

The first counterattacks were directed against this platoon; three such assaults varying in strength from platoon to company were repulsed during the day. Between the time it arrived on the ridge and its relief at 0800, 21 February, the platoon successfully beat off seven enemy attempts to recover the position.

Counterattacks which were successfully repelled were also received at other points along the ridge. Two companies of the German 4th Independent Mountain Battalion were virtually wiped out in these battles. The supply and evacuation problem was overcome by supporting engineers, who constructed a tramway which reached two-thirds of the way up the cliff. Seven .50 caliber machine guns and two 75-mm pack howitzers were emplaced on the ridge to support the main effort on the west slope of Mount Belvedere. The 1st Battalion held and improved its positions until early morning of 22 February, when it was relieved by the 10th Mountain Antitank Battalion and the 10th Mountain Reconnaissance Troop. The relieved units assembled with other elements of their regiment in the vicinity of Gaggio Montano, at the foot of the Belvedere—Torraccia saddle.

The left flank protected by capture of the ridge, the division secretly moved its other units into attack positions. Reinforcing the fire power of the division were the 175th Field Artillery Battalion; Battery A, 1125th Armored Field Artillery Battalion; Company A, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion; and 4.2-inch mortars of the 84th Chemical Battalion. The 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 751st Tank Battalion provided armored strength, and extensive arrangements were completed for air support by Rover Joe and XXII Tactical Air Command. The division plan of attack called for the 87th Mountain Infantry to move northeast up the western slope of Mount Belvedere while the 85th Mountain Infantry was committed to a frontal attack to the north against the Belvedere and Gorgolesco summits. The 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry, would cover the right flank of the division by seizing the village of Mazzancana. When the 10th Mountain Division had reached Hill 1053, in the saddle approximately halfway between Mount Gorgolesco and Mount della Torraccia, the BEF was to attack Mount Castello. IV Corps artillery was in position to support both divisions.

Since the enemy on Mount Belvedere had complete observation over our positions in the Silla Valley, assault troops secretly marched 8 miles on foot during the night of 18–19 February into forward assembly areas at the base of the Belvedere—Gorgolesco mass. The attack jumped off at 2300, 19 February, without artillery preparation, in the hope of securing at least tactical surprise in such a night assault. On the left the 87th Mountain Infantry crossed the line of departure along the road net near Querciola. Near the village of Corona the 2d Battalion turned west and southwest toward the villages of Polla and Rocca Corneta, while the 1st Battalion pressed northeast up the slope toward Mount Belvedere and north to the village of

Valpiana. Leading troops advanced approximately 800 yards before reaching the first enemy outposts; sporadic resistance was offered by groups of the enemy dug in along a line of bunkers, machine-gun positions, and fortified houses which extended from the summit of Mount Belvedere west to Rocca Corneta.

Extensive antipersonnel and antitank minefields were encountered on the western slopes near Corona, and some casualties were caused among the troops and partisans who were acting as guides. Most of these fields were negotiated without great difficulty, although the frozen ground made probing almost impossible. Corona was bypassed at about 0300. An hour and one-half later 1st Battalion units reached Mount Belvedere against moderate resistance and began clearing a spur of the main ridge running north toward Valpiana. The 2d Battalion meanwhile mopped up around Corona and swung  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile west toward Polla. This strongpoint was taken at 1035, knocking another hole in the enemy's main line and rendering Rocca Corneta, between Polla and elements of the 86th Mountain Infantry on Pizzo di Campiano, untenable. The 3d Battalion moved into the center of the 87th Mountain Infantry zone north of Corona during the morning, and positions were improved and organized on the regimental front throughout the day. Two companies of the 1st Battalion, 1044th Grenadier Regiment, were badly cut up in our initial advance and in German counterattacks launched at 0400 on the 20th.

The regiment beat off local counterattacks along most of its front on 21 February, inflicting severe casualties on the attackers, while artillery fire and aerial bombardment broke up a potentially powerful concentration of enemy troops north of Valpiana before they could be organized for attack. By darkness of 22 February the regiment occupied and consolidated all objectives in its zone, and partisans entered Rocca Corneta without resistance at 2100 that night. On 27 February the 1st Battalion, 1st Brazilian Infantry, took over positions held on the western slopes of Mount Belvedere, and the 3d Battalion, 87th Mountain Infantry, moved east to relieve the 2d Battalion, 1st Brazilian Infantry, on Mount Castello.

Efforts were begun early in the morning of the first day of the attack to get tanks and tank destroyers into position on the ridge, principally as a defensive measure since it was expected heavy counterattacks, possibly by as large a unit as a division, would be received. Great difficulty was experienced due to heavily mined roads and bad terrain. Tanks advanced as far as Querciola on 20 February, but several were disabled by mines and others threw their tracks in attempting to continue on to Corona and Valpiana. One tank finally reached Valpiana on the morning of 21 February; by the next morning both tanks and tank destroyers reached the ridge northeast of Mount Belvedere after engineers at last cleared the roads of deeply laid mines by detonating them with Bangalore torpedoes.

