

## E. VI CORPS ASSUMES THE DEFENSIVE

The continuance of the Fifth Army attack on Cassino prevented XIV Panzer Corps from sending more than its mobile reserve of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division and 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment from the southern front. Nor was much immediately available in the Rome area, which had been denuded to reinforce the Gustav Line. Consequently Marshal Kesselring was compelled to draw his main strength to meet our beachhead from units facing the Eighth Army or from those resting, refitting, or guarding the line of communications in north Italy, Yugoslavia, and even south France. This troop shift was aided by the fact that once our amphibious task force was committed it was no longer necessary to guard the long Italian and southern French coastline from seaborne attack. Also, once the enemy appreciated that at least two divisions had been moved from the Adriatic to reinforce Fifth Army for its offensive, it was not necessary to keep large forces on the Adriatic front. The Luftwaffe, too, was recalled in strength to Italy to harass our vulnerable seaborne supply lines.

Traveling by every available means—rail, motor, and even air—German reinforcements poured down the roads leading toward the beachhead. Our constant air attacks hampered but could not prevent these movements. First to arrive were units from the nearby Eighth Army front. The bulk of the 3d Panzer Grenadier Division, en route to bolster the line above Cassino, was quickly diverted to the beachhead. After it came the 26th Panzer Division, strongest German armored formation in Italy, and elements of the crack 1st Parachute Division. Both of these formations arrived just in time before Cisterna to aid in turning back our assault.

The largest and most unexpected German reinforcements hastened down from the north. The 715th Light Division, a new motorized unit from Avignon, came down the west coast in its own transport in seven to nine days. Advance elements arrived in the line around Campoleone at the end of our attack. By 1 February the arrival of the 145th Grenadier Regiment (65th Grenadier Division) from Genoa, the reconnaissance battalion of the 114th Light Division from Istria, and elements of the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division Reichsfuehrer from Florence presaged the appearance of part or all of these formations on the beachhead front. A battalion from the long awaited but never arrived 90th Panzer Grenadier Division also showed up from the south. In addition, elements of the 71st Grenadier Division, the reconnaissance battalion, the artillery regiment, and the 194th Grenadier Regiment, en route from Trieste to the Liri Valley, were diverted to Anzio. Hastily drawing these and other miscellan-

eous formations from wherever available, the enemy faced us on 1 February with a strength of at least 5 full divisions, supported by 42 batteries of artillery.

By 1 February, after a succession of groupings and regroupings as the Germans met each new situation, the pattern of enemy tactical organization had emerged. To command the force around the beachhead Fourteenth Army under General Eberhard von Mackensen had been called down from Verona. I Parachute Corps, from the Rome area, faced the British west of the Albano road, while LXXVI Panzer Corps, transferred from the Adriatic, controlled the sector to the east. Under I Parachute Corps, the 4th Parachute Division, supplemented by a battalion each from the 90th Panzer Grenadier and 65th Grenadier Divisions, held the flank along the Moletta River. Then, grouped around the Campoleone salient, were the 715th Light Division, the 29th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, the 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and the 2d Battalion, 71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment, the last three under the tactical command of the 3d Panzer Grenadier Division. In the LXXVI Panzer Corps sector were, west of Cisterna, the 194th Grenadier Regiment, the 26th Panzer Division, reconnaissance battalions from the 71st, 356th, and 114th Divisions, and part of the 1st Parachute Division. The east flank of the beachhead from Cisterna south was held by the Hermann Goering Panzer Division, reinforced by the 7th GAF Battalion. The 2d Battalion, 35th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and the 2d Battalion, 36th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, plus some divisional auxiliaries of the then still formative 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, were also on our extreme right flank. VI Corps was faced on 3 February by elements of no less than 14 divisions, with the remainder of 4 of them believed en route.

