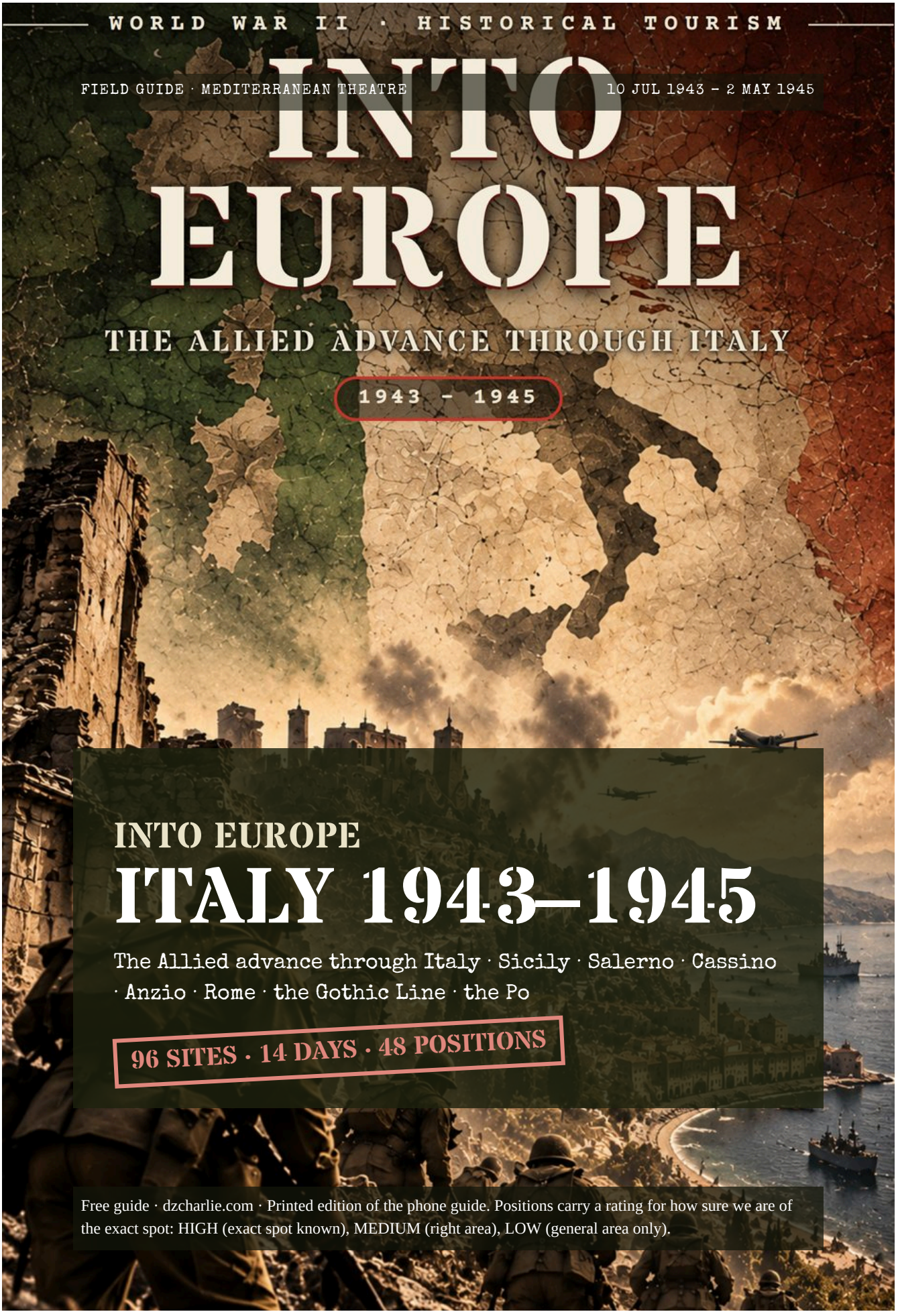


INTO EUROPE

ITALY 1943–1945

The Allied advance through Italy · Sicily · Salerno · Cassino · Anzio · Rome · the Gothic Line · the Po

96 SITES · 14 DAYS · 48 POSITIONS

Free guide · dzcharlie.com · Printed edition of the phone guide. Positions carry a rating for how sure we are of the exact spot: HIGH (exact spot known), MEDIUM (right area), LOW (general area only).

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THE STORY IN BRIEF

This guide follows the Allied armies through Italy for twenty-two months, from the landings on the beaches of Sicily on 10 July 1943 to the German surrender that came into force on 2 May 1945. It is a long road — well over 1,500 km by car from the Sicilian beaches to the plain of the Po — and two sets of positions are kept apart on purpose:

TIMELINE — historical positions in date order: what happened, where and when, and who was there. **TOUR** — driving stops in road order across up to 21 days: where to go, how long to stay and where to sleep. Drive the whole route or pick the days that suit you; each day stands on its own. Every stop opens directly in Google Maps.

Sicily. On 10 July 1943 the US Seventh Army under Patton and the British Eighth Army under Montgomery landed on 26 beaches along the south and east coasts of Sicily, after airborne drops that the wind scattered across the island. Patton swept west to Palermo while Montgomery ground up the east coast under Mount Etna; on 17 August American troops entered Messina. By then more than 100,000 German and Italian troops had slipped across the Strait to the mainland. In Rome, the invasion brought down Mussolini on 25 July.

Salerno and Naples. Montgomery crossed to Calabria on 3 September — the day Italy secretly signed an armistice. It was announced on 8 September, and next morning Clark's Fifth Army, American and British divisions side by side, landed in the Gulf of Salerno. Germany was ready: it seized Rome, disarmed the Italian army and counter-attacked the beachhead on 12–14 September, coming close to splitting it. Naval gunfire, bombers and reinforcements held the line. Naples, which had risen against the Germans in the Four Days, was entered on 1 October.

The Winter Line and Ortona. Kesselring now made the Allies pay for every valley. Through the autumn rains the Fifth Army crossed the Volturno and fought for the mountain positions of the Winter Line — Monte Camino, San Pietro, Monte Lungo, where Italy's new co-belligerent troops fought their first battle — while the Eighth Army crossed the Sangro and the Moro on the Adriatic side. Over Christmas 1943 the 1st Canadian Division fought German paratroopers house by house through Ortona. By January the Allies stood in front of the Gustav Line.

Cassino and Anzio. To break the deadlock the Allies attacked the Gustav Line around Cassino from 17 January 1944 and landed behind it at Anzio on 22 January. Neither went to plan. The Anzio beachhead was sealed off and fought for its life for four months; three battles for Cassino — first by American, British and French troops, then twice by the New Zealand Corps with New Zealand, Indian and British units — broke down below the monastery, which Allied bombers destroyed on 15 February. The fourth battle, Operation Diadem, opened on 11 May; French colonial troops broke through the Aurunci mountains and on 18 May Polish soldiers raised their flag over the ruined abbey.

Rome and the pursuit. The Anzio force broke out on 23 May and met the main front on 25 May. Clark then turned most of it towards Rome instead of cutting the German line of retreat at Valmontone — a decision still argued over — and entered the city on 4 June, two days before D-Day in Normandy. Through the summer the pursuit ran north past Lake Trasimeno to Siena, Ancona, Livorno and Florence on the Arno. But seven American and French divisions were taken away for the landings in the south of France.

The Gothic Line and the winter. On 25 August the Eighth Army attacked the Gothic Line near the Adriatic; in September the Fifth Army struck through the mountain passes north of Florence. Both broke in, and Rimini fell on 21 September, but rain, exhaustion and German reserves stopped the Americans a few miles short of Bologna and the British in the flooded Romagna. Behind the front, SS and army units massacred civilians in anti-partisan sweeps — at Sant'Anna di Stazzema in August and around Monte Sole (Marzabotto) at the turn of September and October. A hard mountain winter followed.

Victory in Italy. In spring 1945 the rebuilt armies struck again: the Eighth Army across the Senio on 9 April and through the Argenta Gap, the Fifth Army out of the mountains from 14 April. Polish and Italian troops entered Bologna on 21 April, the Allies raced over the Po, and the Resistance rose across the north, freeing Milan and Genoa. Mussolini was caught and shot by partisans on 28 April. German envoys signed the surrender at Caserta on 29 April; it came into force at 2 p.m. local time (12:00 GMT) on 2 May 1945, six days before VE Day.

THE ACCURACY RULE

A GPS coordinate can locate a museum, cemetery, bridge or town precisely; it cannot turn the confusion of a mountain battle into an exact point. When the records only place a battalion "somewhere on the ridge", this guide says so rather than invent a spot, and where historians disagree — over numbers, times or motives — the text tells you. Each position carries a coloured label:

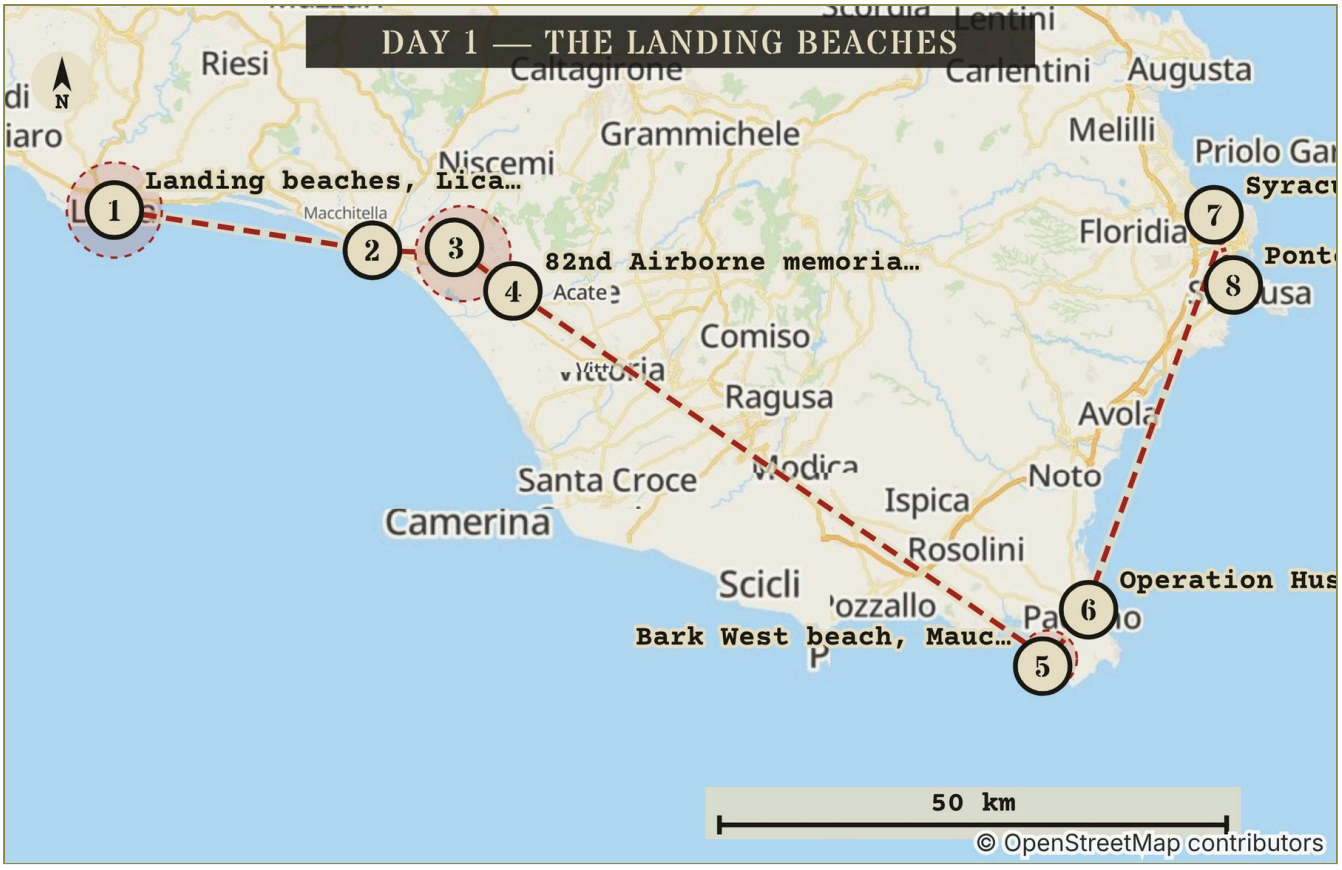
HIGH exact spot known — a landmark, museum, cemetery, memorial, bridge or town, or a position fixed by the records MEDIUM well supported, but the exact spot is uncertain LOW general area only — the pin is the centre of a search area

HIGH exact spot known — a landmark, museum, memorial or town MEDIUM well supported, but the exact spot is uncertain LOW general area only — the pin is the centre of a search area

WHY THE WIDER TOUR

Italy was not one battle but a chain of them, and each makes sense only beside the others. Driving it end to end shows the problem the armies faced: a long, narrow peninsula of mountains cut by rivers, where every ridge could become a new defence line. It shows who fought here — Americans and British, Canadians, New Zealanders, Indians and Gurkhas, Poles, French, Moroccans and Algerians, South Africans, Brazilians, Greeks, the Jewish Brigade, and Italians on both sides — and how heavily civilians paid. The tour follows their road north, stop by stop.

DAY 1 — THE LANDING BEACHES



Licata → Gela → Piano Lupo → Ponte Dirillo → Pachino → Syracuse · 8 stops

Follow the south coast from the American beaches around Gela to the British and Canadian beaches of the Pachino peninsula and the airborne battle at Syracuse.

1 Landing beaches, Licata

LOW Landing beach · ≈30 min

The westernmost Allied landing. Major General Lucian Truscott's US 3rd Infantry Division came ashore on beaches either side of Licata at dawn on 10 July and took the town and its small harbour on the first day, which quickly became a supply port for Seventh Army. A short stop sets the scale of the whole 150-kilometre invasion front.

What you can see: Walk the harbour mole and look at the beaches to east and west. Optional if time is short: Gela is 35 km east on the SS115.

Plan: Free, public seafront. Drive to Gela 35 km, about 40 min.

GPS 37.10267, 13.93972

2 Gela seafront and pier, Gela

MEDIUM Landing beach · Timeline 2 · ≈45 min · ★ must see

Heart of the American landings. The Rangers attacked the town directly while the 1st Infantry Division landed on the beaches to the east. Over the next two days Italian and German tanks came close to throwing the Americans back into the sea here; only naval gunfire and artillery landed on the beach saved the beachhead.

What you can see: The modern pier on the site of the one blown in 1943, the long beaches to the east, and the old town on its ridge that the Rangers cleared street by street.

Plan: Free, public seafront. Parking along the lungomare.

GPS 37.06450, 14.24730

3 Piano Lupo crossroads, near Gela

LOW Battlefield · Timeline 4 · ≈30 min

The road junction the 505th paratroopers were meant to seize on the night of 9–10 July. A small group under Captain Edwin Sayre took the complex of Italian pillboxes here and, joined by 1st Division infantry, held it against the German armoured thrust of 11 July.

What you can see: Look for surviving Italian pillboxes on the slope of the Niscemi road and look south over the Gela plain where the German tanks were stopped.

Plan: Roadside; pillboxes are on private farmland, view from the road. Busy junction: park with care.

GPS 37.06126, 14.35509

4 82nd Airborne memorial, Ponte Dirillo

HIGH Memorial · Timeline 5 · ≈60 min · ★ must see

The main American memorial to the Sicily campaign, beside the SS115 where it crosses the Acate (Dirillo) river. It lists paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne killed nearby; Biazza Ridge, where Gavin stopped the Tigers, is about three kilometres east. A ceremony is held here every July.

What you can see: The memorial tablet, the restored Italian bunkers of the Ponte Dirillo strongpoint, and the view east to Biazza Ridge.

Plan: Free, open access by the SS115. Next: about 100 km (1 h 40 min) east to the Pachino peninsula.

GPS 37.03185, 14.40448

5 Bark West beach, Maucini

MEDIUM Landing beach · Timeline 3 · ≈45 min

Where the 1st Canadian Infantry Division began Canada's part in the Italian campaign. The beach is almost unchanged: low dunes, shallow water and the offshore sandbars that grounded some landing craft. Royal Marine Commandos landed on the western sector, and the first Canadian steps on Italian soil were taken here.

What you can see: Walk the sand, find the Canadian flag, and look west along the Roger and Sugar sectors of the landing beach.

Plan: Free, open beach; reached by minor roads from Pachino. Can be busy in summer.

GPS 36.67545, 15.05265

6 Operation Husky monument, Pachino

HIGH Memorial · ≈15 min

A modern monument in front of the town hall recalls the landings on the beaches south and east of Pachino by the Canadians, the 51st Highland Division and other units of Eighth Army. A quick stop on the way north to Syracuse.

What you can see: The monument and its inscription in the town square; coffee in the square before the drive north.

Plan: Free, town centre. Syracuse is 55 km, about 50 min.

GPS 36.71558, 15.09352

7 Syracuse War Cemetery, Syracuse

HIGH War cemetery (CWGC) · ≈45 min · ★ must see

About 1,060 Commonwealth soldiers lie here, most killed in the landings and the first days ashore, including many glider-borne men of Operation Ladbroke. British, Indian, South African, Canadian and other graves show how multinational Eighth Army was, and how young most of the dead were.

What you can see: The Cross of Sacrifice, the headstones of the glider pilots and airlanding soldiers, and the rows of Indian graves.

Plan: Free. CWGC cemetery, normally open daylight hours; check before you go.

GPS 37.07502, 15.25794

8 Ponte Grande, Syracuse

HIGH Bridge · Timeline 1 · ≈30 min · ★ must see

The objective of the first large British glider operation of the war. A few dozen men held this bridge for most of 10 July until the last fifteen unwounded defenders surrendered at 15:30, less than an hour before the relief force arrived and retook it intact.

What you can see: The bridge over the Anapo, the canal ditches, and the view towards Syracuse, the prize the bridge protected.

Plan: Roadside on the SS115 at the south edge of Syracuse; park nearby with care.

GPS 37.05444, 15.26500

End of day 1 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Fontane Bianche, south of Syracuse. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 2 — CATANIA PLAIN AND THE ETNA LINE



Syracuse → Primosole → Catania → Motta → Centuripe → Agira → Troina · 7 stops

Follow Eighth Army onto the Catania plain, then swing inland along the German Etna line to the Canadian battlefield at Agira and the American fight for Troina.

1 Primosole Bridge, Simeto river

HIGH Bridge and memorial · Timeline 6 · ≈30 min · ★ must see

Scene of the battle between British and German paratroopers on 13–16 July. Holding this bridge meant opening the road to Catania; losing it cost Montgomery three weeks on the plain beyond. The fighting set British 'Red Devils' against German Fallschirmjäger in one of the first clashes between rival paratroops.

What you can see: The bridge on the SS114, the river banks where the paratroops dug in, and the memorials beside the road.

Plan: Roadside on a busy highway; park only where safe. 55 km from Syracuse, about 45 min.

GPS 37.39944, 15.06500

2 Catania War Cemetery, Catania

HIGH War cemetery (CWGC) · ≈45 min · ★ must see

About 2,135 Commonwealth soldiers are buried here, many killed at Primosole and in the fighting for the Catania plain; it holds most of the fallen paratroopers of 1st Parachute Brigade, as well as Highlanders and Durham men who fought for the Gerbini airfields and the Simeto crossings.

What you can see: The paratroopers' and Durham Light Infantry graves, and the view of Etna above the plain that Eighth Army could not cross for three weeks.

Plan: Free. CWGC cemetery at Stradale Passo del Fico, west of Catania airport; check hours before you go.

GPS 37.46303, 15.03864

3 Museo Storico dello Sbarco in Sicilia 1943, Catania

MEDIUM Museum · ≈90 min · ★ must see

Sicily's main museum of the 1943 campaign, in the converted sulphur works of Le Ciminiere. It tells the story from Allied, Axis and civilian points of view with uniforms, weapons, reconstructed scenes and a large display of Phil Stern's war photographs.

What you can see: The reconstructed air-raid shelter and Sicilian village square, the uniforms and weapons, and the Phil Stern photo gallery.

Plan: Daily 09:00–19:00, last entry 18:00. Adults €8, reduced €4 (prices from 15 April 2026). Check before you go.

GPS 37.50912, 15.10220

4 German War Cemetery, Motta Sant'Anastasia

HIGH War cemetery (Volksbund) · ≈45 min

The German war cemetery for Sicily: 4,561 dead, 451 of them unidentified, in a walled vault building at the foot of Etna. Among them is Luz Long, the long jumper who befriended Jesse Owens at the 1936 Olympics. Most of the dead were very young.

What you can see: The five raised courtyards, four of them named after Sicilian provinces, the comrades' grave in the first courtyard and the bronze figure of a dying youth.

Plan: Free. Apr–Sep 08:00–18:00; Mar, Oct, Nov 08:00–17:00; Dec–Feb 09:00–16:00 (Volksbund). Check before you go.

GPS 37.52510, 14.98976

5 Centuripe, Enna

LOW Viewpoint · Hill town · ≈30 min

The 38th (Irish) Brigade of the British 78th Division stormed this cliff-top town on 2–3 August against German paratroopers. Its fall cracked the German Etna line and helped decide Kesselring and Hube to plan the evacuation of the island. Montgomery is reported to have said he doubted any other division in his army could have done it.

What you can see: The view from the town over the Simeto and Salso valleys to Etna and Adrano; imagine the Irish battalions climbing the slopes below.

Plan: Free, town centre. Steep narrow streets; park at the edge of town.

GPS 37.62336, 14.74049

6 Agira Canadian War Cemetery, Agira

HIGH War cemetery (CWGC) · Timeline 8 · ≈45 min · ★ must see

Sicily's only Canadian war cemetery, where the Canadian dead of the island were gathered: 490 Canadians killed in Sicily lie on a hilltop above Lake Pozzillo, looking across to Agira and Etna. It has been a place of pilgrimage for Canadians since 1943, and walkers who retrace the division's route end here.

What you can see: The terraced rows, the views to Agira town and Etna, and the visitors' book full of Canadian messages.

Plan: Free. CWGC cemetery on the SS121 east of Agira; check hours before you go.

GPS 37.65491, 14.55086

7 Robert Capa Photography Museum, Troina

MEDIUM Museum · Timeline 9 · ≈75 min · ★ must see

Troina was the scene of the hardest American battle in Sicily. The museum in the Palazzo Pretura shows 62 prints by Robert Capa, who photographed the fighting and the ruined town. Walk to the upper town for views of the battlefield hills.

What you can see: Capa's pictures of soldiers and civilians, then the views west and south from the upper town towards the hills the 1st Division attacked.

Plan: Tue–Sun 10:00–13:00 and 16:30–19:30, closed Monday. Adults €5 (reported). Check before you go.

GPS 37.78516, 14.60053

End of day 2 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Cesarò, Nebrodi mountains (near Troina). The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 3 — THE NORTH COAST TO MESSINA



Cesarò → San Fratello → Sant'Agata → Brolo → Messina → Torre Faro · 5 stops

Cross the Nebrodi mountains to the north coast and follow Patton's race along the coast road, with its amphibious 'end runs', to Messina and the Strait.

1 San Fratello ridge, San Fratello

LOW Viewpoint · Battlefield · ≈30 min

From 3 to 8 August the German 29th Panzergrenadier Division held the US 3rd Division on this ridge above the Furiano river. Frontal attacks failed with heavy loss until the Americans took Hill 673 and landed behind the line at Sant'Agata.

What you can see: The flat-topped Monte San Fratello and the Furiano valley below; the town sits on the ridge the Germans held.

Plan: Free, town viewpoints. Reached on the SS289 across the Nebrodi from Cesarò, about 1 hr 10 min.

GPS 38.01556, 14.59818

2 Landing beach, Sant'Agata di Militello

LOW Landing beach · ≈30 min

Patton's first amphibious 'end run' landed Bernard's 2nd Battalion, 30th Infantry, here at 03:15 on 8 August. They achieved surprise, but most of the Germans had already pulled back from the San Fratello line. Patton ordered a second landing at Brolo three days later.

What you can see: The beach west of the Rosmarino river mouth and the coast road the landing force cut.

Plan: Free, public beach and seafront.

GPS 38.08300, 14.65000

3 Monte Cipolla, Brolo

LOW Battlefield · Timeline 10 · ≈45 min

The second 'end run'. Bernard's battalion landed at Brolo on 11 August and held Monte Cipolla for a day against the 29th Panzergrenadier Division, losing 177 men, before the rest of the 3rd Division broke through the Naso ridge to relieve them.

What you can see: The hill above the coast road between the Naso and Brolo rivers, and the beach below where the landing craft came in.

Plan: View from the coast road and Brolo seafront; the hill is farmland. Messina is 85 km, about 1 hr on the A20.

GPS 38.15000, 14.81500

4 Sacrario di Cristo Re, Messina

MEDIUM Military shrine · Timeline 12 · ≈45 min · ★ must see

Italy's military shrine for Messina holds the remains of some 1,288 Italian soldiers of the Second World War and 110 of the First. Its terrace gives the best view of the city Patton entered on 17 August and of the Strait across which the Axis escaped.

What you can see: The crypt, the great bell cast from captured First World War guns that rings at sunset, and the view over the harbour.

Plan: Free. Opening of the church and crypt varies; the terrace is usually accessible. Check before you go.

GPS 38.19636, 15.55176

5 Capo Peloro, Torre Faro

LOW Coastline · Timeline 11 · ≈30 min

The narrowest point of the Strait, about three kilometres across. The German ferry routes ran from the beaches between here and Messina; the flak batteries around the Strait kept Allied aircraft at bay. This is the best place to understand why the Axis escape succeeded.

