EPILOGUE

Ray Sherman was with the U. S. 179th Regimental Combat Team, 45th Infantry Division. The landing took place at Anzio, Italy on the 22nd January 1944. A beachhead was established and additional troops moved in to secure the front line. On the 24th January, the U.S. 179th Regimental Combat Team and others were moved to Anzio from Naples.

On the 16th of February 1944, the beachhead was still only about ten miles from the sea shore. For a little insight as to the events that took place at this time, the following excerpts and maps have been taken out of the published book Anzio the bid for Rome, by Christopher Hibbert. (out of print)

The U.S. 1st Armored Division was being held in reserve with the British 1st Division just south of the "Flyover" bridge. The U. S. 45th Division and the (London) 56th Division held most of the front between them. The 56th faced the “wadi” country down from Buonripaso Ridge towards the sea; the 45th held the line from Padiglione to the Anzio-Albano road. The 157th RCT was responsible for the defense of the road itself and for linking the American defenses to the right-hand of the British south of the Buonriposo Ridge.

In the center, facing the “Factory” was the 179th RCT and on the right, the 180th. The 3rd Division and the Special Services Force covered the rest of the right flank from the Cisterna-Campomorto road to the sea along the Mussolini Canal.

The attack plan of the German Generals Kesselring and Mackensen involved throwing the whole weight of the reinforced 14th Army at the Allied center by night. Part of the 65th German Infantry Division and of the 4th Parachute Division was to advance through “wadi” country to the west of the main road. At the same time the 715th Infantry Division, the 114th Light Infantry Division, the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division and various units of the Hermann Goring Division were to attack on a wider front to the east of it. Once the infantry had gone through, the 26th and 29th Panzer Grenadiers, with two battalions of the new Mark V Panther and Mark VI Tiger tanks would quickly follow them.

This plan was approved by Hitler, but modified somewhat to narrow up the width of the thrust and to be led by the Lehr Regiment of select Nazis although they had never been in battle before. The time of attack was also changed from night to dawn. The German Army now would have 125,000 troops opposing approximately 100,000 Allied troops.

The German attack was heralded on the 16th February at 6:00 of a damp and foggy morning, by a devastating artillery bombardment. From beyond the “Flyover” bridge the artillery of the VI Corps, numbering 432 guns, replied with equal force. For one half-hour the air was rent with the deafening sound of exploding shells. Then at 6:30 the infantry attacks began.
Map #1 - February 16, 1944, Beachhead at Anzio, Italy.

The German General Mackensen attempts to break into the beachhead and the Allies counterattack.
Six separate diversionary attacks were made against the American 3rd Division; while the German 4th Parachute Division assaulted the British with such force that it broke through the lines of the 56th Division and penetrated behind them for almost two miles. This was a diversionary attack.

The main assault fell with fearful force upon the American 179th and 157th Regimental Combat Teams in the center of the Allied line. Both sides suffered crippling losses as the Germans forced their way between the American regiments and drove them back for almost a mile. In particular the German troops who were given the task of advancing from the “Factory” in the open were cut apart by the Americans’ rifle and machine gun fire and the Allied artillery which poured a torrent of shells onto the open ground south-east of Carroceto.

The Americans, though they too were badly mauled and several of their forward positions were overrun, and though pushed back south of the “Factory,” held firm before the final beachhead line. The Germans had gained ground along the front. They had advanced across the forward positions of the 157th RCT and of the 167th Brigade of the 56th (London) Division and had driven both the Americans and the British back.

Several companies of German infantry had penetrated the front further west and pushed deep behind the Allied lines. After dark a far stronger force of the German 715th Division infiltrated between the American 157th and 179th RCT and blasted the American tanks and infantry off the Anzio-Albano road south of Carroceto, opening up a vital gap in the very center of the Allied line.

At daylight the next morning, 17th February, another powerful attack led by nearly forty dive bombers of the German Luftwaffe was launched into this gap in a determined attempt to split the Allied front wide open. Infantry and tanks of the German 715th, 65th and 114th Divisions poured forward out of the “Factory” and down the main road; while a simultaneous assault was made down the farm track that led from Carroceto to Padiglione.

