

The Italian Campaign

The Italian Campaign began with the invasion of Sicily in July 1943. The invasion went by the code name Operation Husky. It was the first attack on Axis-held Europe. It was also the first large scale use of paratroops in the war. Sicily was captured in a 38-day campaign that cost the U.S. 7th Army 7,500 and British troops 11,500 casualties. The Germans lost 12,000 men killed or captured. The Italians lost 145,000 men killed or captured.

“ The astonishing Americans, they fight all day, attack all night and shoot all the time”

-From a letter written by a German soldier killed in the Sicily invasion. *Time Life WWII: The Italian Campaign*

Mainland Italy was attacked by Allied Troops on September 8, 1943, just as the Italian government was surrendering to the Allied forces. The allies were now fighting only the Germans for control of Italy. Allied troops first took Salerno, then drove onto Naples. The original mission had been to drive Italy out of the war, once that had been achieved, their mission became to engage German troops so that they would not be able to reenforce Normandy, to do so they needed to push on to Rome.

The first step in taking Rome was to face the German forces at the Winter Line, which was followed by the landing of troops at Anzio. At the Winter Line, the Allies had severe problems breaking into the Lirio Valley. After months of fighting and sustaining heavy losses, the Allies were able to break into the Lirio Valley, forcing the Germans to retreat. At the end of May the Allies were finally able to break out of the beachhead at Anzio and link up with the troops moving north from the Winter Line. A night time march pushed the troops through the Germans new defensive position at the Caesar Line. At this time, the Germans withdrew leaving Rome open to the Allies. The drive to Rome cost the Allies 40,000 dead, wounded, or missing.

After taking Rome, the Allies pressed forward and met the Germans at the Trasimeno Line. This line held up the Allies for 10 days. The Germans then fell back to the Arezzo Line, which also stopped the Allies for 10 days. Each time the German's fell back, they destroyed the ports and set booby traps. On August 25, the Allies broke through the Arno Line and by September 13 they faced the Germans at the heavily fortified Gothic Line, which was 15 miles north of Florence. By October, the Allies had managed to break through the Gothic Line and faced the Germans in the Po Valley. The push was put on hold in late December as the Allies went to winter quarters. By April 20 1945, the Allies were in Po Valley and the German troops were crumbling.

For twenty months, the longest sustained Allied drive of the war, the Allies were able to keep 20 German divisions tied up. If not for the Italian campaign these troops would have been able to shore up defenses at Normandy, and could have dramatically changed the outcome of the D- Day invasion.