

# CHAPTER IV

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## *Attacks across the Rapido*

### A. *THE BATTLE OF SANT'ANGELO*

21-22 JANUARY

IN the offensive launched on 15 January II Corps had captured Mount Trocchio, and 10 Corps had paralleled the advance on the south. By 17 January the enemy had withdrawn to the Sant'Angelo defenses west of the Rapido River, which were held by the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division. The enemy made several changes in his order of battle, but by 20 January the following units were identified: the 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment from Highway 6 to a short distance south of Sant'Angelo; the 115th Reconnaissance Battalion on its right, opposite the mouth of Cesa Martino Creek; and the 1st Battalion, 129th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, in the pocket between the Gari and Liri rivers. The 211th Grenadier Regiment was southwest of Piedimonte in reserve.

The Rapido River south of Highway 6 is a narrow but swift stream. Varying in width from 25 to 50 feet, it flows between nearly vertical banks 3 to 6 feet high, which are generally covered with brush. In January the water was from 9 to 12 feet deep. Sant'Angelo is built on a 40-foot bluff above the west bank about midway between Cassino and the Liri-Gari junction. This bluff slopes away to the north and south; there are no bluffs on the east side of the river. The town therefore gave the Germans observation over much of the river and a large area to the east. Observation posts in the Abbey of Montecassino provided perfect coverage for the area between Mount Trocchio and the Rapido.

Mines, planted lavishly east of the Rapido, were completely concealed under reeds and brush on the long slopes and in the flat marshy land. In this area a dirt road parallels the river from Highway 6 south to a point below Vandra. S-mines, Tellermines, and wooden box mines, laid in a belt one mile wide, guarded the entire length of this road. Other minefields lay farther east of the road and between the road and the river. S-mines and Tellermines, with trip wires

attached, protected the banks at possible crossing sites. All houses and open fields near the Rapido were also mined. In short, mines were everywhere.

A belt of dugouts, machine-gun positions, slit trenches, and concrete bunkers behind hedgerows followed the west bank at about 200 to 1000 yards distance. All trees had been cut to clear fields of fire. Double-apron fences, booby-trapped with mines, lay in front of these positions. Machine-gun emplacements with interlocking fields of fire extended west in depth for hundreds of yards. Portable steel pillboxes, connected by communication trenches to well constructed bunkers, were impregnable to all but direct artillery hits. Photo interpretation gave some indication of the depth of these positions, but patrols were never able to get much beyond the west bank of the river. The town of Sant'Angelo, reduced to rubble and shattered walls by demolitions, bombs, and artillery fire, contained strongly prepared machine-gun emplacements. The destruction of stone houses did not seriously affect their defensive value; in fact the rubble often improved the emplacements by providing additional protective cover.

1. *II Corps Plan of Attack.* (See *Map No. 4.*) As outlined in orders issued by General Keyes on 16 January, the 36th Division under Maj. Gen. Fred L. Walker was to carry out the principal mission of II Corps by establishing a bridgehead in the Sant'Angelo area as far west as Pignataro. Then, on Corps order, Combat Command B of the 1st Armored Division under Brig. Gen. Frank A. Allen, Jr., was to pass through the bridgehead and attack toward Aquino and Piedimonte. The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was to screen the left flank during this exploitation. On the Corps right flank the 34th Division under Maj. Gen. Charles W. Ryder was to demonstrate in conjunction with the attack of the 36th Division to hold the enemy on the Cassino front. The 34th Division orders governing this demonstration specifically prohibited any firing by infantry or artillery on the Abbey of Montecassino, an injunction imposed by higher headquarters. The 34th Division would also prepare plans to attack Cassino from the east or from the south through the Sant'Angelo bridgehead; or to pass through the 36th Division to continue the Corps effort to the northwest. In brief, the plan called for a wide envelopment south of the Cassino position. The 45th Division under Maj. Gen. William W. Eagles was to prepare to pass through the bridgehead to reinforce Combat Command B, to capture Cassino from the southwest, or to capture Piedimonte and Aquino. One combat team of the 36th Division was to assemble near Mount Trocchio, prepared for the same missions. This apparent duplication was a necessary precaution since the 45th Division was likely to be withdrawn for the Anzio operation.