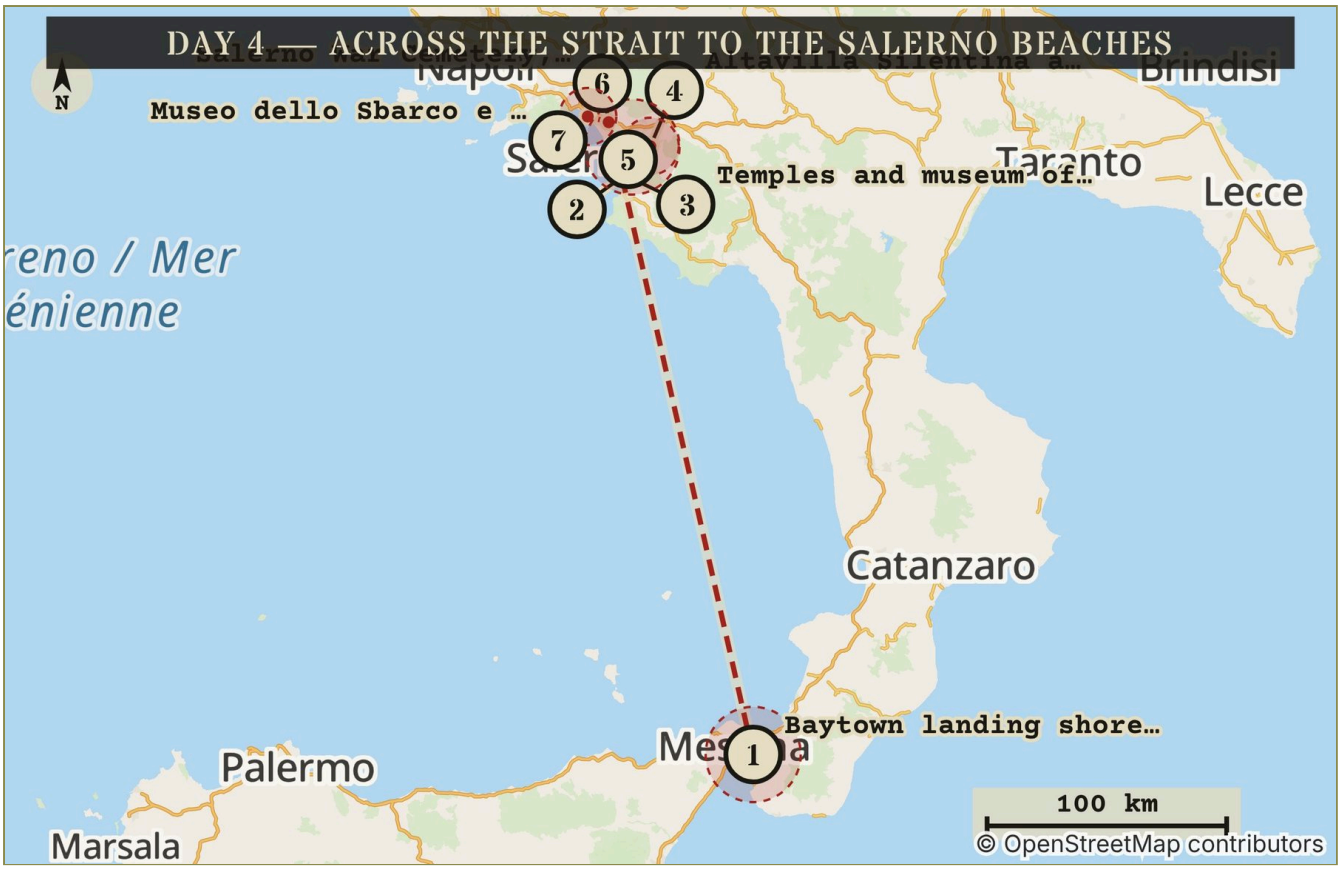
What you can see: The lighthouse point and the Calabrian shore opposite; the tall pylon is a relic of a 1950s power line, not the war.

Plan: Free, public seafront. Camping Il Peloritano at Rodia is 15 km west.

GPS 38.26589, 15.65096

End of day 3 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Messina north coast (Rodia). The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 4 — ACROSS THE STRAIT TO THE SALERNO BEACHES



Villa San Giovanni → Reggio shore → Paestum → Altavilla → Sele plain → Salerno · 7 stops

A long transfer day: the short ferry from Messina to Villa San Giovanni retraces Operation Baytown, then about 4 h 30 min on the toll-free A2 brings you to the Salerno beachhead of September 1943.

1 Baytown landing shore, Gallico–Catona (Reggio Calabria)

LOW Landing beach · Timeline 13 · ≈20 min

Right beside the ferry port, this stretch of shore north of Reggio is where Eighth Army returned to the European mainland on 3 September 1943, the first Allied landing on the Italian peninsula. It was almost unopposed, which made it a strange beginning for a campaign that would last another twenty months.

What you can see: Walk to the waterline and look across the strait to Sicily, only a few kilometres away.

Plan: Free, open shore · 10–15 min from the Villa San Giovanni ferry terminal · then about 4 h 30 min to Paestum

GPS 38.16500, 15.65200

2 US 36th Division monument, Paestum beach

HIGH Memorial · Timeline 14 · ≈30 min · ★ must see

The 36th 'Texas' Division came ashore here at 03:30 on 9 September 1943, straight into fire from the 16th Panzer Division. Sergeant James Logan won the Medal of Honor near here that morning, knocking out German machine-gun posts. The memorial by the shore is the best place to understand the American landings at Salerno.

What you can see: Read the monument, walk the sand towards the Torre di Paestum, and look inland across the flat plain to the temples and Monte Soprano.

Plan: Free, open access · beach parking along Via Poseidonia (paid in summer)

GPS 40.41553, 14.99061

3 Temples and museum of Paestum

HIGH Archaeological site · Timeline 14 · ≈90 min

The three great Greek temples were on the edge of the 36th Division's beachhead. Both sides treated them as off limits, and Allied medics set up aid stations nearby. Walking among 2,500-year-old columns where shells were landing in 1943 is one of the most striking contrasts of the whole trip.

What you can see: See the Temple of Neptune and the Basilica, then the museum's painted Tomb of the Diver. Look west to the landing beaches 1 km away.

Plan: Daily 08:30–19:30, last entry 18:30 · €15 (Mar–Nov), €10 (Dec–Feb), reductions for young visitors · check before you go

GPS 40.42222, 15.00528

4 Altavilla Silentina and Hill 424

MEDIUM Viewpoint · Timeline 16 · ≈40 min

The hilltop village that dominated the American sector changed hands three times in a week. From here German observers could see every beach and road on the plain, which is why the 36th Division fought so hard for the village and Hill 424 behind it, and why the village itself was shelled from sea and land.

What you can see: Drive up to the old centre and find a viewpoint west over the Sele plain to the sea and the landing beaches.

Plan: Free · narrow streets, park below the centre · 25 min from Paestum

GPS 40.53300, 15.13300

5 Sele–Calore corridor, near Ponte Barizzo

LOW Battlefield (drive-through) · Timeline 17 · ≈20 min

On the afternoon of 13 September German armour drove down this corridor between the two rivers towards the beaches, and the Allied beachhead came close to being split in two. American field artillery stopped the attack near the Calore. There is little to mark the spot, but seeing how flat and open the ground is explains the crisis.

What you can see: Stop safely on a farm road near the Calore bridge and look north-east up the corridor towards Persano and Altavilla.

Plan: No facilities · private farmland: stay on public roads

GPS 40.53000, 15.04000

6 Salerno War Cemetery, Bivio Pratole (Montecorvino Pugliano)

HIGH CWGC war cemetery · Timeline 15 · ≈45 min · ★ must see

The Commonwealth war cemetery for the Salerno landings holds 1,851 graves, 109 of them unidentified, most of them men of the British X Corps who fought between the Sele and Salerno. It lies close to the old Montecorvino airfield and the Battipaglia battlefield. The American dead of Salerno were later moved to the US cemetery at Nettuno.

What you can see: Walk the rows and note the regimental badges of X Corps; the register box by the entrance lists the burials.

Plan: Open access (CWGC) · on the SS18 between Battipaglia and Pontecagnano · parking at the gate

GPS 40.62551, 14.92251

7 Museo dello Sbarco e Salerno Capitale, Salerno

MEDIUM Museum · ≈60 min

A volunteer-run museum of about 200 objects covering the landings and Salerno's months as seat of the Italian government (February–July 1944). Outside stand a Sherman tank, a jeep and a sealed railway wagon of the kind used to deport Italian Jews, a reminder that the war in Italy was also a racial persecution.

What you can see: Uniforms and weapons of all three armies, photographs of the beachhead and the story of the 'Salerno capital'.

Plan: Visits by reservation only (info@salerno1943-1944.com) · Via Generale Clark, Salerno · check before you go

GPS 40.64696, 14.81740

End of day 4 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Paestum (Capaccio Paestum). The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 5 — NAPLES, CASERTA AND THE WINTER LINE



Naples → Caserta → Capua (Volturno) → Mignano Monte Lungo → San Pietro Infine · 8 stops

From the city that liberated itself to the palace where the war in Italy ended, then north across the Volturno to the ruined village of San Pietro in the Winter Line.

1 Monument to the Four Days of Naples, Piazza della Repubblica

HIGH Memorial · Timeline 18 · ≈20 min

Naples was the first large Italian city to rise against the German occupiers. This monument on the seafront at Mergellina honours the Four Days of 27–30 September 1943 and all who fought, from soldiers to street boys like Gennaro Capuozzo, killed aged 11 or 12 (sources differ).

What you can see: Walk round the four carved panels, then look along the bay: the port the Germans wrecked is to the east.

Plan: Free, open · heavy traffic: park and walk, or take the metro to Mergellina

GPS 40.83179, 14.22633

2 Galleria Borbonica air-raid shelter, Naples

HIGH Museum / shelter · ≈75 min

Naples was one of the most heavily bombed cities in Italy: about 200 Allied raids between 1940 and 1944, with civilian deaths estimated at 20,000–25,000. This 19th-century royal tunnel and old cisterns became a shelter for thousands of people. Graffiti, beds and wrecked cars left here after the war make the civilian experience very real.

What you can see: Guided tour through the shelter rooms, wartime graffiti and the vehicles dumped here after 1945.

Plan: Fri–Sun 10:00–17:30, guided tours only, booking required · €11–16 depending on route · entrance Vico del Grottone 4 · check before you go

GPS 40.83552, 14.24626

3 Naples War Cemetery, Miano

HIGH CWGC war cemetery · ≈30 min

The main Commonwealth cemetery of Naples holds 1,202 Second World War burials, many of them men who died in the three general hospitals set up in the city after its liberation, as well as soldiers moved in from small burial grounds nearby. It is a quiet counterpoint to the chaos of the city centre.

What you can see: Look for the variety of regiments and nations; the cemetery reflects the whole Allied base in Naples.

Plan: Open access (CWGC) · Via Vincenzo Ianfolla, off Corso Secondigliano

GPS 40.88497, 14.24000

4 Royal Palace of Caserta (Reggia)

HIGH Palace / museum · Allied HQ · ≈120 min · ★ must see

The vast Bourbon palace became an Allied headquarters in the autumn of 1943, first for the US Fifth Army and later for Allied Force Headquarters. Here, on 29 April 1945, German envoys signed the surrender of German and Italian Fascist forces in Italy, which took effect on 2 May. The campaign you are following ended in these rooms.

What you can see: The royal apartments, the grand staircase and the long park with its cascade; imagine offices, map rooms and soldiers' rest camps in the grounds.

Plan: Closed Tuesdays · Apr–Sep apartments 08:30–19:15 (last entry 18:15) · €18 full ticket · check before you go

GPS 41.07333, 14.32639

5 Caserta War Cemetery

HIGH CWGC war cemetery · ≈20 min

A walled section of the town cemetery holds 768 Commonwealth burials: men who died in the 2nd General Hospital, which worked here from December 1943 to September 1945, prisoners of war who died in the prisoner-of-war hospital at Caserta, and soldiers killed in the Volturno fighting of October 1943.

What you can see: A small, peaceful plot inside the town cemetery; note the Volturno dates of October 1943 on many headstones.

Plan: Open during town-cemetery hours · short drive from the palace

GPS 41.08873, 14.34439

Read more: CWGC: Caserta War Cemetery

6 Volturno crossing, Capua–Triflisco

LOW River crossing · Timeline 19 · ≈20 min

The first great river obstacle north of Naples. On the night of 12–13 October 1943 Fifth Army attacked across the flooded Volturno; here, between Capua and the Triflisco gap, the US 3rd and British 56th Divisions made their attempts. Seeing the steep banks explains why the crossing was so hard.

What you can see: Stop by the river at Capua or near Triflisco and look north to the ridges the Germans held.

Plan: Free · roadside stop · Capua's historic centre is worth a short walk

GPS 41.14000, 14.24500

7 Italian military shrine and museum, Mignano Monte Lungo

HIGH Italian war cemetery & museum · Timeline 23 · ≈45 min · ★ must see

The resting place of 974 Italian soldiers, most of them men of the co-belligerent army that fought beside the Allies after the armistice. Their first battle was here, on Monte Lungo, on 8 December 1943: a failure with heavy losses, followed by success on 16 December. The small museum across the road displays weapons and vehicles.

What you can see: Climb the terraced shrine for the view of Monte Lungo and the Mignano gap; then cross the Via Casilina to the museum.

Plan: On the SS6 Via Casilina · museum free, hours vary · check before you go

GPS 41.42249, 13.96877

8 San Pietro Infine: ruined village and Parco della Memoria Storica

HIGH Ruined village & museum · Timeline 23 · ≈90 min · ★ must see

One of the most powerful war sites in Italy: a whole village left as it was destroyed in December 1943 when the US 36th Division fought for it. The museum in an old olive mill uses sound, darkness and John Huston's film footage to tell the story of the battle and the villagers who sheltered in caves.

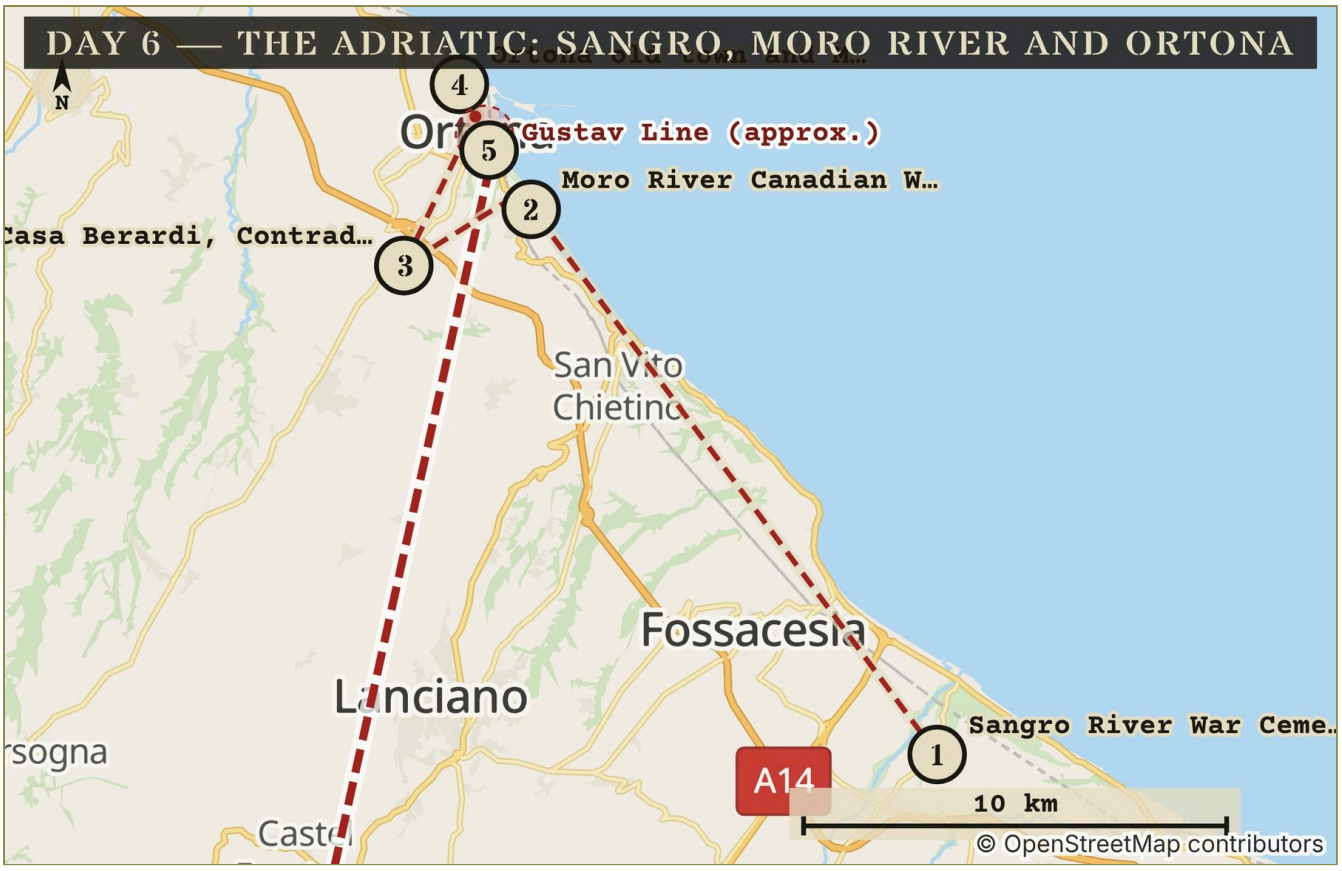
What you can see: Walk up through the roofless houses to the church, see the cave shelters, then the museum in Piazza Risorgimento.

Plan: Museum Sat–Sun 10:00–12:30 and 14:30–17:00 (summer 16:30–19:00), weekdays on request, booking required · ruins open · check before you go

GPS 41.44604, 13.96727

End of day 5 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Cassino. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 6 — THE ADRIATIC: SANGRO, MORO RIVER AND ORTONA



Cassino → Castel di Sangro → Sangro valley → Moro River → Ortona · 5 stops

Cross the Apennines (about 2 h 45 min) down the Sangro valley to the Canadian battlefields of December 1943, ending in the streets of Ortona.

1 Sangro River War Cemetery, Torino di Sangro

HIGH CWGC war cemetery · Timeline 20 · ≈40 min

The largest Commonwealth cemetery on the Adriatic front, with 2,617 burials from the Sangro battles of November–December 1943 and the winter that followed. British, New Zealand, Indian and other soldiers lie here, and the Sangro River Cremation Memorial names more than 500 Indian servicemen cremated according to their faith.

What you can see: See the cremation memorial and the New Zealand and Indian headstones; the ridge the Germans held rises to the north-west.

Plan: Open access (CWGC) · Contrada Sentinelle, Torino di Sangro · about 4.5 km from the Val di Sangro exit of the A14 via the SS16

GPS 42.21841, 14.53559

2 Moro River Canadian War Cemetery, San Donato

HIGH CWGC war cemetery · Timeline 22 · ≈45 min · ★ must see

The heart of any Canadian visit to Italy. Of its 1,615 graves, 1,375 are Canadian, most from the December 1943 battles for the Moro, the Gully and Ortona. It stands on high ground between the river and the town, above the sea, close to where the fighting happened.

What you can see: Walk the terraces of maple-leaf headstones; look north to Ortona and south to the Moro valley.

Plan: Open access (CWGC) · Strada San Donato, south of Ortona

GPS 42.33694, 14.41644

3 Casa Berardi, Contrada Alboreto (Ortona)

MEDIUM Battle site (private) · Timeline 22 · ≈30 min

The farmhouse where Captain Paul Triquet of the Royal 22e Régiment earned the Victoria Cross on 14 December 1943, holding on with a handful of men against German counter-attacks. It is a private house, now with holiday apartments, and a memorial recalls the Van Doos' fight.

What you can see: From the road, look at the house and the open fields between it and the Gully to the south-east.

Plan: Private property · view from the road unless the owners invite you in **Private land — view from the road.**

GPS 42.32163, 14.38319

4 Ortona old town and MUBA battle museum

HIGH Town battlefield & museum · Timeline 24 · ≈90 min · ★ must see

Canada's most famous battle in Italy was fought in these streets for eight days at Christmas 1943. Walking from the southern edge of town along the Corso to the cathedral follows the Canadian advance. The MUBA museum tells the story of both soldiers and the 1,314 civilians who died.

What you can see: Corso Vittorio Emanuele, the rebuilt cathedral of San Tommaso and the Aragonese castle above the sea.

Plan: MUBA (Corso Garibaldi, Complesso Sant'Anna) is temporarily closed for renovation, no reopening date given · check before you go

GPS 42.35306, 14.40361

5 Santa Maria di Costantinopoli, Ortona

MEDIUM Church · Timeline 24 · ≈20 min

In this damaged church on 25 December 1943 the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada held their Christmas dinner in the middle of the battle, companies coming back from the line in turns while the fighting went on a few hundred metres away. The dinner became one of Canada's best-known war stories.

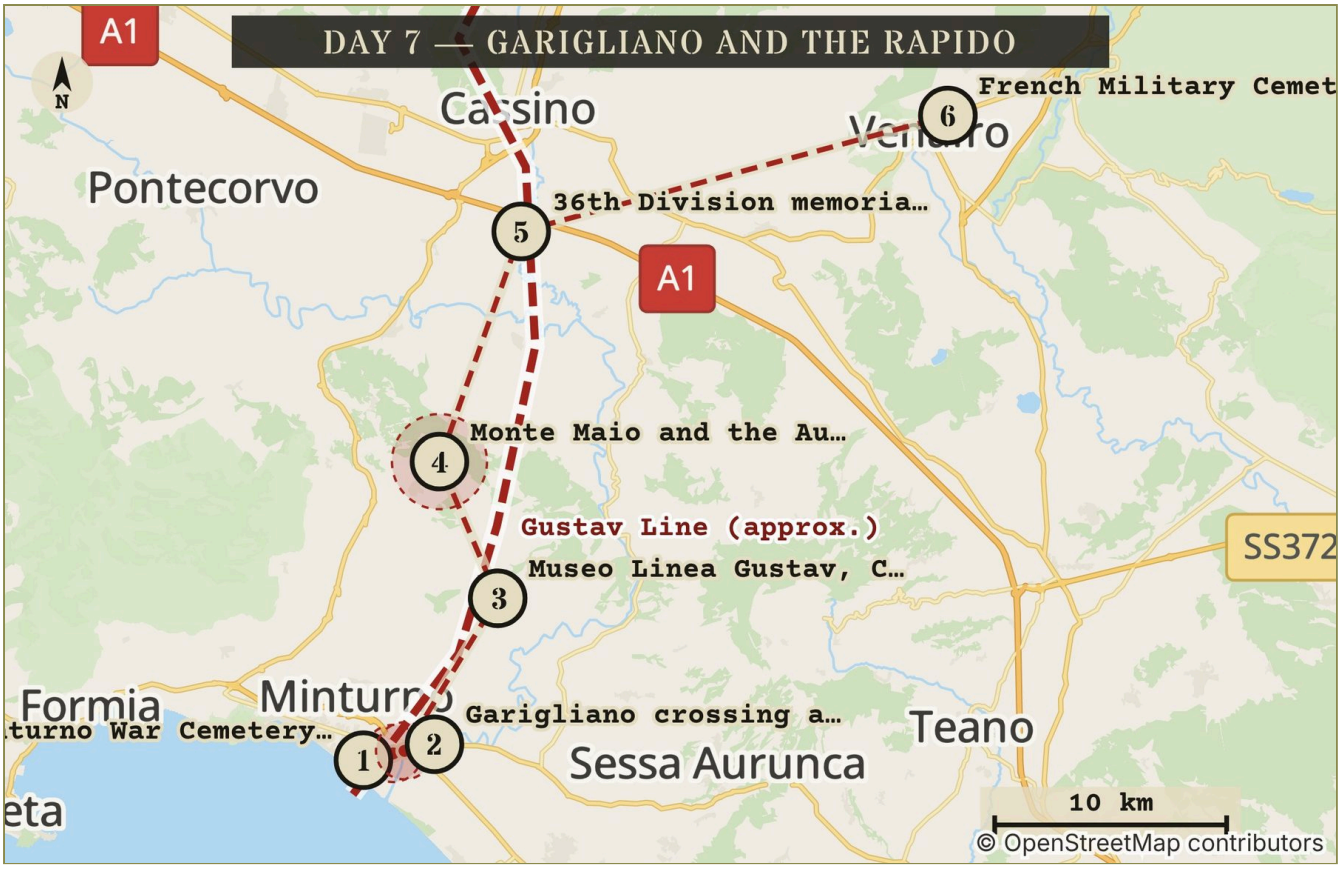
What you can see: The medieval church on Via Don Bosco, south of the old centre, with its 14th-century portal; much of the rest was rebuilt after the war.

Plan: Usually closed except for services · view from outside

GPS 42.34929, 14.40624

End of day 6 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Ortona. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 7 — GARIGLIANO AND THE RAPIDO



Minturno → Castelforte → Ausonia → Sant'Angelo in Theodice → (Venafro) → Cassino · 6 stops

The southern half of the Gustav Line, where the first Allied attacks of January 1944 broke down and the French broke through in May.

1 Minturno War Cemetery, Marina di Minturno

MEDIUM War cemetery (Commonwealth) · ≈45 min · ★ must see

More than 2,000 Commonwealth soldiers lie here, most of them killed in the crossing of the Garigliano in January 1944 and in the fighting for the hills beyond. It is the natural first stop on the Gustav Line: quiet, beautifully kept and only a few hundred metres from the river they crossed.

What you can see: Read the regimental badges: London Scottish, Royal Scots Fusiliers, North Staffords, Hampshires and many more of X Corps. Note the ages.

Plan: CWGC cemetery, normally open daily (CWGC sites in Italy may be locked outside gardeners' hours). On the Via Appia (SS7) near the Garigliano bridge; small car park.

GPS 41.24097, 13.76589

2 Garigliano crossing and Real Ferdinando bridge, Minturno

MEDIUM Battlefield · Timeline 25 · ≈45 min

This is where the Via Appia crosses the Garigliano, the western anchor of the Gustav Line. The Germans blew up the 1832 iron suspension bridge in autumn 1943; British engineers bridged the river under fire in January 1944. Beside it lie the Roman ruins of Minturnae, so ancient and modern war sit side by side.

What you can see: Look at the width and current of the river, then north to Minturno on its hill. Combine with the archaeological area if open.

Plan: The bridge (restored 1998) is visible from the Via Appia; the Minturnae archaeological area has its own tickets and hours. Check before you go.

GPS 41.24198, 13.77191

3 Museo Linea Gustav, Castelforte

MEDIUM Museum · ≈60 min

A small volunteer-run museum in a town that was almost wiped out. The British 56th Division fought at its gates in January 1944, and the French took it in May. The collection tells the story of the Garigliano front from the viewpoint of the civilians who lived through it.

What you can see: Weapons, equipment and photographs found locally; ask about the fighting for Monte Damiano and the civilian toll.

Plan: Via Armando Diaz, in the old centre. Visits by arrangement with the Associazione Linea Gustav Fronte Garigliano (+39 328 681 0710). Check before you go.

GPS 41.30166, 13.82041

4 Monte Maio and the Aurunci mountains, near Ausonia

LOW Viewpoint · Timeline 33 · ≈30 min

The French breakthrough of 13–16 May 1944 happened in these mountains, which the Germans thought too rugged for a major attack. It unlocked the whole Gustav Line. The villages along this road, among them Ausonia and Esperia, also suffered the worst of the Marocchinate in the days that followed.

What you can see: Stop on the road between Castelforte and Ausonia and look up at Monte Maio, the 940 m summit to the north-east.

Plan: Roadside stop only; the summit is a long hike for experienced walkers.

GPS 41.35500, 13.79000

5 36th Division memorials and the Rapido, Sant'Angelo in Theodice

HIGH Memorial and battlefield · Timeline 26 · ≈60 min · ★ must see

The most painful American site of the campaign. On this bluff the Germans watched the Texas Division try to cross the river below on 20–22 January 1944. Memorials to the 36th Division and a peace bell stand on the edge of the village square, looking down on the crossing sites.

What you can see: Look over the parapet at the Gari (Rapido) below and the flat fields beyond; then turn round to see how Monte Cassino dominates everything.