Farther to the east similar successes were achieved when the 85th Mountain

Infantry sent its 3d Battalion against Mount Belvedere and the 1st Battalion against Mount Gorgolesco. At 0100, 20 February, the 3d Battalion first encountered resistance 300 yards below the summit. Three hours later leading elements had fought their way to the top, and at 0615 the entire battalion was on the ridge in the face of heavy mortar and artillery fire. On Mount Gorgolesco the 1st Battalion experienced almost identical enemy reaction but by 0610 cleared the summit; after reorganizing it moved on at 0730 up the ridge toward Mount della Torraccia, meeting increased small-arms and mortar fire. Enemy artillery was partially neutralized by counter-battery fire; activity of friendly aircraft which began operating about the time the battalion started to advance toward the saddle caused a marked reduction in the German shelling. The aircraft provided close support on all parts of the division front during the day, bombing, strafing, and firing rockets at gun positions and other enemy installations. A total of 412 sorties was flown in support of the Belvedere—Torraccia attack. Both Rover Joe and “Horsefly” — the latter a forward observer flying in a Cub plane — directed the Spitfires and P-47’s of the 57th and 350th Fighter Groups and the 8 South African Air Force Wing. Support as close in as 600 yards was provided throughout the operation. The 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry, experienced little opposition in its supporting attack on the right of the 85th Mountain Infantry, occupying the village of Mazzancana and setting up defensive positions about halfway up the southeastern slope of the saddle early in the morning of the 20th.

Company-strength counterattacks were received east of Mount Gorgolesco at 1115, and several other smaller thrusts were repulsed later in the day. These were ineffective in stopping the advance, and about half the saddle had been cleared at 1800 when the 2d Battalion passed through the 1st Battalion to continue the attack. The 2d Battalion encountered stubborn resistance as it pushed slowly forward along the ridge on 21 February. At 0700 a battalion-strength counterattack from the north was launched by elements of the 741st Light Regiment, the first unit of the 114th Light Division committed against us in this sector. Part of this division previously had been noted moving westward from the Eighth Army front near Lake Comacchio and apparently had been on the way to reinforce the Mount Belvedere sector even before the 10th Mountain Division began its attack. These counterattacks, reinforced by elements of the 1st Battalion, 1043d Grenadier Regiment, which had constituted a local reserve, temporarily halted our forward progress although they failed to recapture any of the ground the 85th Mountain Infantry had already taken.

The 2d Battalion inched ahead again late in the afternoon and at darkness reached points just below the summit of Mount della Torraccia. The Germans pummeled the area with heavy artillery and mortar concentrations, and at the end of 22 February the summit yet remained in enemy hands, although we had taken many

