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THE NORTH APENNINES (GOTHIC LINE) CAMPAIGN

AUGUST 1944 - APRIL 1945

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THE NORTH APENNINES (GOTHIC LINE) CAMPAIGN
AUGUST 1944 - APRIL 1945

INTRODUCTION

When the Allies invaded Western Europe Allied Forces in Italy had already captured Rome, the first Axis Capital to fall to the Allies, and were now engaged in pursuing the Germans north of Rome. Let's look at some of the achievements of the allies in the Mediterranean area. They had invaded French North Africa and gained the support of the French Colonial Troops. The Germans were driven from Africa. All these actions helped to weaken the German pressure on the Russian front. Sicily was captured, thus freeing the Mediterranean to Allied shipping. Italy surrendered but the Germans within its borders did not follow suit. The Allied 15th Army Group, composed of the American Fifth Army and the British Eighth Army invaded Southern Italy, captured the Ports of Naples and Bari, and took the Foggia Airfields, which enabled Allied Air Forces to bomb portions of Hitler's Europe out of range of bombers based in England. Throughout the War in Italy the Fifth Army fought on the left and the Eighth Army fought on the right. During the winter of 1943-1944 the Allies engaged in a bitter and slow moving campaign which was brought to a halt by German Defenses hinged on Cassino. Also during this winter the American VI Corps established and held a beachhead at Anzio. After a secret switch of troops to place the mass on the Tyrrhenian side of the boot the Allies (except those at Anzio) jumped off at 2300 hours 11 May, 1944. (Map A) (1) The attack was made all along the line, thus making it hard for the Germans to tell just where the main blow was coming (2) Fighting was

(1) A-1, p. 43; (2) A-27, p. 7.

fierce, but the ~~st~~av and Hitler lines were ~~smashed~~ and the allies surged north. On 23 May the forces on the Anzio Beachhead jumped off. (3) They soon joined the forces coming up from the south.

The Allies entered Rome on 4 June, 1944. Important as Rome was as a political objective and as a center of communications (Every road leads to Rome), the Allies did not tarry there but proceeded to other important objectives - the Viterbo Airfields and the port of Civitavecchia. (4) North of Rome along Highway 2 the remains of destroyed vehicles and dead horses bore testimony to the effectiveness of Allied Air. (5) On 17 June French troops invaded Elba and by June 19 had completed its occupation and taken about 1800 prisoners. (6) The enemy fought fierce delaying actions at Lake Trasimene, Cecina, Volterra, and Arezzo. (7) But on the same day, 17 July, ~~that~~ the port of Leghorn on the Tyrrhenian Sea was entered by the victorious allies, the port of Ancona on the Adriatic Sea was also entered. (8)

It was one continual race for Fifth Army G-4 to keep the stretched and taut supply lines from breaking. To aid in accomplishing the supply mission one port after another was rapidly repaired and opened for use and relinquished to the Peninsular Base Section as the advance continued. Among these ports were Civitavecchia, San Stefano, Piombino, and finally Leghorn. At one port, Piombino, the port engineers went in before the infantry. (9)

On 3 August the Allies penetrated into the southern

(3) A-1, p. 43; (4) A-2, p. 81; (5) Personal knowledge;
(6) A-2, p. 81; (7) A-3, p. 84; (8) A-3, p. 86; (9) A-33, p. 32.

outskirts of Florence. By 5 August the enemy was cleared from the south bank of the Arno River from the Tyrrhenian Sea to a point 12 miles East of Florence. Further east the Allies were across that stream. During the next few days the Germans slowly withdrew from Florence. Along the Adriatic the Eighth Army had advanced to the Metauro River, on the other side of which were the advanced positions of the Gothic Line.

(Map B) (10)

Troops were being rested, trained, and regrouped. This campaign, the Rome-Arno was drawing to a close and the North Apennines Campaign was soon to begin with the assault on the Gothic Line.

