

CHAPTER IV

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To the Ombrone-Orcia Valley

AT noon on 11 June Fifth Army pursued the Germans northwestward with two fresh command groups directing operations. IV Corps was on the left and the FEC on the right after completion of their relief of VI Corps and II Corps respectively. Comparatively fresh troops were available for the continuance of the chase, especially in the French zone where the two FEC divisions initially committed, the 1st Motorized Division and the 3d Algerian Infantry Division, had been out of heavy combat nearly two weeks. Only one American division, the 36th, was in action on the IV Corps side. It had been following behind the swift advance of Combat Command A of the 1st Armored Division north of Rome. Although its men had been constantly on the move since passing Rome, it had not been engaged in any extensive fighting, its action behind the armor having been confined largely to mopping up operations. The 361st Regimental Combat Team was attached, giving the 36th Division four regimental combat teams.

The 34th Division was resting in the vicinity of Tarquinia, where it had moved from Civitavecchia to make way for supply depots being set up near the port. The 1st Armored Division was rehabilitating near Bracciano, and the other two French divisions, the 2d Moroccan Infantry Division and the 4th Mountain Division, were in FEC reserve. The 85th and 88th Divisions were en route to rest areas south and west of Rome. Other American and British divisions around Rome were in the process of leaving Fifth Army. The 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate) was attached to IV Corps and remained with the 34th Division. Other major VI Corps elements turned over to IV Corps were the 36th and 39th Engineer Combat Regiments, the 1st Armored Group, and the 6th Armored Field Artillery Group of self-propelled 105-mm howitzers.

The left flank of the Fifth Army line lay along the coast well to the north of Tarquinia, forward elements of the 141st Infantry being within four miles of the

Orbetello Isthmus along Highway 1. The 142d Infantry and 143d Infantry were inland from the highway due east of the 141st Infantry. The 117th Reconnaissance Squadron, which had been attached to IV Corps when II Corps was relieved, was working north along small roads near the right boundary of the IV Corps zone and screening the advance of the 36th Division. The 3d Algerian Division on the FEC left was within sight of Valentano, and on the right the 1st Motorized Division, advancing up Highway 2 north of Viterbo, was close to the southeastern shore of Lake Bolsena.

The missions of the FEC and IV Corps remained the same as those of their predecessors: to continue to push forward in their respective zones, the FEC along the axis of the Acquapendente—Siena—Poggibonsi—Castelfiorentino road, and the Americans up Highway 1. The 91st Reconnaissance Squadron (reinforced), now with IV Corps, was preparing to cover the roads east of the 36th Division, to add strength to the Corps right flank, and to advance in the zone from which the 1st Armored Division had been relieved. In a section devoid of any major roads, it was also to maintain contact with FEC units.

Enemy formations were slowly becoming more cohesive but there was no indication as yet that a determined stand was to be expected on the immediate front. A reported defensive line in the vicinity of Viterbo had fallen without any protracted resistance, and the enemy action continued to be of the rearguard type, weak to moderate as the FEC began its task on the inland flank, slightly more aggressive in the coastal sector. The 162d Turcoman Grenadier Division was being encountered in strength for the first time by IV Corps, and it was evident the enemy had thrown in this fresh division in an effort to slow our pursuit. Attached to this division was the 871st Grenadier Regiment. These troops, with a sprinkling of men from many other German divisions who had been hastily organized into independent battle groups, held a front of about 30 miles. The principal enemy element on the FEC front was the 356th Grenadier Division with a wide variety of independent units also being met in this zone. Over-all command apparently was held by XIV Panzer Corps.

A. *IV CORPS ON THE LEFT*

11-20 JUNE

The 36th Division was strongly reinforced when it took over the main IV Corps effort along the coast. (*See Map No. 4.*) In addition to its regularly assigned troops the division had the 361st Regimental Combat Team, the 753d Tank Battalion, and the 636th Tank Destroyer Battalion attached, while both the 91st and 117th Reconnaissance Squadrons were operating in support of the division advance, the former

on the right and the latter largely screening the infantry advance. On 11 June the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron was attached directly to the division. Supporting Corps artillery and armor further backed the infantry.

The immediate objective of the division was Grosseto, a medium-sized city with good airport facilities located just north of the Ombrone River near the junction of Highways 1 and 73. Grosseto is situated almost in the center of the flat valley formed by the Ombrone as it nears the sea. This valley is nearly 15 miles square and is criss-crossed by scores of small canals and drainage ditches. Between Grosseto and the advanced positions of the 141st Infantry on Highway 1 was the town of Orbetello, where causeways link the steep, rocky peninsula of Mount Argentario and its port of Santo Stefano to the mainland. Orbetello was approximately six miles beyond the front line on the morning of 11 June. Four miles north of Orbetello Highway 74 turns east from Highway 1; Grosseto is about 18 miles farther north. Low hills come almost to the beach line for much of this distance, especially in the Orbetello section, forming a defile through which Highway 1 passes. Highway 74 follows the narrow valley of the Albegna River inland; between this valley and Grosseto are more hills, while the entire eastern portion of the division zone was a mass of hills from 500 to 1000 feet in altitude, practically unbroken north to the Ombrone. South of the Albegna Valley the eastern portion of the zone is almost roadless. At Magliano, four miles north of the river, a road net begins which leads northwest to Grosseto and northeast to Scansano. The main axis of the division advance continued to be Highway 1, which runs within a few hundred yards of the sea from south of Orbetello to the little town of Bengodi, five miles north of the mouth of the Albegna River. From that point the road gradually curves inland until at Grosseto it is almost seven miles from the sea.

