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Allied World Greet Fall of Rome; True to Promise, King Victor Quits



Associated Press Radio photo from U. S. Signal Corps
Tanks and jeeps carried the newest conquerors into the City of the Caesars

The capture of the Eternal City—first Axis capital to fall to the Allies—came on the 275th day of the Italian invasion and realized the political and psychological objective of the entire campaign. Yet for the Allied Armies the fall of Rome was rather the beginning than the end of the job. Paced by the air forces, without a pause the troops rolled on through the city and across the Tiber in a drive aimed at smashing completely the retreating German forces.

Key: The key move in the triumph came early in the week when the Fifth Army cracked open the Nazis' bristling defense line stretching from Valmontone on the Via Casilina through Velletri on the Appian Way and Lanuvio on the south side of the Albans. Pursuing disorganized Germans in flight toward Valmontone from the west, Americans discovered a portion of the Nazi defense arc, including pillboxes and trenches, had been left unmanned at the base of Mount Artemisio, overlooking Velletri. Five days later, a force of Yanks scrambled up the steep slopes by moonlight. Outflanked, the Germans pulled out of Velletri. The road to Rome now lay open.

After that, as Valmontone fell and the Eighth Army in the south smashed its way up the Via Casilina to join the Fifth, the battle turned into an unequal contest between overpowering Allied armor and infantry and German rearguard units. But the Germans fought on fiercely. They stuck in Lanuvio until the Allies blasted them out with phosphorus shells. Many escaped the trap between the Fifth and Eighth Armies by fleeing eastward along secondary roads into the mountains.

Yet within a 24-hour period, the Yanks surged 15 miles along the Via Casilina to the outskirts of Rome, smashing through the enemy batteries of self-propelled 88-millimeter guns. So swift was the advance that large numbers of Germans were by-passed or pocketed in surrounding terrain, while prisoners taken since the offensive began mounted above 20,000. Daniel De Luce, Associated Press war correspondent, told how a spearhead of 24 Sherman tanks, 8 armored cars, and 150 American and Canadian infantrymen surged to the edge of Rome on the morning of Sunday June 4, and there ran into last-ditch opposition: "Old men and young girls and toddling children were waving the Americans on when the fire of German 88-millimeter guns knocked out the leading tank and snipers started pouring machine-gun fire from hide-outs next to a white church whose bells were ringing for early mass."

U.S. General Mark Clark

Right up with his troops, Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark, commander of the Fifth Army, reached the outskirts of Rome and Lake Bolsena, 50 miles above Rome. Their job was to smash as much of the enemy's fighting potential as possible before the German commanders could reorganize for a new stand further north. Already some observers were predicting that the Germans had suffered enough damage to make it unlikely that they could stand on a new defense south of the Po Valley, 250 miles to the north.

Welcome: Unlike Naples, where the Germans wrecked buildings and utilities before withdrawing last September, Rome appeared to be relatively unscarred when the Allies rolled in, with only the railroad marshaling yards—a constant target for Allied bombers—heavily damaged.

Zeke Cook, NEWSWEEK's correspondent with the Fifth Army, was one of the first reporters on the scene. He cabled: "I entered Rome with the victorious Fifth Army at 3.30 Monday morning, June 5, after having spent hours lying in a ditch and crouching in foxholes in the suburbs, dodging snipers and enemy shells.

"With the speed of the enemy withdrawal, it was obvious Saturday night that Rome's capture would come very soon. Allied divisions raced up routes 6 and 7 and all the roads to Rome. The outfits tried to achieve the proper order, with tanks first and then tank destroyers. Although the men had five days' mountain fighting behind them and had marched to Rome despite loggy legs and bleary eyes, they arrived in good spirits. As they drove through the moonlit streets, hundreds of the populace leaned out of windows, shouted 'Vivas!' clapped hands, and rushed out offering vino despite the lateness of the hour."

The same morning Pope Pius XII came out on a balcony in the Vatican to survey the crowds in St. Peter's Square. About the same time two GI's added a touch of comedy by climbing up to the Palazzo Venezia balcony—once Mussolini's favorite speaking platform. One of them, whose mimicking gestures included a jutting chin, made an uncomplimentary speech about the Duce while a crowd of Italians cheered below, although they could not understand a word.

Repercussions: As the Allies went about the job of taking over the city, the fall of Rome produced repercussions in all corners of the world. In both Allied and enemy capitals there were statements and speeches. In Washington President Roosevelt on the evening of June 5 made a radio address in which he proclaimed the event to the nation and the world.

Stressing that Rome was the first Axis capital taken by the Allies, the President remarked—"One up and two to go." He gave the event a symbolic twist when he

said: "Our victory comes at an excellent time . . . while our forces are poised for another strike at Western Europe." He emphasized the difficulty still ahead in bringing relief to Rome, left "on the verge of starvation" by the Germans. He warned that while victory was certain, Germany had not yet been "driven to the point where she will be unable to recommence world conquest a generation hence."

That was an address in which there throbbed the tones of victory. But in the Axis pronouncements there were only blustering excuses and hollow-sounding heroics. In a statement from Hitler's headquarters the Germans minimized their military defeat and said: "The year of invasion will bring Germany's enemies an annihilating defeat at the most decisive moment." Nevertheless, a Nazi broadcast admitted "a certain loss of prestige."

Meanwhile, King Victor Emmanuel acted promptly on his pledge of last April: On June 5 at Ravello, near Salerno, the 74-year-old little monarch signed a decree "irrevocably" turning over his regal powers to Crown Prince Humbert, as "Lieutenant General of the Realm." But Victor Emmanuel still reserved for himself the title "King of Italy and head of the House of Savoy."