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16 Oct 46

Canadian Operations in Italy,  
October - November, 1943.

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CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

16 OCT 46

Canadian Operations in Italy,  
October - November, 1943.

1. This report continues the detailed account begun in Report No. 144 of Historical Section, C.M.H.Q., of the operations of 1 Cdn Inf Div and 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde (later 1 Cdn Arm'd Bde) in Southern Italy during 1943.
2. Report No. 144 dealt with the landing at Reggio di Calabria on 3 Sep 43, and the advance northward to the line Potenza - Auletta, which was undertaken by 13 Corps to relieve the pressure on Fifth Army at Salerno. During this period both Canadian formations were under the command of Lt.-Gen. M.C. Dempsey, commanding 13 Corps. Thereafter, the account described the advance by the Eighth Army, which resulted in the capture of Foggia on 27 Sep and in which the Canadians played their part on the 13 Corps front. The present report continues the story, beginning with the advance of 13 Corps west of Foggia on 1 Oct, ending in the capture of Campobasso by 1 Cdn Inf Div and including the fighting at Termoli in which 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt took an active part. The operations of 1 Cdn Inf Div across the Biferno River in the latter part of October and the subsequent long-range patrolling and deception undertaken by 3 Cdn Inf Bde in November are also included in this report. There has been no attempt to divorce the experience of the Army Tank Brigade from that of the division and their separate histories have been interwoven as much as possible.
3. Considerable limitations have been imposed on this narrative owing to the unfortunate destruction of many original Canadian war diaries which were all involved in a misfortune to one aircraft. The absence of valuable documents attached to these originals as appendices has been responsible for a certain air of conjecture in some passages which would otherwise be improper in a final narrative. Unit and formation war diaries, the reports of the Historical Officer, 1 Cdn Inf Div, and other relevant documents, have all been consulted, including the appropriate war diaries of British formations, Field Marshal Lord Montgomery's book, entitled "El Alamein to the River Sangro" and the diary of Lt.-Col. Lord Tweedsmuir, who at the time of the events described was O.C. Hast & P.E.R.



## THE CONCENTRATION BEHIND FOGGIA

4. For some time before the actual fall of Naples on 1 Oct 43 it had been clear that the objectives of Operation "AVALANCHE" had been achieved and that the Fifth Army would for some time be fully occupied with the task of restoring the facilities of the port and driving the enemy away from its immediate environs. It was thus incumbent upon the Eighth Army to launch a blow "with the right fist" in the Adriatic sector and to draw on to the enemy's left flank as much of his strength as he could be induced to commit. For this purpose 13 Corps was given command of all those troops of the Eighth Army which could be spared for the offensive while 5 Corps withdrew to superintend the build-up in the Bari and Taranto areas. This process has been described in Report No. 144 (para 129). Operational command passed from 5 Corps to 13 Corps on 27 Sep and on the same day the latter issued orders to its units to concentrate on the southern edge of the Foggia Plain (Hist Sec file: Italy 1943/13 Corps/C/1, 13 Corps Operation Order No. 3, 27 Sep 43).

5. The Foggia Plain, otherwise known as La Tavoliere di Puglia, is a gently undulating, almost treeless expanse which has for centuries been devoted to the rearing of sheep, although in modern times the demands of agriculture have absorbed four-fifths of its arable surface. On the south it is bounded by the lower course of the River Ofanto and a general line running westward from Canosa to where the Cervaro Torrent plunges out of its mountain valley below Bovino. To the east are the salt marshes of the Gulf of Manfredonia and in the north rises the abrupt mountain promontory of the Gargano. A tongue of low-flying land separates the Gargano from the main mass of the central Apennines and permits easy access for road and railway to cross the Fortore River and reach the coast near Termoli. The western edge of the plain is bounded by the foothills of the central Apennines. Clearly visible from Lucera is a ridge rising steeply and running roughly from Serracapriola in the north southward to Castelnuovo and Motte di Montecorvino from where it runs south east towards Troia and Bovino.

6. Almost in the middle of the Plain is the town of Foggia, one of the most considerable in southern Italy. Although it preserves little of the magnificence conferred upon it in the thirteenth century by the Emperor Frederick II, it has in modern times become a considerable manufacturing and distributing centre with a population of from eighty to a hundred thousand souls. Roads and railway lines radiate from it in all directions as do the innumerable broad and stony sheep tracks which meander independently all over Apulia and indeed far to the north in the Adriatic coastal region. Around Foggia itself was the vital ring of airfields which had fallen so cheaply to the British 4 Armd Bde on the very day - 27 Sep - when the Corps concentration was ordered. From these in a few short weeks the hitherto unscathed industries of Austria, Hungary and the southern Reich would fall under the hammer of the Strategic Air Forces.

7. It was on the higher ground south east of the Plain that 13 Corps was to concentrate its troops for the new advance. The area of concentration was roughly a quadrilateral bounded by the towns of Bari, Barletta,



Canosa and Gravina. The troops under command were as follows:

- 1 Cdn Inf Div
- 5 Div
- 78 Div
- 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde
- 4 Armd Bde with a Sqn Royals and 78 Fd Regt under command
- S.S. Bde
- 6 A.G.R.A.

(Ibid) 78 Div and 4 Armd Bde were to assemble in the coastal strip between Barletta and Bari with the S.S. Bde in the immediate vicinity of the latter. 1 Cdn Inf Div would concentrate along the Canosa - Spinazzola road, with its advanced elements near Minervino. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde was allotted the hilly and wooded area immediately east of Minervino, while H.Q. 13 Corps and corps troops were to cover the ground to the north and east of the tank brigade facing the road Canosa - Terlizzi (ibid, Appendix B, Trace of concentration areas). This concentration was to be complete by 30 Sep ready for the tactical advance on 1 Oct (ibid, and Hist Sec file 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/I: Notes from G.S.C.'s conference 28 Sep 43). At 2200 hours 30 Sep 5 Div would relieve 1 Cdn Inf Div in the Potenza area and take over the patrolling responsibility at Melfi.

8. While this deliberate concentration of force was being planned and taking place rapid changes were occurring on the opposite or western edge of the Foggia Plain. It is interesting to reflect that five days before the issue of this 13 Corps Operation Order General Simonds had held an "O" Group at his headquarters near Potenza to outline the method by which Foggia would be captured in the face of determined German resistance along the line of the River Ofanto (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div /C/I: Notes on G.O.C.'s "O" Group, 22 Sep 43). On 27 Sep the probable tasks after concentration as laid down in the Corps Operation Order, and for which the tactical advance would begin on 1 Oct, were cautiously suggested as the capture of S. Severo by 78 Div and a westward advance from Foggia by the Canadian Division, but by last light of 28 Sep a company of 1 Air Landing Bde had entered S. Severo and the S.A.S. Regt were in Lucera, a dozen miles west of Foggia. Meanwhile patrols of Popski's Private Army ranged far and wide circling the Gargano promontory and exploring the roads westward from Lucera, deep into enemy held territory (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H: Ops message log 28 Sep 43 serial 1989; W.D., G.S. 13 Corps, September 1943, Appendix J3). With the Gargano clear, and no possibility of a descent upon their rear, these elements and other troops of 4 Armd Bde were able to reach the line of the Fortore River 15 miles to the north west of S. Severo before the enemy entrenched on the frowning height of Serracapriola brought them to a standstill (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div /C/H: Ops message log 30 Sep 43 serial 2032). Thus in the space of a week the entire Foggia Plain had been cleared of German outposts and their position along the ridge Serracapriola - Castelnuovo - Motta was disclosed (ibid.). From the forward limits of the Corps concentration area at Canosa to the ridge at Motta was a distance of just over 50 miles.

9. The general situation of the enemy has been dealt with in Report No. 144 but may be recapitulated, and to a certain extent modified here. Contemporary intelligence documents reveal a certain hesitation in pronouncing upon the



tasks and boundaries of the enemy's principal formations. It had recently been announced by the German radio that the supreme enemy commander in southern Italy was Field Marshal Kesselring. From what was known of his relationship with Rommel it seemed clear that their spheres of responsibility would have to be clearly defined to prevent the friction of a long-standing antagonism. Rommel certainly commanded in northern Italy and possibly as far south as Tuscany. As for Kesselring's command in the south, it was believed that the makings of nine divisions were in the field south of Rome. More specifically it was known that the fast-failing struggle for Naples was being conducted by the Hermann Goering Panzer Division with elements of 3 and 15 Panzer Grenadier Divisions under its command. Although the battle was being fought predominantly by the Hermann Goering Panzer Division the over-all operational responsibility in the south-western sector belonged to 14 Panzer Corps. Further north the operations of 76 Panzer Corps were more subtle. While 1 Para Div broke contact and withdrew to the hills on the western edge of the Foggia Plain, 26 Panzer Div and 29 Panzer Grenadier Div were withdrawing northwards along a general line Avellino - Benevento before the steady pressure of 6 U.S. Corps. As they went through the tangle of steep hills and deep valleys they methodically blew bridges and cratered roads to impede the progress of the American troops. On the last day of September reports from prisoners and from Popski's patrols indicated that 1 Para Div were holding a line from S. Bartolommeo in Galdo running northward through Serracapriola to the coast with at least two battalions in the Termoli area to guard against a turning movement from the sea. Thus 1 Para Div provided a thin screen facing east behind which 29 Panzer Grenadier and 26 Panzer Divs could withdraw northward without fear of surprise or immediate interruption. All these operations from coast to coast were under the direction of General Vietinghoff genannt Scheel who commanded the German Tenth Army. Contact in the mountains was difficult to maintain in the face of the enemy's elaborate and persistent demolitions. In the north only the lightest forces were in contact across the Foggia Plain (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/13 Corps/L/F: 13 Corps Intelligence Summaries Nos. 254, 258, 260-62, September 1943; War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee Weekly Resume No. 214).

10. The concentration of 1 Cdn Inf Div and 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde within the framework of 13 Corps was complete on 30 Sep. The division used two routes from Potenza. Route A, running through Acerenza, Gonzano and Palazzo S. Gervasio was followed by 3 Cdn Inf Bde Group, while the rest of the divisional troops moved eastward along Route B, the winding road to Gravina and thence north-westwards to Spinezzola and Minervino. The tank brigade was more widely dispersed. 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt was still under the command of 1 Cdn Inf Div but only "A" Bn had accompanied the division as far as Potenza, the remainder of the regiment being still far to the south near Villapiana, from which area it had not moved since 17 Sep. Brigade headquarters, together with A and B Echelons of both 11 and 12 Cdn Army Tk Regts, moved from the Massafra area near Taranto to the designated concentration area between Minervino and Andria, but the tanks of the Ontarios were at this point still in the process of embarkation from Scaes on the west coast where



they had been left by 5 (Brit.) Div; and those of the Three Rivers were in transit, consigned to the east coast port of Manfredonia. Only the Calgaries, therefore, were in a position to participate at once in the next operation and the long move from Villapiana by way of Gioia Del Colle and Altamura began on 29 Sep. The whole regiment was complete in the harbour near Canosa on the following day while the infantry brigades and other divisional troops of 1 Cdn Inf Div were assembled behind it between Canosa and Spinazzola (W.D. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 1 Oct 43; W.D. 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 29-30 Sep and 1 Oct 43).

11. On the completion of the concentration of 13 Corps it was possible to be more specific in defining the objectives of the new advance. 13 Corps Operation Order No. 4 was dated 1 Oct 43, and defined the limit of advance as the line of the road Termoli - Campobasso - Vinchiatur. The Corps would then concentrate south east of that line "preparatory to (a) a further advance north west (b) operations to the south west if necessary". The axis for 78 Div with 4 Armd Bde under its command was to be Barletta - Trinitapoli - Foggia - S. Severo - Termoli. 1 Cdn Inf Div was allotted the axis Canosa - Foggia - Lucera - Campobasso. This latter axis was singularly devoid of alternative routes; it ran westward in the most serpentine fashion across the upper valley of the Fortore River into the heart of that portion of the central Apennines known as the Monti Del Sannio. The Eighth Army boundary, which was also the left boundary of 13 Corps, extended as far south as Benevento. The boundary between 78 Div and 1 Cdn Inf Div was the road Canosa - Foggia - Lucera - Casalnuova - Bonefro to its junction with the Termoli - Campobasso - Vinchiatur lateral road just south of Casacalenda (W.D. 1 Cdn Armd Tk Bde, October 1943; 13 Corps Operation Order No. 4, 1 Oct 43). On the same day (1 Oct) 5 Div and 1 Airborne Div passed under command of 5 Corps. It was intended to move the former through Spinazzola to the neighbourhood of Foggia on 4 and 5 Oct to form a defensive screen west of Lucera (W.D., G.S. Main H.Q. Eighth Army 1 Oct 43).

12. In order to assist the progress of the advance and to prise loose the more obstinate elements of German resistance it was proposed to employ the "seaborne hook" against the small Adriatic port of Termoli, the seaward terminus of the lateral road from Campobasso. For this purpose the Special Service Brigade (Commandos) was to put to sea from Bari, when the situation looked promising, in four L.C.I.(L) and eight L.C.A. Its task was to seize the port and prepare the way for the landing of an infantry brigade of 78 Div. A further six L.C.I.(L) were set aside for the purpose of ferrying the marching troops of 78 Div along the coast should occasion arise for their employment (W.D. H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, October 1943, Appx 52, 13 Corps Operation Order No. 3, 27 Sep 43). The orders issued on 1 Oct gave a very optimistic definition of the forward limit of patrols consequent upon achieving the line Termoli - Vinchiatur. This was to be the general line Pescara - Popoli (ibid.: Appx 52a 13 Corps Operation Order No. 4, 1 Oct 43); but Pescara was not less than 130 miles from Foggia by road and Popoli was separated by a formidable barrier of mountains including the great Maiella range from the most advanced elements of the Eighth Army. There is no doubt that the most sanguine hopes were entertained by the Allied commanders at this



stage of the Italian campaign, and that these hopes were magnified into the wildest optimism by the troops. But it may be useful to quote a telegram sent by General Montgomery to Mr. Winston Churchill on 4 Oct when the situation was still fluid and enemy resistance had not appreciably hardened:

We have advanced a long way and very quickly. It had to be done in order to come to the help of 5 Army, but it has been a very great strain on my administration, which had to be switched from the TOE to the FEEL during the operation and which is now stretched to the limit. When I have got the lateral TERNOLI - CAMPOBASSO I will have to halt my main bodies for a short period and operate in advance of that lateral only with light forces while I get my administration on a sound basis during the period of the halt. But light forces directed on a sensitive area can be very effective and by this means I will attain the initiative and gain ground. After the halt I will advance with my whole strength on PESCARA and ANCONA. I shall look forward to meeting you in ROME.

(W.D., G.S. Tac H.Q. Eighth Army, Appx Z, 4 Oct 43).

In spite of the confident tone of this communication there is an underlying strain of caution in the Army Commander's analysis. The problems inherent in an extended line of communication were all too familiar to a veteran of the campaign in the western desert, and indeed, have never proved susceptible of an easy solution in the history of war. Determined enemy resistance at the moment when the lines of communication had reached an extreme stage of attenuation was to provide a decisive check during the coming weeks in a manner very similar to that subsequently experienced in North-West Europe during the early autumn of 1944.

13. The plan for the advance of 1 Cdn Inf Div had been laid down, in so far as it was possible to anticipate the progress of the operation, by Major-General G.G. Simonds at an "O" Group near Potenza on 29 Sep. This was the last exercise of command by General Simonds before he was evacuated to hospital with the ever prevalent jaundice. It therefore fell to Brigadier C. Vokes, as acting commander of the Division, to carry out the plan of 29 Sep. Brigadier Vokes' own command, 2 Cdn Inf Bde, was entrusted to Lt.-Col. B.M. Hoffmeister, O.C. Seaforth of C. (See Report No. 144, para 136). The details of the plan have been derived from notes taken at the "O" Group, for at this point, as before and after, the Division did not produce written Operation Orders. (The Orders for Operations "HUSKY" and "BAYTOWN" were exceptions, doubtless owing to the greater complexity of the plans and the requirements of other Services.) The task assigned to the Division by 13 Corps was to advance westward on the axis Canosa - Foggia - Campobasso with flank protection towards Bovino (W.D. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, October 1943, 13 Corps Operation Order No. 3, 27 Sep 43), and for this purpose the following corps artillery and ancillary troops had been allotted to it:



165 Fd Regt, R.A.  
66 Med Regt, R.A.  
"C" Flt 651 Air OP Sqn  
Det C.B.O. 13 Corps  
A.3 Bty 3 Svy Regt  
126 Met Sec

(This allotment resembles that made to 78 Div, except that in the latter case the additional supporting field regiment was placed directly under command of 4 Armd bde. 6 A.G.R.A. retained under command two medium regiments and a field regiment.) (*ibid.*) General Simonds had anticipated that, long before the final objective of Campobasso had been reached, contact with the enemy would be achieved on the high ground west of Lucera and the following dispositions were made accordingly. It was decided, with a view to preventing a premature deployment of the division and thus slowing the advance and enabling the enemy to break contact in his own time, to repeat the expedient adopted in the advance on Potenza and constitute an advanced guard. This was to consist of 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, one battalion of infantry (to be detailed by 1 Cdn Inf Bde) and one battery of anti-tank guns (17 pdr). The Advanced Guard was to be highly mobile and its infantry to be carried in T.C.Vs. and on tanks. The whole force was to be commanded by the O.C. 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, Lt.-Col. C.H. Neroutsos.

14. Immediately behind the Advanced Guard would come the divisional light anti-aircraft regiment (2 L.A.A. Regt, R.C.A.) which was to picquet the road Canosa - Foggia and thence westward as the tactical situation permitted. The next troops in the order of march would be one field and one medium artillery regiment in support of the Advanced Guard. Immediately behind them would be the G.O.C's and C.R.E's recce groups (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/I: Notes of "O" Group 0900 hrs 29 Sep 43).

15. The main body was to consist of the remainder of 1 Cdn Inf Bde (Brigadier H.D. Graham); a forward echelon of divisional main headquarters; the remainder of the divisional artillery; 2 Cdn Inf Bde (Lt.-Col. B.M. Hoffmeister) with under its command one field regiment and a battery of anti-tank guns; and the remainder of divisional main headquarters. 3 Cdn Inf Bde (Brigadier M.H.S. Penhale) was to move forward from Spinazzola to the neighbourhood of Minervino and remain on three hours' notice to resume the advance (*ibid.*). At a fairly early stage in this movement 2 Cdn Inf Bde Gp would detach itself from the main body and from the main road to Foggia and move across country through Orta Nova to the south-western edge of the Foggia Plain, which is overlooked by the grassy slopes of M. Calvello and the town of Bovino high on its pedestal of rock above the gorge of the Cervaro Torrent. Thus 2 Cdn Inf Bde would become flank guard to the division, to 13 Corps and to the Eighth Army, and after crossing the Cervaro would move north-westwards over the rolling countryside to the ancient Norman town of Troia. Here it would be abreast of Lucera and commanding the important main road from Benevento to Foggia. No movement forward of this area would ensue until further orders (*ibid.*)



# THE ADVANCE FROM FOGGIA TO THE FORTORE

16. The Corps tactical advance was to begin before first light on the morning of 1 Oct. It was unheralded by any bombardment either from the ground or the air except that the Desert Air Force had since 29 Sep been methodically searching the roads behind the enemy's lines, paying particular attention to the coast road in the Adriatic sector and the important nexus of roads near Isernia which, since the enemy's loss of Benevento, had become the chief traffic control point for all movement in the interior and from one side of the peninsula to the other. The Corps start line was the road from Barletta to Canosa overlooking the River Ofanto and the historic battlefield of Cannae (W.D. H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, October 1943, Appx 52, 13 Corps Operation Order No. 3). The Advanced Guard of 1 Cdn Inf Div was drawn up along the main road behind Canosa. Its own vanguard was under the immediate command of Lt.-Col. F.D. Adams and consisted of his Reconnaissance Regiment, "C" Squadron of 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, "B" Company, R.C.R., and a small allotment of supporting arms (W.D. 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 1 Oct 43). 4 Cdn Recce Regt was concentrated just south of Orta Nova and was therefore about 20 miles ahead of the Corps start line. At 0400 hours on 1 Oct the Calgaries crossed the start line with the R.C.R., the Engineer Recce Group, 27 Anti-Tank Bty, 2 Fd Regt R.C.A., 66 Medium Regt R.A. and 2 Light A.A. Regt R.C.A. following in that order (W.D. 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 1 Oct 43). The Divisional start line at Lucera was reached exactly four hours later.

17. In the meantime Lt.-Col. Adams' vanguard had reached Lucera at 0530 hours. The fighting echelon consisted of "A" and "B" Squadrons of the Reconnaissance Regiment. "A" Squadron pressed forward along the main axis towards the high ground at Motta, while "B" Squadron followed a minor road south-westwards towards Alberona. As "A" Squadron's vehicles closely attended by the T.C.Vs. carrying "B" Company of the R.C.R. wound downwards from the height of Lucera on which another of Frederick the Second's great castles faces the unpredictable dangers of the Samnite hills, the first demolished bridge, reinforced by a formidable road block, necessitated a wide detour to the south. The vanguard, still embussed, moved cautiously along the straight line of Route 17 taking advantage of the occasional cover of roadside trees and detouring past two more blown bridges until it reached the abrupt face of the Motta ridge. At 0755 hours regimental headquarters heard "A" Squadron report enemy machine-gun fire as the squadron attempted to ascend the first upward spirals of the highway ascending to the village of Motta itself. In due course it became clear that reconnaissance elements would not succeed in a direct assault on Motta, and while "B" Company of the R.C.R. went to ground at the foot of the hill two troops of "A" Squadron and one platoon of the infantry moved rapidly north westwards to Pietra Montecorvino, which was occupied without opposition. A third troop of reconnaissance vehicles was brought to a halt on the right flank by fire from German 88-mm guns from the direction of Castelnuovo della Daunia (W.D. 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 1 Oct 43 and Appx 3; W.D., R.C.R., 1 Oct 43).

18. In the meantime "B" Squadron with an Engineer Reconnaissance party had moved rapidly south westwards from



Lucera and by 0930 hours reported that it was two miles beyond Biccari and was investigating Alberona. Alberona, standing high on the ridge about six miles south of Motta, proved to be held by the enemy, and it was not until noon that "B" Squadron was able to outflank the position with a scout troop and an assault troop and attack the village from the rear. By 1600 hours the enemy had been driven out leaving at least 15 dead behind him (W.D. 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 1 Oct 43). The bodies were clothed in uniforms of Luftwaffe blue with yellow pipings. It was soon clear from this and other incidents up and down the line of the ridge that the Germans' 3 Para Regt was in position along it and as usual prepared to fight (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F; 1 Cdn Inf Div Intelligence Summary No. 16, 3 Oct 43).

19. The vanguard had now done its work and by the early afternoon it was clear that no further progress would be made without delivering an attack in force on Motta and its commanding ridge. The enemy's situation could hardly have been better, commanding as it did the whole stretch of road back to Lucera with an uninterrupted view and field of fire for all forms of artillery. No further progress being possible by "B" Company of the R.C.R. and the dismounted troops of 4 Cdn Recce Regt, it was decided to make a combined infantry and tank attack uphill on Motta with "A" and "B" Squadrons of 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt and the R.C.R. supported by 2 Fd Regt R.C.A. and 66 Med Regt R.A. (W.D. 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 1 Oct 43). The attack was set for 1600 hours.

20. At this point the protracted tactical move of guns, tanks and vehicles across the Foggia Plain had begun to lose cohesion and all unit records speak of appalling traffic congestion between Foggia and Lucera. Tactical Headquarters Eighth Army was informed early on the morning of 2 Oct by 13 Corps as follows:-

78 Div move going well; half day ahead of schedule.  
Cdn Div move going badly. Arty through and 2 Bde tail through CANOSA at first light.

(W.D. Tac HQ Eighth Army, Appx "B", Ops Message Log, Serial 4, 2 Oct 43).

