San Pietro site museum, opened in 2009, tells only the local story. The museum and the restoration of the San Pietro site was the initiative of the town of San Pietro. The site, however, seems to integrate the need for a modern museum to appease veterans and tourists to the area, but also to integrate the Allied story with the local story of the town. The opening of the San Pietro museum was another stage in local efforts to revitalize the area as a memorial park. Old San Pietro was left abandoned after the war and until the Texas monument was placed there in 2003, the ruins of the old town were left to decay.

San Pietro is a unique site in the Cassino sector as the local inhabitants decided not to rebuild their town after the war and the ruins themselves stand as a monument to the suffering of the people. Those who did not choose to move to locations abroad

worked to build a new town closer to the main highway.⁸³ The old town was left to decay after the war; nature took over the ruins and structures. Much of the town, like the basilica, crumbled further under the weight of neglect. In the town square, overlooking the valley below, a monument to 36th Texas Division was built on the sixtieth anniversary to commemorate the achievements of the division but also the liberation of the town. The ceremonies are well attended by local populations and survivors from the war.

Unlike the narrative at the *Historiale* and the Abbey, local commemorations at San Pietro celebrate shared suffering between Allied soldiers and the local populations. At the December 2010 ceremony, San Pietro Infine Mayor Fabio Vecchiarino noted that the citizens of Monte Cassino and San Pietro “are forever grateful” for the sacrifice of the 36th Division and other Allied forces.⁸⁴ Although San Pietro suffered the same fate as the Abbey, Cassino town, and other towns in the Cassino sector, the narrative of the museum and the site commemorates the experiences of the Texas Division and the local population together and does not attempt to lay blame.

The San Pietro museum, like the *Historiale*, is a guided visit. The visit begins at a model of the earth with a fountain timeline that runs from the earth. The fountain signifies the idea that the town of San Pietro existed since the beginning of time and that life in the village was simple. That world of San Pietro, however, was completely destroyed in December 1943, never to exist again. The visitor is then led into through a mock-up of a cave to signify how the people of San Pietro were forced to flee into caves

⁸³ Ironically, as one of the local inhabitants has told me, the “new” town was built on the location of the old town. The town destroyed during the war was not the original site of San Pietro.

⁸⁴ Brenda Benner, “WWII heroes of 36th ID honored in Italy,” 36th Infantry Division website found at <http://www.agd.state.tx.us/36id/storyquery.asp?ID=21> accessed 26 October 2012.

for the winter as they were trapped between two armies. Life in the cave is described and the dark passageway only hints at the desperation the local civilians must have felt. The visit then transitions into another room where a version of John Huston's *The Battle of San Pietro*, edited to include the local story of the people of San Pietro, is shown. After the museum, the visitor can walk the old town or the network of caves dug by local inhabitants to survive the winter of 1943-44. The real caves enhance the museum experience and tell more of the story. Human-sized holes carved into the floors show how wives and mothers hid their sons and husbands from German patrols. The San Pietro museum reflects what has been the norm in the Cassino sector since the end of the war. The local experiences are very much integrated with the sacrifice of Allied divisions that fought in that area. Although it may not be clear why their town had to be destroyed, the people of San Pietro and other communities in the Cassino sector celebrate the shared experience and suffering of Allied soldiers and themselves.

The memory of the war in the Cassino sector is twofold. From an international perspective, the Allied bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino and the town of Cassino is central to the story. Secondary literature, including the memoirs of General Mark Clark and others, are critical of the decision to bomb the Abbey.⁸⁵ The message that the Allies were culpable in the bombing started with German propaganda messages immediately after the bombing and was propagated by the Benedictine monastery community and Allied commanders after the war. The controversy over the bombing – whether the Allies bombed it unnecessarily or not – will not be solved. There is just no evidence available that proves the case either way. On an international and even national Italian

⁸⁵ The focus is most generally on the bombing of the Abbey and does not consider the wide scale bombing of the towns in the sector.

level, the focus on Allied responsibility overshadows other, revealing aspects of the war in Italy such as the Allied desire to care for Italian civilians through the Civil Affairs organization and the tension felt by Allied commanders between the need to win the war and the need to protect Italian civilians.

For the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of the Italian civilians who lived through it, the memory of the war is as variable as the individuals themselves. In fact, the real local story is impossible to commemorate on a larger scale because of the variety of versions present. Arguably, those who were refugees in the Abbey of Montecassino when it was bombed, or who lost loved ones, may be equally venomous about the bombing. For some, especially the Benedictine community, the bombing of the sacred Abbey was the worst part of the war. In contrast, the predominant memory among locals, based on their monuments and local customs, focuses on the sacrifice of Allied soldiers. Monuments built by the people, such as the peace bell at Sant' Angelo in Theodice and the museum at San Pietro, consider Allied soldiers as liberators. Although local monuments do acknowledge the suffering of civilians, missing from the story of the war is the cooperation between Italian personnel and Allied officials. This cooperation meant that major disease and disaster were avoided. Much of the heavy lifting was done by the Italians themselves due to a shortage in Allied personnel.

Chapter 5:
The meaning behind a massacre:
Trials and Tribulations in Marzabotto, 1944-2006

The visitor to Monte Sole national park is greeted with picturesque countryside that is utterly tranquil and peaceful. An individual unaware of the brutal history of the area could easily be convinced that the rolling hills, planted with golden wheat that sways gently in the breeze, had been deliberately left for cultivation. At a crossroads at the top of the hill near *Il Poggiolo*, the visiting centre and the Scuola di Pace, one encounters brown signs pointing to the *Area del Memoriale*, Casaglia, and San Martino. If one follows these signs, the realization of the brutal reality of what happened so many years ago becomes clearer. At random points throughout the park, the visitor finds the remnants of churches and cemeteries, all in varying states of decay, and plaques, in Italian and English, revealing the secrets of the events that happened there so long ago. The steep road up the mountain to Caprara and Casaglia and the trail to the summit of Monte Sole has been improved since the park was inaugurated in the 1980s but traveling it still requires caution. Two-way traffic, even by Italian standards, is not possible. When faced with oncoming traffic, the driver must relent and pull off to the side or reverse to a safe spot to continue the journey. Those who make the trip up the switch-backed narrow road, either by foot or by car, are rewarded with the remains of Caprara and Casaglia, a spectacular view, and a path to the summit of Monte Sole, always littered with jagged pieces of shrapnel left from artillery, hurled at the mountain to break the German position there. At Caprara di Sopra (Upper Caprara), a building has been reconstructed enough to show foundations and a wall. The Casaglia church, on the other hand, has been reinforced from further deterioration. The altar, desecrated during the war, is flanked by

only one wall; the rest of the church, still used for services, is open to the elements. The marble tiled floor, no longer protected by a ceiling, has been softened by the rain and the footprints of thousands of visitors. About 50 metres up the road from the Casaglia church is the Casaglia cemetery. Here the visitor can open the iron door to enter the walled cemetery and trace the bullet holes made when the Germans opened fire on those who were herded into the cemetery on 29 September 1944.



Casaglia Church is still used for services. Since this picture was taken in 2007, the walls on the back right have been reinforced to prevent them falling down. (Author photo)

The park, designated as a naturalistic and memorial park in 1989, attracts tourists for both its history and its scenic views. Within the scope of the park are a number of walking itineraries that explore local art, nature, religious, and the modern and ancient

history of the area.¹ Hiking trails lead to majestic views and hidden reminders of the past and hints about the present day. Only one route emphasizes the local Second World War experience; it explores the ruins of the small hamlets like Casaglia, Cerpiano, and San Martino. In 2009, staff of the Monte Sole Historical Park began reconstruction and interpretation of German defensive positions on the trail to the summit of Monte Sole to enhance the war itinerary. Seeing the terrain from the German perspective, the visitor can understand why it was so important for the German army to take and then hold the mountain. From the reconstructed bunker, the valleys of the Reno and Setta rivers are visible. Monte Sole is a terrain feature that truly dominates the railway lines and roads that travel between Bologna and Florence.

The quiet picturesque hills of Monte Sole contrast greatly with the town of Marzabotto that has been the epicenter of commemoration of the massacre since the end of the war. The town of just under 7,000 inhabitants lies thirty kilometres south of the Renaissance city of Bologna. The state highway 65 bisects the town and visitors and townspeople alike must be careful in crossing the street lest they be struck by speeding traffic. In the centre of town is the *sacrario*, built in the late 1950s to honour the war dead of the local communities. The walls leading to the *sacrario* are lined with plaques honouring other well known atrocities in history like Hiroshima, Lidice, and Oradour-sur-Glane. Despite the emphasis on atrocities, the *sacrario* does not memorialize the massacre exclusively; it includes the remains of those who died for other causes of war as well as Italian soldiers from the First and Second World Wars.

¹ There are six itineraries for the park only one of which explores the history of the Second World War. One itinerary explores the Etruscan roots of the area. Other itineraries include a water route that explores water works from ancient Rome to the present and an artistic route that celebrates the work of local artist Giorgio Morandi.

Despite the fact that the *sacrario* honours dead from all causes of war, the massacre victims are central to the message. In addition to relating the massacre at Marzabotto to other international atrocities, the names and images of those killed in the massacre in September and October 1944 are featured in the walkway to the entrance. The enormity of the price becomes apparent when the faces of those who were killed stare back at the visitor. They are young and old, some just babies. Most of them are women. Staring at the faces of the victims, the horror of what happened becomes clearer. In the four corners are slightly larger pictures of four partisans, including brigade leader Mario Musolesi, who were honoured with the Gold Medal for Military Valour. The placement of the partisan fighters with the victims of the massacre under the name of “*I martiri dell’eccidio di Marzabotto, 1944*”² speak to the troubled way in which the massacre is remembered. A short stroll from the *sacrario* is the town hall, outside of which the visitor finds sculptures that confirm the brutal history of the town. Those who can tear their eyes away from the harsh truth expressed in the sculptures and art in the town hall may see the map to the *Parco Storico di Monte Sole* with its six walking itineraries.

² “The martyrs of the Marzabotto massacre”



“The martyrs of the Marzabotto slaughter, 1944.” The plaques under the photo collage remember the Srebrenica, the Risiera di San Sabba concentration camp in Trieste Italy, Auschwitz, Lidice, and Obruk. Additional plaques, commemorating other atrocities are found on the other side of the walkway. (Author photo)



Above is a representation of the civilians of Monte Sole, huddling together while they awaited their fate in September-October 1944. The sculpture is outside the town hall in Marzabotto. (Author photo)

The memory of the massacre resides in both Monte Sole and Marzabotto. This is a fairly recent development, however. For decades, the memory of the massacre was associated only with the town of Marzabotto. The restoration of the memory to Monte Sole has not diminished the controversy over the meaning behind the massacre. The war in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy is remembered in one of two ways: as a glorious war, fought by the partisans to liberate Italy from the Nazi-Fascist threat; or as a war in which partisans, fighting illegally and contrary to international law, provoked the Germans to retaliate brutally against the civilian population. These contrasting and competing memories have been further polarized by myths established in the aftermath of the massacre. The myths, about the location of the massacre, the number of dead, and the role of the partisans, have endured and been shaped by the three phases of commemoration since September-October 1944: the months between the massacre and the end of the war; the period from 1945 to 1980s with declining Cold War tensions but also the pending release of Major Walter Reder; and after 1989 with the opening of a memorial park in Monte Sole. The three stages of commemoration and the myths have fed the major debate about how the war and the massacre should be remembered.

* * *

In the stage between the massacre and the end of the war in April 1945, two things happened that helped to shape local memory. First, the war continued; Monte Sole became the front line. The German army did not abandon its defence of Monte Sole after they massacred the civilians and burned the communities. In fact, they cleared the area to facilitate winter defence. Those who were not killed in the massacre were forced to flee for their lives. Any hope of returning to rebuild was further destroyed as the battle

continued. Casaglia, Caprara, San Martino, Cerpiano and many of the other 115 hamlets that existed on Monte Sole were further reduced by the artillery thrown to break or defend the position in the subsequent seven months of war. In the spring of 1945, when the Germans were finally forced to retreat, the mountain was a wasteland. Survivors could not return to rebuild and to forge a memory in that location. After the war, the memory of the massacre was transferred to the town of Marzabotto, in the valley of the Reno River and the local seat of administration for the commune of Marzabotto.³ The transfer of the memory from Monte Sole to Marzabotto is not surprising; many of the 115 communities subjected to the massacre ceased to exist in the aftermath.

