

the **FINAL CAMPAIGN**
across
NORTHWEST ITALY

14 APRIL - 2 MAY, 1945



HEADQUARTERS IV CORPS, U.S. ARMY

ITALY



S. ANTONIO BATTILIO

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HEADQUARTERS FIFTH ARMY
APO 464 US ARMY

1 August
1945

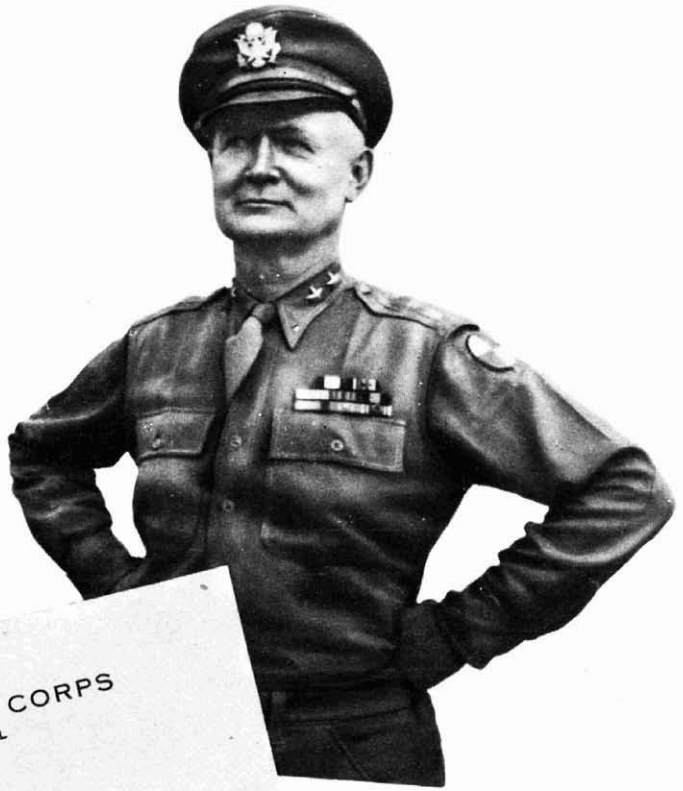
The military operations in the Po Valley which ended the fighting in Italy and resulted in the unconditional surrender of all enemy forces marked the first complete theatre-wide success of Allied arms in this war. The participation of the IV US Corps in the Po Valley campaign is related briefly in this booklet.

As Commander of the Fifth Army of which the IV Corps was a part, I am privileged to have this opportunity of testifying to the very great contribution that that Corps made to the success of those operations and of paying tribute here to the courage and determination displayed by its officers and men throughout.

It is to be regretted that space limitations have necessitated the omission from this narrative of the human details that compose the drama of war. No reading should proceed without taking pause to think upon them - the untold acts of individual sacrifice and bravery that underlay every action recorded and without which the victory could not have been achieved - or this story written.



L. K. TRUSCOTT, JR.,
Lieutenant General, U. S. Army,
Commanding.



HEADQUARTERS IV CORPS
THE COMMANDING GENERAL

9 July 1945

Our last campaign in Italy only lasted nineteen days, but the great victory that was won by IV Corps will live forever in the memory of all of us who participated.

When our magnificent troops tore a wide hole in the hostile line and then with lightning rapidity enveloped the remaining enemy in Northwest Italy, military history was made.

I am proud to have commanded such soldiers, and I shall always glory in their fine achievement.

Willis A. Bittenger
Lieutenant General, U. S. Army
Commanding

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THE FINAL CAMPAIGN ACROSS NORTHWEST ITALY

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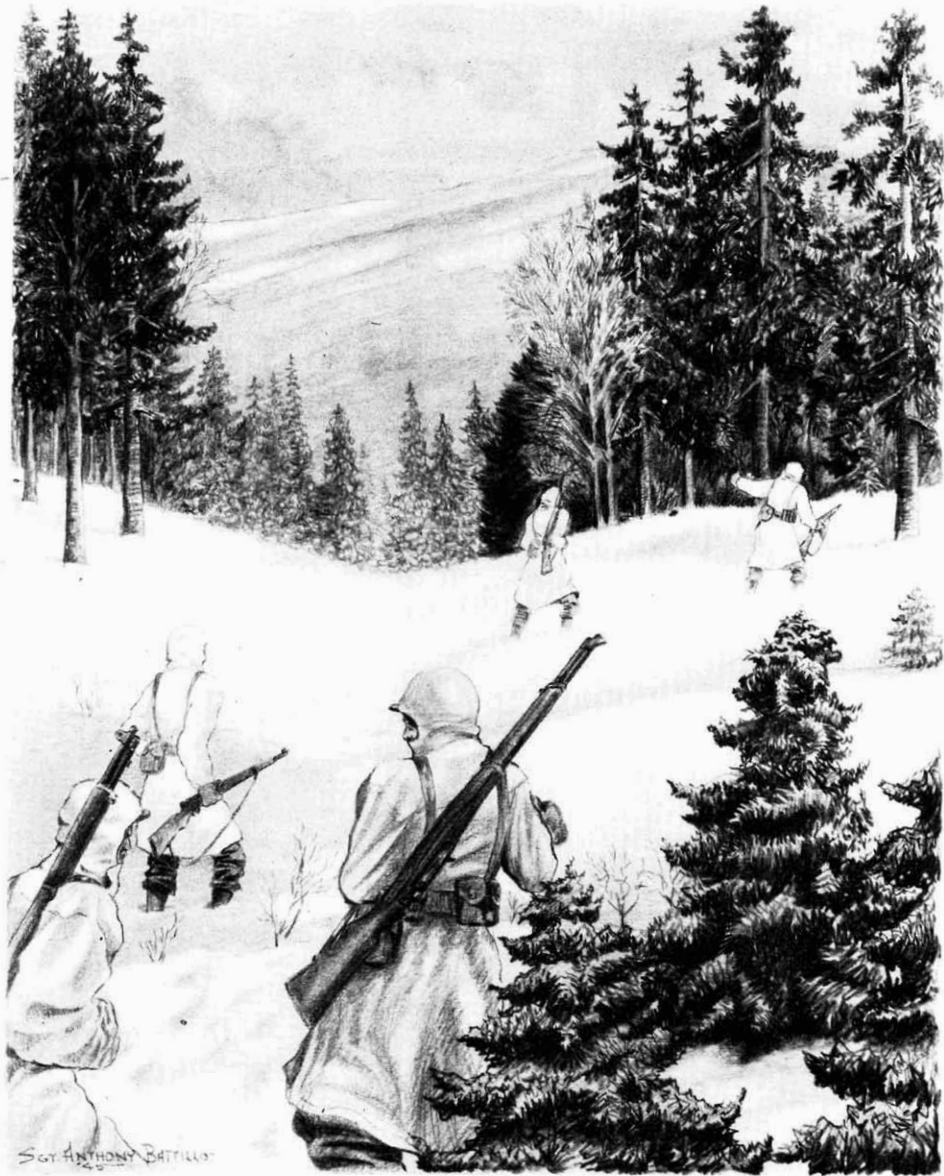
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Introductory



Apennine Winter

When Kesselring, presumably following out a plan for orderly withdrawal, began to fall back in early September, 1944 from the north bank of the Arno River into the better defensive terrain afforded by the Apennines, the plans of Fifteenth Army Group for breaking through the enemy's Gothic Line and debouching into the Po valley rapidly took final form. Both the Eighth Army on the Adriatic, and the Fifth in the west, had their respective parts to play in the drive.

For the Fifth Army, in which for present purposes our interest is centered, the task was by frontal attack to hammer a way through the Gothic Line and the remaining Apennine barriers, until by sheer strength it reached the plains at Bologna. This attack would be delivered on the right of the Fifth Army zone, and for the purpose most of the effective combat troops then available were to be used, including four infantry divisions, all of the powerful corps artillery, and the majority of the engineers and service units on hand. IV Corps, on the left, was to hold the shoulder, maintain contact on its right with the troops engaged in the main attack and defend the rest of the Army front all the way to the Tyrrhenian coast. It was to prevent any hostile penetration to the south and at the same time follow up, as it could, any enemy withdrawal. Nothing spectacular was expected from IV Corps; its long, tenuous front was thinly held, much of it by units which had not had extensive combat experience.

As the battle-scarred American infantry divisions in the main attack battered their way into the mountains north of Florence in September and October, IV Corps sent the 6th South African Armored Division up the tortuous Prato road to protect the flank of the advance, and later CCB of the 1st Armored Division worked its always-assertive way up Highway 64 to somewhat broaden the left shoulder.

Over the remainder of the IV Corps front, British and American converted anti-aircraft units in the center were learning (the hard way) how to become mountain infantry, while on the left



...deep snows and sometimes punishing winds...

the untried Brazilian and 92nd Division units were gathering bitter experience in their first dealings with the disagreeable Hun. As we passed from the foothills into the mountains, wheeled transport had in many cases to be given up and the pack mule relied upon as a means of supply for forward elements. The days were already becoming shorter and on the peaks of the Apennines the snow line was creeping ever lower.

At last, in the first week of November, the going for troops in the main effort, struggling against both Germans and severe weather conditions, became so difficult that all thought of « Bologna by Christmas » had to be abandoned. The Fifth Army settled down in make-shift shelters to get through the winter in the rugged Apennines the best way it could. Winter clothing began to be issued to front line units, while skis and snowshoes were parceled out where most needed.

By this time, CCB had fought forward in the vicinity of Porretta to precarious positions which afforded at best inadequate protection for Highway 64. Exhausted, it was being replaced by the Brazilian division, the last of whose units were now ready to enter the line.

Effective the evening of 4 November, IV Corps was relieved from further command of the zone extending from the sea coast to

the 250 Easting, and on the same day the advance command post was established at Taviano, in close touch with our most vital positions. Amid the deep snows and sometimes punishing winds of the region, the IV Corps burrowed in for the winter, making itself as comfortable as conditions permitted and dedicating itself to the task of keeping the enemy in a constant state of anxiety along the 54 mile front for which it was responsible.

Preliminary Operations

A welcome addition to the IV Corps troop list occurred in January, when the first RCT of the 10th Mountain Division was released from the staging area and began its combat indoctrination in the Cutigliano sector. The balance of the division followed quite promptly and the anti-aircraft units which had thus far maintained the defense were gradually relieved. Although untried in combat, the brisk manner in which the new troops plunged into their work was a happy augury for their future.

Early in the year, in the higher echelons of command, plans were being polished off for the knockout blow to German forces in Italy. IV Corps again was not scheduled for any very important

...plans were being polished off...





...a happy augury for their future.

part in things; it was hoped that the 10th Mountain Division might move to the Porretta area and in a preliminary operation comb the enemy from the dominating Monte Belvedere ridge, which he had so far held firmly against all efforts of the Brazilians. This would deprive the German of most of his observation on Highway 64 and would give us more room for future operations to the north. Then, presumably, IV Corps would lose the mountaineers, whose manpower would be employed to better advantage on a more active front.

The Fifth Army planned in January to make its principal effort in the Spring drive west of Highway 65, with a secondary

effort to the northeast, along the high ground west of Highway 64. The rôle of IV Corps would be secondary, designed and timed to assist the progress of the main attack in its final thrust on Bologna.

How splendidly the 10th Mountain Division performed in its first offensive operation needs only brief reference here. Its success led to the decision that, before the big show began, it should make another preliminary thrust northward from the Torraccia heights, with a hook to the east — the combination having for objective the capture of practically all of the high ground which still afforded observation to the enemy. This operation, culminating in the capture of Monte della Spe by the mountaineers and Castelnuovo by the now thoroughly offensively-minded Brazilians, was equally successful, not only in ground gained, but more particularly because it brought post haste to our front three of the best available enemy divisions, including one of the only two in his mobile reserve. It became evident that von Vietinghoff, who had by then replaced Kesselring as Army Group commander, was apprehensive of his ability to defend the ground between the Reno and Panaro Rivers. We had developed the always desirable « soft spot », — west of the Reno River.

The IV Corps Mission

As already indicated, the original tactical conception of Fifth Army's part was that it should capture Bologna by a frontal attack which, moving directly north astride Highway 65, would smash its way through the German defenses in the Apennines. After the pause for a much-needed rest in early November, the same idea prevailed, for in the attack scheduled for Christmas week, IV Corps was only expected to carry out minor operations on the coast, including the taking of Massa, and to capture the Monte Belvedere ridge on the shoulder of the attack.

As a result of the enemy's diversionary action on the coast, undertaken on 26 December, this holiday offensive was postponed. Thereafter, instructions were issued providing that the troops engaged in the main effort might be called upon to attack with

nine day's notice at any time, but still with the Reno River as their left boundary and the definite idea that Bologna could best be taken by frontal attack.

Fifth Army regrouped early in January, following the Serchio diversion, and no instructions covering further offensive operations were issued. On 9 January, the resumption of any large scale offensive by Fifteenth Army Group was postponed until a date to be announced later. This action was influenced by the expected arrival of fresh units, the necessity of building up ammunition reserves, the difficulty in predicting weather conditions during the winter, and the necessity for regrouping and resting for an all-out attack.

Before any major effort was again made, certain preliminary operations were to be carried out, designed to keep the enemy off balance by threats at various widely separated points. Among these were the Belvedere ridge attack, and the Monte Grande d'Aiano - Castelnuovo advance, both to be executed by IV Corps elements. The favorable results attained in each case have been previously mentioned.

The Operations Instruction of Fifth Army dated 1 April 1945, announced that it would make the main effort of the Army Group, attacking with corps abreast, initially astride Highway 64, to debouch into the Po Valley between the Reno and Panaro Rivers, and capture or isolate Bologna. For the first time, there was here an indication that pressure west of the Reno River might give better results than the old scheme of pushing doggedly on, directly north toward Bologna. It was known that the enemy had worked energetically during the winter on improving the deep and well-prepared defenses south of Bologna, as far west as the 750 Easting.

The limited offensive put on by IV Corps during March, when our success caused several good divisions to be rushed to the threatened front, may also have had its influence in causing this new scheme of maneuver to be considered. But, though the possibility of a breakthrough west of the Reno River was now recognized, it was still planned to employ the same troops which had previously been engaged in the main attack to capture or isolate Bologna, ope-

rating either east or west of the Reno River as required by the situation. IV Corps was to seize certain heights west of the Reno River, and to clear Highway 64, until an east and west line generally along the 370 Northing was reached; after that it would relinquish the entire eastern part of its zone and resume its old rôle of protecting the left flank of the Army and following up aggressively any enemy withdrawal.

Based upon this assigned mission, IV Corps plans provided for the main effort to be made by the 10th Mountain Division, which would attack generally northeast, its axis of attack veering more and more eastward as the 370 Northing was approached. The maneuver was a difficult one, the left flank being continuously exposed to the enemy in such a way that much of the available strength in the division might have to be used for protecting it as the attack progressed.

Despite the initial secondary part which IV Corps was to play, however, there was the strong possibility that the situation might develop during the attack so that the 10th Mountain Division could stop its traveling on the arc of a circle and head due north for a break-through. It was to be hoped, also, that the first few days of the attack would be light enough so that the mountaineers would still have the necessary impetus left, as and when such a moment arrived.

Fifth Army had held out the 85th Infantry Division as its reserve. This it was prepared to commit either east or west of the Reno River, as the situation might warrant when the time came. But on 14 April, when IV Corps jumped off, there was little expectation on the part of anyone that the 85th Division, even if it should go in west of the Reno River, would be made available to IV Corps. On the contrary, it was anticipated that if progress were too slow east of the Reno, the main effort would swing west, cross over the stream, taking a goodly bite out of IV Corps' zone of advance and push on for the break-through.



10th MOUNTAIN DIVISION



1st ARMORED DIVISION



85th INFANTRY DIVISION



IV CORPS



34th INFANTRY DIVISION



1st BRAZILIAN
INFANTRY DIVISION

SHOULDER, SLEEVE INSIGNIAS
OF **IV CORPS** AND ITS DIVISIONS
IN THE SPRING OFFENSIVE, 1945

PLATE NUMBER 4

Troop List

The troops available to IV Corps for its sweep through north-west Italy were of many national origins and represented various types of military traditions; they included American units (white and colored) and the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, among others, and although few of these units had had extensive combat experience, they had to bear the responsibility of defending the left flank of the Italian front.

Throughout the fall and winter, IV Corps had been responsible for the defense of a very long front, and each time that an advance was made by any of its units, the situation was very much like stretching a rubber band; everyone felt that there was just so much elasticity before the danger point was reached and a weak spot developed through which the Hun might very well decide to punch his way, in a spoiling attack.

The attachment of the 10th Mountain Division to IV Corps, its battle indoctrination and its highly successful limited operation on Belvedere not only renewed confidence in corps staff circles, but seemed also to inspire the Brazilians to greater offensive efforts. The only remaining apprehension was the possibility that the 10th Mountain Division might be lost to IV Corps in order to use it in what might be considered a more important part of the line. This threat vanished when the mountaineers staged their second offensive in early March because, before they stopped on their final objectives, it was evident that the German feared they would slash on farther into a part of his line where he was ill-prepared to receive them. Plainly the 10th Mountain Division would be more useful where it was than by shifting it to any other part of the Fifth Army front.

Following the Monte della Spe - Castelnuovo operation, the 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, which was not necessary in the purely defensive rôle of the 1st Armored Division, was attached to IV Corps and took over gradually increased frontages on the right of the corps zone, until, with a corresponding movement to the east of 10th Mountain elements, the Brazilian units that had

been holding between the two were entirely pinched out. This permitted the regrouping of the BEF in one part of the left flank, instead of having the division responsible for two different non-adjacent portions of the line.

The problem of finding sufficient strength to open up Highway 64 was solved by attachment to IV Corps of the 1st Armored Division, which upon its relief from a tour of front line duty in the mountains to the east was — in the interests of concealment of intentions — to move first to the vicinity of Lucca, and then infiltrate by night, just in time to play its part in the attack.

In order for the units of the 10th Mountain Division to obtain more rest and training, a battalion of the 365th Infantry had been attached to it and had held a portion of its line. It was desirable that the 10th have available its entire strength for the coming operation, and accordingly it was planned that after the attack got started, the BEF would gradually take over the left of the mountaineers' front, releasing the latter's units to take part in the advance northeast. As the BEF was holding from Monte Serrasiccia clear along to the vicinity of Monteforte, the old question of stretching the rubber band came up again. The situation was met by planning to attach the 371st Infantry to IV Corps as soon as it could be spared from the coastal operation scheduled to be undertaken by the revamped 92nd Division shortly before D-day. The 371st Infantry would relieve the Brazilians, beginning on their left flank, releasing successive battalions which could then be employed to relieve 10th Mountain units on the right. If the Spring offensive was successful, it was hoped that the pressure up both sides of the Reno River would so threaten the enemy's Apennine communications that he would begin withdrawal of his forces in the neighborhood of Abetone and Pavullo before there was too much over-extension of our own lines on these fronts.

The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was also attached to the IV Corps, allowing it a mobile unit in reserve, which might move quickly to assist in repelling any enemy countermeasure that endangered Highway 64.

For tank destroyer and nondivision armored units there were

attached the 701st and 894th Tank Destroyer Battalions (the latter less one company), and the 751st Tank Battalion and two companies (less one platoon) of the 760th Tank Battalion. Some of this armor was attached to the 10th Mountain Division for the attack; the remainder, as corps troops, was available in direct support as needed.

The artillery of IV Corps, as attached before the attack, was adequate for the assigned mission. It comprised the 424th Field Artillery Group Headquarters with 766th Field Artillery Battalion (12x155H) and the 633rd Field Artillery Battalion (12x155G), and the 85th Division Artillery with the 328th and 910th Field Artillery Battalions (36x105H) and the 403rd Field Artillery Battalion (12x155H). In addition, there remained attached the British 7th Army Group Royal Artillery, made up of the 2nd Medium Regiment (16x4.5G), the 253rd Battery of the 17th Medium Regiment (8x5.5H) and the 178th Medium Regiment (16x5.5H). The 84th Chemical Battalion remained available and, less one company, was attached to the 10th Mountain Division; the detached company was held in corps reserve. The 179th Chemical Smoke Generator Company (less one platoon) and « C » Battery, 360th AAA Searchlight Battalion (less one platoon) were also in corps reserve.

The corps engineers consisted of the 1108th Engineer Combat Group, with the 235th, 255th, and 337th Engineer Combat Battalions, the 23rd Engineer Combat Battalion (Italian) and the 1029th Engineer Treadway Bridge Company.

Final Preparations

After consolidating positions following the capture of its final objective on March 5, a comprehensive schedule of reliefs was undertaken in the 10th Mountain, whereby all battalions had a few days of combined rest and training in a rear area, followed by a period in reserve. Its activities in the month that was to elapse before the jump-off may well be likened to the final conditioning of a racehorse, or to the last days of a team before going on the field for the big game of the season.

Evidence of the impending attack began to appear to friendly eyes a few days before the scheduled D-day; camouflaged supply dumps and medical installations were moved in along the main axis and an Army POW cage between Marano and Silla was opened. The long haul of supplies over the Apennines which had been necessary for months, would soon be a thing of the past.

The 371st Infantry arrived in the Lizzano area around midnight on 8-9 April and during that same night the battalion of the 365th Infantry (1st) attached to the 10th Mountain Division was relieved by a Brazilian battalion. On the night of 9-10 April, the 371st Infantry completed relief of the left three battalions of the BEF while the 1st Battalion 365th Infantry moved to join the 371st Infantry.

Units of the 1st Armored Division had begun to close in the vicinity of Riola, and on the night of 10-11 April relieved the battalion of the 10th Mountain Division which was on the right. Further west, a battalion relief of 10th Mountain by BEF was carried out on 11-12 April. This completed inter-division adjustments preparatory to the attack.

The last elements of the 1st Armored Division, including ordnance and medical units, closed on the night 12-13 April; the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron closed at 120735B in the vicinity of Silla.

Active patrolling was carried on all along the IV Corps front, every effort being made to simulate normal activities continuing exactly as they had for the past several months.

Air and Weather

In due time, D-day for the Fifteenth Army Group was set for 9 April 1945. The Eighth Army was to launch its attack on that date and on D, D+1 and D+2 was to receive all of the heavy, medium and fighter bomber air support available.

A relatively elaborate program of air support for IV Corps was arranged. On D+3, the day originally set for opening its attack, fighter bomber support would include concentrations on some el-

even medium and light gun positions, a fire bomb « blitz » in the Pigna area, attacks on designated enemy CP's and other vital areas, constant daylight armed reconnaissance by two aircraft in the Zocca - Bazzano area, four aircraft every half hour during daylight for Rover Pete activities and, finally, night bombing by radar control near Bazzano and by star shell control on Zocca. A total of 150 missions of 600 sorties were planned.

The Pigna blitz was to precede the opening artillery preparation, to allow the pilots unimpaired visibility. These blitz attacks, which had been developed and employed successfully before, would be carried out by fighter bombers upon enemy positions very close to our troops, and the Air Corps considered they would be highly effective.

