

CHAPTER II * * * * *

Preparing to Attack

IN formulating the Fifth Army plan of attack on the Gothic Line, General Clark and his staff were faced with an unusually large number of difficult and in many cases uncontrollable factors. From the air photos supplied by the Fifth Army Photo Reconnaissance Unit and from information gained from German prisoners and Italian civilians it was clear that the Gothic Line was a formidable obstacle, and it was further known that a number of delaying positions existed between the Arno River and the Northern Apennines. Whether the enemy would elect to hold these positions in strength or would draw back quickly to the Gothic Line when our attack was launched was not yet certain, and there was even a possibility that the Germans might at any time decide to withdraw from Italy entirely. Many believed that the war in Europe was nearly over and that this might be the last attack of Fifth Army. In any case, the months of August and September were critical ones for the German High Command. The Allied Armies in France were driving hard for the Rhine, and the Germans were faced with the necessity of making broad strategic plans for the defense of Germany. The effect of these decisions on the Italian campaign could not yet be predicted. Of more immediate influence on Fifth Army planning was the fact that in the attack on the Gothic Line the main blow was planned to be delivered by Eighth Army. All plans made by General Clark, in addition to taking into consideration enemy capabilities, had to be based on the progress made by Eighth Army. Repeatedly corps and division staffs worked out the detailed plans necessary to implement Army instructions only to have a changed situation necessitate the issuance of new orders.

A. PRELIMINARY PLANS

See Map No. 2

During the last week of July Fifth Army was operating under instructions from General Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, commander of the Allied Armies in Italy (AAI), to rest and regroup its forces along the Arno Line in preparation for a renewal of the offensive as soon as Eighth Army had taken Florence and cleared the area north of the Arno and immediately west of the city. Operations were then to be conducted in two phases. In the first phase Fifth and Eighth Armies were to cross the Arno and clear the approaches to the Gothic Line; in the second phase the two armies were to breach the Gothic Line between Pistoia and Dicomano, a 30-mile-wide zone to the north of Florence. It was expected that D Day for the first phase of the operation would be some time within 5-10 August, and Fifth Army preliminary planning in July was pointed toward being prepared for this target date.

General Clark assigned the mission of making the Fifth Army attack to II Corps. The main effort was to be made on the Army's right flank in the vicinity of Montelupo, 12 miles west of Florence, where Mount Albano, the more eastern of the two spurs jutting into the Arno plain, slopes south to the Arno. After crossing the river II Corps was to seize Mount Albano and Pistoia and then swing west across the plain to take Lucca. Montelupo was in the 13 Corps sector, but it was expected that a new interarmy boundary would be established before D Day. For planning purposes a temporary boundary was established which crossed the Arno 4 miles east of Montelupo and then followed Highway 66 to a point southeast of Pistoia where it turned north to include Pistoia in the Fifth Army zone. For the attack General Keyes would have available the 85th, 88th, and 91st Divisions, each with one tank and one tank destroyer battalion attached, and for engineer support the 19th and 39th Engineer Combat Regiments. In addition to maintaining holding forces along the greater portion of the Fifth Army front, IV Corps was to assist the main attack by staging a demonstration between Pontedera and Angelica at the western end of the plain lying between Mount Albano and Mount Pisano. Once the II Corps attack was under way General Crittenberger was to be prepared for a follow-up or pursuit action, utilizing either one or both of the 1st Armored and 34th Divisions. The detailed planning for these attacks was carried out while Fifth Army was still in the process of consolidating the area south of the Arno and effecting the relief of its infantry divisions⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾For the text of AAI and Fifth Army Operations Instructions affecting plans for the attack on the Gothic Line issued prior to 1 August 1944, see Fifth Army History, Part VI, Annex No. 1.

As a supplement to the operations instructions for the projected attack across the Arno, Fifth Army issued special instructions designed to conceal the real intentions. The effective execution of these instructions caused the enemy repeatedly to send large and aggressive patrols across the river in an effort to take prisoners and find out what was going on behind the thin but effective screen of outposts guarding our lines south of the Arno.

On 7 August, General Clark issued Operations Instructions No. 31 (see *Annex No. 1A*) postponing D Day to the tentative date of 19 August and making minor changes in the original plan. The extra time would permit Eighth Army to complete the regrouping of its forces and to take the high ground north and northwest of Florence. Eighth Army would then attack simultaneously with Fifth Army to take the high ground northeast of Prato, 10 miles to the east of Pistoia. The II Corps mission of crossing the Arno at Montelupo and seizing Mount Albano remained unchanged; for the subsequent drive to seize the Mount Pisano hill mass the 1st Armored and the 34th Divisions were to be made available. The loss of the 1st Armored Division and the movement of the 34th Division from its reserve position on the west coast would greatly weaken IV Corps, and it was recommended that the corps commanders arrange a change in the intercorps boundary. In addition, Fifth Army planned to make the 442d Regimental Combat Team available to IV Corps when the 1st Armored Division was withdrawn and to assign the 370th Regimental Combat Team to IV Corps as soon as it arrived in the Army area. The tentative interarmy boundary designated in the previous operations instruction for D Day remained unchanged. Necessary alterations in corps and divisional plans were made to comply with General Clark's instruction, and on 16 August, when the new interarmy boundary was put into effect, the 85th Division relieved the 2 New Zealand Division in the area on each side of Montelupo.

