



19 DAYS

*from the Apennines
to the Alps*





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from the
APENNINES
to the **ALPS**



THE STORY OF THE
Po Valley Campaign



*To the Officers and Men
of the Fifth Army :*

You have made this book.

It is compounded of the snow and sleet of the Apennines; the tenacious mud of the mountain valleys; the heat of summer in a foreign land, and the cold of winter. It is written in the blood of your comrades; bound in the imperishable glory of their memory.

You have fought long and hard, but you have won a memorable victory. I am proud to have been one of you.

No general has ever commanded a finer army; I think no general ever will.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "L. K. Truesdell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "L" and a long, trailing flourish at the end.

Lieutenant General, U. S. Army
Commanding



Infantrymen patrol in the deep snow of the Northern Apennines.

Six months in the mountains

The last snows had vanished from the Apennine slopes, and the Italian peasants, certain that the war had passed them by, plowed their upland fields. Gentians and violets were beginning to appear on ridges where a long half year earlier the roar of high explosive shattered the air.

A short ten miles to the north, however, war was present in stark reality. Venturesome buttercups reconnoitered among the gun emplacements and dugouts, but they seemed foolhardy

adventurers, like the handful of farmers who had filtered back to their shattered homes in the deceptive quiet of forward areas. The sun shone brightly, flanked by chill winds from the Alps. Mortars belched intermittently, machine guns argued excitedly, and 105's spat accurate death at the invisible enemy.

« Little to report », said communiques, but there were some of our patrols that didn't come back; there were German soldiers, too, who would never again yearn for the faithless Lili Marlene. The line lay sprawled like a sleeping giant, in the fitful half-waking hour before the dawn, mumbling and muttering in the maze of a disquieting dream.

It had been the sleep of exhaustion, this half year. The Fifth Army in the preceding six months had fought its way from positions in the rugged mountain areas south of Rome and from the desolate plain of the Anzio Beachhead to a point but a few miles south of Bologna, gateway to the broad valley of the Po where, within range of our binoculars, the enemy was fattening on the wealth of the low fertile farmlands. Rome had fallen, Florence had fallen, the vaunted Gothic Line had been erased from the map of Italy.

The Army had fought hard and continuously and with but little respite. Thousands of battle-tested men had fallen in the drive up the Peninsula; many thousands more had been withdrawn for the assault upon the southern bastions of France. Supply lines were long and severely strained, and winter was at hand. The enemy held the commanding ridges and peaks from the narrow Ligurian coastal plain on the west to rugged Monte

Grande on the east, where the Fifth Army rubbed shoulders with the British Eighth.

Throughout the winter months the Army had rested, trained, and built up its combat equipment for the eventual knockout. Replacements and reinforcements flowed in; wornout vehicles were repaired or exchanged; reserves of ammunition were piled up, new and improved types of weapons added.



Men and Mules plodded through the mud of the Apennine Trails.

For the men in the line there was no let up. They plunged wearily through waist-deep snowdrifts on patrol; they endured bone-chilling cold and damp; the slick mud of the Apennines became a part of their daily life. Some began to forget that they had ever known any other life. The War Correspondents in Rome

began to refer in their dispatches to « the Forgotten Front ».

The equivalent of ten divisions was spread out over some 90 miles of the toughest type of terrain for military operations; on the west a narrow strip of coastal plain, the rest a formidable maze of tortuous mountains. The IV Corps, commanded by Major General (now Lieutenant General) Willis D. Crittenger, on the left flank extended from the Ligurian Sea to the Reno River, a span of 70 miles, while the II Corps, under the command of Major General (now Lieutenant General) Geoffrey Keyes, was concentrated on a 25 mile front from the Reno to the Idice and the low mass of Monte Grande. Approximately 270,000 troops of all branches and services made up the Fifth



Snow plows cleared the drifts from the highway to let supplies move up.

Army. They included units composed of American whites, American negroes, and Americans of Japanese descent as well as Brazilians, South Africans, and Italian elements. (A division of British East Indians had been released to the Eighth Army a short time before).

The combined line of the two armies slanted northeast across the map of Italy from the vicinity of Viareggio, in the lush resort country on the Ligurian Sea, to the marshy southern shore of Lake Comacchio on the Adriatic, passing less than 12 miles south of Bologna.

The giant had slept, but there had been brief awakenings.

Limited objective attacks had been made during the late win-



Ski patrols dotted the dreary mountain slopes, probing enemy positions.

ter and early spring. The 92^d Infantry Division in early February had pushed out up along the west coast, but the enemy had been ready and had counter-attacked to recover most of the gains made by our troops.

On 19 February the 10th Mountain Division, newly arrived in the Theater, in conjunction with the Brazilian Expeditionary Force attacked Monte Belvedere and enemy-held positions along Highway 64. It was here that the Army spring offensive was later to begin. To the fresh mountain troops, trained to razor-edge fineness, but as yet lacking extensive combat experience, was assigned the task of clearing commanding heights held by the Germans.

With a verve and enthusiasm reflecting their caliber and their training, and predictive of future performance, the men of the 10th took the Serrasiccia-Campiano Ridge, Monte Belvedere and Monte Torraccia, key features covering Highway 64 north of Porretta, and continued on to the northeast. They succeeded in clearing an area within their sector five to seven miles in front of the previously held front line. The BEF kept pace, moving up on the flank of the 10th as it spearheaded the attack. After 16 days, General Truscott called a halt. It was not yet time for the full-scale spring offensive, and it was not desirable to call the enemy's attention too pointedly at this time to this part of the line.

This was the position of the Fifth Army at the beginning of April, 1945, as it prepared for the push that was to culminate in complete victory in Italy. On the left was the 92^d Division,

commanded by Major General Edward M. Almond, under army command. The division was reinforced by the 473^d Infantry Regiment, converted during the winter from antiaircraft units, and by the 442^d Infantry Regiment, the famous Japanese-American outfit already tried and tested in two theaters. In General Almond's command the 370th Infantry, 442^d Infantry, and the 473^d Infantry were deployed from left to right in that order. Detached from the 92^d and under army command, the 365th and the 371st Infantry held positions in the desolate mountains on the right.

Here, as the army line swung sharply to the northeast along the ridges, the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, commanded by Major General Joao Batista Mascarenhas de Moraes, was in position, with the 10th Mountain Division under command of Major General George P. Hays on its right. On the right of the 10th, and extending the IV Corps line to the Reno, was the 1st Armored Division, commanded by Major General Vernon E. Prichard.

In the II Corps sector the 6th South African Armored Division, under Major General W. H. E. Poole, occupied the left. Next to it was the 88th, commanded by Major General Paul W. Kendall. Then the 91st, under Major General William G. Livesay, and the 34th, under Major General Charles L. Bolte. Finally, next to the Eighth Army and linking up the two forces, was the Italian Legnano Group, a combat organization of about half the strength of an American infantry division and commanded by Major General Umberto Utili. The 85th Division with Major General John B. Coulter in command was in army reserve.



Highway 65 winds past Loiano, Mt. Adone, and out into the Po Valley.

Bullets and beans

The battlewise troops confronting the Fifth Army were Hitler's best. In Europe, between the giant jaws of the trap extending from the Rhine to the Oder, was compressed the remainder of the force that had once been the terror of the civilized world. All, that is, except the two armies in Italy.

These armies, although they had been pushed steadily backward, had suffered serious losses, and were laboring under handicaps of supply and lack of transport, had never been routed.

Divisions were intact, and had had ample time to train and battle-season replacements. Among these units were some of the best the Wehrmacht had ever had. Their total effective combat strength was approximately equal to that of the American Fifth and British Eighth Armies, which they had fought from the toe of Italy here to the Gothic Line in the heights of the Apennines.

These German forces were virtually self-sustaining in the rich valley of the Po. What our troops had come to call The Promised Land was indeed a « land of milk and honey » — to say nothing of wheat and rice and fruit and livestock. While southern Italy lived on semi-starvation rations, the Po Valley residents had all they needed and more, lacking only tobacco, sugar, and a few other luxuries. The Krauts had all they could eat, but because of the destruction of their oil plants, and with railroad and highway bridges out, movement to and from Germany had become a tedious and hazardous process, and they were not able to loot the country as thoroughly as they had done in Denmark and the Low Countries.

Enemy motor transport suffered from lack of spare parts and shortage of fuel. Our air force had made almost a no-man's land of the entire Po Valley. Vehicles or trains moved in daylight only at great risk. There were no longer any bridges over the Po River and all supplies had to be ferried. Even at night movement over the roads in the Po Valley was hazardous because of the operations of our night bombers.

The magnificent job that had been done by supporting air forces was all too evident to anyone who ventured to fly out over

the Po Valley on a clear day. Northward in the vast pattern of little farms, vineyards and orchards interlaced by white roads and dotted with towns and villages, hardly a sign of life and but little movement could be seen, even in such large towns as Bologna and Modena.

However, turning south and passing back over the Allied front the scene changed abruptly to one of great activity. Dust clouds hung over every road; motors, guns and tanks clustered around every farm and village building. Tiny figures could be seen moving everywhere, piling supplies, training earnestly, playing football or softball; little fear of the once vaunted Luftwaffe here.

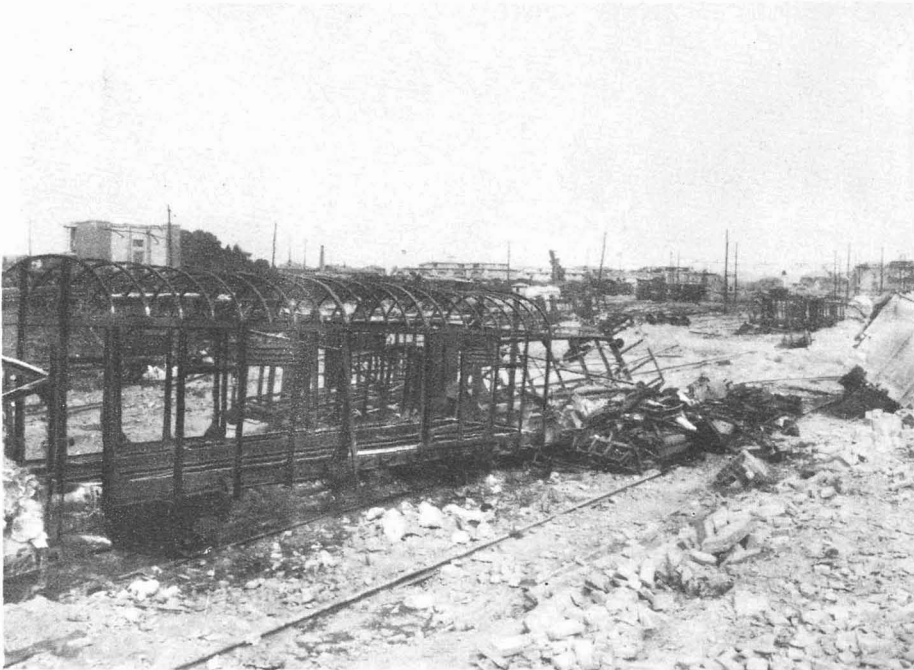
The enemy was well supplied with arms and ammunition for defensive operations, but because he could not bring in vast quantities with which to build up his stocks it was necessary for him to hoard the supplies he had on hand. He carefully conserved his artillery, using it only when he considered it to be absolutely necessary or extremely profitable. He moved troops by motor only in emergency.