II Corps had very strong artillery support for its attack. In addition to the organic artillery of the 34th and 36th Divisions three groupments of Corps

artillery were available. Groupment S, composed of the 6th Field Artillery Group (two battalions of self-propelled 105-mm howitzers) and two tank destroyer battalions with 3-inch guns, was to be in direct support of Combat Command B. Groupment B, which was in general support to provide long-range counterbattery, harassing, and interdiction fires, had four battalions of 155-mm howitzers (932d, 985th, 976th, and 935th), the 194th Field Artillery Group with two battalions of 8-inch howitzers, the 2d Field Artillery Observation Battalion, and part of the 15th Field Artillery Observation Battalion. Similar general missions and particularly close-in support were assigned to Groupment M, composed of one battalion of 155-mm guns (2d Battalion, 36th Field Artillery) and three battalions of 155-mm howitzers (936th, 937th, and 2d Battalion, 77th Field Artillery).

Prior to the Rapido assault XII Air Support Command was to bomb strongpoints in the bridgehead area, with the main effort to be directed against installations in the vicinity of Pignataro. Other sorties were to bomb Sant'Apollinare, San Giorgio, Pontecorvo, Aquino, and Piedimonte; carry out armed reconnaissance of the Liri Valley road net; and attack known enemy concentrations. During the infantry assault the air effort was to shift to strongpoints in the bridgehead area and along Highway 6 from Cassino to Aquino. Extra cover was to be provided for the front-line troops and the bridgehead after it had been established.

2. *Plans of the 36th Division.* On 18 January General Walker, commanding the 36th Division, issued his attack order. The 141st Infantry was to cross north of Sant'Angelo, attack to the south and west, and then close in on Sant'Angelo to capture the town alone or in conjunction with the 143d Infantry. South of Sant'Angelo the 143d Infantry was to cross with two battalions abreast, seize its initial objectives, and assist the 141st Infantry in the capture of Sant'Angelo. The 36th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, on division order, would follow the 143d Infantry to outpost the Liri River west of the Liri-Gari junction and to contact the 46 Division at that point (1). Each regiment had one battalion of division artillery in direct support; the remaining two battalions were in general support, each with priority to one of the regiments. An intense preparation of 30 minutes would be fired before H Hour (2000, 20 January), followed by concentrations to advance by call on phase lines ahead of the infantry.

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(1) Attached to the 36th Division were the 1st and 2d Battalions (less one company each), 19th Engineer Combat Regiment; 636th Tank Destroyer Battalion; 760th Tank Battalion; 443d AAA Automatic Weapons Battalion (less one battery); Companies A, B, and C, 2d Chemical Battalion; and Companies A and B, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion. The 142d Regimental Combat Team was in Corps reserve.

Firing one round per gun per minute for the period 1930-1945, the artillery would increase its rate to four rounds per gun per minute, or the maximum, during 1945-2000. The 636th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 760th Tank Battalion, from positions north and south of Cesa Martino Creek, would support with direct fire on known targets. One battalion of 8-inch howitzers, carefully registered on Sant'Angelo, would fire throughout the attack until ordered by direct support artillery to lift.

