

5TH ARMY ANTI-AIRCRAFT

SALERNO ^{to} FLORENCE

9 SEPTEMBER 1943 • 8 SEPTEMBER 1944



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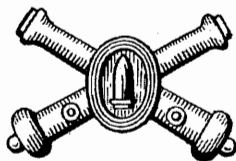
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FIFTH ARMY ANTIAIRCRAFT ARTILLERY

SALERNO
TO
FLORENCE

9 September 1943 - 8 September 1944



Prepared by the Antiaircraft Artillery Section
Headquarters, Fifth Army

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HEADQUARTERS FIFTH ARMY

*To the Officers and Men of the Antiaircraft Artillery Units,
Fifth Army :*

You have made history in more ways than one. You were part of those brave Allied troops of all branches who smashed their way up the Italian peninsula to take Rome from the south—a task the mighty Hannibal failed to accomplish. Together with the Allied air arm, you stopped the Luftwaffe from blasting the valorous Anzio force from existence.

Everywhere in Italy you have stopped the German Air Force consistently whenever the opportunity arose. You have stepped into new and responsible roles, accomplishing your mission each time with distinction. You have gained the admiration and respect of all the Allied troops.

In short, you have proved—and brilliantly so—the great value of Antiaircraft Artillery. I am proud of your achievements. You, too, should be proud of them. Your country is grateful.

This is your book—your record of the history which you made.



Brigadier General, U.S.A.
Antiaircraft Commander.



AARON BRADSHAW, Jr., Brigadier General,
Antiaircraft Commander.

Introduction

In the single year from the landings of the Fifth Army at SALERNO, 9 September 1943, the feathers have been plucked one by one from the wings of the proud *Luftwaffe* until today, its striking power greatly weakened, it seems practically grounded. Participating to an important degree in this major victory were the Fifth Army antiaircraft artillery units, who inched, pushed, and finally raced their way up the Italian peninsula with the infantry, the armor and the field artillery. Theirs was the task of stopping those elements of the German Air Force that penetrated our air defenses and came on to bomb and strafe our troops and installations. This they did so well, together with our own air arm, that for the present at least, they seem literally to have worked themselves out of their primary job.

Today, as a consequence, many antiaircraft units are preparing for a host of new assignments as infantry, military police, trucking companies, engineers, and field artillery, in which, if called upon, they can be expected to serve the Fifth Army with the same thoroughness and excellence as their former role. So long as the *Luftwaffe* still possesses a threat, however, enough AAA units to meet it will continue their normal roles. Others, if used on other tasks during periods of relative inactivity, will continue to keep their guns handy and themselves ready for prompt return to the battle should the *Luftwaffe* show signs of revival.

To celebrate the first anniversary of Salerno Day and to mark the achievements of the year, this short account of antiaircraft activities has been prepared for the officers and enlisted men who can look back with satisfaction on a task superbly done.

THE BOYS DONE THE SAME THING AT SOUTHERN FRANCE
BUT I DROVE MY PRIME MOVER WITH THE GUN OFF OF ONE
OF THESE BOATS.
Salerno

From the beaches at SALERNO, in the defense of NAPLES, in the crossing of the VOLTURNO and the RAPIDO to ANZIO, Fifth Army antiaircraft bested the German Air Force.

Stress has been laid not only upon the prime commitment, that of actively and aggressively fighting enemy aircraft, but also upon its value in general support. Rolling ashore at SALERNO, the automatic weapons units, which went in with the early assault waves, dug in and engaged German tanks, infantry and artillery as well as raiding planes. Early on the morning of 9 September, an automatic weapons battalion with only 7 guns ashore and ready for enemy aircraft found itself in a general melee of enemy tanks and infantry. Two tanks were put out of action by 40 millimeter armor-piercing shells. As more guns were put ashore and into hasty positions, the battalion poured fire into buildings, clearing them of enemy snipers. Mortar and enemy machine gun positions were knocked out. A



".... the early assault waves...."



"The enemy gun crew deserted their weapon."

A- GERMAN 88 M.M.

unique engagement occurred between a single 40 millimeter gun and a German 88 millimeter piece at 1,350 yards range. The 40 millimeter gun engaged the target with 75 rounds automatic fire. The enemy gun crew deserted their weapon.