He was not, however, in any desperate position nor would he be so long as we did not attack in deadly earnest. At the beginning of April it was estimated that the enemy had on hand fourteen days of supplies of all classes, while he still had control of the great industrial region of the northwest, including the factory cities of Milan and Turin, with their automobile and airplane plants. In preparation perhaps for the development of Hitler's « National Redoubt » in the Bavarian Alps, he had moved large numbers of drill presses, lathes, and other machine

tools from these cities into the highway tunnels on the western shore of Lake Garda. Here, securely sheltered, they were used to turn out airplane engines.

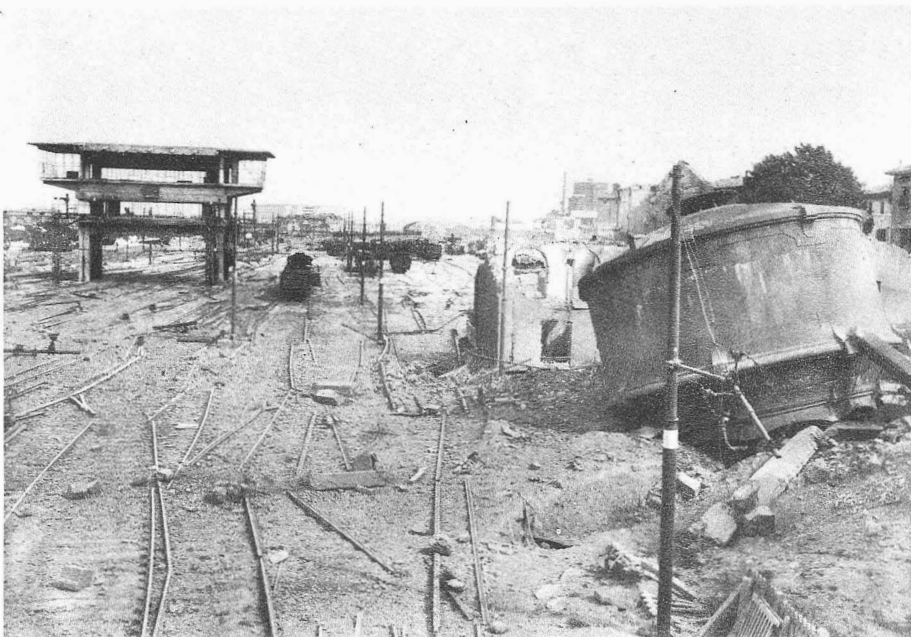
But it took him a long time to move a division from one sector to another. His troops travelled only at night and on foot. Late in February General Crittenberger, questioning a Nazi prisoner as to how he had come all the way from a locality on the extreme right of the Eighth Army asked, « And how did you get here? » « Zu Fuss » (on foot). « All the way — you didn't ride at all? » « Nein. Zu Fuss » (No, walking all the way).

Here was the telling effect of the Allied air effort on the Wehrmacht in Italy. Our air forces had so persistently bombed his



Air force pilots turned railroad stations into piles of scrap metal.

sources of oil and his synthetic oil plants that he was forced to adopt the most drastic conservation methods. This meant, too, that the Luftwaffe itself had been reduced to little more than a memory. Second, it meant that the capabilities of the Wehrmacht for movement had been severely restricted. Pilots frequently reported seeing trucks and combat vehicles being hauled by horses or oxen.



Wrecked yards, twisted rails, gave Jerry a taste of his own medicine.

Was this the time? The Allied armies in France were moving forward; the Russian cannon were pounding the eastern front, and the armies in Italy were ready. Hitler from his shelter on Wilhelmstrasse had announced to the world that the German armies would fight to the last man. With the Wehrmacht on the

east and west fronts slowly crumbling before the Allied attack there was some question as to the wisdom of an all-out assault in Italy. « Why attack now? » it was asked. « Why not sit and wait until Germany collapses and save the lives we shall lose here? » To this General Truscott gave the following answer:

« It is largely a question of where the lives are to be saved. It will require just so much effort to destroy the German will to fight. The attack of this army against the German's sole remaining army may be the very factor, if launched now in coordination with the attacks on the eastern and western fronts in northern Europe, that will cause the final German collapse; I think there is a great possibility that that may prove to be the case.

« The second point is that the German army confronting us here is in better condition than any German army has ever been in Italy, so far as strength is concerned. We know that definite shortages of certain critical supplies exist, but they are in good shape, probably better than any other German force still in the field. If we succeed in destroying the Boche here, he will be unable to withdraw to the Alps and prolong the struggle there.

« A third point: If we sit by and wait, we allow him to continue the exploitation of northern Italy. By destroying him here, we will quickly complete the liberation of all of Italy. We will minimize the destruction that he will be able to effect; and we will deny to him the resources that will enable him to continue the struggle elsewhere, or to prolong the struggle here. These factors indicate that troops in Italy must join in the attack now.»



From atop an ancient Italian tower, an observer directs artillery fire.

Planning the knockout

On 12 February, 1945, 15th Army Group, commanded by General Mark W. Clark, issued its Operations Instruction No. 3. This directive stated the objectives of the offensive to be undertaken and outlined its fundamental strategy.

The strategy governing the operations was essentially the same as it had been in the previous fall, when a drive had been conceived which was to bisect northern Italy and to be followed by a debouchment from the Apennines out into the Po Valley.



The Army Commander studies a map with Gen. Crittenberger on D Day.

The offensive was to be divided into three general phases: (1) The capture and consolidation of a position around Bologna; (2) The development of the Po River positions; (3) The crossing of the Po and sealing of the Brenner route, main enemy exit from Italy, with the seizure and development of the Adige River positions. (The Adige, which flows south through Verona and thence southeastward to the Adriatic, was known to be a main German line of defense).

Operations Instruction No. 4, issued by 15th Army Group on 24 March, was the outgrowth of extensive preliminary planning on the part of the two armies, and covered plans for the offensive in detail. It set 10 April as D Day (later changed to 9 April), and

prescribed that Fifth Army should make the main attack, following preliminary attacks to be made by Eighth Army which were to clear the plain East of Bologna. Wide enveloping movements on the part of both armies were to be made in an effort to cut off and destroy the bulk of the enemy forces south of the Po, the Eighth operating east of Bologna and the Fifth to the west, with their spearheads meeting somewhere on the south bank of the Po.

The three phases were described in detail. In Phase I, Eighth Army was to break through the Santerno River defense, while Fifth Army debouched from the mountains into the valley, and captured or isolated Bologna. Phase II contemplated a breakthrough by either or both armies to encircle the enemy forces south of the Po, while Phase III called for the actual crossing of the river and the capture of Verona which guarded the gateway to the Brenner.

The general outline for Operation Craftsman — the title designation of Fifth Army's plan for its part of the offensive — was complete by the middle of March. Fifth Army would attack with both Corps abreast, with the main effort initially astride Highway 64 until the valley of Setta Creek had been cleared and the road junction of Praduro, 15 miles north of Vergato, had been captured. A secondary effort would be made along Highway 65, to the east of 64 and generally parallel to it, while the units with the IV Corps reduced the dominating positions west of the road and came up abreast. Thereafter the weight of the Army would be concentrated west of Highway 65.

Five days prior to D Day a preparatory attack was to be launched along the Ligurian Sea, to keep the enemy off balance and to maintain pressure on his right flank. Operational decisions which could be made only in the light of the situation existing after the main enemy line had been broken were not included in detailed advance instructions.

The approval of this plan, described here in brief outline, was reached only after full examination and discussion of half a dozen plans which had been considered at one time or another during the winter. The main question had been whether the principal line of attack would be up Highway 65, the most direct route to Bologna, or up Highway 64 from the southwest.

On Highway 65 our forces were already within 12 miles of the city, while on Highway 64 they were 20 miles away. Along 65 the terrain was more favorable and the road net, the best in the Army area, was capable of supporting five divisions. But it was on this approach to Bologna and entrance to the Po Valley that the enemy had constructed his strongest array of defenses. All winter he had been working on this defensive system, and at Fifth Army Headquarters its character was well known. Virtually every square yard of the area bristled with mines, artillery emplacements, and all the other devices designed to make a ground assault costly in the extreme.

The Highway 64 route, while longer, was less heavily fortified, offered the possibility of a close envelopment of Bologna from the northwest after our troops had descended from the mountains, and also might be exploited to supply five divisions. This

road, which followed the course of the Reno River and was partially defiladed from the west over much of the distance, was the more protected of the two. On the other hand, it was commanded by a ridge 15 miles long in possession of the enemy. This would have to be cleared, as would Monte Sole to the east, before the road could be used throughout its length.

A close study of all the aspects of the situation, including many which had been discarded almost immediately, led to the conviction that a direct, massed attack straight down Highway 65 would be too costly in men and materiel, and would consume a considerable period of time. Consequently all planning thereafter was restricted to operations in the area west of Highway 65 and immediately west of 64. On the extreme left of this area there was a road net which led into Highway 9, the broad trans-peninsular route passing through Bologna, at points only five to six miles west of the city.

The 10th Mountain's preliminary attack in late February and in the first days of March was designed to clear as much as possible of the ridge which commanded Highway 64 on the west, and actually at the close of that separate operation about three-fourths of it was in our hands. At that time a halt was called to avoid focussing too much enemy attention on this part of the line.

Fifth Army's Operations Instruction No. 7 was issued on 1 April, and set forth the operation which was to break through the hard core of enemy resistance. Three phase lines — Green, Brown, and Black — were set up for control purposes. IV Corps

would open the attack with the 10th Mountain on the left in the rugged country west of Highway 64, and with the 1st Armored on its right, along and to the left of the Highway. The BEF, 92^d, and attached units were to protect the left flank and follow up enemy withdrawals in their respective sectors.

When IV Corps had reached the Green Phase line, which included the clearing of the ridge by the 10th Mountain, the capture of Monte Pero and the town of Vergato by the 1st Armored, II Corps would join the attack, with both corps participating in the second or Brown Phase. IV Corps was to continue pushing northeast generally parallel to Highway 64 to a point about six miles north of Vergato, and capture a number of hills and villages to the west.



The 91st Division's General Livesay holds a staff meeting in the field.

II Corps was to attack with all its divisions in line, the South Africans to take Monte Sole, the 88th to take Monterumici directly to the east, the 91st to take Monte Adone and the village of Pianoro on Highway 65, with the 34th on the east of the highway. The Legnano Group was to attack on the extreme right, maintaining contact with the Eighth Army.

The third or Black Phase involved further advances of from three to five miles by IV Corps, while II Corps was charged with the capture of Praduro. By that time the 25th Division, after remaining in close reserve during the first two phases, was to be passed through the 1st Armored, either just before or immediately after the Brown line had been reached, depending upon the situation at that time.

A mobile reserve of armored units was to be set up during the Black Phase, with both the 1st American and 6th South African Armored Divisions using all available routes to push forward into the valley and aid in the rapid encirclement of Bologna. Once in the valley, swiftly-moving task forces composed of Infantry and Armored elements would forge out along the main avenues of enemy withdrawal to seize the Po crossings and cut off all enemy escape.