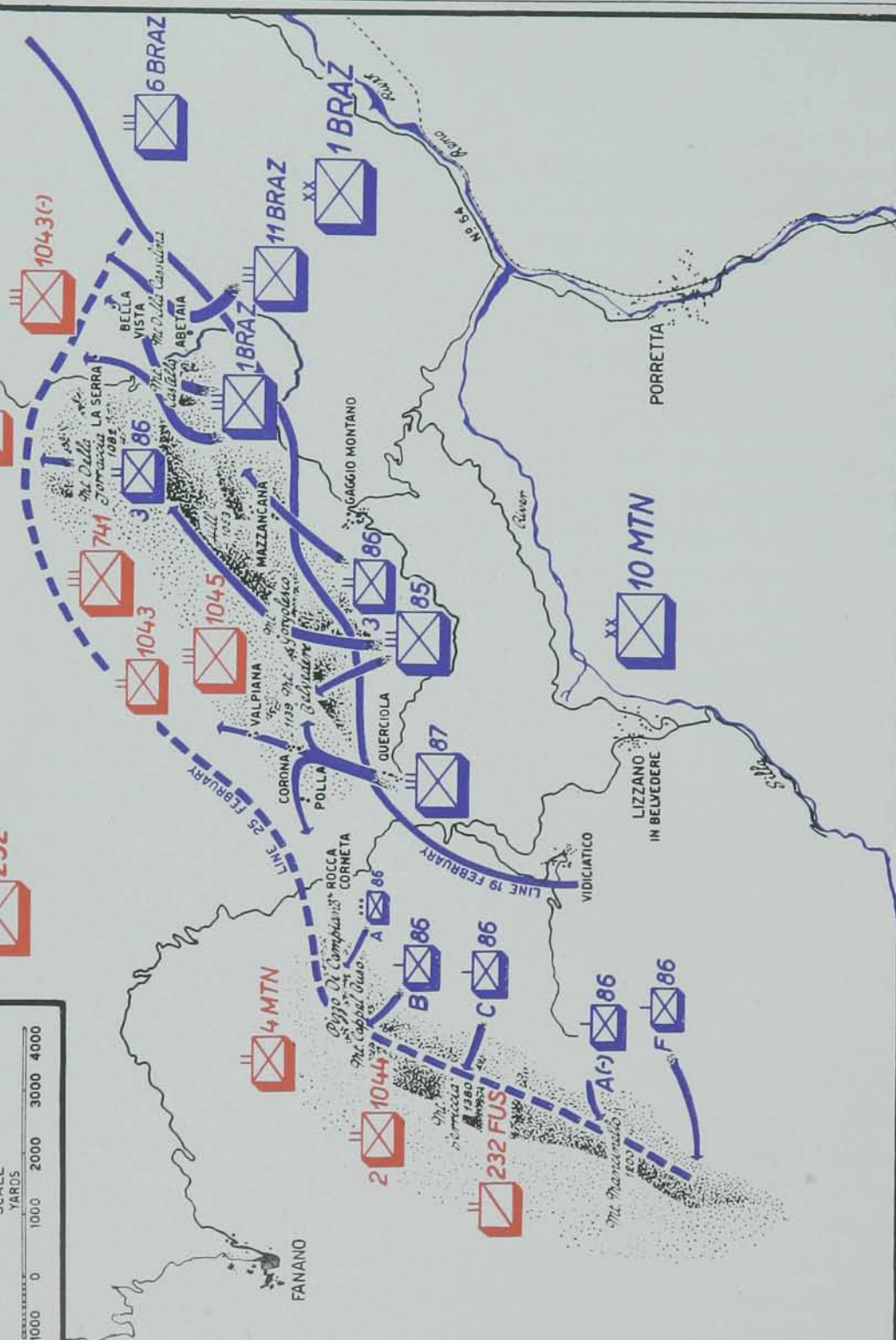
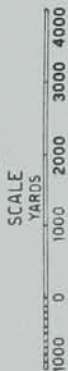
of the lesser hills around the mountain. Positions were virtually unchanged the following day. After relief of the 2d Battalion by the 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry, during the night of 23–24 February, the fresh unit seized the summit of the disputed mountain at 0730, 24 February, following a heavy artillery preparation, and advanced slightly beyond the crest. Extensive trench systems were overrun. On 25 February the enemy made one final effort to drive us back, mounting a counterattack which resulted in the almost complete destruction of the assaulting units of the Mittenwald Mountain Battalion. These and following units were thrown in piecemeal when they arrived by forced marches. Members of the 741st Light Regiment and the 114th Reconnaissance Battalion (114th Light Division) continued to offer resistance on the northeast slopes of Mount della Torraccia for the next few days, but the attack on the 25th marked the actual conclusion of the battle for the ridge.

The 1st Brazilian Division in its attack against Mount Castello followed tactics similar to those used by the 10th Mountain Division. The 1st Brazilian Infantry attacked from the west and south while the 11th Brazilian Infantry pushed north across the lower eastern slopes with the bulk of its weight directed east of the mountain. The 1st and 3d Battalions, 1st Brazilian Infantry, jumped off from positions north and east of Mazzancana at 0530, 21 February, taking hills below the main mountain within 2 hours against light opposition. The Germans, whose right flank was threatened by our advance along the Belvedere—Torraccia saddle, withdrew from some of their positions and were blasted out of others by a 15-minute preparatory artillery barrage before the Brazilians began their main assault on Mount Castello at noon. The two battalions converged on the objective, the 1st Battalion attacking northeast and the 3d Battalion north. Leading elements of the 1st Battalion reached the summit at 1745, and an hour later the 3d Battalion came up the southern slopes; by 2040 scattered pockets of resistance on the mountain had been mopped up. The 11th Brazilian Infantry advanced in its zone, capturing the village of Abetaia. The 6th Brazilian Infantry, holding the right flank of the 1st Brazilian Division, took no part in the attack.

On 22 February the 1st Brazilian Infantry continued to make slight gains north of Mount Castello and consolidated its positions on the mountain. The following morning Mount della Casellina, 1 mile east of Mount Castello, was occupied. The village of Bella Vista fell late in the afternoon, and by midnight of 24–25 February La Serra, slightly more than 1 mile due east of Mount della Torraccia, was outflanked and captured in the face of heavy machine-gun fire. Numerous counterattacks were beaten off; enemy resistance in the vicinity finally collapsed about noon on 25 February when several pillboxes were reduced in a bayonet and grenade assault.

The reliefs affected between the 10th Mountain Division and the 1st Brazilian

MAP No 5  
*The BELVEDERE - TORRACCIA  
 OPERATION*  
 19-25 February 1945



Division resulted in splitting the Brazilian zone of operations after the first phase of the attack was concluded on 25 February. All objectives included in this phase had been captured and consolidated; the two divisions adjusted positions in preparation for the second phase. On 28 February, after the 87th Mountain Infantry and the 1st Brazilian Infantry had completed mutual reliefs, the BEF took command of the western part of the 10th Mountain Division zone, the 10th Mountain Antitank Battalion and the 10th Mountain Reconnaissance Troop on the Serrasiccia—Campiano ridge coming under operational control of the Brazilians. These changes left the 10th Mountain Division holding a sector running northeast with its left boundary along the eastern slopes of Mount Gorgolesco and the right boundary  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile east of Mount Castello. From this point eastward the BEF again held territory extending to the Reno River, where its sector adjoined that of the 1st Armored Division of II Corps.

