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Battle of Cassino: January-May 1944
Axis of Attack Campaign
By Scott Elaurant
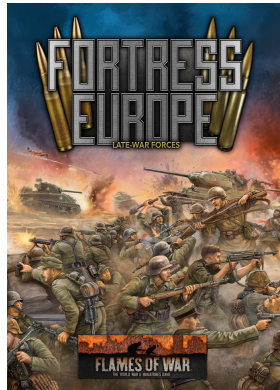
Italy, Winter 1944

Allied forces have reached the Gustav Line. Attacks on the east coast and the west coast failed. The flank landing at Anzio is pinned down. To reach Rome the Allies must travel up the Liri Valley. First they must take Monte Cassino.

| Town Axis	Massif Axis
Axis Win	Axis Win
|	|
Rapido River	Rapido River
|	|
Cassino Town (Start)	Snakeshead Ridge (Start)
|	|
Castle Hill	Point 593
|	|
Monte Cassino	Monte Cassino
|	|
Allied Win	Allied Win

Campaign Setting

Route Six up the Liri Valley is the natural gateway to Rome from southern Italy. But to get to the Liri Valley the Allies must cross the Rapido River, and take the dominating heights of Monte Cassino.

The Allied player may choose between two axis of attack – the Town Axis through Cassino, or across the Massif.

Time is critical. The Allies have six games to capture Monte Cassino and break through to Rome. If not, the Axis wins.

Allied Briefing:
Well boys, what a stroke of luck! General Clark has selected your company to lead the attack on the Gustav Line. There may be a few Germans but the guys in army intelligence say you can't fail.
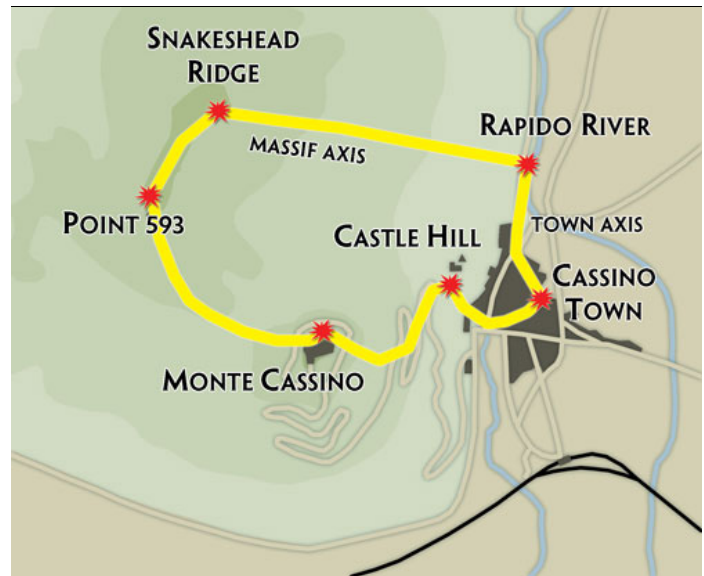
Now that we've crossed the Rapido River you just need to break through the Gustav Line and capture Monte Cassino, and then its on to Rome for victory.

German Briefing:
Reports from Feld Marshall Kesselring's staff are that the Allies will once more try to break through the Gustav Line in your sector. Hold the enemy off as long as you can. All of Germany will be watching you.

Axis of Attack Campaign:

This is a modified form of campaign, representing a situation where one side has overwhelming superiority. Cassino is a race against time: if the Allied attacker captures their objective before the time limit, they win. If instead the Axis defender holds out, they win.

To play the Cassino campaign, use all of the rules for Axis of Attack Campaigns, including the Mission Selector, Linked-Missions and Victory Points rules (Axis of Attack Campaign rules PDF). However, change the following:

•　There are 6 campaign games for the Allied player to take their objective and win. If not, the Axis player wins.
•　The Axis player may opt to remain the defender in all campaign games, regardless of the result of the previous game.
•　Each game, if the Attacker wins advance to the next battlefield. If the Defender wins, use the same battlefield.
•　Only the Attacker rolls for the Mission Type each game.

Situation Report

At the start of the campaign the Allies are trying to press on through the Gustav Line and open the road to Rome. The first battle of the campaign is fought just after the Allies have crossed the Rapido River when the Gustav line is first encountered. The Allies have 6 games to advance three battlefields (i.e. they need at least 3 wins). If the Germans advance 2 battlefields and reach Mount Trocchio they win. If neither side wins within six games it means a German campaign victory.

