

UNAVOIDABLE HOPE

ROGER SABBADINI

CPL EDITIONS

Unpublished biographies  
and correspondence

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**UNAVOIDABLE HOPE:  
A JEWISH SOLDIER'S  
FIGHT TO SAVE HIS  
FAMILY FROM FASCISM**

ROGER SABBADINI

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*Ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle  
sì come rota ch'igualmente é mossa  
L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle*

(But already my desire and my will  
were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed,  
by the Love which moves the sun and the other stars)

Dante Alighieri  
*Divina Commedia, Paradiso,*  
Canto XXXIII, lines 142-145  
1462

This book is dedicated to the chivalrous, the cavaliers, the righteous among us, as they will be known forever by the tracks they left behind.

## PREFACE

This work details a period in the life of an Italian Jewish refugee, Alessandro (Alex) Sabbadini, who escaped Fascist Italy to America on the eve of WWII, only to return and fight in Italy as a G-2 Intelligence officer with the U.S. 5th Army. He was in the fight for personal reasons – to liberate Italy and free the members of his Jewish family who were being pursued by the fascists and the Nazis. For several agonizing years Alex did not know the fate of his family, and they did not know that he was a U.S. soldier. The United States was at war with Italy, and those circumstances precluded any communications with his loved ones on the other side of the Atlantic. He desperately sought to find his family and returned to Italy as an American soldier to accomplish that mission.

The story of the Sabbadini family and Alex Sabbadini's quest to discover their fate, is not told in chronological order but begins with the January 22, 1944 invasion of Italy at the seaside towns of Anzio and Nettuno, when Alex landed a mere 200 yards in front of the Sabbadini summer villa. In one of the great fiascoes of the war the Allies became trapped in a small strip of beachhead with their backs to the sea, facing 120,000 German troops who thwarted the Allies' plan to capture Rome and prevented Alex from reuniting with his family. Anzio/Nettuno was only 40 miles from Rome, where the fate of Alex's family would

eventually be discovered some four torturous months later.

During the agonizing stalemate, the horror of the Anzio/ Nettuno battle is documented from Alex's perspective. But the time he spent there is also used to reminisce on the history of Alex's archetypical family, in the context of the robust history of the Jews in Italy. Flashbacks also involve earlier military activities of the Mediterranean Campaign, including the fight in North Africa, the invasions of Sicily and Salerno, and the battles of Monte Cassino, all of which helped bring Alex to the doorstep of Rome and the final discovery of his family's fate.

This book is a biography, but some elements have been depicted for literary purposes. Alex's personal story is woven into actual historical events of the war. The personal history comes from Alex Sabbadini's military and other records, a series of videotaped interviews conducted when Alex was 80, a detailed scrapbook that he assembled shortly after the war entitled "*War As I Knew It*," interviews and written memoirs of Alex's nephew, Gilberto Sabbadini, who lived in Rome during the war, as well as many WWII documents and artifacts that Alex carefully preserved. In that era it was rare for a GI to have a camera and document his activities in war, but using a quality camera was part of his job as one of the "documents men." Alex was in the intelligence service, G-2 documents section; his job was to preserve and document items of military importance, and to conduct interrogations of POWs

and work with the Italian partisans. Alex accompanied the troops whose mission was to capture Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini. He witnessed Mussolini in death and sat at *Il Duce's* desk examining the Italian dictator's military and personal documents.

As a G-2 man, Alex also had personal orders that he either kept or were obtained from the U.S. government through the Freedom of Information Act. These were used to reconstruct Alex's war years, to identify the people he encountered, and to recount the battles he experienced.

Most of the events and people in this biography are historically accurate, but some literary license has been invoked to convey the essence of Alex's war experience and with the intent of portraying the essence of the events while harnessing the emotions of the time.



