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Peter Caddick-Adams, *Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013. Pp. xvi, 396. ISBN 978-0-19-997464-1.

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The Allied effort to conquer Italy in the Second World War began almost a year before D-Day, consumed substantial resources, produced disappointing results, and is often dismissed as a sideshow of the larger war going on in Russia and northern Europe.¹ At the same time, military historians have found in the Italian campaign a useful source of case studies of Allied military mismanagement² and recognized that the theater saw some of the most grueling combat of the entire war, especially in the battles for Monte Cassino (December 1943 into June 1944). The growing appreciation of oral history materials has aided historians chronicling the Italian campaign and the Cassino battles from the perspective of the individual soldier. *Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell* is a worthy, often original addition to the literature on the topic.

A British army officer with experience in Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, Caddick-Adams (UK Defence Academy) is a gifted writer well qualified to capture the experiences of soldiers on both sides. As the book's subtitle indicates, he examines the roles played by troops of often overlooked nationalities in the Allied armies—the newly rallied Italian forces, substantial Free French and Polish units, and the imperial and Commonwealth forces (Indians, New Zealanders, Canadians, South Africans, and even stray Cypriots, Palestinians, and Basutos) that bolstered the British Army at that stage of the war. While other historians³ have described the roles of such contingents, Caddick-Adams draws on much new material, including both interviews and written accounts.

While the emphasis on the various national units is certainly a strength of the book, it also causes some problems early on. The introductory chapters on specific contingents, starting with the Italians, are quite disjointed and less effective than they might have been in covering the preliminaries to the fight for Cassino. The author must jump around and backtrack to fill in the context for his material; readers without background knowledge of the campaign will have trouble sorting out the details of the story. Still, Caddick-Adams says more about the Italians than do most other historians, explaining the difficulties that soldiers and their commanders confronted as they tried to take their place among the Allied forces; in so doing, he gives them more credit as fighters than they commonly receive.

Once he sets the stage and moves into the Cassino battles themselves, Caddick-Adams hits full stride and his concentration on one national contingent at a time works well, for the campaign often consisted of isolated, fragmented battles each fought by a single Allied force. He tries to combine the personal accounts of soldiers of different ranks and responsibilities, including support troops as well as combat infantry. In discussing the movement of New Zealand forces into the lines in February, for instance, he begins with a newly arrived German paratrooper observing them while men from his unit set up sniper positions; he then juxtaposes the comments of a junior New Zealander intelligence officer, who offers a fairly sophisticated description of the situation, with those of a truck driver:

Jim Wright also volunteered for the RNZASC [Royal New Zealand Army Service Corps], when he turned nineteen. At Cassino, he drove ammunition, food and petrol up to the front, observing: "after the Yanks bombed the abbey, it just gave Jerry a crater to shoot from. Their snipers were deadly. God, that was frightening." The limit for overseas service was twenty-one, so, like many others, Wright lied about his age and was posted to It-

1. For a reappraisal of this view, see Douglas Porch, *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

2. See Carlo D'Este, *Fatal Decision: Anzio and the Battle for Rome* (NY: HarperCollins, 1991) and *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily* (NY: HarperCollins, 1988).

3. E.g., Matthew Parker, *Monte Cassino: The Hardest-Fought Battle of World War II* (NY: Doubleday, 2004).

ally as a driver. He remembers his lonely night-time ammunition runs, driving slowly along roads carved through rubble. He would often pass a wrecked statue of the Madonna, which spooked him, as her eyes seemed to follow his truck: “we’d peer out into the darkness; there were craters and blown-up buildings everywhere. No lights. Total darkness. If it was a full moon, we wouldn’t go. When we got near the front line, we would just unload our ammunition. No one would talk.” (174–75)

Next come the accounts of one of the New Zealand artillerists who received the ammunition and of an artillery observer; the divisional history and other military records are drawn on as well. The depth of research here and throughout the book is impressive, as is the author’s deft weaving of his materials into a coherent narrative.

Caddick-Adams goes beyond storytelling, however, to offer a critical analysis of the campaign itself and the reasons for it, asking why it took so long and became so costly. He has a soldier’s eye for terrain and the physical conditions of combat. Nor does he neglect issues of logistics and weaponry or morale and leadership. The fundamental problem was the narrow front itself: since the lay of the land heavily favored the defenders and most avenues of attack were too obvious, the Germans, despite their limited resources and lack of air power, often inflicted much more severe casualties on their attackers than they suffered themselves. Even locally successful Allied attacks often could not be exploited properly. Beyond this, the Germans had veteran soldiers, noncoms, and officers who understood how to fight and had the advantage of highly effective tactical doctrines and infantry weapons. Allied soldiers, in contrast, while courageous enough, often lacked the training, weapons, or tactics to capitalize on their superior resources. Over time, however, they adapted to the situation and wore down the Germans through attrition and their own better understanding of how to fight in the Monte Cassino environment.

A major part of the problem for the Allies, Caddick-Adams argues, came from the higher levels of command. His assessments of individual commanders and their decisions are mostly sound and follow or improve on previous studies, thanks again to his careful research. The consensus is that the commander of the New Zealand forces, Lt. Gen. Bernard Freyberg, while an excellent soldier with a strong record leading a division in North Africa, was out of his depth as a corps commander at Cassino, where he could not fight the sort of battle of maneuver that suited his expertise. Caddick-Adams notes, too, that the subordinate division and brigade commanders who might have offered him better advice had been lost to illness or injury, with the result that poor staff work and planning led to many unnecessary deaths. He does also credit good leadership at higher levels when appropriate, especially in the case of the Free French commander General Alphonse Juin, whose largely North African troops operated well in mountainous terrain. Juin helped devise the plan that broke the line around Cassino and opened the roads to Anzio and Rome.

Typically for a history written largely from the bottom up, the book’s most notable weakness is its assessment of the higher officers, especially the theater commander, British General Harold Alexander, who had served with ethnic Germans aiding the Latvians in their war of independence after World War I and so had a healthier respect for the fighting capacities of his opponents than did many of his colleagues (69–70). The author praises him for his diplomatic approach as a higher commander in World War II, but ignores some of the more serious criticism leveled at him until the end of the book, when he discusses American commander Mark Clark’s decision to move toward Rome after breaking out from the Anzio beachhead rather follow Alexander’s plan to move south and east and cut off the Germans retreating from Cassino (279–80). He quotes the sharp criticisms of Alexander by Clark’s excellent corps commander General Lucian Truscott⁴ and the military historian Carlo D’Este,⁵ but without really engaging either one. Instead he cites the example of the Falaise Gap in Normandy as evidence that cutting off the Germans was no easy task. This is a flimsy defense of Alexander, who, Caddick-Adams admits, could not manage strong-willed subordinates like Freyberg and Clark. But high command decisions are not the true focus of the book. Most of the decisions that hurt the Allies, including the destruction of the monastery (136–40), were made at levels

4. See Fred Majdalany, *Cassino: Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longman, 1957) 256–59.

5. *Fatal Decision* (note 2 above) 365–66.

at least one remove from Alexander as consequences of inadequate staff work at the divisional and corps levels; these can hardly be blamed on a theater commander who also had Anzio to worry about.

Peripheral issues aside, this is a remarkably good book based on painstaking research into the battle and the men who fought it. Its analysis of the evidence is incisive and sensible. Caddick-Adams's *Monte Cassino* should be standard reading for anyone interested in the military history of World War II or the historical uses of soldiers' accounts of any conflict.