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# FIFTH ARMY HISTORY



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SUBJECT: Corrected Map, Fifth Army History

TO: Commandant,  
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Attached is corrected copy of map to be inserted in lieu  
of Map No. 7, Po Valley Campaign, between pages 124 and 125,  
Volume IX, Fifth Army History.

FOR THE CHIEF, HISTORICAL DIVISION:

1 Incl  
Map (dup)

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SEP 5 1949

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# FIFTH ARMY HISTORY



PART IX

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## *Race to the Alps*

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*Lieutenant General*

LUCIAN K. TRUSCOTT, JR.

\* \* \* *commanding*



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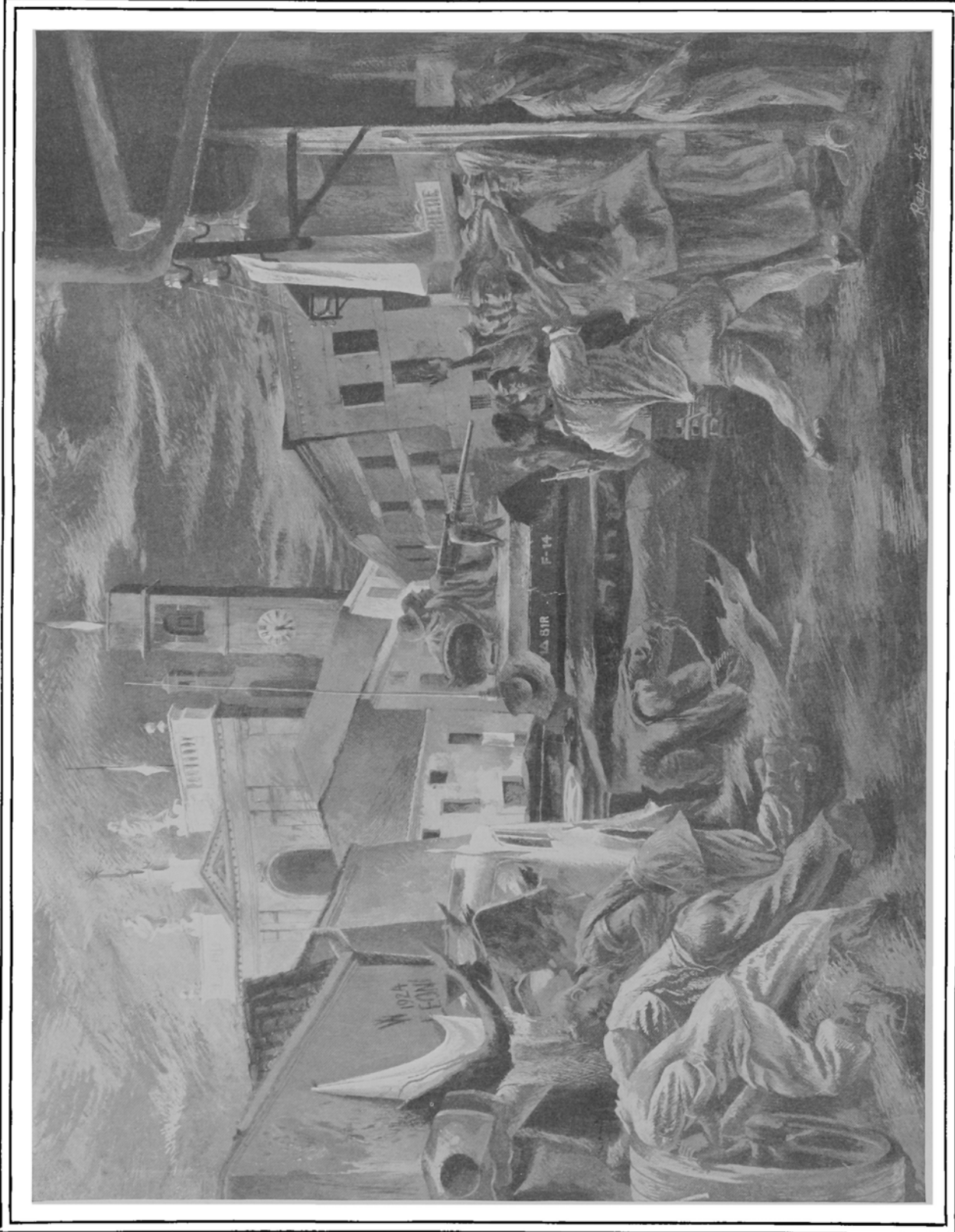
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*An Italian town is liberated north of the Po River . . . painted by Captain Edward A. Reep*

# CHAPTER I \* \* \* \* \*

## *Preparations for the Attack*

SPRING of 1945 found the American and Allied troops of Fifth Army in the rugged mountains and narrow valleys of the northern Apennine range, which divides Italy into two separate sections, peninsular and continental. The men were in relatively the same positions they had occupied for slightly more than 5 months, following the conclusion of the Gothic Line campaign of September and October 1944. For the second time in the Italian campaign our forces maintained a stabilized line for a period of several months, in both cases preparing for great spring offensives. The 1944 late spring campaign resulted in the capture of Rome and the advance north of the Arno River, beyond the summit of the Apennines, and almost into the valley of the Po River; the early spring of 1945 was to witness the knockout blow, the final punch which crushed and captured the German armed forces in northern Italy and liberated the remainder of the nation.

The cessation of offensive operations at the beginning of the winter had been influenced to a great degree by the continued stiff resistance put up by the veteran troops of German Army Group Southwest as they withdrew slowly from one mountain top to another. Our forces were badly depleted in numbers, our supply line was long and overtaxed, and the severe winter weather normally to be expected in the Apennines forced us to halt to replenish our strength before delivering the next big assault. The period of winter stalemate had been well spent. Replacements and reinforcements came to the Army during these months; badly worn vehicles were exchanged for new ones; ammunition reserves were piled up; and new and improved types of equipment and weapons were issued. By 1 April, Fifth Army had completed its program of rehabilitation of men and equipment and was ready for the spring battles.