## **PART I: Beaches of Pleasure, Beaches of Terror**

*"I could not love thee, Dear, so much, loved I not honor more"*

Richard Lovelace, *To Lucasta, Going to the Wars*

No soldier who ever crowded into a World War II landing craft will ever forget the sounds of terror that precede a beach landing. They are the sounds of amphibious boat ramps slamming down on the shallow waters of hostile sands. They are the sounds of artillery shells splashing and exploding into the water near the landing craft as the vessels attempt to disembark reluctant gladiators onto the beach before the boats could become great watery coffins for soldiers and crew alike. They are the sounds of bullhorns bellowing, whistles blowing, and commanders urging the men to advance from protected positions into the fierce maelstrom that is so suddenly and dramatically revealed as bow gates and ramps are opened, exposing their fierce but apprehensive contents. They are the rat-a-tat sounds of 30-caliber machine guns firing from side positions on the forward bows, in desperate attempts to provide some semblance of offensive cover for the emerging troops. They are the sounds of enemy airplanes strafing the beach like raptors swooping down and preying on the exposed. They are the sounds of bullets whizzing by, close enough to hear but not close enough to spill your blood on the sand.

Those collective sounds are indelibly imprinted into the memories of soldiers as they encounter the terror of the beach. Sounds that will echo for decades as those fortunate enough to survive eventually return home and attempt to resume normal lives. While the hearing perception of veterans often fades with advancing years, the sounds of war do not; they remain in their memories as unwelcome visitors who not infrequently haunt old warriors with night terrors that are just as vivid as originally conceived but linger long after armistices have been signed, foes have become friends, and war parapets have disintegrated into relics of history

As part of Task Force 81 of the Allied flotilla, Technical Sergeant Alex Sabbadini purposefully positioned himself in front of the other soldiers on the landing craft so that he would be the first to hit Yellow Beach, the code name of the landing zone between the seaside resort towns of Anzio and Nettuno on D-Day<sup>1</sup> morning of January 22, 1944. The GIs who landed on Yellow Beach consisted of the 6615th Ranger Group that included the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion (PIB), all of whom were to land on the beach just northwest of Nettuno. Other 5th Army assault troops, such as the 45th and 3rd Divisions of Task

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<sup>1</sup> D-Day is a military term that refers to the initiation of combat operations such as D-Day Normandy June 6, 1944 or D-Day Anzio January 22, 1944 and usually refers to an amphibious landing. Thus, each military operation has its own D-Day. There is controversy as to what the "D" stands for - decision, day, disembarkation, departure, etc.

Force X-Ray, landed just southeast of Nettuno and were complemented by Task Force Peter, the British 1st Infantry landing five miles to the north of Anzio. The combined invasion was codenamed "Operation SHINGLE," named for the thought that the Allies could peel enemy forces as one would remove the shingles from a roof. For the two months previous to SHINGLE the Allies had been miserably stalled by the Germans, who were deeply entrenched on the Gustav Line in the middle of the boot of Italy just south of the monastery of Monte Cassino, a formidable German defensive position that bisected the peninsula south of Naples.

As was the case for Alex, most of these soldiers were seasoned combatants who had landed in Salerno the previous September before being blocked at Cassino. Many had fought in Sicily the previous July, and some had participated in the North African Campaign before that. Unable to break through at Cassino after months of combat that resembled the brutal trench warfare of World War I, Allied commanders decided to make an amphibious end run at Anzio, which was far north of the formidable Gustav Line at Cassino. They would make an amphibious landing there, take the Germans by surprise, proceed to the South, and outflank the seemingly impenetrable German line at Cassino before reversing direction and resuming the pursuit of the most valued strategic prize of the Southern European Front, Rome. The Southern Front would also distract the Germans and allow the Allies to

consolidate forces for the Normandy invasion, which was planned for the following June.

But there was also another, darker goal for Operation SHINGLE at Anzio . . . to kill as many Germans as possible by trapping them between the Anzio invasion force and the Allied Force entrenched in the South at Monte Cassino.

None of the seasoned soldiers crouched at the ready in the Anzio landing crafts was anxious to be the first to hit the beach and go back into combat, save one . . . Alex Sabbadini.