The big job at Salerno, however, was the primary one of fighting off the savage and repeated air attacks directed at the massed troops and supplies in the small beachhead area, at the shipping, and at the small boats plying to and from the beaches. These attacks continued at frequent intervals day and night for the first 7 days. They failed utterly in their prime object of destroying troops and supplies on the beaches and in stopping the flow of vitally needed reinforcements and supplies. Time and again the AAA units engaged these planes, destroyed some, damaged many, and turned others from the area. Those who penetrated the defenses, in their efforts to escape destruction, were unable to bomb accurately.

Advance and Seizure of Naples.

Defeating the enemy in the battle for the beaches, the Army began the gruelling, relentless fight up the Italian peninsula. The light and heavy antiaircraft was committed to the protection of river crossings, bridges, lines of communications, field artillery, infantry, supply dumps, ports and other vital installations. Our seizure and use of the port of NAPLES brought the German long-range bomber force down from Northern ITALY in an attempt to smash the work of restoring the harbor, and later, in an effort to destroy the shipping. Flights of 25-30 Junkers 88s struck frequently in determined night attacks. Our damage was slight—the cost to the *Luftwaffe* heavy. The antiaircraft artillery was there for the first attack, and with each succeeding one, the Nazis found the defenses extended and strengthened. Failing to interfere materially with use of the port and unable to halt the steady advance to the North, the enemy soon turned his attention to the forward troops, and raids on NAPLES became infrequent.



The *Luftwaffe* fails to disrupt shipping at SALERNO.

The Volturno

With the crossing of the VOLTURNO, the German Air Force struck at the bridges and artillery with increased determination.

Flights of from 25-40 aircraft, with the pilots showing remarkably more skill and daring, attacked in wide sweeps along the river. Here the experience at SALERNO and NAPLES began to tell. In an outstanding engagement 15 October, 34 enemy aircraft attacked the 3d Division artillery. Coming in out of the sun, 20 Focke-Wulf 190s dived to the attack. Seven aircraft were destroyed in flames. The 14 which remained aloft did not attack. Four more were destroyed on the same day when 30 aircraft attacked forward infantry. The troops and supplies still flowed over the bridges, and the *Luftwaffe* had been unable to disrupt the advance.

*BUT NOT SO HEALTHY
HAD CROSSED THIS MANY OF TIMES*



"The troops and supplies still flowed over the bridges."



On the alert in the SAN PIETRO area.



90 millimeter director crew spots a "hostile."

Cassino - Minturno - The Rapido

The antiaircraft dug in shoulder to shoulder with the infantry and field artillery in the mud and snow of the bitter season before the German's winter line. With the enemy firmly intrenched in the fastness of the GUSTAV LINE, II Corps was given the mission of establishing a bridgehead across the RAPIDO RIVER. An engineer regiment had the task of building initially three bridges across this river. Over these would pass the armor to exploit the infantry attack. Enemy air reaction was expected to be sharp, with determined dive bombing attempts to destroy the bridges and strafe the assembly areas of infantry troops. The antiaircraft artillery mission was one of close support, to move up with the engineers and defend the bridges and the flow of troop reinforcements and supplies after the infantry had established bridgeheads.

(THE TYPE OF GUN WE HAD) AND THE HOLES WE WERE IN AT TIMES



".... in the mud.... before the German's winter line."

At 2000B 20 January the infantry jumped off, encountering immediate and heavy enemy opposition. At 2400B engineer and antiaircraft personnel and equipment moved, per schedule, towards the river. Intense enemy small arms, mortar and artillery fire which had inflicted heavy casualties and prevented establishment of a satisfactory bridgehead by the infantry, was still falling on the approaches to the crossing areas. Roads blocked by casualties and wrecked equipment prevented occupation by some of the antiaircraft guns of their previously reconnoitered positions. However, all guns which were able to reach satisfactory positions moved in, and their crews, despite the heavy fire, prepared and occupied the positions prior to daylight. Other guns, temporarily prevented from reaching positions, were held in assembly areas at short distances to the rear



"Red alert!" for a self-propelled gun crew manning a 37 millimeter gun and two .50 caliber machine guns.



