

CHAPTER V * * * * *

The German Armies Collapse

ON 21 April Fifth Army, leaving behind the 34th Division to garrison Bologna, launched the pursuit to the Po with II and IV Corps abreast, each in the strength of one armored division and two infantry divisions. The enemy had been dislodged, his disorganization had begun, but only our unrelenting pursuit, involving many stiff small-unit engagements and over-all coordination, turned his retreat into a rout. Acting under instructions from General Truscott, the pursuing divisions reorganized so as to spearhead the drives with forces of armor and motorized infantry. The emphasis was placed on speed and more speed; for the first time in the Italian campaign we had an enemy falling back in terrain suitable for swift pursuit. The Germans were short of vehicles and gasoline; they were retreating across an open valley with a superb network of roads for our mechanized forces; and in that retreat they were forced to cross a wide river by ferries and ponton bridges. The slow, persistent tempo of mountain fighting yielded to the headlong dash of our forces to reach the Po.

In the advance to the river, units pushing forward in the center ran into comparatively light resistance; elements fanning out on either flank found the enemy willing and able to put up stiff opposition. The explanation of this variation lies in the enemy situation. As the left flank of the German Fourteenth Army collapsed west of the Reno and the remnants of XIV Panzer Corps fled north to Bologna, LI Mountain Corps, still relatively intact west of the main attack, found its path of retreat threatened by Fifth Army units moving northwest on Highway 9 and instituted a withdrawal from its mountain positions. Consequently our thrusts, especially by the 34th Division, to the northwest in the vicinity of Modena and Parma met a series of well-organized delaying forces covering the enemy retirement to the north. A similar situation was encountered on the right; there the 1st and 4th Parachute Divisions fought fiercely to cover the exposed right flank of Tenth Army falling back across the Po before the British Eighth Army.

The Germans, driven to desperation, took to the roads in daylight and laid themselves open to our far-ranging planes. By the end of the 22d increasing numbers of abandoned vehicles and equipment began to tell the story of disorganization and panic in a retreat which had thus far remained orderly. On the 23d the enemy columns converging on the river crossings were blasted into a shambles of wrecked and burning junk. The wreckage was accompanied by a prisoner bag which assumed fantastic proportions as our forces closed on the Po; the 88th Division alone, travelling up Highway 12 toward the Revere—Ostiglia crossing, took 11,000 prisoners on 23–25 April. Even a superficial analysis of the personnel taken serves only to augment the picture of confusion and breakdown in command existing behind the enemy lines; captured rear echelon personnel were a commonplace—hospitals, bakeries in which the bread was still warm, a paymaster with his pay roll, and personnel units. Though the bulk of the German forces managed to get across the Po before our arrival, the loss in equipment augured ill for any extended stand on their part thereafter.

A. FROM THE APENNINES TO THE PO

21–24 APRIL

As the Black Phase objectives of the break-through attack were being cleared on the 19th, General Truscott, in Fifth Army Operations Instruction No. 9, dated 19 April (*See Annex No. 1G*), had ordered a continuation of the attack with the aim of capturing or isolating Bologna and destroying the enemy south of the Po River. More specifically II Corps was ordered to clear Highway 64 and to secure the line of the Panaro River east of Camposanto, to be prepared to continue to the Po to seize crossing sites between Ostiglia and Sermide, and, if ordered, to establish contact with Eighth Army north of Bologna at Bondeno. One regiment was to be held in Corps reserve; the 6 South African Armoured Division, contrary to earlier plans to draw that unit back into reserve and to reorganize for the pursuit, was to remain attached to II Corps. IV Corps was to secure the line of the Panaro west of Camposanto and to be prepared to continue to the Po to seize the line Ostiglia—Borgoforte; one regiment was to be held in reserve.

1. *IV Corps Races to the Po.* (*See Map No. 6.*) On 20 April, as IV Corps drove down the final low Apennine hills to the Po plain, General Crittenberger issued orders for debouchment into the valley and continuation north to seize the line of the unfordable Panaro River, the major obstacle between the mountains and the Po. He included also instructions to the effect that units be held in readiness to press on from there to seize crossing sites on the Po between the towns of Borgoforte and

Ostiglia. The main Corps drive was to be made by three divisions, the 1st Armored Division on the left, the 10th Mountain Division (reinforced) in the center, and the 85th Division (less the 339th Infantry) on the right. The 1st Brazilian Infantry Division immediately west of the 1st Armored Division was to reconnoiter aggressively and to follow enemy withdrawals; the 365th and 371st Infantry on the lightly held extreme left were also to continue following the enemy.

The two infantry divisions, moving through the shattered center of the enemy forces, reached the Po in less than 3 days. With the exception of the Panaro River line, where the Germans made a futile effort to hold open the bridges at Bomporto and Camposanto while denying their use to our forces, the resistance encountered was disorganized and ineffective, consisting chiefly of small knots of soldiers dug in around houses or along canal banks. Even the Panaro River defense line, though well prepared, was poorly manned and constituted no major obstacle; both the Bomporto and Camposanto bridges, ready for demolition though they were, were taken intact. On the left the 1st Armored Division, covering the left flank and fanning out to the northwest along Highway 9, met more spirited and effective delaying forces attempting to prevent the encirclement of enemy divisions west of the main thrust. The Germans haggled over Panaro crossings east of Modena and again at the Secchia west of that city, where Combat Command B, driving nearly due west south of the highway, was stopped. Combat Command A forces, however, moving northwest to Guastalla on the Po River met little organized opposition beyond the Panaro. On the whole, IV Corps encountered little resistance during its drive to the Po.