Alex Sabbadini was assigned to Advance Document Section Allied Forces Headquarters (AFHQ) G-2 5th Army, and was ordered to act as an "advanced agent" for the section commanded by Major General K.W.D. Strong.<sup>2</sup> While the other members of X-Ray Force were to secure the beachhead, move inland, and eventually outflank the Germans to the south, Alex's orders were to move directly from Yellow Beach to the seaside resort town of Nettuno, and to capture the German command post, which G-2 intelligence had learned was housed in

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<sup>2</sup> Oscar W. Koch and Robert G. Hays, *G-2 Intelligence for Patton* Schiffer Military History Press, 1999. The "Gs" stood for the War Department General Staff. G-1 was personnel. G-2 was intelligence, G-3 operations and G-4 supply. G-2 was commanded by Colonel B.A. "Monk" Dickson

two-story former villa converted into a hotel on Piazza del Mercato 16 at the end of *Via Gramsci* in centro città.

Alex was uniquely qualified for this mission. He knew Anzio and Nettuno, and he knew *Via Gramsci*. His family had a summer home on *Via Gramsci*, one half-mile northwest of the German command post in Nettuno. Alex understood this would be a strange homecoming indeed.

The landing craft engaged the sloping sands of the Nettuno beach with a loud thud . . . an ominous and foreboding sound that was all too familiar to warriors like Alex and his G-2 comrade, Alexander De Bondini, who had landed this way during previous beach invasions. Then came the sharp shrill of the Captain's whistle, followed by a call to move out. All bravely advanced and exposed themselves. None hesitated at the ramp, for to hesitate and not move quickly onto and then off the beach can ensure death. There are only two types of soldiers who linger on the beachhead – dead soldiers and soldiers who are about to die.

As soon as the ramp slammed down on Yellow Beach, Alex moved into the shallows to the forward position of X-Ray Force and into the familiar maelstrom of an invasion. This time, however, the invasion experience was quite different. Unlike his previous landings in Sicily (Operation HUSKY, July 10, 1943) and Salerno (Operation AVALANCHE, September 9, 1943), he knew this beach intimately because he landed just two hundred yards from the

Sabbadini summer home, Villino Silvia. Alex hit the beach as German Messerschmitts screamed by overhead, and he instinctively fell to the prone position with his Thompson submachine gun at the ready. The Nettuno beach was smooth and sloping, with no harbor, no rock walls, and nothing to hide behind . . . just sand.

At that moment, as Alex embraced the sand, everything stopped for him. He no longer heard the sounds of combat nor the terror that he had experienced in his two prior beach landings. Rather, all fell silent as a veil of tranquility overcame him in that moment . . . a sublime calmness that muted the screams of strafing Messerschmitts, the sounds of small arms and machine gun fire, and the earth-shaking impact of exploding shells. The confusion and fog of war gave way to clarity of mind and the realization that Alessandro (Sandro) Sabbadini had returned home at last.

In that instant, he was no longer Alex Sabbadini, the 27-year-old Italian immigrant-turned-American soldier. Rather, he was "Sandro" Sabbadini, the Italian boy of his youth. For a moment, he was transported back in time to that same Nettuno beach. It wasn't January, 1944; it was August, 1925. His skin was not covered by the unwashed and disheveled combat regalia that he had been living in for months. Rather, his semi-naked body was marginally covered by a swimming suit, his costume da bagno that clothed him as it did every August while the family vacationed in Nettuno. His infected feet that hadn't

enjoyed new socks for months were no longer crammed into tired combat boots digging strategic footholds into hostile sand. Rather, his feet were bare, deliciously embedded in unthreatening sand. He felt delighted as he burrowed his toes into the cool under layer of the familiar granules. These were the sands of pleasure for Sandro, the nine-year old, and not sands of terror for Alex the GI.

In stark contrast to that frigid January day of the Anzio/ Nettuno invasion, Sandro was enjoying a warm, August day at the beach with his family. Hostile bullets and strafing warplanes weren't passing by him on that beach; instead, it was a friendly soccer ball kicked to him by his closest brother, Paolo. Just as Paolo's proud kick approached, Sandro was distracted by a familiar and inviting sound, a whistle, a whistle that caused him to instinctively look up, and without a care, to let the ball roll down the beach in favor of what pleasantries might await him at the source of the distant signal. It was not the whistle of an angry war projectile of 1944. It was the sound was of the Sabbadini family whistle . . . a *fischio*, calling him to lunch on that same Nettuno beach.