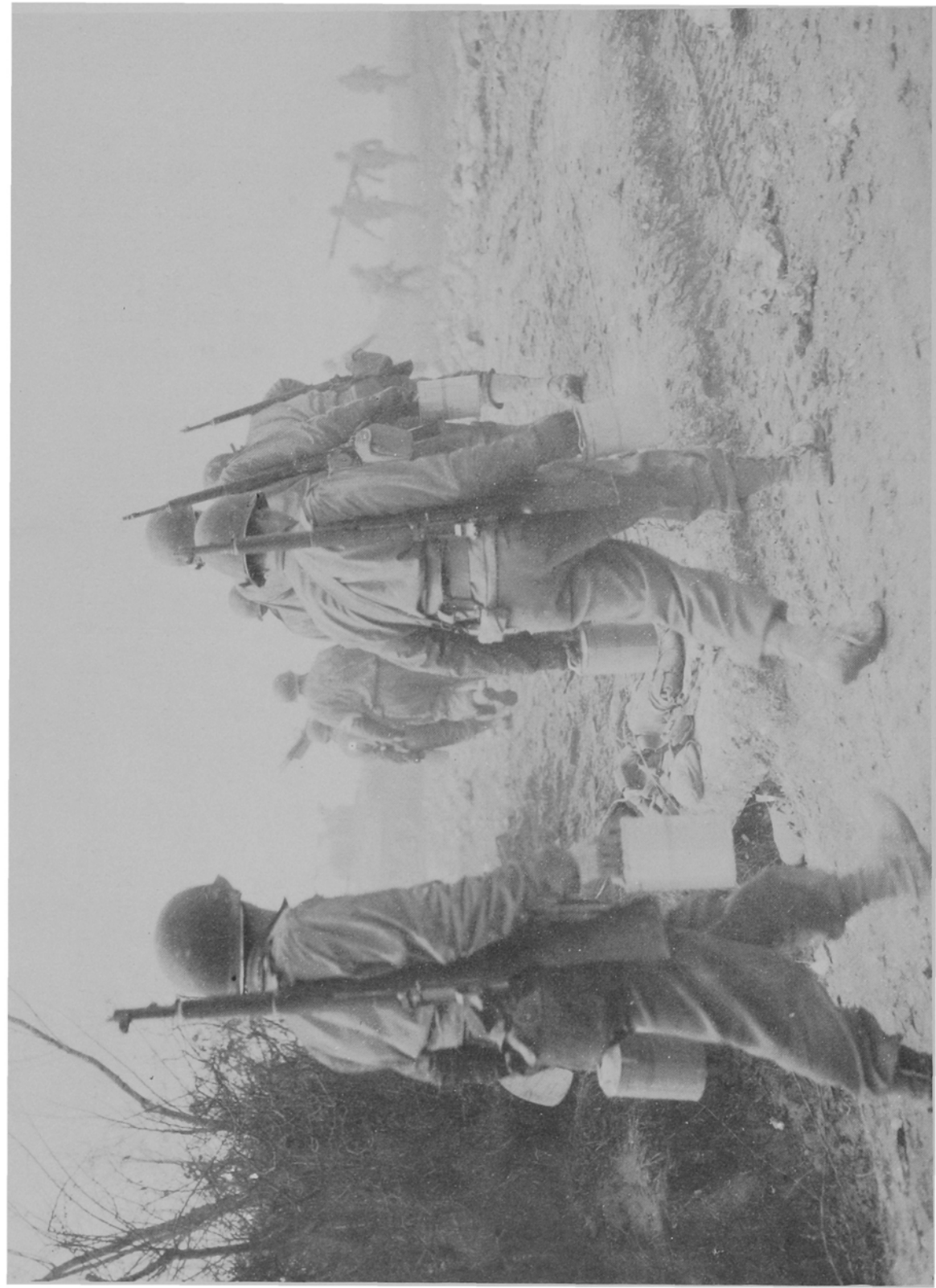
The 111th Engineer Battalion, reinforced by two companies of the 16th Armored Engineer Battalion, was to clear the mines at the crossing sites before 20 January, construct and maintain bridge approaches and exits, maintain the roads and clear mines within the bridgehead, and construct two Class 40 Bailey or armored treadway bridges. During the night of 20-21 January the 1st Battalion, 19th Engineer Combat Regiment, was to construct an 8-ton infantry support bridge in the 143d Infantry zone and one Class 40 Bailey bridge on the main supply route after the capture of Sant'Angelo. The 2d Battalion of the regiment had a similar mission to carry out for the 141st Infantry. Each of the two engineer battalions was to spot assault boats and footbridge equipment on the night of 19-20 January.

3. *Regimental Plans to Capture Sant'Angelo.* Commanders of the infantry regiments issued detailed orders for the operation on 19 January. The 141st Infantry under Lt. Col. Aaron W. Wyatt, Jr., was to cross at the S bend north of Sant'Angelo with the 1st Battalion leading at 2000, 20 January. The three rifle companies were to cross abreast, seize an area 1100 to 1500 yards due west of the bend prior to daylight on 21 January, and then advance on Sant'Angelo. The first waves were to cross in boats while the engineers constructed five footbridges. The 3d Battalion was to follow behind the 1st Battalion over the same crossings an hour later and seize the high ground west of Sant'Angelo. The 2d Battalion in regimental reserve was to demonstrate south of the bend to simulate a crossing. During the night of 19-20 January the Cannon Company (less a 75-mm howitzer platoon) moved to hull-down defilade to support the attack by direct fire on targets of opportunity. The 1st Platoon, Antitank Company (57-mm guns), was to prepare to cross the river at 2400, 20 January, and protect the right flank against mechanized attack. Company A, 2d Chemical Battalion, was to support with smoke.