On 21 April the attack had been continued by the 10th Mountain Division at 0630. Through the organization of elements of the division into hard-hitting, fast-moving groups preparations were made for the rapid exploitation of the enemy disorganization. A task force, consisting of the 3d Battalion, 85th Mountain Infantry; Company C, 751st Tank Battalion; one platoon, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion; one company, 126th Mountain Engineer Battalion; and the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, was formed under the assistant division commander, Brig. Gen. Robinson E. Duff, early on the morning of 21 April with the mission to move by motor to the town of Bomporto and to secure the bridge crossing the Panaro River 13 miles north-northwest from Ponte Samoggia. The 1st Battalion, 87th Mountain Infantry, was in task force reserve. At 0630 Task Force Duff set out together with the 2d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry. A rapid advance along the narrow roads, bypassing all towns, continued all day, opposed only by snipers and occasional machine-gun fire. The task force was out of communication with the remainder of the division much of the time, but the entire division advanced as fast as possible in the wake of the spearhead. A steady stream of bewildered pris-

oners from a great variety of units marched south unguarded alongside the north-bound columns. By 1600 the Bomporto bridge was securely held by Task Force Duff, and the engineers began to remove the unexploded demolition charges under the bridge.

Before midnight the rest of the division was assembled just south of the bridge. Acting on information from higher headquarters General Hays ordered Task Force Duff to continue on 22 April and secure the town of San Benedetto Po on the south bank of the Po River 24 miles north of Bomporto. The advance on 22 April was astoundingly swift, for the column sped almost uninterrupted straight to its objective. By 1800 the town of San Benedetto Po was secured, and by 2300 the division began to assemble along the south bank of the river. The enemy was completely confused and surrendered willingly. Italian partisans operating in small bands mopped up the enemy troops from fields and farmhouses and turned them over to the Americans.

The rest of the division continued to advance by trucks and captured enemy vehicles employed in a shuttle system. Occasionally determined pockets of resistance were uncovered, but these were left to small detachments to control and clean up. At the river General Hays resumed complete control, for General Duff was wounded in San Benedetto Po. Crossing material was sent for at 1800, 22 April, and the 87th Mountain Infantry was designated as the first regiment to cross the river, 300 yards wide at this point. The 1st Battalion was selected to make the initial assault. Little was known about the countryside to either flank, and there was not sufficient time for a thorough reconnaissance before the crossing if the enemy was to be kept off balance.

During the morning of 23 April, 50 M-2 assault boats were brought forward from the IV Corps dump and dispersed along the south bank. A battalion of self-propelled 105-mm howitzers and a battery of 5.5-inch guns were prepared to give supporting fire for the crossing. H Hour was set finally at 1200, and preparations for the initial crossing were completed hastily. A few minutes before the jump-off a heavy enemy barrage was received in the assembly area. Most of the fire was from enemy antiaircraft guns lowered to fire airbursts on a flat trajectory. This barrage continued until 1300 and then, after a lull, from 1330 to 1430. Moderate artillery fire was received for the next 24 hours at the crossing site.

The 1st Battalion crossed the river on schedule and was followed immediately by the remainder of the 87th Mountain Infantry. The casualty rate was high for the entire operation, but no one was seriously injured on the river itself. Artillery, machine-gun, mortar, and sniper fire was thrown at the assaulting troops, but by 1745 the 87th Mountain Infantry had established a bridgehead 2,000 yards square on the north bank of the Po River. The 85th Mountain Infantry was over by 1800,

and the 86th Mountain Infantry crossed during the night. The bridgehead was difficult to support or to supply because of the lack of opportunity for adequate preparations before the crossing, but the next day (24 April) engineer bridge crews began the construction of a ponton bridge and a treadway bridge. A battalion of Dukws reached the river early in the evening of 23 April and assisted with the later parts of the crossing. A cable ferry was operating by afternoon of 24 April, and light tanks and guns began to cross onto the north bank. The crossing was far swifter than the enemy had expected; the Po defense line had been broken; and the situation was ripe for further exploitation as soon as the 10th Mountain Division was reinforced on the north bank by the division to its east.

Immediately on its right, the 85th Division had during the morning of 21 April secured the Samoggia line for $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles northeast from Ponte Samoggia with three battalions of the 338th Infantry. Operating in two battalion columns, each with a platoon of tanks and tank destroyers and led by the 85th Reconnaissance Troop, the 338th Infantry started for the Panaro shortly after noon with the intention of seizing the bridge at Camposanto 6 miles northeast of Bomporto. The method of movement was to carry the lead company on the armored vehicles and shuttle the remainder of the infantry forward with trucks. By 0610, 22 April, the leading elements reached the river. The 337th Infantry, which had been motorized and organized into two task forces, then took up the attack to seize the Camposanto bridge and press on to the Po.

The town of Camposanto proved to be held in some strength by antiaircraft troops who, it was learned later, had been reinforced by the 1097th Security Battalion from Bologna. The bridge, already mined for demolition, was saved by the heroic work of an engineer sergeant who crawled across the span to cut the detonation wires. Clearing the town itself proved an all-day job even with the aid of the 6 South African Armoured Division operating on the right, and not until nightfall were the 1st and 3d Battalions, 337th Infantry, able to cross. The 2d Battalion meanwhile had crossed at Bomporto through the 10th Mountain Division and was already on its way north.

All night the 337th Infantry pushed on, and by 1045, 23 April, the 3d Battalion task force reached the Po at Quingentole, about halfway between the crossing site of the 10th Mountain Division at San Benedetto and the Revere—Ostiglia bridge on the division and Corps boundary on the right. A line was established along the river to head off any escaping Germans, and the 85th Reconnaissance Troop moved on to Revere and partially cleared the town; the bridge was found to have been wrecked several days before. The region, however, was by no means clear; enemy forces, ignorant of the fact that they had been beaten to the river, were still streaming north to Revere—Ostiglia. During the night one group tried to force a crossing

but was driven away, and the next day the 88th Division also had some trouble there with Germans who had infiltrated back into the town after 85th Division units moved out to assemble for the crossing at Quingentole.