B. CHANGE IN ALLIED STRATEGY

Until 16 August, Fifth Army planning was based on the assumption that the Allied armies would launch the main attack on the Gothic Line north of Florence. On that date General Alexander ordered a change in strategy embodied in AAI Operation Order No. 3. (See *Annex No. 1B*.) Accumulating evidence of the strength of the Futa Pass defenses and the concentration of enemy divisions in the central area of the line made the success of an attack from Florence appear doubtful or at best, promised to be a slow and costly assault. North of Florence the enemy had the crack 4th Parachute Division, flanked on the west by the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division and on the east by the 356th Grenadier Division. The 26th Panzer Division could

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be moved quickly to provide armored support, and the heavy tanks of the 508th Heavy Panzer Battalion were available in the Florence area.

General Alexander's new plan was to throw the enemy off balance and to gain surprise by unexpectedly and swiftly shifting his main attack to the Adriatic coast. When this thrust had gained sufficient momentum to endanger the enemy's flank, Kesselring would be forced to throw in additional troops to meet the threat. Although he was in the process of pulling back elements of his mobile units to form a reserve, Kesselring could meet a major attack on one part of the front only by robbing other sectors of the line. As soon as he weakened the central sector, Fifth Army was to be prepared to strike north along the original Florence—Bologna axis to Bologna while Eighth Army broke into the Po Valley, exploiting to a line from Bologna to Ferrara. If the attack succeeded, the German Tenth Army would be caught in a trap between the two Allied armies. Once in the Po Valley, Eighth Army was to be prepared to secure a bridgehead over the Po River north of Ferrara; Fifth Army was to take Modena and then exploit to the north and northwest. The plan was a bold one designed not only to crack the Gothic Line defenses and reach the lower Po but also to destroy a large part of Kesselring's forces.

The success of General Alexander's plan depended largely on the degree to which coordination and timing of the attacks and surprise were achieved. If Fifth Army was to make an attack from Florence, it would need more troops under its command, and it was further advisable to keep the command unified in each attack zone. Consequently 13 Corps was to be transferred to Fifth Army, thereby reducing Eighth Army's long front and creating a better balance between the two forces.

The new boundary between the two armies left Siena within the Eighth Army sector, ran east along Highway 73 to Monte San Savino, and then almost due north on a line approximately 20 miles east of Florence. D Day of the Eighth Army attack was to be determined by General McCreery; of Fifth Army, by General Alexander in consultation with General Clark. Fifth Army was, if possible, to be prepared to attack on 24 hours' notice any time after D plus 5 of the Eighth Army attack. Choosing the proper time for the commitment of Fifth Army was essential. If too soon, the attack might prove abortive; if too late, the plan for trapping the enemy might fail to achieve maximum results. Surprise was to be gained by concealing the build-up of Eighth Army on the Adriatic coast and by emphasizing preparations for an attack in the center. Fifth Army was to make every effort to convey the impression that both armies were attacking on a front extending from Pontassieve to Pontedera, and the activities necessary to create this illusion were to be continued in full until Fifth Army's actual attack was launched.

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C. FIFTH ARMY PLAN OF ATTACK

The change in Allied strategy resulted in a scrapping of all the preliminary plans worked out by Fifth Army, and on 17 August Operations Instruction No. 32 was issued. (See *Annex No. 1C.*) The principal effort was still to be made by II Corps, but the attack zone was shifted to the east to the 8-mile stretch of the Arno between Florence and Pontassieve and 13 Corps was to share in the operation. The attack was to be in two phases. In the first phase II Corps would attack through the British troops holding Florence and capture and secure Mounts Morello, Senario, and Calvana, while 13 Corps was to take Mount Giovi. These four 3,000-foot mountains approximately 6 to 8 miles north and northeast of Florence represented the enemy's first natural line of defense. Once they were captured, the way would lie open to the Sieve Valley and the approaches to the Gothic Line. In the second phase II Corps was to continue the attack on Army order along the axis of Highway 65 with 13 Corps following the axis of the San Piero—Imola road to the east of Highway 65. The 13 Corps troops west of Florence were to be relieved by II Corps by 20 August; those within and to the east of Florence were to remain in place acting as a screening force until passed through by the troops launching the II Corps attack on D Day. At that time the intercorps boundary south of the Arno would be shifted 6 miles east of Florence to coincide with the attack zones north of the river. Since the change of boundary would leave 13 Corps without adequate supply routes, II Corps was to extend to 13 Corps running rights over the roads in its zone. D Day for the attack was dependent on Eighth Army, but II and 13 Corps were to be prepared to attack on 72 hours' notice after 0001, 25 August.