TROOPS

Between mid-June and the last of July, during the pursuit North of Rome, more than a division a week was withdrawn by the Allies from the forces in Italy to prepare for and engage in Seventh Army's invasion of Southern France, which was scheduled for August. Among the forces removed were the American VI Corps Headquarters, the veteran 3rd, 36th, and 45 Infantry Divisions, the French Expeditionary Corps Headquarters, four French Colonial divisions, and supporting troops. (11) On 1 June the assigned strength of Fifth Army was 248,989; on 1 August it was 153,323. Good authorities state that during this period nine full divisions and the equivalent of a tenth were assigned elsewhere. (12) However, I am unable to account for more than seven of these. The removal of these troops from Italy had a greater effect on the future of the War in Italy than any other single factor.

(10) A-3, p.90; (11) A-1, p.45; (12) A-2, p. 82;

It is true that the 91st Infantry Division (American) had entered the fight in June (13) and that the 92nd Infantry Division (American Negro) and the 1st Division, Brazilian Expeditionary Force were to join the forces in Italy during the late summer and early fall, (14) but these could not make up for the loss of seven veteran divisions.

Also the 442nd Infantry, a Nisei Unit, went to France just before Fifth Army's assault on the Gothic Line and did not return until just in time to take part in the initial attacks of the Po Valley Campaign.

It may be added that the divisions to participate in the battle of the Gothic Line were of as diverse national and racial origin as could be found anywhere. Among these were Americans both black and white, British, Canadians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Indians from India, Poles, Brazilians and Greeks; later in the campaign a Jewish Brigade from Palestine and some Italian troops joined the fight. (15) It was a United Nations in miniature.

List of Major Headquarters:

15th Army Group, an Allied Force Headquarters commanded by General Alexander (British) (In late November he was promoted to Field Marshal and given command of the Mediterranean Theater of Operations) (16)

Fifth American Army, commanded by General Mark W. Clark

(He succeeded General Alexander as commander of 15th Army Group. Lt. Gen. Truscott then took command of the Fifth Army) (17)

(13) A-12, p. 19; (14) A-1, p. 45; (15) A-4, p. 134;

(16) and (17) A-4, p. 134.

II American Corps, commanded by Major General (later Lt. Gen.)
Keyes.

IV American Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. (later Lt. Gen.)
Crittenberger.

Eighth British Army, commanded by General Leese until October
when General McCreery took command of this army.

V British Corps

X British Corps

I Canadian Corps (Left for European Theater, March 1945) (18)

II Polish Corps

Some of the fighting troops,
Armored

American: 1st Armored Division, 34th, 85th, 88th, 91st,

and 92nd Infantry Divisions. The 473rd Infantry Regiment
composed of retrained Anti-Aircraft units entered the fight
during the North Apennines Campaign. Also some Anti-
Aircraft Artillery units occupied a defensive sector
under a Headquarters known as Task Force 45 during this
campaign. The 10th Mountain Division entered the Line in
January 1945.(20)

Brazilian; 1st Division, Brazilian Expeditionary Force

British: 1st, 4th, 46th, 46th, and 78th Infantry Divisions,
(Only two of these , the 56th and 78th were present at
the end of the campaign), 6th Armored Division

Canadian: 3 Canadian Divisions. These left for the European
Theater of Operations, March 1945, to join 21st Army
Group. (21)

New Zealand: 2nd New Zealand Division.

South African: 6th South African Armored Division.

(18) A-14, p. 34; (19) Personal Knowledge; (20) A-26, p. 10;

(21) A-14, p. 34.

