

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 416

“The Iron Gut of Europe”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“[Churchill] got up before a map with his pointer and he kept pointing to Gibraltar, North Africa, the Mediterranean, Sicily and Italy. Finally he said, ‘We should slit the soft belly of the Mediterranean.’ Well, my friends, I assure you, when I landed at Salerno, I found it was a tough old gut!”

US Army General Mark Clark.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 416. The Iron Gut of Europe.

When last we talked about Italy, I left off at the end of September 1943 and noted that the Allied force in that country had gotten bogged down by an able German defense led by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring. His fellow field marshal, Erwin Rommel, had recommended the Wehrmacht abandon the Italian peninsula and draw its defensive line in the northern part of the country. Kesselring thought that would miss an opportunity. The rugged terrain of the peninsula was a defenders’ dream, and Kesselring believed he could hold off the Allies in southern Italy for a long time.

Hitler had to make the call, and at first he was inclined to take the advice of Rommel, his favorite commander, until the SS advised him they had reason to believe Rommel was “politically unreliable,” and so Kesselring got his way.

On the Allied side, their troubles in Italy reopened old arguments between British and American leaders. From the get-go, Churchill had favored nibbling at the edges of Axis-occupied Europe, so to speak, a longstanding British strategy for intervening in continental conflicts, while the Americans were gung ho about taking the Germans head on with an invasion somewhere in Western Europe, most likely France.

The British had to talk the Americans into the invasion of French North Africa; that invasion had proved relatively easy and had paid substantial dividends. It gave the French resistance a shot in the arm and helped de Gaulle consolidate his position as its leader, though that last part was unintentional. It also forced Rommel and his panzers out of Africa and gave the Allies useful air and naval bases on the continent's north coast.

Then the British pushed for the invasion of Sicily. That had been a tougher sell, but it ended the Axis threat to Allied Mediterranean shipping and therefore freed up cargo ships that would then be available to supply that coming invasion of Europe the Americans were so keen on, so even they had to admit the results had been worth the effort, and don't forget that invasion also triggered the overthrow of Mussolini.

Next the British pushed for an invasion of the Italian mainland. It seemed like a good idea at the time. The new Italian prime minister had been in secret talks with the Allies about switching sides, but the Italians had wanted Allied boots on the ground in their country to help protect them against the wrath of the Germans. So that seemed worth doing, especially since this was the time when the Germans were contemplating Rommel's plan to withdraw from Italy altogether, and the Allies knew it from their Enigma intercepts.

So the British landed forces at various points in southern Italy and met little resistance; then the Americans landed their Fifth Army at Salerno and expected the same. But the Germans had anticipated the landing and Kesselring fought them bitterly on the ground, while the Luftwaffe pounded them from the air. American casualties were high and military commanders contemplated evacuating their forces altogether until heavy naval fire from British warships broke the German attack and the British Eighth Army reached the Americans' position.

The British Eighth Army was commanded by Bernard Montgomery, who had been sharpening his public relations skills ever since El Alamein. By September 1943, he was handing out autographed pictures of himself, as if he were Tyrone Power or something. After his Army linked up with the American beachhead at Salerno, Montgomery began talking as if he and his Eighth Army had saved the Americans from destruction.

This went over not at all well with the commander of the American Fifth Army, US General Mark Clark, who thought Montgomery had taken his good old time advancing to Salerno and resented it. It didn't help that, if anything, Mark Clark was a worse publicity hound than even Montgomery. Clark eventually expanded the Fifth Army's press office to fifty people and lectured photographers on the importance of capturing him in profile, which he thought was his best look.

Clark also became obsessed with the thought of leading the force that liberated Rome. The ancient city had experienced any number of famous military commanders marching through its streets in triumph, and he was eager to add his name to that list of immortals. A few of his subordinates began referring to the general as "Marcus Aurelius Clarkus" behind his back.

Now that the Allied forces had linked up, what came next? General Eisenhower had predicted Rome would fall by the end of October, but the campaign was not shaping up that way. Allied hopes of capturing the entire peninsula in one bold stroke had been dashed, and now there was no plan, apart from a vague idea that the Americans would advance north along the west coast of the peninsula and the British would advance up the east coast. The two armies combined officially made up the Allied Fifteenth Army Group, under the command of British General Harold Alexander, and above him American General Dwight Eisenhower, but neither of them offered any bright ideas.