The second factor that shaped local memory relates to the first. The Germans and Fascists continued to occupy the area and denied that a massacre of civilians had even happened. German reports and the local Fascist administration indicated the incident was a justified military action against partisans; rumours that women and children were massacred were largely exaggerated. On 10 October 1944, the Provincial head of Bologna, Dino Fantozzi, sent a letter to Mussolini. Fantozzi referring to a previous letter, sent the day before, about the “*Fatti di Marzabotto.*” Fantozzi wanted to reassure Mussolini that he had been in contact with the Consul General from Germany in Milan who clarified that the incident in the zone of Marzabotto was an “*azioni repressive contro elementi ribelli costituenti una “brigata rossa” comandata dal ‘Lupo.’*”⁴

Fantozzi continues, writing that “*In questa azione risulterebbero uccisi circa 700 fuori*

³ The Italian commune is equivalent in English to a municipality. It provides local administration under a mayor (sindaco).

⁴ Fantozzi assured Mussolini that he had carried out an inquest in which it was determined, with precision, that the action was a repressive action against the Stella Rossa brigade, commanded by Mario Musolesi, “*Il lupo.*” Monte Sole Park Archives (MSPA), E: Eccidio di Marzabotto, busta 7, fascicolo, letter, Dino Fantozzi, Capo della Provincia di Bologna to Benito Mussolini, Il Duce, 10 ottobre 1944.

legge, ivi compreso il comandante della brigata.”⁵ Fantozzi continued, however, to say that the Consul General did not exclude that during the action, it was possible that other inhabitants may have been killed, “*compresa qualche donne, in quanto molti casolari sparsi nella compagnia erano trasformati dai bandati in vere e propri fortificazioni.*”⁶ Fantozzi was adamant that the operation was not a German reprisal against the inhabitants; any statements made by the *Segretario Comunale di Marzabotto* that supported the idea were exaggerated.

The effort to deny the massacre did not end with Fantozzi’s letter. On 11 October 1944, *Il Resto del Carlino* published an article entitled *Voci Inconsistenti*.⁷ The article did not dispute that anti-partisan operations had been carried out in the area but disputed the “*le solite voci incontrollate, prodotto tipico ... in tempo di guerra*”⁸ stating that 150 women, elderly, and children were shot by German troops in a *rastrellamento* against a band of “out-laws” in the commune of Marzabotto. The article stated that a successful operation had been carried out against a small group of rebels, “*questo macabre voci*”⁹ that women and children were shot could be refuted after a visit to the site. The article continued that a survey of the inhabitants of Marzabotto would further affirm that the

⁵ E: Eccidio di Marzabotto, busta 7, fascicolo, letter, Dino Fantozzi, Capo della Provincia di Bologna to Benito Mussolini, Il Duce, 10 ottobre 1944. “This action resulted in killing around 700 outlaws, including the commander of the brigade.”

⁶ E: Eccidio di Marzabotto, busta 7, fascicolo, letter, Dino Fantozzi, Capo della Provincia di Bologna to Benito Mussolini, Il Duce, 10 ottobre 1944, “... including a few women, in the many scattered houses in the countryside that were transformed by the bandits into true and proper forts.”

⁷ “Inconsistent Voices.”

⁸ MSPA, Fondo Nazario Sauro Onofri, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, “Voci Inconsistenti,” reprint of article in *Il Resto del Carlino*, 11 ottobre 1944 in *Unità*, 6 January 1985. “rumours, typical products...in times of war”

⁹ MSPA, Fondo Nazario Sauro Onofri, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, “Voci Inconsistenti,” reprint of article in *Il Resto del Carlino*, 11 ottobre 1944 in *Unità*, 6 January 1985, “these gruesome rumours”

rumours were false.¹⁰ It is conceivable that the people of Marzabotto would not be aware of the massacre that happened high in the mountains five kilometers away. Moreover, the article associates the massacre with Marzabotto and not the communities on Monte Sole. The Fascists were the first to make this association. Moreover, the reports were the first to doubt that the massacre even happened, a line of argument that German commanders continued to press in their trials in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The single most controversial idea that emerged in the first stage of commemoration and has permeated all subsequent stages was that the reprisal carried out by the German army was justified. The articles published by the Fascists support the idea that the German army was carrying out a *justified* reprisal activity or military action to clear the Stella Rossa partisan brigade. Claims that women and children were deliberately targeted were exaggerated. As outlined in Chapter 3, testimony gathered from German prisoners of war and civilians in the immediate aftermath dispute the fact that the claims were exaggerated. However, referring to the massacre as a justified military activity (military necessity) fuels the side of the debate that insists the partisans were responsible for the deaths of civilians. In this line of argument, the partisans provoked a German response that led to the death of innocent civilians. The partisans were therefore responsible for the deaths of any innocent civilians.

German documentation published before the war was over supports the idea that the operation was a justified military action. In March 1945, Guido Musolesi, brother of “*Il lupo*” and then commander of the Stella Rossa, was told of the existence of German counter-insurgency documentation in a shop in Bologna. Musolesi and another partisan

¹⁰ MSPA, Fondo Nazario Sauro Onofri, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, “Voci Inconsistenti,” reprint of article in *Il Resto del Carlino*, 11 ottobre 1944 in Unità, 6 January 1985.

went to investigate. Despite coming under fire by Germans and members of the *Brigete Nere*, they were successful in retrieving the booklet, called *Achtung Banden Gefahr*,¹¹ published in March 1945 under the auspices of 1st Parachute Corps (those responsible for organizing the counterinsurgency operation). The booklet outlined the structure and organization of the resistance in Italy from the CLN and the CVL to the smaller groups such as the SAP and GAP¹² and detailed strategies for the German fight against the bands. Although the instructions focus generally on the fight against the partisan bands and outline policy for dealing with the particulars of anti-partisan operations, the operation against the Stella Rossa is featured on a map in the pamphlet. Mario Musolesi is listed as the commander.¹³ The content of the booklet proves two things: first, the partisans were enough of a threat to operations in Italy that German high command developed counterinsurgency doctrine to combat them; second, the operation against the Stella Rossa brigade, in which the vast majority of the victims were women and children, was held up as an example of a successful military operation. The booklet, which was found only by accident, supports the idea that the operation in the Monte Sole area was executed as a military operation that only became necessary because the partisans were fighting in the area.

* * *

The theme that the Monte Sole operation was a justified military action against the Stella Rossa gained ground in the second phase of commemoration, from the end of

¹¹ As per an interview recounted in Baldissara and Pezzino, *Il massacro*, p. 97. Title translates into “Warning Bandits Danger.”

¹² MSPA, Sezione E: Eccidio di Marzabotto, busta 4, “Achtung Banden Gefahr.”

¹³ MSPA, Sezione E: Eccidio di Marzabotto, busta 4, “Achtung Banden Gefahr.”

the Second World War to the 1980s. This phase was shaped by the birth of the Republic, the polarization between the left and right in Italy, and the trials of those considered responsible for war crimes against Italian civilians. The resistance in Italy is a divisive issue and there is much written about how the painful birth of the Republic and the Cold War pertains to the national story.¹⁴ Local memory was shaped and formed by these issues, which in turn fueled the debate about the role of the partisans during the war. The communists were bitter because they were denied the chance to participate in politics after the war despite the role they played in the resistance. This bitterness caused them to emphasize their role in combatting the Germans. Anti-communists, on the other hand, denied the communist “hoax of liberation,” arguing that the communists exaggerated their role.¹⁵ As the example of the Stella Rossa shows, there are grains of truth to be found in either side, contributing to the enduring debate. The conflict between the right and the left has an effect on how memory is shaped in Marzabotto.

¹⁴ For more, see Robert Ventresca, *From Culture to Democracy: Culture and Politics in the Italian Elections of 1948* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2004). Ventresca writes about the United States influencing the 1948 elections to keep the Communists from winning, thereby creating a communist buffer zone in Italy. In addition, the debate, in Italian historiography over the meaning of civil war, the resistance, and the country’s Fascist legacy is quite rich. The publication of Claudio Pavone’s book, that viewed the resistance through the lens of a patriotic war, a civil war, and a class war allowed for a more textured look at Italy’s experience between 1943 and 1945. Claudio Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile: Saggio Storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri Editore, 1991). This sparked new scholarship by historians like Paolo Pezzino, Philip Cooke, Luca Baldissara, Luigi Ganapini, and Mirco Dondi, to name just a few. Baldissara and Pezzino, *Il massacro*; Paolo Pezzino, “The Italian Resistance between History and Memory,” in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, 2005, pp. 396-412; Paolo Pezzino, “The German Military Occupation of Italy and the War against Civilians” in *Modern Italy* 12 (2) (2007), pp. 173-188; Philip Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Luigi Ganapini, “The Dark Side of Italian History, 1943-1945” in *Modern Italy* 12 (2) (2007), pp. 205-223; Mirco Dondi, “Division and Conflict in the Partisan Resistance” in *Modern Italy* 12 (2) (2007), pp. 225-236. In spite of this breadth of scholarship the debate continues to rage between left and right in Marzabotto.

¹⁵ Luigi Vallari, *The Liberation of Italy, 1943-1947* (Wisconsin: C.C. Nelson Publishing Company, 1959), p. vii.

Cold War tensions at the end of the war meant that an honest, unburdened assessment of Italy's Second World War was not possible. Although the dialogue shifted back and forth between the 1950s and the 1990s, the period was characterized by the Cold War struggle that pitched communists against non-communists. In an ironic twist, the debate continued a civil war that began with the September 1943 armistice, pitting Italian against Italian. The 1950s is defined as a period of "a pervasive anti-communism"¹⁶ that was countered in the 1960s by the "Opening to the Left" that, after more than a decade, permitted an official dialogue with the communists in Italy. The result of the "Opening to the Left" was an emphasis on the importance of the communist resistance in the liberation of Italy. With their voice restored, the communists worked to promote the idea that their role that was most important in the resistance, denying that the other parties of the CLN contributed much.¹⁷ In addition, the communists argued that they were the only true anti-Fascists, having opposed Mussolini from the start. It was in the context of this tension that the commemorations of the wartime experience were forged after the war. How the war was remembered in Marzabotto both supported and clashed with this tension.

Despite the fact that the leadership of the Stella Rossa brigade tried its best to maintain an apolitical stance, the pervasive anti-communism of the 1950s impacted the memory of the massacre. The significant role of the communists in the Italian civil war meant that the entire resistance was viewed in a negative light as a result of the fear of

¹⁶ R.J.B. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London: Arnold Publishers, 1998), p. 185.

¹⁷ For example, see Guido Quazza, "The Politics of Italian Resistance," in S.J. Woolf, ed., *The Rebirth of Italy, 1943-1950* (London: Longman Group Limited), pp. 1-29.

communism.¹⁸ It was in this political and social context that the first commemorations of the war happened in Marzabotto. In 1948, the gold medal for military valour was presented to the commune of Marzabotto for its suffering during the war. It was at this celebration that the official number of victims was recorded as 1,830.¹⁹ The *Medaglia d'Oro al Valore Militare* (Gold Medal for Military Valour) was awarded, not for the brutal massacre on the slopes of Monte Sole, but to commemorate the collective suffering of the three communes of Monzuno, Marzabotto, and Grizzana.²⁰

The scope of those who were honoured under the auspices of the medal was wide and included all those who fell in battle against the *nazifascisti*, who were victims of the violence of the Germans or Fascists, who fell in the fight for the redemption of Fascism and for peace, including those who fought with the partisans, who were forced to become displaced persons for the needs of war, who fell in German reprisals, and who were victims of aerial bombardments of the area (German or Allied).²¹ The Gold Medal was therefore in honour of all Italians who were victim of the war within the confines of the three communes, even refugees from other cities.

In addition to the more than 1,800 victims who were awarded the gold medal were four partisans who died in the context of fighting the Germans and Fascists: Mario

¹⁸ Characteristic of 1950s scholarship on the subject is Luigi Vallari, *The Liberation of Italy*. Vallari writes of the “hoax of liberation” on the part of the communists. Interestingly enough, he also writes of the role of the Allied encouragement in the resistance but in a very negative sense.

¹⁹ Baldissara and Pezzino, *Il massacro*, p. 11. As Baldissara and Pezzino point out, the number was not reduced to the more accurate figure of 771 victims until 1995. However, generations of Italians had grown up understanding that the massacre claimed 1,830 lives.

²⁰ Renato Giorgi, *Marzabotto Parla*, (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini Editore spa, 2007), p. 14. Giorgi’s book was first published in 1955.