After a conference with General Clark on 1 February General Alexander ordered that Fifth Army should continue the attack to extend the beachhead to the Incastro River–Campoleone–Cisterna line and then organize for defense. The initial beachhead had been the largest that could be held with the limited number of troops originally landed, but it was so small that any part could be reached by enemy artillery and there was little room for defense in depth. A breakthrough at any point would bring the Germans almost to the sea. Consequently General Alexander desired to extend the beachhead farther inland and anchor it on the strongpoints of Cisterna and Campoleone. By the afternoon of 1 February, however, it was evident that these objectives could not be immediately attained. The enemy build-up had become so threatening that VI Corps ordered all divisions to organize to repel a counterattack. On 2 February General Clark radioed General Lucas to consolidate the bridgehead and prepare for defense. All units at the beachhead began immediate preparation of defensive positions to meet the expected German assault.

## F. *SUMMARY OF ACTION*

22 JANUARY-3 FEBRUARY

The January offensive of Fifth Army had planned to catch XIV Panzer Corps between two pincers and force an enemy withdrawal north of Rome. It was expected that the Germans, weakened by a month of battering on the Winter Line, could not cope with a simultaneous frontal assault and an amphibious landing in their rear. The northern pincer, the Anzio landing, had been an outstanding strategic surprise. The enemy had completely failed to appreciate a landing over the shallow beach at Anzio and had just shifted troops from the Rome area to meet our southern drive. By D plus 3, against relatively minor opposition, VI Corps had seized a firm beachhead ashore.

But in over a week of bloody fighting the southern army of the offensive had failed to breach the Gustav Line. By 24 January it was clear that the two pincers could not link up in the short period originally expected. Instead of all the enemy reserves being pinned down by our drive up the Liri Valley, the enemy could now disengage and move swiftly northward toward the beachhead to meet the much greater threat to his rear. Our landing was expected to force the enemy to assume this course. Accordingly it was inadvisable to extend our lines too far inland toward Colli Laziali and thus run the risk of being cut off by a sudden German counterthrust. VI Corps consolidated its gains and secured the beachhead before striking inland in full force. Meanwhile our troops probed along the two major axes of advance toward Colli Laziali to seize the intermediate objectives of Cisterna and Campoleone. By 29 January stiffening enemy resistance held us short of these objectives and made it evident that further progress inland could not be achieved without a major attack.