40 millimeter gun provides antiaircraft protection for the field artillery at base of MT. ROCCHETTA.

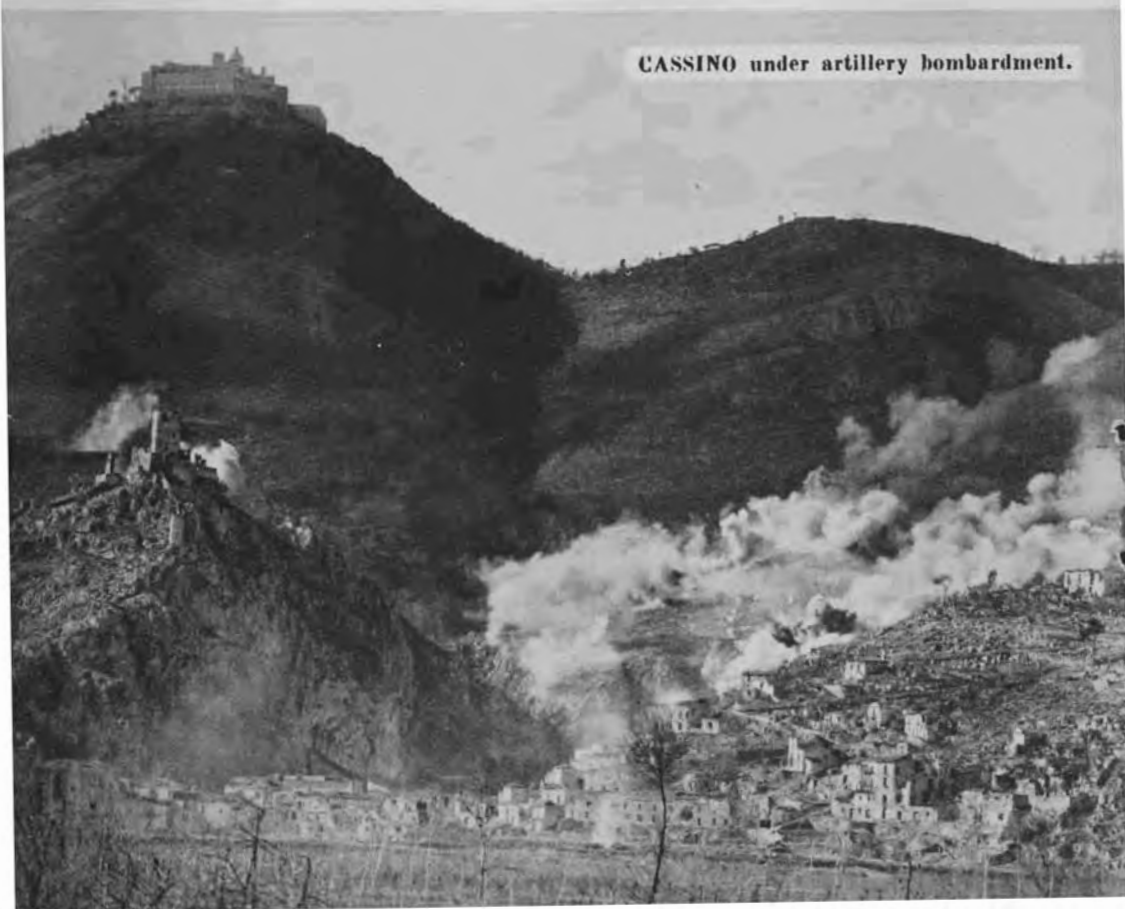
from which the crews, under fire, proceeded forward on foot to prepare their positions. Daylight found 21 of the 32 guns in dug-in positions, ready to fire, a feat which, under the conditions encountered, attested to the outstanding discipline, courage, training and determination of the officers and men involved. Remaining guns occupied positions the following day.

All units withdrew on the night of 22 January when the operation was abandoned. Notable during the operation was the morning of 21 January when infantry troops in front of antiaircraft positions in the center sector, because of severe losses, withdrew. The antiaircraft personnel, holding to their positions, provided their own ground defense until the afternoon of the same day.

