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FIFTH ARMY HISTORY



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FIFTH ARMY HISTORY

16 AUGUST - 15 DECEMBER 1944

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American soldier inspects German pillbox knocked out during the Gothic Line fighting



The Gothic Line

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ON 20 Jun 69

Lieutenant General MARK W. CLARK

* * * *commanding*

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CHAPTER I * * * * *

The Arno Line

THE month of August 1944 found the troops of Fifth Army, under the command of Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark, poised along the south bank of the Arno River on a 35-mile front extending from Marina di Pisa on the Ligurian coast to the Elsa River, 20 miles west of Florence. (*See Map No. 1.*) After the capture of Rome on 4 June, the advance of Fifth Army had been spectacular. By 18 July it had driven the Germans over 150 miles up the west coast of the Italian peninsula to capture the strategic port of Leghorn, and its advance patrols had reached the Arno. The Army then had devoted the succeeding weeks to consolidating its positions along the south bank of the Arno and reorganizing, training, and resting its troops in preparation for future operations. The British Eighth Army, advancing through the central and eastern portion of the peninsula, had occupied the portion of Florence south of the Arno on 4 August, completed the work of securing the remainder of the river line in the next few days, and brought its lagging right flank up the Adriatic coast beyond the port of Ancona. By mid-August, with the exception of the Eighth Army right flank, the line Pisa—Rimini, which had been established as the objective of the Allied spring drive, had largely been reached. From the low hills south of the Arno our troops could look across the broad Arno Plain to the serrated peaks of the Northern Apennines, the last mountain barrier blocking the approaches to the Po Valley. Once across the mountains, Fifth Army could hope for an early end to the long and arduous Italian campaign.

A. *ADVANCE TO THE ARNO*

The speed which had marked the progress of the Allied armies from Rome to Florence was no guarantee that the next phase of the campaign would be an easy one.

Past experience indicated the contrary. At the start of the Italian campaign in September 1943 the Allied armies had made similar rapid progress in their drive up the Italian peninsula. On 1 October Fifth Army took Naples, 2 weeks later it had crossed the Volturno River, and by mid-November it was 75 miles beyond Salerno. Eighth Army had kept pace with these advances on the east side of the peninsula. Then the drive had slowed. Taking advantage of the mass of mountains lying between the central ridge of the Apennines and the Tyrrhenian Sea 100 miles below Rome, the enemy had prepared a series of skillfully laid out defensive positions. It took 2 months of exhausting fighting before Fifth Army broke through the first of these defenses, the Winter Line; 2 more months of repeated and costly assaults failed to do more than dent the formidable Gustav Line or to take Cassino, its most famous bastion; and the effort to outflank the mountain barriers by an amphibious landing at Anzio did not break the deadlock. During those long winter months of 1943-44, our troops learned from hard experience the difficulty of combatting an enemy who had the advantage of fighting from prepared mountain defenses.

Weeks of careful planning preceded the spring attack. Eighth Army shifted the bulk of its strength to the Cassino front, fresh divisions arrived from America, and large stocks of ammunition and supplies were built up. Then on 11 May 1944 Fifth and Eighth Armies attacked. With the American II Corps on the left and the French Expeditionary Corps on the right Fifth Army smashed through the Gustav Line on a narrow front extending from the Liri River valley to the Tyrrhenian Sea. On 23 May the American VI Corps, coordinating its attack with the advance of the troops from the south, broke out of the Anzio beachhead, then linked up with II Corps, and drove north to share in the capture of Rome on 4 June. Outnumbered and outmaneuvered, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, commander of the German Army Group Southwest, lost the greater portion of his Fourteenth Army in the fighting before Rome and barely succeeded in extricating his Tenth Army from the shattered defenses of the Gustav Line. Working frantically to piece together sufficient forces to cover his retreat, Kesselring pulled his broken units back toward northern Italy. In the 25-day period 11 May-4 June Fifth Army had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy both in personnel and equipment, had captured 15,606 prisoners, and had advanced nearly 100 miles. Once the mountain defense lines had been broken the static warfare of the winter months had changed to a war of movement.

Without pause Fifth and Eighth Armies drove north from Rome through the ripening grain fields and vineyard-clad hills of central Italy. Rapid in its early stages, the pursuit gradually slowed as extended supply lines, demolitions, and stiffening enemy resistance hampered the movement of our troops. In addition the strong force General Clark had built up for the May offensive was steadily re-

duced by the withdrawal of units for other theaters. Two days after the capture of Rome Allied forces crossed the English Channel to open the long-awaited offensive in France. Two months later, on 15 August, Seventh Army, made up from troops drawn from the Mediterranean Theater, landed on the French Riviera. The action in France, which represented the major Allied offensive in the west, took precedence over the Italian campaign. When troops were needed to build up the southern task force, both the French forces and the veteran VI Corps were transferred to Seventh Army. In all, nine full infantry divisions and the equivalent of a tenth left Fifth Army in the period 1 June–1 August. In spite of these losses of experienced troops Fifth Army pressed hard on the heels of the retreating Germans. When the Arno River line had been reached the Army was nearly 150 miles farther up the Italian peninsula, and it had inflicted additional heavy losses on the enemy. During this period a total of 14,226 Germans passed through the Army prisoner-of-war cages, and over 2,000 more were evacuated through medical channels.