To permit the concentration of II Corps troops for the attack north of Florence, IV Corps was made responsible for the whole of the front from the mouth of the Arno to a point 5 miles west of Florence. The new intercorps boundary was to take effect on 20 August. With only Task Force 45 and the 1st Armored Division under his command General Crittenberger lacked the troops necessary to hold a line 55 miles in length. In order to supply the needed infantry units to hold this long front it was planned to transfer the 6 South African Armoured Division from 13 Corps by 27 August. Until this move was completed the 85th Division would pass under control of IV Corps and continue to hold the sector it had just taken over from the 2 New Zealand Division. General Crittenberger estimated that when the 6 South African Armoured Division was in the line he would have 14 infantry battalions each holding a front of 7,000 to 8,000 yards. Behind this thin screen of forward troops the tank battalions of the 1st Armored Division would provide a close mobile reserve, and additional reserves were to be supplied by the 88th Division. One regi-

mental combat team was to be sent to Leghorn to support the left flank, and a second was to be held at Montaione to support the right flank. During the first phase of the Army attack IV Corps was to simulate a crossing of the Arno between Mount Pisano and Mount Albano, with the emphasis on the town of Fucecchio near the center of this zone. It was also to be prepared to follow up any enemy withdrawal.

The changed Allied strategy, in addition to shifting the zone of Fifth Army's attack to the east and forcing a major regrouping of forces, outmoded special measures taken to attain surprise. On 16 August General Clark issued revised special instructions designed to conceal the build-up of II Corps troops for the attack north of Florence. On 21 August these special instructions were again amended to give less emphasis to gaining surprise for the attack of Fifth Army and more to concealing the Eighth Army attack.

Fifth Army was still anxious to conceal the strength and exact point of the attack to be launched by II Corps so far as such plans did not conflict with the priority given to the Eighth Army attack. Measures carried out to achieve this end were made easier by the fact that most of the II Corps units were in bivouac areas well behind the front. Also the changes in plans involved major shifts in the positions of units. With a constant procession of troops moving east and west behind the lines, it was easy for the enemy to deduce that an offensive was shaping up somewhere along the Fifth Army front, but it was difficult to tell where the attack would come. Enemy air reconnaissance was limited and the occasional prisoners captured by his patrols could offer little information, even if forced to talk. Similarly, although the number of civilians living along the Arno was too great to make evacuation practicable and many were undoubtedly in contact with the Germans, their information was probably of doubtful value. The flexibility of the Allied plans made the period of waiting for the attack a trying ordeal for German outposts along the Arno, and the enemy reflected his nervousness by an increased sensitivity to any move made by our artillery or patrols.