To 31 December, the German Air Force had made 398 attacks—305 of which were against the forward area. Anti-aircraft fire destroyed 119 planes; an additional 86 were probably destroyed. Of these, 82 aircraft were destroyed in attacking forward troops.

Meanwhile, with inclement weather and lack of enemy air action, the 90 millimeter crews, pounded by enemy artillery, were allowed to shoot back, a mission they enthusiastically performed with a definite uplift to their morale. They soon demonstrated their ability to hit and destroy ground targets, and the field artillery acquired a valuable supporting weapon, the capabilities of which were exploited more and more as the campaign progressed. Notable during the middle of December was the technique developed of shelling enemy anti-aircraft with our 90s whenever our aircraft attacked. The fire was highly successful, forced the German flak batteries to remain silent or to withdraw and brought forth the thanks and appreciation of our Air Corps.

CASSINO under artillery bombardment.



Anzio

As our attack was being thrown back at the RAPIDO, other troops were landing far in the German rear at ANZIO. There the duel between the Allied antiaircraft and the German Air Force reached a climax. The target was vital, small, and concentrated, within easy reach of enemy fighter and bomber fields. Air attacks against the invading forces quickly began and were continued as the enemy frantically rushed troops to the threatened area.

The enemy was determined to destroy our forces by heavy bombardment or drive us into the sea. For the first time in the Italian campaign, he heavily supported his ground attacks from the air. His bomber strength in Northern ITALY and Southern FRANCE hit with the missions of destroying the port of ANZIO and its shipping and of pounding one end of the beachhead to the other.



" other troops were landing far in the German rear at ANZIO."

The iron determination of the Germans was demonstrated 29 January, 7 days after the landing, when 60 aircraft—Junkers 88s, Dornier 217s and Heinkel 177s—came down to smash the shipping in ANZIO harbor. The fire of our 90 millimeter guns caught the formation far out at sea, forced the aircraft to strike in single harassing attacks, and succeeded in destroying 5 planes. By disrupting the mass plan of attack, the antiaircraft saved the vital ships and ammunition dumps.

By that night, when the score was taken, the German Air Force had raided the beachhead 53 times. Antiaircraft had destroyed 38 planes, with 10 probably destroyed.

The strongest consistent attacking force yet seen in the Italian theater, however, was mustered by the Nazis 15 February, the day before the full-scale German offensive. For 7 consecutive days, the German Air Force, trying every known trick and using everything from fighters to heavy bombers, struck again and again at the port of ANZIO.

AGAIN A 90 M.M.

Adding up the score, a 90 millimeter gun fires at the enemy.



In those 7 days, the Nazis lost 25 planes, which were seen to crash and burn, and 23 more, which were listed as probably destroyed.

Thus, for the period 22 January to 22 February, we destroyed 68 planes—68 planes which were seen to crash. Damage to our materiel and personnel was slight. The shipping still unloaded smoothly. The supplies poured into the port and over the beaches by the thousands of tons.

After 178 raids pressed home with determination, the tempo of enemy air activity fluctuated. Raids in definite patterns followed, but each attempt was smashed. In efforts at early morning raids, 30 per cent of the attacking craft were destroyed. An afternoon engagement 29 March proved disastrous for the Nazis when 8 of 20 planes which dived on the harbor from the sun were destroyed and the others scattered and fled, some with bombs still aboard.

Failing in these methods of attack, the Germans, taking a page from our book, sought to neutralize the AAA by shelling the heavy antiaircraft gun batteries during their air raids. Our field artillery gave an immediate answer—counterbattery on call from the AAA—coordinated and definitely effective. Again the enemy had to mark off an unsuccessful attempt.

About 75 per cent of all air attacks came at night, and new techniques made our fire on unseen targets deadly accurate. This was not the old familiar barrage fire the enemy had encountered so often in the past, but fire so efficiently coordinated that individual German planes were caught by it even when they attacked simultaneously from several directions and altitudes.

The number of planes destroyed is not a measure of the full effectiveness of antiaircraft fire. A large percentage of the planes making the attacks veered from the target, jet-tisoned their bombs in the water or many times on their own troops, and abandoned the attack because of the devastating fire.

