

CHAPTER III * * * * *

Approaching the Gothic Line

THE efforts made by the enemy to meet the threat posed by the powerful Eighth Army offensive on the Adriatic coast brought a radical change in the situation on the Fifth Army front. Once the main Eighth Army attack was launched on 25 August, Kesselring was forced to strain his resources to the utmost in order to provide the troops necessary to prevent the collapse of his left flank. Any plans he may have entertained of fighting a slow delaying action from the Arno to the Gothic Line were abandoned when the continued transfer of both reserve and front-line troops to the Adriatic led to a critical thinning out of his forces opposite Fifth Army. Rather than risk the danger of having troops still holding along the Arno west of Florence cut off by a Fifth Army attack, the enemy began a planned withdrawal toward the Gothic Line. Evidence that the German Fourteenth Army was pulling back on the IV Corps front began to accumulate on 31 August, and on that day General Clark sent a message to his corps commanders ordering them to initiate the follow-up measures called for in Operations Instruction No. 32. Although the extent of the enemy withdrawal was not immediately evident, it appeared possible that the preliminary phase of the Fifth Army plan of attack would be accomplished before the main attack was ordered.

A. *IV CORPS CROSSES THE ARNO*

1-5 SEPTEMBER

1. *Securing a Bridgehead.* (See Map No. 4.) The message to General Crittenger called for a reconnaissance in force in the Mount Albano and Mount Pisano areas, the two dominating hill masses in the Arno Plain. Not less than one company of infantry was to be used in each area, and if the situation proved favorable the

Corps was to be prepared to follow up at once in sufficient strength to occupy the two objectives. For the task of crossing the Arno, additional bridging equipment and engineer support was to be provided by Army engineers. Although IV Corps patrols had encountered enemy fire at numerous points along the Arno on 30–31 August, the sound of enemy demolitions and reports from Italian partisans indicated a withdrawal was under way. IV Corps intelligence officers estimated that the enemy had left only a shell of troops along the Arno consisting of not over a reinforced company, liberally supplied with automatic weapons, self-propelled guns, and some tanks, in each battalion sector and that once this shell was broken through only isolated enemy groups, mines, and demolitions would hold up the advance until the delaying positions guarding the approaches to the Gothic Line were reached. Acting on this estimate and in accordance with the instructions from General Clark, General Crittenberger issued orders calling for reinforced company patrols to cross the Arno on the night of 31 August–1 September and for preparations for a large-scale follow-up crossing the following night.

At the designated time Task Force 45 on the left, the 1st Armored Division in the center, and the 6 South African Armoured Division on the right of IV Corps each sent reinforced patrols across the river at a number of points. Extensive minefields along the river banks and particularly near the fordable crossing points caused some casualties, but only scattered contacts were made with enemy snipers and rear guard elements. The rumors of an enemy withdrawal were now confirmed, and it was decided that the time for the crossing should be pushed up to 1000, 1 September. The previous weeks of patrolling the river banks and laying plans for an attack greatly facilitated the task of locating favorable crossing sites, and the passage of troops over the river was carried out smoothly and rapidly.

The task of taking Mount Pisano was assigned by Maj. Gen. Vernon E. Prichard, commander of the 1st Armored Division, to Col. Hamilton H. Howze, commander of Combat Command A (CCA). The infantry component of CCA consisted of the attached 370th Infantry (less Company C) with armored support provided by the 1st Tank Battalion; Troop B, 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron; and Company C, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion. All three battalions of the 370th Infantry, commanded by Col. Raymond G. Sherman, crossed the river on the morning of 1 September, the 1st and 2d Battalions to the east of Mount Pisano and the 3d Battalion to the west. Sniper fire and mines caused the only casualties along the river, and the troops pushing inland met no opposition. Engineers cleared away the mines, improved fords to get the tanks across, and by 0300, 2 September, had a class 30 armored force treadway bridge in operation near Pontedera. On 2 September the 3d Battalion, 370th Infantry, skirted the west side of Mount Pisano and reached the banks of the Serchio River 5 miles north of Pisa; the 1st Battalion, with one com-

pany riding on tanks of the 1st Tank Battalion, swept forward for 6 miles around the east side of the mountain to reach positions on the northeast slopes; and the 2d Battalion, discarding much of its equipment, followed mule trails directly into the hill mass. The progress of the troops was so rapid that the 4th Tank Battalion, which had moved its three medium tank companies into positions south of the river to offer indirect fire support, found that by the time the guns had been registered in it was unsafe to fire. Control of Mount Pisano was virtually assured by the end of 2 September.

In the open plain to the east of Mount Pisano Combat Command B (CCB), under Col. Lawrence R. Dewey, crossed the Arno with the 11th and 14th Armored Infantry Battalions; Company C, 370th Infantry; the 13th Tank Battalion; and the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion (less Companies A and C). By early afternoon of 1 September each of the two infantry battalions had two companies across the river between Castelfranco and Santa Croce, and tanks and tank destroyers were moving across. Two miles north of the river tanks and vehicles were held up by a canal until early the next morning when the tanks crossed in time to break up enemy tank and small-arms fire which was delaying the infantry. Advancing on a broad front across the open plain and meeting only scattered resistance, CCB completed its crossing of the Arno and reached to within 5 miles of the important road center of Altopascio. On the right the division reconnaissance force, made up of the bulk of the 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and a company of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, skirted the edge of the Padule di Fucecchio, an extensive swamp area forming the boundary between the 1st Armored and the 6 South African Armoured Divisions, to reach positions less than 3 miles southeast of Altopascio.

On 1 September the 6 South African Armoured Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. W. H. E. Poole, was holding a 20-mile sector of the Arno extending from near Fucecchio to within 5 miles of the outskirts of Florence. Patrols from the 24 Guards Brigade which crossed the river the previous night encountered an enemy patrol near Empoli; 2 miles west of the town they wiped out an enemy pocket of resistance south of the river. As late as 0900, 1 September, a conference was held to discuss how best to conduct an opposed river crossing. Shortly thereafter reports were coming in from all along the front that the enemy had pulled out, and by mid-afternoon the 24 Guards Brigade had troops across the river just west of Empoli. Three bulldozers, constructing fords, were disabled by mines, but by dark it was possible to start moving armor across. Driving north the next day between Mount Albano and the marshes on the division left boundary, the 24 Guards Brigade advanced 7 miles to match the progress of the 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. Civilians and partisans reported that Mount Albano, on the brigade's right flank, was clear of the enemy. Partisans proved extremely useful in supplying informa-

tion, and on 2 September they contributed several of the 21 prisoners taken by the 24 Guards Brigade.

