

# CHAPTER VI \* \* \* \* \*

## *The February Drive on Cassino*

### A. *THE ENEMY AND THE TERRAIN*

AT the beginning of February the tactical situation on the southern front was fairly clear from the enemy's point of view. His extreme flanks had given way slowly but were still strong. The attacks by Fifth Army revealed the plan to turn each flank to pave the way for a breakthrough in the Liri Valley. The obviously critical points were the Sant'Ambrogio and Castelforte areas south of the Liri, and the hills around Cassino. Enemy troop movements brought added strength to these positions. The 94th Grenadier Division (less the 276th Grenadier Regiment) was left on the south from the coast to Ausente Creek, while the 5th Mountain Division, reinforced by the 3d Mountain Battalion, garrisoned the north flank from Terelle nearly to the Eighth Army boundary. In the Castelforte sector the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division held from Ausente Creek to the Mount Majo ridge until the middle of February, when it was relieved by a conglomeration of units badly mauled in the Anzio fighting. On the Mount Majo ridge the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division had the 276th Grenadier Regiment, borrowed from the 94th Grenadier Division, while the 129th Panzer Grenadier Regiment held the Sant'Angelo sector. The area around Cassino was the key to the portion of the Gustav Line lying north of the Liri River. The 211th Grenadier Regiment, reinforced by the 132d Grenadier Regiment, was responsible for Cassino itself. The 134th and 131st Grenadier Regiments, the 191st Grenadier Regiment, and the 8th Panzer Grenadier Regiment held the rest of the sector from south to north.

In this region the mountains rise abruptly from the valley floor, which has an elevation of about 40 meters above sea level at Cassino. Four miles to the northwest of the town massive Mount Cairo, crowned with snow through the winter, towers 1669 meters, or more than 5500 feet, above sea level. About half of the district, extending over two miles west and three miles north of Cas-

sino, was the scene of some of the bitterest battles fought during the Italian campaign. This small area of six square miles held the enemy's forces protecting Cassino and the northern entrance to the Liri Valley. Mount Castellone (771 meters) and Sant'Angelo Hill (575 meters) marked the western limits of the Cassino defenses. The greatest enemy strength lay south of Majola Hill near the center of the district. Monastery Hill (Hill 516) and more than a dozen hills and knobs close to it dominated the town. Hill 593, about one-half mile to the northwest, was the outer bastion of Monastery Hill in that direction. This point was itself protected by Sant'Angelo Hill and Majola Hill. The ridge running northeast to Cassino had three important points, terminating in Castle Hill (Hill 193) on the western outskirts of the town. Hangman's Hill (Hill 435), three-fourths of the way up the southwestern slopes of Monastery Hill, was another key point.

There is practically no timber in this area. Some slopes are terraced; cultivated fields occupy some of the narrow valleys; and deep ravines are numerous. The few trails winding among the mountains could easily be covered by machine-gun fire. All positions were mutually supporting, protected by minefields, and strongly fortified. This terrain and the enemy's use of it gave him an all but impregnable fortress. Nevertheless, Fifth Army had to attack to force its way into the Liri Valley, and the attack had to be made by troops already near the point of exhaustion after several weeks of hard fighting.

## B. THE 34TH DIVISION DRIVE ON CASSINO

1-14 FEBRUARY

1. *Plan of Maneuver.* (See Map No. 8.) General strategy of the II Corps drive on Cassino remained unchanged in February. The 34th Division continued its thrust from the north, and Combat Command B of the 1st Armored Division prepared detailed plans for deployment into the Liri Valley if the Cassino bastion fell. The 1st Tank Group, attached to the 34th Division, had the mission of spearheading the Liri Valley drive and supporting the infantry with fire and movement. The 756th Tank Battalion was assigned to support the 133d Infantry advancing south from the barracks; the 753d Tank Battalion was to support with fire from the east, then move into Cassino; the 760th Tank Battalion, most of which was attached to the 36th Division, planned to advance through Cassino to seize the highway south of the town <sup>(1)</sup>. During prepara-

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<sup>(1)</sup> In addition to the armor, the 1st Tank Group on 1 February comprised the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion; 59th Armored Field Artillery Battalion; Company C, 48th Engineer Combat Battalion; and Troop B, 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron.

tory fires preceding the infantry attack on 1 February elements of all three tank units were to advance to positions immediately around Cassino to provide close-in fires on enemy strongpoints. The success of these plans for the use of tanks would depend on their ability to move into position, the elimination of strongpoints and road blocks, and the progress of infantry elements.

As outlined in the 34th Division orders of 31 January, the 135th Infantry was to make the main effort toward Mount Castellone and be prepared to exploit toward Piedimonte. An alternate plan contemplated the seizure of Majola Hill and Hill 445, followed by an advance southeast to attack Cassino from the rear. The 142d Regimental Combat Team was to continue its attack toward Mount Castellone from the Belvedere bridgehead, held by the FEC. Thus the 135th Infantry might be called on to take the objective of the 142d Infantry or to parallel its advance on the left. The tactical situation at the close of 31 January caused General Ryder to order the 135th Infantry to attack Castellone with one battalion and Majola Hill with two battalions, while the 142d Infantry came up to take over Mount Castellone. The 168th Infantry was to hold in place on Hills 56 and 213, support the 135th Infantry with fire, and protect the right flank. The 133d Infantry would prepare to attack south from the barracks. H Hour was set as 0630, 1 February.