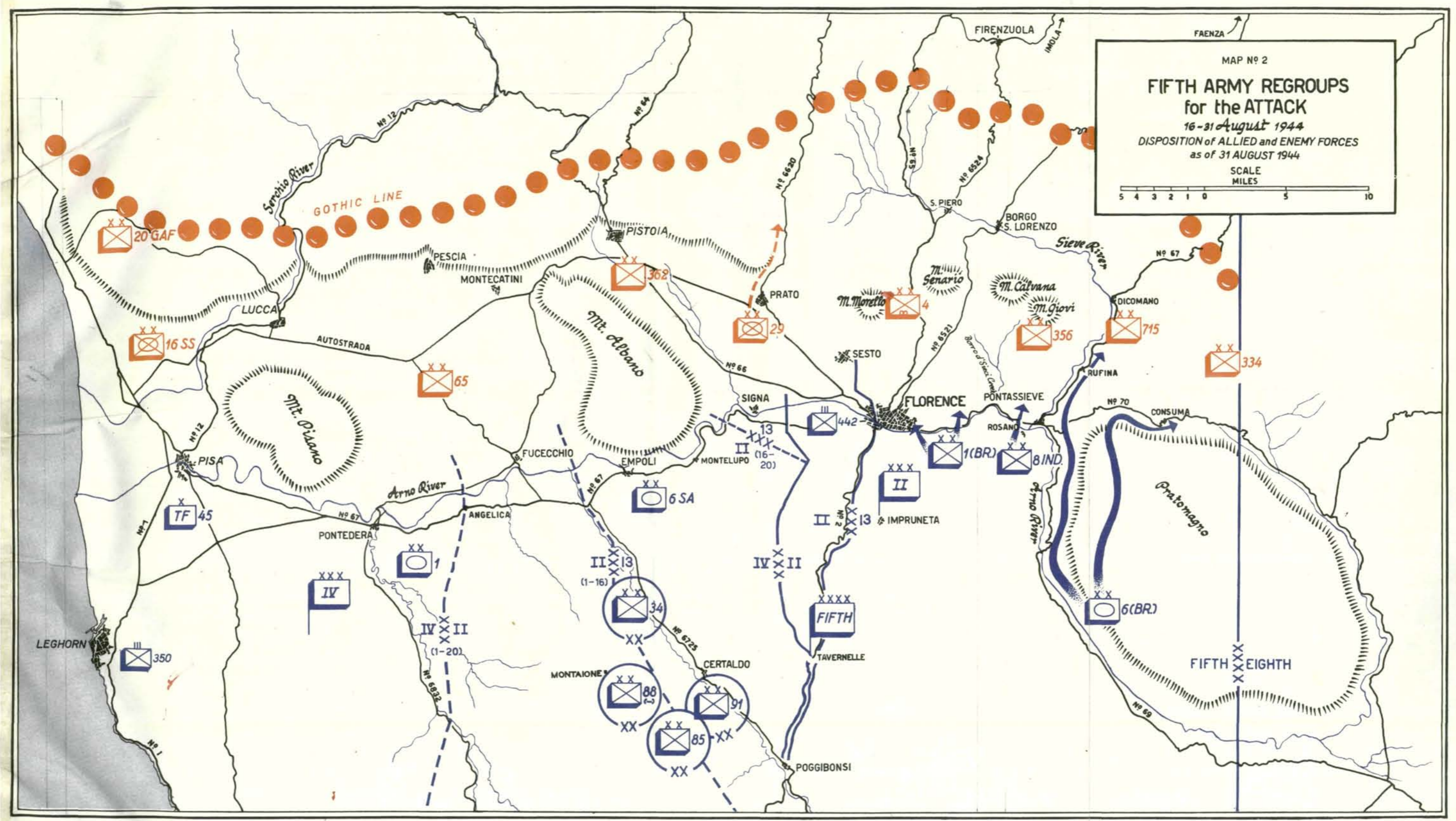
D. ACTION IN LATE AUGUST

20-31 AUGUST

1. *Regrouping on the Left.* During the remainder of August, IV Corps and II Corps completed the regrouping of their forces and prepared plans to implement General Clark's instructions for the crossing of the Arno and the attack on the Gothic Line. As quickly as its units were relieved, II Corps assembled them in bivouac areas between Volterra and Florence. The 91st Division, which had had one regiment on the line south of Fucecchio, was relieved by the 85th Division on

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18 August and went into training near Certaldo. On that same day the 34th Division was assigned to II Corps. Beginning on 20 August it moved from its assembly area on the west coast to positions near the 91st Division. General Keyes planned to use these two divisions to spearhead his initial attack across the Arno. The 85th Division, after passing to control of IV Corps on 20 August, was relieved by the 6 South African Armoured Division and the 1st Armored Division on 26–28 August. Thereafter it also assembled near Certaldo. For the task of relieving the British troops holding the 5-mile sector of the Arno west of Florence the 88th Division under II Corps was given the 442d Regimental Combat Team (less the 100th Battalion), which occupied the area on 20 August. One regiment, the 350th, was sent to Leghorn on 21 August to give support to IV Corps, but the bulk of the 88th Division remained near Volterra. Before the end of the month General Keyes had succeeded in concentrating four divisions for the attack, plans had been completed, and the artillery had begun to move into position areas south of Florence.

IV Corps also had completed its series of reliefs. Task Force 45 lost two battalions of anti-aircraft infantry when the 439th and 536th Anti-aircraft Automatic Weapons Battalions were ordered to Naples for shipment to Seventh Army. In return it received the 100th Infantry Battalion and the British 47 Light Anti-aircraft Regiment. The 1st Armored Division was strengthened by the commitment of the 370th Regimental Combat Team on 23 August, and the 6 South African Armoured Division, reinforced by the 24 Guards Brigade, was in line by 26 August. The addition of the armored and infantry troops of the 6 South African Armoured Division gave IV Corps a more effective force with which to hold its extended front, and it could further count on the support of two regiments of the 88th Division in reserve.

2. *13 Corps Crosses the Arno.* In accordance with General Alexander's orders 13 Corps, under the command of Lt. Gen. S. C. Kirkman, passed to command of Fifth Army on 18 August. At the time of its transfer the Corps was made up of two infantry divisions, the British 1 Division and the 8 Indian Division, and two armored divisions, the British 6 Armoured Division and the 6 South African Armoured Division. The last named division had been withdrawn from the line and was soon to pass to control of IV Corps. The 13 Corps left boundary adjoined the 85th Division 5 miles west of Florence; the right boundary, which adjoined 10 Corps, was also the boundary between Fifth and Eighth Armies. It ran generally along the eastern edge of the Pratomagno hill mass, east of the upper reach of the Arno. By 15 August, 13 Corps had cleared the south bank of the Arno and had crossed the river at Florence to win control of all except the northern outskirts of the city. The 1 Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. C. F. Loewen, held the left flank to and including Florence; the 8 Indian Division, under Maj. Gen. Dudley Russell, was responsible for the area east of Florence to the bend in the river at Pontassieve; and the 6 Armoured

