

CHAPTER III * * * * *

Diversion and Break-Through

A. *THE 92D DIVISION ON THE COAST*

5-19 APRIL

THOUGH the main thrust of Eighth Army did not begin until 9 April, and that of Fifth Army not until 14 April, minor attacks had been launched in the zones of both armies well beforehand to confuse the enemy and to pin down his troops. Along the Adriatic coast the 2 Commando Brigade launched an amphibious operation on 2 April against enemy positions on the Comacchio Spit, a barren, sandy stretch of wasteland extending north to Porto Garibaldi between Lake Comacchio on the left and the Adriatic Sea on the right. Two battalions crossed the southeast corner of the lagoon by LVT's to land on the western shore of the spit while a third force pushed up the tongue of land between the Reno River and the sea. By 4 April the objectives had been reached against light resistance; over 800 prisoners were taken from the 162d Grenadier Division.

Immediately thereafter action began on the extreme left of the Allied line. Under 15th Army Group orders a limited objective attack was to be launched along the Ligurian coast, with the purpose of taking Massa, 5 miles from our front lines behind the strong defenses of the Gothic Line. The attack was then to continue toward La Spezia, important seaport and western anchor of the Gothic Line, 16 airline miles farther up the coast. General Truscott accordingly directed Maj. Gen. Edward M. Almond, commanding the 92d Division, to carry out this diversionary attack, beginning on 5 April. The division was to release the 365th Infantry under Col. John D. Armstrong and the 371st Infantry under Col. James Notestein to guard the long left flank of IV Corps, but received in return the 442d Regimental Combat Team under Lt. Col. Virgil R. Miller, fresh from France, and the 473d Infantry under Col. William Yarborough, which had by this time reached a high degree of training.

1. *Positions and Plans.* (See Map No. 3.) On the eve of the offensive the 92d

Division held a front of 22 airline miles, extending from a point on the coast southwest of Massa to Seravezza, then north to Mount Cauala and Azzano, and on across the Serchio Valley to the IV Corps boundary 6 miles east of the Serchio. The 2d Battalion, 370th Infantry, was on the coastal plain 1 mile north of Forte dei Marmi, the 1st Battalion astride Highway 1 just north of Querceta, and the 3d and 2d Battalions, 371st Infantry, from Seravezza due north to Azzano along Serra Creek. The mountains were lightly held by the 92d Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, deployed as infantry, while the 473d Infantry garrisoned the Serchio Valley with the 1st Battalion, 371st Infantry, attached to hold the extreme right flank of the division.

The terrain before us consisted of a 3-mile coastal plain on the west, a range of almost impassable mountains 10 to 15 miles wide in the center, and the Serchio Valley, some 5 miles wide, on the east. Since the coastal plain was the only flat, open approach to the north, the enemy had made it his most heavily defended line, fortifying the region with antitank obstacles, extensive minefields, pillboxes, and gun positions having excellent fields of fire. One of the main German defenses along the shallow Cinquale Canal had proved impregnable during an earlier attack in this area in February. Two miles beyond the canal the Frigido River extended across the plain; behind that lay Carrione Creek and the Parmignola Canal before the Magra River was reached, halfway between Massa and La Spezia. If forced from his initial positions, the enemy was prepared to make a stand on each of these successive fortified water lines, generally called the Green Line defenses of his Gothic Line system. From La Spezia to Genoa the mountains extend virtually down to the water's edge, giving the enemy good opportunity to delay our advance with numerous demolitions.

Adjoining the enemy's strong coastal defenses lay one of the most formidable mountain ranges in Italy. Resembling an Alpine chain rather than the Apennines, this mass of sharp peaks, tremendous gorges, and sheer, rocky cliffs was fittingly named the Apuan Alps. While the central chain was unsuitable for any extensive military operations, the lower ranges extending toward Highway 1 and the sea offered a possibility of an advance, despite their rugged nature. Between the lower Apuans and the Serchio Valley lay the main Apuan chain, 13 miles wide at this point and extending 35 miles to the northwest with peaks as high as 6,000 feet. The mountains provided a natural barrier guarding possible enemy escape routes up Highways 62 and 63, which extend from La Spezia north and northeast to the Po Valley; retreat was further protected by a strong defensive line running from Sarzana through Fosdinovo to Highway 63. The Serchio Valley, completely cut off from the coast by the Apuans, was not to play a vital part in the forthcoming offensive. Successes along the coast would outflank enemy forces in the 35-mile long valley, a relatively narrow but flourishing area of olive groves, vineyards, and cultivated fields.