2. *The Action of 1-3 February.* The 135th Infantry had relieved the 133d Infantry along the Rapido during 26-29 January. Then the 133d Infantry went back into line, and the 135th Infantry moved to the 34th Division general assembly area near San Michele. On 31 January the 2d and 3d Battalions left their bivouacs and marched into position for the attack. The 3d Battalion proceeded to Cairo, its line of departure; the 2d Battalion passed through the saddle between Hills 56 and 213. Both battalions jumped off at 0630, 1 February and advanced swiftly. On the right the 3d Battalion captured Hill 771 on Mount Castellone by 0935. Enemy artillery from the northwest and self-propelled guns near the barracks hit the 2d Battalion advancing on Majola Hill, but our troops captured the crest and Point 382 to the east by 0945. A heavy fog enabled both battalions to come on the enemy almost undetected.

On 2 February II Corps modified its plan of attack to provide for the 36th Division to take over the west flank about Mount Castellone. With its sector thus narrowed, the 34th Division would make a strong attack upon Cassino. The 36th Division was to attack west against Mount Corno to envelop Villa Santa Lucia and Piedimonte from the north. This plan was later abandoned as being beyond the capabilities of the 36th Division. However, regrouping began to make possible a closer envelopment of Monastery Hill by capturing Sant'Angelo Hill. General Ryder ordered the 135th Infantry to continue south to seize

Sant'Angelo Hill, Hill 706, Albaneta Farm, and the south and southeast slopes of Monastery Hill. The 133d Infantry was to continue its attack on Cassino.

On 2 February the 2d Battalion, 135th Infantry, advanced south toward Hill 445 <sup>(1)</sup> and succeeded in getting halfway to Hill 593. The 1st Battalion paralleled this advance and cleaned out resistance on Hill 324 on 2-3 February, thus protecting the regiment's left flank. By the 3d the 1st Battalion had suffered heavy casualties, especially in Company A. Strong counterattacks against the 2d Battalion on the morning of 3 February caused General Ryder to order reinforcements from the 168th Infantry. Colonel Boatner sent the 3d Battalion to occupy the gully between Majola Hill and Hill 445. At 1700 Company K took up positions on the extreme north end of Hill 593, while Company 1 occupied Hill 445. At the end of the action on 3 February the 2d Battalion, 135th Infantry, and the 3d Battalion, 168th Infantry, were one and one-half miles north of Highway 6. Prisoners of war captured in the area revealed that Hill 593 was garrisoned by the 3d Battalion, 3d Parachute Regiment, which had been rushed into line from Ortona on the Adriatic coast.

On the regimental right flank the 3d Battalion, 135th Infantry, beat off counterattacks from the north, south, and west on 2 February. About noon the 1st Battalion, 142d Infantry, reached Mount Castellone from Manna Farm. Then, continuing the attack southward, the 3d Battalion, 135th Infantry, went on to capture Hill 706 on the following day. Operations by the rest of the 142d Infantry met with little success. Santa Lucia Hill, half a mile northwest of Mount Castellone, gave the enemy a position dangerous to our right flank. The 3d Battalion moved out to attack the hill at 1530, 2 February. By 0500, 3 February, enemy opposition held up the battalion halfway to its objective, so Colonel Lynch ordered the troops to proceed to Mount Castellone. During the night of 2-3 February the 2d Battalion attacked Hill 875 northwest of Manna Farm, but was forced to fall back to its original positions after suffering heavy casualties. General Butler on the 3d ordered the 2d Battalion to hold fast on Manna Farm and join the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry, in an attack against Terelle in conjunction with the French; the 1st and 3d Battalions, 142d Infantry, would at the same time attack Santa Lucia Hill. This plan, however, was abandoned later in the day.

When the 168th Infantry crossed the valley on 30 January to attack Hills 56 and 213, it received machine-gun and small-arms fire from the barracks area. Early in the morning of the 31st the 133d Infantry sent a reinforced rifle com-

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(1) Hill 445 is about 550 yards south of Majola Hill. Point 445 is the same distance north of Monastery Hill.



pany and a platoon of tanks to clean out the enemy. This attempt failed; but on the following day the attack was renewed by Company I and a company of tanks. Most of the buildings were captured by 2300, although mopping up continued until the morning of 2 February.

With the barracks under control, the 133d Infantry then prepared to advance south against Cassino with the 3d Battalion in the lead, preceded by two platoons of Company B, 756th Tank Battalion. The tanks advanced down the road and the stream bed while the infantry spread out to take the high ground commanding the road. The platoon of tanks in the stream bed was stopped about 600 yards north of the town by blocks and antitank fire; the armor advancing on the road made slightly better progress but pulled back to a quarry west of the road behind Hill 56 when antitank guns, concealed by smoke, fired on our tanks. At 1725, 2 February, both infantry and tanks advanced under smoke and were in the north end of the town of Cassino by 1740. Within an hour enemy infantry were attacking the tanks that had succeeded in penetrating the outskirts. As darkness increased, the tanks lost their effectiveness and our troops withdrew about 1000 yards. Two tanks had been captured by the enemy and three had been damaged.