Plan: Piazza G. Mazzini, used as a car park. About 6 km south of Cassino.

GPS 41.44480, 13.83260

6 French Military Cemetery, Venafro

MEDIUM War cemetery (French) · ≈45 min

The largest French war cemetery in Italy, with the graves of between about 3,400 and over 5,000 soldiers (sources differ, partly because graves from Naples were moved here in 1990–91) of the French Expeditionary Corps, many of them Moroccans, Algerians and Tunisians buried beneath headstones marked for their faith. A detour for those who want to see all the nations who fought for Cassino.

What you can see: Compare the Christian crosses with the Muslim headstones, and read the North African regiments named on them.

Plan: About 30 km east of Cassino on the SS85; allow 35 min each way. Extra for long trips. Check before you go.

GPS 41.49002, 14.05492

End of day 7 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Cassino. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 8 — MONTE CASSINO



Abbey → Polish cemetery → Point 593 → Rocca Janula → Historiale → Cassino War Cemetery → German cemetery · 7 stops

The four battles of Monte Cassino, from the rebuilt abbey on the summit to the cemeteries of every nation in the valley.

1 Abbey of Monte Cassino

HIGH Abbey · Timeline 29 · ≈105 min · ★ must see

Founded by Saint Benedict around 529, destroyed on 15 February 1944 and rebuilt 'where it was, as it was', the abbey is the reason Cassino is famous. Its bombing remains the most argued-over act of the Italian campaign. Today it is again a working monastery, with a museum and wide views over the battlefield.

What you can see: Look at photographs of the ruins inside, the rebuilt basilica and the view from the terrace down to the town and the Liri valley.

Plan: Daily 09:30–18:30 (Apr–Oct), shorter in winter; museum Sundays and holidays only in winter. Modest dress required; paid parking. Check before you go.

GPS 41.49000, 13.81389

2 Polish War Cemetery and Memorial Museum, Monte Cassino

HIGH War cemetery (Polish) and museum · Timeline 34 · ≈60 min · ★ must see

More than 1,000 soldiers of General Anders' Polish II Corps lie in this amphitheatre-shaped cemetery facing the abbey; Anders himself was buried among them in 1970. Many of these men had come to Italy via Soviet camps and the Middle East, and could never go home to a free Poland.

What you can see: Read the inscriptions at the entrance and on the terraces, find Anders' grave, then see the museum's films and battlefield relics.

Plan: Cemetery on the Strada Albaneta, below the abbey; museum at the entrance. Check before you go.

GPS 41.49391, 13.80575

3 Point 593 memorial, Monte Cassino

HIGH Battlefield and memorial · Timeline 34 · ≈45 min

The white cross on Point 593 marks the summit that the US 34th Division, the 4th Indian Division and finally the Poles fought over from January to May 1944. It is the best place to understand the killing ground of the Cassino massif: rocks, thin soil and no cover.

What you can see: Walk up from the cemetery; on top, find the abbey to the east, Albaneta farm and the Snakeshead ridge to the north-west.

Plan: Short, steep, stony path (10–15 min up); good shoes needed.

GPS 41.49706, 13.80228

4 Rocca Janula (Castle Hill), Cassino

HIGH Castle and battlefield · Timeline 31 · ≈45 min

This medieval castle above the town was taken by New Zealanders on 15 March 1944 and held by the 1/4th Essex Regiment and others against fierce counter-attacks. Restored and reopened in 2015, it gives the classic view of the town battle and of Hangman's Hill below the abbey.

What you can see: Look for the memorial to the 4th Essex; from the walls trace the zigzag road up to the abbey and the rubble zone of 1944.

Plan: Reached from Via Montecassino; small entry fee (reported €3). Check before you go.

GPS 41.49511, 13.82522

5 Historiale museum, Cassino

HIGH Museum · ≈60 min

Opened in 2004 for the battle's 60th anniversary, the Historiale is Cassino's own multimedia museum, with rooms designed by the Oscar-winning effects artist Carlo Rambaldi. It explains the Gustav Line, the bombing and what the town's 20,000 inhabitants endured, a story easily lost among the military cemeteries.

What you can see: Follow the guided route through the war rooms, the bombing and the postwar rebuilding of a town that had been completely destroyed.

Plan: Via San Marco 23. Weekday guided visits at set times; published hours vary between official sources. Check before you go.

GPS 41.48386, 13.82869

6 Cassino War Cemetery and Memorial

HIGH War cemetery (Commonwealth) · ≈60 min · ★ must see

The largest Commonwealth cemetery in Italy: 4,271 graves, with the Cassino Memorial naming more than 4,000 soldiers of the Italian campaign who have no known grave. British, New Zealand, Indian, Canadian, South African and Gurkha soldiers lie together below the mountain they fought for.

What you can see: Walk the memorial panels by regiment, then look up: the abbey is framed above the headstones.

Plan: CWGC. Open during gardeners' hours: about 08:00–12:00 and 13:00–15:30 in winter, 07:30–12:00 and 13:00–16:00 in summer; lock your car. Via S. Angelo, about 1 km from Cassino railway station.

GPS 41.47756, 13.82714

7 German War Cemetery, Caira

HIGH War cemetery (German) · ≈45 min

About 20,000 German soldiers who died in southern Italy lie on the terraced slope of Colle Marino, gathered here from many field graves in 1959–60. The paratroopers who held Cassino are among them. It is a sober counterpart to the Allied cemeteries in the valley.

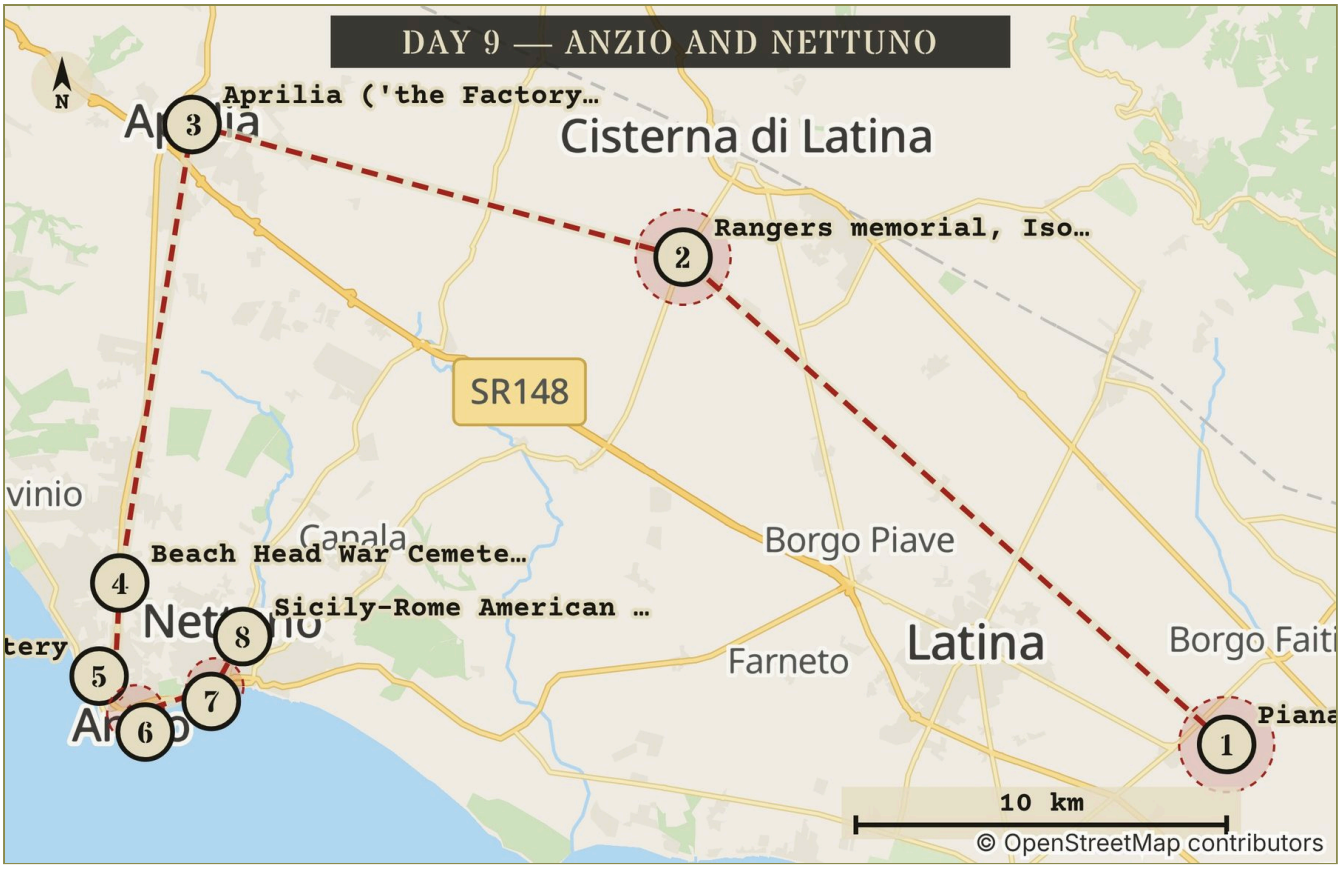
What you can see: Climb to the bronze cross at the top for a view back down the Rapido valley to Cassino and the abbey.

Plan: Via Colle Marino, 3 km north of Cassino. Managed by the Volksbund. Summer Mon–Fri 09:00–18:00, weekends and holidays 09:00–19:00; winter daily 08:00–16:00. Check before you go.

GPS 41.53130, 13.82299

End of day 8 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Cassino. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 9 — ANZIO AND NETTUNO



Cassino → (Latina) → Cisterna → Aprilia → Anzio → Nettuno · 8 stops

The Anzio beachhead: the landing, four months of siege on a flat coastal plain, and the breakout towards Rome.

1 Piana delle Orme museum, near Latina

LOW Museum · ≈120 min

A huge private museum of 20th-century life in the Pontine plain, with large pavilions on the Second World War: dioramas of the Anzio landing and Cassino, and a big collection of vehicles. Good for families and vehicle enthusiasts, though less focused than the museums at Anzio.

What you can see: See the Anzio landing pavilion with the Rangers battle and civilian shelters, and the vehicle halls.

Plan: Strada Migliara 43½, Borgo Faiti (Latina). Mar–Oct weekdays 09:00–17:00, weekends and holidays to 19:00; Nov–Feb 09:00–16:00 (weekends to 18:00); adult €13. Skip on a short trip. Check before you go.

GPS 41.44257, 12.98580

2 Rangers memorial, Isola Bella near Cisterna

LOW Memorial · Timeline 28 · ≈20 min

A roadside marker and a 'Via dei Rangers' sign recall the destruction of two US Ranger battalions on 30 January 1944. Cisterna itself held out until the breakout of May, when the US 3rd Division finally took the ruined town on 25 May.

What you can see: Look at the flat, ditch-crossed fields and imagine them in daylight with German armour on the road.

Plan: On the Via Nettuno about 6 km from Borgo Montello; roadside parking only.

GPS 41.56140, 12.80860

3 Aprilia ('the Factory') and the Via Anziate

MEDIUM Battlefield · Timeline 30 · ≈30 min

The centre of the February fighting. Aprilia was a Fascist new town founded in 1936; its tower and buildings became the German strongpoint called 'the Factory'. From here the German attacks of February rolled south down the Via Anziate towards the sea.

What you can see: Stand in the main square, then drive south on the Via Anziate past Carroceto and Campo di Carne, the heart of the defensive battle.

Plan: Aprilia is a busy modern town; park near the centre.

GPS 41.59368, 12.64853

4 Beach Head War Cemetery, Anzio

HIGH War cemetery (Commonwealth) · ≈45 min · ★ must see

2,316 Commonwealth soldiers lie here, most killed in the defensive battles of February and March 1944 along the Via Anziate. Most are British, with Canadians, South Africans, Australians, Indians and New Zealanders among them. It lies on the road the Germans were trying to reach.

What you can see: Walk the rows of the Guards, the London regiments and the Scots; look north-east towards Aprilia, only a few kilometres away.

Plan: CWGC, open access. Via Nettunense, about 5 km north of Anzio.

GPS 41.48194, 12.62500

5 Anzio War Cemetery

HIGH War cemetery (Commonwealth) · ≈30 min

A smaller Commonwealth cemetery of 1,056 graves on the edge of Anzio, begun just after the landings. Many here were killed in the first weeks: the landing, the advance on Campoleone and the fighting round the Factory. It is often quieter than the larger Beach Head cemetery.

What you can see: Note the dates in late January and February 1944, and the regiments of the British 1st Division and the commandos.

Plan: CWGC, open access. About 1 km north of Anzio town off the SS207, near the communal cemetery.

GPS 41.45547, 12.62318

Read more: Anzio War Cemetery (CWGC)

6 Museo dello Sbarco di Anzio (Villa Adele)

MEDIUM Museum · Timeline 27 · ≈60 min · ★ must see

The town's landing museum, opened for the 50th anniversary, with American, British, German and Italian sections: uniforms, weapons, documents, maps and objects raised from the sea, including from the British cruiser HMS Spartan and destroyer HMS Janus, both sunk off the beachhead.

What you can see: Look for the relief maps of the beachhead and the finds from the sunken ships; then walk down to the harbour.

Plan: Via di Villa Adele 2, near the station. Free. The museum's own site gives 10:00–13:00 and 16:00–18:00 (17:00–19:00 in July–August), closed Mondays and Wednesdays; the town's page differs. Check before you go.

GPS 41.45010, 12.63019

7 Museo dello Sbarco Alleato, Forte Sangallo, Nettuno

MEDIUM Museum · ≈45 min

Inside a Renaissance fort built in 1501 on the Nettuno seafront, this museum of the Allied landing displays uniforms, helmets, documents, photographs and material found around Anzio and Nettuno. The fort itself watched the landing ships arrive on 22 January 1944.

What you can see: See the period photographs of Nettuno under shellfire, then look out to sea from the fort.

Plan: Via Antonio Gramsci 5, Nettuno. Free. Check before you go.

GPS 41.45662, 12.65599

8 Sicily–Rome American Cemetery and Memorial, Nettuno

HIGH War cemetery (American) · ≈75 min · ★ must see

7,858 Americans lie here, killed from Sicily to just north of Rome, with 3,095 names of the missing on the chapel walls. The site is on ground captured by the US 3rd Division on 22 January. Its visitor centre and map room explain the whole campaign clearly.

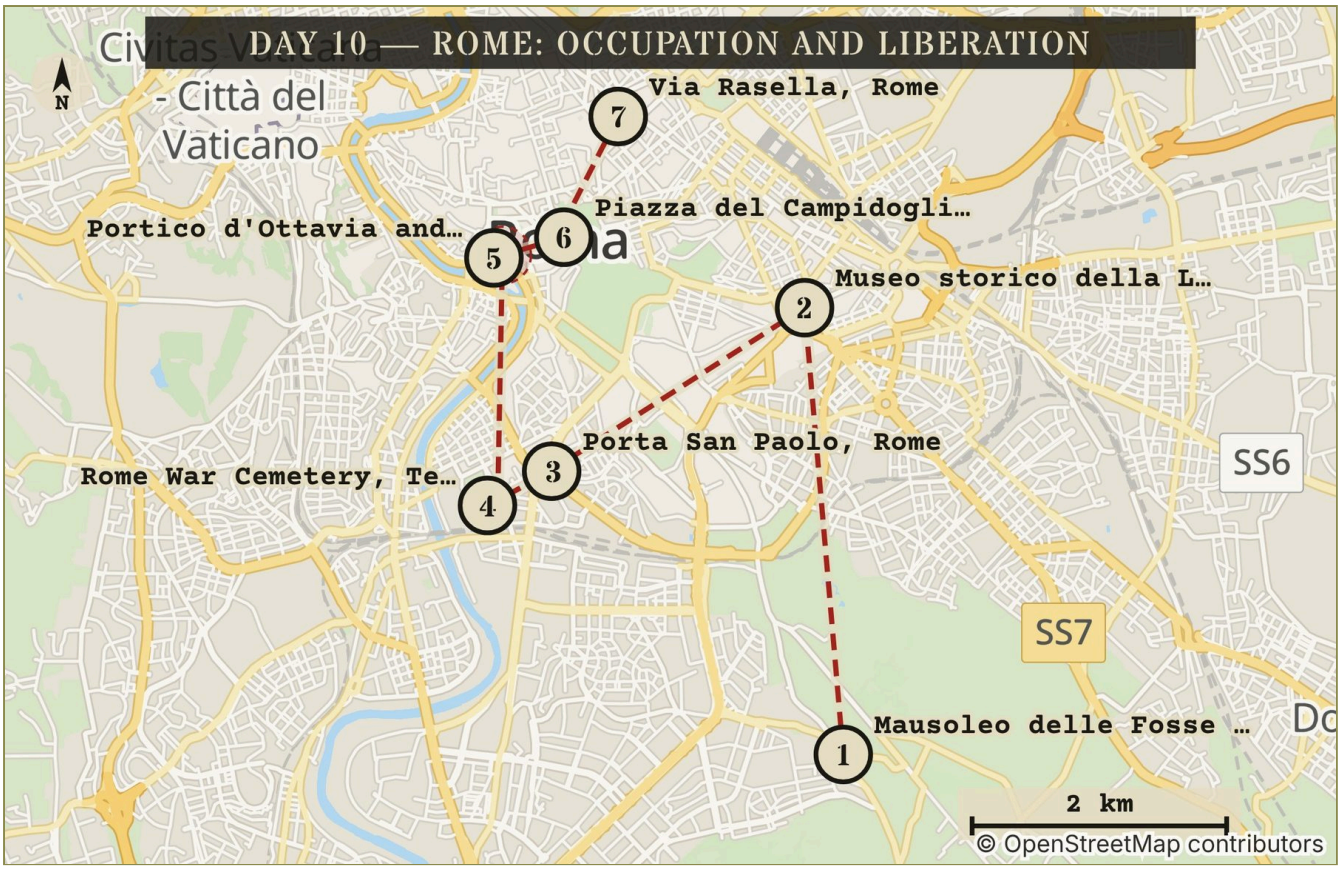
What you can see: Walk under the pines to the memorial; see the bronze relief map and fresco maps of the Italian campaign in the map room.

Plan: ABMC cemeteries are normally open daily 09:00–17:00 except 25 Dec and 1 Jan. Free. Check before you go.

GPS 41.46472, 12.66194

End of day 9 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Nettuno / Anzio. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 10 — ROME: OCCUPATION AND LIBERATION



Fosse Ardeatine → Via Tasso → Porta San Paolo → Rome War Cemetery → Portico d'Ottavia → Campidoglio → Via Rasella · 7 stops

Nine months of German occupation, resistance and reprisal, and the liberation of 4 June 1944.

1 Mausoleo delle Fosse Ardeatine, Rome

HIGH Memorial and museum · Timeline 32 · ≈75 min · ★ must see

Italy's national memorial to the 335 victims of 24 March 1944, opened in 1949 on the site of the massacre. It is one of the most powerful memorials of the war anywhere: the caves, a museum, and a shrine where every victim has his own tomb.

What you can see: Walk through the tunnels, see the small museum, and stand among the 335 tombs, many with photographs and names of the victims.

Plan: Via Ardeatina 174. Free. Mon–Fri 08:15–15:30, Sat–Sun 08:15–16:30; museum closes 15 min earlier; closed 1 Jan, Easter Sunday, 1 May, 15 Aug and 25 Dec. Buses 118 and 218; parking at entrance. Check before you go.

GPS 41.85705, 12.51008

2 Museo storico della Liberazione, Via Tasso

HIGH Museum · ≈75 min · ★ must see

The building where Herbert Kappler's security police imprisoned and tortured some 2,000 people during the occupation, among them many of the Fosse Ardeatine victims. The cells are preserved with the prisoners' messages scratched on the walls, and the museum is the best place in Rome to understand the occupation.

What you can see: Read the graffiti in the cells, and the sections on the Resistance and the persecution of Rome's Jews.

Plan: Via Tasso 145, near Manzoni–Museo della Liberazione metro. Free; the museum's website gives daily 09:00–19:00, closed around Christmas, New Year, Easter and 14–16 August. Check before you go.

GPS 41.88861, 12.50639

3 Porta San Paolo, Rome

HIGH Battle site and memorial · ≈30 min

On 10 September 1943, two days after the armistice, Italian soldiers and armed civilians fought German troops at this Roman gate in a last attempt to keep them out of the city. It is remembered as the first act of the Roman Resistance, and plaques on the walls honour those who fell.

What you can see: Find the memorial plaques on the gate and the Aurelian Walls; the Pyramid of Cestius stands next to it.

Plan: Piramide metro (Line B). Combine with the Rome War Cemetery a few minutes away on foot.

GPS 41.87667, 12.48139

4 Rome War Cemetery, Testaccio

HIGH War cemetery (Commonwealth) · ≈30 min

A small, walled Commonwealth cemetery of 426 graves, used mainly for the garrison after the liberation, with some soldiers and airmen who died as prisoners in Rome. It sits in a quiet corner of Testaccio beside the Protestant Cemetery and a short walk from Porta San Paolo.

What you can see: Note the airmen and the prisoners of war; the Protestant Cemetery next door holds Keats and Shelley.

Plan: CWGC. Via Nicola Zabaglia 50, near Piramide metro. For security it is locked outside gardeners' hours (Mon–Fri about 08:00–15:00). Check before you go.

GPS 41.87502, 12.47724

5 Portico d'Ottavia and the Jewish Ghetto

MEDIUM Memorial site · ≈30 min

Before dawn on 16 October 1943 German police rounded up 1,259 people in Rome, most of them here in the old Ghetto; 1,023 were deported to Auschwitz, and only 16 came back. The square outside the Roman portico is now Largo 16 Ottobre 1943.

What you can see: Look for the memorial plaques and the brass Stolpersteine (stones of remembrance) set into the pavements outside victims' homes.

Plan: On foot in the historic centre; respectful dress near the synagogue.

GPS 41.89230, 12.47770

6 Piazza del Campidoglio, Rome

HIGH Liberation site · Timeline 36 · ≈20 min

On 5 June 1944, the morning after American troops entered Rome, General Mark Clark held his famous press conference on the Capitoline Hill. For a day Rome was the world's headline, until the Normandy landings on 6 June pushed Italy off the front pages, where it largely stayed.

What you can see: Stand at the top of the Cordonata staircase and look over the city that was liberated almost undamaged.

Plan: Open square; the Capitoline Museums are separate and ticketed.

GPS 41.89340, 12.48270

7 Via Rasella, Rome

MEDIUM Resistance site · ≈20 min

Here on 23 March 1944 partisans of the GAP set off a bomb hidden in a rubbish cart as a column of the German police regiment 'Bozen' marched past. Thirty-three policemen and several civilians died. The attack led directly to the Fosse Ardeatine massacre the next day.

What you can see: Walk up the steep, narrow street near the Quattro Fontane crossroads; the attack took place outside Palazzo Tittoni.

Plan: Near Barberini metro (Line A). A residential street: please be discreet.

GPS 41.90210, 12.48870

End of day 10 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Rome (west). The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 11 — TRASIMENE TO FLORENCE



Castiglione del Lago → Arezzo → Florence (Girone) → Ponte Vecchio → Palazzo Vecchio · 5 stops

Follow Eighth Army north from the Trasimene Line to the Arno, ending in a Florence that lost all but one of its bridges.

1 Trasimene Line viewpoint, Castiglione del Lago

LOW Battlefield · Timeline 37 · ≈60 min

In late June 1944 the lake's western shore was the German Trasimene Line. Castiglione del Lago, on its promontory, is the natural viewpoint over the ridges where British, South African and Canadian troops fought through villages such as Sanfatucchio. It is a short drive from the A1 and a good first stop coming north from Rome.

What you can see: Walk the town walls for the view south over the lake shore; then drive a few kilometres south to Sanfatucchio to see how its houses dominate the road.

Plan: Town and lakeside free; the castle and palace museum are ticketed, with seasonal hours — check before you go.

GPS 43.12764, 12.05346

2 Arezzo War Cemetery, Indicatore

HIGH Commonwealth war cemetery · ≈45 min

Arezzo was defended hard in early July 1944 and taken on 16 July by the British 6th Armoured and 2nd New Zealand Divisions. The cemetery holds 1,266 Commonwealth burials from the advance up the upper Arno; plots VII to IX contain the graves of soldiers of the 4th and 8th Indian Divisions, a reminder of how many Indian troops fought in Tuscany.

What you can see: Compare the headstones of the Indian plots, with their varied scripts and religious emblems, with the British and New Zealand rows.

Plan: CWGC site at Località Indicatore Zona Prima, north-west of Arezzo; open access, free.

GPS 43.48407, 11.79036

3 Florence War Cemetery, Girone

HIGH Commonwealth war cemetery · ≈45 min

In the Arno valley just east of the city, this cemetery holds 1,632 Commonwealth burials, most of them men killed between July and September 1944 in the approach to Florence and the fighting on the Arno line. The site was chosen in November 1944 for burials from nearby hospitals; 83 graves were later moved here from the Arrow Route cemetery.

What you can see: Look for the regimental badges of British, South African, New Zealand and Indian units carved on the headstones.

Plan: CWGC site on the main road at Girone, 2 km towards Pontassieve from the Firenze Sud ring road; bus A14 from Santa Maria Novella to the Girone terminus. Free; the gates are locked outside working hours (roughly 07:30/08:00 to 15:30/16:00 with a lunch break), with a code lock — check before you go.

GPS 43.76976, 11.34258

4 Ponte Vecchio and the demolished quarter, Florence

HIGH Historic bridge · Timeline 38 · ≈60 min · ★ must see

The only Florentine bridge the Germans did not blow on the night of 3–4 August 1944. Popular memory credits Hitler; historians note the Germans chose instead to block it by demolishing the medieval streets at both ends. Today's shops and flats along Por Santa Maria, Borgo San Jacopo and Via Guicciardini are post-war reconstructions on the rubble line.

What you can see: From the bridge, look downstream to Ponte Santa Trinita, rebuilt in 1958 from stones raised from the Arno; the head of its Primavera statue was found in 1961.

Plan: Always open; very crowded from late morning, so come early or at dusk. Pedestrian zone: park at a peripheral car park or use the tram.

GPS 43.76799, 11.25316

5 Palazzo Vecchio and Piazza della Signoria, Florence

HIGH Civic palace · Timeline 38 · ≈60 min

On 11 August 1944, as the Germans withdrew north of the city, the ringing of the Martinella bell in the Palazzo Vecchio tower signalled the rising of Florence's partisans and the Tuscan liberation committee. Fighting went on in the northern suburbs for weeks, with snipers, shelling and more than 600 civilians killed during the battle for the city.

What you can see: Look up at the tower whose bell called the rising, then walk three minutes to the river: for a week German rearguards and Allied troops faced each other across the Arno.

Plan: Square always open; Palazzo Vecchio museum ticketed, hours vary by season — check before you go.