During the dash from the Panaro to the Po the 1st and 3d Battalions, 337th Infantry, alone picked up over 1,000 prisoners each. The division left had been well covered by the 10th Mountain, but a wide gap existed along the 85th—88th Division boundary throughout the movement. The 339th Infantry under Lt. Col. John T. English, which had reverted to division control from the 1st Armored Division at 1200, 21 April, was mopping up behind the advance elements and later took over the right side of the defensive river line. At 1900, 23 April, a westward shift in the corps boundary gave to the 88th Division Highway 12 and the river bank as far west as Quingentole; the relief was completed on the morning of the 24th.

2. *Protecting the Left Flank of IV Corps.* On the left of the IV Corps drive the 1st Armored Division, handicapped by an open and troublesome left flank, was somewhat slower getting under way. When the 10th Mountain and 85th Divisions were leaving Highway 9, leading elements of the 1st Armored Division right column (Combat Command A) were just emerging into the plain at the town of Crespellano, previously passed through by the 10th Mountain Division. From Crespellano Combat Command A, operating in two parallel columns of infantry and armor, moved to Highway 9 and thence northwest to converge on Castelfranco $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles beyond Ponte Samoggia. Going was slow because of scattered groups of enemy, demolitions, and canals, and not until 2000 was Castelfranco finally cleared. The columns then swung northwest toward the Panaro and the Po. The city of Modena, a Fascist center reportedly strongly held, was to be bypassed and cleared later with the assistance of the organized partisans in the area, who had been ordered by 15th Army Group to seize the city.

The Panaro was crossed 4 miles north of Highway 9 on a bridge captured after a fire fight. That river crossing constituted the last major obstacle encountered on the road to the Po, and Combat Command A, with the 1st Tank Battalion and the 14th Armored Infantry Battalion on the left and the 13th Tank Battalion and the 6th Armored Infantry Battalion on the right, raced nearly unhindered to its objective. By 0420, 23 April, the left column was at the town of Guastalla on the river bank. Six hours later the right column, after some delay at a blown bridge, reached the river at the village of Luzzara.

On the division left Combat Command B came along more slowly and did not emerge into the Po plain until 1420, 21 April, at the town of Bazzano. From there the columns swung north and northwest to reach the Panaro south of Castelfranco. Considerable difficulty was encountered in making the river crossing on the 22d. The 4th Tank Battalion had to move north of Highway 9 into the zone of Combat



Our infantry hit the beach on the German side of the Po and head for cover



Ferrying equipment across the Po to support the Ostiglia bridgehead



Loading jeeps into Dukws at the crossing site of the 10th Mountain Division



The II Corps treadway bridge near Ostiglia, opened 26 April 1945

Command A in order to cross. Skirting back around the east and south of Modena in order to return to their own zone, the tanks had a fight outside the city; one tank was damaged and several enemy self-propelled guns were knocked out, but the city was not entered. The 11th Armored Infantry Battalion forded the Panaro 3½ miles south of Castelfranco and ran into a sharp fight which lasted until tanks were brought up. The 81st Reconnaissance Squadron, protecting the left and until 1800 maintaining contact with the BEF, also had some trouble crossing the Panaro south of Castelfranco. During the 23d Combat Command B, flanked on its left by the 81st Reconnaissance Squadron, drove west south of Highway 9 to the Secchia River where the enemy was found drawn up again in delaying positions.

The drive to the Po and Secchia Rivers, swift as it was, bypassed many German troops. Extensive mopping-up operations were conducted by special task forces organized for the purpose during and after 23 April as the 1st Armored Division covered the infantry divisions crossing the Po farther east. Roads leading to the Po were blocked from Luzzara on the east through Colorno north of Parma. A special force also cleared Modena. Prisoners totalled 1,171, 1,400, and 2,500 on the 21st, 22d, and 23d, respectively. Three hundred vehicles, including 10 tanks, were claimed on the 23d; the next day 450 vehicles and 10 antitank guns were captured and nearly that much material destroyed.

During 23-24 April the 10th Mountain and the 85th Divisions crossed the Po, and Fifth Army resumed the chase to cut off the enemy retreat through the Alps. Preparations were begun on the 24th to send Combat Command A across the San Benedetto bridges. Developments entailing changes in corps and division missions brought shifts in unit attachments as mopping-up continued south of the river. The 13th Tank Battalion was attached to the 10th Mountain Division at 1500, 23 April, and on that same day the 34th Division was relieved of garrisoning Bologna and attached to IV Corps to assume the important offensive northwest down Highway 9, which screened the exposed left flank of our thrust toward Verona. Combat Command B and the 81st Reconnaissance Squadron at the Secchia River line southwest of Modena were accordingly relieved to be assembled and regrouped north of Reggio to assume the zone south of the Po.

To the left of the IV Corps main thrust the 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry (BEF), with elements of the Reconnaissance Company, 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion, had taken Zocca early on the 21st after a stiff fire fight and then continued to advance the next 2 days against only slight opposition. By the end of the 23d Marano village and the Vignola road center to the east had been taken. Those points marked the entrance of the BEF into the Po plain. The 2d Battalion was then motorized and started out for Formigine, the next objective, on Highway 12 south of Modena. On the extreme left, in the mountains north of Lucca, the 365th Infantry and the 371st

Infantry on their wide fronts continued to patrol actively and to follow enemy withdrawals. Some minor advances through the hills were made in this region.

