

FINITO!

BRENNER PASS

UDINE

CREMONA

VERONA

VENEZIA

TRIESTE

PISA

LEGNANO

THE

PO VALLEY CAMPAIGN



finito!

The Po Valley Campaign
1945

HEADQUARTERS, 15th ARMY GROUP-ITALY

Passed for publication by Field Press Censor



GENERAL MARK W. CLARK,
Commanding the 15th Army Group.

To the soldiers of the 15 th Army Group:

With a full and grateful heart I hail and congratulate you in this hour of complete victory over the German enemy, and join with you in thanks to Almighty God.

Yours has been a long, hard fight — the longest in this war of any Allied troops fighting on the Continent of Europe. You men of the Fifth and Eighth Armies have brought that fight to a successful conclusion by recent brilliant offensive operations which shattered the German forces opposing you. Their surrender was the inevitable course left to them, they had nothing more to fight with in Italy.

You have demonstrated something new and remarkable in the annals of organized warfare: You have shown that a huge fighting force composed of units from many countries with diverse languages and customs, inspired, as you have always been, with a devotion to the cause of freedom, can become an effective and harmonious fighting team.

This teamwork which has carried us to victory has included in full measure the supporting arms which have worked with us throughout the campaign. The services that have supplied us have overcome unbelievable obstacles and have kept us constantly armed, equipped, and fed. The magnificent support which we have always had from the Allied air and naval forces in this theater has written a new page in the history of cooperative combat action.

Our exultation in this moment is blended with sorrow as we pay tribute to the heroic Allied soldiers who have fallen in battle in order that this victory might be achieved. The entire world will forever honor their memory...

I am intensely proud of you all and of the honor which I have had of commanding such invincible troops. My thanks go to each of you for your capable, aggressive, and loyal service which has produced this great victory.

MARK W. CLARK

GENERAL, USA, COMMANDING

May 1945.



The Po Valley.



« Patrols were active on the Italian front ».

Winter: 1944-45

Through the dismal winter of 1944-45, Allied and German troops watched each other vigilantly across the lines of the forgotten front — Italy.

On the east they stared through the mists of the muddy flats of the Senio River. On the western two-thirds of the line, they peered from observation posts atop the chill, abrupt, white Apennines.

The Germans — 25 divisions of them, plus 5 of Fascist Italians — feeding on the Po Valley granary and using North Italy's industry, stirred infrequently from behind the defenses to which they had been driven in 1944's last campaign — a campaign which had pierced their mountain Gothic Line and given us a secure grip on the plain's eastern fringes as well.

Our daily communiqués reported laconically: « Patrols were active on the Italian front », and few but the front-line soldier knew what those words meant in danger, in toil and in the hardships of rain, mud, snow, and cold. The patrols supplied a steady stream of prisoners — and of information.

When the murky skies permitted, the air forces twisted the enemy's rail lines into pretzels of steel, pock-marked his highways, tumbled his bridges, and closed the Brenner Pass. The job had to be done again and again, for the enemy, tough, smart, and ingenious, built bridges which were slid into place only at night, or

which lay invisible under water; he organized radio-directed repair crews who time and again reopened the railways and sometimes the Pass.

The battles in North Europe overshadowed all else; to the Germans, however, this was no forgotten front. The Po Valley had to be held. And because the Po was vital to them, it was almost as vital to us. But the Western Front had first call on Allied men and munitions. Crack veterans of Italy's campaigns — Americans, British, Canadians, Frenchmen — were in France (Bill Mauldin's Willie and Joe had gone there to get some publicity) and few ships could be spared to supply the scant forces that remained.

To those scant forces, of many races, creeds, and colors, fighting on Europe's most difficult battleground, fell the task of harassing, deceiving, and busying throughout the winter two first-rate German armies and an Italian Fascist army, so that they might not be used on the Western and Eastern Fronts.

That mission was accomplished.

But the long months were not spent merely in harassing and tying down superior enemy forces. It was apparent that the logical sequel to the 1944 campaign and the winter's activities was a spring offensive. At 15th Army Group headquarters, the commander, General Mark W. Clark, and his staff pored over maps and plans for the drive to finish the Nazis in Italy. It would start when the flooding rivers



« ...the air forces twisted the enemy's rail lines into pretzels of steel... ».

Scene: Bologna.

had subsided and the wet ground, much of it inundated by the Germans, would bear the weight of armor. The campaign was to be coordinated with offensives on the Eastern and Western fronts.

But before this could be done, 15th Army Group had to rest its tired troops of many nationalities — Brazilian and Palestinian, Polish, Italian, New Zealand, South African and British Indian, British and American. It had to weld and reorganise this Army, most representative of the United Nations, into a fresh fighting machine capable of compensating by its quality for its lack of numbers now that so many tried troops had left for the West.

Nothing that would contribute to the success of the offensive was left undone. The trickle of supplies broadened. Behind the lines, clothing, cartridges, mortar shells, artillery shells, C-rations, K-rations, food, the stuff for Bailey Bridges, medical supplies were brought ashore in wreck-clogged harbors and moved forward.

Troops were rested, regrouped, retrained. Coordination between Army and Air Forces was strengthened. The many problems involved in administering a varied force with differing racial habits, religions, and needs, were satisfactorily solved.

Late in February, the newly-arrived 10th Mountain Division attacked « to improve our positions » in preparation for the offensive, capturing Mt. Belvedere, which dominated Highway 64 to Bologna, after one battalion, using ropes, had scaled precipitous, 3000-foot Riva Ridge, to the west of Belvedere.

The stage was set for the task ahead.

The Task Ahead

The task before the 15th Army Group was to destroy some 30 divisions of the Nazis' Army Group Southwest before they could retire to the northeast into the Alps toward Austria and prolong the struggle.

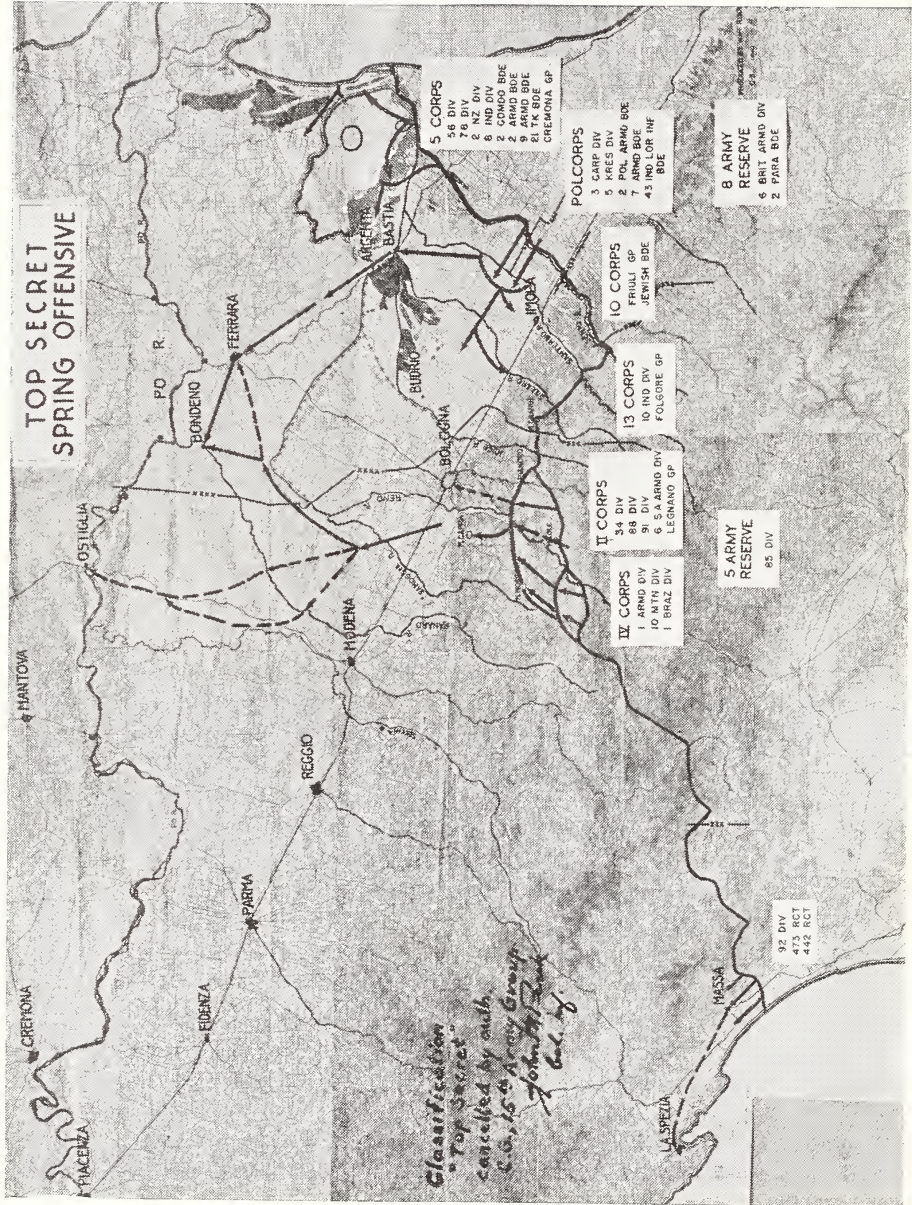
For any force, in any terrain, the task would have been formidable. On the west, the enemy right was firmly planted on the rugged mountains. On the east he was solidly entrenched behind the Senio, Santerno, Sillaro, and Idice Rivers, all comparatively wide and steeply banked. An attacker there faced a maze of dikes, ditches, and flooded fields. Behind these riverlines were the machine gun nests, 88's and ack-ack on the Po River's north shore; behind *them* was the short and heavily fortified Adige River line; and beyond *that* more river lines and mountains across the road to Austria.

However, he had little motor transport, less air power, and was so short of gasoline that he was reported to be using grappa — the very best grappa, no doubt — in some of his vehicles.

Overwhelmed in the sky, he could not defend his highways or his railways. His communications with Germany in a critical state, he grew ever more dependent on the Po Valley.

Two lines of action were open to the enemy:

a. He could fight where he stood, and if forced to withdraw, could delay successively on each river line, using floods and demolitions to slow our advance, or



The Plan for the Spring Campaign.

b. He could attempt a voluntary withdrawal to a position behind the Po and subsequently the Adige.

Since he desperately needed the Po Valley, it was believed he would contest every foot of ground. It appeared to the Group Commander that if the 15th Army Group could achieve a quick break-through and a rapid exploitation, huge enemy forces might well be destroyed or captured before they could retire across the Po.

The Plans

General Clark weighed his decisions with extreme care. The possible lines of attack were severely restricted.

The 15th Army Group's front now ran from just below Massa on the Ligurian Sea to the Comacchio lagoon on the Adriatic, skirting south of Bologna. The Fifth Army held the mountainous zig-zag line from Massa to Monte Grande, 10 miles southeast of Bologna; the Eighth Army line ran southeast from Grande, astride the Sillaro and Santerno Rivers, and then northeast along the Senio's south bank to Comacchio's southern shore and the Adriatic.

General Clark decided that the main effort of the 15th Army Group would be launched in the Bologna area by Fifth Army since, after their debouchment into the valley, the terrain in their front favored a quick break-through and a rapid advance.

It was to be preceded by a thrust northwest across the Senio River on the Eighth Army front, to draw enemy reserves from the zone of the main effort.

The plans for the attack were necessarily made flexible to provide for any possible contingency. The operation was divided into three phases. During Phase I, the Eighth Army was to breach the Santerno River and attack toward Bastia and Budrio; the Fifth Army was to debouch into the Po Valley with the secondary mission of capturing or isolating Bologna.

Phase II provided for a breakthrough by either or both armies to encircle the enemy forces south of the Po. The Eighth Army was to break through the Argenta Gap to seize the Po crossings at Ferrara and Bondeno, and failing in this restricted maneuver was to push on towards Bologna. In the Ferrara-Bondeno area it was to make contact with Fifth Army columns exploiting northeast down the corridor north of the Reno. A secondary Fifth Army effort was to be made northward on Ostiglia.

The continuation of operations in Phase III was to be directed toward crossing the Po and exploiting northward, to include the capture of Verona. If the situation permitted, further exploitation toward and across the Adige was to follow.

Though the operation was theoretically divided into these three phases, there would be no pausing between them.

Of some importance to the main aim — destruction of enemy forces in Italy — but independent tactically, there was to be a diversion against Massa, on the

battlefront's extreme left flank, at the mountains' edge and overlooking the route up Italy's west coast.

