

## Italian Campaign: The Gustav Line--Bombing Monte Casino (February 15, 1944)



*Figure 1.--The Benedictine Monastery of Monte Casino was the most fabled monastery of Western Christendom. It was here that Saint Benedict lived and taught and created the template for Western monasticism. The destruction of the Monastery by American bombers was one of the many tragedies of World War II. Here a group of boys are collecting mortar shells left by the Germans in the sea of rubble that was once Benedict's great Monastery. Soon after Monte Casino was destroyed, the Allies liberated Rome and the fighting moved to the north. The shells the boys have collected, all live munitions, could be sold for scrap metal. The reconstruction of the Abbey began in 1948.*

The bombing of the magnificent monastery at Monte Casino was one of the many tragedies of World War II. St Benedict founded the monastery at a mountain site where a pagan temple was located (529 AD). It was 87 miles south-east of Rome. The monks lived with a routine of prayer and farming. It was not just any monastery. It was there he wrote the Rule of St Benedict. This became the foundation for Western celibate asceticism. It was a major departure from the early Church. And Monte Cassino became a template for Western monasticism. St Benedict died (547) by which time Monte Cassino was well established and thriving. The monastery would be no stranger to war and pillage. The Lombards stormed the monastery (580s). The Monks transferred their iconic copy of the Rule to Rome for safe keeping. Saracen forces stormed the monastery (884). This should be noted. Islamicists today go on endlessly about peaceful Islam and Christian attacks, especially the Crusades. They entirely ignore three centuries of

constant Muslim attacks on Christendom. Norman forces stormed the monastery (1030). Magnificent New bronze doors for the Abbey were cast in Byzantine Constantinople for the Abbot Desiderius (1066). The scholar monk Constantine the African, died after vital translations of classical Greek medical texts. Many such texts had been destroyed by barbarian pillaging but had survived in Constantinople and medieval monasteries. A young Thomas Aquino joined the monastery for spiritual learning (1230). He would become Western Christendom's most important medieval theologian--St Thomas Aquinas. The monastery is damaged by an earthquake (1349). The buildings were repaired and extended (16th century). The Allies invaded southern Italy and German Field Marshal Kesselring constructed a powerful defensive line centered on the town of Casino blocking the Allied advance on Rome--the Gustav Line. (September-October 1943). The Allies Late 1943 - early 1944 The town of Cassino becomes a key German defence point against the allied advance on Rome. The Allies take heavy casualties atmtng to blast through the Gustav Line. The eventual bombing of Monte Casino was more out of frustration than a well thought strike. Battered Allied troops devastated by accurate German artillery fire could not believe that the Germans did not have artillery spotters in the monastery. A translation error by a British intelligence officer may have been the final straw. [Ezard] Allied artillery fire leaflets alleging German occupation of the monastery and warning the monks about the bombing (February 14). Allied bombers obliterate the most fabled monastery in Western Christendom (February 15).

## Sources

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Created: 11:06 AM 12/24/2014

Last updated: 11:06 AM 12/24/2014