3. *II Corps Swings around Bologna to the Po.* On 20 and 21 April, as II Corps came down out of the mountains with four divisions, two on either side of the Reno, orders were issued directing the capture of Bologna and subsequent advances by the three westernmost divisions—the Legnano Group was pinched out and the 34th Division was detailed to garrison Bologna—around the west side of Bologna to the Panaro River and thence on Army order to the Po. The general scheme of maneuver contemplated after the capture of Bologna was a high-speed three-division drive, two infantry divisions abreast spearheaded by an armored division. “Rover Pete” air-ground control was to be employed to inflict maximum damage by air on the retreating enemy. To enable II Corps artillery to keep pace with the rapidly advancing infantry in the Po Valley the 77th and 178th Field Artillery Groups worked directly with the 88th and 91st Divisions respectively.

The 6 South African Armoured Division was to push out ahead of the Corps, bypassing rear guards and delaying positions, seize crossings on the Reno just northwest of Bologna, hold them until the 91st Division took them over, and then swing over to the left side of the Corps zone to seize the San Giovanni road junction on the Corps boundary. From there it would move to take crossings over the Panaro east of Camposanto and then on Corps order head for the Po Crossing sites east from Revere—Ostiglia to Sermede. Strong contact was to be established with Eighth Army at Bondeno, about 30 miles north of Bologna, in an effort to surround enemy units moving north from Bologna. Two infantry divisions, the 88th on the left and the 91st on the right, each of which was assigned one battalion of tanks and one of tank destroyers, were to follow the South Africans to clear bypassed knots of resistance and to consolidate the important points taken. A minimum of one infantry battalion per division was to be motorized. The 34th Division, scheduled to garrison Bologna, was to keep 1 regiment in Army reserve ready to move on 12 hours’ notice. The Legnano Group, after assisting the 34th Division forward to Bologna, was to assemble in Corps reserve about 5 miles northwest of the city prepared to follow the 88th and 91st Divisions by bounds. Two battalions of the group were held in readiness to be motorized on 12 hours’ notice.

On 21 April, as Bologna was being cleared, II Corps struck north for the Po. The pattern of resistance before II Corps bore some resemblance to that before IV Corps to the west. Units toward the Army center ran into less difficulty than those moving up on the right. The Panaro River constituted an obstacle which was more strongly defended around Finale on the eastern boundary than it was in the direction of Camposanto. The 1st and 4th Parachute Divisions succeeded in their purpose on the right; although suffering severe losses themselves, they successfully

covered Tenth Army's flank in the retreat across the Po. The Fifth Army—Eighth Army junction at Bondeno was effected too late for maximum success. While the 91st Division and the 6 South African Armoured Division were delayed by large rearguard elements on the right, particularly in the vicinity of Finale, the 88th Division forged ahead on the left against generally disorganized resistance which declined steadily after the division crossed the Panaro and moved north astride Highway 12 toward Revere.

On the night of 20–21 April the 6 South African Armoured Division made preparations for its forthcoming exploitation mission. The division was to advance generally on a line drawn from Praduro through Casalecchio up along the right side of the II Corps zone to north of Highway 9, from there northwest to the San Giovanni road junction 12 miles northwest of Bologna on the left Corps boundary, then 14 miles northeast across the II Corps zone to Finale dell' Emilia, a Panaro River crossing on the Army boundary, and thence generally north to the Po. Regroupings and plans for the pursuit were consummated during the night. The 11 Armoured Brigade with the SSB from the 13 Motorised Brigade and the 4/22 Field Regiment was to pass through the 13 Motorised Brigade at Casalecchio and drive for San Giovanni; the 12 Motorised Brigade was to be prepared on division order to seize the Panaro crossings at Camposanto on the left Corps boundary. The tanks of the PR (PAO) (minus one squadron) were to protect the right flank in addition to seizing and holding the Reno crossings northwest of Bologna for the 91st Division. The 13 Motorised Brigade was to be in reserve.

At daybreak on 21 April the 11 Armoured Brigade, operating in two battle groups—one on the left heavy in armor and another on the right heavy in infantry—passed through the 13 Motorised Brigade at Casalecchio. South of Highway 9 the chief obstacles were demolitions and mines, but north of the highway opposition stiffened. On the right the PR (PAO) pushed along the flank to just east of Calderara, 5 miles north of Bologna, while the 13 Motorised Brigade in the rear secured crossings over the Reno just west of the city. By darkness of 21 April the South Africans held a line bulging somewhat on the left where the armor had forged ahead across the Samoggia to within 2½ miles of San Giovanni. Enemy opposition had consisted chiefly of scattered groups, usually with a few self-propelled and assault guns, fighting for time from improvised defenses.

The 6 South African Armoured Division halted for the night, and the 88th Division passed through to clear San Giovanni. The next day the South Africans made a dual thrust to seize the Panaro crossings in the II Corps zone. The 11 Armoured Brigade set out for Finale on the eastern flank, and the 12 Motorised Brigade started for Camposanto on the west. Corps orders of 0900, 22 April, to the effect that all units make every effort to cross the Panaro that night meant that the 6 South

African Armoured Division was forced to share roads with each of the infantry divisions. The 12 Motorised Brigade, meeting little opposition, reached the Panaro near Camposanto at 1245 to find the bridge intact but the enemy in position on the north bank of the river. The 337th Infantry was also stalled on the same obstacle.