It was not the Sabbadini whistle calling young Sandro to lunch in 1924. Rather, it was 1944 and he was awakened from his momentary daydream, Alex quickly shook off the old memories that now were a life-threatening distraction. He rose from his prone firing position on the wet terrain of Nettuno beach and quickly raced forward with his

comrades as enemy warplanes and exploding munitions attempted to thwart their advancement off the beach and into the relative protection of the buildings ahead. In that current moment he was running for his life on that beach, not running after soccer balls on that familiar sand as he so often did as a youth.

It was not fate that Alex Sabbadini, the soldier, had embarked a mere 200 yards from the Villino Silvia where he spent his childhood summers. Yellow Beach represented the culmination of all that had passed between that summer day in 1924 and D-Day in Anzio twenty years later. It was also not by chance that Alex participated in the first wave invasion force at Yellow Beach. As a G-2 intelligence officer during battle, his mission was to locate enemy command posts and capture strategic documents left behind as German commanders hastily retreated from the landing zone to interior positions, information that G-2 could eventually use to create an evolving document referred to as the "*Order of Battle of the German Army*" that detailed the German command structure, in addition to intelligence summaries, or ISUMs, that were passed up the chain of command as coded messages or telegrams. Alex and the other "documents men" of G-2 used information obtained from captured documents to supplement interrogations providing invaluable tactical information on the status of the enemy forces. G-2 used this information in addition to standard air reconnaissance "phantom patrols" probing of the front lines, and radio



monitoring to make critical decisions in the heat of battle.<sup>3</sup>

As they had done since the Sicily campaign, Alex and his G-2 partner, De Bondini, gained key data on the disposition of enemy forces from their interviews of Italian locals, including the partisans, as well as from their interrogations of prisoners of war and enemy defectors. Their mission during the early hours of a battle was to report to superiors the disposition of the German army so that Allied commanders could better prosecute the battle, modifying their tactics to take into consideration the status of the foe they faced.

In Naples before the Anzio/Nettuno invasion, Alex had convinced his G-2 commander, Captain Bartholomew (Bart) L. Ciforelli, that his familiarity with the landing zone and his command of the Italian language uniquely qualified him to gain critical intelligence necessary for a successful military campaign. But he did not reveal to Captain Ciforelli or others of G-2 his personal mission . . . to find his family and ensure their safety, and he certainly did not tell anyone that the Sabbadini family had a summer home in Nettuno. It was extremely fortunate for Alex, in this regard, that the Allied plan for Operation SHINGLE included the initial landing of a special Ranger Group, the 6615th, led by Colonel William O. Darby 200 yards from the Sabbadini villa. Darby's Rangers were tasked to initiate the US 5th Army invasion point at Yellow Beach between Anzio and

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.32

Nettuno, to capture the Port of Anzio, and to secure the beachhead so that the bulk of Task Force 81 could follow with its cargo of Task Force X-ray combat soldiers, command personnel, and war materiel.

For Alex, the first order of his personal business was to move directly to Villino Silvia, a four-story building on Via Antonio Gramsci just opposite the beach between the seaside resort towns of Anzio and Nettuno on the Tyrrhenian Sea area of the Italian Mediterranean, just 40 miles southwest of Rome. The two towns were nearly contiguous, stretching a three-mile length of beachfront villas along Via Gramsci, which connected the two resort towns. Anzio's claim to fame was that Emperor Nero reportedly fiddled there while Rome burned.

The Sabbadini villa was affectionately named after Silvia Sabbadini, the matriarch of the family. And, as was their custom, all homes in Rome, or elsewhere like Nettuno, were the purview of the women, while any business assets, including the Sabbadini printing factory in Rome, were exclusively controlled by the men of the family.