That in brief was the plan. How it developed, how the men of the Fifth fought their way down out of the mountains against the bitterest sort of enemy opposition; how they broke out into the valley and together with their valiant teammates of the British Eighth Army, compelled the surrender of the entire enemy force in Italy, is the story of the 19 short days that it took to



General Poole, South African Commander, prepares for the jump off.

drive from the Apennines to the Alps; after 19 long months of fighting up the peninsula to this final starting point.

An elaborate program of deception was worked out and put into effect, as a preliminary to the big push.

This was desired primarily to make the enemy believe that the entire II Corps, composed of the 85th, 88th, and all supporting units, was moving over to join the Eighth Army for a major push from the right, while IV Corps took over control of the entire Fifth Army area. Although most of the « movement » was simulated, some actual shifts did take place. Forward elements of the 88th were pulled back behind a screen of other II Corps units, and division reconnaissance parties were sent to

Forli over in the Eighth Army area. A dummy II Corps command post was set up at Forli, and Army headquarters stepped up its liaison with the British. Meanwhile IV Corps set up a dummy command post in the II Corps area.

For ten days before the Fifth Army jumped off, certain units maintained radio silence, but the dummy CP's received dummy messages, the real headquarters handling all their communications by wire. Artillery batteries involved in the mythical move went off the air, and fired their missions by telephone. And on 9 April, before the Fifth Army jumped off, a small group of operators from the 85th Division opened a dummy radio net in the Eighth Army zone, continuing to operate it until II Corps actually had begun its attack.

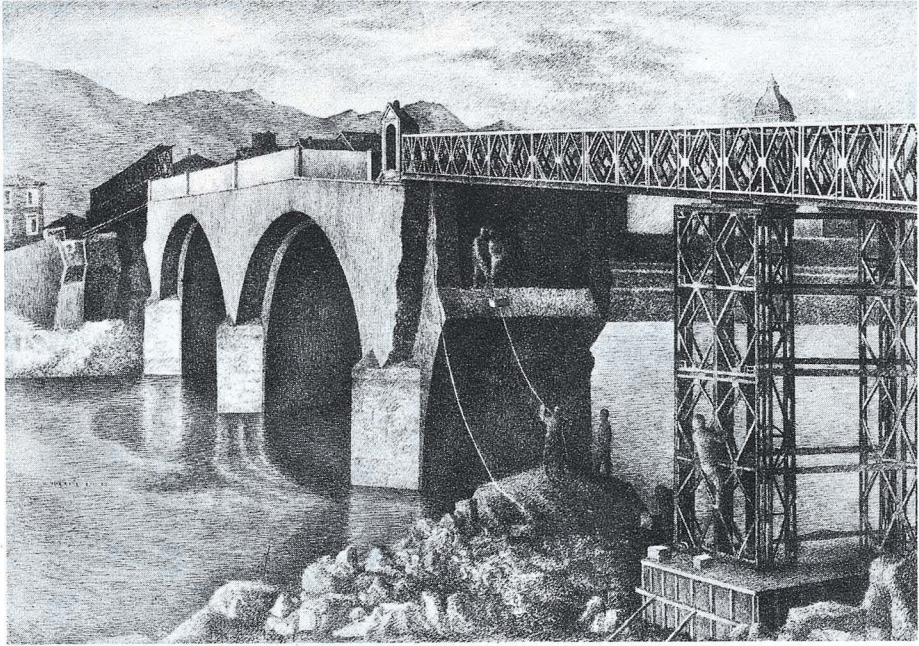


Men and supplies formed a continuous chain of traffic over Highway 65.

To mask the actual hour for the opening of the attack, a twenty-day program of steadily increasing artillery fire was substituted for the customary preparatory barrage, with the rate of fire accelerating over three periods. In the execution of this, 342 .105 howitzers fired 7840 rounds the first five days, 19,152 rounds the second eight days, and during the last seven days, 799,390 rounds. To conceal the presence of heavy artillery reinforcements moved up during the early spring, these guns were not permitted to participate in the accelerated program. As guns moved to their attack positions they remained silent, while those remaining in the winter defense positions increased their volume of fire.

All winter long the war correspondents had written dolefully about « the Forgotten Front ». All winter long the artillery observers up front had cursed at their inability to register on the choice targets visible through their binoculars, because the big guns had been pulled out of Italy.

But with the coming of spring equipment began to move up Highway 64 and Highway 65. Huge supply dumps were created; vast stocks of ammunition piled up; heart-warming convoys of tanks, tank destroyers and artillery rolled steadily up the roads. Officers and enlisted men broke into spontaneous cheers when they again saw 8-inch howitzers rumbling by. The time had come to move down out of the mountains.

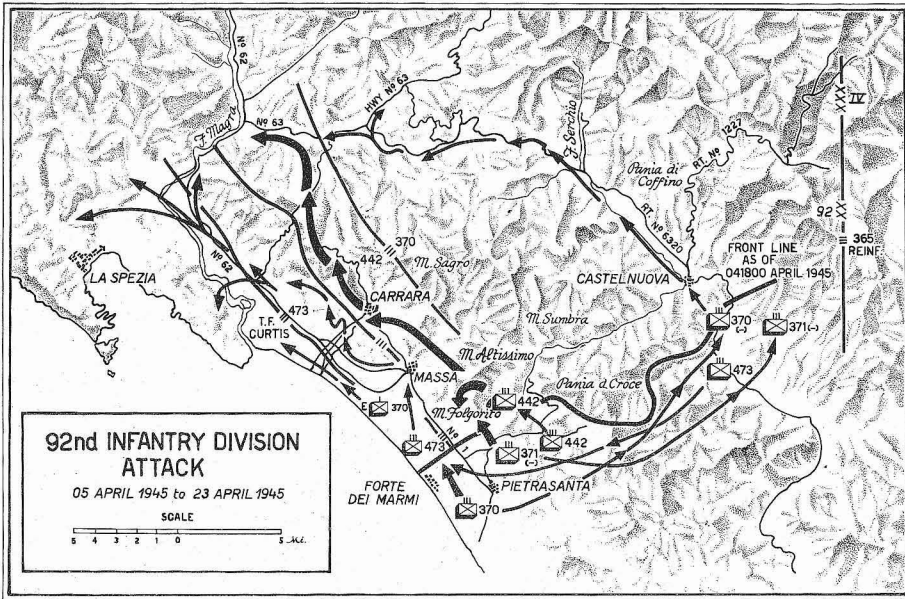


Bridges were prepared for demolition during the Serchio counterattack.

East side, west side

At first light on 5 April in the 92^d Division sector, the Japanese-Americans of the 442^d Infantry attacked in the hills just to the east of the Ligurian coastal plain. Later in the morning, the 370th was committed, and on 7 April, two days to the hour after the jump-off of the 442^d, the former ack-ack men of the 473^d passed through the 370th, which had been stopped by mortar barrages.

Massa, Carrara, the La Spezia naval base, and eventually the



great port of Genoa were the objectives, but also these three regiments were to keep the enemy occupied on the left while bigger game was sought farther to the east.

Bitter opposition was encountered from the start. The tough, battle-wise warriors of the 442^d, recently returned from France, moved slowly but steadily forward, fighting every step of the way, taking their losses without faltering. On their left the 473^d, seasoned by wintry months in the wildest, most rugged part of the line, found the going difficult.

By the evening of the second day the 442^d had taken two heights — Monte Cerrata and Monte Belvedere (not to be confused with the Monte Belvedere farther east, captured more than a month earlier by the 10th Mountain Division). The 473^d, twenty-four hours later, had by hard fighting gained much ground. By

9 April our troops were well on their way to Massa and the line of the Frigido River, clearing out enemy strong points as they went. Opposition had been stiff and losses heavy, but the mission was being accomplished.

On that day, with the bulk of the Fifth Army straining at the leash, the British Eighth Army attacked, with the 5th Corps and the Polish 2^d Corps leading off. A stupendous air-artillery preparation preceded the jump-off, which came late in the evening. Nothing like it had ever before been seen in Italy.

All day long hundreds of heavy and medium bombers operated just ahead of the line, their attacks alternating with massed artillery barrages across the flat, marshy lands of the coastal



Brazilian Infantry moved forward on the flank of the Tenth Mountain.

plain. Then finally a fresh wave of heavies went over — but dropped no bombs. By now the Boche had become practiced in ducking, and as he ducked, the Eighth Army took off.

The spring offensive had started.

The Eighth, commanded by Lieutenant General Sir Richard L. McCreery, crossed the Senio in a surge of power and advanced steadily for the first few days. As cosmopolitan an army as had been seen in more than a century was headed toward the Greater Reich.

All evening on the ninth of April, men on the Fifth Army's right could hear the sustained thunder of the artillery in the British sector. An undercurrent of excitement flowed through the army. All felt that this must be the beginning of the big push; few were aware of the magnitude of the part the Fifth was destined to play; few knew precisely what was expected of their individual divisions.

Deception had been working well, if the response of American troops not in the know was any criterion. Certain divisions had been elaborately blacked out. The 85th and 88th had spent some time in the extreme left of the IV Corps sector, with identifying markings removed, busily practicing amphibious operations. A Stars and Stripes correspondent with Fifth Army Headquarters, learning of this, protested vigorously against his paper's not being invited to send a correspondent along on the landing he assumed the 85th was to make.

A Fifth Army officer, driving to the 85th headquarters on business, asked an MP for directions. « Are you an 85th Divi-

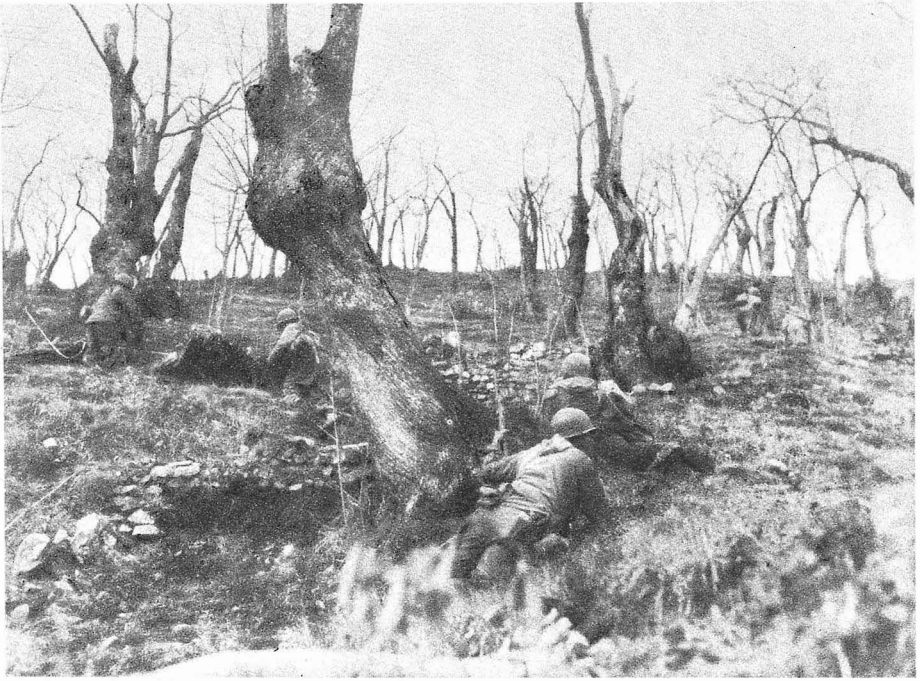
sion MP? » « No sir. » « Is this the way to the 85th Division C. P.? » « I wouldn't know, sir. » « Do you know where the 85th Division is? » « Never heard of it, sir. » Two hundred yards down the road he found it!