South of Sant'Angelo the 143d Infantry, commanded by Col. William H. Martin, had two crossing sites. One was about 1000 yards south of Sant'Angelo just below the mouth of Cesa Martino Creek. At this site the 1st Battalion would go over with companies in column and advance northwest to seize the high ground southwest of the town. Enemy positions were to be mopped up



*An 81-mm mortar of the 141st Infantry fires at the Germans across the Rapido River.*



*Soldiers move up toward the Rapido with smoke pots, to be used in screening the crossings.*

with hand grenades and bayonets, then organized for all-around defense. The 3d Battalion, crossing 500 yards farther south in column of companies, was to turn southwest to seize the area in the pocket formed by the junction of the Liri and Gari rivers. Prepared to cross at either site, the 2d Battalion was in reserve to assist where most needed. One company in each of the assault battalions was to cross in boats operated by the 1st Battalion, 19th Engineers; the rest of the infantry were to use footbridges, two of which were planned for each site. Companies B and C, 2d Chemical Battalion, were to assist with smoke on call, place prearranged concentrations of white phosphorus on enemy front-line positions from H minus 45 to H minus 30, and thicken the artillery fires. The Antitank Company, with two platoons on the east side of the river, would place direct fire on enemy armor and positions and would be prepared to send one platoon across to protect the right flank. The mission of the Cannon Company was to fire prepared concentrations on call.

Final preparations for the river crossing were made on 19-20 January. Infantry patrols went out continuously to determine the strength and locations of enemy installations. Engineers and infantry reconnoitered crossing sites, and the former cleared lanes through the minefields to the river bank. These lanes had to be checked continually because German patrols would cross the river to lay more mines. There was therefore little assurance that a lane marked as free of mines was actually safe for troops. The 111th Engineer Battalion procured 100 wooden assault boats and 100 6-man pneumatic reconnaissance boats in addition to the 19 assault and 13 pneumatic boats normally carried. No footbridge equipment was available, but 50 sections of catwalk were obtained. Floating footbridges could be improvised by laying sections on the pneumatic boats. This equipment was placed at designated spots where the infantry would carry it forward to the crossing sites.

(On 20 January XII Air Support Command flew 124 sorties to support II Corps. Sixty-four P-40 sorties bombed strongpoints just west of the river north and south of Sant'Angelo; 36 A-20's and 24 P-40's hit roads and gun positions in the Cassino area. A heavier effort was impossible in view of the needs of 10 Corps and the air preparation for the Anzio landing. Corps and division artillery continued a systematic pounding of defenses and gun positions.

During the night of 19-20 January the 1st and 3d Battalions, 143d Infantry, moved to the assembly area between the southern tip of Mount Trocchio and La Pietra, one mile east of the S bend where they were to cross the river. The 1st Battalion, 142d Infantry, moved forward from the Mignano area to the vicinity of Mount Trocchio in reserve. A battalion of the 139 Brigade (46 Division) was attached to the 36th Division and further attached to the 143d In-

fantry to hold the regimental sector south of Sant'Angelo. This attachment was for the purpose of permitting all of the 143d Infantry to exploit the bridgehead if the crossing should succeed.

4. *The First Effort.* With the 1st Battalion in the lead the 141st Infantry moved out from assembly areas before 1800, 20 January. On reaching the dumps the infantry discovered that enemy fire had destroyed several boats. White flares went up from the enemy positions at 1900, indicating that the assault had failed to achieve surprise. Company C left the dump in column of boat teams at 1905, followed by Companies A and B at 1930. Enemy mortar and artillery fire fell constantly among the troops during the approach to the river bank; in addition, the Germans shelled crossroads and positions between Mount Trocchio and San Vittore and placed large concentrations of Nebelwerfer shells on our assembly areas. Company B suffered more than 30 casualties, including the company commander. The cleared lanes through minefields were difficult to find because the white tape had been lost or destroyed. Mines wounded many men and destroyed the pneumatic boats. Poor visibility caused a delay in reaching the crossing points and caused guides to become separated from their units. Lieutenant Colonel Wyatt, knowing that the assault companies would not reach the river by 2000, ordered the direct and special support artillery to continue firing on the targets covered by the original preparation.

A few boatloads of men from Companies A and B were across by 2100 and were clearing opposition on the west bank. Throughout the night the effort continued. German machine guns covered the area; hostile artillery, mortars, and Nebelwerfers fired in steady cadence. Machine-pistol and small-arms fire caused many casualties and destroyed boats. Only a few men of Company C succeeded in getting over. The engineers attempted to install footbridges under great difficulties. One was defective, one was destroyed by mines, and artillery fire knocked out two more. From remnants of the four, one bridge was finally installed at 0400, and nearly all of Companies A and B rushed across. None of the 3d Battalion reached the west bank. By morning on 21 January there was no communication with the elements fighting west of the river. Only by the firing was it possible to determine that some progress was being made. At 0515 Brig. Gen. William H. Wilbur, assistant division commander, ordered all elements still east of the river to withdraw to their assembly areas before daybreak; those west of the river were to dig in.

