
The Round Tablette

Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)

April 2010

Volume 18 Number 8 23:9

Published by WW II History Roundtable

Edited by Connie Harris

www.mn-ww2roundtable.org

Thursday, April 8, 2010

Welcome to the April session of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II

Roundtable. Our speaker tonight is Flint Whitlock, a former Army officer and author of numerous books on World War II, along with veterans of the Italian Campaign.

During the last few months of 1943 the British and American efforts to move up the Italian boot were frustrated by the stiff German defenses at the Gustav Line. The Allies were stopped sixty miles south of Rome, and decided to do an end run around the Germans with an amphibious landing at the Italian resort towns of Anzio and Nettuno. The American commanders were skeptical of such a move and the plan was put on hold because of lack of troops and shipping due to the ongoing buildup for the cross channel invasion (OVERLORD). During this same time there was a reshuffling of Allied commanders, with Dwight Eisenhower becoming Supreme Commander of Allied Forces Europe and transferred back to Great Britain to plan Operation OVERLORD while British General Sir Henry Wilson took over the Italian campaign. Thus, the British became the primary commanders in the Mediterranean theater, and plans for the Anzio landings were revived.

The British Prime Minister Winston Churchill believed that Italy was the “soft underbelly of Europe” and convinced President Franklin Roosevelt that the Allies would succeed in taking Rome. Anzio was chosen because of its proximity to Rome while still being within range of Allied aircraft flying out of Naples. However enthusiastic the British might have been the US commanders in the field Fifth Army Commander Lieutenant General Mark Clark and Major General John P. Lucas were still unconvinced. Lucas would be leading the landings but worried the operation would be another Gallipoli, referring to the British Army’s World War I fiasco in 1915. Clark added to Lucas’ caution by advising him “not to stick his neck out.”

On January 22, 1944, Operation SHINGLE, the Allies’ amphibious landing at Anzio and Nettuno, went off like clockwork. The Germans were caught completely by surprise, the only Germans in the immediate vicinity were three drunken officers in a Volkswagen command vehicle who drove down the beach into an landing craft. By the end of the first day the Allies had landed over 36,000 troops and over 3,000 vehicles. By the end of the second day the Allies occupied a beachhead seven miles deep. Lucas’ caution would be his undoing though because he failed to exploit his opportunity and push further inward, instead he consolidated his position on the beachhead which gave the Germans time enough to react.

WWII History Round Table on DVD!!!

Order online at: www.barros.us/online-store.cfm or contact Rob at (763) 639-3399

Programs \$10 + tax & shipping

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, whom Adolf Hitler appointed to lead the German troops in Italy in November 1943 promised to hold the Gustav Line for at least six months. Within a week of the landings Kesselring had concentrated eight divisions and launched counterattacks that almost drove the Allies into the sea. Far from annihilating the Gustav Line, the Anzio landings became an Allied liability.

The Allies spent months trying to breakout of the beachhead at Anzio and it wasn't until May that they gained the advantage over the tenacious German defenses. By this time Lucas had been replaced by Major General Lucian Truscott who instead of driving the German Tenth Army inland to capture them, turned north to Rome. Clark ordered him to grab the glory away from the British; the Americans captured Rome on June 5, 1944.

The Anzio landings continue to be controversial to the present day. What did this invasion accomplish? The desired immediate objective was to out flank the Germans Gustav Line, which it failed to do. However, the landings could not be ignored by the Germans, which tied up much needed troops, equipment, and materiel that could have been used at other fronts.

Further Readings:

Flint Whitlock, *The Rock of Anzio: From Sicily to Dachau, A History Of The 45th Infantry Division* (New York: Westview Press, 1998)

John S.D. Eisenhower, *They Fought at Anzio* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007)

Joseph Garland, *Unknown Soldiers* (Rockport, MA: Protean Press, 2009)

Avis Schorer, *A Half Acre of Hell* (Lakeville, MN: Galde Press, 2000)

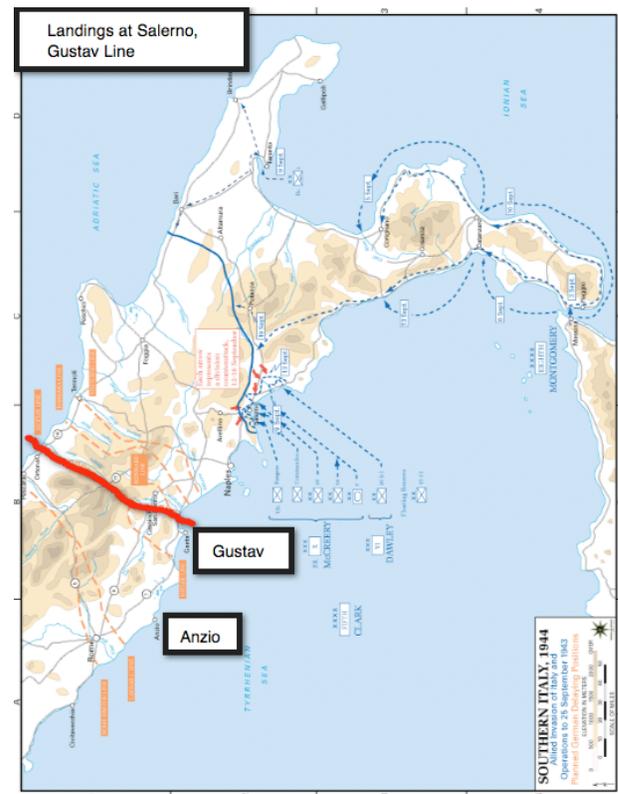
Steven Zaloga and Peter Dennis, *Anzio 1944: The Beleaguered Beachhead (Campaign)* (Oxford UK: Osprey Publishing, 2006)

Lloyd Clark, *Anzio: Italy and the Battle for Rome – 1944* (London: Grove Press, 2007)

Carlo D'Este *Fatal Decision: Anzio and the Battle for Rome* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008)

Round Table Schedule 2010

22 April 10	Normandy Then & Now
13 May 10	Flying the Hump



WWII History Round Table on DVD!!!

Order online at: www.barros.us/online-store.cfm or contact Rob at (763) 639-3399

Programs \$10 + tax & shipping