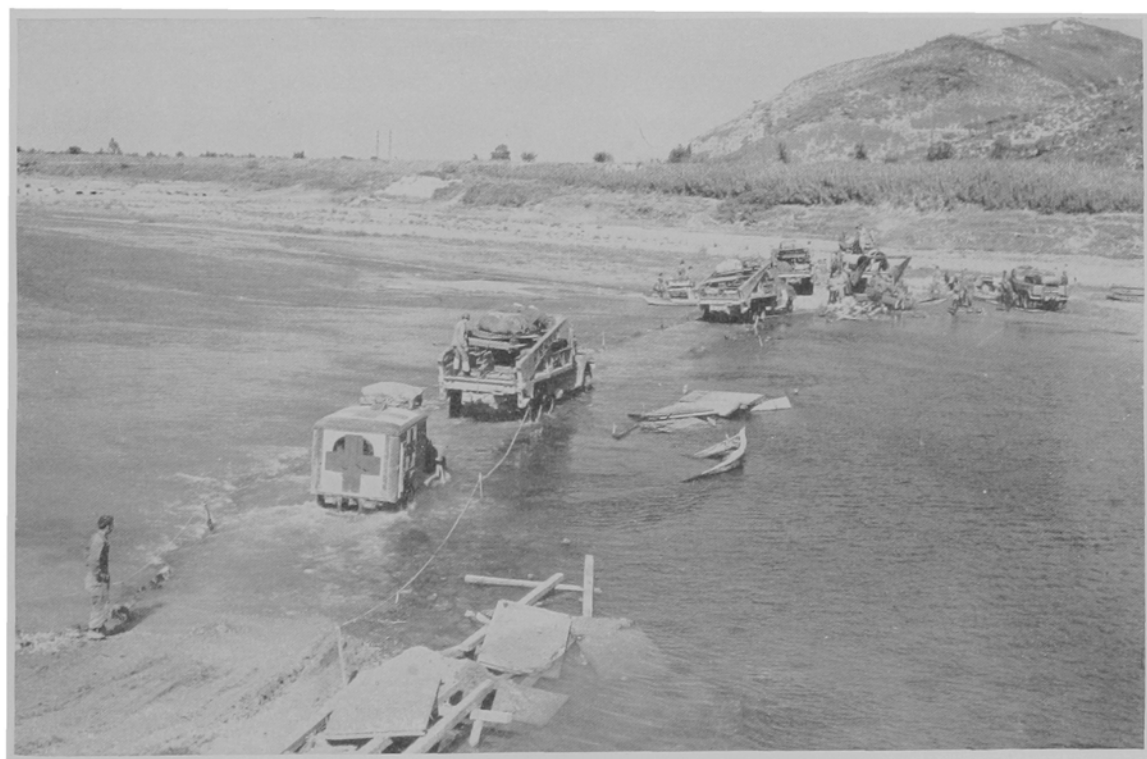
On the division's right flank the 12 South African Motorised Brigade, reinforced by the 74 Light Antiaircraft Regiment; the 4/13 Battalion, Frontier Force Rifle Regiment (4/13 FFR); and a squadron of the Natal Mounted Rifles (NMR), the division reconnaissance regiment, also began crossing on the afternoon of 1 September with the objective of clearing Mount Albano. One battalion, the Witwatersrand Rifles De La Rey (WR/DLR), suffered 17 casualties from mines and concentrated artillery fire near Montelupo; otherwise enemy resistance was negligible, and by 2 September the bulk of the reinforced brigade had crossed the river and occupied the lower slopes of Mount Albano. The rough country made initial progress slow, but by 3 September Hill 614, the crest of Mount Albano, had been reached and contact had been made with II Corps troops near Highway 66.

Task Force 45, which held the area from Mount Pisano west to the Ligurian Sea, initially was ordered to hold its positions south of the Arno. Before noon on 1 September General Crittenberger ordered Brig. Gen. Paul W. Rutledge, the task force commander, to pass the 100th Infantry Battalion across the river without delay to the east of Pisa. Keeping pace with the 3d Battalion, 370th Infantry, advancing around the southwest side of Mount Pisano, the 100th Infantry Battalion had patrols as far as the south bank of the Serchio River on 2 September. The remainder of Task Force 45 occupied all the ground south of the Arno on 1 September; the next morning the 435th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, using assault boats, crossed the river just to the east of Pisa, while tanks and tank destroyers crossed farther upstream and then swung west to assist in the occupation of the northern portion of the city. Following up the advance, the 434th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion took over control of Pisa while the 435th pushed north toward the Serchio River and the British 39 Light Antiaircraft Regiment crossed the Arno west of Pisa to clear the heavily wooded area near the coast. As on other portions of the long IV Corps front, extensive minefields along the Arno proved to be the chief delaying factor.

By the end of 2 September the bulk of the IV Corps combat elements were across the Arno, and its leading units had pushed the front forward from 2 to 7 miles north of the river. The enemy had made no effort to oppose the river crossing; as the troops cleared road blocks and bulldozed crossings over the canals and ditches in the plain or worked up the slopes of Mount Pisano and Mount Albano there was as yet no evidence that the enemy was ready to offer more than local rear guard opposition. Division and Corps artillery in position areas south of the river located few targets; in some areas the troops had advanced beyond supporting artillery range before the necessary bridges were constructed to permit the artillery to move up.



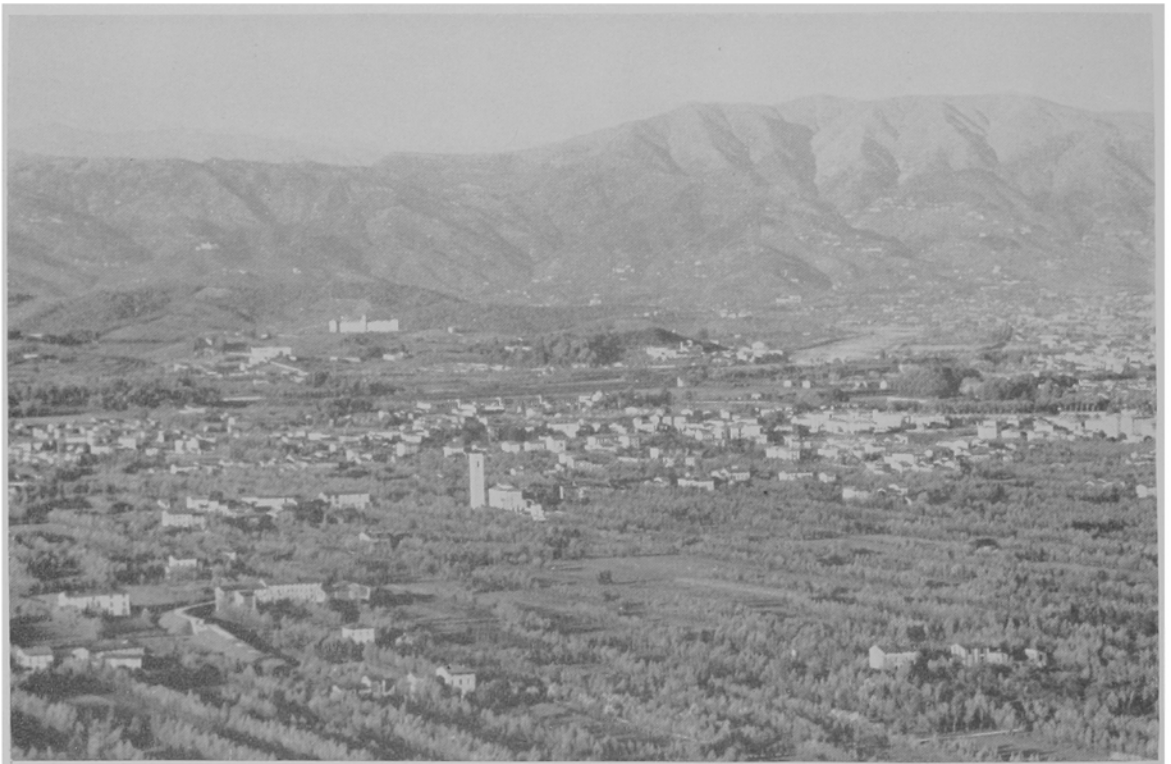
Briefing Italian civilians who are to be evacuated from near the Arno



Shallow fords, like this one at Cascina, aided our troops in crossing



Antiaircraft-infantry troops of Task Force 45 cross on a demolished bridge



North of Lucca the mountains rise abruptly from the fertile Arno Plain

2. *Consolidation.* For the next 3 days the advance, spearheaded by the 1st Armored Division, continued unchecked. The 2d Battalion, 370th Infantry, striking northwest across Mount Pisano, reached the village of Vorno on the north slope on 3 September, reorganized, and attacked toward Lucca on the afternoon of the 4th. Heavy artillery fire and some machine gun and sniper fire from rear guards of the 65th Grenadier Division failed to do more than slow the attacking troops. By early evening the battalion had crossed the Autostrada, less than 1 mile south of the ancient walled city, and a platoon of Company F with tank support reached and held the west and south gates. Early in the morning of the 5th the 2d Battalion entered Lucca, established a garrison force, and sent one company north to defend the road crossing over the Serchio River. Meanwhile the 3d Battalion cleared the road from Pisa to Lucca on the west side of Mount Pisano, and the 1st Battalion reached positions north of the Autostrada $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Lucca. Although Task Force 45 was moving less rapidly, particularly through the wooded area west of Pisa where extensive minefields rather than opposition from the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division slowed the 39 Light Antiaircraft Regiment, the area south of the Serchio River from Lucca to within 2 miles of the Ligurian Sea had been cleared by 5 September.