²¹ *Marzabotto. Quanti, Chi e Dove: I Caduti e le vittime delle stragi nazifasciste a Monzuno, Grizzana, e Marzabotto e i Caduti per cause varie di guerra, seconda edizione riveduta ed ampliata*, (Bologna: Ponte Nuovo Editrice, 1995), p.27.

Musolesi, the commander of the brigade, priest Don Giovanni Fornasini, the priest of Sperticano, Gastone Rossi, a sixteen-year-old partisan who died on 3 September 1944, and Francesco Calzolari, who succumbed to wounds from a battle in June 1944. Despite its general nature, the award is most often associated with the partisan heroes and the fallen of the massacre.

Although intended to honour the dead from all causes of war, local commemoration activities held at the *sacrario* focus on the massacre. A direct connection is made between the predominant story of the area - the massacre - and the Gold Medal. This led to the growth of myths surrounding the massacre. For example, the idea was established very early that the massacre happened in Marzabotto and that there were 1,830 victims of the massacre.²² Histories, published in English and Italian, note that more than 1,800 Italians were victim of the massacre of Marzabotto.²³ Until the number was revised in the 1990s, the assumption remained that the Gold Medal was awarded to Marzabotto for the massacre and that the figure of 1,800 victims named in the award citation was correct. The inflated figure contrasts with numbers reported in German reports after the massacre.

The difficult political and social environment in the 1950s and 1960s was further exacerbated by the trials of German commanders, considered by the Allies and the

²² For example, Jack Olsen, journalist and author, visited Marzabotto in the 1960s to collect survivor testimony. It was his impression, from his investigation into the massacre, that although the number of victims could not be known with certainty, the “educated guess” the Italian army used in Major Walter Reder’s trial was close. Olsen dedicates the book to sixty-one survivors of the massacre, many of whom he interviewed in the process of writing his book and the more than 1,200 Italians who died. Since his book is about the massacre and *not* about the suffering of the Marzabotto commune, it seems clear that he takes the figure of somewhere around 1,200 as true. Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, p. 371.

²³ Lamb, *War in Italy*. Lamb quotes from an Italian author Cervo Monaterlli who states the total killed was 1,830.

Italians to be responsible for war crimes against civilians. Field Marshal Kesselring, General Max Simon, and Major Walter Reder were all accused of having a level of responsibility for the massacre. The necessity of defending oneself for war crimes, however, further complicated the story of Monte Sole and the memory associated with the massacre. The need for the German defence lawyers to pick apart survivor testimony and for survivors, including the partisans, to defend themselves fuels confusion and also encourages the fabrication of other myths associated with the massacre. For example, the need to defend the partisans for failing to stop the Germans resulted in testimony that supported the idea that members of the Stella Rossa did attempt to stop the Germans but were unsuccessful.²⁴

The trial process attempted to find the truth, the black and white, in the grey that is war. Kesselring, Simon, and Reder had to be found guilty, beyond a reasonable doubt, for the massacres at Monte Sole in order for a conviction to hold. In law, charges need to be based on something concrete, something that is conclusively right or wrong. Truth is judged and manipulated in order to allow for a satisfactory judgment. These trials, especially, do not have the finality they should have. Although Kesselring, Simon, and Reder were found guilty for war crimes against Italians, all of their sentences were eventually commuted from execution to life imprisonment and all were eventually released from prison. Moreover, in their respective defences, each argued that the operation was a military necessity and they had committed no crime. The release of each of them in turn offered no validation to survivors and the families of those who had died.

²⁴ The mythologized battle that happened on 29 September 1944 at Cadotto was held up as an example of the glorious partisan fight in the second phase of commemoration. Its existence was not supported by partisan documentation or even the course of events of the battle. Baldissara e Pezzino, *Il massacro*, p. 285.

The trials of Kesselring, Simon, and Reder were influenced by Cold War politics. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring was tried in Venice in 1947. The focus of that trial was the legality of the Ardeatine Caves massacre in March 1944 and the anti-partisan order he issued in June 1944. As overall supreme commander in Italy, Kesselring was tried first. His conviction allowed for trials to be carried out against Simon and Reder.²⁵ Although he was not charged with the Marzabotto massacre specifically, Kesselring was accused of inciting his troops to wage war against Italian civilians in the 17 June order, in which he promised to “protect any commander ...

... who exceeds our usual restraint in the choice and severity of the methods he adopts against partisans. In this connection the old principle holds good, that a mistake in the choice of methods in executing one’s orders, is better than failure or neglect to act. Only the most prompt and severe handling is good enough as punitive and deterrent measures to nip in the bud other outrages on a greater scale.²⁶

Kesselring was convicted and sentenced to death although his death sentence was immediately commuted. He was released from prison in 1952.²⁷ Before Kesselring’s release, however, both General Max Simon, the commanding officer for 16 SS Panzergrenadier Division, and Major Walter Reder, commander of 16 SS recce squad, were prosecuted for crimes against humanity for respective roles in Italy during 1944. Simon was charged with transmitting orders that led to the operation while Reder directly

²⁵ Kerstin von Lingen, *Kesselring’s Last Battle: War Crimes Trials and Cold War Politics, 1945-1960* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2009), p. 10.

²⁶ PRO, WO 311/28, “Allied Force Headquarters Report on German Reprisals For Partisan Activity in Italy.”

²⁷ von Lingen, *Kesselring’s Last Battle*, p. 5. Von Lingen explains the political situation that allowed for Kesselring’s release in the context of the debate regarding German rearmament.

participated in the Monte Sole operation. Simon was charged by a British tribunal while an Italian court was given the responsibility for trying Walter Reder.²⁸

Simon was tried in Padua in 1947 by a British Military Tribunal. He was considered guilty because his division, 16SS Panzergrenadier, carried out the six incidents in which civilians were killed between August and October 1944.²⁹ The San Martino incident³⁰ was distinguished from the others because Simon issued orders that an anti-partisan operation against the Stella Rossa “was to be carried through without regard to the security of civilians and regardless of losses on both sides.”³¹ In Simon’s trial, conducted in an Allied court in Italy, the prosecution argued that the *rastrellamento* at Monte Sole constituted the murder of innocent civilians, while the defence argued it was military necessity in response to the partisan threat. Kesselring’s 17 June order was instrumental to the argument for both sides.

The prosecution hoped to prove “that the officers and men who actually carried out each massacre ... must have known that they had the express or at least tacit approval of the accused, or they would never have dared to murder civilians on such a scale.”³² In their assessment, the prosecution distinguished between the regular combating of

²⁸ At the 1943 Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers it was decided that the Allies would be responsible for trials against the “main culprits for war crimes” while affected countries would carry out war crimes trials against specific individuals. Von Lingen, *Kesselring’s Last Battle*, p. 10.

²⁹ In Allied JAG reports, the first is listed as the Molina di Quosa incident happening around 11 August (the dates listed are approximate) and the last is “The Stella Rossa Brigade incident” on 29 and 30 September 1944. (the others are St Anna and Val di Castello on 12 August; Bardine on 19 August; the Apuan Alps incident on 23-27 August; and the Bergola Foscina incident on 16 September). TNA, WO 235/538, Jag No. 356, “Synopsis of the Case,” Accused Max Simon, 2 February 1954.

³⁰ Referred to in trial documentation as the San Martino incident.

³¹ TNA, WO 235/538, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Dr. H.A, Schütze to the Mixed Consultative Board, 25 January 1954, pp. 9-10.

³² TNA, WO 235/586, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Opening Speech for the Prosecution.

partisans, when the Germans rounded up men and sent them to concentration centres or deported them to Germany for forced labour, and operations that resulted in the massacre of unarmed women and children. Most of the incidents for which General Simon was charged were of the latter kind. According to evidence provided by the prosecution, approximately 1,110 civilians were victim to such actions.³³ The prosecution contended that one or two isolated incidents could be explained away by “sudden uncontrolled outburst” but there was a series of massacres, “each bearing a striking resemblance in their execution.” Like the massacre at Monte Sole, each of the six cases involved the deaths of unarmed women, children, and the elderly, and the houses and villages were burned in the aftermath. They were not isolated incidents; each charge was considered in relation to the others.³⁴ The prosecution argued that the Monte Sole operation was unique because Simon issued direct orders for it to be carried out without regard to the civilian population, resulting in the deaths of unarmed men, women, and children.³⁵

Simon’s defence, on the other hand, focused on the partisan threat that provoked a necessary German response. Simon’s defence lawyers made two main points. First, the defence emphasized the fact that the partisans were illegal combatants operating contrary to international law; the fight against the partisans was a military necessity.³⁶ Second, the

³³ According to the Prosecution, the approximate numbers of civilians who lost their lives were 70, 560, 170, 70, and 80 = 1110. TNA, WO 235/586, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Opening Speech for the Prosecution.

³⁴ TNA, WO 235/586, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Opening Speech for the Prosecution.

³⁵ TNA, WO 235/538, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Dr. H.A, Schütze to the Mixed Consultative Board, 25 January 1954, p. 4.

³⁶ The defence argued that the fighting of the partisans became a military necessity because partisans were fighting contrary to international law by passing themselves off as civilians, using women as combatants, and committing atrocities against the German soldier. The defence also emphasized the fact that the Germans did not provoke the rise of the resistance movement with its forced conscription of civilian labour. The defence argued that forced conscription of civilian labour only began “when the partisan movement

defence argued that Kesselring's order did not have the "sinister" meaning given to it by the prosecution.³⁷ It was delivered in response to a growing partisan threat after June 1944 that necessitated a calculated counterinsurgency campaign. His order was about military necessity and not about committing excesses against Italian civilians.³⁸ Moreover, there were many opportunities to commit excesses but in not all cases were excesses committed, "so that orders, schemes or plans for such excesses cannot have been in existence."³⁹

The defence used a similar line of reasoning for Simon arguing that the insurgency threat at Monte Sole forced him to order a counter-insurgency operation against the partisans. For the operation to be successful, German soldiers were forced to use all means possible including mortars and heavy artillery. But, as the defence argued, "the destruction in combat of a partisan brigade of several thousand men in hardly accessible mountain terrain, excluded the possibility of consideration for the civilian population."⁴⁰ The defence argued that it was reasonable to expect civilian casualties under such circumstances.

The heart of Simon's defence was therefore built on the threat the partisans posed and the inability of the German army to combat them due to their illegal nature. The

had already become a military danger." TNA, WO 235/586, "Opening Speech of the Defence in the Trial against General of the Waffen-SS Max Simon,"p.1.

³⁷ This argument around semantics formed the basis of a campaign to have Simon released in the 1950s.

³⁸ TNA, WO 235/538, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Dr. H.A, Schütze to the Mixed Consultative Board, 25 January 1954, p. 12.

³⁹ TNA, WO 235/586, "Opening Speech of the Defence in the Trial against General of the Waffen-SS Max Simon,"p.1.

⁴⁰ TNA, WO 235/587 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Dr. H.A, Schütze to Sir Anthony Eden, 15 September 1953.

defence argued that the partisans fought without identifying uniforms and used women and children to carry messages and weapons. The covert methods meant that the German soldier could never feel safe around Italian civilians. Therefore, Simon's order to carry out the operation against the Stella Rossa brigade without consideration for the civilian population "represented a tactical necessity."⁴¹

Witness statements gathered after the war supported this line of argument.

General Joachim Lemelsen, former commander of 14th German army, confirmed that the operation in Monte Sole "was not a retaliatory expedition but a purely combatant activity in the course of which also heavy arms were employed against the partisan support posts."⁴² Lemelsen's testimony highlighted the growing problem of the partisan threat after the fall of Rome.⁴³ German efforts to wage war were compromised by a growing resistance that threatened supply lines and retreat. Moreover, a coordinated attack by Allied armies and Allied-supplied partisans would be disastrous for the German army, particularly in the Monte Sole area.⁴⁴ Simon was forced to issue the orders for the anti-partisan operation on Monte Sole that caused civilian casualties. In reference to the *Achtung Banden Gefahr* pamphlet, Simon's defence team argued that the requirement for the military operation that inadvertently killed "innocent victims and their relatives"

⁴¹ TNA, WO 235/587 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Dr. H.A. Schütze to Sir Irvone Kirkpatrick, High Commissioner of the United Kingdom, "Review of the Case of the former Lieutenant-General of the Waffen-SS, Max Simon, Werl.," 8 July 1952, p.7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴³ TNA, WO 235/587 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon Translated statement of Joachim Lemelsen, Göttingen, 10 June 1952.