The attack would keep busy the Germans in the west, and, if it went well, there was the possibility of exploitation toward La Spezia, naval base 17 miles north, and on to Genoa. The task was to be entrusted to the American 92d Division, two of whose regiments were detached for defensive action in the Serchio Valley, and to two infantry regiments, the ex-ack-ack 473d, and the 442d,

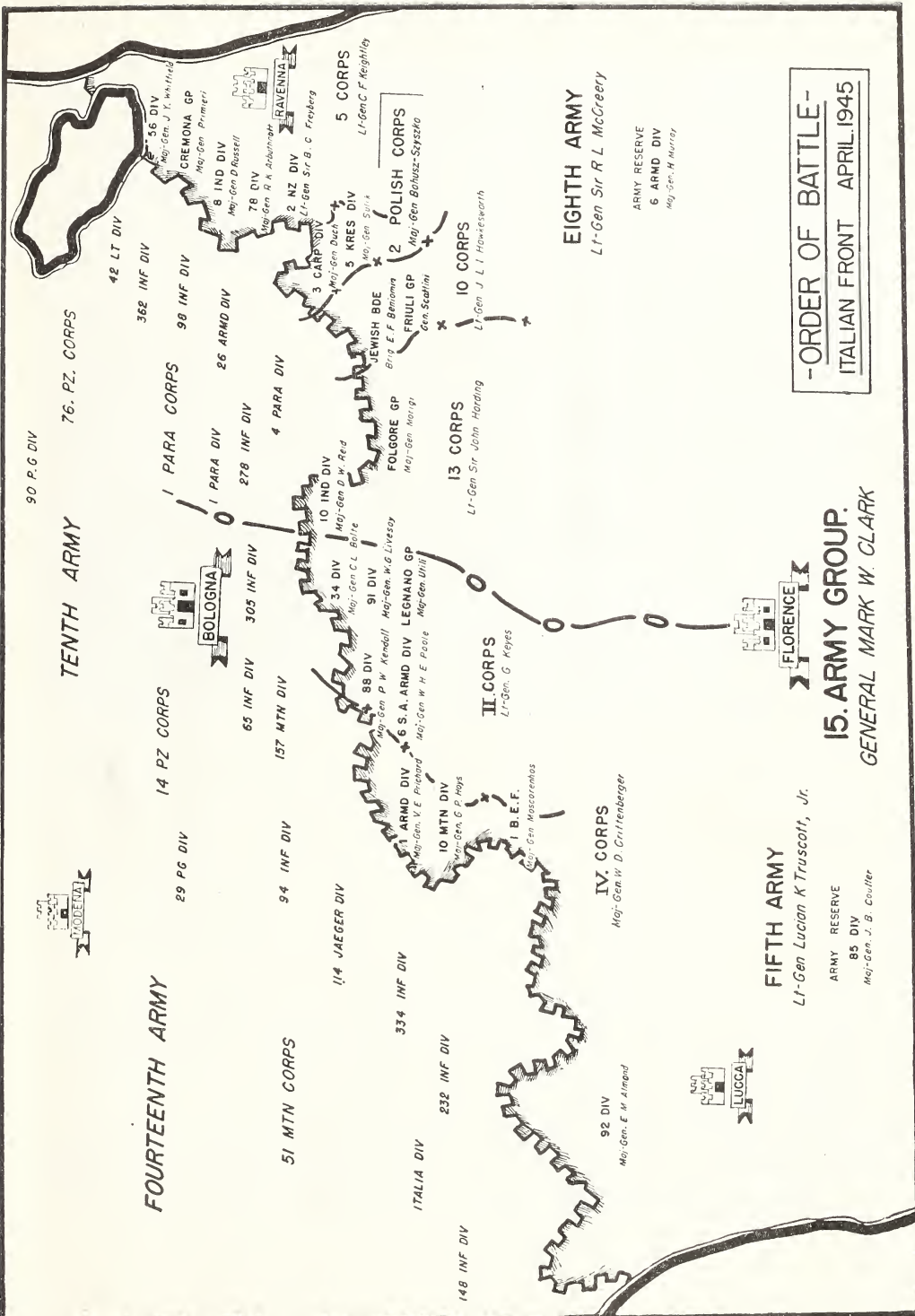


« The 442d, formed of Americans of Japanese ancestry (Nisei) » being welcomed back to Italy from France by General Clark, just before their west coast attack was launched

formed of Americans of Japanese ancestry (Nisei). Destroyers of the Allied Naval Forces were to cooperate.

Of even greater importance were the preliminary operations at the Eastern end of the line which were planned to give Eighth Army free access to Lake Comacchio and to prepare the way for the amphibious operations which were to aid in opening the road through the Argenta Gap to Ferrara.

It was also intended to drop the British 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade behind the Germans — some 30 alternative plans for this were made, but much to the disgust of the paratroops none of these came off.



-ORDER OF BATTLE-
ITALIAN FRONT APRIL 1945

FIFTH ARMY
Lt-Gen Lucian K Truscott, Jr.
 ARMY RESERVE
 85 DIV
Maj-Gen J. B. Coulter

15. ARMY GROUP.
GENERAL MARK W. CLARK

EIGHTH ARMY
Lt-Gen Sir R L McCreery



FOURTEENTH ARMY

14 PZ CORPS
 29 PG DIV

1 PARA CORPS
 1 PARA DIV
 278 INF DIV

98 INF DIV

362 INF DIV

42 LT DIV

36 DIV
Maj-Gen J. L. MacNeil

OREMONA GP
Maj-Gen Primeri

6 IND DIV
Maj-Gen D Russell

78 DIV
Maj-Gen R. A. Schuyler

2 NZ DIV
Lt-Gen Sir B. C. Freyberg

5 CORPS
Lt-Gen C F Haghia

3 CARP DIV
Maj-Gen Duck

5 KPES DIV
Maj-Gen Sylla

2 POLISH CORPS
Maj-Gen Bohusz-Systema

JEWISH BDE
Brig E. F. Ben-Gurion

FRULLI GP
Gen. Scattini

10 CORPS
Lt-Gen J. L. Howitzers

4 PARA DIV

13 CORPS
Lt-Gen Sir John Harding

10 IND DIV
Maj-Gen Sir Red

34 DIV
Maj-Gen C. L. Boffe

91 DIV
Maj-Gen P. W. Kennell

88 DIV
Maj-Gen W. G. Livesey

6 S.A. ARM DIV
Maj-Gen V. E. Pritchard

LEGNANO GP
Maj-Gen W. E. Peole

II. CORPS
Lt-Gen. G. Hayes

10 MTD DIV
Maj-Gen G. F. Hays

I B. E. F.
Gen. Mascarenhas

IV. CORPS
Maj-Gen W. D. Crittendenberger

334 INF DIV

ITALIA DIV

232 INF DIV

92 DIV
Maj-Gen. E. W. Almond

94 INF DIV

157 MTD DIV

65 INF DIV

305 INF DIV

26 ARMO DIV

6 IND DIV

36 DIV

90 P. G. DIV

76. PZ. CORPS

TENTH ARMY

ARMY RESERVE

6 ARMO DIV

Maj-Gen. A. Murray

General Clark informed the Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean, Field Marshal Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, of the date on which he was prepared to attack. The field marshal concurred in the general's decision, which was based on weather, condition of the terrain, readiness of our forces and rapid advances by General Eisenhower and the Russians. The time was ripe.

The dates chosen were: for preliminary operations on the east coast, 1-2 April; for the Massa diversion, 5 April; for the 8th Army's thrust, 9 April; and for the blow of the Fifth Army, a day to be decided later by General Clark.

The Battle Begins

Those were the plans — you know the outcome.

Perhaps you were there when the first Allied troops broke out of the Apennines onto the lush flatlands of the Po Valley and a delighted but puzzled soldier asked, « What do we do for observation posts? ».

Perhaps you were there when liberated Bologna went wild.

Perhaps you were there when hysterically happy Italians, ignoring the flames crackling through their Po Valley homes and the smoke darkening the sky, tossed flowers, bread — very hard bread — eggs and bottles of wine at our fast-moving columns.

Perhaps you were there when the paint was still wet on the wall inscriptions that read, « Thank you for liberating us. We have been waiting so long ».

The first blow of the campaign was struck at 0300 hours, 2 April to eliminate enemy observation of the Eighth Army's right flank from the spit that divides Lake Comacchio and the Adriatic.

Commandos of the 2d Commando Brigade, 20 men to each 20-foot, powered, plywood storm boat, headed from Lake Comacchio's southeast end for the spit's western shore. At the same time, other Commandos attacked across the River Reno, to clear the spit's east side. After two days, despite rifle, machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire, and many mines, the whole spit was in our hands, along with nearly 1000 prisoners. Small enemy outposts on islands in the lake were also wiped out.

On the night of the 6th, the 167 Brigade of the 56th (British) Division attacked to win a bridgehead across the Reno on the lake's south shore. Opposition was moderate and by the 8th the line stood on the Navigazione Canal. Our right flank was ready.

At the extreme left end of the Italian front, the west coast diversion began 5 April. The 442d Infantry, the Nisei regiment, and the ex-ack-ack 473d Infantry, fought northward against stiff opposition through mountainous country just east of the coast. At the same time the 370th Infantry Regiment of the 92d Division, with which the 442d and 473d were fighting, started up the coast.

The 473d entered Massa on midmorning of the 10th and advanced north across the Frigido; the 442d took Mt. Brugiana. On the 11th, partisans captured Carrara, the 442d reported the town clear, and the two regiments continued north through the mountains.

The preliminaries and the diversion were successful.



« The 473d entered Massa on midmorning of the 10th ». The wounded man was hit by machine gun fire at the town's north edge.

The Eighth Army Strikes

The blows that knocked out the Germans in Italy began as slow, deliberate punches with heavy fists. Within two weeks the enemy was staggering; the fists became wide-stretched hands, with fingers probing, then grasping vast numbers of Germans and all of Italy's north. After a campaign lasting only 23 days, the remnants of the foe surrendered; he had been destroyed south of the Po River.

On 9 April, at 1350 hours, a terrific bombardment was begun by Allied air forces on the Eighth Army front. At 1920, after a stunning artillery barrage, the Eighth Army's 5th Corps and Polish Corps stormed the Germans' Senio River positions near Lugo. The 2 New Zealand and 8th Indian Divisions of 5th Corps quickly dealt with the enemy's first line of defense and pushed through bitterly fighting rearguards to cross successive canals. The 3d Carpathian Division of the Polish Corps forged slowly ahead up Highway 9, driving towards Bologna.



*« ...amphibious vehicles... Lake Comacchio... ». 2/5 Queens
in Fantails (Buffaloes) on the lake.*

The next day the air bombardment was repeated, and the attack was resumed with fury to force a bridgehead across the Santerno. The Poles, still fighting for every inch, reached the Lugo Canal that night.

With the enemy busy along the rivers and canals, the British 56th Division, using amphibious vehicles along the west and south shores of Lake Comacchio, struck for Bastia, gate to the Argenta Gap.

Early on the 11th the first of the series of FANTAIL operations across the floods South of Lake Comacchio was launched with 169 (Queens) Inf Bde landing at Menate supported by No. 40 Commando, which walked along the narrow bank between the lake and the floods. By the 11th some New Zealanders had crossed the Santerno. The Poles, making better progress than on the first two days were forcing the enemy to withdraw from the pocket west of Imola.

Next day the 8th Indian Division, the 2d New Zealand Division, and the 3d Carpathian Division had troops across the Santerno and Lt. Gen. Richard L. McCreery, Eighth Army Commander, threw in the 78th Division to attack through the bridgehead north toward Bastia. This key point was being caught in a pincers between the 56th from the east and the 78th from the south.

The 13th was marked by slow stubborn progress all along the line.

Against stiff opposition the New Zealanders crossed the Sillaro at first light of the 14th.

Three river lines on which the enemy had depended had been breached within five days; Polish units were closing in on Imola, just north of the Santerno; an enemy pocket southeast of the city had already been eliminated.

The Fifth Pushes off

Now the left fist flew. The IV Corps of Lt. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott's Fifth Army joined the battle at 0945 of the 14th. An aerial assault and a heavy barrage preceded the advance. The 10th Mountain Division pushed forward across a mined valley and up heavily-defended, steep slopes. The 1st Armored Division moved north on the left of Highway 64 for Vergato and Mt. Pero. The Brazilian Expeditionary Force took Montese.

Vergato fell on the 15th.

On the night of 15-16 April, II Corps, on IV Corps' right, launched the main effort of 15th Army Group and Fifth Army. The initial assault, by the 88th Division and the 6th South African Armoured, was reinforced four and a half hours later by the 34th and 91st Divisions. The enemy was being hit everywhere.

On the Eighth Army front, the 56th was advancing further toward Bastia; the 78th had crossed the Reno. In the south, too, the situation was loosening. The 2d New Zealand Div. under command of the 13th Corps, which had been shifted on the 13th-14th from left of 10th Corps to a position between the diverging 5th and Polish corps, was across the Sillaro in force. On the 17th the 78th Division established a position two miles north of Argenta. The Eighth Army was more than half way through the Argenta Gap. On the Eighth Army's left flank, the Poles were firing heavy artillery on the enemy in Bologna.

The enemy was forced from the Argenta Gap on the 18th.

On the north of the Eighth's front, the 78th and the 56th Divisions approached the Po Morto, over which the bridges had been blown. Of the three main Eighth Army spearheads, one had penetrated northwestward through the Argenta Gap, a second was north of Budrio, striking for the Idice line, and a third was dangerously close to Bologna.

Victory on the Horizon

The 20th was the day on which the approaching victory first appeared clearly in the distance. For days the Fifth Army had been fighting over rugged, heavily mined, strongly fortified terrain west and south of Bologna. On the 17th and 18th, Mt. Adone and Mt. Rumici, dominating the approaches to the city, had been taken by the 91st and 88th Divisions.

Then on the 20th, the 10th Mountain Division and the 1st Armored broke out of the Apennines onto the plain. The 10th cut Highway 9 between Bologna and Modena; and the 85th Division, part of which was now fighting beside the South Africans at the foot of the hills just west of Bologna, cut it again.

That night the Italian parachutists of No. 1 ISAS, were dropped far and wide behind the retreating German columns. They did a remarkable job killing and capturing over 1000 Germans.

About dawn of the 21st, troops of the Fifth and Eighth Armies entered Bologna simultaneously. The 91st and 34th Divisions broke into the city from the south, as the Italians of the Legnano Group and the Poles of the 3rd Carpathian Division entered from the southeast.

The first phase was over: Bologna was ours, the Fifth Army was in the Po Valley; the enemy's defense lines had been broken, and the Argenta Gap crossed.

But the enemy still fought stubbornly against the Eighth Army north of the Argenta area to prevent the juncture of our two Armies. However, the 6 British Armoured Division broke through on the 20th, and next day reached Poggio Renatico driving 10 Para Corps into the encircling arms of Fifth Army. On the 22nd Ferrara was in sight; on the 23rd Bondeno was captured, closing the trap on 7,000 prisoners.

