

THE DESTRUCTION OF MONTE CASSINO ABBEY BY THE ALLIES IN WW2

A STALEMATE ON THE GUSTAV LINE IN JANUARY 1944 BROUGHT ABOUT ONE OF THE MORE
CONTROVERSIAL ALLIED DECISIONS OF THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN

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US servicemen walking amidst the ruins of Monte Cassino Abbey destroyed by Allied bombers

Close to the hearts of many Italians, Monte Cassino, a Catholic monastery situated high on a rocky hill above the town of Cassino, was a symbol of peace and magnificence for hundreds of years.

However, in 1944 this religious beacon transformed into a looming reminder of Allied attrition, stagnancy, and the costliness of war.



The Monte Cassino Abbey in 1940 - Four Years before the Allied Bombing

Benedict of Nursia established the very first monastery of his new order on this promontory in 529 AD. Even before Benedict, the location possessed tremendous historic importance. In Benedict's time, the road leading to the monastery was already more than 10 centuries old and was the location of an ancient Roman temple of Apollo. As monasticism spread throughout Europe, more Benedictine monasteries were founded on the same strict standards as Monte Cassino. Inside the Abbey, monks painstakingly worked to preserve both contemporary and ancient texts, ensuring important documents and manuscripts were not lost to the ravages of time

The structure itself had been rebuilt many times due to natural disasters and sieges but remained a center of historic scholarship. The complex that stood above Cassino during World War II was constructed primarily in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many of the manuscripts preserved

within its walls were evacuated to Rome before the fighting raged around the site, however, this did not spare the Abbey itself from ultimate destruction.

As the Allies moved northward up the boot of Italy, invasion forces stalled on either side of the Gustav Line. With the failed amphibious landing at Anzio and brutal fighting at the Battle of the Rapido River, the Italian campaign arrived at a stalemate in January 1944. Four attempts were made to climb the mountain and take the shrine, and each failure led to a tremendous decline in morale. Fifth Army Commander Mark Clark recalled that the battle of Cassino was, "the most grueling, the most harrowing, and in one aspect the most tragic, of any phase of the war in Italy." This never-ending battle was one of the places where the all-Nisei 100th Infantry Battalion earned their nickname "Purple Heart Battalion."

Allied Forces assumed that the Germans were using Monte Cassino as a fortified position and observation post. Even ambiguous information regarding the German's location was believed to be valid. However, up to the last days before the bombing, Martino Matronola, a monk who remained at Monte Cassino, asserted that the Wehrmacht was not using the monastery. A number of terrified townspeople from Cassino, Matronola, and one other monk were the only ones trapped in the Abbey during the bombing.

As B-17s, B-25s, and B-26s soared over the sacred site on February 15, 1944, bombs rained down on much of the structure, reducing it to rubble. Even though German forces were camped on the mountain below, none were harmed during the bombardment. The two monks also survived unscathed, but an estimated 115 refugees taking shelter perished during the attack.

AFTER THE ALLIED BOMBINGS



In David Hapgood and David Richardson's book on Monte Cassino, they illustrate the scene as the monks emerged from their underground shelter, "The cloisters and their colonnades were all smashed. Where monumental stairs had led up to the basilica, they saw only a jumble of fallen rocks. The statue of Saint Benedict still stood in the cloister, but it had been decapitated.



Three war cemeteries were built: the "Cassino War Cemetery", housing the Commonwealth victims, the Polish Cemetery and the Germanic Cemetery.

The bombing decision came only months after Eisenhower's Protection of Cultural Property Order, signed in December 1943. (see copy on page 2364). Eisenhower details in the order, "If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men's lives count infinitely more, and the buildings must go. But the choice is not always so clear-cut as that. Nothing can stand against the argument of military necessity.

That is an accepted principle. But the phrase 'military necessity' is sometimes used where it would be more truthful to speak of military convenience or even personal convenience. I do not want it to cloak slackness or indifference."



See the actual live bombing by copying the link below and pasting it onto your browser
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kM00KDFhsV4>

The total ruin of Monte Cassino evoked mixed emotions on both sides and remains one of the most debated decisions of the war itself. Americans with loved ones and friends involved in the conflict were angry that their family members might be risking their lives to save a building.

Preceding the bombing, soldiers and spectators camped out for an optimal view of the destruction. When the initial bombs hit the Abbey, cheers emanated from the troops and reporters below.

Many American newspapers published the falsehood that the monastery was inhabited by German troops, capitalizing on the headline that the Nazis violated the religious institution to use it as a safe haven. Instead, the bombing of Monte Cassino became fodder for the German propaganda machine to smear the United States as enemies of ancient and religious traditions.

In the end, the destruction of the Abbey proved to be incredibly detrimental to the Allies. In the coming months, the German forces hid in the rubble, occupied, and fortified the site. Subsequent Allied assaults up the mountain achieved little despite heavy casualties. *Polish troops finally captured Monte Cassino on May 18, 1944, five months into the bloody campaign and four months after the monastery was leveled.*

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ALLIED FORCE HEADQUARTERS
Office of The Commander-in-Chief

AG 000.4-1

29 December 1943

SUBJECT : Historical Monuments

TO : All Commanders

Today we are fighting in a country which has contributed a great deal to our cultural inheritance, a country rich in monuments which by their creation helped and now in their old age illustrate the growth of the civilization which is ours. We are bound to respect those monuments so far as war allows.