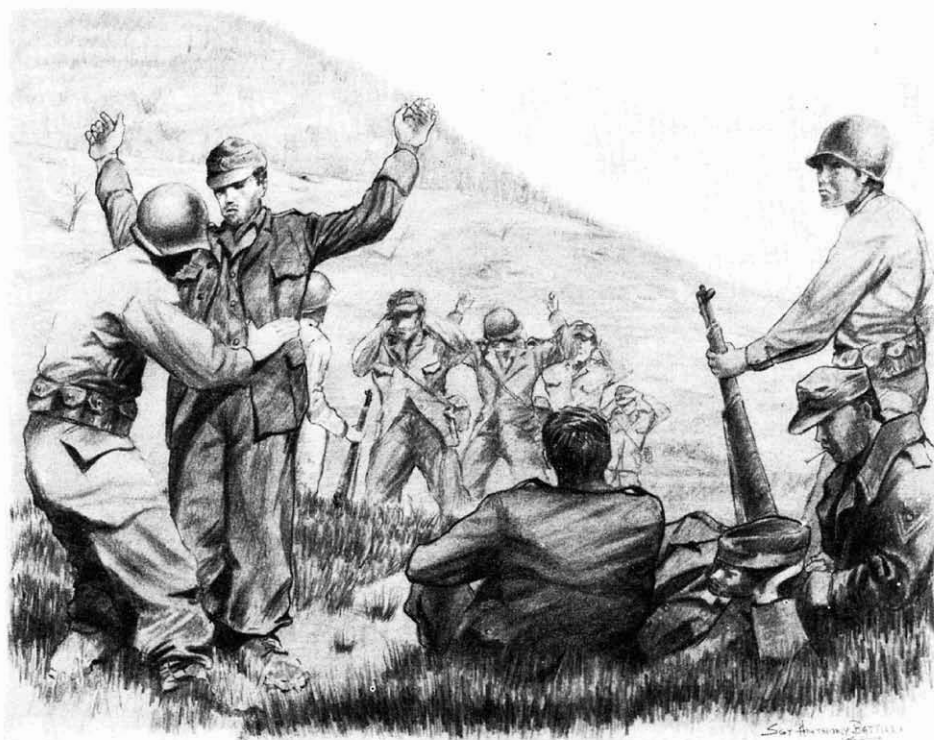
On D+4, IV Corps was to receive approximately the same day and night air effort as on the preceding day, except for some decrease during the afternoon on account of diverting aircraft for the air operation scheduled to precede the attack on Monte Sole, in the zone to our east. On D+5, our Rover Pete missions were to be reduced by half, to supply aircraft for Rover Joe, then to become active farther east. On the same day, the Fifth Army attack was to be augmented by approximately 800 heavy and 400 medium aircraft, attacking targets along Highways 64 and 65, generally south of Bologna. As the flights were to pass over IV Corps zone in returning to their bases, no air activity would be undertaken there while they were overhead. During the succeeding days of the attack the same pattern of fighter bomber aircraft on pre-planned and Rover Pete missions, augmented by heavy and medium attacks, was to be followed, the detailed schedules naturally being dependent upon the progress of the offensive.

Throughout the Spring, weather in the Apennines had been all that could be desired; the snow had melted early, there were practically no rains and, save for occasional ground haze, visibility was excellent. This fine weather was extremely favorable for movement of troops and supplies, living conditions of troops in the line, conduct of artillery fire, and air attack of targets. Day after day the prediction for IV Corps zone continued to be good.

There was, however, one uncertain factor; the weather on the western coast, where the air bases were located, was on a given day very apt to be different from that prevailing in the Apennines. In particular, the visibility on the coast was frequently poor in the early morning and prevented aircraft getting off the ground on schedule.

This situation made itself felt when the weather forecasts for 12 April, scheduled date for the IV Corps attack, were first received. While over the Apennines some scattered clouds and poor visibility were predicted, visibility over the air bases would be restricted to two to four miles in the early morning. This caused a postponement of twenty-four hours in the attack. Again on 13 April, while at the bases visibility would be fair in the morning and good by noon, we could expect broken clouds over the western slopes in our zone. Another twenty-four hour delay ensued. Finally, the prediction for 14 April being better than those for the preceding two days, and the need having become urgent for coordinating Fifth Army's attack with that of Eighth Army, which was already under way, the decision was made in the late afternoon of 13 April that the IV Corps attack should jump off on the following morning.

Mountains to Foothills



Sticky Going

As a rule in the Italian campaign, the Allied forces had found themselves occupying the low ground, because the Hun chose to make his stand on the heights, with all the resultant advantages to him. The local operations of February and March had brought a welcome variation in this respect in the eastern part of the IV Corps zone for its attack, which was to open the Fifth Army offensive, would be made downhill. True enough, there were still

some elevations to be climbed to the north, but they were becoming both fewer and lower. The Apennines were gradually changing from mountains to foothills; the German was beginning to run out of high ground.

From our front lines, several ridges ran north and northeast until they were swallowed up in the plain of the Po Valley, and it was along these that our effort would be directed, at least until the 370 Northing was reached. The situation then, particularly the comparative ease of progress being made on the two sides of the Reno River, would determine the further scheme of maneuver for Fifth Army.

Dawn of 14 April brought good weather both along the IV Corps front and at the coastal fields, and the air preparation from 0830B to 0910B was laid on as scheduled. An intense artillery preparation followed, lasting, until 0945B. At that hour the 10th Mountain Division, commanded by Major General George P. Hays and charged with delivering the main attack for IV Corps, jumped off with two RCT's abreast.

Progress was slow; the enemy was waiting for us in a deep defensive position which had been skillfully organized on extremely rugged terrain, in which no opportunity had been overlooked for the most effective use of mines, demolitions, self-propelled guns and machine guns to halt our advance.

...the most effective use of... demolitions...





...to make their evacuation a problem...

But like a relentless tide which, stemmed in one spot, flows serenely around the obstacle to engulf it, the 10th Mountain Division, with soundly coordinated fire and maneuver, was once more on the offensive. The Hun could and no doubt would make things difficult; that he could stop the mountaineers, except momentarily here and there, was doubtful.

For three and a half days the German 334th and 94th Infantry Divisions resisted doggedly; the enemy's local reserves were committed, and repeated counterattacks and severe artillery and mortar concentrations were employed against our slow but steady advance northeastward. German losses in men and equipment were heavy; not only did the number of enemy killed and wounded left on the field testify to the terrible destruction he was undergoing, but the steadily increasing stream of prisoners of war flowing through the 10th Mountain cages became so great as to make their evacuation a problem.

The attack on the important road center of Tole by a battalion of the 87th Mountain Infantry with tank support, which began on

the morning of 16 April and continued with a crescendo of fire against a very stubborn defense until the town was cleaned out in mid-afternoon, was one of the conspicuous minor actions on a busy battlefield. When Tole was finally clear of enemy it was left such a mass of rubble that it was difficult to re-open the main road.

That day, too, another battalion of the same regiment started due east from Monte Croce to seize Monte Mosca. It was a march of almost five kilometers along the ridge, neglecting the enemy and all his works. But as the movement got under way in response to a laconic order from the division commander to « take all Krauts off all high ground », many mines hindered progress and enemy resistance increased as the day wore on. The maneuver had turned and was rolling up the flank of the German 756th Infantry Regiment. The extent of the Hun's chagrin is best revealed by the fact that after the objective fell about 1515B, there were ten separate counterattacks launched in a vain effort to regain it. But ground once in the mountaineers' possession was usually theirs for keeps, and this case was no exception to the rule.

On 15 April the 86th Mountain Infantry did efficient work in the capture of Monte Mantino, an operation which was not completed until long after dark. The following day, after the force attacking Monte Mosca had progressed sufficiently to the east, the 86th started due north across its rear and by evening had captured Baccuchi, la Sirena and Hill 701, all after the toughest fighting, featured at one point by the destruction of hostile self-propelled guns by bazooka fire. On the left flank, the advance of the 85th Mountain Infantry had been do difficult and costly during the first two days that further effort to the north and northwest was abandoned. The 85th gathered itself together during the succeeding forty-eight hours, preparing to turn over to the Brazilians and get into the fight again nearer its two sister regiments.

By noon on 17 April our leading elements had reached Monte Vignola and Montepastore, and columns were advancing on Monte Moscoso, and San Pròspero, both of which would be in our hands by dark. The fighting was still bitter, but the more open terrain



...Tote was finally clear of enemy...

permitted better close support by armor. Capture of a battalion commander and staff at one point and taking of prisoners from a reconnaissance battalion at another, definitely identified the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division as having been thrown in to stop our progress. Thus, the last German reserve of division size had been committed; about all that the enemy could do in future was to gather together provisional « battle groups » and rush them to the most threatened parts of his line.

There had been vaguely perceptible during the morning a decrease in the tenacity of the Hun; for the first time there began to be signs that he might withdraw to save his remaining troops rather than throw them into the maw to be chewed up. General Hays, sensing the enemy's change of heart, wanted to head directly north, and believed that during the night 17-18 April he could have two regiments along the 400 Northing, between the 660 and 710 Eastings.



...not... without paying the price...

The 10th Mountain had not made this deep penetration without paying the price; casualties in killed, wounded, and captured for the four days had amounted to 1429, and despite rotation of battalions, men were beginning to be physically tired from their efforts. Any weariness the body of the division might be feeling, however, had not in the least been communicated to its soul; as time would demonstrate, the offensive spirit, the will to close with the enemy, still surged strongly in every mountain soldier's breast.

Clearing Highway 64

While the mountaineers were slugging their way through the enemy defenses in the center of the IV Corps zone of advance, there was also a job to be done on the right, where Highway 64 paralleled the Reno River. This road, once considered of little importance, was now destined to be the main route for building up the vast dumps necessary to supply Fifth Army once it reached the Po Valley.

The mission of clearing Highway 64 west of the Reno River was assigned the 1st Armored Division, commanded by Major General Vernon E. Prichard. Its units had been infiltrating into assembly areas in the vicinity of Riola for several nights previous to the originally scheduled time for opening the IV Corps attack. Except for the narrow valley of the Reno, the terrain in its assigned zone was far from suitable for armor; but tedious experience up the length of the Italian boot had accustomed the division to mountain warfare, and its three armored infantry battalions had long since become reconciled to fighting over the crags and chasms of the Apennines, along with any other foot troops.

Following the Castelnuovo operation, the 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron had been gradually driving in the enemy's outposts in the Reno valley until the southern edge of the town of Vergato was reached; his defenses were strong there and he was evidently not ready to withdraw without a struggle. Farther west, an armored infantry battalion had taken over the front held by the right battalion of the 10th Mountain, and on the night of 13-14 April a platoon of medium tanks moved to positions in front of

...after clearing the town...





...Suzzano... on to Monte Pero.

this battalion, suitably protected by an infantry covering party. A small fire fight following this movement was indicative of the uneasiness of the enemy along our front. Confident as he was that we were coming at him soon, he could not be sure just *when*.

The advance in the right of the zone, which was to be started on IV Corps order, did not get under way until late afternoon of 14 April. Prior to its initiation, small elements of a second armored infantry battalion had been sent forward, and the unit itself moved out toward Suzzano at 1645B. There was no opposition encountered and a halt was made about two kilometers southwest of the village, which was to be attacked the following morning.

A troop of the reconnaissance squadron moved on Vergato about an hour later, and entered the town at 2000B. Defensive small arms and mortar fire effectively restricted our penetration to the southern outskirts and another troop was very soon moved up to help clear the town.

Suzzano was entered in the face of determined artillery and small arms fire at 1815B on 15 April and the attacking force, after clearing the town, made preparations to continue on to Monte Pe-

ro. The fighting in Vergato continued all day of the 15th, the enemy being strongly ensconced in almost every cellar and behind every wall, and numerous mine fields, demolitions and booby traps combining to make progress exceedingly slow.

The attack from the west along the high ground with Monte Pero as an objective, was launched at 0630B on 16 April, encountering artillery and mortar fire. A rapid advance put the mountain top, of particular importance because of the observation on the adjacent zone which it afforded, in our hands by 0845B. The attacking force remained in possession during the day and in the evening moved northwest to be able to support an attack on the high ground northwest of Venola, scheduled for 17 April.

The third infantry battalion of the division moved to the vicinity of Monte Mosca after that height had been captured by the 10th Mountain on 16 April, and from there it attacked the same day eastward and captured high ground two kilometers away. On 17 April this battalion went on and seized Monte Milano, remained there for some hours, and then moved southwest to an assembly area.

After Monte Milano had been captured, the battalion that had taken over the right of the 10th Mountain line prior to the opening of the offensive, which had also moved forward to the vi-

...had at last cleared Vergato...





...up both banks of the Reno...

cinity of Monte Mosca after its capture, took off on the afternoon of 17 April in an easterly direction and, against considerable small arms and sniper fire, captured Monte d'Avigo.

The reconnaissance squadron had at last cleared Vergato of all enemy in the early morning of 16 April and advanced up both banks of the Reno to the 290 Northing, meeting small arms, mortar and artillery fire, and finding a badly demolished highway. On the following day the advance continued against scattered resistance, reaching on the west bank of the river a point just short of Pian di Venola, approximately eight kilometers northeast of Vergato. The advance down the eastern bank encountered mines and was a kilometer and a half behind at the end of the day.

The original mission of the 1st Armored Division had provided for its continuance in the advance until it arrived at approximately the 370 Northing, except that upon or after reaching a certain indicated phase line it might at any time be passed through by another division. Monte d'Avigo was, however, destined to be the point farthest north in this zone that the armored infantry would reach; the general situation on IV Corps front had unfolded sufficiently by that time to permit the Army plans for further advance to assume a definite form.

The Rubber Band is Stretched

As has been mentioned, the 1st Infantry Division, BEF, commanded by Major General Joao Baptista Mascarenhas de Moraes, next in line to the left of the 10th Mountain Division, was to be gradually relieved on its left flank by the 371st Infantry, and on its right was in its turn to relieve successive elements of the 10th Mountain. The Brazilians were to hold defensive positions, reconnoiter, and on IV Corps order would follow up any enemy withdrawal along either the road Zocca-Guiglia-Bazzano or the alternate route through Monte Ombraro and Zappolino.

Detailed plans for a limited advance to the northwest to occupy Montese and the neighboring high ground had been made by the staffs concerned; in the division the hope ran high that the opportunity might soon come to take a more active part in the offensive. They had not long to wait, for at 141215B General Crittenberger notified the division commander that he could start to move whenever he liked. Of the numerous reconnaissance patrols that had gone out into the Montese area during the morning, none

...badly demolished highway.





...only after a sharp fire fight...

had made any contact. A battalion, with tanks and tank destroyers in support, followed these patrols at 1300B, with the town of Montese and nearby hilltops as objectives. There was only scattered opposition until the cemetery east of town was reached; at that point, resistance stiffened considerably and Montese was finally taken only after a sharp fire fight. Several other small villages in the same area were also occupied.

The enemy, ever sensitive to any pressure northwest, proceeded to deliver one artillery concentration after another on the newly-won positions, and that night and in fact almost continuously for several days, the Brazilians underwent severe punishment from these fires.

On 15 April, the attack was continued at 0945B, in three battalion strength. Some advances were made and the positions taken were consolidated; a small enemy counterattack in the afternoon was repulsed by small arms and artillery fire. Harassing mor-

tar and artillery fire continued to fall in the Brazilian advance areas throughout the day on 16 April, and a battalion relief was carried out. No important advances were recorded; an attack was planned for 1200B, but the enemy discovered the preparations and dropped severe and timely mortar fire on the line of departure, which disorganized one company and disrupted all communication, resulting in an indefinite postponement of the operation. On 17 April the principal Brazilian activity was regrouping. Another battalion of the 10th Mountain was relieved by the BEF, resulting in a new inter-division boundary and the assumption of additional responsibility on the Brazilian right. Two battalion reliefs within the division were also effected, while the enemy kept up a steady program of harassing fires, both mortar and artillery.

The efforts of the 1st Infantry Division, BEF, during the first phase of the Spring drive had been effective, and the Brazilians had made their distinct contribution to that part of the IV Corps attack. Their aggressiveness had undoubtedly held in place both infantry and artillery which the German, had he dared to move them, could well have used elsewhere. The continued Brazilian activity in the Montese area had attracted no small amount of artillery and mortar fire which would otherwise have been directed at the flank of the 10th Mountain Division, and would have complicated its problems of supply and security. The help given also included the relief of 10th Mountain elements, which not only took from the latter the responsibility for defense but also made these troops available to take part in the main attack.

While the heavy shelling received in the Montese area had for the time being prevented a further Brazilian advance, the division commander had by no means abandoned his resolve to have a full share of the honors fall to Brazil in what might well be the final campaign in Italy. Casualties had not been light; they had amounted to an even 400 for the first four days. But while the Brazilian division was temporarily at a standstill, it had no intention of abandoning the offensive, and eager eyes were watching for the enemy's first sign of weakness, which would be the signal for a renewal of the advance.

The 371st Infantry, reinforced, holding the sector of IV Corps' long front to the left of the Brazilians, was to hold the defensive positions taken over, reconnoiter, and on Corps order follow up any enemy withdrawal as far as the Panaro River. For the purpose there were available to begin with the three organic battalions, plus one of the 365th Infantry.

Three company-strength combat patrols pushed out on 14 April toward the enemy positions, moving from two to four kilometers before they made contact. All engaged the enemy, and all received small arms, mortar and artillery fire. During the afternoon all three disengaged and, under cover of darkness, withdrew to former positions.

The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, held in corps reserve in the vicinity of Silla, carried out reconnaissance and made plans for moving promptly to intercept any enemy attempt to penetrate toward Porretta, through the vulnerable saddle between Monte Belvedere and Rocca Corneta.

On the second day, 15 April, no enemy activity whatever was observed, although our patrolling was continued. On 16 April three company-strength patrols again moved out, all receiving severe artillery and mortar fire, but only one actually engaging the enemy. In the subsequent fight, one enemy was killed, five wounded and two taken prisoners. No aggressive action was attempted on 17 April, although a battalion relief was carried out.

On the left of IV Corps, where the 365th Infantry was guarding the Lima Valley corridor from positions about Cutigliano, a quiet day was spent on 14 April, activity being limited to driving off a too-inquisitive hostile patrol. Similar quiet prevailed on the following day, although our reconnaissance was active. Scattered enemy artillery fire was received on 16 April, and another enemy party approaching our lines was forced to withdraw. On 17 April an additional battalion was detached and moved to join the 371st Infantry; this left the Cutigliano garrison with only the barely necessary manpower, and restricted activities from then on to a minimum.

The Picture Changes

The decision of the Army Commander to release the 85th Infantry Division, commanded by Major General John B. Coulter, to IV Corps was made shortly after noon on 17 April. One of its regiments had been in Army reserve in the Sassomolare area since the night of 16-17 April; a second closed in the vicinity of Africa at 170345B, and the third reached its assembly area near Sassomolare the following afternoon. One regiment was to be held in reserve behind the western shoulder and only committed with authority of the Army Commander.

The division artillery, less one battalion, had already been attached to IV Corps and was participating in the attack, reinforcing the fires of the 10th Mountain artillery. The detached battalion, which had been assisting in the coastal attack of the 92nd Infantry Division, was ordered on the morning of 17 April to rejoin its parent unit without delay.

The 85th Infantry Division, less one regiment as stated, was to be employed to relieve the 1st Armored Division and to continue to clear Highway 64, assisting the advance of units in the adjoining zone. One regiment was in position to relieve infantry of the 1st Armored and to continue the attack by morning of 18 April, and command of the zone passed at 0900B. Later in the day, 10th Mountain elements farther to the left were also relieved by troops of the 85th.

The relief of the 1st Armored Division from the right zone permitted it to be moved to the left, behind the 10th Mountain and along and across the latter's main supply route. Most of the armored vehicles of the division were still concentrated in the Africa area, as opportunities for their employment in the right zone had been very few. The two armored infantry battalions committed in the mountains had a slow and precarious march back to their half-tracks, for in addition to the terrain itself, there were mine fields and by-passed enemy forces that continued to offer resistance. It was almost as much of a fight to come back as it had been to go forward. Combat Command A was the first column to



...opening up an alternate route...

get under way; it moved westward over the Vergato-Suzzano road, toward an assembly area near Tole. This highway had been badly demolished at a vulnerable turn beyond Suzzano, but corps engineers had succeeded in opening up an alternate route to by-pass the blown portion, utilizing for the purpose a very poor mountain road that would only permit painfully slow one-way traffic. Despite the inadequacy of the net, CCA had assembled and was regrouping by early morning of 18 April; movement westward of the balance of the division was undertaken as soon as the way was clear.

There was a certain amount of delay and confusion south of Tole and in the town itself due to interdictory fire by enemy guns and to the use of same road by two divisions, the 10th Mountain and 1st Armored, and part of a third — the left RCT of the 85th. Corps artillery was also displacing forward over the same road at the same time. Traffic control was a problem, and was aggravated by the presence of many individual vehicles that were trying to get forward by infiltration at the earliest possible moment. These conditions were unavoidable in view of the scarcity of roads and the urgency for the movement of the armored division and

the left RCT of the 85th Division which, from their respective starting points, were bound to create cross currents. The wonder was that a greater snarl did not develop, and on the whole, the results were surprisingly satisfactory.

The combined efforts of 1st Armored and IV Corps engineers resulted in opening a second route from Suzzano north, which rejoined the main road again at a point about 1 3/4 miles beyond Tole. This was devoted exclusively to the passage of armored vehicles until the movement westward had been completed, and by its use much congestion that otherwise would have prevailed was avoided.

Tribute should be paid here to the omnipresent but generally unsung 2 1/2 ton, 6x6 cargo truck, and to the man who drove it. From the standpoint of dependability in delivering essential combat supplies through difficult country such as now confronted IV Corps, the vehicle was invaluable. The driver, who knew no hours and frequently drove the clock around with only an occasional cat-nap and another cup of coffee to keep him going, made his contribution to the success of the campaign just as surely as the combat soldier whose groceries and bullets made up the load.

And no story of this operation could pretend to be complete without also mentioning the lowly pack mule, and the important part he played in IV Corps transportation. At the opening of the

Despite the inadequacy of the net...





groceries and bullets made up the load.

drive there were five Italian pack companies attached to our divisions; in addition to these, the 10th Mountain had received some six hundred American mules, some of which were used in their artillery and some in their quartermaster battalion, both of which units had had to be motorized when they first reached Italy. These animals and the men who led them, whether of American or Italian origin, did an indispensable piece of work in getting food, ammunition and medical supplies to advance elements in the more inaccessible parts of the zone. At times unorthodox as it may seem, gasoline and oil were actually delivered to some of the armored units by pack mule.

Opportunity for Armor

By comparison, the ground in the valleys of the Panaro and Samoggia Rivers, in the new zone assigned to the 1st Armored Division, was a little more suitable for armor than had been the mountain fastnesses just west of Highway 64. There was a good road net, the streams were low and fordable in many spots and the country, although still rugged and broken to about the 480 Northing, was falling away to the north. As soon as the plains

began, there would be a multitude of roads, without many places for effective demolitions. All in all, if enemy resistance was not too determined, it looked as though the tanks might reach the valley quickly, and could then begin to roll northwest and comb the Kraut from his crossing sites along the south bank of the Po.

With the 10th Mountain pushing on north in the center and the 85th on the right keeping up the pressure along Highway 61, an armored thrust in the general direction of Castelfranco dell'Emilia would broaden the front of the IV Corps effort and might well hasten the breakout into the valley.

CCA started from its area north of Tole at 181220B, one column heading north and one west, to protect the open flank. Along the Samoggia valley CCA forces that day moved north about five kilometers beyond San Pròspero; only about three kilometers were made westward. The progress north was against fairly light resistance, but the thrust toward Monte Ombraro, which threatened the enemy's escape route through Zocca, encountered stiff opposition, including mines, blown roads and many well-handled self-propelled guns, in addition to artillery and mortar fire. Next day CCA went on in three columns, against stubborn and determined resistance in the form of artillery, self-propelled guns and small arms fire. The center column reached Zappolino, the right column Badia and the left C. Caselli. CCB had meanwhile closed and moved in to the left of CCA; it relieved some CCA elements and advanced westward to C. Masetto and went north almost to Samoggia.

Progress on 20 April in the 1st Armored zone was slow everywhere; determined resistance was encountered and the various columns had to fight every inch of the way. A tank battalion attached to CCA had battered its way to the 500 Northing by the end of the day, while CCB, consolidating in one column, moved tediously over broken country to a point near Castello di Serravalle.

Thus the 1st Armored Division, moving through broken country and against a stubborn enemy that was trying his best to delay the broadened shoulder of our advance, had, after three days of

heartbreaking effort, hammered its way forward so that its main forces were very close to the plains of the Po Valley. By midnight reconnaissance elements were out into the valley and across Highway 9 in places; but enemy forces in Bazzano, an important road center that could not very well be by-passed, still were offering determined resistance. Except for 20 April, when the fight had been toughest, casualties in personnel had been light; the number of tanks out of action, due mostly to the narrow mountain roads and mule paths that it had been necessary to use, was considerable.

Armor in Italy had been persevering, to say the least, for some of the mountainous country successfully crossed by our tanks and tank destroyers had most certainly put both drivers and maintenance crews to the acid test of ability and patience. Throughout the dark winter days when specialists had parked their vehicles and gone into the line as infantrymen, the hope had nevertheless survived that some way, some time, the division would come out upon favorable ground where armor could really roll as it was meant to roll. No matter what the way had been, the time had almost arrived. There must have been many an expectant smile as from the last foothills of the Apennines men looked out over the flat stretches of the Po valley.