At 1600 General Keyes ordered the South Africans to gain contact with the 6 British Armoured Division of Eighth Army at Bondeno on the Panaro River 6 miles northeast of Finale. Normally the job should have gone to the 11 Armoured Brigade operating on the right, but it was tied up by some strong delaying positions about 6 miles south of Finale. The 12 Motorised Brigade on the left was therefore ordered to drop its plans for crossing the Panaro at Camposanto and to move northeast along the south side of the river past Finale to Bondeno. The RDLI made the shift and at 2045 came upon a large, well armed enemy column 1½ miles south of Finale. Heavy, confused fighting ensued. Although part of the column got away over the bridge before it blew up at 2220 and other elements escaped under cover of two infantry counterattacks, the RDLI, at a cost of 8 wounded, took a toll of 160 prisoners, 200 dead, and 60 vehicles.

The following morning found the 11 Armoured Brigade through the delaying positions before it and ready to resume its advance to Finale; contact was made with the 6 British Armoured Division 2 miles east of the town during the morning of the 23d. The RDLI then reverted to the 12 Motorised Brigade, which was to resume its original mission of driving north from Camposanto to seize 6 miles of the Po banks east from Revere. Because of traffic delays the WR/DLR did not cross the Camposanto bridge until 1030. Movement was rapid thereafter; the column was 8 miles beyond Camposanto when it was halted and ordered to swing northeast to seize the Po River town of Felonica near the Army boundary. The change represented a shift in II Corps operational procedure; instead of operating with one armored division pacing the advance followed by two slower infantry divisions mopping up and consolidating, each division was assigned a separate zone—that of the South Africans being on the extreme right. The original plan had become unnecessary in view of the scattered resistance and the speed of the infantry divisions travelling by tank and truck.

During the night of 23–24 April the WR/DLR en route to Felonica halted about the middle of the II Corps zone only 6 miles short of its objective. Over on the right rear the 11 Armoured Brigade continued to mop up south of Finale, where 400 prisoners had already been taken. The bulk of the division, including a large portion of the 12 Motorised Brigade, which was to seize the crossing sites at Felonica, was still south of the Panaro, and no bridge existed in the division zone. It was decided therefore to send the remainder of the 12 Motorised Brigade over the 91st Division bridge midway between Finale and Camposanto in order to avoid a serious delay in the

drive to the Po River crossings. Meanwhile a Bailey bridge was to be built at Finale for the use of the 13 Motorised and 11 Armoured Brigades, who were to follow in that order.

Early on 24 April the remainder of the 12 Motorised Brigade crossed the Panaro through the 91st Division. Movement northeast met only scattered opposition, and by 1645 the WR/DLR and the RDLI were on the banks of the Po at Felonica, where they saw the usual scenes of discouraged German stragglers, wrecked equipment, and dead or abandoned draft animals. Preparations proceeded for the crossing during the night 24-25 April. Although two small patrols which swam the river during the night drew small-arms fire, two companies crossed by boat at 0500, 25 April, against very little opposition and captured a few 4th Parachute Division troops. By 1340 a third company, plus mortars and machine guns, was across. In the division rear the Finale bridge was completed during the morning, and the 13 Motorised Brigade, followed in the afternoon by the 11 Armoured Brigade, moved up to prepare for the crossing. To the left the two infantry divisions of II Corps were already crossing.

The 88th Division had moved forward on a narrow front during 20 April on the right of the 85th Division, which, being somewhat ahead and crowded on its left by the 10th Mountain, had hurried over in its zone on the right and cleared most of the 88th Division objectives, excepting Lagune and Mount Capra, as far north as the Casalecchio road. On the night of 20 April the 351st Infantry relieved the 337th Infantry, outposting the Casalecchio road, and at 0600, 21 April, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 351st Infantry, moved out from Riale across Highway 9 toward San Giovanni, where the regiment was to pass through the South Africans. The 351st Infantry advanced against scattered resistance, mopping up behind the South Africans until it was stopped by a deep canal 2 miles south of San Giovanni. The bridges had all been demolished, and the Germans, supported by a few tanks and self-propelled guns, held the north bank. The 3d Battalion and a South African task force attacked the canal positions frontally, and the 2d Battalion swung 3 miles to the left to enter San Giovanni and outflank the enemy. Not until midnight were the Germans dislodged from the town and canal. The regiment held for the night 1 mile north of San Giovanni.

On the morning of 22 April the 351st Infantry resumed the advance with the 2d and 3d Battalions abreast assisted by armor from the 6 South African Armoured Division. When the 3d Battalion on the right struck a knot of resistance and remained to mop it up the other two battalions went on ahead and reached the Panaro just east of Camposanto by 1500. The South Africans had arrived at the river a little to the west some 3 hours previously; over in the IV Corps zone the 10th Mountain Division had already crossed, and the 85th Division was clearing Camposanto pre-