⁴⁴ Of the six incidents he was charged with, Simon only admitted to giving orders for the Apuanian Alps incident on 24-25 August and the Monte Sole incident. TNA, WO 235/586 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon, "Closing Address in the Trial against Lt. General of the Waffen-SS Max Simon," delivered by Dr. Friedrich Frohwein, p. 16.

proved how insidious, dangerous, and illegal the partisans were.⁴⁵ The defence team painted a picture in which the partisans were the villains who provoked the German reaction. The defence argued that Simon had not intended that “innocent women and children should pay for the wrong which their male relatives perhaps had done to the Germans.”⁴⁶

The defence argued that not all the women and children were innocent; many of them were fighting as partisans. For example, the defence heard testimony from Lucia Sabbioni, a female partisan from Casaglia who fought with the Stella Rossa brigade. She testified that women and girls assisted the partisans by taking care of supplies, fighting in battles, and carrying weapons. Women and girls were also trained to handle rifles.⁴⁷ In the end, the defence argued that men were fighting without wearing uniforms (or they at least did not always wear their uniforms to distinguish themselves), women and girls were armed and fighting or assisting the partisans, and non-partisans were helping the partisans by offering them shelter. According to the defence, it was impossible for the German army to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty. The trustworthiness of the Italians was also questioned.

Doubt is also expressed about the testimony of witnesses who described the systematic killing of civilians, at the same time calling into question the role of the partisans in the massacre. The defence expressed disbelief at how

⁴⁵ TNA, WO 235/586 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon, “Closing Address in the Trial against Lt. General of the Waffen-SS Max Simon,” delivered by Dr.Friedrich Frohwein,, p. 3.

⁴⁶ TNA, WO 235/586 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Exhibit N, Affidavit, Max Simon Interrogation report.

⁴⁷ TNA, WO 235/586 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon, “Closing Address in the Trial against Lt. General of the Waffen-SS Max Simon,” p.8.

... thousands of heavily armed and well trained partisans would just have quietly stood by, looking at a near distance from the mountains, without taking any action whatsoever when their wives and children were being murdered and their villages set on fire by relatively small German units.⁴⁸

The implication is that if any “illegal acts” were committed by German soldiers, it was the actions of the partisans that provoked them.⁴⁹ The German defence is clear: the incident should be regarded as a military operation and evidence indicates that the German army believed it was a counter-insurgency operation against the Stella Rossa brigade. The *Achtung Banden Gefahr* pamphlet and German reports both treat the operation as a militarily necessary counter-partisan operation. The defence argued that a soldier could not be prosecuted for following orders or for carrying out a militarily necessary operation.⁵⁰

Despite the efforts of the defence, Simon was found guilty of all six incidents. Like Kesselring, he was sentenced to death by shooting. Simon’s supporters, including his lawyer Friedrich Frohwein, immediately began to petition the Allied courts for his release or commutation of the death sentence to a term of imprisonment.⁵¹ Much like in Kesselring’s trial, Frohwein and others highlighted deficiencies in the case of the

⁴⁸ TNA, WO 235/586 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon, “Closing Address in the Trial against Lt. General of the Waffen-SS Max Simon,” p.8.

⁴⁹ TNA, WO 235/586 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon, “Closing Address in the Trial against Lt. General of the Waffen-SS Max Simon,” p. 9.

⁵⁰ Despite the fact that Simon’s defence argued a soldier could not be prosecuted for following orders, the superior orders defence was no longer considered valid after the Nuremberg trials. Henry T. King, Jr. “The Legacy of Nuremberg,” *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 34: 3 (Summer 2002), pp. 335-356.

⁵¹ TNA, WO 235/586 43505, Dr. Frohwein to GOC-in-C, British Troops in Italy, “Petition for Lt. Gen. of the Waffen-SS, Max Simon, p.2.

prosecution to create doubt in the decision against his client.⁵² Simon's supporters continued to argue that the legal proceedings were flawed, leading to an unfair decision. The defence argued that key witnesses were missing, including Walter Reder himself, and that the prosecution used unreliable Italian witnesses. In addition, Frohwein and other supporters argued that the operation was a military necessity provoked by an illegal partisan resistance. For example, in a June 1949 letter, Frohwein conceded that even among the best disciplined troops there can be found examples of excesses and violence, especially "if these troops are provoked by insidious murders and special cruelties of the opposite side."⁵³ The partisans were again held up as responsible for provoking the military operation that led to the deaths of innocent civilians.

Frohwein and others continued to debate the meaning behind Kesselring's order. Even if Simon had passed on Kesselring's order of 17 June 1944 order, there is no proof that either Kesselring or Simon passed the order along with the intention of inciting the troops to commit murder against Italian civilians. The perceived misuse of the order by the prosecution became a supporting argument. The prosecution argued that the statement "I shall cover every officer who exceeds our usual self-restraint in the choices and severity of the methods he adopts against the partisans..." encouraged German soldiers to commit atrocities against civilians. The decisiveness of the statement in determining Simon's guilt was inconsistent with how it was treated in Kesselring's trial in Venice.

⁵² Von Lingen, *Kesselring's Last Battle*, p. 10. Hans Latenser highlighted problems in the case against Kesselring's case, such as the failure to swear in witnesses, to "provoke general doubt" in Kesselring's culpability.

⁵³ TNA, WO 235/586 43505, Dr. Frohwein to the War Office, Director of Army, "Application of rescinding the judgment against the former Lieutenant General of the Waffen-SS Max Simon," 25 June 1949, p. 4.

At the Kesselring trial, the court debated the meaning of the German word “mittel.” The British translated the word as “methods” instead of “means”; Frohwein and the rest of the German defence team argued that this was a mistranslation that altered the meaning of the whole sentence, making it much more sinister: “In the German military usage the word “Mittel” refers without doubt to military means of fighting and is understood in this sense only.” Frohwein pointed out that “military means of fighting are, however, admitted under International Law and therefore are not illegal.”⁵⁴

In an effort to secure his client’s release, Frohwein and his colleague Dr. Schütze focused on wording and mis-translations instead of the facts of the case. In July 1952, Dr. Schütze picked up the issue of semantics, arguing that Kesselring’s order was not meant to provoke

... retaliatory measure, but it was exclusively provided for instruction on fighting tactics. It was intended to equalize the fight against the partisans to that at the front; it was further meant to actuate the fighting against partisans since after the fall of Rome partisan activity had been strengthened in such a way as to endanger the German retreat.⁵⁵

The interpretation of the order as a tactical, military order was shared by General Joachim Lemelsen, a witness in Simon’s defence. Lemelsen’s statement indicated that the order was intended to mark a shift from passive reaction to the partisan threat: “From now on, the gangs were to be met in an active way by employing all means, i.e. all means of military combat.” As General Lemelsen states, in order to comply with Kesselring’s order of 17 June,

⁵⁴ TNA, WO 235/586 43505, Dr. Frohwein to the War Office, Director of Army, “Application of rescinding the judgment against the former Lieutenant General of the Waffen-SS Max Simon,” 25 June 1949, p. 3.

⁵⁵ TNA, WO 235/587 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Dr. H.A. Schütze to Sir Irvone Kirkpatrick, High Commissioner of the United Kingdom, “Review of the Case of the former Lieutenant-General of the Waffen-SS, Max Simon, Werl.,” 8 July 1952, p. 4.

... all military means of combat, including heavy arms, such as shells and artillery, were employed as by this only it was possible to break up the resistance. It is inevitable that in such a battle eventually women and children may be killed by heavy bombardment. Moreover, it was known that the partisans employed women with arms and children for courier services.⁵⁶

Simon's supporters focused on the military necessity of anti-partisan measures and not on the massacre of Italian civilians.

To strengthen the case in favour of Simon, his supporters attacked the reliability of testimony of Italian witnesses and survivors. In July 1952, lawyer Dr. H.A. Schütze petitioned for Simon's release (his sentence was already commuted to life in prison in 1948). Schütze picked apart the Italian witnesses, whom he claimed "reported on hearsay." Moreover, their reliability as witnesses was damaged by their Italian-ness:

... insofar as they testified on facts out of own knowledge their objectivity was constantly endangered by the fact that they were Italians and, most of them, partisans themselves. It is of general knowledge that the Italians, as a result of their vivid temperament, are inclined to imaginative 'embroideries' even where they intend to be objective. Whenever they do not have that intention, they are masters in the art of concealing the truth ... it is therefore extremely doubtful whether the atrocities with which members of the division under my client's command were charged were actually committed or, at least, to the extent asserted by the Italian witnesses to the prosecution.⁵⁷

Schütze painted a picture of the dangerous fortified mountain villages in which partisans and their supporters could hide and jeopardize the safety of the German soldier.

According to Schütze, "The Italian witnesses strove to cause the impression that German soldiers killed peaceful civilians in undefended localities"⁵⁸ instead of telling the truth

⁵⁶ TNA, WO 235/587 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon Translated statement of Joachim Lemelsen, Göttingen, 10 June 1952.

⁵⁷ TNA, WO 235/587 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Dr. H.A. Schütze to Sir Irvone Kirkpatrick, High Commissioner of the United Kingdom, "Review of the Case of the former Lieutenant-General of the Waffen-SS, Max Simon, Werl.," 8 July 1952, p.2.

⁵⁸ TNA, WO 235/538, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Dr. H.A. Schütze to the Mixed Consultative Board, 25 January 1954, p.5.

that the German soldier was threatened by the partisans who were fighting from the strongholds of the fortified mountain villages. The myth of “the decent German soldier in Italy”⁵⁹ contrasted with the devious and dishonest Italian partisan and fit well within the context of a growing anti-communism throughout the 1950s.

A final consideration raised by Simon’s defence was that, at the time of his trial, Major Walter Reder could not be found. Reder, Simon’s subordinate, led the troops of the 16 SS Reconnaissance Division in the anti-partisan operation. In October 1947, Reder made a voluntary statement to a British investigative unit that “he had not received any orders from Simon which had induced him or the units under his command to terrorise the Italian civilian population.” The defence argued that this was final proof that Simon did not, in fact, pass orders leading Reder and his men to commit atrocities against Italian civilians. Reder could have defended himself by arguing that he was only a subordinate carrying out orders. The fact that he did not do this clearly indicated according to the defence, that Simon was innocent and painted a picture of the rogue and aberrant 16 SS Recce Division.

As a so-called lesser war criminal, Walter Reder was turned over to Italian authorities for prosecution in spite of his role in carrying out atrocities against unarmed civilians. The politics that surrounded the trials of the upper echelons of German command in Italy were less influential in the Italian trial against Major Walter Reder. The conviction of Kesselring and Simon in the late 1940s paved the way for trials against lower-ranking German officers like Reder, whose division was actually responsible for carrying out the anti-partisan operation. After the trials of the major war criminals, such

⁵⁹ Von Lingen, *Kesselring’s Last Battle*, p. 6. von Lingen’s research shows how Kesselring and his counsel attempted to create an image of the clean and honest German soldier in contrast to the rogue SS troops.

as Kesselring, Simon, Maltzer and von Mackenson, Italian tribunals were given an opportunity to try individuals, like Walter Reder, for specific crimes. Unlike Kesselring and Simon, Reder was involved in the counter-partisan operation on Monte Sole; many Italian witnesses testified to Reder's direct involvement in brutal acts against civilians. The Italian tribunal charged Reder with premeditating the killings, torturing, and mutilating his victims, and conspiring with his subordinates to commit atrocities:

... Senza giustificato motive, per cause non estranee alla Guerra che egli conduceva contro la brigata partigiana "Stella Rossa" con ordini dati ai propri dipendenti, determinava la morte di circa 1.800 persone, che non prendevano parte alle operazioni military, in prevalenza vecchi, donne e bambini inermi, che, dopo essere stati per lo più ammassati in luoghi senza via d'uscita, furono trucidati selvaggiamente e senza discriminazione, con raffiche di mitraglia e bombe a mano, in territorio del comune di Marzabotto e in quello viciniore, nei giorni 29 e 30/9/1944, 1 e 5/10/1944.⁶⁰

The inflated number of 1,800 victims was confirmed at Reder's trial.