Allied Forces (100 or 135 point Force)

The Allies eventually used a huge variety of forces at Cassino, any one of which could be played in a campaign. Units used included the US 34th, 36th and 85th Infantry Divisions, British 4th, 5th, 46th, 56th and 78th Infantry Divisions, Canadian 5th armoured and 1st Infantry Divisions, Indian 4th and 8th Infantry Divisions, New Zealand 2nd Division, French 1st Motorised, 2nd Moroccan, 3rd Algerian, and 4th Moroccan Divisions and the Polish 3rd Carpathian and 5th Kresowa Infantry Divisions.

Feel free to use US and British forces from *Fortress Europe*, *D-Day: US* and *D-Day: British* with appropriate Command Cards.

For French forces us US formations.

German Forces (100 or 135 point Force)

German defensive units comprised the 15th, 29th and 90th Panzergrenadier, 44th, 71st and 94th Infantry, 5th Mountain and 1st Fallschirmjager Divisions.

Grenadier, Panzer, Motorized Panzer Grenadier, Panzer pioneer or Fallschirmjager companies (no SS) would all be appropriate forces for this campaign.

So use German forces from *Fortress Europe* or *D-Day: German*

Allied forces used support weapons typical of the time: Sherman, Churchill, Priest, 25pdr, 105mm artillery, M10s, 6 pdr and 57mm Anti-tank guns.

FEC French also used M5 light tanks and M3A1 Armoured Cars.

German forces were mainly infantry and had a limited range of support present: Panzer IV H, StuG III G, Marder, Nebelwerfers, 7.5cm and 10.5cm artillery. No Tigers, Panthers, or Panzer IIIs were used.

Right: Rubble was one of the hazards fighting around Cassino town.

Terrain

The terrain was a critical feature of the Cassino fighting and should be a major feature of any campaign game tables. Use the Anzio Terrain Chart in the Axis of Attack Campaign rules. See pages 32 to 37, and 43 of the Flames Of War rulebook for more on Terrain.

Divide you table into six sections and roll a die for each section on the table below:

Use the Mediterranean Terrain Chart Axis of Attack Campaign rules for all other battlefields. Some games will need a big hill.

For the Castle Hill, Snakeshead Ridge, Point 593 and Monte Cassino battlefields it is critical that there is a large hill (desirably 4"/10cm to 8"/20cm high) that is higher than any other feature on the battlefield.

These should have a dominating field of vision, with troops able to be seen from them unless in ravines or immediately behind large buildings.

While some gamers will love the idea of constructing their own scale model of Monte Cassino, for most this would take far too much time. There are lots of ways to construct large hills quickly for gaming purposes. One of the simplest is to pile up thick books and the like and spread a sheet or ground cloth over them. Either way, make sure both players agree before the game starts where the hills start and finish, which bits are steep or impassable, and so on.

Weather: January - March
Winter is cold in Italy, with snow possible in the mountains. If Mud is rolled in the Snakeshead Ridge, Point 593 or Monte Cassino battlefields, treat it as Snow (see page 30 of the rulebook.)

Time:
Supply difficulties and weather made it difficult to sustain operations in Italy. Assume that a battles occurs every week. The 6 turn campaign may last up to a month and a half. (The historical battle lasted six months because the Allies made four attempts to take Monte Cassino, from January to May 1944.)

Maximum number of battles: 6

Rubble: Any time a battle is played on the same battlefield again, the pounding of Allied aircraft and artillery means that the buildings on the table have been damaged or reduced to rubble.
• See page 43 of *Flames Of War*.

Air Support
The Allies had overwhelming Air Superiority at Cassino, although bad weather made it difficult to use. Allies get Aircraft on a roll of 3+. Germans only get aircraft on a roll of 5+. There is no roll for Aircraft games with Mud or Snow.

Aerial Bombardment:
The Allied player may opt for a pre-game Preliminary Bombardment in any one game in the campaign (see the Axis of Attack Campaign rules) regardless of the mission being played in that game.

Corps Artillery Support:
The Allied player may opt for Corps Artillery Support in any one game in the campaign. The Allied player gains the use of one additional four gun artillery battery of their force's nation. This is located off the board. An observer is also provided for the battery. Range is measured from the middle of the table edge.