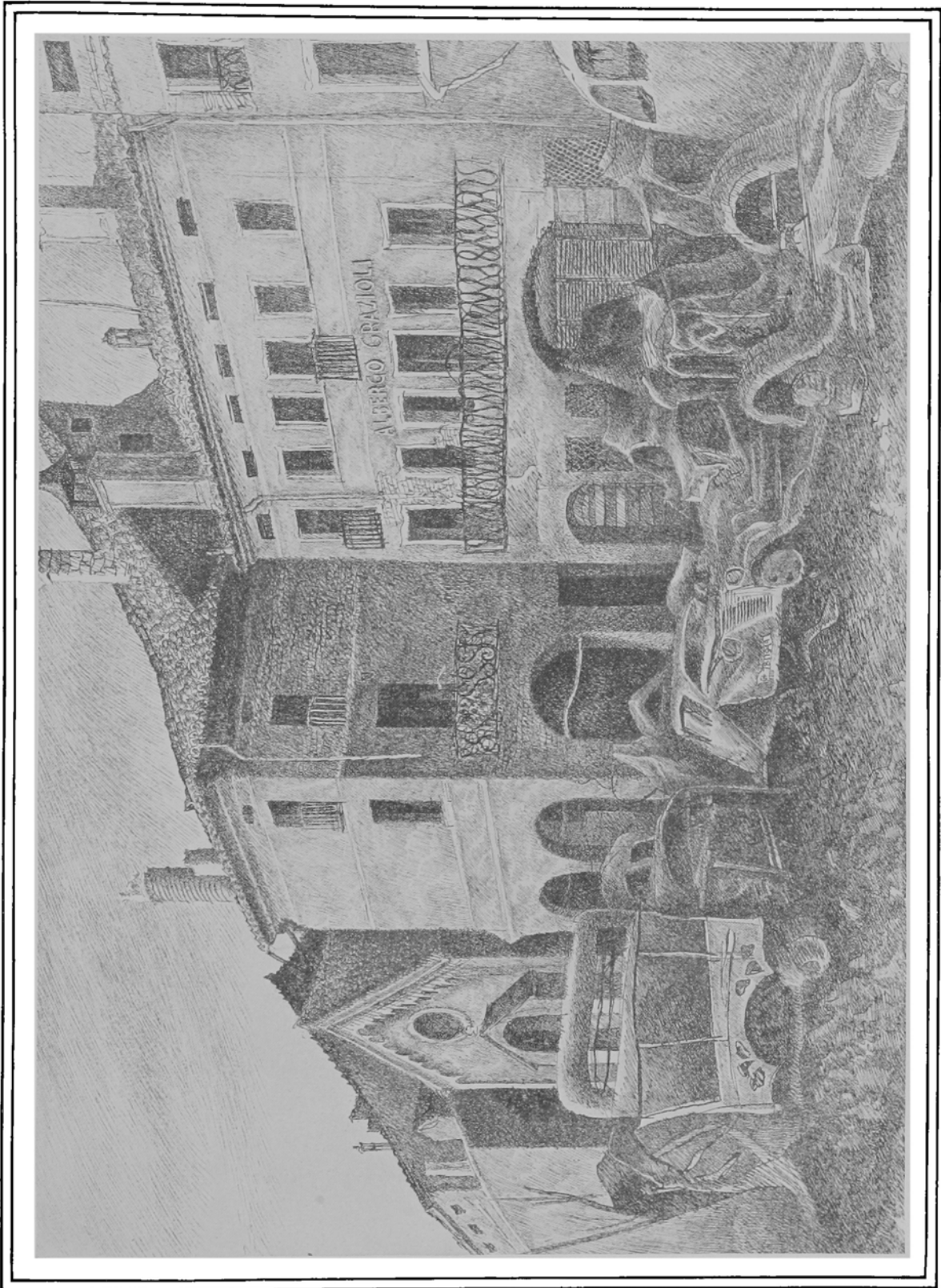
paratory to crossing. Elements on the right, however, had not yet come up to the Panaro.

Although the enemy forces confronting the 351st Infantry on this river line were small, they had good cover behind the high levee from which they could harass our troops. A suitable crossing was finally found on a semidemolished bridge near a small village east of Camposanto. The 913th Field Artillery Battalion then laid down a heavy curtain of fire to smother the German defenders north of the river; the 2d Battalion moved over on the bridge, and a short distance to the east the 1st Battalion crossed on improvised rafts of timbers and doors from the village. The division vehicles came around by way of the captured Camposanto bridge. Nightfall found the crossing nearly complete, and by midnight advanced elements were almost 2 miles beyond the river. At 0500, 23 April, the 350th Infantry passed through the 351st Infantry to make the final drive to the Po.

