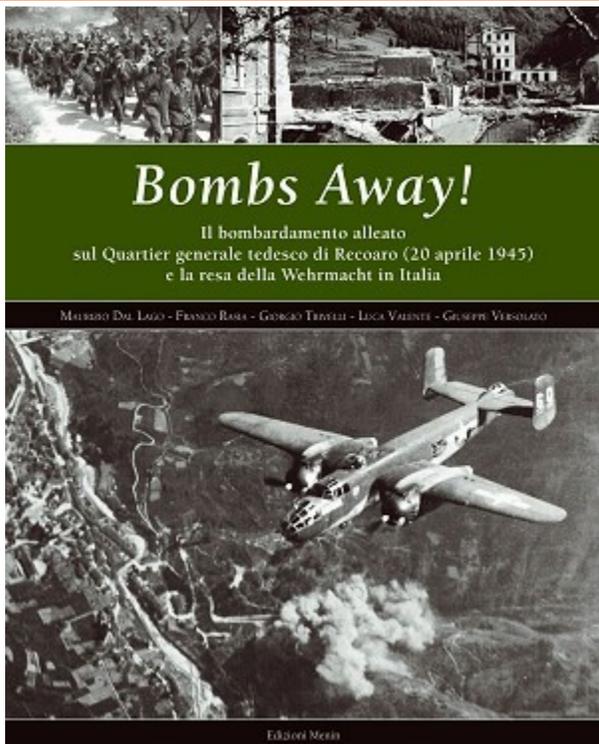


BOMBS AWAY! IL BOMBARDAMENTO ALLEATO SUL QUARTIER GENERALE TEDESCO DI RECOARO



“Bombs Away!: The Allied Bombardment of the German Headquarters in Recoaro (April 20, 1945) and the surrender of the Wehrmacht in Italy.”

On April 20, 1945, almost exactly 65 years ago, a little after mid-day, General von Vietinghoff found himself in one of the bunkers of the general staff waiting for lunch to be served when 18 American B-29J bombers suddenly appeared in the skies over Recoaro. They broke the usual calm of the Central Springs with a devastating bombardment aimed at the center of the German supreme command in Italy. This historic episode will be highlighted as well as the behind-the-scenes activity surrounding the central episode during the commemoration on April 20, 2010 at 8:30 PM in the meeting hall of the Central Springs with the

presentation of **“Bombs Away!: The Allied Bombardment of the German Headquarters in Recoaro (April 20, 1945) and the surrender of the Wehrmacht in Italy.”** (Editions Menin, 224 pages, 18 Euros). This publication demonstrates how it is possible to effectively unite the great events of history with the smaller local events. This has been achieved due to the work of five authors, Maurizio Dal Lago, Franco Rasia, Giorgio Trivelli, Luca Valente and Giuseppe Versolato, each with a different area of expertise and all working with original, period documents.

The book, containing over 250 images, many unpublished up until now, covers the last two months of the war on the Italian Front where the Allies were preparing for a final offensive and the Germans were dug in to defend their lines to the bitter end. Interwoven with this is the surrender proposal offered by Karl Wolff, head of the German SS, to Allen Dulles, head of the American Secret Service in Europe. Born from this was the secret operation codenamed “Sunrise” that wound through Zurigo, Berna, Ascona and finally Recoaro. Wolff returned to the Central Springs in Vicenza several times, even after the Allies had begun the offensive against the Gothic Line (April 9, 1945) to try and convince General von Vietinghoff, who was responsible for the German armies south of the Alps, to surrender. These events are recounted in the first chapter, then the book alternates between describing what was happening on the field of battle with the events of Operation Sunrise. As it became apparent that the Allied military superiority would be the decisive factor, the negotiations were seen as being superfluous and the whole operation was dropped. Once the Allied command made the determination that von Vietinghoff at Recoaro was “unreasonable,” he became a prime target for destruction.

At this point the book shifts gears from talking about the major events of history to looking at the smaller local events at the thermal springs. There are descriptions of all of the bunkers and air raid shelters built by the “Todt Organization” [An organization of laborers working at the direction of the

German military.] in the area surrounding the central offices of the thermal springs where the German command was posted and also in the central housing area. The results of this construction were a large number of tunnels that are still intact, making Recoaro one of the most important sites for the study and viewing of such military archeological artifacts. This authentic provenance makes Recoaro a key cultural-touristic site.

It was here, upon these hideouts of the German Generals that 18 B-25J's of the 340th Bombardment Group of the USAAF taking off from Rimini, dropped their 30 tons of bombs during that far off day of April 20, 1945. It was their 874th mission. The mission is analyzed in fine detail in the third chapter using original American documents and the testimony of several of the surviving members of the flight crews as well as photos taken during the course of the raid.

The attack had a decisive political result. The highest German military and political leaders operating in Italy – von Vietinghoff, Wolff, Ambassador Rahn and the Tyrolean governor, Hofer – met at Recoaro on the 22nd of April and, in complete contradiction to Hitler's orders, decided to surrender their troops. The fourth and final chapter of “Bombs Away!” narrates two races for time: One toward the North where the Americans and British pursued the remnants of the Wehrmacht across Vicentina and the Venetian plains in an effort to prevent them from retreating into the Alps, and the second race against time in the South, via Switzerland where the German emissaries rushed to get to the Allied Command at Caserta to deliver their surrender effective the 29th of April.

Here is one of the little-known facts of the history of the Second World War on the Italian front: The common belief is that hostilities virtually ceased on April 25th, what is now celebrated as Liberation Day. In reality the battle continued to rage until May 2, 1945 the date of the official cease-fire and in some cases the skirmishes continued beyond that date. Only on May 5th did the German paratroopers in Valsugana lay down their arms. Arms that only a few days before were used in a valiant fight against the Allied forward elements.