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THE CAMPAIGN IN ITALY

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

MY principal sources, for this narrative, were the long and elaborate series of documents prepared by the British Historical Section of the Central Mediterranean Forces ; and a history of the Fifth Army compiled by the Historical Section of the American Forces in Italy. I have read many official War Diaries, and some unofficial accounts of action in regimental journals and the like ; and I have occasionally used my own records of conversation and observation. I have also had the advantage of detailed criticism from military historians in Canada, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa.

To all these anonymous prime authors, analysts, and critics I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness and express my gratitude ; and especially must I thank the officers of the British and American Historical Sections, without whose expert labour I could have done nothing.

TO
FIELD-MARSHAL THE VISCOUNT ALEXANDER
AND THE SOLDIERS OF FIVE CONTINENTS
WHO IN A BROTHERHOOD OF ARMS
AND OBEDIENT TO THEIR VISION OF THE TRUTH
SERVED IN ITALY
THE TROUBLED CAUSES OF
FREEDOM, JUSTICE, AND PEACE

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INTRODUCTION

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The Scapegoats

THE teaching of Clausewitz, that war is the continuation of policy, appears to us, in the light of modern experience, to ignore the relation between effort and result as grotesquely as did von Moltke when he undertook to translate *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* for the sum of £75, with which he intended to buy a horse. The comparison may go a little farther indeed, for as von Moltke's publisher went bankrupt before the translation was finished, and the waiting stall stood empty after all that labour, so the aggressive maker of war in the XXth century is disappointed of even modest hope of gain; and—what is more important and more lamentable—the virtuous defender who from the beginning opposes him must also be reduced to poverty if not to destitution. A major war, it is clear, can no longer be regarded, with Sadowa for an example, as the continuation of policy; but, with the ruins of western Europe before us, as the collapse of policy.

It may therefore be asked: what is the use or purpose of dis-interring and reconstructing from complicated records the story of a campaign which is, in fact, no more than evidence of humanity's failure to be sensible, and of the slenderness of its claim to be civilised? The question may not be ignored, but it can be answered. It can be answered by considering the soldier's part as the scapegoat of a flock incapable of securing its peace by sagacity; as the scapegoat who suffers, and by his suffering redeems the people from the failure of their policy; as the scapegoat who, in extremity, reveals unsuspected virtues that might perhaps have saved his country—and the enemy's—from the calamity of war if means had been found, before its outbreak, to enlist and deploy them in the cause of peace.

It has for some time been the tendency of Britain to regard war

as an irrelevant part of its history, as a tiresome and un instructive interruption of its proper state of peace; and save in periods of extreme danger, or in the week when he brought his victories home, the soldier has no more been regarded as a useful citizen, whose example might profitably be followed, than the common hangman. It may, however, be more enlightening to see in war, not an activity set quite apart from peace, but another scene in the common drama which happens to be distinguished by a signal and decisive exhibition of human qualities that are at all times desirable, but which, for lack of the spur, do not sufficiently show themselves in peace.

What catches the general attention most readily during a campaign is some episode of dramatic endurance—such as the siege of Calais, the long resistance at Tobruk, the fighting at Arnhem—or a personal exhibition of unusual gallantry that is signed and authenticated, as it were, by the award of a decoration for valour; but is gallantry that takes the popular eye considered and studied and analysed with proper seriousness in the deeper parts of the popular mind?—Take, for instance, the case of Major Sidney of the Grenadier Guards, who commanded a support company of his battalion in the critical days of early February in the Anzio bridgehead, when almost every yard of ground was of tactical importance in the bloody area between Carroceto and the Buonriposo Ridge. The German infantry, filtering through our forward lines, had reached the gully south-west of Carroceto bridge in which Major Sidney had his headquarters. He summoned the crew of a mortar in action nearby, and leading a small attack drove the enemy out of the gully with tommy-guns and hand-grenades. He sent the mortar-crew back to their previous duty, and with a few men held the bulk of the enemy, again attacking, from the forward edge of the gully. Some, however, reached a ditch twenty yards away from which they could outflank his position, and Sidney charged them across open ground, engaged them with his tommy-gun at point-blank range, and drove off those whom he had not killed. He returned to the gully and sent all his small party but two guardsmen to bring up ammunition. The Germans renewed their attack, one guardsman was killed, and Sidney and the other were wounded. Single-handed, Sidney kept the enemy at bay until his ammunition-party returned, when the Germans were driven back. He was on his way to a nearby cave to have his wound dressed, when yet another attack was made. He ignored his bleeding thigh and engaged the enemy for a long hour until they were finally ejected, and the left of the battalion's position was made secure.

Then, barely able to walk, he allowed his leg to be bandaged, and all the next day, when contact with the enemy was so close that he could not yet be taken to hospital, his high spirit gave encouragement to those about him.

Or consider an episode in the earliest days of the campaign, when a company of American infantry, landing at Salerno, was halted by a counter-attack. The Germans were sheltered by a stone wall, the Americans took cover in an irrigation ditch parallel with the wall. A German machine-gun was particularly troublesome, but Sergeant Logan, exposing himself to its fire, shot three Germans who came through a gap in the wall, and charged the gun, two hundred yards away. He crawled along the wall until he reached it, stood up and shot the two gunners, leapt the wall and seized the gun and turned it against the remnant enemy. He drove them off and took a pair of prisoners. Later in the day he went out again, across open country, and killed a sniper who was hidden in a house a hundred and fifty yards from the American position.

There is, in these episodes, the evidence of a strength of mind, a capacity for decision, which is truly remarkable. To retain a decent self-control under the abominable storm of battle is in itself an achievement worth a little notice, and that many thousands of men did so, repeatedly and for long periods of time, is an interesting testimony to the training, to the capacity for discipline of their own reason, and to the sturdiness of our contemporary stock: it should comfort those who recurrently feel that we are in the last stages of our decadence. But to see clearly, under the most fearful conditions of war, a tactical necessity, and to arm the understanding with such an obdurate courage that fear for oneself is a together lost in heroic responsibility—to go forward and dominate a situation of roaring, hissing menace that the smallest impulse of self-preservation would bid one flee—to do that, is something very different from observing a respectable self-control. It is an exaltation of the human spirit that tells us something of the human spirit that we could not otherwise suspect. It reveals a latent magnanimity whose existence is not suggested by the ordinary conditions of life. For Major Sidney and Sergeant Logan—and there were a good many others of the same calibre—were quite certainly animated, not only by the combative instinct of a gamecock, a stag at bay, or Tom Sayers fighting on with a broken arm; but by the plight of their companions, that roused them to generous fury and a gallantry whose aggressive temper was born of an indignant resolve to save their fellows. They were men capable of reason, able to analyse a

monstrous problem and discover its tactical solution—their actions proved it—and the mere ascription to them of a surplus of fighting spirit, as in the case of a Malay running amok, can by no means explain their behaviour. There was magnanimity in their valour, as well as ratiocination; and to realise that is to think better than one often does of the race to which they belong. I mean the human race.

Such examples, moreover, though conspicuous above the average, were not isolated from common form; and there were countless anonymous good men who, by smaller instance of bravery as truly devoted, helped to maintain the almost ceaseless advance of the armies in Italy, from the beaches of Salerno to the great cold plain of the Po, against every sort of human, geographical, climatic and explosive obstacle. In this narrative of the senior European campaign there are no commoner phrases than: 'The advance was maintained against strong opposition. . . . Their objective was achieved after bitter fighting. . . . But the enemy was determined to hold the dominating ridge.'—They are repeated, with minor variation, in almost deafening persistence, and their dull heroic monotony is a true description of a great part of the campaign; but if it could be told with the detail it deserves—in a human consideration of it—the monotony would be broken, as a prism breaks a flat light into many-coloured radiance, into a panorama of rough and countless instances of burly magnanimity.

If one considers the history of any one of twenty infantry battalions, one will quickly discover some period during which it maintained, against the usual hard opposition, a fairly steady advance and suffered, day by day, fairly constant losses. There was, it is probable, nothing spectacular in its little battles. They did not make headlines in the newspapers, and even in the Army they attracted but scant attention; they drew no reinforcement of artillery, nor Orders of the Day to proclaim their success. The battalion simply went on, enduring its anticipated casualties, over harsh mountain-ridges or through lush green country full of unseen peril, to no visible goal and with a purpose that was, in effect, no larger than loyalty and devotion to the officers and fellow-privates of a particular company, or to the company in difficulty on its flank. Throughout the British Army ideology was vague, unspecified, and indifferently regarded; but regimental loyalty—which is an awareness of common interest, of common humanity, raised by limited association to a striking potency—was usually strong enough to maintain, without advertisement of its aim or virtue, a cause that

thinkers laboured to define and statesmen strove to glorify. For when, in some bloody but unnoticed advance, the subalterns and the sergeants went forward, and the sweating privates followed, was there anything but the charity and magnanimity of their souls, and the reasoned discipline of their training, that impelled them? The war, that tumbled down so much of pride, also uncovered to the view—if it be regarded—an unspent treasury of human worth; and the soldier who acquired a forceful sense of community with the Hampshires, or the Black Watch, or the East Lancshires, had perhaps a profounder knowledge of human requirement than many well-intentioned critics of our perplexed community. True charity was unleashed in battle, and furthered battle.

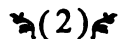
Nor, in what seems to be a fashion of our time, may virtue be restricted to the lower ranks. Intelligence, and a decisive use of intelligence, are much to be desired in any community that aspires to a civilised way of life; and in many a caravan at Brigade, or Division, or Corps Headquarters there could be seen so full and detailed a comprehension of some intricate situation—an awareness so lively of its weaknesses and possibilities—such readiness and ability to exploit a turn for the better, or repair a local misfortune—as might be of astonishing advantage in certain departments of civil life where the professional soldier's intelligence is customarily disparaged. The campaign in Italy was waged, of necessity, with intelligence as well as hardihood.

Throughout its course there were alternating periods of pressure and movement: pressure was never relaxed, and full advantage was taken—almost without exception—of every opportunity for forward movement. The Germans were never allowed to settle down, they were never given time to complete the fortification of their successive lines of defence; and in the circumstances of the war in Italy this was a very remarkable feat. The long narrow peninsula, the mountains brooding above it, and the watery plains beyond were 'ideally suited to defence'—there is another phrase that recurs in the narrative with brutal persistence—and General Alexander had never a superfluity of troops with which to break through the barriers by the sheer weight of his attack. For much of the time his resources were scanty, and reserves could only be found by the dexterous juggling of troops already committed to battle; for the campaign—its prime object was to wear the enemy down, to bleed him deeply and so weaken his offensive against Russia and reduce the strength of his opposition to the Allied Armies landing in Normandy—the campaign was always

secondary to the western invasion of Europe, and while that was being prepared, the armies in Italy could not expect much reinforcement. Yet Alexander maintained the offensive, hustled the enemy, and kept his armies moving always, save only for a little while in the frozen depths of winter. Any relaxation of effort might have brought the campaign to a stop before obstruction that had been given time to grow, and become impassable; but to maintain the effort required unflinching resolution, a mind of singular fortitude, and outstanding generalship.

Alexander's strategy, moreover, was prosecuted by senior officers—British, American, French, and Polish—whose characters, for a proper understanding of their war, should be analysed and studied in the leisurely manner that our ample histories of campaigns in the XVIIIth century permitted. It would be invidious to mention a few names, when there are so many that deserve biographical account; but how instructive, and how rewarding, would be some careful portraits of the leaders in the Allied armies—and how interesting to compare the different atmosphere and mood in a corps headquarters of the Fifth Army, and the caravans of the Eighth; or the angered gallantry of the Poles with the hard professional assurance of General Juin's Colonial officers; or the sense of *métier* in an Indian division with the Cromwellian temper of the New Zealanders.

The winning of a battle, and the losing of it, are exercises of the human intelligence and the human will; and that is why the history of our wars requires to be written, and deserves to be read even by those who deplore and condemn the whole business of war. It is unfortunate, in this narrative of the Italian campaign, that very little is said, plainly or with illuminating detail, about the human attributes of those who took part in it—the crowded concourse of events leaves no room for individual features—but in the record of events there is a multitude of human implications like the anonymous voices in the roar of a great crowd; and the narrative may provide a framework, a kind of map, for those who, by knowledge or by sympathy, can identify some of the voices.



The Impossibility of Writing Military History

THE General who has made the plan for a successful battle will believe that his plan was the prime cause of success; but the

Company Commander and his company who have fought all day, and by their valour and tactical ability have dislodged the enemy from an important position, will remain convinced that it was they who tipped the balance towards victory. With his eye upon intention, the General cannot observe all the details that help it to its goal; and with their bitter gaze upon the immediate foreground, the Captain and his men must exaggerate the importance of their own achievement. The evidence of both may be as true as the human mind can make it, and yet fall short of perfect truth.

Though many battles, in the records of modern history, have achieved the results for which they were fought, it is utterly improbable that any one has ever gone entirely according to the plan. There was always some unexpected blunder, some failure to exploit an opportunity, some loss of direction; and equally there may have been a brilliant but uncalculated recovery, a moment of inspiration on the part of a hitherto unregarded officer that helped to turn the fortune of the day, or the revelation by sheer luck of an unsuspected weakness in the enemy's defence. To attribute the credit and responsibility for success is impossible without knowing all the factors, and to be aware of every factor operative in a modern battle is well-nigh impossible. In one of the small and sudden engagements of an older time, an opportune charge of horse might win the day in sight of all; but in the prolonged and complex battles of 1944 the view was obscured by smoke, and darkness, and distance. A Commander's shrewd calculation of the enemy's reserve-strength at a given point might be an essential but not the decisive factor of victory. Perhaps a sergeant's unobserved but resolute action against a German machine-gun enabled his battalion to reach a vital objective by the given time; perhaps a fighter-bomber's lucky hit disrupted the enemy's communications and delayed a counter-attack; perhaps the perfect co-operation of an infantry company and the troopers of an armoured squadron—created by long association and their commanding officers' mutual good will—made light of some obstacle that was expected to give trouble for half a day; perhaps a bridge was captured before the charges were blown—and all these incalculable events, added to the Commander's prevision, were what gave him his victory. The sum of what happened was decisive; but a few of its component parts were fortuitous—or beyond measurement—and if any one of its components had been subtracted, what would the answer have been?

It can be said, with assurance, that in modern times a battle is unlikely to be won unless it is well ordered: the proper tactics must

be employed, there should be sufficient knowledge of the enemy's dispositions and strength, and arrangements for the punctual delivery of ammunition and bridging-material are desirable. But with equal assurance it can also be said that if all the genius of the world had united to plan the perfect operation, the operation would fail most dismally if the troops were deficient in fortitude. A plan, that is, is ultimately dependent on the soldiers' morale; and other things being equal—or not grossly disparate—a battle is won by that side whose soldiers are prepared to deny their weariness, to maintain their purpose, and to go on fighting a little longer than the others. The prime factor, that is, is the human factor; and the weakness of a factual history is that it may not linger by the way to analyse its human material.

The historian may describe, with broad accuracy, the course of events; he may explain the choice of that course in preference to any other course; he may compile a time-table and mark upon the course its significant mile-stones—but he cannot describe in detail the traffic on the road, because there is too much traffic—he can only follow the main stream—and he cannot explain why traffic keeps its momentum, because that springs from human motives—the General's and the private soldier's—with which he has no concern. A history such as this is like an old-fashioned map whose coastlines enclose a great emptiness that still awaits explorers. The empty places in histories of the war await the novelist.

How good a novel of the war in Italy might be written by someone who, being able to write well, had seen something of battle at Cassino, on the lush green shore of Trasimene, in the wintry horror of the Romagna; and knew also the strong sobriety of peasant-life and the rich comedy of Anglo-Italian society, in Rome or Florence, in the days before the war! If, in the Eighth Army or the Fifth, there was anyone with the budding mind of a Stendhal or a Tolstoy—or perhaps a Byron—and this history serves him for reference and a chart, its writing will have been useful. And if others, of more contemplative intelligence, see through its record of bloodshed and destruction, as if through the transparent leaves that guard the plates in an old book, the perdurable historic names of towns that have survived so much of war, and nurtured beauty and learning in despite of it—and if such readers catch in consequence a little assurance of the heroic stubbornness of our civilisation—why, the faults and weaknesses and blank spaces of the history may be somewhat excused.

It was a singular part of Alexander's genius that he, being

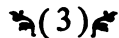
a General hard-pressed by the innumerable and often conflicting demands of war and diplomacy, saw Italy not merely as a succession of battle-fields, but as a land whose history had fashioned knowledge and delight. In Rome and in Siena, at his instigation, the master-pieces of Italian art were hung for the delectation of his armies—a history of his campaign, to be complete, should perhaps include some description of the exhibitions?—and in his introduction to a book by Edward Seago, whose drawings and paintings are true and vivid, heart-breaking pictures of the misery, and unspeakable desolation, and invincible gallantry of the autumn battles in the Romagna and on the Apennines, Alexander wrote: ‘The Italian campaign—more, probably, than any other—abounds with drama and romance. The background, as it unfolded, evoked continual memories of Italy’s great past; in the foreground in sharp strident contrast there was the momentous advance of modern armies . . . The scene called to mind Italian masters of every age and school: if the ruins of Cassino resembled the cold desolation of Dante’s Nine Circles of Hell, the countryside very often recalled the canvases of Bellini.’ He sets down, almost at random, a few of the great names of old that became new battle-honours for his troops, and declares: ‘On this historic ground the Allied Armies in Italy have themselves made history.’ A true statement, but an added difficulty to the historian of his armies.

Montgomery invaded Sicily, Mark Clark fought in Campania, McCreery took Ravenna; so had Belisarius some fourteen hundred years before. Near Capua, where Hannibal’s army was infected by luxury and lay till its strength rotted, our soldiers without holiday fought most bitterly to cross the Volturno; they had come ashore, a few weeks earlier, at Salerno where in mediaeval times the medical school of the Civitas Hippocratica had dictated to all Europe a regimen of health. We fought against an almost impregnable position dominated by the monastery of Monte Cassino, that St. Benedict had founded on the site of a Volscian fortress, that had been sacked by the Lombards and the Saracens, that was spared in the dissolution of the monasteries by English intervention; and past the promontory where Circe ruled the advance continued to Rome, expedited by flank attack from Anzio, the birthplace of Nero and Tiberius; and over the slopes of Horace’s Sabine hills.

Past Trasimene, where Hannibal caught the army of the Consul Caius Flaminius, and under the hill of Assisi where St. Francis preached to the birds and the poor, our armies pressed northward to the birthplace of the Renaissance, and angry soldiers from the

midmost states of America were shelled under Pisa's Leaning Tower, while South Africans, and the Guards Brigade, and New Zealanders saw the smoke of ruined buildings rise miserably from Florence, where new Guelphs and more savage Ghibellines strove in beleaguered streets for the mastery. Thence north and north-eastward over the desperate mountains to Bologna, famous for churchmen, cooks, and scholars, and to the well-cultivated cruel Romagna and the Byzantine mosaics of Ravenna.—And when new graves were dug between such famous sepulchres of old, there was some temptation to enquire what meaning might be discovered in Time's superb and vacillating, brutal and unaccomplished pageant.

If the significance of history is to be found in what survives it, there was a good deal of evidence that its perdurable phenomena were art, agriculture, human folly, and human charity. As the armies moved northward, more and more late prisoners of war came in, who had escaped their German captors and been succoured, in remote and lonely villages, by simple people whose only motive was sympathy with their distress. Charity was uncovered, to be set beside the pictures hung in Rome and in Siena; beside the cultivation of the fields that from Etruscan times had shaped the countryside to fertility and comeliness; beside the Fascist inscriptions on the walls, that were so sad an illustration of mankind's ineradicable tendency to take the wrong turning. And if it seems extravagant to suggest that a war was required to disclose some vestiges of human charity—why, charity was a Mediterranean invention, and in the present conditions of our world, perhaps only a Mediterranean campaign could have found them.



The Course of Events

It may be useful to summarise the course of events in the Italian campaign before describing them in such detail as space allows; and with tolerable accuracy the campaign can be divided into chapters that succeed each other in a logical progression.

In May and June of 1943 the North African Air Force and the Royal Navy disposed of a serious obstacle to the invasion of Sicily: the island of Pantelleria, which under Mussolini's regime had assumed a sinister importance in the Mediterranean. Pantelleria surrendered, and on July 10th an Allied army landed in Sicily. Sicily was conquered in thirty-eight days of fighting.

The campaign in southern Italy, and the Allied invasion of Europe, began on September 3rd, when the Eighth Army landed on the Toe, and in three weeks over-ran Calabria, Lucania, and Apulia; secured the ports of Taranto, Brindisi, and Barletta; and won the strategic airfields at Foggia. The Fifth Army, landing at Salerno on the 9th, was engaged in sterner fighting. On or near the beaches the battle lasted for a week, and from September 23rd to the 28th the Xth Corps fought for the passes to the north. Naples was captured on October 1st, and by the 5th both corps—the British Xth and the American VIth—were on the line of the rivers Volturno and Calore between Benevento and Capua.

The Germans, shaken by the surrender of their Allies—the armistice with Italy, signed on September 3rd, was announced on the 8th—were in doubt about their general policy in Italy until mid-October. They decided then to defend Rome, and several formations were brought down from the north to hold what they called the Winter Line. Based on the southern shoulder of the Abruzzi mountains, the Line lay behind a deep and elaborate system of outposts and lesser defences.

The Fifth and the Eighth Armies were engaged with these lesser defences until mid-November. Between October 1st and November 20th the Eighth Army on the east fought a series of pitched battles to advance about ninety miles from Foggia to the Sangro; while the Fifth, after crossing the Volturno by October 15th, fought slowly towards the entrance to the Liri Valley until it was checked by the strongholds of Monte Camino and Monte Lungo, south of the road from Capua to Cassino, and by Monte Sammucro north of the road.

Then, in succession, both armies attacked the main defences of the Winter Line. By mid-January the Eighth Army had crossed the Sangro and the Moro, taken Ortona, and reached the outskirts of Orsogna; there it was halted by the violence of the weather, strong German reinforcements, and its inability to deploy larger forces. The Fifth Army, reinforced by the arrival of another corps from the United States, resumed its attack on December 1st: the Xth Corps took Monte Camino and Monte Maggiore; the IInd Corps took Monte Lungo and Monte Sammucro and advanced to the threshold of the Liri Valley; the VIth Corps took the eastern half of the mountain spur between Venafrò and Cassino; and the French Expeditionary Corps carried its advance as far as Sant' Elia at the head of the valley of the Rapido.

The Fifth Army was now face to face with the inner ramparts

of the Winter Line, that closed the entrance to the Liri Valley. On January 17th, 1944, the Xth Corps attacked across the lower Garigliano and secured a foothold on the lower slopes of the Auruncian mountains, but was unable to break through into the valley. The IInd Corps was repelled in its attempt to cross the Rapido, and joined the French Corps in an attack through the mountains north of Cassino. The key to the defensive system was Monte Cassino, which defied the assault of the IInd Corps from January 29th to February 11th; and from February 12th to the 18th successfully resisted the New Zealand Corps, which had come across country from the Eighth Army. The American VIth Corps had in the meantime landed its mingled force of British and American troops at Anzio and established its bridgehead, though it had failed to cut the enemy's lines of communication or so to threaten the security of his southern front as to compel a withdrawal. The German counter-offensive against the bridgehead was finally defeated on February 28th, and the front in Latium remained fairly quiet until May 23rd.

After a very heavy bombing attack, the New Zealanders again attacked Cassino on March 15th, but made no appreciable gains in ten days of fighting; and thereafter the Fifth Army stood on the defensive until May 11th. The winter battles had brought the Allied forces into a favourable position for the summer offensive—the Xth Corps's foothold under the Auruncian mountains gave the French Corps its all-important starting-line—and created a strong potential threat to the enemy's western flank at Anzio. It had also served our primary intention in Italy: to engage, and weaken, a large German army.

In the seven-weeks pause that ensued, the Armies were re-grouped. The Eighth Army moved from the Adriatic to the entrance of the Liri Valley with a Polish Corps, a Canadian Corps, and two British Corps under command. The Fifth Army, responsible for Anzio and the Garigliano sector, commanded the VIth Corps at Anzio, the American IInd Corps and the French Corps on the southern front. Both armies had been strongly reinforced, and on the Adriatic the Vth Corps had also been augmented. The battle for Rome began on the night of May 11th.

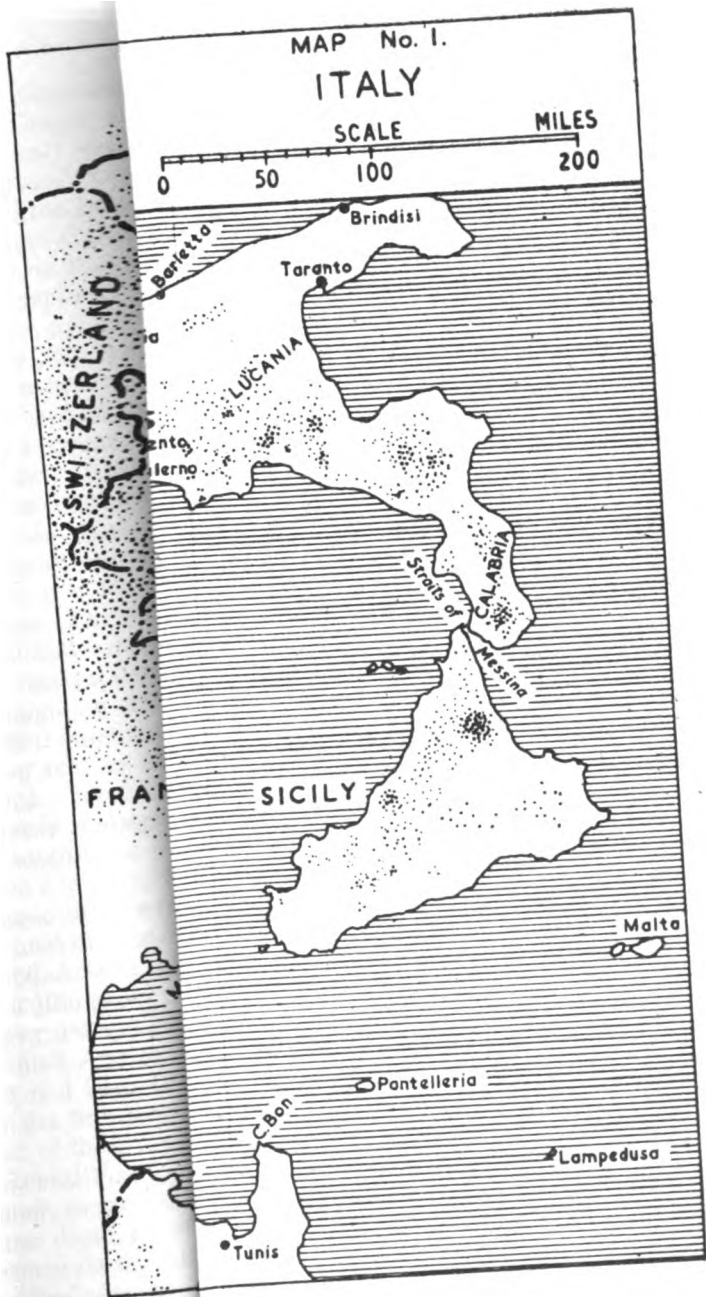
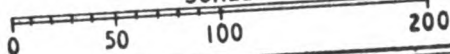
The defences of the Liri Valley were based on two lines with a common pivot on the south shoulder of the Abruzzi mountains: the Gustav and the Hitler Lines. Progress was slow to begin with, except in the French sector where the Colonial troops captured the dominating height of Monte Maio on May 13th, and continued

MAP No. 1.

ITALY

SCALE

MILES



C.B.H. 3

to lead the advance. The Poles on the mountains above Cassino, the XIIIth Corps in the valley, and the IIInd Corps on the coast were stubbornly opposed, but dogged fighting and exploitation of the gap opened by the French overcame the Gustav Line, and Cassino and the Monastery were isolated and captured on the 18th. The Canadian Corps joined the battle to force the Hitler Line near Pontecorvo on the 23rd. The IIInd Corps, after initial difficulties, made very rapid progress on the coast, and on the 23rd the VIth Corps broke out from Anzio. The German right flank collapsed, and on the 25th patrols of the IIInd and VIth Corps met in the Pontine marshes.

At the head of the Liri Valley the Germans offered a desperate resistance to cover retreat of their main forces; and the Americans had violent battles for Velletri and Valmontone. The latter was captured on June 2nd, and the Fifth Army turned west and entered Rome on the night of June 4th.

Kesselring's armies fled north in disorder, but stabilised a front again, about a fortnight later, across the southern edge of Lake Trasimene. The advance continued in green country, but now it was slow and costly. Arezzo and its knot of roads under a bare hillside were captured by the XIIIth Corps on July 16th, and continuous fighting drove the Germans back to the Arno. On the Tyrrhenian coast the Fifth Army, having captured Leghorn, gained the lower reaches of the river, almost as far inland as Empoli, on July 23rd. The XIIIth Corps fought its way into the southern half of Florence on August 4th, and a week later was in secure possession of the south bank of the Arno on both sides of the town. On its right, on a long arc bending south across a mountainous area where communications were poor and scanty, the Xth Corps somewhat thinly held the line. And on the Adriatic the Polish Corps, having captured Ancona on July 18th after two days of battle, had by August 10th pressed on to the river Cesano.

After nearly twelve months of fighting on the Italian mainland the Allied Armies were within striking distance of the objective which had been their conscious aim, their inevitable battle-field, since the first days of the landings in Calabria and at Salerno. Ahead of them rose the defences of what had long been known as the Rimini-Pisa Line, but now was called the Gothic Line. The defences, in various stages of construction but all by nature disposed in great depth, extended from Massa, overlooking the Ligurian Sea, to Pesaro on the Adriatic. They were formidable defences, and as the Allied Armies came into their shadow General Alexander's

command was grievously mutilated—not by hostile action, but by the larger strategy of the war. The French Expeditionary Corps and several American divisions were withdrawn to form the Seventh Army for service in the south of France. It landed on the Riviera on August 15th.

With little pause, however, an offensive was mounted against the Gothic Line. On the Adriatic the Poles had driven the enemy across the Metauro by August 22nd. Three nights later the Eighth Army launched an attack in that sector, and taking the enemy by surprise, made swift progress. Hard fighting followed, but in less than three weeks the Vth Corps and the 1st Canadian Corps had broken through the Gothic Line and advanced the Army's right flank about thirty miles. On September 10th, when the Germans had transferred three divisions from the central front to close the Adriatic breach, the Fifth Army attacked towards Bologna and speedily broke through the very strong defences of Il Giogo and the Futa Passes. This advance then went forward ever more slowly against increasing difficulties, and came to a halt about the end of October, when the Americans were within twelve miles of Bologna. The Eighth Army, continuing its efforts in September to reach the plain beyond Rimini, had encountered furious resistance, and it failed to reach the plain before the weather broke. The Germans were then able to reinforce their front against the Fifth Army at the expense of the Adriatic sector, where increasingly severe weather more than balanced the enemy's numerical diminishment. Ravenna was captured by the Canadians on December 4th, and the Vth and the Polish Corps crossed the river Lamone. The winter offensive was maintained until early January, 1945, when it was halted on the line of the river Senio.

The last battle began on April 9th, 1945. After preliminary operations on both the Ligurian and the Adriatic coasts, the Eighth Army attacked across the Santerno, and from there in a northerly direction through the strongly held Argenta Gap towards Ferrara; and to the north-west against Budrio. The Fifth Army opened its offensive on April 14th, and its IVth Corps advanced with spectacular rapidity through the mountains west of Bologna. Bologna, abandoned by the enemy, was entered by the Americans from the west and the south, by the Poles from the east, on April 21st. On the right flank of the Eighth Army the Vth Corps had broken through the Argenta Gap, and was advancing to Ferrara and the Po. The German armies were already showing remarkable signs of disorganisation, but there was much savage fighting on the

eastern battle-field before the river was reached. The Americans, with unremitting speed, raced north to Verona and closed the Brenner Pass. They spread into north-west Italy—where the Partisans had risen to reclaim their own land—and moved swiftly to the east along the northern frontier. The Eighth Army crossed the Po and the once-dreaded Venetian Line; entered Venice and Trieste; and seized the eastern passes into Austria. The German armies had been utterly routed, and throughout northern Italy their enormous, disorganised remnants were coming in to surrender.

The final capitulation was made on May 2nd, when the representatives of General von Vietinghoff signed their unconditional surrender at Caserta, six hundred days after the invasion of Europe.



The Allied Army which landed in Sicily on July 10th, 1943, had been under the Supreme Command of General Eisenhower, whose Deputy Commander-in-Chief was General Alexander. In General Alexander's 15th Army Group was the American Seventh Army commanded by General Patton, and the British Eighth Army commanded by General Montgomery.

In the campaign on the mainland of Italy, the Eighth Army remained under General Montgomery's command until December 30th, 1943, when it passed to the command of General Leese, and from him to General McCreery at the beginning of October, 1944. The American Fifth Army was commanded by General Mark Clark until December 16th, 1944, when it passed to the command of General Truscott. General Clark succeeded to the command of 15th Army Group, and General Alexander, having been Commander-in-Chief in Italy throughout the campaign, was appointed Supreme Allied Commander in the Central Mediterranean in General Maitland Wilson's place.

CHAPTER I

THE TAKING OF SICILY

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The New Plan

AFTER the defeat of the German and Italian armies in Africa, the minesweepers of the Royal Navy put out to make for our shipping a clear path through the sea which the Italians had claimed as their own. In the month of May, 1943, the mine-sweepers took pride of place in naval operations in the Mediterranean: the Allied Armies had destroyed their enemy on the southern shore, and won for our ships the right of passage that for so long had been in bitter dispute, but the inshore water was still foul with mines and before it could be used a safe channel must be swept. So the little ships went out, and when they had done their work a convoy came in from the Atlantic, passed through the Straits of Gibraltar on the 17th of May—four days after the surrender of von Arnim and Messe—and under cover of aircraft flying from new-won fields in Tunisia steamed slowly but safely past the conquered shore. Part of the fleet went to Malta, the rest to Alexandria. It was the first time, since Italy with malignant opportunism entered the war, that our ships had made their way into the Grand Harbour without having to fight for it: it was the first time since 1941 that a convoy had made the whole passage through the Mediterranean; and our desert-burnt soldiers and the victors of Tunisia, watching from Cape Bon the procession of laden merchantmen, must have seen in their freedom an earnest of the general freedom for which they were in arms.

The Mediterranean had been opened from west to east, the road was clear from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean; and now the Mediterranean had to be crossed from south to north, out of Africa into Europe.

As early as January, 1943, when the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Great Britain were in session with their Combined Chiefs of Staff at Casablanca, the ultimate defeat of Rommel and von Arnim was visible to those long-ranging eyes, and a plan was being made for a new assault upon the Fascist allies.

It was necessary, and immensely desired, to mitigate the huge strain that Russia was bearing; but it was utterly impossible to mount, in the summer of 1943, an invasion of the continent from England. We had, however, large numbers of men and a considerable quantity of shipping in and upon the shores of the Mediterranean: if they could be successfully used against the enemy's southern flank, they would divert German strength, in appreciable measure, from the Russian front. It would be prudent, moreover, to secure, as soon as possible after they should be opened by victory in Africa, our lines of communication through the Mediterranean. And because the weakness of Italy was already manifest, the obvious course of action was to hit her again, and hit her quickly.

Here, then, were three good reasons for opening a major campaign in the south, and three important objectives for our forces there. It was accordingly resolved, at Casablanca in January, to undertake the conquest of Sicily. In the opinion of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, we should conclude our campaign in Africa by the end of April, and be ready to move into Europe some ten weeks later in the favourable period of the July moon. General Sir Alan Brooke, indeed, went farther than his colleagues in prophecy, and made what has been called a "well-educated guess" that Sicily could be taken in six weeks.

Supreme command of the Allied forces was again given to General Eisenhower: his was to be the final responsibility for planning and preparing and initiating the new campaign. His deputy Commander-in-Chief was General Alexander, while Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham and Air Chief Marshal Tedder would command our fleets upon the sea and in the air.

The preparations began. At the Ecole Normale in Bouzarea a special planning staff was established early in February, and became the embryonic headquarters of the Fifteenth Army Group. Its birth-pangs were protracted and various, its growing-pains innumerable. Component parts of the emergent new army had to

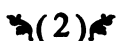
be assembled from the United States and Great Britain and the Middle East as well as from the divisions of the First Army, the Eighth Army, and the American IInd Corps that were still fighting in Tunisia. The North African ports most suitable for mounting the invasion had to be selected, and their harbours prepared. Ships and landing-craft had to be found: vessels of many shapes and sizes, of ungainly nomenclature abbreviated to bewildering initials—LSI(L) for Landing Ship Infantry, large, and LST for the slab-sided, angular, uncomprising tank landing ships, and DUKWS for the happiest of all such new creations, the excellent amphibians so engagingly known as Ducks.

Then the troops had to be exercised in how to enter these vessels quickly, live aboard them, and leave them at the proper moment with all possible despatch. Ships had to be loaded, and loaded in such a way that what would first be wanted on the Sicilian beaches would first appear. Calculations of appalling complexity had to be made to ensure that troop-ships and store-ships coming from the eastern seaboard of America, from Liverpool and the Clyde, from Alexandria and Bougie and Bizerta would simultaneously arrive at their appointed rendezvous. The bewildering science of logistics—a name that aptly summarises what all but a Quartermaster-General's Department find incomprehensible—had to estimate and assemble, not merely the immense variety and fantastic number of weapons, vehicles and stores that would primarily be required, but the myriad spare parts and replacements that would next be needed. A thirty per cent shipping loss was anticipated on D-day; for the air-fields already being levelled in Tunisia, a fifty per cent reserve of bombers, a hundred per cent of fighters, were demanded.

Nor were planning and preparation made easier by the fact that many of those most importantly concerned with the operation were often very widely separated. Our Command in the Middle East contributed very largely to the invasion, and from Algiers to Alexandria is nearly two thousand miles. The Allied Navies, Air Forces, and Armies had all to be co-ordinated, fitted closely into a three-dimensional pattern of time, space and intention; but the normal course of their duties seldom brought all the leaders of every service together for the discussion of plans. Exemplary co-ordination was obtained in the upshot, but the process was piecemeal and attended by infinite difficulty.

The exhilarating triumph of May the 13th gave a new urgency to planning, and released more troops for rehearsal of the victory to come, but could not advance the date of it. Logistics and the

moon had firmly marked on the calendar July the 10th. There was, moreover, a preliminary task to be accomplished before the allied armada might put to sea.



The Prelude : Pantelleria

FROM Cape Bon to the nearest shore of Sicily is eighty miles. Some forty miles south of the mid-point of the channel rises a volcanic island from whose cliffs—higher and more precipitous on the south-eastern side—the ground climbs roughly, scarred by lava-streams and planted with vines, to a central eminence 2,700 feet high. At its north-western corner is a little harbour and a town whose 4,000 inhabitants are nearly half of the whole population of the island. With its smaller neighbours to the south it forms a group known as the Pelagic Islands.

Pantelleria, since 1926, had been to foreigners forbidden ground. Its natural defences had been strongly fortified. The genius of Italian engineers had been employed to make it impregnable. Mussolini boasted that it was impregnable. The few places where it was possible to land were covered by more than a hundred guns in emplacements blasted from the rock. Pill-boxes and other strongholds were sunk in the cliffs, impervious to air-attack. A great reserve of stores and ammunition lay safely in deep caves. A garrison of 10,000 men guarded its lofty shores.

Its reputation as a Mediterranean Heligoland had been sedulously fostered by Italian propaganda, but the real strength of Pantelleria, beyond disputing, was formidable enough; and because of the R.D.F. stations that made it an advanced listening-post for the enemy, and its airfield that accommodated perhaps eighty fighters, it was a positive menace to our projected invasion of Sicily. From its tall cliffs the enemy could watch the assembly of some part of our invasion-fleet; he could give warning when the advance-guard of the invasion, the airborne divisions, took wing; his fighters might harry, or try to, our air-squadrons in their preparatory bombardment of Sicily.

If, on the contrary, its airfield were in our hands, it would help us to provide sufficient close support to the troops first landing on the southern beaches. The North African fields were too far away for such employment, and Malta and Gozo could not hold all the

necessary short-range fighters. Five squadrons on Pantelleria would be a great assistance.

Its tactical value was undeniable, but General Eisenhower could not afford heavy losses in taking it, either in men, ships, or smaller craft, because he had no more strength than was reckoned to be sufficient for the conquest of Sicily. Nor could he spare much time for the reduction of the little island.

He therefore decided to blockade Pantelleria from the sea, to cut its communications in the air, and having completely isolated the garrison, to shatter their morale and pulverise their defences by intensive bombardment from the air and the heavy guns of the Fleet. The garrison might then surrender; or, if they remained obdurate, the assaulting troops would be able to land with minimum loss.

Now the Allied Air Force saw the war in a different aspect to the Navy's view or the Army's. To the Navy and the Army the war came in chapters, and between the chapters there were periods—not indeed of much rest or relaxation—but of cessation from fighting. To the Air Force, however, it was more like a continuous stream that now flowed fast and full, and now in freshets; now in this direction, now in that; but never ceased its flow. For the Air Force, the defeat of von Arnim in Tunisia meant only that pilots must in future carry their bombs to targets farther afield; and within a week they were taking the war into Italy and Sicily and Sardinia—and Pantelleria. The African victory had not halted the stream of their attack, but merely diverted it.

The bombers of the North African Air Force continued this widely-spread and many-pronged offensive, but from May 20th to June the 6th the weight of bombs that fell on Pantelleria grew daily heavier. Then, from June the 7th till June the 11th, the island was battered day and night in a pitiless, unrelenting crescendo of violence. Two hundred sorties were flown on the 7th, two thousand on the 11th.

Meanwhile, to confuse the enemy and augment destruction, *Orion*, *Penelope*, and other ships found targets from time to time, and shelled them. *Penelope*, in return, was slightly damaged by shore batteries. At noon on June the 8th the harbour was bombarded by five cruisers and eight destroyers, while the Air Force among its bombs dropped an invitation to surrender. The naval bombardment raised huge clouds of dust and smoke, and under their gloom three M.T.Bs. went roaring across the harbour-mouth and at three hundred yards range raked the pier with their Bredas

and heavy machine-guns. They had been ordered to attack at a thousand yards, but twice they repeated their run within four hundred yards, and when the time came for an explanation, apologetically blamed the smoke for their inability to judge distances.

Of the sixteen shore-batteries that could have engaged the ships, only two returned fire throughout, one till it was silenced, and three others fired occasionally. But no white flag appeared.

Day and night our bombers went on pounding the wretched island, Wellingtons dropped leaflets to explain the futility of resistance, and then, on June the 10th, another call to surrender. But still no answer came.

The British 1st Division embarked at Sfax and Sousse to launch a direct assault, and by ten o'clock on the morning of June the 11th the leading convoys, within an endless chain of destroyers, trawlers, and minesweepers, were lowering their assault-craft, in perfect weather, eight miles off the harbour. Ships of the 15th Cruiser Squadron and eight destroyers opened fire, raising huge clouds of dust from the island's volcanic soil, and at half-past eleven a fleet of Fortresses, approaching from astern, flew over the ships to bomb their targets with fearful power and devastating precision.

The first flight of assault-craft landed on beaches near the harbour about noon. A light north-westerly breeze had blown away the dust fog. There was some small-arms fire from one of the beaches, but that was soon silenced, and simultaneously the destroyer *Laforey* reported a white flag on Semaphore Hill.

The soldiers went forward over the ruins of the hungry little town—it had been without food and water for three days—to their first objective, but met no opposition, and at half-past five Admiral Pavesi, the Governor, signed the terms of surrender. He had sent a signal to Rome, asking permission to do so, but before an answer came he saw the persuasive sight of the Army coming ashore under the guns of the Fleet; and formed his decision without waiting for the voice of a more distant authority.

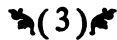
The bombardment of Pantelleria had been in the nature of an experiment: it was the first considerable attempt to overcome a strong defensive position by air-attack. The Axis air-fleets had been unable to interfere—of the 250 enemy aircraft seen, over a large surrounding area, in the eleven days of June, 57 were destroyed—and 4,656 tons of bombs were dropped on the doomed island.

The experiment was successful, and unexpectedly merciful. Neither the garrison's morale nor their communications nor water-supply nor the gunners' scientific instruments survived the bom-

bardment; but fewer than 200 men were killed by it, and no more than 200 wounded.

While Admiral Pavesi was signing his abdication, bombers of the North African Air Force were already attacking the smaller island of Lampedusa, nearly a hundred miles to the south. Cruisers and destroyers continued the bombardment, and during June the 12th it suffered an almost continuous bombstorm as Mitchells and Marauders, Warhawks and Lightnings, Bostons and Mustangs arrived in endless procession. In the early evening 'A' company of the 2nd Coldstream Guards, who for twenty-four hours had been tossing uncomfortably in an infantry landing-ship, went ashore to accept its surrender and 4,600 prisoners.

The remaining Pelagic Islands, Linosa and Lampione, gave no trouble. The obstacles on the invasion-road to Sicily had been cleared within the necessary conditions—without loss of ships, men, or time—and a month later the positive value of the operation was demonstrated when American fighters flew from the airfield on Pantelleria to patrol the Licata beaches where the American 3rd Infantry Division was going ashore.



The Invasion of Sicily

A MOUNTAINOUS island, stormily beautiful and harshly patterned, Sicily gave its defenders many natural advantages. Messina, only two miles from the mainland of Italy, was our most important objective, but direct assault upon it was impossible because the Straits were effectively closed to our shipping and the town was beyond the range of fighter-aircraft; for the enemy, however, it was an open funnel through which he could pour (if he so desired) his constant reinforcements. General Eisenhower's primary intention was to seize the ports of Syracuse and Licata, and the coastwise airfields between them, to establish a base for subsequent operations against Augusta, Catania, and the dominating plexus of aerodromes about Gerbini; but seaborne troops assailing the south-eastern corner of the island would have to land on narrow beaches, most of which led quickly into hilly, then mountainous country, where roads were comparatively few and overlooked by adjacent heights. Tanks could be used with freedom only in the flat lands around Catania. The south-eastern beaches, moreover, were soft and

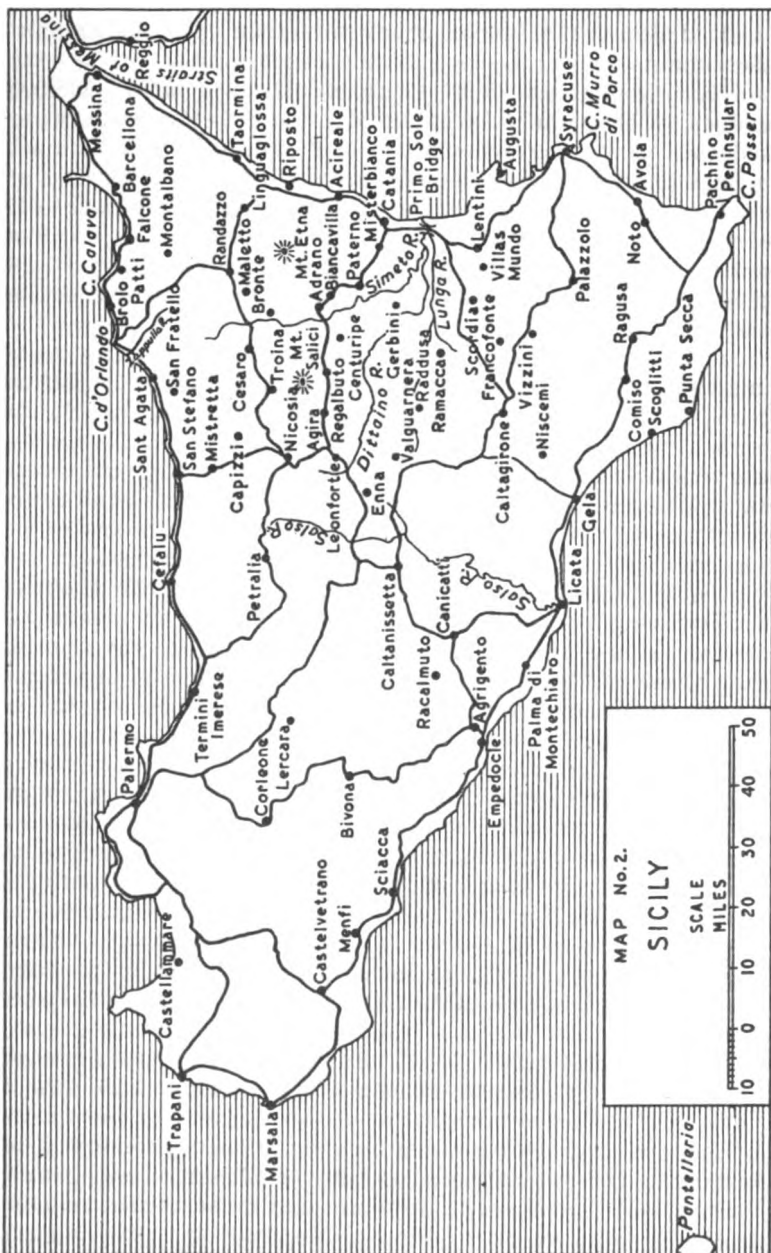
sandy, difficult for the landing of heavy transport, guns, and armour. They could, however, be covered by our fighters.

There were about 75,000 German soldiers in Sicily; 275,000 Italians. The German forces included the 15th Panzer Division, with sixty tanks, the Hermann Goering Division with a hundred; both these divisions had been reconstituted after the destruction of their original formations in Tunisia. The Italians had four field divisions, with about a hundred light French tanks, and five coastal divisions. That the Italians, with gratifying unanimity, would presently refuse to fight, was not expected and could hardly have been anticipated.

By early July the Luftwaffe and the Regia Aeronautica had more than thirty airfields in Sicily from which to operate; and the Italian Navy, based equally on Spezia and Taranto with the Messina Straits for a covered way between its two halves, had still six battleships and two 8-inch gun cruisers, with a large number of lighter cruisers and destroyers. Hitherto it had avoided battle with great determination, but now, in defence of Italian soil, it must either fight or renounce for ever its pretended power in the Mediterranean.

General Alexander's Fifteenth Army Group, that was destined to overcome these considerable difficulties and numerous opponents, consisted of the American Seventh Army, commanded by General Patton, and the British Eighth Army, under General Montgomery; and all their forces, until they made their lodgement on Italian ground, were dependent for their safety and due arrival on the navies of Great Britain and America.

The fleets began to move in early June. Battleships gathered in Gibraltar, in Alexandria, in Mers-el-Kebir. Stocks of fuel were accumulated—it was thought that 270,000 tons of oil might be needed in the first three weeks—and tankers were strategically situated for re-fuelling. A convoy put out from the United States, bearing aboard its ships the American 45th Division. From England came the 1st Canadian Division, from the Middle East the British 5th and 50th Divisions and the 231st Infantry Brigade. The American 1st and 3rd Divisions, and the 51st (Highland) Division were mounted in North African ports. From widespread harbours on this huge circumference the invaders came with a precise and certain pace to their appointed rendezvous, and on the afternoon of July the 9th closed their formations east and west of Malta, and turned towards the beaches. Of ships and landing craft, counting all sizes from battleships to assault-boats, there were more than three thousand.



That afternoon a Mediterranean storm blew up, and threatened the landings with disaster. The wind blew strong, the sea rose steeply. Commanding officers were filled with a sudden anxiety, and many of the soldiers in the smaller craft were emptied, as suddenly, of their physical burdens. The storm, indeed, did much to spoil the airborne assault that preceded the beach-landings.

Three hundred and fifty aircraft, and nearly a hundred and forty gliders, were flying from Kairouan in Tunisia, over four hundred miles of sea, with five thousand men aboard. This was the first time that the Allies had mounted an airborne attack of any considerable size, and there had been little opportunity for training and organisation. Navigation was difficult. Radio-silence was necessary and visibility poor. The bad weather diminished it, and the quarter-moon, setting soon after midnight, gave a minimum of light to the airmen; who found little consolation in the thought that its disappearance would leave an ample sufficiency of darkness to the ships that followed. To aggravate the difficulties, preliminary bombing had here and there started fires—there was a notably big one near the lake east of Gela—that made it hard for pilots to recognise the lie of the land. Then they encountered flak, and in the British sector many of the tug-pilots released their gliders too far from the shore. Forty-seven came down into the sea south of Cap Murro di Porco.

Only twelve gliders landed in their designated area, south of Syracuse, where the intention was to capture a bridge and prevent destruction of the railway crossing. The two hundred and twenty American troop-carriers, whose mission had been to drop their parachutists within a few miles of Gela, to capture the high ground there and the road-junctions controlling the nearby beaches, scattered their men over a front of fifty or sixty miles. Adverse circumstance and the lack of experience had spoiled the airborne assault of its potential full effect, but the air-expedition was by no means a failure. Valiance retrieved it from disaster. Eight officers and sixty-five men of a British glider-regiment held the Syracuse bridge till mid-afternoon of the 10th, when seaborne patrols made contact with their survivors—four officers and fifteen men—and so enabled the 5th Division to enter Syracuse without more difficulty; while a handful of American parachutists took a hill above Gela, defended it against German tanks and prevented the enemy from reinforcing the neighbouring beaches, and others most usefully harassed and confused the enemy over a wide area. The airborne troops paid a heavy price, but they expedited the general advance

and saved—it was calculated—some forty-eight hours of fighting on the shore.

At half an hour after midnight the young moon had set in the west, and on the morning of the 10th the main attacks went in a little before three o'clock: British troops on the right landed on both sides of the Pachino peninsula and the east coast below Syracuse, while the Americans, to the west of them, found with more difficulty a footing on the weather beaches between Licata and Punta Secca. A few searchlights burned erratically in the neighbourhood of Licata, and for some anxious minutes a cluster of them held a leading ship in their beams—and then quietly went out. By various devices we had already confused the enemy about our intentions. The rough weather had finally persuaded him that no attack would be made that night; and contrary to expectation, he was taken entirely by surprise.

At Licata the American 3rd Division met some opposition, but resistance on the whole was light and there was little response from the Italian coastal batteries to the storm of gunfire, rockets and coloured tracer-ammunition that the multitudinous, darkly-silhouetted Allied fleets discharged against the burning shore. A steep sea still broke unhandily on the American beaches, and made landing difficult, but when, by resolution and skilful seamanship, it had been accomplished, the attack went smoothly in. The Italian coastal defences were over-run.

By midday on the 10th the Canadian Division and the Highland Division had captured Pachino, and an hour later, with a landing strip laid on the deeply ploughed field, Pachino airport was being used by our own craft. Avola was taken, and the 5th Division entered Syracuse at dark.

The American 1st and 45th Divisions had entered Gela and Scoglitti and were moving inland; the 3rd held a twelve-mile beach-head centred on Licata with the airfield north of the town as part of its prize. All day, over a bright blue sea, the various fleets of landing-craft made passage from the anchored transports to the beaches. The whole armada was guarded by a never-resting circle of destroyers, sloops, corvettes and frigates. Smoke-screens enclosed the larger merchantmen in the outer anchorage. The Allied air forces, which for a week had been bombarding Sicilian targets with growing vigour, increased their attack to maximum weight and violence.

On this and the following day, over a beach-line of approximately a hundred miles, 80,000 men with 7,000 vehicles, 300 trucks and

900 guns were landed. The sea-borne traffic was impressive, but equally significant, though less apparent, was the Navies' mastery of the sea that allowed it to move in safety. Immediately responsible for putting the two armies ashore, and supporting them with fire in their preliminary engagements, had been the Eastern Task Force under Vice-Admiral Hewett, United States Navy, and the Western Task Force, commanded by Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay; but far out of sight were the great ships that kept the Italian navy in its harbours, and round our anchored off-shore fleet the Hunt-class destroyers, the corvettes and frigates maintained their constant guard. From July the 9th till all the beaches were closed they kept their circular watch: the destroyer *Harworth* steamed 517 hours, the *Exmoor* 482, in that endless chain—making about three hundred circuits, that is—and when the campaign was over the destroyer *Aldenharn* had done thirty-two days continuous steaming.

While our heavy and medium bombers attacked the enemy's airfields, or raided his communications and troop concentrations, our fighters from Malta and Gozo and Pantelleria maintained a cover over the beaches; under it the first day's objectives were all taken at a surprisingly small cost in casualties and shipping losses. One landing-ship and the American destroyer *Maddox* were lost, and after dark, while embarking wounded from Syracuse, the British hospital-ship *Talamba*, brightly lighted, was deliberately dive-bombed and sunk. In addition to these misfortunes, a good many small craft had been wrecked on the windy beaches; and that was all.

On this first day no contact was made with German forces. Their two armoured divisions, in apprehension of attack from Marsala in the west to Catania in the east, were disposed in four groups at Castelvetro, Canicatti, Niscemi and Misterbianco; and this nervous dispersion made it impossible for them to launch an early concentrated assault against any part of the invading forces. On the morning of the 11th, however, the Niscemi group, supported by a Panzer Grenadier regiment from Canicatti, began to make a series of counter-attacks against the American 1st and 45th Divisions in the vicinity of Gela. The Germans employed about sixty tanks, with accompanying infantry, and though their armour suffered heavy losses, their third and last attack in the afternoon was halted only by the combined efforts of Naval gunfire, Rangers, Infantry, and an Engineer Shore Group summoned hurriedly from the beach. The Americans, not without periods of anxiety, had

won the first of their Sicilian engagements; and the enemy began to withdraw slowly northward.

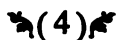
The 3rd Division on the left was thrusting inland, and on the right of their line the Americans took Comiso and met the Canadians in Ragusa. General Montgomery, in the east, had begun to advance in two directions: towards Augusta, and north-westward against Vizzini. Half-way between Syracuse and Augusta the 17th Brigade (of the 5th Division) met German armour from the Misterbianco group, and there was a day of heavy fighting, during which the enemy was strongly supported by dive-bombers. But when this resistance had been overcome the advance continued, and in the early morning of the 13th our leading troops entered Augusta; in whose harbour the destroyers *Exmoor* and *Kanaris*, which had been bombarding the town, already lay.

But Augusta was not yet decisively in our hands. While the 17th Brigade was securing its position there, the 15th Brigade, advancing towards Lentini, took Villas Mundo some half-a-dozen miles to the west. Then, on the night of the 13th, the Germans counter-attacked, took part of the harbour of Augusta, including the seaplane base, and interposed themselves between the two brigades. They were ejected with some difficulty, contact was re-established with the 15th, and the enemy withdrew towards the Catanian plain. The 50th Division, advancing on the left, arrived by dusk in the area of Lentini and Scordia, where it was in contact with the XXXth Corps (the Canadians and the Highlanders) which had been advancing rapidly from the Pachino peninsula towards the middle parts of Sicily.

The 51st had taken Noto on the 11th, and the 23rd Armoured Brigade, arriving there at nightfall, had gone on to capture Palazzola, delayed only by a few anti-tank guns, on the following day; and thereafter advanced on Vizzini. But Vizzini was not taken without heavier fighting than had so far been encountered. The 23rd Armoured and the 231st Brigades—the latter the veterans of the siege of Malta—made an entrance into the town on the 13th, and came under heavy artillery and mortar fire from positions to the west. An attack on hill-ground to the north was unsuccessful, and not until the next day was Vizzini securely occupied by a brigade of the 51st; when another brigade of the same division took Francofonte on the right.

Naval operations had meanwhile become livelier, as the enemy's submarines arrived to attack our seaborne reinforcements. At the beginning of July there had been half-a-dozen U-boats and eight

Italian boats operating in the western Mediterranean; and most of them were now in Sicilian waters. Anti-submarine measures were intensified, and zealous hunting secured six of them. Light coastal forces—motor torpedo-boats and gun-boats—did mettlesome work, not only in screening the ports of Empedocle, Augusta and Syracuse, but in raiding the Straits of Messina and Calabrian shore-waters, under the guns of Italian batteries, where they destroyed a U-boat and damaged two others, sank three E-boats and lamed seven; losing two sunk and one crippled in the process. The minesweeping flotillas that had opened this new chapter of the war by sweeping the two-hundred mile Tunisian channel and the eighty-mile approach to Malta, continued their good work. They had swept ahead of the assault convoys and cleared the entrances to the ports; they served in the endless chain that enclosed the merchantmen, and one of them, *Seaham* of the 14th Flotilla, signally distinguished herself by capturing, whole and intact, an Italian submarine.



Development and Expansion

THE Eighth Army now prepared to combine its twofold advance against the port and airfields of Catania; and the plexus of roads at Enna and Leonforte in the very heart of the island. To conform with General Montgomery's intentions, the Seventh Army was instructed to wheel westward, pivoting on its left flank, and hold a line running north from Palmo de Montechiaro through Canicatti to Caltanissetta. The Americans had already made excellent progress, advancing inland from their beaches, and swift action by their Engineers had saved the runways on several of their new-won airfields, from which their own craft quickly began to operate. They had taken about 18,000 prisoners, in the first three days, for the loss of approximately two hundred killed, less than nine hundred wounded.

The Americans, against light resistance, moved rapidly towards their new objectives. On the 15th the 45th Division reached Vizzini, on their army's right boundary, and was then withdrawn in rear of the 1st Division (their neighbours to the west) to attack again, with the 1st Division conforming, in a north-westerly direction towards the high ground between Caltanissetta and Enna. On the

extreme left of the Allied line the 3rd Division sent strong patrols beyond Canicatti and to Racalmuto.

And now General Patton, foreseeing the imminent possibility of a quick advance into the western corner of Sicily, formed from the 3rd Division and the 82nd Airborne Division a Provisional Corps to undertake its immediate conquest. It was in part suspected, in part known, that the Germans were leaving their westward positions, moving into the central highlands, and concentrating strength against the British threat to Catania; and when, on the 16th and 17th, the Provisional Corps took in their stride both Porto Empedocle and Agrigento, General Patton could reasonably infer that the west of Sicily was no longer held by German troops, but merely occupied by Italians whose will to fight was fast evaporating. It was a Ranger battalion, making a reconnaissance in force, that took Porto Empedocle; and the 3rd Division, with excellent support from the guns of their Navy, that assaulted Agrigento in the evening and had it in their possession by the following morning. Into the coastal plain east of Agrigento came the American 2nd Armoured Division, ready for the drive to Palermo.

Meanwhile the 45th Division, on its way to Caltanissetta, had been fighting hard. Resistance on the road was strong, and several times the enemy made local counter-attacks. But these were repelled, and Caltanissetta fell on the 18th; while the 1st Division cut the road between it and Enna to the north-east, and took a dominating position on the nearby hills. The Canadians, on the left of the Eighth Army, had led the advance towards Enna; then passing the town in their progress towards Leonforte, left also a pocket of German resistance. The Americans wasted no time in emptying the pocket, and took Enna on the 20th.

The Canadians had had a grim struggle. They had come ninety miles in nine days, and from Caltagirone, which they took on the 15th, their advance had been continuously opposed by German rearguards fighting hard to keep the roads open till their armoured formations—the group originally stationed near Castelvetro and the regiments beaten at Gela by the Americans—could extricate themselves from the south and west. The country was mountainous, and with every day's advance the mountains rose more steeply to taller heights. Movement was almost restricted to the roads, and the numerous road-blocks in narrow passes were covered on either hand from rugged hillsides. But the Canadians went forward. During their seemingly interminable training in England they had grown somewhat weary of restraint, and now,

in their first action, their long-stored impatience swept all obstacles aside. They left Enna behind them, and continued to advance towards Leonforte and Agira.

On the eastern flank, in the country about Lentini, progress had been slower. XIIIth Corps' immediate task was to seize Catania. But there were water-obstacles on their way thither, and it was obviously desirable to take and hold two vital bridges over the Malati and the Simeto. The Malati bridge was three miles north of Lentini, and on the night of the 13th a commando was landed on the coast west of there, to proceed to its capture, while the 1st Parachute Brigade flew farther north to essay the more difficult taking of the Primo Sole bridge across the Simeto: the single entrance from the southern hills into the open plain.

Some ill fortune again waited for the airfleet. Of the one hundred and twenty-nine craft that put out from Africa, twenty-six returned early because of engine trouble or off-shore flak. Others, near Syracuse, flew above a returning convoy while German planes were also in the sky. After several days of combat the gun-crews of the merchantmen had quick fingers for the trigger, and an offensive spirit that somewhat obscured their discrimination. They opened fire on the north-bound airfleet, and did much damage. There was some excuse for them, indeed—German planes were overhead and bombed the Greek destroyer *Kanaris* while she was rescuing British and American airmen from the busy sea—but though the accident might be explained it could not be redeemed.

Fifty-six troop-carriers dropped their parachutists, and thirteen tugs released their gliders, in the designated area; and rather more than two hundred airborne soldiers, with five anti-tank guns, presently went into action against the Simeto bridge and took it.

In the afternoon of the 14th, after a good deal of marching, and some fighting against Italian troops, the Durham Infantry Brigade of the 50th Division was ordered to advance from Lentini to relieve the Airborne Brigade. By half-past seven the paratroops had spent all their ammunition in the repelling of many fierce counter-attacks and had no choice but to retreat; before leaving the bridge, however they drew the charges that the Germans had set to blow the piers. Two hours later the Durhams met them a mile south of the bridge, but weary as they were after five days of almost continuous movement, and having made no reconnaissance of the area, they could not attack before morning. During the night small-arms fire prevented the Germans from replacing the charges, and two field

regiments came up to support the first attempt at regaining the bridge and establishing a hold on the farther bank.

The Simeto was sluggish and deep and bordered by reeds; the bridge about four hundred feet long with farm-buildings left and right of the road on the enemy's side. There was some cover on the near bank, none south of it, but beyond the river on the west of the bridge grew vineyards and olive-trees, densely planted, to a depth of a quarter of a mile; to the north, open country traversed, two miles from the river, by the Bottaceto ditch, ten feet deep. This useful tank-obstacle was the southern frontier of the permanent defences of the Catania aerodrome. The background to the scene was the vast slope of Etna and the hot blue sea.

"A" Battalion of the Durham Brigade attacked at half-past seven, and a few platoons succeeded in crossing but were driven back by the furious defence of the German Parachute Battalion that held the bridge and fought to hold it, with the utmost tenacity and skill, in the close cover of the vines and from a sunken road behind them. Two 88-millimetre guns on the road, firing over open sights, defeated the attempt of our tanks to cross. The Germans made more efforts to blow up the bridge, but were still prevented by fire. Under moonlight on the following night "B" Battalion of the Brigade, after eighty minutes of artillery fire, sent two companies to ford the river four hundred yards west of the bridge, where it was no more than four feet deep on a treacherous muddy bottom, and turn east through the vines to seize the northern end of the bridge. The Commander of the Airborne troops who had first taken it taped a route to the river-bank, and the Durhams crossed rapidly and did their task with bayonet and grenade and Thomson gun. But four attempts were defeated to summon the remaining companies, who received no order to move until a visiting officer, arriving on a bicycle to observe the battle, returned with instructions for them. So retarded, dawn was breaking as they crossed the bridge, they were met by withering fire, and though they extended east and west of the road the bridgehead could not be enlarged, and all day it was held in no greater depth than three hundred yards, in length about the same. Carriers and mortars, however, succeeded in crossing, and took cover behind one of the farms. Tanks failed to come over, and two Shermans were destroyed. Artillery was unable to give close support, because Durhams and Germans were often within a few yards of each other; but in the bridgehead the Durhams' mortar-platoon and a machine-gun platoon of the Cheshires never failed to punish the enemy's movement, and his

numerous counter-attacks, with tanks and lorried infantry, were invariably foiled.

At night the other battalions of the Brigade crossed by the ford, and at dawn tanks came over the bridge. In moonlight the Germans had still fought bitterly, but with daylight upon them and armour among them they surrendered or retreated, and by ten o'clock the bridge-head, comfortably enlarged, could be called secure. But in front lay the main strength of the German forces in Sicily, for most of the Hermann Goering Division was now concentrated in the plain, and it had been reinforced by two Fortress battalions and certain composite formations. The straight road to Catania was decisively blocked.

During the next few days, however, some progress was made—not easily—to the west of Primo Sole. The 51st took Ramacca on the 18th, crossed the river Gornalunga, and prepared to advance against the airport at Gerbini. Far to their left the Canadians of the XXXth Corps had taken Valguarnera, and between the two divisions there was now a gap of eighteen miles. Into it came the 231st (Malta) Brigade, captured Raddusa, and in the afternoon of the 18th reached the Dittaino where the main road from Raddusa crosses the river on its way to Agira. By the following day the 231st was within three miles of Agira; but the town was very strongly held, and the attack was delayed.

The Canadians, in difficult country, were still advancing, but against ever-increasing resistance. They fought for a day in front of Leonforte, then surrounded it and fought another day, before it fell on the afternoon of July 22nd. Their further advance was bitterly contested as they fought slowly towards Agira. While the Canadians were entering Leonforte the Malta Brigade had taken a hill to the south of Agira, and the next day they cut the main road to the east of it; but they could not withstand the Germans' heavy counter-attacks, and were compelled to withdraw. Some twenty miles to the south-east the 154th Brigade—right-hand brigade of the 51st—took most of the great Gerbini airfield, but held it only for a night. A powerful counter-attack on the 21st drove the Highlanders back to positions south of the field.

There had been more heavy fighting on the Gornalunga, where the 5th Division, to the left of the Primo Sole bridgehead, had bridged the river under heavy fire, and established a small hold on its northern bank. But their most resolute efforts to exploit it were firmly held. The advance of the Eighth Army had been stopped. The Germans, with all their forces in the north-eastern corner of

the island, were prepared to fight a stubborn delaying action in country superbly created for defence. Great mountains with savage cliffs, hill-top villages, and winding narrow passes filled the northern parts of their triangular battle-field. In a score of places there were positions that, in a romantic novel, could have been held by a handful of devoted men against an army—and could in solemn fact be held with disconcerting strength by a company with its mortars and machine-guns. Though inferior to the Allies, the German force in these parts was redoubtable: in addition to parts of the Hermann Goering Division there were the 15th and 29th Panzer Grenadiers and some troops of the 1st Parachute Division. There were also the remains of three Italian field divisions, of no great worth.

South and east of the mountains lay the Catanian plain; and this flat land was also well-suited to defence. Its fertile soil was deeply cut by rivers, canals and ditches, that would hinder armour and stop transport, and behind the plain rose the huge cone of Etna, whose foothills and lofty sides gave the enemy observation-posts of commanding value. The largest group of airfields in Sicily lay about Gerbini, in the plain, and though, with our forces on their southern boundary, the enemy could make little use of them they were a strategic prize of great importance which he would deny to us for as long as he was able. To attempt the taking of Catania by a frontal assault would be woefully expensive in men and material, and General Montgomery decided instead to circle the plain and outflank the German position, so formidably based upon Mount Etna, with a swinging attack from Leonforte and Centuripe to Adrano; which was the heart of it.

His four divisions, however, in the mountains and on the plain, were closely engaged with the enemy. They had been fighting without rest since the morning of the 10th, or marching on the rugged hills, and under the blazing sun of a Sicilian summer they were beginning to show signs of weariness. Another division was needed to provide impetus for the conclusive attack on Messina in its well-guarded corner; and in North Africa the 78th was waiting to embark. It could be moved into Sicily, and ready for action, by the end of the month.

The Americans would require approximately the same time to make their new dispositions. Their IInd Corps could bring the 1st and 45th Divisions into line between Leonforte and the north coast—there was no room for more than two—but these divisions, like the British, had been in action or ceaselessly moving from the day of the invasion, and were somewhat tired. The 3rd and 9th

Divisions had to be brought forward to give depth to the Corps front and provide relief, when needed, for the 1st and 45th. The Seventh Army had also to create a new axis of supply for the coming offensive, and that required a little time. So August the 1st was chosen for the inception of the next, and final drive to clear and conquer Sicily; and till then, though there was continuous fighting on the outskirts of the German position that Etna dominated, and in the north where the Americans were driving on towards Nicosia and Mistretta, there was, during the rest of the month, no great movement except in the west—where the American tanks and troop-carriers, jeeps and command-cars and ambulances and ammunition-trucks, were roaring night and day over mile after mile of roadway in a never-halted movement.

On July 17th, Lieutenant-General Patton flew to Africa for a conference with General Alexander. The situation clearly demanded a change of plan and a larger role for the Americans than their original task of protecting the flank of a British advance to the north. General Patton had already seen the possibility of swift and decisive movement into the west, and by forming a Provisional Corps and rapidly capturing Agrigento he had created a force ready to march, and assembled it on the starting-line.

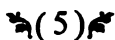
The new plan directed the IInd Corps to continue the excellent progress it was making through the centre of the island to the north coast, with the double object of cutting Sicily in two and establishing a base for an advance against Palermo and the west; and the Provisional Corps immediately began its run-through by taking Sciacca and Menfi on the south coast, and Bivona on the cross-country road to Palermo. Menfi is forty miles from Agrigento, Bivona about twenty-five; and both were occupied on the 20th.

On that day the 2nd Armoured Division came under command of the Provisional Corps, and with the utmost vigour and remarkable speed began its direct advance over the mountains to Palermo. Two other attacks converged on the city, as the 3rd Division, on the right of the Provisional Corps, went forward from Corleone, and troops of the 45th reached Lercara. Swiftly they drew nearer, and by late afternoon of the 22nd the three divisions were approaching the south and south-eastern fringes of Palermo. A plan was made for co-ordinated attack, but it proved unnecessary. There was no resistance, and at eight o'clock the Italian Commander surrendered to Major-General Keyes, of the Provisional Corps, and the 2nd Armoured Division entered the city.

On the following day the western corner was over-run, and

Marsala, Trapani, and Castellammare fell without opposition. East of Palermo the coast-road near Termini Imerese was cut by a column of the 45th Division. Sicily had been carved in two, and the western third, with more than forty thousand prisoners and a vast booty, was in American hands.

It is difficult to praise too highly the boldness of manoeuvre and the unflagging speed with which the Seventh Army had moved. Though sufficient evidence had been gathered to prove the improbability of stern resistance by the Italians, there were still, when the drive began, about four enemy divisions in the west, whose power to hit back could not be entirely dismissed. No serious opposition was indeed encountered, but here and there the Italians briefly fought to delay the advance; and the natural difficulties of traversing an unfamiliar mountainous country were by no means inconsiderable. Nor did the Americans move wholly upon wheels; foot-soldiers sweated with a fine old-fashioned freedom when a battalion of the 30th Regiment marched fifty-four miles (much of it across country) in thirty-six hours; and when all three battalions of the 7th Regiment, after an all-night move by motor-transport, foot-slogged thirty miles the next day with a brisk fight in the middle of it to take their minds off emergent blisters.



Advance to Messina

WITH the second part of their task triumphantly concluded, the Seventh Army turned their faces to the east when General Alexander, on July 23rd, ordered immediate preparation for the third and concluding stage of the campaign. The American base of supply was to be transferred forthwith to Palermo. Sufficient forces were to remain in the west to wipe up what was left of the Italian divisions, and maintain order. Then, with all possible despatch and its maximum available strength, the Seventh Army was to advance by the shortest route towards Messina. General Alexander's directive read: "In order to bring about the rapid collapse of the German forces left in Sicily it is imperative that you exert strong pressure on their northern flank and maintain this pressure continuously. To co-ordinate the action of the Seventh and Eighth Armies this effort should start as early as possible and in any event by August 1st."

The IInd Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General Bradley,

and reinforced by all the Seventh Army's non-divisional artillery, began to advance along two axes: the coast-road and the highway that runs from Petralia through Nicosia and Troina to Randazzo.

After three days of determined fighting the 1st Division took Nicosia on the 28th, and pressed onwards by a tortuous mountain road to Cerami, while a detached force turned north towards Mistretta to threaten San Stefano, which was strongly held and had so far resisted all attack by the 45th Division, which had advanced along the coast-road from Cefalu. The threat had a beneficial effect, and on the last day of the month San Stefano was taken by the 45th: which was then relieved by the 3rd Division. On the same day the 1st Division took Cerami and came within five miles of Troina.

South of Troina rises the hill, steep-sided, called Monte Salici. Of no great height—less than four thousand feet—it is dwarfed by the huge bulk of Etna, soaring some twenty miles away to its majestic summit two miles above the sea. But during the next few days, from its moderate crest, Monte Salici was going to look down, north and south, on the bloodiest fighting of the campaign: at Troina, at Agira and Regalbuto and Centuripe.

The Malta Brigade resumed its attack on Agira, over the same ground it had taken and abandoned twenty-four hours before, during the night of July the 25th; while the 1st Canadian Brigade launched an assault from the west. The Canadians failed to reach the town, and the Malta Brigade, having crossed the road, was again driven back to its starting-line. As dusk came down they went in again, over the scarred familiar ground, and now the 2nd Canadian Brigade fought forward from the west. The Canadians were held astride the road, but in the morning light the Malta Brigade pressed on, and by the evening of the 27th held positions east and south of the town. Fighting was renewed in the morning, and by nine o'clock Canadian patrols were in the streets, by afternoon the town was taken.

The fighting had been harsh and costly, and the Germans left many dead behind. But now the way was open for an advance on Regalbuto, then Adrano.

The 1st and 2nd Canadian Brigades consolidated in the neighbourhood of Agira, and the Malta Brigade pushed on to Regalbuto. Mines and gunfire stopped its advance. During the night of the 30th it attacked and was partly successful, but the Germans threw in a heavy counter-attack and after a stern day's fighting it was still a mile west of the town, astride the highway.

The 78th Division was now in the line, in front of Catenanuova,

and taking the 3rd Canadian Brigade under command it cleared the town, with stubborn effort, by the early morning of July the 30th; and that night took hill-ground north and north-east of it, from which the way was open for an attack on Centuripe. A steep and twisting road, much cratered, led to their new objective, but in spite of obstacles and the enemy's resistance, the 36th Brigade secured a useful hold within a thousand yards of it on the 31st.

On that day the much-fought-for bridge at Primo Sole was put out of action for the third time in ten days. It had been, almost continuously, a target for the enemy's mortars and field-guns. Broken on the 23rd, it had been re-opened on the 25th, and put out of action again on the 26th. Repaired three days later, it again was made unusable on the 31st.

The German positions in the north-east were very strong, and to subjugate them the Seventh and Eighth Armies were now to attack in close co-ordination. The Eighth Army's supply system, through Augusta and Syracuse, was working well, but the Americans had much difficulty with their line from Palermo. As the result of Allied bombing, Palermo harbour was a confused and horrid shambles, with forty-four ships sunk in its channels. A month's work was needed before it could handle sixty per cent of its normal traffic; but by strenuous effort its remaining facilities were used to full advantage, and on August the 1st twelve ships were disembarking the 9th Division there.

The north-coast road, which the Americans were using, was a nightmare route for the quartermasters. Often a mere ledge on the steep hill-side, it had offered German Engineers the most tempting prospects of demolition; and they had invariably yielded to opportunity and their natural inclination. From Palermo to Messina every bridge had been blown, and here and there, as though before a landslide, the road had completely vanished. But the Americans were not halted. With hardihood and ingenuity they by-passed these obstacles, and at the same time relieved congestion in Palermo, by fetching supplies forward—and where necessary troops—in a little coastwise fleet of tank-landing ships and Italian schooners; and landing them on whatever beaches were available.

The Allied Air Force, whose activity from the start of the campaign had been unremitting, intensified its bombing of key-positions in the enemy's communication system. A squadron of two cruisers and half-a-dozen destroyers of the United States Navy—known as Task Force 88—was instructed to work along the north coast and assist the Army with its gunfire when required, and enable

troops to make advanced landings if the situation made that desirable. Ships of the Royal Navy were available for the Eighth Army for similar functions; and *Warspite* had already bombarded Catania. As the sides of the German triangle grew shorter, the operations of our three services and two armies became even more closely interwoven.

Both armies were now in position for the concluding offensive, and on August the 1st an attack was opened against the enemy's strong-holds on the south-western flank of Etna. Like a double girdle round the mountain run a road and a railway—from Catania through Paterno and Adrano to Bronte—and on these lateral communications the Germans depended for the maintenance of an orderly and continuous defence on the slopes below them. The high parts of Etna were, of course, unassailable; but they were as great an obstacle to retreat, or withdrawal, and General Alexander had decided to use the bulk of the mountain as an anvil on which to break the German line with a sudden heavy blow. The hammer was in his hand; he had sent to Africa for it, where it had been forged and tempered and proved through a long winter in the Tunisian hills: the 78th Division was poised for the blow in front of Centuripe. This was the vital link in the enemy's forward positions. Captured documents had revealed that if the Germans were compelled to retire from Catania, they intended to use Centuripe as a pivot on which to swing back their left flank. Centuripe was of prime importance.

The attack began when the 51st Division crossed the Dittaino and took a pair of hills some six miles south-east of Catenanuova. Their advance was stubbornly opposed and much hampered by extensive mine-fields, but the Highlanders succeeded in making slow progress, and gradually approached their objective.

From the high-ground they had taken north of Catenanuova, the 78th Division went forward, in the darkness before dawn, against Centuripe. It was very heavily defended. When leading troops entered the town, they found that its fortified houses were held by a numerous garrison and they withdrew again when day revealed the full sternness of their task. Not until the 2nd did they launch an assault that cleared the town, and even then their victory was not decisive. Twice during the night the enemy counter-attacked; but these blows, both parried, were the German rear-guards' last resistance, and by early morning on the 3rd the 78th were in secure possession of the town, and the enemy had retired across the Salso, a tributary of the Simeto.

Through the Malta Brigade, halted a little west of Regalbuto, the 1st and 2nd Canadian Brigades had in the meantime advanced from Agira, and after a stiff battle on the afternoon of August the 1st they entered Regalbuto and occupied it in force the following morning; when their leading troops advanced three miles beyond the town.

While the Eighth Army was thus breaking into the German lines south of Etna, the Americans, under the northern slopes of Monte Salici, were fighting at Troina their bloodiest battle of the campaign.

In the darkness of the last night of July the 1st Division had reached a position five miles north-west of Troina. They were supported on their left by French Moroccans: the 4th Tabor of Goumiers, who had come ashore at Licata, a day or two after the first assault, from a tank-landing ship whose officers had been more perturbed by the Goumiers' horses and mules than by the enemy's bombing or the dangers of his under-sea attack. And now the Moroccans took Capizzi in the hills, and secured the Americans' northward flank. The Germans re-acted quickly to the advance, and on August the 1st sent a local counter-attack, about two hundred strong, against the advancing 1st Division.

This attack was repelled, and the following day preparation was made for a combined assault by the 1st Division and a Combat Team—approximately the strength of a brigade—from the 9th. Moving north of the 39th Infantry, who were advancing directly, the 16th Infantry were to cut the road east of Troina, while a motor-battalion of the 18th, coming north from Agira by the villainous mountain-road through Gagliano, were to enclose the German positions south of Troina.

The attack went in at half-past three on the morning of August the 3rd, and in the early stages it went well. The enemy gave ground north and west of the town, and under pressure withdrew slowly from the south-west. But his main positions in front of Troina were impenetrable, and the attack was halted.

Reinforced by artillery, it was renewed the next morning. Eight and a half battalions deployed their guns and opened a bombardment that lasted for fifty minutes, while seventy-two Mustang dive-bombers dropped as many five-hundred pound bombs on the dust-enveloped crumbling town. An infantry attack followed, in the afternoon, but the Germans held firm and repulsed it. From the 9th Division, now being brought forward to relieve the 1st, a Regimental Combat Team went north of Troina to threaten the enemy's supporting positions north and north-west of Cesaro; and

well to the south the Canadians, advancing from Regalbuto, had now crossed the river Troina. On the 5th the frontal attack was renewed with a bombardment, from artillery and the air, even heavier than that of the day before. The German defences were broken, and after the 18th Infantry had taken a dominating position to the south, the 16th took the town of Troina on August the 6th.

The 9th Division now relieved the 1st, and two days later entered Cesaro on the heels of the retreating enemy, and though hindered by mines and blown bridges continued its advance towards Randazzo.

On the coast, north of this bitter struggle, the 3rd Division had been fighting, as severely, on the San Fratello ridge where the enemy held a strong position running down to Sant' Agata on the shore. The battle began on the morning of the 2nd, when the 2nd Battalion of the 15th Infantry attacked along the coast-road, after a two and a half-hour barrage, but were halted by heavy fire and minefields. All three battalions of the 15th found intermediate positions west of the Furiano, a small river-bed, dry in summer, formed by the confluence of two mountain-streams, that lies north of and parallel with the ridge. Two battalions attacked on the following morning, but again were halted, and for the next three days the river-bed was a perilous obstacle that most of the Division essayed to cross, and often did cross, and then from the farther slopes had to retire and cross again to the western bank, harassed in their retreat by the mortar and machine-gun fire that still kept them from the ridge.

On the 6th, after reorganisation, a patrol of the 1st Battalion of the 30th reached the top of the hill south-west of San Fratello, and at nightfall the remainder of the battalion attacked, while the 2nd Battalion prepared to make a seaborne landing in the enemy's rear. Another day of fighting followed, on the south-western slope of the ridge, and the 3rd Battalion made progress and killed many of the enemy. That night the 2nd Battalion, with two troops of artillery and a tank platoon, were landed, under the protection of Task Force 88, some miles to the east of San Fratello, and capturing hill-ground south of the cross-road broke the enemy's resistance. Having taken the towns of San Fratello and Sant' Agata, advancing units of the 3rd Division made contact with the landing force on the afternoon of August the 8th.

Continuing its thrust along the coast, the 3rd Division, though much hindered by mines and blown bridges, reached the Zappulla river on the 10th, repelled a counter-attack, and crossed it; and farther inland a column, marching by Militello, crossed the Rosmarino in face of considerable opposition. The mountainous

foreland, whose apex is Cape Orlando, was outflanked by another seaborne landing, again made by the 2nd Battalion of the 30th, who successfully came ashore between the Cape and Brolo, where they resisted counter-attacks during the day. Cape Orlando was captured on the 12th, and Brolo fell immediately after.

The 9th Division, which had been advancing along the road from Cesaro to Randazzo, compelled the enemy to withdraw across the Simeto on the 10th. On either side of the road its wings were in the mountains, the whole line advancing north-eastward. On the left the road from Randazzo to Cape Orlando was cut, on the 12th, by the 60th Infantry; and on the right the Americans were in contact with the British 78th Division, which, having taken the village of Maletto, was advancing to the high ground south of Randazzo. Confined and discomfited by this pressure on their flank, the Germans, after sullenly opposing the Americans' frontal attack, at last gave ground, and the 9th Division took Randazzo on the 13th. This was the last really strong position on the southern axis of the IInd Corps' advance.

During this week of heavy fighting in the north, the situation in the east had changed entirely, and the ring of German defences round the south and south-western base of Etna had gone down like the walls of Jericho before the unremitting fierce assault of the Eighth Army.

The capture of Centuripe had opened the outer ward of the enemy's main defences south of Etna. His line ran from Adrano through Biancavilla to Paterno, and to breach it would outflank Catania, and all the forces south of Catania which had for so long been holding the XIIIth Corps. General Montgomery decided to press northward with the XIIIth Corps as opportunity offered, without committing it to unduly heavy fighting or incurring serious casualties; and to exploit his success on the inland flank by developing, with his major force, the left hook which had already struck Centuripe down.

The Germans, however, had quickly realised the danger they were in about Catania. They began to thin out. Laying innumerable mines, demolishing everything that gun-cotton would usefully wreck, and leaving behind them strong rearguards to hold and hinder the pursuit, they planned the withdrawal of their main forces round the two sides of Etna: in part by the coast road, in part along the highway to Adrano and Bronte and Randazzo.

As soon as it was seen that the enemy was on the move, Naval forces bombarded Taormina, blocking the coast-road in three places;

and the 5th Division attacked on a two-brigade front. By the early afternoon of August the 4th the XIIIth Corps had advanced to a depth of about four miles along its whole front. In the sector nearest to the coast the demolitions were especially numerous, and the minefields extensive. Then the Germans, facing the 50th Division with parachute troops and an air force contingent, made a resolute stand astride the main road not far from the southern outskirts of Catania, but this hard-fighting rearguard was penetrated and defeated during the night, and Catania surrendered to the 151st Brigade, which entered the town on the morning of the 5th. Paterno fell, about the same time, to the 5th Division; and the enemy withdrew to Acireale on the narrow coastal strip between Etna and the sea.

And now the left hook was going in, over and under the enemy's guard, with blow after blow. The Highland Division went storming into Biancavilla, while a brigade of the 78th and another from the 1st Canadian Division swept over the river Salso on the road to Adrano. The enemy fought back fiercely, but both brigades pressed forward, and patrols of the 78th reached the outskirts of Adrano on the 6th, while others of the same division, having by-passed the town, threatened the northward road to Bronte. Parallel to their advance, and farther to the north, came the 3rd Canadian Brigade. In Adrano two diminished battalions of the Germans' 3rd Parachute Regiment fought stubbornly till darkness on the 6th, but then withdrew; and on the following morning the 78th occupied the town. Promptly its 11th Brigade were in pursuit of the enemy, and followed him five miles up the road to Bronte, over a surface so evilly cratered and fields so thickly sown with mines that no progress at all could have been made had it not been for the magnificent work of the Sappers. But here, as everywhere in Sicily throughout the whole campaign, the Sappers did their vital work with unflinching heart and matchless efficiency. Over the roads they patched and bridged, and the minefields they taped and disarmed, the pursuit went on. By August the 8th the 78th had taken Bronte after fierce fighting, and advanced a little way beyond it towards Randazzo. But here the country gave them appalling difficulty. On the right of the road was Etna's wild mountainside, and on its left the river Troina, the Simeto, and many tributary waters. Their vehicles could hardly leave the road, and on the narrow fronts of their advance the depleted enemy could still offer strong resistance.

North of Bronte they were stiffly checked. With four battalions and numerous mortars the enemy held a formidable position south

of the village of Maletto. In a countryside of steep-walled ravine and close defiles, the 78th could not properly deploy. Their advance was slow, and they had to fight for it yard by yard. But their advance did not cease, and gradually their stubborn pressure told upon a weakening enemy, and slowly he withdrew. The village of Maletto and the hills around it were captured on the 12th, and so, while the American 9th Division was advancing directly on Randazzo, the 78th was able to give some help from the south, and when the town had been taken the two armies joined hands over the ruins.

The XXXth Corps' sector of operations was now reduced to a divisional front, and while the 78th remained in the line the 51st was transferred to the coastal sector, under command of the XIIIth Corps, and the 1st Canadians went back to Lentini for rest and refurbishing.

In the narrow lands between Etna and the sea, sweating over innumerable obstacles, the 5th and the 50th Divisions slowly but steadily advanced, and on the 11th took Riposto. It was now known that the Germans were already withdrawing their divisions, or what was left of them, from Sicily; but on the seaward flank of Etna, where every bridge over the numerous mountain streams was blown and obstacle succeeded obstacle, there was neither hope nor prospect of a rapid pursuit.

The advance of the American 9th Division came to a halt at Randazzo. Of the two roads emerging from the town, one led to Cape Orlando, and here, on the north coast, the 3rd Division was making steady progress against fantastic difficulties; the other road ran east to Linguaglossa, which the 51st took on August the 14th.

The Germans had begun to withdraw their forces from Sicily after the fall of Cesaro and Adrano; and by now they had broken contact all along the front. The end of the campaign was imminent, and preparations were already afoot to carry the war into the mainland of Italy. The XXXth Corps took over the Eighth Army's shortened front, the 51st replaced the 5th Division in the line, and with Headquarters of the XIIIth Corps the 5th joined the 1st Canadian Division in a training area south of Etna to refit in readiness for the invasion of Calabria.

The German evacuation could not be prevented. The Straits of Messina, at their narrowest no more than two miles across, were covered by a very large number of anti-aircraft and coastal guns, and this careful fortification of a natural bolt-hole succeeded in keeping it open—by night—against all the efforts of the allied air

force and the two navies. From August the 14th, when the Mediterranean Air Command was informed that evacuation had begun, the air fleets concentrated their strength on the escape-route, and in spite of its prodigious defences inflicted heavy casualties on the retreating enemy. By day the route was closed, but in the darkness a regrettably large proportion of the German divisions succeeded in crossing, in a nervous continuous traffic of small craft, the narrow sea to Italy. With them they took what equipment they could load, and what must be left behind they destroyed.

In the four days between the fall of Randazzo and the entry into Messina on the 17th, the Allied forces expedited the German evacuation by as destructive a squeezing-out process as they could contrive. From either side the navies bombarded communications and what targets they could find in the shortening triangle of enemy territory, while the divisions that remained in the line pushed doggedly forward over the cratered roads.

The 50th Division occupied Taormina—but found nothing there to remind them of elegant holiday-making—and a last attempt was made to cut off the retreating enemy by landing from the sea a squadron of the 4th Armoured Brigade and Number 2 Commando three miles north of Ali Marina: sixteen miles, that is, from Taormina. But so far from intercepting the enemy, the landing-party was fired on, from the north, by a German rearguard. A detachment from the landing-party then moved inland to look for another route to Messina.

On the north coast, advancing towards Patti, the 3rd Division had been halted by a spectacular demolition. At Cape Calava the road, hewn from the solid rock, had entered a tunnel; but when the Americans arrived the road had vanished, leaving only a great scar on the face of the cliff. While the infantry and artillery used landing-craft to circumvent the impasse, Engineers succeeded in building a wooden bridge to strut the cliff, and the pursuit was continued. Patti fell on the 14th, Falcone on the 15th, and a few hours later contact with the enemy was regained a little farther to the east; troops of the 3rd and the 9th met in Montalbano, which the Germans had evacuated. At Barcellona they offered only a nominal resistance, and now the 3rd Division was advancing rapidly again. Another landing from the sea had been planned, but the troops who came ashore were beaten in the race, and the 3rd kept its lead. Now they were going headlong for Messina.

On that last night of the campaign a full moon shone upon thousands of men, and hundreds of vehicles, hurrying across a

wrecked and burning landscape to their prize. The roads were littered with ruined transport, camions still smoking, and abandoned burnt-out cars. A vanguard of bulldozers ploughed through heaps of rubble. Shells from the German batteries now mounted in the Italian Toe fell among the ruins and the advancing troops. Patrols went forward with orders to advance until they encountered resistance, or Messina. But there was no more resistance.

General Patton entered Messina at a quarter past ten on the morning of the 17th, and about the same time a detachment of the 4th Armoured Brigade from the Eighth Army joined the American troops already there. There was much jubilation at the Allied entry, and the weary soldiers were greeted with a Sicilian ovation, hand-clapping, and the more useful gift of figs, grapes, and wine. It was thirty-eight days since they had landed on the southern beaches of the island.

The escape of a large proportion of the German forces, though unpreventable in the course of events, was a disappointment; but the conquest of Sicily was, notwithstanding that, a military and a political victory of major importance. The enemy's casualties—not counting his losses in crossing the Straits—were 164,000 dead, wounded, and prisoners, of whom 32,100 were Germans; and equipment captured and destroyed included about 1,500 aircraft, 78 tanks and armoured cars, 287 pieces of artillery, and 3,500 motor vehicles.

British casualties were 2,721 killed, 7,939 wounded, 2,183 missing; American losses amounted to 1,233 killed, 4,695 wounded, and 968 missing. But against this heavy cost it is proper to balance the new renown won by the Eighth Army, with its notable reinforcement from the First; the distinction gained (for brilliance of manoeuvre, the speed and vigour of its movement) by the first American field army to fight a campaign in this war; and above all the invaluable spirit and admirable practice of co-operation, under General Alexander's leadership, which the Allied forces had so unmistakably demonstrated.

The political and strategic consequences of victory were enormous, and the three objectives of the campaign had all been achieved. Our lines of communication through the Mediterranean were now secure. The moral and physical pressure exerted upon Italy had been so severe, and so deeply felt, that the Fascist regime had already collapsed, and Mussolini's resignation on July the 25th—when the Canadians were bloodily fighting their way towards Agira—was manifestly an announcement that the Fascist Axis which had been

“forged in steel” was about to break. Italy’s participation in the war would not last much longer; and with Italy’s defection the enemy’s possession of Corsica and Sardinia must cease, for the islands would be untenable; a narrow way was opened for invasion of the Continent; and the enormous increase of German commitments in Southern France, in Italy, and the Balkans must draw appreciable strength from the Russian front. Mitigation of the burden that Russia was bearing had been the third of our objectives and the following winter would show how decisively the Soviet armies took advantage of this lightening of their load. Goebbels also took advantage of it, by blaming Italy’s treason for Germany’s consequent defeat upon her eastern front.

The campaign had lasted thirty-eight days, and nine months had gone since the Allied armies landed in North Africa. And now we occupied a bridge into the Continent, and plans were already afoot to cross it.

CHAPTER II

FESTUNG EUROPA: THE FIRST BREACH

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Policy and Supply

At the Trident Conference, assembled in Washington in May, 1943, it was decided that the decisive attack on German-occupied Europe would be made from Britain, probably in the early summer of 1944; and General Eisenhower was urgently instructed to consider by what operations the anticipated conquest of Sicily could, in the intervening period, most usefully be exploited. Two things had to be done: to eliminate Italy, and occupy the attention of the greatest possible number of German troops. The purpose of operations in the Mediterranean would henceforth be to keep the enemy busy while preparations were made for the assault from the west; and to bleed him as deeply as might be done, to contribute to the speedy success of that assault. Italy had thirty-five divisions in the south of France and the Balkans: when Italy had been defeated, Germany would have to find at least twenty divisions with which to replace them. Germany must be stretched to the limit of her resources, weakened and bled. While the matador in the west was attiring himself and rehearsing his final blow, the British and American troops in the Mediterranean, like the picadors in a bullring, must weaken the bull and bring down his head.

Clearly much depended on the course of events in Sicily. The number of troops on the shores of the Mediterranean was large,

but limited; and already it had been decided that four United States and three British divisions were to be returned to Britain by November the 1st. The number of landing-craft and assault-ships was less than could be desired, and it was still not known how many would be lost or damaged on the Sicilian coast, nor how many the Combined Chiefs of Staff would recall to the United Kingdom. On June the 5th, however, General Alexander began to make plans for the initial step in the conquest of Italy: invasion of the Calabrian Toe. September the 1st was the tentative date for the assault.

General Alexander had a paper-strength of nineteen British and Allied, four United States, and four French divisions to draw on; but that was greater than the number in fact available. Some of the British, under the command of Middle Eastern headquarters, would still be required for service in the Levant, and the garrisoning of the African ports; while other formations were under strength or not fully trained. The number that could be employed, at any given place on a given date, would always be limited, moreover, by the available amount of shipping. The Allied air force would include 780 heavy and medium bombers, 300 light bombers, and 2,000 fighters: a reduction of 300, mostly heavy bombers, on the number allotted for Sicily. To mount the invasion, the facilities of every port in North Africa, from Oran to Alexandria, would have to be used.

As soon as evidence accumulated, in Sicily, of the Italians' disinclination to fight a losing war, General Eisenhower recommended to the Combined Chiefs of Staff that the campaign be carried into Calabria as soon as Messina had fallen; he had, moreover, recently advanced a more ambitious proposal, to make a seaborne landing in the vicinity of Naples, and the Combined Chiefs had already expressed their interest. With the dismissal of Mussolini and the abolition of the Fascist Grand Council, on July the 25th, the recommendation became a decision, and a cable from the Combined Chiefs directed General Eisenhower to make immediate plans for the earliest possible capture of Naples with whatever resources he might have.

To hasten the surrender of Italy, General Eisenhower broadcast an offer of peace on honourable terms, if the Italians would cease all assistance to the Germans; and he offered to return the Italian prisoners taken in Tunisia and Sicily if the British and Italian prisoners in Italian hands were safely returned. He had sought, and been granted, the authority to conclude an armistice.

The improvement of the situation did indeed suggest that an

early seaborne assault against Naples was desirable to supplement the Calabrian attack, which, in the difficult country of the south, was bound to be slow-moving, and might be indefinitely contained within the Toe. To establish a Calabrian bridgehead was still considered necessary, however. It would be a door into Italy: it might draw German forces to the south, away from Naples and the landing beaches at Salerno, and if the enemy concentrated his forces against Salerno, it would create a position from which his southern flank would be threatened and might eventually be attacked. The planning for the more northerly landing was entrusted to General Mark Clark, with September the 7th as the provisional date for it.

The scale of both the landings was decided, as rigorously as ever Procrustes imposed his will, by the shipping and assault-craft available. No more than two divisions could cross the Straits; and only three, with an addition of two Ranger battalions and two Commandos, could be initially employed in the vicinity of Naples. It was, undeniably, going to be a lightweight invasion—the Italians, however near they might be to the brink of surrender, had still 180,000 troops in southern Italy—and even with minimum loading, General Clark's force would have to wait for many of their landing-craft till the Calabrian invaders had finished with them.

While necessary preparations were being made, and the campaign in Sicily was nearing its end, the political situation began its expected development. On August the 15th General Castellano, representing Marshal Badoglio, arrived at the British Embassy in Madrid and stated that when the Allies landed on the mainland, Italy would be prepared to join them in war against the Germans. President Roosevelt, Mr. Churchill, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff were then in conference in Quebec; on August the 18th they instructed General Eisenhower to send two staff officers to Lisbon to meet Castellano and acquaint him with our terms for an armistice. This was two days after the General had decided to cross the Straits on the earliest possible date, and quickly follow the landings at Reggio with a heavier assault at Salerno. The staff officers returned from Lisbon on the 20th, and considerable discussion ensued. The Italians wanted us to put at least fifteen divisions ashore, and were anxious to know our invasion-plan; but as we intended to attack with only six divisions, or a little more, it was considered impolitic to give them the information they demanded.

The terms which Castellano took back to Rome were those of a military capitulation. Hostilities were to cease at a time of which the Italian government would be informed, and which would be

a few hours before the main assault went in. Following a broadcast announcement by the Allied Commander-in-Chief, the Italian government must proclaim the armistice; order its armed forces and people to collaborate with the Allies and resist the Germans; despatch its fleet, shipping, and aircraft to Allied bases; and release all Allied prisoners.

General Castellano flew to Sicily on August the 31st to say that his government could not accept the Allied terms until they had been assured that British and American forces were coming in sufficient strength to give the Italian government freedom of action. He repeated his plea for, at the least, fifteen divisions. Far more frightened of German reprisals than of the Allied invasion, the Italians were immensely concerned for the safety of Rome and their government. Under the terms of the armistice, the Italian divisions in and about Rome were to secure it against German occupation; but Castellano insisted that, in order to do this, they must have immediate help.

It had been intended to use the American 82nd Airborne Division to assist the Salerno assault by dropping it along the Volturno to destroy the river-crossings; but now it was decided to fly it to Rome, on the first day of the major landing, if the Italians agreed to sign the armistice, to seize and hold the necessary airfields near Rome, and muzzle their anti-aircraft batteries.

It is not improbable that General Eisenhower felt some anxiety as he considered the gathering strength of the German hold on Italy; for south of Rome the enemy had been reinforced by the 60,000 men evacuated from Sicily, and new formations were arriving in the north. It was increasingly desirable to detach the Nazis' Italian allies before embarking our six divisions on their hazardous crusade. But all anxiety (if indeed it existed) was concealed from the Italian emissary, and when Castellano returned to Rome it was to inform his government that, no matter what action it took, the Allies were going to invade the Italian mainland; and Marshal Badoglio and his colleagues must make their decision by the night of September the 1st.

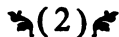
The Italian government accepted the amended terms, and the armistice was signed, in circumstances of complete secrecy, at General Alexander's headquarters at Cassibile, near Syracuse, in the late afternoon of September the 3rd. This was eleven hours after two divisions of the Eighth Army had crossed the Straits and taken Reggio and San Giovanni.

The armistice would not be made public until a few hours before

the other invasion-force landed at Salerno. Then, according to arrangement, General Eisenhower would broadcast the announcement, and Marshal Badoglio would immediately follow him and give the news to his own people. The assault-craft were to land on the Salerno beaches before dawn on September the 9th.

On September the 8th Badoglio sent a signal that strong German forces in the neighbourhood of Rome prevented him from guaranteeing to hold the three aerodromes on which the 82nd Division was to land; and he could not, he said, accept an armistice until the seaborne invasion had achieved success. The Airborne Division was already preparing to take-off on its flight to Rome; and the operation was cancelled in the nick of time. Badoglio's last-minute attempt to break the armistice that his representative had signed, five days before, brought from General Eisenhower a stern rejoinder. But Badoglio made no reply.

General Eisenhower waited until half-past six, the stipulated time for the announcement. Badoglio was still silent. General Eisenhower, adhering to his plan, broadcast his news of an armistice with no assurance that its terms would be obeyed. An hour and a quarter later, however, Badoglio's voice was heard, and to the Italian people he confirmed the fact that an armistice had been granted, and accepted. The Axis was broken; Italy was out.



The Invasion of Calabria

ON the Toe of Italy, covering the Straits, were forty-nine coastal guns, and these, it was decided, must be destroyed or dominated to ensure the safe crossing of our divisions from Messina. But to assemble a sufficient artillery and transport the necessary ammunition over the cratered roads and broken bridges of north-eastern Sicily was a formidable task which could not be completed in time to mount the invasion on the date originally chosen. Another forty-eight hours was needed, and it was not till the early morning of September the 3rd that General Montgomery embarked his exploratory divisions and sent them forward, over the last of the water-obstacles, into the mainland of Europe.

From the hills above Messina six hundred guns tore the darkness with their lightning and shook the sky with a co-ordinated thunder.

The barrage descended upon the beaches, lifted from them to positions in the rear, returned to the beaches, and then stepped forward a hundred yards at a time.

Bombers and light bombers flew far ahead of the landing-craft to drop their loads wherever tactics had suggested they might be useful; and the Navy patrolled the narrow sea and added its supporting fire. The great guns of *Nelson*, *Warspite*, *Rodney* and *Valiant* hammered the shore-defences, while destroyers and gunboats in close support accompanied the landing-craft. Thus immensely shepherded the 13th and 17th Brigades of the 5th British Division, and the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Canadians—vanguard of the invading armies and first flight of the XIIIth Corps—crossed the Straits in safety, and making their landings against flimsy resistance, established their beach-heads with gratifying speed. No mines or demolitions hindered them, and the Grenadier battalion of the German 29th Motorised Division, that had been in Reggio two days before, had silently withdrawn. The last remaining troop of 88-millimetre guns followed them at what (for German gunners) was probably a little after breakfast-time.

Taking San Giovanni and Reggio, our troops immediately thrust forward like a fork, British to the north and Canadians on the south, to seize and hold the Calabrian peninsula. They were cheered by the civil population, and whole units of the Italian coastal regiments surrendered to them.

During the night of the 3rd a Commando landed near Bagnare, met German troops there and drove them northward, and took the town. The 15th Brigade, marching along the steep coast road under the cover of naval guns, with a flank guard on the hills above, made contact with the Commando on the 4th, and cleared the remaining pocket of German resistance. It continued to advance. Then the 13th Brigade, landing from the sea south of Gioia Tauro, passed through it, and going forward to Rosarno found that the bridge over the river Messina had been demolished.

The Canadians, marching through the middle of the Toe, went as far as Cinquefrondi without opposition, and when a battalion had reached Locri, on the east coast, they took a new route, and partly by sea, partly along the coast road from Locri, went quickly forward and in the evening of the 10th took Catanzaro under the inmost joint of the Toe. They had gone faster and farther than their companions on the west, where the enemy had made something of a stand.

In the early morning of the 8th the Malta Brigade and a

Commando landed south of Pizzo and came under heavy and well-aimed fire from field-guns, mortars, and machine-guns. In the afternoon the battle went to-and-fro, but the newcomers held their gains, and presently the 13th Brigade, having found a way across the Messina, made contact with them and on the next day thrust into and beyond Pizzo.

This day, the 9th, had seen two other forces come ashore in Italy. To the north, General Clark's Fifth Army had landed on the Salerno beaches, and in the east some part of the British 1st Airborne Division had taken Taranto.

In the early stages of the planning for invasion, the taking of Taranto and the Heel had been regarded as a major operation; but in the new situation presented by the surrender of Badoglio, and the discovery that a single battalion of the German 1st Parachute Division was the remaining garrison of the Heel, a swift decision was taken to establish ourselves, without delay, on the Adriatic coast. To advance up the Leg of Italy would, in deference to the unshakable argument of geography, require two forces, each with its own base and lines of supply. There is no good or sufficient communication across the Apennines that divide the Leg, and though the capture of Naples would enable us to feed and maintain an army advancing on the Tyrrhenian side, it could do little to nourish lines of communication on the Adriatic. To supply a companion advance on the east it was necessary to acquire the triangle of Bari, Taranto, and Brindisi.

It was on September the 3rd that a new plan was made for the speedy occupation of Taranto. The prospective surrender of the Italian fleet released the 12th Cruiser Squadron of the Royal Navy from the duty, to which it had been assigned, of protecting the Salerno assault-convoys from surface-attack; and in its cruisers and escorting destroyers a part of the 1st Airborne Division was embarked. There was no opposition at Taranto, and rapidly, on the evening of September the 9th, the troops took possession of the town and its nearby airfields. Columns were promptly sent east and north to capture Brindisi and Bari.

The battleships *Howe* and *King George V*, with U.S.S. *Boise* and the 14th Destroyer Flotilla accompanied the 12th Cruiser Squadron into Taranto, and as they approached the port, up the swept channel, they met the Italian battleships *Andrea Doria* and *Caio Duilio* with a pair of cruisers, a destroyer, and a submarine or two on the surface of the astonished sea. The two fleets passed in silence. The Italian ships were no longer at war with us. They had

abandoned the fight as Hannibal, years before, had turned his back upon impossible war and fled from that same port.

In the morning of this day—the day of the bloody landings at Salerno—our reconnaissance aircraft had seen the main part of the Italian fleet, coming out of Spezia and Genoa to surrender, steam southward down the west coast of Corsica on its ordered course. There were the battleships *Roma*, *Italia*, and *Vittoria Veneto* with six cruisers and thirteen destroyers. Their instructions from the Italian Admiralty were insufficiently precise, however, and presently they turned into the Gulf of Asinara, between Corsica and Sardinia. An urgent signal from Allied Force Headquarters informed them of their mistake, and they turned west again. But before they were clear of the land they were attacked with glider-bombs by fifteen Junkers 88, and the *Roma* was hit, and caught fire, and sank. While the remainder of the fleet continued on its course to North Africa, the cruiser *Regolo* and six destroyers remained to pick up survivors, and then proceeded to Majorca, where the crews of two destroyers scuttled their ships and the others were interned.

On September the 10th General Eisenhower and Admiral Cunningham went to sea in the destroyer *Hambleton*, and north of Bizerta saw the surrendered fleet, escorted by *Warspite*, *Valiant*, and six destroyers, steam past them on its way to Malta. To General Eisenhower it was the happy symbol of Italy's defeat, and the first solid and substantial product of the armistice. But to Admiral Cunningham it meant more than that. For three years he had been fighting against an enemy who was always his superior, and often vastly his superior, in strength and strategic advantage. He had begun his war with vigour, and fought it with unflinching audacity. In the deadly off-shore waters of Greece and Crete, in open sea and the desperate traffic along the Libyan coast, even in the harbour of Alexandria, the Royal Navy had suffered fearful losses. By the cold light of accountancy it seemed—more than once it seemed—that we had lost the Mediterranean. But Admiral Cunningham hid his losses from the enemy, used his remaining ships with unflinching courage, with unrelenting vigour, with a genius that united these qualities in a matchless force before which accountancy lost its significance, and the Duce's swift and lovely fleet, like Cleopatra's flagship, turned tail and fled. And now, after three years of unrelenting struggle, Sir Andrew saw, in imposing procession on the summer sea, the greatness of his reward.

On September the 10th, at the Lascaris Barracks, he accepted the formal surrender of the Fleet from Admiral de Zara, who had

succeeded the Italian Commander-in-Chief, drowned in *Roma*, and to the Admiralty made the signal: 'Be pleased to inform Their Lordships that the Italian Battle Fleet now lies at anchor under the guns of the fortress of Malta.'

The terms of the armistice were observed with scrupulous exactitude by the Italian Navy, and during the next few days, into various Allied ports, came the battleship *Giulio Cesare*, the aircraft carrier *Miraglia*, some forty submarines, about sixty torpedo-boats, corvettes and minesweepers, and more than a hundred merchantmen.

The Army, to begin with, was less responsive: they laid down their arms, readily enough, wherever our troops made contact with them, but they offered no apparent resistance to the Germans. The King and Badoglio and the shadowy government had fled from Rome, and like the heat of those September afternoons, apathy lay upon their people. Starved by twenty years of Fascism, their spirit had been broken by war; and the unremitting assault of the Allied Air Force gave it no opportunity for convalescence.

There had been no halt or pause in the always advancing flow of the war in the air. In the latter part of August the allied air-fleet had dropped some 1,500 explosive tons on railway yards at Battipaglia, Salerno, Bagnoli, Taranto, Villa Liturno, Aversa, and Torre Annunziata; and on the airfields at Foggia, Capua and Grazzanise. They had disorganised transport, they had destroyed aircraft on the ground, they had cratered landing-grounds. In the week that ended on September the 3rd, they had widely dropped another load of 2,800 tons, most of it on railways. All traffic had been stopped at Pisa, Benevento, Aversa, Sulmona, Salerno, Cancelli, and Foggia. Railway traffic through the Brenner Pass had been blocked by a successful attack on the bridge spanning the river Iscara at Bolzano.

In preparation for the Eighth Army's invasion of Calabria the Tactical Air Force had assailed enemy gun positions, military works, and the southern railways; and in direct support of the troops its fighters and fighter-bombers flew two hundred and fifty sorties against which the enemy—who had already withdrawn much of his airforce from Calabria—flew an estimated hundred.

During the week before the Salerno landings the air assault was intensified, and co-ordinated attacks on the fighter bases near Naples put the aerodromes of Capua and Capodichino out of use, and seriously damaged that at Grazzanise. Roads and railways leading to the battle area were cut and blocked, the enemy's bomber-stations at Foggia and Viterbo were soundly hammered, and as a

climax to the week's campaign a hundred and thirty Fortresses dropped nearly 400 tons of bombs on General Kesselring's Army Headquarters at Frascati. Fighter opposition to these attacks diminished steadily.

On the ground the Germans withdrew nearly all their forces from the south, and in the most desperate endeavour to drive the Fifth Army back into the sea from which it had so audaciously come ashore, used them in violent but perhaps ill-governed attacks on General Clark's precarious position. German rearguards still opposed the Eighth Army's advance along the Tyrrhenian roads, with gunfire and demolition, but on the 10th, in despite of a blown bridge over the Amato and more positive opposition, the Malta Brigade reached Tiriolo, north-west of Catanzaro, and on the next day the 17th Brigade established itself in the Nicastro area. Advancing through the 17th, the 15th then led the advance, and its patrols went forward at great speed to Cosenza, and returning to the coast-road reached Scalea, on the Gulf of Policastro, on the 13th.

The Corps was now established between Catanzaro and Nicastro, on the inmost joint of the Toe, and a brigade of the 5th Division was ready to embark, near Vibo Valentia, for a seaborne advance to Scalea. A line through the narrowness of the land about Scalea had been the Corps' original objective, but now it had to move forward, as quickly as possible, to give what help it could to the Fifth Army. It had also to make contact with the Taranto invaders. But from Reggio to Scalea was two hundred and fifty miles by road, and the little ports along the coast were incapable of handling any considerable seaborne traffic. The difficulties of administration were extreme. It was decided to use the indifferent communication lines through the Toe merely for the XIIIth Corps' advance towards Salerno; and develop the ports of the Heel so that as soon as the Fifth Army had secured its bridgehead and begun to go forward, the axis of advance for the Eighth Army could be transferred to the Adriatic side.

By road and a shuttle-service of landing craft on either shore, the XIIIth Corps moved northward to the Scalea neck, and forward still, on the west, to Sapri. On the 16th the 5th Division was concentrated in the triangle of Lagonegro, Sapri, and Maratea, on the Gulf of Policastro, and patrols moving to the west had met patrols of the American VIth Corps west of Vallo di Laconia. Patrols of the Canadian Division, which was concentrating east of Castrovillari in the Scalea neck, met on the same day troops of the Airborne Division near Metaponto on the Gulf of Taranto.

On the 17th the Eighth Army, on a line running from west to east, from Sapri through Lagonegro to Rotondella, and in contact with the Americans near Vallo, was within striking distance of the southern arc of the German cordon round Salerno. The Germans had already shown themselves sensitive to the threat, and were apparently beginning to withdraw in front of the American VIth Corps.

The most important centre of road communication in the enemy's rear was Potenza, which was held by troops of the 1st Parachute and the 26th Panzer Division. It was the latter which had supplied rearguards to oppose the XIIIth Corps' advance. To occupy Potenza would certainly be the most effective means of persuading the enemy to abandon his counter-offensive against the Salerno invaders; and an order to capture it was received from General Alexander on September the 17th.

On the following day the XIIIth Corps resumed its advance in three directions. While the Reconnaissance Regiment in contact with the Americans near Vallo continued to explore that area, the 5th Division sent its main force northward from Lagonegro towards Brienza, and on a road roughly parallel a Canadian brigade advanced from Rotondella towards Potenza. Another Canadian brigade followed the Gulf road to Taranto.

The advance of the 5th Division from Lagonegro, through the Diano valley of the Tanagro river, was impeded by demolitions, but progress was made both there and to the west of the road, where patrols of the Reconnaissance Regiment from Vallo met an enemy rearguard south of Sacco; and a detachment of the 13th Brigade took Sanza. The main thrust was delivered up the Diano valley, and by last light on the 19th Brienza was reported clear of the enemy. On the following day reconnoitring troops of the 15th Brigade, having crossed the mountains to Marsica, entered Brienza by rail. On both days patrols of the 5th Division were in contact with Fifth Army patrols near Controne and Rocca d'Aspide, well to the west. The 3rd Canadian Brigade had, in the meantime, moved with great speed on its more easterly route, and captured Potenza on the 20th. Potenza had been heavily bombed, and the rearguard left by the 1st Parachute Division withdrew before Canadian pressure. Contact with the enemy was made again north-west of the town; a more difficult task was to establish road-communication with the 5th Division at Brienza, and a great deal of work had to be done by the Engineers before wheeled traffic could use the road between the two towns.



There was now a short pause in the progress of the Eighth Army: a pause determined by three factors. In the first place, the Fifth Army had survived the crisis at Salerno and regained the initiative; the tactical situation, that is, no longer demanded forced marching. In the second place, the next phase of the campaign and the Eighth Army's new objective—Termoli, well forward on the east coast—required the preliminary concentration of the XIIIth Corps on the Foggia plain; and Foggia, ninety miles by road across the mountains, was defended by a regiment of the 1st Parachute Division which was unlikely to surrender it unless to superior force. And in the third place, the Calabrian supply-route had reached its terminus; the axis of supply must now be based upon Taranto, and according to estimate the new administrative system could not operate fully until October the 1st.

During this period the XIIIth Corps, in a comparatively passive role, assured the safety of the Fifth Army's right flank. It was not unduly passive, however, for there was vigorous patrolling to the north and west, and the Canadians, in the course of the next week, went forward against prodigious obstacles and small but determined enemy rearguards to capture Melfi, some forty miles to the north of Potenza. Their further advance was prevented by very extensive demolitions.

As far west as the main road between Bari and Taranto, the Heel had been cleared by the 18th, and the enemy quickly evacuated his positions in and south of Altamura when Canadian patrols arrived to threaten his western flank while the 1st Airborne Division continued its attack from the south. That all the south-eastern corner was being abandoned became obvious when, a few days before the Canadians reached Atella on their way to Melfi, the Germans breached the Apulian aqueduct there, and cut the main water supply of the whole area from the Heel to Foggia. On the 22nd they were retiring through Spinnazzola, and there was no possibility of their making anywhere a determined stand until they had reached the mountains west of Foggia.

Part of the 78th Division and the 4th Armoured Brigade had now landed at Bari, and from them a mobile force known as Force 'A' was formed and sent in pursuit of the retreating enemy along the Adriatic coast. While patrols of the XIIIth Corps covered its flank on the eastward slope of the Apennines, as far as the Foggia plain, Force 'A' drove in the enemy's rearguards at Andria and Barletta, crossed the Ofanto in spite of its demolished bridge, swiftly passed Cerignola, and on the 27th drove through Foggia

and into the northward hills. By the 29th, following Force 'A', troops of the 78th Division had established themselves in the hills beyond San Severo and Lucera; and the first phase of the Eighth Army's campaign in Italy had come to its close.

Before it the mountains rose more abruptly to sterner heights, and the evidence was accumulating that the Germans proposed to hold them. From the north came news of German reinforcement, and in the West the Fifth Army was advancing on Naples, and as soon as Naples had been captured it would pause to build strength, from incoming supplies there, for its further campaigning. The Eighth Army would presently go forward to the new objectives of Termoli and Campobasso: but first there were administrative problems to solve, the divisions that had moved so far and so fast needed rest and re-grouping, and the material of battle must be brought forward before the stiffer tasks that lay to the north could be essayed.

General Montgomery could look back with reasonable satisfaction at what he had already accomplished, however. Draw an undulating line from a point on the Adriatic, a few miles east of Termoli, south across the mountains to Capi Licosa, or thereby: all the land east of that had been cleared of the enemy in twenty-seven days. The Eighth Army, before September was out, had taken all the three provinces of Calabria, Lucania, and Apulia, and the great airfields round Foggia.

For the first time since the ill-starred expedition to Greece we had challenged the enemy to fight a campaign in which his routes of supply and reinforcement were immune from naval attack. We had committed ourselves to fight in a country that gave every topographical advantage to the enemy, all the way down its narrow Leg from the mountains to the north and north-west of Florence. But the Eighth Army had made a good beginning. It had secured a firm foothold on the mainland of Europe, and to the Chiefs of the Allied Air Force the acquisition of Foggia was, of itself, a strategic prize rich enough to pay for the whole campaign. The great industrial targets of southern and south-eastern Europe, that were beyond the economic range of our bombers based in England, could be satisfactorily attacked from Foggia as soon as its airfields had been re-made, and a sufficient organisation provided.

Work on the airfields was begun immediately. Much of the town had been ruined by bombing-attack, and now its fragments were pulverised and packed into the earth to make runways for the heavy bombers which had destroyed it. It had

been decided by the Combined Chiefs of Staff that the air-war must be carried into south-eastern Europe as soon as possible, and though the Army needed rapid supply and the speedy development of its twin bases Naples and Taranto, to wage an autumn war through the mountains, the reconstruction of Foggia was held to be more urgent, and much of our shipping was diverted to Bari to meet the strategic requirements of the air.

✻(3)✻

The Beaches of Salerno

NAPLES, the most populous city in the south of Italy, has the largest port and the best harbour facilities on the west coast. We needed the port to supply an army of sufficient size to march north and capture Rome. Not only we, but the Germans, were aware of this, and there was no prospect of acquiring Naples without fighting for it.

The preliminary seaborne landings were made on the beaches of Salerno because they were close to Naples, they were suitable for amphibious assault, and they were just near enough to Sicily to enable our fighters to cover the landings. Flying from a Sicilian base a Spitfire fitted with an additional 90-gallon tank could remain over the Gulf of Salerno for about twenty minutes. The sea approach was good and there were no shoals or river-mouth ridges to impede the landing-craft. The beaches, as beaches, were excellent; the best of them was a twenty-mile stretch of sand, running south from Salerno, bisected by the river Sele. The coastal plain, however, was less favourable. It was narrow, it was dominated by mountains, and consequently exposed to view and open to gunfire. There was, moreover, no exit from it into the plain of Naples except two mountain-passes, north of the Gulf, which would assuredly be held against us.

General Clark would have preferred to make his landing in the Gulf of Gaeta, north of Naples, but because the Air Force could not adequately cover an assault so far from their bases he had to abandon his own choice of terrain. He had also to accept a reduction in the force initially assigned to him, for the British 1st Airborne Division, which had been included in it, was now engaged in the Heel: and the American 82nd Airborne Division had been taken from him to seize (on Marshal Badoglio's plea) the Roman

airfields, and though that operation had been cancelled at the last minute, the Division could not immediately resume its place in the original plan. There was the usual difficulty in finding enough landing craft, and the invaders had to cut their weight to the minimum. And then, during the short voyage to Salerno, there came a necessary but very disconcerting announcement.