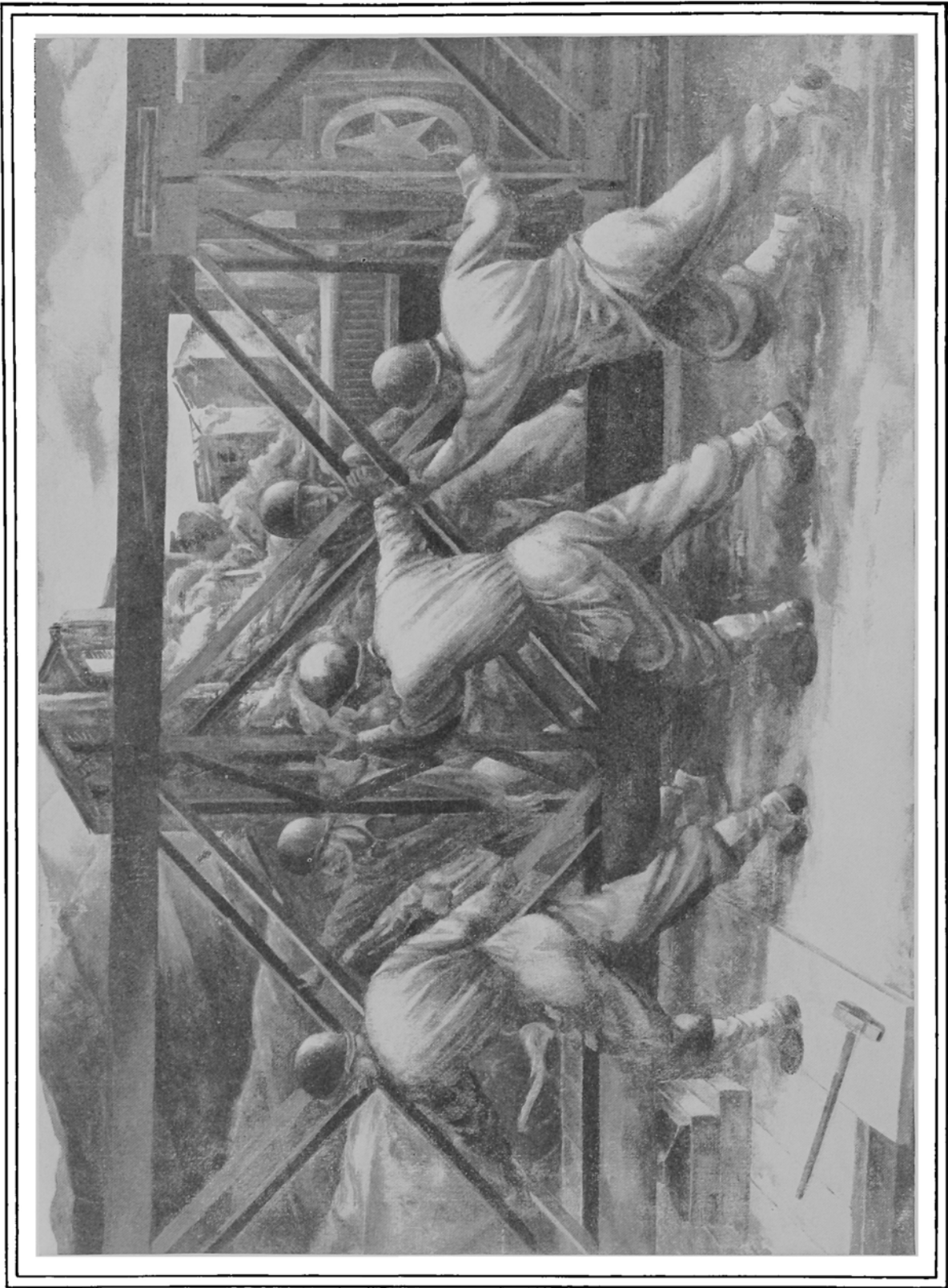
In the meantime the 349th Infantry on the division right started to move at 1000, 21 April, and advanced steadily in a column of battalions for nearly 24 hours against scattered to light opposition. On the morning of the 22d the 2d Battalion received five tanks and two tank destroyers, took the regimental lead, and moved toward the town of Decima. En route the regiment met its first serious opposition, which was reduced with the assistance of the 6 South African Armoured Division after some sharp fighting. Thereafter the advance proceeded steadily all day on a two-battalion front. The 3d Battalion on the left met lighter resistance and reached the Panaro by midnight of 22 April; the 2d Battalion was there shortly thereafter. Rubber boats were brought up, and by 0800, 23 April, the two battalions were across the river about 3 miles east of Camposanto.

On the 23d the 349th and the 350th Infantry pushed off at top speed to make the 20-mile dash to the Po. The 349th Infantry on the right started out with the 2d and 3d Battalions abreast; the 2d Battalion on the regimental right was again organized as a task force containing five tanks, four tank destroyers, and a platoon of the 88th Reconnaissance Troop. At 1650 the shift in corps boundaries giving Revere and Highway 12 to the 88th Division necessitated changing the direction of travel from northeast to straight north. After a hectic day the 349th Infantry reached the Po north of Carbonara at 2000 and fanned out along the river bank to gather in the thousands of German stragglers in the vicinity. The 350th Infantry, after shifting over to the left astride Highway 12, arrived at the river a little later.

The 88th Division had closed in on the Po where the Germans were assembling their shattered forces for the escape across the river. As a result the prisoner haul, large along the whole Army front, reached its peak in the 88th Division zone. From 1200, 23 April to 1200, 25 April, approximately 11,000 prisoners were taken. The bulk of the prisoners were from the 65th Grenadier, the 305th Grenadier, and the



The wreckage of the enemy at Revere . . . painted by Master Sergeant Mitchell Siporin



A Bailey is erected to speed our advance . . . painted by Staff Sergeant Ludwig Mactarian

8th Mountain Divisions. A testimonial of the confusion existing behind the German lines was the capture of the first German division commander taken during the whole Italian campaign, Maj. Gen. von Schellwitz, commander of the 305th Grenadier Division, as well as his G-3, signal officer, and division artillery commander. The 65th Grenadier Division artillery commander was among those killed.

The advance of the 91st Division to Sermide, downstream from the 88th Division, had been almost as swift. At 1145, 21 April, the 2d Battalion, 362d Infantry, began to move through the western side of Bologna, which had already been entered by the 34th Division and units of Eighth Army. The 362d Infantry advanced steadily and northwest of the city crossed to the west side of the Reno early in the evening. The river, 150 yards wide, was shallow enough for the infantry to wade; engineers snaked the vehicles across the sandbars with bulldozers. On the division left the 363d Infantry, which, after a brief period of rest following the Pianoro and Mount Arnigo fighting, had been moved around the rear of the 91st Division to Casalecchio, drove north along the west side of the Reno and seized the municipal airport by early afternoon. In the days to follow the 91st Division usually operated in motorized columns and special task forces protected by tanks and tank destroyers, each carrying a squad of infantry, leading the attack; all division vehicles were pressed into service, and an additional 30 trucks were borrowed from II Corps. On an average, about five battalions were completely motorized at all times.

During the night of 21-22 April preparations were made for the pursuit. The 362d Infantry on the right moved up 1 mile north of the airport where it was joined by four companies of armor, two each from the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 757th Tank Battalion, which were to carry the 3d Battalion, 362d Infantry, in the van of the attack. On the division left the 1st Battalion, 363d Infantry, kept going all night and by 0615, 22 April, had reached positions $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles beyond the airport. The 3d Battalion relieved the 2d Battalion at the airport and reorganized with two companies of trucks and one company of tank destroyers. The division set out for the Panaro on the morning of 22 April.