The 85th and 10th Push On

There still lay ahead of the forward elements on the right of IV Corps zone on the morning of 18 April, some 9 miles of rough territory from which the Kraut had to be driven before we could reach the flat country west of Bologna. He was moving back, but very reluctantly, not yet convinced of his desperate situation.

The 85th Infantry Division, having completed relief of 1st Armored elements, sent its right regiment forward against slight resistance to reach Lama and Luminasio. The left regiment attacked at 0930B with two battalions abreast and, against fairly

light resistance during the day, had advanced by evening to the vicinity of Ca del Rosso.

The series of boundary changes which was to plague the 85th Division from this time on, now began. On 19 April its right regiment was relieved in position by units from the zone to the right, which had crossed the Reno River in anticipation of a shift west of the inter-corps boundary. The left regiment continued to advance along the ridge between the Lavino and Olivetta Rivers, and reached the 410 Northing. Prisoners taken from several elements of the German 8th Mountain Division were an indication that we were beginning to overrun the sector assigned this unit, and every kilometer that we advanced would threaten more and more its exposed flank. The 85th was indeed assisting the advance of units on its east.

The right elements of the 10th Mountain surged forward on 18 April in habitual style; on the left, due to dogged resistance in the shape of artillery fire and counterattacks from the west bank of the Samoggia River, the advance was slower. By evening the general line San Chierlo - Hill 330 - il Casone was all safely under mountaineer control.

...poised on the brink...



On the following day, on the right, a fresh regiment took over and advancing almost 6 airline miles parallel to the Lavino River reached C. Bianca, where it halted in column of battalions. After a hard fight the regiment on the left had with one battalion captured Mongiorgio by midday; its other units, passing to the right, pushed on to seize Monte Avezzano. The center regiment had meanwhile been moving forward between the other two, meeting gradually increasing resistance. By nightfall, having shifted its direction of march northeastward, it was in position behind the right regiment, ready to attack northwest on the following morning.

The spearhead of the 10th Mountain Division was thus poised on the brink of the Po Valley. The stiff enemy resistance which had been met for several days on the left of the division front had continued unabated, but in the advance on the right full advantage had been taken of the comparatively soft spot which had developed in the Lavino corridor, and two RCT's waited only for the coming of dawn to make the attempt to isolate Bologna from the west.

Into the Valley



Infantry and Armor Push Through

On 20 April, its seventh day of continuous attack, the 10th Mountain Division increased the speed of advance with tank-riding infantry, jeeps and trucks as it debouched into the Po Valley, the first American unit to fight its way out of the rugged Apennines. The center regiment (86th) attacked at 0700B, driving northwest toward Ponte Samoggia, and by 1050B leading elements including some armor had entered the valley. By 1900B all three battalions of the regiment were in the valley, moving toward Highway 9. At 2055B one battalion reached Ponte Samoggia, where defensive positions were set up for the night. The remainder of the regiment held a four kilometer section of Highway 9, running southeast from the Samoggia River crossing. An enterprising company of tank destroyers attached to the 1st Armored Division had also reached Ponte Samoggia.

The right regiment (85th) ran into enemy delaying action as soon as it jumped off, but reached the valley by 1500B and before midnight was also along Highway 9, on the right of the center regiment. Although the general advance on the right was slower than in the center, a platoon of A Company, 85th Mountain Infantry, which struck the flat at 0830B, was actually the first element on the floor of the valley.

On the left of the division, the 87th, whose task it was to secure high ground which would protect the corridor of advance, encountered severe small arms and artillery fire all morning, particularly in the taking of Pradalbino, on which the enemy concentrated both artillery and mortars. The town of la Fornace was also occupied, and during the early evening leading elements of this regiment had also reached the plain. The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron had been attached to the 10th Mountain, and moved into the valley near Crespellano, prepared to furnish flank protection where needed on the following day.

The advance along the ridge in the zone of the 85th Infantry Division continued under IV Corps instructions, in order that no momentum should be lost while the relieving troops were com-



...as it debouched into the Po Valley...

pleting their march forward to take over. Elements of the regiment concerned (337th) reached Gesso, and after a sharp fire fight pushed on northeastward to Riale. One company, with the I and R Platoon, entered the outskirts of Casalecchio during the afternoon, repelled a stiff counterattack at 1845B and continued mopping up. The 338th moved forward during the day behind the 337th until uncovered by the shift northwestward of the 10th Mountain and then advanced during the night across Highway 9, prepared to attack the following day from the vicinity of C. Masetti.

The day had been one of great progress on the right of IV Corps, for not only had the enemy's communications westward from Bologna been definitely and permanently severed, but on the flat we held a sizable bridgehead, into which Fifth Army might begin at once to pour supplies for its dumps. Two divisions held this area securely against anything the Hun might attempt and, with ample armor attached and corps artillery hastening forward to their support, they were ready to push on northwestward to seize the crossings of the Panaro River, if possible before the bridges could be destroyed.

On to the River

At 211110B the Army Commander sent a directive to corps and division commanders stating that a strong pursuit was indicated and maximum use of transportation would be made; artillery and tanks were to carry infantry as superloads, and organic transportation on good roads would be loaded to capacity. When any opportunities came to pursue or cut off the enemy, unit commanders would utilize every possible means of getting fighting personnel, guns and ammunition forward.

The 85th Infantry Division advanced rapidly northwest on a two battalion front on 21 April, crossed the Samoggia River near Budrie about noon, and continued on against scattered resistance.

In the 10th Mountain, Task Force Duff was formed, consisting of a motorized infantry battalion, an engineer company, a company of light tanks and a tank destroyer platoon, to spearhead the advance. It reached the Panaro River near Bomporto and pushed some elements across the stream before dark. Part of a company of TD's attached to the 1st Armored Division also crossed at Bomporto during the evening.

The balance of the division followed rapidly, an entire regiment reaching Bomporto during the night. Leading elements of the 91st Recon were at the crossroads near C. Riva by early evening.

Resistance encountered during the day across the entire front of the advance toward the Po was disorganized and in small groups. Seven enemy tanks counterattacked a regiment of the 10th Mountain during the afternoon, but were successfully driven off. Elsewhere, considerable trouble was caused in spots by tanks, TD's, SP guns and infantry using hastily prepared positions.

The only concrete information on the enemy situation was that his 8th Mountain, 65th Infantry and 305th Infantry Divisions had all been forced to withdraw beyond Bologna in an effort to contain our right flank, while his 334th Infantry, 94th Infantry and 90th PG Divisions, reportedly joined by the 114th Jaeger Division, were doing what they could on our left flank. The enemy seemed to be falling back behind the Panaro on a wide front.

Heavy movements to the north of hostile horse-drawn vehicles, motor transport and horse-drawn guns took place during the afternoon, probably making the effort to withdraw behind the Po River. Our air bombed and strafed these columns, causing great destruction. Many enemy artillery positions were overrun by our advance troops before the batteries had any opportunity to withdraw.

On 22 April the 85th Division drove forward against scattered resistance. The 338th Infantry led initially with two battalions abreast, and reached the Panaro River in the early morning at Camposanto and southwest thereof. The bridge at Camposanto was intact but prepared for demolition. First elements crossing it were counterattacked and driven off, but succeeded before they left in cutting the wiring to the charges. Heavy resistance continued at this point, but the 337th reached the river later in the morning on the left, crossed in the vicinity of Solara and one motorized battalion continued north against no resistance to begin with.

Elements of the left regiment also worked their way eastward along the north bank of the river to assist in clearing Camposanto, where the bridge was finally reported secure at 2000B. The motorized advance of the 85th Division continued during the evening and night and by 230330B had reached the line of the Canale Diversivo southeast of Mirándola. Abandoned by the enemy during the night in the vicinity of San Felice sul Panaro were a 170mm and a 210mm gun, both in good condition but with the prime mover knocked out.

The 10th Mountain, on the left of the 85th and still led by Task Force Duff, continued to advance rapidly; it captured the vital communications center of Carpi and sped on north. Meeting many determined pockets of resistance, including road-blocks, self-propelled guns, bazookas and small arms, it by-passed the larger towns and arrived at dark on the south bank of the Po River, just north of San Benedetto Po. About 35 road miles had been covered during the day.

The division command post moved along with the task force and, due to the rapidity of the advance, clerks, cooks and staff officers had to clear towns, rout Krauts from foxholes and probe

the flanks for snipers. Among the enemy equipment captured were three 170mm guns, which were found abandoned in the main street of Moglia. The remainder of the division followed the spearhead, hiking or riding in captured vehicles when no other transport was available. During the night the bulk of the division closed along the south bank of the Po. Preparations were at once begun to force the crossing of this formidable river obstacle on the following day. The 91st Recon was detached from the division at 221700B, reverting to Corps control.

Elements of the 85th Infantry Division reached the south bank of the Po River by 231050B; positions were consolidated and plans made for a crossing on 24 April. The front held extended from about Quingéntole to Revere. Other units of the division mopped up resistance in Mirándola during the day and then came on north.

The 1st Armored Gets Going

It will be recalled that the 1st Armored Division ended the day of 20 April with its leading elements at the 500 Northing, and that Bazzano was still offering stiff opposition to its breakout into the valley. Throughout the day of 21 April there was continued resistance, but it became more scattered toward evening. Bazzano was captured by CCA at 1430B, and its units moved on north without delay. At 1918B a tank Battalion had reached the southern outskirts of Castelfranco dell'Emilia and other elements were echeloned to its rear.

CCB had followed CCA through Bazzano and, heading northwest at 1900B, reported its units well echeloned in depth from the 540 to the 520 Northings, generally east of the Condotto Muzza, south of Piumazzo. The division recon squadron was protecting the west flank, west of the aqueduct, about a kilometer south of Magazzino.

The entire division kept on rolling north and northwest during the night, making for crossings of the Panaro and Secchia Rivers in zone. After the sticky going of the past three days, progress

was most gratifying. At 220200B CCA elements were engaged in a brisk small arms fire fight on the 715 Northing, just short of the Canale Naviglio, having crossed the Panaro and almost reached the Secchia. CCB swung west and attempted the crossing of the Panaro east of San Donnino della Nizzola during the night; unsuccessful at this point, it went north and at 220615B was crossing at San Ambrogio.

The armored advance continued all day on 22 April against scattered resistance from anti-tank, mortar and small arms fire, capturing many prisoners and creating confusion and havoc wherever the demoralized enemy sought to make a stand. By 1600B forward elements of CCB were by-passing Módena to the south, while the 13th Tank Battalion was just southwest of Soliera, and other elements of CCA had thrust three kilometers northwest beyond Campogalliano, to which town the division command post moved during the early evening. Módena, in which patriots had been street-fighting with the Hun for about twelve hours, was reported clear by General Prichard, who rode through the city at 1730B.

That night the exploitation by armor went on unabated, with the destruction and dislocation of the enemy abundant enough to meet the wildest dreams of any tanker. Rear echelon troops, such as construction units, field bakeries, etc., were even overrun; but although the enemy organization was badly mixed up, his resistance was not disorganized. Prisoners stated that battle groups had been formed from elements of 90th PG, 94th and 334th Divisions, and the opposition of these makeshift assemblies was not to be disregarded.

CCA had a tank battalion with infantry support on the banks of the Po River northwest of Guastalla in the early morning hours of 23 April; no further enemy crossings at this important point would be undertaken.

CCB, working southwest of Highway 9, had reached the outskirts of Rubiera and also thrust south into the foothills toward Formigine in the afternoon.

By midnight, the 13th Tank Battalion, ordered attached to



...no further enemy crossings... would be undertaken.

the 10th Mountain Division by IV Corps, was well enroute to the San Benedetto Po bridge site from south of Guastalla. CCB made some further gains to the west of Formigine before 2400B, but there was still strong resistance to its advance along the highway below Rubiera.

The surge of armored vehicles out of the foothills had taken place so rapidly, once begun, that there had been many enemy pockets overlooked or by-passed, and much work remained to be done in cleaning up areas well in rear of our lines. Small isolated hostile groups attacked our communications during the night of 23-24 April, and the mopping up of these forces had to be undertaken by both our troops and the local patriots. Over 6000 PW's are of record for IV Corps between 231200B and 241200B April, no small proportion of which represented enemy personnel originally by-passed in our advance.

Continued pressure up Highway 9 gave every promise of meeting similar conditions, for not only would the Germans already there be forced into a smaller and smaller space, but these would be joined by the columns attempting to get out of the Apennines

to the south. The infantry of an armored division being so limited, prompt reinforcement was indicated if the most was to be made of our drive to the northwest.

Brazilians Scent Game

Three more reliefs were accomplished on 18 April in the zone of the BEF. On the left, a unit from the adjoining sector took over from the flank battalion; within the division, a battalion relief was carried out; on the right, a Brazilian unit relieved the flank battalion of the mountaineers. Harassing fire by both mortars and artillery fell at intervals on all forward elements.

The next day, aggressive patrolling was carried out in the direction of the Panaro River, extending to Ranocchio and Bertocchi. The last remaining unit of the 10th Mountain was relieved by the Brazilians at 2225B. This relief shifted Brazilian responsibility farther to the east, the boundary between it and the 1st Armored Division becoming roughly the 640 Easting.

Before the Brazilian troops there now lay the twisting road to Zocca, important town and road junction which the Germans had always considered one of their key points. Its defenders were growing a little jittery on 20 April, because the Armored thrust that had penetrated to within about five kilometers to the northeast of them two days previously, was now apparently by-passing Monte Ombraro, and threatened to cut them off. Brazilian reconnaissance patrols that pushed out across the entire zone during the morning were followed by all front line units. In general, no opposition was met, but in front of Zocca a determined fight developed. The average Brazilian advance for the day was from five to six kilometers; on the right, two battalions supported by TD's wound up within about two kilometers of Zocca, while on the left flank and echeloned slightly forward, the division recon troop was astride the road and a bare 3/4 of a mile short of the town.

A platoon of the recon troop entered Zocca at 0710B on 21 April. Some delay took place in launching the main attack, because cub planes were unable to get into the air on account of high wind.

The advance did get started at 0930B, and by 1700B, two battalions had established a three mile front along the high ground about a mile north of Zocca. The recon troop itself moved well out, and arrived on the east bank of the Panaro, opposite Marano. It could not cross, due to determined resistance from the high ground north of the river. Other elements including armor were following close behind it. On 23 April the Brazilian advance continued. The left battalion, holding defensive positions, was relieved by 371st Infantry elements, giving additional available manpower for the movement forward. A IV Corps order issued during the day directed the Brazilians to advance in the northeastern part of their zone to a line FormíGINE-Maranello-Denzano, which would effectively block Highway 12 leading out of the Apennines, as well as stop any attempted exit from the Panaro Valley. Enemy forces to the south would in future have to go farther west to look for escape routes north.

By the evening of 23 April the Panaro had been crossed at Marano and Vignola, and columns were continuing on toward Castelvetro and Rola. An infantry battalion was motorized and began movement forward to FormíGINE. A rapid advance was maintained in the BEF zone on 24 April against only slight opposition. Task Force Nelson, reactivated for this operation and consisting of infantry and armor, had reached FormíGINE the previous day, and was now joined by the motorized battalion. Pushing aggressively on westward, other Brazilian elements passed Sassuolo and occupied Scandiano, thus blocking two other avenues of enemy escape from the mountains to the southwest.

Somewhere below the Brazilians, the enemy forces that had been holding the westernmost part of the line must be marching northward, hoping to reach the valley and gain the safety of the north bank of the Po before the IV Corps thrust up Highway 9 could cut them off. Parts of the Brazilian division had begun their combat service facing some of these same Germans, and remembered them not too pleasantly. It was therefore, only natural that the task of contesting their way back to *die Heimat* was one which the whole division could definitely relish.

The Western Barriers Vanish

Abetone, Monte Cimone and Fanano are names that will long be remembered by IV Corps men who went through the long winter in the rugged central part of our long Apennine defense line. They represented hostile barriers to their further progress — places they would have liked to go, but could not, without fighting their way.

When it came time for the Spring offensive, none of these enemy-held localities lay in the direction of the advance; consequently, the troops that held our own lines in that area had only the mission of following up any enemy withdrawal.

More and more patriots were used on our front as good weather came. The members of these bands knew every inch of the lofty peaks and narrow valleys of the region. Their services were of great value and their presence strengthened our lines at a time when every possible man was needed for the main effort.

Patrols probed daily ahead of our positions in the central sector and, as the main attack progressed northward, found fewer and fewer signs of the enemy in any force. The 365th Infantry pushed up Highway 12 to Abetone on 20 April and sent patrols on toward Pievepelago. The highway was in bad condition from demolitions, but mine sweeping and repair work were immediately started with the scant means at hand. Next day patriots took possession of Alpe Tre Potenze and Monte Gomito. Two other peaks, Libro Aperto and Monte Cimone, were found to be clear of the enemy.

Also on 21 April, farther east, the 371st Infantry moved out to points along the Leo River more than 3 miles ahead of former positions, and there established a new defensive line. That same afternoon a patriot group occupied Fanano.

Pievepelago was occupied by a company of the 365th on 22 April, and patrols began reconnaissance north on Highway 12. Meanwhile on the right, the 371st had pushed patrols out to the east banks of the Panaro in zone, and these had encountered no resistance and found the roads passable.

On 24 April IV Corps operations instructions ordered the

371st to advance and occupy Highway 12 in zone. Motorized patrols reconnoitered the Séstola-Fanano road, and from Fanano went on westward to Lama and also pushed up the road clear to Módena. No enemy was encountered and the highway was found to be in fair condition.

On the same date the two battalions of the 365th serving with the 371st reverted to their parent unit. The 365th Infantry was detached from IV Corps at 241420B, passing to Fifth Army control. On 25 April, the 371st Infantry was ordered to the Módena area; it closed there at 261800B, at which hour it also was detached From IV Corps. No enemy was left in the mountains who had either the desire or the power to push through the thin crust of our Apenine defenses; and there was accordingly no need for these to be further occupied. But the hoards of PW's that were being rounded up in the Po valley were becoming a great hindrance to the combat troops, and from this time on the 365th and 371st were to have new parts to play in undertaking to guard these captives.

The Crossing and Beyond



Best Laid Plans...

As late as 20 April, the day the mountaineers were debouching onto the Po flats, no decision had been reached as to whether or not IV Corps would cross the river. All the long-range planning had foreseen that the break-out would occur farther east, and reasoned that the main attack, speeding on toward Verona, would take the Po in stride. IV Corps, destined to carry out the minor task of reestablishing law and order in Northwest Italy, was ex-

pected to reach that area by routes south of the Po; its eventual crossing, at a later date and supposedly under peaceable conditions, would be provided for somewhere near Piacenza.

The troops in the main effort were therefore scheduled to receive priority with respect to the limited equipment and specially trained personnel available for combat river crossings. No allocation of bridging equipment was made IV Corps, although the speed of its advance across the valley did result on the evening of 20 April in ordering forward 100 assault boats to Anzola, where they might be available, just in case. This equipment arrived on 21 April, and 50 of the assault boats with paddles (there were no motors) were turned over on wheels at Anzola to a 10th Mountain guide at 222000B, about as the mountain soldiers were reaching the river bank, 64 road miles away.

Inquiry at Fifth Army on the evening of 22 April developed the fact that the Po operation was to be a « scramble » crossing on a broad front and going as fast as possible, and that IV Corps, having reached the southern banks, could have any equipment it needed that was available. But as matters worked out, many unexpected difficulties, both in the availability and in the delivery of the equipment, presented themselves.

That same night request was made for enough assault equipment for two RCT's, on the basis that both the 10th Mountain and 85th Infantry Divisions had reached the river and were ready to cross. Next morning Army notified IV Corps that two sets of assault equipment, one for each division, were moving to Anzola. Included in each set were storm boats with motors, assault boats with one motor to every two craft, infantry support rafts, quonsett barges and Dukws. The first convoy began arriving piecemeal about noon; because it contained no assault boats, the 50 remaining on wheels at Anzola were added, and, less the 60 Dukws, the convoy was turned over to an 85th Division guide.

The second convoy, which was supposed to contain the second set of assault equipment, did not appear. The Dukws that had arrived with the first convoy were most of them full of Bailey bridge parts; these had to be unloaded by hand and more useful cargoes of gas

and ammunition substituted. All of these factors combined to put the 10th Mountain at a disadvantage in the final stages of its crossing.

It should also be mentioned that it had been pointed out on 22 April that M-1 Treadway would not be suitable for the armored division, being too narrow to carry the M-24 light tank and too light to carry the mediums. When on the following day 1200 feet of M-1 was about to be turned over to IV Corps, this fact was again stressed, and the reply was received that the M-2 Treadway bridge was to be built farther east. Further delay was occasioned by another unexpected difficulty—it became necessary to send back to Florence, to obtain the anchor cables and manila rope for the floating Treadway equipment.

The heavy ponton battalion, with another bridge, was moving forward from Pisa to Bologna on 23 April. As late as 1600B next day, 12 trucks of this train were reported lost and waiting in Módena for a guide. Some of the ponton equipment actually did not arrive at the site until after that bridge was completed.

To add to the difficulties, telephonic communication was sporadic and frequently did not exist at all. This applied not only forward through the divisions, but also back to Army echelons. The surest way of getting information through was by courier, but this method was also uncertain because the rapid advance had left behind so many enemy groups that it was not always possible to tell which roads were open and which were still in enemy hands.

Such was the back-drop of confusion when the stage was finally set for IV Corps units to force the crossing of the Po River. The fact that, in spite of all this, the crossing was so successful as to become an epoch-making event in the Italian campaign, must be attributed to the courage and stamina of the well-trained American combat infantryman, coupled with the natural ability of the American combat engineer to contrive his ends with whatever materials are at hand.

The 10th Mountain Operation

The enemy, if given time, could and no doubt would move his reserves to prepared positions to oppose the threatened crossing of the Po, and it therefore behooved us to get across the 300-yard wide river immediately and establish a bridgehead. After arrival in the San Benedetto Po area, two regiments of the 10th Mountain were put to work mopping up hostile elements on its flanks and protecting its rear, but both tactical and technical preparations were begun the night of 22-23 April to cross the remaining regiment in assault boats at the earliest practicable moment.

Final assembly areas were picked out on the bank and in the lee of the southern levee and other necessary reconnaissance was completed as soon as daylight permitted. Fragmentary orders for the operation were issued during the night; the final order was issued verbally and provided that while one regiment was making the crossing, another would guard the two flanks, and the third would protect the rear of the division area. It will be seen that, due to the speed of the advance to the river, all was not yet exactly peaceful on the south bank.

The 50 assault boats with paddles arrived on the scene at 0800B, and when all was ready at 1220B the crossing commenced with two companies of the 87th Mountain Infantry as the leading rifle units. Heavy weapons along the south bank did what they could to keep down enemy activity on the north bank, and a group of tanks and TD's in sight defilade on the south levee also contributed their fire support. The division artillery counterbattered all enemy guns that could be spotted.

The appearance of the first wave on the south bank was the signal for the enemy to open with every weapon that could bear. Hostile 88's, apparently fired without observation, began to come in in considerable volume, but for the most part went on over the river and levee, causing some damage in the final assembly area. Well-aimed flak air bursts coming from the left flank broke over the river itself in vicious clusters of thirty or more rounds; frequent changes in the deflection provided effectual coverage of the whole



...Dukies... did a commendable job.

width of the crossing. From carefully prepared and well-concealed positions along the northern levee, mortars and machine guns with deadly coordination swept the surface of the water across which the boats had to be paddled.

Unshaken, the men of the mountain division, infantryman and engineer alike, picked up their boats, carried them into that churning cauldron of the enemy's malice, launched them unhurriedly, and coolly paddled for the northern bank. It might have been a training maneuver.

A 5-mile current caused a certain amount of drift, so that succeeding waves landed gradually farther and farther down stream. Supporting artillery lent what aid it could in the enemy rear areas, but the mobile guns the Hun was using made this help of only passing value.