All knew that something big was about to happen. But preparations for a full-scale campaign had to be kept as secret as possible: only a minimum essential number must know of the plan in all of its details. Yet the convoys of supplies and equipment rolling day and night up the two main highways could not be misunderstood, and the vast dumps just behind the front line were their own eloquent evidence.

The army's preparations for the attack were made easier by the scarcity of enemy air observation, and his reduced capacity for aerial attack. Nevertheless no chances were taken. To support the action in the IV Corps sector it was necessary to establish dumps far up the valley along Highway 64. The sites for these were spotted but not stocked until the last night before the attacks but then every truck that could be found was sent up; by evening of D Day regular issues were being made from the new dumps. Engineers, augmented by native labor, worked without a stop patching, watering, and oiling the roads, but despite their toil, the thin mountain soil quickly resolved itself into clouds of choking dust, which rose high above the highways.

It could not be hoped that the enemy would not be alert to the preparations for attack; the cover plan was to keep him guessing as to just where and when it might strike.

Fifth Army was to attack on 12 April, the third day after the



Men of the 92^d had sniper trouble, crept through a blasted landscape.

Carrara, and other towns in their sector enroute. On our right troops of the Eighth Army, pushing northwest toward Bologna, were crowding our flank. The Fifth waited for the bell.



Fantastic, smoke-shrouded Livernano was always under enemy fire.

The bell and opening rounds

It was 4:00 in the morning on the 14th of April, and in the small tent he used for a mess sat the Fifth Army Commander. With him sat his Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Don E. Carleton, and Brigadier General Thomas Darcy, commander of the XXII Tactical Air Force. The Chinese boy was serving black coffee; General Darcy's ear was glued to the telephone. As he listened he repeated what was coming to him from his air bases at Pisa, Florence, and Grosseto.

« He says the clouds are banked up over the south slopes of the mountains and the fog is rolling in from the sea. »

General Truscott turned to the Chief of Staff.

« Call Critt (General Crittenberger, commanding IV Corps) and tell him the planes are not yet able to get off and we may have to delay George's attack. I won't let him go without air support. » (« George » was Major General Hays, 10th Mountain Division commander).

The hours ticked slowly by; many cups of coffee were consumed; the receiver remained glued to General Darcy's ear. « Florence blanketed with heavy fog, Pisa visibility one half mile, Grosseto broken clouds of fog rolling in from the west. » On all fields sat row after row of fighter bombers, warmed up and armed, their pilots at the controls waiting for the order.

The attack was delayed to 8:00 a.m. It was 6:45 and the planes had not yet left the ground. 7:15, and it was set back another half hour to 8:30, when General Darcy's face broke into a grin: « 57th Fighter Group is in the air! »

General Truscott said: « Get Critt. The show is on. We attack at 8:30. »

The last great battle of the Fifth Army in Italy had begun.

Precisely at 8:30 wave after wave of bombers came over the mountains from the south. Men of the 10th Mountain looked up from their jump off position and got set; they too knew the show was on. Over to their right, on Highway 64, the veteran 1st Armored was ready. For 40 minutes the sky was filled with planes, while the Boche held his breath for the blow.

At 9:10 the artillery opened up, laying down an intense 35-minute barrage, driving the enemy into his dugouts, blasting his eardrums with the roar of the big guns, shattering his nerves with the knowledge of worse to come.

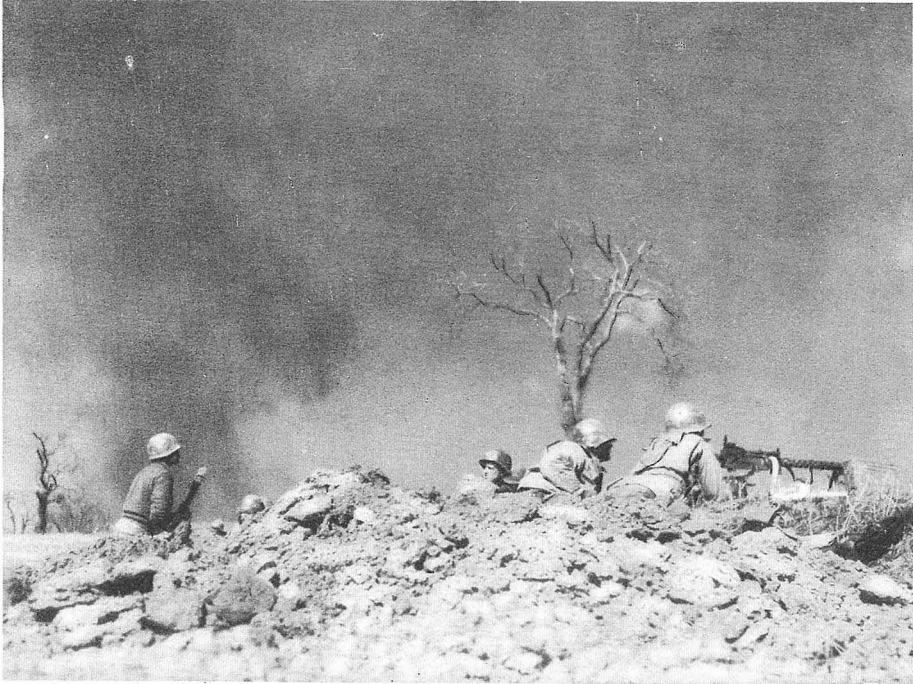
The Mountain Division took off at 9:35, two regiments abreast, while fighter bombers, guided by Rover Pete (ground controller) and Horsefly (Cub airplane controller), soared and swooped just ahead, bombing and strafing minutely selected targets. Dust and smoke on the ground merged to form an artificial twilight.

The enemy had been introduced to the 10th Mountain seven weeks earlier; he had known the other units for a long time, the 1st Armored and the 34th for a very long time. He knew what to expect, and was as well prepared as it was possible for him to be. He resisted inch by inch, and made the going tough for the Mountain Division, levying many casualties. But by midnight of the first day the division had secured its objective and was well on its way toward the Valley of the Po.

At 4:45 in the afternoon, its left flank now secure, the 1st Armored moved out toward the village of Suzzano and the 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, attacking at 5:50, had by 8:00 p.m. moved into the southern part of Vergato. For a long time the Germans had fiercely defended this road junction, and now fought back so tenaciously with small arms and mortars that Troop A was held up, and had to await the arrival of reinforcements.

To the left of the 10th Mountain, the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, the 371st Infantry and the 365th Infantry took up their

supporting positions. The BEF, advancing toward the town of Montese, sent a battalion through a cemetery to the east of the village and ran into a brisk fire fight, but continued steadily forward until the place was taken, and with it the neighboring hamlets of Paravento and Cerreto.



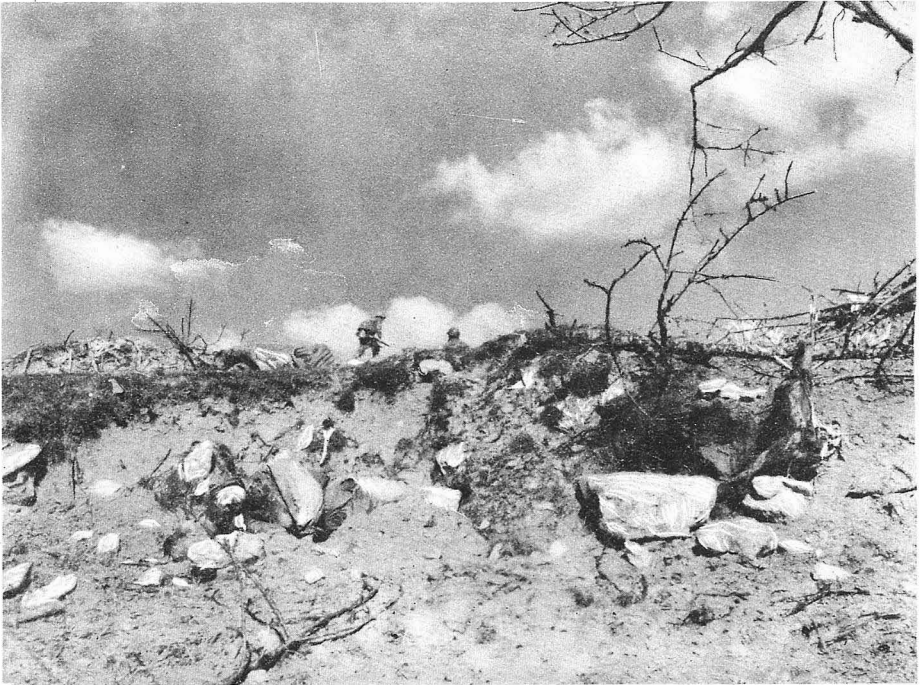
The smoke of battle hung like a fog over ridges near Highway 64.

All night our troops awaited the « inevitable » counterattack, but this time it didn't come. Artillery and flares constituted the enemy's sole answer to the first day of the Fifth Army's final attack.

The opening effort had been successful, but it had confirmed the expectations of Field Marshal Alexander, General Clark and

General Truscott, that the enemy would not be easily forced from his mountain strongholds. Our men that night knew they were in a fight.

On the morning of 15 April the 1st Armored took Suzzano and continued the bitter struggle for the ruins of Vergato, while the



Shell torn wilderness made a forbidding path to Bologna and the Po.

10th Mountain, still compelled to fight hard for every hill in its path, pressed slowly ahead along the ridges.

Just before noon on that bright, warm Sunday, peasants along Highway 65, relaxing outside their house doors after late mass, craned their necks and pointed. High overhead great, graceful silver shapes were moving majestically toward the line, the roar

of their engines muting only to an ominous rumble as it reached the ground more than three miles below. The II Corps show was about to start.

All afternoon the air attack continued. Seven hundred and sixty-five Flying Fortresses and Liberators blasted targets on the main highways south of Bologna, following an elaborate system of ground markers to their destination and guided by a « flak line » sent up to ten thousand feet by anti-aircraft artillery. Two hundred medium bombers attacked on Highway 64 a few miles south of Bologna, and 120 fighter bombers worked over Monte Sole from 4:30 p.m. to 7:45, when the light began to fail. Incendiaries, rockets and machine guns blackened the surface of the hill and drove the enemy deep into his rocky caves. « I wonder if they remember Rotterdam, » remarked an 88th Division observer.

That night, following a violent 30-minute artillery preparation which started at 10.30, the South Africans and the 88th attacked. Five and a half hours later, at 3:00 a.m. on Monday, the 91st and the 34th attacked, and were supported on the right by the Legnano Group. The entire Fifth Army was now hammering at the gateway to the Po. At last the Boche knew.