Faster and faster was the advance. The enemy resisted with demolitions, a few strong points, and some mortar and artillery fire, but it was obvious that Col. Gen. Von Veitinghoff hoped to withdraw the bulk of his army across the Po River. He partly succeeded but thousands of his troops already were streaming southward, captive, along the same roads on which our two armies raced north. Others were surrounded. Large quantities of equipment and supplies had been abandoned. Planes pounded the enemy's troop concentrations and convoys, and attacked roads, bridges, and ferry sites from Mantua to the Adriatic. His burning vehicles lined the highways.

Phase II was complete; the breakthrough had been accomplished and the German Armies were hopelessly split and mauled.



« ...thousands of his troops already were streaming southward, captive »



Italian troops who participated in the capture of Bologna celebrate with music in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II.

The River is Crossed

Our troops and armor now moved so fast that headquarters often did not know their positions.

The Po was crossed by the 10th Mountain Division, just north of San Benedetto, on the 23d, after an advance of 75 miles in eight and a half days. The fall of Ferrara, Codigoro, and Modena was announced on a single day, the 24th. The first two were taken by the Eighth, Modena by the Fifth. On the west coast, La Spezia was captured by the 473d Infantry and Task Force Curtis.

Everywhere the fingers were spreading out. On the map the complex campaign was beginning to resemble a top-heavy hour-glass, with the waist at Bologna. But south of the Po east of Ferrara, 76 German Corps still fought on for another day, losing many prisoners.

The British and Americans were both largely across the Po on the 25th. The 88th Division shot northward and fought in the streets of Verona's outskirts. The 10th captured Villafranca airport before the Germans could destroy it, and swung toward Verona. South of the Po, the 34th, which had turned northwestward from Bologna along Highway 9, took Parma. On the west coast, the 370th reached Aulla, northeast of La Spezia, on Highway 63. The town was taken on the 26th by the 442d, while the 473d headed for Genoa, which both the 442d and 473d entered on the 27th. They bagged 9,000 PWs and a battery of 15-inch guns.



To the Allied Air Forces which hammered at the enemy week after week must go much of the credit for the final triumph.

The 91st and 88th by now had turned northeast, and, on the 26th the former cleared Legnago, northwest of Ferrara, and crossed the Adige. The 88th was along the river to the 91st's left and crossed in the night. Still further west was the 85th.

On the 27th, the 2d New Zealanders crossed the Adige north of Badia, while on the Fifth Army's side, the 34th thrust out to Piacenza, and the Brazilian Expeditionary Force southwest of Parma cut Route 62, last enemy escape road on the Ligurian coast. Above the Po, the 10th Mountain Division reached the east shore of Lake Garda and turned north; the 1st Armored, much farther west, sped 90 miles in twenty-four hours to capture Brescia, Bergamo, and Como, and cut off the escape routes from the west.

The 88th Division, on the 28th, captured Vicenza in a bitter fight. The 10th was fighting at the north end of Lake Garda, having bypassed blown tunnels in ducks and a schooner.

On the Eighth Army front, the 5th Corps' 56th and 8th Indian Divisions and the Cremona Group moved east of the Euganei Hills on the 29th. The 2d New Zealand Division entered Padua at 0100 that morning, Venice on the same day, and drove northeast, crossing the Piave next morning.

Victory

On the 30th of April, the Army Group Commander predicted the end. In response to an inquiry from the press he stated that our troops had so smashed the German Armies in Italy that they had been virtually eliminated as a military force — 25 German Divisions, some of the best in the German Army, had been torn to pieces and could no longer effectively resist our Armies.

On the west coast, the 442d had sped north from Genoa to Alessandria, taken it, and had occupied Cisa Pass, all on the 29th. The regiment then had swung northwest and entered Turin on the 30th. The 473d reached Savona, from which, on the 31st, it made contact at Noli with French troops from across the border.

Far to the east, the British 6th Armoured Division entered Udine on 1 May. The New Zealand division, advancing 75 miles on the 1st, met Tito's forces coming from the east. The New Zealanders had gone more than 200 miles in 23 days.

By 2 May, 15th Army Group's forces were strung out all over northwest, north, and northeast Italy. The country was entirely in our hands from Messina to the Brenner, from the French border to Trieste. The Germans, sliced, slashed, and battered into impotence, laid down their arms 2 May, adding 230,000 PWs to those already taken, and raising the total bag to between 600,000 and 900,000.

That summarized, was the 15th Army Group's victorious campaign. Fifth and Eighth Armies had fought together as parts of a single great fighting machine. Because of the complexity of their achievements, the role of each is told separately in some detail in the following pages.



« The 88th captured Vicenza in a bitter fight ».



LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR RICHARD L. MCCREERY, KCB, DSO, MBE, MC,
Commanding the Eighth Army.

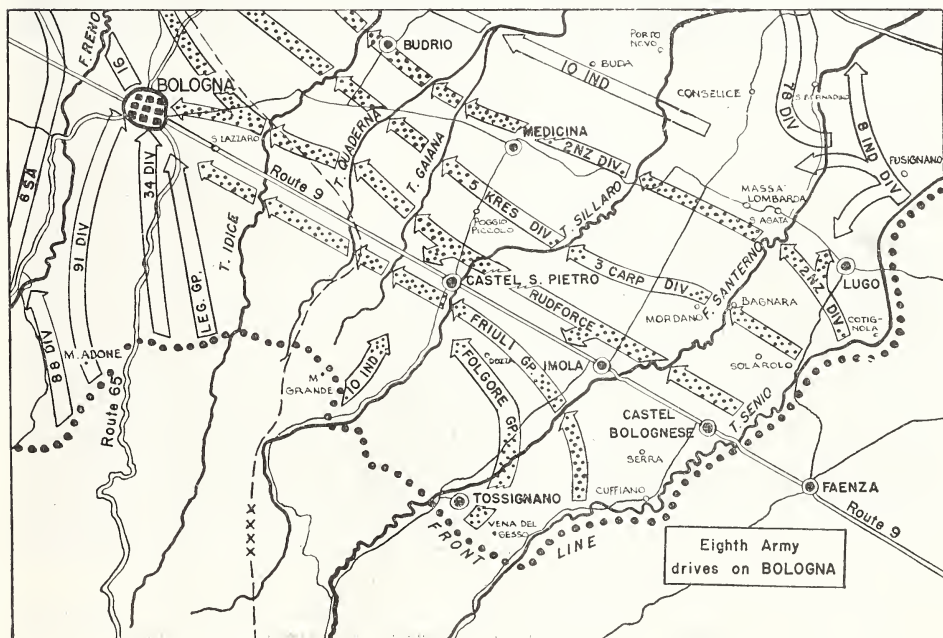
THE EIGHTH ARMY'S STORY

9th April, 1945

9th April on the eastern plains was warm and sunny. Among the patchwork of dykes, fields, ditches, and occasional cluster of red and white-walled houses, the bulk of Lt. General Sir R.L. McCreery's Eighth Army faced its old enemy for the last struggle.

The mountainous left flank was held by the 13th Corps under Lt. General Sir John Harding. 10th Corps, commanded by Lt. General J.L.I. Hawkesworth, joined its left flank to the 13th's right on the mountain ridge of Vena Del Gesso. Next in the battle-line stood the formidable 2nd Polish Corps under Major-General Bohusz-Szyszko, linking the Castel Bolognese area, along the line of the Senio, with the area south of Lugo. From the Lugo area to the southern shores of the Comacchio lagoon was aligned 5th Corps under Lt. General C. F. Keightley.

At 1400 hours 9th April, 1945 the blow fell.





« ...Vicious orange jets of Wasp carriers and the Assault Brigade's flame-throwing tanks... ». A Wasp supporting the New Zealanders on the Senio River.

Breaching the Senio

The Eighth Army's own Desert Air Force under Air Vice-Marshal R.M. Foster, with massive support by the XII Tactical Air Command, the 57th Bomb Wing, and 15th U.S. Air Force, battered enemy positions for over five hours.

At 1920 hours Eighth Army's 5th Corps on the right, and 2nd Polish Corps on the left, opened the vanguard assault for 15th Army Group.

Behind a shattering artillery bombardment which ploughed craters in the fields and flung up spouts of earth and red embers, battalions of the 8th Indian Division, 2nd New Zealand Division, and 3rd Carpathian Division, preceded by the vicious orange jets of Wasp carriers and the Assault Brigade's flame-throwing tanks, went in through drifting battlemoke and met fierce counter-fire from the outset.

By nightfall the 8th Indian Division had bitten a bridgehead 1,000 yards deep in the enemy's strong defences, and had four infantry companies across the Senio River. The New Zealand Division had four battalions across, and the iron trellis-work of Bailey bridging was swinging into place in the darkness.

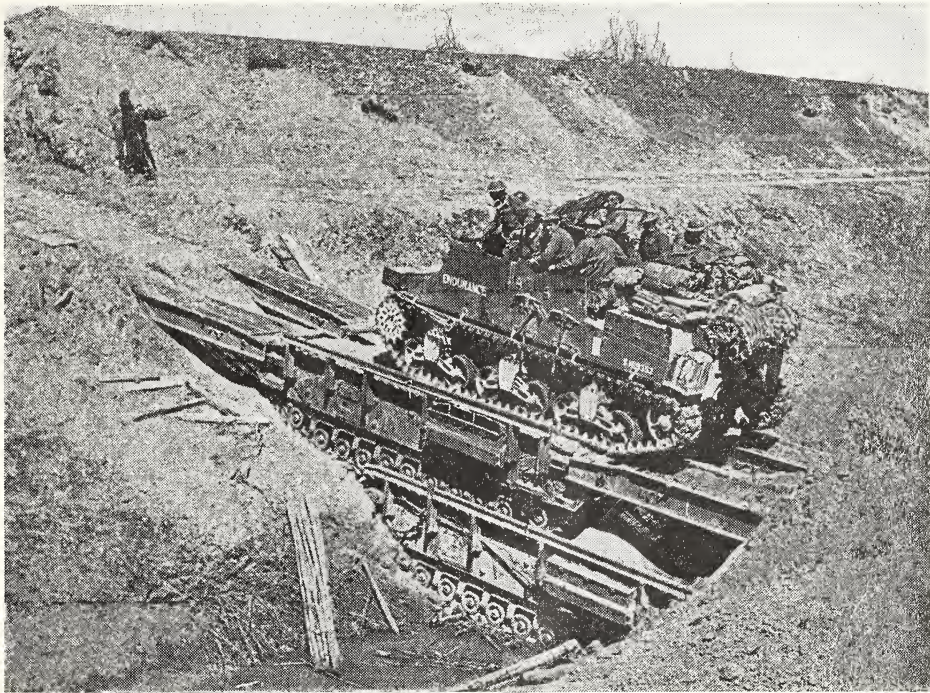
Meanwhile the 3rd Carpathian Division was grappling with heavy resistance. After ding-dong fighting two companies succeeded in crossing the river, but were

pinned down by intense enemy machinegun fire. A pitched battle continued both north and south of the river. Progress was delayed by mines and heavy shelling, but a battalion fought its way to the near floodbank and prepared to reinforce the existing bridgehead. A diversionary attack to assist the Division was launched by a composite Polish force known as Rudforce. It made progress against heavy shelling and mortaring, and positions on the near floodbank were finally consolidated.

The thunder of battle continued throughout a night of solid gains. The three bridgeheads were extended and linked up. Engineers toiled ceaselessly to span the river with Baileys. Before morning the enemy heard the rumble of our tanks on his side of the river.

The following morning, 10th April, again preceded by a heavy air assault and closely supported by tanks, the infantry pushed forward to the line of the Lugo Canal through the thick haze which overspread the battlefield.

By mid-day the 8th Indian Division and 2nd New Zealand Division had reached the Lugo Canal in strength, and, protecting the left flank of 5th Corps, the 3rd Carpathian Division kept abreast through light mortar fire. 1,200 prisoners had already passed into our cages. Air Observation pilots reported that the enemy had begun demolitions by wrecking six bridges in the area.



« ...The enemy's first river defence line had been chewed to pieces... ». Troops of 8th Indian Division cross the Senio River over an Ark.

Meanwhile, elements of the Cremona Combat Group in the north crossed the Senio, and against light opposition forged on towards the Fusignano Canal, capturing Alfonsine. In the south 10th Corps forced yet another crossing in the Cuffiano area.

The enemy's first river defence line had been chewed to pieces.

Breaching the Santerno

New Zealand troops attacked to cross the Lugo Canal soon after mid-day, 10th April, and the obstacle was soon breached. Their advance to the Santerno River, the enemy's second river defence line, was fiercely contested, and the enemy was severely mauled before the Kiwis reached their objective that evening.

8th Indian Division crossed the Lugo Canal, and forced its way against stubborn resistance to reach the Tratturo Canal before nightfall. The highlight of the day's fighting came in the afternoon when the 5th Battalion Royal West Kents cracked the defensive ring of strong points among the battered houses on the outskirts of Lugo. When the town was at last taken and left behind, a deserted air hung over gaunt streets veiled in dust-haze and strewn with rubble.

Farther south, battalions of the 3rd Carpathian Division were locked in some of the hardest fighting of the whole front.

They hacked their way over shell-blown roads and tracks to take the town of Solarolo after bitter house-to-house battles. Units of the 2nd Carpathian Brigade finally reached the Lugo Canal and succeeded in capturing a bridge intact.

During the night 8th Indian Division forced a crossing of the Tratturo, which had been prepared as the enemy's main stopline between the Senio and Santerno Rivers, against the weighty opposition of infantry and Tiger tanks. The 2nd New Zealand Division consolidated its positions along the Santerno, while Polish troops began to close in on the town of Bagnara.