Indian: 4th, 8th, and 10th Indian Divisions and the 43rd Gurkha Brigade. The 4th Indian Division received orders on 20 October 1944 to go to Greece, but not until after participating in the assault on the Gothic Line. (22)

One of the divisions of the Eighth Army was sent to the Eastern Mediterranean area during the early months of 1945. (23)

These troops were opposed in the eastern and western sectors of the line by the German Tenth and Fourteenth Armies respectively, which were part of the German Army Group Southwest, commanded by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring until March when he left to take over the defenses of Western Europe. He was succeeded in Italy by General Vietinghoff. (24)

THE GOTHIC LINE

The Gothic Line included concrete pill boxes with slits for automatic weapons, well sited and camouflaged - tank turrets mounted upon concrete pill boxes - command posts dug far into the sides of mountains - mines and barbed wire.(25)

In addition it was built along the southern glacis of the rugged North Apennine mountains and stretched from coast to coast.(See Map B). The Germans had been working since early in 1944 in preparing the defenses of the Gothic line. (26)

The Todt Organization in constructing the line had reputedly used the labor of a whole Slovak division and a half million Italians as well as a considerable amount of German labor and supervision.(27) Also the Germans had spread propaganda which stated that the Gothic line was impregnable and depicted the frightful slaughter that any assault on this line would be certain to meet.(28) Yet, as the allies were moving forward toward Leghorn and the Arno River, the Gothic Line

(22) A-16, p. 203; (24) A-18, p. 54; (23) A-4 p. 134; (25) Personal Knowledge; (26) A-1 p.46; (27) A-3 p.90; (28)A-6 p. 101.

was not ready. Hence, it was necessary for Field Marshal Kesselring, the German Commander, to delay the advance of the Allies at points south of the Arno River until the Gothic Line was ready. This he did but it required some fierce fighting. (29)

TERRAIN AND WEATHER

From one half to two thirds of Italy consists of mountains. For centuries these mountains have aided the natives in stopping invaders. (30) It is to be expected therefore that in general terrain in Italy would favor the defense, particularly if the defender is skilled in the choice and use of the best defensive terrain. The wisdom of the enemy was demonstrated by his choice of the North Apennines, for these mountains cross Italy in a transverse fashion, thus forming the only strictly geographical division of Italy. ~~there is,~~ North Italy thus being distinctly separated from the rest of Italy. The Apennines branch off from the Maritime Alps somewhere between Nice and Genoa, follow the coast around the Gulf of Genoa, and in the vicinity of Carrara north of Pisa and Lucca turn and go across the peninsula. Then, ceasing to be called North Apennines when they turn south and go lengthwise down Italy, they form the central spine of the peninsula.(31)

In the German-held territory to the north of the allies at the beginning of the North Apennines Campaign we find that there are only a few small beaches on the rocky western coast and the one beach on the east coast just north of Rimini can be easily defended.

The further west we go the broader the North Apennine Mountain Range becomes. An inspection of the map reveals (29) A-3, p.102; (30) A-29 p.1; (31) A-28, p.755; (32) A-2, p. 87.

Bologna then in the possession of the enemy to be an important communications center. Continued possession of this city by the enemy would hamper the support of any exploitation of the Po Valley by the Allies even if they did succeed in reaching it. Let's look further to the east. An attack in the direction of Rimini in the Po Valley appears to offer the quickest and easiest approach into the Po Valley from the standpoint of terrain obstacles. Rimini, the eastern terminus of Highway nine and also on the Adriatic coastal highway is certainly an important objective. To reach it the Allies would have to cross several stream and ridge lines. Even after they had reached this portion of the Po Valley they would still be attacking one little river line after the other. This portion of the Po Valley is no warriors valhalla, particularly after the Fall rains set in. The little stream lines here are peculiarly suited to the defense. Centuries ago this portion of the Po Valley was a marsh. The natives found that by building dykes they could canalize the flow of the rivers and eliminate the marsh, but these rivers after reaching the valley ceased to erode and instead deposited the products of their mountain erosion in their valley river beds, thus raising the level of their river beds in the valley. Consequently the dykes had to be built higher and higher, thus making a kind of aqueduct of each of this type of river. Some of these dykes are twenty feet above the level of the flat lands of the valley. These earthen dykes are easy to dig in and make weapon emplacements. A single machine gun emplaced in one of these dykes can cover hundreds of yards. The numerous turns in these lazy meandering streams and their dykes facilitate development by a defender

of flanking and mutually supporting fires. And finally the defender can breach the dykes on the attacker's side and flood the area in which the attacker is maneuvering.(33)

For centuries the Po Valley has attracted conquering hordes. With its factories and its fertile farms it was highly important to the German Economy. The enemy could be expected to react vigorously to an attack against this area.