The 143d Infantry south of Sant'Angelo had somewhat better success initially. In spite of the heavy fog and darkness the engineer guides led the infantry through the minefields and reached the north crossing site at 2000. Three platoons of Company C were over before enemy fire could destroy the boats.



However, heavy fire at the crossing site caused many casualties in Companies B and C. Colonel Martin went to the crossing site and organized a carrying party from Company B to bring more boats from the dump. Two footbridges were installed by 0500, and the 1st Battalion completed its crossing. One bridge was soon destroyed and the other was badly damaged. By 0700 the infantry on the west side had been forced into a pocket with the river to their backs. Enemy tanks or self-propelled guns in hull-down positions, mortars, small arms, and machine guns were taking a heavy toll. Maj. David M. Frazier, the battalion commander, requested permission to withdraw. Before General Walker's order to remain reached him. Major Frazier decided that his men faced certain annihilation from the intense fire and ordered the companies to fall back. By 1000 the remnants of the battalion had returned to the east bank.

None of the 3d Battalion, 143d Infantry, succeeded in getting over at the south crossing site. Engineers leading the boat group became lost in the dense fog and strayed into a minefield where the rubber boats were destroyed. Both infantry and engineers were badly disorganized. By the time Maj. Louis H. Res-sijac, battalion commander, could restore order and bring up footbridges, enemy artillery again prevented a successful effort. Before daybreak the assault companies were back in their original positions.

5. *The Second Effort.* General Keyes conferred with General Walker at 1000, 21 January, and ordered the attack to be resumed at once. General Walker set the hour at 1400, but it was 1600 before either regiment could renew the assault. In the meantime the enemy had brought up reinforcements from the rear; demonstrations by the 34th Division north of Cassino seem to have prevented any shifting of German troops from this sector. The 211th Grenadier Regiment moved into the line between Highway 6 and Pioppeto Creek; the 3d Battalion, 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, went in south of Sant'Angelo, while the 115th Reconnaissance Battalion sideslipped into the Liri-Gari pocket. When the 143d Infantry jumped off at 1600, the enemy was stronger than he had been the day before.

Under cover of smoke the 3d Battalion, 143d Infantry, succeeded in ferrying the three rifle companies across in rubber boats by 1830. A footbridge was then constructed, and the rest of the battalion crossed. With Company I on the right, Company K on the left, and Company L following to the left rear, the infantry struggled on toward their objectives. German machine guns protected by wire delivered low grazing fire that wounded or killed many men as they crawled forward. The 2d Battalion, ordered to follow the 3d Battalion, sent Companies E and F over shortly after midnight, leaving Company G to guard the rear at the footbridge. During the morning of 22 January the two

battalions advanced more than 500 yards; but intense enemy fire and heavy casualties made their positions untenable.

The 1st Battalion had even less success on 21 January. Starting at 1600, Companies A and B were over by 1835, but Company C was unable to follow because of heavy fire. Some of the infantry advanced about 200 yards. Major Frazier crossed with Company B and directed operations until he was wounded by mortar fire at 0135, 22 January. When Lt. Col. Michael A. Meath relieved him at 0500, the situation was hopeless. Companies A, B, and C had lost their commanders; the footbridge and all boats were destroyed; and most of the infantry had been driven back to the east side of the river. The open flat terrain offered no protection from artillery and Nebelwerfer fire, so Colonel Martin ordered a withdrawal to higher ground where the battalion was to reorganize and await instructions. By 1240 all three battalions had been driven back to the east side of the river, except for a few isolated groups still in enemy territory. The members of these elements were killed or captured while the regiment, its combat efficiency seriously impaired, organized defensive positions near its former assembly areas.

To the north strenuous efforts had been made on 21 January to reinforce the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry, elements of which had penetrated enemy defenses as far as 1000 yards west of the river. Because of difficulties in moving boats and bringing equipment forward, the attack was not resumed north of Sant'Angelo until 2100. A small part of Company F survived the swift current and enemy fire, but not until 0200, 22 January, did the infantry eliminate enemy riflemen and machine guns that had been firing directly on the crossings. Two footbridges were then put in by the engineers. By 0400 most of the assault troops were over, followed shortly by Companies H and M. The 3d Battalion, 141st Infantry, had a footbridge in operation south of the S bend, and by dawn most of the infantry had filed across.

Visibility was limited by fog to less than 50 yards after dawn but increased to about 800 yards early in the afternoon. Smoke pots were used liberally to screen the crossings, but enemy fire all along the stream was heavy since automatic weapons had been zeroed in on final protective lines. When the engineers attempted to work on the Bailey bridge, artillery and mortar fire prevented significant progress. Telephone communications between the regimental command post and assault troops were satisfactory until 1300; then the lines began to go out, and by 1600 all communication was cut off. All radio equipment was either destroyed or inoperative. Also by 1600 the bridges and boats were destroyed. The infantry on the west side were therefore completely isolated; resupply, evacuation, and communication were impossible.