The heavy enemy fire caused some casualties but did not slow the crossing; Kraut machine gunners and mortar crews on the northern levee, when confronted with grenade and bayonet, came forth from their holes and meekly surrendered. In mid-afternoon, with the crossing still in progress due to the limited number of



...reached the north bank by ferry...

available assault boats, the Hun opened up with heavier artillery, and for a time his 170's caused trouble in the approach areas.

By 231800B two regiments had crossed the Po and secured an area roughly a mile and a quarter deep by four miles wide, of which the Mincio River formed most of the far boundary. The required reconnaissance for bridging operations could now be undertaken and, when it arrived, the necessary equipment could be placed in convenient location for later construction.

Without waiting for the bridges, the ferrying of supplies and vehicles was started at once. Rafts were formed with the assault boats, and a few motors were located along the bank and put into service. Later on, some Dukws arrived and did a commendable job of their own. Italian residents of the northern bank turned out with carts to help haul supplies. Many boxes of ammunition and rations had to be manhandled forward, but gradually the dumps beyond the river grew to respectable proportions. The remaining regiment completed during the day its work of clearing the enemy that was left on the south bank, and some of its elements crossed over in the course of the evening.

On 24 April, while some of the division artillery was being ferried across, the bridge across the Mincio at Governolo was captured in fair condition. This permitted all three regiments to work at expanding the bridgehead, and by noon it had become a rough

semicircle of 2-mile radius. Night operations on 22-23 and 23-24 April were subjected to bombing and strafing by enemy planes, and his artillery and self-propelled guns were still somewhat active both north and south of the river.

Some few pieces of supporting armor reached the north bank by ferry, but the radius of action there was limited due to the doubtful strength of the Governolo bridge. The next requirement for the pursuit northward was for adequate bridges over both the Po and Mincio Rivers, by which armor and artillery could cross and essential combat supplies go forward in quantities sufficient to supply all units engaged in continuing the chase of the Hun.

The Bridges

The M-1 Treadway equipment, less essential cables and manila rope, was sent forward to Quingéntole (no one seems very certain just why this site was chosen) on 23 April. As the intercorps boundary was shifted to the west that same evening, the pro-

...officially opened at 251230B...



posed bridge would have been too far east in the readjusted zone of the 85th Infantry Division.

That night, IV Corps succeeded in stopping the leading trucks carrying the M-1 material at the CP of the 85th and arranged for their motorcycle escort to the vicinity of San Benedetto Po. At this inopportune moment it was found that the trucks did not have sufficient gasoline for the trip and further delay of several hours ensued, while they were being regassed.

In the early morning, advance parties reported and a site near Brede was chosen and organization of the work vigorously begun. The missing cables and rope arrived at 1900B, six hours after construction had been started. The personnel of the original combat engineer unit were tired out and also had had no previous experience in building in swift water; they were relieved by a fresher battalion at midnight. The bridge was officially opened at 251230B, but it should be remembered that neither M-24 light tanks nor mediums could use it.

The site chosen for the heavy ponton bridge was north of San Benedetto Po, about one mile west of the Treadway. Little work on the approaches was necessary as, before its destruction by our air, an Italian floating bridge had been located at the same place. The south approach was littered with destroyed and abandoned enemy vehicles which had to be pushed into the ditch, and the north approach needed only to be widened at a turn. The essential dirt-moving equipment, enroute from Pisa, did not arrive until 241600B, whereupon raft and crane sites were prepared. The first ponton was launched at 2100B, but raft construction did not begin until after 2300B.

At noon on 25 April an additional company of engineers was attached, and at 1500B the last raft was placed. The first tank rolled across the bridge at 1730B, and in the first ten hours thereafter over five hundred vehicles, mostly tanks, crossed the bridge. These were tank-support elements of the 10th Mountain and 85th Infantry Divisions, and leading units of the 1st Armored Division. This bridge carried the bulk of the armored traffic, the high day being 27 April when over 3400 vehicles crossed in twenty-four



This bridge carried the bulk of the armored traffic..

hours, mostly from the 1st Armored and 34th Infantry Divisions.

Enemy action on the heavy ponton bridge began with shelling by 88's during the reconnaissance, the guns responsible being soon silenced by our own counterbattery with AOP fire direction. No further enemy fire was received during construction, but just before dark on 25 April, he again shelled the site with 88mm air bursts and later on that night tried to bomb the bridge. A terrific volume of fire from our own antiaircraft defenses prevented any damage from his half-hearted attempts.

Bridging the Po had been so engrossing a subject that perhaps too scant attention had been paid to crossing the Mincio River just beyond. There had been three bridges over this stream in the vicinity of Governolo, two of which were permanent stone structures which had been destroyed either by the enemy or by friendly air. The third was a wood and steel trestle bridge about 120 feet in length with a height above water of some 30 feet. The Germans in their haste had attempted its destruction by putting



...taking many prisoners...

charges on the caps of the trestles; these, in addition to being badly placed, were too light to do the work. The result was destruction to the flooring in one span and a general lateral displacement of girders and loosening of those parts which gave rigidity to the structure. There was in consequence an amount of vibration and side-sway which was alarming to the onlooker, although careful examination and observation led to the technical conclusion that the bridge was strong enough for Class 40 traffic moving at slow speeds, and that it would safely take the heaviest loads that our combat units would have to offer. It was the opinion of the engineers that any real strengthening would take several days, and that rather than delay, the pursuit should go forward over the bridge as it was.

There were many arguments until a command decision finally prohibited tanks from using the bridge for about four hours on the afternoon of 25 April. Jeeps and weapon carriers were allowed to cross, but what threatened to be a traffic jam was gradually building up from the vehicles that had already been ferried across the river or those that had crossed on the Treadway after its opening. As the M-1 Treadway would not take most of our tanks, not much armor could have been included in this accumulation of traffic. The flood of armor on the north bank of the Po did not begin until shortly after 251730B, when these vehicles began to cross the completed heavy ponton bridge. At that hour another

command decision was made to allow a light tank to cross the Mincio bridge as a test; if the structure held, the rest of the armor would be pushed across.

The bridge did hold, and eventually passed most of the 10th Mountain Division, parts of the 85th Infantry Division, and many elements of the 1st Armored Division without failure. There was no doubt a delay of a few hours in starting the drive on Verona, due to the fact that armored vehicles belonging to the task force spearheading this movement could not cross during the four-hour-long command interdiction to tank traffic; but this delay probably had little effect on the outcome of the campaign. The whole incident of the Mincio bridge, while worthy of record here, can best be considered as a case of frayed nerves, produced by eleven days of strenuous combat and aggravated by the vicissitudes just experienced in bridging the Po.

The Vacant Adige Line

On the right of the IV Corps zone the 85th Infantry Division, making use of available ferries and other craft picked up on the scene, began to cross the Po River at 240840B, between Quingéntole and Sabbioncello, meeting no resistance. By evening, a regiment

...arrived on the southern outskirts...

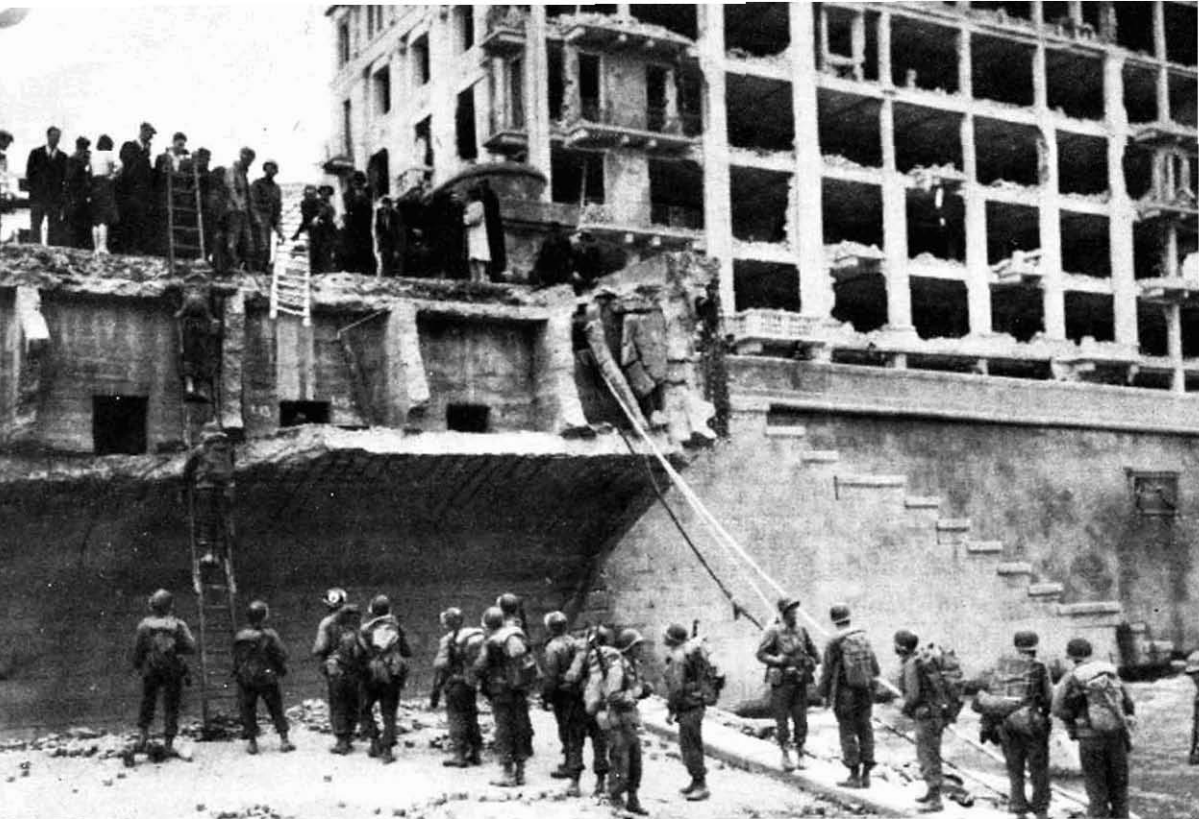




...spent the morning clearing the walled city...

had crossed and was moving north, while another had finished mopping up and reached the river bank. Elements in the new zone assigned to the adjacent corps shifted to the west. On 25 April advance elements of the division reached Vigasio, action during the day having been confined to mopping up small pockets of disorganized enemy, taking many prisoners and abandoned equipment.

The renewed advance of the 10th Mountain Division really began when a battalion left the bridgehead perimeter in the early morning of 25 April and advanced rapidly northwest. It skirted Mántova to the east and had reached the Villafranca airport by 0945B, after a 20-mile forced march. It was joined there at nightfall by Task Force Darby, made up of one tank battalion, one motorized infantry regiment, one company of TD's, one company of medium tanks, a battalion of medium artillery, and elements of engineers with three truckloads of Bailey bridge. An incident of



...crossed elements over a footbridge..

the day at Villafranca had been the capture intact of an enemy plane which landed without knowing that the field had changed hands; the pilot escaped in the excitement, but a ground crew hidden in nearby buildings was eventually rounded up.

Task Force Darby continued on in the night from Villafranca and arrived on the southern outskirts at Verona at 0600B on 26 April. Two infantry battalions spent the morning clearing the walled city, and upon being relieved in the early evening by elements of the 85th Division, continued along Highway 12 to the northwest. Meanwhile, other 10th Mountain units had spread out to the west and captured Bussolengo and Sona. Regrouping took place during the night for a continuation of the pursuit on the next day.

The 85th Division, advancing in zone, reached the Adige River during the afternoon, and crossed elements over a footbridge on the western edge of Verona. Another regiment crossed on the railroad bridge south of town, and both continued to the north af-

ter dark, reaching positions well through the Adige Line by 2300B.

This was the last German organized defense south of the Alps. The 85th reported passing through a deep defensive position which, while well prepared, was wholly unmanned. A battery of abandoned 88's was captured as well as large supplies of all types of ammunition. The German's long-standing plan for delaying our advance toward the Brenner at this point had been nullified by the destruction of his forces farther south. The speed of our advance had caught him with no available fresh troops and without time in which to reorganize his fleeing remnants.

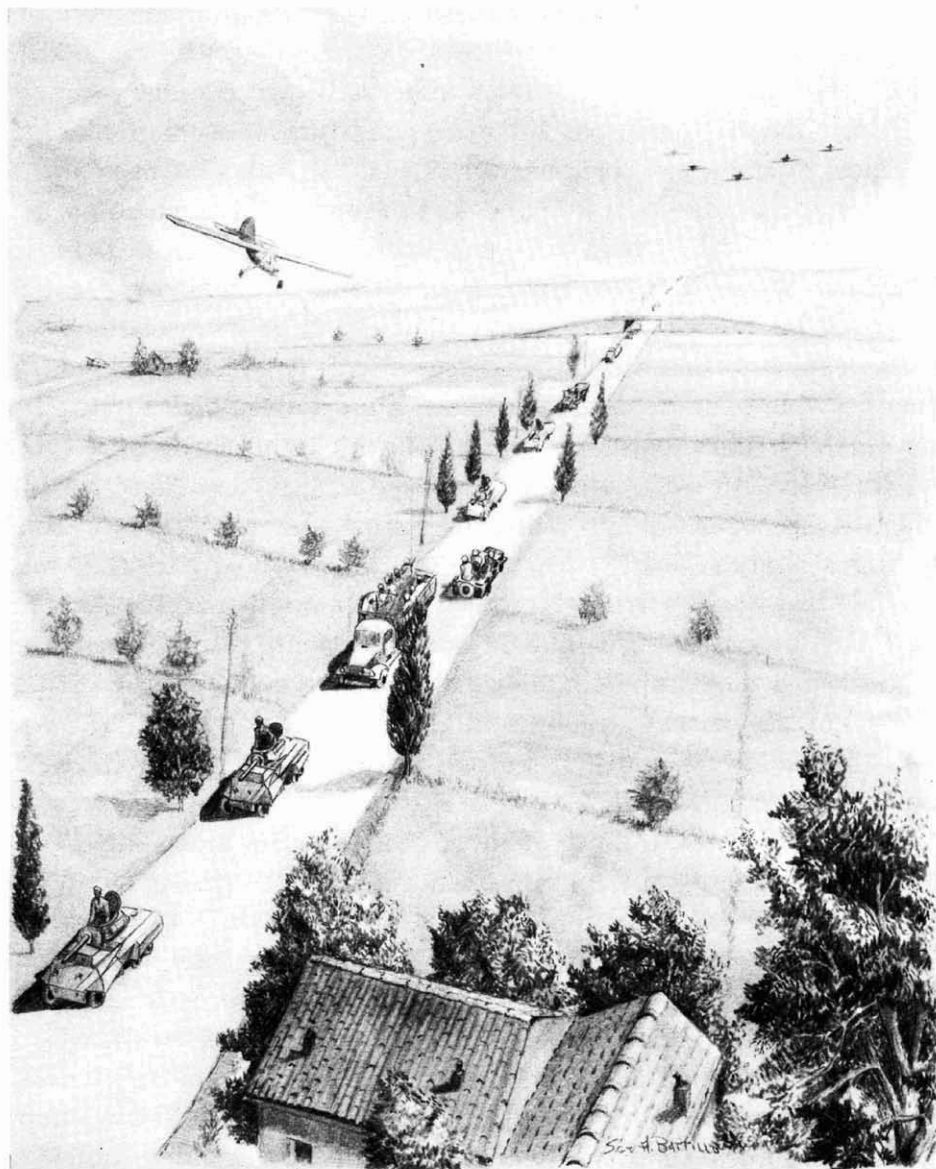
On 27 April the 85th consolidated, establishing road blocks to the east and northeast of Verona. There was no material change in its positions, but its units were in hand promptly to support its neighbors on either side, should any resistance be encountered. At 280800B the division was detached from IV Corps and reverted to Fifth Army control.

Having regrouped, and in accordance with new orders from IV Corps, the 10th Mountain Division, acting with great speed, jumped off at 270800B and went rapidly north along the road skirting the east shore of Lake Garda. This quick thrust would, if it could reach Trento, seal off the last escape route left to the Germans in northwestern Italy.

There were two sharp fire fights during the day in both of which the enemy, although he employed artillery and SP gun fire, was driven back. In the late afternoon, a fresh regiment, motorized for the trip forward, passed through the leading elements and carried on the pursuit. The arrangement was for each regiment to have 8 hours in the line and 16 hours out, thus allowing the Hun no respite and no chance to get his heels into the ground.

During 28 April enemy rearguard actions and demolitions slowed the advance somewhat, but by 1800B, when it was detached from IV Corps and reverted to Fifth Army control, the division had reached Malcesine, a good three-quarters of the way along the eastern shore. In the fifteen days since the jump-off at Monte della Spe, the mountaineers had covered 105 airline miles to the north.

Strategic Envelopment



Vulnerable Flank

Our estimate of enemy capabilities for defending the southern approaches to the Bavarian «redoubt» had for months included his making a stand upon the plains north of the Po River. Most likely he would contest to begin with any crossing of that obstacle with all his strength, and if his defense of the river line failed, then, on the flat lands leading up to the foothills of the Alps, he could still make our further advance a slow and costly proceeding.

Whatever his original intentions may have been of making the most of the great river barrier at his disposal, IV Corps' swift crossing at San Benedetto Po and its uninterrupted advance northward thereafter had torn a gaping hole in any proposed defense line on the north bank of the Po, and a salient had been created which by the evening of 25 April was over six miles broad and 22 miles deep. And this was no ordinary salient; its western boundary was the wide-open door to the famous *quadrilatero* of Italian military history, that four-sided figure of which the corners are the old fortified cities of Verona, Brescia, Cremona and Mántova, of which it has been said, « Who holds the quadrilateral controls northwest Italy ».

We had by 25 April driven northwest along the south bank of the Po as far as the Taro River. Hostile elements retreating northward toward the escape routes were therefore denied any crossing of the Po east of that stream, and Germans still striving to reach the other side and continue retreat to the north would have to use the three main roads, Cremona-Brescia, Piacenza-Bergamo and Pavia-Milan, or else follow roughly parallel routes along the many less improved but still passable roads that were to be found in the area.

That there were retreating enemy numbering thousands upon thousands, and that while many had suffered severe destruction of their equipment or had perforce abandoned it on the south bank, many more still had artillery, SP guns and even tanks sufficient to put up a serious fight, were facts well realized. The destruction of enemy forces that would ensue if we, by moving quickly

west, could manage to intercept or cut off these desperate fleeing columns was apparent. But, most interesting of all, we knew that somewhere in the neighborhood of Turin was the entire German LXXV Corps, at long last withdrawing from the French border. And we also knew that it was in first-class condition and ready to fight. Our greatest concern was that it should not escape from the trap; to that end we must put ourselves in strength between it and the Swiss and Austrian borders as soon as possible and as far down toward Turin as we could make it. The Ticino River was probably the best defense line on which we could deploy our forces, could we but reach it in time.

To best accomplish this envelopment, we should strike west from the vicinity of Mántova and go through with all possible speed and as much power as we could gather together straight to the Swiss border. What enemy opposition we might encounter was questionable, but any organized resistance to such a thrust was improbable because of the great dislocation he had suffered; his ability any longer to assemble a worthwhile force and get it into favorable positions to stop us was extremely doubtful.

Other hindrances to a rapid advance were probably few. The terrain was generally flat for the greater part of the way, and an abundance of good roads existed. Since the enemy had expected to use these same roads himself in quitting northwest Italy, only destroying behind him as he left, there was every likelihood that the destruction of bridges would be limited to whatever damage had been inflicted by Allied air in the long campaign to cut, and keep cut, as many as possible of the enemy main arteries of supply.

Finally, there was the possibility to be reckoned with that a deep thrust on a narrow front might be cut off by a sudden and determined attack on either flank of its line of communications. But the danger from this source was remote, because, except for the LXXV Corps, there was little organized power available to the south, and LXXV Corps would hardly waste its strength in trying to pinch off a comparatively small force. It would prudently save all its energy for defense or, if it was in fact still on the move northeastward, for the purpose of fighting its way through



...fanned out on 26 April...

to the Alps. From the north there was little probability that any German troops that had reached the mountains would venture south of them again, even with such a raid in view; manpower in the German army had suddenly become at a premium and any still competent combat forces must be sparingly used.

91st Recon Probes

Crossing its vehicles over the Po ferries and bridges as opportunity permitted during 24-25 April, the 91st Recon, once more under corps control, fanned out on 26 April to the west from the bridgehead area, to protect the flank of the salient and to gain information on the situation to the west.

Enemy in estimated strength of 150 had been reported near Rivalta and 1,000 more were supposed to be at Castelluchio. Four or five small tanks and 20 enemy were rumored to be near Goito. These reports were received from civilian sources and were considered only reasonably accurate.

Acting on orders of the Corps Commander to seize the im-

portant airport at Ghedi, the 91st Recon Squadron had elements in Roverbella and Goito during the morning of 26 April, while by 1700B the objective was reported captured. The German troops there were taken by complete surprise, and there was a lively fire fight in which many prisoners were captured.

Later in the afternoon Partisans reported that Volta was surrounded by enemy tanks and an estimated 100 enemy. Probably most of the tanks that were being reported in this area were in reality SP guns or other tracked vehicles making their escape for so long as their fuel might hold out.

During this same day other elements of the squadron had seized intact the Mincio River bridges at Peschiera and Paradiso, and had taken more than 450 additional prisoners of war.

The enemy encountered in this area was of either one of two categories; there were well-armed columns which were willing and able to fight if anyone impeded their northward flight, and there were just casual groups of disorganized stragglers who, usually having already been engaged and defeated somewhere to the south, were only looking for American troops to which they might surrender.

The Partisans in the area north of the Po were out in force with the usual variety of colored scarves and weapons. They were avid in their harrying of the retreating Hun, and gave invaluable help in supplying information on the whereabouts of these enemy groups as well as on the condition of roads and bridges. Where the Germans were without artillery, the Partisans were frequently able to engage and defeat them, and many prisoners of war fell into their hands which later reached our cages. On the other hand, where the enemy party was strong, about all the Partisans could do was to keep contact with them and call on the Americans for help in rounding them up.

On 27 April the 91st Recon, with the exception of one troop which continued to guard the Ghedi airport in the absence of other friendly troops to take over that duty, moved on to the Brescia area. The situation at the time in Brescia was not very clear; according to most reports the Germans there were in considerable

strength and prepared to give battle to anyone that tried to turn them out before they were prepared to go. The city was an important road junction, and the hostile forces there may also well have been influenced in their stand by the presence of a considerable SS detachment, which had been using Brescia as its headquarters.

The 1st Armored Begins Regrouping

After CCA reached the Po at Guastalla on 22 April, the newly-organized Task Force Howze was pushed forward to the south bank at Brescello. Many stiff fire fights developed, and severe casualties were inflicted on the stubbornly contesting Hun; many prisoners fell into our hands, as well as much destroyed and abandoned enemy equipment. CCB, fighting south of Highway 9 on 23 April, had little success in advancing westward, its way being barred by the enemy in strength and with determination.

On 24 April units of the 34th Infantry Division, newly assigned to IV Corps, had begun arriving in the area, and their presence allowed some reliefs to take place so that regrouping could be commenced in the 1st Armored Division. CCA began assembly near Guastalla and CCB received orders for later assembly near Moglia. Some changes in the composition of each combat command were to take place.

Task Force Howze and the 81st Recon continued to thrust on westward and established important road blocks, engaging in several sharp bouts with the enemy, causing extensive destruction in his ranks and taking a large number of prisoners. There was a great deal to be done in the pockets south of the Po, where the enemy was doing his utmost to defend his crossings. Many bitter fire fights took place, bazookas being used frequently against our tanks. There was also sniping against our communications from by-passed groups.

Extensive mopping up was necessary. Prisoners were taken during this stage of the action from the 90th Panzer Grenadier,



...had to wait some hours...

114th, 232nd and 334th Divisions, indicating the confusion that existed in the hostile situation. Large numbers of enemy were holding out fanatically, and the Partisans, although out in force in the area, could not hope to cope with them. During the day, four German ambulances and a half-track, all loaded with enemy wounded, drove into one of our CP's by mistake.

CCA as reconstituted moved 25 April to the vicinity of San Benedetto Po, where it had to wait some hours before being able to use the bridges. All its vehicles were crossed during the night and the command was closed on the north bank by 260630B, in readiness for movement to the west, over ground that was already being reconnoitered by the 91st Recon.