By now the enemy had received a grim foretaste of what was coming to him. His outlook was further darkened in the early hours of the morning of the 11th. From the bridgehead north of the Reno already won by 167 Bde of 56 (London) Division on 6-7 April, No. 40 Commando waded and walked to Menate along the bank separating the Lake from the floods. They were soon joined by 169 (Queens) Bde who assaulted in Fantails over the desolate flood lands and captured Langostrino, 4 miles behind the enemy's front. Heavy fighting brought in 150 prisoners and by next day 56 Division were nearly up to Filo. The enemy reacted strongly, for this was a direct threat to Bastia, to Argenta and to Ferrara.

To the south the enemy was preparing to fight desperately for the line of the Santerno River. Heavy shelling from his gun positions over the far bank began soon after dawn. During the morning, tanks and anti-tank guns were reported opposite our positions all along the river front between San Agate and Mordano.

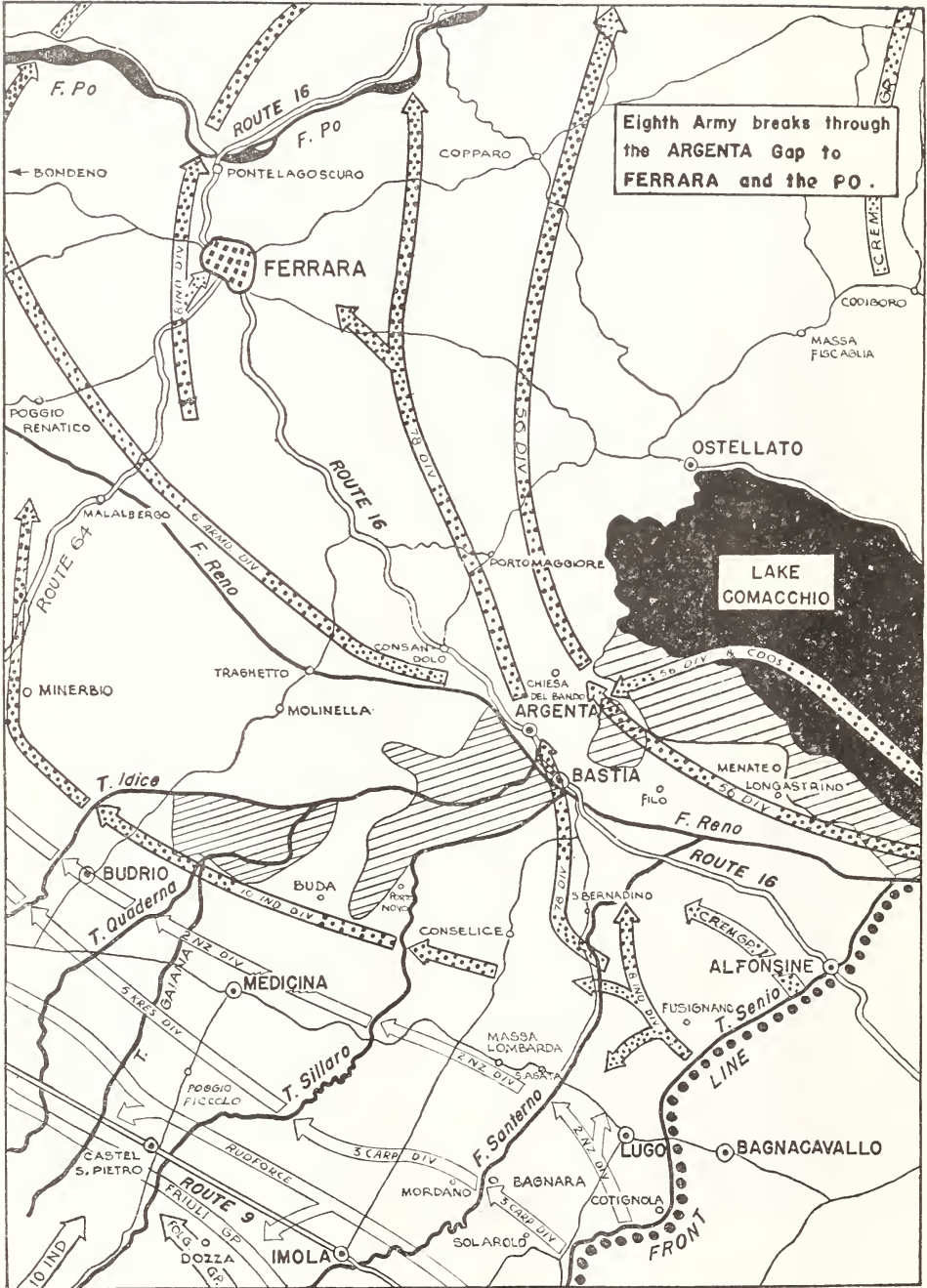
Soon after 0800 hours 11th April, the 3rd Carpathian Division on the heels of the enemy retreating to the Santerno, seized Bagnara and pressed on against machine-gun and mortar fire from over the river. 8th Indian Division brushed aside light resistance and reached the Santerno in the San Bernardino area, then drove northward to mop up scattered infantry posts, self-propelled guns, and tanks.



Tanks moving up in support of 56 Division.



The 15th Army Group Commander, General Clark, inspecting Indian Army troops just before the battle.



On the left flank in the mountains 13th and 10th Corps began to press forward. Preceded by sharp patrol clashes, these diverse forces of British, Jewish, Italian, and Indian Army troops, advanced over mined mountain roads against the enemy's flank as he was forced to fall back from the dangerous pocket southeast of Imola being created by the Polish thrust. This advance took Tassignano, captured by Italian troops, and also Borgo Tossignano and the Gesso Ridge.

Between the Senio and Santerno Rivers the flat countryside was beginning to show the ravages of battle. Here and there were farmhouses with gaping holes in their walls, and collapsed rafters athwart the upper windows. Other dwellings were huge piles of shattered brickwork with, perhaps, a gaunt piece of wall still standing on the edge of the ruins. On the patched, shell-blown roads were deep furrows and undulations from the passage of transport and tanks; the dust lay in deep grey ridges, rose to fill the air, and covered hedges and trees with a mantle of drabness.

The battle for the Santerno crossings maintained its high pitch throughout the afternoon and evening. The caked ground trembled from the recoil and impact of artillery and mortar fire; the rattle of spandau and machine-gun scarcely ceased; infantrymen toiled with their folding boat equipment on the river bank, while Spitfires and Mustangs weaved in strafing sorties over the enemy's positions. Heavy



« ...Over mined mountain roads... ». Indian Army troops of the 10th Indian Division move up.



« ...The commitment of the 78th Division... ». Men of the 1st East Surreys work their way through a ruined town.

fighting against infantry and tanks continued through a starlit night. Counter-attacks pressed home by Tiger tanks were repulsed, and by morning of 12th April, the 8th Indian, 2nd New Zealand, and 3rd Carpathian Divisions all had battalions across the river.

The situation was favorable for the commitment of the 78th Division from 5th Corps reserve. The division moved up through the northern part of the bridgehead towards Bastia with the object of producing a local pincer movement in conjunction with 56th Division attacking westward.

At dawn on 12th April the Polish Rudforce attacking up the important Route 9, captured Castel Bolognese from a strong German rearguard after a period of hard fighting. The bravery of Polish infantry contrasted strangely with their quiet demeanor and courtesy when resting or waiting in the shade of hedges on the battlefield.

During the morning the Cremona Combat Group launched an attack supported by artillery fire, and by 1000 hours forward troops were along the Canale di Fosignano.

During the day 8th Indian, 2nd New Zealand, and 3rd Carpathian Divisions, using Arks, Baileys, and rafts, crossed the Santerno with infantry and tanks, and

repulsed heavy counter-attacks. On the Army's mountainous left flank 10th and 13th Corps pushed forward 4,000 yards against wilting enemy resistance. In the late afternoon the 3rd Carpathian Division launched an attack which carried Polish troops into Mordano before nightfall.

At this juncture the 8th Indian Division, after splendid work in the spearhead of the initial attack, had completed its primary task, and concentrated in the area northeast of Massa Lombarda.

The Sillaro crossings and the Capture of Imola

The advance was gathering momentum. Two of the enemy's main river defence lines, the Senio and Santerno Rivers, were broken. On the right, the threat to the Argenta Gap was growing. On the left, the Polish Rudforce battled its way along Route 9 towards Imola. In the mountains the Fifth Army anxiously watched the Eighth Army's progress, and waited impatiently for the word « go ».

Gains limited when viewed on the map, but impressive in achievement, maintained the spirit and humour of the hard-fighting troops. In the midst of battle they found time to snatch a drink of « vino » from well-wishers in villages through which they passed; while one enterprising — and perspiring — Tommy, careering after his advancing comrades in a jeep, paused to book a room for his



*« ...The flooded south-western shores of the Comacchio lagoon... ».
Commandos moving up.*

next short leave, with disconcerted citizens whose liberation was scarcely thirty minutes old.

In the bleak early dawn of 0630 on 13th April, 56th Division's 24th Guards Brigade in conjunction with Commandos, landed on the flooded south-western shores of the Comacchio lagoon, in yet another amphibious assault behind the enemy's forward positions on that flank. A wave of 1st Battalion Buffs met raking fire from spandaus and SP Guns, but succeeding waves landed elsewhere to cut the Menate-Porto Maggiore road.

78th Division was now attacking strongly about twelve miles to the west. The 6th Battalion Royal West Kents fought their way into Conselice, and by noon penned the enemy in the northern half of the town. Three counter-attacks with tanks against the left flank of our attacking troops were repulsed after bitter fighting.

The 2nd New Zealand Division fanned out steadily north and north-west of Massa Lombarda. Farther south Polish troops closed in on Imola. Patrols of 10th Corps' Friuli Combat Group were at grips with the enemy three miles from the city.

By this time the enemy pocket south-east of Imola had been eliminated, and a reduced number of troops were required on the Eighth Army's left flank. General McCreery therefore made readjustments. The Folgore Combat Group came under the command of 10th Corps. The 10th Indian Division moved to a new sector on the right of the 2nd New Zealand Division in the Lugo area; and the 2nd New Zealand and 10th Indian divisions now constituted 13th Corps' command. 13 Corps was directed towards Budrio on the right flank of 2 Polish Corps to maintain the pressure on the retreating enemy and to prevent him slipping away. This freed 5 Corps to concentrate solely on the Argenta Gap Battle.

At dawn 14th April, the 2nd New Zealand Division attacked over the Sillaro against tanks and small arms fire, and by mid-day was firmly across with two infantry battalions and two squadrons of armour.

It was hard to realise that these relentless fighters were the soul of natural friendliness out of the battle-line, — from the officer who broke off a stern argument with civilians to inquire, chattily, the latest «griff» from a passing Tommy, to the outraged tank man who deprecatingly chewed gum while the luckless driver of a 15 cwt. ripped the side of his truck along the tank track.

On the right of the 2nd New Zealand Division resistance in Conselice finally crumbled, and the troops of the 78th Division occupied the shattered town. Along Route 9, the Poles executed an outflanking movement which caused the enemy line to sag, and the 7th and 8th battalions of the 4th Wolynska Brigade surged into Imola, biggest prize yet in the Eighth Army's offensive.

Late in the day, news filtered through to the Eighth Army's dust-ridden battle-lines that the Fifth Army had launched their attack against the Bologna defences. The left arm of the pincers had begun to reach out.

Without pause after the capture of Imola, Polish troops swept on through enemy rearguard actions, crossed the Sellustra River without a check, and by evening of 15th April were closing in on Castel San Pietro. Fanning out from a Sillaro bridge captured intact, the 5th Kresowa Division advanced against the severe resistance of German paratroops.

Fighting through floods and minefields, the 56th and 78th Divisions ploughed to within a mile of Bastia. The enemy was trying desperately to hold this vital

hinge. During the night the 2nd New Zealand Division, attacking from their Sillaro bridgehead, took 150 prisoners, and knocked out 8 tanks.

On 16th April, 10th Indian Division in its new sector reached the Sillaro with 1st Battalion Durham Light Infantry. Elements of the 2nd Polish Corps, closing in on Medicina from the south through the twilight, saw flames licking up through a pall of smoke overhanging the town. The British 14/20 Hussars, and the 2/6 Gurkhas of the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Infantry Brigade, attached to the Polish corps, fought their way in and found that the enemy had fired the town before his retreat.

The achievements of the 2nd Polish Corps during the first week of the battle were praised by General McCreery in a personal message to Major-General Bohusz-Szyszko.

On 17th April, 56th Division stormed the Marina Canal due east of Argenta. 78th Division attacked over the Canal abreast of Argenta, and south-west along the Reno, meeting heavy fire from the strongly held railway station on the outskirts. On this sector one of the enemy's finest formation, the 29th Panzer Grenadiers, committed from the reserve in a desperate attempt to stem our advance, suffered heavy casualties.

10th Indian Division, having crossed the Sillaro, closed in on Portonovo and Buda; while the 2nd New Zealand Division in a sweeping advance along the Medicina - Budrio Railway, reached the Gaiana River to find the enemy in strength on the far bank.

The 2nd Polish Corps crossed the Medicina Canal, and after stiff fighting the 5th Wilenska Brigade captured Poggio Piccolo south-west of Medicina. The Polish troops pressed on to storm the Gaiana River. At 1800 hours the 9th Polish Heavy Artillery Regiment opened long-range fire on the enemy in Bologna.

In the mountains to the southwest, Fifth Army troops had battled their way to within eight miles of the city.

Through the Argenta Gap

On 18th April, in the Argenta Gap, 56th Division forged its way over a network of drainage canals, ditches, and flooded fields, to Chiesa Del Bando. In the 78th Division sector, Boccaleone was cleared after fierce street fighting. 8th Battalion Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders began mopping up in Consandolo to the north-west. 5th Battalion Northants finally crushed resistance in Argenta. Bastia, previously by-passed, had succumbed to the 78th Division. Tanks and self-propelled guns were captured intact, in some cases with exhausted, battle-weary crews asleep beside them.

