

# CHAPTER II \* \* \* \* \*

## *Plans for the Attack*

### A. *ALLIED STRATEGY IN ITALY*

EARLY in April General Alexander informed Fifth and Eighth Armies of his future intentions. These outline plans of AAI served as a basis for further preparation by the armies and for the issuance of the army attack orders. Operation Order No. 1 of AAI, which gave the final plan, was not published until 5 May. (*See Annex No. 1A.*)

The intention of General Alexander, as stated in this order, was:

to destroy the right wing of the German Tenth Army; to drive what remains of it and the German Fourteenth Army north of Rome; and to pursue the enemy to the Rimini—Pisa line inflicting the maximum losses on him in the process.

In other words the German forces between Cassino and the sea were to be smashed and all enemy units swept back over 200 miles. Execution of this intention would free Rome, which had by now become a symbol of Allied success or failure in Italy, would give us additional air bases closer to the heart of Germany, and would be another step in the Allied mission in Italy to destroy the German forces before them. During the months of May through July these plans were carried out by Fifth and Eighth Armies substantially as ordered.

For the drive on Rome General Alexander directed a simultaneous attack by both armies on the southern front. Initially Eighth Army was to break through the enemy's positions into the Liri Valley; Fifth Army would capture the Ausonia Defile. Though this plan was very similar to the strategy of the January drive, such a concentration of forces represented a new departure in AAI plans. In a critique of our operations, which we later captured (*See Annex No. 2D*), Marshal Kesselring singled out this point:

In direct contrast to enemy tactics observed prior to the present offensive, which involved attacks strictly confined to small areas (no wider than 8-10 km. at the most), the enemy attacked for the first time on a wide front (of approximately 40 km.). The offensive was launched with absolute co-ordination.

After the initial breakthrough both armies were ordered to drive forward, Eighth Army on the general axis of Highway 6 to the area east of Rome with Fifth Army parallel to it but southwest of the Liri—Sacco rivers. In his preliminary discussions General Alexander had indicated that Fifth Army might swing northwest toward Frosinone to assist Eighth Army, but this point was not included in Operation Order No. 1. The final objective of the Fifth Army forces on the south front in fact was not announced at this time.

While the two armies drove northwest, 5 Corps on the Adriatic would hold its front with the minimum of troops but would vigorously pursue the enemy should he attempt to withdraw. The beachhead forces were ordered to attack after D Day on the general axis Cori—Valmontone to cut Highway 6 in the Valmontone area, thereby preventing the supply and withdrawal of the German Tenth Army on the southern front. This attack would be ready to be launched on 24 hours' notice from AAI at any time from D plus 4.

The estimate of probable enemy action, as given in Operation Order No. 1, proved to be extremely accurate. The Germans were expected to fight stubbornly for their initial positions. When forced out of the Gustav Line, they would retreat to the Hitler Line, for the defense of which all reserves at the disposal of the German Tenth Army were likely to be used. It was also expected that on losing these positions the enemy would make every effort to stabilize his front south of Rome by organized resistance on the general line Avezzano—Valmontone—Velletri. For the defense of that line all reserves of the German Fourteenth and Tenth Armies probably would be employed.

Neither D Day nor H Hour was announced in the AAI order. Their determination depended upon a number of factors. Preliminary planning had been begun by Fifth Army in March, based on an original intention to attack about 15 April; but the regrouping of Eighth Army was not fully completed until the middle of April. Thereafter units needed time to become acquainted with the terrain and to make their own plans of action. The forthcoming attack, moreover, was to be a hammer blow to end the German defense south of Rome once and for all, so careful preparations were necessary.

These conditions, coupled with the requirements of Allied strategy in the European campaign as a whole, put our attack on Rome some time in May. In Italy the month of May is one of the best periods for campaigning, both on the ground and

in the air. It is the spring month, neither so wet as to impede action nor so dry as to produce problems of water supply or unending dust. The temperature rises rapidly to an average of 64°, 7° more than in April; the average maximum is 75°—85°, the minimum 45° on the coast and 32° in the mountains. Precipitation drops off on the coast to an average of 2.42 inches at Gaeta but remains substantial inland. The Liri Valley averages over four inches of rainfall and is subject to brief thunderstorms which may produce flash floods and sticky soil. Cloudiness is less pronounced in the morning than in the afternoon, when cumulus covers part of the sky. Though coastal fog occurs five to six times in May, visibility generally is excellent.

The exact day in May for our attack was largely determined by the choice of a night attack to begin the drive. Enemy positions were so well known and so well fortified that an attack in the dark appeared to offer the best chances of breaking through the initial defense lines of the Germans. At the same time moonlight would be useful for the exploitation of our first gains. D Day was initially set for 10 May, then postponed 24 hours inasmuch as Eighth Army was not ready. D Day, accordingly, was 11 May and H Hour at 2300 (1).

On this day the sun set at 2012, and the moon, 4 days from the last quarter, rose at 2331. Our troops would thus have about two and one-half hours after dark to move into position, and approximately one hour of attack in the dark before the moon rose over Mount Massico. On 9 May the air force weather station reported that little rain and a minimum of cloudiness were expected for the next seven days. Rain was falling that day in north Italy, but the rain front moving south was not expected to reach the Garigliano.

## B. THE ATTACK ORDER OF FIFTH ARMY

*See Map No. 3*

1. *Mission and Methods.* The mission of Fifth Army, as assigned by AAI, was a difficult one. The Germans were well entrenched in a commanding area which they had held against a previous attack by 10 Corps. The natural defenses of this region were weakest at the south near Minturno, but even if we broke through here into the Ausonia Valley we should only have put ourselves into a salient commanded by the La Civita—Fammera escarpment on the west and by Mount Majo on the north. The enemy had built the fortifications in the Orange Line north of Ausonia against just such a possibility. Consideration of the terrain

---

(1) Standard Army Time (from 0200, 2 April 1944) was B Time, two hours ahead of Greenwich Standard Time (Z).

immediately ahead of us made it clear that the difficult terrain about Mount Majo was the key to the Ausonia Defile; if we held Mount Majo, the Ausonia Valley and the Orange Line would fall almost automatically.

In many ways capture of the Ausonia Defile was an easier task than the subsequent advance. When we had reached the Ausonia Valley and the defile at its north end, our troops would then face the almost insurmountable rock cliffs of the Petrella massif. On either side of this mass roads led through to Itri and Pico, but the Germans had barred each flank with their Dora Line and also with the Hitler Line in the case of the Esperia—Pico route. Attack directly through the mountains from the east and south would be most difficult even to infantry; if the enemy were warned, he could throw enough troops into the area from the north and west to hold the mountains indefinitely.

A preliminary study of the terrain facing Fifth Army and of possible courses of action had been prepared as of 26 March by the Planning Subsection, G-3. This study pointed out the importance of Mount d'Oro as an anchor to the Hitler Line and stressed the significance of Mount Majo, the wedge of hills running up to Mount dei Bracchi, Mount Scauri, and Castellonorato. It then deduced that occupation of these points would be necessary to our operations. The Petrella massif, however, was considered impassable at the time of this report, and all proposed plans of attack detoured it on either side.

Four such plans were offered for consideration. The first involved an advance west along Highway 7 to Formia and Itri with the object of turning the enemy's southern flank. This attack had the advantage of proceeding along the main line of communications from a firm bridgehead and close to the sea where naval support could be obtained. The coastal strip, however, was narrow, strongly defended, and commanded on the right flank by high ground. Even if such an attack were successful, it would not necessarily open up the Liri Valley; the enemy could swing his right flank back on Terracina and Fondi and keep his central positions intact.

Another possibility was repetition of the January strategy of driving up the Ausonia Valley from Minturno with the object of debouching into the Liri Valley, securing Mount d'Oro, and penetrating the Hitler Line. Routes for such an advance were available and armor could be used. Here again we would be attacking against well prepared defenses along a narrow corridor dominated on both sides in this case by mountains.

The third suggested scheme of maneuver consisted of a push northwest from Mount Juga to secure in turn Mount Majo, the ridge running northwest therefrom, and Mount d'Oro. Enemy defenses in the area of Mount Majo were not formidable, and tactical surprise might be obtained by attacking at such a relatively

unexpected place. Our troops could deploy on a broad front from a secured bridgehead and would be driving straight for the dominating terrain. Tanks could not be used, and artillery support would be difficult after the first advance. Supply also would present problems, for maintenance initially would depend on pack trains and jeeps.

In the fourth plan we would attack across the Garigliano to gain Sant'Ambrogio and advance west to capture Mount d'Oro. Tanks could be employed here, routes of supply were available, and the attack could be supported by our artillery. On the other hand we would be crossing a defended, deep river, and both flanks would be under fire, from Mount Majo on the south and from across the Liri River on the north.

In conclusion the report of 26 March favored the third plan, that of taking Mount Majo and pushing on to Mount d'Oro. In Phase I of this attack, two divisions of the FEC (the 4th Mountain Division in the lead) would take Mount Majo, while II Corps advanced as far as Mount Scauri, Castellonorato, and Mount dei Bracchi. In Phase II one division of the FEC was to mop up northwards to Sant'Ambrogio, and another was to take the ridge running northwest from Mount Majo to Castellone Hill, including Ausonia in its sweep. II Corps would clear the south part of the Ausonia Valley and regroup below Ausonia. Phase III consisted of the FEC attack to take Esperia and Mount d'Oro; then II Corps would pass through and in Phase IV exploit northwest to Mount Leucio and Pico.

A suitable corps boundary would be Castelforte—Coreno—Ausonia to allow the FEC to concentrate its forces, for we would have to hit the enemy at Majo with everything we had. Sufficient troops must be kept on hand to maintain maximum pressure on the enemy for at least three weeks in the area of our main thrust. If tactical surprise were obtained and the battlefield efficiently isolated by our air force, success should be achieved in a shorter space of time.

Two days later, on 28 March, General Keyes submitted a proposed plan of action for II Corps, based on the tentative placing of D Day in the middle of April. Until that time the 85th Division on the left would rotate its regiments in the line to gain experience while the 88th Division held the right flank. The 36th Division was to continue training as long as possible. Preliminary operations to secure commanding points were indicated; in the main attack it was suggested that II Corps block Highway 7 generally along the line Scauri—Spigno and assist operations of the FEC by taking the hills south of the Castelforte—Coreno road.

When the attack was delayed by AAI beyond 15 April, General Clark in conjunction with the FEC devoted further thought to his problems. The final solution was issued in Fifth Army Field Order No. 6, 20 April (*See Annex No. 1B*), in which General Clark defined the Army mission:

Fifth Army from present Garigliano positions attacks with Corps abreast, secures Ausonia defile, advances south of the Liri River to cut the Pico—Itri road... Subsequent advance on army order.

The plan of attack was a bold one. If the mountains dominated our objectives, then Fifth Army would attack through the mountains. First we would take Mount Majo, as previously planned; then we would take the Petrella massif. Afterwards we could fan out and seize the lower ground to the flanks. Surprise and aggressiveness were the keynotes of the plan. All four divisions of the FEC were committed at H Hour, at least in part. II Corps initially assisted the FEC, but the plan of passing it through the French in later phases was dropped in favor of an independent drive by the American divisions through the mountains on the north side of the Formia corridor and up the corridor itself. Instead of slugging forward slowly, we would smash the enemy with one fierce blow and crack him open. As the order noted, « The success of the attack depends to a great degree on secrecy, speed of execution, and co-ordinated action by the corps. »

In this scheme we would hit the enemy at the point where he least suspected attack, and would penetrate his lines of defense at the least fortified points. Time after time in the past Italian campaign Fifth Army had found it easier to advance in mountainous terrain, where enemy observation and fields of fire had numerous blind spots, than over a rolling countryside, the even slopes of which afforded superb final protective lines to the German machine guns. Yet another factor which facilitated our final decision was the presence of the 4th Mountain Division and the *goumiers*; trained for mountain warfare, these French troops were just what we needed to spearhead the drive.