The main assault convoy sailed from Tripoli on September the 6th. Its destination, of course, was a heavily-guarded secret—but the Chinese cook of a water-boat shouted in farewell, 'See you in Naples!', and its course was soon observed by some torpedo-bombers which attacked it without result. Thereafter the voyage was peaceful till half-past six on September the 8th when, into the calm of a lovely evening, into the minds of the soldiers advancing to battle—taut with resolve and vibrant with anxiety—came the voice of General Eisenhower to proclaim the astonishing news that hostilities had ceased between the United Nations and Italy, and that an armistice had been proclaimed. The announcement was made on the very eve of battle to prevent the Germans—so it was hoped—from taking over the defensive positions which the Italians were now permitted to leave.

The excitement in the ships was enormous, and perplexity almost as great. In some quarters there was audible relief, in others vociferous disappointment: But almost throughout the fleet there was uncertainty that showed itself in varying degree from logical enquiry to plain bewilderment. In the larger ships it was not long before senior officers informed the men that the armistice would make no difference to the coming battle, except, perhaps, to increase its severity by peeling-off the soft skin of Italian resistance; and the assault must go in according to plan. In the smaller craft, however, perplexity continued, and was not wholly dispelled even when German aeroplanes flew out of the evening dusk to attack some parts of the convoy. Little damage was done by the attack. The red lines of tracer-bullets faded from the sky, and presently the moon went down, and darkness enclosed the ships. In the darkness ahead of them the mine-sweepers were clearing safe channels into the Gulf.

General Clark's Fifth Army consisted of the British Xth and the American VIth Corps. The Xth Corps, on the left, was to deliver the main assault and capture Naples. The immediate objectives were the mountain-passes north of Salerno, the port of Salerno, the airfield at Montecorvino, and the rail and road centre of Battipaglia. On the left flank three battalions of United States

Rangers and two Commandos were to land on the inner part of the Sorrento Peninsula at Maiori and Vietri, the former to clear the road to Pagani and seize the Nocera Pass—that leads into the plain of Naples—the latter to hold the defile immediately north of Salerno. The main body of the Corps would land on a seven-mile stretch south of the little river Picentino, the 46th Division on the left on a one-brigade front, the 56th on the right on a two-brigade front. South of the river Sele the American VIth Corps was initially to land Regimental Combat Teams of the 36th Division on the beaches of Paestum, to advance inland and seize the high ground overlooking the Salerno plain, and so prevent the movement of enemy forces into the plain from the east and the south.

As the ships arrived in the outer anchorage, nine miles from the land, and prepared to lower their landing-craft, German searchlights swept the foreshore and repeated demolitions on the harbour front at Salerno raised clouds of orange flame. There had been no preparatory bombardment of the enemy's positions, either from the air or by the Navy: a Naval bombardment would have entailed the previous sweeping of the heavily-mined waters of the Gulf, and General Clark had hoped to achieve some degree of surprise. He did not, in fact, achieve it, but his troops had not to face a concentration of the German forces, as they might well have done if he had advertised his intention by previously sweeping the inshore waters. While his troops were landing at Salerno, a strong German force was watchfully guarding the Gulf of Gaeta.

It was half-past three when the assault-boats grounded on their various beaches, and the troops went ashore under a curtain of fire from destroyers and smaller vessels and ear-splitting salvos of rockets. They found in front of them defended positions that could only be taken by hand-to-hand assault.

North of the Sele the beaches were held by something less than two battalions of the 69th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, south of the river by two companies of the 79th, both of the 16th Panzer Division which with wise precaution had recently taken them over from the Italians. The defences were based upon several strong-points, capable of producing heavy fire, and supported by self-propelled guns and the Divisional armour working in groups of tanks and armoured cars.

On the extreme left the Rangers at Maiori and the Commandos at Vietri landed easily, and by half-past six the Commandos were on the outskirts of Salerno. But though Vietri had been taken, the enemy's gunfire prevented us from using the port for further landings.

From the principal beaches, both north and south of the Sele, machine-guns opened their coloured fire and 88-millimetre guns threw their shells against the flotillas of approaching landing-craft and among the forward troops hurrying over the sand, mined and wired to receive them, while the guns of the Allied Navies maintained a ragged curtain of fire over the soldiers' heads, and dropping flares revealed a grotesque and sinister landscape. Dawn found most of them in better positions than the beaches could offer, and dawn showed them something of the country over which they must fight.

Within a great amphitheatre of mountains, from the Sorrento peninsula on the north to Agropoli on the south, the Salerno plain is an irregular triangle, its long base upon the sea, its apex in the Sele river-valley under the dominating height of Mount Eboli. Under the south-western and southern slopes of Eboli are the little towns of Battipaglia and Eboli, where important roads cross and join, and through which the railway runs. Towering enormously over the American beaches at Paestum—landmarked most proudly by the Temple of Neptune and Paestum's mediaeval tower—rose the sheer bulk, to a height of more than three thousand feet, of Monte Soprano.

The plain, flat and well cultivated, with tree-lined fields and copses and groves of olives and oranges, is watered by two rivers, by many lesser streams, and in the coastal flats it is drained by numerous canals. The river Sele comes into the plain at Contursi; the Calore, running north to circle Altavilla, turns west and joins the Sele four miles from the sea. From their junction to the coast, the river is a serious obstacle to movement. There are no villages in the plain except for the poor settlement of Paestum. The villages are on the hill-slopes or under the mountains.

On the left of the beachline the assault brigade of the 46th Division landed north of the enemy's main strongholds, and made good progress towards the high ground north of the Picentino and west of Pontecagnano Faiano, which it captured. Patrols were sent westward into Salerno, and made contact with the Commandos there.

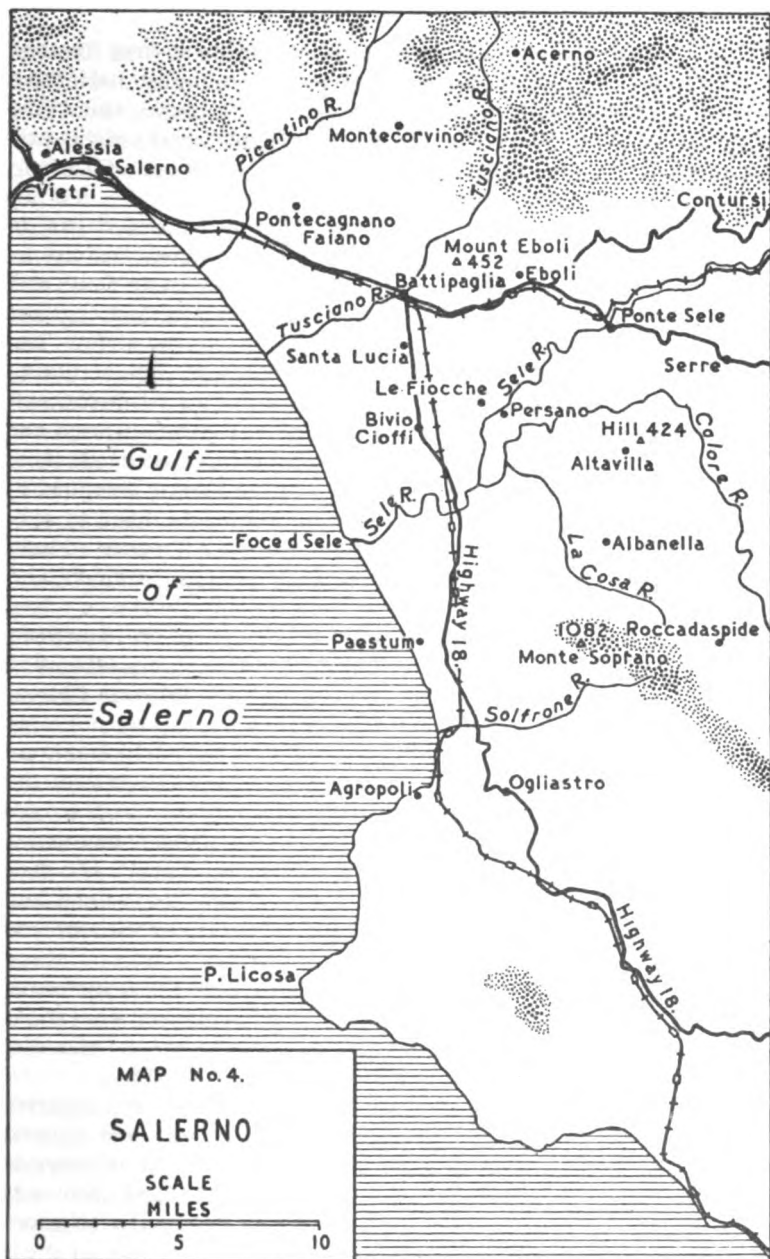
The 56th Division, on their right, had a more difficult landing. Its forward brigades were confronted by two German strongholds and by roving armour, but their fire could not prevent the landings, and the 167th Brigade, on the right, steadily advanced. A threatening tank attack from the south was driven off by naval gunfire, and patrols, reaching far forward to the outskirts of Battipaglia, found no enemy in the town. The 169th Brigade was for some time held

by small-arms fire, but overcoming resistance near the shore reached the Montecorvino airfield—four or five miles south of Montecorvino itself—before noon, and there was halted by heavy fire. The enemy moved quickly into Battipaglia, and from there to the airfield held his ground with great determination.

From the British right flank to the American left there was a gap of about ten miles; and the assaulting troops in Paestum found, to begin with, rather more difficulty in establishing themselves ashore than had their neighbours to the north. The American 36th Division, though admirably trained, had not previously had experience in battle, and both in near-shore waters and on the beaches there was, in the early hours of the day, a certain amount of confusion. This was remedied, however, by the excellent example of many individual soldiers who grasped the situation quickly, and restoring order led the advance inland. The opposition south of Paestum was especially severe. The beaches there were defended by wire and mines, by thirty-four machine-gun emplacements, by half-a-dozen field guns, by mortars, and a battery of 88-millimetre guns sited on a hill behind. The right-hand beach had for some time to be abandoned, but elsewhere the troops, by daylight, were about three hundred yards inland, and a company of Shore Engineers continued to do excellent work, not only in the unloading of supplies and organisation of the beaches, but in occasional assistance to the infantry.

At about eight o'clock a company of Mark IV tanks came up from the south, up the main coast road into Paestum, and passed through it. Shortly after then, thirteen of them reappeared from the direction of Battipaglia, and between the road and the northern beaches met a Duck towing a 105-millimetre howitzer. The gun-crew immediately took action, and so did a destroyer off-shore and a passing Mustang. Five of the tanks were destroyed, and the remainder withdrew. Later in the morning more tanks attacked along the railway north of Paestum, but their attempts to break through the American left flank were abandoned when eight more had been destroyed by gunfire.

On the southern beaches the tanks gave more trouble. Small farmsteads and low walls provided the Germans with defensive positions from which to support their marauding armour, and though the Americans in this sector resisted successfully the attempts to drive them back into the sea, they were unable to advance and in certain places were held throughout the day in great discomfort no more than a thousand yards from the shore.



From the northern American beaches the advance went forward to the day's objectives, and by darkness the infantry held their first line of high ground on the nose of Monte Soprano, about five miles inland; and except for the doubtful flank on the right they could fairly be said to control the plain south of the Sele. The long gap remained, however, between the two Corps.

On much of the Xth Corps' sector fighting continued during the night, and behind the German lines there was great activity as both infantry and armour disengaged from the American front and moved north to reinforce the prospective counter-attack against the British divisions. At sea also there was activity by night. The ships of the Cruiser support force—*Delhi*, *Uganda*, *Hilary*, *Orion*, and *Mauritius*—had stood to sea after their day-long bombardment of the shore, and soon after darkness fell the pathfinders of the Luftwaffe came and dropped their flares in red and white clusters. When the bombers arrived the anchorage was brilliantly illuminated, and the cruisers were manoeuvring at high speed within their smoke-screens. They avoided the bombs, but *Delhi* and *Uganda*, closely appearing from the smoke on converging courses, collided and *Uganda* suffered damage.

The following day was quiet at sea and quiet on the American front. While part of the 45th Division came ashore and moved north by the coast-road towards the valleys of the Sele and Calore, in preparation for attack through the lowlands, the Combat Teams of the 36th took steps to secure their ground. They could find none of the enemy south of Mount Soprano but burnt vehicles on the road to Ogliastro were evidence of his discomfiture; and on the coast-road of Ogliastro and among the steeply divided mountains south of the river Solofrone, the 141st Combat Team, who had had so hard a time on the right flank of the beach-line, established themselves with considerable expenditure of sweat but without loss of blood.

The 3rd Battalion of the 142nd, ordered to take the steepness of Albanella, midway between Soprano and Altavilla, did so against light opposition; and the 1st Battalion, advancing on Altavilla, came by nightfall to within a couple of miles of Hill 424.

On the left of the line the British had all day been closely engaged. At four o'clock in the morning the Royal Fusiliers had entered Battipaglia, and reported its capture; but much of the infantry of the 16th Panzer Division arrived with the daylight, and there was very determined fighting round the town and the nearby tobacco-factory. The Germans held the road east of the town in great

strength, and every attempt to cross it was thrown back. Then in the early evening, with tanks and two battalions of infantry, they counter-attacked in force and recaptured Battipaglia.

On the left, however, we made ground; the 169th Brigade cleared the airfield at Montecorvino, north of the road, and took Farano.

✻(4)✻

The Crisis in the Bridgehead

MOUNT EBOLI, steep-sided and 1,500 feet high, dominated most of the 56th Division's area, the roads that met in Battipaglia, and the Sele valley; and orders were issued on the 10th for a triple offensive with the mountain as the principal objective. On the right the 167th Brigade was to take, in night attack, a small hill north of the road between Battipaglia and Eboli and almost due south of Eboli's peak. In the centre the 201st Guards Brigade, which had come into that area on the previous day, was to capture Battipaglia and the tobacco-factory on the west of it, and then advance up the mountain and on to the nearby hill west of the Tusciano. The 169th Brigade, on the left, was to advance north of Montecorvino airfield, to a hill halfway to Montecorvino itself, and maintain its already won position at Farano.

On the left the attack was successful, and by the afternoon of the 11th the Queens had done all that was asked of them. In the centre the Guards fought their way into the streets of Battipaglia, but on the right the 167th Brigade met an impenetrable defence, and there our attack was held from the start. The Germans promptly took advantage of their local superiority, and in the evening of the 12th, the 29th Panzer Grenadiers launched a well-prepared attack, headed by forty tanks, on Battipaglia and drove our troops out of the town with heavy loss. For some time our situation was extremely dangerous and there were no adequate reserves to deal with the crisis. Royal Engineers and Stevedore companies from the beaches were called upon to help in stopping the gap, and a new defensive line, three thousand yards south-west of the town, was hurriedly manned and stoutly held. The Germans were stopped and the gap was sealed; but too thinly sealed for comfort. Fighting continued during the night, but we lost no more ground.

It had to be admitted that Mount Eboli, for the time being, was

out of reach; and to provide a firm base for operations in the immediate future the 56th Division front was shortened to a line from the hamlet of Santa Lucia, across the Tusciano, to the neighbourhood of Montecorvino station, with the 167th Brigade on the right, and the Guards on the left; while farther to the north the 169th Brigade was reinforced by two squadrons of tanks to hold the positions they had won there. The right flank of the Division was guarded by the 44th Reconnaissance Regiment, that was feeling southwards for contact with the Americans.

As quickly as possible the new positions were strengthened by digging, by wiring and mining, and while this work was going on, under no inconsiderable strain, news came of more danger in the north. Our light forces, Rangers and Commandos, had been allowed to occupy, almost without a fight, useful positions on the mountains overlooking the plain of Naples, and the 46th Division had entered Salerno easily enough. Though German batteries continued to shell the town, they were effectively engaged by our Naval guns. But now, from the north and south, the German reinforcements were arriving. From the north came the Hermann Goering Panzer Division and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, convalescent after their Sicilian mauling, and proceeded to attack—but in battle-groups, never in concentration—the Allied mountain-hold above Salerno and those on the mountain-sides dominating Nocera. The Allied forces held their ground, but there were anxious moments, especially on the 12th, when German armour tried to force a way down the Avellino road, and again on the 13th, when a strong attack from Nocera made some headway. And so, from the hard-pressed 167th Brigade a battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry was transferred to the 46th Division to counter the more immediate threat from the north. East of the town of Salerno the enemy was attacking with three battalions.

On the Battipaglia sector there was sharp fighting on the 13th, 14th, and 15th, but its importance was mainly local, for the shape of the battle was changing. While a major crisis was developing in the American sector, the Xth Corps was re-grouping so as further to strengthen the lines about Salerno. Headquarters and the 8th Royal Fusiliers of the 167th Brigade moved north under command of the 46th Division; the 23rd Armoured Brigade took command of its vacated area with the Scots Greys, the 9th Royal Fusiliers, and what else remained of the 167th; and from the extreme right of the American line two battalions of the 141st Regimental Combat Team moved in on the left of the VIth Corps to fill the international gap.

The first of the renewed counter-attacks on the 56th Division came down the Tuscano, and astride of it, on the evening of the 13th. It was held, halted, and repelled by the Hampshires and the Coldstream Guards. Forty-eight hours later the Germans attacked the same positions, but the Coldstream and the Greys dealt with them very confidently, destroyed some of their vehicles, and drove them up the valley again. A smaller attack from the tobacco-factory was also defeated, and though in the neighbourhood of Santa Lucia there was some confused fighting after the enemy had succeeded in filtering through our positions, quiet was soon restored by a counter-attack from the Greys.

During these three days the battle reached and survived its most perilous phase in the valley of the Sele and on the high ground by Altavilla. Hill 424 dominates Altavilla, but though from its summit there is a fine view over the valleys of the Sele and Calore, the closer views are restricted by olive groves and scrub-oak, by terraced fields and wooded ravines. On the morning of the 11th the 1st Battalion of the 142nd Regimental Combat Team had occupied Hill 424 without meeting opposition, and prepared to defend it, while the 3rd Battalion sent out its patrols on the Albanella hills, and the 2nd went south-west along the ridge towards Rocco d'Aspide.

The 179th Combat Team, of the 45th Division, was meanwhile advancing up the valley towards Ponte Sele and Serre; and about noon on the 11th its 2nd Battalion was halted by a stiff counter-attack, supported by artillery, as it was crossing the Calore at the foot of Hill 424. The other two battalions had gone north-east through Persano, till their forward troops could overlook the bridge and the highroad from Serre to Eboli. There they were stopped by small-arms and gun fire. Then, from the little knoll at Persano, the regimental support column came under heavy fire. It was heavy enough to prevent movement, and the main part of the regiment appeared to be cut off.

From Eboli eight German tanks and a battalion of infantry crossed the Sele and attacked the regiment before it had time to prepare a defensive position. With difficulty the enemy was checked. Below Persano the regiment's supporting tanks and anti-tank guns, halted by fire from the Persano knoll, attacked the German position there; but without avail. Then, in the afternoon, the regiment was attacked by aircraft, by tanks and infantry, and the forward battalion was compelled to retire towards the 1st Battalion's ground north-east of Persano.

North of the Sele the 56th Division was stubbornly fighting

towards Battipaglia; it could do nothing to lessen the very grave and imminent danger of a German thrust down the river valley, in the weakness between the two Corps, that, if it succeeded, would split the Allied force in two. To counter this threat the boundary of the VIth was extended north of the Sele, the 45th Division took over the left flank of the Corps, and the 157th Regimental Combat Team prepared to advance along the west bank of the Sele with the immediate object of relieving pressure on the 179th by taking the river-fords near Persano. The neighbourhood of the fords was dominated by a large tobacco-factory, on rising ground at Le Fiocche, which the Germans held in strength. They continued to hold it, and positions to the west, in spite of determined attacks by American tanks and infantry.

In addition to their reinforcements from the north, which were menacing our tenuous hold of the passes into the plain of Naples and our possession of Salerno, the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division had now arrived from the south, and thus strengthened the enemy proceeded to explore for weakness, and attack, with thrust after vicious thrust, the American positions in the hills above Altavilla and in the valleys of the Sele and Calore. The enemy, however, suffered a grave inherent weakness: he had only limited forces and limited time at his disposal, for the Eighth Army was rapidly approaching from the south, and unless he could quickly divide and destroy the Salerno invaders he would have to abandon his whole intention and retire before the greater strength of the united armies. This weakness produced a certain indecision in his attack upon the Fifth. Though his repeated assaults were heavy and impetuous, no one of them was long sustained or supported by the full concentration of his effort. They were, none the less, extremely dangerous.

On the 12th the Americans were driven off Hill 424, above Altavilla. It was difficult to hold, for it offered many covered lines of approach, and the Germans, surrounding it in the darkness, attacked it in the morning from several directions and succeeded in cutting right through the lines of the battalion that was holding it.

In the valley, however, the Germans withdrew from Persano, and after very stubborn conflict the Americans captured the tobacco-factory of Le Fiocche. Later in the day the enemy counter-attacked and re-took it, and thereafter fighting went to-and-fro in that area.

The situation now urgently required a redistribution of forces. The international gap was still open—for the 44th Reconnaissance Regiment, no matter how vigorously it patrolled, could not be said

to hold it—and the powerful counter-attack which had driven the British from Battipaglia seemed to indicate that the German thrust through the cleft in the hills, between Eboli and Altavilla, was not only very strong but very seriously intended. The 179th Regimental Combat Team was therefore moved from its line between Sele and Calore to the left of the 157th Team at Le Fiochette; and two battalions of the 141st Infantry arrived, after some delay, from their southernmost position in the hills, and moved towards the north-west flank beyond Bivio Cioffi where the coast road runs north into Battipaglia. A battalion was found to fill the space between the river, left by the 179th; and two battalions, one from the 142nd Infantry, the other from the 143rd, with some tanks and two battalions of artillery in support, prepared to regain the lost hill-ground above Altavilla.

The two battalions had varying fortune, but failed to take their objective. Parts of each made considerable progress, held stoutly for a little while to their limited gains, but by midnight of the 13th Hill 424 was still in German hands, one battalion was surrounded in the vicinity of Altavilla, and the other had retired to the little valley of La Cosa.

This unlucky day had begun quietly on the left of the American sector, but in the afternoon a storm broke and swept across the valley. The 1st Battalion of the 157th Infantry covered the Sele river-crossing on Persano; the first attacks struck down from the north against both its flanks, while another force assailed the 2nd Battalion of the 143rd Infantry in the tongue between Sele and Calore: the main weight of the attack came down between the Sele and the road from Eboli.

Under the great cloud of dust that filled the lowlands, churned from the summer earth by innumerable wheels and destructive tracks, the German armour manoeuvred boldly and could advance without discovery to within easy range of the harassed infantry; while the guns of the Navy, now as always supporting the land forces, were handicapped by the yellow haze that overhung their targets. The Americans hastily brought forward their tanks and anti-tank guns, their light howitzers and the anti-aircraft guns that had lately found few targets in the sky. The infantry, surprised and overwhelmed, gave way and some were surrounded and trapped; but the mixed artillery fought back and poured a great volume of fire into the oncoming Germans. They continued to advance, however, and by early evening were on the north bank of the Calore, with their guns in Persano. There they were finally halted by two

very resolute battalions of field artillery, the 158th and 189th; and fighting was temporarily discontinued.

During the night there was much hard work as broken battalions and weary gunners were re-grouped in a defensive line that lay in a loop from the swamps north-east of Bivio Cioffi, through Bivio Cioffi and down the highway till it neared the confluence of Sele and Calore, round the river-bend and north-east again to the stream La Cosa. Behind La Cosa, in its course from Mount Soprano, the 36th Division, with every available man, stood to a last defensive line. Two battalions of the 504th Parachute Infantry descended from the skies to help it with their welcome reinforcement.

Throughout the 14th the Americans held their new line successfully. Several times the Germans attacked, now here and now there, fairly heavily but with no great persistence; and the line stood to every assault and repelled it.

General Alexander visited the beach-head and found some reason for confidence in the outcome of the battle. Reinforcements of men and material were coming in, the Eighth Army was approaching, and the Fifth Army, uninterrupted by any major attack, was slowly improving its positions. The Germans, however, still held most of the dominating features in the landscape: the Allied troops were tired, and there was very little depth in their hold; and because the Germans had been able to concentrate a striking force more quickly than the Allies could build a defensive force, the Germans had temporarily gained and still held the initiative.

General Alexander issued certain directions. The Fifth Army was to hold on at all cost. Key-positions must be fortified, scattered units re-organised, and a mobile reserve was to be formed. The troops were to be told that the Eighth Army and reinforcements for the Fifth were both on their way: in addition to the two battalions of the 82nd Airborne Division who had already arrived, a parachute battalion had been dropped behind the enemy's lines in the neighbourhood of Avellino, the 7th Armoured Division and the 3rd American Division were on their way, and an infantry brigade was due to land on the evening of the 15th; cruisers of the Royal Navy were bringing 1,500 infantrymen from Philippeville, and the Allied Air Forces were concentrating all their strength against the encircling German positions.

On the 14th, by day and in the ensuing darkness, more than five hundred Mitchells, Marauders and Fortresses of the Strategic Air Force neglected their usual far-away targets to co-operate with the Tactical Air Force and drop a great weight of bombs on the

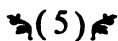
German positions at Eboli and Battipaglia; and the battleships *Warspite* and *Valiant* arrived offshore to give the hard-pressed soldiers the enormous encouragement of naval gunfire. Though little change was yet apparent to the troops in the Sele valley, the eclipsing shadow that so nearly occluded all our effort had now been halted, and, indeed, was already diminishing and retreating.

The great guns of *Warspite* and *Valiant*, firing over the southern beaches, gave invaluable reinforcement to the American lines, but quickly drew the Luftwaffe's attention. Intermittently the Luftwaffe had already been attacking the offshore fleet of merchantmen and warships, but vigorous anti-aircraft fire from land-guns and naval guns had till now very successfully defended it. The cruiser *Delhi*, guarding some fifty Liberty-ships, had withstood the repeated attacks of Focke-Wulf 190's—by flare-light at night, or flying out of the dazzle of the morning sun—and seen them repelled by the furious fire of pom-poms and oerlikons. From *Delhi* they had also watched, near midnight of the 13th, the passage of American troop-carriers, flying in wing-tip to wing-tip trios and then, against the black-purple of the mountains beyond them, a curious snow-storm as their two thousand soldiers leapt into the air and the parachutes blew open. In the morning the Focke-Wulfs returned, and *Delhi* shot down two out of five, but one of them hit a Liberty-ship and set it on fire. It burned all day and all night, and could not be sunk for fear of opening a lake of burning oil that would surround the neighbour-ships and flow to the beaches. But the flames led the bombers back, and lighted them as they flew with malignant valour through the barrage and over a sea that rose in great fountains of water-spouts and subsided in tormented whirl-pools.

On the following day another Liberty-ship was hit and a tank landing-craft beside it, loaded with petrol, caught fire, but was towed-off and sunk. The air-attack continued on *Warspite*, *Valiant* and many lesser ships, and occasionally a bomber, hit squarely by a five-inch shell, vanished in mid-air; but those caught in the curtain of close fire burnt till their cindery wings could no longer support them.

At night the battleships put to sea, but returned in the morning. That was the 16th. In the early afternoon they were attacked simultaneously by Focke-Wulf 190's and craft that carried gliding bombs, and one of these hit or fell disastrously near *Warspite*. A cloud of sulphurous smoke rose from her funnels, but though wounded she was not mortally hurt. A veteran of two wars, she

had not yet fulfilled her turbulent history. A pair of American tugs came to her aid, and with *Delhi* to escort her, they took her in tow for the long haul to Malta.



Advance to Naples

Two acts of the Salerno drama had now been played: the landings had been accomplished, and the counter-offensive, anxiously contested, had been stubbornly halted, first by the British in the north and then by the Americans in the south. Now the last act, the purposive and culminating advance on Naples, was about to open; and though there was no prospect of facile conquest, the circumstances were propitious. On the 16th, at Vallo, the foremost patrols of the Eighth Army met the southern outposts of the Fifth, and two days later the Canadians of the Eighth were shaping an armoured course for Potenza. To avoid being outflanked the Germans must withdraw.

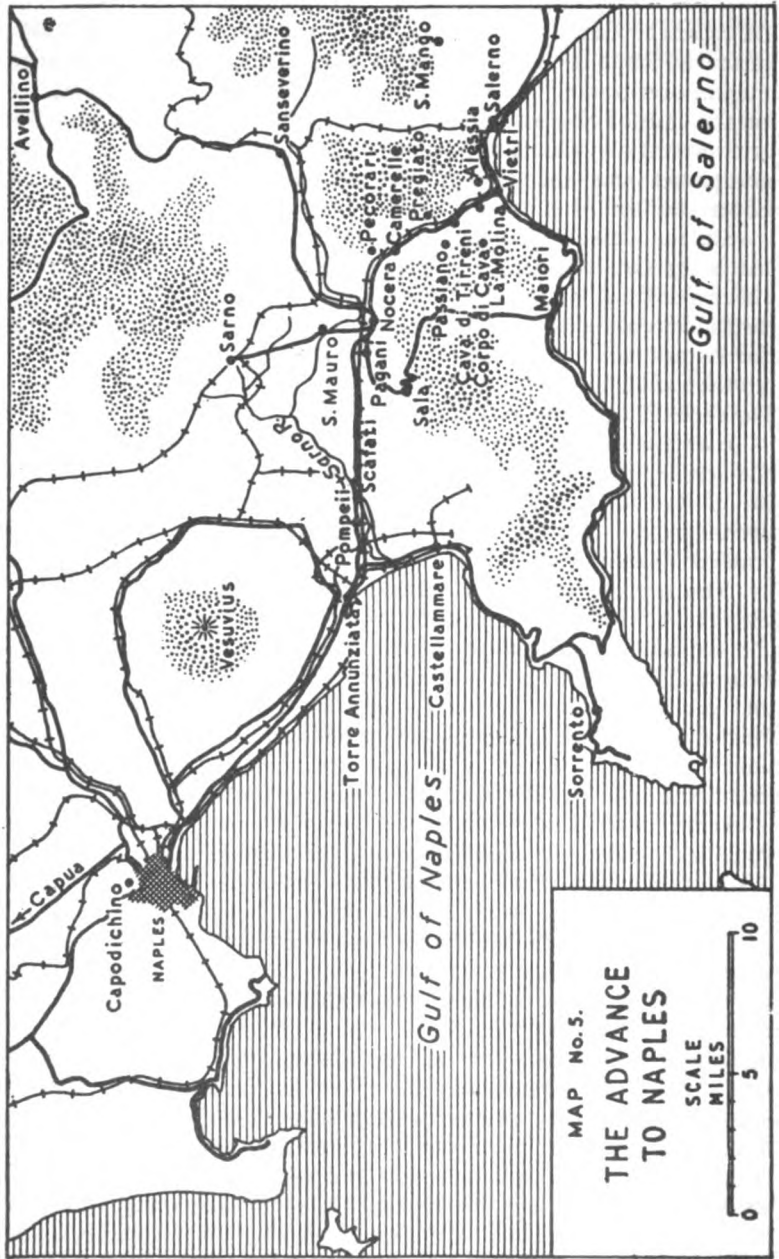
The arc of their withdrawal was wide, the general direction north-west, and the centre—the last to move—lay in the mountain strongholds of the Sorrento Peninsula. Those parts of the XIXth Panzer Corps which had opposed the Americans and the British right flank began their disengagement and retreat; in front of the British left flank the Germans still fought strongly, and there, where resistance was fierce and the mountain-passes would give the shortest passage into the plain of Naples, we presently launched our new attack. By September the 18th the enemy had retired from the bloody fields about Battipaglia and the tobacco-factory; the Americans, not without fighting for them, were again in possession of Albanella and Altavilla. Northward from there, through Battipaglia, the usual obstacles of demolitions, the harassing fire of rearguards, and a countryside of precipitous patterns, the American 3rd Division pressed forward to Acerno, took it on the 22nd, and five days later reached the highway east of Avellino, that runs through Avellino to the town of Naples. East again from there, on the same day, the 45th Division arrived in strength at a crossroads in the mountains where the Avellino highway cuts the road that climbs northward from Contursi.

The British Xth Corps, in the meantime, had been fighting hard for the passes north of Salerno. In these passes, so admirable for

defence, the Germans had three or four battalions, with a flank-guard at Santo Mango, north-east of Salerno, and a battalion in Pagani overlooking the plain of Vesuvius, another in Castellammare on the Gulf of Naples. To expedite the withdrawal of this powerful and powerfully situated force would not be easy, but plans were completed and the offensive began in the early morning of September the 23rd.

On the west the Rangers, with the 23rd Armoured Brigade and the Scots Greys under command, were to secure a position astride the road from Maiori to Pagani, through which the Armoured Brigade would then pass to combine with the Rangers in clearing the Pagani pass, and so debouch into the plain below; in the centre, up the road from Vietri to Nocera, the 46th Division would advance, supported by the Corps artillery—if it could be brought up in time—to seize and hold the defile between the villages of Pecorari and Camerelle, through which the 7th Armoured Division (the last of which had now landed) would pass into the plain; while the 56th Division, in a subsidiary role on the right, was to advance to limited objectives on the road from Salerno to Sanseverino.

The narrow way from Vietri to Nocera was stiffly defended, and every furlong had to be fought for. A battalion of the Foresters led the advance of the 46th Division, and by three o'clock on the morning of the 23rd was on the lower slopes of Telegraph Hill, east of the road and four thousand yards north of Vietri. The Germans held the top of the hill in resolute strength, and assault after assault failed to dislodge them. Alessia, to the south, was surrounded by the Leicesters, but still resisted. West of the road, however, the Durham Light Infantry, supported by the Rangers artillery on their left, had established themselves on a line from Corpo di Cava to Cava di Tirreni—three or four thousand yards inland, that is—while on the road itself the York and Lancasters had entered La Molina. But La Molina had not yet been won, and fighting continued all day on the steep sides of the eastern hills. A high ridge-line on the right flank, however, was made secure by the following dawn, and La Molina was cleared of the enemy. Now movement along that side became easier, and the Foresters and the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry made a considerable advance to the hills south-west of Pregiato; but progress along the road was hindered by a partly demolished viaduct at Cava di Tirreni, which the sappers finally bridged in spite of the enemy's artillery, and then a tank regiment crossed over and drove an infantry rearguard from the village. On the left of the road the



MAP No. 5.
THE ADVANCE
TO NAPLES

SCALE
MILES
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Durhams and the York and Lancasters went a little farther and took the village of Passiano.

The advance, so far, had been slow and difficult. Now its pace became slower, its difficulties increased, and disconcerting news arrived that the Germans in the neighbourhood of the Camerelle gorge were being strongly reinforced. The American Rangers, west of the 46th, were ordered to harass the Camerelle roads with machine-gun fire, and the 46th continued its costly and laborious battle against an enemy whose cunningly chosen positions, in villages and on the tall hillsides to the east, demanded with deadly repetition the deployment of infantry on ground that derided them, the summoning of tanks for the assistance of their guns, and yet another task for the few pieces of medium artillery which had succeeded in following the advance.

Less than halfway from Vietri to Nocera there is a village with the sinister name of Epitaffia. It was so strongly held that, on the 25th, it defied all efforts by a battalion of the Hampshires and another of the Royal Tank Regiment to take it, and required concerted attack by the whole 128th Brigade. Nor did this attack immediately succeed. On the right, indeed, we advanced beyond the village, but the village itself remained in German hands, and on the left of it our infantry were stopped by machine-gun fire and had to dig-in. East of the road we still held the hills of Pregiato, and sappers worked on broken bridges to furnish lines of supply. Near Camerelle the advancing Rangers covered the roads with their machine-guns till counter-attack drove them from their new positions.

Then, overnight, the whole situation changed, and resistance vanished with the darkness. All along the Corps front the Germans had retired. The advance was quickly resumed, and by midday of the 26th our leading troops were within a mile of the Camerelle defile. On the right of the road the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry took many prisoners, apparently in a state of confusion, but then, on the left, the Hampshires were suddenly counter-attacked and driven from their last-taken hill. The check was brief, however, and in the morning the advance was continued. The Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment entered Camerelle on the 27th—the day on which the Americans, twenty and thirty miles to the north-east, had taken command of the lateral road to Avellino—and after the 128th Brigade had driven the last of the enemy's machine-gunners from the spurs that overhang the defile, and established positions there, the 7th Armoured Division, with a

motor-borne brigade of the Queens, made ready to go through. Farther west the Rangers were ordered to secure high ground overlooking the Sala defile south-west of Pagori, through which the 23rd Armoured Brigade, in conformity with the general movement, would then advance.

All that night there was fighting on the heights about Camerelle and Pecorari, and at dawn the Queens Brigade went through to take and hold the Nocera pass. The Rangers and the 23rd Armoured Brigade were also successful, and by eight o'clock in the morning of the 28th the Scots Greys reached the plain by way of the Sala defile. The enemy had retired behind the Sarno, the river that bisects the flat land between the mountains of the Sorrento peninsula and the broken cone of Vesuvius; and from Scafati to the sea every bridge of it was blown. Ten miles inland, however, the bridge at San Mauro was intact. The Queens first crossed it, and then it was used by the 56th Division, now advancing, by a devious route because of demolitions, through Sanseverino to the heights beyond Sarno. The 56th, though its advance had been less stubbornly opposed, had fought for its passage through the eastward pass, and now its reward was a new objective: the Volturno.

Orders for this operation were issued during the evening of September the 28th: the 46th Division was to concentrate north-west of Nocera, the 56th and the 7th Armoured to move round the inland shoulder of Vesuvius to Capua and so north, while reconnaissance troops went forward on the coast road from Pompeii to Naples.

Then it began to rain. Heavily and persistently a drenching rain descended, turning the flat land before them into a yielding mud, a soft and treacherous mud that would not support a heavy weight nor let a light weight go unloaded. Here and there the German rearguards still showed fight—at Torre Anunziata and beyond it to the coast, at Scafati and at Passanti under the slope of Vesuvius—and the rain and the German sappers and the indefatigable Hermann Goering Division so impeded the advance that it was not until the morning of October the 1st that the King's Dragoon Guards entered Naples, and, on their inland route, the leading troops of the 7th Armoured Division left Vesuvius behind them.

To the soldiers who entered Naples by the coast road from Pompeii, it seemed, at first, that the city lay in ruins. The waterfront and the eastern suburbs were indeed a dismal spectacle, a black and ragged testimony of the destructive power of our

bombers; but testimony also to their accuracy, for the principal parts of the town were unharmed by us. The Germans, however, had shown less regard for the population. The Neapolitans would have no wafer for three weeks, because the great city aqueduct was cut in seven places. The power-station was destroyed. All the food which the enemy could find he had removed, and in many buildings there lay hidden his secret bombs that would presently, without warning or discrimination of victims, explode and casually murder whatever children, hungry mothers, old men and holiday-making soldiers might happen to be passing.

The King's Dragoon Guards did not remain long in Naples, but were relieved by the American 82nd Airborne Division. Work of repair was quickly begun among the ruined wharves, where a host of American bulldozers cleared with marvellous speed the hills of rubble, and our sappers and Naval officers devised, almost immediately, a system of harbour-lighting by linking the dynamos of half-a-dozen deserted submarines. Over the castle where Lucullus made of dining a baroque art; in whose vaults the Emperor Frederick II, known as *Stupor Mundi*, kept his treasures safe; whose sea-wall had echoed so often the boatswain piping Nelson aboard—over the Castel dell'Ova rose the White Ensign.

CHAPTER III

THE OUTPOSTS OF THE WINTER LINE

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The Passage of the Volturno

IN twenty-two days of fighting the Fifth Army had taken the port necessary for its further advance up the Tyrrhenian coast. The cost of entering Naples had been 6,847 British casualties and 4,870 Americans killed, wounded, or missing; and before Naples could be held securely and fully used the mortal price of it would steeply rise. Twenty miles to the north runs the river that, in our hands, would be a barrier behind which the wharves could safely receive our reinforcements and supplies; but the river-crossings would be strongly held and dourly contested.

Rising in the mountains north-east of Isernia, the Volturno pursues a tortuous course to the south-east, and then turns—not decisively indeed, but in a series of convolutions that ultimately steer it westward—towards Capua and the Tyrrhenian sea. East of Capua it flows in a well-cultivated valley through country that is hilly and thickly wooded, but west of there its serpentine banks spread flatly to open fields, to a depth of half-a-dozen miles on either side, where there is no cover and the whole area lies visible to the commanding heights of Monte Massico, north along the coast.

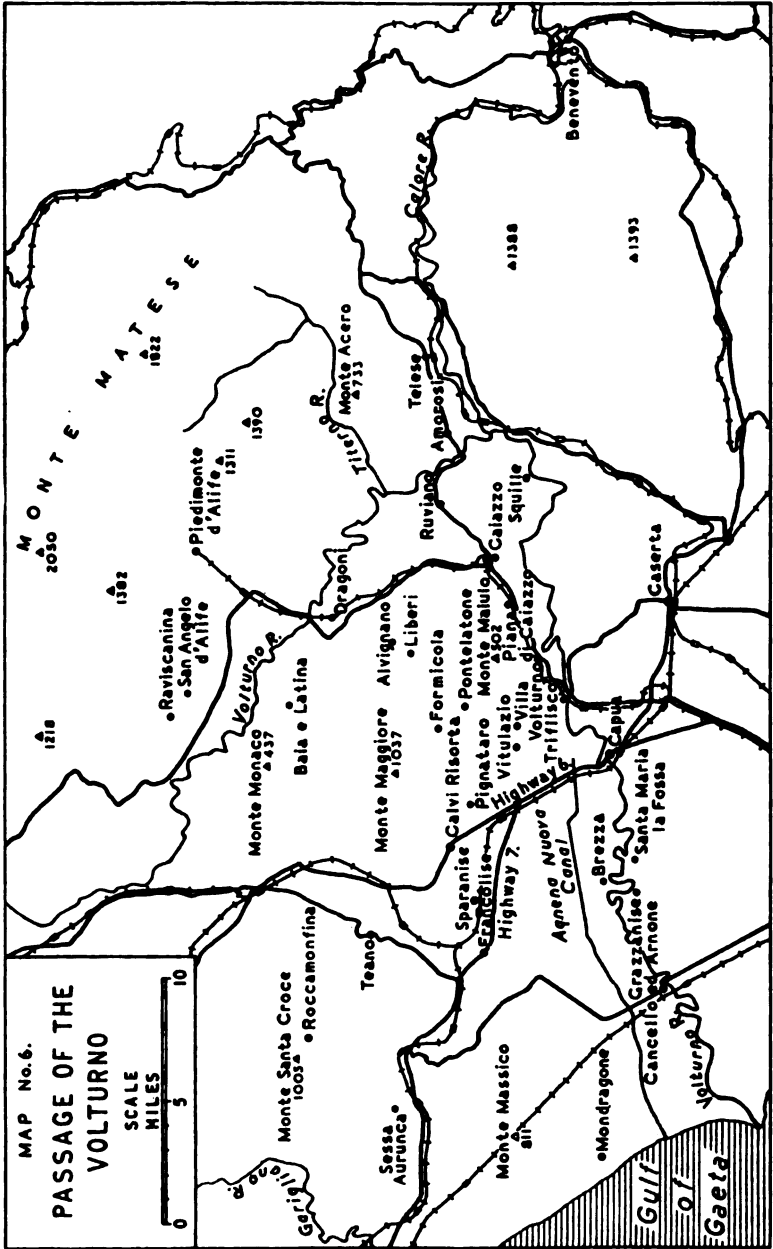
A slow withdrawal had become the German policy—a temporary policy, be it noted—and the Volturno was an obstacle of such difficulty that it could be used as the chief natural factor in an action

intended to delay for a long time our advance up the western side of Italy. Not definitely to halt us, but seriously to retard us, was the enemy's purpose on the Volturno: and our intention was to cross it with what speed we could.

Wet ground, rearguards, and demolitions continued to impede progress, but by October the 8th we had reached the south bank of the river, and were lightly holding it from Capua to the sea. In the coastal sector the 45th Division had relieved the 23rd Armoured Brigade, and with one brigade forward held the road to Cancelli; in the centre a battalion of the Queens, of the 7th Armoured Division, held Santa Maria la Fossa and Grazzanise; and on the right were the 56th Division, with a brigade along the river west of Capua and the 201st Guards Brigade in the town and as far east of it as Trifisco. East of the Guards was the 3rd Division of the American VIth Corps, which had come by an inland mountainous route from the hills above Paestum, some of it over high passes, rain-darkened and narrow trails, where only mule-train and man-pack could supply it. East again of the 3rd Division were the 34th and 45th Divisions. The former had entered Benevento on the 3rd, the latter had passed through it and over the Calore on the following day.

Because of the nature of the river-ground—hills and covered approaches to the east of Capua, and naked plain to the west—the main attack was to be launched by the Americans of the VIth Corps, while the three divisions of the British Xth Corps, in a secondary role, were charged with the duty of establishing bridgeheads across the river, and securing the ridges north and north-east of Mondragone when the river-attack had drawn sufficient strength away from that area; a task in which they would be assisted by a sea-borne landing of a regimental combat team from the American 36th Division. In the upshot, however, the Germans showed no inclination to withdraw from Mondragone, and the sea-borne landing was therefore cancelled.

Opposing the Allied advance were the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division from Capua to the sea; north and east of Capua, the Hermann Goering Panzer Division; and east again from there the 3rd Panzer Grenadiers. The Germans' main gun-area was on the commanding heights of the Monte Maggiore range, his secondary area on Monte Massico. West of Capua the Germans manned the north bank of the river in a continuous line of company positions, with rifle platoons on the reverse slope of the flood-dyke parallel to the river and a hundred or a hundred and fifty yards beyond it;



MAP No. 6.

PASSAGE OF THE
VOLTURNO

SCALE
MILES



with heavy platoons behind them in support, and small outposts forward on the river-bank. They had machine-gun and mortar positions dug in the flood dyke, and from its ridges and taller observation-points they could watch all our movements for several miles to the south. But because the Germans regarded the coming battle as a delaying-action only, their defence had no great depth.

East of Capua, opposite the American 3rd and 34th Divisions, the enemy had neither a continuous line nor a wide observation. The undulating and closely wooded country made both impossible. Here the German defences consisted of minefields to close the most probable crossing-places, with anti-tank and artillery fire to cover the minefields, and counter-attack groups ready to oppose the assault. The defences on this side of Capua were organised in greater depth, with the intention of cutting-off any successful crossing and closing the penetration.

The Allied attack began on the night of October the 12th. General Clark's earlier intention had been that the VIth Corps should force a crossing on the night of the 9th, and the Xth Corps follow suit twenty-four hours later. Had this happened, and the Americans succeeded in endangering the enemy's main gun-area by winning the foothills of Monte Maggiore, the British might have had a relatively easy task. Both Corps, however, were delayed in their approach to the river and their preparations for the assault, and in each case the delaying factors were bad weather, muddy roads or no roads, and the enemy's powerful opposition. When both were ready the Army Commander issued orders for a simultaneous attack. In the open dreary expanse of his sector General McCreery had little hope of achieving surprise, but he believed that his best chance lay in a widely dispersed assault with the main emphasis on the left, where the Royal Navy was waiting to give assistance with gunfire and landing-craft.

In the centre after an hour's prelude by the artillery, the Queens Brigade of the 7th Armoured Division tried to cross the river north of Santa Maria la Fossa and east of Grazzanise; but in the belief that this was the vanguard of a major attack, the Germans immediately and strongly opposed the crossings, neither of which succeeded.

On the right a company of Scots Guards made a feint attack near Trifisco to cover the 56th Division's main assault, and under cover of a tremendous barrage in which three guns fired over every Guardsman, the Scots crossed the river; but the Germans were neither deceived nor appreciably disconcerted, and before morning

the Company withdrew from an untenable position. The Division's main assault was to be made just south of the blown railway bridge on the western outskirts of Capua.

This, unhappily, was the most obvious place for a crossing, and the Germans had it well covered by machine-guns, mortars, and artillery. It was, however, the only place within the Divisional sector where assault-boats could be used and the crossing made, or attempted, in sufficient strength; for the fields were so soft and muddy that no large approach to the river was possible except by an existing road. The Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry led the advance. Earlier in the evening the Germans had observed their concentration, shelled it, and launched a counter-attack across the river; but in spite of this hindrance to its movement the battalion advanced and made repeated efforts to reach the northern bank. It suffered heavy casualties from the German artillery, ten assault-boats were sunk, and before midnight it was ordered to discontinue its action.

On the left, however, a silent attack by two brigades of the 46th Division took the enemy by surprise, and three battalions—Foresters, Hampshires, and the Durham Light Infantry—were over the river by half-past one in the morning, though there was no ford in their sector to help them across, and no entrance from the south bank had any opposite exit for vehicles on the north. Naval co-operation was necessary, to ferry guns and supplies round the river-mouth. North of the river a good beach had been found, and tank-landing craft and Ducks made the passage successfully.

In the centre the Queens were making another effort to cross. Before the last attempt was driven back a wire-rope had been made fast on the northern shore, by which the crews of assault-boats might haul themselves across; for the river ran strongly and the flat-bottomed assault-boats, with nothing but small paddles to drive and steer them, were almost unmanageable. The wire-rope was useful, but air-bursting shells above it defeated the attempt to cross by it. Then a fresh start was made, and a single platoon got over at half-past three. Half-an-hour later another platoon crossed by a broken bridge, and very small reinforcements also made their passage.

Day brought the counter-attacks. The three leading battalions of the 46th Division had been reinforced, before dawn, by the Leicesters and two more Hampshire battalions, but not all had been able to dig themselves in. On the coastal sector the Hampshires were held by an enemy strongpoint and supporting tanks, while our

own tanks, of the 40th Royal Tank Regiment, which had come ashore were halted by a minefield, and against the fire of 88-millimetre guns no more could be landed. On their inner flank the Leicesters and the Durhams consolidated their positions, and on their right the Foresters, between Cancellò and Grazzanise, held their positions valiantly against repeated assault by infantry and tanks until late afternoon, when, having suffered heavy casualties, they had to withdraw. The small bridgehead made by the Queens, nearer Capua, was gradually reinforced to a strength of two companies.

Much work was done that night, 6-pounder guns were rafted across the river, the York and Lancasters went over to fill the gap left by the battered Foresters, and another squadron of tanks was put ashore. By first light a lane had been cleared through the minefield that had halted the first squadron, and a second minefield was opened three hours later. The Hampshire Brigade, in the coastal sector, was firmly disposed with eighteen 6-pounder guns to support it, and when the tanks went through to join the Durhams and the Foresters, the enemy withdrew and left the 46th Division secure in its bridgehead.

The Queens, with further reinforcement, were advancing against accurate shell-fire and mortaring—there was now a well-working ferry behind them—but in and about Capua continual reconnaissance by the forward brigade of the 56th Division had still failed to find such weakness in the enemy's positions as would enable a crossing to be made. Heavy machine-gun fire and a plenitude of mortar-bombs met every forward movement.

East of Capua there was gratifying progress and the American 3rd Division had crossed the Volturno. This Division had been disposed along some fifteen miles of the river and on the dominating hills behind it, from Triflisco to the confluence of the Calore; but before the attack it had handed over the right half of its line to the 34th Division. At midnight on the 13th a feint was made against Triflisco—where the road goes north and east through a gap in the hills: an obvious choice for the crossing—and two hours later, following intensive bombardment by the divisional artillery, the three battalions of the 7th Infantry Regiment crossed the river, using assault-boats, rafts, and guide-ropes, south-west of Piano di Caiazzo, and moved rapidly forward against small-arms fire over the ploughed fields beyond, towards Monte Majulo. By eight o'clock in the morning the leading troops of the 1st Battalion, who had crossed the river below an almost closed loop in its hesitant course, were not far from the foot of Majulo, and by midday, while

the other two battalions, which had crossed above the loop, made a somewhat slower advance down the valley, tanks and anti-tank guns were being successfully ferried over. In the afternoon the 1st Battalion held the river-flats south of the road, and the 2nd and 3rd Battalion took Majulo.

On their right two battalions of the 15th Infantry fought their way over the water and, against considerable resistance, up the side of a pair of useful small hills on the north bank. They reorganised under heavy fire and energetically resumed the advance. Before dusk they were on the hills overlooking Piano di Caiazzo. But more difficulty was encountered on the left by the 30th Infantry in an attempt to cross and capture a dominating ridge over Triflisco. The 2nd Battalion made two attempts, but without success. A bridge, however, had been built below the loop, and the 1st Battalion, crossing by night, took the westward slopes, and in the morning were joined by the 2nd Battalion. They then thrust northward along the high ground towards Pontelatone and Formicola.

The whole of the 3rd Division was now across the river, and the infantry's admirable work was matched by the Engineers, who, in despite of observed fire from the German artillery, had built a light, an 8-ton, and a 30-ton bridge to span the river in three places.

East of the 3rd Division, over a river-front of about eight miles, two regiments of the 34th Division crossed against lighter opposition. The ninety-six guns of the reinforced divisional artillery fired their barrage, and the infantry moved down to the dark river. Leading troops of the 1st Battalion of the 168th Regiment on the left, facing Caiazzo, waded across without difficulty, but when assault-boats escaped and went down-stream on the swift current, the enemy discovered what was afoot and opened fire from machine-guns on the flat land and field-guns behind Caiazzo. All that morning the battalion was confined between the river and the road, but with help from the artillery began to move uphill in the afternoon. The 2nd Battalion crossed without resistance, and at night the 3rd came over and joined with the 1st to capture Caiazzo.

On the Divisional right flank the German opposition was negligible, and the 1st Battalion of the 135th Infantry made easy crossings opposite Squille and just below the mouth of the Calore. During the morning progress was checked by tank-fire from Amorosi, but the Germans appeared to be withdrawing. The 2nd Battalion met some resistance from German positions that the leading troops had passed by, but on the following morning the

advance continued towards Ruviano. On this stretch of the river, working under observation of the enemy's guns, the Engineers had great difficulty in building bridges, and progress was hindered by a lack of supplies and artillery. On the 14th, however, a small bridge was built near Squille, and a 30-ton bridge below Caiazzo on the following day.

Farther to the east the 45th Division was making brave progress under the mountains. From Telese it carried an uphill advance over the rough slopes of Monte Acero, and by evening of the 13th it was fairly evident that the Germans were withdrawing over the little river Titerno. The Division continued to advance, in a north-westerly direction, towards the upper valley of the Volturno.

On the west of the American front the forceful and steadily continuing advance of the 3rd Division was now dangerously opening its left flank, for its neighbour, the 56th Division, was still held south of the river. A feint attack, on the 14th, had brought such a storm of gunfire that any further attempt to cross was regarded as hopeless. To avert a possible flank-attack on the 3rd Division the boundary line between the VIth and the Xth Corps was shifted, and the 56th was enabled to use the American bridge at Triflisco.

There on the morning of the 15th the 201st Guards Brigade crossed the river and advanced to secure the American flank, while a battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, also crossing there, turned west towards Capua and presented the enemy with a new threat from an unexpected direction.

On the following day the Guards advanced towards the higher ground to the north, while a company of the Fusiliers made another river-crossing south-west of Capua, which was cleared of the enemy and occupied that evening. Brezza fell about the same time, the bridge being built near Grazzanise was completed, a tank-ford was discovered near it, and before the rapid increase of our strength north of the river, the Germans withdrew behind a vigorous and destructive rearguard. Demolitions more numerous than ever before were now encountered in the advance to the mountains that rear their huge semi-circular ramparts north of the Capuan plain; but progress was made slowly and sternly, through the wet and difficult country near the coast, and over the precipitous mountain-trails to the east.

✻(2)✻

Across the River

It has been observed that the American VIth Corps was to play the principal part in the battle of the Volturno, and this it did by turning the central highlands of the German position—after the 3rd Division had forced a way across the river and successfully bridged it—and so compelling the withdrawal of the German artillery from their main gun-area on the forward spurs of Monte Maggiore. When the boundary between the two Corps was shifted, the 3rd Division, in the hills east of Pontelatone and Formicola, turned north-eastward towards Dragoni, and prepared to fight its way over ridges and stony slopes, through scrub and ravines, against German strong-points and the usual demolitions, the customary obstruction of mines and booby-traps. Here and there, as at Liberi, there was hard fighting, but the German inclination to withdraw was translated, by pressure, into steady movement, and the Division reached Dragoni on the 18th. From there it moved in a north-westerly direction, past Baja e Latina, and in three days' skirmishing drove the enemy from the slopes of Monte Monaco.

Late on the 14th, in front of the 34th Division at Caiazzo, there were signs that the enemy was withdrawing, and the Division was ordered not to lose contact. It pressed forward, through olive-groves and vineyards, sometimes meeting a spirited resistance, to enter Alvignano on the 17th. At Dragoni, a couple of miles farther on, a rearguard of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, supported by self-propelled guns, attempted to counter-attack to cover evacuation of the town. The American field-guns, well forward, drove the German artillery back, and the enemy's infantry retired before the infantry of the 168th Regiment. The German demonstration of strength, however, was sufficient to hinder the crossing of the Volturno—this time from west to east—and the urgent effort that was being made to cut the enemy's retreat to Piedimonte d'Alife. North of Dragoni a bridge had carried road and railway across the river, but the Germans had demolished it with their usual thoroughness. A battalion of the 133rd Infantry crossed the river, beyond the shattered bridge, during the afternoon of the 18th and swung right to face its exit. In darkness and the fog

of the next morning the other two battalions came up—but they were too late and the enemy had gone.

Swamp, and swiftly running small canals fed by mountain streams, hindered movement beyond the river, and enemy rearguards in the olive-groves did what they could do to impede it. But the Americans entered the bomb-ruined streets of Alife before daylight on the 20th, and the Division continued its advance up the valley under the dark-coloured, vast, and forbidding sides of Monte Matese. The 133rd Regiment had to fight strongly for San Angelo d'Alife, a village in a coign of the hills, where the enemy had prepared positions on the terraced slopes while his artillery was ensconced behind the further hill. Twice they counter-attacked with tanks, and it took the Americans three days to force an entry. With the occupation of Raviscanina, the neighbouring village, the Division had secured its prescribed objectives.

East of the Volturno the 45th Division left Monte Acero and the narrow gorge of the Titerno behind it, and advanced through comparably difficult country against varying opposition. The 3rd Panzer Grenadiers were spreading their rearguards east over the river to meet it, while its original opponents of the 26th Panzer Division hurried away to confine, if they could, the gathering momentum of the Eighth Army's advance. Against lively resistance and the Luftwaffe's occasional intervention, the 45th maintained the advance and entered Piedimonte d'Alife on the 19th. Men with an eye for country were, perhaps, recompensed in part for their labour by the superb and extensive view.

In the coastal sector, opposite the Xth Corps, progress had become possible after the shifting of the boundary between the two Corps, that gave the Xth the American bridge at Triflisco and the ridges north and north-west of it. The 56th Division had been provided with a door out of its hitherto impossible situation, and the chance to secure some observation over the transpontine plain. The view, however, was not very encouraging. The expanse of drenched and level fields, closely cultivated and deeply drained, was closed by the mountain-wall running south-west from Monte Santa Croce through Monte Massico to the coast at Mondragone. There was a narrow gap in the wall at Sessa Aurunca, another below Roccamonfina. In front of the Volturno ran the Agnena Nuova canal, brim-full, that had still to be crossed.

Because the dominating heights of Monte Massico commanded all the coastal belt, the Xth Corps' main axis of advance had been transferred to the Via Casilina that runs north through Capua:

Highway 6, the road to Rome that, many months later, the Eighth Army would immortalise with its sacrifice and use for its triumph. East of the road the ridges above Triflisco rise to Monte Grande and beyond it, climbing still, on a long slope towards Monte Maggiore. This was the route taken by the 201st Guards Brigade when, on the 15th and 16th, under heavy fire, it crossed the Triflisco bridge with a tank-squadron of the Scots Greys. After a stiff fight Monte Grande was taken by the Coldstream, and the Scots Guards, turning west, captured a stubbornly defended height above Vitulazio.

The American 30th Infantry were still south-west of Formicola, and the Germans, dug-in between them and the advancing Guards, had artillery enough to prevent their eastward movement into their new sector. The Grenadiers accordingly went north to relieve them, and fought a small action that combined mountaineering with battle. They fought on a ridge so narrow that only one platoon could be deployed, and because the rugged heights were impassable to any organism less adaptable than man, the Coldstream had to serve them as porters. A Guardsman could carry two rounds of 3-in. mortar ammunition at a time, and to deliver it and return for more took him four and a half hours. But the Grenadiers, winning their mountain battle, reached Formicola on the afternoon of the 18th, and successfully relieved the 30th.

In the meantime the 169th Brigade had crossed the Triflisco, been stopped by minefields in a headlong rush to seize the bridge over the Agnena Nuova Canal, and on the right of that had rapidly advanced through Villa Volturno to Pignataro to come in line with the Guards. Some part of the 167th Brigade had crossed the river at Capua and were west of the Salomone airport; the remainder were using the Triflisco bridge. The 169th carried its advance up the Via Casilina to its bifurcation into Highways 6 and 7, and then along both forks to Calvi Vecchia and towards Sparanese.

A very welcome reinforcement now arrived for the 56th Division, which, having been fighting continuously since its landing at Salerno, was both weary and diminished in numbers. The 168th Brigade came over from Sicily and proceeded to strengthen the Guards' flank by moving into highland positions overlooking the hills of Calvi Risorta; while the Greys advanced as far as the road-fork to Teano. To substantiate this encouragement the Divisional supply had been greatly improved by the construction of a Bailey pontoon-bridge at Capua. Over a water-gap of eighty yards, with bad approaches and twenty-foot banks, the Sappers had

built the bridge and opened the road for direct access to Highway 6 within forty-eight hours of the German artillery's withdrawal.

On the 7th Armoured Division's sector in the centre of the Corps' front, after the capture of Brezza and the building of a bridge at Grazzanise on the 16th, the 131st Brigade made slow and painful progress over the wet lands, against a stiffly resisting enemy, and secured with much difficulty a bridgehead over the Agnena Nuova Canal. Their advance proceeded across the arable plain beyond, and by the 22nd tanks of the City of London Yeomanry were close to Sparanise and Francolise, but against continuing resistance the Brigade did not occupy these villages till the 25th.

Stubborn opposition also met the 46th Division as soon as attempts were made to exploit its success on the coast and cross the canal. Before daylight on the 15th the enemy had withdrawn from the fenland between the two waterways, and the leading troops of the 128th Brigade reached the canal-bank. The water was deep, the gap was broad. The other brigades, spreading out from their bridge-heads, formed a screen in front of Cancellone ed Arnone, where the Sappers were bridge-building. Over the bridge the road ran straight to the canal, and here, in the late evening of the 18th, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry fought their way over and secured a bridgehead. Two days later there were three ferries at work, and the Brigade was ready to advance again. But some regrouping was necessary before the attack could be carried to Sante Croce and Massico, the barrier hills that divide the plain of the Volturno from the valley of the Garigliano.

General Clark's battle-line now extended from Raviscanina, under the great mass of Matese, through Monte Monaco to the hills of Calvi Risorta, down to Sparanise and Francolise, and so in a loop to a still narrow and vaguely defined area in front of the seaward end of the Agnena Nuova Canal. There was no real pause, at this stage of the campaign, but the Fifth Army had secured its bridgehead over the Volturno, and before describing its further achievements it may be useful to consider some related events on the other side of Italy.

For as the American advance on the right of Capua determined the fate of the Volturno battle, and undid the previously successful German defence of the western reaches of the river, so a British advance, much farther to the east, had played some part in weakening the German left flank, through which the Americans then cleared their decisive way. From its position in potential reserve behind the Volturno the 16th Panzer Division had been moved, of necessity,

to meet another threat. It had been compelled to move in a hurry, by daylight, and the Desert Air Force had taken the opportunity to destroy much of its transport. Still in a hurry, it had been committed piecemeal to battle outside Termoli, and there decisively beaten.

Moving forward from Foggia, the Eighth Army was again in action, and events on the Tyrrhenian were affected by the flowing tide of battle on the Adriatic sea. The Fifth Army and the Eighth Army, in their separate channels, were related parts of the same organism, and the Germans could not do battle against one without apprehensive regard for the other.

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The Eighth Army's Advance to the Trigno

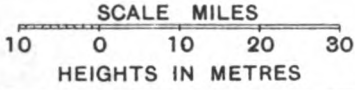
WHILE the leading troops of the Fifth Army were approaching Naples, the Eighth Army, now ready to resume its advance, was preparing to strike northward and westward from Foggia. Immediately opposing General Montgomery was the German 1st Parachute Division on a line that ran almost due south from somewhere a few miles east of Termoli, on the Adriatic coast, through Motta and Alberona, nearly as far as Arcano di Puglia. West of the Parachute Division were the 29th Panzer Grenadiers, whose right boundary was the road from Benevento to Campobasso; and west of them was the 26th Panzer Division. By the end of the first week in October the Allied line ran approximately south from Termoli to somewhere north of Benevento, where the Eighth Army was in contact with the American 45th Division; and from there the Fifth Army lay along the Calore and the Volturno to the sea.

From the Tyrrhenian to the Adriatic the German positions were nowhere quite stationary, but their movement, or the pace of it, was not wholly the result of Allied pressure. The enemy was trying to close his lines as one would close a double door. His projected defence was roughly comparable to a pair of inward-swinging doors, the one hinged on Monte Massico north of the Volturno, the other on Termoli. To appreciate his movements and ours, the calendar as well as the map must be watched.

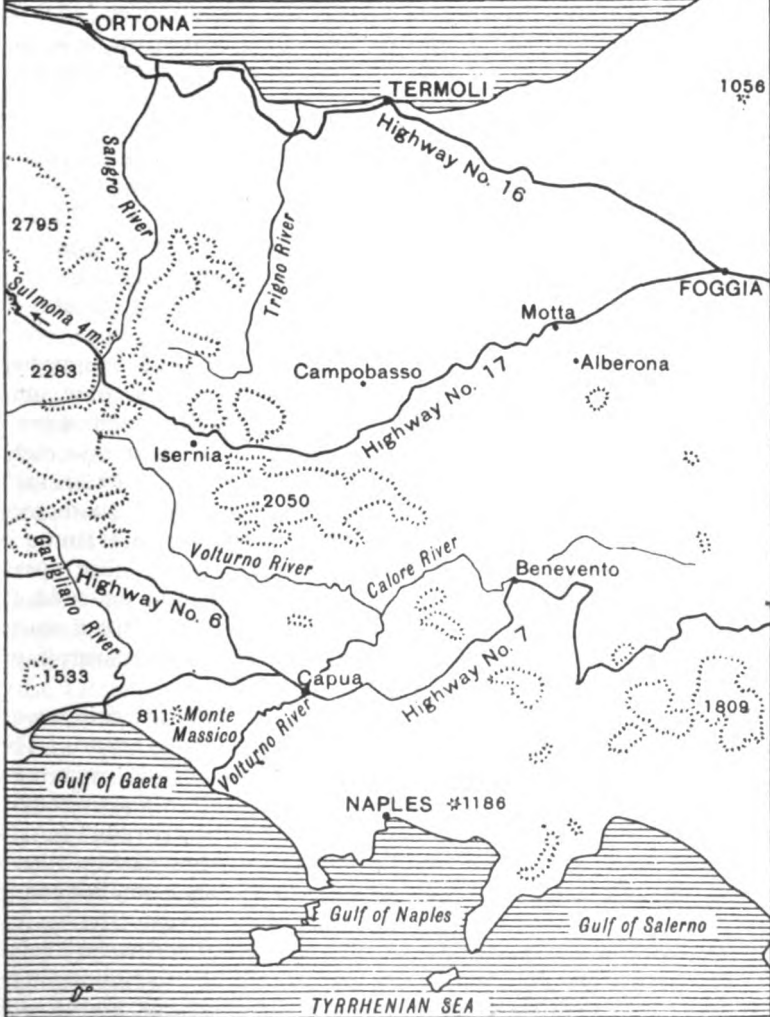
It was on September the 18th that the Germans began their retreat from the mountains rimming Salerno. A week later, having come to the conclusion that it would either be impossible or

MAP No. 7

NAPLES — ORTONA



ADRIATIC
SEA



ruinously extravagant to hold Corsica, they hastily evacuated it and thereby opened all their right flank to seaborne attack. Their apparent intention was to abandon the Leg of Italy and retire northward—gradually from one stiff holding position to another—as far, perhaps, as the mountain-line above Florence: the Rimini-Pisa line, as it was loosely called. On October the 3rd, two days after the King's Dragoon Guards had entered the ruined outskirts of Naples, General Alexander informed the Prime Minister that he was satisfied with the military prospect; his armies, he believed, could retain the initiative, pursue their stated ends, and advance according to a plan that would carry them north of Rome to a line running from San Benedetto del Tronto, on the Adriatic, through Terni to Civitavecchia. But three days later, in a report sent to General Eisenhower, he described a radical change in the situation. Evidence had suddenly become abundant that the enemy had formed a new intention; no longer was he going to retire and content himself with charging a steady toll for our advance, but was going to hold fast. He had resolved with a Prussian rigidity to stay in Rome and defend it to the utmost of his power.

The Germans' new policy was uncovered by extensive reinforcement of their troops in the south. Our further progress, said General Alexander, would be slow, and direct assault on the enemy's positions in the mountains, now strongly held, must be costly. The Prime Minister, having accepted the evidence and the General's appreciation of it, informed the President of the United States that "we must look forward to very heavy fighting before Rome is reached." But Rome was our objective, and the Allied Commanders were not deterred by the German resolve to hold it. They decided to abandon various projects for offensive activity in the Aegean and concentrate all their Mediterranean resources on the defeat of Germany-in-Italy.

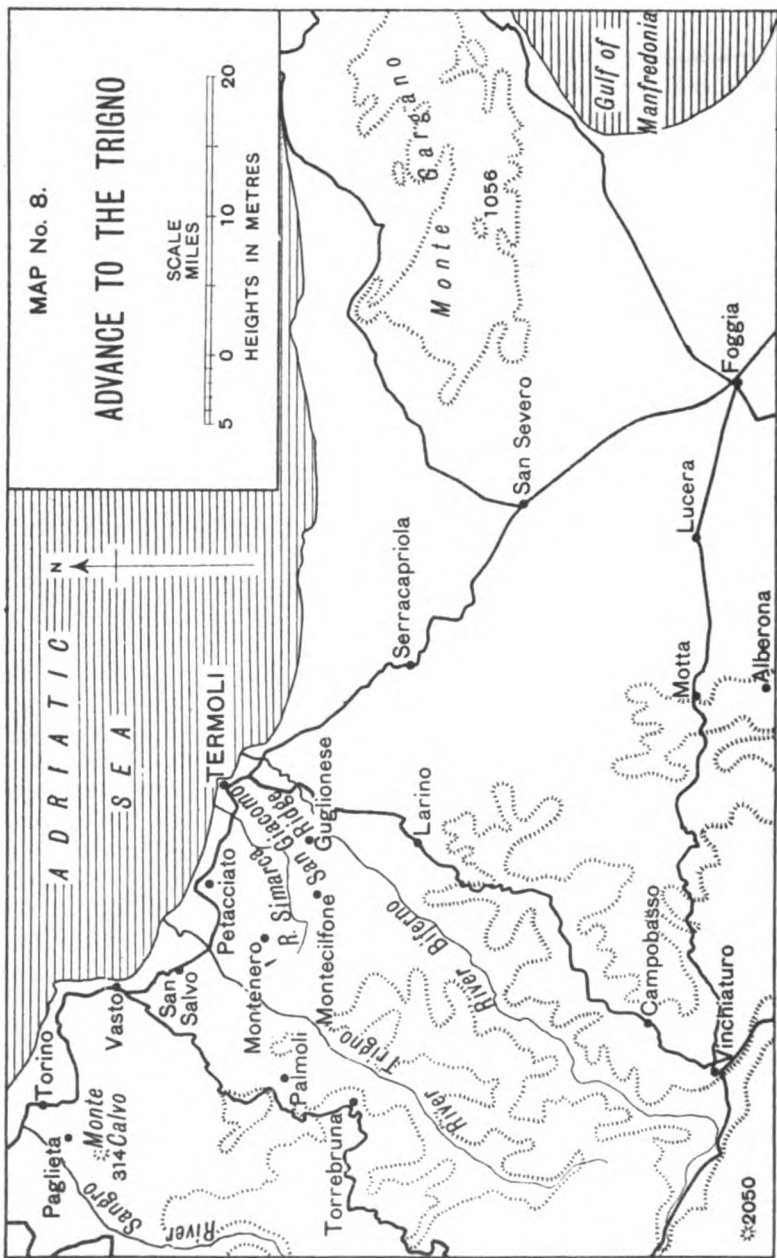
Sudden though the change had been, the German decision to hold Rome was eminently practical and politically sound. The Germans, with some twenty fighting divisions in Italy, were now in full control of the north; their communications were assured, and their own engineers were working the principal railways. In the Balkans they had disarmed the Italian garrisons, and recovered from their first anxiety. With returning confidence they looked at the ramparts that protected Rome against the invaders. The nearest patrols of the Allied armies were still a hundred and twenty miles away, and every mile lay in the shadow of the mountains. The natural strength of the German positions was enormous, and already

the winter rains had begun, which would swell the mountain rills to torrents and turn the valleys into swamps. Not since July of 1942 had the Germans won a battle against us, and now their people were also alarmed by disasters on the Eastern Front: they needed a victory, and here, in a country perfectly suited to defensive fighting, they saw a prospect of victory. They determined to hold the doors to Rome.

But the eastern door of the outermost pair—that hinged on Termoli—was not nearly strong enough to withstand the weight of the Eighth Army. It was on October the 1st that the enemy heard a knocking at the door, when the 4th Armoured Brigade took Serracapriola, less than twenty miles from Termoli, and captured three 88-millimetre guns which the Parachute Division—it was short of artillery—could ill-afford to lose, and that night the Canadians attacked Motta, and captured it after a struggle that lasted till daylight on the 2nd.

The XIIIth Corps led the new advance, while the Vth Corps protected its landward flank and secured lines of communication. There are two forward roads from Foggia, the one reaching west and north-west through Lucera towards Vinchiaturro, the other to the north through San Severo to Termoli. The 1st Canadian Division moved on the former, the 11th Brigade of the 78th Division on the latter. At Bari, under command of the 78th, was a Special Service Brigade. As soon as the new-won village of Serracapriola was made safe by the occupation of high ground to the west, the Special Service Brigade put to sea and in the small hours of October the 3rd landed near Termoli. They took by surprise a battle-group of the 1st Parachute Division numbering more than six hundred men, and by half-past seven were in possession of the town and the uninjured port. Having beaten off a sharp counter-attack, in which the Germans lost a hundred and thirty killed and two hundred prisoners, including their Commanding Officer, contact was quickly made with the 11th Brigade, which had reached the Biferno, and though the railway-bridge and both road-bridges had been blown, the Lancashire Fusiliers were over the river by three o'clock in the afternoon. The Germans had withdrawn to positions south-west of Termoli, and while their artillery shelled the town and their mortars at long range threw their bombs, they made preparations for the counter-attack.

The 11th Brigade strengthened its bridgehead. Eight anti-tank guns were ferried over the river and by seven o'clock a Bailey Bridge had been built. It was raining and the approaches were difficult,



MAP No. 8.

ADVANCE TO THE TRIGNO



A D R I A T I C
S E A



TERMOLI

Paglietta
Torino
Vasto
San Salvo
Montenero
Palmoli
Torrebruna

River S. Antonio
R. S. Antonio
San Giacomo
San Geronzo
Montecifone
Guglionese

Trigno River
Bierno River

Serracapirola

San Severo

Lucera

Motta

Alberona

Campobasso

Vinchiaturo

*2050

Monte Garigliano

1056

Gulf of
Manfredonia

Foggia

but transport was crossing before nightfall. The 36th Brigade had by now embarked at Barletta. It landed at Termoli at two o'clock on the following morning, and at dawn moved to the attack and engaged the enemy on the high ground in the neighbourhood of Guglionese. At nine o'clock, near Petacciato, a German motorcyclist was captured, who, when he had been identified, was recognised as the harbinger of serious counter-attack. He belonged to the 16th Panzer Division which had, until now, been stationed north of the Volturno.

Early on the morning of October the 5th the remaining brigade of the 78th, the Irish, began its voyage from Barletta. The sea was calm and the blunt-bowed infantry-ships crossed the Gulf of Manfredonia among peaceful fleets of many-coloured fishing boats; but north of the Gargano Peninsula a very different climate was awaiting them. Termoli was being heavily shelled when they arrived, and the night was uneasy with the news and rumour of German success. The counter-attack had made ground, from San Giacomo and also on the left, and in the early afternoon the situation had been serious. It was somewhat relieved by the City of London Yeomanry, who with great dash attacked and cleared a dominating plateau which had been occupied by German tanks; and before dusk two squadrons of the 12th Canadian Tank Regiment were across the Biferno. But during the night, while the Irish Brigade was disembarking under fire and seeking ways through the darkness to positions on the outskirts of the town, the approach of German armour was clearly heard, and the Divisional Commander, withdrawing the Special Service Brigade from its forward position, ordered the Yeomanry to advance the hour of its intended morning attack on San Giacomo, about three miles from the town.

Both sides attacked at dawn. The Germans had taken a cemetery less than a mile to the west of Termoli, and advanced from there with tanks and infantry. They were driven back, and a second attempt, more strongly made, was with comparable difficulty also repulsed. Nor were the Yeomanry successful, but were halted, after an hour of skirmishing, by a screen of anti-tank guns. The capture of the San Giacomo Ridge, which had been their task, was now entrusted to the Irish Brigade and an excellent squadron of Canadian tanks. The Irish had already shown a very soldierly competence in rapidly disembarking under heavy fire, and, in darkness and an unknown town, taking position on its perimeter; when it came to fighting, they were brilliantly successful. The attack went in before noon, and by three o'clock the Royal Irish

Fusiliers and the tanks—of the Three Rivers Regiment—had taken the right half of the ridge. Two hours later the Inniskilling Fusiliers, after fighting over more difficult country, with the Buffs and the London Yeomanry—now on the move again and taking toll of the German armour—were in possession of the left half; and by nightfall the London Irish were settled firmly on the river Simarca, while anti-tank guns were going forward along the road. The German losses, which included eight Mark IV tanks, had been very heavy, but there were few casualties among the Irish. Captured documents included the Germans' plan of attack, which disclosed the Panzer Division's intention to retake the port at any cost. But Termoli was now safely in our hands, and the Division which might have turned the scale on the Volturno had been thoroughly defeated.

Within the next two days the 11th Brigade took Larino, twenty miles to the south, and regained contact with the enemy two miles beyond it. The 36th Brigade occupied Guglionese, and the Irish, moving astride the coast-road, found the Germans on the Petacciato ridge. It was, however, impossible to exploit the situation on a hand-to-mouth supply system, and the Army Commander now ordained a brief pause to organise the administrative services.

Some fifteen miles beyond the mouth of the Biferno, the Trigno empties its mountain-water into the Adriatic; and along the Trigno the Germans would fight the next delaying action. The topographical pattern of Italy, fascinating the tourist with romantic heights and stern declivities, to the soldier invading from the south is a monotonous repetition of traps and barriers, of mountain-rampart and river-ditch. From the Apennines great ribs go down to either coast, and between the ribs run meandering streams that the autumn solstice and the winter snow may enlarge with disastrous speed to roaring torrents. Every rib had to be climbed and crossed, and every river bridged under fire from the slopes beyond. The liberation of Italy was going to be a bitter process.

In the battle for the Trigno the enemy used the river itself merely as an obstacle. His main positions were on the San Salvo ridge some five thousand yards beyond it, and these were attacked three weeks after the German defeat at Termoli. During this period, while forces were regrouped and supplies accumulated, there was light fighting in the area between the Biferno and the Trigno, and the London Irish took Petacciato in a brisk engagement. The 8th Indian Division came into the line, and cleared the enemy from high ground west of the Biferno. Two potentially strong positions, Montecilfone and Montenero, were taken without much

trouble, and on October the 22nd a patrol of the Irish Brigade discovered that the bridge which carried the coast-road over the Trigno was still intact, and did not appear to have been prepared for demolition.

In the three months that had passed since the invasion of Sicily, the Allies with infinite toil had by-passed or spanned a vast number of blown bridges, but the hope still lived of taking one whole, and the Trigno bridge was a prize indeed, a stone structure four hundred feet across. The patrol's report was quickly followed by an order to capture it forthwith. It was kept under fire to discourage German demolition parties, and at dusk on October the 20th two battalions of the Irish Brigade advanced to the attack.

They had four miles of heavy country to cross and a few machine-gun posts to eliminate, but the London Irish successfully occupied a commanding ridge on the near side of the river, between the bridge and the sea, and the leading files of a company of the Royal Irish Fusiliers set foot on the near abutment of the bridge. Then the bridge blew up, and when the smoke and thunder of the demolition had subsided a gap of some two hundred feet was discovered in the long procession of arches. The river was crossed, however, and the Fusiliers established a bridgehead on the far side which they held, under fire, for six days.

Here, as elsewhere, the Germans defended their river line with light forces to oppose the approach and the crossing; with strenuous resistance to the reinforcement of the bridgehead, especially the reinforcement with anti-tank guns and armour; and then with a stubborn fight for their main position on commanding ground beyond the river. The complementary pattern of attack was to break through the outermost defensive screen, force an evening crossing, and dig in quickly on the other side; then, after a night of bulldozing, drive tanks and anti-tank guns across at dawn; enlarge the bridgehead, assemble for battle, and attack the main positions.

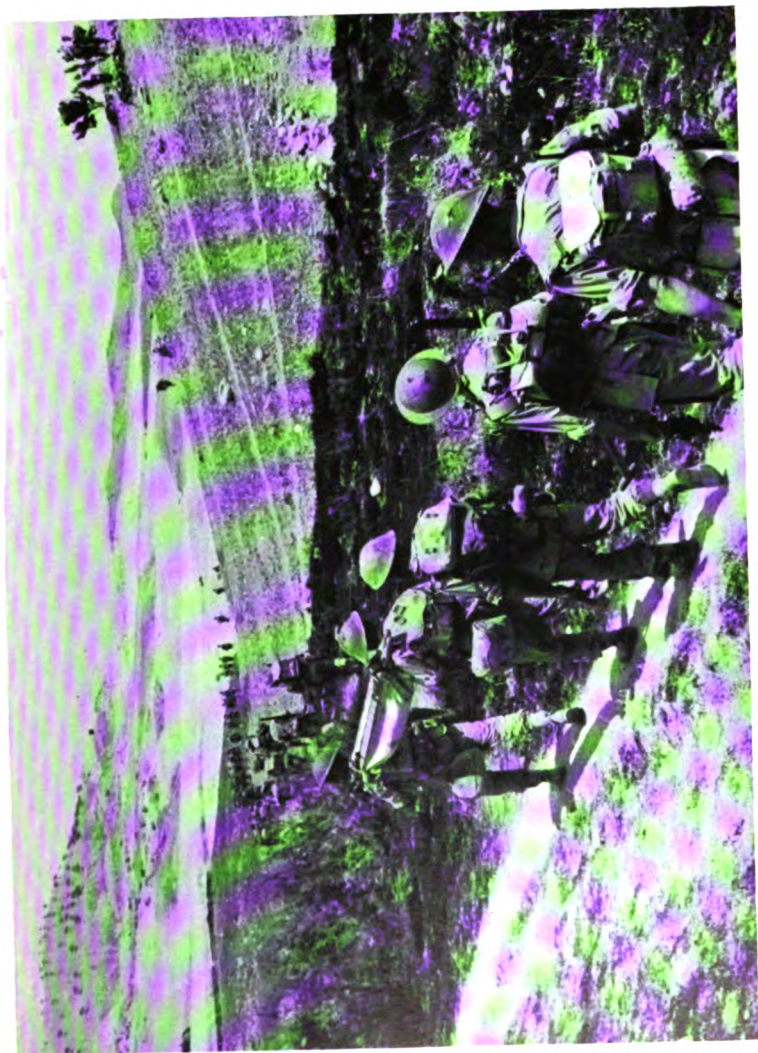
The Trigno was a moderate stream in a broad bed with precipitous banks of fifty to eighty feet in height. The channel was commanded from either side by wooded heights; and the town of San Salvo, on which the Germans based their defence, was situated in very thick country. The Irish Brigade was ordered to take it by night attack on October the 27th. The assault battalions were the London Irish on the right of the road, the Fusiliers on the left.

An afternoon of rain preceded their advance and a heavy barrage covered it, but overshot numerous machine-gun positions.

The guns had been brought forward over the river, by approach-roads of great difficulty, on to ground that became an all-engulfing quagmire in bad weather. The German defensive fire was formidable, and the Irish suffered grievously but continued to make headway in difficult circumstances until malignant chance deprived them of their leaders. Both Colonels were killed, the commanders and the platoon commanders of the leading companies of the Fusiliers were all killed or wounded, and two company commanders of the London Irish were killed. The advance was halted and the diminished battalions dug in. Then, to save inevitable and needless casualties, they were withdrawn to the bridgehead. A battalion of the 11th Brigade, whose objective was the San Salvo station, had also to retire after having made appreciable progress. The bulldozed river-crossing had become almost impassable.

The 78th Division was compelled to deploy more strength and in the early morning of November the 3rd, after elaborate artillery preparation reinforced by air bombing and diversionary attacks on the left and right—by light artillery and the Royal Navy—the 36th Brigade resumed the attack with the 46th Battalion of the Royal Tank Regiment and the Inniskillings of the 38th under command. The ground was in vile condition, but all the tanks succeeded in crossing the river and did excellent work in destroying hostile machine-gun posts. The infantry reached their first objectives, on the escarpment, by the dawn light, and by ten o'clock the Buffs on the right were on their second objective and the Inniskillings were in the outskirts of San Salvo. The Germans counter-attacked promptly, but the Buffs destroyed three Mark IV tanks, while the Inniskillings were clearing the town, and in a battle in the nearby olive groves the 46th successfully engaged a Panzer Battalion and eliminated six of the tanks and two self-propelled guns. In the afternoon a score of enemy tanks were seen approaching from Vasto to the coast, and the 50th Royal Tank Battalion, at Petacciato, was ordered to cross the river and meet them.

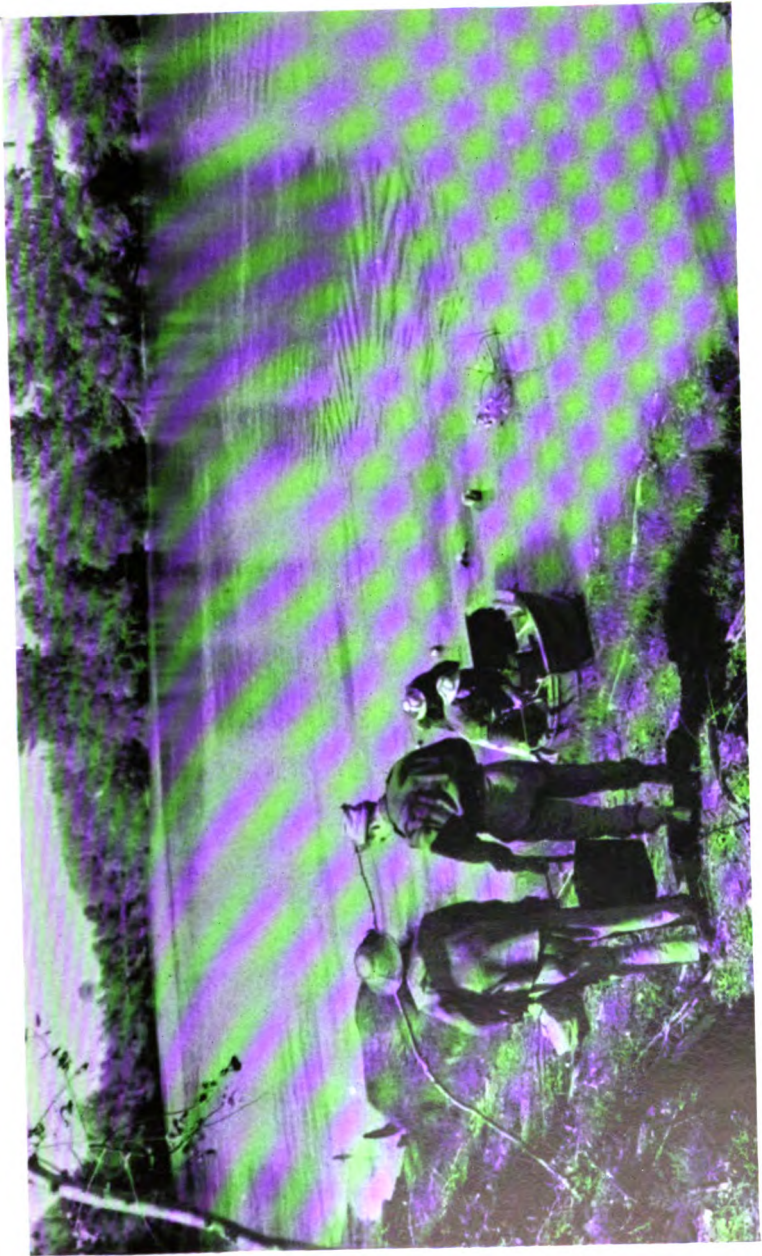
When dusk fell the battle was confused. The Inniskillings and two companies of the Buffs were firmly in San Salvo, and the Royal West Kents were moving towards them astride the coast road; but enemy tanks lay between them and San Salvo, and what remained of the 46th, which had suffered heavily and run out of ammunition, was harbouring in the Boso di Moltice with the leading squadron of the 50th. The Surreys of the 11th Brigade were over the river but had failed to take the railway station a mile and a half beyond it.



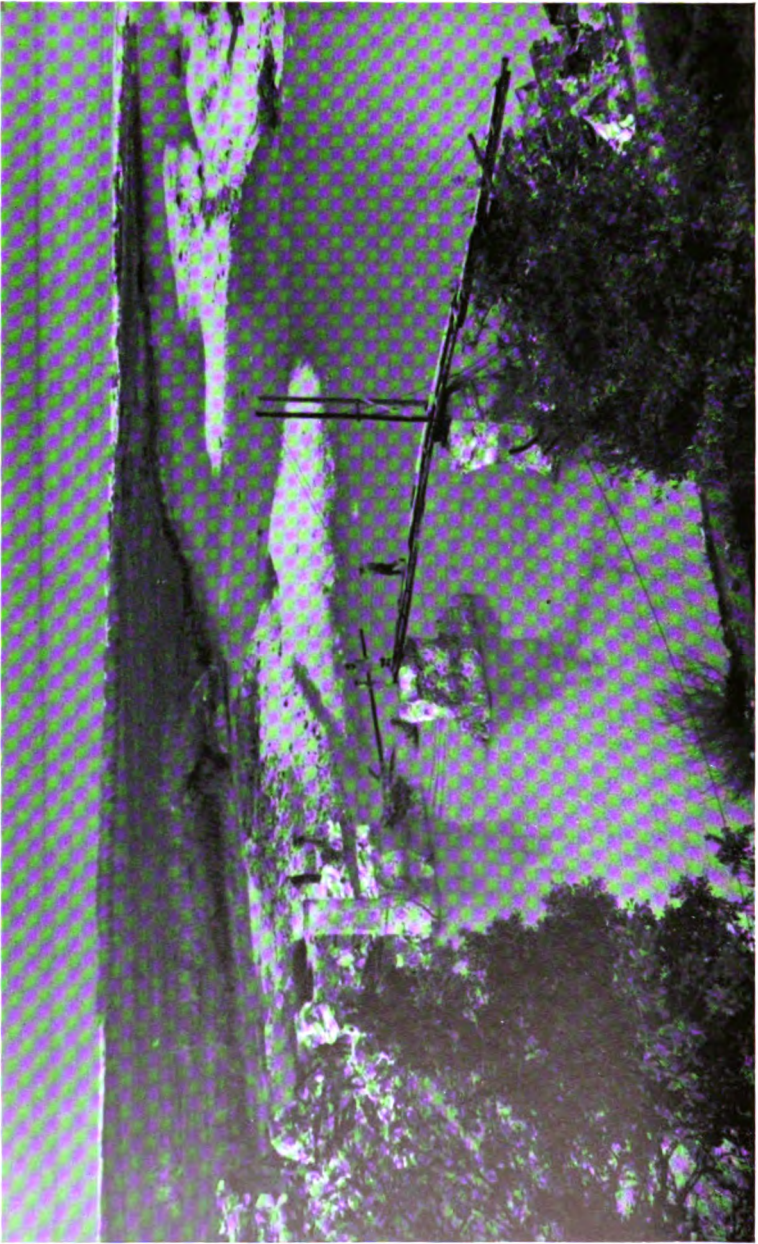
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SALERNO LANDING



THE VOLTURNO

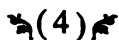


THE SANGRO

The momentum of the attack was maintained, however, and the Royal West Kents and the Argyll and Sutherlands of the 36th Brigade pushed forward to high ground beyond San Salvo, while two battalions came up the road to exploit and continue their advance. By tragic mischance the West Kents fell foul of a German tank harbour not much more than half a mile north of San Salvo, and the resultant volume of gun-fire threw them into confusion and also stopped the Argylls.

But supplies and reinforcements were now pouring into the bridgehead, and before morning it became evident that the enemy had realised he must withdraw. The Surreys occupied the station, and the Northamptons of the 11th Brigade, going through the 36th, fought for and captured the road junction south-west of Vasto; while the remainder of the Brigade, on their left, came up abreast of them.

During the battle for San Salvo the 8th Indian Division had been fighting on higher ground some twenty miles inland against the expert troops of the 1st Parachute Division. They made little progress to begin with, but when their opponents were shaken by the withdrawal of the defeated 16th Panzer Division on their left, the Indians advanced swiftly to Palmoli and Torrebruna. Progress then continued on the right against scanty opposition to Vasto and the road that runs south-westwards from it, and beyond that to the parallel line of the Sangro, which reconnoitring troops of the 36th Brigade, on the coast-road, reached in the early morning of November the 8th. The bridge was already blown, and the approaches to nearby crossing places were thickly mined. The 11th Brigade, occupying Torino and Paglieta, also reached the river, and from the useful height of Monte Calvo had good observation to the north and to the west.



Winter and the Sangro

A CONSIDERABLE separation now divided the Eighth Army's advance on the Adriatic coast, on Highway 16, from its operations in the mountains on Highway 17; but the danger of hostile action from the rear—against which the Vth Corps had deployed its limited reserves—had vanished when contact was established with the Fifth Army. To accommodate his forces to meet the new

situation General Montgomery had re-grouped his Army in mid-October, when the Vth Corps assumed responsibility for the right sector between the coast and Larino, taking command of the 8th Indian Division, the 4th Armoured Brigade, and—from the XIIIth Corps—the 78th Division and 2nd Special Service Brigade. The XIIIth Corps, in the mountains, now commanded the 5th Infantry Division and the 1st Canadian Division. When this re-distribution of command took place only the 78th Division in the Vth Corps, and the Canadian Division in the XIIIth, were in contact with the enemy, though a brigade of the 5th Division was on its way to occupy the dangerous broken ground between the Canadians and the 78th. The 8th Indian Division, which had disembarked on September 24th, was coming forward as quickly as transport became available for it.

The advance had so far been maintained with *ad hoc* forces, but as it continued towards the Army's main objective—the lateral road that runs from Pescara through Avezzano to Rome—it was led by proper divisional advanced guards, though for some time only light forces were engaged. For a long time—for too long—the 78th Division had had to bear the brunt of battle, because its experience in war, greater than that of the other divisions in the Army, required its sacrifice.

Against the fourteen divisions which the Allies now disposed in Italy, the Germans had nine divisions in the line, supported by armoured units, and considerable reinforcement in the north had increased the enemy's strength there to another fourteen divisions. It appeared possible that the Germans were contemplating a counter-offensive, and it was imperative that the Allies should retain the initiative to spoil their presumptive plans. Amphibious operations were impossible because of the lack of landing-craft, and the Armies had to maintain their forward attack. The battle for the Trigno had gone well, though the 78th Division had suffered over a thousand casualties in it, but harder tasks lay ahead. The Army Commander reinforced his line, and brought in the 2nd New Zealand Division on the left of the Vth Corps's front.

In early November the weather was bad and growing worse, and snow fell on the 10th. The two forward brigades of the 8th Indian Division, headed for Atessa and Castiglione—with fifteen miles between their axes of advance and four-thousand-foot mountains in front of them—were hindered more by flooded fords and dissolving by-passes than by the enemy. Far-ranging patrols, in Bren carriers wherever possible, kept touch between the brigades,

and the overworked sappers strove to keep the roads open. Road maintenance demanded so much labour that it was impossible to concentrate many troops in the forward areas, and though the advance continued it was tentative rather than bluntly aggressive. Castiglione and Casalanguida were occupied on successive days, and on November the 11th leading troops of the 17th Brigade made contact with the enemy near Atessa and Tornareccio. The forward road from Gissi, fantastically tortuous and extensively damaged, was still under shell-fire, and forty-eight hours were required to mount the attack. A Grenadier Battalion of the 16th Panzer Division was holding Atessa, but the Indians took it and repelled several counter-attacks.

The 17th Brigade was then relieved by the 19th, which maintained the advance in wretched weather, and presently took Perano and compelled the Germans to give up their more southerly positions at Archi and Tornareccio. This success was doubly useful in that, as well as making ground, it screened the advance of the 2nd New Zealand Division and brought it, unobserved by the enemy, to the near bank of the Sangro. The New Zealand Division, with its headquarters near Gissi, had taken over the left section of the Corps area and command of the 19th Brigade on November the 14th, when the remainder of the 8th Indian Division had gone into reserve. New Zealand tanks supported the Indian infantry in their capture of Perano, while the 2nd New Zealand Cavalry guarded the Division's open southern flank and patrolled the broad no-man's-land between it and the XIIIth Corps.

Near the sea, in front of the little towns of Torino and Paglieta, on their ridge of high ground among leafless woods, the river, when swollen with rain and snow, ran five or six feet deep in a bed a hundred yards wide, between sheer sides, a dozen feet high perhaps, buttressed by trees. Flat farm-land to the north, some three thousand yards beyond the river, rose about fifty feet to a parallel escarpment from which an upward slope, sprinkled with farm houses and patched with olive groves, climbed steadily to a ridge crowned, near the coast, with the village of Fossacesia, and four miles inland with the villages of Santa Maria and Mozzogroga. It was here, in the last few miles of its course, that General Montgomery had decided to cross the river—and break the Germans' Winter Line.

For several weeks there had been rumours and gossip of the enemy's preparation to defend a position called the Winter Line, the Gustav Line, or the Hélène Line. The name was uncertain

and the nomenclature misleading; for Italian labourers, conscribed by the thousand, had been working with concrete and mines, by digging and wiring, to give the so-called line a depth in many places of twenty miles. The result of their labour was a defensive belt, studded with pill-boxes, reinforced farmhouses and concealed machine-gun positions, that crossed the narrowness of Italy between the mouth of the Sangro and the Tyrrhenian mouth of the Garigliano: the two rivers and the intervening mountains defined the course, and prisoners of war spoke openly of its purpose. It was designed to stop the Allied advance. It was no mere check line, but the inner doors of the fortress of Italy, locked and barred.

In accordance with German custom the river itself was only lightly defended and the 36th Brigade, advancing from Torino, cleared the south bank, reconnoitred crossing places, and sending over patrols established several small bridgeheads without much difficulty. From the bridgeheads there was such vigorous patrolling that for several days the enemy was denied all access to the river, and our sappers were able to reconnoitre additional crossings for tracks and wheels. On November the 15th, however, there was heavy rain and the river rose beyond fording-depth. The Germans took advantage of two days of bad weather to lay new mine-fields and strengthen their outpost-line between the escarpment and the river; but as soon as the flood-water diminished our fighting patrols went out and quickly regained the initiative.

The 65th German Infantry Division, that lay nearest to the sea, was of indifferent quality, but inland from it was the redoubtable 1st Parachute Division, now rested and refurbished after its bruising at Termoli; and side by side with it the 16th Panzer Division, that held ground on the south side of the river till November the 18th, when the 19th Indian Brigade drove it back. Under the mountains behind Castel di Sangro the 305th Division held a wide front in comparative security; the mountain ramparts on which it rested rose to seven, eight and nine thousand feet.

In the uplands about Castel di Sangro and Alfedena the XIIIth Corps took certain measures to delude the enemy into a belief that General Montgomery's main attack would be pointed there. A fictitious Army Headquarters, complete with wireless communication, was set up; dummy gun-positions and ammunition dumps were built; and a permitted leakage of information suggested that the date of the XIIIth Corps' attack would be two days after the real attack by the Vth Corps. In the meantime preparations continued in earnest in the coastal sector. Stores and equipment



were laboriously brought up on the only road available—much of it so narrow that one-way traffic-control was necessary—and the new dumps and the new gun areas were carefully hidden and occupied in darkness. Some of the gun-areas were almost inaccessible: four miles of mule-track had to be broadened and surfaced before guns or ammunition could reach one of them. On the river banks the sappers worked in marsh and quagmire, the river-level went up and down like a fever-chart, and more rain fell. But steadily the apparatus of major assault was gathered and concentrated behind the Torino ridge, and at a quarter past four on the morning of November the 20th the 36th Brigade led the attack.

The intention was that the 36th Brigade should enlarge the bridgehead on the river-flats, and capture by first light positions on the escarpment. The 8th Indian Division would later attack the enemy's main defensive position, moving along the road to Mozzogogna; and following them the 4th Armoured and the Irish Brigades would wheel right towards Fossacesia and the sea, so outflanking the enemy's position and opening the way for exploitation to the north. The New Zealanders, in the meantime, were to cross the river and head straight for Chieti with the main road from Pescara as their objective; for if they could then move westwards down it they would threaten the Germans' principal lines of communication in the neighbourhood of Avezzano behind the Fifth Army. This was the Eighth Army's real object in attacking over the Sangro. Its new battle was to be the opening chapter in General Alexander's winter campaign. Chapter Two was to be written by the Fifth Army, which would—it was intended—capture Camino, open the Liri Valley and advance, perhaps as far as Frosinone. Then, at the appropriate moment, there would be an amphibious landing south of Rome to march to the Alban Hills.

It was an ambitious plan and a good one, but it did not fructify. It was, perhaps, too late in the year to expect the plums of a decisive victory. On the Adriatic side the villainous weather broke and released the full spate and malignity of winter before the Indians could move, and that was the first mishap.

The 36th Brigade was partially successful and enlarged the bridgehead. The Buffs and the Royal West Kents, each attacking with one company forward, reached their objective under the escarpment, on either side of the main road, but the Argylls on the left were strongly counter-attacked and driven back across the river. In rain and flood-water, under shell fire, attempts to bridge the Sangro failed; and the Indians' attack was postponed. The

bridgehead, if it was to be maintained, had to be reinforced; but before new troops could cross, the company of the Buffs was counter-attacked and driven back. A few tanks which had crossed found the ground impossible and returned. During the night of the 21st, however, Northhamptons and Royal West Kents, Argylls and Lancashire Fusiliers and a battalion of the 60th fought their way across, though the river was now running at seven knots, and no vehicles could move except on a road; and by the following day, with the greater part of five battalions across—the 36th had been reinforced by the 11th and the 4th Armoured Brigades—the enlarged bridgehead was fairly secure. Some tanks succeeded in crossing on the following day, the infantry improved their positions, and two bridges were built. The enemy was now withdrawing to his main position in front of the ridge road. There was fine weather on the 23rd—though rain was falling in the mountains that would presently show itself in yet another spate—and a third bridge was built, another squadron of tanks went over, and work was redoubled on the treacherous approaches.

The sappers of the 78th Division laboured prodigiously. One of their crossings was approached by a steep diversion, half a mile long, bull-dozed through earth so soft that a vast quantity of faggots, railway sleepers and heavy steel netting was needed to make it bear. The diversion led to a water-gap bridged by a Bailey a hundred and forty feet long: a simple job in normal circumstances, but here, whenever the Sangro rose in its wrath, the bridge was submerged and in danger of being swept away. On the far side a track was bull-dozed through mud that had no palpable bottom, that swallowed many tons of stone and demanded more, and then, on the night of the 22nd, successfully bore two anti-tank guns and other vehicles. For a week this nightmare-crossing carried its invaluable traffic. Sometimes as many as a hundred vehicles crossed in a night, sometimes less than a dozen. It was, on the whole, the most successful of the three crossings.

When darkness came on the 23rd the river was in full flood, its whole bed filled, and that night none of the bridges could be used. The troops in the bridgehead fought minor actions to improve their positions, but they were grievously short of supporting weapons, and their stock of ammunition was alarmingly small. This deficiency was repaired, however, by a speedily organised amphibious supply-route. Ammunition was carried from Vasto to a beach south of the Sangro, loaded into Ducks, and ferried through a heavy swell at the river-mouth to a beach beside the railway

station at Fossacesia. In forty-eight hours the Ducks carried into the bridgehead some two thousand tons of petrol, lubricating oil and ammunition—including fifty thousand rounds for the 25-pounders—and brought out of it battle-casualties and captured prisoners.

The original battle-plan was modified and a less ambitious operation order was issued by the Vth Corps on November the 24th. The river began to subside and airfields showed patches of dry land. The Desert Air Force took to the sky and the offensive again, and in the early morning of the 27th, the specified date for it, the Frontier Force Regiment, of the 8th Indian Division, captured a spur a thousand yards south-east of Mozzogogna. It was supported by the guns of four field-regiments in the first chapter of a bombardment so lavish that prisoners were to complain of its exceeding even the vicious concentration of fire they had grown accustomed to in Russia. Nine field and three medium regiments were in position to support the attacking divisions, and in three days of battle the field-guns fired more than six hundred rounds apiece, the mediums between three and four hundred. On the Indians' left the 2nd New Zealand Division crossed the Sangro on the night of the 27th, and keeping pace with its neighbours, captured Castel Frentano.

The good start was followed by disappointment. After a day of great activity, during which all secrecy was discarded and guns, tanks, carriers and transport stormed across the river in face of heavy shell-fire, the 17th Brigade went in to attack and captured Mozzogogna and Santa Maria. But the enemy's defence was stiffening. The whole of the 65th Division was now in the line, and Nebelwerfers had been added to its fire-power. A battle-group of tanks and flame-throwers of the 26th Panzer Division was waiting in Lanciano in readiness to counter-attack; and leading troops of the 90th Panzer Grenadiers, brought from Venice, were beginning to move south from Chieti. The Gurkhas of the 17th Brigade, strongly supported by artillery, took Mozzogogna, but craters and demolitions prevented tanks and supporting weapons from reaching them, and the Royal Fusiliers from going on to capture Santa Maria. When the battle-group of the 26th Panzer Division counter-attacked at dawn on the 28th, the Gurkhas suffered badly and were ordered to withdraw.

A new attack was mounted, and at dawn on the 29th the Inniskillings of the Irish and tanks of the 4th Armoured Brigade assaulted the ridge of Li Colli. The three Irish battalions had for two days been waiting under the escarpment. They were on

friendly terms with the Armoured Brigade, and had rehearsed the attack together, company with squadron, men and tanks in co-ordinated movement. The actual performance went well, but they had to fight for their success. The enemy on the ridge were in deep trenches, dug-outs, and fortified houses. For a long time the tanks of the 44th Regiment were held up by mine-fields, but the Inniskillings methodically eliminated Germans from their strong-points while the armour advanced with ponderous caution; and when they united their efforts the Li Colli position was captured, and a company of the Inniskillings with a squadron of tanks went on to take Santa Maria, which fell at five in the afternoon, rather less than eleven hours from the start.

The Argylls of the 36th Brigade came under command and relieved the Inniskillings in Santa Maria. The proximate objective was that portion of the Winter Line between Li Colli and the sea, and shortly after ten o'clock on the morning of the 30th, in fine weather, the tanks of the County of London Yeomanry moved into battle with the London Irish at their tails and a tremendous barrage sweeping the country ahead of them. They went about their business with great spirit and, more important, they went about it like experts. The Winter Line was breached and broken, and within three hours the Irish held the ridge to Fossacesia, and Fossacesia itself. An hour later a barrage preceded tanks and the Royal Irish Fusiliers in an equally decisive assault on that segment of the line between Fossacesia and the sea. By four o'clock it also was taken, and they had reached the sea; and meanwhile the Inniskillings, with assistant tanks, had pressed on towards Rocca.

Following a day of brilliant fighting and decisive achievement, the Brigadier commanding the Irish reported the capture of seven hundred prisoners and much booty. Higher authority, perplexed but impressed by the old-fashioned, somewhat romantic word, was inclined to believe that the Irish had taken nothing less than a store of whisky; but their considerable prize, in fact, was guns and other strictly military equipment.

On the following morning the London Irish took Rocca, and by darkness had advanced as far as a ravine half-way between there and San Vito, that had halted the Fusiliers on the previous evening, and was a decisive tank-stop. When daylight came on the 2nd, three companies crossed and had a day's hard fighting on the northern rim. They could make no progress but they held their ground till dark, and were then recalled. The Royal Irish Fusiliers,

in the meantime, were engaged in a remarkable action about six miles behind the German lines. Two companies, marching across country in the darkness, at daybreak had appeared in the outskirts of San Vito. One platoon, entering the town, took the Germans entirely by surprise, and for a little while did notable execution, but suffered heavily in the process. The remainder dug-in some three hundred yards from the town, and though they had not expected to be in that hazardous position for more than an hour or two—until the London Irish joined them, in fact—they decided, when it became apparent that the London Irish had been prevented, to hold on for as long as might be necessary. They beat off five counter-attacks, inflicted a heavy loss on the enemy, and remained in position.

During the night the London Yeomanry and the Inniskillings found a long way round the uncrossable ravine, and by dawn were ready to attack San Vito, and by mid-afternoon had taken it. The two companies of Fusiliers had withdrawn to join the rest of the battalion, and now they and the London Irish moved up to the Feltrino, a little stream north of San Vito, in preparation for advance to the larger Moro water that runs to the sea midway between San Vito and Ortona. There was more hard work for the sappers, and the bulldozers were busy all night making a tank-crossing over the Feltrino. It was a rough and difficult crossing, but they made it, and at daybreak on the 4th some forty tanks went over with the infantry into the undulating and wooded country beyond.

There was another day of hard fighting. The German 65th Division had been broken on the Winter Line, and in its place the tougher soldiers of the 90th Panzer Grenadiers were joining battle in increasing numbers. The Irish, moreover, were leaving the rest of the Vth Corps behind, and their inland flank was now hazardously exposed. The Inniskillings came forward as flank-guard and the advance continued against a shrewd and stubborn resistance. By nightfall the Brigade was firmly on the Moro with anti-tank guns in position, and two battalions of tanks in comforting proximity. Ortona was little more than three miles ahead—but Ortona was reserved for the Canadians, who were now relieving the 78th Division, and took over its spearhead from the Irish on the night of December the 5th.

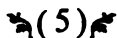
The Irish Brigade began to move south from Rocca, two days after its relief, and crossing its own battle-field of Fossacesia, made reasonable progress until it came within a couple of miles of

the Sangro. It was in search of rest, and though in its primary intention the journey was not very successful, it illustrated certain conditions of the campaign. Near the Sangro the Irish entered a traffic-jam of remarkable size and alarming density. To the northern end of the bridge three roads, or tracks, converged, and on the two lateral tracks motor vehicles stood nose-and-tail for miles. Over the bridge from the south came laboriously a thick unbroken stream—rations and petrol and ammunition for the Canadian attack—that on the northern bank took perforce the centre road, the other channels being blocked. Foul weather, demolished roads, broken bridges, and the voracious appetite of a modern army—not for bread and bully only, but for oil and shells—had produced this infuriating stasis, this typical picture of winter-war in Italy. The Irish, indeed, refused to acquiesce in stasis and obtained their right of passage; but according to their own story it took them three hours longer to cross the Sangro against the traffic of their own army than it had taken them ten days previously to fight their way over against the Germans. They bivouacked at night, and noted that they had travelled fifteen miles in twelve hours.

On December 12th, with the other brigades of the 78th Division, they reached their resting area, on the Apennine slopes above the plain of Foggia, and settled down in anticipation of a month of peace. But within a few days one brigade was going up the line again, and before Christmas the Inniskillings were reinforcing the dubious neighbourhood of Pescopennataro. This kind of disappointment is inseparable from war, and is due partly to the natural optimism of the soldier, whatever rank he may hold, who always looks forward to some reward for his fighting; and partly to the enemy's equally natural inclination to spoil the fruits of victory. In Italy, moreover, the probability of such disappointment was aggravated by the fact that until the early summer of 1944 General Alexander never had at his disposal more than a bare necessity of troops with which to maintain an offensive.

In spite of his limited resources, however, he did maintain the offensive. He maintained it against the fantastic and fearful difficulties of the country, against a winter so unruly that it gathered all the rain-clouds from the Atlantic to Dalmatia—Spain lay parched and gasping for water—and shook their deluge over his narrow battle-field. He maintained it against an ever-increasing German strength, and fulfilled his task of weakening the enemy, of holding and bleeding in the Apennines divisions that might have

saved their strength for Normandy, or spent it to good purpose against the Russians. But he could not maintain his offensive and simultaneously allow his troops a lavish holiday between engagements. The soldiers' war in Italy was a hard one.



The Canadian Advance

WHEN the Eighth Army began its advance from Foggia, the 1st Canadian Division took the inland road to Lucera and Vinchiaturò, an easy road in the plain, but when it left the plain and the open, cultivated eastern hill slopes it climbed into a stern country of ridges and ravines, the hillside wooded or obscured by scrub, and fortress-villages on commanding heights. The road turned and twisted, the villages looked down upon it, and the village houses were built of such stout masonry that field guns battered them in vain. Behind such walls, in such country, a few riflemen and a pair of machine-guns could very easily delay advancing troops, while a gunner's observer brought fire from distant batteries that compelled them to deploy. Again and again the Germans won a few hours of time, at little or no cost to themselves, and retired at their convenience. The Canadians' opponents were the 1st Parachute Division on their long hill line from Serracapriola down towards Aciano; and their purpose, in the early days of October, was to gain time while the right wing of their army withdrew behind the Volturò. Minefields, demolitions, and the defence of villages superbly sited for defence were the means they used to achieve their purpose.

After the fighting for Motta—which was taken on the 2nd of October—and unopposed entry into Troia and Bovino, the 1st Brigade, having captured Volturara, was directed against Campobasso, while the 2nd, on its left, advanced over the difficult minor roads of the Sannio mountains. Resistance grew stiffer, and the Parachute Division was reinforced by the 29th Panzer Grenadiers between San Marco and Baselice. These villages were taken on the 4th and 5th, and on the 7th the 3rd Canadian Brigade forced the crossing of the Fortore with such vigour that it drove forward, unchecked, to expel the Germans from Pietracatella and Gambatesa, to which the rearguards had withdrawn, and on the following day the Division advanced along

its whole front under heavy rain, but made no contact with the enemy.

The Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment, on the right of the Division, had been busy on a wide front, covering the gap between the Vth and XIIIth Corps, and on the 8th it entered Colletorto. Some regrouping followed, and at Colletorto the 15th Brigade of the 5th Division, now under command of the XIIIth Corps, relieved the Reconnaissance Regiment and advanced towards the main lateral road from Termoli to Vinchiaturo. It entered Bonefro, fought hard and successfully for the dominating mountain called Cerro Ruccolo, and moving rapidly took Casacalenda, on the lateral road, on October the 13th. By this time the Canadians were within a mile of Campobasso, and after a bloodless advance the 1st Brigade took it on the 14th; and on the 15th the 2nd Brigade, on their left, captured Vinchiaturo, from which the enemy had hurriedly withdrawn. Now, while the XIIIth Corps consolidated its position on the lateral road, patrols went forward and discovered the enemy on a line approximately parallel to it and roughly continuous with the line through Petacciato and Montecilfone, nearer the coast, on which he was resisting the Vth Corps. From the coast inwards the opposite German formations were the 16th Panzer Division, the 1st Parachute Division, the 29th Panzer Grenadiers, behind Campobasso, and the 26th Panzers holding the road to Isernia.

A brief pause for replenishing the military larder now ensued, coincident with a similar state of affairs on the Vth Corps' front after the successful battle of Termoli, and, on the other flank, with heavy fighting on the Volturno. In the mountains—the weather was already prophesying winter with heavy skies and drenching rain.

In this, the middle sector, the next objective was Isernia, twenty-five miles from Vinchiaturo by a road that travels, to begin with, a much watered valley under the enormous and forbidding bulk of the Matese mountains, their crests among the clouds at six thousand feet. On the right of the road there is, by comparison, a gentler landscape—though hills dominate its open slopes—until the valley becomes pinched and narrow under the Pesco della Messa, a spur of the Matese four thousand feet high. Over the last ten miles to Isernia the road climbs and crosses the north-eastern shoulder of the Matese. To open this daunting route was the Canadians' task.

The advance was renewed on the 17th. On the right of the XIIIth Corps' front the 15th Brigade cleared the enemy from an area north-west of Casacalenda and conformed with the progress of its eastern neighbours to the Trigno; while the Canadians, on the

other extremity, began their difficult task of securing the dominating positions over the road to Isernia. The Germans were very sensitive about movement in this direction, and immediately encountered them with heavy shelling. There was fierce fighting, by the 1st and 2nd Brigades, for San Stefano and Baranello. They were taken, and lost, and taken again. The 3rd Brigade came in on the left flank, on the left of the road, and on the 21st took Campochiaro, which a patrol had entered—but only to be driven out again—three days before. Now movement became freer, the enemy slowly withdrew, and on the 23rd the 2nd Brigade, after considerable skirmishing, took Colle d'Anchise in an attack that armour assisted, and repelling an evening counter-attack, followed the enemy to Spinete and won that too. On the following day the 3rd Brigade, against heavy fire, took Boiano by noon, and before dusk the 1st Brigade was in Castropignano. That night the German guns shelled all these new-won positions very heavily, to hinder consolidation, and where guns and vehicles were striving to cross the Biferno there were casualties and material loss.

For nearly three weeks and over eighty miles the Canadians had borne the brunt of the advance, and it was decided to let the 5th Division, fresh and strong, carry the main attack to Isernia and beyond it to Forli and Alfedena. From October the 27th only the 1st Canadian Brigade remained actively engaged in operations. On the 26th one of its battalions, supported by tanks and artillery, took Torella. Another battalion went through and took Motise by night, and on the 28th a patrol of company strength successfully reconnoitred as far as Frosolone. On November the 5th orders from the XIIIth Corps placed the 3rd Canadian Brigade in readiness to move forward on the 5th Division's right flank to the Carovilli area as a preliminary to the Corps' diversionary attack on the Upper Sangro. Until the main Brigade Group left its concentration area around Campobasso on November the 16th, the 4th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment, which had relieved the 15th Brigade, covered the entire front between the 5th Division and the 8th Indian Division on the left of the Vth Corps.

By October the 28th the 5th Division had taken over all the Canadian positions on either side of the Isernia road, and in foul weather were pushing forward with commendable energy on high and difficult ground. After skirmishing on the high spur called Pesco della Messa, a battalion of the 17th Brigade, climbing strenuously, took the mountain village of Macchiagodena, and threatening the enemy with encirclement, forced him to withdraw

west of the highway. On the other side, on the steep sides of the Matese, the 13th Brigade occupied San Massimo and Cantalupo during the morning and afternoon of the 30th and on the last day of the month a patrol entered Roccamandolfi. Skirmishing continued, and heavier fighting that required strong artillery support. A hundred guns covered a battalion attack on two peaks, each nearly four thousand feet, north-west of Macchiagodena, where the enemy was resisting very fiercely. Then on the night of November the 3rd, after the 13th Brigade had taken the villages of San Angelo and Castelpetroso, the enemy broke contact and Isernia was occupied on the next day.

German demolitions were so extensive that they alone, in this rigidly confined country, for some days prevented further advance. All the Division's sapper strength was employed on the removal of obstacles and reconstruction of forward routes, and two days after its occupation the road to Isernia was fully opened to traffic. Patrols went boldly out, but no contact was made except on two occasions near Acquaviva. Forli was entered on the 9th, and progress was laboriously maintained until on the 15th it was checked again, not by the Germans, but by torrential rain that made movement impossible except on the roads. West of the Forli road the enemy had withdrawn, east of it his outposts were still in the wooded hills. The Allied offensive, by destroying and engaging more and more German troops, had brought about shrinkage in the German line, and a gap had grown between the 26th Panzer Division on the east and the 3rd Panzer Grenadiers on the west. Into the gap had come the 305th Infantry Division, whose outposts were now in the hills overlooking the Forli road.

The infantry of the 17th Brigade advanced from ridge to ridge, the artillery engaged German batteries in the farther hills, and on the night of November the 22nd our patrols entered Alfedena and found no Germans there. But the Germans were still on the dominating high ground beyond it, with a battalion of the 305th Division on either side of the road to Barrea, and further south the other two regiments of the Division held in strength commanding positions in the neighbourhood of Pizzone and south of the road from Colli to Atina. But during the rest of November there was no serious conflict in this area.

The Canadians, in the meantime, on the right of the 5th Division, were advancing towards the headwaters of the Trigno against similar opposition; demolitions and wild weather were their more serious opponents. On the Bagnoli road, for instance, they found sixteen

demolitions in fifteen miles; on the road from Carpinone to Sessano, eleven in four miles; on routes leading to Carovilli, forty-five major demolitions in twenty-seven miles. And all the time, under the winter rains of Italy and heavy traffic, the roads were crumbling and melting, and had to be maintained. The Canadians took Pescolanciano on the left bank of the river, on November the 7th, Agnone on the 10th, and then for more than a week, while bridges were built and roads repaired, patrols went vigorously out and searched far for the enemy, but without result. Not until the 21st was contact made, when a patrol, trying to secure a bridge over the Sangro south of Quadri—about ten miles from Agnone—was driven back by machine-gun and mortar fire. The enemy had withdrawn behind the river, leaving a light rear-guard on the east bank. The 3rd Canadian Brigade, by this time, was in fairly effective control of a square of ground whose corners were Ateleta, Agnone, Carovilli, and Castel di Sangro; the enemy, however, was still in Pescopennataro, and north of Ateleta, and on a high hill west of Castel di Sangro. After some disappointment this hill was taken, with the help of artillery, on the 24th, and during the next few days the Canadians saw drastic evidence of the Germans' intention to lay waste the country from which they were now preparing to withdraw. From over the Sangro, north of their territory, came the roar of heavy demolitions, and village after village was set on fire. For what remained of the month they had no more fighting with the enemy, but in the flames that rose to the winter sky from Borella, Civitoluparella, Pizzofecato and Gamberale in the deliberate destruction of San Pietro, Castel di Sangro, Pescopennataro and other villages—they had the opportunity of observing his typical handiwork. And then, on December the 2nd, the Canadians were relieved by the 15th Brigade, and their Division passed to command of the Vth Corps for the attack on Ortona.

The 5th Division assumed responsibility for the twenty-five miles of the XIIIth Corps front, and the offensive was maintained with what small weight and strength were possible in the conditions of winter, almost impassable country, and a strictly limited supply. The 15th Brigade occupied the ruined villages of Borella, San Angelo and Castel del Giudice; but the rearguards of the 1st Parachute Division, which had been left to threaten our communications and harass our advance, still held, in spite of the increasing depth of snow, a strong position on Rocca Cinquemiglia—some three miles north of Castel di Sangro—and maintained their guns on the northern slopes of Arazecca to the west of it across the road

to Sulmona. They imposed on us the delay they intended, and took advantage of it to demolish, not bridges only, but long stretches of the mountain roads.

When the Canadians took over the 78th Division's sector, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade was concentrated near Fossacesia, the 1st Brigade was at Petacciatto some twenty miles farther back, and the 3rd Brigade, about to be relieved by the 5th Division, was still in the mountains north of Isernia. Until December 5th the advance to the Moro was maintained by the Irish Brigade, temporarily under Canadian command, with the 2nd Canadian Brigade on the left between Apollinare and Rogatti, and west of it the 8th Indian Division, which had made little contact with the enemy since its capture of Lanciano on the 3rd. It was the intention of General Vokes, commanding the Canadian Division, to cross the Moro on the axis of Highway 16, and put a brigade astride the road from Ortona to Orsogna on the ridge north of the river as quickly as possible, in order to move against both Ortona and Tollo.

The Canadians had redoubtable opponents. The German 65th Division, almost destroyed in the previous fighting, had been replaced by the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, brought down from Venice; the 16th Panzer Division was being replaced by the better 26th; and the 1st Parachute Division, relieved by two Mountain Battalions and the enemy's discovery that in winter the highlands of Italy were almost impenetrable, was slowly moving into reserve near the coast.