2. *The Second Phase.* The second phase of the Corps attack, which was designed to push our positions forward to a general east-west line slightly south of Vergato, was originally planned to begin on 1 March, but poor weather forced two postponements, the assault troops finally jumping off at 0800, 3 March. (*See Map No. 6.*) Between the 10th Mountain Division and the final phase line of the operation lay more than 4 miles of high ridges and peaks through which the main burden of the attack still rested on the American division. The Brazilians were given the task of continuing ahead in a northeasterly direction parallel to Highway 64 with the town of Castelnuovo being the principal objective in the BEF zone.

General Hays committed two regiments abreast, the 86th Mountain Infantry on the left or west flank, directed chiefly against Mount Terminale, Mount della Vedetta, and Mount Grande d'Aiano, and the 87th Mountain Infantry on the right against Mount della Croce, Mount della Castellana, and ultimately against Castel d'Aiano and Mount della Spe. Tanks of the 751st Tank Battalion and self-propelled 3-inch guns of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion were assigned the mission of providing armored support.

The 86th Mountain Infantry crossed the line of departure from positions just north of Mount Torraccia, advancing with two battalions abreast, the 1st Battalion across the western slopes of Mount Terminale and the 2d Battalion across the eastern side of the mountain. An intense 20-minute artillery preparation preceded the attack, all the division weapons and corps artillery ranging up to 155-mm guns participating. The 1st Battalion advanced rapidly through enemy artillery, mortar, and small-arms fire, successfully passing through German minefields without suffering a casualty. After the entire western section of the mountain had been cleared at 1100 the 3d Battalion, 85th Mountain Infantry, was moved forward from division reserve to take over these positions and provide protection for the left flank. The

relieved battalion was assembled ready to relieve in turn another of the attacking formations.

The 2d Battalion rapidly overran the eastern portion of Mount Terminale, clearing it by 0840, but ran into stiff resistance an hour later in the village of Iola, just north of the mountain. Supported by the direct fire of tank destroyers, the battalion battled through the streets and cleared houses which had been turned into strongpoints by the Germans; the village was finally cleared about noon. Among the prisoners taken at Iola were the commanding officer and most of the staff of the 2d Battalion, 721st Light Regiment, which had been moved up to join other elements of the 114th Light Division in relieving and reinforcing the 232d Grenadier Division. The action of the 86th Mountain Infantry in the first 5 hours of the attack virtually destroyed this enemy battalion and inflicted heavy losses on other elements of the 721st Light Regiment. Following the fall of Iola, the 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry, passed through the 2d Battalion and continued on ahead to take Campo del Sole at 1745. This advance placed the forward troops about 2 miles north of the line of departure of the morning, and the regiment dug in for the night.

Similar success was achieved in the zone of the 87th Mountain Infantry. With only the 3d Battalion completely committed, the regiment advanced in column of battalions against varying resistance; by noon Mount della Vedetta, a mile southeast of Campo del Sole, was cleared and a road block established at Pietra Colora. Here, as elsewhere across the division front, the enemy fell back from ridge line to ridge line, never counterattacking as it had been expected he would do, and giving up large numbers of prisoners representing various units of both the 114th Light Division and the 232d Grenadier Division. It developed that once again our attack had caught the enemy in the midst of a relief, this time by the 721st Light Regiment of elements of the 1043d Grenadier Regiment. Extensive air support by fighter-bombers directed by Rover Joe again pinned down German units behind the immediate front, thus preventing shifting of enemy strength from one sector to another. The planes also contributed greatly to an effective counterbattery program against enemy artillery and mortars.

Both attacking regiments resumed their advance at 0800, 4 March, following artillery barrages. In the zone of the 86th Mountain Infantry the 1st Battalion moved toward the town of Sassomolare, cleared it by noon, and continued pushing north against Mount Grande d'Aiano, the last regimental objective. The final assault against this height was begun at 1315, and in little more than 2 hours the scant organized opposition had been overcome. Immediate organization for defense was undertaken on Mount Grande, since no further advances were planned in this sector. The 3d Battalion, which had passed through the 2d Battalion, moved forward on the right of the 1st Battalion, while the 3d Battalion, 85th Mountain In-





*Soldiers pick their way cautiously on a mine-swept path through Corona*



*Litter bearers bring back the wounded in the attack on Mount Belvedere*





*General Truscott confers with his commanders near Castel d' Aiano*



*A tank destroyer moves up; below, engineers work on a Bailey bridge*

fantry, occupied additional defensive positions along the extended flank on the west.