Access to Mount Majo was relatively simple, for several trails penetrated the area. The trails of the Petrella massif, however, required careful study. Two separate trail reports were issued, on 24 and 30 April, based on thorough photo reconnaissance studies. Though Army engineers were of the opinion that only foot troops without mules could ascend the steep trail from Spigno over the escarpment, the French decided that this route would be practicable not only to their mountain infantry but also to their pack artillery. Once Mount Revole had been reached, the striking force could fan out on several trails toward the north and west. The mountain basins such as Piano del Campo offered good drop zones for aerial resupply, and a conference with AAI worked out full details on this subject. Prisoners reported that the sources of water in the mountains were drying up, but our attack was launched before this scarcity grew serious.

2. *The Plan of Attack.* The drive to the Itri—Pico road, the limit covered by Field Order No. 6, was divided into four phases. In Phase I the objective was the

Ausonia—Formia road. The FEC was to take Mount Majo, fan out on the two ridges running north to Castellone Hill and Cantalupo Hill, and secure the Ausonia Defile. The capture of the lower ground at La Guardia Hill at the same time would put all the Majo district in our hands. II Corps had more limited objectives: Hill 413 just west of Castelforte, the S Ridge running southwest from Santa Maria Infante, Mount dei Bracchi, and San Martino Hill. From these points it could cut the lower reaches of the Ausonia road. The plans for preliminary attacks outlined by II Corps on 28 March were scrapped to secure surprise.

The objective of Phase II was the placing of French troops on Mount Revole and exploitation in the Ausonia Valley. The FEC was to take the hills commanding the Coreno—Castelforte road, and then pass its mountain troops through to seize Mount Revole and Mount del Lago. Assistance from II Corps consisted principally of the capture of Mount La Civita and Spigno; American troops would also take Mount I Cerri and Castellonorato.

Phase III would bring the cutting of the Itri—Pico road in the vicinity of Itri and the fanning out by the French. The objective of the FEC in this phase was Mount d'Oro. While part of II Corps took Mount Scauri and Mount Campese, other units were to advance across the mountains south of Mount Petrella and cut the Itri—Pico road near Itri. The 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion was alerted to drop in the mountains in the II Corps zone to facilitate this advance.

The fourth and final phase would put Fifth Army on the Itri—Pico road ready for further advance. With the aid of II Corps the FEC would cut the road from its position at Mount Revole. Both corps were then to bring up their forces and prepare to continue the attack.

All divisions of Fifth Army on the southern front except the 36th Division were committed in Phase I. This unit constituted the mobile reserve of the Allied forces in Italy. By AAI order it was not to be committed without prior consent of that headquarters. General Clark placed it in II Corps reserve with the dual mission of being ready to attack in the zone of II Corps or to move rapidly to the beachhead in support of VI Corps. On 5 May the 36th Division was withdrawn from II Corps and placed in Army reserve, but continued to have the same mission.

3. *Support of the Attack.* Prior to H Hour our artillery fire and aerial activity were restricted to the normal amount suitable to a defensive attitude. As soon as our attack jumped off, all possible support was furnished by all arms. During the night of 11-12 May this assistance consisted primarily of an extensive artillery program, to be delivered by the guns and howitzers of 7 divisions and 28 separate battalions.

The initial artillery fires were designed to be a quick, smashing blow. Beginning at H Hour, corps artillery laid down counterbattery fire in heavy concentrations

on known positions, this fire lasting for 40 minutes in the FEC zone and for 80 in the II Corps zone. Then the corps artillery shifted to enemy command posts, reserves, dumps, and routes of communication, while divisional artillery kept up its fire on areas closer to the front lines. Special attention was to be paid to isolating the battle area by interdicting roads and trails and by destroying bridges. These initial fires were carefully co-ordinated and their control so strongly centralized that the artillery of Fifth and Eighth Armies from the sea to beyond Cassino acted as one great machine of destruction on the night of 11 May.

To extend the range of our artillery and to support possible naval raids in the vicinity of Mount Scauri and Sperlonga, one cruiser was made available to II Corps on call during D Day-D plus 5. This vessel was to fire at least 5 missions, expending about 100 rounds each, as a daily average on suitable firing days. Naval targets, laid down generally in an annex to Field Order No. 6, were the town of Itri with the dumps and heavy guns in the area, the Itri—Formia road, and points about Sperlonga and Mount Scauri.

The Air Support Plan, issued on 29 April, divided aerial operations into four phases corresponding with the ground phases. The primary task of XII Tactical Air Command throughout the operation was to isolate the battlefield and to restrict enemy movement thereto and therein. On second and third priority were counter-battery targets and close support targets.

In Phase I isolation of the battlefield was to be achieved by sustained attacks on five points. Two of these, the Itri road center and the Pontecorvo—Esperia road in the vicinity of Sant'Oliva, lay close enough to our lines to be hammered also by our artillery. The other three, which were the responsibility of the air force, consisted of the San Giovanni—Pico road, the Pastena road, and the Vallecorsa—Lenola road. The FEC had first call on second and third-priority targets.

Isolation of the battlefield continued in Phase II by attacks at the same points. Close support targets to ensure the fall of Mount La Civita, Spigno, and Ausonia received second priority with the preference to II Corps. By Phase III our troops would be so advanced that the air force was to concentrate on the San Giovanni, Pastena, and Vallecorsa road; Highway 7 was entrusted primarily to the navy. Counterbattery missions held second priority and close support targets third place. Priority in close support missions was given to the FEC in attacks on Mount d'Oro. The proposed drop by the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion would occur in this phase, and requirements of this operation, if mounted, took precedence over all other missions. Aerial support in Phase IV continued in the same fashion as the third phase, with priority to the FEC.

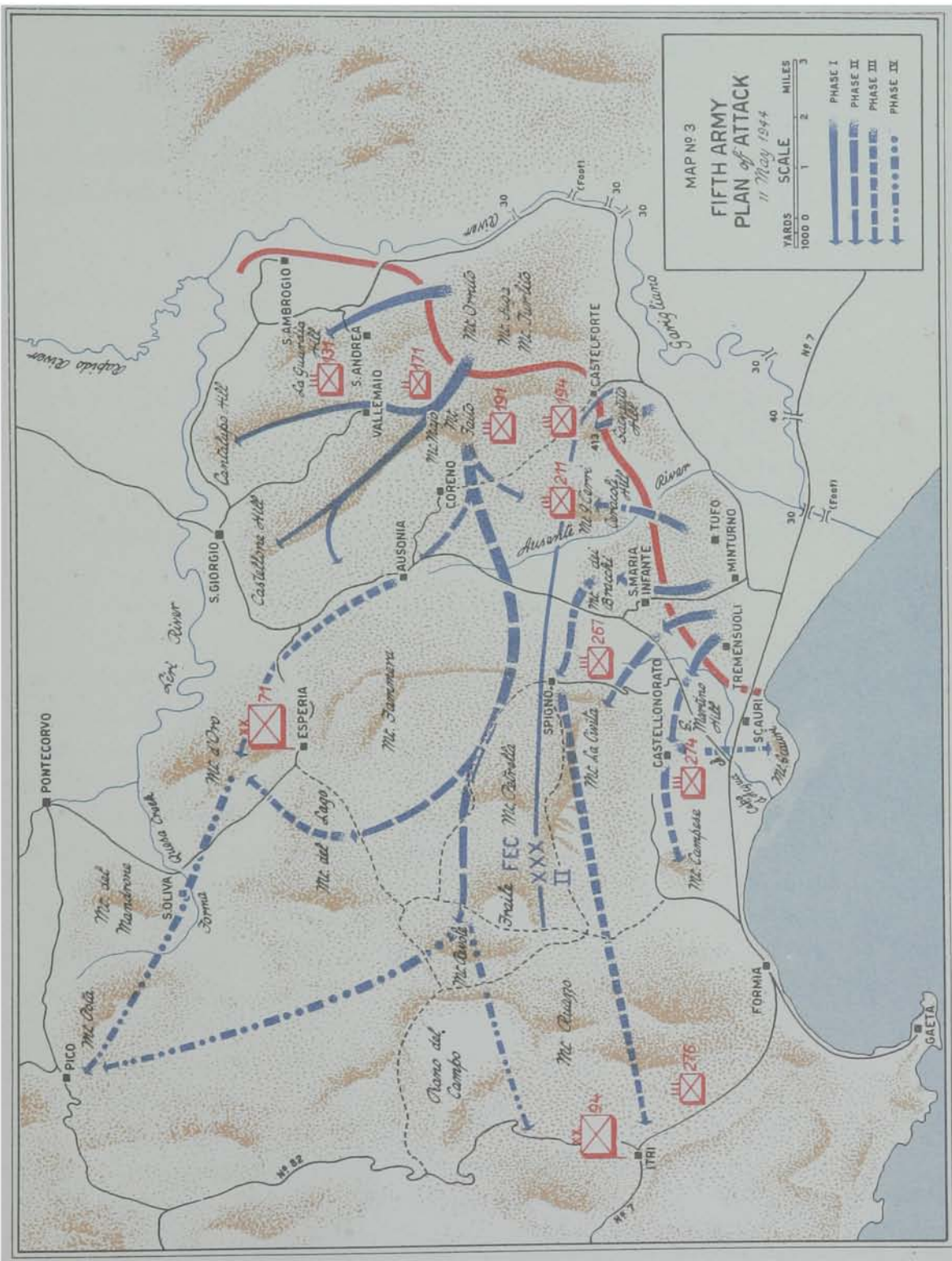
The mechanism for handling air support targets now consisted of an Air Support Control Section under Fifth Army, which relieved the British 7/9 Army Air



MAP No 3  
**FIFTH ARMY**  
**PLAN of ATTACK**  
 11 May 1944

YARDS SCALE 1000 0 1 2 3  
 MILES

PHASE I  
 PHASE II  
 PHASE III  
 PHASE IV



Support Control on 20 April. This agency arranged for first-priority targets in all phases by D minus 3, and transmitted daily corps requests for second and third-priority targets. Details on second-priority requests were submitted by the corps not later than 1100, and on third-priority targets not later than 1700 on the day preceding the desired attacks. Targets of opportunity continued to be handled in an expeditious manner in accordance with the standing operating procedure of the previous campaign.

### C. *THE APPROACH OF H HOUR*

1. *Final Movements.* On 5 May the corps and division commanders of Fifth Army attended a conference at the command post near Francolise. General Clark and his staff presented the plans in detail and last arrangements were made. On the following days the subordinate commanders held their own conferences. Final changes in artillery support plans were issued, and our troops prepared for the attack to come.

Movements into position for the drive had been delayed until the last practicable date. In the II Corps zone the 36th Division moved to the Qualiano area just north of Pozzuoli 29 April-9 May. Departure from the training camps near Avelino was open, but arrival in the new area was carefully camouflaged. Combat Command B went to the beachhead in small increments on 26 April-7 May. The 85th and 88th Divisions regrouped from 3 May in preparation for the attack; tank and reconnaissance troops closed in forward areas; and in the night of 10-11 May divisional commanders established advance command posts.

