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REPORT NO. 179

HISTORICAL SECTION

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

CANADIAN OPERATIONS IN THE LIRI VALLEY
MAY - JUNE 1944.

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HISTORICAL SECTION

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

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Canadian Operations in the Liri Valley,
May - June 1944

1. This report is an account of the part played by Canadian military forces in the large-scale operation of Fifth and Eighth Armies in the Italian theatre of war in May and June 1944. The entire operation was, perhaps, the most important of the Italian campaign, as it led to the capture of Rome, the first of the Axis capitals to fall to the Allied Armies. It also resulted in the liberation of the greater part of the Italian Peninsula and the destruction of a substantial part of the enemy forces in Italy. In addition it forced the Germans to draw deeply on their reserves, and so made a timely contribution to the success of the larger operations about to begin in northern France.
2. Canadian troops actually took part in these decisive operations from the first day of the offensive on 11 May, when 1 Cdn Armd Bde attached to 13 (Br) Corps assisted in the attack across the Gari, until 4 Jun, when Canadian personnel of the First Special Service Force, which was among the vanguard of allied troops, entered the "Eternal City". This report, however, deals mainly with the operations of 1 Cdn Corps, which entered the Liri Valley offensive on the night of 15/16 May, broke through the formidable defences of the "Hitler" Line and advanced towards Rome until it was withdrawn into reserve on 4 Jun. This was the first offensive operation of 1 Cdn Corps since its arrival in Italy in the autumn of 1943.
3. This narrative is based mainly on the mass of material found in the War Diaries of the formations and units taking part in the operation, supplemented by detailed reports prepared by "G" Branch of 1 Cdn Corps, 1 Cdn Inf Div and 5 Cdn Armd Div available in C.M.H.Q. Historical Section files. A great deal of information on the wider aspect of the operation is derived from the British Historical Section's volumes on Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Part II, dealing with the campaign in Italy from 26 Mar to 10 Aug 44.

REGROUPING OF FIFTH AND EIGHTH ARMIES, SPRING 1944

4. The decision of the Combined Chiefs of Staff to give the Italian campaign "overriding priority" in the Mediterranean Theatre, (see Report No. 178) was communicated to General Sir H. Maitland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theatre, on 26 Feb 44 (H.M. Stationery Office, London: Report by The Supreme Commander Mediterranean to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Southern France, August 1944, p. 11). With this assurance that all resources would be available for a new land offensive on the Italian Peninsula, General Alexander, C.-in-C., Allied Armies in Italy, began to plan the operation which was finally to break the Winter Line, pass through Rome and advance to the enemy's main defensive positions on the Pisa - Rimini Line.

5. The winter offensive of the Fifth and Eighth Armies had not succeeded. By the end of December 1943 General Montgomery's Eighth Army plan to outflank Rome by advancing to Pescara had been discarded. West of the Apennines, however, the Fifth Army continued the offensive, and in the latter part of January the Anzio bridgehead was established. Efforts to link the main Fifth Army front with the bridgehead, however, failed. During the latter part of January and all through February, costly attacks on Cassino and across the Garigliano had failed to break the German main line. The enemy placed great political value on Rome and planned to hold it at whatever price. Hitler's Special Order, read to all ranks in the German Army, 24 Jan, stated:

The Gustav Line must be held at all costs for the sake of the political consequences which would follow a completely successful advance. The Fuhrer expects the bitterest struggle for every yard.

(Hist Sec file Italy:
1944/A.A.I./K/F Docket III:
H.Q. A.C.M.F. Int Summary
No. 30)

This determination on the part of the enemy, coupled with the obstacles imposed by bad weather and the mountainous nature of the country, had produced a stalemate on all fronts from Ortona to the Tyrrhenian Sea.

6. It was apparent at the beginning of February, and more so later in the month when 2 New Zealand Corps failed to take Cassino, that a quick junction of the Anzio bridgehead and the main forces of the Fifth Army could not be expected. This failure to achieve decisive results necessitated a complete reconsideration of plans and resources. General Alexander therefore decided to concentrate the main weight of both armies west of the Apennines and to hold the central mountains and the Adriatic sector with as few troops as possible (Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Part II, Sec "B", Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. I, para 1). The first plans for an all-out spring offensive were laid at a conference of army commanders held at Caserta on 28 Feb 44. For ease in administration, all British-equipped divisions, which included Indian, Dominion and Polish formations, would be brought into Eighth Army, and American-equipped U.S. and French divisions would remain in Fifth Army. General Alexander's plan was to continue to enlarge the Anzio bridgehead and to attack Cassino again, while at the same time regrouping his armies to the west of the Apennines for a full-scale offensive in the Liri Valley to link up with the bridgehead at Anzio. Accordingly, on 15 Mar the 2 New Zealand Corps launched a further attack on the monastery town, but little headway was made, and the termination of the battle on 23 Mar brought to an end the winter offensive (Ibid: Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/A.A.I./K/F Docket III: Agenda, Army Commanders' Meeting, 28 Feb 44; and "The Tiger Triumphs", published by H.M. Stationery Office for the Government of India 1946: Chap. VI).

7. Orders for the regrouping of formations on the main front were issued on 5 Mar. 5 Corps, acting as an independent corps directly under command H.Q. A.A.I., was to take over the east coast sector.* Whereas the previous inter-army boundary

* See Map "A"

had run north-west and south-east through Isernia mid-way across the Peninsula, now the whole central sector, extending from 5 Corps boundary to the junction of the Liri and Gari Rivers, was to come under Eighth Army. Included in this sector was the narrow front covering Cassino and the Liri Valley, where the bulk of the Eighth Army would concentrate for the spring attack. Fifth Army's front was to be reduced and would extend from Eighth Army's boundary west along the Garigliano to the Gulf of Gaeta. H.Q. Fifth Army was to continue to command the Anzio bridgehead. These changes in boundaries were completed on 26 Mar, three days after the New Zealand Corps' attack on Cassino was abandoned. (Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Part II, Sec "A", Allied Strategy, Appx "C"-1)

8. Although the change in the boundary between Eighth and Fifth Armies took place on 26 Mar, the regrouping of formations was carried out by degrees during the period between this date and 11 May, the day on which the spring offensive began. This regrouping involved not only movement of formations from one army to the other, in order to have all American and British-equipped divisions in the armies to which they had been reallocated, but it also entailed a complete rearrangement of formations within each individual army. Considerable time was required, for all troops in both armies were exhausted and needed rest and re-equipping. During the time that a formation was out of the line there would be an opportunity to acquire reinforcements and to undergo a short period of training.

9. The regrouping resulted in the following dispositions of 15 Army Group on the eve of the attack. In the sector from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the junction of the Liri and Gari Rivers Fifth Army had two corps in the line - on the left II U.S. Corps (two divisions) and on the right the French Expeditionary Corps (four divisions) - with one infantry division in army reserve.^x On the Eighth Army front there were three corps in the line with one corps in reserve (1 Cdn Corps). From the Liri to Cassino was 13 Corps (four divisions and an armoured brigade), and behind it, ready to pass through or come into the line on the left, was 1 Cdn Corps (two divisions and an armoured brigade). 2 Polish Corps (two divisions and an armoured brigade) was concentrated facing Cassino. This concentration of eight divisions and three brigades^{ix} on a front of less than ten miles was to be the striking force of the Eighth Army. The mountainous centre of the Peninsula between the Polish Corps and the independent 5 Corps was held by 10 Corps, comprising a miscellaneous group of forces based on 2 New Zealand Division. In army reserve were 1 Cdn Corps and 6 (South African) Armd Div. (Ibid, para 4)

MOVES AND TRAINING OF 1 CDN CORPS

10. The first move in the regrouping of Eighth Army to affect 1 Cdn Corps took place on 8 Mar when the Corps handed over its command on the Adriatic to 5 Corps and moved into reserve. Headquarters were established at Larino, south of Termoli. On the same day 5 Cdn Armd Div (less 11 Inf Bde) moved out of the line into reserve and set up Headquarters at Caselnuovo della Daunia, north of Lucera. 11 Inf Bde was

x See Map "A"

ix See Appx "A"

relieved a week later when it moved into reserve in the Divisional area (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, March 1944; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, March 1944). 1 Cdn Div and 1 Cdn Armd Bde, however, remained in the line until their relief several weeks later. Although in reserve, 5 Cdn Armd Div still played an important part in the defence of the Adriatic sector. Under orders of Eighth Army the Division would be moved into a defensive position behind 5 Corps should an enemy attack on that front become a serious threat. (Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Part II, Sec "E", para 3)

11. Five days before 1 Cdn Corps went into reserve Lt-Gen H.D.G. Crerar, C.B., D.S.O. released command of the Corps to Maj-Gen E.L.M. Burns, O.B.E., M.C. (later D.S.O.) G.O.C. 5 Cdn Armd Div, and returned to the United Kingdom to assume command of First Cdn Army (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, 3 Mar 44). Maj-Gen Burns later in the month was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general, and to him fell the task of preparing 1 Cdn Corps for its role in the coming offensive. In order to facilitate the necessary planning, H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps was moved from Larino to the west of the Apennines. The new headquarters was set up on 4 Apr at Raviscanina, less than 25 miles south-east of the Cassino front, and a Corps O.P. was established on M. Trocchio overlooking the enemy positions (see para 48). W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 4 and 19 Apr 44) In this area the G.O.C., under direction H.Q. Eighth Army and in conjunction with 13 Corps, began to make plans for the coming offensive. Study periods for staff officers were arranged and the coming operation was discussed in all its aspects. From the newly established O.P. the Corps Commander made frequent visual reconnaissance of the enemy-held territory. The closest co-operation existed with the planning staff of 13 Corps, which formation was to be associated with the Canadians in the impending operations. (Ibid: 19-20 Apr 44; and Hist Sec files: Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Corps/B/I Docket II: Planning Notes Operation "HONKER"; and B/F Docket I: 1 Cdn Corps Notes on Staff Study)

12. Meanwhile, 5 Cdn Armd Div carried on intensive training in the vicinity of Lucera. Tank and infantry co-operation training at squadron and company level began when 11 Inf Bde arrived in the training area. Schools and training centres were established which covered all aspects of an armoured division in offensive warfare. Officers' study groups and N.C.O. schools formed an important part of the training. On 21 Mar Maj-Gen B.M. Hoffmeister, D.S.O., former commander of 2 Cdn Inf Bde, assumed command of the Division.* A divisional scheme, Exercise "THRUSTER", designed to practise the Division in a combined infantry and tank attack, took place on 8 Apr. The following day 11 Inf Bde left to take over a portion of the front near Acquafondata east of Cassino under command of 4 (Br) Div. The rest of the Division, however, remained in the Lucera area and continued its training programme. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, March and April 1944; W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, March and April 1944)

* During the period 3 Mar (when General Burns left 5 Cdn Armd Div) until 21 Mar, the Division was temporarily commanded by Brigadier J.B.D. Smith, commander of 5 Cdn Armd Bde.

13. Before he left 1 Cdn Corps, General Crerar had emphasised in a directive to his commanders two fundamental requirements concerning the employment of infantry and tanks in the deliberate attack and in the fluid battle:

The first concerns the basic aim in battle of every commander - to bring his strength against enemy weakness. The tank is strong against the small-arms fire of infantry and ordinary mortar and artillery fire. It is weak when opposed by anti-tank guns and other anti-tank weapons. The infantry is strong against the enemies of the tank, but weak in the face of small-arms fire and HE bombs and shells.

On this basis, the question of which arm should lead the other in the attack has but one sensible answer - the arm which can best get forward and close with the enemy in the circumstances of the particular time and place. This is a situation which may change several times in the course of one attack. The essential is for each arm to recognize the changing circumstances and fully understand the part which it is then required to play.

It follows that co-operation between tanks and infantry and artillery is not simply desirable - in the conditions of battle in this theatre, intimate team-play between these three arms is a stark, staring necessity.

This co-operation, or team-play, is not one of those things which can be arranged overnight, or after a few hours professional conversation about a particular tactical problem. It is a product of mutual knowledge and understanding, inspired by a common aim and developed over a period of time. It follows that "intermingling" of Commanders and personnel of tank, infantry and artillery units should be regarded as an essential requirement in every formation, at all times and I desire that arrangements to this end be given your personal attention.

(W.D., Comd 1 Cdn Corps,
February 1944: Appx 4,
G.O.C. 3-6, dated 26 Feb 44)

Subsequent Canadian operations against the Hitler Line were to show the value of the principles contained in this directive.

14. On 23 Apr H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div moved to S. Agata, east of Caserta. Meanwhile, during the latter part of April the Division (less 11 Inf Bde) crossed the Apennines and concentrated in the Divisional Headquarters' area. This move involved the loading of over 200 Sherman tanks at Troia and unloading them again at Caserta. Nevertheless, it was completed without incident on 25 Apr and the G.O.C. was complimented by G.O.C. Eighth Army (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, April 1944; Appx 16). Movement north to a more forward

concentration area began on the night 1/2 May. The area allotted to 5 Div was just north of Capua and directly east of Highway 6. Divisional Headquarters was established on the night 2/3 May at Vitulazio (N 1884), and during the night 5/6 May 11 Inf Bde moved back from the line (see para 12) into this area.* Great care was taken here to camouflage all equipment and bivouacs, as the new location was within 30 miles of the Cassino front. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, April and May 1944; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, April and May 1944; W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, April and May 1944)

15. 1 Cdn Inf Div remained in the line in 5 Corps' area during March and most of April. On 22 Apr it was relieved by 10 Ind Div and moved to the Campobasso area, staging overnight at Larino. On 24 Apr Headquarters opened at Vinchiaturo and the Divisional formations were established in training areas in the vicinity of Campobasso. After only 48 hours' rest the Division went into intensive training. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, April 1944)

16. It is interesting at this point to look back on the tireless activities of 1 Cdn Inf Div during the preceding ten months. It had been in the line or on the move almost continuously since it landed on the shores of Sicily in July 1943. After the hard fighting of the island campaign the infantry brigades had battled their way up the Italian Peninsula into Campobasso and continued the fight into the mountains beyond. They had fought across the Moro and into the streets of Ortona, and during the winter months in snow and mud they had harassed the enemy by continuous patrols on the rugged Arielli front. With the coming of spring the Division was feeling the effects of this continuous strain and the return to Campobasso was indeed a welcome move. An excerpt from the Divisional War Diary comments on the pleasure derived from the change of environment:

The Larino staging area is a great success. 3 Inf Bde are settled in little groves and green meadows off the Termoli - Larino rd. This is the Bifferno Valley and the country hereabouts is lush to war-hardened eyes and seems impossibly green and untouched. We, in Div H.Q. are staging in a fine glade on the hill above Larino.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 23 Apr 44)

When appreciation such as this is expressed by a Headquarters' staff which experienced little of the hardships of a fighting front compared with that of the infantry in the line, it is not difficult to realize what the move meant to the Division as a whole.

* 11 Inf Bde with an Italian battalion under command held a mountainous sector of the front north-west of Acquafondata on the upper Rapido from 12 Apr to 5 May. The Brigade was under 4 (Br) Div until 15 Apr when it passed to command 2 New Zealand Division. On 5 May the Brigade was relieved by 12 S.A. (Mot) Bde Gp. The position was a static one and consisted mostly of remaining under cover during the day and patrolling by night (W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, April and May 1944).

17. With the Division thus disposed around Campobasso units occupied the countryside with which their battles of the previous autumn had made them most familiar. The Historical Officer with the Division reminds us that to the native population the Canadians were no strangers:

Forty-eight hours before these moves commenced advance parties appeared in the CAMPOBASSO district. The display of the red patch to the local inhabitants aroused frenzied excitement and in many of the smaller communities a tumultuous welcome. The good will built up in this district by the division during October and November of last year easily survived a winter's absence on the ADRIATIC coast. British officers who were in CAMPOBASSO during the winter have testified to the regret of the local people when the division left and to their excitement when it appeared likely that the division would return. It was not until the early morning of 23 Apr, after 1 CIB had reached the LARINO staging area, that an order was received from 1 Cdn Corps to remove all identifying marks such as red flashes, Canada badges, cap badges, and vehicle signs throughout all units of the division. This order continued to be effective until 1 May. Its effect was curious. Although most civilians appeared to be well aware that the unmarked soldiers were Canadians, demonstrative enthusiasm abruptly ceased.

(Hist Sec file, Italy:
1944/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/F
Docket I: Historical
Officer's Report dated
3 May 44)

It would appear that the local inhabitants of Campobasso foresaw the impending offensive which was to restore to them their capital city, and were willing to co-operate in the security measures involved.

18. Maj-Gen Vokes, G.O.C. 1 Cdn Div, foresaw the difficulty of going into an offensive action after months of static warfare. A large percentage of his formation were reinforcements who had joined the Division after the heavy losses of the Battle of the Moro. In conference with his brigade commanders prior to the relief he initiated a training programme that, in spite of the short time available, brought the Division back to fighting fitness. His instructions were definite:

Now, the first principle I want established is that we are NOT repeat NOT being pulled out for rest. It is probable, but I cannot guarantee it, that each bde will be able to carry out 7 days clear trg. 48 hrs after arrival in the new area, I want this trg to commence.

As a result of our protracted period of static warfare, the Div had tended to become morally and physically soft. A hardening up of these qualities for offensive operations will be the main theme of the trg.

(Hist Soc file, Italy:
1944/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/E:
Notes of Verbal Instrs to
Sub-Comds 1 Cdn Inf Div)

19. Intensive training in the Divisional area began on 26 Apr. It included a review of all aspects of infantry training, with hardening-up exercises which included route marches, mountain climbing and river crossing. Beginning 1 May each brigade in rotation moved to the Lucera area and carried out a three-day Infantry-cum-Tank exercise with units of 25 (Br) Tk Bde assigned to work with 1 Cdn Div in the coming operations. Following the completion of its training each brigade proceeded direct from Lucera to the Caserta area which 5 Cdn Armd Div were vacating at that time. Divisional Headquarters was established at S. Agata on 5 May, and each Brigade continued its training on arrival in the concentration area. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, April 1944 and 5 May 44; H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 1-4 May 44; H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 7-11 May 44; H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 4-7 May 44)

20. By the time the offensive opened the Divisional training programme was nearly completed. On 11 May 1 Cdn Inf Bde and 3 Cdn Inf Bde were in the S. Agata area, and 2 Cdn Inf Bde was completing its Infantry-cum-Tank training at Lucera. The training had been highly successful and the morale and fighting fitness of the Division was again at top level. The value of this intensive preparation was later appraised in the words of the Commander of 1 Cdn Inf Bde after the successful operations in the Liri Valley:

It is of value to record that the successes attained by 1 Cdn Inf Bde in this phase of the Italian Campaign were in large part due to the very useful three week trg period which preceded the battle. This period enabled the Bde to join battle mentally and physically prepared.

(Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/F
Docket II: 1 Cdn Inf Bde in
the Liri Valley Battle, Part V)

The 2 Bde Commander gave particular credit to the Infantry-cum-Tank training:

The bde moved to LUCERA (sq J12, ref BENEVENTO sheet 1/250,000) on 8 May for three days tk and inf trg. This bde was fortunate in being allotted the NORTH IRISH HORSE, a regt that distinguished itself at LONGSTOP HILL. The NIH were equipped with both Churchill and Sherman tks. The regt had just arrived from N AFRICA and were the first Churchill tks to be employed in ITALY.

The trg was on a coy - sqn level. All rifle coys had time to learn the technique of tk co-op and in particular comm problems were worked out. The result was that, by the end of trg, all units were confident that the troublesome problem of 'marrying up' tks and inf had been largely solved. This would leave comds at all levels free to make a quick co-op plan if tks were allotted in sp of inf at short notice.

The tps also were given great confidence in their tks by being able to see what fire sp they could get from them. Use of smoke from close sp tks was made a feature of the inf adv over open ground during the schemes. The schemes were done with live amm on a fd firing range...

(Ibid: Part VI)

21. One other Canadian formation was involved in the preparation for the forthcoming offensive. At the end of March 1944, 1 Cdn Armd Bde was relieved of its operational role with 5 Corps on the Adriatic front and moved across the mountains to join 8 Ind Div at a training area in the Volturno Valley. On 2 Apr it came under command 13 Corps. Its operations with this Corps against the Gustav and Hitler Lines are recorded in Hist Sec Report No. 158. Part of the Brigade (12 Cdn Armd Regt), however, came under command 1 Cdn Corps during the Hitler Line operation and the activities of the armoured formation are, therefore, closely associated with the present narrative.

GERMAN DEFENCE SYSTEM AND DISPOSITIONS, 11 MAY

22. West of the Apennines the natural avenue of approach to Rome was along the valleys of the Liri and Sacco Rivers. It is through this Sacco - Liri Valley that the Naples - Rome road (Highway 6) and railway pass. The lower valley (the Liri) is bounded by two parallel mountain ranges running north-west to south-east. These high ridges are studded with occasional hill villages and are traversed by a number of tracks. The Eastern range, which includes the towering M. Cairo, terminates abruptly at Cassino, and is of a higher average height than the Western range. The valley itself is cut, at its mouth, by the Gari River, and along its western edge the Liri River runs parallel to the mountain ranges. Throughout its length the Liri Valley is dominated by the heights on either flank. Stretching north-west from the Gari the Liri Valley is very flat and open for the first few miles, gradually becoming more rolling and fairly heavily wooded. Six or seven miles from the southern end a series of

IV The river, which is called the Rapido in the vicinity of Cassino, becomes the Gari lower down before its junction with the Liri.

transverse gullies, the largest of which is the Forme d'Aquino, run south-west into the Liri. The upper valley, (the Sacco) begins near Ceprano, where the Liri turns north into the mountains. It is a continuation of the Liri Valley depression to the north-west and forms a natural passage through mountainous terrain right up the Peninsula to Rome. (Geographical Handbook Series, Naval Intelligence Division, Italy, Vol I: p. 292)

23. The German plan of defence in the west rested on three fortified lines barring the avenue of approach to Rome along the Sacco - Liri Valley (see Map "A"). The first of these was the main Winter Line which extended across Italy from the Adriatic to the Tyrrhenian Sea. West of Cassino and covering the entrance to the Liri Valley this line was known as the "Gustav". It was anchored on M. Cassino and in general it followed to the west the line of the Rapido and Garigliano to the mouth of the latter river in the Gulf of Gaeta. The most strongly fortified part of this line extended from Cassino across the mouth of the valley to the Liri River junction. The Gari with its steep banks and swiftly flowing current was in itself a formidable obstacle. Along its eastern bank there stretched a thick and continuous network of wire and minefields. West of the river there were many well positioned trenches and deep shelters which provided good protection against air and artillery bombardment. The greatest single element in the strength of the Gustav Line, however, was the way it was overlooked by the mountains on either side of the Liri Valley. From observation posts on these heights enemy artillery could be directed with the greatest accuracy on any force attempting to cross the Gari River. Although dented and threatened in some parts by the Allied offensive from January to March the Gustav Line had held, and during the lull in April work had been done to improve its defences. (Allied Strategy, para 15; Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. I, para 11)

24. Moreover, in the rear a second line, the "Adolf Hitler",^{*} had been constructed during the winter. Its function was to bar the advance up the Liri Valley to any force which might succeed in passing the Gari. Its left rested on M. Cairo, where it hinged on the main Winter Line, and its right crossed the Liri at Pontecorvo. South of the Liri there were few defences, for the Aurunci mountains beyond were considered practically impassable. (Allied Strategy, para 15). South-west of Pontecorvo the Hitler Line defences joined at S. Oliva a lightly fortified position skirting the base of the Petrella mountains to the coast at Formia. This southern portion was known to the Germans as the "Dora" Line, the name they eventually gave to the whole line in anticipation of its fall. (German Strategy, Appx "B")^{**} The line had taken five months to build and was designed after the fashion of the famous Todt West Wall defences. Across the valley concrete and steel pill boxes were built in large numbers to a depth of about 800 yards. Anti-tank ditches were dug across all favourable approaches and the whole system tied in with wire and mines. These defensive structures were carefully camouflaged. The line, marked by an almost continuous belt of wire across the valley, roughly followed the lateral Aquino - Pontecorvo - S. Oliva road. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1944: Appx 54, Int Summary No. 47 dated 1 May 44; Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/F Docket II: Part V: The Adolf Hitler Line). The nature of the fortifications in this line are best described in the words of

* German documents refer to this line as the "Senger Line" (Hist Sec file AEF/45: First Cdn Army L/F, Docket III: Vol 2, The Italian Campaign As Seen By The Enemy: p. 31)

** A switch or secondary line eventually defended by the enemy after the Aurunci mountains had been pierced by the F.E.C. joined the Hitler Line at Pontecorvo and ran west through Pico to the coast at Terracina. Fifth Army History refers to this temporary line as the Adolf Hitler Line. (Fifth Army History, Part V, The Drive to Rome, p. 8)

the Commander 1 Cdn Inf Bde recorded after the battle:*

Several types of fortifications that had not previously been met by the forces engaged were salient features of the defence. Amongst these were the turrets of Mk V "PANTHER" tanks in concrete emplacements. Mobile and heavily armoured pill boxes of the "CRAB" type that are sunk almost flush with the ground and are impervious to anything except direct hits from A-Tk projectiles or heavy arty fire; and finally a series of prefabricated armour-plated dugouts, some three inches thick built twenty feet under ground and covered with concrete. These are said to be impervious to direct hits from 1,000 lb bombs, and serve as Nodal Points for MG posns which are reached by concrete tunnels.

(Hist Sec file Italy:
1944/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/F Docket II:
Part V, The Adolph Hitler Line)

Although the Hitler Line was almost entirely an artificial structure it was strengthened by one bit of natural defence, the *Forme d'Aquino* (see para 22), which ran at an angle across its front. This stream varied in width from 10 to 30 yards, and throughout the greater part of its length rough approaches and steep banks made it a formidable obstacle to tanks. (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. V, para 4)

25. There was, however, one serious threat to the strength of the Hitler Line - the presence of a strong Allied corps many miles behind it at Anzio. A breakout here cutting Route 6 would make the Line useless. The Germans, therefore, began in March to construct a third position known as the "Caesar" Line. This was a position to which the enemy could withdraw when and if the Allies forced a junction with the Anzio bridgehead. Its main purpose was to block the gap between the Alban Hills and the Prenestini Mountains through which runs Highway 6. To the west of this gap the line continued across the Alban Hills to the left flank of the bridgehead. To the east it extended via Avezzano and Celano to Pescara, but very little work had been done on this part of the line. Only the two southernmost of these lines were to be of concern to the Canadian forces, since before the Eighth Army's advance reached the Caesar Line 1 Cdn Corps had been withdrawn from the offensive. (Allied Strategy, para 15)

26. It will be seen that as the main German material defences were west of the Apennines, so also was their main concentration of troops. Field Marshal Kesselring, the Commander of Army Group "C", had approximately 18 divisions employed in the defence of Rome. Ten divisions under Tenth Army which was commanded by General von Vietinghoff held the main front across the Peninsula and the equivalent of eight divisions - including mobile reserve formations - under Fourteenth Army commanded by General von Mackensen contained the Anzio bridgehead and protected the west coastal flank. Over and above these there were five divisions under General von Zangen in Northern Italy, making a total of 23 in the Peninsula. Under Tenth Army in the main line, following the

* A detailed description of the defences of the Hitler Line in the Liri Valley appears as Appx "D".

example of the Allies, the enemy left the Adriatic coast sector to a small command of three divisions - "Gruppe Hauck" (see Map "A"). The central sector of the front, roughly opposite the regrouped Eighth Army as far west as Cassino, was made up of the three divisions of LI Mountain Corps. On their right XIV Panzer Corps with three divisions under command covered the Liri Valley and faced Fifth Army in its new sector west of the river. 90 Pz Gr Div was in Army Group reserve in the vicinity of Frosinone.* In Fourteenth Army five divisions were employed against the Anzio bridgehead, and three were in reserve. These, 26 Pz, 29 Pz Gr and elements of 90 Pz Gr, comprised Kesselring's mobile Panzer force. They were disposed along the coast from the area of the bridgehead to Civitavecchia, and formed perhaps the most important element of the German defence because of their mobility. Advantage was taken of the April lull to get all mobile divisions out of the line into reserve areas, leaving only non-motorized infantry forward; and they too were thinned out as much as possible to allow for rest and training. All were well up to strength. (Allied Strategy, para 16; Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. I, para 6; Hist Sec file Italy: AEF/45 First Cdn Army/L/F Docket III: Vol 2: Italian Campaign As Seen By The Enemy, p. 26)

27. On the eve of the offensive the enemy facing the Eighth Army in the Liri Valley had in the line only five infantry battalions with one battalion of tank and another of assault guns. These units were under command 15 Pz Gr Div, the greater part of which was watching the coast between the main defence line and the beachhead. South-west of the Liri, facing the French Expeditionary Corps (F.E.C.) was 71 Inf Div. These two divisions and 94 Inf Div facing II U.S. Corps made up XIV Pz Corps and were responsible for the defence of the Gustav Line from Cassino to the Gulf of Gaeta. Under command of LI Mtn Corps 1 Para Div facing the Polish Corps held M. Cassino and the M. Cairo hinge of the Gustav and Hitler Lines. Although the paratroops had been in the sector since the latter part of February and were very much depleted in numbers, these fanatical, highly-trained and resourceful soldiers knew the ground intimately and, as later events were to show, were prepared to hold it to the last man (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. I, para 13; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1944, Appx 54: Int Summary No. 51 dated 13 May 44).

A.A.I. PLANS FOR THE ATTACK

28. On 2 Apr General Alexander held an Army Commanders' Conference at his Headquarters at Caserta and discussed detailed plans for the coming Allied offensive. The first phase of these operations was designed to link up the main front with the Anzio bridgehead. Eighth Army, commanded by Lt-Gen Sir Oliver Leese, was to break into the Liri Valley and advance on the axis of Highway 6 towards Valmontone. Fifth Army, under Lt-Gen Mark Clark was (a) to secure the Ausonia defile and advance by way of Esperia to the south of the Liri and Sacco rivers, (b) to break out of the Anzio bridgehead and

* Actually 90 Pz Gr Div formed part of Fourteenth Army, since the bulk of this formation and its headquarters had moved before the offensive began to the coast, between the Anzio Bridgehead and the Tiber. In this way it could be considered a reserve for either front. (Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Part II, Sec "F", German Strategy, para 4)

advance to Valmontone. 5 Corps was to hold its present front with the minimum number of troops and to follow up the enemy withdrawal that might be expected as a result of the main attack. The main frontal offensive was to begin some time between 1 and 15 May, in order to take advantage of the full moon on 8 May. This would allow time for relief of formations for rest and training. In a summary of the plan General Alexander gives a broad picture of how the attack should progress:

The offensive on the main battle front should open with the attack of Eighth Army and American IIInd Corps with the full support of the air.

This attack will continue until seriously checked or until a pause is essential to regroup. At that stage all the enemy's resources should have been drawn in, and we hope the enemy's troops guarding the beachhead will have been drawn on and weakened. This will be the moment to strike from ANZIO - under the full protection of the air. If this flank is successful and gets as far as Valmontone it may well be decisive and lead to the destruction of all the German forces between the bridgehead and the main battle front.

(Allied Strategy; Appx "B"1, Notes by General Alexander for Conference at H.Q., A.A.I. on 2 Apr 44)

29. At a final conference on 1 May D Day was fixed at 11 May and H Hour at 2300 hours. The break-out from Anzio, which was to be in readiness from D plus 4 would take place when the enemy's second line of defence (the Hitler Line) had been broken. (Ibid, para 10). H.Q., A.A.I. Operation Order No. 1, dated 5 May 44 contained the instructions required to carry out these plans and provided also for carrying out the second phase of the offensive designed to capture Rome and to drive the enemy back to the Rimini - Pisa line in Northern Italy (Ibid, Appx "C"3).

30. The Eighth Army plan was elaborated at a series of conferences for corps commanders. The Army's task involved breaking through or turning both the Gustav and Hitler Lines. The assault on the Gustav Line was to be carried out by 13 Corps attacking across the Gari while at the same time the 2 Pol Corps on the right would attack and isolate Cassino. Both Corps would then converge on Highway 6 and advance to the Hitler Line. While 13 Corps carried out a frontal attack on this position the Poles were to develop operations with a view to turning the line from the north. 1 Cdn Corps was to be held in Army reserve in readiness either to assist or to pass through 13 Corps as the situation required. 10 Corps was to secure the right flank and demonstrate in force in the direction of Atina, with the object of leading the enemy to believe that an attack was being made from that direction. Altogether the striking force of the Eighth Army offensive was equivalent to about ten full divisions, (see para 9). Simultaneously F.E.C. (of Fifth Army) was to attack on the left flank through the Aurunci mountains and the Ausonia defile with four divisions and about 12,000 "Goumiers"^x (Ibid, paras 17 and 18; Eighth

^x A specially organized formation of Arabic-speaking Moroccans from the region of the Atlas Mountains. In their operations mountain tactics were carried to the logical extreme. See Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Corps/M/F Docket III: Notes on a Visit to General Guillaume at the H.Q. of the Gp des Tabors de Goumiers by Lt-Col Lord Tweedsmuir.

Army Advance to Rome, Appces A and B : Appx "A"-3, Army Comd's Directive to Corps Comds, 11 Apr 44; and "A"-4, Eighth Army Plan)

31. The part the Canadian Corps was to play in the offensive depended on the initial success of the Eighth Army attack. The Corps was to be prepared for one of two alternatives, (i) to pass through 13 Corps in the Liri Valley and operate towards Rome with its axis of advance Highway 6, (ii) in the event of strong opposition in the Hitler Line, to attack in conjunction with 13 Corps (Army Comd's Directive to Corps Comds, 11 Apr 44). The second alternative was the one which General Leese considered the more probable. At a C.-in-C.'s conference on 1 May he submitted his appreciation of 1 Cdn Corps' role:

I have in mind a situation whereby:-

- (a) The FRENCH are making progress SOUTH of the LIRI.
- (b) 13 CORPS have established their bridge-head but are still engaged in stern fighting to isolate CASSINO and join hands with 2 POLISH CORPS...

Under these circumstances, it may be that 1 CDN CORPS would be told to cross the RAPIDO NORTH of the LIRI RIVER, through the area SOUTH of ANGELO, and operate on the LEFT of 13 CORPS.

Such operations might take the form of either:-

- (a) A breakthrough to the WEST, whilst 13 CORPS completed the operations round CASSINO ... or ...
- (b) Assisting 13 CORPS on what might, under these conditions, be a continuous front stretching NORTH and SOUTH the other side of CASSINO.

To assist CDN CORPS, 13 CORPS will, in their initial operations, develop all tracks leading to the RAPIDO from HIGHWAY 6, and will in addition establish bridges across the RAPIDO wherever profitable.

(Eighth Army Advance to Rome:
Appx "A"-4, Eighth Army Plan)

32. The Allied long term strategic air plan was already in operation. The Allied Air Forces had complete air supremacy with nearly 4,000 aircraft available in the Italian theatre as against an enemy force of 700, half of which were based in southern France and Yugoslavia. On 19 Mar and continuing until D Day the Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Forces began Operation "STRANGLE", designed to cut enemy road, rail and sea lines of communication and to destroy supply dumps, in order to prevent him from increasing his effort when the offensive

began. On the other hand the constant air cover provided for the Allied forces made it possible to concentrate our own troops and supplies in the battle area with little or no loss at all. (Ibid, Appx "A"-5; Notes on Air Operations During the Advance to Rome)

33. The outline plan for the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces for D Day was:

- (a) By counter air force operations to keep the German Luftwaffe in a state of ineffectiveness.
- (b) To isolate the battle field and reduce the supplies reaching the enemy's forward areas to such an extent that he could offer no sustained resistance to our ground assault. (i.e. a continuation of the interdiction Operation "STRANGLE").
- (c) To assist the offensive by direct support.