The morale of the Eighth Army's troops was high and steady. There was the story of the infantry platoon besieged in a machine-gunned, shell-rocked house, listening-in to dance tunes from New York on the operational wireless set which had failed to contact their company headquarters. Then the infantryman who, left to guard two corpses by the roadside, watched the plodding work of an artillery signaller laying telephone line, and said finally: « Blimey, you've got a rotten job, ain't you? ».



«...The gate to Ferrara was ajar...». Lancashire Fusiliers of 78th Division, supported by tanks, move up on the road to Ferrara.

In a message to the Eighth Army Commander, General Mark W. Clark congratulated all ranks on their achievements in the offensive. From Burma came congratulations from the Army's old commander, General Sir Oliver Leese.

The liberated Italian populace was reacting with remarkable enthusiasm. Armed partisans, secretly supplied by our Air Force during the winter, sprang

to our aid from every village and town. Retreating Germans were rounded up and handed over to our troops in scores. Tears, flowers, wine, food, and even offers to wash and darn our laundry, greeted us on every hand.

The intensified efforts of 5th Corps reached a peak during the 18th and 19th April. The enemy was finally forced from the Argenta Gap, and the gate to Ferrara was ajar. But though fanning out in the open country beyond, 56th and 78th divisions had yet to overcome canals, strong-points and defence posts against considerable opposition. The 2nd Battalion London Irish Rifles, with units of the 56th Recce Regiment drove the Germans from Porto Maggiore after street-to-street battles.

The Po crossings were now within range of the Eighth Army's guns; and it was during this week, 17th to 24th April, that almost the entire weight of the Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force was thrown upon the enemy escape routes across the Po River.

From its concentration area south-east of Bastia, the 6th Armoured Division, from Army reserve, began to move through the gap to push the door wide open. Meanwhile away to the south-west the 2nd New Zealand Division stormed the Gaiana crossings during the night in the face of vicious fire from dug in positions on the floodbanks, and swept on to cross the Quaderna against heavy resistance from German paratroops, many of whom died fighting at their posts rather than surrender or retreat.

Crossing the Quaderna over the New Zealand division's bridge, 10th Indian Division pushed northwest towards the Idice River under heavy machine-gun fire from both banks. Preceded by a massive artillery bombardment the 2nd Polish Corps crossed the Gaiana, and the ensuing struggle to cross the Quaderna was marked by some of the heaviest fighting of the offensive, and grimly illumined by a pitched battle between flame throwing tanks. The Polish troops took over 200 prisoners and themselves suffered heavy casualties.

Bologna falls

On the 20th of April, the 2nd New Zealand division cleared Budrio and swept on to the Idice, where infantry smashed spandau nests and struggled on over mines and wire on both floodbanks to force a crossing.

In the Polish sector the core of the enemy resistance was now broken. A squadron of Carpathian Lancers secured a firm bridgehead over the Idice. 10th Corps reached the Quaderna, where, in fierce fighting, Italian troops drove back the German paratroopers.

On 21st April, 5th Corps' 28th Garibaldi Brigade of partisans captured Comacchio and San Giuseppe. 56th Division had reached Medelana overnight and, clearing it later, went on to capture Corezzio after stiff fighting. Veering north-east along the northern shores of the Comacchio lagoon our troops entered Ostellato.

8th Indian Division, once more committed, came in between the 78th and 6th Armoured Divisions to advance on Ferrara astride the River Primaro. 6th Armoured Division broke through the struggling enemy line through a tiny gap



«...The 2nd Polish Corps swept on to its greatest triumph...». The Polish flag is raised over Bologna.

between the Reno and a canal northwest of Traghetti, and they quickly reached Poggio Renatico well in the enemy's rear. 10th Indian Division weathered a night of heavy fighting before Punjab and Gurkha troops crossed the Idice. Overnight, the 2nd New Zealand Division also crossed the Idice with infantry and tanks on a two brigade front against opposition that was now staggering before repeated hammer blows.

Farther south the 2nd Polish Corps swept on to its greatest triumph. Driving across the Idice the Polish troops cleared San Lazzaro, overran wavering enemy

resistance, and entered Bologna on 21st April against slight sniper opposition, at the same time that Fifth Army troops were entering from the south. Troops of both armies exchanged greetings in the centre of the city amid scenes of indescribable enthusiasm.

The Enemy is routed

With Eighth and Fifth Army troops in Bologna, and 5 Corps streaming through the Argenta Gap, Phase I of General Clark's plan was completed. Phase II turned out to be a headlong pursuit; Phase III was a pushover.

The Eighth Army now pushed on for Ferrara and Bondeno to meet Fifth Army. On 22nd April, the 28th Garibaldi Brigade of partisans pushed on over roads only a few feet above surrounding floods and began fighting in Codigoro. 56th and 78th Division had advanced rapidly overnight to the Po di Volano and forced a bridgehead. By 1800 hours both 8th Indian and 78th Divisions were engaged with the enemy one and a half miles from Ferrara airfield.

6th Armoured Division, in their lunge to Poggio Renatico, had snapped a vital line of enemy communications by cutting the Bologna-Ferrara Railway twenty miles from Bologna. Pushing on to Bondeno and sending elements to Finale — significant name! — the Division drove 7,000 prisoners into the arms of advancing



« ...6th Armoured Division had snapped a vital line of enemy communications... ».
The 6th Armoured Brigade moves forward to the attack.



« ...Elements of the 8th Indian Division swept on to the River Po... ». Mahrattas go over the top of the Po bank.

Fifth Army troops, only eight miles away. The jaws of the pincers were closing fast. 10th Indian Division, with the advance of 6th Armoured Division across its sector, had completed its task, and concentrated in an area north of Minerbio.

The 2nd New Zealand Division, bypassing San Giorgio and making contact with Fifth Army troops, overran enemy rearguards and plunged ahead.

On reaching Castel Maggiore, the 2nd Polish Corps was drawn into Army reserve. In twelve days of continuous fighting the Poles had fought troops of the 26th Panzer Division, 1st and 4th Paratroop Divisions, old enemies of the Cassino battle. 10th Corps, after invaluable achievements by the Jewish Brigade, and the Friuli and Folgore Combat Groups, also passed into reserve.

On the 23rd April, 56th Division cleared Massa Fiscaglia and Copparo, and overcame all opposition in Formignana. Elements of the 8th Indian Division swept on to the River Po. In the dust-haze on the outskirts of Ferrara, factories, houses, engineering plant, collapsed in ruins and tangled metal under artillery bombardment.

The Mediterranean Air Force, which had been attacking the enemy's retreating columns throughout the battle, had destroyed and damaged hundreds of vehicles. The destruction of the enemy's equipment and the slaughter of his troops at the Po crossings mounted hourly.

On the 24th April, the 1st Battalion Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders finally cleared Ferrara.

The situation was now as follows. The enemy were in some strength south of the Po east of Ferrara and fully occupying 5 Corps. But west of Ferrara and east of Bondeno the way was clear, so it was decided to cross the Po here while 5 Corps was still hammering away. Accordingly 13 Corps took over 6 Armoured Division and swung north to cross the Po with 2 New Zealand Division on the left and 6 Armoured Division on the right. Bridges were rushed up.

By 1400 hours the 2nd New Zealand Division had forward troops on the Isola Tontola in the Po River. The remaining enemy territory south of the Po in 5 Corps' sector, and the last escape corridor for five divisions, was now only 5,000 yards deep and being steadily compressed.

By morning of 25th April, the 6th Armoured Division had a secure bridgehead across the Po. The Division revealed later that the total enemy forces opposing its crossing consisted of fourteen men, ten of whom were killed and the remaining four taken prisoner.

27th Lancers captured the Commander of the German 76th Panzer Corps, who said there was nothing left in front of 5th Corps. Well over 12,000 prisoners had now been taken by Eighth Army, and on the Polish front alone more than 1,500 enemy dead had been counted.



« ...Well over 12,000 prisoners had now been taken by Eighth Army... ».

Fantastic stories of advance and liberation were now coming in. Headquarters of formations were moving up in front of everything but front-line infantry. The enemy was retreating so quickly that in some cases the inhabitants of liberated villages asked our arriving troops why they hadn't come sooner! Partisans rendered invaluable assistance to our troops by preventing the destruction of bridges and key facilities as well as by harassing the enemy columns.

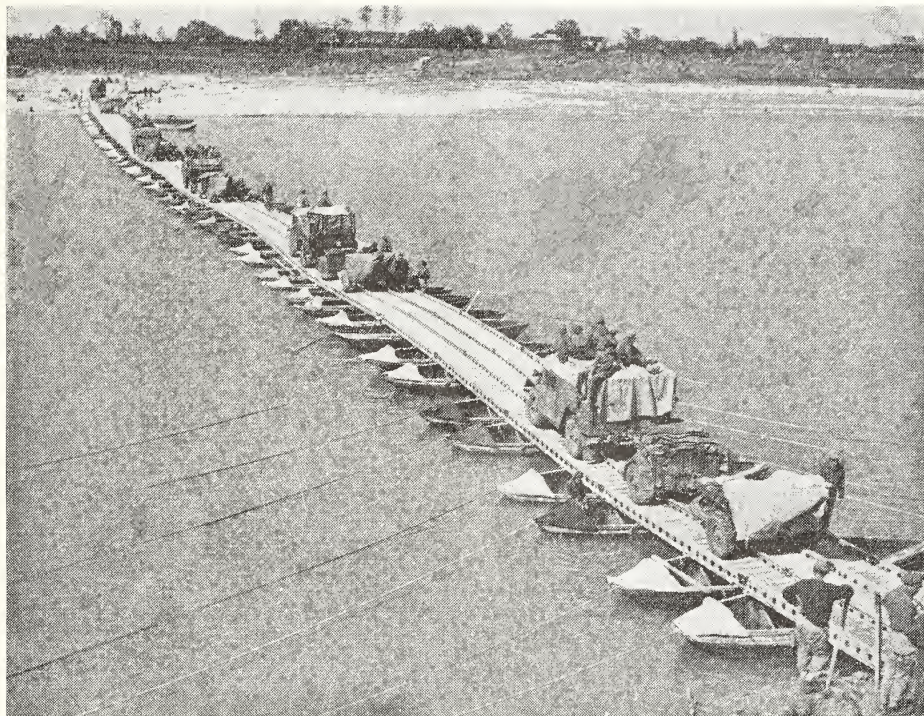
The 2nd New Zealand Division crossed the Po with infantry and tanks and raced on to the Adige, a fast-flowing river and a formidable obstacle between 100 and 200 yards wide.

To the west the Fifth Army was across the Po on a broad front, with other divisions racing north-westward.

The battle had now entered into the exploitation stage of Phase III in General Clark's plan.



« ...The 2nd New Zealand Division crossed the Po with infantry... ».



This pontoon bridge across the Po is 620 feet long, and was built by Eighth Army engineers in twelve hours.

The End

The plight of the German Army on the 27th April was desperate.

The next day, 28th April, following a major engineering feat by the Royal Engineers, the Eighth Army crossed the Adige and advanced on a broad front. On the 29th April, the 43rd Gurkha Brigade, now under 13th Corps, cleared Padua after fighting which reduced the outskirts of the city to rubble, and took a thousand prisoners including the Military Commander. Troops of the 2nd New Zealand Division captured Mestre, on the mainland opposite Venice, and a few hours later were sweeping along the broad causeway over the deep-blue waters of the Venetian lagoon to the city, which they found in the hands of Partisans. They were soon joined by 56 Division and by Popski's Private Army which had come by jeep and Army-manned landing craft up the coast capturing Chioggia on the way.

On the 30th April the 56th Division took over Venice. On 1st May, elements of 6th Armoured Division entered Udine. That night the 2nd New Zealand Division advanced 75 miles to link up with forces of Marshal Tito advancing from the east.

At last the German Army in Italy, cut to pieces, dazed and despairing, could stand no more. The German Commander-in-Chief surrendered.



LIEUTENANT GENERAL LUCIAN K. TRUSCOTT,
Commanding the Fifth Army.

THE FIFTH ARMY'S STORY

14 April 1945

The attack of the Fifth Army started at 0945 of 14 April, on the same day that the Eighth Army's 2d New Zealand Division crossed the Sillaro River. It was launched some twenty miles southwest of Bologna, just west of Highway 64, in Major-General Willis D. Crittenger's IV Corps sector.

For forty minutes, Spitfires, Thunderbolts and Liberators had wheeled and dived among the hills and on the valley towns, through 200-foot columns of smoke of their own raising. « Give 'em hell », muttered the infantry.

Before the planes had fired their last rockets or dropped their last oil bombs, artillerymen pulled the lanyards for the first few probing shots of a barrage from hundreds of guns that totaled 33,400 rounds by nightfall. One early round hit squarely on a mountain's conical peak. The figure of a man appeared, staggered and vanished in the smoke. One German OP knocked out. A grey haze — the smoke of our own guns — hung over our lines; puffy, white clouds, then a fog of white, grey and black, over the enemy's. Nazi strongpoints in the valley disintegrated in flashes fractions of a second apart. The artillery — everything from 75's to 240's — and the guns of tanks and TD's hit anything the planes had missed.

Then the infantry, tense and silent, moved out. The crack of rifles, the rattle of machine guns, the whirr of burp guns, filled the artillery's momentary silences. The enemy was firing from the rubble of his strongpoints.

The 1st Armored Division rumbled north on the left of Highway 64 toward Vergato and Mt. Pero. The Brazilian Expeditionary Force moved against Montese. The 10th Mountain Division pushed forward from Castel D'Aiano across a valley studded with Teller mines, Schu mines and the glass-topped Topf mines that fooled the mine-detectors.