Starting the Campaign:

The campaign starts with the Allies across the Rapido River and ready to attack either Cassino Town or Snakeshead Ridge (battle 1).

For Cassino play a *No Retreat* mission with the Germans defending. For Snakeshead Ridge play a *Counterattack*, or *No Retreat* mission with the Germans defending.

Unless otherwise noted use the Axis of Attack mission selector to determine the battles thereafter.

The Battlefields – Town and Massif Axis

1. Rapido River (German Objective)
Cassino lay at the entrance to the Liri Valley, with Monte Cassino behind. But before the Allies could reach it they had to cross the Rapido River. It is narrow but swift flowing and with steep sides. The Germans have flooded the fields below Cassino, forcing the Allies to approach through the town or mountains to the north.

Terrain: The terrain is flat and marshy; use the Anzio Terrain chart. The Rapido River runs across the board between the Attackers and Defenders deployment zones. A road (Route Six) runs from the Allied table edge to the German table edge, and crosses the river at a bridge. The Rapido is very difficult for infantry and vehicles must cross at a bridge. Large buildings are located in the defender's deployment zone – the railway station on the Cassino axis and a barracks on the Massif Axis.

Mission Suggestions: *No Retreat*. (or use Mission selector)

Victory: If the Germans recapture the Rapido River crossing the Allied advance is repelled and they have won the campaign.

Left: Monte Cassino, with the remains of passed battles in the foreground.

Town Axis

2. Cassino Town (Start position for Town Axis)
Cassino Town lies at the foot of Monte Cassino, with Castle Hill and then the mountain and its monastery rising successively behind it. The town itself is flat with stone buildings and narrow roads.

Terrain: Route Six passes through the town from the Attacker's table edge to the Defender's table edge. The rest of Cassino Town is an urban battlefield with just a few walled gardens. The three- story Hotel Continental dominates the German half of the table. Cassino is a typical southern Italian town with stone one or two story buildings with cellars that provide excellent bullet-proof cover.

Mission Suggestions: *No Retreat*.

Gustav Line: Regardless of the mission being played, the German player receives 2 bunkers, an anti-tank obstacle and a section of minefield to place anywhere in their deployment zone.

Aerial Bombardment: If the Allied player opts for a pre-game Aerial Bombardment in any game in Cassino (see above) all buildings are then treated as rubble, in addition to other effects.

Victory: If the Allies win, they have cleared the town and press on to Castle Hill. If the Germans win, they may rest or counterattack.

Massif Axis

2: Snakeshead Ridge (Start position for Massif Axis)
Monte Cassino was actually at the end of a huge ridge, called the Cassino Massif, that stretched away to the east and the even higher Mount Cairo. The Massif was a maze of ridges and gullies leading down from the crest to the Rapido River. The most accessible routes up was via a side spur ridge called Snakeshead Ridge. The area was part of the Gustav Line.

Terrain: Snakeshead Ridge is a large, multi-level hill running down the centre of the table. The highest level should be in the German's deployment zone. Use the Meditteranean Terrain table for the rest of the board (Axis of Attack Campaign rules PDF).

The ridge and any adjoining hills or gullies on the table are steep and very difficult for vehicles. The ridge is covered in rocks and brush, but otherwise there is little cover.

Mission Suggestions: *No Retreat* or use Mission selector.

Gustav Line: Regardless of the mission being played, the German player receives 2 bunkers, an anti-tank obstacle and a section of minefield to place anywhere in their deployment zone.

Weather: Bad weather on Snakeshead Ridge is Snow

Victory: If the Allies win, they may continue up the ridge to Point 593, on the very crest of the Cassino Massif.

Town Axis

3: Castle Hill
Almost as important as the Cassino monastery was Castle Hill. Starting immediately behind Cassino town, Castle Hill formed a foothill to the main mountain. A ruined old medieval castle sat atop the hill, and from it German observers could

spot into the town. Castle Hill overlooked the only road from Cassino up to Monte Cassino.

Terrain: There is a large hill (Castle Hill) on the north side of the Defenders half of the table. Castle Hill has steep slopes (very difficult for infantry, impossible for vehicles) and a ruined castle on top. The castle is a stone building with only one entrance at rear. Use the Meditteranean Terrain table for the rest of the board (Axis of Attack Campaign rules PDF). The mountain is not climbable by vehicles except by a winding road up the side of the hill, from the town.