The Americans by this time were increasingly turning their attention to Operation Overlord. As far as they were concerned, everything else was subordinate to the coming invasion of France. The Americans scratched Douglas MacArthur's proposed invasion of New Britain for the sake of maximizing the numbers of soldiers, equipment, supplies, and supply ships available for Overlord. I'll have more to say about that in a coming episode. There was nothing left over to contribute to beefing up the Italian Front either; you have to think that senior American commanders were beginning to regret having landed forces in mainland Italy at all, and wondering if it was another British attempt to divert them from Overlord.

The one senior American commander who agreed with the British was General Carl Spaatz, who at this point in our narrative was commander of the US Army Air Forces' Twelfth Air Force, based in Tunisia. General Spaatz would be appointed commander of the Fifteenth Air Force, based in Italy, in November 1943, and overall commander of US Strategic Air Forces in Europe in January 1944. Spaatz was a key member of the group of Army Air Forces officers derogatorily referred to as "the Bomber Mafia" by their opponents in the military. These were the American air force commanders who advanced the view that strategic bombing of Germany alone could win the war, and that Operation Overlord would be neither necessary nor desirable. This is the same view held by the commander of the RAF's Bomber Command, Air Chief Marshal Arthur Harris, or "Bomber" Harris, as the British press liked to call him.

General Spaatz advocated for the US Army to press onward up the Italian peninsula, reasoning that as the Italian Front drew closer to Germany, his bomber force would get closer to targets in Germany and the bombing campaign would become increasingly effective until it forced a German collapse. Who needs Operation Overlord?

Here's a fun fact: Carl Spaatz was born in Boyertown, Pennsylvania, just a hop, skip, and a jump from where I live.

But the most senior official advocating for a Mediterranean strategy was, as always, Winston Churchill. It had been Churchill who talked Roosevelt into invading North Africa, and then Sicily and then Italy. Churchill's advocacy had certainly spared the Americans what would likely have been a bloody and disastrous failed invasion of France in 1943, if they'd had their way, and he had been proved right about the value of the invasions of North Africa and Sicily.

The Italian campaign, on the other hand, was more of a mixed bag, but Churchill, far from recalibrating his strategic thinking after the Allies got stuck in southern Italy, doubled down on it by advocating for an invasion of the Dodecanese Islands, especially the island of Rhodes.

In part this was because he believed that an Allied demonstration of military superiority, in the form of evicting a German force stationed on Turkey's doorstep, would be enough to persuade Ankara to join the Allied cause. No doubt he was also thinking about that invasion of the Balkans he was also keen on, and with Turkish assistance, if all went according to plan.

The Americans were bemused and frustrated by Churchill, no one more so than Franklin Roosevelt, who had thought they'd thrashed all this out in Québec in August and that Churchill had conceded the primacy of Overlord. Yet it seemed Churchill was still trying to lead them down the path to that invasion of the Balkans he kept going on about.

Even the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Alan Brooke, who was on the same page as Churchill, at least insofar as agreeing on the importance of the Mediterranean Front, thought he was pushing too hard. He wrote in his diary, "[The Prime Minister] has worked himself into a frenzy of excitement about the Rhodes attack, has magnified its importance so that he can no longer see anything else and has set his heart on capturing this one island even at the expense of endangering his relations with the President and with the Americans, and also the whole future of the Italian campaign... The Americans are already desperately suspicious of him, and this will make matters far worse."

George Marshall and the American military wanted nothing to do with an invasion of Rhodes, so the British attempted to do it on their own. In early September, just after the Italian government announced it was switching sides. The British attempted to take control of the Dodecanese, in coordination with the Italian Army garrisons on the islands. Churchill asked for American assistance in the operation; the Americans declined.

The Italians were for the most part willing to follow their orders from Rome and switch sides, but the Germans had other ideas. German forces on the islands, reinforced by German occupation forces from Greece, succeeded in ejecting the British and taking the Italians prisoner. Some 100 Italian officers were executed on the spot for the crime of obeying the orders of the Italian government. Admiral Inigo Campioni, the overall commander of Axis forces in the Dodecanese, and one other Italian admiral stationed in the islands were taken prisoner and handed over to the government of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic, which tried and executed them for treason.