Having reached the Arno, Kesselring was ready to call a halt to the series of rear guard actions and retrograde movements which had marked the long and exhausting retreat from the Gustav Line. By throwing reserve divisions into the line and rushing reinforcements to battered veteran divisions he had been able to restore a semblance of organization in his order of battle, and the last 20 miles of Fifth Army's advance to the Arno were studded with hard-fought engagements. Now the enemy had behind him the rugged peaks of the Northern Apennines, reinforced by a series of fixed defenses even stronger than the Gustav Line. The war of movement was over. Unless the enemy elected to withdraw his troops from Italy, Fifth Army was faced with another difficult mountain campaign. Our troops too were exhausted by over 3 months of action and they had outrun their supply lines. A period of rest, regrouping, and building up of supplies would be necessary before a coordinated attack could be launched, and if there was a lesson to be learned from the fighting of the past winter it was that only a carefully planned and sustained attack would succeed.

B. *TERRAIN BEFORE FIFTH ARMY*

The mountain barrier facing Fifth Army, known as the Northern Apennines, extends from the Ligurian Alps south of Genoa southeast across the Italian peninsula nearly to the Adriatic Sea below Rimini. Then the mountains run southwards close to the coast for a short distance before gradually swinging inland as the Central Apennines to form the backbone of the long Italian boot. On the north side the Northern Apennines meet the broad fertile plain of the Po River in a slightly curved,

clean-cut line; to the south they drop away to the narrow coastal plain along the Ligurian Sea and in an irregular line to various plains along the Arno. At its narrowest point, between Florence and Bologna, the range is approximately 50 miles wide, and individual mountains rise to well over 5,000 feet, making the Northern Apennines at all points a deep and formidable obstacle to an advance into the Po Valley.

Although the dominant alignment of the Northern Apennines is northwest-southeast, erosion by numerous transverse streams draining opposite slopes of the range has cut it into numerous irregular spurs projecting northeast and southwest. The ill-defined summit line lies closer to the southwest edge of the range so that the slopes which faced our troops are generally steep while those facing northeast are relatively long and moderate. The mountains rise from an elevation of 300 feet at the Po Valley to an average crest elevation of 3,000–4,000 feet. Above the ridges, which are broken and discontinuous, rise many lofty peaks, the highest being Mount Cimone of 7,095 feet and Mount Cusna of 6,857 feet, both in the western portion of the range where the average peak of elevation is somewhat higher than at the Adriatic end. The principal streams follow relatively direct, parallel courses northeast to the Po Valley and southwest to the Arno and the Ligurian coast; a few, such as the Sieve River, which flows almost due east to form a valley 15 miles north of Florence, violate this pattern. There is also considerable interlocking of headwaters of streams flowing in opposite directions so that the water line fails to correspond to the summit line. The Reno River, which flows into the Adriatic on a course parallel to the Po, rises only 6 miles north of Pistoia, at the foot of the southwest slopes; Lima Creek, a tributary to the Arno, rises 12 miles northwest of the source of the Reno. The eroding effect of the mountain streams together with the irregular geologic formation of the Northern Apennines has served to divide the range into a number of compartments marked by broken ridges, spurs, and deep, pocket-shaped valleys, the whole offering to the enemy an excellent series of defensive positions.

The principal river valleys carry roads which cross the mountains by low passes over the watersheds. In line with the dominant pattern of spurs and stream lines, these roads run northeast-southwest, a single exception being the Florence—Bologna road, which follows a north-south axis. Seven state roads connect the Arno and Po Valleys. From La Spezia on the west coast Highway 62 goes to Parma and Highway 63 to Reggio; Highway 12 connects Lucca and Modena; Highway 64, Pistoia and Bologna; and three roads cross the mountains from Florence: Highway 65 to Bologna, Highway 67 to Forli, and Highway 71 to Cesena. The passes by which these roads surmount the ridges vary from 2,962 feet, the height of Futa Pass on Highway 65, to 4,553 feet, the height of Abetone Pass on Highway 12. Few lateral roads connect the main highways, and secondary roads are limited in number. All roads are

marked by twisting curves, sharp gradients, and narrow defiles; bridges over the mountain streams are often hard to bypass; and landslides are frequent even without the assistance of German demolition experts. The few electric railways through the mountains could easily be blocked by destroying the bridges and blowing in the entrances to the numerous tunnels.

In contrast to the rolling, extensively cultivated hill country of central Italy, the mountains of the Northern Apennines are so rugged that movement of wheeled or tracked vehicles off the roads is seldom possible. In large areas cart tracks or mule trails offer the only local routes of communication. Villages are small and are generally confined to the valleys or to the main roads. The valleys, low hills, and lower slopes of the mountains are cultivated with grain fields, vineyards, and olive groves. Upper slopes are covered with chestnut trees, scrub oak, and pine forests wherever there is any soil, but many of the mountains have precipitous, bare rock slopes, razor-back ridges, and occasional sheer cliffs.

Late in September the fall rains begin. Mountain streams which virtually dry up in the summer months change to raging torrents in a few hours' time, and fog and mist, accompanying the cloudy days, often reduce visibility nearly to zero. By late October snow begins to fall on the higher peaks, and in midwinter the passes through the mountains are sometimes blocked to traffic for short periods. The problems of conducting offensive operations in the mountains, difficult at best, would be greatly increased once the fall rains and cold weather set in.