The 90th Panzer Grenadier Division offered very fierce resistance on the morning of the 6th to the Canadian assault, but was unable to prevent the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment from crossing near the mouth of the river, and Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry at Rogatti. The situation at Rogatti promised well, and the Corps Commander ordered a brigade of the 8th Indian Division to relieve the 2nd Canadian Brigade in that area and so allow it to carry the main assault. The enemy was heavily bombarded on December 8th, and the 1st Canadian Brigade attacked San Leonardo to secure a firm bridgehead from which the 2nd Brigade might proceed to its objective, the cross-roads on the ridge beyond. The battle was hard, and though San Leonardo was captured and the Engineers worked desperately under fire to prepare approach roads, it was impossible to bring forward sufficient armour to maintain the advance without pause. A heavy counter-attack further delayed the assault, but in the morning of December 10th the Loyal

Edmonton Regiment and the 11th Canadian Armoured Regiment advanced northward from San Leonardo as far as a long steep gully, three hundred yards in front of the ridge road, where they were halted by a deluge of fire and a counter-attack supported by self-propelled guns.

The enemy had thoroughly prepared the gully for defence, and it presented an absolute obstacle to the tanks. The 2nd Brigade continued to fight for it, however, while reconnoitring for better approaches on either flank. The 3rd Canadian Brigade was brought up to reinforce the battle, but two attacks by two of its battalions, to the west of the Highway and along it, failed to make progress, and the Canadian infantry lost grievously in their stubborn efforts to get forward and their determined resistance to counter-attack. Only on the left, where an armoured reconnaissance patrol had surprised and destroyed an assembly of half-a-dozen German tanks on a track west of San Leonardo, was there any immediate prospect of advance; and on the afternoon of the 13th, with the support of the whole Corps artillery, the 3rd Canadian Brigade sent its remaining battalion, the Royal 22e Regiment, forward on this approach, accompanied by a squadron of tanks of the 11th Canadian Armoured Regiment, to win access to the ridge road and attack north-eastward to Casa Berardi and the main cross-roads. With this fresh assault there would be a renewed attack by Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry across the pernicious gully, and by the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment on the coast road.

Despite a furious resistance the 'Van Doos'—as the rest of the Division called the Royal 22e—took Berardi by nightfall on the 14th, and though half of the forward company were casualties, the remainder stood heroically against counter-attack. 'Ils ne passeront pas', was their Captain's order, translating to Quebec the spirit of Verdun—and such was their success that the Divisional Commander decided to put in his main attack through the position they had gained. But a pause was necessary to assemble the forces of assault, though on the German side there was a comparable need for reinforcement. The 90th Panzer Grenadier Division had spent its strength extravagantly to hold the Canadians, and the 1st Parachute Division, which had been called upon to provide the unavailing forces of counter-attack, was now assuming responsibility for the 4,000 yards of front between Berardi and the sea; while the 90th Division concentrated in an area of like width to the west. The success of the 8th Indian Division, which had reached and cut the lateral road in two places, had not affected the enemy's determination to hold it

near the sea, and the New Zealand Division, west of the Indians, had for the second time been thrown back from its attack against Orsogna and the road in that vicinity.

Battle was resumed on the morning of the 18th when the 48th Highlanders of the 1st Brigade, supported by nine regiments of field artillery and three medium regiments, went forward to secure the line of a track five hundred yards west of Berardi, and the Royal Canadian Regiment, with the 12th Canadian Armoured Regiment, prepared to go through the Highlanders to reach the cross-roads south-west of Ortona. The Highlanders reached their objective, but the following troops against heavy fire were forced to consolidate a thousand yards short of the cross-roads. The Loyal Edmonton Regiment and Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, however, renewed their efforts to advance across the destructive gully, and the enemy's accumulated casualties in so much close fighting, added to the loss of his tactically important positions west of Casa Berardi, compelled him to abandon his defence of the cross-roads by the morning of the 20th; when the Loyal Edmonton Regiment advanced behind a heavy barrage, and after strenuous fighting reached the outskirts of Ortona, where in the evening it was joined by Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

The 8th Indian Division on the left had in the meantime been faced by an enemy, infuriated at the loss of Rogatti, who was resolved to prevent further penetration. The village was heavily shelled, and because the near bank of the river was so precipitous as to leave no room for the building of a bridge, an area on the far side had to be seized, the bridging material carried across, and the bridge built in reverse. This was done, and 'the Impossible Bridge', as it was called, was erected; tanks, anti-tank guns, and the 1st Mahrattas of the 21st Indian Brigade went over and secured a low ridge overlooking the lateral road. The 17th Brigade, having found crossing-places farther to the left, sent the 1st Royal Fusiliers and the 1st/5th Gurkhas north to join the Mahrattas on the 13th; and after a costly battle they took the village of Caldari, from which they overlooked the lateral road. From these positions of advantage General Russell, commanding the 8th Indian Division, pressed forward through most difficult country to secure certain villages beyond the road, and his reserve brigade, the 19th, came forward to occupy Jubatti and make contact with the Seaforth of Canada on the left flank of the Canadian Division. Thereafter the 19th Indian Brigade patrolled towards Villa Grande, while the Canadians

concentrated their effort on forcing a passage along the highway to Ortona.

The German delaying action to defend the road from Ortona had undeniably been successful—it had imposed delay—and General Montgomery assumed that his only course was to conquer in turn the succession of obstacles in front of him. The Germans, he anticipated, would now fall back on the river Arielli, which he expected to reach by Christmas Eve. It was thought unlikely that the enemy would make a serious stand in defence of Ortona, and to obviate unnecessary damage to the town—a place of some 10,000 inhabitants which could be useful as a port and maintenance area—it was decided not to bomb it before the infantry attacked; and their assault was to be accompanied by an advance along the inland road, through Villa Grande to Tollo, that, if successful, would outflank Ortona. But when the 2nd Canadian Brigade, and the 5th Essex of the 19th Indian Brigade, moved to the assault on the evening of December 20th, they found that both Ortona and Tollo were defended, with an evident intention of prolonged resistance, by the 3rd Regiment of the expert 1st Parachute Division.

The noise of extensive demolitions in Ortona was heard by the Canadians as they approached the town and the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, and later the Seaforth of Canada, were gravely obstructed by the high piles of rubble that confronted them when they advanced on the only line that topography permitted. The outlying houses were strongly defended, and the solitary avenue of approach, deliberately left open, led to the main square of the town into which a great number of automatic weapons, well sited in concealed and protected positions in the surrounding buildings, poured their fire. Anti-tank guns from positions close behind the barricades of rubble could fire at the belly of a tank climbing over the obstacles, and unoccupied houses had been cunningly prepared as booby-traps. The two Canadian battalions, each on a front of about two hundred and fifty yards, sought limited objectives and made slow progress from house to house. The fighting was peculiarly savage. On one occasion a whole platoon was killed when the house which it had occupied blew up; and immediately the Canadians withdrew from another house, which they had prepared with explosives and timed fuses, and a score of Germans, lured into it, lost their lives in the loud reprisal. For seven days there was bitter fighting for possession of the town, and not until December 28th did a patrol of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry break out of the ruins and move northward on the coast

road to make contact with the 48th Highlanders, who had been fighting across country west of the town.

Heavy fighting had also been taking place at Villa Grande, where the 5th Essex had been engaged in a similar struggle for the closely defended houses of the village. A company of the 8th Punjabis came in to reinforce the Essex, but after a week of very costly effort the enemy still held some houses on the northern edge of Villa Grande, and the Essex had lost nearly three hundred men. The 21st Indian Brigade attacked across country to seize some high ground north of the village, and despite a misfortune to the 5th Royal West Kents, who were caught in the supporting fire of their own guns, the northern height was occupied and the Germans were compelled to withdraw from the village. The 2nd New Zealand Division, in the meantime, had been reconnoitring forward to regain contact with the enemy who, after the fall of Castel Frentano on December 2nd, had fallen back to positions beyond the Moro to cover Poggiofiorito, Orsogna, and Guardiagrele. The 65th Infantry Division was being relieved by the 26th Panzer Division, while west of Casoli a mountain battalion was moving into the area of Maiella. The New Zealanders' immediate task was to climb the high ridge in front of them and secure a hold on the Orsogna road, to open a passage through San Martino to Chieti.

The attack, on the night of the 2nd, began well, and the 25th Battalion of the 6th New Zealand Brigade approached to within a quarter of a mile of the centre of Orsogna; but early the following morning the 26th Panzer Division threw in a strong counter-attack, with tanks, and the New Zealanders were forced back to Castel Frentano. The Germans were holding Orsogna and San Martino in great strength, and their newly arrived Mountain Battalions were a menace to the New Zealand Division's left flank in the neighbourhood of Casoli and the upper Sangro; where the 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade came into the line to counter the threat.

The weather, which had been bad, improved a little, and on December 7th, after artillery and aerial bombardment, the New Zealanders launched a second attack, with both brigades, to envelop Orsogna from the right. Again the result was disappointing, and no ground was gained except by the 23rd Battalion, which established itself securely on the Sfasciata Ridge in front of Poggiofiorito. That the New Zealanders required an addition of strength was by now fairly evident, and as there was stalemate in the mountain sector, where snow lay thickly on the heights, the Army Commander ordered the XIIIth Corps to move eastward, take command of the

New Zealanders, and immediately reinforce them with the 17th Brigade of the 5th Division. The 78th Division was to come forward from reserve to relieve the stronger 5th Division, and the XIIIth Corps would follow its vanguard into the sector between Lanciano and Casoli.

A third assault was launched against Orsogna, on an axis to the right of it, and patrols of the 17th Brigade entered Poggiofiorito; but the advance was too costly to be maintained. On December 23rd the fourth and final attack was made, supported by the whole of the XIIIth Corps's artillery and five regiments from the Vth Corps: the 15th Brigade of the 5th Division took Arielli, and the 5th New Zealand Brigade advanced for a thousand yards on a broad front, but failed to break through the German defences. The severity of the fighting had been such that the New Zealand Division since its crossing of the Sangro, had suffered more than sixteen hundred casualties, almost all in two infantry brigades.

The enemy's prolonged resistance on the ridge between Ortona and Orsogna had come as a surprise, and in the Eighth Army there was some anxiety about its supply of ammunition. The ground was too soft to permit the extensive use of tanks, in which the Army was superior to the enemy; and there was no prospect of any improvement in the weather. If the battle were maintained, it would be wasteful of lives, and might serve the enemy better than the Allies. General Montgomery considered, therefore, that the offensive should be halted; and the Commander-in-Chief agreed with him.

General Montgomery had now been appointed to command the 21st Army Group in England, and on December 30th he handed over the Eighth Army to General Sir Oliver Leese; whose immediate task was to create an impression that the Army would shortly resume its attack—and so, by keeping the enemy in a state of apprehension, discourage reinforcement from the Adriatic sector of his front against the Fifth Army.

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Winter; Mountains; and Camino

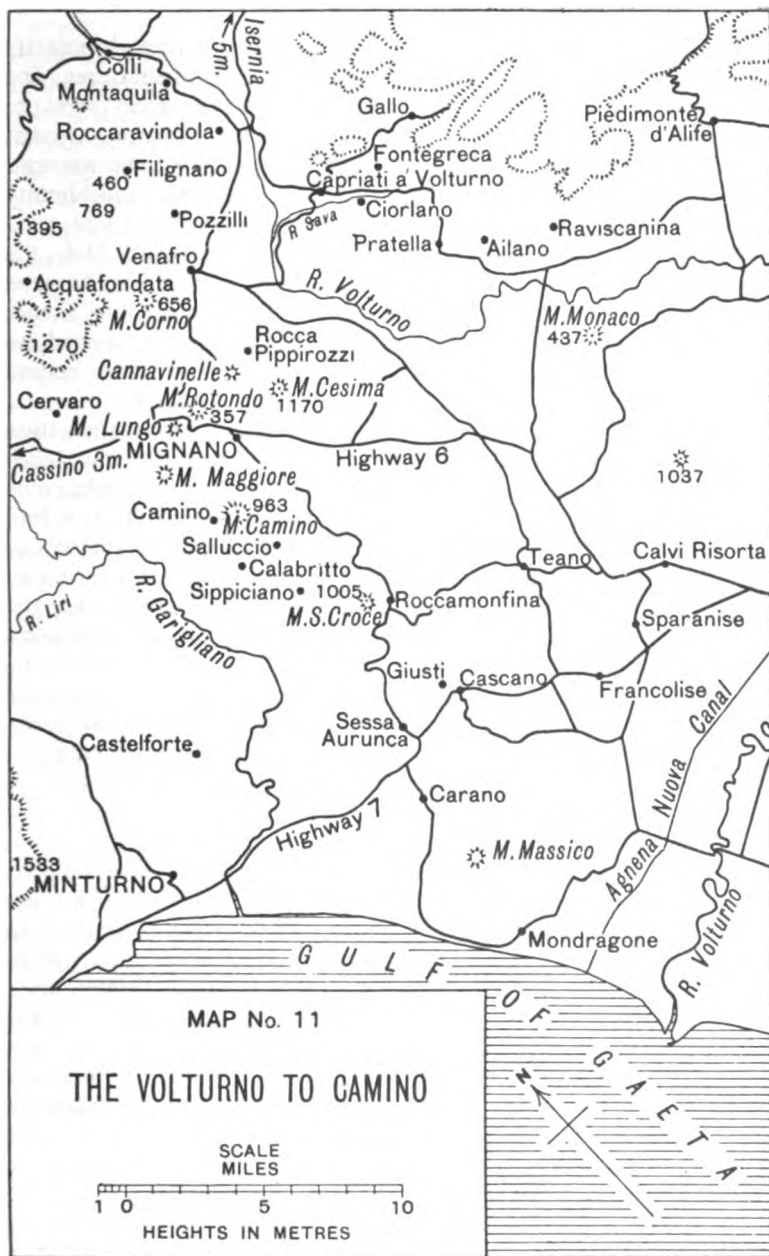
FROM the western foot of the Montagna di Matese to the sea coast below Mondragone—on a curving line from Raviscanina to Monte Monaco and the hills of Calvi Risorta, from Sparanise and Francolise to the fens just north of the Agnena Nuova Canal—the

Fifth Army, in the fourth week of October, stood secure in its bridgehead over the Volturno and was ready for a further advance to the mountains, and through them, that separated it from the valley of the Garigliano. It was unfortunate for the Allies that winter clouds were already gathering on the mountain tops, and the growing coldness of the wind had begun to assume a forbidding note.

It was now intended that the Fifth Army should advance to a line running from Isernia through the mountains beyond Venafro to the confluence of the rivers Liri and Garigliano west of Mignano, and thence along the Garigliano to the sea. The immediate objectives of the Xth Corps were Monte Santa Croce, the impressive mountain that rises more than three thousand feet high behind Roccamonfina, and Monte Massico, almost as tall, with the ridges falling south-westward from it to the sea. On the wet flat lands overlooked by the mountains there were few roads but innumerable bridges. The roads were in poor condition and the bridges had been blown up. The necessary supply road, to feed the advance, crossed a seven hundred foot pass between the mountains east of Sessa Aurunca. As the ground in the middle part of the Corps' sector was unsuitable for tanks, the 46th and 7th Armoured Divisions changed places, and the armour moved towards the coast. The attack on the mountains was to begin on October the 31st, the same day as the VIth Corps was to resume its advance towards the more northerly gap in the mountains at Mignano. The enemy's position, which the Germans called the Barbara Line, was thought to be strong.

In the British sector it was intended that the 56th Division should make the main attack from Teano between the road that reaches forward to Roccamonfina and that minor road, hill-twinning, that joins the Via Appia at Cascano; while the 46th Division, on the Via Appia, opened the defile at Cascano and went on to capture the road junction below Sessa Aurunca. The 7th Armoured Division would protect the left flank of the advance, and with the assistance of the Royal Navy threaten the coast road through Mondragone. During the last few days of the month there was contact with the enemy all along the Corps' front, and as evidence accumulated that the Germans were withdrawing, the preliminary advance gathered momentum and the main attack went in on the day before that marked upon the calendar.

The two forward brigades of the 56th Division, the 167th on the left and the newly arrived 168th on the right—the latter fighting



with great vigour against strong resistance—by a partial encirclement of Teano compelled the enemy to retreat from that area, and in the centre the 46th Division made good progress west of Francolise. On the coast the 7th Armoured Division, though opposition was slight, could take little advantage of the enemy's weakness because the 22nd Armoured Brigade was mud-bound and the Queen's Brigade had been unable to complete its forward concentration. On the following day, however, the 31st, the Queens went forward and took the ruined town of Mondragone and the steep dominating hill behind it. When Monte Cicoli, a couple of miles to the north, was also cleared, the coast-road lay open and a tank battalion carried the advance inland again, behind Massico, towards Carano on the road to Sessa Aurunca.

On the right the 168th Brigade, its liveliness unimpaired, took Roccamonfina on November the 1st, and in the centre the 139th Brigade occupied Giusti at the entrance to the Cascano defile. The enemy continued his withdrawal, and on the 2nd, while the 56th Division maintained its advance through the mountains, patrols of the 46th and 7th Armoured Divisions went swiftly forward and reached the Garigliano. From the fenlands south of the river the Germans were swiftly expelled, and already the troops could look over their shoulders at the Barbara Line. The Line had been over-vaunted, for its defences consisted only of the usual demolitions and small but well-sited and resolutely held machine-gun posts. The swiftness with which it had been over-run, however, caused some alarm among the Germans, who, apparently expecting a seaborne landing north of the river, set to work on defensive obstructions in the neighbourhood of Minturno.

The line to which the VIth Corps was, in the meantime, fighting its uphill way was something like the arc of a circle of which the upper Volturno was the chord. From Isernia it was drawn almost westward for about fifteen miles over a very wild landscape to Monte Passero, more than four thousand feet high, and from there south-westward through other mountains, steep-sided and deeply separated, to Cervaro and the Garigliano west of Mignano. In this part of its course the Volturno runs through a valley, intensively cultivated, that varies in its breadth from two miles to a maximum of five at Venafro. In places the gravel bed of the river is eight hundred feet wide, and the Volturno is divided into little separate streams. The valley is very wet and immensely fertile.

While the 45th Division was moving forward from Piedimonte d'Alife, and the 3rd Division was crossing the river towards

Mignano, the 34th advanced up the valley to take the heights about Ailano and Pratella. On October the 26th the enemy chose to make a stand and held up the 34th's advance by his very stubborn defence of a mere hillock in the open country west of Raviscanina. Hill 235 rose only some eighty feet above the valley, but from it the Germans blocked the advance for two days, and then, as they withdrew, the Americans went quickly forward to occupy Ciorlano, Fontegreca, and Capriati a Volturno, in the valley of the swift-running Sava, by November the 1st. Simultaneously, on the other side of the river, the 3rd Division had taken Pietravaiiano and was steadily moving towards Mignano, driving before it the rearguards of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division. Over the mountains north of Ailano, to Gallo that lies in a valley like a giant's cap, and beyond it towards Isernia, the American 504th Parachute Infantry were reaching out towards the Eighth Army.

The third American crossing of the Volturno was initiated by an infantry company of the 45th Division, on the night of November the 2nd, about six miles south-east of Venafro. Parachute infantry of the 2nd Parachute Division were holding the little village and castle of Rocca Pippirozzi on the peak of a narrow ridge running down from Monte Cesima, but a battalion of the 180th Regiment put them to flight during the day, and the 4th Ranger Battalion, crossing the mountain on a higher level, advanced westward to cut the Via Appia beyond Mignano, but was halted on the height above it. Higher up the river, near the broadest part of the valley, a battalion of the 179th Infantry crossed after midnight on the 3rd, and during the following morning advanced through cornfields and vineyards towards Venafro till machine-guns stopped all but one company a mile from the town. One company fought its way into Venafro, and the remainder of the battalion reached the slopes of Monte Corno above it after dark. Another battalion took up the advance and carried it as far as Pozzilli.

The 34th Division made its crossings higher up the valley, east and north-east of Venafro, and suffered severe casualties, particularly from mines and booby-traps. Heavy gunfire preceded their advance, and at midnight on the 3rd the 168th and the 133rd Infantry waded through the swift cold water under fire from the enemy's mortars and artillery, ran into his trip-wires on the farther slopes, and punctuated their advance with the crack of exploding Teller and S-mines. The 168th Infantry reached the hills by early morning, and the two leading battalions re-organised at noon in Roccaravindola; but their losses prevented a continuance of the attack.

The remaining battalion came over after dark and occupied the heights above the village. Lower down the river, all three battalions of the 133rd Infantry made useful progress in spite of mines and the enemy's rearguards on the valley road and along the railway, and were in Cliveto and the adjacent hills by mid-morning.

The Germans had not defended the river in any strength, nor from prepared positions, but the guns of the 34th Division had fired more than four thousand rounds to cover the crossing, and in one day the VIth Corps had lost, in killed, wounded and missing, nearly five hundred men: a loss little less heavy than that exacted for the Americans' last crossing of the river.

The Xth Corps was by now in position for its projected assault on the great mountain-mass of Camino, La Difensa, and Monte Maggiore, whose conjoint bulk, huge and precipitous, rises between the Garigliano and Highway 6, dominating the road to Rome. The 56th Division was given the task of capturing it. From the neighbourhood of Galuccio, whence the attack would start, two parallel sharp-spined ridges climbed steeply towards Camino's crest. The westerly ridge rose from the village of Cavelle to Point 819; the easterly—the Razorback—to a solitary building called the Monastery. Information was scanty about the enemy's dispositions, but in the course of events it was found that Camino was held by the 129th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, of the 15th Division, with troops of the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division on the nearby slopes.

While the 168th Brigade took Sippiciano, to secure their left flank, the 201st Guards Brigade captured Cavelle in preparation for the attack. It was November the 5th, the weather was cold and wet. In the uncertain knowledge of the German strength it was thought that a full-dress battle might be unnecessary, and a brigade assault would carry the position; and the Guards, battle-worn and depleted in strength though they were, came very near to substantiating that hope.

By early morning on the 7th, after stiff fighting, the Coldstream had captured Calabritto, west of the Cavelle ridge, and the Grenadiers, after eight hours of hard climbing, were on the lower slopes of Point 819, fiercely opposed and strenuously counter-attacked by the enemy; as were the Coldstream at Calabritto. A company of the Scots Guards moved up to reinforce the Grenadiers, and the remainder of the battalion—two weak companies, that is—climbed a goat-track in the corrie between the two ridges to assault Razorback. It had been said that the goat-track

was impassable, except to goats, but an officer of the Scots Guards had disproved that by taking a mule-train up it until stopped by fire near the top. So the two companies of his battalion went up in moonlight to seize the head of the corrie and make contact with the Grenadiers. They were prevented from reaching Monastery Hill by an enemy strongly disposed in weapon-pits blasted from the rock, but for five days they held their precarious position, took some sixty prisoners in constant fighting, and were supplied by mule-trains led by Basuto, Mauritian and Italian muleteers over a trail made hazardous by spandau-fire and air-bursting shells. The difficulties of supply were such that it was impossible to reinforce them.

In Calabritto, on November the 10th, the Coldstream were relieved by the Royal Berkshires and went uphill to relieve the Grenadiers; who by that time had lost half their battalion in battle and frostbite. Of the hundred and five men of the reinforcing company of Scots Guards, fifty-seven remained. Then through the Coldstream the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry went forward with great gallantry, and by dawn on the 11th were in possession of Point 819 and some prisoners. Their position, however, was open to devastating fire from the Razorback and Monastery Hill, and they were forced to give ground before a strong counter-attack. At Calabritto the Berkshires had repelled many assaults, and that flank was secure.

It was clear by now that another brigade would be needed to take Camino, but in the circumstances it was impossible to supply a greater force on the mountainside. Already it was necessary to use a whole battalion as porters to carry food and water and ammunition up the steep slopes, under the enemy's fire, and the Corps had no maintenance for a larger fighting-strength. Nor were there any more mules.

The forward troops were now being heavily shelled, but they sent out their regular fighting-patrols, and an attack was projected on the right to relieve their position. It was cancelled, however, and with the Army Commander's approval it was decided to withdraw from Camino. On the American front the situation was comparable, for the 3rd Division had also come unwillingly to a standstill on the eastern slopes of La Difensa west of Mignano, and on the southern aspect of Monte Lungo. Both the 56th and the 3rd Divisions were battle-weary and diminished by long fighting. They had had little or no respite since their landing at Salerno. The interdependence, moreover, of the two armies under General

Alexander's command had again become apparent, for to counter the strong attacks by the Fifth, the enemy, drawing strength from the east, had brought the 26th Panzer Division to the Tyrrhenian side of his front; and now the Eighth was preparing to take advantage by attacking the Adriatic flank of the Winter Line. The attack was timed for November the 20th, and if the Eighth could cross the Sangro and exploit its crossing, then the enemy might be compelled to reverse his recent movements and shift strength to the east. There was good reason, therefore, why the Fifth Army should call a temporary halt, and extricate the frost-bitten and exhausted troops of the 56th Division from their intolerable position.

The Germans themselves were none too happy on their mountain-tops, and it took them thirty-six hours to discover that the Guards had gone; by then a line had been established to cover the withdrawal and prevent its being followed. To the south, among the mine-sown fenlands of the Garigliano, the 46th Division had had a quieter time, though rain dissociated quietness from comfort, and the 7th Armoured Division had been withdrawn from the Fifth Army and their coastal sector, which was extensively flooded. South of Castelforte there were still some pockets of the enemy on the east bank of the Garigliano.

While the 56th Division was attacking Camino, the American 3rd Division had played the principal part in the fighting on the VIth Corps' front, its object being to force a way through the Mignano Gap along Highway 6, that leads to Cassino and the Liri Valley. On one side of the Gap rises the mass of Monte Maggiore, La Difensa and Camino; on the other the wooded and loftier heights of Monte Cesima and Cannavinelle; while in the Gap itself beyond Mignano are two awkward hills, Monte Rotondo and Monte Lungo, which the enemy had prepared for defence with minefields, tank-obstacles, and machine-gun posts. A strenuous effort to capture Monte Rotondo in a flank attack was made by a battalion of the 15th Infantry, marching up and over Monte Cesima, and by the 30th Infantry, which came from Rocca Pippirozzi over Cannavinelle; but the attack was unsuccessful. A frontal attack on Monte Lungo by another battalion of the 15th, also on November the 6th, was equally unfortunate. Eight battalions of artillery covered the next attempt, on the morning of the 8th, when the 30th Infantry took the crest of Monte Rotondo in a fog, and the 1st Battalion of the 15th drove the Germans from a spur of it that fills a horse-shoe bend of Highway 6. Both regiments were

counter-attacked, and spent the next few days in holding their positions and doing whatever was possible to improve them.

From the 5th of November to the 15th, the 7th Infantry tried in vain to capture La Difensa. Along the top of the mountain there was nearly a mile of sheer cliff, fifty or sixty feet high, and with perfect observation the enemy could bring fire to bear from all his weapons. Only porters could supply the regiment, and as in many places men needed both hands for climbing, they could carry very little at a time. Attempts were made to drop supplies from aeroplanes, but without success, for the country was precipitously broken. It took six hours to carry down the wounded, and in abominable weather all suffered from lack of sufficient food and winter clothing.

The 34th and 45th Divisions also found that war in Italy could mean mountaineering in misery. West of Venafrò the 45th advanced over heights that their pack-mules balked at, and slowly drove a fiercely resisting enemy before them. Forward slopes, they found, were only lightly held, but on the reverse slopes the guns were sited to meet the attackers as they came over the crest. From Monte Santa Croce, that rises sheer above Venafrò, they drove northward into a wilderness of cloudy heights and dark ravines; and from Pozzilli along mountain-roads towards Filignano and Acquafondata. Hills unknown except to the Geographical Survey and a few score villages acquired a new significance and became fierce battlefields. There was heavy fighting for Point 769, which could not be captured, and Point 460, on a cultivated plateau, had to be abandoned after being taken, because it was dominated from 769; these points lie south-west of Filignano, and mark the limit of the 45th's advance at this time.

The 34th Division was fighting on the lightly wooded heights east of Filignano, and their casualties in crossing the river were now exceeded by their losses under hard weather. But a mixed force, including tanks, tank-destroyers, and engineers, assembling in the valley south-west of Roccaravindola, succeeded in capturing Montaquila, a few miles farther up the valley, from where patrols went forward into the mountains and made contact with troops of the 504th Regiment of American Parachute Infantry at Colli on the river-bank.

Along the whole front of the Fifth Army the Allied advance had come to a standstill. Casualties and fatigue had reduced the impetus of divisions which had been continuously in action for several weeks, some of them without rest since the 9th of September,

and facing them now were the ramparts of the German Winter Line. Here, below Camino, in front of Mignano, and above Venafro was where the enemy had intended to hold them for as long as might be profitable. The Gustav Line, that was intended to be the decisive stop, was a few miles nearer Rome, but here, on the *Winterstellungen*, the Germans would stand while they could; and here for a little while, the Allied divisions stayed to find their breath again. On November the 15th General Alexander instructed General Clark to halt his advance and regroup his forces. They could not be relieved by divisions held in reserve, for there was no reserve of sufficient substance for that.

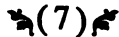
Since the landing at Salerno the Fifth Army had lost, in killed, wounded and missing, just under twenty-two thousand officers and men, of whom nearly twelve thousand were American, more than ten thousand British. The losses from sickness had also been high.

It had been, so far, a soldier's war, and once they were joined battles had been fought by regimental officers, often of junior rank, and non-commissioned officers. In the lowlands the country was confined by crops and vineyards, olive-groves, streams and canals and farm-buildings; in the uplands by the steep and precipitous heights above, for even a little hill had usually an Alpine aspect, and the valleys they enclosed were generally narrow and often blind. It was therefore difficult to control the course of a battle—it had to be fought by the men on the spot—and the brunt of the fighting was borne by the infantry, who suffered also the heaviest proportion of casualties. In the British Army the strength of a battalion is about 35 officers and 800 men, of whom 30 officers and 500 men may be habitually in contact with the enemy. How heavily the infantry had suffered in its progress from Salerno to the Winter Line is shown by the casualties, in killed, wounded, and missing, suffered by the following battalions of the 46th and 56th Divisions from September the 9th to October the 31st:—

	<i>Officers</i>	<i>Other Ranks</i>
2nd Hampshire Regiment	11	354
1/4th " "	16	287
5th " "	22	426
2/4th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry..	20	383
5th Foresters	23	537
16th Durham Light Infantry	13	367
9th Royal Fusiliers	25	547
2/5th Queens	16	410
3rd Coldstream Guards	24	282
2nd Scots Guards	27	304

The smallest casualties suffered by any battalion in those two

divisions was eleven officers and 115 other ranks; and however rapidly reinforcements may arrive, reinforcements cannot restore a battalion to its previous efficiency without a period for rest and training during which its newcomers can be absorbed into and identified with their fighting-teams.



Stalemate on the Adriatic

BEFORE describing the Fifth Army's renewed assault on the Winter Line, it may be convenient to complete the account, for this phase of the war, of operations and policy in the mountains and on the Adriatic; though to do so, the narrative must be carried beyond the main course of events, and into the bleak new months of 1944.

The Eighth Army had made better progress than the Fifth, and broken the eastern abutments of the Winter Line. But the Germans, having prepared their defence in depth, had fallen back on inner positions, and now the Eighth Army had been forced to a standstill on ground, and in conditions, that appeared to offer no prospect of further advance. Gradually, therefore, the strength of the Army was transferred to the west of Italy, and the Adriatic sector relapsed for some time into a relative quietude. But the intervening period was painful.

The enemy's line, against which the Eighth Army stood halted at the New Year, followed the course of the little river Riccio from the coast, a couple of miles north of Ortona; it crossed the river Arielli and passed through the villages of Crecchio and Arielli; it came down east of Orsogna, and climbed the foothills to the great slopes of Maiella. On this line the German LXXVIth Panzer Corps—which was relieved by the LIst Mountain Corps on January 22nd—deployed about four divisions, and the Eighth Army's task was to discourage the enemy from transferring formations to his front against the Fifth Army, where the ground still permitted large offensive operations. Its task, however, was made difficult by the steady reduction of its strength. The 1st Infantry Division, newly arrived in Italy and assigned to the Eighth Army, was diverted to the Fifth; the 5th Division was under orders to follow; reinforcements of artillery had been transferred; and the New Zealanders were to go as soon as they could be relieved by the 4th Indian Division, which was on its way from the Near East.

The new Army Commander had intended to mount an attack towards Chieti, in order to improve his positions and acquire, if possible, the freedom of movement that control of Highway 5, the Pescara road, would give him. His main effort was to be made by the 4th Indian Division, under command of the XIIIth Corps, against the enemy at Orsogna and Guardiagrele, after a diversionary attack by the Canadians on the coast. The Canadian attack, on January 17th, made no progress, however, and all thought of a larger offensive had to be abandoned when the 4th Indian Division was ordered to the Fifth Army's front.

The Germans, having appreciated the situation despite constant raiding, elaborate measures to deceive them, and the limited success of a new effort by the Canadians, were also moving troops to the west. The 90th Panzer Grenadier Division had been withdrawn to Rome, and the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, on the way to replace it, had been stopped and committed against the French Expeditionary Corps at Aquafondata; the 26th Panzer Division went next, being relieved by the 305th Infantry Division, which extended its line; and three battalions of the 1st Parachute Division followed.

The IIInd Polish Corps now came into the mountain sector, and in deep snow the 3rd Carpathian Division relieved the long-trying 78th Division on February 4th; while Headquarters of the 1st Canadian Corps, newly arrived from England, took command of the Vth Corps' sector. The 78th Division did not remain in Eighth Army reserve, but having extricated itself with considerable difficulty from the snow-drifts of an appalling storm, moved into the Fifth Army's area to reinforce the New Zealanders' projected attack on Cassino.

The physical conditions in which the Eighth Army had to live—and to fight, for its forward companies were continuously aggressive, and its artillery active—would have tried the spirit of Polar explorers. Snow fell blindly, great gales blew against the mountains, the river-beds between their yielding banks filled with the sudden tumult of torrential streams, and trenches and weapon-pits on the sodden hillsides gathered deep pools of icy water. Nor was there much relief in its rearward areas, and tired soldiers found little comfort and no gaiety in such places as Lanciano, Vasto, and Campobasso. It was a dreary, bitter winter in the Abruzzi.

CHAPTER IV

THE WINTER LINE

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The Taking of Camino and San Pietro

THE stubbornness of the fighting on the Winter Line was a reflexion of the Germans' determined intention to hold Rome, and of their appreciation that on these formidable mountains they had made an excellent choice of ground for a defensive battle. By the beginning of November they had brought two new divisions into the line, raising the strength of the XIVth Panzer Corps—the Fifth Army's opponent—to five divisions. Along its forty-mile front the Fifth Army, on the 15th of November, had only the same number in the line, all extremely weary and much reduced in strength. The 7th Armoured Division had been withdrawn and the American 82nd Airborne Division was also leaving Italy: except for its 504th Regiment, on the far inland flank at Colli, the 82nd had been on police-duty in Naples. In reserve, however, General Clark had his American 36th Division, and the American 1st Armoured Division was now arriving, but would remain in Army reserve until there was a favourable opportunity for its employment. On the 31st of October the 1st Italian Motorised Group came under command, a well-trained but inexperienced force whose addition to the battle-line and to lines of communication—it did useful work—had been suggested by the need to recognise Italy's new status; and from Africa the Corps Expeditionnaire Francaise was expected to arrive by the beginning of December. When the halt was called in mid-November General Clark's immediate task was to regroup his forces, give them what rest was possible, make good their losses, improve his supply-routes, build a reserve—and prepare to resume

the offensive. The Fifth Army had so far been advancing on a broad front, but a different strategy was demanded by the numerical strength of the enemy, and the natural strength of his positions, now confronting it.

It would now be necessary to attack each position in turn with the full support of artillery and the available air force. The main intention in this, an intermediate phase, of the winter campaign was to open the Liri Valley, so making possible an armoured advance on Rome; and the first step was to capture the Camino massif. The Xth Corps would make the initial effort to win Camino itself and the southward ridges, while the American IInd Corps on the right would secure La Difensa and Monte Maggiore. (This Corps, newly reconstituted, consisted of its Headquarters Staff, recently arrived from Sicily under Major-General Keyes, and the 36th and 3rd Divisions.)

The Xth Corps would relieve the IInd Corps on its two heights as soon as they were captured, and the Americans would then lead the advance to the north. Attempts would be made to divert the enemy's attention from Camino by a feigned crossing of the lower Garigliano, and by skirmishing in the mountains on the VIth Corps' front.

To protect the 56th Division's concentration for the assault, the 46th was to capture Calabritto on the day before the attack; but this could not be easily arranged, for the 46th, in order to reach its forming-up area, had to use the road from Ponte to Sipicciano which was in full view of the enemy on the other side of the Garigliano. Movement had to be restricted to the dark hours, troops were stripped of their distinguishing badges, and an elaborate cover-plan was devised with the object of persuading the enemy that our intention was not a mountain-assault but a seaborne landing in the Gulf of Gaeta. In Naples and Mondragone mock landing-forces were assembled, naval and air squadrons made ready to bombard the coast below Gaeta, dummy guns were mounted, and the artillery selected targets near Gaeta; and though it is not yet known whether the Germans were seriously deluded, they were certainly perturbed and their reinforcements—presumably held in readiness about the Gulf—were late in reaching the battle. The German strength on Camino, only lightly reinforced during the fighting, was six infantry battalions of the 15th Panzer Grenadiers.

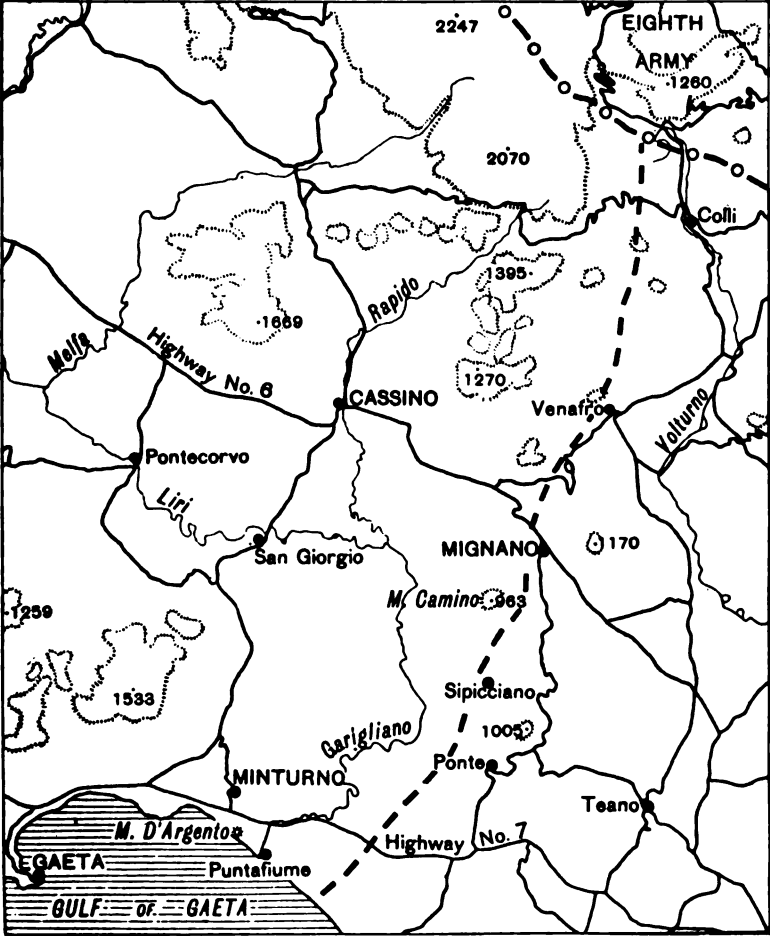
The battle opened on the night of December the 1st, when Foresters and Leicesters of the 46th Division advanced from Cavelle against the village of Calabritto and the woods around it. Almost

MAP No. 12
FIFTH ARMY FRONT

Mid-November 1943

Limit of Advance - - - - -
Army Boundary - o - o - o - o -

SCALE
MILES



immediately they came under heavy machine-gun fire, the fields through which they had to move were tangled with wire and sown with mines. Very little progress was made until the early morning, when two troops of the 40th Royal Tank Regiment brought up sappers who opened roads through the minefields while the tanks engaged the enemy machine-gunners in Calabritto. The two battalions fought their way forward until by half-past nine they were within two hundred yards of their objective, when heavy fire compelled them to withdraw to a position south of the village which, though not wholly satisfactory, would enable them to protect the main assault by the 56th Division. This began in the late afternoon of December the 2nd, and was supported by the artillery of both the Xth and the IIInd Corps, which between them fired over nineteen hundred tons of shell at the German positions on Camino and Monte Maggiore, and against the San Ambrogio gun-area.

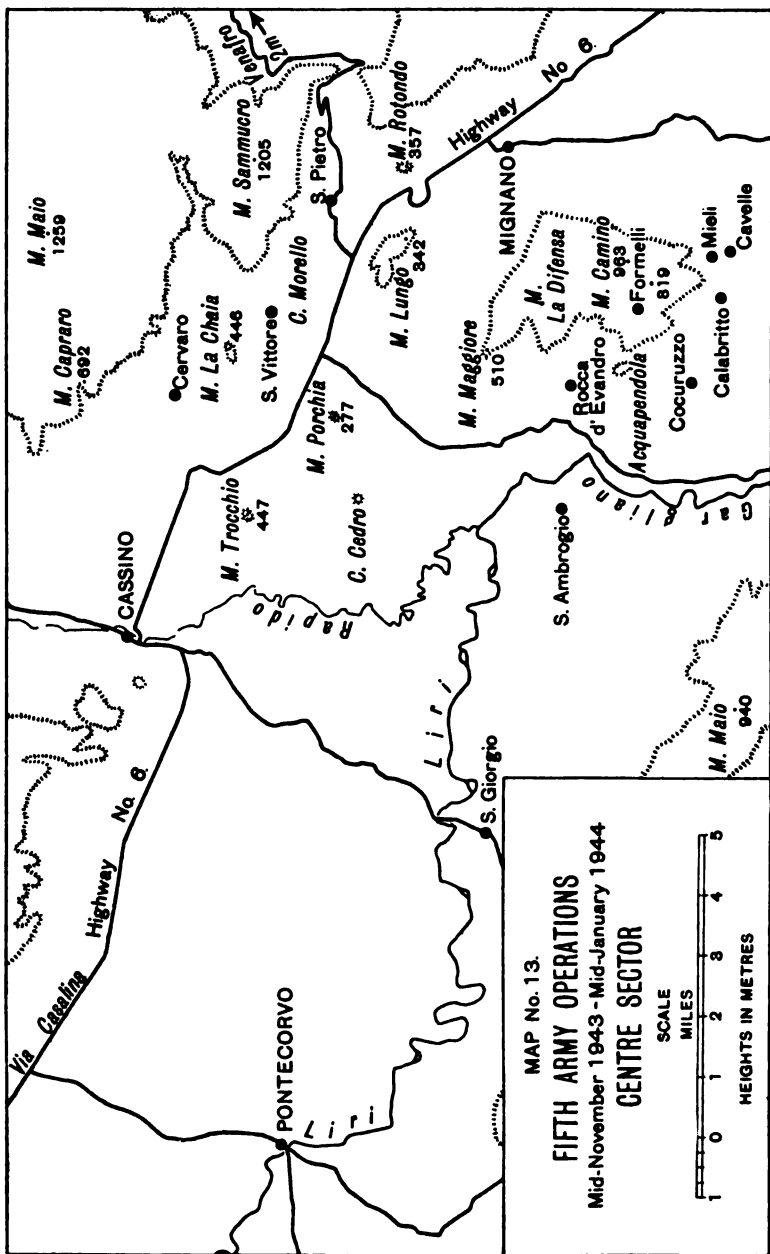
The infantry plan of attack was a straightforward assault on Camino's long ridges: Razorback to the east, leading to the Monastery, and the westerly one which had acquired the name of Bare Arse. The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and the 9th Royal Fusiliers, of the 167th Brigade, led the attack on Bare Arse, without much difficulty in the early stages, then against heavy fire on the ridges which was quelled by the Allied guns. The 8th Royal Fusiliers joined them, and in despite of fierce opposition they reached and captured Point 819 by ten o'clock in the morning. On the right, on Razorback, a battalion of the Queens of the 169th Brigade had done equally well, and by noon was in possession of the ridge except for the Monastery building and Point 963. A platoon that fought its way into the Monastery, in the afternoon, had to be withdrawn from the storm of machine-gun and mortar fire that met it. Another platoon of the Queens reached the saddle between Monastery Hill and La Difensa, and remained there during the day. As the victors on Bare Arse consolidated their gains they were joined by the London Irish Rifles and the Coldstream Guards, and on the next day, with comparative ease, the Coldstream captured a more easterly ridge that points down to Cocuruzzo.

The mule-track up the corrie under Razorback had been developed into a jeep-track and was in steady use, and the 139th Brigade's limited success at Calabritto prevented the possibility of a westward counter-attack against this difficult supply-line. The situation was fairly satisfactory, but in the heavy rain that was now falling the 169th Brigade failed to clear the enemy from the summit of Monastery Hill, though the Monastery itself was taken again.

An attempt to gain position on the saddle between it and La Difensa was also unsuccessful, and the Germans had entered the mountain hamlet of Formelli, from which they could hinder the deployment of troops from the Mieli corrie. Two platoons of the Fusiliers and a company of the London Irish Rifles, after initial failure, took Formelli in the early morning of December the 5th, but another company of the London Irish, that was to have made an attack on Monastery Hill, was unhappily delayed on its approach, and when, during the afternoon, the Germans counter-attacked the Monastery, they overpowered the reduced company of the Queens that was holding it.

In spite of these set-backs the 56th was steadily concentrating on the massif, and the Germans were growing nervous about the situation of their troops east of the Garigliano; for with the heavy rains the river was rising, several bridges had been washed away, and their main supply-route was now under observation from Monte Maggiore. In the neighbourhood of the railway station of Monte Mortola they were already beginning to withdraw.

A co-ordinated attack went in on the evening of the 5th, and was everywhere successful except at Colle, north-east of Formelli, where a company lost direction and had to withdraw. From Formelli the Durham Light Infantry, of the 139th Brigade, moved south-east over country deeply cut by ravines and before midnight of the 6th had captured the steep-sided spur above Cocuruzzo, while the York and Lancasters took the hill west of Calabritto. The Grenadiers and the Scots Guards advanced westward from the ridge above Cocuruzzo already captured by the Coldstream, and took the Acquapendola hill, the most westerly part of the massif, so offering a threat from the rear to the Germans on Monastery Hill, who, after being heavily battered by field-guns and mortars during the morning of the 6th, retired leaving many dead. The battle for Camino had now been decided, and on the 46th Division's front resistance collapsed. But between Cocuruzzo and the river there was still a large number of German troops, and the enemy fought strongly for time to extricate them and for his continued possession of the north-running road east of the Garigliano. A stubborn rear-guard battle developed for the village of Rocca d'Evandro and the heights about it, which control the northern part of the road. The village is built on the end of a sharply-falling spur, with a ravine to the north, another to the south, and deeply broken country above it, and though it was simultaneously approached from Acquapendola and the ridge of Camino, it was difficult to



take. The Germans had mounted thirty machine-guns on the northernmost spur of Acquapendola, and from the other side of the Garigliano their mortars were in action. The Guards were checked, and a larger and more elaborate plan of attack had to be devised, that almost encircled the village; and still it resisted capture till the 9th, when a company of the Grenadiers entered a little before noon.

That was the end of the battle, though on the IInd Corps' front there were still small resisting groups of the enemy that were not obliterated till the next day. Camino had cost the Xth Corps 941 casualties: killed, wounded, and missing.

Now, while the British relieved the IInd Corps on the northern and eastern parts of the massif, the Americans took up the advance and the main weight of the battle. The mountains south of the Mignano Gap were in Allied hands, but in Italy mountain succeeds mountain, and Monte Maggiore and Camino were overlooked by the giant Sammucro on the other side of the Via Casilina.

The IInd Corps had cleared the northern parts of the Camino massif in a very workmanlike fashion, La Difensa falling to the three regiments of the 1st Special Service Force, and Monte Maggiore to the 142nd Regimental Combat Team. Some of the natural difficulties which they had to overcome are indicated by the fact that they had to employ two battalions of infantry as porters to supply their forward troops, and the return journey from a base near Mignano to Monte Maggiore took twelve hours. Attempts were made to drop rations from the air, but without much success, for in addition to broken ground the airmen were handicapped by the villainous weather; which, indeed, almost nullified the extensive plans which had been made for air force co-operation in the battle. For most of the time aeroplanes had been unable to leave the ground, and when they did go up their pilots found it difficult to locate the targets. Immense demands were, in consequence, made on the artillery, and the German positions on and about Camino felt the heaviest barrage fired so far in Italy.

Eight hundred guns were in action, ranging in calibre from 3-inch to 8-inch howitzers. In an afternoon performance lasting an hour, on December the 2nd, the three hundred and forty-six pieces in the IInd Corps fired 22,508 rounds, and continuing their practice till the following afternoon fired a total of 64,000 rounds—about 1,500 tons of ammunition—in twenty-four hours. In the same period the three hundred and three guns in the Xth Corps fired 89,883 rounds, of which nearly 76,000 rounds were fired by

25-pounders. The effect of this prodigious bombardment was, in many places, to cut German communication and prevent the arrival of reinforcements, but where the hostile infantry lay in caves and deep shelters they suffered no great loss except their sleep. To the American infantry on Monte Maggiore it seemed that their gunners did more valuable work in repelling counter-attacks than with their preliminary barrage.

Now in the IInd Corps the Americans lifted their eyes to Monte Sammucro and the village of San Pietro, on its hither slope, that overhung with a frown the Via Casilina. San Pietro was the hard centre of the German defences, and it was proposed to capture it by an enveloping movement in which the commanding crest of Sammucro, and Monte Lungo on the near side of the road, would be taken first. The burden of the attack was entrusted to the 36th Division.

The new battle began well, and the 1st Battalion of the 143rd Infantry took the summit of Sammucro—Point 1205—in swift assault, and repelled a counter-attack by the Panzer Grenadiers who had held it; while a Ranger battalion on their right, after stubborn fighting, took Point 950. For four days, from December the 10th to the 13th, the enemy fought to regain possession of the heights, but the Americans had the advantage of positions from which their artillery observers could direct fire with confidence, and numerous counter-attacks were all broken, at a high cost to the enemy, by the accurate shooting of field-guns and mortars.

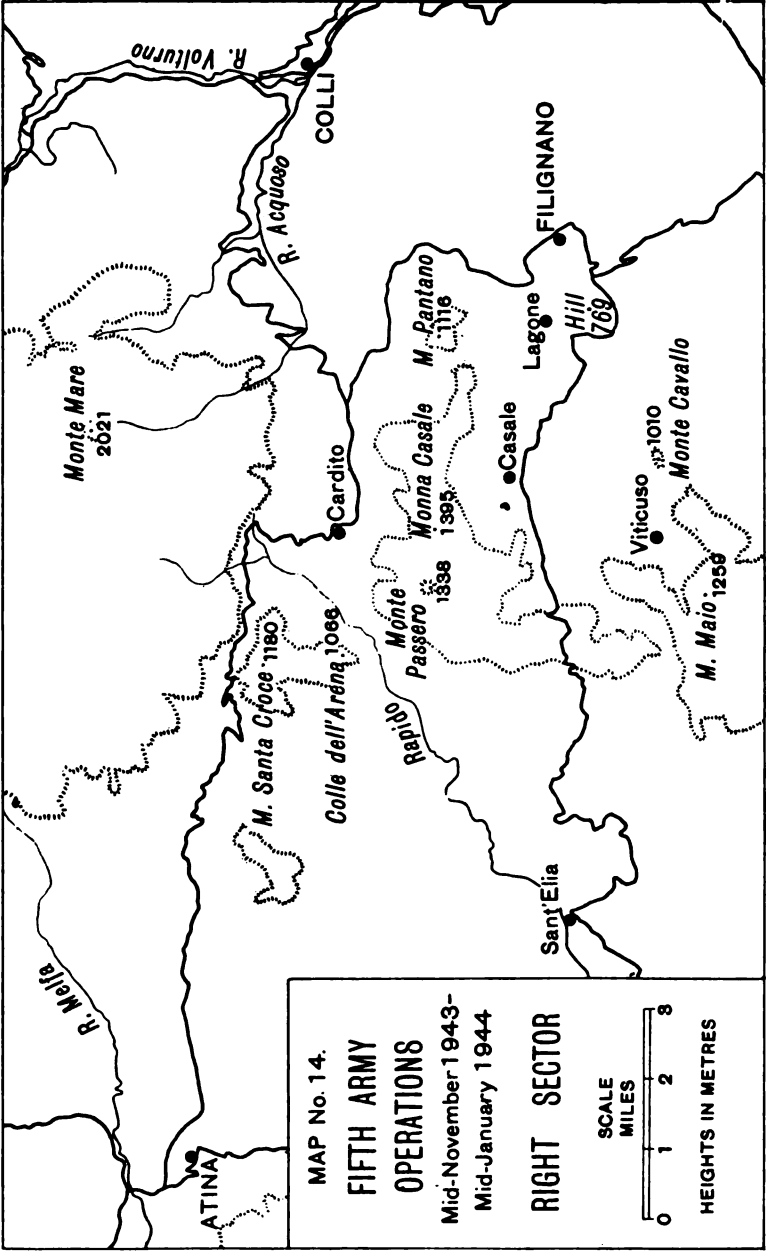
Meanwhile, on the other side of the road, Italian troops were in action against their traditional enemies for the first time since 1918. The 1st Italian Motorised Group had relieved an American battalion on the south-eastern side of Monte Lungo, and in the early morning of December the 8th, in a heavy fog that quite concealed the rocky shape of their objective, they attacked the mountain from several directions. It was held in great strength, and the Italians suffered heavily and made no progress. They were supported by very heavy gunfire, but their renewed assault was again broken by the numerous mortars and machine-guns which the Germans had sited in carefully prepared strong-points. Their attack failed, but the Germans were dissuaded from any attempt to snatch advantage from their success by the concentrated fire of the American 8-inch howitzers.

Two battalions of the 143rd Infantry were equally unsuccessful in an attempt to take San Pietro from the east. They could make no impression on the German positions, and withdrawing under compulsion resigned the battle to the indefatigable artillery. The

village was impregnable so long as the enemy retained his commanding positions on the high ground on either flank, and though the Americans were on the crest of Sammucro, Sammucro had lesser peaks below the crest that were still in German hands. There was in particular a trio of heights west of the summit, and a very desperate attempt was made to secure them, on December the 15th, by the 1st Battalion of the 143rd Infantry and the 504th Parachute Infantry, who had relieved the Rangers. But by ten o'clock in the morning the fighting strength of the former battalion was reduced to a hundred and fifty-five men, their ammunition was spent, and the Parachute Infantry had been stopped on the lower slopes of their allotted hill.

Later in the day an attack was made, with tanks and infantry, by the 143rd Regimental Combat Team on San Pietro itself. Moving from east of the village the tanks had to work in very unsuitable country, on a narrow road that had been mined, between rock-walled olive-terraces, among trees that closed their visibility to a few yards, and on ground sodden with rain. Twelve tanks were destroyed or disabled, four returned to their assembly area in the evening, and nothing had been accomplished. The infantry, starting from a position about a mile north of Monte Rotondo, were at once met by fire from the front and both flanks, and stopped with heavy losses. They renewed their attack after midnight, though communications had been destroyed and the artillery could not help them, and with grenades and bayonets a few men fought their way into the village. At two o'clock in the morning a dismal count revealed that the fighting strength of the 2nd Battalion of the 141st Infantry was a hundred and thirty officers and men, and though an attempt was made to carry the attack, no progress could be made and in the afternoon they withdrew.

The last show of success, and success in reality, came from the left, where the 142nd Infantry with great spirit and well co-ordinated movement took Monte Lungo from the south-west; while the Italians occupied its south-eastern ridge. The loss of Monte Lungo quickly proved decisive. Three hours after its capture the Germans on the other side of the highway counter-attacked fiercely and maintained the offensive, north of San Pietro, till after midnight. Their purpose was discovered when daylight came. They had been covering their withdrawal, and now the village was abandoned and the enemy, reluctantly yielding yet another position, had retired to a line running south-westward from San Vittore over Monte Porchia to Colle Cedro.



The fall of San Pietro meant the winning of another mile or two on the interminable road to Rome; and while the IInd Corps was painfully opening the highway the VIth Corps with equal travail had been capturing a few more ridges and peaks and ravines of the unending Apennines.

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Monte Trocchio

DURING the battle for Camino the VIth Corps, cast in a minor part, had found itself involved in a bitter and costly battle for a pair of hills near Filignano. Its task was to advance on the two roads within its sector—the roads from Filignano to Sant' Elia, from Colli to Atina—and everywhere, in the usual pattern of the country, the roads were overlooked by the hills, and every hill was dominated by a taller height that some unfriendly mountain supervised. For eight days the 45th Division fought for a nameless peak that the cartographers identified as Hill 769, and on Monte Pantano the 34th Division in a contest of equal severity won two kilometres on a narrow front at the cost of nearly eight hundred casualties. The 34th was then relieved by the 2nd Division of Moroccan Infantry, the first French troops to take part in the Italian campaign. This was on December the 8th, and the reinforcement was most opportune. A week later the VIth Corps mounted a new and larger offensive.

Its two objectives were another pair of hills, or hill-areas, the one east of Cardito overlooking the road from Colli, the other south-east of Casale on the Sant' Elia road. The weather had temporarily improved and the airforce led the attack by bombing villages on both the roads, the enemy's forward supply-point at Vitico, and his gun-positions near Cardito. The northern objective was to be taken by the French Colonials, and on the night of December the 14th two regiments of Tirailleurs Marocains with two Tabors of Goumiers set off to cross the Colli road, and make a mountaineer's flank attack on the Cardito position by traversing the slopes of Monte Mare, nearly seven thousand feet high, and coming down upon it from the north; when more Moroccans would make a frontal attack. This part of the plan collapsed, however, as the African regiments failed to reach their assault positions in time.

The 179th Regimental Combat Team, of the 45th Division, drove the enemy from the little village of Lagone, and the 157th Combat

Team, after a day of stiff opposition and limited success, perceived that the Germans were withdrawing to conform with their rearward movement further south; thereafter the Division advanced without much difficulty to the western slopes of Monte Cavallo. Two and a half miles of the road to Sant' Elia had been won.

It had become evident, in the meantime, that the heavy fighting for the Mignano Gap was not going to be largely rewarded. A few hundred yards west of San Pietro the reconnoitring patrols of the American IInd Corps found a new German line in a landscape depressingly familiar—fissured hills and terraces and olive-groves—and all the road was under fire from field-guns and mortars and machine-guns. Two miles beyond San Pietro lay San Vittore, and it was going to take sixteen days to win it.

Two attempts to make a frontal advance were stopped, and it was then discovered that San Vittore, in the usual way, was dominated by several hills which must be captured first. Hill 730, with two hundred Germans entrenched on it, was one of them, and Morello was another. The former was taken by the 1st Special Service Force on Christmas Day, the latter by the 141st Infantry on Boxing Day; but the Germans were still on the northward heights, and though American patrols fought their way into San Vittore they had to retire again, and the village remained in German hands. The end of the year found the winter's allotted task uncompleted, the troops battle-weary, disappointed, and suffering acutely in the bitter cold. Their clothing was hardly adequate for mountain warfare in December, their reserves had never been of sufficient strength to exploit a temporary advantage and give decision to their local victories. The Germans had always held the territorial advantage in a country that time and time again produced the situation and inspired the monotonous cliché, *ideally suited to defence*. But in spite of weariness and the freezing air and the daunting succession of dark mountains in front of them, the soldiers of the Fifth Army, like their comrades of the Eighth, were still attacking. The Germans were given no respite save the occasional brief halt of exhaustion, the necessary pause for the replenishing of supplies. With audacity, with remorseless vigour, with unflinching purpose the attack was maintained and always on the cruel line that marched from icy swamps on the Tyrrhenian shore over cloudy mountains to hailstorms on the Adriatic slopes there was movement somewhere, a battle-patrol forcing the enemy to fight for a shattered farmhouse, a brigade in action for another hill, field-guns deploying and howitzers assailing the hidden ridges beyond our outpost-line,

sappers striving to bridge a debated stream. Still water froze and often the frozen air hung still as ice, but winter never quite stopped the attack. General Alexander's unflinching resolution had a sufficing instrument: his soldiers' fortitude.

On the lower Garigliano the last days of the year were enlivened by skirmishing and a small but very successful seaborne raid by the 9th Commando. The objects of the raid were to obtain prisoners and information, and to harass the enemy; and the troops, having embarked in two ships at Pozzuoli, landed on a beach not far beyond the river-mouth, and with great confidence—with insolence indeed, for they went with pipers playing—they explored the German positions on the north bank of the river, on Monte D'Argento, and in Minturno; and having taken a score of prisoners, returned. Coldstream and Scots Guards of the 201st Guards Brigade assisted the operation by attacking enemy positions at the hither end of the blown bridge on the Appian Way; and across the river at Puntafiume. A night or two later the Scots alarmed the Germans, and brought gunfire on the irritated battalion which had relieved them, by sending out a small patrol armed only with 12-bore shotguns; they were duck-shooting to furnish a Hogmanay feast, and duck, as it happened, were fairly numerous in the marshes of no-man's-land.

The remainder of the Fifth Army's winter task, as outlined by General Clark in an operation order of mid-December, was the capture by the American IIInd Corps of Monte Porchia and Monte Trocchio, both south of the Via Casilina, while the French Expeditionary Corps (replacing the VIth) continued its highland advance towards the mountains north-west of Cassino, and the Xth Corps, protecting the left flank and harassing the enemy along the Garigliano, prepared to exploit success—if it came in sufficiency and with due speed—and open the Liri Valley. The 1st Armoured Division was attached to the IIInd Corps to lead the hoped-for subsequent advance. If the attack succeeded and the armour broke into the Valley, there would be a seaborne landing south of Rome to aggravate the German discomfiture. Plans were afoot—but changing their balance fairly often—for the Anzio adventure. In preparation for this, and the IIInd Corps' continued offensive, there was, about the end of the year, widespread movement and regrouping of forces.

The New Year came in with a snowstorm that, like some ancient catastrophe, produced a legend that grew with constant addition; and the guns of the IIInd Corps and their unseen adversaries saluted 1944 with their massed artillery. Three nights later the 1st Special

Service Force, with a mule-train of seven hundred beasts, was in position to attack Monte Maio—north-east of Gervaro, north-west of Venafro—as the preliminary to a flank attack on Trocchio. They took it in the darkness before dawn on January the 8th, and for three days held it against a furious succession of counter-attacks in which the Germans suffered heavily: in these days a battalion of armoured Field Artillery fired 8,500 rounds into the unhappy German regiment, the 132nd Infantry, which had been driven from the mountain and was endeavouring to recapture it. After an initial reverse a neighbouring height, Point 1190, was taken by a long night march and tactical surprise.

The Special Service Force was on the extreme right wing of the attack. Their neighbours on the inner wing were the 168th Infantry, who in six days of hard fighting took a series of peaks that overlooked Cervaro and turned the German position on Monte la Chiaia: a ridge defended from the front by the stubbornly held and strongly defended village of San Vittore. Simultaneous with the 168th's advance against the peaks was an attack by the 135th Infantry on the houses of San Vittore—houses built thickly of native stone—and for most of the day there was door-to-door fighting in which the Americans took a hundred and seventy prisoners. Equally desperate resistance was encountered on La Chiaia, but it was taken on the 7th and the Americans moved westward, against a confused and retreating enemy, to the hills immediately overlooking Highway 6.

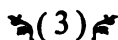
South of the Highway Monte Porchia rises from the flatness of the valley in rocky isolation. Moving directly against it from Monte Lungo the forward troops of a special Task Force of tanks and armoured infantry reached its crest in less than a day's fighting, but were driven off it in a counter-attack by three companies of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division, newly arrived to reinforce the enemy. The Task Force recaptured Porchia on the following day, held it for twenty-four hours against more counter-attacks, and then the Germans, having lost La Chiaia, gave up their attempts to recover it and withdrew. The lesser hill called Cedro, south of Porchia and dominated by it, was taken after some costly fighting by a brigade of the British 46th Division as part of the Xth Corps' flank-guard duty.

During the last few days of this battle for Monte Trocchio the Germans made fierce and restless attempts to hinder the continuously successful advance of the American right wing in the mountains; but without avail. The 133rd Infantry took Monte Capraxo, the 168th captured Cervaro, and by January the 13th the

Germans had withdrawn from all the neighbouring hills on that side of Highway 6. The way was open for an attack on Trocchio, and Trocchio indeed was as good as taken. A large isolated hill between the Highway and the Rapido, apparently closing the approach to Cassino, it was useful for observation but scarcely defensible after the northern hills had been taken. The Germans made no serious attempt to hold it, and on the 15th the Americans were on top of it with a good view of the town of Cassino. East of the Rapido German resistance had come to its end, but so had the impetus of the Fifth Army's advance, and the river could not yet be crossed, the Liri Valley was still many months away.

On the right of the IInd Corps the French Expeditionary Corps had made its debut with admirable vigour and considerable success. The 2nd Division of Moroccan Infantry, on the right flank north of the Atina road, advancing towards Cardito surprised the enemy and repelled his counter-attacks; they took Cardito, sent their patrols across the upper Rapido, and established their outposts on the slopes of Monte Santa Croce and Colle dell'Arena. The 3rd Division of Algerian Infantry, advancing over the eastern slopes of Monna Casale, went on to take Monte Passero and reach the neighbourhood of Sant' Elia. In three days the French Corps had made an average advance of nearly four miles; and now before it rose the formidable barrier of the Gustav Line.

This was the end of the Fifth Army's winter campaign. In two months of fighting, from mid-November to mid-January, it had won the two great mountain-keeps that overlook the road to Rome, and come a little nearer to the city: seven or eight miles perhaps. In that slow progress, however, it had served its primary purpose by killing or disabling many Germans; and taken two thousand prisoners. Its own casualties were not light. Seven thousand British soldiers and nearly nine thousand Americans had been killed or wounded or were missing; fifteen per cent of this total had been killed. The mountains and winter weather had also taken their toll, and sickness of one sort or another had incapacitated, for work or fighting, fifty thousand Americans in sixty days.



Anzio: Plans and Difficulties

HANNIBAL fought in Italy for fifteen years, though Carthage sent him no ponderable reinforcements. General Alexander was better

served than Hannibal, but from time to time he may have remembered his distinguished predecessor with the sympathy of a fellow-sufferer. From the autumn of 1943 the shadow of a larger campaign obscured his war, and while preparations for the invasion of France diminished at the source his possible supply of troops and equipment, the strategic requirements of the Allied Air Force at Foggia took, to begin with, the greater part of such cargoes as did come to Italy. In mid-October it had been calculated that 2,000 vehicles a week might be expected for military use, and with this rate of supply it would be possible to maintain not more than sixteen or seventeen divisions by January of 1944. In October the Germans had already twenty-three divisions in Italy, of which nine were in the south. With his limited strength and permissible resources General Alexander could not rely solely on frontal attack and a straightforward advance to the north: he might succeed in taking Rome and advancing beyond it, but if the process cost too much there was a danger of his being so weakened that he could not hold what he had gained; and the Germans with their superior mobility might launch a counter-offensive that would give them such a victory as Dr. Goebbels in particular could use to advantage.

To avoid a debacle of this kind an amphibious operation was mooted, and by the end of October the idea had been adopted and plans were being discussed. The size of the expeditionary force and its composition were debated, and once more the familiar task began of counting landing-craft. Of two hundred and one tank landing-craft in Italian waters, thirteen had been ordered to India, a hundred and sixteen were to sail to England in January in preparation for *Overlord*—the code-name for the Norman invasion—and of the remainder some were engaged in the Messina ferry-service, some in harbour-work; only twenty-four, it was estimated, would be entirely free and fit for service by the beginning of November, and to wring more from the grasp of *Overlord* would be difficult indeed. The weather had also to be considered, and the landing, in early opinion, would have to coincide with the arrival of the main army in a position from which it could support the minor adventure and implement its menace. In Sicily and at Termoli the seaborne flank attacks had been successful because the time of descent had in each case been well judged.

At Bari on November the 8th General Alexander announced the first plan for a landing at Anzio and the establishment of a bridge-head in Latium. The attack would be directed against the Colli Laziali, the Alban Hills, with the intention of capturing Rome.

The operation would be known as *Shingle*. To carry the expedition landing-craft would have to be borrowed from *Overlord*, and December the 20th was therefore selected as the date for it. By then, it was expected, the main army would have breached the Winter Line and be in a position from which it could join hands with the amphibious force within a week of its coming ashore. The borrowed landing-craft could then be released in time for their ordered return to England.

But with December came the most abominable winter that Italy had suffered for many years, and though foul weather was not the only hindrance to the Fifth Army's advance, it was a strong agent in the defeat of their hopes. The skies descended and all hope was washed away of breaking the Winter Line in time to use the borrowed fleet. *Shingle* was put away, and the laborious battle for the frozen heights went slowly on.

About this time the Prime Minister was returning from the Allied Conference at Teheran. He fell ill, recovered some strength in Africa, and sent for General Alexander. At Tunis on Christmas Day they agreed that unless Rome could be captured the Italian campaign would be accounted as a failure, and that the best way of breaking German resistance was a seaborne attack from the flank. It was therefore decided that the expedition would be made without reference to the position of the main army; but as the amphibious force would have to stand in its own strength for some considerable time, and as the enemy had now reinforced his troops in the neighbourhood of Rome, the expedition must be larger than that originally intended. A division and a little more had been the first intention; now it was decided to send two divisions and supporting troops. There was the inevitable argument about shipping, but the seeming impossibility of ever finding enough of it was finally solved by the provision of nearly three hundred transports—landing-ships and landing-craft for men and their fighting vehicles—on condition that those necessary for service elsewhere would be released by a given date.

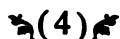
The objective was the same as before—the Alban Hills—and there was a confident expectation that their capture would compel the enemy to withdraw his forces in the south, and leave Rome in our hands. It was admitted, however, that the plan was audacious and the enterprise would be risky; and for this reason both the Prime Minister and General Alexander thought it important that between American and British troops there should be equality of hazard to equalize the unavoidable sacrifice. The control and

administration of a homogeneous force would have been simpler, but simplicity is not the only criterion in the management of allied armies, and in the light of what happened the decision was a sound one. The sacrifice at Anzio was lamentable, but the honour of fighting that soldier's battle is not one that either nation would lightly forfeit to the other; and though elsewhere Britain and America have competed in unfriendliness, here there was competition only in gallantry, rivalry in endurance.

Major-General Lucas, commanding the VIth Corps, was chosen to command and his Headquarter Staff to administer the new Corps; which, as initially intended, was to consist of the British 1st Division, with armour and two Commandos; the American 3rd Division, with armour, a Ranger Battalion, and a Paratroop group. In instructions, adumbrating the new plan, dated January the 2nd, it was stated that the object was to cut the enemy's lines of communication and threaten the rear of his XIVth Corps. The landing was to take place as soon as possible after January the 20th and not later than the 31st. The Eighth Army, while releasing two divisions—the 1st for the expedition, the 5th to reinforce the Xth Corps—would maintain pressure on the enemy and try to reach the Pescara line from which to threaten Rome from the east; and the Fifth would resume its attack on the Gustav Line.

In the short period that remained for preparation new difficulties were discovered in the shipping programme; and it now appeared that if the tank-landing ships that had to return to England were withdrawn at the time stipulated, it would be impossible to maintain the expedition. This *impasse* was crossed by the Prime Minister, who in conference at Marrakesh declared that “*Overlord* must not be a tyrant”, whereupon it was found that the homeward fleet need not be so numerous or so punctual in its departure as had previously been supposed. The planners breathed more freely, and advisedly increased the original strength of the expedition. Again, on the 12th, the plan was altered and enlarged when it was decided to launch the expedition in conjunction with another attack on the Gustav Line: a frontal assault by the American IIInd Corps towards the Liri Valley with a turning movement on either side by the Xth Corps and the French Expeditionary Corps. The Xth Corps would open the new battle by forcing a crossing of the lower reaches of the Garigliano to open the valley of the Ausente and so threaten the Liri valley defences from the rear; then the Americans would make their direct attack, and in the highlands on the right the French would drive towards the mountains above Cassino; and when

battle had been joined and the enemy's reserves had been committed—as it was hoped they would be—the newly constituted VIth Corps would seek to establish its bridgehead in Latium.



The Battle of the Garigliano

SINCE its capture of Monte Camino on December the 9th General McCreery's Xth Corps had engaged only in minor operations, though in the battle for Colle Cedro the 138th Brigade, of the 46th Division, had unhappily suffered two hundred and fifty casualties. The other brigades, however, had been relieved and rested, and now, with its reinforcement from the Eighth Army, its strength was three infantry divisions and one armoured brigade. The 46th Division was to cross the Garigliano in the neighbourhood of San Ambrogio, to guard the left flank of the American attack, and the remainder of the Corps would make its attack on the nine miles of marshland between Monte Castellucio and the sea. The German defenders here were a comparatively new horse-drawn infantry division: the 94th. The German XIVth Corps, that faced the whole Fifth Army front, had two mobile divisions in reserve, and could call on two more divisions from Army reserve.

At Monte Castellucio the Garigliano leaves its mountain valleys to wind its way through a flat alluvial plain. In winter it ran wide and deep—a hundred yards across, and everywhere too deep for fording, between banks about fifteen feet high—and the flat fields on either side were numerously channelled by streams and ditches which would confine mechanised movement to a few tracks whose exits on the far side had all been mined, and to the Via Appia and the coast-road from Mondragone, which converged at the entrance to the blown Minturno bridge. The two railway bridges that formerly had crossed the river had been totally demolished. The enemy's main defences were on the hills on either side of the Ausente, with a reconnaissance regiment holding outposts on the plain, nowhere more than two miles broad, between the hills and the river. His observation of the river-line was close and complete, and to establish crossings for supporting weapons and vehicles it would be necessary to win quickly and control both the low hills about Minturno and the taller heights near the village of Castelforte. It was hoped to achieve this with the help of surprise and four brigades attacking in line.

Great care was taken to conceal the assembly of bridging equipment, rafts, and assault boats. The reinforced Corps artillery moved in by night and the guns found cover in the olive-groves. In the darkness ammunition-dumps were built, and sappers patrolled the river to look for crossing-places. The 5th Division came into the line, on the seaward sector, only forty-eight hours before the battle began. The 5th, with a long approach-march before it, was to make a silent crossing; the guns would support the 56th Division on the right, whose sector the enemy closely overlooked. The 201st Guards Brigade was transferred from the 56th to the 5th, in reserve, to carry the advance northward if the crossings were successful; and a design was made, with the co-operation of the Royal Navy and the Allied air force, to isolate the area of battle by bombardment of the roads leading to it. In the event, however, bad weather interfered with the plan, and though fighter-bombers did destroy the bridge at San Giorgio on January the 17th, it was not until the 23rd that heavy bombers were able to attack—and then without success—the Pontecorvo bridge; and by then the enemy had received strong reinforcement and made his counter-attack in strength.

In the evening of the 17th the guns of the Xth Corps opened the battle with concentrated fire against various targets on the 56th Divisional front and a barrage to cover the advancing brigades. The Division's objective was the hills surrounding Castelforte, and while the 169th Brigade on the right crossed the river to gain a foothold on the ridge from Monte Castellucio to Sujo, the 167th Brigade on the left made its initial advance towards Colle Salvatito. The enemy replied to our barrage with heavy fire, especially on the right where with close observation he could use his mortars. Many assault-boats were sunk in this part of the river, and many sappers fell in their grim labour to establish ferries. But when morning came all three battalions of the Queens were over the water, with a few anti-tank guns to help them hold both ends of the ridge. A little knoll in the centre was still in the enemy's hands, who stubbornly resisted for some hours longer, but by early evening the Brigade had narrowly enlarged its hold to the slopes of Monte Valle Martina. But the intended ferry was still under observation from close range, and jeep and assault-boat were still the only means of bringing in men and supplies.

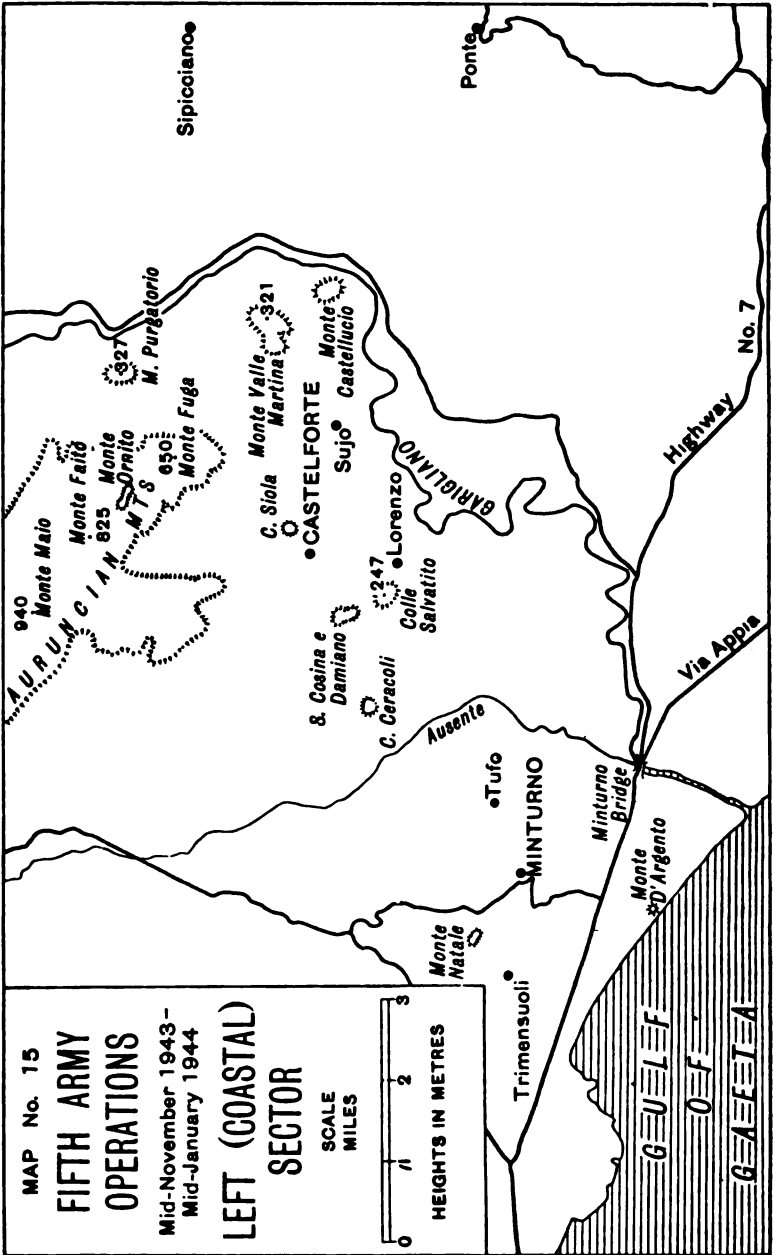
On the left of Castelforte the 8th Royal Fusiliers crossed the river with little trouble near Maiano di Sotta and by dawn were on the slopes of Colle Salvatito, with the sappers working behind them

so successfully that before noon a ferry was running and the first tanks coming over. The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry followed them; and by evening the Fusiliers were on top of the further hill, San Cosina e Damiano, though the Germans still disputed its possession. But a mile down-river, near the broken railway-bridge, the other Fusilier battalion had met with ill-fortune and an enemy strongly entrenched. They lost their Colonel, became disorganised, and could make no progress.

The 5th Division also had varying fortune. In their silent attack the Wiltshires of the 13th Brigade crossed the river a couple of miles above the Minturno bridge and by early morning, after a brisk fight, had taken the village of Tufo. The Inniskillings of the same brigade, after losing a number of assault-boats higher up the river, decided to follow the Wiltshires and in the forenoon reached the shoulder of the hill east of Tufo above the glen of the Ausente. The sappers, however, were prevented from bridging the river by minefields on both sides of it, and the infantry were compelled by a strong local counter-attack to withdraw slightly in the early evening.

The 17th Brigade's attack was less successful. The plan had been to land the Royal Scots Fusiliers from the sea near Monte d'Argento, while the Seaforth Highlanders crossed the river below the Via Appia. Most of the landing-craft found their proper beach, but some that carried infantry, sappers, and anti-tank guns mistook their landfall and beached south of the river. It was a diminished battalion that essayed the attack on the little seaside hill called Monte d'Argento, and almost immediately it found itself in a large minefield where, without the sappers and their instruments to clear a path, it became somewhat disorganised. West of the Garigliano, between the Via Appia and the sea, there was another minefield a mile in depth; and here the Seaforths and the Northampton, after successfully crossing the river, found progress impossible. Morning discovered the Seaforths holding a small bridgehead astride of the highway, with the Northampton dug in on their left. At ten o'clock the Seaforths gave ground before a counter-attack by tanks, but the guns of five Field Regiments restored the situation with some violence. There was no immediate prospect of improving it, however—though Monte d'Argento would have to be taken and was indeed taken that night—and the Divisional Commander decided to send his 15th Brigade after the Wiltshires to clear the Minturno hills.

The early counter-attacks in the seaward sector were the



preliminary to a very violent series of assault with which the German 94th Division succeeded, during the next four days, in confining our bridgehead until, with reinforcements, they should be able to mount in strength their counter-offensive.

The reserve brigades of the Xth Corps were moving forward over the river, and in the early hours of the 19th the first bridge was built two miles above the Via Appia; but the first vehicle to cross it exploded a mine buried deeply under the ramp, and though it was re-opened before daylight it was hit and closed again a few hours later. The approaches to it were poor, and there were mine-fields everywhere; but the 15th Brigade succeeded in crossing, and passing through the 13th, where the Inniskillings had been fighting hand-to-hand in counter and recounter-attack, went on to recapture Tufo with the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and take Minturno with the Green Howards. On the following day, the 20th, the York and Lancaster, till then in Brigade reserve, went further and took Monte Natale.

In the 56th Divisional Sector all three brigades had been committed, but they had been able to do little more than hold their ground against repeated counter-attack, and though the German 94th Division had lost very heavily in its spirited fighting it had by now been reinforced by the Reconnaissance Battalion of the 44th Infantry Division and a battalion of the Hermann Goering Division; with whose help its line became comparatively stable. Of the 5th Division there were two brigades on the Minturno ridge, and the 17th was laboriously clearing minefields on the coastal plain. To maintain the offensive and exploit his limited success General McCreery had only one brigade in hand, the 201st Guards. Whatever criticisms may be made against them, the Allied Commanders in Italy cannot be accused of hoarding their capital; for they never had any capital to hoard.

A misfortune higher up the river was turned to account, however, and the bridgehead reinforced from the 46th Division, which had failed to cross the Garigliano at San Ambrogio, and been released, with the exception of one battalion, from its obligation to the American IInd Corps. Fog and a wildly running stream had so decisively beaten a flotilla of assault boats that of two battalions which embarked only a company reached the further bank; and General Clark decided to abandon his projected crossing here. The 138th Brigade was at once put under command of the 56th Division to relieve its right-hand brigade and attack north-west towards Monte Fuga and the dismal little height of Purgatorio.

Simultaneously the Guards Brigade would take up and carry the seaward drive along the Minturno hills.

That was the intention, and by dawn on the 21st most of the necessary regrouping had been done. On the right the 138th Brigade had relieved two battalions of the Queens Brigade; in the centre the Royal Berkshires and the London Scottish of the 168th had taken over their positions from the depleted Fusiliers and Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry of the 167th; between Castelforte—still in German hands—and Lorenzo were the London Irish Rifles of the 168th, and on Colle Salvatito the 9th Royal Fusiliers of the 167th. In the 5th Divisional sector the Via Appia now crossed the river on a Bailey bridge; but it could only be used at night, and the way across the lesser bridge two miles higher up was still impeded by minefields. These restrictions on movement had prevented some of the Guards' supporting artillery from assembling on the other side, and scarcely had orders been given for a day's postponement of their attack when the Germans entered a more enduring caveat. With two new divisions and part of a third they opened a very strenuous counter-offensive.

The battered and much-weakened 94th Division had already been reinforced by a battalion of the 44th, another of the Hermann Goering Division. On January the 21st both regiments of the 29th Panzer Grenadiers came in, and were followed within forty-eight hours by the other infantry battalion of the Hermann Goering and both regiments of the 90th Panzer Grenadiers. The British strength, to oppose this attack, was equivalent to two divisions.

Down the valley towards Sujo and down the road from Castelforte came a double thrust on the right; out of the glen of the Ausente a battalion rose to attack the positions on Cosina e Damiano; and on the left a new battle began for Monte Natale. On the right, with small exceptions, the line was firmly held: the Lincolns and the Yorkshire battalions, the Berkshires and the London Irish and the Fusiliers stood their ground and repelled the fierce assault, and though between the Berkshires on Cosina e Damiano and the Fusiliers on Salvatito the Germans drove a narrow wedge, they were driven out again by the London Scottish in a quick night-attack. On the left, however, the assault on Monte Natale was barely withheld, and when darkness fell the Germans were still in close contact. At dawn on the 22nd they renewed the offensive, and before noon, making progress against both the 13th and 15th Brigades, they had recaptured Natale and some small hills north of Minturno and Tufo.

Sixty miles away, on the beaches of Anzio and Nettuno, the British and American troops of the Vth Corps had, on this same morning, disembarked with unexpected ease to establish their bridgehead in Latium; and in the centre of the Fifth Army's front the foremost troops of the American IInd Corps had crossed the Rapido, but only to be halted by a murderous fire from impregnable positions.

In the critical phase of the Minturno battles the two forward brigades were ordered to hold their ground, and the 17th stood at short notice to reinforce them at need. But the hard-pressed battalions achieved their own salvation, and in an afternoon of stubborn fighting Green Howards and Cameronians regained the nearer hills, and York and Lancasters held a new position under Natale. Meanwhile, in the Castelforte sector, the 40th Royal Tank Regiment had been clearing small parties of the enemy from the neighbourhood of Lorenzo, and the Germans had been attacking in vain down the glen of the Ausente. Heavy shellfire met and broke their advance, and on the Damiano and Salvatito hills the London Irish and the Berkshires maintained their lines intact. Again, when night came, there was fighting on the left, but the Germans made no progress. And then, quite suddenly, they became obedient to a new strategy and on the Xth Corps' front abandoned the offensive and stood to defend.

This, clearly, was the result of the landing in Latium, and that, as obviously, had been made so easily because the Xth Corps had drawn from the enemy's reserve two of his best mobile divisions, and engaged them in so fierce a battle that after two days of sternest fighting they had won only the hill called Monte Natale, and that at great cost. And now General McCreery had regained the initiative; but could he use it to advantage? His troops were tired, and he had only a small uncommitted reserve, and his losses had been considerable. Two battalions of the 167th Brigade could between them muster only three hundred and thirty men. By bringing the remainder of the 46th Division into the bridgehead, however, and entrusting nine miles of the right wing to the 139th Brigade, the 46th Reconnaissance Regiment, and the King's Dragoon Guards—who would have to engage the enemy closely to conceal their lack of numbers—it might be possible to mass strength enough for another assault on Castelforte. With this intention the 128th Brigade came under command of the 56th Division, and while it was moving up for the attack local operations were in progress in the centre and on the left of the bridgehead.

The Queens Brigade moved into the Damiano area to clear the irregular hill called Ceracoli, above the Ausente; but after making some progress were held by heavy gunfire. The 17th Brigade, relieved on the beach by the 23rd Armoured Brigade, concentrated south of Minturno and advanced with the object of retaking Monte Natale; but the enemy counter-attacked in strength, pinned to the ground the right-hand battalion of Seaforths, and on the left so disorganised the Royal Scots Fusiliers that they had to be withdrawn. It became evident that the offensive could not be resumed until the troops had been given a little rest; and fortunately the Germans were in the same plight, though for a different reason. Their lately arrived divisions were now needed at Anzio, and some of them were already discovered there on the 24th. At Castelforte and round Natale the enemy was thinning-out, but not so much as to impair his defensive strength.

Monte Fuga, north-east of Castelforte, was to be the next objective, and to form on the Sujo ridge a firm base for the assault the 139th Brigade, less one battalion, was brought in from the right: this left on the sparsely held nine-mile wing only the King's Dragoon Guards, the Reconnaissance Regiment, and a battalion of the Leicesters. The American IInd Corps, having failed in its attack over the Rapido, was now committed to a battle for Monte Cassino, and could not help. The situation had to be accepted, and the necessary dispositions were made for the attack; which would be supported by the whole Corps Artillery. On January the 26th the 46th Division took command of the Sujo sector, and the 138th Brigade with the Durham Light Infantry of the 139th under command began its task of clearing, house by house, the Sujo valley and securing the overlooking hills. By dawn on the 28th the valley was ours, and the advance continued against accurate gunfire but little resistance from the German infantry; who had apparently been taken by surprise and showed a surprising disposition to surrender. Before midnight of the 29th two companies of the York and Lancasters were on Fuga, with the Lincolns on a hill between there and Castelforte, and the Durham Light Infantry approaching Colle Siola; where, however, they met strong opposition. This good beginning having been made, the 56th Division, now rested, also entered the attack, and the 5th renewed its assault on Natale.

Between Colle Siola and Cosina e Damiano, in an arc of the hills overlooking Castelforte, four German battalions were deployed, and against their dogged resistance the 56th made no progress and

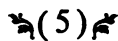
suffered many casualties. Better fortune, however, awaited the 5th, whose Brigade—Northhamptons and Seaforths—took Natale and a roadside cemetery to the right of it without much trouble, while the Guards Brigade on their left, against strong resistance in the initial stage of their attack, successfully won the western slopes of the Trimensuoli ridge. Both brigades consolidated quickly, and repelled several German counter-attacks.

It was now the 30th of January, and in the Xth Corps only two brigades, the 15th and the 168th, were not wholly committed to action; and the 168th was about to resume the attack on Castellorte. But by now the bridgehead in Latium was in danger, and so small were our resources in Italy that the hard-fighting Xth was ordered to find reinforcements for the hard-pressed divisions at Anzio. The attack on Castelforte was postponed, and the 168th Brigade went into the other bridgehead. But there could be no relaxation on the Garigliano front, and General Clark impressed upon General McCreery the importance of maintaining the offensive as strongly as he could to assist the operation in Latium. The 2nd Special Service Brigade, consisting of two Commandos, arrived on the last day of the month and promptly went into the line in the Sujo valley, attacked two nights later north-westward from Monte Fuga, and took in darkness the high peak of Monte Faito; but later had to withdraw to the midway height of Ornito. The enemy reinforced in in this neighbourhood, and the 5th Hampshires, relieving the Special Service Brigade, extended their mountain hold, captured the nearby Monte Cerasola, and beat off some very determined counter-attacks in which the enemy lost, in immediate view of the Hampshires, over a hundred dead. The battalion had five days of continuous fighting, and was largely instrumental in securing for the Corps its strong position in the Auruncian mountains.

The dominating height of the range is Monte Maio, and a proposal to capture it was mooted on February the 6th when the 1st Guards Brigade arrived and came under command of the 46th Division. But quickly following the Guards came further disquieting news from Anzio, and the 56th Division—Headquarters and its two remaining brigades—had to withdraw from the hills and join the now more desperate battle by the sea. This drastic reduction in its strength brought the Xth Corps' offensive abruptly to an end; the bridgehead in Latium was maintained, but the battle of the Garigliano died of inanition. The 5th Division stretched itself thinly to the right and took responsibility for holding what had been the sector of the 56th; in the mountains the 1st Guards Brigade

relieved the 138th and in a week's defensive fighting, of which the Coldstream bore the brunt, convinced the Germans that it would be wiser to accept the situation. From then till March the 29th, when the Xth Corps handed over command of its sector to the French Expeditionary Corps and the American IInd Corps, the line of the Garigliano bridgehead remained substantially unchanged.

When the repeated calls for reinforcements for Anzio compelled abandonment of the offensive, there was no little disappointment in General McCreery's Corps, and the gloomy feeling supervened that nothing conclusive had been gained by all their valiance and fighting skill. But time brought his troops their recognition. Time passed, and in early May General Alexander set moving his great battle for Rome. Then, under cover of the Auruncian mountains that the Xth had captured—Cerasola, Ornito, and Fuga—the French Expeditionary Corps assembled for its swift and decisive advance; then, in the shelter of the captured hills about Minturno, the American IInd Corps prepared an attack so heavy as to throw the enemy off his balance. To win a bridgehead over the Garigliano was an indispensable prelude to the advance on Rome; and the Fifth Army was to make brilliant use of that which the Xth Corps had so stoutly fought for and so strongly held.



The Americans at Cassino

DISAPPOINTMENT, very bloodily arrayed, had also been the Americans' lot in the middle sector of the battle. It was on January the 20th that the IInd Corps made its frontal attack, over the Rapido, against the entrance to the Liri Valley; and a few hours later the French Expeditionary Corps, on the right, began its mountain-attack to turn the Gustav Line from the north. But the main-door into the valley was easy to hold and hard to force.

The inner wall of the valley consisted of a series of steep-sided mountains dominated by Monte Cairo some five thousand feet high. The mountains came down to the headland of Monte Cassino and Monastery Hill from whose crown, the ancient Benedictine Abbey, the enemy enjoyed an uninterrupted view over all the approaches to the valley of the Rapido. The natural strength of the mountains had been reinforced by well-hidden emplacements for automatic weapons on their forward slopes, and mortars tactically sited on

the reverse slopes. The town of Cassino was very strongly fortified and its narrow streets and massive architecture were well suited for defence. Self-propelled guns guarded every approach to the town and its defenders were closely supported from numerous machine-gun emplacements blasted out of the rock on the peaks and ridges of the steep slopes behind. Above Cassino the stream of the Rapido had been diverted on to the river-flats and made them too soft for tanks. The approaches to the river were heavily mined. South of Cassino the approaches were also guarded by mines and wire and covered by fire from pill-boxes and machine-gun emplacements on the west bank, by artillery and Nebelwerfers higher up the valley, and by enfilading fire from the high ground on either side. The Italian General Staff, which had often used this area for its training exercises, believed its defences to be an impregnable obstacle to any army advancing against Rome from the south; and the Germans had made thorough preparation to substantiate that belief.

According to the IInd Corps' plan of attack, the 36th Division was to establish a bridgehead in the area of Sant' Angelo from which Combat Command 'B' of the 1st Armoured Division would attack towards Aquino and Piedimonte; while the 34th Division on the right put in a holding attack against Cassino, and the 45th Division made ready to pass through the bridgehead at Cassino from the south-west. The Corps had very strong artillery support for its attack and an aerial bombardment of strong points west of the river preceded its advance.

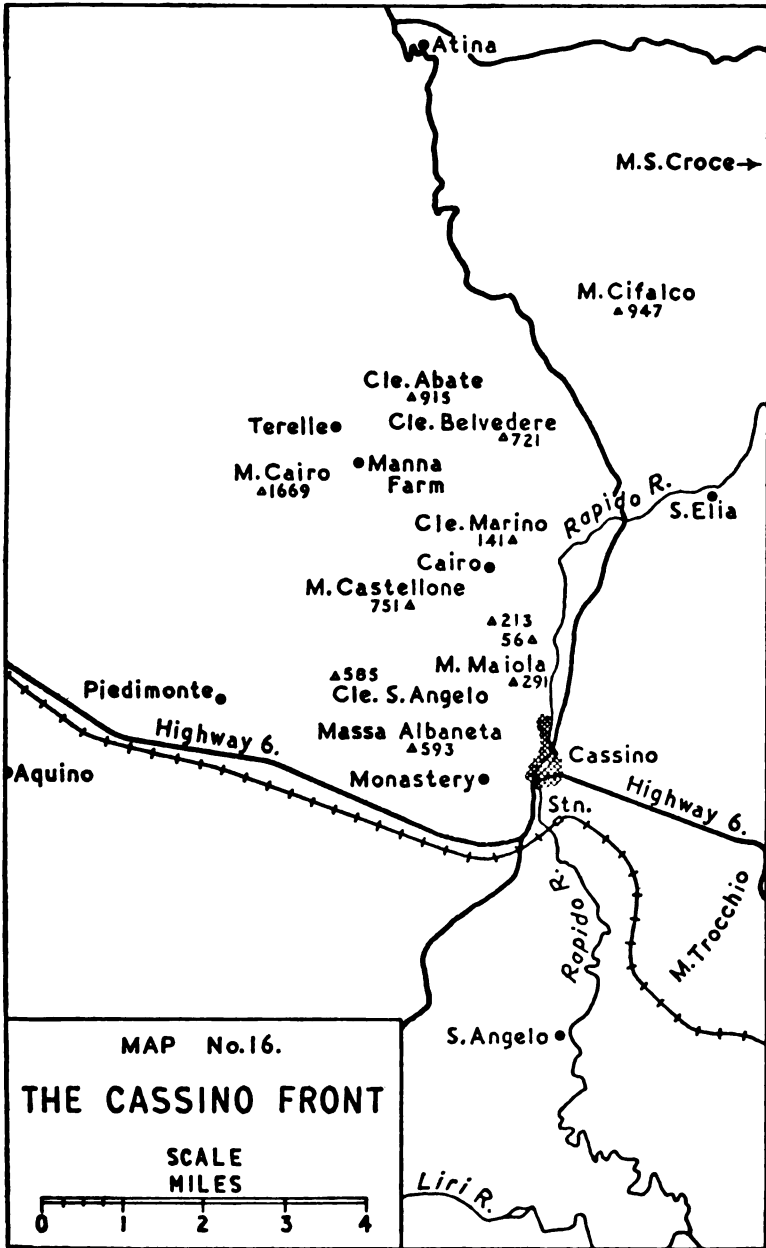
The assault was launched by the 141st Infantry north of Sant' Angelo, the 143rd Infantry south of the village and the high river cliff on which its ruins stood. But the approach to the river through mine-fields and under heavy fire was extremely difficult and only a few boat-loads of men from the 141st Regiment succeeded in reaching the west bank, and the 143rd, after a somewhat easier approach, was compelled before morning to withdraw the small parties which had survived the crossing. The attack was resumed on the 21st and the 3rd Battalion of the 143rd made an advance of several hundred yards beyond the river but could not hold its gains; and by mid-day on the 22nd the regiment had been driven back to the east bank. North of Sant' Angelo the 1st Battalion of the 141st Infantry had forced an entrance more than half a mile deep, but the most strenuous efforts to reinforce it were unsuccessful and the isolated companies were finally overwhelmed.

The Germans had made great use of smoke to conceal the

positions and movement of their guns and Nebelwerfers whose fire, directed from perfect observation points, had been consistently effective; while the American artillery though firing 112,000 rounds in five days had been handicapped by the dense fog that overhung the assaulting infantry, whose positions were too often unknown because of the rapid failure of communication. The 36th Division had lost nearly seventeen hundred men in its attack, of whom more than eight hundred were missing. Now it assumed a defensive role and the 34th Division prepared a new attack north of Highway 6.

In the mountains to the north between the Fifth Army and the Eighth, the French Expeditionary Corps, after an advance of several miles in mid-January, had been stopped by the high defences of the Gustav Line, but resuming their attack on the 21st in the direction of Atina, took the crest of Santa Croce before stubborn resistance and persistent counter-attack again halted them. The French were now ordered to change the direction of their advance and turn south-west toward Piedimonte while the American 34th Division made its attempt to cross the Rapido north of Cassino.

The approaches here were perhaps even more difficult than south of the town, for beyond the wired and explosive quagmire of the valley rose the fortified and rugged slopes of the Cassino headland. The Division's main effort was made on the right, and in the late evening of the 24th the 133rd Infantry advanced behind a heavy bombardment and after very stubborn fighting its three battalions had crossed the river and were reorganising on the west bank by midnight of the 25th. To its left, north of Cassino, the 135th Infantry had to withdraw a single company which had succeeded in crossing, and no armour could be brought forward to support either regiment. Through the small bridgehead still held by the 133rd Infantry a new assault was launched by the 168th Infantry supported by the 756th Tank Battalion and a prodigious artillery bombardment. The attack suffered very heavily, but after extremely bitter and costly fighting Hills 56 and 213 and the village of Cairo were captured by the 31st. The French were then able to take Colle Marino north of Cairo. General Juin, who had been fighting for the high ground between Terelle and the Rapido to secure the north flank of the intended envelopment of Cassino, had taken the Germans by surprise in a swift attack on Le Propaia and occupied also Colle Belvedere and Colle Abate; the latter height, however, was recaptured by the Germans on the 27th. The French in their advance had passed by the strong German position on Monte Cifalco and thereby uncovered their right flank; to



reinforce them and exploit their bridgehead on Colle Belvedere the 142nd Regimental Combat Team was attached to the 34th Division and after an approach march of the greatest difficulty from Sant' Elia, reached Belvedere and made a further advance to capture Hill 720 and Manna Farm while the 3rd Algerian Division retook Colle Abate. The Belvedere bridgehead was now tolerably secure.

In the days of fighting the 36th Division had suffered defeat in a most difficult operation and the 34th, after initial failure, had made a little breach in the Gustav Line north of Cassino and taken the first foothills in the mountain area behind it. The French had consolidated their hold on higher ground to the north and it was now possible to make a southward attack against Cassino. Though its assault had been costly and its gains were small the IInd Corps had also attracted to its battle zone some of the reserves which the enemy required at least as urgently to counter the Allied landings at Anzio.

In the small mountainous area north of Cassino, of which Monte Maiola was approximately the centre, the 211th Grenadier Regiment supported by the 132nd Grenadiers defended a natural fortress of the most savage aspect whose naked slopes and deep ravines and scanty paths gave every possible advantage to its well-armed and mobile garrison. It was against this fortress that the 34th Division now made ready to advance, while Combat Command 'B' of the 1st Armoured Division advanced to positions in the near vicinity of Cassino to provide close fire on its strong points and make ready for deployment in the valley if the bastion should fall. The assault was launched in heavy fog in the early morning of February 1st and within a few hours the 135th Infantry had captured Hill 771 under Monte Castelone and the crest of Monte Maiola. On the following day the southward advance was resumed and made some slight progress against increasing resistance, and by nightfall on the 3rd despite heavy losses the 2nd Battalion of the 135th Infantry and the 3rd Battalion of the 168th were a mile and a half to the north of Highway 6, but German reinforcements were arriving and the tactical centre of the area, Hill 593, was now held by a battalion of the 3rd Parachute Regiment which had arrived from Ortona.

In the valley the Barracks north of Cassino had been captured by the 133rd Infantry whose 3rd Battalion, supported by two platoons of tanks, then turned southwards against the town. Advancing under smoke both tanks and infantry penetrated the northern part of Cassino during the late afternoon of February 2nd, but when darkness fell the German infantry counter-attacked and

capturing two of the tanks, disabled three others; the Americans withdrew about a thousand yards. The assault was renewed on the next day, now against Hill 175 which was taken. But Hill 175 was overlooked by Castle Hill with its vertical northern face, and the tanks and infantry who had fought their way into a courtyard in the north-west corner of the town were also under fire from its emplacements. Castle Hill could only be taken by assault from the south-east, from the town, that is. On February 4th the 135th Infantry made further progress on the heights, its 3rd Battalion on the right capturing Colle Sant' Angelo, but then withdrew before a counter-attack to Hill 706. The 2nd Battalion, in the centre, advanced to within five hundred yards of Hill 593 and on the left the 1st Battalion secured a precarious hold on Hill 445. Throughout the day there was confused and bitter fighting at close quarters and on the 5th it was impossible to maintain the advance, though a platoon of the 1st Battalion made a daring foray to the walls of the Abbey and took fourteen prisoners from a cave on Monastery Hill. At night the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 168th Infantry assembled on Hill 445, and while the 1st Battalion of the 135th protected their left flank against attack from Castle Hill, prepared an assault on Monastery Hill. The two leading companies reached a point in a narrow defile covered by machine-gun fire from the Abbey and from Castle Hill behind them on their left, and were pinned down. At night they withdrew, and on the 6th, the 2nd Battalion of the 135th Infantry advanced against Hills 593 and 596 and after a day of furious fighting retained a precarious hold on their northern slopes.

The 133rd Infantry and tanks of the 760th Tank Battalion which had penetrated the northern quarter of Cassino consolidated their positions on the 4th, but all effort failed to reduce by artillery fire the German strong points in the town. One field artillery battalion fired 4,500 rounds during the day, but the 105 mm. howitzers made little impression against the reinforced concrete emplacements or on the sturdy old masonry of the town. The 1st Battalion moved southward from Hill 175 on the 5th to attack Castle Hill and reached its objective; but was promptly thrown back by a violent counter-attack. In the town the 3rd Battalion repelled a counter-attack and took some more houses.

Alarmed by the loss of so much ground in the highlands above Cassino the Germans were steadily reinforcing their lines, and by mid-February the four battalions of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division were in position and the original defenders had already

been reinforced by a battalion of the 3rd Parachute Regiment. Counter-attack by these new formations against Monte Castellone and Hill 593 decisively halted the American advance. But Allied reinforcement was also on its way, for at the end of January General Alexander ordered the 2nd New Zealand Division and the 4th Indian Division to be withdrawn from the Eighth Army to form an Army Group reserve, and on February 3rd these divisions came under command of the Fifth Army as the New Zealand Corps. The 2nd New Zealand Division moved into that part of the American sector south of Highway 6 and relieved the 36th Division to continue the attack on Cassino.

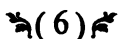
The 36th Division moved into the mountains to attack on the right of the 34th with the intention of capturing Piedimonte from the north-east. The 34th Division was to renew its assault on Monte Cassino, and south of the Liri the Xth Corps was to attack again towards Monte Faito and the mountains behind Castelforte. If both attacks were successful the enemy would be compelled to withdraw and open the Liri valley to the New Zealand Corps, which was now in position to exploit success. But neither the Xth Corps nor the IIInd Corps reached their objectives. In the 34th Division's sector it had been intended that the 135th Infantry should attack before midnight on the 7th to seize Albaneta Farm and protect the right flank of the 168th Infantry in a new assault on Monastery Hill on the following morning. But the 135th Infantry was fully occupied in beating off counter-attacks, and the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 168th took advantage of darkness instead and attacked at four in the morning. Little progress was made and every movement was strongly counter-attacked. Heavy casualties were sustained and the 1st Battalion was halted at the base of Hill 444, while the 3rd Battalion was pinned down on the forward slopes of Hill 445. On Hill 593 the 135th Infantry re-took some ground which it had previously lost. Throughout the 9th and 10th the enemy continued his violent counter-offensive while the 36th Division moved up to make a last effort against the mountain strongholds. In the town below the 133rd Infantry committed all three of its battalions to battle, making some progress towards Castle Hill, and with the aid of tanks and 8-in. howitzers won another couple of hundred yards of ruined streets.

The 36th Division made its attack on February 11th to capture Albaneta Farm, Hill 374 and Hill 593, and the New Zealand Corps prepared to send troops of the 4th Indian Division through the mountains towards Piedimonte, if it were successful, or against

Monastery Hill, if the 34th Division should fail to take it. The 141st Infantry and the 142nd both failed to take their objectives. The 142nd Infantry on the right endeavoured to neutralize by fire the enemy strongholds near Albaneta Farm but did not occupy the area; and fire from it inflicted heavy losses on the 141st Infantry in its attack on Hill 593. By noon on the 11th the regiment had made little progress but twice in the afternoon repelled heavy counter-attacks. The two forward battalions, however, could by evening muster barely a couple of hundred men between them.

On February 12th the 36th Division stood on the defensive on Castellone, Hill 706 and Hill 465. After an extraordinarily heavy barrage the Germans launched an unusually persistent counter-attack and until noon the situation was critical; when the enemy, having suffered considerable loss, abandoned his effort. But the infantry regiments of the 36th Division were by now little more than a quarter of their proper fighting strength and its relief by the French would soon be necessary. In its last attack on Monastery Hill on February 11th the 168th Infantry, in a violent snow-storm, had made no ground and again suffered numerous casualties. Two or three days later the regiment was relieved by troops of the 4th Indian Division. In Cassino the 133rd Infantry continued its house-to-house fighting until the New Zealanders took over from them.

The IInd Corps had broken through the Gustav Line only to be defeated on the last defences of Monte Cassino, when its forward troops were little more than a mile away from Highway 6. Victory had seemed to be within reach, but the closely packed fortifications on the mountains and in the town had been too strong for direct assault, and the extremely efficient movement of German reinforcements and the fanatical bravery of their persistent counter-attacks had reduced the American divisions to a battered remnant incapable of any further offensive. Responsibility for continuing the battle now passed to General Freyberg and his New Zealand Corps.



The New Zealanders and Indians at Cassino

THE New Zealand Corps, commanded by General Freyberg, initially consisted of the 2nd New Zealand Division and the 4th Indian Division, both transferred from the Eighth Army to create a reserve capable of exploiting the Fifth Army's anticipated breaking

of the Gustav Line. On February the 6th General Freyberg relieved the American IInd Corps on the Rapido below Cassino, and six days later took over the whole Cassino sector. The British 78th Division had in the meantime been added to his command, and the course of events had altered its purpose. Not to exploit success but to maintain and develop a thwarted offensive was now his task, and Monte Cassino his objective.

Though the Americans had been compelled to retreat from some of their forward exposed positions, they were reported to have four regiments in the neighbourhood of Monte Cassino, one on Castellone, and one in the outskirts of the town; they still claimed possession of Point 593. The New Zealand plan was that the 4th Indian Division should secure this point and then advance along the ridge previously traversed by the Americans, storm the Monastery, and move down to cut Highway 6 and so force the enemy to abandon the town of Cassino. About midnight on February the 11th the 7th Indian Brigade concentrated on the lower eastern slopes of Monte Castellone, near Cairo, to take over the position on Point 593 and head the new advance. In the early morning of the 12th, however, the Germans counter-attacked the Americans on Castellone, and though they were beaten back they tried again in the afternoon to filter through, and the 7th had to deploy two battalions to safeguard itself, and postpone the relief till the following night. The Indians waited, under fire from the German guns and mortars, till darkness came again and then set off up the rough mountain-trail, still under fire, and found that the Americans' forward positions were so exposed—some of them within a few yards of the enemy—that they could not be entered in daylight; and so it was not till the early hours of the 15th that the 7th Brigade took command of the sector, with Sussex on the right, Punjabis on the left, and Gurkhas in reserve.

In front of one of the American company-positions lay the dead bodies of more than a hundred and fifty German soldiers: so bitter had been the fighting, so resolute the German counter-attacks, and so tenacious the American resistance. On those rocky slopes it was impossible to dig weapon-pits or slit-trenches, and the popular name of *foxhole* was wild exaggeration for the rabbit-scrappings in which many men of the 36th Division had endured the enemy's fire and the enmity of the skies. The two battalions of the 36th that were thought to be holding Point 593 had in fact been so reduced in numbers that their tenure of it was little more than an honourable fiction. Their exhausted and half-frozen survivors were still on the

ground, fixed to it by a frosty pride; but they did not control the ground, and on the summit of the hill the enemy held in strength the ruins of an old fort. The forward slopes of the ridge were quite untenable, being under fire from Point 575, twelve hundred yards to the west, and from Monte Cassino to the east. Before they could attack the Monastery the 7th Brigade had therefore to do more than accept possession of Point 593: they had to fight for it.

The attack on the Monastery had to be postponed, and this, as it happened, suited the New Zealand Division that was proposing simultaneously to cross the Rapido below Cassino. The crossing was to be made on the site of the demolished railway bridge, where tanks could approach the river on the embankment; but the floods were so deep and general that for the present even infantry—who do not often recognise the impossible—could not cross the flat fields near the railway station. Better weather, moreover, was needed for the bombing of the Monastery, which, it had been reluctantly decided, was an inevitable necessity. The Monastery was the hub of the German defensive system.

St. Benedict had founded it early in the Sixth Century, the Lombards had sacked it before the century was out, it had been rebuilt and then destroyed by the Saracens and restored again, and in the Nineteenth Century it would have ceased to be a monastery, in the general dissolution of monasteries, had it not been for the shocked remonstrance of its English admirers. It survived the political danger and became a national monument. It had, however, already been converted into a fortress, and as the same vast unscalable walls that enclosed its spiritual purpose served also a secular intention, they were doomed to destruction as had been the earlier masonry that Lombards and Saracens had tumbled down. The walls, of prodigious thickness, rose sheer from the face of the rock. We had no guns heavy enough to breach them, and the main gate was the only entrance, General Tucker, commanding the 4th Indian Division, asked for heavy bombers to serve as siege artillery and his request was approved and granted.

On February the 14th the weather forecast was *Fair at first, risk of rain to-morrow*. All day the weather remained fine, but still threatened to grow worse, and it was decided to bomb on the following morning, though our forward troops did not expect the bombardment till the following day, and could not now be withdrawn before it began. The bombardment, however, was very accurate, and out of three hundred and fifty tons dropped by a mixed fleet of two hundred and fifty-five heavy and medium

bombers, only a dozen missiles went astray. The Monastery was wrecked, the outer wall breached, but so thick was the wall that none of the fractures was complete.

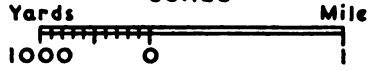
It was unfortunate that although the bombardment had been put forward, the infantry attack on the Monastery could not be advanced, for a battalion of the Rajputana Rifles and another battalion of the Gurkha Rifles, which were to support the 7th Brigade, were still on the other side of the Rapido. But an attack on Point 593 was essayed when the last of the bombers had flown home, and a company of the Royal Sussex tried to rush the hilltop but after losing heavily were stopped by a ravine not shown on the map. Next day fighter-bombers again assailed the Monastery, and at night the Sussex, finding a way round the ravine, fought hard, at close grenade-range, for possession of the ruined fort on the summit of the hill; but lost twelve officers and a hundred and thirty men without the compensation of success.

That the attack must be made in greater strength was now quite obvious; but equally obvious were the almost prohibitive difficulties of assembling and supplying a larger force in a restricted space under the enemy's close observation. Nevertheless, the task was accepted, and with five battalions under command and the equivalent of another battalion to serve as porters, the 7th Indian Brigade prepared a new attack while the New Zealand Division made ready its assault on the town of Cassino. On the 17th fighter-bombers came out again to drop a small weight of bombs on the Monastery ruins, and for a very heavy concentration of artillery targets were selected with some difficulty: our advanced troops were so near the enemy that direct support was impossible, but a great volume of shells would be poured on the enemy's probable areas of assembly. At midnight the Rajputana Rifles, with three companies of Sussex under command, went through a hail of grenades and machine-gun and mortar-fire to capture at heavy cost Point 593; and on their left two companies of the 1st/2nd Gurkhas, advancing towards the Monastery, were stopped almost at once in a belt of scrub. In aerial photographs the scrub had appeared to be an ordinary and innocent growth, but in reality it was neck-high and stiffly thorned. Within a grenade's throw of the starting-line, moreover, were German concrete and steel emplacements, undiscovered because close reconnaissance was never possible, from which now came a storm of fire that struck down the greater part of the leading companies; yet the survivors fought on, many of them wounded, and in the darkness closed with the enemy and drove him from some of his

MAP No.17.

CASSINO

SCALE



Cle. Abate
▲915

Terelle

● Manna

▲720
M. Castellone
751▲

▲706

▲585
Cle. S. Angelo

465 ▲
445 ▲

▲596

▲575 Massa Albana
▲593 ▲450

M. Maiola
▲291

▲175

Castle Hill
▲236 165▲
Cassino

Monastery

374▲

Highway 6.

Stn.

Highway 6.

Rapido R.

Cairo

Rapido R.

strongholds. But now, of the two companies, only a handful of Gurkhas remained, and these were ordered to withdraw and dig themselves in.

On the right the Rajputana Rifles had repelled a German counter-attack; but under intense fire were unable to advance over the forward slopes of Point 593 to Point 444 nearer the Monastery; which accordingly was attacked and taken by a company of the 1st/2nd Gurkhas which had not yet been committed, and which was speedily followed by three companies of the 1st/9th Gurkhas. But with the enemy overlooking it from either side, Point 444 would be untenable by day, unless the Monastery also were taken, and the Monastery could not be assaulted in daylight. Till dawn there was hand-to-hand fighting on Point 593, and more counter-attacks were beaten off; but the forward slopes could not be cleared in time, and in darkness that was already wearing thin the much weakened battalions were re-organised so that when dawn came there were three short companies of the Rajputana Rifles on the reverse slopes of Point 593, with one in reserve, and the Sussex on the ridge behind them and the Punjabis to the east. At eleven o'clock the Gurkhas were withdrawn from Point 444 and both battalions dug in on the northern face of Point 450.

At the foot of Monte Cassino, where the New Zealanders had been fighting to cross the Rapido, an equal gallantry had been equally unavailing. Its purpose had been to assist in capture of the town by attacking to the south and so, if town and Monastery fell into our hand, afford the Division an entrance into the Liri Valley. To the 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade fell the duty of securing a bridgehead below the demolished railway-crossing, while an armoured Task Force made ready to advance along the embankment. The 28th Maori Battalion was to lead the attack, and on February the 17th it concentrated north-west of Monte Trocchio, between the railway and Highway 6, with its assault-boats and bridging equipment. When darkness fell two companies advanced, under fire from Cassino and Monastery Hill, over water-logged fields that had been sown with mines, and crossing a couple of streams were checked by wire in front of the strongly defended railway station. Violent effort gave them possession of the station before dawn, but the enemy still held a block of houses to the north of it, a little knoll to the south, and though sappers worked within point-blank range of the German riflemen to open the minefields that protected these strongpoints, daylight came before they had finished. Daylight came, and from the wreckage of the railway

station the Maoris looked at Monte Cassino towering before them, at the enemy's strongpoints on either side, and behind them the impassable sodden fields and the breached embankment. With marvellous speed the sappers had already bridged the streams they had crossed, but there were still gaps in the embankment and neither tanks nor anti-tank guns could come to the aid of the diminished infantry companies.

During the morning the station was heavily mortared, and in the afternoon the Germans counter-attacked in strength with infantry from the west and tanks from Cassino. After stubborn fighting and the loss of many men the company in the station was over-run, and the rest of the battalion was forced to withdraw across the Rapido. On the other side it was relieved by the 24th Battalion.

The possibility had already been considered—and abandoned—of turning to advantage the Maoris' brief tenure of the station and the enemy's preoccupation with the 7th Indian Brigade on the heights. An attack on the town from the north was the logical next-step; but logic was defeated by topography, for the northern approach was dominated by Castle Hill, which rose, unassailable, on a sheer cliff. And now stalemate was recognised on the heights, and it was admitted that the Indians had no chance of winning the Monastery until Point 575, on the enemy's left, could be secured; and to do that would require three battalions to hold the line and another brigade to attack on the flank. It was decided to reorganise and bring two brigades onto the heights; but this movement was never completed, for belatedly it was recognised that the whole plan of attack would have to be changed.

The difficulties of a mountain-assault had been under-estimated, and the best excuse for this maybe that the fighting abilities of the 4th Indian Division were so highly esteemed. It had seen at least as much action as any other division in the Allied armies. It had played a major part in General Wavell's marvellous double victory in the early days in Africa, it had learnt its trade on the North-West Frontier, it had served in Syria and fought in Tunisia. It had known occasional rebuffs, but victory was its old acquaintance and Monte Cassino may well have been considered as but another battle-field for its tale of conquest. But those wintry peaks and sharp ravines, covered and swept by a murderous cross-fire, were a more fearful obstacle even than the sun-scorched cliffs of Keren, and the sloughs of the valley of the Rapido a greater abomination than the breathless oven-heat of Eritrean passes. The Division's own vehicles had stuck fast in the engulfing mud of the valley, and

it had been compelled to borrow from the Americans their more useful six-wheeled trucks. For the mountain ascent five companies of porters and eight hundred mules had been needed. Casualties among them had been heavy, for the route was always under fire, and there were no more mules available. To muster and supply a larger force on the heights was impossible, and to the meagre force assembled there the Monastery was impregnable. That was the situation, and this new assessment of the problem of taking Monte Cassino by assault, in winter cold and winter rain, judged it insoluble.

But the offensive could not be abandoned, for at Anzio the Germans were counter-attacking with desperate energy to win the victory they needed so badly, and on the Liri Valley front there could be no such relaxation as might encourage them in Latium. New plans were considered, and it was quickly decided that the eastern approach to Monte Cassino offered no hope, for it was covered by the enemy's strongest defences and the lowlands were still too soft and wet for armoured vehicles and transport. But American troops had still a foothold in the northern outskirts of the town, and though that approach was covered from Monastery Hill and that part of the town dominated by Castle Hill with its steep rock-face, honey-combed with machine-gun posts, Castle Hill might be reached through the town itself, and from there to the Monastery lay a potential route over small intervening peaks. True, the Americans had found it impossible to capture the town, but since their unavailing efforts the bombardment of the Monastery had reminded authority of the awful power of aerial assault, and to open a way for the infantry it was decided to paralyse the street-defences with a great weight of bombs. The new attack, on the ground and from the air, was to be made on February the 24th; and in preparation for it the New Zealanders relieved the Americans who still held positions on the fringe of Cassino and on Highway 6 to the east.

In ancient Rome the New Year did not come in till March; and it now seems probable that the ancient Romans knew more than we about their native climate. The February of 1944 certainly lay in the butt-end of winter, and on the 24th it was raining heavily. Steadily, without pity or remission, it went on raining. The troops stood ready to move at short notice, and the meteorologists of the Allied Air Force searched the skies in vain and combed the winds without profit for hope of improvement. The heavy bombers could not take off from water-logged runways, nor could they bomb with

precision except in fine weather. And still it rained, and snow fell on the mountain-heights where, week after week, the 7th Indian Brigade held their grim sangars in despite of German mortars, German machine-guns, and all the malignity of nature. Never have troops endured with more patient valour the peril and abominations of war than did these men of the 1st Royal Sussex, the 4th/16th Punjab Regiment, and the 1st/2nd Gurkha Rifles in their vigil on the rocks. It was impossible to relieve them, and their open positions, on narrow ground so closely overlooked, could not be much improved. In their lines and on the supply route they lost an average of sixty men a day, but the remainder held their ground. For four interminable weeks they held it, until the rain stopped and the sun came out, and at long last the bombers took-off from the plain of Foggia.

To capture Cassino and establish a bridge over the Rapido to the south of it: that was the purpose of the new operation, and to achieve it the 6th New Zealand Brigade and the 5th Indian Brigade were available for the immediate assault. Already in the line, from the right flank of the 7th Indian Brigade, which was in touch with an Algerian Division of the French Expeditionary Corps, to the left wing on the Rapido opposite Sant Angelo, was the equivalent of one division; and the 78th was to be committed as soon as it was possible to exploit success. The first objectives were Castle Hill and that part of the town north of Highway 6, and to complete, as it was hoped, the paralysis induced by the air attack a very numerous artillery would fire a slow barrage and bombard the enemy's batteries and defences. The New Zealand Corps' own artillery, the Xth Corps, and the American Field Artillery battalions contributed an impressive total of six hundred and ten pieces of all calibres, and twelve hundred tons of shell were allotted for their several tasks.

Cassino was now held by the 1st Parachute Division, which had relieved the 15th Panzer Grenadiers in the last days of February. The new division was the most redoubtable of all the enemy's formations in Italy. Fervent believers in the Nazi doctrine and imbued with a remarkable esprit de corps, the Parachute soldiers were admirably trained, individually resourceful, and fanatical fighters. Seven battalions, including a machine-gun battalion, were deployed on Monte Cassino and in the town, and in the later stages of the battle three additional battalions were also engaged. They had very little armour and less than two hundred guns, of which only a few were heavy pieces; but they had many mortars and about twenty nebelwerfers and the advantage of the ground gave them

superb observation, so that their artillery could be used to full advantage, while our more numerous guns, with indifferent observation, had to be sited on a flank and could rarely give close support to troops in the town. The New Zealanders' vast superiority in armour was nullified by the bombing attack, which converted the town into an impassable tank-obstacle.

During the night of March the 14th the 24th New Zealand Battalion withdrew to a distance of a thousand yards from the northern fringes of Cassino, and at half-past eight on the following morning the first bombers arrived. Three hundred and thirty-eight heavy bombers and a hundred and seventy-six mediums took part in the attack, which with brief intervals was maintained for four hours. The medium bombers were very accurate in their aim, but not all the heavies were so fortunate. Venafro, some dozen miles away, was three times mistaken for Cassino and bombed by about thirty aircraft, causing regrettable casualties among our soldiers and Italian civilians. Individual craft made errors in navigation or identification that allowed them to cast their missiles as far afield as Isernia and Trocchio and Cervaro. And though the Air Corps had originally estimated that six hundred tons of bombs would produce the effect desired, the total dropped was in fact about a thousand tons.