The assault with tanks and infantry was resumed on 3 February. At 0600 Company C attacked with tank support toward the northeast corner of Cassino, only to be forced back. Plans were then made to attack with the 1st and 3d Battalions in the afternoon. The first objective of the 3d Battalion was Hill 175. Castle Hill, just north of Cassino, has a nearly vertical cliff on its north side which concealed machine guns and small strongpoints in caves and dugouts. To capture this feature the infantry had to pass between the hill and the town and climb the southeast slopes. Castle Hill with Point 165, Point 202, and Hangman's Hill formed a natural approach to Monastery Hill. The 3d Battalion moved out at 1400, captured Hill 175, but was still under fire from Castle Hill. In conjunction with this attack Company C, 760th Tank Battalion, moved down the road into the north edge of Cassino by 1645. One platoon of tanks with elements of Company I consolidated positions in a courtyard at the northwest corner of Cassino, using walls and corners of buildings for defilade. This position was very precarious so long as the enemy held Castle Hill rising immediately above it. The 1st Battalion penetrated the northeast edge of town and dug in.

The 34th Division made important gains in the first three days of the February drive. Approximately one-third of the critical area northeast of Cassino was in our hands, and both infantry and tanks had won a slight foothold in Cassino itself. Our troops were at close grips with the enemy's strongest defenses barring the way into the Liri Valley. Although losses had been heavy,

there was reason to believe that our superiority in artillery and armor might enable the infantry to break through to Highway 6.

3. *The Action of 4-7 February.* (See Map No. 9.) The 135th Infantry continued its southward progress on 4 February. On the extreme right the 3d Battalion reached Sant'Angelo Hill, but an enemy counterattack threw the battalion back to Hill 706. In the center the 2d Battalion advanced to within 500 yards of Hill 593. The 1st Battalion on the left secured a precarious hold on Point 445. Fighting throughout the day can best be described as confused. Our own and the enemy's troops were often only a few yards apart, exchanging hand grenades across stone walls. Close control was extremely difficult and often impossible. There was little progress on the 5th as the 34th Division regrouped. The 2d Battalion, 135th Infantry, was hard-pressed in beating off counterattacks. A squad-sized platoon of the 1st Battalion fought its way to the walls of the Abbey and captured 14 prisoners from a cave on Monastery Hill before withdrawing. This daring foray represented the farthest advance of the 34th Division in the battle for Cassino.

During the night of 5-6 February the 1st and 3d Battalions, 168th Infantry, assembled on Point 445, while the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, concentrated toward the left flank to block enemy infiltration from Castle Hill. At dawn on 6 February Company L led the attack of the 168th Infantry against Monastery Hill. Working through the V-shaped gorge between Point 445 and their objective, our troops started up a path toward the Abbey. They reached a point where the path became a narrow defile covered by enemy machine guns on the Abbey walls and on Castle Hill to their left rear. Companies K and L were pinned down all day, then retired to Point 445 to relieve the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, which moved into reserve north of Point 450. The 2d Battalion, 135th Infantry, had only slightly better success on the 6th. Jumping off at 0630, the advance elements gained a foothold on Hills 593 and 569. Driven off by a counterattack, the battalion again recovered the north slopes of Hill 593. Furious counterattacks continued through the next day; but the battalion, greatly reduced in strength, held on grimly.

On 4 February the 133d Infantry and tanks of the 760th Tank Battalion consolidated the positions they had won in the north edge of Cassino. The 1st Battalion again penetrated the northeastern corner but was driven out by six enemy tanks at 0800. The battalion then moved over to occupy Hill 175, thus permitting Company I, to come up to support the rest of the 3d Battalion. Artillery fire continued the effort to pulverize strongpoints. The 151st Field Artillery Battalion fired 4568 rounds during the day in support of the 133d Infantry, but the 105-mm howitzers were ineffective against the concrete and

steel bunkers and heavy stone buildings. Eight-inch howitzers were called on to level these strongpoints. The 760th Tank Battalion emplaced a 57-mm anti-tank gun north of Cassino to provide plunging fire; the assault gun platoon and the 105-mm howitzers of the medium tank companies moved to firing positions near Cairo village. One section of 3-inch tank destroyers advanced to the south end of the barracks. On 5 February the 1st Battalion began to advance south from Hill 175 to attack Castle Hill. Clearing out the draws and gullies on the way, the battalion reached the objective, but at 2030 a strong counterattack compelled it to fall back to Hill 175. The 3d Battalion repulsed a counterattack against its left flank and captured another block of houses.

4. *Shifts and Plans.* The loss of Cairo village, Majola Hill, Mount Castellone, and Belvedere Hill called for reinforcements if the enemy were to defeat our attempt to envelop Cassino from the north. The 90th Panzer Grenadier Division was already on the way. First to arrive was the 2d Battalion, 361st Panzer Grenadier Regiment, by 31 January, which had served opposite 10 Corps for a few days and had then enjoyed a short rest. The 1st Battalion of this regiment was identified in the Cassino sector on 5-6 February, after having moved from the Adriatic. The 3d Battalion traveled from the Adriatic to the Rome area, then to the Anzio beachhead, and finally appeared at Cassino on 7 February. In the period 7-15 February the 200th Panzer Grenadier Regiment came in to complete the division. In the meantime units of the 1st Parachute Division also began to show up from the Eighth Army front. By 3 February the 3d Battalion, 3d Parachute Regiment, had been identified, initially in the area east of Hill 593. Together these units were able to check our advance and throw powerful counterattacks against Mount Castellone and Hill 593.