If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men's lives count infinitely more and the buildings must go. But the choice is not always so clear-cut as that. In many cases the monuments can be spared without any detriment to operational needs. Nothing can stand against the argument of military necessity. That is an accepted principle. But the phrase "military necessity" is sometimes used where it would be more truthful to speak of military convenience or even of personal convenience. I do not want it to cloak slackness or indifference.

It is a responsibility of higher commanders to determine through A.M.G. Officers the locations of historical monuments whether they be immediately ahead of our front lines or in areas occupied by us. This information passed to lower echelons through normal channels places the responsibility on all Commanders of complying with the spirit of this letter.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER,
General, U. S. Army,
Commander-in-Chief.

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Shultz

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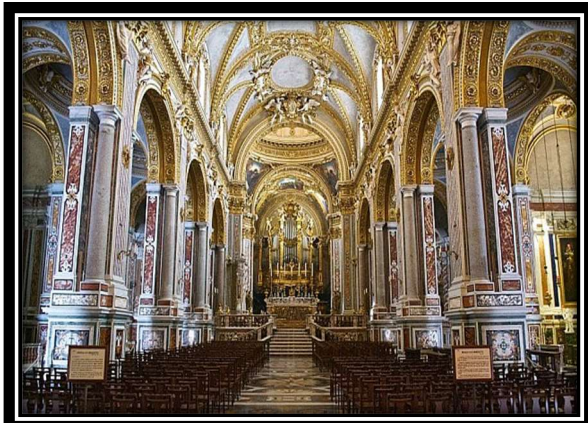
Eisenhower's Protection of Cultural Monuments Order, December 29, 1943, File: CAD 000.4 (3-25-43) (1), Sec. 2, Security Classified General Correspondence, 1943-July 1949, General Records, Civil Affairs Division, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, RG 165.
Courtesy of The National Archives.

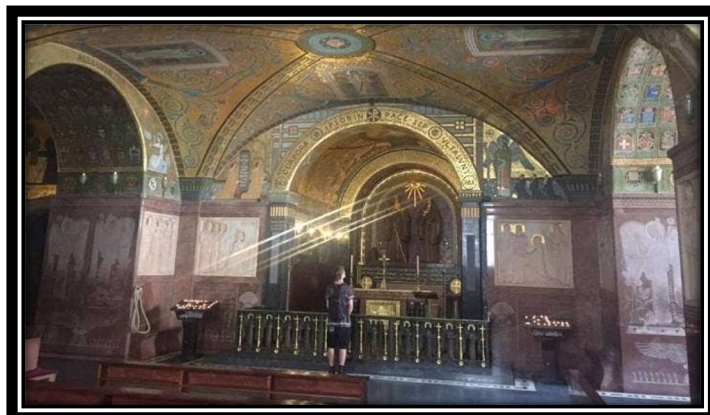
MONTE CASSINO REBUILT AFTER WW2



Monte Cassino as seen today

PICTURES OF THE REBUILT MONTE CASSINO





The immaculately maintained Commonwealth War Cemetery in Cassino Italy

**THE WORLDS OLDEST BEER-BREWING ABBEY..... IS STARTING
PRODUCTION AGAIN**

Beer lovers around the world rejoice because a new “abbey beer” is coming to town straight from Italy *and the oldest beer-producing monastery in the world.*



The Montecassino Abbey is found in the region of Lazio, In Italy.

The Montecassino Abbey was founded in 529 AD by Saint Benedict of Nursia and it's the birthplace of the Benedictine order, *but it's also the oldest monastery in the world known for its beer producing activity* – its beer was already famous throughout Europe in the 15th century.



Montecassino's beer was already known around Europe in the 15th century. Photo by Keith Bedford/The Boston Globe via Getty Images



The brewery at Montecassino will look very much like this one found in Rochefort Abbey in Belgium

The process started with a complete restoration of the abbey's 700 acres of land, which had lain idle for more than thirty years – after that, the production team sowed barley in December and reaped it for the first time on 11 July, the day dedicated to Saint Benedict. This first harvest is going to be refined both in a Peroni establishment and in the abbey following the traditional recipe, producing an “abbey beer” that will have a 6.5% alcohol content. Abbey beers are a “subspecies” of Trappist beers, produced by only eleven monasteries in the world – six of which are in Belgium. They all have some features in common, though, mainly a traditional recipe and a production made using only local resources.



A monk oversees production in Rochefort Abbey

Montecassino is also brushing up on its beekeeping history by starting the production of honey. The abbey hopes to create a complete experience for both beer and honey, from production to degustation, that the abbey's pilgrims will be able to enjoy during their stay.



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HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM WHAT APPEARS TO BE AUTHENTIC WEBSITES
I CANNOT ENSURE THAT ALL THE DATA IN THIS ARTICLE IS ACCURATE AND CORRECT.