GPS 43.76940, 11.25610

End of day 11 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Florence (south bank, near Piazzale Michelangelo). The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 12 — THROUGH THE GOTHIC LINE TO BOLOGNA



Florence American Cemetery → MuGot → Il Giogo Pass → Futa Pass → Monte Sole → Marzabotto → Bologna · 7 stops

Cross the Apennines on the Fifth Army's axis, from the American cemetery over the Gothic Line passes to the massacre sites of Monte Sole and liberated Bologna.

1 Florence American Cemetery, Tavarnuzze

HIGH American war cemetery · ≈60 min · ★ must see

The only American Second World War cemetery north of Rome holds 4,402 US dead, most of them killed after Rome fell, in the Gothic Line battles and the final push to the Alps. The Tablets of the Missing list 1,409 names. Many men of the 85th, 88th and 91st Divisions who fell at Il Giogo, today's next stop, lie here.

What you can see: Walk the curved terraces up to the memorial; inside, the operations maps trace the campaign from Rome to the Alps.

Plan: Via Cassia, Tavarnuzze (Impruneta), 12 km south of Florence; A1 exit Firenze Impruneta. Daily 09:00–17:00, closed 25 Dec and 1 Jan; free — check before you go.

GPS 43.69183, 11.21043

2 MuGot — Museo Gotica Toscana, Ponzalla

HIGH Museum · ≈60 min

A volunteer-run museum founded in 2019 between the Futa and Giogo passes, telling the story of the 1944 battles in the Mugello through documents, filmed testimonies, uniforms and recovered equipment. Its guides also lead visits to the battlefields and bunkers of the Gothic Line, so it is the best place to get oriented before climbing to the passes.

What you can see: Ask about the battlefield tour to Monte Altuzzo, and look at the maps of the German positions around the two passes.

Plan: Via Ponzalla 47, Scarperia e San Piero. Wed and Fri 09:30–13:30; Sat–Sun 09:30–12:30, 14:00–18:30; €5, guided visit €8 — check before you go.

GPS 44.02491, 11.37020

3 Il Giogo Pass and Monte Altuzzo

HIGH Battlefield · Timeline 42 · ≈45 min · ★ must see

Here US II Corps broke the Gothic Line in the central Apennines in September 1944, after six days of fighting up Monte Altuzzo and Monticelli against German paratroopers. The breakthrough outflanked the stronger Futa Pass. A 5.2 km waymarked Gothic Line ring trail from the pass leads to trenches and positions on Monte Altuzzo.

What you can see: Stand at the pass and trace the skyline positions; with 2.5 hours to spare, walk the ring trail Passo del Giogo – Monte Altuzzo – Fonte Fredda.

Plan: Parking at the pass on the SP503 between Scarperia and Firenzuola; trail moderate, 213 m of climb; wear boots.

GPS 44.04680, 11.38803

4 German War Cemetery, Futa Pass

HIGH German war cemetery · ≈45 min · ★ must see

Italy's largest German war cemetery holds more than 30,600 dead, gathered from across the region, in terraces spiralling up a hilltop on the old Gothic Line. Designed by Dieter Oesterlen and dedicated in 1969, its 2 km stone wall climbs to a sharp prow-like summit. The graves are of the defenders of the Line, and of men from every Italian front after Rome.

What you can see: Follow the spiral wall to the top for the view over the Futa and Giogo passes; note how young most of the men were.

Plan: Via San Jacopo a Castro, Traversa (Firenzuola), on the SS65 at the Futa Pass. Open daily, free; hours vary by season — check before you go.

GPS 44.09678, 11.27165

5 Brazilian Votive Monument, Pistoia

HIGH Key site · Brazil · FEB cemetery 1944–1960 · ≈60 min

The Brazilian Expeditionary Force buried its dead here, 463 men, until they were repatriated to Rio de Janeiro in 1960. A modernist votive monument by Olavo Redig de Campos, opened in 1967, now marks the site, with the tomb of an unknown Brazilian soldier.

What you can see: The open pavilion, the stone terraces of the former cemetery and the tomb of the unknown soldier.

GPS 43.94500, 10.94306

6 Sant'Anna di Stazzema National Park of Peace

HIGH Key site · Civilians · 12 Aug 1944 · ≈60 min

The mountain village where about 560 civilians, most of them women, children and elderly, were killed by SS troops in a single morning. The whole village is now a memorial, with a museum, the church square and an ossuary monument above the coast.

What you can see: The church square where many were killed, the Via Crucis path and the ossuary monument overlooking the Versilia coast.

GPS 43.97417, 10.27361

7 Sommocolonia — Lieutenant Fox memorial

HIGH Key site · US 92nd Division · 26 Dec 1944 · ≈60 min

In this Garfagnana hill village about 70 soldiers of the African-American 92nd 'Buffalo' Division and 25 Italian partisans were overrun on 26 December 1944. Lieutenant John Fox called artillery fire onto his own position to cover the withdrawal and was killed; his Medal of Honor came only in 1997.

What you can see: The Memory Park at the ruined tower opposite the parish church, a 10-minute walk from the lower car park.

GPS 44.09211, 10.49061

8 Monte Sole Historical Park — Casaglia

MEDIUM Memorial site · Timeline 43 · ≈75 min · ★ must see

The heart of the Marzabotto massacre of 29 September to 5 October 1944. The Monte Sole Historical Park, created in 1989, preserves the ruins of hamlets, churches and farms where about 770 civilians were killed. At the church of Santa Maria Assunta in Casaglia, villagers who had taken refuge with their priest, Don Ubaldo Marchioni, were led into the cemetery and shot.

What you can see: Walk the short way from the road to the Casaglia church ruins and cemetery; longer marked paths link San Martino, Caprara and Cerpiano.

Plan: Park roads are narrow; allow time. The Il Poggiolo visitor centre and the Scuola di Pace Monte Sole offer guided visits — book ahead.

GPS 44.31102, 11.21793

9 Sacrario dei Caduti, Marzabotto

MEDIUM Memorial crypt · Timeline 43 · ≈30 min

Inaugurated in the early 1960s in the crypt of the parish church of Saints Joseph and Charles, the shrine holds the remains of hundreds of victims of the Monte Sole massacre and of partisans killed in the area. Plaques honour those decorated for their sacrifice, among them the priest Don Giovanni Fornasini and the Stella Rossa commander Mario 'Lupo' Musolesi.

What you can see: Read the names on the tombs of the crypt; the paintings and bronzes by Stella Angelini depict the war, the massacre and the Resistance.

Plan: Via Aldo Moro, Marzabotto town centre. Daily about 09:00–12:00 and 15:00–17:00 — check before you go.

GPS 44.34106, 11.20459

10 Sacrario dei Partigiani, Piazza del Nettuno, Bologna

HIGH Memorial · Timeline 46 · ≈30 min

On 21 April 1945, the day Bologna was liberated, families began pinning photographs of their dead to the wall of Palazzo d'Accursio, where many partisans had been executed. The permanent memorial by Giuseppe Vaccaro, opened on 25 April 1955, holds more than 2,000 ceramic tiles with names and faces of partisans who died between 1943 and 1945.

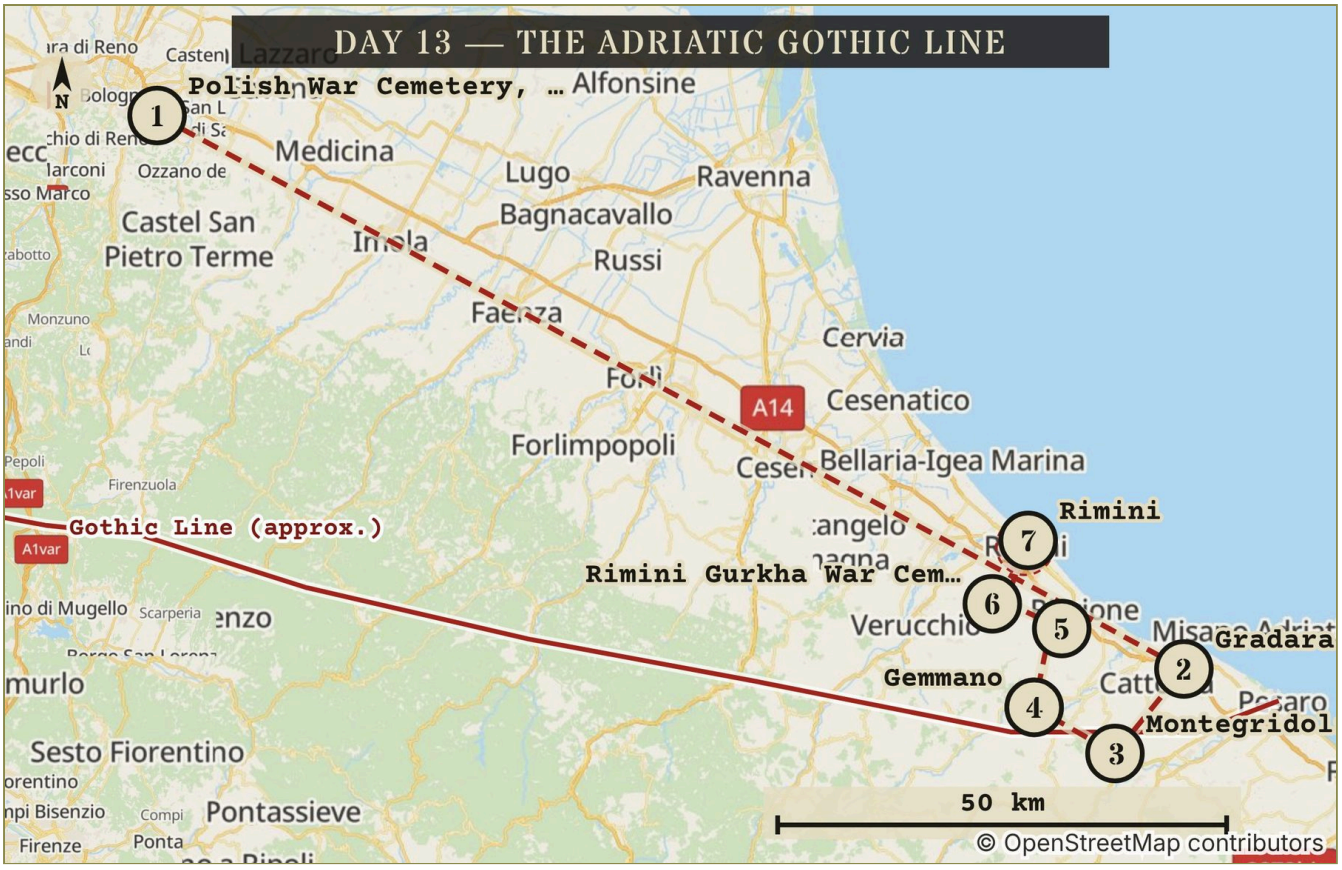
What you can see: Look for the photographs among the tiles, then walk into Piazza Maggiore, where Allied tanks and partisans were cheered on liberation day.

Plan: City centre, always visible; Bologna has a limited-traffic zone, so leave the car at your campsite or a car park.

GPS 44.49444, 11.34250

End of day 12 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Bologna (north-east, Fiera district). The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 13 — THE ADRIATIC GOTHIC LINE



Bologna (Polish cemetery) → Gradara → Montegridolfo → Gemmano → Coriano → Rimini · 7 stops

Walk the ground of Operation Olive, where Eighth Army broke the Gothic Line in a week and then bled on the ridges before Rimini.

1 Polish War Cemetery, Bologna (San Lazzaro)

HIGH Polish war cemetery · Timeline 46 · ≈30 min

Here lie 1,432 soldiers of General Anders' Polish II Corps who died in 1944–45, many in the last offensive and the drive on Bologna, which Polish troops entered on 21 April 1945. The inscription reads that they fell on Italian soil fighting for a free Poland, a cause that, for most of them, the peace did not deliver.

What you can see: Note the different headstone shapes for the soldiers' different faiths, and the ages: many were deportees released from the Soviet Union in 1942.

Plan: Via Giuseppe Dozza, on the eastern edge of Bologna near the A14 San Lazzaro exit; free. The Museo Memoriale della Libertà (Via Dozza 24) nearby opens by appointment — check before you go.

GPS 44.47408, 11.40051

2 Gradara War Cemetery

HIGH Commonwealth war cemetery · ≈40 min

The cemetery holds 1,191 Commonwealth burials (and one Belgian) from the advance from Ancona to Rimini, which broke the Gothic Line, and from the heavy fighting around Rimini until its capture on 21 September 1944. Canadian, British and other Commonwealth soldiers who fought through this coastal sector lie side by side.

What you can see: Walk the terraces, then look up at the medieval castle of Gradara on its hill above the coast road.

Plan: On the SS16 between Cattolica and Pesaro (A14 exit Cattolica, follow Gradara then SS16 towards Pesaro); free, open access.

GPS 43.94106, 12.78238

3 Montegridolfo and the Museo della Linea dei Goti

HIGH Battlefield and museum · Timeline 40 · ≈75 min · ★ must see

The walled hilltop village taken on 31 August 1944, where Lieutenant Gerard Norton won the Victoria Cross. A small local museum 300 metres from the centre gathers newspapers, photographs, weapons and everyday objects from 1943–44, many donated by villagers, telling the story of the Gothic Line from both sides and from the civilians caught between them.

What you can see: Walk the walls for the view over the Foglia valley, then visit the museum on Via Borgo.

Plan: Museo della Linea dei Goti, Via Borgo; admission by donation; opening days are limited — phone +39 0541 1613093 before you go.

GPS 43.85915, 12.68948

4 Gemmano — "the Cassino of the Adriatic"

MEDIUM Battlefield · ≈45 min

Between 4 and 15 September 1944 this hilltop village and the heights around it were attacked again and again by British 46th and 56th Divisions before the 4th Indian Division took the last positions on 15 September. The German mountain troops holding it suffered heavily, and more than 100 villagers were killed, many by naval shelling.

What you can see: From the village look out over Zollara and the surrounding knolls and spurs, which changed hands repeatedly.

Plan: Small village on narrow roads west of Morciano di Romagna; park in the centre and walk.

GPS 43.90393, 12.58091

5 Coriano Ridge War Cemetery

HIGH Commonwealth war cemetery · Timeline 41 · ≈45 min · ★ must see

The largest Commonwealth cemetery of the Adriatic Gothic Line: 1,939 burials, among them 1,413 British, 427 Canadian, 52 New Zealand and 28 South African. It lies on the slopes of the ridge fought over from 4 to 13 September 1944; in the week after its capture Eighth Army was losing some 150 killed a day. The cemetery was begun in April 1945.

What you can see: Read the Canadian headstones from the 5th Armoured Division's assault, then look up the slope towards Coriano village on the crest.

Plan: Via Piane, Coriano, 3.5 km west of Riccione, reached by turning west off the Rimini–Riccione road; free, open access.

GPS 43.98485, 12.60404

6 Rimini Gurkha War Cemetery, Cerasolo

HIGH Commonwealth (Indian Army) war cemetery · ≈30 min

A quiet cemetery of 618 soldiers of the Indian Army, many of them Gurkhas, who died in the autumn 1944 fighting around Rimini and San Marino. It also holds the Rimini Cremation Memorial, one of three in Italy, naming 172 soldiers of the Indian Army whose bodies were cremated in accordance with their faith.

What you can see: Look for the cremation memorial and the Nepali names on the Gurkha headstones; San Marino rises to the south-west.

Plan: Via Consolare Rimini–San Marino, Cerasolo (Coriano); free, open access.

GPS 44.00523, 12.54311

7 Rimini — the liberated city

MEDIUM Town · Timeline 41 · ≈60 min

Rimini was bombed from November 1943 onwards and about 82 per cent of its buildings were destroyed, the highest share among Italy's larger cities. On the morning of 21 September 1944 the 3rd Greek Mountain Brigade, fighting with I Canadian Corps, entered the abandoned city; the brigade was afterwards known as the Rimini Brigade.

What you can see: Cross the Roman Tiberius bridge, which survived the war, and walk the old centre looking for the many plain post-war buildings between the monuments.

Plan: Historic centre is a limited-traffic zone; park outside it. Good evening stop before the campsite.

GPS 44.05944, 12.56833

End of day 13 — where to sleep: a good area to stay is Rimini – Miramare (south of the city, for Coriano and Gemmano). The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

DAY 14 — THE LAST OFFENSIVE — SENIO, ARGENTA AND THE PO



Alfonsine → Lake Comacchio → Argenta Gap War Cemetery → Argenta → Po at Ferrara → (San Benedetto Po) · 6 stops

Follow Operation Grapeshot across the Romagna rivers and the Argenta Gap to the banks of the Po, where the German armies in Italy were destroyed.

1 Museo della Battaglia del Senio, Alfonsine

MEDIUM Museum · ≈60 min

For the winter of 1944–45 the front lay along the high embankments of the Senio, with Germans and Allies sometimes on opposite sides of the same levee. Alfonsine was liberated on 10 April 1945, the day after the final offensive began. The museum, founded in 1981, covers the Allied operations, the Romagna partisans and civilian life under occupation.

What you can see: Study the maps of the Senio front and the photographs of Kangaroo and Fantail vehicles used in the flooded plain.

Plan: Piazza della Resistenza 2, Alfonsine. Mon–Fri 08:30–13:00, Wed also 14:00–17:00, Sat 09:00–12:00, Sun on request, closed in August; free — check before you go.

GPS 44.50757, 12.03864

2 Lake Comacchio — the commandos' battlefield

LOW Battlefield · ≈45 min

In early April 1945 British commandos and the Special Boat Service opened the offensive on the spit and lagoons of Lake Comacchio. Corporal Tom Hunter of 43 Commando and Major Anders Lassen, a Dane serving with the SBS, won posthumous Victoria Crosses here; both are buried at Argenta. The lagoon's eastern side became the right flank of the drive on Argenta.

What you can see: From Comacchio, drive the lagoon roads and imagine assault boats stuck in the shallows by night, as they were during the raid.

Plan: Comacchio town is a good base for walking the lagoon edges; the lagoons are protected wetland, so stay on roads and paths.

GPS 44.69478, 12.18194

3 Argenta Gap War Cemetery

HIGH Commonwealth war cemetery · Timeline 45 · ≈45 min · ★ must see

The cemetery of the last hard battle in Italy holds 625 Commonwealth burials, most of them men killed in the Argenta Gap and around Lake Comacchio in April 1945. Among them are Anders Lassen VC, Tom Hunter VC and the George Cross holder Arthur Banks, an RAF pilot who fought alongside Italian partisans.

What you can see: Find the Victoria Cross headstones of Lassen and Hunter, then look east across the flat fields that the 78th and 56th Divisions crossed.

Plan: Strada di Sant'Antonio, about 2 km north of Argenta: from the SS16 pass the town centre and follow signs to Bando; the entrance is about 800 m from the road across private land, and the barrier is usually open 08:00–19:30; free — check before you go.

GPS 44.63414, 11.83190

4 Argenta — the Gap

MEDIUM Town and battlefield · Timeline 45 · ≈30 min

Argenta sits on the narrow strip of dry ground between the Reno and the flooded Valli di Comacchio. Once British V Corps took the town on 18 April 1945, armour could pour through the Gap towards Ferrara and the Po, turning the whole German defence line along the rivers. The town was heavily damaged in the fighting.

What you can see: From the Reno embankment at the edge of town, see how thin the corridor of dry land really is.

Plan: Park in the centre; the river embankments can be walked on the service tracks.

GPS 44.61397, 11.83547

5 The Po at Pontelagoscuro, Ferrara

LOW River crossing · ≈30 min

By 23–24 April 1945 the German armies were pinned against the Po with every bridge down. Eighth Army's 8th Indian, 56th and 2nd New Zealand Divisions crossed from 24 April with little opposition, while upstream the 6th South African Armoured Division crossed with the US Fifth Army; the banks were littered with abandoned guns and vehicles. The Adige followed on 27 April.

What you can see: Walk up the embankment and look across the river: several hundred metres of fast water that thousands of Germans tried to swim.

Plan: Pontelagoscuro is on the SS16 just north of Ferrara; park near the embankment and use the cycle path.

GPS 44.88700, 11.60800

6 San Benedetto Po — the 10th Mountain crossing

MEDIUM River crossing · Timeline 47 · ≈45 min

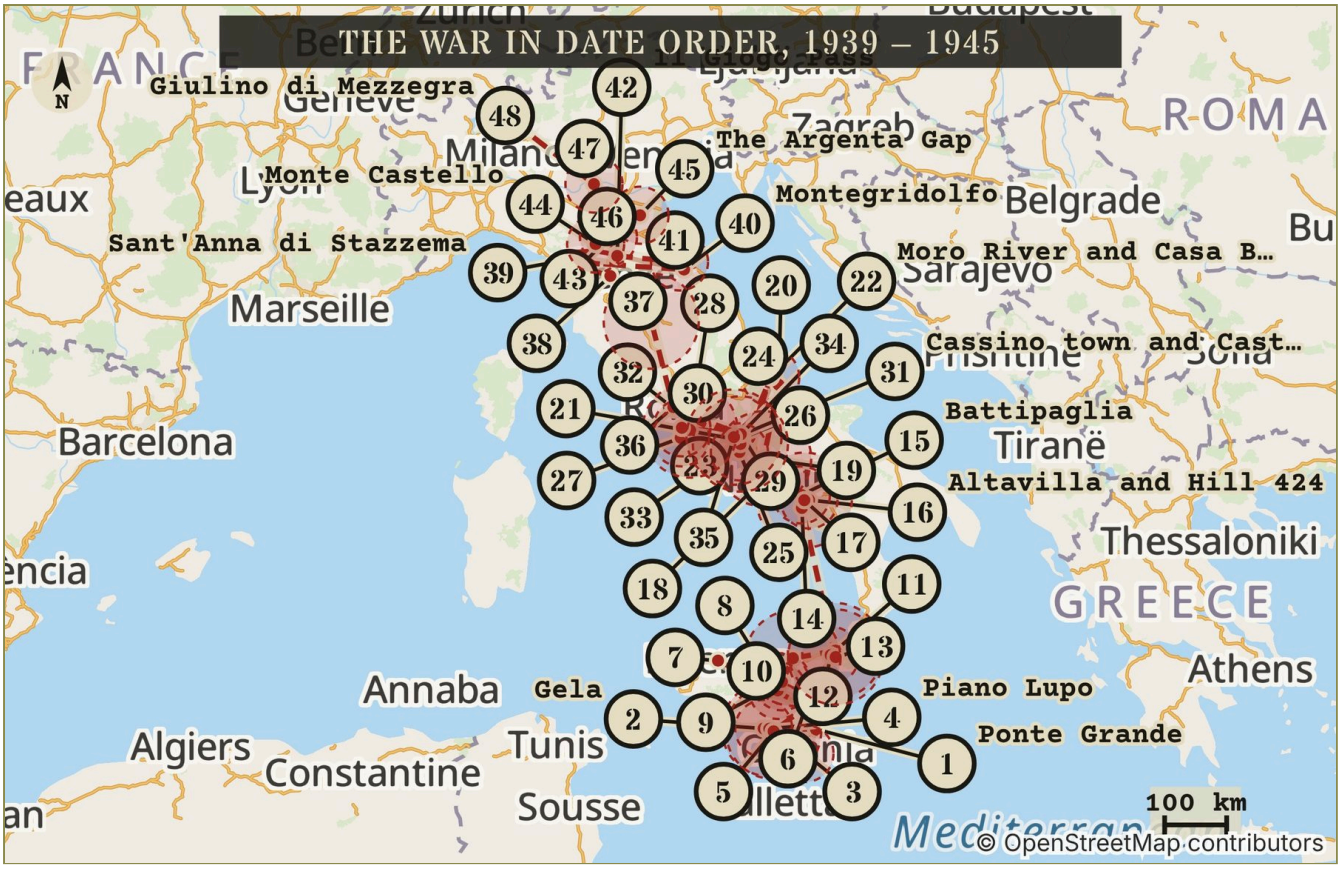
The first Allied crossing of the Po was made here by the US 10th Mountain Division on 23 April 1945, in assault boats, the day after reaching the river. Within days the division was pushing up Lake Garda towards the Alps. The town itself grew round the great Benedictine abbey of Polirone.

What you can see: Stand on the embankment and picture boats pushing off under sporadic fire; then visit the abbey square.

Plan: About 1 hr 15 min west of Ferrara; worth it only on a long trip or if continuing towards Mantua and Verona.

GPS 45.04612, 10.93367

THE TIMELINE



48 historical positions in date order: what happened, where and when. The numbers follow the campaign from south to north.

1 Ponte Grande — gliders seize the bridge

HIGH 9–10 Jul 1943, night · Sicily, July–August 1943

Operation Ladbroke sent 144 gliders of the British 1st Airlanding Brigade to seize this bridge over the Anapo south of Syracuse. In a gale, 65 came down in the sea and some 252 men drowned; only a handful landed near the target. A single platoon of the South Staffords took the bridge and, reinforced to about 87 men, held it until mid-afternoon. The Royal Scots Fusiliers of 5th Division retook it intact at 16:15.

On the ground: The road bridge over the Anapo and the flat, canal-cut ground around it. Imagine the few glider men firing from the ditches, with Syracuse harbour behind you.

GPS 37.05444, 15.26500

2 Gela — Rangers and 1st Division storm ashore

MEDIUM 10 Jul 1943, 02:45 · Sicily, July–August 1943

At 02:45 the US 1st Infantry Division landed on the beaches east of Gela while Darby's 1st and 4th Ranger Battalions went straight at the town, whose pier the Italians blew up. The destroyer USS Maddox was sunk offshore by an air attack just before 05:00. That morning nine or ten Italian tanks of Mobile Group E dashed into Gela's streets before Rangers and engineers drove them out with bazookas and grenades.

On the ground: Stand on the seafront by the pier and look along the flat beaches to the east, where the landing craft grounded, then up at the old town on its low ridge.

GPS 37.06450, 14.24730

3 Bark West — the Canadians land near Pachino

MEDIUM 10 Jul 1943, early morning · Sicily, July–August 1943

The 1st Canadian Infantry Division (Major-General Guy Simonds) and the 1st Canadian Army Tank Brigade came ashore on 'Bark West' beach near Maucini, with Royal Marine Nos. 40 and 41 Commandos landing alongside. Opposition from the Italian coastal troops was light and Pachino was reached the same day. It was the start of a month-long campaign that cost Canada some 562 dead.

On the ground: A low, sandy beach at the south-eastern tip of Sicily, today marked only by a Canadian flag. Look west along the Roger and Sugar sectors.

GPS 36.67545, 15.05265

4 Piano Lupo — the Gela counterattack

LOW 11 Jul 1943, 06:15 · Sicily, July–August 1943

At 06:15 the Hermann Göring Panzer Division and the Italian Livorno Division struck at the Gela beachhead. German tanks rolled down the Niscemi road past Piano Lupo, held by the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 16th Infantry with scattered paratroopers of the 505th, and across the Gela plain to within about 2,000 yards of the water. Artillery landed by DUKW, anti-tank guns and naval gunfire stopped them; sixteen German tanks were left burning and the attack was called off after 14:00.