Before reaching the Northern Apennines it would be necessary for Fifth Army to cross the Arno River and the broad valley lying between the river and the mountains. The Arno flows north from Arezzo to join the Sieve River at Pontassieve, 10 miles east of Florence, and then proceeds almost due west for 65 miles to enter the Ligurian Sea at Marina di Pisa. The river averages 200–250 feet in width; its depth shows great seasonal variation, accentuated by a system of 20- to 30-foot levees on both banks which serve to hold the river in flood stages from spreading over the low, reclaimed land on each side. In late summer, before the September rains, the river can be forded by vehicles at several points, and foot troops can wade across almost at will. At Florence the foothills of the Northern Apennines reach south nearly to the river; west of Florence the mountains curve back to the northwest, leaving a broad, level plain approximately 15 miles wide on the north side of the river. Two spurs extending southeast from the Northern Apennines divide this plain into three parts. Fifteen miles west of Florence the Mount Albano ridge, which reaches a peak elevation of 2,014 feet, dominates the eastern half of the area; 4 miles northeast of Pisa the Pisano hill mass, 3,011 feet high, provides observation over the western half.

Numerous roads cross the plain. A four-lane superhighway, the Autostrada, describes an arc through the northern portion of the plain, connecting Florence with

Pistoia, Lucca, and the coastal road north of Pisa; and a good network of secondary roads branches out from these large towns to the numerous rural villages which dot the fertile farmland around them. Much of this farmland consists of reclaimed swamps and is crisscrossed with drainage canals. In the dry summer months armor can operate almost at will through the valley, but the complex system of canals with their built-up banks offer excellent antitank ditches and delaying positions.

On either coast the Northern Apennines give way to a narrow coastal plain. The coastal lowland along the Ligurian Sea extends from the mouth of the Arno to the Magra River below La Spezia, diminishing in width from 9 miles at Pisa to 3 miles at Massa. From Pisa north to the resort center of Viareggio large areas consist of reclaimed bogland covered with planted pine woods or small cultivated fields and traversed by numerous canals. From the Arno to the Magra River the beaches are sandy and favorable for amphibious operations; north of the Magra the mountains border the sea, and the coastline is too rocky to permit a large-scale landing. On the Adriatic side opposite Eighth Army the coastal lowland is narrow and characterized by a series of flat-topped ridges extending eastward from the Northern Apennines. The ridges are separated by numerous short, torrential streams which are subject to flash floods. North of Rimini, where the mountains turn away from the coast, the Po Valley stretches forth in a broad alluvial plain. Sandy beaches and easy gradients favor landings here, but progress inland toward the Rimini—Bologna highway could be made difficult by flooding the low-lying ground. Any effort to outflank the Northern Apennines by a landing north of Rimini would have to be executed in force because the enemy could make use of the excellent road net of the Po Valley to rush troops to any threatened sector.

In addition to the tremendous advantage given the enemy by the natural strength of the mountain barrier facing the Allied Armies in Italy, the road net available for the movement of troops and supplies in the Po Valley is more extensive and better integrated than the corresponding facilities south of the mountains. Close to and paralleling the clean-cut northern edge of the Apennines is Highway 9, running from Rimini on the Adriatic coast northwest to Milan, Italy's largest industrial city. Along Highway 9 are Cesena, Forli, Bologna, Modena, Reggio, and Parma, all termini of highways crossing the Northern Apennines. Until our troops could cut this key highway it would be easy for the Germans to switch troops rapidly from one part of the front to another and to keep supplies moving up the roads into the mountains. Bologna, terminus to Highway 65, the best route across the mountains, is both an important rail and road center. It provided an excellent nerve-center for the enemy's system of supply.

Florence, at the other end of Highway 65, is the main center for communications south of the mountains. Two roads connect it with the Ligurian coast: the Autostrada



Mile after mile of rugged mountains lay between the Arno and Po Valleys



Few roads cross the Northern Apennines, and these could be easily blocked



Antitank ditch constructed by the Todt Organization to protect Futa Pass



German machine-gun position in the Il Giogo Pass sector of the Gothic Line

across the northern edge of the Arno Plain and Highway 67 along the south bank of the Arno. In mid-August the former road was in enemy territory, and the latter was too close to the enemy lines to be used. Supplies reached Fifth Army through the ports of Civitavecchia and Piombino where they were transferred to trucks and carried forward on Highway 1 along the coast and over secondary roads leading north from Highway 68, the first good lateral road south of Highway 67. Past experience indicated that the railroads in the Arno Valley which parallel the Autostrada and Highway 67 would be rendered useless for months by German demolition experts; but once the almost demolished port of Leghorn could be repaired and the enemy cleared from the north bank of the Arno to permit work on the blown bridges and demolished houses blocking Highway 67, the rear supply lines of Fifth Army would be shortened. The road net southeast of Florence in the Eighth Army zone was inferior to that of the Arno Valley, and there was no continuous lateral highway behind the Allied front comparable to Highway 9. Furthermore, in direct proportion to the distance our troops pushed forward into the mountains the advantage held by the enemy in logistics would increase.

C. *ENEMY DEFENSES*

The Germans began the work of constructing defenses in the Northern Apennines when Fifth Army was still engaged in breaking through the Winter Line 200 miles to the south. Under the direction of the Todt Organization, which had built Germany's West Wall and eastern defense lines, approximately 15,000 Italian farmers and laborers were herded into labor camps and forced to do the manual labor of digging antitank ditches, gun emplacements, machine gun and rifle pits, trenches, and personnel shelters. Work continued at an increasing tempo during the summer months as the Allied armies drove past Rome and drew closer to northern Italy. The stiff resistance our troops met as they approached the Arno was in part due to enemy efforts to complete his defenses before falling back to the mountains.