As D Day approached, the enemy was holding his defenses with the German 148th Grenadier Division and the Fascist Italia Division. From the coast inland as far as the vicinity of Azzano the enemy front was held by the 148th Fusilier Battalion; the 2d Battalion, 285th Grenadier Regiment; and the 281st Grenadier Regiment. The Apuan Alps were lightly held by Italian units; across the Serchio Valley were the 1st Battalion, 1st Bersaglieri Regiment; the 2d Battalion, 2d Bersaglieri Regiment; and the Reconnaissance Battalion of the Italia Division. Between the Serchio and the Apennines the 2d Battalion, 286th Grenadier Regiment, was deployed. Supporting his infantry the enemy had an estimated 69 artillery pieces in the coastal sector, including 12 coast defense guns and 7 self-propelled guns, with 29 more pieces in the Serchio Valley. Immediate infantry reserves were believed to be the 1st Battalion, 285th Grenadier Regiment, and the 1st Kesselring Machine Gun Battalion; the 1st Battalion, 286th Grenadier Regiment, and a Bersaglieri battalion were in reserve in the Serchio Valley and could be employed in the coastal plain in 12 hours. A company of 15 self-propelled guns formed the enemy's artillery reserve. Further reinforcement could be obtained only from the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, the central reserve of the enemy.

In view of the terrain across the front of the 92d Division, any offensive on Massa must proceed either along the coastal plain or over the hill masses adjoining it. The enemy's strong defenses on the plain and the failure of the February attack in that area did not make a second attempt there feasible. The only alternative was to attack through the ridges north of Seravezza and Azzano with the possibility of surprising the enemy holding Mount Strettoia, the Mount Cauala—Mount Cerreta ridge some 5 miles southeast of Massa, and the higher features to the northeast consisting of Mounts Fragolita, Belvedere, Carchio, and Brugiana. Seizure of these elevations would probably force the enemy's withdrawal from the coastal plain and Massa and open the way for a push on La Spezia.

This alternative was adopted. In the final plan the 442d Infantry was to drive up the mountains overlooking the coastal plain, bypass Massa, and seize Mount Brugiana. The 370th Infantry under Col. Raymond G. Sherman in the lower hills on the left would push through Montignoso to Massa in a column of battalions, branch off with one battalion to the sea north of the Cinquale Canal, and then drive on to the Frigido. No attempt would be made to cross the Cinquale Canal by the sea. The veteran 442d Infantry was thus given the task of seizing the dominating terrain on the right and cutting off the heavily defended plain. Such an operation would be an all-out mountain offensive. The rocky ridges ranged from 1,500 to 3,000 feet in height and were guarded by precipitous slopes and ravines. Mount Cauala, the line of departure for the attack, had changed hands several times during the fall and winter, with troops of the 92d Division finally using scaling ladders to reach the

summit. Mutually supporting strongpoints, consisting of extensive bunkers, pillboxes, and gun emplacements, covered likely avenues of approach through most of this lower mountain area.

In division reserve the 2d Battalion, 473d Infantry, was to be in readiness to support the attack of the 370th Infantry or to exploit successes of the 442d Infantry. The 371st Infantry was to support the attack by fire until it was shifted to the IV Corps zone. To back up his difficult attack General Almond had heavy reinforcements. The armor consisted of the 760th Tank Battalion (less two companies), the 758th Light Tank Battalion, the 679th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion (less Company C and the Reconnaissance Company). Organic division artillery was supplemented by the 329th Field Artillery Battalion (85th Division), the 530th Field Artillery Battalion with 155-mm guns (less one battery), the British 76 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, a battery of the British 26 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, and a company of the 84th Chemical Mortar Battalion. Other units included the 317th Engineer Combat Battalion, the 232d Engineer Combat Company, the 12th Mule Pack Company, and two wire teams from IV Corps. Strong air support was requested, including specific attacks on 27 targets, chief of which were six 152-mm and four 128-mm fixed coastal guns together with 90-mm dual-purpose guns on Punta Bianca, the promontory below La Spezia. The coastal guns, firing from elaborate reinforced concrete positions, had repeatedly brought devastating fire on our troops along the coast, especially during the February attack. Since fighter-bombers had failed to put them out of operation, heavy or medium aircraft were requested to begin bombing on 2 April. Destroyers of the British Navy were to assist the ground forces with heavy preparations on enemy strongpoints.

2. *The Capture of Massa and Carrara.* The offensive began at 0500, 5 April, after a series of air attacks on enemy positions and on the Punta Bianca guns.¹ A 10-minute artillery barrage accompanied the jump-off as the 370th and 442d Infantry moved out abreast. The 370th Infantry advanced up Highway 1 from the vicinity of Querceta with Company A, 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and Companies B and C, 760th Tank Battalion, supporting the push with fire on enemy pillboxes and dugouts. One infantry company advanced more than 2 miles to reach Castello Aghinolfi, surmounting an elevation which commanded the highway 2 miles south of Massa. The enemy launched a counterattack which the company repulsed, but so few men were left in the company that a withdrawal was ordered. Intense enemy fire had also forced back the supporting armor. The 3d Battalion received

¹ Official Army time from 0200, 2 April, was B Time, 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Standard Time (Z). Previous to that date it had been A Time, 1 hour ahead of Z Time.