(Ibid)

An operational directive of Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Forces told how this plan was to be put into effect:

The principal task of the Mediterranean Tactical Air Force is to maintain the destruction and disruption already caused to the enemy's land and sea communication. The first priority air mission in direct support of the Army operation is the isolation of the immediate battle area on the Fifth Army front and the neutralization of enemy gun positions commanding observation of the crossings over the Rapido River on the Eighth Army front.

(Ibid, MATAF Operational Directive No. 11 dated 10 May 44)

THE DECEPTION PLAN, 18 APR - 11 MAY

34. It was, of course, impossible to conceal from the enemy the fact that the weight of the Eighth Army was being transferred west of the Apennines. It also must have been obvious to the enemy that the resumption of our offensive in the south would take the form of a thrust up the Liri Valley, as this was the only front on which a decisive action could take place. At the same time, however, he was concerned about the vulnerability of his long coast line, and to increase his concern the Allied command devised a cover plan, called "NUNTON". It was designed to lead the enemy to believe that the Allies were planning an amphibious assault on Civitavecchia, north of Rome. By convincing the German Commander-in-Chief that such an operation was to take place it was hoped that he would place the bulk of his reserves in that area, thus leaving the main

front with only local reinforcements.* (Allied Strategy, para 5; Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. I, para 21)

35. The following appreciation sets out the arguments for the success of such a deception plan:

The fact that, as was well known, the enemy constantly overestimated our strength and resources in the theatre and, from his lack of experience of amphibious operations, was bad at assessing the probability of such a threat was an assistance in this and it was considered that the surprise which had been sprung at him at Anzio would make him more willing than ever to believe such a story and more cautious in guarding against a repetition of his surprise. Such a deception plan had the further advantage that he would expect that, as in January, we would begin with a strong attack on the Garigliano to draw in his reserves so that the actual opening of the offensive would not cause him to revise his appreciation.

(Allied Strategy, para 5)

36. 1 Cdn Corps was given the leading role in putting the deception plan into effect. Briefly it involved a signals scheme designed to lead the enemy to believe that the Canadian Corps had moved to the Salerno area and was preparing for a large-scale water-borne landing north of Rome. Plan "NUNTON" provided for a skeleton signals set-up under H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps to include 36 U.S. Inf Div, 1 Cdn Inf Div and 5 Cdn Armd Bde. Headquarters of these formations (less 1 Cdn Div, which was in the line in the 5 Corps sector) were to be placed on Special Operational W/T Silence from 18 to 22 Apr. During that time H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps and H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde were to set up notional W/T signal headquarters in the vicinity of Salerno. 36 U.S. Div would participate while remaining in its present area. When operational silence was broken on 22 Apr H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps would work direct to H.Q. A.A.I., and 36 U.S. Div and 5 Cdn Armd Bde would open up links to 1 Cdn Corps. On completion of their relief on 5 Corps front 1 Cdn Div would also be placed on operational silence, and as soon as practicable signals personnel of the divisional headquarters would move to the same area and open links with 1 Cdn Corps. Dummy cipher traffic would be passed on W/T links down to and including brigade headquarters and headquarters of armoured regiments in the Canadian formations, and to a corresponding level in the American division. (Ibid, Appx "C"-2: H.Q. A.A.I. Operation Instruction No. 53, 18 Apr 44)

37. W/T equipment and personnel of H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps were detailed to move from Raviscanina to Baronissi (about 10 miles north of Salerno) and detachments from 5 Cdn Armd Bde from Castilnuova (near Lucera) to S. Cipriano (a few miles east of Baronissi), where they were to begin passing dummy cipher on 22 Apr 44. In addition 1 Cdn Div, after relief on the Adriatic front, was instructed to send a W/T detachment to Nocera (about 10 miles north-west of Salerno) to join the dummy network on 26 Apr. Detachments were to be

* This is actually what Kesselring did do (see para 26).

under 94 Sub-Area Salerno for local administration. 1 Cdn Inf and 5 Cdn Armd Divs were each to detail a Staff Officer to supervise their respective organizations. (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/Eighth Army/C/I: Eighth Army Operation Instruction No. 1420, 19 Apr 44; W.D., G.S. H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div May 1944: Appx 4, 1 Cdn Corps Operation Instruction No. 6, 20 Apr 44)

38. Instructions issued by C.S.O. 1 Cdn Corps provided the necessary details for the operation of Plan "WAYSOCK" (as the Canadian Signals Plan was called). Cipher detachments from 1 Cdn Corps Sigs were detailed to provide the dummy cipher traffic, which was to be gradually increased in volume to reach a peak on 3 May 44. (W.D., 1 Cdn Div Sigs, April 1944: Appx 34, 1 Cdn Corps Sigs Instr No. 8, 20 Apr 44). Although at this stage the scheme only arranged for participation to brigade level in the infantry divisions and to regimental level in the armoured brigade, it was later expanded into a more comprehensive signal set-up within the Canadian Corps. The W/T detachments were despatched on the dates arranged^x and carried on the signal operation until they were recalled to their respective headquarters on 12 May (only three days before 1 Cdn Inf Div was committed to the Gustav Line). (W.D., 1 Cdn Corps Sigs, 18, 21 Apr and 12 May 44; W.D., 1 Cdn Div Sigs, 28 Apr and 12 May 44; W.D., 5 Cdn Armd Div Sigs, 21 Apr and 12 May 44)

39. On the same day that the deceptive wireless scheme went into effect plans were initiated to enlarge "WAYSOCK" by a large-scale skeleton signals exercise involving a practice assault landing (Hist Sec file, Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Corps/B/I: Memorandum of Conversation Lt-Col Napier A.A.I. with Lt-Col Darwin). This new scheme was given the code name Exercise "WILDERNESS" (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, April 1944: Appx 13: Exercise "WAYSOCK", Appx 16: Exercise "WILDERNESS"). Plans for Exercise "WILDERNESS" I (its final designation) "to exercise 1 Cdn Inf Div Sigs in an opposed landing" were completed by H.Q. A.A.I. on 27 Apr. (No mention is made of its being part of cover plan "WAYSOCK" although in the original plan it was designated as "the skeleton exercise within 'WAYSOCK'" (Memorandum of Conversation Lt-Col Napier A.A.I. with Lt-Col Darwin)^{xx} It was considered

* 1 Cdn Inf Div were to have set up W/T H.Q. at Nocera on 26 Apr but were held up two days on the Adriatic coast near Termoli by a mechanical breakdown (W.D., 1 Cdn Div Sigs, 28 Apr 44).

xx In the instructions issued by H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div the fact that the exercise was to be part of the cover plan for future operations was disclosed down to brigade level, although A.A.I. Instructions had withheld this information for security reasons (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, April 1944; Appx 34, 1 CD/OPS/1/G, 27 Apr 44). This indiscretion on the part of H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div was the subject of correspondence between the Divisional Commander and the G.O.C. 1 Cdn Corps, in which the former expresses regret for the error (Hist Sec file, Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/E).

that if the enemy were picking up the dummy cipher traffic which was already being passed daily from the notional W/T set-up, further traffic indicating a practice assault landing would certainly make the deception more convincing. The importance of the scheme is readily noted in that it was to be directed by a major-general, (Maj-Gen Hayman Joyce, D.S.O.) assisted by a staff of four other officers, including Major Proctor of H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps. Signals personnel and equipment representing 1 Cdn Inf Div supported by two regiments of 5 Cdn Armd Bde were to rehearse an assault landing south of Salerno. A Force Headquarters was to be represented by H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps Sigs, with notional Naval and Army Air Support elements. (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/A.A.I./C/I: Gen Instrs for Exercise "WILDERNESS" I, Index No. 1). The exercise was to take place between 28 Apr and 3 May, with the actual assault at 0200 hrs on 2 May (Ibid: Appx "C").

40. The exercise, which was to involve 1 Cdn Div so prominently, thus served a dual purpose. 1 Cdn Inf Div had come to be considered an assault division (having made two successful landings in Sicily and Italy) and it was not improbable that an amphibious operation might be assigned it later on in the campaign.^x It should also be noted that the area chosen for the practice assault landing south of Salerno corresponded topographically with the coastal area immediately to the north of Civitavecchia (General Instructions for Exercise "WILDERNESS" I: Index No. 3). H.Q. A.A.I. refers to the importance of Civitavecchia in an appreciation by the Chief of Staff, Lt-Gen A.F. Harding, during the planning for the main spring offensive:

When Rome fell it was quite clear that for administrative reasons, Civitavecchia must have highest priority as our next objective.

(Allied Strategy: para 6)

The area detailed for the rehearsal included about ten miles of coast lying north of Agliastro (8894). A notional airfield was to be located in square 8707 (Sheet 198, Italy 1/100,000) (Ibid: Index No. 3). Agliastro would represent Civitavecchia, while the airfield would simulate Tarquinia, an actual landing ground north of Civitavecchia (Sheet 7, Italy 1/250,000). The Corps' task was to capture the town and establish a bridgehead preparatory to an advance inland in an easterly direction (General Instructions for Exercise "WILDERNESS" I, Index No. 3). 1 Cdn Div's assignment was to land just north of the airfield, secure a beachhead, capture the airfield and establish a bridgehead to a depth of ten or twelve miles (Ibid: Index 6).

* General Sir H. Maitland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean Theatre, suggests a possible attack on Civitavecchia in the summer of 1944 as an alternative to his Southern France Operation if the Allied situation required it. (Report by the Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on Operations in Southern France, August 1944, H.M. Stationery Office: Alternatives, p. 20)

41. Signals and other personnel required in the exercise totalled 37 officers and 191 other ranks. They operated 61 signal sets and 60 vehicles (Ibid: Index 9). It is not easy to get information as to just how successfully Exercise "WILDERNESS" was carried out.^x Representatives of H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps and 1 Cdn Div, in addition to those detailed on the actual operation, attended the exercise, and the G.S.O. II (Ops) 1 Cdn Corps was on the directing staff. No detailed account of the operation has been found. The only reference of importance is given by Lieut Smith of 1 Cdn Div Sigs, contained in a war diary report, and indicates that from a signals point of view the exercise was a success:

Lieut. Smith reports that Exercise "Wilderness" I was very successful and that compliments were paid our personnel at the reviewing conference. The Div H.Q. ship was too far from the beaches for wireless to operate properly so that an enormous amount of traffic was passed through Tac H.Q.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Div Sigs, 2 May 44)

42. It will not be possible to assess properly the full value of Exercise "WILDERNESS" I from the "cover plan" point of view until German War Diaries and other enemy documents have been checked. It would seem, however, that the enemy was almost completely deceived as to the real intentions of 1 Cdn Corps. A paper issued by Intelligence, H.Q. A.A.I., on 15 Jun 44 prepared from enemy documents and based on a captured map gives the enemy's confused and inaccurate appraisal of 1 Cdn Corps' formations on 12 May 44:

The Canadian picture is very confused: 5 Cdn Armd Div is shown at Aquafondata under command Polish Corps, 1 Cdn Corps H.Q. is unlocated and 1 Cdn Inf Div is shown at Nocera.

(Allied Strategy: Appx "F")

Nocera was the location of the notional 1 Cdn Div Sigs H.Q. operating under Plan "WAYSOCK" until 12 May. 1 Cdn Div, however, was on that date in a concentration area near Caserta ready for the move north into the line (W.D., 1 Cdn Inf Div, May 1944) and 5 Armd Div was assembling and training north of Capua (W.D., 5 Cdn Armd Div, May 1944).

43. With the material at present available it cannot definitely be established that the enemy expected an attack on Civitavecchia. The fact that Kesselring held a Panzer Grenadier Division (29 Pz Gr Div) in that area (Allied Strategy, para 16; German Strategy, para 4) is not conclusive proof, as the German

x The following War Diaries and appendices for the months of April and May 1944 were carefully checked: G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps; 1 Cdn Corps Sigs; G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div; 1 Cdn Inf Div Sigs; G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div; 5 Cdn Armd Div Sigs; H.Q. A.A.I., G(I) (Br); H.Q. A.A.I., G(Ops) (Br); A.A.I. Sigs (Br).

Commander had always to be watching his coastal flanks. A British evaluation, however, attaches considerable importance to the deceptive schemes carried out by A.A.I. under cover plan "NUNTON".

But for his fatal and Allied-inspired misappreciation of our intentions Kesselring was well placed. Fear of an Allied landing, of which he believed he had unimpeachable evidence, caused him to disperse widely the mobile reserves which he had carefully collected, rested and replenished. One Panzer Grenadier Division was disposed to watch the coast between the "Gustav" line and the bridgehead, a second was posted between the bridgehead and the Tiber and a third north of the Tiber in the Civitavecchia area. The remaining two were on the bridgehead, one partly in the line, the other, the 26th Panzer Division, in reserve; these also were regarded as available for use against a seaborne landing. Thus when the attack came the German reserves were far away and, since it was some time before Kesselring abandoned his preconceived idea of our intentions, they were committed reluctantly, piecemeal and too late. It is not too much to say that the victory gained in the Battle for Rome will rank in future as one of the supreme examples of the successful employment of deception.

(Allied Strategy, para 16)

44. In order to meet the requirements of the cover plan it was essential to persuade the enemy that an all out attack on the southern front would not be put in until some time after the threatened landing had taken place north of Rome. Eighth Army therefore set out to mask all signs of concentrations for the impending attack. Elaborate measures of concealment were necessary since a great part of the Liri Valley sector was under direct enemy observation from M. Cassino. Units moving out of training areas to more forward positions were instructed to leave behind enough transport and tanks to represent continued occupation; assembly areas were not to be marked with formation signs until the last possible moment; and all moves were to be carried out during darkness. Guns moving forward in position were to remain quiet until the opening of the attack. As an added measure of deception all training programmes for units not actually in the line were prepared and published up to and including 21 May (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. I, para 29).

45. In order to conform with the strict camouflage plan instituted by Eighth Army H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps prepared careful instructions for all its formations. In this task it was assisted by the staff of Eighth Army's Camouflage Branch. Prior to concentration all formations in 1 Cdn Corps received special instruction accompanied by demonstration in the art of camouflage. Extra supplies of the necessary materials for carrying out concealment were placed at their disposal. The Camouflage Branches of both Eighth Army and 1 Cdn Corps carried out careful supervision of camouflage work within all formations and units. (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/C/F Docket II: 1 Cdn Corps Concealment of Concentration Exercise "HONKER")

46. Units of 1 Cdn A.G.R.A. were the first to move into the battle area. Regiments took up positions opposite the Liri Valley front during the last week of April. In every case movement was carried out at night and complete concealment was obtained by first light. Inspection of each position was supervised by a camouflage officer of 1 Cdn Corps. Complete gun silence was enforced. (Ibid: Concealed Conc 1 Cdn A.G.R.A.)

47. 5 Cdn Armd Div moved into a concentration area near Vitulazio during the first week of May (see para 14). Although the location was approximately 30 miles south of the Liri Valley front, there was no reduction on the emphasis placed upon concealment. A camouflage directive from Divisional Headquarters emphasized this need:

It is of paramount importance that the camouflage policy in this area be such that there is no disclosure of concentration and even more important that the type of our formation is not made known to the enemy. The element of surprise must be preserved and to this end emphasis is therefore placed on concealment rather than dispersion. Siting and concealment will therefore be such that to the casual observer the extent of the concentration is not apparent. This policy must be made known to all ranks.

(Ibid: Concealed Conc 5 Cdn Armd Div, Appx IV)

Advantage was taken of natural cover and nets were used to cover all vehicle parks in the open. Strict camp discipline was enforced and movement of vehicles and personnel kept to a minimum. (Ibid). During the period of concentration the G.S.O. II Camouflage, A.A.I., flew over the area and commented: "It is really the finest effort of its kind I have seen." (Ibid: Appx VII)

48. Good natural concealment was provided for H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps when it moved from the Raviscanina area on 10 May to its operational Headquarters in area H 0107 south of Mignano. As Headquarters left Raviscanina units of corps artillery took over the vacated sites to make it appear that no movement had taken place. The Corps Commander's O.P. which was established on M. Trocchio, (see para 11) was given the most careful attention. In constructing the position the rocky face of the hillside was skilfully simulated and a covered approach was provided so that observers could enter and leave the post without fear of enemy detection. The enormous quantities of supplies and vehicles of Corps F.M.C. created a special problem, in the solution of which a great deal of work was carried out. As it was impossible to hide from view the vast amounts of ammunition, stores and equipment that had to be concentrated for the forthcoming offensive, the principle was followed of avoiding the use of large conspicuous dumps, and instead distributing material along roadside ditches and in the shadowed edge of tree clumps, where, covered by nets garnished with foliage and strips of hessian, its presence was effectively concealed from possible enemy observation. (Ibid: Concealed O.P., 1 Cdn Corps; Concealed Conc 1 Cdn Corps F.M.C.; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 10 May 44)

49. 1 Cdn Inf Div and 25 Armd Bde in areas S. Agata and Lucera did not require such careful camouflage. Both these formations were completing their training on the eve of the offensive. As each infantry brigade and its corresponding armoured regiment completed its infantry-cum-tank training in the Lucera area they were moved under cover of night to concentration in the S. Agata area, where training was continued on a smaller scale. The movement of tanks of 25 Armd Bde between these two points was carefully camouflaged, and on arrival in the new area only three tanks were used at one time for training purposes. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, May 1944)

THE EVE OF THE ALLIED OFFENSIVE, 11 MAY.

50. The eve of the offensive found 1 Cdn Corps prepared and awaiting its important role in the coming operations. Corps Headquarters in close proximity to the front (see para 48), was anxiously awaiting the opening of the main Allied attack and the subsequent order for the Corps' first offensive operational role. Two Canadian formations would be engaged from the very first. 1 Cdn A.G.R.A., positioned in the battle area (see para 46), was to take part in the enormous artillery programme that was to open the assault. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn A.G.R.A., 3 May 44). 1 Cdn Armd Bde under 13 Corps was assembled at G 9516, ready for its important role that was to begin on the first day of the attack. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 11 May 44) On 9 May the Corps Commander ordered a state of readiness and placed 1 Cdn Inf Div, 5 Cdn Armd Div and 25 Army Tk Bde on 24 hours' notice to move from 0600 hours 12 May (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1944, Appx 16).

51. No Eighth Army Operational Order was issued for the offensive. All orders were given verbally at a series of conferences (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. I, para 25). At a conference on the morning of 11 May at H.Q., 1 Cdn Corps, General Leese addressed unit and formation commanders and senior staff officers of the Corps. The strictest security cloaked this meeting as the following war diary account indicates:

The C.O., Lt-Col A.J. Creighton, left for 1 Cdn Corps H.Q. where, the following day, he attended a lecture given by the Eighth Army Commander, General Sir Oliver Leese. This lecture, ostensibly entitled as an Anti-Malaria Drive, dealt solely on the big offensive which was about to commence in Italy.

(W.D., Seaforth of C.,
10 May 44)

The conference was followed by another the same afternoon conducted by General Burns, in which the Corps' forthcoming course of action was examined. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 11 May 44; H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 11 May 44)

52. The outstanding significance of this great offensive, in which Canadian troops were destined to play a major part, was apparent to all. The morale of the troops was stimulated by the easily drawn conclusion that, contingent upon the fall of Rome, operations of greater magnitude would open in Northern France, thus welding the Italian offensive into the general plan for the destruction of Nazi Germany. A forecast of the trend

of events, indicating that the Allied Armies were on the last lap of the great adventure, was given by General Alexander in a message addressed to the 'Soldiers of the Allied Armies in Italy':

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. You will be supported by overwhelming air forces, and in guns and tanks we far outnumber the Germans. No Armies have ever entered battle before with a more just and righteous cause.

(W.D., H.Q. R.C.A., May 1944:
Appx 15, C.-in-C.'s Message
to 'Soldiers of the Allied
Armies in Italy')

53. On 11 May 13 Corps with two assault divisions - 8 Ind Div, with 1 Cdn Armd Bde under command, on the left, and 4 (Br) Inf Div on the right - was deployed on the east bank of the Gari from Cassino to the Liri, in readiness for the assault against the Gustav Line. 78 (Br) Inf Div and 6 (Br) Armd Div were in the Corps reserve area, (see Appx "A" and Map "A"). The task of 13 Corps was to secure a bridgehead over the River Gari between Cassino and the Liri, isolate Cassino from the west by cutting Route 6 and effecting a junction with 2 Polish Corps, (see para 30) and then clear the town and open up the Highway (Allied Strategy, para 17). Along the Corps front the Gari presented a formidable obstacle to infantry and tanks, as it was 60 feet wide and its rapid current ran some seven to eight feet deep. (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D, Narrative by Brigadier W.C. Murphy) The first task of 8 Ind Div, supported by 1 Cdn Armd Bde, was to establish a bridgehead across the Gari to include the S. Angelo Horseshoe^x and the Liri "Appendix".^{xx} Simultaneously on the right 4 (Br) Div was assigned the task of establishing a bridgehead between Cassino and S. Angelo. (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Appces C-F: Appx "C"-2, 13 Corps Operation Order No. 17, 30 Apr 44)

54. The attacks by the corps on Eighth Army's two flanks were to be developed at the same time as 13 Corps' effort. As we have seen (para 30), on the right of 13 Corps the Polish Corps was assigned in the first phase of the assault the task of isolating the area Monastery Hill - Cassino from the north and north-west and dominating Route 6 until a junction should be

x The S. Angelo Horseshoe was the name given to the area enclosed by a series of rises in the ground forming the shape of a horseshoe: Point 51 (G 852164 - Point 70 (G 847163) - Point 82 (G 833158) - Point 66 (G 845143) - Point 60 (G 853143). (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. III, para 6).

xx The triangle formed by the junction of the Liri and Gari Rivers is given the name Liri "Appendix".

effected with 13 Corps, subsequently capturing Monastery Hill; in the second phase the Poles were to gain contact with the Adolf Hitler Line north of Route 6 and develop operations against it with a view to a break-through. On the left the French Expeditionary Corps had as its first objective the Ausonia defile, to be followed by an advance on an axis generally parallel to that of Eighth Army but south of the Liri River; in the second phase the French were, if possible, to outflank the main defences of the Hitler Line from the south. (Allied Strategy; Sec "A", paras 17 and 18)

55. One thousand and sixty guns of all types were deployed for the attack on the Eighth Army front alone, whilst approximately 2000 guns covered the fronts of both Armies.* (Allied Strategy, para 20) Owing to the open nature of the ground on the left of Eighth Army's front approximately 300 of the guns had to be sited in the Polish Corps sector where better cover was obtainable. Among the 700 in 13 Corps sector, those of 1 Cdn A.G.R.A. and R.C.A. 1 Cdn Inf Div were disposed in an area north-west of Mignano (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn A.G.R.A., 2 May 44). The battle was to open with a forty-minute counter-battery programme by all the medium and heavy artillery against the enemy's estimated 400 guns and mortars. During the same period, and for an additional period in the case of 2 Polish Corps, the field and heavy anti-aircraft guns were to fire counter-mortar and concentrations on the enemy forward localities. When the counter-battery programme finished the bulk of the Corps and divisional artillery would revert to the command of their own formations. 13 Corps artillery would then fire a slow-moving barrage to cover the infantry attack across the Gari. (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. I, para 26)

56. To preserve the element of surprise there was to be no intensification of air effort on Eighth Army's front prior to the attack. During the early stages of the assault the main air support by day would be directed against the German batteries and mortars in the Liri Valley and in the Atina area east of M. Cairo, and by night against the enemy lines of communication. In addition fighter bombers would carry out vigorous armed reconnaissance missions in and behind the battle area with the object of harassing enemy daylight movements. A number of enemy headquarters were singled out for special attack on the first day of the battle. (Ibid: Appces A - B, Appx "A"-5, Notes on Air Operations During the Advance to Rome)

57. After many weeks of planning the stage was now set for the opening of the attack along the entire Fifth and Eighth Army fronts from M. Cairo to the Tyrrhenian Sea. All arms of the services had their appointed tasks dovetailing into the one co-ordinated plan of assault. Although 1 Cdn Corps was in Army reserve, with its future role dependent upon the progress of the battle, the guns of 1 Cdn A.G.R.A. and R.C.A. 1 Cdn Inf Div and the armour of 1 Cdn Armd Bde had their parts to play on the opening day of the great offensive.

THE ATTACK ON THE GUSTAV LINE

58. The day of 11 May was cloudy, with a little rain, but the night was clear except for heavy ground mist in the

* Fifth Army gives a total of approximately 600 guns on its front (Fifth Army History, Part V, The Drive to Rome, p. 33).

Liri Valley. At 2300 hrs the whole of the artillery of the Fifth and Eighth Armies, some 2000 guns, opened up with the pre-arranged violent counter-battery programme. The Fifth Army attack, which required comparatively little counter-battery firing, began immediately; that of 13 Corps three quarters of an hour later when the effects of our artillery fire should have been felt. Action on the Polish Corps front, which had to wait until 13 Corps had finished using the bulk of the artillery, did not commence until two hours later, at 0100 hrs 12 May. (Allied Strategy, para 20). The attack on 13 Corps front opened vigorously:

A storm of shell swept the Liri Valley, pounding enemy fortifications and artillery lines. Mortar teams sprang into action, raining their bombs on infantry concentration areas... As the shoot went down the leading infantry companies moved forward to the river bank. Among them staggered sappers under the weight of assault boats.

(The Tiger Triumphs, p. 69)

59. At 2345 hrs the first assault boats were launched; tanks of 12 Cdn Armd Regt were deployed on the river bank to help the crossing with covering fire.* The shoot on the enemy back areas abruptly switched on to a tight barrage advancing from the bank of the Gari at the rate of 100 yards in six minutes. (Ibid) By dawn on 12 May the right brigade of 8 Ind Div (17 Ind Inf Bde) had crossed the river and the bridgehead was pushed forward several hundred yards. The brigade on the left (19 Ind Inf Bde) was not so fortunate. As the right-hand battalion (3/8 Punjabs) moved forward up to the Gari enemy defensive fire crashed down on to its launching areas and caused heavy casualties. Many of the assault boats were swept down stream; others were holed or sunk by enemy fire. When first light broke at 0535 hrs the infantry were deployed on the enemy's side of the river without the benefit of barrage or the protection of darkness. The battalion on the left flank (A. & S.H.) fared even worse but managed to gain a shallow bridgehead. (Ibid, p. 72). 4 (Br) Div on the Corps right flank also succeeded in crossing the Gari and establishing a bridgehead after very heavy fighting. However, this formation's sector was most critical as daybreak approached because sappers had not been able to begin bridging operations. (Ibid, p. 75)

60. The whole success of the opening stage of the battle on 13 Corps front depended upon the rapid construction of tank-bearing bridges. The Gari, with its swift current, poor approaches and strong defences, was a formidable obstacle from the engineer aspect. The possible bridging sites were well known to the enemy and had been registered for defensive fire tasks. The failure of the infantry to secure more than a very shallow bridgehead, together with intense enemy fire, had made it necessary to abandon all attempts on 4 (Br) Div front with the coming of daylight on 12 May. On 8 Ind Div front the situation was better. Early on the morning of 12 May a strange looking object approached the Gari. (Germans captured later in the day asked awe-inspired questions concerning the new British secret weapon). A tank of 14 Cdn Armd Regt carried

* This section of the narrative, which deals with the operations of 1 Cdn Armd Bde in support of 13 Corps from 11 to 15 May, is recorded in Report No. 158, Operations of the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade in Italy, Part I. Repetition occurs only insofar as is necessary to carry the main theme of the story.

a complete Bailey span on its back, which another tank pushed from behind. The leading tank waddled into the river carrying one end of the bridge. In mid-stream it submerged; the crew climbed out at the last minute. The rear tank thrust, and the span slid across the back of the carrier until it reached the far bank. A slight hold-up occurred when the bracket clamping the bridge to the pusher refused to disconnect. A Canadian officer blew off the union with a light charge. This new bridge, a triumph of mechanical improvisation, was open for its first trial in action. (Ibid, p. 74)

61. The bridge which Canadian tanks had thus skilfully launched in so timely a fashion crossed the Gari at G 864148, on the site previously code-named "PLYMOUTH". A second bridge ("OXFORD") in 8 Ind Div's sector was completed about the same time, early on the morning of the 12th, at G 866147. The construction of these two crossings made it possible for tanks of 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts to reach the far bank and push forwards towards S. Angelo in close support of the infantry. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 12 May 44). By mid-day the greater part of the Division's two assaulting brigades and four squadrons of tanks were across the river (Ibid). One squadron pushed forward on its own to G 849141, but the infantry, pinned down by heavy fire, was unable to advance, and the tanks were compelled to return (Narrative by Brigadier Murphy). Not until the morning of 13 May did 4 (Br) Div manage to complete a bridge in its sector. At 0500 hrs "AMAZON" bridge was ready for use at G 868182, and support was available to the hard pressed infantry on the far bank. (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Appces G - F: Appx "C"-13, Notes on Engineering Operations, 13 Corps)

62. On the right of 13 Corps it was soon evident that the Poles were in great difficulties. They had seized "Phantom Ridge" north-west of Cassino Monastery early in the day but their losses were very heavy, and, by the late afternoon of the 12th, after a succession of counter-attacks accompanied by intense fire, they had been driven back along their entire front to their starting line. The Poles thus shared the fate of their predecessors, the Americans, British, Indians and New Zealanders in their first attack on this formidable bastion, Cassino. (Allied Strategy, para 20)

63. The air programme was launched successfully. On the opening night of the offensive over 50 Wellingtons continued their attacks on the enemy's west coast reinforcing ports whilst light bombers intruded on the roads north and south of Rome. On the 12th Kesselring's Headquarters was attacked twice, and the bombs of 80 heavy bombers completely destroyed Tenth Army Headquarters.* Medium bombers intervened

* Lt-Gen Fritz Wentzell, Chief of Staff, Tenth German Army Headquarters described this attack:

In the early morning, at about 0900 hours, there was a heavy air attack on Army H.Q. We had built air-raid shelters, and therefore our losses were small, those of the civil population very high. In a short time, however, we had re-established telephone communication with the Corps, and with Army Group, but conditions in the village no longer favoured quiet and intensive work on the part of the staff. After brief occupation of an interim HQ, Tactical HQ of Tenth Army moved to the HQ of 14 Panzer Corps in Castel Massimo near Frosinone, where there was room enough, and we had the advantage of being in the immediate vicinity of Corps HQs.

in strength in the land battle with attacks on other enemy headquarters, troop concentrations and communications; the light bombers successfully attacked enemy headquarters near Pico and Arce and gun areas over Pontecorvo, Atina, S. Giorgio and Cassino (Notes on Air Operations During the Advance to Rome; The Drive to Rome, p. 34).

64. Reviewing the general A.A.I. picture as it presented itself on the evening of 12 May it may be said that the situation was on the whole disappointing. The Poles had failed completely on the right, and on the left 13 Corps had gained only about half of the initial objectives which it had been hoped would be captured within the first two hours. Fifth Army had made some progress but it was still involved with the strong enemy positions facing it, and it had failed to obtain a breakthrough. Nevertheless General Alexander reported at 1830 hrs on 12 May that both Army Commanders were reasonably satisfied with the opening stages of the battle. (Allied Strategy, para 20)

65. During the greater part of 13 May there was hard and bitter fighting to enlarge the bridgehead on the 13 Corps front. At 1200 hrs a full-scale attack by 17 Bde of 8 Ind Inf Div and the tanks of 1 Cdn Armd Bde was launched against S. Angelo, and by 1500 hrs the town was reported clear. By last light armour and infantry had reached the line of their second objective and had consolidated in the areas of Colle Romano (G 8416) and Colle Vittiglio (G 8415). The tanks had played havoc with enemy strongpoints and had inflicted severe casualties on the defenders. Further west 19 Inf Bde, supported by Canadian armour, captured Panaccioni in the face of stubborn resistance, and by the evening the bridgehead was well established with a depth of 1500 yards on a 3000-yard front. On 4 (Br) Div front the infantry had made corresponding progress and had begun to mop up the area between the Cassino - S. Angelo road and the River Pioppeto (Narrative by Brigadier Murphy).

66. In the air the medium bombers' effort was now split between the direct support of the two Armies and the continuation of their interdiction programme. The heavy bombers reverted to the normal tasks well to the north of the ground struggle. There were few immediate targets, for the enemy's reaction was slow and it was evident that our offensive had been a tactical surprise. Visibility improved on the second day of the battle and virtually complete cover was maintained throughout the day by tactical or reconnaissance aircraft. 520 sorties were flown in support of Eighth Army during the daylight hours of 13 May. (Notes on Air Operations During the Advance to Rome)

67. Both 8 Ind Div and 4 (Br) Div made good progress on 14 May despite stiffening enemy resistance. On the Indian front the S. Angelo Horseshoe was captured, the Liri "Appendix" cleared and advanced elements reached Massa Evangelista within 1200 yards of Pignataro. On the 4 Div front a significant advance was made across the Cassino - Pignataro road in the area of G 8418. During the night of 13/14 May 78 Div (the reserve infantry division of 13 Corps) had passed over into 8 Ind Div bridgehead and pushed north-west between the two divisions already there with a view to cutting Route 6 and isolating Cassino and Monastery Hill. But their advance along the Piopeto was impeded by traffic congestion and constant shelling; progress

was slow. Although the gains during the day converted what had been a rather uneasy foothold across the Gari into a firm bridgehead, the commitment of the reserve division had not produced the impetus that had been hoped. On the right the Poles had still been unable to advance and it was clear that another attack on Cassino could not be attempted until the leading troops of 13 Corps were within striking distance of Route 6. (Narrative by Brigadier Murphy)

68. On 15 May a continued progress was made along the whole of 8 Ind Div front. At 0800 hrs 1/5 Mahrattas (21 Ind Bde) and 12 Cdn Armd Regt advanced against lessening opposition to the divisional objective, the cross-roads north of Pignataro. At 2000 hrs R.F.F. Rif, (19 Bde) supported by H.E. and smoke from 14 Cdn Armd Regt, managed to get into Pignataro and by 2300 hrs, after stubborn house to house fighting, the town was reported clear and tanks and infantry consolidated for the night. (Ibid). 4 (Br) Div, which was to serve as a pivot for 78 Div's wheeling movement to the north, consolidated its positions in the areas 8518 and 8317. Although the thrust against Route 6 again made little headway, all told it had been a successful day for 13 Corps. The whole of the lateral road from the railway south of Cassino to Pignataro had been wrested from the enemy. (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. III, para 32) A firm base had now been secured for a drive against the Hitler Line.

69. At this stage of the Liri Valley battle it is of interest to review the campaign on the entire front. On 15 May, after only four days of fighting, the Gustav Line from Cassino to the Tyrrhenian Sea was lost to the enemy. On that day 13 Corps had a firm bridgehead across the Gari and had overrun the defences in the Liri Valley. The Cassino stronghold was still in enemy hands but threatened by Polcorps, which was sitting poised for the attack to cut Highway 6. The F.E.C. had advanced across the Aurunci Mountains by way of M. Majo (taken on the 13th), captured Ausonia on the 14th, and had cleared all the country north of this town to S. Giorgio-a-Liri. On the coastal sector II (U.S.) Corps had captured Castelforte on the 13th and by the 15th had reached Spigno opening the Ausonia defile to the F.E.C. forces that had crossed the mountains to reach this town on the previous day. The whole of the German right flank had collapsed; its casualties had been such that it was never to form a coherent line again. (Allied Strategy, paras 21 and 22)

70. The enemy's own appreciation of the situation confirmed the breaking of the Gustav Line:

Hope of recovering our positions in the "Gustav" Line had to be abandoned when, on the third day of the offensive, 14th May, the vital sector of the Gustav position, from Cassino to the sea, was lost. Field Marshal Kesselring, however, believed that the enemy offensive could be stopped on a line somewhat further back; for example, on the Senger (Hitler) Line, or in the Melfa sector, somewhat after the manner in which it had occurred in the Sangro battle. In this case, by and large, the basis of our winter position would have been retained. (Wentzell).