In October 1951, Walter Reder was convicted as charged and sentenced to life imprisonment for leading his men and participating in a string of atrocities against civilians in Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna through the summer and autumn of 1944.⁶¹ In its judgment, the Italian tribunal defined Reder as "the unmistakable example of the subspecies of human produced by Hitlerian fascism: cold, insensitive, full of "abuse arrogance," educated cynicism, and hatred of race."⁶² Unlike Kesselring and Simon,

⁶⁰ MSPA, Sezione I: Walter Reder, fascicolo 2, "Requisitoria Scritta dal P.M. Dottore Piero Stellacci al termine dell'istruzione formale del procedimento penale contro Walter Reder, Maggiore delle S.S.," p.2. "... without justified reason, for a cause unrelated to the war that he conducted against the partisan brigade "Stella Rossa" . . . [which] determined the death of around 1800 persons . . . predominantly unarmed old, women and children, that, after they were gathered for the most part in places without ways of exit, they were slaughtered savagely and without discrimination with bursts of automatic fire and hand grenades . . ."

⁶¹ The incident in Monte Sole accounted for the largest number of victims according to the Italian tribunal.

⁶² MSPA, Fondo Nazario Sauro Onofri, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, "Perché sia pubblicata in omaggio all "passionata discussion: una lettera del legale di Reder," in *Il Resto del Carlino*, 9 July 1967.

however, Reder's sentence was not reduced in the 1950s. He remained in prison in Gaeta, on the Adriatic coast, until he was released in 1985.

Even with Reder in jail, the survivors of the Monte Sole could not begin the process of healing. Like in Simon's case, Reder's supporters, including his mother, and Reder himself, continued to petition for his release, arguing that the incident was the result of a military operation. Although Kesselring, Simon, and Reder all attempted to defend themselves behind the cloak of military necessity in the face of a brutal partisan operation, the partisans were not central to the story in the thirty years after the war. The focus was on the survivors as victims and Reder and his men as "authentic beasts."⁶³ In the face of the repeated requests for pardon, the survivors had to relive the experience of September and October 1944 again and again.

The Italian tribunal deemed that he could not be released until the survivors forgave Reder for his crime. In April 1967, Reder wrote to the Mayor of Marzabotto, Giovanni Bottonelli, imploring him to grant forgiveness so that Reder's mother, then in her eighties, could see her last remaining child before she died. In addition, Reder argued that those who were responsible for giving the orders, including Kesselring and Simon, were already free men: "*Coloro che impartirono gli ordini dai quali nacquero fatti tanto funesti sono in libertà già da lunghi anni.*"⁶⁴ Bottonelli requested that the survivors and their families vote on the matter.⁶⁵ The public outcry against Reder's release was such

⁶³ MSPA, Fondo Nazario Sauro Onofri, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, "I familiari delle vittime daranno la risposta di Marzabotto a Reder," in *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 28 June 1967.

⁶⁴ "Those who gave the orders which gave birth to such deadly events have been free already for many years."

MSPA, Fondo Nazario Sauro Onofri, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, "Reder: delitto e castigo: non può bastargli d'essere vivo per ottenere pietà da Marzabotto, 28 giugno 1967.

that his lawyer, Jacksonig di Innsbruck, complained of a campaign in the newspaper *Resto di Carlino*, a “*spassionata discussione*”⁶⁶ that threatened to discredit Reder’s plea for forgiveness. The newspaper argued that it was only reflecting the true feelings of the local civilians.⁶⁷ The survivors and the families of survivors were invited to vote; the results reflected the sentiment found in the newspapers. On 16 July 1967, 288 survivors of the massacre were present to vote: 282 voted against Reder’s pardon; only four voted to forgive him.⁶⁸

The overwhelming response was not enough to convince Reder or his supporters to relent in the effort to secure his release. For forty years after the end of the war, the survivors of the Monte Sole massacre had to relive the experience again and again as Walter Reder petitioned for release. The trial process and the subsequent petitioning in the decades that followed clearly had an impact on how the incident is remembered in local memory. The need to build a case for and against German commanders and their subordinates meant that survivors not only had to relive the traumatic experience as they testified, but the truth of their statements was repeatedly called into question. In addition, the case built to defend Simon and Reder justified the massacre as military necessity. This created an environment in which the partisans were regarded as responsible for provoking the massacre. After the trials and until his release in the mid-1980s, Reder’s repeated petitions caused the focus to be on the 1,800 victims of the massacre, and not on the activities of the partisans. Much of the context that led to the massacre, including

⁶⁶ Dispassionate discussion.

⁶⁷ MSPA, Fondo Nazario Sauro Onofri, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, “Perché sia pubblicata in omaggio all “*spassionata discussione: una lettera del legale di Reder,*” in *Il Resto del Carlino*, 9 July 1967.

⁶⁸ Olsen, *Silence on Monte Sole*, 28.

Allied encouragement and support, was lost throughout this second phase of commemoration.

* * *

A number of factors converged in the mid-1980s to allow for a shift to the third phase of commemoration regarding the massacre of Monte Sole. Reder's pending release, a decline in the tensions in the Cold War, and efforts of a local organization, the Regional Committee for the Remembrance of the Fallen of Marzabotto, led to an attempt to preserve the memory but also to investigate what actually happened on Monte Sole. This renewed effort was provoked by the context in which Reder was released. The local people of Marzabotto, the *superstiti*⁶⁹, did not want to pardon Reder. In the late 1960s they were given the option to vote. By 1980, Reder's fate was out of their hands.

In 1980, a Bari military tribunal ruled that Reder was sincerely sorry and should be released. The judgment provoked cries from the local population at Marzabotto who could not pardon "the executioner." Although Reder himself claimed he had repented, newspapers in Germany maintained that the massacre had never happened.⁷⁰ In 1984, Reder sent another letter to the mayor of Marzabotto, Dante Cruicchi, claiming that "In me non c'è più nulla dell'ideologia che nella mia lontana gioventù avvelenava il mondo."⁷¹ For the first time, Reder signed his letter without his rank of major and seemed to be clearly repentant for the massacre. On 15 July 1985, he was released from prison and allowed to return to Vienna. Within a year of being released, Reder publicly retracted

⁶⁹ *Superstiti* are survivors and family of the victims.

⁷⁰ MSPA, Fondo il Resto del Carlino, Busta 1, "è l'ultima ferita di Reder a Marzabotto," 30 luglio 1980

⁷¹ "In me there is no more the ideology that in my youth poisoned the world."

his apology, arguing that he owed no repentance for the massacre of Marzabotto. His apology and statement that he no longer believed in the Nazi ideology had been a ploy to secure his release.⁷² In Marzabotto, the response varied from disbelief at Reder's willingness to lie to gain his freedom,⁷³ to acceptance that it was only a matter of time before Reder retracted his apology, to rage.

Despite the fact that the *superstiti* did not want to pardon Reder, the ruling of the Bari tribunal and his release in 1985 allowed a shift in focus. The focus was no longer on the evil of one man and his victims; the survivors and their families could finally begin the process of healing. Throughout the 1980s, cries for peace were prevalent but there was also a search for the truth. The campaign of denial in Germany and from Reder himself led to a desire to discover the truth about the massacre, the partisans, and the Nazi-Fascist ideology that allowed the massacre to be carried out. This investigation into the facts led back to the territory of Monte Sole itself, shifting the focus from the town of Marzabotto to the actual place where most of the victims lost their lives. This shift led to a revision of a number of the "truths" that were established in the first two phases of commemoration. In addition, an attempt was made to establish a memory centre of gravity for both the resistance and the massacre in the territory of Monte Sole.

The effort to investigate the facts around the partisan effort and the resulting massacre met with much resistance. In some respects, the end of the Cold War did not eliminate tensions between the left and right in the commune of Marzabotto. The civil war over the memory of the massacre did not cease; the left and the right continued to use

⁷² MSPA, Fondo Nazario Sauro Onofri, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, "Reder: "Il mio pentimento fu una mossa dell'avvocato," in *la Repubblica*, 25 gennaio 1986.

⁷³ Priest don Zanini had petitioned for Reder's release and truly believed he had repented.

the example of the massacre to promote their respective politics. The decline of Cold War tensions and the loss of survivors with the passage of time led to a desire to preserve the memory but also to understand what had happened. This desire to discover the truth led to the establishment of a memorial park and research centre, *La Scuola di Pace*, on the Monte Sole plateau where the massacres occurred. Until that time, only a monument to the Stella Rossa existed on the summit of the Monte Sole massif. The monument, dated 29 September 1955, was a plinth dedicated to the “Gloria eternal al partigiano che su questi monti immolarono la loro esistenza per la libertà e l’indipendenza d’italia”⁷⁴ and the “Ricordo imperituro degli uomini, donne, e bambini, vittime innocent della ferocia e dell’odio nazifascista”⁷⁵ The monument to both the victims and the partisans, largely inaccessible due to the rugged nature of the terrain and the poor road access, was the only commemoration to the massacre or the partisans in the Monte Sole area until the park was established in the late 1980s.

⁷⁴ “Eternal glory of the partisan brigade that on this mountain immortalized their existence for the liberty and independence of Italy.”

⁷⁵ “Imperishable memory of the men, women, and children, innocent victims of the ferocity and hatred of the nazifascisti.”



The monument to the partisans and victims of the massacre found on the summit of the Monte Sole feature. The back of the monument (inset) commemorates the “innocent victims.” Although the path to the monument and to the extraordinary view have been improved, it is still a feat to climb to the top as the path is steep and in some cases, follows a knife edge, narrow path. (Author photo)

A number of organizations began to conduct research into the massacre in the 1980s. Although the memory had been associated with the town of Marzabotto since the

end of the war, investigations into the massacre and the resistance led back to Monte Sole, abandoned since the Germans cleared the area in 1944. In 1982 the *Comitato regionale per la onoranza ai caduti*⁷⁶ was created “with the task of keeping the memories of the victims alive and of spreading the ideals of freedom, peace and democracy.”⁷⁷ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the *Comitato* conducted research, clarifying a number of facts about the massacre. Most notably, the *Comitato* was involved in the establishment of the Monte Sole historical park in 1989 and also an investigation into the number of victims in the mid-1990s that led to the revision of the official figures. The Bologna Catholic Church conducted its own investigation into the five priests who were killed during the massacre, sparking an annual pilgrimage to Monte Sole on the anniversary.⁷⁸ The 1980s led to a renewed interest in Monte Sole itself, although not without controversy.

The renewed interest in the Monte Sole site led to a desire to preserve it in some way. Dante Cruicchi, former Communist mayor of Marzabotto and then president of the *Comitato regionale per la onoranza ai caduti*, proposed the creation of a naturalistic and memorial park in the mountainous area between the Reno and Setta valleys. The proposed park of Monte Sole encompassed a territory of about 6,000 hectares and included the site of the former communes of Casaglia, Cerpiano, and San Martino. It was

⁷⁶ Regional Committee for the Remembrance of the Fallen of Marzabotto

⁷⁷ Information Guide, “Parco Storico Monte Sole,” Consorzio di Gestione del Parco Storico di Monte Sole, 1998-2000, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Sara Guzzetti and Ugo Sachs, “Peace Education and Holocaust Sites of Memory,” 14 October 1999 http://www1.yadvashem.org/download/education/conf/Sachs_Guzzetti.pdf last accessed September 2010. About the annual pilgrimage of the Bologna Church that had been ongoing since 1978, see MSPA, Fondo il Resto del Carlino, Busta 1, “Il 50° di Monte Sole: ‘Onoriamo quei martiri,’ *Il Resto del Carlino*, 12 September 1994.

intended as a nature conserve and historical memorial park that preserved the memory of the massacre and the resistance. Not all agreed there was value in emphasizing the naturalistic side of the territory of Monte Sole. The local branch of the Italian Socialist party (PSI) felt the park should be called the *Parco della Resistenza* because the “strage e resistenza a Monte Sole furono una cosa sola.”⁷⁹ Lamberto Cotti, the provincial secretary for the PSI, argued that the martyrs (martiri) “morirono per l’attaccamento agli ideali di libertà, di democrazia, di giustizia, di fratellanza e di pace.”⁸⁰ For the PSI, the designation of naturalistic park hid and diluted the message that should be conveyed: that the massacre and the resistance are one and the same.⁸¹

The PSI emphasis on the martyrs of the massacre gives the impression that those women, children, and elderly who perished in the September-October 1944 German operation did so willingly in order to progress the cause of liberty, democracy, justice, and peace, supporting the view that all victims were antifascist supporters of the partisans - the same arguments made in the trials of Kesselring, Simon, and Reder that everyone on the mountain posed a threat as a partisan. Ultimately, the efforts of the PSI to have the park named a park of resistance exchanged one myth for another. One cannot expect a critical view of the war if the values of the resistance are emphasized exclusive of all others. In addition, the argument that the victims are all martyrs for a cause does not acknowledge the 216 children under the age of twelve who were killed, some still in the

⁷⁹ “the massacre and the resistance at Monte Sole were the same thing.”