Progress was not quite so rapid in the 87th Mountain Infantry zone. The 1st Battalion attacked Mount Acidola, due north of Pietra Colora, while the 2d Battalion branched off to the northwest and then swung in ahead of the 1st Battalion against Madonna di Brasa, northeast of Sassomolare. Mount Acidola fell by midday, and shortly after 1600 Madonna di Brasa was occupied. At 1000 the 3d Battalion was committed for the first time, striking east from Pietra Colora against Mount della Croce. This brilliant flanking attack speedily wrested the important feature from the Germans, who were cleared from it soon after 1500; the mountain troops were subsequently relieved by the 3d Battalion, 6th Brazilian Infantry.

The capture of Mount Grande on 4 March paved the way for the completion of the Phase II operations the following day in the territory between the mountain and Highway 64. While the 86th Mountain Infantry continued to mop up in the northwestern portion of the division zone, the 87th Mountain Infantry pushed through in the center, and the 85th Mountain Infantry was committed to clear out the mountains on the right. Both the 1st and 2d Battalions, 87th Mountain Infantry, were concentrated in a narrow zone less than 1 mile wide and directed their attack against the town of Castel d'Aiano. The 2d Battalion maneuvered to the left, to take high ground and block the roads running northwest from Castel d'Aiano, while the 1st Battalion smashed into the town. By the late afternoon of 5 March the 2d Battalion fought its way into the covering positions; by 1940 the 1st Battalion, spearheaded by tanks, moved into Castel d'Aiano itself, pushing the deep salient in the center to the final phase line. In this area elements of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, which the Germans had rushed up from reserve to block our advance, were encountered for the first time, but in a fierce battle could not prevent our capture of the town.

Previous advances had made it possible to commit the fresh 85th Mountain Infantry at 0800, 5 March, on the right of the 87th Mountain Infantry. The 1st Battalion attacked north against Mount della Spe, which lies slightly northeast of Castel d'Aiano; the 2d Battalion struck northeast in a flanking attack against the Mount della Castellana hill mass. Shortly before noon the 1st Battalion reached a wide draw below the southern slopes of its objective, crossed it under heavy enemy fire which inflicted severe casualties, and struck up the mountainside. Despite stiff enemy resistance the battalion reached the top of the mountain at 1800. When the 2d Battalion attempted an attack up the south side of Mount della Castellana, it found the approaches heavily covered by fire. The leading companies fell back, circled around to the west, and launched a new assault up the western slopes, after the area had been covered by a concentration from all available artillery. By 1500

extensive trench systems were overrun, and leading elements reached the summit. The bypassed enemy on the southern slopes were speedily rounded up, and Company E, moving northwest along the ridge line, captured the northern peak — Mount Spicchione — before darkness.

The long expected counterattacks finally materialized during the night of 5–6 March, directed against our most forward positions on Mount della Spe. Elements of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment launched one attack before midnight, followed with others at 0030, 0130, and 0440, but failed to drive the 1st Battalion off the peak, although one German group penetrated to such close range that bayonets came into play. After the fourth attempt failed, the enemy was forced to cease such efforts and rely on heavy artillery fire to harass the American positions, when the front once more became stabilized. The 3-day effort of the 10th Mountain Division resulted in the capture of approximately 1,200 prisoners and occupation of more than 35 square miles of enemy territory.