It will be seen hereafter that this congestion's effect on 2 Cdn Inf Bde caused delay of half a day which in the event had no serious results. But a perusal of the War Diaries of Canadian units and formations indicates that 78 Div did not entirely earn this crisp encomium and that much of its traffic seems to have made an unauthorized use of the road Canosa - Foggia, isolated vehicles cutting in and out amongst the carefully-spaced convoys and adding to the general confusion. 1 Cdn Inf Div Traffic Control at Lucera must bear a fair portion of the blame. (W.Ds. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, H.Q. R.C.A. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 1 Oct 43). At all events, it was found impossible to disentangle the great majority of the guns from the huge procession of motionless traffic on the main axis and the attack which was designed to have the support of a regiment of field and a regiment of medium guns was unable to secure more than a battery of the former. (W.D. 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 1 Oct 43).

21. The Calgaries' tanks advanced with great dash up the ridge in the face of steady fire from German 88-mm guns



and anti-tank weapons of smaller calibre. "A" Squadron, which was ordered to clear the village itself and the ground immediately south of it and behind it, reported one troop of tanks in Motta at 1700 hours. "B" Squadron, which was to form the northern arm of the pincer, also had tanks abreast and behind the village within the first hour of fighting. At this point the enemy was seen to be making desperate efforts to evacuate his transport and guns from the immediate neighbourhood of the village, but below it and behind the enterprising Calgaries the ground up which the R.C.R. were to toil was still swept by regular machine-gun fire from both the enemy's flanks. The O.C. R.C.R., Lt.-Col. D.C. Spry, expressed his doubt of the wisdom of making such an exposed approach when he received orders from Lt.-Col. Neroutsos to attack westwards from Motta now that the village had been reported clear by the forward troops of "A" Squadron. Lt.-Col. Neroutsos appears to have attempted to withdraw the tanks from the action in which they were then engaged while the R.C.R. moved forward to its forming-up place, continually harassed by machine-gun and mortar fire. Only after the O.C. "A" Squadron (Major deB.G. Trotter) had been killed and individual troop commanders had concluded their private actions with enemy anti-tank gun crews was this withdrawal arranged for 1900 hours. By this time the R.C.R. were ready to begin their share of the attack in rather more favourable circumstances. The Battalion Commander has referred to this phase as follows:-

Fortunately by the time we had moved up to the forming-up place it was late afternoon which necessitated an attack in failing light. This was what I wanted.

(Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, account by Lt.-Col. D.C. Spry, 27 Nov 43).

In spite of the carriage of infantry in T.C.Vs. and the efforts made to follow hard behind the advancing tanks, this brief action was apparently a failure as an example of infantry-tank co-operation. It may be concluded that the Motta Ridge was by no means favourable ground for such experiments.

22. As the sun went down behind Motta and darkness spread eastward over the plain, Lt.-Col. Spry gave his orders for the attack on the village. "C" and "D" companies of the R.C.R. were moved up on the right of the road to occupy a subsidiary ridge between Motta and the plain. When darkness fell "A" Company moved up to the foot of the ridge and sent two platoons up the hill directed on Motta to patrol to the edge of the town and reconnoitre the enemy's position for the heavier attack. This was done in darkness illumined only by the flames still rising from one of the Calgaries' tanks knocked out during the action earlier in the day. These troops reached the foremost line of houses without incident and sent a report back that the near edge of the town was clear. Shortly afterwards when they had penetrated some distance into the back alleys they were engaged on all sides by small-arms fire. Lt.-Col. Spry, however, acting on their report, sent "B" Company up the hill in trucks as quickly as possible and as close to the houses as they could get, where they leapt off the vehicles and joined the fray. The night was now well advanced and a violent storm of wind and rain broke over the ridge. (W.D. R.C.R., 1 Oct 43 and Spry, op.cit.)



23. The first reports of the skirmish received over O.C. "A" Company's 18 set were favourable, but before long he was asking for help. Accordingly Lt.-Col. Spry withdrew "A" and "B" Companies several hundred yards eastward and down the slope, and from his forward command post arranged by wireless for a 10-round-per-gun concentration to be laid on Motta by 2 Cdn Fd Regt. This came down at 0250 hours on the morning of 2 Oct and "A" and "B" Companies of the R.C.R. followed in close behind. Enemy vehicles with their lights on were seen leaving the town, although so tortuous was the road above it that the movement of the lights appeared at first to indicate the arrival of enemy reinforcements. "A" and "B" Companies consolidated their positions on the far side of Motta and at first light the position was securely in their hands (ibid.).

24. At this time Lt.-Col. Spry had been ordered back to Advanced Guard Headquarters to receive fresh orders from Lt.-Col. Neroutsos. He describes this as a "bad break in continuity" and the two anti-tank guns which he had just ordered forward failed to take any toll of the enemy traffic through lack of continuous direction (Spry, op.cit.) The "O" group held at 0430 hours provided for an advance to secure the high ground west of Motta at first light. "C" Sqn of the Calgaries was placed under the R.C.R. and Lt.-Col. Spry, returning to his battalion, mounted "C" Company on tanks, passed through the village where "C" Company debussed, and attacked towards the junction of the Volturara and Castelnovo roads. This movement involved crossing the saddle behind Motta at its highest point and before the objective was reached "C" Company was pinned to the ground and no further movement was possible. Heavy fire from mortars, machine-guns and anti-tank guns swept the crest of the ridge, and in short order six of the tanks supporting "C" Company had been hit and immobilized (W.D. R.C.R., 2 Oct 44; W.D. 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 2 Oct 44, Spry op.cit.)

25. This action has been described in some detail not only because it constituted the first blow struck in the south against the protecting screen of the German 1 Para Div, but because a misunderstanding has arisen as to the actual course of events. At Corps and Army Headquarters the impression was formed that the enemy had counter-attacked during the night and driven the R.C.R. out of Motta, whereas it is clear from the accounts of those actually engaged that the withdrawal was purely tactical to enable the artillery to induce a stubborn enemy to leave more quickly. Even the War Diary of the Calgaries says, "however, at 0200 hrs information was received from the R.C.R.'s that the Germans had counter-attacked and driven them out of the town". This impression had grown so considerably by July 1944, when the present writer was at H.Q. A.A.I. in Rome, that the draft despatches of General Alexander stated categorically that the Canadians had been attacked by a battle group of 26 Pz Div and forced out of Motta which they had attacked and retaken on the following day. Intelligence documents show that a battalion of 26 Pz Div without tanks were some days later at Colletorto; but more positive information of the composition of the German force actually engaged at Motta was given by two prisoners captured by the R.C.R. during the fighting. The enemy were described as a "hotch-potch band" drawn from 3 Para Regt, having in their charge four 8.8-cm guns, two or four 7.5-cm anti-tank guns, two or four 5-cm anti-tank guns, three 3.7-cm anti-tank guns and about half a dozen 2-cm flakvierling. This formidable ad hoc collection was known as Battle Group Grassmehl. Two 8.8-cm, one 5-cm and one 2-cm were left in the hands of the



Canadian troops. (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F, 1 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No. 16, 3 Oct 43).

26. While the attack on the saddle behind Motta was in progress the acting G.O.C., Brigadier Vokes, decided to eliminate the advanced guard and restore the Commander of 1 Cdn Inf Bde to direction of the battle (W.D. 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 2 Oct 43). At last light on the previous day (1 Oct) the Hast & P.E.R. had debussed and moved off the main road to remain under cover some four to five miles east of Motta. The 48 Highrs had harboured in a similar manner immediately west of Lucera in the early morning of 2 Oct. While the R.C.R. were at grips with the enemy the two battalions were on the move westwards, the Hast & P.E.R. halting at the foot of the high ground and the 48th doing likewise in the immediate rear (W.Ds. Hast & P.E.R. and 48 Highrs, 2 Oct 43). They had barely arrived in these new positions when the Luftwaffe took a hand in the game for the first time. Three M.E. 109s swept out of the mountains and raked the open ground with machine-gun bullets and cannon-shells. The exact time of this attack is hard to determine. The R.C.R. reported it at 0715 hours. The Hast & P.E.R. gave 0823 hours as the time of the attack. 2 Cdn L.A.A. Regt reported engaging three M.E. 109s at 1015 hours over the immediate gun area (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H: Ops Message Log, 2 Oct 43, serial 2120). H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde was strafed, although no time is mentioned (W.D. H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Oct 43 and Renison, op.cit.). It is hardly possible that such widely varying estimates of time could refer to a single attack and it is probable that these aircraft made several sweeps over the great concentration of men and vehicles in the plain and on the ridge.

27. Brigadier Graham's plan to break the stalemate on the other side of Motta involved a right-flanking attack by the Hast & P.E.R. to the north of the main axis, which would cut the lateral road running north to Castelnovo at the point where the road from Carlantino meets it below M. Sambuco. While the R.C.R. made a firm base at Motta, the 48 Highrs would break out from this position and attack westwards driving the enemy from his positions commanding the junction of the Castelnovo lateral and the main axis. It had now become apparent that the crest of the Motta ridge actually overlooked the Castelnovo road from the west, causing the main axis to bend around its southern extremity before descending sharply to the valley of the Torrente La Catola below Volturara. While the enemy continued to hold this high ground and prevent progress towards the road junction, no further movement along the main axis would be possible (W.D. H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde October 1943 Appx 3; Ops Message Log 2 Oct 43).

28. Accordingly the Hast & P.E.R. moved into Motta in T.C.Vs., dismounted and sought cover in the houses of the village while the Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. Lord Tweedsmuir, received his instructions from Brigadier Graham as to the direction of his battalion's attack. The scene which confronted the Hast & P.E.R. has been graphically described by its Commanding Officer:

From an O.P. we surveyed the front. There were some gunner officers there directing fire.



The enemy was aware of its position and was ranging on it with mortar bombs. Ahead of us the road climbed slowly to the top of a long wooded ridge. In the first half mile there were three of our tanks, stationary and burning.... Rain had begun to fall and mist was settling on the high ridge three miles away (Diary of Lt.-Col. Lord Tweedsmuir, 20 Sep - 3 Nov 43).

Three deep gulleys carrying the head waters of the Fra.Della Motta Montecorvino ran down from M. Sambuco, which formed the northern part of the ridge and along the flank of which ran the all-important road to Castelnuovo. Lt.-Col. Lord Tweedsmuir observed that the middle one gave cover to within 200 yards of his objective and two companies of the battalion set off at once along this covered approach, now rapidly becoming a torrent. The time was about 1230 hours. Arrangements had been made for the artillery to lay smoke at the head of the gully to conceal the movements of the leading company as it gained the woods below M. Sambuco. All went well until the woods were reached and by this time thick mist had settled on the objective, but when the leading files were within easy reach of the road, the enemy opened up with heavy machine-gun fire and forced them to cover. No further move was possible until darkness fell but in the meanwhile the rear companies were brought forward to the wood (W.D. East & P.E.R., 2 Oct and Tweedsmuir, op.cit.).

29. While the East & P.E.R. were reaching out on the right to cut the Castelnuovo road Lt.-Col. Spry was preparing to make Motta a firm base. In the course of his "O" Group at about 1600 hours he was called by Brigadier Graham and told that the 48 Highrs would not be available for the attack on the left half of the ridge and that the R.C.R. would have to put it in at 1730 hours (Spry, op.cit.). No reason for this change of plan is given specifically in any of the records examined, but it would appear that the 48 Highrs had been compelled to debus two miles east of Motta by heavy enemy mortar fire on the village itself. Their progress on foot up the long slope was slow and it seems that in order to co-ordinate the attack on the left with that of the East & P.E.R. on the right, it was necessary to commit the R.C.R. again (W.D. 48 Highrs, 2 Oct 43). Accordingly, with barely one and a half hours to reconnoitre, issue orders and move into an F.U.P., two companies of the R.C.R. crossed their start line at 1730 hours and moving across the muddy pastures reached the Castelnuovo road where it joined the main axis at last light. Only isolated outposts engaged them at this stage and these were quickly mopped up. The tanks of "C" Squadron, 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, gave valuable support from hull-down positions (W.D. R.C.R., 2 Oct 43 and Spry op.cit.).

30. The two leading companies proceeded forthwith to mount the ridge along converging axes of advance to gain the woods near the crest. In the meanwhile, Lt.-Col. Spry and his command group were involved in exciting and unorthodox contact with the enemy. Lt.-Col. Spry's account is as follows:

Myself, the I.O., the 18 set, three stretcher bearers and two runners were lying in a ditch when I heard the sound of tanks and possibly a small car approaching. I ordered no fire to take place because I thought it would be the Brigadier who I knew was coming out to



see us. The vehicles came in from our left, went down to the Y in the road, paused and came back. When the tank came opposite me it stopped together with the car and I am sure I could have reached out and touched the boggy wheel. I whispered for everyone to keep quite. Suddenly from the turret a voice spoke in German apparently ordering the motors to switch off. This was quite a dilemma. We had no weapons and decided to lie doggo, discretion in this case being the better part of valour. After a moment they moved off after considerable conversation. We got up out of the ditch and went forward... (Spry, op.cit.).

The R.C.R. War Diary suggests that this may have been a demolition party and describes it as moving off northward, presumably towards Castelnovo (W.D. R.C.R., 2 Oct 43).

31. As the assaulting companies reached the edge of the wood at the top of the ridge, the enemy opened up with machine-guns and light weapons, firing on fixed lines and sweeping the gulleys on the flank of the hill. Hand-to-hand fighting developed and rifle-butts were used freely (Spry, op.cit.). The R.C.R. were in possession of the top of the ridge by midnight and by first light, after numerous encounters in the darkness and rain, which was now falling heavily, had "seen off" the enemy from the whole position (ibid., W.D. R.C.R., 3 Oct 43). In spite of the confused nature of the fighting fatal casualties were confined to one officer and four other ranks (ibid.).

32. On the right flank the onset of darkness had enabled the Hast & P.E.R. to resume its advance through the oak saplings, among which it had taken cover earlier in the day. This was done as soon as 2 Cdn Fd Regt had put down a concentration on the suspected positions of the German machine-gunners and only trifling opposition was encountered in the advance to the Castelnovo road. The leading companies made a firm base at the junction of the Castelnovo and Carlantino roads on the forward slope of M. Sambuco by 0200 hours on 3 Oct and the reserve companies passed through at first light, moving north-west, and completed the clearing of the ridge (W.D. Hast & P.E.R., 2-3 Oct 43 and Tweedsmuir, op.cit.). It was now time for 48 Highrs to take a hand and at 0730 hours the battalion moved out of Motta towards Volturara.

33. Volturara is a mountain town typical of the Apennines. It sits on the top of a high and precipitous pinnacle overlooking the narrow valley of the Torrente La Catola. The main road to Vinciatiuro descends beside it after crossing the high ridge west of Motta. Where it reaches the banks of the river, the main lateral road to Benevento crosses the stream and climbs in steep spirals up the hillsides to the south. Volturara was an important objective, not only because it dominated a vital road junction, but because it commanded the valley of the Torrente La Catola and the main road beside it, both of which ran westward to the vital crossing over the Fortore River.

34. The Commanding Officer of 48 Highrs (Lt.-Col. I.S. Johnston) had been ordered to take Volturara and exploit westwards. He planned to do this by outflanking whatever enemy might be holding the position and when the Battalion



reached the junction of the main axis and the Castelnuovo road, he despatched "C" Company northward through the Hast and P.E.R. and along the road to Carlantino supported by one troop of 4 Cdn Recce Regt and one troop of tanks from the Calgaries, together with two detachments of anti-tank guns and two of 3-inch mortars. This force proceeded north-west until the reconnaissance vehicles reached the spot where the narrow road to S. Marco leaves the road to Carlantino. Here they were fired upon by enemy artillery. At about noon the enemy were observed on the forward slope of M. Capello. The F.O.O. with "C" Company brought down a regimental concentration on the enemy position and the Company Commander established himself on M. Ingotto preparatory to launching an attack on the M. Capello feature at first light on the following day (W.D. 48 Highrs, 3 Oct 43).

35. In the meantime the main body of 48 Highrs had advanced against light opposition and occupied Volturara which was found to be undefended. All attempts to advance westward along the main road were, however, met by heavy mortar and machine-gun fire from positions on the left bank of Torrente La Catola. Needless to say, the bridge across this stream had been blown and the southern slopes were partially cleared with difficulty in the rain and heavy mud. Enemy fire continued none the less and the three companies spent the night in defensive positions in and beside the river bed (*ibid.*).

36. During the evening it was decided that the R.C.R. would be employed to attack the next dominant hill feature west of Volturara, on which stood the village of S. Marco. On the following day (4 Oct) while to the north "C" Company endeavoured to tighten its hold on the northern approaches to S. Marco by an afternoon attack with tanks, "A" Company crossed to the south of the Torrente La Catola to create a left-flank diversion for the main R.C.R. attack. "D" Company was able to move westwards along the main road for almost half a mile before again drawing mortar fire and being forced to deploy to engage individual enemy posts (*ibid.*). The 48 Highrs had now outstripped their supporting arms and only on the northern flank, on the Carlantino road, was tank support effective (Hist Sec file: Italy 1943/ 1 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Account by Lt.-Col. I.S. Johnston). "C" Squadron of the Calgaries had followed the infantry into Volturara, presumably in support of the 48th (W.D. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 3 Oct 43) but had been unable to proceed westwards along the narrow valley which was thoroughly covered by the enemy's 88-mm guns. Accordingly, Brigadier Vokes ordered the Calgaries to seize the height of M. San Angelo which overlooked the valley from the south opposite the S. Marco ridge. The Officer Commanding the Squadron in Volturara, who was entrusted with this outflanking movement, reported that crossing the Torrente La Catola was not practicable until the enemy's anti-tank gun positions were eliminated. Even his cross-country reconnaissance had been frustrated by heavy mortar fire. The acting G.O.C. then decided that this squadron might be better employed in assisting 2 Cdn Inf Bde in the more open country to the south (W.D. 14 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 4 Oct 43).

37. In the meantime more ambitious efforts were being made on the Division's right flank with a view to turning the enemy's positions east of the Fortore River from the north. While "C" Squadron of 4 Cdn Recce Regt patrolled the divisional right hand boundary along the Castelnuovo road as far as the crossing of the river in front of Colletorto (W.D. 4 Cdn Recce Regt 3/4 Oct 43), the Hast and P.E.R. were given a new task involving far-reaching penetration of the inhospitable hills. From their positions on M. Sambuco the



Battalion were to march westwards north of the Carlantino road to seize the crossroads at M. Miano and drive the enemy's paratroops from Celenza. By the successful completion of this operation the Division would control the only lateral communication between Carlantino, Celenza and S. Marco which towns the enemy held as an outpost line in front of the Fortore. There were no crossings over the river capable of carrying traffic behind these towns and the Fortore, like other rivers of the central Apennines, the banks of which are subject to frequent landslides, was devoid of lateral roads paralleling its course. For this movement of the Hast and P.E.R. the operations of "C" Company, 48th Highrs, provided an effective screen and diversion (W.D. Hast and P.E.R., 3 Oct 43 and Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, account by Capt. H.K. Macintosh).

38. The approach march began at last light in heavy rain which was succeeded by dense mist. It involved a journey of 15 miles across the mountains through unfamiliar country and undefined enemy outpost positions. No mules were available and all supplies would be man-packed. The following graphic description of this march has been given by the Commanding Officer:

We covered a mile of road before we swung up hill through the inky, dripping blackness of the oak forest. The going was so bad that much of it was done on all fours. On the top of the hill it was a little clearer, there were no trees but darkness was blended with mist. We carried on as we were for hours. The single shells, that were to have acted as pointer to our destination, sighed mournfully overhead and burst with a muffled thud in the distance. The eyestrain was so acute that we began to see things that were not there. Every now and then we would halt the Battalion and go forward to recce, only to come back and find them sound asleep in the rain. At about 0200 hours we were descending a hillside when we saw the road. The weather was clearer and the rain had stopped, or we should never have seen it. After half an hour's recce we were still unable to make out what part of the road it was, and there seemed nothing for it but to move along it some little distance to find out, relying on the darkness to cover us. The long snake of men wound down on to the road. They were dog-tired from stumbling among those sodden hills, and many of them stumbled and fell when they jumped down on to the road. I dropped back from the lead and marched with my command group. The road turned left, and then bent to the right climbing slowly round the spur of a mountain. The spur was a smooth one, of hill turf. The Battalion wound along the road until the tail had crossed the valley, and was on the spur itself, when the light was shattered by Machine Gun fire, directed at the head of the column. Simultaneously a golden tongue of tracers licked the road just behind the tail of the Battalion. Fortunately the road makers had cut their road into the spur which gave us protection from the guns varying from a foot of



bank at the tail of the column to fifteen feet near the head of us down which the Huns were industriously rolling grenades. There was also a machine gun firing straight down the road at the leading troops. We were neatly bound in by fire. Each company took its own appropriate action. The leading company grabbing its wounded pulled back out of direct fire, and opened fire with its mortars. The Huns fired three Verey lights which lit up hills in unearthly, flickering brightness. Two of our mortar bombs landed neatly in machine gun pits, spattering the gunners over their guns. The situation was saved by one of our snipers. He was a trapper from Ontario, illiterate, stoical and a deadly shot. Like many woodsmen he could see almost as well in dark as in daylight. By the dying light of the Verey flare he saw the machine gun that was cutting off our withdrawal, and dropped both gunners forward over their own gun at seventy yards range. I gave the order to withdraw and we thinned the companies out, leaving Bren guns in until the last. As light was breaking we were ensconced on the heights of MOUNT INGOTTO, with our wounded, as comfortable as they could be made, ensconced in a deserted cottage on the hill side. (Tweedsmuir, op.cit.)

Consequently, by first light on 4 Oct the East and P.E.R. in its positions on M. Ingotto was some three miles short of its objective and not yet abreast of the right flank of 48 Highrs. During the morning contact was made with "C" Company of the latter. The troops were tired, wet and without food. (W.D. East and P.E.R., 4 Oct 43 and Tweedsmuir op.cit.) Between M. Ingotto and M. Miano lay a steep and thickly wooded valley and after resting until noon the East and P.E.R. resumed its march. This involved a circuitous tramp northward with a view to turning the M. Miano position from the right and cutting the road from Colenza to Carlantino. By 1800 hours the Battalion was established in thick woods at the base of the mountain and sent out small patrols which reported no immediate threat to its position (ibid.). Not until 0900 hours on 5 Oct did a carrying party from Rear Battalion Headquarters appear with rations for the troops. Morning patrols reported that M. Miano was held by the enemy. No further movement was undertaken during daylight on 5 Oct.

39. By this time the R.C.R. had already delivered its frontal attack on S. Marco, beginning at 1400 hours on 4 Oct. The start line was a stream running due south into the Torrente La Catola about one mile east of the village. The F.U.P. was a wood on the reverse slope of the ridge immediately east of the stream and was only reached after a difficult two-hour march across country which exhausted the troops. Consequently, at zero hour only one company had been long enough in the F.U.P. to prepare for the assault. Since artillery support was on the scale of three field regiments and a battery of 56 Med Regt R.A., the Commanding Officer was obliged to telephone by newly-laid line for the postponement of the artillery programme. Even so, "B" Company could not be reached in time to effect a 30-minute postponement of its attack and in the event both infantry and artillery programmes started at 1400 hours, only to be checked after 10 minutes when the new orders



eventually took effect. Unfortunately the O.C. "B" Company was wounded and one of his platoons disorganized by rounds falling short in this preliminary effort. When the attack finally went in the two forward companies were allowed to cross the stream and get well up on the S. Marco ridge before heavy enemy enfilading fire swept the narrow valley. One of the reserve companies was firmly pinned by fire on the start line but the other managed to cross and close up on the forward troops. Attempts by this reserve company to outflank the enemy were frustrated by very superior small arms fire and a complete stalemate was avoided by Lt.-Col. Spry bringing the dismounted carrier platoon with all its Bren guns forward to lend extra weight to the fire fight. Darkness fell with the enemy still maintaining his positions on the ridge (W.D. R.C.R., 4 Oct 43 and Spry, op.cit.).