On the ground: The junction where the Niscemi road meets the SS115. Some Italian concrete pillboxes survive on the slope among greenhouses; look south across the plain to the sea.

GPS 37.06126, 14.35509

5 Biazza Ridge — Gavin stops the Tigers

LOW 11 Jul 1943, afternoon · Sicily, July–August 1943

Colonel James Gavin, commander of the 505th Parachute Infantry, gathered paratroopers, engineers, cooks and clerks on this low ridge east of the Acate river and met a German battle group with Tiger tanks. Pack howitzers fired over open sights; in the evening, reinforced by Sherman tanks, Gavin counterattacked and the Germans fell back. The stand stopped the eastern arm of the counterattack and won Gavin the Distinguished Service Cross.

On the ground: Look east from the Ponte Dirillo memorial along the SS115 to the low ridge line among vineyards and greenhouses, about three kilometres away.

GPS 37.02000, 14.44000

6 Primosole Bridge — paratroops against paratroops

HIGH 13–16 Jul 1943 · Sicily, July–August 1943

Operation Fustian dropped the British 1st Parachute Brigade to seize this bridge over the Simeto, the gateway to the Catania plain. Scattered by flak, including Allied naval fire, only about 295 of 1,856 men reached the objective. They took the bridge but were driven off on 14 July by German paratroopers. The Durham Light Infantry of 50th Division needed until 16 July to secure it; the plain beyond held Eighth Army for three weeks.

On the ground: The SS114 still crosses the Simeto here. Look at the flat riverbanks and the roadside memorial to the fallen of all nations; Etna rises to the north.

GPS 37.39944, 15.06500

7 Palermo falls; three days later Mussolini is deposed

HIGH 22 Jul 1943, 19:00 · Sicily, July–August 1943

Patton's Provisional Corps swept across western Sicily and at 19:00 on 22 July accepted Palermo's surrender at the royal palace; Patton arrived that night. The drive took some 53,000 prisoners, mostly Italian. In Rome the Fascist Grand Council voted 19 to 8 against Mussolini in the early hours of 25 July, and that afternoon the King dismissed and arrested him. Marshal Badoglio's new government announced that the war would go on.

On the ground: The Norman royal palace, today Sicily's regional parliament. Palermo is off the three-day route; a separate city visit shows the palace, the port and the bomb-scarred old quarters.

GPS 38.11056, 13.35333

8 Agira — the Canadians' hardest fight

MEDIUM 24–28 Jul 1943 · Sicily, July–August 1943

Advancing east from Leonforte, the 1st Canadian Division attacked Agira, a hill town held by German Panzergrenadiers. Five days of fighting through Nissoria and along the surrounding ridges, ending in house-to-house combat, cost the division about 438 casualties, its heaviest of the Sicilian campaign. The town fell on 28 July, opening the road east towards Regalbuto and Adrano and the western end of the German Etna line.

On the ground: The steep hill town with its castle on top. From the Canadian War Cemetery east of the town, look back at the ridges the battalions climbed.

GPS 37.65580, 14.51972

9 Troina — the battle of the Big Red One

MEDIUM 31 Jul–6 Aug 1943 · Sicily, July–August 1943

At 1,100 metres, Troina anchored the western end of the German Etna line. The US 1st Infantry Division under Terry Allen, with the 39th Infantry and a Moroccan Tabor of Goums, attacked the German 15th Panzergrenadier Division and Italian troops of the Aosta Division. The defenders made about two dozen counterattacks; bombers and artillery wrecked the town. The Germans slipped away on the night of 5–6 August; Allen was relieved of command soon afterwards.

On the ground: The ridge-top town with views over the hills the infantry crossed. Robert Capa's photographs of the ruined town and its civilians hang in the museum here.

GPS 37.78516, 14.60053

10 Brolo — Patton's end run behind the lines

LOW 11 Aug 1943, 02:43 · Sicily, July–August 1943

To outflank the German line on the Naso ridge, Patton put Lieutenant Colonel Lyle Bernard's 2nd Battalion, 30th Infantry, with tanks and two artillery batteries, ashore behind the enemy at Brolo. They seized Monte Cipolla above the coast road and, supported by the cruiser USS Philadelphia, held out all day against counterattacks by the 29th Panzergrenadier Division. Relieved at 07:30 on 12 August, the force had lost 177 men.

On the ground: The steep hill between the Naso and Brolo rivers that overlooks the coast road and railway. Imagine the landing craft on the beach below.

GPS 38.15000, 14.81500

11 The Strait — the Axis gets away

LOW 11–17 Aug 1943 · Sicily, July–August 1943

In Operation Lehrgang German ferries, landing craft and barges carried troops from the beaches north of Messina to Calabria night after night from 11 to 17 August, under an umbrella of some 500 anti-aircraft guns. The Allied air forces and navies failed to stop them. Estimates run from about 40,000 to 60,000 German troops, with some 10,000 vehicles, plus 62,000–75,000 Italians carried in their own operation. The same divisions would fight at Salerno.

On the ground: At Torre Faro the Strait is only about three kilometres wide. Look across at the Calabrian shore at Villa San Giovanni and picture the nightly shuttle.

GPS 38.26500, 15.64500

12 Messina — Patton wins the race

MEDIUM 17 Aug 1943, 10:00 · Sicily, July–August 1943

A patrol of the US 3rd Division's 7th Infantry entered the bomb-wrecked city on the evening of 16 August. At 10:00 next morning Patton drove down from the hills to accept its surrender, just ahead of British commandos arriving from the south. The last German boats had left hours earlier. The 38-day campaign was over; Allied troops crossed the Strait to Calabria on 3 September.

On the ground: From the terrace of the Cristo Re shrine you see the harbour, the city rebuilt after the bombing, and the Calabrian coast across the Strait.

GPS 38.19636, 15.55176

13 Reggio Calabria — Eighth Army crosses to the mainland

LOW 3 Sep 1943, dawn · Salerno and the road to Naples, Sep–Oct 1943

Before dawn on 3 September 1943, after a barrage from more than 600 guns firing across the Strait of Messina, British XIII Corps landed on the beaches north of Reggio in Operation Baytown: the 1st Canadian Division aimed for Reggio and its airfield, the British 5th Division for Villa San Giovanni. The Germans had already pulled back, and Italian coastal troops surrendered. Six days later the British 1st Airborne Division sailed into Taranto (Operation Slapstick).

On the ground: Stand on the Gallico–Catona shore and look across the narrow strait to Sicily, where the guns were lined up. The ferry you arrived on crosses roughly the same water.

GPS 38.16500, 15.65200

14 Paestum beaches — US 36th Division lands at Salerno

HIGH 9 Sep 1943, 03:30 · Salerno and the road to Naples, Sep–Oct 1943

Hours after the Italian armistice was announced on the evening of 8 September, the US 36th Infantry Division, in battle for the first time, landed on four beaches (Red, Green, Yellow, Blue) below the Greek temples of Paestum at 03:30. There was no preliminary bombardment, and the 16th Panzer Division was waiting. By nightfall the Texans held Capaccio and the slopes of Monte Soprano, at a cost of about 500 casualties.

On the ground: The flat beach, the pine belt behind it and the medieval Torre di Paestum are much as the assault waves saw them. Look inland to the temples and the grey ridge of Monte Soprano.

GPS 40.41553, 14.99061

15 Battipaglia — British X Corps fights for the northern plain

MEDIUM 9–18 Sep 1943 · Salerno and the road to Naples, Sep–Oct 1943

North of the Sele, the British 46th and 56th Divisions of X Corps landed on 9 September while Commandos seized Vietri and US Rangers the passes above Maiori. The 56th took Montecorvino airfield and on 10 September pushed into Battipaglia, a vital road junction, but was thrown out that evening; after two more days of fighting, German counter-attacks drove the division off the edge of the town on 12 September. The British held on just south of the town; Battipaglia, largely destroyed, was finally entered on 18 September.

On the ground: Modern Battipaglia was rebuilt almost from scratch. From the SS18 look north to the airport (the old Montecorvino airfield) and east to the hills that gave German observers their view.

GPS 40.60800, 14.98400

16 Altavilla and Hill 424 — the heights above the beachhead

MEDIUM 10–19 Sep 1943 · Salerno and the road to Naples, Sep–Oct 1943

The hill village of Altavilla and Hill 424 behind it overlook the whole Sele plain. Men of the 36th Division occupied the village by 11 September, lost it to German counter-attacks on 12 September, and failed to retake Hill 424 the next day; the 1st Battalion, 142nd Infantry was almost destroyed. Naval gunfire and bombing wrecked the village, and 85 civilians died on its territory. The Americans only reoccupied it on 18–19 September.

On the ground: From the upper village look west over the plain to the sea: this is the view that let German gunners direct fire onto every beach and road. Hill 424 rises just behind the houses.

GPS 40.53300, 15.13300

17 Sele–Calore corridor — the German counter-attack is stopped

LOW 13 Sep 1943, 15:30 · Salerno and the road to Naples, Sep–Oct 1943

At 15:30 on 13 September German tanks and infantry drove down the corridor between the Sele and Calore rivers, into a gap between the US and British corps. The 2nd Battalion, 143rd Infantry was overrun, and the attack headed for the beaches. Near a burned bridge over the Calore, the 158th and 189th Field Artillery Battalions fired about 3,650 rounds in four hours, their crews fighting as infantry. It was the crisis of the Salerno battle.

On the ground: Flat farmland of buffalo-milk dairies and tomato fields between two tree-lined rivers: imagine it without cover, the guns firing over open sights from the low ground near La Cosa creek.

GPS 40.53000, 15.04000

18 Naples — the Four Days and the arrival of the Allies

HIGH 27 Sep – 1 Oct 1943 · Salerno and the road to Naples, Sep–Oct 1943

After the German commandant, Colonel Walter Schöll, declared a state of siege and ordered men aged 18–33 to report for labour, Neapolitans rose up on 27 September. For four days civilians, soldiers and teenagers fought German troops in the Vomero, Materdei, Capodimonte and elsewhere. Death tolls vary widely: from 155 to more than 600 Italians, and several dozen Germans. On 1 October British armoured cars of the King's Dragoon Guards entered a city with a wrecked port.

On the ground: The stone panels of Marino Mazzacurati's monument (inaugurated 1969) show fighters of every age. It is popularly, if loosely, called the monument to the scugnizzo, the street boy, though it honours all who fought.

GPS 40.83179, 14.22633

19 Volturno — Fifth Army crosses the river in flood

LOW 12–13 Oct 1943, 01:00 · The Winter Line and Ortona, Oct 1943 – Jan 1944

The Volturno, swollen by autumn rain, was the first German river line north of Naples. At 01:00 on 13 October Fifth Army's guns opened fire and six divisions, three American and three British, attacked. The US 3rd Division feinted at the Triflisco gap and crossed near Monte Caruso; the 34th took Caiazzo. The British 56th Division failed at Capua and later used an American bridge, while the 46th crossed near the sea. The Germans fell back to the Barbara Line.

On the ground: Near Capua the river runs deep between high banks, 45–65 metres wide. Picture assault boats and rafts crossing in the dark under fire from the ridges to the north.

GPS 41.14000, 14.24500

20 Sangro River — Eighth Army storms the Adriatic end of the Winter Line

HIGH 24–30 Nov 1943 · The Winter Line and Ortona, Oct 1943 – Jan 1944

On the Adriatic, Montgomery's Eighth Army reached the Sangro in November. Small bridgeheads had been won by 24 November and, after days of rain and flooding, the main attack by the British 78th Division, 8th Indian Division and 2nd New Zealand Division took the ridge beyond the river by nightfall on 30 November. The German 65th Infantry Division was badly mauled, but mud, rain and fresh German divisions slowed the advance towards the Moro and Ortona.

On the ground: The war cemetery sits on the valley floor facing the ridge the Germans held. Look north-west up the Sangro to Mozzagrogna and Fossacesia on the heights above the river.

GPS 42.21841, 14.53559

21 Monte la Difensa — the Special Service Force climbs the cliffs

HIGH 2–9 Dec 1943 · The Winter Line and Ortona, Oct 1943 – Jan 1944

Operation Raincoat opened Fifth Army's attack on the Winter Line at the Mignano gap. On the night of 2–3 December the US–Canadian 1st Special Service Force scaled the cliffs of Monte la Difensa (Hill 960) and took the summit at dawn, while the British 56th Division fought for Monte Camino (Hill 963), secured on 6 December. In six days of cold and rain the Force suffered 511 casualties, including 73 dead.

On the ground: The summit, reached by a steep hike of several hours, carries memorials to the Force. From the valley, look at the rock faces the men climbed with ropes at night.

GPS 41.39088, 13.95099

22 Moro River and Casa Berardi — Canada’s December battle

MEDIUM 6–20 Dec 1943 · The Winter Line and Ortona, Oct 1943 – Jan 1944

The 1st Canadian Division crossed the Moro on 6–9 December at Villa Rogatti, San Leonardo and near the coast, then ran into 'the Gully', a ravine about 60 metres deep held by German paratroopers and panzergrenadiers. On 14 December Captain Paul Triquet's company of the Royal 22e Régiment fought through to the farmhouse of Casa Berardi, reaching it with only 14 to 17 men fit to fight (sources differ). Triquet received the Victoria Cross. The Germans left the Gully on 20 December.

On the ground: Casa Berardi is a private farmhouse with a memorial at the gate; view it from the road. The flat fields around it were the killing ground between the Gully and the crossroads.

GPS 42.32163, 14.38319

23 San Pietro Infine — a village destroyed in the Winter Line

HIGH 8–17 Dec 1943 · The Winter Line and Ortona, Oct 1943 – Jan 1944

San Pietro sat on the slopes of Monte Sammucro, covering the road through the Mignano gap. From 8 December the US 36th Division attacked across terraced olive groves; on the same day the Italian 1st Motorised Group made its first attack for the Allies, on nearby Monte Lungo, and failed. A tank attack on 15 December lost 12 of 16 Shermans. The Germans withdrew on the night of 16–17 December, leaving the village in ruins.

On the ground: The old village was never rebuilt: walk its roofless streets, church and cave shelters. John Huston filmed the battle here, and the museum screens his footage.

GPS 41.44604, 13.96727

24 Ortona — street fighting in “Little Stalingrad”

HIGH 20–28 Dec 1943 · The Winter Line and Ortona, Oct 1943 – Jan 1944

From 20 December the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, with Three Rivers tanks, fought house by house against the German 1st Parachute Division. Streets were rubble-blocked and mined, so the Canadians 'mouse-holed', blasting through walls from house to house. On Christmas Day companies rotated through a dinner in the church of Santa Maria di Costantinopoli. The paratroopers withdrew on the night of 27–28 December. 1,314 of Ortona's people died in the battle and the bombardments.

On the ground: Walk Corso Vittorio Emanuele, the Canadians' main axis, to the rebuilt cathedral of San Tommaso, which German engineers blew up on 21 December 1943, according to most accounts (some blame Allied shelling). Most of the old town was rebuilt after the war.

GPS 42.35306, 14.40361

25 Garigliano, Minturno — British X Corps crosses the river

MEDIUM 17 Jan 1944, 21:00 · Cassino and Anzio, Jan–May 1944

At 21:00 on 17 January 1944 British X Corps opened the first battle for the Gustav Line. The 5th and 56th (London) Infantry Divisions crossed the fast, flooded Garigliano near its mouth, in assault boats and DUKWs, and fought their way up to Minturno, Tufo and the slopes towards Castelforte. The bridgehead held, but cost about 4,000 casualties in the first weeks. Alarmed, Kesselring rushed two panzergrenadier divisions south from Rome, just before the Anzio landing.

On the ground: Stand by the restored Real Ferdinando suspension bridge beside the Roman ruins of Minturnae. Look north to the hill town of Minturno: every ridge between the river and the town was fought over.

GPS 41.24198, 13.77191

26 Sant'Angelo in Theodice — the US 36th Division fails at the Rapido

HIGH 20 Jan 1944, evening · Cassino and Anzio, Jan–May 1944

On the foggy night of 20 January the 141st and 143rd Infantry Regiments of the US 36th (Texas) Division tried to cross the Gari (Rapido) river on either side of Sant'Angelo in Theodice, under German guns on the far bank. Boats were holed, footbridges broke and minefields waited on both banks. After two nights the survivors were back where they started. Sources give between about 1,700 and 2,100 American casualties in 48 hours, against light German losses.

On the ground: From the piazza memorials look down on the narrow, fast river and the flat meadows on the far side, with Monte Cassino filling the skyline to the north.

GPS 41.44480, 13.83260

27 Anzio — Operation Shingle lands behind the Gustav Line

MEDIUM 22 Jan 1944, 02:00 · Cassino and Anzio, Jan–May 1944

At 02:00 on 22 January 1944 US VI Corps under Major General John P. Lucas landed at Anzio and Nettuno, about 60 km south of Rome: the British 1st Infantry Division north of the town, US Rangers and paratroopers at the harbour, and the US 3rd Infantry Division to the east. Surprise was complete. By midnight some 36,000 men and 3,200 vehicles were ashore for 13 killed. Lucas dug in rather than dash inland, and the Germans reacted fast.

On the ground: Walk the harbour front of Anzio, where the Rangers and the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion came ashore, then imagine hundreds of ships lying off this flat coast.

GPS 41.44600, 12.62900

28 Cisterna — two Ranger battalions destroyed

LOW 30 Jan 1944, dawn · Cassino and Anzio, Jan–May 1944

Before dawn on 30 January the 1st and 3rd Ranger Battalions crept along a drainage ditch towards Cisterna, leading a US 3rd Division attack. At first light they were caught in open fields near Isola Bella by German troops and tanks. Of 767 Rangers, only six got back to Allied lines; the rest were killed or captured. The same day the British 1st Division pushed towards Campoleone but ended in an exposed salient. The beachhead was now under siege.

On the ground: At the roadside Rangers memorial near Isola Bella, look across the flat, open farmland of the reclaimed Pontine marshes: there was nowhere to hide once day broke.

GPS 41.56140, 12.80860

29 Monte Cassino — the abbey is destroyed from the air

HIGH 15 Feb 1944, morning · Cassino and Anzio, Jan–May 1944

On the morning of 15 February 1944, at the request of the New Zealand Corps, 229 American bombers (142 B-17s, 47 B-25s and 40 B-26s) dropped about 1,150 tonnes of bombs on the 6th-century Benedictine abbey, and artillery joined in. Allied commanders believed German troops were using it. They were not: the abbey was sheltering civilians, of whom about 230 died by one widely cited count. German troops then moved into the ruins and made them a fortress.

On the ground: From the rebuilt cloisters look down the 500 m drop to Cassino town and the Liri valley: you see exactly why both sides thought this height controlled the road to Rome.

GPS 41.49000, 13.81389

30 Aprilia, 'the Factory' — the German counter-offensive

MEDIUM 16 Feb 1944 · Cassino and Anzio, Jan–May 1944

The brick-built new town of Aprilia, called 'the Factory' by Allied soldiers, and nearby Carroceto were lost by the British 1st Division on 9–10 February. On 16 February General von Mackensen's Fourteenth Army launched Operation Fischfang down the Via Anziate, the Albano–Anzio road, to split the beachhead. For four days British and American troops held on near the Flyover bridge, helped by massed artillery and bombers, and the attack was stopped only a few kilometres from the sea.

On the ground: Stand on Aprilia's central square, rebuilt after the war, and look south along the straight Via Anziate towards Anzio: this was the axis of every German attack.

GPS 41.59368, 12.64853

31 Cassino town and Castle Hill — the third battle

HIGH 15 Mar 1944, 08:30 · Cassino and Anzio, Jan–May 1944

From 08:30 on 15 March 1944 Allied bombers dropped about 750 tonnes of bombs on Cassino town for three and a half hours, followed by a massive artillery barrage. The 2nd New Zealand Division attacked through the rubble and took Castle Hill (Rocca Janula); Gurkhas of the 4th Indian Division reached Hangman's Hill just below the abbey. But German paratroopers survived in cellars and ruins, rain flooded the craters and tanks could not pass. The battle was called off on 23 March.

On the ground: From the walls of the Rocca Janula look up to the abbey and across the town below: the Continental Hotel, the railway station and Hangman's Hill are all in view.

GPS 41.49511, 13.82522

32 Fosse Ardeatine, Rome — 335 men murdered in reprisal

HIGH 24 Mar 1944 · Cassino and Anzio, Jan–May 1944

On 23 March 1944 Roman partisans of the GAP exploded a bomb in Via Rasella, killing 33 men of the German police regiment 'Bozen'. Within 24 hours, on Hitler's order, passed down through Kesselring and General von Mackensen, SS officer Herbert Kappler had 335 men and boys taken to disused quarries on the Via Ardeatina and shot in the back of the head, five more than the ten-for-one ratio demanded. The victims included 75 Jews. The caves were then blown shut.

On the ground: Walk through the tunnels where the shootings took place and into the low, dim shrine where the 335 lie in identical granite tombs under a single vast concrete slab.

GPS 41.85705, 12.51008

33 Monte Maio — the French break through the Aurunci mountains

LOW 13 May 1944 · Cassino and Anzio, Jan–May 1944

Operation Diadem opened at 23:00 on 11 May with more than 1,600 guns. While the British and Poles were held at Cassino, General Alphonse Juin's French Expeditionary Corps, mostly Moroccan and Algerian troops, stormed the Aurunci mountains. Monte Maio fell on 13 May and the Moroccan goumiers then crossed trackless heights behind the German line. This was the decisive breakthrough. In the villages beyond, such as Esperia, the following days also brought the Marocchinate: mass rapes and killings of Italian civilians by some of these troops.

On the ground: Monte Maio (940 m) is the high summit north of Castelforte and Ausonia. From the Ausonia road, look at the steep, scrubby slopes the goumiers crossed on foot and by mule.

GPS 41.35500, 13.79000

34 Point 593, Monte Cassino — the Poles take the heights

HIGH 18 May 1944, morning · Cassino and Anzio, Jan–May 1944

Point 593, the rocky summit north-west of the abbey, had defeated Americans, Indians and British since January. From 12 May General Władysław Anders' Polish II Corps attacked it and the nearby Albaneta farm, losing heavily. After the German paratroopers had been outflanked in the valley and ordered out, a patrol of the 12th Podolian Uhlan (cavalry) Regiment raised a Polish pennant over the abbey ruins on the morning of 18 May (about 10:20 by most accounts). Monte Cassino had fallen after four months.

On the ground: Climb the short, steep path from the Polish cemetery to the white cross on Point 593 and look east: the abbey is just across the saddle, under 1 km away.

GPS 41.49706, 13.80228

35 Pontecorvo and Aquino — the Hitler Line broken

LOW 23 May 1944 · Cassino and Anzio, Jan–May 1944

Behind the Gustav Line the Germans had built a second barrier across the Liri valley, the Hitler Line (renamed Senger Line), from Piedimonte through Aquino to Pontecorvo. On 23 May the 1st Canadian Infantry Division attacked it between Pontecorvo and Aquino, at heavy cost, and broke through; the Poles took Piedimonte on 25 May. The same morning, 23 May, VI Corps began its breakout from the Anzio beachhead. Two days later the two fronts joined up.

On the ground: Drive the minor roads between Pontecorvo and Aquino: this flat, wooded valley floor, crossed by streams, was covered by concrete tank-turret emplacements and anti-tank guns.

GPS 41.45800, 13.66400

36 Rome — the first Axis capital to fall

HIGH 4 Jun 1944 · Rome and the pursuit north, Jun–Aug 1944

After the breakout, Lieutenant General Mark Clark turned most of VI Corps north-west towards Rome instead of driving on to Valmontone to cut off the retreating German Tenth Army, a decision still argued over. With Hitler forbidding a defence of the city, Kesselring pulled his troops out and left Rome undefended as an open city. On 4 June 1944 American troops, including the 88th Division and the US–Canadian 1st Special Service Force, entered from the south-east; next morning Clark held a press conference on the Capitoline Hill. Two days later came D-Day.

On the ground: Stand in Michelangelo's Piazza del Campidoglio, where Clark spoke on 5 June, and look down over the Forum: Rome was spared the destruction of so many Italian towns.

GPS 41.89340, 12.48270

37 Lake Trasimene — the Trasimene Line

LOW 20 Jun – 2 Jul 1944 · Rome and the pursuit north, Jun–Aug 1944

Two weeks after Rome fell, Kesselring's rearguards turned to fight on the Trasimene Line, a belt of hill villages running west from the lake towards Chiusi. Their aim was time: every day bought let engineers finish the Gothic Line. British 4th and 78th Divisions, the South African 6th Armoured Division and Canadian tanks fought village by village against 1st Parachute, 334th and Hermann Göring divisions until the line broke on 28 June.

On the ground: From the lakeside walls of Castiglione del Lago look south over the low ridges towards Sanfatucchio, where the London Irish Rifles fought house to house on 21 June 1944.

GPS 43.12764, 12.05346

38 Florence — the night of the bridges

HIGH 3–4 Aug 1944, from 22:00 · Rome and the pursuit north, Jun–Aug 1944

As Eighth Army closed on Florence, German engineers blew every bridge over the Arno from about 22:00 on 3 August — alle Grazie, Santa Trinita, alla Carraia, San Niccolò and alla Vittoria. Only the Ponte Vecchio was spared, but the medieval streets at both ends were demolished to block it. Allied troops reached the south bank on 4 August; the partisan rising in the centre began on 11 August.

On the ground: Stand mid-bridge and look at the rebuilt blocks along Via Por Santa Maria and Borgo San Jacopo: their plainer post-war façades mark exactly where the demolitions fell.

GPS 43.76799, 11.25316

39 Sant'Anna di Stazzema — massacre in the Apuan hills

HIGH 12 Aug 1944, morning · Rome and the pursuit north, Jun–Aug 1944

On the morning of 12 August 1944 soldiers of II Battalion, SS Panzergrenadier Regiment 35 (16th SS Division Reichsführer-SS), guided by Italian Fascist collaborators, climbed to this mountain village, which was crowded with refugees. In a few hours they killed about 560 people, sources give 540–560, among them more than 100 children (sources give 107 to 130); the youngest, Anna Pardini, was 20 days old. Ten former SS men were convicted in absentia at La Spezia in 2005; none served a sentence.

On the ground: Walk from the church square, where many were shot and burned, up the Via Crucis path to the ossuary monument overlooking the Versilia coast.

GPS 43.97417, 10.27361

40 Montegridolfo — the Gothic Line broken

HIGH 30–31 Aug 1944 · The Gothic Line and the winter, Aug 1944 – Mar 1945

Operation Olive opened on 25 August 1944 when Eighth Army, secretly shifted to the Adriatic, crossed the Metauro. By 30 August British, Canadian and Polish troops faced the main Gothic Line positions on the ridges above the Foglia. On 31 August the walled village of Montegridolfo fell to 1/4th Hampshires; Lieutenant Gerard Norton, a South African, won the Victoria Cross clearing machine-gun posts single-handed. The Line had been breached in days.

On the ground: Walk the ramparts of this restored Malatesta hill village and look south over the Foglia valley: the attack came up those open slopes towards you.