In the meantime the troops fought tenaciously under these insurmountable handicaps. Maj. Milton J. Landry and Lt. Col. Edwin W. Richardson, commanding the 2d and 3d Battalions, made every effort to reorganize and regroup to continue the attack; but all officers of both headquarters were killed or wounded by 1500. At about 1600 the enemy felt out our positions with a counterattack by approximately two companies which was repulsed with heavy casualties. By that time every company commander but one was killed or wounded. The enemy renewed the attack on the center and both flanks shortly after 1700. American fire was noticeably less in volume, indicating that ammunition was running low. Practically no American fire was heard after 2000, and 30 minutes later the fire was all from German weapons. Between 1800 and 1900 about 40 of our troops returned to the east side. All the rest had been killed, wounded, or captured.

6. *Summary of the Battle of Sant' Angelo.* On 23 January the 36th Division assumed a defensive role while the 34th Division prepared to cross the Rapido north of Highway 6. The 1st Battalion, 142d Infantry, held a portion of the line south of the highway until the night of 26-27 January when it was relieved by the 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry. General Keyes and General Walker continued to lay plans for a renewal of the assault in keeping with the Fifth Army mission to maintain maximum pressure on the southern front; but losses had been too great to permit further offensive action. Total casualties for the 36th Division during the crossing of the Rapido were 1681, of whom 143 were killed, 663 wounded, and 875 reported missing.

Maximum use of the II Corps artillery was impossible both preceding and during the attack. Counterbattery missions were difficult because the enemy's artillery, located generally in the Pignataro, Piedimonte, and Cassino areas, was generally silent prior to H Hour. Heavy smoke, which interfered seriously with visual observation, required almost exclusive use of sound ranging. With our own artillery doing so much firing, this method of locating enemy gun positions could not yield satisfactory results. Under cover of smoke the enemy moved his artillery and Nebelwerfer positions. The latter operated effectively with complete freedom of movement, since their flashes were concealed by smoke and sound microphones cannot detect the discharge of rockets. Our artillery was not able to assist the infantry when enemy counterattacks were forming. Since smoke covered the bridgehead and communications were nonexistent, infantry locations were unknown. During 20-24 January II Corps artillery fired 112,303 rounds, most of it in support of the Rapido attack, as follows:

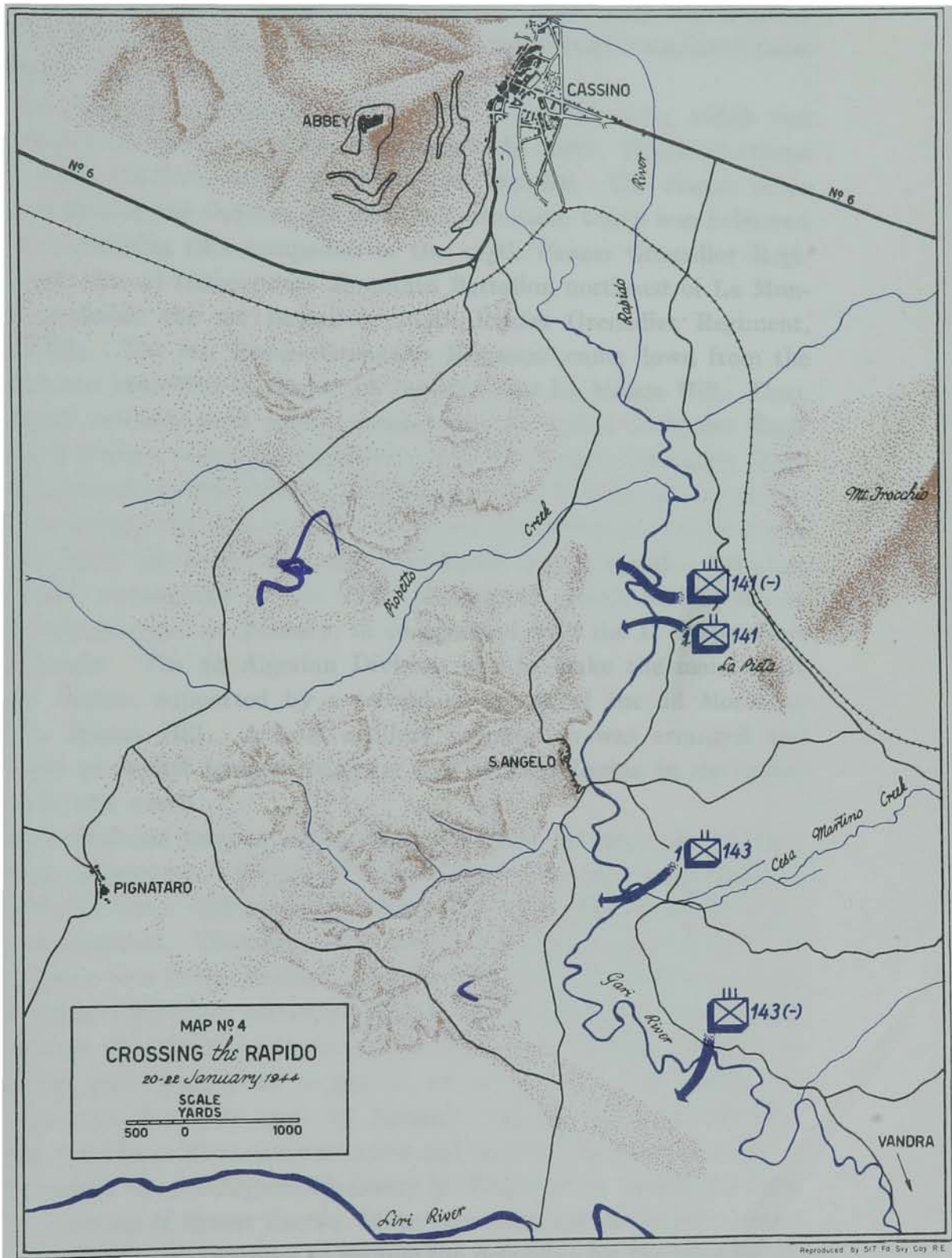
<i>Weapon</i>	<i>Average number in action daily</i>	<i>Total rounds</i>	<i>Rounds per gun per day</i>
75-mm howitzer . . . . .	10.0	3,732	74.6
3-inch gun . . . . .	110.2	28,667	52.0
105-mm howitzer . . . . .	108.8	48,976	90.0
4.5-inch gun . . . . .	12.0	1,969	32.8
155-mm howitzer 1917-18 . . . . .	24.0	5,903	49.2
155-mm howitzer M1 . . . . .	47.6	11,693	49.1
155-mm gun . . . . .	34.8	6,466	37.2
8-inch howitzer . . . . .	24.0	4,697	39.1

In assessing the situation on 23 January it is apparent that our efforts to cross the Rapido were a costly failure. A veteran division, victorious in the battles of Salerno, Mount Maggiore, and San Pietro, had suffered its first significant defeat. Officers and men were well trained; plans had been made carefully; supplies and equipment, with the possible exception of boats and footbridges, were ample. Even this exception was not a decisive factor in the failure since many companies succeeded in crossing the river. Inability to follow through with strong reinforcements and supplies, lack of visibility for more effective artillery fire on enemy counterattacks, and disruption of communications by hostile fire were all contributing factors. Even more important as a reason for the failure were the enemy's extremely strong and expertly defended fortifications west of the river." If the 46 Division had been able to cross the Garigliano, pressure could have been exerted on these defenses from the south; but that effort had been beaten back on 19-20 January.

## B. BREACHING THE NORTH FLANK OF THE GUSTAV LINE

21-31 JANUARY

1. *The Battle of Mount Santa Croce.* (See Map No. 5.) After an advance of about four miles along its entire front, 12-15 January, the FEC had been stopped before the Gustav Line. Ahead lay a tangled mass of mountains rising to 1500 meters in height. La Monna Hill (1492 meters) and the town of San Biagio guarded the north side of the road to Atina. On the south were Mount Santa Croce (1184 meters), L'Arena Hill (1129 meters), and the area of Il Gallo rising steeply from the Rapido. West of L'Arena Hill were three rugged peaks forming a ridge almost three miles in length: Mount Carella (1074 meters), Mount Ro-



MAP No 4  
**CROSSING the RAPIDO**  
 20-22 January 1944  
 SCALE  
 YARDS  
 500 0 1000

tolo (1120 meters), and Mount Bianco (1167 meters). Two miles southwest of Mount Bianco, over rough valleys and ravines, lay the strongly organized mass of Mount Cifalco (947 meters).