## A. FIFTH ARMY DISPOSITIONS

*See Map No. 1*

1. *Positions in the Mountains.* Lieutenant General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., the Army commander, had nine divisions and the equivalent of a tenth under his control at the beginning of the spring. Six American infantry divisions, one Brazilian infantry division, one American armored division, one South African armored division, and Italian and American infantry troops equal to another division were assigned to the Army and either in position or resting in rear areas on 1 April. IV Corps, under command of Maj. Gen. Willis D. Crittenger, held the left flank of Fifth Army; II Corps, under command of Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes, occupied the right sector. Three divisions were committed in front-line positions in each corps, while the remaining three were in reserve.

IV Corps, occupying more than two-thirds of the length of the Army line, was extended from the Ligurian Sea on the west to the Reno River on the east, a total distance of nearly 70 miles. The 92d Infantry Division, reinforced by the attachment of the 473d Infantry, a separate regiment formed during the winter months from antiaircraft units converted into infantry, and by the 442d Regimental Combat Team, recently returned from France, garrisoned positions from the sea inland to the Cutigliano Valley, which lies about 12 miles northwest of the Arno Valley town of Pistoia. The division held nearly 30 miles of the Corps front, across the narrow coastal plain, then through the rough mountainous country to the narrow valley of the Serchio River, and on east over wild and lightly held terrain to the Cutigliano area.

To the right of the division boundary, in even more forbidding and trackless country, the 365th Infantry, detached from the 92d Division, held an independent command sector running east from Cutigliano to the south end of the Serrasiccia—Campiano ridge, a terrain feature 15 miles due north of Pistoia which had been wrested from the Germans in February. From this point the front swung sharply to the northeast along a general ridge line which formed a mountain backbone extending almost to the Po Valley. The 1st Brazilian Infantry Division of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (BEF) held the Serrasiccia ridge line and other positions northeast to the vicinity of the little mountain town of Pietra Colora, where it adjoined the 10th Mountain Division. The latter division had succeeded in making important advances through the mountains west of the vital Highway 64 in February and March, and at the beginning of April it held almost all of the remainder of the IV Corps sector northeast from Pietra Colora to the Reno River boundary of II Corps. A narrow sector on the extreme right of the Corps was held by the 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (1st Armored Division).

East of the Reno II Corps was concentrated in a sector approximately 25 miles wide. In this area the assault elements advancing astride Highway 65 had reached to within 12 miles of Bologna before the end of the fall campaign, and practically no change had been made in positions along this portion of the front during the entire winter period. The 1st Armored Division, to which was attached the separate 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, occupied the left part of the II Corps sector from the Reno east through the valley of Setta Creek to within 3 miles of Highway 65. In the center of the Corps line was the 34th Infantry Division, astride the highway from the 1st Armored Division boundary to a point slightly less than 2 miles east of the road; here the 91st Infantry Division took over responsibility for the remainder of the ground to the Fifth Army-Eighth Army boundary on Mount Grande. The 91st Division sector, including the Idice River valley and Mount Belmonte, was held by one regimental combat team of the division and by the attached Legnano Group, an Italian combat unit made up of approximately 9,000 men, trained and equipped by the British.

The British 13 Corps, which had been part of Fifth Army during the fall fighting and until mid-January when it was returned to operational control of Eighth Army, adjoined the 91st Division on the east. The 6 South African Armoured Division, reinforced to a total strength of more than 18,000 men, and the 85th Infantry Division were in Fifth Army reserve, while the 88th Infantry Division was in II Corps reserve. No major reserve existed in IV Corps. Eighth Army, after fighting its way around the eastern edge of the Apennines, had advanced up the lower Po Valley as far as the Senio River, about 20 miles southeast of Bologna, and extended along the Adriatic coast line north of Ravenna to the southern shore of Lake Comacchio. Withdrawal of troops for service in Greece and Holland during the winter reduced the strength of Eighth Army to seven infantry divisions, one armored division, and three Italian combat groups.

Although Fifth Army had lost control of 13 Corps during the winter months, the strength of its other components had been considerably increased. The largest reinforcement was the 10th Mountain Division, a unit specially trained and equipped for Alpine fighting, which arrived from the United States late in December and early in January. The Italian combat group was attached to the Army in mid-March, and the veteran 442d Regimental Combat Team returned to Italy late in March after a 6 months' period of absence in France. American artillery strength, weak in heavy caliber weapons during most of the winter, was increased until by mid-April, in addition to the organic artillery in the divisions, six battalions of 155-mm howitzers, four battalions of 155-mm guns, two battalions of 8-inch howitzers, and one battalion of self-propelled 105-mm howitzers were available. British heavy artillery attached to the Army included two regiments (battalions) of 5.5-inch



howitzers, one regiment of 4.5-inch guns, a mixed regiment of 155-mm guns and 5.5-inch howitzers, and two batteries of a mixed regiment which were equipped with two 8-inch guns and four 240-mm howitzers. In addition, offensive strength and fire power had been built up to include six separate tank battalions and five tank destroyer battalions.

The general personnel picture throughout the Army was excellent. Every division was overstrength, for more than 7,000 officers and men had been assigned as overage to combat organizations as an advancement on future replacements to enable them to obtain valuable experience and training. The replacement depots were stocked with approximately 21,000 white officers and enlisted men. Less than 2,000 colored replacements were available for the 92d Division and other Negro units, but 1,200 men were on hand to keep up the strength of the Japanese-American 442d Infantry. More than 5,000 Brazilian replacements were in Italy, although they had not completed all their required training. This favorable balance of reserves had been built up through a combination of several methods: by a reconversion program in which troops of other branches were retrained as infantry, by an improved flow of replacements from the United States, by the operation of an officers candidate school to augment the supply of officers, and because of a comparatively low casualty rate during the winter.

The morale of the Army was very high due to a number of factors. The 5 months' period of relative inactivity had been utilized to bring troops to a high state of training, and frequent rotation of units in the defensive positions had allowed adequate opportunities for rest and recreation. The operation of rest centers in the cities of Florence and Rome and at the spa of Montecatini, 20 miles west of Florence, together with intensive efforts to provide comforts even for the most forward troops, contributed not a little to the favorable morale situation. Another factor was the continued success of the Allied arms on both the eastern and western fronts, and the feeling in Italy that one final push in this country would contribute to the rapid and complete collapse of the enemy.