The main line of defense, named by the Germans the *Goten Stellung* or Gothic Line, was sited to take maximum advantage of the rugged mountains and the limited number of roads across them. In general it followed the south side of the water divide rather than the crest line, which, though higher, is more irregular and is pierced at several points by streams flowing northeast into the Po Valley. Starting from the west coast near the town of Massa, the Gothic Line swung southeast through the heights overlooking the Ligurian coast, then east across the narrow valley of the Serchio River, and through the mountains north of Lucca, Pescia, and Pistoia. Above Pistoia the line crossed the headwaters of the north-flowing Reno River and curved

northeast to form an arc around the headwaters of the Sieve River, crossing Highway 65 below Futa Pass and then turning southeast again to follow the main Apennine ridge to the headwaters of the Foglia River where it bent northeast to reach the Adriatic near Pesaro. The total length of the line was approximately 170 miles, too great a distance to permit the type of continuous defenses characteristic of the West Wall with the limited time and resources available to the Todt Organization in Italy. On the other hand, the paucity of good roads and passes through the mountains made it possible for the Germans to concentrate their defensive works at a few key points. Our troops were to encounter strongpoints in the Gothic Line equal to anything met at Cassino.

Topographically the weakest point in the Gothic Line was along the north-south axis of Highway 65. Futa Pass, with an elevation of 2,962 feet, is one of the lowest of the passes, the terrain here is less precipitous than in other portions of the range, and Highway 65, connecting Florence and Bologna, is the best and most direct road through the mountains. Since Highway 65 was the logical route for an attacking force to follow, the Germans made Futa Pass the strongest point in the Gothic Line defenses.

The principal defense works were located not in the pass itself but in the vicinity of the hamlet of Santa Lucia, 2 miles to the south. Here the highway follows an ascending ridge between two valleys, characterized by rolling farmland and areas of low brush, which slope steeply south toward the Sieve River. From his vantage points on the high ground the enemy possessed excellent observation and broad fields of fire for antitank guns and automatic weapons. Since it was possible for armor to operate across the fields on both sides of the highway, elaborate preparations were made against tank attacks. West of the highway reliance was placed primarily on minefields consisting of six and eight rows of antitank mines laid in an almost continuous band for a distance of 2 miles. East of the road Italian laborers dug a deep V-shaped antitank ditch strengthened with pine log revetments. The ditch extended from a point $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles south and east of the highway, across the road behind the minefields, and for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile northwest of the road.

Covering the minefields and antitank ditch was an intricate network of infantry positions and bunkers for antitank guns. Many of these bunkers were dug deep into the sides or crests of the hills and strengthened with up to 6 feet of reinforced concrete, which rendered them impervious to all but heavy artillery. Two of the bunkers in the Futa Pass area were topped by Panther tank turrets with only the long-barreled 75-mm guns and the turrets showing above ground level. Infantry positions, consisting of concrete machine gun pillboxes, trenches, and foxholes connected by crawl trenches to large, heavily reinforced personnel shelters, were protected by antipersonnel minefields and 1 or more 20- to 30-foot wide bands of barbed wire. The wire

was strung close to the ground in dense masses, and automatic weapons were sited to cover the entanglements with low grazing fire. Troops held in reserve positions behind the lines lived in dugouts burrowed deep into the reverse slopes of hills. Also behind the front line were prepared gun pits and personnel shelters for field artillery units. A frontal assault against the Futa Pass defenses promised to be a difficult and costly struggle.

To the east of Futa Pass the defenses continued in an almost unbroken line to beyond Il Giogo Pass on the road from San Piero to Firenzuola. The mountains on each side of Il Giogo Pass are too steep to necessitate antitank defenses other than road blocks, but the infantry positions were almost as fully developed as those below Futa Pass. Many of these hills were covered with pine forests which made it more difficult to locate enemy defenses by air photos, and the Germans were thorough in camouflaging the results of their work. Small underground fortresses were constructed by boring shafts straight down, excavating rooms for personnel, and then running tunnels for machine guns out to the face of the slopes. All spoil was taken out through the shaft to be disposed of well away from the position, and since no digging had been done near the firing apertures they were extremely difficult to locate even at close range. Barbed wire and antipersonnel minefields guarded all approaches. Similar defenses extended west of Highway 65 as far as the hills covering the Prato—Bologna road above Vernio, giving strong flank protection for approximately 7 miles on each side of Futa Pass. For the remaining 150 miles of the Gothic Line the Germans relied heavily on the natural defenses provided by the rugged mountains, concentrating their pillboxes, minefields, and tank obstacles to cover the river valleys and passes.