The enemy had made vigorous efforts to reinforce this line, which was intended to prevent an envelopment of Cassino from the north. Mountain troops were brought from positions facing the British 78 Division. The French drive had seriously weakened the German 5th Mountain Division, which was bolstered with the three remaining rifle companies of the 115th Panzer Grenadier Regiment in the area; the 3d Independent Mountain Battalion northeast of La Monna Hill; and probably the 1st Battalion, 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, north of Sant'Elia. The 8th Panzer Grenadier Regiment came down from the Rome area and was identified in line on 19 January near La Monna Hill. Thus, when the French renewed their drive, elements of the 578th Grenadier Regiment, the 115th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, the 8th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and elements of the 85th Mountain Regiment were in front of the 2d Moroccan Division holding the right. The rest of the 5th Mountain Division and elements of the 131st Grenadier Regiment were facing the 3d Algerian Division.

General Juin, commander of the FEC, planned to attack on the Mount Bianco-Atina axis at 0530, 21 January, in conjunction with the II Corps effort against Sant'Angelo. The 3d Algerian Division was to make the main effort toward Mount Bianco, supported by a secondary attack of the 2d Moroccan Division on La Monna Hill. A brief artillery preparation was arranged and plans were made to exploit toward Atina by way of Villa Latina in the center and Picinisco in the north.

The assault elements jumped off in the main effort at 0535, after a five-minute artillery preparation. Within two hours Hills 1030 and 1129, south of the summit of Santa Croce, Hill 1004 to the southwest, and the southern shoulder of Il Gallo were captured. Then the center of battle shifted to the Santa Croce attack. The Moroccans broke through the first defenses, but difficult terrain and stubborn enemy resistance prevented capture of the summit. French losses were slight because of infiltration tactics, while the enemy suffered much more heavily. General Juin planned to reorganize on 22 January and resume the offensive on the next day. At 0500, 23 January, the 5th Moroccan Infantry (5<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Tirailleurs Marocains) attacked and reached the summit of Santa Croce. To the south the 7th Algerian Infantry (7<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Tirailleurs Algériens) captured a portion of Mount Carella. Bitter resistance and persistent counterattacks then compelled each regiment to resume the defensive for the time being.

2. *The Plan to Envelop Cassino from the North.* By 22 January the tactical situation required that Fifth Army modify its plans to break into the Liri Val-

ley. The Anzio landing was under way, but our forces on the southern front gave little indication of moving forward to an early junction with the beach-head. General Clark therefore directed that II Corps attempt to envelop Cassino from the north. In conjunction with this maneuver the FEC was to change the direction of its advance and turn southwest toward Terelle and Piedimonte. This shift would throw the weight of the FEC to its extreme left and might weaken the Cassino defenses by developing a threat to the enemy lines of supply and communication. On the left of the French the 34th Division would cross the Rapido and advance south, sending one column down the road into Cassino while other forces went through the mountains to take the high ground dominating the town and debouch to the enemy's rear near Piedimonte. Intelligence reports available to the 34th Division placed the 44th Grenadier Division in line from Cairo village south beyond Cassino. The 131st Grenadier Regiment was in the Cairo village area; on its right the 132d Grenadier Regiment was believed to be in line, with the 134th Grenadier Regiment south of Cassino. Elements of the Hermann Goering Panzer and 29th Panzer Grenadier Divisions were available as possible reserves.

Defensive positions were similar to those guarding the Rapido River line south of Cassino, with the additional advantage of barren, rough, and steep mountains overlooking all approaches to the Rapido. A dam on the river, a little over a mile southwest of Sant'Elia, had been blown by the enemy to divert the stream. The entire plain, already soggy from heavy rains, was thus turned into a quagmire impassable for armor except by the construction of corduroy roads. Many irrigation and drainage ditches, extensive minefields on each side of the river, and barbed wire added greatly to the infantry's difficulties. Just north of Cassino the road to Cairo village follows the west bank of the Rapido and the edge of the mountains to the Italian military barracks at the hamlet of Mount Villa. Here it turns northwest past Hill 56 (the Pimple) and Hill 213. The latter dominates the hamlet of Cairo. West of the barracks lie the steep, ravine-scarred slopes of Majola Hill (Hill 481), which sends a long ridge south to Cassino. West and southwest of this ridge are mountains, hills, and ravines in tangled profusion.

Once across the Rapido, our troops would face a line of pillboxes, dugouts, and reinforced stone houses along the base of the mountains from Hill 213 to Cassino. From these positions the enemy had fields of fire which completely covered the river flats. All trees and brush west of the river north of Mount Villa hamlet had been cut to provide clear fields of fire. Stumps three feet high were left as minor tank obstacles. Poorly constructed barbed-wire entanglements extended through the minefields for 300 to 400 yards west of the river.