On our side General Alexander at the end of January ordered the 2 New Zealand Division and the 4 Indian Infantry Division to be withdrawn from Eighth Army to serve as Army Group reserve to exploit through the Liri Valley. On 3 February these two divisions were formed into the New Zealand Corps and came under Fifth Army. General Clark then directed the 2 New Zealand Division to take over the sector south of Highway 6. Thus relieved, the 36th Division could provide the strength needed to continue the drive against Cassino.

On 5 February General Keyes ordered the 36th Division to move around to the right of the 34th Division, prepared to capture Piedimonte from the northeast. The 34th Division was to capture the Cassino stronghold and thus pave the way for armor to enter the Liri Valley. One task force of armor and infantry was to drive southwest; a second was to push up Highway 6 to meet the wide envelopment by the 36th Division. The New Zealand Corps would be available to pass through to continue the attack. These plans were co-ordinated with an



assault by 10 Corps south of the Liri River. During the night of 7-8 February 10 Corps was to attack on its right toward Mount Faito, and a day later capture the mountains behind Castelforte. Success in these attacks would force the enemy to withdraw and open the Liri Valley, but, as has been noted, the 10 Corps effort did not reach its objectives.

The New Zealand Corps took over south of Highway 6 at 0900, 6 February. The 143d Infantry (less the 2d Battalion) moved to Cairo village that night and on the following day relieved the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry, at Manna Farm; the 141st Infantry went into reserve north of Highway 6; and the 142d Infantry reverted to the 36th Division on 7 February. With these movements completed, II Corps was ready to resume the drive to cut Highway 6.

5. *The Action of 8-10 February.* The 34th Division plan of action called for an attack at 2200, 7 February, by the 135th Infantry to seize Albaneta Farm and thus protect the right flank of the 168th Infantry in its assault on Monastery Hill at 0600, 8 February. The 133d Infantry would continue the battle in Cassino. But the 135th Infantry was fully occupied in beating back counterattacks and could not muster the strength necessary for offensive action. H Hour was therefore set ahead to 0400 for the 168th Infantry to take advantage of darkness. The 2d Battalion, 135th Infantry, dropped back slightly from Hill 593, being relieved by elements of the 168th Infantry, and the 1st Battalion moved over to the right of the 2d Battalion in order to aid in defending the division right flank.

The 1st and 3d Battalions, 168th Infantry, jumped off at 0400, 8 February, against Monastery Hill. Companies A and C on the right moved down the gorge to the east of Hill 593 and had reached a path at the base of Point 444 when fire from both flanks caused the battalion to withdraw to more protected positions. Company K, working forward on the right of the 3d Battalion, was pinned down on the barren, forward slope of Point 445. After an hour's artillery preparation both battalions again attacked at 1530. The 1st Battalion again reached the base of Point 444 but could proceed no farther because of heavy casualties. Companies A and C had lost so many men that the remnants were combined into one company. Late in the afternoon an enemy counterattack gained ground on the northern slopes of Hill 593, but the 135th Infantry succeeded in driving the enemy back after bitter fighting. Counterattacks continued through the 9th and 10th while elements of the 36th Division moved up to make a last effort against the mountain strongholds.

During the night of 7-8 February the 100th Battalion came forward to join the attack on Cassino. At 0645, 8 February, all three battalions of the 133d Infantry jumped off under cover of smoke and supported by tanks. The 100th

Battalion on the right advanced quickly from Hill 175 to the vicinity of Point 165, some 400 yards southwest of Castle Hill, and was ordered to hold there as flank protection. In the center the 1st Battalion reached the northwest slope of Castle Hill. The 3d Battalion in Cassino gained about 200 yards with the aid of tanks and 8-inch howitzers. Thereafter progress was painfully slow with bitter fighting for each shattered house and rubble heap.

6. *The Final Effort by II Corps.* Though anxious for an early decision at Cassino, General Alexander was reluctant to commit the New Zealand Corps in an active role unless II Corps failed to defeat the enemy. General Keyes therefore ordered another attack to begin on 11 February. The 36th Division was to capture Albaneta Farm, Hill 374, and Hill 593; the 34th Division would again strike at Monastery Hill and Cassino. The FEC was expected to attack toward Terelle with the aid of the 142d Infantry, but this part of the plan was dropped. Armored elements with infantry attachments were grouped tentatively into two task forces to exploit through the Liri Valley. If II Corps should succeed in these efforts, the New Zealand Corps would send elements of the 4 Indian Division through the mountains to exploit toward Piedimonte; if II Corps failed, the same division would continue the drive on Monastery Hill.