40. Darkness in this case added to the difficulties of the attacking troops. In the first place, the long approach march and the hotly contested scramble up the ridge had exhausted them to the point where their offensive momentum had been substantially reduced. Secondly, they were in such close contact that artillery assistance might well be productive of great risk and added confusion. At this juncture the C.O. asked his F.O.O. to experiment with a troop salvo immediately in front of "C" Company, now forward on the right and acting as fire company for the abortive outflanking movement on the left. Having observed the effect of the troop salvo Lt.-Col. Spry ordered a regimental concentration for 10 minutes. As he expected, the enemy anticipated a fresh attack and withdrew from S. Marco. But the night's operations were not yet over for the weary R.C.R. Fresh orders were received to push on and occupy the hillside overlooking the valley of the Fortore and commanding the exposed and demolished bridge which carried the main road over its bed. Rather than involve his men in the inevitable hazards of another cross-country march, Lt.-Col. Spry descended to the road itself and marched safely westwards to his objective, encountering no obstacle other than a mined crater which was safely swept by the regimental pioneers. Enemy reaction to this advance was confined to defensive shelling and sporadic bursts of machine-gun fire and by first light the R.C.R. had two companies on the high ground overlooking the crossing. By this time the R.22e R. had moved up on the left-hand side of the road in the van of 3 Cdn Inf Bde (ibid.).

41. At this point it is necessary to turn back in time and over ground to follow the fortunes of 2 Cdn Inf Bde which, throughout the fighting described above, had been pushing over the wild and cheerless watershed of the Monti Del Sannio many miles to the south. Its operations were not unconnected with those of the American troops pushing northward from Benevento. Far to the north on the Adriatic coast a Commando landing at Termoli on the night 2/3 Oct had prepared the way for a lodgement of 78 Div which was to prove decisive in its effect on the enemy's resistance in the mountains. Canadian participation in the fighting for the Termoli bridgehead, which during the first few days of October was fierce and critical, will be related in due course. In spite of the great width of the Eighth Army's front, the hazardous operations in mist and rain across the desolate hills were well supported in the grand design.



OPERATIONS ON THE LEFT FLANK

42. 2 Cdn Inf Bde began its move in M.T. from the assembly area immediately east of Spinazzola at 1130 hours on 1 Oct. It had not gone far before it became apparent that the road leading into Canosa was heavily blocked. The reasons for this congestion have been discussed above. In the event the only forward movement possible during the balance of the day brought the brigade group to positions just south of Minervino. Not until midnight was the traffic position on the main axis sufficiently clear to allow it to proceed as far as the Crta Nova crossroads, about 12 miles short of Foggia, where the whole column turned left and moved across the south edge of the Foggia Plain towards Bovino and Troia. By 0900 hours on the morning of 2 Oct the brigade was disposed in its designated areas with P.P.C.L.I. in the most advanced position overlooked by Troia and L. Edmn R. and Seaforth of C. along the main Foggia - Naples road between M. Calvello and the end of the Cervaro Gorge below Bovino. (W.D. H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 1-2 Oct 43).

43. No contact of any kind had been made with the enemy and, as mentioned above, no move of the main body of the brigade group forward of the Troia area was to be made without specific orders from Division. During 2 Oct, therefore, extensive patrolling of the country south and west of Troia and Bovino was ordered by the Acting Commander, Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister. The country between Troia and the Fortore River (in other words between the Foggia - Bovino - Ariano and the Volturara - S. Bartolommeo - Foiano di Val Fortore lateral roads) was mountainous and sparsely inhabited. It was of the same nature as that west of Motta and in that portion immediately west of Troia reached much greater altitudes, culminating in M. Cornacchia (1151 metres). The crossings over the upper reaches of the Fortore between S. Bartolommeo and Foiano, which lay immediately west of the Cornacchia massif, could only be reached by motor transport by two routes from Troia - Bovino area: a northern route running from Troia through Biccari, Alberona and Roseto, and a longer but more serviceable one to the south along the main road up the Cervaro valley to Savignano and thence north-westwards through Castelfranco and Montefalcone di Valio Fortore. During the day patrols reported bad blows on both routes, one immediately north of Alberona and another between Savignano and Castelfranco. In the case of the former the Regimental Pioneers of the P.P.C.L.I. were despatched to prepare the necessary diversion, while for the latter R.C.E. assistance was required (W.D. H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Oct 43; W.D. P.P.C.L.I., 2 Oct 43: Hist Sec file Italy 1943/2 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, account by Brigadier B.M. Hoffmeister; Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H Ops Message Log 2 Oct 43, serial 2168).

44. The patrol on the southern route, detailed from L. Edmn R., had orders to push forward to S. Bartolommeo. In due course it was warned that mobile patrols of 4 Recce Regt were endeavouring to reach the same locality through Alberona and Roseto (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, Ops Message Log 3 Oct 43, serial 2178). In the event Popski's Private Army forestalled both the Canadian patrols and reported S. Bartolommeo clear at 0815 hours on the following morning. The enemy had been seen leaving the town at 1500 hours on 2 Oct (*ibid.* serial 2206). Reports from 2 Cdn Inf Bde patrols generally covering the villages between Troia and the Fortore indicated that the enemy had left anywhere up to four days previously. At Ariano, however, a Seaforth patrol made contact with an American machine-gun



unit from 45 U.S. Div (ibid., 2 Oct 43, serial 2164).

45. At midday on 2 Oct 13 Corps issued a Most Secret message to the effect that 30 men of 1 Airborne Div and 20 men of 2 S.A.S. Regt might be found in areas in front of the leading troops up to and including Ancona organizing mass rescues of Allied prisoners of war. (ibid., 2 Oct 43, serial 2166). Drastic action was now contemplated to increase the trickle of escaped prisoners which in the case of 1 Cdn Inf Div had begun to reach its lines near Potenza and had swelled steadily during the subsequent advance. This was made the more necessary by swift action on the part of the Germans to round up scapers in the hills. Light coastal craft of the Royal Navy patrolled the Adriatic to take off parties of escapers at predetermined points.

46. At 0745 hours Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister left for Divisional Headquarters. Before setting out he ordered one company of the Seaforth to S. Bartolommeo. The War Diary of the brigade gives the route of this company as Savignano - Castelfranco - Montefalcone. Equally explicit, the diarist of the Seaforth of C. indicates that a northerly route through Alberona was followed, and this is supported by the Brigade Message Log (W.D. 2 Cdn Inf Bde: Appx I, 3 Oct 43, serial 67). At all events, it would appear that the destination of this company was changed subsequently to the area immediately west of Foiano (W.D. Seaforth of C., 3 Oct 43). During the Brigade Commander's absence the L. Edmn R. patrol exploring the southern route reported first contact with the enemy in the form of a demolition party in the immediate vicinity of S. Bartolommeo on the preceeding afternoon. In addition to capturing a prisoner, the patrol claimed to have constructed diversions around four blown bridges including two of the Fortore crossings south of S. Bartolommeo (W.D. L. Edmn R., 3 Oct 43). That more substantial work was required on these demolitions is clear from later requests for R.C.E. assistance, particularly on the southern route (W.D. H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde 3 Oct 43). At 1800 hours on 3 Oct the order to move forward from Troia on the following morning was received from Division, together with the designation of the ultimate objective as Vinchiatturo. The brigade was to concentrate in the area S. Bartolommeo - Foiano on 4 Oct and advance westward on 5 Oct (ibid. Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H Ops Message Log 3 Oct 43, serial 2266; Hoffmeister, op.cit.). At 0930 hours on 4 Oct the P.P.C.L.I. set out on the northern route through Alberona to reach the high ground south of S. Bartolommeo overlooking the Fortore crossings, while the Seaforth of C. and L. Edmn R. moved at 1130 hours along the southern route to occupy S. Bartolommeo and Foiano respectively. (W.D. H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Oct 43, and Hoffmeister, op.cit.). The road between Castelfranco and Montefalcone was blocked at intervals by felled trees, booby-trapped by the enemy. These were exploded by attaching a cable to the tree-trunks and having them dragged aside by an armoured car from the Reconnaissance Regiment. Mines became more frequent as the convoys approached the Fortore (Hoffmeister, op.cit.).

47. It was apparent that 2 Cdn Inf Bde would make contact with the enemy's defensive screen as soon as it attempted to cross the forks of the Fortore River between



S. Bartolommeo and Foiano. Popski had reported heavy enemy traffic passing through Colle Sannita northward to Riccia on the next north-and-south road west of the Volturara - Foiano lateral. This traffic included tanks and lorried infantry and was presumably part of the withdrawing movement of 26 Pz Div (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H Ops Message Log 3 Oct 43, serial 2283). Another obstacle would obviously be the Fortore crossings. The river was rising fast as a result of continuous rain. A patrol of 4 Cdn Recce Regt, working in front of "C" Company of the Seaforth, had been stuck in the crossings on the previous evening, delaying the advance of the latter to its objective west of Foiano (W.D. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, October 1943, Appx 1, Ops Message Log 3 Oct 43, serial 67). During 4 Oct the Reconnaissance Regiment reported enemy shelling and mortaring and contact with enemy patrols west of Foiano (W.D. 4 Recce Regt, 4 Oct 43) together with the depressing intelligence that three bridges were blown south of S. Bartolommeo and that the approaches had turned to "muck" (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, Ops Message Log, 4 Oct 43, serial 2344). On the strength of this information Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister informed Brigadier Vokes that it was imperative for his brigade group to retain its Engineer detachment with ample bridging equipment - including its D7 bulldozer - to negotiate the river crossings (ibid., serial 2407). By the end of the day the force was in position with the Edmontons on the high ground overlooking S. Bartolommeo and the P.F.C.L.I. commanding the forks of the Fortore; while the Seaforth of C., which had been compelled to leave its transport east of Foiano owing to a demolished bridge, over the "Fiumara" of that name, had consolidated the important feature known as M. Faggi immediately west of the junction of the main road and the secondary road to Decorata (W.D. Seaforth of C., 4 Oct 43). The shelling of the Foiano area had stopped by the end of the day but the Edmontons were under sporadic fire from the village of Baselice across the river from S. Bartolommeo. A last light patrol, however, reported that the enemy had withdrawn from his positions (W.D. L. Edmn R., 4 Oct 43).

48. Although 5 Oct had been given by Division as the time for moving westward towards Vinchiature through Castelpagano, it was apparent that no effective movement could be made on the Brigade's left flank until the divisions east of Foiano had been prepared to carry the heavy traffic of supporting arms. On the right flank, however, the Edmontons' patrols which had moved down-stream to investigate the village of Castelvetero noticed signs of renewed enemy occupation in Baselice (W.D. L. Edmn R., 5 Oct 43). Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister, who had gone forward to the Edmontons in the morning, ordered an immediate attack with artillery support from a battery of 165 Fd Regt R.A. together with the 4.2 mortars of the Brigade Support Group (Sask. L.I.) (ibid., and W.D. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, October 1943, Appx I, 5 Oct 43, serial 44). By 1635 hours "B" Company had cleared the town after a three-minute concentration from these weapons (W.D. Edmn R., 5 Oct 43).

49. In view of the fact that the brigade was now to be committed west of the Fortore with its flank technically "in the air", careful precautions were taken to see that close liaison was established with U.S. troops



pushing north from Benevento and to provide adequate covering patrols along the main lateral immediately in rear of the advance. For this purpose the G.O.C. 5 (Brit) Div had visited Brigade Headquarters at Troia on 2 Oct to co-ordinate the patrols of his Division with those of the Brigade in its rear and on its left flank (W.D. 2 Cdn Inf Bde 2 Oct 43). On 5 Oct a five-car patrol from 4 Cdn Recce Regt moved south-west along the main road to Benevento for the purpose of making contact with 45 U.S. Div and having done so, to travel in front of the American patrols in order to simulate a wide extension of the Canadian front and if possible to invite a German counter-attack against our main effort (W.D. 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 5 Oct 43). Contact was established with the Americans in the neighbourhood of the viaduct at Pescolamazza at approximately 1500 hours (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, Ops Message Log 6 Oct 43, serial 2564). While the patrols of all three battalions of 2 Cdn Inf Bde felt forward west of the Fortore their regimental pioneers together with those of the Brigade Support Group and a platoon of divisional engineers laboured to improve the Fortore crossings and earned high praise from the Brigade Commander (Hoffmeister, op.cit.). After a period of shadow-boxing with enemy patrols it became clear that progress towards the important road junction at Decorata on the lofty tableland of the Monti di Sannio would necessitate a planned attack against the high ground overlooking the Decorata road from the south. This could be divided into two prominent features, one of 1007 metres and the other of 960 metres. It was from these that the enemy secured his best observation for the continuous harassing fire which exacted casualties from the Seaforth of C. during 5 Oct (W.D. Seaforth of C., 5 Oct 43 and Hoffmeister, op. cit.).

50. At 0800 hours on the morning of 6 Oct an order was received at Headquarters 2 Cdn Inf Bde from Division, "You will take and hold the crossroads at 729118". (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H Ops Message Log 6 Oct 43, serial 2482). This was the crossroads at Decorata which controlled the secondary lateral road Riccia - Colle Sannita - Roino - Benevento, the only remaining switch-line for the enemy in front of Vinchiatturo. B. securing the line of this road enemy resistance on the main axis around Gambalesa and the main Fortore crossing might be appreciably reduced. Accordingly, Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister ordered the P.F.C.L.I. to move up to Foiano and to take over the defensive positions of the Seaforth of C. in that area to enable the latter to form up for an attack on M.S. Marco (1007 m.) and the Toppo Felici feature (960 m.) beyond. The Seaforth plan provided for a three-company leapfrogging advance to take the two features and exploit to the crossroads. This attack would be supported by a battery of 165 Fd Regt R.A., a platoon of 4.2 mortars and a platoon of Vickers machine-guns from the Sask L.I. (W.D. Seaforth of C., 6 Oct 43). It was to be preceded by two troops of "B" Squadron 4 Cdn Recce Regt moving along the road to Decorata, the nearer portions of which had been swept of mines by the divisional sappers. Zero was 1500 hours (ibid.).

51. The reconnaissance vehicles had not gone far before they were met by heavy fire from enemy mortars and machine-guns on M.S. Marco. Four armoured reconnaissance cars and one carrier were knocked out and one officer and seven other ranks killed in a matter of moments. The infantry in their turn were greeted by a storm of fire sweeping the interval between M. Faggi and M.S. Marco and although "D" Company



reached its intermediate objective with only one casualty, "C" Company was temporarily disorganized and pinned to the ground by a fire which was described as "such as had never before been experienced by this Battalion". "C" Company, rallied by its Commander, Major S.W. Thompson, who called immediately for all supporting arms to concentrate on M.S. Marco, eventually drove the enemy from its slopes and was joined on the position by "D" and "B" Companies. When darkness fell, Major Thompson seems to have taken over the command of the three companies from the Battalion Commander (Major J.D. Forin) and to have organized the advance to the next objective. Bright moonlight aided the advance in its early stages, but was soon succeeded by heavy fog. Various enemy machine-gun posts were put out of action by the infantry but when the latter were confronted by fire from enemy armoured vehicles they were without weapons to deal with them. The C.C. "D" Company (Capt. J.E.T. MacMullen) was killed in an encounter with one such vehicle. Faced with the probability of having his force attacked by these vehicles at first light without anti-tank guns or FIATs and on the open moorland of the plateau, Major Thompson secured permission to withdraw to M.S. Marco. The withdrawal was accomplished without casualties in the obscuring fog (ibid. and Hoffmeister, op.cit.).

52. Some of the difficulties of this type of fighting were later enumerated by the Brigade Commander:

.....great difficulty was experienced in getting anti-tank guns and vehicles into position on account of the prevailing mud. The artillery support provided by 165 Fd Regt in engaging the target prior to and during the attack was outstanding. The 1007 feature was captured after a very difficult advance over rugged country completely impassable to vehicles. Mules were used to get wireless sets, M.Gs and mortars forward to the objective, while oxen and the bulldozer were the only two means of getting anti-tank guns into position. The F.O.Os of the Fd Regt were unable to move with forward companies of the Seaforth and company commanders did outstanding work in shooting guns and mortars through their 18 sets.

(Hoffmeister, op.cit.)

Although the final objective of the attack (Toppo Felici) had not been achieved, the commanding observation which the Seaforth now enjoyed from the heights of M.S. Marco compelled a rapid withdrawal of the enemy to the north-west (ibid.).

53. During 7 Oct no immediate attempt to push towards Decorata appears to have been made, although patrols were active on both sides of the road and those of the L. Edm R. were particularly venturesome, actually entering Castelvetero (still in the hands of the enemy) to observe the effect of their own artillery fire on the town. One of these patrols which got into Castelvetero on 6 Oct was apparently unnoticed by the enemy, although one of its members who had disguised himself as a peasant was sternly refused entrance to the town because the Germans had closed the area to civilians!



(W.D. L. Edmn R., 6 Oct 43 and Hist Sec file Italy 1943/2 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, account by Major E.W. Day). On the morning of the Seaforth attack "C" Squadron of 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt which was last noticed leaving Volturara for the southern sector, made contact with the three battalions to lend welcome support to their future operations. The following day the P.P.C.L.I. were ordered to concentrate west of Foiano to make another attempt on Decorata. The orderly preparations for this attack were for a moment interrupted by a report that the Americans had secured the crossroads and two companies were warned to move forward embussed on half an hour's notice. At noon the Acting G.O.C. held an "O" Group in the vicinity of M.S. Marco to communicate the final details of the P.P.C.L.I. attack which would be supported by two troops of tanks, the whole of 165 Fd Regt R.A., two platoons of 4.2 mortars, one platoon of Vickers guns and one troop of 17-pounder anti-tank guns. This attack which was carefully planned for 1530 hours was to have the limited objective of Topo Felici from which point another plan would be made for the capture of the crossroads. As zero hour approached it was discovered that the tanks had insufficient petrol to reach Decorata and the advance was postponed until first light of 9 Oct (W.D. P.P.C.L.I., 8 Oct 43). During the evening a Seaforth patrol reported that the crossroads were not held by the enemy, so the P.P.C.L.I. set off at once without tanks and by first light were at Decorata, having encountered no other obstacles than some deeply buried Tellarmines (*ibid.*). By this time the enemy had also withdrawn from Castelvetera in front of the Edmontons and was in full retreat across the hills.

#### THE THREE RIVERS REGIMENT AT TERMOLI

54. The foregoing narrative has followed the fortunes of 2 Cdn Inf Bde some distance beyond those of the rest of the Division engaged in the fighting along the Lucera - Vinchiatturo road. Before resuming the account of the main thrust to Campobasso, it is desirable first of all to give a brief account of the part played by 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt (The Three Rivers Regiment) in the vital action at Termoli which continued throughout the period dealt with. Secondly, it will be necessary to examine the evidence available to Intelligence of the enemy situation during and after the break-in attack against the enemy's protective screen along the eastern boundary of the Samnite Hills.

55. The plan of the Termoli operation comprehended a seaborne landing at that port by the Special Service Brigade closely followed by two brigades of 78 Div. The landing force would join hands at the earliest possible moment with the balance of 78 Div which would advance overland.

56. The overland force of 78 Div (11 Inf Bde and 56 Recce Regt) led by part of 4 Armd Bde (3rd County of London Yeomanry and "A" Squadron Royals) had been halted on 30 Sep by the demolition of the bridge carrying the main Termoli road across the lower Fortore and the defensive measures of the German Paratroops entrenched on the ridge at Serracapriola, two and a half miles to the west. But the halt was only temporary. 1 Para Div was spread much too thinly across nearly half of the Italian peninsula to impose more than delay on such a powerful column. On 1 Oct the enemy yielded



Serracapriola and withdrew across the bare rolling hills to the north west. During the following day British armoured and reconnaissance elements reached the edge of the plateau overlooking the broad flat valley of the lower reaches of the Biferno river, beyond which lay Termoli. Nevertheless, the going was not easy. In the hills north of Serracapriola the main road twisted narrowly up and down the intervening valleys. The weather had broken and ten vehicles per hour at diversions was the rate of traffic movement (W.D. G.S. Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 2 Oct 43). The vehicles of 36 and 38 Inf Bdes (whose fighting echelons were coming by sea) and the balance of 4 Armd Bde were principally affected. Every effort was made to push 11 Inf Bde forward to the Biferno in view of the impending landing of the Special Service Brigade at Termoli.

57. This took place at 0215 hours on 3 Oct one mile west of the harbour and met with instantaneous success. By 0725 hours the town and port were secured. Two hours later the bridgehead had been enlarged to include the road junction south-west of Termoli where the coast and Guglionesi roads divide, and the two bridges over the lower Biferno, at and above Campomarino, both of which were blown. During the day 11 Inf Bde completed its advance from Serracapriola and relieved 4 Armd Bde between Portocannone and S. Martino (ibid., 3 Oct 43). Contact was established with the S.S. Bde across the river at 1200 hours. The S.S. Bde informed 13 Corps that contact had been made with the enemy on the Piano Della Croce near the subsequently celebrated Point 169 (S. Giacomo). At this stage the enemy consisted of paratroops and railway sappers only (W.D. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, October 1943, Appx 70 Ops Message Log, 3 Oct 43).

58. At the beginning of October 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde was still concentrated between Minervino and Andria. Its organization was far from complete, 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt being employed with 1 Cdn Inf Div in the fighting towards Campobasso and 11 and 12 Cdn Army Tk Regts being represented only by their A and B Echelons. Of the two latter regiments, 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt - The Ontarios - had no immediate prospect of being rejoined by its F Echelon (i.e., fighting) vehicles, but 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt - The Three Rivers - expected its tanks, shipped from Taranto to land at Manfredonia, within the next two days. The Brigade War Diary speaks plaintively of this situation on 1 Oct, but by the end of that day advice was received of the expected arrival at Manfredonia on 2 Oct of vessels carrying tanks of all three regiments of the Brigade and of 1 Cdn Tk Delivery Sqn (Elgin R.). In the event the only tanks on board belonged to the Three Rivers and the Tank Delivery Squadron, and, as it turned out, these were only just in time. At 0900 hours on 2 Oct the Brigade received orders from 13 Corps to concentrate between Foggia and Lucera on 3 Oct. During the night 2/3 Oct Brigadier Wyman was informed that the Three Rivers would come under command 78 Div forthwith and concentrate east of S. Severo by the shortest route from Manfredonia. (W.D. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 1-3 Oct 43). Tactical H.Q. Eighth Army received word from Main H.Q. that G.S. (Int) appreciated a counter-attack against the Termoli bridgehead. One reason given was that elements of 26 Pz Div were reported to be moving north to the area of 1 Para Div (W.D. Tac H.Q. Eighth Army, October, 1943/, Appx B, Message Log 4 Oct 43, serial 137). Whatever



the other sources of information may have been - and these were mistaken at least about the designation of the German formation involved - a contributory source was undoubtedly the interrogation of Sergeant-major Wiemann of the French Foreign Legion who came through the lines of 1 Cdn Inf Div at Volturara on 4 Oct. Wiemann said that at dusk on 2 Oct he had noticed a heavy convoy proceeding north-east from Campobasso towards Termoli. (Hist Sec file Italy 1944/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F, Interrogation Reports). On the day of this interrogation, 78 Div was startled by the identification of two prisoners from 16 Pz Div, one at either end of the Termoli perimeter. This division had last been identified near Naples (W.D. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, October 1943: Appx 21, 78 Div Int Summary No. 82, 5 Oct 43).

59. During 4 Oct, 36 Inf Bde landed at Termoli screened by the S.S. Brigade inland. It moved south at once and relieved 11 Inf Bde in the positions the latter had taken up west of the Larino road on the left bank of the river. An immediate battalion attack was launched from the neighbourhood of Point 169 towards Guglionesi against M. di Coccia. This was met by heavy artillery and machine-gun fire from enemy positions judged to be "north and east of Larino", but the machine gun fire at least probably came from Guglionesi (W.D. G.S. Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 4 Oct 43). At 0745 hours on the following morning 36 Bde was heavily counter-attacked by tanks and infantry at Point 169 and 8 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were compelled to fall back. The enemy moved rapidly and by noon on 5 Oct had turned the left flank of 36 Bde and was threatening the vital junction of the Larino and Campomarino roads. On the right flank the hard-pressed S.S. Bde were forced back to the outskirts of Termoli itself and H.Q. 78 Div described the situation as "serious" (*ibid.*, 5 Oct 43 and W.D. G.S. H.Q. 13 Corps, October 1943, Appx B, Information Log 5 Oct 43, serials 58 and 129). It soon became apparent that a powerful pincer attack was being delivered by the German 16 Pz Div, using the same tactics which had all but succeeded at Salerno. Teams of seven to eight tanks supported by infantry were launched throughout the day against the British positions. One squadron of 3 County of London Yeomanry was despatched across the river at Portocannone to offset the German armour. Only two troops succeeded in crossing before the bridge collapsed. As the din of battle grew louder, the Luftwaffe and the German gunners turned their attention to the port of Termoli. Beginning at 0915 hours and throughout this critical phase 38 Inf (Irish) Bde had been landing across the beaches. 78 Div had made a long jump forward by means of the seaborne hook. But there was urgent need for more tanks if the bridgehead was not to be wiped out (*ibid.*, Appx F4, 13 Corps Int Summary 266, 5 Oct 43; W.D. G.S. Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 5 Oct 43; W.D. 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 5 Oct 43).