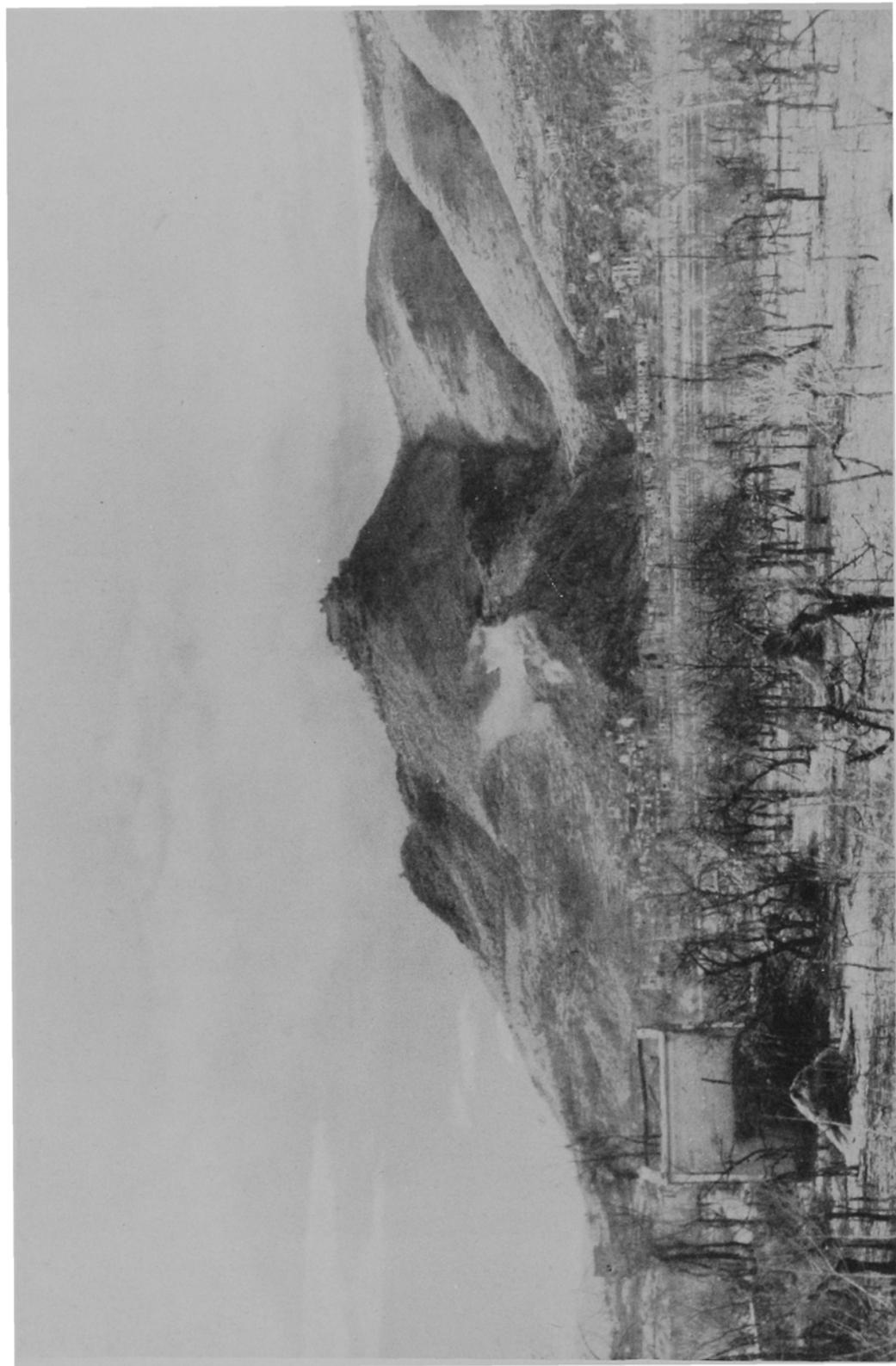
The German High Command Southwest was fully aware of the grave danger presented by the Allied landing. Only the enemy's success in repulsing our drive up the Liri Valley enabled him to meet the threat of our landing in his rear. With the southern front holding firm, Marshal Kesselring sensed the opportunity of not only meeting the beachhead threat but of gaining a resounding victory by wiping out the audacious Allied landing force. Unable to draw more than a minimum of force from the southern front, where the Fifth Army offensive was continuing around Cassino, the enemy drew to a wholly unforeseen extent on the inactive Adriatic front and his dwindling strategic reserves. The expected holding offensive by Eighth Army to pin down enemy reserves had not materialized, and no less than three full divisions moved from the Adriatic front to Anzio and Cassino. But the most unexpected enemy build-up came, as noted above, from units in north Italy, Yugoslavia, and south France.

Higher headquarters had estimated that German commitments in northern Italy and elsewhere would only permit his bringing 2 divisions from north of Rome, and these not for 16 days. Instead, by 1 February the appearance of elements from four divisions from the north presaged their imminent arrival at the beachhead.

When VI Corps attacked with three divisions on 30 January, it was unable to break through. After three days of heavy fighting the growing enemy strength forced General Lucas to abandon his assault and prepare for an expected German counterthrust. By 2 February VI Corps had suffered 6487 casualties but had taken 1485 prisoners and inflicted heavy casualties upon the foe. We had driven 18 miles inland to Campoleone and 15 toward Cisterna before the swift enemy reaction had sealed in the beachhead. Allied troops in Italy were on the defensive for the first time since the crucial days at Salerno. Hitler had reputedly ordered that the " abscess " below Rome must be removed at all costs. VI Corps, dug in behind its minefields and barbed wire, was confident that it could repulse the enemy counteroffensive while building up sufficient forces to resume the assault itself.



*Machine-gun position of the 504th Parachute Infantry, built in a farm house near Cisterna.*



*The Cassino "headland," looking west across the Rapido Valley to Cassino and Monastery Hill.*