(24/Interrogation/1,
Maj J.A. Philip, Wentzell
Interrogation, 5 Dec 46)

71. It is of value at this stage to note the apparent success of the Allied cover plan. The enemy appears to have been not only deceived in his forecast of the timing of the attack but also in his appreciation of the actual forces pitted against him. There is evidence to show that he completely failed to anticipate the opening of the operations on 11/12 May. In an order of the day the Commander 14 (Pz) Corps had warned his troops "The enemy offensive will start. We are prepared. From 24 May at 2400 hrs be on the alert to fight." A map showing our dispositions as known to the enemy on 12 May was very faulty and corresponded exactly to what the Allied Commanders wanted him to believe. Enemy dispositions were based on the belief that our frontal attack was only a diversion, and that we really intended to carry out another landing in his rear. Consequently he had the minimum number of troops in the line, and his reserve divisions were disposed along the west coast to meet the landing which he confidently expected. All German divisions in reserve were either grouped round the Anzio bridgehead or strung out along the western coast, and, by the time the enemy had decided his fears of a landing were groundless, these reserves were so slow in reaching the scene of battle that they were drawn in and destroyed piecemeal. That no really coordinated counter-attack developed against 13 Corps bridgehead during the first day is a measure of the extent of surprise achieved. (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. III, para 20)

72. But in spite of these Allied successes, there was still no sign of any immediate abandonment of the German intention to resist. Although the Gustav Line in the valley had been broken by the heavy fighting of 13 Corps, the enemy was holding out in strength all across the front, roughly along the line of the Pignataro - Cassino road. Between this position and the prepared fortifications of the Hitler Line, some half-dozen miles to the rear, the nature of the country, especially on the west side of the valley, where several streams drained into the Liri at right angles to the line of advance, was ideal for defensive fighting. Thus, by the evening of 15 May the battle of the Gustav Line in the Liri Valley was drawing to a close and the stage was being set by Eighth Army for a rapid advance to the Hitler Line. It was at this point that 1 Cdn Corps was to enter the Liri Valley Battle.

1 CDN INF DIV ADVANCE TO THE HITLER LINE, 16 - 19 MAY

73. The appreciation made by General Leese (see para 31) as to the role of 1 Cdn Corps proved to be an accurate one. On 13 May he issued orders for the Corps to prepare to move forward. (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/Eighth Army/C/I, folio III(d): M/1100/G(0), Preparations for Move of 1 Cdn Corps, 13 May 44) At that time, as we have seen, the assault divisions (8 Ind and 4 Br) had secured a bridgehead across the Gari and 78 Div was on the move forward into the line. Because of the failure of Polcorps on the right to cut off Cassino (see para 67), the task suggested in the second alternative of the Army Commander's appreciation - to attack in conjunction with 13 Corps - fell to 1 Cdn Corps. On 15 May General Leese issued the order that brought this plan into action (Ibid: Eighth Army Operation Instruction No. 142, 15 May 44; Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/Eighth Army/C/F, Docket II: Eighth Army Operations, Battles for the Gustav Line, and for the Adolph Hitler Line, May 11th to May 30th 1944).

74. This order extended the Eighth Army operation into a three corps offensive. 1 Cdn Corps was ordered to enter the battle on the left of 13 Corps, after relieving 8 Ind Div. By nightfall on 15 May the Indian formation had reached the area of Pignataro, practically exhausted after its four days of fierce fighting. 13 Corps was ordered to complete with Polcorps the pincers movement aimed at isolating Cassino and Monastery Hill. On the successful termination of this operation 13 Corps would advance in conjunction with 1 Cdn Corps towards the Hitler Line. (Eighth Army Operation Instruction No. 1421, 15 May 44)

75. On receipt of the Army order General Burns issued an operation instruction, putting into motion the fighting forces of the Corps.¹ 1 Cdn Inf Div with 25 Tk Bde under command was ordered to relieve 8 Ind Div at first light on 16 May, and then to advance and contact the Hitler Line. 1 Cdn Inf Div artillery was to revert from 13 Corps to the command of the division and 1 Cdn A.G.R.A. was placed in support or on call. 1 Cdn Inf Div Engineers were already constructing a Class 40 bridge across the Gari at 871135 ("Quebec") and two other Class 40 bridges, "Swindon" (885120) and "Tonbridge" (873126), were being built by 13 Corps for 1 Cdn Corps' use. Traffic control had already passed from 8 Ind Div to 1 Cdn Corps on 14 May and on completion of the three bridges 1 Cdn Corps would have three routes for traffic across the Gari. (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Corps/C/F: 1 Cdn Corps - Report on Battles of Liri Valley, 1 Cdn Corps Operation Instruction No. 8)

76. 1 Cdn Inf Div Tac H.Q. and 1 Cdn Inf Bde Gp had moved forward from S. Agata to the area Mignano on 14 May, at which time it was apparent that 1 Cdn Corps would shortly enter the fight, with 1 Cdn Inf Div taking over from 8 Ind Div. Plans were already laid for 1 Cdn Inf Bde to be committed first. The G.O.C. 1 Cdn Inf Div, Maj-Gen Vokes, was following closely the progress of 8 Ind Div and on 15 May while visiting 8 Ind Div H.Q. he completed plans for the take-over, a brigade at a time. 1 Cdn Inf Bde was to move forward and come under 8 Ind Div for the first phase of the relief. The next day 3 Cdn Inf Bde would follow. When both brigades were established in the line command of the Indian front would pass to General Vokes. (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/F Docket II: 1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I)

77. 1 Cdn Corps Operation Instructions No. 8 (see para 75), confirmed these plans, and 1 Cdn Inf Bde with 142 Regt R.A.C. (25 Tk Bde) and supporting arms began the move across the Gari the afternoon of the 15th. Although the Gustav Line had been broken the enemy was still maintaining a stubborn resistance across the whole front. The sector assigned to 1 Cdn Inf Bde included Pignataro, which had been captured at 2300 hours, and the sector south-west to the Liri. West of the river on the brigade's left flank the F.E.C. had already reached S. Giorgio-a-Liri (see para 69). The divisional intention for the relief was gradually to pinch 8 Ind Div out of the line by a slow extension to the right across the Indian front. During the day General Vokes' Headquarters received a serious blow when a jeep in which the G.S.O. II and the A.D.C. were riding hit a mine, killing the A.D.C. and seriously wounding the other officer. Both officers were important members of the Divisional staff, particularly on the eve of an offensive (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 15 May 44 and Appx 8)

* 1 Cdn Corps Order of Battle as of 1200 hours 17 May 44 is given as Appx "B".

78. During the night 15/16 May 1 Cdn Inf Bde dug in behind the Indians and movement into the line began at 0700 hours next morning. R.C.R. on the left advanced along the axis of the tow path (Liri) passing through 6 Lancers (8 Ind Div Recce), while Hast & P.E.R. were ordered to proceed towards Pignataro and take over from 21 Ind Bde. 48 Highrs remained in reserve (Ibid; W.D., R.C.R., 16 May 44; W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 16 May 44).

79. During the advance the leading company of R.C.R. came under heavy M.G. and mortar fire at 1030 hours as they crossed the S. Giorgio - Pignataro road. The enemy were holding a feature (802132) covering a road junction on the battalion's axis. "D" Coy, in the lead, tried flanking attacks on both the right and the left of the position, but were unable to make any progress. By this time it was apparent that the position was held in strength and a battalion attack was prepared with tank and mortar support. "A" Coy moved up behind "D" Coy and "B" Coy deployed to the right flank. The whole battalion dug in and awaited the attack. (W.D., R.C.R., 16 May 44; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 16 May 44)

80. The attack went in at 1700 hours with a squadron of 142 Regt, R.A.C. supporting the battalion. Two platoons of "A" Coy fought their way up the hill and forced the greater part of the enemy to retire. However, the defenders on the left near the river held on and covered the position with M.G., mortar and S.P. fire. "C" Coy attempted to reinforce "A" Coy but were held down by heavy fire and could not advance. The platoon on the left of "A" Coy had very severe fighting and during the engagement the platoon commander was killed while endeavouring to capture an enemy M.G. post. On the left as the enemy continued to rake their old position with mortar and S.P. fire causing heavy casualties the battalion commander, Lt-Col W.W. Mathers, ordered "A" Coy to withdraw. Casualties during the attack were 12 killed and approximately 25 wounded. About 50 prisoners were taken and as many killed or wounded. As later events proved that the enemy did not re-occupy the feature the attack was considered a success (Ibid). During the night 16/17 May the R.C.R. held a defensive position opposite the position from which they had withdrawn. The enemy continued shelling and mortaring, causing considerable casualties and destroying a six-pounder and an ammunition truck. Hast & P.E.R. had been contacted on the right at 1640 hours that afternoon but a patrol to the river during the night to link up with the F.E.C. was unsuccessful due to encountering enemy mines (Ibid).

81. As the Hast & P.E.R. moved into their sector on the morning of the 16th the Indians were completing the clearing of Pignataro. The battalion proceeded to by-pass the village and soon came into contact with the enemy at 813144 less than a mile to the west. Here they deployed with three companies forward and were engaged in heavy fighting for the rest of the day, making contact with the R.C.R. just prior to the latter battalion's attack. Several prisoners were taken during the afternoon by the Hastings at a cost of a few casualties. (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 16 May 44; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 16 May 44) By nightfall on the 16th 1 Cdn Inf Bde was thus established in the line from Pignataro to the Liri and in close contact with the enemy. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley: Part V).

82. Meanwhile 3 Cdn Inf Bde crossed the Gari during the 16th and relieved 21 Ind Inf Bde that night. The take over was completed by last light. West N.S.R. took up a position in area 8215 immediately north of Pignataro and Carlt & York R. in area 8216 on the right of the brigade and the divisional front.

R. 22e R. remained in reserve in rear of West N.S.R. (Ibid; Part VII). General Vokes assumed command of the 8 Ind Div sector at 2215 hours that night and immediately made plans for an advance by both brigades the following day (Ibid, Part I).

83. It is interesting to lay aside for a moment the main theme of the story and to try and picture a more romantic side. Here in the historical Sacco - Liri Valley, thousands of miles from their native lands, youths of Canada are on the march to Rome. How many of these lads as schoolboys a few years back could have imagined themselves continuing the history of that great city? Few of our fighting soldiers had time or the desire to record such romantic thoughts, but it is interesting to note the expression of adventure between the lines of the official records. Note this feeling which colours the following excerpts from two battalion War Diaries:

A long miserable winter of rain, snow, mud and the inevitable patrolling was at last but a memory in the minds of the Regiment. Now after three weeks of hardening training, away from the nerve shattering noise and tumults of front line service, the men of the Carleton & York Unit were ready for new tasks ahead. Our Allies had crossed the GARI river; the defences of the GUSTAV line had been bent and broken and the EIGHTH ARMY was on the march again.

On the 16th May 44, just as dusk was descending in the smoky battle scarred LIRI valley, the men of the Carleton & York under command of Lt.-col. E.D. Danby once again took their place in the line, relieving the short, tough, dusky fighters of a MAHARATTA bn in the Eighth Indian Div. There is only a cold MR of the location, with the ruined remains of PIGNATARO a mile or two beyond and S. Angelo a similar distance behind, but our task was clear: contain and destroy as great a force of the enemy as possible and push on to ROME.

The first night in a new area is always weird and creates an uneasy feeling in one's mind. Our posn as fwd right bn of the Div hardly tended to ease matters, particularly with an enemy so active with artillery, mortars, Moaning Minnies, flares and indiscriminate firing of M.G.'s...

(W.D., Carlt & York R.,
May 1944: Appx 16)

At about 1700 hours [16 May] this evening Royal 22e Regiment arrives in an area just South of Cassino. The main defences of the German Gustav line in this sector have already been breached by Indian Troops from whom we are taking over. Our unit takes over from the 3rd Bn, 15 Punjab Regt.

To our right are troops of the British 78 Division. Beyond them stands Monte Cassino, on top of which, one can just make out the outline of the Monastery, famed German bastion of the Gustav Line, still firmly and stubbornly held by enemy paratroops. On our left are units of 1 Cdn Inf Bde, and beyond them, in the mountains there, is the French Expeditionary Corps, now well on its way towards the Hitler Line...

(W.D., R. 22e R., May 1944:
Appx 10)

This determination and feeling of being part of a great military adventure, as well as the trained battle discipline of 1 Cdn Inf Div, was to take the Canadians forward on the morrow and enable them to play a leading part in the great battle so well begun.

84. The Army Commander was apparently not satisfied with the progress of 1 Cdn Inf Bde on 16 May, * as the following communication to General Vokes from General Burns indicates:

I have just been to see the Army Comd. and gave him an outline of progress of 1 Cdn Inf Bde to-day, and of your plans for tomorrow.

He is disappointed that no greater progress was made in the face of quite light opposition and is very urgent that a determined advance should be made tomorrow.

The French have progressed very quickly as far as Asperia [sic] and your left flank is therefore quite secure. The weight of the enemy's reserves have been put in against 78 Div who are attacking tomorrow in conjunction with the Poles. According to the Army Comd's information there is little immediately facing you to the west.

Your task for tomorrow the 17th is to advance towards the Hitler Line and it is most important that you send your brigades forward with great determination.

(Hist Sec file Italy:
1944/1 Cdn Corps/C/E folio 2,
Correspondence G.O.C.:
G.O.C. 1-0-2, 16 May 44)

85. In order to understand the Army Commander's remarks it is necessary to review the situation on the whole front on 16 May. South of the Liri the F.E.C. had advanced several miles further than the Canadians. That morning their troops were attacking Esperia and the whole area north to the Liri had been cleared (Allied Strategy, para 22; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1944: G Log, Sheet 42, Serial 36). To the right of the Canadian sector 78 Div had made good progress

* 1 Cdn Inf Bde was under command 8 Ind Div that day.

toward Highway 6, but with 1 Para Div still on M. Cassino the enemy was still putting up a very heavy fight all along 13 Corps front. (Allied Strategy, para 23). At this time the Pignataro area appeared to be the weakest part of the Liri Valley front (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div: May 1944 Appx 26). It would, therefore, be quite natural for the Army Commander to have expected 1 Cdn Inf Bde positioned between F.E.C. and 13 Corps to make better progress.

86. Immediately after taking command of 8 Ind Div sector General Vokes called an "O" Gp at 2300 hours 16 May and issued orders for the advance to begin at dawn on the 17th. The boundary between 13 Corps and 1 Cdn Corps dividing the valley roughly in half ran from S. Angelo west to road junction 786172 and thence north-west along the Forme d'Aquino (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, May 1944: Appx 45, Message Log Serial 9629). 3 Cdn Inf Bde on the right and 1 Cdn Inf Bde on the left were to advance simultaneously and contact the Hitler Line. 2 Cdn Inf Bde was ordered across the Gari to a reserve position east of Pignataro. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I) 3 Cdn Inf Bde, commanded by Brigadier J.P.E. Bernatchez, D.S.O., O.B.E., was ordered to advance at first light using all three battalions in "leap frog" fashion from their position in the Pignataro area to the high ground in G 7817 overlooking the Forme d'Aquino (Ibid, Part VII). 1 Cdn Inf Bde under Brigadier D.C. Spry was to press on with 48 Highrs passing from reserve into the attack between the R.C.Rs. and Hast & P.E.R. (Ibid, Part V). 3 Cdn Inf Bde would be supported by 12 Cdn Armd Regt, as 51 Tk Regt (25 Tk Bde) would not arrive in the battle area in time for the attack. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 16 May 44)

87. The 3 Cdn Inf Bde advance began at 0630 hours on the 17th after a fifteen-minute barrage, with R. 22e R., supported by "A" Sqn 12 Cdn Armd Regt, attacking across the Pignataro - Cassino road toward the high ground in G 8115. The battalion quickly overcame enemy opposition except on the right, where "D" Coy had to deal with a strong standing patrol. The tanks had more favourable going on the left and with their support "A" Coy was on its objective at 0930 hours. "D" Coy on the right after regaining contact with the armour completed its task twenty minutes later after very heavy fighting. By 1000 hours the battalion was secure on its objectives and approximately 45 prisoners had been taken. Unit casualties were 3 killed, 18 wounded, 7 missing. (W.D., R. 22e R., 17 May 44; W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 17 May 44)

88. West N.S.R. with "C" Sqn 12 Cdn Armd Regt went into the attack at 1030 hours, directed on the high ground in G 8016. Passing through R. 22e R. they went for the enemy like wildcats. The tanks supporting the rifle companies experienced considerable difficulty and most of the squadron got bogged down before reaching the objective. However, with the help of "A" Sqn fresh from its work with R. 22e R., the West Novas reached their objective at 1630 hours, and pushed patrols further forward. Resistance on the whole was slight, but heavy mortar fire accounted for considerable casualties. "D" Coy advancing through close country lost direction and one platoon wandered off to the 78 Div front. (W.D., West N.S.R., 17 May 44; W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 17 May 44)

89. Carlt & York R. during the day had followed up the brigade advance, and after the West N.S.R. had secured its position the battalion from New Brunswick began its "leap frog" movement, passing through the West Novas at 1700 hours. By 1900 hours the

Carlton & York R. with "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt had reached the area of the road junction G 785169 overlooking the Forme d'Aquino having encountered only moderate opposition. The brigade advance for the day had gone according to plan. (W.D., Carlton & York R., 17 May 44; W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 17 May 44; 1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part VII). Brigadier Spry, determined to push on while the enemy was disorganized, ordered Carlton & York R. to continue the advance during the night. Under cover of darkness "D" and "C" Coys moved forward towards the Forme d'Aquino. Before daylight "D" Coy had crossed the stream in the area of the mill at 776176, after overcoming determined resistance. By first light the company had secured a substantial bridgehead. (Ibid)

90. Meanwhile on 17 May 1 Cdn Inf Bde continued its advance toward the Forme d'Aquino in conjunction with 3 Cdn Inf Bde's attack on the right. A small stream, the Spalla Bassa, across the Brigade front restricted the use of supporting armour. The Brigade plan, however, was to continue the advance on a two-battalion front, with 48 Highrs from reserve passing to the attack on the left and the Hast & P.E.R. continuing its action on the right. (Ibid, Part V; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 17 May 44)

91. The Hast & P.E.R. had been held up the previous day in the area G 8114. The enemy facing them was found to be very strong and well supported by heavy weapons. Their position lay across the steep gully of the Spalla Bassa which was impassable to our tanks in a frontal attack. But maps indicated that further to the north the stream was not a serious obstacle, and woods offered good cover from view. The battalion plan for 17 May therefore was to outflank the enemy position from the right and occupy the high ground in G 7815 (Ibid).

92. At 0745 hours the battalion moved forward in a north-westerly direction on the near side of the Spalla Bassa. The unit had in support a squadron of tanks, one troop of S.P. guns, one troop of anti-tank guns, heavy mortars and a regiment of field artillery. During the advance through the wooded area "D" Coy became detached and was out of contact with the battalion all day. This Company, however, went off to the left where it carried on the fight with the 48 Highrs. "C" Coy leading the battalion, after an advance of nearly a mile, came under machine gun fire from strong enemy positions at 794157 and "B" Coy on the right also encountered heavy fire. At 0930 hours "C" Coy with mortar support tried to dislodge the enemy but was unable to do so; "B" Coy was ordered to support "C" Coy but met with no success. The enemy returned with heavy shell and mortar fire which forced the battalion to dig in with the forward companies around 799157. As the tanks had been unable to get forward artillery and mortars were ordered to bombard the enemy's position. By 1130 hours the West N.S.R. was attacking close by on the right (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, May 1944: Appx 8, Ops Log, 17 May 44). With this indirect support and the effectiveness of the supporting artillery Hast & P.E.R. was able by 1400 hours to continue the advance. By 1900 hours the battalion was across the Spalla Bassa but short of its original objective, because it was impossible to get supporting arms forward. Severe casualties were inflicted on the enemy during the day's fighting and nine prisoners were taken. The battalion casualties were seven killed and 30 wounded. During the night "D" Coy returned to its parent unit. (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., May 1944: Appx 4, The Battle of the Woods, and entry 17 May 44; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, May 1944: Appx 8, Ops Log)

93. On the 1 Cdn Inf Bde's left flank there was equally heavy fighting. During the night 16/17 May 48 Highrs moved a company into the line between the R.C.R. and the Hast & P.E.R. Plans for 17 May called for a battalion attack passing through the R.C.R. and advancing along the river on the Brigade left flank. The battalion task was to advance with Hast & P.E.R. to the high ground overlooking the Forme d'Aquino. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part V)

94. The battalion began its advance at 0730 hours with "C" Sqn 142 R.T.R. in support. But during the day events occurred which hindered successful infantry-tank co-operation. The tanks advancing along the Pignataro - Pontecorvo road encountered a minefield at the Spella Bassa crossing (806132) and were held up while gapping operations were completed. The infantry, however, continued the advance without the armour passing through the position that R.C.R. had fought for and abandoned the day before. They made contact with the enemy a few hundred yards beyond, and heavy fighting began. The 48th captured an enemy 88-mm at 798134 and continued their advance. "C" Sqn advancing without infantry after crossing the stream was surprised in tall grain by enemy troops armed with grenades and "faustpatrones" and lost several tanks. Such was the penalty of faulty team work between our infantry and armour. "D" Coy Hast & P.E.R., which had lost touch with its parent battalion was making good progress on the right of the 48 Highrs. It came under command of the Highlanders and fought with them for the remainder of the day. By last light the battalion had occupied the high ground in G 7813 overlooking the Forme d'Aquino (Ibid; W.D., 48 Highrs, 17 May 44; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, May 1944; Appx 8). During the day's fighting 48 Highrs had advanced over two miles and had captured 70 prisoners. Of this total "D" Coy Hast & P.E.R. claimed 20. This company, after having lost its initial direction, had actually done a wide left flanking movement on its own battalion's objective, and in doing so had greatly assisted the 48 Highrs in their advance (Ibid).

95. The remaining battalion of the Brigade, R.C.R., at 1335 hours moved two companies up between the 48 Highrs and the Hast & P.E.R., to cover the centre of the brigade front. During the afternoon these two companies came under heavy mortar fire and at last light one of them repulsed a strong enemy force which tried to infiltrate through its position (W.D., R.C.R., 17 May 44).

96. In the confused fighting during the day 1 Cdn Inf Bde had advanced parallel with 3 Cdn Inf Bde, although over more difficult terrain and possibly against heavier opposition. By nightfall, however, both brigades were in positions overlooking the Forme d'Aquino and within three or four miles of the Hitler Line. During the night the enemy counter-attacked with infantry and S.P. guns "D" Coy 48 Highrs, which was holding the Pignataro - Pontecorvo road at 783133 east of its crossing over the Forme d'Aquino. The attack proved to be the enemy's last reaction before his withdrawal along the whole divisional front, and it was driven off with heavy losses by the company and particularly by the efforts of the anti-tank personnel. Two S.Ps. were knocked out, but unluckily in a position where they blocked the crossing. (W.D., 48 Highrs, 17 May 44; H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, May 1944, Appx 8; and Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/F Docket III: The Enemy on the Adolf Hitler Line)

97. During the Canadian advances on 17 May the enemy was desperately engaged in attempting to reorganize his depleted forces in the Liri Valley. The units under control of 15 Pz Gr Div which had manned the Gustav Line had suffered heavily during

the first five days of the fighting and Field Marshal Kesselring had already been forced to release to the Tenth Army Commander some of his hoarded mobile reserves as reinforcements. Some time during 16 May or on the following day the troops that had fallen back from the Gustav Line were again in the process of being reinforced by units of 90 Pz Gr Div. Opposing 1 Cdn Inf Div on the 17th were III Bn 361 Pz Gr Regt, 190 Engr Bn, (two companies) 190 Recce Bn and I Bn 576 Gr Regt. The latter unit had already seen heavy action in the Gustav Line under command 15 Pz Gr Div. The total enemy infantry forces comprising approximately 1200 personnel were supported by 1/71 Nebelwerfer Regt and elements of 907 Assault Gun Bde (Mark III S.Ps.) and by elements of 190 Tk Bn (Mark IV S.Ps.) (The Enemy on the Adolph Hitler Line, May 1944).

98. A revealing picture of the enemy's disorganization following our advance of the 17th is given in an intelligence reconstruction of his dilemma:

During the night of the 16/17 and during day 17 this whole force continued to give strong resistance to our advancing elements and suffered particularly heavy casualties at the hands of the tanks in support of our troops. By last light the situation for the enemy was serious. Heavy casualties had been suffered, large amounts of SA had been expended without replacement, wireless jamming had occurred from similarity of frequencies placed side by side because of piecemeal commitment, and confusion was rampant because of disjointed command and rapid retreat combined with local penetrations on our part. The Bn HQ of III/361 was overrun and this led to much valuable information. Vague rumours of tank support were circulating in the enemy lines but in fact little support other than their own mortars and the Nebelwerfers of 1/71 Regt, and a very few SP guns had been realized. Particularly serious to the enemy at this time was loss of equipment. A/Tk defence was relying mostly on the Faustpatrone and these were getting scarce. One 88mm was overrun as well as many 75mm PAK and two 15cm Nebelwerfers and three halftracks.

(Ibid)

99. On the whole main Allied front on 17 May great advances had been made. 13 Corps' attack toward Highway 6 had reached its objective by nightfall. 78 Div attacking on the left flank of the Corps had advanced to the area of Piumarola (8018), which corresponded to the general advance of 3 Cdn Inf Bde. On the right sector of the F.E.C. front troops had reached M. d'Ono, (7410) and were fighting between this mountain and the Liri, well in advance of 1 Cdn Inf Bde (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1944, Appx 27).

100. During the night 17/18 May 1 Para Div pulled out of Cassino. Polcorps had fought hard all day on 17 May but was unable to join with 13 Corps on Highway 6 and so close off the escape route. It had been anticipated that the enemy would retire

during the night and patrols from 13 Corps were posted on Highway 6 to cut off the retreating Paratroopers. Although harassing fire was also laid on all possible exits the enemy slipped past. Early the next morning 4 (Br) Div captured Cassino town and at 1030 hours the Polish standard was seen flying over the ruins of the monastery (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. IV, paras 7, 8).

101. The enemy's withdrawal from the Cassino area on the night of 17/18 May was part of a general retirement on the whole Liri Valley front. The French by their spectacular advance were threatening to turn the Hitler Line from the south. There seems little doubt that the Commander of the Tenth Army, who had to rush reserves to the area, had begun to realize the necessity of saving his forces in the Liri Valley. By retiring to the fortified positions in the Hitler Line his already depleted forces would be better able to resist the powerful attacks of the overwhelming forces against them (Ibid, Chap. V, paras 1, 2).

102. Although on the morning of 18 May the units of 1 Cdn Inf Div found that the enemy had withdrawn completely from their front, both brigades had made plans during the night to continue fighting forward, and these plans were now put into effect. 1 Cdn Inf Bde's programme for the day was for R.C.R. to attack across the Hast & P.E.R.'s front and to clear the enemy from Massa Termine (7815). The latter regiment would then attack forward across the Forme d'Aquino and advance to high ground in 7715. 48 Highrs on the Brigade's left was to advance along the axis of the Pignataro - Pontecorvo road. (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 18 May 44; W.D., 48 Highrs, 18 May 44)

103. Following a Brigade "O" Gp at 0600 hours R.C.R. began its advance but encountered no enemy resistance. Hast & P.E.R. with tanks in support (142 Regt R.A.C.) then began to move forward. By mid-day the Hastings had crossed the Forme d'Aquino and with two companies of R.C.R. on its right flank the battalion reached its objective without opposition. At 1500 hours Hast & P.E.R. was ordered forward again and by 2300 hours was in position in the area 7515. R.C.R. in the meantime again advanced and by last light was in position in the same general area in rear of the Hast & P.E.R. (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 18 May 44; W.D., R.C.R., 18 May 44)

104. More caution was observed on the 48 Highrs' front, as they had been counter-attacked during the night by tanks and infantry. During the morning, however, the scout platoon patrolled forward and it soon became apparent that the enemy had withdrawn. Finally at 1545 hours the regiment crossed the Forme d'Aquino and continued forward without opposition. The divisional Commander, by this time knowing that the enemy had withdrawn, ordered 4 Cdn Recce Regt (P.L.D.G.) forward, assigning to it the area south of the Pignataro - Pontecorvo road. After delay caused by the two S.Ps. and blown bridge at 783133, (see para 96) a diversion was completed and both units moved forward. By last light 48 Highrs were in position in the area 7414 and 4 Cdn Recce Regt south of the road in 7413, both in light contact with the enemy. (W.D., 48 Highrs, 18 May 44; W.D., 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 18 May 44)

105. During the day 1 Cdn Inf Bde had advanced over two miles and was now within 2,000 yards of the outer defences of the Hitler Line. No casualties were suffered, but all day long prisoners were being taken, and a great deal of enemy equipment

fell into our hands; communication lines had been cleared and transport and supporting arms were on the move forward (Ibid).

106. On 19 May 48 Highrs were on the move again at 0830 hours and shortly after noon reached the area 7415, where they encountered light opposition. Hast & P.E.R. advanced until they made contact with the enemy, and by late afternoon found themselves up against the much publicised Hitler Line, within a few hundred yards of the enemy and under observation and machine gun fire. The battalion consolidated in the area 7416 as their tank support moved up. The disposition of the brigade at this time was: on the left 48 Highrs with 4 Cdn Recce Regt (who had forward elements right up to the outer fringes of the Hitler Line) between themselves and the Liri, on the right Hast & P.E.R., and in the rear R.C.R. in reserve. (W.D., 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 19 May 44; W.D., 48 Highrs, 19 May 44; W.D., R.C.R., 19 May 44; W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 19 May 44)

107. The right of the Divisional front saw more action. The morning of 18 May found 3 Cdn Inf Bde well in advance of its flanking formations. Carlt & York R., the leading unit, had one company across the Forme d'Aquino (see para 89) extending the Brigade front to a salient with both flanks open. On the right 78 Div had only reached the area 8018; to the left Hast & P.E.R. was still short of Massa Termine. The Brigade objective for the day was high ground in 7518 to be taken by the R. 22e R. attacking on the right and the Carlt & York R. on the left. During the night 17/18 May 51 R.T.R. had arrived in the Brigade area to relieve 12 Cdn Armd Regt, but Canadian Engineers had to build a bridge across the Forme d'Aquino at 775177 before the tanks could support the day's advance. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part VII)

108. When it became apparent that the enemy had withdrawn under cover of darkness great effort was made to get the battalions forward at once to their objectives. R. 22e R. began to move forward at 0630 hours and took up an intermediate position left of the Carlt & York R. along the Forme d'Aquino. Due to units of 6 Armd Div crossing the corps boundary and blocking 3 Cdn Inf Bde's route forward, the bridge was not completed until 1800 hours. Nevertheless, in the afternoon R. 22e R., without tank support, crossed the Forme d'Aquino and advanced along the road parallel to this stream, and by nightfall reached its objective without opposition. Carlt & York R. moving forward at the same time on the left flank of the R. 22e R. and suffering several casualties from shell and mortar fire during its advance, by nightfall had taken up positions in 7516 a bit short of its objective. After completion of the bridge at 775177 more units of 6 Armd Div became involved in another traffic congestion in the 3 Cdn Inf Bde area. For a time all traffic control broke down entirely as the British units insisted that they be given priority. The urgency of this advance by the 13 Corps armour is apparent. At the moment it appeared that the Hitler Line might be broken that night by 78 Div, who had advanced very quickly to the outskirts of Aquino. By midnight, however, the situation had been cleared up. The brigade supporting arms were on the way forward and after great confusion in the vicinity of the bridge these were in the unit areas by first light. (Ibid; W.D., R. 22e R., 18 May 44; W.D., Carlt & York R., 18 May 44)

109. By nightfall on the 18th the position of 78 Div in relationship to that of the Canadians had been reversed. The British formation had no obstacles like the Forme d'Aquino to hold up its advance. In response to an order from General Alexander urging Eighth Army to take advantage of the enemy

withdrawal, 78 Div, supported by armour, was directed to advance and pierce the Hitler Line before the Germans should have time to settle down in it. The advance was practically unopposed, and by 1800 hours patrols were in contact with the Hitler Line and a troop of tanks had entered the outskirts of the village of the Aquino. (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. V, paras 3, 4, 5). During the night 18/19 May, eager to exploit these gains, the Division attacked Aquino in strength, only to find the streets blocked from the heavy bombing of the previous day and the enemy on the alert. An exceptionally dark night made it difficult to keep control, and the attack was held up until daylight. (Ibid, para 6)

110. At 2200 hours 18 May the G.O.C. 1 Cdn Inf Div ordered 3 Cdn Inf Bde to push forward vigorously the following morning and assault the Hitler Line. The attack was to tie in with the attack of 78 Div on Aquino. As the ground was more favourable for tanks on the British front the main assault and the bulk of armour and artillery were assigned to that division. 3 Cdn Inf Bde's task was to break through the Hitler Line to the Aquino - Pontecorvo road. R. 22e R. on the right was to seize positions in 7319 and Carlt & York R. on the left in 7318. Both battalions were to be supported by a squadron each of 51 R.T.R. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part VII)

111. After preliminary concentrations of artillery the Canadian attack went in as planned at 0630 hours (19 May) and the first objectives were quickly overrun. At this stage the Brigade Commander decided that the artillery support was not strong enough for the two-battalion attack to continue. Carlt & York R. therefore consolidated 800 yards short of the Hitler Line and R. 22e R. was ordered to continue. By 0930 hours forward companies of the latter battalion had reached the edge of the wood in area 7419 with few casualties, caused mostly by snipers. When attempting to debouch from the wood, however, they came under heavy and accurate machine gun fire from the enemy prepared positions. The tanks moving forward to deal with these positions were engaged by 88-mms from the right flank, and several tanks were lost in a very short space of time. The infantry, still attempting to go forward on its own, came into very strong mortar fire and suffered heavily. The O.C. of the regiment, after a personal reconnaissance of the forward area reported to Brigade that the enemy was winning the fire fight and that stronger artillery concentrations would be required if he were to push on. It now became apparent that the enemy intended to fight for the Hitler Line and that a full scale attack with strong artillery support would be necessary to effect a breach. At 1400 hours Brigadier Bernatchez ordered the R. 22e R. to withdraw. (Ibid; W.D., R. 22e R., 19 May 44, and W.D., Carlt & York R., 19 May 44)

112. The attack of the R. 22e R. had taken them right up to the Hitler Line. One company reached a position 50 yards from the wire and the whole battalion was under heavy fire all day long. In front stretched the barbed wire and pill boxes of the enemy lines. All that the enemy could muster seemed to be centred on them. Snipers were everywhere, even behind the forward companies. In all the battalion suffered 63 casualties that day, (see Appendix "C"). When it became apparent that the advance was impossible the battalion Commander ordered all dead and wounded evacuated. All jeeps available were put on the job, but enemy snipers were reported as firing on the Red Cross flag. At 1500 hours West N.S.R. took up supporting positions behind the battalion, and at 1830 hours the R. 22e R. moved into reserve. (W.D., R. 22e R., 19 May 44)

113. Meanwhile Carlt & York R. had consolidated on the left of the West N.S.R. and by nightfall these two battalions held the brigade front several hundred yards from the enemy line. The former battalion had suffered over 30 casualties from artillery and mortar fire which had persisted very heavily all day long. They contacted the Hast & P.E.R. on the left to complete an unbroken divisional front that night (W.D., Carlt & York R., 19 May 44; W.D., West N.S.R., 19 May 44).