General Walker, 36th Division commander, outlined his plans at 2030, 10 June, to go into effect the following morning. During the night the 141st Infantry would relieve the 361st Infantry in forward positions along Highway 1, while the 142d Infantry would advance on Capalbio, a small village three miles inland. From Capalbio it was to push northwest parallel to the highway to reach the Magliano—Grosseto road and then advance along that axis. The 143d and 361st Infantry would be initially in reserve. The advance was to be carried out as rapidly as possible, the rate depending on the ability of artillery to displace forward to cover the foot troops.

1. *Action to the Ombrone River.* The 141st Infantry relieved the 361st Infantry astride Highway 1 at midnight 10-11 June in the vicinity of Nunziatelli, six miles southeast of Orbetello. The 361st Infantry had been blocked most of the previous day by heavy German artillery fire coming from the hills south of Orbetello. The relieving regiment, in column of battalions led by the 1st Battalion, moved out immediately after taking over and progressed forward two miles without opposition

until 0230, when leading elements walked into a German ambush and road block, heavily defended by artillery and infantry.

The 1st Battalion was pinned down along the highway, while the 2d and 3d Battalions swung off in an enveloping move to the right. The 2d Battalion attacked against Mount Capalbiaccio, a 700-foot peak about one mile north of the highway, and several lesser hills. It made some progress until the Germans counterattacked strongly in mid-morning. No friendly artillery was then in position to help repel this assault, and one company of the 2d Battalion was overrun. A force of two companies of Germans infiltrated in the wheat fields between the 1st Battalion, still along the road, and the 2d Battalion. The 3d Battalion was rushed into this threatening gap, and the 2d Battalion, 361st Infantry, came up as additional help. Artillery support became available soon after noon, and the lines were restored along this portion of the front by the end of the day, although the 2d Battalion was stalled in the mountains. The 2d Battalion, 361st Infantry, was sent over to back up this unit, which attacked again at 2000. The battle see-sawed fiercely most of the night until a final push at 0545, 12 June, drove the Germans off Mount Capalbiaccio, which dominated the main portion of the German position. The enemy then began a withdrawal.

At noon on 12 June the 3d Battalion, 141st Infantry, was attached to Task Force Ramey, a provisional force which was committed on the right of the 36th Division. The 1st and 2d Battalions kept up pressure along the road, and Task Force Dubois, made up of a reconnaissance platoon from the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron, a platoon of tanks, a platoon of tank destroyers, and Company K, 361st Infantry, finally broke through the Highway 1 road block in the late afternoon. The 143d Infantry passed through the 141st Infantry, followed the task force forward, and before dark reached Highway 74. The enemy put up little resistance after his Nunziatelli position was broken and did not attempt to defend the Orbetello sector. The remaining two battalions of the 141st Infantry were also attached to Task Force Ramey and moved to their new zone on the Corps right flank.

While this stiff battle was raging near the coast, the 142d Infantry was having almost as hard a fight through the rugged hills on the division right flank. Jumping off from an assembly area five miles southeast of Capalbio at dawn on 11 June, the regiment advanced over the rough country and reached the town before noon without resistance. Just beyond the town enemy fire from the high ground to the north was received. After reorganizing, the 2d and 3d Battalions attacked in mid-afternoon against hills to the north and northeast of Capalbio and in an afternoon of heavy fighting gained high points about three miles beyond Capalbio. The regiment advanced again at dawn on 12 June with infantry working through the hills and the supporting tanks moving through the small valleys. The enemy had departed during

the night, and with practically no enemy contact leading elements consolidated the high ground south of Highway 74. When reconnaissance units encountered a group of German tanks in the Albegna Valley, artillery fire directed on them destroyed two and dispersed the others in the only real action of the day. Still farther on the right flank elements of the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron entered Manciano without opposition.

Division plans to cross the Albegna in a night assault were discarded when all the bridges were found blown; the water was too deep in the 143d Infantry zone to permit fording either by infantry or by armor. Both regiments attacked at dawn on 13 June, crossing on footbridges prepared by the engineers. The 143d Infantry advanced with its 3d Battalion on the left and 2d Battalion on the right. No opposition was encountered most of the day until the smaller but deeper Osa River was reached just south of Bengodi. On the right the 142d Infantry also had little difficulty advancing north across the valley, but Magliano was strongly defended.

Elements of the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron, tanks, and tank destroyers spearheading the advance made their way within a mile of the town by noon with the 1st and 2d Battalions, 142d Infantry, about two miles behind them. Heavy fire coming from Magliano itself and from the hills to the north held them off. The 1st Battalion moved to the southeast of the town, and the 2d Battalion attempted to by-pass it on the west, but heavy resistance developed all along the line. Armored elements and parts of the 2d Battalion reached the outskirts by 1500 when heavy street fighting developed. At dark the enemy still held the major portion of the town. By morning of 14 June resistance broke. At 0700 the 2d Battalion wiped out final pockets of opposition within Magliano and outposted the position while the 1st and 3d Battalions advanced toward the northwest. Moderately heavy mortar and artillery fire continued to fall on our advancing troops as the enemy began a withdrawal toward Grosseto. The two battalions launched an attack at 1245 to seize high ground on both sides of the Magliano—Montiano—Grosseto road. This attack progressed favorably; by 1600 the objectives generally two miles beyond Magliano had been occupied. The 361st Infantry relieved the 142d Infantry here at darkness and prepared to continue the attack astride the road. This relief was consistent with a set policy of almost daily rotation of troops, which provided relatively fresh men in the assault echelons.

