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## Liberation of Rome June 4, 1944

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# Italians, Americans fought for freedom

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In the first two days immediately following the day of the sudden announcement that an armistice had been signed between Italy and the British-Russian-U.S. Allies, 3,000 Italian soldiers fell fighting against the Nazis in Corsica, Greece, and Yugoslavia.

On Sept. 9-10, 1943, Italian divisions saved the port of Bari from destruction and kept the Germans from occupying it. Only in the days that followed did the first motorized patrol appear at its blockade post of Polese. On Sept. 28 the Italian First Motorized Group was constituted in San Pietro Vernotico, which entered into action at Monte Lungo on Dec. 7, 1943. It underwent a cruel baptism by fire the next day. The Italian armed forces thus returned together, after so many dark trials, to success, and regained the trust of their old allies of the First World War.

The battle of Monte Lungo was the test which assured the holding power of Italian units and permitted them to retain Sardinia and re-occupy Corsica.

This dawning phase of the new Italian army was to receive the light of a second success, Monte Marrone, taken on March 31, 1944, with an action which was the first to punch a hole in the Gustav Line, a task in which the French and Moroccan troops had been unsuccessful up to then. This action opened up the way to Rome for the first time, by conquering Monte Mare, Piccinisco and the suburbs of the key position of Otina.

Worries connected to the heavy pressure exercised by the Germans against the beachhead of Anzio dissuaded General Alexander however from throwing his forces against the Liri valley, which would have thus unlocked the formidable bolt of Monte Cassino, liberating Rome and threatening to cut the road of retreat of the German forces fighting on the perimeter of the Anzio beachhead.

A fatal circumstance induced yet a different approach, aimed at joining the allied forces which had landed at Anzio

on Jan. 22, 1944 with those coming from the Gustav line before proceeding on Rome.

### The liberation of Rome

When Gen. Mark Clark enters Rome on June 4, 1944, the landing in Normandy (D-Day) is at the doorstep. In the Far East, American victory is taking shape, and on the Eastern European front, from Byelorussia to the Ukraine, the biggest general offensive in history is about to be unleashed.

The reborn Italian army is already fighting on the Adriatic front, competing in valor with its ex-adversaries of the Eighth British Army. Once Rome is taken, everything seems to precipitate. The old King Victor Emanuel III abdicates, and the Badoglio government which had succeeded the fall of Mussolini and Fascism steps down.

Italians rediscover their national spirit, and the movement which will carry Italy toward its present democratic and republican institutions starts to come into being.

The repercussions around the world are enormous. For the first time in history an American general enters a European capital as victor, welcomed by applause, a popular liberator. And this capital is the oldest and most prestigious of all, Rome. The two other capitals, Berlin and Tokyo, understand that the clock fated to signal the hour of their defeat is inexorably ticking away. In the occupied capitals, from Paris to Prague to Warsaw, people prepare to await their hour of freedom. Once again, the old, sacred fear which links every occupation of Rome to profound historic upheavals begins to spread: the birth or death of new empires.

Hannibal himself, rather than attempt to occupy the city, had preferred to push on horseback to the lowest point in the walls, trample with his horse's hooves what was called "Campo Infame" (Field of Infamy, located right behind the walls where Vestal Virgins who had lost their virginity were buried alive), and launch javelins inside the walls, with strips of cloth tied to them on which horrible threats and curses were written.

An old proverb, which is not just Italian, says that victory has many fathers, while defeat is an orphan. General Clark died almost on the eve of the 40th anniversary of his entry into Rome, but his name, setting aside the dispute on the general conception of the operations in the Mediterranean, figures with full rights among those of the fathers of the victory in Rome.

For the first time definitively united in the struggle against Nazi tyranny were Americans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Italians, as they had fought together once before against the central empires during World War I.

It was almost a prelude to the Atlantic Alliance, which still today sees free peace-loving peoples join forces to defend themselves from that which, for thousands of years now, Western civilization has seen as the worst of evils: the loss of liberty.