In the portion of the Fifth and Eighth Army zones lying between the Arno River and the Gothic Line there were few fixed defenses. Italian civilians who filtered through the enemy lines and German prisoners captured by Fifth Army reported a Green Line consisting of weapons pits and machine gun positions in the Sieve River valley. It was later established that the Green Line was only another name for the Gothic Line and that the positions reported along the Sieve River were outposts of the Gothic Line. West of Florence in the Arno Plain there were reports of a Gisela, a Gudrun, and an Edith Line, all similar delaying positions in the Lucca—Pistoia area. The Ligurian coastal plain north of Marina di Pisa was more strongly fortified. Fear of amphibious operations had led the Germans to construct coast defenses at such points as Viareggio and Marina di Carrara long before our troops reached the Arno. During July and August these defenses were improved, and lateral lines of defense from the sea to the mountains were constructed to seal off any successful landing. Along the Arno itself the enemy had only machine gun nests, minefields, and road blocks built by the troops holding the river line. The character of these

defenses indicated that the enemy intended to use them only to delay our troops while he fell back to the mountains.

Information concerning the location and strength of the Gothic Line defenses was obtained primarily through the study of air photographs. First reports of the existence of such a line and of the activities of the Todt Organization in the area were checked on photographs by Base Section Mediterranean Army Interpretation Unit (West) as early as December 1943. During the spring months photo reconnaissance planes mapped the area at regular intervals, and in June 1944, on the basis of information then available, a set of 1/50,000 scale overprints of the entire Gothic Line were issued to Fifth and Eighth Armies. The Fifth Army Photo Intelligence Center then assumed responsibility for the interpretation of photos of the portion of the line within the Army zone. Defense overprints and mosaics were issued periodically as additional flights revealed changes and additions to the defenses. By the time Fifth Army was prepared to attack photo interpretation, particularly of the Futa Pass area, was unusually detailed. Accurate information concerning many individual works was obtained from Italian engineers who had helped in designing them and from Italian laborers who had been engaged in their construction.

D. STRENGTH AND DISPOSITION OF ENEMY FORCES

In mid-August the enemy forces facing the Allied Armies in Italy and in immediate reserve totaled 21 divisions: 6 divisions opposite Fifth Army, 14 opposite Eighth Army, and 1 division, the 90th Panzer Grenadier (Armored Infantry) Division, in the Bologna area. Beginning at the west coast the units facing Fifth Army consisted of the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division "Reichsfuehrer SS," the 65th Grenadier (Infantry) Division, the 26th Panzer (Armored) Division, and the 3d Panzer Grenadier Division, with the infantry regiments of the 362d Grenadier Division attached to the latter two units and the 20th GAF (German Air Force) Field Division guarding the coast at Viareggio. Continuing to the east in the Eighth Army zone, opposite the British 13 Corps sector, were the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, the 4th Parachute Division, and the 356th, 715th, and 334th Grenadier Divisions, with the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division in the process of withdrawal. Opposite the British 10 and 2 Polish Corps were the 305th, 44th, and 114th Grenadier Divisions, the 5th Mountain Division, and the 71st and 278th Grenadier Divisions. The 1st Parachute Division was in close support along the Adriatic coast, and the 162d Grenadier Division was reforming below Ravenna. These divisions were divided between the German Fourteenth and Tenth Armies, the Fourteenth Army under Lt. Gen. (Gen-

eral of the Armored Forces) Joachim Lemelsen holding the western sector of the Gothic Line opposite Fifth Army and 13 Corps.

The units of Fourteenth Army holding the Arno River line were the same ones which had fought the delaying action north of Rome, and the mobile units such as the 3d, 15th, 29th, and 90th Panzer Grenadier and the 26th Panzer Divisions had been in action almost constantly since the beginning of the May offensive. All were tired and understrength and many were in the process of reorganization. The 20th GAF Field Division had recently absorbed the 19th GAF Field Division, and the 65th Grenadier Division, after being nearly annihilated at Anzio, had been withdrawn and rebuilt with Volksdeutsche from the Ost Preussen Division. The 26th Panzer Division made up its losses by absorption of the 1027th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and by the attachment of the Infantry Lehr Brigade and the 1059th and 1060th Grenadier Regiments (originally part of the disbanded 92d Grenadier Division) from the 362d Grenadier Division. Similarly the depleted 3d Panzer Grenadier Division was strengthened by the attachment of the 956th Grenadier Regiment, also from the 362d Grenadier Division.

After Fifth Army reached the Arno on 18 July there was no heavy fighting along the river for a period of weeks. Lemelsen took advantage of this opportunity to give his troops a much needed rest while the Todt Organization rushed work on the Gothic Line. The practice of attaching infantry regiments to units such as the 3d Panzer Grenadier and 26th Panzer Divisions facilitated the withdrawal of the bulk of these divisions from the line for rest and made possible the formation of a much needed mobile reserve. Later in the month when the 3d followed the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division out of the Italian theater and the 26th Panzer Division was moved to the Adriatic coast these shifts were effected smoothly. The Infantry Lehr Brigade was transferred to the 65th Grenadier Division; the 956th, 1059th, and 1060th Grenadier Regiments were returned to the reorganized 362d Grenadier Division, which then took over the sector of the front held by the 3d Panzer Grenadier Division. During August only a shell of troops were kept along the Arno, the remainder being withdrawn to positions within the Gothic Line.