Hard fighting was also experienced by the 143d Infantry along Highway 1 early on 14 June. Crossing bridges over the Osa built by engineers during the night, the 2d and 3d Battalions engaged in heavy battling for the high ground on both sides of the highway north of Bengodi. The battalions jumped off at 0400 and about five hours later had seized the summits, taking 50 prisoners and 5 artillery pieces. Enemy infantry resistance slackened as the push was resumed in the afternoon and

the 142d Infantry advanced on the right. For the first time heavy German armor was encountered when a group of Mark VI tanks opened fire on the advancing infantry, but they were driven off by friendly artillery. By mid-afternoon a bridge was completed on the highway, and the armor of Task Force Dubois rolled on up the center to a point about two miles north of Bengodi where the entire regiment dug in for the night.

2. *Clearing the Grosseto Area.* Reconnaissance patrols entered Grosseto on 15 June while the main body of the division covered an average of eight miles to reach the Ombrone River all along the front. The 143d Infantry, with the 2d and 3d Battalions straddling Highway 1, advanced before dawn and at first light took the hills on both sides of the road in the vicinity of Collecchio, a highway village six miles south of the river. A steady, all-day advance against machine-gun and mortar fire carried the regiment forward to the Ombrone. Much difficulty was encountered with demolished crossings over a myriad of small streams and canals which cut across the southern edge of the valley. By 1900 forward units had reached the river line, less than two miles south of the city, and a ford was found a mile to the east. As darkness fell the regiment began to cross the stream without encountering serious resistance.

On the right of the division zone the 361st Infantry kept pace with the push up the highway. Screened by the 36th Reconnaissance Troop in front and the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron angling in on the right from captured Scansano, the infantry advanced along the Magliano—Grosseto road after relieving the 142d Infantry, and by 0530 entered Montiano, which was taken by the 1st Battalion. The foot elements then turned off the road and advanced due north cross-country toward the Ombrone east of Grosseto. The cut-up country, with twisting and turning trails and a maze of hills, afforded many opportunities for small delaying actions by the Germans, but by steady pushing the troops reached the river banks about the same time as the units coming up the main highway. Heavy minefields were encountered and the enemy's demolition program was comprehensive. To the east of the 361st Infantry the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron forced a crossing over the stream against some resistance about three miles east of Grosseto and sent mechanized patrols into the town at 2130. The patrols found only a few snipers.

The 143d Infantry successfully placed all its battalions on the north bank before dawn and moved west into Grosseto along a paved road, protected from enemy fire by a high bank which ran along the north side of the highway. Soon after daylight on 16 June the city was occupied in strength, and patrols fanned out across the flat country north and northwest for about five miles. All roads were heavily mined; while no enemy infantry were encountered, medium-caliber artillery fire began falling around the city from guns located near Montepescali, a little town on high ground

seven miles to the north which covered the junction of Highways 1 and 73. A perfect Y is formed by the roads here where Highway 1 swings sharply west and then northwest and Highway 73 runs northeast on its twisting course to Siena. Montepescali lies on the northwestern corner of a mass of hills, which rise along the north bank of the Ombrone and dominate the flat lands on the east of Highway 1 between the river and Highway 73. It would be necessary to clear these hills to secure the lateral highway.

Four miles east of Grosseto, in the vicinity of the hamlet of Istia, the 361st Infantry advancing north in its zone could find no natural crossing and was forced to wait until footbridges were constructed across the Ombrone. The regiment was unable to get to the north side until after daylight when the crossing was made under enemy fire, but by noon all battalions were across and attacking the nearest high ground overlooking the river. By nightfall the regiment was about a mile north of the stream.

Though the crossing of the Ombrone had been made by foot troops without great difficulty, it was necessary to erect bridges to bring across vehicles and supporting artillery before the pursuit could be continued in force. Engineers worked all through 17 June preparing crossings over the river and the Canal Diversivo, a wide drainage ditch north of Grosseto. The infantry took advantage of the delay to improve their positions all along the 36th Division front in preparation for the co-ordinated Corps attack on 18 June. The 143d Infantry pushed patrols farther out into the valley and up Highway 1 without contacting any large enemy force. Meanwhile the 361st Infantry moved forward in the rough ground, taking Hills 177 and 192 and Mount Mosconia, a 1000-foot knob 3 miles north of the river and about 4 miles northeast of Grosseto. The 517th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team under Lt. Col. George R. Walton was attached to the 36th Division and was placed on the right flank, solidly filling the gap between the division and Task Force Ramey, which was advancing on the east toward Campagnatico. The IV Corps plan of attack called for the 36th Division to clear all the high ground southeast of Highway 73 while the task force came up on the right flank through Campagnatico and Paganico and cut Highway 73 below the town of Roccastrada.

The assault began at dawn on 18 June. The three infantry regiments advanced abreast on a front of only five miles, the 143d Infantry on the left, the 361st Infantry in the center, and the paratroopers on the right. The rough country was made more difficult by extensive minefields, though enemy resistance was moderate. The 143d Infantry, with the easiest terrain to cover, moved directly against Montepescali; the 361st Infantry was pointed toward the secondary road from Grosseto to Batignano, a village in the center of the hill mass. The village of Montorsaio, farther into the hills to the northeast, was the objective of the 517th Parachute

Infantry, which also was charged with maintaining contact with Task Force Ramey. Gains of approximately three miles were made the first day, the greatest advance being recorded in the 143d Infantry zone. The center force succeeded in opening the road to within a mile of Batignano.