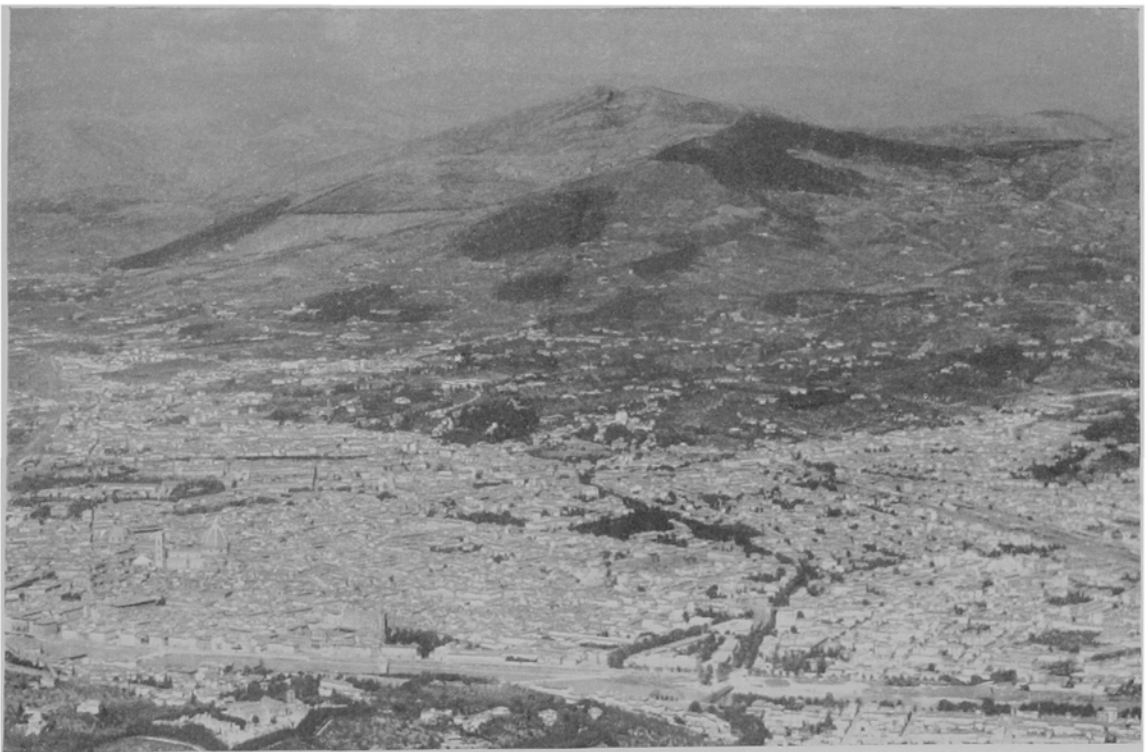
Division, under Maj. Gen. H. Murray, held the right flank from the Arno east to the boundary with Eighth Army. A shift was made in these positions after 20 August when II Corps took over the sector west of Florence. Three days later the 1 Division extended its right boundary to Borro delle Sieci Creek, 3 miles west of Pontassieve, thereby reducing the front of the 8 Indian Division.

The Fifth Army plan of attack called for 13 Corps to hold its positions along the Arno until passed through by II Corps. Weakening enemy resistance along the river after 20 August made it necessary to modify this plan in order to maintain contact. Patrol reports and information gained from Italian partisans indicated that the enemy was pulling back from the Arno to the more defensible line of hills to the north of the river. The gradual withdrawal of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, which was leaving the theater, from the Pratomagno hill mass reduced the enemy troops available to hold the Arno Line, and the shallow river, with the level plain behind it, offered a poor defensive position. Acting on the information that only light resistance would be met, 13 Corps prepared to secure a bridgehead before the anticipated date for the Fifth Army attack. The 2 Infantry Brigade of the 1 Division already had occupied most of Florence and had patrols operating into the suburbs, but until bridges were built across the river it was an unfavorable point at which to move the remainder of the Corps across. Also the Allies hoped to spare Florence from heavy shelling by avoiding a direct assault through the historic art center. The decision was made that the river should be crossed on a broad front to the east of the city.

A possible threat to a force attacking the river line was the presence of an artificial lake held back by weir locks at the junction of Borro delle Sieci Creek and the Arno. To prevent the enemy from blowing these locks and possibly isolating troops who had succeeded in crossing, on 21 August engineers of the 8 Indian Division forded the river and opened the locks. After the first rush of water subsided, the Arno was found to have a depth of less than 2 feet in places, and where the banks were not too steep both infantry and light vehicles could cross. Infantry of the 3 and 66 Infantry Brigades began to ford the river on 24 August; by the next day the 1 Division had all three of its brigades north of the Arno, holding a bridgehead approximately 1 mile deep. Highway 67, which skirts the north bank of the Arno east of Florence, was cleared in the division area, and engineers could start work on the bridges necessary for supplies and artillery to cross. The 8 Indian Division found a tank ford at Rosano, 1 mile to the west of Pontassieve. Tanks of the 17 Infantry Brigade were moved across on the 24th while the 19 Infantry Brigade protected the ford with troops who had crossed farther downstream and fanned out along the north bank. As in the crossing of the 1 Division on the left, enemy opposition was totally lacking, the Germans having pulled back of the first line of hills.