The immediate results of the attack were gratifying, and by the evening of the 15th the greater part of the totally ruined town had been captured. In the northern and easterly parts many Germans had been killed, resistance had been crushed among the falling masonry, and the New Zealanders went in at little cost. But in the west and south-west a still numerous enemy emerged from deep shelters and fought very fiercely and effectively. Their morale was apparently undiminished, and though prisoners taken early in the northerly ruins declared that the bombing had been devastating, psychiatrists who quickly examined a score of them found symptoms of nervous collapse only in one.

Under the barrage that immediately followed the bombing the 6th New Zealand Brigade advanced with the 25th Battalion leading, which found progress difficult through the extraordinary chaos of the shattered streets, but turning west from the town attacked Castle Hill and took it, after stubborn fighting, by half-past four. Half an hour later the 26th Battalion, within a couple of hundred yards of Highway 6, was held up by two strongpoints on either side of it: the Continental Hotel and a building four hundred yards to the east. The 24th Battalion was ordered to its assistance, and

though the process of clearing the ruins was slower than had been anticipated, partly because of the fantastic obstacles created by the bombing, partly because of the unexpected resistance in the south, there was at this time still good hope of ultimate success. And then the weather broke. Not moonlight to illumine craters and tumbled walls and hostile snipers, but inky clouds and a drenching rain obscured the night, blinding the attackers but covering the defenders—who knew their way about the place—and permitting their return to many tenable positions.

Rain, darkness, and heavy fire on the western outskirts also impeded the 5th Indian Brigade when it followed the New Zealanders into the town, and moved out of it towards Castle Hill and the Monastery. Before midnight the Essex had relieved the New Zealanders in the Castle and taken Point 165, three hundred yards farther on; but the Indian battalions were less fortunate. Two companies of the Rajputana Rifles, advancing from the Castle to capture the Hairpin Bend (Point 236) were shelled by our own artillery, and compelled to retire; while the Battalion lost its Headquarters, obliterated by a direct hit, and all its remaining officers were killed or wounded. West of the town the Gurkhas were held by fire, except for one company which lost touch and went on to capture Hangman's Hill (Point 435), the battalion's objective only four hundred yards under the Monastery; and there it remained, isolated and unsupported, until the following afternoon.

The night's rain had flooded the cratered road, and sappers estimated that it would take two days to clear a path through the town. The New Zealand infantry, therefore, got little support from their armour, though half a dozen tanks that found a way in were successful in dealing with snipers' posts, and fought their way a little farther to the south. Scissor-bridging tanks were used to close small gaps, and with their aid two troops came to the assistance of the 26th Battalion, which was held near the Botanical Gardens where Highway 6 enters the town. The Continental Hotel was still strongly defended. During the night more tanks approached the eastern outskirts, and at dawn on the 17th the attack was resumed. The Botanical Gardens were shelled, and then cleared by the tanks in a couple of hours fighting. The 26th Battalion advanced on the railway station, and though held at first on open ground by mortar-fire from the south-west, by gunfire and mortar from Monastery Hill, went on again under cover of smoke laid by the Corps artillery and its concentrated bombardment of the enemy's positions; and by six o'clock had captured the station and the two strongpoints

which, a month before, had defied the Maoris. But no advance had been possible west of the Gardens, and the enemy had regained two positions at the foot of Castle Hill.

The Indians, in the meantime, had again attacked the Hairpin Bend, which dominated all that part of the hillside, and the Rajputana Rifles had captured it before midnight of the 16th but lost it to a vigorous counter-attack before dawn. The Gurkhas reached Hangman's Hill just in time to save the lonely company which held it, and now was being violently attacked; but Point 202 some four hundred yards to the east, remained in the enemy's possession. The problem of supplying the Brigade was extremely difficult, for the Germans had full observation of the route to the Castle, and the rough hillside between there and Hangman's Hill was debatable land where anything might happen. For two nights the 4th/6th Rajputana Rifles, the Brigade's only reserve, served as porters and escorts for porters, and on the 18th were relieved by the Machine-gun Battalion of the same regiment; though by then it was impossible to reach Hangman's Hill, and the Gurkhas had to be supplied from the air. Their rations came somewhat erratically, but they tightened their belts and held their ground, a storm-swept island of resistance, for another week.

With Hangman's Hill and the Railway Station in our hands, the situation looked fairly promising; and yet the promise was delusory, for the Indians could not continue the attack without reinforcement, and the New Zealanders were faced by an enemy who, though he now held but little of the town, held the most vital part of it, astride the highway, in which almost every ruin concealed a machine-gun-post supported by cross-fire and covering fire from neighbouring posts in a system invulnerable except to tanks, and well protected against tanks by huge water-brimming craters and mounds of impassable debris. Here and there small gains were made on the 18th, and Point 202 was captured. To offset this progress, however, the Germans had found a covered approach to the buildings they held at the foot of Castle Hill, and were reinforcing their positions there. The Castle Hill route was now so narrow that troops moving up to be deployed against the Monastery had to go through the Castle itself, whose entrance was the well-registered target for the enemy's weapons.

On the 19th a combined attack was made, and all day there was hard fighting that failed to take the enemy's principal positions. The New Zealanders began the attack before dawn, and the Maoris, fighting their way from house to house, reached the corner of

Highway 6 and with only the breadth of the street between them engaged the enemy in his main stronghold, the Continental Hotel. Hull-down in the rubble were two tanks, and among the shattered masonry many machine-guns. The Maoris took a hundred prisoners, but the Continental still defied them. And the 25th Battalion, in the north of the town, found a strongly reinforced enemy in deep dug-outs at the bottom of Castle Hill that also were impregnable.

The 5th Indian Brigade had planned to send the Essex forward to Hangman's Hill, whence they and the Gurkhas together would attack the Monastery. Unfortunately the Germans had chosen half-past five in the morning, when the Essex were making their preparatory movement, to attack the Castle in battalion strength under heavy fire from their guns and mortars. The attack was held, but half the Essex were confined in the Castle, and the other half, most gallantly fighting forward, were reduced to the number of a platoon when they reached Hangman's Hill. The attack on the Monastery was necessarily postponed, but hope was maintained by the good progress of a squadron of the 20th New Zealand Armoured Regiment which, coming down from the north, broke through the enemy's advance guard, until checked by his resistance on Point 593 and Point 575, and slowly advanced along an abominable mountain-trail towards the Monastery. If the armour could maintain its advance, then the infantry on Hangman's Hill—the 1st/9th Gurkhas, in company of the 4th/6th Rajputana Rifles, and a handful of the Essex—might justifiably attack. But the trail was so narrow, the ground on either side fell so abruptly away from it, that the tanks could only advance in single file. The trail became rougher, it was under fire, it had been mined. The Sherman tanks of the armoured column were withdrawn, and light tanks took their place. They made progress for a little while, but when a dozen had been disabled and another, after striking a mine, lay athwart the track and blocked it, they too had to retire.

That night there was necessary reorganisation in the town, and while the reliefs were taking place the Germans shelled and mortared the ruins and heavily engaged our active batteries. Sappers working to clear tank-roads were hindered by the bombardment, and under its cover the enemy again strengthened his positions, bringing troops down the ravine north of Castle Hill or over the Hairpin Bend. Both sides were now feeling the strain of battle, and Engineers of the Parachute Division were in the line as infantry;

but the Germans were still able to find reinforcements and bring them into battle. The Indians made yet another attempt to close the leak and control the situation by gaining the heights; while in the foul and reeking chaos of the town the New Zealanders fought for another day or two with dogged persistence to cross the highway and subdue the persistent defenders of the Continental. The moon was waning, and a dark night limited the hours of fighting, but the Germans, it was thought, must be near the breaking-point, and under cover of smoke-shells that blinded their guns and mortars on the high ground, another attack went in. There was very bitter fighting on the 22nd, but its profits were immaterial. The battle was over, and the end was deadlock. Though the Germans had been driven from all Cassino but its western fringe, their hold on that was strong; and by their possession of the Monastery and its satellite peaks they still dominated the ruined town.

The New Zealanders were too exhausted to maintain the attack, the 4th Indian Division had bled too deeply; in six weeks of fighting it had lost over three thousand officers and men. The 1st/9th Gurkhas, isolated on Hangman's Hill, declared they could hold it for another three days if, as was mooted, the 78th Division was brought in for a new assault on the Monastery; but after thorough consideration the idea was rejected and it was decided to stabilise our positions on a line running from the Castle to the Railway Station. The task remained of extricating their small garrisons from Hangman's Hill and Point 202, and under cover of a heavy barrage and a diversionary attack from the West Kents, who had taken over the Castle, this was done on the night of March the 24th. From Hangman's Hill ten officers and two hundred and forty-nine men of the Essex, Gurkhas, and Rajputana Rifles came back; three officers and forty-two other ranks of a company of the 24th New Zealand Infantry from Point 202. The New Zealand Corps was disbanded, and the formation passed under command to the XIIIth Corps.

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The Bridgehead in Latium

IN the United States VIth Corps, commanded by Major-General Lucas, that landed on the beaches of Anzio and Nettuno on January 22nd, there were at first almost as many British troops as

American. The British troops nominated for the assault were the reinforced 1st Infantry Division; the 46th Royal Tank Regiment; and the 2nd Special Service Brigade of the 9th and 43rd Commandos. The American contingent consisted of the reinforced 3rd Infantry Division, the 751st Tank Battalion, three battalions of Rangers, and the 504th Parachute Infantry Battalion. The second wave, however, would be wholly American: it would bring in half of the 1st Armoured Division, the 157th Regimental Combat Team of the 45th Division, and three battalions of Corps Artillery.

The task-forces which conveyed the assaulting troops to the beaches were commanded by Rear-Admiral Lowry, of the United States Navy, and Rear-Admiral Troubridge, Royal Navy. The soldiers and their primary weapons were embarked at Naples and near-by ports; and supplies, already loaded into lorries, were taken aboard tank-landing ships at Naples, or loaded in bulk in Liberty ships at North African ports. The uncertainty of January weather in the Western Mediterranean is such that only two fine days out of seven could realistically be anticipated; and the ships had therefore to be completely unloaded on to the beaches within forty-eight hours. But the beaches were exposed, and that on which the 1st Division landed was so difficult to approach that the men had to wade a hundred yards to reach it; the port of Anzio, which could accommodate vessels of shallow draft behind its long breakwater, would have to be opened and used as soon as possible. Nettuno was merely a sea-side resort of no particular use to the invaders.

To protect the disembarkation, both the Tactical and Strategic Air Forces, comprising rather more than sixty squadrons of fighters and bombers, were employed to isolate the area of assault by attacking the roads of access to it and any concentration of hostile troops within their range. The enemy's air force offered at first only a meagre threat to the operation, for by early January most of his long-range bombers had been destroyed or frightened from the sky.

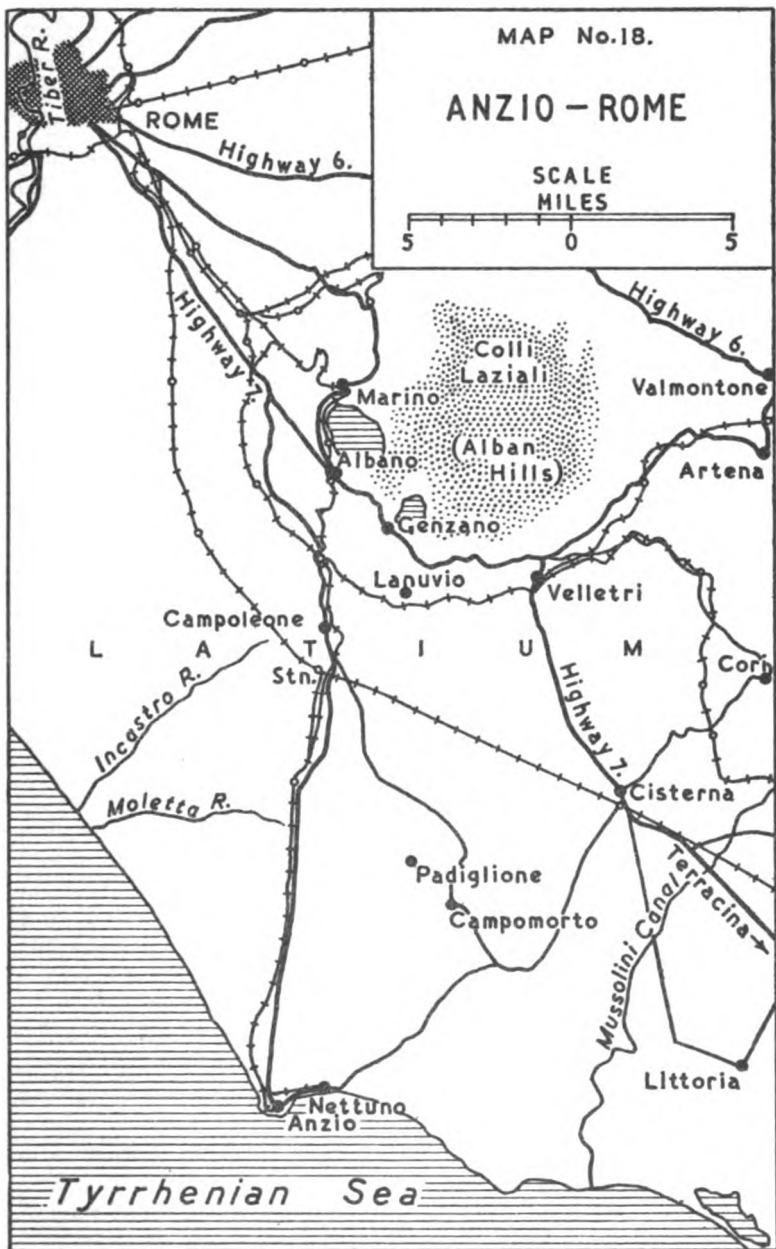
The plain of Anzio stretches inland for some twenty miles to the Alban Hills, which rise abruptly in volcanic slopes to a forbidding height of some three thousand feet. South-east of Anzio, the plain merges into the flat farm-lands reclaimed from the Pontine Marshes; north-west it swells and descends in wooded, undulating fields that extend to the river Tiber. From the inland hills, looking seaward over the plain, it appears to be quite level and mercilessly exposed to view; but in fact it offers useful cover in several parts. Immediately behind the port of Anzio there are four or five miles

of scrubby woodland, and north of the woods—soon to be crowded with bivouacs and supply dumps—the area is divided by the road that runs from Anzio to Highway 7 near Albano: west of the road the plain is deeply cut by gullies, in which shallow streams meander under banks as high as fifty feet; and east of the road, towards Cisterna, are cultivated fields and vineyards. Comparatively few of the invading troops remembered that Anzio had been the birth-place of the Emperors Caligula and Nero, but many thought gratefully of a more recent tyrant when they looked at the Mussolini Canal on the right flank of the beach-head; for with a breadth of nearly sixty yards, and sixteen feet of water in it, it made an admirable anti-tank obstacle and offered a most useful defence.

The landings were designed as the climax to the offensive which had been launched on January 15th, and were intended to lead directly to the capture of Rome. With this end in view, a Fifth Army Field Order of January 12th had ordered General Lucas to secure his beach-head, and then advance to the Alban Hills. The beach-head was to be seized by co-ordinated assault: the American 3rd Division would land its three regiments about four miles east of Anzio, while the Rangers and the Parachute Infantry put ashore on a little beach near the town to clear the harbour; six miles north-east of Anzio a brigade of the British 1st Division would land with our two Commandos, which would strike eastward to the road from Anzio and block it, while the remainder of the Division, initially in Corps reserve, would stand ready to fill any gaps between the leading forces; or to reinforce—if need be—the assault on the right, and meet the anticipated counter-attacks against it.

The sky was clear and the sea calm when the motley fleet of two hundred and forty-three vessels—Dutch, Greek, Polish and French, as well as British and American—put out from Naples on the 21st, and unobserved, unhindered by the enemy, reached its assembly position off the beaches, ready to disembark some 50,000 men and more than 5,000 vehicles. To avoid advertisement of hostile intention against Latium, there was no preliminary naval bombardment of the shore, but a little before two o'clock on the morning of the 22nd, under a still, moonless sky, a rocket-ship in the British fleet fired a salvo of seven hundred and eighty-five five-inch rockets against a suspected enemy's position. There was no answer, save the roaring echoes of their explosion. Nor was there an enemy on the beaches to oppose the soldiers who leapt and tumbled from the assault craft that reached the dark shore at two o'clock.

The enemy had been taken entirely by surprise. An elaborate



cover-plan had done something to bring this about. A feigned attack had been designed against Leghorn. An assembly of small craft and a radio-station on Corsica had advertised the fictitious intention, and a naval bombardment of Civitavecchia had possibly aggravated confusion. The Royal Navy had also been able to provide more direct assistance. The discomfiture of the enemy's blockade-runners in the Atlantic had released the 15th Cruiser Squadron for service in the Mediterranean, and on January 20th H.M. Ships *Orion*, *Spartan*, *Jervis*, *Janus*, *Laforey* and *Faulknor* bombarded coastal batteries near Terracina; and at day-break on the 22nd the cruisers hindered a possible reinforcement at Anzio by bombarding Terracina again, and Formia. But the weight and fierceness of the Xth Corps' offensive in the south was the most solid reason for the absence of German resistance at Anzio.

It had been expected that the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division with a considerable force of armour would be in position to oppose the landings; but that division and the 29th Panzer Grenadiers, who had been in Rome, were both engaged in furious battle on the Garigliano bridge-heads; and except for some coastal artillery positions, the enemy defences were unmanned and the only German unit in the neighbourhood—or for twenty-five miles on either side of Anzio—was one badly mauled battalion of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Regiment which was resting and refitting there.

This surprising combination of good weather, a calm sea and no opposition enabled the unloading of the assaulting fleets to proceed rapidly, and the forward infantry to move inland to secure their bridge-heads without difficulty. Shortly after mid-day on the 22nd, there was a continuous perimeter round the landing area and both the American and British troops were firmly established. Anzio and Nettuno were completely in our hands, and by nightfall the channel had been swept, and the port was open. The enemy's reaction had been confined to occasional gunfire, and a small air-raid in the afternoon; while the Allied Air Forces flew over twelve hundred sorties that day and dropped two million leaflets to announce an Allied landing only thirty miles from Rome. But this attempt to forge a psychological weapon had unfortunate consequences when the excitement aroused in Rome was turned to sour disillusion by the Allied failure to exploit the landings.

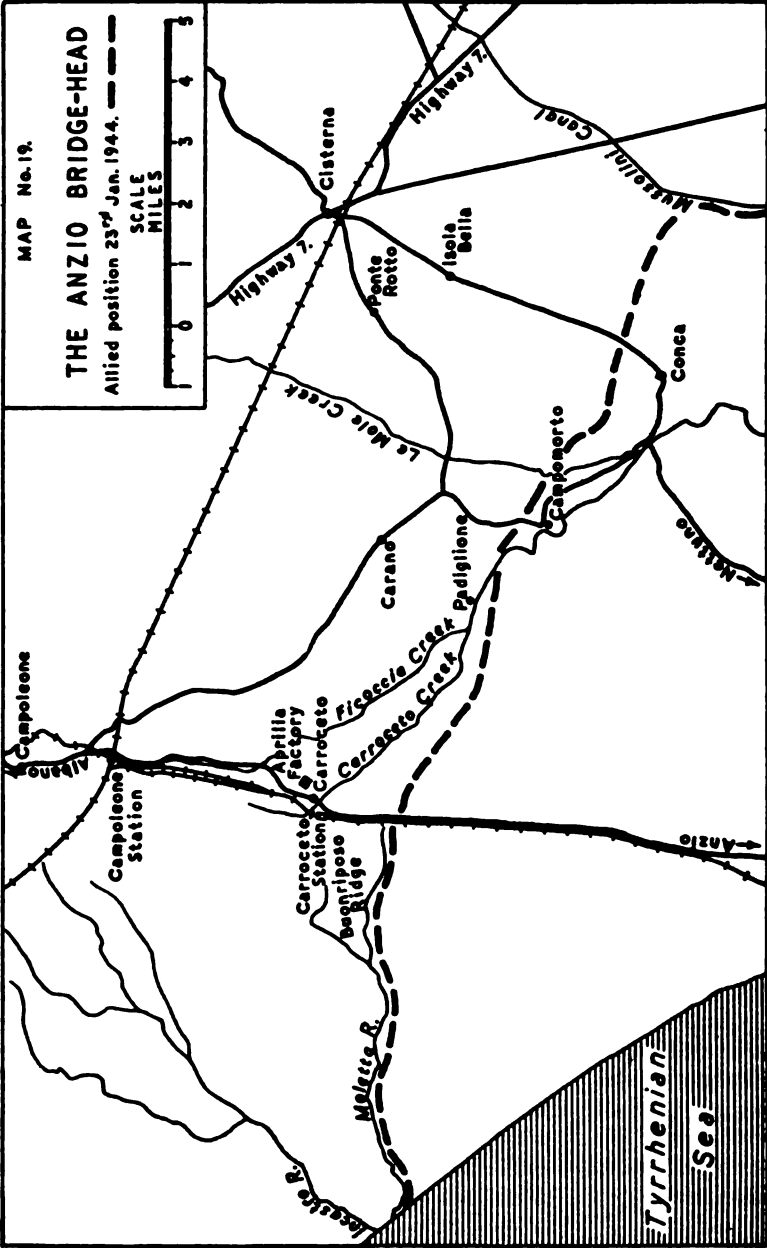
The following day, January 23rd, was employed in consolidating an area approximately seven miles deep by fifteen miles wide within a perimeter of some twenty-six miles. In the British sector west of the Albano road among the deep, harsh-sided gullies, the river

Moletta was our boundary; east of the road the line ran across fields for some four miles to meet a branch of the Mussolini Canal below the village of Padiglione, and from there the whole right flank of the bridge-head was most usefully protected by the Canal. It was already possible to unload eight tank-landing ships a day, and a great number of tank-landing craft, in Anzio in good weather; and that perfect co-operation between the services, which had done so much to bring early success to the expedition, was clearly evident in the busy harbour. The invading Corps grew to real strength as heavy guns, tanks, ammunition and stores were disembarked.

On the main front a special order from Hitler was captured on the 24th: 'The Gustav Line must be held at all costs for the sake of the political consequences that would follow a successful defence of it. The Fuhrer expects the bitterest struggle for every yard.'—And so, while his reserves were committed to battle against the French and the Xth Corps, there was quiet on the Anzio front; but already the roads leading to it, from the east and the south and the north, were gathering a momentous traffic, and over the ships at sea the early peace was soon broken. At dusk on the 23rd the two hospital-ships, *St. David* and *Leinster*, lying fully lighted off shore, were attacked by air-craft, and hit; and the former was sunk. The destroyer *Janus* was hit and sunk by a glider-bomb, and an American ship was sunk by a mine.

There were gales on the 24th and 26th, but still the tank-landing ships were discharging 1,500 tons of stores a day, ready loaded in lorries, of which sixty per cent was ammunition. Forty tank-landing ships were in service on a ferry-run from Naples, and Liberty ships from Africa, lying off-shore, used tank-landing craft as lighters, or unloaded into Ducks, of which over four hundred were in service. By January 29th, the VIth Corps had nearly 70,000 men ashore with 508 guns, 237 tanks, and 27,000 tons of stores—though the enemy's artillery and aircraft had been harassing shipping and the harbour with increasing severity. His 88 mm. and 170 mm. batteries were now shelling the bridge-head and the port with embarrassing accuracy, mines were laid in the sea-lanes, two bomber-groups arrived from Greece and the valley of the Po, and aircraft based in the south of France made torpedo and glider-bomb attacks on the off-shore fleet. At dusk on the 29th, in a violent assault by more than a hundred aircraft, the new cruiser *Spartan* and a Liberty ship were sunk.

By a fortunate combination of good weather, energy and a sound organisation, the invading force had been built into a powerful



striking force; but it was not used with speed enough to achieve the results which had been hoped for. Not until January 27th did General Lucas resolve to launch his attack towards the Alban Hills; and the attack was not made until the 30th. And Kesselring, by then, was ready to meet it. Kesselring's first reaction to the invasion had been to muster a defensive force to meet its immediate threat; and when—without budging from the Gustav line—he decided that his lines of communication were in no great danger, he was content to observe our movements in the bridge-head, the steady building of our strength, and while resisting further expansion, to wait patiently until he had gathered a force strong enough for a counter-attack which would, he hoped, altogether eliminate the new menace to Rome.

He had just combed his Tenth Army for a force to contain the bridge-head, and found about three divisions. Then, aware of the Eighth Army's inability to advance, he withdrew the 26th Panzer Division from its sector, and from his main front brought the 3rd Panzer Grenadier and Hermann Goering Divisions to form a mobile force for counter-attack. From North-west Italy and France came the equivalent of two weak divisions, and another was mustered in central Italy. This was the force that molested the bridge-head, and defeated General Lucas's tardy resolve to exploit his successful landing.



The Battle of the Bridgehead

THOUGH the success of the landings had been a welcome surprise, it was discounted by the German reinforcement of the Gustav Line and the Xth Corps' failure to break it. So far from there being any sign of a German withdrawal from the south, there was the strongest proof of the enemy's decision to hold his ground; and confronted by a static situation instead of the fluid conditions which he had expected, General Lucas was reluctant to adventure quickly inland lest a too precipitate thrust should be cut off. He therefore decided to consolidate his position, and while awaiting reinforcements to reconnoitre along his main axes of advance towards the intermediate objectives of Cisterna and Campoleone. These objectives, if secured, would provide useful bases for a decisive attack on the Alban Hills.

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Campoleone was the British 1st Division's objective. The 24th Guards Brigade, which had been in Corps reserve, was released on the arrival of the American 179th Regimental Combat Team, and led the assault after the 2nd Brigade on the afternoon of the 24th had won in stiff fighting the Buon Riposo ridge overlooking the Moletta River, and thereby secured the division's left flank. The Guards met their first opposition in the factory buildings at Aprilia. The factory, which included a model village and shopping centre built by a Fascist organisation for the workers, covered a considerable area and soon acquired a sinister and violent reputation. On January 25th the Guards found it already occupied by troops of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and after an abortive company attack the 5th Grenadiers with powerful artillery support successfully stormed it and took over a hundred prisoners. Supported by the Irish Guards, they broke and repelled a very strong counter-attack on the following day, and took another fifty prisoners. But the Germans continued to show disapproval of this advance by a heavy artillery bombardment and aerial attack.

The American advance towards Cisterna began at dawn on the 25th after a preliminary reconnaissance across the Canal, on the previous afternoon, had failed to make headway against a mobile force of the Hermann Goering Division. The attack went in along the roads from Campomorto and Conca, but after an advance of less than two miles, it was stopped by unexpectedly strong resistance; and a renewed assault on the 26th and 27th was halted some three miles from Cisterna.

Despite the Air Forces' continuing attack on the roads of access, Kesselring had by now concentrated three full divisions round the bridge-head, and others were on their way. His defences, however, still consisted only of road-blocks, field fortifications of hurried construction, and mine-fields. The line that he appeared to be building along the railway between Campoleone and Cisterna was intended, it was thought, to impose delay while he prepared his main defences on the high ground in the neighbourhood of Cori and Velletri. The steady growth of the enemy's strength was disconcerting, but General Lucas had under his command more than four divisions when he launched, on January 30th, a full-scale attack towards the hills.

His plan was to set the American 3rd Division astride Highway 7 to strike north-west towards Velletri; while in the centre the British 1st Division would advance on the Albano road to seize the slopes above Albano and Genzano; and on the left the American 1st

Armoured Division was disposed to attack the high ground above Marino on the western flank of the Alban Hills. On the flanks of the bridge-head the 1st and 3rd Divisions had been relieved by the American 45th, and in the quietness of its centre the British 1st Reconnaissance Regiment had taken over from the American Rangers.

From January 27th to the 30th the only activities on the 1st Division's front had been patrolling and re-grouping. On the evening of the 29th the 24th Guards Brigade went forward to new positions covering the area of Carrocetto and Aprilia from about a thousand yards to the north, while the 3rd Infantry Brigade—to which, in General Penney's divisional plan, the first phase of the main attack had been entrusted—came into the Guards' previous position in the Factory. Before midnight on the 29th the Guards launched a preliminary attack; and the Scots Guards on the right suffered sorely at a road-block, but with heavy losses pushed through to their objective, while the Irish on the left met still fiercer opposition and in the morning, exposed on both flanks to the fire of hull-down tanks and self-propelled guns, had to retire to ground south of the Scots. A company of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, with tanks of the 46th Royal Tank Regiment, boldly restored the situation, and by the end of the morning the Guards were firmly established, and the 3rd Brigade, behind them, was ready to attack.

By nightfall the 1st Shropshires and the 1st Duke of Wellington's had defeated scattered opposition and were digging-in on high ground south of the Campoleone railway-line. After a night of almost continuous artillery bombardment the 2nd Foresters, with tanks of the 46th Royal Tank Regiment, resumed the attack and fought a desperate battle to cross the railway embankment. The houses on the far side of the line had been converted into strongholds, and from the enemy's tanks and guns came such a withering fire that the Foresters, who had crossed the embankment with the greatest difficulty, found it impossible to remain on the far side. The enemy was in great strength, and despite the strongest artillery support that could be provided, and the help of American tanks, the attempt to reach Campoleone had to be abandoned. The American 1st Armoured Division, which unavailingly had lent its tanks to support the Foresters, had also been defeated in its attempt to take up the advance on the left of the British attack. The country there was quite impossible for tanks, which either capsized into precipitous gullies or bogged-down in their soft bottoms.

The American attack towards Cisterna had been led by the 1st

and 3rd Ranger Battalions, who, starting an hour after midnight—an hour before the main attack went in—were intended to filter through the enemy's outposts and under cover of darkness cross four miles of open fields. But within half a mile of Cisterna they came disastrously into an ambush, and despite desperate resistance, and the 3rd Division's sturdy efforts to help them, they were surrounded. Out of nearly eight hundred men only six escaped.

The 4th Ranger Battalion was stopped on the road to Isola Bella, but the 3rd Battalion of the 15th Infantry went round on the right and took the battered village; while the 1st Battalion, to the right again, made an advance of a mile and a half on a parallel road. On the left, attacking northward to cut Highway 7 above Cisterna, the 7th Infantry were hindered by deep drainage ditches, that stopped their escorting armour, and at dawn came under prohibitive fire and were counter-attacked by newly-arrived troops of the 1st Parachute Division. They had made half the distance to Cisterna, and on the afternoon of the 31st, within two miles of the town, resumed their attack with the support of every gun that could be brought to bear but without much help from the air; rain-clouds hung low above the plain, and most of our air-craft were grounded. A furious battle followed, in which the Germans lost heavily in men and armour, but by noon on February 1st it became apparent that Cisterna could not be taken. It lay less than a mile away, but every house on the way to it had become a stronghold, the enemy appeared to have been reinforced by the bulk of the 26th Panzer Division, and the American 3rd Division had exhausted its effort.

The belief had been falsified that Campoleone and Cisterna were only the bastions of a delaying-line; Kesselring had been given time enough to establish his main resistance there, and the VIth Corps had failed to break through. But a prospect more dangerous than stalemate confronted the invaders for German reinforcements were still arriving. From the south of France the 715th Light Division had come swiftly down the west coast in its own transport, and formations had also arrived from the 65th Grenadier Division in Genoa, the 114th Light Division in Istria, from the 16th and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions and the 71st Grenadiers; from Florence and Trieste and the southern front they came, till by February 1st there were not only the constituents, but the organisation of a purposive army arrayed against the invaders.

From Verona General von Mackensen had brought the headquarters of the Fourteenth Army, and disposing his forces in two Corps—the 1st Parachute Corps against the British, west of the road

to Albano, and the LXXVIth Panzer Corps in the eastern sector—not only confined the bridgehead but revealed an increasing threat of attack. The weakness of our position was evident. The bridgehead was so small that any part of it could be reached by the German artillery; there was little room for defence in depth; and if a German counter-attack decisively broke the perimeter, its momentum would almost certainly carry it to the sea and split our strength in two. On February 1st General Alexander had advised a continuation of the offensive, on a limited scale, to extend the area as far as the river Incastro and include within it the two strongholds of Cisterna and Campoleone; but as this was impossible, the VIth Corps prepared for defence within its existing lines. And now when the expedition had so disastrously failed in its intention, its reputation was to be redeemed. Now, with their backs to the sea, the imprisoned soldiers were to fight with so stubborn a valour, with such indomitable resolve that the memory of lost chances and opportunity unused would be obscured by the spectacle of men who defied the odds against them, and let their spirit triumph in the most sullen circumstance. Now, when strategy seemed bankrupt, began the soldiers' battle, and from the wildest improbability the soldiers exacted victory.

Hitler had ordered the elimination of what he described as the 'abscess' south of Rome, and von Mackensen's attempt to carry out his orders can be divided into three phases. There was, first, a local attack on the British salient at Campoleone; second, a full-scale assault down the Albano road that was intended to reach the sea; third, an attack from Cisterna with the intention, at least, of reaching the Mussolini Canal. The first attack began on February 3rd. Von Mackensen was not yet in a position to launch a major offensive, but he had more than sufficient troops for a limited attack, and the narrow salient which the 1st Division had driven towards Campoleone was vulnerable. Some four miles deep, its apex was no more than a mile and a half broad where the 3rd Infantry Brigade had intruded far into the enemy's territory. On the left flank the 24th Guards Brigade had relieved the American Armoured Division and lay in front of the Buon Riposo ridge; on the right were the 6th Gordons and the 1st Loyals of the 2nd Infantry Brigade, with part of the 1st Reconnaissance Regiment. West of the road were deep and over-grown gullies in which the enemy could secretly assemble, and on the east the railway embankment concealed the assembly of hostile armour. The day was cold and heavy clouds obscured the sky.

In the late afternoon there was a small attack on the tip of the salient, which was repulsed. An hour before midnight the German guns brought heavy, concentrated fire to bear on its base. On the west, from the covered ravines, the enemy began to filter between the Scots and Irish Guards. A little later German infantry were fighting in the area held by the 2nd Brigade, and at three o'clock in the morning there was another diversionary attack on the apex. The enemy's intention was to cut deep wedges into both sides of the salient near its base, and so destroy the whole of the 3rd Brigade. The Irish Guards on the left and the 6th Gordons on the right bore the brunt of the fighting, and under a cold drizzle of rain the German tanks penetrated deeply into our lines and his numerous infantry came pouring after. Sherman tanks of the 46th Royal Tank Regiment counter-attacked, but were out-ranged by the German armour. The Irish Guards were isolated, but fought their way back into the main defence area of the Guards Brigade; and at four o'clock in the afternoon of February 4th the 1st London Scottish, of the newly-arrived 168th Brigade of the 56th Division, put in a resolute counter-attack supported by two squadrons of the 46th Royal Tank Regiment to regain the ground which the enemy had won in the middle of the salient, and so enable the 3rd Brigade to withdraw. The London Scottish were successful, and before darkness the Shropshires and Foresters withdrew behind a heavy barrage. The Duke of Wellington's had to wait until night fell, and then suffered heavily in its retreat; but by eleven o'clock the Brigade lay securely south of Carroceto, and the Germans, though they had succeeded in erasing the salient, had failed to achieve their more vital purpose. The Gordons and the London Scottish withdrew to positions covering Carroceto. The remnants of the Irish Guards went into reserve, and the London Irish Rifles of the 168th Brigade came in to the line on the right. The battle had cost us 1,400 casualties—killed, missing, and wounded—but German losses had also been heavy. The London Scottish had taken nearly three hundred prisoners in their counter-attack, and it was estimated that three-fifths of the five German battalions employed had been destroyed.

While this bitter fighting was going on, orders were issued for defence of the bridgehead and the invaders set about the task of transforming their offensive purpose into a programme of resistance. The flanks of the bridgehead on the Moletta River and the Mussolini Canal were fairly easily defensible. The 45th Division was responsible for the former, the newly arrived 1st Special Service Force for the latter. The British 1st Division on the left, the American

3rd Division on the right, would be responsible for the middle sector while the American 1st Armoured Division and the 45th Division provided a Corps reserve. The preparation of defensive positions in the centre was extremely difficult. Work could only be done under cover of darkness, and work was hampered by foul weather, hindered by artillery fire, and sometimes grossly halted by the irruption of battle.

For three days after our withdrawal from the Campoleone salient, the enemy made no large attack, but his patrols and artillery were always active, and on the night of February 5th the American 30th Infantry were surprised by a brisk assault and lost a defensive position at Ponte Rotto. That day, the air-strip at Nettuno had been heavily shelled by the now continuously active German heavy batteries, and five Spitfires were destroyed on the ground. The field was partially abandoned; but the German gun positions were engaged by some of our ships, and this counter battery work, directed by aerial reconnaissance, achieved some good results. The enemy's bombers were on the whole more troublesome than his guns. Butterfly-bombs caused many casualties among our forward troops, and on February 7th there were very heavy attacks on the port area, in which hospitals suffered as well as ammunition dumps; but the Germans paid heavily for their success. Twenty-four of their aircraft were brought down, and nearly a score were probably destroyed.

Evidence accumulated, in a sinister crescendo, of the enemy's intention. The British sector was again to be the battlefield. The German offensive was directed down the Albano road, and to the 65th Grenadier Division was delegated the capture of the Factory at Aprilia, and of Carroceto. Six full regiments were committed to the battle.

In the late evening of February 7th the German artillery bombarded both flanks of the 1st Division's sector, and before midnight there was heavy fighting along the left front. Infantry of the 145th Grenadier Regiment had crossed the Moletta, and taking advantage of a dark night and the ravines in that part of the country, thrust deeply into our position. The 2nd North Staffords shires bore the main weight of the attack along the Buon Riposo ridge, and when the ridge was lost the 5th Grenadiers and the 1st Scots Guards were involved, as was the 3rd Battalion of the American 157th Infantry. Throughout the morning of the 8th fighting continued as the German infantry tried to push forward from the ridge to the road, and to break through to Carroceto.

On the right where the London Irish, the 10th Royal Berkshires,

and a squadron of the 1st Reconnaissance Regiment were in the line, the 29th Panzer Grenadier Regiment employed the same tactics of rapid infiltration by small groups whose object was to penetrate as deeply as possible, cut communications, and establish offensive strong-points far behind our forward troops. But here, except for some local success, the attack made little progress, and despite the fiercest pressure throughout the 8th failed to gain the important lateral road from the Factory to Padiglione.

The 504th Parachute Infantry came into the line south of Carroceto to support the hard-pressed Scots Guards, but their counter-attack, supported by tanks of the 46th Royal Tank Regiment, was unsuccessful; and to redress the critical situation on the left, General Penney ordered two battalions of his divisional reserve—the 3rd Brigade—to recapture the lost positions of the North Staffordshires on the Buon Riposo ridge. The Foresters and the Shropshires, who made the attack, suffered heavily and took only a little of our lost ground; and the 504th Parachute Infantry, in a second attack, were no more successful; but these abortive actions were of material assistance to the Guards Brigade. North of Carroceto the Scots Guards, who had prevented infiltration of their line, repelled a heavy attack during the afternoon of the 8th; and while the enemy dug-in along the Buon Riposo ridge, the battered 1st Division made such re-disposition of its forces as was possible, and prepared to continue the battle.

It had spoiled the Germans of their hope to break through in a swift night-attack, but the effort had weakened it, and when the Germans renewed their assault on the 9th they achieved a more marked success. They used the same tactics as before. After heavy mortar and artillery fire their infantry began to filter through. On the Guards Brigade in front of Carroceto they made little impression, but the Shropshires and the Foresters were pushed south from the Buon Riposo ridge, and on the right the 735th Grenadier Regiment fought its way into the Factory.

The American 1st Armoured Division counter-attacked towards the ridge and up the Albano road without much effect. Tanks were mired as soon as they left the road, and the Germans had quickly covered their new-won ground with minefields, and fortified the Factory with anti-tank guns. Within the Guards' area, however, the Americans assisted in the repulse of a strong infantry attack and destroyed three of the enemy's tanks and two of his anti-tank guns; another company gave the London Scottish some help in sealing an enemy penetration east of the Factory.

Our artillery and naval guns were busy with counter-battery work, but in a gale of wind it was difficult to obtain observation from the air. The Fifth Army, however, sent two hundred bombers and fighter-bombers to attack assembly areas at Campoleone. The enemy as well as ourselves suffered heavy losses, and late in the afternoon of the 9th, when both sides were nearly exhausted, the battle died away except for continuing heavy fire against the Guards in their pitiless exposure to the north. The enemy consolidated his positions, and the 1st Division reorganised.

Its strength had been halved; and the American 180th Infantry were brought in to relieve the 2nd Brigade. The 168th Brigade held the right flank east and south of the Factory, the 3rd Brigade was disposed along the large ravine south of the Buon Riposo ridge, and the Guards still covered Carroceto with the Scots in a narrow salient astride the railway. With feverish intensity their tired and depleted companies strove through the darkness to improve their defences, and waited for the attack. They had not long to wait. Soon after midnight about fifteen tanks came out of the Factory, and with a battalion of infantry assailed the Scots. Gunfire and American tank-destroyers broke up the armoured attack, and the infantry were driven off. A few hours later the Grenadiers were under attack from three sides, and though they held out with the help of a squadron of the 46th Royal Tank Regiment, there now came bad news from the Scots. Contact had been lost with their two forward companies, and the remainder of the battalion had to withdraw behind the Grenadiers. At five o'clock in the morning of the 10th General Penney reported that his division could not hold without the help of a counter-attack by fresh troops who would have to take over much of his front.

The Air Forces and the Corps artillery gave him what help was possible. Two hundred guns broke up two enemy attacks that were forming at Carroceto railway station, and wave after wave of aircraft of the Strategic and Tactical Air Forces went into action against areas of assembly along the Albano road, until bad weather grounded them. But neither guns nor aeroplanes could reverse the success of the German infantry, and there was no consolation for lost ground save in the grim knowledge that it had not been cheaply won, nor won in the manner intended. The Germans had lost time and strength. They had hoped to take Carroceto railway station and the Factory in one night's fighting, but the battle had lasted three days and compelled the two Corps involved—the 1st Parachute and the LXXVIth Panzer—to employ more than twenty battalions.

Nor was the enemy's success admitted without further dispute.

Command of the 1st Division's much reduced sector—between Carroceto and a position just south of the Buon Riposo ridge—passed to the 3rd Brigade, which held it with its own three battalions forward, and the Irish Guards in reserve. The 2nd Brigade had already been relieved by the American 180th Infantry, and on the night of the 10th the 168th Brigade was relieved by a battalion of the 179th Infantry. The Guards Brigade reorganised in Divisional reserve, and the 45th Division prepared to counter-attack on the 11th with the support of the 1st Armoured Division.

The American counter-attack was launched against the Factory in the early morning of the 11th, and continued intermittently for twenty-four hours. Heavy bombardment by our artillery and Air Force inflicted more casualties on the enemy, but none of the lost ground was regained; and on the 12th the Germans made an attempt to renew their offensive with a battalion-attack against the 3rd Brigade's position on the railway embankment overlooking Carroceto. After hard fighting the attack was repelled; and on the other flank the Germans, digging in on the Buon Riposo ridge, were shelled and mortared throughout the day.

Except by continuously active patrols, there was little fighting on the ground for the next three days, but the Allied Air Force was strenuously engaged in almost unremitting attack on the enemy's lines of communication and gun positions. The 167th Brigade of the 56th Division arrived in the bridgehead—the 169th was on its way—and the 1st Division, its relief completed, passed into Corps reserve on the night of the 15th. Its sector was divided between the 56th Division on the left, with the three battalions of the 167th Brigade in the line, and the 157th Infantry of the American 45th Division on the right. Behind these fresh troops the Corps artillery was reinforced, and its four hundred and thirty-two pieces gave it a fire-power far exceeding the Germans': even before the three Field Regiments of the 56th Division arrived, the Allies guns were firing 25,000 rounds a day, to which the Germans replied with perhaps 1,500. But von Mackensen was busily regrouping and reinforcing his infantry for a new and larger offensive that was intended to split the Allied force, reach Anzio, and finally obliterate the bridgehead.

The Infantry Lehr Regiment, a demonstration unit, had come from Germany, with the 1027th and 1028th Panzer Grenadier Regiments; the remainder of the 114th Light Division arrived from

Yugoslavia; troops of the newly formed 362nd Grenadier Division were brought down from Venice; and the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division was transferred from the Gustav Line to be held in reserve until the concluding stages of the offensive. Regrouping was extensive in the centre of the front, where the 362nd Division relieved the regiments which had suffered in the last battle, and were now to be moved to the southern front. On the west the 1st Parachute Corps, reinforced, still held the line; the Hermann Goering Division remained in its eastward position. The enemy's plan was again to attack along the Albano road, with the 114th Light Division on the east, the 715th Light Division in the centre, the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division on the west; behind them lay the 26th and 29th Panzer Divisions, ready to exploit success. Miniature tanks, loaded with explosive and controlled from a distance, were added to the assaulting force, whose actual strength was exaggerated by propaganda for the encouragement of the German troops. Prisoners revealed much of the plan, and the date of the attack: the 16th.

At six o'clock in the morning the German barrage opened, and half an hour later, screened in the morning dusk by smoke, their tanks and infantry struck in a dozen different places at the 5th, 45th, and 3rd Divisions. The previous tactics of sending small groups to filter through our forward positions under darkness had been abandoned in favour of a sudden morning attack spread over a broad front to detain reserves and hide the main thrust.

On the 3rd Division's front there were half a dozen attacks all but one of which—north-west of Ponte Rotto, where fighting went on till mid-afternoon—were repelled without much difficulty. Against the 56th Division, where the 167th Brigade was in the line, an attack from over the river Moletta made disconcerting progress between the 9th and 8th Royal Fusiliers, but was wiped out by tanks of the 46th Royal Tank Regiment; and in an assault on the centre of the line, from the Buon Riposo ridge, the forward companies of the 8th Royal Fusiliers and the 7th Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry were over-run. But the enemy made no attempt to exploit his success in what seemed to have been only a diversionary attack; and the Division had time to bring up the 168th Brigade to counter-attack.

It was in the 45th Division's sector that the enemy intended to break through, and here his possession of Carroceto and the Factory was of the utmost advantage to him. His tanks, in groups of four or eight, would emerge from the concealment of ruined buildings to

fire at close range against the entrenched infantry of the 157th and 179th Regiments, until their ammunition was exhausted; when they would retire into shelter to replenish their stores. German infantry, in co-ordinated attack, advanced down the Carroceto and Filoccia creeks. The 179th Infantry repelled all attacks, though its forward companies on the Carroceto creek had to withdraw a little way; and the Germans appeared to lose fairly heavily in both men and armour. The biggest concentration of gunfire fell on the 2nd Battalion of the 157th Infantry, astride the Albano road, and after very bitter fighting the enemy broke into the American line, but failed to press his advantage. In the evening the fighting died away.

The German counter-battery fire was the heaviest yet experienced, and the Messerschmitt 109's, as well as attacking forward troops, drove our light observation-planes from the sky. The airfield at Nettuno was shelled, and had to be abandoned after four planes were destroyed as they were taking off—fighter-planes used a far-away airfield near Naples—while a desperate attempt was made to close the port. A Liberty ship and a tank landing-craft were hit, and an ammunition-dump blown up; but the attempt was un-availing. Light and medium bombers of the Allied Air Force concentrated their defensive efforts on the 56th and 45th Divisional fronts, while our heavy bombers watched the communication lines to Rome.

The Germans resumed their attack before midnight, and wiping out the forward company of the 2nd Battalion, 157th Infantry, astride the Albano road, opened a dangerous gap between that and the 179th Infantry. They perceived their advantage, and at dawn a considerable force of Messerschmitt 109's and Focke-Wulf 190's bombed the 45th Division's line, and following their bombs came a very heavy infantry attack, supported by numerous tanks, on the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 179th Regiment. The American infantry were forced to give ground, and by noon on the 17th the Germans had made an advance of about a mile on a front of two and a half miles. They were subjected to a prodigious artillery fire, and our light, medium and heavy bombers flew some seven hundred sorties against them; but in the afternoon, reinforced to a strength of about fourteen battalions, they endeavoured desperately to enlarge their salient. After some appearance of success, however, their effort failed.

The Germans were by now dangerously near the bridgehead's final line of defence, and to relieve pressure on the 45th Division

General Lucas ordered the 1st Division to hold a two-mile sector along the line of the 'fly-over' bridge that crossed the Albano road, between the 56th Division on its left and the 179th Infantry on its right. The penetration of the previous day, into the 56th Division's front, had been repaired by troops of the 168th Brigade; and to reduce the danger of the larger salient the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the battered and weakened 179th, and the 3rd Battalion of the 157th Infantry, counter-attacked in the early morning of the 18th. But after some hours of confused and difficult fighting the counter-attack failed; and on both sides of the salient the enemy was most menacingly employing his old tactics of infiltration, while new troops came forward to continue the offensive.

That day, on the 18th, saw the crisis of the offensive. At dawn, before anything could be done to restore the failure and confusion of the night before, the Germans had launched a new attack that broke through the centre of the 45th Division's front east of the Albano road. The enemy's tanks advanced towards Padiglione until a blown bridge stopped them, and his infantry, filtering south, reached the final positions of the 1st Battalions of the 179th and 180th Infantry, and of the 1st Loyals of the 56th Division; but there they were stopped. Under a cold and heavy sky that kept most of the Air Force on the ground, a most bloody struggle continued throughout the morning, and the Corps artillery, directed by a light observation plane, found repeated targets in the large reinforcements of German infantry that were still coming forward. On one occasion a force estimated at 2,500, on the road from Carroceto, was hammered, in quick response to the observer, by over two hundred guns. But the 179th Infantry were in a desperate state, with only the 1st Battalion capable of organised resistance, and the German tanks working almost at will down the Albano road and on the road to Padiglione; and in the late afternoon, as the enemy prepared his heaviest attack of the day, it was doubtful if the last line of the bridgehead could be held.

Twelve tanks came along the road towards Padiglione, as far as the blown bridge, where under cover of their guns the German infantry advanced against the trenches of the 180th Regiment. Fighting spread across the salient as far west as the 'fly-over', where the Loyals held the lateral road on the inland side. There was very fierce fighting along the line of the road, but the enemy, compelled to advance over open country against the heavy fire of the Allied artillery, mortars, and machine-guns, failed to break through despite the numerical weakness of the sorely tried 179th Regiment.

The Loyals had little respite from eight in the morning till eight at night, and when darkness fell they were fighting hand-to-hand on the 'fly-over'; but they lost no ground. On the other flank of the salient the 180th Infantry were also immovable; and between nine and ten o'clock the offensive ceased, and the enemy began quietly to withdraw and re-organise. The German infantry, lavishly deployed, had been extravagantly punished, and a stubborn defence had outlasted their furious attack.

At night, while the VIth Corps prepared to counter-attack, there was vigorous re-organisation, and the 1st Battalion of the 157th Infantry relieved the exhausted 2nd Battalion of the 179th; whose 1st Battalion, and the Loyals, took reinforcement from their rear echelons. West of the Albano road the 6th Armoured Infantry broke through to the 2nd Battalion of the 157th, which had been isolated by the offensive, but stoutly had held its ground at the critical western shoulder of the salient; and on the right the 180th Infantry withdrew its forward companies to hold a shorter line. Despite the long day's fighting there was a new confidence on the Allied side, but in the back areas, to prevent surprise, the 3rd Brigade sent out patrols to watch for the possible descent of parachute troops.

On the 19th the Germans made their last serious effort to break through to the sea, and the Loyals again, and the 1st Battalion of the 179th, bore the brunt of the fighting. Against two battalions of the 15th Panzer Grenadiers, with tanks supporting them, the Loyals lost a company; but they and the 179th, supported still by swiftly directed and deadly gunfire, held their line. German dive-bombers and fighters were active, but they were unable to dislodge the enduring infantry. German losses were heavy in men and armour: the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion wrecked two Mark VI and five Mark IV tanks on the Albano road. It was becoming evident that the offensive had failed.

The American counter-attack, in divisional strength, had gone in at half-past six in the morning and made good progress up the road from Campomorto to reach its objective at the road-junction south of the Factory; and in the afternoon the Loyals and a company of the 2nd North Staffords shires cleared a pocket of resistance left by the morning attack, taking some two hundred prisoners to match the two hundred captured by the Americans in their advance. The evidence of the prisoners, who belonged to many different units, revealed the enemy's serious disorganisation; and the debacle of his final effort on the 20th—when the Allied artillery entirely

disrupted his attack—was the conclusive bloody proof of von Mackensen's failure.

Yet von Mackensen, with nearly ten divisions under his command, had had the initial advantage of much the larger force, of fresher troops, as well as the attacker's normal advantage of concentrating his force of assault, and disposing its reserves, in accordance with his own plan. He had had the support of a by no means negligible artillery and air force. But the VIth Corps' fire-power had been tremendous. Its artillery, excellently directed, had been superbly handled; and the Allied Air Force, more numerous by far than the enemy's, had been continuously active whenever the weather permitted activity. The enemy's salient had become a death-trap for his tanks and infantry, and as the morale of his troops declined under the weight of their appalling losses, the morale of the British and the Americans grew stiffer—or more resilient—as day by day they held their line against an apparently irresistible force, and saw through the wintry clouds their own chance grow towards achievement. From February 16th to February 20th the VIth Corps had suffered some 5,000 casualties—in killed, wounded, missing, and men ill with trench-feet or reduced by exposure—and within the bridgehead there was no safety or quietness for rest and convalescence; but morale survived the battle, the weariness, and the cold. The soldiers' morale was as much a cause of the Allied victory as the Allies' expert and ponderous artillery.

Despite the failure of his offensive and the urgent need for re-organisation of his battered army, von Mackensen continued to harass the Allies' buckled line, and maintained an angry pressure on the shoulders of the salient that he had driven into the 45th Division's sector. The VIth Corps, while fighting off these small but persistent attacks, had also to regroup its forces.

On February 22nd the American 3rd Division took over about a mile of the 45th Division's eastern front, and the 1st and 56th Divisions relieved it of responsibility for the western shoulder of the salient. The two British divisions, now responsible for the western sector from the salient to the coast, did what was possible to give their diminished battalions a brief rest in back-areas, but lack of reinforcements and the continuance of heavy local fighting prevented any real programme of recuperation. By February 25th the 24th Guards Brigade was little more than half its proper strength; the 168th Brigade was only a half; the 167th and 169th were reduced to a third of their numbers.—Anti-aircraft gunners and rear-echelon troops fortified new positions two thousand yards behind what had

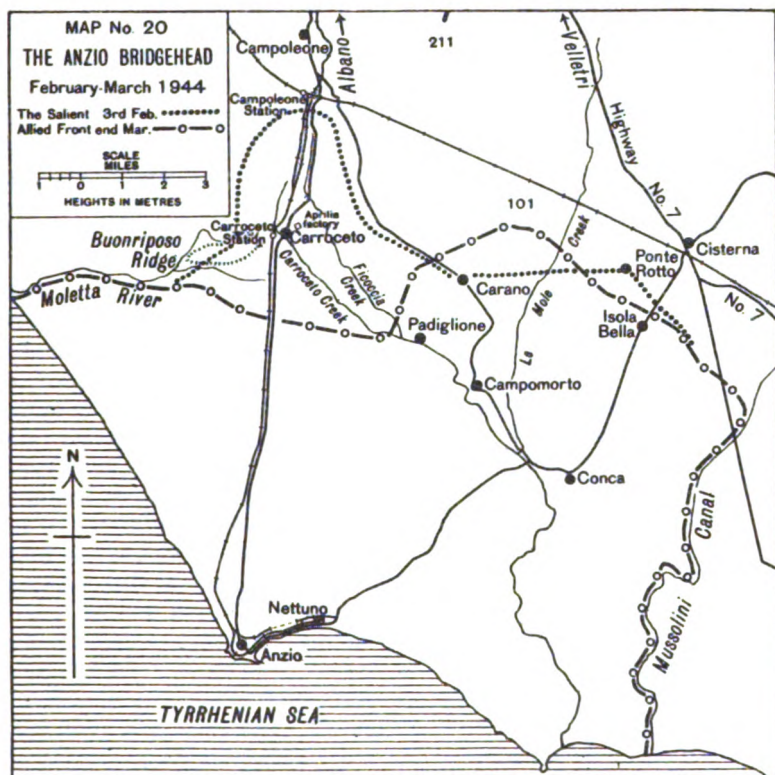
previously been regarded as the final defensive line; but only the arrival of the 18th Infantry Brigade, on the 25th, prevented a new crisis.

The 2nd Battalion of the American 157th Regiment had maintained a position of cardinal importance, at the western shoulder of the salient, throughout the offensive, though it had been isolated for some days and reduced to a small area west of the Albano road where some caves offered a natural fortress. The 56th Division, on taking over this part of the sector, attempted to relieve the Americans on the night of the 21st, and the 2nd/7th Queens reached their lines. But the Queens' carrying parties were unable to bring up their heavy weapons and ammunition, and when a renewed attempt failed on the 22nd, the Americans had to fight their way out. Only two hundred and twenty-five men escaped. The Queens, isolated in their turn, with no heavy weapons and very little ammunition, were attacked on the 23rd, and lost two companies. The remainder withdrew to Battalion Headquarters in the caves, and after dark attempted, in small parties, to reach their neighbouring battalion; but very few succeeded.

This was the most costly action in a week of local fighting among the ravines in the steeply broken ground west of the Albano road. In this extremely difficult country it was impossible to maintain a continuous line of defence, it was almost impossible to bring fire to bear on the enemy's raiding-parties. It was country in which a section of weary men might be surprised and captured, and disappear, leaving no trace behind.

The enemy was moving strength eastward in preparation for a new assault. The 26th Panzer Division and the much reduced 715th Light Division were now disposed in readiness for an attack from Cisterna, with the Hermann Goering Division, the 362nd Grenadier Division, and the 1028th Panzer Grenadier Regiment also available for battle. There was, however, no diminution of the German forces opposite the British sector, where the 65th Grenadier Division, the 4th Parachute Division, and 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, reinforced by the 29th Panzer Grenadiers and the Infantry Lehr Regiment, apparently threatened a new offensive. The enemy appeared to have divided his strength for a double assault, and at dawn on February 28th he led with his right-hand columns.

A mile and a half west of the Albano road an attack was delivered against the 10th Royal Berkshires and the 1st London Scottish. The latter battalion lost a company, but after bitter fighting the attack was beaten off. To the right of the Scottish the 2nd Foresters



were relieving the 2nd/6th Queens; the Foresters also lost a company, but when fighting spread to the rest of the battalion the Germans were decisively repelled. Their losses had been serious, and they abandoned their effort to break through in this sector.

In the afternoon a smoke-screen curtained the German lines opposite the 3rd Division's front, and after midnight the enemy's artillery, which had previously concentrated on the British sector, shifted its fire to the Americans, and shells fell thickly round the village of Carano. The American guns replied, and before dawn there was fighting at half a dozen places in the eastern sector of the bridgehead. The Germans made some progress against the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion north-east of Carano, but their repeated efforts to exploit this advantage were defeated by gunfire and the American armour; and other attacks on the 3rd Division's

left flank were similarly repelled. Along Le Mole creek and west of Ponte Rotto, against the 7th Infantry, the enemy gained a little ground; and his tanks, on the roads from Ponte Rotto and Cisterna, made a minor penetration into the lines of the 15th Infantry. By the end of the day the 3rd Division's forward line was bruised and a little torn, but unbroken; and the enemy had lost three hundred and sixty prisoners. On the right flank a diversionary attack had been repelled without much difficulty.

General Truscott, who had succeeded General Lucas in command of the VIth Corps, reinforced his 3rd Division with a company of tank destroyers and a battalion of the 1st Armoured Regiment, and ordered all roads into the bridgehead to be mined, and new minefields laid. Having made thorough preparation for it, he awaited the next day's attack with confidence; and the Germans repeated their programme on a reduced scale in heavy rain. Their main effort was made against the 7th Infantry west of Ponte Rotto, but it failed to gain ground, as did the assault on the 15th Infantry near Isola Bella. The Germans lost a hundred and sixty prisoners, and in drenching rain, between cratered roads and minefields, ten of their tanks were destroyed. East of Carano an American counter-attack by the 30th Infantry, to regain ground lost on the previous day, was successful, and eighteen battalions of artillery broke up a German attempt to recover their positions. Seventy prisoners were captured here.

In clear weather on March 2nd three hundred and fifty Liberators and Flying Fortresses, with two hundred Lightnings and Thunderbolts to cover them, bombed the areas about Carroceto, Velletri, and Cisterna, and did much to disorganise the German offensive. There was little fighting on the ground this day, and in both the American and the British sectors the enemy's weak attacks were easily repulsed. On the 3rd the Americans went over to the offensive, and made some small gains on the road to Ponte Rotto, and near Isola Bella. The enemy's offensive power was apparently exhausted.

The VIth Corps itself, however, had been dangerously near exhaustion, and but for the punctual replenishment, by sea, of its prodigally expended ammunition, the result of the fighting would have been lamentably different. The 3rd Division had been fortunate in having time, while the Germans were attacking on the Albano road, to prepare its defence and train its new drafts to meet von Mackensen's ultimate attack; and the American victory in the eastern sector was decisive. In the western sector the British grew

stronger as the enemy weakened, and two Royal Marine Commandos, which arrived on March 2nd, were strenuously employed in guerilla warfare; while a few days later the 5th Division came in to relieve the sadly depleted 56th. The German High Command acknowledged defeat, and the Fourteenth Army set to work on its lines to prepare them for defence.

The VIth Corps had failed to achieve its original purpose and take the Alban Hills, but the German counter-offensive had more resoundingly collapsed. The Allied troops had taken hard punishment, but punished their enemy more heavily still, and by sheer tenacity spoiled all his plans. In the Campoleone salient, at Carroceto and the Factory, in the four days of hard fighting in mid-February, and in the last attack in early March, the Germans had always to pay more dearly than they could afford for successes far smaller than they had expected; and in a series of soldiers' battles they were defeated by soldiers better than themselves.

In mid-March the 18th Brigade undertook a fairly extensive operation to improve the position of the 1st Division immediately west of the Albano road, and was successful despite considerable losses. A few days later, in the valley of the Moletta, the 6th Seaforths and the 9th Commando made a useful raid that carried the 5th Division forward to the line of the river. As our patrols grew bolder, the enemy withdrew more and more into his strongly fortified main defences; and by the end of March the VIth Corps had everywhere regained the initiative. Von Mackensen's army now consisted of little more than five divisions, and all his purpose was to contain the bridgehead for as long as might be possible.

CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE FOR ROME

❧(1)❧

The Major Offensive

ON March the 5th General Alexander issued orders for the re-grouping of the armies in Italy in preparation for a co-ordinated major offensive. A month later he informed General Clark and General Leese of his precise purposes, and about the same time came details of an elaborate plan to conceal the prospective operation and delude the enemy. On May the 1st, in conference at Caserta, the plans of the two armies were co-ordinated, and on the 5th an order was published in which the Commander-in-Chief declared that his intention was now 'to destroy the right wing of the German Tenth Army; to drive what remains of it and the German Fourteenth Army north of Rome; and to pursue the enemy to the Rimini-Pisa Line, inflicting the maximum losses on him in the process.' The battle would begin an hour before midnight on May the 11th.

Rome was the obvious prize, its capture would be the most spectacular achievement of the forthcoming battle, for the Germans' resolute defence of it through the bloody months of winter had made Rome and its possession a symbol of victory; and to the Italians, now in minor partnership with us, and to the outer world, the occupation of the capital would go far to redeem and fortify our promise to liberate the countries of Europe from their tyrannous masters. In Italy we had won our first foothold on the continent

and when Rome, that mighty landmark through the ages, became the first capital to raise its multitudinous voice in freedom, the world and all our soldiers would hear such assurance of our final victory as they had long been waiting for. As a purely military operation, however, the taking of Rome would be of comparatively small importance. The vital task was to destroy the German forces and drive their remnant power northwards into a confinement in which, when the time was ripe, the Wehrmacht could be assailed with annihilating strength from east and west and south. Rome would indeed be a symbol of victory, but the pursuit of Kesselring's defeated armies to the Apennines, over two hundred miles of roads littered with the blackened steel of their tanks and field-guns, would give a substantial measure of victory.

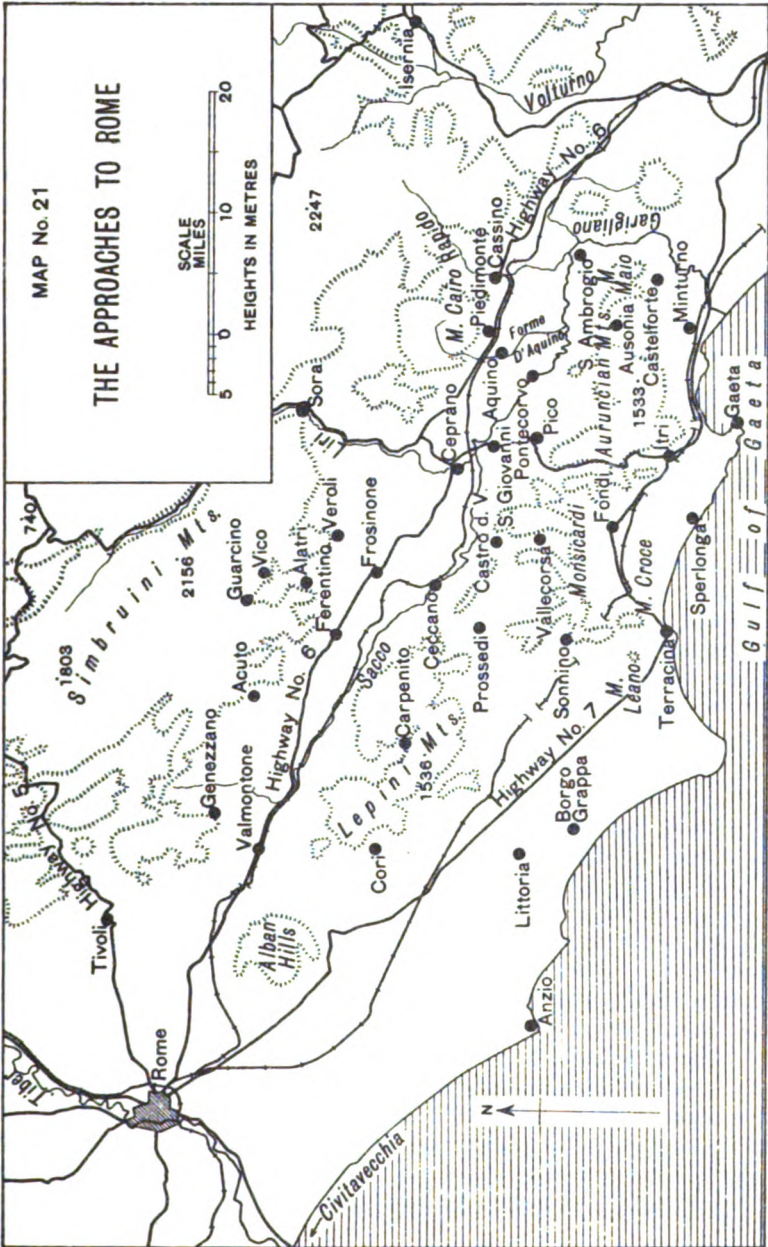
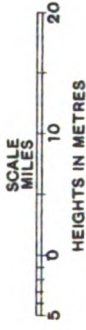
The winter fighting had brought our troops to the very threshold of the Liri valley, had given them their invaluable bridgehead over the Garigliano, and at great cost transformed the perilous plain of Anzio into a stronghold that still threatened—though in April without much conviction—the German lines of communication. The designated regrouping would bring the Eighth Army into the centre of the main front, to bear the major burden of the new battle with the Polish and XIIIth Corps in the van of its attack; while the Fifth Army, with the French Expeditionary Corps under command, would concentrate on a front of about thirteen miles between the Eighth and the Tyrrhenian sea. On the right, to the Adriatic shore, the Vth Corps would somewhat thinly hold the line, prevent the enemy's disengagement, and take what advantage it could from a changing situation. The Xth Corps, which had been fighting in the Fifth Army from the Salerno beaches to the hills above Minturno, would be transferred to the Eighth; and though the battle-worn divisions, the 46th and 56th, were to be withdrawn from Italy and sent to the Middle East, their release could now be afforded. For now, for the first time, the Allied Armies had not merely adequate resources for the task in hand, but considerable reserves. The XIIIth Corps and the Polish Corps of the Eighth Army would have behind them, when they launched the assault, the 1st Canadian Corps and the 6th South African Armoured Division; and the Fifth, vastly strengthened by the hundred thousand men of the French Expeditionary Corps, had an American division in reserve to the two which would make the initial advance on the seaward flank, and was now able to replace its casualties in almost as prompt a system as that which brought bread and beef and ammunition to the line.

The German defensive positions—the notorious Gustav Line—ran from the coast west of Minturno, above Minturno and Castelforte and in front of Monte Maio, to the Garigliano three miles south of San Ambrogio, and from there along the west bank of the river to its confluence with the Liri, and so northwards along the Rapido to Cassino and over the high ground to Monte Cairo; where it met the Hitler Line that stretched from Terracina on the coast, through Fondi, Pico, and Pontecorvo, to Piedimonte at the foot of Cairo. In the quiet weeks before the battle opened photographic reconnaissance had secured a detailed picture of these defences, which varied with the nature of the country in which they were sited. Opposite the Fifth Army were strong but simple fortifications, built in depth on the Minturno hills, about Castelforte, and on the valley-road to Ausonia; but where the stark sides of Monte Maio rose, the enemy depended more on the enormous natural difficulties of approach than on digging. The Liri valley, a flat expanse of good farmland varying in width from four to seven miles, with the mountains rising abruptly on either side, offered a fair prospect to our armour, and therefore its deep defences were primarily designed to stop tanks. All the country from the Rapido back to the road from Pontecorvo to Aquino, over eight miles of growing fields, that is, was patterned thickly with strong-points; a marshy winding stream called the *Forme d'Aquino* was a natural obstacle of some value, and from north of Highway 6 to the Liri an anti-tank ditch had been constructed by blowing a series of craters. Though it was not a complete obstacle throughout its whole length, behind it there were deep minefields, thickly belted by wire to front and rear, and covered by fire. It was, however, in the Hitler Line that the defences were most elaborate, and there was evidence that the Germans intended to make it their enduring frontier. Its outposts were semi-mobile armoured pill-boxes to hold two men and a light machine-gun. Behind these there was a system of reinforced concrete gun-emplacements, covered by weapon-pits and connected by tunnels or communication trenches, with eighteen Tiger or Panther turrets on concrete foundations with underground living-quarters as the key-points of the system; each of these turrets, which had all-round traverse, was covered by two or three mobile anti-tank guns on a flank. Passive protection was provided by deep shelters with thick concrete roofs that were sometimes covered by as much as twenty feet of earth. The line, however, was nowhere more than a thousand yards deep.

The Germans had been building the Hitler Line for about five

MAP No. 21

THE APPROACHES TO ROME



months, but like every other line they constructed in Italy, it was still unfinished when the battle began, and in many places where the swiftly growing spring corn had masked their emplacements, they had not had time to clear their fields of fire. Our unrelenting armies never allowed the enemy to settle down and finish with Teutonic thoroughness that which he so often began to build with Teutonic skill and energy; but again and again took him by surprise and spoilt his admirable plans and ponderous works while they were still in the making. The Hitler Line was broken with such surprising and discomfiting speed that the Germans were deeply embarrassed by the failure of what had been dignified with their Fuhrer's name, and presently were at pains to pretend that it had really been known, with a pretty innocence, as the Dora Line.

These man-made obstacles were formidable enough, but the mountains that enclose the valley are ramparts that seem to deny any hope of progress. In the light of early morning and with the evening shadow on them they rise like insuperable cliffs beyond Minturno and Castelforte, and over the naked little plain of the Rapido; and many a private's heart must have quailed when he looked up and realised that he and the men beside him had been chosen to break this giant's keep. Poorer soldiers than the Germans might well have been confident of their power to stand for ever on a line buttressed on the one hand by the vast bulk of Monte Maio, on the other by the towering stony height of Cairo, and a valley-floor sown eight miles deep with their fortifications in between.

The German line was held by the Tenth Army under General von Vietinghoff. On the Adriatic side there was a Mountain Corps of two or three divisions, and on the main front the XIVth Panzer Corps of six divisions with another in reserve. Northward, confining the bridgehead in Latium, was General von Mackensen's Fourteenth Army of eight divisions, of which three were in reserve. At the beginning of April Kesselring's total strength in Italy was twenty-two divisions, the same number as General Alexander commanded; but the Allied divisions were numerically stronger and greatly more powerful in material resources.

Our superiority in the air was by this time absolute, and while our own supplies moved forward with negligible hindrance from the seaports to the forward areas, the German columns had to run the gauntlet whether they came by road, rail, or sea. When flying weather came in with April, the 12th Tactical Air Force and the Desert Air Force began to take toll of everything that moved.

Medium bombers assailed the west-coast ports of Piombino and Leghorn, and damaged them so badly that the Germans had to unload a large part of their seaborne supplies over open beaches. Dumps and motor-parks were systematically attacked, and during April there was always a block somewhere on the railway lines south of Florence and Leghorn. On the coast line the bridge at Cecina was broken, and remained so. The lines from Florence to Arezzo, from Empoli to Siena, were blocked, and the lines through Viterbo were repeatedly cut.

This drastic interruption of their railway service compelled the Germans to transfer, in the vicinity of Florence, the bulk of their supplies from railway wagon to truck; whereupon the Allied fighters and fighter-bombers went out to harry the roads. One American fighter-group, the 57th, in addition to inflicting very great damage to railway locomotives and wagons, claimed to have destroyed, in the first three weeks of April, no fewer than a hundred and eighty-seven motor-trucks and damaged a hundred and fourteen others. A prisoner taken by the Fifth Army said that on April the 13th, while on his way from Florence to Arezzo, he saw the road bombed four times, and such a ruination of vehicles along it that he described it as a motor-transport cemetery. Other prisoners reported that the German trucks were habitually overloaded, and when they broke down could with difficulty be repaired because of the shortage of spare parts created by our strategic bombing of the factories in Milan and Turin.

That the Allied Air Forces laid an appalling burden on the German supply-system is indisputable, and yet the fact remains that the German troops in the line were never tactically short of ammunition or their rations until our artillery or general movement had cut their forward communications. Aerial attack inflicted great damage, and absorbed a great part of the German effort in repairing it, but of itself it was never decisive until, perhaps, the last battle of the campaign was fought. Its effect was cumulative, not immediate.

✎(2)✎

The Cover Plan

THE cover-plan, to deceive and delude the enemy, consisted of an attempt to persuade him that we accepted as a fact the impregnability of Cassino, and were now going to attack Rome by landing

a force of at least three divisions on the coast near Civitavecchia on May the 15th, in the last quarter of the moon; the patent object of the plan being to induce the Germans to lie thin on the Liri front, to hold their reserves north of Rome and give us the advantage of surprise in the real attack.

In the neighbourhood of Salerno a fictitious force consisting of wireless detachments of the Canadian Corps went into fictitious training, and the area was organised as a mounting-area for an amphibious operation. While these detachments opened their aerial communications at Salerno, and the nearby roads were lavishly signposted with Canadian names and the national maple leaf, the Corps itself, in its actual area, maintained a total silence on the air and lived in the strictest anonymity. The American 36th Division, in reserve to the IInd Corps south of the Volturno, opened communication on the false Canadian wireless-set, and refrained from such communication with the Fifth Army; while the Royal Navy, in Salerno Bay, co-operated in a signal exercise that appeared to rehearse a seaborne landing. The beaches of Civitavecchia were reconnoitred, air-photographs were taken, and information designed to mislead the enemy was by various methods allowed to reach his hands.

As assiduously as the fiction was propagated, so the real preparations were earnestly hidden. On the axis of Highway 6 there was extensive camouflage, and large formations moved only by night. The successful direction and control of movements was indeed the most signal achievement of these preliminaries to battle, for the great convoys that for weeks traversed the roads behind the front, alternately filling them and leaving them spectacularly empty, were unobserved by the enemy—or their significance was not realised—and the divisions that would lead the assault were brought into position with such smooth caution as quite concealed their arrival. The 1st Canadian Infantry Division came from the Adriatic coast, the 8th Indian Division from Larino, south of Termoli. The 4th Division moved back from the mountains east of Cassino and then forward to the Rapido; and the Polish Corps from south and east of Isernia into the mountains. Then, for a little while longer, they lay quietly waiting. Not a whisper went on the air from the Polish Corps, and without a signal the 4th Division came into the line to share the 8th Indian's sector. Towards the end of April there was a perceptible decrease of wireless traffic over the whole front, and this relative inactivity was maintained until the day of attack.

On the Fifth Army front the most stringent precautions were taken to present a picture of static defence. As many units as possible remained in the same locations from mid-April till the eve of assault, and those that moved forward went by night into positions already camouflaged, while parties left behind maintained an appearance of activity in their former areas. Great care was taken in the building of forward dumps and the assembly of bridging material, and wireless activity was not allowed to exceed the normal traffic. This picture of an army quietly engaged in its own defence was exhibited until the attack began.

The success of this cover-plan was considerable. Our attack took the enemy by surprise and disconcerted him by its unexpected weight. A map captured in the early stages of the battle revealed that he had under-estimated by seven divisions our strength in the area of main assault, and therefore believed that we had large reserves in the rear. This fortified his expectation of a landing from the sea near Civitavecchia, which the more dramatic part of the plan had created, and his reserves in consequence were disposed either in the vicinity of the plain of Anzio or farther north along the coast; and were therefore slow in reaching the battle, to which they were committed piecemeal.

In the sector occupied by the French Expeditionary Corps the Germans had identified only one Moroccan division. There were, in fact, four divisions as well as the indefatigable Goums. It was in this sector that the Allied attack first found assurance of decisive success, and the phenomenal speed with which the French Colonials carried their attack contributed very largely to the German debacle. That this fierce and overwhelming blow should have come from a quarter not much suspected of danger is a pretty example of the importance of always knowing who your opponents are and what they are doing; and a pleasant tribute to the efficiency of the Allied Intelligence staffs.

❧(3)❧

Opening the Valley

WITH impressive simplicity General Leese had ordered the Eighth Army to break through the enemy's main front in the Liri Valley and advance on Rome. The Polish Corps, attacking north of

Cassino, and the XIIIth Corps simultaneously crossing the Rapido, were intended to join forces on Highway 6 about two miles west of Cassino, and so isolate it. Then the Poles would attack southward to capture the Monastery, while the XIIIth cleared the town; both would then advance against the Hitler Line, the XIIIth in frontal attack, the Poles endeavouring to turn it from the north. On their right the Xth Corps, holding the line with light forces, would simulate an attack towards Atina, and thereafter be prepared to detach reserves for the progressive battle.

General Clark's Fifth Army, advancing at the same hour with the four divisions of French Colonials on the right and the two divisions of the American IInd Corps on the left, would strike first, with all its strength, to take the mountains that dominate the Ausonia defile, and thereby secure Ausonia itself. It would then advance, south of the line and approximately parallel with the Eighth Army's axis of Highway 6, to cut the road from Itri to Pico. Its subsequent tasks would be dictated by the Army Commander.

At Anzio the forces in the bridgehead were ordered to be ready to move into battle, at twenty-four hours' notice, on or after the fourth day following the general attack. They were to advance through Cori to Valmontone with the purpose of cutting Highway 6, and so preventing, according to circumstances, either the supply or withdrawal of the enemy's main strength.

May in Italy is the spring of the year, bright and warm, and therefore good for campaigning. On May the 11th the sun would set a few minutes after eight o'clock, and the moon, four days from its last quarter, would rise half an hour before midnight. By attacking at eleven the foremost troops would have the advantage of a little darkness to conceal their first advance, and be at no disadvantage since the ground was familiar to them and the German positions well known. And then the late moon would give them light to see what they must do next.

The day before the battle was cloudy, a little rain fell, and a brown haze filled the valley after sunset. But the night sky was clear and the stars bright when the Allied guns opened their fire against the enemy's thirty-mile front from Atina to the Gulf of Gaeta. The tremendous roar of artillery was doubled and redoubled by mountain-echoes, and the heights beyond the Garigliano and the Rapido and the valley between were deluged with exploding shells. Tall dark ridges were lighted by bursting flares, vanished, and reappeared. For forty minutes the general thunder lasted, and

the nearer darkness was torn by the stab and flash of a thousand guns behind the Eighth Army, six hundred behind the Fifth.

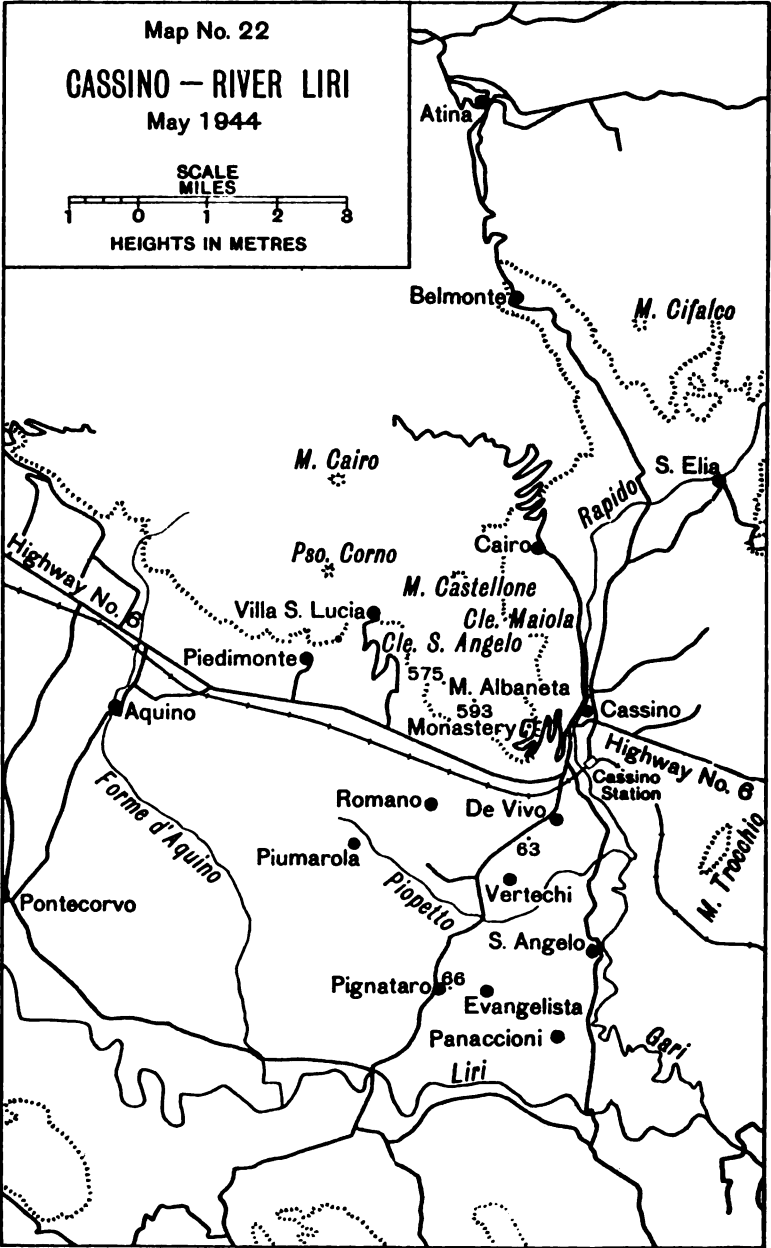
The storm fell upon Germans who were intent only upon their normal tasks and the usual routine. The attack had come nearly a fortnight before they expected it, for General von Senge und Ettalin, commanding the XIVth Panzer Corps had just issued an Order of the Day in which he warned his troops to be ready for the anticipated battle by May the 24th. And yet, though taken by surprise, they were not in the centre of the front found unprepared, but accepted the sudden need for defence with instant readiness and fought with the greatest tenacity.

In the Liri Valley, opposite the XIIIth Corps, there were initially five German infantry battalions, approximately a battalion of tanks, and another of assault guns under command of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division. North of them, defending the high Cassino sector, was the 1st Parachute Division, and south of the Liri, in front of the Fifth Army, the 71st Infantry Division.

The XIIIth Corps on its five-mile front had for the first task the establishment of a bridgehead over the Rapido and that indeterminate stream known as the Gari, between Cassino and the Liri; and it opened the assault with the 4th Division on the right, the 8th Indian on the left. The former made its crossing between Cassino railway station and Sant Angelo, the latter at and south of Sant Angelo. The 1st Guards Brigade and part of the 26th Armoured Brigade, detached from the 6th Armoured Division, were temporarily under command of the 4th; the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade similarly under command of the 8th Indian.

After the heavy and medium artillery had for forty minutes maintained their fire against the German batteries, and field-guns and heavy anti-aircraft guns for the same period assailed the enemy's forward localities and mortar-positions, the assault-boats were launched, and seventeen Field Regiments with four and a half Medium Regiments fired a slow barrage that lifted a hundred yards every six minutes. But despite surprise and the great weight of this bombardment the assaulting infantry had a hard and gruelling battle for even the smallest gains, and suffered heavily from a hail of rifle and machine-gun fire. Many assault-boats were lost in the fast-running river, and the thick smoke-screens that both sides created made it extremely difficult for battalion officers to control their companies. Early fighting on the far bank was very confused, and soon the effects of the barrage were lost.

The leading brigades of the 4th Division, the 10th and 28th,



held only a shallow hold across the Gari when morning came. The 6th Surreys to the north, though there was still fighting behind them, pushed forward over the road from Cassino to Sant Angelo in the forenoon, but were counter-attacked and driven back to their riverside positions. The 2nd Bedfordshires, also of the brigade, reached the road a little farther south, and in the afternoon repelled a counter-attack. Ferries behind them were working intermittently and two anti-tank guns were brought over in time to repel another attack.

Heavy mortar and machine-gun fire met the 28th Brigade on the Division's left, but by nine in the morning the 2nd King's, though with serious losses, were within three hundred yards of the Sant Angelo road, followed by two companies of the 2nd Somersets. Such was the confusion of the first few hours that little news could be obtained of their progress, but the bridging vehicles came forward, and soon after midnight the sappers began to build three bridges. Work had to be stopped when morning came, for the enemy, emerging from deep dugouts unscathed by shell-fire, could rake the riverside with machine-gun fire; and the infantry could do nothing more until supporting weapons reached them.

The German guns at Atina were firing into the Divisional sector, which was enfiladed also from Sant Angelo. When the Germans counter-attacked, the 28th Brigade were unable to hold their ground, and by nightfall the disorganised King's and Somersets were east of the river again except for an isolated company, and half of another, that remained precariously on their objective. Nor could the 10th Brigade, with its bridgehead nowhere more than about six hundred yards deep, be regarded as very secure in its position. The first day's fighting had had disappointing results, and unless the transpontine troops could be quickly reinforced their situation would be critical indeed. It was essential to build a bridge—Amazon Bridge it was called, midway between Cassino and Sant Angelo—before daylight came again.

All night the sappers worked, under continuous fire from small arms and the enemy's guns, and by four in the morning infantry were already crossing, while the sappers laid a roadway on the steel webbing for the tanks that would follow; and an hour later the tanks came over. Strong reinforcements crossed Amazon Bridge on the 13th, and the sappers' work, that had already saved the bridgehead, now let the battle move slowly forward.

The Divisional Commander had committed his reserve brigade, the 12th, to attach southwards and then turn west. The 6th Black

Watch, with a squadron of tanks of the Lothian and Border Horse, fought strongly forward against furious resistance—it was less spectacular than Greys and Gordons at Waterloo, but the regiments recognised a Scottish occasion—and by half-past ten they and the 2nd Royal Fusiliers, with another squadron of the Lothians, were well beyond the Sant Angelo road and nearing the road from Cassino to Pignataro on a mile-long front. On either flank of the Divisional sector advances were also made. On the right the 2nd Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, with armour in support, crossed the Sant Angelo road and recaptured the point lost on the day before by the Surreys, and with it took a hundred and forty prisoners and more than a score of machine-guns from the Machine Gun Battalion of the 1st Parachute Division; while on the left the 2nd/4th Hampshires, taking a hundred prisoners in the process, cleared the river-bank and established themselves firmly in an area about a mile north-west of Sant Angelo.

To the eye of an optimist it might have seemed that a rot was setting-in on the German side, but the enemy was already moving his 90th Panzer Grenadier Division into battle, and until its arrival was quickly patching his front with miscellaneous troops of a Reconnaissance battalion, Engineer and Machine-Gun battalions of the Parachute Division, a Jaeger regiment, and the remnants of the 115th Panzer Grenadiers. The night of the 13th was fairly quiet on the whole, except for some active enemy patrols in the north and a good deal of harassing fire; but there was no rest for the sappers. Before midnight word had been received that the 78th Division would be committed south of the 4th on the next morning, and another bridge was required. The bridge was begun at midnight, and eight hours later it was open to traffic.

Amazon Bridge, unfortunately, was blocked for three hours during the night by some ammunition trucks that were hit and caught fire; but in the early morning a squadron of the 19th New Zealand Armoured Regiment came over to relieve the 26th Armoured Brigade, which was now returned to the 78th, its own division. The valley, this morning of the 14th, was full of white fog that made movement difficult. The enemy was stiffening his resistance, and again there was confused fighting.

The 8th Indian Division, in the meantime, had made an easier and somewhat better start than the 4th. In the sector of Sant Angelo the enemy was off his guard, mines were found ready to be laid but not yet active and our artillery's counter-battery work prevented any serious gunfire on the river-crossings. The area, however, was

shelled from Piedimonte and south of the Liri, there was strong opposition from machine-gun posts, mortars, and snipers, and the enemy fired a smoke-barrage that caused confusion by reducing visibility to something little better than blindness; and in this unnatural gloom a good many assault-boats were lost. By dawn the 1st Frontier Force Regiment, leading battalion of the 17th Brigade attacking on the right, had reached their first objective, half a mile south-west of Sant Angelo, and a company of the 3rd/8th Punjab Regiment, leading the 19th Brigade on the left, was due south of them a thousand yards away. But the 6th Lancers, the Division's armoured regiment, had not yet been able to cross, and two companies of the 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were making little progress against pillboxes surrounded by barbed wire.

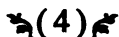
Two bridges across the river, a mile and more south of Sant Angelo, were open to traffic soon after eight in the morning, and though they were shelled throughout the day and closed from time to time, four squadrons of tanks and some anti-tank guns were able to cross. All three battalions of the right-hand brigade came over, though the 1st Royal Fusiliers were still short of the road that was their objective, and in the late afternoon, after heavy gunfire, the 1st/5th Gurkha Rifles with the support of two troops of tanks stormed half the village, and began to clear the remnant enemy from the cellars to which he had retreated.

The 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade, under command of the Indian Division, had sent over its 14th Regiment, a squadron of which with the 3rd/8th Punjabis made a sally to the hamlet of Pannacioni and destroyed two tanks and a pair of self-propelled guns; while another squadron helped the Argylls to establish themselves on the road south of Sant Angelo. By the end of twenty-four hours of fighting substantial progress could be measured, and though it was only in the northern half of the Divisional sector that the bridgehead had been established in something like its designated depth, the enemy was beginning to weaken and had already committed to battle the reserve companies of the 576th Regiment, with which he had been holding the sector, and three companies, piecemeal, of his main reserve of the 111th/115th Battalion.

Good progress was made on the following day. The Fusiliers on the right flank reached the road running north to Cassino. Sant Angelo was completely occupied, and after a German counter-attack, forming east of Pannacioni, had been scattered by gunfire, the Frontier Force Regiment advanced and occupied the hamlet,

while a mile to the north of it tanks and infantry made an advance as deep. The enemy had lost heavily, and the front wall of his Gustav Line was broken.

That night the remaining Indian Brigade, the 21st, with the 12th Canadian Armoured Regiment, passed through the 19th Brigade, and in the morning fog—it was the 14th—made progress against resistance that was negligible to begin with, but quickly grew harder.



The Poles and Monte Cassino

Monte Cassino had already defeated the Americans. It had defeated the Gurkhas, Rajputs and Englishmen of the 4th Indian Division; and the New Zealanders had left their dead in the town below it. Now the Poles were to essay its capture. They were no whit dismayed by the prospect.

It is reported that a Brigadier in a very gallant and distinguished British division, being asked by his General to submit a plan for the taking of Cassino hill—not for operation, but merely for instruction—promptly replied, ‘The best plan would be to get someone else to take it.’ His division had had its full share of battle from North Africa onwards, and his reply, admirable for its pure objectivity, was spoken out of long experience of mountain fighting. No one but the Poles would have faced such a fearful task with enthusiasm, but that is how they, with the *élan* of their immortal Lancers, did in fact confront it. For when the assault-plan for a division was being discussed, and it was decided that one brigade must hold its ground while the other led the attack, both brigadiers immediately claimed the honour, one with the argument that his men had fought at Tobruk and were inured to battle, the other on the ground of his seniority; and the debate was conducted with warmth and settled with difficulty.

Lieutenant-General Anders had been informed on March the 24th that the task of the 2nd Polish Corps in the forthcoming offensive would be to capture Monte Cassino and move towards Piedimonte. His staff immediately gathered information from those who had previously made the attempt, and after reconnaissance of the area an appreciation of it was ready by April the 2nd. On the irregular ridge that descends from inaccessible Monte Cairo to the as yet

unreachable Monastery stood four dominating heights that were chosen as the natural objectives: the Monastery itself, Point 593 of grim memory, Point 575 to the west of it, and Colle Sant Angelo north of that. These strongpoints could not be attacked from the south without first crossing the strongly defended Gari and climbing under direct observation a hill-face as steep as a cliff. The disadvantages of the eastern approach, which the New Zealanders had used, were that the objectives could only be attacked in succession, and a necessary preliminary was clearance of the ruined town. Of the two northern routes, the nearer, from Colle d'Onufrio to Monastery Hill, had been found disastrous by the 4th Indian Division; but no one had so far tried the broad approaches, farther to the west, from Monte Castellone and Colle Maiola to Colle Sant Angelo, Point 575, and Point 593. It was rocky country with negligible cover, but there was no climbing, three of the four objectives could be simultaneously attacked, and from the positions we already held the necessary forming-up places could be covered fairly well. Possession of Colle Sant Angelo, moreover, would provide observation of the area about Villa Santa Lucia where the enemy had sited many of his mortars.

The north-western route was chosen for the attack, and assembly areas were found west and south-west of the village of Cairo which would serve if they could be camouflaged against the enemy's observation from Monte Cifalco, which he held. From Monte Cifalco he had a broad view of the Rapido valley, and for that reason the artillery must be sited in the hills south of Sant' Elia, where paths were few. The French had done a good deal of work during the winter, but more would have to be done.

General Anders' plan was to attack from Colle Maiola towards Massa Albaneta, and by capturing the ridge from Point 593 to Colle Sant Angelo dominate Highway 6 and isolate the Monastery; which would then be attacked from the north-west. Monte Castellone must be held in strength, to cover the right flank against the enemy on Passo Corno and the ridge running south from it, and Monastery Hill on their left would have to be continuously bombarded and screened by smoke if possible. Then the Poles would advance with the 5th Kresowa Division on the right to capture the heights from Colle Sant Angelo to Point 447; and the 3rd Carpathian Division on their left to attack Massa Albaneta, Points 593 and 569, and then—with the Kresowa Division protecting its rear—turn east against the Monastery. In early April the plan was approved by General Leese, who added the fourth task, after its accomplishment,

of advancing against the Hitler Line beyond Highway 6 to turn it from the north.

The 78th Division, which had been holding the Cassino sector, was relieved during the five days following April the 23rd, and went into reserve in the XIIIth Corps. The Poles took over from their predecessors not merely their ground, but the hardships they had endured, and while they waited for the attack lived in shallow scrapings behind a little rampart of boulders, ate dry rations and drank their meagre allowance of water, and suffered daily casualties from an enemy who could see every movement they made. The plans for battle were altered so as to give each division a squadron of tanks, and subtract from each division—each no more than a double brigade—a battalion to form a Corps reserve; while three hundred guns were sited to support the attack. The enemy, the troops of the 1st Parachute Division who held Cassino, appeared to have no suspicion of the coming battle.

Extraordinary measures were taken to provide and maintain adequate supplies, and because only jeeps and mules could be used west of the Rapido, two British jeep platoons and five Cypriot mule-pack companies were allotted to the Corps; and the forward artillery and infantry amassed abnormally large stocks of ammunition. Camouflage was very elaborate—to mask the road to the 3rd Carpathian Division's Headquarters a vertical screen a mile long was erected—and its success was doubly demonstrated by the enemy's failure to shell artillery positions before the battle, and by air photographs that showed hardly a trace of the 15,000 tons of ammunition, petrol and stores concealed among the olive-groves north and east of Venafro. But when the battle began it was necessary to screen the gun-positions and supply routes with smoke; and between May the 11th and the 24th a hundred and eighty men were employed in this noisome task, who set off 18,000 generators, a total weight of four hundred tons.

On the night of May the 10th the Poles moved into their assembly areas, and in the late afternoon of the following day a strange silence fell on all that part of the front. The Polish artillery ceased fire, so did the German guns. The Germans had good reason for their inactivity, which was not discovered till later, but the Poles, nervous lest suspicion be aroused by the phenomenal quietness, presently restored a normal atmosphere by opening harassing fire. Then, at half-past eleven, all the guns of the two armies began their concert, and ten minutes later the greater part of the Polish artillery transferred its fire from the enemy's batteries

to his infantry positions on Monte Cassino. At one o'clock in the morning, on May the 12th, the infantry of the Kresowa and Carpathian divisions advanced to the assault.

Of the former, the 6th Lwow Brigade covered the right flank on Monte Castellone and made a feint attack towards Passo Corno, which drew the enemy's fire, while the 5th Wilno Brigade, with its 13th Battalion on the right and 15th on the left, moved forward against the line of heights that curved south and east from Colle Sant Angelo. Its first objective was a long tongue of rather higher land, called Phantom Ridge, that masked the battalions' ultimate goal. By half-past two they had reached the foot of the ridge, but they had taken twice as long as had been expected and already a fifth of them were casualties. Except for cut telephone-wires the German guns and mortars had suffered little from the bombardment, and as soon as their communications were repaired the Wilno battalions had to face the German batteries in almost their full strength. Nevertheless they gained the crest of the ridge, but could advance no farther nor yet remain unless to die there. On the extreme right the commander of two companies of the 13th Battalion withdrew to Point 706, south of Monte Castellone, and joined the left flank of the 6th Lwow Brigade, which was held there by heavy automatic fire. On the left of the Wilno Brigade the 15th Battalion fought closely to win the German height, but dense thorn-scrub obstructed them as well as boulders. Two companies, indeed, went through the enemy's positions and reached Point 517, a hummock three hundred yards beyond them and half-way to their final objective. But isolated there, and heavily engaged, they had to return to the forward slope of Phantom Ridge.

Communications within the brigade had almost completely broken down, for telephone wires had been cut by fire, wireless-sets destroyed or their operators killed, and runners could scarcely move. The Brigade Commander was without news of his forward troops, and the remaining battalion, the 18th, had no communication with the other two. But when the 15th apparently began the second phase of its advance, the Commander of the 18th decided that Phantom Ridge must have been cleared and advanced at the planned hour of three o'clock. His arrival on the Ridge, some three hours later, caused a good deal of congestion, and as the German fire grew heavier the Polish casualties mounted. But the two companies of the 15th on the forward slope beat off a counter-attack, and confused fighting went on against German positions half-hidden by rocks and bushes.

Despite the paucity of information and the obvious confusion, the Divisional Commander knew that he had two and half battalions, or what remained of them, on the Ridge, and was about to reinforce the attack with two battalions from the Lwow Brigade when, a little before three in the afternoon, he received orders to withdraw. The Commander of the 18th, on his own initiative, had already withdrawn his battalion when he saw it suffering heavy losses without advantage, and found he could neither call down defensive fire nor consult his Brigadier. Some troops of the other two battalions mistook this movement for a general withdrawal, and also returned, leaving the forward companies of the 15th and part of two companies of the 18th to hold the ridge. In the evening, however, orders came from the Corps Commander to withdraw them also.

The other division, the 3rd Carpathian, was also defeated in its attempt to capture Massa Albaneta and the two Points 593 and 569. The 15th Carpathian Rifle Brigade, with the dismounted 12th Podolski Reconnaissance Regiment, a medium machine-gun company, two self-propelled guns and a troop of tanks under command, had advanced with the 1st Carpathian Rifle Battalion on its right, whose intermediate objective was a gorge four hundred yards north of Massa Albaneta; and on its left the 2nd Battalion, to take Points 593 and 569 in succession. The 3rd Battalion was held in reserve, and the Podolski Regiment deployed on the northern half of Colle d'Onufrio to give fire support.

At one o'clock the advance began, and little more than an hour later the 2nd Battalion had taken Point 593 and before three o'clock were on the northern slope of 569. But on the right the 1st Battalion met heavy fire from the gorge which was their first objective, from the western slope of Point 593, from Point 575, and from Colle Sant Angelo. Further movement was impossible until artillery fire had reduced the German opposition, when the Carpathian Riflemen, with support from the tanks, reached the northern edge of the gorge, and found that it was thickly mined. Twenty sappers went in to clear paths and eighteen were killed or wounded. All the tanks of the leading troop and one of another troop were disabled. The Riflemen were held in the gorge, while the Germans shelled it. A few struggled out and forward, and were stopped by fire from Massa Albaneta.

The 2nd Battalion had by now met strong opposition, for on the southern slopes of Point 569 the Riflemen came under fire from the Monastery and from Colle d'Onufrio. With daylight the

Germans began to counter-attack from the rock shelters in the hill where they had lain unharmed by shellfire. Seven times before noon they counter-attacked, supported by fire from the flanks and the rear, and were repulsed. But the battalion remained under fire from the Monastery, from Colle Sant Angelo, from Point 575, and from mortars in the ravines running southward into the Liri Valley, while German artillery about Belmonte and Atina lay so snugly sheltered that only when our fighter-bombers were actually above them were they prevented from firing into the Polish area. In this ring of fire the battalion suffered very heavily, and when the southern slopes of Point 593 were held by one officer and seven men only, the Commander committed to action his reserve, a company of the 3rd Battalion. But at half-past eleven the Germans counter-attacked again and recaptured Point 569.

If he could be given support by the guns of the XIIIth Corps General Anders proposed to renew his attack in the afternoon with fresh troops. But on the afternoon of May the 12th the XIIIth Corps was fighting hard to maintain and enlarge its little bridgehead over the Gari, and it could spare no artillery for any other purpose. The German fire, in the meantime, was growing more intense, and it was discovered that German reserves, as yet uncommitted, were waiting in the vicinity of Villa Santa Lucia and Piedimonte. At two o'clock in the afternoon, therefore, General Anders decided to withdraw to his starting-position, and there reorganise. When darkness fell the infantry began to retire: the 13th and 15th Battalions, with the survivors of Phantom Ridge, to the eastern slopes of Monte Castellone, covered by the 14th Battalion; the little isolated group of Carpathian Riflemen abandoned Point 593, and the greater part of their 1st Battalion retired from the gorge. But one company did not receive the order to retire, and remained there till early afternoon of the following day, and lost more men.

The Polish attack had brought no success that could be marked on the map, but it had drawn to itself a great weight of shells that would otherwise have been directed against the XIIIth Corps in the most critical hours of the assault, and it discovered the reason for the strange silence that fell upon the German artillery during the afternoon of May the 11th. The Germans had lain quiet because, at that particular time, they had no wish to provoke the Allied gunners. That night they meant to carry out extensive reliefs in the mountain sector, and when the Poles attacked they encountered not only those who were due to be relieved, but those who had come to relieve. Nine battalions, they estimated, were engaged, and though

the Germans lost no ground, their loss of men did something to offset the luck that had found them in double strength.

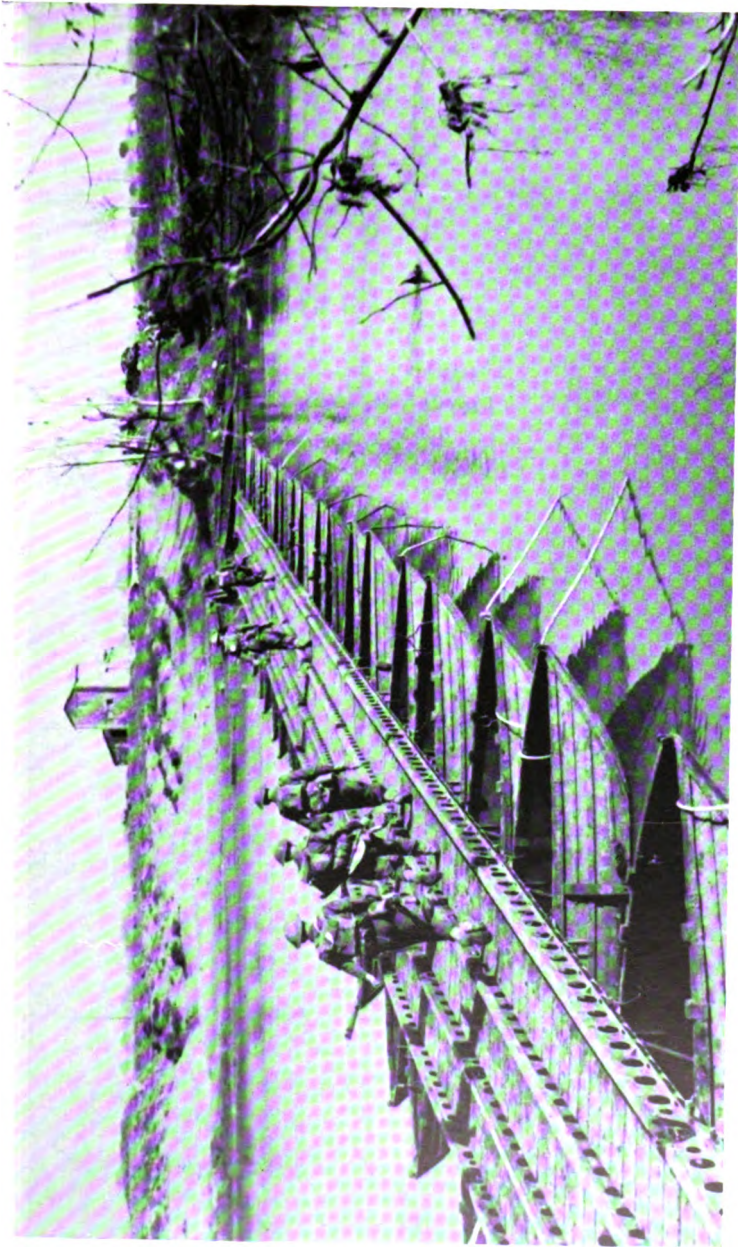
For the next four days, while the infantry reorganised, the Polish guns and Allied fighter-bombers maintained the battle, the former engaging the enemy's batteries and infantry positions, the latter attacking in particular the German gun-area beside Atina and mortars in the gullies beyond Massa Albaneta. On the 14th orders were issued for the second attack, and on that morning tanks made a sortie to the gorge, where under cover of their guns sappers cleared through the minefield paths which thereafter were patrolled and maintained by fire. That was the morning when fog lay so thickly on the valley-floor.

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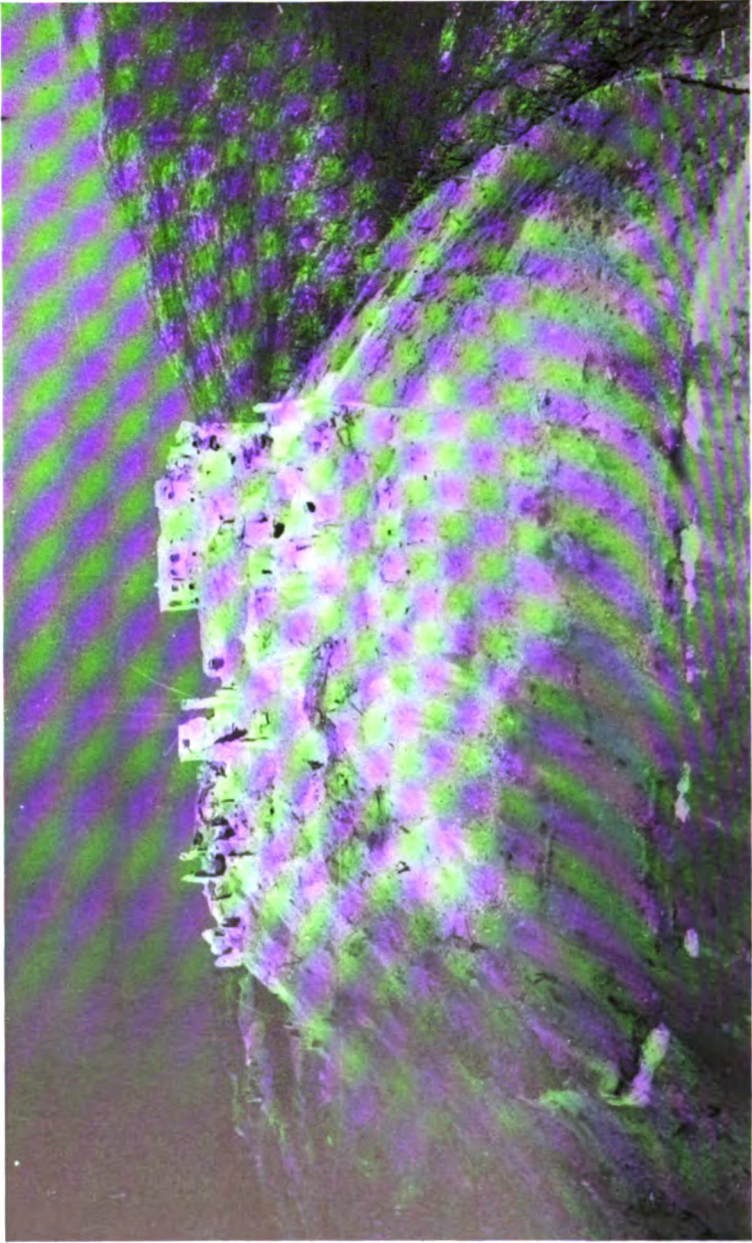
The French Corps takes the Lead

ON the western flank, in the Fifth Army's sector, our fortune had been better. Here General Clark had been confronted with the task of finding a road to Rome through the Auruncian mountains, that rise in places to formidable heights and guard from view the further ranges, the hills and marshes and fertile plains, of the extraordinary varied country between the Liri and the sea, from the Garigliano to the Tiber some sixty miles away. He had, however, had the advantage of wide choice in his plan of attack, and by choosing for his advance the route least obviously desirable—for it included the greatest natural obstacle on his front—he achieved such an advantage by surprise as combined with the wholly unsuspected strength of the French forces who led the attack to present the Allies with their first decisive success in the battle for Rome.

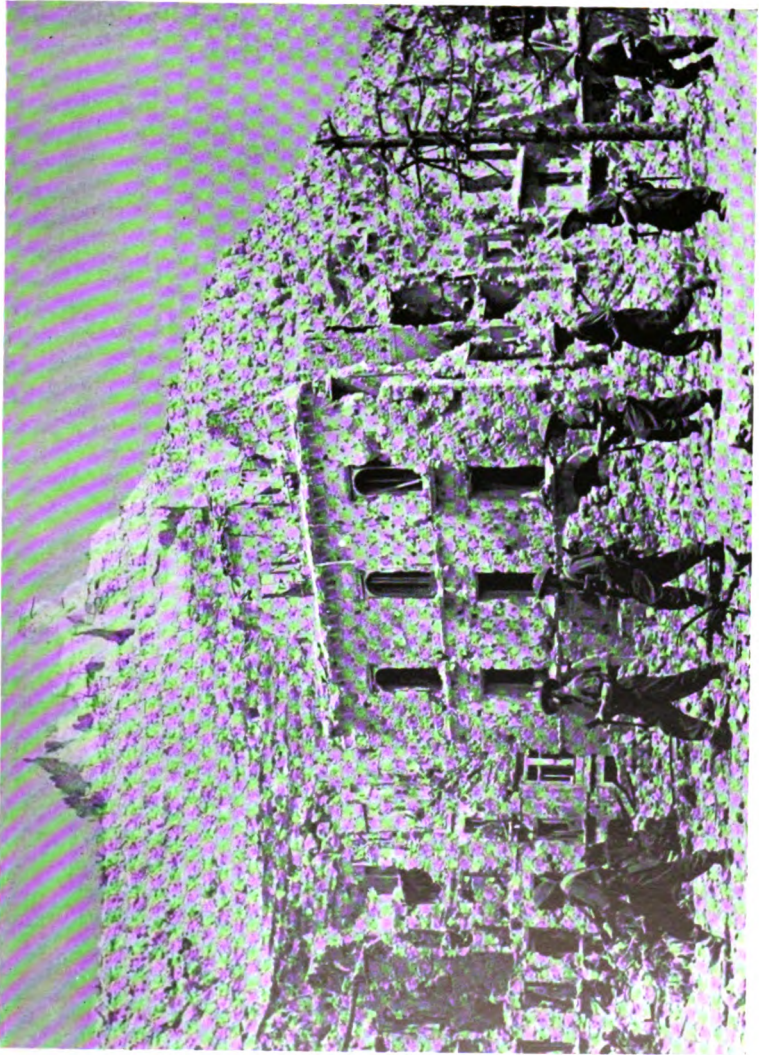
In the last days of quietness the two forward divisions of the American IInd Corps, the 85th and the 88th, had regrouped within their sector, which was that part of the Garigliano bridgehead from the coast east of Scauri to the neighbourhood of Castelforte. Both these divisions were new arrivals in Italy, but each had already had a little experience of battle. The French sector, east from Castelforte, included the rugged hills of Turlito, Juga and Ornito, which the 46th Division had won in early February, and stretched to the Garigliano and along its east bank to the left wing of the Eighth Army. Here the 4th Moroccan Mountain Division had held the right of the bridgehead during April, and when May came in it was



THE GARIGLIANO



CASSINO: THE MONASTERY



CASSINO: THE TOWN AND CASTLE HILL



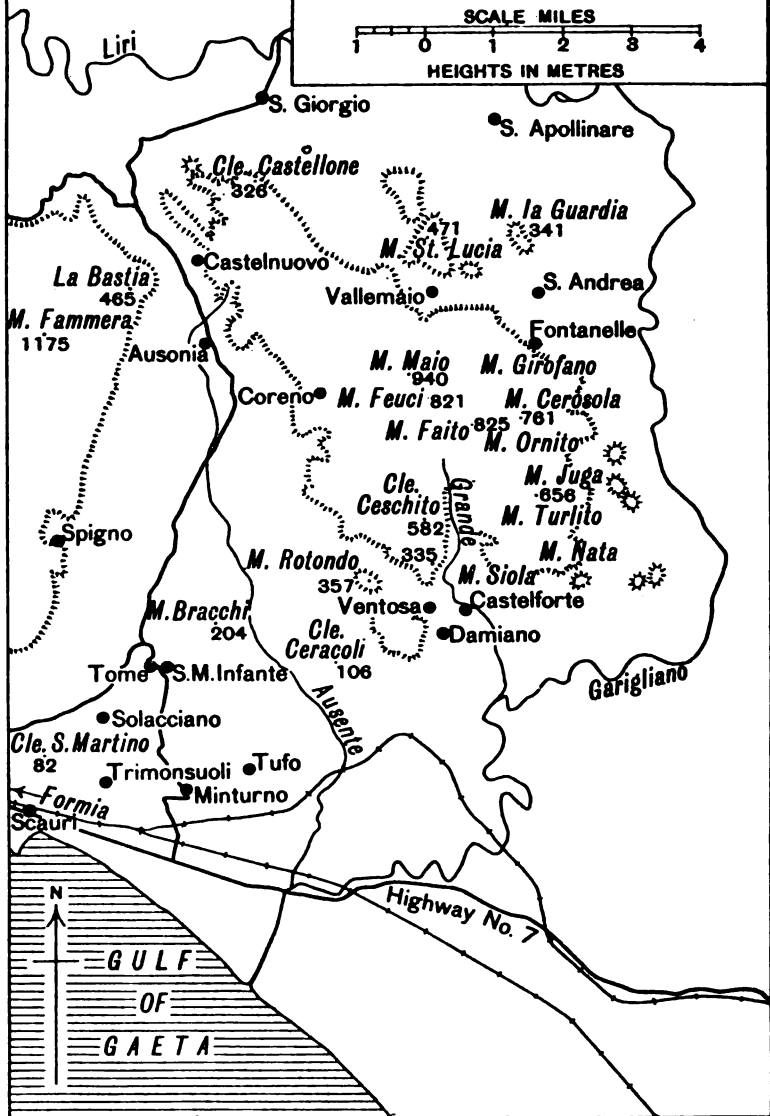
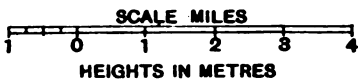
GENERAL ALEXANDER

gradually reinforced till on the eve of the attack there were two complete divisions in the bridgehead—the 4th Mountain and the 2nd Division of Moroccan Infantry—with a brigade of the 1st Motorised Division and two battalions of the 3rd Algerian Division, while the remainder of the latter division, with three groups of Tabors, lay on the river close behind.

Forty minutes after the guns had announced the hour of battle two regiments of the 2nd Moroccan Division moved north-westward to the assault: the 4th Regiment on the right directed up the slopes of Cerosola to Monte Girofano, while the 8th on the left, starting from the top of Ornito, had Monte Faito for its first objective. Within the next twenty-four hours the six hundred guns of the Fifth Army were going to fire 173,941 rounds, and the tremendous downpour of shells had already so damaged the enemy's communications and discouraged his batteries that the Moroccans who started from Ornito met neither artillery nor mortar-fire in the first three-quarters of an hour of their advance. The German infantry resisted strongly, but could not stop them. By three o'clock in the morning the whole top of Faito was in their hands, and before dawn their leading troops were advancing to the saddle between Faito and Feuci. But there, on the saddle, they were stopped before noon on the 12th by small-arms and mortar-fire from the eastern slopes of Feuci.

The 4th Moroccans showed equal vigour against more spectacular and then more serious opposition. For them also in the beginning the American guns had silenced the enemy's field-pieces and mortars, but there were intricate wire-entanglements on the sides of Cerosola, and minefields covered by fougasse flame-throwers activated by remote control; and down the burning hillside swept machine-gun fire. But in spite of this lurid resistance the regiment charged the hill and swiftly took it, then moving northwards against Girofano came under heavy mortar-fire and suffered badly. There was some confusion, the advance was checked, and though the reserve regiment came up to reinforce and repair the losses of the others, no further movement was possible till darkness fell again. Then, under cover of an artillery barrage, the 4th and 5th Moroccans attacked again at three o'clock on the morning of the 13th; the 5th moving round the north-west side of Girofano, the 4th towards its summit. Now the enemy's resistance disclosed some weakness, for though his guns and mortars were still well served, his infantry faltered, a hundred were taken prisoner, and the Moroccans advanced with fewer casualties than before. By half-past seven they were on the top of Girofano and beyond it on Point 739 to the north-west.

MAP No. 23
 May 1944
**THE
 ADVANCE FROM THE GARIGLIANO**



On their left, on the Faito saddle, the 8th Moroccans had in the meantime survived a crisis. In the early afternoon of the 12th they had planned to assault the opposing height of Feuci, and twelve battalions of the artillery behind them had already begun their preliminary bombardment when the whole 2nd Battalion of the 115th Panzer Grenadiers, supported by numerous mortars, launched a counter-attack of extraordinary violence. For some time there was acute anxiety at Corps Headquarters, and General Juin came forward to direct operations. Four of the twelve supporting battalions of artillery put down defensive fire, and after four hours of very stern fighting, in which losses were heavy on both sides, the enemy withdrew.

Promptly, and with great spirit, the French endeavoured to exploit success. The German counter-attack was dismissed as a mere postponement of the attack which they had planned, and on the heels of the retreating Germans they advanced. But all the eastern side of Feuci was deluged with shells and mortar-bombs, and half an hour later the Moroccans were back on the saddle. Daylight attack, it was decided, was for the present too expensive, and General Juin ordered patrols to be sent forward, by moonlight in the early morning, as precursors of a forenoon attack on the 13th. But the patrols made little progress, and again the enemy spoiled intention by a counter-attack that set back the assault on Feuci by another two hours. Then, when the Moroccans again advanced, they found the German infantry, as they had been on Girofano, somewhat less than usually resolute, and though gunfire was heavy they reached the crest of Feuci before noon and looked up at the commanding summit of Monte Maio, a thousand yards away.

It was a steep climb to the top, but there was no other opposition. The Germans had retired from the nearer slopes, and shortly after four o'clock the 8th Moroccans were on the crown of Monte Maio. Rising three thousand feet above the sea, it is the dominating height of that part of the Auruncian Mountains which separates the narrow Ausonia valley from the broad valley of the Liri; a natural strong-point of the Gustav Line, the Germans had assumed that the physical difficulties of approaching it would prevent a serious attack, and its surprising capture, in less than forty-eight hours of fighting, was a disaster to the enemy from which he never recovered. His attempts to repair its loss came always too late and too haltingly. On either side of Monte Maio the French were now sure of penetrating the German line.

On the right of the Corps the 1st Motorised Division had in the

meantime made a substantial advance in the loop of the Garigliano north-east of Monte Maio. Its 4th Brigade, supported by the American 575th Tank Battalion and the 8th Tank Destroyer Battalion of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, had forced a way across the anti-tank ditch that split the river-flat between the Garigliano and the hills rising east of Girofano, and when, about half a mile beyond the ditch, the armour had been stopped in the fog and smoke gloom of early morning by a series of enemy strongpoints, the infantry of the 22nd Battalion had carried the attack through four hours of bitter fighting to the wooded knolls of Conventi, which they took at ten in the morning of the 12th. Before noon the 24th Battalion was in Fontanelle, on the ridge above Conventi, already looking down on the road to Sant Andrea, but so exposed to fire from Girofano that presently it had to withdraw again. The 21st Battalion, however, had established itself on Point 290, on the eastern side of Girofano, and in the afternoon preparations were made to co-ordinate a further advance with the 2nd Moroccan Division's attack on the mountain.

Light tanks of the Division came up to the east bank of the river to give covering fire, and a battalion of howitzers crossed it to add their fire to that of the infantry guns. Girofano was taken by troops of the 2nd Division, and with nothing now to harass its left flank, the 4th Brigade was on the Fontanelle ridge by noon, and in the evening both armour and infantry drove forward and took first Sant Andrea, then Sant Apollinare two and a half miles beyond it to the north. La Guardia, dominating the river-corner, was also occupied, and there was no more resistance in that area.

On the left flank of the Corps the initial assault was made by three infantry regiments of the 4th Mountain Division. From the pass between Monte Juga and Monte Turlito the 6th Moroccan Infantry attacked north-westward against strong resistance, and took Point 664, from which they overlooked the upper reaches of the river Grande and the enemy positions east of it. There they remained until the 8th Regiment, which had taken Faito and was now stopped on the saddle beyond it, should be able to move forward to Feuci. On the left of the 6th, the 2nd Moroccans advanced from Monte Nata to clear the western slopes of Juga and Turlito, and having accomplished most of their task with no great difficulty by daylight, found a strongly defended blockhouse on a ridge running south-east from Juga, whose stubborn garrison made casualties of half the two companies that attacked it, but yielded at last in the early morning of the 13th.

The other regiment of the 4th Mountain Division, the 1st Moroccan Infantry, was in reserve while the 4th Tunisian Infantry of the 3rd Algerian Division fought on the left flank for the long-delayed capture of Castelforte.

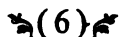
The 1st Battalion of the Tunisians, starting from Monte Nata, quickly took Monte della Torre, and at dawn on the 12th turned south and attempted Monte Siola; but without success. A company of the 3rd Battalion, on the west bank of the river, succeeded in gaining the crest of Cimprone, but could go no farther; and the remainder of the battalion had to wait until its supporting armour, which had been delayed, should cross the river. In early daylight the 4th Spahi Reconnaissance Battalion came over, with part of the American 755th Tank Battalion and the 7th Tank Destroyer Battalion of the Chasseurs d'Afrique; and then the 3rd Battalion, advancing westward over the flat riverland, split into several groups below Castelforte. One group, of infantry and armour, advanced northward against the village from the main road; another mixed group moved across the side of Monte Siola to the slopes above the village.