To the east of Lucca and along the eastern portion of the 1st Armored Division front CCB pushed forward to establish positions astride and north of the Autostrada. Altopascio, the key road center in the zone, was entered by the reconnaissance company of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion on the afternoon of 4 September. Stiff resistance from a German rear guard forced a withdrawal until late in the afternoon when the enemy, following his customary harassing tactics, in turn pulled back. The 14th Armored Infantry Battalion moved up to occupy the town and sent outposts forward 1 mile beyond the Autostrada. Northeast of Altopascio two assault forces, each made up of a company of infantry from the 11th Armored Infantry Battalion, a section of medium tanks, and a section of tank destroyers, also reached the Autostrada, and the 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron matched this progress along the division boundary. There was a general increase in enemy shelling and mortar fire on 4 September, a few tanks were spotted, and at isolated points antitank guns emplaced in pillboxes resisted stubbornly until knocked out. In no instance did the enemy attempt to hold a position for more than a few hours and our casualties were few. Colonel Dewey, commander of CCB, was wounded on the 4th, and Brig. Gen. Maurice W. Daniel temporarily replaced him.

To the right of the 1st Armored Division the 24 Guards Brigade occupied Monsummano and the portion of Mount Albano to the east of it on 5 September, thereby bringing the left flank of the 6 South African Armoured Division to within 5 miles of Pistoia. In the zone of the 12 South African Motorised Brigade the forward line followed the eastern slopes of Mount Albano to reach Highway 66 north of the

village of Tizzana. Italian partisans, a band of whom brought in 28 prisoners from the 362d Grenadier Division, could not understand the leisurely pace at which our troops were continuing the almost unopposed advance across the Arno Plain. General Poole, however, was operating on instructions received on 1 September from General Crittenberger that the Army commander expected IV Corps to gain control of Mount Albano and Mount Pisano but that while reconnaissance beyond these points would be carried out for security purposes the orders did not include capture or occupation of the Lucca—Pistoia area. It was particularly important that the advance of the 6 South African Armoured Division should not jeopardize the element of surprise hoped for in the main Fifth Army attack north of Florence. These instructions received further confirmation on 5 September when General Crittenberger, following the receipt of new Army instructions, ordered a general regrouping along the line Serchio River—Mount Pisano—Altopascio—Mount Albano. This line, which represented the forward position of IV Corps units on the 5th, was to be held with a minimum of troops. Patrols were to maintain contact with the enemy, and plans were to be prepared for a follow-up action in case the enemy continued his withdrawal to the north.

B. 13 CORPS EXPANDS ITS BRIDGEHEAD

1-5 SEPTEMBER

The evidence of an enemy withdrawal, which had prompted General Clark to order IV Corps to cross the Arno, extended along the whole of the Fifth Army front. In the 13 Corps zone prisoners taken on 31 August from the 29th Panzer Grenadier and the 334th, 356th, and 715th Grenadier Divisions all testified that their units were in the process of pulling back. With a firm bridgehead already established across the Arno from Florence to Pontassieve, the new situation merely aided 13 Corps in further expanding the area held north of the river, a process which had been going on for several days and which was to continue until the order was given for the main Fifth Army attack.

Prior to 31 August patrols of the 1 Division operating from Florence reported sounds indicative of the destruction of supply dumps, but no decrease in enemy resistance could be noted and as late as the night of 29 August patrols from the 4th Parachute Division penetrated into the northern outskirts of the city. The reported enemy withdrawal was not confirmed until the morning of 31 August when the 1 Reconnaissance Regiment entered Fiesole and pushed on to reach Highway 6521, the road to Borgo San Lorenzo. Elements of the 3 Brigade took Mount Muscoli, a former strongpoint 1 mile northeast of Fiesole, without encountering anything more

than scattered fire from enemy rear guards, and then took Mount Il Pratone 1½ miles farther north. The next day the 3 Brigade pushed on to Highway 6521 until stopped by concentrated fire from Mount Calvana, a key point in the chain of hills guarding the approach to the Sieve River valley. It appeared that the 356th Grenadier Division intended to fight a delaying action along the Mount Giovi line. The 2 Brigade reached the first line of hills to the north of Florence and began clearing the area west of Highway 65 while the 66 Brigade prepared to drive north up the highway. On the division left flank a mobile column from the 2 Brigade followed the road from Florence to Sesto, where contact was made with patrols of II Corps on 2 September. Elements of the 10th Parachute Regiment (4th Parachute Division) were found to be holding firm on the slopes of Mount Acuto, overlooking Sesto. By 3 September it was clear that the 4th Parachute Division was holding Mounts Acuto, Morello, and Senario, thus completing the chain of natural defenses barring the advance of the 1 Division and affording the enemy time to carry out an orderly withdrawal by echelon to the Gothic Line.

The 1 Division continued to apply steady pressure on the enemy positions with the 2 Brigade putting a ring of troops around Mount Acuto, the 66 Brigade in the center probing up Highway 65 beyond the village of Montorsoli, and the 3 Brigade on the east deployed along Highway 6521 below Mount Calvana, toward which the left flank of the 8 Indian Division was approaching. Enemy patrol activity increased on 4 September, and clashes occurred at Montorsoli and Sesto. Among prisoners taken at Sesto were members of the 755th Grenadier Regiment (334th Grenadier Division). This division, which had formerly faced the 6 Armoured Division on the right flank of 13 Corps, had apparently been moved over to occupy the sector formerly held by the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division when the latter unit was rushed to the Adriatic front.

To the east of the 1 Division the 8 Indian Division was actively engaged at the end of August in expanding its bridgehead over the Arno between Borro delle Sieci Creek and the lower reach of the Sieve River. Two brigades were in the line, the 19 Brigade, which was reorganizing on a mule basis, on the left and the 17 Brigade on the right, while the 21 Brigade remained in division reserve south of the Arno. Staging a night attack, the 17 Brigade struck at 2100, 28 August, to take Tigliano, a village approximately 4 miles north of Pontassieve. Leading the attack, the 1 Battalion, 5 Royal Gurkha Rifles, caught the 1st Battalion, 735th Grenadier Regiment, by surprise and routed it. This failure of the 715th Grenadier Division's westernmost battalion to maintain its positions forced the 871st Grenadier Regiment (356th Grenadier Division) on its right also to withdraw. On 1 September the 17 Brigade held its newly acquired positions north of Tigliano while the 19 Brigade struck northwest toward Mount Calvana. No opposition was encountered, and civilians reported

the enemy had withdrawn to the Mount Giovi—Mount Rotonda—Mount Calvana line. For the next 3 days the two brigades, bothered by heavy rains, were content to consolidate positions on the southern slopes of the three mountains and establish contact with the 1 Division.