The FEC had more extensive shifts to carry out in preparation for the attack. Throughout April the 4th Mountain Division had held the Mount Juga bridgehead, and defense of the sector remained the responsibility of this division until H Hour. Elements of four divisions, however, were to take part in the initial assault. Initially the French front was held by two regiments of the 4th Mountain Division in the bridgehead and by two reconnaissance battalions along the east bank of the Gari-gliano on our right flank. By 1 May one regiment of the 2d Moroccan Division took over the north half of the bridgehead, with one mountain regiment in the south half. In the next phase of the build-up, 4-9 May, the 2d Moroccan Division and the 4th Mountain Division increased their front-line strength across the Gari-gliano to two regiments each and brought across the bulk of their reserves.

The 1st Motorized Division moved up by train from Salerno to Teano on 3-7 May and then to forward assembly areas on the east bank of the river. The 4th

Brigade crossed into the bridgehead and placed one battalion in the line at the junction of the bridgehead with the Garigliano River. On the night of 10-11 May two battalions of the 4th Tunisian Infantry (4<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Tirailleurs Tunisiens) from the 3d Algerian Division and two battalions of the 8th Moroccan Infantry (8<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Tirailleurs Marocains) of the 2d Moroccan Division crossed the river. In the last hours before the attack the regiments of the 2d Moroccan Division and the 4th Mountain Division on the front line shifted from a linear formation to dispositions in depth.

By H Hour the attack formations had been achieved without any incident to interrupt the schedule of movements. Two entire divisions and substantial elements of two more were now in the French bridgehead; the remainder of the 1st Motorized Division and the 3d Algerian Division with three groups of tabors lay in forward positions close to the river. In the bald hills of the bridgehead and on the open plains along the Garigliano, both under enemy observation, the slightest slip might have given away the entire movement; but closely co-ordinated shifts in small increments at night left the enemy unaware of the impending thunderbolt.

2. *Preparations of the Supporting Arms and Services.* Corps and divisional artillery also went into firing positions as late as possible, and registered one gun per battery under covering fire from other units already in place. In the II Corps zone the 697th Field Artillery Battalion took up new positions on 7-8 May and emplaced one 240-mm howitzer almost in the front lines near Minturno. On the same night the 932d Field Artillery Battalion came up from rest areas east of Sparanise; and on the two nights 7-9 May the 173d Field Artillery Battalion moved one battery of its 155-mm guns into position below Minturno. With the arrival of the 36th Division artillery and the 6th Field Artillery Group in the same period, II Corps artillery was ready for the attack.

In the French zone the artillery of 3 divisions was brought forward, and 4 of the 13 battalions of Corps artillery moved up from rest areas. Some of the divisional artillery, including the 75-mm pack howitzers of the 4th Mountain Division, proceeded into the bridgehead, but none of these pieces were allowed any registration fire. The remainder took up positions east of the river. Additions to Corps artillery included the 630th Field Artillery Battalion on 4 May; the 2d Battalion, RACL (Régiment d'Artillerie Coloniale du Levant), and the 178th Field Artillery Battalion on 5 May; the 248th Field Artillery Battalion on 6 May. On 8 May the 1st Battalion, RACL, shifted forward to better positions for the attack.

During the static situation in April the other arms and services had completed most of their preliminary work for the attack, but a few important tasks remained for the weeks before the attack. During the period 27 April-11 May Army Ordnance received 19,192 long tons of ammunition and issued out 16,238 tons, 3 times

the amount expended in the previous 2 weeks. The proximity of PBS dumps made it possible to move this supply from the base dumps to Army dumps and then immediately to using organizations. As a result Army dumps never became so large as to reveal our plans for the attack.

The engineers had replaced most of the Bailey bridges in the Army and corps zones with permanent structures during April and had an ample store of bridging material located well forward by D Day. Preparations for additional bridges across the Garigliano had been completed, and some inconspicuous foundation work done; but actual construction waited for the night of 11-12 May. The signal units likewise had made their plans to extend the main Army open-wire pole line beyond the Garigliano, but could not proceed until the attack had begun.

3. *Orders of the Day, 11 May.* At 1600, 11 May, the commanders of all units announced to their men two Orders of the Day, one from General Alexander and the other from General Clark. The message from the commander-in-chief of AAI (*See Annex No. 2A*) stressed the bravery which our troops had already shown, noted the substantial victories we had won, and announced prophetically:

The Allied armed forces are now assembling for the final battles on sea, on land, and in the air to crush the enemy once and for all. From the East and the West, from the North and the South, blows are about to fall which will result in the final destruction of the Nazis and bring freedom once again to Europe, and hasten peace for us all. To us in Italy has been given the honour to strike the first blow.

General Clark recalled to his men their fight from Salerno, past Naples, and up to the mountains (*See Annex No. 2B.*) He noted the value of the Anzio beachhead, and placed the whole Italian campaign of Fifth Army in its proper setting:

It may appear to you, since the Fifth Army's progress in terms of territory gained during the past few months has been slow, that our campaign is no longer a major one or that it is not having significant success in the war as a whole. Nothing could be farther from the truth. You have made a conspicuously successful invasion of the continental fortress which the Germans boasted was impregnable. You have required the Germans to devote more than twenty divisions to the costly and losing task of retarding the Allied progress to the north. You have inflicted heavy losses upon their troops and have taken more than 13,000 prisoners. You have placed the enemy in his present distressing position of trying hopelessly to hold back the Allied forces, which he knows will eventually overrun him from two directions.

I have direct personal knowledge that the accomplishments of the Fifth Army are understood and appreciated by the governments and peoples of the United Nations... I have full confidence that, as in the past, the men of the Fifth Army will meet the tests to come as true soldiers and that with God's guidance and help you will press on to great and decisive victories.

Our troops were ready; the plans were made. Six hours after the reading of the Orders of the Day the final drive on Rome began.

# CHAPTER III \* \* \* \* \*

## *The FEC Breakthrough*

DARKNESS settled slowly over the Garigliano River on the evening of 11 May. The day had been cloudy, and a little rain had fallen. After sunset smoke and haze still blanketed the valley, but the vast canopy of stars shone down brightly from a clear sky. Except for the crash of an occasional artillery piece all was still. Long columns of swarthy French colonial troops and laden mules moved softly along the steep trails and roads leading to the Mount Juga bridgehead. On the lines of departure the infantry stirred restlessly. The enemy came out of his hiding places and went unsuspectingly about his tasks of strengthening fortifications, patrolling, and bringing up supplies. All was normal, as it had been to German eyes and ears for the past month.

Suddenly at 2300 the guns on the right roared into action. Great flashes burst up from the hills and hundreds of shells screamed across the Garigliano. Then the crash and roar swept down the line through II Corps to the sea. The mountains across the river became an inferno of exploding shells and bursting flares. The ridges were outlined briefly, faded quickly from sight, and then came into view again and again.

Throughout the night and the following day more than 1000 guns roared from Cassino to the sea. Of these, about 600 were massed under the control of Fifth Army; during the first 24 hours of the attack our artillery fired 173,941 rounds against the enemy. The effect of this savage, concentrated smash was overwhelming. Enemy batteries were tossed in ruins; routes of supply were pitted by shell holes; command posts disappeared from the web of German communications.

When the sun rose on 12 May, our air force began its operations to isolate the battlefield. Though cloudy weather seriously interfered with these efforts, our pilots reported fair results. In addition to 294 fighter-bomber sorties 429 medium-bomber sorties were flown on communications behind the enemy lines. In the heavy-

bomber class 728 sorties hit at communications and other targets. Kesselring's headquarters was attacked twice during the day, and the bombs of 80 heavy bombers completely destroyed Tenth Army Headquarters. Continuation of this pounding day after day brought a cumulative effect which hampered the enemy severely and made his ruin the more certain.

Successes had been reported in the first hours of the attack, as our infantry drove forward swiftly under cover of the artillery concentrations. On the left, before II Corps, the enemy held more firmly, but on the right the French smashed through to Mount Revole by 16 May. The Gustav Line was destroyed, the Hitler Line itself was turned by 19 May, and every effort of the enemy to reorganize his defenses had failed. The French drive, indeed, was one of the most spectacular operations thus far in the history of Fifth Army.

#### A. THE PLANS OF THE FEC

1. *The Attack Order.* (See Map No. 4.) On 27 April General Juin had completed his outline plans for the part of the FEC in the forthcoming attack. The general directive from Fifth Army, to drive along the Mount Juga—Pico axis, was broken down into four parts: 1) to secure the mountain mass dominated by Mount Majo; 2) to block the Ausonia road as far north as possible, enlarging the present bridgehead as far as that road; 3) to reach the Itri—Pico road; 4) to put the center of the French force around Pico preparatory to moving on the rear of Arce or against Frosinone, both in the Liri Valley. General Juin further developed each of these four parts of the FEC mission into a specific phase of action, generally along the lines of the four phases in Fifth Army Field Order No. 6. An operation order covering the plans for Phases I and II was issued on 7 May.

In the initial attack elements of all four divisions were in the line. The 4th Brigade of the 1st Motorized Division, backed by the 757th Tank Battalion, held a narrow zone on the west bank of the Garigliano, astride the river road to Sant'Andrea. The 2d Moroccan Division, which had the main role in the attack, lay concentrated on the west slopes of Mount Ornito. To the left again came the 4th Mountain Division from Mount Turlito to the vicinity of Castelforte. The tabors and the 1st Moroccan Infantry remained east of the Garigliano, waiting until the way was cleared for their dash to Mount Revole. All of the 3d Algerian Division was in reserve except for a task force composed of the 4th Tunisian Infantry and the 755th Tank Battalion in the south part of the 4th Mountain Division zone.

Phase I was divided into two parts. In the first, which began at H Hour, only two divisions were initially to attack, with the objective of taking the hill mass up to and including Mount Majo. On the right the 2d Moroccan Division was directed to seize Mounts Faito and Girofano, then Mount Feuci and Agrifoglio Hill, and finally the vital point of Mount Majo. Part if not all of this operation was scheduled to be carried out in the first night. The 4th Mountain Division on the left was to protect the south flank of the 2d Moroccan Division by moving onto the south slopes of Mount Faito and was also to seize the high ground north-east and north of Castelforte.

The second part of Phase I would bring three divisions and part of the fourth into action to exploit the breakthrough. The 2d Moroccan Division would advance rapidly on the two ridges running north and northeast from Mount Majo as far as Cantalupo Hill and Castellone Hill. In addition to taking these points, which would hamper the enemy retreat from the Garigliano bend, the 2d Moroccan Division would support by fire the drive by the 1st Motorized Division at daybreak on D plus 1 toward Sant'Andrea and La Guardia Hill. On the left the Moroccans were also ordered to attack against the flanks and rear of the enemy's defenses in the Coreno—Ausonia area. The 4th Mountain Division would take Castelforte, drive on Mount Ceschito and Hill 335 from north and south, and so open the north side of the Castelforte—Coreno road. A simultaneous operation by the 88th Division of II Corps would clear the hills south of the road.

In Phase II the main objectives were the Ausonia Defile and the cliffs overlooking the Ausonia Valley from the west. Two divisions, the 2d Moroccan Division and the 1st Motorized Division were to continue to clear the district from Mount Majo north to the Liri with the aim of gaining control over the east side of the defile. The « Mountain Corps », composed of the 4th Mountain Division and all the goumiers, would attack first toward Coreno and Ausonia to bar the Ausonia Defile against possible enemy armored counterattacks from the north. At almost the same time other elements of the Mountain Corps were to get a foothold in the Petrella massif in preparation for the drive west to Mount Revole.

To its right the 3d Algerian Division would be employed immediately following the capture of Mount Ceschito and Hill 335 to operate between the 2d Moroccan Division and the 4th Mountain Division in the Ausonia—Esperia area. In Phase II this division was directed to open the Castelforte—Coreno road and advance its armored group swiftly to assist the 4th Mountain Division in beating off any counterattacks through the Ausonia Defile. Complete relief of the mountain troops in the Ausonia area would follow as soon as the 3d Algerian Division came up.