114. The 78 Div attack on Aquino had been no more successful than that of 3 Cdn Inf Bde. At first 11 Cdn Armd Regt supporting the Buffs made good progress in the early mist, but when the sun suddenly appeared and dispersed this cover the tanks found themselves in the open looking down the muzzles of the enemy anti-tank guns. The infantry came under heavy fire and was forced to retire, but the Canadian tanks remained forward all day - losing 13 Shermans - until ordered back after nightfall (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. V, para 7; See Report No. 158, para 50).

PRELIMINARIES OF "CHESTERFIELD", 20 - 22 MAY

115. By the morning of 20 May it was apparent to the Eighth Army Commander that the enemy intended to defend the Hitler Line. The unsuccessful attacks of both 1 Cdn Inf Div and 78 (Br) Div on the 19th made it clear that although the line might not be held in great strength, the heavy fortifications (see para 24) were too great an obstacle to overrun without a proper co-ordinated attack across the whole front. Such an attack would require at least 48 hours' preparation as a great mass of artillery must be moved up in support and careful reconnaissance would be necessary. The G.O.C. 1 Cdn Inf Div therefore ordered intensive reconnaissance and patrolling by both forward brigades to explore further the enemy defences, and to confirm what was already known about them. The divisional artillery was ordered to bring as much fire as possible to bear on these defences in a continuous and systematic softening-up process. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I, paras 11 and 12)

116. There was little change on either the 1st or 3rd Bde's front on 20 and 21 May. The forward units were ordered to patrol vigorously and to harass the enemy as much as possible. On the left of 1 Bde's sector 4 Cdn Recce Regt pushed forward a few hundred yards through the mines and wire and took some 20 prisoners (W.D., 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 20 and 21 May 44). Hast & P.E.R. patrols probed ahead and lifted mines and reconnoitred tank routes (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 20 and 21 May 44). On the 3 Bde front West N.S.R. and Carlt & York R. held their positions under heavy artillery and mortar fire. Patrols were sent forward from the Carlt & York R. to probe the enemy defences (W.D., Carlt & York R. 20 and 21 May 44; W.D., West N.S.R., 20 and 21 May 44).

117. Meanwhile on 20 May 1 D.M.I.^{*} (F.E.C.) attacked across the Forma Quesa, a stream running into the Liri towards M. Leucio (6717); although on 1 Cdn Inf Bde wireless net, the French were under the misapprehension that the Canadians would be in Pontecorvo before them. Consequently they were in danger on their right flank when they reached the outskirts of the town

* 1 Motorized Infantry Division.

south of the river. As a result of their call 1 Cdn Inf Bde brought all of the divisional artillery on to the town and called up 24 Kittyhawks. This artillery and aerial bombardment was kept up until 1800 hours and the French were thus able to advance and to get beyond the town on their own side of the river. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 20 May 44; W.D., H.Q. R.C.A. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 20 May 44)

118. On the 21st the F.E.C. took M. Leucio, and, advancing on Pico were well into the Hitler Line on the south side of the Liri. From their position on M. Leucio they could look down on the rear of the German defences in the Liri Valley. In this forward position with their right flank extending from the outskirts of Pontecorvo to M. Leucio they had only the river between themselves and the enemy. At 1445 hours approximately 50 enemy tanks were seen approaching Pontecorvo from the north-west. Had these tanks been able to cross the river at Pontecorvo the French salient would have been in grave danger. But, the Canadian division stayed the enemy. Artillery of 1 Cdn Div again supported the French and succeeded in dispersing and forcing the Germans to retire again to the north-west. Kittyhawks again assisted, forcing the enemy even further back. (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, Appx 8, Ops Log, 21 May 44). Part of this tank force, however, did cross further up the river that evening in area 6818 and forced the French to withdraw. The latter retaliated, and by midnight the line was again established north of the Pontecorvo - Pico road (Fifth Army History, Part V, Drive to Rome, p. 92).

119. An examination of the enemy situation at this time shows that General Alexander's plan to force him to draw off his mobile forces from the Anzio Bridgehead was succeeding. The identification of the Canadians in the Liri Valley on 16 May diminished Kesselring's fears of an amphibious landing on the west coast. Yet the fear of a main thrust from Anzio still kept him from committing his reserves in bulk to the defence of the southern front. During the early days of the attack on the Gustav Line elements of two of his reserve divisions, 90 Pz Gren Div and 26 Pz Div, were thrown into the battle in piecemeal fashion in the hope of stemming the tide of the Allied advance. Similarly committed were elements of 5 Mtn Div and 114 Jaeger Div from the static central part of the front (Allied Strategy, para 24). About 20 May, as the situation became more critical, two divisions from the Adriatic front, 305th and 334th Inf Divs, were also ordered down (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. VI, para 1). Lt-Gen Wentzell, Chief of Staff, Tenth German Army H.Q., tells in his own words this movement of reinforcements:

G.H.Q. Italy, however, persisted in their idea of defence and of gradually wearing down the attackers as it had done in the previous battles of Cassino and the battle of the Sangro. They placed under command of Tenth Army, one after another, the remainder of 90 Pz Gren Div, 26 Pz Div, and finally also 29 Pz Gren Div. Their task was to stop the enemy offensive on the Senger (Hitler) secondary defence line, and on the high ground of the Monte Ausoni, with their sea flank near Terracina. They believed they still had sufficient forces at their disposal to meet the attack which was expected from the Anzio bridgehead.

Furthermore, G.H.Q. Italy moved to the Adriatic flank and placed under command of Tenth Army 278 Inf Div, a formation which was still not fit to take over a sector of the main front. This new formation released the two-thirds of 305 Inf Div which was committed there, and the first units of 334 Inf Div, in order that these formations might be employed in the decisive sector.

(The Italian Campaign As Seen
By The Enemy: p. 31)

It is obvious that the enemy still hoped to hold the Allied offensive on the main front on a line from east to west, Aquino - Pontecorvo - Pico - Monte Ausoni - Terracina.

120. The defences of the sector facing 1 Cdn Corps on 20th and 21st May were being organized by the Headquarters of 90 Pz Gren Div, with 1 Para Div on its left opposite 13 Corps and 26 Pz Div on its right responsible for the Pontecorvo - Pico line opposite the F.E.C. 90 Pz Gren Div had already lost the greater part of its effectives and was now commanding a motley collection of armoured units which had been turned into infantry upon losing their tanks. In addition there were in support elements of two mountain regiments, an engineer battalion, and parts of four others, all fighting as infantry. Many of the troops had newly arrived from reinforcement units. Their morale was low but not broken. (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. VI, para 4)

121. The march of events was rapidly carrying 1 Cdn Corps to its first major assignment. On the evening of 18 May General Alexander had summed up the situation as follows:

The intention is not only to keep up the present pressure on the main battle front but to step it up. I have ordered Eighth Army to use the utmost energy to break through the Adolph Hitler Line in the Liri Valley before the Germans have time to settle down in it. I have also directed that the Poles press on at once to Piedimonte so as to turn this line from the north. And I have directed that the French Corps, after reaching Pico, turn north and come in behind the enemy facing Eighth Army. If these manoeuvres are successful it will go a long way towards destroying the right wing of the German Tenth Army. If we get held up in front of the Hitler Line, and we are unable to turn it from north or south, a full-scale mounted attack will be necessary to break it.

(Allied Strategy, para 25,
M.A. 1271 of 18 May 44)

122. On 20 May the Hitler Line in the Liri Valley had not been penetrated, and it was still uncertain whether this would be accomplished first by Eighth Army or Fifth Army. It

is obvious that an advance by Eighth Army up the Sacco - Liri Valley to Valmontone would be the better strategy. Such a manoeuvre coupled with an attack from Anzio on the same objective would cut off the enemy forces engaged in the mountains to the west. However, the heavy fortifications in the Liri Valley might make this too difficult a task. As an alternative to possible failure of an Eighth Army attack General Alexander on the 18th had ordered Fifth Army, whose main objective was designed to link up with the Anzio bridgehead, to be prepared if necessary to change the axis of its advance north towards Ceprano (see para 121). F.E.C. on the 18th was accordingly ordered to take Pico and to be ready to advance to Ceprano if the Eighth Army attack failed.^x

123. General Alexander had soon to decide the moment to strike from Anzio. In his appreciation of how the attack should progress (see para 28), he had forecast a stage when the main front should have drawn off the bulk of the German reserves and had paused to regroup. By 20 May, such a situation was now approaching. Eighth Army was regrouping in front of the Hitler Line and preparing for an all-out attack. Fifth Army south of the Liri had reached its first objective, the Itri - Pico road (Fifth Army History, Chap. V, p. 79). As for the drawing off of enemy reserves, about this time^{xx} the last mobile formation under Army Gp "C", 29 Pz Div, began to move south from its coast-watching north of Rome. General Clark ordered preparation for the Anzio break-out on 19 May, but the operation was delayed awaiting General Alexander's decision. Finally concentration at the beachhead took place on the night 21/22 May. Again, however, the attack was postponed a day for complete co-ordination with the attack on the main front.^{xxx} (Fifth Army History, Part V, Chap. XI, p. 108)

* The progress of the French Corps on the 20th and 21st is related in paragraphs 117 and 118.

** No information is at present available as to the date 29 Pz Div was ordered south, but on 22 May two regts of this division were identified opposite II U.S. Corps at Terracina (Fifth Army History, Vol. 5, p. 85).

*** In a speech before the Royal Canadian Military Institute in November 1946, General Alexander made the following statement:

It is arguable whether there is such a thing as luck, but if there is such a thing, it was on our side, because when the Fifth Army launched the attack from the Anzio bridgehead they struck at the moment when the last German battle group to be withdrawn from that front was moving south against the Eighth Army, with the result that it took no part in either of the succeeding vital engagements...

(Newspaper Clippings; Speeches Misc, "The Gazette", Montreal, 25 Nov 46: Timing as a Factor in War)

124. On 22 May General Leese issued the order for 1 Cdn Corps to assault the Hitler Line. 13 Corps would maintain pressure at Aquino and concentrate forward ready to advance abreast of the Canadians. The F.E.C. on the left and the Polcorps on the right would continue their operations against the flanks (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. VI, para 2; and Appx "A"-8, Eighth Army Operation Instruction No. 1422). The first stage of the Gdn Corps' task was to continue operations as far as the line Arce - Ceprano. 13 Corps was ordered to advance abreast of 1 Cdn Corps with Highway 6 as its axis of advance. In the second stage 1 Cdn Corps was to advance along the axis Ceprano - road junction 529261 - Pofi. 13 Corps in this stage would still operate on the right of the Canadian Corps along Highway 6. In the third stage 1 Cdn Corps would advance to Valmontone by way of Highway 6. 13 Corps in this stage would advance on the axis Frosinone - Alatri - Subiaco (Ibid).

125. Meanwhile in anticipation of such an order Headquarters 1 Cdn Corps was making plans for attacking the Hitler Line. On 20 May General Burns issued instructions for the breaching of the Hitler Line. In the first phase 1 Cdn Inf Div was ordered to breach the Hitler Line the night of 21/22 May or early on the 22nd. 5 Cdn Armd Div was to be positioned in support of 1 Inf Div and to be prepared to pass through the breach and exploit towards Ceprano (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1944, Appx 29, 1 Cdn Corps Operation Instruction No. 10). This operation later became known as "CHESTERFIELD".

126. At a conference at Headquarters 1 Cdn Corps on the same day, General Vokes outlined his plan of attack. He proposed a frontal attack in a line about 2000 yards wide with the right resting on the Forme d'Aquino. The attack would be in two phases:

- (a) To breach the defences and gain as a first objective the line of the Pontecorvo - Aquino road;
- (b) To complete the attack and gain as a final objective the line of the road Pontecorvo - Highway 6.

This operation would make a hole in the line 2000 yards wide and sufficiently deep to pass 5 Cdn Armd Div through. To effect such a breach he proposed to use 2 Cdn Inf Bde on a two-battalion front under cover of an intensive barrage, supported by two regiments of 25 Tk Bde. 1 and 3 Cdn Inf Bdes would make feint attacks and get forward into the defences as opportunity offered. This plan was agreed to at the conference, and H Hour set forward to 0600 hours, 23 May. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I, paras 11 - 13)

127. On the same day, however, (20 May) the Army Commander visited Corps Headquarters and discussed the plan of attack with General Burns. Following this meeting General Burns wrote to General Vokes:

The Army Commander has just been with me and has made the following comments on the plan so far as we have developed it.

He says that generally he thinks the scheme is sound, but from his experience of breaching the sort of defended line that

you are tackling, feels we are not using enough infantry, and the front is not quite wide enough. He feels very strongly that you should use two bdes up - either three or four bns in the line as you see fit. They should attack over a 2000 yd front and the barrage should overlap 500 yds either side. I felt that if you did this you would want to employ more tks, and I therefore asked him to provide another regt, without touching 5 Cdn Armd Div, and he agreed to give us the NZ regt which is now in S PIETRO... I am sorry not to have raised this point before, as your planning and preparations may have gone ahead on the other idea, but on thinking it over and hearing the Army Comd's reason (and he has great experience in this type of battle), I am sure he is right. Another advantage would be that if you had two bdes on the final objective, they would be in a good posn to roll outwards, if the conditions were favourable for this sort of manoeuvre.

The Army Comd emphasized that in this kind of battle things seldom go as well as one expects, and unless you have considerable depth, there is danger of the breakthrough failing and the operation failing of its object. He also suggested a possible ruse to get a bit of surprise and to upset the enemy gunners. He suggests that a burst, say of 10 minutes duration, of heavy fire from the bulk of the arty be put down on the 13 Corps front. This will not only lead the enemy to believe the attack is coming in on that side, but should alert his gunners and get them shooting. Then the counter-battery will come on and should catch a good many of them out in the open. After you have had the period of counter-battery you consider necessary, then the preliminary bombardment of the posns on your attacking front can commence. It seems to me like a useful and workable scheme; in fact, something like it had been worked before and when I see you tomorrow, you can let me know what you think of it.

(W.D., Lt-Gen E.L.M. Burns, O.B.E.,
M.C., Commander, 1 Cdn Corps,
May 1944: Appx 5, Burns to Vokes,
20 May 44)

The plan was accordingly changed and 3 Cdn Inf Bde less R. 22e R. was included in the attacking force. The French Canadian battalion and 12 Cdn Armd Regt^{*} were formed into a divisional reserve

* This regiment was used in place of the New Zealand regiment. It was to be the second time 12 Cdn Armd Regt was borrowed from 13 Corps. This regiment was attached to 3 Bde on 17 May and showed splendid co-operation on that day (see paras 86 - 89).

(1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I, para 13).

128. In the revised plan developed by General Vokes, 2 Cdn Inf Bde was to attack with two battalions forward and 3 Cdn Inf Bde on a single battalion front. From right to left across the 2000 yards of the Corps frontage there would thus be ranged three infantry battalions with supporting armour, - P.P.C.L.I. on the right, with one squadron of N.I.H; Scaforth of C. in the centre with the remaining two squadrons of N.I.H., and on the left Carlt & York R. with two squadrons of 51 R.T.R. L. Edmn R. with the remaining squadron of 51 R.T.R. would support 2 Cdn Inf Bde, and West N.S.R. the 3 Bde attack. The plan was simple and was divided into two phases. In Phase I the three forward battalions were to gain the first objective, "ABOUKIR", the line of the Aquino - Pontecorvo road. After a 60-minute pause Phase II would start. L. Edmn R. was to pass through P.P.C.L.I. and with Scaforth of C. the Loyals would advance to the final objective "CAPORETTO", the Pontecorvo - Highway 6 road. West N.S.R. in this second phase was to pass through Carlt & York R. and advance to the same road on the 3 Bde front. During the 60 minutes following the first phase, supporting arms would be brought forward to the P.P.C.L.I. position on the right and Carlt & York R. on the left, and these two battalions would then provide flanking protection for the second phase. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I, Appx "A"; Part VI, Section II, para 14; W.D., Carlt & York R., May 1944, Appx 5)

129. It was estimated that the attack, if successful, would breach the Hitler Line in just over three hours. In Phase I the first objective "ABOUKIR", approximately 1500 yards from the starting line, "ALOUETTE", was to be reached at H plus 75 (100 yards in five minutes). Four intermediate report lines, "JANUARY", "FEBRUARY", "MARCH", "APRIL", approximately 300 yards apart, divided this area. The second phase was to begin at H plus 135, allowing 60 minutes for consolidation of the first objective. The second objective "CAPORETTO", which was approximately 1500 yards beyond "ABOUKIR", was to be reached at H plus 185 (100 yards in three minutes). An intermediate report line, "BANNOCKBURN", approximately halfway between the first and second objectives, was a track running directly across the axis of advance. (W.D., P.P.C.L.I., May 1944; Appx 29, Map Trace; W.D., Carlt & York R., May 1944, Appx 5, Map Trace).

130. Artillery resources available for "CHESTERFIELD" totalled 810 guns of all types. Of these 128 were to be used exclusively for counter battery work, leaving 682 guns of all types available for the division's supporting fire. The attack was to be supported by a barrage of 288 guns along a frontage of 3200 yards which included 500 yards overlap on either side of the attacking area. Depth of the barrage was 3000 yards, and within this zone fire power available was sufficient to provide for a concentration of fire 600 yards deep at any one time. The remainder of the artillery would support the attack by firing approximately 60 concentrations on selected pre-arranged targets in enemy areas, some of which were to be superimposed over the barrage to neutralize the thickest of the enemy defences. The plan also called for four smoke screens (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part II).

* See Map "C"

** These guns included artillery units of adjacent formations including 13 Corps, F.E.C. and Polcorps.

131. On 21 May 1 Cdn Inf Div's preparations for "CHESTERFIELD" were almost complete. 2 Inf Bde had moved across the Forme d'Aquino on 19 May and was deployed in rear of 1 Inf Bde. Plans for the former's relief of 3 Bde on the night 20/21 May were revised, as we have seen (para 127), in order to conform with the two brigade attack planned for the 23rd. As enemy resistance on 1 Bde front was seen to be weakening 2 Bde was ordered to remain in reserve to support a possible breakthrough on the left (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 19 - 21 May 44). Meanwhile patrols of the forward infantry units were assisted by engineers in probing the defences of the Hitler Line all along the sector of the proposed attack, and an artillery bombardment of 1000 rounds an hour was crashing down on all known enemy positions (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part II, para 5).

132. In the early hours of 22 May, H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps issued the order that 24 hours later launched the first Canadian offensive on a corps level in World War II. This order confirmed the instructions previously laid down in Operation Instructions No. 10 (see para 125). Plans for the first phase - "1 Cdn Inf Div will break through the HITLER Line" - were complete. The second phase of the Corps operation - "5 Cdn Armd Div will pass through 1 Cdn Inf Div and exploit towards Ceperano" - was to begin on completion of the first, when Commander of 5 Armd Div received from the Corps Commander the codeword "PUNCH".* In addition to the artillery plan already proscribed (see para 130), 10 Corps artillery would assist by carrying out counter battery tasks on the enemy gun group at Atina. Moreover the Canadian Corps would have priority on all available air resources (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1944, Appx 33, 1 Cdn Corps Operation Order No. 1).

133. On 21 May G.O.C. 1 Cdn Inf Div conceived a plan that, had it succeeded, would have changed the course of "CHESTERFIELD" completely. That morning 4 P.L.D.G. made a considerable advance and captured a score of prisoners of war (see para 116). These prisoners turned out to be members of 44 Ersatz Battalion (44 Inf Div)** - a poor type with little stomach for fighting. It was therefore increasingly apparent that the divisional left flank was weakly held, particularly since the French had advanced on this flank to M. Leucio. The G.O.C. sent Brigadier Spry across the river to liaise with the French, with a view to passing a Canadian battalion across the Liri in the vicinity of Pontecorvo for a flanking attack on the Hitler Line. R.C.R. was ordered to prepare for such a move, and regrouping for "CHESTERFIELD" was postponed 24 hours. However, late in the afternoon, the Brigade Commander returned and reported that in his opinion the operation was not practical. No doubt the appearance of the 50 tanks in the area of Pontecorvo that day (see para 118) had a good deal to do with Brigadier Spry's decision (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 21 May 44).

134. General Vokes, however, still visualized the advantages to be gained by a flanking attack by 1 Bde, and he accordingly issued instructions that night for the brigade to prepare an assault for 0600 hours the following day. 3 Bde was ordered to make strong feint attacks on the right of 1 Bde.

* 5 Cdn Armd Div plan is taken up later in the narrative.

** W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1944: Int Summary No. 161, para 2.

While the attack on the 22nd was considered a preliminary to "CHESTERFIELD", General Vokes intended if 1 Bde had good success, to ask permission to exploit with 2 Inf Bde and outflank the enemy from the left (Ibid). The plan, however, considered in conjunction with "CHESTERFIELD", had one drawback. As we have seen (para 131) 2 Bde by being held in readiness behind 1 Bde was unable to move into the line on the right of the divisional front in time to make successful reconnaissance for the main attack.

135. In detail 1 Bde plan called for an assault against the enemy line and the establishment of a bridgehead in the area 730160 by 48 Highrs supported by "C" Sqn 142 Regt R.A.C. Having achieved this, 48 Highrs were to swing right on to the feature 733175. Hast & P.E.R. and R.C.R. with "A" and "B" Sqns of 142 Regt respectively were then to pass through 48 Highrs and leap-frog forward along the Pontecorvo - Aquino road towards the brigade objective, the high ground 739191 in the rear of the Hitler Line. In the last phase, 48 Highrs were to advance to this final objective. Support for the assault would be supplied by a series of heavy artillery concentrations which were on call and by all normal support weapons (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part V; W.D., 142 Regt R.A.C., 22 May 44). If the attack showed early signs of success all available artillery for "CHESTERFIELD" would be used to exploit (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part II). On the immediate right, Carlit & York R. (of 3 Cdn Inf Bde) were ordered to demonstrate in force with a company of infantry and a squadron of tanks supported by two batteries of artillery (W.D., Carlit & York R., 21 May 44).

136. At the request of Brigadier Spry, the time of the attack was postponed to 1000 hours and early on the 22nd P.L.D.G., with two troops of 142 Regt, was ordered to attack on the left flank along the Pignataro - Pontecorvo road, to pave the way for the Brigade attack (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I, paras 16 and 17). The Princess Louise began to advance at 0700 hours along the road with "A" and "C" Sqns left and "B" Sqn and the 142 Regt tanks on the right. By 1000 hours "B" Sqn with the tanks reached the area 728164, an advance of about 400 yards - good progress in these outer defences. Here they encountered mines, however, and were held up under heavy fire. On the left the other squadrons advanced slowly and during the day took some 60 prisoners from the Ersatz Battalion. (W.D., 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 22 May 44)

137. The 48 Highrs attack did not get under way until 1030 hours, due to the delay in the arrival of the supporting tanks. The battalion then advanced towards the enemy's lines from the position it had been holding for two days. The wire proved no obstacle to the 48 Highrs, but an anti-tank ditch across the attacking front made it impossible for the tanks to continue their advance. The sappers succeeded, however, in blowing down the sides of the ditch, but the tanks were again held up at a road diversion as they proceeded forward along the Pontecorvo road. A tank supporting the P.L.D.Gs. had struck a mine at this point and completely blocked the advance. In the meantime, 48 Highrs, advancing on their own, had almost reached their first objective. At about 1700 hours five of our tanks got through to the infantry - who were now in the area 729162 - but did not have enough petrol left to give the battalion support for a further advance. By this time the Highlanders had the enemy on three sides and were forced to consolidate. They had cracked the Hitler Line, but without continued tank support

could make no more progress. The anti-tank ditches, mines and blocked diversions, as well as the concealed anti-tank emplacements and enemy tanks, had taken a heavy toll of the supporting armour. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 22 May 44; W.D., 48 Highrs, 22 May 44; Hist Sec file Italy: 44/25 R. Tk. Bde/R/F; W.D., 142 Regt, R.A.C., 22 May 44, Appx "Q").

138. Meanwhile, Hast & P.E.R. on the right of 48 Highrs awaited in vain the order to advance, for due to the limited success of the latter battalion the move did not take place. As a diversion, however, the regiment was ordered to engage the line directly to its front in order to relieve the pressure on the Highlanders. With tank support one company went through the outer defences and took over buildings in the area 741171. R.C.R. likewise was not called on to support the attack, and two companies which had moved forward behind the 48 Highrs returned to their original positions. (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 22 May 44; W.D., R.C.R., 22 May 44)

139. On 1 Cdn Inf Bde's right the planned diversionary attacks of 3 Bde went in at zero hour. On the extreme right of the divisional flank West N.S.R., supported by "C" Sqn 51 Tk Regt, met with furious resistance, but after gallant fighting reached the line of the wire obstacle by 1300 hours. Having achieved their object and having gained valuable information, the battalion was withdrawn to its original position (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part VII, p. 33; W.D., 51 R. Tk R., May 1944, Appx 8). To the left of the West Novas Carlt & York R., however, with "B" Sqn of the armour, succeeded in penetrating the wire and passing two platoons through it. At this stage it appeared to the battalion Commander that if the remainder of his regiment could be committed with a second squadron of tanks and adequate artillery support, the battalion would be able to fight its way through the line. But, as a diversion, the attack had served its purpose, and it now became apparent that 1 Cdn Inf Bde would be unable to make a breach in the line through which 2 Bde could be passed. Carlt & York R. was consequently ordered to withdraw* (Ibid, and W.D., Carlt & York R., 22 May 44).

140. The attack of 1 Cdn Inf Bde had made a considerable penetration into the enemy defences, but the breach was not sufficient to justify changing the entire "CHESTERFIELD" plan. At 1600 hours the Divisional Commander, after ordering a halt to 1 Bde operations, directed the completion of the preparations for "CHESTERFIELD" (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I, para 17). During the late afternoon 2 Bde began taking over the

* This point was brought home to the O.C., Carlt & York R. by the Squadron Commander of the supporting armour:

"B" Sqn then received orders through the O.C., Carlt & York R. to advance in support but the O.C., "B" Sqn demurred and spoke to the O.C., 51 Tk R. and asked for confirmation of his decision. After some delay orders from 3 Bde were received that they were not to go through.

(W.D., 51 R. Tk R., 22 May 44:
Appx "H")

right flank of the divisional front. P.P.C.L.I. relieved West N.S.R. and Seaforth of C. took up its position between the Patricias and Carlit & York R. L. Edmn R. occupied an area in the rear of the "Pats". (See Map "D"). The move was complete by last light. Reconnaissance patrols from P.P.C.L.I. and Seaforth of C., with representatives from the North Irish Horse and the Engineers made final preparations for the forthcoming attack. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 22 May 44). On 3 Bde front West N.S.R. now moved in to the rear of the Carlit & York R. The success of the latter battalion in getting behind the enemy wire that afternoon, together with its previous activities on this sector of the front, found it well prepared for the attack next morning (W.D., Carlit & York R., 22 May 44). A gully running north-west from 7518 marked the boundary between 2 Cdn Inf Bde and 3 Bde (W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 23 May 44).

141. On the eve of the attack the Eighth Army Commander sent the following good wishes to the Canadian Corps Commander:

HQ EIGHTH ARMY,
C.M.F.

22 May 44

My dear Tommy,

I send to the 1st Canadian Corps my own best wishes and those of all your comrades in the Eighth Army, for the outstanding success in your great venture.

I am confident that you will add the name of the ADOLF HITLER LINE to those epics of Canadian battle history - SANCTUARY WOOD; VIMY; ORTONA.

Good luck to you all.

Yrs ever

Oliver Leese.

(W.D., Comd 1 Cdn Corps,
May 1944, Appx 6)

142. By nightfall, 22 May, Fifth Army had made great advances. But F.E.C. after 48 hours of heavy fighting had captured Pico that day and on the coast II U.S. Corps was close to Terracina. As we have noted, however, (see para 119) the enemy still hoped to hold a line extending from M. Cairo across the Liri Valley to Pico and through the mountains to Terracina as his last tenable position south of the "Caesar" Line. The assault by Eighth Army on this line was now ready, and the time to strike from Anzio had arrived. The main effort would be a combination of two great drives: by Eighth Army through the Hitler Line up the Liri and Sacco valleys, and by the Anzio Corps inland to Valmontone. If this succeeded the enemy forces in the mountains opposite F.E.C. and II U.S. Corps would be cut off completely. (Allied Strategy, paras 26 and 27)

1 CDN INF DIV'S ASSAULT ON THE HITLER LINE, 23 MAY

143. On the eve of the attack, 22 May 44, General Alexander signalled:

The battle has now reached a critical stage. The simultaneous attacks by the British, American and French planned for the early hours of tomorrow will soon show how operations are going to develop.

(Allied Strategy, para 29)

The weather report for the day of the attack was: "Fair, becoming cloudy, with light rain showers during afternoon. Visibility good, wind calm or light, westerly." (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 23 May 44). Daylight on 23 May was slow in coming, and, when 700 guns of all calibres fired the opening rounds of a mighty barrage, the ground in the valley was covered with that haze so peculiar to Southern Italy (W.D., Carlt & York R., May 1944: Appx 14, History of Carlt & York R.).

144. The preliminary bombardment and counter-battery programme commenced at 0500 hours and at 0558 hours the barrage opened as planned. At 0600 hours the assaulting battalions crossed the start line "ALOUETTE". P.P.C.L.I. and Seaforth of C. advanced respectively on the right and left of 2 Bde front, supported by the entire regiment of N.I.H. To the left Carlt & York R., supported by two squadrons of 51 R.T.R. led the attack on the 3 Bde front. (W.D., H.Q. 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Bdes, 23 May 44)

145. The brunt of the assault was borne by 2 Cdn Inf Bde on whom fell the full force of enemy fire.* As the leading battalions, P.P.C.L.I. and Seaforth of C., advanced the enemy was quick to sense the impending attack and brought down intense mortar fire punctuated with heavy shells on the area between the wire and our start line, inflicting many casualties before our troops were actually into the attack. The enemy's counter-battery barrage was not long delayed; the wail of Nebelwerfers, and a shower of 10 and 15-cm artillery rained on the woods and added to the confusion and din. The steady pounding of our guns, the roar of tanks moving forward and marrying up with the infantry set the pace for a momentous day. The hour of battle was at hand. Despite intense enemy fire our troops moved through the trees and out into the tall grain between the woods and the wire, and advanced slowly through a veritable holocaust, the equal of which had never been known to Canadians in this war. At the outset there was very little S.A. fire and the rate of advance of 100 yards in five minutes was maintained. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 May 44)

* This is understandable when one considers that the Aquino area adjacent to 2 Bde front was held by 1 Para Div, while the 3 Bde front was adjacent to the Pontecorvo area, which was completely outflanked by F.E.C. Moreover, the Aquino area covering Highway 6 - the main thoroughfare up the Liri Valley - held a much greater strategic value to the enemy, who therefore put forth the strongest efforts to retain it.

146. "A" and "C" Coys of P.P.C.L.I. were the first to penetrate the wire, and they fought their way into the defences towards their objective, the Pontecorvo - Aquino road. Both companies reported "JANUARY" at 0620 hours; by 0710 hours they were on "FEBRUARY". Mortar and H.E. fire was now becoming more intense. One troop of tanks moved forward but, owing to the withering enemy fire from strong and cleverly camouflaged S.P. and anti-tank fixed positions,* it was unable to support the infantry, who were forced to proceed without the assistance of armour (W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 23 May 44). Shortly after reporting "FEBRUARY" wireless failed and all contact was lost with the remainder of the battalion, which was pinned down just on the south side of the wire. The position on the right flank soon became grave, for not only were the Patricias under withering fire from their front, but mortars and M.Gs. were wreaking havoc on them from the right flank in the direction of Aquino. Mines on the edge of the wood now added to the difficulties of the supporting tanks which continued to be held up and were of little use to the infantry. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 May 44)

147. The last message over the air from "A" Coy before communications failed was that they were through the wire. "C" Coy gave no information at all, as their signals personnel had been separated from their Company Headquarters almost from the beginning. The situation was now very confused; runners and scouts sent to contact "A" and "C" Coys did not return. Casualties began streaming back with tales of platoons and companies decimated, and all officers dead or wounded. (W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 23 May 44)

148. Meanwhile Seaforth of C. on the left of P.P.C.L.I. were having better success. With "A" and "D" Coys leading they managed to reach the wire, dash through it and work their way into the mass of pill boxes and anti-tank guns between them and the objective. From the outset enemy mortar and artillery fire was intense, and our casualties were heavy. German anti-tank guns came into play and wrought havoc with the N.I.H. who were temporarily immobilized by mines. The infantry was obliged to continue without the support of tanks until a route was found round the minefield. By 0700 hours the "fog of war" had indeed descended on the situation. W/T communication was intermittent and in the case of "D" Coy was non-existent. But in spite of the fierceness of the enemy fire and the breakdown of infantry-tank co-operation, the Highlanders pushed doggedly forward, though suffering heavily. At 0840 hours the O.C. "B" Coy reported by wireless that he had gathered together the remnants of all four rifle companies, about 100 strong, and had consolidated on the first objective. (W.D., Seaforth of C., 23 May 44)

149. On the 3 Cdn Inf Bde front Carlit & York R., "A" and "B" Coys leading, supported by two squadrons of 51 R.T.R., crossed the start line at 0600 hours according to plan. Almost immediately "A" Coy ran into heavy enemy fire and from this moment the battle was fierce and fast. Although our artillery neutralised most of the enemy's M.Gs. and riflemen, the greatest obstacle to the advance was the relentless pounding of the

* Air photographs prior to the attack had not revealed the nature of the camouflaged objects which later turned out to be the anti-tank positions described in para 24.

hostile mortars, Nebelwerfers and artillery which the Germans had in great strength behind the line. A number of enemy tanks and S.P. guns advanced from the right flank to intercept our tanks, and at the same time anti-tank guns from the steel and concrete pill boxes of the Hitler Line came into action. A desperate tank battle developed, and was only won after our tanks had suffered heavy losses. With both squadron leaders knocked out the C.O. of the tank regiment personally took command of the battle. By about 1000 hours our armour had silenced the enemy tanks' anti-tank guns and moved forward on to their objective. Meanwhile the forward infantry who had been allowed 75 minutes to reach their objectives, had reported success. "B" Coy got through on schedule and closely on its heels came a composite company of "A" and "D". The right flank of the breach was secured. From "B" Coy came back the first batch of what later became a steady stream of prisoners. Amidst the smoke and confusion, "C" Coy at first lost direction but managed to pick up 25 prisoners before returning to its correct axis. Consolidation in the centre of square 7318 took place with "B" Coy forward left, "A" and "D" Coys forward right, and "C" Coy in support. (W.D., Carlt & York R., May 1944: Appx 16, Regimental History of Carlt & York R; 1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part VII, para 40)

150. In preparation for its role in the planned second phase of the operation, L. Edmn R. moved forward at 0530 hours and swung into position as the rear companies of P.P.C.L.I. crossed the start line at 0600 hours. "A" and "C" Coys were leading the battalion on the right and left respectively. Tanks of 51 R.T.R. married up with their infantry. According to the divisional plan the Edmontons were due to start Phase II from "ABOUKIR" (the P.P.C.L.I. objective) at H plus 135 (0815 hours). The failure of the two assaulting battalions of the Brigade to advance, however, caused frequent postponements of the schedule - the message "'BLACKWOOD' delayed" came over the Divisional network no less than ten times throughout the day (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, May 1944: Appx 1, Ops Log 23 May 44, Serials 28, 41; and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, May 1944: Appx 51, Ops Log, Serials 64, 71, 77, 81, 88, 94, 96, 102). At 0800 hours, however, L. Edmn R. crossed "ALOUETTE", with the intention of reaching "ABOUKIR" by 0845 hours - the time then designated for "BLACKWOOD" (the commencement of Phase II) (2 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 23 May 44, Serial 30).