2. *Preliminary Attacks.* The battle of the Gothic Line, launched on 10 September 1944, saw the hardest fighting of the entire 1½ years of operations in Italy as Fifth Army punched its way through the elaborate defenses in the mountains guarding Highway 65, the direct route from Florence to Bologna. The latter city, the prime objective at the northern foot of the Apennines and on the southern fringe of the level Po Valley, lay tantalizingly near when our forces passed from attack to defense at the end of October with the forward lines along the highway within 12 miles of the goal and more than 60 miles north of Florence. A 40-mile section of Highway 64, which parallels Highway 65 to the west and extends from Pistoia to Bologna, also was cleared during the fall campaign. In the left portion of the

Army zone, however, the mission had been merely to exert pressure on the enemy and follow up any withdrawals he might make. Consequently the lines had not been advanced nearly as far to the north as in the area of the main effort up Highway 65, and in the western sector the front was only 25 to 30 miles north of the Arno River.

Following the end of the heavy fighting south of Bologna, the mountain battleground was dormant until Christmas time, when the Germans launched an abortive attack down the Serchio Valley which brought them temporary gains but ended with little change in the front-line dispositions. A few see-saw local engagements on other parts of the front resulted in similar outcomes. Fifth Army, however, was faced with the necessity of containing the enemy forces in Italy, preventing the shifting of German units to reinforce other fronts, and at the same time preparing plans for its own future operations. Soon after the beginning of 1945, 15th Army Group, embracing both Fifth and Eighth Armies, had made known its decision that no major offensive would be begun until after 1 April, unless enemy withdrawals necessitated an earlier pursuit. German activity presented no definite signs of any intention on the part of the enemy to abandon the rich country of northern Italy, where industries turned out war equipment in large quantities and rich farm lands provided plenty of sustenance for German troops.

In keeping with the Army mission several limited objective attacks were planned for the late winter period, some of them designed to keep the enemy off balance and others to improve our positions. The first of these attacks was opened on 3 February by the 92d Division, which launched successive drives in the mountainous Serchio Valley and up the coastal plain. Initially success was obtained along the Serchio River, but enemy counterattacks within a few days pushed us back essentially to the starting positions. Similar results were recorded on the well fortified coast where stiffer resistance was met and higher casualties suffered; neither attack forced the enemy to commit any other than local reserves.

The later attack of the 10th Mountain Division, assisted by the Brazilians, west of Highway 64 on the right flank of IV Corps reflected preliminary planning for the spring offensive, inasmuch as it had been determined that the main Army effort would eventually be made astride Highway 64 west of the strong defenses which the Germans had constructed blocking the Highway 65 approach to Bologna. The newly arrived mountain units were assigned the task of clearing the high ground which dominated the upper sections of Highway 64 and other peaks which provided flank protection for still additional mountains lying between Highway 64 and Highway 65 and affording excellent observation over the latter road. This attack was begun on 19 February with the capture of the Serrasiccia—Campiano ridge and the subsequent occupation of Mount Belvedere and Mount Torraccia. These two

mountains were key features covering Highway 64 north of the town of Porretta, and from these springboards the 10th Mountain Division continued on to the northeast, clearing ground 5 to 7 miles northwest of the road and approximately 5 miles northwest from the previous front lines.

The success achieved by the 10th Mountain Division pushed the right flank of IV Corps forward almost abreast of the left flank of II Corps, considerably widening the salient. Fifth Army had previously cut into the mountain wall barring the advance into the Po Valley. The Germans were also forced to bring in additional troops, including the 29th Panzer Grenadier (Armored Infantry) Division from their tactical reserve. By 7 March our troops had gained all the ground included in the list of limited objectives, and apparently could continue farther ahead under the momentum they had already created. General Truscott decided, however, that since at least another month must pass before the main attack was to begin, further advances would overextend the exposed flank and would only serve to center additional enemy attention on this sector, possibly causing the Germans to make a great increase in the amount of prepared defenses west of Highway 64. Positions were consolidated along a series of peaks and ridges which would provide excellent lines of departure later in the spring.

## B. *TERRAIN OF THE ACTION*

*See Map No. 7*

On clear days in the early spring troops of Fifth Army could look out over the broad, level valley of the Po. The buildings of Bologna were visible occasionally, and when the valley haze dissipated sufficiently the towering peaks of the Alps could be seen nearly 100 miles to the north. Although numerous individual mountains and ridges rose between the front lines and the valley itself, all along the II Corps front and in the eastern part of the IV Corps sector the highest portion of the Apennines had been crossed and the ground ahead sloped gradually toward the plain. Only a few miles of hilly country remained to be traversed before the Army could break out onto the flatlands, find excellent terrain for the employment of armor, and, in general, reach an area which would allow flexibility of maneuver such as never before had been encountered in Italy. Whereas distances throughout much of the drive up the peninsula had been measured in yards, distances in the northern part of the country were often calculated in scores of miles.

The major portion of the region ahead ultimately was included in the watershed of the Po River, which sweeps entirely across the nation for a total distance of 420

miles from its sources in the western Alps to its mouth on the Adriatic Sea. Draining a basin of 26,800 square miles, the river has a valley which extends approximately 200 miles from east to west and measures 60 to 75 miles from north to south. West of Milan the Po Valley merges with the Lombardy Plain, which contains the greatest manufacturing centers of Italy and includes the area from the foothills of the Alps on the north to the Ligurian Sea and the port of Genoa on the south, 90 miles away. The plain extends roughly 50 miles west of Milan before it gives way to the Alps. North and east of the Po the Adriatic coastal plain increases in size, forming an arc around the northern end of the sea which reaches to a general depth of 35 miles inland, on the west roughly bounded by the inland city of Padua and on the east by the important port of Trieste.