In a few weeks the fall rains would set in. Once these had begun exploitation of any success would be considerably decelerated. By the opposition of the weather combined with that of the enemy, the mountains, and the streams, the advance of the attack might be brought to a halt. From the standpoint of weather it was imperative that any offensive be mounted as soon as possible.

MISSION

The nature of the mission of 15th Army Group was necessarily to contain as many of the enemy in Italy as possible in order to keep them from being shifted to another front. The very nature of such a mission entails a strict economy of force. To assign an overwhelming concentration of troops on this mission would not be accomplishing the mission.(34)

Also the Allies hoped and planned to break through the North Apennines into the Po Valley.(35) Thus they would not only deprive the Germans of the Po Valley resources, but they would be destroying the Germans and keeping them busy. Furthermore any serious threat to this area, so vital to German economy, would prevent the enemy from moving troops

(33) A-6, p. 173; (34) A-3 p. 60, A-2 p. 88, and A-4 p. 150;

(35) A-1, p. 46.

elsewhere, thus accomplishing the mission of keeping the German Forces in Italy.

PLANS AND PREPARATIONS FOR THE ASSAULT ON THE GOTHIC LINE

While the Allies were still pursuing the Germans in the portion of Italy between Rome and the Arno River there ^{had} already been thinking and planning on the subject of crossing the North Apennines into the Po Valley. In early July II Corps Headquarters, then out of the line and in rest area in the vicinity of Orbetello, was working on a plan known as the Arno plan. According to this plan the 85th and 88th Infantry Divisions would cross the Arno River to the West of Florence, seize the heights north of Pistoia (This town is on Highway 64, which leads to Bologna.), and continue the attack in the direction of Bologna. From about the 15 August to 27 August the 85th Infantry Division did occupy a defensive sector along the Arno River to the west of Florence. During this time the division made preparations to attack pursuant to the Arno Plan, but the preparations turned out to be a deceptive ruse. Engineers built up materials to look as if a river crossing was being prepared. When the division was being relieved by the 6th South African Armored Division no effort was made to conceal traffic coming into the area except that necessary for immediate protection. However, a great effort was made to conceal outgoing traffic. The 85th Division was ordered to leave all signs in place in an effort to make the Germans believe that the division was still there and that an attack was coming from that area. (36)

(36) Personal knowledge.

15th Army Group planned for the Eighth Army to make the main attack along the Adriatic coast while the Fifth Army made the secondary attack towards Bologna. (37) General Leese, commanding the Eighth Army, planned to attack with the bulk of his forces on a narrow front along the coast in the direction of Rimini. V Corps and I Canadian Corps was to attack initially with the II Polish Corps in support on the left. If successful the Eighth Army would be in a position to envelop the enemy positions which were further west. Fifth Army planned to make its main attack with II Corps on a narrow front attacking astride Highway 65. IV Corps on the west, occupying a wide front, was not to attack but was to maintain contact with the enemy and to vigorously follow up the withdrawals it was expected he would make as his positions were being overrun in the front of II Corps. Even if Fifth Army's attack did not succeed in breaking through the mountains, it would certainly help to relieve the pressure against the attack of the Eighth Army. (38)

The implementation of this plan required a switch of troops to put them in the proper place for the attack. This was quite a problem due to the limited road net. But it was accomplished. No doubt the overwhelming Allied air superiority contributed greatly toward the attainment of secrecy and surprise.

SMASHING THE GOTHIC LINE

On 26 August, 1944, the Eighth Army jumped off and attacked across the Metauro River on a twenty mile front. By 31 August it had captured the forward positions of the (37) A-2, p. 84; (38) Personal knowledge and A-2, p. 84.