GPS 43.85826, 12.68995

41 Coriano Ridge — the last ridge before Rimini

MEDIUM 4–13 Sep 1944 · The Gothic Line and the winter, Aug 1944 – Mar 1945

Beyond the broken Gothic Line the Germans rushed reserves onto Coriano Ridge, the last high ground before the Romagna plain. British 1st Armoured Division's attack on 4–5 September stalled with heavy tank losses. After a bombardment by some 700 guns, the 5th Canadian and British 1st Armoured Divisions took the ridge on 12–13 September; in the week of fighting that followed towards Rimini, Eighth Army lost some 150 killed a day, according to the CWGC.

On the ground: From the rebuilt village on the crest, face north-east: Rimini and the sea are only ten kilometres away, the prize both armies could see.

GPS 43.96519, 12.60237

42 Il Giogo Pass — the Americans break the Apennines

HIGH 12–18 Sep 1944 · The Gothic Line and the winter, Aug 1944 – Mar 1945

While Eighth Army fought on the Adriatic, US Fifth Army struck the mountain Gothic Line. Instead of the heavily fortified Futa Pass on Highway 65, II Corps attacked the lesser Il Giogo Pass. For six days the 338th Infantry (85th Division) fought up Monte Altuzzo and the 363rd (91st Division) up Monticelli against the 4th Parachute Division. Both summits fell on 17–18 September at a cost of 2,731 casualties.

On the ground: From the pass (882 m) look west to the wooded crest of Monte Altuzzo and east to Monticelli: the attackers climbed these slopes under fire from bunkers on the skyline.

GPS 44.04680, 11.38803

43 Monte Sole — the Marzabotto massacre

MEDIUM 29 Sep – 5 Oct 1944 · The Gothic Line and the winter, Aug 1944 – Mar 1945

Behind the German front south of Bologna, around 1,000 troops under SS Major Walter Reder swept the Monte Sole massif, stronghold of the Stella Rossa partisan brigade. In a week they killed about 770 people in 115 places, among them 216 children, 316 women and 142 elderly people; older counts give much higher totals. At Casaglia, villagers sheltering in the church with their priest were shot in the cemetery on 29 September.

On the ground: Walk up to the roofless church of Casaglia and the small cemetery beside it, where the killings took place. Keep voices low; this is still a place of mourning.

GPS 44.31102, 11.21793

44 Monte Castello — the Brazilians take their mountain

MEDIUM 21 Feb 1945, 06:00–17:30 · The Gothic Line and the winter, Aug 1944 – Mar 1945

Monte Castello (977 m) overlooked the Brazilian sector all winter; attacks on 24–25 and 29 November and 12 December 1944 failed against the German 232nd Infantry Division. In Operation Encore the US 10th Mountain Division first scaled Riva Ridge by night on 18–19 February 1945 and stormed Monte Belvedere; then, on 21 February, the Brazilian 1st Infantry Division attacked at 06:00 and held the summit by about 17:30.

On the ground: From the Brazilian monument on the slopes above Gaggio Montano look up the bare ridge to the summit, then west to the long wall of Riva Ridge and Monte Belvedere.

GPS 44.21260, 10.96502

45 The Argenta Gap — the door to the Po valley

MEDIUM 12–19 Apr 1945 · Victory in Italy, Apr–May 1945

Operation Grapeshot opened on 9 April 1945 with a massive air and artillery bombardment on the Senio. The key was Argenta, a strip of dry land a few kilometres wide between Lake Comacchio's flooded marshes and the Reno. British V Corps forced it with commandos, amphibious Fantails and Kangaroo armoured carriers against the 42nd Jäger and 29th Panzergrenadier Divisions. Argenta fell on 18 April and British armour broke out towards the Po.

On the ground: Look round the flat reclaimed land outside Argenta: canals, embankments and the Reno levees were the only cover, and the floods on either side made them lethal funnels.

GPS 44.61397, 11.83547

46 Bologna liberated

HIGH 21 Apr 1945, early morning · Victory in Italy, Apr–May 1945

After six months of stalemate within sight of the city, the German front south of Bologna collapsed on 20 April 1945. Early on 21 April troops of the Polish II Corps and the US 34th Division entered from east and south, joined by the Italian Legnano Combat Group and partisans. On the wall of Palazzo d'Accursio, where partisans had been executed, families began pinning photographs of their dead that same day.

On the ground: In Piazza del Nettuno study the wall of ceramic tiles bearing the names and faces of more than 2,000 fallen partisans, beside the Salaborsa library.

GPS 44.49444, 11.34250

47 San Benedetto Po — first across the Po

MEDIUM 22–23 Apr 1945 · Victory in Italy, Apr–May 1945

Breaking onto the plain, US IV Corps raced north. Spearheads of the 10th Mountain Division reached the Po at San Benedetto at 18:00 on 22 April and crossed in assault boats on 23 April without losing a man. Downstream the 88th Division, British and South Africans followed, trapping thousands of Germans south of the river; the bridges were gone and heavy weapons were abandoned on the banks.

On the ground: Climb the Po embankment near the abbey town and look across the wide brown river: this is what the retreating German armies had to cross with no bridges left.

GPS 45.04612, 10.93367

48 Giulino di Mezzegra — the end of Mussolini

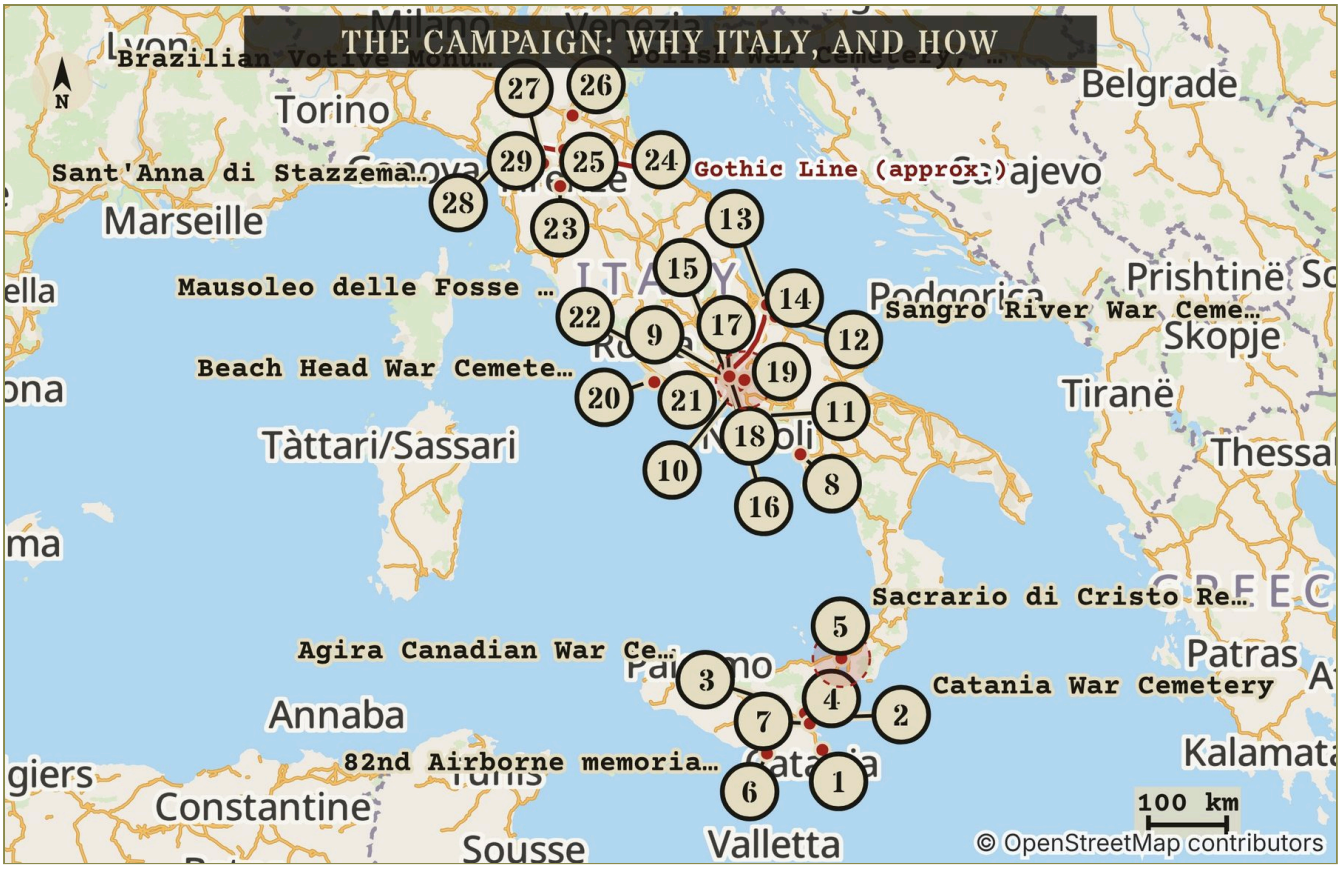
MEDIUM 28 Apr 1945, about 16:10 · Victory in Italy, Apr–May 1945

On 25 April 1945 the partisan committee called the general insurrection; Genoa, Milan and Turin rose as the Germans pulled out. Mussolini, fleeing towards Switzerland with a German column, was caught at Dongo on 27 April and, by the official account, shot with Clara Petacci outside Villa Belmonte here the next afternoon; details remain disputed. On 29 April the surrender of German forces in Italy was signed at Caserta, effective 2 May.

On the ground: A memorial at the gate of Villa Belmonte marks the traditional spot. This is a quiet residential lane between private houses: be brief and respectful.

GPS 45.98111, 9.20333

THE CAMPAIGN: WHY ITALY, AND HOW



BATTLE MAPS

A country built for defence. Italy is a mountain spine, the Apennines, with narrow coastal strips on either side and rivers running down to the sea across every line of advance — the Volturno, Garigliano, Rapido, Sangro, Moro, Arno, Senio and finally the Po. Each river was a moat and each ridge a rampart. Tanks, the Allies' great advantage, were tied to valley roads overlooked from the heights, so the fighting fell to infantry, mule trains and engineers. The retreating Germans blew every bridge and culvert and mined the verges; the Allies answered with thousands of Bailey bridges. An attacker could rarely go round a position. He had to go over it, one ridge at a time. Volturno · Rapido · Sangro · Arno · Senio · Po

Kesselring's defence lines. Rommel advised Hitler to give up southern Italy and hold the northern Apennines; Kesselring argued he could stop the Allies south of Rome, and in November 1943 Hitler gave him command of the whole theatre. The result was a sequence of prepared lines, built with forced Italian labour and the Organisation Todt: the Volturno, Barbara and Bernhardt lines, the Gustav Line at Cassino, the Hitler (Senger) Line behind it, then the Caesar, Trasimene, Arno and Gothic Lines. Each was held long enough to finish the next one. It cost the Allies months at every stage and turned a pursuit into a siege war. Gustav Line · 4 battles · Jan–May 1944

A strategy still argued over. Italy was a British idea that the Americans accepted with reluctance. Its aims shifted: first to knock Italy out of the war, then to seize the Foggia airfields and Rome, and finally to hold down German divisions that might otherwise fight in France or Russia. It did all three, but slowly and at a heavy price, and critics argue that the Allies tied down as many troops as the Germans did. Supporters reply that without Italy there was no way to fight the Germans on land in 1943. Both views have serious defenders; this guide presents the evidence rather than a verdict. Allied casualties c. 310,000–330,000 · sources vary

Rival commanders. Coalition war bred rivalries. In Sicily Patton raced Montgomery to Messina. At Salerno and Anzio British and American commanders doubted each other; Lucas, criticised for caution at Anzio, was replaced by Truscott in February 1944. Clark, ambitious and suspicious of British motives, turned his forces towards Rome in May 1944 instead of trying to trap the German 10th Army at Valmontone, as Alexander had planned. Some historians call that a grave error that let the Germans escape; others argue the trap would not have closed anyway. Alexander's light, consensual style of command smoothed the coalition but did not always impose a single plan. 4 June 1944 · Clark enters Rome

Rain, mud and mountain winters. Sunny Italy was a myth for the soldiers. The autumn rains of 1943 and 1944 turned roads to mud, rivers to torrents and valleys to swamps; snow closed the high passes. Two mountain winters, 1943–44 and 1944–45, brought

trench foot, frostbite and exhaustion, and supplies went forward on mules and on men's backs. Summer brought dust and malaria — worst in Sicily and in the Pontine Marshes near Anzio, which the Germans had deliberately flooded. Even the landscape struck back: the eruption of Vesuvius in March 1944 wrecked dozens of American bombers on an airfield below the volcano. Two mountain winters · 1943–44 and 1944–45

Landing craft and the priority of France. From the start Italy came second to the invasion of France. Landing ships were the scarcest item in the Allied arsenal: their departure for Britain shaped every plan, and Anzio was launched with only enough to land two divisions. Seven veteran divisions left the Mediterranean for Britain in late 1943; in summer 1944 seven more, the US VI Corps and the French Expeditionary Corps, were taken from Italy for the landings in Provence just as the Germans were in retreat. In early 1945 the Canadians left too. Behind the front, wrecked ports, blown railways and the German air raid on Bari in December 1943 strained supply. 7 divisions withdrawn for southern France · Aug 1944

An army of many nations. No Allied campaign was more international. Americans and British fought beside Canadians, New Zealanders, Indians and Gurkhas, South Africans, Poles, French, Moroccans, Algerians and Tunisians, Brazilians, Greeks, the Jewish Brigade and, from late 1943, Italian co-belligerent troops. That brought strengths — the French goumiers' mountain skills, the Poles' determination at Cassino — and problems of language, supply, reinforcement and politics. The Poles fought on while their country's future was being settled at Yalta; America's segregated units fought for a country that denied them equality at home; and Italians fought on both sides. US · UK · Canada · NZ · India · Poland · France · Brazil · South Africa · Greece · Italy

Air power and bombing. The Allies held the skies over Italy for almost the whole campaign. Fighter-bombers hunted German transport by day, forcing movement to the night, and Operation Strangle (March–May 1944) tried to cut the railways feeding the Gustav Line. Heavy bombers flying from Foggia struck deep into Germany, Austria and the Romanian oilfields. But bombs could not dig paratroopers out of the rubble of Cassino, and bombing of Italian cities — ports, rail yards and centres like Naples, Rome, Milan and Treviso — killed many thousands of civilians, most of them after Italy had changed sides. Historians disagree about how much it achieved. Operation Strangle · Mar–May 1944

Partisans and civilians. From September 1943 the Resistance grew from scattered bands into a force of well over 100,000, gathering intelligence, sabotaging railways, rescuing Allied escapers and, in 1945, liberating cities before the Allies arrived. The Germans answered with reprisals: the Fosse Ardeatine in Rome, Sant'Anna di Stazzema, Monte Sole and hundreds of smaller massacres. Civilians lived through bombing, hunger, forced labour, deportation of Jews and displacement as the front crossed their valleys twice a year. Some suffered from their liberators too, above all the women of southern Lazio in the Marocchinate of May 1944, whose true numbers remain disputed. 25 April 1945 · the general insurrection

KEY SITES OF THE WHOLE CAMPAIGN

1 Syracuse War Cemetery

HIGH 1943 · Commonwealth war cemetery

About 1,060 Commonwealth burials, mostly from the landings between Pachino and Syracuse and from the glider operation that ended in the sea. British, Indian, South African, Canadian and Australian graves lie side by side.

What you can see: Glider Pilot Regiment and airlanding brigade headstones, the rows of Indian graves, and the Cross of Sacrifice near the entrance.

GPS 37.07502, 15.25794

Read more: CWGC: Syracuse War Cemetery

2 Catania War Cemetery

HIGH 1943 · Commonwealth war cemetery

About 2,135 Commonwealth soldiers killed in the battles for the Simeto bridgehead and the Catania plain, including most of the 1st Parachute Brigade dead from Primosole and many men of the 50th and 51st Divisions.

What you can see: The paratroopers' graves, the Durham Light Infantry headstones and the view of Etna over the plain.

GPS 37.46303, 15.03864

Read more: CWGC: Catania War Cemetery

3 Agira Canadian War Cemetery

HIGH 1943 · Canadian war cemetery

The resting place of 490 Canadians who died in Sicily, gathered into a single cemetery after the campaign. It stands on a hill east of Agira, where the 1st Canadian Division fought its costliest battle of the campaign.

What you can see: Terraced rows on the hilltop looking across Lake Pozzillo to Agira and Etna; the visitors' book.

GPS 37.65491, 14.55086

4 German War Cemetery Motta Sant'Anastasia

HIGH 1965 · German war cemetery

4,561 German soldiers killed in Sicily, 451 unknown, gathered into a walled building of five courtyards at the foot of Etna. It is maintained by the German war graves commission, the Volksbund.

What you can see: Five raised courtyards, four named after Sicilian provinces,, the bronze memorial sculpture and the grave of Olympian Luz Long.

GPS 37.52510, 14.98976

5 Sacrario di Cristo Re, Messina

MEDIUM 1937 · Italian military shrine

Italy's military shrine in Messina holds 1,288 Italian dead of the Second World War and 110 of the First. Most of the Italian soldiers killed in Sicily lie in communal cemeteries or shrines elsewhere; this is the main one on the tour.

What you can see: The crypt with its wall niches, the huge bell that rings at sunset and the view over the Strait.

GPS 38.19636, 15.55176

6 82nd Airborne memorial, Ponte Dirillo

HIGH 10–11 Jul 1943 · US memorial

The main US memorial to the campaign in Sicily, near Biazza Ridge; it names some 39 paratroopers. American dead from Sicily were moved to the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery at Nettuno, near Anzio, so there is no US war cemetery on the island.

What you can see: The names tablet, the restored Italian bunkers of the Ponte Dirillo strongpoint and the view east to Biazza Ridge.

GPS 37.03185, 14.40448

7 Primosole Bridge

HIGH 13–16 Jul 1943 · airborne battle

The bridge over the Simeto where British and German paratroopers fought each other for three days. Its capture opened the Catania plain, but the German line beyond it held until early August.

What you can see: The bridge, the flat river banks where the paratroops fought, and the roadside memorials to the fallen of all nations.

GPS 37.39944, 15.06500

8 Salerno War Cemetery

HIGH Sep 1943 · Commonwealth graves of the Salerno landings

Burial ground of 1,851 Commonwealth servicemen, most of them killed in the Salerno beachhead between 9 and 18 September 1943. The site was chosen in November 1943; later burials came from a wide area of south-west Italy and from the nearby 59th General Hospital.

What you can see: Row upon row of X Corps headstones in a calm Louis de Soissons design, a few minutes from the old airfield.

GPS 40.62551, 14.92251

Read more: CWGC: Salerno War Cemetery

9 San Pietro Infine ruins

HIGH 8–17 Dec 1943 · village destroyed in the Winter Line

The abandoned ruins of a village fought over by the US 36th Division and the German 29th Panzergrenadier Division. Left as a memorial, it is one of the few places in Italy where the destruction of 1943 can still be seen as it was.

What you can see: Roofless streets, the shattered church, and the caves where villagers sheltered through weeks of shelling in December 1943.

GPS 41.44604, 13.96727

10 Italian military shrine of Monte Lungo

HIGH 8 & 16 Dec 1943 · the new Italian army's first battle

The shrine holds 974 Italian dead, 784 of them from the battles of Monte Lungo and Cassino. It marks the moment Italian troops returned to battle on the Allied side, at a heavy cost, three months after the armistice.

What you can see: Terraced graves facing the bare ridge of Monte Lungo, with the museum and its vehicles across the Via Casilina.

GPS 41.42249, 13.96877

11 Royal Palace of Caserta

HIGH Oct 1943 – May 1945 · Allied HQ; surrender signed 29 Apr 1945

From the autumn of 1943 the palace housed the US Fifth Army's headquarters, and later Allied Force Headquarters. On 29 April 1945 German envoys signed the surrender of German and Italian Fascist forces in Italy here, effective on 2 May, a week before the general German surrender.

What you can see: The royal apartments, the grand staircase and the long park where Allied soldiers once camped and rested.

GPS 41.07333, 14.32639

Read more: Reggia di Caserta: opening times · Reggia di Caserta: tickets · Surrender at Caserta (Wikipedia)

12 Sangro River War Cemetery

HIGH Nov 1943 – 1944 · British, New Zealand and Indian graves

With 2,617 burials, the Commonwealth's main cemetery for the Adriatic winter of 1943–44. It includes the Sangro River Cremation Memorial to more than 500 Indian soldiers, and graves of escaped prisoners of war killed trying to reach Allied lines.

What you can see: The cremation memorial, the New Zealand silver fern on headstones, and the German-held ridge across the river.

GPS 42.21841, 14.53559

13 Moro River Canadian War Cemetery

HIGH Dec 1943 · 1,375 Canadian graves

Canada's largest war cemetery in Italy: 1,615 graves, 1,375 of them Canadian, from the Moro, the Gully and Ortona. It was begun in January 1944, on high ground between the battlefield and the town the Canadians took.

What you can see: Terraces of maple-leaf headstones, with the Moro valley below and the town of Ortona to the north.

GPS 42.33694, 14.41644

14 Ortona

HIGH 20–28 Dec 1943 · house-to-house battle

The Adriatic port where the 1st Canadian Division and the German 1st Parachute Division fought an eight-day street battle. About 80 per cent of the town was destroyed and 1,314 civilians died; the town received the Gold Medal for Civil Valour.

What you can see: The Corso, the rebuilt cathedral of San Tommaso and the castle over the harbour, all reconstructed after 1943.

GPS 42.35306, 14.40361

Read more: Battle of Ortona (Wikipedia) · MuBa43, Comune di Ortona

15 Abbey of Monte Cassino

HIGH 15 Feb 1944 · abbey destroyed by bombing

The Benedictine mother house founded around 529 sat on the height that dominated the road to Rome. Its destruction by 229 Allied bombers on 15 February 1944 killed civilians sheltering inside, handed the Germans a ready-made fortress and remains the campaign's most debated decision. Rebuilt, it was reconsecrated in 1964.

What you can see: Photographs of the ruins, the rebuilt basilica and the terrace view over the Liri valley and the town.

GPS 41.49000, 13.81389

16 Polish War Cemetery, Monte Cassino

HIGH 18 May 1944 · 1,000+ Polish graves

Built by the Polish II Corps between 1944 and 1946 on the slope between Point 593 and the abbey, it holds just over 1,000 soldiers (sources give 1,051 to 1,072). General Anders was buried here beside his men in 1970. For Poles it is one of the most important national shrines outside Poland.

What you can see: The terraces, the tall cross with the Polish eagle, Anders' grave and the memorial museum at the entrance.

GPS 41.49391, 13.80575

17 Cassino War Cemetery and Memorial

HIGH Jan–May 1944 · 4,271 Commonwealth graves

The largest Commonwealth war cemetery in Italy, designed by Louis de Soissons, with 4,271 burials (289 unidentified). The Cassino Memorial within it names more than 4,000 Commonwealth soldiers of the whole Italian campaign who have no known grave, including 194 Canadians.

What you can see: The green memorial panels, the Indian and Gurkha graves, and the view of the abbey above.

GPS 41.47756, 13.82714

18 German War Cemetery, Caira

HIGH 1944 · about 20,000 German graves

Laid out by the Volksbund on Colle Marino north of Cassino and inaugurated on 4 May 1965, it holds about 20,000 German dead of the southern Italian campaign, 3,100 of them unidentified, reburied here from field graves in 1959–60.

What you can see: Terraces of stone crosses rising to a bronze cross, with a wide view of the Rapido valley.

GPS 41.53130, 13.82299

19 French Military Cemetery, Venafro

MEDIUM 1943–44 · French Expeditionary Corps

The largest French war cemetery in Italy, for soldiers of General Juin's French Expeditionary Corps, most of them North African. Published figures differ: 3,414 graves in several heritage listings, about 5,200 in French sources since graves from the Miano cemetery in Naples were moved here in 1990–91. Their breakthrough in the Aurunci in May 1944 decided the battle for the Gustav Line.

What you can see: Rows of crosses and Muslim headstones, and the names of the Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian regiments.

GPS 41.49002, 14.05492

20 Beach Head War Cemetery, Anzio

HIGH Jan–May 1944 · 2,316 Commonwealth graves

The main Commonwealth cemetery of the Anzio beachhead, with 2,316 burials, 2,025 of them identified, mostly British soldiers killed in the February and March battles along the Via Anziate, with Canadians, South Africans and others among them. It stands on the road the German offensive was trying to reach.

What you can see: The Guards and London regiment graves, the personal inscriptions, and the view inland towards Aprilia.

GPS 41.48194, 12.62500

21 Sicily–Rome American Cemetery, Nettuno

HIGH 1943–44 · 7,858 American graves

Dedicated in 1956 on 77 acres at Nettuno, it holds 7,858 American war dead from Sicily to just north of Rome, with the names of 3,095 missing on the chapel walls. A visitor centre opened in 2014 explains the campaign.

What you can see: The curving rows under Roman pines, the chapel, the map room and the visitor centre.

GPS 41.46472, 12.66194

22 Mausoleo delle Fosse Ardeatine, Rome

HIGH 24 Mar 1944 · 335 men murdered

The site of the worst German massacre in occupied Rome, carried out in reprisal for the Via Rasella attack. The memorial of 1949 is a landmark of Italian postwar architecture and the focus of national remembrance every 24 March.

What you can see: The quarry tunnels, the bronze gates, the sculpture of three men and the shrine of 335 tombs.

GPS 41.85705, 12.51008

23 Florence American Cemetery and Memorial

HIGH US · 4,402 burials

The American Battle Monuments Commission cemetery for the campaign north of Rome: 4,402 graves on curved terraces in the Greve valley and 1,409 names on the Tablets of the Missing. The memorial chapel and map room tell the story of Fifth Army from Rome to the Alps.

What you can see: Operations maps in the memorial, the Tablets of the Missing with rosettes for men later found, and the terraces seen from the top.

GPS 43.69183, 11.21043

24 Coriano Ridge War Cemetery

HIGH Commonwealth · 4–13 Sep 1944

The main Commonwealth cemetery of Operation Olive, with 1,939 burials: British, 427 Canadians, New Zealanders, South Africans and Indians. It lies on the ridge that blocked Eighth Army's road to Rimini for nine days in September 1944.

What you can see: The Canadian plots, and the view up the slope to Coriano village on the crest.

GPS 43.98485, 12.60404

25 German War Cemetery, Futa Pass

HIGH German · more than 30,600 dead

Italy's largest German war cemetery, built on the Gothic Line at the Futa Pass and dedicated in 1969. Its spiralling stone wall and hilltop crypt make it one of the most striking war cemeteries in Europe.

What you can see: The 2 km spiral wall, the crypt at the summit and the view over both Apennine passes.

GPS 44.09678, 11.27165

26 Polish War Cemetery, Bologna

HIGH Polish · 1,432 burials

The resting place of 1,432 men of the Polish II Corps killed in 1944–45, including the last battles for Bologna, which Polish troops were among the first to enter on 21 April 1945.