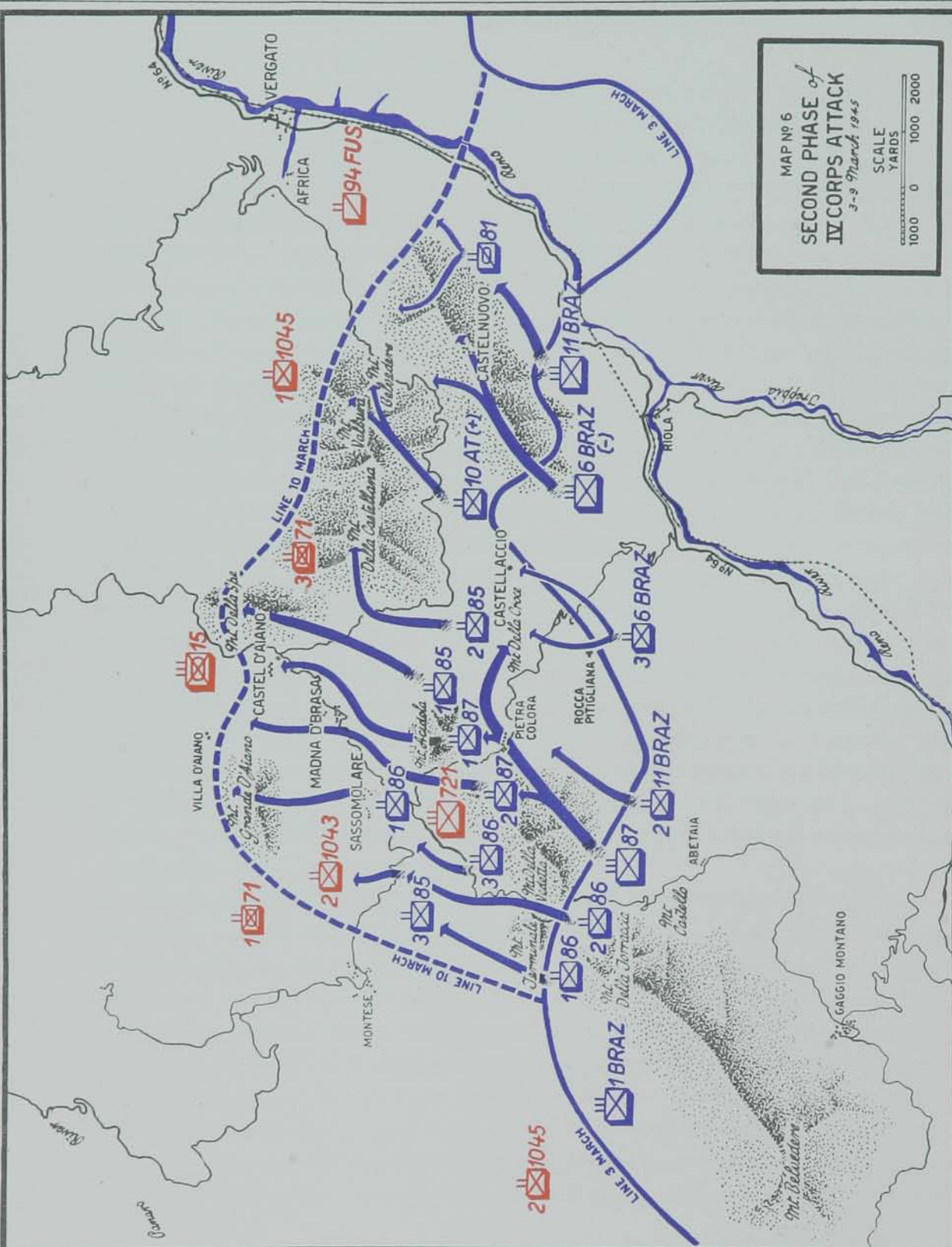
The Brazilian effort on the extreme right of IV Corps was closely coordinated with the advance of the 10th Mountain Division, although the attack initially was delivered in widely scattered areas. On 3 March the 2d Battalion, 11th Brazilian Infantry, pushed forward on the right flank of the 87th Mountain Infantry. The same day the 3d Battalion, 6th Brazilian Infantry, captured the area around Rocca Pitigliana, mopped up several small hamlets between there and Pietra Colora to the west, and on 4 March took over all 10th Mountain Division positions east of Pietra Colora.

In conjunction with the attack of the 85th Mountain Infantry the following day, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 6th Brazilian Infantry, moved northeast to outflank the town of Castelnuovo from the west, finally penetrating into the village at 1910, following an intense shelling of German positions in the vicinity. On the right of the 6th Brazilian Infantry and just west of Highway 64 the 11th Brazilian Infantry advanced east of Castelnuovo and pushed forward nearly 1 mile beyond it into positions which overlooked Vergato.

In the next few days after 5 March further adjustments of troop positions took place to complete the operation. The 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was detached from the 1st Armored Division on 6 March, was attached to IV Corps, and moved west of the Reno River to begin relief of the 11th Brazilian Infantry. The squadron first relieved this unit, then moved elements ahead of the 6th Brazilian Infantry to pinch out that organization and establish a joint boundary with the 10th Mountain Division. On 9 March the 10th Mountain Antitank Battalion and the 10th Mountain Reconnaissance Troop occupied Mount Valbura, and another Mount Belvedere, just west of the reconnaissance squadron positions. No opposition was met in this operation. The occupation of the mountains completed the establish-

MAP No 6  
**SECOND PHASE of  
 IV CORPS ATTACK**  
*3-9 March 1945*

SCALE  
 YARDS  
 1000 0 1000 2000



ment of a solid American front, and all elements of the BEF were moved to what had been the Brazilian west subsector, thereby concentrating the entire 1st Brazilian Division on the left of the 10th Mountain Division.

#### D. *SUMMARY OF LATE WINTER ACTIONS*

Except for the limited attacks along the west coast, in the Serchio Valley, and west of Highway 64, action on the Fifth Army front followed the same static pattern during February and March that prevailed throughout the 3 previous months. Patrols, raiding parties, and rotation and resting of units was the usual order; specialized training was emphasized. Early in February the 34th Division carried out the biggest effort in the II Corps sector during the 2-month period, a two-battalion raid east of Highway 65. This limited objective attack, which had the dual purpose of seizing high ground northwest of Pizzano and northeast of Mount Belmonte and obtaining prisoners, began at 1500, 5 February, as the 2d Battalion, 133d Infantry, and the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry, moved out at a time of day when observation had shown that most of the Germans ordinarily were asleep.