Gothic Line and was ready to assault the main positions of the Gothic Line. The withdrawal of the 71st German Division holding the coastal sector from its forward positions half an hour before the attack commenced was a considerable aid to the advance. Kesselring rapidly threw in three supporting divisions which slowed the advance and gained time for the arrival of three more divisions. Yet by September 3rd the whole of the eastern portion of the Gothic Line had been overrun. (39) By 4 September British and Poles were four miles from Rimini. But now the enemy fought harder than on the Gothic Line itself. The enemy, reacting quickly to the attack of the Eighth Army brought up reinforcements including armor. During the period 4-13 September Allied Advances were in yards. (40)

Fifth Army did not launch its attack until September 10. During the period between Eighth Army's attack and its own, Fifth Army with IV Corps and XIII Corps followed up German withdrawals from positions forward of the main Gothic Line positions. It was now well across the Arno River. Lucca was secured by 5 September and Pistoia by 10 September. (41) Meanwhile II Corps, with the 34th, 85th, 88th, and 91st Divisions, was getting ready to launch its attack through the left of XIII Corps. On 10 September it did attack through the British screening forces of XIII Corps, attacking initially with the 34th Division on the left and the 91st Division on the right. The Sieve River was rapidly crossed. (42) As a matter of fact it was crossed during the night of 10-11

(39) A-3, p. 94; (40) A-2 p. 85; (42) A-3, p. 96; (42) A-5, p. 55.

September, as the Germans had chosen only to delay at this outpost of the Gothic Line, (43) After the crossing of the Sieve River the 85th Division came in on the right of the 91st Division. By September 18 the 85th Division supported by the massed fires of all II Corps Artillery, had broken through the Gothic Line on a narrow front in the Mt. Altuzzo area. The line had little depth. Progress on the right of II Corps was more rapid than on the left and to exploit the breakthrough, the 88th Infantry Division was put into the line through the 85th Division and given a zone on their right. (44) Advancing rapidly II Corps captured Firenzuola, thus flanking the enemy positions at Futa Pass, through which Highway 65 passes enroute to Bologna. The Germans were thus forced to withdraw from Futa Pass, and it fell to the 91st Division on 21 September. But to say that American troops in that area entered it without having to fire a shot would be an error. (45)

The Gothic Line had been broken but there were still plenty of mountains and plenty of Germans.

Fifth Army's threat to the Germans was so great that by the middle of September German reserves were being moved to oppose it. The Eighth Army took advantage of this shift of forces and by 21 September the Greek Brigade captured Rimini on the same day that Futa Pass fell to Fifth Army. Thus, the Allies had now captured a town in the Po Valley. (46) Also by 21 September the little republic of San Marino was liberated. Its peacetime population of 14,000 was swollen to 120,000 by refugees from coastal areas. San Marino occupies (43) A-12, p. 47; (44) A-5, pl. 56; (45) A-2, p. 85 and A-12, p. 68; (46) A-2, p. 85.

a commanding mountain position. So nine days before the Eighth Army's attack the Germans had demanded the use of the state territory and had occupied the crest. The position however was taken with the meagre loss of four killed and thirty-four wounded. (47)

CONTINUATION OF THE ATTACK

The Fifth Army continuing its attack in the mountains presented such a great threat to the German armies that more German reserves were shifted to that area. (48) Monghidoro fell on 2 October, (49) Loiano on 5 October, (50) and after much grim and costly fighting the positions along the Livergnano escarpment were overrun and Livergnano fell on 13 October. (51) Monte Grande, a key terrain feature east of Highway 65 and overlooking Highway 9 just five miles away, was captured. The weather in October was nothing short of terrible. Rain was almost continuous and roads were seas of mud. (52) Advances became fewer and shorter and shorter. Divisions were badly in need of replacements and there were no fresh divisions to throw in. With the Fifth Army now able to see Bologna, only ten miles ahead the attack was ended on October 27. (53) Fifth Army's offensive was temporarily abandoned. At that time thirteen of the twenty-one German divisions across the front were opposing the Fifth Army. (54) Elements of ten divisions were facing II Corps. II Corps' attack had started with little more than one division opposing. (55)

(47) A-6, p. 132; (48) A-2, p. 85; (49) A-12, p. 76; (50) A-12 p. 78; (51) A-12, p. 84; (52) Personal knowledge; (53) A-5, p. 56 ; (54) A-2, p. 86; (55) A-5, p. 56.