The situation in Italy was scarcely any better. Eisenhower's timeline of taking Rome by October proved a fantasy. The Germans had not withdrawn from Italy as expected; instead, they'd put up an able defense and were making the Allies pay dearly for every inch of progress.

Much of the credit for this has to go to the German commander, Albert Kesselring, a shrewd tactician who proved again and again his ability to organize tough defensive lines, often in difficult circumstances.

Kesselring's most valuable ally was Italian geography. The most striking feature of the Italian peninsula, apart from its strong resemblance to a boot, is that it is long and nearly uniform in width. The peninsula measures roughly 1000 kilometers in length and averages roughly 200 kilometers in width, until it splits at the southern end. Or to put it in American terms, the Italian Peninsula is roughly the same length and width as the Florida Peninsula.

Unlike the Florida Peninsula, though, where the average elevation is less than 100 feet, Italy is a rugged country. The spine of the peninsula is comprised of a series of mountain ranges collectively known as the Apennines. Many of its mountaintops are 2,000 meters or more above sea level. (That's 6,000 feet in American.) Mountains make excellent defensive terrain.

Because of these mountains, you won't be surprised to learn, rivers in Italy typically flow from a source in the Apennines, either westward to the Tyrrhenian Sea or eastward to the Adriatic. Put all this together and imagine yourself as an Allied commander thinking about how to advance your army along the peninsula. Sending your troops up the middle would be out of the question; if the Allies had tried that, they would still be fighting there.

The only other option is to advance along the coastal lowlands on either side of the peninsula, or, if you happen to have both a British army and an American army at your disposal, send the Americans up the west coast of the peninsula and the British up the east coast, which is what they did. But this geography forces the advancing armies to squeeze into relatively narrow passages on either side of the mountains and cross a series of rivers that flow perpendicularly to their line of advance, which greatly simplifies Kesselring's job.

Oh, and one more thing. The last three months of the year are the rainy season in Italy, and, with the geography I just described, rain in the mountains makes those rivers prone to flooding, often quickly and unexpectedly, as Bernard Montgomery and Mark Clark soon discovered.

To sum up the situation from the Allied point of view, and using the standard military terminology of the British Army, I believe this would technically qualify as a "right old mess."

[music: Vivaldi, Concerto in F major, "Autumn."]

The Americans originally landed at Salerno because it was as far north along the Italian coast as they could get and still enjoy air cover from Allied air units based in Sicily. It was also as close as they could get to the Italian port city of Naples and still enjoy air cover from Allied units based in Sicily.

Naples is the third largest city in Italy, after Rome and Milan. At this time, its population was just shy of one million. The city has stood since ancient times and has traditionally been a center

of culture and scholarship. During the Baroque era, it was the largest city in the Mediterranean region. It had once been the capital of the Kingdom of Naples, and from 1815-1861, capital of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

Naples was the American landing force's first objective. Kesselring's counterattack postponed any plan to advance northward until September 19, after the British Eighth Army linked up with them and Allied air and naval bombardments forced the Germans to withdraw.

The Allies began the advance on Naples along the west coast of Italy. They had to split their forces in two to get around Mt. Vesuvius which, as I'm sure you already know, meant marching past the ruins of the ancient and ill-fated towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Meanwhile, in Naples, the city was on the brink. After the armistice with the Allies was announced, some 5,000 Italian soldiers in the region left their units and wandered into Naples, where the German Army had stationed some 20,000 soldiers to garrison the city. Neapolitans resented the German presence, which they correctly perceived as an enemy occupation force.

Tensions were high, and they grew higher after the Americans made their surprise amphibious landing at Salerno, just 50 kilometers to the south. Violent clashes broke out between Neapolitan civilians and German military personnel. Some of this violence was a spontaneous public reaction to the German occupation and the news that the Americans were approaching. Some of it was encouraged by Italian resistance groups.

The unrest in Naples grew as the Germans began capturing and deporting those Italian soldiers to do forced labor in Germany. The German military commander in Naples declared martial law, imposed a curfew, and threatened summary execution for any act of violence against German soldiers. The Germans then began staging public executions of Italian soldiers and Italian police who had offered resistance to the German occupation. These executions were held in front of audiences of hundreds of Italian civilians whom the Germans rounded up and forced to watch.