What you can see: The entrance inscription to the soldiers of II Corps who fell on Italian soil fighting for a free Poland.

GPS 44.47408, 11.40051

27 Brazilian Votive Monument, Pistoia

HIGH Brazil · FEB cemetery 1944–1960

The Brazilian Expeditionary Force buried its dead here, 463 men, until they were repatriated to Rio de Janeiro in 1960. A modernist votive monument by Olavo Redig de Campos, opened in 1967, now marks the site, with the tomb of an unknown Brazilian soldier.

What you can see: The open pavilion, the stone terraces of the former cemetery and the tomb of the unknown soldier.

GPS 43.94500, 10.94306

28 Sant'Anna di Stazzema National Park of Peace

HIGH Civilians · 12 Aug 1944

The mountain village where about 560 civilians, most of them women, children and elderly, were killed by SS troops in a single morning. The whole village is now a memorial, with a museum, the church square and an ossuary monument above the coast.

What you can see: The church square where many were killed, the Via Crucis path and the ossuary monument overlooking the Versilia coast.

GPS 43.97417, 10.27361

29 Sommocolonia — Lieutenant Fox memorial

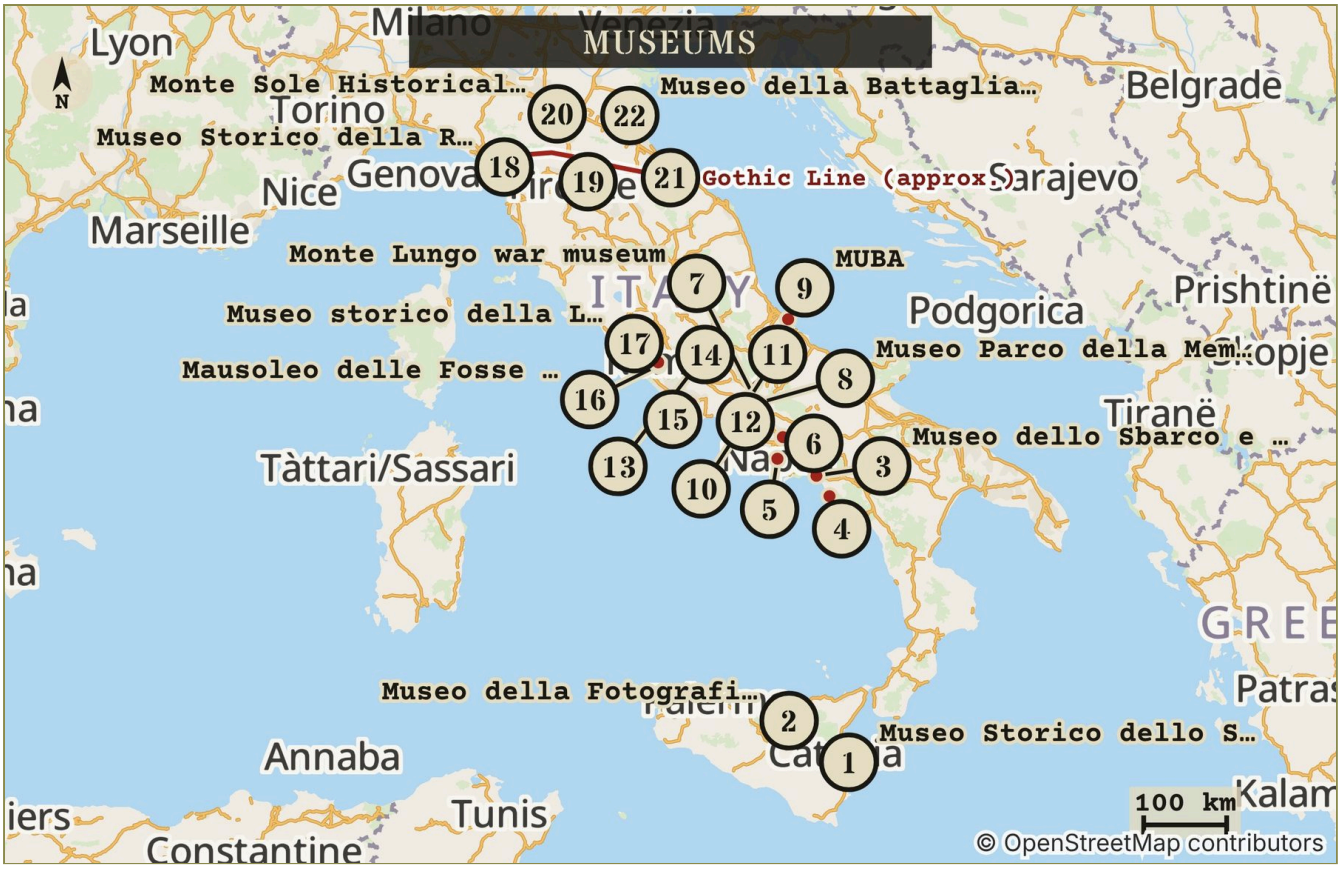
HIGH US 92nd Division · 26 Dec 1944

In this Garfagnana hill village about 70 soldiers of the African-American 92nd 'Buffalo' Division and 25 Italian partisans were overrun on 26 December 1944. Lieutenant John Fox called artillery fire onto his own position to cover the withdrawal and was killed; his Medal of Honor came only in 1997.

What you can see: The Memory Park at the ruined tower opposite the parish church, a 10-minute walk from the lower car park.

GPS 44.09211, 10.49061

MUSEUMS



The museums worth your time on this part of the route. Check opening days before you travel.

1 Museo Storico dello Sbarco in Sicilia 1943

Catania · Day 2 · 1 h 30 min

The island's main museum of the 1943 campaign, opened in December 2002 in the Le Ciminiere cultural centre. Photographs, documents, uniforms and weapons from all sides are combined with walk-through reconstructions of wartime Sicilian life and a large exhibition of photographs by the American war photographer Phil Stern. A good overview before or after visiting the battlefields.

GPS 37.50912, 15.10220

2 Museo della Fotografia Robert Capa

Troina · Day 2 · 1 h

Opened on 1 October 2021 in the Palazzo Pretura, this small museum displays 62 prints, many little known, from Robert Capa's negatives of the Sicily campaign. His pictures of Troina's shattered streets and its civilians remain some of the most powerful images of the war in Italy. Combine it with a walk to the upper town.

GPS 37.78516, 14.60053

3 Museo dello Sbarco e Salerno Capitale

Salerno · Day 4 · 1 h

Opened in September 2012 for the 69th anniversary of the landings, this museum displays about 200 items on Operation Avalanche and on Salerno as seat of the Badoglio and Bonomi governments in 1944. Uniforms and weapons of all three armies, a Sherman tank, a jeep and a deportation wagon. Visits by reservation only.

GPS 40.64696, 14.81740

4 Archaeological Park and Museum of Paestum

Capaccio Paestum · Day 4 · 1 h 30 min

Not a war museum, but the temples stood in the middle of the American beachhead in September 1943 and both sides spared them. The museum's painted Tomb of the Diver is world famous. Combine with the 36th Division memorial on the beach, 1 km away. Open daily.

GPS 40.42222, 15.00528

5 Galleria Borbonica

Naples · Day 5 · 1 h 15 min

A tunnel dug for King Ferdinand II in the 1850s and old aqueduct cisterns, used as an air-raid shelter by thousands of Neapolitans during the Allied bombing of 1940–1943. Beds, graffiti and household objects survive, along with cars and motorbikes dumped here after the war. Guided tours only, Friday to Sunday.

GPS 40.83552, 14.24626

Read more: Galleria Borbonica: tours

6 Royal Palace of Caserta

Caserta · Day 5 · 2 h

The Bourbon royal palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, housed Fifth Army and then Allied Force Headquarters. The surrender of the German and Italian Fascist forces in Italy was signed here on 29 April 1945. The visit is mainly the royal apartments and park, with little on the war, so read up before you go.

GPS 41.07333, 14.32639

Read more: Reggia di Caserta: opening times · Reggia di Caserta: tickets · Surrender at Caserta (Wikipedia)

7 Monte Lungo war museum

Mignano Monte Lungo · Day 5 · 30 min

A small museum beside the Italian military shrine, with documents, photographs, weapons, and Italian and Allied vehicles and guns from the battles of December 1943. It tells the story of the Italian 1st Motorised Group, the first unit of the new Italian army to fight alongside the Allies. Free entry; hours vary.

GPS 41.42319, 13.96824

8 Museo Parco della Memoria Storica

San Pietro Infine · Day 5 · 1 h

Opened in December 2008 in a restored olive-oil mill, this immersive museum uses darkness, sound and seven staged scenes, including John Huston's 1943–44 film footage, to recount the battle and the destruction of the village. Weekend opening; weekdays by booking. Pair it with a walk through the ruins.

GPS 41.44604, 13.96727

9 MUBA — Museo della Battaglia di Ortona

Ortona · Day 6 · 1 h

Founded in 2002, the museum has halls on the civilians, with photographs and a model of the destroyed centre, on the combatants, with objects donated by veterans, and on wartime propaganda. It remembers the 1,314 civilian dead as well as Canadian and German soldiers. Temporarily closed for renovation at last check.

GPS 42.35306, 14.40361

10 Museo Linea Gustav

Castelforte · Day 7 · 1 h

A local museum created by the Associazione Linea Gustav Fronte Garigliano and opened in recent years in the old centre. It gathers weapons, equipment, documents and photographs from the Garigliano front and gives particular weight to the civilians of Castelforte and neighbouring villages, whose homes were almost completely destroyed in 1944. Visits must be arranged in advance by phone or email.

GPS 41.30166, 13.82041

11 Historiale di Cassino

Cassino · Day 8 · 1 h

Cassino's multimedia museum, opened in 2004 for the 60th anniversary of the battle and dedicated to the fallen of all nations. Rooms designed by Carlo Rambaldi take visitors through the Gustav Line, the bombing of the abbey, military strategy, civilian life and the rebuilding of the town. Guided visits run at set times on weekdays; check current hours before going.

GPS 41.48386, 13.82869

12 Memorial Museum of the 2nd Polish Corps

Monte Cassino · Day 8 · 45 min

Opened on 17 May 2014 for the battle's 70th anniversary, at the entrance to the Polish cemetery. Large photographic displays in Italian, Polish and English, films and battlefield relics follow General Anders' soldiers from Soviet captivity through Cassino to the liberation of Bologna in April 1945. It was funded by donors in the countries where many veterans settled after the war.

GPS 41.49391, 13.80575

13 Museo dello Sbarco di Anzio

Anzio · Day 9 · 1 h

The Anzio landing museum in the 17th-century Villa Adele, opened for the 50th anniversary in 1994. Four sections (American, British, German and Italian) display uniforms, weapons, medals, documents, plans and photographs, plus finds recovered from the seabed, including from HMS Spartan and HMS Janus. Entry is free; opening days and afternoon hours vary, so check first.

GPS 41.45010, 12.63019

14 Museo dello Sbarco Alleato

Nettuno · Day 9 · 45 min

Nettuno's museum of Operation Shingle, housed in the Forte Sangallo, a seafront fortress of 1501. The collection covers the landing of 22 January 1944 and the beachhead battle with documents, furnishings, uniforms, helmets, period photographs, maps, war correspondents' reports, newspapers and objects found in the Anzio–Nettuno area. Free entry during opening hours.

GPS 41.45662, 12.65599

15 Museo Piana delle Orme

Latina (Borgo Faiti) · Day 9 · 2 h

A large private museum founded in 1997 by Mariano De Pasquale, with about 50,000 objects in many pavilions. Besides farming, toys and the draining of the Pontine marshes, it has major Second World War halls: dioramas of the Anzio landing (including the Rangers' battle at Cisterna) and Cassino, and a large collection of military vehicles. Adult ticket €13 in 2026.

GPS 41.44257, 12.98580

16 Mausoleo delle Fosse Ardeatine and museum

Rome · Day 10 · 1 h 15 min

The national memorial to the 335 victims of the massacre of 24 March 1944, inaugurated on 24 March 1949. Visitors enter by Mirko Basaldella's bronze gates, pass Francesco Coccia's sculpture of three bound men, walk through the quarry tunnels and reach the shrine of 335 granite tombs. A small museum explains the occupation, Via Rasella and the trials. Free.

GPS 41.85705, 12.51008

17 Museo storico della Liberazione

Rome · Day 10 · 1 h 15 min

Housed in the apartments at Via Tasso 145 that the German security police under Herbert Kappler used as a prison from 1943 to June 1944. Preserved cells with prisoners' graffiti, arrest files, photographs and documents tell the story of the occupation, the Resistance and the persecution of Rome's Jews. Donated to the state in 1950, it opened fully in 1957. Free.

GPS 41.88861, 12.50639

18 Museo Storico della Resistenza, Sant'Anna di Stazzema

Sant'Anna di Stazzema · off the main route · 1 hr 30 min

Opened in 1982 by President Sandro Pertini in the old village school, the museum tells the story of the war, the Resistance and the massacre of 12 August 1944 through photographs, testimonies and objects. It is part of the National Park of Peace, which includes the church square, the Via Crucis and the ossuary monument. Entry is free; check days before you go.

GPS 43.97417, 10.27361

19 MuGot — Museo Gotica Toscana

Ponzalla (Scarperia e San Piero) · Day 12 · 1 hr

Founded in 2019 between the Futa and Giogo passes, this volunteer museum collects documents, filmed testimonies, uniforms and equipment from the 1944 battles in the Mugello. Its guides run battlefield visits to the bunkers and trenches of the Gothic Line. Open Wednesday and Friday mornings and weekends; €5, guided tours extra.

GPS 44.02491, 11.37020

20 Monte Sole Historical Park

Marzabotto · Day 12 · 1 hr 30 min – half day

A regional park created in 1989 on the massif where about 770 civilians were killed between 29 September and 5 October 1944. Marked paths link the ruined churches, hamlets and cemeteries of Casaglia, San Martino, Caprara and Cerpiano. The Scuola di Pace Monte Sole and the Il Poggiolo visitor centre run guided visits and education programmes.

GPS 44.31233, 11.19634

21 Museo della Linea dei Goti

Montegridolfo · Day 13 · 45 min

A small, heartfelt village museum on Via Borgo, built largely from objects donated by local families: newspapers, postcards, photographs, weapons, grenades and gas masks from 1943–44, plus period films. It explains the Gothic Line from the viewpoint of the valley that saw it broken. Admission by donation; opening days are limited, so phone ahead.

GPS 43.85915, 12.68948

22 Museo della Battaglia del Senio

Alfonsine · Day 14 · 1 hr

Founded in 1981 in the town liberated on 10 April 1945, the museum covers the winter front on the Senio embankments and the spring offensive, with weapons, uniforms, flags and photographs arranged along three paths: Allied operations, the partisans and civilian life. Free entry; weekday mornings, Wednesday afternoons, closed in August.

GPS 44.50757, 12.03864

THE ARMIES

No campaign of the war in the West was more international. Between the landings in Sicily on 10 July 1943 and the German surrender on 2 May 1945, soldiers from five continents fought their way up the peninsula in two Allied armies: the US Fifth Army on the western side of the Apennines and the British Eighth Army on the eastern, Adriatic side, both under a single Allied army group. Facing them was the German Army Group C, with Mussolini's Italian Social Republic behind its lines. Italy itself was split: from October 1943 the royal government fought on the Allied side, and partisans fought the Germans and Fascists in the occupied north.

All numbers here are approximate. Divisions came and went, and totals differ between official histories, cemetery records and later research, depending on whether Sicily is included and whether "casualties" means the dead only or also the wounded, missing and captured. Where sources disagree, a range is given.

THE WHOLE CAMPAIGN IN NUMBERS

Sicily and Italy, July 1943 – May 1945

At the peak, in May 1944, the Allies had a ration strength of about 620,000 men in Italy against some 365,000 Germans; counting everyone in the theatre, totals of about 1.3 million Allied and 440,000 German troops are given. Sicily alone cost the Allies about 5,700 dead and the Axis about 9,000 dead and some 127,000 prisoners; over 100,000 German and Italian soldiers escaped across the Strait of Messina.

On the mainland the US official history counts 312,000 Allied casualties of all kinds (killed, wounded, missing) from September 1943 to May 1945, and 434,646 German casualties, including 48,067 killed and 214,048 missing, most of them captured. Other estimates put Allied dead at about 59,000–70,000, and German dead anywhere from under 40,000 to 150,000, depending on the source. At least 150,000 Italian civilians died in bombing, shelling, massacres and hunger; partisan dead are counted at 35,000–50,000, and German and Fascist reprisal killings claimed roughly 15,000–22,000 civilians.

THE ALLIED ARMIES

US Fifth Army

Formed in North Africa and landed at Salerno on 9 September 1943, the Fifth Army fought up the western side of Italy to the Po and the Alps under Clark and then Truscott. Its American core changed over time. The 3rd, 36th (Texas) and 45th (Thunderbird) Divisions fought from Sicily or Salerno through Cassino and Anzio before leaving for southern France in August 1944. The 34th (Red Bull) served from Salerno to the end, including Cassino and Anzio; the 1st Armored Division fought at Anzio and to the Po; the draftee divisions 85th, 88th and 91st fought from the spring and summer of 1944 through the Gothic Line.

Three formations stand out. The 92nd "Buffalo" Division, the only African American infantry division to fight in Europe, held the Ligurian coast and Serchio valley from late 1944. The 442nd Regimental Combat Team, Japanese Americans with the 100th Battalion that had fought since Salerno, became one of the most decorated units in US history for its size. The 10th Mountain Division arrived at the turn of 1944–45, climbed Riva Ridge at night in February and opened the Fifth Army's spring offensive on 14 April. The army also led British, French, Brazilian, South African and Italian troops.

British Eighth Army

Montgomery's desert army landed in south-east Sicily and crossed to Calabria on 3 September 1943, then fought up the Adriatic side under Montgomery, Leese and McCreery. Its British divisions included the 78th (Battleaxe), 4th, 46th, 56th (London) and 1st Infantry Divisions and the 6th Armoured Division, with the 1st Airborne landing at Taranto; the 50th and 51st Highland Divisions fought in Sicily before leaving for Normandy. British X Corps (46th and 56th Divisions) served inside the American Fifth Army at Salerno and on the Garigliano, and the British 1st Division fought at Anzio. Commandos fought at Termoli and Lake Comacchio.

The Eighth Army was really an imperial and allied army: at different times it contained the Canadian, Polish and New Zealand corps and divisions, three Indian divisions, South Africans, Greeks, the Jewish Brigade and Italian combat groups. Its hardest battles were Primosole in Sicily, the Sangro, the last battle of Cassino, the Gothic Line and Coriano ridge in September 1944, and the Argenta Gap in April 1945.

Canadians — I Canadian Corps

The 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade landed near Pachino on 10 July 1943, fought through central Sicily, and crossed to the mainland in September. In December 1943, after hard fighting on the Moro River, they took Ortona in eight days of house-to-house fighting; the month cost the 1st Division several hundred dead (sources give from about 500 to 700). The 5th Canadian Armoured Division joined them, and as I Canadian Corps they broke the Hitler Line in the Liri valley in May 1944, broke into the Gothic Line and fought at Coriano and Rimini in September, then across the rivers of the Romagna. In February–March 1945 the corps moved to north-west Europe. Canadians also made up a large part of the joint US-Canadian 1st Special Service Force, which fought at Monte la Difensa and Anzio.

New Zealand — 2nd New Zealand Division

Freyberg's division, including the 28th Māori Battalion, arrived in Italy in October 1943. It fought on the Sangro and at Orsogna in the winter of 1943, then as part of the New Zealand Corps in the second and third battles of Cassino (February–March 1944), attacking the railway station and the bombed town. It went on to Florence in August 1944, Faenza in December and the Senio in April 1945, and reached Trieste on 2 May 1945.

Indian Army — 4th, 8th and 10th Indian Divisions

Soldiers from every part of undivided India, and Gurkhas from Nepal, served in three divisions with British units mixed in. The 8th Indian arrived at Taranto in September 1943 and crossed river after river on the Adriatic — Biferno, Trigno, Sangro, Moro — before its night crossing of the Gari at Cassino in May 1944 and the fighting on to the Gothic Line and the Senio. The 4th Indian fought on the ridges above Cassino in February and March 1944, where Gurkhas held Hangman's Hill below the abbey, and left for Greece late in 1944. The 10th Indian arrived in 1944 and fought in the Tiber valley, the Apennines and the final offensive. Kamal Ram's Victoria Cross was one of several won by Indian soldiers in Italy.

Polish II Corps

Anders' corps was built largely from Poles deported to the Soviet Union in 1939–41 and released in 1941. It came to Italy in early 1944 with the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division, the 5th Kresowa Infantry Division and the 2nd Armoured Brigade (later a division). In May 1944 it attacked the ridges above Monte Cassino and raised its flag over the abbey on 18 May. It then fought up the Adriatic, taking Ancona in July 1944, broke into the Gothic Line and entered Bologna on 21 April 1945. The corps kept growing by recruiting Poles who had been forced into the German army and later captured.

French Expeditionary Corps

General Juin's corps arrived at Naples from November 1943. Most of its soldiers came from French North Africa and the colonies: the 2nd Moroccan Infantry Division, the 3rd Algerian Infantry Division, the 4th Moroccan Mountain Division and the 1st Motorised Infantry Division (the former 1st Free French Division, with many West and Central African tirailleurs), plus Moroccan goumiers — irregular mountain troops in units called tabors. Tunisians, Senegalese, Malagasy and French from France and Algeria served alongside them. After hard fighting on the Belvedere heights in early 1944, they broke through the Aurunci mountains in May 1944, the key move that unlocked the road to Rome, and went on to Siena before leaving in July 1944 for southern France.

Caveat — the marocchinate. During and after the May 1944 breakthrough, soldiers of the corps, mostly North African troops and especially goumiers, committed mass rapes, killings and looting in the villages of southern Lazio (the Ciociaria). Estimates of victims range from 2,000–3,000 women (Italian Ministry of Defence, 1997) to about 12,000 or more (victims' associations); about 800 men were also killed. French military courts tried 207 soldiers and convicted 156, and France compensated 1,488 victims in 1947. The crimes shaped Italian memory of the liberation, for example in Moravia's novel *La ciociara*.

South Africans — 6th South African Armoured Division

The division landed at Taranto in April 1944, with a British Guards brigade attached, and joined the pursuit north of Rome through Chiusi to Florence in August 1944. It spent the winter in the Apennines under American command and in April 1945 took Monte Sole and Monte Caprara south of Bologna before crossing the Po. South African Air Force squadrons also flew throughout the campaign.

Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB)

Brazil was the only Latin American country to send ground troops to Europe. The first 5,000 men reached Naples on 16 July 1944, and the FEB fought under the US Fifth Army in the Serchio valley and the northern Apennines. After costly winter attacks it took Monte Castello on 21 February 1945 and Montese in April, then trapped the German 148th Division at Collecchio and Fornovo, taking some 14,700 prisoners. A Brazilian fighter squadron flew P-47s alongside the Americans. The dead were buried at Pistoia before being moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1960.

The Jewish Brigade

Formed in late 1944 from Jewish volunteers of British-ruled Palestine, the brigade of about 5,000 men landed at Taranto in November 1944 and went into the line on the Senio in March 1945, fighting at Alfonsine and in the final offensive. After the war its men helped Holocaust survivors reach Palestine. In 2018 Italy awarded its flag the Gold Medal of Military Valour.

Greeks and other contingents

The Greek 3rd Mountain Brigade, a few thousand men raised in the Middle East from the Greek government in exile, fought under I Canadian Corps at Rimini in September 1944 and was renamed the Rimini Brigade. Many smaller groups served too, among them Newfoundland gunners, Cypriot and Palestinian units, African pioneer companies and Australian air squadrons.

Italian co-belligerent forces

After the armistice of 8 September 1943 the King’s government declared war on Germany on 13 October. A small Italian motorised group of about 5,700 men went into the line in December 1943 at Monte Lungo, near Cassino, failing at first and then taking the hill. It grew into the Italian Liberation Corps, which fought up the Adriatic in 1944, and by 1945 into six combat groups (Cremona, Friuli, Folgore, Legnano, Mantova, Piceno) of about 9,000 men each, four of which fought in the final offensive. Tens of thousands more served the Allies as muleteers, labourers and support troops, and the Italian navy and air force fought on the Allied side.

The partisans and the CLN

The resistance began in September 1943, when Germany occupied Italy and disarmed its army. The Committees of National Liberation (CLN), set up by the anti-Fascist parties, directed the struggle; in the north it was led by the CLNAI in Milan. The biggest formations were the Communist Garibaldi brigades and the Action Party’s Giustizia e Libertà brigades, with Socialist, Catholic and non-party “autonomous” units, many of them ex-soldiers. They fought in the Apennines and the Alps, sabotaged roads and railways, sheltered escaped Allied prisoners and rose in the cities, from Florence in August 1944 to Genoa, Turin and Milan in April 1945. 25 April is Italy’s Liberation Day. The Germans answered with reprisals, among them the Ardeatine Caves, Sant’Anna di Stazzema and Marzabotto.

THE AXIS FORCES

German Army Group C

Kesselring commanded the German forces in Italy from November 1943 to March 1945, followed by von Vietinghoff. The 10th Army held the southern front, including the Gustav Line at Cassino; the 14th Army, formed in late 1943, sealed off Anzio and later held the western Apennines; an Army Liguria guarded the north-west from 1944. The best German units in Italy were the paratroopers of the 1st Fallschirmjäger Division (Ortona, Cassino) and the 4th (Anzio); the Luftwaffe’s Hermann Göring Panzer Division (Sicily, Salerno, Anzio, until summer 1944); the 15th, 29th and 90th Panzergrenadier Divisions; and the 16th and 26th Panzer Divisions. The 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division committed the massacres at Sant’Anna di Stazzema and Marzabotto in 1944. Army Group C surrendered under the Caserta agreement, signed on 29 April and effective on 2 May 1945.

Italian Axis forces: 1943 and the Social Republic

In Sicily the Italian 6th Army fought beside the Germans; it lost about 4,700 dead, and many of its coastal troops surrendered quickly. After the armistice the Germans disarmed the Italian army and shipped some 600,000–700,000 soldiers to camps in Germany, where tens of thousands died. In the north Mussolini's Italian Social Republic raised its own forces: four divisions trained in Germany (Italia, Littorio, San Marco, Monterosa), which fought mainly on quiet sectors, on coast defence and in the Garfagnana attack of December 1944; the National Republican Guard; the Black Brigades of the Fascist party; and the Decima MAS naval commandos. Most of their fighting was against partisans, a civil war marked by atrocities on both sides.

AT A GLANCE

Deaths are for mainland Italy, September 1943 – May 1945, unless Sicily is stated; national figures come from different sources and do not add up exactly to the totals above.

Sources: Wikipedia; E. F. Fisher, *Cassino to the Alps* (US Army official history); Veterans Affairs Canada; NZHistory; French Ministry of the Armed Forces; Italian and Brazilian Wikipedia; Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

KEY FIGURES

A CAMPAIGN OF MANY NATIONS

The Italian campaign was fought by generals who often disliked each other and by soldiers from five continents. These are some of the people who shaped it, from Sicily in July 1943 to the German surrender on 2 May 1945.