By daybreak on Monday the South Africans, long-time comrades of the American troops, had taken Monte Sole, a dominant peak to the east of Highway 64. The Germans put up a terrific fight for this critical position, but the Springboks, toughened by nearly six years of war, inspired by the thought of a victorious return to « the Old Transvaal », routed them out of their caves.

Monte Sole was secure, but many a member of the division would never see Capetown again as a result of that night's heroic work.

Not far from Sole, to the west of Highway 65, were two hills from which, all through the winter, the Germans had observed our movements and directed their artillery fire. No Fifth Army infantryman will ever forget the names of Monterumici and Monte Adone. None will fail to remember the ghost town of Livergnano (« Liver and Onions ») just behind the line, held by our troops, but reduced to a mass of fantastic rubble by months of pounding by the Jerry artillery.

Monterumici and Monte Adone had become symbols to the American doughboy. He knew who was on those hills; he knew that up there were invisible grey-clad men with binoculars, counting his eye teeth. Rumici and Adone must fall before we could move far in the II Corps sector.

On 16 April the heavies, mediums and fighters returned to the attack, but this time the fighters showered their visiting cards on Adone. Next day Monterumici fell to the 88th, and the enemy line began to waver. Adone fell to the 91st on Wednesday the 18th, and the jubilant warriors of the 361st Infantry celebrated by raising the American flag on its fireblackened summit. Meanwhile the 363^d Infantry of the 91st had taken Monte Arnigo and advanced up Highway 65 to Pianoro, or what the bombers had left of it, and « Liver and Onions » was already a memory.

The men of the 88th and the 91st knew well enough what the taking of those hills meant. It meant surcease from the constant observation, the accurately directed artillery fire, which they

and other divisions had suffered all winter. But it meant more than that; it meant that the strongest enemy positions covering Highway 65 had been wrested from him.

They collected their dead and wounded those two nights with a feeling that they had not fallen in vain. As on Monte Sole, the enemy had put everything he had into the defenses of these all-important positions, and the men of the Fifth, as they gazed down from the far slopes of those craggy hills, knew that they were at last looking at « the Promised Land. »

Over in IV Corps the 10th Mountain had continued battling its way along the ridges against undiminished opposition. Losses were heavy but a carefully worked out replacement system kept



Bombs and heavy artillery turned Vergato into a grim ghost town.

the ranks up to strength here as in other divisions, with the Boche taking his last, vengeful toll of American lives. Monte Mosca was wrested from the enemy, and ten determined counterattacks beaten off.

The 1st Armored, clearing Vergato after a hard three-day battle, moved on along Highway 64, hurdling bomb craters left by our aerial preparation, by-passing enemy demolitions, struggling up the steep, rocky sides of Monte Pero and Monte Radichio in the face of blistering fire, praying for room to maneuver its tanks.

The IV Corps spearhead had now passed most of the enemy mine fields and at the rate the enemy was using up his reserves it was evident that he was beginning to soften. With every hill he lost he was forced to defend less and less favorable ground; we were looking down his throat for a change.

Far to the left the 92^d Division, with the 442^d and the 473^d Infantry regiments, continued to advance, with the enemy still as tough as at the beginning. In the flat coastal strip the Boche had substantial concentrations of artillery and self-propelled guns which, supported by big coast defense guns at La Spezia, hurled a murderous cross-fire against our advancing troops, both in the flat lands and in the immediately adjacent hills. In the Serchio Valley, enemy withdrawals on the 18th were followed up by the 370th.

On the 18th, too, the day Adone fell to the 91st, the 85th, which had been held in Army reserve, was attached to IV Corps and took over the 1st Armored sector, the tankmen shifting to the left



Litter bearers gently eased the wounded down tortuous slopes.

of the 10th Mountain. Next day the 88th, which had been on the right of the South Africans in the II Corps area, passed through to the left and both attacked down the Reno River Valley. The 91st moved over to the 88th's old sector and the 34th which, after some of the most bitter fighting since Cassino, had captured Gargognano Church Ridge and the Cevizzano Ridge, the controlling features of the Idice Valley on the right flank of II Corps, extended its left to close the gap. Thus the weight of the Fifth Army was shifted to the zone west of Highway 64 where the enemy was beginning to weaken.

By now the terrible weight of seven full assault divisions was converging on the city of Bologna, which constituted the apex

of a giant triangle. From left to right were the 1st Armored, the 10th Mountain, the 85th, the 88th, the 6th South Africans, the 91st and the 34th. On the left of the 1st Armored the Brazilians, and on the right of the 34th the Italians, moved forward in a protective role, covering the flanks of the assault troops, and supporting the advance with their artillery.

To the east the British Eighth Army was forging ahead against extreme opposition, with innumerable canals and drainage ditches hampering its armor, and every dike and levee an enemy line of defense. The going became rougher and tougher; nevertheless on Highway 9, the broad, wellpaved autostrada which cuts diagonally from southeast to northwest through Bologna, the 2^d Polish Corps was driving toward the city, and bets were even as to which army, and which division, would first enter the city.



Partisans, prisoners, wrecked equipment and our men were everywhere.

Bologna and points north

By the night of 18 April more and more optimistic reports began to reach Army Headquarters, and when the headquarters itself made preparations to move to an area just north of Vergato, the optimists were convinced this must be it: the hoped for breakthrough. The greatest optimists were the airmen. The Krauts were being forced to move, and more and more targets were falling into the sights of their 50 caliber machine guns and rockets and bombs. The battle had begun well but was still far from

cans crossed the Reno, whose valley broadens out just southwest of Bologna into terrain suitable for armor. The same evening the 85th entered the town of Casalecchio on the Reno, just outside of Bologna to the southwest, and held it against strong counter-attacks. Next day the Springbok armor had reached the same town, while the 88th, advancing now against weakening resistance, reached Riale to the west of Casalecchio.

The 34th was moving forward, two battalions abreast, along Highway 65 just outside Bologna, and the Legnano Group on its right was keeping pace. Far to the left, the Brazilians likewise were forging ahead, and the 365th Infantry on their left was advancing slowly toward Modena on Highway 12, which slants northeast from the Ligurian coast. Across nearly three-fourths of the breadth of Italy the entire Fifth Army was on the move.

Resistance by now varied widely from sector to sector. The 442^d on the coastal plain was able to move rapidly behind a swiftly retreating enemy. The enemy was withdrawing as fast as he could, but as he did so he was making it as hot as possible for our men pursuing him. Bologna was outflanked, beset by Partisans, and becoming untenable.

Early in the morning of Saturday, 21 April, doughfeet of the 34th Division's 133^d Infantry, riding tanks of the 752^d Tank Battalion, rumbled up Highway 65 into Bologna. Elements of the 91st joined them in mopping up the city, while the Eighth Army's 2^d Polish Corps hurried in from the southeast on Highway 9. The rest of the 91st moved on north past Bologna in the wake of the Jerries, now retreating headlong toward the Po.

This was the real start of the race. All along the Fifth Army line the enemy was striving desperately to extricate himself, hustling north to reach the river if possible ahead of our spearheads. He had no time to waste. After cutting Highway 9 on the 20th, the 10th Mountain moved rapidly north, and next



Guns fired across the Po to prepare the way for our landings.

day its spearhead, « Task Force Duff », crossed the Panaro River east of Modena and continued on toward the Po. Next day, Sunday, 22 April, five more divisions crossed the Panaro — the 85th, 88th, 91st, 6th South Africans, and 1st Armored, the latter taking the important city of Modena in its stride as its unleashed armor drove irresistibly to the northwest. The 34th had been

temporarily held back to clean up Bologna. An outstanding exploit on this day was the seizure intact of the bridge at Camposanto by the 88th.

At 8:30 in the evening of that same Sunday, Task Force Duff, headed by Brigadier General Robinson Duff, assistant division commander of the 10th Mountain, reached the Po River at the town of San Benedetto Po. Next morning the rest of the division moved up, and under a terrific hail of small arms, mortar, and 88 fire, established a firm bridgehead on the north bank, crossing in assault boats under the very nose of the enemy. The Po is wide and its banks are steep, but the 10th didn't wait for support. Bridges were begun at once, and soon guns and tanks and trucks were racing on to the north.



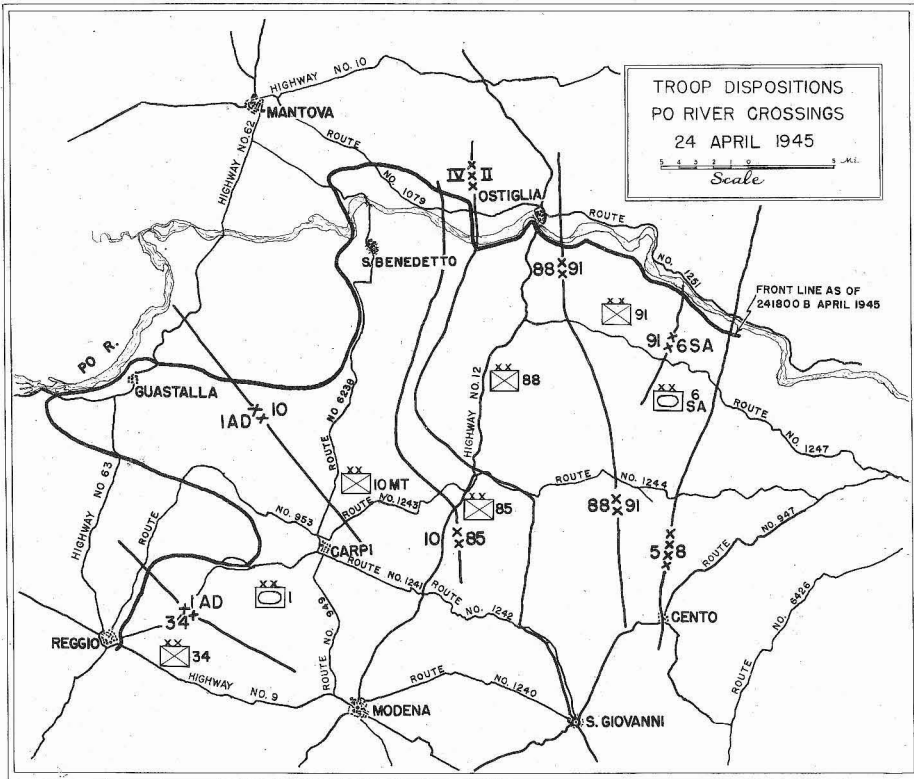
Troops in « Alligators » headed for the north bank under enemy fire.

Next day the 85th and the 88th reached the river, crossing on Tuesday. The same day the 91st and the South Africans arrived at the south bank, the 91st crossing at once, the Springboks delaying a day to get their formidable complement of armor across.

Meanwhile the 34th, released from its brief assignment in Bologna, was attached to IV Corps and on 23 April raced northwest along Highway 9. For the next five days this division, in conjunction with elements of the 1st Armored Division, the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron, and later the BEF, fought a confused but bitter battle with units from several German divisions attempting to withdraw from the mountains south of Highway 9 to the Po River.



Big guns crossed on a hastily constructed « Floating Treadway ».