151. Enemy shelling and mortaring and machine gun fire increased in intensity as the Edmontons advanced. They soon caught up with the rear company of the P.P.C.L.I., who were pinned down in the woods on the edge of the gully (7419). Here, owing to the narrow defile between the woods and the main valley of the Forme d'Aquino "C" Coy L. Edmn R. was forced to close in and to follow "A" Coy. To the murderous assault from mortar and M.M.G. was added fire from enemy snipers, some of whom were hidden in the lower branches of the trees. Nevertheless, "A" Coy pressed on until when only 20 feet from the enemy's wire they were forced to go to ground for a time; once again they resumed the attack and made the final assault on the wire and the enemy posts behind it. Two sections of the company breached the wire, but owing to the heavy volume of fire and the "S" mines sown in and about this network they were pinned down helplessly and unable to get further forward. At 0850 hours the battalion Commander, Lt-Col R.C. Coleman, M.C., reported to Brigade Headquarters that

he had lost control of his companies, whose No. 18 sets had gone out of commission (Ibid, Serial 52); shortly afterwards he himself was wounded and command passed to Major F.H. McDougall, O.C., "D" Coy. For the next two hours there was no communication with brigade. At this point wireless communication with the tank squadron that had been delayed by mines also failed. It was now apparent to the commander of the Edmontons that with his own battalion pinned down and the P.P.C.L.I. still heavily engaged in the same area, the battle on the right of 2 Bde front had reached a deadlock. Efforts were made, however, to get the supporting tanks forward, but to no effect. Sappers engaged in lifting the mines were almost completely wiped out in the face of withering machine gun and mortar fire. Two troops of tanks did endeavour to pass through a gap in the mines but were unable to do so because of the heavy anti-tank fire. The squadron then dropped back slightly and with the tanks of the N.I.H. supporting the P.P.C.L.I. took up a defensive position covering the infantry. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part VI, Appx "C"; W.D., L. Edmn R., 23 May 44; W.D., "B" Sqn 51 R. Tk R., 23 May 44)

152. On the 3 Bde front there was less confusion. In the early morning light, West N.S.R. moved to its forming up area behind Carlt & York R. An air of confidence was apparent everywhere. As Phase I was completed successfully the West Novas followed up to the rear of the assaulting battalion's objective on the Aquino - Pontecorvo road. But the difficult situation on the divisional right flank postponed the start of the second phase, and at 1000 hours the battalion was still waiting to advance; the C.O. gave orders to dig in. Enemy shelling and mortar fire was unremitting, and in their exposed position West N.S.R. had already sustained considerable casualties. The tank squadrons that had advanced with Carlt & York R. and which were to support West N.S.R. in the second phase had also suffered heavy losses. Several Churchills were blazing in every company area. The battalion, however, waited patiently for the order to go forward. (W.D., West N.S.R., 23 May 44; 1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part VII, para 41)

153. At this stage it may be well to summarize the situation as it appeared at 1000 hours on the day of the attack. As early as 0930 hours it was apparent that the much vaunted Adolf Hitler Line had been virtually cracked. Both Seaforth of C., (although only about 100 strong) and Carlt & York R. were astride the Pontecorvo - Aquino road and large numbers of prisoners had been taken. P.P.C.L.I. had not reached their objective, but they had depleted companies on both sides of the wire, where they were pinned down under very heavy fire. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 May 44). They were without effective armoured support, for the tanks on the 2 Bde front had been unable to get through the minefields. On 3 Cdn Bde front, however, our armour had overcome the defences to reach the first objective, and anti-tank guns had been brought forward to secure the position. Unfortunately the L. Edmn R. attack had been prematurely launched and was held up on our side of the wire, where the battalion was being badly cut up by enemy fire. On the other hand, the West Novas had moved up and were in position waiting for Phase II to begin. The enemy was now beginning to react strongly and was counter-attacking, particularly on our right flank. Moreover, our tanks were running out of petrol and required rearming. Such was the general picture of the battle front after four hours of fighting. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I, para 18)

154. By this time Phase II had been postponed nearly two hours because of the uncertain position on the 2 Bde front. By midday the situation all along the front had not changed materially and General Vokes was forced to continue the postponement. The delay compelled a change in the artillery programme. The barrage was reduced to half-scale and held as a protective screen for the attacking forces. The fact, however, that the enemy had not mustered a substantial infantry counter-attack on the Carlt & York position suggested the weakness of the defending forces on the left of the attacking front. The presence of the anti-tank guns in the Carlt & York position made it possible for the remaining tanks of 51 R.T.R. to withdraw in order to re-fuel and rearm. (Ibid, Part II, para 21; W.D., 1 Cdn A.Tk Regt, 23 May 44; W.D., Carlt & York R., 23 May 44; W.D., 51 R. Tk R., 23 May 44)

155. In the meantime, 12 Cdn Armd Regt, the divisional armoured reserve, was positioned forward in area 7418 in readiness for support or exploitation. From this point of vantage overlooking the battle area the Three Rivers tankmen watched the battle progress:

Up ahead there was a grand melee.
"A" and "C" squadrons watched from
their rise of ground while 30
Churchills were engaged and brewed
up by anti-tank guns of the "Hitler"
Line. A.P. was flying around as
thick as the H.E. and mortars.

(W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt,
23 May 44)

So effective and deadly was the enemy's anti-tank fire that even our armour in reserve suffered together with the attacking British tanks. Although taking no part in the battle two tanks of 12 Cdn Armd Regt went up in flames when enemy anti-tank guns discovered their position. (Ibid)

156. Efforts to overcome the opposition on the right of the 2 Bde front met with little success. The whole enemy area was eminently suited for defence, the crops and trees providing cover for the Germans and concealment for their weapons. Around 1100 hours communication with L. Edmn R. was restored and Brigadier Gibson endeavoured to complete Phase I of the operation. At this time, however, both the Edmontons and P.P.C.L.I. were squeezed in the narrow re-entrant on the right sector of the Brigade front, and communication with their leading companies who had crossed the wire could not be re-established. Casualties were mounting and with an enemy counter-attack imminent there was little hope of either battalion reaching "ABOUKIR". All across the Brigade front the tanks made repeated but unsuccessful attempts to get through the mines and wire with sappers desperately toiling to clear a path in the face of intense fire. Efforts to get guns forward from 90 A.Tk Bty also failed (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 May 44; 1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part VI, Section 2). The two infantry battalions therefore remained in a perilous position subjected to frontal and right flank fire, and from Brigade Headquarters to the Patricias came

the encouraging message:

Hold on. Good work. Will do all we can for you and send up more tanks. Looking at the broader picture the news is excellent. German transport is streaming up the road north westwards, and the "Hitler" Line has been breached along its length.

(W.D., P.P.C.L.I.,
23 May 44)

Meanwhile on the left of the Brigade sector the depleted companies of the Seaforth of C. held their ground doggedly on "ABOUKIR". When at about 1600 hours wireless communication with their Regimental Headquarters failed they remained in their position completely cut off from the battle that raged about them.
(W.D., Seaforth of C., 23 May 44)

157. At 1425 hours the Patricias were counter-attacked by tanks from the direction of Aquino, but our artillery fire was brought down and the enemy armour was prevented from closing in on the battalion. Shortly afterwards our tanks were able to draw up a little closer and give supporting fire to the infantry. Our defensive position on this flank became more stable as anti-tank guns were finally pushed forward to join the armour. At the same time one squadron of 12 Cdn Armd Regt was committed for defensive support on this flank. It was now apparent that enemy opposition on the 2 Bde front was too strong to allow the Brigade to undertake Phase II. Both infantry and tanks had been brought to a standstill. (Ibid; W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 May 44)

THE BREACH BY 3 CDN INF BDE

158. Throughout the day General Vokes had continued the postponement of the second phase until the arrival of 2 Cdn Inf Bde on its first objective should enable both brigades to advance together. By 1300 hours, however, he decided that the attack of 2 Bde was unlikely to succeed and that the best opportunity for success rested in exploiting the situation through 3 Cdn Bde. He, therefore, with the concurrence of the Corps Commander, immediately placed R. 22e R. and 12 Cdn Armd Regt under command of 3 Cdn Bde and ordered Brigadier Bernatchez to attack and capture the final objective. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I, paras 19, 20; W.D., Comd 1 Cdn Corps, 23 May 44)

159. This revised plan for 3 Bde did not alter the role of the West N.S.R., still awaiting the order to attack. The barrage would remain unchanged, but a new protective artillery screen was prepared to cover the gap that would exist on the right flank by 2 Bde's inability to advance. Two squadrons of 12 Cdn Armd Regt were ordered to support the attack as the badly battered British tanks were being withdrawn to reorganize. R. 22e R. would follow close behind the West N.S.R. attack and on reaching the intermediate objective "BANNOCKBURN" would veer right and consolidate the right flank of the breach. (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 May 44; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, R.C.A., 23 May 44)

160. By 1630 hours regrouping for the further exploitation through 3 Cdn Inf Bde was complete and West N.S.R. and R. 22e R. were ready to go forward. West N.S.R., who had waited all day under intense shelling and mortar fire, received the welcome message at 1620 hours: "Tank reinforcements coming up; attack 1640^h hours." "A" and "B" Coys leading the attack crossed the start line at 1640 hours to the second, really leaning on the barrage, being little more than 100 yards behind the bursting shells. The infantry made rapid progress, but the tanks had considerable difficulty in keeping up with them and were finally stopped at the Rio S. Martino, a small stream running across the line of advance. While the leading companies pressed forward towards the Pontecorvo road, the reserve companies mopped up. There were dead Germans everywhere; many prisoners were taken, completely demoralized by the speed of the attack. The advance had been so rapid that the enemy counter-barrage was dropping behind the reserve companies. "A" and "B" Coys reported "CAPORETTO", the final objective, less than three-quarters of an hour after crossing the start line. Here "B" Coy consolidated while "A" Coy moved forward to the high ridge beyond the road. "D" Coy performing an intricate left wheel pressed forward diagonally to consolidate the left flank.

161. Consolidation was not effected without strong enemy reaction. "A" Coy was counter-attacked by tanks and infantry, and a large part of the company was taken prisoner. The enemy, however, in apparent ignorance of our strength, marched the captives straight into "B" Coy's position, with the result that all the prisoners were freed and their captors were either killed or themselves taken prisoner. Soon after this incident "B" Coy heard the Germans forming up in the gully beyond the road, and supported by a troop of tanks from the Three Rivers Regt, which had by this time crossed the stream, attacked and dispersed the enemy. Meanwhile "D" Coy was attacked both frontally and from the left flank, but the thrust was dispersed by small arms fire which killed and wounded many of the enemy. It was the enemy's last effort, and for the remainder of the day and night all was quiet as the companies consolidated, with the tanks now in support on high ground overlooking the infantry positions. (W.D., West N.S.R., 23 May 44; W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 May 44)

162. Meanwhile R. 22e R. had received orders at 1400 hours to move forward to the area 7418 in preparation for the attack. Following closely behind the West N.S.R. advance the battalion crossed the Rio Martino with "A" and "C" Coys leading and by 1900 hours reached the area 730189. During their advance shells from the enemy counter-barrage were falling thick and fast all around them. Infantry opposition, however, was only slight, and by 2115 hours the companies had turned right, advanced to their objective, and were consolidating, with the forward companies at 729197, 732196 and 731192. Before nightfall tanks of 12 Cdn Armd Regt moved into position behind them. Several prisoners were taken and many useful maps, documents and traces showing the defences of the Hitler Line were

* The attack was actually set for 1650 hours, and is given as such in both Division and Brigade War Diaries.

seized. Twenty Iron Crosses were taken from a captured enemy Headquarters - possibly intended to be handed out as rewards for the successful defence of the Hitler Line ! (W.D., R. 22e R., 23 May 44; 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 May 44)

163. By last light 3 Cdn Inf Bde was firmly established on the lateral road Pontecorvo - Highway 6 and a wide gap had been made through the much vaunted Hitler Line. All organized resistance on the Brigade front had by this time ceased, although occasional pockets yet remained to be mopped up. It was not, however, until after midnight that enemy shelling and mortar activity died down. The timely attack by the West N.S.R. and the ability of 12 Cdn Armd Regt and R. 22e R. to push forward and consolidate was the crowning success of a day of the heaviest fighting which Canadian troops had so far experienced in Italy. (W.D., R. 22e R., 23 May 44)

164. As we have seen, operations on the 2 Cdn Bde front had reached a stalemate. In the late evening P.P.C.L.I. drew back on "MARCH" (748194) into what their diarist described as a "tight ball", with 77 all ranks* fighting strength gathered from all companies and battalion Headquarters. A company of L. Edmn R. was placed under command P.P.C.L.I. to assist in consolidation and cover the left flank. Opposition had slackened off by nightfall, although at intervals through the night shell and mortar fire was heavy. The battalion had been the recipient of the most concentrated enemy fire during the whole day and its casualties had been very heavy, more severe in fact than the Patricias had sustained in any previous engagement. (W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 23 May 44)

165. The heroic efforts of the Seaforth of C. in reaching their first objective had not directly influenced the course of the main attack. In the morning the smoke of battle which hung heavy over their section of the front had separated companies and platoons. They had, however, pressed forward, some arriving on the objective in sections with only two or three survivors. All of the officers with the exception of Major J.C. Allan, O.C., "B" Coy, had become casualties, and two C.S.Ms. had led survivors of their companies forward. The two squadrons of N.I.H., after the mines had been cleared, had been able to pass the wire, but tank after tank fell prey to the concealed anti-tank Panther emplacements of the Hitler Line. Some surviving Churchills made a gallant advance to the objective, but for some reason were unable to contact the infantry (the war diary of the armour reported "the posn of infantry is hazy"). These, eleven in number, were forced to return, but in doing so seven of them succumbed to the anti-tank positions they had been able to outflank on the move forward. Altogether 41 of the 58 tanks engaged on the 2 Bde front were knocked out during the day. There seems little doubt that had the infantry been able to locate and destroy these anti-tank emplacements during their advance the attack on the Seaforth front would have achieved complete success. (W.D., Seaforth of C., 23 May 44; W.D., North Irish Horse, 23 May 44; 1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part VI, Section 2)

* Total casualties for the day including killed, wounded and prisoners of war amounted to 202 all ranks. (See Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Corps/P/H Docket III). The war diary allusion to "77 all ranks" does not, of course, include the many riflemen who returned to their companies during the night and the following day.

166. At about 1645 hours, still with no tank or anti-tank support, Major Allan called an "O" Group to consider the situation of his isolated force. By this time wireless communication had ceased completely. While he was discussing the predicament with his N.C.Os. the Germans counter-attacked with infantry and tanks. Those Seaforths who were fortunate enough to have slit trenches or shelters fought from there. Others sought in the ditch alongside the road which formed their objective some protection from the murderous fire which poured from tank cannons and machine guns. Their supply of Piat bombs by this time was exhausted and they had no means of effectively engaging the enemy armour. The tanks lumbered slowly down the road pouring M.G. fire into the ditch, and the Seaforths suffered grievously. Then they came up with guns depressed to take each individual survivor in the ditch prisoner. The Seaforth diarist reviewing the day's fighting makes the bitter comment:

It is tragic, after fighting the grimdest battle the Brigade has ever known, being the only troops in the brigade to gain the objective, and then hanging on all day, that we could not be supported by anti-tank weapons.

(W.D., Seaforth of C.,
23 May 44)

167. The Seaforth had fought a good fight but the odds had been against them. One well concealed anti-tank emplacement is reported to have accounted for no less than 13 Churchills on their left flank.* The Historical officer with 5 Cdn Armd Div recorded the following observation two days later:

On the way back I examined a German 88 MM Anti Tank Gun (MR 735186, ITALY 1/100,000 No 160.) It appears to be the same gun as that in the MK 6 "Tiger" Tank. The turret, which is especially made for the purpose was set in an underground concrete emplacement which is connected by tunnel to a small gully some hundred feet to the rear. I am told that tanks, belonging to 25 Br Armd Bde, came upon it in a mist and had no choice but to stay and shoot it out. The 88 MM accounted for no less than 13 Churchills before an AP shot from one of the latter penetrated the German emplacement and exploded the Amm inside. Had its presence been known, the weapon might have easily been taken out by a section of Infantry with Piat or slab charges.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Fd Hist Sec Type "A",
Appx 3; Personal Accounts Capt.
R.T. Currelly, 25 May 44)

* The position of this gun (735186) was actually in the Carlt & York area, but its field of fire covered both battalion fronts.

Some of the personnel manning these emplacements were paratroopers, (see para 170) thrown in to strengthen this part of the Hitler Line. (W.D., Seaforth of C., 23 May 44, Appx 18; Statement by K50302 Pte Dore, H.F.). Of the 100 men who had been overrun on "ABOUKIR" many had been taken prisoner; Major Allan^{*} and 26 other ranks, however, survived the attack and were able to rejoin the unit during the night and the following day. In the early evening Battalion Headquarters, which was still on the fringe of the wire, gathered approximately 120 survivors and retired to its position of the night before (7518). That night the battalion counted its losses for the day as 12 officers and 248 other ranks killed, wounded and missing^{**} (W.D., Seaforth of C., 23 May 44, and Appx 18; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 May 44).

168. The L. Edmn R. remained pinned down in the area of the woods (7419) during the remainder of the afternoon, unable to get forward. At about 1600 hours the battalion had consolidated in a position which ringed the main woods. At 1800 hours, as we have seen, "B" Coy was ordered to come under command P.P.C.L.I. to help in their consolidation, and at night-fall the remainder of the battalion was ordered to the area 7418, where they covered the position vacated by the remnants of the Seaforths (Ibid). A check of the remaining three companies found only 161^{**} all ranks remaining. It had been another costly day for the victors of Ortona (W.D., L. Edmn R., 23 May 44). On the 25th, under the direction of their padre, 37 men of this regiment were buried in the 2 Cdn Inf Bde cemetery (Ibid, 25 May 44).

169. By 1900 hours enemy fire slackened off and was confined to a battery of heavy guns which systematically searched the woods in the 2 Cdn Inf Bde area. It had, without doubt, been the worst 24 hours experienced by 2 Cdn Inf Bde so far in the Italian campaign. Not even in the bloody fighting of Ortona had a single day inflicted such heavy casualties on the Brigade. The day's assault on the Hitler Line had cost the Western Brigade 162 killed, 302 wounded and 77 taken prisoners of war (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Corps/P/H Docket III). A number of reasons may be adduced for the severity of the ordeal this right flanking brigade had faced that day (see also para 174). The brigade's sector on the Aquino side of the divisional front was in close proximity to Highway 6 - a potential avenue of advance for the armour of Eighth Army which the enemy was determined to deny as long as possible. There is little wonder then, that the enemy's defensive positions, particularly in the P.P.C.L.I. area, were later found to have been exceptionally heavily fortified. The terrain, too, through which 2 Bde's advance route lay, was especially favourable to the defenders. The high wooded bluff to the west of the Forme d'Aquino was an effective tank obstacle, while the long depression of the valley itself, overlooked by the enemy's guns

* Major Allan was wounded during the counter-attack and only escaped being taken prisoner by pretending that he was dead. For his gallantry and determined resistance Major Allan was awarded the D.S.O.

** The total casualties as compiled from C.M.H.Q. Casualty Cards give a truer picture of the losses of the two battalions on 23 May. These records show total casualties of 12 officers and 189 other ranks for the Seaforth of C. and for the L. Edmn R. 3 officers and 135 other ranks. (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Corps/P/H Docket III; Summary of Casualties 1 Cdn Inf Div).

on the high ground to the west and in the outskirts of Aquino, became a natural killing-ground. All lines of approach to the Brigade objective were thickly sown with mines. The machine gun posts from which so much of the enemy's deadly fire came were almost impregnable, their concrete roofs flush with the ground. (W.D., L. Edmn R., 25 May 44; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 May 44)

170. Contributing to the enemy's stubborn resistance in this sector of the Hitler Line must be included one other factor. This was the appearance opposite 2 Cdn Inf Bde of representatives of the familiar 1 Para Div. As we have seen, the opening stages of the Liri Valley battle had found General Heidrich's veterans facing 13 Corps and the Poles in Cassino, and later at Aquino. During 1 Cdn Inf Div's advance to the outer defences of the Hitler Line there had thus been no encounter with the paratroopers. But on the night of 22/23 May, after a day that had seen the southern end of the defence line turned, the enemy shifted all of his troops 300 metres to the south, in a desperate effort to neutralize the unfavourable situation. The move brought a company of II/3 Para Regt into position opposite the extreme right of the Canadian front. It is not too much to say that the presence of these hardened paratroopers in 2 Bde's sector contributed in no small degree to the Brigade's losses on that fateful 23rd. (The Enemy on the Adolf Hitler Line, p. 6)

OPERATIONS ON THE LEFT FLANK, 23 MAY

171. While 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Bdes had thus been engaged in the history-making task of breaching the Adolf Hitler Line, 1 Cdn Inf Bde had operated in a diversionary role on the left flank of the divisional front. Not committed on 23 May to the direct assault on the German defence line, the Brigade was ordered to continue its "shuffling process" forward, with the idea that if its attack were successful it was to be exploited as a full scale breakthrough (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part V). Early in the morning a fresh squadron of tanks (of 142 Regt R.A.C.) was passed into the bridgehead secured by 48 Highrs on the previous day, and throughout the day the Battalion fought hard to reach its original objective - Point 106, the hill in square 7317. During the afternoon, when the tank strength of the two supporting squadrons had been reduced to one troop of Shermans, the remnants of one company of the Highlanders ("D" Coy) had managed to gain the top of the hill, and a second company ("A" Coy) was pinned down half way up the slopes. (Ibid). Hast & P.E.R. was now ordered to attack on the right of the 48th in an effort to relieve the situation. The Hastings had forward companies in the areas 740170 and 741166, and at 1400 hours "D" Coy attacked, supported by a squadron of tanks. Uncertainty as to the position of forward elements of 48 Highrs restricted the use of supporting artillery. (Ibid). Enemy machine gun posts were carried in bitter hand-to-hand fighting, and with great courage and determination the attackers stormed through to their objective at 739168. They established contact with the 48 Highrs unit on the left whose position was thus considerably eased. At 1500 hours "B" Coy Hast & P.E.R. attacked, crossed the wire, and fought their way quickly forward until forced to ground by intense machine gun cross-fire. The supporting tanks were called up, and with their aid the infantry were able to advance and overrun the enemy's defended area before he had time for effective

reorganization. The company consolidated in area 738171. At approximately 1700 hours "A" Coy was ordered to move through "B" Coy and seize Point 106. Encountering only slight opposition they reached and consolidated a position just short of the objective. During the day's engagements, the battalion captured some 300 prisoners at a cost of approximately 30 casualties. (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., May 1944; Appx 5)

172. With their right flank secured 48 Highrs continued to push forward and by nightfall had fought their way through the line and consolidated in the area 731166. Their casualties for the day amounted to approximately 50 all ranks. (W.D., 48 Highrs, 23 May 44). R.C.R., who had moved two companies up into the bridgehead to support the Highlanders' attack, followed through in the afternoon behind 48 Highrs and advanced on the Brigade's left flank parallel with the other battalions. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part V). At 1830 hours the C.O. of R.C.R. ordered his scout platoon to reconnoitre the high ground in the area 726173, a south-westerly spur of the 106 feature. The platoon reached the area, on the way capturing an anti-tank gun and its crew. They reported the feature clear and at 0100 hours "A" Coy moved forward and consolidated the Brigade's most advanced position near the Rio S. Martino, only a few hundred yards south of the West N.S.R. position (W.D., R.C.R., 23 May 44). On the extreme left of the divisional front 4 Cdn Recce Regt, which had made little progress during the early part of the day, received orders in the late afternoon from G.O.C. 1 Cdn Inf Div to push on through Pontecorvo to the Melfa River. The enemy was observed withdrawing northward into Pontecorvo from 725158, but no contact was made. Several hundred yards in front of Pontecorvo a minefield stopped the P.L.D.Gs. from advancing further that night. (W.D., 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 23 May 44)

173. As night fell 1 Bde had completed the breach of the Hitler Line on the Pontecorvo - Point 106 front. Although this had come as the result of a diversionary and less spectacular operation than the main thrust, the Brigade had accomplished an important part of the day's success. The severity of the action in this sector is attested to by the following summary:

A few statistics in connection with the entire operation may serve to give some indication of the intensity of the fighting which took place. 77 officers and men of 1 Cdn Inf Bde Gp were killed, and 200 were wounded. The Bde Gp destroyed a considerable number of tks or S.P. guns and a few smaller vehs. Over thirty enemy arty pieces ranging from 5 cm A Tk guns to 15 cm Inf Guns were captured. Over 80 MGs were counted and there were many more that fell into our hands and were not reported. Enemy casualties included over 600 PsW taken by the Bde, and over 200 known enemy dead were reported. On the Bde sector there were some 25 armoured-steel pillboxes of the "CRAB" type, three Mk V "PANTHER" turrets in emplacements, and 12 pre-fabricated steel dugouts with their attached MG posns.

(1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part V)

174. Phase I of "CHESTERFIELD" was now complete. The battle for the Hitler Line had been definitely won by noon on the day of the attack, although the breach in the line had been made later than had been anticipated and further to the south towards Pontecorvo than had been intended. The second phase of the day's operations was devastating in its results, and by 1800 hours it was apparent that the enemy had had enough and that the breach was securely held. At the close of a hard day's fighting the enemy had been driven from the southern part of his defences in the Liri Valley, and he was in full flight towards the Melfa. By first light on 24 May the whole sector from Pontecorvo to the outskirts of Aquino had been cleared. It had been a very tough and steady fight by our forward elements all day long. The carnage and destruction of enemy troops and defences in the Adolf Hitler Line had to be seen to be believed. In the twenty-four hours ending at first light on 24 May 15 officers and 525 other ranks were taken prisoners. This total, when added to the large numbers lost in killed and wounded, accounted for the greater part of the troops that had been left to man the defences. Our own casualties were also high, amounting to 50 officers and 874 other ranks. (See Appx "C"). In drawing conclusions from the battle the Commander 1 Cdn Corps attributed our heavy losses to two main causes:

- (a) The postponement of regrouping on 22 May meant that 2 Cdn Inf Bde had moved into its sector too late to carry out sufficient reconnaissance and patrolling;
- (b) 2000 yards was too narrow a frontage for an attack by three battalions, as this allowed the enemy to concentrate his artillery and mortar fire.

(Eighth Army Advance to Rome,
Chap. VI, para 18)

175. Air support during the attack had not been utilised to any great extent; the day was misty and visibility in the air was poor. However, light bomber and fighter bomber armed reconnaissance missions were soon able to take toll of the enemy's road transport. As the Germans fell back, the air programme of cratering roads, destroying bridges and creating blocks played havoc with his lines of withdrawal. To our pilots with their complete air supremacy many targets presented themselves and the retreating enemy was relentlessly harassed and "strafed". (Ibid, Appx "A"-5, Notes on Air Operations During Advance to Rome)

176. 23 May also brought news of other great successes. Since there had been no offensive operations on 13 Corps front most of their artillery was engaged in support of our attack.* An F.E.C. thrust on the Pico - Ceprano axis designed to support our Hitler Line offensive met with little success, although an enemy counter attack was held and a slight net advance was made during the day. Further west II U.S. Corps advanced rapidly and almost outflanked Terracina (Fifth Army History, Part V, pp 86 - 95). The Anzio bridgehead attack had been an outstanding success. Complete local surprise was gained and the enemy defences, although they had been under development since early March, proved less formidable to the Allied troops than those of the Hitler and Gustav Lines. The Special Service Force (S.S.F.) on the right of the attacking force reached Highway 7 east of Cisterna (Summary C.I.G.S./1/4 No. 265, 24 May 44)

* A troop of 14 Cdn Armd Regt with one platoon of the 1st East Surreys of 78 Inf Div appears to have provided the only (very minor) diversionary move on the 13 Corps front on 23 May. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 23 May 44).

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177. Thus we see that all three corps - 1 Cdn Corps, II U.S. Corps and F.E.C. - contributed to the final destruction of the enemy Aquino - Pico - Terracina line. It is impossible to state with any finality which of these three Allied formations struck the deciding blow. The writer of the Fifth Army History makes the following assertion:

On the 21st the Germans had failed to retake the vital point of M. Leucio and on the 22nd the French captured Pico threatening to trap all the enemy forces; accordingly the German High Command issued orders for a withdrawal all along the front to the Valmontone - Avezzano line.

(Fifth Army History,
Part V, p. 96)

If such an order were issued it seems logical to infer that the F.E.C. drive in the Pico area forced this decision, with its consequent withdrawal toward the Caesar Line. The German viewpoint is given by Lt-Gen Wentzell:

As seen by the German staff, the French Expeditionary Corps made the decisive contribution to the breakthrough in the Gustav Line and the Senger position (Hitler Line). This statement is not an attempt to evaluate the capacities and performance of the French troops, for the French Expeditionary Corps attacked the weakest part of the German defensive front.

(Hist Sec file 24/Interrogation/1
folio 145, Wentzell Interrogation)

178. The influence exerted by the Fifth Army advance upon the course of the battle north of the Liri is emphasized by General Wentzell:

The situation between the Mediterranean and the Liri had the further consequence that no added support could be given to the defensive front against Eighth British Army. On this front our troops were protected by the defence works of the Senger Riegel, and by strong artillery concentrations. Here the battle in itself was not without hope. If we could have allotted a division as reserve to 51 Mountain Corps instead of 14 Panzer Corps, our prospects of holding the Senger Riegel would have been quite favourable. In the existing situation, however, the German defence was soon worn down by the weight of armour and artillery employed by the enemy, and on the 24th of May the Corps had to begin to withdraw, in the first instance behind the sector of the River Melfa.

(The Italian Campaign As Seen
By The Enemy, p. 32)

179. The meritorious exploits of 1 Cdn Inf Div in breaking the Adolf Hitler Line were readily and generously appreciated by the Army Commander, Lt-Gen Sir Oliver Leese, Bt., K.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., who paid tribute to all ranks in a personal letter to the G.O.C., 1 Cdn Inf Div. This letter may well be quoted in full:

28 May 44

My Dear Chris,

I feel at this stage of the battle I would like to write this letter to thank and congratulate you and all ranks of your great Division on your breach of the Adolph Hitler Line.

This line was vaunted to the world as an impregnable position. One has only to visit the defences for a short time to realise the immense amount of work and ingenuity that have been put into their layout and construction.

Your attack was extremely well laid on, very well supported and brilliantly executed. Your Infantry attacked with that same dash and determination that I have grown always to expect in them since your first operations with me in Sicily. Your action played a decisive part in our initial victory. The Adolph Hitler Line will always be a worthy battle honour in the annals of the 1st Canadian Division.

I would be glad if you would pass this message on to your Officers and Men.

With my grateful thanks and best wishes for the future,

Yours sincerely,

(signed) Oliver Leese

(W.D., P.P.C.L.I., May 1944:
Appx 38, Leese to Vokes, 28 May 44)

180. As we have seen, the second phase of "CHESTERFIELD" was to be carried out by 5 Cdn Armd Div. On 18 May the division had moved from the Vitulazio area where it had concentrated during the first week of May (see para 14) to the Liri Valley east of Pignataro (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 19 May 44). On 20 May, in order to conform with the Corps plan, (see para 125), it was ordered forward again, and concentrated in support behind 1 Cdn Inf Div just east of the Forme d'Aquino (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1944: Appx 29, 1 Cdn Corps Operation Instruction No. 10; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 20 May 44; W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 20 and 21 May 44). The hour was now fast approaching when General Hoffmeister's division would embark on its first all-out offensive action and earn for another Canadian formation battle honours worthy of the traditions of the British Eighth Army.

5 CDN ARMD DIV'S ADVANCE TO THE MELFA, 24 MAY

181. In the breaching of the Hitler Line the enemy had suffered a decisive reverse, and his stubborn resolution to stand fast at whatever cost had at last to bend before the hard facts. The line of withdrawal of the enemy forces was now threatened. The French, having captured Pico, were continuing along the San Giovanni road towards Ceprano and Route 6. More significant, however, the breaching of the Hitler Line by 1 Cdn Corps opened the Liri Valley to the full weight of the Eighth Army. The race for Valmontone was on. Simultaneously the Anzio Force was advancing toward the same target on Route 6. The jaws of the Allied armies were closing. No line south of the Caesar Line, the last defence bulwark south of Rome, could now be considered tenable for any length of time. The concern of the Allied Commanders was now not only to destroy the enemy forces but to forestall the occupation of the Caesar defences. The first obstacle behind the Hitler Line on which the enemy rearguard might be expected to take up its position was the River Melfa, a broad, shallow meandering stream with steep banks, whose course cuts at right angles to the Liri. Kesselring would undoubtedly try to block the Liri Valley at this point long enough to allow the withdrawal of his troops from the area to the south, and by halting the advance of Eighth Army prevent a junction of the main Allied forces with the Anzio bridgehead until he could get his armies into the Caesar Line (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. VII, paras 1, 2 and 4; Allied Strategy, para 23).

182. While units of 5 Cdn Armd Div were concentrating forward on 20 and 21 May, General Hoffmeister completed his plan for the second phase of "CHESTERFIELD". The armoured division's role was to pass through 1 Cdn Inf Div after the Hitler Line had been breached and to seize crossings over the Melfa with the object of exploiting towards Ceprano (see para 132). General Hoffmeister planned the advance in two stages:

Phase I 5 Cdn Armd Bde would advance through the Hitler Line and seize a crossing over the Melfa.

Phase II 11 Cdn Inf Bde would pass through 5 Cdn Armd Bde at the Melfa and advance towards Ceprano.

The general plan required that as 5 Bde moved forward to the Melfa 11 Bde would follow and consolidate firm bases initially established by the armoured brigade (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/5 Cdn Armd Div/C/F Docket V: 5 Cdn Armd Div Reports on Operations, Appx "A")

183. Due to the limited width of the front and the depth to which 5 Cdn Armd Bde's attack had to go - approximately five miles - it was appreciated that any plan for the crossing of the Melfa had to be very flexible. Secondly, it was clear that with the possibility of an exposed right flank and the uncertainty of what might happen on that portion of the Hitler Line north of Aquino, a firm base must be established between the Hitler Line and the Melfa, in order that enemy positions on either flank could be adequately dealt with. Further, the difficulty of ascertaining accurately the exact position of the breakthrough of 1 Cdn Inf Div made it impossible to utilize any form

of fixed artillery support for H Hour. Strong supporting forces would become available to the armoured brigade for its role in the opening phase of the operation. The Ir R.C. were to be placed under command, while most of the divisional artillery and engineer resources, plus all the Corps artillery in support of the 5 Cdn Armd Div were to be at the disposal of the brigade (Ibid, Appx "D"; H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944).

184. For the first phase of the advance 5 Cdn Armd Bde was to be broken up into three forces as follows:

Vokes Force, under Lt-Col F.A. Vokes, C.O., 9 Cdn Armd Regt, consisting of:

9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.)
Ir R.C.
98 A.Tk Bty (S.P.) R.C.A.

Griffin Force, under Lt-Col P.G. Griffin, C.O., 2 Cdn Armd Regt, comprising

2 Cdn Armd Regt (Ld S.H.)
"A" Coy, Westmr R. (Mot), plus
two scout platoons.
91 A.Tk Bty (S.P.) R.C.A.

A Reserve Group, made up of:

5 Cdn Armd Regt (8 N.B.H.)
Westmr R. (Mot) (less one company
and two scout platoons)
8 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) (less one battery)

A detachment of engineers would move with each group and would carry mine lifting equipment and demolitions. One section of 7 Lt Fd Amb was assigned to each group (5 Cdn Armd Div Reports on Operations: Appx "D").