The German divisions along the front were supported by a number of general headquarters artillery units including the 764th Heavy Artillery Battalion (170-mm guns and 150-mm howitzers), the 451st Artillery Battalion (150-mm howitzers and 105-mm guns), and the 51st Light Artillery Battalion (105-mm gun/howitzers). Two Nebelwerfer regiments were also identified in the Arno Plain, the 56th and 71st, equipped with 6-barreled 150-mm and 5-barreled 210-mm Nebelwerfers. Toward the end of August the enemy began moving his artillery back to prepared positions in the Gothic Line, placing the burden of artillery support on his self-propelled artillery. The 216th Assault Gun Battalion (150-mm howitzers mounted on Mark IV

chassis) had been met previously in the Tyrrhenian coastal area, and in August the 907th Assault Gun Battalion (105-mm howitzers mounted on Mark IV chassis) was located in the Florence area. Two other assault gun battalions, the 914th and 242d, were in operation on the Adriatic coast. Although there were shortages in some types of ammunition, it could be expected that the Gothic Line positions would be well stocked. Enemy tanks, which could be employed as roving artillery, totaled approximately 350, of which half were heavy Mark V Panthers and Mark VI Tigers organized into independent units.

The enemy's air strength in Italy had declined steadily, due to the attrition of the air warfare, the bombing of German factories, and the necessity of withdrawing planes to meet the increasing pressure from both the eastern and western fronts, until it had reached a point verging on impotence. In August there were approximately 40 single-engine fighters and 25 long-range and 20 tactical reconnaissance planes operating from fields in northern Italy. There were also about 50 Italian fighters which could be expected to operate in defense of Italian targets. The offensive strength of the German air force in Italy was even weaker, amounting only to 35 obsolete Junkers 87 (Stukas) belonging to second-line night ground attack units. Bombers based in Yugoslavia also were second-rate planes, and the threat of raids from fields in southern France was eliminated with the capture of these fields by Seventh Army. With the exception of occasional night-harassing raids by one or two bombers, our troops were hardly aware of the existence of the once formidable Luftwaffe.

Before the invasion of southern France the German forces north of the Apennines were located to protect either coast against amphibious attacks. After the invasion, which brought with it the possibility of an Allied attack across the Franco—Italian border, Kesselring was forced to concentrate his reserves in position to defend this exposed flank. Most of the 5th Mountain Division was transferred from the Eighth Army front, and the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division left its reserve position behind the Gothic Line to join the 148th and 157th Reserve Divisions and the 42d Light and 34th Grenadier Divisions in guarding the frontier. None of the latter four divisions was strong. Protection of the coasts was left to the 94th, 232d, and 237th Grenadier Divisions on the east and on the west to an Italian "Ligurian Army" under the command of Marshal Rodolfo Graziani. By September six Italian divisions had been identified: the San Marco, Monte Rosa, Prince Borghese, Italia, Littoria, and Milizia Armata. These divisions were still in the process of formation, few troops had had any battle experience, and although some units had been sent to Germany for training and indoctrination, it was unlikely that they would be employed in the Gothic Line in any numbers. The bulk of the Italians were still organized as labor troops in small independent battalions or were serving within German units in supply and service functions.

At the end of August Kesselring had 27 German divisions and elements of six Italian divisions in Italy. The removal of two divisions from the theater and the shift of two others to the Franco—Italian border was only partly compensated by the addition of the 98th Grenadier Division to the front opposite Eighth Army, and the force immediately available to defend the Gothic Line was thus reduced from 21 to 18 divisions. Many of the units were still far below strength, and the 27 German divisions in Italy were probably equivalent to not over 15 fresh, full divisions. The process of reorganizing and strengthening the older and more experienced divisions and a period of rest had, however, improved them considerably over the condition they had been in on 18 July when Fifth Army first reached the Arno River. Furthermore, the task of supplying these troops, although rendered difficult by the Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force, was being successfully carried through. In a 3-day period beginning 12 July, all road and rail bridges across the Po River used to carry supplies to the Gothic Line were knocked out by medium bombers of the 57th and 42d Bombardment Wings. The Germans met this crisis by the use of ferries, pipe lines, and ingeniously designed ponton bridges which were thrown across the river each night and then disassembled before daylight. Within a few days supplies were again moving across the Po Valley to the Northern Apennines. Until the Allied troops could break through the Gothic Line and reach the Po Valley, the German position in Italy was as strong as at any previous time in the Italian campaign.

E. DISPOSITION OF FIFTH ARMY FORCES

On 15 August the 35-mile sector of the Arno River held by Fifth Army was shared by the American IV Corps under Maj. Gen. Willis D. Crittenger and the American II Corps under Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes. After the Arno had been reached on 18 July and positions south of the river had been consolidated, Fifth Army had assumed a defensive attitude, maintaining only light screening forces along the river while resting and training its units in rear areas for the assault on the Gothic Line. The loss of veteran divisions to Seventh Army during June and July plus the casualties and fatigue resulting from 2 months of active campaigning made it difficult for General Clark to reassemble and retrain a force strong enough to mount a major offensive. The situation was further complicated by the concurrent need to protect a long line of communications and screen the front while regrouping was in progress. To accomplish these two ends IV Corps was assigned the greater part of the Army front with a purely defensive mission, while the bulk of II Corps was held back in preparation for the attack on the Gothic Line.