On the right flank of 13 Corps the 6 Armoured Division was engaged in opening up Highway 70, the main lateral communications route to the Eighth Army front, and in pushing northeast up the Sieve River valley. The pass at Consuma on Highway 70 had been occupied on 29 August by the 26 Armoured Brigade, but enemy troops, holding the hills to the north of the highway, were able to shell vehicles and personnel using the road. Sharp local encounters characterized the action for the next 2 days as the 61 Motorised Brigade took up the task of clearing the area north of the highway. Information secured from prisoners indicated that the 334th Grenadier Division was thinning out, leaving only one regiment north of Consuma, and that the 715th Grenadier Division, astride the Sieve River, was extending its lines to the east to fill the gap. Patrols operating up Highway 67, the main axis of advance for the 6 Armoured Division, encountered strong enemy positions north of Scopeti. These defenses were thought to be tied in with the chain of mountains west of Mount Giovi, the line along which the enemy was holding the 1 Division and the 8 Indian Division. It could be expected that the 715th Grenadier Division would fight hard to prevent any farther advances up the Sieve River valley until the enemy was ready to stage another general withdrawal.

The 6 Armoured Division used the first days of September to complete the consolidation of its positions along Highway 70, to probe the enemy defenses in the Sieve Valley, and to regroup to continue the advance. On 2 September a new boundary was established between the 8 Indian and 6 Armoured Divisions whereby the latter was made responsible for the area on both sides of the Sieve River. The effect of the change was to narrow the attack zone of the 8 Indian Division, at the same time permitting the 6 Armoured Division to operate against both flanks of the enemy forces barring progress up Highway 67. Light tank forces were sent across the Sieve River to take up positions west of Scopeti, and elements of the 61 Motorised Brigade advanced on the east side of the river to positions south of the village. The 1 Guards Brigade, moving up from division reserve on 3 September, relieved the 61 Motorised Brigade in the hills north of Highway 70, thereby permitting the latter to get set for an attack against the enemy positions astride the Sieve Valley. Patrol contacts on 4 September gave no indication that the enemy planned any further withdrawals in the immediate future.

The expansion of the 13 Corps bridgehead and the rapid advances made by IV Corps units after they crossed the Arno on 1 September brought the extended fronts of the two Corps to an almost continuous line 5 to 10 miles north of the river.

In the narrow zone west of Florence allotted to II Corps, troops under the command of the 88th Division also crossed the Arno on 1 September and maintained contact with the enemy as he withdrew. Brig. Gen. Paul W. Kendall, commander of the 88th Division, had assigned the division's sector of the Arno line to the 442d Regimental Combat Team (less the 100th Battalion), reinforced. Two companies of the 442d Infantry and a company of the attached 760th Tank Battalion crossed the Arno on the afternoon of 1 September, and the next day patrols made contact with the 1 Division in Sesto. That night the 442d Infantry, which was due shortly to leave Fifth Army for shipment to France, was relieved by the 349th Infantry, while the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, reinforced with two companies of the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion, came under the command of the 88th Division and took over the task of keeping contact with the enemy. Together with 13 Corps these advance elements provided a screen between the Germans and the Florence area where II Corps was assembling in preparation for the main Fifth Army attack.

C. DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIFTH ARMY PLAN OF ATTACK

The changed situation resulting from the enemy withdrawal on 31 August and the working out of detailed plans for the passage of II Corps through the screen provided by 13 Corps troops north of Florence necessitated changes and amplifications to Operations Instruction No. 32 issued by Fifth Army on 17 August. The first change was made on 24 August when Operations Instruction No. 33 (*Annex No. 1 D*) increased the time for the announcement of D Day from 72 hours' notice after 0001, 25 August, to an advance warning of 96 hours before troops were to move into final assembly areas and launch the attack. Provision was made for delaying the jump-off time should heavy rains set in after the forward movement of troops was initiated. To give II Corps control over the assembly areas into which its troops were to move, it was provided that on D minus 4 II Corps would take command of the portion of its attack sector from the Corps rear boundary forward to include the assembly areas of the attacking divisions and the Corps artillery. On D minus 2 II Corps would assume command of the forward area of its attack zone. Corps commanders were then to arrange for the movement of 13 Corps troops, other than forward screening elements, to the 13 Corps zone. The latter units would remain under temporary operational control of II Corps until passed through.

The successful advances made by Eighth Army along the Adriatic coast and the consequent shifting of enemy units from the Fifth Army front made it possible for Fifth Army by 4 September to set in motion the machinery necessary for its attack. On that date Operations Instruction No. 34 (*Annex No. 1 E*) was issued completing

the formulation of the Army plan and setting D Day at any time after 0001, 8 September. Since the first part of Phase I of the attack had been accomplished by the withdrawal of the enemy forces opposite 13 Corps, II and 13 Corps were first to complete Phase I by seizing the Mount Giovi—Mount Calvana—Mount Senario—Mount Morello line of hills and then continue the attack to breach the Gothic Line. II Corps was to begin immediately to move into its forward attack positions, assuming command of the southern portion of its new sector at 2000, 4 September, and of the remainder at 0001, 6 September. The initial sector included a 2-mile wide area north of the Arno extending from west of Florence to Borro delle Sieci Creek; the subsequent attack zone extended from Highway 6620 north of Prato, the boundary with IV Corps, to a line running generally north from Borro delle Sieci Creek to the Sieve River, the boundary with 13 Corps. Should the enemy continue his withdrawal prior to 6 September, responsibility for the pursuit would remain with 13 Corps. While II and 13 Corps were getting into position for the attack, IV Corps was to regroup to hold Mount Pisano and Mount Albano with a minimum of troops, withdrawing as much as possible of the 1st Armored Division into Corps reserve. The task of IV Corps remained primarily one of holding along its broad front while maintaining contact with the enemy. As a diversion for the main action it was to simulate a build-up in the Mount Albano area and stage a demonstration on D plus 1 in the Prato and Pistoia areas to indicate an advance to the north and northwest.

Upon the completion of Phase I a new boundary was to be established between II and 13 Corps, dividing the area between Highway 65 and Highway 6521 to the Sieve River and then continuing northeast along a line approximately 2 miles east of Highway 6524, the road from San Piero to Firenzuola. II Corps was to make its main effort along the axis Florence—Firenzuola while 13 Corps was to concentrate its attack along the axis Borgo San Lorenzo—Faenza, initially assisting II Corps by putting the emphasis on the left flank of the Corps zone. The new boundary and the new areas designated for the main attack on the Gothic Line represented a major change in planning. In the operations instruction of 17 August, II Corps was ordered to attack along Highway 65, the Florence—Bologna axis, which would have involved an assault on the powerful Futa Pass defenses. Under the new plan II Corps was to breach the Gothic Line at Il Giogo Pass, 7 miles to the southeast of Futa, and drive on toward Firenzuola, thereby outflanking the Futa Pass defenses. Subsequent events were to prove the wisdom of General Clark's decision.

Once through the Gothic Line, it was hoped that the momentum of the Fifth Army offensive would carry it through the mountains and into the Po Valley where the over-all Allied strategy called for an encircling movement to trap the enemy forces south of the Po River. To provide for this possibility II Corps was ordered to prepare plans for the employment of a strong mobile force to exploit northwest of

Bologna. For purposes of planning the 1st Armored Division, elements of which were to be withdrawn into IV Corps reserve, would be attached. General Crittenger was to be compensated for the possible loss of the 1st Armored Division by the attachment of the BEF on or about 12 September.

D. *II CORPS PREPARES TO ATTACK*

For the completion of the first phase of the Fifth Army offensive, the taking of the Mount Calvana—Mount Senario—Mount Morello line of hills, General Keyes planned to attack on a two-division front with the 91st Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. William G. Livesay, on the right and the 34th Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. Charles L. Bolte, on the left. The 91st Division, after taking Mount Calvana and Mount Senario, was to secure a crossing of the Sieve River on a broad front extending from Borgo San Lorenzo to the vicinity of Barberino to the west of Highway 65; the 34th Division, after taking Mount Morello, was to press forward to parallel positions between Barberino and Highway 6620, the road north of Prato, where the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was to screen the Corps left flank. During this phase both the 85th and 88th Divisions would remain in Corps reserve.