Italian partisans share in the welcome of British troops entering Florence



Our troops seized Florence, but the enemy still held the hills to the north



Sapper of the 8 Indian Division searches for mines near a dead Italian



British engineers clear the way for a Bailey bridge across the Arno River

Tanks and infantry established a defensive line north of the river while reinforcements poured in to expand the bridgehead. The engineers constructed a class 9 bridge at Rosano and a class 5 bridge at Le Sieci. Enemy artillery knocked out both bridges on 26 August; but the damage was quickly repaired, and the Rosano bridge was enlarged to class 30 the next day. Two field and one medium artillery regiments then crossed over the Rosano bridge to give support to the 17 and 19 Brigades in the bridgehead. By 27 August both the 1 Division and the 8 Indian Division were firmly emplaced north of the river, and Highway 67, although still subject to enemy shell fire, was open between Florence and Pontassieve.

The right flank of 13 Corps, held by the 6 Armoured Division, after crossing the Arno 5 miles south of Pontassieve dropped away sharply to the southeast along the eastern slopes of the Pratomagno hill mass. On 19 August the 61 Infantry Brigade held the division front between the river and the mountains with the 1 Derbyshire Yeomanry (reconnaissance regiment) acting as right flank protection. Partisan groups served as scouts for the regiment and conducted patrols deep into enemy territory to determine his positions. With the gradual disappearance of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division from the front the Germans began to pull back from the extended salient formed by the almost impenetrable Pratomagno hill mass, and although small enemy groups were known to be holding out in the mountains they were too weak to be a threat.

As the enemy withdrew the 6 Armoured Division pushed north on Highway 69 and the network of secondary roads along the lower slopes of the mountains. The 26 Armoured Brigade moved up Highway 69 along the east bank of the Arno and reached Highway 70 east of Pontassieve on 25 August, while the 1 Guards Brigade cleared the more rugged country to the east. Continuing his slow retreat northward, the enemy had pulled back into the hills above Highway 70 where he could still keep the road under fire from his artillery. The 6 Armoured Division was now abreast of the other two divisions of 13 Corps, and for the next 3 days it concentrated on securing the right flank of the Corps by pushing east to Consuma, where Highway 70 crosses the ridge of the Northern Apennines through a pass 3,470 feet high, and northeast up the Sieve River valley toward Rufina on Highway 67. Troops of the 26 Armoured Brigade moving toward Consuma were slowed by the tortuous, cliff-walled canyon, trees felled across the road, and sharp enemy rear guard actions. Consuma was taken on 29 August, although the highway was still under fire from self-propelled guns in the hills to the north and small groups of stragglers from the 334th Grenadier Division were still in the area. Elements of the 61 Infantry Brigade reached positions 1 mile beyond Rufina on 28 August before heavy small-arms fire forced them to halt. With the capture of both Consuma and Rufina the 6 Armoured Division, in spite of the fact that it was well ahead of 10 Corps, was in a favorable posi-

tion to insure that the right flank of 13 Corps would not be exposed when General Clark gave the order for II and 13 Corps to attack. The timing of that attack now depended on the enemy reaction to the Eighth Army offensive.

E. EIGHTH ARMY PENETRATES THE GOTHIC LINE

18 AUGUST-6 SEPTEMBER

When General Alexander shifted the weight of the Allied offensive to the Adriatic coast on 16 August, 2 Polish Corps of Eighth Army was poised along the south bank of the Cesano River, 20 miles southeast of Pesaro. (*See Map No. 3.*) West of Pesaro and just north of the Foglia River a combination of high ground and numerous streams, supplemented by prepared defensive positions, formed the eastern anchor of the Gothic Line. The area between the Gothic Line and the positions of 2 Polish Corps was cut by a number of mountain streams which have their source in the eastern slopes of the Apennines and empty into the Adriatic Sea. The principal streams are the Cesano, Metauro, Arzilla, and Foglia Rivers, all shallow and generally fordable during August, but between the Metauro and Foglia Rivers lies a series of ridge lines suitable for a delaying action. The task of 2 Polish Corps was to maintain steady pressure on the enemy, pushing him back toward his Gothic Line defenses while screening the build-up of Eighth Army forces necessary to strike a smashing blow.

Only a small part of Eighth Army was in the line by 18 August when 13 Corps passed to Fifth Army control. In the 2 Polish Corps sector the 3 Carpathian Division was on the right, the 5 Kresowa Division was in the center, and the Italian Corps of Liberation was responsible for the long left flank. The remainder of the Eighth Army front was held by 10 Corps, with the 10 Indian Division and 9 and 23 Armoured Brigades under its command. On the west the 10 Indian Division was in contact with 13 Corps along the Pratomagno hill mass; approximately 40 miles to the east the 23 Armoured Brigade was in contact with the Italian Corps of Liberation. Behind the screen provided by 2 Polish Corps, 5 Corps, made up initially of the British 46 Infantry and the 4 Indian Divisions, was ready to take over the Italian sector, and 1 Canadian Corps, with the 1 Canadian Infantry Division, was grouped in the center. These two corps had other troops available to them, including the British 56 Infantry, the 5 Canadian Armoured, and the British 1 Armoured Divisions. The Eighth Army reserve contained the British 4 and 78 Infantry Divisions, the 2 New Zealand Division, and a Greek motorized brigade. Opposed to this powerful force the German Tenth Army had available along the 2 Polish Corps front the 278th and the 71st Grenadier Divisions. The 1st Parachute and the 98th Grenadier Divisions were in close support, and the 162d Grenadier Division was reforming at Ravenna. Unless the enemy

could move in additional reserves rapidly, Eighth Army would have a clear superiority in numbers.