⁸⁰ MSPA, Sezione V: Parco di Monte Sole, Fascicolo 3, “Cotti lo ha chiesto ufficialmente a Zani: Il Psi: ‘Monte Sole si chiami il parco della Resistenza,’” in *la Repubblica*, 12 January 1988; MSPA, Fondo Nazario Sauro Onofri, Busta 1, Fascicolo 2, *La Squilla: Notizie*, 23 Maggio 1988, p. 1. “the martyrs died for the attack against the ideals of liberty, democracy, justice, for brotherhood, and for peace.”

⁸¹ MSPA, Sezione V: Parco di Monte Sole, Fascicolo 3, “Monte Sole in un progetto di legge regionale: Parco Resistenza,” in *Il Resto del Carlino*, 21 April 1988.

womb. One cannot argue that these children died for the cause of liberation and in the name of the antifascist ideology. Moreover, contemporary research into the subject clearly acknowledges that not all Italians were resisters, but were in fact engaged in a civil war.⁸² The case of Monte Sole demonstrates that the civil war carried on after the war as the left, right, and moderates continue to debate the meaning behind the massacre and what messages should be conveyed regarding the local history.

In May 1989 a regional law established a 6300-acre site as the Monte Sole Historical Park, and not a park of the Resistance. The law was made with the intention that the park would be restored and conserved as a natural site. Secondly, the organizers hoped to “reconstruct, conserve and spread the memory of the partisans and, in particular of the Stella Rossa brigade for the liberation of Italy,” as well as the events of the fall of 1944. Finally, it was hoped that the park would facilitate a study to “deepen ... knowledge of the scientific and historical material, social, and cultural conditions that favoured the rise of the phenomenon of fascism and Nazism to rise.” The law instructed that a centre be opened to conduct research on these issues. To facilitate research into the massacre, a committee of nine individuals, experts in the disciplines of history, sociology, and humanities, were assigned to work in conjunction with the *Comitato regionale per le onoranze ai Caduti di Marzabotto*.⁸³

The first project associated with this new law was an investigation into the number of victims. The five-year project culminated in the publication, *Marzabotto*.

⁸² Pavone, *Una Guerra civile*. Efforts to establish the park were ongoing before Claudio Pavone published his book, *Una guerra civile*, that established that there was a civil war within the greater context of the war. The example of Monte Sole/Marzabotto shows that the civil war over the memory has not ended.

⁸³ Legge Regionale 27 maggio 1989, n.19 “Istituzione del Parco Storico di Monte Sole” found at <http://www.parcostoricomontesole.it/pdf/Legge%20istitutiva.pdf> accessed 2 December 2012.

Quanti, Chi e Dove, issued for the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre.⁸⁴ *Marzabotto, Quanti, Chi e Dove* revised the number of victims, believed to be 1,830, to a more accurate number of 1,676 victims. Moreover, the research project clarified what that number actually represented. The figure of 1,676 denoted all those civilians who were killed in the communes of Marzabotto, Monzuno, and Grizzana during the war for all causes of war.⁸⁵ The research sought to prove where and how each individual from the three communes died between 1943 and 1944. According to the research, which was arguably hindered by the lack of records and materials, 757 were “killed (uccisi) by the nazifacisti” between 29 September 1944 and 1 October 1944. As the title of the publication suggests, the researchers pinpointed, if possible, where, when, and how each individual perished. Not all of these individuals were killed in the massacre. Although a number of individuals died at the same time they were not in the same location, i.e., not within the 115 locations in the Monte Sole area. At the back of the book, *Marzabotto, Quanti, Chi e Dove*, it is stated that the *eccidio detto di Monte Sole* has 770 victims. The dates for the massacre are given as 29 September to 5 October 1944.⁸⁶

The research project highlights a problem in the commemoration of the massacre of Monte Sole. Since 1949, with the awarding of the gold medal, commemorations have included all those who perished in war by all causes. Victims of Allied or German aerial bombardment, individuals killed by German mines, those who fell as partisans in the fight against the Germans, or those unarmed women and children who were killed in the

⁸⁴ *Marzabotto, Quanti, Chi e Dove. Nuova edizione riveduta ed ampliata, 1995.* The research was conducted to honour the 50th anniversary of the massacre in 1994.

⁸⁵ Renato Giorgi, *Marzabotto Parla*, p. 14.

⁸⁶ *Marzabotto, Quanti, Chi e Dove*, p. 199.

massacre between 29 September and 1 October were all considered equally victims of war. The 1994 research project, however, divides the victims into two categories. The first category includes those killed in so-called reprisal actions by the *nazifacisti*. Only a proportion of these were killed in counter-partisan operation in September and October. The other category includes all those who died through other causes of war.⁸⁷ The project revealed much about the massacre. The identification of the names, ages, and location of deaths in the German counter-partisan operation of September-October 1944 supports evidence found in German reports after the massacre was carried out. After the operation, the German troops were congratulated for their efforts in killing somewhere around 800 partisans.⁸⁸ Later German reports clarified the numbers further, noting that 497 partisans and 221 partisan helpers were killed in the massacre.⁸⁹ The project of the *Comitato regionale per la onoranza ai caduti* confirmed these numbers, identifying that the previous number of nearly 2,000 victims was wrong. The number of children under the age of twelve killed is very close to the number of partisan helpers the Germans claimed to have eliminated. The report of the *Comitato* broke the numbers down: of the 775 they discovered were killed on 29-30 September and 1 October, 216 were children under the age of twelve, 317 were women over the age of twelve, and 141 were elderly. Cruicchi argued that although the research into the actual number of victims was late, it was a necessary project.⁹⁰ Ultimately, the project substantiates German reports from the days

⁸⁷ *Marzabotto, Quanti, Chi e Dove*.

⁸⁸ TNA, WO 235/538, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Statement of Pte. Legoli Julien, Infantry Gun Platoon, 1 October 1944.

⁸⁹ As noted in Staron, *Fosse Ardeatine e Marzabotto*, p. 89

⁹⁰ In a media interview, Dante Cruicchi explained that the number of 1,830 came from the difference in distributed ration cards between 1943 and 1945. To arrive at the number of 775 victims, the *Comitato* and

immediately following the massacre. The young age of the more than 200 so-called “partisan helpers” reveals the brutal nature of the German operation carried out under the cloak of military necessity.

In addition to the quest for truth, another major theme that emerged in this third phase of commemoration was the desire for peace, at least from some organizations.⁹¹ Throughout the 1990s, the history of the resistance and the massacre was used as a vehicle for peace education primarily through youth camps held on Monte Sole. The Peace in Four Voices camps were initiated by the *Laboratorio Nazionale per la Didattica della Storia* and the Women’s Centre of Bologna. The purpose of the camp was to use the site of the massacre as “more than a monument” and conduct research into the “tragic past” to create “challenging educational activities aimed at the establishment of a culture of peace.”⁹² The program for the camp was developed over time based on the practical experiences of conducting peace education camps. There were many challenges to overcome. The first camps involved Israeli and Palestinian youth only and the dialogue quickly devolved into a political discussion that divided along predictable lines. In an effort to solve this problem, the next camp involved a group of Italians. This too was problematic, as the Palestinian and Israeli youth attempted to convert the Italians to their own cause. In 2000, a German delegation was added in light of the historical role of the

its academic advisors carefully studied population regards, records from the trials, archives of the minister of defence, and compensation records for partisan forces. MSPA, Fondo il Resto del Carlino, Busta 1, “Ricerca sull’eccidio di Marzabotto stabilise per la prima volt ail numero esatto dei caduto: Furono 775 vittime della rappresaglia nazista,” in *Il Resto del Carlino*, 8 ottobre 1944.

⁹¹ The debate between the left and the right did not end in the third phase of commemoration but continues to be prevalent in the local polemic. Francesco Fabbriani, “Polemica Monte Sole: “Rispettate i partigiani, ne morirono duecento,” *il Resto del Carlino*, Sabato, 29 maggio 2010, p. 34.

⁹² Nadia Baiesi, Marzia Gigli, Elena Monicelli and Roberta Pellizzoli, “Places of Memory as a Tool for Education: The ‘Peace in Four Voices Summer Camps’ at Monte Sole” in *The Public Historian* 30 (1), February 2008,” 29.

Germans in the massacre. Camp organizations hoped that the addition of the German delegation might illustrate that there was hope for the Palestinian and Israeli youth to reconcile their problems.⁹³

Peace education activities were ongoing through the Peace in Four Voices camps throughout the 1990s and in 2002, the Scuola di Pace of Monte Sole was opened. Its aim was to “promote training and peace education projects, non-violent transformation of conflicts, respect for human rights in order to develop a society without xenophobia, racism and other kinds of violence towards human beings and their environment.”⁹⁴ The main program of the Scuola di Pace was the peace education camps. Although devoted to research connected to all facets of the history of the local Second World War experience, the first stage of the project was an investigation into the issue of memory, including how the Germans and the Italians remembered the events of September-October 1944.⁹⁵ The Scuola di Pace also conducts visits by schools groups, both local and international, for day programs.⁹⁶ An interesting outcome of the work of the Scuola di Pace is the multiple conflicting ‘truths’ that are created in the collective memory of such a tragic event. The addition of German and Italian youth to the camps highlights these conflicting memories and how they have been passed down over time. For example, one Italian participant disagreed with the interpretation of the massacre because it differed from his own “heroic

⁹³ Baiesi, Gigli, Monicelli and Pellizzoli, “Places of Memory as a Tool for Education,” p. 30.

⁹⁴ Roberta Pellizzoli, “The Peace School of Monte Sole: Doing Peace Education Between Memories and Histories,” Paper abstract. “Who Owns the Past? Heritage Rights and Responsibilities in a Multicultural World” The Second Annual Ename International Colloquium,” 22-25 March 2006.

⁹⁵ Baiesi, Gigli, Monicelli and Pellizzoli, “Places of Memory as a Tool for Education,” p. 30.

⁹⁶ I have participated in one of the day programs on Monte Sole. I am the co-director for the University of New Brunswick’s *Second World War in Italy* course that visits Monte Sole as part of its program.

view” of the event that he had learned from his family.⁹⁷ Although the focus of the camps was initially on international sites of conflict, this problem highlights how the memory of the massacre still leads to conflict in Italy seventy years later.

The search for the truth did not end with the revision of the number of victims and the peace camps of the Scuola di Pace. Between 2001 and 2003, a research project was commissioned by the Parco Storico di Monte Sole, the Emilia-Romagna region, and the Ministry of the Environment to discover the facts about the massacre. The result of the project was a book, *Il massacro: Guerra ai civili a Monte Sole*, written by historians Luca Baldissara and Paolo Pezzino.⁹⁸ Baldissara and Pezzino consulted Italian, German, and Allied archives to provide the most complete account of the massacre to date. Their account recognized the problematic truths of the massacre established between the end of the war and the contemporary period, distinguishing between public and private, and local and national memory.⁹⁹ The national way of remembering the resistance conflicts with the local story of the resistance and the massacre. Moreover, the private memory of civilians conflicts with the public memory of the Monte Sole massacre and atrocities in general in Italy. One of the most noteworthy revelations from the study is the contention that the focus on the “memory war” and the excessive rhetoric used to discuss the massacre of Marzabotto obscures the truth of the Monte Sole massacre.

The findings of Baldissara and Pezzino’s study bring the story of the massacre full circle. They argue that the massacre of Monte Sole was a German military operation

⁹⁷ Baiesi, Gigli, Monicelli and Pellizzoli, “Places of Memory as a Tool for Education,” p. 31.

⁹⁸ Baldissara e Pezzino, *Il massacro: Guerra ai civili a Monte Sole*.

⁹⁹ Baldissara e Pezzino, *Il massacro*, p. 15. These “falsa notizia” (false reports) include the number of victims, and the dual location of the memory (i.e., Marzabotto vs. Monte Sole).

in the counter-partisan war even if, as they state, it was “more precisely a criminal action conducted as if it were a military operation.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, in this context at least, the argument made in defence of Kesselring, Simon, and Reder was legitimate in so far as the massacre was intended to be a military operation, conducted because it was a military necessity to eliminate all that allowed the partisans to exist. According to Baldissara and Pezzino, the German army needed to clear the area of all living things to ensure the defence of the Gothic Line, at least in the eyes of the Germans committing the action.

