

# Wartime Claim to Fame Divides 2 Italian Towns

By [ELISABETTA POVOLEDO](#) JAN. 21, 2014



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About 8,000 Americans are buried at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in Nettuno. Gianni Cipriano for The New York Times

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NETTUNO, Italy — The landing of Allied forces 70 years ago who went on to liberate Rome in World War II is now the focus of a conflict between two seaside towns over which one has the right to commemorate the event.

In the early hours of Jan. 22, 1944, the American Third Infantry Division landed at a seafront site in Nettuno code-named X-Ray Beach, as other American and British troops landed on nearby beaches in Anzio. In the decades since, the Anzio beachhead was engraved in history books as the main landing site.

For decades, the two towns jointly commemorated the landing. But this year for the first time, whether seeking to correct what they say is a historical slight or to promote their town to lure tourist dollars, the authorities in Nettuno have decided to stake a claim to the memory of the landing and mark the occasion separately by promoting X-Ray Beach.

And that is when a new conflict opened up.

“It’s a maneuver to change the history of the landing that goes against military maps,” said the mayor of Anzio, Luciano Bruschini, who has accused his neighbors of nothing short of historical revisionism.



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A display at the Anzio Beachhead Museum on the father of the musician Roger Waters. Gianni Cipriano for The New York Times

“There have been books and films about the Anzio landing,” he said. “It’s always been called the Anzio landing. In fact, troops landed along a 20-kilometer tract of coast, but they don’t call it the Anzio-Nettuno-Ardea landing.”

Anzio, he added, also bore the brunt of German bombings. “The city was destroyed by bombs, but Nettuno was barely touched,” he said. Locals say that the destruction makes it difficult to put the two cities on equal footing.

Those arguments have failed to persuade the mayor of Nettuno, Alessio Chiavetta. He envisions the creation of a study center in his town to consolidate documentation of its role in Operation Shingle, the code name for the landing along the coast.

“We want to re-establish a series of historical truths,” Mr. Chiavetta said. “We want to remember the landing as something that involved both Anzio and Nettuno for the liberation of Rome.”

As it is, Operation Shingle, which was intended to outflank the German Gustav Line between Naples and Rome, dragged out for four and a half months of bitter fighting before troops arrived in Rome on June 4, leaving thousands dead, wounded or missing.

In any case, the Italian campaign was quickly overshadowed by the Allied landings in Normandy two days after the liberation of Rome.

“Nettuno wants a Nettuno landing, but I’ve been all over the world and everyone speaks of Anzio,” said Alfredo Rinaldi, 86, a resident of Anzio who said he had been adopted as a mascot by American soldiers who landed there and had worked with veterans ever since. (Only a handful of the dwindling number of living veterans are expected for the celebrations this week.) “We can’t change history,” Mr. Rinaldi said.

Local historians note also that two of the most notorious German railway guns of the war are better known by their Allied nicknames — Anzio Annie and Anzio Express — and that the United States Navy named a ship the U.S.S. Anzio.

“There isn’t a U.S.S. Nettuno,” though the town lobbied for one, said Patrizio Colantuono, president of the [Anzio Beachhead Museum](#).

Recent weeks have seen a volley of inflamed communiqués and piqued proclamations.

Each town chided the other for not inviting it to the news conference for its ceremony, a series of doppelgänger events that include a historical re-enactment of the landings scheduled for next weekend.

“You will note that everything happening in Nettuno is listed in our 70th anniversary brochure, while with regret I note that they did not include ours,” said Bruno Parente, an Anzio City Hall press officer who is in charge of the commemorations. “That’s a bit squalid.”

Nettuno “invented point X as a gimmick to promote their city,” he added. “In the meantime, we are organizing important cultural events.”

Nettuno officials deny any intention to change history, “as Anzio implies,” said Luigi Visalli, Nettuno’s council member in charge of sports and entertainment. “We just want to highlight the importance of Nettuno.”

To support Nettuno’s claims, he pointed out that when the Allied landings occurred in 1944, the towns of Anzio and Nettuno had been fused by fascist administrators into one municipality, known as Nettunia.

Mr. Chiavetta, Nettuno’s mayor, also says he has baseball on his side. Nettuno remains one of the few Italian cities to have a baseball stadium, and many of its first coaches were the American soldiers who landed there. “We are tied to the American people,” the mayor said.

He and other Nettuno officials also point out that it is no coincidence that the [Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and Memorial](#) — where nearly 8,000 are buried — is in Nettuno, not Anzio, where there are British and Commonwealth cemeteries.

Tina Young, the superintendent of the American cemetery, said that many Americans mistakenly go to Anzio, thinking it is there. “The tension is lost to us,” Ms. Young said of the local dispute.



In the cemetery, a map of the campaign diplomatically refers to the landings at Anzio and Nettuno. “It’s kind of sad that it’s taking precedence over the sacrifices,” Ms. Young said.

While some Nettuno residents believe that Anzio wants to preserve the glory of the landing for itself, there is also a certain amount of grumbling about what one Nettuno official described as the “Roger Waters gold nugget.”

As part of Anzio’s ceremonies this year, the town will confer honorary citizenship on Mr. Waters, a former member of Pink Floyd, whose father was killed during Operation Shingle.

Indeed, Anzio kicked off the 70th anniversary ceremonies in City Hall on Tuesday by showing schoolchildren a video of the British landing at the beach with a soundtrack of Pink Floyd songs referring to the seaside city. A viewing of the band’s film “The Wall” followed.

In fact, Eric Fletcher Waters was killed on Feb. 18, 1944, at a ditch near the town of Aprilia, about 10 miles from Anzio, when Roger, his youngest son, was only 5 months old.

Mr. Waters is expected to attend commemorations in Anzio and Aprilia next month when a monument designed by his art director will be unveiled in honor of his father, whose body was never found, and all those who went missing in the war.

“It’s right to give citizenship to a man who has sung the battles of this city,” Laura Nolfi, Anzio’s culture and education commissioner, said Tuesday.

Despite their tussle, officials from both towns were expected to attend the other’s commemorations on Wednesday, including one on X-Ray Beach, which has remained in pristine condition as part of an Italian military firing range and is usually off limits to the public.

“I wanted to do more for this anniversary because I noted that young people don’t know why we have cemeteries in town,” said Mr. Bruschini, the mayor of Anzio. “It’s important to emphasize the story. We have to keep this memory alive.”

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