The 2nd Battalion, in the meantime, had crossed the river and by ten o'clock was on the hillside above the village of Damiano. It was supported by armour of the 3rd Spahi Reconnaissance Battalion, the American 755th Tank Battalion, and the 7th Tank Destroyer Battalion. By noon Castelforte was almost surrounded, and the French left flank had been secured by the Americans' capture of Monte Cianelli and the little village of Ventosa. But Castelforte and Damiano were stoutly held, their garrisons had numerous mortars and machine-guns, and attacks that were launched at two in the afternoon, and again at four, failed for lack of strength. But at five o'clock the villages were attacked in force, and the enemy's intercepted wireless messages admitted that the situation was desperate. Rubble blocked the entry to Castelforte from the south, but from the south-east, from the hill immediately above it, two infantry platoons with tanks went in between five and six, and well before midnight the last of the defenders had been eliminated; and Castelforte and Damiano were both secure in French hands.

The way was now open for an advance to Coreno; or would be when the entry had been widened by capture of the hills on either side. On the afternoon of the 13th the American 350th Infantry took Monte Rotondo to the south, and the French in a day's fighting cleared Monte Ceschito to the north by conjoint action of the 6th Moroccans, who came down from Faito; of the 2nd

Moroccans; fighting up its steep eastern slope; and of the 4th Tunisians in a hard battle northwards from Point 335 above Castelforte. More than seven hundred prisoners were caught in this brilliant attack when troops of the three regiments met on the summit of Ceschito; and now, in the evening of the 13th, the French on their mountain line had no organised opposition before them from the top of Ceschito to the crest of Maio. The German 71st Grenadier Division had been well beaten, and the stage was set for yet more rapid action, for an advance to Esperia, an assault on Monte Revole.

On the 14th—the morning of fog in the Liri Valley—the French Mountain Corps went swiftly forward with the Goumiers, its fierce irregulars, in the van.



Americans on the Coast

ON the left, the seaward flank of the Allied Armies, the 85th and 88th Divisions of Major-General Keyes' IInd Corps had attacked simultaneously with varying success. The main effort was entrusted to the 88th on the right.

The plan of attack was a frontal advance against the defences of the Gustav Line, with the weight of it concentrated about Minturno and on the undulating slopes above it that lead to Monte Bracchi. On the left, by the sea, the land was low-lying, thickly settled, and swift movement could not be expected; while on the right the IInd Corps' purpose was to assist the French by capturing heights south-east of Castelforte. But if, in the centre of the line, the hills north of Minturno could be taken, the tactical reward would be considerable, and the enemy's hold on the lower part of the Ausonia valley might be expected to collapse.

The 350th Infantry, on the right of the 88th, was led by two companies of the 1st Battalion, that advanced over terraced olive-groves, and against moderate opposition quickly took Point 413, their first objective; and on the following day a platoon took the nearby village of Ventosa and twenty-five prisoners without loss to itself. The 2nd Battalion took Point 316, a little farther north, and dug-in against anticipated counter-attack, which came before dawn but was defeated and driven back by quickly responding artillery, by mortar and small-arms fire. Armour of the 753rd Tank

Battalion, moving up the glen of the Ausente, had in the meantime over-run Ceracoli, and the infantry followed. These were the regiment's first objectives, and no more was required of it till the French had cleared the other side of the Castelforte road. Then, under cover of intense fire and against slight opposition, the 1st Battalion took Monte Rotondo and completed its task in support.

The 351st Regiment had the major role, and its initial purpose was the capture of the village of Santa Maria Infante on the ridge running north from Minturno. On either side the ridge falls away in terraced slopes and little ravines, and from the west it is commanded by a chain of seven small hills that was called the S Ridge. It was desolate country, the vineyards unkempt and the olive-trees broken by fire, the fields overgrown with weeds and poppies. It was long since the farmers had tended them, and long since the enemy had begun to prepare them for defence. The whole area was covered by fire, its defenders on the S Ridge being the 1st Battalion of the 267th Grenadier Regiment, and the 94th Reconnaissance Regiment in Santa Maria.

The attack was made by the 2nd Battalion of the 351st with two companies moving astride of the Minturno road. East of the road the land was broken by a broad gully, behind which lay the 1st and 3rd Battalions to provide covering fire, while farther east the 349th Infantry and the Cannon Company of the 351st, near Tufo, also gave support. The leading companies quickly secured a pair of small hills, some two thousand yards from their starting line, and part of the left-hand company went forward to a road between Santa Maria and the hamlet of Tome, where it was caught and held by small arms fire from both flanks, front and rear. On the east of the road the other leading company, after slight progress beyond the twin hills that cost it ninety casualties, including the Battalion Commander, was stopped by machine-gun fire from a group of houses; it was joined by a third company, and both dug in.

Now the 3rd Battalion came up, west of the road, to retrieve the situation by a twofold attack on Santa Maria in conjunction with the two companies on the right; but eight well-sited machine-guns on a hillock to the left, and continuing fire from the S Ridge—which troops of the 338th Infantry had meanwhile attacked but failed to capture—again brought movement to a halt. Armour in small groups had been active during the night of the first attack and the morning of the 12th, but in spite of some local successes the tanks had also failed to make progress. Throughout the day the guns of both sides drenched the debatable land with shells, and when night

fell the little isolated company on the road to Tome was attacked, and the fifty men who remained were taken prisoner.

Elsewhere the regiment was counter-attacked during darkness, and in the early afternoon of the 13th a score of Focke-Wulfe fighters raided Minturno and Trimensuoli. The regiment had planned a new attack at dawn, but this was postponed—or should have been postponed—till the late afternoon when it would coincide with a renewed assault on the S Ridge by the 338th. The later order, however, failed to reach the 2nd Battalion of the 351st, which attacked at half-past four, west of the road, and won a hill-top called the Spur, where it was again halted. The enemy, moreover, had apparently intercepted a message that revealed the 3rd Battalion's time of attack, for at half-past six, when it was preparing to move, a sudden storm of 88-millimetre shells fell in its area, caused many casualties, and spoiled it of its intention. The 1st Battalion, advancing up the bed of the stream under the S Ridge, defeated in several hours of fighting the enemy's machine-guns, and completed the occupation of a hillock on the ridge which the 338th had already partly taken.

At dawn on the 14th the advance was resumed. The enemy had retired during the night, leaving rear-guards only in Santa Maria and on the Ridge. These were eliminated during the forenoon, the fragmentary ruins of Santa Maria were finally occupied, and after sixty hours of very stubborn fighting the 351st secured its objective.

The 85th Division, on the left, had had a similarly protracted battle for its objectives: the S Ridge and the small round hills of San Martino, north of Scauri. The only method by which the 338th Infantry, on the Division's right, could attack the Ridge, was by frontal attack from its positions above Trimensuoli, and while the opening barrage kept the German heads down, the 1st Battalion made progress up the valley to the east, and one company reached the last hillock above Tome, but had later to give ground. Another company reached the centre of the Ridge, but had also to withdraw. On the 12th, when the 351st asked for assistance on its left, the 1st Battalion attacked again up the valley, while tanks and tank destroyers came far forward to engage twelve German tanks in Tome and on the strongpoints on the hillock above. But the enemy's fire was still extremely heavy, and by midnight, when the attacking companies were withdrawn, the strength of the battalion had been reduced to three hundred and fifty.

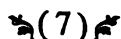
The 3rd Battalion had also gained but a precarious foothold on the Ridge. The Germans in Solacciano defended the village with

fanatical vigour, and after the most strenuous effort the Americans had captured only two houses by late afternoon of the 12th. Systematically, with grenades and bazookas, they cleared the remainder of it, but when the battalion dug-in to hold its gains, it numbered no more than two hundred men.

Again, before dawn on the 13th, the 1st Battalion assaulted the northern part of the Ridge, and again was stopped. In the afternoon twelve tanks, with infantry, went forward from Solacciano and made a little progress along the Ridge, and held most of their ground against counter-attack. The 2nd Battalion, after initial reverse, took San Martino's neighbour-hill to the north, Cave d'Argilla, and held it against a prompt and resolute counter-attack. Then on the 14th, as the enemy withdrew, the regiment secured the middle parts of the Ridge and sent forward its outposts to the Formia road.

Meanwhile, in fighting as stubborn against an enemy as resolute as elsewhere, the 3rd Battalion of the 339th Infantry had captured the two little hills of San Martino, with the assistance of exceptionally heavy mortar-fire, and held them against the Germans' several efforts to regain their tenure. The 1st Battalion's objective was the ridge of San Domenico, south-west of Trimensuoli, but its defence resisted frontal assault, and the battalion dug-in east of Scauri. Small peaks on the south-eastern slopes of Monte dei Pensieri were the 2nd Battalion's objectives, but though to begin with it achieved a limited success against well-built defences, counter-attack compelled withdrawal and left one company isolated on an intermediate ridge. In the evening of the 13th, its ammunition exhausted, this company was obliged to surrender; but elsewhere the enemy had been decisively beaten, and in this sector also he withdrew when darkness came.

Dawn of the 14th came brightly for the diminished battalions of the IInd Corps, and brought in a better week than the desperation of their initial fighting had allowed them to expect. For the next seven days the enemy, steadily withdrawing as the French maintained their irresistible advance through the mountains, made on this seaward flank no serious or prolonged attempt at resistance.



Close Fighting in the Valley

IN the Liri Valley the enemy was by now mustering with feverish haste all his available reserves, and endeavouring to form a coherent

defence. A reserve battalion of the 1st Parachute Regiment had come into the Valley, with two battalions of the 114th Jaeger Division, a company at a time, from the central mountains; and a miscellaneous reinforcement from the 5th Mountain Division had arrived. These troops were formed into two battle-groups, the Schultz Group on the north, the Bode Group on the south of the Valley line. The 200th Panzer Grenadier Regiment had begun to move forward from Piglio, followed by the remainder of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division; but as the German position in the mountains south of the Liri was rapidly deteriorating, the 200th Panzer Grenadiers were diverted and sent to reinforce the defeated 71st Division.

The Commander of the XIIIth Corps had intended that the 78th Division should advance through the 4th Division and the 8th Indian Division, as early as possible after dawn on the 14th, to make contact with the Poles on Highway 6. The Poles, however, were compelled to postpone the renewal of their attack, and the 78th was delayed by recurrent damage to its bridges, and hindered by the growing congestion of traffic behind the river. Space was limited on both sides of the Gari. Reconnaissance parties of the 78th returned with the news that it was going to be difficult to find room for transport on the forward bank, and on the hither side, in the neighbourhood of Monte Trocchio, there was so great and close an array of vehicles that everyone who could remember evil days in the Desert, when the Germans dominated the air, pictured with imagined fear the chaos that would occur if the enemy suddenly produced, from some unsuspected reserve, a few resolute squadrons of dive-bombers.

But our control of the air was by now absolute, or within a degree or two of that, and as evidence of our dominion *the Cab Rank* circled steadily overhead. This was a continuous circus of fighter-bombers, controlled by a senior officer of the Royal Air Force who, in his position on the top of Monte Trocchio, could receive from anywhere in the battle-area a wireless call for assistance, and promptly send, to its designated target, a bomber from the rank. On the plain below him the many guns of the Army maintained their ceaseless fire, and from the German batteries came an irregular response. Slowly in the yellow dust the long transport columns moved forward, or waited in their areas—the patient soldiers brewing tea in the shadow of their vehicles—and the officer on Trocchio must often have thought, with a justified and decent complacency, that it was his Service, youngest of the three, which

permitted this monstrous assembly and preserved it as a token of decisive victory in the sky.

The 78th Division was initially to go forward with one battalion leading. It had been hoped that the Monastery would by now have fallen to Polish attack, but as the Irish Brigade came up in the van of the 78th the soldiers realised that those broken walls, high on their commanding hill round which the smoke-clouds drifted and dispersed and filled again, still gave the Germans observation over the crowded valley. Smoke lay heavily across its floor and the din of battle was unceasing.

Major-General Keightley, commanding the 78th, had decided on four bounds for his Divisional advance, and with cheerful irrelevance christened them *Grafton*, *Pytchley*, *Fernie*, and *Bedale*. The Irish Brigade came over the Gari on the 14th, but shell-fire on the bridges and heavy traffic on the approaches still hindered the movement of supporting arms, and the advance to *Grafton*—which coincided with the road from Cassino to Pignataro—was put off till the following day, when the Division was also expected to reach forward from there to *Pytchley*.

In the meantime, in the 4th Division's sector, the 12th Brigade made a good beginning on the 14th, and the Royal Fusiliers and the Black Watch, supported by the Lothians' tanks, took their next objective and crossed the Pignataro road in the early morning while the West Kents, echeloned back on the left flank, made a small advance to the south-west, and supported by a squadron of the 19th New Zealand Armoured Regiment took Point 66. The enemy replied with counter-attacks against both flanks of the Brigade, but these were repelled with the aid of tanks and defensive fire. On the left, however, the situation was still uncomfortably fluid, and to consolidate it the Hampshires, of the 28th Brigade, advanced in the later afternoon against Massa Vertechi, which they took after two hours of fighting. At the same time the West Kents tried to reach the road due west of Massa Vertechi; but without much success.

On the 14th that area of ground east of the road from Sant Angelo, confined by the Gari, the Liri, and their confluence—it was known as the Liri Appendix—was completely cleared by the 14th Canadian Armoured Regiment; but the enemy had already retired and the Canadians took only a few prisoners. Elsewhere in the sector of the 8th Indian Division the Royal Fusiliers and the Frontier Force Regiment, of the 17th Brigade, were securely established on Colle Romano and at Casa Vittiglio, while the 19th

Brigade was moving west towards Pignataro, and two battalions of the 21st were over the river. The bridges had now been built.

Turning north-west, the 21st made a considerable advance on the following day, its Royal West Kent battalion going forward to the neighbourhood of Evangelista, whence two companies and the 1st Mahrattas attacked and took high ground north of Pignataro; while the Argyll and Sutherlands, of the 19th Brigade, moved to a position south-east of the village. Pignataro was taken at eleven o'clock that night, after heavy bombardment by artillery and mortars, by the 6th Frontier Force Rifles. The prisoners taken there belonged to a composite unit which had been hurriedly mustered from a Mountain Training school.

On the right of the Liri front the 4th Division had closed a gap between its 10th and 12th Brigades, and established a continuous line between Massa de Vivo and Point 63. The West Kents, in battalion strength with armour supporting them, had fought for two hours in the middle of the day to clear Point 86 on the Pignataro road and secure the Division's other flank. The 4th was now to serve as a pivot on which the 78th might base a wheeling movement to the north. The 78th had again been delayed and spoiled of its intention to reach *Pythley* on the 15th. Somewhat to the surprise of its leading troops their approach to *Grafton* had been contested by stubbornly remaining groups of the enemy, still to be eliminated, and by anti-tank guns, few in number but well sited. The close country was difficult for armour, there were mines to be lifted, and the enemy still had observation of the battle-field that enabled him to put down well-directed artillery and mortar fire; much of the latter came from what was known as the Mortar Wadi, west of Cassino hill. By the end of the day the Inniskillings had done well to establish themselves firmly on the *Grafton* line: the Pignataro road, that is.

During the first few days of fighting in the crowded valley it was often impossible for a battalion commander to get accurate information of the positions held by his neighbours on his right and left. More than once, indeed, embittered officers were heard to say that it was far easier to learn what the Germans were doing, than to get news of the Royal So-and-So's on their right. The fog of war was very evident in those days, the metaphorical fog being thickened every morning by heavy mist rising from the marshy fields, and by the filthy clouds that came pouring from the canisters and smoke-bombs of both sides.

The Inniskillings, for example, leading the Irish Brigade on the

morning of the 15th, came through standing corn, unseeing and unseen, to within seventy yards of a German stronghold at Massa Tamburrini; where machine-gun fire checked them at daybreak, and they heard the enemy's tanks. They waited till the sappers behind them should finish a bridge and let a squadron of the 16th/5th Lancers come over the river; and in the meantime engaged the enemy with small arms and mortar fire. About nine o'clock the fog lifted and the Lancers came through the corn. Artillery concentrated on Tamburrini, the infantry and tanks went forward, and half an hour later the village had been taken.

Quickly the attack moved on towards Point 86 on the Pignataro road. For five minutes the divisional artillery was directed on it, two regiments of self-propelled guns fired air-bursts over positions south-east of it, the Lancers found targets for their guns and machine-guns, and then two companies of the Inniskillings, charging with the advancing tanks, took their objective despite the loss of several tanks in a mine-field. Sixty prisoners and five anti-tank guns were captured; a score of Germans had been killed, two self-propelled guns and a Mark IV tank destroyed; and by noon the battalion was securely in possession of its sector of the *Grafton* line. While this action was in progress the West Kents of the 4th Division, a few hundred yards to the north, were also fighting towards Point 86; which they reached about an hour after the Irish were established south-west of it.

Casualties in the battalion had not been heavy, but they increased in the afternoon when the enemy's harassing fire, from artillery, self-propelled guns, mortars and nebelwerfers, became phenomenally heavy; and the London Irish Rifles, now moving up behind the Inniskillings in preparation for the next advance, lost their Colonel, who was killed, and the Colonel of the 16th/5th Lancers was seriously wounded. The task of the Irish Rifles was to take the *Pythley* line in co-operation with the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, of the 11th Brigade, on their right, each battalion supported by the Lancers with a squadron of tanks; while the Derbyshire Yeomanry, with the 10th Rifle Brigade under command, protected their left flank, and a barrage laid by seven field regiments preceded the attack.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the 16th the barrage came noisily down, and trapping many Germans in their dug-outs, allowed the infantry to reach them with bayonets before they realised that the barrage had moved on. The Irish Rifles advanced astride the road to Casa Sinagogga, the Lancashire Fusiliers were

parallel to the north. A mine-field, covered by fire from close range, did not stop them. On the left flank the Derbyshire Yeomanry were held up for several hours by strongpoints south of the Piopetto, where with tanks and anti-tank guns the Germans held fast until the Rifle Brigade came up to consolidate the Yeomanry's gains and assist in expelling the enemy. This long delay opened the Irish Rifles' southern flank to persistent heavy fire, but their squadron of Lancers gave the staunchest support, and not only put out of action several of the enemy's fighting vehicles, but blew up two of his ammunition dumps. In the village of Sinagogga there was very desperate hand-to-hand fighting for an hour before the surviving enemy surrendered; and the junction between Rifles and Fusiliers was the scene of a fierce counter-attack that was subdued by more hard fighting, in which a Mark IV tank was destroyed at a range of fifty yards. All day the enemy's artillery and mortar-fire was very heavy, and his machine-gun fire unusually intense; but *Pytchley* was won, and before dark companies were patrolling towards *Fernie*. Casualties were not light, but the Germans lost a hundred and fifty killed, three hundred prisoners, and a score of anti-tank guns.

In the 4th Division's sector there was no advance on the 16th, but in the evening the Bedfords and West Kents supported by New Zealand tanks fought to eliminate a small enemy salient that still threatened the junction of the 10th and 12th Brigades in the vicinity of Massa de Vivo. Visibility was bad, and through the smoke the infantry could barely see fifty yards ahead; but the Bedfords took their objective along the Pignataro road at point of the bayonet, their opponents of the 1st Parachute Machine-gun Battalion suffering heavily in the engagement. New Zealand tanks led the West Kents in their attack, and in some places the enemy showed white flags to the armour and then returned to their well-hidden machine-gun nests to oppose the infantry. At last light the West Kents were still a little short of their objective, and had to dig-in where they were. Their prisoners complained that no rations had been brought up during the last forty-eight hours, and said that in some places their ammunition was exhausted.

These actions on the 16th were designed to improve the position of the XIIIth Corps in preparation for a renewed offensive in which the Canadian Corps would come into the Liri Valley on the left; and for another effort in conjunction with the Polish Corps to isolate Cassino. When the 78th Division came into action the XIIIth Corps was left without a reserve; but during the 16th the 8th Indian Division had been relieved by the 1st Canadian Division,

command of its sector had been assumed by the Canadian Corps, and now the Indian Division would lie in reserve except for its 17th Brigade which remained temporarily under command of the Canadians. The bridgehead, by this time, was approximately two miles deep. Its cost, to the XIIIth Corps, had been 4,056 killed, wounded, or missing.

On the 17th the 4th Division attacked with two brigades towards the railway that below Cassino hill runs nearly parallel with Highway 6; and the 78th continued its wheeling movement towards the *Fernie* line to threaten the highway farther to the west. On the left flank of the Corps the Derbyshire Yeomanry advanced to the river Fernile in the neighbourhood of Massa Pontanolongo, where it was in contact with the 1st Canadians to the south.

In spite of shelling from the Monastery and Piedimonte, the 11th and Irish Brigades of the 78th had no great difficulty in reaching the *Fernie* line, but the later advance of the Irish to Piumarola and the *Bedale* objective was more difficult. The Royal Irish Fusiliers had taken Massa Cerro, on *Fernie*, but west of that lay territory still unexplored except by the Lothian and Border Horse, who were somewhere in the neighbourhood of Piumarola. About mid-day the Inniskillings were brought up to Massa Cerro to capture the ground overlooking Piumarola, and a patrol that went out made contact with the Lothians, and returned to report that the village was strongly held with anti-tank and self-propelled guns in attendance on the garrison. An attack was planned for the late afternoon, the village was shelled in preparation for the assault, and with the Lothians and their own squadron of Lancers to support them the Inniskillings quickly took it, captured a hundred prisoners, of the 361st Panzer Grenadier Regiment, who had arrived from Rome only twenty-four hours before; and by nightfall were consolidating their new position.

The 4th Division, advancing northward, had also done well. The Bedfords of the 10th Brigade on the right had advanced to the railway, then to Highway 6, and put patrols across it; and all battalions of the 12th advanced in conformity with the 78th's attack on their left, forward troops of the 6th Black Watch and the 2nd Royal Fusiliers reaching the highway by noon. In the town of Cassino the 1st Guards Brigade observed more movement than usual, but an appeal by loudspeaker to the remaining Germans to surrender, despite the choice of what appeared to be the psychological moment for such an address, was quite unavailing, and the enemy's a-psychological reaction was to fire rifle-grenades at the

voice of persuasion. But though they would not listen to reason they could not disregard force, and after dark the Bren-carriers and tanks of the 4th Division reached and cut the highway that was the life-line to Cassino; and to the west the 11th Brigade of the 78th came forward to fill the gap between that division and the 4th.

In the Valley the day had brought gratifying success; but the day's hardest fighting had been on the mountains.

❧(8)❧

General Anders Strikes Again

GENERAL ANDERS'S plan for his second attack on the heights did not substantially differ from his first. After twenty minutes' bombardment of the enemy's batteries and mortars, the artillery would concentrate on the German infantry positions, and then, at seven in the morning, his two divisions would again attack their original objectives; but after taking Massa Albaneta and Point 569, the Carpathian Division would await further orders before turning south-east against the Monastery. But though the plan was the same, the conditions were different. The enemy had lost heavily under the first attack, and since then the 1st Parachute Division had been compelled to weaken itself by sending reinforcements into the Valley in the vain hope of patching the ever-increasing holes in the Gustav Line. The Germans' mountain-garrison now consisted, according to intelligence reports, of three battalions; two of them, 2nd/100th Mountain Regiment and the 1st/3rd Parachute Regiment, both in the line, were below strength. In the Valley, moreover, the threat to Highway 6—the escape-route from Cassino—was very near to materialising.

The Kresowa Division proposed, on this occasion, to attack in waves of battalion strength, and take in succession the northern part of Phantom Ridge, Colle Sant Angelo, and Point 575; an *ad hoc* group, of greater than brigade-strength with supporting armour, would then carry the advance downhill to cross Highway 6 to meet the 78th. Circumstances changed the plan, however, for on the night of the 16th a company of the 16th Battalion, making a reconnaissance in force on Phantom Ridge, captured a number of enemy positions, and the Battalion Commander, quick to exploit success, had his remaining companies there before midnight. There was

a lot of confused fighting on the ridge, and a strong German counter-attack; but the 16th held its ground.

In the morning, when the artillery opened fire, the 17th Battalion came quickly through the 16th and began its attack on Colle Sant Angelo at ten minutes past seven. So swift had been its movement that it escaped the enemy's defensive fire, and without much difficulty took the hill, though leaving behind it some pill-boxes on the western side. Then it came under heavy fire from Passo Corno and the Villa Santa Lucia, and the Germans counter-attacked from the vineyards under the south-western slopes. Twice they were repelled, but the 17th were running out of ammunition—the enemy's defensive fire, which the assaulting companies had avoided by their speed, had caught the following porters—and in their third attack the Germans recaptured the southerly peak of Colle Sant Angelo. But now the 15th Battalion had moved forward to join the 16th, and both were employed to restore the situation. That was done, defence was organised, and there was the limit of the day's achievement; which had discomfited the Germans, but cost the Kresowa Division many lives.

Massa Albaneta and Point 593, the dominating features of German defence, were the Carpathian Division's primary objectives; and the 2nd Brigade, with the 2nd Tank Squadron and a troop of anti-tank guns, prepared to take them by direct assault. Soon after seven o'clock, on the morning of the 17th, the 6th Battalion advanced to the still troublesome gorge north of Massa Albaneta with a company of sappers, but found that the removal of the Germans and their mines was going to take longer than had been anticipated. It was therefore decided to commit the 4th Battalion to an attack on Point 593 while Massa Albaneta was kept inactive under fire. The 4th began its assault at twenty minutes past nine, and immediately the Germans counter-attacked in strength from the south. All three companies of the 4th joined battle, and by half-past eleven had forced their way to the summit, with its view across the intervening valley to the Monastery two hundred feet below it; and Point 593 was in their hands. Meanwhile, under machine-gun fire, the sappers in the gorge were still lifting mines.

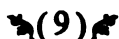
In the early afternoon a company of the 6th Battalion advanced to within two hundred yards of Massa Albaneta, and then was halted by a storm of fire from well-hidden and well-dispersed steel pill-boxes. The 4th Battalion attacked southward to Point 569, but was obstructed—as had been the Indians before it—by what appeared to be the ruins of an old fort; and under mortar-fire

from the Monastery and machine-gun fire from Point 575 the companies began to wither away. The 5th Battalion came forward to reinforce, but till Massa Albaneta should be taken, the capture of Point 569 was impossible. The Division was forced to accept this unwelcome fact, and prepared defensive positions for the night.

In a day of bitter fighting, much of it man-to-man in closest conflict, the Poles had broken the enemy's northern defence ring; but a little rest and a lot of reorganisation were necessary before they could complete their task of clearing the mountains, and reach the highway below them. The Carpathian Division was ordered to prevent any attempt by the enemy to withdraw along the ridge from Monte Cassino to Massa Albaneta, and preparations were made to defend Colle Sant Angelo against the anticipated counter-attack. The Germans, however, neither counter-attacking nor retiring, stayed where they were and still fought to defend their rocky strongholds. Or many of them fought, but not all; the remnant garrison in the Monastery had had its fill of war, and when in the morning of the 18th a patrol of the 12th Podolski Lancers set out from Colle d'Onufrio they met no resistance from the thirty soldiers, many of them wounded, who still held the mighty ruins. Their commander surrendered, and by half-past ten the Polish standard flew above the Monastery.

In the town below, troops of the 4th Division were clearing the monstrous wreckage of tumbled streets, and searching the warren of cellars and tunnels about the Continental Hotel, the Hotel des Roses, the Baron's Palace and the Gaol. On the mountain top the Poles continued to search for and destroy—not without difficulty—the last Germans in the ultimate strongpoints on Massa Albaneta, on Point 569 and Point 593; and to occupy Point 575 and the vineyard below it took them longer still. But a little after noon on the 18th a patrol met troops of the 78th Division on Highway 6, due south of the crest of Colle Sant Angelo, and the Polish mission was accomplished.

Now the Germans had lost, to its last shred, any hope they may have had of prolonging battle in the lower valley of the Liri. The loss of Monte Cassino made untenable all their positions below it, and on the 18th both Corps in the valley found that the enemy had everywhere broken contact. All he could do now was to retire and gather his disorganised troops for defence of the Hitler Line; but already the Hitler Line was in peril of being outflanked from the south by the triumphal advance of the French.



The Speed of the Goumiers

ON the morning of the 12th the Goums—three *Groupements* of Tabors—had crossed the Garigliano by the Damiano bridge, entered Castelforte in the evening behind the 4th Tunisian Infantry, and moved westward after dark into the valley north of Monte Rotondo. There, on the 13th, they waited until the French had cleared the enemy from Ceschito, and Major-General Guillaume, in command of the Mountain Corps that was now to quicken the tempo of battle, divided his force into three groups: a battalion of the 1st Moroccan Infantry and the 1st Group of Tabors; another battalion of the 1st Moroccans and the 4th Group; a battalion of the 6th Moroccans and the 3rd Group. The force consisted of 12,000 men and 4,000 mules, and its task was to force its way through the mountains from the Ausonia Valley to the road between Itri and Pico.

West of the Ausonia Valley the country rises over a high escarpment to a wild mountain region whose centre is Monte Revole, more than 4,000 feet high. The mountains are treeless, and there are no roads but shepherds' paths. Access to this inhospitable region is almost impossible from the south and east except for a path at Spigno that climbs the escarpment on a gradient, at its worst, of one in two. The whole region had been carefully reconnoitred and photographed from the air, and though there were some tolerable tracks reaching north and west from Monte Revole, American engineers were of the opinion that the initial path from Spigno was useless for transport of any kind, and only foot-soldiers could climb it. But the French thought differently. The French declared that where their mountain infantry could go, so could their mules and guns. And the French had their way.

As soon as Ceschito had fallen the three mountain-groups moved forward. The 1st Group turned west, and by the early afternoon of the 14th was just east of the Ausonia road and halted by enemy tanks and infantry; the American 753rd Tank Battalion, on its left, was held by a large minefield. The 4th Group, heading north-west, moved west again from the Coreno road to a position twelve hundred yards from the 1st Group; and both spent the night on the banks of the Ausente river. The 3rd Group, against small opposition, advanced north-west towards Ausonia.

On the night of the 14th, as a result of the capture of Monte Maio, the Germans withdrew from the Ausonia Valley, and at dawn on the 15th the 1st and 4th Groups advanced westward to the escarpment, and north of Spigno, which the American 351st Infantry now held, the 1st Group took Monte Castello. North-west of Ausonia, Goumiers of the 3rd Group scaled Monte Fammera.

Up the steep and tortuous path to Monte Stampadura marched or rode the Mountain Corps, and all night they marched, on the uphill shepherds' paths, with no halting but a short rest every four hours, and by six o'clock on the morning of the 16th the vanguard was on the crest of Monte Revole, more than twelve miles beyond the boundary of the bridgehead from which the attack began; and by mid-day a battery of Algerian artillery was on the Polleca water a mile to the east. Opposition had been negligible, for the Germans had prepared no defences in this improbable region; and from Monte Revole was visible the enemy's general withdrawal into Itri before the advancing American IInd Corps.

Mule-borne supplies were augmented by forty tons dropped between Spigno and La Valle by thirty-six Baltimores of the XIIth Tactical Air Command. More than half was recovered, and in three columns the Goumiers continued their advance. One column went west to Monte Calvo, another north-west towards Monte Faggeto, and the third towards Serra del Lago. All reached their new positions by six o'clock in the afternoon of the 17th, though the first column was stubbornly opposed on Monte Calvo by German troops defending the withdrawal into Itri; and other two surprised, and deployed to encircle, a working-party building a road at the north end of the Valle Piana. A battalion of mountain guns came up to Il Colie and brought the Itri road under fire.

The Goumiers on Monte Faggeto were now threatening the defences of Pico, and during the evening of the 17th the Germans counter-attacked with a battalion of lorry-borne infantry supported by tanks. But the Moroccans destroyed several of the tanks and troop-carriers, took many prisoners, and drove back the remainder; and by the following dawn were firmly established on Faggeto and Monte le Pezze to the south-west, but hindered from further advance by shortage of supplies. Campodimele was occupied on the morning of the 19th, however, and in the neighbourhood of Monte Vele patrols were across the road before noon. To the north there were enemy self-propelled guns on the highway, that forbade further movement in that direction by the lightly equipped mountain troops;

but in the afternoon the Americans entered Itri, and the French flank was made secure.

On the right the 8th Moroccan Infantry, of the 2nd Division, after taking Monte Maio, had gone rapidly forward on the road from Vallemαιο to San Giorgio, with flanking regiments on the ridges on either side, and in a brisk engagement defeated the German 818th Mountain Pioneer Battalion with three companies of the 115th Reconnaissance Battalion which, by motor and route-march, had hurriedly been sent to meet them. Continuing to advance along the valley, the 8th Moroccans then turned west over the Castellone ridge, and by the morning of the 15th were in the village of Castelnuovo, from which they commanded the Ausonia defile and so threatened the retreat of those forces still engaged by the 3rd Algerian Division at Ausonia.

Simultaneous with this advance had been the 1st Motorised Division's westward thrust along the south bank of the Liri. Artillery had crossed the Garigliano to positions north-east of Monte La Guardia in the morning darkness of the 14th, and a little later the 3rd Spahi Reconnaissance Battalion and the American 757th Tank Battalion joined forces with the 22nd Motorised Battalion at Sant' Apollinare to attack San Giorgio. The village was entered that evening without resistance, but further movement was stopped by German artillery and anti-tank gun-fire from the west.

On Monte Santa Lucia the 5th Moroccans were counter-attacked and compelled to give ground, which they regained on the following morning—the 16th—and that day the enemy guns beyond San Giorgio were silenced, and the 1st Motorised Division continued its westward march to Monte d'Oro. All the tangled country north and west of Monte Maio was rapidly cleared of remnant Germans by troops of the 1st Motorised, 2nd Moroccan, 4th Mountain, and 3rd Algerian Divisions in a series of overlapping and continuous actions that took no heed of divisional boundaries, but completed the task without delay, and enabled the French to concentrate quickly for the next attack on Esperia.

The 3rd group of Tabors had moved towards Ausonia on the Coreno road in the early morning of the 14th while the 6th Moroccans, from Monte Ceschito, advancing over the hills above the road, descended upon Coreno in the afternoon and took it without opposition. The 3rd Algerians promptly relieved them there, and the Moroccans hurried forward to join the Goums, who were by then on the heights overlooking Ausonia from the south. The rearguard in Ausonia resisted strongly, however, so the Goums

passed it by—the Moroccan and Algerian infantry dealt with it the next morning—and continued moving to the north and west.

Armour of the 3rd Algerians came up to Castelnuevo, and forward from there in an attempt to reach the road from San Giorgio; but a German rearguard with anti-tank guns on the hill called La Bastia checked the tanks and then, when they attacked, drove them back. Infantry of the Algerian Division joined the armour before dawn on the 16th, and together they silenced the guns, destroyed the nearer troops of the rearguard, and leaving a holding force to contain those on the upper slopes, moved on again to the road-junction.

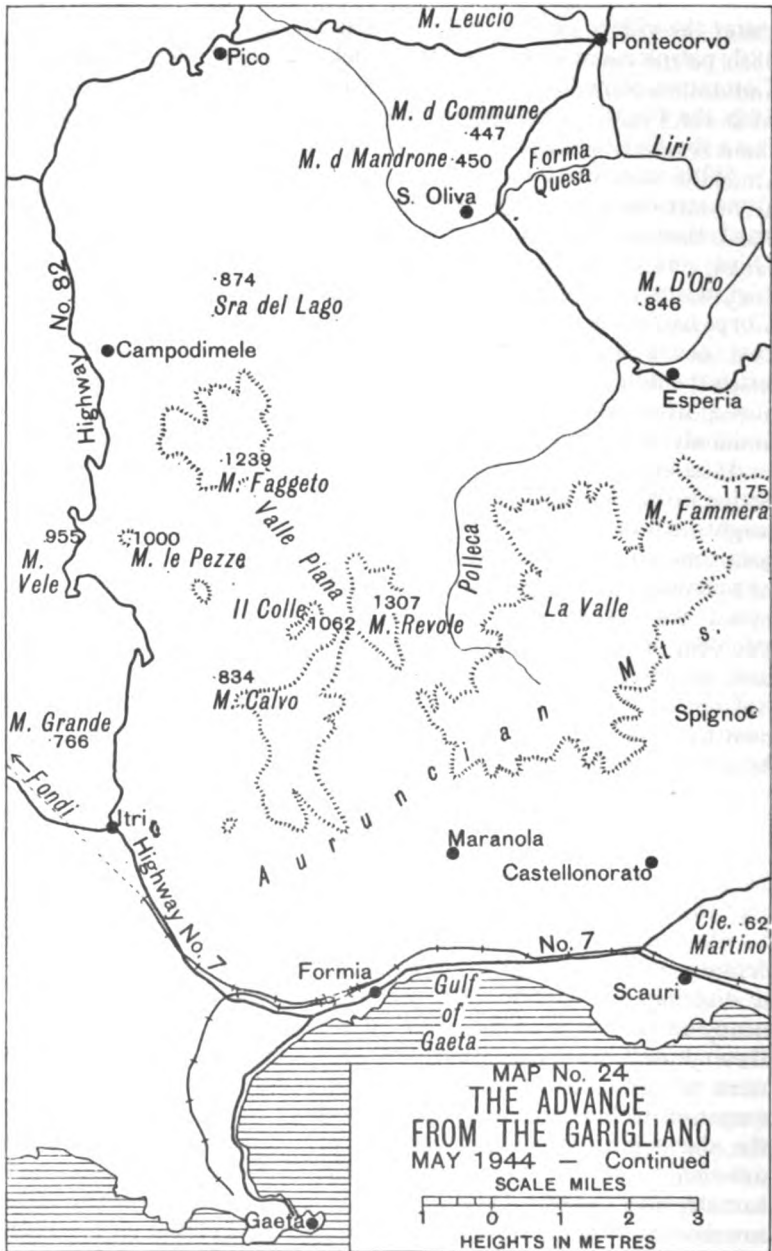
At the junction the 3rd Algerian Infantry was attacked, and repelled the attack, by the 3rd Battalion of the 200th Panzer Grenadiers, newly entered to the battle for the defence of Esperia; while the 2nd Battalion of the 164th Panzer Grenadiers suffered heavy losses from the French artillery on its way to Esperia from Fondi. The 3rd Group of Goums, in the meantime, had climbed the steep Fammera escarpment from the south—part of the force was mounted—and joined by the 6th Moroccans they brushed aside some enemy resistance and drove westward below Esperia. By the morning of the 17th the stage was set for the attack.

The 1st Motorised Division lay west of San Giorgio, with the 3rd Algerian Division—newly rejoined by the tanks that had completed their task of clearing the Ausonia Valley—in command of the road-junction on its left; while in the hills above, the Goums and the Moroccans were threatening to encircle the town from the west. Dispositions were made in anticipation of serious battle, but the Algerians, advancing cautiously along the road, met little resistance and entered the town to find that the Germans had gone, leaving behind them only a thin rearguard of snipers. With tanks in the van, the Algerians moved quickly north to regain contact, and beyond the town discovered many abandoned guns, tanks, and vehicles which the Corps artillery had destroyed. But they met no opposition till dusk, when they had reached the slopes of Monte d'Oro, and were suddenly assailed by anti-tank guns on the hills on either side. The French armour retreated towards Esperia; and north of Monte d'Oro the vanguard of the 1st Motorised Division, halted by minefields and mortar-fire, also perceived that the enemy was now prepared to stand. In his present positions, however, he was not allowed to stand for very long, and despite a stubborn resistance the advance went slowly forward, round both sides of Monte d'Oro, and in spite of steel pill-boxes on the Forma Quesa

water the village of Sant' Oliva was taken, and by midnight of the 18th patrols were searching Monte del Mandrone and Monte della Commune, some four miles south-east of Pico. But at dawn on the 19th the French came under fairly heavy mortar and artillery fire from the German emplacements on Monte Leucio.

With three divisions and the Goumiers in the line, the French front stretched from Monte Calvo to Campodimele along the Itri road, then over the mountains to the hills west and north of Sant' Oliva, and down the east bank of the Forma Quesa water to the Liri, where its right wing was under fire from the north bank. The Corps had made this very striking advance, in eight days, in manner that inevitably suggests the irresistibility of a flowing tide—though often the flood ran up-hill. Here and there the tide might be halted for a little while, but elsewhere would be channels that filled suddenly with movement, and the channels would presently meet and the intervening obstacle be overwhelmed. Regimental organisation broke down occasionally, but the flow continued. A company might take in error another company's objective, then both would join and go forward. The Colonial soldiers would complain of exhaustion, and forget it in the excitement of another success. The speed with which they reached their objectives simplified the problem of supply by minimising what they required, both of food and ammunition, and the sappers behind the infantry and the tanks did remarkable work in bridge-building and repairing the breached roads. The Goumiers, at home upon mountains and commanded by officers of exceptional quality, had been outstandingly successful in leading the way over country that the Germans had believed to be impassable. And now, with the Gustav Line broken behind them, the French threatened already to turn the Hitler Line. From Monte d'Oro they looked down on Pico, and it was fairly clear that the Hitler Line could not be held much longer.

On the seaward flank, following their capture of Santa Maria Infanta on the 14th, the Americans had rapidly advanced against a disorganised enemy. On the 15th, without opposition, they occupied the ruins of Spigno, and a little later forced their way through half-hearted resistance to seize Castellonorato. Prisoners were taken in increasing numbers, here and there the enemy was surprised in his gun-lines, and everywhere signs were apparent of the disintegration of the German 71st Division and the great destruction done in the 94th. On the 16th the pursuit began in earnest, with the 88th Division moving west through the mountains towards Itri, and the 85th to Formia, which it entered on the 17th.



Delaying action and the fire of artillery rearguards occasionally checked the pursuers, but the Americans were exhilarated by victory and dealt impatiently with resistance. The 351st Infantry, advancing to the capture of Monte Grande west of the road to Pico, out-ran their communications, pack-trains, and artillery, and after twice attacking without support were compelled to await, under fire, the arrival of the howitzers and mountain-guns of the 697th and 601st Field Artillery Battalions; which quickly silenced the German tanks. The 350th Infantry, brushing aside the ineffectual 620th Ost Battalion, came hardily over the mountains from Maranola, and supported by their fire the 351st again attacked and took Monte Grande. In the afternoon of the 19th the 349th Infantry entered Spigno, taking a few German stragglers, and the 351st welcomed a pack-train that brought them their first supply of food and ammunition for three days.

Possessed of Itri and Monte Grande, the IIInd Corps had completed its first task; and the Germans, with no choice in the matter, were retiring on Fondi. A new chapter of the battle was already being dictated, moreover, and the 85th Division had been warned of its prospective withdrawal to Naples, there to embark for Anzio to reinforce the flank attack now imminent in Latium. The 36th Division, withdrawn from IIInd Corps reserve, was already on its way to Anzio; and General Keyes was ready to hand over his present sector to the Commander of the IVth Corps and take his own Headquarters and Corps troops to the bridge-head on or after May 22nd.

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Canadians at Pontecorvo

WHEN the 1st Canadian Corps, from reserve, took over the southern part of the XIII Corps' front on the 16th, the 1st and 3rd Infantry Brigades advanced abreast, against small resistance, towards the Hitler Line, and on the night of the 18th—after troops of the 4th Division had taken Cassino—consolidated their positions along the Forme d'Aquino; across which their Engineers had already built three bridges, and prepared the construction of three more for the following day. Lieutenant-General Burns, the Corps Commander, had already issued instructions for the breaching of the Hitler Line, and an advance therefrom towards Frosinone. That part of the

Line opposite the Canadians was manned, according to estimate, by rather more than a thousand infantry soldiers of the 361st and 576th Grenadier Regiments, with a motley crew of gunners, engineers, armoured and signal units, all under command of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. On the night of the 19th, the 1st and 3rd Brigades being in contact with the defences, the Royal 22ième Regiment attacked midway between Pontecorvo and Aquino, and met heavy fire from machine-guns, mortars, and artillery. It was decided that the breach could be made only by a full-scale attack after elaborate preparation by the artillery; and for the next three days the proximate parts of the Hitler Line were the targets for systematic and increasing fire from the guns of the Canadian Corps and artillery of the French Expeditionary Corps on the southern flank, whose assistance was very readily given.

About this time the tactical plan—not for the Canadians only, but for all forces in the Liri Valley—began to be complicated by an intricate and crowded traffic problem. Between the Liri and the mountains to the north there is only one through road, the Via Casilina or Highway 6, with one other good road from Pignataro to Pontecorvo. From Pontecorvo two lateral roads, diverging a little, go roughly north to the highway. In addition there are local roads, indifferently surfaced, that no doubt serve in time of peace a useful purpose by linking one hamlet to another and winding this way and that for the convenience of isolated farms; but for the transport of armed forces in haste to reach the enemy their value is slight. More roads had to be made, and the Engineers with their bull-dozers quickly dug from the fields new paths that ran in the proper direction, often between white tapes that marked adjacent mine-fields, and not seldom—as the traffic thickened—under a canopy and in a cloud of choking yellow dust. These new routes were christened, and lavishly signposted, with such names as Ace, Heart, and Spade.

Now an infantry division of the British Army normally uses nearly 3,400 vehicles of all sorts; and in the narrow Valley were the 4th Division, the 78th, the 1st Canadian, and the 8th Indian in immediate reserve. An armoured division moves with about 3,000 vehicles; and in the Valley were the British 6th Armoured Division and the Canadian 5th Armoured, with the 6th South African still waiting for its opportunity to enter and go through. There were now, moreover, two Corps in the Valley, and each Corps commanded certain regiments of artillery, which had their own vehicles, and the Headquarters of a Corps is itself well mounted.

Visitors in increasing number were also appearing, most of whom had legitimate business with those formations engaged in battle, but some of whom were indulging in a favourite pastime of the Army, known as *swanning*. The swan, that gracious bird, has the habit of taking short flights that create appreciable commotion but have no serious purpose. Officers who spent their spare time in *swanning* had in a like manner no graver reason than a desire to watch some particular fragment of a battle, or to visit friends who had lately been embroiled in it; and their cars, though few in number when compared with those of an armoured division, added somewhat to the dust and confusion. The traffic problem was serious, and the 6th Armoured Division was seriously hindered in its mission by the congestion on the roads.

Parts of the division had been in action from the beginning: the 1st Guards Brigade had been at Cassino under command of the 4th Division; the Derbyshire Yeomanry with the 10th Rifle Brigade had been fighting under direction of the 78th; while the 16th/5th and 17th/21st Lancers and the 2nd Lothian and Border Horse had very strenuously been engaged in battle. After the fall of Cassino the 1st Guards Brigade, reverting to the command of the 6th Armoured, crossed the Gari and moved by Spade route to an area north of Pignataro; but the Canadians, having christened it Heart, were already using that route as their centre line, and beyond the road-junction at Massa d'Alessandro the Guards had to move on to a newly-opened Rhine route. The outlying members of the division were in the meantime reverting to its command, and on the 22nd the Divisional Commander outlined a plan for passing through the Hitler Line, which the Canadians were to break on the next day, and turning north to Highway 6, to move westward and force a crossing over the river Melfa on the Canadians' right. But the time and the axis of this projected movement could not finally be settled until it was known when the Canadians were prepared to dispense with Spade route, and the 78th with their axis, which was called Ace. The swiftly moving French Colonials in the mountains had a saying: *No mules, no manoeuvre*; and armour, were it vocal, might answer, *No roads, no action*.

The Canadians, after an elaborate preparation by artillery and a deceptive concentration of gunfire in front of the XIIIth Corps, were to attack on a two-thousand yard front midway between Pontecorvo and Aquino, with the 2nd Brigade on the right and two battalions of the 3rd on the left, at six in the morning of May 23rd. But before the attack went in the 1st Brigade and the 4th Recon-

naissance Regiment were to reconnoitre in strength on the southern flank, and use what opportunity might occur of penetrating the enemy's lines. Some local success was quickly gained by the Reconnaissance Regiment in the early morning of the 21st, and the next morning the 1st Brigade made a breach in the German wire, and though its supporting armour was then held by mines and the infantry hotly assailed by fire, more progress was made and the 1st Field Company of Canadian Engineers cleared two roads through the minefield, one to within four hundred yards of Pontecorvo. Though the breach was now considerable, it was not thought to be of a magnitude sufficient to warrant alteration of the Corps plan in order to exploit it.

On the morning of the 23rd the 2nd Brigade attacked with Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry on the right, the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada on the left, supported by tanks of the North Irish Horse; and satisfactory progress was made until minefields halted the tanks and heavy fire had inflicted numerous casualties on the infantry. Control was difficult, among tall-standing crops in air thickened by dust and smoke, but late in the morning the Seaforth reached their objective on the road from Pontecorvo to Aquino, and consolidated the positions they had won. Neither they nor Princess Patricia's, however, were able to bring up supporting arms. Princess Patricia's failed to reach their goal, and the Edmonton Regiment, attempting to pass through, were also hindered by mines and wire, and halted by casualties.

The action went better on the left, where the Carleton and York Regiment, supported by the 51st Royal Tank Regiment, won a hold on the road in an hour's fighting. The British tanks fought a desperate battle against enemy tanks, self-propelled guns, and anti-tank guns firing from the concrete-and-steel emplacements of the Hitler Line; but in spite of considerable losses they quelled the defence, destroyed some German tanks, and drove the remainder back. The West Nova Scotia Regiment came up behind the Carleton and York, and both battalions dug in under shell and mortar fire. Abortive counter-attacks from the direction of Aquino were defeated by gunfire and a squadron of the 12th Canadian Armoured Regiment.

In the early afternoon, when it was apparent that the 2nd Brigade's attack was unlikely to make further progress, the Divisional Commander decided to exploit success and reinforce the 3rd Brigade with the 22e Regiment and the 12th Canadian Armoured Regiment. in order that it might carry the attack to objectives a

mile or two north-east of Pontecorvo on a line that crossed the westerly road of the two that led to Highway 6. With the Nova Scotia Regiment on the left, the 22ième on the right, the new assault was made in the afternoon with complete success. A German reserve, on the point of counter-attacking, was caught in the open and scattered, and both battalions, having fought fiercely for their new positions, were consolidating them by nightfall.

On the left flank the 1st Brigade and the 4th Reconnaissance Regiment made slow but steady progress during the day, despite heavy losses in armour. The 48th Highlanders were brought to a halt when all their supporting tanks had been disabled, but a company of the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment came to their assistance and made contact with them after hand-to-hand fighting with German machine-gunners. The remainder of the Hastings battalion, with tanks and a troop of self-propelled guns in support, went through the forward company to take some high ground beyond it on the Aquino road. The Royal Canadian Regiment and the 48th Highlanders went a little farther and consolidated; and by dawn on the 24th the Royal Canadians were established in Pontecorvo and the road to Aquino had been cleared of the enemy. More than five hundred prisoners had been taken in twenty-four hours of fighting, but the Canadians themselves had lost more than eight hundred killed and wounded; the 2nd Brigade, whose casualties were heavy, had come into the line too late to have proper time for reconnaissance and had suffered accordingly. The concrete fortifications of the Hitler Line had not been appreciably damaged by the prolonged bombardment; and in the Corps Commander's opinion the emplacements could not have been destroyed by any lesser gun than a 7.2-inch howitzer. But though the casualties were regrettable, the result was gratifying. The Line was broken.

On the high northern part of the Line the Poles, in the meantime, had again been in action. Out of his tattered battalions General Anders had formed a battle-group with which to capture Piedimonte San Germano and the high ground at Passo Corno under Monte Cairo, and thus secure the right flank of the XIIIth Corps. On the 20th, moving northward out of the Liri Valley, the 21st Indian Brigade had taken a point five hundred yards south of Piedimonte from which they supported the Polish attack with fire, but after some early success the Poles had to withdraw, and fighting continued until the 25th when the Germans were ready to retire, and Piedimonte, Passo Corno, and Monte Cairo were all occupied. In the mountains to the east the Xth Corps was now advancing, the XIIIth

was moving slowly up the valley, and the weary Poles, pinched between them, lost contact with the enemy.

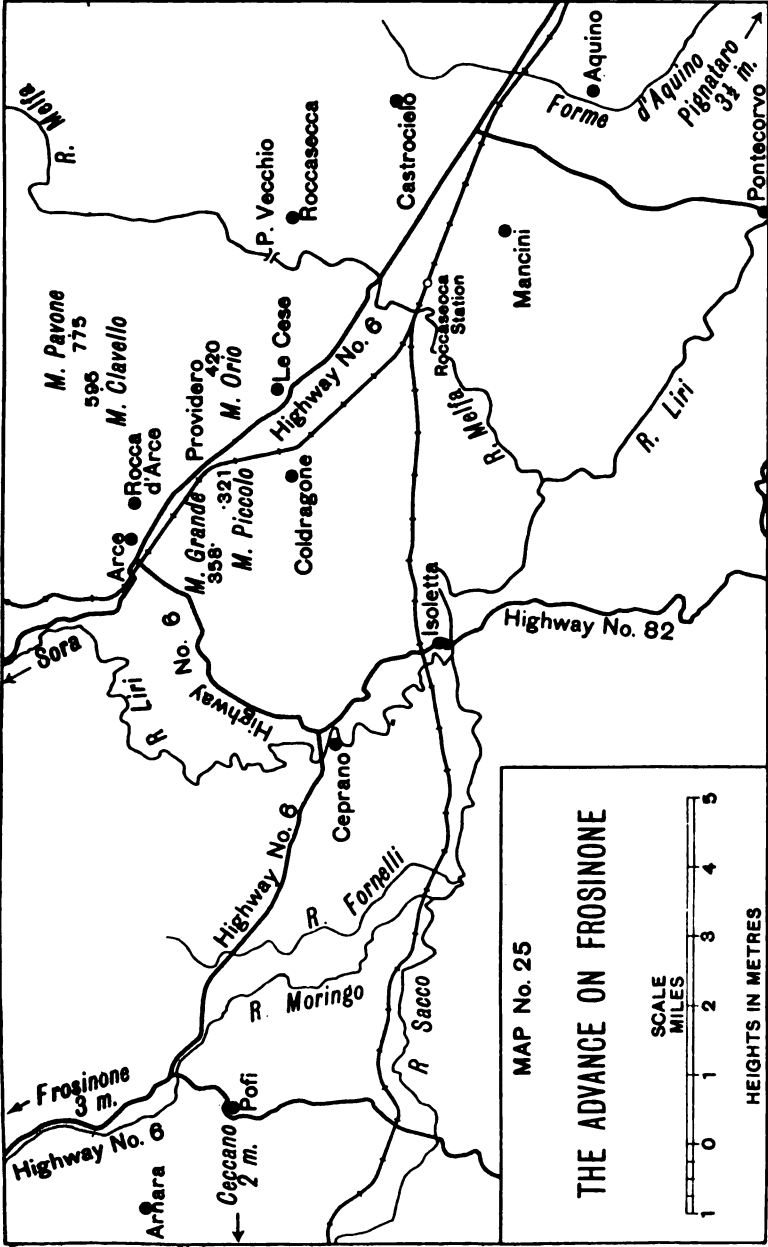
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Advance in the Valley

His stubborn determination to hold the Hitler Line had left Kesselring in an embarrassing position, and his dilapidated Tenth Army was now menaced from three directions: by the British who were advancing towards the Melfa, by the French who had taken Pico on the 22nd and were driving towards Highway 6; and by the American VIth Corps which, with a strength of seven divisions, was moving out of the plain of Anzio towards Valmontone. Kesselring hoped to stand for some little time on the river Melfa, but there was no chance of any prolonged defence south of Rome save on the dubious Caesar Line under the Alban Hills. His immediate tasks were to keep open the roads that led back to this line, to parry the flank attack from Anzio, and to delay the advance of the Eighth Army and the French as long as he could. For these ends he brought into battle his last useful reserves, the 29th Panzer and the Hermann Goering Division; the latter from a staging-area where it was about to entrain for France.

The Fifth Army's main effort was now to be made by the VIth Corps, whose objective was the Alban Hills, its immediate intention to prevent the enemy from manning the Caesar Line. For the Eighth Army it was imperative to force the pursuit as hard and fast as possible, to break through the Caesar Line if it should be held, and press on to the neighbourhood of Rieti and Terni fifty or sixty miles north of Rome; for Rome itself lay in the Fifth Army's zone, and officially was of no concern to the Eighth.

The crossing of the Melfa, a shallow wandering stream with difficult banks, was the task of the Canadian Armoured Division, led by the 5th Armoured Brigade; the division would then press on towards Frosinone. On the night of the 23rd rain and dissolving roads prevented it from moving through the gap which the infantry division had made in the Hitler Line, but a Brigade Group was under orders to advance and secure a firm base in the neighbourhood of Mancini, about two and a half miles east of Aquino, with the 9th Armoured Regiment, the Irish Regiment of Canada, and a



battery of anti-tank guns. The 2nd Armoured Regiment, reinforced by infantry and guns, would then go through to cross the Melfa a mile south-west of Roccasecca Station; and finally, if a suitable crossing had been found, the 5th Armoured Regiment would advance in the direction of Ceprano. Two squadrons of the 3rd Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment were to cover the flanks of the Brigade Group.

The operation was postponed to the morning of the 24th, when traffic congestion again delayed it for two hours, but the leading tanks, beginning their advance at eight o'clock, reached Mancini before noon in spite of heavy shelling and the opposition of tanks and self-propelled 88-millimetre guns. The second group went through, and a Reconnaissance Troop reached the Melfa at three in the afternoon; but the main force, in difficult country, had a stiff engagement with Panther tanks and mobile guns before it could dispose its squadrons to cover the crossing. Three light tanks of the Reconnaissance Troop and the leading sections of the Westminster Regiment were over the river within half an hour of their arrival on the eastern bank, but the steepness of the banks and anti-tank guns on the far side prevented the 2nd Armoured Regiment from following. On the west bank 'A' Company of the Westminsters was very violently counter-attacked, but despite the loss of half its number held its ground with great determination and took fifty prisoners as well as destroying three self-propelled guns and a Panther tank. 'B' Company, after crossing higher up, had been compelled to withdraw; but the remainder of the regiment went over behind 'A' before dark, and supporting weapons were brought up after midnight.

On both flanks the 3rd Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment had been vigorously engaged throughout the day, and had crossed Highway 6 due south of Roccasecca. On the left flank a detached force of the Canadian Infantry Division had advanced along the Liri, maintaining a running fight, and reaching the Melfa area near its junction with the Liri by midnight on the 24th, bridged it the next morning. The first bridgehead, that to begin with had been held against heavy odds and was still being persistently shelled and mortared, was by mid-day on the 25th firmly established on a two-battalion front; and some fifty enemy tanks and vehicles were seen withdrawing to the west. Later in the day the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade passed through the bridgehead, after having been delayed by excessive traffic, and at midnight orders were issued for an advance to Ceprano.

Mines, machine-gun fire, and sniping from higher ground beyond the railway hindered progress on the following day, and the Brigade failed to reach Ceprano before dark; then, during the night, a patrol of the Irish Regiment crossed the Liri and found the town empty. Under shell-fire the Perth Regiment contrived a primitive shuttle-service, with a rope and a single boat, and followed the Irish when morning came. Ceprano was occupied soon after nine o'clock, but six hundred yards to the south-west the enemy continued to offer resistance until silenced by artillery.

On the right of the Canadians the Germans' obstinate disinclination to abandon Aquino had upset the plans of the XIIIth Corps by preventing the advance of the 78th Division. It was therefore decided that the 6th Armoured Division should advance along the route known as Heart, south of Aquino, to take Castrocielo and Roccasecca Station. The designed route, however, was still being used by Canadian armour, and because of the congestion of the traffic and the tenacity of the mud in which it moved—or did not move—the advance of the XIIIth Corps had to be postponed from the 24th to the 25th.

At dawn on the 25th the 6th Armoured began to advance through the 78th Division and met ill-fortune early when it ran into a deep minefield two or three miles east of Pontecorvo. In the afternoon, however, the Derbyshire Yeomanry and the 10th Rifle Brigade crossed the Melfa under heavy fire about five hundred yards south of Highway 6, but were prevented by the tall steep banks of the stream from getting their support weapons over, and withdrew when darkness fell. Aquino, at last abandoned by the Germans, had been occupied by troops of the 78th Division, who found two small bridges there intact, and by evening tanks of the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade, leading the 78th along Highway 6, had reached Roccasecca; while on their right Indians of the 8th Division entered Castrocielo.

The enemy's intention to compel delay at the Melfa had been thwarted, and for a little while his troops had been in great disorder in this sector. The main battle, indeed, was now over, but the Eighth Army's advance was still to be opposed with fierce determination, and at the head of the Liri Valley—where the Upper Liri comes down from the right and the broader valley of the Sacco leads eastward to Rome—the enemy had good ground for a strong rearguard action. The Germans were now retreating through both valleys, towards Sora and to Frosinone, with rivers and abrupt hillsides to delay pursuit.

On the morning of the 26th the XIIIth Corps resumed their advance, the Canadian on the 27th, from Ceprano and towards Arce, over country heavily mined and booby-trapped, under the continuous fire of guns and mortars. Progress was slow. The Perth Regiment of Canada made an assault-boat crossing of the Liri and cleared snipers out of Ceprano, but against strong opposition the Canadians failed to take some high ground south-west of the village, and further attack was postponed until the bridgehead had been strengthened. The 8th Indian Division, on the right, occupied Roccasecca early on the 26th, and moving quickly to the Melfa discovered a useful ford at Ponte Vecchio, and downstream from it a German bridge intact. A small column consisting of a squadron of the 6th Lancers, a troop of New Zealand tanks, and a company of Punjabis caught an enemy rearguard in the gorge of the river north of Arce, and handsomely defeated it; while the remainder of the division concentrated behind Roccasecca Station.

In the crowded triangle between Aquino, Pontecorvo, and Pignataro the 6th Armoured Division had been bombed by thirty or more German aircraft, and suffered some casualties; but on the banks of the Melfa a German bomb struck a German nebelwerfer which had been particularly troublesome, and the compensation was gratefully acknowledged. From the bed of the stream the Rifle Brigade took a small mixed bag of prisoners belonging to the 3rd Parachute Regiment, the 85th Mountain Regiment, the 721st Infantry, and the 2nd/37th Flak Regiment; and in the morning, while the sappers made a crossing for wheeled vehicles, the Derbyshire Yeomanry and the Rifle Brigade went forward again and quickly reached the Providero defile a couple of miles south-east of Arce, where they were driven from the road by accurate gunfire, and then found observation-posts on Monte Piccolo and Monte Orio, that guard the defile.

Behind them the 3rd Grenadier Guards and the 16th/5th Lancer were laboriously dealing with small continuing knots of resistance and the snipers who still infested every coppice and spinney. In their rear the wheeled vehicles were still in difficulty at the Melfa crossing, and when the 3rd Welsh Guards set off on foot, with a squadron of the Lothians in support, a little before midnight on the 26th, they were impeded by gross darkness and a difficult road. By four in the morning the infantry lay on a line from Monte Orio through Providero to Monte Piccolo, but the hill-tops had not been secured, and when daylight came there was heavy mortar and machine-gun fire from the heights that compelled both the Welsh

and the Coldstream Guards behind them to withdraw to Le Cese, a mile or more to the rear. Tanks were hardly able to move on the steeply terraced hills, but their guns covered the Guards' withdrawal.

On their right the 8th Indian Division came to their assistance by a flanking movement directed against Rocca d'Arce, and crossing by the ford and bridge at Ponte Vecchio the Royal Fusiliers and Gurkhas, supported by New Zealand tanks, took Monte Orto and Monte Clavello, while Sikhs of the Frontier Force Regiment had the better of it in a bayonet-charge and stormed Monte Pavone. Its flank secure, the 6th Armoured struck again, and in the early morning of the 28th the 2nd Coldstream and 3rd Grenadiers captured the heights commanding the defile—Monte Grande and Monte Piccolo—but though the Coldstreamers were able to hold their position, and later to improve it, the Grenadiers were compelled by most resolute counter-attack to abandon some part of their gains. Arce and the overlooking hills were held in strength by the 1st Parachute Regiment.

To bypass German resistance in the defile the 78th Division now moved westward off the axis of Highway 6, and the 38th Brigade, using whatever tracks could be found, passed through Coldragone and by darkness on the 27th were a mile east of Ceprano with no opposition in front of them. Patrols reached the Liri, but the country was very rough, there were no roads, and to prevent further congestion the remainder of the division stayed on the Melfa.

The Canadians enlarged their bridgehead unopposed, and the Armoured Brigade was waiting for the Engineers to build a bridge, a hundred and twenty feet long, south of Ceprano. The bridge buckled, but was re-built and ready for use by early evening of the 28th. By then, however, the 78th Division had priority on the crossing, and the Canadian armour was sent off south of the Isoletta reservoir, and over the Sacco by another bridge, losing nearly a day and then finding itself in wretched country for tanks. Sharp-backed hills lay across its path, and only one regiment could be deployed. The 9th Armoured Regiment advanced towards Arnara, with the object of outflanking Pofi, and made slow progress against numerous obstacles. Demolitions were numerous, the rivers Fornelli and Moringo hard to cross. The enemy's shelling grew heavier, and near Pofi the two companies of the Westminster Regiment that accompanied the tanks came under intense fire. Pofi from its hill commands the surrounding country, and was considered a proper target for dive-bombers. After their attack

the troops went in again, and the Westminsters consolidated on high ground a thousand yards short of Arnara. Pofi was stormed in darkness by the Perth Regiment of the 11th Brigade, who pressed forward again during the night, and Arnara was occupied.

Confronted by such a cross-grained landscape, the Canadian Corps Commander decided to let the infantry divisions come gradually into the lead; and while on the 30th two composite forces of the Armoured Division continued the advance to the high ground between Ceccano and Route 6, the 2nd Infantry Brigade was preparing to attack Frosinone. The infantry of the two composite forces secured their objective. The armour of the right-hand force—the 2nd Canadian Armoured Regiment—was suddenly diverted from its initial task to cut off enemy tanks withdrawing along Highway 6, and at the Tartarella crossroads fought stiffly to destroy four German tanks and a self-propelled gun for the loss of five of their own; while the 5th Armoured Regiment of the left-hand force were ordered to make contact with the French, who had reached Ceccano, and there they were halted, on a tentative advance towards Frosinone, by minefields and a large crater that was covered by enemy fire. Despite this diversion of the support they had anticipated, the infantry battalions of the two composite forces held their positions throughout the night under heavy fire, and were relieved by the 2nd Infantry Brigade on the afternoon of the 30th. The advance continued, and on the last day of May Frosinone was in Canadian hands.

On Highway 6 the obstacle in the Providero defile had dissolved. During the night of the 28th the hills re-echoed the roar of demolitions in Arce, and on the morning of the 29th the Lothians found it deserted. The Indians' flank attack had made it untenable, but the enemy had not retired far, and a mile or two beyond it the Lothians were halted by a blown bridge and a river eight feet deep whose hither bank was under fire. At night the 10th Rifle Brigade established a small bridgehead, and the Indian Division then took the lead in an advance towards Alatri.

The Fifth Army was now engaged in desperate battle for the Alban Hills, and while the Canadians were poised for an attack on Valmontone—the Americans were still some miles distant from it—the XIIIth Corps was prepared either to join the Fifth in assault on the ill-defined Caesar Line—if that should prove necessary—or maintain its advance on routes east of Rome in a tempo quickened to pursuit; in which it would be joined by the Xth Corps on the right. But then, for a day or so, the prospect of pursuit receded,

and all our divisions lay locked in stupid conflict for the right of way. Traffic in the narrow, over-crowded, mined and cratered valley had been difficult from the moment after our dogged infantry had broken the bloody door and entered. Now traffic became impossible, it almost ceased to move, and crowded vehicles and idle guns stood nose to petrol-smelling tail in helpless confusion, while officers of all degree swore horribly in impotent wrath and weary huddled soldiers gave their fatigue an aspect of philosophy by sleeping while they could. The jam of traffic had coagulated and become a fevered stasis.

The 6th South African Armoured Division, till now in reserve, was coming forward. The 1st Canadian Infantry Division and the 25th British Tank Brigade had barely completed their forward movement to relieve the Fifth Canadian Armoured Division. The 1st Army Group of Royal Canadian Artillery was moving to an area west of Pofi. All supply transport, the normal traffic-stream, that is, was standing aside to make way for these formations. And Highway 6 had been allotted to the XIIIth Corps, for its advance, in immediate succession to the Canadians' operational requirements. But all these eager columns, emulous of victory, lay locked in frustration and mutual embarrassment.

Chaos was resolved, and the pursuit continued. The Indian Division and the 78th were both thrusting towards Alatri, and after the Xth Corps, entering Sora on the 31st, had cut one of the enemy's two escape routes from there, the 78th made for Veroli to command the other, but was anticipated by the Indians' 19th Brigade, before whom the enemy had hurriedly retired, then stood again at Veroli. The 78th therefore struck directly at Alatri and entered after dark on June 2nd, while the Indians, after the enemy had broken contact at Veroli, moved parallel to the main road over very difficult country through Vico towards Guarcino.

The Royal Canadian Regiment had entered Ferentino late on June 1st, about the same time as the American IInd Corps, on the right of the attack from Anzio, cut Highway 6 in its final attack on Valmontone. Twenty-four hours later, in grave danger of seeing his positions turned in the Alban Hills, the enemy abandoned all thought of fighting longer there, and hastily withdrawing from the hills retreated northward on all roads leading to Highway 5, the Via Tiburtina, from Rome to Tivoli. The Eighth Army thereupon made a general change of direction to the north, to cut the retreat if possible, and by June 4th, when the Americans entered Rome, the Indians were in Guarcino, the South African Division with the

24th Guards Brigade under command had occupied Acuto and Paliano, and the 6th Armoured Division was in the neighbourhood of Genezzano.

❧ (12) ❧

Through Marshes and Mountain

WHEN the advance of the Fifth Army had taken it as far as Itri and Monte Grande and the heights overlooking Pico, on May 19th, General Alexander had to decide whether the Americans should strike north-west to the bridgehead in Latium, or in a more northerly direction to Ceprano and Frosinone. He contemplated the latter movement if the Eighth Army, failing to break the Hitler Line, was unable to come abreast of the Fifth by the time the French had taken Pico; for in such circumstances an American thrust to Highway 6 might cut off a large body of the enemy. Both the IIInd Corps and the French were therefore ordered to dispose themselves and prepare for such employment at need. For some little time General Clark was left in doubt as to his role, but while the French held themselves in readiness for an advance towards Ceprano until the 23rd, the IIInd Corps began, on the 21st, to open the way for an advance along Highway 7 to Terracina. And then, after the Canadians had successfully breached the Hitler Line, the full weight of the French Corps became available for movement to the west over yet more mountains.

The decision to move against Terracina was dictated—as were so many operations in the campaign—by lack of shipping. General Clark had intended to transfer most of his IIInd Corps to Anzio by sea, but the movement of the 36th Division had taken four days, and to shift the 85th in similar fashion would require a week, and service troops would still be waiting for transport. As it had now become apparent that the Germans could not make a stand on the hither side of Terracina, and not even there without large reinforcement, it was obvious that much time could be saved by thrusting aside the desultory opposition that might be expected, and opening an overland route to the bridgehead.

In the earliest hours of May 20th the 88th Division moved forward from Itri and Monte Grande, along Highway 7, and in the afternoon the 3rd Battalion of the 349th Infantry took Fondi after a brisk engagement. The division pressed its advance north-

west over the mountains, drawing ahead of the left flank of the French Corps, which was meeting strong resistance in an attack towards Vallecorsa, and on the 23rd established an advance-guard at Roccasecca dei Volsci, fourteen miles north of Terracina.

Its right flank thus effectually guarded, the 85th Division proceeded to clear the hills south of Highway 7, and while a battalion of the 338th Infantry, embarking at Gaeta in Ducks, made an unopposed landing at Sperlonga, the 337th Regiment moved across the plain of Fondi against Terracina and the mountains west of the plain. The 1st Battalion, reinforced by some part of the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron, by tanks and tank-destroyers, made quick progress along the highway until resistance in and near the town compelled a short retreat to Monte Croce. The German garrison had been reinforced by troops of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division from north of Rome, but they had arrived too late to keep the Americans out of the hills that rise closely above it to the north; and though they held out for two days, and even forced the Americans to withdraw a little farther, their resistance was hopeless from the beginning.

The bulk of the Corps artillery came south of Fondi, and during the afternoon of the 22nd the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 337th Infantry fought their way down towards the town over the rocky side of Monte Croce, while the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 338th moved over the mountains to the north to secure Monte Leano and block the highway beyond Terracina. Their march was diversified, and somewhat impeded, by the discovery of a considerable number of German troops, of the 71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment, in the Monte Orso railway tunnel, fifty of whom were captured. The battle for Terracina was renewed on the 23rd, and till long after dark the Germans held the attack at bay. By midnight, however, the 337th Regiment was at the entrance to the town, while the 338th was nearing Monte Leano, and north of there Sonnino had fallen to the swift onslaught of the 339th. Before morning came, the garrison of Terracina—a battalion of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and the 103rd Reconnaissance Battalion—had retired; and the IIInd Corps resumed pursuit, much encouraged by the early success of the offensive from Anzio, which opened on the 23rd and promptly compelled the Germans to abandon all their positions in the Lepini Mountains.

Delayed only by heavy demolitions, the vanguard of the IIInd Corps pushed northward over the flooded Pontine Marshes, and during the morning of the 25th the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron

made contact below Borgo Grappa with a composite force—a battalion of the 36th Engineer Combat Regiment, anti-tank guns, and part of the Reconnaissance Unit of the British 1st Division—which had broken out of the bridgehead by way of Littoria. The long beleaguement at last was broken, and the garrison that had endured its precarious isolation for a hundred and twenty-five days had again become part of the continental army.

Highway 7 was quickly opened to traffic, and supplies flowed northward to support the drive to Rome. But the IInd Corps had to await the advance of the French on their right, and for the next few days the 85th Division remained in the neighbourhood of Sonnino, while the 88th held the mountain-ridge between Monsicardi and Roccasecca dei Volsci.

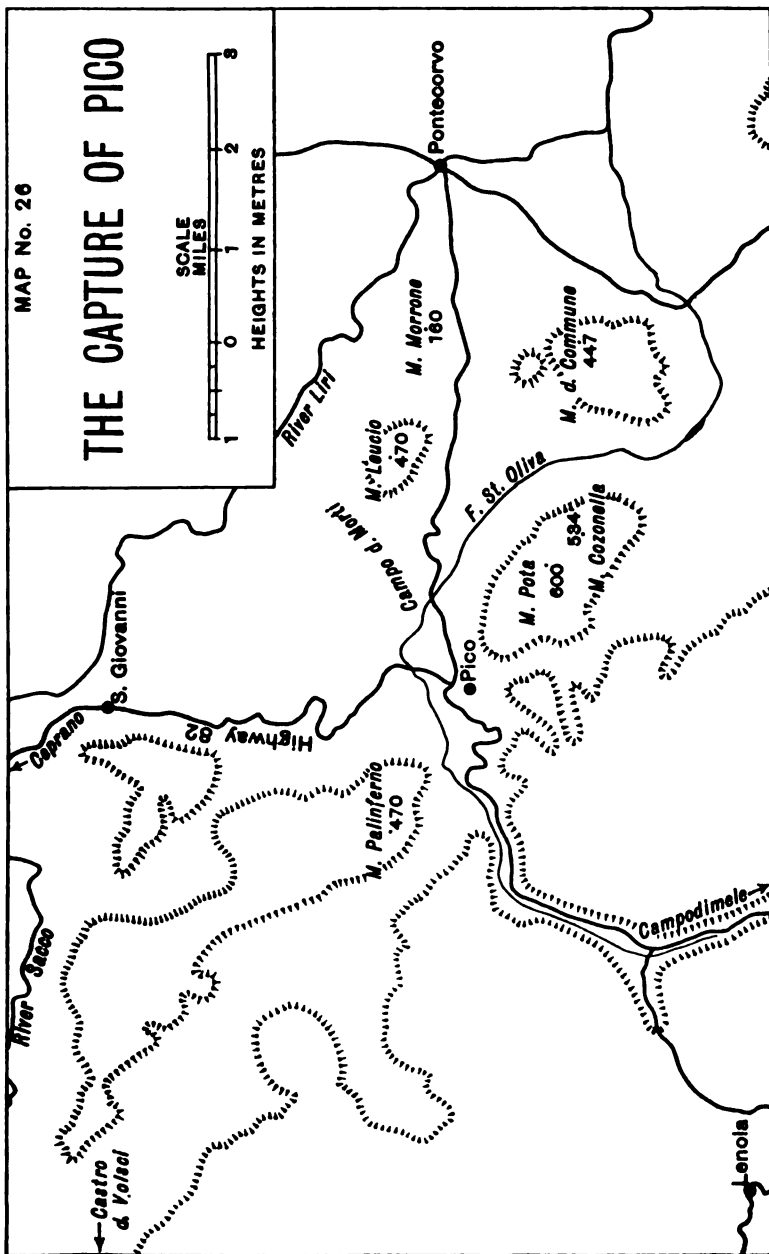
The French, while awaiting further orders for Ceprano in the valley or another advance through the mountains, had been disposed in the quadrant of a circle east and south of Pico, from Campodimele to a position near Pontecorvo, with three divisions in the line. The attack on Pico would be a major operation, for its defences were manned by the 26th Panzer Division, which had received orders to hold its ground as long as possible. Unless the French could be halted, the Hitler Line would be untenable.

From their strong position on Monte Leucio—an isolated hill rising abruptly from the valley floor—the Germans defeated, on the afternoon of the 19th, an attempt by the 1st Motorised Division to advance round the northern slopes of Monte delle Commune, and on the following morning rebuffed the 7th Algerian Infantry when they tried to cross the Forma di Sant' Oliva to take the heights of Monte Pota. No such movement was possible till Monte Leucio had been reduced; and that was done, after very hard fighting, by the 3rd Algerians. Then the 7th renewed their attack, and against fierce resistance gained the hill-tops of Monte Cozonella and Monte Pota before dark, and at once began to probe the immediate defences of Pico.

To their left the Mountain Corps, in three groups each comprising Goumiers, Moroccan Infantry, and Algerian Artillery, moved north and west across the mountains against varying opposition, and a patrol reached a position just south of Pico after dark. The outer defences of the town had now been broken or breached from two sides, and the Germans had lost command of the road to Pontecorvo. On the following day, the 21st, while the Motorised Division advanced past Monte Leucio to the vicinity of San Giovanni in the valley, and the Mountain Corps took Lenola and some nearby

MAP No. 26

THE CAPTURE OF PICO



hills, a frontal assault was launched by infantry of the 3rd Algerian Division, some of whom took and held a position among the orchards on the Campo dei Morti east of the town, and others with great dash secured a foothold among the ruins of its nearest houses. But German resistance continued as fierce as ever, and from the north bank of the Liri a force of fifty tanks, moving towards Pontecorvo, harassed with their fire the Motorised Division until they were driven back by French artillery and the guns of the Canadian Corps on their right.

A second counter-attack, by tanks and infantry along the south bank of the Liri, compelled the French to withdraw from their forward position near San Giovanni, and despite most furious rejoinder by the Motorised Division they were driven back to an area between Monte Leucio and the hillock called Monte Morrone. Another considerable force, of some twenty tanks and infantry, drove the Algerians from the Campo dei Morti, and a third group, rather larger, counter-attacked the companies which had entered the town and forced them also to retreat a little way. But French tanks arrived about midnight, and to some extent redressed the situation. The two bold Algerian companies who had entered the town had to retire, however, to avoid encirclement.

During the night the German armour withdrew, and on the morning of the 22nd, against a much weakened garrison, the Algerians again attacked; a group of the Mountain Corps came from Lenola to breach the western perimeter; and by mid-afternoon Pico was in French possession. At the same time another group of the Mountain Corps, under General Guillaume, was fighting hard for heights north of Lenola; which, with two hundred and fifty prisoners, were captured before dark. The 26th Panzer Division had withdrawn to the north-west, and the French were behind the Hitler Line.

It was now decided, by General Clark and General Juin, that the 3rd Algerian Division should advance through San Giovanni to Ceprano, while the Mountain Corps on its left headed for Castro dei Volsci. Very little progress was made on the 23rd, however. The Mountain Corps gained something from German rearguards, but a remnant nest of Germans near Pico, and a Tiger tank that appeared astonishingly among the ruins of the village, played havoc with plans to advance, and strong counter-attacks from the north halted the 3rd Algerians on the outskirts of Pico and drove the 7th off Monte Palinferno. German reinforcements of the 334th Grenadier Division had arrived inopportunistically from the Adriatic,

and were making a last attempt to patch or mend the southern position and re-assert the existence of a Hitler Line.

Though the French intention was still dubious, poised between Ceprano and the mountains to the north-west, the success, on the 23rd, of the Canadians' assault permitted reinforcement of their left wing, and a vigorous attack was made against a stubborn core of resistance in and about Vallecorsa. In the darkness the fortune of battle swung like a pendulum as Goumiers, Moroccans, and the armour of the Mountain Corps strove for possession of the village; and American guns at Fondi had to bring their fire to bear before the French secured it on the morning of the 25th. In the valley of the Liri the Germans still opposed the Algerians with fierce determination, and not until the evening of the 25th did their leading troops reach San Giovanni. And now, with the VIth Corps moving triumphantly out from Anzio, the Germans could hope for nothing better than to moderate the pace of advance from the south and disengage their troops in the valleys of the Liri and the Sacco. On the east of their broken line their rearguards fought stubbornly; on the west they retreated quickly.

From the hills above the Pontine Marshes the 29th Panze Grenadier Division withdrew through Prossedi and Carpineto, while the Hermann Goering Division stood firmly about Valmontone. Fragments of the 94th Grenadier Division, the 334th Grenadier Division from the Adriatic, and of isolated regiments opposed the French; but their opponents at Pico and Monte Leucio—of the 26th Panzer and 305th Grenadier Divisions—joined the retreating forces in the Liri Valley. By May 30th the American battle was surging round the slopes of the Alban Hills, and what had been the IIInd Corps area was under French command, whose 4th Mountain Division was clearing the Lepini Mountains and advancing through Carpineto, while the 2nd Moroccan Division fought its way up the south bank of the Sacco.

✻(13)✻

The Besieged Break Out

ON May 22nd the bridgehead in Latium extended from the ridge south of the river Moletta to the Mussolini Canal, and its north-eastern front, parallel to the railway through Cisterna, lay a couple of miles to seaward of it. The perimeter was manned, from left to

right, by the 5th and 1st British Divisions, the 45th and 34th United States Divisions, and the 36th Engineer Combat Regiment. During the first half of May large reinforcements had come into the bridgehead: there stood in reserve the American 3rd Division, the 1st Armoured Division, and by the 22nd the last convoy bringing the 36th Division had arrived off Nettuno.

The enemy forces enclosing the bridgehead consisted of the 4th Parachute Division north of the Moletta, the 65th Grenadier Division astride the Albano road, the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division from there to the Carano creek, the 362nd Grenadier Division before Cisterna, and on the eastern flank the 715th Light Division with additional troops under command. All these divisions were far below normal strength, and for the first three weeks of May they had lain even more quietly than in the previous month. The German strength in the neighbourhood of Cisterna, where our main attack went in, was estimated at eight battalions numbering eighteen hundred men, with a local reserve of six battalions amounting to another fourteen hundred. The enemy had about two hundred and twenty tanks, but no general reserve at all. His forward positions, however, had been prepared for defence with customary skill and a plenitude of mines and barbed wire. Opposite Cisterna his platoon positions were some three hundred yards apart, each containing from four to eight machine-guns, and each covered by adjacent strongholds. Five hundred or a thousand yards behind the front line the supporting companies lay in dug-outs along wadis or ditches; and farther back, from Lanuvio through Velletri to Valmontone, there were the dug-outs, command-posts, and occasional trenches of an unfinished reserve position that was sometimes referred to as the Caesar Line. The Germans were everywhere on higher ground, and the attack must go up-hill.

Of the three possible directions that assault from the bridgehead might take—south-east towards Terracina to join the advancing IInd Corps; north through Cisterna to Valmontone to cut Highway 6; north-west to Albano to break the western extremity of the Caesar Line—General Alexander, with General Clark's agreement, had decided by May 5th to aim the attack at Valmontone. The plan of battle required the VIth Corps to establish first a base about two miles beyond Cisterna from which to attack the high ground near Cori, and so press the assault to Artena. It was to be an American battle. The two British divisions would make only small diversionary attacks and hold the enemy in their sector; they were not to be employed north of the Tiber.

At a quarter to six on the morning of the 23rd, in a drizzle of rain, the American artillery opened fire and light bombers and fighter-bombers attacked the neighbourhood of Cisterna. Forty-five minutes later tanks appeared in the smoke, followed by the attacking infantry, who went forward all along the line of battle. The Americans attained complete surprise in their first assault, and though the German infantry recovered quickly, the heavy gun-fire had disrupted their communications and counter-attack was only local.

On the left of General Truscott's Corps the 45th Division attacked and secured limited objectives about Carano and the Carano creek; and rebuffing counter-attack remained in its new positions for two days. The main attack, through positions held by the 34th Division, was three-fold, with the 1st Armoured Division to the north, the 3rd Division in the middle, and the 1st Special Service Force to the south. The Armoured Division made successful use of four-hundred foot long 'snakes' to clear minefields, and after a day's fighting lay on the railway with infantry, in some places, a quarter of a mile beyond it. On the extreme right the Special Service Force also reached the railway beyond Highway 7, but was heavily counter-attacked by tanks and infantry and pushed back behind the road; at night the 1st Battalion of the 133rd Infantry came to its relief, and again advanced to the road. The 3rd Division, in the centre, met the fiercest opposition, though its artillery support was exceptionally heavy and Cisterna, ahead of it, was shelled for two hours by 8-inch guns and howitzers. All its three regiments attacked with two battalions abreast, and by midnight the advance had been carried forward to an average depth of a mile or more. Fifteen hundred prisoners were taken, half of them by the 3rd Division, whose casualties were the heaviest on the American side with just over eight hundred killed, wounded, or missing. Nearly seven hundred aircraft—fighters, fighter-bombers, light and heavy bombers—had supported the attack.

On the following day the 1st Armoured Division crossed Highway 7 north of Cisterna before noon, and while one Combat Command pressed on towards Cori, securing numerous prisoners willing to surrender, the other turned in the direction of Velletri and met stiffening resistance. The 133rd Infantry, who had relieved the Special Service Force on the right, won before dark a position on the railway beyond Highway 7 and made a two-mile advance along the Mussolini Canal. In the centre the 3rd Division closed

round Cisterna. All enemy communication between Littoria and Velletri was already broken, and during the night of the 24th the 36th Engineer Combat Regiment, in the east of the bridgehead, sent out special task forces to make contact with the southern front. The Special Service Force prepared to advance through the 133rd Infantry and strike towards Monte Arrestino, and at dawn on the 25th the 34th Division took command of a five-mile front north of Cisterna, behind the Armoured Division, to give the armour freedom to exploit the German collapse below Cori by assuming protection of Cisterna against counter-attack from the north.

That morning the Germans appeared to be in desperate plight. In the ruins of Cisterna a remnant of the 362nd Grenadier Division still fought tenaciously, and paratroopers below Velletri refused to be dislodged. Elsewhere on the German left flank, however, there was chaotic retreat, towards Velletri and Valmontone, while against the tide the enemy threw in reinforcements from the 92nd Grenadier Division, and the Hermann Goering Division prepared to hold Valmontone. In so grave distress were the Germans that their motoring columns were on the road all day, despite the Allied command of the sky; and fighters and fighter-bombers found targets in gross abundance. Throughout the afternoon the forward ground controller of the XIIth Tactical Air Command sent flight after flight to attack enemy transport, and by dusk the Air Force had achieved its most spectacular success of the campaign in direct support of ground operations. The German traffic was jammed by bombing, and punished at leisure. The airmen claimed to have destroyed 645 motor-vehicles and damaged 446 during the day, and though the score was doubtless enlarged by double counting, no one would accuse them of gross exaggeration who saw the fantastic litter of blackened, twisted wrecks, of tanks and lorries and troop-carriers and guns and command-cars, that remained on the roads from Cori to Giulianello, from Velletri to Valmontone.

On the 25th, in the neighbourhood of Cisterna, the enemy broke, and by nightfall the Americans were on a line that ran north-west from the slopes of Monte Arrestino through Cori to Giulianello and a little way beyond. In Cisterna itself, among the ruins, the Germans had fought stubbornly till evening, and below Velletri, where the advance had been roughly halted, they still held their ground. But in cages at Anzio 2,640 prisoners, and on the inland roads the many hundreds of burnt-out vehicles, were evidence of the Americans' overwhelming success; and the situation inspired a new development in the offensive of major importance. Confirming

verbal orders given shortly before midnight on the 25th, General Clark issued instructions early on the 26th to launch a direct attack on Rome. The change in direction, of two divisions of the VIth Corps, the 34th and the 45th, was effected with remarkable speed, and within twelve hours the new attack had begun; while the 3rd Division continued its original thrust towards Valmontone. It was unfortunate, however, that the drive to Valmontone was reduced in weight, or potential weight, just before it met the strong—and temporarily sufficient—defence of the Hermann Goering Division.

The 3rd Division, supported on its flanks by the Special Service Force and a task force of the Armoured Division, pressed forward against scattered opposition, and by evening of the 26th was on the high ground south and west of Artena, with its infantry prepared to attack on the following day, and a company of tanks of the task force astride the road from Velletri to Valmontone. Heavy fire from self-propelled guns repelled an exploratory move by the task force towards Highway 6 on the 27th, and it remained west of Artena. The Special Service Force, advancing across the hills, brought a pack-howitzer battalion to a crest above the town from which it could harass enemy traffic to the south and south-east. Artena itself was captured, after stiff fighting, by the 2nd Battalion of the 15th Infantry. The 3rd Division, with its supporting troops, was then disposed for all-round protection of its gains, and General O'Daniels looked down upon the Via Casilina and made ready to cross it. But he was spoiled of his hope by the Hermann Goering Division, that held him at bay and stood at Valmontone long enough to permit withdrawal of the very large proportion of the German army still to the east of it.

Kesselring made no attempt to reinforce his troops south and west of the Alban Hills, but the Hermann Goering Division—that should have been in France by this time, and was in fact his last considerable reserve—was powerfully disposed for the defence of Valmontone and the roads of escape, and to it were added fragments of the 715th Light Division and other units retreating before the French. In the late afternoon of the 27th the Americans at Artena were stiffly counter-attacked, and for three days the 3rd Division remained on the defensive while the VIth Corps' new attack, on what may conveniently be called the Caesar Line, was roughly stopped after a promising beginning.

The Armoured Division, in the meantime, after advancing towards Velletri over close and broken country, defended by mine-fields, anti-tank guns, and fanatical paratroopers, had been relieved

before morning of the 27th by the 36th Division, which maintained pressure on Velletri without becoming heavily engaged, and defended the area between the 3rd and 34th Divisions. The latter division and the 45th had begun their drive towards Lanuvio and Campoleone before noon on the 26th after half an hour's very heavy artillery preparation by their divisional guns and over two hundred additional pieces. Progress was quick at first, against scanty resistance except on the left flank where the 180th Infantry were confronted by the still formidable defences of the Factory. American armour broke the German defence, however, and by darkness the 180th were over the Prefetti creek, and along the whole front of attack an advance had been made of about a mile and a half. Against a screen of automatic weapons and some roving tanks the 34th Division resumed its advance on the 27th, till it was checked in the afternoon by an outpost line running south from Colle San Gennaro. The 45th, somewhat delayed by long-range fire, made comparable progress, and by nightfall both divisions were within two miles of their objectives. It was doubtful if the Germans could hold their line with the weakened forces available—the much diminished 65th Grenadier Division, some units of the 3rd Panzer Grenadier and 4th Parachute Divisions, and remnants of the 362nd Grenadiers—and the American Armoured Division was warned to prepare for an attack through the 45th on the 28th. But the hope of a speedy break-through was disappointed, and by consummate tactics and the resolute use of small bodies of troops—whose high military quality enabled their commanders to weld or disperse them as the situation required—the Germans with their inferior strength denied the American advance for three long days.

The right flank of the 3rd Division was already in contact with the German defences, and halted by them. As units on the left came forward they too were stopped; and movement, and the hope of movement, shifted gradually to the outer flank. The 168th Infantry of the 34th Division vainly assaulted the strongholds east of Lanuvio; and on the 30th the 135th, on their left, were halted too. Opposite the 45th Division the Germans fought a delaying action from Campoleone Station, and the Americans suffered fairly heavy casualties as they slowly followed the enemy to his main line of resistance. On the far left the British 1st and 5th Divisions were also moving, the former through dense minefields south of the Factory, which it occupied on the 28th without opposition; while the latter went ahead and crossed the Albano road. That night General Truscott committed his last major reserve and ordered the

1st Armoured Division to advance through the 45th and attack towards Albano.

The attack began well, and before noon on the 29th the German rearguard had been driven out of Campoleone Station and the two Combat Commands of the division were moving north astride the road; but the remainder of the day was less happy. Enemy strongholds which the tanks had passed held up the infantry who followed, and as the armour went forward it came under the fire of heavy guns, self-propelled guns, anti-tank guns and rival tanks, and closely lying infantry. By evening the division had lost thirty-seven tanks, and the leading battalion retired to the infantry line a mile north of Campoleone. After another day of strenuous fighting on the 30th, the right flank had advanced only a thousand yards, and the left had gained a little more and gone as far as the Campoleone creek. The British on the seaward extremity of the line crossed the Moletta and by darkness on the 30th were in the village. But these inconsiderable successes could not dispute the blunt unpalatable fact that the VIth Corps' attack, divided in strength between Valmontone and the southern slopes of the Alban Hills, had failed in both places; and for three days the honours had gone to Germany.

It would indeed be as foolish as dishonest to deny the enemy the possession of every military quality, and that in the highest degree, save chivalry alone. The Allied Armies were opposed by Generals and soldiers of supreme ability. Again and again their leaders' skill was embodied in the most resolute endurance of non-commissioned officers and private soldiers; and though the cause for which they fought was abominable, and their political principles matched in evil by the brutality of their execution, a German army in the field was a formidable and brilliant instrument that deserved, indeed demanded, an unflinching and often anxious respect. In the proper emotions of war it was difficult to recognise in the German infantry who held the bitter heights of Cassino, and fought so desperately in the channelled chaos of the ruins below, a courage equal to the valour of the soldiers whose death and heroism filled our hearts; and so long as German tactics were a villainous obstacle that had to be overwhelmed or circumvented, it was not easy to appreciate, and impossible to admire them. But now the swiftness, sagacity, and brave robustitude of their fighting must be recognised, not only for the sake of truth—perhaps an outmoded cause—but also to ensure for the Allies their due credit in defeating them; and nowhere did the Germans more convincingly

show their profound and finished aptitude for war—their sincere regard for it, one might say—than in their ability to see in apparent disaster some hope of retrieving fortune, and their remarkable faculty for re-shaping from broken battalions and the rabble of defeat a rearguard of unimpaired morale. This ability was very strikingly demonstrated, to the Americans' discomfiture, in the last days of May.

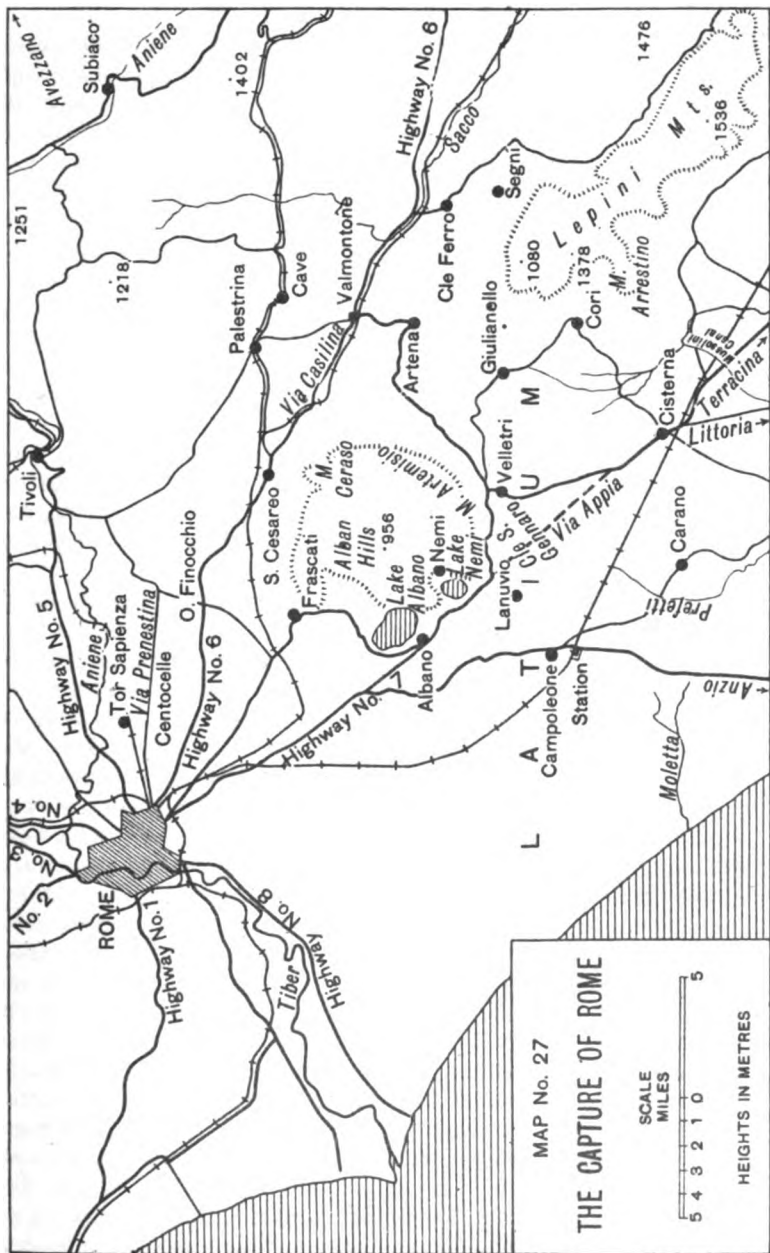
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Americans in Rome

THE delay so rudely imposed on the VIth Corps advance was naturally limited, for the immovability of the resisting object was materially less than the irresistibility of the opposing force; and the 36th Division, which many months before had secured the Fifth Army's beach-head at Salerno, about to lead evidence for the latter, was ready to show also the American faculty of swift decision and resolute exploitation of a suddenly perceived opportunity.

The 36th Division, while holding Highway 7 north of Cisterna, had been energetically patrolling, and had discovered that the enemy, drawn on the one side to Valmontone, on the other to Lanuvio, had left Monte Artemisio unguarded between them. New orders were quickly given, and on the night of the 30th the 142nd Infantry came forward through the 141st and began to climb upward through the vineyards on the steep hillside to the wooded slopes above. Till the following noon they met no resistance—they found a German artillery observer in his bath—and by evening of the 31st, now under fire from tanks and flak-guns near Lake Nemi, were on high ground overlooking the road from Velletri to Nemi. Following them to secure the central heights, the 143rd Infantry beat off some minor counter-attacks from the north-east, and the 141st fought their way down towards the Velletri road west of the town.

In an Operation Instruction dated May 31st, General Clark issued orders for the final drive. The VIth Corps was to attack the southern parts of the Alban Hills, press on to cut the German escape-roads through Rome, and seek to crush the enemy against the barrier of the Tiber; while the British 5th Division came forward prepared to meet and destroy such forces as might turn away from



the Americans to the south. The IInd Corps was to secure the heights north of Valmontone, block traffic on the road, and occupy the northern part of the Alban Hills. The Special Service Force would co-operate with the French Expeditionary Corps in clearing the mountain country about Segni.

On June 1st the Hermann Goering Division offered very strong opposition to the IInd Corps, but slowly yielded ground and retired from Valmontone. The 3rd Division reached Highway 6 before night, and the 85th and 88th Divisions made some progress in their difficult advance towards Monte Ceraso. On the following day, with the Germans retreating to Tivoli, the 3rd Division occupied Valmontone and pushed on towards Cave and Palestrina. East of Colle Ferro the Special Service Force made contact with the French, who by this time had completed their task of clearing the Lepini Mountains; and now the Fifth Army had a continuous line from the Moletta round the slope of the Alban Hills and east to the Sacco river. The 88th Division cut Highway 6 at San Cesareo, and took Colle Gardella beyond the road; while the 85th captured Monte Ceraso.

On June 3rd the IInd Corps, turning towards Rome, drove steadily forward astride Highway 6, the 3rd Division on the right, the 88th in the centre, the 85th on the left; and by dark had reached the cross-roads at Osteria Finocchio. Enemy resistance had collapsed, and the Special Service Force, coming forward into the lead, were at Tor Sapienza by four in the morning of June 4th. The shape of the American advance was now like a protruded tongue, pointed derisively at their goal—the 85th Division, moving north-east of Frascati, took thirty-eight unhappy prisoners who had been thrown into battle from a German Army Cooks and Bakers School—but the root of the tongue still lay in the hills between Lake Nemi and Lake Albano. In this sector the Germans' solid opposition to the VIth Corps, from Velletri to Lanuvio, had grown lighter on June 1st, after a partial withdrawal, but the 34th and 45th Divisions had still to fight bloodily for their advance on to the hills that overlook the still waters of Lake Nemi and Diana's sacred grove—and looked down, at that moment in their history, on smoke rising from the galleys of Tiberius that the Germans, in wanton revenge, had set on fire before they withdrew. Not until the night of the 2nd and the early morning of the 3rd, when the positions they had so resolutely held were almost outflanked by the 36th Division on the heights above and the IInd Corps advancing on the north, did the VIth Corps' enemies admit defeat; but then

withdrew along the Corps' whole front. Against sporadic and flimsy resistance the two divisions advanced during the day in the direction of Albano, and by evening had lost contact with the enemy. The 1st Armoured Division prepared to go through the infantry and enter the city from Highway 7, the Via Appia.

Though the fall of Rome was now certain, the northward passage over the bridges of the Tiber was still in doubt. The advancing divisions were ordered to send forward armoured reconnaissance columns to secure the river-crossings in their zones of action; and boats and bridging equipment were brought up. Nor was it yet known whether the Germans intended to fight within the city, and the delicate problem of how to counter such action had still to be resolved if it should present itself. But happily the enemy had no such desperate plan, and most of the remnants of Kesselring's two armies were already beyond the city. The divisions from the Liri and Sacco valleys had in general withdrawn through Avezzano and Subiaco; troops from the Lepini Mountains had retired behind the Hermann Goering Division while it still held Valmontone; and the Hermann Goering Division itself had gone northward below Tivoli. From the Alban Hills the retreat had passed through Rome on the night of the 3rd and the morning of the 4th, behind a rearguard of the 4th Parachute Division moving across the front from the neighbourhood of Ardea; and the rearguard followed through the city later on the 4th.

In front of the American army the reconnaissance columns moved forward along the converging highways, the Via Appia and the Via Casilina and the Via Prenestina to the north, opposed only by small mobile forces except at one point, west of Centocelle, where infantry and self-propelled guns offered resistance until mid-afternoon. In Rome the excitement of the citizens rose to wild enthusiasm to match the towering pleasure of the approaching troops, and the welcoming crowds in the outer streets, throwing flowers and bringing wine before the last snipers had been flushed from covert, did as much to hinder the Americans' passage through the city as had the Germans to delay the last few miles of their approach to it; but well before midnight the bridges in the city, all intact, were safely under guard.

Two battalions of the 88th Division made their entry from the Via Prenestina at half-past seven; the Special Service Force came in through the Porta Maggiore, and secured the seven bridges north of the Ponte Margherita when the two infantry battalions advanced through the city towards its northernmost exits. A battalion of

the 85th, after a brief encounter on the outskirts, entered by the Porta San Giovanni and moved to the Cavour bridge, while behind it a column of the 1st Armoured Division came in and took the Sant Angelo and Umberto bridges, leaving those to the south to another column of the same division, which also secured the two major river-crossings outside the city, where the bridges had been demolished. Advance parties from the 34th and 45th Divisions came forward, and their Engineers began to build new structures. By midnight troops of the Fifth Army stood on the bank of the Tiber from the sea to the river Aniene, which had now been reached by the French Expeditionary Corps, on whose right the American 3rd Division was advancing to the Tiber north of the Aniene.

During the 5th, in a sunny air of carnival and through hilarious crowds, tanks and long columns of artillery and marching infantry moved northward still, and from the gardens of the Villa Borghese the guns of the 88th covered the division's advance up Highway 2; while on Highway 1 the 1st Armoured Division led the 36th in pursuit. To the north the French stood aside to let the South African Armoured Division go forward on Highway 6, that now the Eighth Army was using again—or trying to use, for the congestion of traffic was appalling—and the American 3rd Division came into the city to serve as its garrison with the 1st Battalion of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment and a composite battalion of the French Expeditionary Corps. The battle for Rome was over, and while the holiday mood in its streets was loudly maintained by thickly coming troops from the south, the van of the Fifth Army was already seeking new battles to the north.

The battle had cost the Americans 18,000 casualties in killed, wounded, and missing; the French had lost 10,000; the Eighth Army and British divisions in the Fifth more than 14,000. The physical losses of the German armies are unknown, but between them the Fifth and Eighth Armies had taken more than 20,000 prisoners, of whom by far the larger part—more than 15,000—had fallen to the Fifth in its more spacious movement; and assuredly the enemy's total casualties were heavy. His material losses were enormous, and his strategic defeat gravest of all. The conquest of the Germans' ponderous line in southern Italy, and the winning of Rome, was an Allied victory of the largest significance.

CHAPTER VI

PURSUIT TO THE ARNO

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Strategy

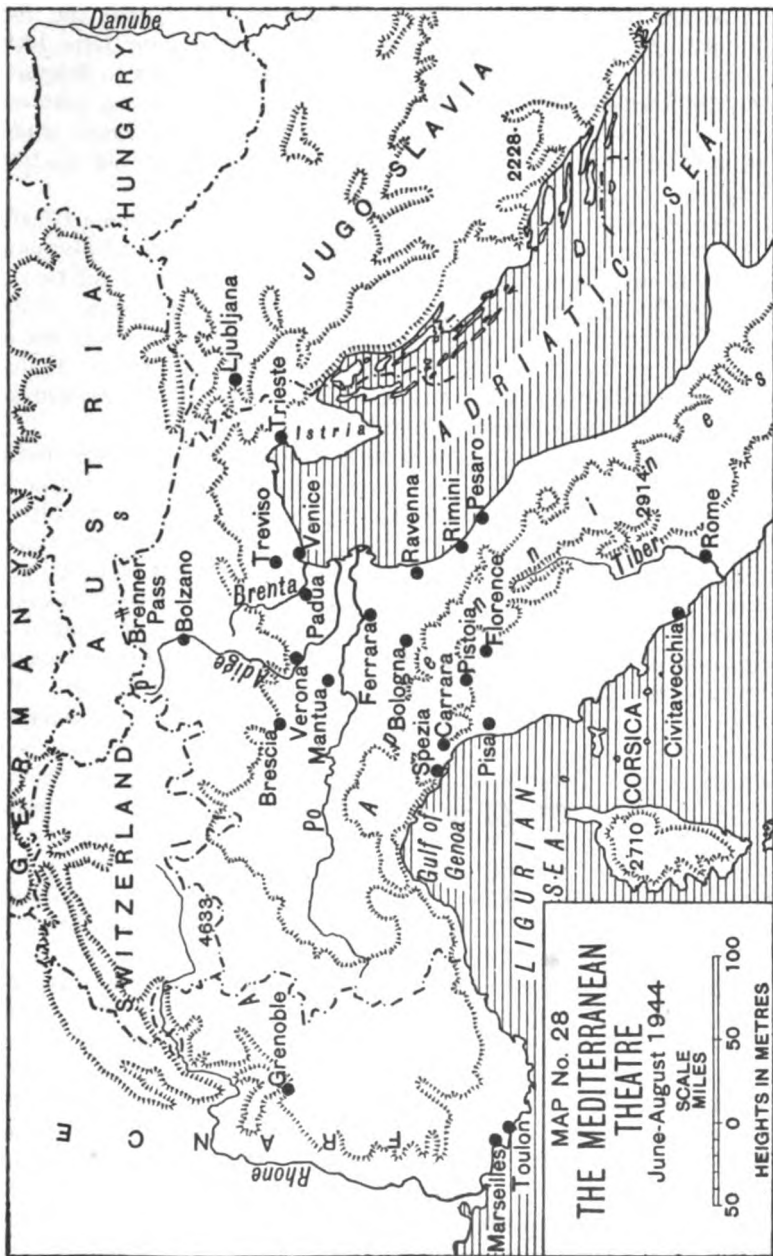
IN the world's esteem—in the newspapers' daily splintering of history to make a headline or a paragraph—the taking of Rome had been obscured by the momentarily successful landing of the Allied Armies in Normandy two days later; and the shadow that fell so promptly on the Armies in Italy was premonitory of a greater loss they would presently suffer in the cause of general strategy. The peninsular campaign, that in one way was so straitly confined by the narrow geography of Italy, was subject also to influence from afar and always open to the interference—benign to the larger view but sometimes inimical to local prospects—of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. From the first landing in the Calabrian Toe to the last winter of heart-breaking endurance in the Etruscan Apennines the campaign that seemed on the map to be contained so clearly between its Tyrrhenian and Adriatic coasts was, in fact, more truly defined by the vague and shifting frontiers of the whole war; and in the summer of 1944 its impetus was checked and much of its force diverted from the mountains ahead to a coast upon its flank.

In August 1943, at the Quadrant Conference in Quebec, the Combined Chiefs of Staff had decided that the invasion of northern France in the following year should be accompanied by a diversionary attack in the south; and in Cairo in November, at the Sextant Conference, the plan for a diversionary attack was enlarged to make it a major assault. When President Roosevelt, Mr. Churchill, and Marshal Stalin met in Teheran, the strategic decision became a political agreement.

In December 1943 a date in May 1944 was chosen for the invasion of southern France; by then, it was hoped, the Allied Armies would have reached the line from Rimini to Pisa. No one at that time realised Hitler's jealous determination to hold Rome and his southern lines in Italy at any cost. No one supposed that political consideration and regard for prestige would persuade the enemy to reinforce his troops below Rome up to seventeen divisions and fight, not merely to confine the bridgehead in Latium, but to drive out the invaders. No one suspected such extravagant resistance—but when it frustrated the hopes of December, and late in February the project of invading France from the south was postponed to June—then deferred to July, and later to August—doubts were expressed about the wisdom of the plan; and General Maitland-Wilson, Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean Theatre, stated his opinion that a larger contribution might be made to the Allied cause by maintaining the offensive in Italy with all available resources.

Since the Germans had committed so great a strength to the defence of Rome, it was obvious that the battle for Rome would be a major battle, and to exploit an anticipated success in it would be a reasonable policy. The invasion of the French Riviera required a great fleet of landing craft, moreover, and there would be the usual difficulties in finding them: many could be supplied only after the invasion of Normandy had succeeded in its first phase, and a port had been secured. A port would also be necessary to maintain the southern offensive in France—Marseilles was the obvious choice—and if the operation did not begin till mid-August, could Marseilles be captured before the beginning of bad weather? The future was unpredictable, and for two months there was wide uncertainty about operations in the Mediterranean. Maitland-Wilson began to make alternative plans for landings in the Gulf of Genoa, off Civitavecchia, and on the Riviera, the latter being first in importance and still first in probability.

On June 7th he informed the Chiefs of Staff that an amphibious operation could be mounted on August 15th, and that plans were being made for it on the assumption that an invasion of southern France would fit most usefully into the general pattern of the war in Europe; though this was still doubted by the British Chiefs. Two days later Maitland-Wilson told Alexander that the new operation would not adversely affect his Italian campaign till July, and by early July they would know where and for what explicit purpose it was to be mounted. But already Alexander must prepare



to release troops for it. The United States VIth Corps and the French Expeditionary Corps were to be used, and on June 14th came orders to withdraw the 45th Division immediately to Salerno, the 3rd Division on the 17th and the 36th ten days later, with an anti-aircraft and a tank battalion to accompany each division; while the French divisions, with corps and service troops, would quickly follow.

On the same day, however—June 14th—the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed that the prime necessity was to destroy all German forces south of the Rimini-Pisa line, and that there would be no withdrawal from Italy of troops necessary for that purpose. They still considered that a choice might have to be made between a seaborne assault on the Riviera, the west coast of France, or the head of the Adriatic; and were of opinion that a final decision must wait until the general situation had become a little clearer.

Maitland-Wilson's planning staff had in the meantime been considering the possibility of continuing the Italian offensive through the Rimini-Pisa line to develop, with the support of amphibious operations against Trieste and the Istrian peninsula, an attack through the Ljubljana Gap into the Hungarian plain. Its obvious advantages were that it would maintain the cohesion and striking power of a very effective and well-trying team, under Alexander's admirable leadership, and without pause in the campaign would secure for it all the shipping and Naval assistance available. By striking at the innermost parts of *Festung Europa* it might achieve decisive results; it would certainly compel the withdrawal of divisions from the west, and though its support of General Eisenhower's armies would be less direct than an assault on the Riviera, it might be more effective. In Italy, little doubt was felt that a break-through into the valley of the Po, followed by a quickly developing threat to the Danube Valley, was the most promising operation of all; but, of course, no local decision could be made.

Then, from General Marshall, Maitland-Wilson learnt 'a consideration of paramount importance to the entire strategic problem' that seemed to decide the question. There were still more than forty divisions in the United States that could not be brought into France as quickly as was desired through the harbours of north-western France and by staging through Britain; and to deploy them rapidly on a broad front General Eisenhower needed more ports. The invasion of southern France was primarily required to secure Marseilles, and despite a report from Maitland-Wilson to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on June 19th, recommending an offensive

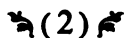
to the Po and landings at Trieste, the original plan was finally approved and orders were received to mount the assault on the Riviera on August 15th.

On July 5th Maitland-Wilson informed Alexander that the new operation must now receive prior attention, but that not more than three American and four French divisions—with their necessary army, corps, and service troops—would be removed from his command; and his command would receive in compensation the United States 92nd Division—a negro division—and a Brazilian Infantry Division, that would become available on September 15th and October 30th. Alexander was directed to continue his task of destroying German forces in Italy by advancing through the Apennines to the Po, and thereafter to a line from Venice through Padua and Verona to Brescia. All resources in the Mediterranean theatre—except those required for the new operation—would be at his disposal; and the Air Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean had been requested to give him the maximum support consistent with the prior importance of the imminent descent on the Riviera.

The long season of indecision was over. That at least was a gain. But strategic necessity had dealt a hard and bitter blow to tactical advantage, and though the pursuit of Kesselring's beaten armies north of Rome was maintained with high hope and pressed forward with great vigour, it lacked the weight to overcome opposition quickly—when opposition developed—that in happier circumstances it might have had. The withdrawal, moreover, of the American VIth Corps, the French Expeditionary Corps, a large part of the Allied Air Force, and their supporting service troops let loose upon the roads a flood of south-going traffic against the vital north-bound tide; and the expeditionary ports of Naples and Brindisi and Taranto were crowded with men and ships, all outward bound, that hindered the disembarkation of reinforcements and supplies for the continuing battles in Italy. The fighting divisions in the peninsula had to compete for attention with the new Seventh Army's requirements of transport and training facilities and shipping arrangements; and Staff officers had some difficult problems to solve.

From Naples on August 12th the leading convoy of the Seventh Army sailed for the Riviera, and a fleet of six battle-ships, twenty-one cruisers, and a hundred destroyers—American, British, French, Polish, Dutch, and Greek—stood ready to support the new invasion. The Fifth and the Eighth Armies were still fighting on the Arno; and their achievement in reaching so far, their ill fortune in getting no farther, must be judged against the strategic necessity that

hampered their movement by counter-movement, and deprived them in the midst of battle of seven excellent divisions.

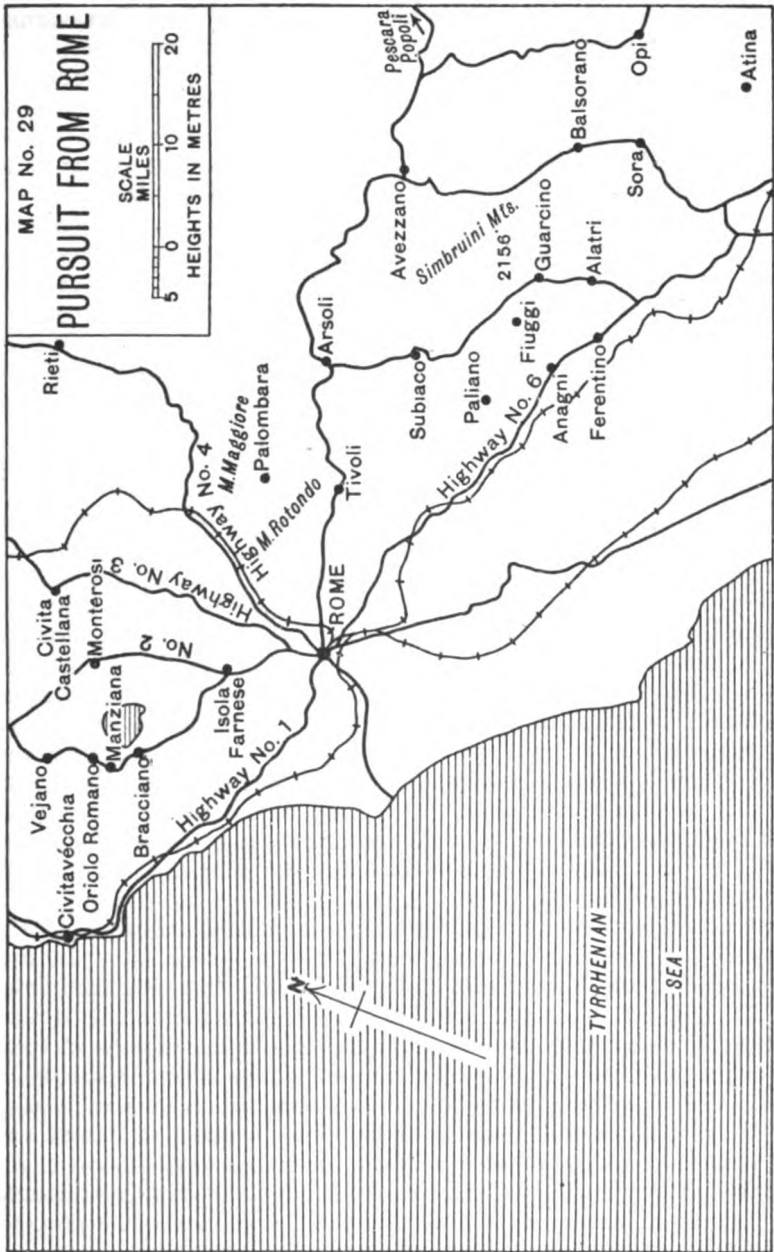


The Pursuit of Kesselring

In the Eighth Army there was grievous disappointment that its hard battles in the Liri Valley led, not to Rome and some enjoyment of victory, but still to the north and arduous pursuit of the beaten enemy. Nor did the leading divisions of the Fifth Army dally in the capital; but Rome became for a little while an American city—indeed the Americans had paid the heavier price for it—and grumbling prodigiously the Eighth looked briefly over its left shoulder at the dome of St. Peter's, and angrily pushed aside the German rearguards in its onward path.

Kesselring was in a difficult position. He had suffered enormous losses in men and material, and of the eighteen battered divisions under his hand, thirteen were on the east, only five in the critical sector west of the Tiber; and between Rome and Todi, sixty miles to the north, the Germans had demolished the river bridges. In Rome the bridges had been left intact, and north from the city ran three good roads. But the Allies were still dependent for supplies on the accumulated stores at Anzio and a railhead at Mignano a hundred miles south of Rome—the railway from Cassino to Rome had been utterly demolished, and Highway 6 was full of fearful chasms—and the advance had brought us no new ports. No more than nine Allied divisions could be fed, with oil and rations and shells, to pursue the enemy; and Kesselring's immediate task, of strengthening his west flank, was not quite impossible. East of the Tiber his retreating divisions were in very Italian country: country that geology had created for defence, that is.

From Avezzano to Pescara on the Adriatic his forward troops withdrew behind heavy demolitions, and from other theatres of war came reinforcements for his scattered front. The bloody purpose of the Allied Armies in Italy had always been to kill Germans so that the task of others on the same side—Russians in their prodigious battles, the new armies in Normandy, partisans in the Balkans—might in proportion be the easier; and now their success was again evident in Kesselring's cry for new battalions to replace those that had been destroyed. Following the Hermann Goering Division,



that had already been subtracted from the defence of France, came the 20th Luftwaffe Field Division from Denmark, the 42nd Jaeger and the 162nd Turkoman Divisions from the Balkans, and the 19th Luftwaffe Field Division from Belgium. The Jaeger Division took the place of the 356th Infantry Division in Northern Italy—the only good division still there—and the latter, with the three other incomers, added substance to the ghostly line west of the Tiber.

The Eighth Army prepared to advance towards Terni, but was hindered in the beginning by the later tactics in the battle for Rome, which had required the cession of Highway 6, north of Ferentino, to the Fifth Army; that now lay athwart the British route with its vanguard near Tivoli. When Rome fell the forward divisions of the Eighth Army were echeloned back facing the mountains. On the right the Xth Corps, led by the 2nd New Zealand Division, was on the road from Sora to Avezzano, with light forces moving from Atina to Opi. The XIIIth Corps in the centre had the 8th Indian Division on the road from Alatri to Guarcino, the 6th Armoured advancing from Alatri to Fiuggi. The 6th South African Armoured Division led the 1st Canadian Corps from Anagni to Paliano.

General Leese decided to advance on a front of four divisions, using his Xth and XIIIth Corps; and to bring his main strength into the plain of the Tiber he moved gradually to the left, using at first the latter corps on both banks of the river and up the road from Tivoli to Palombara, the Xth through the Simbruini Mountains towards Rieti. The XIIIth Corps took over command of the South African Armoured Division from the Canadian Corps, which went into reserve; and on June 5th the Xth Corps accepted command of the 8th Indian Division on the road to Subiaco, leaving some part of the 2nd New Zealand Division to follow the retreating enemy through Avezzano.

General Kirkman used the two armoured divisions of the XIIIth Corps on Highways 3 and 4, and the 4th Infantry Division with the 25th Tank Brigade under command on the right flank from Tivoli to Palombara. The South Africans, most courteously treated by the Americans, were given passage through Rome to let them move quickly up Highway 3, and having advanced thirty-three miles on June 6th, they captured at Civita Castellana a German Casualty Clearing Station with nearly six hundred wounded in it, and sent patrols on to Borgheno who found the bridge demolished and the river difficult. East of the river, on Highway 4, the 6th Armoured Division found the enemy still disposed for resistance, and progress

was slower. There was a stiff little battle for Monte Rotondo, and on the following day, the 8th, another struggle, undertaken by the Welsh Guards, for a ridge running west from Monte Maggiore five thousand yards to the north of the previous day's fighting.

In the central Apennines the 8th Indian Division led the Xth Corps steadily through Guarcino to Subiaco, and to Arsoli on the 9th. On their right the Germans abandoned a strong position at Balsorano which the New Zealanders entered on the 6th; and on the 10th, though much impeded by mines and demolitions, they reached Avezzano.

But before then new orders had been received from General Alexander, who saw in the weakness and disorganisation of the enemy an opportunity of reaching the Northern Apennines before their defence was organised—if speed could be maintained, that is—and to maintain it the ordinary military preoccupation with security on a flank must be disregarded. 'To take full advantage of this situation', ran the order of June 7th, 'Eighth Army will advance with all possible speed direct on the general area Florence-Bibbiena-Arezzo and Fifth Army direct on the general area Pisa-Lucca-Pistoia. Armies will maintain general contact on their inner flanks but will not wait on each other's advance. . . . The Commander-in-Chief authorises Army Commanders to take extreme risks to secure the vital strategic areas mentioned above before the enemy can reorganise or be reinforced.' Pursuit of the enemy on the Adriatic flank was halted to save transport and bridging material for the main effort. The strategic purpose was to use the valley of the Arno as a base from which to pierce the Apennine line from Florence to Bologna; and this continued to be the strategic principle of the campaign until August 4th, when circumstances compelled a change.