For the attack on the Gothic Line II Corps planned to employ three divisions, introducing the 85th Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. John B. Coulter, to make the main effort on a narrow front in the vicinity of Il Giogo Pass. It was to capture Mount Altuzzo, the dominant height on the east side of the pass, and then press north to seize the line of mountains lying to the east and north of Firenzuola. The 85th Division would be assisted on the right by 13 Corps and on the left by the 91st Division. The latter was to concentrate a strong force to take the high ground on the west side of the pass, while the remainder of the division pressed forward to contain the enemy along a broad front from Mount Calvi to west of Highway 65. The 34th Division, on the Corps left flank, likewise was to contain the enemy at the outer bastions of the Gothic Line and would hold one regimental combat team in reserve prepared to attack north to Mount Coroncina, 5 miles west of Futa Pass. The 88th Division would remain in Corps reserve prepared to pass through any one of the three attacking divisions in case of a break-through or enemy withdrawal. Corps artillery was to give maximum support against the enemy defenses on the Corps right flank with the Futa Pass defenses receiving second priority, and medium and fighter-bombers were to attack strongpoints in the Gothic Line. For the difficult task of supplying its troops through the mountains, II Corps had available 9 Italian pack mule companies, each containing 260 mules. ✓

Once the Gothic Line was broken at Il Giogo Pass it could be anticipated that the enemy would be forced to stage a withdrawal from his Futa Pass positions. Without pause the 85th, 91st, and 34th Divisions were to converge on the line of high mountains flanking Radicosa Pass, 8 miles north of Futa. The 85th Division was to take Mount Canda, on the east side of Radicosa Pass, and the 91st and 34th Divisions were to take, respectively, Mount Oggioli and Mount Bastione on the west side of the pass. Whereas the main effort during the attack on the Gothic Line was to be made at Il Giogo Pass on Highway 6524, in this next phase the emphasis would be shifted back to Highway 65. As in the previous phase the 88th Division would be prepared on Corps order to pass through the 91st Division along Highway 65 or through the 85th Division along the Firenzuola—Castel del Rio—Castel San Pietro road, and all divisions were to be ready to exploit within their zones toward the Po Valley. General Keyes was particularly insistent that there should be no pauses for regrouping and that reserves be kept close behind the attacking troops to take full advantage of a break-through at any point along the Corps front. In the early days of September the success of the Eighth Army drive up the Adriatic coast and the reports of victories won by the Allied forces in France and on the eastern front gave rise to optimistic hopes of a more rapid breach of the Gothic Line than the strength of the German defenses warranted. II Corps plans, while reflecting this optimism, were designed to meet any situation which might occur.

The movement of II Corps units into their forward assembly areas began on the night of 4–5 September when the bulk of the 34th and 91st Divisions moved up to positions just south of the Arno and nine battalions of Corps artillery crossed the river. The following night the 133d and 168th Infantry, the 34th Division's assault regiments, assembled north and northeast of Florence, while the 362d and 363d Infantry, which were to spearhead the attack of the 91st Division, closed in the vicinity of Mount Il Pratone. Division artillery also crossed the river. In accordance with the time schedule included in the Army Operations Instruction No. 34 of 4 September, II Corps assumed command of its attack zone at 0001, 6 September, thereby placing the 1 Division and elements of the 8 Indian Division temporarily under its operational control. At noon the 88th Division turned over control of the portion of its zone southeast of Highway 66 to the 34th Division and the remainder at 1600 to the 6 South African Armoured Division when the new boundary between II and IV Corps became effective. The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, now operating under the 34th Division, continued patrolling northwest of Florence. By 7 September, II Corps had completed the assembling of its leading elements north of the Arno and was prepared to pass through the British troops screening the Corps front.

E. *FURTHER ENEMY WITHDRAWALS*

6-9 SEPTEMBER

Hardly had II Corps assumed command of its attack zone before the enemy staged another withdrawal. Following up patrol reports from the night of 5-6 September that the 4th Parachute Division was pulling back from its forward positions, elements of the 1 Division occupied Mount Acuto and pushed up Highway 65 to the village of Fontebuona, 7 miles north of Florence. During the night of 7-8 September the 356th Grenadier Division gave up Mount Calvana and Mount Giovi, the bulk of the division pulling out before midnight and rear guards taking advantage of a thick mist of the following morning to complete the withdrawal. The evacuation of these two objectives came just as the 8 Indian Division had completed the movement of its troops into position for an attack on Mount Giovi, the objective assigned to 13 Corps for the first phase of the Army attack. On the morning of the 8th the 17 Brigade occupied Mount Giovi, and the 19 Brigade placed elements on Mount Calvana. The 4th Parachute Division also continued its withdrawal on the night of 7-8 September, giving up Mount Morello and Mount Senario to the 1 Division. The following night numerous explosions were heard to the north indicating that German engineers were preparing road blocks and destroying the bridges over the Sieve River. To the west of Mount Morello patrols of the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, operating on a broad front along the roads north of Calenzano and Prato reached as far north as Mount Maggiore, the dominant height on the Monti della Calvana ridge line, on 9 September, without making contact. The only enemy resistance was met on the right flank of 13 Corps where the 715th Grenadier Division held its positions near Scopeti until the 356th Grenadier Division had completed the evacuation of Mount Giovi and had withdrawn behind the Sieve River; it then began to draw back up Highway 67 toward Dicomano on the 9th.

The attack of II and 13 Corps on the Mount Giovi—Mount Calvana—Mount Senario—Mount Morello line of hills, tentatively set for 7 September, had now been rendered unnecessary by the enemy's decision to give up these strong delaying positions without a fight. Air observation planes on 9 September flew at low altitude up Highway 65 and along the north side of the Sieve Valley from San Piero to Borgo San Lorenzo without spotting military activity or drawing anti-aircraft fire. All the evidence pointed to the fact that the enemy had withdrawn the bulk of his troops to his Gothic Line positions, thereby placing them well beyond the range of both division and Corps artillery and necessitating the movement of all attack elements to new forward assembly areas. These shifts were carried out on 9 September with the 91st Division occupying an assembly area east of Highway 65 below Mount Senario and

the 34th Division moving in west of Highway 65 3 miles north of Mount Morello. The 8 Indian Division had already occupied Mount Giovi and Mount Calvana, the first objectives of 13 Corps, and the 1 Division, now relieved of its mission of screening II Corps, could be shifted to the east to take over the Corps left flank.

The task of moving reserves and supplies across the Arno and up to the forward troops was complicated by the same period of rainy weather which had forced a halt in the Eighth Army attack toward Rimini. Swelled by the rains, the Arno reached the flood stage on 7 September, rendering all fords useless and washing out most of the floating bridges as far west as Pontedera. Highway 69, the chief supply route of 13 Corps, was cut south of Pontassieve, forcing the routing of 13 Corps traffic through Florence. Fortunately by the time of the flood high-level, two-way Bailey bridges had been completed at two points within the city and so permitted an uninterrupted flow of traffic up Highways 65 and 6521. Since Florence was now out of range of enemy artillery and the need for security in the movement of troops and supplies was largely over, the temporary loss of the bridges east of Florence caused no serious derangement of Fifth Army's attack plans. The 19th Engineer Combat Regiment salvaged the damaged equipment, and essential bridges were quickly replaced. Rear supply lines were improved during this period by the opening of the port of Leghorn on 26 August and the clearing of Highway 67, which was available for use within a few days after IV Corps crossed the Arno.