At the top. Eisenhower ran the Mediterranean from Algiers until January 1944, then the British general Maitland Wilson, then Alexander from December 1944. Alexander commanded the Allied armies in Italy for most of the campaign; Clark took over from him in December 1944.

Two armies side by side. The US Fifth Army (Clark, then Truscott) fought on the western, Tyrrhenian side of the Apennines; the British Eighth Army (Montgomery, Leese, then McCreery) on the eastern, Adriatic side. Each held troops of many nations: French, Brazilians and South Africans served under the Americans at times, and Poles, Canadians, New Zealanders and Indians under the British.

The other side. Kesselring commanded the Germans for most of the campaign, with corps commanders such as von Senger holding the line. Mussolini's Social Republic fought beside them in the north, while Italian partisans, and a royal Italian army on the Allied side, fought against them.

ALLIED COMMANDERS

Harold Alexander "Alex" — Commander of the Allied armies in Sicily and Italy, then Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean. Born 10 Dec 1891, London · died 16 Jun 1969, Slough

An Irish Guards officer decorated for bravery in the First World War, Alexander commanded the Allied ground forces in Sicily and Italy under a string of titles — 15th Army Group, then Allied Armies in Italy. Charming and unflappable, he managed Americans, British, French, Poles and many others by tact rather than orders. Critics, Montgomery among them, thought his grip too loose and the campaign short of direction. He accepted the bombing of the Monte Cassino abbey in February 1944 and planned the May 1944 offensive, Operation Diadem, that finally broke the Gustav Line. Made field marshal with seniority from 4 June 1944, the day Rome fell, he became Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean in December 1944 and received the German surrender in Italy, signed at Caserta on 29 April 1945 and effective on 2 May.

Decorations: Military Cross — Battle of Loos, 1915 (gazetted January 1916); Distinguished Service Order — the Somme, 1916.

After the war: Governor General of Canada 1946–52 and Minister of Defence 1952–54; created Earl Alexander of Tunis.

Bernard Montgomery "Monty" — Commander, British Eighth Army, in Sicily and southern Italy. Born 17 Nov 1887, Kennington, London · died 24 Mar 1976, Alton, Hampshire

Fresh from El Alamein and Tunisia, Montgomery had the Sicily plan changed so that his Eighth Army and Patton's Seventh Army landed side by side in the south-east on 10 July 1943. His drive up the east coast stalled south of Catania, around Primosole Bridge and the slopes of Etna, while Patton swept west and north; their rivalry became legend. On 3 September 1943 his army crossed the Strait of Messina to Reggio Calabria (Operation Baytown), then pushed up the Adriatic side of Italy, crossing the Sangro and the Moro rivers in the winter mud while his Canadians fought for Ortona. At the end of December 1943 he handed over the Eighth Army and left for England to prepare the Normandy invasion.

Decorations: Distinguished Service Order — Méteren, near the Belgian border, 13 October 1914, where he was shot through the lung.

After the war: Commanded 21st Army Group from Normandy to the Baltic; Chief of the Imperial General Staff 1946–48; Viscount Montgomery of Alamein.

George S. Patton Jr. “Old Blood and Guts” — Commander, US Seventh Army, in Sicily. Born 11 Nov 1885, San Gabriel, California · died 21 Dec 1945, Heidelberg, Germany

Patton’s Seventh Army landed around Licata, Gela and Scoglitti on 10 July 1943 and held off counter-attacks at Gela. Given a supporting role, he swung west, entered Palermo on 22 July and then raced Montgomery along the north coast, reaching Messina on 17 August — by which time more than 100,000 German and Italian troops had escaped to the mainland.

Caveat. Sicily also stained his name. On 3 and 10 August he struck two soldiers suffering from battle fatigue in field hospitals, Privates Charles Kuhl and Paul Bennett. Eisenhower made him apologise; when the story broke in November he was left without a fighting command for months. The same campaign saw the Biscari massacre of prisoners by men of the 45th Division; their defence cited Patton’s pre-invasion speech, and how far his words encouraged the killings is still argued.

Decorations: Distinguished Service Cross — wounded leading tanks in the Meuse-Argonne, 26 September 1918.

After the war: Led Third Army across France and Germany in 1944–45; died after a road accident in Germany in December 1945.

Mark W. Clark — Commander, US Fifth Army, then 15th Army Group. Born 1 May 1896, Madison Barracks, New York · died 17 Apr 1984, Charleston, South Carolina

Clark led the Fifth Army ashore at Salerno on 9 September 1943, and when German counter-attacks nearly split the beachhead he went forward under fire, winning the Distinguished Service Cross. In May 1944 his troops broke out of Anzio; in December he took over the whole Allied army group and on 2 May 1945 the German surrender in Italy took effect.

Caveat. Two decisions still divide historians. The 36th Division’s crossing of the Rapido in January 1944 failed with about 1,700 casualties; Texan veterans demanded a Congressional inquiry in 1946, which cleared him. And after Anzio he turned most of his force north-west towards Rome, which he entered on 4–5 June, instead of driving everything to Valmontone to cut off the retreating German 10th Army. Critics call it vanity; defenders say the trap could not have been closed.

Decorations: Distinguished Service Cross — under fire on the Salerno beachhead, September 1943.

After the war: US High Commissioner in Austria, then UN commander in Korea who signed the 1953 armistice; president of The Citadel 1954–65.

Oliver Leese — Commander, British Eighth Army, end of 1943 – September 1944. Born 27 Oct 1894, London · died 22 Jan 1978, Wales

A Coldstream Guards officer wounded three times on the Western Front, Leese had led a corps under Montgomery from El Alamein to Sicily. He took over the Eighth Army at the turn of 1943–44, when it was stuck in the Adriatic mud. In spring 1944 he moved most of the army in secret across the Apennines to the Cassino front, and in May its British, Canadian, Polish and Indian divisions broke into the Liri valley in the last battle of Cassino. In August he persuaded Alexander to switch the main effort back to the Adriatic, and Operation Olive broke into the Gothic Line between Pesaro and Rimini. The breakthrough was costly and did not end the war in Italy that year. In late September he left for South-East Asia.

Decorations: Distinguished Service Order — the Somme, 1916.

After the war: His South-East Asia command ended after a failed attempt to remove General Slim. Later a noted grower of cacti and president of the MCC.

Richard McCreery — X Corps commander at Salerno, then commander of the Eighth Army. Born 1 Feb 1898, Market Harborough, Leicestershire · died 18 Oct 1967, Templecombe, Somerset

A cavalryman who walked with a limp after a wound at Arras in 1917 cost him several toes, McCreery commanded the British X Corps inside Clark’s Fifth Army: it landed at Salerno in September 1943, crossed the Volturno in October and the Garigliano in January 1944. On 1 October 1944 he took over the Eighth Army, the only cavalryman ever to lead it, as it slogged through the rain on the Romagna plain. His best moment came in April 1945: with amphibious tracked carriers across the flooded ground by Lake Comacchio he forced the Argenta Gap, a narrow strip of dry land between floods and marsh, and opened the way to the Po. In February 1945 he pinned Italy’s Gold Medal on the partisan leader Arrigo Boldrini in Ravenna.

Decorations: Military Cross — mounted patrol near Solre-le-Château, 9 November 1918.

After the war: Commanded British forces in Austria, then the British Army of the Rhine 1946–48.

Lucian K. Truscott Jr. — Commander, US 3rd Division, VI Corps at Anzio, then Fifth Army. Born 9 Jan 1895, Chatfield, Texas · died 12 Sep 1965, Alexandria, Virginia

A former cavalryman, Truscott trained the US 3rd Infantry Division to march at the fast "Truscott trot" and led it in Sicily, where he won the Distinguished Service Cross, and through the first winter in Italy. In February 1944 he replaced Lucas at Anzio, held the beachhead against the German counter-offensive and in May led VI Corps' breakout towards Cisterna and Rome. After commanding the corps in the landings in southern France he returned in December 1944 to lead the Fifth Army to the Po and the Alps. At the American cemetery at Nettuno on Memorial Day 1945, the cartoonist Bill Mauldin later wrote, he turned his back on the dignitaries and spoke to the graves.

Decorations: Distinguished Service Cross — Sicily, 11 July 1943; Legion of Merit; Purple Heart; Army Distinguished Service Medal, several awards.

After the war: Succeeded Patton at the head of Third Army in Germany; later a senior CIA officer.

John P. Lucas — Commander, US VI Corps, Salerno to Anzio. Born 14 Jan 1890, Kearneysville, West Virginia · died 24 Dec 1949, Great Lakes, Illinois

Lucas took over VI Corps in September 1943 in the last days of the Salerno battle and led it through the autumn in the mountains. On 22 January 1944 his corps landed at Anzio almost unopposed; about 36,000 men were ashore by midnight. Instead of striking at once for the Alban Hills, he spent a week building up the beachhead, and by the time he attacked on 30 January Kesselring had ringed it with troops. Weeks of desperate defence followed, and on 22 February Clark replaced him with Truscott.

Caveat. His caution is usually blamed for Anzio's failure; Churchill complained that he had hoped for a wildcat and got a stranded whale. Many historians reply that two divisions could not have held the hills, and that the plan itself was too thin.

Decorations: Army Distinguished Service Medal (two awards); Navy Distinguished Service Medal; Silver Star; Purple Heart.

After the war: Commanded Fourth Army in the United States for the rest of the war; then headed the US military advisory group in China (1946–48) and was deputy commander of Fifth Army in Chicago.

Alphonse Juin — Commander, French Expeditionary Corps in Italy. Born 16 Dec 1888, Bône (Annaba), Algeria · died 27 Jan 1967, Paris

Born in French Algeria, Juin brought the French Expeditionary Corps to Italy from November 1943: Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian, African and French soldiers who proved superb in the mountains. They fought on the Belvedere heights north of Cassino in the winter. In May 1944, in Operation Diadem, Juin argued for and led the decisive move: his Moroccan and Algerian divisions and goumiers crossed the Aurunci mountains, which the Germans thought impassable, and broke the Gustav Line in two days. That opened the Liri valley and the road to Rome. The corps left Italy in July 1944 for the landings in southern France.

Caveat. The same advance brought the marocchinate, mass rapes and killings of civilians in southern Lazio by soldiers of his corps. A story that Juin promised his men a free hand has never been documented.

Decorations: Legion of Honour — Grand Cross.

After the war: Resident-General in Morocco, a senior NATO commander, and from 1952 Marshal of France; buried at Les Invalides.

Władysław Anders — Commander, Polish II Corps. Born 11 Aug 1892, Krośniewice-Błonie, Russian Poland · died 12 May 1970, London

Wounded and taken prisoner by the Red Army in 1939, Anders spent nearly two years in Soviet prisons, including the Lubyanka in Moscow. After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 he was freed to raise a Polish army from deported prisoners, and in 1942 led it out through Iran. Many of its men, and their families, had come straight from the gulag. In May 1944, in the last battle of Cassino, his two divisions attacked the ridges above the monastery; after a week of heavy losses the Poles raised their flag over the ruined abbey on 18 May. The corps went on to take Ancona in July 1944, broke into the Gothic Line and entered Bologna on 21 April 1945 — by which time Yalta had handed their home provinces to Stalin.

After the war: Stripped of his citizenship by communist Poland, he lived in exile in London. At his wish he is buried among his soldiers in the Polish cemetery at Monte Cassino.

Bernard Freyberg "Tiny" — Commander, 2nd New Zealand Division and the New Zealand Corps at Cassino. Born 21 Mar 1889, Richmond, Surrey · died 4 Jul 1963, Windsor

Raised in New Zealand, Freyberg won the Victoria Cross on the Somme in 1916 and led New Zealand's division throughout the Second World War. It arrived in Italy in October 1943 and fought on the Sangro and at Orsogna that winter. In February 1944 he led a New Zealand Corps at Cassino. Sure that the Germans were using the abbey, he pressed for its bombing on 15 February; his attacks then and in March, including the Māori Battalion's fight at the railway station, failed at great cost. His deputy, Howard Kippenberger, lost both feet to a mine. The division fought on north and raced to Trieste, arriving on 2 May 1945, where Yugoslav partisans were already in the city.

Caveat. After the war it became clear that German troops had not been inside the abbey before the bombing.

Decorations: Victoria Cross — Beaucourt, Battle of the Somme, November 1916; Distinguished Service Order and three Bars (First and Second World Wars).

After the war: Governor-General of New Zealand 1946–52; made Baron Freyberg.

João Baptista Mascarenhas de Moraes — Commander, Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB). Born 13 Nov 1883 · died 17 Sep 1968, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil declared war on Germany and Italy in August 1942 after U-boats sank its ships, and Mascarenhas, then about sixty, was chosen to lead the only Latin American ground force to fight in Europe. About 25,900 Brazilians reached Italy from July 1944 and fought under the US Fifth Army in the Serchio valley and the northern Apennines. After failed attacks in the winter, they took Monte Castello in February 1945 and Montese in April, their costliest battle. At the end of April, around Collecchio and Fornovo di Taro, Mascarenhas received the surrender of the German 148th Infantry Division and Italian Fascist units — some 14,700 men and two generals.

After the war: Made marshal by the Brazilian Congress in 1946; chief of the armed forces general staff 1951–54.

ALLIED SOLDIERS

Audie Murphy — Rifleman to platoon sergeant, 15th Infantry Regiment, US 3rd Infantry Division. Born 20 Jun 1925, Kingston, Texas · died 28 May 1971, air crash in Virginia

Slight and baby-faced — he had enlisted at 17 with a falsified birth date — Murphy landed with the 3rd Division at Licata on the first day of the Sicily invasion and was made corporal within days. He fought on the mainland from the Salerno beachhead through the winter mountains, suffering repeated bouts of malaria. He missed the Anzio landing in hospital but rejoined his company for the battle of Cisterna at the end of January 1944 and became a platoon sergeant. On 2 March 1944, near Anzio, he knocked out a German tank with rifle grenades after his men had shot its crew — his first Bronze Star. He left Italy with his division for southern France in August 1944, where he earned the Distinguished Service Cross and, in January 1945, the Medal of Honor.

Decorations: Medal of Honor — near Holtzwihr, France, 26 January 1945; Distinguished Service Cross — southern France, August 1944; Silver Star, twice — France, 1944; Legion of Merit; Bronze Star with "V", twice — the first for the tank near Anzio, 2 March 1944; Purple Heart, three times — all for wounds in France.

After the war: Became a Hollywood actor and played himself in To Hell and Back (1955); buried at Arlington.

Paul Triquet — Company commander, Royal 22e Régiment, 1st Canadian Infantry Division. Born 2 Apr 1910, Cabano, Quebec · died 8 Aug 1980, Quebec City

In the battles for Ortona in December 1943 the Canadians had to cut the road behind the town. On 14 December Captain Triquet's company of the "Van Doos", French Canadians of the Royal 22e Régiment, attacked towards a farmhouse called Casa Berardi with tanks in support. Half his men and all his other officers were soon killed or wounded. Surrounded, he told the survivors, according to his citation, that the only safe place was on the objective, and pushed on; his group and the tanks knocked out four German tanks and several machine-gun posts. He reached the house with two sergeants and 15 men, told them "Ils ne passeront pas" — they shall not pass — and held it until the rest of the battalion arrived next day.

Decorations: Victoria Cross — Casa Berardi, 14 December 1943; Legion of Honour (France).

After the war: Stayed in the reserve army, rising to brigadier.

Kamal Ram — Sepoy, 3rd Battalion, 8th Punjab Regiment, 8th Indian Division. Born 17 Dec 1924, Bholupura, Rajputana · died 1 Jul 1982, Bholupura, Rajasthan

On the opening night of the last Cassino battle, 11–12 May 1944, the 8th Indian Division crossed the fast-flowing Gari river south of Cassino under heavy fire. Next morning Kamal Ram's company was pinned down by machine-guns. Aged 19, he volunteered to work round the flank, crept up to the first post and attacked it alone, shooting the gunner and killing a second German with the bayonet. He knocked out a second post, then helped a comrade finish a third. Later that day he shot a German in a slit trench and captured two more, clearing the way for his company. King George VI presented his Victoria Cross in Italy that summer, during his visit to the troops.

Decorations: Victoria Cross — Gari river, 12 May 1944 (London Gazette, 27 July 1944).

After the war: Stayed in the Indian Army after independence and retired in 1972 as an honorary lieutenant.

Daniel K. Inouye — Platoon leader, 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Born 7 Sep 1924, Honolulu · died 17 Dec 2012, Bethesda, Maryland

Inouye was a Honolulu teenager when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. He joined the 442nd, a regiment of Japanese Americans raised while many mainland Japanese American families were held in camps. He fought with it north of Rome in summer 1944 and in the Vosges mountains of France, winning a battlefield commission. In spring 1945 the 442nd returned to Italy to attack the western end of the Gothic Line. On 21 April 1945, on the Colle Musatello ridge near San Terenzo, he was shot in the stomach but kept attacking German machine-gun posts until a rifle grenade shattered his right arm. He prised a live grenade from his shattered right hand, threw it, and kept directing his men until he was carried away.

Decorations: Medal of Honor — Colle Musatello, 21 April 1945 (first awarded as the Distinguished Service Cross, upgraded in 2000); Bronze Star; Purple Heart with oak leaf cluster.

After the war: Lost his right arm. US senator for Hawaii from 1963 until his death in 2012.

Vernon Baker — Platoon leader, 370th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Infantry Division. Born 17 Dec 1919, Cheyenne, Wyoming · died 13 Jul 2010, St. Maries, Idaho

The 92nd "Buffalo" Division was the only African American infantry division to fight in Europe, in an army that kept Black and white soldiers apart. On 5 April 1945 Lieutenant Baker's platoon attacked the German strongpoint around Castle Aghinolfi, above the coast north of Viareggio. He knocked out machine-gun posts, an observation post and a dugout, killing nine Germans himself; most of his 25 men were killed or wounded. The next night he volunteered to lead a battalion advance through minefields and heavy fire. He received the Distinguished Service Cross. Only in 1997, after an Army-commissioned study found that Black soldiers had been passed over, was it upgraded to the Medal of Honor.

Decorations: Medal of Honor — Castle Aghinolfi, 5–6 April 1945 (presented by President Clinton, January 1997); Silver Star; Bronze Star with "V", twice; Purple Heart, twice.

After the war: Stayed in the army until 1968, then worked for the Red Cross for nearly 20 years. The only one of the seven Black Second World War soldiers honoured in 1997 still alive to receive his medal.

Wojtek — A curiosity: the bear of the 22nd Artillery Supply Company, Polish II Corps. Found as a cub in Iran, 1942 · died 2 Dec 1963, Edinburgh Zoo

Wojtek was a Syrian brown bear cub bought in 1942 near Hamadan, Iran, by Polish soldiers who had just come out of the Soviet Union. He grew up with their supply company, wrestling his friends, riding in their lorries and famously fond of beer and cigarettes. To get him aboard a ship to Italy he was enlisted as a private, with a paybook and a number. His comrades said that at Monte Cassino in May 1944 he helped carry crates of artillery shells, and a bear holding a shell became the company badge. The story is hard to prove, though at least one British soldier later described seeing a bear carrying crates.

After the war: Went with the company to Scotland and lived in Edinburgh Zoo from 1947. Statues stand in Edinburgh, in Poland and, since 2019, at Cassino.

AXIS & ITALIANS

Albert Kesselring "Smiling Albert" — German Commander-in-Chief South-West and Army Group C. Born 30 Nov 1885, Marktsteft, Bavaria · died 16 Jul 1960, Bad Nauheim

A Luftwaffe field marshal, Kesselring persuaded Hitler that Italy could be held far to the south rather than abandoned up to the Alps. From Salerno onwards he fought a skilful delaying war along a chain of fortified lines — the Gustav Line through Cassino, the Hitler Line, the Gothic Line — making the Allies pay for every river and ridge. He had the Anzio beachhead ringed within days. His harsh anti-partisan orders of 1944 promised officers backing for severe measures, and reprisal killings followed under his command. In March 1945 he left Italy to command in the west.

Caveat. In 1947 a British military court in Venice sentenced him to death for the Ardeatine Caves massacre and for inciting the killing of civilians. The sentence was commuted to life imprisonment and he was freed in 1952, officially on health grounds.

Decorations: Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds.

After the war: Wrote his memoirs and led the Stahlhelm, a right-wing veterans' league.

Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin — Commander, German XIV Panzer Corps at Cassino. Born 4 Sep 1891, Waldshut · died 9 Jan 1963, Freiburg

An unusual German general: a devout Catholic and a Rhodes scholar at Oxford before 1914. In Sicily he was the German liaison officer with the Italian 6th Army; afterwards he brought the German garrisons out of Sardinia and Corsica. From October 1943 his XIV Panzer Corps held the southern front around Cassino through all four battles. German troops were kept out of the abbey before the Allied bombing; afterwards his paratroopers turned the ruins into a fortress. When the Poles and French broke through in May 1944 his corps fell back towards Rome, and in May 1945 he came to Allied headquarters in Florence to receive the terms of the German surrender.

Decorations: Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves.

After the war: Wrote the memoir Neither Fear nor Hope and advised on the creation of the new West German army.

Benito Mussolini "Il Duce" — Fascist dictator, then head of the Italian Social Republic. Born 29 Jul 1883, Predappio · died 28 Apr 1945, Giulino di Mezzegra

Italy's dictator since 1922, Mussolini fell fifteen days after the Allies landed in Sicily: on 25 July 1943 the Fascist Grand Council voted against him and the King had him arrested. On 12 September German paratroopers freed him from a hotel on the Gran Sasso — the SS officer Otto Skorzeny took most of the credit — and Hitler set him up as head of the Italian Social Republic, based on Lake Garda and wholly dependent on Germany. In April 1945 he fled north with a German column; partisans caught him at Dongo on 27 April and shot him and Clara Petacci the next day.

After the war: Afterwards: Their bodies were hung up at Piazzale Loreto in Milan on 29 April 1945. He is buried at Predappio.

Arrigo Boldrini "Bulow" — Partisan commander, 28th Garibaldi Brigade, Ravenna. Born 6 Sep 1915, Ravenna · died 22 Jan 2008, Ravenna

A former army officer, Boldrini took his battle name from the Prussian general von Bülow and organised Communist-led partisans in the flat marshes and pinewoods around Ravenna, country where guerrillas were not supposed to survive. His plan for the liberation of Ravenna, carried out with the advancing Allies in early December 1944, helped them take the city without a battle for its Byzantine monuments. Wounded in the German counter-attacks, his brigade held its ground and then fought alongside Allied units along the Senio front. On 4 February 1945, in Piazza Garibaldi in Ravenna, General McCreery pinned the Gold Medal of Military Valour on him.

Caveat. Later writers tried to link him to the killing of Fascist prisoners at Codevigo in 1945. The killings were investigated after the war, but he was never named as a suspect or charged.

Decorations: Gold Medal of Military Valour — liberation of Ravenna, pinned on 4 February 1945.

After the war: First president of the partisans' association ANPI (1947–2006) and a member of parliament from 1946 to 1994.

MYTHS AND DISPUTES

These bios follow the best-supported version. Where the record is still argued over, this is what the argument is about.

The abbey of Monte Cassino

Allied commanders, Freyberg above all, believed the Germans were using the monastery; they were not inside it before the bombing of 15 February 1944, though their positions ran close by. The ruins then became a German strongpoint.

Clark and Rome

Whether turning towards Rome in late May 1944 let the German 10th Army escape, or whether it would have escaped anyway, is still debated.

Lucas at Anzio

Blamed for caution; defended by historians who argue that a quick dash inland would have been cut off.

Patton

The slapping incidents are well documented. His share of blame for the Biscari prisoner killings is disputed; the soldiers tried cited his speech, and one was convicted, one acquitted.

Juin and the marocchinate

The crimes are documented; French military courts convicted over 150 soldiers. The alleged “licence” speech by Juin has no documentary source.

Kesselring

Admired as a defensive general, convicted as a war criminal; his early release in 1952 caused outrage in Italy.

Mussolini’s rescue

The Gran Sasso raid was planned by the Luftwaffe paratroop command and led by Major Harald Mors’ men; Skorzeny’s role was later inflated by propaganda and his own memoirs.

Kamal Ram

Often called the youngest Indian VC; some sources rank him second-youngest.

Wojtek

The shell-carrying at Cassino rests on his comrades’ accounts; there is no official record of it.

Boldrini

Accused by later writers over the Codevigo killings; post-war investigations never named him as a suspect and he was never charged.

Truscott at Nettuno

The famous Memorial Day scene comes from Bill Mauldin’s account.

WORDS TO KNOW

15th Army Group — the Allied headquarters that ran the land war in Italy under Gen. Sir Harold Alexander — called Allied Armies in Italy for most of 1944

Fifth Army — the American-led army, usually on the western (Tyrrhenian) side, under Mark Clark and from December 1944 Lucian Truscott; it also included British, French, Brazilian and South African troops

Eighth Army — the British-led army of El Alamein fame, mostly on the eastern (Adriatic) side, with Canadian, New Zealand, Indian, Polish and other formations

Army Group C — the German command in Italy from November 1943 under Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, with the 10th and 14th Armies

Winter Line — the Allies' name for the belt of German positions south of Rome in late 1943, of which the Gustav Line was the strongest

Gustav Line — the main German defence line across Italy's narrow waist, anchored on the Garigliano and Rapido rivers and Monte Cassino

Gothic Line — Germany's last great defence line, across the northern Apennines from near La Spezia to the Adriatic near Pesaro

Co-belligerent — Italy's status after it declared war on Germany on 13 October 1943 — fighting on the Allied side without being a formal ally

RSI — the Italian Social Republic, Mussolini's German-backed state in the occupied north, often called the Republic of Salò

Partisans — armed Italian resistance fighters in the mountains and cities of the occupied centre and north

CLN — Committee of National Liberation — the alliance of anti-fascist parties that led the Resistance; in the north, the CLNAI in Milan

Goumier — a Moroccan soldier of the goums, lightly equipped units of the French Expeditionary Corps, famed for mountain fighting

DUKW — the "Duck" — a six-wheeled American amphibious truck, first used in large numbers in Sicily

LST — Landing Ship, Tank — a sea-going ship that ran onto a beach to unload tanks and lorries; there were never enough

Nebelwerfer — a German multi-barrelled rocket launcher — "Moaning Minnie" to British soldiers, for its howl

Schu-mine — a German anti-personnel mine in a small wooden box, almost invisible to metal detectors

Bailey bridge — the prefabricated steel bridge that carried the Allies over Italy's hundreds of blown crossings

LCI — Landing Craft, Infantry

CWGC — Commonwealth War Graves Commission

ABMC — American Battle Monuments Commission

RCT — Regimental Combat Team

FEB — Brazilian Expeditionary Force

CEF — French Expeditionary Corps

VC — Victoria Cross, the highest British and Commonwealth award for gallantry

MOH — Medal of Honor, the highest US award for valour

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