Surprise failed, however, and heavy machine-gun and artillery fire halted the 133d Infantry units before they had made any appreciable headway. High casualties were suffered from the fire and in antipersonnel Schu minefields. Less severe immediate opposition was encountered by the 168th Infantry. By 1815 Company G penetrated to the village of Orbega, at the foot of the Pizzano ridge, but here Germans of the 305th Grenadier Division, entrenched in rocks above the village, poured forth such a stream of small-arms and mortar fire that further advances were impossible. Company I tried again at 0400, 6 February, battling to within 50 yards of the ridge top before being beaten back. In the afternoon a third attempt to reach the summit also was met by heavy fire. The attack was then abandoned, and the troops fell back to the positions they had previously held. Enemy reaction had been violent, an estimated total of 1,360 rounds of artillery falling on our attacking elements in less than 9 hours. At the same time, apparently fearing the raid was the start of a much greater offensive, the Germans heavily shelled Highway 65 and adjacent areas.

Throughout the remainder of the month no raids in greater than company strength were undertaken. Planned reliefs were carried out. On 13 February the 91st Division replaced the 34th Division in the Idice Valley and Mount Belmonte sector; 10 days later the 1st Armored Division, with the 135th Regimental Combat Team (34th Division) attached, relieved the 6 South African Armoured Division on the left flank of II Corps. This change brought the South Africans off the front for

the first time since the beginning of the Gothic Line campaign. The division reverted to Army reserve in a training area near Lucca. The 8 Indian Division, which had constituted part of the Fifth Army reserve since early in January, was returned to control of Eighth Army on 13 February, taking positions in the Adriatic coastal sector. Few routine changes were made by IV Corps during the month. The separate 473d Infantry, after attachment to the 92d Division in positions near Cutigliano on 22 February, made a mutual relief with the 365th Infantry in the Serchio Valley. Two days later the 92d Division extended its command to include the former Task Force 45 zone, which made the division responsible for the entire western half of the IV Corps sector, extending from the Ligurian coast inland as far as the left boundary of the 10th Mountain Division near Mount Mancinello.

March operations in the II Corps sector and in the central and western portions of that of IV Corps were more restricted than in the previous month, although forward positions in the 1st Armored Division sector on the left of II Corps were improved slightly as a result of our gains west of Highway 64. The German positions in Vergato and in their limited bridgehead across the Reno River east of the town were rendered somewhat precarious by the establishment of the 10th Mountain Division on the heights west of Vergato. On 8 March the 6th Armored Infantry Battalion occupied the village of Carviano, a mile northeast of Vergato, but on 15 March attempts of the 11th Armored Infantry Battalion to establish an outpost in Salvaro, slightly farther northeast, were beaten off in a stiff local engagement. Later in the month, on the 27th, the same unit occupied the town without resistance, an indication that evacuation of this area by the enemy might be taking place. Elements of the 135th Infantry, attached to the 1st Armored Division, placed outposts in other slightly more advanced localities in the Setta Valley during the month. Although they themselves did not act aggressively, the Germans were sensitive to our patrol activity in this sector.

Regrouping and reliefs continued in the II Corps area throughout March. On the 6th the 34th Division relieved the 88th Division in the sector astride Highway 65, and on 13 March the 10 Indian Division assumed command of the 85th Division sector in the Mount Grande hill mass. Eighth Army extended its boundary westward, placing the interarmy line just east of the Idice River valley and Mount Belmonte. The 85th Division was detached from II Corps on 18 March, became Army reserve, and moved to Gagliano for a period of intensive training.

The Germans changed their front-line order of battle in Italy as little as possible during the 2 months, although the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division and the 715th Grenadier Division left the Italian theater, making with the 356th Grenadier Division a total of three which had been moved out since shortly after Christmas. The enemy was able to stop our attacks on the west flank without committing any other than local



reserves, but our advances in the mountains on the right of IV Corps late in February and early in March caused him more trouble. The 114th Light Division suffered comparatively heavy losses when it provided reinforcements for the 232d Grenadier Division in this sector, and our continued gains toward Castel d'Aiano forced the almost complete commitment of the reserve 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, including its tanks.

Since it was imperative that a mobile unit such as the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division be kept in reserve ready to bolster any threatened point, the enemy high command cast about for a substitute to place in the Castel d'Aiano sector once we had ceased our attack. The 334th Grenadier Division was pulled out of the line east of Highway 65 and relieved the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division about 20 March, enabling the latter to return to reserve near Modena. No replacement being available for the transferred infantry unit, the 278th Grenadier Division was forced to extend its sector to cover the gap left by withdrawal of the 334th. Opposite IV Corps in the Serchio Valley reliefs were effected by Fascist troops, the Italia Division replacing the Monte Rosa Division, which was then shifted to northwest Italy.