Neither the 141st Infantry nor the 142d Infantry succeeded in executing its mission. On the right the 142d Infantry advanced to the east and west ends of the small, bowl-shaped plateau of Albaneta Farm and attempted to neutralize enemy strongpoints by fire. Colonel Lynch believed that Albaneta Farm could not be held unless Hill 575 to the northwest were also captured; his troops therefore did not occupy the area, enemy fire from which was still sufficiently heavy to cause considerable casualties among the 141st Infantry in its attack against Hill 593. By noon on the 11th the infantry had registered very little progress; during the afternoon the enemy counterattacked twice but was thrown back with large losses. The 141st Infantry used more than 1500 hand grenades in repelling these thrusts by elements of the 361st Panzer Grenadier Regiment. Our own losses were so heavy that the 1st and 3d Battalions together could muster only 22 officers and 160 men. Colonel Wyatt combined the remnants into one unit.

On 12 February the 36th Division passed over to the defensive. The 1st Battalion, 142d Infantry, held Mount Castellone; the 3d Battalion, 143d Infantry, garrisoned Hill 706; and the 2d Battalion, 141st Infantry, defended from Hill 706 to Point 465. An unusually persistent counterattack developed at about 0630 along the 36th Division line, following one of the heaviest barrages ever fired by German artillery in Italy. The situation was critical until 1200, but by that time the enemy gave up, having lost heavily. The 1st Battalion, 200th

Panzer Grenadier Regiment, left about 150 dead on the slopes of Mount Castellone. On 14 February the infantry regiments of the 36th Division averaged less than 25% of their effective combat strength. By 28 February the division had been relieved by the French and by the 2d Battalion, 351st Infantry (88th Infantry Division), and went into bivouac.

The 168th Infantry was unable to gain ground in its attack toward Monastery Hill on 11 February. A violent rain and snowstorm raged in the mountains, reducing visibility to a few yards. The regiment's combat strength was so low that extra drivers, clerks, and antitank personnel were formed into provisional units to provide reserves for the infantry companies. During 13-15 February the regiment was relieved by elements of the 4 Indian Division. In Cassino the 133d Infantry continued its house-to-house fighting while the New Zealand Corps completed plans to take over the battle.

7. *Summary of the Action.* During the first two weeks of February II Corps had driven through the Gustav Line to the last defenses of the Cassino position. An area about a mile in width separated our troops from Highway 6. A decisive victory seemed to be within reach. But the closely-packed fortifications of Cassino and Monastery Hill stood as one of the most formidable enemy strongpoints yet encountered by Fifth Army troops. The extremely bitter fighting had reduced the combat efficiency of the 34th Division to a critical point. The 36th Division, after its losses on 20-22 January, was more than 3000 infantrymen understrength. Heavy losses had been suffered by the enemy, but his ability to rush reinforcements forward to meet our thrusts had been decisive. Although there was little discrepancy in numbers between the opposing forces, a numerically inferior force in such strong mountain defenses still would possess a great advantage. Moreover, the enemy fought with fanatical bravery and determination under Hitler's orders to hold the line at all costs. Our troops had, nevertheless, captured numerous strong positions and held them against furious counterattacks.

Our artillery continued to support the attack efficiently and with heavy expenditure of ammunition. Eight-inch howitzers fired more than 12,000 rounds; 240-mm howitzers fired nearly 900 rounds; the 105-mm howitzers fired more than 100,000 rounds. The impressive total of 199,293 rounds fell on the enemy in Cassino, the mountains, strategic communications targets, concentration and bivouac areas, gun positions, and dumps.

<i>Weapon</i>	<i>Average number in action daily</i>	<i>Total rounds</i>	<i>Rounds per gun per day</i>
75-mm howitzer . . . . .	8	4,577	40.9
3-inch gun . . . . .	83	34,662	29.8
105-mm howitzer . . . . .	112	106,546	68.0
4.5-inch gun . . . . .	12	4,958	29.5
155-mm howitzer 1917-18 . . . . .	24	10,146	30.1
155-mm howitzer M1 . . . . .	45	17,926	28.6
155-mm gun . . . . .	23	10,011	31.1
8-inch howitzer . . . . .	24	12,568	37.4
240-mm howitzer . . . . .	5	899	12.9

But the most accurate and persistent artillery fire could not completely destroy a well protected enemy determined to hold on. At such places as Hill 593 and Cassino, where only a few yards separated our troops from the enemy, the maximum advantage could not be gained from this artillery support.