Fortunately for Alex and De Bondini, there was only light resistance on the beach compared to other beach landings they had experienced. Operation SHINGLE was a huge success, having caught the enemy completely by surprise. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a short-lived success, which was effectively thwarted by a rapid massive German

counterattack eventually resulting in approximately 30,000 U.S. combat casualties (48,000 total) during the four months of the ensuing battle.<sup>4</sup>

Initially, this stretch of the Lazio coast was lightly defended by the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, the 2nd Battalion of the 71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and three engineer companies that were assigned to destroy the Port of Anzio but who failed to activate the charges they set because they were caught so unaware of the G-2. Despite the modest initial *Wehrmacht* (defense force) resistance on the ground, there was substantial artillery activity and the *Luftwaffe* (air force) managed to mount 140 sorties on D-Day.<sup>5</sup> To ensure surprise the pre-invasion Allied plan specifically excluded the typical off-shore naval bombardment normally used to soften up the beach. Aerial bombardment was mostly confined to key bridges and roads to the northeast and not near the beachhead. Consequently, the Port of Anzio remained intact, as did the cities of Anzio and Nettuno, and, most importantly to Alex's relief, all the beachfront homes between the two towns, giving Alex the hope that the Villino Silvia would be unaffected by the maelstrom of munitions fire.

The Provisional Ranger Force included the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion (PIB) and the 1st, 3rd and 4th Rangers.

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<sup>4</sup> *Anzio Beachhead*, American Forces in Action Series; Historical Division Department of the Army 1947

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

The Rangers moved north to the Port of Anzio while the 509th advanced towards Nettuno, which was eventually occupied by 10:15.<sup>6</sup> While the 509th was attempting to secure Nettuno, Alex and De Bondini could move quickly to the first set of beach homes on Via Gramsci, even though there was light gunfire from snipers and residual German troops offering token resistance. There was no substantial German rearguard action since the Germans were too surprised to mount an organized retreat. At any rate, this part of the coast was poorly defended and, as a result, the Germans were greatly overmatched by the Allied invasion force. This was true for D-Day, but the tables would soon turn.

Alex and De Bondini's D-Day orders were to move southeast along Via Gramsci into Nettuno, following the 509th PIB that planned to occupy Nettuno and capture the German command post, which G-2 had learned was in the center of Nettuno. When Alex and De Bondini had almost reached the street they briefly halted between two houses before entering the street itself. Alex moved first out of the temporary cover of the buildings. However, with a highly unusual maneuver, Alex moved left and to the northwest on Via Gramsci, away from the Nettuno center and not towards it, surprising De Bondini.

Before proceeding, Alex explained to De Bondini that a small 'detour' was of critical personal importance and

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

would only take a few minutes.

Within 50 yards the quick left jog brought them to the large external wrought iron gate, or *cancelli*, of a small villa. With the skilled precision that comes only from having performed the task many times before, Alex reached through and behind the gate and opened the latch that was hidden from view.

De Bondini furled his brow as he watched the maneuver. The persistent gunfire on the street, as well as the German artillery and aerial activity, encouraged the soldiers to rush into the protection of the garden within. Alex immediately closed the gate behind them. De Bondini, virtually a spectator in the unanticipated drama, noted the squeaking of the rusty hinges of the large gate followed by a reverberating iron-on-iron 'clang' at closure.

Bewilderment added to De Bondini's already heightened combat senses as he followed Alex down the rustic walkway of the garden, a path made of large stones sewn together like a masonry quilt, with bright green moss that the years had allowed to stitch between the stones.

Alex and De Bondini headed towards what was obviously the front door on the left. Alex again astonished De Bondini as he reached into a nearby planter, retrieved a large vintage key hidden there and opened, with some difficulty, the bulky front door. Just before entering Alex

transferred his Thompson to his left hand and raised his right hand to his lips, kissed his fingers, and ritualistically transferred the kiss to the mezuzah that was affixed to the right door jam. He muttered to himself as countless Jews have done over the ages when they enter a Jewish home and kiss the symbol, "*Hashem yishmor tzetcha u'vo'echa me'atah v'ad olam*" ("May the Lord protect my going and coming in, now and forever"). Alex would reflect on these words later, for they never seemed so appropriate as the present circumstances of war now dictated.

As they had done several times before, the two soldiers made their weapons at the ready and rushed into the ground floor level of the three-story villa. With experienced precision, the two made sweeps of each floor, making sure that there were no hostiles in the building.