The activity of the FEC in Phase II thus involved swift, overlapping advance on a wide front from the Petrella escarpment around to Sant'Ambrogio. The



enemy would have no time to regroup his broken forces in defense of vital points; success on our part would sever the enemy north-south communications through Ausonia as well as pave the way for a drive through the mountains to the Itri—Pico road.

2. *The Artillery Plan.* The Corps artillery of the FEC was organized under the 13th Field Artillery Brigade (U.S.) and included the 17th Field Artillery Group with two battalions of 155-mm howitzers; the 178th Field Artillery Group with two battalions likewise of 155-mm howitzers; the 194th Field Artillery Group with two battalions of 155-mm guns, one battalion of 8-inch howitzers, one battalion of 240-mm howitzers with an 8-inch gun attached; the RAAC with two battalions and one battery of 155-mm guns; and as independent units one battalion of 4.5-inch guns and one battalion of 8-inch howitzers. More than half of the Fifth Army artillery was thus placed in support of the main thrust. In particular, the FEC received most of our long-range artillery, which could support the drive both in Phase I and in Phase II without displacement; for it would be difficult to find good artillery positions anywhere east of the Ausonia Valley. The artillery of the FEC in general lay south of Mount Camino, but the 194th Field Artillery Group remained in its old positions along Highway 6. These units could support both the FEC and the drive of 13 Corps across the Rapido River; British artillery in the same area was on call for FEC targets.

The initial preparation by Corps and divisional artillery was carefully coordinated and centralized to ensure the delivery of a quick, terrific blow at H Hour. Before that moment artillery fire remained normal; but at 2300, 11 May, every battery in the FEC opened up on the enemy. The ensuing program was divided into 2 sections, H Hour to H plus 40, and H plus 40 to H plus 400. During the first 40 minutes the Corps artillery laid down counterbattery fire. Every known enemy gun position received a concentration of from 24 to 48 rounds in 2 minutes, and then 15 to 20 minutes later another concentration of the same weight. The next six hours were devoted to a program of harassing and interdiction fire, designed to cut enemy roads leading into the area, to neutralize enemy reserves, and to smash enemy command posts and dumps.

The pattern of targets in this period showed a careful concentration of fires on the most vital points of the German rear areas. The enemy reserves at Coreno were raked over by heavy fire from the 8-inch howitzers of the 630th Field Artillery Battalion and of Battery C, 995th Field Artillery Battalion. Fourteen concentrations were spotted along the Ausonia—San Giorgio road in the defile north of Ausonia. In particular, the 985th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm gun) was to put 50 rounds per hour from H plus 120 to dawn at 2 points on the road; after day-



light it could continue at not more than 30 rounds per hour if observation indicated sufficient enemy movement. This battalion was also to lay 80 rounds per hour on the Esperia—Pico road west of Esperia, continuing after daylight at a rate up to 60 rounds per hour if necessary. The 240-mm howitzers fired on San Giorgio and Ausonia in the first period; then put 40 rounds on Esperia, the command post of the 71st Division, from H plus 50 to H plus 105; and interdicted the Esperia road and the route north of Mount Santa Maria with 10 rounds each. Command posts of reserve units at Sant'Oliva and Monticelli would also be given 20 rounds apiece.

Rates of fire, as set forth by Army order for all corps artillery, were one round per gun per minute for all pieces through the 155-mm gun, and one round per gun each two minutes for the 8-inch and 240-mm howitzers. These rates could be exceeded for short bursts of not more than five rounds per gun. After the counter-battery fire one gun in each battery would be rested in rotation for ten minutes if the scheduled fire for the unit lasted more than an hour. Allotments of ammunition for D Day were 250 rounds per 4.5-inch gun and 155-mm howitzer; 200 rounds per 155-mm gun and 8-inch howitzer; 100 rounds per 240-mm howitzer. On D plus 1 and succeeding days these allotments were reduced by approximately one-half, except for the 155-mm howitzers.

After the scheduled fires had been completed, the artillery support was designed to be as flexible as possible in accordance with the changing situation. At 0800, 12 May, the 17th Field Artillery Group was placed in support of the 2d Moroccan Division and the 178th Field Artillery Group in support of the 4th Mountain Division. The 8-inch howitzers of the 630th Field Artillery Battalion would fire on Sant'Andrea and Castelforte as requested by the respective divisional commanders. A zone of primary responsibility for the divisional artillery had been laid down, to be shifted forward at H plus 240; but Corps and divisional artillery both were utilized as necessary during the attack.

## B. *THE CAPTURE OF MOUNT MAJO*

11-13 MAY

1. *The 2d Moroccan Division Breaks the Gustav Line. (See Map No. 5.)* The opening blow in the French zone was struck by two regiments of the 2d Moroccan Division under Maj. Gen. André W. Dody. The 8th Moroccan Infantry moved northwest from the summit of Mount Ornito to take Mount Faito. On its right the 4th Moroccan Infantry was set to drive up the slopes of Cerasola Hill and Mount Girofano. The 5th Moroccan Infantry remained in reserve.

At 2300, 11 May, the artillery opened the attack with heavy concentrations on enemy positions on Mounts Faito, Feuci, and Girofano. This blast so damaged enemy communications that the 8th Moroccan Infantry encountered no enemy artillery or mortar fire during the first 45 minutes of its attack. At 2348 its leading elements gained the crest of Mount Faito against stubborn infantry resistance. The eastern slopes were cleared shortly after midnight, and by 0300, 12 May, the entire summit was firmly in our hands. Troops of the regiment moved down the western slopes before dawn and began to work their way toward the saddle connecting Mount Faito with Mount Feuci to the northwest. At about 0930 patrols drew enemy fire, both automatic-weapon and mortar, from enemy dugouts on the eastern side of Mount Feuci and from positions on the reverse slopes. By 1130 the 8th Moroccan Infantry was definitely stopped along the saddle between the two summits.

The 4th Moroccan Infantry had started off with equal vigor and quickly gained the lower slopes of Cerasola Hill despite some delay on the left flank due to an intricate barbed-wire entanglement. At 2355 the enemy opened up with Fougasse flame throwers which had been dug in to cover the minefields; these were operated by remote control from a centrally located dugout. Here again enemy artillery and mortar fire was lacking, but the rapid fire of German automatic weapons constantly swept the flaming slopes. The 1st Battalion, 4th Moroccan Infantry, on the right continued its advance across the east side of Cerasola Hill in the face of this opposition, while the 2d Battalion on the left started up the summit of its objective. In one charge the regiment met success and swept over the hill in a matter of minutes.

At 0015 the 1st Battalion, moving on north across the draw to Mount Girofano, received a terrific mortar concentration from the north slopes of the hill. This fire soon split and also pinned down the 2d Battalion on the northwest slopes of Cerasola Hill. Losses were heavy in both battalions, especially in the 1st Battalion which was farther forward. The situation became confused as both sides developed their maximum fire power, but the 4th Moroccan Infantry clung to its positions on Cerasola Hill with fierce determination throughout the rest of the night.

During the morning the 1st Battalion attempted to move around the western slopes of Mount Girofano to Hill 739, but the grazing fire of the enemy machine guns stopped the effort. The 5th Moroccan Infantry was moved up from division reserve to the left flank of the regiment just before noon to compensate for its heavy losses, which totalled about 10 officers and 450 men by 1530 on the 12th. Both units were formed into a task force under the assistant division commander, but renewal of the drive on Mount Girofano waited until dark.

After regrouping during the first hours of darkness the 4th Moroccan Infantry and 5th Moroccan Infantry attacked at 0300, 13 May. Under the cover of a strong artillery preparation, laid by divisional artillery and by the 17th and 178th

Field Artillery Groups, the 5th Moroccan Infantry advanced around the northwest edge of Mount Girofano and the 4th Moroccan Infantry toward the summit. At 0730 the task force commander was able to report that the crests of Mount Girofano and Hill 739 to the northwest were both securely held by our troops. Casualties during the attack had been much lighter than on the 12th. Though the German mortars and artillery reacted as strongly as before, the infantry did not fight stubbornly. A sense of futility seemed to have come over the enemy, for over 100 prisoners were taken on Mount Girofano alone.

On the left flank, meanwhile, the 8th Moroccan Infantry had planned an assault on Mount Feuci from the Faito saddle, to begin at 1400, 12 May. The enemy was alert, and at 1310 the entire 2d Battalion, 115th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, launched a counterattack against Mount Faito under mortar support. Four of the 12 battalions of artillery which had begun preparatory concentrations for the attack were forced to shift to defensive fires on the west end of the saddle. The violence of the enemy attack, verging on desperation, caused considerable alarm in Corps headquarters, and General Juin hastened to the scene to direct the battle personally. At 1515 the Germans were finally forced to retire after inflicting and receiving considerable casualties.

Determined to take advantage of the enemy withdrawal, General Juin ordered our planned attack to begin immediately. This prompt exploitation met a tremendous concentration of enemy mortar and artillery fire which covered the entire eastern side of Mount Feuci; by 1540 the 8th Moroccan Infantry had been driven back to the saddle. The Corps commander decided that another daylight attack on the position would be too expensive, and ordered infiltration by the moonlight of the early hours onto its eastern slopes, to be followed by an assault at 0800, 13 May.

The night patrols made little progress. As the artillery opened up for the morning attack, three enemy companies counterattacked our positions in the saddle and thus delayed the push until 1020. Artillery and mortar resistance was again heavy, but as at Mount Girofano the enemy infantry fought with less tenacity. At 1130 the summit of Mount Feuci was occupied by our troops. This capture opened the way for an attack directly on Mount Majo, 1000 yards to the northwest, and the regiment moved out promptly after mopping up Feuci. The steep rocky slopes of the new objective offered more resistance than the enemy garrison, which had been ordered to evacuate its post. By 1615 the 8th Moroccan Infantry had taken the crest of Mount Majo.

In less than two days of fighting the 2d Moroccan Division had driven through the Gustav Line to the keystone of all German defenses west of the Garigliano. From this penetration the enemy was never to recover, and every step thereafter which he took to plug his gap was always one move too late. Immediately, the

success of the division assured a breakthrough by the French units operating in the lower ground to either flank.

2. *The Drive to Sant'Andrea.* To the northeast of Mount Majo the 1st Motorized Division under Maj. Gen. Diego Brosset struck against the enemy forces holding the bend in the Garigliano River. The 4th Brigade had moved into position on the northern rim of the bridgehead during the last few days before the attack, and the rest of the division lay on the east bank, ready to cross the river to support the attack. The plan of maneuver called for an armored group, composed of the 757th Tank Battalion (U. S.) and the 8th Tank Destroyer Battalion (8<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Chasseurs d'Afrique), to attack in three waves in the low ground to the right and for an infantry task force to clear the hill slopes to the left in co-ordination with the attack on Girofano by the 4th Moroccan Infantry. Since the enemy antitank ditch across the flat could not be approached until H Hour, the 1st Motorized Division was forced to schedule its full attack somewhat after 2300.

As the artillery concentrations began, crews from the armor and infantry set to work with the engineers in clearing away the network of barbed wire in front of the ditch and in filling up a section of the ditch itself. Other engineers rushed to completion an infantry footbridge over the river just behind our lines so that from 0100 on other elements of the division were able to use this shortcut into the north part of the bridgehead. Work on the antitank ditch proceeded at a rapid pace with little interference, for most of the enemy forces were absorbed in the heavy fighting to the west in the Girofano area. Between 0300 and 0400, 12 May, the passage across the ditch was opened.