South of the Po the flat countryside is highly cultivated and is broken up into small rectangular fields, which are usually separated by narrow drainage ditches. North of the river the same flatness prevails, the ground is criss-crossed by irrigation ditches, and in the lowlands surrounding Mantua and Ostiglia the area is featured by marshy rice paddies. North and west of Mantua a few low, rolling hills are encountered; most of the land is arable or is used for pasturage, and rises to the north in long steps into the foothills of the Alps. The Lombardy Plain is generally level, highly industrialized, and thickly populated. West of Turin the country rises into the gentle lower Alpine valleys of the Piedmont region. From the military point of view fields of fire are generally excellent in the central part of the valley and plain, but the highly developed agricultural areas, which include numerous vines and trees, limit ground visibility and offer many opportunities for concealment.

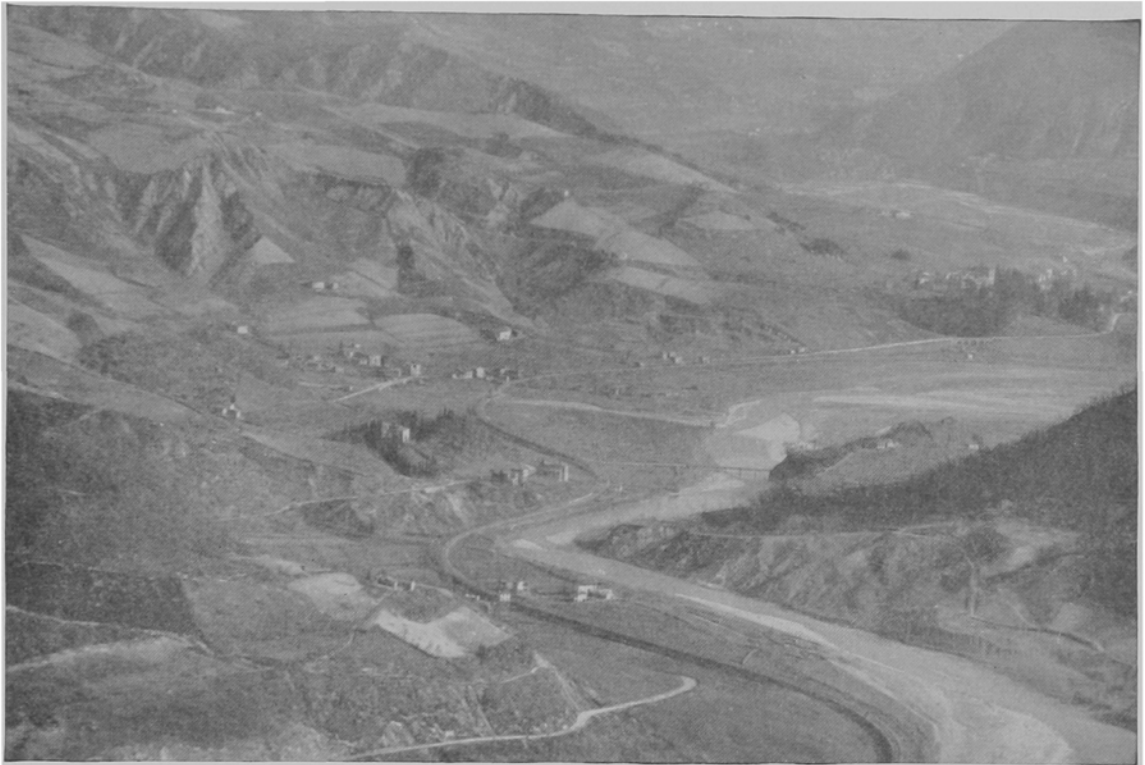
Northern Italy is served by an extensive network of ground communications, including a large number of paved highways which connect the many cities and smaller centers of population. Most of the second-class roads are gravelled and well kept, and afford many alternate routes to almost any given point. The railroad organization also is well developed, containing double-tracked main lines, the majority of which are electrified. Although the Po itself and several of the smaller rivers form major obstacles for military movement, cross-country travel, except in certain marshy or ditch-filled areas, is practicable during the spring and summer months.

Four roughly parallel main arteries run from east to west across the valley, while an equal number run north and south through the flatlands. To reach the valley at Bologna from our mountain lines Highway 65 and Highway 64 were the two most likely routes, especially the latter, which follows the valley of the Reno River. Along this road our lines lay a little more than 15 miles from the city, and overlooked the German-held road junction town of Vergato. The first east-west national highway in front of our positions was Highway 9, which stretches the entire length of the valley along the northern base of the Apennines. This road turns

northwest at Rimini on the Adriatic coast, passing with scarcely a curve through the cities of Bologna, Modena, Reggio, and Parma to Piacenza, where it crosses the Po and continues on to Milan. Highway 10 traverses the length of the valley on the north side of the river, beginning at the road center of Padua and running west through Mantua to Cremona. Here it crosses to the south bank of the river and continues southwest to Piacenza, Alessandria, and Turin. The third great valley route is that of Highway 11, running along the southern foothills of the Alps and connecting most of the largest cities including, from east to west, Venice, Padua, Vicenza, Verona, Brescia, Milan, Novara, and Turin. The extreme southwestern portion of northern Italy is served by Highway 1, which, after passing through our lines north of Viareggio, strikes up the Ligurian coast to La Spezia and Genoa and then turns westward along the Italian Riviera to the French frontier.

The long association of Fifth Army with Highway 65 would be ended with the capture of Bologna, which is the northern terminus of this route across the Apennines from Florence. Highway 64, however, passes on through Bologna and on to the northeast as far as the city of Ferrara, a short distance south of the Po River. The main north-south road in the Army zone was Highway 12, which originates at Pisa in the Arno Valley, crosses the mountains, and strikes Highway 9 at Modena. From Modena this highway continues almost due north across the Po at Ostiglia to the cities of Verona, Trent, and Bolzano, into the Brenner Pass, and eventually on to Austria. To its west Highway 63 cuts northwest across the Apennines from Aulla to Reggio and on to the Po where it joins Highway 62, which passes through Mantua to Verona. Highway 16 generally parallels the Adriatic coast, turns inland to skirt the southwestern shores of Lake Comacchio, is joined by Highway 64 at Ferrara, and then runs north to Padua, where it enters Highway 10. Half a dozen north-south roads connect the cities located on the Lombardy Plain. In addition to these main highways several Autostradas, or superhighways without grade crossings, link the major cities and most populated areas of northern Italy. One of these roads extends from Brescia through Milan to Turin, closely bypassing each of these centers. Near Milan another Autostrada branches to the north and northwest, one segment running to the resort town of Como on Lake Como, and another to the town of Varese, 10 miles farther west. Both of these termini are within a few miles of the Swiss border.