60. The tanks of 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt had arrived in harbour just east of S. Paolo di Civitate at midday on 4 Oct and the ground was now so soft that the regiment's wheeled vehicles had to be pulled into harbour by them. At 0200 hours on 5 Oct orders were received from H.Q. 78 Div for two squadrons to proceed as soon as practicable to Campomarino. "B" and "C" Squadrons left at 0800 hours, taking with them carriers and a maintenance echelon and arrived at Campomarino at 1500 hours. Immediately maintenance was put in hand in preparation for action during the early hours of the following



day. During the night "B" Squadron was put under command of 38 Bde, while "C" Squadron was allotted to 36 Bde and under the immediate command of 3 C.L.Y. in order to relieve "C" Squadron of that regiment which had lost seven tanks during the previous day's fighting. During darkness the two squadrons moved across the Bailey bridge at Campomarino and joined their respective brigades. (W.D. 12 Cdn Army Tk Rgt, 4-5 Oct 43).

61. In order to forestall renewal of the enemy attack, H.Q. 78 Div had decided to counter-attack the ridge west of the Termoli - Larino road, using in the first place 36 Bde to attack in the southern sector with its supporting tanks sweeping the ridge from south to north, while 38 Bde, which had completed its landings during the night, would try to dislodge the enemy from his positions on the coast road south-west of Termoli. According to H.Q. 78 Div the tanks supporting 36 Bde in the course of their left flanking movement came under heavy anti-tank fire at Masseria Candela. It appeared that the enemy had placed a screen of anti-tank guns in front of Guglionesi. In spite of this opposition, however, 3 C.L.Y. with "C" Squadron of the Three Rivers on its right flank were able to mount the ridge and join a battalion of the Buffs advancing from the north-east. During the course of this movement a renewal of the enemy's flank attack of the previous day was anticipated and heavy artillery fire was laid down upon his suspected F.U.Ps. "C" Squadron claimed two Pz. Kw. IV tanks for the loss of one Sherman (a second being probably recoverable) during the course of this action and at the end of the day was harassing the withdrawal of the enemy's infantry. (*ibid.*, 6 Oct 43).

62. "B" Squadron meanwhile had taken up a defensive position on the western edge of Termoli to cover the forming up of the Irish Brigade. Heavy enemy artillery fire succeeded in knocking out one of the squadron's tanks during the morning. At about 1000 hours the Squadron Commander and the C.C. Royal Irish Fusiliers decided that 36 Bde's attack from the left had not matured and that they would push forward to 38 Bde's first objective, the factory buildings near S. Giacomo. This attack was highly successful and by adroit use of ground, together with some inspired work by individual troop leaders, the squadron accounted for at least six Pz. Kw. IVs before the morning was out. The north end of the Piano Della Croce ridge was firmly secured and in spite of some brisk bombing by the Desert Air Force the squadron was able to return to harbour by 1430 hours on the arrival of supporting weapons for the infantry (*ibid.*).

63. "A" Squadron did not leave the harbour near S. Paolo until 0900 hours of the morning on which the foregoing actions took place (6 Oct). Its progress towards Termoli was rapid in comparison with the movement of the previous day. As it crossed the bridge at Campomarino it was subjected to a low-level, but fruitless, attack by six M.E. 109s. At 1320 hours the squadron commander reported to Brigadier Russell, commanding the Irish Brigade, and was ordered to proceed at once to the west of Termoli to assist the infantry against a counter-attack coming in from the direction of the Torrente Sinarca. At this point the town was under shell and mortar fire. At 1430 hours the Squadron moved through the town with no time to refuel after its forty-mile approach march from S. Paolo. It deployed to the north of the main



coastal road and to the west of the latter's junction with the road to Guglionesi and drove the enemy from the neighbouring olive-groves back across the Sinarca. Heavy execution was done on German infantry crossing the railway bridge at the mouth of the stream. (*ibid.*).

64. In the course of this fighting both Brigadier Wyman and the Regimental Commander, Lt.-Col. E.L. Booth, had been compelled to adopt the role of spectators, but although the regiment had been extensively sub-allotted, its efforts were considerable and did not pass without remark. Eight enemy tanks were destroyed (plus two probables) and five Canadian tanks knocked out of which at least two were recoverable. Canadian personnel casualties were four killed and five wounded. (*ibid.*). The environs of Termoli were typical of the Adriatic coastal plateau, consisting of flat clay ridges dissected by steep gulleys and liberally covered with vineyards and olive-groves. In the olive-groves, particularly, the German tanks with their long 7.5-cm guns were at a disadvantage and the lighter, faster Shermans were more effective at close quarters.

65. After 6 Oct the enemy did not renew his attacks. On 7 Oct the M. di Coccia position was taken, although the enemy held firm in front of Guglionesi. Next day 11 Bde entered Larino and Eighth Army was able to conclude that the battle for Termoli had virtually finished. That night 36 Bde took Guglionesi (W.D. Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 8-9 Oct). Although 16 Pz Div was by no means up to strength and was still suffering from the effects of its losses in the Salerno fighting, it is clear that it made a determined attempt to recapture Termoli during 5 and 6 Oct. A captured document found on the body of a lieutenant from the division's artillery regiment gives 6 Oct as the day on which Termoli was to be captured at all costs (W.D. 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt, October 1943, Appx 21: 78 Div Int Summary No. 84, 7 Oct 43). Even after the failure of these attacks 16 Pz Div gave ground grudgingly along the coast towards Petacciato and German defensive positions along the whole front were re-adjusted without confusion. But the enemy's positions in front of Campobasso were untenable after the capture of Termoli and Larino and the decision to abandon them had a salutary effect on Canadian operations in the interior.

66. At midnight on 8/9 Oct a message was received from 78 Div to the effect that 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt would revert to the command of 13 Corps on 11 Oct and would move to Serracapriola on the previous day. Brigadier Russell addressed the officers and men of "B" Squadron on 9 Oct and thanked them for their good work during the fighting for Termoli. He presented the battle flag of the Irish Brigade to the Squadron Commander, Major J.R. Walker, and said that this was the first time it had ever been so bestowed. (W.D. 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 9 Oct 43). Brigadier Wyman received the following letter from the Corps Commander, Lt.-Gen. Dempsey:

I have been speaking during the last two or three days to several of the units of 78 Div and the S.S. Bde which took part in the operations at Termoli. Wherever I have been I have heard nothing but praise of the way in which Lt.-Col. Booth's regiment fought. There is no doubt that they played a very important part in bringing about the defeat of 16 Pz Div.



All the accounts go to show that not only did they fight with tremendous spirit but also with considerable skill. I would be very grateful if you would congratulate them from me on their achievement. It must be a great satisfaction to you to know that whenever a unit of your Brigade gets the opportunity of taking part in a battle, it invariably does so with the greatest credit. (ibid., 13 Oct 46.)

And the following was received on 10 Oct from the G.O.C. 78 Div, Maj-Gen. Eveleigh:

It is with great regret that we have parted with the 12 C.T.R. today. I only hope that we may have the chance of again co-operating with your Brigade and our old friends the 12th. (ibid., October 1943, Appx 24, "The Turret", 16 Oct 43).

#### THE INTELLIGENCE PICTURE

67. Until consultation of German documents and official records becomes possible and at least until the interrogation of enemy commanders is completed, it will be difficult to give an accurate picture of what was happening to enemy forces during the early part of October. Nevertheless, it is useful to examine the information available to Intelligence staffs, if only to estimate its influence upon our own operations. It has been noted above that at the beginning of the month 1 Para Div, on a widely extended front reaching from the middle of the peninsula to the Adriatic coast, was providing a screen behind which the rest of 76 Panzer Corps was withdrawing northward from Avellino and Benevento. This movement was by no means clear to Intelligence staffs at the time. Indeed, on 2 Oct G.S. (Int) at 13 Corps was obviously puzzled by the movements of 29 Pz Gr Div:

One is forced to the view that 29 Pz Gren Div is not moving in unison with the general withdrawal, but being pulled out earlier and for other duties....Wherever 29 Div goes a larger sphere of responsibility is forced on the two remaining divisions of 76 Corps. 1 Parachute Division can scarcely extend its front south; it appears to run as far as the H.00 northing already.\* 26 Armoured Division then must either spread north east or make such arrangements by demolition or mining as to replace actual tenure of the ground.

(Hist Sec file Italy 1943/13 Corps/L/F: 13 Corps Int Summary No. 263, 2 Oct 43).

68. On 4 Oct at H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div the picture was a little clearer. It was known that 1 Para Div was operating with independent battle groups and that Battle Group Grassmehl which had been encountered at Motta was part of the larger formation known as Battle Group Heilmann. Lt.-Col. Heilmann who had commanded 3 Para Regt in Sicily now had,

\* H.00 northing is approximately the line Bovino - Castelfranco.



in addition to his old regiment, II Bn of 1 Para Regt, two troops of parachute artillery, four anti-tank platoons, a machine-gun battalion, two anti-aircraft sections, a company of engineers from 15 Pz Gr Div and apparently a small number of Italian paratroops. This information had been derived from a captured document which was a weekly strength return to H.Q. 1 Para Div and was dated 26 Sep. The strength of the Battle Group was estimated at some 2,000 and it was well supplied with anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns. No tanks were listed in the return and in spite of reports of enemy tanks at Notta, it may be assumed that these were half-tracked vehicles or self-propelled guns. It appeared that the bulk of Battle Group Heilmann had originally occupied positions south of the Lucera - Vinchiatturo road, but by 4 Oct G.S. (Int) at Division had concluded that its main strength was disposed between Colletorto and S. Marco, while the capture of five prisoners by 4 Cdn Recce Regt on 2 Oct had revealed that the actual garrison of Colletorto, which resisted stubbornly during the following week, consisted of II Bn 67 Pz Gr Regt of 26 Pz Div. These prisoners stated that after leaving Benevento for a withdrawal to what they believed and hoped might be Rome, their battalion had suddenly on 1 Oct been ordered into Colletorto to prevent any crossing of the Fortore in that area. Divisional Intelligence was also aware that the enemy facing 2 Cdn Inf Bde in the neighbourhood of S. Bartolommo was not part of 1 Para Div, but stated that in the absence of prisoners no identification could be made in that area (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/ 1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F: 1 Cdn Inf Div Int Sum aries Nos. 16, 2 Oct 43 and 17, 4 Oct 43). By the next day L. Edm. R. took eight prisoners at Baselice who were identified as belonging to 1 Bn, 71 Pz Gr Regt of 29 Pz Gr Div (W.D. L. Edm. R., 5 Oct 43). Henceforth 29 Pz Gr Div comes increasingly into focus opposite 1 Cdn Inf Div and by the time the Fortore crossing on the main axis is reached the paratroops have withdrawn to the north.

69. All evidence points to the fact that the Allies in Italy were surprised at the strength of German resistance at this stage in Southern Italy. It was known that Italian Alpine troops and partisans were giving trouble in the north and it was anticipated that the enemy would withdraw reasonably quickly to a line running from Rimini to Pisa which he was known to be fortifying. A variety of reasons can be adduced for the determined resistance which occurred during the last three months of 1943. There was every strategic reason to fight as far south as possible in order to protect the German divisions then fighting partisans in Yugoslavia from any flanking operations by the Allies in the Adriatic. Although the Foggia airfields had fallen cheaply, there was no reason to suppose that those in the Roman Campagna would be relinquished as readily. A withdrawal to the Pisa - Rimini line would not be effective unless the enemy's troops in the south could disengage quickly and decisively and unless fresh divisions, presumably to be withdrawn from the Balkans, were available to man it. Moreover, the terrain now available for a defensive delaying action was more advantageous than ever before to an army of depleted divisions and inadequate air support. On the Adriatic side a series of river lines of uniform character throughout the Molise and Abruzzi districts were formidable obstacles to a rapid advance, especially in the season of autumnal rains and winter snow-fall. On the T.rrhenian flank the Volturno river and the chain of mountain massifs running north from M. Massico and



screening the Liri Valley approach to Rome invited a resolute stand. Finally the Germans were falling back on the narrowest portion of the Italian Peninsula north of Calabria and for the seven divisions deployed it offered the most acceptable site for a winter line of defence.

70. 76 Panzer Corps had begun by holding a large mountain salient bounded by the Calore and Fortore Rivers. The projection of this salient had been reduced by the necessity of withdrawing from Benevento, but in the hills to the north the thorough campaign of demolition had prevented any rapid exploitation by 6 U.S. Corps. The line of the Fortore had been lost in effect by the capture of Termoli but the enemy adopted a policy of defending minor positions of advantage until pressure became strong enough to dictate withdrawal. Theoretically, the line of the Biferno River had also been lost by the capture of Termoli, but it will be seen how stubbornly 76 Corps defended its battle outposts east of the upper reaches of this river during the rest of the month of October. The quality of the German defence opposing 1 Cdn Inf Div induced General Montgomery to ask General Alexander on 5 Oct for assistance from Fifth Army.

Canadian thrust against Campobasso and Vinchiature meeting stiff opposition. Suggest American division at Benevento be ordered to operate energetically northward to Vinchiature as such a thrust would force the enemy to give ground in front of Canadians. (W.D. Tac H.Q. Eighth Army, Appx Z, 5 Oct 43).

This request, however, provoked patrol action only, because at this stage the Fifth Army had to build up for its attack across the Volturno River which began on 13 Oct.

71. German tactics used in the conduct of a delaying action were explicitly revealed in a directive issued by Major-General Heidrich, commanding 1 Para Div, dated 27 Sep 43. A copy of this document was captured and published in an Eighth Army Intelligence Summary, being subsequently republished in a 1 Cdn Inf Div Intelligence Summary on 26 Oct. It is perhaps unfortunate that this directive was not earlier available to Eighth Army, because it gives a remarkably clear picture of what the Battle Group Heilmann was attempting to do in its withdrawal from the edge of the Foggia plain to beyond the Fortore. The term "delaying action" had been removed from German textbooks and military theory in 1940 and it was necessary for General Heidrich to explain exactly what he meant. The following extract is illuminating:

Delaying actions will not be fought in a main defensive line, but on lines of resistance. The distance between such lines will be great enough to prevent the enemy from engaging two of them from the same arty positions. He must be obliged to move up his arty to each line. The maximum range of English fd and med guns is 10-12 km. It is best to site these lines of resistance along forward edges, so that it is always possible to disengage and withdraw under cover.



Where fighting occurs before lines of resistance, the ideal is to carry it out with mobile forces. In addition battle outposts will be organized in front of each line. It is particularly important during the fighting of a delaying action to maintain intensive recon patrols and keep watch over a great area, so that the enemy's line of advance can be speedily noted.

During a delaying action wide sectors will be laid down and covered by arty units widely deployed - guns will be sited in secs if necessary - and by inf weapons widely distributed. The defence will then be organized by setting up strong points manned by small groups. As a general rule a coy will be responsible for double the front normally allocated in defensive fighting. Delaying actions are characterised by very slight depth.

In a line of resistance it is most advisable to disengage from the enemy by night. If that is not possible, the following basic principles will be observed in detail by commanders:

- (a) A time limit, or
- (b) A distance will be laid down

i.e. I must not allow the enemy to come closer to me than I am to my next line of resistance. The troops must reach the new position before the enemy reaches the old one, e.g. the battle will be broken off and troops will retire to a new line of resistance when the enemy crosses the line A - B in force.

The troops will therefore not retire in the face of enemy patrols - the latter will be destroyed - but only when the enemy really mounts an attack. If it can be ascertained that the enemy is preparing for a massed attack, the main consideration is to make a timely withdrawal, so that our troops will not be exposed to enemy arty concs. Advance elements must have smoke candles to enable them to make a getaway in a critical situation. Riflemen will cover the disengagement of the heavy weapons. They form the defence for heavy weapons during such an action. The aim should be to leapfrog the heavy weapons back. Every opportunity to inflict casualties on an enemy advancing recklessly must be taken by carrying out limited counter-attacks.

Fire will be opened at extreme ranges on an enemy advancing for a major attack. (MG secs and pls will fire from positions sited with as much cover as possible). Enemy recon will, however, be allowed to approach and then be destroyed.



The area between the lines of resistance is called the intermediate area (Zwischenfeld). Explicit orders will be given whether the intermediate area will be covered in one bound or will be fought over. The latter possibility arises especially when the next line of resistance has not been fully prepared and time must be gained. Detachments must reach the line of resistance early enough to ensure that all the main positions are occupied in good time.

This drill was repeated with the usual German thoroughness until the main line of resistance was met at the end of November. (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F: 1 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No. 22, 26 Oct 43, Appx A.).

#### THE CAPTURE OF GAMBALESA, IELSI AND GILDONE

72. It is necessary now to return to the axis (Route No. 17, Lucera -- Vinchiatturo) along which the main Canadian effort was directed. When last noticed (above, para 40) the R.C.R. had taken up positions on the ridge overlooking the Valley of the Fortore River and the long demolished bridge which carries Route 17 across it. At this point the Fortore Valley widens below the gorge through which it runs northward from S. Bartolomaeo. This enlargement is caused by the confluence of two considerable tributaries, the Torrente La Catola along the banks of which 1 Cdn Inf Bde had moved westwards from Volturara, and the Torrente Tappino which enters the Fortore less than half a mile below the crossing. The latter runs eastward from the high ground at Campobasso which constitutes the watershed between the Fortore and Biferno valleys. The junction of these three watercourses provided more extensive visibility than was usual in these hills and from the enemy's point of view a more considerable and effective field of fire. With the exception of a small wood on the right bank of the Fortore, the hills around were bare and devoid of cover.

73. While the R.C.R. were consolidating their positions covering the river crossing, the Hast & P.E.R. were making a belated move towards Monte Miano. The battalion's long and arduous march to outflank this position had taken them as far north as Monte Cima from which Carlantino could be clearly seen. When it reached Monte Miano on 6 Oct the enemy had withdrawn from the position and had abandoned Celenza which the capture of S. Marco and the subsequent advance of the R.C.R. had rendered untenable. In the afternoon of 6 Oct a patrol of drivers and cooks from Hast & P.E.R. battalion headquarters led by the second-in-command cleared Carlantino after a brief exchange of shots. (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 6 Oct 43.) On the right flank "C" Sqn of 4 Cdn Recce Regt with its supporting troop of tanks could make no progress in front of Colletorto although its patrols habitually crossed the river to test the enemy's defences. At Colletorto he was at battalion strength and indeed it appeared that the enemy attached considerable importance to defending this crossing over the Fortore River if his urgent detachment of II Bn 67 Pz Gr Regt for this purpose is taken into account.



74. The main difficulty which confronted 4 Cdn Recce Regt in forcing the crossing at Colletorto was absence of artillery support. Fighter bombers of the D.A.F. had failed to dislodge the enemy on 5 Oct. On the following day all available weapons fired at the town and the shoot was repeated on 7 Oct. Dismounted patrols found Colletorto clear on 8 Oct, by which time the town had been thoroughly outflanked from the north and south. The enemy had left all approaches heavily mined. (W.D., 4 Cdn Recce Regt, 5-9 Oct.)

75. By 6 Oct, 1 Cdn Inf Bde had temporarily exhausted its capacity for further offensive action and the time had come to pass the reserve brigade -- 3 Cdn Inf Bde -- through it to continue the advance to Campobasso. 3 Cdn Inf Bde had moved forward from the River Ofanto led by the Carlt & York R. on the morning of 2 Oct and by early afternoon had dispersed among the olive groves west of Lucera. Here the brigade was put on one hour's notice to move forward from 0700 hrs, 3 Oct. No move occurred until 4 Oct when the Carlt & York R. were sent forward to the high ground west of Motta and had their first taste of movement in the mud. On the following day the R. 22e R. marched across the hills from Volturara to the right bank of the Fortore where, as described above, contact was made with the R.C.R. This was the first step in the relief of 1 Cdn Inf Bde. During the evening the R. 22e R. attacked with one company across the river and above the bridge but withdrew it under cover of defensive fire from its own supporting artillery after drawing persistent and heavy fire from the enemy. It was clear that he would not yield the crossing without greater pressure and on 6 Oct 3 Cdn Cdn Inf Bde concentrated forward for a two-battalion attack at 0730 hrs on the following day. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 2-6 Oct.) The R. 22e R. after this first attack appreciated that the enemy holding Gambalesa and covering the crossing were from 29 Pz Gr Div and at battalion strength. (W.D., R. 22e R., 6 Oct.)

76. While the F.O.O. with the R. 22e R. endeavoured to pinpoint and engage all known hostile battery positions, H.Q. R.C.A. at Division prepared to support the attack with the full weight of the divisional artillery and 66 Med Regt R.A. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 6 Oct 43; W.D., H.Q. R.C.A., 1 Cdn Inf Div, 6 Oct 43.) In addition the medium machine-guns of the Sask L.I. were brought into position on the high ground overlooking the river from the east. Both the attacking battalions, the Carlt & York R. and the West N.S.R., were to deliver the assault south of the main road, the Carlt & York R. being directed on Gambalesa and the West N.S.R. across the road from Gambalesa to Fufara on to the high ground south of Gambalesa which dominated the Fortore crossing and Route 17 to the west of it. After a considerable approach march the battalions formed up in the wooded area to the east of the river and at 0700 hrs artillery concentrations were laid down on the environs of Gambalesa, then on the high ground to the south; finally, the opposite bank of the river was "stonked". (W.D., H.Q. R.C.A. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 7 Oct 43; W.D., West N.S.R., 7 Oct 43.) According to H.Q. R.C.A. and to the West N.S.R. account, this was a most successful shoot but the Carleton & Yorks considered that the enemy was not in the positions on which fire came down. (Ibid.; Carlt & York R., 7 Oct 43.) At all events the Carleton & Yorks ran into difficulty at the river crossing and were heavily engaged by enemy machine-guns on the forward slope of the high ground opposite. The advance started promptly at 0730 hrs and "B" and "C" Coys succeeded in crossing the river under cover of smoke laid



by platoon mortars. Rain was now falling heavily and the infantry had heavy going on the far side of the river. "A" Coy was committed to strengthen the attack but after a day of heavy firing the battalion began to run short of ammunition while still some 800 yards from where Gambalesa crowned the northern end of the ridge. It was reported that two tanks (or S.F. guns) in hull-down positions prevented further movement forward and part of "D" Coy was used to replenish the ammunition supply. In the meantime, on the left flank, the West N.S.R. had fared better. It would appear that the weight of gun-fire had been too much for the enemy's right flank and what was described as "the welcome chatter of the Sask L.I. M.Gs." had a dampening effect on his small arms fire. The whole battalion crossed the bed of the Fortore without a casualty and by 0930 hrs were plodding steadily uphill.