Heavier going was experienced on the left the following day, but the 143d Infantry successfully pushed its 2d Battalion to the edge of the wooded area about a mile south of Montepescali after bucking up against heavy machine-gun and mortar fire. The Germans hastily removed their artillery, which had been hidden in the woods, and Grosseto was freed from harassing artillery fire. The other two regiments registered much greater gains in the center and on the right. The 361st Infantry took Batignano in its stride as the heavily pounded Germans began to fall back, and by nightfall our line had been advanced to within two miles of Highway 73 in the center, with forward patrols of the 361st Infantry probing toward Sticciano, a small village atop a hill just south of the road. The 517th Parachute Infantry moved forward nearly 6 miles during the day, occupying Montorsaio and consolidating positions along a 1200-foot ridge which dominated Highway 73, 6 miles northeast of the Highway 1 junction. A German withdrawal was carried out along the entire front the night of 19-20 June; at dawn elements of the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron climbed into Montepescali, closely followed by the 143d Infantry. Good progress was also being made by Task Force Ramey, and the 361st Infantry was pulled back into division reserve with the paratroop battalions extending west to take in the vacated zone and complete the last stages of the mopping up of the hill country.

IV Corps was making preparations to commit the 1st Armored Division on the Corps right when its zone became wider and the contour of the coastline bent sharply northwest. On 20 June the direction of the 36th Division advance was changed from north to northwest. The 142d Infantry, which had been resting, moved northwest from Grosseto with the mission of securing the high ground south of Highway 1 on the northwest edge of the Ombrone Valley. No opposition was met in this operation, and the town of Giuncarico and the ridge south of Highway 1 were cleared without trouble. It became evident the enemy had withdrawn to the north of the paved road. On 21 June the 143d Infantry, having completed mopping up the junction of Highways 1 and 73, turned sharply left across the valley and attacked the high ground north of Highway 1. The regiment entered the hills again north of Giuncarico and established a solid front with the 142d Infantry on the south. The 517th Parachute Infantry eliminated the last resistance southeast of Highway 73.

3. *Right Flank Task Force.* After being shifted from II Corps to IV Corps the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron was committed again almost immediately, going into the line on 12 June as Task Force Ellis to operate through the area between the

main forces of IV Corps and the FEC. This zone was a sizeable gap from five to six miles wide along the right boundary of IV Corps which contained a large network of minor roads and trails. By the night of 12 June the squadron had reached the general line Ischia—Valentano and was moving northwest in its zone after leaving a force to contact the French at Valentano. Progress was fairly rapid with only slight enemy resistance. Many of the roads were almost inadequate for vehicular traffic, and the advance was further impeded by mines and demolitions which necessitated much dismounted searching for suitable routes.