Throughout its long course the Po meanders in a series of great bends toward the Adriatic, together with its various tributaries forming an extensive system of obstacles and barriers. Its sandy bed dotted with numerous bars and islands, the river increases in width upstream in the central section, expanding from 1,000 feet near Ferrara to 4,000 feet at a point north of Parma, while the actual water width (wet gap) varies between 400 and 1,500 feet. East of Ferrara and west of Piacenza the



*The Reno River and Highway 64, looking north toward the Po Valley*



*One of the wide, level roads in the Po plain—after the German retreat*



*At Ostiglia the Po River is wide and sluggish between its sand banks*



*The mountains of the Alps loom high above the wide expanse of Lake Garda*

river is narrower, but nowhere can it be spanned by military field type fixed bridges. The muddy waters are controlled along almost the entire length of the river by a system of levees, which are constructed along both banks, at times as far as 1 mile from the channel itself; between the main levee and the river secondary embankments have been erected in many places. These banks rise from 15 to 25 feet above the level of the surrounding country, and in some instances the silt deposited by the Po has raised the water above the level of the adjacent land. The river normally can be expected to be at its highest stage during the months of April, May, and June, when the melting snow in the mountains produces spring freshets. The Po's biggest single tributary is the Ticino River, which flows out of Lake Maggiore along the Italo-Swiss border, runs south about 15 miles to the west of Milan, and empties into the main river 20 miles west of Piacenza. The Adda River forms the outlet for Lake Como, flows south 10 miles to the east of Milan, and reaches the Po a short distance west of Cremona. Few cities actually lie on the Po, Turin, Piacenza, and Cremona being the only sizable communities situated immediately on the river bank.

An obstacle which we had to cross in the mountains was the Reno River, running along Highway 64. After reaching the valley west of Bologna this stream flows north for 18 miles, then turns abruptly east and empties into the Adriatic a short distance south of Lake Comacchio. Two smaller streams formed barriers which Fifth Army must cross in its zone before reaching the Po. The Panaro, originating in the northern slopes of the Apennines, runs north about 10 miles west of Highway 64, crosses Highway 9 5 miles east of Modena, and then turns northeast to empty into the Po 10 miles above Ferrara. While still in the mountains it has a rather wide, gravelly bed, but north of Highway 9 it is canalized in a deep, narrow channel with a wet gap of between 60 and 100 feet, guarded by levees 15 to 35 feet in height. The Secchia River parallels the Panaro, crosses Highway 9 10 miles west of Modena, and after flowing close to Highway 12 for nearly 10 miles swerves to the westward and reaches the Po 4 miles east of the town of San Benedetto Po. The Secchia resembles the Panaro in character, although in the valley its wet gap often reaches 200 feet and its guarding flood banks are located at a greater distance from the stream bed than are those of the Panaro.

North of the Po the Army faced two additional major water obstacles before it could reach the southern entrance to the Brenner Pass, the city of Verona. The first of these two barriers was the Mincio River, flowing out of Lake Garda past Mantua and into the Po between San Benedetto Po and Ostiglia. The Mincio forms two large, marshy lakes on either side of Mantua and then from the lower of the two lakes runs to the Po through a deep, navigable channel with a wet gap of 110 to 125 feet. The second barrier was the Adige River, the largest stream in northeastern Italy, which rises near the junction of the Swiss, Austrian, and Italian



borders, and flows southeast through Verona to the Adriatic Sea 15 miles north of the mouth of the Po. The Adige, carrying a large volume of water from a drainage basin of 8,650 square miles, is controlled by flood banks southeast of Verona, which confine it to a wet gap varying between 300 and 500 feet with an exceptionally swift current.

### C. ENEMY DISPOSITIONS IN ITALY

*See Map No. 1*

1. *German Forces.* The German lines in Europe were fast crumbling under the combined blows of the Americans, British, and Russians in the spring of 1945, but the enemy made no move to give up his hold on northern Italy. Although between Christmas and the first of April Field Marshal Albert Kesselring and General Heinrich von Vietinghoff, who succeeded him as commander of Army Group Southwest, had sent 3 divisions from this front for use elsewhere, the enemy still retained 23 German divisions in the country, among them some of the best units remaining in his armed forces. In addition there were two partially formed German divisions, the 155th Field Training Division stationed near Trento and the 24th SS Mountain Division, which was being activated in the extreme northeastern section. The manpower lost with the three divisions during the winter period was offset to a considerable extent by reinforcements in the form of individual replacements, the arrival of several separate battalions, and by the increase in the strength of the Fascist Italian formations to the equivalent of six divisions.

On the main Italian front facing the Allied Armies were 2 German armies made up of 4 corps and 19 of the 29 available enemy divisions. Fifth Army was still faced by its long-time foe, the German Fourteenth Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Joachim von Lemelsen, which held the sector from the Idice Valley west to the Ligurian Sea with two corps. LI Mountain Corps on the west consisted of four German and one Italian divisions. The 148th Grenadier (Infantry) Division, reinforced by the Kesselring Machine Gun Battalion and part of the Italia Bersaglieri Division, occupied the front from the sea inland to the Serchio Valley; the 232d Grenadier Division, which had attached to it elements of the San Marco Marine Division (Italian) and the 4th Independent Mountain Battalion, extended from the Serchio Valley east to Mount Torraccia; the 114th Light Division and the 334th Grenadier Division held two short sections of the front west of Highway 64. XIV Panzer Corps, the other corps in Fourteenth Army, consisted of four divisions committed in narrow sectors astride Highway 64 and east to Mount Grande, the 94th Grenadier Division, the

8th Mountain Division, the 65th Grenadier Division, and the 305th Grenadier Division. The sector of the last named division overlapped the Army boundary, and its left elements faced the British 13 Corps. The 8th Mountain Division was reinforced by the 3d Independent Mountain Battalion and the 7th GAF Battalion, made up of German Air Force personnel serving as infantry.