77. According to the account of the Brigade Intelligence Officer and that of the Brigade War Diary (presumably also attributable to the I.O.) the leading companies of the West Novas delivered a bayonet charge across the open ground which thoroughly demoralized the enemy machine-gunners. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Oct 43; Hist Sec file Italy: 1943/3 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D: Account of Captain R.D. Prince.) The account of the Brigade Major and the War Diary of West N.S.R. make no mention of this exploit and the Brigade Commander in subsequent comments has denied its occurrence. (W.D., West N.S.R., 7 Oct 43; Hist Sec file Italy: 1943/3 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D: Account by Lt.-Col. G.F.C. Pangman; Prince, op. cit., marginal comment by Brigadier M.H.S. Penhale.) It is hardly likely that the battalion war diarist would ignore such a stirring development and the heavy going underfoot reinforces the weight of evidence against it. Nevertheless, a certain amount of close-quarter fighting occurred and on the road to Tufara a troublesome 2-cm Flakvierling together with other weapons and six prisoners were captured. Having gained the road, Lt.-Col. Bogert ordered "A", "B" and "D" Coys to continue the advance to the crest of the Toppe Fornelli and this movement was completed under considerable enemy shellfire. At last light, "B" Coy cleared the ridge with the assistance of the battalion's 3-inch mortars while "D" Coy began to have trouble with shells from the supporting artillery, now firing at extreme range. (W.D., West N.S.R., 7 Oct 43.) During the night Carlt & York R. patrols failed to locate the source of the troublesome gun-fire which had bedevilled them during the afternoon from the direction of Gambalesa but next morning, after a night of continuous rain and enemy harassing fire, Lt.-Col. Pangman sent "A" and "D" Coys into the town at 0900 hrs. Enemy opposition was confined to shellfire.

78. For the day's work, Brigadier Penhale and all ranks engaged were congratulated by the Divisional Commander. (W.D., 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Oct 43.) The enemy had been compelled to yield a most promising defensive position but he continued to exact a heavy price by shelling the Fortore crossing and the main road behind it as well as bringing down intermittent fire at Gambalesa. This practice was becoming a familiar feature of warfare in the hills and it has been observed before how methodically such tactics had been prepared in advance by the enemy. Indeed, the advantage accruing to the enemy by his ability to mine and demolish as he withdrew and to register at leisure his defensive fire tasks was felt generally at this stage of the campaign from one side of the peninsula to the other. (Hist Sec file Italy 1944/1 Cdn Corps/M/F: German Tactics in Italy. No. 1, Salerno to Anzio,



28 May 44, A.F.H.Q., G-2.) In the hill fighting in which the Canadians were engaged during October, this enemy advantage was very noticeable. Heavy mining of both sides of Route 17, particularly at river crossings, imposed great difficulties upon the provision of ammunition and other supplies. In order to maintain 3 Cdn Inf Bde across the Fortore, frequent calls were made by the Brigade Commander for R.C.E. assistance and the resources of the regimental pioneers were stretched to the utmost. (W.D., 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Oct 43; Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H: Ops Message Log, 7-8 Oct 43.) In order to avoid becoming road-bound, the Division had asked for a permanent allotment of mules independent of local impressment. This request had been transmitted to General Montgomery's Tactical Headquarters on 6 Oct and it would appear that the mule component which had been provided for in the Canadian planning for Operation "Husky" was henceforth continuously employed. (W.D., Tac H.Q., Eighth Army, October 1943; Appx "B", Message Log, 6 Oct 43, Serial 9.)

79. The divisional artillery had experienced considerable difficulty in keeping within range for the tasks required of it since leaving its positions on the plain below Motta. Gun areas were hard to come by in the narrow valleys and it seems that the bed of the Torrente la Catola was used at least once during the fighting for S. Marco and the Fortore crossings. (W.D., R. 22e R., October 1943, Appx 13, Sketch by Morel.) The enemy knew well the obvious gun areas and by a judicious mixture of mine-laying and harassing fire delayed the deployment of our guns. A valuable addition to the Division's artillery strength was 1 Air Landing Light Regiment R.A., a component of 1 Airborne Div which was placed under the command of 1 Cdn Inf Div for battle experience on 5 Oct. With its light 75-mm guns towed by jeeps it possessed great advantages of mobility over the field and medium regiments and it performed excellent service. (W.D., H.Q. R.C.A., 1 Cdn Inf Div, 5 Oct 43.) The following entry for 9 Oct in the War Diary of H.Q. R.C.A. sums up the situation:

Div arty moves to the area 7826-7925\* -- a good area but once again we are out of range -- infantry can pass obstacles and mined roads, which is really all that is holding us up, and arty of course cannot, hence the continual struggle to keep the guns in range.

To the south it was apparent that 165 Fd Regt R.A. was having similar difficulty, if not complicated by so much congestion, in supporting 2 Cdn Inf Bde and its efforts to do so on the muddy and sometimes precipitous ground drew praise from Brigadier Hoffmeister. (Hoffmeister op. cit.)

80. In order to secure the right flank of 3 Cdn Inf Bde from interference by the enemy north of Gambalesa and across the Torrente Tappino, the 48 Highrs were ordered to attack across the Fortore River to the north of Route 17 and secure the high ground opposite Gambalesa and overlooking the

\* On the right bank of the Fortore River immediately north of Route 17.



narrow Tappino Valley. Enemy guns had been reported firing from the direction of Macchia on 7 Oct. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde 7 Oct 43.) The villages of Macchia, Pietracatella and S. Elia A Pianisi in the hills above the left bank of the Fortore River were not connected by road with Route 17 and the enemy was able to maintain his gun positions here for enfilading fire on the Fortore crossing. No resistance was offered to the advance of the 48 Highrs and by mid-afternoon on 8 Oct the battalion was firmly established over the river. In the meantime Macchia and Pietracatella had been bombed by the D.A.F. which reported little or no movement seen. (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H: Ops Message Log, 8 Oct 43, Serial 2792.) A patrol from the 48 Highrs on 9 Oct found these towns empty and civilians informed it that the enemy had begun to leave on the night 7/8 Oct. This withdrawal must accordingly have coincided with the enemy's relinquishment of Colletorto. Thus the whole left bank of the Fortore River across the entire divisional front was clear of the enemy and since the crossroads at Decorata were in the hands of 2 Cdn Inf Bde the Germans had no lateral communications available east of Campobasso. Their rearguards on Route 17 were now firmly identified as belonging to 29 Pz Gr Div and twelve enemy guns had been located during the action of 7 Oct. 3 Cdn Inf Bde had captured 30 prisoners, four guns and numerous machine-guns. (W.D. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 7-8 Oct 43.)

81. Divisional Intelligence appreciated that the enemy withdrawal would be accelerated although it was well within the bounds of possibility that the favourable defensive ground contained in the triangle Gildone -- Campobasso -- Vinchiaturò would be exploited to the full. But the value of the Termoli -- Campobasso -- Pontelandolfo road had disappeared with the loss of its terminals. South and south-west of Vinchiaturò loomed the precipitous Matese mountain barrier and the speed of the enemy's withdrawal might be determined solely by the necessity of preventing the Canadian left flank reaching Vinchiaturò before the road thence to Isernia had been adequately protected. (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F: 1 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No. 18, 9 Oct 43.) Accordingly, on 8 Oct, Brigadier Vokes ordered Brigadier Penhale to employ his brigade as an divisional advanced guard and to move on 9 Oct upon the road junction immediately west of Gildone. For this purpose 1 Air Landing Light Regt R.A. less one battery, together with one squadron of 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, would be placed under his command while 1 Cdn Fd Regt and 4 Cdn Fd Coy would be in support. The infantry were to march and the acting G.O.C. requested that the R. 22e R. be used as vanguard with the Carlt & York R. as the main body. The West N.S.R. was not to be used without his permission. (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/I: Instructions by G.O.C., 8 Oct 43.)

82. While these arrangements were being made for the completion of the drive towards the Campobasso position, General Montgomery was planning to increase the weight of his attack by regrouping the Eighth Army. At a conference on 8 Oct he announced his intention of bringing 5 Corps up on the right flank of 13 Corps and limiting the commitment of the latter to the campaign in the interior. In the Adriatic sector 5 Corps would take over the direction of 78 Div's operations west of Termoli while for the moment, 8 Ind Div would be held back in the area of Barletta. 4 Armd Bde would provide the tank support for the Corps and be concentrated



between Lucera and S. Severo. The Army Commander apparently still intended to employ the "seaborne hook" for the Special Service Brigade was assigned to 5 Corps and earmarked for this role. At the same time, 5 Div would pass from under the command of 5 Corps to that of 13 Corps and would be brought forward from its firm-base position to a concentration area north of the "Vulturara road" (presumably Route 17). 1 Cdn Inf Div would continue on its present axis while the Corps' armoured component would still be 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde based on Lucera. 1 Airborne Div would be held in reserve under the command of No. 2 District. (W.D., Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 8 Oct 43.) It will be observed that the Eighth Army was still thin on the ground for the task of forcing back the increased resistance which was anticipated. However, the arrival of another veteran division was expected in the near future. On 1 Oct General Montgomery had cabled to General Freyberg, commanding 2 New Zealand Div, then in the Middle East, as follows: "Delighted to hear your situation and looking forward to arrival of division in Italy." (Ibid., October 1943; Appx "Z", U.493 to Mideast from Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 1 Oct 43.)

83. So much in parenthesis for the larger scene. After the capture of Gambalesa by 3 Cdn Inf Bde the enemy had successfully broken contact. But the operations of the advanced guard were not to be distinguished by the usual rapid motions of pursuit. For administrative purposes the division was still largely road-bound and the enemy continued to shell Route 17 and the Fortore crossing. Brigade Headquarters was heavily shelled during 9 Oct at a time when the acting G.O.C., Brigadier Vokes, and the C.R.A., Brigadier Matthews, were conferring with Brigadier Penhale and these senior officers had a narrow escape. It was clear to the Brigade Commander that before the main road could be safely used the enemy should be pushed back from the high ground on either side of it from which his self-propelled guns were in a position to do considerable execution. (Pangman: op. cit.) While the R. 22e R. was moving forward through the Carlt & York R. in the early morning of 9 Oct it was continuously shelled during its passage across the river and through Gambalesa and several casualties were suffered in the streets. After leaving Gambalesa, the battalion moved southwestward off the road to by-pass three demolished bridges and marched across the high ground to the left. One company was detached to prepare divisions around them (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H Ops Message Log, 9 Oct 43, Serial 2934). During the night the unit was harassed by shellfire and by enemy machine-gun outposts but by morning was established across the Fiumara Sucido one-and-a-half miles north of Riccia. Rations for 10 Oct did not appear until 1800 hrs and then their arrival drew appreciative comments on the stamina of the mules which carried them and the tenacity of their African muleteers who, miraculously, could speak French. "A" Coy was sent forward to cover the junction of the Riccia road and Route 17. (W.D., R. 22e R., 9-10 Oct 43.)

84. In the meantime, Brigadier Penhale had sent the Carlt & York R. forward on the right flank to occupy the dominant hill feature known as Monte Verdone. It was not until late on the morning of 10 Oct, owing to loss of wireless contact, that Brigade Headquarters learned of the success of this movement and the occupation of the objective



without interference by the enemy. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 10 Oct 43.) During the same night (9/10 Oct) the West N.S.R. had been ordered to send out a patrol across country to Riccia with the primary task of establishing the feasibility of a cross-country route. This patrol had approached to within 300 yards of the town and watched the effect of an artillery concentration against enemy gun positions which had forced the German guns to change ground on three different occasions. The patrol returned at 0730 hrs on 10 Oct with a discouraging report of the difficulties of movement in the hills. (W.D., West N.S.R., 9 Oct 43; Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Bde /C/H: Ops Message Log, 10 Oct 43, Serial 3017.) Observing the ground from a West N.S.R. O.P. on the high ground south of Gambalesa, the Divisional and Brigade Commanders decided to hew close to the line of the main axis and send the West N.S.R. forward towards Ielsi through the positions occupied by R. 22e R. In order to protect the right flank and to provide the necessary firm base, Brigadier Penhale decided to leave the Carlt & York R. on Monte Verdone during this movement. (W.D., West N.S.R., 10 Oct 43, and Pangman; op. cit.) The West Novas began to march from their positions south of Gambalesa at about 1330 hrs but so laborious was the movement across country that the battalion got no further than the open ground across the Riccia road. Here Lt.-Col. Bogert decided to bivouac for the night rather than risk pre-mature contact with the enemy in darkness. (Ibid.) Lack of communication again shrouded the progress of the forward troops but in the morning of 11 Oct the Brigade Commander went forward and discovered the situation of the West N.S.R. The advance towards Ielsi was renewed at once and to assist it the R. 22e R. were ordered to pass around the left flank at the West N.S.R. to secure the high ground south and west of Ielsi known as Monte Gildone.

85. The actual objective of the West N.S.R. was the ridge immediately southwest of Ielsi and across the narrow gully through which the Fra Carapello flows northward to the Torrente Tappino. No sooner had this battalion begun to move through the vineyard south of the town than the enemy commenced to shell the area with more than ordinary intensity. As "C" Coy reached the bed of the Fra Carapello the enemy opened up with machine-guns from the crossing and brought down defensive fire which was described as the heaviest German concentration experienced by the Brigade since the Italian campaign began. (W.D., West N.S.R., 11 Oct 43; Prince: op. cit.) The battalion's 22 set and that of 1 Air Landing Light Regt were knocked out by shellfire at this awkward juncture and all communication with Brigade was severed. More serious was the loss of nearly all the mules accompanying the West Novas; and the enemy was not dislodged from the opposite bank of the stream until "A" and "B" Coys had executed a right-flanking attack to enable "C" and "D" Coys to get forward. At this point a heavy mist descended with the result that the battalion lost direction and instead of reaching its objective immediately west of Ielsi and north of Route 17, went forward due west to Monte Gildone where it dug in for the night as soon as the error was recognized. (W.D., West N.S.R., 11 Oct 43.) But from the very circumstances which hampered the West N.S.R., the R. 22e R. derived great assistance. With the enemy engaged by the former and under cover of the mist, it reached



its objectives at the summit of Monte Gildone without incident and during the night sent forward a patrol to the town of Gildone which was found to be unoccupied. (W.D., R. 22e R., 11 Oct 43.)

86. At first light the situation at Ielsi was discovered to be similar to that at Gildone, both towns being clear and the enemy having again broken contact (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 12 Oct 43). The West N.S.R. occupied its original objective astride the main road during the morning and later in the day moved forward to cover Gildone (W.D., West N.S.R., 12 Oct 43). Thus an important stretch of the main axis had been gained swiftly and cheaply in spite of the many hazards of ground encountered and the ever-attendant difficulty of bringing forward supporting arms. Ielsi and Gildone were both built on naturally strong defensive positions on the edge of deep ravines and at switchback bends of this unusually serpentine stretch of Route 17. The enemy had taken his now familiar course of withdrawing northward on a line oblique to the Division's axis. Throughout the advance from the Fortore, "B" Squadron of the Calgaries had been little more than a mobile firm base for 3 Cdn Inf Bde and was never in a position to give close support to the infantry. (W.D., 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 10-11 Oct 43.) The strain on the Engineers, who had to cope with a monotonous succession of craters, blown bridges and belts of Tellermines, is graphically described in the unit narrative of 4 Fd Coy R.C.E. All stretches of the main road and its verges must be swept; by-pass diversions must be constructed around blown bridges, frequently only as a temporary expedient before the arrival of Bailey bridging equipment; and all this work was to be done under the threat and actuality of shellfire which the enemy devoted methodically to the only major roadway through the hills. Frequently the sudden and heavy rains would wash out in one hour the laborious work of days. Small wonder that all the platoons were "out on their feet". (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/ 1 Cdn Inf Div/R.C.E./C/F: Unit History of 4 Fd Coy R.C.E. by Major E.A.N. Prichard.)

#### PROGRESS ON THE LEFT FLANK

87. On the extreme left flank of the Division during the advance on the main axis west of the Fortore, 2 Cdn Inf Bde was in a position to join hands by patrols with the main body and to strike westward from Decorata in an effort to maintain contact with the fast-thinning enemy outpost positions. The country around the Decorata crossroads is open moorland, in the bogs of which lie the sources of streams flowing northward towards the Adriatic and southward into the Mediterranean. The crossroads are situated 826 metres above sea level and are overlooked only by Monte S. Marco to the south and the high group of hills known as Murgia Romitello to the north just west of Castelvetero. Northwards the narrow lateral road runs over the uplands and down the shallow valley of the Fra Sucido through Riccia to Route 17. Southwest of Decorata a similar descent is made to Colle Sannita. Due west of Decorata the even surface of the watershed is broken by the innumerable tributaries of the Torrente Tammarecchia, which eventually joins the Calore River above Benevento. This belt of broken country, in which the towns of Casrelpagano, S. Croce del Sannio, Cercemaggiore and Cercopicola are situated, continues all the way westward to the main Vinchiature -- Benevento road where it meets the flat and well-drained plain of Sepino at the foot of the Matese



mountains. As far as this road the country is stony, un-productive and sparsely wooded.

88. As soon as the P.F.C.L.I. had secured the Decorata crossroads, Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister ordered the L. Edmn R. to move by motor transport from its positions around Baselice to seize the ground northwest of Colle S. Annita, including the village of Castelpagano and the hill to the south of it known as M. Freddo. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 9 Oct 43; W.D., L. Edmn R., 9 Oct 43.) During the same morning the Division ordered a strong P.F.C.L.I. patrol to be sent to Riccia with a view to dislodging the enemy gunners from their positions in that area. Although there is no record of this patrol having joined hands with that of the West N.S.R. sent out the same afternoon, it made definite contact with the enemy less than a mile south of Riccia and killed three before withdrawing. The Edmontons passed through the P.F.C.L.I. and debussed at the road junction just north of Colle to march towards Castelpagano. Their positions were occupied without any other enemy resistance except shelling. Patrols were at once pushed out and the regimental Pioneers set to work on the ubiquitous demolitions, at the same time investigating the road westward to S. Croce. (W.D., L. Edmn R., 9 Oct 43.)

89. In an effort to supply that pressure which the constant struggle to maintain contact had weakened, the brigade had recourse to air support on a greater scale than hitherto. During 9 Oct the D.A.F. were asked to bomb Cercemaggiore but owing to poor visibility Cercemaggiore was mistaken for the target and most of the bombs fell on the latter. Next day, however, 24 Kittyhawks succeeded in finding Cercemaggiore in similar unsatisfactory weather conditions and bombed with much better results. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 9-10 Oct 43.) On the brigade's right flank, the P.F.C.L.I. patrols joined hands with the R. 22e R. after Riccia had been abandoned by the enemy and henceforth patrol contact with the main body of the Division was continuous. The axis of advance of 2 Cdn Inf Bde was beginning to converge on Route 17. On 10 Oct also the L. Edmn R. secured the high ridge across the Torrente Tammarecchia and overlooking the Cercemaggiore -- S. Croce road. It was now the turn of the Seaforth of C. to make a long leap forward from Monte S. Marco to attack S. Croce. Passing through the Edmontons at Castelpagano, the Seaforth experienced various delays in mounting the attack over difficult ground and instead of being in our hands by last light on 11 Oct the town was not actually secured until first light on the following morning. True to form, the enemy had withdrawn shortly before the attack went in, being content with laying down harassing fire on the new occupants. (Ibid.; W.D., Seaforth of C., 11 Oct 43.) The enemy was reported to be holding positions west of S. Croce but during the morning of 12 Oct he withdrew. (Ibid.)

90. Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister, after a long look at the country west of S. Croce, now turned his attention to Cercemaggiore and the high ground in front of it. The D.A.F. were again asked to bomb this village and also enemy positions on Monte Saraceno a considerable mountain (1086 metres) overlooking it from the east. The Edmontons,



who had been shivering on the high ridge northwest of Castelpagano during 11 Oct, were sent in with "C" Sqn of the Calgarys to take Monte Saraceno, and after making a wide sweep to the north forced the enemy to evacuate under the mere threat of this movement without the supporting tanks having been able to find a target. Monte Saraceno was even more inhospitable than the battalion's previous position; but although one of its patrols reported Cerce - maggiore clear it was the P.P.C.L.I. who were ordered to push through to occupy the village and exploit towards Route 17. Cercemaggiore was taken without interference from German infantry but shelling was heavy and vexatious once the P.P.C.L.I. had occupied it. The attempt to make further contact with the R. 22e R. between Gildone and Vinciatiuro was frustrated by a strong German patrol covering the main road. To deal with this opposition the P.P.C.L.I. detached a company with 3-inch mortars which succeeded in capturing two prisoners. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 12-13 Oct; Hist Sec file Italy 1943/2 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D: Account by Lt.-Col. C.B. Ware.) These proved to be from 1 Bn/67 Pz Gr Regt of 26 Pz Div; our Intelligence staffs thus learned that on the left flank at least the Division had worked its way through 29 Pz Gr Div and that 26 Pz Div had its left flank covering the nexus of roadways at Vinciatiuro. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, October 1943: Appx 8, Intelligence Report and Sitrep, 13 Oct 43.) Just before midnight of 12 Oct the Divisional Commander ordered the Brigade to proceed at once to the capture of Vinciatiuro (Ibid., 12 Oct 43.)

#### THE CAPTURE OF CAMPOBASSO

91. The decision to move 1 Cdn Inf Bde forward through 3 Cdn Inf Bde to mount the final attack towards Campobasso was taken by Brigadier Vokes on 11 Oct. Initially the brigade was to move forward to its assembly area at 0500 hrs on the following day, but heavy rain during the day and night compelled a postponement until noon on 12 Oct. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 11 Oct 43; Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H: Ops Message Log, 12 Oct 43, Serial 3235.) The assembly area was to be the ground bordering Route 17 immediately east of the Riccia road (Ibid.). At this point everything conspired to make the climax of a fortnight's arduous marching and fighting in the mountains at once swift and bloodless. On 10 Oct, 15 Inf Bde of 5 (Brit) Div had passed through 4 Cdn Recce Regt at Colletorto bound for Bonefro, while patrols from the reconnaissance regiment moved on its left flank towards the Torrente Cigno, another of the many tributaries of the Fortore. By 12 Oct the Green Howards had cleared the high ground west of Bonefro and 4 Cdn Recce Regt had outflanked S. Elia to the north; while 78 Div patrols which had been probing south-westward from Larino for the previous three days paved the way for the occupation of Casacalenda on the most difficult and precipitous stretch of the Ternoli - Campobasso road. Although 5 Corps had been unable to make appreciable progress westward from Ternoli along the coast -- Petacciato was not taken until 19 Oct -- its patrols south-westward undoubtedly enabled 1 Cdn Inf Div to operate boldly forward into the Biferno -- Matese salient. The situation on the left flank was not nearly so secure, although the possibility of the enemy being able to manoeuvre on the



huge, abrupt and barren eastern flank of the Matese massif was slight. At all events, the combat team of 180 Regt. of 45 (U.S.) Div which on 11 Oct appeared to be moving north from Morcone was content with patrol action only north of that point, and Division was so informed on the following day. Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister told the liaison officer from Division that he felt "out on a limb". (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H: Ops Message Log, 11-12 Oct, Serials 3163, 3224.)

92. Although 1 Cdn Inf Bde began its move from behind the Fortore at noon on 12 Oct, the approach march towards Campobasso did not begin until one minute past midnight. After an extremely tiring march through Ielsi and Gildone, Lt.-Col. Johnston halted the 48 Highrs at the point where the direct route across country to Campobasso leaves Route 17. At this point there was no information about enemy positions and it was not considered advisable to proceed further during darkness. (W.D., 48 Highrs, 13 Oct.) A similar halt was made by the R.C.R. behind the 48 Highrs at Gildone and the Hast & P.E.R. bringing up the rear. In support of the Brigade was "B" Sqn of 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, still hoping for a tank shoot. (Ibid., W.D., R.C.R., 12-13 Oct 43; W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 12-13 Oct.)

93. Ahead of the brigade was the broken country of the Gildone -- Campobasso -- Vinchiatturo triangle, the Gildone -- Campobasso side of which was the road to its immediate objective. As noted above, Campobasso stood on a long saddle which constituted the watershed between the Fortore and Biferno river systems. Campobasso was the capital of the province of the same name, a province which comprised the greater part of the district known as the Molise. It had a population of about 17,000 people (Naval Intelligence Division Handbook -- Italy, Vol III), and consisted of an old town clustering about the rock on which stood the 13th-century citadel, and a new town, largely built in the Fascist era, which contained the principal municipal and provincial administrative buildings, the banks, the railway station and the provincial prison. About two miles south of Campobasso, and connected with it by two roads, one on either side of the saddle, was the picturesque village of Ferrazzano, standing on a high pinnacle (872 metres) at least 600 feet above the plain to the east of Campobasso and dominating the approaches to the town. Ferrazzano was an unlikely site for a modern community and had all the unreal appearance of the fairy castles of conventional illustration. Frequently at this season of the year it was completely hidden by the clouds. At first sight this must have appeared a formidable defensive position, especially had the enemy chosen to hold it as part of an outpost line in front of the Biferno. Quite apart from Ferrazzano, due west of Campobasso was the impressive mass of Monte Vairano (996 metres); and south of Ferrazzano between it and Route 17 was the even higher La Rocca (1000 metres). Between M. Vairano and La Rocca the extraordinarily circuitous main road (Route 87) ran from Campobasso down to Vinchiatturo.