On September 23, the Germans ordered all Italian men between 18 and 30 to report for deportation to Germany for forced labor. Only a handful of Neapolitans voluntarily complied. German soldiers began scouring the city for the men who had disobeyed the order. On the 26th, riots broke out in the streets as citizens began freeing those who had been captured.

The next four days, September 27-30, are known to Italians as *Le quattro giornate di Napoli*, that is, "The Four Days of Naples." Rioters clashed repeatedly with German soldiers, who responded by firing into crowds of civilians. The rioters captured and distributed stockpiles of German arms and fought back against German efforts to destroy buildings in Naples to deny them to the Allies.

On the 29th, one 23-year-old woman named Maddalena Cerasuolo led a band of resistance fighters to defend the Ponte della Sanità, a key bridge on the route north from Naples, built in

1809, which German engineers were attempting to blow up. The Ponte della Sanità is today known as the Ponte Maddalena Cerasuolo.

Outside the city, a unit of approaching British soldiers encountered a group of Italian villagers in a cemetery. They were laying to rest the remains of ten young men who had been killed by the Germans. Shortly after the British left, a squad of German soldiers appeared and fired on the mourners.

The Germans withdrew from Naples on the 30th, as British and American Army units closed in on the city. Before leaving, they set fire to the National Library, the Library of the University of Naples, and the State Archives, destroying irreplaceable historical documents. An estimated 155 Italians were killed in the uprising. The Allies entered on October 1 and discovered a looted city. The Germans had destroyed the port facilities, the railroad tracks, gas, sewer, and water lines, and most of the city's bridges.

The Four Days of Naples were costly to the Italians, but on the other side of the ledger, Italian resistance saved tens of thousands of young men from a deportation to Germany from which many would never have returned, and the uprising forced the Germans to evacuate the city rather than use it as a defensive position against the Allies. We can only guess how many lives, how many buildings, and how many Italian cultural treasures were thereby spared.

The Germans fell back to a new defensive line along the River Volturno, about 30 kilometers north of Naples. The Allies reached the river on October 6. It took a week for them to put together a mass artillery barrage sufficient to break up the German defense and allow a crossing.

Rainy weather and muddy roads slowed the Allied advance. Allied soldiers suffered cases of trench foot, which is what happens to soldiers whose feet suffer prolonged exposure to cold and wet conditions. The Germans put up stiff resistance using mines and hidden anti-tank guns to ambush Allied units. They blew up every bridge along the way.

In 1940, an English engineer named Donald Bailey offered a design for a new type of bridge that soon became known as the Bailey bridge. Bailey bridges are made from a relatively small number of uniform prefabricated steel components, small enough and light enough that they could be carried in trucks, lifted by teams of soldiers, and quickly assembled on site to build a replacement bridge. Soldiers can put together a Bailey bridge and push it over the gap they want to cross, no heavy equipment required. The soldiers don't even need access to the other side, and the finished bridge is strong enough to allow tanks to cross.

Bailey bridges were first used in combat conditions in North Africa by British, Canadian, and American units, but the Bailey bridge really proved itself in Italy, where Allied soldiers assembled 3,000 of them. Only in Italy there were still so many rivers and so much rugged terrain that Allied units soon ran out of the parts needed to build these bridges. Getting more

parts and transporting them up the muddy Italian roads to the front line proved a major logistical challenge.

The Germans' dogged delaying tactics were only part of Kesselring's plan. He'd identified a line across the Italian peninsula that would make a nearly ideal defensive position for his forces: the Gustav Line. This line ran 160 kilometers across the peninsula at its narrowest point, making use of the River Sangro on the Adriatic side of the mountains and the River Garigliano on the Tyrrhenian side, and anchored in between by the rugged mountains around the Italian town of Cassino.

The Allies knew from Enigma intercepts that Kesselring had chosen this challenging terrain as the place where his army would make their stand. Complicating the situation and to the dismay of the British, the Americans insisted they honor their prior agreement to withdraw seven divisions from the Mediterranean and redeploy them for Operation Overlord, now just six months away. The loss of these seven divisions would concede to the Germans numerical superiority in Italy, at least for a while.