Resistance everywhere was deadly — with the mines worst of all. In one area, the terrain around every house was mined for a hundred yards, and every house held German riflemen. At Vergato, the mines were weighed, not counted. The engineers who dug them out, under fire, reported there were many tons.

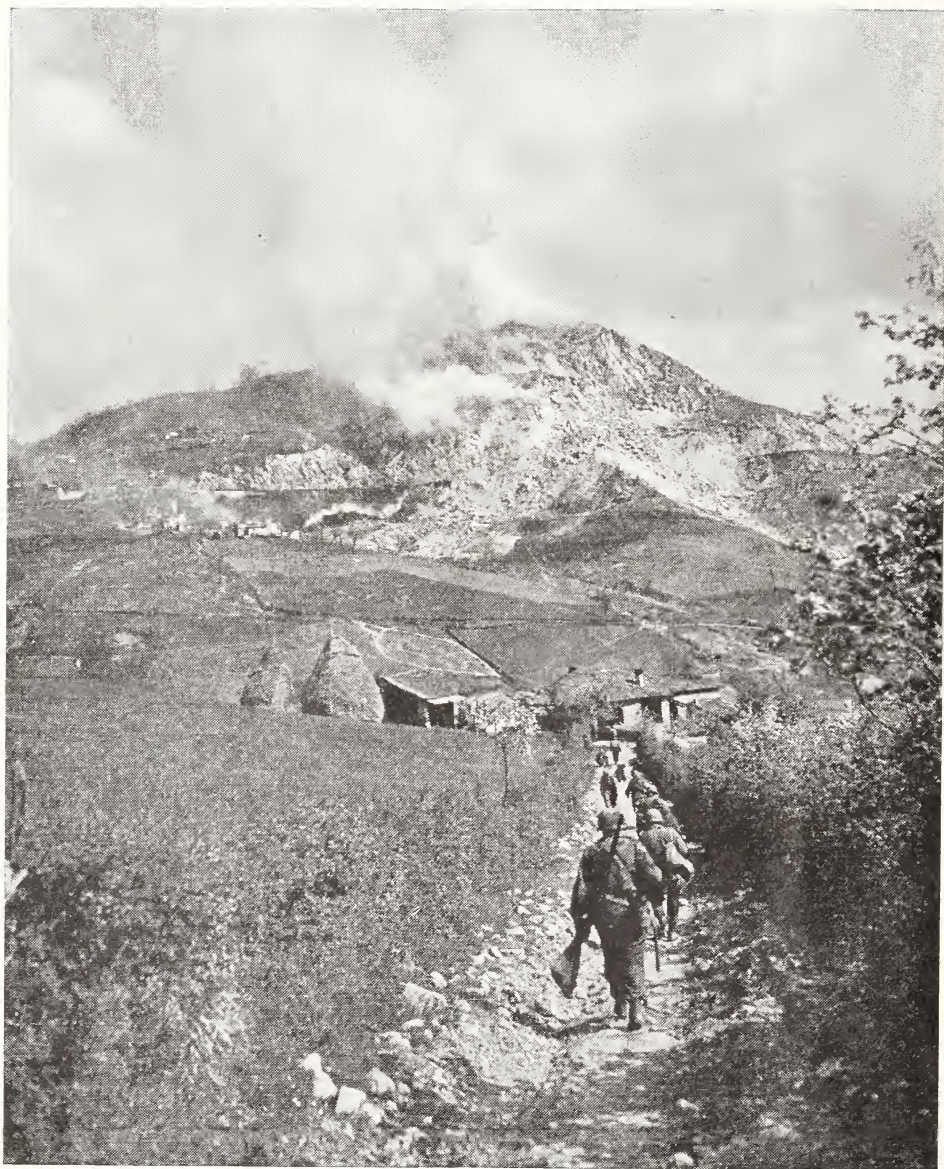
The mines forced development of a new pioneer technique. A road cutoff was needed. A corporal drove his jeep across the area's green fields. Nothing blew up, so the engineers taped off that zone.

Road junction 711 was not only mined, but zeroed in, and quickly earned the title, « Hell's Corner ». One passed there on the double — if one passed at all. Vehicles that hadn't done so littered the wayside.

By dusk the 10th Mountain Division had taken four heavily-defended towns, the bare stone pyramid of 2,889-foot Rocca di Roffeno and the two-mile length of Roffeno ridge. Prisoners numbered a few hundreds the first day. They were young, tough and defiant.

Fighting continued through the night and the next day. By evening of the 15th, the 1st Armored was in Vergato. A few shattered walls still stood.

The Brazilians, who had cleared Montese, captured Hills 778 and 927, under heavy mortar and artillery fire; the 10th, Mt. Mantino and smaller knobs.



« ...With the mines worst of all ». Engineers clear a path. This platoon was in front of the infantry but didn't know it.



« The artillery... hit anything the planes had missed ». Scene: Roffeno Musiola.



« The Brazilians... cleared Montese ». BEF engineers sweep for mines after hard-fought battle.

II Corps Strikes

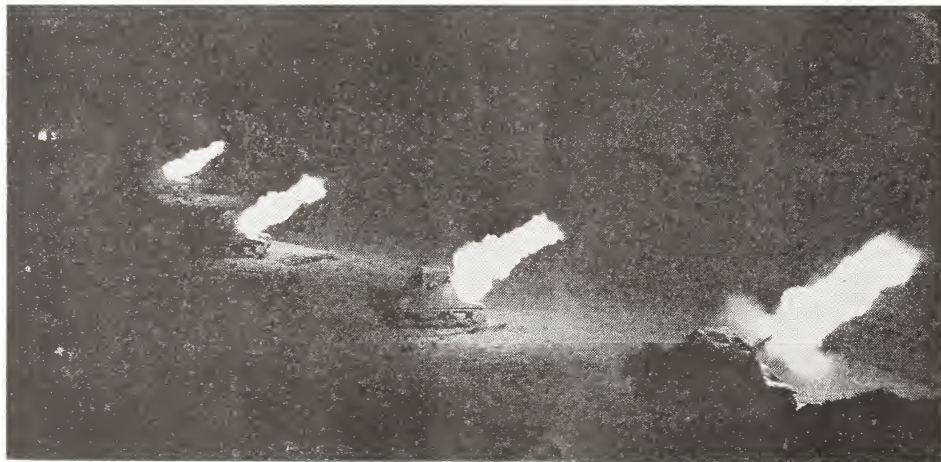
The night of the 15th, at 1030 o'clock, the rest of the Fifth Army front erupted. The sky, lit faintly by a crescent moon and more strongly by the blue fingers of huge searchlights, suddenly glowed with artillery fireworks. Again tanks, TDs and 4.2's supplemented field pieces. Seventy-five thousand rounds were fired in 30 minutes. The ground shook for miles.

When the barrage eased, the 6th Armoured South African and the American 88th divisions of Lieutenant General Geoffrey Keyes' II Corps pushed forward on the right of IV Corps. The South Africans advanced over mine fields, captured important Mt. Sole, and held it against two counter-attacks; one regiment reached Caprara. The 88th gained more than 500 yards under deadly machine gun fire.

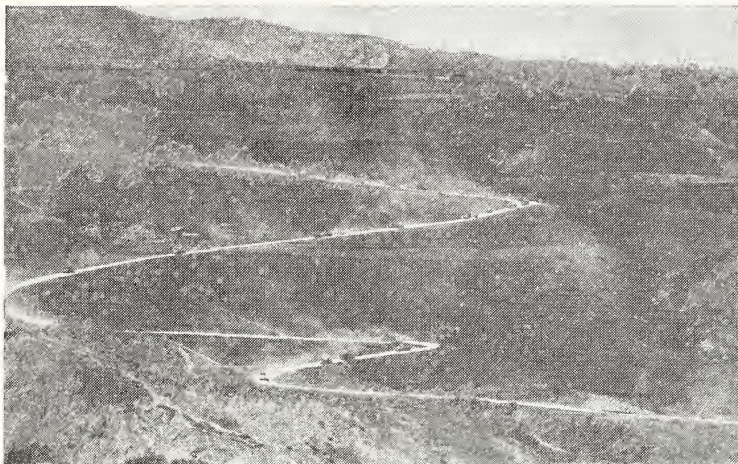
At 3 AM of the 16th II Corps struck another blow. The 91st Division and the 34th, veteran of three Volturno crossings, the Anzio beachhead and the drive to the Arno, rose out of their foxholes on the right of the 88th. Their advance was slow at first, with opposition intense.

The 34th spent its 500th day of combat fighting hand-to-hand for a church near Gorgognana, about 1,000 yards northeast of Mt. Belmonte. It took the place near nightfall.

That day and the next — the 16th and the 17th — the 10th Mountain fought its way into the rubble of Tole, beyond to Mt. Mosca, where it repelled 10 counter-attacks, and then on to Mt. Moscoso and the high ground overlooking Montepastore, 11 miles southwest of Bologna. The 1st Armored captured Mt. Pero and Mt. Radicchio, then swung northeast to conquer Mt. Milano, three miles beyond Vergato, and Mt. d'Avigo, 2,000 yards east of Highway 64. The 6th South African took Mt. Abelle despite its pillboxes and trenches.



« The night of the 15th... the rest of the Fifth Army front erupted ». Tanks of the 6th South African Armoured Division fire a mission.



« Miles of tanks, trucks and mules now choked the tightwound mountain roads ». Scene: Montepastore.



10th Mountain Division mule takes a break when the boss does.

Miles of tanks, trucks, mules and marching men now choked the tight-wound mountain roads designed for ox-drawn wine carts. Clouds of blinding, smarting dust masked the troop in grayish green.

The Road to Bologna

Along Highway 65, the Germans contested the advance on Bologna from tunnels, caves and concrete pillboxes on steep slopes. Selfpropelled guns, small arms, machine guns and mortars poured fire on the 88th, 91st and 34th.

The 17th and 18th were days for the 88th and 91st to remember. On the 17th, the 88th captured Mt. Rumici, 1900-foot peak 3,000 yards west of Highway 65; the 91st was surrounding Mt. Adone, which is north of Rumici and a little higher. On the 18th the 91st planted the American flag atop Mt. Adone and continued northward along a ridge for two miles to capture Mt. dei Frati. The 34th, on the right, took Poggio dei Mori in bitter fighting.

The defenses of Bologna had suffered a smashing blow. Rumici and Adone, dominating the valleys of the Sevenna and Setta Rivers and two main roads into



*« The Germans contested the advance on Bologna from tunnels, caves... ».
Scene: Mt. Rumici.*



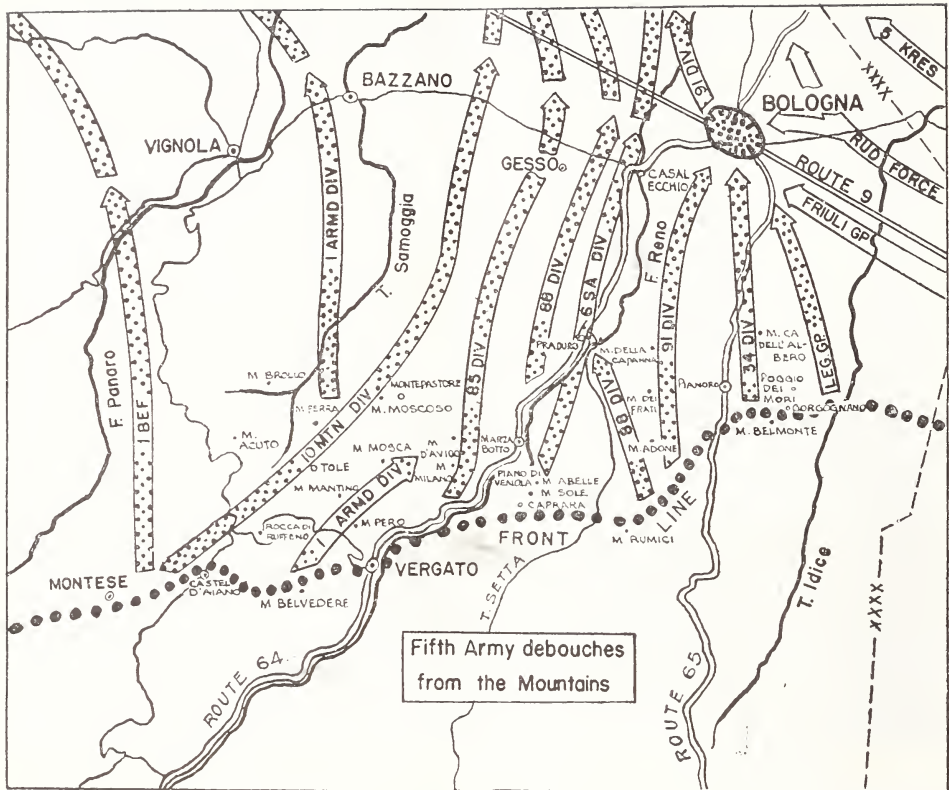
« Gen. Truscott threw in... the 85th... ». Scene: Riale.

Bologna (Nos. 65 and 65A) were the highest peaks that had stood between the Fifth Army and the Po Valley.

These were no ordinary victories for the 91st and the 88th; they avenged a grudge. All winter the enemy, looking down from the heights had made their lives miserable, and death no novelty. Now they were looking down on the enemy.

On other divisional sectors, the advance was progressing. At 0100 hours on the 18th, General Truscott threw into the fight the 85th Division, which had been in Army reserve. It went in on the left of the South Africans, relieving part of the 1st Armored, and drove rapidly along the road between Piano di Venola and Marzabotto. The 1st Armored moved northward from Mt. Ferra, under heavy shelling, and sent another column west toward Mt. Brollo. The 6th South African Armored Division, meeting lighter resistance than at Mt. Abelle, captured three more mountains.

This same day, on the Eighth Army front, the enemy was forced from the Argenta Gap, and the Poles were firing their heavy artillery on the enemy in Bologna.