General Leese accordingly changed the direction of the XIIIth Corps' advance from a northern line across the Tiber towards Terni and Narni, to an advance north-westward to Arezzo. The South African Division received orders on the 7th to conform with the new plan and take Orvieto as its first objective; the 78th Division and the 9th Armoured Brigade were already under orders to follow the South Africans. But as the other formations of the XIIIth Corps were committed east of the Tiber, and the advance there had to be maintained, re-grouping was necessary to give sufficient strength to the thrust against Arezzo. Advance on the east bank therefore became the task of the Xth Corps, now commanding the 6th Armoured Division on the left, the 8th Indian on the right, supported

by the 2nd Army Group of Royal Artillery, with the 10th Indian Division, the 7th Armoured Brigade, the 25th Army Tank Brigade, the King's Dragoon Guards and the 12th Lancers in reserve; while west of the Tiber the XIIIth, led by the South Africans and the 78th, supported by the 6th Army Group of Royal Artillery, disposed in reserve the 4th British Infantry Division and the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade. The 2nd New Zealand Division at Avezzano passed from the Xth Corps to the Eighth Army's command.

As the Germans retired northward into the broadest part of the leg of Italy, their defensive problem became temporarily more difficult, but a running attempt at its solution was made with energy; and by June 9th the 26th Panzer Division had already crossed the Tiber near Orvieto into the vital western sector, and the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, withdrawn to the neighbourhood of Terni, provided Kesselring with a mobile reserve. Three other mobile divisions—though urgently needed on the west—were still engaged east of the river to hold the Eighth Army away from the road from Rieti to Terni, along which the straggling German infantry from Avezzano and Popoli were retreating. The total of prisoners taken by the Fifth and Eighth Armies since May 11th had risen by June 9th to 24,000.

The XIIIth Corps' main axis of advance was the road from Viterbo through Bagnoregio to Orvieto, and on the 9th the South African Division, having been assisted by an American task-force—at great cost to the Americans—to break through German defences at Vallerano, found six miles to the north, at Celleno, the road held by a strong rearguard, which they attacked with the utmost alacrity. The Special Service Battalion and the Imperial Light Horse¹—a motorised infantry battalion—scattered the enemy in a rousing assault, killed more than two hundred, took a hundred prisoners, and with the aid of the Prince Alfred's Guard on the right flank knocked out twenty-seven anti-tank guns. The 24th Guards Brigade, under command of the division, came into the lead, and in the river gorge south of Bagnoregio the 5th Grenadiers were more strongly checked. The Germans had here formed a continuous line that ran west to Lake Bolsena and east to the Tiber,

¹ Three of the South African Infantry battalions were composite bodies:
 The Witwatersrand Rifles/De la Rey Regiment.
 The Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment.
 The First City/The Cape Town Highlanders.

For the sake of brevity, however, they are throughout referred to by one half only of their double title.

where patrols of the 78th, advancing northward from Civitella d'Agliano, were halted.

On the 13th the Guards Brigade made assault on Bagnoreggio, and while the South African Armoured Brigade probed for a passage to the west, South African infantry climbed the sheer face of the gorge and entered the village from the east as the Guards came in from the south. The Hermann Goering Division had been relieving the 4th Parachute Division, and in the confusion both lost prisoners; while on the left the South African Armoured Brigade, having broken through slender defences, returned to the road, captured two bridges before the Germans could blow them, and pressed quickly forward. By evening its leading regiment was within four miles of Orvieto. On the right the 78th had also advanced, against scattered resistance, and in the evening light the 3rd Hussars and the Warwickshire Yeomanry could see the enchanting little town, with its great black and white cathedral and its narrow thirteenth century streets huddled together on their island rock, only a few miles ahead.

The Germans had now no reason for fighting south of the town. The lateral road from Terni and Todi through Orvieto to the west had already served its purpose, and the three mobile division that had been east of the river—the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier, the 26th Panzer—were now facing the French Corps' advance on Highway 2, the Via Cassia. On June 14th, therefore, the Germans withdrew north-west into the hills, but not without loss; for the Warwickshire Yeomanry, crossing the river Paglia east of the town by a lightly protected ford, had the happy experience of surprising a rearguard and attacking its anti-tank screen from behind, to take eighty-five prisoners and destroy fifteen guns and many vehicles.

The Xth Corps, on the road-fork where Highway 4 branches to Rieti and Terni, took the road to Terni; and in that narrow channel under the hills which could be—and was—very easily blocked by demolitions and covering guns, required five days to cover thirty miles. The Lothians entered Terni, across a Bailey bridge that spanned the deep gorge of the Nera, in the early morning of the 15th; and then, for a little while, the Corps met better fortune and better country, while the fortunes of their neighbour, the XIIIth, declined.

Emerging from the steep and twisted defiles below Terni, the Xth had two good roads ahead to Perugia, its next objective, and because there was little of tactical or strategic value to the enemy on its route, south of Perugia, the enemy withdrew under pressure.

General McCreery proposed to send forward his armoured cars on deep reconnaissance, the King's Dragoon Guards under command of the 6th Armoured Division into the country about Perugia, and the Tiber Valley; the 12th Lancers, under the 8th Indian Division, along Highway 3 to Foligno and into the Apennines on the right. While these regiments were coming up from the rear, the Lothians and the 6th Lancers took the lead, and the former drove two miles beyond Todi without a check. A rearguard was defeated there, and the advance was blocked again four miles farther on. That obstacle was cleared, and then at Torgiano, on the edge of the plain of Perugia, the 16th/5th Lancers found the river-crossings held by a strong defence. The King's Dragoon Guards, who had gone west over the river farther south, were stopped by an extension of the same defences.

The 8th Indian Division on the right also advanced rapidly, defeating enemy rearguards at Massa Martana, Osteria del Bastardo, and Foligno—where the capture included a hundred and thirty saddle horses—and taking several bridges intact. The Argyll and Sutherlands ran into machine-gun fire under the slope of Assisi, and with a sigh for the lost gentleness of St. Francis deployed to attack among vineyards and olive groves. At Bastia, on the plain of Perugia, the 6th Lancers were halted, but the 3rd/8th Punjabis attacked and forced a crossing of the river Chiascio.

Both the leading divisions of the Xth Corps were now within half a dozen miles of the city, shining unhurt and serene through the rain on its pleasant hill, but three days elapsed before it fell. The operation for its capture was developed in accordance with a plan, already issued, to continue the advance thereafter with the 6th Armoured Division moving north-westward by Highway 75 along the north shore of Trasimene, and the 8th Indian proceeding north along the Tiber Valley with the river between them. The latter division, on the 18th, accordingly turned right-handed off the road, and for three days fought a series of small and bitter actions in the rough country, rising to hills, between the Chiascio and the Tiber. Royal Fusiliers, Gurkhas, the Frontier Force Regiment, and the King's Own Hussars shared the fighting, and inflicted sharp losses on the enemy at increasing cost to themselves.

As the Guards Brigade and the 26th Armoured Brigade advanced against Perugia, its defenders withdrew to a perimeter round the city and then, after the 7th Rifle Brigade had captured Monte Malfe, that overlooks it from the west, abandoned it before daylight on the 20th; they resented, however, the tactical loss of the hill, and



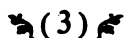
counter-attacked fiercely to regain it. But the Riflemen held their ground, as did the Welsh Guards in the hamlet of San Marco. The Grenadiers and Coldstream failed to capture Monte Pacciano to the north, however, and it was plain to them—as to the Indians on their right—that here the Germans were in positions they meant to hold. A change was coming in the headlong battle, and the skies proclaimed it. On the 17th it had begun to rain.

In the sector of the XIIIth Corps the 9th Armoured Brigade on the right, the South African Armoured Division on the left, had gone forward promptly from Orvieto into country less favourable to pursuit. The Corps had only one good road, that climbed steeply, and because the enemy had succeeded in withdrawing his three infantry divisions that were in danger—between Orvieto and the coast he now had ten divisions—there was a prospect of increasing opposition. Small but violent battles were fought at Ficulle and Alleron. The enemy's strength became more apparent. On Highway 71 the 1st Parachute Division was showing its old ferocity; the good 334th Division was deployed in difficult country east of the road; and west of it among narrow lanes and growing corn on steep fields was the 356th. On the 17th, moreover, there were thunderstorms, and from the fickle Italian sky descended the drenching torrent of Italian rain. On the 18th and the 19th it rained, a heavy downpour with little respite. The rivers rose, the roads dissolved. They were not meant for heavy traffic, and in many places became impassable. Nevertheless the advance continued, fighting mud as well as the enemy, and after two days of savage combat a rearguard of the Parachute Division relinquished the walled village of Citta della Pieve which they had held against repeated attack by the 3rd Hussars, the 1st East Surreys, the 5th Buffs; but could no longer hold after the 11th Brigade had gone forward to Monte Petrarvella on the ridge overlooking the southern shore of Lake Trasimene. On the other side of the Chiana valley the 12th South African Motor Brigade, advancing to Cetona and on towards Chiusi, was increasingly hampered by abominable roads.

The 11th Brigade, of the 78th Division, with great energy had expanded its hold on Monte Petrarvella to include the villages of Paciano and Panicale; and the Warwickshire Yeomanry had gone ahead, downhill, to take Panicale Station on Highway 71 on the lake-flats near the south-western corner of Trasimene. The 5th Buffs and the 6th Royal West Kents of the 36th Brigade had won the village of Strada across the road, and on a fine day, after the rain stopped, held it against counter-attack. Two miles to the north-east

the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers fought violently for the ridge at Sanfatuocchio. But the Germans had found a defensive line between Trasimene and the lake of Chiusi, and meant to hold it. Chiusi on its hill was in their hands, for the South African Armoured Division, which on hard roads might have reached it well before its defence was ready, had been lamed by the glutinous embrace of the soft grey mud into which all the gracious landscape of Umbria seemed to be dissolving.

The Germans had a considerable artillery force behind them, and it was apparent that they could not be dislodged from their positions between the lakes and east of Trasimene to the Tiber without a full-scale attack. The pursuit was halted with the XIIIth Corps south-west of Trasimene, and the Xth Corps just beyond Perugia; and the campaign entered a new phase.



The Fifth Army moves Fast

WITHIN the general intention of pursuit the Fifth Army was charged with the specific tasks of capturing the airfields at Viterbo and the port of Civitavecchia, and thereafter to advance on Leghorn. Through its westward sector ran two first-class roads—Highway 1, the Via Aurelia; and Highway 2, the Via Cassia—and there were several good lateral roads. From a narrow coastal plain the ground rose to rough high ground, but the terrain was not remarkably difficult, and south of the Arno there were no naturally strong defensive positions. The country, however, was fairly thickly populated, and Italian villages and farms, built solidly of stone, could always be made into useful forts. Gunners whose experience had been confined to cities built of brick were often astonished by the massive strength of villages built of stone.

General Clark's immediate orders after the fall of Rome were to secure forward positions some six miles beyond it; and continue the advance. The IInd Corps on the right expected early relief by the French Corps, and the VIth Corps on the left—from which the two British divisions, the 1st and the 5th, would now be released—would soon give place to the IVth. Tentative plans were made for a seaborne attack on Civitavecchia and a drop by parachute troops; but in the event neither was necessary.

The two Combat Commands of the 1st Armoured Division led the 34th and 36th Divisions out of Rome, and on June 5th, against very little opposition beyond the city but delayed by the press of traffic within it, they secured their six-mile perimeter. On the 6th Combat Command 'B' drove forward up Highway 1, delayed only by demolitions, and at night two motor-borne battalions of the 168th Infantry went through to Civitavecchia, which they entered with a minimum of trouble. Combat Command 'B' then left the coastal sector to the 34th Division, and joined its other half in the zone of the 36th. The General commanding the 34th sent forward the 133rd Infantry towards Tarquinia, and five miles short of the town, on the morning of the 8th, they were stopped by fire. They were in action most of the day before they dislodged the Germans and took a hundred and fifty prisoners of the two newly arrived divisions: the 20th Luftwaffe Field Division and the lamentable 162nd Turkoman. On the 9th the 36th Division, which had swung west after its initial advance to the north, took command of the VIth Corps zone, and the 34th went into reserve.

Combat Command 'A' of the Armoured Division had advanced to the outskirts of Bracciano on the 6th, and there in the late afternoon engaged a group of German tanks; on the following day it pushed forward north of the lake and through Manziana, Oriolo Romano, and nearly as far as Vejano. The 36th Division followed, and moved westward from Manziana to the 34th Division's sector without opposition. Combat Command 'A' had to fight for Vetralla but drove on towards Viterbo, which, after a rearguard action to the south of it, the Germans abandoned before dawn on the 9th. Viterbo looked as if it had been the scene of fearful battle; but that was due to the previous attention of the Air Force.

Combat Command 'B', which had now assembled behind 'A', moved north-westward from Vetralla to seize Tuscania, which it took after a brief but vigorous engagement on the 9th, and reconnoitred forward to Canino; while 'A', finding the roads occupied by the advancing French—who had relieved the IIInd Corps—returned to the Bracciano lakeside where it was joined by 'B' after its relief at Canino by the 36th Division.

Through Tarquinia and Montalto the 36th quickly advanced till the 11th, when six miles beyond Montalto there came a check, and a small German counter-attack revealed the enemy's increasing strength. The two new divisions—the 20th Luftwaffe and the Turkoman—were in the line. On this day the Headquarters of the IVth Corps took command of the sector, the 34th and 36th Divisions

remaining attached, and the headquarters of the VIth Corps moved back to Naples, for service with the Seventh Army. Civitavecchia and the Viterbo airfields had been secured, and within four days the port was in use again, and the runways on the airfields were quickly made serviceable.

In the IIInd Corps' sector the 85th and 88th Divisions had moved north out of Rome astride Highway 2. The 85th, having defeated a rearguard at Isola Farnese, met no opposition till some tanks and infantry two miles south of Monterosi imposed a brief halt. A task force of the 1st Armoured Division went into the lead, and as well as by mines and demolitions was hindered by a rearguard fighting on the east side of Lake Vico; but came within a few miles of Viterbo on the 9th. The French were now beginning to relieve the IIInd Corps, and the Eighth Army's left boundary was moved west to include Viterbo. The 85th withdrew to a rest area. The 88th, after having advanced some thirty miles against negligible opposition, was halted on the new Army boundary near Civita Castellana.

When the French took over command of this sector, General Juin appointed General de Larminat to command a Pursuit Corps consisting of the 1st Motorised and 3rd Algerian Divisions; and on June 10th the latter motored forward to positions north of Tuscania, while the former drove through Viterbo on Highway 2, both making contact with the enemy shortly after passing through the forward troops of Combat Command 'A' of the American 1st Armoured Division.

The Motorised Division met opposition on both flanks, from the lakeside village of Marta and from the western fringe of the armoured battle that the South African Division was fighting south-east of Bolsena; but found a way through to Montefiascone, and a little way beyond it, on Highways 2 and 71, were stopped by demolitions covered by fire, and on the latter road were counter-attacked in some force. The attack was repelled, but the French had many casualties. Engineers under fire built a Bailey bridge, the advance was resumed, and against stubborn rearguards the vanguard of the Motorised Division reached Bolsena on the morning of the 14th, and made contact with the 3rd Algerian Division.

On the west side of the lake the Algerians had fought a couple of small but brisk engagements at Piansano and Valentano; and though heavily counter-attacked south of Latera, had by midnight of the 12th cut Highway 74 at several points west of the village, which they occupied before noon on the 13th. The left boundary of the Corps was moved west to a line running through Vallerona,

and a reinforcement of Moroccan units, known as the Guillaume Group, came up into this new territory.

North of Highway 74 the Algerian Division advanced north-west towards Mont' Amiata, and had to fight for progress against infantry opposition that was increasingly stiffened by artillery and mortar fire; but by dark on the 17th it stood on a curving line from Vallerona on the west through Santa Fiora to a point just south of Piancastagnaio. On its left the Guillaume Group was moving towards Cinigiano, its centre faced resistance in the neighbourhood of Arcidosso under Mont' Amiata, and on its right there was progress towards Poggio Uccello, a little south of the river Orcia. To the east the 1st Motorised Division had fought its way north along the spectacular mountain road from Acquapendente to Radicofani, which it entered on the 18th, and after heavy fighting took Sarteano eight miles to the north-east, where it acquired ninety prisoners, a large store of ammunition, and an undamaged Mark IV tank. Goumiers occupied Mont' Amiata, and despite German counter-attacks north of Radicofani, reconnaissance troops of both divisions were nearing the river Orcia by the evening of the 19th.

The 1st Motorised Division was now due to join the Seventh Army for the French invasion, and was relieved by the 2nd Moroccan Infantry Division. The new division was organised into two combat groups of armour, lorry-borne infantry, and artillery similar to those which had so far maintained the pursuit. But now the French Corps was facing stronger resistance, an enemy prepared to fight for his position; and rain had already impeded its armour. A few miles to the east the South Africans were fighting for Chiusi, and on the west the United States IVth Corps had also been brought temporarily to a halt.

When the 36th Division, strongly reinforced, assumed the advance in the IVth Corps' coastal sector, its immediate objective was the mediaeval and somewhat malarious city of Grosseto, in the middle of the flat river-lands of the Ombrone; but almost immediately it ran into trouble south of Orbetello, the curious little town that overlooks a salt lagoon between the mainland and the rocky peninsula of Mont' Argentario. Six miles south of Orbetello the 361st Infantry had been halted by gunfire, and when the 141st went through them on the 11th its 1st Battalion was ambushed on the highway, and the 2nd Battalion, heavily counter-attacked on the high ground to the right, lost one of its companies and contact with its left flank. Two more battalions, with supporting artillery,

engaged the enemy, and the battle continued till dawn on the 12th, when the enemy broke and withdrew. The advance then continued, with little trouble, to Highway 74; which the 142nd Regiment reached farther to the east after stiff fighting in the neighbourhood of Capalbio.

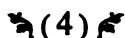
The river Albegna was bridged and crossed on the 13th, and the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron with the 142nd Infantry found the little town of Magliano so resolutely held that it had to be fought for street by street; while the 143rd, on Highway 1, had also a hard struggle for high ground overlooking the road north of Bengodi. The Germans continued to oppose the advance with Mark VI tanks on the road and mortar and machine-gun fire on the flat land south of Grosseto that was criss-crossed with streams and small canals; but by June 15th the main body of the division reached the Ombrone along its whole front, and when darkness fell began to cross the river without much trouble. By dawn on the 16th the 143rd Infantry were all on the north bank, and quickly passing through the city found the roads beyond it thickly mined and under shell-fire from Montepescali. Four miles to the east the 361st Infantry had to bridge the river and cross under fire. Here and at Grosseto heavier bridges had to be constructed for the artillery and supply train, but on the 18th an attack was mounted to clear all the high ground south of Highway 73, and on a front of five miles the 143rd Infantry, the 361st, and the 517th Parachute Infantry advanced over rough country extensively mined for average gains of three miles. On the following day, after varying resistance and considerable gains on the right—and on the far right, where a strong task force was operating—the enemy withdrew.

The task force on the right—Task Force Ramey—had been advancing steadily through difficult country between the IVth Corps and the French. On June 12th it lay between Ischia and Valentano, and by the 16th had gained the lateral road from Triana to Scansano. Changing direction north-west, against heavy gun-fire, it then captured Campagnatico, and after being strongly opposed and much hampered by the heavy rain, Paganico was taken on the morning of the 20th.

To conform with the westward inclination of the coastline and the broad front before it, the IVth Corps now prepared to change its direction somewhat to the left, and on its right wing to commit the 1st Armoured Division in place of the task force. The hills south of Highway 73 had been cleared, and in the last few days' fighting the unfortunate 162nd Turkoman Division had been badly

cut up. But ahead of the Corps now lay a more numerous enemy and rougher country.

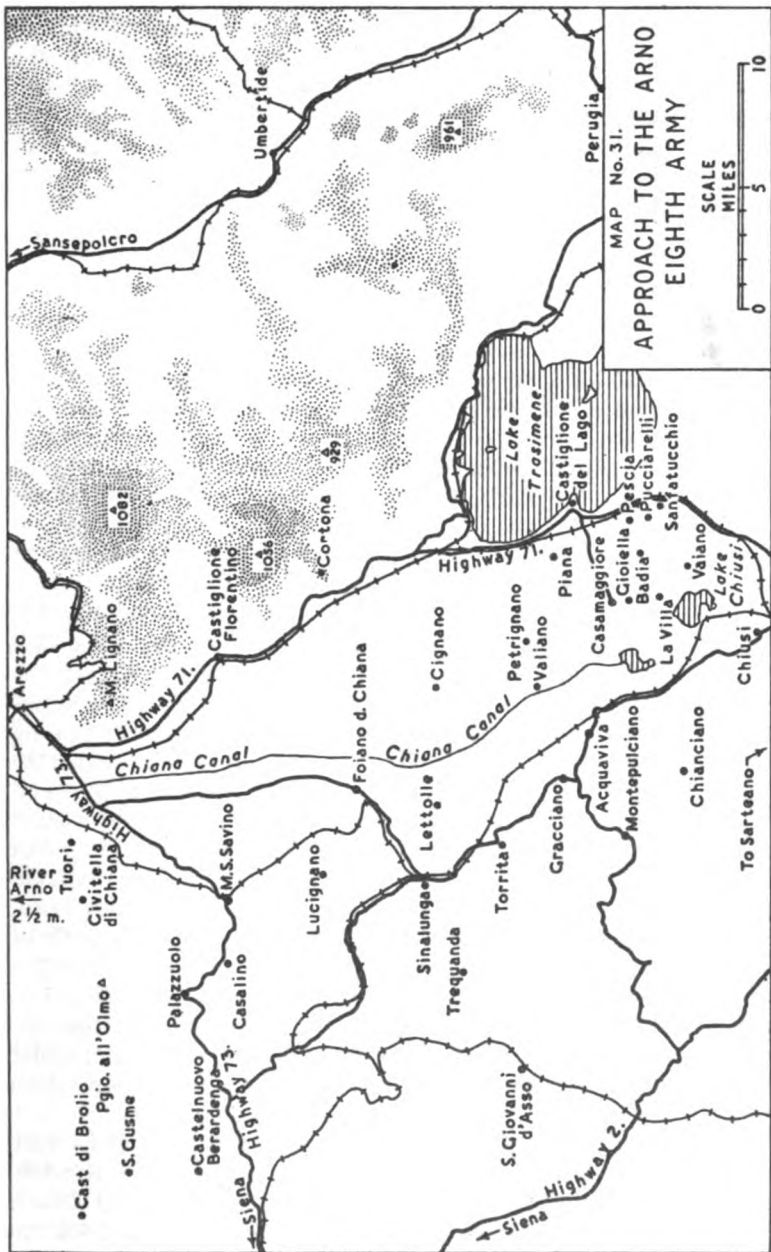
On the outermost left flank, in the Tyrrhenian Sea, the island of Elba had been captured in a swift and fierce assault by the French 9th Colonial Infantry Division—Senegalese and Goumiers and the Bataillon de Choc—under the direction of Allied Force Headquarters.



Battles at Trasimene

By June 20th, evil weather having abetted Kesselring's tactical genius, the Germans had again established a coherent defensive line across Italy. From the Apennine backbone north-east of Perugia it took advantage of Lake Trasimene and the hill-town of Chiusi, and ran westward along the river Astrone. It was ill-defined on the west, but there, on its vulnerable flank, the Germans outnumbered the Fifth Army by two to one. The German Tenth and Fourteenth Armies had been re-grouped, and of the eight armoured or mobile divisions that had, after the fall of Rome, been east of the Tiber, seven were now between Trasimene and the sea, and Kesselring had received four new divisions of varying worth. On the Eighth Army's front the lush, rolling, heavily cultivated land west of Trasimene—the naked mountains overlooking the Chiana valley south of Arezzo—and the steep confusion of the Chianti hills beyond it, all combined to underline the platitudes of Italian fighting: that ground favoured the defence, and both sides would fight for time as much as for position. The Allies were in haste to reach Florence and deploy their next assault, while the Germans needed time to complete their defence of the mountain-line through the Etruscan Apennines.

Roads dominated the Eighth Army's strategy. Highway 71 along the west side of Trasimene was the only road capable of bearing the traffic of an armoured advance, and the XIIIth Corps, discarding a hopeful notion of using the road to Sinalunga, had to be given that while the Xth Corps, which had anticipated its use, faced the confined and unsatisfactory route to Sansepolcro through Umbertide. The operations of the two corps would be almost independent, and after some contact at the north-western corner of



Trasimene they would meet again only after the taking of Arezzo; when they would diverge once more with the mountain-mass of the Pratomagno between them. Owing to the extreme distance of two hundred miles between the Eighth Army and its railhead there could be no reinforcement of the two corps, and each would operate with an armoured division, an infantry division, and the appropriate artillery: the Xth Corps with the 6th Armoured and the 8th Indian, the XIIIth with the 6th South African Armoured and the 78th, with the 4th British Infantry Division in reserve.

By the 20th the infantry of the latter corps was fiercely engaged against a very strong position, organised in depth and served with numerous guns and mortars, between the south-west shore of Trasimene and the lesser lake of Chiusi; while on the left the South Africans, angrily dragging themselves out of the mud that had halted their swiftness, were probing the outer defensive works of Chiusi itself. Three German divisions and part of another held the line: the 334th, the 356th, the Hermann Goering, and part of the irrepressible 1st Parachute Division. Against such strength General Kirkman committed his reserves, the 4th Division and the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade, without delay.

In very close and bloody fighting for the village of Sanfatuocchio the London Irish Rifles and the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers of the 78th Division, supported by Canadian tanks, succeeded in taking the enemy's forward positions, and held them against bitter counter-attack. On their left the Argylls of the same division were fighting for the neighbouring village of Vaiano; and on the right the Inniskillings, with Canadian armour, took the Pucciarelli ridge and gave the division a position from which to attack the enemy's main line along the Pescia water. For two days they held it against furious counter-attack—for the Germans were resolved to maintain their line—and on the 24th the Irish Brigade again advanced, admirably supported by the Canadian tanks, and the 5th Buffs of the 36th Brigade took the lead from them to cross the Pescia a quarter of a mile north of the village. The 334th Division lost two hundred prisoners in the day's fighting, and incapable of counter-attack, took up a position on higher ground north of the river under covering fire of their artillery, that was directed from observation posts on the promontory of Castiglione del Lago.

The 4th Division, which would presently relieve the 78th—now under warning orders for the Near East—had in the meanwhile committed its 28th Brigade in the sector between Vaiano and Chiusi, lately held by the 36th Brigade. Hampshires, Somersets, and Surreys

of the 28th had a day of hard fighting with small gains on the 24th, but the 12th Canadian Armoured Regiment made a substantial advance; and on the following day, though more rain and mud impeded the armour, the infantry fought with greater success and came nearer to Badia and La Villa. On the left of the 4th Division the 4th Reconnaissance Regiment reached the north shores of Lake Chiusi and threatened the escape-routes of the Germans in the village—the strongest natural position in their line—who abandoned it before dawn on the 26th. Chiusi had previously defeated the South Africans' very gallant but perhaps hopeless attempt to storm it: with an armoured regiment on either flank, the Capetown Highlanders had attacked from the railway station before midnight on the 22nd, and one company had forced its way in to the centre of the town; but strong counter-attack isolated it, the tanks on the right were bogged in mud, and under point-blank fire from German armour the solitary company was presently over-run after heroic resistance.

And now, though the armoured brigade could go in, it was impossible to press the advance beyond Chiusi because blown bridges and innumerable demolitions forbade progress; while on the left the 24th Guards Brigade, advancing from Sarteano to Chianciano, found the Germans holding the river Astrone very strongly with infantry and Mark VI tanks. To outflank and dislodge them, the Divisional Commander diverted most of the Canadian Armoured Brigade from frontal advance to a westward movement along the ridge from Chiusi.

Sappers of the 36th Brigade on the right, working all night in a thunderstorm, had repaired the indifferently demolished bridge across the Pescia on Highway 71 before dawn on the 25th, and the Royal West Kents and the Argylls advanced without armour—the tanks were mud-bound—for about a thousand yards, but failed before heavy gun-fire and a reinforced enemy to reach their objective, the road from Castiglione del Lago to Casamaggiore. The main positions of the Trasimene line were still in front of them, on the ridge between Casamaggiore and Frattavecchia; and it became evident that the primary role in attack must pass from the 78th to the 4th Division. The former was ordered to consolidate and defend its ground; and on the 26th the 10th Infantry Brigade of the latter division, with the 12th Canadian Armoured Regiment, advanced from La Villa to Gioiella, which was taken after violent conflict before midnight.

An open valley, and ground too steeply broken for tanks to

manoeuvre at ease, lay in front of the Casamaggiore ridge. The 2nd Cornwalls attacked under heavy fire and reached the top between Casamaggiore and Frattavecchia; but temporarily could do no more. The Lancashire Fusiliers, from the 78th, took the latter village, the Surreys the former; and the Bedfords went forward again from the centre of the ridge. By darkness on the 28th the critical ground had been won, the Trasimene line was broken, and the German positions west of it were also falling. The XIIIth Corps had taken seven hundred prisoners in eight days of savage, close, and stubborn fighting; but the Germans had gained eight days. Now, however, they had no prepared positions on which to fall back, and in more open country would again have been in grave danger. But the South African Armoured Division, advancing through the Chiana valley, was unable to use its speed. The valley is always wet, and the ground closely cut by irrigation channels running into the Chiana canal; all the numerous crossings were blown, and had to be bridged again. Bridging material had been hurried forward during the past week, but neither foresight, hard-working Sappers, nor the admirable Bailey design could restore to an armoured division the speed of an open road.

But an awkward terrain and a persistent enemy were not the Army Commander's only problems: general strategy imposed a burden from without, and his soldiers' weariness presented a difficulty from within.

In accordance with the main intention to assault the Gothic Line, General Leese had made a tentative plan of attack, and on the 24th he decided on the necessary re-grouping of his forces. Because of the diversion of the French and American divisions for the invasion of the Riviera, the Eighth Army must lead the attack in Italy, and without much delay could not do so in any great strength from the advanced bases of its long lines of communication. The force of assault would consist of only two corps with a total of four divisions, and two more in reserve; but there still seemed to be a good chance of success if the attack could be mounted quickly. Arezzo, with its useful rail and road communications, must first be captured for an administrative base, and Florence for a launching-ground.—Bibbiena, one of the Army's original objectives, had declined in importance.—Little help, indeed, could be expected from the Xth Corps' sector, where the country made swift advance impossible, and both the 6th Armoured and the 8th Indian Divisions were in need of relief. The 10th Indian Division was therefore brought forward to maintain pressure on the enemy north of

Perugia, while the 8th was allowed to rest and the 6th Armoured, after a few days to regain its breath, would be transferred to the XIIIth Corps to replace the 78th, which was due to be released for longer recuperation at the beginning of July. This re-grouping was effected during the last days of June, and the XIIIth Corps prepared to advance on Arezzo with the 6th Armoured Division on Highway 71, the Corps axis; the 4th Division in the centre with its left on the Chiana canal; and the South Africans west of them to the Army boundary.

Two days elapsed after the breaking of the Trasimene line before the Corps finally cleared the lakeside of resistance. Before first light on the 29th the enemy had broken contact along the whole front, and Castiglione del Lago, which had dominated our right flank, was entered without opposition. But the 334th Division had found a series of little hills running from north of Piana to Petignano, the 1st Parachute Division manned a ridge west of there to Valiano, and the Hermann Goering Division continued the line to the neighbourhood of Gracciano.

In the centre the 4th Division came under mortar and gun-fire south-east of Valiano, and throughout the 30th fought fiercely in close and difficult country; tanks of the 12th and 14th Canadian Armoured Regiments were engaged by German tanks and anti-tank guns, and could give the infantry little help. On the right the 78th, not yet relieved, made an advance to Piana and a little way beyond; and on the left of the South African Division the 24th Guards Brigade, having taken Montepulciano, secured the road between it and Acquaviva against slight opposition. The bridge south-west of Acquaviva was restored by dawn on the 30th, and the 11th South African Armoured Brigade advanced in two columns through the Chiana valley and on the road that passes through Gracciano to Torrita di Siena; but quickly made contact with the Hermann Goering Division, and there was stubborn fighting between Gracciano and Valiano. The Guards, however, were able to continue their advance to within three miles of Torrita di Siena, and threatening to outflank the Germans, compelled a general withdrawal. Along most of the line they held their ground very doggedly until dark, when they quietly retired; and about Gracciano and Montepulciano Station paid heavily for their resolution. But in the centre, at Petignano, the Cornwalls, who had been fighting all day, were counter-attacked to cover the retreat and having firmly stood their ground, with great spirit then followed the enemy they had repelled and took the village by assault.

Now the advance quickened again, though against the stubborn and skilful German divisions it had still to be fought for. On the east and the west the 15th Panzer Grenadier and the Hermann Goering Divisions could retire without difficulty along Highway 71 and through Sinalunga; but in the centre the 334th Infantry and the 1st Parachute Division, once they had been driven from the Petrignano ridge, had to go back into the hills north-west of Foiano di Chiana, across the route of the advancing left wing of the XIIIth Corps, which would choose the road from Sinalunga to Foiano in preference to the network of canal-crossing little roads in the middle of the Chiana valley. The Germans might be expected to fight strongly to hold Foiano, and on July 1st the 11th South African Brigade was rudely checked below Sinalunga and Lettolle; but the Guards Brigade, after another long advance through Trequanda, reached the road-junction three miles west of Sinalunga. Despite this threat of dissolution to their vital flank the German forces between the Chiana canal and Highway 71 were still reluctant to give ground, and against sturdy rearguards and persistent snipers among farm-buildings and in close country the 4th Division made only two or three miles, the 78th less. Then early on July 2nd the Germans abandoned Sinalunga and Lettolle, left rearguards to cover the approaches to Foiano, and from the centre withdrew in sudden haste. At nine o'clock the 2nd Royal Fusiliers entered Cignano, two and a half hours later the Royal West Kents were in Foiano, and by mid-day tanks were crossing the canal.

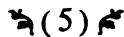
North of Foiano opposition stiffened again, and the Guards west of Sinalunga, the Imperial Light Horse south of Lucignano, and the 12th Brigade on their right fought against infantry and tanks and anti-tank guns till daybreak on the 3rd, when the advance was resumed on a wide front but no contact was made with the enemy. On their left the Germans had withdrawn along Highway 71, and after a brief delay north of Riccio our patrols entered Cortona unopposed. The Germans were falling back to a line from the mountains south of Monte Lignano across the head of the Chiana valley south of Arezzo and westward into the hills parallel with the high-road to Siena.

On Highway 71 the 16th/5th Lancers and the 10th Rifle Brigade, of the 6th Armoured Division, moved quickly forward in spite of demolitions to Castiglione Fiorentino, and beyond it, where the road was completely blocked, along the parallel railway to Colle al Vento; and there minefields stopped them. The Derbyshire Yeomanry, taking up the advance in the valley to the west, succeeded

in crossing the Siena road near the Chiana canal; but on the south-western slopes of Monte Lignano their patrols found the enemy strongly defending the heights, and a company of the Rifle Brigade made a similar discovery on the bare steep hills to the south of Lignano that overlook Castiglione Fiorentino. The rugged highlands east of Highway 71 were held in strength.

On a wide front west of the Chiana valley the 4th Division made good progress to the west and north-west, and on July 4th crossed the Siena road to push forward to the abruptly rising ground about Civitella della Chiana and San Pancrazio. It was the Divisional Commander's intention to strike through the hills to Highway 69—the road to Florence—but on the 5th he encountered opposition too strong to be thrust aside, and his advance was halted. On the right the 2nd King's took Tuori, and on the left the 6th Black Watch with Italian partisans captured Monte Altuzzo in a five-hours' battle, from which the 1st Royal West Kents went on to storm Poggio al' Olmo. But that was the limit of advance.

The South Africans advanced in two brigade-columns from Lucignano and Sinalunga. On the 4th the Natal Mounted Rifles, leading the right-hand column, reached Casalino on the Siena road west of Monte San Savino, and pushed on as far as Palazzuolo, a mile to the north, on the following day; the Capetown Highlanders of the Motor Brigade were halted on a totally demolished road under heavy fire, and the rest of the brigade extended to the west to make contact with the Guards. The 5th Grenadiers, leading the left-hand column—the 24th Guards Brigade—moved forward from Castelnuovo Berardenga, which had been entered without trouble, and after a desperate small battle reached to San Gusme and three miles beyond it on the 5th. With the 1st Scots Guards on the lower slopes of the commanding hill at Castel di Brolio, the Brigade was in the heart of the Chianti country.



Grosseto to Volterra

WESTWARD from the Eighth Army, near Sarteano, the Fifth Army on June 21st lay on a fifty-mile front extending to a point about eight miles north of Grosseto; with the 36th, the 1st Armoured, the 3rd Algerian, and the 2nd Moroccan Divisions in the line from

the coast on the left to the Army boundary on the right, some six miles east of Highway 2. On the hither side of the Army's objective—the river Arno—were Piombino and Cecina for the 36th to capture; the old Etruscan mountain city of Volterra for the 1st Armoured; and Siena and Poggibonsi for the French.

Numerically the Germans against them were strong, and in their battle-line were eight nominal divisions, though several were mere fragments of their proper strength. These were the 16th and 3rd Panzer Grenadiers, the 19th and 20th Luftwaffe Field Divisions, the 4th Parachute, the 356th and the Turkoman Grenadiers, with some part of the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadiers. Without a thoroughly prepared position, this mosaic of a defensive force would not enable the Germans to resist indefinitely, but they would be able to elect their own time of withdrawal; and their tactics were cleverly devised. Their rearguard action was commonly based on a small group of heavy tanks or self-propelled guns, whose commanders chose the ground, with infantry to support them. Their line could present an elastic chain of mobile forts, that is. Along the coast the German intention was to delay the American approach, through Piombino and Cecina, to the large port of Leghorn; while inland they fought to cover the coastal action and protect the lateral roads of retreat.

North of Grosseto the 36th Division made slow but steady progress through rough country under heavy rain till the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron was halted near Follonica on the 23rd. This opposition was avoided by the 142nd and 143rd Regiments, advancing inland, and on the 25th Piombino, isolated by their advance, fell without a struggle. The 36th Division, under orders for the Seventh Army, was relieved by the 34th, whose 168th Infantry, on the right flank along the river Massera, was promptly counter-attacked in strength on the morning of the 27th; but after several hours of fighting the attack was rebuffed, and on the following day the 168th went rapidly on towards the river Cecina. The villages of Suvereto, Belvedere, and Sassetta were taken in quick succession by the 442nd Infantry, and the 135th, relieving them, crossed the river Bolgheri on the 29th and by darkness were within half a mile of Cecina, but stubbornly opposed. One of its companies, that crossed the river in the morning, was isolated, and an attempt to relieve it repulsed with the loss of nine Sherman tanks; but the lone company, under continual fire and repeated attack, held its ground till July 2nd, when the remainder of the regiment fought its way over.



Under cover of these actions on its inner flank, the 133rd Infantry had in the meantime been moving up Highway 1, and on a very narrow front between the hills and the sea at San Vincenzo was engaged in extremely fierce fighting. All three battalions, with artillery support, were in action to dislodge the well-entrenched and stubborn enemy. Ten miles farther north the river Bolgheri presented difficulties again, and beyond it the 16th Panzer Grenadiers were strongly disposed to hold Cecina. For three days the battle lasted, and the 133rd Infantry suffered four hundred casualties before they won the battered ruins of the town on July 2nd.

The 1st Armoured Division, after a week's rest, went into action again on June 21st, Combat Command 'A' on a line running approximately north from Roccastrada on Highway 73, and 'B' on a parallel course through Massa Marittima to the left. The country before them was rugged, and no first-class road ran in the required direction: the division moved, to begin with, on seven minor roads, and so confined was the country that often only the column-leaders were in action at a check. The usual opposition was a small group of tanks and infantry, but in the defile at Torniella Combat Command 'A' was held in battle from noon of the 24th till the following night; and again, after minor engagements, had to fight for progress between Radicondoli and Mensano.

Combat Command 'B' on the left found the major proportion of German armour on its path, or near it, and to expedite progress General Harmon, commanding the division, committed Task Force Howze, the divisional reserve, to battle between 'A' and 'B'. While 'B' was in hot action against heavy tanks six miles south of Massa Marittima, a company of the 13th Armoured Regiment with a platoon of tank-destroyers was ambushed and attacked by four Mark IV and six Mark VI German tanks, with infantry accompanying them, and lost nine of its light tanks and three tank destroyers. Combat Command 'B' moved slowly forward supported by artillery which accounted for several Mark VI's, and after several hours of infantry fighting occupied Massa Marittima by the evening of the 24th. Then for some days the main obstacles were demolitions and difficult country, and the ruins of Castelnuovo were entered on the 29th. Here it was the Engineers who worked hardest, clearing the rubble. A good day followed, and while one column reached forward to high ground overlooking Highway 68, seven miles southwest of Volterra, another took Pomarance; and Task Force Howze crossed the Cecina north of San Dalmazio.

But throughout July 1st the Germans fought strongly to hold

Highway 68, and for three days Combat Command 'B' and Task Force Howze hardly advanced their positions. On the right, as daylight on the 22nd broke on the little walled town of Casole d'Elsa, two companies of the 361st Infantry, of Combat Command 'A', attacked and were driven back, and their accompanying armour, caught in exposed positions, lost six medium and five light tanks and two tank-destroyers to tank and anti-tank fire from behind the walls. After repeated attempts to storm the town had failed, it was taken in the early hours of the 4th.

The 88th Division and Task Force Ramey, now moving up, then began to relieve the 1st Armoured, and the advance continued slowly to Highway 68, which was cut on the 7th; and the 350th Infantry, of the 88th Division, took Volterra on the following day. The Armoured Division had lost heavily in equipment during its three weeks' advance from Grosseto, including seventy medium and light tanks; but it had destroyed fifty German tanks, including thirty Mark VI's. Nor was blackened armour the only destruction that the bright green hills had witnessed, for the American Engineers had had to bulldoze a way through the ruins of eleven small towns.

Farther inland the French had faced stronger defences along the river Orcia, where the Germans had fortified a natural position with machine-gun pits and a large concentration of artillery. From the left, from the Ombrone near the Paganico road, were the Guillaume Group of Tabors, the 3rd Algerian Division, the 2nd Moroccan, with the 4th Moroccan Infantry on the flank near the Army boundary that ran west of Montepulciano. Two full divisions—the 4th Parachute and the 356th Grenadiers—and parts of three others opposed them.

Under heavy gunfire on the night of the 21st the Corps pressed forward, and there was fierce infantry fighting on the following day as the Moroccan Division on the right battled for Castiglione d'Orcia, the Algerians and Goumiers on the left for river-bridges west of Poggio Uccello, and at Sant' Angelo Station. First gains came on the left, where the Goumiers, having made contact with the Americans at Cinigiano, advanced five miles northward along the Ombrone; reinforced by the 4th Moroccan Spahis the Guillaume Group then forded the river and advanced rapidly to Monte Acuto, and beyond it through Casale towards Monticiano on the 24th. But in the centre German resistance remained firm—as firm as it was against the South Africans on their right, and all the way to Trasimene—till the Goumiers took ground north of Monte Acuto; when opposition slackened in the centre, and the advance was continued except on the right, where there was still no movement.

By the morning of the 26th the Algerians were two miles north of the river and in contact with the 8th Moroccan Infantry at Ripa d'Orcia; but despite the Guillaume Group's ten-mile advance there was no general withdrawal, and five days' fighting to win a couple of miles had already cost the French a thousand casualties.

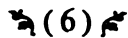
General de Larminat then resumed the offensive in conformity with the American 1st Armoured Division's advance on the left, that outflanked Monticiano. Attacking after dark on the 26th the Guillaume Group again made good progress, and within twenty-four hours had cleared the road from Monticiano for five miles eastward to the bank of the Ombrone. The Algerian division also advanced, more rapidly now, almost as far as Montalcino; and the Moroccans, fighting stubbornly, reached San Quirico and ground beyond Le Checche. That night the Germans withdrew, hurriedly, by the small roads leading north-east from Highway 2, and on two axes—the Moroccans on the highway, the Algerians on the Casale road to Siena—the advance was pressed against rearguards left to cover road-blocks and demolitions; while the Goumiers moved on to Simignano. By July 2nd the Moroccans were across the lateral road from Monteroni d'Arbia to Asciano, though Asciano, resolutely defended, resisted assault all that day. But progress was quicker on the left, and in the late afternoon it was reported that German convoys were retreating northward from Siena; and resistance in that sector became negligible.

West of Highway 2 the Algerian division and the Goumiers had gone forward without much opposition other than small rearguards and mines in the wheatfields, until the 4th Tunisian Infantry were stopped in a day-long battle at Casanova; then, as the Tunisians drove on again, the Goumiers were met with heavy gun-fire, but pressed forward to Highway 73 about six miles north of Monticiano, and the 7th Algerian Infantry fought against stiffly holding Germans for Monteroni d'Arbia. On the afternoon of July 2nd, German resistance weakened, and before midnight both the 4th Tunisians and the 7th Algerians were near the cross-roads south of Siena, and the Goumiers took Simignano to the south-west; though there, to cover the withdrawal, the Germans fought hard. The 3rd Algerian Infantry came up from reserve, and by daybreak on the 3rd Siena was in their hands. Later in the morning the tricolour was hoisted over the lovely Palazzo Publico and the frescoes of Simone Martini; but even greater cause for rejoicing was the fact that Siena had been captured unhurt.

The advance continued beyond the city, but General de

Larminat's Pursuit Corps was disbanded to allow the General and the 3rd Algerian Division to join the Seventh Army; and the 4th Moroccan Mountain Division came in relief, while some of the indefatigable Goumiers, now on a thirteen-mile front to the west of Siena, were also relieved: the 3rd Group of Tabors was replaced by the 6th Moroccan Infantry, and the 4th Group was joined by the 2nd Moroccans. The enemy offered little resistance south of Highway 68, which joins Highway 2 below Poggibonsi; but at Abadia, four miles south of the junction, and at Colle di Val d'Elsa there was strong opposition and battle was joined again. Abadia was captured by Goumiers and the 6th Moroccans early on the 5th, but at Sant' Andrea the 2nd Moroccans were stopped by violent resistance. On Highway 2 the 3rd Moroccan Spahis were halted by demolitions three miles north of Monteriggioni, as were the 5th Moroccans to the right between Quercegrosso and Ligliano. Here, on the right, the Moroccan division's flank was dangerously exposed because the British XIIIth Corps to the east had been unable to keep pace; and not until the Guards advanced from Montepulciano could the Moroccan right wing move forward from San Giovanni d'Asso. On Highway 2 the Spahis moved again, and the 5th Moroccan Infantry took Ligliano.

On July 6th the 4th Mountain Division resumed its battle for Colle di Val d'Elsa, at first without visible effect on the defenders; but then they faltered, and withdrew, and by the early hours of the 7th the head of the valley was in French hands, and before dark the forward troops of the Mountain Division were north of Highway 68.



The Taking of Arezzo

ARRAYED against the XIIIth Corps were the four divisions to which it had given battle at Trasimene. Though diminished in numbers they now stood on dominating heights—from Monte Castiglione Maggiore to Castel di Brolio, a line broken only by the 4th Division's capture of Poggio all' Olmo—and with excellent observation and in most places a long field of fire, their morale was high.

After the advance had been checked, on July 5th, the Commander of the 6th Armoured Division decided that his main effort must be to capture the massif east of Highway 71, from which, it was clear, the enemy had observation over all the Chiana valley. While most of the division, delayed by heavy rain, was still moving up, the 10th,

2nd, and 7th battalions of the Rifle Brigade, supported by a squadron of the 17th/21st Lancers and a troop of the Derbyshire Yeomanry, made a considerable advance up the steep sides of Monte Lignano and Monte Castiglione Maggiore; and though in each case they failed to reach the crest, they established themselves below the hill-tops, and against heavy and violent counter-attacks on the 7th succeeded in holding positions high up on the forward slopes.

In the centre of the Corps' front an attempt by the 4th Division to pass the 10th Brigade through the 28th east of Civitella della Chiana, and advance towards Pergine in the Arno valley, met strong resistance and achieved no success. Movement was blocked along the whole front of the division, but two German counter-attacks were successfully repulsed. On the left flank, on a ten-mile front, the South Africans had been called to a halt under dominating hills; and in the Chiana valley the 26th Armoured Brigade could make no progress. It became apparent that another major action would be necessary to dislodge the enemy and capture Arezzo; and there was evidence that in the centre of the front the 15th Panzer Grenadier and 1st Parachute Divisions had been substantially reinforced. The diminished 334th Division lay between them; the Hermann Goering Division, also reinforced, was west of San Pancrazio; and holding Monte Lignano and the mountainous area stretching to the Xth Corps' sector was the 305th Infantry Division with a battle-group of the 94th Division under command.

The situation was difficult, and somewhat complicated by the fact that the XIIIth Corps, now ahead of the Xth, had its right flank exposed. In the wide area between the 10th Indian Division's left flank and the XIIIth Corps' right on Highway 71 there were no roads; and infantry were required to guard it. From the 9th Armoured Brigade under command of the Xth Corps the King's Dragoon Guards and the 1st/60th Rifles were therefore withdrawn to form the nucleus of a flank-guard known as Sackforce. But for the battle a larger reinforcement was necessary, and this could only be found—unless the Xth Corps' projected attack on Sansepolcro was abandoned, or the weary 8th Indian Division brought in again—by drawing on the general reserve now training for the assault on the Gothic Line. Reluctantly the decision was taken, and the 2nd New Zealand Division ordered forward from its training area in the Liri Valley to join the XIIIth Corps.

Four days would elapse before the New Zealanders could arrive, and during this period the 6th Army Group, Royal Artillery, maintained heavy counter-battery fire along the Corps front. Four

Field Regiments, five Medium, and a Heavy Regiment, with two Field Regiments of the 4th Division and two Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments were engaged, and on the day of attack the field guns would increase their rate of fire to three hundred rounds a day to support it. There was continuous air-reconnaissance, and from the 10th to the 14th the Air Force added its bombs to the gun-fire with an average of a hundred sorties a day.

The plan for the taking of Arezzo required the 6th Armoured Division to fulfill its Commander's intention of capturing the high ground to the south-west; to cut the roads north and west of the town; and having crossed the Arno, to advance along its right bank and seize Arezzo as the chance occurred. The New Zealanders, having relieved Sackforce on the massif, would open the battle and protect the Armoured Division's flank by occupying the heights from Monte Castiglione Maggiore to Monte Lignano. The assault was to be led by the 1st Guards Brigade, supported by the 17th/21st Lancers, against the hills about Agazzi at the head of the Chiana Valley, while the 4th and South African Divisions on the left attempted to divert attention by gun-fire and patrolling. The time of assault was one o'clock in the morning of July 15th.

The Guards met stubborn resistance from the German infantry despite heavy artillery-fire on their lines and on the batteries behind them, and the New Zealanders, after easily taking the crest of Monte Lignano, had a hand-to-hand battle for the reverse slopes. Throughout the 15th the enemy gave ground unwillingly, and beneath a roar of gunfire the battle ebbed to-and-fro, alike on the mountain-tops and on their lower slopes. By the end of the day, however, the Guards had driven a wedge into the centre of the German front, and the New Zealanders, firmly established on Lignano, overlooked Arezzo and the gun-areas to the north. The Germans had paid heavily for their resolution, and to the south-east their forward troops were in a critical position. The XIIIth Corps had clearly had the better of the fighting, and at night the enemy admitted his disadvantage and broke contact.

In the early hours of the 16th the 6th New Zealand Brigade took Monte Camurcino without loss, and the Welsh Guards, held in reserve till then, met no opposition in occupying the summit of the Agazzi hills. The 26th Armoured Brigade broke out of the Chiana Valley towards the fords of the Arno, and before ten o'clock the 16th/5th Lancers entered the town. The armoured Regiments and the 10th Rifle Brigade of the 6th Armoured Division advanced rapidly along the roads to the north and the west, and the 2nd

Lothians, fighting with dashing assurance, captured a bridge a mile beyond Quarata and had their tanks over the river before evening.

Though the outer defence of Arezzo had been protracted, the final battle for it was short and decisive. An administrative base for the assault on the Gothic Line had been secured, from which a force of some thirteen divisions might be maintained; and the advance on Florence could begin. But the Germans, with few casualties, had won ten more days to improve their mountain strongholds, and the 4th Division and the 6th Armoured, which had been fighting for a long time, were showing signs of exhaustion.

Natural and tactical conditions had prevented the Xth Corps from playing as decisive a part in the battle as at one time had seemed possible. In its sector north of Perugia the country was so difficult that only infantry could manoeuvre. The Germans had blocked the roads leading out of the city, and three divisions supported by a very numerous artillery were disposed to hold the Xth and prevent action that might influence the main battle on the other side of Trasimene. For a week after June 20th, when their advance had been halted a few miles beyond Perugia, the 6th Armoured—still with the Xth Corps—and the 8th Indian Divisions had fought with unavailing gallantry to breach a line they had not strength enough to break; but not until the 27th, when the German defences west of Trasimene were crumbling, was any progress made. Then the Germans began to withdraw, only on the west of the Tiber at first, but within two or three days on both banks. By this time, in conformity with the Army Commander's decision to re-group his forces, the 6th Armoured and the 8th Indian Divisions had been relieved by the 10th Indian.

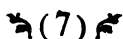
The Germans withdrew steadily behind occasional rearguards, and abandoning the north shore of Trasimene made use of a natural defensive position based on Monte Acuto and Monte Corona, south of Umbertide, to check the now lively advance for two days till July 4th; when they again withdrew to a line running from Carpini to Montone and west over the Tiber to a position south of Nestore, some half-a-dozen miles north of Umbertide, where they stood firmly. On the right, however, patrols of the 12th Lancers had pushed far into the mountains, and at San Severino were little more than twenty miles from the Adriatic. Two mobile columns were formed on July 2nd, to continue this Apennine advance to Gubbio and Fabriano.

On July 6th the attempt to force a way over the mountains between the Tiber and the XIIIth Corps' front was postponed until the 4th Indian Division should arrive. The opposing German

forces—the 114th Jaeger and the 44th Divisions on a fourteen-mile front east of the Tiber, with the 5th Mountain east again in the high Apennines; the 305th west of the river—were in actual number much weaker than they appear on paper, but in good defensive country they could play their part well enough to stop the Xth Corps' single division and its scanty auxiliaries. On the arrival of the 4th Indians, however, in the sector west of the Tiber on July 8th, with the 9th Armoured Brigade under command, and now with two Mountain Regiments of pack-howitzers in his Corps, General McCreery ordered a resumption of the advance to Sansepolcro; and for three days of heavy fighting slow progress against bitter resistance was made in the river valley, but west of it, over pathless mountains that in the judgment of the German commander had required only a minor defence to fortify their steep sides, movement was gratifyingly quicker. By the morning of the 13th the great ridge from Monte Santa Maria to lofty Favalto had been occupied by the 5th and 7th Indian Brigades; though Monte Cedrone on the right was still held, as the 1st Sussex, of the latter brigade, quickly discovered when they tried to add it to their gains.

East of the river, south of Citta di Castello, the 10th Division still fought doggedly for slow advantage against an enemy who contested every furlong. Above them, on the heights south of Monte Favalto, the outlying regiments of the 305th Division withdrew to avoid being cut off. The mountain route still seemed the better, and a strong thrust was planned from Favalto to cross Highway 73 and capture the Alpe di Poti. But first a jeep-track had to be built through a wild landscape from Volterrano to Palazzo del Pero, and not until the 15th was it open to traffic; this was a remarkable feat of engineering, but in the event its tactical importance was negligible.

The Xth Corps could justly claim that its capture of high Favalto had weakened, by a serious threat from an unexpected direction, the German hold on Arezzo; but its further advance, to the Alpe di Poti, was simplified by the capture of the town, instead of assisting it, as had been expected.



The Fifth Army captures Leghorn and Pisa

AT the beginning of July the strongly reinforced 34th Division, on the left flank of the American IVth Corps, lay north of Cecina and its river; on its right, along Highway 68, was the 1st Armoured

Division, soon to be relieved by the 88th; to the east the French Expeditionary Corps was fighting hard for Colle di Val d'Elsa, Highway 68, and Poggibonsi. The main effort of the IVth Corps in the new phase of the advance would be made by the 34th Division on the right of its sector. Highway 1, so far the main axis of advance from Rome, had now become an inhospitable seaside road with cliffs below it and steep hillsides above; but east of the coastal range were a valley and a lesser road, through Riparbella, Castellina Marittima, Pastina and Lorenzana, that led direct to Pisa. A successful advance by this route would pass Leghorn and leave it isolated.

Rapid manoeuvre and brisk fighting after the fall of Cecina took the 135th and 442nd Infantry forward to the lateral road of Le Presselle; and while a battalion of the 168th Infantry captured Riparbella, an armoured force prepared to advance on Highway 1. Through confined and rugged country movement was difficult, and Rosignano, one of the principal strongholds south of Leghorn, was stoutly defended by units of the 16th Panzer Grenadiers, the division which had fought so fiercely to hold Cecina. About a third of Rosignano, a hill-top town of closely built stone houses, was cleared street by street by the stubbornly fighting 3rd Battalion of the 135th Infantry on July 4th, and several counter-attacks were repelled. The 1st Battalion, and the 2nd Battalion of the 442nd Regiment, fought with varying success for commanding ground on the landward side; and by the night of the 7th the 3rd Battalion had reached the northern limits of the now ruined town. On the following day both regiments made an appreciable advance, and before darkness were four miles north-east of Rosignano and steadily dealing with German rearguards. The armoured force on the highway made slow going for a week against mines and demolitions.

The savage fighting for Rosignano was matched by strenuous combat in the eastward hills, where, on the 4th, the 363rd Infantry were committed on the right of the 168th to provide two full infantry combat teams on a front of less than four miles. Limited gains were achieved in an attack on Castellina Marittima, but not until the 6th was the little town taken by the 1st Battalion of the 168th. A few hours later, advancing over mined hill-slopes under heavy fire, the 3rd Battalion of the 363rd seized Monte Vase, two and a half miles to the north-east, but lost it on the following morning to a resolute counter-attack by the 9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 26th Panzer Division. On the 9th the Americans resumed the offensive, and after heavy fighting the 363rd Regiment recaptured some of the high ground to the right, while two battalions of the

168th took the village of Casale, three miles to the north of Castellina. This mountainous area, and Rosignano, had been the two main strongholds in the German defensive line.

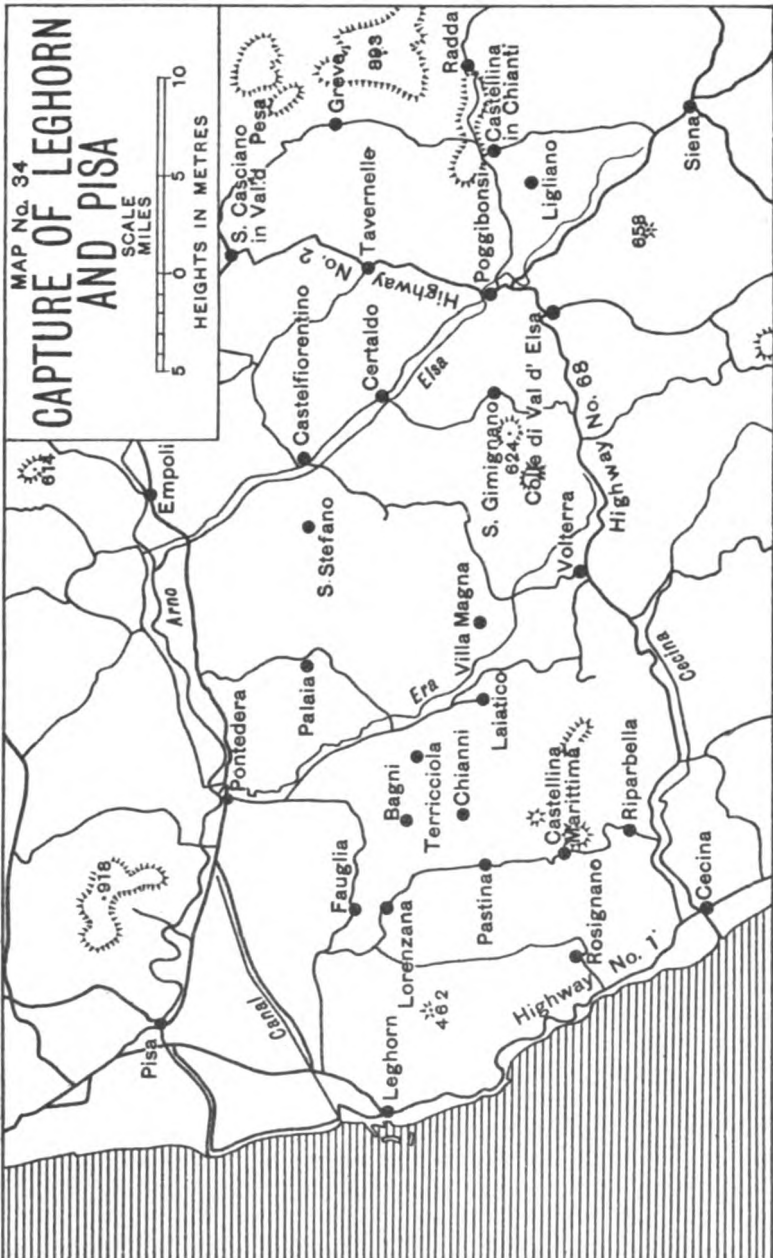
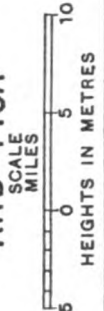
Passing through the 168th Infantry on July 10th, the 133rd maintained the advance till it was halted by strong resistance north-east of Pastina; Pastina itself being left on its flank to be taken by the 442nd Regiment. Throughout the 12th the 133rd fought doggedly for Hill 529, the last of the high peaks in that vicinity, while on its right the 91st Division came into the line and took command of the 363rd Regiment. Suddenly, before dawn on the 13th, the Germans withdrew and the 133rd advanced three miles beyond the contested hill, and with the 168th, now in the line again on their left, made quick progress to the north.

By nightfall on the 16th, after a series of small village-actions, the 2nd Battalion of the 133rd was within three miles of the Arno river-flats, and a day of somewhat stiffer fighting brought the whole regiment into the valley. On the left the 168th Infantry had a harder passage, for the Germans fiercely defended Fauglia and used seven Tiger tanks in the battle. Massed artillery fire broke their counter-attack, and the 2nd Battalion took the town.

To protect the seaward flank of this northern drive, the 100th Battalion had been blocking the roads out of Leghorn, and now, with open country ahead, the Corps Commander was ready to divert strength to the left and capture the port. The 135th and 442nd Regiments had been making slow progress up the coast against opposition that grudgingly gave ground until the mountain-flank collapsed; when there came a comparable withdrawal, and on the 13th the 135th Infantry advanced some three miles—to a general line five miles north-west of Rosignano—without making contact, and the 100th Battalion, assisted by a battalion of the 442nd, took Pastina. On the 14th and 15th there was still no serious opposition on the coast, till on the high ground overlooking Leghorn from the south-east the 3rd Battalion of the 135th was stiffly counter-attacked on its left flank, which was exposed by the inability of the armoured force on the highway to keep pace. Hard fighting and all available artillery, including the guns of the British 66th Anti-Aircraft Brigade, were needed to repel this attack.

The regiment then took Monte Maggiore and a lesser hill to the north, while the 442nd cleared Luciana by midnight on the 17th. A little progress was made towards the north-west, but on the highway the armoured cars and tank-destroyers still found movement so difficult that they could barely cover the seaward flank of the more

MAP No. 34
**CAPTURE OF LEGHORN
 AND PISA**



successful infantry. On the 18th all three battalions of the 135th were committed to the final assault on Leghorn, and simultaneously the 363rd Infantry, now returning to the 34th divisional zone, prepared to attack it from the east. Little opposition was encountered except by the 2nd Battalion of the former regiment, which drove a strong German force from a wood by setting fire to it with phosphorus shell. The 1st Battalion entered the city in the early morning of the 19th and found it dangerously mined, the port demolished, and the harbour partly blocked by sunken ships. The 100th Battalion assumed police duty in Leghorn, and engineers set to work to bridge the many canals to the north and demolitions in the highway. In one stretch of it five bridges were needed in just over three hundred yards, and the Canale Navigabile presented a wet gap of a hundred feet.

The 363rd Infantry took over the left sector of the divisional front. The advance was resumed on the 22nd, and the 1st Battalion reached the mouth of the Arno in the early morning of the 23rd, while the 2nd Battalion entered that part of Pisa which lies south of the river. It was thickly mined and booby-trapped, and the German artillery opened heavy fire on its uncomfortable streets. The infantry, their task concluded, were relieved by anti-aircraft and other supporting units; and by the 26th the 363rd Regiment had returned to the 91st Division, and the 34th Division had assembled near Rosignano. In spite of its losses at Cecina, casualties in the latter division were not high, but its expenditure of ammunition had been prodigious. During the first third of July an average of 117 rounds per gun had been fired every day, and in one day 715 tons of ammunition had been spent. The ration-strength of the division had been as high as 36,000.

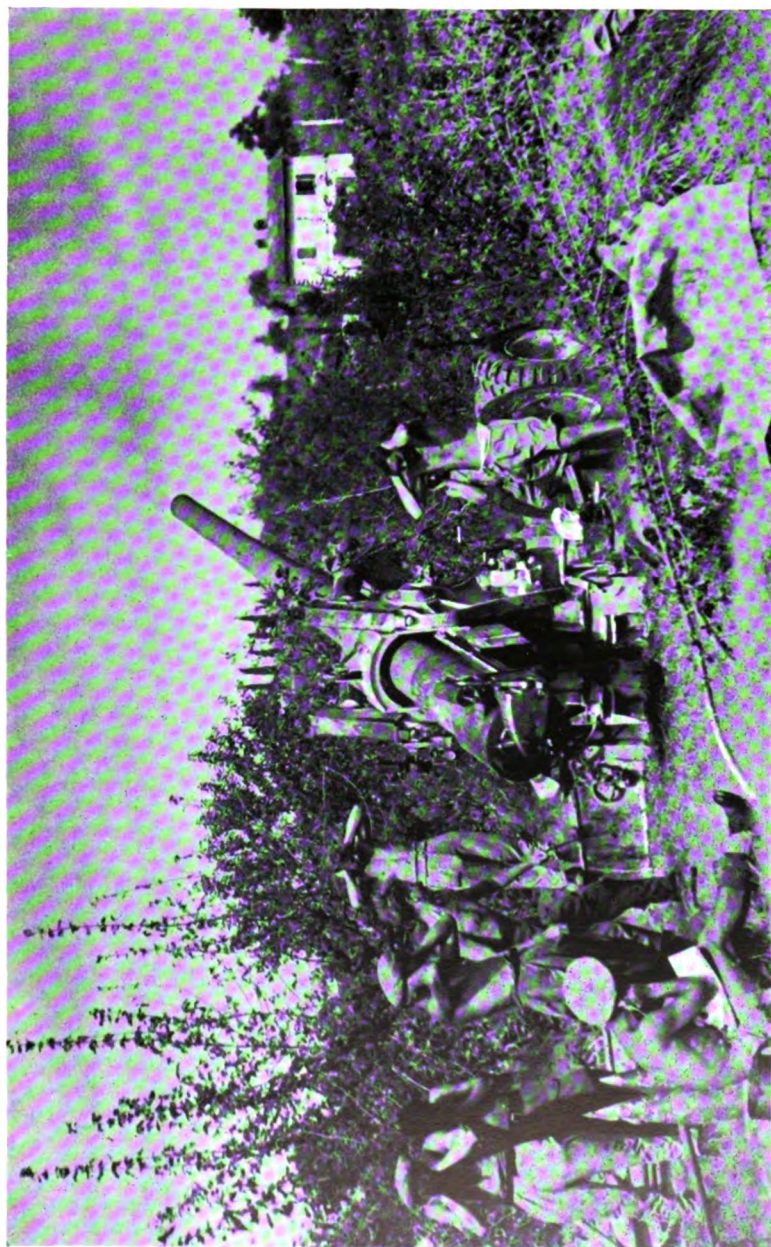
On the right of the 34th the foremost troops of the 91st Division had reached the Arno some days earlier. Its general route had been the valley of the Era, its first objective Chianni, for which the 362nd Regiment fought a stiff battle. The 361st went into the lead, and north-west of Terricciola was temporarily halted by heavy gun-fire while the enemy was already withdrawing across the Arno. On the left the 363rd Regiment entered Bagni di Casciano without a fight. German armour resisted the forward drive to Pontedera, but the 361st, fighting strongly, reached Ponsacco on the 17th, and on the following day a company supported by tanks of the 1st Armoured Regiment entered Pontedera. The 362nd Regiment, after crossing the Era to the east at Capannoli, had been checked by counter-attack, but on the 18th climbed a ridge overlooking the



GENERAL CLARK IN ROME



GOUIMS



BOMBARDING THE GOTHIC LINE



GURKHAS CROSS THE RONCO

river to the right of Pontedera, and consolidated its positions there. After some days of energetic patrolling the last resisting groups of the enemy were driven over the Arno, but every attempt by the patrols to follow them to the farther bank was defeated.

On the right again, the 88th Division had relieved the 1st Armoured in the neighbourhood of Volterra on July 8th. Perched on top of a hill eighteen hundred feet high, the old Etruscan walled city, built of a stone that is almost alabaster, had presented a formidable obstacle to the Armoured Division, and a co-ordinated attack by the 88th was mounted for its capture. Two regiments strongly supported by artillery moved forward to encircle the city and capture high ground to the north and east. Despite heavy fire from the German gun-positions they took their objectives before midnight, and the enemy, nearly cut-off, retired without further opposition; but offered very stubborn resistance to any further advance. The 351st Regiment, moving up from Divisional reserve, had a costly struggle for Laiatico, but in a second night-attack took it with four hundred prisoners.

Across the whole divisional front the Germans fought bitterly to impose delay, but the two strongholds of Belvedere and Villamagna were captured early on the 15th, and thereafter a methodical advance was maintained. By nightfall on the 18th the Division stood on high ground some three or four miles north of Palaia and overlooked the Arno. Its patrols went forward again to reconnoitre.

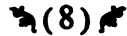
To maintain contact with the French Expeditionary Corps on the Fifth Army's right flank, and to protect the flank and rear of the 88th Division, Task Force Ramey had moved up from Corps reserve, but in a terrain of many small roads, all mined and booby-trapped, its armour had been sadly handicapped, and until a couple of infantry battalions were attached its progress was slow. On July 20th it reached the high ground along the river Orlo, six miles east of Palaia, which it held while the Eighth Army relieved the French, and the while the reconnoitring patrols of the 88th Division engaged in vigorous skirmishing towards the river. These patrols had some stiff fighting round the villages of San Miniato and San Romano, which were not finally secured until the 25th.

At the same time as the 88th had begun its advance against Volterra, the Goumiers of the 4th Group of Tabors had engaged in battle for the many-towered mediaeval town of San Gimignano.

and after rapid advance to begin with, were counter-attacked by infantry and twenty tanks on Hill 380. Three times the hill changed hands before the Germans could claim to have had the best of it; and then two battalions of Moroccan infantry came forward to take the ground again. The 3rd Moroccan Spahis, in a salient on Highway 2, were counter-attacked and driven back on July 9th, but counter-attacks against the 5th Moroccan Infantry south-east of Poggibonsi were repelled. On July 11th, timed to accompany British and American attacks on either side, the French advance was resumed, and the 4th Mountain Division made quick progress towards San Gimignano. The German gunfire was heavy, but behind it the enemy withdrew, and San Gimignano and the hills to the west were occupied on the 13th. Infantry of the 2nd Moroccan Division took Ligliano and advanced to within a mile of Poggibonsi and to the outskirts of Castellina in Chianti.

Enemy resistance broke on the 14th, but on positions north-west of Certaldo and near Tavernelle the Germans stood again, till the rapid advance of the Americans on the west induced a new withdrawal; and through dangerous minefields the 4th Mountain Division moved into Certaldo and followed the enemy along the west bank of the Elsa to Castelfiorentino. The French Corps established a forward line—and its final position—from San Stefano to the Elsa, and down its stream to Certaldo. There, on the nights of July 21st and 22nd, the French were relieved by two battalions of the 2nd New Zealand Division and troops of the 8th Indian Division. A week later all their units had reported in Naples to General de Larminat, and under command of the Seventh Army turned their sombre faces to the west.

From Valentano, beside Lake Bolsena, to Castelfiorentino within ten miles of the Arno, the French Colonials had maintained, in forty-three days of vigorous pursuit, the reputation they had won in the battle for Rome. For a loss of 1,300 killed, 5,000 wounded, and three hundred missing in action, they had inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, taken more than 2,000 prisoners, and sometimes led the whole Allied advance. If the visitor to San Gimignano shudders to read a plaque commemorating its capture by Moroccan infantry—while he has been recalling Dante's embassy from Florence—he may be reconciled a little to history's violent incongruity by remembering that the state of Venice once employed a distinguished soldier of the same race and colour. Othello too was a Moor.



The Taking of Florence

THE capture of Arezzo again divided the Xth and XIIIth Corps, the former advancing east of the great mountain-mass of the Pratomagno towards Bibbiena, the latter wheeling north-west against Florence. The XIIIth was well disposed for this new movement. It lay on a broad front that ran from the Arno west of Quarata through Civita della Chiana and San Pancrazio to Castel di Brolio, where two brigades of the South African Division were concentrated on a minor road that led to Radda in the heart of the Chianti hills; and the Corps Commander's immediate intention was to advance with his two armoured divisions, the 6th in the valley of the Arno and the South Africans astride the road to Radda, with the 4th British Infantry in the hills between them. On his left the French Expeditionary Corps was soon to exchange its sector for its share of the Riviera, and he proposed to fill the fifteen-mile gap it would leave with the 8th Indian Division on the axis of the road from Siena to Empoli. The Corps front would then extend to about forty miles.

On the morning of the 16th the Germans broke contact in front of Arezzo, leaving a screen of anti-tank guns between the Arno and the Chiana canal, west of the latter, to cover the exits from the town; but its rearguards were over-run or threatened with encirclement before evening, and the front was advanced as much as ten miles. In the centre the 10th and 28th Brigades, of the 4th Division, advanced towards Montevarchi on converging lines along Highway 69 and a lesser road from Mercatale; and the 2nd Somersets of the former brigade took the little town before noon on the 18th. But then both brigades, and the Canadian tanks supporting the 28th, were stopped by heavy fire from the ridge at Ricasoli a little to the west of Montevarchi. On the right the advance of the 6th Armoured Division, which was intended to be the Corps' main effort and had been so promisingly begun by the Lothians, had been decisively halted at Castiglione Fibocchi. The Lothians then crossed the river south-east of Laterina, and took the town after stiff fighting on the morning of the 19th; but the ford behind them had become unusable and their advance could not be continued. The Germans had

another series of defensive lines, the outermost between Ricasoli and Castiglione Fibocchi; and it became evident that movement in the hilly wooded valley of the middle Arno, cut deeply by winter streams from the Pratomagno and manned by the enemy in prepared positions, would not be easy.

The South African Division was a little more successful. In its sector also the Germans broke contact on the 16th, and by that evening the 24th Guards Brigade, with the 12th South African Motor Brigade on its left, had advanced over demolished roads and through numerous minefields to Gaiole and the outskirts of Radda; but there were halted. Very little progress could be made on the 17th, but on the 18th resistance melted. This was due to the Americans' swift advance in the west, who had already captured Pontedera on the Arno and so compelled the Germans to withdraw from the vicinity of Poggibonsi in the French sector, and from neighbouring Radda. Through more minefields, and skirting other demolitions, the advance was resumed through the steep green hills towards the highest ridges of that lovely but difficult country along the road to Greve. Some comfort against the steepness of the hills was got from the mutual affection, and their equal pride in each other, which had grown in the South African soldiers and the Guardsmen under their Division's command. The 5th Grenadiers and the tanks of the Pretoria Regiment took Monte Maione, the Witwatersrand Rifles stormed Monte Querciabella, and the 1st Scots Guards went through to capture Monte San Michele; from which the tanks of the Pretoria Regiment, firing down into the valley of the Arno, compelled the Germans to abandon their positions on the Ricasoli ridge, and so enabled the 10th and 28th Brigades of the 4th Division to move forward another mile or two, while on their right Castiglione Fibocchi fell to the 3rd Welsh Guards of the 6th Armoured Division.

That the Germans were disposed in great strength to hold the valley of the middle Arno and Highway 69 was now apparent. North of the Arno were the 1st Parachute and 334th Divisions and a regiment of the 15th Panzer Grenadiers; and on the left bank the Hermann Goering Division was being relieved by the re-formed 715th Infantry Division. To the west, however, over the Chianti mountains to Highway 2, over ten miles of country, there was only the 356th and the 4th Parachute Divisions. On July 20th, therefore, when the relief of the French Corps was imminent, General Kirkman decided to bring the 2nd New Zealand Division as well as the 8th Indian into his new sector, and develop an offensive with the New

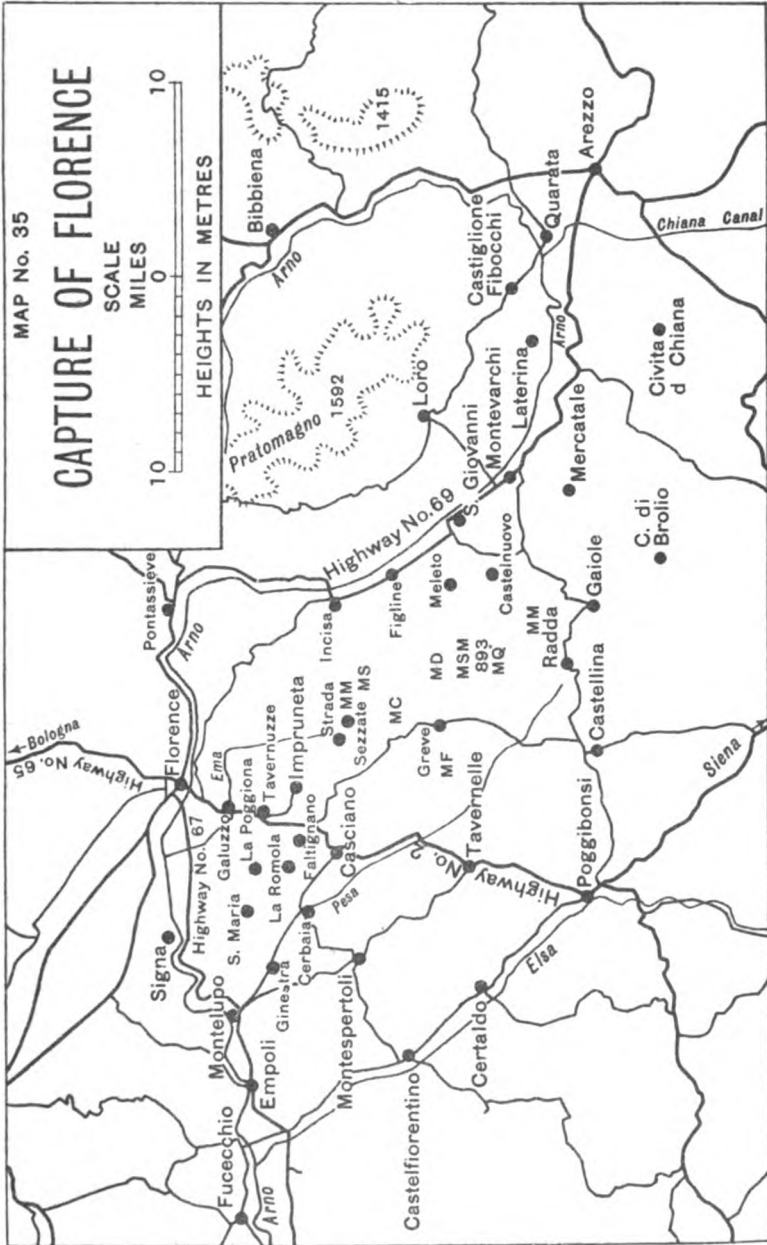
MAP No. 35

CAPTURE OF FLORENCE

SCALE
MILES



HEIGHTS IN METRES



Zealanders attacking northward from Castellina in Chianti, east of Poggibonsi, towards San Casciano in the Val di Pesa, and so to the Arno a few miles west of Florence; while the South Africans, astride the road from Radda to Greve and Impruneta, would make a parallel advance. The 4th Division was to fight on, with its right flank on the Arno, to cross the river east of Florence; and on the flanks the 8th Indian and the 6th Armoured Divisions would follow as opportunity occurred.

The opposition of the 356th Division in front of the South Africans stiffened considerably, and there was heavy fighting for the high ground on either side of Greve. The 3rd Coldstream, of the 24th Guards Brigade, had a bitter struggle for the wind-swept crest of Monte Domini, but with the support of a troop of the Pretoria tanks—a fantastic spectacle on those steep green heights—they won it by the evening of the 23rd; while on the other side of the valley the Witwatersrand Rifles, supported by tanks of the Prince Alfred's Guard, took the neighbour-top of Monte Fili in a well co-ordinated engagement. The advance continued on the heights. The Imperial Light Horse over-ran a strong German position two miles south of Mercatale, and the 5th Grenadiers won a succession of peaks to reach Monte Collegalle. But there, and south of Mercatale, the Germans counter-attacked with armoured reinforcement, and checked the advance.

The New Zealanders on the left, who had gone into action on the 22nd slightly in rear of the South Africans, now drew level. Their stubborn opponents had been the 4th Parachute Division, below strength in infantry but well served by artillery, mortars, and heavy tanks. On a two-battalion front the New Zealanders had first advanced against Tavernelle on Highway 2, and Sambuca to the east of it, and from the opening exchanges the fighting had been hard. The New Zealanders made appreciable gains, however, and when the South Africans on their right were approaching Mercatale, a limited German withdrawal enabled them to advance rapidly to within a couple of miles of San Casciano; and by the early hours of the 25th their 21st and 28th Battalions, with an armoured force, were on the line of the road from San Casciano to Montespertoli. But then, from Mercatale to Montespertoli, both the South African and the New Zealand Divisions were brought to a halt before what was known as the Olga Line; and on the right, where the 24th Guards Brigade threatened to turn the line, the Germans were massing for a counter-attack.

Our two divisions in the Arno valley had advanced slowly and

with great difficulty. The line-of-advance of the 6th Armoured Division was dominated from the gaunt slopes of the Pratomagno, and the 4th Division, blocked on Highway 69, was compelled to shift its axis to a demolished country-road through Castelnuovo, that the Divisional Engineers strove to make serviceable. From Castelnuovo the 2nd/4th Hampshires turned a minor German defensive line and secured Meleto. But every ridge and hamlet had to be fought for, and when the South African Division's advance to Monte Collegalle compelled the Germans west of the Arno to withdraw, they prepared to defend the long slopes of the Monte Scalari massif; and held still to their positions at San Giovanni on Highway 69, at Loro under the Pratomagno, and blocked the west-running road from Figline to cover their open flank.

The 8th Indian Division advanced steadily on the left on the axis of Tavernelle and Montespertoli, and up the valley of the Elsa to Certaldo. Opposition was light, and by the 25th the 21st Brigade was within two miles of Montespertoli with the 19th Brigade level on its left. The former was stopped, but the latter advanced as far as Cambiano north of Castelfiorentino. Here was the western end of the Olga Line. On the Corps' right flank, under Monte Scalari, the 4th Division now faced the Lydia Line. Behind Olga lay Paula, and the Mädchen Line through Impruneta. Modern Valkyries and thickly muscled Rhine Maidens had been imaginatively mobilised for the guarding of Florence, and here, as on the near approaches to Rome, the Germans showed a defensive genius that could be resolved into an elastic pertinacity, a masterly eye for ground, and the efficient tactical disposal of infantry, tanks, and artillery in groups of mutual support. From west to east lay the 4th Parachute Division, the 356th, and the 715th under Scalari. East of that, the enemy had begun to re-group.—The Eighth Army's deception plan, to mask its intentions against the Gothic Line north of Florence, presented the appearance of an attack on the Adriatic flank, and the IInd Polish Corps was in fact making progress up the coast. To meet either the feinted blow or the actual Poles, the 1st Parachute Division was beginning to withdraw from the Pratomagno, though it was still responsible, with the 334th Division and a regiment of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, for defence of the mountains east of the Arno.

While the 4th Division prepared to attack Monte Scalari, the 5th New Zealand Brigade and the 6th South African Armoured Brigade made vigorous assault on the heavily defended Olga Line. The latter made a little progress near Mercatale, but throughout

the 26th the former was strongly held at Poppiano. The 24th Guards Brigade defeated a large and purposive counter-attack on Monte Collegalle, and the 12th Brigade of the 4th Division moved forward against Scalari. The growing threat to the Olga Line persuaded the Germans to withdraw to the Paula and Mädchen Lines, and at Poppiano they were caught, while they were thinning-out, by the 5th New Zealand Brigade in renewed attack. Quickly exploiting the opportunity, the 6th Brigade and an armoured force struck northward to cross the Pesa at Cerbaia and occupy the mined and ruined streets of San Casciano. Here, however, their continuing efforts to advance involved them in bitter and inconclusive fighting. The South African Division, following the German withdrawal as far as possible, after the stout-hearted capture of a hill called Poggio Mandorli by the 1st Scots Guards, was halted on the outposts of the Mädchen Line from Strada to Impruneta.

The 12th Brigade of the 4th Division fought stubbornly on to the southern end of Scalari, and in the afternoon of July 29th the 6th Black Watch stormed the high crest and held it against five vigorous counter-attacks. In the low ground to the east the Germans' tenacious resistance had also been broken, and Figline on Highway 69 had fallen to the 4th Reconnaissance Regiment. The 61st Brigade made difficult progress on the other side of the Arno, dislodging the enemy from another delicately named position—the Karin Line—to come abreast of the Reconnaissance Regiment.

Closing on the left of the New Zealand Division, the 3rd/15th Punjabis of the 8th Indian Division occupied Montespartoli on the morning of the 27th, and the 5th Royal West Kents took San Donato a Libizzano, a hamlet four miles to the north, overlooking the Pesa; and thus secured the New Zealand flank. On the 28th the New Zealanders opened their attack on the Paula Line, over the wooded slopes north of Cerbaia, and encountered the most violent resistance. An appreciable advance here would lead inevitably to the capture of Florence, and the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, which had moved into the sector, threw fierce counter-attacks wherever the New Zealanders appeared to be making any progress. The Desert Air Force supported the New Zealanders, and the South Africans on their right, with numerous and increasing sorties: again and again, on the 28th and 29th its fighter-bombers came swooping low over the green hills and the savagely disputed villages of La Romola and Le Torri and San Michele in close support of the valiant infantry below.

The 6th New Zealand Brigade from Cerbaia, the 4th New

Zealand Armoured Brigade from north of Casciano, advanced together. The latter, against heavy and persistent fire, established a hold under the ridge between Faltignano and La Romola; while the former, heavily counter-attacked by German infantry and Tiger tanks, lost ground that the 26th Battalion initially won south-east of Le Torri, but held San Michele, which a company of the 24th Battalion captured. During a day when both battalions stood to the most violent counter-attack, the hamlet of San Michele was perhaps the scene of the heaviest fighting of all. Four counter-attacks were beaten off, but at dusk on the 29th infantry and Tiger tanks broke in, isolating the company that held it, and it appeared to be lost. The lonely company, however, maintained possession against the point-blank fire of the heavy tanks, and the New Zealand guns behind kept up so close and constant a bombardment that the Germans could not be reinforced; and their attack was finally abandoned. Throughout the day, indeed, the New Zealand gunners had played a decisive part in breaking up the German attacks; while the Desert Air Force persistently bombed the hamlet of Santa Maria, which the enemy used as a place of assembly.

The German line, a combination of the Paula, Mädchen, and Lydia positions, now ran from Montelupo, at the confluence of the Pesa and the Arno, to Figline on Highway 69; and the enemy had four and a half divisions, with a large strength of guns and heavy tanks, to hold it. West of Montelupo patrols of the 8th Indian Division had reached the Arno, and halted on it, between Montelupo and Empoli; further movement depended on its relief by the Fifth Army. It was unlikely that the 4th Division could, without assistance, clear the massif behind Scalari; and on the right the function of the 6th Armoured Division must continue to be flank-defence. To breach the Paula Line, opposite the New Zealanders and the South Africans, was still the necessary approach to Florence, for despite its military strength, the natural obstacles were less formidable than elsewhere.

The Germans had declared Florence an open city, and it was hoped that they would leave its bridges intact. In this event the Corps Commander intended to avoid the centre of the town and cross the Arno on the bridges to the east and the west. But until the German tactics became evident, he was unable to make any firm decision except that the advance beyond Florence would be led by the New Zealanders and South Africans astride Highway 65, the main road to Bologna.

Concentrated on a narrower front, the 2nd New Zealand

Division launched another full-scale attack on the night of July 29th: the 4th Armoured Brigade against La Romola, the 5th Brigade towards Faltignano. Good progress was made after a night of fierce fighting, and on the 5th Brigade's front the 28th (Maori) Battalion took Faltignano, killed many Germans, and made a farther advance to the north-west; while the 22nd (Motor) Battalion of the Armoured Brigade broke into La Romola, where they killed forty of the enemy and took a Tiger tank intact. The first phase of the battle had been successful, but so much ammunition had been used that the second chapter had to be postponed for twenty-four hours. Vigorous patrolling revealed some weakening of resistance to the east of the main front, and the 1st Scots Guards and the Pretoria Regiment of the South African Division took Strada in Chianti; while in the 4th Division's mountainous sector, where local action had been continuous, the 2nd Royal Fusiliers and 6th Black Watch captured Sezzate and Monte Maggio. East of the Arno, after vigorous action by the 7th and 10th Battalions of the Rifle Brigade, opposite Figline, the 17th/21st Lancers advanced along the river bank almost as far as Incisa. On the Corps' other flank, patrols of the 21st Indian Brigade crossed the Pesa between Montelupo and Ginestra—to which the enemy clung firmly—and advanced some two thousand yards.

The air force attacked the German strong-points, forming-up areas, and gun-positions with a hundred fighter-bombers on July 31st and August 1st, and before midnight on the 1st the New Zealanders resumed the attack, with all three brigades forward, to secure the heights of the Pian dei Cerri ridge. On the right the advance of the 5th Brigade was prevented by a spoiling attack, but the Armoured Brigade in the centre and the 6th on the left took all their objectives, and after renewed bombardment by the fighter-bombers and the artillery, the 22nd Battalion captured La Poggiona on the crest of the ridge, and finally decided the battle for Florence.

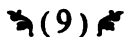
As the New Zealanders moved on to the hill, the Germans east of Highway 2 withdrew from their positions. The 24th Guards Brigade, which had been relieved by the 4th Division at Strada, and the 11th South African Brigade, converging from the south-east and the west on Impruneta, entered without opposition. German rearguards with their right flank on the high ground north of Giogoli fought a delaying action on the river Ema, that crosses Highway 2 at Galuzzo, and stemmed the advance of the 5th New Zealand Brigade. The South Africans took Tavernuzze, but were halted a mile below Galuzzo; and from Impruneta the 24th Guards

Brigade broke through strong resistance to approach the Ema bridge at San Giusto. On either flank the advance conformed with equal speed, the Indian division moving up from its bridgehead over the Pesa, the 4th approaching from the Scalari hill-roads.

On the night of the 3rd the Germans withdrew again, and crossed the lower Arno. At dawn on the 4th patrols of the Imperial Light Horse, of the South African Division, went forward through the southern outskirts of Florence and reached the bank of the river. All the bridges had been ruthlessly destroyed except the Ponte Vecchio, the approaches to which on either side had been blocked by the demolition of many old and gracious houses. German snipers and machine-gunners opened fire from the northern part of the city as the South African Division closed on the river, but immediately to the west the south bank was quickly cleared. The 2nd New Zealand Divisional Cavalry swept the low ground between the Arno and Highway 67, and the 8th Indian Division, though heavily shelled, secured the high ground above Montelupo and the suburban area opposite Signa. West of Montelupo, at Pontormo and Empoli and Ponte a Elsa, the Germans still held a number of outposts on the south bank.

No serious attempt was made to force a crossing of the Arno in the neighbourhood of Florence. To do so would have been impossible without making a battle-field of the city. The Eighth Army, moreover, was already re-grouping for its attack on the Gothic Line.

For some days the Florentines lived most wretchedly under the gangster-rule of Republican Fascists, with snipers busy in their streets and houses, and the Germans behind, the British in front, confining them in a double siege. Serious fighting continued, in the meantime, against a strong German position in the loop of the river opposite Pontassieve. Here the indomitable 4th Division, whose advance from the southern shore of Lake Trasimene had been an almost continuous battle, were still in action against the 715th Infantry Division and the 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. The hill and the monastery at Incontro were the centre of the enemy's position, and on August 8th this formidable stronghold was stormed by the 2nd Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry after a desperate fight; and on the following day all resistance south of the river collapsed. From Pontassieve to its boundary at Fucecchio the Eighth Army stood on the line of the Arno, and its advance through central Italy was nearly concluded. The Xth Corps was still in action on the right.



The Xth Corps' Advance to Bibbiena

THOUGH temporarily deflected for its intended attack on the Alpe di Poti, the Xth Corps, after the fall of Arezzo, had continued its general advance against Bibbiena.

The diversionary attack was entrusted to two Brigades of the 4th Indian Division, with most of the mountain artillery and a regiment of the 9th Armoured Brigade, while the 10th Indian, with the remaining brigade of the 4th under command—operations on the main axis being suspended—protected the right flank and blocked the approaches to the area of Citta di Castello from the north and north-east. The 4th Division had a forward road from Monte Santa Maria to Monterchi, but another, from Volterrano to Palazzo del Pero on Highway 73, had to be built; and a more serious cause of delay was the Germans' stubborn refusal, after their loss of Monte Favalto and Monte Santa Maria, to fall back over the Cerfone and the road to Sansepolcro as had been expected of them. They held their positions, and could not be dislodged. The Indians were denied access to Highway 73, and so to the Alpe di Poti, until the new track from Volterrano was opened to jeeps on July 15th; when the tanks of the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry found Palazzo del Pero already taken by the XIIIth Corps. They drove two miles along the road to Sansepolcro, somewhat behind the German lines south of the Cerfone, and were halted by a demolished bridge. And now, by force and manoeuvre, the Germans were slowly nudged and shifted from their strongholds.

The taking of Arezzo had weakened the Alpe di Poti positions, and when on July 17th a battalion of the 7th Indian Brigade took its high peaks, and began to clear its eastern slopes, the enemy fell back also from Pezzano, south-east of Highway 73, and Monte Cedrone, east again towards Citta di Castello, was stormed by the 1st Durhams and 2nd/4th Gurkhas of the 10th Indian Brigade, who successfully resisted two counter-attacks. The Xth Corps began to close in on Citta di Castello, at the entrance to the plain of Sansepolcro; but the Lippiano ridge had still to be won.

East of the Tiber the 20th Indian Brigade had taken the high Monte delle Gorgacce; and between it and the Tiber, on the 15th

and 16th, the 1st King's Own and the 3rd/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles, of the 25th Brigade, fought their way forward, against a numerous infantry and heavy gunfire, to the river Soara. But still a ridge rose between them and Citta di Castello, and for the next four days no large attack could be made as the Corps was regrouping for the advance to Bibbiena.

Eighteen miles north of Arezzo, Bibbiena lies in a narrow plain at the head of the valley of the upper Arno, to one side of which rises the high untenanted mass of the Pratomagno, to the other the roadless and desolate heights of the Alpe di Catenaiia. The Corps Commander planned to move the 4th Indian Division up the valley—an operation for which it must side-step to the left, and use a base in Arezzo—and with the 10th Division initially protect his right flank, then strike north-westward across the Catenaiian Alps from the plain of Sansepolcro; in preparation for which it must come west of the Tiber. The units comprising Sackforce (the King's Dragoon Guards and the 1st/60th Rifles) reverted to command of the Corps, and the Armoured Car regiments, operating on the right flank, accepted an extension of their western boundary to cover the gap left by the 10th Division's movement across the river. These regiments had made progress, and by July 16th the 12th Lancers were just short of Scheggia on Highway 3, but held below Gubbio by a strong rearguard in the Sant' Ubaldo monastery that stands above it; and the Household Cavalry, advancing as the Germans retreated, were north of Highway 76.

For some days the 4th Indian Division made small gains in the Alpe di Poti, but from the ridges overlooking Citta di Castello the enemy could not be budged until, at dawn on the 21st, two troops of the 3rd Hussars crossed the river Soara a mile east of its confluence with the Tiber, and climbing a steep ascent took by surprise the German infantry, who had not anticipated tanks in such country and fell into a panic. Following the Hussars came the 1st King's Own, who secured the dominating ridge north of the Soara; and the end of German resistance south of Citta di Castello was now imminent. As well as local rebuff, larger consideration counselled their withdrawal; for to the west the XIIIth Corps was steadily advancing, and in the east, on the Adriatic, the Poles had taken Ancona.

Completion of the Xth Corps' regrouping coincided with the Germans' anticipated withdrawal, and on the morning of the 22nd patrols of the 10th Indian Division were a mile beyond Citta di Castello on the road to Sansepolcro, and progress was fast along

the minor road from Monte Santa Maria to Monterchi. On the 24th, however it became evident that the Germans were going to fight again to hold Sansepolcro from the high ground east of San Giustino, and the ridge of Citerna on its south-west side. From the latter, however, they were quickly dislodged when a spirited flanking attack by the 3rd Hussars turned their position, and on the 26th the ridge was occupied by the 20th Indian Brigade, which then advanced slowly north-west towards Monte di Pello.

The 4th Division, with its 7th Brigade on the eastern slopes, the 11th on the west, had found the Germans stubborn in their defence of the Alpe di Poti, and determined especially to hold Monte Veriano. They were spoiled of their intention, however, by the 2nd/11th Sikhs, who after initial reverse fought all day for it on the 24th, and took it at night. On the north-west corner of the massif the 3rd/12th Frontier Force Regiment engaged in violent but indecisive battle for Campriano, and when the 5th Brigade, moving forward, committed the 1st/9th Gurkhas and the 3rd Baluchis, the former took Monte Castiglione in hand-to-hand fighting, and the latter seized the high ground at Gello, from which the 1st/4th Essex captured the village and found positions dominating the lateral road from Anghiari to Giovi.

After losing Gello, the Germans gave ground all along the centre of the Xth Corps' front—south of the road from Anghiari to Giovi, that is—and fell back on their flanks to conform. Near the Corps' left boundary at Castellucio, the 11th Indian Brigade crossed the Arno on the 29th, the Chiassa east of Highway 71 on the 31st; and in the high Apennines on the right the enemy abandoned Scheggio and the monastery of Sant' Ubaldo that overlooks Gubbio.

These hard-won advances had brought the 4th Indian Division to the entrance of the valley of the upper Arno, and given the 10th a base in the Sansepolcro plain from which to attack across the Alpe di Catenaiia. The 10th, however, had to concentrate for the assault, and as Sansepolcro itself, and its eastward mountain, were of no great importance, the forces on that flank could be reduced. The 1st/60th Rifles relieved the 25th Indian Brigade east of the Tiber, and the Household Cavalry on the extreme right extended their sector westward to the road from Gubbio to Pietralunga. With the 12th Lancers and the 27th Lancers these regiments passed to command of the 9th Armoured Brigade, which then assumed responsibility for the entire flank east of the Tiber, and west of it as far as a line from Citerna to Gricignano. The Corps as a whole was gradually moving westward in obedience to the first plan of attack on the Gothic

Line, according to which its headquarters were to move on the road from Florence to Firenzuola; but that plan was already fading, and on August 4th it was wiped out. This was the day after the Xth Corps launched a major attack to clear the Alpe di Catenaià and capture Bibbiena.

The main German positions between the Tiber and the Arno were held by the 305th Division, with the much reduced 44th Division to the east, and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division on a wide front to the west. This flank appeared to be weak, but the 305th, on which the heaviest blows would fall, had lately been reinforced up to six battalions, and it stood on a massif between two and three thousand feet high approached by deeply cut foothills. The two Indian divisions, each with a regiment of tanks under command, were to make a converging attack: the 10th over the alps to the area of Chitignano and Monte Fonda overlooking Highway 71; the 4th over the Subbiano ridge to Falciano and Poggio Pianale. Gun-areas were scarce and difficult to find, and the Engineers' task employed the whole resources of the Corps: the 10th Division had to build a jeep-track more than eight miles long.

The 4th Division, however, made a flying start, and after some skirmishing on August 2nd, patrols of the 11th Brigade entered Subbiano without opposition, and on the following day the 5th Brigade reached the northern end of the divisional objective, a thousand yards east of Falciano. The 20th Indian Brigade concentrated on Castello di Montauto, where the jeep-track started; on the left, a composite armoured force—known as Lindforce, and formed to cover the Corps' extension westward to the 6th Armoured Division's boundary—kept pace with the 4th, and reached a point well forward on the road to Talla before finding the Germans in strength about Monte Ferrato. This apparent weakness induced the Corps Commander to bring the 9th Armoured Brigade from the right flank into the sector previously held by Lindforce, which would now pass under command of the 9th Armoured Brigade, and the 4th Division; but the new concentration was not effected until thirty-six hours after the Corps attack had begun.

The enemy was taken by surprise while thinning out the 305th Division east of the Arno, and the 20th Indian Brigade, heading the 10th Division on its jeep track, made excellent progress and after hard fighting by the 3rd/5th Mahrattas and the 2nd/3rd Gurkhas were in possession of the twin peaks of Monte il Castello. West of the Arno the 4th Division was also advancing, and when the 2nd

Camerons took the village of Bibbiano the attack on their left was reinforced to increase the pressure on the Germans who were now withdrawing towards Talla.

The results of thirty-six hours' fighting were encouraging, but now the Germans showed their customary ability to recover from surprise, and quite suddenly opposition hardened along the whole front. Their 305th Division had been brought up to strength, the 115th Panzer Grenadier Regiment in the Bibbiano sector was reinforced by a battalion of the 578th Grenadier Regiment, and the net result of vigorous regrouping, while it weakened their hold on the Alpe di Catenaia, brought twelve battalions into the line with all the emphasis on defence now west of the Arno. On the east they had abandoned Sansepolcro. The persistent efforts made by the Xth Corps to maintain the initiative were opposed by the Germans' equally violent determination to prevent any further advance, and after confused and very heavy fighting, in which the Indians suffered many casualties, there was deadlock along the whole line despite the 7th Indian Brigade's successful advance on to the heights of Poggio la Cesta and Monte Lori on the Pratomagno.

Decisions of greater importance, however, than the capture of these bloodily contested hills had now been taken at Army Headquarters. On August 4th, the whole plan for the Eighth Army's assault on the Gothic Line had been drastically changed. The old plan, which had envisaged a parallel attack by the Xth and XIIIth Corps towards Bologna, had been abandoned, and now it was intended to mount a major attack on the Adriatic coast with the IIInd Polish Corps, 1st Canadian Corps, and Vth Corps; while for the time being, the Xth and XIIIth Corps would merely hold their positions. The XIIIth Corps would presently be transferred to the Fifth Army, and the Xth Corps would then assume the task of protecting the Eighth Army's left flank. On August 6th, the 46th and 56th Divisions, waiting to join the Xth Corps' advance, had been warned of their impending transfer to the Vth on the Adriatic; and on the following day the 4th Indian Division, the King's Dragoon Guards, and the 1st/60th Rifles were also subtracted from the Xth Corps in preparation for the new attack.

This change of plan and diversion of force put a stop to any thought of further advance by the Xth Corps. The 10th Indian Division, reinforced by two mountain batteries, the Lovat Scouts and the 4th/11th Sikhs, was now to hold the whole Corps front between Anghiari and the crest of the Pratomagno, while the 9th Armoured Brigade returned to its former ground and assumed

responsibility for the right of the Corps sector east of Anghiari. The 6th Armoured Division west of the Pratomagno would return to the XIIIth Corps on August 12th.

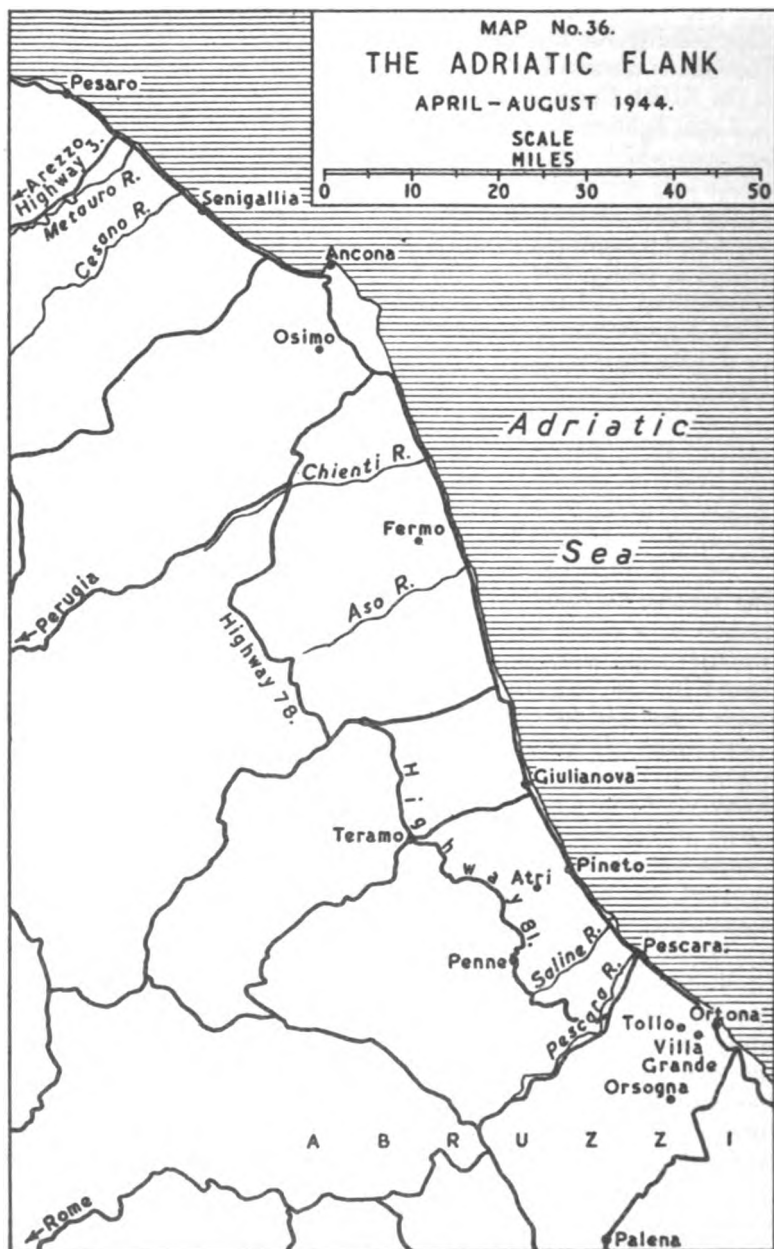
Local fighting continued, to secure for the 10th Indian Division positions which they could hold on their long front, and small but satisfactory advances were made when the 6th Armoured Division on the left drew near to Pontassieve on August 9th. Vigorous and aggressive patrolling concealed the relief of the 4th Division and the change in policy, and the Xth Corps, spoiled yet again of decisive achievement, had to find in a philosophic acceptance of the facts what compensation they could for the nagging thought that Bibbiena, for so long their objective, still lay uncaptured beyond the stubborn hills.

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The Adriatic Flank

THE relative quietness of the Adriatic shore, which was soon to be broken by a major battle, had persisted since early spring, when the Vth Corps, under direct command of Headquarters of the Allied Armies in Italy, had relieved the XIIIth Corps and the 1st Canadian Corps—destined for the battle for Rome and the pursuit beyond it—and assumed command of a thirty-mile front from Palena in the Abruzzi to the sea. Its strength consisted of a little more than two divisions, the 1st Canadian and the 8th Indian; and its role, though purely defensive, was complicated somewhat by the necessity of concealing its inactive strategy from the enemy. The enemy, however, was thinly spread, and without reinforcement incapable of launching an offensive.

Patrols grew active and aggressive when fine weather came in April, and both sides bombarded each other with propaganda as well as shells. The liveliest area on this front was the town of Orsogna, which the Germans still held while we occupied a cemetery and some caves in an isolated position within a few hundred yards of it. The battle for Rome compelled the Germans to withdraw their most experienced troops from their Adriatic sector, but the 278th Infantry Division, which came in to replace them, held very steadily to its ground, and not until early June was the Vth Corps—which now, after the general re-grouping of the previous month, consisted of the Italian Utili Division on



the left, the 4th Indian on the coast—able to advance, without a major operation, to the line of the river Pescara. The German withdrawal began on the night of June 7th. With little difficulty the Pescara line was quickly penetrated, and the Corps advanced to the river Saline, where on the 17th General Allfrey halted his main forces with his outposts at Penne and Atri and Pineto, and patrols as far forward as Teramo and Guilianova. On the 15th, the Polish Corps, having briefly rested after its violent battles at Monte Cassino and Piedimonte, came into the sector to relieve the 4th Indian Division; and on the 17th took command. The Vth Corps went into Army Group reserve at Campobasso.

General Alexander's immediate instructions to the Poles were to press with all possible speed towards the capture of Ancona. The northward pursuit from Rome was going well, and as the distance steadily increased between railhead and the fighting infantry, the problems of supply became even more difficult: Leghorn on the west, Ancona on the east, were the two ports whose possession would simplify the problem, and Ancona was strategically the more important.

To ask the Poles to move fast was like asking them to play with the *brio* which their nature demanded. Their advance was rapid indeed, and by the 20th they had crossed the river Aso and taken Fermo. Rashly and impetuously they pushed on, another ten miles to the Chienti, and established beyond it a desperate small bridgehead. But on the 22nd the Germans counter-attacked in force, and re-took it. To force the Chienti, it seemed, the full weight of the Corps would be needed, and because supplies and ammunition had to be fetched a long way, and troops concentrated far in advance of their starting-line, General Anders reluctantly calculated that he would probably be unable to cross the river before July 4th. But thereafter, he thought, he could advance without a check to Ancona, twenty-five miles beyond it. This programme was approved by General Alexander.

On the main front, the Germans withdrew from their positions on June 29th; and their forces on the Chienti conformed. Though their concentration was by no means complete, the Poles crossed the river in quick pursuit, and on July 6th took the town of Osimo, ten miles south of Ancona, and made their final preparations for the capture of the port. It fell to them on the 18th—the day before the Americans entered Leghorn—and with scarcely a pause they pressed forward up the coast to Senigallia and beyond it.

The next river, in the herring-bone pattern of water-courses that

split the coastal belt, was the Cesano; and this they crossed on August 10th, the same night as the Germans in Florence withdrew from the north bank of the Arno to the Mugnone Canal. Nine days later the Poles, having strengthened their bridgehead, began to clear the high ground between the Cesano and the Metauro; and although the Germans had no intention of making a prolonged stand, and had indeed withdrawn their artillery across the river, their infantry, supported by self-propelled guns, offered a furious resistance to enable the withdrawal to be conducted in an orderly fashion, and to spoil the Polish Commander's bold plan to cut off their main forces. His ambitious project was to make a holding attack on his inland flank, break through on the coast, and send an armoured brigade westward to cut the retreat of one of the two divisions opposing him. But heavy rain delayed the attack for twenty-four hours, and gravely impeded the forward movement of artillery. The more ambitious intention failed, but the Poles successfully reached the south bank of the Metauro, and by the early morning of August 22nd were on the starting-line of the Army's new offensive. The Poles had responded to General Alexander's demand for speed with all their customary *élan*; and the stage was set for assault on Pesaro, the eastern bastion of the Gothic Line.

CHAPTER VII

THE GOTHIC LINE

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The New Plan

ONE of the few certainties in the Italian campaign had been the knowledge that the Germans would fight with the utmost determination to hold a line based on the Etruscan Apennines, and so deny our entrance into the valley of the Po. Geography anticipated their decision, for in the valley of the upper Tiber the mountainous backbone of the peninsula bends north-west to join the Maritime Alps in Liguria, and create a huge natural barrier between central Italy and the flat lands of the north-east; and the apparent corridor that remains on the Adriatic coast is in fact interrupted by numerous rivers, overlooked by the menacing foothills of the Apennines, leads finally into a plain most intricately seamed and divided by water-courses, and has no communication with the western part of central Italy save by a few vulnerable roads that run through difficult and sombre mountain-passes.

Here, it was obvious, must be sited the final defensive position for the protection of what Mr. Churchill had once called "the under-belly of Europe"; and to strengthen the natural rampart the Todt Organisation was already at work with forced Italian labour in the autumn of 1943.

Coastal defences south of Spezia and north of Pesaro, and the fortification of the Futa Pass on the road from Florence to Bologna, were first begun and seriously prepared; but work on the greater part of the line was spasmodic and appeared to depend on the swinging fortune of the battles to the south. When Cassino fell and Rome was taken, work was resumed with feverish intensity, and the series of delaying battles from Trasimene to Florence was of the greatest value to the German engineers. But the Gothic Line

was never completed. Despite the most desperate efforts to prevent their advance, the Allied Armies by the end of August were in a position to attack before the elaborate fortress which had been intended to repulse them was in a condition to receive them.

The barrier was formidable, however, and the military genius of the enemy did much to compensate for the material imperfections of his line. On the west, the approaches to Spezia were barred by anti-tank defences in depth; from the region of Carrara the line strode through the mountains north of Pistoia to the elaborate fortifications of the Futa Pass—which included anti-tank ditches, concrete casemates and tank turrets—and so eastward, always on the southern side of the watershed, to the Adriatic foot-hills and the concentrated defensive positions along the Foglia to Pesaro. Here on the coastal belt timber had long since been felled to open fields of fire, and there were deep mine-fields, a tank ditch, pill-boxes and tank-turrets cunningly sited.

Had the French Expeditionary Corps remained in Italy under General Alexander's command, it is not improbable that the Etruscan Apennines would have been crossed as quickly as the Auruncian mountains had been—the weakness at Firenzuola might have been quickly found and exploited—but the withdrawal of the French deprived the Allies of their most useful and experienced mountain-troops, a curtailment of their strength perhaps more serious than the gross diminishment of their numbers. It was due largely to the lack of mountain-troops that the long-established plan of attack on the Gothic Line was on August 4th radically altered, and instead of the parallel assault by American and British troops against its central heights to Bologna and the vital parts of the Po Valley, a disparate attack was substituted which committed the Americans to the mountain route and the Eighth Army to battle in the Adriatic sector.

General Leese suggested the change of plan. The enemy, in his opinion, would be prepared for a continuance of our offensive northward from Florence; but an attack on the Adriatic flank would have the advantage of surprise. In addition to his lack of mountain-troops, moreover, he foresaw a psychological difficulty in fighting the parallel battle which had been designed. He disliked the almost inevitable spirit of competition which would ensue—and the equally inevitable comparisons that would be made—if the Fifth and Eighth Armies were to fight side by side for contiguous objectives; and despite the manifest objections to battle in the confined area of the Adriatic corridor, preferred its chances and set

his hopes on its success. Realising how impolitic it would be to persuade an Army Commander to fight a battle against his inclination and judgment, General Alexander acceded to General Leese's new proposal ; and in the early stages it appeared that General Leese had been well advised in his strategy and choice of terrain.

Plans for the offensive were issued on August 13th: with three Corps in line, the Poles on the right were to attack and seize the high ground north-west of Pesaro; the 1st Canadian Corps in the centre was to capture the heights west of Pesaro and from there aim at Cattolica and the coast road to Rimini; while the Vth Corps on the left struck west of Rimini towards the far goal of Ferrara. The offensive would open on August 25th and in preparation for it there began immediately an intricate and crowded movement of troops to the east. Roads were barely adequate for so great a traffic, and our intentions had to be concealed from the Germans. A vast amount of engineering work was required to bring the assaulting forces within striking distance of the enemy. But these preliminary operations, hurried and complex and ponderous though they were, were triumphantly completed.

The XIIIth Corps, now isolated on the extreme left wing of the Eighth Army's front, was still committed to the original intention of fighting northwards towards Bologna, but as it was no longer possible for the Eighth Army to command or administer it effectively, it would now pass to the Fifth Army. General Clark assumed command on August 17th, when the Corps comprised the 1st British and 8th Indian Infantry Divisions, the 6th South African Armoured Division, and the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade. The long mountain front, roadless and unaccommodating, between the two Armies, would be held by the Xth Corps which now consisted only of the 10th Indian Division and a scratch brigade.

Because the Fifth Army had been so greatly reduced by the transfer of several of its divisions to the south of France, the Eighth Army assumed the heavier task in the battle for the Gothic Line, and in the opening stages of the offensive it received most of the Air Forces' assistance. General Alexander's intentions were to drive the enemy from his Apennine positions and exploit whatever opportunity offered for an advance as far as the lower Po. As always in the campaign, it was insisted that maximum losses must be imposed on the German Armies. The Fifth Army, in order to distract attention from the British assault, was to be ostentatious in its preparation for battle between Pontassieve and Pontedera ; and as soon as the enemy in front of it showed signs of withdrawing

troops to meet the actual menace on the Adriatic, it would attack towards Bologna using its own IInd Corps on the left and the British XIIIth Corps on the right. The exact date of the attack would be decided by General Alexander; the presumptive date was five or six days after the opening of the Eighth Army's attack.

The Allied Armies in Italy and their Commanders were still confident of success despite the recent dislocation of their forces and the weeks of exasperating and enervating indecision before General Truscott put to sea. This confidence, moreover, was now enhanced by General Truscott's overwhelming success in the south of France—Toulon, Marseilles and Grenoble had all been captured and the Germans were in swift retreat up the valley of the Rhone—and it was clear that if the Apennine Line could be broken the enemy would have to withdraw all his forces from North-west Italy, and the Fifth Army, with no danger to its left flank, could turn right against Mantua and Verona, while the Eighth, on the axis of Ferrara, Padua and Treviso, would cross in succession the Po, the Adige, and the Brenta. The optimism of this forecast was apparently substantiated by the first few days of battle, for on the east the Gothic Line was broken at the first assault; but behind the Line arose the tall confusion of mountain behind mountain, and behind the mountains, were the long straight roads from Bologna to Forii and Rimini, from Ferrara to Ravenna, which gave Kesselring the opportunity to shift and manoeuvre his forces with the rapidity and decision that the German Commanders so un-failingly showed in any crisis; and then—as though Kesselring was drawing yet again on the reserve that never failed him in Italy—then the weather broke.

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The Vth Corps' Assault

To the Vth Corps, now commanded by Lieutenant-General Keightley, was entrusted the major role in the new offensive. It comprised the 4th, 46th, 56th, and 4th Indian Infantry Divisions, the 1st Armoured Division, the 7th Armoured Brigade, and the 25th Army Tank Brigade. The 46th and 56th Divisions had had some months to refit and recuperate after their heavy fighting of the previous winter, and had only recently returned to Italy; the 7th Armoured Brigade, after fighting in Burma, had also been

refreshed; and the 1st Armoured Division—or most of it—had had an idle year in North Africa. The other formations were merely exchanging one battlefield for another.

In the Canadian Corps were the 1st Canadian Infantry Division, the 5th Canadian Armoured Division, and the 21st British Army Tank Brigade. The Polish Corps consisted of the Carpathian and Kresowa Divisions, the 2nd Polish Armoured Brigade, the 7th Hussars and the Household Cavalry, and an Italian Liberation Corps.

Four German divisions held the Adriatic corridor: the 1st Parachute, the 71st Infantry, the 5th Mountain, and the 278th Infantry. Two lay along the Metauro from the coast to Fossombrone, one along a line south of the Metauro westward from Fossombrone, and the other was in close reserve. Farther back, at Cesena, was the 98th Infantry, and north of Rimini, on coast-defence, were three other divisions of inferior quality. The Eighth Army's swift, immense, and laborious movement to the coast had been unobserved by the enemy, who appeared to be blandly ignorant of our new intention.

General Keightley's plan was to attack with the 46th Division on the right, the 4th Indian on the left, supported by the 25th Tank Brigade; and bring in the 56th as opposition stiffened, while the 1st Armoured Division waited for an opportunity to exploit success. The leading divisions' main objectives were the Gothic Line and Monte Gridolfo on the right, the high ground at Tavoletto on the left; and both were required to advance at utmost speed. The Desert Air Force would support the Army's attack with twenty-seven squadrons of fighter-bombers and medium-bombers; but in the swift unheralded advance that was intended there was no need for a Corps artillery plan. The Engineers would have liked to prepare their operations across the Metauro in greater detail, but the shortage of bridging material suggested the principle of expediency rather than an orderly Chatham programme.

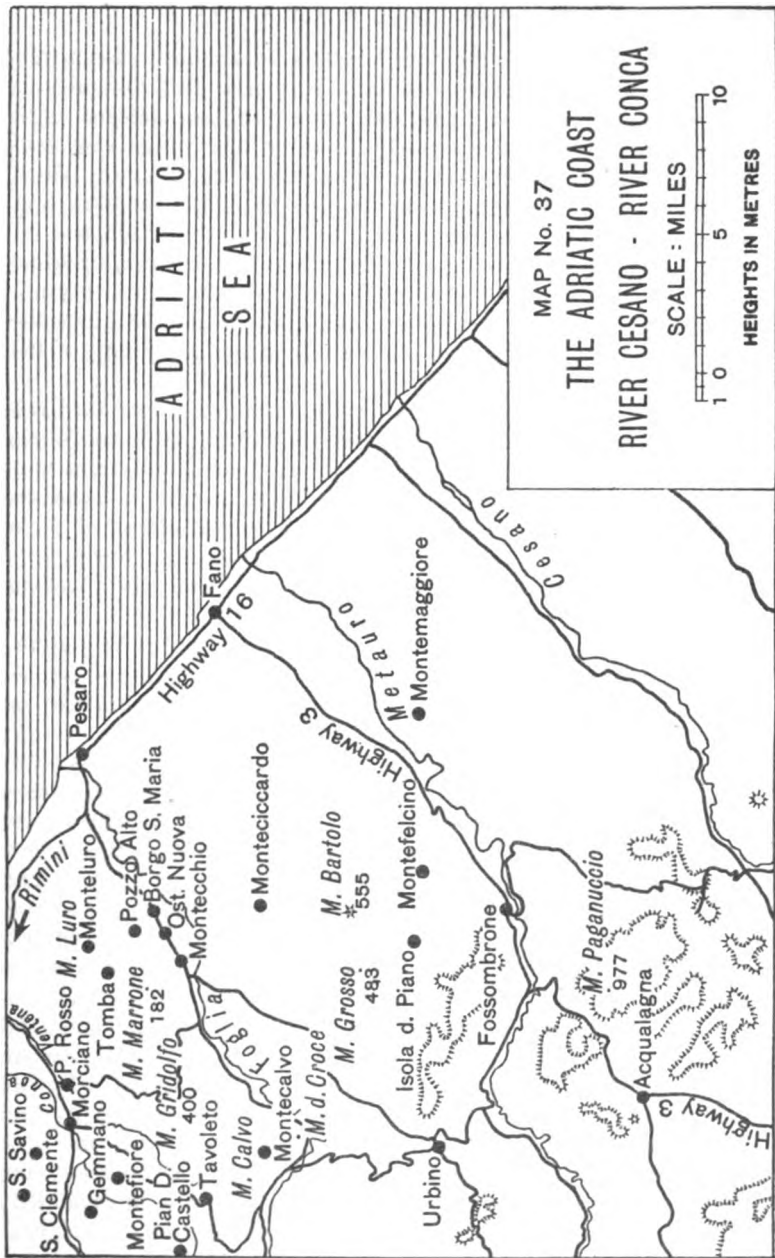
The 4th Indian Division opened the offensive in the early hours of August 25th, and by nightfall was closing on the Metauro with its 5th Brigade on Monte Paganuccio four miles south of Fossombrone, and the 7th on Highway 3 at Acqualagna, where it encountered heavy gunfire and mortar-fire. Before midnight the leading battalions of the 46th Division moved silently down to the Metauro behind a forward screen of the Household Cavalry Regiment, and on the right the 2nd Hampshires, having crossed the river without opposition, took Montefalcino at dawn, and during

the day, escorted by the North Irish Horse, advanced a further two miles. On the left the 46th Reconnaissance Regiment had reached a point just south of Isola del Piano. The advance continued with remarkable speed, despite an opposition of varying strength, and by the evening of the 27th the Division had captured Monte Bartolo, Monte Grosso, and Monte Tombola; and perceived a hardening resistance ahead.