Soon the two strong attacks appeared to be succeeding; the Allied front was cracking open, the gap in the center was being forced wide enough to admit the armor, which was being held in reserve. Well inside the gap on the main road, three Grenadier Regiments and German infantry, supported by tanks, lashed out to their left against the 2nd Battalion of the 179th RCT and crushed it by weight of numbers. The survivors of this Battalion attempted to reform along a farm track about a mile in front of the “Flyover” bridge, but neither they or the threatened 3rd Battalion seemed capable of holding out much longer and resisting the German onslaught which had already torn so gaping a hole in the middle of the Allies’ front.
At 09:00 hours on the 17th, the Allied air force came to the VI Corp’s rescue with the full power of the artillery of the VI Corps and of the 45th Division supported by four batteries of ninety mm anti-aircraft guns and the fire of two cruisers on the Germans in the gap. Every available aircraft of the XII Air Support Command was sent flying to Anzio, 1100 tons of bombs were dropped during 531 sorties.

Yet for all the density of the storm of high explosives on their position, the German attacks continued as relentlessly as before. Fourteen battalions, supported by tanks, pushed still further down the road to within a mile of the “Flyover” bridge; to the east of the road a counter attack by a Regiment of the British Armored Division failed to retake any of the lost ground; to the west of it, the Germans all but surrounded a battalion of the 157th Regiment. On the far right of the American 45th Division, the 180th RCT now also came under attack while German tanks were threatening the “Flyover” bridge, which two of them had almost reached before being stopped by anti-tank guns.

The British 1st Division was called out of reserve to support the hard-pressed Americans in preventing a German break-through across the “Flyover” bridge.

The American 1st Armored Division had orders to drive straight up the Anzio-Albano road to do what it could to help the 157th RCT.

The 45th Infantry Division was ordered to make a night attack in support of the 179th. Both counter attacks failed. By dawn no news had reached Divisional headquarters from the 179th and it was feared there that they would have to be “written off.”

On this day, 18th February, the Germans made what they expected would be a final effort to break the enemy front. It was another rainy morning, hence little danger from the air. To the left, on the western shoulder of the present front line, the 2nd Battalion of the 157th RCT, less one company that had been driven back towards the “Flyover” bridge, were holed up in a group of caves and gullies in the “wadi” country south of Buonriposo Ridge cut off from both the British 56th Division on their left and from the troops around the “Flyover” in their rear. (P.O.W. Henry Kaufman was captured here.)

The eastern shoulder of the present front line was held by the 2nd Battalion of the 180th RCT. Along the bottom center of the front line, eastwards from the “Flyover” bridge, were the 1st Loyal and 179th RCT. Behind them stood the 1st Division.

Again, on the 18th as on previous days, the German attacks hammered at the Allied center, maintaining a savage artillery barrage at the “Flyover” bridge and the road that ran over it.

Tanks rumbled down the “Bowling Alley” and along the main road, swarms of infantry rushed the positions of the 179th RCT and the isolated 157th RCT in front of the “Flyover” bridge, pushing through to the Loyals.
Map #2 - February 19, 1944, the Final Beachhead Line is Established.
The Germans attempt a second counterattack and are held and defeated at the “Flyover” bridge.

The American troops on both shoulders came under heavy attack. The 180th RCT was forced to give ground, but held on north of Padiglione; the isolated 157th held out grimly in the caves and gullies.

In the early hours of the 19th February, the Germans made a supreme effort to break the front line. They over-ran a company of Loyals and were on the verge of storming past the “Flyover” bridge. The Allies brought up every possibly available man from the rear to stem the tide.

On the right a force (H-force) comprising of the 30th Infantry Regiment and the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment with tanks from the 1st Armored Division had been given the task of attacking up the “Bowling Alley” towards the eastern end of the “Dead End Road.”

On the left, a force (T-force) consisting of the 168th Brigade of the 56th Division, which had just landed at Anzio, was to move north from the “Flyover” bridge towards the isolated companies of the 157th RCT, south of the Buonriposo Ridge.

Although the enemy was still in considerable numbers between Padiglione and “The Factory,” they had been badly shaken by the barrage and had tired themselves out by their continuous exertions over the past twenty-four hours. They were far from being the strong, well-organized force that had begun the attack in such confidence.

The forces on the right moved against the Germans and forced them back to the “Dead End Road,” taking over two hundred prisoners. The crisis of the battle had passed. At the “Flyover” bridge the German attack collapsed. They began to fall back towards Carroceto, across the country known as the Camp di Carne, the field of flesh.
Map 02 - February 19, 1944, the Final Beachhead Line is Established.