On the 19th, the 6th South Africans of II Corps crossed the Reno, and the 88th swung over to the South Africans' left. The 85th took over the rest of the 1st Armored's old sector, while the 1st Armored spread west and northwest of the Samoggia River. The 10th Mountain Division shot ahead to within four miles of Route 9 in the Po Valley.

On the morning of the 20th, scouts of the leading company of the 10th Mountain Division stepped onto the Po Valley flatlands at Gesso. At 1030 the company was astride Highway 9 between Bologna and Modena. It was digging in when the 85th Division reached the road just to the east.

The Fifth Army was out of the Apennines.

« Hell's Bells! Paved roads! » exclaimed men who had seen nothing but mountains and frozen, muddy or dusty trails since their arrival in Italy.

The drive on Bologna was going well. The Germans had rushed cooks, drivers, and quartermasters into the fight, but the 34th had taken Mt. Cadell Albero; the 91st, Mt. della Capanna; the 88th, Mt. Torrone. Casalecchio, three miles west of Bologna, had been captured after sharp fighting involving the South Africans and parts of the 85th. All the high ground before Bologna had been cleared.

Bologna falls

Bologna fell on the morning of the 21st. Simultaneously, the Fifth and Eighth Armies entered the city. The Fifth was represented by the 34th and 91st Divisions and by the Legnano Combat Group; the Eighth by the Polish troops, who had fought their way up Highway 9 from the southeast.

Most of the enemy had departed the night before. The liberators had little to do but submit to the embraces of the liberated. The 34th — old hands — drew the assignment.

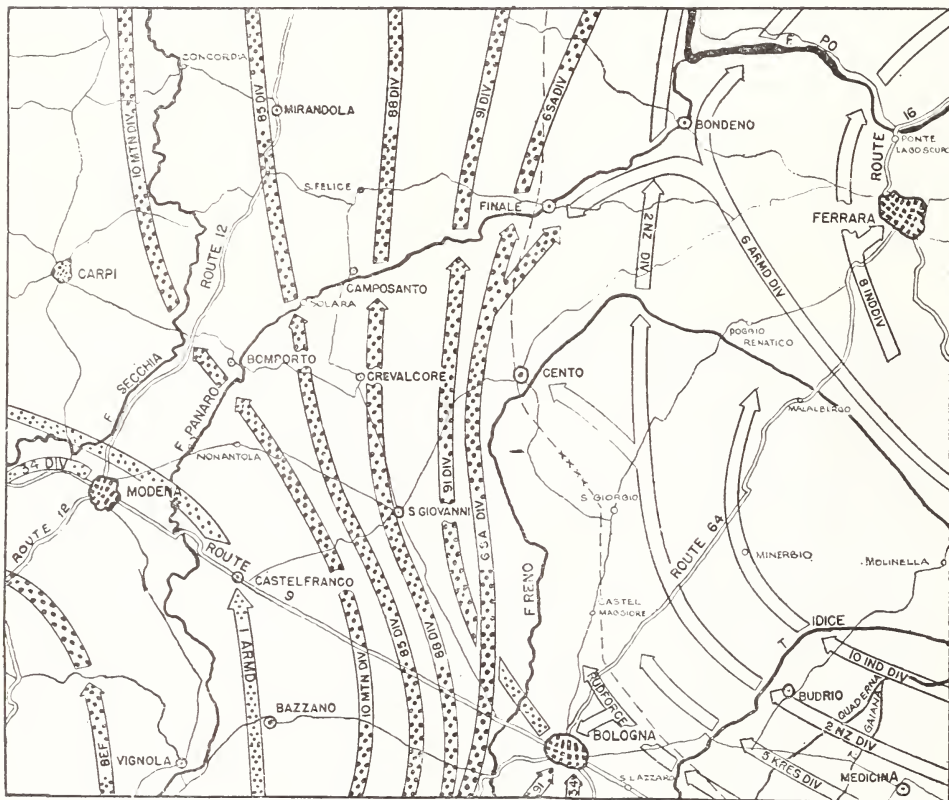
To the west of Bologna, the drive across the Po Valley — Phase II — was under way and accelerating rapidly. The Germans were on the run — and thousands of them weren't running fast enough. Up to the 21st, the PW total had been 7,300 on the Fifth Army's front. Now, would-be prisoners hurried from houses, hands high — afraid to miss the parade. Some reluctant to surrender, were routed from hiding places by partisans, who had sprung to arms



« Bologna fell... The 34th... drew the assignment ».

— and bicycles — at a word from army group headquarters. No one had time to count the prisoners or to send them through channels. Hastily searched and stripped of their weapons, they were ordered « Geh » with a wave of the hand toward the south.

Air reconnaissance showed long columns of German transport and men streaming north and northwest over jammed roads. Escape routes to the north-



Fifth Army drives on beyond Bologna.

east had already been cut or threatened by the Eighth Army. The air forces riddled scores of German vehicles and left them ditched and burning, sent troop concentrations scattering over the countryside, and once again put the Po River bridges and ferries out of commission.

But some German transport was captured intact; many an infantryman rolled forward in a volkwagon, a bus, a kitchen truck, a Fiat or on a motorcycle; others nonchalantly rode German horses or drove captured carts.

The crossing of the Panaro

By evening of the 21st we were more than 20 miles beyond Bologna. A bridge over the Panaro at Bomporto was seized before the Germans could touch off the dynamite piled beneath it. The captors were Task Force Duff — a battalion of 10th Mountain Division Infantry riding trucks, a company of tanks, a few TDs and some engineers. Another bridge was taken at Camposanto by the 6th South Africans.

Still another crossing was made near Camposanto by the 85th Division, one of whose battalions ran into stiff resistance. A reconnoitering officer warned his men the bridge might be blown at any minute. A corporal stripped off his clothing, dived into the stream and struck out for the other bank. He was midway when German slugs began peppering the water. The swimmer reached the far side, cut the demolition wires and swam back safely. The advance could continue.

Fifth Army spearheads raced on all day of the 22d. The now-opened fist had its longest finger pointed toward San Benedetto on the Po.

The lineup of divisions, from left to right, was BEF, 1st Armored, 10th Mountain, 85th, 88th, 91st and 6th South African Armoured. The 34th, which had been occupying Bologna, was now ordered northwest up Highway 9 to Castelfranco. The whole front was shaped like a broad arrowhead, with the 10th at the point.

The columns moved so fast now that rear echelons found themselves firing on Germans from jeeps or from roadside ditches. Cooks and clerks sometimes discovered *they* were spearheading the push. Drivers who had taken a wrong turn were hailed as the liberators of towns still strongly held by the enemy.

Germans who had counted on time to set up defenses suddenly heard firing to the north — and knew that they were just pockets of resistance. Such pockets — strong pockets — remained everywhere and fire fights were frequent. When they were over, a few more German tanks or trucks lay burning off the road, or a few hundred more Germans were marching to our rear. PWs now numbered 10,000.

The Po Valley was aflame and the setting sun was obscured by smoke. Ammunition and vehicles hidden by the Germans under haystacks were being fired, sometimes by the fleeing enemy, sometimes by our speeding scouts. Houses too were burning, but the Italian householder ignored the crackling flames and the exploding cartridges, shells and mines to cheer the advancing troops.

Our columns were spread out all over the map. A 15-mile gap between two sections of one column was patrolled by a single I & R platoon in jeeps.

Once a German convoy of two 170mm cannon pulled by prime movers and followed by personnel carriers, swung out of a side road and into the stream of traffic. Americans in trucks thought the guns' outlines unfamiliar, leaped to the ground, and captured the entire battery.

A German kitchen truck, its culinary crew and a dinner that was ready, just in time, were captured by another group. The meal was served to Italian Partisans, who here, as throughout north Italy, were cooperating valiantly with our forces.



« the first Allied troops reached the Po ». Tenth Mountain Division men reconnoitre for a crossing.

We reach the Po

At 2230 of the 22d, at San Benedetto, the first Allied troops reached the Po River. They were a task force of the 10th Mountain Division, which had advanced 55 miles in two days and 75 miles in eight and a half days, in a push in which everyone from draughtsmen to generals had taken prisoners — and wondered what to do with them.

The Germans had plenty of artillery behind the Po's north dikes and our troops were shelled by ack-ack from across the river, worried by snipers from San Benedetto's church tower, and bombed and strafed by one of the Luftwaffe's last planes, which came out at night to tour the foxholes. Part of the 88th crossed the Panaro the same day, some of the troops wading the river.

Under murderous artillery, rifle and machine gun fire, the 10th crossed the Po in rubber assault boats at midday of the 23d.

On this day, the 1st Armored reached the Po due north of Reggio, the 34th were along Highway 9, moving toward Reggio, and the 85th was mopping up Camposanto, in the same area. The BEF was patrolling the Panaro. The 91st and

the 6th Armoured South African Division, to the east, met vicious resistance at Finale, southwest of Bondeno.

In that area, between Finale and Ferrara, the South Africans made contact with the British 6th Armoured Division, of the Eighth Army, closing the jaws on thousands of the enemy.

The Eighth already was in Ferrara's outskirts, the 8th Indian meeting considerable opposition there; the 6th British Armoured had elements on the Po to their left.

It took the infantry of the 10th Mountain all day of the 24th to increase its initial 1000-yard bridgehead across the Po to a depth of two miles and to a width of four. Engineers toiled to span the 200-yard wide, swift-running stream with a ponton bridge for the tanks and trucks.

All of II Corps was now on the river as was the 85th of IV Corps. Later that day, the 88th and the 85th joined the 10th on the north bank, and crossings by the 6th South African and the 91st followed speedily.



« The Germans had plenty of artillery behind the Po's north dikes ». Anti-tank gun crew covers our crossing.



« Engineers toiled to span the swift-running stream with a ponton bridge ».

To the west, the 34th, with some of its tanks clearing Reggio, already was racing for Parma which it captured next day, and the 1st Armored was pushing northward toward the Po. The BEF was moving northwest toward Reggio capturing and destroying many isolated pockets of enemy resistance.

On the west coast, the ex-ack-ackers of the 473d Infantry Regiment, serving with the 92d Division, entered La Spezia. Carrara, which had been expected to be an obstacle, had been taken by the Partisans, who had harassed the Germans there for months.



« Later... the 88th and 85th joined the 10th on the north bank of the Po ».

Enemy opposition, though often sharp, was now well scattered and restricted to pockets of a few hundred troops, or to a few tanks, or to a lone sniper. Even the Germans realized their position was hopeless, a realization made easier by the successful pincers movement north of Bologna in which the Eighth Army pushed 7,000 PWs into the 88th's cages between noon of the 23d and noon of the 25th. The 88th added 4,000 all its own. The total bag included the commanding general of the 305th Infantry Division, von Schellwitz; his artillery commander, his G3 and the rest of his staff. Two 88th Division infantrymen brought in the generals.



« On the 26th the 91st occupied Legnago, southeast of Verona, and crossed the Adige ».

Verona falls

On the evening of the 25th the 88th Division fought in the outskirts of Verona. At dark a TD crew setting up a road block heard a noise around a corner — a hundred Germans were drawing candy rations from a PX dump. When their trucks came out on the road, the TD crew challenged them. Machine pistols replied. Two rounds from the TD's 76mm gun, a few bursts from the 50-caliber and there were only dead and wounded Germans in the square.

South of Verona, a task force of the 10th, led by Col. William O. Darby, former Ranger commander, sped into Villafranca and captured the airport on the morning of the 25th. German pilots landing on the field were surprised to find it had changed hands. Darby continued into Verona the next morning, passing through the 88th; the Germans had fled. The 10th Mountain then turned toward Lake Garda, while the 91st and the 88th turned northeast.

On the 26th the 91st occupied Legnago, southeast of Verona, and crossed the Adige. At Cerea, it seized a tank column and a supply train seeking to escape over the river. Small units of the 2d New Zealand and 56th British Divisions were across near Rovigo.

The 88th crossed the river on the 91st's left. The two divisions rapidly developed their bridgeheads against opposition from troops hastily collected from many different units, but mostly from the 1st and 4th Parachute Divisions. Prepared enemy positions behind the Adige were found abandoned.

The 85th still farther to the left, reached the Adige northeast of Verona late on the 26th, and continued north unopposed the next day.

The 1st Armored, which had crossed the Po near San Benedetto the night of the 26th, now was streaking northwestward. On a single day — the 27th — it captured the ruined rail center of Brescia; then Bergamo, which controls Highway 42 to the Brenner Pass, and finally Como, three miles from the Swiss frontier. The Germans in northwest Italy were fenced in.

In its 90-mile advance in 24 hours, the division's veteran tankmen and infantry smashed a German convoy and took its 450 survivors prisoner; captured another large convoy intact; took, lost and retook an airport, and battled German rearguards who tossed hand grenades and fired rifles from Brescia's rubble. Supply columns following the push were attacked again and again by by-passed Germans.



« The First Armored was streaking northwestward ».



The 92d Division enters La Spezia.



« On the west coast the 442d and 473d entered Genoa ». PWs marched the other way.

The finale

On the west coast, the 442d and 473d Regiments entered Genoa, where the Partisans had been hard at the work they loved. To the northeast of Genoa, the 34th Division, the « Old Red Bulls », were spread out from Cremona to Piacenza, which they captured on the 27th.

Germans on the Ligurian coast had little chance of escaping encirclement, a chance which grew even slimmer the next day when the Brazilian Expeditionary Force cut Highway 62 near Parma.

On the right flank of the Fifth Army's front — hardly a "front" now — the 91st fought several fire fights on the way to Sassano, and the 88th hit fanatical resistance in Vicenza, where bazookas knocked out nine of our tanks. The 88th pushed on, however, to cross the Astico River.

The 10th Mountain Division, which had reached Lake Garda and was progressing northward along its east shore, was slowed when the Germans blasted shut the entrances to several of a series of highway tunnels.