White phosphorus paves the way for our attack in the Strettoia hills



Men of 44²d Infantry run for cover from a German shell about to land



Six men died here, close to Seravezza, when a German mortar shell came in



The first German prisoners in the coastal drive come down from the hills

severe mortar fire when it was committed at 0600; attempts to take Strettoia were without success, and minefields knocked out two medium tanks in that area.

In the meantime the 442d Infantry had passed through the 371st Infantry north and west of Azzano, with the 100th Battalion attacking frontally and the 3d Battalion making an enveloping move around 2,800-foot Mount Fragolita from the east. The 100th Battalion encountered a series of log bunkers and machine-gun emplacements on Mount Cerreta where close fighting limited the use of our artillery. It was necessary to destroy the bunkers one by one with bazookas and grenades and follow with swift infantry dashes. Two miles to the northeast the 3d Battalion had surprised the enemy and seized the ridge between Mount Fragolita and lofty Mount Carchio. One company then moved rapidly south to take Mount Fragolita and continue on toward Mount Cerreta to cut the supply route to the Germans opposing the 100th Battalion; another company pushed northeast to occupy Mount Carchio.

The task of supplying and evacuating these front-line units was complicated by the terrain. Rations, water, and ammunition had to be carried by packboard, a trip requiring 8 hours to reach the forward elements. Partisans and all available personnel were pressed into service by the 3d Battalion. In gaining a firm hold within the enemy's defenses the regiment had destroyed by the end of the day 12 log bunkers and 17 machine guns. Bombing and strafing attacks on the enemy rear by XXII TAC, plus 500 rounds from the guns of two British destroyers firing on Marina di Massa, pillboxes, and enemy positions around Castello Aghinolfi, provided support for the attack.

On the second day of the drive the attack of the 2d Battalion, 370th Infantry, scheduled for 0600, did not materialize inasmuch as the enemy had intercepted our radio messages giving the time of the attack and laid down a heavy mortar barrage on the battalion's avenue of approach at 0600. The attack was rescheduled for 0800, but our radio monitors intercepted an enemy message stating that he was to be attacked at 0800 and that if given reinforcements he could hold his position. A projected attack in the afternoon was called off after it was discovered that excessive straggling had reduced the battalion's effective strength to 88 men.

The 442d Infantry on the right continued to clear the mountains on the 6th, the 3d Battalion attacking Mount Cerreta from the north and the 100th Battalion attacking from the south to effect a meeting on that objective. Fighter-bombers, directed through communications by the 100th Battalion commander on the ground, again gave valuable support with rockets, bombing, and strafing. A German counterattack at dusk near Mount Cerreta was easily repulsed as our radio monitors had intercepted a German message giving plans for the attack. The 442d Infantry committed its 2d Battalion on the afternoon of the 6th with the purpose of taking Mount Belvedere. After hard fighting, which continued through rain and fog on

the 7th, the fresh battalion was able to penetrate defenses of the Kesselring Machine Gun Battalion and clear the summit of that 2,800-foot peak overlooking Massa.

With the offensive lagging along Highway 1, General Almond committed his division reserve, the 2d Battalion, 473d Infantry, to spearhead the 370th Infantry's attack on the 7th. The battalion gained 2,000 yards, bypassing Strettoia and seizing strongpoints in the Strettoia hill mass east of Highway 1. A task force of tanks and tank destroyers, employed on Highway 1, was checked by minefields and bazooka fire with the loss of three vehicles. The enemy's coastal guns at Punta Bianca continued their damaging fire despite attacks for 4 successive days by medium bombers during which one casemate was blasted open. On 8 April the regimental zones of the 370th and 473d Infantry was exchanged, the latter (less the 3d Battalion) moving from the Serchio Valley to the coast. Along the Cinquale Canal the 2d Battalion, 370th Infantry, relieved the 2d Battalion, 371st Infantry, for movement to IV Corps. The 1st Battalion, 473d Infantry, supported by medium tanks of the 760th Tank Battalion, attacked up Highway 1 and by noon of the 9th had pushed through a tank trap, extensive minefields, and heavy artillery and mortar fire to the outskirts of Massa. Tanks of the 758th and 760th Tank Battalions, after fighting all day against machine-gun nests and snipers, reached the center of the city before strong resistance forced a withdrawal.