94. Brigadier Graham's plan was to send the 48 Highrs forward along the road to Campobasso to occupy the junction two miles from the town where a side road leads off north-eastward to Toro. From here the R.C.R. would be passed through into Campobasso itself while the Hastings were to be



held in reserve and used as the situation required. (W.D., 48 Highrs, 13 Oct 43; Renison, op. cit.). At 0630 hrs the 48th started forward with two companies astride the road and by 1100 hrs had established themselves at the road junction without sight of the enemy. Here they were shelled and mortared and shortly afterwards counter-attacked by a small team of infantry and two tanks (S.F. guns?). This counter-attack, according to the 48th, was beaten off but seems to have caused a certain amount of anxiety to the O.C., R.C.R., who on his way forward was forced into cover behind a farmhouse, and to the Hast & P.E.R. who placed themselves in an all-round defensive position as a result of hearing exaggerated stories of the strength of the attack. (Spry and Tweedsmuir: op. cit.). The two following battalions were shelled on their way up the road. In the confusion the Second-in-Command of the Hast & P.E.R., Major A.A. Kennedy, who was acting as liaison officer between his battalion and the R.C.R. was misdirected to the command post of the latter and together with an R.C.R. wireless operator walked into the 48th area, where they were involved in the counter-attack and disappeared. For some days rumours about the discovery of Major Kennedy's body continued to circulate but it was subsequently established that he had been taken prisoner.\* During this general movement forward, "D" Coy of the 48 Highrs had been sent up into Ferrazzano and after a brief fire fight secured this dominant position. (Ibid.; W.D., 48 Highrs, 13 Oct.)

95. The Brigade plan provided for the immediate passage of the R.C.R. through the line established by the 48 Highrs at last light, but Lt.-Col. Spry had no desire to be in a strange and possibly hostile town after dark and obtained permission from the Brigade Commander to postpone zero hour until 0530 hrs on 14 Oct. This development was confirmed at an "O" Group at 2200 hrs on the 13th at which Lt.-Col. Lord Tweedsmuir was ordered to take the Hast & P.E.R. up to Ferrazzano and from there exploit forward to the high ground immediately southwest of Campobasso overlooking the road to Vinchiatturo. Coincidental with the attack of the R.C.R., the Hastings were to stage a demonstration of fire and movement from the south to divert the enemy's attention from the main attack. Early on the following morning this plan was put into effect and the R.C.R., with a medium battery, a field regiment and the Air Landing Light Regiment in support, entered Campobasso in an attack which was described by the commanding officer as "absolutely bloodless". All entrances to the town were secured and the castle occupied while the artillery successfully harassed the withdrawal of the few Germans who had remained in Campobasso to the last. (W.D., R.C.R., 14 Oct 43; Spry, Tweedsmuir and Renison, op. cit.).

\* Major Kennedy actually made his escape from the truck in which he was being carried towards ROME many miles behind the German lines and after 18 days' wandering in the hills with occasional assistance from Italian peasants succeeded in crossing over into American positions near VENAFRO. He subsequently commanded the Hast & P.E.R. in the Adriatic sector.



Meanwhile the Hast & P.E.R. had moved across the saddle northwest at Campobasso and had engaged an enemy machine-gun post which succeeded in wounding four men before being dislodged. At 0530 hours "D" Company staged its diversionary attack to coincide with the R.C.R. attack (W.D. Hast & P.E.R., 14 Oct 43).

#### THE CAPTURE OF VINCHIATURO

96. On the Division's left flank, in the meantime, Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister had been developing his plan to capture Vinchiaturo. Early in the morning of 13 Oct he and his battalion commanders surveyed the ground in front of them from the western edge of Cercemaggiore. A report had just come in from the Edmontons that Cercepiccola was clear of enemy. From the O.P. enemy guns on railway mountings were observed on the flat and open plain behind Vinchiaturo, but subsequent attempts to locate these from the air were unsuccessful. (W.D. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Oct 43). The Brigade Commander ordered a concentration preparatory to the attack on Vinchiaturo and the Seaforth were brought by march route from S. Croce northwards to Cercemaggiore during the day. (W.D. Seaforth of C, 13 Oct 43). All this time Cercemaggiore and Route 17 to the north were under fairly heavy shellfire. Although at first glance the ground to be traversed was easier than that in front of Campobasso, sloping as it did downwards and westwards towards Vinchiaturo, the possibility of a strong enemy defence of such a vital centre of communications was not to be discarded. Whereas 29 Pz Gr Div was withdrawing northwards on Campobasso, the formation covering Vinchiaturo and the entrance to the valley leading westwards towards Isernia was now clearly identified as 26 Pz Div, a formation of high quality and presumably well equipped with tanks.

97. While the P.F.C.I.I. and L. Edmn R. patrols were out endeavouring to contact the enemy, 3 Fd Coy R.C.E. was sweeping Route 17 west of its junction with the side road to Cercemaggiore. By evening one of its platoons had reached the neighbourhood of the crossroads a mile and a half east of Vinchiaturo known as the Quadrivio di Monteverde, where it came under heavy artillery fire and withdrew. At the same time a fighting patrol from the Edmontons confirmed the report that Cercepiccola was clear. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Oct; W.D., Seaforth of C., 13 Oct.) The Edmontons accordingly made preparations to occupy the saddle overlooking the road between S. Giuliano and the Monteverde crossroads. (W.D., L. Edmn R., 13 Oct.)

98. Vinchiaturo lay on a forward slope overlooking the plain of Campochiaro at the foot of the Matese range. This plain is but a part of the long and narrow valley containing Boiano and Cantalupo through which Route 17 and the railway line run westward towards Isernia. In this plain between Vinchiaturo and Boiano the headwaters of the Biferno River collect from the numerous mountain streams and springs running down the northern slope of the Matese. The main stream appears abruptly where Boiano shelters beneath the steep face of the mountains and runs nearly eastward until it enters its narrow valley below Colle d'Anchise and runs thence in a general north-easterly direction between narrow banks and steep hill-sides towards the sea.



At Vinchiature Route 17 is crossed by Route 87 which spans the greater part of the peninsula from Termoli to Capua. About two miles south of the town is a railway junction where the line to Isernia joins the line from Termoli to Benevento. At the Monteverde crossroads Route 17 is crossed by a secondary road leaving Route 87 at Baranello station and joining it again at S. Giuliano. The effect of this road system upon the map is that of an elongated cross-bow of which this secondary road is the string, Route 17 the stock and Route 87 the bow. The Monte Verde crossroads besides being overlooked by two rocky hillsides nearby is dominated tactically by the 1000 metre summit of La Rocca. Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister appreciated that securing this latter feature was an essential preliminary to taking the crossroads. This task was entrusted to the P.P.C.L.I., while the L. Edmn R. was to seize the high ground between the S. Giuliano road and Vinchiature, overlooking the latter from the south. Emphasis was to be placed initially on the P.P.C.L.I. attack and artillery support would be increased by the allocation of 3 Fd Regt which was brought forward from the Gildone area. The P.P.C.L.I. concentrated in the woods north of Route 17 near its junction with the Cercemaggiore road and at 0830 hrs on 14 Oct commenced the attack on La Rocca. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 13-14 Oct and W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 13-14 Oct.) It was Brigadier Vokes' intention to secure Vinchiature by noon and he had so informed 13 Corps. (Hist Soc file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, Ops Message Log, 13 Oct 43, Serial 3471).

99. The P.P.C.L.I., in addition to the artillery support of 3 Fd Regt R.C.A. and 165 Fd Regt R.A., had under command a platoon of 4.2 mortars and a platoon of medium machine-guns from the Sask L.I. (W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 14 Oct 43). The precise allocation of "C" Squadron of the Calgarys between the P.P.C.L.I. and the L. Edmn R. is not clear owing to the destruction of original copies of the relevant war diaries, but it would appear that both battalions had tanks in support (Hoffmeister and Ware, op. cit.; W.D., L. Edmn R., 14 Oct 43). Although the two field regiments were in a position to support either or both of the battalions, priority was given to the P.P.C.L.I. attack and La Rocca was heavily shelled before the Patricias went in. Communication by the latter with brigade was non-existent because the battalion's 22 set was on the back of a mule and in transit during the attack. Nevertheless, it was estimated that its forward elements must have crossed Route 17 by 0920 hours. Supported by the impressive fire power of artillery, tanks and mortars, the Patricias scaled La Rocca and consolidated their positions thereon by 1245 hours. No direct enemy opposition had been met but intense artillery fire was brought down upon the battalion as soon as it had achieved its objective. When this had been done the O.C. "C" Company detailed a platoon to approach towards the Monteverde crossroads (W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 14 Oct 43). Meanwhile, the Edmontons had pressed forward and reached the ridge between Cercepiccola and the S. Giuliano road, their supporting tanks drawing most of the enemy's artillery fire. The enemy, indeed, appeared to be concentrating on Route 17 east of the crossroads and continuous searching of this area by his guns succeeded in frustrating a brigade "O" Group called for 1600 hours and knocking out one of the Canadian tanks. In moving forward to hold the "O" Group, the Brigade Commander and the officer commanding the Brigade Support



Group almost collided with a German O.P. and observed an enemy tank near the main road. These were quickly withdrawn in the direction of Vinciatiuro before fire could be brought down upon them (W.D., 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 14 Oct 43).

100. At 0200 hours in the early morning of 15 Oct "C" Company of the P.F.C.L.I. attacked towards the crossroads, meeting no enemy but hearing the unmistakable sound of trucks and motorcycles withdrawing westwards towards Vinciatiuro. Two platoons were despatched in this direction to endeavour to achieve contact, one of them reaching the outskirts of the town, where it discovered an enemy demolition and covering party which had just completed cratering the road. This party was accompanied by tanks which moved forward to engage the platoon and caused it to withdraw (W.D., P.F.C.L.I., 14 - 15 Oct 43).

101. Activity of the enemy's tanks and demolition parties, combined with the persistent shelling of Route 17 east of the crossroads, which frustrated attempts of 3 Fd Coy R.C.E. to repair the crater three miles behind it, postponed the capture of Vinciatiuro until later in the morning of 15 Oct. As soon as the Edmontons found S. Giuliano clear of the enemy, they pressed forward towards the 711-metre hill southeast of Vinciatiuro, which commanded the important junction of the Isernia and Benevento roads. This was occupied by 1400 hours and, with typical resourcefulness in this line of endeavour, the battalion's patrols were sent far forward to investigate the villages of Guardiaregia and Campochiaro, which hugged the flank of the Matese Mountains across the intervening plain. During the morning the Seaforth of C. had concentrated immediately east of the Monteverde crossroads and had despatched a patrol from its scout and sniper platoon to investigate Vinciatiuro. When this patrol returned and reported the town clear Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister ordered the battalion to swing north-westward, cut the Campobasso road and seize the ridge between Baranello Station and the village of Baranello itself, at the same time detaching a force to secure Vinciatiuro. This movement was to have tank support and was to be carefully checked against report lines. In the event no enemy were encountered, but it was a fairly trying march over difficult ground and the objective was not reached until 1800 hours. Vinciatiuro was occupied without incident, except for the normal accompaniment of enemy harassing fire. An attempt by a Seaforth patrol to get into Baranello after dark, however, encountered a series of alert German machine-gun posts (W.D., Seaforth of C., 15 Oct 43).

102. The capture or rather the circumvention of Vinciatiuro was achieved by the occupation of ground vital to the enemy's defensive front, coupled with the liberal use of our own superior strength in artillery and close-support aircraft (Hoffmeister, *op. cit.*). On 14 Oct, 2 Cdn Inf Bde had particularly requested the divisional artillery to provide for effective fire on Vinciatiuro and the road junction immediately south of it to coincide with its own operations. This form of "interdiction" immediately in the enemy's rear undoubtedly hastened his departure when pressed from the east and from the south (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/E, Ops Message Log, 14 Oct 43, serial 3572). At the same time, the railway guns, which had been observed from the brigade O.P. on 13 Oct, were causing anxiety, and a request was made for Tactical Reconnaissance aircraft to



search for their mountings in the region of Boiano (ibid., serial 3581). On 15 Oct these guns had been identified as being of 21-cm calibre\* and Air Support Control was asked to cut Route 17 with medium bombers 20,000 yards west of Vinciatiuro (ibid., serial 3622). This was too heavy a commitment for Air Support Control which replied that the use of medium bombers was not practical and undertook to attack the offending guns with fighter-bombers (Ibid., Serial 3623).

#### CONSOLIDATION AND REGROUPING OF 1 CDN INF DIV

103. At 0800 hrs on 14 Oct, the G.S.O.I, Lt.-Col. Kitching held a conference of heads of supporting arms and services to communicate the concentration areas to be occupied by 1 Cdn Inf Div when the line Campobasso-Vinciatiuro was secure. It will be noted that fighting was still in progress for this line, but authority for re-organizing on reaching it had already been communicated by 13 Corps' Operation Order No 5 of 9 Oct (W.D. H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, October 1943, Appx 53). At this conference brigade areas were allotted as follows. 1 Cdn Inf Bde was to occupy a perimeter surrounding Campobasso and including the road junction on Route 87 from which the roads to Petrella and Montagano branch northward from the main highway. These roads provide the only crossing over the Biferno river between Casacalenda and Campobasso, and the former after crossing the river becomes the main lateral road to the Adriatic between the Biferno and the Trigno. The East & P.E.R. were to cover Route 87 north of Campobasso, the R.C.R. the road across the Biferno between Campobasso and Castropignano, and the 48 Highrs to remain behind Campobasso itself. 2 Cdn Inf Bde was to consolidate around Vinciatiuro with the Seaforth astride the road to Baranello, the Edmontons covering the southern approaches to Vinciatiuro, and the Patricias behind the town in the neighbourhood of Monteverde cross-roads. 3 Cdn Inf Bde would continue to cover Gildone, with 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt on the road between Gildone and Campobasso. 4 Cdn Recce Regt was to concentrate as a regiment near S. Giuliano on the southern border of the 2 Cdn Inf Bde area. (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/I - Notes on G.S.O. I's Conference).

104. These dispositions were further elaborated by Brigadier Vokes at 0900 hrs on the following morning. After passing on the congratulations of the Corps Commander on taking Campobasso one day ahead of schedule, and announcing that General Simonds would return to his command on that day, he communicated to brigades the areas of standing patrols, giving 1 Cdn Inf Bde patrols of platoon strength at Montagano, S. Stefano, Oratino and Busso, and 2 Cdn Inf Bde patrols of the same strength at Baranello, Colle d'Anchise and Guardiaregia. In the event, the majority of these localities had to be fought for and the symmetry of the picture developed during these conferences was distorted

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\* Counter Battery Intelligence later concluded that these guns were Italian equipment.



by the changing tactical situation. (Ibid., Notes on G.O.C's Conference, 15 Oct 43, and W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, Appx 11, 16 Oct 43 - Trace of Patrols and Brigade Areas).

105. At the conference of 15 Oct great emphasis was laid upon the necessity of adopting formal defensive measures during the consolidation period. Nevertheless both 1 Cdn Inf Bde and 3 Cdn Inf Bde were given ambitious long-range patrol tasks. The former was to provide a fighting patrol of company strength, to be supplied by its own train of 24 mules, which would cross the head waters of the Biferno and the Trigno rivers and penetrate as far north-west as the environs of Carovilli returning by way of Bagnoli and Castropignano. This task was assigned by Brigadier Graham to the 48 Highrs to be put in hand between 18 and 22 Oct, but was abandoned owing to the unfavourable situation which had developed by that time (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, October 1943, Appx 10: 16 Oct 43). At the same time 3 Cdn Inf Bde was to make a reconnaissance in force along the main axis towards Isernia. This would be undertaken by an entire infantry battalion together with a squadron of tanks, one battery from the Air Landing Light Regiment, two platoons of 20-mm Oerlikons and one platoon of Vickers from the Sask L.I., together with a platoon of sappers and all the pioneer platoons of the brigade. This force was to establish patrol bases at Boiano and Cantalupo and to operate independently of the division towards Isernia. This task was allotted by the Brigade Commander to the Carlt & York R. and, as will be seen later, was undertaken in a modified form (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/I: Notes on G.O.C's Conference, 15 Oct 43; and Italy/1943/3 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D: Account by Brigadier T.G. Gibson).

106. These plans were based upon the assumption that the enemy would continue his withdrawal across the Biferno and Trigno rivers and were designed to permit that period of re-organization of the main body of the division which was so necessary for administration after the long advance. A pause of eight to ten days was provided for. In conformity with this estimate of the tactical situation H.Q. 13 Corps decided to develop Campobasso as a Forward Maintenance Centre and, on 17 Oct, 102 F.M.C. began to move into the town (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/I: Notes from G.O.C's Conference, 17 Oct 43). By this time it had become clear that neither 29 Pz Gren Div nor 26 Pz Div had any intention of withdrawing even behind the Biferno river until they had received a strong blow. Campobasso was under intermittent but steady shellfire day and night. To push the enemy guns back out of range of the Campobasso area therefore became the chief preoccupation of 1 Cdn Inf Div. Vinchiatturo, as a communications centre even more important than Campobasso, was in similar plight and until German outposts were withdrawn behind the Biferno both towns were within range of mortars as well as artillery.

107. The general situation from sea to sea on the Italian front, of which the difficulties confronting 1 Cdn Inf Div were a minor reflection, indicated a growing enemy disposition to stand and fight. From the Adriatic coast to the Matese mountains the Eighth Army was confronted by the four divisions of 76 Panzer Corps: 16 Pz Div, 1 Para Div, 29 Pz Gren Div and 26 Pz Div. The boundary between Eighth Army and Fifth Army, which left Route 17 to Isernia inclusive to



the former, apparently conformed to the boundary between 76 Pz Corps and 14 Pz Corps of the German Tenth Army. The Allied Fifth Army had gained initial successes in its attack across the Volturno river which had begun on 13 Oct; but enemy resistance was stubborn. Under the heading "The Situation in Eighth Army on Reaching the Termoli-Vinchiatturo Line", Field-Marshal Montgomery has given the following description of the administrative difficulties which had brought his Army's advance to a halt in front of the Trigno river in the coastal sector and astride the Biferno river in the mountains:

Having secured the Foggia airfields, Eighth Army was given the task of advancing to the "Rome Line", which was the name given to the lateral road Pescara-Avezzano-Rome. There were two major factors confronting me in planning the development of my operation: administrative considerations and the weather.

I have explained already that our advance from Reggio was continually delayed by maintenance difficulties. Administration had not been able to keep pace with operational planning and this was now to have serious consequences, for the winter weather was beginning. Obviously our difficulties were going to be greatly increased when winter conditions set in, because the "leg" of Italy is essentially ideal defensive country and when climatic conditions operated in the enemy's favour, it might become almost impregnable. The Adriatic winter is severe; seaborne operations would be uncertain; on land progress would become impossible off the main roads owing to snow and mud; mountain torrents subject to violent fluctuations would create great bridging difficulties and flying would be constantly restricted by low cloud and mist.

Rome was the immediate Allied objective and it was increasingly certain that unless we could secure the city very rapidly, weather would undoubtedly impose long delays on our plans. At the same time, our difficulties were immeasurably increased by a change in the enemy's conduct of the campaign, for it became apparent from his resistance at Salerno, Vinchiatturo and Termoli that his withdrawal policy had been superseded. The Allied advance along the whole front was now being solidly contested and reports showed that the German forces in Italy were being reinforced and had reached a total of some twenty-four divisions.

(Montgomery, El Alamein to the River Sangro, pp. 136-7).



108. Simultaneously with the return of General Simonds to active command of 1 Cdn Inf Div certain changes in personnel became effective. Brigadier Penhale was succeeded in the command of 3 Cdn Inf Bde by Brigadier T.G. Gibson and returned to England to become B.G.S. at C.M.H.Q. In a second conference on 17 Oct the G.O.C. announced that his G.S.O. I, Lt.-Col. Kitching, and the acting commander of 2 Cdn Inf Bde, Lt.-Col. Hoffmeister, had been appointed to command brigades in 5 Cdn Armd Div and 3 Cdn Inf Div respectively.\* Lt.-Col. Kitching was succeeded as G.S.O. I by Lt.-Col. C.M. Harding, R.C.A. On 17 Oct, 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt was relieved in support of the division by 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt, one squadron of which had accompanied 15 (Brit) Inf Bde during its advance on Bonefro (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 17 Oct 43). At the conference on this day the G.O.C. was at pains to deny the current rumour that the Canadian force was to be withdrawn from Italy to rejoin First Cdn Army in the United Kingdom (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 17 Oct 43).

#### OPERATIONS ON THE RIGHT BANK OF THE BIFERNO RIVER

109. In order to give an intelligible account of the course of operations between the line of Route 87 (Campobasso-Vinchiatturo) and the Biferno River, it is necessary here to give some description of the intervening country. North-west of Campobasso, as far north as the division's boundary with 5 Div along the road to Montagano, the country consisted of poor cultivation and scattered woodlands on low rolling hills, descending gradually to the right bank of the river. From Oratino south, the countryside becomes more rugged, the hills steeper and dissected by innumerable small tributaries of the Biferno. The banks of the river between Castropignano and Colle d'Anchise are steep and, in places, precipitous; and there are no bridges between the Castropignano road and Route 17 at Boiano.

110. On the right bank, the whole prospect is dominated by M. Vairano, almost 1,000 metres in height. Along the southern flank of this mountain a secondary road runs in a westerly direction from Route 87 to the village of Busso, which stands on a plateau overlooking the river. Due south of Busso is the village of Baranello, also connected with Route 87 by a secondary road running west, which connects it intermediately with Baranello Station on the extraordinarily tortuous stretch of the Termoli-Naples railway which joins Campobasso and Vinchiatturo. Between

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\* Subsequently Brigadier Hoffmeister was confirmed in the command of 2 Cdn Inf Bde on the appointment of Brigadier Vokes to command 1 Cdn Inf Div in succession to Major-General Simonds, and his appointment in 3 Cdn Inf Div did not take effect.



Busso and Baranello runs the deep ravine of a torrent, and a similar obstacle divides the former from Oratino. The only lateral connection between these three villages is a very indifferent sheep track. Oratino is perched high above the gorge of the Biferno, facing the cliffs on which stand Castropignano, Roccaspromonte and Casalciprano; all four villages overlook the stone bridge across the river which before its destruction by the Germans carried the road from Campobasso northwards to Trivento and Bagnoli on the River Trigno and provided an important link between the interior and the Adriatic coast. Between Oratino and Montagano in the North were the villages of S. Stefano and Ripalimosano.

111. South of Baranello the ground rises some 200 metres to a ridge immediately opposite Colle d'Anchise on the left bank, and thence descends more gradually to the plain in which lies Route 17. Colle d'Anchise stands on the left bank of the river on a height of great natural defensive strength. This village has no communications eastward, and in order to reach Baranello, it is necessary to take the road west from Colle d'Anchise to Boiano, thence eastward to Route 87 and Vinchiaturro. To the north of Colle d'Anchise, on the indifferent lateral road between Boiano and Castropignano, is the village of Spinete. Westward again of this line runs a much better lateral road connecting Cantalupo on Route 17, Frosolone and Molise and joining the Campobasso-Bagnoli axis at Torella.