This particular sweep was profoundly different for Alex, however. It was not some anonymous and unfamiliar building. The stairs that he now hurriedly jumped two-by-two between floors were quite familiar to him. They were the stairs he had negotiated joyfully as a youth, making his rounds before dinner to each of his sisters and sisters-in-law, hoping for a small treat from whatever delicacies they were preparing for the evening meal. Being the youngest, he was the favorite "*Il Maschio d'Oro*" (The Golden Boy), as his mother, Silvia, preferred to call him, a position he enjoyed and of which he took full advantage.

But today was different. Alex was not the cheerful youth negotiating familiar stairs. This time he had a loaded weapon at the ready. He was scared and worried about his family. It did not escape his observation as he moved from room to room that all the windows were boarded up and all the furniture was covered in white sheets. The place was unusually and noticeably neglected, indicating to him that the family had not been there in some time. He asked himself, "Where have they all been? There's no sign of their fate . . . no trace of the family."

De Bondini must have been quite confused as he followed Alex in sweeping the house.

Only when Alex was confident that the house was clear of Germans did he confide in De Bondini the purpose of the diversion. If Alex had told De Bondini before, they may have gone directly into Nettuno.

Bondini loved his friend and trusted him, and figured that Alex had a good reason for his strange behavior. Alex opened his field pack and pulled out a poster that had been rolled up in the pack with obvious forethought. He grabbed his Thompson and went back outside. De Bondini dutifully followed. In front of the street entrance, Alex unfurled the sign and taped it to the wall that supported the *cancellò* of the Villino Silvia. It read,

Out of Bounds to All Ranks Not to be Requisitioned or Used for Any  
Military Purpose by Order of Mark W. Clark Commanding General  
Fifth Army, United States Army

The placard would ensure that no Allied soldiers would billet in the Villino Silvia. The two comrades then saddled up their gear in silence, closed and locked the gate, hid the key, and moved down Via Gramsci towards Nettuno and the military objective that they had momentarily neglected. In the end, Alex's diversion to the villa did not take more than ten minutes. If the German resistance at the beachhead and in the town, had been more formidable, and the situation more critical, Alex would have delayed his short sojourn to the Villino Silvia until things had quieted down.

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Alex and De Bondini were experienced soldiers having fought in all the major Italian campaigns, from the invasion and conquest of Sicily to the invasion of the mainland at Salerno, to the most recent stalemate at Monte Cassino. Because they were in G-2 Intelligence they were familiar with being among the first soldiers to enter German and Italian command posts, and their job was to accompany the first-line troops and capture Axis headquarters before important documents were destroyed or lost. Alex was fluent in Italian, of course, and he spoke French. De Bondini was skilled in the German language as well as



Italian, and thus complemented Alex's acumen. As a two-man team they interrogated prisoners of war, evaluated the strategic significance of captured enemy documents, and obtained valuable intelligence from Italian partisans and German defectors. They were the boots on the ground and passed their information on to Cpt. Ciforelli, who would assimilate and digest the intelligence and would eventually make a comprehensive written intelligence assessment communique, the ISUM, which Ciforelli would draft and send to higher-ups at Allied Forces Headquarters (AFHQ). Because Alex had lived in Europe and knew its culture and the antecedent politics that contribute to the war, he was well-suited for understanding the nuances of the debriefs and the resulting intelligence assessments.

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Back on track, Alex and De Bondini moved quickly but cautiously towards the Nettuno town center, which was about one-half mile from the Sabbadini villa and familiar territory for Alex. They moved from house-to-house along with the 509th, who were still sweeping the area and had not yet consolidated the Allied position as there was occasional gunfire and explosions indicating that Nettuno was not yet pacified.

They passed the familiar 16th Century Castel Sangallo fort and soon reached the *Fontana del Dio Nettuno* (the Fountain of God Neptune). Neptune was the Roman

god of the sea and namesake of the town. Both ancient Neptune and the Renaissance fort were quite ineffective in protecting the town against modern German and Allied occupiers. Alex knew that the center and *comune* of the town were just on the left, past the fountain and near their destination, #16 Piazza del Mercato where the former German command center was located at an elegant villa captured earlier that morning. Alex and De Bondini had unfettered access to the command post. Each had orders from Allied HQ originating from the Sicily and Salerno invasions which they presented to the GIs standing guard, like they had done many times before, documents that showed the creases and deteriorated edges resulting from many such cycles.