Through the mountains on the right the 442d Infantry forged ahead toward the Frigido River under heavy artillery and mortar fire, after making contact with the 473d Infantry at Strettoia. Our bombers had reduced Montignoso, 2 miles southeast of Massa, to rubble, and the town fell without a struggle. Resistance at Pariana, overlooking the Frigido, was more stubborn, but that village together with Altagnana to the east fell to the 2d Battalion on the 9th.

Thus outflanked from the east, Massa was evacuated by the enemy and was occupied on the morning of 10 April by the 473d Infantry. Attempts by the regiment, however, to force a crossing of the Frigido were fiercely contested until the 2d Battalion commander brought up a platoon of tank destroyers, placed them on heights above the river, and had them fire all afternoon on the numerous enemy guns in houses on the north bank. The battalion was then able to complete its crossing after dark and repulsed the enemy's immediate counterattack. The 1st Battalion was not able to effect a crossing in the flatlands until noon of the 11th, when the 2d Battalion could provide covering fire from the higher ground on the right. That night a tank-infantry attack on the 1st Battalion's bridgehead was also beaten off. Efforts by our medium tanks to cross on the 10th and 11th met intense fire, but finally they got over near Massa on the following day. The Punta Bianca coastal guns shelled the crossing and Massa continually, despite 4 fighter-bomber missions and a medium bomber mission of 24 planes directed against them on 11-12

April. From noon on the 11th to noon on the 12th the enemy dropped 1,000 rounds of artillery in the Massa area.

Late on the 11th the coastal plain was assigned to the 758th Tank Battalion (less Company A, Assault Gun Platoon, and Mortar Platoon) reinforced with Company E, 370th Infantry, and the Antitank Company, 473d Infantry. This force moved ahead nearly 3 miles after the withdrawing enemy on the 12th and reached Carrione Creek, where strong resistance prevented a crossing. The 473d Infantry advanced rapidly east of Highway 1, crossed the Carrione on the southwest edge of Carrara, and prepared to move on from the main road connecting Carrara with Highway 1. Farther east the 442d Infantry was pursuing the enemy through forbidding terrain. Following the fall of Pariana and Altagnana, the infantry waded the Frigido on the 10th behind partisan guides and pushed on to take Mount Brugiana, a 2,800-foot peak 2 miles north of Massa. From this feature, which dominates Carrara, the 100th Battalion continued the march over nearly impassable terrain on the 11th, using mules to reach the mountain hamlet of Colonnata 3 miles due east of Carrara. The famous marble city had been evacuated by the enemy and was occupied by troops of the 442d Infantry at 0900, 11 April.

Supply problems had again become critical, for the Massa-Carrara road had been rendered impassable by mines, craters, and artillery fire. Four bulldozers of the 232d Combat Engineers, attempting to repair the road on the 11th, were destroyed by mines and artillery fire. Ravines, cliffs, and peaks prevented movement by carrying parties, making it necessary to drop supplies from planes. Blankets were laid on white rock formations to form air-ground panels, and planes then attempted on the 12th to drop supplies. Most of the rations, however, fell over a cliff, and only one box reached the hungry infantry. Later in the day the engineers succeeded in repairing the Massa—Carrara road, and jeeps were able to take rations to Colonnata from Carrara by bumping over the ties of a mountain railroad.

The enemy's resistance at Carrione Creek, followed by his aggressive raids and increased sensitivity north and northwest of Carrara in the 442d Infantry zone, indicated that he had reached the first of his Green Line defenses. To offset his heavy losses, which included 573 prisoners, the enemy had been forced to call upon most of his available reserves. One company each of the 1048th Engineer Battalion and the 907th Fortress Battalion had been committed; both were virtually destroyed. On his extreme left flank he had been reduced to defending the mountain passes with a Bersaglieri battalion. The 1st Battalion, 281st Grenadier Regiment, had been reactivated with 100 air force replacements and recommitted. The enemy was obviously showing grave concern over the weakening right flank of Fourteenth Army, and it might be expected that he would fight desperately in his Green Line system.

The 92d Division collided with these defenses all along the line on 13 April. An attempt by the 758th Tank Battalion and attached units to force a crossing of Carrione Creek was repulsed by heavy small-arms and antitank fire covering strong antitank obstacles. The 473d Infantry attacked on a front extending from Carrara nearly to Highway 1, and though held up on the right flank by concrete pillboxes succeeded in pushing a company to within 2 miles of the Parmignola Canal. On the right the 442d Infantry, operating on a front 6 airline miles wide, continued to pursue the enemy up the Gragnana Valley road, which cuts through the mountain fastnesses from Carrara to Fosdinovo. The Germans suddenly indicated the end of their withdrawal at 1400, 13 April, when they laid heavy barrages on the 2d Battalion as it attacked toward Mount Pizzaculo, a 2,500-foot peak standing at the head of a series of peaks and ridges barring the way to the Fosdinovo road. Self-propelled guns also opened up from Mount Pizzaculo, forcing the battalion to dig in for the night. Our artillery was not yet within range of the mountain, having been outdistanced by the fast 9-hour march of the infantry, and was unable to retaliate for the 1,300 enemy shells which fell in the regimental area during the day.