On the morning of the 24th it was engaged with elements of three German divisions. Some were driven back toward the mountains while others were pushed up against the Po River, which they were unable to cross. All over the valley between Highway 9 and the Po small and large battles were in progress. During this drive the 34th took prisoners from the 232^d Infantry Division, 148th Division, the 90th Panzer Division and the Italia Division.

By the night of Wednesday the 25th the division had crossed the rear of the entire Army and had passed Parma, nearly 60 road miles from Bologna, thus blocking escape routes for all

enemy forces withdrawing northward through the mountains to the south. By morning of the 28th Piacenza was taken after a bitter fight in which the town changed hands twice.

Ahead was Milan, but far more important to the success of the campaign were the escape routes of enemy forces in northwest Italy. Milan could wait — blocking the vital highways from northwest Italy could not. It was to this task that the 34th and the 1st Armored now devoted themselves.

The 1st Armored moved rapidly almost due north from Modena and crossed the Po in the 10th Mountain zone on the night of 25 April, just as the South Africans were getting their tanks across farther to the east. A day later the 1st Armored had a task force in Montechiari, and by night fall were engaged in a sharp fight with a German SS motor column on the outskirts of Brescia.



A single American soldier often brought back large groups of prisoners.

The feel of victory

The feel of victory came slowly to the men who had spent a winter in cold muddy fox holes, straining their eyes from wind-swept peaks, watching for enemy patrols, ducking enemy mortars and patiently sweating out the pounding of enemy artillery. As the enemy line crumbled under the weight of our attack, the pace of battle stepped up. Battle groups moved forward less cautiously, then faster, and soon were up on tanks, trucks and jeeps, pressing forward at all possible speed.

The same officers who yesterday would not order the advance without the mortars, artillery, and the air to pave the way now threw caution to the winds, and were possessed with a mad desire to get ahead and in a hurry. It may have looked like confusion and disorganization, but the scent of victory was in the air. The battle was changing from the heavy attack on an enemy in an organized defensive position to the pursuit of a not yet beaten but retreating foe.

So one can understand the tired soldier of the 34th Division when he exclaimed: « Hell, yesterday crawl and shoot; today a rat race! »

Dour wearers of the Red Bull patch stared poker-faced from the truck ahead. Men, women, plump young girls and small children lined the highway and the village streets, screaming « Evviva! », « Ciao », and tossed spring flowers into the vehicle. The men of the 34th could take it. They were tough. Besides, why get all worked up over a dream? They'd wake up in the morning and they'd still be up there in those mountains, with Krauts looking down at them. This level land, this slick, paved road, couldn't be true.

Presently one of them believed it. Standing up suddenly in the truck, he yelled « whoopee! », blew a kiss at a blonde girl, and abruptly sat down again.

So it developed all over the Po Valley during those tremendous days. You had to see it to believe it, and even then you weren't sure. The Fifth had come down out of the Apennines with such a rush and in such concentrated strength that the enemy was

unable to organize his intermediate defensive positions south of the Po. There was plenty of hard fighting, but more and more the battle took on the aspect of a chase, a gigantic mopping-up operation.

On the night of 18 April the General had asked: « Were you in Tunisia? » « Yes sir, » replied his visitor. « Well, » remarked the General, « if my armor is where I think it is, by tomorrow night it will be far enough down the valley to deploy, and if that happens, by Sunday night I'll have troops all over the Po Valley. And then you'll see a worse mess than the wind-up in Tunisia. »

A few days later the enemy was fleeing for his life. Few of his units retained any semblance of order; few commanders had any clear idea of where their own troops or the American were. Germans were ordered to make for the Po and get across by any means they could devise. Said one divisional order captured by the Fifth Army: « We will cross the River as individuals as best we can. Motorized vehicles will be left behind and destroyed if possible. Horse-drawn vehicles will be taken across if possible, with the horses swimming. Heavy weapons will be discarded, and we will defend ourselves with rifles and machine pistols. »

So the south bank of the Po was a scene of indescribable confusion, a gargantuan junk pile. Vehicles were run into the ditches, overturned, and set afire. Others were abandoned intact as they ran out of fuel. Still others, including many horse-drawn, lay in ruins where American fighter bombers and artillery had stopped them. Horses lay in rigid postures of death.



The river bank became a gargantuan junk pile of German equipment.

Other horses, unscathed, milled up and down the banks of the stream, and as the wave of retribution passed on, Po Valley peasants streamed out from their houses to replenish their stables. Sometimes one farmer could be seen driving as many as a dozen stout steeds back toward his farm. A German Strength-Through-Joy Volkswagen, the enemy's jeep, could be had for the taking and enough gasoline to drive it away.

American G. I.'s, many of whom had never sat a horse before, roped and mounted stray cavalry hacks and cantered down the roads looking for scattered enemy. Two, from the 85th Division, came thus upon some forty dejected Nordics, sitting beside the road, with one other squatting under a tree a few yards away.



On the double through a Po Valley city amidst a hail of lead.

Dismounting, the infantrymen approached the Germans and with significant gestures indicated that they were prisoners and the time had come to go to the cage. All rose but the solitary one. He just sat. « Get going, » invited the Americans. He said nothing, did nothing. « Get up! Via! Andate! » the doughfeet told him, prodding him with a « can-opener. » « I am a General of a Division, » replied Superman in halting English, « and I demand to ride as is due my rank. » « Oh yeah! And we're General Coulter and his Chief of Staff, » replied his captors. The outraged German rose and stiffly marched the few miles back to the C. P., where he asserted his rights with no little emphasis. For of course he was a German division commander.

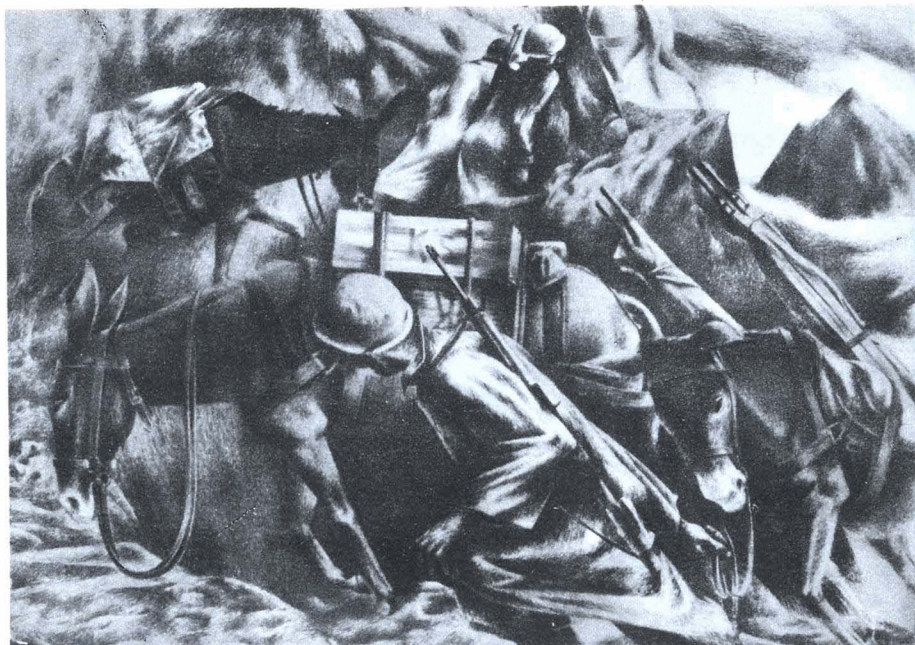
All along the highways our advance elements moved so rapidly that they didn't take time out in many cases to mop up. Their primary assignment was to cut off the enemy from his avenues of retreat, as by this time he was more concerned with escape than with fighting. By 22 April German units still south of the Po River realized that they were being cut off; exhausted and with little or no ammunition left, they were beginning to surrender in large numbers. Organized units still with transportation were moving north on secondary roads with orders to cross the river as best they could and to occupy the prepared defenses on the north bank and prevent our crossing at all costs. This situation resulted in odd incidents.

The highways were relatively safe in daylight and in the vicinity of troops, but one division staff officer strayed a few hundred yards off Highway 9 and was captured by a wandering band of Germans. Many a party of the enemy sneaked across that road under cover of darkness, thinking it was the farthest north the Americans had progressed, only to run head on into another spearhead. And a German aviator landed his plane on Villafranca Airport near Verona, thinking it was still in German hands, only to be greeted by a very American Tommy gun and a drawled « Step down, brother — this is old home week! » The Army Commander flying out over the valley during this period counted in one area seven German columns moving in five different directions.

One German, fearing the Partisans but desiring to surrender, changed to civilian clothes, walked into an American camp, and

asked, in his best Italian, « Dovè MP.? » A group of others, likewise disguised, were walking gingerly along when an MP. spoke to them. Instantly six pairs of hands shot skyward.

Whole units sat down and waited for someone to capture them. Passing American units simply pointed the way to the rear and hurried on. Some tried to surrender to chaplains, some to war correspondents. When large units began to give themselves up, they were disarmed, loaded into their own trucks, and started back along the road which would lead them to a stockade. One entire field hospital, complete with nurses and ambulances, was captured and sent packing back under its own power to the P. W. cage.



Pack trains toiled constantly-munitions went up; the wounded back.

The trap snaps shut

By now the principal preoccupation of the enemy was not to establish and maintain positions but, as he once conservatively put it after El Alamein, « to extricate himself from a situation which had become confused. » There was no longer any cohesion in his ranks. Units were hopelessly mixed up, and prisoners taken in one small area frequently included men from half a dozen or more organizations.

The men of the Fifth were weary but happy, even though

they were all over northern Italy, with units spread thin and communications extended almost to the breaking point.

But the Germans still fought. Those who were able retreated to the Po, and some succeeded in crossing. But large numbers were hopelessly trapped south of the River, and some even in the northern Apennines, where the rapid cross-country run of the 34th had cut them off from retreat. Highway 9 was blocked, the BEF was moving up, and huge pockets of Germans and Fascist Italian troops milled about, vainly seeking escape. These fought desperately in isolated areas, selling their freedom as dearly as they were able. And on the right and left flanks of the Fifth, where the enemy was not yet completely trapped, fighting continued intense.

On Wednesday, 25 April, the same day the last of the 88th crossed the Po on Highway 12, the 351st Infantry of that division after nine days of fighting advanced on foot nearly 30 miles to Verona. An hour before midnight patrols entered the city in the face of brisk enemy fire. While these advance elements of the 88th were fighting in the southern part of the city, the 86th Mountain Infantry of the 10th moved up from the southwest on Highway 62, after having taken the vital Villafranca airfield.

On the 26th, the 85th Division passed through Verona and crossed the Adige Line, the last prepared defense line of the Germans south of the Alps. During the afternoon, elements of the 339th Infantry crossed on a footbridge in the western edge of Verona, while the 338th moved up and crossed on a railroad bridge south of the city. While the 337th remained in Verona.

the other two regiments moved swiftly on to the north, and before midnight were several miles up in the Alpine foothills, with the vaunted Adige Line hopelessly breached. Meanwhile the 88th Division had crossed several miles to the east and had cut Highway 11. The 6th South Africans and the 91st made the Adige crossing on the 27th.