185. The plan in brief was as follows: Group I (Vokes Force) would move through the breach formed by 1 Cdn Inf Div and secure a firm base in the general area of Mancini (7122). (See Map "E") Once this position was established, Group 2 (Griffin Force) would pass through it or on one flank, depending upon the situation, and cross the Melfa in area 6824, using for the river crossing the Westmr R. (Mot) company, and if possible the armour allotted to the Group. Immediately a fording place was found the remainder of the Westmr R. (Mot) was to be ready to go forward and enlarge the bridgehead, while 8 N.B.H. were to be prepared to move forward, cross the Melfa and exploit in the general direction of Ceprano. During the move forward of Group 2, one squadron of G.G.H.G. was to cover the Westminsters' right flank, and one the left. As soon as the bridgehead was established and the 8 N.B.H. had crossed and moved towards Ceprano, it was anticipated that Group I would be relieved by 11 Cdn Inf Bde and would go into reserve (Ibid).

186. 11 Inf Bde's plans could not be formulated in advance. Ir R.C. engaged with Group I, would play a part with 5 Cdn Armd Bde in the first phase. The remaining units of the brigade would move forward behind the armoured brigade and be prepared to exploit beyond the Melfa. The infantry brigade's operations in this phase would, of course, depend on the success of Phase I, as well as on the amount of opposition encountered (W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, May 1944).

187. Three routes from the Gari forward to the Hitler Line (see para 75), "Club", "Diamond" and "Heart" had been taken over from 13 Corps and developed by 1 Inf Div during its advance. On the left, "Club" route followed the Pignataro - Pontecorvo road, "Heart" on the right was adjacent to 13 Corps boundary and "Diamond" ran along the central axis (W.D., C.R.E., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1944; Appx 9). On 20 May, 5 Armd Div was given control of "Heart" route for its move forward. This route crossed the Forme d'Aquino in the area of square 7717, and it was along this route that 5 Div would advance, to whatever point the breach in the Hitler Line might take place (W.D., H.Q. R.C.E., 5 Cdn Armd Div, May 1944: Appces 2 and 4). Consideration was given to the problem of clearing a route forward when the breach of the Hitler Line was complete and R.C.E. personnel of both 1 Inf Div and 5 Armd Div were to co-operate in such a task. (W.D., H.Q. R.C.E., 5 Cdn Armd Div, 21 May 44).

188. Grouping of 5 Armd Div was carried out east of the Forme d'Aquino in the general area 7917, and on the morning of 23 May preparations were complete. As the success of 1 Cdn Div was delayed, however, 5 Armd Bde were unable to assemble further forward during the day. Moreover, "Heart" route was blocked by the excessive traffic on the one road available as well as by tanks of 25 Armd Bde which were withdrawing from action to regroup and refuel. At 1730 hours, however, the Commander of 1 Cdn Corps judged that the battle for the Hitler Line was won and ordered 5 Cdn Armd Div to pass through the gap made by 3 Inf Bde. Great difficulty was experienced crossing the Forme d'Aquino and due to the rain, which began to fall during the late afternoon, the road forward was becoming practically impassable for armour. Moreover, the tanks had to cross the Forme d'Aquino on the right of the Corps sector, while the breach in the Hitler Line had been made on the left. At 2100 hours Group I, (Vokes Force) had barely reached the 3 Bde gap in the Hitler Line. By this time, however, General Hoffmeister had informed the Corps Commander that due to the extreme difficulties in moving his Division forward, he would have to postpone the advance until first light. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 23 May 44; W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 May 44; W.D., Comd 1 Cdn Corps, 23 May 44)

189. The leading tanks of Group I (Vokes Force) crossed the start line at 0800 hours on 24 May. To support the advance artillery "Stonks" of approximately 230 guns were laid down on selected targets to the north-west of the Hitler Line and on Highway 6. Difficulty was experienced in crossing the River Martino, where the Engineers had not yet been able to complete a bridge. The B.C.Ds. advanced with two squadrons up, each supported by a company of infantry (Ir R.C.) in carriers. Although at first no direct contact was made with enemy infantry, the units were subjected to heavy shell fire, both from the front and from their right rear, in the general area of Aquino. The first enemy was encountered in the general area 7120 which was reached at approximately 1030 hours. These were quickly dealt with and the Force pushed on to reach its objective in the area of Mancini at 1220 hours. This latter move was made under intense and heavy shelling. The group encountered and engaged a number of Panther tanks and S.P. 88-mm guns, destroying three tanks and capturing several anti-tank guns. During this action 90 Paratroopers were rounded up and sent back. Total casualties for both Ir R.C. and the armoured regiment during the advance were 13 killed and 20 wounded. 4 Sherman tanks were knocked out. (5 Cdn Armd Div Reports on Operations, Appx "D"; W.D., 5 Cdn Armd Regt, 24 May 44; W.D., Ir R.C., 24 May 44; W.D., H.Q. R.C.A., 5 Cdn Armd Div, May 1944: Appx 15)

THE WESTMINSTERS ESTABLISH A BRIDGEHEAD

190. Appreciating that speed was essential in reaching the Melfa and that enemy resistance was not at this time well organized the Commander 5 Cdn Armd Bde, Brigadier Smith, ordered Group 2 (Griffin Force) to move forward from their assembly area in the rear of 3 Cdn Inf Bde at 1130 hours. At this time Vokos Force had not established the firm base, but it was considered a legitimate risk to push the striking force forward and that bold action was necessary. Griffin Force moved forward without incident and at 1340 hours passed through the base established by Group 1. The Recce Troop of Ld S.H. was then sent forward with all speed to the line of the River Melfa, which it reached at 1500 hours after destroying an enemy half-track and taking several prisoners. Following the Recce Troop the head of the main force encountered an infantry position, which they destroyed; they found themselves in very bad going caused by sunken roads and cross tracks in which it was difficult to maintain direction. During the move forward they passed beyond the range of the divisional artillery, and for the remainder of the day support devolved upon 8 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) and 64 Jeep Bty (165 Lt Regt R.A.) which had been able to move forward, and upon the long range A.G.R.A. guns. As they approached the river our leading tanks encountered on the left flank approximately a squadron of Panther tanks and S.P. guns. There ensued a very heavy tank versus tank action. Our armour was subjected to direct fire, not only from enemy tanks on our side of the river, but also from Panther and S.P. guns on the far bank where the ground overlooked the country to the east and south-east of the Melfa. While this tank battle was in progress the Recce Troops managed to find a ford across the river by means of which, after some difficulty, it got three Stuart tanks across at 688243.* These were in position on the opposite side of the river by 1520 hours. (Ibid; W.D., 2 Cdn Armd Regt, 24 May 44)

191. Meanwhile "A" and "C" Sqns 2 Cdn Armd Regt after a heavy engagement succeeded in destroying several enemy tanks and S.P. guns and drove them across the river at a point 1000 yards downstream from the bridgehead. After their withdrawal the regiment took up a defensive position with "A" Sqn in general area 6924 covering the approach to the crossing, "B" Sqn covering Highway 6 on the right flank and "C" Sqn covering the open ground to the south-west. (5 Cdn Armd Div Reports on Operations, Appx "D"; W.D., 2 Cdn Armd Regt, 24 May 44)

192. "A" Coy Westmr R. (Mot) moved up through the centre of the tank battle and by 1530 hours began crossing the Melfa to support the Recce Troop of the Ld S.H. The passage of the river, covered by M.Gs. on the flank, was unopposed although German mortar fire was coming down consistently on the river bottom. On reaching the west bank "A" Coy platoons fanned out and at once began to run into small pockets of enemy. These were successfully dealt with and in less than an hour the Company had destroyed a Mark IV tank and an S.P. gun with Piat and grenades and had captured 25 prisoners. By 1615 hours the whole Company was across the river and a firm footing had been established. The bridgehead, however, was not easy to hold with so small a force. From 1530 hours until 2030 hours the Company maintained itself in the face of relentless A.Tk and infantry fire. Almost immediately

* For his part in this action, the Recce Troop Commander, Capt. E.J. Perkins, was awarded the D.S.O.

the enemy counter-attacked with infantry supported by tanks and S.P. guns, but the attack was beaten off with Piats and with the aid of the Strathconas' Stuarts. Scarcely an hour later enemy tanks formed up about 500 yards in front of the bridgehead and in company with infantry launched a second counter-attack. This attack was finally beaten off with the destruction of three enemy S.P. guns and one Panther tank. The bridgehead still held. (5 Cdn Armd Div, Reports on Operations, Appx "D"; W.D., Westmr R. (Mot), 24 May 44)

193. The remainder of the Westmr R. who had been moving with the Reserve Group were called forward, and by 1700 hours reached the east bank of the Melfa. The C.O. (of the Westmr R.), after an interview with Lt-Col Griffin, ordered "B" and "C" Coys across the river to the left and right of the bridgehead to link up with "A" Coy. "C" Coy experienced heavy opposition on the left. Before they could effect a crossing there, in answer to a request for assistance from "A" Coy who were being counter-attacked the Company were sent directly over into the bridgehead. Upstream, "B" Coy also succeeded in crossing under heavy fire further to the right of the bridgehead. By nightfall all three companies were across the Melfa. (5 Cdn Armd Div, Reports on Operations, Appx "D"; W.D., Westmr R. (Mot), 24 May 44)

194. At last light the C.O. Westmr R. crossed over to the bridgehead. He decided that "B" Coy was too isolated on the right and ordered it to pull back into "A" and "C" Coy's bridgehead. This was interpreted as an order to withdraw and "B" Coy recrossed to our side of the river at 0200 hours. In the early hours of the evening eight six-pounder anti-tank guns were man-handled across the river under most difficult conditions and it was felt that, as two counter-attacks had been turned back earlier in the afternoon, these weapons with the two companies and the three Stuart tanks would be firm in the small bridgehead which they held. A crossing of the Melfa and the establishment of a small bridgehead had been successfully effected (Ibid).

195. In surveying the successes of 5 Armd Div on 24 May the gallant fighting of "A" Coy of the Westmr R. cannot be overlooked. Major J.K. Mahony, commanding "A" Coy, was awarded the V.C. for the gallant leadership of his company in this action. Two months later at an investiture on the airstrip at Castel San Angelo Major Mahony received the decoration from H.M. the King, who was travelling in Italy at that time as "General Collingwood" (W.D., Westmr Regt, 31 Jul 44). Part of the citation is as follows:

With absolute fearlessness and disregard for his own safety, Major Mahony personally directed the fire of his PIATS throughout this action, encouraging and exhorting his men...Major Mahony, determined to hold the position at all costs, went from section to section with words of encouragement, personally directed fire of mortars and other weapons.

At one stage, a section was pinned down in the open by accurate and intense machine gun fire. Major Mahony crawled forward to their position, and by throwing No. 77 Smoke Grenades, succeeded in extricating the section from its position with the loss of only one man...

At the first sign of hesitation or faltering, Major Mahoney was there to

encourage, by his example, those who were feeling the strain of battle. The enemy perceived that this officer was the soul of the defence and consequently fired at him constantly with all weapons, from rifle to 88-mm guns...

Early in the action, Major Mahony was wounded in the head and twice in the leg, but he refused medical aid and continued to direct the defence of the bridgehead, despite the fact that movement of any kind caused him extreme pain. It was only when the remaining Companies of the Regiment had crossed the river to support him that he allowed his wounds to be dressed and even then refused to be evacuated, staying instead with his Company.

(Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order No. 4826, 15 Jul 44)

196. During the day G.G.H.G. carried out their task of protecting the flanks with vigour. "A" and "C" Sqns were despatched to the right flank and "B" to the left. "C" Sqn leading moved in behind the Hitler Line and exploited in the direction of Aquino. "A" Sqn exploited further north and covered the railway on the extreme right of the Ld S.H. "B" Sqn advanced on the left and were of considerable assistance to the Strathconas by preventing the enemy from infiltrating around the left flank of the armoured regiment. All three squadrons fought almost continuously throughout the day, undergoing very heavy shell and mortar fire. Altogether the regiment knocked out five to seven S.P. guns, killed over a hundred of the enemy and captured as many more, with hardly any casualties themselves. This unusual number of prisoners taken with so little loss may be explained by the rapid advance of the Griffin Force to the Melfa in by-passing enemy infantry, who were by this time completely demoralized by the swiftness of our advance and the weight of our artillery and offered little or no resistance (5 Cdn Armd Div Reports on Operations, Appx "E"; W.D., 3 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 24 May 44).

197. By nightfall 5 Cdn Armd Bde had succeeded in completing the first phase of the divisional task. It had established a bridgehead across the Melfa and its three armoured regiments were commanding the whole area between the Hitler Line and the bridgehead. 2 Cdn Armd Regt (Ld S.H.) had borne the brunt of the day's fighting, losing in all 17 tanks and suffering approximately 50 casualties in the engagement at the Melfa. 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.) remained in the general area 7121 just south of the base established by Group I during the morning. 5 Cdn Armd Regt (8 N.B.H.), moving with the Reserve Force, advanced during the afternoon to area 7320. One squadron and the Recce Troop engaged the enemy on the right flank in the rear of the Hitler Line and at 1800 hours the regiment moved forward and concentrated for the night in area 7120. (5 Cdn Armd Div Reports on Operations, Appx "D").

198. 11 Cdn Inf Bde was not called upon to play an important part in the day's operations; the day belonged to the armoured brigade. Ir R.C. (under Vokes Force) remained in the area of Mancini until about 1800 hours, when it was ordered forward to the Melfa and took up a defensive position on our side of the river opposite the bridgehead. The remainder of the brigade experienced

transportation difficulty in moving forward. C.B. Highrs leading the brigade, however, reached area 7121 and tied in for the night with B.C.Ds. Perth R. followed the C.B.Highrs and by nightfall had established themselves just south of this regiment. Some shelling was experienced during the day but both regiments arrived with very few casualties. (Ibid: W.D., C.B. Highrs, 24 May 44; W.D., Perth R., 24 May 44)

199. During the advance of 5 Cdn Armd Div on 24 May opposition by German infantry had failed to show any great determination or concerted effort. This is the more understandable when the general situation of the enemy strength in the Liri Valley is considered. The survivors of the Hitler Line defenders had dropped back in small disorganized groups, although the High Command had not yet put into effect any order for a general withdrawal to the Melfa. (An operation order captured that day gave instructions for the withdrawal of 1 Para Div to take place on the night of 24/25 May (1 Cdn Corps Int Summary No. 65, 27 May 44)). During the day an attempt was made to place a screen of troops between the Hitler Line and the Melfa. Many of these were fresh reserves brought in piecemeal in a last minute effort to stem the Canadian advance. A 1 Cdn Inf Div appreciation estimated the combined strength of this containing force at 825 men (The Enemy on the Adolf Hitler Line, p. 7).^{*}

OPERATIONS OF 1 CDN INF DIV, 24 MAY

200. After the breakthrough on the 23rd the G.O.C. 1 Cdn Inf Div ordered 4 Cdn Recce Regt to push through Pontecorvo to the Melfa (see para 172). A strong battle group under command of Lt-Col F.D.Adams (the P.L.D.G. commander) consisting of his own regiment, two squadrons R.C.D. (1 Cdn Armd Regt), one squadron 12 Cdn Armd Regt and the Carlt & York R. was to advance on the left flank along the Liri and capture a further bridgehead over the Melfa. This force got under way during the morning of 24 May, but made only a limited advance. Throughout the day the Carlt & York R. and the P.L.D.G. engaged the enemy in a running fight along the road just north of the Liri from Pontecorvo to the Melfa. Small pockets of enemy barring the advance were quickly overrun and before darkness fell they consolidated about two miles short of the Melfa. (1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley, Part I, para 27; W.D., Carlt & York R., 24 May 44; W.D., 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 24 May 44)

201. For the bulk of 1 Cdn Inf Div 24 May was a day of comparative rest and reorganization. On the right flank 2 Inf Bde was subjected all day to concentrations of artillery fire. Seaforth of C. engaged in some mopping-up operations on its front but no concentrated action was taken to clear the right flank in the direction of Aquino (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 24 May 44;

* Elements of enemy units and formations detailed to bar the Canadian advance were estimated to be the following:

II/4 Para Regt (moved south from AQUINO)	-	210
334 Engr Bn (from the Adriatic)	-	210
305 Engr Bn	-	30
WITZEMAN Mtn Battle Gp (consisting of elements of 85 and 100 Mtn Regts relieved by 361 PGR) at PIGNATARO	-	100
III/721 Regt (newly arrived)	-	275
		825

(The Enemy on the Adolf Hitler Line, p. 7)

W.D.; Seaforth of C., 24 May 44). On 3 Bde front R. 22e R. remained in its position during the day under considerable shell fire and rounded up a number of prisoners in the morning. Carlt & York R. began moving off from their position to join the Adams Force at 1000 hours. West N.S.R. withdrew behind the Pontecorvo - Aquino road to reorganize (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 24 May 44; W.D., R. 22e R., 24 May 44; W.D., Carlt & York R., 24 May 44). On the divisional left flank 1 Bde moved forward in the early hours of the morning and two companies of the R.C.R. entered Pontecorvo. To celebrate this event an R.C.R. officer climbed a church tower in the town and rang the church bells, and their regimental flag flew from a spacious villa. During the day the enemy reacted by shelling the town heavily. The remainder of the brigade completed the clearing of the left flank, taking a number of prisoners. All units of the division carried out the sad task of burying their dead. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 24 May 44; W.D., R.C.R., 24 May 44; 55 Axis, With the Royal Canadian Regiment 1939 - 1945, Provincial Publishing Co., Ltd., Montreal p. 139)

202. On the Canadians' right the parallel advance of 13 Corps scheduled to follow the breach of the Hitler Line was delayed, mainly by the difficulty in getting 6 (Br) Armd Div forward and by the continued resistance of the enemy in the Aquino area which denied the Corps the use of Route 6 (Allied Strategy, para 23). "Heart" route was ordered cleared as soon as possible for 6 (Br) Armd Div to advance, but due to various delays and congestions 5 Cdn Armd Div did not get clear of this route until 2100 hours, and as a result the advance of 13 Corps had to be postponed until 25 May* (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. VII, para 19). This was the second occasion when units of 13 Corps became involved with Canadian units in a traffic congestion (see para 108). When 6 Armd Div finally began its advance along "Heart" route on the following day, it was again delayed several hours in the area 7717 by mines which our sappers had failed to remove (Ibid, para 21).

203. Commenting on this confused situation on the Corps' right flank General Burns wrote on 23 May:

About 1830 hours, I discovered that the Sprs who had been sent to complete the minesweeping of the HEART route where it went into the lateral between AQUINO and PONTECORVO at 740198 were unable to complete

* The Canadian Corps Commander gives the following account of what happened:

Returning to HQ about 1230 hours, I found the Army Comd and Lt-Gen Kirkman, Comd 13 Corps, waiting, and it was requested that the HEART route should be cleared as soon as possible for the 6 Brit Armd Div to pass through, in order that they could move fwd on the RIGHT of 5 Cdn Armd Div and help to mop up the enemy in the CASTROCIELO and ROCCASECCA area, thus securing the RIGHT flank of 5 Cdn Armd Div for the move fwd. Orders were given to do this and it was estimated at the time by the GSO 1 5 Cdn Armd Div that the rd could be clear for the adv of 6 Armd Div by 1430 hrs. However, through the rest of the afternoon and evening, due to difficulties caused by bad rds and stream crossings, congestion and unexplained delays occurred, and the 5 Cdn Armd Div did not get clear of the pt where 6 Armd Div was to come in until about 2100 hrs.

their task because of sniping, said to come from the direction of AQUINO or slightly to the SOUTH of it. The enemy had not been cleared from this sector, or from any of the sec of the 13 Corps front and they were consequently not able to adv. The plan made for the 11 Brit Inf Bde and the 11 Cdn Armd Regt to put in an attack from the sector held by 2 Cdn Inf Bde was greatly delayed due to difficulty in crossing this force over the F D'AQUINO and the necessity of building a br. It later developed that for some unexplained reason 2 Cdn Inf Bde had been withdrawn from the line, and this may have allowed certain German elements who had not been mopped up to come to life again, or it may have been that parachutists infiltrated and started sniping.

(W.D., Comd, 1 Cdn Corps,
23 May 44)

204. On the other Allied fronts the 24th was another day of rapid advances. The F.E.C. attacking towards Ceprano moved forward against stubborn enemy resistance near San Giovanni. Although the enemy made rapid counter-attacks, preventing the French from entering the town, General Juin's forces were, however, still forward of the Canadian units on the Melfa (Fifth Army History, Part V, pp 94 and 95).^{*} On the coast II U.S. Corps continued their advance and captured Terracina. In the Anzio bridgehead the Allied forces crossed Highway 7 and encircled Cisterna (Ibid, p. 112).

* A critical report written by Lt-Col Lord Tweedsmuir after a visit to the French Expeditionary Corps makes clear some of the reasons for the outstanding successes achieved by that Corps during the Liri Valley offensive. An extract follows:

Summary of the Reasons for the F.E.C.'s Success

- (a) In General JUIN'S words - "This is the warfare to which we are accustomed."
- (b) Hard driving by commanders, coupled with the tremendous exhilaration which success on a big scale produces in a temperamental race.

This operation is the justification of their methods and training, it is revenge on the Boche, and the first big success of an Army which desperately wishes to re-establish its reputation. Such enthusiasm produces a will to advance which can overcome, for many days, otherwise overpowering fatigue and induces an indifference to all the minor worries and difficulties of operations.

- (c) The French Corps is virtually a Regular Army, undiluted. In contrast to our Army and still more to the American Army, Commanders and Staff mostly hold appointments below those to which their service and experience would entitle them. Staff work and leadership are clearly of a very high order and in consequence great latitude is given to subordinate commanders.
- (d) They possess great reserves of mules. 4 DMM started the operation with 7000 mules, and were able at times to run two echelons of mule pack transport ahead of Jeep or truck-head.

(Contd on page 76)

205. At 1800 hours on 24 May the G.O.C. 1 Cdn Corps ordered 5 Armd Div to organize a strong bridgehead during the night in order to move on Ceprano the following day. 1 Inf Div was ordered to press on across the Melfa and support this advance. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps Operation Instr No. 11, May 1944: Appx 40)

FROM THE MELFA TO CEPRANO, 25 - 27 MAY

206. The advance to the Melfa and the establishment of the bridgehead by 5 Cdn Armd Bde on 24 May pushed the spearhead of Eighth Army several miles beyond the Hitler Line. In making this advance 5 Armd Bde had cut through the remnants of the infantry of 90 Pz Gren Div and 1 Para Div who had failed to retire during the night 23/24 May. The captured Operation Order (see para 199) is evidence that units of 1 Para Div intended remaining in the Aquino area during 24 May. The fact that a large number of infantry under command of 90 Pz Gren Div were captured that same day during the mopping-up process by the G.G.H.G. (see para 196) indicates that the enemy forces on the Canadian front had also not been ordered to withdraw. During the night 25/26 May, however, 1 Para Div withdrew under cover of a sharp air raid on concentrations of troops and vehicles in the Aquino area. Next morning the enemy covering the line of the Melfa consisted of elements of units of 44 Inf Div placed under command 90 Pz Gren Div on the Allied left opposite the Canadians and 1 Para Div on the right covering the advance of 13 Corps. Enemy organization, however, by this time was so chaotic that it is difficult to present a clear picture of the German troops in this area. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, May 1944, Appx 37: 1 Cdn Inf Div Intrep, 25 May 44; Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. VII, para 22)

207. There is no doubt that the enemy planned to hold the Melfa in a rearguard action while his main forces were retiring toward the Caesar Line, but the quick thrust by 5 Armd Bde had upset his plans. But although forestalled on the Melfa the German rearguard had yet another and better opportunity at the head of the Liri Valley to impose delay on both 1 Cdn Corps and 13 Corps. In the area of Arce - Ceprano the Liri Valley depression forks in two directions - the upper Liri Valley on the right which leads to Sora, and the Sacco Valley on the left leading north-westwards in the direction of Rome. The remnants of the German Tenth Army were retreating by both valleys, following Route 82 through Arce to Sora and Route 6 through Ceprano to Frosinone. The entrance to both these valleys afforded opportunities of blocking the Eighth Army advance. The Profidero defile leading to the upper Liri Valley forms a narrow entrance to

Footnote contd from page 75.

French mountain doctrine says, "No mules - no manoeuvre".

- (e) They always had great superiority in infantry. 4 DMM, with the GOUMS attached, put 35000 men into the field. In the initial assault on MONTI FAITO and FEUCI, superiority was of the order of 5 to 1. Later the proportion must have been very much higher.
- (f) Speed made speed. The enemy, taken by surprise, was rushed off his feet and demolitions were never serious even up to VALLECORSA. Risks were taken and justified.
- (g) Flexibility in the handling of artillery and the lines of supply.
- (h) Careful and meticulous planning and preparation, with speed and simplicity in execution.

(1944/1 Cdn Corps/M/F Docket III:
M/1327/C(P) Report on a Visit to the
French Expeditionary Corps)

the escape route beyond Arce, and on the left the Sacco Valley is blocked by the upper Liri and the Isoletta Reservoir. Thus on the one side there was a defile to be forced and on the other a serious water obstacle. (See Map "F") (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. IX, para 1)

208. 5 Cdn Armd Div, although it had elements across the Melfa, did not establish a firm bridgehead on the night of 24 May. The insecure position of the Westmr R. bridgehead demanded rapid reinforcement, and plans for a full-scale attack to enlarge this foothold were prepared for the following morning. Ir R.C., who had advanced to the near bank of the Melfa on the night of the 24th, prepared for the assault, which was to take place on the left of the bridgehead in the vicinity of the ford by which the Germans made their escape after the tank action of the previous afternoon. The objective of the initial assault was the lateral road beyond the river. Simultaneous with the Ir R.C. assault the Westminsters would advance from their narrow bridgehead. It was hoped to launch this attack at 0600 hours, but due to difficulty in getting supporting arms forward the start had to be delayed. (W.D., Ir R.C., 25 May 44; W.D., Westmr R. (Mot), 25 May 44; W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt, 25 May 44)

209. At 1130 hours 25 May Ir R.C. made the assault and simultaneously the Westminsters broke out from their bridgehead. The attack went well, and by 1230 hours both battalions had reached the line of the lateral road and had started to consolidate. Opposition was confined mainly to intense shelling and mortaring, which caused a considerable number of casualties; enemy anti-tank guns greatly reduced the strength of two squadrons of the B.C.Ds. supporting the attack. From this enlarged bridgehead C.B. Highrs, supported by 8 N.B.H., resumed the attack at 1630 hours. The attacking troops were heavily shelled and three of the supporting tanks were knocked out by enemy S.P. guns, but by nightfall the force had penetrated to a depth of about 2000 yards. Here the forward elements were ordered to consolidate and Perth R. was brought in on the left. (Ibid; W.D., 5 Cdn Armd Regt, 25 May 44; W.D., Perth R., 25 May 44; W.D., C.B. Highrs, 25 May 44)

210. Meanwhile, Adams Force pushed on at first light to the junction of the Liri and Melfa Rivers. An attempted crossing by 4 P.L.D.G. at this point was repulsed, but a quick attack by a company of the Carlt & York R. supported by tanks on the near bank of the river succeeded in crossing and gaining a bridgehead. The remainder of the Carlt & York, despite very heavy enemy artillery fire, followed closely beyond the leading company and the bridgehead was secured. Due to the flatness of the area and the lack of cover, the regiment sustained heavy casualties before they were properly dug in. Towards dusk, however, the situation eased and the West N.S.R. moved through the Carlt & York bridgehead to take up a position on the left. (W.D., 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 25 May 44; W.D., Carlt & York R., 25 May 44; W.D., West N.S.R., 25 May 44)

211. Thus by nightfall on the 25th the Canadian holdings across the Melfa extended from the Liri to the line of the railway and elements of both 1 and 5 Divs were in the enlarged bridgehead. Two bridges were completed, one in each divisional sector, and artillery and supporting arms had begun to move forward. On the right flank of the Canadian bridgehead 6 (Br) Armd Div had by early evening reached the near bank of the Melfa in the vicinity of Highway 6, but their infantry were unable to force a crossing that night. This meant that again on the night 25/26 May the

Canadian bridgehead, although greatly extended, still had an unprotected right flank. (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. VII, para 21, W.D., H.Q. R.C.E., 5 Cdn Armd Div, May 1944; 1 Cdn Corps Report on Battles of Liri Valley, para 19)

212. Next morning, however, with the Melfa bridgehead secured and units of 13 Corps now well up on the right flank, the Canadian Corps was ready for a rapid exploitation and orders were issued for the advance of 1 Cdn Inf Div and 5 Cdn Armd Div forward along the general axis Ceprano - Pofi - Frosinone. (For the armoured division the operation was the completion by 11 Cdn Inf Bde of Phase II of the "CHESTERFIELD" plan (see para 182)). The first objective was the road Ceprano - Staz di Ceprano (6024) covering the area between Highway 6 and the Sacco River. 1 Cdn Div was ordered to cross the Liri south of the reservoir and by agreement with the F.E.C. skirt its southern boundary and cross the Sacco in the area 6023. 5 Cdn Div was to advance north of the Isoletta Reservoir and cross the upper Liri in the vicinity of Ceprano. From this objective the Corps' advance would continue north-west along the Sacco River valley, between Highway 6 and the river, to the second objective, the road Pofi - Staz Pofi Castro (5025). On reaching the first objective the infantry division would go into reserve and the second phase would be carried out alone by 5 Armd Div. (1 Cdn Corps - Report on Battles of the Liri Valley, Appx F: 1 Cdn Corps Op Instr No. 12, 26 May 44)

213. At 0700 hours 11 Inf Bde with C.B. Highrs on the right and Perth R. on the left, each supported by a squadron of 8 N.B.H., began the advance to Ceprano. There was continuous enemy shelling and mortaring and the leading companies of C.B. Highrs after advancing several hundred yards were held up by heavy M.G. fire and sniping from the wooded high ground (6725) north of the railway. The Perth R. advancing on the left of the C.B. Highrs, were also held up by mines and demolitions. The tanks had difficulty in crossing the railway but with artillery support the C.B. Highrs put in a sharp attack, which dispersed the enemy and resulted in the capture of 15 prisoners. At this juncture the supporting tanks ran out of petrol and it was not until late afternoon that they returned from refuelling. The advance was resumed at 1630 hours in the face of continued artillery and mortar fire and by nightfall both regiments consolidated on the high ground 1500 yards east of Ceprano (6126). Ir R.C. then moved forward from reserve and two companies advanced to the Liri, only to find that the bridges had been destroyed. During the night, however, patrols from the Ir R.C. swam the river and returned with the report that Ceprano was free of the enemy. In general it had been a successful day for the units of 11 Cdn Inf Bde, although C.B. Highrs and Perth R. had together suffered more than 75 casualties. (W.D., C.B. Highrs, 26 May 44; W.D., Perth R., 26 May 44; W.D., 5 Cdn Armd Regt, 26 May 44; W.D., Ir R.C., 26 May 44; and 5 Cdn Armd Div Reports on Operations: Appx G, G(1), G(2), G(3))

214. As the advance of 11 Inf Bde was proceeding along the right flank, Adams Force on the left pressed on again during the early hours of 26 May to seize a bridgehead over the Liri to the south of the reservoir (6322). They found little trouble in advancing here, for the enemy had been driven off by the French, who had taken San Giovanni the day before. As might be expected, the bridge at 635230 was found to be blown, but a patrol from 4 P.L.D.G. crossed the river where they made contact with the French. Without encountering any enemy the patrol continued on foot, south of the Liri, crossed the Sacco River and established itself for the night just south of Ceprano station (6024). The bridge across the Sacco (6023) had also been blown so that the patrol now had two unbridged rivers between them and their unit. (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. IX, para 4; W.D., 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 26 May 44)

215. Early in the morning of 27 May the Perth R. advanced to the Liri, and using assault boats ferried two companies across the river (602262) 1000 yards south of Coprano. Ir R.C., who were now consolidated on the high ground east of the town, were in a commanding position and were able to give the Perths support during their crossing. The Perths met heavy artillery and some small arms fire but soon established a shallow bridgehead. The remaining two companies followed during the morning, entered Coprano and cleared the town of snipers. During the afternoon some anti-tank guns were ferried across and the battalion prepared to attack the high ground (5926) some 600 yards south-west of Ceprano, where the enemy were making a rearguard stand. The enemy strongly resisted and it was therefore decided to defer further action until the bridgehead had been reinforced. Accordingly Perth R. took up a defensive position in the general area of the town. At 1830 hours C.B. Highrs came forward and crossed the river. By midnight they had consolidated along the lateral road beyond the river, thus extending the bridgehead on the left flank. Casualties for the day were not light, the Perth R. having four killed and 27 wounded. Engineers worked hard through the night to construct a bridge in the area in which the brigade had crossed (602262). (5 Cdn Armd Div Reports on Operations, Appx "G"; W.D., Perth R., 27 May 44; W.D., C.B. Highrs, 27 May 44; W.D., Ir R.C., 27 May 44)

216. The first stage of the advance from the Melfa to Frosinone was now completed. A further advance was not possible, however, until three bridges had been constructed. 5 Armd Div, passing north of the reservoir, required the bridge across the Liri at Ceprano. The route followed by the Adams Force south of the reservoir, ("Club" Route) as we have seen necessitated bridging both the Sacco and Liri Rivers. While engineers went to work the 4 P.L.D.G. patrol (see para 214) remained in the area of Staz di Coprano. The two bridges were completed and the "Club" Route opened at 0430 hours 28 May. During an inspection of this route on 27 May the C.R.E. 1 Cdn Inf Div, Lt-Col K.J. Southern, was killed with his driver when his jeep ran over two wooden box mines. During the night 27/28 May the engineers of 5 Armd Div worked hard to complete the bridge at Coprano. There was a mechanical breakdown, however, and the task was not completed on schedule. (W.D., H.Q. R.C.E. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 27, 28 and 29 May 44; W.D., H.Q. C.R.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 28 May 44)

217. Before continuing the narrative of 1 Cdn Corps and its subsequent advance up the Sacco Valley it is necessary to review the exploits of the other Allied formations during the five days following General Alexander's signal of 22 May (see para 140). II U.S. Corps had joined forces with the Anzio bridgehead on 25 May, just two weeks to the day after the beginning of the offensive. Highway 7, (Via Appia) was opened immediately and supplies began to flow from the main front to support the already quite successful VI U.S. Corps' attack (Fifth Army History, Part V, p. 88). By nightfall on the 27th advance forces of VI Corps were within five miles of Valmontone and the divisions of II Corps and the F.E.C. were pursuing the enemy northward in their retreat to the Caesar Line. There was now a continuous front between the right flank of the Anzio bridgehead and the Eighth Army in the area Arce - Ceprano (C.I.G.S. Summary No. 269, Operations Italy, 28 May 44). On the right of the Canadian Corps 6 (Br) Armd Div were engaging the enemy at the Providero defile, but the enemy were putting up a fierce resistance (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. IX, para 9). Further to the right Polcorps and 10 Corps were advancing as the enemy retired toward the north in the M. Cairo area (C.I.G.S. Summary No. 269, Operations Italy, 28 May 44).

THE PURSUIT TO FROSINONE, 28 - 31 MAY

218. At 2035 hours on 27 May General Burns issued orders for 5 Cdn Armd Div to continue the advance next day to secure the line of the road Pofi - Staz Pofi Castro (see para 212). As the

Canadian Corps' front was now greatly reduced and the enemy formations along the whole Allied front were in headlong retreat, 1 I Div was ordered into reserve and "Club" Route was made available to 5 Armd Div (1 Cdn Corps - Report on Battles of the Liri Valley, Appx "G", 1 Cdn Corps Ops Instr No. 13, 27 May 44).