To assist in the supply problem, which was already becoming difficult, IV Corps had attached to the 1st Armored Division a mobile gas platoon, which maintained a rolling reserve of about 30,000 gallons. This provisional unit was to prove itself indispensable in the next few days.

Rumble of Track-laying Vehicles

CCA, as it assembled north of the Po River in the early morning hours of 26 April, was made up of the 4th Tank Battalion, the 6th Armored Infantry Battalion, the 68th Armored Field Artillery Battalion and Company A of the 16th Armored Engineer Battalion. It was commanded by Brigadier General Maurice W. Daniel.

Acting upon orders of the Corps Commander to the 1st Armored Division to attack vigorously to the northwest along the Verona-Brescia-Bérgamo-Como axis to cut off and destroy the enemy, CCA began its advance from assembly area near the bridgehead and moved rapidly forward over the good roads and flat country, meeting little organized opposition. So rapid was the movement and so scattered the elements of the division, that not much was reported on the progress being made until at 1550B a column believed to be CCA was seen entering Montichiari by an AOP. A few minutes later it was confirmed that other elements of CCA were passing through Castiglione delle Stiviere at 1600B. Another AOP observation placed leading elements at Castenedòlo at 1815B. As darkness closed in, the advance continued more slowly and when elements reached the southeastern outskirts of Brescia during the night, a halt was made for determining the situation in the town.

While this reconnaissance was being made, a German convoy was discovered approaching from the west. Warned by reconnaissance elements out ahead, our column remained silent and in the darkness watched with interest the approach of this unsuspecting body of enemy vehicles down an almost parallel road, only about 70 yards away. The hostile column turned left, toward the north and home, when they were strung out opposite our own tanks, and the party then began. A 76mm gun scored a direct hit on a personnel carrier at point blank range with its first shot and from then on the carnage was general all up and down the German column. When firing ceased a few minutes later for want of further targets, the road was so strewn with the débris of the fight that a tank-dozer had to clear it before our own movement could con-



...various types... boiled inexorably westward.

tinue. This engagement somewhat delayed the start from Brescia the following morning and when it did begin the city was by-passed to the north to avoid the enemy garrison.

Reinforcements in the shape of the balance of the 1st Armored Division were on the way, as rapidly as they could be disengaged south of the Po. CCB had its hands full on its own front on the 24th, and on the 25th was called upon to pass through the 81st Recon, which had seized crossings of the Taro River northwest of Parma. It made the crossing on the morning of 26 April, was then relieved by 34th Division elements and could finally move toward its assembly area. The 81st Recon and Task Force Howze, the latter having meanwhile enjoyed a sanguinary encounter with several converging enemy groups in the town square at Parma, were similarly free by afternoon and moved toward the Po bridges.

The crossing of remaining elements of the 1st Armored Division was completed by 270600B, with CCB's approximately 2,000 vehicles assembled near Mantova, prepared to broaden the salient left by CCA. It had moved as far westward as the Ghedi airport by nightfall. The fertile plains of Lombardy were beginning to resound to the clatter of tracked vehicles as some 4,000 of various types of these boiled inexorably westward in a swift move that was spelling the doom of all German forces to the south.

Como and the Swiss Border

Driving northwest from Brescia against still negligible resistance, CCA by-passed Bérgamo during the day on 27 April, and leading elements (4th Tank Battalion) pressed on into the night toward Como. They were leaving the flat country again, getting into the rolling foothills of the Alps. As they looked at the dim outlines of mountains ahead, the tankers may well have told each other, « The Lombardy plains are flat - *weren't* they? » Well, after all, they had covered close to 125 miles through enemy country in 42 hours.

The risks of by-passing enemy groups was well illustrated by an incident at the Bérgamo airfield on the afternoon and evening of 27 April. The 1st Armored AOP moved in at that point with little protection and established its cub strip. First of all, two fairly small detachments of the enemy appeared from the south and were one after the other induced to surrender to the strip personnel, on the theory that many additional armored reinforcements were close at hand. Then, about 1800B a third column of troops numbering close to 1,000 men and having with them some armored vehicles, came north up the same road. They were less gullible and refused to surrender, opening fire with machine guns and grenades on the much weaker force of mechanics and other specialists and upon their vehicles. Only a few of our men escaped to report the incident, although strangely enough, several cub planes on the field escaped undamaged.

The town of Como, situated as it was so close to the Swiss border, had witnessed first and last a lot of the political activity connected with the war in Italy, but from experience its people knew little about armed forces in action and nothing at all about armor. The ebb and flow of political refugees had washed through Como for almost two years, going to and coming from neutral Switzerland, but its buildings were intact - there were no piles of rubble, no stacks of brick cleaned and ready for putting together again. It's business was fairly regular, shops were well stocked and factories operating whenever coal and raw materials could be found.

Perhaps the most noticeable discomfort was the nightly blackout, a necessary precaution against prowling Allied planes.

In the little town that night there was expectancy in the air, The people knew vaguely that the Po had been crossed, that the long-planned schedules for German evacuation of northwest Italy were at last being carried out. There could not be much longer to wait now until they were gone - two weeks perhaps a month The Americans would surely come before *too* long

Then, along after midnight there came a sudden rumor that the Americans were very near And within an hour it was a certainty! Every light in the town blazed out, no one slept Officials met the head of the column on the southern outskirts and miraculously at 280200B the narrow streets were

... active patrolling maintained...



echoing to the rumble of armor. Many of the vehicles went on out the road to Chiasso and the frontier; another column started toward Varese.

Fascists suddenly disappeared from the scene; German military and civilian staffs that had sought refuge in the neighborhood were all under Partisan guard in their many different hotels and villas. A great change had come to Como.

Of interest to the record is a frank expression of opinion by Phantom with the 1st Armored Division to Phantom Keystone (IV Corps) at 280820B, more than six hours after the entry into Como. Said he, « Div Hq at Bérgamo. I doubt if God knows where forward elements are ».

Having sealed off northwest Italy, the 1st Armored Division faced south toward Milan and consolidated its positions on 28 and 29 April. CCA was on the right, CCB on the left and Task Force Howze in the center, with the 81st Recon pushing out on the left flank. Scattered resistance continued to be met, and road blocks were established and active patrolling maintained on all routes running north and south.

The Clean Up



The Red Bull Bellows

The 34th Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Charles E. Bolte, was attached to IV Corps at 1600B on 23 April, at which hour one RCT closed in an initial assembly area southeast of Módena. The division had previously taken part in the Fifth Army main attack and had entered Bologna on 21 April.

The 34th was given a zone between the 1st Armored Division and the BEF with the mission of advancing in zone and destroying



The advance up Highway 9...

any enemy therein. By midnight, two regiments were in line abreast, had crossed the Secchia River and were moving toward Reggio and Bagnolo. The resistance encountered was stubborn rearguard defense and required the cleaning up of many hastily organized pockets of resistance.

Before the start for the Módena area was made the order had gone out that units would take along with them « only Kraut-killing equipment », and this was faithfully carried out even to the leaving behind of kitchens, all in the interests of getting there quickly, with as many men and as much ammunition as was possible. The 34th appeared upon the scene with every available combat soldier and fighting tool and with one day's rations. Every other bit of space on its organic transportation, which was all it had for the move, was packed to capacity with ammunition.

The advance up Highway 9 continued and Reggio was entered and gradually cleared on 24 April, while road blocks were established to the south to cover the left flank. The following day Parma

was half clear by nightfall and additional road blocks had been established to the south to contain the increasing number of German units which, realizing they had been outflanked, were attempting to come down out of the mountains and reach the Po crossings.

Fierce battling continued along Highway 9 on 26 April as the Germans trapped to the south made try after try to break out. The advance in the center continued rapidly to the outskirts of Piacenza, while on the right, elements reached a point just south of Busseto, a vital road junction. All principal roads from the south were kept blocked to prevent any enemy escape from the mountains.

In the thrust up the main highway, it has been said that the zone of the 34th was « forty miles long and forty feet wide ». There were enemy on both sides of the division and frequently behind it, all milling about trying to reach the Po, and all still fighting mad. The night the division command post was in Fidenza, the Germans came to within 400 yards and stopped, when they might just as well have come on through. Some of the non-combatants were inquiring that night about their right to carry arms under the Geneva convention.

...advance in the center continued rapidly...



The struggle continued on 27 April with unabated intensity. Piacenza was held determinedly by elements of the Italia Division and the 1st Italian SS Police troops, who resisted every effort to drive them out. While one regiment undertook this work, another was equally busy in the Busseto area, finally moving on to Castelvetro and Monticelli, where mopping up went gradually on to clear the pocket south of Cremona. The enemy was doing his best to defend the remaining crossings of the Po, which were becoming fewer and fewer.

During the night of 27-28 April two battalions of the 133rd Infantry started a forced march north, under orders to use initially separate routes, and later on in the night the same road. There seemed to be some miscalculation at the point where the two separate routes joined, as the battalion scheduled for the rear of the column had to wait some time until the tail of the other cleared. However, it eventually got under way again. Both battalions felt that the march had been well worked out, for the leading one could hear the other coming along just behind it, and the one at the tail of the column knew the other one was just ahead of it on the road. But when dawn broke, it was somewhat startling to find that between the two American battalions a regiment of the German 232nd Division had also been high-tailing it along in the night, making for the Po crossings. There was a furious fire fight between the surprised Germans and the equally surprised Americans ahead of and behind them. Heavy losses in killed, wounded, and equipment were sustained in the German column; the survivors finally surrendered, and then the march continued with the American units in the proper order in column.

The road blocks which had been established to the south were being successively taken over by the Brazilians as they advanced south of Highway 9. On 28 April they also occupied Piacenza in which resistance had ceased, and moved up into the pocket south of Cremona, taking over there from other 34th Division elements. Thus freed, the 34th, under orders from General Crittenberger to General Bolte, began to move to its new zone north of the Po River. This involved shuttling because of the limited transportation



Piacenza was held determinedly...

available, but was nevertheless very expeditiously carried out.

One regiment had moved to Bozzolo on the morning of 28 April and went on from there toward Bergamo; another was en-route to Bergamo by the end of the day; the third had assembled and was only waiting for the necessary trucks to follow the other two.

The businesslike manner in which this veteran division moved into the picture in the important Highway 9 area and proceeded rapidly to shove the enemy back beyond Piacenza, had been most gratifying; its subsequent abandonment of that mission and swift move to the Lombardy plains were undertaken with an equally keen appreciation for the need for speed. Neither area was a pleasant one, both being filled with snarling and desperately fighting enemy, but the 34th realized the opportunity that was at hand for destroying a great many of the enemy forces in Italy, and did not

fail to get down to its work. It boasts that in the nine days it fought under IV Corps it covered, using only its own organic transportation, a total of 420 ½ road miles, a good performance for any infantry division. And in that same period it captured roughly 16,000 prisoners of war.

The 148th Division Surrenders

Moving swiftly, units of the 1st Infantry Division, BEF, advanced northwest on 25 April, to the south of Highway 9 and on the left of the 34th Infantry Division. Only slight opposition was met, and advance elements reached the line Montecchio - San Polo. The day following further advances were made and the division recon troops reported it was holding half the town of Collecchio, assisted by a band of Partisans, but was having trouble and needed help. TD's and infantry were sent in support, a serious fire fight having developed.

On 27 April the fight at Collecchio terminated, with 300 prisoners of war being taken. Brazilian units were already moving to the south into the Fórnovio area, where a strong enemy pocket was beginning to take shape as the German 148th Division attempted to debouch from the mountains down the Taro valley. Heavy fighting was in progress and the Corps Commander instructed both division commanders concerned (Brazilian and 34th) to make every possible effort to prevent the escape of this enemy unit to the north.

In the Fórnovio area on 28 April there was continuous fighting as the Brazilians continued to mop up elements of the still recalcitrant 148th German Division. These unfortunates, who had just cleared the Partisan-infested hills south of Parma, now found themselves confronted by the very determined Brazilians, whose supporting artillery and armor were wreaking havoc on every attempt to break through. It may be added that the Brazilians also found troops to send to Piacenza and to the pocket north of Cremona; they did not require all their strength for this job of blocking Highway 62.

The end came on 29 April when a representative of the 148th



...wreaking havoc on every attempt...

Division accepted the unconditional surrender terms of General Mascarenhas. The battalions of the 148th were to surrender formally and successively during the night and their commander, General-leutnant Fretter-Pico would himself surrender last of all. The commander of the Italia Bersaglieri Division, which had started through the mountains ahead of the 148th, was already a prisoner of the BEF. His troops had evaporated during the movement.

This capitulation was duly carried through and by it the Brazilians took 6000 prisoners of war, 4000 horses and 1000 trucks. It was a historic moment, and one filled with much satisfaction for the Brazilian soldiers. This once formidable German Division had first faced the Brazilians in the Serchio valley and had, in the end, been compelled to lay down its arms to them in one of the most bitter battles waged in the final phases of the campaign in Italy. The mopping up operations were completed in the Fórno area on 30 April. The bag of prisoners for the 24 hours after 290600B amounted to 13,579, practically all of which came from the 148th German Infantry Division.

Pemsel Turns in His Suit

The Army of Liguria, consisting of the German LXXV Corps and the Lombardy Corps, had been under command of Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, one-time conquerer of Ethiopia and later commander of Italian forces in Africa. The staff of the Army was largely German and for about three weeks, from a date just before the opening of the Allied offensive, its chief of staff and deputy commander had been Generalleutnant Max Josef Pemsel.

For several days prior to the arrival of the American forces in the Como region, this staff had been split by Partisan activities into two parts which were without communications either with each other or with Marshal Graziani who, with a few Italian staff officers accompanying him, had been in Milan, where negotiations were being undertaken through the Archbishop with the Partisans with respect to surrender.

On 28 April, Pemsel, feeling that the jig was up so far as the staff was concerned, drove from Lecco to Como and surrendered himself and his staff to the 1st Armored Division. Arrangements were promptly made for an interview with the Corps Commander, with the object of capitulation for other Ligurian Army elements if the situation warranted.

With one staff officer he arrived at the IV Corps command post at Castiglione delle Stiviere early on Sunday morning, 29 April and, after explaining that he had been without communications for over 48 hours, he was briefed by General Crittenberger and Colonel Laurence K. Ladue, Chief of Staff, on the existing situation. That being what it was, and finding himself confronted with the prospect of complete annihilation of the remaining Ligurian forces should they attempt to fight their way through in the direction in which they had been ordered to withdraw toward the Garda area), Pemsel, after some hours of discussion and consideration, signed an instrument of unconditional surrender covering the entire Ligurian Army.

Late that same night Marshal Graziani himself was brought into the IV Corps command post which had meanwhile moved to

Ghedi and, having been advised of Pemsel's surrender, confirmed the action of his chief of staff by indorsement on the surrender document.

It is believed that because of lack of communications this action by Pemsel and Graziani was entirely independent of the negotiations then under way in Caserta between AFHQ and the German High Command in Italy. There were no indications that either one knew of any orders to surrender which had been issued by the Army Group.

After signing the surrender terms, General Pemsel issued an army order to put them into effect in the Ligurian Army. This order was taken by the German staff officer and an American staff officer to Headquarters LXXV German Corps. Travel by night in the area was difficult because, by agreement among themselves, the Partisans shot at any vehicles running blackout while the Germans fired on any displaying lights.

The reply from the commanding general of the LXXV Corps, General of Mountain Troops Schlemmer, was short and to the point. He did not recognize the arrangements made by General Pemsel inasmuch as he considered himself bound by his oath until the death of the Fuehrer. He added that so long as he was not attacked by air or ground, he would stand fast until the death of Hitler permitted capitulation. Until then he would defend himself against every enemy attack.

The effect on the Lombardy Corps was more positive. On the evening of 30 April General Jahn, its commander, surrendered his forces in the vicinity of Abbiategrosso, southwest of Milan. The corps had been composed of Germans and Italians and the latter had either already surrendered or deserted to the Partisans. The Germans who were left numbered about 2000, with approximately 280 vehicles and 12 88mm guns. They were allowed to keep their arms overnight for protection against Partisans; next day the entire body was evacuated to the Army PW enclosure.

Long Road Home

After CCA reached the Swiss border and completed the envelopment of the remaining enemy in Northwest Italy, the IV Corps units north of the Po faced south and southwest to confront the foe, ready for any attempt of his at a break-through. In order from right to left on 28 April were the 1st Armored Division, the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and the 34th Infantry Division. The Legnano Gruppo, a British trained and equipped Italian unit roughly equivalent to half a division, was closing in the Brescia area as rapidly as its transportation would permit.

There was no concerted effort at a break-through on the part of the Germans, but for several days the plains of Lombardy were full of every variety of small enemy groups, all headed toward the Garda region from the Po crossing. These columns, scattered and without cohesion, were to be met at practically every turn in the road. Some few were electing still to fight it out, probably being without news of just how badly the fight had gone for German arms. The vast majority of them were disillusioned and disheartened, nasty to the last in their treatment of the Partisans, but only seeking Allied forces to whom they might with safety surrender themselves.

Where the enemy columns and groups were intercepted by properly equipped combat units, there was no particular novelty about the situation. Either they fought for awhile and then surrendered, or they surrendered immediately without any resistance. In either case, thousands of them streamed back down the roads to the Army area, or to the temporary cages set up by the Army further forward.

But not infrequently these hostile groups had to be taken care of by whatever troops were at hand and the circumstances in several cases, involving corps troops as they did, are worth recording. They are only representative incidents of those several days that the harried Hun spent in that doubtful state of freedom that preceded his captivity.

During the late evening of 27 April the 91st Recon was work-



... to the temporary cages set up...

ing southwest from Brescia. One troop spotted an enemy convoy traveling from southeast to northwest at Caravaggio at about 2200B, and opened fire when about half the column had passed the road junction at that town. In the darkness they estimated that 15 enemy vehicles were knocked out. The number of enemy dead and wounded were unknown but 6 prisoners were taken who stated that the convoy consisted of about 40 vehicles including four SP guns, two to four 20mm. guns and 150 to 200 enemy personnel. Another troop farther south collided with a hostile column at Soncino at 2255B, had a fire fight and took about 30 prisoners of war.

On the morning of 28 April, when the 34th Infantry Division was moving in north of the Po, the AMG officer in Mantova reported 250 enemy, three 88mm. guns, 1 smaller gun and 2 American trucks at San Lorenzo and Grazie. The enemy was reported to have 52 hostages with them. A corps artillery reconnaissance officer reported about noon that 100 enemy with women hostages

were surrounded by Partisans in the vicinity of Vasto. This later turned out the same strong and efficient group. The Partisans needed help to capture them.

A mixed force from the IV Corps command post security guard was sent during the afternoon to mop up this pocket, the command post being on the move at the time from Governolo to Castiglione delle Stiviere. The enemy guns lay in wait for our tanks and at the proper moment pinned them down for some time with their fire. The corps artillery possessed one 8-inch Howitzer which was on the road in the vicinity; this went into action in a neighboring field and sent some 20 rounds of unobserved fire toward the hostile force. It was unfortunately not effective in discouraging the enemy from further resistance. Later, a 155mm gun from another battalion of corps artillery which was passing went in battery just north of Goito and destroyed the two hostile guns that had held up our tanks.

Next day an authentic source reported enemy casualties and losses to have been three 88's, two 20mm guns, 2 trucks and 1 car destroyed; killed 5, wounded 11, and 29 German and 32 Fascist prisoners. About 30 survivors with small arms, automatic weapons and bazookas were still at large next day near Castelgrimaldo, and as they constituted a definite menace to our supply lines, they were finally mopped up by a company of corps engineers.

In the afternoon of 28 April a call for help was received by IV Corps headquarters from the Partisan commander north of Desenzano, who claimed that his men were unable to continue the fight with some 10,000 SS personnel in the vicinity of Salò, and that American troops were needed. The nearest and only available unit was the specially formed engineer assault company of the 1st Armored Division, then bivouacked south of Castiglione and about to move forward.

A task force of two peep loads of men with sub-machine guns was gathered together, a tankdozer dropped its blade and joined up at the last moment, and the party set out on reconnaissance. Upon its return several hours later, the officer in charge reported that he had seen the Partisan commander, a former Italian resident



...all organic transportation taxed...

of Cincinnati, who explained that he could get along well enough by himself but that it improved the morale of his force mightily just to feel that their chief could summon aid from the Americans if he had to!

A Partisan report stated that at 282330B a large force of enemy, estimated at 4000, with 80 motor transport and 20 towed artillery pieces had been seen by civilians going north up Highway 45 in the Bagnolo Mella area. A previous report had also mentioned a force of about this same size in the same general area, and as they might cause trouble if they came on in strength, IV Corps instructed its corps artillery, which had its headquarters and some units assembled at Ghedi, to deal with the situation. A battalion of 155mm Howitzers went into action and fired several hundred rounds of interdiction fire between midnight and 0300B. The personnel of a British survey regiment were hastily formed into a provisional infantry battalion and set out road blocks to the south and west and prepared to undertake the close-in protection of the

field. A group of Partisans at the field were also pressed into service and machine guns dismounted from artillery vehicles were used to reinforce the road blocks.

A strange part of these proceedings was that Partisans and civilians to the south and west sent in frequent reports on the effectiveness of our artillery fire. Toward dawn, a battalion from the 34th Infantry Division arrived as reinforcements. This enemy column was never fully accounted for; it did not put in an appearance along Highway 45, and the chances are that it broke up into a number of small groups which took separate routes along the back roads and were all eventually taken prisoners.

Units of corps engineer troops, whose primary work it was to repair and maintain the supply lines, were given the additional duty of apprehending any enemy individuals or parties that attempted to cross the road, or were reported in the vicinity. During these few days, not only was all organic transportation taxed to the limit trying to haul prisoners of war to the nearest army cage, but trucks of supply convoys moving up to forward dumps were required to take loads of prisoners back. To reduce the number of guards required, it became quite usual to stand prisoners up in the body of a cargo truck, packed in so tightly that they could not raise their arms above their heads nor move about until some one opened the tail-gate at the end of the journey. There were many cases where a convoy of German vehicles would come down the road filled with German personnel and driven by a German driver, with perhaps one jeep heading the column and a half-track, armored car or tank bringing up the rear.

Partisans at Milan

Elements of the 91st Recon entered Milan in the morning and more passed through that city in the afternoon of 29 April with no molestation whatever, proceeding on southwest on their mission of seizing crossings of the Ticino River. Also, a IV Corps artillery AOP which flew over Milan that same afternoon, reported that he received no opposition, that the people were crowding in the streets,

street cars were running and a large procession was passing down a main avenue. All bridges appeared to be intact. The reason for these conditions in Milan was that the Partisans had wrested control from the Germans some days previously.

A plan for the uprising in Milan had been worked out by the Partisan city command in February. The town was divided into sectors, with responsible commanders for each, and each had 20 to 30 vital objectives designated for capture. Included were plans for groups of Partisans from outside of city to give aid if required.

When on 25 April a discussion on the surrender of the Republican forces failed at a meeting attended by General Raffaele Cadorna, commanding the Partisan forces in northwest Italy, Mussolini and his cohorts fled from the Provincial Governor's Palace for Como during the night. Thereupon, the finance guards at the Palace, who were secretly Partisan in their allegiance, took control of the building. This was the first step of the insurrection.

On 26 April Partisan patrols began to disarm Germans and Fascists patrolling the streets, and called on all Fascist barracks and German installations to surrender forthwith. By 28 April all German groups save two had complied and were remaining in their quarters, waiting to surrender to the Allies. There were about 4000 German troops in Milan at this time. The total of 20,000 Fascist troops on the eve of the uprising largely deserted their barracks and disappeared.

About 25,000 arms were taken by the Partisans as well as a large number of vehicles. Fifteen German and Fascist warehouses were seized. About 30,000 Partisans took part in the uprising, suffering some 40 killed and 60 wounded during the fight.

The German groups that held out in Milan were the SS headquarters for Northwest Italy and a party of about 70 others, who were well armed and possessed four tanks. Their fates are described elsewhere.

The seizure of control in Milan by the Partisans, while primarily carried out for their own ends, was a great help to IV Corps in its occupation of Northwest Italy. Here was the largest city, destined to be the headquarters of IV Corps activities, left in prac-



...sadly proceeded back to Brescia...

tically complete running order. All public services continued uninterrupted during the uprising and thereafter, except the street cars, which were idle for two days while their personnel took part in the fighting. And generally civil administration went right on, the officials appointed by CLN (Committee of National Liberation) stepping in immediately. In most cases those incumbents who were tainted with Fascist tendencies eliminated themselves from the scene by fleeing.