Baldissara and Pezzino’s study reveals much about the tension over the local memory of September and October 1944.¹⁰¹ The massacre of Monte Sole is reduced to a military operation while the massacre of Marzabotto allows for much more latitude in interpretation. In the massacre of Marzabotto, the victims are “eroi” or hero partisans, fighting for the liberation of Italy and the *caduti* or the fallen women and children who died for the cause of war.¹⁰² The label of “hero” or “fallen” fuels the debate over the responsibility of the partisans. One can argue that they caused the reprisal action that saw nearly 800 unarmed women, children, and old people die or that they were heroes fighting for the cause of liberation. The truth, however, is grimmer. The importance of the terrain at Monte Sole as the last mountainous feature before the city of Bologna and the Po Valley beyond meant that the Germans would have had to clear the area even in the absence of partisan activity. The existence of the Stella Rossa brigade only provided

¹⁰⁰ Baldissara e Pezzino, *Il massacre*, p. 21.

¹⁰¹ To date, little has been found about the reception of Baldissara and Pezzino’s book. The lack of positive or negative local assessments is revealing, since the research was commissioned by the local association in Marzabotto. Had the findings been more supportive of a local narrative, the book should be talked about more. This is an area for further investigation and questioning upon my next visit.

¹⁰² Baldissara e Pezzino, *Il massacre*, p. 12.

the justification for the brutal way in which the Germans cleared the area. As Paolo Pezzino writes, a number of the massacres committed by the Germans in northern Italy were these types of “territorial control” and not based on a need for reprisals.¹⁰³ It would seem that the massacre of Monte Sole was conducted for both territorial control and the need to eliminate the partisan threat. The brutal reality of who the victims were (unarmed women, children, and elderly people) falls outside the realm of this message.

Under the new narrative about the massacre of Monte Sole, those who died are victims of the war that swept through Italy, destroying most everything in its path. They did not willingly give their lives for the cause of liberation. Under the new narrative, the work of the Scuola di Pace, in its effort to discover the truth through research and also use the history to educate about the effects of war, seems to be the most effective way to finding meaning behind the massacre. The work of the Scuola di Pace uses the history in its peace education program to prevent such an atrocity from happening again.

The work of Baldissara and Pezzino and the Scuola di Pace has not and arguably cannot eliminate the narrative of the massacre of Marzabotto. The *sacrario*, the sculptures that surround the town hall, the relationship between the town of Marzabotto and other sites of atrocities like Hiroshima, Auschwitz, Lidice, Srebrenica, and others, and the plaque to “I martiri dell’eccidio di Marzabotto 1944” all support an understanding that the massacre happened in Marzabotto, not in the hills nearly ten kilometers away. The ill-informed visitor is presented with the narrative of the massacre of Marzabotto in the little town. There is evidence that a memorial park exists, but it is not clear that the park is the site of the massacre. The result of the investigation by

¹⁰³ Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre*, p. 7.

Baldissara and Pezzino and the Scuola di Pace is that there now exist two parallel narratives, one for Marzabotto and one for Monte Sole, that only continue to fuel the debate about the meaning behind the local history. Ultimately, the narrative of the massacre of Marzabotto better supports the needs of a country that still struggles to understand its Second World War experience. The tension between the two narratives is part of the civil war over the meaning of the Second World War that has not yet ended.

Part of the trouble in finding meaning is the brutal truth that lies behind why and how the massacre was carried out. The latest research into the massacre reveals much about German policy toward civilians in the Second World War. The detailed research carried out in the 1990s, specifically on who the victims were and where, when, and how they died, confirms the argument made by Kesselring, Simon, and Reder in their defence that they were carrying out a military operation. Their actions were justified by lumping all of the civilians under the title of partisans, including infants and the unborn. There is far more hope in believing that the victims were heroes who died in the effort of the liberation of Italy.

Conclusion

Monastery Hill at Cassino and the Monte Sole feature were two pieces of vital ground in the fight for Italy. The geographical features were factors in where and how the German army chose to defend. Monastery Hill and Monte Sole were so important that in both cases, when the German hold on these particular mountains was lost, the Germans were forced to retreat. In addition, the two terrain features definitely ensured that the Allied fight to break each respective position was costly in men and materiel. The geography of each area also impacted the local inhabitants: how and where they lived, how isolated they were from other communities, and their outlook on life. In both examples, the dominant high ground, so important to German defence of the area, became sources of refuge for the people trying to survive the war.

The geographical importance of both Monte Sole and Monastery Hill put the Italian people who lived on or near these features in great danger. As pieces of vital ground, Monte Sole and Monastery Hill were the focus of Allied and German attention as they planned how to wage war. Both sides worked to defend or attack the position; both sides were fighting to win the war at all costs. The presence of human life that had existed in these regions for centuries meant that both armies had to devise a strategy for dealing with civilians and their buildings. This strategy had a significant impact on how the Italians experienced and subsequently remember the two year military campaign.

Italy has a long history reaching back centuries to the time before the Romans ruled. And much has happened since then. In addition to being rich in relics from antiquity, Italy is a centre of the Renaissance, Catholicism, and the place of origin of some of the greatest thinkers, writers, and painters of all time, from St. Benedict to

Michelangelo to Dante. Much would be lost in a country reduced to ashes by war. The importance of Monte Sole and Monastery Hill meant that the inhabitants and the buildings that existed in these points of vital ground were in grave danger. The Allied bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino greatly concerned the Vatican. After the bombing, the Holy See redoubled its efforts in a letter writing campaign to both sides, pleading with them to spare the treasures of Catholicism. The Allies, however, rightly or wrongly, believed that the bombing of the Abbey was a military necessity. What is clear, however, is that Allied planners carefully considered what was necessary to bomb and what they could afford to spare. In many cases, notices were given to inhabitants before the bombing occurred.¹

The Allies were aware of the tension between winning the war and preventing collateral damage. In a December 1943 memo, General Eisenhower made it clear that given the choice between the lives of his soldiers and the protection of a famous building, his soldiers needed to come first. But Eisenhower affirmed that he did not want “military necessity ... to cloak slackness or indifference.”² Whenever possible, Allied soldiers were to respect Italy’s treasures. When necessary, however, Italian historic treasures and cities became military targets like when Rome was bombed on 19 July 1943. Although

¹ Before the bombing of Rome on 19 July 1943, the Allies dropped leaflets on the city of Rome to warn the inhabitants of the areas to bomb. In addition, the bombers were sent in daylight so they could follow the rail line and avoid bombing Rome’s precious buildings. In spite of this, there were still civilian casualties. Carlo D’Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), pp. 428-429. In the case of the bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino, the Allies dropped leaflets the day before. In spite of these, there were still civilian casualties. Molony, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Volume V*, p. 713. In both cases, however, the Allies gave up any element of surprise they may have had in the bombing.

² The National Archives, UK [TNA], FO 371/43817, “Dwight D. Eisenhower to All Commanders,” 29 December 1943.

Allied bombers avoided hitting any of the city's cultural and religious treasures, thousands of civilians were killed.

Although Allied commanders conceded, as Eisenhower said, that “sometimes the buildings must go”³ they had a different attitude toward civilians. Efforts made to forewarn inhabitants before of a bombing raid did not prevent all civilian casualties but at least the effort was made. The Allies understood that they would be forced in war to damage buildings and injure and even kill innocent Italian civilians. To mitigate this necessary outcome, however, the Allies sacrificed time and resources to ensure they caused the minimum amount of collateral damage both to the people and Italy's cultural heritage. Moreover, they planned, through Allied Civil Affairs, to repair the damage caused by battle.

In spite of the benevolent attitude taken toward Italian civilians, the Allies had much reason to distrust Italian intentions after September 1943. As an enemy a few short months before, Italian soldiers killed Allied soldiers in Sicily and North Africa. But as early as the Sicily campaign, the Allies recognized they could get more leverage from being kind to the Italians. The Allies followed through on promises made through Allied Civil Affairs in which precious resources (Allied engineers and sappers) were used to restore electricity and water to town after town. Experts in all matters pertaining to civilian life, from financial matters to health issues, were recruited and trained to become part of the Civil Affairs team that had a significant impact on the restoration of normal life in the aftermath of battle. In the Cassino sector, Civil Affairs worked with local

³ The National Archives, UK [TNA], FO 371/43817, “Dwight D. Eisenhower to All Commanders,” 29 December 1943.

Italians for months, after the battle moved on, to pick up the pieces, bury the dead, and feed the living.

Although the relationship between Italians and Allied personnel was not always positive, the assistance provided by Allied Civil Affairs and the cooperation of the Italians helped the Italian people restore faith in themselves and their local government and begin the process of rebuilding after months of war. In addition to the assistance provided to the Italian people themselves, Allied Civil Affairs is an important source of documentation for the state of Italian communities after the war moved on and the efforts made by both the Italians and the Allies in rebuilding and restoring infrastructure and Italian administration.⁴

The Allied tension between winning the war and preventing collateral damage continued throughout the Italian campaign, even after it became clear that the Allies could not afford to lose the war. By the spring of 1944, if not before, the Allies were clearly aware of the threat Nazi Germany posed to humanity. On 24 March 1944, the same day the Germans carried out the Ardeatine Caves massacre in Rome, President Roosevelt issued a statement in which he acknowledged that the Germans were perpetrators “in one of the blackest crimes of all history ... the wholesale systematic murder of the Jews of Europe.” Roosevelt proclaimed that the “until the victory that is now assured is won, the United States will persevere in its efforts ...”⁵ The necessity of

⁴ There are thousands of boxes with detailed reports on all facets of the extent of the damage and matters of Italian life after the battle moved on for all parts of Italy.

⁵ NARA, RG 107, Office of the Secretary of War, FBI and G2 – Germany, Treatment of, Statement of the President, 24 March 1944.

winning the war and winning it soon became all the more important with the realization that the Germans were carrying out the Final Solution.

As the campaign in Italy progressed, Allied resources dwindled and were divided as other fronts were opened in France. In spite of this, the Allies continued to commit manpower to Civil Affairs, helping the inhabitants in southern Italy to restore their towns and villages to a minimum level of functionality. As this study suggests, the resources and time required to feed, clothe, house, and medically care for the thousands of refugees was not insignificant. While this effort was carried out, the war for north Italy continued. To cope with a lack of resources, the Allies encouraged the growing resistance in the north, going so far as to recruit Italian soldiers to liaise with partisan bands. Through Italian agents, partisan bands were trained and equipped with Allied resources. Targets were given and General Alexander publicly incited the partisans to rise up and kill the German enemy.⁶ For the Allies, using the available Italian resistance became a military necessity. The Resistance contributed much to the Allied victory in Italy.

While the Allies were cleaning up the mess made by war and enabling Italians to get in the fight,⁷ the Germans were stripping the Italian countryside of all available resources. Allied provisions for humanitarian aid and their encouragement of the Italian resistance exacerbated punitive German policies. After the betrayal of the September 1943 armistice, the Germans felt they were entitled to strip the Italian countryside of men and materiel to support their war effort. As Timothy Saxon has discovered in his doctoral

⁶ Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre*, p. 92-93.

⁷ As this study suggests, the Allies not only supplied Italian partisans operating in the north, they also absorbed vast amounts of Italian soldiers into Allied units to use as truck drivers. Many Italian soldiers were entrusted to carry out missions in which they would liaise with Italian partisan units in North Italy.

work, maintaining a hold on the Italian industrial north became a military necessity for the Germans.⁸ This particular study shows that the Germans adopted a policy of taking whatever was of use and destroying what was not, including men. Italian men who were called up to fulfill their duty in Mussolini's Republican army were given the choice to go to Germany for work, join the *RSI*, or die.

As the Resistance, supplied and encouraged by the Allies, became more of a threat to the German hold on north Italy, the brutal German policy against civilians only escalated in its intensity. After the liberation of Rome in early June 1944, Kesselring issued orders condoning the severest response to the partisan threat. He instructed German commanders that they would be punished for failing to act before they were punished for acting in excess.⁹ After the order, the German army committed a string of massacres in Tuscany and Emilia Romagna under the guise of militarily necessary counter-partisan operations. The victims of these massacres were largely unarmed women, children, and elderly people. The last and largest of the massacres was at Monte Sole in September and October 1944. German reports noted the success of the Monte Sole operation, recording that 497 "bandits" were killed, in addition to 221 partisan helpers. Italian research has revealed that the more than 200 so-called "partisan helpers" were under the age of twelve. After the massacre, the region of Monte Sole, that was once home to 115 small Italian communities, became the front line. The Germans fortified it in preparation for the coming spring offensive which further destroyed the

⁸ As Saxon argues, Italy "offered economic, geographic, military, and political assets worth the cost of a military campaign." In addition, Saxon's research indicates that Italy became so important to the Germans that they wanted to avoid offending "Italian sensibilities." Perhaps this is why the Germans hid the massacres of the north under a cloak of military necessity. Saxon, "The German Side of the Hill," pp. 336-337.