112. The dominant situation of the Matese has already been mentioned. This ridge of mountains, 6,000 feet high, is the main watershed of the peninsula in this region and rises like a wall overlooking Route 17 from the south between Vinchiaturro and Isernia. Around its western tip and along its southern flank runs the considerable stream of the Volturno through a flat and fertile valley. On its northern flank the valley at its base is narrower, contracting to a defile between Cantalupo and Isernia. At Boiano, huddled close against the almost vertical mountain wall, the infant Biferno rises, spring and torrent fed, and runs in a deep channel eastward, over the plain turning north into the gorge below Colle d'Anchise, and running thence perennially swift and deep until it widens into its broad flood basin in the Adriatic coastal plain. Southeast of Boiano the plain is overlooked by the picturesque villages of S. Polo, Campochiaro and Guardiaregia. The Matese itself, a complete military obstacle, is traversed by only a few precarious paths. In a fold of its peaks lies a valley, itself some 4,000 feet above sea level, containing the Lago di Matese and the villages of Letino and Gallo. The clearing of this region was the responsibility of 2 U.S. Corps.

113. Although clearing the German outpost positions on the right bank of the Biferno was by no means a formidable military operation, it provided a nice problem in utilizing ground and artillery resources, and was complicated by the fact that the troops to be employed were officially resting and that the enemy's main target - Campobasso - was to be developed forthwith as an administrative and recreational centre. The following remarks by the Brigade Major of 1 Cdn Inf Bde illustrate the point of view of the troops most closely concerned with the protection of the town:-



During the next few days active patrolling was carried out whereby it was established that we were still in close contact with the enemy, who occupied BUSSO, ORATINO, SAN STEFANO and actively patrolled the ground between. The enemy guns also came into their own during this period and for the first time in Italy we were heavily pounded by enemy artillery. Previously we had been fired at by wandering batteries and mortars but now that we were settled on well marked features the enemy was able to concentrate his artillery and hammer us unmercifully. Also for the first time our own counter battery arrangements came into evidence and a duel between the guns ensued in which, unfortunately, the infantry was always the loser.

Great plans had been made for CAMPOBASSO and it was taken over from the brigade as fast as we had taken it from the Hun. The plan was to make it a rest centre, a Corps administrative base and a sort of general honey-pot for all troops in the area. On the second day of its occupation - although still under shell fire, the RCR mounted a ceremonial guard in the town square. The Town Major read a proclamation and the 48 Highrs Pipe Band played. It was a nice gesture but rather wasted as the population very sensibly remained deep in their cellars. Things were well organized for the occupation. Too well organized, and without seeming to realize that it was the front line, large dumps of ammunition and stores were created in the town.

(Renison, op. cit.).

114. On the division's right flank covering Campobasso, the most important O.P. was the castle perched high above the town itself on a pinnacle of rock. This was occupied first of all by the R.C.R. and became a target for enemy gunners, who, as usual, had carefully registered the chief points of vantage. From the castle an admirable view of S. Stefano, Oratino and Busso was obtained, although the actual line of the river was obscured by the ridge on which these villages sat. By the same token, the enemy stationed there commanded an excellent prospect of our forward positions and of Campobasso itself. At two points in particular, that of Colle d'Oratino (803 metres) and M. Vairano (996 metres) enemy F.O.s were particularly well situated. Further south towards the left flank, it should be noted that the enemy had observation from the Busso road and from Busso itself over Baranello and the road connecting it with Route 87. Baranello, in turn, was overlooked by the feature known as Point 763, about one mile to the south, and also by Colle d'Anchise.

115. Immediately after the capture of Campobasso and Vinchiatturo the implications of this enemy outpost line became clear. In the effort to implement the orders received



on 15 Oct to establish standing patrols in the villages, both 1 and 2 Cdn Inf Bdes encountered opposition. The Hast & P.E.R. did succeed in placing a company in Montagano, which was at once subjected to heavy shell and mortar fire. But the attempt to send a section of carriers to S. Stefano on 15 Oct met strong resistance. S. Stefano itself was necessary to the retention of Oratino, to the control of the main crossing over the Biferno, and, in short, to the very existence of the enemy outpost line. On the following day a further section of carriers, two detachments of 3-inch mortars and a platoon of "C" Coy had little better success but managed to hold ground overlooking the village. On 17 Oct, this detachment was reinforced by an additional platoon but an attempt to enter S. Stefano was ambushed, a platoon commander and four of his men being killed. It was soon clear that the enemy was reinforcing the S. Stefano garrison from Oratino, and a further attempt to outflank the village on the same day was itself enveloped by a counter-attack, causing a withdrawal of the Hast & P.E.R. to positions two miles to the east. The situation here was observed on 18 Oct by both Generals Simonds and Dempsey, and on 19 Oct Brigadier Graham gave orders to Lt.-Col. Lord Tweedsmuir to mount a two-company attack which would be closely co-ordinated with an R.C.R. operation against Busso and Oratino. (W.D. Hast & P.E.R., 15-19 Oct 43).

116. The R.C.R., after the occupation of Campobasso, had become responsible for the western and south-western sectors of the perimeter and the two exits in those directions, namely, the Oratino and Vinchiatturo roads. Campobasso was not healthy, and although its impressive buildings provided adequate shelter, the regiment sustained a number of casualties from shells. Extensive patrolling was undertaken, and contact with the enemy, although not continuous, was sometimes surprisingly close. For instance, on 17 Oct an enemy C.P. was reported less than a mile out of town in a house on the Oratino road, and was dealt with faithfully by the medium guns (W.D. R.C.R., 17 Oct 43). The next day, as we have seen, after the visit of the Corps and Divisional Commanders, a brigade operation against Busso, Oratino and S. Stefano was undertaken and the 48 Highrs were ordered to assume responsibility for the town and whatever ceremonial guards were required. This responsibility was less onerous than might have been expected, because very early in the occupation proceedings 1 Cdn F.S. Sec and the representatives of Amgot had commenced work on their special tasks in relation to the civilian population.

117. During the afternoon and evening of 18 Oct, R.C.R. patrols were active probing enemy positions prior to the attack on Busso, which was to go in at first light on 20 Oct, and to be followed, immediately success was reported, by a similar attack on Oratino. Since the direct approaches towards the Biferno were obviously held and had provoked hostile action against the battalion patrols barely further forward than the outskirts of Campobasso, it was clear that M. Vairano and the road leading to Busso along its southern flank were the keys to Busso itself. As a preliminary, a platoon of "B" Company was to secure a pink house in the woods on the southern slope of the ridge which was known to be an enemy C.P. and which had caused considerable trouble



to the Seaforth during the operations against Baranello. (W.D. R.C.R., 18 Oct 43; Murdoch, op.cit.).

118. At 0830 hrs on 19 Oct "B" Company moved out towards M. Vairano, but the attack on the O.P. was delayed by the thick woods which clothed the southern exposure of the mountain, and when it was reached the pink house proved to be empty.\* "B" Company moved cautiously across this difficult ground and not until 1700 hrs was it in position to attack Busso. The attack was entirely successful and was regarded as a model of the employment of battle drill. Two platoons were moved into position as fire and cut-off platoons, while a third was detailed to clear the town. After a five-minute artillery concentration from 1 Fd Regt, R.C.H.A. the attack went in, the town was cleared and eleven Germans were taken prisoner, along with wireless and other equipment of the former O.P. While Lt.-Col. Spry was forward with "B" Company, the O.C. "D" Company was making his reconnaissance from the castle at Campobasso for the attack on Oratino (W.D. R.C.R., 19 Oct 43; and Spry, op.cit.). This was timed for first light on the morning of 20 Oct, to be roughly simultaneous with that of the Hast & P.E.R. against S. Stefano. The latter, on account of previous disappointments, was a formidable affair, consisting of "B" and "D" Companies, two Bofors anti-aircraft guns, a section of 4.2" mortars and four Vickers machine-guns, the supporting weapons being placed on the left flank of the approach to the village. A troop of "C" Squadron of the Ontarios was also in support and was used to outflank S. Stefano on the right. At 0500 hrs a 10-minute artillery concentration was brought down, and, well covered by smoke, the attack went in without any opposition from the enemy. In the meantime, "D" Company of the R.C.R., unaware of the success on their right, moved cautiously north of the Oratino road and over the ridge to the end of the saddle leading like a drawbridge to the hill on which Oratino stands. Although informed by civilians that the town was empty, the Company Commander, estimating this report at the value which previous experience dictated, waited until Oratino had been shelled and entered it without incident (W.D. Hast & P.E.R., 19/20 Oct 43; W.D. 11 Cdn Armd Tk Regt, 19/20 Oct 43). Thus, after several troublesome days, the enemy outpost line before the Biferno was pushed back across the river from S. Stefano to Baranello.

119. The next day - 21 Oct - was the last on which enemy shells fell in Campobasso. (W.D. A.A. & Q.M.G. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 21 Oct 43). In the meantime, 2 Cdn Inf Bde had been exposed to a similar situation covering the western approaches to Vinchiatturo. It has been seen that the Seaforth of C. succeeded in occupying positions astride the Baranello road and covering Baranello Station on 15 Oct. Nevertheless, patrols ascertained that the enemy was firmly established in Baranello itself and Vinchiatturo was shelled and mortared with, if anything, more persistence

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\* See W.D. Seaforth of C., 18 Oct 43; and Hist Sec file Italy/1943/2 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Account by Capt K.S. Murdoch, in which it is implied that this O.P. was knocked out by Maj S.W. Thomson of the Seaforth who brought anti-tank guns to bear on it during the final attack on Baranello.



than Campobasso. The efforts of patrols of the three battalions were redoubled to ascertain enemy gun and mortar positions, and special arrangements were made with air support control to supply a "Rover" and to intensify air bombardment generally. On 16 Oct, 48 aircraft bombed Boiano. On the following day this bombardment was repeated to the tune of 60 aircraft and extended to cover Colle d'Anchise and Spinete, bombs actually landing on Baranello inadvertently. (W.D. H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 16-17 Oct 43). Meanwhile, on the previous day, the C.C., Seaforth of C. (Lt.-Col. J.D. Forin, recently promoted vice Brigadier Hoffmeister) mounted a company attack against Baranello to be supported by a platoon of Vickers machine-guns, a platoon of 4.2 mortars and a battery of 165 Fd Regt, R.A. This attack was put in at 0500 hours on 17 Oct and "D" Company succeeded in entering the village without difficulty. Owing to serious shortages in No. 18 set batteries, Battalion Headquarters was out of communication with "D" Company, and it was not until the late afternoon that Lt.-Col. Forin learned that the Company Commander had subsequently withdrawn from Baranello before the threat of counter-attack in some force. During the evening, patrols confirmed the re-occupation of Baranello by the enemy and a more ambitious attack was ordered for the following day. (W.D. Seaforth of C., 17 Oct 43).

120. It was now realized that the key to Baranello was the high ground (Point 763) commanding it from the south. Although a night patrol had reported this to be clear, it was decided that "A" Company should be directed on to this area, while "B" Company would advance straight to Baranello. The left flanking movement would be reinforced by two troops of "A" Squadron of the Ontarios. The left flanking movement was successfully concluded shortly after first light and the tanks destroyed an enemy machine-gun post situated in farm buildings. "B" Company began to advance at 0900 hours and line was laid behind it to compensate for the ineffective wireless communications. It encountered stiff opposition just east of the village and the enemy at one point attempted to cut off the company from the south, but eventually yielded to the heavy weight of our artillery and mortar fire and withdrew from Baranello at 1630 hours. In protecting the right flank of this attack, the C.C. "C" Company brought anti-tank gun fire to bear on an enemy O.P. on the Busso road which had been revealed by civilian reports. (W.D. Seaforth of C., 18 Oct 43).

121. No sooner had the enemy been forced out of Baranello than his guns and mortars commenced to fire on the new occupants. This was an experience endured by the troops holding all the villages on the right bank of the Biferno, which now drew down the available fire of the German guns to an increasing extent and relieved the more important communications centres of Campobasso and Vinchiatturo from this interference.

122. It is now necessary to see how the Carlt & York R. fared on the Division's extreme left flank in the effort to push the enemy across the headwaters of the Biferno River. The general topography of this region, the essential feature of which is the precipitous edge of the Matese massif, has been described before. The immediate



objective of the Carlt & York R. was Boiano, but it soon became apparent that progress along the floor of the valley in face of increasing opposition from 26 Panzer Div was impracticable. It must be remembered that the effective front of 26 Panzer Div at this time was opposed to half that of 1 Cdn Inf Div and the configuration of the ground had the effect of canalizing the defensive energies of the German division against 2 Cdn Inf Bde and the related movements of the Carlt & York R.

123. A jumping off place had been secured by the Edmontons on 16 Oct, when their carrier platoon "less carriers", as the War Diary puts it, and equipped with mules, had established themselves in the village of Guardiaregia (W.D. L. Edmn R., 16 Oct). Guardiaregia was one of three villages intervening between Sepino and Boiano. It was built close against a sheer wall of rock descending from the Matese known as La Torella, below which ran the Torrente Quirino, one of the principal tributaries of the Biferno. West of Guardiaregia was Campochiaro, built well up on the flank of the mountain and overlooking a re-entrant from the plain below. Less than a mile to the north-west of Campochiaro was the village of S. Polo Matese, much smaller than the other two and built even higher up on the mountainside. It was in every way a miniature mountain village. None of these three communities connected laterally for traffic with each other, except by mountain paths, because spurs of the Matese projected into the plain between them, and, indeed, obscured the view of one from another. Narrow roads, however, ran northward from each of them to Route 17. It was obvious that while the enemy remained in this cluster of villages overlooking Route 17, no progress could be made along it to Boiano.

124. It is difficult to tell in detail the story of the operation undertaken by the Carlt & York R. to clear these villages because of the unfortunate destruction of the original copy of the War Diary of Headquarters 3 Cdn Inf Bde for the month of Oct 1943, in which valuable appendices were irrecoverably lost. The battalion's War Diary is not of the best and does not even list the supporting arms involved. Suffice it to say that it is apparent that the supporting arms, as detailed in the G.O.C.'s Conference of 15 Oct (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/I: Notes on G.O.C.'s Conference, 15 Oct 43), were employed with minor subtractions owing to the changed nature of the operation. "C" Sqn of 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt was in support. (W.D. 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 18 Oct 43).

125. Initial reconnaissance of both sides of the valley was undertaken. The battalions had been ordered to commit only one company at a time to establish patrol bases and not to move forward of these until the surrounding areas had been thoroughly patrolled. (W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 18 Oct 43). While "C" Company was preparing to move with L. Edmn R. guides across country to Guardiaregia with two F.O.Os, detachments of supporting arms from the Sask L.I. and an attendant train of mules, a reconnaissance party from "A" Company went forward with "B" Company of the Edmontons on the night of 17/18 Oct to investigate Colle d'Anchise. (W.D. Carlt & York R., 18 Oct, and W.D. L. Edmn. R., 18/19 Oct). The Edmontons discovered that the Biferno River in front of Colle d'Anchise was a tank obstacle and that the town was held by the enemy. The Carlt & York R. representatives were missing when the patrol returned and did not come in until the following night. (Ibid.). At all



events no further attempt was made by Lt.-Col. Pangman to utilize the right flank and the battalion was definitely committed to working along the edge of the Matese,

126. On 18 Oct air bombardment of 26 Panzer Div area continued on the same generous scale, 72 Kittyhawks attacking Boiano and Colle d'Anchise. On the following morning this was intensified against Boiano and its immediate area in the narrowest part of the valley. A total of 84 Bostons and 96 Kittyhawks were employed. Considerable devastation resulted in Boiano, and Route 17 was blocked at the entrances to the town (W.D. H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 18/19 Oct). In the meantime, "C" Company of the Carleton & Yorks, which had established itself in Guardiaregia, with the assistance of the Edmonton guides began to feel its way along the edge of the mountains towards Campochiaro, and having established itself across Torrente Quirino, was joined by "A" Company (W.D. Carlt & York R., 19-20 Oct). The battalion's 3-inch mortars were used to good effect and the P.F.C.L.I. O.P. behind Vinchiatturo reported that the enemy appeared to be withdrawing from Campochiaro (W.D. H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 20 Oct 43). "C" Company of the Ontarios made the best of an extremely exposed position in the plain near Guardiaregia Station and engaged targets of opportunity wherever they could. (W.D. 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 20 Oct 43). At this point the chronology of the various war diaries becomes confusing but the consensus of opinion indicates that "C" Company delivered an attack against Campochiaro at last light on 20 Oct and reported the town clear at 1010 hours on the morning of 21 Oct. Next day, the battalion was placed under command of 2 Cdn Inf Bde (W.D. H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde October 1943 Appx 1 Message Log Serial 22, 22 Oct 43 and W.D. Carlt & York R., 20-21 Oct). From then on its operations were closely related with those of 2 Cdn Inf Bde against Colle d'Anchise and Spinete, and its patrols were pushed forward towards S. Polo and Boiano.

127. Stiffening resistance was encountered on 22 Oct and eleven of the valuable mules were destroyed, together with all the available 3-inch mortar ammunition. The next day "D" Company pushed forward to take S. Polo, which was occupied early in the morning, but brisk fighting, together with increasing weight of enemy mortar fire, lasted until darkness. Finally, on 24 Oct all companies joined in an attack on Boiano, which was occupied by noon and without the strong resistance expected. By this time, the capture of Colle d'Anchise and Spinete had made the retention of any German positions east of Boiano impossible. (W.D. Carlt & York R. 22/24 Oct 43).

128. This operation, the account of which has anticipated the development of the central theme, was conducted under the most difficult supply arrangements. Success was dependent upon the ability of the infantry to scale the heights above their various objectives and literally to outflank the enemy from above. Although mule transport was freely used and all available jeeps, the provision of rations and ammunition, and even medical supplies, to the forward troops was difficult at all times, and frequently impossible. The various problems encountered are set forth by the I.O. of 3 Cdn Inf Bde who was attached to the Carleton & Yorks during the advance:



The supply question was fantastic. The pioneers had to build a road using an old Roman road from San Giuliano which they improved upon. Mules were invaluable as usual. We learned three things as a result of this experience:

- (1) An independent battalion on a flank needs a good deal more wireless equipment and in hilly country particularly 21 sets. With a company in Guardiaregia, one in Campochiaro and one in San Polo it was necessary to use nearly the whole brigade signals to maintain communication.
- (2) Excessive fatigue and lack of food brings on shell shock.
- (3) Bulk rations are useless for an expedition of this kind. Giving out rations such as rice which have to be cooked is virtually a hopeless task for a platoon under shell-fire. Potatoes and meat for instance, come in large cans and it is suicidal to call men out of their slit-trenches to get their food when it is cooked. A compo or 48 hr pack would have been much better.

The CO and MO of the battalion were agreed on these points. About forty sickness casualties resulted.

(Prince, op. cit.).

#### RESUMPTION OF THE ADVANCE

129. After the capture of Termoli, the progress of the Eighth Army on the right flank had been slow. The operations which were undertaken westward from Termoli have been described by the Army Commander as a process of 'squaring up to the defences on the River Trigno' (Montgomery, op. cit.). These had been almost entirely the responsibility of 78 Div. Montecilfone was not entered by 36 Bde until 18 Oct, after which it was necessary to withdraw and the town was not actually cleared until 23 Oct. In the meantime, Petacciato, the only village of any size between Termoli and S. Salvo, was taken by 38 Bde on 19 Oct. Further inland, Montenero resisted until 23 Oct which was apparently the date for a withdrawal behind the Lower Trigno by 16 Pz Div, because 38 Bde was able to establish a bridgehead over the river on the following day. In order to strengthen the right flank and to provide for the now expanding front of the Army, 8 Indian Div was brought into the line between 78 Div and 15 Bde of 5 Div and occupied Palata and Acquaviva on 24 Oct. (W.D., G.S., Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 18/24 Oct). While this process of squaring up to the Trigno was developing, the Army Commander had been planning a "resumption of the advance in strength". His own later description of the part which 13 Corps was expected to play is as follows:-



My outline plan for breaching the Trigno defences was based on diversionary operations on the western flank, followed by a strong thrust up the coast. In order to focus the enemy's attention inland I intended that 13 Corps should deliver a strong attack on the axis Vinchiaturro-Isernia prior to the 5 Corps operations on the river and set a target date of 28 October for the thrust. On the night 30/31 October 5 Corps would attack across the Trigno with 8 Indian and 78 Divisions.....At the same time I ordered 2 New Zealand Division forward to the Foggia area to preserve balance in my dispositions and to provide a safeguard for the Foggia airfields. (1)

(Montgomery, op.cit., pp 137-8).

130. It would seem from the foregoing that General Montgomery was preoccupied as before with the battle in the coastal sector. Nevertheless, it seems possible that at the time the capture of Isernia - one of the main communication links in the front of the German Tenth Army - was considered as more than a "diversionary operation". This is the more likely in view of the expected junction of Eighth and Fifth Army troops in the region of Isernia after the latter had cleared the Volturno Valley.

131. At all events, the new offensive involved a regrouping of 13 Corps which would bring 5 Div into a concentration area behind the left flank of 1 Cdn Inf Div near Vinchiaturro. On 21 Oct, H.Q. 13 Corps issued its Operation Order No. 6 in which the intention was for 13 Corps to capture Isernia, for which purpose 1 Cdn Inf Div and 5 Div were given successive and contingent tasks. These were communicated as follows:-

1 Cdn Div will:

- (i) secure the Colle d'Anchise feature by evening 23 Oct, and hold it with one Bde Gp.
- (ii) secure the Molise - Torella feature by evening 26 Oct, and hold it with one Bde Gp.
- (iii) patrol forward from both these features on axis  
Torella - Salcito (4249)  
Torella - Bagnoli (3844)  
S. Elena - Frosolone - Mt Marchetta (3432)  
Bojano - Cantalupo
- (iv) be prepared to relieve 15 Inf Bde Gp on axis Petrella - Lucito on 24 Oct.

5 Div will:

attack through the foremost tps of 1 Cdn Div on the axis Bojano - Isernia on 29 Oct.



(W.D. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde October 43, Appx 54;  
13 Corps O.O. No. 6, 21 Oct 43).

132. Tank support would be supplied by 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt which was to concentrate near Vinchiasturo by 23 Oct and would come under command 5 Div on 28 Oct; while 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt would remain under command of the Canadian Division. 6 A.G.R.A. would remain in support of 1 Cdn Inf Div until the Division's tasks were complete, and 165 Fd Regt, R.A., plus 1 Air Landing Light Regt, R.A., would remain under command. It is of some significance that for the Division's second task, i.e., securing the Molise - Torella feature, an additional allotment of artillery was provided, consisting of one battery of 66 Med Regt allotted to 6 A.G.R.A. and 92 and 78 Fd Regts, R.A. under command of the Division. All this artillery support would be transferred to 5 Div after 29 Oct and 1 Cdn Inf Div would retain only its normal artillery component (*Ibid.*).

133. This Operation Order was made the subject of a G.O.C.'s conference on 22 Oct at which General Simonds said that as far as he knew, after the special tasks of 1 Cdn Inf Div had been completed, the division would come into reserve to reorganize. The Canadian part in the attack across the Biferno would secure a suitable jumping off place for the main thrust by 5 Div. 2 Cdn Inf Bde was to attack Colle d'Anchise that night and follow it up with an attack on Spinete, while on 25 Oct, 1 Cdn Inf Bde would attack in succession Castropignano on the left bank of the Biferno and Point 761 to the west of the village, and thereafter the higher ground running between Torella and Molise. The left flank operation of the Carlt & York R. towards Boiano would continue and the rest of 3 Cdn Inf Bde would relieve 1 Cdn Inf Bde in the area Campobasso - Ripalimosano - S. Stefano on 23 Oct, and thus release the latter for the attack. 4 Cdn Recce Regt was given the formidable task of relieving 15 Bde on the right flank of the division and taking over 1 Cdn Inf Bde's responsibility for the axis Montagano - Limosano, thus filling the gap, created by the concentration of 5 Div and the withdrawal of 15 Bde, which would otherwise exist between 8 Indian Div and 1 Cdn Inf Div. (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/I: Notes on G.O.C.'s Conference, 22 Oct 43). General Simonds went on to say that the offensive westwards had two main objectives: first, the seizure of the high ground Torella - Molise; second, the hitting of a hard blow at 29 Pz Gren Div before the delivery of the main attack towards Isernia and, ultimately, the still more crucial offensive on the coastal sector. Unless this division was hit hard, he said, before the main attack commenced, it would be free to manoeuvre and deploy to assist other more hard-pressed formations. (*Ibid.*).