After capturing Rimini the Eighth Army continued to press its attack up Highway 9 against German delay on the river lines. When Fifth Army's offensive ended the Eighth Army still continued its slow and difficult advance. By 20 October troops of the Eighth Army had reached the Savio River as far upstream as Cesena. It required the combined efforts of New Zealanders and British and Indian troops before Cesena could be successfully stormed. On 22 October a bridgehead over the Savio River was established just north of Cesena by the 5th Canadian Armored Division and another near by on the following day, thus threatening the integrity of the whole line. The Germans withdrew. Heavy rains rendered exploitation ineffective, and when the Eighth Army reached the Ronco River the Germans were there to oppose it.(56) By 13 November the Ronco River had been crossed and Forli had been captured. (57)

The Montone River was crossed against opposition. On 2 December Indian troops cut the Ravenna-Faenza road and on 8 December the escorting armored cars of the Canadian Corps entered Ravenna from the Northwest and South. On the same day Russi fell to Indian troops, and mobile troops got across the Ravenna-Bologna railway on the road to Argenta.(58) Another river, the Lamone, was finally crossed and Faenza was captured by 18 December.(59) By Christmas the Eighth Army had reached the Senio River on a seventeen mile front south of the confluence of that river with the Reno River. By now full winter had set in. (60)

It may be added that where river dykes existed the Germans did use them as defensive positions and also breached them for

(56) A-4, p. 126; (57) A-2, p. 87; (58) A-4, p. 128;

(59) A-2, p. 87 ; (60) A-4, p. 132.

flooding. On some of the dykes there were houses. Some of these were occupied. Others were booby-trapped. At first the artillery and air of the Eighth Army found it difficult to secure hits on the narrow river lines and their dykes. To overcome the above type of defense the Eighth Army had to work out a special system of attack which involved a great amount teamwork and depended heavily upon the coordinated use of tanks and other direct weapons as well as vehicular and manual flame throwers.(61)

DEFENSE BY ATTACK

Meanwhile Fifth Army was resting its troops and building up supplies and replacements in preparation for a resumption of the offensive. By 1 December II Corps was under a 72 hour alert to resume the attack. Various D-Days were announced only to be postponed. The weather showed little signs of improvement. A coordinated attack was finally planned to commence during the last few days of December; it seemed fairly certain that it was coming off, but it didn't. (62)

Early in December 1944 IV Corps intelligence had noted in the Serchio Valley area a lot of enemy activity, which indicated that some sort of attack might be in the making. However, it caused no great concern at first. The activity continued and finally the 18th Indian Division was about 22 December in receipt of orders to pull out of its positions in the line east of Highway 65 and go to the vicinity of Lucca in order to be ready to assist the 92nd Division which held the sector including the Serchio Valley.

(Maps B and C) The 18th Indian Division set to work to
(61) A-6, p. 174; (62) A-7, p. 1, December.

build a line in rear to afford depth. (63) On 25 December the Germans attacked with three battalions. The attack was unusually successful; it overran the positions of the 92nd Division in that area (Serchio Valley). It was during this month that a political crisis with street fighting in Athens took place in Greece. Also the Germans had launched their Ardennes offensive in France. Furthermore, according to instructions to lower units, two German Divisions on the Italian front could not be located or accounted for and had completely disappeared for the present. (64) To meet the threat the 85th Division, the 1st Armored Division, and a Regimental Combat Team of the 34th Division, also II Corps Artillery Battalions and a Chemical Mortar Battalion, moved from II Corps area to the IV Corps area during the period 25-30 December and detached from II Corps. Allied attack plans were temporarily abandoned. (65) But the Germans did not continue their attack. As a matter of fact they withdrew without a great deal of pressure. Within a few days the line had been restored to its original position. (66) But plans were canceled for any large scale Allied offensive during the rest of the winter. (67)