⁹ PRO, WO 31128, "Allied Force Headquarters Report on German Reprisals For Partisan Activity in Italy."

evidence that humans had ever occupied the mountain. The massacre at Monte Sole was therefore a counter-partisan operation *and* an effort to clear the area to ensure German “territorial control.”¹⁰

It seems clear, from this study, that Allied and German policies played off one another as the war progressed. For both sides, certain things became military necessities to ensure victory. The Italian people were forced to make decisions in the context of the military campaign; they were sometimes agents (partisans or fascists) and sometimes innocent bystanders.

The 1943-45 military campaign in Italy produced fractured memories for the Italian people who continue to debate the meaning of the two-year period. This study reveals that the fractured memory can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that the German army was better at information operations than the Allies. After all, one of the dominant memories in the Cassino sector is of the “cruel and unnecessary” crime committed by the Allies in the bombing of the Abbey of Montecassino. This message, first conveyed by Field Marshal Kesselring only two days after the bombing,¹¹ has permeated both the secondary literature of the campaign and Italian memory. Allied efforts to first warn the inhabitants of the Abbey of the bombing and then to clean up the mess from seven months of battle through the Civil Affairs organization is rarely mentioned. Neither is the German choice to defend at Cassino.

¹⁰ Pezzino, *Memory and Massacre*, p. 7. Pezzino notes that only a minority of Italian massacres, carried out in north Italy were committed as reprisal killings. Many were carried out to ensure the German’s could control the territory unimpeded by civilians. Killing all living things and burning the evidence was an expeditious way to do this.

¹¹ TNA, FO 371/43817, File No. 32, “Kesselring’s Statement on the Bombing of Monte Cassino and Castel Gandolfo,” Outline of News and Enemy Propaganda, 17 February 1944.

In a similar vein, the Germans were successful in deflecting the blame for the massacres of unarmed women, children, and elderly people at Monte Sole. German reports immediately after the massacre was carried out described a successful counter-insurgency operation and implied that those killed were partisans. Days after the massacre, the Fascist press acknowledged that partisans were killed but denied the rumours that women and children were also killed.¹² After the war ended, General Simon and Major Walter Reder, both on trial for war crimes against humanity, insisted that the operation was a justified military necessity. The deaths of women and children were explained as collateral damage in a battle in which the Germans needed to use heavy artillery to ensure victory against the partisans, who were fighting unfairly. Moreover, Simon's defence lawyer, a Dr. Schütze, wrote in 1952 that the testimony from Italian survivors could not be trusted: "...insofar as they testified on facts out of [their] own knowledge their objectivity was constantly endangered by the fact that they were Italians and, most of them, partisans themselves."¹³ Both Simon and Reder were eventually released from prison, further supporting the argument that the massacre was justified and that Italians were exaggerating the extent of the crime.

The result is that the German message about the campaign, at least in the particular examples of Monte Sole and Cassino, have been adopted as the dominant messages about the Italian campaign. In neither case is German culpability considered. In the Cassino sector, the Allies are blamed for their tactic of bombing and their destruction

¹² MSPA, E: Eccidio di Marzabotto, busta 7, fascicolo, letter, Dino Fantozzi, Capo della Provincia di Bologna to Benito Mussolini, Il Duce, 10 ottobre 1944.

¹³ TNA, WO 235/587 43505, Trial Documents for Max Simon, Dr. H.A, Schütze to Sir Irvone Kirkpatrick, High Commissioner of the United Kingdom, "Review of the Case of the former Lieutenant-General of the Waffen-SS, Max Simon, Werl.," 8 July 1952, p.2.

of the Abbey of Montecassino. In Monte Sole, the partisans are blamed for provoking a militarily justified operation in which innocent civilians were killed.

The comparison between Monte Sole and Cassino show the wide variation of experiences for the Italians. This does not suggest that the events written about in this study are definitive; the nature of the military campaign and the rugged geography of the country meant that the war impacted each Italian region differently. The military campaign in Sicily, for example, lasted for thirty-eight days but was then followed by Allied occupation. Allied Civil Affairs remained in Sicily for seven months repairing damage, providing for local populations, and maintaining a secure area for Allied troops who were staging in Sicily for follow-on operations on the Italian mainland. Even so, the impact of the military campaign on Sicily varied. Although much of the island was liberated fairly quickly, the bitterest battles gravitated around the northeast corner causing much damage to cities like Catania and Messina. In addition, Italy remained an ally to the Germans throughout the Sicily campaign so the Germans had no reason to be threatened by the Italian betrayal. The Sicilian people had a very different war than Italians living on the mainland.

Although there are a multitude of different ways Italians experienced the war, it is clear that the two-year period between 1943 and 1945 defined the country that came after it. The legacy of the military campaign, resistance, the civil war, and the massacres had an impact on the course of events that led to the establishment of the Republic. The difficult things that happened in places like Monte Sole and Cassino had to be reconciled in order for the Italian nation to establish a future. In many cases, that meant forgetting and remembering at the same time. For example, as Rosario Forlenza notes, partisans

were useful in Italian memory, but could only be “commemorated dead, not alive, as martyrs, not as victors.”¹⁴ As the civil war over the memory of the role of the partisans continues to rage in Marzabotto, this seems to be true. The partisans were useful during the war but no longer. They had a purpose and now should be left to rest. The existence of former partisans who beg for recognition exacerbates the debate.

The German claim that they did nothing wrong and were forced to carry out the operation against the partisans means that responsibility lays with the partisans for provoking the massacre. It seems true that the civil war that waged within the military campaign has permeated all facets of Italian life since the war ended.¹⁵ The *Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia*'s unsuccessful bid to have the script of Spike Lee's movie, *Miracle at Sant'Anna*, changed and the continued debate in the town of Marzabotto over the role of the partisans makes this clear. In May 2010, the newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino* featured an article called “Polemica Monte Sole” that described the debate between the president of the *Comitato Onoranze Caduti di Marzabotto* who felt the partisans should be given respect, and Giancarlo Nanni, a survivor of the massacre, who recalled being abandoned by the Stella Rossa brigade in the days of the massacre.¹⁶ The issue remains a sensitive one, more than seventy years later.

As this study suggests, the presence of Allied “liberators” and German “occupying” troops had an impact on how the Italians experienced and subsequently remember the war. Despite the brutal nature of German occupation, German culpability

¹⁴ Forlenza, “Sacrificial Memory and Political Legitimacy in Postwar Italy, p. 82.

¹⁵ Philip Cooke's latest book outlines how the legacy of the Italian Resistance continues to impact Italian politics and culture. Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*.

¹⁶ Francesco Fabbriani, “Polemica Monte Sole: “Rispettate i partigiani, ne morirono duecento,” *il Resto del Carlino*, Sabato, 29 maggio 2010, p. 34.

in massacres and destroying the country is rarely an issue of discussion. As the above article from *il Resto del Carlino* suggests, the responsibility for the massacre continues to lie with the partisans, not the Germans. At Cassino and at Monte Sole, the German role in waging war does not feature in official commemorations.

The evidence, however, suggests German troops generally treated the Italians brutally. Kesselring, in his 17 June order, went so far as to make brutal treatment part of German doctrine in Italy. Although the examples used in this study paint a picture of the bad German who stripped the Italian countryside, rounded up working-age males, and massacred unarmed civilians, the Germans were not uniformly evil. That is a problematic generalization; not all Germans took a brutal, punitive attitude toward Italian civilians. German efforts to save the treasures at the Abbey of Montecassino in 1943 and the fact that Private Legoli Julien deserted his unit after the first day of the Monte Sole massacres show that not all Germans were intent on exacting revenge on the Italian people.

In the context of the wider war, however, the general German policy toward civilians indicates that Italy's experience was unique, at least in that regard. The Italians were, after all, at one point in the war enemy and ally to both sides. Although massacres were committed in other theatres throughout the course of the war, German policy toward civilians was not uniformly punitive or brutal. Historian Julia Torrie's book, *"For Their Own Good": Civilian Evacuations in Germany and France, 1939-1945* show that German policy in these two countries at least was geared toward protecting civilians.¹⁷ Benevolent German policies toward civilians in France and Germany contrast with brutal

¹⁷ Julia Torrie, *"For Their Own Good": Civilian Evacuations in Germany and France, 1939-1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

policies in Italy and Eastern Europe.¹⁸ But even in France, there were cases of brutal German massacres against civilians like the example at Oradour-sur-Glane on 10 June 1944.¹⁹

By contrast, the Allies generally tried to adopt a benevolent attitude toward the Italian people, who had formally been their enemy. Except on a local level, as the example of Cassino proves, the memory of the Allies is largely negative for their bombing of Italy's cities and cultural sites. In spite of efforts to care for civilians and reconstruct broken towns, the Allies are not the quintessential "good." French Moroccan soldiers raped Italian women and stole their goods and Allied soldiers were prosecuted for stealing goods from Italian civilians. The policies of the Fine Arts and Monuments division of Civil Affairs were designed to protect against such looting. Moreover, although they viewed the Italian populace favourably despite the fact they were former enemies, the Allies would not take the same attitude toward the Germans when the time came to occupy Germany.²⁰

Even so, the Allies demonstrated a desire to prevent collateral damage. The example of Cassino shows the tensions that result from the need to do what is a military necessity against a desire to prevent collateral damage. For the Allies, the solution in the Second World War was to avoid causing collateral damage if possible (by not bombing, by careful targeted bombing) or by planning to repair the damage in the aftermath

¹⁸ For the situation in the East, see Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009).

¹⁹ For more on Oradour-sur-Glane, see Farmer, *Martyred Village*.

²⁰ Hugh Gordon, unpublished PhD dissertation, "Cheers and Tears: Relations Between Canadian Soldiers and German Civilians, 1944-46," University of Victoria, 2010.

through Civil Affairs. Civilians were warned ahead of time if bombing was necessary so they could remove themselves from the area.

In the contemporary environment, NATO countries, Canada especially, have taken that a step further to state that civilian casualties were unacceptable. Provincial Reconstruction Teams, designed to liaise with local populations and also build stability by ensuring civilians have what they need to thrive, have become a staple of modern missions in theatres like that in Afghanistan.²¹ The lessons learned from Allied Civil Affairs are visible in modern conflict. The Italian campaign therefore becomes an important learning tool for modern practitioners of war.

Both a military campaign and a civil war raged in Italy between 1943 and 1945. The four sets of protagonists²² in these conflicts – the Allies, the Germans and Fascists, the Italian partisans, and the civilians – all had different desired outcomes. Each played off one another in the effort to achieve those outcomes. Rarely is the civil war considered within the context of the how and why the military campaign in Italy was waged. The wider scope employed in this study reveals more about the Italian war experience and the difficult resulting memory. Unfortunately, what this study shows is that hundreds of

²¹ Captain Christian Breede, “Intelligence Lessons and the Emerging Canadian Counter Insurgency Doctrine,” in *Canadian Army Journal*, vol. 9.3 (Winter 2006), pp. 24-40; Major Alex D. Haynes, CD, “Manoeuvre Warfare Theory and Counter-Insurgency Doctrine” *Canadian Army Journal*, vol. 11.1 (Spring 2008), pp. 25-34. Haynes refers to David Kilcullen’s “Twenty-Eight Articles” for counterinsurgency principles and methods. One of these is “Practice Armed Civil Affairs” as an armed social worker. Kilcullen advises that modern soldiers should be able to “redress basic social and political problems while being shot at.” In addition, he writes about winning hearts and minds by building trust and also the need to build people skills. Haynes, “Manoeuvre Warfare Theory,” p. 28. Most of the practical examples used to build modern COIN and Civil-Military Relations doctrine are based on historical examples that happened after the Second World War. Most modern soldiers are unaware that Civil Affairs existed in the Second World War. This is based on my own practical experience lecturing to modern Canadian and American soldiers about Civil Affairs in Italy.

²² In his research about massacres in Italy, Paolo Pezzino identifies three protagonists, the civilians, the partisans, and the Germans, This study contends that the Allies are a fourth protagonist that should be considered in the context of Italy’s war.

thousands of Italians were forced to make impossible choices on a daily basis throughout the war. The result of those choices, made in the context of a war and a civil war, did not make life any easier after the war. The memory of Italy's Second World War remains fractured and divisive seventy years on.

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