### C. THE NEW ZEALAND CORPS IN THE BATTLE OF CASSINO

15-29 FEBRUARY

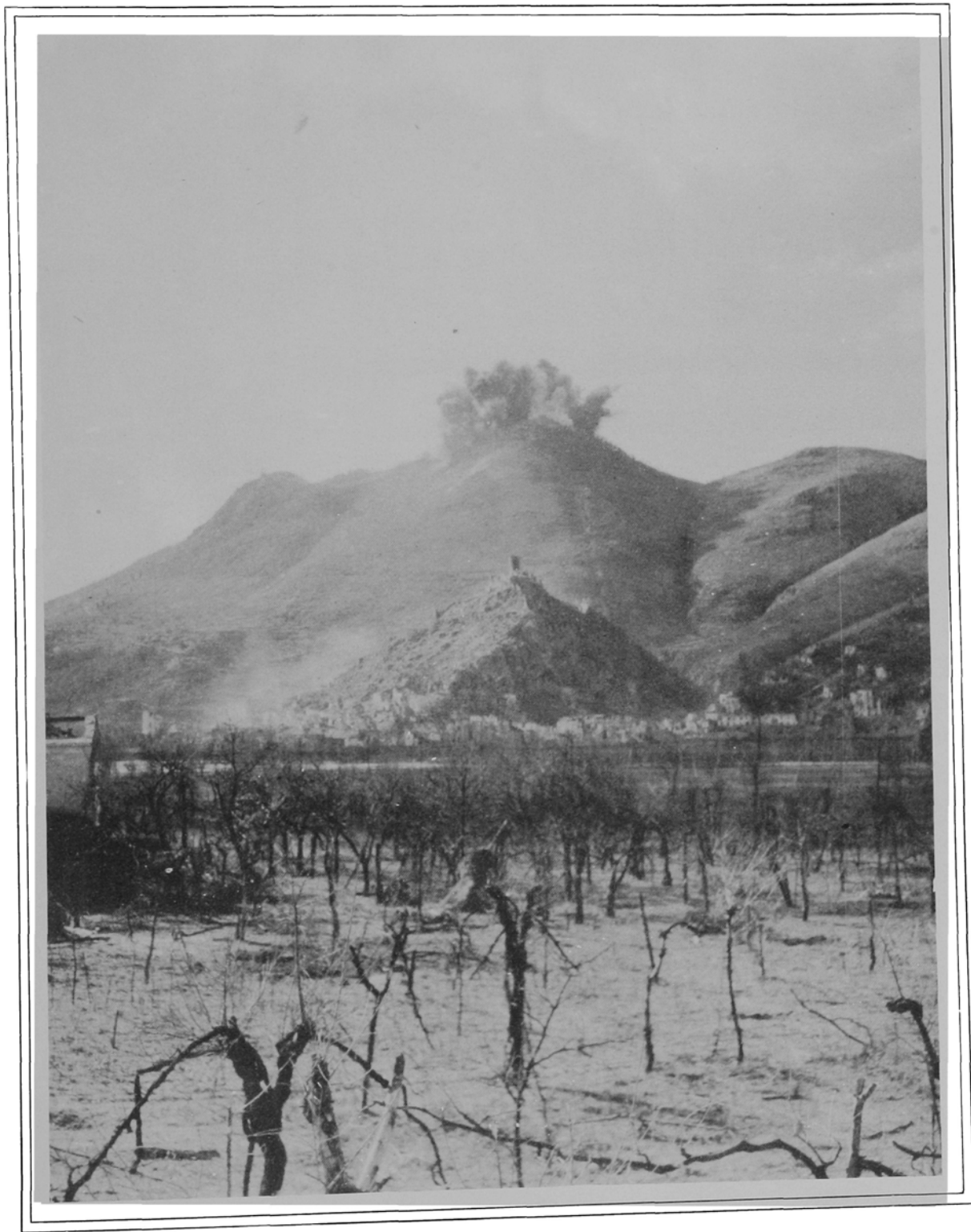
1. *Plans for the Employment of the New Zealand Corps.* The first part of the New Zealand Corps to go into line at the battle of Cassino was the 21 Battalion (5 New Zealand Infantry Brigade), when it relieved the 143d Infantry south of Highway 6. The 4 Indian Division assembled near Cervaro on 11-12 February and sent the 7 Indian Infantry Brigade to relieve elements of the 34th Division north of Monastery Hill. At a conference on 12 February General Keyes and Lt. Gen. Sir Bernard C. Freyberg, commanding the New Zealand Corps, agreed that II Corps would garrison and hold Mount Castellone with the 36th Division until the attack by the New Zealand Corps had passed through and Castellone need no longer be occupied. In case of extreme emergency the New Zealand Corps would provide reinforcements to defend the position. The 133d Infantry would continue to hold its ground in Cassino, and the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron under Lt. Col. Charles A. Ellis would protect the former left flank of the 34th Division. II Corps artillery was to remain in support with priority to defensive fires for American units. In addition to organic divisional artillery the New Zealand Corps had three field and five medium regiments under its command.

On 11 February General Alexander addressed Operations Instruction No. 42 (See *Annex No. 1D*) to General Clark. This instruction directed that the 4 Indian Division attack as quickly as possible to clear the high ground west of Cassino and that a bridgehead be established across the Rapido south of the town. The advance of the New Zealand Corps up the Liri Valley would not take place until weather conditions permitted effective air support and the ground must be sufficiently dry for armor to operate off the roads. Once committed to an attack, the New Zealand Corps was to be supported with all available resources. On 8 February the British 78 Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. C. F. Keightley, was placed under the New Zealand Corps. Relief of the 78 Division was held up by deep snow on its Eighth Army front so that the division did not arrive in the New Zealand Corps area until 17 February.