The enemy, however, was given no time to rest or gather his strength. The 46th Division, with burly impetuosity, hustled him on, and by noon on the 29th the 5th Foresters and the 2nd Hampshires were on the ridge that looks down into the Foglia valley a mile away; and the German 71st Division, battered and herded over twelve miles of steep green country, withdrew into the Gothic Line. The 4th Indian Division on the left had made comparable progress at equal speed, and two of its battalions were on the high ground north and north-east of the old, high-pitched, princely city of Urbino, which the 1st Sussex, unopposed, had taken. Across the Foglia the Indians were now confronted by the steep face of Monte Calvo. And at night, without a pause, the battle for the Gothic Line began.

The 3rd/10th Baluchs of the 5th Indian Brigade crossed the Foglia in silence, and took Monte della Croce, the only fortified outpost of the Line, without a struggle. The Brigade moved on towards the main defences, which crossed the mountain through the village of Montecalvo; and in the afternoon of the 31st, after moderate fighting, the village was taken. By that time a very stubborn battle for Monte Gridolfo was reaching its climax after the 46th Division had fought its way, against accurate and heavy machine-gun fire, on to the lower ridges across the river, and stormed in succession a series of strongholds on the slopes above. The Foresters of the 139th Brigade took Montevecchia after a bloody fight, and the Durhams passed through to attack Mondaino with the Leicesters on their left. At the day's end, in Mondaino, the issue was still in doubt, but by then the 1st/4th Hampshires had burst into the Gothic Line on the eastern slopes, and made certain of success. Before darkness the Hampshires were in the village of Monte Gridolfo and on the high ground of San Francesco—and the Gothic Line was broken.

The Canadians on the right had made excellent progress, and General Hawkesworth, commanding the 46th, resolved to employ his 138th Brigade, reinforced by armour, to press forward along the lower ground adjoining their sector, and make his main effort

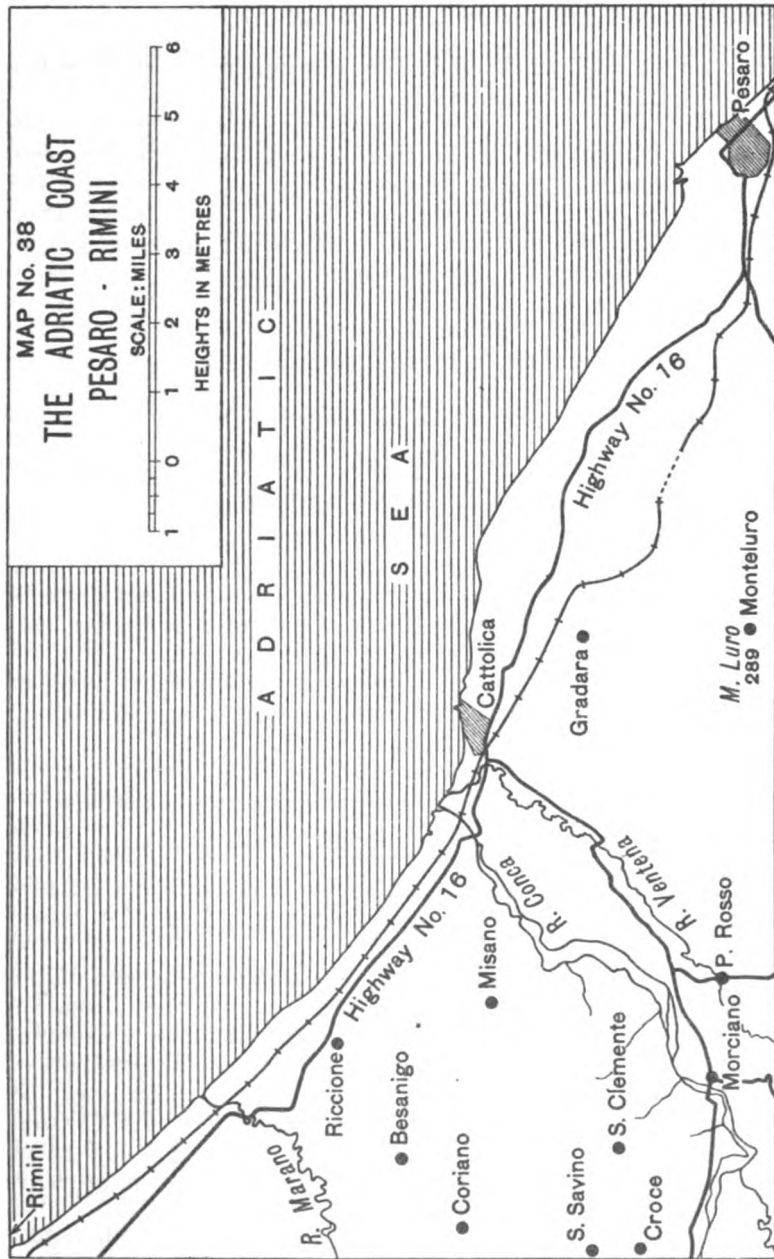
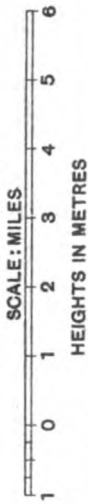


to reach Ponte Rosso on the river Ventena, four miles to the north. The tanks of the 142nd Royal Tank Regiment had difficulty in coming forward, however, and the movement was delayed until nearly mid-day on September 1st; by when the Gothic Line had been broken over a front of fifteen miles inland from Pesaro, which still remained in German hands, though the Poles were rapidly outflanking it. The 4th Indian Division was firmly established on Monte Calvo, though on the extreme left its 7th Brigade, opposed by strong rearguards on the lower slopes of Monte San Giovanni, towering two thousand feet above, had so far failed to cross the Foglia. Between the 4th and the 46th Divisions a brigade of the 56th was coming in to line.

On the German side reserves were also arriving, and the 26th Panzer and the 98th Infantry Divisions were committed piece-meal to battle as they came into the fighting area. Their hasty endeavour to repair the situation produced some confusion, and a battalion counter-attack by the 9th Panzer Grenadiers was launched on a position still held by the Germans. But the enemy fought very stubbornly on September 1st, and at the end of the day the situation was substantially unchanged, though the 2nd/6th Queens of the 169th Brigade—the Corps Commander having decided to commit the 56th Division on the left of the 46th—had gone forward south-west of Mondaino to capture Monte Capello on the ridge in front.

On the left flank the 5th Indian Brigade, advancing from Monte Calvo towards Tavoleto, was stiffly opposed by the German reinforcements, and though by the evening of the 1st it was closing on Tavoleto, a German counter-attack on the Gurkhas who were forming for the assault resulted in some hours of very heavy and confused fighting. A spirited attack across open ground on the morning of the 2nd was repelled by accurate fire from prepared positions, and further advance was delayed until the 11th Brigade could come forward to relieve the 5th. On the right, however, the Canadians had taken Tomba di Pesaro in a savage action, brilliantly fought; and the battle for the Gothic Line had reached a stage at which exploitation of its early success could be anticipated with some confidence. The prospect was materially improved by the admirable work of the Corps and Divisional Engineers, who had by now opened the main road through Fossombrone to Urbino, an arduous task which entailed the blasting away of a hillside cliff, the construction of a long diversion, the filling of many craters, and the building of several Bailey bridges; and from Fossombrone to

MAP No. 38
THE ADRIATIC COAST
PESARO - RIMINI



Fano on the coast traffic on the Via Flaminia ran freely from the Army's administrative centre.

Beyond the Foglia rose bare, steep-sided, green hills like those before the Gothic Line; and across the line of advance ran the rivers Conca and Marano, and the smaller but more difficult stream of the Ventena. North of Pesaro, moreover, the foothills and the coastline converge, and the possibility of swift pursuit diminished in a narrowing corridor that, beyond Cattolica, is crossed by spurs of the hills that reach to within three miles of the sea. According to the Army plan the Canadian Corps would continue to advance along the coast, and the Vth Corps' right boundary was shifted to a line parallel with the coast and three or four miles inland of it, to permit the employment of the 1st Armoured Division in tolerably good country.

Within the Vth Corps the 46th Division was to be relieved as soon as possible, the 56th and 4th Indian Divisions were to advance on roughly parallel lines—the former towards Croce across the Conca, the latter towards Monte Colombo and Montescudo—and the 1st Armoured Division, now moving forward, would come in on the right. In the meantime, in the afternoon of September 2nd, the reinforced 138th Brigade reached the Ventena, two miles below Ponte Rosso, where it was in contact with the Canadians; and on the following day the 6th York and Lancasters, in a stiff battle, forced a crossing of the Conca, and with the 2nd Hampshires established themselves on the slopes below San Clemente. In the face of heavy fire the 46th Reconnaissance Regiment advanced to a point a mile north-west of San Clemente; and after the 139th Brigade had taken the ridge overlooking the valley of the Conca above Morciano, the 2nd/4th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry entered the village, capturing intact the bridge in front of it, before midnight on the 3rd.

Believing that the enemy must now abandon the line of the Conca, General Hawkesworth demanded a final effort from his division: an advance along the ridge from San Clemente to Coriano, and beyond it to seize the crossing of the Marano at Ospedaletto, before the 1st Armoured Division pass through. But now the German resistance became much stronger, and the 46th Division was brusquely halted a mile or two from Coriano, and in front of Croce. The tanks of the Armoured Division came up, and tried to pass through, on September 4th.

In very difficult country to the left, the 56th and 4th Indian Divisions had had some hard fighting. After strenuous action west

and north of Mondaino, the 56th found the mountain village of Montefiore and the Gemmano ridge a most formidable obstacle, and the deployment of both the 167th and 168th Brigades to deal with it had to wait until the 4th Indian Division should take Tavoleto, and secure a starting-line for the 168th. The 11th Indian Brigade and the 167th attacked on the night of the 3rd, with the 168th in reserve, and Tavoleto and Montefiore were captured with over a hundred prisoners. On the extreme left the 7th Indian Brigade, after stiff fighting, took Monte San Giovanni, and both Indian brigades looked northward to the broad ridge of Pian di Castello. But the situation north of Tavoleto was not yet clear enough to deploy the 168th Brigade, and the Commander of the 56th Division decided to pass to the right of the Gemmano ridge and advance north-westward through Croce to the Marano. During the night of the 4th the 167th and 168th Brigades crossed the Conca, but by noon on the 5th their forward troops were halted by the most obstinate resistance from San Savino, and Croce, and the north-eastern slopes of Gemmano.

German reinforcements were now coming steadily forward, and the tanks of the 26th Panzer Division had very materially strengthened the defence. It was already evident, on the 4th, that the general situation had changed for the worse, and though the 46th Division, in its thrust towards Coriano, had opened a useful door for the advance of the 1st Armoured Division, the door was immediately shut in their faces. The armour had had a very difficult approach from the Metauro to the Foglia, and many tanks had broken down or shed their tracks. There was little time for rest or refitting before the 2nd Armoured Brigade crossed the Conca, and the 10th Hussars and the Bays set out from the ridges below San Clemente to attack the Coriano ridge. They came at once under very heavy fire from the high ground between San Savino and Coriano, and from Gemmano; and the attack failed to make any progress. The prospect of exploiting success was fast fading.

On the following day, the 5th, the 9th Lancers were unsuccessful in an attack on San Savino, but a strongly defended cemetery four hundred yards to the south was taken thirty-six hours later with the assistance of the 1st Buffs, sixty Germans being killed and sixty prisoners made; and after another abortive attempt to capture the village, the 18th Brigade consolidated its position among the graves, and waited to see if the 56th Division could drive a wedge through Croce and turn San Savino from the south. But the German positions on the heights of Croce and Gemmano dominated the

valley of the Conca, and their guns closed the roads on both sides of the river to all but single and swiftly moving vehicles; the enemy had assembled a very strong force, drawn from four divisions, to block the advance in this sector. Yet with the Armoured Division stopped at San Savino, and the 4th Indian Division halted before the Pian di Castello, Croce appeared to be that point on the Vth Corps' front where a new effort must be made.

A night of furious fighting by the London Irish Rifles of the 168th Brigade, and the 9th Royal Fusiliers of the 167th, gave the latter a foothold in the village by dawn on the 6th, but they were still under observation and heavy fire from Gemmano, and the armour could not, as had been intended, use the new-won ground as a fresh starting-line. Croce was cleared during the day, but an attack on Gemmano hung fire. Then Croce was recaptured by the Germans, and at daylight on the 7th their tanks moved in, though behind them the London Scottish of the 168th Brigade had fought their way on to the ridge of Il Palazzo, and presently took Casa Menghino; where they were strongly counter-attacked. Their leading company was isolated, but in bitter fighting the Germans were driven back, and before nightfall Croce was taken again by the 8th Royal Fusiliers and half a squadron of the 2nd Royal Tank Regiment. The 169th Brigade came up from reserve, to advance from the salient to Monte Colombo and Montescudo, and so turn the enemy's positions on Gemmano; but now the autumn rains had begun, roads melted beneath, and the 169th Brigade was unable to get forward before another counter-attack was launched on Croce, while a stiff assault against the 7th Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, on the lower slopes of the Gemmano ridge south of the Conca, drove them out of their precarious hold. The Germans, it seemed, had regained the initiative, and the Gemmano ridge still dominated the battlefield. As it could not be passed by, the Corps Commander decided to commit the 46th Division again, to hold Croce, while the 1st Armoured Division renewed its attack on the Coriano ridge, and the 56th Division endeavoured to take Gemmano.

Throughout the 8th the Germans pressed their counter-attack on the salient at Croce. The London Scottish were driven out of Casa Menghino, but held stoutly against repeated assault a perimeter round Il Palazzo; and the right flank of the attack, against the 167th Brigade in the village of Croce, was ill-managed and unsuccessful. In the early hours of the 9th the 168th Brigade came to the relief of the hard-pressed battalions, and assumed command of the whole sector. Again the Germans attacked, and were beaten off.

The 169th Brigade, in the meantime, had been fighting for the ridge of Gemmano, a mile long and 1,500 feet high. The 7th Oxford and Buckinghamshires had already won a foothold in the village, and been driven out again. Fighter-bombers had attacked the ridge and blown up an ammunition column. Preceded by heavy artillery fire, the 169th Brigade's attack went well, and the 2nd/7th Queens took the village of Gemmano, though the 2nd/6th Queens were prevented from reaching the crest of the ridge. Before darkness on the 9th, the Brigade was in possession of the eastern half of the southern slopes of the ridge; but the enemy was still tenaciously resisting on the western half, and apparently bringing up reinforcements. The 56th Division could carry its offensive no farther.

Some distance to the south, the 4th Indian Division, after a very arduous battle, had succeeded in taking the formidable heights of the Pian di Castello. The 6th Royal Tank Regiment had played a decisive part in the fighting, and its tanks had successfully operated on apparently inaccessible ridges. By dawn on the 7th the 2nd Camerons were established in the centre of the ridge, with the 3rd Royal Frontier Force Regiment on its north-eastern end. They were heavily shelled and repeatedly counter-attacked, but stood firm against all assault, and presently the 1st Royal Sussex took the village of Pian di Castello. The 1st/9th Gurkhas went on to capture the highest points of the ridge, and the Sussex consolidated positions on the crest beyond the village. The Divisional Commander had intended to press on to Monte Colombo, which adjoins the Gemmano ridge; but rain had been falling heavily, the ground was a quagmire, and his troops were exhausted by the bitter fighting. Circumstances enforced a halt.

In consequence of the stopping of the Vth Corps' advance, the Canadians, who had been fighting in a corridor less than four miles wide and dominated by the ridge running north and south from Coriano, were compelled also to halt, and await the outcome of the battles on their left.

✠ (3) ✠

The Canadian Assault

ON August 24th the 1st Canadian Corps had taken over from the Polish Corps a sector of the front east and west of Montemaggiore, and assumed command of the Polish Cavalry Force, which was

disposed along the roads overlooking the Metauro. Its plan was to co-operate with the Polish Corps in a silent crossing of the Metauro, to break the Gothic Line, and advance to Rimini.

The Germans, to begin with, were taken completely by surprise. On the coast the 278th Division was being relieved by the 1st Parachute Division, and on the 26th there were only rearguards in the line; and for the next three days the Parachute Division, and inland of it the 71st, withdrew before the attack. In the early hours of the 26th, the 1st and 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigades were over the river, on the Via Flaminia, and scarcely in contact with the enemy. As the advance continued the Germans retired towards the high ground east and west of Monteciccardo, below which the 2nd Brigade encountered stiffer opposition, and its movement was checked. By darkness on the 27th the 5th Armoured Division was all north of the Cesano, and preparing to relieve the 2nd Brigade. The Corps would have both of its divisions forward for the attack on the Gothic Line.

On the 28th the 1st Brigade successfully attacked against strong resistance, on the right of the sector, and sent patrols to the Foglia, while the 2nd Brigade captured Monteciccardo after a vigorous battle. The Armoured Division then relieved the infantry brigade, and assumed command of the left half of the sector. The Germans withdrew the bulk of their forces over the Foglia, harassed by artillery and the Desert Air Force, and the Canadian Corps advanced to the high ground south of the river. Beyond the river, on the 29th, its patrols met few of the enemy; and on the following morning no patrolling was possible on the northern bank, as the Corps Commander, Lieutenant-General Burns, had asked the Air Force to make its maximum effort against the Gothic Line between Montecchio and Borgo Santa Maria; and the bombing was intense. In the afternoon, however, patrols of company strength found the strongholds of Montecchio, Colle Mancini, and Osteria Nuova unoccupied, and the 3rd and 11th Brigades crossed the Foglia to establish bridgeheads beyond it. The leading companies, held up in the thick forward minefields of the Line, came under small-arms fire, and the West Nova Scotia Regiment was forced to withdraw across the Foglia without reaching the Pesaro road. On the left the Perth Regiment got a foothold on the slopes west of Osteria Nuova; while the Cape Breton Highlanders, after reaching the ridge north of Montecchio, was driven back to the river by heavy cross-fire.

Though the opposition was growing in strength—by August 31st all three Corps in the Eighth Army, from Tomba di Pesaro to

Mondaino, would be meeting fierce resistance from the 26th Panzer and 1st Parachute Divisions—it was obvious that the Gothic Line was cracking in a wholly unexpected frailty, and orders were now issued for an advance towards Cattolica and Rimini. The 1st Infantry Division was initially directed towards Monteluro, the 5th Armoured Division towards Tomba di Pesaro. Osteria Nuova was captured by a company of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, and the Irish Regiment attacked Montecchio from the rear and took it with over a hundred prisoners. Supported by a squadron of the 5th Armoured Regiment, the Cape Breton Highlanders passed through and moved against Monte Marrone; and the 9th Armoured Regiment took the high ground south of Pozzo Alto despite considerable opposition from Panther tanks and emplaced turrets in the Gothic Line. A counter-attack with tanks was repelled, and the Perth Regiment, accompanied by the 2nd Armoured Regiment, consolidated there and prepared for the capture of Tomba di Pesaro.

On the night of August 31st the Perth Regiment was attacked by a numerous force armed with light anti-tank weapons. Surprised to find infantry in position, they were beaten off with heavy losses. The Cape Breton Highlanders occupied Monte Marrone, and on the right the Royal 22e and the Carleton and York Regiment cleared the neighbourhood of Borgo Santa Maria in bitter fighting. Pozzo Alto was taken by the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada and the 15th Armoured Regiment.

It had previously been arranged that the Carpathian Division of the Polish Corps should co-operate with the 1st Canadian Infantry Division in assault on Monteluro, and the Poles had halted their direct attack on Pesaro for this purpose. They moved east, and cutting the road from Pesaro to Rimini near Gradara, took a number of prisoners from the Parachute Division. Pesaro, watched by the Polish Cavalry Force, was evacuated by the Germans on September 2nd, and it was decided to withdraw the Polish Corps into reserve. Its share in the operation against Monteluro having been cancelled, the heights were taken by the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and the 12th Royal Tank Regiment, who subsequently held them against several determined counter-attacks. Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the 48th Royal Tank Regiment passed through, and at dawn on September 2nd seized the cross-roads beyond. On their left, on the day before, the 4th Princess Louise Dragoon Guards—an infantry battalion—with the 2nd Canadian Armoured Regiment had fought a bloody engagement for ground about a mile south-east of Tomba di Pesaro, and though suffering heavily themselves, had

taken a hundred prisoners and counted as many German dead. Through their lines the Irish Regiment of Canada went forward to carry Tomba di Pesaro by assault, and triumphantly conclude a most spirited and hard-fought operation. The Canadians now dominated the coastal plain as far as the valley of the Conca.

As the enemy withdrew, under the bombs of the Desert Air Force, the Canadians made use of the gap between the 26th Panzer and the 1st Parachute Divisions, and reaching the Conca, established a small bridgehead across it at dusk on the 2nd. Quickly breaking out of the bridgehead, they pressed on and took Misano on the following day, where, in a fruitless counter-attack, the Germans lost eight Panther tanks. There was now a prospect of securing bridgeheads over the Marano, and on the coast road the Royal Canadian Regiment made good progress, while farther inland an advance on a narrow front reached Besanigo despite heavy fire from the Coriano ridge. The Irish Regiment of Canada took Besanigo on the 5th, but the Royal Canadian Regiment was stopped west of Riccione. Now the advance was checked, and already the roads were treacherous beneath a steady rain.

On the 6th there was a conference between the Canadian Corps Commander and the Commanders of the 1st British and 5th Canadian Armoured Divisions to discuss a method of capturing the Coriano ridge, but in the event the decision was made by General Leese, who chose the Vth Corps for an assault on the night of the 7th, and instructed the Canadians to patrol towards the Marano. The 4th British Infantry Division, the 25th Tank Brigade, and the 3rd Greek Mountain Brigade passed to command of the Canadian Corps; and the rain continued. All the bridges over the Foglia were washed away, and the roads dissolved. The 1st Armoured Division's attack on Coriano was postponed.

✠(4)✠

Gemmano and Rimini

SINCE the breaching of the Gothic Line progress had failed to keep its early promise, but something had been done to maintain the primary purpose of the armies in Italy—to kill and weaken the enemy, that is. In a fortnight's fighting the Germans had lost 3,700 prisoners and at least a normal proportion of killed and wounded. The price paid for this mortal success, however, was

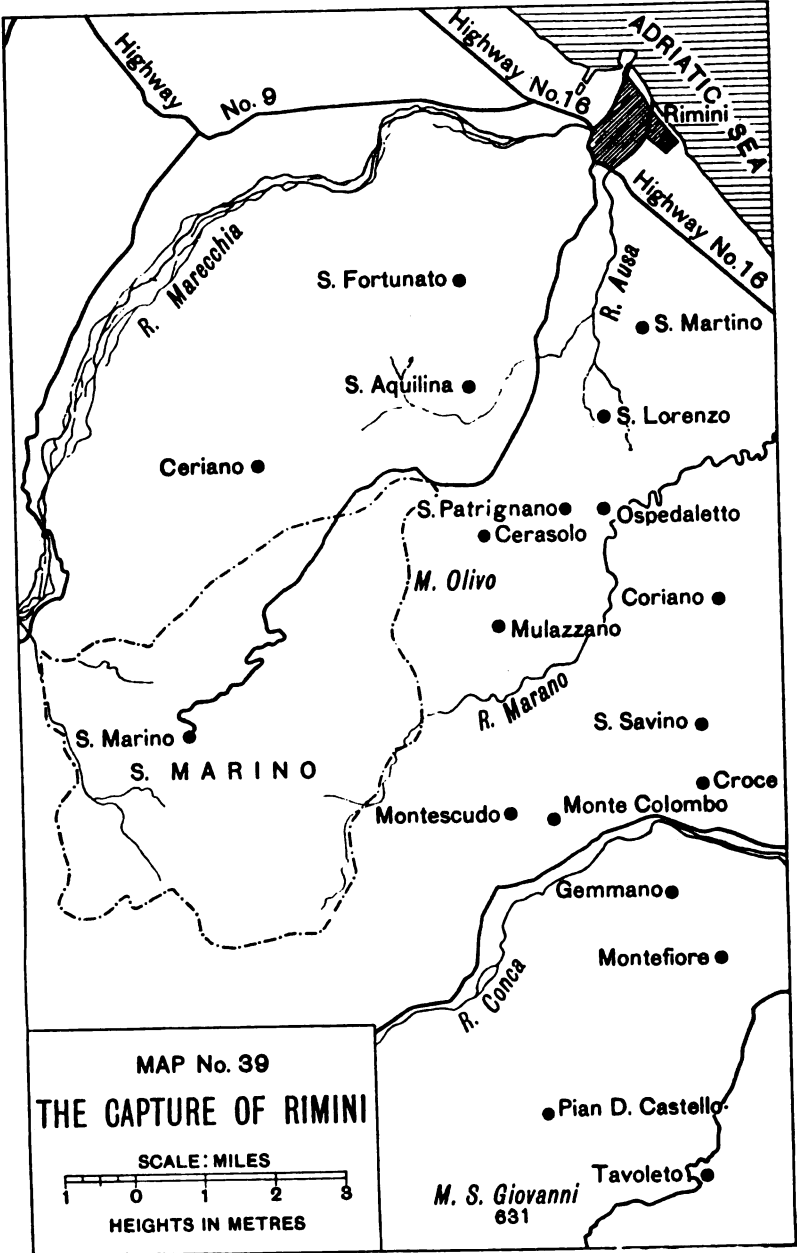
unpleasantly high: our own losses since August 25th had been nearly 8,000 killed, wounded and missing. Tank losses had as yet not been unduly heavy—about a hundred had been wrecked beyond repair—but tank crews were worried by the enemy's Panther. It was superior both in armour and gun-power to all the fighting vehicles on the Allied side except the new heavy Churchills which were only beginning to arrive in the theatre. These, and the promised new Shermans, were eagerly awaited.

The abominable profile of Gemmano continued to dominate the battle. The 56th Division, having fought itself to a standstill, gave way to the 46th, which had been intended to hold the still debatable heights at Croce; and on the 10th Gemmano was again attacked. Its defenders were first-class troops in a position of great natural strength, and there was bitter fighting for possession. Point 449 was taken and lost many times before the 2nd/4th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry admitted failure; and the high peaks remained in German hands. The Army's attack against Coriano had been postponed for two days in the hope of favourable developments at Gemmano, but very little had been achieved by the 12th, when the attack could be delayed no longer; and before midnight the 1st British Armoured Division and the 5th Canadian Armoured Division began their assault on the ridge. There followed a week of bloody fighting in which the Eighth Army lost every day a hundred and fifty killed and some six hundred wounded, and so weakened itself that it did not recover its normal strength for several months. It is true that the enemy lost at least as heavily, but though men fell equally, the rain fell on Kesselring's side. The terrible autumn rains, that filled the rivers and melted the roads, made rapid movement impossible and slowed the attack in clinging mud.

The immediate purpose of the renewing battle was to gain possession of the Coriano ridge; but this was only the preliminary to an attack on the defences of Rimini, of which the nodal point was the fortified village of San Fortunato. Coriano ridge was the first step to San Fortunato. San Fortunato was the next step to Rimini and the valley of the Po.

While the two armoured divisions, supported by seven hundred guns, advanced on the ridge, the 56th Division mounted an attack at Croce, and the 46th, with the 4th Indian supporting it on the left, again endeavoured to clear the Gemmano ridge, and go on to the capture of Montescudo.

In this opening phase the battle went well—the defenders had been stunned by the bombardment—and by midnight on the 13th,



after hand-to-hand fighting, the villages of Coriano and San Savino had both been taken; but further advance was prevented by strong resistance and the little river Fornaci which the rain had so swollen that tanks could not cross it. The British 4th Division, now under Canadian command, was to have gone forward through the Armoured Division, but its leading brigade had been delayed by shellfire while forming up, and its attack was postponed. On the left, at Croce, the 56th Division had considerable success, advancing about a mile and taking several hundred prisoners; but the opposition was powerful and it was strongly counter-attacked. On the coast the Canadian infantry were prevented, by fire from dominating ridges to the west, from crossing the Marano until the 14th, when the 3rd Greek Mountain Brigade—whose debut in the battle had been the spirited repulse of a German reconnaissance in force—drove forward to its south bank and the Canadians secured a bridgehead across it. The Vth Corps, by this time, had overcome the very formidable obstacles in its path, and was closing up in strength. The 1st Buffs and the 60th Rifles of the 1st Armoured Division had secured the Ripabianca ridge, and on its left, the 167th Brigade of the 56th Division, with two hundred more prisoners in its cages, was overlooking the Marano from near Sensoli. Farther to the left, the long battle for the Gemmano ridge was at last nearing the end. On the night of the 13th the 4th Indian Division had taken command of the southern part of the ridge; the 138th Brigade was in Gemmano, and on the slopes running down to the Conca; and by evening on the 14th—the 46th Division having captured Monte Colombo—the Germans on the ridge, threatened with encirclement, were thinning out. The 2nd Camerons of the 11th Indian Brigade attacked with heavy artillery support, and by dawn on the 15th the whole ridge was in their hands, with prisoners from all three battalions of the 100th Mountain Regiment. While the Germans were still in confusion, the 46th Division prepared to attack Montescudo.

The second phase of the attack began when the British 4th Division passed through the Canadian armour and crossed the Marano at Ospedaletto. The enemy, regrouping his forces, was relieving the battered 98th Division with the 356th, which had arrived from the central mountain sector, and a slight withdrawal assisted the Eighth Army's advance on the 15th. Both Corps made good progress, the Canadian Infantry Division taking San Lorenzo in Corregiano, and pushing forward to San Martino in Monte l'Abate, three miles south of Rimini, while the 4th Division took

San Patrignano; and on the Vth Corps front, the 1st Armoured Division crossed the Marano and took a ridge beyond it at Colle il Monte. In the centre the 46th Division took Montescudo, but could go on further.

On the following day, the 16th, fortune was less kind, and the Canadian infantry at San Martino, in full view of the German guns at San Fortunato, lost their hold on the ridge. It was quickly re-occupied by the enemy with a strong force which thereafter resisted any attempt to push past it on the coast road. The German gunfire in this sector was intense, and a projected attack by the 1st Canadian Division towards San Fortunato had to be postponed. In the centre the British 1st Armoured Division repelled a counter-attack on Colle il Monte, and the 56th Division crossed the Marano and after a day of heavy fighting took the western end of the ridge, at Mulazzano. West of Montescudo, the Germans could not yet be dislodged, and the 46th Division was prevented from joining the 56th and 1st Armoured Divisions across the Marano.

The battle was no less stubborn on the 17th, and three strong attacks by the Canadians on San Martino failed to make any impression. The British 4th Division, however, crossing the boundary between the two Corps, came to the assistance of the Vth, and in a night attack under artificial moonlight took the ridge at Cerasolo. West of Cerasolo the 56th Division advanced in daylight, but had to fight all day without positive success for Monte Olivo on their left. The 46th Division at last crossed the Marano when the Germans abandoned the high ground west of Montescudo, but had another stiff battle for a ridge at Colle di Monte Lupo, a mile south of Monte Olivo. At the end of the day the Germans were still forward of the river Ausa on both flanks, blocking any advance in the coastal sector from San Martino—which appeared to be the outer bastion of their position at San Fortunato—and still firmly holding on the hillsides about Monte Olivo. More reinforcements were arriving to thicken the defence, and when the 20th Luftwaffe Field Division came from Lucca, and a battle group of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division from the north-west, the German Commander could dispose the elements of about ten divisions, of which six were massed in the sector of San Fortunato, three in the neighbourhood of Ceriano.

On the 17th the Desert Air Force flew four hundred and eighty-six sorties against San Fortunato in a phenomenally heavy attack, and on the following day after considerable fighting the Canadian Infantry Division finally passed by San Martino and compelled the

Germans to abandon it. On the left of the Canadian Corps the 4th Division crossed the Ausa and reached Sant' Aquilina where it was stopped by fire from a high crest on the right of the Vth Corps' sector. The Vth Corps was still engaged in the heaviest fighting. By darkness on the 18th the 56th Division had a small bridgehead over the Ausa at Monte dell' Arboreta, where it was held by artillery and mortar fire, and the 1st Armoured Division, which had been intended to exploit the breaking of the Rimini defences, was committed to battle there. There was only one ford, however, which the 56th Division was using, and the Armoured Division could not attack until the 20th. The 56th Division had almost reached the crest of the ridge east of Ceriano, but after a violent counter-attack by the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division it was fighting desperately to maintain a now dubious hold on the hill. The Armoured Division, when it advanced, encountered devastating fire from German high velocity guns on the slopes in front of it, and after fighting with great gallantry and losing a large number of tanks the attack was abandoned. On the right, however, the Canadians were more fortunate. Advancing with the utmost determination, the Royal 22e and the Loyal Edmonton Regiments penetrated the enemy's defensive lines at San Fortunato, the latter moving by sunken roads to some rising ground beyond the village, and followed by the Seaforth of Canada and the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, succeeded in surrounding this vital stronghold. There was a day of hard fighting at close quarters in the course of which the enemy made the most violent efforts to break out, but his position was hopeless, and five hundred prisoners were taken when the ground was finally cleared on the 21st. At night the Germans blew up their installations in Rimini, and withdrew from the town.

On the left of the Army's line a problem of another sort had now been resolved. While fighting was continuing for the three-peaked ridge of Gemmano, our infantry had been confronted by a farther and more spectacular skyline. Tall and raggedly pimpled rose the mountains of the little independent republic of San Marino, whose neutrality was bound to be respected by an Army fighting for justice and the democratic institutions, though it was uneasily recognised that the Germans might be less scrupulous. The Germans indeed, with a different conception of responsibility, had concentrated a strong force to defend the republic and block the main road leading to it. Its neutral territory had therefore to be invaded, and on the 20th the 4th Indian Division entered the capital, which stands high in the middle of the State, and the minute

army of San Marino assisted in rounding up the remnant of the German forces there.

The capture of San Fortunato had secured our entry into the valley of the Po, but the view was discouraging. There was heavy rain on the night of the 20th and the Germans were able to withdraw their left flank in good order across the Marecchia. On the 21st when patrols of the 1st Canadian Corps went over the river they met no resistance, but the rain was still falling and the endless, formless expanse of the valley was infinitely depressing to the eye and equally discouraging to sober calculation. In the curious optimism with which the offensive had been planned the huge flats of the river valley had apparently been regarded as a happy playground in which tanks might roam at will; perhaps the speed with which the Eighth Army's assault had been transferred from the mountains beyond Florence to the corridor along the Adriatic had prevented close study of the agricultural methods which had made such drastic alterations in the nature of the plain. That the flat lands were intersected by a series of rivers and streams, and crossed and criss-crossed by a network of roads, was obvious in any map; but less obvious, it seems, had been the innumerable ditches, irrigation channels, and high-piled embankments which covered the apparently open country with obstacles and tank-traps beyond counting. Meteorology had been as misleading as the maps; statistics of Italy's rainfall had appeared to promise some weeks of relatively dry weather after the offensive began, and local experts who asserted that the rainfall in this part of Italy never conformed to the average had been discounted. But only the most insoluble optimism could now survive so watery a prospect, though some encouragement might be derived from the knowledge that Kesselring, to meet the Eighth Army's assault, had been compelled to withdraw troops from the Fifth Army's front to an extent that dangerously weakened his defences there.

It was true also that the wastage of the German divisions had been serious; as had ours. In the last eight days another 3,000 prisoners had been taken, and the German troops were tired; but reinforcements could still be found, though there were no fresh divisions available for defence. In the Eighth Army, to repair its heavy losses, all the British reinforcements had already been absorbed, and the mere trickle of new strength that was allowed to come from home could do nothing to replenish its numbers. It was decided, therefore, to reduce all British battalions from a strength of four companies to three; a necessary expedient which sadly

reduced the tactical strength of a battalion. The armour, especially during the last week of fighting, had lost very heavily. During September some two hundred and fifty tanks had been destroyed by the enemy and nearly as many lay bogged or useless from mechanical failure. Except for the New Zealand Division, now under command of the Canadian Corps, and the Polish Corps which consisted only of four infantry brigades and an armoured brigade, the whole army was weary and casualties in the British 1st Armoured Division and the 56th Division had been so heavy that it was necessary to reduce to a mere cadre one infantry brigade in each. The troops needed rest and recuperation; but the overriding necessity was to maintain strong pressure on the enemy in order to assist the operations of the Fifth Army in the mountains.

It had been the Army Commander's intention to pursue a beaten enemy beyond the Rimini defences with the three armoured divisions of the Vth and Canadian Corps—the 2nd New Zealand, the 5th Canadian, and the 1st British Armoured Divisions, that is—while the rest of the army reorganised. The leading corps were to continue on the axes previously allotted to them: the Canadians on Highway 16, leading to Ravenna and Ferrara, the Vth on Highway 9, the road to Bologna. Immediate regrouping was impossible, however, for both the British 1st Armoured and the 56th Divisions had to be reconstituted as fighting formations; and for this purpose they were relieved from the line. It was urgently necessary to find fresh troops, but the 78th Infantry Division, which had begun to arrive at ports in the Heel of Italy, could not be brought into the line before early October. In the meantime the 10th Indian Division was borrowed from the Xth Corps' mountain sector, where it was relieved by the 1st Guards Brigade Group and the 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, which the Fifth Army had released. The 9th Armoured Brigade came into Army Reserve, and though the Army Commander had not wanted to use the Polish Corps until it was absolutely necessary, the Poles were now ordered to be ready to move at forty-eight hours' notice, and the 2nd Polish Armoured Brigade advanced as far as Pesaro.

The administrative situation had improved since railheads on the Foligno line had been opened at Iesi and Chiaravalle, but the strain on army transport was still very heavy because of the large expenditure of ammunition and the great quantity of bridging and road-making material which the difficult country and the abominable weather made necessary. At Ancona the Engineer Stores Depot was handling every day between six and eight hundred tons of

bridging equipment, and four hundred tons of other Engineer stores. Battle-dress and winter-clothing, in bulk, had also to be brought forward; autumn in the Romagna was no season for summer clothing. The Recovery and Workshops services grew busy with the urgent task of repairing the many lamed and abandoned tanks with which the late battlefields were strewn, and third-line Workshops were brought far further forward than the authorities or their crews had ever considered probable.

Throughout the Army, indeed, there was an heroic intensity of effort that discounted weakness and would not admit to weariness; and with no pause in the fighting the advance continued, and the cold and diminished battalions entered, with gloomy but obdurate hearts, upon their long-protracted Battle of the Rivers.

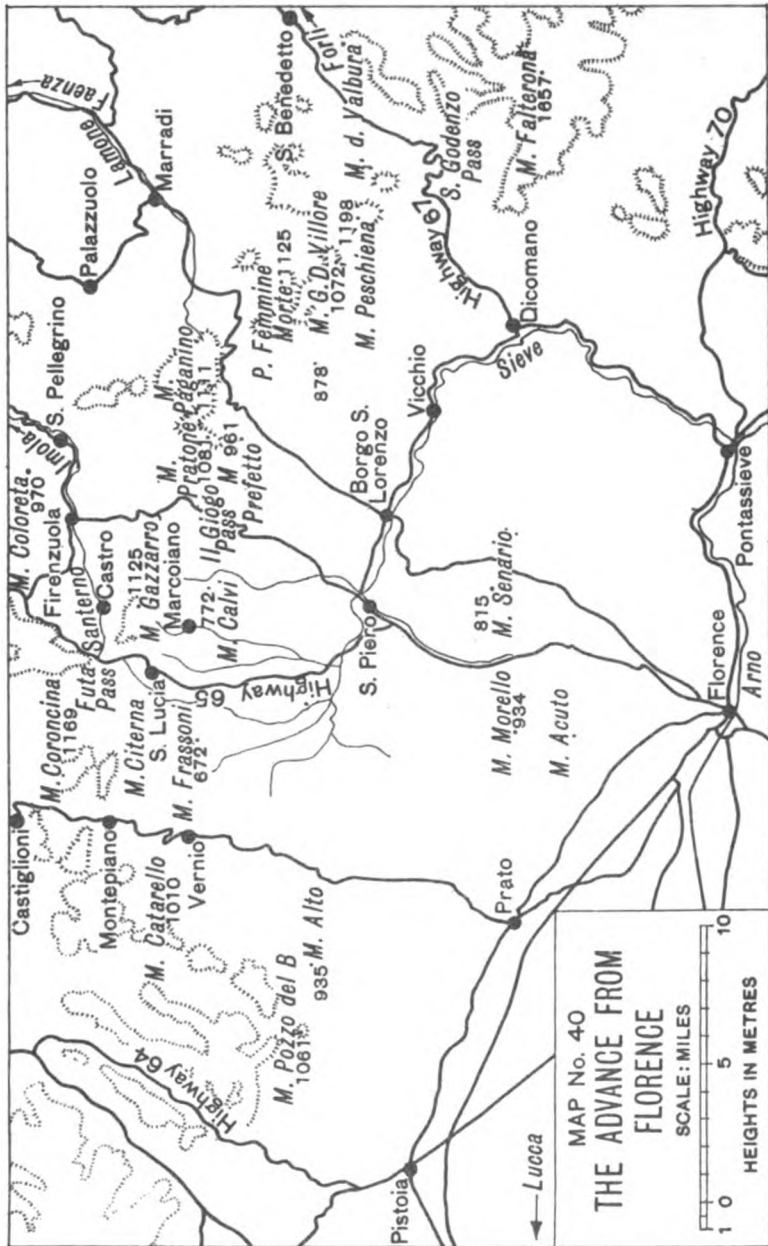
Before relating its cold and bloody events, however, it is necessary to observe the progress of the Fifth Army on the left of the line.

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The Fifth Army's Offensive

FOR several weeks after the Fifth Army reached the Arno on July 18th it engaged in no serious fighting. Its strength had been cruelly reduced by the loss of its veteran divisions to the Seventh Army, and its role became purely defensive. By mid-August, after resting and refitting his troops, General Clark had no more than six divisions capable of offensive operation, and within the original strategy of attack on the Gothic Line his plan of attack was entirely dependent on the hypothetical progress of the Eighth Army. When the new strategy of attack in the Adriatic sector was adopted, however, the Armies became more evenly balanced by the transfer to the Fifth of the British XIIIth Corps, and the extension of the Fifth Army's front to a point about twenty miles east of Florence. General Clark had now to be ready to attack, at twenty-four hours' notice, five days after the British assault.

He decided to make his main effort with his IInd Corps, in conjunction with the British XIIIth—which was supported by Canadian Armoured Regiments—from the eight miles of the Arno between Florence and Pontassieve with the initial purpose of securing the mountains some six or eight miles north and north-east of Florence and thus opening his approach to the Sieve valley and the Gothic Line. The IInd Corps would then continue the attack on the axis of Highway 65, the main road from Florence to



Bologna, with the XIIIth Corps to the eastward on the road from San Piero to Imola. The IVth Corps, between Florence and the coast, would hold the enemy's attention and advance as opportunity occurred.

Late in August the necessary re-grouping of the IInd and IVth Corps had been accomplished, and the XIIIth Corps was gradually advancing east of Florence, when it became apparent that the enemy was already withdrawing from the Arno as a result of his sudden need for additional troops on the Adriatic. Following extensive reconnaissance the IVth Corps, now reinforced by the 6th South African Armoured Division, prepared to cross the river on September 1st, and by darkness on the following day its forward troops, after an unopposed crossing, had made advances of between two and seven miles on a broad front. The advance continued for three days unchecked, but stopped short of Lucca and Pistoia for fear of jeopardising the IInd Corps' hope of surprising the enemy in the main attack north of Florence.

East of Florence the enemy withdrawal was closely followed by the 1st Division of the XIIIth Corps, until by September 3rd it was evident that the 4th Parachute Division was holding Monte Acuto, Monte Morello and Monte Senario: the Fifth Army's preliminary objective, that is. On its right the 8th Indian Division made a considerable advance north of Pontassieve, and further east the 6th Armoured Division opened Highway 70 and probed the enemy's defences in the Sieve valley. In the IInd Corps' narrow zone west of Florence the 88th Division also crossed the Arno, and maintained contact with the enemy.

New plans of attack were formed, and became inoperative when the Germans again withdrew. Against small delaying actions the Army continued its advance until September 13th, when it reached the main defences of the Gothic Line; and before darkness on that day it was painfully clear that the German withdrawal had come to an end.

The Fifth Army plan for breaching the Line required the co-ordinated attack of its three corps, but the critical sector was that part of the line occupied by the IInd Corps and the 1st Division of the XIIIth, between the roads running north and north-east from Prato and Borgo San Lorenzo; a sector that grew narrower as the action advanced to Il Giogo Pass. General Keyes, commanding the IInd Corps, had concentrated his main striking force opposite the Pass, and it was there that the line must be breached. The divisions east and west of the Pass were required to pin down

troops that might otherwise be moved to oppose the main attack, and then to exploit success when the breach had been made. The Pass and its enclosing heights presented a most forbidding aspect. A series of mountains whose peaks rose to a height of 3,000 feet stood shoulder to shoulder from west to east, and their southern slopes were roughly broken into sharp-edged ridges and deep gullies patched irregularly with brush and timber. Had these ramparts been held in strength they might well have been insuperable, but such had been the drain on Kesselring's forces to meet the offensive in the east that by early September he had only two divisions left in the mountain sector, and the 4th Parachute Division had to cover most of the IInd Corps' zone of attack.

The IInd Corps had three divisions forward, all substantially reinforced, and one in reserve; and in addition to its normal artillery each of the attacking divisions would be supported by a group of Corps artillery. The 363rd Infantry of the 91st Infantry Division had reached the approaches to Monti Celli and Monte Altuzzo, on either side of Il Giogo Pass, by September 12th; when it was halted by fire, and a day of confused fighting failed to improve its positions. East of the road to Firenzuola the 85th Division came forward, and a concerted assault was launched on Monte Altuzzo and Monte Veruca (Pt. 878) to the east, while the 363rd Infantry continued its battle for Monti Celli. The Germans were using their mortars and machine-guns with great skill to search the gullies which appeared to offer cover to the advancing troops, and to sweep the open slopes of the mountains. The strength of the defence made it necessary to reinforce the attack, and endeavour to breach the line by sheer force. Every resource was used to concentrate fire against prepared emplacements, and on the reverse slopes of the mountains to prevent the enemy's forward positions from being reinforced. The infantry attacks were as far as possible co-ordinated and simultaneously launched on a broad front, but in general the battle was divided into many small actions which did not so much result in gaining ground as in gradually wearing down the enemy's resistance.

After two days of hard and difficult fighting the 91st and 85th Divisions had gained very little ground, and there was no evidence that the enemy was weakening. In fact, however, the Germans were fighting under conditions of even greater difficulty, and were hard put to it to supply the 11th and 12th Parachute Regiments, which were holding the Pass; while desperate attempts to reinforce them failed to relieve the shell-dazed paratroopers.

Attempting to circumvent the obstruction the 337th Infantry on the right of the division attacked Monte Pratone, to the north-west of Monte Veruca, in conjunction with the Royal Scots of the British 66th Brigade; but failed to capture it. Then on the night of the 16th the 338th Infantry repeated its assault on Monte Altuzzo, and found an exhausted enemy incapable of further resistance. By the morning of the 18th the regiment had broken through the defences of the Pass, and along all the 85th Division's front the opposition collapsed. Monte Verruca was taken by the 339th Infantry, and the 337th captured Monte Pratone. The enemy had been driven from all the dominating heights east of the Pass, and only Monti Celli now guarded the road to Firenzuola. The 363rd Infantry of the 91st Division had since the 15th been battering its defences without apparent effect, but after repeated attack a small detachment of the 3rd Battalion reached the crest of the mountain on the afternoon of the 17th, and timely artillery fire on the reverse slopes broke up a threatened counter-attack. At night the enemy withdrew to the north and the 363rd Infantry completed their occupation of the height. On the following day the 361st Infantry after hard fighting captured Hill 844 to the left, and thus secured the whole western ramparts of the Pass.

General Keyes ordered the 85th and 91st Divisions to pursue their now thoroughly disorganised opponents, who, having no prepared defences behind Il Giogo Pass—where apparently they had not expected attack—were compelled to withdraw to the farther heights beyond the headwaters of the Santerno. The 338th Infantry passed through Firenzuola on the 21st, and by the following day the forward troops of the 339th Infantry were two miles north of Monte Coloreta, and the 337th had crossed the Santerno at the village of San Pellegrino. Opposition increased, however, as the 85th Division approached the opening valley of the Santerno, and it was much harassed by long-range artillery fire from the neighbourhood of the Radicosa Pass. West of the road to Firenzuola the 91st Division had been delayed by excessively difficult country where mule-trains were the only possible transport, but by the 21st the forward troops of the 361st and 363rd Infantry were on the line of the Santerno from Firenzuola westward to the village of Castro San Martino, two miles east of the Futa Pass, and had outflanked its defences. The Division was now ready to move northwards towards the Radicosa Pass.

The hard fighting for Il Giogo Pass had occupied two regiments of the 91st Division, leaving to the 362nd Infantry a four-mile front

from Monte Calvi to Highway 65 and across it. Its task, moreover, was to attack the formidably defended Futa Pass, which on that part of the front was the main stronghold of the Gothic Line and a symbol of its strength. The Todt Organisation had very thoroughly fortified the defile—through which runs the main road to Bologna—with pill-boxes, anti-tank ditches and gun-emplacements, and a plenitude of barbed wire. Neither the Todt Organisation nor the German High Command, however, had anticipated the success of the Americans' ponderous attack on Il Giogo Pass, and the frontal defences were overcome with unlooked-for ease. While the 3rd Battalion of the 362nd Infantry advanced northward along Highway 65, the 2nd Battalion on September 13th attacked Monte Calvi and made steady progress up its long slopes. On the 15th, however, its advance was stopped and the attack was temporarily abandoned; the 1st Battalion was then committed at the village of Marcoiano. Neither battalion had any success until the 17th, when the enemy was compelled to abandon Monte Calvi by his failure to the east, and the 2nd Battalion, following his withdrawal, reached the lower slopes of Monte Gazzarro three days later. The 3rd Battalion in the meantime had reached the anti-tank ditch at Santa Lucia, and after the main defences here had been heavily bombed and shelled by a large force of artillery, the battalion attacked on the 20th and succeeded in crossing the ditch in a concerted attack. The 1st Battalion then prepared to attack Monte Gazzarro while the 3rd Battalion renewed its assault from the south-west; and by nightfall on the 21st the Pass had been entered, and on the following day, with the capture of Hill 952 to the west of the Highway, control of it was assured. After their defeat at Il Giogo the Germans' defence of the Futa Pass had indeed been limited to rearguard action, and the emplacements which had absorbed so many months of labour were overcome in one of the least costly of the battles for the Gothic Line.

While the IInd Corps' main effort was being made by the 85th and 91st Divisions, the 34th Division attacked that part of the Line between Highway 65 and the north road from Prato. Its main objective was the great mass, 3,500 feet high, of Monte Coroncina, in front of which the defences of the Gothic Line lay on the corrugated, river-seamed, and rocky forward slopes of the hills beyond the valley of the Sieve. From September 13th to the 21st the 133rd Infantry engaged in slow battle for Monte Torricella on the left of the road, while the 135th in somewhat easier country assailed Monte Frassinò. Torricella was taken on the 21st, and

two days later the 133rd, having broken the Line, were within a couple of miles of Coroncina. The 135th Infantry had by then taken Monte Citerna from an enemy whose power of resistance was definitely failing. The 168th Infantry, which had been in reserve, was committed between the other regiments, and on the 22nd, it captured Hill 1134 on the ridge eastward of Montepiano, so bringing the whole division into position to attack northward of Monte Coroncina, and north-eastward to the Radicosa Pass.

In the XIIIth Corps' sector the two forward routes were the road from Borgo San Lorenzo to Faenza, and the highway to Forli from Pontassieve. The trackless mountain area between them was held, in no great strength, by the 715th Grenadier Division and the 1028th Grenadier Regiment; there were no fixed defences except in the valleys traversed by the roads. General Kirkman had planned to make his main effort with the 1st Division on the left, where by attacking along the road to Faenza it would be in a position to assist the American IInd Corps' assault on Il Giogo Pass and protect its eastern flank. In the centre the 8th Indian Division was to attack over the mountains north of Vicchio, and endeavour to outflank the enemy holding the Faenza road; and on the right the 6th Armoured Division, astride the Forli road, was to assist the Indian Division on the one side and maintain contact with the Eighth Army on the other.

By darkness on September 12th the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Division was some four miles north-east of Borgo San Lorenzo, with the 21st Brigade of the 8th Indian Division north-east of Vicchio. Behind them the 66th Brigade and the 1st Division's artillery crossed the Sieve that night to launch an attack on Monte Prefetto and Monte Pratone, but an enemy counter-attack from Monte Prefetto delayed the project, and on the following day the American 337th Infantry, advancing through the 66th Brigade, assumed responsibility for the capture of Monte Pratone; where the Germans maintained their resistance until the 18th and so prevented the 66th Brigade's alternative intention of taking Monte Paganino to the right of Pratone. The 3rd Brigade, east of the road to Faenza, fought hard for Monte Giuvigliano until the 18th, when it was relieved by the 2nd Brigade; and as the 715th Grenadier Division began to withdraw, following the American capture of Monte Pratone, both the 2nd and the 66th Brigades made substantial advances to cross the headwaters of the Lamone and move north-eastward over the mountains on each side of the gorge through which the river flows.

The 8th Indian Division in its flanking operation had for its objective the mountain called Femmine Morte, nearly 4,000 feet high, and on September 13th the 21st Brigade stormed the lower hills in front of it where certain fixed defences, alleged to be part of the Gothic Line, were indifferently constructed and lightly held. The 1st/5th Gurkha Rifles of the 17th Brigade attacked the Femmine Morte on the 18th, and captured it after five hours of steady fighting. The 19th Brigade, committed on its right, reached Monte Giogo di Villore while the 6th Armoured Division maintained steady pressure from the south. The enemy withdrawal on the 20th enabled the division to move steadily to the north-east, but the extremely rough and difficult country demanded caution and prohibited speed. The 6th Armoured Division, advancing from Dicomano, had found the country so inhospitable to tanks that it was forced to rely mainly on the 1st Guards Brigade, whose patrols, reaching the San Godenzo Pass on the 14th, had found the road utterly demolished. The enemy retired to Monte Peschiena north of the Pass, which the 3rd Grenadiers captured on the 18th, and the enemy subsequently withdrew from the high ground south and east of the Pass, including the lofty peak of Monte Falterona on the division's boundary with the Eighth Army. While the Engineers were at work on the demolished highway the Division pressed forward to regain and maintain contact with the enemy.

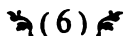
On the left of the Fifth Army the IVth Corps had held the enemy's attention by aggressive patrolling until the IInd Corps reached the main defences of the Gothic Line, the 6th South African Armoured Division on its right being charged with the task of protecting the IInd Corps' left flank. The 11th South African Armoured Brigade, in the heaviest engagement in this sector, stormed a line of mountains about eight miles north of Prato to which the enemy clung with dogged persistence. The 4th/13th Frontier Force Rifles took Monte Alto on the 16th in hand-to-hand fighting, and the Imperial Light Horse and Kimberley Regiment had an equally stern battle for Monte Porro del Bagno to the left. Limited advances in the centre and left of the divisional sector were made by the 12th South African Motorised Brigade and the 24th Guards Brigade. Then, on the 22nd, movement became freer and orders were issued to pursue the withdrawing enemy.

The 1st Armoured Division in the Serchio valley, restricted at first by the necessity of maintaining a reserve to exploit any sudden success by the IInd Corps, became more aggressive on the 17th when it opened an attack through the hills on both sides of the

river, and in two days advanced a couple of miles until it was stopped by strong defences in the gorge of the Serchio north-west of Ponte a Moriana. North of Pescia, against light resistance, the advance went as far as the village of Castelvecchio and Monte Lignana, but the difficulties of supply became very great in more mountainous country. The IInd Corps' success at Il Giogo Pass again required the provision of an armoured reserve to take advantage of a possible break-through, and when Combat Command 'A' of the 1st Armoured Division was released for this hypothetical task, the Division's advance was brought to a halt.

On the coast Task Force 45 occupied Viareggio on the 15th, and advanced some eight miles forward to Forte dei Marmi and the mountains above Pietrasanta. A Combat Team of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force came into line on its right, and assuming responsibility for a five-mile mountainous sector between the coastal plain and the valley of the Serchio, promptly initiated an advance to keep pace with the rapid progress of Task Force 45, but was halted by strong defences on Monte Prano.

In the two weeks of its offensive the Fifth Army had broken through the Gothic Line on a thirty-mile front between Vernio on the road from Prato, to the San Godenzo Pass on the road to Forli; and the IVth Corps on the left had breached the line at several points. Success had been due largely to the skilful execution of the Allied plan of attack that had induced the enemy to move the bulk of his forces to the Adriatic, and to the concentrated power of the Fifth Army's assault against an enemy who had been given no opportunity to anticipate where it would fall, or to reinforce his line when battle had been joined. The extraordinary weight of gun-fire directed against the defences of Il Giogo Pass had not only isolated that part of the Gothic Line, but demoralized its defenders. The IInd Corps Artillery fired nearly 13,000 rounds on September 17th, which was quite a normal day; but despite their overwhelming superiority in fire-power the three American divisions engaged in the five-day battle had lost over five hundred killed and more than 2,000 wounded.

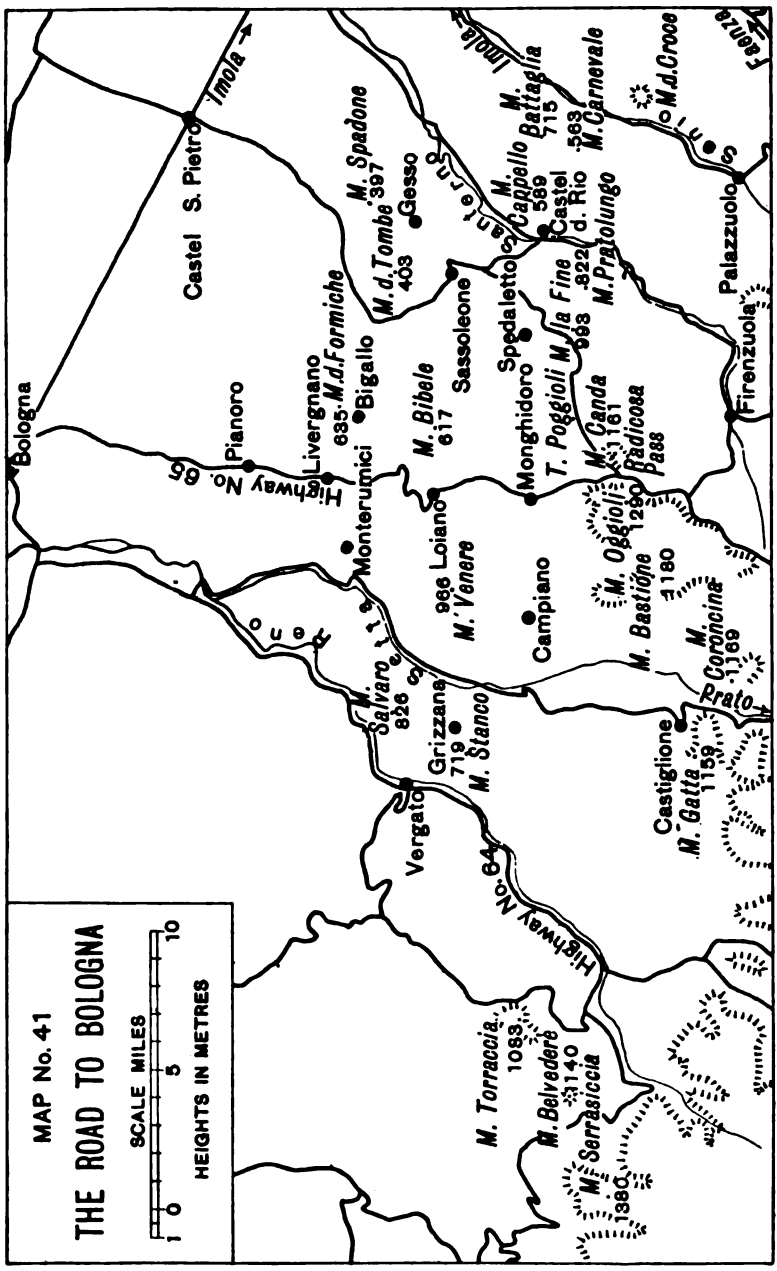


The Road to Bologna

GENERAL CLARK had now to make a choice between fighting northwards to Bologna on the axis of Highway 65, or turning

MAP No. 41

THE ROAD TO BOLOGNA



north-east along the valley of the Santerno and the road to Imola. The capture of Bologna, in addition to providing the Fifth Army with a first-class supply route, would give major assistance to the Allied intention of trapping the German Tenth Army between converging American and British arms south of the Po. By this time, however, the British arm was moving very slowly, and General Clark decided that an advance against Imola would be of more immediate advantage to the Eighth Army. The road was poor, the valley of the Santerno was narrow, steep and rugged; but the German defences here were less developed than on Highway 65, and there was a possibility of surprise. It was therefore decided that while the IInd Corps continued its attack towards the Radicosa Pass, the 88th Division should endeavour to force its way through the valley of the Santerno. From Firenzuola to Imola was thirty miles, and for half of that distance the road and the river lay at the foot of a gorge.

The 350th Infantry, leading the advance, met little opposition for three days, and on the 23rd reached Monte della Croce. Its main difficulties were the extremely rough country and an open right flank, for the British 1st Division was unable to match its pace. The three regiments of the division, abreast on a line from Monte della Croce to Monte la Fine, were fiercely engaged on the 24th, however, when the disorganisation of the enemy was repaired by the arrival of strong reinforcements, and hard fighting ensued before it won possession of the mountains of Pratolungo, Carnevale and Battaglia.

These three heights, closing the valley at Castel del Rio, were the last of the major obstacles on the road to Imola, and the loss of them would deprive the Germans of their strongest positions between Castel del Rio and the Po. The assault was launched at dawn on September 26th, and the 349th Infantry took Pratolungo before darkness, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. On the following day it advanced northward along the ridge from Pratolungo to a point overlooking Castel del Rio, which the 351st Infantry captured on the morning of the 27th. The 351st Infantry, fighting hard for two more days, pressed its advance and captured Monte Cappello north-east of Castel del Rio. The 350th Infantry, in the meanwhile, had made such rapid progress towards Battaglia that the gap between it and the British 1st Division on its right lengthened to nearly five miles, and two battalions of Armoured Infantry from Army reserve had to be brought in to protect its exposed flank. The 2nd Battalion of the 350th Regiment surprised the enemy in

the act of digging-in on Monte Carnevale, and was met by a group of partisans who claimed to be in complete possession of Battaglia. Led by the partisans the battalion at once advanced, and during the afternoon of September 27th reached the crest of the mountain without opposition and prepared for defence. The most important position on the road to Imola had been taken without a struggle, but quickly the enemy gathered all his available troops to recapture the mountain before the 351st Infantry could come abreast of it on the left, and so enable the 88th Division to exploit its unexpected success.

Far in advance of the British troops on its right, and well forward of the Americans on its left, the battalion was in a precarious and exposed position. Within an hour of its arrival on the summit the Germans had begun their counter-attack, and for four days there was bitter fighting for possession of the heights. The Germans had many advantages. Ravines and ridges covered their approach from three sides, and low cloud and heavy rain, persisting almost throughout the battle, prevented observation of their movement and deprived the nearly isolated battalion of the support it could otherwise have been given by artillery and the Air Force. The Germans threw large forces into their counter-attack, and it was only the unbending resolution of the 2nd Battalion that maintained the position until the remainder of the regiment joined it on the 30th, when the capture of Monte Capello by the 351st Infantry and the advance of British troops on the right gave it also a decisive security on its flanks.

Despite their failure to retake Battaglia, the Germans had used the days of fighting for it to reinforce their defences to the north. Troops of the 334th Grenadier Division had been brought from the 34th Division's front; the 44th Grenadier Division opposite the Xth Corps in the mountains had supplied others, and reinforcements had been borrowed from the 715th and 305th Grenadier Divisions opposite the XIIIth Corps, and from the 98th Grenadier Division on the Adriatic. These forces, though insufficient to recapture the mountain, effectively closed the road to Imola, which did not permit the deployment of a large attacking force. For some days the enemy continued his attacks on Battaglia without success, and General Clark revised his plan and resumed his offensive on the main road towards the Radicosa Pass.

The XIIIth Corps had been fighting for the mountain road from Marradi to Palazzuolo. As in the assault on the Gothic Line, the main purpose of the Corps was to assist the major action on its left,

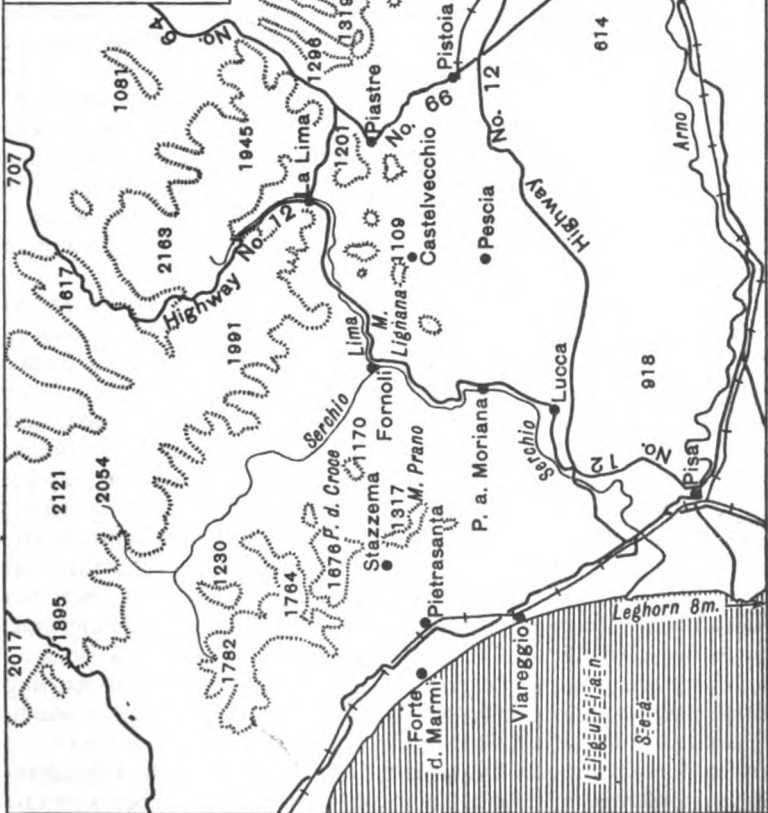
and now its task was to open the road to Palazzuolo so as to prepare a route that might supply a future operation down the valley of the Senio. The enemy made no effort to hold the area south-west of Palazzuolo, but defended the road to it from three heights to the north-east. Palazzuolo was occupied by the 66th Brigade on September 25th, while the 2nd Brigade fought against stubborn resistance for the heights, which were secured with some assistance from the 66th. On the 30th the 1st Division was able to advance and regain contact with the Americans on Battaglia.

The 8th Indian Division on the right had been engaged in a similar operation to clear the minor road from San Benedetto to Marradi, which was dominated by Monte Castelnuovo. The natural difficulties of the country here, increased by heavy rain, were so excessive that many tracks were impassable even to mules, and the fighting was inconclusive until the German 305th Division was compelled to shorten its line and withdraw from Castelnuovo. The road was opened by the end of the month. The 6th Armoured Division, unable to use its tanks in such precipitous country, had made what progress it could along Highway 67 and entered San Benedetto on the 25th; but its progress on the highway was much hampered by the over-riding necessity to protect the open flank of the XIIIth Corps, and because the Xth Corps in the mountains was numerically so weak that it could not adequately cover its own left flank, the 6th Armoured Division had to detach the 1st Derby Yeomanry to patrol Highway 70—the eastward road from Pontassieve—and make the 61st Brigade responsible for the area south-east of Highway 67.

The IInd Corps, in its advance to the Radicosa Pass, was confronted by three mountains about 4,000 feet high on the watershed of the Apennines. Monte Canda, east of the Pass, was the 85th Division's objective; Oggioli on the west was the 91st's responsibility; and the 34th Division was required to take Monte Bastione. The enemy's ability to hold the Pass depended on his power to reinforce the weakened 4th Parachute and 334th Grenadier Divisions, and this was temporarily achieved by withdrawing units from the IVth Corps' front; but the 88th Division's success on Battaglia again upset the Germans' equilibrium, and the recurring need to regroup their forces restricted their defence of the Pass to a series of delaying actions.

The 337th Infantry of the 85th Division made a difficult cross-country march to seize Monte la Fine, west of Castel del Rio, while the 338th and 339th Regiments, moving north-westward against

MAP No. 42
THE ADVANCE WEST OF FLORENCE
 September 1944
 SCALE MILES
 0 10
 HEIGHTS IN METRES
 10 0 10



Canda, fought against determined opposition for the intervening villages of Sambuco and Montarello and the slopes of Torre Poggioli north-east of Canda. Torre Poggioli was captured, and after reduction of the villages tanks could operate on the lateral road that enters the Pass from Castel San Pietro to the north-east. Monte Canda became untenable, and on September 28th the 338th Infantry found its crest unoccupied.

The 91st Division on Highway 65 attacked with two regiments abreast to secure a pair of high, rocky peaks that covered the approach to Monte Oggioli, and securing both on the 26th, was in position to launch a co-ordinated attack. To begin with progress was slow, the enemy's resistance strong; but the opposition dwindled and vanished, and by September 29th, in rain and fog, the 91st Division was two miles north of the Pass. It appeared that the enemy had withdrawn his main forces to a line running through Monghidoro.

Before the 34th Division on the left the German 334th Grenadier Division fell back to Monte Coroncina, and then fought a series of defensive battles as the Americans drove forward to Monte Bastione. Despite the extreme difficulties of the ground and their need to rely for several days on mule trains, the divisional objective was secured before noon on September 28th, and a further advance made to the village of Fornelli three miles to the north.

The IVth Corps, deprived of the greater part of the 1st Armoured Division and unable to mount a general offensive, continued to advance against an enemy who was forced to give ground in the west while he strove to reinforce and maintain his positions in front of Bologna. Task Force 92—consisting of the 370th Infantry and part of the 1st Armoured Division—passed through the Gothic Line in the valley of the Serchio and at Lucchio cut Highway 12, which had been the enemy's main line of lateral communication. Within the sector of the 6th South African Armoured Division the most notable advance was on the right where the 11th Armoured Brigade, protecting the IIInd Corps' left flank, advanced along the road from Prato as far as Monte Gatta, south-west of Castiglione; while the 24th Guards Brigade and the 12th Motorised Brigade, following the retreating enemy along Highways 66 and 64, reached Piastre, seven miles north-west of Pistoia and the village of Collina. The Guards Brigade then moved to the right flank to support the attack from Prato, and by the 30th the 1st Scots Guards, fighting on the upper slopes of Monte Catarello, were abreast of the foremost troops of the 34th Division. This narrowing of the South African

sector required the redistribution of other units of the IVth Corps, and the moiety of the 1st Armoured Division which had been operating with Task Force 92 took over the advance on Highway 64, while the 370th Infantry, having entered La Lima, thrust north-westward along Highway 12. The Brazilians reached Fornoli at the junction of the Lima and the Serchio on the 30th, and Stazzema under the tall slopes of Pania della Croce.

By the end of the month the Fifth Army appeared to be in a favourable position, but certain developments within the last few days were already undoing its seeming advantage. The Eighth Army's offensive was moving more slowly, and the IVth Corps on the other flank had been unable to hold the attention of all the German units originally opposing it. Kesselring was therefore able to shift more troops into the area south of Bologna to oppose the spear-head of the IInd Corps, and success now clearly depended on the ability of that Corps to reach the Po before the growing concentration should become insuperable; but already there were four divisions in front of it, with additional troops from three others, and the Americans, who had been fighting for three weeks in most difficult circumstances, were understandably weary. The weather was growing worse, and low-lying rain-clouds in the mountains could nullify or reduce the Fifth Army's numerical superiority in the air and in their gun-lines.

Though the IInd Corps had crossed the watershed of the Apennines and lay on their northern slopes looking down to Bologna, twenty-four miles away, the intricately seamed and rugged mountains allowed the enemy to develop successive lines of defence along ridges and ravines running transversely across the general fall of the ground. On such a line through Monghidoro the Germans stood at the beginning of October, and already with Italian labour they were fortifying a second and stronger line some three or four miles behind it through the village of Loiano. About the same distance behind Loiano there was a third line through Livergnano, and behind that a fourth through Pianoro. Against each of these lines the IInd Corps would be compelled to re-group for a major attack. On October 1st General Keyes employed all four of his divisions on a front extending over sixteen miles, and a day of autumn sunshine enlivened their prospect; but for the rest of the week they faced cold wind and rain and fog. Despite very strong artillery support the 91st Division, starting from about a mile south of Monghidoro, made only small gains on the first day, but late on the second the Monghidoro line was breached and the enemy fell

back to Loiano. The 85th Division, in a series of bitter but successful engagements, broke through the Monghidoro line at Spedaletto, and maintaining its advance in the most resolute fashion approached the slopes of Monte Bibeles and a series of peaks to the right of it, all on or beyond the Loiano line, by October 4th. On the IInd Corps' right flank the 88th Division, after a costly engagement, entered Sassoleone, and on the left the 34th Division captured Monte Venere west of Loiano.

The first phase of the resumed offensive had within four days gained approximately four miles of ground, and though the American losses had been heavy they were not serious enough to impair the four divisions' fighting strength. At two points the enemy's second lines of defence had already been breached, but in the central area below Bologna the Germans were steadily reinforcing their defences.

During the next four days the rapidly advancing 85th Division was roughly halted on its right flank, where hard fighting brought only meagre gains, though on its left the enemy was driven back to Monte della Formiche on his third line, while to the left of that the 91st Division, taking the lead in its turn, approached the terrible escarpment at Livergnano, where a sheer rock wall some three miles long rose over a thousand feet high. By October 9th a company of the 361st Infantry had fought its way into Livergnano, but was trapped there, and two others were firmly held above Bigallo to the east. The battle for the escarpment had still to be won. North of Monte Venere the 34th Division advanced stubbornly but slowly towards Monterumici, while on the right the 88th Division, after equally laborious and costly fighting, was stopped at Gesso and south of Monte delle Tombe.

In the second phase of the October offensive the pace had been slower than during the first four days, and the IInd Corps was now confronted by stronger defences. The problems of supply through such abominable country grew daily more complex, and the infantry, fighting sullenly in the mountain fog, had had but little support from the air.

In the third phase of the offensive, from October 10th to 15th, the Americans had the uncommon advantage of fine weather which allowed their Air Force and artillery to give their maximum support to the infantry, but the Germans, though by now their forces were in many places fragmentary and confused, had the compensatory advantage of a line of great natural strength. The IInd Corps again made progress, but more slowly than before and at a heavier cost. By the 15th it had broken through the Livergnano line except on

the left, where the Germans still held their ground at Monterumici, and their foremost troops were only ten miles from Bologna. But the Corps had suffered 2,500 casualties in the last six days' fighting, and its loss of regimental officers was disproportionately high and increasingly serious. The expenditure of ammunition had been prodigal—the 91st Divisional Artillery in the battle for the Livergnano escarpment had fired 24,000 rounds in three days—but the effect of continuous and heavy bombardment had been to demoralise many of the German infantry, and only the remarkable German capacity for patching together the broken fragments of many units, to form a coherent line out of seeming chaos, had maintained a continuous front. But the Germans were still reinforcing their defence, and General Clark was unable to reinforce his attack.

On the left of the IInd Corps the 6th South African Armoured Division, reinforced and under direct control of the Fifth Army, had been concentrated on the road from Prato and in the valley of the Setta. Its advance had been no easier than that of the American divisions. In the first days of October the 24th Guards Brigade had fought fiercely for Monte Catarello, and thereafter the Division's main effort had been to gain control of the mountains between the Setta and the Reno. There was much bitter fighting that culminated on October 13th, when in a set attack following a fifteen-minute bombardment, the 12th South African Motor Brigade, supported by the Guards Brigade on the right, attacked Monte Stanco and took their objective with an estimated loss to the enemy—troops of the 94th Grenadier and the 16th Panzer Grenadier Divisions were their opponents—of five hundred casualties. The village of Grizzana was occupied on the following day, with some high ground to the north-east, but it was impossible to continue the advance to the proximate height of Monte Salvaro until an adequate system of supply had been established. A series of well-prepared and stiffly fought engagements led to the occupation of Solvaro on the 23rd; and this advance was sufficient to protect the IInd Corps' left flank, but the South Africans themselves had now a long and exposed front of some fifteen miles.

Protection of the IInd Corps' other flank on the east had become the XIIIth Corps' principal task—over-riding its projected attack towards Faenza—when General Clark decided to advance directly on Bologna. At the beginning of October the 1st Guards Brigade had been required to relieve the 350th Infantry of the 88th Division, who were still fighting off German counter-attacks on Monte

Battaglia, and this was effected under cover of night—all approaches to the mountain were within sight of the enemy—despite the continuance of his savage opposition. The arrival of the 78th Division permitted also the relief of the 351st Infantry on Monte Cappello; which also could be approached only by night. Supplies had to be carried forward by mule-train, and as the IInd Corps had difficulty in finding pack-mules for its own requirements, the 8th Indian and the 1st Divisions had to supply draught animals from their own scanty resources. These reliefs, when completed, reduced the 88th Division's front by nearly six miles; and while the Guards Brigade held Battaglia, and the 78th Division's 38th Brigade defended Cappello, the 11th Brigade was ordered to attack north towards Monte Spadone to release the troops of the 88th Division who were engaged on the Gesso ridge. The extreme difficulties of supply and the persistence of German counter-attacks permitted only an advance to limited objectives, but after confused and heavy fighting the 11th Brigade established an outpost line below Monte la Pieve, a hill-top village south-east of Gesso, and released more troops of the 88th Division for the main attack. After the Guards on Battaglia had repulsed four assaults on October 12th, the Germans at last abandoned their costly and stubborn attempts to retake the mountain.

On the remainder of the XIIIth Corps' front the main purpose was to occupy as far as possible the enemy's attention and assist the 78th Division. The burden of fighting fell chiefly on the 1st Division, which was advancing down the valley of the Senio, and three times the 3rd Brigade captured Monte Ceco and three times was driven off before the height was finally secured on October 9th. After ten days of fighting it was relieved by the 2nd Brigade, which thrust forward against the 715th Grenadier Division's next line of delay, and made ready to take the remaining heights south of Battaglia. On the road to Faenza the 8th Indian Division made some progress south of the Senio against an enemy well supported by artillery and mortars, and on Highway 67 the 6th Armoured Division, much reduced in strength by the diversion of the 1st Guards Brigade to Battaglia and the 26th Armoured Brigade to the Xth Corps' open flank on the left, also made some minor advances. There was nothing to be gained by a major offensive in this sector, for the success or failure of the Army's offensive depended wholly on the ability of the IInd Corps to maintain the impetus of its attack towards Bologna.

And now, though Bologna lay only ten miles away, confidence

was dwindling. The advance made in the third phase of the offensive had been meagre, the troops were nearing exhaustion, and the Germans were still strengthening the lines which confined the salient. A shortage of ammunition was imminent, moreover, and it was estimated that if the daily expenditure of shells continued at its present rate the Army would be compelled by November to assume the more passive role of defence. Unless an early decision could be reached in the battle the inevitable result was stalemate, and so without pause or delay orders were issued on October 13th for a final effort to be made, and made again in the centre of the IInd Corps' front. The confusion discovered in the enemy's order of battle opposite the 85th Division, and the capture of Monte delle Formiche, suggested a weakness in this area and General Keyes, having brought two regiments of the 34th Division east of Highway 65, proposed to commit them in a narrow zone directly to the north of the mountain. By October 16th the Corps was ready for its next effort—but circumstance postponed it till another year.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLE OF THE RIVERS

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The Abominable Autumn

THE southern part of the delta of the Po is man-made. Originally a swamp, it has been reclaimed by the arduous work of seven centuries, and the many rivers and streams that cross it have been canalized, and confined where necessary, between high flood-banks. The territory immediately in front of the Eighth Army was a broad and level expanse bounded on the east by the sea, on the west and north by the river Reno, and on the south by Highway 9—the old Roman road, the Via Emilia—which runs as straight as a ruler from Rimini to Bologna under the steeply descending ridges of the Apennines. The area was geographically divisible into five sectors of varying characteristics. Along the coast there was a narrow belt of sand dunes and pine woods; behind that a belt of reclaimed swamp which could be flooded by stopping the pumps which normally kept it dry; a central part, extending almost as far as the highway, which was liable to flood after heavy rain; a drier and well-drained segment on either side of the highway; and south of the highway, the foot-hills of the Apennines, the spurs of which fell abruptly into the alluvial plain and afforded good observation over the road and the adjoining country. Across these five sectors ran thirteen major rivers. South of the highway the rivers themselves were not serious obstacles, but the valleys in which they flowed were so steep-sided that their heights might be a formidable barrier. North of the highway rivers were the dominating features of the landscape, and their flood-banks were sometimes built as high as forty feet above the plain. There were very few fords, and between the rivers were innumerable lesser water-courses, also canalized,

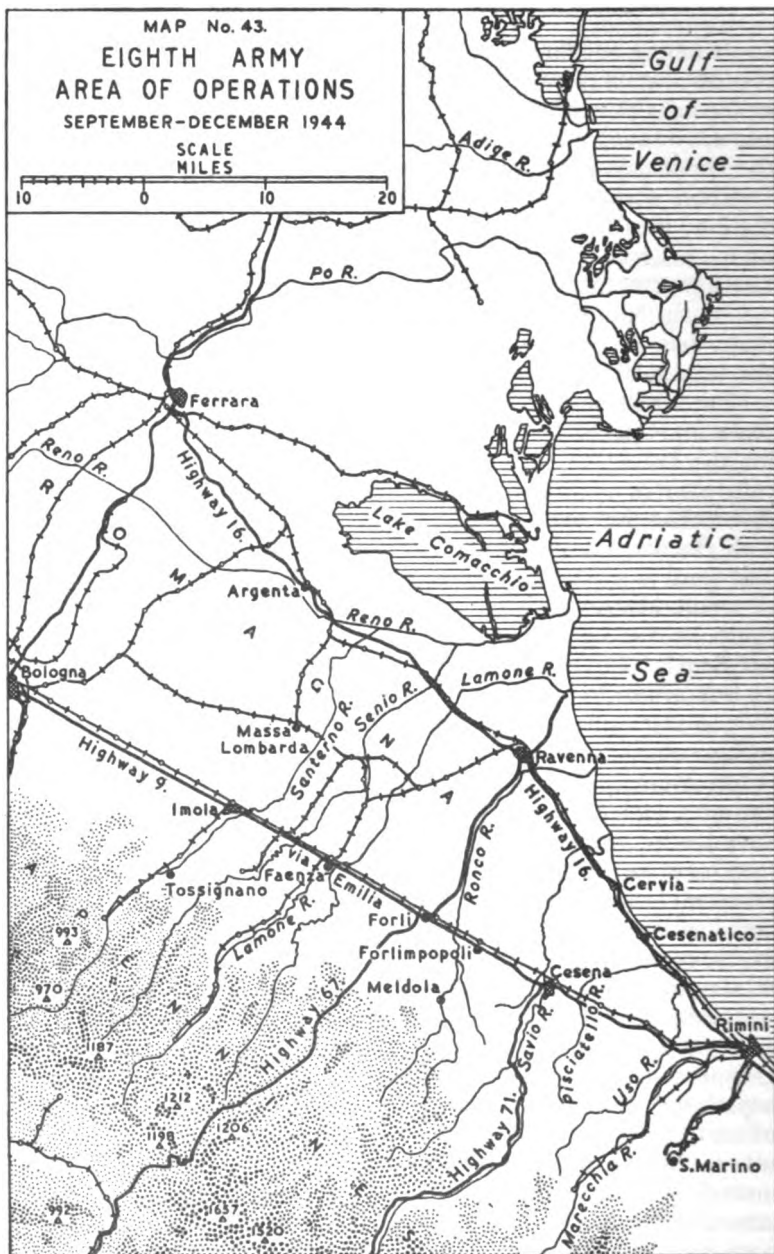
and running roughly parallel to the main streams. The soil and subsoil was clay which in dry weather was quickly pulverised; under light rain became at once greasy, slippery and treacherous; and after heavy rain dissolved into a morass in which men sank to their boot-tops and wheels to their axles.

There were only two main roads, the Via Emilia, and the coastal highway that runs from Rimini to Ravenna, Argenta, and Ferrara; both of which on their embankments were safe from flooding. There was, however, a sufficiency of lateral roads, the best of which ran along the flood-banks of the main rivers; but the many minor roads between the rivers offered local communication only, and led nowhere outside their immediate area.

The whole country was thickly populated, and the innumerable farms and villages made excellent strongholds and sniping positions for the enemy. It is a wine-growing country, and the vines are cultivated in high trellises that grow like screens to cut off the view ahead, but often allowed the Germans to enfilade our advance with machine-guns sited to fire down one leafy corridor, and anti-tank guns to shoot along the one behind. By systematic destruction of small bridges and culverts the forward movement of heavy equipment, and also of tanks, was habitually and seriously impeded. A bridgehead over a river had always to be held for a long while by infantry without any support from anti-tank weapons, since the six-pounder anti-tank gun was too heavy to be carried across a serious obstacle without help from the Engineers. The infantry, in these circumstances, had to rely chiefly on the Piat gun for anti-tank defence until a drill was devised for dismantling the six-pounder and man-handling it.

There was little that generalship could do to solve the tactical problems which a masterly agricultural economy had created, and the delta suited the enemy's purpose of imposing delay upon our advance as well as had the endless mountains of the peninsula. A sea-borne landing on the coast might appear to have offered release from stalemate among the rivers, but in fact it was impracticable even if landing-craft for such an operation had been available; and they were not. Only superiority in numbers and a great superiority in fire-power could overcome the disadvantages with which the Army was confronted, and as time went on and the troops became more and more tired, the quantity of artillery ammunition that was needed became larger and larger, until finally the offensive power of the Army could almost be measured by counting shells.

MAP No. 43.
EIGHTH ARMY
AREA OF OPERATIONS
SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 1944



It was on September 21st that the 1st Canadian Division crossed the Marecchia near the coast and took Rimini with its Tiberius bridge intact. On the next day, the 2nd New Zealand Division passed through, and after heavy fighting approached the line of the Fontanaccia four miles north-west of Rimini. The 4th British Division crossed the Marecchia opposite Santa Justina, and on the 23rd the Canadian Armoured Division went through, and closed on the left of the New Zealanders. The 4th British and 1st Canadian Divisions were then withdrawn into Corps reserve.

On the Vth Corps front the approaches to the Marecchia were under heavy fire and it was not until the 23rd that the tanks of the 1st Armoured Division were able to join the infantry who had led the attack south of Santarcangelo. The 46th Division, replacing the 56th which had gone into reserve, attacked in conjunction with the 4th Indian in a westerly direction towards the ridge running south from Poggio Berni to Montebello, but both divisions were hotly counter-attacked and when night fell on the 23rd they were still fighting bitterly and short of their objectives. The Germans fought to impose delay, but on the 25th the Canadian Armoured Division secured a small bridgehead across the river Uso north of San Vito, and held it against counter-attack while the 1st British Armoured Division also won a bridgehead where the Uso is crossed by Highway 9. The ridge from Poggio Berni to Monte Bello was cleared in a series of resolute and costly engagements.

As the enemy withdrew across the Uso, his intentions became clearer. He was apparently occupying strong delaying positions with his main force on the plain covering the two highways and only one division opposite the Vth Corps' left flank. He had released three tired divisions from the line, but the elements of the eight that remained were fighting well despite the loss of seven hundred more prisoners to the Eighth Army, which brought the total number taken in September to nearly 9,000. He had prudently withdrawn his two divisions in the mountains opposite the Xth Corps at the same time as he retired across the Uso. Having lost the high ground south of Savignano, he could not make a prolonged stand anywhere below the Savio, and it was doubtful whether his defence of that indifferent line would be serious or protracted; for there was at this time certain evidence, and much rumour, of the Germans' intention to abandon Italy altogether. In the north there were considerable troop movements, and our Intelligence reports agreed with the statements of prisoners and deserters that such was the

enemy's new policy. It was certain, however, that he would continue to delay our advance in the Adriatic sector as long as possible, for on his ability to do so would rest all his hope of withdrawing in good order.

If under sustained pressure the Germans retired it was the Army Commander's intention to maintain the advance to Ravenna and Ferrara with the Canadian Corps and the Vth Corps respectively; if, however, they stood to fight on a strongly defensible line the Polish Corps would have to be brought in on the right and the Army would attack with three Corps forward. Within a day or two it became evident that the second policy would have to be adopted, and on the 29th the Polish Corps began to advance forward to relieve the 2nd New Zealand Division on the coast. Though the enemy had found it impossible to hold the line of the Uso—which was crossed on a broad front—he was able, with the assistance of heavy rain, to settle down on the Fiumicino. Rain fell steadily from September 29th to October 2nd, and operations in the coastal sector came to a standstill. All the fords over the Marecchia and the Uso had become impassable. The 56th Division, after having been checked below Savignano, was able to close on the hugely swollen Fiumicino, where it is crossed by Highway 9, when the Germans retired to conform with their withdrawal on the coast. By the 30th they had abandoned Montalbano and gone back across the Fiumicino there; but in the foothills to the south they were still fighting stubbornly west of the river. On the night of the 30th the Vth Corps attacked on a broad front, but strong resistance and the abominable weather prevented both the 56th and 46th Divisions from crossing the river, though the 4th Indian Division succeeded in taking Monte Reggiano and Borghi. The division, which had been fighting continuously in very difficult country since August 25th, was now relieved by the 10th Indian Division; and the advance was continued to capture San Martino and bring the left flank of the Corps up to the Fiumicino. This was successfully accomplished by October 5th.

Farther to the left the Xth Corps now appeared on the fringe of the offensive. The Corps, which had been almost isolated in the mountains, having little contact with the Fifth Army on one side or the Vth Corps on the other, had also been serving as milch-cow to the Eighth Army. Despite the drain on its strength, however, it had fulfilled its role of containing the enemy forces opposing it and maintaining contact with them in their gradual withdrawal. The Corps now stood at the head-waters of the Savio, but with no

strength to undertake a swift advance down the valley and deliver a flank attack on the forces opposing the Vth Corps.

On the enemy's side, indeed, there was now a disconcerting look of stability. The shallow streams of summer had become rushing torrents; there were floods from south of Cesenatico almost as far north as Ravenna; reinforcements were arriving for depleted divisions; and the line of the Pisciatello was being fortified. In these circumstances Kesselring found it possible to release from the Adriatic sector some of his infantry reserves. The 71st Division went to Istria, while the 44th Jaeger Division from opposite the Xth Corps, and part of the 98th Division and the 100th Mountain Regiment, were sent to strengthen the central front which was now much endangered by the Fifth Army's advance. His nine remaining divisions held the eastern front with apparent firmness while the Eighth Army wrestled with administrative problems. The appalling rain which had lamed the attack had also clogged the administrative wheels; and the Army was short of covered accommodation, hospitals, workshops, warm clothing, air-fields and hard standing for the winter. Main Headquarters of the Eighth Army had been flooded out on September 29th, and not until some days later could its caravans be dragged from the engulfing mud. Accommodation was found in Rimini—though Rimini was without water, light and drainage—for Main Headquarters and two hospitals; and the situation grew a little easier when at the beginning of October railheads were opened at Pesaro and Cattolica. In these circumstances, with the Army unhappily poised on the watery threshold of the Romagna, its command passed to General McCreery, formerly commanding the Xth Corps, and General Leese was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Land Forces in South-East Asia.

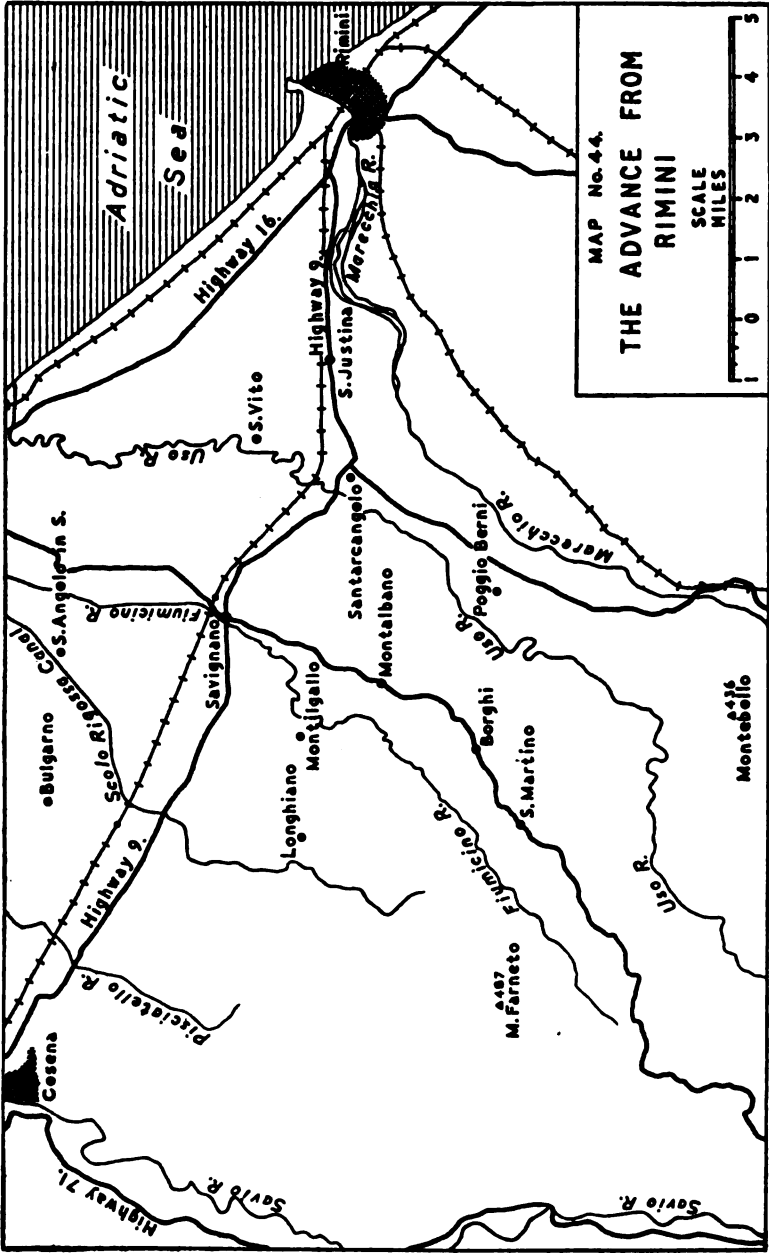
General McCreery's first decision was to cancel the forward movement of the Polish Corps on the coast, and move it into the Xth Corps sector; there, on the axis of Highway 71, it might bring pressure to bear on the enemy in an area where he was thin on the ground, and where a successful attack would outflank the forces opposing the main body of the Eighth Army in the plain. Considerable difficulty was experienced, however, in the movement of the Polish Corps, and it was not until October 16th that any of its formations were in position to fight; and by then the main Army south of Highway 9 had made considerable progress and almost reached the line of the Savio and Highway 71. It was therefore decided that the Poles should advance across country against Forlimpopoli and Forli on Highway 67. Highway 67 was the axis

of advance of the 6th Armoured Division in the XIIIth Corps, and within the Fifth Army's boundary; but it was impossible to estimate its rate of progress.

Resumption of the general attack in the plains had been prevented by the flooded Fiumicino—now thirty feet in breadth between high flood-banks broader than the river—and the Canadians had taken advantage of delay to re-group; but the Vth Corps' left wing made progress in the foothills south of Highway 9, and on October 7th the 10th Indian Division stormed Monte Farneto, taking the defenders by surprise, and threatening to turn all the German defences between there and the highway. Furious counter-attacks against Monte Farneto were successfully repelled, and the 46th Division took the ridge running south-west from Montegallo. The weather grew worse and for two days prevented exploitation of these successes, but on the night of the 9th the Indian Division took Monte Spaccato north of Farneto in a silent attack, and next day the 46th Division captured Longiano. To counter this serious threat to his southern flank the enemy was obliged to bring a battle group of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division from the Romagna into the foothills to prevent the outflanking of all his defences east of the Savio.

The Army Commander was confirmed in his opinion that only in this sector, in the foothills and astride the highway, could progress now be expected, and on October 7th he decided to make his main attack here. As usual, there were difficulties in the new deployment necessary, for two brigades of the 56th Division were so weak that they had to be withdrawn immediately, and the 78th Division, which was to have joined the Vth Corps, had now been transferred to the Fifth Army. It was decided, however, that the Canadian Corps could extend its front about a thousand yards to the south of Highway 9 to relieve the 56th Division, and advance on the axis of the highway towards Cesena with the 2nd New Zealand Division as its flank guard on the right, the composite forces of the Canadian Armoured Division watching the flooded areas near the coast, and the Canadian Infantry Division making the westward thrust. On the Vth Corps front the 10th Indian and 46th Divisions would continue their attacks in the foothills with the object of crossing the Savio at Cesena.

The Army Commander's plan was, in fact, a succession of outflanking movements: as the river-obstacles were reached the Vth Corps crossed the upper waters, and as each river-line was turned in the foothills, the enemy was obliged to withdraw before



the continuous pressure of the Canadian Corps in the plains. By October 10th the enemy had begun to retire to a canal called Scolo Rigossa in the centre of his front, and two days later the 1st Canadian Division, advancing along the highway, had made contact with strong rearguards on that line. Two days later, after heavy fighting, it was in possession of Bulgaric, a thousand yards beyond the canal, while the New Zealanders on the right were fighting strongly for Sant' Angelo in Salute. The two forward divisions of the Vth Corps had been fighting in the meanwhile to turn the line of the Scolo Rigossa, and after a series of most vigorous actions they dislodged the enemy from commanding heights and compelled him to retire with little further resistance to the line of the river Pisciatello. Only in the coastal sector, where he still clung to the bank of the Fiumicino, did the enemy delay his withdrawal.

Without a pause the Vth Corps fought on to turn the new position on the Pisciatello, and advance north along the foothills parallel to the Savio towards Cesena. A few days of fine weather had given the Desert Air Force the opportunity to destroy all but one of the bridges across the Savio, and the enemy fought stubbornly to maintain his position in spite of its tactical danger. By the 20th, however, after a vigorous parallel attack by the 46th and 10th Indian Divisions, Cesena was entered in force. The Canadian Corps in the meanwhile had crossed the Pisciatello, and continuing to advance with the 1st Canadian Division on the left, the 2nd New Zealand Division on the right, had closed on the line of the Savio. The enemy withdrew also on the coast. Cesenatico was occupied, and by the 21st the German line ran from a point between Cesenatico and Cervia through Pisignano and Borgo Pipa to the Savio and south along it.

On this line the enemy was clearly prepared to stand, and though determined efforts were made to dislodge him before he found a proper foothold, they were unavailing except on the left where the 4th British Division, relieving the 46th according to plan, crossed the river in the southern outskirts of Cesena, and getting tanks across by means of a chain of tank-bridges, held the bridge-head against repeated counter-attacks; and south again, ten miles away, near Monte Falcino, where the 10th Indian Division, undetected by the Germans, crossed and rapidly enlarged their bridgehead. This was the important crossing, because it would enable the Division once more to outflank the enemy.

The Polish Corps, engaged in a wide outflanking movement, had also made progress. Its axis of advance had been the secondary

road from San Piero in Bagno, at the head of the Savio valley, to Rocca San Casciano where the lesser road meets Highway 67, the road to Forli which follows the valley of the Montone. The Poles advanced against scattered opposition, that gradually hardened, as far as the difficult hills a few miles south-west of Rocca San Casciano, and Monte Grosso between the rivers Bidente and Rabbi.

The successful operations of mid-October had brought the Eighth Army twenty miles nearer to Bologna, but this gratifying advance was somewhat discounted by the inevitable advantage that accrued to the Germans in that their defensive line in the hills was appreciably shortened. By this time the Fifth Army was seriously threatening Bologna, and all the reinforcements available to the enemy were needed to oppose its advance; but reinforcements unfortunately could be diverted to the Fifth Army's front while strength still remained—on the shorter front—to meet the Vth Corps' unexpected thrust. The Eighth Army's administrative problems remained as difficult as ever, and much of the new equipment that was arriving—such as heavier tanks, flame-throwers, self-propelled guns and engineers' assault equipment—was of little use because as usual it had arrived without spare parts. The burden of movement, however, was somewhat lightened by the opening of railheads at Riccione and Fano and at Rimini on the 23rd. But more important than the persisting problems of supply, was the general necessity for revising strategy.

This revision necessarily arose from the grudging acknowledgment that the final destruction of the German armies in Italy would have to be postponed until the spring. Until then it would be necessary to keep their forces fully extended, to secure winter quarters for our own troops, and to advance the Allied line so far as to give the forces for a conclusive assault the proper positions from which to start their attack. The achievement of even a diminished purpose such as this would not be easy, for it seemed that no ponderable reinforcement could be expected in the theatre, and our depleted armies were now faced with a new commitment: it was necessary to find troops for the occupation of Greece, and on October 20th the Greek Mountain Brigade was withdrawn from the Canadian Corps, and immediately afterwards was followed by the 4th Indian Division. The Canadian Corps, which had been in action since the end of August, was sorely in need of rest; the 56th Division and the 1st Armoured Division had ceased to be operational owing to the lack of infantry; and the Xth Corps was

almost without troops. A further and unexpected difficulty appeared when it became known that there was a grave shortage of ammunition. The original allotment for October had allowed for the expenditure of a hundred rounds per gun per day for nine days, and sixty-five rounds per gun for twenty-two days, for field artillery—and fifty-five rounds a day, for the thirty-one days, for medium artillery; but this was reduced, and reduced again, to twenty-five rounds per gun per day for field artillery, and fifteen for medium and heavy guns.

In spite of all handicaps, however, it was imperative that an offensive towards limited objectives should be maintained, and the desired goals were Bologna for the Fifth Army and Ravenna for the Eighth; or failing them, such nearby positions as would provide a suitable starting line for battle in the spring. A plan was devised for the capture of Bologna. The Fifth Army was to suspend active operations, withdraw two divisions for rest, and encourage the enemy to suppose that it had been obliged by weakness to assume the defensive; meanwhile with all the resources at its command the Eighth Army would continue its offensive towards Ravenna in order to draw hostile forces from the American front and give the Fifth Army an opportunity to surprise a diminished enemy by sudden resumption of attack. For its immediate purpose the Eighth Army could use only the Polish Corps and the diminished Vth; the Canadian Corps would go into reserve on the 27th, when the Vth Corps would be given the 12th Lancers for protection of its right flank, and the remainder of the Canadian front would be entrusted to an *ad hoc* formation, called Porterforce, consisting of an Armoured Car Regiment and two Armoured Regiments supported by three regiments of artillery and some Engineers.

From October 21st, when the Eighth Army had reached the line of the Savio, its limited offensive was maintained until November 26th, when there came a brief pause to prepare for resumption of the general offensive on December 2nd. During these strenuous weeks the weather grew steadily worse but the Army advanced another ten miles over three more rivers to the line of the Lamone.

The Kresowa Division of the Polish Corps launched an attack against a strong position on the western wall of the valley of the Rabbi on the 23rd, but made little progress until the 25th. The 4th Division's desperate efforts to enlarge its bridgehead across the Savio, in the southern outskirts of Cesena, were strenuously opposed, and when under heavy rain the river rose four feet on the 21st all the temporary bridges were washed away. The seeming deadlock

was broken by the 10th Indian Division in the foothills. Attacking on a broad front on the night of the 21st, it captured a pair of mountains at the southern end of the watershed between the valleys of the Savio and Ronco, and by this menace to his flank compelled the enemy to withdraw, and so enabled the 4th Division to break out of its bridgehead on the 24th. North of Cesena the Canadians had been fighting hard for small gains and established bridgeheads over the Savio; and light forces on the coast had passed through Cervia. Then before dawn on the 24th the enemy withdrew swiftly all along the line.

Polish patrols advanced almost as far as Predappio Nuova—Mussolini's birth-place—and the Vth Corps, closing on the Ronco from Highway 9 to south of Meldola, thrust boldly across the river in four places. Suddenly, however, the river rose under violent rain, the transpontine troops were isolated, and when the Germans attacked them with tanks the 4th Division lost the better part of four companies. North and south of Meldola the 10th Indian Division established two small bridgeheads which the enemy made little attempt to oppose. The Canadian Corps advanced to the Ronco in the sector immediately to the north of the railway line from Rimini, but on the right made slower progress. In the centre of the plain, three miles east of the Ronco, they crossed the Bevano and crossed it also near the coast; but in a gale of wind and rain the dykes between the Bevano and the Savio collapsed, and there was wide flooding. The rain continued for several days, the floods spread, bridges were washed away or became impassable, and operations were halted in a waste of waters. The Canadian Corps was relieved, however, and rescued from the floods. On October 28th the 12th Lancers took command of the sector on the Ronco between the Rimini railway and Bagnolo, while Porterforce assumed responsibility for the right flank from Bagnolo to the coast. On the left the Poles made a further advance, north-eastward from Predappio Nuova, and reduced the gap between their Corps and the Vth to a narrow strip; but the Army could make no further progress until bridges had been built to enable tanks and field artillery to follow the forward infantry.

In addition to protecting the Vth Corps' right flank, the formation known as Porterforce had the seemingly ambitious task of capturing and occupying Ravenna. It was obvious that its own weight was insufficient for such a purpose, but the Vth Corps' westward advance on Highway 9 would outflank the obstacles in front of Ravenna and make it possible, once the Ronco had been

crossed, to move northwards between the Ronco and the Lamone to threaten Ravenna from the rear.

On the left the near approach of the Polish Corps to Highway 67 required some revision of its plans, and the westward extension of its boundary into the XIIIth Corps' area. The Poles' objective was Forli at the junction of Highway 9 and Highway 67, and its fall appeared to be imminent. It was proposed to put the Carpathian Division astride Highway 67 and as far west of it as Monte Marzanella, some four miles north-west of Rocca di San Casciano, but the bad weather, landslides on the highway, and the first winter snow prevented resumption of operations in this sector until November 6th.

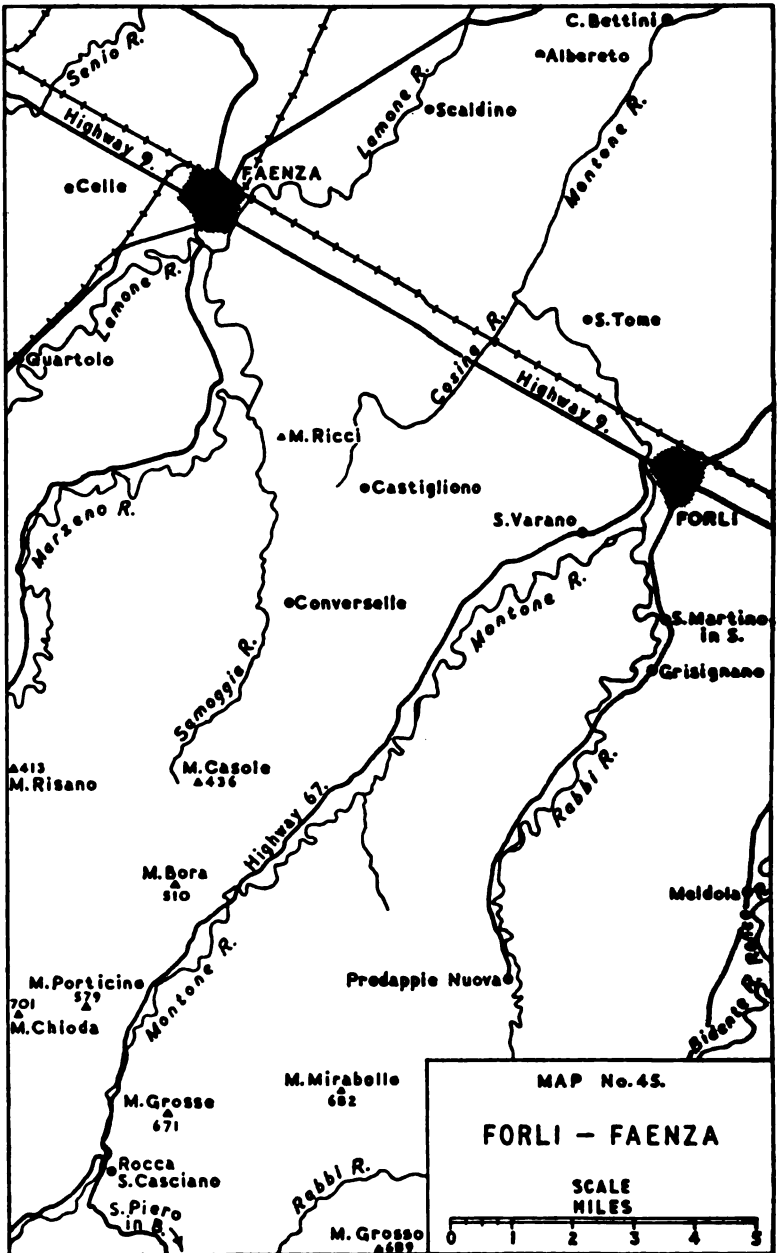
In the 10th Indian Division's sector not much movement was possible during the last days of October, and then Meldola was taken on the 30th, and in heavy fighting the Indians advanced for a mile from their bridgehead. On the following day the enemy fell back to a temporary line north of Grisignano, across the southern edge of Forli airport, so shortening his front and easing the task of the 356th Division which had been holding, not only the line of the Ronco north and south of Meldola in front of the Vth Corps, but also a wide stretch of country from Meldola across the valley of the Rabbi opposite the right of the Polish Corps. South of Highway 9 the 4th Division was then able to cross the Ronco and advance as far as the German defences south and east of the airport. On the rest of the front there was little change, though Porterforce had moved forward in the plain of the Romagna, after a check at San Stefano, and closed on the Ronco. On November 2nd there was more rain, more bridges were washed out, and south of Forli airport the floods were a grave danger to the foremost troops of the Vth Corps across the Ronco. The next five days were occupied by bridge-building, ferrying stores over flooded fields, and relieving the 10th Indian Division at Grisignano with the 46th.

It is necessary, for tactical appreciation of the situation, to insist on the abomination of the weather; for during these weeks it was a defensive factor of the utmost value to the enemy, who found a most welcome reinforcement from the rain when his numbers were diminishing. His withdrawal on the 24th had been caused by the need to send more troops to oppose the Fifth Army—the 1st Parachute Division, which at the time had been about to relieve the tattered 114th Jaeger Division, was moved westward, and the consequent gap on Highway 9 was closed by withdrawing the

26th Panzer and 278th Divisions to the rather shorter line of the Ronco—and the Eighth Army was still taking numerous prisoners and draining his strength. In these recent engagements more than two thousand men had been captured, making a total of 12,570 since the offensive began at the end of August. The rain and the floods were as useful to Kesselring as a couple of fresh divisions.

New plans were made for resumption of the offensive on the night of November 7th, when it was decided that the Vth Corps would attack with two divisions between the Ronco and the Rabbi. The 4th Division was to attack from its bridgehead towards Forli, with the intention of pressing forward to the Montone either on Highway 9 or in the plain farther north; while roughly parallel to it the 46th Division was to advance from Grisignano to cross the Montone at San Varano. It was decided also that the Polish Corps, as soon as Highway 67 had been cleared, must make its main effort parallel with Highway 9 on the lower foothills where roads and paths were better than in the uplands; the administrative advantages of this new design were enhanced by tactical consideration, for now the assault of both Corps would be concentrated.

Suddenly the weather improved, and the Desert Air Force was able to support the operations on land. The Vth Corps' attack was stubbornly opposed, but after a day of hard fighting the enemy's defences south of Forli airport collapsed, and while the 4th Division captured much of the airfield on the night of the 7th, the 46th Division on its left took San Martino in Strada, and drove the enemy northward in house-to-house fighting. The 4th Division entered Forli early on the 9th, clearing the town with little difficulty, and the 46th Division, crossing the Rabbi, headed for a ford over the Montone at San Varano. There it was strongly opposed by infantry and Tiger tanks; and in Forli's north-western suburb of Fornace the 4th Division again met the enemy's main forces concentrated in a narrow strip of ground between the Montone south of the highway and the Canale di Rivaldino north of it. Again the weather came to the Germans' assistance. The rain and snow that fell on the night of the 9th flooded the Montone and for two days immobilized the 46th Division south of the highway, while the 4th was fighting hard to break through at Fornace. In one factory-building in particular the Germans resisted most tenaciously, and when at last they were driven out on the 11th they retired only a little way to a new position still in front of the Montone at San Tome, where, supported by self-propelled guns and heavy tanks, they fought again with the utmost resolution. With



the help of the Desert Air Force their defences here were crushed on the 13th, and on the following day the 4th Division closed on the Montone on a wide front, though south of Highway 9 the 46th were unable to draw level with them till the 16th; and then, once again, the whole Corps was halted.

North of the Highway the Montone ran between high flood banks. It could only be approached over liquid mud and the enemy had made extensive preparations for defence; south of the highway, with tanks and self-propelled guns in action, the Germans had good positions with long fields of fire across flat fields too soft for manoeuvre. Four days were spent in re-grouping for an army attack, and the 10th Indian Division was brought back into the line to take over the sector on the right of the 4th Division.

The Poles in the Apennine foot-hills had also made progress, and from their main westward thrust, after it had been delayed by the collapse of a bridge on Highway 67, the Kresowa Division had turned northwards between the rivers Montone and Samoggia to assist the 46th Division; here, however, it met heavy opposition. Converselle was captured on the 16th, lost in a counter-attack, and recaptured in a stiff battle by the Carpathian Division. On the coastal flank there was little fighting during this period, except by the energetic patrols of Porterforce, and no appreciable advance after November 9th when the enemy had withdrawn to the line of the Fiumi Uniti, the confluence of the Ronco and the Montone, where he strengthened his position by demolishing the banks and increasing the floods which in that area were already large. This was the last position covering Ravenna.

Only a fortnight remained before both Armies were to begin their concerted offensive for the capture of Bologna and Ravenna, and on the 18th orders were issued for the final chapter of the present intermediate operation. It had been decided to capture Faenza, and the high ground to the south-west of it, on the west bank of the Lamone, as a starting-point for the major offensive. Faenza was only eight miles away, but the approaches to it could not be considered easy, and in the Vth Corps' sector astride the highway there was little opportunity for anything but straight-forward attack. The Poles, however, were more fortunately situated, and there were lesser roads south of the highway that permitted them to move over somewhat lower ground than previously, and make their effort rather farther to the north. The Vth Corps' objective was Faenza and the high ground south-west of it; the Poles were directed to seize successive heights some four to seven

miles south of the highway on a line that crossed successively the rivers Marzeno and Lamone and the road from Florence to Borgo San Lorenzo.

The Vth Corps' main attack, postponed until the 21st to enable the 46th Division to deal with German outposts east of the Cosina and north of Castiglione, was supported by the assault of more than five hundred aircraft, but none the less the enemy opposed the advance very strongly. Castiglione was taken on the afternoon of the 20th, and the Germans were about to launch a heavy counter-attack when their reserves were hurriedly called south to meet the Polish attack; but the 46th Division was still short of the river line when the 4th Division advanced in the early hours of the 21st. The 4th Division, attacking along the Cosina between Highway 9 and its confluence with the Montone, was in difficulties from the start among the mine-fields that covered their approach, and after some hours of heavy defensive fire a strong spoiling attack by the Germans caused the division to abandon its effort. While it was preparing to make a new attack south of the Highway the 46th Division and the 3rd Carpathian Division were slowly advancing, and in the afternoon of the 21st the Poles took Monte Poggio di Piano. By dawn on the 23rd the two British divisions, after hard fighting, had put their battalions across the Cosina, and by the end of the day their bridgehead was secure. The Poles, in the meantime, had taken Monte Ricci, the first of the upland objectives.

Twenty-four hours later the enemy broke contact and retired, and the 46th Division, advancing rapidly to the Marzeno, had little difficulty in crossing south of its confluence with the Lamone, and after a stiff fight with a strong rearguard made further progress. The Poles, advancing more rapidly, not only reached the Lamone but sent a strong patrol across it to Brisighella, where, unfortunately it was lost. On the right of the 46th Division, and south of the highway, the 4th Division also reached the Lamone after a series of rearguard actions; but on the extreme right the Germans were unyielding, and the 10th Indian Division could find no weakness in the defences of the Montone. On the 25th, however, after the 4th Division had cleared the area north of the highway between the Montone and the Lamone, a brigade of the 10th Indian Division crossed the nearer river on the highway, and from the south attacked a switch line that the enemy had established between the rivers; but still the enemy held stubbornly his strong-points on this line, at Albereto and the bridge across the Montone at Casa Bettini.

On the 26th the position was that the Polish Corps and the

Vth Corps had reached the east bank of the Lamone on a front as far north as Scaldino, and the 10th Indian Division on the right had good hope of extending this useful advance; but then it began to rain again, and it became fairly obvious that the major attack in December would have to be launched from the near side of the Lamone, and not, as had been planned, from the better position on the west. What was vitally necessary was to secure the bridge at Casa Bettini, which was the first good crossing over the Montone north of Highway 9, and which the Canadian Corps must use when it was again committed to battle. The 10th Indian Division concentrated its efforts to secure the bridge, its right wing along the Montone north of Casa Bettini being relieved by Canadian troops on the 27th, and in spite of bad weather continued its attack on the German switch line between the two rivers. The Indians suffered heavily and made scant progress. The attack was halted, and resumed in better weather on the 30th, when tanks were able to manoeuvre; and by the end of the day Albereto had been taken and the bridge at Casa Bettini was closely invested. On December 1st its final defences were over-run, and the Canadians began to cross the river.

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The Dominant Purpose; the Halt on the Senio

In the first phase of its winter offensive the Eighth Army, fighting alone, had been only partially successful. To facilitate the Allied purpose of capturing Bologna and Ravenna, to secure good administrative bases for the spring offensive, it had been hoped that the Eighth Army's November attack would draw strength away from Bologna; but very little impression had, in fact, been made on the Germans there. Vietinghoff's Tenth Army had been able to meet our attack without calling on the general reserve and the reorganisation and relief of the divisions opposing the Fifth Army had been conducted without hindrance. Ravenna had not yet been captured, though it was now fairly closely threatened; and we had failed to reach the western bank of the Lamone, where a strong position would have been of great advantage in the joint attack on Bologna. The German Tenth Army, however, had been strained more seriously than was apparent. The 114th Jaeger Division on the coast was very weak; the battered 356th on the Albareto switch line had had no rest; the 26th Panzer Division south of Highway 9

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had lost heavily against the 46th Division and the Poles—four hundred prisoners had been taken from it on the night of November 22nd when it contested the crossing of the Cosina—and the 278th north of the highway, and the 305th in the Apennines, had both suffered appreciably. When the offensive was resumed Vietinghoff was compelled to draw heavily on his reserves.

The capture of Forli had done much to ease administration, and the development of the rail-head at Rimini, with the prospective opening of a new rail-head at Cesena, had lightened and would progressively lighten, the intolerable traffic on the roads. This was especially fortunate at a time when the bad weather was growing steadily worse, and when Ordnance was sadly admitting the serious shortage of spare parts for vehicles. Except for spare parts and ammunition, supplies were adequate but men were scarce. The Army had lost several of its formations, and could find almost no reinforcements for those that remained. Hope had been abandoned of reconstituting the 1st Armoured Division, and to create a new brigade of Assault Engineers and reinforce the 25th Tank Brigade—which was one of the only two brigades in the theatre equipped with Churchill tanks—it was necessary to borrow from the 21st Tank Brigade and convert what remained to the new role. It was becoming apparent that more troops would be needed to restore order in Greece; and the 4th British Infantry Division was under orders to leave the Eighth Army at the end of November, to take over in the Middle East from the 5th Infantry Division, which would then embark for Italy. The 46th Division, sorely in need of rest, was to be relieved as soon as possible by the 2nd New Zealand Division; the 56th Division had not yet been reconstituted, and mustered only two brigades. To repair this serious diminishment of its strength the Eighth Army anticipated the release in the near future of the 6th Armoured Division from the XIIIth Corps, and the arrival of the Cremona Group, the first of several new formations raised by the Italian Government and equipped by Britain. The number of light anti-aircraft regiments had been reduced to provide infantry reinforcements; for a considerable time many of these regiments had been employed in a variety of tasks, some as Pioneers, some on traffic control, and some in mortar detachments; but at the end of November four were simultaneously withdrawn for disbandment. The strain on Engineer resources continued to be very heavy, and the mountain roads crossing the Apennines had to be kept open in spite of recurring floods and subsidences and snow-drifts. Traffic over these forbidding heights, in the crowded darkness

of a winter night, was always an ordeal for the sturdy transport drivers, even when the Engineers had done all that was possible for their safety.

In the Army Commander's orders issued to Corps Commanders on November 27th it was again emphasised that "the primary task of the Allied Armies in Italy is to ensure that the enemy is afforded no opportunity to withdraw divisions from Italy to reinforce his armies on either the Western or Eastern Fronts. This object cannot be achieved by a purely defensive attitude. In consequence, it has been decided that the Allied Armies are to mount a major offensive on a wide front." Within the scope of this plan the first task of the Eighth Army was to give all possible assistance to the Fifth Army in its purpose of taking Bologna; its second to capture Ravenna and provide itself with winter quarters. The Fifth Army would be ready by December 7th to launch its attack, the actual date of assault being determined by the Eighth Army's progress and the state of the weather. Within the Eighth Army the Canadian Corps was to adventure into new ground opposite the sector formerly held by Porterforce, and capture Russi on the lateral road between Ravenna and Faenza; to cut Highway 16 beyond Ravenna, and capture the town; and continue its advance westward towards the Santerno at Massa Lombarda. There was some hope that by a sudden and swift assault the Canadians might surprise the enemy, who was comparatively weak in this sector. The Vth Corps with the 56th British, 10th Indian, and 2nd New Zealand Divisions, two Armoured Brigades, and in the first stage of the advance, the 46th Division, would continue its attack along Highway 9 with the object of seizing bridgeheads in succession over the Lamone, Senio and the Santerno; while the Polish Corps advancing through the foothills on the left of the line, from Brisighella to Riolo dei Bagni, protected its flank and endeavoured to cut off such enemy troops as might be forced to retire before the XIIIth Corps' advance on the road from Tossignano to Imola. Our re-grouping for these operations was conducted during the last days of November under ceaseless rain.

On December 2nd both divisions of the Canadian Corps crossed the Montone by a bridge near Casa Bettini and next morning resumed the attack on the enemy's switch-line between the Montone and the Lamone; and for the first three days made good progress. On the left, after heavy fighting on the canal called Scolo Via Cupa, the Canadian Infantry encircled Russi and reached the Lamone west of the town, throwing back the left wing of the German 356th Division and

forcing its neighbour, the 114th Jaeger, into an awkward position. The latter division fought hard for San Pancrazio, but failed to hold it against the Canadian Armoured Division. Its fall opened a gap between the two German divisions, and through it the Canadian armour advanced to capture Godo on the lateral road to Ravenna and thence to cut Highway 16 at Mezzano and to capture Ravenna. The Jaeger Division, out-flanked, was compelled to retire rapidly to the north, and by dawn on December 5th the Canadians, assisted by several hundred partisans, were securely in possession of Ravenna and the highway beyond it as far as Mezzano. But now the enemy's unfailing ally, the weather, came once more to his assistance, and while in mist and rain the Canadian armour waited for bridges to be built across the Lamone, the Canadian infantry on the left, over the river but without the support of their tanks which had been unable to cross, were counter-attacked in strength and driven back with heavy losses. A plan to renew the attack was spoiled when the river suddenly rose on the following day.

The Vth Corps and the Poles had also had some success against the stubborn resistance of the German 305th Division, and crossed the Lamone south of Highway 9. The Poles took Montecchio and the high ground west of it to secure the flank, and the 46th Division, overcoming great difficulties, succeeded in capturing the village of Pideura. The failure of the German 305th Division to prevent our crossing the Lamone in this sector was a grave embarrassment to the enemy, and on December 8th the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division came in to reinforce his yielding defences. The 10th Indian Division had begun to relieve the 46th when, on the 9th, the Germans launched a series of headlong assaults all along the right of the bridgehead, striking in particular at Celle, a couple of miles west of Faenza; but the 46th, fighting with the utmost skill and resolution, threw off every attack and did such hurt to both the 90th Panzer Grenadier and the 305th Divisions that neither was immediately capable of any further action. Unfortunately, however, the 46th Division was equally incapable of turning its victory to advantage, and the advance was halted until the 10th Indian Division and part of the New Zealand Division had come into the bridgehead. Their movement was immensely difficult because Faenza was still in German hands, Highway 9 was thus closed, and the two divisions across the Lamone had to be maintained by a single inadequate road that must be closed for twelve hours daily for repair. The situation was somewhat eased on the 11th, when the New Zealanders put a second bridge over the Lamone between Quartolo and Faenza,

and passed a regiment of tanks across on the 13th; and by the following day re-grouping had been completed in the bridgehead, with the 10th Indian Division on the left, and the New Zealanders straddling the river south of Faenza. North of Faenza the 56th Division's sector was comparatively quiet.