ACTIVE DEFENSE OF SECTOR INCLUDING LIMITED OBJECTIVE ATTACKS

On 15 January the Eighth Army was holding positions along the Senio River and the south shore of Lake Comacchio, (68) and units of 15th Army Group settled down to what is described as active defense of sector.

(63) A-6 p. 170; (64) Personal knowledge; (65) A-7, p. 2, December;

(66) A-6, p. 171; (67) A-2, p. 87; (68) A-2, p. 87;

During the first part of February some limited objective attacks were engaged in by the 92nd Division in the Ligurian(Tyrrhenian) coastal sector, but there were no marked changes in the front during this period. (69)

Though American Divisions in Italy had received some mountain training in the Mediterranean Theater and had continually waged mountain warfare throughout the war in Italy, none of these American divisions had been specifically trained and organized as mountain divisions. In January 1945 troops of the 10th Mountain Division(American) joined the forces fighting under IV Corps. This division contained many world famous skiers and mountain climbers, who had now become soldiers, and the division was trained, organized, and equipped specifically for fighting mountain and winter warfare.

The 10th Mountain Division, assisted by the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, engaged in two limited objective attacks (Both were in accordance with a single plan), one in February and one in March. After preliminary attacks on the night of 18-19 February to seize important terrain on its left flank the Division jumped off on the night of 19-20 February and on 20 February captured Monte Belvedere, ~~on 20 February.~~ (Map C) Belvedere commanded Highway 64 to Bologna. The attack was continued until the capture of Monte Torraccia was completed on 24 February. The 10th Mountain Division jumped off again on 3 March and by 6 March had taken its objective - Castel D'Aiano. The capture of these objectives greatly improved Allied positions for the Po Valley offensive to come in April. The Division executed these attacks with great vigor and speed. (69) A-11, p. 2 ; February.

In these attacks snow, ice, and rugged mountains were overcome as well as the Germans. Germans in many positions were completely surprised and captured or killed by the troops of the 10th Mountain Division. (70)

The rest of the period covered by this campaign is characterized by defense and preparation for the Po Valley Campaign, the commencement of which ended the North Apennines or Gothic Line Campaign. Preliminary attacks of the Po Valley Campaign were launched on 2 April 1945. (71)

AIR

Allied air superiority during the North Apennines Campaign was complete. German planes that were able to harass the allies were indeed few in number. For supply and reinforcement it was necessary for the Germans that they keep the Brenner Pass open. Our air forces kept it closed 82% of the time. Also Allied air forces kept down all bridges over the Po River which were visible.

Meanwhile the Germans used numerous devices of passive defense, such as bridges that during the day appeared to be destroyed but which could be slid into place for the night. (72) The Germans also used bridges that were just below the surface of the water. (73)

Toward the end of the campaign the Allies had an effective combat strength of 4,393 planes against 130 of the Luftwaffe. (74)

The advantages of this overwhelming superiority are obvious. The allies could move in the day while the Germans

(70) A-26, p. 20 and A-11, p. 8, Feb; (71) A-10, p. 12;

(72) A-9, p. 44; (73) A-10, p. 5 ; (74) A-9, p. 198.

had to move in the night. The Germans had to devote an enormous amount of time, labor, supervision, and materials to camouflage and deception of a purely passive defensive nature, while the Allies could devote this same amount of men and materials to other uses.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing this campaign one notices an event of a particularly decisive nature. That is the shifting of troops by the Allies to engage in the landing of Southern France. Even without these troops Fifth Army almost reached Bologna, and the Eighth Army did occupy a corner of the Po Valley. I think that there can be little doubt that these extra divisions would have enabled the allies to debouch into the Po Valley in a full scale exploitation. However, history records that the forces landing in Southern France did far more toward the ultimate attainment of victory than they could have ever done in Italy, whether successful or not.