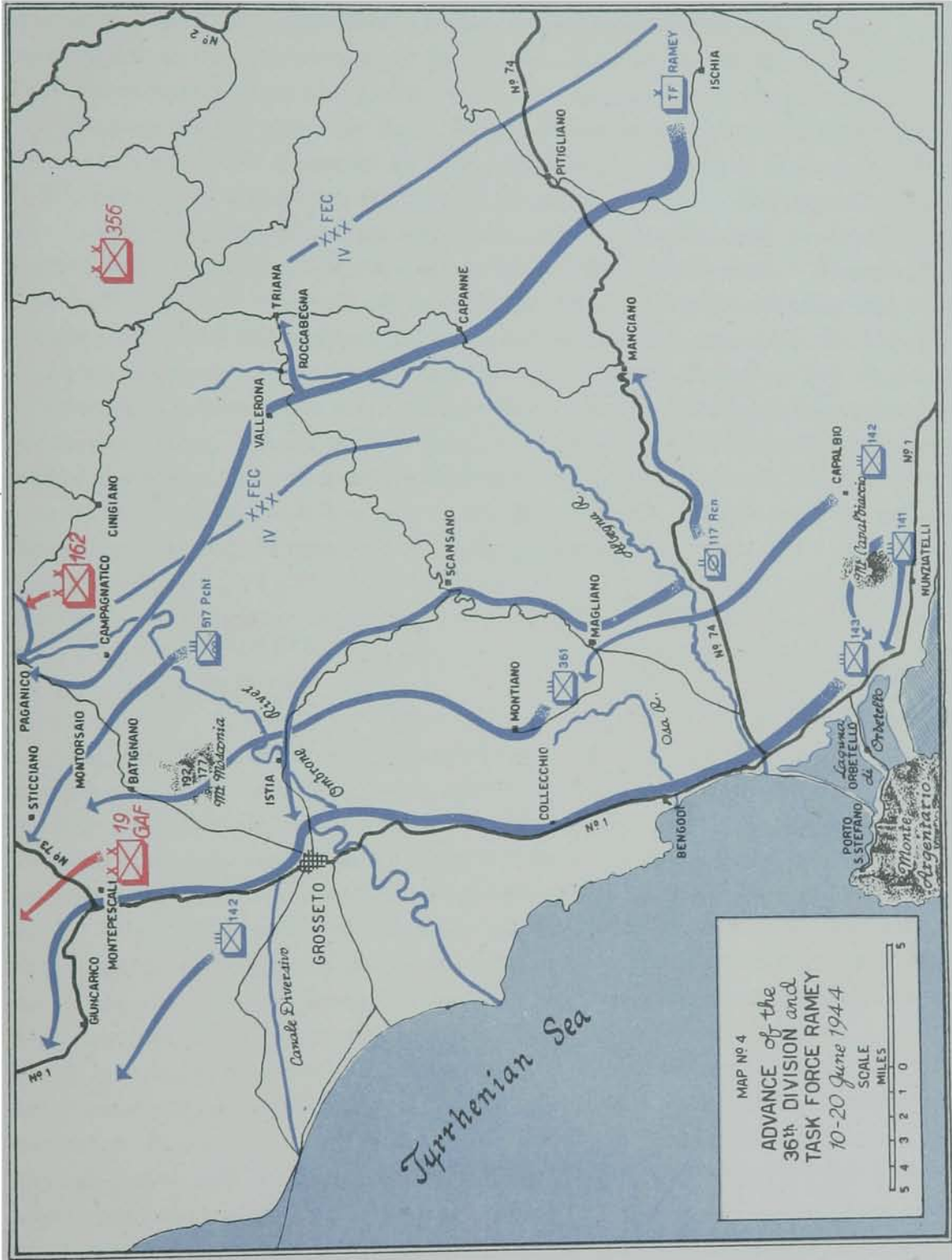
The zone assigned to the squadron was excessive for its strength, and in Operations Order No. 5 from IV Corps on the night of 12 June, General Crittenberger organized Task Force Ramey to assume responsibility for the zone of Task Force Ellis. Brig. Gen. Rufus S. Ramey was given command of the new force, which had the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron as the nucleus for a provisional brigade. To form a headquarters for this new organization General Ramey received Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Armored Group. Initial troops attached, in addition to the reconnaissance squadron, were the 3d Battalion, 141st Infantry; the 59th Armored Field Artillery Battalion; the 2d Battalion, 39th Engineer Combat Regiment, less Company F; and a company of the 52d Medical Battalion. Task Force Ramey's first mission was to advance rapidly northwest in its zone and seize the line of the road from Scansano to Triana, about 25 miles northwest of the positions held when the force was created. Secondary missions were to seize and hold Pitigliano, ten miles northwest of Valentano, to protect the IV Corps right flank, and to maintain contact with the French.

Attacking at dawn on 13 June, the force advanced slightly more than ten miles during the day against negligible opposition; forward elements of the reconnaissance troops and infantry were outposting the road from Pitigliano to Manciano, six miles west, by darkness that night. The following day the force was greatly increased in strength with the addition of the remainder of the 141st Infantry, the 93d Armored Field Artillery Battalion and the 752d Tank Battalion. By 1500, 15 June, the line had been pushed northwest another eight miles to Capanne, with tanks, infantry, and reconnaissance moving steadily ahead against sporadic opposition from enemy infantry and self-propelled guns. Increased demolitions were encountered which hindered the armored progress, but the infantry elements continued to advance during the night. By morning of 16 June the 141st Infantry aided by the 752d Tank Battalion occupied the village of Vallerona and the town of Roccabegna, then turned east three miles to take the objective of Triana against heavy mortar and small-arms fire. Elements of the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron on the left of Task Force Ramey meanwhile had reached Scansano, and the lateral road between these two towns was opened.

At noon on 16 June a change of boundaries between IV Corps and the FEC went into effect. This did not reduce the width of the zone but changed the line to correspond with the increasing northwest curvature of the coast line. Task Force Ramey, leaving a small defending group in Triana until the French arrived, moved westward to assemble in the new zone. The FEC, whose left boundary had been moved roughly five to six miles west by the change, swung its forces gradually northwest to absorb the new territory, slowly pinching out the Americans. By noon on 17 June the French relieved the troops left in Triana, and these joined the main force, which had pushed well forward during the morning, aiming for Campagnatico, eight miles northwest of Grosseto. Leading 91st Reconnaissance Squadron units pushed forward steadily in spite of intense artillery opposition.

By orders issued on 17 June IV Corps set Campagnatico as the objective of Task Force Ramey in the general Corps attack along the Ombrone River valley. Advancing rapidly during the night, the 141st Infantry surrounded the town by 0600, 18 June. The night advance took the infantry across the Ombrone River, for the enemy failed to attempt a stand along this natural barrier and withdrew after blowing all bridges. A brisk fire fight in and around Campagnatico lasted for three hours before the enemy finally fell back toward Paganico, seven miles to the north, protecting his retreat with extensive demolitions which slowed pursuit efforts of the reconnaissance troops and light tank elements. Heavy showers turned dust into mud, further hampering vehicular movement. Rear guards fought stubbornly to hold Paganico in order to protect the lateral Highway 73 route of withdrawal for German units in the lower Ombrone River valley and the Grosseto region. This delaying force stalled the infantry of Task Force Ramey a short distance beyond Campagnatico at dusk on 18 June. Another attack launched early on 19 June made slow progress; since the French had not yet assumed responsibility for their entire zone on the IV Corps right, a battalion of infantry was left in defensive positions along high ground east of Campagnatico. This unit had instructions to hold its positions until it could make contact with the French at Cinigiano, six miles to the east. Contact was finally achieved on 22 June.