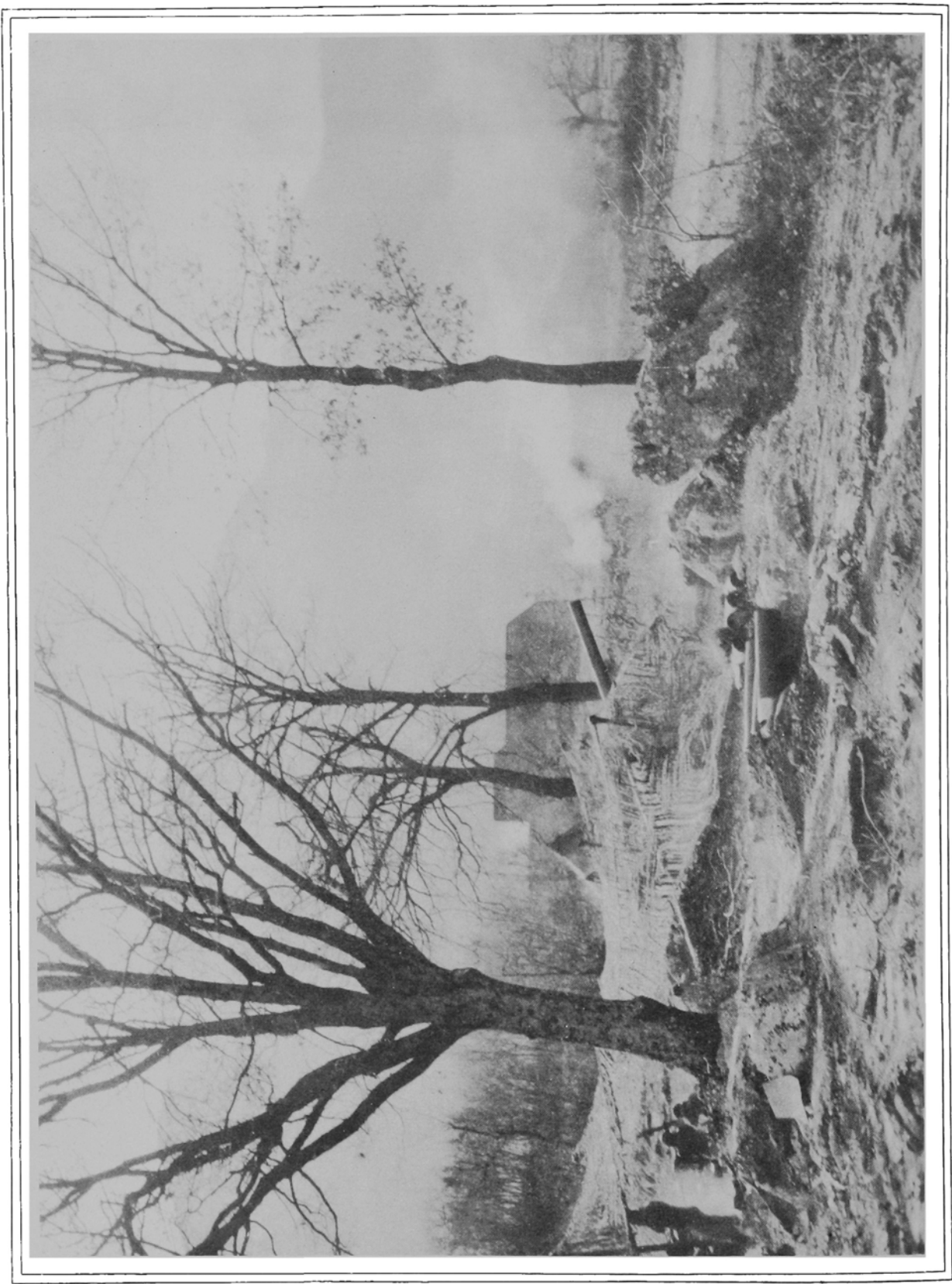
General Freyberg issued his first plan for the capture of Cassino on 9 February while II Corps was preparing to make its last effort to capture Monastery Hill. The 4 Indian Division was to attack Monastery Hill during the night of 13-14 February, exploit south to cut Highway 6 after its capture, and then take Cassino from the west. At the same time the 2 New Zealand Division would fire on Cassino from the east and be prepared to cross the Rapido to aid in taking Cassino. Combat Command B was to exploit through the Liri Valley in the direction of Pignataro.

Weather conditions caused the execution of this plan to be postponed until the night of 16-17 February, with a preliminary attack to clear all of Hill 593 on the night of 15-16 February. In the meantime General Freyberg decided that the Abbey of Montecassino must be destroyed. Enemy activity around the famous structure had been observed for some time. Ammunition dumps were dangerously close to the Abbey; observers used it constantly to direct artillery fire; snipers had fired from it; and gun emplacements were numerous around the building. The hallowed Benedictine monastery, thus far spared by Fifth Army, was definitely a military objective. In conjunction with the bombing, artillery serenades were to add to the destruction. In order to permit the use of heavy bombers, the Indian troops were to be withdrawn from their positions on the slopes of Hill 593, although they were about 1000 yards northwest of the Abbey. The 4 Indian Division under Maj. Gen. F. I. S. Tucker would then attack toward Monastery Hill, while the 2 New Zealand Division under Maj. Gen. G. B. Parkinson drove along the railroad bed to capture the Cassino station. This move required the construction of two Bailey bridges, one across a canal and the second over the walled channel of the Rapido River.