219. At first light on 28 May Perth R. moved forward to the high ground in 5926. The enemy, no doubt sensing the danger that might befall them on the completion of the Ceprano bridge, had withdrawn most of their holding force during the night. With the aid of our artillery the Perths had no difficulty in gaining their objective, and C.B. Highrs followed and expanded on the left a bridgehead which was now some 1500 yards in depth. Ir R.C., which had also crossed the river during the night, moved forward on the left of C.B. Highrs. From this enlarged holding 5 Armd Bde was ordered to pass through the infantry and advance to the Pofi objective. However, the delay in completing the bridge held up the armoured brigade, and by 1730 hours, when it was finally completed, 78 Div had been given priority on the crossing. The 11 Bde advance was thus postponed until the following day^x. (W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 May 44; W.D., Perth R., 28 May 44; W.D., C.B. Highrs, 28 May 44; W.D., Ir R.C., 28 May 44)

220. The delay at the Ceprano bridgehead resulted in an awkward situation for the Commander 5 Cdn Armd Bde, who had held his "O" Group at 0700 hours 28 May and completed plans for his brigade to advance that day to the Pofi objective. The Engineers, who had hoped to complete the bridge at 0900 hours that morning, apparently sacrificed efficiency to speed; the bridge when launched buckled as it hit the far side. A new field squadron was called up, however, and the work continued.^{xx} (H.Q., R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 28 May 44). When

* The Army Comd commenting on the delay to 5 Armd Div on 28 May makes the following observation:

The 5th Canadian Armoured Div., after some delay on the MELFA River, turned westwards towards CEPRANO, which was reached on the 27th May. After considerable delay owing to the inexperience of higher command and staff, two bridges were eventually got across the river; one at CEPRANO and one South of the Reservoir. At 1830 hours on the 28th May, after considerable delays the 5th Canadian Armoured Div. started to cross and advanced into the plain towards CESSANO and FROSINONE.

(Italy: 1944/Eighth Army/C/F
Docket II, Eighth Army Operations,
May 11th to May 30th 1944)

** The C.R.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div records in his war diary the following account:

Received word early in the morning that the estimated time of completion of the Liri br would be 0900 hrs. Received word that the br had collapsed and estimated time of completion would now be 1130 hrs. I informed the GOC and went fwd to find that they had built the launching nose single only and had neglected to put on raker braces. The result had been that when they pushed the br in launching the nose hit the far bank and buckled. The two tps of the 1 Fd Sqn employed on the task were almost beaten, having been working then for a full 24 hrs. Gave the Div estimated time of completion as 1600 hrs and ordered up a fresh tp from 10 Fd Sqn. Things were in quite a flap as two Divs were virtually lined up on the rd waiting to get across on the br. However we worked as steadily as we could and I tried to keep the men from rushing things and becoming careless. The br was opened at 1730 hrs. This delay caused a change in the Army plan and had given us a bit of a black eye.

(W.D., H.Q. R.C.E., 5 Cdn Armd
Div, 28 May 44)

higher command gave priority on the bridge to 78 Div, in order that one of its brigades might cross and carry on the pursuit to the north of Highway 6, it was decided that 5 Armd Bde would wait no longer, and at 1600 hours the B.C.D. with under command two companies of the Westmr R. (Mot), one squadron G.G.H.G. and 98 A.Tk Bty began the long detour around the south of Isoletta Reservoir ("Club" Route). It was midnight before this force reached the 11 Bde area and further advance, as we have seen, was postponed until morning (W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt, 28 and 29 May; W.D., Westmr R. (Mot), 28 May 44). In the meantime Air O.P. reported the enemy retreating along Highway 6 in the direction of Frosinone and already the F.E.C. had patrols in Cocciano (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 28 May 44).

221. The armoured brigade group moved off from the Coprano area at 0500 hours on 29 May. (See Map "G"). Owing to the very enclosed nature of the country the force moved in two columns, one right and one left, with one company of the Westminsters in each group. Demolitions were numerous, but little opposition except shelling was encountered until the advance reached the general area of the R. Fornelli (5527) and the R. Malingo (5525). Both these rivers proved to be serious obstacles, as the retreating enemy had blown all bridges. Mines were encountered in increasing numbers and the shelling was unabated. The motorized companies of the Westminsters with their light vehicles soon outran the armour, and as they drew near to Pofi during the afternoon they came under intense artillery fire. Self-propelled guns sited north of Route 6 also engaged our advancing armour. After Pofi had been subjected to a dive-bombing attack elements of the Westmr R. entered the town and captured several prisoners. The remainder of the motorized infantry continued on and reached the brigade objective north and west of the town. The armour kept battling forward over the difficult terrain, and nine tanks succeeded in reaching the objective and consolidated with the Westminsters by nightfall. The B.C.Ds. had five tanks destroyed during the day and the Westminsters lost a large number of their light vehicles owing to the rough nature of the country. Personnel casualties, however, for the brigade group were practically nil. At 2000 hours the Westminster companies reverted to the command of their own unit, which had moved forward behind the leading columns. (5 Cdn Armd Div, Reports on Operations, Appx "D"; W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt, 29 May 44; W.D., Westmr R. (Mot), 29 May 44)

222. In the meantime 11 Cdn Inf Bde had moved forward close behind 5 Armd Bde Gp and were in position to continue the pursuit. During the afternoon, Perth R., followed by the C.B. Highrs, were ordered to advance through Pofi and secure the high ground (4930) in front of Arnara - two miles further north-west - with the object of capturing the town the following day. After difficulty in passing through Pofi due to remaining enemy snipers, Perth R. advanced beyond the town and secured their objective shortly after midnight. C.B. Highrs followed behind the Perths and, leaving one company in Pofi, moved forward to the area 5030. Ir R.C. also came up and consolidated before daylight in the area 4929. Perth R. had two casualties; the other battalions none. (5 Cdn Armd Div, Reports on Operations; Appx "D"; W.D., Perth R., 29 May 44; W.D., C.B. Highrs, 29 May 44; W.D., Ir R.C., 29 May 44)

223. By midnight 5 Cdn Armd Div had advanced approximately seven miles and were within five miles of Frosinone. Units of 11 Cdn Inf Bde in the area north-west of Pofi were in a position ready to strike north-west to Arnara and to continue the advance beyond in the direction of Frosinone. During the 29th 8 N.B.H. and the Ld S.H., although encountering the same difficulties as the B.C.Ds.,

were able to concentrate for the night just short of Pofi. Because the country in this area was so unsuitable for tanks General Burns now ordered 1 Cdn Inf Div to pass into the lead. In order to avoid a sudden halt which might result in losing contact with the enemy altogether, the process of relief would be gradual. An infantry brigade of 1 Cdn Div was therefore ordered to relieve 11 Inf Bde and to come under command of 5 Cdn Armd Div until its parent formation should take over. 5 Armd Div was ordered to press forward vigorously on 30 May in the direction of Frosinone. A second infantry brigade was ordered to move forward on the afternoon of the 30th, when 5 Armd Div would be withdrawn. The command of the sector would then pass to 1 Inf Div, who would continue the advance on Frosinone. (5 Cdn Armd Div, Report on Operations; Appx "D"; 1 Cdn Corps - Report on Battles of Liri Valley; Appx "H", 1 Cdn Corps Ops Instr No. 14, 28 May 44)

224. 5 Cdn Armd Div's intention for 30 May was for the three armoured regiments to press forward beyond Arnara and to secure three separate objectives (respectively by 9, 5 and 2 Cdn Armd Regts), "Tom" (4833), "Dick" (4632) and "Harry" (4735). The three infantry battalions were to follow the armour and secure these three positions. Prior to this move Perth R. was ordered to capture Arnara as a preliminary to the advance (5 Cdn Armd Div, Report on Operations, para 50; Appx "D"). From these three bases 2 Cdn Inf Bde - brought up as relief - would move forward under command of 5 Armd Div and be in a position to attack or outflank Frosinone. (W.D., Comd 1 Cdn Corps, 30 May 44)

225. At 0430 hours on 30 May the Perth R. moved into Arnara and by 0900 hours had secured the town, which immediately came under heavy enemy fire. At 0500 hours the armour began to move forward over the worst possible type of tank-going. Because of the slow advance of the tanks the infantry pushed ahead, and on the right C.B. Highrs occupied "Tom" and on the left Ir R.C. "Dick" before midday. Both infantry battalions were in contact with the retreating enemy and the Ir R.C. took 15 prisoners in the vicinity of their objective. C.B. Highrs, on reaching "Tom", were so heavily shelled that they were forced to retire and take up a position 1000 yards short of the objective. Both Ir R.C. and the Perth R. had a small number of casualties but the C.B. Highrs had none. As 2 Cdn Armd Regt, assigned with Perth R. to take "Harry" became heavily involved on the right with enemy armour (see para 226), the Divisional plan to capture this third objective was perforce changed, and the Perths spent the day in Arnara. (Ibid; W.D., C.B. Highrs, 30 May 44; W.D., Ir R.C., 30 May 44; W.D., Perth R., 30 May 44)

226. At 1500 hours the Ld S.H. advancing behind C.B. Highrs were ordered by Divisional Headquarters to proceed with all speed to the crossroads at Tartarella (4934) in order to cut off enemy tanks reported retiring along Highway 6. The Recce Troop followed by "B" Sqn were pushed forward to carry out this task. As our tanks advanced they were engaged by the enemy, who were in position on the high ground north of the crossroads in the vicinity of Torrice. A sharp engagement followed which resulted in the loss of five of the Ld S.H. tanks. The C.O., Lt-Col Griffin, while on a forward recce, was wounded by a H.E. shell, and casualties for the engagement included seven killed and 16 wounded. The enemy, however, lost three Panthers, a Mk IV and a S.P. gun, as well as a number of killed and wounded. With the approach of nightfall the armour sent back a request for infantry support. After some delay, and after the shelling ceased, a platoon of the C.B. Highrs arrived and joined the tanks for the night. The enemy by this time, however, had retired, and the flank was secure. (W.D., 2 Cdn Armd Regt, 30 May 44)

227. On the left flank the advance of 5 Cdn Armd Regt (8 N.B.H.) continued fairly smoothly throughout the day. The regiment advanced along the Arnara - Cocciano road and its tanks were constantly held up by mines and demolitions. However, assistance came from the pioneer platoon of the Ir R.C. who lifted mines and patrolled the route which led past that battalion's position. Around 1400 hours a French patrol informed them that the F.E.C. had patrols in the town. 8 N.B.H. continued their advance north and by 1800 hours had reached the area 4431 immediately north of Cocciano, where without infantry support they laagered for the night in an all round defence. (W.D., 5 Cdn Armd Regt, 30 May 44; W.D., Ir R.C., 30 May 44)

228. Meanwhile 78 Div participating in the race up the valley, was advancing on 29 and 30 May on the right of Highway 6 with Frosinone as its immediate objective. Like the Canadian Division it was experiencing the greatest difficulty in getting its armour forward. By nightfall on the 30th the division was just short of Ripi (5234). (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. IX, para 24). On our left flank the F.E.C. had reached Cocciano on the 30th and were continuing their advance along the west bank of the Sacco to Supino, still in advance of the Canadian Corps (Fifth Army History, Part V, p. 136).

229. Conforming with 1 Cdn Corps Operation Order No. 14 (see para 223), 2 Cdn Inf Bde began moving forward on 30 May to take up the chase toward Frosinone. By nightfall P.P.C.L.I. were in position to relieve or pass through Ir R.C. and on the right L. Edmn R. had moved in behind C.B. Highrs and were preparing to advance further. At 2010 hours the sector passed to command of 2 Cdn Inf Bde. In the meantime 1 Inf Bde was also on the move forward, preparatory to the transfer of control of the Corps front to 1 Cdn Inf Div on the morning of the 31st (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 May 44; 5 Cdn Armd Div Reports on Operations, para 61). No time was lost in putting 2 Cdn Inf Bde (now under command 5 Armd Div) into action that night (30/31 May). On the right L. Edmn R. was ordered to pass through C.B. Highrs and to advance to "Harry" - 5 Cdn Armd Div's final objective. On the left P.P.C.L.I. was directed through Ir R.C. with orders to consolidate beyond the latter regiment's position and send out strong patrols to the line of the railway Cocciano - Staz di Frosinone. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 May 44)

230. L. Edmn R. supported by two troops of the Ld S.H. began moving forward at 2000 hours and without opposition reached their objective, less than two miles short of Frosinone. A prisoner was taken who had been one of a party of 50 in a rear-guard mine-laying detachment. After the battalion consolidated a patrol was sent forward to reconnoitre Frosinone. P.P.C.L.I. on the left flank had no difficulty in advancing beyond Ir R.C. ("Dick") and during the hours of darkness leap-frogged their companies forward where they consolidated for the night several hundred yards beyond the 10 Bde battalion (W.D., L. Edmn R., 30 May 44; W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 30 May 44).

231. On the morning of 31 May 2 Inf Bde began closing in on Frosinone, as at 0615 hours 1 Cdn Inf Div took over command of the sector from the armoured division. During the night Seaforth of C. had moved forward to the brigade area and all three battalions were in a position to occupy or outflank the town. At 0800 hours a fighting patrol of "D" Coy L. Edmn R. entered and found that with the exception of a small rearguard the enemy had withdrawn. The

The patrol had a sharp encounter with this force before the remainder of "D" Coy moved in to complete the clearing of the town. In the meantime P.P.C.L.I. had also moved forward on both the right and left flank and had sent patrols to the town. Seaforth of C. were ordered forward on the left flank to cut the cross-roads 4538 to the north-west of Frosinone. As they advanced toward their objective they were engaged by the enemy rearguard who were still in the northern sector of the town with some Panther tanks. With only Piats for anti-tank protection the Seaforths pressed on, and fortunately the tanks did not engage them at close range. They reached their objective and consolidated at last light. In the day's action Seaforth of C. had three killed and 16 wounded but they had succeeded in capturing 17 prisoners and several enemy vehicles in an ambush at the cross-roads objective. The Patricias and the Edmontons had little contact with the enemy all day except for patrol clashes in Frosinone. (W.D., Seaforth of C., 31 May 44; W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 31 May 44; W.D., L. Edmn R., 31 May 44)

232. By nightfall 2 Cdn Inf Bde was consolidated in a position of vantage overlooking the plains that led to Rome. Frosinone was swarming with vehicles, troops and working parties. Engineers had swept and cleared the mines, constructed the necessary detours and bridged demolitions on the main route forward. At 2300 hours tanks of the N.I.H. had arrived to support the brigade in further engagements. 78 Div during the day had moved forward from Ripi and made contact with our troops at Frosinone at 2000 hours. Over towards the railway 1 Inf Bde had come up and were advancing on the left flank of 2 Bde. Thus, on the last day of the month 1 Cdn Inf Div was again in the line on a two-brigade front. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 31 May 44; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 31 May 44; W.D., Seaforth of C., 31 May 44).

THE FINAL PHASE, 1 - 4 JUN

233. By 31 May Eighth Army's Operations were moving into the third and final phase prescribed for them in the forecast issued on 22 May (see para 124). 1 Cdn Corps was poised for the advance toward Valmontone and 13 Corps was ready to drive forward to Alatri. At 1140 hours on the 31st 1 Cdn Corps issued instructions ordering 1 Cdn Inf Div to secure the line Frosinone - Tomacella and to continue the advance toward Valmontone on the axis of Highway 6. 5 Cdn Armd Div was to remain in reserve while one infantry brigade group of 6 S.A. Armd Div with a regiment of tanks was to move forward on 1 Jun and come under command 1 Cdn Inf Div. A second South African brigade group, also with an armoured regiment, was to move forward on 3 Jun, at which time command was to pass to 6 S.A. Armd Div. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 31 May 44; 1 Cdn Corps, Report on Liri Valley Battles, Appx "J", 1 Cdn Corps Ops Instr No. 15, 31 May 44). Ferentino, six miles north-west of Frosinone on Route 6 was accordingly the next objective for the Cdn Corps. The capture of Ferentino was assigned to 1 Cdn Inf Bde, while 2 Inf Bde secured the right flank by occupying Monte Radicino (4142). (W.D., R.C.R., 1 and 2 Jun 44)

234. While 2 Inf Bde secured Frosinone 1 Inf Bde advanced toward their objective. In the lead, the R.C.R. and 4 P.L.D.G. moved across the Ferentino plains on 1 Jun with very light shelling by the enemy as the only resistance. The number of demolitions increased, particularly after they reached the vicinity of Route 6 (3942) and there were more mines as the forward elements neared Ferentino. During the evening R.C.R. moved forward toward the town, and as soon as a patrol reported it only lightly held one

company entered and passed through, mopping up as it went along. By 0330 hours 2 Jun the town was cleared and the remaining companies moved up and consolidated, to receive an enthusiastic welcome from the local population. Ten prisoners were taken during the morning. (W.D., R.C.R., 1 and 2 Jun 44; W.D., 4 P.L.D.G., 1 and 2 Jun 44).

235. Meanwhile on 1 Jun, 2 Inf Bde pushed forward to secure the right flank of the Div by advancing to the high ground in the vicinity of Monte Radicino. With L. Edmn R. leading, supported by a squadron of the N.I.H., the advance began at mid-day. At 1440 hours the battalion launched an attack on the feature and the objective was reached in less than an hour without any opposition having been encountered. A prisoner reported a pocket of enemy in the vicinity of a convent (4342), stating that there were approximately 200 men with orders to hold the area until dark and then withdraw. By 2200 hours, however, when "C" Coy of the L. Edmn R. attacked the position, what enemy there were had retreated, and the convent was found deserted. By daylight on 2 Jun the whole Monte Radicino area to the rocky summit was completely cleared and 18 prisoners had been taken. During the action one prisoner showed his willingness to co-operate by directing our artillery fire on to his own positions. The Edmontons came through with only four casualties. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde 1 and 2 Jun 44; W.D., L. Edmn R., 1 and 2 Jun 44)

236. For 3 Jun the Corps' orders were to continue to attack the enemy and press on to the north-west. 1 Cdn Inf Bde was to capture the high ground about Anagni (2949) and establish a firm base, while 4 Cdn Recce Regt was to secure a stream crossing at 264481 and exploit north and west. A brigade group of 6 S.A. Armd Div (24 Gds Bde) was to pass through 1 Cdn Inf Bde on 3 Jun and advance to Fiuggi (3555). Contact patrols were to be maintained with the F.E.C. on the left flank by 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt under command 6 S.A. Armd Div, which already had forward elements in area (3639) on the left flank of 1 Cdn Inf Div. Command of the sector was to pass from 1 Cdn Inf Div to 6 S.A. Armd Div at a time agreed upon between the commanders concerned. (1 Cdn Corps - Report on Battles of Liri Valley, Appx "K", 1 Cdn Corps Op Order No. 2, 2 Jun 44)

237. In the early afternoon of the 2nd the Commander of 1 Cdn Inf Bde received special instructions direct from Eighth Army Headquarters to get forward no matter what the cost and re-establish contact with the enemy. At the time all three battalions of the Brigade were in the Ferentino area. As a result the Brigade Commander ordered Hast & P.E.R. to advance north-west astride Route 6. The move was begun at once and by 2340 hours the regiment had reached the vicinity south of the road junction at 2947. Here they consolidated and began patrolling. The R.C.R., who had followed Hast & P.E.R., proceeded to the right of Highway 6 and reached Anagni by midnight. The town was found free of the enemy and in the hands of Italian partisan forces, who reported that the enemy had withdrawn about a mile to the north-west. (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 2 Jun 44; W.D., R.C.R., 2 Jun 44; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Jun 44)

238. On 3 Jun 4 P.L.D.G. moved through 1 Bde area and pushed on up Highway 6, only to find that the enemy had completely withdrawn from the area of the Highway. The reconnaissance regiment had little difficulty in its advance and at 0745 hours "C" Sqn reached the battalion objective (2648) south-west of Anagni. The main body of the regiment halted in this area, but a patrol of five jeeps continued forward and at 1600 hours reached Colloferro

(1748), where they established contact with the F.E.C. This marked the limit of 1 Cdn Inf Div's advance. The P.L.D.Gs. collected approximately 15 prisoners during the day, stragglers from the German units hurrying back towards Rome. On the same day contact was made with the Fifth U.S. Army's bridgehead force. An American sergeant driving a jeep along Highway 6 had the honour of establishing the first contact between the two armies. He was escorted to 1 Cdn Inf Bde Headquarters, where he lunched with the Brigade Commander and was later in the day presented to the Army Commander, General Sir Oliver Leese, who arrived during the afternoon. From this time onwards 1 Cdn Inf Div made no further contact with the enemy in the Sacco - Liri Valley. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 3 Jun 44; W.D., 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 3 Jun 44)

239. By now the success of the whole operation on all sectors was assured to the Allied Armies. On 26 May VI U.S. Corps had begun a direct offensive on the north flank of the bridgehead down Highway 7 in the direction of Rome (Fifth Army History, Part V, p. 192). At the same time II U.S. Corps had taken over the offensive on the right flank of the bridgehead toward Valmontone, (see para 217). On 2 Jun, after heavy fighting, the American Corps had taken Valmontone and on the following day the Special Service Force linked up with the F.E.C. at Colleferro (Ibid, p. 146) (It was at this juncture that 4 P.L.D.G. had made contact with the French on 3 Jun.). During the night 2/3 Jun the hard-pressed German forces, obliged to give ground before VI Corps in the north of the bridgehead and being in danger of finding their position turned by II Corps, which was now marching down Highway 6, pulled out of the Alban Hills and abandoned all thoughts of manning the "Caesar" Line. As a result of this collapse the enemy on Eighth Army front had now no choice but to retreat northwards by the roads leading to Route 5 (the Rome - Avezzano - Pescara lateral). (Ibid)

240. It thus became necessary to change the direction of the Canadian Corps' advance northwards in order that the pursuit might be maintained, for with Fifth Army advancing toward Rome on both Highway 6 and Highway 7 Eighth Army was forced to the right of Highway 6. (Eighth Army Advance to Rome, Chap. IX, para 34). In the narrowing of the front 1 Cdn Corps, which was on the left flank of Eighth Army, was crowded out of the advancing formations. On 3 Jun, in keeping with the Army plan, 24 Gds Bde of 6 S.A. Armd Div passed through 1 Cdn Inf Bde in the Anagni area and the South African division assumed command of the sector from 1 Cdn Inf Div. The South African Division's stay under Canadian command was a brief one. At 1745 hours 4 Jun the Corps Commander issued orders for all Canadian units and formations of the Corps to stand fast in their positions and for 6 S.A. Armd Div to pass from under command 1 Cdn Corps to 13 Corps at 1800 hours that night 1 Cdn Corps thus came into army reserve and took no further part in the fighting (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 3 and 4 Jun 44; 1 Cdn Corps Reports on Battles of Liri Valley; Appx "L", 1 Cdn Corps Ops Instr. No. 16, 4 Jun 44)

241. During the next few days units of 1 Cdn Inf Div remained in the area of their final objective. 1 Cdn Inf Bde Headquarters was established at Anagni with the infantry battalions in the vicinity of the town. 2 Cdn Inf Bde was established near Ferentino. Both brigades had almost outrun their endurance, having followed the enemy on foot and over rugged terrain all the way from the Pofi area, where they had taken over the pursuit from 5 Cdn Armd Div. Unit transport and supplies arrived in due course, and during the next few days the battalions rested and equipped themselves while arrangements were being made for their future disposition. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 and 6 Jun 44; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 and 6 Jun 44; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 5 Jun 44)

1 Cdn Div had again completed a successful phase of operations as a component part of the British Eighth Army. From the Army Commander came to the G.O.C. an acknowledgement which was passed to all formations and units throughout the Division:

First phase of our operations is ended, eventually from tough fighting in the Alban Hills, the Fifth Army on our left is entering Rome. On the right the Eighth Army made history by breaking the "Gustav" Line, capturing Cassino and Monastery Hill. Next we broke the "Hitler" Line and by close pursuit scattered several German divisions and prevented the enemy from reorganising. Thus the two Armies jointly have won a great victory. I thank you and congratulate you on your achievement. We now have the enemy disorganized on the run. We must drive him and keep him moving night and day. Every hour gained, every German killed or captured brings us nearer the annihilation of the German Army in Italy. This is our aim and we will achieve victory. It is the Eighth Army's contribution to the second front. Thank you and good luck to each of you.

(W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde,
June 1944: Appx 17)

242. In the meantime 5 Cdn Armd Div had gone into reserve in the vicinity of Pofi when 1 Inf Div had taken over their sector on 31 May. Their advance through the Hitler Line to this area had been well executed and the congratulations of General Leese were passed on to all component units:

GOC 5 Cdn Armd Div

I feel I would like to write you this short letter, conveying my thanks and congratulations to you and your Division on the successful outcome of your first fight as a Division.

To you was given the arduous task to exploit the break of the 1st Canadian Division through the ADOLF HITLER LINE and continue the pursuit. Owing to physical difficulties, it was particularly difficult for you to pass your Division quickly through the bottle-neck of the breach in the HITLER LINE. That you accomplished this task is to the credit of you all.

You then advanced with great dash to the MELFA LINE, where brilliant actions were fought; in particular by the Governor General's Horse Guards, Strathcona's Horse, and the Westminster Regt. After that you had considerable fighting with your infantry brigade, culminating in the passage by swimming and boating, under fire, by the Irish Regiment of Canada and the Perth Regiment, at Ceperano.

I congratulate you particularly on the work of your infantry, tanks, and sappers. I am very proud to have the 5th Canadian Armoured Division in the Eighth Army; and I have learned in this battle how greatly I can rely on you in the future.

I would be glad if you would convey my grateful thanks and best wishes for the future to all ranks in your Division.

(sgd) (Oliver Leese) Lt-Gen
Comd Eighth Army

(Italy: 1944/8th Army/C/I,
folio I: G.O.C. Eighth
Army, 5 Jun 44)

243. The battle for Rome was now over. By midnight on 4 Jun the Fifth Army stood at the Tiber, its forces extended from the river mouth to several miles east of the city; advance elements of 1 Special Service Force were in the heart of the city. In his hasty retreat the enemy had left most of the Tiber bridges intact. The reception of Fifth Army by the citizens of Rome was hysterical. While the hated Germans were scurrying north and west out of the city through the deserted streets, the roads leading into the city from the south and east were filled by its cheering citizens welcoming the Allied soldiers. (The Drive to Rome, pp 158 - 163). To the Canadian soldiers in reserve only 30 miles short of the Eternal City there was bitter disappointment at not being present at this final episode. A war diary excerpt reveals how the majority had to depend on others for a description of the scene:

Our Corps therefore reverts to a reserve role. We are all a little bit disappointed, and envious of the Americans. Surely ROME depended on PONTECORVO. Or are we the only soldiers to think so?

One of the G staff offrs drove to ROME this afternoon. There is a magic about the words "Drove to ROME" which he says is even stronger in the actual experience. No 6 Highway was crowded all the way, but the jeep was able to slip in and out of the traffic and made good time. He passed en route 6 SA Armd Div with its tail around FERENTINO and its head near VALMONTONE. Ahead of it there was a US Div. The rd from VALMONTONE began to show the increasing richness of the country. There were certain marks of fighting along the rd but nothing to indicate intensive inf combat. Most of the towns are badly broken, but the agent of this had obviously been the Fortress. You do not see ROME from the distance. You approach from the plain and you see only that the houses on both sides of the highway become streets, and the streets become metropolitan, and suddenly there are wide intersections with white gloved police on duty, and massive many storied buildings showing beyond. There had been rain, and as the offr drove in, the cobbles glistened and the crowds were again coming out on the streets.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf
5 Jun 44)

244. Although Canadian troops did not have an opportunity of celebrating the fall of Rome in that city they did join in the general jubilation that took place in the small towns which they had liberated during the first three days of June. At **Anagni** they were acclaimed with the same wild enthusiasm and generosity that had been met everywhere the previous autumn, before the hardening of the enemy resistance in November. The inhabitants of this town were keen anti-fascists and several days before our occupation had expelled the mayor and his council and set up their own representatives (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 6 Jun 44). On the following Sunday this worthy group of citizens joined the R.C.R. in a church parade and march past, which is recounted in the regimental war diary:

At 1130 hrs the C. of E. church parade was conducted by Major Wilkes, M.C. in a large auditorium formerly used as part of a childrens' orphanage. All companies turned out very strongly and at the conclusion of the service the regiment was formed up outside the auditorium and moved by march route through the town. Lt-Col Ritchie took the salute on the march past and as soon as the leading company appeared they were met by a fanfare of trumpets. Formed up behind Lt-Col Ritchie was a bn of partisans, 600 strong, who had been formed a few hours prior to this. As soon as the regiment were out of sight the partisan bn moved off swinging around and also past Lt-Col Ritchie, giving a weird and wonderful "eyes right" as they passed by. The bn was made up of Italians anywhere from the age of 15 to 60 and although it was obvious that very few of them had ever had any military training, what they lacked in training they made up in enthusiasm. After the parade Lt-Col Ritchie and several officers had lunch with an Italian family, which was greatly enjoyed by all.

(W.D., R.C.R., 4 Jun 44)

To add to the general enthusiasm on 6 Jun the B.B.C. news told of the opening of the long-awaited Second Front in Normandy. Speculation on the future operations of 1 Cdn Corps at once became the main topic of conversation. Would the next move be the United Kingdom and back to First Cdn Army, or would the corps remain with the Eighth Army? No one, of course, knew the answer.

245. Meanwhile, on 5 Jun at a conference at main Eighth Army Headquarters, plans were formulated for the withdrawal of 1 Cdn Corps. The Corps was to move to the area around Piedimonte in the upper Volturno Valley, where formations under command would again go into training under the direction of Eighth Army (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 5 Jun 44). 1 Cdn Inf Div began the move south on 7 Jun. It was a long but interesting journey back through the battle ground of the previous month, and by the morning of 10 Jun the Division was complete in its new area. The transfer of 5 Cdn Armd Div from the area of Pofi took a longer time because of the difficulty in moving tanks, but by 14 Jun Divisional Headquarters had completed its move and the bulk of the Division had arrived, (Ibid, 7 and 10 Jun 44; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 6 - 14 Jun 44). 25 (Br) Tk Bde had passed to under command 13 Corps

on 4 Jun. On 8 Jun Lt-Gen Burns presented the British Brigade with 8000 Maple Leaves for wear by its personnel as a recognition of the co-operation they had given 1 Cdn Corps in the operations just concluded. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 4 Jun 44; W.D., Comd I Cdn Corps, 9 Jun 44)

246. The successes gained by 1 Cdn Corps in its initial offensive were highly gratifying, but the cost had not been light. During the fighting in the Liri Valley the Corps had suffered over 3100 casualties and 1 Cdn Arm'd Bde nearly another 200. In a little less than a month casualties had amounted to approximately 25 per cent of the total Canadian losses for the entire 11 months' campaign in Italy.^{*} Compared with the Adriatic offensive of December 1943 the battle casualties of 1 Cdn Inf Div in the Liri Valley were almost as great, although on the Adriatic the Division had been committed the whole month as compared with only about two weeks in the Liri Valley.^{**} (Report No. 165, Appx "B"). The Corps Commander estimated that the losses inflicted upon the enemy, however, were considerably greater. A total of 1421 prisoners were taken by 1 Cdn Corps between 17 May and 6 Jun. To this total must be added the unknown - but certainly large - number of killed and wounded. (Report No. 121, Appx "D")

247. Colonel Ralston, Minister of Defence, in a message to General Burns on 9 Jun expressed his appreciation and that of the Government and citizens of Canada in the following cable:

Canadians have enjoyed an outstanding part in the drive from the Rapido to Rome. You have carried out one task after another with distinction and success. Canada is proud of the irresistible gallantry and resolution shown by all ranks. The Eighth Army Commander's commendation is a rare tribute and must be a source of deep satisfaction to all of you. The congratulations and thanks and the admiration and confidence of all Canada. Our support, our good wishes and our prayers go with you. This is to be read to every officer, N.C.O. and man in the Canadian Army participating in these hard fought operations.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps,
June 1944: Appx 28)

248. In so brilliantly executing the notable role assigned to them in the Liri Valley campaign, 1 Cdn Corps had contributed materially to the success of the larger Allied plan - that of bringing about the destruction of the enemy in every theatre of war. The fulfilment of that plan continued to claim the sole attention of the Allied forces in Italy. On the day that the invasion

* A summary of casualties is given in Appx "C". Detailed statistics may be found in Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Corps/P/H Docket III: Summary of Casualties 1 Cdn Corps Italy, 11 May - 4 June 1944.

** The total Liri Valley casualties were 1964 as against 2339 on the Adriatic.

of Normandy was launched, General Alexander wrote to General Wilson:

My object is to complete the destruction of the German armed forces in Italy, and in the process to force the enemy to draw to the maximum on his reserves, whereby I shall be rendering the greatest assistance to the western invasion of which my armies are capable.

(Allied Strategy, Appx "D"-2,
Alexander to Wilson, 6 Jun 44)

The Allied Armies in Italy were now directed to advance with all possible speed - the Eighth Army up the valley of the Tiber to Arezzo and Florence, the Fifth Army along the west coast to Pisa and Pistora. But in these operations 1 Cdn Corps played no immediate part. In their rest area in the Volturno region the tired formations recuperated and reorganized for coming battles when the tide of conflict should take them once again to the Adriatic coast.

249. This report has been prepared by Major E.A. Haines C.I.C. He was given some assistance by Mr. V.A.G. Eliot.

E.A. Haines Maj
C.P. Stacey (Colonel)
Director Historical Section

EIGHTH ARMY ORDER OF BATTLE 11 MAY 44

10 Corps (Lieutenant-General Sir R.L. McCreery)

2nd New Zealand Infantry Division
24th Guards Brigade
12th South African Motor Brigade
Hermon Force
Corps of Italian Liberation
2nd Army Group R.A.

13 Corps (Lieutenant-General S.C. Kirkman)

6th British Armoured Division
4th British Infantry Division
78th Infantry Division
8th Indian Infantry Division
1st Canadian Armoured Brigade
6th Army Group R.A.
1st Canadian Army Group R.C.A.

1 Canadian Corps (Lieutenant-General E.L.M. Burns)

5th Canadian Armoured Division
1st Canadian Infantry Division
25th Tank Brigade

2 Polish Corps (Lieutenant-General W. Anders)

3rd Carpathian Infantry Division
5th Kresowa Infantry Division
2nd Polish Armoured Brigade
Army Group Polish Artillery

6th South African Armoured Division

11th African Armoured Brigade

12th Anti-Aircraft Brigade

(Eighth Army Advance to Rome,
Chap. I, para 24)

1 CDN CORPS ORDER OF BATTLE
as of 1200 hrs 17 May 44

H.Q.

H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps

ARMD TPS

1 Cdn Armd C. Regt (R.C.D.)

ARTY

7 Cdn A.Tk Regt (less 15 and 111 Btys)
1 Cdn L.A.A. Regt
1 Cdn Svy Regt (less P. Bty)
654 Air O.P. Sqn (less three flts)

H.Q. 1 Cdn A.G.R.A.

1 Cdn C.B.O. Staff
1 Cdn Med Regt
2 Cdn Med Regt
5 Cdn Med Regt
51 Med Regt R.A.
32 Hy Regt R.A. (less one bty)
11 Cdn A.Fd Regt
One flt 654 Air O.P. Sqn
17 Cdn Met Sec

ENGRS

H.Q. R.C.E. 1 Cdn C. Tps
12 Cdn Fd Coy
13 Cdn Fd Coy (less one pl under comd)
14 Cdn Fd Coy 1 Cdn Armd Bde)
9 Cdn Fd Pk Coy
1 Cdn E. & M. Sec
26 Mech Eqpt Sec
1 Cdn Drilling Coy (for adm only - under
comd 11 C.E. Wks Main
Eighth Army for ops)
236 Br Coy R.A.S.C.