F. II AND 13 CORPS REACH THE GOTHIC LINE

10-12 SEPTEMBER

The enemy withdrawal having made possible the completion of the first phase of the Fifth Army attack, General Clark at noon on 9 September ordered that future operations be conducted in accordance with Phase II of the instructions issued on 4 September. The boundary between II and 13 Corps planned for Phase II between Highways 65 and 6521 was to become effective immediately with II Corps retaining administrative control of movements within its old attack zone until 0800, 10 September. This shift of the boundary eased the supply problem of 13 Corps by placing Highway 6521 within its zone. The restrictions on the advance of IV Corps were lifted; in order to assist the II Corps attack, on Army order IV Corps was to be prepared after 2000, 11 September, to attack northeast with approximately a reinforced brigade to secure the high ground north of Prato. D Day for the II and 13 Corps attack was to be 10 September with H Hour as early as the troops should be ready to move forward. Since the immediate task was to occupy the ground vacated by the withdrawing enemy troops and to gain contact, there was no need to arrange for

preliminary artillery support, and the two corps were each given authority to initiate movement without regard to the other.

1. *Advance of II Corps.* The 34th Division, on the II Corps left flank, jumped off at 0530, 10 September, with the 133d Infantry, under Col. William Schildroth, on the left along the Monti della Calvana ridge line and the 168th Infantry under Col. Henry C. Hine clearing the rolling hill country at the head of the Sieve River valley. The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, patrolling the division left flank up the Bisenzio Creek valley, reported at 0700 that Mount Maggiore was still clear of enemy troops, and the 1st Battalion, 133d Infantry, moving up from the southeast, occupied the 3,000-foot peak without opposition. Pushing on north along the sharp, naked ridge of Monti della Calvana, the 133d Infantry reached the forward slopes of Mount Il Prataccio before dark. Meeting only light resistance from enemy rear guards and some artillery and machine gun fire at the close of the day, the regiment had covered 5 miles of rugged mountain terrain. To the right the 168th Infantry, hampered by transverse ridge lines and by artillery fire which forced the troops to seek covered routes of advance, proceeded at a slower pace. Positions for the night were taken up just to the south of the Sieve River to conclude a day's advance of approximately 3 miles.

The 168th Infantry began moving again on the morning of 11 September with the objective of reaching Mount Frassino, an advance outpost of the Gothic Line. Leading the advance, the 1st Battalion crossed the Sieve and passed through the village of Cavallina. The village was unoccupied but heavily mined and booby-trapped; later in the morning the heavy weapons company suffered five casualties from mines on the banks of the Sieve. Under scattered artillery fire the 1st Battalion pushed on slowly another mile to Barberino. The lead company engaged an enemy patrol at an old castle north of the village, and the ensuing action held up the battalion until dark 2 miles short of Mount Frassino. General Bolte had originally planned to have the 168th Infantry extend to the left to pinch out the 133d Infantry north of Mount Il Prataccio. Although the 133d Infantry was faced with more difficult terrain, it was making better progress, and Colonel Schildroth was ordered to continue his attack while the 168th Infantry concentrated on Mount Frassino. When a night attack by the 2d and 3d Battalions brought the 168th Infantry only to the lower slopes of the mountain by dawn on 12 September, Colonel Hine halted the two battalions to avoid a daylight attack over ground which was open and exposed to enemy observation. During the day the 135th Infantry, under Col. Ashton H. Manhart, fought its way forward through bypassed pockets of enemy troops to relieve the 168th Infantry, which then passed into division reserve.

While the 168th Infantry was making its night attack on Mount Frassino, the 133d Infantry to the west was outposting positions in the vicinity of La Dogana Hill,

2 miles to the southwest of Mount Frassino. On the morning of the 12th the 2d and 3d Battalions, with the 2d Battalion leading, resumed the attack at 0530. No enemy was encountered in the early morning, and progress through the rough hills was steady if slow until 1015 when the 2d Battalion was stopped by an extensive minefield covered by machine gun fire, ½ mile west of the village of Fresciano. After a 3-hour delay the 2d Battalion succeeded in working its way around the east side of the mined area and gained another mile before halting 1 hour before midnight; the 3d Battalion, swinging to the west of the minefield, reached positions 1 mile to the left rear on a ridge due north of La Dogana Hill. By the night of 12 September the 3-day advance of the 34th Division had been reduced from gains of miles to hundreds of yards as the combination of continuously rising ground, minefields, and increasing enemy resistance slowed the attacking troops. The division had now reached the outer defenses of the Gothic Line, and the elements of the 334th Grenadier and the 4th Parachute Divisions holding the sector of the line between Highways 65 and 6620 showed increasing reluctance to give ground.

The 91st Division, attacking simultaneously with the 34th Division, jumped off at 0530, 10 September, from the forward assembly areas it had occupied the night before between the town of Vaglia on Highway 65 and the eastern slopes of Mount Senario. The division moved forward on a two-regiment front, the 362d Infantry under Col. John W. Cotton on the left and the 363d Infantry under Col. W. Fulton Magill, Jr., on the right, with the first objective of securing the high ground south of the Sieve River on each side of Highway 65. No contact was made with the enemy during the morning, but the troops proceeded cautiously due to extensive demolitions and the ever present threat of mines. The latter problem was partially solved by pressing Italian farmers and villagers into service to act as guides through suspected areas. In the afternoon when the two regiments, following the steep, parallel ridges and narrow valleys which lead north to the Sieve Valley, reached the last line of hills south of the river, they began to receive artillery and some small-arms fire. They also caught their first glimpse of the higher peaks of the Northern Apennines. Five miles to the north across the gently rolling fields of the Sieve Valley loomed a massive wall of mountains shrouded in the blue haze of the early autumn afternoon. Hidden somewhere in this maze of lofty, jumbled hills lay the enemy's prepared defenses and the bulk of his troops. The column of marching troops, less interested in the impressive scenery than in the immediate task at hand, paused only to reorganize and complete their preparations to force a crossing of the river below them.

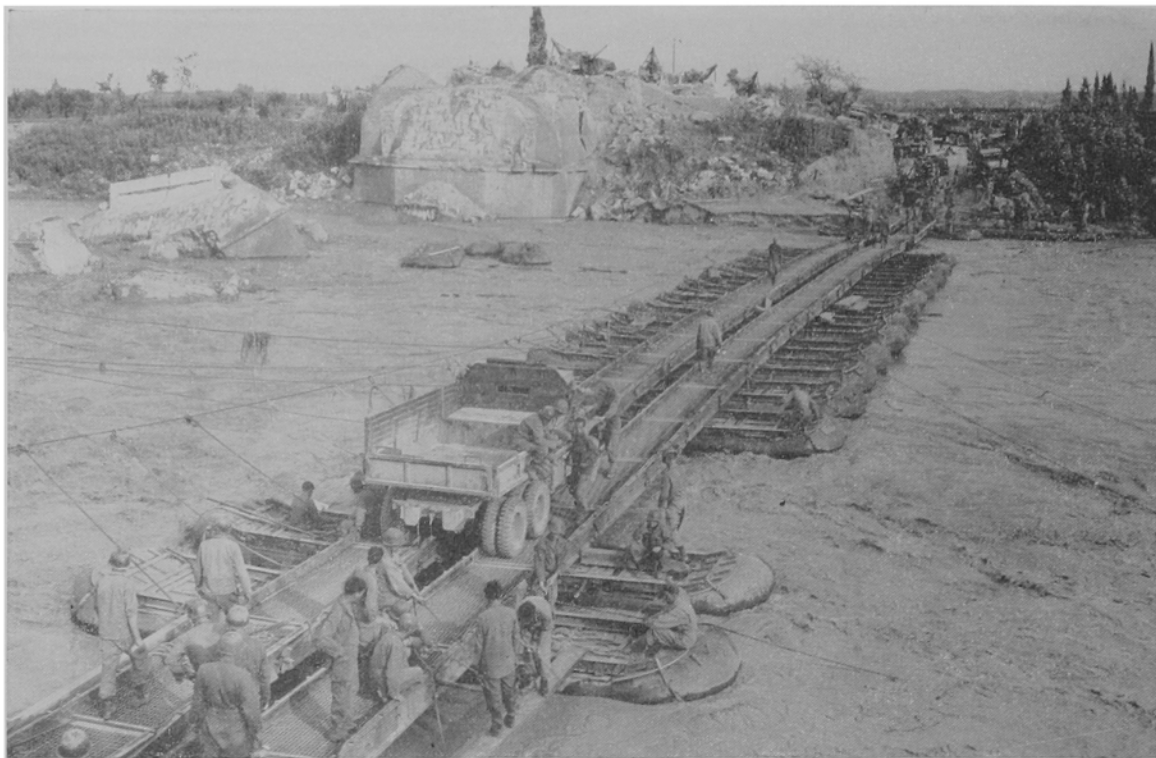
The Sieve is a narrow, shallow stream which could easily be forded; the chief problem was to locate suitable crossing points free of mines. This was accomplished during the night; before dawn on 11 September both regiments were across the river and moving ahead against only slight resistance. By the end of 11 September the