Opposing Eighth Army was the German Tenth Army under Lt. Gen. Traugott Herr, with I Parachute Corps, made up of the 1st Parachute Division, the 4th Parachute Division, and the 276th Grenadier Division, and LXXVI Panzer Corps, consisting of the 362d Grenadier Division, the 98th Grenadier Division, the 26th Panzer (Armored) Division, the 162d Grenadier Division, and the 42d Light Division. The only two panzer grenadier divisions remaining in Italy, the 29th and 90th, were held in Army Group reserve in the vicinity of Bologna ready to reinforce the enemy on either the Fifth or Eighth Army fronts. The 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, after being rushed in to block our drive west of Highway 64 early in March, had again been returned to reserve during the last week of that month. Despite the renewed availability of this division the enemy was faced with an alarming weakness of capable reserves. Neither army had reserves of its own, and the two divisions, mobile though they were, were scarcely adequate for a front 130 miles long facing a well equipped and extremely mobile opponent.

The other enemy units in Italy were scattered in widely separated areas. The 710th Grenadier Division and the 237th Grenadier Division were in the eastern section, the former northeast of Venice and the latter south of Trieste. A third enemy force, the Ligurian Army, composed of both German and Italian units, under nominal command of Italian Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, was responsible for the defense of western Italy and the blocking of the Alpine passes leading from France. Within this Army the Lombardy Corps, including elements of the 1st Italian SS Infantry Division and the 135th Fortress Brigade, was distributed between Genoa and Milan. The German LXXV Corps, commanding the 34th Grenadier Division, the 5th Mountain Division, and three Italian units — the Littoria Infantry Division, the bulk of the San Marco Marine Division, and the Monte Rosa Alpine Division — covered the western and northwestern Italian frontiers.

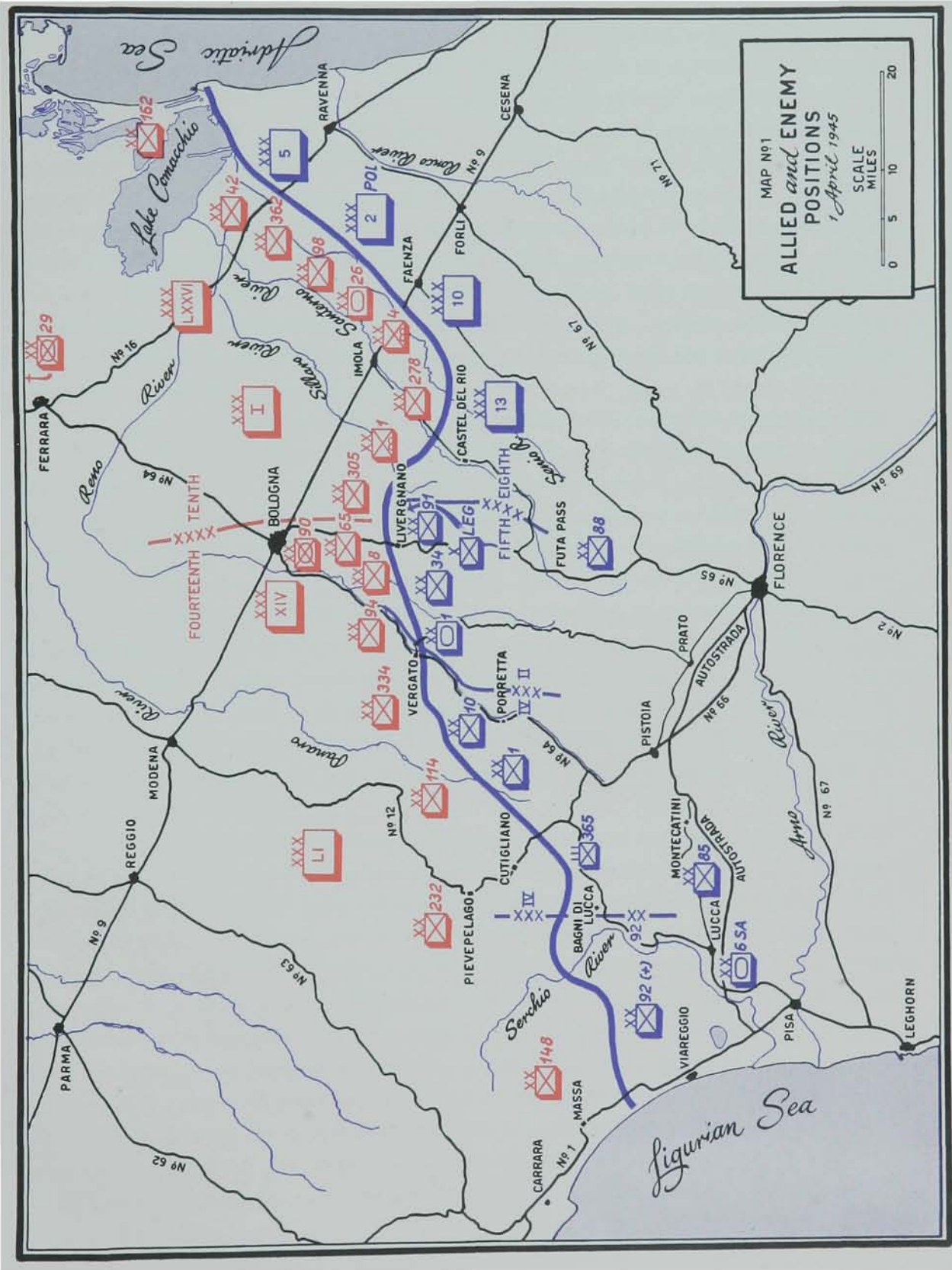
Rumors were current at various times during the winter months that the Germans intended to evacuate all of Italy, that they would evacuate only the western half, or that they would retire north and northeast to the line of the Po and Ticino Rivers. No evidence was uncovered to substantiate these reports, and as the spring drew near increased vigilance by the enemy along the entire front line indicated that he was not likely to move at all unless forced to do so. Northern Italy provided the forces occupying it with nearly all the necessities of life and warfare. When continued bombing by Allied aircraft smashed much of the industrial areas, many man-

ufacturing plants were moved underground into huge caves where they continued to produce relatively large quantities of munitions, and Italian farmers raised sufficient food to meet German needs. Another possible factor governing the German decision to remain in Italy was the mere difficulty of getting out. The first enemy unit to leave Italy, the 256th Grenadier Division, departed in December and early January without much apparent trouble, but the continued program of rail and road interdiction by our air force and the destruction of large quantities of enemy rolling stock created a situation whereby between 3 and 4 weeks were required to move the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division "Reichsfuehrer SS" over the Brenner Pass into Germany in February and an equally long period was needed to pull the 715th Grenadier Division out of the country in March.