I won't trouble you with the names of the subsidiary German defensive lines south of the Gustav Line; suffice it to say that the Germans mounted an expert defense. That defense, plus the cold, wet weather, plus supply problems due in part to Allied inexperience with rugged terrain meant a slow advance, with Allied troops forced into tough battles every step of the way. This slow and costly slog up the Italian peninsula couldn't have been more different from what these soldiers got used to in North Africa, with its broad, flat terrain and dry weather, which made possible sweeping advances by armor and motorized units. Here the terrain negated the Allied advantage in numbers of tanks and vehicles, rendering them all but useless.

The terrain along the approaches to Rome would force any Allied advance into one of three possible routes. There were Italian state routes 6 and 7, which approached Italy from the south. (The Italian state route 7 follows the course of the ancient Roman Appian Way.) Clark and his Fifth Army would have to use one or both of these routes, but the trouble with either of them is that they both ran between mountains that would make excellent positions from which the Germans could rain artillery fire on advancing Allied troops.

The third option was Route 5, which approached Rome from the east, along a route beginning on the Adriatic coast and crossing the width of the peninsula. Montgomery's Eighth Army on that coast conceivably could fight their way across and help flank the German defenses south of Rome, but this route would take them through the full width of the mountains. With the mud and snow they were facing, this option wasn't exactly attractive.

Route 7, which ran closer to the coast than Route 6, would also force advancing soldiers through the Pontine Marshes, which are salt-water marshes that line the coast for about 45 kilometers south and east of Rome. Here the Roman Appian Way runs along the inland edge of the marshes. The marshes were home to a species of mosquito that adapted to salt water and was also a carrier

of malaria, which plagued the region since ancient times. Roman soldiers marching south along the Appian Way made it a point to hurry and get past the marshes as quickly as possible.

Over the centuries there were various efforts to drain the marshes. In 1929, the Fascist government of Italy began an ambitious ten-year project of dikes, pumps, and canals that drained the swamps, cleared out the mosquitoes, and made the land available to settlers, mostly veterans of the last war, who were given a house and land and agricultural equipment with which to start a family farm. The program was a success and a propaganda boon for Mussolini and Fascism.

But now, if Allied forces approached Rome, the Germans could, and ultimately did, destroy the pumps, demolish the tidal gates, and deliberately re-flood the region to turn it back into salt marshes, which would the Allies to fight their way through a mosquito-infested swamp.

The Germans were blowing up everything else across Italy as they retreated. They also seized stocks of food, creating a famine. By now, the Germans were treating Italy as harshly as any of the other European countries they occupied. Even Benito Mussolini and his cabinet ministers, the puppet government of the Italian Social Republic, were pressing the Germans to ease up on the looting and destruction. Their pleas went unanswered.

It took until November for the Allies to reach the Gustav Line. On the Adriatic coast, where the terrain was a little easier and the German defenders fewer, Montgomery had ambitions of breaking through the Gustav Line and taking advantage of Route 5 to march his army westward, across the enemy rear, which would force a withdrawal and free up Clark's Army to continue their advance.

Easier said than done. The Eighth Army was short on supplies. Allied supply ships were arriving regularly at the port of Bari on the Adriatic coast, but Allied command was giving first priority to building up the Fifteenth Air Force, now commanded by General James Doolittle, he of the Doolittle Raid. This force, based in southern Italy, was thought crucial to stepping up the pressure on German industry. They could reach targets in southern Germany, Austria, and the Balkans that were unreachable from England.

Here on the east coast, the German defenses took advantage of the River Sangro, assisted by heavy rains that caused the river to flood and kept Allied warplanes out of the sky. Pontoon bridges built across the river were swept away in the floodwaters. Beyond the Sangro was another river, the Moro, then the town of Ortona, and beyond that, the eastern end of Route 5, the potential path to crossing the peninsula and breaking the Gustav Line.

On November 27, the New Zealand 2nd Division, still commanded by Bernard Freyberg, whom we've encountered a couple of times now, crossed the Sangro and began a fierce battle to secure a beachhead on the far side. On December 6, the Canadian 1st Division began an attack intended to cross the Moro and take Ortona. Nine days of ferocious combat followed as the Canadians

went up against a German paratrooper division and a panzergrenadier division, some of the best soldiers in the German Army.