At 0530, 14 April, as Fifth Army launched its main offensive far to the east, the command post of the 2d Battalion, 442d Infantry, below Mount Pizzaculo was attacked in force by the 1st Battalion, 361st Panzer Grenadier Regiment (90th Panzer Grenadier Division). The counterattack was beaten off, as were similar counterattacks along the coast, but during the next few days our advance was considerably slowed by the stiffened enemy resistance. Along Highway 1 the 473d Infantry crossed the Parmignola Canal on the 17th and closed in on Sarzana, at the junction of Highways 1 and 62; on the right the 442d Infantry tried again and again to pierce the enemy's defenses running north and south from the mountain strongpoint of Fosdinovo, but gains were small.

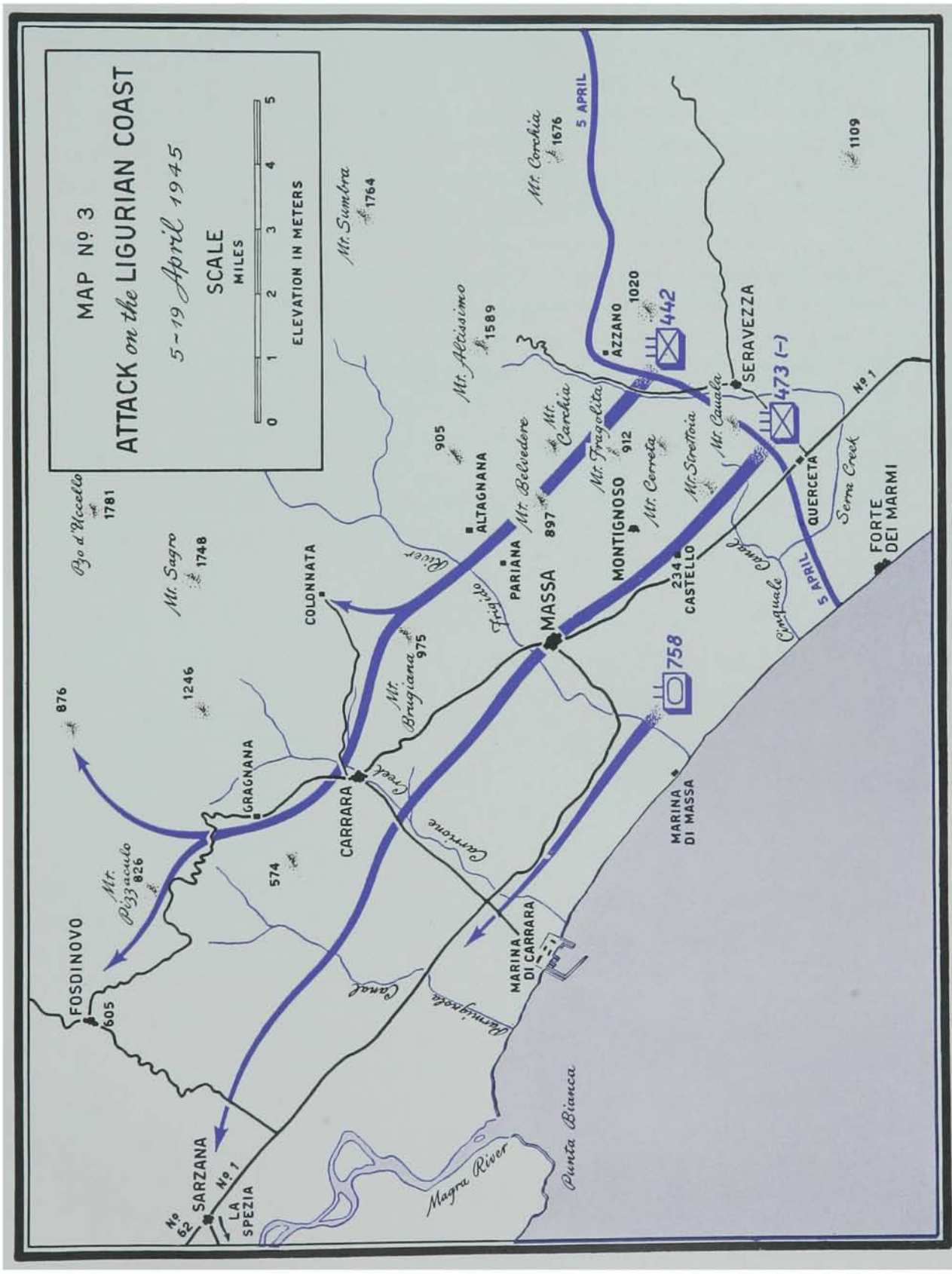
As the enemy slowly withdrew to his prepared positions anchored at Sarzana he covered the withdrawal with increasingly effective artillery fire, particularly from the coastal guns at Punta Bianca. Both Massa and Carrara were repeated targets for heavy enemy concentrations; the entire avenue of approach up the coastal plain and to the east was continually shelled by the tireless cannon. After almost daily attacks on the guns by fighter-bombers and medium bombers had failed to put them out of action, attempts were made to silence them with artillery as soon as our guns came into range about 14 April. All 36 of the 76-mm guns of the 679th Tank Destroyer Battalion were assigned to neutralize the coastal pieces. Every time an enemy gun fired it received 60 to 180 rounds from the tank destroyers, the first round landing within 45 seconds after the forward observers called for it. The enemy's smoke generator, by which he concealed his positions on the promontory, was eliminated on the 15th, and a self-propelled gun which attempted a duel with the tank