2. *The Action.* The weather proved good on the 15th, so at about 0900 the first wave of 255 Allied bombers began to bomb the Abbey. Flying For-



*The bombing of the Abbey 15 February, Castle Hill in the foreground.*



*A camouflaged 155-mm gun (36th Field Artillery) has just fired on the Abbey, 15 February 1944.*

tresses, Marauders, and Mitchells dropped 342 bombs before noon and scored several direct hits. During the day 576 tons of bombs were dropped. German troops made repeated efforts to run from the Abbey to safer positions while others took refuge in tunnels and cellars. After each wave of bombers passed over, heavy artillery fired on the target. II Corps artillery fired a serenade of 266 rounds at 1030. Ten 240-mm howitzers and 24 8-inch howitzers fired 5 rounds each; 12 4.5-inch guns and 24 155-mm guns fired 4 rounds each. The Abbey was destroyed as a monument of the past; its usefulness to the enemy was only impaired.

Enemy troops occupied Hill 593 when the bombing ceased and so regained without effort a key position that had been the scene of much bitter fighting by American units. During the night of 15-16 February the 1 Royal Sussex attacked Hill 593 with one company but made little progress. On 16 February two more battalions came up to assist in the attack toward Monastery Hill, and in the afternoon 48 fighter-bombers dropped 24 tons of bombs on enemy positions around the Abbey. Fifty-nine fighter-bombers dropped 23 tons of bombs in the same area on the following day.

The 1 Royal Sussex again attacked Hill 593 during the night of 17-18 February. Initially successful, the battalion was driven off the crest by 0200 in fierce hand-to-hand fighting that cost the 1 Royal Sussex 12 officers and 130 men in casualties. Two companies of the 4/6 Rajputana Rifles (11 Infantry Brigade) moved up to support the 1 Royal Sussex, and the 4/16 Punjabs occupied the high ground between Points 450 and 445. During the early morning of 18 February the 4/6 Rajputana Rifles made a third attack against Hill 593. By 0915 these troops, backed by the 1 Royal Sussex, were secure on part of the hill and held out against four counterattacks. At 0200 the 1/2 Gurkha Rifles (7 Infantry Brigade) and the 1/9 Gurkha Rifles (5 Infantry Brigade) passed through Point 444 to assault Monastery Hill. The two battalions made very little progress.

While these attacks were under way, the 2 New Zealand Division was attempting to capture the Cassino station and a road junction beyond. At 2130, 17 February, the 5 New Zealand Brigade attacked. The enemy, driven from the station, counterattacked the 28 New Zealand (Maori) Battalion and recovered the key point by mid-afternoon on 18 February; the 24 New Zealand Battalion held the two Bailey bridges installed the previous night.

The rest of the month was spent in consolidating and effecting reliefs. Hill 593 remained firmly under our control; but the 1/9 Gurkha Rifles, compelled to withdraw early on 18 February from Point 444 by small-arms and machine-gun fire from Monastery Hill, consolidated positions between Points 450 and



445. The 133d Infantry and elements of the 756th Tank Battalion, which had been fighting in the north end of Cassino, were relieved by the 2 New Zealand Division on 22 February. Two days later the 78 Infantry Division took over the 2 New Zealand Division sector south of the railroad. By 26 February the FEC had relieved the 36th Division on Mount Castellone.

#### D. *SUMMARY OF THE FEBRUARY DRIVE ON CASSINO*

The greatest gains in the February battle to crack the Cassino fortress were made by the 34th Division in the first week of fighting. Thereafter gains were small and the lines changed but little during the rest of the month. The town and the Rapido River on the east prevented a successful sweep around the Cassino headland; Monastery Hill, surrounded by mountain outposts on three sides, stood as an impassable barrier to Highway 6. Under crushing concentrations of artillery and the heavy bombing of Allied planes the German defenders were badly battered; but they fought with a tenacity and skill that made the most of their unique opportunity. Two fresh Allied divisions, veterans of mountain campaigns, failed in their initial attack beginning on 15 February. Bombing the Abbey was a measure taken only as a last resort. The Germans, despite their ridiculous propaganda to the contrary, had made it a military objective. For weeks Fifth Army had refrained from firing as much as a rifle shot at the historic symbol of monasticism sacred to the Church.

The French, after consolidating the Belvedere bridgehead, assumed a defensive attitude. Their long front stretching to the Eighth Army boundary was lightly held. Nevertheless, preparations were made to continue the attack toward Terelle and Roccasecca should the Cassino position be captured. An Italian combat team was attached to the 2d Moroccan Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. André W. Dody, to aid in garrisoning the right flank. The 4th Moroccan Mountain Division (4<sup>e</sup> Division de Montagne Marocaine), under Maj. Gen. François Sevez, came under command on 10 February but was not immediately committed. The month of February ended with only one American infantry battalion in line on the southern front. II Corps was in reserve for the most part, and VI Corps was at Anzio. Under Fifth Army the FEC with Italian attachments held the north sector; the New Zealand Corps was in the center; and 10 Corps held the south sector. There was no immediate prospect of a junction between the main force of Fifth Army and the Anzio beachhead.