The mountaineers, on the 29th, attacked Tobole, almost at the lake's north-east tip, and captured it despite defense and counterattack by infantry, tanks, and artillery. The town contained an underground airplane factory, housed in 70 tunnels. Its 500 employees were still at work when our troops found it.

The 1st Armored, its columns cleaning up around Como and east of Milan on the 29th, captured the entire German 232d Division, including its commander, as well as the commanding general of the 334th Division, and the staff, minus CG, of the Ligurian Group.

Far to the rear, but not missing its share of the glory, the BEF was continuing its mission of cleaning up pockets southwest of Highway 9. At Fornovo, on the 29th, it captured the entire German 148th Division, with commanding general, staff and 6,000 men.

In the next two days, Fifth Army had strong columns on main highways to the northwest, north and northeast. One spearhead had reached the Swiss frontier and was fanning out along the border, another had turned northeast from the top of Garda toward Trento and the Brenner; the 85th was west of Vicenza. The 88th, after pushing northeast crossed the Brenta River north of Padua and captured Bassano. The 6th South Africans met the 2d New Zealanders, who were between Legnago and Rovigo, west of the Venetian lagoon. The Eighth Army's 8th Indian and 56th Divisions were converging on Rovigo. The 91st was to their northeast, at Treviso.

Together, the 85th, 88th, 6th South Africans and 91st formed a solid line, with the Eighth Army, across northeast Italy.

On the 30th April, in the Ligurian sector, the 34th Division captured in mass the 75th German Army Corps comprising some 40,000 Germans including the German 34th Infantry Division.

The 1st Armored was spread out along the Ticino River and still farther west the 92d, with the 442d and 473d Regiments, was guarding the roads to France. Partisans had taken Milan and had caught and executed Mussolini.

The Germans, cut to ribbons, had no choice but surrender.



*« ...toward the
Brenner ».*



« The Partisans had taken Milan ».

*Our medics treat
German wounded.*



Italians cheer Americans' entrance into Milan.

Finito!

Two German officers in civilian clothes arrived by plane at AFHQ, Caserta, at 4 PM Saturday, 28 April. The next day, the two officers, a lieutenant colonel representing General von Vietinghoff, and a major representing SS General Karl Wolff, signed the surrender agreement.

All German troops remaining in Italy and those in the Austrian provinces of Vorarlberg, Tyrol, Salzburg, and parts of Carinthia and Styria — 230,000 men — were to put down their arms not later than noon of 2 May.

On 4 May, General von Senger und Etterlin, commanding the XIV Panzer Corps, arrived at the 15th Army Group Command Post. Representing Colonel General von Vietinghoff, German Commander-in-Chief, Southwest, General von Senger reported to General Clark for orders for the surrender of German land forces. Dressed in his green uniform with an iron cross on his chest, the German commander, stiffly at attention, saluted General Clark and said:

« General Clark, as the representative of the German Commander-in-Chief, Southwest, I report to you as the Commander of the 15th Army Group for your orders for the surrendered German Land Forces ».

General Clark replied:

« I assume you come with complete authority to implement the unconditional surrender terms which were signed by your representative at Allied Force Headquarters ».

General von Senger replied:

« That is correct ».

General Clark, concluding the exchange, then said:

« Here are my written instructions to carry into effect the surrender conditions. General Gruenther, my Chief of Staff, will now conduct a conference for members of my staff and yours to cover the details of the plan ».

La guerra in Italia è finita!

The Eighth and Fifth Armies had reached the end of the long long roads from El Alamein and Salerno.

They had destroyed the enemy in Italy, and in doing so, had demonstrated to the world the power of coordinated action by united nations. Magnificently equipped and sustained by the untiring efforts and whole-hearted support of the « home front », the 15th Army Group — that polyglot group of many nationalities fighting as a unit for a single cause — had done its share and perhaps more in the fight for human liberty.



« ...General Clark... I report to you... for orders... ». The Germans take their orders from us now. General von Senger und Etterlin reports to General Clark in the presence of the Commanding Generals of the Fifth and Eighth Armies and the Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force.

HEADQUARTERS 15 TH ARMY GROUP

3 May 1945

PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

I take great pleasure in conveying to each American officer and enlisted man in 15th Army Group the following message received by me from the President of the United States:

« On the occasion of the final brilliant victory of the allied armies in Italy in imposing unconditional surrender upon the enemy, I wish to convey to the American Forces under your command and to you personally the appreciation and gratitude of the President and of the people of the United States. No praise is adequate for the heroic achievements and magnificent courage of every individual under your command during this long and trying campaign.

« America is proud of the essential contribution made by your American Armies to the final allied victory in Italy. Our thanks for your gallant leadership and the deathless valor of your men.

SIGNED - HARRY S. TRUMAN ».

MARK W. CLARK
GENERAL, USA, COMMANDING

THE PRIME MINISTER'S MESSAGE TO
FIELD MARSHAL
SIR HAROLD R. L. G. ALEXANDER

« I rejoice in the manificently planned and executed operations of the Fifteenth Group of Armies which are resulting in the complete destruction or capture of all enemy forces South of the Alps.

« That you and General Mark Clark should have been able to accomplish these tremendous and decisive results against a superior number of enemy divisions after you have made great sacrifices of whole armies for the Western front is indeed another proof of your genius for war and the intimate brotherhood in arms between the British Commonwealth and Imperial Forces and those of the United States.

« Never I suppose have so many nations advanced and manoeuvred in one line victoriously. British, Americans, New Zealanders, South Africans, British Indians, Poles, Jews, Brazilians and strong forces of liberated Italians have all marched together in the high comradeship and unity of men fighting for freedom and for the deliverance of mankind.

« This great final battle in Italy will long stand out in history as one of the most famous episodes in this second world war.

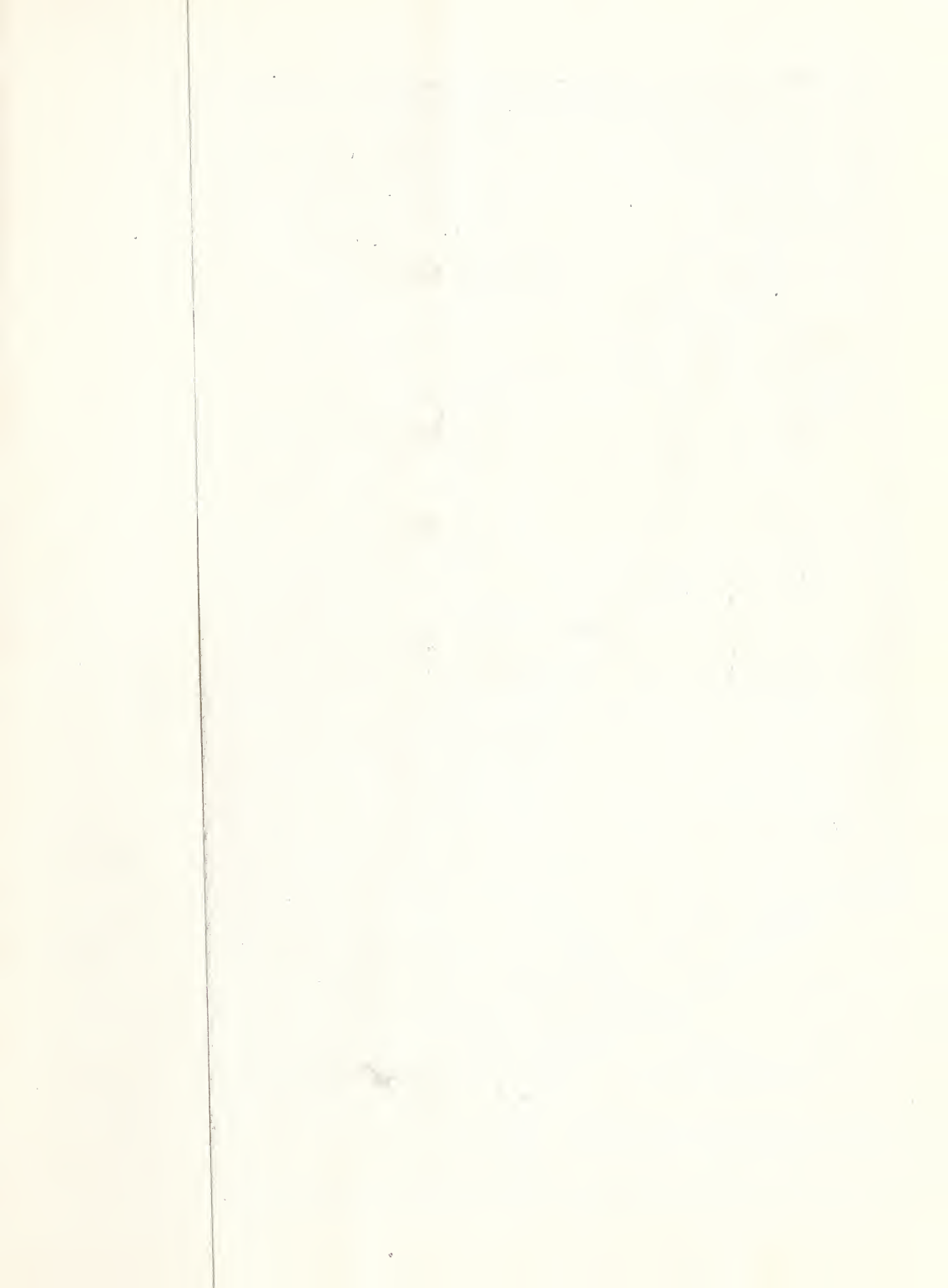
« Pray give my heartfelt congratulations to all your commanding and principal officers of all Services and, above all, to the valiant and ardent troops whom they have led with so much skill ».

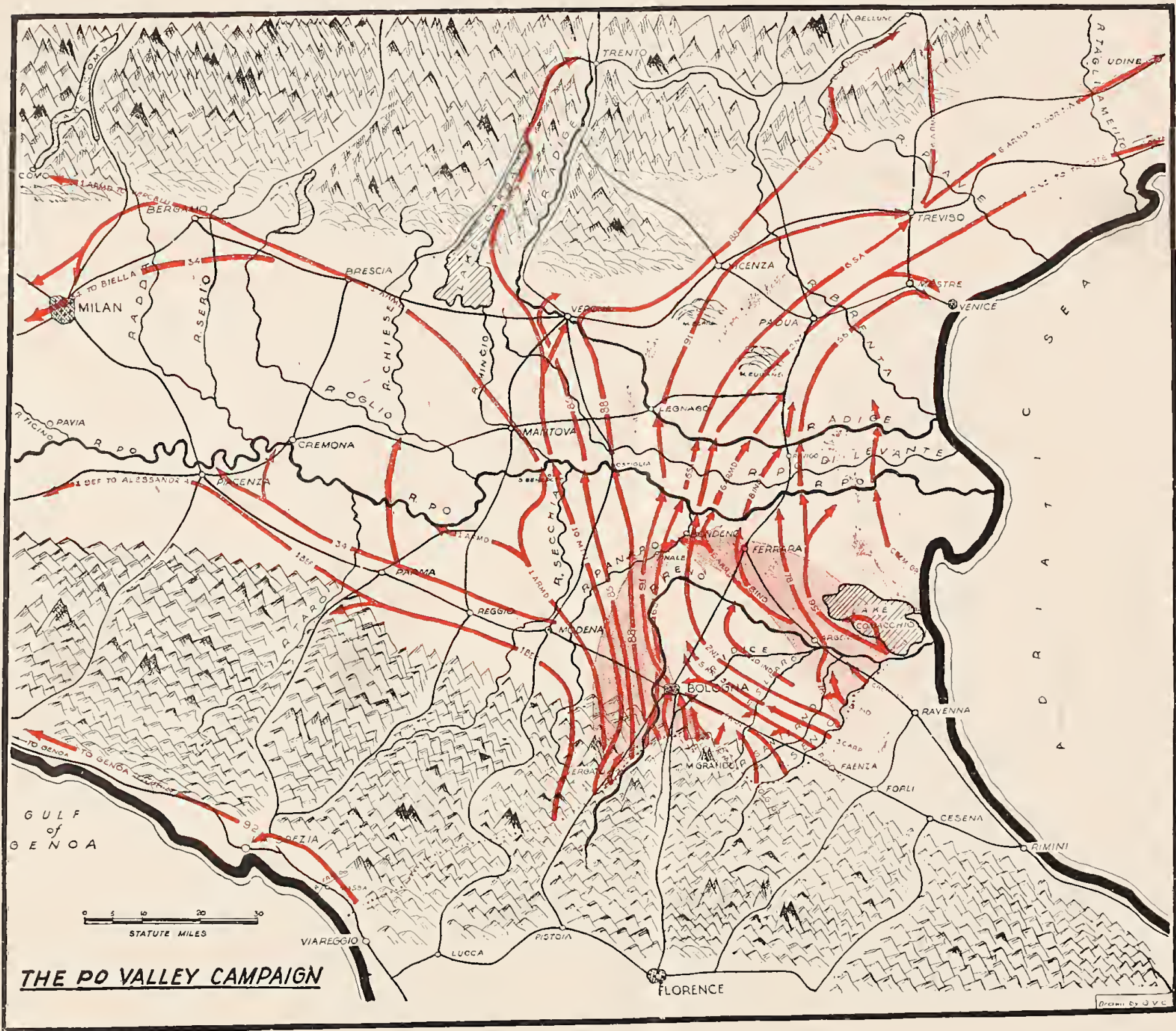


LIEUTENANT GENERAL
JOHN K. CANNON,
*Commanding the Twelfth
Air Force.*



MAJOR GENERAL
BENJAMIN W. CHIDLAW,
*Commanding the Mediterranean
Allied Tactical Air Force.*





THE PO VALLEY CAMPAIGN

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NICE

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