SS at Milan, Monza and Brescia

In those last three days of April, the glumdest of all the glum German faces that were to be seen on the highways rolling along under token American guard to the Army PW enclosures, were those of the three columns of SS personnel from Milan, Monza and Brescia, respectively.

As distinguished from the *Wehrmacht*, the *Waffen SS* had been employed in Northwest Italy to mop up Partisans, to counter insurrection activities of other kinds and to track down Allied agents. Remaining at their posts by order of the High Command

until it was too late for them to escape, these much hated and feared people had been forced to protect themselves behind the barricades and pillboxes of their main headquarters and await the coming of the American forces. To have surrendered to the Partisans would have been for most of them tantamount to self-destruction.

The SS troops in Milan were commanded by a Colonel Rauff, who had his headquarters at the Hotel Regina in Milan. The two other principal groups in the area overrun by the IV Corps were located at Monza and at Brescia. The Milan district had originally a total garrison of about 12,000 German troops of which 3000 were SS, but only some 200 of these personnel were actually holding out at the Regina.

In the Monza area there was an SS¹ brigade numbering 4000 for the most part other than German in nationality. They made one unsuccessful attempt to combine forces with other SS personnel in Novara, but the Partisans resisted their march to such good effect that the idea was abandoned and they returned to Monza and surrendered to 1st Armored Division units at the first opportunity.

At Brescia was situated the headquarters of about 3000 SS troops of Ukrainian and Croatian origin who worked the mountains to the north. The bulk of this force undertook to retreat by the northern routes and were among those that eventually had to be combed out of the mountains a few at a time; the headquarters started to move north from Brescia on 29 April. A destroyed bridge at Nozza held up their convoy and a fight ensued in the vicinity of Sabbio between their right flank guard and local Partisans who had meanwhile requested help from IV Corps.

An OSS major, a captain and a sergeant in a jeep with a radio truck responded. They persuaded the group at Sabbio, numbering 85 men, to surrender and sent them to the rear under Partisan guard. The commander of the main body, which was on the road between Barghe and Nozza, was more obdurate and a long argument into which considerable bluff was injected from our side was necessary before he too agreed to surrender. The convoy turned its vehicles around and, led by the jeep and radio truck, sadly



...upon the walls... hung a swastika...

proceeded back to Brescia where they were turned in to the 34th Infantry Division PW enclosure. The total bag amounted to 1275 personnel, 85 trucks, 4 *Volkswagen*, 12 civilian cars, 8 AA guns and 4 AT guns.

The capitulation at Milan was perhaps the most spectacular of all three. A staff officer from IV Corps with a sergeant interpreter took the formal surrender in the lobby of the Regina, upon the walls of which were hung a swastika flag and a large portrait of *der Fuehrer*. The terms were unconditional, and after they had been explained to the assembled personnel by the SS commander, he gave a guttural command and all sidearms clattered to the floor.

There were 30 female camp followers with the group. The

entire force, females included, were loaded into their own motley array of vehicles for evacuation.

Some difficulty was experienced in leaving the premises with these prisoners, as the populace were in an ugly mood, many of them having personal scores to settle. But with the help of a few tanks and armored cars the way was cleared and the long column of German vehicles, occupied and driven by their own personnel, wound out of town and was safely headed down the *autostrada* to captivity and screening. The prospect of this screening was what caused the dour expressions; many of these people faced trial for the crimes which they had committed in the heyday of German strength, when to be a part of the *Waffen SS* in an occupied country was to be sitting on top of the world.

Italian Republican Forces

At the time of the Spring offensive the Italian Republican Army had some four divisions in Northwest Italy — the Littorio, Monte Rosa, San Marco and Italia. When the rapid advance of the IV Corps severed their only possible route of withdrawal the desertion rate in these units, already high, soared to practically 100 percent. As the Allied forces approached, the personnel of these Italian organizations were quick to realize that the best way to avoid captivity was to return forthwith to civilian life, and this they proceeded to do by droves, evaporating into the very countryside from which most of them had come.

The Partisans captured some of them in combat and later turned them over as prisoners of war, but in the general case a desertion meant another weapon available for them to use and in many instances the deserter himself joined up with the Partisans. So there was little concerted effort to hold these individuals, the large majority of whom had been forced into the service to begin with and had no very strong political or patriotic convictions one way or another. Exceptions were made in the case of those, mostly officers, who were on the lists as war criminals; these were usually executed promptly.

It was a different story too for the personnel of the special Fascist organizations, such as the *Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana* and the *Brigata Nera*. These people, being notorious in their communities, stood no chance of escape by the method of donning civilian clothes and returning to the land as simple farmers. And, knowing the hatred of the Partisans for them and the summary justice that they might expect at their hands, these units usually held together, resisted capture and fought on until they could surrender to the Allies.

The cases where members of Republican units captured in combat by the Partisans were turned over as prisoners of war, has stirred up some contention among the families of Northwest Italy, who can not understand why their sons should remain prisoners while so many other men of the same forces have returned to their homes and are allowed to circulate freely in the community. This problem is only one of the many anomalies of the situation in the country, which probably only years of peace under a good government can finally solve.

Mussolini and Friends

Benito Mussolini spent the last few days of the existence of the Italian Socialist Republic in a turmoil of unpreparedness and indecision. Faced with imminent crisis, realizing that the sand in

...to captivity and screening.



the hourglass of Destiny was perilously near to running out, his frantic efforts to save the situation, politically and personally, were futile in the extreme.

On the afternoon of 25 April at the very hour that some IV Corps elements were already consolidating their bridgehead north of the Po while others of its troops were hammering at the gates of Parma, a meeting was called at the home of Cardinal Schuster in Milan to discuss the surrender of the Republican forces in Milan. Among those present were Mussolini, Cadorna, Graziani and representatives of the CNL. A German general who was also to have been there, failed to arrive. Cadorna and the CNL insisted upon unconditional surrender and Mussolini refused; the meeting finally broke up without reaching any agreement.

Mussolini and his companions, including Graziani, went back to the Provincial Governor's Palace and later on decided to go to Como and discuss matters there. The party left Milan at 2000B and spent the night in Como planning to escape to Switzerland. With the idea that the entire government should cross the frontier with the Duce, they continued on on 26 April as far as Menaggio, where more indecision and uncertainty developed.

At this point Marshal Graziani declared that as he still commanded the Ligurian Army he refused to leave his troops; accordingly he left the group and returned to Como where he tried to contact his headquarters which had just been moved to Lecco. Later on in the day he joined the German SS headquarters at Cernobbio, without apparently having accomplished much.

Mussolini and the remaining group for some reason abandoned the idea of crossing the border at Porlezza as originally intended and set to work on another plan of escape.

On the following day a Partisan road block at the village of Dongo, well up the western shore of Lake Como, stopped a large German convoy that was proceeding to the Italo-Swiss frontier; they were searching for Fascists whom they knew were trying to get out of the country under German protection. After hours of argument they bluffed the convoy commander into permitting his vehicles to be searched, and hidden in one of the trucks, with a Ger-

man military overcoat over his own regular Italian uniform, they uncovered *il Duce*. When he was found, the other Fascists in the group were also quickly apprehended. Included was Benito's girl friend, Clara Petacci, who had elected to share the fate of her lover.

Subsequent events in the lives of Benito Mussolini and his companions on this excursion remain at present far from clear. They were brought back by the Partisans part way to Como and Mussolini was separated from the others, and no one save Clara was allowed to see him. The executions were probably carried out at Azzano, and it is known that after a few hours the bodies were taken back to Milan and there publicly exhibited on April 29. Great secrecy surrounded the whole affair, as American troops were already in the area.

Graziani telephoned on the afternoon of 27 April from Cernobbio to Milan offering to surrender to General Cadorna under guarantee of personal safety for himself and the two officers accompanying him. The reply came two hours later that he must give himself up with his staff to the Partisans at Como. After some further parleys with the local SS commander and an officer of Partisans, Graziani and his companions accompanied the latter back to Como and surrendered, being taken on during the evening to Milan.

While enroute to the SS headquarters in Milan, where peculiarly enough he was permitted to spend the night, Graziani narrowly escaped death when his car was fired upon by a Partisan road block. On the morning of 28 April he and his companions were transferred to the Hotel Milano where they remained under Partisan guard until they were evacuated from Milan under American protection on the night of 29-30 April.

Withdrawal from the Border

The German plan for withdrawal from Northwest Italy was influenced by tactical considerations as well as economic and political factors. The Franco-Italian frontier was held by the LXXV Corps, which had the 5th Mountain Division on the right and the 34th Infantry Division on the left. The 5th Mountain extended from the Franco-Swiss border to a point west of Turin, and the 34th held the remainder of the line to Ventimiglia. The Lombardy Corps was spread out in the rear areas behind the LXXV Corps, occupied principally with maintaining order and keeping the supply routes open.

There had been rumors in Allied intelligence of preparations for withdrawal of the LXXV Corps for several months, but no confirmation was ever obtained and any movements that did take place were probably only local reliefs. The plan for pulling back provided first for the retirement of the 34th Division to the line Asti-Chivasso. When this move had been completed, the 5th Mountain was to fall back behind (northeast of) the Ticino River.

The Germans began their withdrawal, but Partisan activities in the region were so effective that the original intentions had to be given up. Alba and Bra were captured by the patriots and the way to Asti thus barred to the 34th; it was accordingly decided to route the whole division down the upper Po Valley through the 5th Mountain, which at the same time would concentrate in the Chivasso-Rivoli area. A broadcast order to Partisans to make an all out effort in Northwest Italy was made on 26 April and at dawn the next day the local forces moved on Turin, capturing a bridgehead over the Po and holding the eastern part of the city. By 1200B on 28 April, Turin was in Partisan hands, the German garrison having retired to the western hills.

To further hinder the 34th German in its retirement, the bridgehead at Chivasso was captured, the enemy withdrawing north of the Po and blowing the bridge behind him. This forced the Germans to take a route north and west of Turin in any further movement northeast. The LXXV Corps started moving from the con-

centration area generally west of Turin on 29 April, headed toward Lombardy.

French to the West

In addition to the difficulties that the Partisans were making for the German in his withdrawal, there was to his rear another source of annoyance which he could not overlook. The French frontier had been defended by the French Army Detachment of the Alps, with headquarters in Grenoble, which was directly under the Allied Sixth Army Group.

It had been decided late in March to drive the Germans from French territory and several schemes to achieve this objective had been launched. One attack had been undertaken at the northernmost end of the French sector in the vicinity of the Little St. Bernard Pass. Although hampered at several points by lack of artillery, the French achieved real success in the southern end of their sector where a concentration of all available artillery working with a somewhat limited ammunition supply resulted in the expulsion of the Germans from France and the actual invasion of Italy at Cima di Diávolo.

Some time after the start of the Spring offensive in Italy, the Sixth Army Group ordered the French Army Detachment to advance as it could to a stipulated line, which on the average was some ten miles east of the Franco-Italian border. The evident purpose of this movement was to keep the LXXV Corps occupied so that no part of it could be spared to reinforce the battered divisions trying to hold out south of the Po. Later the French Army Detachment received somewhat broader orders to follow up the withdrawal of the Germans. On 29 April the order was received to stop any further advance.

The invasion of Italy by the French had again been carried out in three principal sectors through the available passes, the two northern of which were still snowed-in and caused considerable supply trouble. Before their advance ceased, the penetration had

reached to Pont San Martin in the north, to Ceres and Avigliana in the center, and to the line Borgo San Dalmazzo-Ventimiglia in the south.

The follow-up of the German withdrawal by the French Army Detachment undoubtedly made a significant contribution toward the evacuation of northwest Italy by the German LXXV Corps. It unquestionably exerted its influence in completing the encirclement of the Hun, who found himself with the IV Corps bearing down on him from the northeast and east, with the Partisans making his life a burden in a small way wherever he tried to move, and with the French behind him, ready and anxious to close with either German or Italian to the extent that their strength and armament permitted. To the north in the French line there were *chasseurs alpins*, still smarting from the invasion of France from Italy in 1940; to the south there were Senegalese, who liked to fight on general principles, no matter who, when or where.

Hesitation

The German LXXV Corps, groping its way northeast with Partisans in swarms all around, regardless of which way it moved, was entering Lombardy. Before it stretched mile after mile of open country affording scant protection from air observation, and there were several appreciable river barriers to be crossed before the Garda region could be reached. What little news it could receive on the situation to the north was growing worse from day to day and certainly gave no encouragement either to its command and staff or to the mountaineer or grenadier within its ranks.

Somewhere ahead lay the Americans of IV Corps, while on its right flank Brazilians and Japanese-Americans were also not far distant. There were still rations for some days which could be augmented by what food could be taken from the country, and the basic loads of ammunition were intact and could be supplemented by what could still be found in the numerous German dumps in the area. The personnel of the corps, although somewhat footsore from



What little news it could receive...

marching, had suffered few casualties and was still fresh enough for combat. It was quite possible for LXXV Corps to offer battle.

But the big question was, what would be gained by an effort to break through to the Brenner Pass, and what fate awaited the survivors that might get there? And if the LXXV Corps took up a defensive position and fought it out in place, to what avail such tactics, with the war in Europe in its last stages? Some further casualties could be inflicted on the Allied forces, yes; but heavy German losses would also be suffered in the process, for its artillery and scant armor could be no match for those of IV Corps.

These were just some of the problems that perplexed General

of Mountain Troops Schlemmer as he endeavored to carry out the long-overdue instructions to fall back to the Garda area. His LXXV Corps still possessed the strength to fight and was undefeated on the field of battle; but the prospects confronting him were far from reassuring, no matter what might be his final decision.

The Modern Cannae

On 1 May the advance of IV Corps to the southwest was continued. The preceding day advanced American elements had reached Turin and the 91st Recon had taken over the maintenance of law and order in the city, an important task in view of the large industrial plants there situated.

In the 1st Armored Division, Task Force Dewey remained in control in Milan, and other elements continued in their positions with the exception of the 81st Recon, which moved west as far as the Sesia River.

The 34th Division closed one regiment in the Cuggiono area and another in the vicinity of Gallarate during the morning. The third regiment was enroute to join the others. In the afternoon, elements of the division entered Novara, taking more than 1000 prisoners in the town. A regiment of the Brazilian division closed in Alessandria during the day, placing its battalions at strategic points about the town. Another Brazilian regiment in Piacenza had thrown one battalion north of the Po River, to cover the main roads in that area.

About sunset on 1 May, the reconnaissance troop of the 34th Infantry Division, which had continued on to the west after passing through Novara earlier in the day, was approaching Santhia, on the lookout for any signs of the German LXXV Corps, which must now be somewhere very near. Suddenly a German sentinel challenged the point of the American advance guard. Before fire could be opened on him another voice cried out in English, « Do not shoot! Do you not know an armistice is declared? ».

The advance guard commander replied in due time that he was aware of no armistice and would continue to advance, but an



... it was difficult to believe that hostilities had ceased.

officer from the German side came out and explained that they had orders to remain in place and not fire unless to defend themselves, an evident reference to General Schlemmer's reply of the previous day to the Pemsel surrender order. This was an outpost on the edge of the area occupied by the German LXXV Corps, he explained; any American effort to advance further would be resisted. The recon troop commander considered the situation in which he found himself and decided to report back and request further orders; meanwhile he settled down for the night in place.

Schlemmer Signs on the Dotted Line

The LXXV Corps was concentrated in the triangle Chivasso-Santhia-Ivrea by the afternoon of 1 May. Allied representatives

working with the Partisans in the region had made several attempts to contact the corps commander, in order to convince him of the futility of further resistance, and a report of these negotiations duly reached IV Corps headquarters at Brugherio. Also on the afternoon of 1 May there occurred the German broadcast announcing that Hitler was dead.

One outpost of the LXXV Corps having been located the previous evening by the 34th Infantry Division, IV Corps on the morning of 2 May pushed out other reconnaissance to develop the hostile position and at the same time began the assembly in forward areas of the 1st Armored and 34th Infantry Divisions, preparing to attack the German without further ado. Its mission still was to destroy the enemy in Italy, and here before it stood some enemy that could not make up their minds. The impending attack did not materialize only because, before it could be launched, notification was received that the German armies in Italy had surrendered, effective at 1400B.

A staff officer had been dispatched by General Crittenberger the same morning to contact the commander of the German corps and to conduct him or his representative to the IV Corps command post. A request for such a meeting had been made from the German side. General Schlemmer arrived at Headquarters during the evening and was informed of the cessation of hostilities. He explained that his force amounted to some 40,000, consisting of the two German divisions, various corps troops and an, to quote him, « indeterminate » number of Italians. The LXXV Corps was not particularly offensively-minded at the moment and the death of Hitler served as sufficient excuse to Schlemmer for surrendering his command. This he did by signing the same text that General Pemsel had previously accepted.

This brought to an end all organized resistance in the area, and thus ended active combat in Italy for the IV Corps. After nearly a year of continuous combat, after playing a leading role in the famous pursuit from Rome to the Arno River, after crushing all enemy forces before it in the final campaign, the end came so quickly that it was difficult to believe that hostilities had ceased.

Fruits of Victory



Entry into Milan

Formal entry into the city of Milan was made by General Crittenberger about 1400B on the afternoon of 30 April. A task force was formed for the event, the elements of which, in the order of march, were as follows:

- Hqs CCB, 1 Armd Div
- 2 Bn 135 Inf, 34 Inf Div
- Co A 1 Tk Bn, 1 Armd Div
- One Plat, Speciale Regt, Legnano Gruppo
- One Btry FA, 7 AGRA (Br)
- One Plat Inf, 1 Inf Div BEF
- One Sec 26 LAA Regt (Br)
- 2 Plat Co A, 751 Tk Bn

The above column, commanded by Colonel Lawrence R. Dewey, entered town from the north on the *autostrada* and moved down the Corso Sempione and Via Dante to the Piazza del Duomo, where it broke up into elements, establishing road blocks and patrols over the entire metropolitan area. The task force remained in occupation of the city for several days, during which time there were no intoward incidents reported and our troops were everywhere greeted as liberators, the platoon of Bersaglieri in particular receiving acclaim.

The Commanding General, IV Corps, accompanied by motorcycle police including Bersaglieri, and with an escort of tanks and armored cars, followed shortly after the task force, taking the same route into the city. At the toll barrier at the north end of town he was officially greeted by General Raffaele Cadorna, leader of the Partisans, who joined the column when it moved on.

The Corps Commander continued on past the Duomo to the *Prefettura* on Via Monforte. No further halt was made enroute and no one addressed the public. General Crittenberger was greeted at the *Prefettura* by representatives of the CNL and by the local officials, and the usual amenities were exchanged.

The corps command post, which was then located at Brugherio, some miles out of town, remained there until 4 May, on



...to the Piazza del Duomo.

which date the forward echelon moved to the new command post in the Foro Bonaparte, Milan. The rear echelon closed the next day.

Brigadier General William C. Crane, Artillery Officer, IV Corps, was appointed Military Commander of the Milano Military Area on 2 May, and assumed control of all troops in the area, defined as the Metropolitan area of the city of Milan.

From the day of arrival in Milan, every effort was made to make up for the discomforts of the winter in the Apennines and the rigors of the Spring campaign. Hotels, apartments, and restaurants were requisitioned for convenience of living; ample office space was found for all sections of the corps headquarters, and everyone concerned set out to enjoy life to the fullest extent compatible with getting on with the job of establishing law and order.

Military Government Begins

Allied Military Government followed the IV Corps advance from 24 April, when it was established in Módena to the accom-

paniment of small arms fire as the Partisans mopped up, to include the capital cities of Parma, Piacenza, Cremona and Brescia as the tide of battle rolled swiftly on. These locations were all important enough, but the real goal was Milan, the heart of Northwest Italy.

The Civil Affairs Officer of IV Corps entered Milan on the morning of 30 April to meet the Committee of National Liberation of North Italy (CLNAI), which had set up a well-organized series of commissions to deal with every phase of government, down to a complete military billeting office in anticipation of the arrival of the Allies. The Provincial Commissioner of the Milan Province and his team and the City Commissioner of Milan accompanied the CAO. Externally everything was in good order; the Partisans had seen to this. But food supplies and transportation were short and were to prove problems for days to come. Except for these difficulties and some unlawful killing of alleged Fascists, the city in a very short time became reasonably calm and orderly.

Despite frequent frantic pleas for reinforcement, a shortage of trained personnel threatened to prevent the establishment of military government in Piemonte and Liguria, near the Franco-Italian border. Every commune had to be manned with civil affairs officers, and none were available from the usual sources. The Corps Commander took a hand and a call to the Army Commander brought 111 officers on detached service from combat divisions, to be employed as CAO's under the supervision of those more experienced in civilian affairs; these people performed their duties with great credit.

Transportation remained the critical item in civilian supply. It was all well enough to assure the population that sufficient food was available, but delivering it was something else again. Due to mines, Genoa was not available as a port, and food landed by LST's on the beaches only sufficed for Genoa and famished Liguria. The long line of communications from Forli was an obstacle which was never overcome until the rail lines were reopened, and not fully then because for days the lack of coal kept locomotives stalled and freight trains motionless.

The Public Health Officers had a field day in Northwest Italy.



...set out to enjoy life...

After months of struggling to get together bits and pieces to put civilian hospitals in operation, they came to an area where the hospitals were fully equipped and public health staffs organized and functioning, so that their only problem was to supply the drugs. Since the tonnage of these was not large, this was not difficult.

The Engineer likewise had surcease from his usual worries. While Allied air had done its best to destroy power houses and dams, the damage had been quickly repaired and two-thirds of the potential electrical power was available when IV Corps reached the region. Bridges and roads were a different matter, but the military urgency was gone, so more time could be taken for civilian road and bridge construction.

Public safety was a big problem. Everyone had firearms — rifles, Sten guns, BARS's and literally bushels of pistols and hand grenades, and they used them on each other, to shoot into the air, or just generally to assert themselves as occasion demanded. A strict curfew in all major centers and the use of *carabinieri* in conjunction with military roving patrols quickly restored some semblance of order. Lawless elements among the Partisans and lingering Fascist groups gave trouble in outlying areas as well, and police officers of Allied Military Government were frequently hard put to keep up with the demands on them.

When prisoners were taken, the problem of where to put them came up. The jails were full. The ordinary criminal represented only a small proportion of the inmates. German soldiers, *Brigata Nera*, Republican militia, Fascists of both low and high degree, victims of personal grudges and the man who couldn't be persuaded to part with his car — all were there. Three weeks after our entry the Special Courts of Assize set up to judge political offenders began to grind out sentences. Then somewhere someone would remember the 10 Germans in the local jail, and the over-worked Provost Marshal would come and take them and their friends with the black shirts away. Eventually the prison population began to wane. As this is written, the problem of how many innocent persons were thrown into jail by zealous Partisans is still a mystery because the wheels of Italian justice, even in the light of a new found freedom, grind exceedingly slow.

IV Corps for the greater part of its combat experience in Italy was blissfully unaware of Civil Affairs, as it should have been; in Northwest Italy it became completely AMG conscious, because of the size and importance of the problems. Civilian situations arose which occasioned midnight calls to the Chief of Staff and on some occasions even to the Commanding General, and kept everyone awake for hours. Crisis after crisis was overcome — the killers who laid their victims in the streets to be found next morning — the over-zealous arrest of a political leader — a border fist fight between an Italian civilian and a French corporal — an annexationist rally thwarted by quick thinking on the part of



...concentration of the German LXXV Corps

Corps Headquarters and the local troop commander — all these were passed through successfully with no major explosion, to the end that IV Corps might establish Military Government in the area of its responsibility.

Primary Disarmament of LXXV Corps

With the cessation of hostilities on 2 May, the 1st Armored and 34th Infantry Divisions moved back from their forward assembly areas into bivouac, established road blocks and local security, and awaited the concentration of the German LXXV Corps in the triangle Azeglio-Ivrea-Caluso, as had been ordered by IV Corps.