To Whom It May Concern: This is to state that Alex Sabbadini, 3626304, T-3, of the Advanced Document Section, AFHQ, attached to G-2 Section, Fifth Army . . . will act as advance agent for the section, functioning with advance agents, G-2 Section, Fifty Army until such time as the remainder of the A. D. S. reaches the combat area. For the A. C. of S., G-2, Arthur R. Block, Major, Inf., Asst. A. C. of S. G-2 Fifty Army.

The villa recently occupied by the German commander was completely intact as evidenced by a plate of half-eaten sausage and an unfinished drink, both of which sat undisturbed on the dining room table as if the diner had only temporarily paused from his meal and risen to fetch

some bread that was perhaps missing from the table.<sup>7</sup> Apparently caught entirely by surprise by the clamor of the invasion, the commandant left his unfinished meal and rushed to the beach to help repel the invaders. It was later learned that he died in defense of his position.<sup>8</sup> Luckily for Alex and De Bondini, finding a command post so intact was a gold mine for them, an occurrence not often encountered since German officers are required to remove or destroy potentially valuable documents before vacating a command post.

Alex and De Bondini went with quick deliberation to the commandant's desk that was in front of a bay window overlooking the Piazza del Mercato, where they began to sift through the disheveled stack of papers and documents left by the German commander. They were hoping to find something of tactical significance to report to Ciforelli immediately, to be followed later by a more comprehensive intelligence assessment.

As they hastily perused the documents they were astonished to discover that the German contingent on this part of the Lazio Coast consisted only of the 2nd Battalion of the 71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment, plus scattered elements of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division

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<sup>7</sup> Rick Atkinson (2007), *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944*, The Liberation Trilogy, New York City, New York: Henry Holt and Company, p. 362-3

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

with only one company of troops covering a nine-mile section of the coast nearby.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence of the weak defense mounted by the Germans, Allied D-Day casualties consisted of only 13 soldiers killed, 97 wounded, and 44 missing-in-action while the Allies succeeded in capturing 227 German troops and landing approximately 36,000 men by days end<sup>10</sup>, making the Anzio landing on January 22 one of the most successful surprise attacks in military history.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately to the Allies' dismay, and for Alex in particular, Operation SHINGLE also was soon to become one of the greatest military blunders of the war, eventually costing 90,000 combined Allied and German casualties<sup>12</sup> and stalling the Allies at Anzio/Nettuno for over four beleaguered months before the breakout in late May.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Anzio Beachhead*, American Forces in Action Series; Historical Division Department of the Army 1947

<sup>10</sup> Steven J. Zaloga, *Anzio 1944: The beleaguered beachhead*, 2005. Osprey Publishing

<sup>11</sup> MajGen Paul Lucas' self-serving remark on Operation Shingle was that they "achieved what is certainly one of the most complete surprises in history." Milan Vego. *The Allied Landing at Anzio and Nettuno, 22 January-4 March 1944 Operation Shingle*. Army War College Review Autumn 2014 v 67(4) Naval War College Press p. 123

<sup>12</sup> *Anzio Beachhead*, American Forces in Action Series; Historical Division Department of the Army 1947

<sup>13</sup> Steven J. Zaloga, *Anzio 1944: The beleaguered beachhead*, 2005. Osprey Publishing



Page 29 the Sabbadini  
brothers reunited

Page 30 Above the Sabbadini  
family

Below the Sabbadini women



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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Roger Sabbadini** is an Emeritus Professor at San Diego State University. He received his Ph.D. at the University of California, Davis. Dr. Sabbadini is the eldest son of Alex Sabbadini, the subject of this biography. Dr. Sabbadini has lectured internationally and has been an invited or a keynote speaker at many international conferences. He has presented his father's WWII story to numerous Italian-American, Jewish and military group meetings.