2. *The Rear Areas.* Activities of the Italian partisans contributed to a gradual deterioration of the German strength in rear areas. On 1 April Allied intelligence officers estimated that a minimum of 50,000 well-organized patriots were either already engaged in sabotaging and harassing the enemy or ready to spring into action on a given signal. Aided by Allied liaison officers who were parachuted into the country or smuggled through the German lines, the partisans had formed themselves into battalions, brigades, and even divisions. They were armed with weapons stolen or captured from the Germans or dropped to them by Allied aircraft, which delivered more than 500 tons of supplies to these behind-the-line fighters during March. The constant threat of partisan attack forced the Germans to employ thousands of their own troops and most of the Fascist forces in a campaign against the guerrillas, while heavy guards had to be constantly maintained over most of the rear area installations. The partisans also were active in escorting escaped Allied prisoners of war and agents back and forth across the lines. Patriots whose homes were in the mountains often accompanied Fifth Army patrols and participated in actual combat operations with our forces.

Despite the troublesome partisans in its rear, the main worry of the German High Command was the rapidly worsening condition of its transportation system, the lack of vehicles and motor fuel, and the interdiction of railroad supply lines by Allied air power. Bombing of factories and railroads leading into Germany made it almost impossible to obtain new motor vehicles from the homeland, while the reduction of the Italian automobile output, coupled with incessant bombing and strafing attacks by our tactical aircraft, reduced enemy military transport to a progressively lower level. To augment his scanty supply the enemy commandeered hundreds of civilian passenger cars, trucks, and busses, and substituted horse- and oxen-drawn carts for much motorized equipment.

Even more serious was the fact that enemy gasoline supplies were rapidly being reduced to a mere trickle, limiting the use which could be made of the available



vehicles. In many cases animals were used to tow vehicles, which started their motors only while passing over steep grades; even in the so-called "fast" convoys only every third truck operated its engine and towed two others. The enemy made use of gasoline substitutes such as methane, which was available in considerable quantity in certain areas of the Po valley. Methane did not provide sufficient power for use in combat vehicles but was adequate for administrative transport, thus affording some saving of both gasoline and diesel oil. Other substitute fuels used were alcohol and benzol, which could be mixed with gasoline in proportion of one unit of substitution to three units of regular fuel. The few small oil fields in northern Italy were exploited to the maximum, wells producing as little as 1,000 gallons per day being worked. The lengths to which the enemy was willing to go to obtain fuel were indicated in a captured order issued by the 98th Grenadier Division which offered a reward of 1,000 cigarettes to any man returning from patrol with a 5-gallon can of captured gasoline.

The program of interdiction of lines of communication carried on by the Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force (MATAF) whenever flying was possible during the winter and spring imposed great difficulties on the enemy; good weather in February and March allowed an extensive effort on this mission up to the moment of the ground offensive. Fighter-bombers of XXII Tactical Air Command (XXII TAC), supporting Fifth Army, and the Desert Air Force (DAF), operating with Eighth Army, roved over and behind the enemy lines, attacking rail yards, roads, bridges, and dumps. Numbers of these craft ranged as far north as the Brenner Pass railroad line where they enlarged blocks originally created by medium bombers. DAF concentrated on the Tarvisio—Udine route, the most important pass leading out of northeastern Italy. Both units smashed rail and road lines in the Po Valley as well, claiming destruction or damage to approximately 2,200 enemy motor vehicles in February and March.

Traffic across the Po River was further disrupted and harassed. By the fall of 1944 all bridges over the Po had been destroyed by bombers, and the winter program was aimed at interdiction of the ponton bridges, ferry terminals, and overhead cable crossings between Piacenza and the Adriatic to which the enemy had been forced to resort. In addition to daylight attackers, night intruders regularly visited these crossing sites. On 5 nights during March XXII TAC intruders dropped bombs on 17 different crossings; the average number of targets for the entire month was 5 per day. During March 2,201 sorties were flown against dumps, supplies, and installations, including attacks on more than 100 separate ammunition depots.

The good early spring weather enabled Allied medium bombers to fly against lines of communication targets almost every day during February and March. Their main effort was directed against the vital Brenner Pass, with railroads on the

northeastern Italian frontier and feeder lines to the Brenner route also coming in for their share of attack. During February the Brenner line was cut in at least one place every day throughout its entire length from Verona in Italy to Innsbruck in Austria. In March it was cut daily in at least one place between Verona and Trent and in one place between Trent and Bolzano, and for 18 days of the month a block in at least one place from Bolzano north to Innsbruck made this stretch unserviceable. The Germans resorted to numerous stratagems to offset this bombing. In some instances they constructed removable bridges which could be hidden during the daytime and installed at night; another trick consisted of painting the railroad bed to give the impression that craters blocked the line. Concentration of spare equipment and the maintenance of large crews of workmen to enable rapid repairs to be made proved the best defense, while transshipment of passengers and supplies around the blocked sections of the Brenner line allowed limited use to be made of this route. Allied aircraft also continued to cut into the small amount of shipping available to the Germans, virtually eliminating all daylight coastwise traffic and reducing the enemy to the night use of small vessels and barges plying between the few ports still usable by him.