Enemy strength in Italy was considerably reduced by the departure of the capable 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division and the much less outstanding 715th Grenadier Division. The move by the single SS unit over the battered Brenner Pass route required most of February, for its elements began to pull out of the Italian lines on 6 February and were not reported on the eastern front until 6 March. The 715th Grenadier Division, which had seen only limited action during the winter period, was completely relieved on the front by 25 February; advance elements of the division appeared on the Ukrainian front on 27 March. Departure of these troops cut enemy combat strength to 23 German and 5 Italian divisions distributed as follows: 16 German and 1 Italian divisions opposing Fifth and Eighth Armies with 2 German divisions in reserve; 2 German and 4 Italian divisions in northwest Italy; and 3 German divisions — plus 2 others only partially formed — in northeast Italy. About the middle of March, Marshal Kesselring also was called to Germany to take charge of the breached German defense lines along the western front. For the first time since the campaign began a new commander was directing enemy operations in Italy when General von Vietinghoff, who had acted as Kesselring's understudy for brief periods in the past, was elevated to the supreme command.

During the month of March Fifth Army received important additions to its fighting strength, particularly in infantry and artillery units. The biggest single reinforcement was added on the 18th when the Italian Legnano Group, previously placed under control of the Army, was attached to II Corps and further to the 91st Division, where it relieved two regimental combat teams. This organization was one of five such combat groups of the new Italian Army which had been formed,



trained, and outfitted with British equipment. It was made up of approximately 9,000 men, many of whom were veteran soldiers of the old Italian Army who had also received combat experience under Eighth Army command in the summer campaign of 1944. The Group contained 6 infantry battalions, 2 of which were composed of Alpine troops, and 1 artillery regiment equipped with 32 25-pounders. The second major addition arrived on 24 March when the separate 442d Infantry Regiment and attached units returned from southern France, where it had been fighting with Seventh Army since its departure from Italy early in September, 1944. The assignment of these two organizations gave the Army the equivalent of one additional infantry division. One infantry regiment was lost, however, when the separate 366th Infantry was disbanded on 28 March and its personnel converted into the 224th and 226th Engineer General Service Regiments.

Heavy artillery featured the increase in this arm. One section of the British 11/54 Super Heavy Regiment (battalion), a 240-mm howitzer unit, was attached to Fifth Army on 6 March. Two days later the 536th and 527th Field Artillery Battalions, 8-inch howitzers, arrived in Leghorn from the United States. These units were followed by the 530th Field Artillery Battalion, 155-mm guns; by the 765th and 766th Field Artillery Battalions, 155-mm howitzers, on 16 March; and by headquarters of the 428th Field Artillery Group at the end of the month. The 679th Tank Destroyer Battalion, equipped with towed 3-inch guns, had landed earlier, on 3 March, to inaugurate the list of American reinforcements. Two British light artillery units were added. On 13 March the 111 Field Regiment, which had been taking part in joint British-Partisan operations in Yugoslavia, came under command of Fifth Army, and the 15 South African Field Regiment completed its activation and equipping during the month. Both regiments were armed with 25-pounders. British artillery locations were altered so that all but the 8-inch gun and 240-mm howitzers were placed under operational control of IV Corps. The 11/54 Super Heavy Regiment remained with II Corps in the Highway 65 sector. To make a more equitable distribution of big guns for the spring offensive the British 61 Heavy Regiment (7.2-inch howitzers and 155-mm guns) was to be sent from II Corps to Eighth Army.

The end of March saw Fifth Army troops almost completely regrouped in preparation for spring action. Except in the area west of Highway 64 where the 10th Mountain Division and the Brazilians had carved out large-sized gains, the front line was little changed from that which had existed on 1 November. With 13 Corps no longer under our control, the length of the Army forward line had been reduced to less than 100 actual ground miles. IV Corps held the greater share of this front, all territory west of the Reno River and Highway 64 being under its command. The 92d Division, with the 473d Infantry and 442d Infantry attached, was extended from

the west coast inland to the Cutigliano Valley, where the 365th Infantry, detached from the division, held an independent command in the old Task Force 45 sector. East of this unit the Brazilians occupied part of the recently captured mountain sector stretching northeastward from the Serrasiccia—Campiano ridge past Mount Belvedere to the boundary with the 10th Mountain Division west of Pietra Colora. The mountain troops held the remainder of the Corps line northeast and east to the II Corps boundary with the exception of a narrow sector south of Vergato on the extreme right flank of IV Corps which was occupied by the 81st Reconnaissance Squadron. On the left flank of II Corps the 1st Armored Division, with the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron attached, held a 5-mile sector east of the Reno River. The 34th Division adjoined the armor, straddling Highway 65, while on the right flank of the Corps the 91st Division and its attached Legnano Group occupied the positions in the Idice Valley and on Mount Belmonte. 13 Corps of Eighth Army extended eastward from the Mount Grande area.

The Army line, strengthened by constant improvement of defenses throughout the winter months, thus was held by considerably fewer troops than had been engaged in the battle at the end of fall. On 1 April three complete divisions were in rest areas, the 6 South African Armoured Division and the 85th Division in Army reserve, and the 88th Division in II Corps reserve. All divisions were overstrength, close to 5,000 men and officers over and above tables of organization totals having been assigned to combat units. The troops were rested. Ammunition dumps bulged with huge quantities of explosives. Food, equipment, and supplies of all types were stocked behind the front. After more than 5 months of relative inactivity, Fifth Army was ready for whatever action the spring of 1945 might bring.