The IV Corps front, extending from Marina di Pisa at the mouth of the Arno to

the village of Capanne approximately 30 miles to the east, was held by Task Force 45 on the left and the 1st Armored Division on the right. Task Force 45, consisting of the 45th Antiaircraft Artillery Brigade and attached troops, had been formed on 26 July to meet the pressing need for additional infantry. The antiaircraft units were given brief periods of training, equipped with infantry weapons, and placed in the line to permit the relief of the 34th Division, which had been in action since 26 June. The new infantry unit was composed of the 91st and 107th Antiaircraft Artillery Groups and the 2d Armored Group, each with two battalions of antiaircraft troops and attached tanks and tank destroyers. The task force functioned as a reduced three-regiment division, holding two groups on the line and one in reserve. To provide direct supporting artillery the 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 751st Tank Battalion were formed into a special group and placed in indirect fire positions with additional support provided by the IV Corps artillery. By rotating the units in forward positions and continuing an intensive training program in the rear under the guidance of infantry officers, the antiaircraft troops gradually mastered the fundamentals of infantry fighting. The right sector of the IV Corps front was held by a second provisional force, Task Force Ramey, until 13 August, when the sector passed to the 1st Armored Division. In the weeks just prior to its recommitment the 1st Armored Division was reorganized under a streamlined Table of Organization which reduced it to approximately two-thirds its old size. The period of reorganization was also a period of rest, and the division by 15 August was again ready for action. There were no reserves attached to IV Corps, but the 34th Division and the 442d Regimental Combat Team in Army reserve were in rest areas along the coast below Leghorn where they would be available in case of an enemy counterattack.

The short sector of the Fifth Army front west of the Elsa River assigned to II Corps was held by a regimental combat team of the 91st Division. The 85th and 88th Divisions, also under II Corps control, were located in bivouac areas in the hill country north of Volterra approximately 15 miles from the Arno. In addition to a general program of rest and rehabilitation of the units and the absorption of replacements, special emphasis was placed on instruction in the techniques of river crossings and the peculiar features of mountain warfare. Engineers gave instruction in handling boats, footbridges, and hand lines, use of grappling hooks and ladders for scaling steep banks, and methods of detecting and clearing minefields. In preparation for mountain fighting troops were taken on long conditioning marches and trained to function in country where their vehicles could not operate. Tank and tank destroyer units were given training as supporting artillery, and Italian pack mule companies were attached for training in the use of mules for supply. Stress was also laid on the development of a system of communications for mountainous country. Experience

was gained in the use of cub planes to pick up and deliver messages, the use of pigeons, and in the use of mules for laying wire. This training program continued from the end of July through the month of August. On 17 August, when the 91st Division was relieved of responsibility for the II Corps sector of the front, it also engaged in a full training schedule, and the 34th Division likewise combined a period of rest with preparation for a return to action.

By mid-August General Clark had four infantry divisions, the 34th, 85th, 88th, and 91st, and one armored division, the 1st, rested and capable of offensive operations. Also Task Force 45 had received sufficient experience to be relied upon as a follow-up or holding force. Additional troops were on the way, including the 92d Infantry Division and a Brazilian Expeditionary Force (BEF). Only one regimental combat team, the 370th, of the 92d Division reached Fifth Army in August. It was assigned to IV Corps and took over a portion of the front held by the 1st Armored Division after 23 August. The elements of the BEF which arrived in August were in need of additional training before being committed. In contrast to the period before the May drive when General Clark had the equivalent of 14 divisions under his command, Fifth Army had been reduced in August to the strength of 6 divisions. Similarly, the number of corps artillery battalions had been reduced from 33 to 22 with additional battalions prepared to leave. The Army was rested and ready to attack, but it was necessary to coordinate its action with that of Eighth Army, which was holding a longer front and was the larger force.