(Sigs, S. & T., Ord, Meds, etc. omitted)

1 CDN INF DIVH.Q.

H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div

with under command

H.Q. 25 Tk Bde (Br)
N.I.H. (North Irish Horse)
51 R. Tks (51 Bn Royal Tank Regt)
142 R.A.C. (142 Regt Royal Armoured Corps)

RECCE

4 Cdn Recce Regt (P.L.D.G.)

ARTY

H.Q. R.C.A. 1 Cdn Inf Div
1 Cdn Fd Regt
2 Cdn Fd Regt
3 Cdn Fd Regt
1 Cdn A.Tk Regt
15 Cdn A.Tk Bty S.P.
111 Cdn A.Tk Bty S.P.
2 Cdn L.A.A. Regt
12 Cdn Met Sec
142 Regt R.A.
One Bty 165 Lt Regt R.A.
One flt 654 Air O.P. Sqn

ENGRS H.Q. R.C.E. 1 Cdn Inf Div
 1 Cdn Fd Coy
 3 Cdn Fd Coy
 4 Cdn Fd Coy
 2 Cdn Fd Pk Coy
 1 Cdn Br Pl.

INF H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div Sp Bn (SASK L.I.)
 H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde
 1 Cdn Inf Bde Sp Gp
 R.C.R.
 Hast & P.E.R.
 48 Highrs

H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde
 2 Cdn Inf Bde Sp Gp
 P.P.C.L.I.
 Seaforth of C.
 L. Edmn R.

H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde
 3 Cdn Inf Bde Sp Gp
 R. 22e R.
 Carlt & York R.
 West N.S.R.

(Sigs, S. & T., Ord, Meds, etc. omitted)

5 CDN ARMD DIV

H.Q. H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div

ARMD TPS H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde
 2 Cdn Armd Regt (Ld S.H.)
 5 Cdn Armd Regt (8 N.B.H.)
 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.)

MOT TPS Westmr R. (Mot)

RECCE 3 Cdn Armd Recce Regt (G.G.H.G.)

ARTY H.Q. R.C.A. 5 Cdn Armd Div
 17 Cdn Fd Regt
 4 Cdn A.Tk Regt
 5 Cdn L.A.A. Regt
 16 Cdn Met Sec
 8 Cdn Fd Regt S.P.

INF H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde
 11 Cdn Inf Bde Sp Gp
 Perth R.
 C.B. Highrs
 Ir R.C.

ENGRS 1 Cdn Fd Sqn
 10 Cdn Fd Sqn
 4 Cdn Fd Pk Sqn
 5 Cdn Armd Div Br Tp

(Sigs, S. & T., Ord, Meds etc. omitted)

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps,
 May 1944: Appx 26)

APPENDIX "C" (contd)

SUMMARY OF CASUALTIES BY UNITS - 1 CDN INF DIV, ITALY

11 MAY - 4 JUN 44

UNIT	KILLED		WOUNDED		P.W.		TOTAL	
	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.
H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div	1	-	1	-	-	-	2	-
4 Cdn Recce Regt (P.L.D.G.)	-	13	2	51	-	-	2	64
H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde	1	-	-	2	-	-	1	2
R.C.R.	1	29	3	60	-	-	4	89
Hast & P.E.R.	1	28	6	68	-	-	7	96
48 Highrs	3	38	3	87	1	2	7	127
H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
P.P.C.L.I.	3	69	6	160	2	19	11	248
L. Edmn R.	2	51	3	127	-	3	5	181
Seaforth of C.	3	61	7	133	2	54	12	248
H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
R. 22e R.	4	25	6	111	-	10	10	146
Carlt & York R.	2	39	4	142	-	1	6	182
West N.S.R.	1	49	5	140	-	12	6	201
1 Cdn Inf Div Sp Bn (SASK L.I.)	3	7	3	43	-	-	6	50
1 Fd Regt, R.C.A.	-	8	3	16	-	-	3	24
2 Fd Regt, R.C.A.	-	1	1	11	-	-	1	12
3 Fd Regt, R.C.A.	1	13	2	17	-	-	3	30
1 Cdn A.Tk Regt, R.C.A.	-	5	1	28	-	-	1	33
2 Cdn L.A.A. Regt, R.C.A.	-	3	2	18	-	-	2	21
H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div R.C.E.	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	1
1 Fd Coy, R.C.E.	-	-	-	5	-	-	-	5
2 Fd Coy, R.C.E.	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
3 Fd Coy, R.C.E.	-	5	2	11	-	5	2	21
4 Fd Pk Coy, R.C.E.	-	2	-	8	-	-	-	10
R.C.O.C.	-	2	2	6	-	-	2	8
R.C.A.S.C.	1	4	-	21	-	-	1	25
R.C.C.S.	-	1	-	12	-	-	-	13
R.C.A.M.C.	-	2	4	14	-	-	4	16
Cdn Pro Corps	-	4	-	6	-	-	-	10
	28	459	66	1300	5	106	99	1865

SUMMARY OF CASUALTIES BY UNITS - 5 CDN ARMD DIV, ITALY

11 MAY - 4 JUN 44

UNIT	KILLED		WOUNDED		P.W.		TOTAL	
	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.R.
H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div	-	3	2	6	-	-	2	9
25 Cdn Armd Del Regt	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
3 Cdn Recce Regt (G.G.H.G.)	3	7	4	30	-	-	7	37
H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
2 Cdn Armd Regt	5	46	12	73	-	-	17	119
5 Cdn Armd Regt	-	9	5	24	-	-	5	33
9 Cdn Armd Regt	1	12	13	49	-	-	14	61
H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
C.B. Highrs	2	28	5	106	-	-	7	134
Perth R.	-	22	3	92	-	-	3	114
Ir R.C.	-	36	7	98	-	2	7	136
Westmr R. (Mot)	1	21	8	99	-	3	9	123
11 Cdn Inf Bde Sp Gp	1	3	4	16	-	-	5	19
8 Cdn Fd Regt, R.C.A.	1	10	-	20	-	-	1	30
17 Cdn Fd Regt, R.C.A.	-	6	3	11	-	-	3	17
4 Cdn A.Tk Regt, R.C.A.	-	4	-	22	-	-	-	26
5 Cdn L.A.A. Regt, R.C.A.	-	-	1	3	-	-	1	3
1 Cdn Fd Sqn R.C.E.	-	3	-	9	-	-	-	12
10 Cdn Fd Sqn R.C.E.	-	8	1	20	-	-	1	28
4 Cdn Fd Pk Sqn R.C.E.	-	1	-	7	-	-	-	8
R.C.O.C.	-	3	-	14	-	-	-	17
R.C.A.S.C.	-	1	-	10	-	-	-	11
R.C.C.S.	-	2	-	6	-	-	-	8
R.C.A.M.C.	-	2	-	6	-	-	-	8
Cdn Pro Corps	-	2	-	6	-	-	-	8
	14	231	68	729	-	5	82	965

SUMMARY OF DAILY CASUALTIES

1 CDN CORPS, ITALY

11 MAY - 4 JUN 44

DATE	1 CDN CORPS TPS		1 CDN INF DIV		5 CDN ARMD DIV		1 CDN ARMD BDE		TOTAL	
	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.
MAY										
11	-	6	-	4	-	3	-	2	-	15
12	1	6	1	10	-	2	2	11	4	29
13	-	1	-	5	-	2	3	16	3	24
14	1	2	-	14	-	4	1	12	2	32
15	1	2	3	10	-	2	4	11	8	25
16	-	4	7	61	-	4	2	5	9	74
17	4	12	6	140	-	3	-	1	10	156
18	1	13	5	38	-	2	-	4	6	57
19	1	3	6	122	-	7	3	8	10	140
20	-	8	4	85	1	15	-	1	5	109
21	-	11	-	40	1	45	-	13	1	109
22	1	17	4	122	3	47	1	5	9	191
23	-	2	45	820	-	36	5	16	50	874
24	-	5	6	155	11	186	3	18	20	364
25	-	15	4	90	29	226	1	4	34	333
26	-	20	1	18	11	97	1	6	13	117
27	-	4	2	5	6	107	-	4	8	120
28	-	2	-	4	9	68	-	4	9	78
29	-	6	1	6	3	25	-	3	4	40
30	1	4	-	41	4	43	-	2	5	90
31	1	7	1	28	4	30	-	1	6	66
JUN										
1	-	-	-	27	-	2	-	-	-	29
2	1	1	1	7	-	4	-	-	2	12
3	-	5	2	12	-	4	-	-	2	21
4	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	2
	13	156	99	1865	82	965	26	147	220	3133

THE "ADOLF HITLER" LINE

The main feature of the defence was the employment of the turrets of Panther tanks converted to a static role (1). These were scattered along a line extending from San Olivo (G.6913), at the exit of the Esperia defile, to a point on the Liri river two kilometres south of Pontecorvo (G.7217), thence following the secondary road from Pontecorvo through Aquino (G.7521) to the junction with Highway 6. The line then turned eastwards skirting the hills to Piedimonte (G.7922) and was anchored on the formidable Monte Cairo, northeast of Cassino where it joined the "Gustav" line. This stretch was the thickest part of the "Hitler" line and by the end of April 1944 the number of Panther turrets had increased to nearly two hundred; a wide arc of thirty-five turrets ran roughly west to east from Aquino across Highway 6 and covering the approaches to Piedimonte, the whole intended to prevent any outflanking movement from the Liri valley up the wide re-entrant commanded by Piedimonte on its prominent spur. Between Highway 6 and the point where the line crossed the Liri river south of Pontecorvo (a distance of 9,000 yards) a further hundred and fourteen camouflaged turrets were emplaced. Finally, west of the Liri to a point just beyond San Olivo there were another thirty structures, most of them in the rolling country northeast of San Olivo. In front of these prepared positions and interrupted only by three stretches of anti-tank ditch (one forward of Pontecorvo and two South and southeast of Aquino respectively) was a belt of wire (double-apron type) with approximately twenty-two feet between the two rows. Only in the Piedimonte area did the turrets come forward of this line of wire. To the rear of the line most of the farms and buildings were incorporated as strong-points; trees were felled and buildings demolished to improve the field of fire. By the time the Allied offensive was resumed this stretch of the "Hitler" line presented a formidable barrier and indeed so well camouflaged were the German positions that the Eighth Army probably suffered its heaviest tank losses in the fighting between Piedimonte and Pontecorvo and on the approaches to Aquino airfield.

South of the Piedimonte - San Olivo positions the "Hitler" line was not nearly so far advanced on 11 May and in fact was known to the Germans in this area only as the "Dora" line, the name eventually given to the whole line in anticipation of its fall. The "Dora" line continued from San Olivo along the northern and northeastern slopes of Monte San Maria (G.7213) and the eastern slopes of Monte Calvo (G.7212) and Monte D'Oro, a total length of about four kilometres and south of Esperia incorporated

(1) So good was the German camouflage that it was not until the start of operations that these structures were discovered to be Panther turrets. Troops manning these positions were organised into Panther turret companies (Panther-Turm Kompanien).

APPENDIX "D" (Contd)

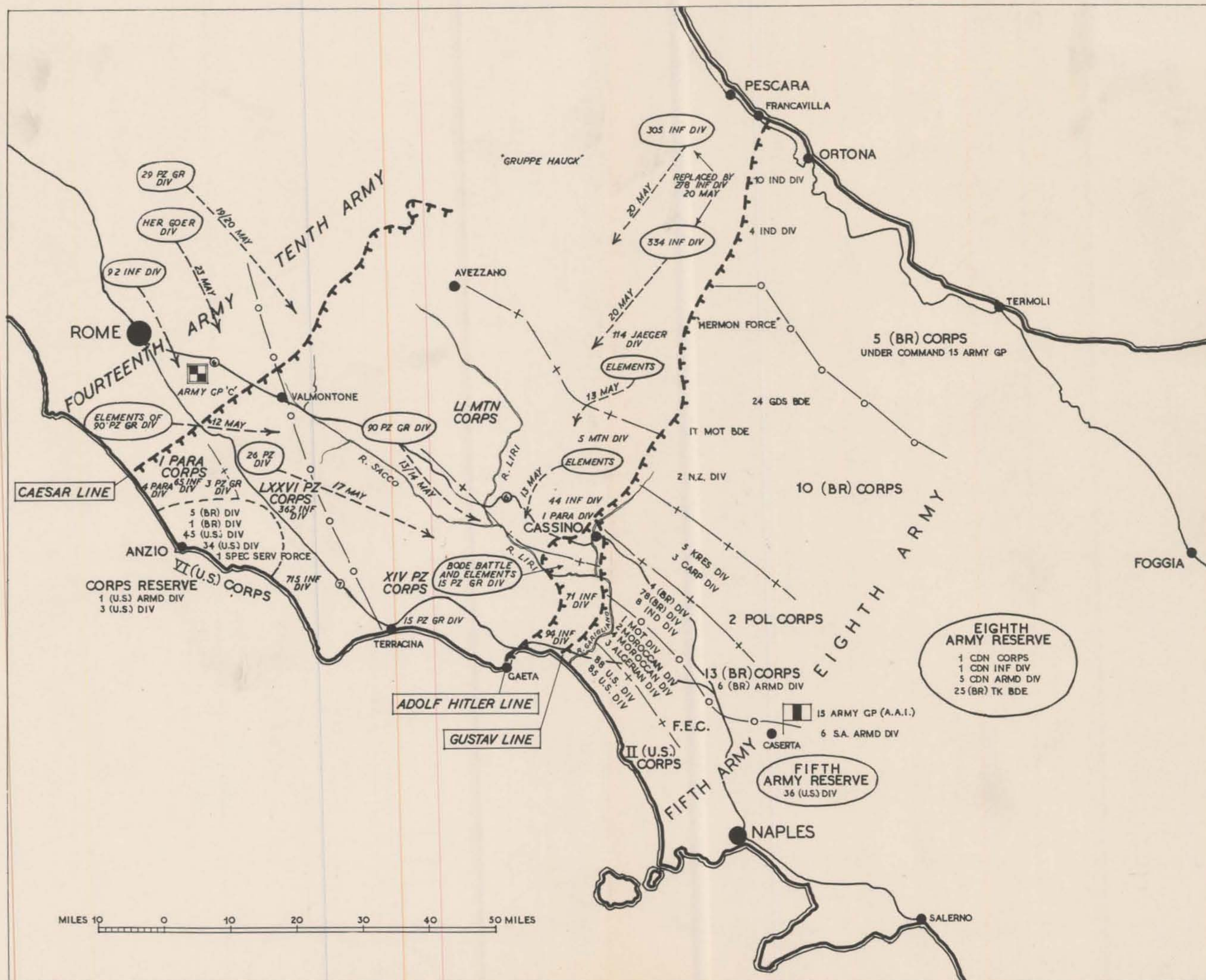
the Monte Fammora massif; from here the line, in a very elementary stage, doubled back to Formia on the coast. Compared with the northern part of the "Hitler" line defences were hastily prepared, consisting in the main of shelters dug out or cut out of the hill-side but well camouflaged with rocks and stones dashed with green paint. The line had only been constructed to a depth of fifty metres with a hundred and fifty metres interval between positions and was still in the course of preparation at the time of the French attack on 11 May 1944.

(Operations of British, Indian
and Dominion Forces in Italy,
Part II, Sec "F" Appx "B":
The "Adolf Hitler" Line)

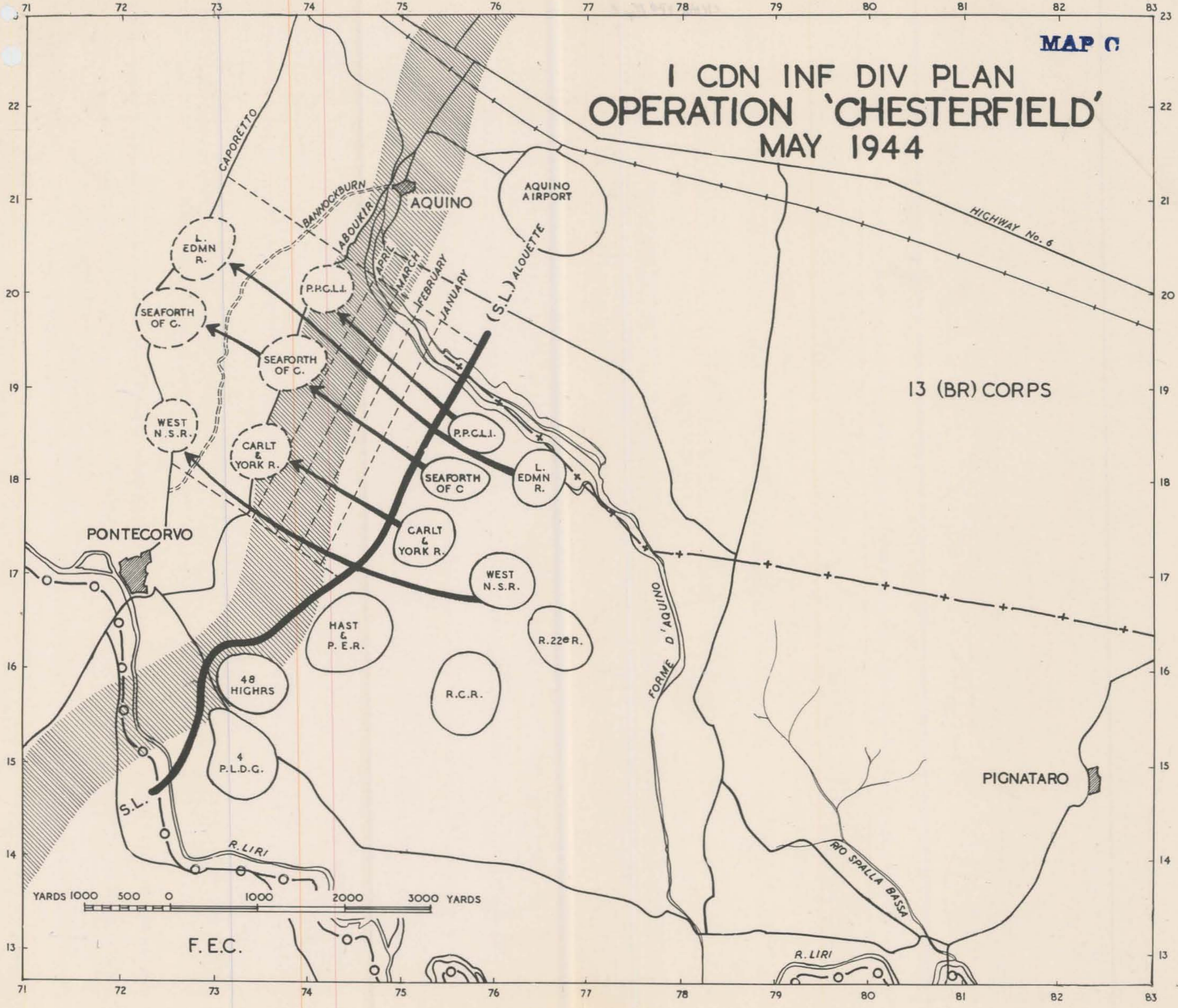
ALLIED AND ENEMY DISPOSITIONS IN CENTRAL ITALY

— 11 MAY 44 —

MAP A



I CDN INF DIV PLAN OPERATION 'CHESTERFIELD' MAY 1944



13 (BR) CORPS

YARDS 1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 YARDS

F. E.C.

PIGNATARO

AQUINO AIRPORT

AQUINO

PONTECORVO

L. EDMN R.

SEAFORTH OF C.

WEST N.S.R.

CARLT & YORK R.

SEAFORTH OF C.

CARLT & YORK R.

WEST N.S.R.

HAST & P. E.R.

R. 220 R.

R.C.R.

48 HIGHRS

4 P.L.D.G.

R. LIRI

S.L.

FORME D'AQUINO

R. LIRI

RIO SPALLA BASSA

HIGHWAY No. 6

(S.L.) ALOUETTE

BANNOCKBURN

ABOUKIR

APRIL

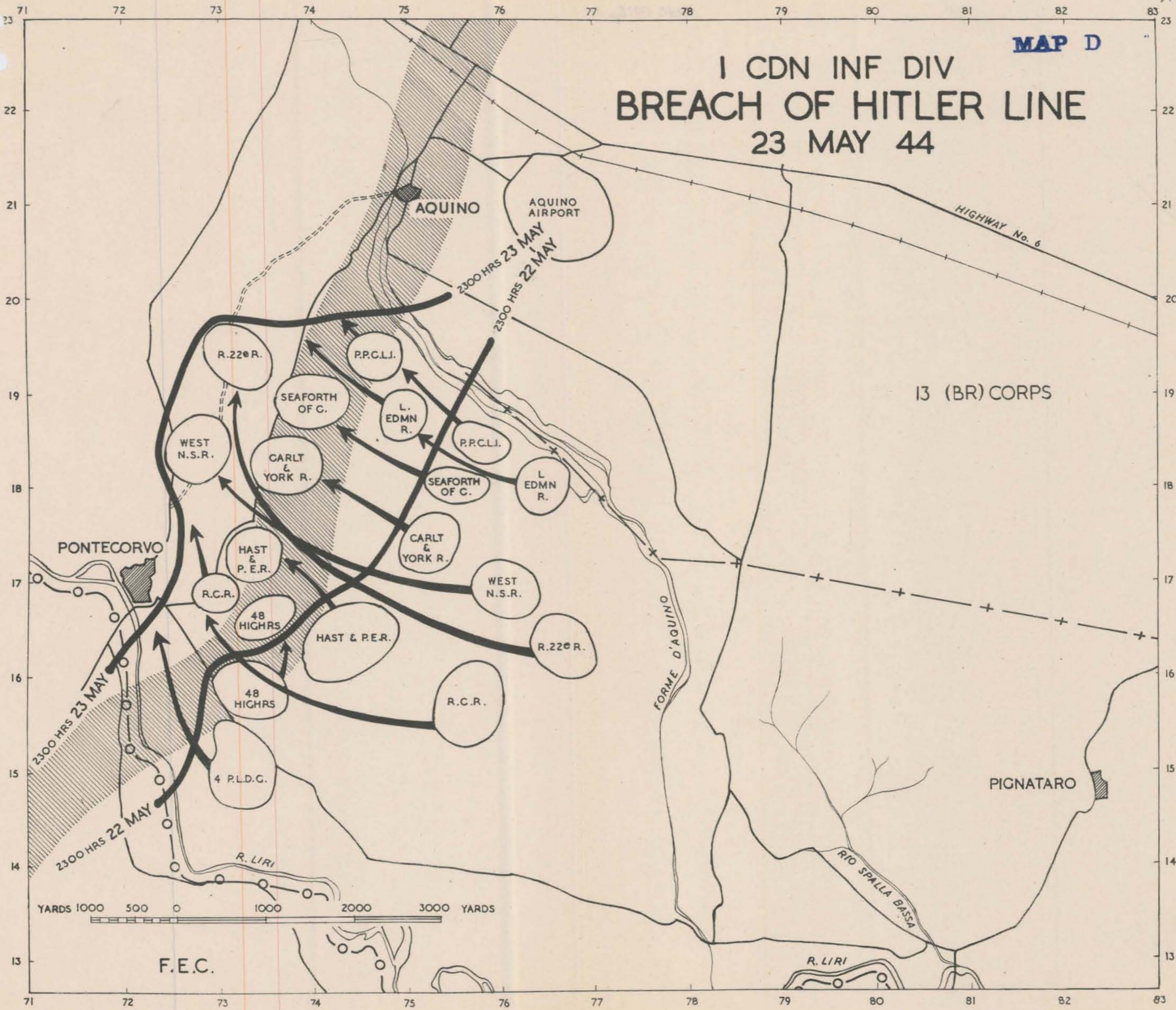
MARCH

FEBRUARY

JANUARY

MAP D

I CDN INF DIV BREACH OF HITLER LINE 23 MAY 44



AQUINO

AQUINO AIRPORT

HIGHWAY No. 6

13 (BR) CORPS

PIGNATARO

PONTECORVO

FORME D'AQUINO

RIO SPALLA BASSA

F.E.C.

R. LIRI

R. LIRI

2300 HRS 23 MAY
2300 HRS 22 MAY

2300 HRS 23 MAY
2300 HRS 22 MAY

R.220 R.

P.P.C.L.I.

SEAFORTH OF C.

L. EDMN R.

WEST N.S.R.

CARLT & YORK R.

P.P.C.L.I.

SEAFORTH OF C.

L EDMN R.

HAST & P.E.R.

R.C.R.

48 HIGHRS

HAST & P.E.R.

CARLT & YORK R.

WEST N.S.R.

R.220 R.

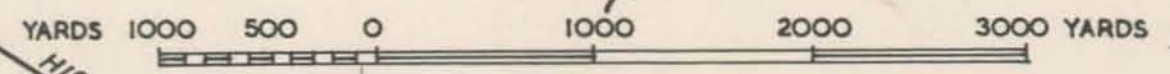
48 HIGHRS

4 P.L.D.G.

R.C.R.

YARDS 1000 500 1000 2000 3000 YARDS

CASTROCELO



HIGHWAY No. 6

WESTMR R. (MOT)
'B' & 'C' COYS CROSSED LAST LIGHT
'B' COY WITHDREW 0200 HRS

RECCE TP 1520 HRS
'A' COY WESTMR R. (MOT) 1530 HRS
'B' SQN 2 CDN ARMD REGT

'A' SQN 2 CDN ARMD REGT

'C' SQN 2 CDN ARMD REGT

GPI 1220 HRS
9 CDN ARMD REGT
IR R.C.

RES GP 5 CDN ARMD REGT
WESTMR R. (MOT)
LESS 'A' COY

'B' SQN 3 CDN ARMD RECCE REGT

ADAMS FORCE
4 CDN RECCE REGT
CARLT & YORK R.
1 CDN ARMD C. REGT (2 SQNS)
12 CDN ARMD REGT

2300 HRS 24 MAY

F.E.C.

5 CDN ARMD DIV ADVANCE TO THE MELFA 24 MAY 44

PONTECORVO

23 MAY 2300 HRS

R. 22e R.

P.P.C.L.I.

SEAFORTH OF C.

L. EDMN R.

CARLT & YORK R.

HAST & P.E.R.

R.C.R.

48 HIGHRS

AQUINO

AQUINO AIRPORT

LIMIT OF 1 CDN INF DIV ADV
2300 HRS 23 MAY

13 (BR) CORPS

AQUINO STN

R. MELFA

CROSSING PLACE OF ADAMS FORCE

R. LIRI

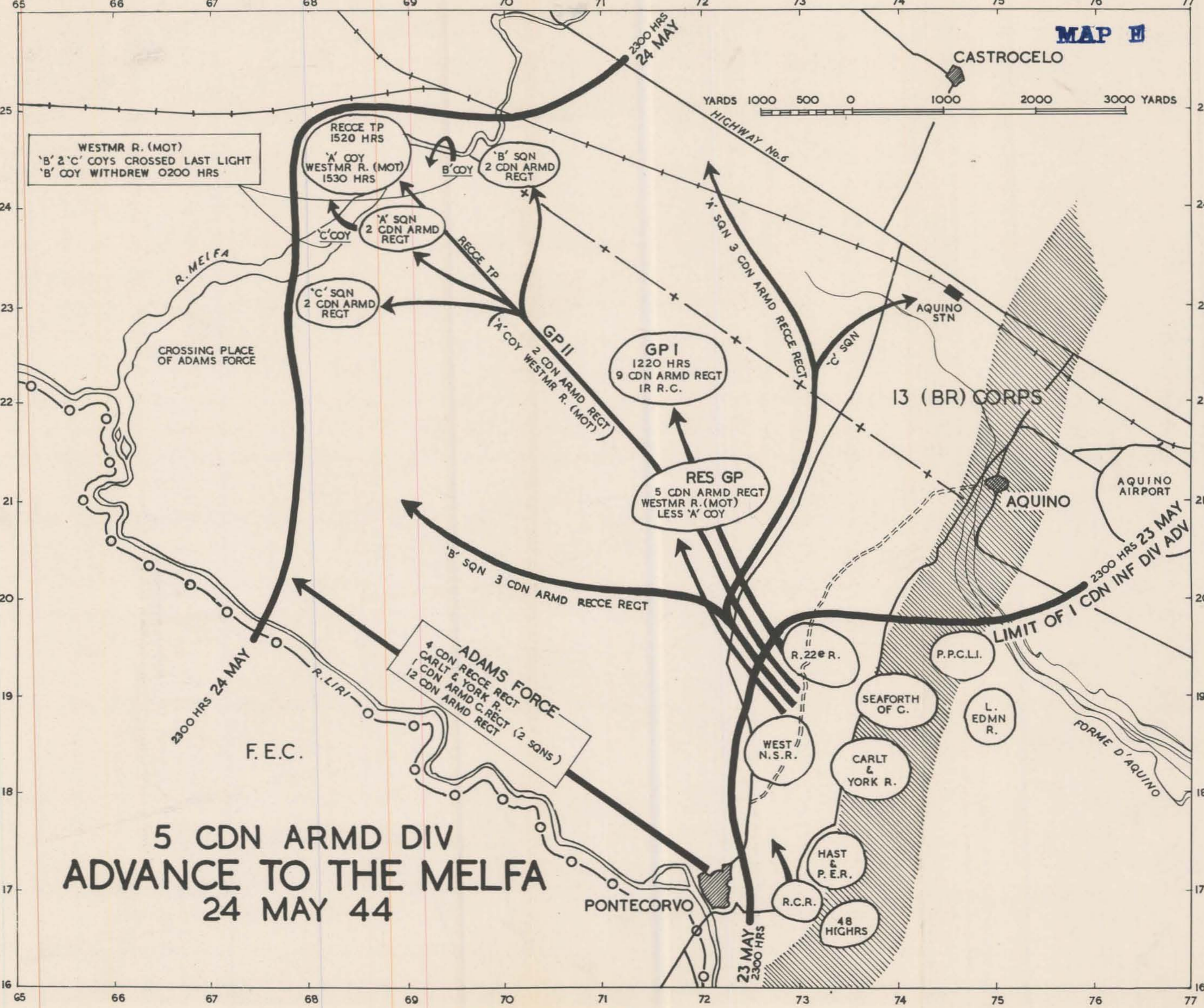
FORME D'AQUINO

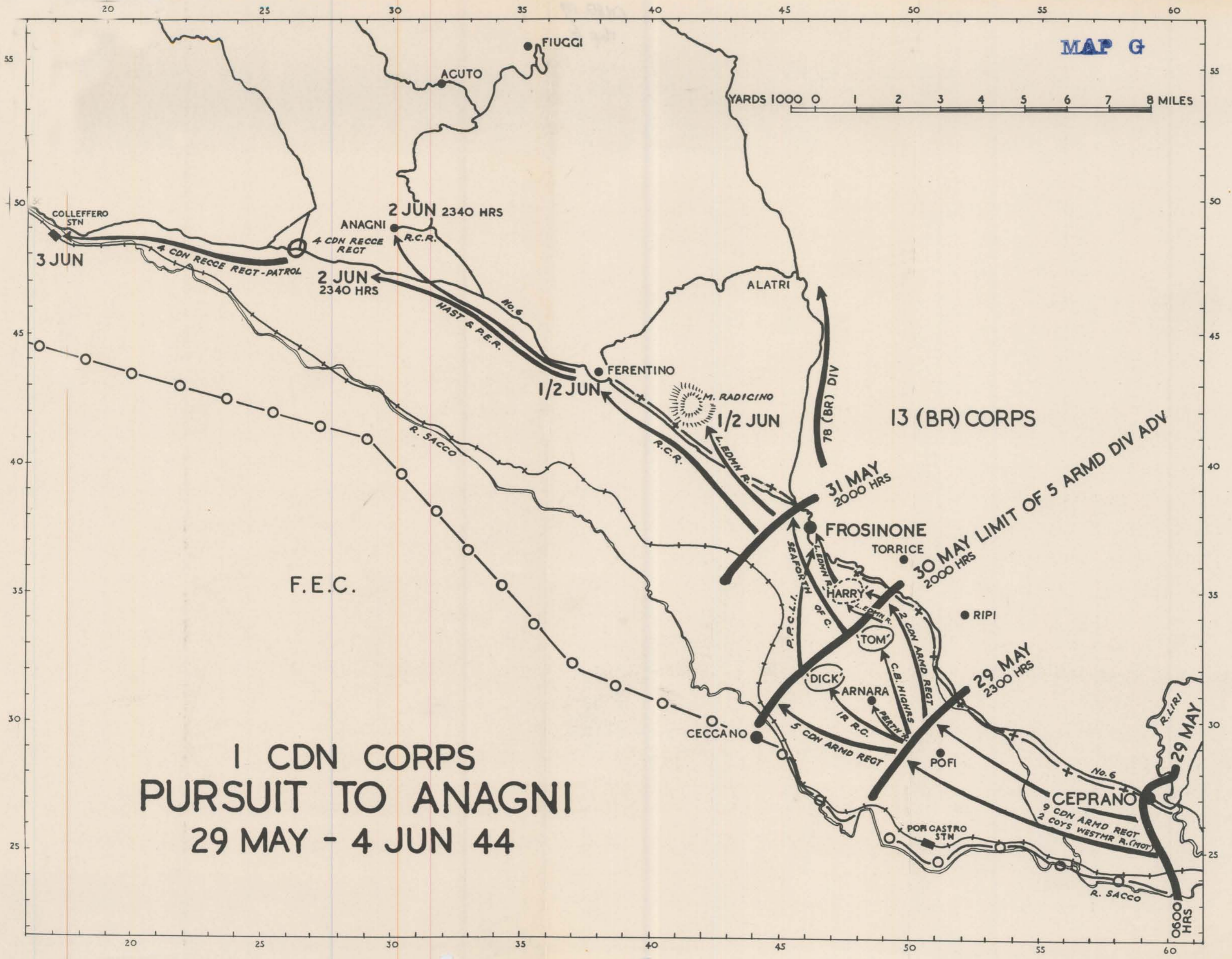
2300 HRS 24 MAY

GPII 'A' COY 2 CDN ARMD REGT WESTMR R. (MOT)

'A' SQN 3 CDN ARMD RECCE REGT

'C' SQN





MAP G

YARDS 1000 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 MILES

I CDN CORPS
PURSUIT TO ANAGNI
29 MAY - 4 JUN 44

F.E.C.

13 (BR) CORPS

30 MAY LIMIT OF 5 ARMD DIV ADV

2 JUN 2340 HRS

2 JUN 2340 HRS

1/2 JUN

1/2 JUN

31 MAY 2000 HRS

30 MAY 2000 HRS

29 MAY 2300 HRS

29 MAY

0600 HRS

FIUGGI

ACUTO

ANAGNI

ALATRI

FERENTINO

FROSINONE

TORRICE

RIPI

CECCANO

POFI

CEPRANO

POR CASTRO STN

COLLEFFERO STN

4 CDN RECCE REGT - PATROL

4 CDN RECCE REGT

R.C.R.

HAST & P.E.R.

No. 6

M. RADICINO

R.C.R.

L. EDWIN R.

78 (BR) DIV

HARRY

'TOM'

'DICK'

ARNARA

IR R.C.

5 CDN ARMD REGT

2 CDN ARMD REGT

C.B. HIGHRS

PERTIN

9 CDN ARMD REGT

2 COYS WESTMR R. (MOT)

R. SACCO

No. 6

R. LIRI

P.R.C.I.

SEAFOURTH

of C.