Twelve days after Fifth Army's D Day the Adige River Line, which our troops, with the Eighth Army, were to develop as the third phase of the basic plan of campaign, no longer existed. Five divisions had crossed in two days, and on the 28th the British also crossed in strength, after very « sticky » going south of the river.

On 26 April the Fifth Army's position was roughly as follows: The line, or rather the border of the controlled area, ran sharply northwest from a point just north of Ferrara, in the British zone, past Verona on the East, and mostly along the north bank of the Adige. At Verona the line turned west, passing the city on the north, skirting the southern shore of Lake Garda and extended a menacing finger toward the industrial city of Brescia, only six miles away on Highway 11.

From this point it turned back southeast to the south bank of the Po, and followed that river westward from the great bend just southwest of Mantua to about 20 miles southeast of Cremona. Here another long finger shot west on Highway 9 south of Piacenza. Back again to the southeast along Highway 9, then south of the highway and forming a huge loop back to Highway 12 due south of Lake Garda. Hence, it wound generally west-

ward through the northern Apennines to Chiavari on the Ligurian Sea, only 27 miles from the port of Genoa.

One long spearhead of the 1st Armored Division was now driving northwest along the Autostrada from the vicinity of Mantua toward Lake Como. By 28 April elements of 1st Armored reached Como only to learn that on that day Mussolini had been captured and shot by the Partisans.

By now the last exit from the western Po Valley was closed. The Ligurian Army and what remained of the 14th Army were trapped. Farther south astride Highway 9 the 34th and the Brazilians were closing in on enemy troops still south of the road. In the mountains on the west coast the 92^d Division and attached troops, temporarily under control of Headquarters 15th Army Group, were progressing steadily northward toward the Germans' last seaport.

The enemy found himself in two vast blind alleys—between the Apennines and Highway 9, and between Highway 9 and Highway 11, just south of the Alpine foothills.

From east to west, the units lined up in this fashion: 6th South African Armored Division, 91st Division, 88th, 10th Mountain, 85th, 1st Armored, 34th, BEF, and 92^d, including the 442^d Infantry Regiment, which had entered La Spezia on the 24th, and the 473^d Infantry, which was spearheading the drive up the coast to Genoa.

The 85th Division, after crossing the Adige River, took positions on the high ground in the rear of and commanding the Adige Line, when it passed to Army reserve.



Doughboys race across an open space in hotly contested Vicenza.

The 88th crossed the river south of Verona while it passed its tanks over the partially destroyed railroad bridge on the southern edge of the town and continued the advance toward Vicenza. Swinging to the north, this division passed through Bassano, Feltre, and Fonzaso and headed toward the Brenner Pass, where it became a threat from the east to the key Nazi city of Bolzano.

Farther to the west the 10th Mountain had run into a hornets' nest at the head of Lake Garda, after having travelled 105 air-line miles in 15 days. Its advance was threatening the southern frontier of the National Redoubt in which, according to report, Hitler and his more fanatic Nazis planned to hole up and defy all comers. Bolzano, the former Austrian Bozen, and an important

rail center before our Air Force messed it up, had been designated as the rallying point for the Germans. Here they were to reorganize into some semblance of order and move on up into the high Alps.

The road up the east shore of Lake Garda is in many places only a scratch along the cliffs, and it passes through several tunnels. Here the 10th Mountain was met by seemingly impassable road blocks. The cliffs towered sheer hundreds of feet up on the right and the waters of the lake were hundreds of feet deep right at the shore. Here they found blown out tunnels, blown bridges all artfully covered by 88's, and machine-guns concealed in tunnels and caves farther on. However, this contingency had been foreseen and they had brought up from the sea many Dukws (amphibious 2 ½ ton trucks) and barges capable of floating a tank. Here two amphibious landings were made that outflanked the road blocks and opened the way for the Engineers to repair the damage. However, this was not without cost. The enemy fought back viciously and two Dukws were sunk and now lie in hundreds of feet of blue water with their precious cargo on the bottom of Lake Garda.

After the wounding of the Assistant Division Commander, General Duff, Colonel William O. Darby, of Ranger fame, took his place. A small group led by Colonel Darby crossed the lake in Dukws and raided Mussolini's villa at Gargnano, capturing valuable documents but not Mussolini, who was even then hanging dead in Milan.

At the head of the lake, near Riva, the Germans fought back

with an energy born of desperation and the 10th suffered heavily before it could resume its drive. Here Colonel Darby was killed. In Italy on a routine mission from Washington, he had been abruptly assigned to help his old friend General Hays, and had died in action after a few glorious days of battle. He was posthumously promoted to Brigadier General.

The Army boundary was now shifted to a north-south line through Treviso, to relieve heavy pressure on the Eighth Army. Immediately the 91st, advancing east south of Highway 53, passed Vicenza, crossed the Brenta River, and drove on to take Treviso, only 12 miles due north of Venice, before it halted and began mopping-up operations. It was at this point that the remnants of the German 14th Army, which had been delaying the Eighth along the Po, were frantically attempting to escape through a narrowing gap between Treviso and the sea. On 30 April elements of the 91st and the South Africans linked up with the British 6th Armored Division just east of Treviso and closed the trap.

Over on the west coast the 473^d took Genoa right after breakfast on 27 April. Three days later the 442^d occupied the industrial city of Turin, far to the northwest toward the French frontier. Combat patrols reached Imperia and Cuneo. On the morning of the 29th the 1st Armored sent a reconnaissance force right through Milan without stopping, having received orders not to become involved in any large city until the enemy's escape routes were fully blocked. The next day a small group selected from IV Corps, representing American, British, and Brazilian troops, made a formal entry, remaining in the city overnight.

The 34th Division, after its spectacular dash across the Fifth Army rear to cut off the Germans south of Highway 9, was now relieved by the BEF. Here started an even more spectacular movement. Relieved by the BEF early on the 28th, the 34th doubled back. By forced marches it crossed the Po River and on the heels of the 1st Armored Division had by the night of the 29th



German dead lay in the streets as the tide of battle rolled on.

closed in the Brescia-Bergamo area and was blocking the escape routes from the valley to the mountains west of Lake Garda. The entire Division had fought a stiff fight in Piacenza and moved roughly 156 miles in a little over 24 hours.

On the 29th General Mascarenhas accepted the surrender of the entire German 148th Division and the commander of the

Italian Italia Division, troops his men had cut off and isolated in the mountains south of Parma. More than 6,000 prisoners, 4,000 horses and 1,000 trucks were taken. It was a moment of great satisfaction for the « Smoking Snakes » because it was the 148th which had been their principal antagonist from the start.

That same Sunday Generaleutnant Max Joseph Pemsel, Chief of Staff and acting commander of the German-Italian Army of Liguria, surrendered to General Crittenberger at IV Corps headquarters. Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, the Army commander, had been captured by the Partisans, General Pemsel had little idea where his troops were, and could see no purpose in continuing the pretense of a battle. That night Graziani, released to IV Corps by the Partisans, confirmed the act of his deputy.

By now all routes out of Italy had been blocked, and the enemy forces had been rendered utterly ineffective. Only in the north, on the route to the Brenner Pass, did there remain any determined resistance.

Here in the mountains the German commander had been trying to reassemble his shattered troops. But they never got there in any material numbers, and the Bolzano-Merano-Cortina-Bressanone area, high up in the Dolomites, wound up as a troublesome nest of Gestapo, SS, and Hitler Youth elements, who somehow had found a way to get there ahead of the Wehrmacht.



Partisans fought both behind enemy lines, and with our advancing troops.

Our informal allies

Modern military campaigns have a way of being chronicled in terms of cities captured. The Russian campaign, for example, was one long recital of sieges, first by the Germans, later by the Russians.

The Po Valley campaign was unique in that not one important city needed to be besieged; not one put up a protracted, determined resistance. Most were « occupied » rather than « captured », some with virtually no fighting, others after sharp conflict with

enemy rearguard troops. In some cases, notably that of Milan, our forward elements sped through without stopping, intent upon the primary objective of cutting off and destroying the retreating enemy.

The campaign would have lasted materially longer, and many more American lives would have been lost, had this not been the case. The catalogue of these cities reads like a tourist's guide to Northern Italy. Not one of outstanding importance was still fully in enemy hands at the time of the surrender.

First was Bologna, gateway to the Po Valley, a main highway center, and symbol of all that the Army had been striving for during the long winter of 1944-45. Its fall was almost anticlimactic. The Germans, finding themselves in an untenable position, withdrew and the Allies had the city under control in a few hours. The citizens promenaded up and down the streets, parading a little, cheering a little, peering curiously at American troops and their equipment, but generally accepting their liberation as calmly as a movie star accepts a fan letter.

From Bologna to Verona, from Vicenza to Milan, it was this way. To one who did not know how and why it happened the circumstances would appear incredible. Bologna, Modena and Mantua; Verona, Vicenza, Treviso and Cremona; Reggio, Parma, Piacenza; Brescia, Bergamo, Milan and Turin; La Spezia and Genoa--all these and others fell to the Fifth Army in seventeen days, and all without a siege.

How did it happen? What made the enemy evacuate city after city, until at the end he was for the most

part milling in bewildered fashion about the countryside?

First, the inescapable forces that swarmed out over the Po Valley in the ten days between 21 April and the first of May quickly eliminated all hope of an effective defense. City after city was outflanked and rendered incapable of being held by any normal military standards. It was a case of get out or get caught, and the Germans chose to get out.

But the history of this war is full of examples of German suicide garrisons, fanatic Nazis who, obeying Hitler's orders to the letter, have battled street by street and house by house within an inexorably contracting ring of steel, with no hope either of victory or of rescue. There were no such episodes in northern Italy.

For this phenomenon much credit is due the Partisans, or « Patriots, » as many of them preferred to be called. It was they in large measure who made the cities so hot for the Germans that even a suicide defense was out of the question. In many large centers of population the enemy had lost effective control even before the arrival of our troops.

All across northern Italy the Partisans were numerous, well organized, and surprisingly well disciplined. Their coordinating organization was the Committee of National Liberation, which in turn represented a militant coalition of all the principal political parties, from Communists to the conservative Christian Democrats. All were united in the same cause — the defeat of the invader, the liberation of Italy, and the elimination of autocratic government.

As the Allies moved up the Peninsula their numbers grew and their activities increased. Like any guerrilla movement, their ranks included many youths in search of adventure, some rascals seeking, in a simulated patriotism, « the last refuge of the scoundrel and the knave ». And toward the end the « time servers » began to don red scarves and parade with the real patriots, hoping thus to become firmly established in the ranks of the majority.

But always there was a solid core of patriotic, intelligent leadership, striving by every means at its disposal to aid the march of the liberators. Allied liaison officers parachuted down to join them. Food, clothing, arms and ammunition were smuggled to them in their mountain hideouts, or dropped from planes, to supplement what they could steal or capture from the enemy. Radio broadcasting stations in the liberated portion of the country sent them instructions in code, always preceded by the same little bar of music and the salutation « Allo, Romo! ».

Organized into brigades of varying sizes, the north Italian Partisans proved to be valuable Allies. They continually harassed the enemy, cutting his supply lines, raiding his towns, stealing his equipment, making life hazardous for individuals or small parties foolhardy enough to venture far from base. In some cities enemy troops dared not wander into certain neighborhoods.