The 141st Infantry took Paganico on the morning of 20 June as resistance slackened. Task Force Ramey then planned to continue pushing northwest pending its relief by the 1st Armored Division, which was being committed to provide a heavier punch along the IV Corps right flank. The last attack of the Ramey force was started up the road running northwest from Paganico at dawn on 21 June when the 141st Infantry and tanks of the 752d Tank Battalion were aided considerably by a low morning fog which restricted enemy observation. Some artillery fire and infantry opposition were encountered, but by 1400 the troops had advanced to the junction with Highway 73, seven miles above Paganico, while infantry



MAP NO. 4
 ADVANCE of the
 36th DIVISION and
 TASK FORCE RAMEY
 10-20 June 1944
 SCALE
 MILES
 0 1 2 3 4 5

of the 36th Division came up steadily on the left. This junction was outposted until the armored troops could come through; another road block was set up east of Paganico by Task Force Ramey elements until it was relieved by Combat Command A late in the afternoon of 21 June. On relief by the 1st Armored Division Task Force Ramey assembled in the vicinity of Campagnatico in Corps reserve.

Mopping up operations by the 517th Parachute Infantry and the 141st Infantry on the right of IV Corps by 21 June completed the clearing of the country south of Highway 73 in the Corps zone, and all but a small portion of the upper Ombrone River valley was occupied. This formidable river barrier had been crossed without a great deal of difficulty, and the German 162d Turcoman Grenadier Division had been badly cut up. The first elements of the 19th GAF Field Division had been encountered as the Montepescali hill mass was cleaned out, and, when the 36th Division turned across the valley and into the hilly country through which Highway 1 ran toward Follonica, the first prisoners from the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division were taken. In its first 10 days of pursuit north of Rome IV Corps had pushed the enemy back an average distance of 22 miles on a front of slightly less than 20 miles. The Corps was now on the threshold of a new phase of the pursuit. Ahead lay more rugged country and increasing enemy opposition.

B. *THE FEC DRIVE*

10-20 JUNE

The goal of the FEC as it re-entered battle was the same as that of the American divisions—the Arno River—but whether or not the Corps would be able to reach it was uncertain. The river was over 100 miles away and all French armed forces in Italy were due to be withdrawn from Fifth Army at an unknown early date for use in Operation Anvil, the amphibious assault against the southern French coast. While the French divisions had had an opportunity to rest and regroup, the French Corps Headquarters had been in constant offensive operations since 11 May and in the line since 10 January. As his troops went back into the line General Alphonse Juin, the FEC commander, was granted permission to set up a special mobile operations headquarters, streamlined and designated the « Pursuit Corps », under command of Lt. Gen. Edgard R. M. de Larminat, who later became commander of the 1st French Corps in the Anvil assault. This provisional corps supervised actual field operations, while the FEC headquarters in the rear handled major command and policy functions.

Basically the Pursuit Corps was composed of the 1st Motorized Division under Maj. Gen. Diego Brosset and the 3d Algerian Division under Maj. Gen. de Goislard

de Monsabert, reinforced; it was ordered to advance rapidly on the FEC axis along the Acquapendente—Siena—Poggibonsi—Castelfiorentino road. (See Map No. 5.) This route followed Highway 2 as far north as Poggibonsi and from there continued on a good state road through Castelfiorentino to the Arno River near Empoli. The eastern boundary of the FEC was set provisionally along a line through the towns of Viterbo, San Quirico d'Orcia, San Casciano, Asciano, Castellina in Chianti, and Empoli on the Arno; the western boundary passed through Valentano, Sorano, and Mount Amiata and struck the river objective at San Miniato. The zone for the French operations averaged 15 miles in width and 110 miles in length.

Forward elements of Combat Command A of the American 1st Armored Division had reached a line roughly eight miles south of Lake Bolsena when the French forces passed through them. The 3d Algerian Division motored forward on 10 June, took positions in the line just north of Tuscania, and made contact with American forces on the coastal flank. The same day the 1st Motorized Division moved north on Highway 2 through Viterbo, relieved the American 88th Division, and passed through the Combat Command A armor, thus taking over the Fifth Army right flank position. Liaison was established with Eighth Army on the right of the French.

1. *Advance to Highway 74.* The first objective of the Pursuit Corps was Highway 74, the lateral highway connecting Highways 1 and 2 and running east-west above Lake Bolsena, approximately 19 miles north of the point where the French took over the pursuit. The 1st Motorized Division was given the eastern half of the Corps zone. It advanced on Highway 2 and a parallel road, Highway 71, running north from Viterbo along the east side of Lake Bolsena to the village of Bolsena on the northeast shore of the lake. In the western half of the zone the 3d Algerian Division moved along the axis of a road from Tuscania through Valentano and along the west side of the lake to Latera and Gradoli on the northwest shore.

The 1st Motorized Division immediately encountered resistance on both flanks. On the left this took the form of demolitions and tank obstacles covered by infantry outside Marta, a resort village on the south edge of the lake, while on the right the division became partially involved on the fringe of a heavy tank battle raging between the 6 South African Armoured Division of Eighth Army and the Hermann Goering Panzer Parachute Division. Forward elements of the division managed to slip between these resistance points and gained the town of Montefiascone on the southeastern edge of the lake by mid-afternoon of 11 June. Two task forces were made up of reinforced brigades. The 2d Brigade or East Group advanced along Highway 71 and the 1st Brigade or West Group moved up Highway 2. Heavy enemy demolitions covered by fire from mortars and self-propelled guns on

both roads about ten miles south of Highway 74 stopped the advance at midday on 12 June. An enemy counterattack was repulsed on Highway 71 but cost the French heavy casualties; not until the engineers working under fire on 12-13 June, had installed a Bailey bridge over craters and demolitions was the advance resumed. Pushing back stubborn enemy rear guards, French troops covered the eight miles north to Bolsena on the morning of 14 June and seized the hills on the northeastern shore. Armored spearheads moved on to San Lorenzo at the head of the lake where contact was made with the 3d Algerian Division at 1800 that day. This action cleared the eastern section of Highway 74; the South Africans kept abreast on the right.