Despite all the difficulties this air offensive caused, the Germans were able to meet most of their requirements other than vehicles and gasoline due to the long period in which relatively light demands were made for supplies. A sufficient amount of food, clothing, and ammunition was available, and the morale of the enemy soldiers remained surprisingly high, especially in the two parachute divisions and in the two panzer grenadier divisions. Desertions by native Germans were relatively few; while a greater desire to quit was apparent among the non-Germans in the enemy forces, this tendency was checked by the policy of teaming real Germans and the "Volksdeutsche" together so that the actions of the latter could be closely watched. Approximately 35 percent of prisoners taken from German divisions during the winter were deserters. In the ranks of the Fascist divisions this rate was 85 percent, and total desertions ran into the thousands, although only a small percentage of the men came to our lines. A number joined the partisans; the majority simply went into hiding or assumed civilian disguises.

3. *Enemy Defense Lines.* (See Map No. 2.) The inactive months provided the Germans with an excellent opportunity to carry out their usual methodical organization of the ground. By 1 April the defenses guarding Bologna had been heavily built up south, southeast, and east of the city and to a lesser extent on the southwest; additional belts of prepared fortifications rested on the river barriers of the Po and the Adige. The main line of resistance protecting the city, known as the Genghis Khan Line, began on the Fifth Army front west of Vergato, crossed the Reno River, ran over the guardian peaks of Mount Sole and Mount Adone in the area between

Highway 64 and Highway 65, and continued east of the latter road along the mountain tops north of Mount Belmonte and Mount Grande until it reached the line of the Senio River, along which the British forces had been stalemated since early in January. Facing Eighth Army in this sector east of Bologna, the enemy line swung northward, following the course of the Senio across the lower Po Valley, and finally struck the southern shore of Lake Comacchio. Four miles farther west ran the Santerno River, paralleling the Senio and just as heavily fortified. Several smaller streams remained to be crossed between the Santerno and Bologna and could serve as delaying positions in front of Eighth Army.

The mountain line was made up primarily of mutually supporting strongpoints, featuring automatic weapons and antitank guns. Machine guns were liberally distributed to cover all possible approaches to the summits of the mountains; anti-personnel minefields were laid along all the paths, ravines, and creek beds. Dugouts had been constructed to shelter the garrisons of the various strongpoints, which were connected by communication trenches and further protected by bands of barbed wire. All roads and cross-country avenues of advance were strewn with mixed antitank and anti-personnel minefields. Many of the existing stone farmhouses were fortified and incorporated into the line, while many of the small villages also were organized for defense and surrounded by firing positions. The suburbs of Bologna itself contained many concrete pillboxes and antitank gun emplacements.

The enemy massed hundreds of mortars to back up his infantry defenses and was estimated to have a total of 789 artillery weapons in the area opposite Fifth Army: 367 light pieces (under 149-mm); 138 antitank guns; 75 medium field pieces (149-mm to 170-mm); 2 heavy pieces (over 170-mm); 160 self-propelled guns; and 47 tanks. Heavy antiaircraft guns which could also be used in ground roles were sited in some instances where they could fire on either the Fifth or Eighth Army fronts. After the German surrender enemy sources revealed the following items of equipment were actually in the hands of the German armed forces in Italy: 353,550 small arms; 9,830 machine guns; 5,040 pieces of artillery (60-mm to 155-mm); 29 pieces of heavy artillery (155-mm and larger); 235 medium tanks; 25 Mark V tanks; 36 Mark VI tanks; 21 antiaircraft guns mounted on tanks; 385 German and 167 Italian self-propelled guns; and 3,241 antiaircraft guns of all types other than those mounted on tanks. The Germans possessed 22,741 vehicles of all types and had 66,128 tons of ammunition, plus 9,500 tons additional Italian ammunition for which there were no available weapons.

Many months had been expended on construction of defenses farther out in the Po Valley. It was believed that once the enemy had been driven from his mountain line he would not make serious attempts to stop us until we reached the Po, although he would seek to inflict as much delay as possible. To provide positions for such

delaying action and to act as outposts for the Po line, most of the cities and towns along Highway 9 were prepared for defense. Road blocks made of steel railroad rails, bricks, and rubble were constructed at key highway intersections and along the main streets of the towns; windows of buildings were bricked up and provided with loopholes; cellars became machine-gun or antitank gun positions; concrete pillboxes commanded long straight sections of the valley highways. Canals and ditches which already formed minor antitank barriers were widened and deepened, and additional ditches were dug.

The Po defense line ran along the main river from Ferrara west to its junction with the Ticino, from which point the enemy apparently planned to defend along the Ticino rather than farther west along the main stream. This line meant giving up Turin but retained Milan in the defended area. It was estimated that 20 divisions could man this defense system, which extended about 50 miles along the Ticino and 3 times that distance along the Po. The latter river ran through such marshy country in the final 25-mile section to its mouth that it was scarcely necessary even to cover this natural obstacle. Along the Po line work progressed rapidly, and by mid-January photo cover showed the defenses were well under way, containing many prepared positions for mortars, antitank guns, and field artillery north of the Po while the high, thick levees along the river banks were utilized to the maximum. Trenches and pits for riflemen and machine gunners, protected by barbed wire and well camouflaged, were dug into these flood barriers. Antitank ditches were constructed near Ferrara, Cremona, and Parma. The depth of the line extended far north of the river, even Mantua being provided with perimeter defenses where several canals around the city were widened until they became major tank obstacles.

The third and final line, based on the Adige River and the foothills of the Alps, had been under construction since July 1944. Designed to cover the lower southern approach to the Brenner Pass and to hold us back from northeastern Italy, it was anchored on the right flank by Lake Garda, extended east through Verona, and followed the foothills as far as Vicenza. Low hills which stood up from the valley floor around Padua were included in the system, and strong defenses were also prepared in the area around Venice. The Adige line was formed on the same principles as the other enemy defense belts, consisting primarily of firing points located on high ground covering all approaches toward the north. It was reminiscent of World War I in its intricate system of trenches, profusion of dugouts, and machine-gun emplacements. These defenses varied in depth from 1,000 to 5,000 yards in the mountains; natural obstacles in the lower ground eastward toward the Adriatic Sea were turned into antitank ditches. In general the strength of the Adige line was sufficiently great that in the hands of a determined enemy, such as the Germans had proved to be in the past, it might well have become the most difficult position to crack in the history of the Italian campaign.