The 3d Battalion, 363d Infantry, riding tanks and tank destroyers, and followed at an interval of 2,000 yards by the 2d Battalion riding on trucks, started from a point west of the airport and passed through the 1st Battalion, which reverted to reserve. By midnight of 22 April advanced elements had reached the south banks of the Panaro. There the infantry dismounted from the vehicles and crossed the river by foot bridges halfway between Finale and Camposanto while the armor and trucks went around to the Camposanto bridge. Movement beyond the Panaro was unopposed until a few miles southwest of Sermide where our forces lost two tanks to a self-propelled gun in a sharp firefight. The Germans disengaged thereafter and apparently got away across the Po, since no more resistance was encountered as the

363d Infantry moved north to reach the river banks near Carbonara west of Sermide at 0800, 24 April.

On the division right the 3d Battalion, 362d Infantry, riding tanks and tank destroyers, followed by the 2d Battalion in trucks, started from north of the airport on 22 April. It likewise struck no serious difficulty. At 1410 this column was halted 7½ miles north of its morning starting point to reorganize and relinquish part of its armor to the 2d Battalion, which was to organize as Task Force McAdams and swing right to effect a junction with Eighth Army at Bondeno; the 1st Battalion was to assume at the same time the left of the regimental zone to drive to the Panaro just west of Finale. The task force, under the command of Maj. Ronald McAdams, was composed of the 2d Battalion, 362d Infantry; Company A, 757th Tank Battalion; Company A, 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company G, 316th Combat Engineer Battalion; Battery B, 346th Field Artillery Battalion; and one platoon of the Antitank Company, 362d Infantry.

The thrust to Bondeno was delayed first by a difficult crossing over the Samoggia canal and met further difficulty from scattered enemy planes which for the second consecutive night made feeble but troublesome attacks. Meanwhile the RDLI of the 6 South African Armoured Division, moving along the south side of the Panaro toward Bondeno, had become involved with delaying forces south of Finale. Task Force McAdams, 4½ miles south of Finale and still 10 miles southwest of Bondeno at midnight, was then ordered to shift straight north to assist the RDLI. As the task force moved north through the darkness to its new objective it ran into a German column attempting to use the same highway. The resulting fight had little organization under the circumstances; the Germans, apparently more mixed up even than our forces, lost 293 prisoners, 150 dead, and 11 vehicles, 3 of which were tanks. More enemy were met 1 mile beyond; by noon 23 April Task Force McAdams, although it had been diverted from its original mission, could look back upon a not unprofitable 18 hours, during which over 400 enemy were killed and 423 were captured. Contact with the British on the right had finally been established during the morning of the 23d by elements of the 11 Armoured Brigade 2 miles east of Finale.

As a result of the reassignment of division zones by which the 6 South African Armoured Division took over the right and the 91st Division the center, the Finale area was no longer a 91st Division problem. The 1st Battalion, 362d Infantry, which had reached the Panaro just west of Finale, was, however, detailed to assist the South Africans in clearing the Finale area, while the 2d and 3d Battalions were loaded in trucks and at 1600 taken around by way of the Camposanto bridge to continue the attack north. The 363d Infantry had crossed the river in the center of the Corps zone shortly after daylight. Advance to the Po during the night 23-24 April was steady, the chief hindrances being those arising from the necessity of moving

around through the 88th Division to cross the Panaro while the South Africans, formerly operating to the front of the whole Corps, were shifting simultaneously to the east side of the Corps zone. Near noon on 24 April the 362d Infantry began to close in on Sermide, east of positions previously reached by the 363d Infantry. On the banks of the Po the 91st Division found the usual discouraged enemy stragglers. The 3d Battalion, 363d Infantry, alone picked up over 500 prisoners along the river banks between 0800 and 1200, 24 April. In one instance an Italian farmer, after frantic though futile efforts to attract the attention of busy American soldiers, escorted in 75 prisoners himself. During 21-24 April the 91st Division took over 1,300 prisoners.

By the end of 24 April Fifth Army, large parts of which already had crossed the Po, held the south bank of that river on a line extending about 60 miles from the Taro River to the Eighth Army boundary at Felonica, with the 1st Armored Division, 10th Mountain Division, 85th Division, 88th Division, 91st Division, and 6 South African Armoured Division along the banks from west to east. Forty miles from the mountains to the river had been covered since 21 April through the smashed center of the German armies. Though we had not succeeded in cutting off all of the German forces south of the Po, thousands of Germans had been captured and killed, and abandoned equipment south of the river literally choked the roads. In the period 21-25 April inclusive, Fifth Army took approximately 30,000 prisoners at a cost of 1,397 casualties. By 25 April, IV Corps estimated that six divisions, two before Eighth Army and four before Fifth Army, could be practically written off. Of the other divisions in Italy four were estimated to be in two-thirds strength, five in one-half strength, three in one-third strength, and one in one-fourth strength. Six divisions, three each in northwest and northeast Italy, were known still to be in full strength. The prisoner haul, coupled with the tremendous quantities of equipment destroyed or abandoned, left the German armies in Italy ripe for destruction and in no condition to make a major stand if the speed of our offensive could be maintained. After the break-through in the mountains the Germans made desperate efforts to cover the withdrawal to the Po, but our rapid pursuit gave them no time to organize a careful delaying action. The Po itself was only weakly contested as the Germans made every effort to put distance between themselves and their pursuers in the vain hope of reorganizing enough to save the escape routes from Italy. Once our forces had those in hand the doom of the German forces was sealed. By 24 April complete victory in Italy was more than a possibility.