The first wave of the armor, which planned to jump off at 0400, was delayed for one hour by a small enemy counterattack from the northeast slopes of Hill 433, a commanding point on the left flank of the division. Then the leading tanks crossed the ditch. On the right the second and third armored waves remained on our side of the ditch in a draw between the obstacle and the river, ready to furnish fire support to the first wave. After an advance of 700 yards along the slopes west of the road, our armor met several enemy strongpoints built around machine guns, mortars, and a few antitank guns. The 44th Reconnaissance Battalion, which manned the defenses, was greatly aided by the dense fog and smoke of the early morning and stopped our tanks. The attack then became an infantry battle carried on by the leading elements of the 22d Motorized Battalion of the 4th Brigade, backed by our tanks and tank destroyers. In four hours of very heavy fighting, 0600-1000, the infantry occupied the main enemy positions on the wooded knolls of Conventi, which command the point where the river road turns west.

On the left of this thrust the 24th Motorized Battalion advanced to the heights of Fontanelle, just west of Conventi, before noon of 12 May. Though this thrust

put the 24th Battalion in positions overlooking the road almost to Sant'Andrea, its left flank was exposed to fire from Mount Girofano. After noon the battalion withdrew to maintain contact with the infantry on its left, but the troops and armor in the Conventi area were able to hold their ground. To the far left the 21st Motorized Battalion had pushed north while the antitank ditch was being filled and captured Hill 290 on the east slopes of Girofano before daybreak. This advance under fire from the enemy positions on top of Girofano was assisted materially when a special force seized Hill 433.

During the afternoon preparations were made for an all-out attack in conjunction with the 2d Moroccan Division drive on Girofano. Light tanks of the 1st Motorized Division moved to the east bank of the Garigliano after dark to furnish a base of fire, and a battalion of 105-mm howitzers was pushed across the river to join the infantry cannon companies. A ferry was installed a few hundred yards downstream of the footbridge. The plan of attack was designed to avoid exposing our troops to the murderous fire from the enemy positions on Girofano. The 21st Battalion on the left was to hold in place on Hill 433 until the 4th Moroccan Infantry had gained Mount Girofano, and to support this push; farther to the right the 24th Battalion, which was less subject to the enemy fire, would again advance to Fontanelle and so gain observation over the eastern approaches to Sant'Andrea. Then an assault on Sant'Andrea itself would be launched.

The attacking elements moved out before dawn on the 13th and advanced swiftly. On the left the 4th Moroccan Infantry took Girofano by 0730, and the 4th Brigade itself was on the Fontanelle—Conventi line by noon, with the armor forward on the right to the point where the river road turns west. This advance represented a breakthrough of the main enemy line, and the second wave of the armor came up to speed the capture of Sant'Andrea. After it had taken positions on the east and the first wave had moved up to the southeast, the infantry battalions moved north down the slopes of the hills, opposed by automatic-weapon fire from the village.

The supporting artillery battered the objective for ten minutes beginning at 1800, and elements of the 4th Brigade drove into the village. The armor, which had by-passed Sant'Andrea, converged on the road junction to the north at 1925 and then split again, the first wave east to Sant'Ambrogio and the second wave west to Sant'Apollinare. By midnight of 13 May both villages had been occupied. The infantry moved on from Sant'Andrea and took La Guardia Hill, which dominated the Garigliano bend. The prisoner toll for the day ran into several hundred and marked the end of the organized resistance in this area.

3. *Castelforte and Mount Ceschito.* On the left flank of the FEC three infantry regiments were employed by Maj. Gen. François Sevez of the 4th Mountain Division in his initial assault. The enemy positions on the east side of the gorge of

Riva Grande from the vicinity of Mount Juga to Mount Rotondo were entrusted to the 6th Moroccan Infantry (6<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Tirailleurs Marocains) and the 2d Moroccan Infantry (2<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Tirailleurs Marocains); the town of Castelforte was assigned to the 4th Tunisian Infantry of the 3d Algerian Division operating under the control of the 4th Mountain Division.

In conjunction with the 2d Moroccan Division on its right flank the 6th Moroccan Infantry drove northwest at H Hour from the pass between Mounts Juga and Turlito. Stiff enemy resistance delayed the two assault battalions temporarily, but the troops fought on to occupy Hill 664 on the south edge of Mount Faito, overlooking the upper reaches of Riva Grande. There the regiment consolidated its gains and waited further progress by the 8th Moroccan Infantry, which had just taken Mount Faito. Since this unit was stopped throughout the 12th on the saddle between Mount Faito and Mount Feuci, the 6th Moroccan Infantry remained quiet until the night of 12-13 May.

On its left the 2d Moroccan Infantry pushed northwest from Mount Nata in a series of separate thrusts which cleared most of the western slopes of Mount Juga and Mount Turlito by daylight. Stiff resistance was met only at the pillbox at Tolarso, at the end of a ridge running southwest from Mount Juga. During the morning the regiment held its new positions and hammered at the pillbox. The companies attacking this point had suffered 50 % casualties by dark, but their stubborn attacks finally reduced the enemy garrison early on the 13th.

While two regiments of the 4th Mountain Division had been gaining positions north and east of Riva Grande, the third regiment, the 1st Moroccan Infantry (1<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Tirailleurs Marocains), remained in reserve. Action on the left flank of the division was entrusted instead to the 4th Tunisian Infantry of the 3d Algerian Division under the immediate supervision of Brig. Gen. Georges Guillebaud, commanding the division armor. The 1st Battalion of this regiment, located behind the southwest spur of Mount Nata, moved out at H Hour and gained Mount della Torre during the first attack. At dawn on the 12th it attempted to swing south onto Mount Siola, but heavy enemy resistance forced it back. During the day the battalion worked along the north slopes of Mount Siola in an unsuccessful effort to open a path to Mount Ceschito.

The 3d Battalion, 4th Tunisian Infantry, was on the west bank of the Gari-gliano at H Hour but delayed its attack until the supporting armor crossed Lion Bridge. One company of infantry set out before the armor was in position and gained the crest of Cimprone Hill, a knob on the east side of Mount Siola, but could not advance farther because of its exposed flanks. An enemy counterattack hit the right side of this company at 0900 but was beaten off. Shortly after daylight the 4th Spahi Reconnaissance Battalion (4<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Spahis Marocains), elements



of the 755th Tank Battalion (U.S.), and the 7th Tank Destroyer Battalion (7<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Chasseurs d'Afrique) completed their movement, and the 3d Battalion advanced west across the flat by the Garigliano. Below Castelforte it split into several groups. One infantry company with ten tanks advanced a few hundred yards north from the main road on the Castelforte road; another group of infantry, tanks, and tank destroyers moved around the southwest slopes of Mount Siola to the high ground a thousand yards north of Castelforte.

Meanwhile the 2d Battalion, 4th Tunisian Infantry, under the regimental commander, Colonel Lambilly, crossed the Garigliano by the Damiano Bridge and worked its way to the slopes of Damiano village by 1000. Armored support for this battalion included a squadron of the 3d Spahi Reconnaissance Battalion (3<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Spahis Marocains), the bulk of the 755th Tank Battalion, and a squadron of tank destroyers from the 7th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

The main activity in the zone of the 4th Mountain Division on the 12th consisted of efforts to reduce Castelforte. By noon the infantry and armor in the 4th Tunisian Infantry task forces had almost ringed the objectives, with one group to the west by Damiano, another south of the town on the road, a third on Cimprone Hill, and a fourth to the north of the town. The 350th Infantry of the 88th Division had by this time occupied Mount Cianelli and the hamlet of Ventosa, which secured the French left flank; on the right the 2d Moroccan Infantry held the east side of Riva Grande.

All morning the enemy harassed the advance with mortar and machine-gun fire from Castelforte and Damiano, and during the afternoon the garrison put up a stiff resistance. Attacks were begun by our forces at 1400 and at 1600, but stopped each time because of insufficient strength. Shortly after a new attack was launched in force at 1700, the enemy was radioing that we were all about the town and that the situation was desperate. The 2d Battalion, 4th Tunisian Infantry, on the south found the entrance to Castelforte blocked by rubble, which was not cleared by the bulldozers until 1930. To the east two infantry platoons and part of the armor advanced up the hill immediately above the town and entered the southeast corner of Castelforte at 1720. The armored detachment on the high ground north of the town gave supporting fire to the attack, which was completely successful. Mopping up continued until well after dark, but Castelforte was firmly in our hands.

The capture of Castelforte opened the way to Coreno. Before the Mountain Corps could advance, however, it was necessary to widen the gap by taking the hills on either side of the road. Mount Rotondo on the south was taken by the 350th Infantry on the afternoon of the 13th, and the French spent most of the day in reducing enemy resistance about Mount Ceschito to the north of the road. This

action involved the co-operation of the 6th Moroccan Infantry to the north, the 2d Moroccan Infantry to the east, and the 4th Tunisian Infantry to the south.

The 3d Battalion, 4th Tunisian Infantry, jumped off from Castelforte at 0500 and worked its way along the hills north of the road under the protection of fire from the 755th Tank Battalion and the 350th Infantry. After noon the battalion swung north, occupied Hill 335, and pushed on toward Mount Ceschito. In order to permit the expansion of our forces in this area the armored elements which remained in reserve, as well as the 3d Algerian Infantry (3<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Tirailleurs Algériens), were sent forward at noon from the east bank of the Garigliano. The 1st Battalion, 4th Tunisian Infantry, which had remained on Mount della Torre, was pulled out and moved up to assist the 3d Battalion in the stiff fighting on Hill 335 and the hills to the north and west.

Thus protected to its rear, the 3d Battalion pushed on to the north. The 6th Moroccan Infantry, relieved from its previous positions by the capture of Mount Feuci, came down the ridge running south from Mount Faito, and the 2d Moroccan Infantry began a frontal attack on the east slopes of the objective. At 1700 the units, approaching from three directions, met on the crest of Mount Ceschito. Over 700 prisoners, including an Army staff officer, were trapped in this brilliant attack. Since the 2d Battalion, 4th Tunisian Infantry, had mopped up Mount Siola in the afternoon, all organized opposition by the enemy on a line from Mount Majo to Mount Ceschito had been crushed. The 2d Moroccan Infantry remained behind to clean out the last German stragglers while the rest of the force drove on.

By the evening of 14 May the French had everywhere broken through the enemy lines. On the right the 1st Motorized Division had reached Sant'Apollinare and was preparing to drive on to San Giorgio. The main thrust by the 2d Moroccan Division in the center had put our forces in firm control of Mount Majo, the key to the Ausonia Defile. Skillful penetrations by the 4th Mountain Division with one regiment of the 3d Algerian Division on the south had gained Castelforte and the hills overlooking the Coreno road. Over 1000 prisoners had been taken, and the 71st Grenadier Division to our front was rapidly disintegrating in the rout. Coordinated, speedy action by the troops of the FEC had thus prepared the way for rapid exploitation to Esperia and to Mount Revole.