The 3d Algerian Division on the west side of Lake Bolsena met and overcame its first resistance on 10 June at Piansano, seven miles north of Tuscania. Before darkness armored elements of the 3d Algerian Spahis (3^e Régiment de Spahis Algériens) and the 7th Algerian Infantry (7^e Régiment de Tirailleurs Algériens) advanced three miles to the outskirts of Valentano. A two-company counterattack coming out of this town was smashed on the morning of 11 June and Valentano was cleared by 1300. A detachment of the 7th Algerian Infantry gained the western shore of the lake during the night of 11-12 June, but encountered stiff resistance the morning of 12 June. The regiment attempted to reach Latera, but another heavy counterattack at 1700 forced it back a short distance toward Valentano. After beating off this thrust, the unit reformed, drove ahead again, and by midnight had cut Highway 74 at several points west of Latera.

During this same night elements of the American 91st Reconnaissance Squadron had moved into the gap between the 3d Algerian Division and the American 36th Division. At dawn Troop C attacked the highway on the FEC left flank, relieving the pressure and enabling the French division to advance with comparative ease on 13 June. Latera was occupied before noon, Gradoli during the early afternoon, and before dark French troops were three miles north of Highway 74, in Sorano on the west and in Onano, due north of Gradoli. When the 1st Motorized Division was contacted at San Lorenzo, the entire Lake Bolsena shoreline was cleared and Highway 74 opened.

2. *Gains on the Left.* On 14 June the west boundary of the FEC was changed, with the French extending to take over the zone which had been occupied by Task Force Ramey of IV Corps. The new boundary extended along a north-northwest line from Vallerona, a small village 23 miles northwest of Valentano. To cover this wider front the 3d Algerian Division was reinforced by a special group of Moroccan units. Brig. Gen. Augustin Guillaume was given command of the 1st Moroccan Infantry (1^e Régiment de Tirailleurs Marocains) of the 4th Mountain Division, the 1st Group of Tabors, two squadrons of the 4th Moroccan Spahis

(4° Régiment de Spahis Marocains), artillery, and supporting units to form a task force known as the Guillaume Group. The Group assumed actual coverage of the new zone by advancing diagonally to the west, thereby pinching out the Americans.

The axis of advance north of Highway 74 for the two forward regiments of the 3d Algerian Division was a northwest line through Mount Amiata, a large hill mass 16 miles north-west of Onano. On the left the 4th Tunisian Infantry (4° Régiment de Tirailleurs Tunisiens) advanced toward Mount Civitella six miles to the north, and on the right the 7th Algerian Infantry continued forward during the night of 14-15 June from Onano toward Acquapendente. Elements of the 7th Algerian Infantry operating with units of the 1st Motorized Division entered Acquapendente about noon on 14 June. They then moved on against stiff enemy infantry resistance to secure the road junction a mile east of the town five hours later. Opposed by persistent delaying detachments from the German 356th Grenadier Division, the 4th Tunisian Infantry advanced six miles north of Sorano on 15 June and by noon the following day captured Mount Civitella. Meanwhile the newly committed Guillaume Group came into the line during the night of 15-16 June, and at dusk on 16 June it relieved the American armored combat team of Task Force Ramey at Vallerona, along the inter-corps boundary.

The 4th Tunisian Infantry sent a battalion combat force along Highway 2 on the morning of 16 June. Assisted by the 1st Motorized Division, this team crossed the Paglia River seven miles northwest of Acquapendente and during the afternoon headed toward Piancastagnaio, five and one-half miles farther. Enemy infantry, supported by increased artillery, mortar and Nebelwerfer fire, gave ground only when forced to do so, and at noon 17 June the forward troops were still two miles south of the town. In the afternoon the enemy withdrew three miles north; at 2000 the Tunisians entered Piancastagnaio and cleaned out a few snipers. To the west the remainder of the 4th Tunisian Infantry supported by the 3d Algerian Infantry (3° Régiment de Tirailleurs Algériens) had reached the outskirts of Santa Fiora, seven miles northwest of Mount Civitella, by 2200, 16 June. Seragiola, three and one-half miles to the east of Santa Fiora on the lateral road to Piancastagnaio, was captured late that night, and Santa Fiora fell at 0900 the next morning, clearing the Piancastagnaio road.

By nightfall on 17 June the 3d Algerian Division front formed an arc above Vallerona on the west through Santa Fiora to a point just south of Piancastagnaio. On the left the Guillaume Group was moving up eight miles above Vallerona toward Cinigiano; in the center the 4th Tunisian Infantry had the Arcidosso area, four miles west of Mount Amiata, to clear in its push toward the east-west Orcia River, which flows 11 miles northwest of Santa Fiora. On the eastern part of the

division zone the 3d Algerian Infantry was driving toward Poggio Uccello, six miles north of Mount Amiata and just south of the Orcia.