MAP No 3

ATTACK on the LIGURIAN COAST

5-19 April 1945

SCALE



destroyers was knocked out by 144 shells. During the period 14-19 April 11,066 rounds were fired by the tank destroyers on the guns. An 8-inch howitzer was brought up to help deal with the Punta Bianca pieces and on the 16th was reported to have silenced one of the guns. By the 19th the guns on the east side of the point had stopped firing, reportedly blown up by the Germans, but fire continued from those on the west side. Through fire directed from close range several of these pieces were destroyed in the following 24 hours; by this time the enemy in front of the 92d Division was preparing to pull back rapidly, threatened by the breakthrough of IV Corps to the west of Bologna.

Though the attack of the 92d Division had been slowed considerably during the period 14-19 April, it had more than served its purpose. Its primary objectives had been secured; the enemy to its front had been badly battered; and all available reserves in the area had been drawn into the line. Even more, the German High Command was so concerned over the thrust that it had committed on the 14th a battalion of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division in this area far off to the flank and thus diminished its scanty strategic reserves at a time when the center of the German line was about to meet terrific blows. The success of the 92d Division, as reported up to 14 April, augured well for the main attack of Fifth Army.

B. IV CORPS SMASHES THROUGH THE ENEMY DEFENSES

14-17 APRIL

1. *Positions and Plans.* (See Map No. 4.) On 10 April IV Corps had three divisions and two infantry regiments holding its long line from the vicinity of the Serchio to the Reno River. The left half of this front was thinly garrisoned by two regiments detached from the 92d Division, the 365th Infantry in the Cutigliano area and the 371st Infantry southwest of Mount Belvedere; the right half was more strongly held by the 1st Brazilian Infantry Division, the 10th Mountain Division, and the 1st Armored Division from left to right. The 371st Infantry had moved into its area on 9 April and had relieved elements of the 1st Brazilian Division. On the 10th the 1st Armored Division began to take over its zone south of Vergato from the 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and the right elements of the 10th Mountain Division, in preparation for the attack.

Beyond the front lines of IV Corps stretched more of the apparently unending mountains of the Apennine ridge. From Cutigliano to the edge of the Po Valley it is 30 airline miles; on our right flank, which had been pushed up nearly to Vergato by the February-March attacks of the 10th Mountain Division, the distance is a little more than 15 miles. Only two main roads penetrate these mountains and hills in

the Corps zone: Highway 12 on the left, which twists up from Cutigliano across the Abetone Pass, then down through Pavullo to Modena; and Highway 64 on the right along the Reno, running to Bologna. From Highway 64 a minor road branches off at Vergato and runs to the northwest to Modena via Zocca; an offshoot of this road leads north into the upper Samoggia Valley through Tole. In this area, to the left of Highway 64, the hills fall away rapidly from the ridge on the west side of the highway into hillocks sinking into the Po plain; small settlements and unimproved roads become numerous as one approaches the flatland.

The enemy forces on the IV Corps front were generally concentrated in the area of greatest danger, from Montese to Vergato. The 232d Grenadier Division guarded the area to the west of Montese; to the east were the 114th Light Division, then the 334th Grenadier Division, and finally the 94th Grenadier Division astride the Reno. A line running generally due north from Vergato marked the boundary between LI Mountain Corps and XIV Panzer Corps and also between the 334th and 94th Grenadier Divisions. Outside of local reserves, reinforcements could be gained from the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division south of Bologna. It was estimated that a total of 240 guns of all types opposed IV Corps.