## C. *THE DRIVE THROUGH THE PETRELLA MASSIF*

13-19 MAY

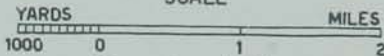
1. *Opening the Way.* (See Map No. 6.) The operation against Castelforte had provided a base of departure for the startling drive of the Mountain Corps

MAP NO 5

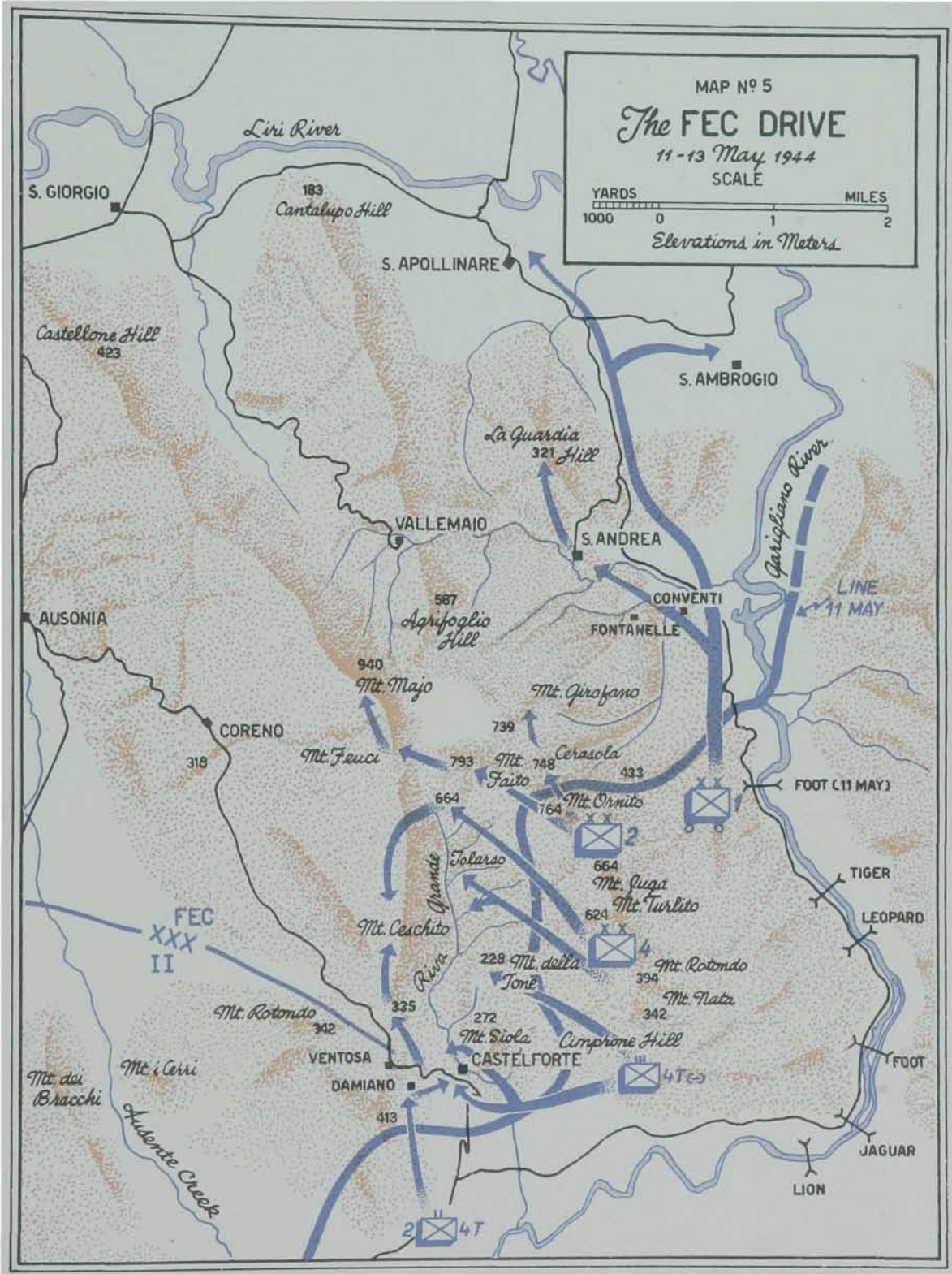
# The FEC DRIVE

11-13 May 1944

SCALE



Elevations in Meters



across the Ausonia Valley, up the stern cliffs on its western side, and over the mountains to the Itri—Pico road. This force consisted of the 1st, 3d, and 4th Groups of Tabors, the 1st Moroccan Infantry of the 4th Mountain Division, and the 2d Battalion, 69th Algerian Artillery Regiment (69<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'Artillerie Algérienne): a total of approximately 12,000 men and 4,000 animals.

Initially the tabors were held in reserve on the east bank of the Garigliano. On the morning of the 12th they began to move forward by the Damiano Bridge, entered Castelforte in the evening behind the forces of the 4th Tunisian Infantry, and moved out promptly from the north end of the town after dark. Cover was provided by tank destroyers of the 7th Tank Destroyer Battalion, which were lent by the 4th Tunisian Infantry.

About 500 yards northwest of Castelforte the tabors turned off the Coreno road and continued west along a trail toward Mount I Cerri. In the valley north of Mount Rotondo they halted and waited throughout the 13th for the other French forces to clean out Ceschito to the north. During this halt Brig. Gen. Augustin Guillaume divided his Mountain Corps into three groups or task forces (groupements) as follows: the 3d Group of Tabors and the 6th Moroccan Infantry; the 4th Group of Tabors and a battalion of the 1st Moroccan Infantry; the 1st Group of Tabors and a second battalion of the 1st Moroccan Infantry. At this time the 6th Moroccan Infantry was still operating under the control of the 4th Mountain Division, but it could be expected to swing west and join the 3d Group of Tabors on completion of the Ceschito action.

The plan of action called for all three groups to move out as soon as Ceschito had fallen. The 3d Group of Tabors under Colonel Bondis would drive northwest along the Coreno road to seize Ausonia or at least to bar enemy counterattacks out of the Ausonia Defile. When the 3d Algerian Division came up, the Bondis Group was to move on Mount Fammera. The other two groups under the direct command of General Guillaume would push west to the break in the Fammera—Civita escarpment at Spigno and then enter the mountains. Advance across the Ausonia road was necessarily dependent upon success by the 88th Division in its mission of seizing the high ground about Mount dei Bracchi and also the Civita crest south of Spigno.

During the night of 13-14 May, after the fall of Ceschito, the three groups fanned out in accordance with their orders. To the south the 1st Group of Tabors with a battalion of the 1st Moroccan Infantry followed the Corps boundary west and by 1430, 14 May, had pushed its advance guard to a point just east of the Ausonia road. Here enemy infantry and tank opposition forced the group to halt; on its left the 753d Tank Battalion of II Corps was held up by a large enemy minefield. The 4th Group of Tabors and a battalion of the 1st Moroccan Infantry moved out in the center and headed northwest, by-passing Avrito Hill on the west.

In the afternoon of the 14th this force came out on the Coreno road but turned west again toward the Ausonia road to positions 1200 yards northwest of the 1st Group of Tabors. Both groups spent the night along the banks of Ausente Creek. To the right the 3d Group of Tabors struck northwest for Ausonia, with the 6th Moroccan Infantry in the hills above. Enemy opposition was light as far as Coreno, and the Bondis Group pushed on toward Ausonia.

The French breakthrough to Mount Majo and the stubborn attacks by II Corps forced the enemy to withdraw the bulk of his shattered forces from the Ausonia Valley during the night of 14-15 May. At dawn on the 15th the 1st Group of Tabors moved west across the Ausente against light opposition; cut just north of Spigno, which the 351st Infantry already held; and by 1130 had gained Mount Castello directly north of the town. The 4th Group of Tabors likewise moved west but halted below the escarpment until the 1st Group of Tabors had gained its foothold. To the north elements of the 3d Group of Tabors scaled Mount Fammera. The way for the dash to Mount Revole was open.

2. *The Goumiers Race West.* During the afternoon of 15 May the Moroccan mountaineers under General Guillaume split into two echelons and began the ascent of the tortuous trail on Mount Strampaduro. In one stretch of 700 yards this path, barely wide enough for a man, rises 400 feet; yet the first echelon scrambled up on horseback and assembled on the first heights of the Petrella massif by 1600. The second echelon contained heavier equipment and made the climb more slowly but no less successfully. No opposition was met in the ascent.

As the drive to Esperia got under way on the north, General Guillaume pressed west along the miserable trails of the mountains. During the night of 15-16 May the goumiers of the 1st and 4th Groups of Tabors kept steadily on the march, except for a brief halt every four hours. Passing below Rave Grande and along La Valle, they crossed the basin of the Fraile by dawn, and at 0600, 16 May, the advance guard had reached the crest of Mount Revole—a gain of 12 miles from the old bridgehead line in 4½ days. Opposition was paltry during this last push, for there were almost no Germans to meet our troops. Once again the daring of our plan, to strike the enemy where he least expected an attack, was proving justified.

During the rest of the 16th the remainder of the goumiers closed at Mount Revole. The exhaustion of men and mules forced a brief halt at this point, while the two battalions of the 1st Moroccan Infantry kept on to positions to the north. By 1200 a battery of the 3d Battalion, 69th Algerian Artillery Regiment, was in position on Polleca Creek 1800 yards to the east of Mount Revole. From the latter could be observed the general enemy withdrawal before II Corps into Itri, but the 75-mm pack howitzers with the goumiers could not reach these tempting targets. Prearranged plans for aerial resupply were carried out on 17 May, when 36 A-20's

of XII Tactical Air Command dropped 40 tons of mixed supplies along the Spigno—Strampaduro—La Valle trail. Recovery of roughly 60 % was reported and proved sufficient to keep operations moving until the pack trains could bring up supplies.

The Mountain Corps now had two objectives: the first to cut the Pico—Itri road, and the second to bring its full weight against the rear of Pico to smash the expected enemy stand on the Hitler Line. On the 17th the goumiers pressed west from Mount Revole in three columns. One group struck out due west for Mount Calvo, about three miles from Mount Revole; a second group turned northwest toward Mount Faggeto; and a third group headed on beyond the second for Serra del Lago. Despite the long marches all three positions were reached by 1800, 17 May. The drive to Mount Calvo proved uneventful, but at its destination the first group met stubborn resistance from German troops defending the enemy withdrawal into Itri. The other two groups ran into enemy details building a road at the northwest end of Valle Piana. Our troops deployed in the hills on each side of the basin and then trapped the enemy workers. Thereafter the two groups separated, and each proceeded to its objective without delay. The battalion of 75-mm howitzers moved to Il Colle and brought the Itri—Pico road under fire during the afternoon of the 17th.

Our advance to Mount Faggeto put us at the outskirts of the enemy defensive lines about Pico. In the evening of the 17th the goumiers on Faggeto met an infantry battalion which had been trucked to the area to strengthen the German defenses. Though the enemy infantry was supported by tanks, the French mountain troops succeeded in setting fire to several of the tanks and trucks, took many prisoners, and drove the remainder back toward Pico. By dawn of the 18th Mount Faggeto and Mount Le Pezze to the southwest were firmly occupied. Farther advance was hampered by supply difficulties, but the troops of General Guillaume occupied Campodimele on the morning of 19 May. The appearance of enemy self-propelled guns on the highway checked the exploitation by our lightly equipped mountain troops to the north, and the Mountain Corps proceeded to concentrate about Campodimele.

Highway 82 itself was definitely cut by this time. Some patrols had crossed the Itri—Pico road in the vicinity of Mount Vele before noon on 19 May. The battalion of mountain artillery on Il Colle had maintained steady harassing fire on the road, and along its eastern side French troops controlled the hills from Mount Calvo to just north of Campodimele. The entry of II Corps into Itri on the afternoon of the 19th protected the left flank of the FEC. On the right flank other French forces had by this time mopped up the Majo district, captured Ausonia and Esperia, and were in position east of Pico to co-operate with the Mountain Corps in an attack on this pivot of the Hitler Line.