The next objectives lay along a widening front. The 1st Motorized Division was already threatening Radicofani; with its fall the enemy probably would drop back a full ten miles to the next good delaying position along the line of the Orcia. Radicofani, 13 miles north of Acquapendente on Highway 2, was entered during the morning of 18 June by 1st Motorized Division forces, and its fall hastened the German withdrawal in front of the Algerian troops. By 1700 Piancastagnaio and the hills southeast of Arcidosso were in the hands of the 3d Algerian Division. Mount Amiata was occupied by a detachment of goumiers of the 1st Group of Tabors on the afternoon of 17 June, and by dawn 19 June Arcidosso and the villages east of Mount Amiata were entered. By mid-afternoon the 4th Tunisian Infantry took Castel del Piano. Goumier elements pushed through the hills to seize Seggiano, four and one-half miles north of Arcidosso, and moved west three miles toward Cinigiano. East of Mount Amiata the 7th Algerian Infantry moved north three miles farther and was then passed through by the 3d Algerian Infantry, which pushed forward under orders of General Guillebaud, assistant division commander, to capture the Orcia River bridge three miles west of Poggio Uccello. By evening of 19 June reconnaissance parties of all elements were close to the river.

3. *Action on the Right.* Revision of the inter-divisional boundary on 14 June gave the 1st Motorized Division use of Highway 2 as its route of advance to Acquapendente and Radicofani. The 1st Brigade drove up this road on 15 June while the 4th Brigade, after relieving the 2d Brigade, advanced on the right flank maintaining contact with the British. Led by armor, the 1st Brigade advanced against slight opposition on the morning of 15 June. Acquapendente fell without a struggle in the afternoon; by 1000, 16 June, the 1st Brigade had crossed the Paglia River in strength and reached a point seven miles beyond the town. Resistance stiffened on 17 June, but by the end of the day forward armored units of the brigade were less than two miles from the south edge of Radicofani and about four miles east of the town at a road junction which controlled the road northeast from Radicofani to Sarteano, eight miles away. In heavy fighting on 18 June against infantry and mobile artillery the 1st Brigade overcame mines and demolitions as well as the Germans before breaking into the town at 1100. Four hours later final resistance was mopped up. Approximately 90 prisoners were captured, and large stores of munitions and materiel were taken, including one undamaged Mark VI tank, which the French manned and turned against its former owners.

While the 1st Brigade was moving successfully up the highway the 4th Brigade struck against Allerona, seven miles northeast of Acquapendente, on 15 June. By evening the entire road net between the two towns was securely held; at noon the

next day San Pietro, a hamlet three miles northwest of Alleron, was occupied against only light resistance. San Casciano, six miles southeast of Radicofani, fell on 17 June, and the heights dominating Sarteano were occupied on the morning of 18 June. A heavy rain storm, which bogged down the armor, prevented immediate exploitation of this gain. Unable to use much of its armor due to the lack of good roads, the 4th Brigade moved slowly, advancing to within three miles of Sarteano by noon 19 June. The 1st Brigade was counterattacked in the hills northeast of Radicofani during the night of 18-19 June. It threw back the assault, however, and after daylight pushed north three miles above Radicofani.

At this point the first withdrawal of French troops in preparation for the invasion of southern France took place when the 2d Moroccan Infantry Division was brought up from FEC reserve to relieve the 1st Motorized Division. On 16 June General Juin was asked to make a decision as to which of his units should be released first. He decided that the 1st Motorized Division should be out of the lines by 24 June and the 3d Algerian Division by 1 July. Maj. Gen. André W. Dody, commander of the 2d Moroccan Division, sent the 5th and 8th Moroccan Infantry to relieve the 1st and 4th Brigades during the night of 20-21 June. The other regiment of the division, the 4th Moroccan Infantry (4^e Régiment de Tirailleurs Marocains), moved into a reserve status on the right flank the following day.

The fresh division organized two combat groups similar to those which had been conducting the pursuit in this zone. Each group contained a mixed armored squadron, a battalion of truck-borne infantry, and various supporting artillery and service troops. The 5th Moroccan Infantry took over the pursuit on the right flank while the 8th Moroccan Infantry prepared to continue the advance up Highway 2. On 20 June the entire Pursuit Corps was within striking distance of the Orcia River line and prepared to assault this barrier, the most formidable yet encountered north of Rome. Resistance before IV Corps had stiffened in the same manner as it had on the French front; on the right of Fifth Army the British units were running into even more determined Germans and generally lagged somewhat behind the French. It was becoming apparent that the next phase of action was to involve more fighting and less pursuing.

C. *THE CAPTURE OF ELBA*

Operations for the capture of the Island of Elba were started on 17 June. The northern tip of the island, famous as the home of Napoleon in exile, is located about eight miles southwest of Piombino. Though not carried out by Fifth Army troops, the attack was co-ordinated by Allied Force Headquarters with the advance

on the Italian mainland, and was launched when the Fifth Army forces driving up the west coast of Italy were nearly opposite the island. French troops of the 9th Colonial Infantry Division, made up of Senegalese and tabors reinforced by the Battalion de Choc, landed at Golfo di Campo on the southern shores of the island and in a whirlwind campaign ended all organized resistance two days later. A battery of 155-mm guns was installed in position on the northeastern tip of the island commanding Piombino on the mainland, and the availability of support from these weapons was communicated to IV Corps. Piombino fell without necessity for their use.