Before the change in Allied strategy was announced 2 Polish Corps had already prepared to force a crossing of the Cesano River. The attack was planned for 17 August but was delayed until the afternoon of the 18th while minefields were cleared. After crossing the Cesano River without difficulty, the 3 Carpathian Division was slowed by a determined enemy stand at the village of San Costanzo, which permitted him to effect a slow and orderly retreat in front of the 5 Kresowa Division. The Germans made good use of tanks and self-propelled guns to cover their withdrawal, and it was not until the two Polish divisions were fully committed that the enemy was forced to pull back across the Metauro during the night of 21-22 August. The Polish troops were then able to occupy a 15-mile stretch of the river line from Sant'Ippolito northeast to the coast. The Italian Corps of Liberation, meanwhile, had been engaged in bringing up the Corps left flank. Against light rear guard opposition the Italian troops pushed north to Cagli, 15 miles southwest of Sant'Ippolito, on the 22d.

The stage was now set for the employment of the reserve units which General McCreery had been secretly building up behind the front for his main attack. On 24 August 1 Canadian Corps moved the 1 Canadian Division into an attack position east of Sant'Ippolito while 5 Corps relieved the Italian Corps of Liberation with the 46 Division on the right and the 4 Indian Division on the left. These moves were screened by 2 Polish Corps. The plan of attack on the right flank called for the 5 Kresowa Division to advance north, secure the high ground in front of the Arzilla River, and continue on toward Pesaro and the Foglia River, while the 3 Carpathian Division was to be held in Corps reserve. The 1 Canadian Division would drive straight north through the rough country beyond the Metauro River until it also reached the Foglia. 5 Corps, with a broader front to cover, planned to advance its 46 Division on a narrow front to conform with the advance of the 1 Canadian Division on the right; it assigned to the 4 Indian Division the task of bringing up the longer left flank and maintaining contact with 10 Corps. The Italian Corps of Liberation passed to Eighth Army reserve. The attack was scheduled for the night of 25-26 August with artillery support beginning at midnight.

The coordinated attack of the three corps commenced smoothly. The Metauro River itself offered no serious obstacle since it was fordable at many points, and the troops met no strong opposition until they had crossed the Via Flaminia, the highway paralleling the river, and reached the high ground to the north of it. Here the enemy held. He was fighting desperately for time in which to move reinforcements into the Gothic Line positions north of the Foglia River, and it required better than 2 days of bitter fighting for the 5 Kresowa Division to reach the Arzilla River, 4 miles from

the jumping-off point, on 28 August. The enemy continued to resist north of the Arzilla all that day; then, during the night, he pulled back of the Foglia River, and Pesaro was entered on the 30th by a special force made up of Italian commandos and Polish troops. Within the town the battle continued as the crack German 1st Parachute Division, veteran of the Cassino fighting, took over the coastal sector from the 278th Grenadier Division. The 1 Canadian Division also was held up in the hills north of the Via Flaminia and did not reach the Foglia River until 29 August. On the left 5 Corps met less resistance. The 46 Division kept abreast of the 1 Canadian Division without difficulty, while the 4 Indian Division cleared the long left flank, secured Urbino, an important road center, and reached the Foglia on the 29th. Eighth Army was now in position to assault the Gothic Line. The heavy fighting south of the Foglia, however, had delayed the attacking troops long enough for the enemy to move reinforcements eastward and had thereby robbed the British troops of the advantages of complete surprise.

The Foglia River was found to have a depth of less than 1 foot in many places with a hard gravel bottom which was free of mines. Back of the river lay more defensible ground. A series of ridge lines extend east to the coast, and many of these are paralleled by small streams. Bridges over the gullies could be dynamited by the enemy, making the fortified ridge lines difficult to approach. Near the coast the area suited to defense extended approximately 12 miles from Pesaro northwest to Riccione. Farther inland the rough eastern slopes of the Apennines made it virtually impossible to mount an offensive in force, since a few well-placed antitank guns could command the scattered roads and automatic weapons, in the hands of determined troops, could make assaults on individual positions extremely costly. Although more heavily fortified, the most favorable point to attack the Gothic Line in the Eighth Army zone was near the coast. Photographic reconnaissance supplemented by information gained from prisoners and civilian sources indicated that prepared defenses of the Gothic Line would be encountered as soon as the Foglia was crossed. Key points in these defenses were from west to east Montecalvo, Montegridolfo, and Tomba, towns used to identify three prominent ridges overlooking the Foglia Valley. Lesser ridges connected up with these three points to form an almost solid front. It was expected that the stiffest resistance would be met along this line.