## D. THE ADVANCE ON THE RIGHT FLANK

13-19 MAY

1. *Exploitation North from Mount Majo.* (See Map No. 6.) After taking Mount Majo on the afternoon of 13 May the 2d Moroccan Division had not stopped, for it still had the task of exploiting its breakthrough by pressing down the two ridges to the north. The 5th Moroccan Infantry drove north to Agrifoglio Hill, which it occupied by midnight 13-14 May. By-passing the scant opposition, this regiment pushed along the northwestern ridge to Castellone Hill, the objective of the 8th Moroccan Infantry, and occupied the hill by 0945, 14 May. At 1500 the 5th Moroccan Infantry held Santa Lucia Hill overlooking the river road west of San Giorgio. Four and one-half hours later the 4th Moroccan Infantry, which had advanced down the ridge to the east, was on Cantalupo Hill.

Between these two regiments, moving on the ridges, the 8th Moroccan Infantry advanced along both sides of the Vallemaio—San Giorgio road. Here it met the 818th Mountain Pioneer Battalion and also three companies of the 115th Reconnaissance Battalion, which had come by truck from San Giovanni Incarico to Esperia and on by foot to the Vallemaio valley. Neither unit could stop our advance; in the afternoon the German reconnaissance troops received orders to scatter and make their way to the rear as best they could. Mopping up as it advanced, the 8th Moroccan Infantry was well down the valley by dark and then turned west across the Castellone ridge to the village of Castelnuovo by 0930, 15 May. This move put elements of the 2d Moroccan Division in command of the Ausonia Defile and threatened the retreat of the enemy forces still remaining in front of the 3d Algerian Division at Ausonia.

The speed with which the 2d Moroccan Division was able to push north was due in part to the simultaneous thrust by the 1st Motorized Division along the south bank of the Liri River. During the night of 13-14 May artillery of this division was brought across the Garigliano to positions on the road northeast of La Guardia Hill. Early on the 14th the 3d Spahi Reconnaissance Battalion and the 757th Tank Battalion pushed west with the 22d Motorized Battalion from Sant' Apollinare toward San Giorgio. A small detachment of infantry was left on the lower slopes of Cantalupo Hill until the 1st Battalion, 1st Motorized Brigade, could relieve it after noon. The rest of the advance guard moved rapidly and entered the village of San Giorgio at 1930. This point did not prove to be a center of enemy resistance in itself, but once our troops had entered it they found all the western exits commanded by enemy artillery and antitank fire from the west, including one 88-mm gun firing directly down the road into the village. Throughout the 15th

German antitank guns prevented our advance west from the village. Another group which was to cross the Cantalupo ridge and drive down the Vallemajo valley meanwhile found the Sant'Andrea—Vallemajo track impassable for its medium tanks, but the success of the 2d Moroccan Division in clearing this area and the unopposed entry into San Giorgio made prosecution of this thrust unnecessary.

By dark on the 15th the 2d Moroccan Division and the 1st Motorized Division had mopped up the area north of Mount Majo as far as the Liri. The 5th Moroccan Infantry, extended on the heights about Santa Lucia Hill, met an enemy counterattack late on the 15th which pushed it back temporarily, but early on the 16th our troops regained their ground. Most elements of the 2d Moroccan Division had by this time been relieved by the 1st Motorized Division on the north and by the 3d Algerian Division on the south; the last troops on Santa Lucia Hill, the 5th Moroccan Infantry and the 2d Battalion, 8th Moroccan Infantry, were relieved and moved back to the 2d Moroccan Division reserve areas east of the Gargigliano on the night of 16-17 May. During the 16th the infantry of the 1st Motorized Division silenced the enemy antitank guns beyond San Giorgio, and the division moved west toward Mount d'Oro.

2. *Clearing the North End of the Ausonia Valley.* While the 2d Moroccan Division and the 1st Motorized Division co-operated north of Mount Majo, the 4th Mountain Division and the 3d Algerian Division, the latter under Maj. Gen. de Goislard de Monsabert, cleaned up the area west of Mount Majo past Ausonia. Distinct divisional zones were disregarded in this operation as troops of all units sliced through the enemy defenses in a speedy attack to gain the Ausonia Defile and positions on Mount Fammera for the drive on Esperia.

The 3d Group of Tabors and the 6th Moroccan Infantry under Colonel Bondis led the way up the Coreno—Ausonia road during the early morning of 14 May. This task force did not start out as a single unit, for the 6th Moroccan Infantry had just cleared Mount Ceschito and could not join the 3d Group of Tabors in the Mount Rotondo area without causing considerable delay. Instead, the goumiers headed for Ausonia by themselves, while the infantry regiment backtracked to the north and gradually worked around to Coreno by following the hill crests above the Coreno—Castelforte road. To the rear the 3d Algerian Infantry of the 3d Algerian Division was advancing along the road proper but was slowed considerably by enemy demolitions.

The 6th Moroccan Infantry moved in on Coreno from the east in the afternoon and occupied it without opposition at 1605, the enemy having evacuated the village in the previous night. Meanwhile the 3d Group of Tabors had pushed around to the southwest of Coreno and gained the slopes south of Ausonia about 1600. The 3d Algerian Infantry reached Coreno almost immediately after its capture and



relieved the 6th Moroccan Infantry, which marched rapidly along the road to join the goumiers. After several unsuccessful efforts during the night 14-15 May to enter Ausonia the 3d Group of Tabors by-passed the resistance and moved on west, leaving the small enemy rear guards to the French infantry.

Though Ausonia itself held out until noon of the 15th, the bulk of our forces detoured about it and continued their drives to the north and west. Elements of the 3d Algerian Division came up in the morning, relieved the 6th Moroccan Infantry, and pushed a detachment of armor north to Castelnuovo, which the 8th Moroccan Infantry had taken at 0930. By 1135 the tanks held Castelnuovo and two other villages on the track to San Giorgio. Infantry then consolidated this area while the armor struck north on the main road in an effort to reach the Esperia road junction. A mile northwest of Castelnuovo enemy antitank weapons opened fire from the slopes of La Bastia Hill and stopped the tanks; evidently the Germans had concentrated their rear guards in this area to deny us access to the Esperia road.

After regrouping our armor attacked the enemy positions at 1930 but bogged down quickly under enemy close-range fire. The tanks then withdrew and prepared to attack again at dawn on the 16th. Meanwhile the 3d Algerian Infantry had followed the road west from Ausonia to Selvacava at the base of the Fammera escarpment. This little hamlet was deserted, and the infantry moved north to join the armor and infantry below La Bastia Hill. A fresh attack at daybreak on the 16th silenced the antitank guns and eliminated the enemy garrison on the lower slopes. A holding force was left to contain the German troops higher up the hill, and the rest of the French slipped on by to the north; by 0800 infantry patrols had pushed on to the junction of the San Giorgio and Esperia roads.

In the afternoon the 3d Algerian Infantry moved up to the junction and beat off an attack by the 3d Battalion, 200th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, a fresh unit which was committed in vain for the defense of Esperia. The 2d Battalion, 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment,, which came up from Fondi to Esperia during the day, suffered heavy losses and was finally dispersed by our artillery. The French thrusts were moving so rapidly and were so numerous that the German command south of the Liri found itself completely unable to cope with the situation.

While the 3d Algerian Division was thus driving north from Ausonia to get in position for the Esperia attack, the 3d Group of Tabors had advanced west. During the night of 14-15 May, before the fall of Ausonia, the goumiers had pushed to the base of the Fammera escarpment, and by 1100, 15 May, elements of this force on horseback had ascended the steep slopes at a small break southwest of Ausonia between Mount Fammera and Mount Chiavica. To their south the main force of the Mountain Corps was at this same time driving up to Mount Castello in preparation for the drive on Revole. During the afternoon the 6th Moroccan

Infantry, relieved at Ausonia, moved west to join the main body of the 3d Group of Tabors at Selvacava, and after dark our troops made their way to the top of the escarpment. During the 16th they drove west below Esperia, brushing aside the 171st Field Replacement Battalion.

3. *The Drive on Esperia and Mount d'Oro.* By the morning of 17 May the forces on the right flank of the FEC were ready to launch their attack on Esperia. The 2d Moroccan Division had mopped up the ridges north of Mount Majo and was now relieved. The 1st Motorized Division, which had pinched it out on the north, lay west of San Giorgio. On the left flank of this division the 3d Algerian Division was in command of the Ausonia—Esperia road junction; in the hills above, the Bondis Group was 2000 yards south of Esperia at dawn and was threatening to encircle the village from the west as the 3d Algerian Division closed in from the east. Additional armor had been freed from mopping up in the Ausonia Valley and joined the division during the night.

For the attack on Esperia the 3d Algerian Division was divided into three groups or task forces, two of infantry and one of armor. The 4th Tunisian Infantry, which had borne the brunt of the Castelforte attack, was in reserve together with the 3d Spahi Reconnaissance Battalion. In addition to the Bondis Group on the south, another group (Louchet Group) had been formed from the 4th Mountain Division to operate below Esperia.

All three groups of the 3d Algerian Division advanced on the 17th along the Ausonia—Esperia road to a point about 1500 yards east of Esperia. Here Colonel Chappuis, commanding two battalions of the 7th Algerian Infantry and a battalion of artillery, turned left over the north slopes of Mount Fammera and headed for Mount del Lago, a commanding point southwest of Esperia. The other groups proceeded toward their objective on the road and advanced cautiously into the town just before noon. The main enemy force had pulled out hastily, leaving only snipers behind. The van of the 3d Algerian Division, with medium tanks in the lead, pursued rapidly in the hope of regaining contact. Just beyond the town it came on a graveyard of German tanks, guns, and vehicles which had been smashed earlier by our Corps artillery, but no opposition was met.

At the point where the road begins to drop down into the Monticelli valley the armor halted to give the accompanying infantry time to check the flanks and catch up. Troops of the 3d Algerian Infantry secured positions on the slopes of Mount d'Oro to the northeast, and the armor moved forward again just before dusk. Suddenly enemy antitank guns opened up from the hills on both sides, from Sant'Oliva to the front, and from the crest of Mount d'Oro. Caught in a trap, our armor beat a hasty retreat toward Esperia, stopping finally behind the cover afforded by a crest just west of the town. On the north side of this mountain the 1st Motorized Division

advance elements had been halted by extensive minefields and by mortar and automatic-weapon fire from Mount d'Oro and the north side of the Liri. The enemy had been discovered, and the period of our easy pursuit was over.