Although the enemy had not provided himself in front of IV Corps with defenses as complex as those on the coast or in front of II Corps, the usual types of emplacements, machine-gun nests, and bunkers were to be found. Our February-March attacks had wiped out the German main line of defense on the ridge just west of Highway 64, but after falling back to the neighborhood of Vergato the enemy had set to work to build up another line as rapidly as possible; Vergato itself was strongly fortified. A captured enemy appreciation of our situation indicates that he expected an attack in this area by IV Corps, probably before II Corps jumped off; nevertheless, the enemy misread the significance of the Belvedere operation and expected that the direct thrust toward Bologna on Highway 65 would be our main effort.

The broad plan of the Fifth Army attack called for IV Corps to hold its long left flank lightly and to concentrate its forces in a push up the hills on the west side of Highway 64. IV Corps was to begin its attack on 12 April; II Corps was not to attack until the first, or Green Line of objectives had been gained west of the Reno. This Green Line consisted of 3 wooded hills over 2,000 feet high, Mounts Pigna, Mantino, and Pero, forming a wide arc open to the south and commanding the entry into the Samoggia Valley. A northern extension of the Belvedere ridges, these hills constituted the first line of enemy defenses before IV Corps and would be taken by the 10th Mountain Division, attacking on the left of the main Corps thrust, and by the 1st Armored Division, jumping off immediately thereafter on Corps order along Highway 64. Arrival of our troops at the Green Line would bring them abreast of II Corps and would assist it in clearing Mount Sole east of the Reno. Upon sei-

zure of the Green Line and as II Corps joined the attack on the right the drive was to continue northeast across a creek valley to gain the next line of hills barring the route to the Po. This second line of hills, Mounts Ferra, Mosca, and Milano, was designated as the Brown Phase Line. The final, or Black Line extended east and west through Praduro and marked the real end of the hills.

After reaching the objectives in the Brown Line IV Corps was to be prepared to pass the 85th Division through the 1st Armored Division and relinquish the right portion of its zone to II Corps, which would thus be operating astride the Reno to the west of Bologna. The 1st Armored Division would go into Army reserve in the vicinity of the village of Africa, near Vergato, ready to move to the west down the Samoggia or Panaro valleys and exploit on the Po plain; the 10th Mountain Division at this time was to turn due north and drive over the dwindling hills to the plain with the 85th Division under II Corps on its right. While the main IV Corps attack was progressing northeast two divisions abreast, the BEF was to hold its defensive positions, reconnoiter, and prepare on Corps order to follow enemy withdrawals in its zone. The 365th Infantry and the 371st Infantry on the extreme left were to protect the flank and be prepared to follow enemy withdrawals in the mountains and along Highway 12.

All troops were in their final positions for the attack, and preparations for the jump-off were completed by the morning of 12 April; then the attack was postponed for 24 hours because of cloudiness and low ceilings, which prevented the scheduled air support. The attack was held up again on the 13th by reason of continued inclement weather, but in view of a favorable forecast for the 14th final plans for the attack were made. The battle lines were quiet before the 10th Mountain Division and 1st Armored Division on the 12th and 13th as activities and patrolling were held to a minimum. On the IV Corps left flank the Brazilians and the two infantry regiments from the 92d Division continued a program of vigorous patrolling and artillery harassment of the enemy.

2. *The 10th Mountain Division Spearheads the Attack.* At 0945, 14 April, the 10th Mountain Division, under Maj. Gen. George P. Hays, led off with the first blow in the main offensive of Fifth Army. The hour, late enough in the day to provide ample time and light for the preparatory air program, contained also an element of unexpectedness in that the Germans expected the blow to fall either at a much earlier hour or at night. Before the infantry jumped off fighter-bombers bombed and strafed enemy positions 0830-0910; for the next 35 minutes our artillery poured shells on the Germans. Then the preparation ceased abruptly, and the first wave of infantry pushed off toward the dust-shrouded and smoking German positions.

From their positions from Castel d'Aiano east, the 85th Mountain Infantry and the 87th Mountain Infantry, the latter on the right, jumped off abreast in a

frontal assault along a 2-mile front, moving across the Pra del Bianco basin to take the enemy defenses on the north side as far east as Rocca di Roffeno. The area to be brought under attack was a mountain mass extending eastward through Mount Pigna in a narrow double ridge line which terminated at Mount Mantino and Mount Mosca. The 85th Mountain Infantry under Col. Raymond C. Barlow was to advance through the hills just north of Pra del Bianco, seize the dominating mass of Mount Righetti, and take up defensive positions facing northwest until the BEF, which was to guard the left flank of the division, could carry out a relief in the area. The 87th Mountain Infantry, under Col. David M. Fowler, was to attack just west of Rocca di Roffeno through the village of Torre Iussi in an effort to capture Mount Pigna and the ridges extending to the east. The 86th Mountain Infantry, under Col. Clarence Tomlinson, was to follow behind the 87th Mountain Infantry, initially to clear the right flank of the division zone; then it would cross the ridges north to Tole along the main north-south road and attack northeast over the rolling hills toward Mount Moscoso on the Black Phase Line.

