



Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell

Peter Caddick-Adams

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The five-month Monte Cassino campaign in central Italy is one of the best-known European land battles of World War Two, alongside D-Day and Stalingrad. It has a particular resonance now, because Cassino, with its multitude of participating armies - most notably the American 5th Army under the controversial General Mark Clark - was perhaps *the* campaign of the Second World War that most closely anticipates the coalition operations of today, with its ever-shifting cast of players stuck in inhospitable, mountainous terrain, pursuing an objective set by unknowing politicians in distant capitals, where victory is difficult to define.

Monte Cassino was characterised by the destruction of its world famous Abbey: in retrospect, considered an unjustifiable act of cultural vandalism by the allies. The audit trail of decision-making to destroy an icon as well known then as the Eiffel Tower or Lincoln Memorial, is a chilling reminder that similar decisions are still being made in Iraq and Afghanistan and indeed Libya. To this day, reversing normal prejudice, German troops are welcome in the abbey, having rescued its treasures from allied destruction in February 1944.

Cassino was an unusual campaign for World War II in that its outcome was not reliant on sweeping movements or the use of tanks or aircraft - but by old-fashioned boots in the mud, whether capturing the town of Cassino after months of grinding urban warfare (a Stalingrad in miniature) or scrambling up the steep mountain to seize the heights and the religious complex on top of Monte Cassino.

Monte Cassino Abbey was painstakingly rebuilt after the war (its baroque chapel remains incomplete) and is now a World Heritage site. An hour south of Rome, it is visited each year by up to one million tourists and pilgrims from around the world.

Reviews:

"Peter Caddick-Adams's exceptional Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell is a study in the challenges and possibilities of coalition warfare...Following the style of Richard Holmes and Max Hastings, Monte Cassino includes lucid analyses of high-level operational and strategic matters as well as choice quotes from the poor bloody infantry." --The Wall Street Journal

"Comprehensive and very well researched, Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell is an important addition to our understanding of the ghastly campaign for central Italy in World War II." --Rick Atkinson, author of the Liberation Trilogy

"A superb account of one of the bloodiest battles of World War II. There is no shortage of histories of the agonizingly drawn-out debacle at Monte Cassino, but this is certainly one of the best." --Kirkus Reviews (starred)

"Caddick-Adams uses the events of the battle to tell the stories of the armies that bled out around Cassino. His particular strength is his treatment of combat dynamics on both sides of the fighting line, from division headquarters to foxholes. This book is a learning experience for anyone interested in World War II on any level." --Dennis Showalter, former President of the American Society for Military History and author of Tannenberg: Clash of Empires, 1914

"Peter Caddick-Adams has brought highly perceptive and much-needed fresh analysis to this new account of

the Cassino battles. Both authoritative and compellingly written, his immense knowledge and understanding of the Second World War exudes from every page. It will unquestionably remain the standard text on this bloody episode of the war for many years to come." --James Holland, author of Dam Busters

"Peter Caddick-Adams has produced a thoughtful treatment of a crucial period of the Italian campaign. It should be read by anyone with an interest in the Second World War." --Military History Monthly

Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell Details

Date : Published May 31st 2012 by Preface Publishing (first published 2012)

ISBN : 9781848093584

Author : Peter Caddick-Adams

Format : Hardcover 384 pages

Genre : History, Military, Military History, Nonfiction, War, World War II, Military Fiction, Cultural, Italy

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From Reader Review Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell for online ebook

Conor Day says

enthralling

Sally Wragg says

I'm not in the habit of reading military books but my dad fought at the Battle of Monte Cassino so when I came across this book in my local library, I thought I ought to read it. I know a little about his experiences of course though he didn't talk about it much. I know that he and his fellow soldiers were often so hungry, they stole water melons from the fields and eggs from local farmers and that they were left alone for days, wandering on the mountain-side around Monte Cassino, without instruction from the powers that be, easy prey to a sniper's bullet. The book doesn't dwell on the horrors though they're there in plenty. It concentrates instead on facts and details and in particular, the individual battles that led to the capture of Monte Cassino, thus opening up the route to Rome for Allied forces. It also highlights the horrendous conditions the troops suffered, the constant shelling and the brutal nature of the fighting, the bitter freezing cold and the wretched terrain over which the men were expected to operate. It was an iconic battle but also a controversial one, given it led to the bombing of the monastery above the town of Monte Cassino, an act of war that Hitler turned into a propaganda triumph.

My dad used to recount the tale of how he once sheltered from enemy fire in a graveyard and that a grave nearby was hit by artillery fire. As he looked up, the fully dressed skeleton of an old man sailed across his head. He used to laugh when he told us this but they were just young men at the time and would have to cultivate a black humour to cope with all they had to face.

All I have left of his time in the army is his commandos badge with its iconic little dagger enclosed by the words 'united we conquer'. I'm glad I've read the book and know more now of exactly what he went through. I wish he was still here so I could tell him how proud I am of him.

Jon says

A well-researched history that expertly balances the strategic and tactical, the lowly private and famed general. Sometimes the chronological timeline gets a little lost, and there were frequently sentences with awkward, fragmented phrasing - sloppy editing more likely than writing. Overall a solid history, especially as a great intro to the Italian theatre.

Tim says

Bloody Hell

Stephen Gill says

A well researched and excellent retelling of the Cassino battles.

Damon Hall says

Good book about a tough battle fought by a multi-national force in horrible conditions.

Pawe? Sobiegraj says

Po prostu rewelacja.