A 240-mm howitzer crosses a road fill while moving up near Vaglia



Armored cars of the British 1 Division follow a narrow mountain road



Traffic waits while the engineers work to save this bridge near Pontedera



Troops of the 92d Division in action along a canal north of Lucca

362d Infantry, advancing astride and to the east of Highway 65, and the 363d Infantry, on each side of Highway 6524, had crossed the valley and were entering the foothills of the mountains. Although the 4th Parachute Division had made no effort to hold the reported Green Line positions in the Sieve Valley, when our troops approached the high ground they encountered small-arms, mortar, and artillery fire on an increasing scale. The strength of the enemy defenses, however, had not yet been tested, and the 91st Division, following General Keyes' instructions that there was to be no let-up in the pressure applied on the enemy, attacked again at 0600, 12 September, with the ambitious objective of taking Mount Calvi and both Mount Monticelli and Mount Altuzzo, the two hills dominating Il Giogo Pass. These heights were all strongpoints in the Gothic Line defenses, and the day's advance brought the leading elements of the 362d and 363d Infantry only to the enemy's outpost positions.

The 363d Infantry employed its 1st and 3d Battalions for the attack on the Il Giogo Pass area. In the morning, the 1st Battalion made good progress toward Mount Monticelli, moving northeast nearly 1 mile from its positions near the village of Sant'Agata; then small-arms fire from the front and from Mount Calvi on the left stopped any further movement 1 mile short of its objective. To the right of Highway 6524 the 3d Battalion made a simultaneous effort to reach the summit of Mount Monticelli from the east. Companies K and I led the attack along the axis of the highway, followed by Company L, which was to branch off to the right to seize Mount Altuzzo. The drive up from the valley went well until the lead companies approached a rocky hill due south of Mount Monticelli. Enemy troops manning an outpost on the hill were driven off, but mortar and small-arms fire prevented either company from occupying the ground and stopped all efforts to move forward until darkness. On the left of the division's long front the 362d Infantry also made only minor gains. The 3d Battalion advanced less than 1 mile up Highway 65, and the 1st Battalion reached only the lower slopes of Mount Calvi. Additional support was needed before the 91st Division could hope to breach the prepared defenses lying ahead.

2. *Advance of 13 Corps.* The advance of 13 Corps across the Sieve River and into the hills marking the approaches to the Gothic Line followed virtually the same pattern as that of II Corps. The 715th Grenadier Division held its positions astride the lower reach of the Sieve until the 356th Grenadier Division had been withdrawn for movement to the Adriatic coast, but by the time the 13 Corps attack was under way on 10 September the area south and west of the Sieve was clear of enemy troops. The speed of the pursuit for the first 2 days was thus conditioned only by the difficulties met in moving troops and supplies forward. German demolition squads, in addition to blowing the bridges over the Sieve, had cut the highways on both flanks

of the Corps zone, and there were virtually no roads whatever in the central area ahead of the 8 Indian Division.

Having completed its role of screening the attack of II Corps, the 1 Division was assigned the mission of attacking on the left of 13 Corps along the axis of Highway 6521. Leading the division advance, the 3 Brigade reached the Sieve below Borgo San Lorenzo on 10 September, crossed the river the following day, and on the 12th made contact with enemy patrols and outposts at numerous points along the division front. The rate of advance had slowed as the troops entered the mountains; at the end of the period, like the 91st Division on their left, they had reached only the approaches to the Gothic Line. In the central zone, assigned to the 8 Indian Division, patrols of the 21 Brigade reached the Sieve near the village of Vicchio on 10 September; the 19 and 17 Brigades remained in position in the vicinity of Mount Calvana and Mount Giovi. Lack of roads through the rugged, mountainous terrain so seriously hampered all movements that at the end of the period the division was still moving up to the Sieve River and no attempt had yet been made to enter the mountains northeast of Vicchio. Farther to the east the 6 Armoured Division, following up the withdrawal of the 715th Grenadier Division, occupied Dicomano and prepared to swing northeast up Highway 67. Elements of the 1 Guards Brigade entered Casaromana, a mountain village 3 miles northeast of Dicomano, on 11 September and pushed on another mile the next day without making contact. Although the center and right flank of 13 Corps had lagged behind, the 1 Division, on the left flank astride Highway 6521, was in position to carry out the Corps primary mission of supporting the II Corps attack on Il Giogo Pass.

G. *IV CORPS ENTERS THE MOUNTAINS*

6-12 SEPTEMBER

The period 6-9 September, when II and 13 Corps were moving into their attack positions, was for IV Corps a period of reorganization, minor forward movements to occupy ground vacated by the enemy, and active patrolling to maintain contact; in the succeeding 3 days, while II and 13 Corps were crossing the Sieve River and approaching the Gothic Line, IV Corps also began the laborious task of surmounting the mountain barrier barring access to the Po Valley. Throughout, the action of IV Corps was to remain secondary to and conditioned by the main Army effort on the right. Advances were made only when the enemy elected to withdraw or when it was necessary to apply pressure to discourage him from transferring units to the more critical area. The enemy, for his part, made no serious effort to hold the Arno Valley or the forward slopes of the Northern Apennines. It appeared that he was

carrying out his withdrawal in accordance with a predetermined timetable, occasionally offering resistance but frequently giving up good defensive positions without a fight. Since the enemy timetable was generally ahead of that prescribed for IV Corps, contact was almost entirely limited to patrol clashes.

West of Mount Pisano Task Force 45 had occupied most of the flat coastal plain south of the Serchio prior to 5 September, although the task of clearing away enemy mines was holding up the advance of the 39 Light Antiaircraft Regiment to the river. The next day the 100th Infantry Battalion on the right flank of Task Force 45 was withdrawn to rejoin the 442d Infantry, and the 434th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion moved up to relieve it. Efforts to send patrols across the Serchio were repeatedly frustrated by the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, which held this portion of the Gisela Line until the progress of the 1st Armored Division north of Mount Pisano threatened to outflank it. The subsequent enemy withdrawal was confirmed on the morning of 8 September when a patrol from the 435th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion crossed the river and entered the village of Vecchiano without opposition. Work was begun immediately on a bridge at Vecchiano; by 10 September the 107th Antiaircraft Artillery Group had both the 434th and 435th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalions over the river and had consolidated positions south of the Autostrada.