F. *THE EIGHTH ARMY FRONT*

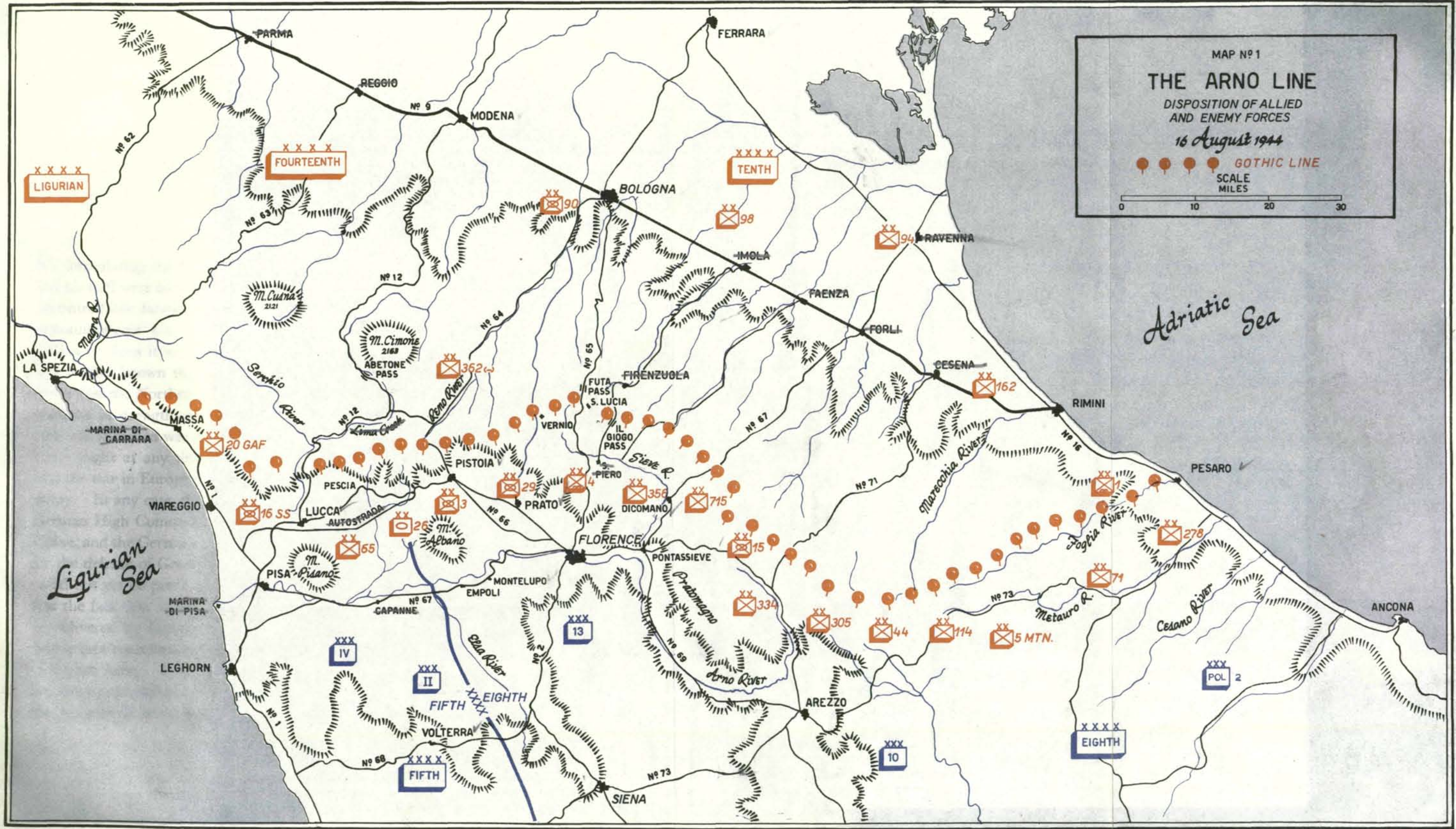
The British Eighth Army under the command of Lt. Gen. Sir Richard L. McCreery was responsible on 16 August for four-fifths of the long Allied front extending across the Italian peninsula. General McCreery had 16 divisions at his disposal, of which 7 were actually in the line. These divisions were divided among the British 13 and 10 Corps and the 2 Polish Corps on the front and the British 5 Corps and 1 Canadian Corps in reserve. Whereas the Fifth Army sector had been virtually static since 18 July, Eighth Army had continued a series of limited objective attacks to consolidate its positions along the Arno and to bring up its right flank along the Adriatic coast. These attacks, together with a regrouping of the units on the front, were still in progress in the middle of August.

13 Corps, after reaching the Arno on 4 August, spent the next few days clearing up enemy pockets south of the river in the area southwest of Pontassieve and in the Empoli—Montelupo area west of Florence. This work was accomplished by 11 August. At the same time a series of reliefs was carried out. The British 4 Infantry

and the 6 South African Armoured Divisions were withdrawn from the line, and the British 1 Infantry Division was moved up from Army reserve. On 12 August the right boundary of 13 Corps was moved east to a line running almost due north-south approximately 10 miles east of Pontassieve. This shift brought the British 6 Armoured Division into the 13 Corps area and left the Corps with four divisions in line: the 2 New Zealand Infantry Division on the left, the British 1 and the 8 Indian Infantry Divisions in the center, and the 6 Armoured Division on the right.

The situation in Florence remained static from 4 August to 12 August. 13 Corps troops held the area of the city south of the river, and the Italian partisans and German parachutists of the 4th Parachute Division fought for control of the northern and larger portion of the city. The Germans had blown all bridges across the Arno except the historic Ponte Vecchio. In this case they had spared the bridge but destroyed all the buildings along the narrow, canyon-like streets leading to it on each side of the river, effectively blocking the approaches with the rubble of what had been part of the oldest and most picturesque portion of the city. Although the partisans failed to prevent the Germans from destroying the bridges, they subsequently succeeded in gaining control of most of the area along the river and thereby facilitated the crossing of British troops. Two battalions of the 8 Indian Division crossed by way of the Ponte Vecchio on 13 August and occupied about a third of the town. Supported by this corps of regular troops, the partisans continued to carry the fight to the enemy in the outskirts of the city.

The British 10 Corps, to the right of 13 Corps, by 10 August was reduced to one division in the line. On 11 August the 4 Indian Infantry Division had been moved into reserve, and the next day the 6 Armoured Division was lost to 13 Corps. The remaining 10 Indian Infantry Division, with a brigade of reconnaissance troops, was left holding a 40-mile front of difficult mountainous terrain. Since the lack of good roads in this area made it unfavorable for offensive operations, the role of 10 Corps was less one of gaining ground than keeping as many German troops occupied as possible. The key area was to the right where the 2 Polish Corps, with the 5 Kresowa Infantry Division, the 3 Carpathian Infantry Division, and the Italian Corps of Liberation in the line, was pushing up the Adriatic coast. By 11 August the area south of the Cesano River had been cleared, and plans were under way for an attack across the river. Although Eighth Army had not yet reached the outposts of the Gothic Line, the limited advances made during the first 2 weeks of August and the regrouping and relief of units, which produced an effective supply of reserve troops, made possible the preparation of an over-all Allied plan for an attack on the Gothic Line.



MAP Nº 1
THE ARNO LINE
 DISPOSITION OF ALLIED
 AND ENEMY FORCES
 16 August 1944

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 SCALE
 MILES

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