On every occasion where the enemy employed 8 or more planes, he lost at least 1 plane destroyed, and in some cases 30 to 45 per cent of his raiding force. The Nazis were forced to abandon their large-scale attacks.

In all night attacks on the port, the German Air Force obviously noted that no fire was received from light anti-aircraft units in the forward areas of the beachhead. Knowing that our heavy guns could not engage low-flying aircraft in that area without endangering our own ground troops, the Nazis began to take advantage of the night inactivity of the forward antiaircraft. Their aircraft began to come at low altitudes into the forward areas where they maneuvered while watching for targets of opportunity, upon which they promptly unloaded AP or HE bombs, or both. The antiaircraft artillery promptly countered these tactics by organizing the forward antiaircraft units to permit the firing of controlled barrages in any one or all three sectors into which the forward areas had been divided. The fears of the forward area troops that such firing would merely serve to outline their position to the enemy airmen and would, in addition, be likely to bring down concentrated enemy artillery fire, were completely allayed by the first demonstration. The massed fires of the hundreds of guns quickly drove the enemy aircraft from the area. After a few further half-hearted attempts and some ineffective shelling of a few of the light gun sites, the forward areas were added to the territory forbidden to the *Luftwaffe*.

When the beachhead was finally broken, antiaircraft fire had destroyed 204 planes and probably destroyed 133. ANZIO had suffered 291 attacks totalling 2,500 sorties.

90mm Ground Fire Against the Gustav Line

The development of the 90 millimeter gun as a field artillery piece during the winter months was brilliantly demonstrated in the Army's final assault on the GUSTAV LINE. In preparation for the attack launched 11 May, all the heavy gun batteries were moved up so that they could closely support the infantry.

From previous experience in the campaign, it was found that the 90 millimeter gun, particularly with air burst, and because of its rapidity of fire and accuracy, was quite deadly against enemy infantry concentrations. From previous experience as well, we learned the value of the gun in a counterbattery role. We knew also that the Germans feared the weapon, and prisoners taken several months before during the winter campaign had called the gun "*Ratsch-bum.*" Prisoners said that they could hear the crack of the gun, and before they could fall or take cover,



Crew inflates another barrage balloon to defy the enemy raiders.



90 millimeter ground fire against German troop concentrations.

BACK IN THE HOT OLD DAYS

the shell struck or burst. Ordinary foxholes failed to protect against the downward spray of shrapnel from air bursts, and because of the high rate of fire, many rounds often fell before dugouts with overhead cover could be reached. They said that this characteristic had a great demoralizing effect on their troops.

Therefore, in the assault on the GUSTAV LINE 90 millimeter guns were assigned 218 missions and fired 40,000 rounds of ammunition. The heavy gun fire, delivered rapidly in heavy concentrations, neutralized enemy field and antiaircraft artillery, caught enemy infantry concentrations forming to attack, denied the enemy use of important road junctions, and by spraying shrapnel upon the pack trails over which he hauled supplies, helped to disrupt some of his important lines of communication in the mountains. Batteries of Nebelwerfers were also engaged and silenced.

90mm Fire in the Breakthrough from Anzio

Preparatory to the offensive launched from the Anzio beachhead 23 May 1944, all gun battalions on the beachhead were organized for ground fire under one fire-direction center. The batteries were registered on ground targets, and prior to D-day and H-hour conducted heavy preparatory fires on troops, machine gun positions, mortar positions and enemy artillery. Shortly after H-hour on the day of the attack, 1,000 rounds of 90 millimeter ammunition were brought down on 17 enemy locations. An example of the results is given in the following intelligence report:

" Shortly after mid-day on the 23rd, 300 to 400 German soldiers were observed coming towards our lines bearing white flags and waving white handkerchiefs. The concentration hesitated about coming across a railroad bed which was between them and our lines. Fearing they might return

A 90 M.M. IN ACTION FIRING ARTILLERY



The 90's give infantry support during the ANZIO breakthrough.