In the 5 Corps zone the 46 Division crossed the Foglia at 1200, 30 August, on a two-brigade front with the objective of taking Montegridolfo, the central of the three key ridges. The 4 Indian Division jumped off during the afternoon toward Montecalvo. On the right the 1 Canadian Division spearheaded the attack toward Tomba while the 2 Polish Corps continued its efforts to clear the town of Pesaro. At many points German reinforcements were just entering the Gothic Line when the British troops attacked, and they were too confused to take full advantage of the defenses

which had been prepared for them. The 2d Battalion, 9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (26th Panzer Division), for instance, launched an attack against a hill which the British troops had not yet reached and were then caught by surprise when the British attacked. By 1 September the 4 Indian Division had taken Montecalvo and was pushing north while the 56 and 46 Divisions completed the mopping up of the Montegridolfo ridge. The 1 Canadian Corps meanwhile was fighting hard to take Tomba.

The shift of enemy reserves to meet the Eighth Army attack now became clear as prisoners were identified. The 1st Parachute Division held the area from Pesaro west to Tomba in the face of the two Canadian divisions and elements of 2 Polish Corps; the 26th Panzer Division, which had come into line during 28–29 August, held the area from Tomba to Montegridolfo against the left flank of the 1 Canadian Corps and the right flank of the 46 Division; the 71st and elements of the 98th Grenadier Division opposed the 56 and 4 Indian Divisions from Montegridolfo southwest to Montecalvo; and farther west the 278th Grenadier Division, with elements of the Italian Monte Rosa Division, guarded the German right flank. With the exception of the 162d Grenadier Division, reforming in the Ravenna area, and the 20th GAF Field Division, on the western side of the peninsula, the enemy had now committed all his reserves south of the Po River. The Allied aim of forcing Kesselring to commit his reserves and weaken his forces opposite Fifth Army was beginning to take effect, and the Eighth Army drive to break through into the Po Valley, although slowed, had succeeded in penetrating the Gothic Line.

On 2 September the 5 Canadian Armoured Division captured Tomba, the only remaining stronghold of the Gothic Line, while the 1 Canadian Division struck north to reach the coastal highway 7 miles above Pesaro, thereby pinching out the 2 Polish Corps. This proved to be a particularly successful operation when a large portion of the 1st Parachute Division was trapped in a pocket between the two corps. Both Canadian divisions then drove northwest with Rimini as their next objective. On the 5 Corps front the 46, the 56, and the 4 Indian Divisions made equally good progress, and by 4 September both 1 Canadian and 5 Corps had generally reached the line of the Conca River. In the fighting south of the Conca River 1 Canadian Corps had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. Over 1,500 prisoners had been taken up to 2 September, and more were expected when the task of mopping up the pocket of resistance above Pesaro was completed. The 1 Armoured Division was moved up from reserve and was ready to pass through the right flank of 5 Corps as soon as a bridgehead was established over the Conca. With only 3 more miles of streams and ridges to cross before reaching open ground the momentum of the Eighth Army attack was still unchecked.

During the afternoon of 4 September the 46 Division secured a bridgehead over the Conca River needed for the advance of the 1 Armoured Division, and 1 Canadian

Corps on the right also crossed the river. Then the advance slowed. Taking full advantage of a ridge line running northeast through San Savino and Coriano and reaching the coast at Riccione, 6 miles below Rimini, the enemy elected to hold. Two days of bitter fighting failed to break this line. The weather, fair all during the first days of September, now came to the aid of the Germans. Beginning on 6 September it rained continuously for 2 days. Streams which had offered only minor obstacles during the early days of the attack changed to raging torrents, washing out the temporary bridges along the inland roads and leaving only the coastal highway open to supply the needs of all the troops north of the Foglia River. It was necessary to call a halt temporarily to the advance until the flooded streams subsided. The brief period of respite afforded by the delay gave General McCreery an opportunity to relieve tired troops and bring up fresh units. The 4 Division moved up behind the 5 Canadian Armoured Division, and the Greek Motorized Brigade came under command of 1 Canadian Corps. The renewal of the attack to secure the Coriano—San Savino ridge line was planned for the night of 10–11 September; after its capture both 1 Canadian and 5 Corps were to carry out the original orders to reach Rimini and the coastal plain.

In the 19-day period from 18 August, when 2 Polish Corps crossed the Cesano River, to 6 September, when 1 Canadian and 5 Corps reached the Coriano—San Savino ridge line, Eighth Army had advanced its right flank up the Adriatic coast a distance of nearly 30 miles, the Gothic Line defenses had been broken, and a single ridge line remained to be taken before Rimini and Highway 9 to Bologna would be open before it. Although bad weather and Kesselring's swift concentration of reserves to strengthen his threatened flank had reduced the possibilities of a quick exploitation into the Po Valley, the broad pattern of strategy laid down by General Alexander was working according to plan. Already in August the 26th Panzer Division had left the Fifth Army front and appeared on the Adriatic, and the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division began moving in the first days of September. By the end of the first week of September the 356th Grenadier Division was also in the process of moving. With the shift of three good divisions to the Eighth Army front and the commitment of all the enemy's available reserves, the opportune moment was at hand for Fifth Army to launch its attack.

MAP Nº 3
**EIGHTH ARMY
 BREACHES the GOTHIC LINE**

24 August - 6 September 1944

SCALE
 MILES