On December 21, as the bloodied Canadians approached Ortona, German engineers blew up the town. The German paratroopers continued to oppose the Canadians from the ruins of the city as a brutal battle was fought through the rubble for another week before Ortona was secure. The Canadians called it “Little Stalingrad.” They lost 500 killed, 2,000 with physical wounds, and many more afflicted with battle fatigue.

The year 1944 dawned with the German defenders holding fast. Mark Clark’s dream of liberating Rome was nowhere near reality. Eisenhower and Montgomery had both left the Mediterranean to take up their commands for Operation Overlord. South of Italy, Winston Churchill was in Tunis. His return to London had been delayed by heart problems; he was in Tunis to convalesce. From there, he proposed a plan to break the stalemate in Italy.

But that is a story for another episode. We’ll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening and I’d like to thank Phil and Mike for their kind donations, and thank you to Andrew for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Phil and Mike and Andrew help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you’d like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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I’ve been thinking about doing a question-and-answer episode, in which I would answer questions from you, my listeners. It would depend on whether I had enough listeners who had enough questions to fill up an episode, so let’s find out. If you have a question for me that you’d like to hear me answer on the podcast, send it to the email address, historyofthetwentiethcentury@gmail.com. Also please let me know if and how you’d like to be named if I use your question, and let’s see what happens.

And I hope you’ll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*; it’s time to take a break from the war, so we’re going to look at some important women singers of the time. We’ll also talk about that movie, the one I haven’t done yet. Join me *Over the Rainbow*, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I mentioned that the British Eighth Army was getting its supplies through the port of Bari, on the Adriatic coast of Italy. The British captured Bari shortly after they first landed in Italy and had been using the port since then.

On December 2, 1943, British Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, who was in command of Allied tactical air forces in the Mediterranean, held a press conference in Bari in which he assured the assembled journalists that the Germans had lost the air war over Italy. He emphasized the point by saying, "I would consider it a personal insult if the enemy should send so much as one plane over the city."

That very night, some thirty Allied cargo ships were docked in Bari, a city of 250,000 people. The port facilities were fully lit because the port was unloading cargo around the clock because of Allied supply shortages in Italy. At 7:30 that evening, over one hundred Luftwaffe Junkers-88 bombers appeared over Bari. The port had no anti-aircraft guns; Allied fighter aircraft in southern Italy were all engaged on other missions.

The German bombing attack was devastating. Twenty-eight Allied merchant ships were destroyed; fifteen others were damaged. Two ships carrying loads of ammunition exploded with such force they shattered windows across the city. One bomb cut a fuel pipeline and burning gasoline poured into the harbor. The raid shut down the port for three months, further complicating the Allied supply situation in Italy.

One of the 28 ships destroyed was an American Liberty ship named the *John Harvey*. This ship was carrying a highly classified cargo: a load of mustard gas bombs.

You may have noticed that while both sides used chemical weapons during the last war, this time around we haven't seen any of that. Both sides in the European Theater had chemical weapons, but they were both holding them in reserve, to be used only in retaliation after the other side used them first.

Neither side ever did use them. After the war, Hermann Göring said that among the reasons Germany had for not using these weapons was their heavy dependence on horses for transport. The Germans had been unable to develop a practical gas mask for horses, and feared that no matter what good a gas attack might do for the Wehrmacht would be negated by the loss of large numbers of horses and hinder the flow of supplies.

As for the raid on Bari, the *John Harvey* was bringing in mustard gas bombs just in case the Germans used chemical weapons in Italy. When the ship was destroyed, it released the gas across the harbor and the city. Over 600 military personnel at the port were injured. Allied leaders kept the gas secret even after the bombing raid, out of a fear that if the Germans learned of the presence of the gas in Italy, it might provoke them to use chemical weapons. Eighty-three of the military victims died, in many cases due to mustard gas poisoning that went untreated

because the doctors and medics were unaware of their exposure. Three months later, the US military publicly admitted to the release of mustard gas during the raid.

No records exist of casualties among Italian civilians who were in Bari that night, and no one knows how many of them were killed or injured by the mustard gas.

[music: Closing War Theme]