The drive for ROME jams the roads.

to their lines, a forward observer on the bank of the railroad called for fire upon them. The 90s, without any other supporting fire, opened up. Immediately after the first concentration, 50 of the enemy came running across the railroad into our lines in complete disorder. The others remained where they were. More heavy fire was brought down. Two hundred rounds were poured into them, and another 100 Germans came running into our lines wildly surrendering. Remnants were either incapable of making it into our lines or retreated from where they were. As the attack progressed, and our infantry moved forward, the 90s continued to give close support to the advance. For 5 days, during the critical stages of the battle, this continued. In all, 24,650 rounds of heavy ammunition were fired. "

The Drive Through Rome to Florence

Smashing determined enemy resistance at CISTERNA, VELLETRI and LANUVIO, the beachhead forces joined with the main force from the Southern Front and drove for ROME. Early on the morning of 4 June our troops entered the outskirts of the city.

The enemy, demoralized and beaten, retreated to the North. It was a retreat which eventually carried them to the ARNO River, whence the Germans fell back on the vaunted GOTHIC LINE.

This was one of the most gruelling phases of the campaign for the antiaircraft troops. Units frequently changed positions several times during a 24-hour period so that the forward elements would have constant protection against enemy aircraft. So swift was the advance that the anti-



Welcome to the liberators in front
of ROME'S historic Colosseum.



".... set up immediate protection.... of CIVITAVECCHIA."

aircraft troops, in order to establish their most forward gun sites, on several occasions were forced to clear the area of snipers and infantry troops covering the retreating enemy.

Enemy air activity from the breakthrough at CISTERNA in May to the occupation of FLORENCE in August, went from slight to almost nothing.

As the Army pushed up the coast, the antiaircraft, always among the forward elements, set up immediate protection of the ports of CIVITAVECCHIA, PIOMBINO and LEGHORN. Several halfhearted attempts by the *Luftwaffe* to raid the ports at night were frustrated by the guns long before the planes entered the vital area.

The Antiaircraft Score

Adding up the score, antiaircraft artillery with the Fifth Army knocked 463 planes from the skies in the year since the landing at SALERNO. In addition to these planes, which had been seen to crash, 303 craft probably were destroyed. The latter were hit and burst into flame, but their wreckage was not found.

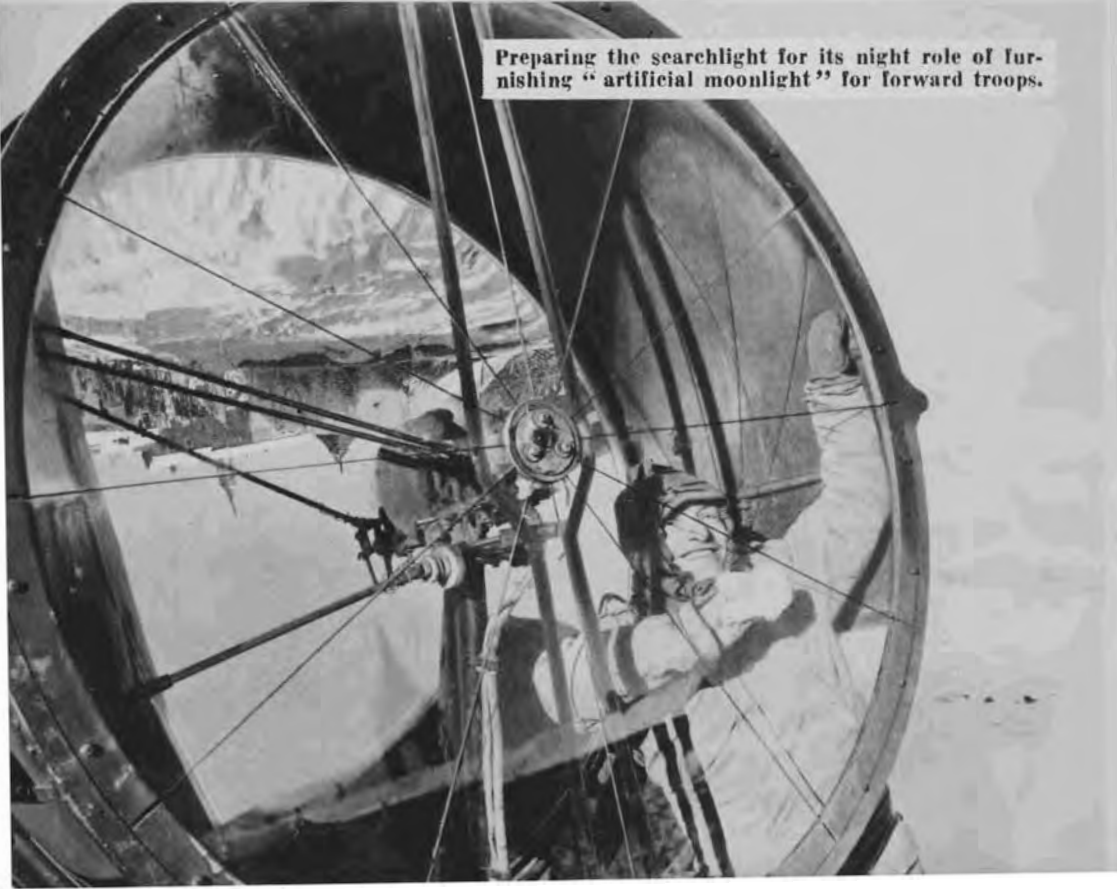
The enemy, during that period, projected on Fifth Army troops and installations 635 attacks totalling 4,670 sorties. But the antiaircraft artillery decisively defeated the Nazi effort and forced a heavy toll of destroyed and probably destroyed airplanes in approximately 85 per cent of all engagements.