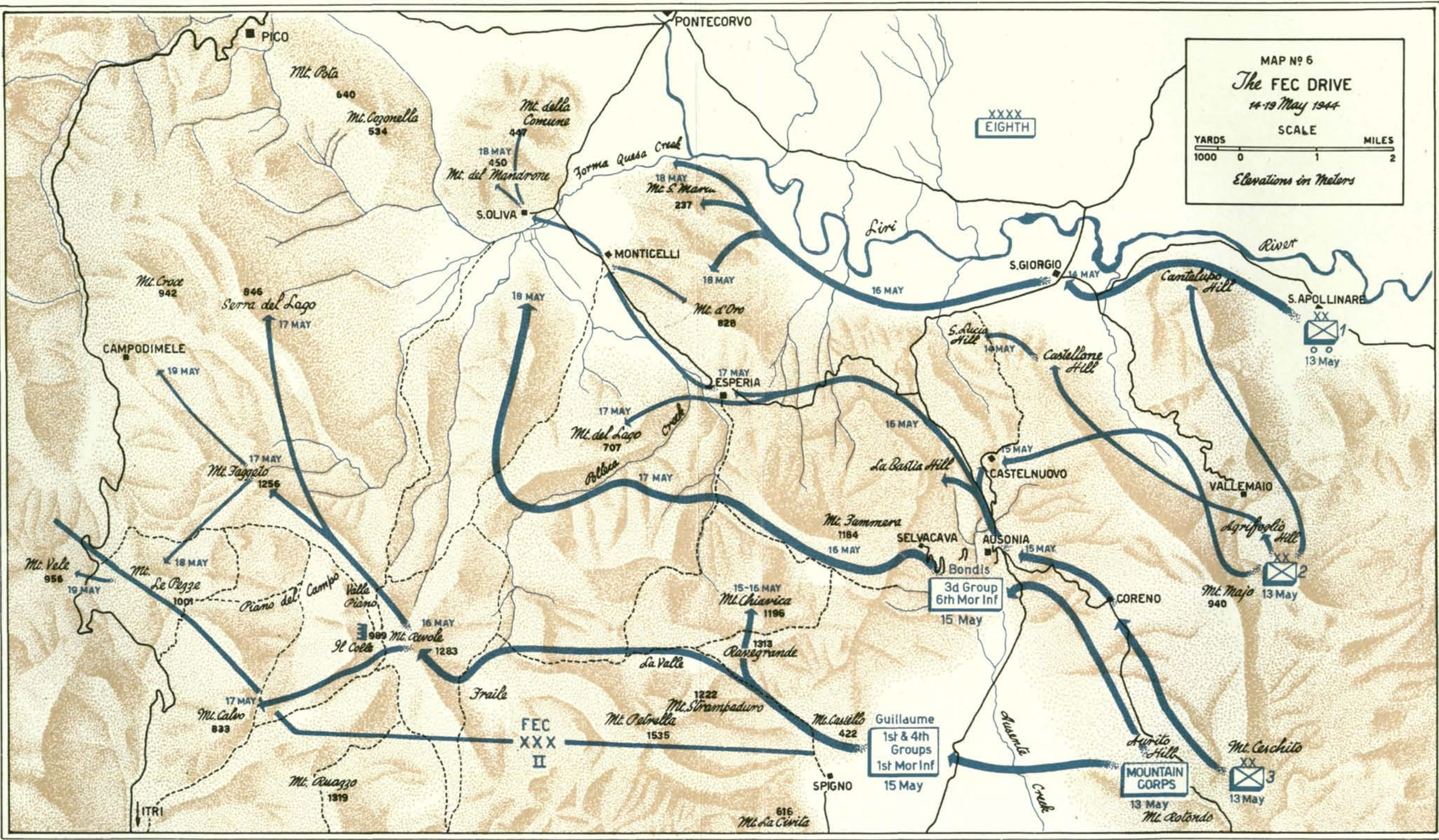
On the 18th our advance met stubborn resistance, but important gains were secured. The 3d Group of Tabors had pushed forward from Mount Fammera to the hills south of Mount del Lago on the 17th, and curved north by noon of the 18th to the heights directly south of and commanding Sant'Oliva. During the night of 17-18 May part of the 3d Algerian Infantry advanced up Mount d'Oro from the neighborhood of Monticelli and gained the crest by 1030 in conjunction with an attack by the 1st Motorized Division on the two hills to the north. Other elements of the 3d Algerian Infantry cleared Monticelli itself, routing a company of the 1st Battalion, 9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. This unit belonged to the 26th Panzer Division; its appearance was the first indication that powerful reinforcements had been thrown in the line to stop the French drive on Pico.

After the capture of the valuable terrain feature of Mount d'Oro infantry of the 1st Motorized Division worked forward to the east bank of Forma Quesa Creek by 1400. To their left the 3d Algerian Division pressed on to Sant'Oliva. Enemy resistance grew stronger but seemed to be falling back on Pico. In the rolling swells along the upper reaches of Forma Quesa Creek our troops met steel pillboxes of Cassino fame; some were defended, others were abandoned, but the French came in from the southeast and took most of them on the flank. By 1400 the village of Sant'Oliva was completely cleared; by midnight the infantry pushed patrols up Mount del Mandrone and Mount della Comune. Dawn of the 19th found the enemy rapidly growing more sensitive to our efforts, and the French troops north and west of Sant'Oliva received mortar and artillery fire from enemy emplacements about Mount Leucio to the north.

#### E. *SUMMARY OF THE FEC ATTACK*

On the morning of 19 May the FEC had in line three divisions plus the tabors. The French front extended along the east side of the Itri—Pico road from Mount Calvo to Campodimele, then cut across the mountains to the hill mass west and north of Sant'Oliva, and down the east bank of Forma Quesa Creek to the Liri. The left flank was held by two groups of tabors of the Mountain Corps with two battalions of infantry; in the center were the Bondis Group with one group of tabors and two battalions of infantry, the Louchet Group with five battalions of infantry, and the bulk of the 3d Algerian Division. The 1st Motorized Division on the right

MAP No 6  
**The FEC DRIVE**  
 14-19 May 1944  
 SCALE  
 YARDS 1000 0 1 2 MILES  
 Elevations in Meters



flank curved about the west and north slopes of Mount d'Oro. Since Eighth Army in the Liri Valley had fallen behind the FEC from the opening days of the attack, the 1st Motorized Division was forced to keep a considerable part of its strength along the south bank of the Liri River and constantly met enemy fire from the north bank.

The rapid advance of the FEC had minimized the difficulties of supply and artillery support. Movement of truck columns up the Castelforte—Ausonia road was limited by the bottleneck at the curves below Castelforte and by the generally poor condition of the road, but the routes Minturno—Ausonia and Sant'Ambrogio—San Giorgio—Esperia were now open. Engineers had thrown additional bridges across the upper reaches of the Garigliano opposite Sant'Ambrogio and had performed yeoman work in repairing or by-passing the numerous demolitions. Air resupply had assisted the Mountain Corps in the most difficult stages of its supply; after 19 May Highway 7 was rapidly opened to Itri, from which point supplies could be brought north on Highway 82.

The light artillery of the 4th Mountain Division had kept up well, and the regular battalions of the other divisions found no difficulty in selecting positions after we had reached Ausonia. Four battalions of the 13th Field Artillery Brigade were out of range on 14 May, but Corps artillery generally moved forward on 14-15 May to positions below Castelforte and west of Sant'Ambrogio. On 17-18 May the Corps battalions again displaced to the vicinity of Ausonia and San Giorgio. By 19 May the only units which had not yet moved were the 985th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm gun) and the 698th Field Artillery Battalion (240-mm howitzer), and both of these were to move at least in part on 20 May in preparation for the attack on Pico.

The drive by the FEC had been a fluid operation, which cannot be easily schematized. Regimental and even divisional organization had been broken down on occasion; units crossed the paths of each other and not infrequently wound up on the objectives assigned to someone else; considerable pockets of the enemy were by-passed in the drive to reach the principal keypoints. In his critique of our operations Marshal Kesselring noted that:

British and American tactics were again methodical. Local successes were seldom exploited. On the other hand the French, particularly the Moroccans, fought with great élan, and exploited each local success by concentrating immediately all available forces at the weakened point.

By the employment of such tactics the drive of the FEC in the first eight days of the May attack was extraordinarily successful. Opening with its initial capture of

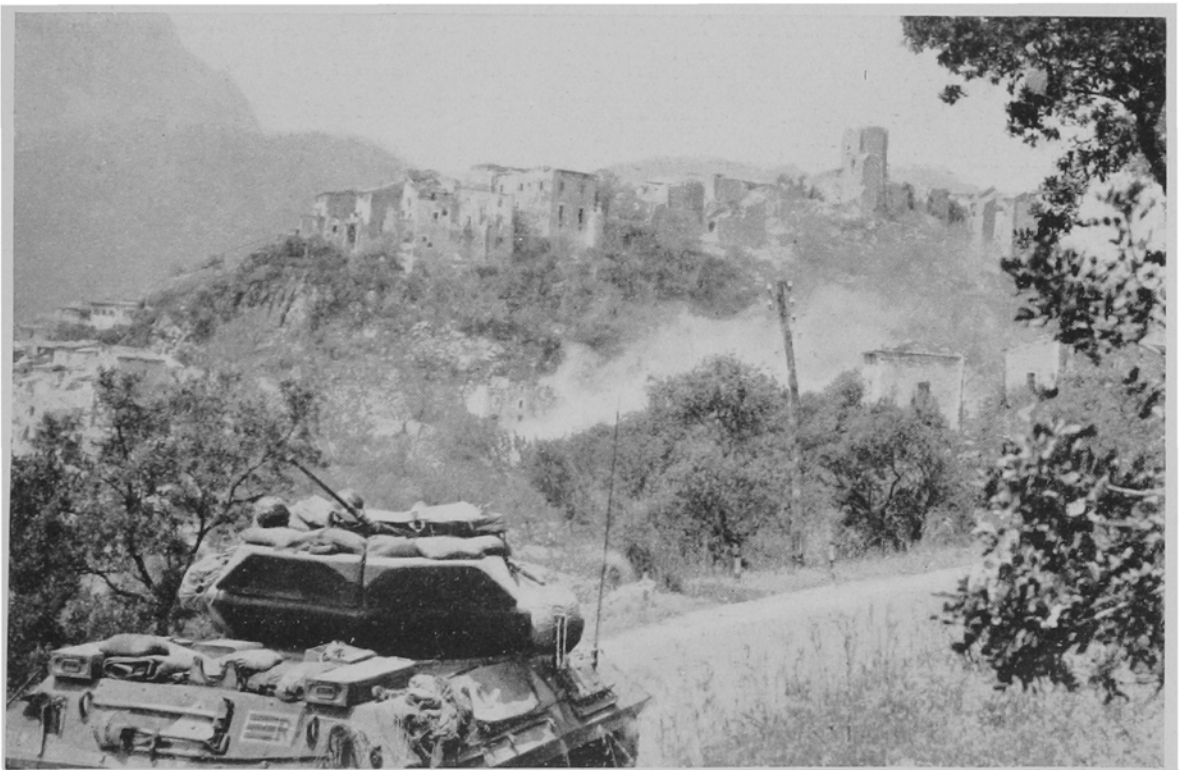
Mount Faito and Cerasola Hill, the 2d Moroccan Division had smashed through to Mount Majo by the evening of 13 May. This penetration brought the collapse of German positions on either side. The 1st Motorized Division had cut north along the hills to Sant'Apollinare and trapped a large force of the enemy; the 4th Mountain Division had carried out two pincers movements, one on Castelforte and the other on Ceschito, to break through the German lines south of Mount Majo.

The action from the 14th was particularly bold. While the 2d Moroccan Division and the 3d Algerian Division concentrated on the Ausonia Defile, the mountain troops had dashed across the Ausonia Valley, up the steep cliffs on the west side, and through the Petrella massif with great rapidity and utter disregard for the safety of their flanks. After reaching the Itri—Pico road these troops had swung north toward Pico and lay ready on 19 May to begin fresh operations against this strongpoint on the Hitler Line. The 3d Algerian Division and the 1st Motorized Division had encircled and then taken Mount d'Oro, annexing Esperia in their stride, and had advanced to the last bastions guarding the eastern approaches to Pico.

The operations of the FEC during the period 11-19 May form one of the most spectacular and most important parts of the entire drive on Rome. Large bodies of troops had been moved through terrain which the Germans deemed impassable and had arrived at their objectives in fighting condition. The Gustav Line had been broken, and the Hitler Line was so outflanked by our dominance of Mount d'Oro and our threat to Pico that it could not long remain tenable. The advance of the FEC south of the Liri was of inestimable value to the British drive up the Liri Valley, and also greatly assisted the progress of II Corps along the coast to the left. Together with II Corps the FEC had by 19 May carried out almost all the operations directed by General Clark in his Field Order No. 6.



*The goumiers move forward in preparation for their drive to Mount Revole.*



*The Fammera escarpment (on the left) towers over the town of Ausonia.*



*A tank passes a ruined village on the north slopes of Mount Cianelli.*



*Santa Maria was a mass of shattered rubble when our troops entered the town.*