Jedna z najlepiej napisanych ksi??ek historycznych jak? mia?em przyjemno?? przeczyta?. Z dok?adno?ci? do najmniejszego szczegó?u zosta?a opisana ca?a tzw. kampania Cassino. Co najwa?niejsze bardzo dobrze jest opisany kontekst w jakim toczy?y si? te dzia?ania. Polecam! :)

Rory Costello says

A richly detailed history that succeeds on many fronts, mainly the one you can see in its title: it puts the World in World War II, describing the soldiers from many different nationalities. I'd read a book about the Gurkhas before but had not been so aware of the Polish effort.

The description of the physical terrain and climate conditions was also essential. There was also much insight into the generals' personalities and battle strategies and tactics.

Mike Davis says

The battles of Monte Cassino were part of the Allied march through Italy during WWII. Often overshadowed by the great invasion at Normandy, these battles were both diversionary and essential in the Allied cause. It is a work of meticulous preparation and research. Indeed, the last 30% of the book is devoted to exhaustive Footnotes, Bibliography and Index.

The writing is chronological and is infused with quotations from survivors, memoirs, personal interviews and existing accounts. It should be appreciated as a welcome addition to the small, often forgotten theaters of WWII for its readability, thoroughness and bibliographical content. This is a must read for any history buff, and especially those interested in WWII.

This was reviewed as an e-book as a review copy from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Igor says

This is the first book I read about anything from the Italian Campaign, and only my second about the German West-Front. Caddick-Adams explains clearly how and why the Allies came to face the Germans on the Gustav-Line, and why they wanted to break through at Monte Cassino. The writing blends eyewitness accounts with tactical considerations from both sides.

What he says about Alexander's great diplomatic skills can also be applied to himself. He shows all the nationalities fighting on the Cassino Front as equally brave, strong, resilient, and human under hellish conditions. Bitter cold at the beginning, bare rocks, having to rely on mules for transport, the summer heat, dust. He gives credit where it is due, for example the title of chapter 10: Poland the Brave. Likewise, he doesn't convict Clark's decision of pushing for Rome, in stead off driving to Valmonte in the hope of trapping the escaping German Tenth Army.

Central, of course, is the bombing of the Cassino Abbey and a month later the Cassino Town. Caddick-Adams tells of both sides of the bombing-discussion. He continues with the capture of the abbey and breaching the Gustav-Line and the pursuit through the Liri-Valley. Finally reaching Rome. Where other auteurs are often distracted with writing pages that read like: "Meanwhile, at the Führerbunker, Hitler is having a heated debate with [...]", Caddick-Adams stick to the topic at hand and rarely talks above division levels.

Caddick-Adams could have said the same as this quote from Alexander: "No other troops in the world but German paratroops could have stood up to such an ordeal and then gone on fighting with such ferocity."

Also important for a (military) history books are the maps. I liked that all six are right at first pages of the book. These maps are as clear as I find his writing, giving enough information for one who starts reading about the Italian/ Cassino campaign, without pushing towards unnecessary details.

Jack London says

Peter Caddick-Adams, is a history of the Allied attempts to break out of the Neapolitan beachheads to penetrate the Gustav line in 1944, a wrenching and not-oft-told account of the Italian campaign that resulted, on the one hand, in the fall of Rome and, on the other hand, of the unnecessary destruction of Christendom's oldest and most revered monastery, the Benedictine abbey that since AD 539 had stood high above the Liri Valley. Americans, Texans certainly, know the history from the perspective of the suicidal attempt to cross the Rapido River that destroyed the 36th Infantry Division, hand in glove with the tragic landings at Anzio. Caddick-Adams writes the entire account of the British, French, Polish, Indian, and German units as well as paying full homage to the Fifth US Army. It is a fine book. The only drawback is the pardonable difficulty in keeping all the numbered and nicknamed units sorted out as you turn page after page. The only thing he is not is Rick Atkinson. 90 watts, or more.

Michael Confoy says

This is the second book I have read dedicated to Cassino and one of several on the combined Cassino/Anzio

campaign. The book brings an unique perspective to the battle by focusing on how the the various Armies were successful or not successful. Of particular interest was the success of the French under Juin and the Polish Corps that finally took Monte Cassino. Caddick-Adams is much friendlier to British General Harold Alexander than most historians. There is also a nice focus on the 8th Army's breakthrough up the Liri Valley. We know that Churchill liked Alexander, but the author considers him to have similar skills to Eisenhower as a diplomat general. The author also goes easy on American General Mark Clark's decision to take Rome and deliberately disobey orders by not cutting off the retreating German 10th Army. Caddick-Adams notes that there was no guarantee of trapping the 10th Army which seems to be a spurious argument for disobeying orders.

Interesting Facts

Nearly 15,000 mules were used during the campaign as they proved the only reliable means of bringing supplies up and the injured and dead down from the mountains.

The Germans would mount a revolving Panther turret, called a Pantherturm, to a concrete bunker in the Gustav line. One killed 17 Allied tanks in 3 days, the Pantherturm leader actually becoming a "tank ace."

Because of such a lack of food in Naples, it is estimated that 42,000 women out of 150,000 engaged in regular or part-time prostitution.

Matt Caris says

The narrative of the battle is fine, but this is a seriously lacking book. For anyone going to Cassino (the only reason I slogged through it), the lack of maps makes it a poor guide. For any audience, though, the author's terrible analysis - conjectures, really - about command decisions are unbearable. Especially for an American audience. Montgomery's "incredible march" from Calabria didn't save the Salerno landing - reporters attached to Eighth Army grew so frustrated at Monty's glacial pace that they took off in jeeps ahead of the Eighth Army and reached the beachhead on their own. The X Corps attack across the Galighiardo wasn't so successful that Clark could have reinforced it and cancelled all II Corps attacks on the Rapido. And on and on. Errors and faulty analysis abound.

This is a battle narrative, not a piece of scholarship. Perhaps that was my mistake, not the author's, but this was painful to slog through regardless.