The movement of the Germans having been completed and the necessary road blocks and screens established by our own troops around the perimeter of the designated area, the 1st Armored Division was assigned in addition to its other duties the mission of primary disarmament of the 5th Mountain Division and the 34th

Infantry Division given the same responsibility with respect to the German 34th Division. It was a happy coincidence that the veteran 34th should wind up its European combat service by disarming and evacuating the German division bearing the same numeral.

The primary disarmament followed a general pattern prescribed by higher echelons of the command; in it there was from start to finish, so far as IV Corps was concerned, never any disregard for the fact that the German personnel were surrendered forces. No relaxation of discipline was permitted, and the German units, through their own chain of command, were required to carry out their instructions promptly and to the letter.

The first evacuation of enemy personnel and matériel took place on 5 May when certain Fascist units and the artillery of the German 34th Division were moved out of the concentration area. The movement of artillery and tracked vehicles of the 5th Mountain was also started that afternoon. Due to the possibility of Partisan reprisals within the German area, all individuals within the surrendered forces were permitted to retain their weapons as long as possible.

The disarmament and movement to the rear of the surrendered LXXV Corps was delayed somewhat until suitable facilities could be arranged farther back for their proper administration. The deluge of prisoners had been such in North Italy as to fairly swamp all previous plans. Surrendered enemy engineer units, with necessary tools and transportation, were evacuated especially to assist in the preparation of sites.

The surrendered forces had rations, with the exception of fats, flour, meat and salt, for about ten days, and were required to eat these out. After the supplies were exhausted, they began drawing from our own dumps on the reduced prisoner of war scale. Grain and hay were necessary from the beginning.

There were about 9000 horses in the LXXV Corps, the disposition of which was a problem for some days. It was finally decided to evacuate a considerable number of animals and suitable vehicles to the Ghedi area, which had meanwhile been chosen as the site

of a huge prisoner of war enclosure. They would there be used for the necessary local hauling of supplies. Horse drawn convoys of this nature, carrying their own rations and forage and headed toward Ghedi, were spread over the back roads for days. Their marching took place by night, and the trip required about nine days. Some 3000 horses were thus taken care of. The balance of the animals were taken over gradually by AMG and distributed in the agricultural rehabilitation programs for Lombardy, Piemonte and Liguria.

The evacuation of surrendered personnel was accelerated with the opening of the facilities at Ghedi on 18 May, and except for detachments remaining to care for the horses and vehicles, the 1st Armored Division completed its work on 20 May and the 34th Division on the following day. The last of the horses for AMG were not turned over until 2 June, after which care-taking detachments made final police of the German triangle, and the last members of LXXV Corps went on their way to Ghedi, fatter and happier than when they entered captivity.

The handling of more than 35,000 men and 9000 animals, together with all arms and equipment was a task in itself. Probably none of the enemy made any serious attempt to leave the concentration area, for it was a long way back to Germany. Discipline was well enforced in the LXXV Corps to the very end and health records were excellent. The IV Corps troops designated to carry out this mission can take just pride in its effective accomplishment.

Partisans go Home

Steps to bring about the demobilization of the Volunteer Corps of Liberty (CVL), comprising all of the Partisans in North Italy were initiated on 2 May, when IV Corps officers met with General Cadorna and Signor Ferruccio Parri, vice-commander, later to become Prime Minister of Italy. It was found that plans had already been made for a patriot Victory Parade for Milan and all of Lombardia, to be held in Milan on 6 May. At the meeting it was



...under an early summer sun...

determined that General Cadorna and his staff would direct the demobilization and disarmament of the Partisans through already well-established channels of command. General Cadorna was in favor of a long period for demobilization, held that it was absolutely necessary, but it was decided that demobilization and disarming in the city of Milan would take place almost immediately after the victory parade, and that complete demobilization in the balance of the IV Corps area would be completed during the next few weeks.

On Sunday, 6 May, under an early summer sun, the Victory Parade was held with about 15,000 participants representing all the Partisans of the city of Milan and the mountain bands of Lombardia. A guard of honor made up of American, British, Brazilian and Italian troops flanked the reviewing stand in front of

the Castello Sforzesco. Though the bulk of the patriots paraded with arms, order was excellent and only two shots were fired, these into the air by exuberant members. General Cadorna pinned Italy's highest military medal to the flag of the Corps of Liberty and General Crittenberger made a speech of congratulation and thanks to the assembled Partisans.

Subsequent discussions established specific dates for demobilization, which were 13 May for the city of Milan, 19 May for the Province of Milan, and 7 June for all other Partisans in IV Corps area. Orders to this effect were sent out from General Cadorna's headquarters to the regional commands in Lombardia, Piemonte and Liguria, and from these commands to the lower echelons of zones and individual bands. In the city of Milan, General Faldella, commander of the city and province groups, issued similar orders. There were obstacles encountered due to the difficulty of communications, the degrees of autonomy enjoyed by certain local chiefs and the attempted interference of CNL in several localities, but despite these difficulties the order for demobilization by 7 June was in the end universally accepted.

The month of May saw much unrest among the Partisans. Almost all were willing to demobilize if certain guarantees were made. It was insisted that enough Partisans be made members of the police to insure the new democratic order, and the fact was bemoaned that no instructions were forthcoming from the Italian government on enrollment of Partisans in the Army. The thousand lira bonus was considered too little. In some cases, this expressed dissatisfaction was only a subterfuge to keep the arms. In Piemonte it was said that little could be hoped for until a strong national government was set up, until all Germans in the area were collected, and until the French troops withdrew from Italy.

Nevertheless, by the middle of the month concrete results were beginning to appear. General Cadorna went on the radio to broadcast a plea for complete disarmament by 7 June. The Italian government increased the bonus to 5000 lira, and a certain number of Partisans were enrolled in the army. In all three regions some Partisans were also taken into the police. Collection of German

prisoners was completed in the area, and the French situation was somewhat improved. Six demobilization centers were established in Piemonte and four in Liguria. All the bands in Lombardia wanted to establish demobilization centers where they happened to be and not in any central spot.

But demobilization was gradually taking place. By 20 May, the Partisans of the cities of Milan and Turin were virtually disarmed. No more Partisans appeared on the streets. Disarming had also taken place in Brescia, Bérghamo, Alessandria, Vercelli and Cuneo provinces. Partial disarming had been effected in Biella province. Theoretically at least, all the patriots of the Liguria region had been disarmed and very few remained in the centers to be demobilized.

In and about Milan, always the center of greatest unrest throughout demobilization, trouble with the Partisans persisted. There were illegal possession of arms, abuse of police powers, continuing illegal executions, considerable extortion, and hairclipping threats to young women. On 19 May the Milan Area Command disbanded the Partisan police as such and ordered a complete evacuation and closing of Partisan barracks by 30 May. This order was satisfactorily executed. In a final appeal, a message from General Crittenberger went out over the radio on 5 June, reminding Partisans of the 7 June deadline.

Partisans in Lombardia, Piemonte and Liguria had handed in by the deadline date a grand total of 124,254 arms of all types, including mortars and cannon, and even some tanks. Considerable additional arms have been collected since. About 7,000 Partisans, continued to be used as special police, and about 12,000 still awaited demobilization in centers. Although strict enforcement of the disarmament ban was carried out by all police and troops, only 47 arrests for illegal possession of arms were made.

The demobilization of the Partisans required the distribution of 220,000 Italian military rations, 2,400,000 cigarettes, and 80 tons of clothing. Return to peacetime pursuits by the Partisans was best carried out in the city and province of Milan, where about 30,000 returned to former jobs in industry and business and ano-

ther 3,000 were found employment by the CVL. About 4,000 patriots were employed by the Fiat plant in Turin. Unemployment was worst in Liguria, where the delay in reopening the port of Genoa and the comparatively few large industrial plants made the absorption of the disbanded Partisans a particular problem.

The Score for IV Corps

As participants in the campaign that had such a whirlwind finish, we are apt to remember only that we won a great victory and contributed a goodly share to ending the war in Europe, without much concrete appreciation of just what did take place. While it was in progress, the campaign as a whole was too large in scope for any one man to know about all that was happening. A summary of the most important details making up the victory of IV Corps will, therefore, not be out of place here.

The last seventeen days of April and the first two days of May witnessed the complete disintegration of the enemy forces in Northwest Italy under the violence of our assault. Exclusive of the LXXV Corps of the *Wehrmacht*, which when it was surrendered in mass tallied up to a total strength of 35,485 officers and men, IV Corps took 83,001 personnel, among them 21 general officers.

Of the Ligurian Army the entire army and corps headquarters as well as divisional staffs were apprehended, including Marshal Graziani, Generalleutnant Pemsel and Generalleutnant Jahn, all of whom have been mentioned heretofore.

In the Fourteenth Army, the division commanders of the 148th Infantry Division, Italia Division, 354th Infantry Division, 90th Panzer Grenadier Division and 232nd Infantry Division were all captured. This meant that every division commander opposing IV Corps at the beginning of the period was taken prisoner with the exception of the commander of the 114th Jaeger Division, who was reported killed in action.

Among the regional commanders taken were those of the Milan, Como and Genoa areas. The SS commander for Northwest Italy became a prisoner also, along with the general officers in

charge of production and transportation and the *generalleutnant* who headed the Liaison Mission.

When the LXXV Corps surrendered, in addition to General of Mountain Troops Schlemmer, already named herein, three additional division commanders and two more generals with liaison duties were taken.

The most accurate information available at the writing is that about 1500 dumps of enemy material were captured comprising ordnance, engineer, signal, quartermaster, medical, chemical and air corps equipment. The dumps held weapons, vehicles, horses, aircraft, wagons, ammunition, rations, gasoline, torpedo boats, razor blades, toothbrushes, cigarette cases, skis, snowshoes, beds, clothing, shoes, swords, chinaware, gas masks, radio equipment, sound detectors, completely equipped hospitals, etc., *ad infinitum*.

No information as to the quantities of small arms captured is available, but as a minimum the enemy ordnance matériel captured or destroyed by IV Corps from 14 April to 2 May 1945 is estimated as more than 120 tanks and armored vehicles, 175 self-propelled guns, 650 artillery pieces, 3750 general purpose vehicles and 10,000 horse-drawn vehicles.

A total of 50,550 square kilometers were liberated, including over 550 major towns and cities. Political and economic frameworks of the entire region were taken over in running order; the industrial facilities were seized and held by the Partisans and were relatively undamaged, due to the swiftness of our advance. Because of the rapidity with which we came to their assistance, the Partisans were likewise able to preserve the cities of the industrial and agricultural heart of Italy from serious damage.

It had been learned from the statements of officer prisoners of war that the speed of our advance came as a complete surprise to the enemy. They believed that we would halt south of the Po River to await the movement of dump areas north of the Apennines, thus giving them time to organize the Po and Adige defense lines. Prisoners taken in the Verona area said that the arrival of our troops there in less than three weeks time had been considered impossible.

The Ligurian Army feared that we would achieve a breakthrough and had repeatedly requested permission from the High Command to withdraw from Northwest Italy. This permission was consistently refused. The reasons for holding combat forces in the sector of the Ligurian Army until it was too late to withdraw seemed to fall into the political and economic spheres rather than the military.

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the whole IV Corps campaign in the Po Valley is to be found in two factors. First, was the employment of our armor and infantry in wide sweeping drives to the northwest, instead of wearing the troops out in bloody, short-range, head-on attacks. Second, was the cooperation achieved between troops of so many different military origins. Working, fighting, sacrificing together for a common cause, they provided an example of brotherhood in arms which will be a luminous memory through life for all who fought the war in IV Corps.

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ITALY, 1945



The WINTER LINE in ITALY
·1944-1945
SHOWING·
the WESTERN SHOULDER,
HELD BY IV CORPS

FROM 25 DECEMBER, 1944
TO 2 APRIL, 1945
INCLUSIVE

LEGEND

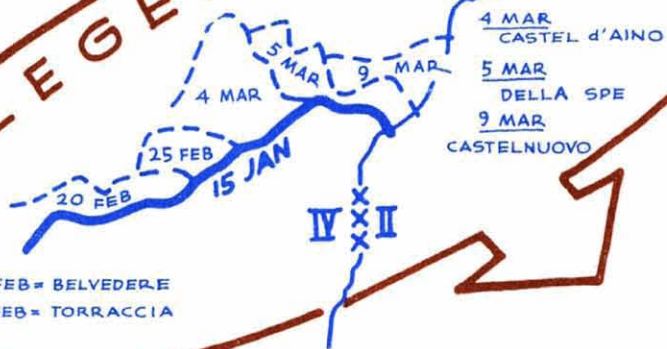
FRONT LINE OF 15TH ARMY GROUP

FRONT LINE OF IV CORPS



LEGEND

20 FEB = BELVEDERE
25 FEB = TORRACCIA



IV CORPS PRELIMINARY OPERATIONS on the LEFT SHOULDER of FIFTH ARMY as of MIDNIGHT 20 FEBRUARY to 9 MARCH, 1945

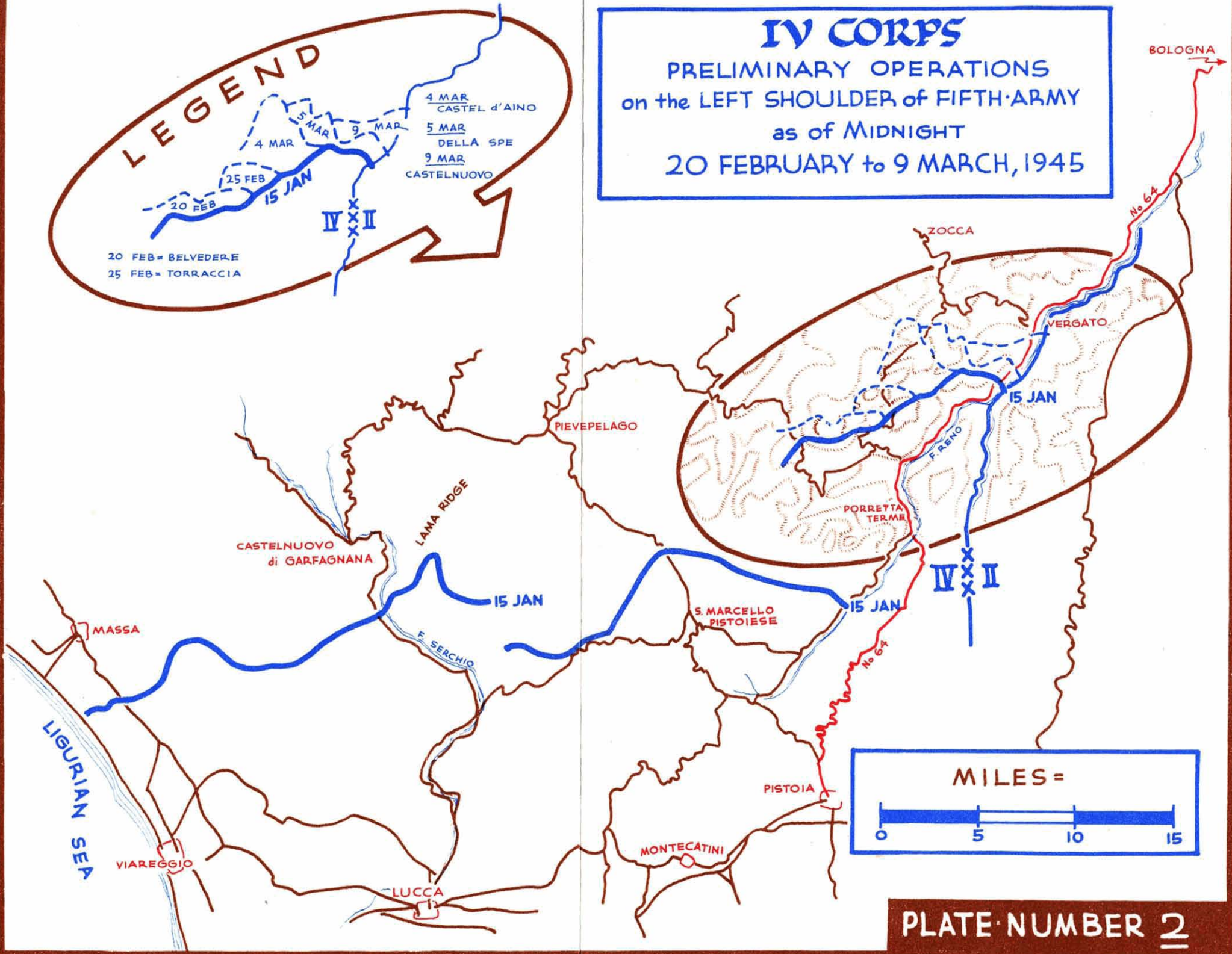


PLATE NUMBER 2

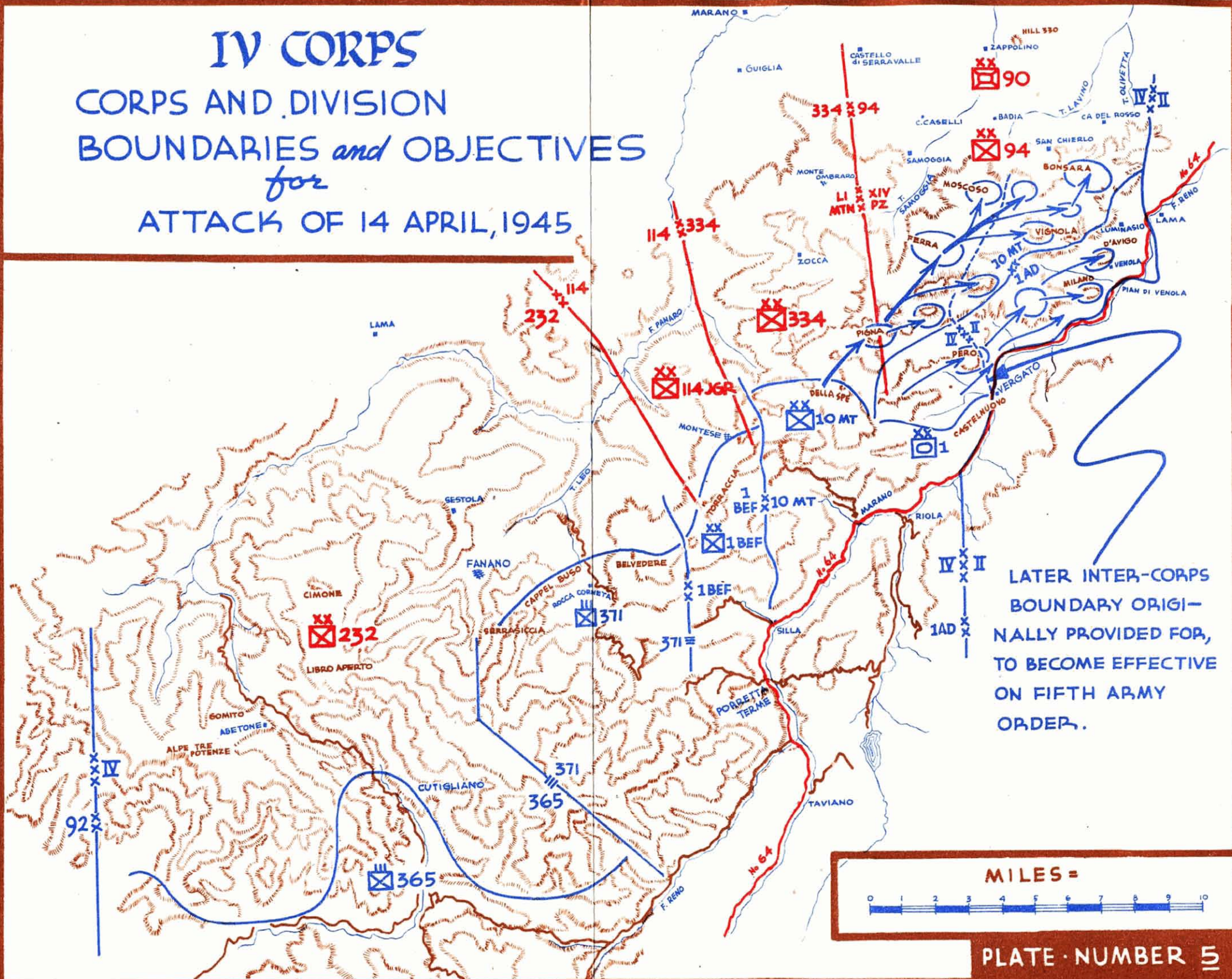
IV CORPS

CORPS AND DIVISION

BOUNDARIES *and* OBJECTIVES

for

ATTACK OF 14 APRIL, 1945



LATER INTER-CORPS
BOUNDARY ORIGI-
NALLY PROVIDED FOR,
TO BECOME EFFECTIVE
ON FIFTH ARMY
ORDER.