The Castle is a ruined medieval fortress (able to contain a whole platoon) with a courtyard and single gate, and of course bulletproof cover. The Castle is the objective of the game.

Mission Suggestions: *No Retreat* or use Mission selector.

Defensive Observers: The presence of German Observers in Monte Cassino behind meant that German artillery could be located further back and called in. German artillery batteries are not placed on table, but can fire Artillery Bombardment measuring their range from their table edge.

Fortress Cellars: The ancient fortress walls provided excellent cover. Any team Gone to Ground in the Monastery has successful Artillery Bombardment Firepower tests against it re-rolled.

Massif Axis

3: Point 593
At the top of Snakeshead Ridge, Point 593 was the location where the ridge joined the crest of the main Cassino Massif. The Gustav Line was built in depth, and so Point 593 still contained defensive fortifications. They had to be captured before the Allies could reach the Monastery.

Terrain: The battlefield is dominated by two ridges that meet to form a T at Point 593. The higher ridge – the crest of the Cassino Massif, runs across the German deployment zone from one table edge to the other. Snakeshead Ridge runs up the centre of the table from the Allied deployment zone to meet the Massif Ridge in the middle of the German deployment zone.

Point 593 is the point where the two ridges intersect. Use the Meditteranean Terrain table for the rest of the board (Campaigns & Terrain PDF). All hills and gullies on the table are steep and very difficult for vehicles.

Mission Suggestions: Bridgehead, or use Mission selector.

Gustav Line: Regardless of the mission being played, the German player receives 2 bunkers, an anti-tank obstacle and a section of minefield to place anywhere in their deployment zone.

Weather: Bad weather on Point 593 is Snow

Victory: If the Allies win, they may move up the ridge to attack the monastery. Victory is in sight!

Town Axis and Massif Axis

4: Monte Cassino
The dominating terrain feature of the Cassino campaign was the mountain of Monte Cassino, which was directly behind the town, with Castle Hill forming a foothill to the main mountain. A historic Benedictine Monastery sat atop Monte Cassino, and from it the German's had a panoramic view of the adjacent Liri and Rapido Valleys. Monte Cassino had to be captured before the route into the Liri Valley would be open.

Terrain: Monte Cassino is actually the end of a huge steep sided ridge. It is rocky with short brush but no woods. Use the Meditteranean Terrain table (Campaigns & Terrain PDF). The mountain is not climbable by vehicles except by a winding road up it from Cassino town, and another built by Allied soldiers during the campaign. From the heights on top observers can see over all other obstacles, although gullies and ravines up the sides provide some cover. The crest of Monte Cassino and the Monastery must be on the German side of the battlefield.

The Monastery is a large fortress (able to contain three platoons) with a courtyard, gate large enough for vehicles, and of course bulletproof cover. The Monastery is the objective of the game.

Mission Suggestions: The Allies tried to attack Monte Cassino from several angles during the campaign. Try any of Counterattack, No Retreat, Breakthrough, or Bridgehead missions.

Corps Artillery: Monte Cassino was recognised to be the key to the German defences. Allied corps artillery is available to support any attack on it. The Attacker adds a battery of artillery.

Fortress Cellars: The ancient fortress walls provided excellent cover. Any team Gone to Ground in the Monastery has successful Artillery Bombardment Firepower tests against it re-rolled.

Weather: Bad weather on Monte Cassino is Snow.

Victory: If the Allies win, the heights above Route Six have been cleared of German observers, and Allied tanks may enter the Liri Valley. The campaign is won!

Actual Outcome

Cassino would prove to be one of the most difficult defensive positions to capture of the entire war. The Allies made four attacks on it, in January, February, March and May 1944. Eventually on May 18 1944 Cassino Monastery fell, and on June 5 Rome as well. But by then it was too late. German troops had delayed the Allies and withdrawn to northern Italy. Within the campaign timeframe, the Allies had won only 2 of 8 games, getting across the Rapido River and into Cassino town, but still not capturing Monte Cassino before May 15. It was a decisive German victory. They would then "win the next three games" to reach Rome by June 5, but too late.

A Brief History of the Battles for Monte Cassino...

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