From west to east along the 10th Mountain Division front just prior to the attack were two battalions of the 85th Mountain Infantry and one battalion of the 87th Mountain Infantry. The remainder of the division, including the 10th Anti-tank Battalion, which constituted the division reserve, was in position south of the line of departure. Opposite the division zone from west to east were the 754th Grenadier Regiment, the 755th Grenadier Regiment, and the 756th Grenadier Regiment, all of the 334th Grenadier Division. Farther east, in front of the 1st Armored Division, was the 94th Grenadier Division in position on the ridges along which the 10th Mountain Division was scheduled to drive as it swept to the northeast. The enemy had constructed an intricate system of bunkers and gun emplacements controlled from observation posts on key features overlooking the entire Pra del Bianco basin. Forward posts in the basin itself were manned by the enemy only at night, but widespread antipersonnel and antitank minefields provided additional protection on the north side of the basin for the German defenses.

Despite a tremendous weight of explosives and fire bombs from our artillery and planes the enemy defenses were still intact when the infantry assault began. On the left, in the 85th Mountain Infantry zone, the 2d and 3d Battalions moved out abreast, supported by the 1st Battalion from hills to the rear. The men advanced slowly and by 1300 were on the first hills on the north side of the basin. Resistance was intense, though limited largely to mortar and machine-gun fire. During the early afternoon enemy fire became heavier, and the advance on the left was brought to a halt short of the crests overlooking Torre Iussi.

On the right the 87th Mountain Infantry moved across the basin in the face of machine-gun and mortar fire; the 1st Battalion in the lead was finally stopped



The town of Vergato, a German bastion on Highway 64 overlooking the Reno



Men of the 81st Reconnaissance Squadron move through the ruins of Vergato



A scene on the Tole road as the enemy begins to fall back before IV Corps



Tanks and trucks send up a cloud of dust as they climb near Montepastore

below Torre Iussi by fire from the hills in front of the 85th Mountain Infantry. After the capture of these points late in the morning the advance was again taken up. Bitter house-to-house fighting broke out in Torre Iussi and continued until the 2d Battalion was dispatched around the village onto the hill above it. The 1st Battalion cleared Torre Iussi and relieved the 2d Battalion, which immediately set off for Mount Pigna. The long thrust, however, was begun too late in the day, and the 2d Battalion was recalled at darkness to prevent the possibility of serious enemy countermeasures.

On the extreme right flank of the zone the 2d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry, moved into the Pra del Bianco basin at 1030, following the right rear flank of the 87th Mountain Infantry. It was promptly pinned down by fire from the hills north of Torre Iussi. After the clearance of that area by the 87th Mountain Infantry the advance was resumed and carried swiftly onto Rocca di Roffeno, which was occupied at 1648. The enemy retaliated with a heavy artillery barrage but failed to dislodge the men from this rocky promontory. At 1900 the advance was halted across the entire front, and defensive positions were manned for the night. Contact was established on the left with the BEF and on the right with the 1st Armored Division, which began to move forward in the afternoon. Resistance had been strong all day, and casualties, particularly on the left flank, were heavy; 553 men were killed, wounded, or missing in action during 14 April. The basin, however, was now south of the front line. The large minefields prevented close armored support from the 751st Tank Battalion and the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the divisional engineers at work clearing paths suffered many casualties.

The second day of the offensive opened with a 20-minute artillery preparation, followed by an infantry attack at 0700 by the 2d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry, toward the village of Amore northeast of Rocca di Roffeno. The village was occupied about 1000 without much opposition. The regiment then began a drive along the ridge to the northeast to capture Mount Mantino. A slow and difficult advance through mountainous country against almost constant sniper and machine-gun fire was culminated at 2000 when Mount Mantino, over 2½ miles northeast of Rocca di Roffeno, was occupied and mopped up. To the south of Mount Mantino the 1st Armored Division had occupied Suzzano and was on the slopes of Mount Pero. The main objectives of the Brown Phase Line had accordingly been reached, for the 2d Battalion, 87th Mountain Infantry, had seized Mount Pigna at 0810, 15 April, against very light opposition. Moving on eastward along the ridge running out to Mount Mantino, the 2d Battalion was midway between Mounts Pigna and Mantino by 1300 in spite of heavy enemy artillery fire. The 3d Battalion pushed farther north and occupied the hills just north of Mount Pigna in preparation for a drive northward over the last ridge and into the village of Tole.