When the entire staff of a certain German division was to assemble at its headquarters for a meeting, the Partisans learned the hour and informed Fifth Army agents. An attack was arranged, the Air Corps to bomb and strafe the house after all the Krauts had had time to arrive, and the Partisans, lying in wait

in the adjacent hills, to swoop down afterward and kill or capture as many they could.

When the 442^d Infantry entered Carrara they found it controlled by Partisans. The Germans had become so intimidated that they dared not walk the streets after dark. Hidden away in the marble caves near the city were several hundred of the



Happy citizens lined the streets as troops and Partisans paraded.

enemy, taken prisoner by the Partisans, and it was observed that while the Germans were barefoot and often naked to the waist, their captors were well clothed and shod with German or Italian military clothing.

Just before the fall of Bologna the signal was passed from Army Headquarters for the Partisans in that area to move in

on the city. When our troops entered, they found the Italian irregulars policing the streets and rounding up known Fascisti who were trying to masquerade as citizens.

Many of the Partisans wore scarlet neck-cloths, and many gave the clenched-fist salute of the Communists, while others were from wealthy families and of ultra-conservative training. All had a single purpose.

Milan, cradle of Italian Fascism, financial angel of Il Duce in his early days, provided the classic example of united Partisan action. Here a general strike had been in progress for nearly two weeks when the Americans arrived; the Partisans were in control; Mussolini and his immediate followers had already been hanged.

From Partisan headquarters at Milan had emanated the orders to find and capture Mussolini. From Milan came the order to try and execute him and his cabinet.

When the first Americans entered Milan they found the Partisan headquarters in a prominent building, boldly labelled and with the Italian colors draped across the street. Street cars were running, electric lights were burning, and the water supply was intact. The customary sabotage by the enemy when he was driven out of a city was nowhere to be seen. He was a prisoner in his own fortress.

So it went all over northern Italy. The Partisans, carefully timing their activities with those of the advancing military forces, harassed the German garrisons and rendered them ineffective within the cities, while the Fifth Army killed or captured them

as they retreated into the open. Genoa, an exception, surrendered garrison and all to an American regiment, to avoid violence at the hands of the Italian irregulars.

After the surrender our informal allies, hitherto very shy of the camera, came out in the open and had their fill of parades, turning in their weapons at elaborate ceremonies in all the principal cities. In the meantime they had been of great value to the Allies. Because of their relatively loose organization and the fact that they were not directly under our control it was not always possible to predict with any degree of accuracy what they might do, but for the most part they displayed a sound judgment and a cooperative attitude which unquestionably helped to shorten the war in Italy.





Some of the stubborn German defenders would never be captured.

Surrender

On 2 May, right after lunch, word came to the Army Commander that the unconditional surrender of the enemy in Italy might be expected that day. He had known that negotiations which were in progress had reached a critical point, but the precise time of the capitulation, if it should come, was known to no one.

He was instructed to expect German emissaries, on foot, coming down from German headquarters at Bolzano to confirm

General Von Vietinghoff's acceptance of the conditions of surrender. Until such word was definitely received, there must be no intimation of what was in the wind, lest carefully laid plans blow up in a premature wave of celebration.

A major assault on the mountain strongholds toward Bolzano had been ordered for early the following morning, with the 10th Mountain Division driving northeast from Riva, and the 88th from Fonzaso. It was imperative that this not take place unless it was evident that the surrender was off. Who could tell, the German Commander and his negotiators might in the meantime have been arrested; they might be dead. The General dared not trust the telephone to impart such significant instructions.

That afternoon he took off in a liaison plane for II Corps Headquarters, well to the north in the Alpine foothills, while the Chief of Staff drove straight up along Lake Garda to the command post of the 10th Mountain Division.

General Hays was told to hold up the attack until further orders, but was not definitely informed of the expectation that surrender would come that day. He was instructed to keep an eye out for the German emissaries.

By this time, however, tense listeners monitoring the German radio had picked up broadcasts to German troops sent in the clear from Bolzano, ordering them to cease firing at 6:30. The emissaries did not arrive from Bolzano that day, but the German radio signals were clear and explicit.

At 6:30 word was flashed to the world that all the enemy forces in Italy and western Austria had surrendered unconditionally,

and that the long, bitter campaign for the liberation of Italy had ended.

Even then, some soldiers of the Fifth Army, notably advance elements of the 88th and 85th Divisions, learned about the surrender from the Germans, and then encountered fire afterward from fanatic Nazi bands which refused to accept the dictum of their generals.

But it was not long before all knew. The reaction was curious, but characteristic. The campaign in the Mediterranean Theater was over; the first theater-wide surrender of the Germans had occurred, but the war was not finished, not even in Europe, and there was little jubilation — only a sensation of profound relief.

For the Fifth Army, events had moved with such unbelievable rapidity in the 19 days which had just ended that there had hardly been time to think. Officers and men, having geared themselves to tremendous effort, to sleepless days and nights, to exertions seemingly beyond human endurance, felt momentarily lost, as if an intolerable silence had fallen; as if, indeed, they had suddenly been precipitated into a vacuum.

Yet they had known that something of the sort must happen, and soon. Whole divisions and corps of the Germans and Italian Fascists had been surrendering the past few days. There was no longer a German line, no longer an organized defense — only a breakneck race to the mountains and the sea. Men were too weary to think.

« You knew the end was coming — you expected it any time, but now that it is actually here you almost can't believe it, »

said one infantry lieutenant. « You feel sort of let down, as if the bottom had fallen out of everything. »

« This is too big a thing, » remarked a private from Chicago. « What can you say that makes any sense except maybe a 'thank God'? He's the only one can really understand how a guy feels right now. »

Said a sergeant: « Wait till the European war is over — that's the time to be excited. »

But the thoughts of thousands of doughboys were clearly expressed by one mortarman with the 88th Division who, with astonishment in his voice, sat on the ground and murmured, « Thank God! I made it! »

The announcement had come to the troops with dramatic suddenness, but it marked the culmination of secret negotiations that had been in progress for weeks. Initially, word came to the Allied Headquarters that General Karl Wolff, top officer of the SS in northern Italy, was convinced that further resistance would be futile and was prepared, with other high-ranking Nazi officers, to discuss surrender. Negotiations went on in an atmosphere like that of a mystery novel. By April nothing had been decided, and the attack was ordered.

But at 2:00 p.m. on 29 April, emissaries of the German High Command in Italy, after much futile haggling, signed the papers in the Royal Palace at Caserta, headquarters of the Allied Forces, and it was stipulated that the surrender should become fully effective on 2 May. The German representatives immediately set out by air for General Von Vietinghoff's headquarters.



Long columns of enemy prisoners passed our convoys moving forward.

Yet Monday, 30 April, was a day of anxious waiting. Would the German officers be able to reach Von Vietinghoff's headquarters without being captured by American troops? Would Generals Von Vietinghoff and Wolff honor the signatures of their representatives? Would the news leak out and upset everything?

An elaborate system of codes had been set up for communication between Allied and enemy headquarters, and on Monday Field Marshal Alexander, Allied Commander, sent off a radiogram to Von Vietinghoff, just in case the plenipotentiaries had failed to arrive. Next day word came from Bolzano that the emissaries had reached headquarters there, and that the surrender would be carried out.

The Allied troops were not to cease firing until the German radio had broadcast the surrender orders. When on the afternoon of 2 May Allied radio receivers began to pick up the German broadcasts, our own troops were ordered to halt in place.

The German surrender, largest-scale enemy capitulation so far in the war, was to have a tremendous effect on the conclusion of hostilities throughout Europe, less than a week later. It knocked a million German soldiers out of the war and provided the moral impetus for the collapse of the Nazis everywhere. It laid the foundation for the return of peace to Europe.

Bewildered enemy commanders of lesser rank had already surrendered or been captured with their troops all over northern Italy and more than 150,000 prisoners of War had been taken by the Fifth Army alone. In the IV Corps sector, where the greatest amount of territory had been covered and the most extensive hauls made, every division commander opposing the Corps when it jumped off on 14 April had been taken but one, and he was reported killed.

The cold numerical record of casualties sustained by the brave men of the Fifth Army during those final fateful days of the Italian campaign is but a slight indication of the severity of the fighting that characterized their actions and contains nothing at all of their countless stories of individual valor and sacrifice. In the nine days from 5 April, when the preliminary attacks on the west coast began, through 13 April, the eve of the all-out attack, the losses totaled 4495. These included 195 killed, 999 wounded, 45 missing in action, with 3256 non-battle casualties

from all causes. From 14 April through 2 May the losses were 12,059, which included 1394 killed, 5,009 wounded, 74 missing, with 5582 casualties from non-battle causes.

Throughout the entire operation and closely following the Army spearheads, officers of Allied Military Government, integral to Fifth Army, absorbed the problems of civil administration. With the rapid expansion of the Army's area of control these problems increased enormously. At the close of the campaign nearly half of Italy, an area with a population of some 23 million people, was under direct control of the Fifth Army — an area which included the great financial and commercial centers of Milan, Turin and Genoa.



A cemetery provided a macabre setting for a soldier and his prisoners.

Such complex problems as the movement of hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons; the disarming of the Partisans, from whom approximately 200,000 weapons were collected; the care and transportation of some of Italy's greatest works of art which had been retrieved from the Germans; the feeding of the entire civilian population of the area; the administration of justice, the supply of civilian labor to the Army, were but a few of the manifold civilian tasks which had to be undertaken. These were accomplished successfully and concurrently with the progress of military operations and kept pace at all times with the rapidly moving situation.

From the Straits of Messina to the Brenner Pass, Italy was free. The last great battle of the war in the Mediterranean Theater had been fought and won. The Fifth Army, born overseas, was victorious.

As the 88th Division G. I. remarked, « We made it! »

In nineteen days!

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Name and Rank

Organization

Arrived in Italy

Campaigns

Other Information



II Corps
Lieutenant General
**GEOFFREY
KEYES**
Commander

85th Infantry Division

Major General
JOHN B. COULTER
Commander



IV Corps
Lieutenant General
**WILLIS D.
CRITTENBERGER**
Commander

1st Brazilian
Infantry Division
Major General **JOAO
MASCARENHAS
DE MORAES**
Commander



1st Armored Division
Major General
**VERNON
E. PRICHARD**
Commander

92nd Infantry Division

Major General
**EDWARD
M. ALMOND**
Commander



34th Infantry Division
Major General
CHARLES L. BOLTE
Commanding

10th Mountain Div.

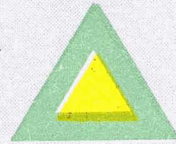
Major General
GEORGE P. HAYS
Commander



91st Infantry Division
Major General
**WILLIAM
G. LIVESAY**
Commander

6th South African
Armoured Division

Major General
W. H. E. POOLE
Commander



88th Infantry Division
Major General
PAUL W. KENDALL
Commander

Legnano Gruppo

Major General
UMBERTO UTILI
Commander



442nd Infantry Regt.
Colonel
VIRGIL R. MILLER
Commander

473rd Infantry Regt.

Colonel
**WILLIAM
YARBOROUGH**
Commander
*Army troops converted
from antiaircraft units.*





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