Despite the snow, still on duty as usual.

Conclusion

The antiaircraft can truly look back with just pride and pleasure upon their activities during the year following the historic landings at SALERNO 9 September 1943. In that year they met and decisively defeated each attempt of the German Air Force to interfere effectively with the ground operations of the Fifth Army. Always working in the closest harmony and cooperation with our Air Force, they met and successfully surmounted their greatest test at ANZIO. With the enemy airfields almost in their front yard and our own far away, they became practically the first line of defense for the beleaguered beachhead troops who later played such an important part in the capture of ROME and the pursuit of the beaten enemy to the ARNO far to the north.

A black and white photograph showing a large, circular searchlight mounted on a tripod. A soldier in a light-colored uniform and helmet is positioned in front of the searchlight, adjusting its controls. The searchlight's lens is large and has a grid of support struts. The background is a bright, hazy sky.

Preparing the searchlight for its night role of furnishing "artificial moonlight" for forward troops.

Since the enemy's air effort faded, some antiaircraft troops, highly trained and disciplined and accustomed to close work with other branches of the army, have demonstrated their talents for other purposes. They have earned the admiration and the appreciation of the entire army by their demonstrated ability to perform creditably almost any task with a minimum of time for preparation. Our troops, having fought and won the battle for which they were initially trained, are still here as proven soldiers of Uncle Sam and have yet to receive a task which they are unable to handle. Today, in the Fifth Army, whenever an emergency arises for which trained and disciplined troops are required, the call goes out for the Antiaircraft to take over. Truly, we of the Fifth Army AAA can be proud of our contribution to the war effort during the last year in Italy.

ROLL CALL

FIFTH ARMY ANTIAIRCRAFT ARTILLERY TROOPS

Antiaircraft Artillery Command, Fifth Army

Brigades		
34th	45th	71st
35th		
Operations Detachments		
34th	45th	71st
35th		
Groups		
5th	68th	209th
8th	91st	505th
9th	107th	
Gun Battalions		
67th	87th	403rd
68th	(108th)	409th
72nd	216th	410th
73rd	401st	
Automatic Weapons Battalions (Self-Propelled)		
105th	432nd	441st
106th	434th	443rd
Automatic Weapons Battalions (40 Millimeter)		
201st	439th	630th
400th	450th	894th
433rd	451st	895th
435th	532nd	898th
436th	534th	899th
437th	536th	900th
Searchlight Battalions		
331st	351st	360th
337th		
Machine Gun Batteries (Airborne)		
688th	690th	692nd
689th	691st	693rd
Barrage Balloon Batteries (Very Low Altitude)		
102nd	104th	
Attached and Associated Units		
24th Cml Decon Co	84th Engr Camouflage Bn	
78th Cml SG Co	93rd Ord Co (AA)	
172nd Cml SG Co	261st Ord Co (AA)	
179th Cml SG Co	262nd Ord Co (AA)	