In the meantime the Canadians had renewed their attack across the Lamone on a wide front, again surprising the 356th Division. By the evening of the 11th the Armoured Division on the right had reached the Fosso Vecchio canal, and the Infantry Division, crossing the river at Le Due Torri on the road from Godo to Bagnacavallo, had closed on the canal to their left. Both divisions continued their advance on the following day, and the leading brigade of the Infantry Division secured a small bridgehead across the Canale Naviglio north of Bagnacavallo; but now the enemy, alarmed by this unexpected thrust, reinforced the 356th Division with tanks and launched a succession of counter-attacks which lasted until the 14th. The Canadian infantry were hard put to it to repel these attacks until the Armoured Division, which had also crossed the canal to their right and been thrown back, had re-established its bridgehead and made a junction with them. The enemy remained in close contact while the Canadians improved their positions and prepared to resume the attack.

Now the Vth and Polish Corps advanced again. The 2nd New Zealand and 10th Indian Divisions, supported by four hundred guns, attacked on the night of the 14th, to secure the ridge from Pergola to Pideura and the downward slopes to Highway 9, while the Poles, on their left, advanced across the Sintria to close on the Senio. The advance of both divisions was most bitterly contested, but by the end of the 15th the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division had lost some two hundred killed and nearly three hundred prisoners to the New Zealanders who were in firm possession of Celle; and the 10th Indian Division though failing to capture Pergola had pushed forward on the left north-west of Pideura to take the ridge beyond. That night the enemy withdrew, and on the 16th, while the Indian Division secured Pergola, the New Zealanders closed on the line of the Senio, and at dawn on the following day the Indians established two small bridgeheads across it north and south of Tebano. On the left the German 715th Division lost heavily in men and failed to prevent the Poles from drawing level. North of the highway, however, the enemy was still firm on the Lamone, and along a switch line running past the north-eastern outskirts of Faenza along the railway to its crossing over the Senio. Faenza had been cleared

without difficulty on the 16th by the 43rd Indian Lorried Infantry Brigade, which had been detailed for the purpose, but when the brigade proceeded to cross the switch line it was strongly counter-attacked and driven back. Here the advance came temporarily to a halt, for the 10th Indian Division, which had suffered considerable casualties, could not be supplied for a full-scale attack across the Senio, and the New Zealand Division, also hampered by the difficulties of supply, found the river in its sector wide and deep between flood banks twelve feet high. Highway 9 required new bridges in Faenza before the advance could be continued, and the bridging, carried out under machine-gun and artillery fire, was not completed until the 22nd.

The XIIIth Corps, which on the Fifth Army's right flank had been attacking towards Highway 9 at Imola to assist the advance of the Eighth Army, had achieved some success but failed to take Monte Maggiore and the village of Tossignano. East of Tossignano the XIIIth Corps was confronted by the great escarpment of the Vena del Gesso, which in General Kirkman's opinion could only be attacked in conjunction with a Polish assault on his right. Four months were to pass, however, before this attack could be made.

Despite the halting of the Eighth Army's advance on yet another of the rivers of the Romagna, the prospect seemed fair for the launching of the combined offensive that had been projected, for at last our persistent pressure was taking effect and the enemy had been compelled to withdraw three divisions from the Fifth Army's front to repair his breaking defences on the rivers. After the Canadians had taken the 356th Division by surprise for the second time, the 98th Infantry Division was brought to its assistance, and by the 19th the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division had also arrived to relieve the exhausted 26th Panzer Division. About this time command of the Allied Armies changed hands, when Field-Marshal Alexander became Supreme Allied Commander, Central Mediterranean, and was succeeded in command of the Armies in Italy by Lieutenant-General Mark Clark, formerly commanding the Fifth Army; but the change in command involved no fundamental change in the strategy or organisation of the armies, though their Headquarters was re-organised on the American model and their designation became the Fifteenth Army Group. Almost immediately General Clark declared his purpose to be the destruction of the enemy's forces in Italy, the prevention of a German withdrawal to reinforce other theatres, and the capture of Bologna.

The Eighth Army's operations to complete its advance to the Senio were developing satisfactorily. The Canadian Corps, breaking out of its bridgehead over the Canale Naviglio near Bagnocavallo on the night of the 19th, drove the enemy back behind the Senio in heavy fighting, and having occupied Bagnocavallo closed on the river along a front from a mile south of Alfonsine to a point just north of Cotignola; but the enemy was still east of the Senio on both flanks. In the Vth Corps' sector the enemy had retired a little way north of Faenza, and the 56th Division, having crossed the Lamone east of the town, had room to deploy for its north-eastward attack. Thereafter, however, the Germans bitterly contested every step of the advance, and very slow progress was made under a yet more hostile sky; for now snow was falling in the plain. The Poles completed the clearance of their front east of the Senio, and extended their sector to the west to give some relief to the XIIIth Corps, which had been compelled to send its 8th Indian Division to the west coast to meet a sudden German threat in the valley of the Serchio north of Lucca. An unexpected attack on what had been a quiet part of the line, held by the 92nd Negro Division, had broken through with disconcerting speed and threatened to cut the Fifth Army's communication with its base at Leghorn. This alarming incursion was responsible for the postponement of the Fifth Army's attack towards Bologna—initially until early January, but on further consideration until the spring—and consequently brought to a halt the Eighth Army's offensive, which had been designed as one part of a concerted action and could not be maintained alone without the gravest risk of exhausting the supply of ammunition which by previous economies it had managed to accumulate. The seriousness of the crisis in supply is apparent in the fact that the Allied Headquarters had allotted to the British artillery, in both armies, a January ration of five rounds per gun per day.

It was Christmas when General McCreery reported to the Army Group Commander his restricted offensive power—due to his prolonged offensive and the attraction to his front of German reinforcement from the mountains—and gave his opinion that his supply of ammunition would permit continuance of a major operation only as far as the Santerno, the next river beyond the Senio. By the New Year all idea of resuming the offensive in January had been abandoned, and the decision was taken to defend a winter line on the Senio. It would be necessary to drive the enemy from his remaining holds east of the river—north of Ravenna, that is, on the southern shore of Lake Comacchio, and the smaller

area between Cotignola and Granarolo on the Canale Naviglio—and these tasks were undertaken by the Canadian Corps and the Vth Corps respectively. Clear weather and frozen ground allowed the Canadians to use their armour with unusual freedom, and between January 2nd and 5th, in a series of spirited actions the Germans were ejected from all the ground south of the Reno except for a small coastal area on the extreme right. In these operations the Canadians took three prisoners for every one of their own men killed or wounded. The Vth Corps, also assisted by frozen ground and very materially helped by the use of the infantry-carrying tanks called Kangaroos, completed its smaller task with equal success.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST BATTLE

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The State of the Armies

THE line of the Senio having been secured, except for the strong redoubt which the enemy still held in front of Alfonsine, there was little action of any significance except raiding and patrolling until the opening of the spring offensive. Our strategy was to hold the line with as few troops as possible, relying on preparation for instant counter-attack should the enemy show sign of movement; and simultaneously to promote acute anxiety about our offensive intention. That the Germans were anxious indeed was soon apparent, for although they had long since chosen the Senio as a possible defensive line, and fortified it, they had now become doubtful of their ability to hold it, and continued to strengthen their Adriatic front at the expense of their line south of Bologna. By mid-January there were eight and a half divisions, five and a half of them fresh, opposing the Eighth Army, in comparison with the six divisions which had confronted it at the beginning of December. The Eighth Army continued to face the Germans, and a redoubtable winter, with the Canadian, the Vth, and the XIIIth Corps; and the Polish Corps in reserve.

In the early spring of 1945 the American and Allied troops of the Fifth Army were approximately on the line across the rugged heights and narrow valleys of the Northern Apennines where they had been halted at the conclusion, in early November, of their autumn offensive. There had been local fighting during the winter which had resulted in the loss, sometimes only temporary, of a few outpost positions; but the only important threat to the stability of

the line had occurred at Christmas-time when the Germans, launching a sudden attack down the valley of the Serchio, broke through the 92nd Division and threatened the Army's main communication with Leghorn. This alarming penetration, however, had been blocked in time with the assistance of the 8th Indian Division, detached for the purpose, from the Eighth Army, and the breach had been repaired.

In February and early March a successful operation by the newly arrived 10th Mountain Division had secured tactically important gains on the high ground dominating the upper reaches of Highway 64, and between that road and Highway 65. The ridge from Serrasiccia to Campiano was captured, with the two heights of Belvedere and Torraccia; the advance was pressed forward another five or six miles to bring the right flank of the IVth Corps almost abreast of the IInd Corps' left flank, and provide a spring-board for the projected offensive in April. This was the only successful attempt to advance the autumn line, for the Army's limited attacks in the Serchio valley and on the coast had achieved no appreciable results.

But though for five months the Army had made little geographical progress, its constitutional improvement had been remarkable. In November, it had been exhausted both spiritually and materially; but now its battle-worn divisions were rested and restored, replenished and reinforced, and their morale was high. Man-power was abundant, new weapons had arrived, and a huge reserve of ammunition had been accumulated.

General Truscott, now commanding the Fifth Army, had nine divisions and the equivalent of a tenth at his disposal on a front that extended from the Ligurian Sea to its boundary with the Eighth Army on Monte Grande. On the left, between the sea and the river Reno, the IVth Corps consisted of the 92nd Infantry Division reinforced by the 473rd Infantry—a regiment newly formed from anti-aircraft gunners—and by the 442nd Regimental Combat Team which had recently returned from France; to their right was the 365th Infantry, detached from the 92nd Division, holding a sector about fifteen miles north of Pistoia; east and north-east from them the 1st Brazilian Infantry Division held the ridge of Serrasiccia; and on its right flank stood the 10th Mountain Division. East of the Reno the IInd Corps held a front of about twenty-five miles with the 1st Armoured Division on its left, the 34th Infantry Division in the centre, and on the right the 91st Infantry Division and the Italian Legnano Group. The 6th South African Armoured

Division and the 85th Infantry Division were in Army Reserve, and the 88th Infantry Division in IInd Corps Reserve. The Fifth Army no longer commanded the British XIIIth Corps, but the strength of its other component parts had been greatly augmented, and the Army Commander would be able to replace battle casualties almost immediately from his abundant supply of replacements.

The winter programme of the Eighth Army had included the resting and recuperation of overtaxed and diminished formations, training for the coming battle, reorganisation and re-equipment with new offensive weapons, and the ceaseless maintenance of a thinly held front that must always be capable of vigorous action. It had been difficult enough within the terms of the known situation, and was to be further complicated by one of those sudden changes of policy, from which the Armies in Italy had suffered before, which were a consequence of the Italian campaign's minor importance in the total strategy of the war.

At the end of the winter offensive there had been a worrying decline in the morale of certain units. They had suffered too heavily in battle and been too long away from home: domestic trouble, unhappily frequent when a soldier has been serving overseas for more than two years, may find a dark reflection in the battle-area, and a woman's infidelity can weaken a man's fighting-spirit almost as gravely as the discovery that he is short of ammunition. This moral debility—which only showed itself when aggravated by extreme hardship—could usually be repaired by material improvement of the conditions in which the troops were living, and by material additions to their fighting strength. They were rested as much as could be contrived, and they saw or heard of the new weapons which were arriving to arm them for the next battle: the flame-throwing Churchill tanks, known as Crocodiles, the amphibious carrier-tanks called Fantails, the new Sherman tanks that mounted heavier guns than ever before, the Kangaroo tanks that had been turned into infantry-carriers, and the Ark tanks that dropped into canals and made a bridge for those that followed, and the bull-dozer tanks. The weather also improved, and the cold sunlight of early spring was exhilarating.

The restoration and revival of the Army was achieved in despite of all difficulties—the recuperative power of the British Army has always been one of the marvels of our history—and plans were almost complete for the spring offensive when, at the beginning of February, the Army Commander was suddenly informed that the Combined Chiefs of Staff had decided to withdraw to Western

Europe the 1st Canadian Corps, two hundred American fighter-bombers, and three divisions from Greece and the Middle East—the 1st, 5th and 46th Infantry Divisions—whose early return to Italy had been confidently expected. This drastic reduction compelled the Army Commander again to reorganise his forces and recast his plans, while imposing on him also the large and delicate task of withdrawing the Canadians from his line while concealing their movement from the enemy. There was some perturbing evidence that news of the withdrawal was leaking out, but the methods devised to mislead the enemy were apparently successful; and the Germans appeared to be unaware that the Canadian Corps had left Italy until it was again in action in North-western Europe.

The Eighth Army's loss was compensated by a corresponding reduction in German strength when increasing pressure on both the Western and the Eastern fronts demanded the release from Italy of the 16th SS. and the 356th Divisions.

Command of the German Armies in Italy had passed from Field-Marshal Kesselring to General von Vietinghoff, who had at his disposal twenty-three divisions, two others partially formed, and six divisions of Italian Republican Fascists. The Fifth Army was opposed by the German Fourteenth Army, the Eighth Army by the German Tenth. The Fourteenth Army consisted of the LIst Mountain Corps on the west, in which were four German divisions and one Italian; and the XIVth Panzer Corps on the east, in which were four German divisions. In the Tenth Army, on the Adriatic sector, were the four divisions of the 1st Parachute Corps on the Eighth Army's left, and the three divisions of the LXXVIth Panzer Corps on its right. The German armies had been considerably strengthened by individual replacements and the arrival of several new battalions, but neither the Fourteenth nor the Tenth had any reserve at its own disposal, though von Vietinghoff held the 29th and the 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions in Army Group Reserve. The other German and Fascist formations in Italy were widely scattered between the French frontier and the mountains of Yugoslavia, and the hazards of holding so broad a territory were by now much aggravated by the rapid increase in strength, and numbers, and spirit, of the Partisans in the north of Italy.

It was estimated on April 1st that at least 50,000 organised Partisans were already engaged in harassing the German garrisons, and ready for open action as soon as the time was ripe. They were armed with weapons captured from the Germans or dropped by Allied aircraft, which during March alone had delivered more than

five hundred tons of supplies to the patriots. Allied officers had penetrated the German lines or been dropped by parachute into the northern provinces, and with their assistance the Partisans had been organised into battalions and brigades. Their harassing tactics, their sabotage and guerrilla warfare, already occupied the attention of many German troops and most of the Italian Fascist formations; and it was clear to both the Allied Commanders and the Germans that they would exert considerable influence on the coming offensive if early success in it encouraged them to an open declaration of war.

A further and even more serious weakness on the German side was the deterioration of its transport and lines of communication. The almost continuous attack of the Allied Air Forces had made it nearly impossible for the German High Command to receive new motor-vehicles and adequate supplies of fuel from Germany, and the production of automobiles in the Italian factories had been very seriously reduced. Railways had been bombed and bridges broken. All the permanent bridges over the Po had been destroyed by our bombers during the autumn of 1944, and thereafter repeated attack was made on the pontoons and other temporary equipment of which the enemy made use. In the fine weather that prevailed in February and March the fighter-bombers of the XXIIInd Tactical Air Command, supporting the Fifth Army, and the Desert Air Force on the Eighth Army's front, attacked railway-yards, roads, bridges and supply-dumps, and ranged as far north as the Brenner Pass and the north-eastern corridor through the Julian Alps. During February the Brenner railway-line was cut in at least one place on every day of the month, and in March it was still more gravely interrupted. The destruction of motor-vehicles was so enormous, and the shortage of petrol so severe, that the German Armies were compelled to rely increasingly on horses and oxen to move their transport, and to commandeered farm wagons, urban buses, and civilian cars of every description.

During the months of inactivity, however, the Germans' material requirements had been relatively small, and when the battle opened they were well supplied with food and clothing and ammunition. The morale of the German soldiers remained surprisingly high, especially in the two Parachute Divisions in the Tenth Army, and in the two Panzer Grenadier Divisions in Army Group Reserve. Among their Republican Fascist allies desertion had been frequent, but of the prisoners lately taken from German formations only a third had been deserters. The enemy's ground defences, well

organised during the winter, had been prepared with typical thoroughness and customary skill.

The main line of resistance to protect Bologna, the Genghis Khan Line, extended from the Fifth Army front west of Vergato across the Reno and the peaks of Monte Sole and Mont' Adone, between the two highroads to Bologna, then eastward over the mountain-tops north of Belmonte and Monte Grande to the line of the river Senio, and so across the lower valley of the Po to the southern shore of Lake Comacchio. Four miles west of the Senio the parallel banks of the Santerno were more heavily fortified. In their usual manner the Germans had established strong points capable of mutual support, created small fortresses in farm houses, villages and suburban streets, and bestrewn the approaches to their line with mines and wire. They had many hundreds of mortars to support their forward infantry, a numerous artillery and sufficient ammunition. Most of the cities and towns along Highway 9 were prepared for defence, and behind the Genghis Khan Line lay the prepared defences of the rivers Po and Ticino. A third and final line was based on the river Adige and the foothills of the Alps, which in the intricacy and strength of its positions was reminiscent of the elaborate trench-systems of the war of 1914-18, and if defended by a resolute army might prove as formidable a position as any so far encountered.

Detailed orders for the Allied offensive were issued by General Mark Clark, commanding the Fifteenth Army Group, on March 24th. The battle was to open on April 9th, and the first major attack was to be made by the Eighth Army; the Fifth would join action on the 12th. The offensive was deliberately designed to bring the war in Italy to an end, and its importance was made known to all troops so that every individual might contribute to its purpose by his own exertions. The intention, as promulgated, was to destroy the maximum of enemy forces south of the Po; to force crossings of the river; and to capture Verona. The plan indicated three phases in the offensive, in the first of which the Eighth Army was to fight its way across the rivers Senio and Santerno, while the Fifth Army broke through into the valley of the Po after capturing or isolating Bologna. In the second phase the encirclement of the German armies south of the Po was foreseen; and in the third was envisaged the crossing of the river and the capture of Verona.

There had been considerable discussion about the relative parts to be allotted to the Armies, and the appropriate dates for opening the offensive. It was General Clark's desire that the Eighth Army

should attack first, and be prepared, after a bridgehead over the Santerno had been secured, to make its main effort either north-west towards Budrio—to aid the Fifth Army's drive on Bologna—or north-east towards Ferrara, if the battle developed in such a way as to make that the more promising operation. In the Eighth Army the capture of Ferrara was considered to be an objective of the first importance, and there was some doubt as to whether concentration of the joint effort on the taking of Verona would achieve the ultimate purpose of the offensive and close the doors out of Italy against a defeated German army. Ferrara was a centre of communications on the shortest route to the north-east and the defences of the Adige, the last possible line of German resistance; and to secure it General McCreery would have to mass the greater part of his forces to storm the narrow access to it; the so-called Argenta Gap, a dry corridor that carried Highway 16 between great flooded areas to the east, and impassable marshes to the west. A series of flank attacks on the right—the capture of the Comacchio Spit, and amphibious operations across the Comacchio lake and the adjacent floods—had been designed to assist the frontal attack on Argenta, and originally it was intended that the Canadian Corps should be responsible for these operations. When the Canadians were withdrawn, it fell to the Vth Corps to mount them; and the Vth Corps had also to modify its plans for the forcing of the Gap to permit reinforcement of the Polish Corps in a westward advance to co-operate in the attack on Bologna.

Plans for the water-borne attack, across Comacchio, were long delayed by uncertainty about the number of Fantails—the amphibious armoured carriers that were to navigate the lake—that would be available; and complicated by the Army's very limited experience with these unknown vehicles. A difficulty of quite another sort appeared when a political crisis threatened the morale of the Polish Corps: news of the decisions made at the Yalta Conference, and the restriction of Poland's frontiers, was received with such indignation, especially by the Polish officers, that General Anders, though he guaranteed their good behaviour, doubted that he could ask them to undertake a new offensive. In the event, however, the Poles most manfully swallowed their grievance, and the Carpathian and Kresowa Divisions fought yet again with their accustomed *élan*.

All problems were eventually solved—strategic and political, administrative and tactical, moral and mechanical—and on the eve of the offensive, in the battle-order of the Eighth Army, the Vth

Corps, the IInd Polish Corps, the Xth Corps, and the XIIIth Corps were disposed from right to left. The general pattern of the plan already elaborated was maintained, and as it was essential to concentrate the greatest possible weight in the assault on the Argenta Gap, the Vth Corps commanded the larger proportion of the Eighth Army's forces : in it were deployed, from right to left, the 56th Division, an *ad hoc* force known as 'Checkforce', the Italian Cremona Group, the 8th Indian Division, the 78th Division, and the 2nd New Zealand Division. The Polish Corps disposed the 3rd Carpathian Division, 'Rudforce', and the 5th Kresowa Division; the Xth Corps consisted of the newly-arrived Jewish Brigade, the Italian Friuli Group, the Lovat Scouts, and the Folgore Group; and in the XIIIth Corps was the reinforced 10th Indian Division.

The Vth Corps and the Polish Corps were to attack across the Senio to secure bridgeheads beyond the Santerno, from which the Vth Corps would advance north towards Bastia and Argenta, though the 2nd New Zealand Division might be directed westward to Budrio to conform with General Clark's desire that the Fifth Army's offensive against Bologna should have adequate support from the east. The Polish Corps would advance on two axes, to Medicina on the right in the direction of Budrio, and to Castel San Pietro on Highway 9. The Xth Corps, after assisting in certain preliminary movements to mislead the enemy as to the main direction of the offensive, would advance as opportunity occurred to Highway 9; and the XIIIth Corps, after participating in the same deception plan, would defend its ground and hold the 10th Indian Division in readiness to move either into Army Reserve north of Highway 9, or to launch a limited attack north-eastward from Monte Grande. In addition to its leadership of the main attack the Vth Corps had also to undertake the preliminary operations on Lake Comacchio, and be prepared to mount certain amphibious operations either to capture crossings of the Reno at Bastia and Anerina; or to exploit the capture of the Spit in a movement round the north of Lake Comacchio; or to turn or capture the Argenta Gap in conjunction with the 2nd Parachute Brigade.

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'To the Argenta Gap

THE preliminary operations on the northern flank had been entrusted to the 56th Division and the 2nd Commando Brigade.

Within a period of ten days before the opening of the main offensive, the Commando Brigade was to capture the Comacchio Spit, and if the opportunity occurred advance in the direction of Ferrara. A squadron of the Special Boat Service would seize the islands in the lake, and a brigade of the 56th Division was charged with the capture of a triangle of land known as 'the Wedge', between the lower reaches of the Reno and the southern shore of the lake, from which it could gain access to the flooded areas, prepare launching sites, and open the road to Menata.

The forty Fantails which were to convey the 2nd and 9th Commandos against the western shore of the Spit made an unpromising start on the night of April 1st. After prodigious labour had been expended to launch them from the softly dissolving southern shore of Comacchio—the lake was uncommonly low after a long period of dry weather—they stuck in the mud, and in circumstances of great confusion the soldiers were transferred to storm-boats, which themselves had to be man-handled over a muddy barrier in the dark, whereby confusion grew the worse, and only one thing could be plainly seen: that it was impossible to reach the Spit before daybreak. The decision was taken, however, to continue the attack, and behind a heavy barrage and a curtain of smoke the Commandos landed on a treacherous shore, while the 43rd (Royal Marine) Commando made an overland advance on to the narrow Tongue of the Spit.

Despite the initial mishap, the enemy was completely surprised by the two-fold attack, and a series of vigorous and daring actions carried the Brigade successfully to its objectives. By April 4th the greater part of the Spit—as far north as the Valetta Canal—had been captured, and eight hundred prisoners were in the cages. On the following day a squadron of the Special Boat Service captured the islands in the lake, and on April 6th the 56th Division attacked across the Reno, and against strong resistance occupied 'the Wedge', and took some seven hundred prisoners. The failure of the Fantails was unfortunate, however, and it was feared that the Germans, having seen these new and curious craft stranded in the lake—which they had regarded as an effective obstacle—would be warned of the danger of attack from its shore.

Alarmed by the Commandos' rapid success, the German Army Commander sent forward a reserve battalion of the 42nd Jaeger Division and the Reconnaissance Unit of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division to the northern side of the lake. The 29th Panzer Grenadier Division had recently been moved from reserve south of the Po to

the north-eastern parts of Italy, in response to the British deception plan which had purported operations in the neighbourhood of Venice and a threat to the lowlands above Comacchio. The Germans had apparently been persuaded that our intention was indeed to make landings at the head of the Adriatic. The Division was to return in time to take part in the battle, and indeed at a critical period of it, but the German strength was by no means such that its Commander could afford to waste his resources in unnecessary movement. There were ten German divisions opposing the ten stronger divisions of the Eighth Army, and it had been calculated that our offensive strength in infantry was as 1.6 to 1, while in artillery it was 2 to 1, and in armour as 3 to 1.

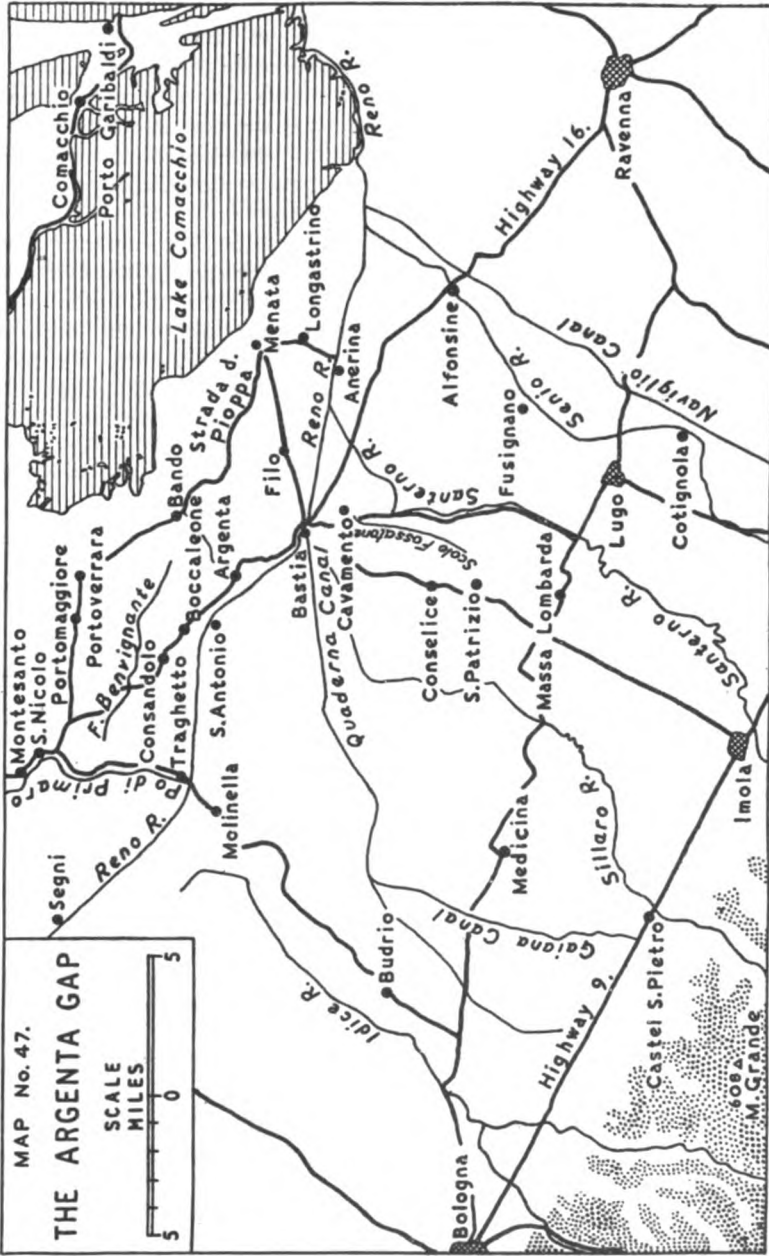
It had for some time been evident that the Germans were anticipating the attack with considerable nervousness, and on the night of April 6th when their artillery began a very heavy barrage along the whole front, it seemed probable that they were about to retire from the line of the Senio to their stronger defences on the Santerno. Had they done so the Eighth Army's plan of attack would have had to be revised, and the offensive postponed. No withdrawal was made, however, and the purpose of the barrage remained unknown until General von Schwerin, commanding the LXXVIth Panzer Corps, who later surrendered himself, explained that the Commander of the Tenth Army had, in fact, been about to retire to his main defences, but at the last moment had been forbidden by German Supreme Headquarters to yield any ground without fighting for it. The main battle therefore opened according to plan.

On April 9th the sky was bright and cloudless, and after weeks of dry weather the ground was firm underfoot. In the early afternoon our heavy bombers made their attack in front of the Polish Corps and the Vth Corps, and after an hour and a half a thick cloud of yellow dust hung over the targets which they had bombarded with remarkable accuracy. At three o'clock our forward infantry retired for several hundred yards, and twenty minutes later a great artillery bombardment was directed against the flood-banks of the Senio. Fighter-bombers roared in to the attack, and medium bombers attacked the enemy's gun-areas. The dust clouds grew thicker and spread wider, and out of the fog from the German side came only a half-hearted response to the bombardment. At about seven o'clock the assaulting infantry advanced beside flame-throwing tanks, and while long streams of fire were directed against the German positions on the flood-banks, the New Zealanders on the left of the line carried their boats and floating bridges to the river,

and Indian and British troops of the 8th Indian Division stormed its high banks on the right. The New Zealanders were quickly across, and rapidly advanced through utterly disorganised defences in a dense fog that obscured the artificial moonlight which the searchlights were now projecting. Tanks appeared in their path, but were destroyed, and the advance continued. On the extreme right the 19th Brigade of the Indian Division quickly overcame opposition on the still-smouldering eastern flood-bank, but on the western bank the 6th/13th Royal Frontier Force Rifles had a bitter fight to reduce some stubbornly defended strongholds before the advance could be resumed. The 21st Indian Brigade had a fierce and costly battle for possession of the eastern banks, and there was much close-range fighting before the enemy was dislodged from his well-prepared and deeply-dug positions. The assaulting battalions—the 1st/5th Mahrattas and the 3rd/15th Punjab Regiment—also encountered very fierce resistance on the farther bank, but despite many casualties reached their first intermediate objective by dawn.

Behind the New Zealand advance the Engineers erected Bailey bridges with remarkable speed, and when the Poles on their left, who had had a desperate battle to establish themselves on the western bank, asked leave to use these bridges to bring their tanks forward, permission was immediately granted and with the assistance of their armour the Poles broke out of their bridgehead and thrust strongly forward. On the right of the Indian Division's sector bridges had promptly been constructed, but behind the 21st Brigade's furious battle it was difficult to bring even an Ark assault-bridge into position. A crossing was completed before dawn, however, and three squadrons of the 48th Royal Tank Regiment were quickly on the far side, and anti-tank guns were being hauled over the river on a cable in face of heavy fire.

By ten o'clock on the morning of April 10th the reports of progress were everywhere encouraging, and again the sky was full of aircraft. On the open flank to the left the German armour was retreating before the Poles, and the New Zealanders were firmly established on the Canale di Lugo. The Indian Division was also on the line of the Canal. Lugo had been captured, and the 78th Division had occupied Cotignola. On the right flank the Argylls of the 8th Indian Division were moving northward, and the Cremona Group, having passed through Fusignano, was heading for Alfonsine. But misfortune delayed the general advance to the Santerno, for when our heavy bombers, a little before noon, again carpeted the approaches, their aim was inaccurate and caused many casualties



in both the New Zealand and Indian Divisions. By the late evening, however, the New Zealanders, having overcome strong opposition, held a road a thousand yards short of the Santerno, and ten hours later the Indians were also in position for the next assault after a night of the most strenuous fighting, in the course of which a complete deadlock had been broken by a very spirited charge of the 48th Royal Tank Regiment.

The New Zealanders were ahead of both the Poles on their left and the Indians on their right, and their Commander resolved to force the Santerno without delay. At dawn on the 11th four battalions advanced, supported by tanks, and quickly reached the flood-banks which enclosed the river in its artificial course. But the dry bed of its natural course, looping and twining across its canalised flow, was a serious obstacle to tanks, and its sides were fortified. The Maoris on the right made a gallant advance, and by the early morning of the 12th the 5th Brigade was nearly a mile west of the river; but on the left the 6th Brigade was hemmed in by a loop of the old course, and there was a gap between the two brigades. The 26th Battalion moved in to fill the gap, and the advance was resumed on the right with such success that the outskirts of Massa Lombarda were reached before dark.

The 8th Indian Division had again to fight desperately for its advance, and now without assistance from the flame-throwing tanks, which failed to come forward. The tanks of the North Irish Horse, however, made a remarkably successful attack, unsupported by infantry, and crossing many ditches and craters with the aid of fascine bridge-layers, advanced on the divisional right for about six thousand yards. The infantry, wading through the river waist-deep, were subjected to murderous enfilade fire from both sides, but their resolution was unflinching, and by the evening of April 12th the Indians had joined hands with the New Zealanders in front of Massa Lombarda. Their bridgehead across the Santerno was firmly held, and traffic was crossing the new-built bridges behind them. The Cremona Group to the north had encountered only slight resistance, and after occupying Alfonsine had rapidly advanced along Highway 16 to reach the river. The line of the Santerno had been decisively broken, and in three days of battle the enemy had lost well over two thousand prisoners. The enemy's opposition was failing, and he was retreating fast from well-prepared and formidable positions.

The Germans had made the mistake of holding the Senio in strength, and in consequence of the very effective preparatory

bombardment, and the devastating effect of the flame-throwers, three battalions of the 98th Infantry Division opposite the New Zealanders, and two of the 362nd Division in the Indians' sector, had virtually been destroyed. The momentum of the New Zealanders' advance had overwhelmed the 98th Division on the line of the Santerno, but an armoured group of the 26th Panzer Division had arrived in time to delay the capture of Massa Lombarda. The 1st Parachute Corps, athwart Highway 9, saw the advance sweep past its northern flank and was obliged to withdraw the 26th Panzer Division, whose northernmost regiment had been outflanked and was hard-pressed; whereupon the 4th Parachute Division, in the foothills, retired in conformity with it. There was, as yet, no sign that either of the German divisions in Army Group Reserve was prepared to move, and the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division could certainly not leave its central position until the Fifth Army attacked, and von Vietinghoff was able to assess the whole situation. On the northern extremity of the Eighth Army's front the 42nd Jaeger Division withdrew when the 56th Division launched an attack towards Bastia—the shape of the battle farther south left it little choice in the matter—but there was no evidence of any weakness in the German hold on Bastia, nor on the corridor of the Argenta Gap. It was apparent, on the contrary, that the enemy was determined to hold this vital approach to the valley of the Po and all north-eastern Italy with his utmost strength.

General McCreery, who had been prepared to make his main effort either to the north or to the west after crossing the Santerno, now decided to break through the Gap on the shortest route to the Po, and General Keightley, commanding the Vth Corps, prepared to commit the 78th Division to direct assault while he launched the 56th Division, reinforced by the 2nd Commando Brigade and the 9th Armoured Brigade, in an attack across the northern floods to secure the bridges that carried Highway 16 over the Reno at Bastia, and prevent the enemy from crossing the Reno anywhere east of Bastia. The principle defences of this narrow passage to the north were the floods, which the Germans had released by breaching the dykes of Lake Comacchio and demolishing the pumping engines and drainage system in the marshy areas east and west of Argenta, which now lay waterlogged. The dry gaps through this far-spread inundation—along Highway 16 from Bastia to Argenta, and east of that along the minor road called the Strada della Pioppa to the village of Chiesa del Bando—were heavily mined, and had it not been for the Italian Partisans it would have been impossible to gain

information about them. Fortunately, however, there was a German officer who was fond of eels. He permitted an Italian fisherman to use the otherwise prohibited waters of Comacchio, and the fisherman was so obliging as to bring maps of the mine-fields to the 56th Division before returning to his German master with a dish of eels. To cross the flooded area adjacent to the lake two battalions of the 169th Brigade—the Queens—were to embark in Fantails from 'the Wedge', and after a voyage south of the Comacchio dyke land north-east of Menata and seize the village. On the right flank of the Fantails the 40th (Royal Marine) Commando would advance on the dyke to capture a bridge north of Menata, and proceed along the Strada della Pioppa. A smoke screen would cover the left flank of the voyage. The 167th Brigade, which had a footing on 'the Wedge', north of the Reno, was to advance along the river towards Bastia, and northwards to meet the 169th Brigade.

The Marine Commando, advancing at midnight on April 10th, had to cross a thirty-foot water-gap in the dyke, and found a mine-field beyond it which hindered their hazardous attempt to reach the bridge beyond Menata before dawn; and possession of the bridge, which was finally secured with the assistance of fighter-bombers, cost them heavy casualties in a small but savage battle. The Fantail fleet, with better fortune than had attended it against the Spit, was by then making good progress over the floods between its smoke screen on the left and the covering fire of the Marines on its right, and the defenders of Menata, already shaken by a precise aerial bombardment of their area, fell into a panic at the wholly unexpected sight of the amphibious troop-carriers. Menata was quickly surrounded, and before darkness the two battalions of the Queens, with more than two hundred prisoners in their hands, were firmly established along the road from Longastrino through Menata, and northward to a junction with the Marines. The 167th Brigade, though to begin with it was checked by heavy fire, was able to join the Queens at dawn on April 12th, and a considerable advance was made that day against light opposition. The Queens advanced more than two miles along the Strada della Pioppa over the bridge which the Marines had taken, and on the left were not far short of Filo on the road to Bastia. The 167th Brigade advanced four miles along the Reno until it was close to the confluence of the Santerno, where it was halted by mine-fields and self-propelled guns; while the Queens to the north, now out of range of their supporting artillery on 'the Wedge', had to halt until a battery of 25-pounders could be

embarked in Fantails and taken to new positions near Menata. Considerable difficulty was experienced in finding roads out of 'the Wedge' which would bear the necessary traffic.

In the early afternoon of April 12th the Corps Commander ordered the 78th Division into the Indian Division's bridgehead across the Santerno. The 36th Brigade, supported by the 48th Royal Tank Regiment, having taken over from the Indians, was to advance westward as far as the Scolo Fossatone, a mile and a half beyond the river, whereafter the Irish Brigade and the 2nd Armoured Brigade would follow into the east of the bridgehead as the main force of attack, and face northward with two battalions in line. On poor roads and in heavy traffic the 36th Brigade made good speed, and reached the Scolo Fossatone by last light. The Irish Brigade was delayed by shelling of the Santerno bridges. The Commander of the 36th Brigade, though both his flanks were open—the New Zealanders were heading towards the far side of the Argenta marshes—decided to press his advance against an obviously disorganised enemy, and his leading troops—the 8th Argylls—rode their supporting Churchill tanks for another three miles to the village of San Patrizio, and captured intact its two bridges and a large self-propelled gun. This most promising advance was carried still farther by the 6th Royal West Kents towards Conselice; but Conselice was very stubbornly held.

On the 13th the Irish Brigade advanced, between the Santerno on the right and the Scolo Fossatone on the left, against the bridge at Cavamento which carries the main road to Bastia. The two leading battalions were each supported by an armoured squadron of flame-throwing tanks, and the third battalion was mounted in Kangaroos. Resistance, light to begin with, grew stiffer to the north, but the third battalion in its Kangaroos reached Cavamento in the late afternoon in time to see the enemy blow the charges in the bridge. The demolition was only partly successful, and two troops of tanks crossed the Canal on what remained of the bridge. At Conselice, however, behind them to the left, the 36th Brigade had made no progress against an enemy so confident of his strength that he had launched a strong counter-attack from the village. On this flank the Germans appeared determined to stand their ground, and to have established a coherent defence. Plans had been made to envelop the village from the south-west, when the Germans, having served their purpose by delaying the advance for twenty-four hours, withdrew to the river Sillaro, two miles to the west.

Fantails were again used to exploit the 56th Division's successful amphibious operation, and the 24th Guards Brigade, with the 9th Commando under command, was ordered to cross the floods to reach the area of Chiesa del Bando and move against Argenta from the north-east. It was originally intended to support this movement with the 2nd Parachute Brigade, which would make a descent in front of the Fantail force, but this part of the plan was abandoned when it was learnt that the enemy, apparently aware of the projected drop, had brought anti-aircraft guns into the threatened area. The Fantail fleet had to venture alone.

An operation undertaken so far ahead of the forward troops of the main force was obviously hazardous, and in the event had to be modified when an obstacle was discovered in the flooded area, on the course to Chiesa del Bando, that the 9th Commando's Fantails could not cross. The Commando, embarking as had been planned at Menata, landed on the Strada della Pioppa only a thousand yards ahead of the advancing column of the Queens, through which the 2nd Coldstream Guards were preparing to hasten northward to make contact with the water-borne troops. The 1st Buffs, also in Fantails, succeeded in putting a company ashore south of the road-bridge over the Fossa Marina. But the enemy, now apparently aware of the danger to his watery flank, opposed the landings vigorously and inflicted heavy casualties on the Fantail-borne soldiers. At nightfall on the 13th a party of the Buffs reached the bridge, but the battalion's main positions, though firmly established, were five hundred yards from the canal; and there were still considerable forces of the enemy on the Strada della Pioppa between the Buffs and the Guards advancing towards them.

On the left, in the meantime, the 2nd New Zealand Division had been advancing with magnificent vigour from Massa Lombarda, and while the Buffs were fighting on the Strada della Pioppa the New Zealanders were on the Scolo Correchio, the last water obstacle below the river Sillaro, and preparing to storm them both in one attack. They had again punished the 98th Infantry Division; and on Highway 9 the Parachute Corps was disengaging, as quickly as the Poles and the Xth Corps permitted, in order to withdraw to the north, shorten the German line, and relieve the 98th Division with the 278th Infantry. The New Zealanders were already engaged with the relieving force when, to the north of their sector, the enemy retired to the Sillaro, which was thinly held by the much diminished 362nd Infantry Division. Still more serious were the enemy's losses beyond the Reno, where the 42nd Jaeger Division was broken into

three battle groups, each about two hundred strong; but here the enemy had committed his largest available reinforcement, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, which was now opposing the 24th Guards Brigade in its advance to the Fossa Marina. The danger of amphibious attack had so daunted the Germans that this most able regiment had been stationed to guard the Lake flank, while the defence at Bastia and the Argenta Gap was left to the remnants of the 42nd Jaeger Division.

On the 13th the road and railway bridges over the Reno at Bastia, which had been heavily bombarded by artillery and from the air, were finally destroyed, and the enemy was no longer able to maintain a perimeter in front of them; the 78th Division and the Cremona Group were thus able to approach ground that was vital to the German defence. The only whole division that von Vietinghoff still held in reserve, the 90th Panzer Grenadier, was unlikely to be committed until the Fifth Army should open its attack; and the 26th Panzer Division, which had been released when the Parachute Corps fell back on Highway 9 and was now concentrated south of Ferrara, would with almost equal certainty be held in reserve until the British 6th Armoured Division came through the Gap. It appeared that the enemy's defence of Bastia and the Argenta corridors was crumbling.

The Vth Corps' further advance, however, would now be split by the Argenta marshes, across which no communication was possible, and the Army Commander relieved it of responsibility for the westward thrust by placing the New Zealand Division under command of the XIIIth Corps. Concentrating on the task of breaking through the Argenta Gap, General Keightley decided to advance on a front of two divisions: the 56th Division on the right would continue its operations against Chiesa del Bando and so north-westward to Portomaggiore, while the 78th advanced against Argenta and north-westward along Highway 16. The 8th Indian Division was in Corps Reserve, and the 6th Armoured Division followed close behind.

The New Zealanders continued their formidable attack on April 14th, and having broken through a strong position on the Scolo Correchio occupied both flood-banks of the Sillaro and held them against growing opposition until evening; when command of their division passed to the XIIIth Corps. The 78th Division thrust forward on Highway 16 and reached the Reno south-east of Bastia; and the 56th Division, heavily engaged in the north, improved its position near the Fossa Marina, where the isolated Buffs had fought

most valiantly, and the Guards, in a new amphibious operation, outflanked a defensive position on the Scolo Campazzo and enabled the Queens to resume their advance, capture Filo, and approach within a mile of the broken bridges in Bastia. Also approaching Bastia, astride the Reno, was the 167th Brigade; part of which, south of the river, was now in contact with the 78th Division.

In the 56th Division's sector it was decided that the Guards Brigade should continue on its present axis to cross the Fossa Marina, capture Chiesa del Bando, and secure a bridgehead over the Fossa Benvignante, three miles north-east of Argenta; while the Queens Brigade, turning northward to find roads through the flooded area between the two dry gaps, endeavoured to seize another bridge over the Fossa Benvignante, two thousand yards to the east of the Guards' bridge. The 78th Division prepared to deploy the 11th Infantry Brigade and the Queens Bays north of the Reno to advance directly on Bastia and Argenta, and the 2nd Commando Brigade took over the divisional flank on the Sillaro in order to hold that flank and advance to the bend of the Reno a mile and a half north-west of Argenta. By April 16th the enemy had withdrawn from the flank, and the Commando Brigade concentrated its efforts on reaching the river bend. The only feasible approach was by foot along the high flood-banks of two canals west of the Reno, and though the march was patently hazardous—for the flood-banks were conspicuous landmarks on the flat and featureless landscape, and nothing was known about the enemy's dispositions ahead—there was no time for reconnaissance, because it must synchronise with, if it could not precede, the frontal assault.

The 56th Division's attack began at dawn on the 15th, when the 2nd/7th Queens made quick progress and advanced through the floods for two and a half miles before they were halted by lack of roads, a waterlogged plain, and mine-fields. The Guards Brigade, however, met very heavy fire which destroyed all the assault-boats of the 1st Scots Guards and the 9th Commando, and their attack was abandoned. The 167th Brigade occupied Bastia on the 16th, and the 11th Brigade of the 78th Division then took the lead and headed for Argenta. Numerous mine-fields restricted manoeuvre, but flail tanks were invaluable in beating a way through them. It was anticipated that the enemy would offer strong resistance along the Fossa Marina, the western end of which crossed the Gap and skirted the town of Argenta; and to disrupt his defences the town had been heavily bombed on April 13th and 14th. Anticipation was confirmed, and when the 11th Brigade drew near the Fossa

Marina it appeared that a full-scale assault would be necessary to cross it.

On the 16th, strongly supported by fighter-bombers, the Scots Guards resumed their attack in the north, and having established a bridgehead across the Fossa Marina made an advance of about half a mile supported by tanks of the 10th Hussars. In four days of resolute fighting the Guards Brigade had made only scanty progress, but its persistence had drawn to its sector the enemy's best troops, and its efforts were reflected in success elsewhere. Little success was achieved by the Queens, still searching for forward roads in the marshes; and the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers of the 11th Brigade, having passed the eastern corner of Argenta and reached the Fossa Marina after darkness on the 16th, encountered most violent opposition. By midnight, very bitter fighting had won for them a minute bridgehead on the northern bank; which the enemy shelled, mortared, and counter-attacked in vain. A troop of the Bays crossed the Fossa on an Ark, but then their bridge collapsed behind them. Our artillery caught the enemy while his forward troops were being relieved, and inflicted losses that he could ill afford. In daylight on the 17th the little bridgehead was expanded, and two battalions of the Irish Brigade crossed the Fossa and fought doggedly throughout the day for meagre gains. Supported by flame-throwing Crocodiles the 5th Northhamptons attacked Argenta and cleared much of it before night, but then were hard put to it to beat off a strong counter-attack, supported by tanks, which came down from the north-west. The 2nd Commando, in the meantime, had advanced on the flood-banks west of Argenta as far as the bridges immediately west of the town, where it was halted by machine-gun fire in the very early morning of the 17th. Fighter-bombers attacked the German positions, and the Commando launched a series of frontal charges which dislodged the enemy. But five hundred yards ahead the Commando, again stopped by heavy fire, was forced to dig in. During the next five hours the enemy made four counter-attacks, heavily supported by guns and mortars, but all were broken and the Commando remained firm. On their most unpromising terrain on the right, the Queens had made unexpected progress.

Despite the local fierceness of the enemy's resistance, the general situation had materially improved. The Fifth Army, attacking on the 14th, had made spectacular gains and compelled von Vietinghoff to commit the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division. It was still unlikely that the whole of the 26th Panzer Division would be thrown in until

the British 6th Armoured Division came forward, and the Germans had no other substantial reinforcement for their strained defences. The Vth Corps still had the initiative, and new attacks were quickly mounted from the salient that had by now been won east of Argenta. In the early hours of April 18th the 6th Royal West Kents and the 8th Argylls of the 36th Brigade passed through the Irish Brigade, and struck north-westward against Boccaleone and Consandolo on Highway 16. There was much confused fighting during the night, but solid gains were made though a desperate small force of the enemy, strongly established at Sant' Antonio north-west of Argenta, prevented our use of Highway 16. On the flood-banks to the west the Royal Marine Commando took over from the 2nd Commando, and advancing in face of withering fire gained a thousand yards to come level with Sant' Antonio, but was later forced to withdraw. On the eastern flank the Guards Brigade had secured Chiesa del Bando, and closed on the strongly defended Fossa Benvignante.

The fighting for Consandolo became very fierce, and the enemy strove desperately to prevent a break-through on Highway 16. The village was demolished by the Air Force, but the enemy still held the ruins until the Argylls carried them by assault in the afternoon of the 18th. Early next morning the Kangaroo Force of the 2nd Armoured Brigade came up to break out on the right of Highway 16, and presently was engaged with German tanks in the open country east of Consandolo, and not far from the Fossa Benvignante. The Argenta defences were shattered by now. The 2nd/5th Queens had captured intact a bridge over the Fossa Benvignante, and three troops of the 12th Royal Tank Regiment went over. A mile to the north of Consandolo the Kangaroo Force found another bridge only partly demolished, and after a troop of tanks had surprised a number of Germans who were resting on the far side, the Force pushed on to engage at point-blank range a group of German field-guns. Three squadrons of tanks of the 9th Lancers, supported by the London Irish on foot, charged the enemy guns and were quickly masters of the field with twenty-seven pieces of enemy artillery and two hundred prisoners in their hands. But in Consandolo and Sant' Antonio there still remained pockets of German resistance which had to be cleared before the 6th Armoured Division could move along Highway 16, and take up the pursuit of the almost beaten enemy. With the last of their strength the Germans were still endeavouring to deny our passage to the northern plains, and on the flood-banks west of Argenta the defenders had been reinforced by many stragglers in a last effort to hold that flank; but the Marines struck again after

dark on the 18th, supported by artillery, tanks and flame-throwers, and the enemy fell back and allowed the Commando to reach its objective at the bend of the Reno.

The New Zealanders, by this time, had reached the Gaiana canal, and now the Poles, on their left, were drawing level with them. In the early days of the offensive the Polish Corps had encountered fierce resistance, and though troops of the 26th Panzer Division had fallen back when its right flank was exposed by the New Zealanders' irresistible advance to the Santerno—and the 4th Parachute Division had conformed with its withdrawal and retired from the foothills—the Germans had stood again, on April 12th and 13th, in such strength that the Army Commander had ordered the XIIIth Corps to bring the 10th Indian Division into action on the Poles' right flank to give them the requisite momentum to maintain their vital advance to Budrio. On April 12th the XIIIth Corps was instructed to hand over command of its sector to the Xth Corps, and move into the plain; and on the following day a boundary was indicated, forward of the Sillaro, between the Polish Corps and the Vth Corps—that was in effect to become the boundary between the Poles and the XIIIth Corps—which gave the Poles an axis through Medicina and Budrio, and the New Zealanders a parallel axis to the north of these villages.

The Poles and the New Zealanders did not wait for the 10th Indian Division, but pressed their attack with the utmost vigour. The former were still opposed by the two Parachute Divisions and the 26th Panzer Division; the latter, moving faster against lighter resistance, attacked the line of the Sillaro on the night of the 13th, and having stormed and broken its defences, established themselves on the far bank by dawn on the following day. The Poles took Imola, and reached the river twenty-four hours later. By the 14th, when the Fifth Army attacked, the Eighth Army in its westerly advance had already reached the Sillaro on a broad front—half-way from the Senio to Budrio—and drawn into battle the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, one half of von Vietinghoff's reserve.

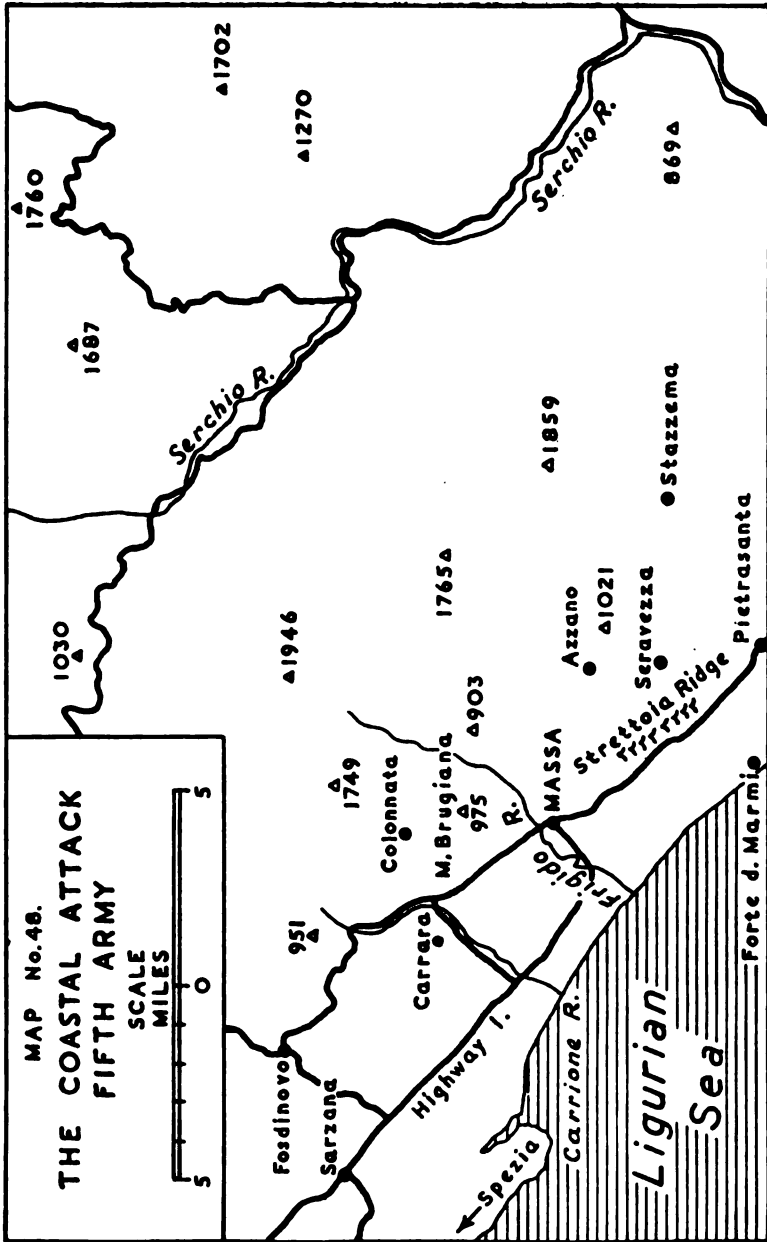
On that day the XIIIth Corps took command of the westerly thrust. The 10th Indian Division had not yet completed its movement into the line, and the New Zealanders, contending with the difficulties of soft ground, were bridging the Sillaro in preparation for a resumption of their advance. The enemy was re-grouping his forces to relieve the 98th Infantry and the 26th Panzer Divisions: both had been severely punished, and the former, which retired

far to the rear, was replaced by the 278th Division, which had been squeezed out of the line between the two Parachute Divisions as they fell back; while the latter went into reserve and the Parachute Divisions extended their line to fill the vacancy. To cover these reliefs, the Germans launched several counter-attacks on our bridgeheads across the Sillaro, and while the New Zealanders stood firm, the 43rd Indian Lorried Infantry Brigade, under command of the Polish Corps, was driven back across the river.

The German success was of short duration, for at night on the 15th the Poles and the XIIIth Corps attacked, and while the Poles gained a firm bridgehead, the New Zealanders extended theirs. The 278th Division was hard hit, and the 4th Parachute Division had again to extend its front to meet the weight of the attack. On the 16th an advance of 4,000 yards was made on a broad front, and by the following evening the New Zealanders had reached the Gaiana Canal. Its far bank, however, was held by the 4th Parachute Division with three regiments in line, and the 43rd Indian Lorried Infantry Brigade failed to carry it by assault. A little pause was necessary in which to mount a set attack.

The Indian Brigade had captured Medicina, and at night on the 16th the boundary between the Poles and the XIIIth Corps was so adjusted as to allow the latter the unrestricted use of roads through Medicina and Budrio; and the Indian Brigade passed to command of the New Zealand Division. The 10th Indian Division had by now arrived in the line, and taken over the right sector of the XIIIth Corps's front to force a way through floods and minefields to Molinella, and so broaden our threat to territories north of the Reno. But movement in the water-logged plain was almost impossible against even light resistance, and the 10th Indian Division got little farther than the Quaderna canal.

In the pause that followed the New Zealanders' arrival on the Gaiana canal, and while the XIIIth Corps prepared to attack on a wide front, the Poles drew level. Castel San Pietro on Highway 9 fell to them on the 17th, and by darkness on the 18th they too had closed on the canal. April 18th was, for the enemy, the beginning of the end. His best troops, in a series of well defended positions of very great natural strength, had failed to prevent the Eighth Army's veteran divisions from breaking his line; and within forty-eight hours the victors and the vanquished would be racing for the Po. It would not, however, be a flat race; for the course was strewn with many obstacles.



❖(3)❖

The American Attack

THE Fifth Army's preliminary attack on the Ligurian coast began on April 5th. The composition of the 92nd Division had been materially altered in preparation for it; the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, newly returned from France, and the highly trained 473rd Infantry, had replaced the 365th and 371st Infantry Regiments, which had taken over defence of the IVth Corps's long left flank. A narrow coastal plain, a range of precipitous mountains, and the Serchio valley lay in front of the division, and a choice had had to be made between frontal attack on the heavily defended plain, or a difficult approach over the alpine declivities of the mountains. The latter alternative had been chosen, and the Divisional Commander's plan was to attack over the ridges north of Seravezza and Azzano in the hope of surprising the enemy on Monte Strettoia, the ridge south-east of Massa, and the neighbouring defences on the taller heights to the north-east. The assault was to be led by the 442nd Infantry, which would proceed after taking its first objectives to capture Monte Brugiana, leaving Massa behind on its left flank. The assaulting infantry would be heavily supported by tanks, tank-destroyers, field artillery and naval guns, and aircraft.

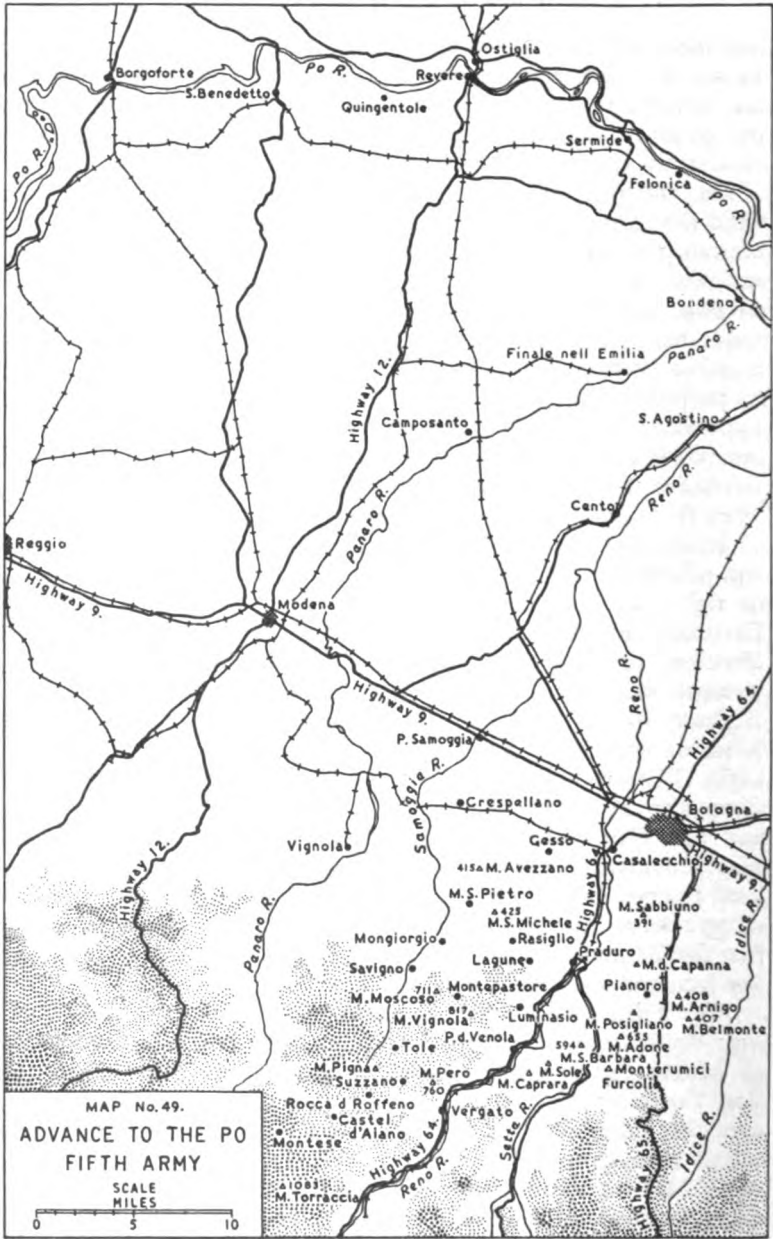
Neither the enemy's stubborn resistance nor the immense difficulties of the mountainous landscape could prevent the advance, which proceeded under a deluge of fire—though not without losses, and not without a determination that refused to be balked by the most formidable obstacles—until Massa, outflanked from the east, was evacuated by the enemy and occupied on the morning of April 10th by the 473rd Infantry. There was a very fierce battle for the crossing of the river Frigido, but when a bridgehead had been established the advance was quickly carried as far as the river Carrione, over which the 473rd Infantry secured a crossing south-west of Carrara on the 12th, and prepared to move forward again from the road between Carrara and Highway 1. The 442nd Infantry, in the meantime, having pursued the enemy over the alpine heights to the east, had taken Monte Brugiana. From the slopes overlooking Carrara the 100th battalion had continued its march, with mule transport, to reach the hamlet of Colonnata, three miles east of Carrara, on the 11th; by when the town and its marble quarries had been evacuated. The problem of supplying this

mountain advance was difficult, however, because the road from Massa to Carrara, cratered and mined, was still under fire, and the attempt to drop rations from the air had missed the hungry troops and consigned their rations to the ravines below; the road to Carrara had to be repaired before the troops could be fed.

The enemy's resistance was stiffening, and on April 13th the 92nd Division met a reinforced defence along its whole line. Slowly the advance continued behind a prodigious volume of artillery fire, and the enemy sullenly withdrew under cover of his own very effective bombardment to positions based on Sarzana and the mountain stronghold of Fosdinovo. Though the 92nd Division failed to maintain the momentum of its early advance, it had served its purpose and not only inflicted heavy casualties on its immediate opponents, but drawn all their local reserves into action, and compelled von Vietinghoff to detach a battalion of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division to meet its attack—and this on April 14th, when the Fifth Army opened its main offensive.

Inland from the 92nd Division the left flank of the IVth Corps was somewhat thinly held by the 365th and 371st Infantry, but in its right half, from left to right, were the 1st Brazilian Infantry Division, the 10th Mountain Division and the 1st Armoured Division, the last lying south of Vergato. The enemy's main strength on this front was concentrated between Vergato on Highway 64 and Montese about ten miles to the west. West of Montese was the 232nd Grenadier Division, east of it the 114th Light Division, the 334th Grenadier Division, and the 94th Grenadier Division. Vergato, the boundary between the 334th and the 94th Divisions, also marked the division between the LIst Mountain Corps and the XIVth Panzer Corps; except for local reserves both Corps were dependent for reinforcement on the Army reserve, the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division. It was estimated that the German artillery opposite the IVth Corps disposed of some two hundred and forty pieces.

The Fifth Army's plan prescribed an attack on April 12th, over the hills west of Highway 64 to capture the wooded heights of Monte Pigna, Monte Mantino, and Monte Pero; when the IInd Corps would join the attack on the right. Low-lying cloud over the mountains, which would have impaired the Air Force's activity, postponed the offensive for forty-eight hours. But on April 14th the weather was fine, and following a heavy attack by fighter-bombers and a great artillery barrage, the 10th Mountain Division opened the offensive from Castel d'Aiano between Montese



and Vergato. Despite the weight of the preceding bombardment the enemy's defences were intact, and the infantry advanced slowly against intense mortar and machine-gun fire. On the left, movement was stopped under the crests overlooking Torre Iussi, but on the right, after bitter house-to-house fighting, the village was occupied and Rocca di Roffeno was captured to the north-east. On the following day, again after artillery bombardment, the advance continued on the right and Monte Mantino was occupied, Monte Pigna had been taken fairly easily, and on the extreme right the 1st Armoured Division was in Suzzano and on the slopes of Monte Pero. The first objectives had been attained, but this success was in sharp contrast with the action on the left of the 10th Mountain Division's sector; where heavy fire had halted the Americans on their starting-line. To the south-west, however, the Brazilians, after a sharp fight, had taken Montese and held it under heavy gun-fire.

On the morning of the 16th a smoke-screen covered the road running south from the village of Tole, and behind it the Germans withdrew their artillery from Monte Mantino and the neighbouring heights. The rapid success of the 10th Mountain Division on the right wing of its advance was already evident in the disintegration of the 756th Grenadier Regiment; and the consequent threat to the 94th Division, now in danger of being outflanked, was sufficient to compel the enemy's withdrawal behind a fierce delaying action to his positions along the river Panaro. Ten times the enemy counter-attacked the 87th Mountain Infantry on Monte Mosca, but Tole was captured while the battle for Monte Mosca still raged, and from the left flank the 85th Mountain Infantry, who had been thwarted in their first attack, now began to move north-eastward to relieve the 87th, while the 86th Regiment forged ahead from Tole for three miles over the bare rolling hills to the hamlet of Monzuno. The enemy was given no chance to repair his broken strength, and irresistibly the Mountain Division swept on to open the way into the valley of the Samoggia. The danger of German counter-attack from the valley of the Pinaro was countered by the north-eastward advance of the 85th Mountain Regiment and the Brazilians, swiftly followed by the Divisional artillery, while the leading regiments, the 86th and the 87th, drove on to occupy Monte Moscoso, Monte Vignola, and the village of Montepastore. This brilliant achievement, which shattered the enemy's defences and cut his lines of communication, was the result of four days' impetuous fighting by a superbly trained and magnificently equipped division.

On the left and the right of the 10th Mountain Division, its neighbouring formations contributed to the assault. The Brazilians had occupied Montese, the 1st Armoured Division took Vergato on Highway 64 after house-to-house fighting for the ruins. The Armoured Division then made its main effort on the left, along the hills above the highway, and by darkness on April 17th its foremost infantry and a Cavalry Reconnaissance squadron had advanced some eight miles to occupy Monte D'Avigo, Monte Milano, and a position abreast of it on Highway 64.

To the east, on Highway 65, the IInd Corps had advanced much more slowly against a very stubborn enemy who had so far yielded only Monte Sole and Monterumici; but the irresistible assault by the right wing of the IVth Corps forbade the enemy to hope for any prolonged defence of Highway 65. The 10th Mountain Division was already moving on to the last foothills above the plain of the Po, with very few troops before it. The 94th Grenadier Division, the greater part of which lay to the east of its advance, had been split by the attack, and by April 18th it had lost a thousand prisoners. Another thousand had been taken from the 334th Division. These divisions had both committed their local reserves as early as the 15th, and now the enemy's general reserve, the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, had to be thrown in against the left of the American advance in an endeavour to hold the west side of the gap which the 10th Mountain Division had opened, and to impede its further advance by counter-attack. Between the Reno and the Samoggia the German defences were crumbling, and to prevent the re-disposal of their forces on other lines to the north, the Fifth Army made swift plans to reinforce success and broaden the area of penetration. Into the 1st Armoured Division's sector came the 85th Division from Army Reserve, to maintain the IVth Corps' northern advance on the right, while the Armoured Division moved a Combat Command to Tole and prepared to open a new attack on ground more suitable for tanks to the east of the river Panaro.

On the morning of the 18th the 86th Mountain Infantry advanced from Montepastore, fought fierce battles two or three miles to the north near Sulmonte and San Chierlo, and took many more prisoners. The Brazilians relieved the 85th Mountain Infantry, who moved up to San Chierlo and on the 19th took the lead and advanced to Monte San Michele. The enemy withdrawal became a rout, and all available armour was summoned for the pursuit. In the afternoon of the 19th the 85th held a road junction three

miles to the north of Monte San Michele, and halted there till its reserves and supporting troops should arrive. To the left the 87th Mountain Infantry, after savage fighting at Mongiorgio, advanced through Monte San Pietro, almost as far as Monte Avezzano; and the 86th in the centre stood on a defensive position north of Monte San Michele. On the evening of the 19th all three regiments were in line and looking down over rolling hills into the valley of the Po; and on the morning of the 20th the three regiments descended abreast, and against negligible resistance from an enemy hopelessly disorganised the 86th Regiment crossed Highway 9, the great highway to Bologna, and seized Ponte Samoggia. The 87th on the left had to fight for its advance at the village of Pradalbino, north of Monte Avezzano, but the 85th on the right was only lightly opposed. In a week's fighting the 10th Mountain Division had broken the enemy's main defences and made an advance of sixteen miles.

The newly committed 85th Division on the right began its attack against an almost non-existent enemy, and while the 338th Infantry moved easily north from Piano di Venola, the 337th took Luminasio, its first objective, without firing a shot. To the north, however, on the Lagune ridge, there was serious resistance and the advance was also hampered by the IIInd Corps' general movement to the west at this time, which brought the 88th Division across the 85th's right boundary, and finally pinched-out the 338th Infantry to make room on Highway 64, not only for the 88th, but also for the 6th South African Armoured Division, which moved in ahead of the 88th. In the 85th Division's narrowed zone the 1st Battalion of the 337th Infantry remained in action on the left and advancing through Rasiglio, despite heavy flanking fire from its open flank to the right, resumed its attack on the 20th—now supported by the 3rd Battalion, by tanks and tank destroyers—towards the road junction at Gesso, six miles west of Bologna. A reconnaissance platoon reached Gesso early in the morning, but in the hills on the still open right flank, the infantry of both battalions were opposed by stubborn knots of resistance; and while they were still fighting, orders arrived from General Truscott that the 85th Division was to make a wide sweep to the right, across the front of the 88th Division and of the 6th South African Armoured Division, to cut off the enemy's retreat on Highway 64 and capture Casalecchio, a western suburb of Bologna. The 2nd Battalion of the 337th Infantry, reinforced by tanks and tank destroyers, initiated the movement, and after some spirited action occupied positions

along its designated outpost line west of Casalecchio, many Germans being cut off by this rapid thrust.

The westward movement of the 1st Armoured Division had been made with some difficulty on over-crowded roads, but on the 18th, though Combat Command 'B' was still moving into Tole, Combat Command 'A' attacked northward in the valley of the Samoggia and against varying opposition made substantial progress. At night, however, four miles beyond Savigno, a series of counter-attacks compelled a temporary withdrawal. Anti-tank weapons had been its principle obstacles, but on the 19th, when Combat Command 'B' was also committed and the 1st Armoured Division resumed the attack with five columns of armour and infantry, more serious opposition was encountered. The Germans were now using the armour of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division in a desperate endeavour to check the advance, and very slow progress was made until late on the 20th. In the early hours of the following morning, however, American tanks were in Crespellano on the plain of the Po, due south of Ponte Samoggia. Three divisions of the IVth Corps, the 85th, the 10th Mountain, and the 1st Armoured, were now coming down from the hills into the plain, and on their right the IInd Corps had broken through the defences south of Bologna.

It had been anticipated, from the beginning, that the IInd Corps would have to fight slowly and stubbornly for small gains. The country ahead of it, on either side of Highway 65, was no more difficult than that which faced the swiftly moving troops on the right wing of the IVth Corps, but the Germans had expected the main attack to be launched directly against Bologna, and had prepared and fortified their defences in that area with thoroughness and grim intention. Monte Sole on the east bank of the Reno, Monterumici and the bare, steep slopes of Mont' Adone on the west of Highway 65, Pianoro on the highway, and the hills beyond Belmonte to the east were the strongholds of the German line, and the defences of all except Monte Sole were tactically connected.

From east to west in front of the IInd Corps lay the 305th Grenadier Division, the 65th Grenadier Division, the 8th Mountain Division, and the 94th Grenadier Division; the 65th Division, which held the immediate objectives astride Highway 65, was of mediocre capacity, but the 8th Mountain Division, which defended the heights between the road and the river Reno athwart the IInd Corps' projected advance, was of high quality. Under command of the IInd Corps were the 6th South African Armoured Division,

the 88th, the 91st, and the 34th American Divisions. Monte Sole and Monterumici, Mont' Adone and Pianoro were their first objectives, and it was General Keyes' intention, having breached the mountain line, to advance north-westward to the road junction at Praduro on Highway 64, from where the attack might be continued either east or west of the Reno according to circumstances.

During the afternoon of April 15th nearly eight hundred heavy bombers attacked targets on the two highways, and two hundred medium bombers bombarded Praduro. A little while later a hundred fighter-bombers assailed the German strong-points on Monte Sole, the South Africans' objective. Shortly before midnight, under the enormous barrage of the Corps artillery, the South Africans and the 88th Division advanced against Monte Sole and Monterumici, the 91st and 34th Divisions following four hours later against Mont' Adone, Pianoro, and the ridge of Sevizzano; but despite heavy bombardment by Flying Fortresses and Liberators and the great volume of shell-fire in the first twenty-four hours of the attack—the Corps artillery fired nearly 18,000 rounds—the German infantry in their well-prepared positions had suffered few casualties, and offered very strong resistance to the Allied infantry.

In the 88th Division's sector the 349th and 350th Infantry advanced against Furcoli and the heights of Monterumici, and by darkness on the 16th, after bitter fighting in which fortune swung from side to side, had succeeded in establishing a precarious hold on some parts of the main line of German defence. The 349th Infantry held Furcoli and positions on the ridge half a mile to the west, though on the left, on the slopes overlooking the Setta, no progress had been made. The 350th Infantry had four companies in contact with the enemy on the eastern and northern slopes of Monterumici, and some troops on the eastern slopes of the saddle below Mont' Adone; but the summit of Monterumici and many of its strongest positions were still in the enemy's hands. There were great gaps between the foremost American companies that the Germans still occupied, and their right flank was in danger; for the 91st Division had had no success in its attack on Adone. Only on the left had substantial progress been made, where the South Africans, in a spectacularly successful battle, had captured the formidable mountain triangle of Monte Sole, Monte Caprara, and Mont' Abelle.

On the 17th battle was resumed for Monterumici, and after stiff fighting the 350th Infantry reached the summit shortly after

noon; but the strongholds under the steep southern slopes of Mont' Adone could not be attacked until dark, and then the assault on them failed. In daylight on the 17th the 349th Infantry made little or no progress against the ridge west of Furcoli, but at night a resolute attack, concentrated on the enemy's principle stronghold on Hill 427, was successful, and by the morning of the 18th the ridge was secure in American hands. The Germans' resistance now showed signs of collapsing, and the advance became more rapid.

The South Africans' attack had been preceded, twenty-four hours earlier, by the capture of Ca Poggiolo, a thousand yards south-west of Monte Caprara on their left flank, by the 4th/13th Frontier Force Rifles. The 12th South African Motorised Brigade led the main attack behind a heavy barrage, and in spite of thick mine-fields in their path and the enemy's fierce resistance, the Cape Town Highlanders were within five or six hundred yards of the summit of Monte Sole little more than an hour after their start. There they were checked by a mine-field, but without waiting for a gap to be cleared a platoon-leader and a mere handful of men charged through the field, and caught the enemy still hiding from the heavy gun-fire in their shelters. The little attacking force was quickly reinforced, and Monte Sole was taken before dawn. Three counter-attacks and heavy shelling failed to regain it for the Germans.

The Witwatersrand Rifles, also of the 12th Brigade, were shelled on their starting-line and delayed by mine-fields in their attack on Monte Caprara, but shortly after day-break two companies were on its crest, a third arrived at noon, and three tanks, out of six which started in company, had reached the saddle between Monte Sole and Monte Caprara. In the late afternoon the Witwatersrand Rifles attacked Mont' Abelle, the third peak of the triangle, and took it in two hours' fighting. The enemy's counter-attack was broken by artillery and mortar-fire, and the South Africans stood firmly on the whole ground of their objective. The tremendous weight of their gunfire—in addition to the counter-battery fire by Corps artillery, the divisional artillery had fired over 35,000 rounds—had contributed largely to their success, but it was the great spirit of the infantry which had established them so swiftly on the heights.

But further they could not go. The Razorback ridge which led to the proximate height of Santa Barbara was covered by mortar and machine-gun fire, and flank attack was impossible on its steep

slopes. During the night of the 16th no progress was made, and there was none on the following day. There was stalemate, indeed, along the IInd Corps's whole front. But then on the morning of the 18th, when the 13th South African Motorised Brigade was about to swing widely to the right in a new attempt to gain control of the narrow ridge, deserters reported that the enemy was withdrawing, and by noon the ridge was occupied without difficulty, and by darkness patrols were as far forward as the confluence of the Setta and the Reno, just south of Praduro.

The 91st Division's plan of attack had been designed, in conjunction with the advance of the 88th on its left, to isolate the garrison on the steep-sided Mont' Adone by seizing the ground on both sides of it. An artillery bombardment, heavy and carefully directed, preceded the attack, but the enemy, in his caves and concrete pill-boxes, was almost immune to gun-fire, and the infantry could make little progress against defences which were still almost intact. By nightfall on the 16th the 361st Infantry on the divisional left were still denied approach to Mont' Adone, and the 363rd Infantry on the right were a thousand yards short of Monte Arnigo, their first objective. On the following day, a little ground was won at heavy cost, and the 363rd were within striking distance of the crest of Monte Arnigo and the village of Pianoro, though the 361st's advance on the left was still insignificant. On the 18th, however, the enemy's resistance began to break in consequence of success elsewhere. Monterumici had fallen to the 88th Division, on the right the 34th Division had taken the ridge at Sevizzano, and when the 361st attacked again, Mont' Adone was captured, and the advance continued more rapidly against fragmentary opposition. On the right, after a day of very strenuous fighting, the 363rd Infantry entered Pianoro in the evening of the 18th to find it dangerously full of mines and booby-traps, and stormed Monte Arnigo with the assistance of tanks and a very heavy artillery bombardment.

The 34th Division on the IInd Corps' right flank had concentrated its efforts against the ridge at Sevizzano, which the 168th Infantry secured after two days and nights of almost continuous fighting in which the infantry were, as usual, supported by a great volume of fire from the Corps and divisional artillery and from the divisional mortars, infantry-cannon and anti-tank weapons. By nightfall on the 18th the enemy's resistance was broken, and the Italian Legnano Group on the right was also advancing west of the Idice, where the enemy still maintained vigorous opposition.

Though the IInd Corps had not yet broken through on Highway 65, the enemy had begun to make an orderly withdrawal before it on the 18th, when the German formations south of Bologna found their positions threatened by the Eighth Army's advance up Highway 9 from the east, and by the IVth Corps' rapid success on the west. On the 19th, in preparation for maintaining the offensive into and through Bologna and past it on the west into the plain beyond, the IInd Corps moved its divisions to the left in a manoeuvre that resulted in some confusion on the overcrowded roads. While the South Africans and the 88th Divisions crossed to the west bank of the Reno, the 91st and 34th Divisions and the Legnano Group moved directly against Bologna; and though gains on the 19th were small, their advance was much accelerated on the 20th. Without opposition the 361st Infantry advanced from positions west of Monte Posigliano to occupy Monte della Capanna, and a little after midnight reached Monte Sabbiuno without much difficulty. Unhindered, the regiment advanced to a point a mile south-west of Bologna, and the 362nd Infantry, which had been advancing on the east bank of the Reno, sent patrols into the town—which the Poles had entered that morning—before midnight on the 21st. The 363rd Infantry, which had moved round the rear of the division on to Highway 64, advanced into Casalecchio. The 34th Division, after the 168th Infantry had captured the height called Dei Mori, moved into the 91st Division's previous sector west of Highway 65, having taken some hills north of Monte Arnigo in a brisk engagement. The 133rd Infantry and the Legnano Group then advanced rapidly towards Bologna, and the American infantry, riding on tanks, reported their entry into the town before nine o'clock on the morning of the 21st; the Poles having preceded them by a couple of hours.

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The Fifth Army in Pursuit

ON April 21st, with the IInd and IVth Corps abreast—each disposing an armoured division and two infantry divisions—the Fifth Army continued its attack against an enemy, who having been dislodged rudely and with a wholly unexpected speed from well-prepared positions, was already showing evident signs of disorganisation. Desperately short of transport, the Germans were now retreating across an open plain whose many roads offered a mechanised army

every opportunity of swift pursuit; and beyond the plain ran a broad river spanned only by ferries and pontoons, for its permanent bridges had long since been broken. It was clear to all that the German retreat might be turned into a German rout if the attack were pressed with unremitting speed.

In their advance to the river, American troops in the centre encountered little or no resistance, but those extending eastward and westward on the flanks found the enemy still capable of fighting briefly for some local advantage. It was the left flank of the German Fourteenth Army which had collapsed before the American attack, but the LIst Mountain Corps on the west was still capable of battle, and withdrawing northward in an orderly fashion, defended itself against the north-westward advance of the Americans on Highway 9 towards Modena and Parma; while on the east, where the Tenth Army was retreating before the British, the 1st and 4th Parachute Division still fought determinedly to cover its right flank.

The Allied Air Forces took full advantage of the opportunities presented by an enemy so intent on gaining the apparent safety of the farther bank of the Po that he abandoned all precaution and fled to the north in the open light of day. Such was the havoc on the roads that within twenty-four hours of the fall of Bologna, the signs of rout, the evidence of panic, were already showing; and before darkness on the 23rd there was such destruction of German transport and supplies, smoking and blazing on the roads, that there was little chance of von Vietinghoff being able to assemble a coherent and organised force on the farther bank even though the majority of his troops might succeed in reaching it. Daily the total of prisoners taken grew larger—between April 23rd and 25th the 88th Division alone took 11,000 on Highway 12 on its way to the river crossing at Ostiglia—and the advancing troops were heartened by visible proofs of the enemy's collapse when they captured administrative headquarters, a field bakery with the bread still warm in its ovens, a paymaster with the money that he had newly drawn from a field-cashier.

The task of the IIInd Corps in pursuit was to clear Highway 64, secure the line of the Panaro east of Camposanto, and seize crossings on the Po between Ostiglia and Sermede; the IVth Corps, having secured the line of the Panaro west of Camposanto, was to advance to the river between Ostiglia and Borgoforte south of Mantua. Except for a futile attempt at resistance on the Panaro the IVth Corps encountered little difficulty and reached the river

in three days. In the IInd Corps, the South African Armoured Division took a bridge over the Panaro at Camposanto, but was delayed by a mass of wrecked German transport in the neighbourhood of Finale nell' Emilia, where they made contact with the British 6th Armoured Division. The 88th Division on the left advanced steadily along Highway 12 against scattered resistance towards Revere, where it took a vast number of prisoners from the 65th Grenadier, 305th Grenadier, and the 8th Mountain Divisions which were assembling to cross the river. Here, too, the first German Divisional Commander to be taken during the Italian campaign was captured: Major-General von Schellwitz, commanding the 305th Grenadier Division. In the centre of the Corps the 91st Division advanced to Sermide almost as swiftly.

By darkness on the 24th the Fifth Army held the south bank of the Po on a front extending for some sixty miles from the river Taro west of Parma, to its boundary with the Eighth Army at Felonica, fifteen miles north-west of Ferrara, having in line from left to right the 1st Armoured Division, the 10th Mountain Division the 85th, 88th and 91st Divisions and the 6th South African Armoured Division. The Army had covered forty miles since the 21st, and though the hope of completely cutting off the German Armies south of the Po had not been realized, about 30,000 prisoners had been taken and the vast quantity of equipment that had been abandoned left no doubt that the destruction of the German forces in Italy was well within sight. On the American front the crossing of the Po was nowhere seriously contested, and by the 24th so many troops were already over it that the plans for a deliberate assault were discarded, and General Truscott ordered the foremost divisions to drive forward as far and as fast as they could. The 10th Mountain Division had begun to cross on the 23rd against strong but quite insufficient opposition, and on the 24th it was moving to the north. The 85th Division crossed on the 24th without firing a shot, and established ferries and brought up its assault-barges. By the 25th two bridges had been completed at San Benedetto, and on the 26th there was another at Ostiglia. The Army possessed an abundance of assault-boats and bridging equipment for, long before the Spring offensive began, the most elaborate plans had been made for the crossing of the Po and there had been intensive training for the operation.

Within the IVth Corps's sector, the 10th Mountain Division was to advance east of Mantua to seize the airport at Villafranca, and thence to Verona; to cut Highway 11 west of the city and block

the German roads of escape to the Brenner Pass between Verona and Lake Garda. The 85th Division, on its right, having crossed the Po at Quingentole, was to advance directly against Verona; while the 1st Armoured Division on the left continued to protect the Corps's western flank and deal with the numerous disorganised parties of the enemy still in its vicinity. Several German divisions, or the remnants of them, had been passed-by in the Apennines, and the Brazilians, coming into the plain at Vignola, prepared to hold the exits from the mountains and to relieve the 34th Division in Bologna.

The 10th Mountain Division moved very quickly to Villafranca, a daring advance under cover of darkness, and thence more deliberately to Verona where it found troops of the 88th Division already in possession. It then moved north along the east side of Garda to close the roads to the Brenner Pass. The 85th Division, after an uneventful march during which large parties of the enemy surrendered to it rather than fall into the hands of the Partisans, who were now robustly in action, crossed the Adige west of Verona and entered the hills and defensive positions of what had been designed as the Adige Line. The 1st Armoured Division, ranging as far west as the river Taro, prepared to move swiftly into the north-western parts of Italy. The 34th Division, having moved into Modena, advanced along Highway 9 and fought its way into Reggio; it continued after another brief action, and occupied Parma; it moved once more against Piacenza, forty-five miles away, where its advance was checked for a little while, but on the 28th, less than three days after leaving Modena, the Americans entered Piacenza and found the Partisans in control. The 34th Division, extended along eighty miles of road, stood between the 148th Grenadier and the Italian Bersaglieri Divisions, which had been caught on the fringe of the Apennines south of Highway 9, and the 232nd Grenadier Division, which had assembled for defence in the loop of the Po south of Cremona; the disorganisation of the Germans, however, was such that the danger of the position was only academic, and by the end of April 27th, after it had been attacked from two sides, the 232nd Grenadier Division collapsed as a fighting force, and the Brazilians, who had advanced to Colecchio on the 26th, cornered the 148th and Bersaglieri Divisions in the hills where they had retreated after a half-hearted engagement south of Parma. There was some fighting in the hills, but on the 29th the Commanding Generals of both Divisions formally surrendered to the Brazilians.

The IInd Corps's purpose, after reaching the Po, was to clear the west bank of the Adige from Legnano, where the river is crossed by Highway 10, north to Verona. The 88th and 91st Divisions would lead the advance, while the South African Division maintained contact with the Eighth Army on its right. The 88th Division crossed the Po under fire and raced north to Verona in a motley column of jeeps, captured vehicles, and bicycles.

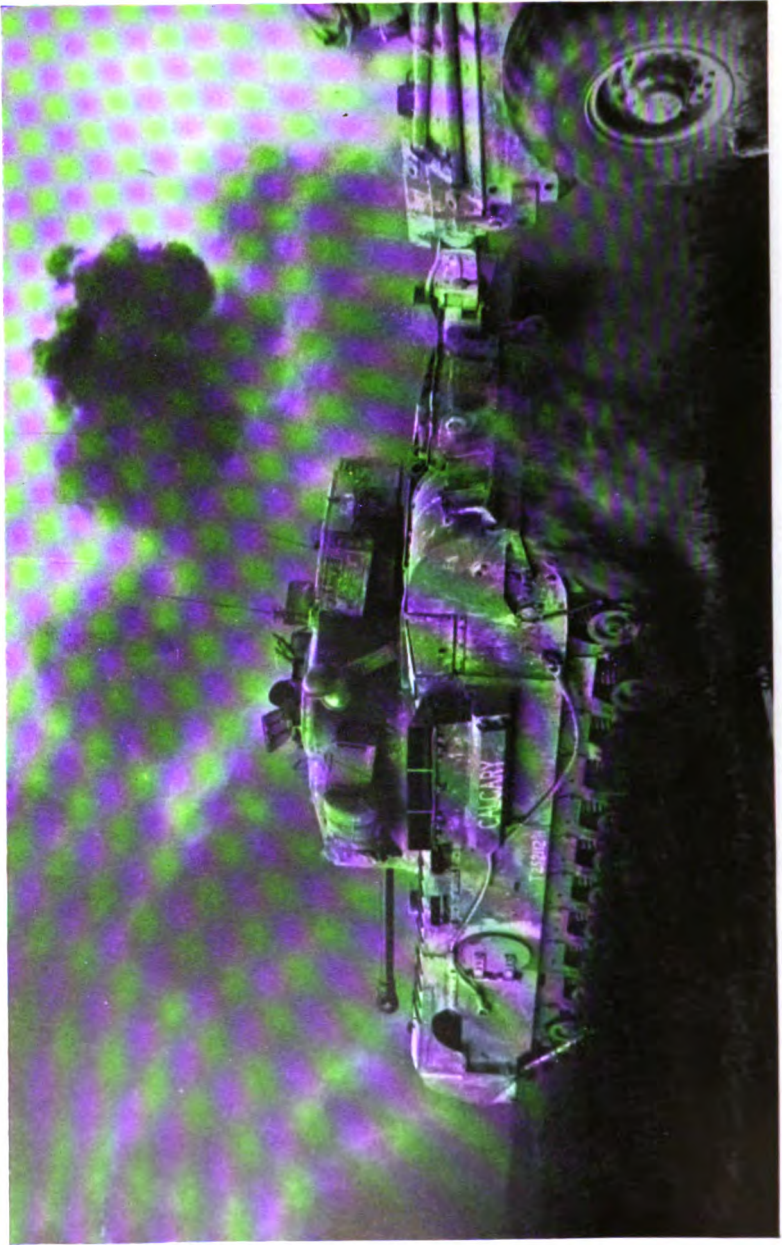
Some resistance was encountered at Nogara, but before midnight on the 25th, after a march of forty miles in sixteen hours, the column was in the southern outskirts of Verona, and by daylight on the 26th, though small parties of the 1st and 4th Parachute Divisions had fought stubbornly to hold it, the city was in American hands. The 91st Division, after its 361st Infantry had fought a confused engagement throughout the night of the 25th against an enemy column that was trying to force its way through the road junction at Cerea, just west of Legnano, reached the Adige without further trouble, took Legnano after a short fight, and began to cross the river. The South Africans, having crossed the Po at Felonica, were on their way to the Adige at Legnano; from there to be directed north-east towards Longare, south of Vicenza.

By April 26th the German forces in Italy had been split in two. The 10th Mountain Division had closed the roads to the Brenner Pass between Verona and Lake Garda, and while the 85th Division on its right was moving through Verona to attack the line of the Adige, Combat Command 'A' of the 1st Armoured Division on its left was moving northwards to Brescia and Lake Como. South of the Po Combat Command 'B' was clearing the country north of Parma. The Brazilians were somewhat to the south of it, and the 34th Division had reached Piacenza: to the south of Highway 9 were the remnants of the two divisions whose line of retreat had been cut by the 34th. On the Ligurian coast the 92nd Division was moving fast towards Genoa, and on the Fifth Army's eastern flank the IInd Corps stood on the Adige from Verona south to Legnano.

The Fifth Army's final tasks were dictated by General Truscott on April 26th: to destroy the remaining forces of the enemy in North-western Italy, and assist the Eighth Army in the capture of Padua. The IInd Corps was to advance eastward from Verona to Vicenza to block the possible roads of escape from the Adriatic littoral, while the IVth Corps, sending a division along the eastern shore of Garda to Bolzano and the Brenner Pass, towards the mountainous 'central redoubt' where the enemy had lately been threatening to offer a desperate last resistance, drove also north-west



PURSUIT



ARMOUR



THE ENEMY



PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

to Como with the 1st Armoured Division, and made a final clearance south of the Po with the 34th and the Brazilians. The whole country was swarming with German troops, but such was their disorganisation that no coherent opposition was encountered, though here and there were units that still fought fiercely to cover their retreat. The majority, however, were no longer combative, and either tried to pass unobserved through the long, loose Allied lines into the mountains, or waited, apathetic, to be captured. The IInd Corps crossed the Adige on a broad front, and Vicenza was captured on the 28th after a stiff engagement. The 88th Division spread its advance into the hills and into the valleys of the Brenta and Piave north of Bassano and Treviso, while the 91st Division drove eastward to Treviso, which it entered on the 30th. The South Africans, on a parallel course to the south, made contact with the Eighth Army at Padua on the 29th, and crossing the Brenta, reached an area south-west of Treviso. There, at the extremity of the Fifth Army's zone of operations, the South African Division assembled and prepared to march westward again to Milan.

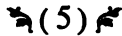
On the east shore of Lake Garda, in demolished railway tunnels, the 1st Armoured Division had been fiercely opposed, and reached the top of the lake only after some difficult fighting. The towns about the head of the lake were reported clear on the 30th, and on May 2nd the 86th Mountain Infantry had established a road block at Arco, five miles up the valley of the Sarca from Riva. Through Brescia and Bergamo Combat Command 'A' of the 1st Armoured Division had advanced to Como on the 28th, with Combat Command 'B' on an axis parallel with it to the south, and on the 29th a reconnaissance troop found Milan in the hands of Partisans. A Task Force of the Armoured Division formally occupied Milan on the 30th. In three days of almost continuous movement the Armoured Division had placed itself between the enemy's forces in the mountains and those who still remained in the plains; and to assist in clearing the country beyond Milan the 34th Division moved far and fast to assemble in the neighbourhood of Brescia and drive swiftly on to Novara, twenty-five miles west of Milan, and to Biella at the edge of the mountains. A cordon had been established across the top of the valley of the Po, and to the enemy's forces still south of the mountains and west of the Adige there was no choice left but surrender.

On the Ligurian coast the 92nd Division had taken, by the 22nd, all the strongholds of the Gothic Line except the old castle of Aulla, and when the defeated enemy began to withdraw, his

retreat was roughly expedited. The garrison of Genoa had surrendered to Partisans on the 26th, and the Americans occupied the city on the 27th. On the following day Alessandria, thirty miles to the north in the Lombardy Plain, was taken with its garrison of 3,000 men; and contact was established there with the Brazilians, whose westward advance had also been swift. Partisans were in control of Turin by the 30th, and on the same day the 92nd Division made contact with French Colonial troops between Ventimiglia and Menton. Throughout North-west Italy the Germans were by now intent only on submission.

The fantastic speed of the Fifth Army's pursuit of an enemy, straightforwardly beaten in battle, had been made possible by the extraordinary efficiency of its supply services. The enemy had been given no slightest chance to gather and refurbish his scattered divisions, though the Germans had expected that even if they should suffer defeat on the Po, the Americans would be unable to pursue them beyond it until they had paused to regroup and establish new forward bases. But there had been no pause and the attackers, with their ammunition wagons and ration lorries marvellously replenished, had never allowed the Germans to stabilise a new front.

A substantial number of prisoners had been taken in battle in the mountains. The number rapidly increased as the Fifth Army approached the Po, and became enormous when it reached Verona. The enemy's communication system had been completely disrupted, and lines of retreat that had been mapped by Corps and Divisional Headquarters crossed each other in utter confusion. Until April 29th, however, when all the roads of escape were blocked and negotiations for an armistice had already begun, there was no surrender in mass. But then the 148th Grenadier and the Bersaglieri Divisions south of the Po surrendered, and the Chief of Staff of the Ligurian Army of North-west Italy signed terms which the Army Commander, Marshal Graziani, who had earlier been captured by Partisans, confirmed; and both his Corps Commanders were ordered to lay down their arms. The Commander of the Lombardy Corps complied on the 30th, but General Schlemmer of the LXXVth Corps, who was bound by oath to Hitler not to yield, gathered his troops in a small area north-east of Turin to await the news of Hitler's death, which would absolve him from his rash promise. News of that happy event reached him on May 1st, and Schlemmer's surrender marked the end of resistance in Western Italy.



The Eighth Army in Pursuit

By April 18th all but two of the German divisions opposing the Eighth Army had been grievously punished. Of the 98th and 362nd Infantry Divisions, which had borne the brunt of the Vth Corps's attack, the former had been withdrawn, and the latter was worth only two battle-groups which would soon crumple before the advance of the 78th Division. The remnants of the 42nd Division and the 29th Panzer Grenadiers were losing heavily as they were forced back from the Argenta Gap. The 278th Division, hard hit by the New Zealanders, was holding with difficulty the north flank of the XIIIth Corps on the Quaderna canal. The 26th Panzer Division, withdrawn for reorganisation after disastrous battle against the Poles, had been given no time to recuperate before it was again committed. Only the 4th Parachute Division on the Sillaro, and the 1st Parachute to the south of it, were still in good condition.

Though the fighting had been very hard, none of the Eighth Army's divisions had suffered so severely as to require its withdrawal. The Army's most serious problems were concerned with movement and supply. Its artillery had already fired at least a quarter of all the ammunition available to it, bridging equipment was running short though there had been a vast quantity of it, and the only two roads through the Argenta Gap were seriously damaged. But no timorous economy restricted the gunners; Bailey bridges were dismantled and carried forward to be used again; and by ceaseless work the Sappers repaired and maintained the roads. The advance continued.

The XIIIth Corps was to proceed through Budrio to San Marco, while the Polish Corps made its main effort on its immediate left. The principal task of the Poles was to protect the XIIIth Corps's flank, but they might capture Bologna if circumstances permitted; though Bologna was an American objective. The Xth Corps's front had almost disappeared, and it prepared to reinforce the 10th Indian Division, in the XIIIth Corps, as might be required.

The XIIIth and the Polish Corps resumed their advance on the night of the 18th, and having stormed the line of the Gaiana pressed on towards the Idice, the last river before Bologna. That afternoon the Fifth Army had cut Highway 9 west of the city,

and the German 65th and 305th Divisions—hitherto untouched between the two courses of the Allied advance—withdraw hurriedly to the north. The enemy was now desperately intent on extricating the 1st Parachute Corps, whose flanks were both open, and while the 65th and 305th Divisions stood on the Reno, in front of Cento, to protect its right, the LXXVIth Corps was ordered to hold its ground on the east, to prevent the Vth Corps from reaching and crossing the Po, and to leave the 278th Division on the northern arm of the Idice to serve as a pivot on which the Parachute Corps might swing back. The result of this rearward movement was that the Poles and the New Zealanders, advancing to the line of the Idice, found it had been evacuated. They crossed the river, paused until some necessary bridges had been built behind them, and went forward again. The Poles, unopposed, entered Bologna in the early morning of the 21st, a couple of hours before the Americans arrived; and the New Zealanders, dealing resolutely with isolated rearguards, reached the Reno and made contact with the South African Division of the Fifth Army. On the right of the XIIIth Corps the 10th Indian Division, throughout the 20th, fought against the 278th Division on the Idice; but by the following morning the Germans had performed their task, and the Indians continued their advance.

It was in the earliest hours of April 19th that General Keightley issued orders which sent the greater part of his Vth Corps through the Argenta Gap to Ferrara and Bondeno, to prevent the main forces of the enemy from withdrawing northwards from Bologna across the Po, and to convert a German retreat into a German rout. The loss of his defensive position on the bend of the Reno had finally undone the enemy's hope of holding the eastern approaches to the plain, and on the coast as in the mountains the apparent solidity of his line had melted in the ardent heat of battle. No longer was Lake Comacchio a symbol of security, and the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division must now withdraw its seaward wing into the wide territories on the northern shore so uncertainly held by the 162nd Turcoman Division. No longer was the Argenta Marsh an obstacle, for it had been passed on both sides and beyond it there was a gaping interval between the LXXVIth Panzer Corps and the 1st Parachute Corps. Farther west, in the neighbourhood of Budrio, the XIIIth Corps was steadily advancing against opponents who could find no stability even in the strong line of the Idice, and ten miles north-west of Bologna the Fifth Army was already threatening to cut Highway 9. The risks, foreseen

and calculated, of engaging the enemy in a crowded battle on narrow ground had been justified; since the opening of the offensive the Vth Corps had taken 5,300 prisoners; the two leading British divisions were still full of fight, and General Keightley had not yet committed the 6th Armoured Division.

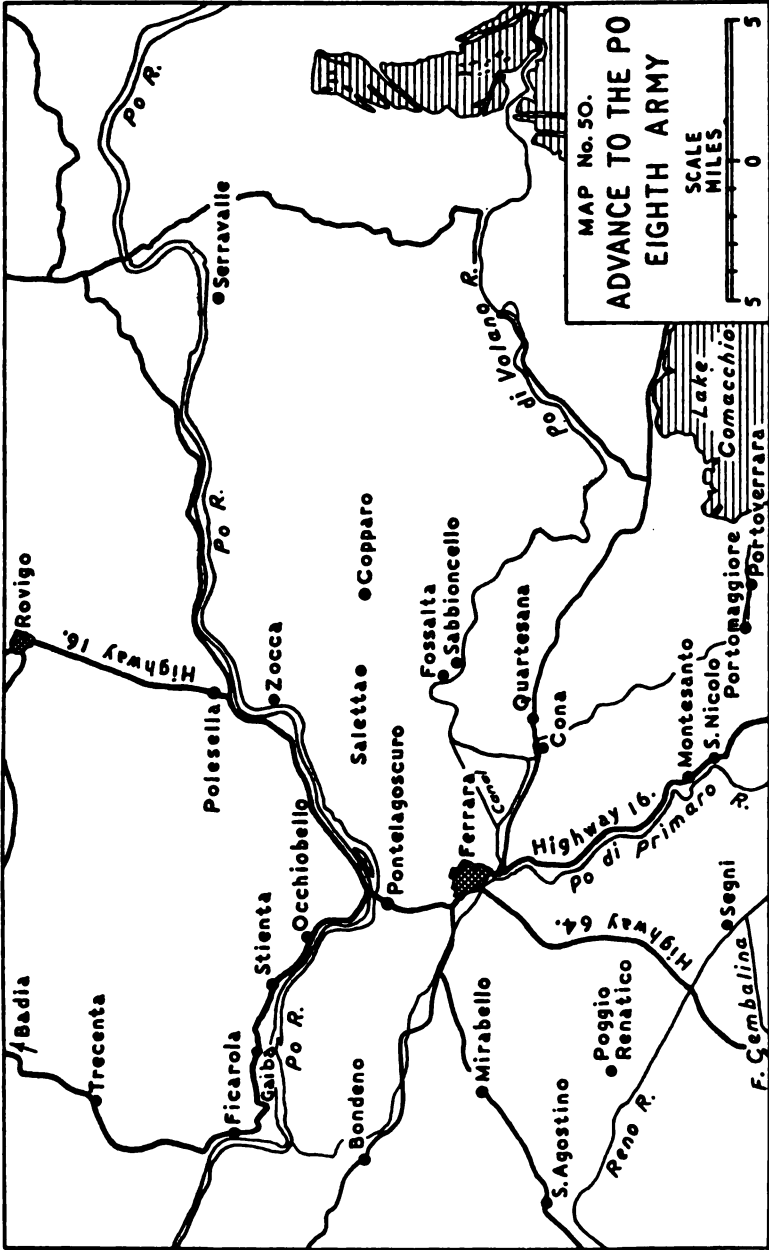
The country ahead, however, though open to the view, was intersected by canals and irrigation ditches and their embankments, and Highway 16 led northwards between the water-ways and ridges of a closely reticulated plain. The 56th and 78th Divisions were to continue their advance, and as the ground permitted the 6th Armoured Division would come forward on the left of the 78th to strike between the separated German Corps towards Bondeno. As the front widened the armoured cars of the 27th Lancers would come in on the right flank, and the 8th Indian Division, moving forward from Corps Reserve, would concentrate on the left behind the Armoured Division in preparation either to protect the left flank or to mount a new assault to clear a way for the armour. The 2nd Armoured Brigade, complete with its Kangaroos and flame-throwing Crocodiles, was under command of the 78th Division, the 21st Tank Brigade under command of the 8th Indian Division. The immediate purpose of the operation was to cross the Po north or north-east of Ferrara, and the main axis of advance would be Highway 16 as far as Ferrara, from where it would lean westward to Bondeno. To increase flexibility of manoeuvre the Corps artillery was divided between the three divisions, to each of which was given command of a mixed group of guns.

The first day of the advance, the 19th, began satisfactorily with the Lothians and the 16th/5th Lancers of the Armoured Division passing through the forward positions of the 36th Infantry Brigade to secure crossings over the Po di Primaro between Traghetto and San Nicolo; but when darkness fell the situation was less favourable than had been anticipated. The 78th Division had entered Portomaggiore, and won two bridgeheads over the Scolo Bolognese after some confused and stubborn fighting, and the Queens of the 56th Division had gained a crossing to the east at Portoverrara; but the armoured regiments had been held at San Nicolo and Traghetto where the enemy, foreseeing our intention, had reinforced his positions with troops of the 26th Panzer Division. On the 20th, too, resistance was strong, and it was painfully evident that the Germans were still able to oppose our advance with stubborn rearguards behind well-executed demolitions. All three divisions had to fight hard to maintain progress, for the enemy was obviously

aware of the grave threat to the lines of communication and the lines of retreat of the 1st Parachute Corps and the 268th Division, which the Vth Corps' armoured thrust might sever before the general withdrawal to the Po had been completed. To prevent this, and to impede the Vth Corps' bifurcated attack to the north and north-west, the enemy employed all his resources, and for some little time a succession of rearguard actions promised to enable him to withdraw the LXXVIth Corps behind the river in an orderly fashion. A general retreat to the Po had become, by the night of April 20th, von Vietinghoff's essential manoeuvre. Had he been allowed to use his own initiative he would have retired earlier, but he had been prevented by the German Supreme Command, whose judgment was less sound.

The attempt, too long delayed, to withdraw the LXXVIth Corps was defeated by the Vth Corps's fiery attack. The 16th/5th Lancers crossed the Po di Primaro at Traghetto, and to exploit their success the 17th/21st Lancers went through to advance on Segni on the next main obstacle, the Fossa Cembalina, which was held by the 9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, of the 26th Panzer Division, and fragments of the 362nd Infantry Division supported by armour and a machine-gun battalion. On the right of the Armoured Division the 1st Guards Brigade shared the attack on the canal, and though every attempt of the Lothians to advance at San Nicolo was fiercely halted, the 1st Welch in the centre and the 7th Rifle Brigade at Segni secured small bridgeheads over the Fossa Cembalina and held most of their ground in spite of furious counter-attack. Opposition died away on the afternoon of the 21st, and the 17th/21st Lancers crossed the Fossa at Segni, and now advancing at some speed reached Poggio Renatico in the early evening. This advance decisively broke the enemy's rearguard line, and closed the roads of retreat against the 278th and 362nd Infantry Divisions.

On the 78th Division's front the Irish Brigade rushed the enemy off the San Nicolo canal, and before dawn on April 21st had reached the village of Montesanto half a mile beyond it. The Divisional Commander decided to use the 36th Brigade and his Kangaroo Force to achieve decisive results. As a preliminary, the Irish Brigade and the 10th Hussars set about enlarging their bridgehead over the canal, and though opposition was strongly organised, and the advancing infantry had outstripped the divisional artillery, the battle was maintained in brilliant moonlight and the smoky glare of burning buildings until crossings had been won over another



canal and the villages of Cona and Quartesana five miles to the north. The 36th Brigade then moved forward on the left of the Irish. The 56th Division, on the east, advanced throughout April 21st with a momentum that grew as resistance diminished, and by first light on the 22nd the 24th Guards Brigade was in contact with the enemy on the Po di Volano at Sabbioncello, where the bridge was blown when the foremost troops were almost within reach of it. Crossings were made, however, without serious trouble. North of the Comacchio Spit, in the neighbourhood of Comacchio and Porto Garibaldi, the Germans were rapidly withdrawing, and the small but high-spirited Group of Garibaldi Partisans occupied both villages early on the 21st, and in spite of widespread demolitions pressed on towards the Po.

Now the 8th Indian Division came up to reinforce the pursuit on Highway 16, and when the 19th Indian Brigade had relieved some part of the 6th Armoured Division at San Nicolo, the 16th/5th Lancers moved on to Poggio Renatico as a preliminary to a quick advance on Mirabello, while the Lothians prepared to cut swiftly through to Bondeno ten miles north-west of Ferrara. This movement—a rapid exploitation of the armour's previous success—wrought great confusion among the enemy, broke his lines of communication, and resulted in the capture of some seven hundred prisoners. A troop of the Lothians entered Bondeno during the evening of the 22nd. By that time the Indian Brigade on Highway 16 had reached the Po di Volano on the southern outskirts of Ferrara, and three miles west of the town were in possession of a canal bridge across which, early next morning, the 5th Royal West Kents advanced with Churchill tanks to the south bank of the Po. They were the first troops of the Eighth Army to reach the river, but ten minutes later, a few miles to the west, patrols of the 6th Armoured Division were also on the bank. By the evening of the 22nd, the 78th and 56th Divisions having continued their advance despite the German rearguards who fought like men with their backs to the wall, some seven brigades were on the line of the Po di Volano and its canals—the last line of resistance south of the Po, that is—and Ferrara was threatened from two sides.

The 56th Division had already secured crossings and Bailey bridges were being constructed; but ahead of it lay the Canale Naviglio, and though the intervening ground was quickly covered during the night of the 22nd, the canal was strongly defended. West of Copparo the 167th Brigade fought for a crossing on the 23rd, while the Guards Brigade and the 27th Lancers spread their

front north-eastward to make contact with the Cremona Group, which had again been committed to reinforce the Garibaldi Partisan Brigade. The 78th Division, fighting for a bridgehead over the Po di Volano south of Fossalta, was very stubbornly opposed, not because the Germans were still anxious to retain their ground south of the Po, but because they were unable to cross quickly enough. The Desert Air Force's continuous assault on their crossings had destroyed so much of their transport, and so impeded their movement, that it was imperative for the LXXVIth Panzer Corps, which was covering the retreat, to deny for as long as possible our advance towards the river at Polesella, where its own crossings had been planned.

The 8th Indian Division had made excellent progress, winning the Ferrara airfield by the evening of the 23rd after hard fighting, while the Jaipur Infantry of the 21st Brigade swung quickly west of the town and by nightfall were in possession of a factory on the left of Highway 16, a mile beyond Ferrara. Between them and the river-bank to the north the 5th Royal West Kents were clearing their area, and the 6th Armoured Division was establishing control over the confusion created by its twenty-mile advance into the enemy's flank at Finale nell' Emilia west of Mirabello, where contact had been made with the South African Division. In the area contained by these converging advances there were still many troops of the Parachute Corps who fought fiercely in their desperate efforts to reach the river. To block their escape the 6th Armoured Division held San Agostino, Finale nell' Emilia, Bondeno, and a position on the river north-east of Bondeno; and as the Vth Corps now controlled a front of fifty miles, and the Armoured Division was on its extreme left, command of it passed to the XIIIth Corps while the Vth Corps concentrated its attention on securing crossings east of Stienta.

Since the night of the 18th the Desert Air Force had been attacking the crossing places and points of assembly on the river with remorseless persistence. The Germans had used all their ingenuity to conceal their crossings and the equipment for them—their pontoons were removed and hidden by day—but flares by night and the bright sun by day revealed their most cunning measures to the airmen's continuous searching, and on the night of April 22nd the Germans suffered a major disaster. Three pontoon bridges received direct hits, many rafts were damaged, and the assembling soldiers suffered heavy casualties. By the following morning the Germans had taken to swimming the river. But they had started too late.

Twenty-five miles upstream from Ferrara the Americans were already crossing the Po.

The 26th Panzer and the 29th Panzer Grenadier Divisions were in a desperate plight on the morning of the 23rd. The former had hoped to cross near Bondeno, but Bondeno was occupied by the Lothians; so the German division turned and tried to pass between Ferrara and the river-crossings east of the town. Our artillery and the Desert Air Force increased the weight of their bombardment against numerous targets, accurately observed, and created utter havoc on the crowded roads. Into the seething mass of Germans east of Ferrara the 78th Division thrust its way on the 24th, while the 8th Indian Division occupied the town, and the Jaipur Infantry continued their battle against German tanks on the open ground to the north. In the 78th Division's sector the Irish Brigade engaged at close quarters a desperate garrison of the 29th Panzer Grenadiers, who were holding the village of Saletta, and after three hours of battle in the early morning of the 24th, pressed slowly on towards the river at Zocca. Despite the weight of the bombardment on the shrinking area still held by the enemy, the Panzer Grenadiers refused to break; and the 8th Indian Division, which by now was on the river bank north of Ferrara, was ordered to lead the Corps across, a task for which the 78th Division had originally been nominated.

Soon after midday on the 24th the assault was renewed in the sector of the latter division, and the 2nd Armoured Brigade drove westward towards Pontelagoscuro. All afternoon and evening and far into the night, under brilliant moonlight and among fiercely burning fires, a mobile battle raged until the Germans had clearly lost all control; when the Armoured Brigade was ordered to turn at right angles to its previous direction, and drive into the disorganised remnants of the German divisions. Dawn discovered a scene of extraordinary desolation and fearful carnage. There was no longer any coherent resistance, and along the river lay the ruins of a German army. On April 25th resistance also ceased before the 56th Division's advance to the Po, and by dusk the Vth Corps had cleared the ground on a stretch of twenty-five miles from Stienta to Serravalle, except for a little pocket south of Polesella.

The battle had passed almost beyond reach of the other three Corps in the Eighth Army. The westward advance of the 6th Armoured Division had cut across the XIIIth Corps's line of advance, and that Corps had halted with the 10th Indian Division facing north on the line of the Reno, and the New Zealand Division, some of whose troops had crossed the river, to the left of it facing

north-west. To the south of the XIIIth Corps the Polish Corps had halted east and north of Bologna, and the small Xth Corps was in reserve. Only the Vth Corps on its extensive front was in a position to press the pursuit, and there was still some speculation—as there had been much in the past—about the enemy's capacity to offer battle beyond the river. Doubt was resolved on April 25th when Lieut.-General the Graf von Schwerin, commanding the LXXVIth Corps, surrendered with some formality—and the remnants of his champagne—to the 27th Lancers, and declared his inability to continue fighting with a few Divisional Headquarters which had no troops under command. His opinion was substantiated by the wreckage on the river bank, where among hundreds of loose horses and draught oxen a thousand motor vehicles had been abandoned, nearly three hundred pieces of artillery and eighty tanks lay in the discard, and a vast concourse of carts and wagons—pressed into service and crowded with the accoutrements of flight—stood smouldering or lamed on broken wheels. Fourteen thousand prisoners were in the Vth Corps's cages to increase the evidence of an Army's mortality.

It had been necessary, however, to complete the plans for crossing the Po before the full extent of the enemy's disorganisation had been realised, and when it still seemed possible that resistance might be expected on the Adige—the well-prepared and potentially formidable Venetian Line, that is—and the Army Commander had made suitable provision for a new assault. On April 21st, indeed, General McCreery had been compelled to take something of a gambler's chance in maintaining a maximum offensive, for by then the Eighth Army had expended more than half of all the ammunition it possessed. His plans had been made, however, for continuous attack from the Po to the Adige, and bridging equipment and assault craft had been divided between the Vth and XIIIth Corps to enable the advance to be maintained on two axes: on Highway 16 on the right, on the road from Ficarola through Trecenta and Badia to Este on the left.

In the XIIIth Corps's sector the 6th Armoured Division secured a crossing at Stienta, and the New Zealanders went over at Gaiba without difficulty. The New Zealanders reached the Adige on the other side of Badia in the afternoon of the 26th, and by dawn on the following morning had established a bridgehead. The 6th Armoured Division, which had to wait for use of a single bridge, reached, but did not cross, the Adige on the 27th. On the Vth Corps's front the 8th Indian Division crossed at Pontelagoscuro

and at Occhiobello before midnight on the 24th, and advanced to the Adige on Highway 16; while the 56th Division went over east of Polesella, and after a brief engagement reached Rovigo, and crossed the Adige by the evening of the 26th. Near the mouth of the Po the Cremona Group crossed on the 25th, and was much assisted by the excited population in clearing that part of the country.

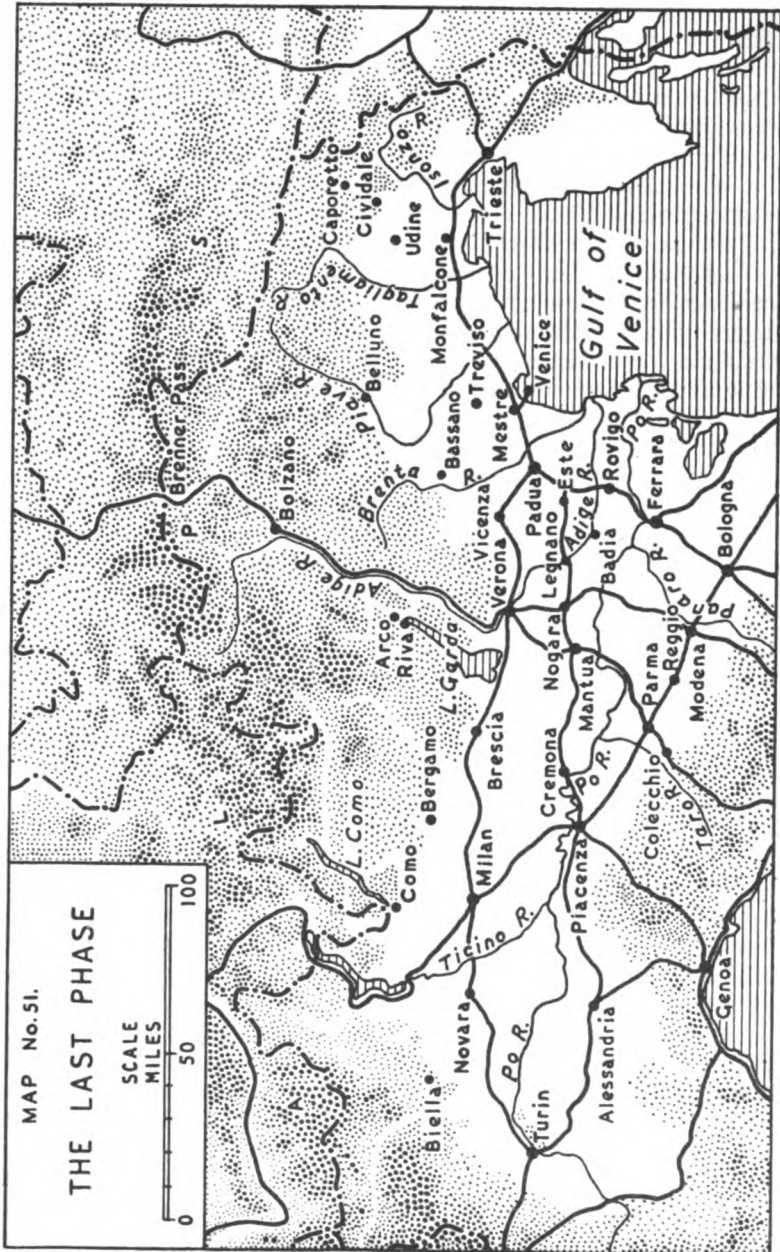
The plans elaborated for a set assault on the Venetian Line, and for the Fifth Army's assistance in the capture of Padua, proved unnecessary; and on the 28th the two Corps resumed their advance. The problems of maintenance were extremely difficult, but political considerations demanded the employment of more troops than the military situation now required, and the supply services were obliged to accept a very heavy responsibility. It was essential that north-eastern Italy should be occupied as quickly as possible by British and American troops. Not only were there great numbers of German soldiers who must be captured, but many thousands of Partisans, emerging from obscurity in a state of high excitement, had to be controlled and in some few cases restrained. There was, moreover, already the threat of international dispute about the possession of Trieste and Venezia Giulia, and it was manifestly advisable to reach these territories, and the Allied zones in Austria, with all possible speed and in suitable force. The XIIIth Corps advanced, therefore, with the 6th British Armoured Division, the New Zealand Division, the 43rd Indian Liorried Infantry Brigade and three British armoured units to occupy Trieste without delay, and to cut off the Germans' retreat into Austria; while the Vth Corps's advance was undertaken by the 56th Division to capture Venice. Padua was captured on the 29th, and after a brief action at Mestre by the New Zealanders and the 56th, Venice was occupied on the same day.

Along the coastal road the New Zealand Division made rapid progress on May 1st, and met the forces of Yugoslavia at Monfalcone. Swiftly advancing into the foothills of the Dolomites, the 6th Armoured Division made contact with the Americans at Treviso, and its mobile columns reached Udine and Belluno. Many thousands of the enemy surrendered in the latter area, but there were large and scattered German forces which failed to receive their order to Cease Fire on May 2nd, and the order did not yet apply to hostile formations east of the Isonzo. Military operations continued throughout the 2nd; the 6th Armoured Division thrust northward from Udine to Tarvisio, entered Caporetto, and found

MAP No. 51.

THE LAST PHASE

SCALE
MILES



Tito's troops in Cividale di Friuli; the New Zealanders arrived in Trieste, where the Germans, who had been determined to hold their ground against the Yugoslav Fourth Army, surrendered to General Freyberg.

The formal conclusion of the Italian campaign came at noon on May 2nd, when representatives of General von Vietinghoff, Commander-in-Chief of the German South-Western Army Group, signed their unconditional surrender in the baroque magnificence of the great palace of Caserta. News of their old enemy's capitulation reached the fighting troops of the Eighth Army that night. Six hundred days had gone since the Army landed in Calabria—with victory in Sicily behind it, and the epic memory of its great anabasis across the roof of Africa from the immemorial Nile to the forgotten ruins of old Carthage—and from Lucania to the black canals of Venice and the flowering foothills of the Alps it had gathered new battle-honours on the beaches and the rivers, the wintry mountains and the ripening fields, grape-garlanded, of the long peninsula that had been the first bridge from victory in Africa to war and victory in Europe. It could look back at memories of resolution that never failed, of surging attack that had broken the sternest defence; and at the graves of 59,000 men who had died for their resolution and its triumphs. If ever an army deserved the laurels and the wine of conquest it was the Desert Army that had carried its soldier's faith from the Libyan frontier to the Austrian passes; but the wind came coldly from the Alps while the rejoicing divisions listened to the news of peace, and over the Romagna the *bora* blew with ice in its breath.

In the south, on the Eighth Army's old battlefields, the corn was filling in the ear, but in the north the harvest was denied. Before the echoes of the *Cease Fire* had died away, Marshal Tito's soldiers were threatening to claim by force Italian territory in Venezia Giulia and Austrian ground near Klagenfurt and Villach. The allies of the war were dividing already to become antagonists in peace, and grimly the New Zealanders, the British, and the Americans stood to arms again, taut and resentful at being cheated of the jubilation they had earned. They had won their laurels, but they must wear their wreaths about a steel helmet, and drink their wine with a rifle between their knees. Their war had been hard and cruel and bitter with death, and their victory had brought them but a doubtful peace and granted them leave to live in a world that was angry still. They deserved more than they gained, the polyglot soldiers of the Allied Armies in Italy, and like

valiant men the world over they had given more than they received.

But they had won their war, they had beaten a powerful enemy of high temper and superb accomplishment in arms; and the memory of a well-fought campaign is riches in the private mind and a certain page in history. Even when it is most fruitful, peace has its terms, but victories like the taking of Rome and the storming of the Gothic Line keep their name through the centuries. Though their grandeur may somewhat fade, they do not altogether wither nor fall away from the parent branch; and if in its voyage through space and time the world shall come into fine weather, there will be those who remember with awe—sitting in peace under their vines—the storms that preceded their happiness. There will be some who talk of Alexander, and the great names of the regiments that he led.

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