Another event of a decisive nature, but not so far reaching, was the launching of the relatively small scale attack of the Germans down the Serchio Valley. This puny attack disrupted plans for an Allied offensive in Italy at that time. It is true that there were other considerations such as the situation in Greece, but there are always other considerations. This attack was the last straw that broke the back of the scheduled Allied offensive.

Another important factor was the weather. I believe that if fate had placed the allies in a position to launch the assault on the Gothic Line a month sooner the Allies would have been able to have cleared the North Apennines and to

debut into the Po Valley in an exploitation. As it was the bad weather accrued to the advantage of the Germans. It hindered immensely the movement and supply of the Allies. Every time the Allies were stopped by the weather, that much longer was available to the Germans to improve their positions. Furthermore, bad weather decreased Allied air activity.

The nature of the general mission of the Allies in Italy, that of containing as many Germans in Italy as possible, makes it difficult to criticize. Every German killed, captured, or wounded, every German vehicle destroyed, and every German - held key terrain feature captured or threatened - all contributed to accomplish this mission. With a holding mission some may question the advisability of adopting the offensive instead of the defensive in Italy at this time. Reflection, however, will reveal the following. No war was ever won solely by sitting down. No alert and aggressive enemy was ever contained by a few scattered rounds of harassing light artillery. If it is to hold the enemy a holding attack must be an attack.

In considering the conduct of the campaign it is obvious that General Alexander in his attack did a rather nice job of keeping the Germans off balance and their reserves moving back and forth. A certain amount of initial surprise was gained by the Eighth Army, and after the German reserves had moved against the Eighth Army and stopped its advance Fifth Army launched its offensive. The German reserves again had to be shifted to stop Fifth Army. At that time Eighth Army moved forward again.

General Kesselring conducted his defense quite skillfully.

He could afford to give ground slowly along the Po Valley river lines in front of Eighth Army. As Fifth Army neared Bologna delay in that sector became out of the question. Kesselring had to hold. Both of these tasks he accomplished with the result that the War was practically over on the main fronts before the Po Valley was finally wrested from the Germans.

It does seem that the Germans could have delayed the allies longer between the Arno River and the Gothic Line instead of withdrawing with no more than slight resistance. It had been expected that they would make a stand along the Arno River. (75)

The special training of the 10th Mountain Division paid big dividends in the form of their well-executed attacks in February and March over mountains and conditions of snow and ice.

The possession of air superiority by the Allies was a tremendous factor ~~in~~ their favor.

Though defensive operations were conducted by the Allies for many months during the campaign, I believe the campaign is still an example of the offensive since the defensive was only adopted as a temporary measure.

Both the principle of mass and the principle of economy of force are demonstrated in the initial assaults on the Gothic Line. Troops were massed to effect the main and secondary attacks. Elsewhere the line was lightly held.

We see movement employed in the switching of Allied troops to mass for the assault and also in Kesselring's switching of reserves to oppose the attack. We see the damaging effect on the campaign of movement hindrances in the form of difficult terrain and bad weather.

Surprise is demonstrated in the ~~initial~~ assault on the Gothic Line and in the operations of the 10th Mountain Division.

There certainly had to be cooperation in order to enable the coordination of so many nationalities into a unified and effective force.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. A well-chosen attack is often the best defense.
2. Holding attacks, as well as main attacks, must be vigorously conducted.
3. Troops, if at all possible, should be trained in the kind of terrain in which it is expected that they will be employed.
4. In general bad weather and difficult terrain favor the defense. However, in purely limited objective attacks bad weather and difficult terrain may actually favor the attack on account of the surprise element.
5. There is no defensive line, hasty, deliberate, or permanent that cannot be broken.
6. In modern warfare air superiority is an essential for success.