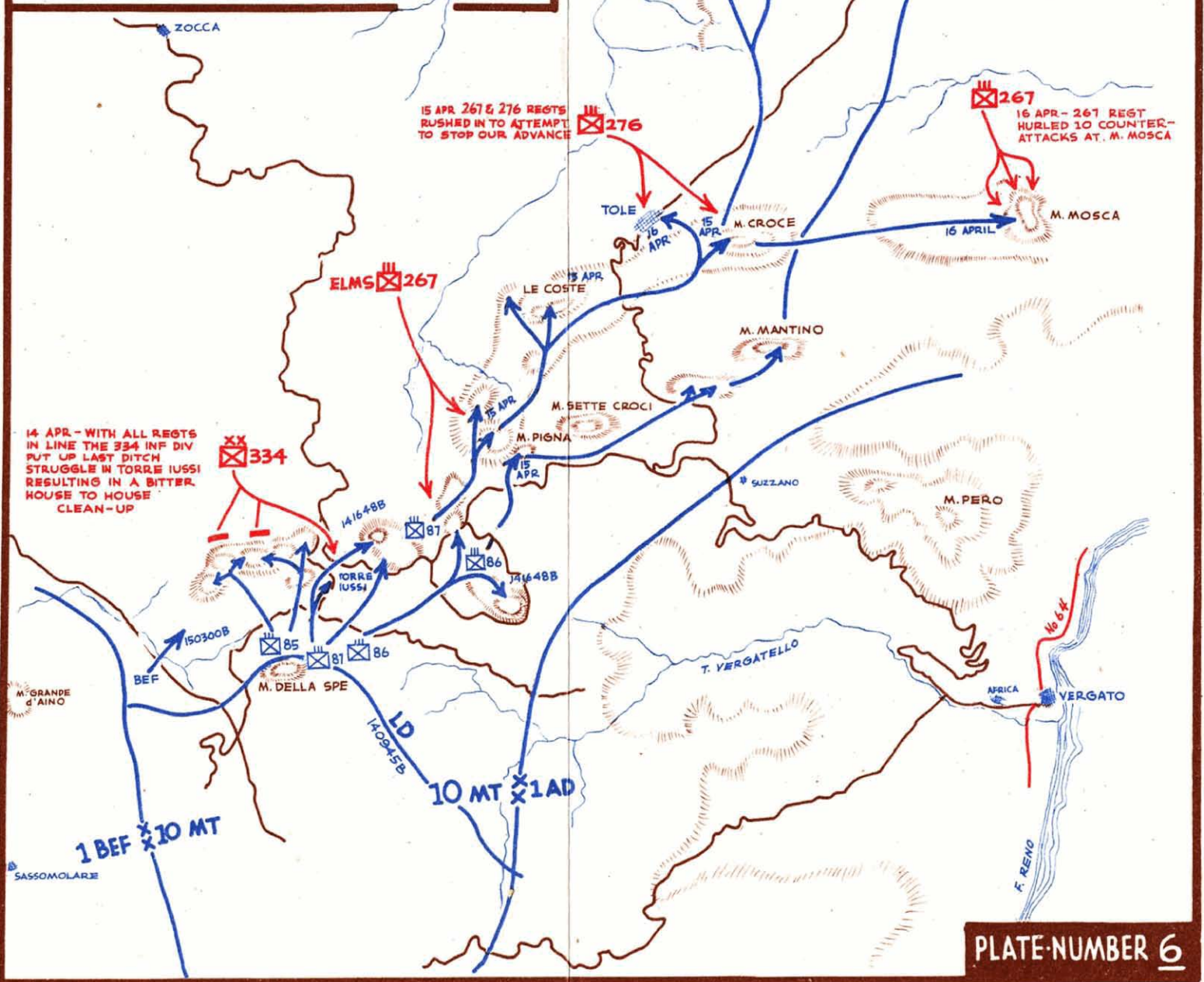




MILES

C. M. AGETTO

IV CORPS THE MAIN ATTACK of the 10th MOUNTAIN DIVISION 14 APRIL to 17 APRIL, 1945



IV CORPS

LOCATION OF FRONT LINES
AS OF MIDNIGHT
FROM 14 APRIL -
TO 19 APRIL, 1945
INCLUSIVE

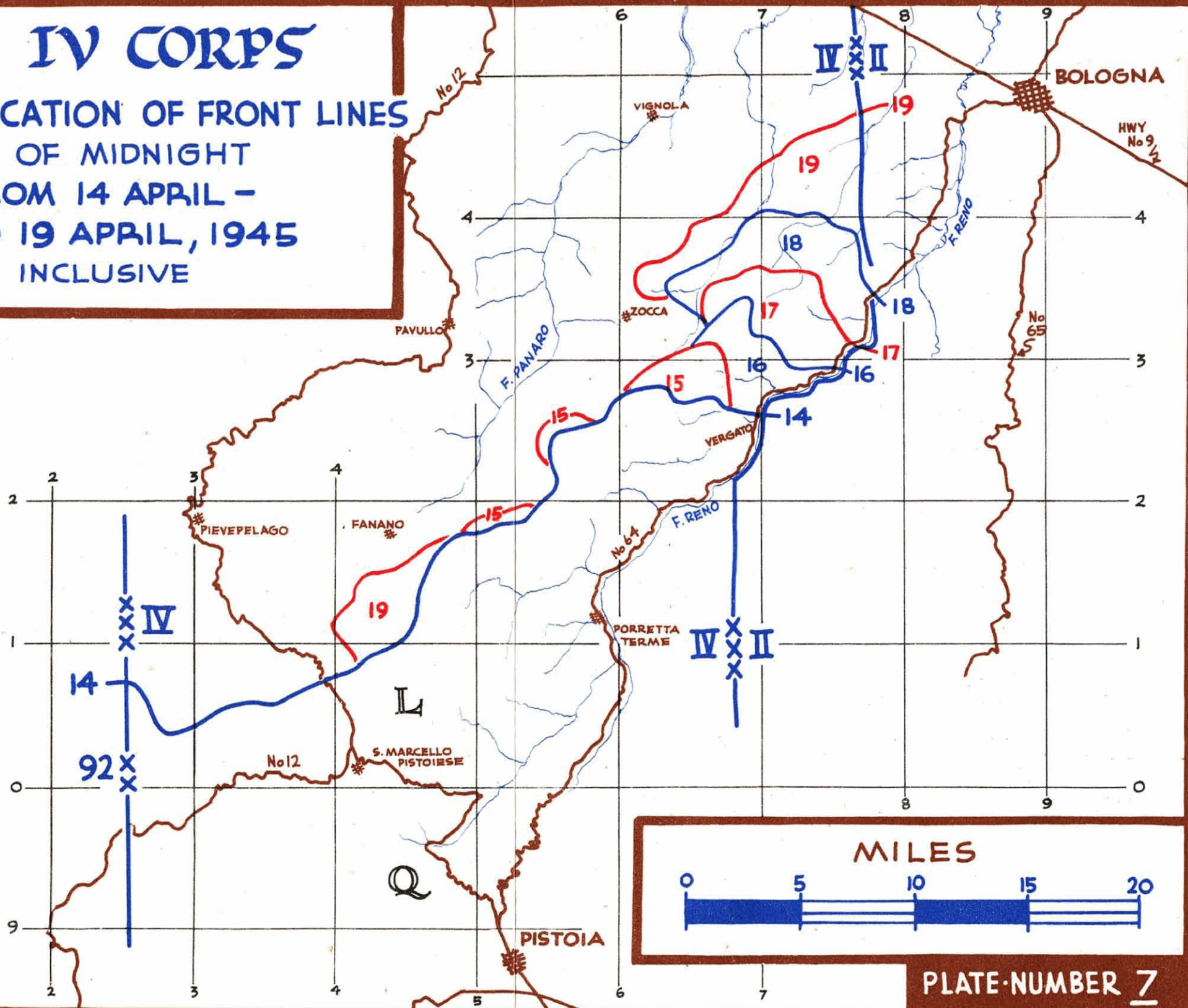
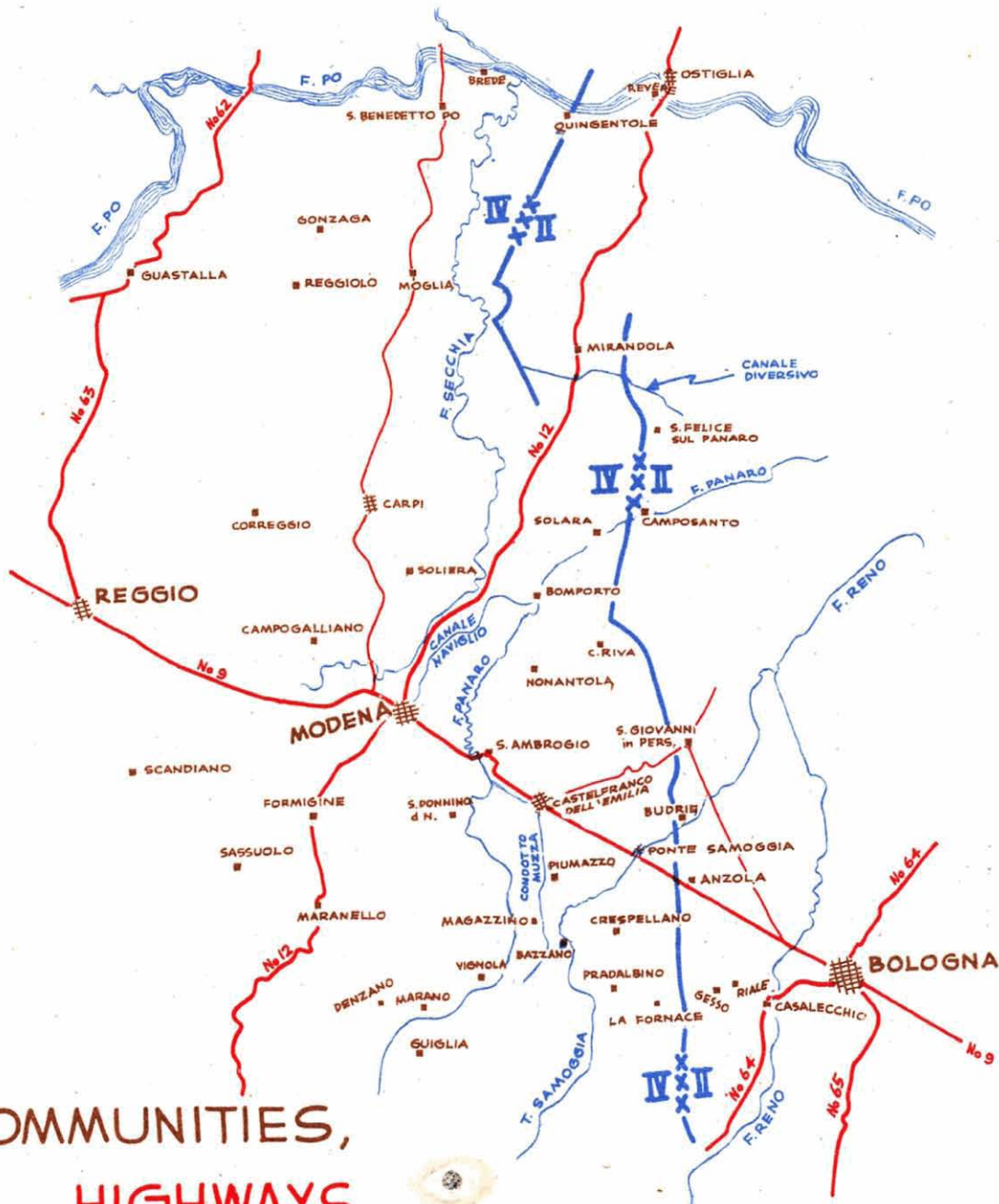
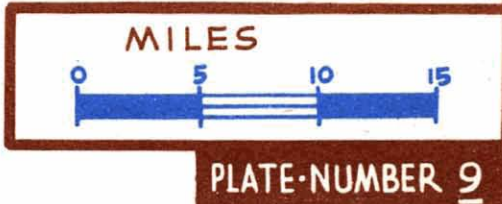


PLATE NUMBER 7



COMMUNITIES,
 HIGHWAYS
 and WATERWAYS
 --- NORTH to the PO RIVER

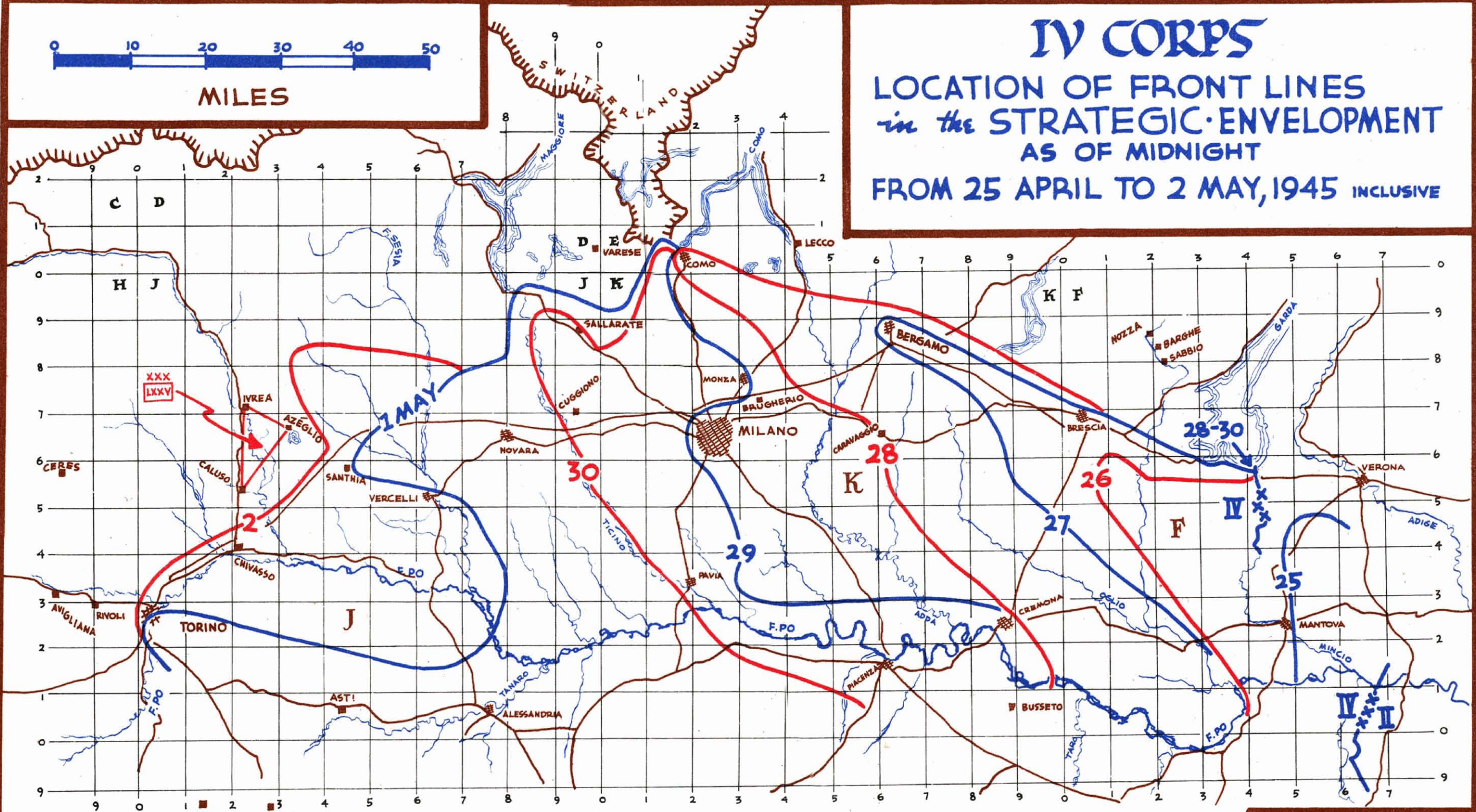


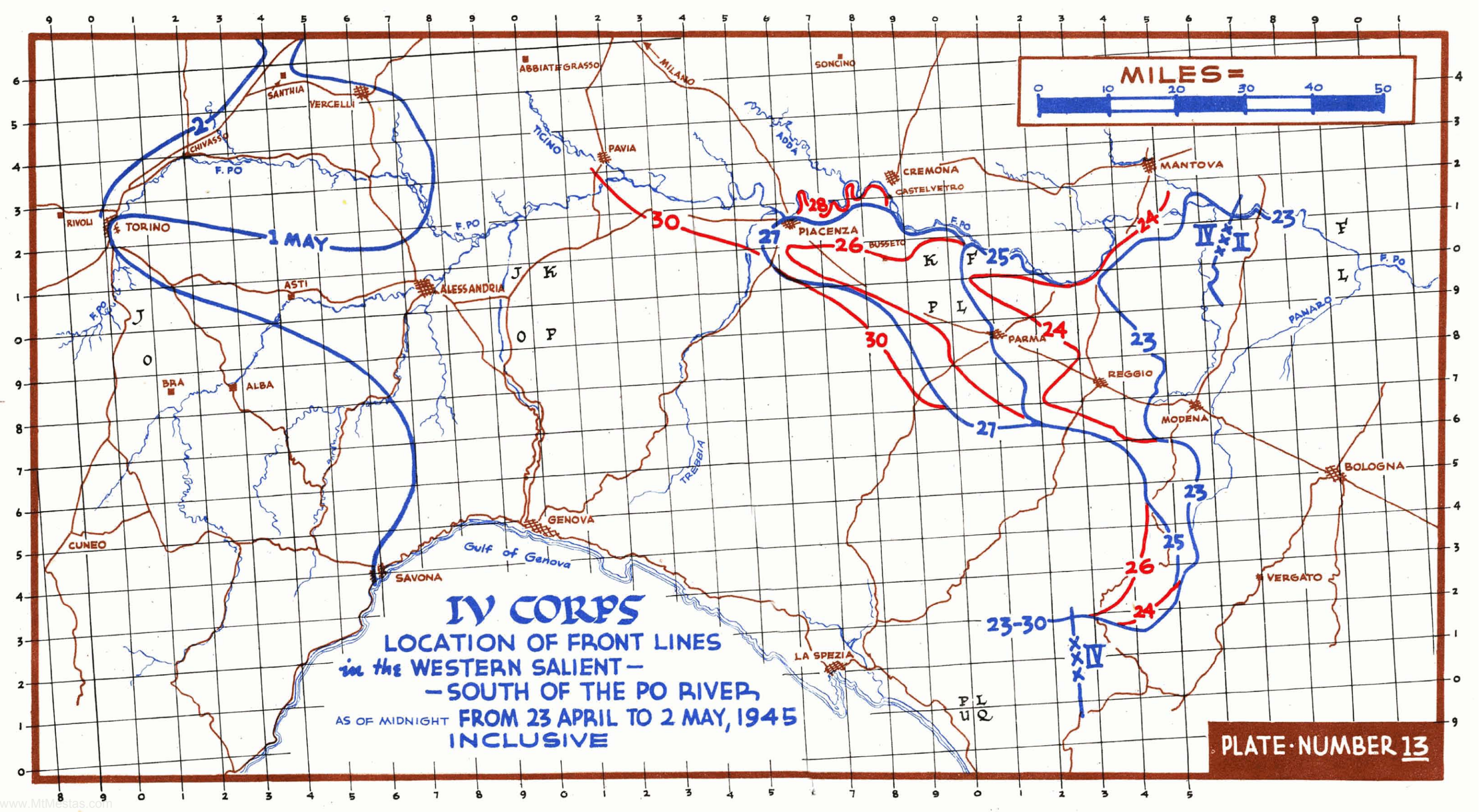


MILES

IV CORPS

LOCATION OF FRONT LINES
in the STRATEGIC ENVELOPMENT
AS OF MIDNIGHT
FROM 25 APRIL TO 2 MAY, 1945 INCLUSIVE

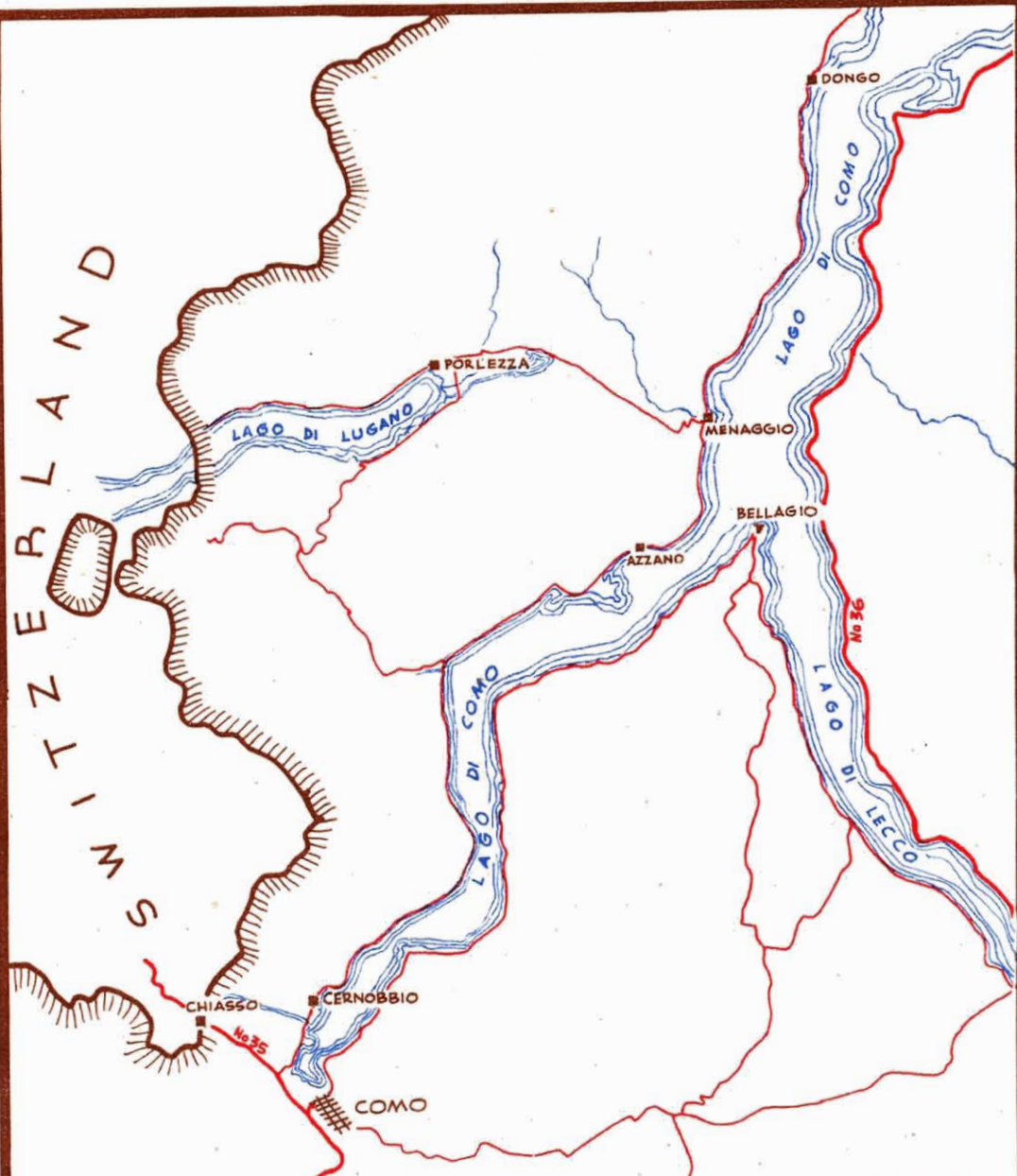




IV CORPS
 LOCATION OF FRONT LINES
in the WESTERN SALIENT -
 - SOUTH OF THE PO RIVER,
 AS OF MIDNIGHT FROM 23 APRIL TO 2 MAY, 1945
 INCLUSIVE

PLATE NUMBER 13

BERGLAND
TIMS

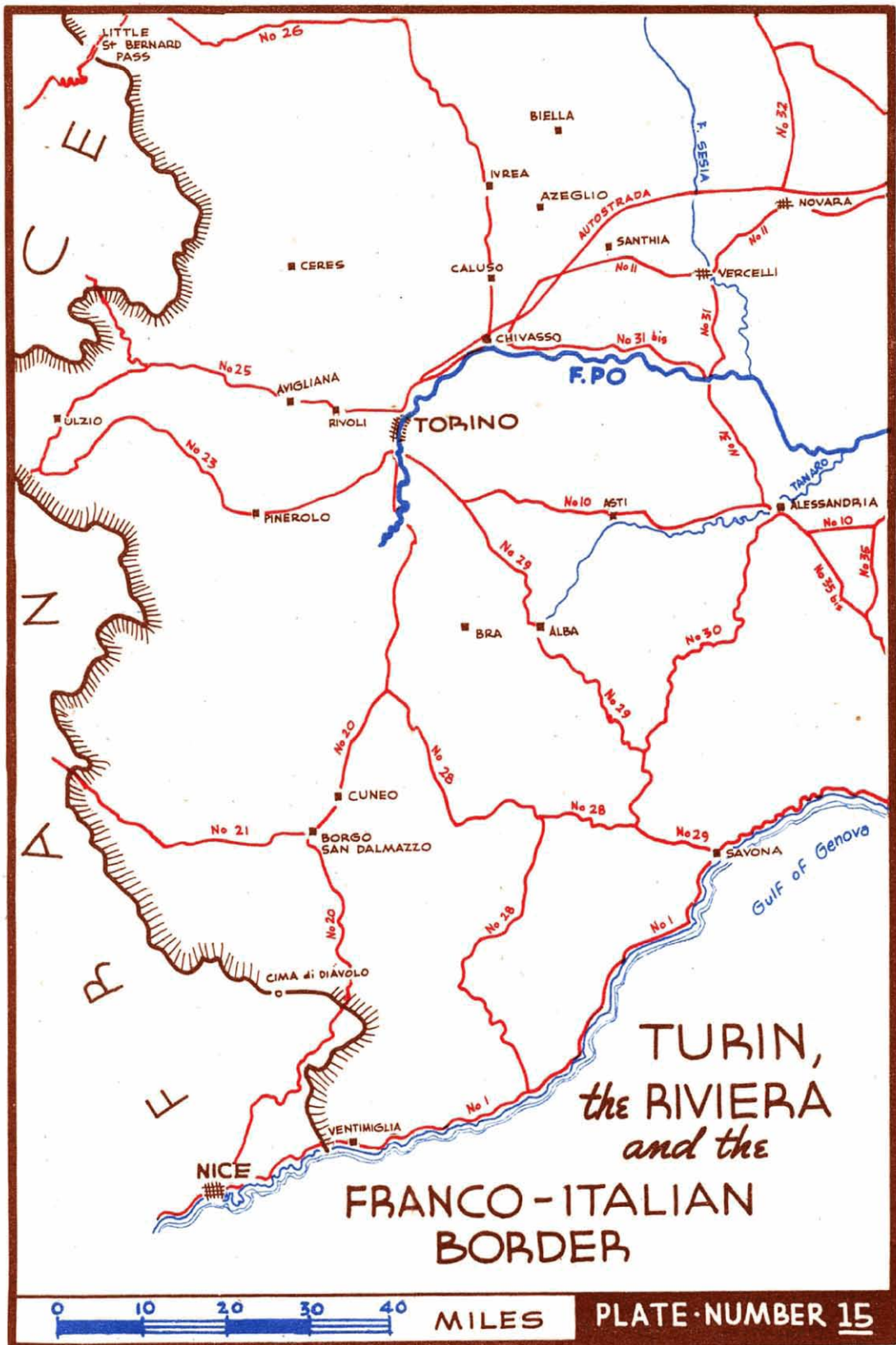


The COMO REGION
WHERE
MUSSOLINI
SPENT HIS LAST HOURS



MILES

PLATE NUMBER 14



Researching World War II

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