A special task force made up of tanks, tank destroyers, reconnaissance, and engineer elements from the 2d Armored Group crossed at Vecchiano to cover the crossing of the 39 and 47 Light Antiaircraft Regiments farther downstream. The next day the two British regiments occupied the wooded area between Massaciuccoli Lake and the sea, and armored patrols reconnoitered to the outskirts of Viareggio. The 107th Antiaircraft Artillery Group reached parallel positions in the hills east of the lake. With the exception of the ambushing of three British trucks by an enemy patrol, no opposition was encountered, and the extent of the withdrawal of the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division could not yet be determined. Action on 12 September was limited to patrolling and consolidation of the ground gained in preparation for a continuation of the advance.

On the 1st Armored Division front General Prichard, following the Army instructions of 4 September that he was to form a task force of armor and infantry for possible employment under II Corps, withdrew the 11th and 14th Armored Infantry Battalions to division reserve. The former was passed through and relieved by the 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron northeast of Altopascio at 1830, 6 September; later in the evening of the same day the latter was passed through and relieved by the 6th Armored Infantry Battalion northwest of the same town. Farther to the west in the Lucca area the 370th Infantry brought up its right flank to positions paralleling the Serchio River. After 6 September General Clark ordered that

aggressive reconnaissance patrols be pushed well forward to maintain contact and to create the impression that an attack was forming on the 1st Armored and 6 South African Armoured Division fronts. This policy resulted in minor gains along the division front until 9 September, when the order for the main Fifth Army attack lifted all restrictions on the advance of IV Corps.

On the morning of 10 September the 2d Battalion, 370th Infantry, crossed the Serchio River on a front extending from Lucca to Ponte San Pietro and began clearing the hills on the west side of the river while the 1st Battalion pushed north over the last few miles of plain on the east side of the river. Three days later, on 13 September, when Company A, riding on tanks, fought its way into Ponte a Moriana, 4 miles upstream from Lucca, the regiment had reached the foothills of the Northern Apennines on a line forming an arc from Ponte San Pietro to Segromigno, a hamlet 3 miles east of the Serchio. Northeast of Segromigno the 6th Armored Infantry entered the mountain village of Villa Basilica on 10 September, and the 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron began to work its way up a narrow gorge north of Pescia. Combat patrols operated far ahead of the leading units which were handicapped by the paucity of roads and skillfully executed demolitions. The rate of the 65th Grenadier Division's withdrawal could be accurately gauged by the daily succession of explosions marking the destruction of bridges or the creation of road blocks which trebled the work of the already hard-pressed engineers. Increasing artillery fire and frequent sharp encounters with small groups of the enemy, who continued the practice of defending a town for a few hours and then withdrawing, characterized the advance. The 1st Armored Division was operating on a 20-mile front with two of its infantry battalions completely out of action. Armor could be used only to a limited extent in the mountains, and the 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was forced to become in effect a mountain infantry unit. Only the enemy's willingness to give up ground permitted the steady advance to continue.

The 6 South African Armoured Division was stretched over an equally long front from west of Mount Albano almost to the outskirts of Florence where the 74 Light Antiaircraft Regiment, attached to the 12 South African Motorised Brigade, took over the portion of the 88th Division zone south of the Autostrada on 6 September. Plans to move the 11 South African Armoured Brigade across the Arno to reinforce the 24 Guards Brigade and the 12 South African Motorised Brigade were interrupted by the floods on 7-8 September. All the division bridges were washed out, and supply trucks had to be routed across the 1st Armored Division bridge at Pontedera or through Florence. The projected reinforcement had to be cancelled, leaving the two infantry brigades spread along an 18-mile arc with no forces in reserve. Aggressive patrolling was maintained all along the division front but no effort was made to speed the retreat of the opposing 362d Grenadier Division. Par-

tisans who brought in a captured German officer on 7 September claimed that they held control of both Montecatini and Pistoia. The next day a patrol reached Montemurlo, 6 miles northwest of Prato, and another patrol contacted partisans near Highway 66 who reported that a large enemy force had pulled back into the mountains to the north of Montemurlo. These and other reports indicated that the 362d Grenadier Division had completed the evacuation of the Arno Plain and had left at most only rear guards on the forward slopes of the mountains.

Before following up the enemy withdrawal General Poole ordered the 11 South African Armoured Brigade to cross the Arno and take over the right half of the division front from the 12 South African Motorised Brigade. The movement was effected by utilizing the Florence bridges and was completed on the evening of 10 September when control of the area passed to the relieving troops. The 12 South African Motorised Brigade then assembled in division reserve east of Mount Albano. The message from Fifth Army establishing D Day for the II and 13 Corps offensive had included provision for an attack by a reinforced brigade into the mountains northeast of Montale. The attack, which was to take place on Army order after 2000, 11 September, was cancelled, but it was decided that in order to apply greater pressure on the enemy all three brigades should be put into line. The 12 South African Motorised Brigade, with the NMR attached, was again committed and given responsibility for the central zone north of Pistoia. Its axis of advance was to be along Highway 64. On the left the 24 Guards Brigade was to clear Highway 66 and the mountains to the west of it, and on the right the 11 South African Armoured Brigade, with the 4/13 FFR and the 74 British Light Antiaircraft Regiment under its command, was to move into the mountains west of Highway 6620.

All three brigades advanced during 11-12 September within their respective zones. Elements of the 11 South African Armoured Brigade reached Migliana, a mountain village 7 miles north of Prato, and occupied Mount Pratocavola, a 2,500-foot mountain 5 miles northeast of Pistoia. Directly north of Pistoia the 12 South African Motorised Brigade reached the V-shaped area of ground where Highway 64 branches off from Highway 66; parallel positions were reached by the 24 Guards Brigade in the mountains north of Montecatini. The enemy, who had made no effort to utilize the commanding ground overlooking the Arno Plain to delay the advance to the mountains, had now fallen back to his prepared positions. Harassing artillery fire increased on 12 September, and patrols began to encounter minefields and barbed wire as they probed deeper into the mountains.

H. *SUMMARY OF ACTION*

The first 12 days of September had seen Fifth Army register significant gains along the whole of its extensive front. At the end of the period Florence and the Arno River lay almost 20 miles behind the forward troops of II and 13 Corps, and IV Corps held the whole of the broad Arno plain as well as the first line of hills overlooking it from the north. After the long weeks of stalemate along the Arno when the troops in reserve had been trained in the technique of opposed river crossings and detailed plans had been formulated first for an assault on the Arno line and then for the capture of the two hill masses in the Arno plain (together with the ring of hills north of Florence), each of these objectives was taken with remarkable ease and at a very low cost in lives. The delays encountered were almost entirely due to the natural obstacles presented by the mountainous terrain and the Arno floods, and the man-made obstacles left by German demolition squads; delays occasioned by enemy opposition were confined to harassing artillery fire and to clashes between Allied patrols and enemy rear guards. Indeed the unwillingness of the enemy to hold fast long enough for Fifth Army to strike a real blow was becoming a problem in itself. It was only at the end of the period when the forward troops approached the Gothic Line itself that resistance increased.

This failure of the Germans to make full use of their defensive positions short of the Gothic Line could be attributed to the surprise and initial success gained by the Eighth Army offensive on the Adriatic coast and to the threat, which became a reality on 10 September, of an attack by Fifth Army. The timing of the blows, beginning with the offensive on the right and followed by the attack north of Florence, served to keep the enemy off balance. To meet the first thrust Kesselring was forced to exhaust his mobile reserves and draw troops from the central front, thereby weakening the forces available for use against Fifth Army and necessitating a general withdrawal to the more easily defended Gothic Line positions. It was now the intention of Fifth Army that the enemy should be given no opportunity to regain the equilibrium in his order of battle lost by the transfer of units to the east. While advance elements of II and 13 Corps probed the outer defenses of the Gothic Line on 12 September, as fast as the engineers could open the roads reinforcements and Corps artillery had been moving up. The planning and the follow-up phase of the Fifth Army offensive were completed; the troops were in position to attack the Gothic Line.