134. Divisional Intelligence, in a summary issued on 21 Oct, placed the boundary between 29 Pz Gren Div and 26 Pz Div at the line Baranello - Spinete inclusive to 26 Pz Div. No enemy defences had been observed on what was described as the bottleneck position immediately northwest of Castropignano, presumably the road link between that town and Torella. For this reason, it was deduced that the battle for Isernia would be conducted by the enemy along



the line Torella - Cantalupo, or, in other words, along the line of the secondary lateral road joining the villages of Molise and Frosolone with these two termini. (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F: 1 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No. 21, 21 Oct 43).

135. The gun-power of the German formations had undoubtedly decreased since 17 Oct when an active counter-battery policy had been adopted by C.B.O. 13 Corps on 1 Cdn Inf Div's front. It was estimated on 20 Oct that on 13 Corps front, which was, in effect, with the exception of the small sector allotted to 15 Bde of 5 Div, that of 1 Cdn Inf Div itself, the enemy disposed of 81 guns, including infantry guns, and one troop of heavy artillery behind Boiano. (W.D. E.Q. R.C.A. 1 Cdn Inf Div, October 1943, Appx 17: Counter-battery Int Summary No. 2, 20 Oct 43). By contrast, it was estimated that the attack of 1 Cdn Inf Div with the extra allotment of artillery and the employment of the field regiments of 5 Div could be supported by 216 guns. Moreover, the enemy increasingly resorted to flash simulation to confuse our counter-battery experts, and this was considered to be a sign of the efficiency of the latter. (Ibid., 22-23 Oct).

136. At 1130 hours on 21 Oct Brigadier Hoffmeister outlined his plan for the capture of Colle d'Anchise and Spinete. Until the evening of 22 Oct the two villages were to receive concentrated attention from the D.A.F., from the Corps artillery and 3 Fd Regt R.C.A. and 165 Fd Regt R.A. Thereafter, during the night 22/23 Oct the L. Edm R. would cross the Biferno River and capture Colle d'Anchise. This would be followed at once by the P.P.C.L.I. moving through the Seaforth crossing the Biferno opposite Baranello and advancing on Spinete. Tank support would be supplied by "A" Squadron of the Ontarios while M.M.G. and anti-tank support by the Sask L.I. and 90 A.Tk Bty, R.C.A. About 60 mules were available for the operation. Flank protection was assured by the position of R.C.R. in Busso and the Carleton & Yorks having reached high ground between Campochiaro and S. Polo. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 21 Oct 43; W.D., 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 21 Oct 43).

137. Enemy shelling had almost ceased in the 2 Cdn Inf Bde area and little activity was reported, except on the extreme left flank, where the Carlt & York R. was everlastingly engaged in a battle with the rocks. In the afternoon a dozen Kittyhawks bombed Colle d'Anchise, and during the night 21/22 Oct the brigade's patrols had much to do to reconnoitre and prepare the vital crossings across the river. It has been observed before that these were few and far between. But a patrol from the P.P.C.L.I. discovered a wooden bridge due west of Baranello, which it suggested had been built by the Germans, with a width of 12 feet and a possible capacity of three tons. No route for vehicles approaching it at either end had been found. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 10 Oct 43; Appx 1: Message Log 22 Oct 43, Serial 7c). Another P.P.C.L.I. patrol working further upstream opposite Point 763 reported that the river was approximately three and a half feet deep and 50 feet wide, but that its steep banks and approaches made it a formidable tank obstacle. (Ibid.: Serial 10c). Subsequently, a Seaforth patrol despatched to hold the bridge found it unsuitable for all vehicles owing to its construction and to



its complete lack of approaches. (Ibid.; 23 Oct 43, Serial 30c). In the meantime, the tank representative with the patrol exploring the crossings above Colle d'Anchise found them all unsatisfactory, except immediately below the confluence of the Biferno and the Torrente Quirino, where work on the approaches would be required from 3 Fd Coy, R.C.E. (Ibid.; 22 Oct 43, Serial 25c). This crossing was also selected by the Edmontons, who had now called in their far-flung patrols from Guardiaregia and the Lago di Matese. (W.D., L. Edmn R., 21 Oct 43).

138. At 1400 hours on 22 Oct a second "O" Group was held by Brigadier Hoffmeister and the outline plan of the previous day confirmed in detail (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 22 Oct 43). When darkness fell, Lt.-Col. Jefferson concentrated the Edmontons just north-west of Vinciatiuro, and at about midnight the battalion began to move westwards to the river, which was crossed through three feet of water near Pescarella, south of the objective, at 0400 hours on the morning of 23 Oct. "B" Company formed a protective bridge-head on the far bank while "A" Company swung northward to scale the steep escarpment leading to Colle d'Anchise. The village consisted of a single straggling main street which ran from the west, where the road from Boiano entered the village, up to the eminence known as Point 681. Here there was an open space above the steep side of the escarpment which fell some 700 feet to the river bank. By far the greater part of Colle d'Anchise was thus hidden from view from the east and lay, as it were, upon a more gentle reverse slope facing the enemy. To the south, however, the ground was much more open and less precipitous and it was here that the tanks expected to operate most effectively in outflanking the village and cutting its link with Boiano.

139. The Edmontons left their pioneers with the detachment of 3 Fd Coy now setting to work at the crossing, together with their 3-inch mortars and the carrier platoon, and the main body pressed forward without much opposition. "A" Company scaled the heights to Point 681, but as soon as this was reached, the Germans literally awoke to their perilous situation. On all sides they tumbled out of their billets and "fierce hand-to-hand fighting" ensued. In the meantime, "D" Company had penetrated to the main street in the middle of the village and was similarly engaged, while "B" Company on the extreme left grappled with enemy machine-gun positions, and "C" Company gave supporting fire to "A" Company. In this situation the morning wore on without producing a decision, although it was clear that the Edmontons held Point 681 and thus dominated their objective. (W.D. L. Edmn R., 22-23 Oct 43; and Hist Sec file Italy/1943/2 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D: Account by Major E.W. Day).

140. In the meantime, the tanks were in an unhappy position. A heavy mist which lay in the gorge of the river and which had proved of great assistance to the Edmontons, was correspondingly awkward for armour. What transpired is not entirely clear but a synthesis of the War Diary and the Regimental History of the Ontarios would suggest that at 0630 hours two troops of "A" Squadron crossed the river and then moved up the river bed to where the engineers were preparing an exit for them with a bulldozer. At first the two troops reported that they could make no contact with either the engineers or the guides arranged for



the Edmontons. Going in the river bed, as may be expected, was described as "very rough". Thereupon ensued a steady exchange of messages between "A" Squadron and H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, the former complaining that it could not get up the bank of the river, was under heavy mortar fire, and was without guides, while the latter urged it vehemently to get forward and support the infantry now urgently requiring its aid. Not until 0829 hours was the first tank able to struggle out of this impasse. Ten minutes later seven tanks were across the Biferno. Meanwhile, the devoted sappers had suffered many casualties, including three men killed. (W.D. 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 23 Oct 43: and History of the 11th Canadian Armoured Regiment (The Ontario Regiment), 1939-45, printed at Harlingen, Holland).

141. As the tanks pressed forward towards Colle d'Anchise, they encountered a certain number of German infantry but none of the Edmontons, and the Squadron Commander, Major Millen, redoubled his efforts through Brigade Headquarters to secure guides. This state of affairs prevented the tanks shooting at targets of opportunity until about 1030 hrs, when a patrol of the Carleton & Yorks informed them that two enemy tanks were on the way from Boiano. These proved to be Mark IVs, and after being assured that all was well in Colle d'Anchise, "A" Squadron ordered the two troops to intercept the enemy tanks. During this operation, the tanks were repeatedly hit by enemy mortar bombs and failed to locate the enemy. They therefore returned to their first objective, and when approaching Colle d'Anchise from the south were ambushed by Mark IVs which knocked out three tanks, two of which "brewed up". Three men were killed in this action.

142. It now became clear that the wooded area south of Colle d'Anchise was full of Germans trying to reinforce the village from the direction of Boiano. Captain Baylay, commanding the two troops of the Ontarios was ordered to clear the area and make contact with the Carleton & Yorks; but he had become separated from his tank while making a reconnaissance and was cut off from contact with his vehicles. At this point things began to go badly for the Edmontons and the Mk. IVs which had succeeded in approaching Colle d'Anchise now led a counter-attack, forcing "D" Company out of the village and compelling it to make a detour southward. (It is obvious from various narratives that the Edmontons were unaware of the presence of their own tanks, and although they made numerous requests for tank support through Brigade Headquarters, no effort was made to find the tanks on the ground.) This development occurred at about 1530 hours and it would appear that at the time when the Edmontons were hardest pressed, the survivors of the Ontarios were beginning to withdraw to the Biferno with their casualties. (Ibid; and Day, op.cit.).

143. The Edmontons found that their FIATs were ineffective against the German tanks owing to lack of penetration (the difficulty may actually have been the necessity of "normal" impact on the percussion fuse). In these circumstances and without anti-tank guns except those that were in position on the other side of the river, the infantry were in a difficult situation. Major Millen, who had one troop of tanks detached in support of the F.P.C.I.I. attack on Spinete, at this point decided to commit the remainder of "A" Squadron to the assistance of the Edmontons. Ordering Lieut. C.B.D. Jamieson, the surviving troop leader



west of the river, to leave his casualties in a safe place and return to support the Edmontons, he pushed across the Biferno and arriving on the scene of action made further repeated requests for infantry guides, again without success. Accordingly, he formed a tight leaguer below Colle d'Anchise and awaited the events of the night. During darkness communication by R.T. was impossible owing to the closeness of German patrols, and no fire was exchanged with the enemy. Just before first light on the morning of 24 Oct the German tanks moved off westwards, towing a bullet-riddled staff car behind them.

144. The enemy's counter-attack had not been pressed and the Edmontons were able to consolidate their positions in Colle d'Anchise at leisure during the morning. During the action 29 German prisoners had been taken and the total of enemy casualties was estimated at 100. The Edmontons themselves had 30 casualties, five of them fatal. It was not until the afternoon of 24 Oct that the battalion's anti-tank guns and the medium machine-guns of the Sask I.I. reached the village, having become involved in a fire fight of their own on the river crossing. Altogether, the battle for Colle d'Anchise was a fierce, if somewhat confused, action; and it betrays that lack of co-ordination between tanks and infantry which was to cause the introduction of new training methods and more extensive co-operation in the campaigns of 1944. (Ibid.).

145. On the face of it, the P.F.C.L.I. operation against Spinete appeared to be more hazardous than that undertaken by the Edmontons. It was to be performed in daylight and involved crossing the Biferno River at an exposed ford, to be followed by a long uphill approach of two-and-a-half miles to Spinete, which would carry the battalion far beyond the protection of flanking units. The one factor essential to success, and on which the P.F.C.L.I. attack was contingent, was the success of the Edmontons at Colle d'Anchise. Lt.-Col. Ware subsequently admitted that he was anxious about the result and felt that the battalion might well be involved in the most serious test of its fighting qualities hitherto undergone. (Ware, op.cit.). Owing to the failure to discover a crossing adequate for the passage of vehicles, exclusive reliance had to be placed on mules, and the provision of supporting arms was not to be expected without considerable delay. The P.F.C.L.I. concentrated in the vicinity of Point 763 after dark on 22 Oct to await zero hour at 1400 hours the following day. (W.D. P.F.C.L.I., 22 Oct 43).

146. The next morning the situation at Colle d'Anchise, as we have seen, was by no means clear, although at an early stage it was assumed that the Edmontons had been successful. At noon, all four companies of the P.F.C.L.I. moved down to the river and turned northwards along the right bank to the ford west of Baranello, where a small torrent entered it at right angles. Patrols had reported considerable enemy shellfire in the neighbourhood of the crossing place during the morning. From 1300 hours onwards the air was filled with the noise of aircraft bombing Spinete, and incidentally dropping some bombs on Busso by mistake (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/E: Cps message log, 23 Oct 43, serial 4680). At 1400 hours the



greater part of the divisional artillery opened up on the approaches to Spinete with smoke and high explosive. "D" Company, "B" Company, Battalion Headquarters and "C" Company crossed the river unmolested and gained the ridge half-way to Spinete and overlooking the village. Not until "A" Company, together with the battalion's mortars and the machine-guns of the Sask I.I., began to cross, did the enemy open up with his machine-guns, creating havoc amongst the mules. No casualties, however, were suffered by the troops, and by 1800 hours the whole battalion had consolidated in positions which dominated Spinete. By 2100 hours the village had been entered and the road to Casalci-prano cut and mined with No. 75 grenades. From these positions the P.P.C.L.I. despatched patrols to S. Elena and Frosolone. Although on the following day these towns were found to be held by the enemy, it subsequently transpired from intelligence reports that the attack on Spinete had coincided with a planned withdrawal by the enemy, and save for a few scattered shells and machine-gunning of the river crossing, no opposition had been encountered. (W.D. P.P.C.L.I., 23 Oct ). The troop of "A" Squadron of the Ontarios detailed to support the attack was unable to negotiate the banks of the river (W.D. 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 23 Oct 43).

147. Thus, in spite of stubborn resistance at Colle d'Anchise, 2 Cdn Inf Bde had successfully performed its task within the time allotted. It has been noted before that 26 Pz Div withdrew its sub-units from Colle d'Anchise during the night 23/24 Oct, and, indeed, with Spinete in Canadian hands, they were withdrawn none too soon. It was now the turn of 1 Cdn Inf Bde to strike an even stronger blow with all three of its battalions lower down the river against 29 Pz Gren Div.

148. The problem confronting 1 Cdn Inf Bde might have seemed more difficult of solution than Brigadier Hoffmeister's. For one thing, it was necessary to force the main axis which had now been clearly identified as belonging to 29 Pz Gren Div. For another, the possible crossings over the Biferno seemed even less promising. The bridge which carried the main road across the river had been blown and there was no possibility of replacing it in short order because of its high level and steep approaches. Furthermore, another bridge over a gully on the road leading down to the river had also been demolished. No attempt to repair this could be made until a footing had been established by infantry on the left bank, the road from Oratino down to the crossing being entirely under enemy observation. Again, a line of sheer cliffs fell from the ridge on which stood Castropignano and Roccapromonte, and at their base was boggy ground impassable to vehicles. Torella and Molise stood nearly four miles behind Castropignano and covered two approaches to Bagnoli and the Upper Trigno, one running north from Torella through Salcito and the other running north-westwards from Molise through Duronia. At the base of these axes was the lateral road from Cantalupo on Route 17.

149. The tactical situation on the flanks was unfavourable compared to that which had existed before the 2 Cdn Inf Bde attack. North of Castropignano, the Biferno turns eastward before again running north past Limosano, and thus created a salient occupied by the right flank of the division.



In order to reach enemy positions on the line Torella - Molise, it was necessary to site the guns of the divisional artillery and 6 A.G.R.A. only 2,000 yards behind the line of the Biferno. (Renison, op.cit.). Immediately after the conference of 22 Oct, Brigadier Graham regrouped his battalions in accordance with the provision made for the relief of his right flank by 3 Cdn Inf Bde. The Hast & P.E.R. were moved from the Montagano - S. Stefano position to the oak woods clothing M. Vairano, where facilities for concealment were admirable. (Tweedsmuir, op.cit.). The R.C.R. company in Busso was relieved by the 48 Highrs and the battalion concentrated in the ravine of the torrent known as Rio d'Oratino, which divided the high ground at Oratino from that of M. Vairano, and ran due west down to the river. While the 2 Cdn Inf Bde attack was proceeding, the patrols of the R.C.R. and 48 Highrs feverishly explored the approaches to the Biferno and the exits from the left bank. Crossing places had indeed been found on the eastward reach of the river by Hastings patrols, but were obviously too far outside the limits of the required bridge-head. A 48th patrol examining the river bank on the night 22/23 Oct lost three men fatally wounded by S mines. (Renison and Spry, op.cit. W.D. 48 Highrs, 23-24 Oct. 43; W.D. R.C.R., 22-23 Oct).

150. A good deal of valuable information was given by escaped Allied prisoners who had been crossing into the lines of 1 Cdn Inf Div ever since the original advance from Foggia, but who now began to arrive in groups of considerable size. In addition to the information provided by patrols - always limited to observation of an actual route and generally collected at night - and that portrayed by Italian maps which were notoriously unreliable in detail, air photographs were closely studied. An escaper reported that the road running north from Torella was being much used by the enemy, and this is not surprising in view of the planned withdrawal about to take place. (W.D. H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, October 1943: Appx 3: Message Log 22 Oct 43). During the night 23/24 Oct, the R.C.R. patrolled at least half a mile north of, the road bridge to a point due east of Castropignano, finding the west bank of the river unsuitable for vehicles without preparation by the sappers, and the river not fordable for vehicles for over a mile upstream. No enemy was encountered by the patrol. A 48 Highrs patrol crossed the river higher up opposite Casalciprano, investigated the town and the ridge above the valley, and similarly found no enemy. Descending from Roccaspromonte it could find no practicable route for anything more complicated than men and mules. It made a report similar to that of the R.C.R. on the unsuitable nature of the banks. The river was found at its shallowest to vary between two and three feet in depth and to be fordable by troops. In places it was considerably deeper and everywhere ran swiftly. From these investigations it appeared that the only suitable vehicle crossing for development by the R.C.E. was in the vicinity of the road bridge. (Ibid., 23 Oct 43 and Renison, op.cit.).

151. The brigade plan for the forthcoming operation is nowhere clearly stated in routine documents but it may be assumed on the authority of the Brigade Major that it was flexible and depended for final development on initial success at Castropignano and Casalciprano. By his account,



the 48 Highrs were to send a patrol to the latter place and be prepared to follow it up with one company. A similar patrol was to be despatched to Castropignano, and, if no unfavourable report was received, to be followed by the whole battalion. (Renison, op cit.). However, examination of the war diaries suggests that Lt.-Col. Johnston was at first informed by Brigadier Graham that the 48 Highrs would be responsible for the capture of Castropignano by crossing the river below Casalciprano, cutting the road between there and Roccaspromonte, and Advancing on Point 761 and Castropignano from the south. (W.D. 48 Highrs, 24 Oct 43). According to the 48 Highrs' diary, "C" Company actually crossed to the first bound, starting at 0730 hours on 24 Oct, but fresh orders were issued at 1800 hours implying that the capture of Castropignano was to be undertaken by the R.C.R. (ibid.). This is supported by the account of Lt.-Col. Spry, who makes the following definite statement:

The Brigade plan was to pass the 48th through us over the Biferno, the Hast & P.E.R. to pass through them to capture the high feature across the river, and then the R.C.R. to follow through them and take Torella and Molise. After the 48th had got one company across, however, we were ordered to capture Roccaspromonte and Castropignano....the 48th eventually crossed some distance above this point (the R.C.R. crossing place) and passed down the left bank of the river and round our right flank to take Torella. The Hast & P.E.R. passed around our left flank for their attack on Molise. (Spry, op cit.).

152. At all events it is clear that "C" Company of the 48 Highrs established itself in the neighbourhood of Casalciprano during the morning. The R.C.R. War Diary, however, asserts that a battalion "O" group was held at 1330 hours and the new plan communicated, and it is unlikely that the 48 Highrs were left unaware of the Brigadier's intentions until 1800 hours. During the morning Torella and Molise had been bombed from the air, and in the afternoon at 1705 hours "A" Company of the R.C.R. began to cross the Biferno (W.D. R.C.R., 24 Oct 43). Some time was apparently spent in waiting for enemy reaction to the battalion's patrols. "A" Company crossed the river between the mouth of the Rio d'Oratino and the Roccaspromonte cliffs, and, guided by civilians, reached Roccaspromonte itself at 1800 hours. While pushing forward northwestwards thence it made contact with the 48 Highrs who were apparently directed on the same objective.

153. At 2015 hours "C" Company crossed the river, guided by an escaped New Zealand prisoner-of-war, who, in attempting to gain the Canadian lines, had become involved in the attack. This crossing was made dry-shod by way of a dam, and "C" Company then pushed forward through "A" Company along the road to Castropignano and towards Point 761 which overlooks the road to Torella. In the meantime, "B" Company, which was charged with a right flanking movement and the capture of Castropignano itself, had crossed the Biferno immediately below the demolished bridge, moved up the steep



slope along the line of the main road which here is cut into the face of the cliffs in spirals. Castropignano was entered without opposition and only one machine-gun fired on the company before the town was cleared by 0330 hours on 25 Oct. (ibid. and Appx 14: Company Accounts of Battles in October).

154. The enemy's outposts offered no resistance until "C" Company endeavoured to establish itself at Point 761 to the west of Castropignano. At this point a quantity of parachute flares revealed the company's advance, and enfilading machine-gun fire severely wounded its commander, Capt. Carling, who died before the stretcher-bearers could get forward to him. The junction of the Roccaspromonte and Torella roads, which was the key to the situation of Castropignano, was thereafter heavily shelled and mortared. "C" Company was compelled to withdraw to "A" Company's position to await the coming of daylight. Not until noon on 25 Oct was the position at Point 761 consolidated and enemy fire reduced by our own artillery (ibid.). Whilst "C" Company was in difficulties at the road-junction west of Castropignano, "D" Company and the command group crossed the river by "B" Company's route at 2230 hours on 24 Oct. By this time enemy gunners were alert and the crossing was heavily shelled, splinters of rock flying in all directions. Miraculously there were no serious casualties and "D" Company was able to consolidate on the side of the hill between Roccaspromonte and Castropignano. Patrols were sent out north of Castropignano along the river bank to secure the right flank of the bridgehead (ibid., and Spry, op.cit.).

155. Meanwhile, the 48 Highrs had completed their crossing and concentration by 0900 hours. The companies on their own showing passed through and around the left flank of the R.C.R. to Point 761, but after proceeding some distance northwards on the right of the road to Torella were brought to a halt by heavy shell and mortar fire and did not move forward for the rest of the day. Between Castropignano and Torella the road winds over open rolling country, bare of trees, and consequently suitable for tanks. "B" Squadron of the Ontarios was therefore ordered by Brigadier Graham to cross the river. During the night the engineers had laboured in bright moonlight to construct a diversion at the demolished bridge below the Oratino hill. This, as has been noticed, was in full view of the high ground on the other side and fire on the work was continuous. Nothing could be done to construct a vehicle-crossing over the stream itself. It was an awkward predicament for the tanks and it appears that "B" Squadron was averse to attempting the crossing which had been universally reported as impracticable. Nevertheless, Brigadier Graham insisted, and after several vehicles had bogged down, one tank succeeded in scaling the bank and the rest followed without mishap. Mounted on the banks were the dismantled guns of a battery of the Air Landing Light Regiment now badly needed to give close support to the 48 Highrs.

156. The next morning at first light "A" and "C" Companies of the 48th, supported by the tank squadron, moved forward north of the road towards Torella with "D" Company moving up on the left. The appearance of tanks drew considerable fire and the bare ridges commanded by the high ground on which Torella stood provided an excellent field for it.



Accordingly, several squadrons of Kittyhawks bombed Torella and silenced fire from that side, but Molise to the west provided observation from its conical hill, and fire from this direction continued to sweep the open approaches to the ridge. The 48th were now less than 1,000 yards from Torella. The axis of advance was changed, "A" and "C" Companies crossing to the left of the road and approaching the village from the south, while "D" Company maintained pressure from the east. For half an hour between 1730 and 1800 hours the divisional artillery pounded the enemy's positions and at last light, protected by the onset of darkness, the Highlanders were able to get forward to positions close to their objective with the tanks supplying heavy covering fire from hull-down positions. By the morning of 27 Oct "D" Company's patrols reported Torella clear. (J.D. 48 Highrs, 25-26 Oct; W.D. 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 25-26 Oct; and Renison, op. cit.).

157. While the 48 Highrs were advancing towards Torella, the Hast & P.E.R. were waiting along the road east of Oratino for the word to cross the Biferno and advance on Molise. During the morning Brigadier Graham and Lt.-Col. Lord Tweedsmuir observed the distant eminence of Molise from the shell-torn buildings of Oratino. Apparently it was not originally intended for this advance to begin until Torella had been captured; but when it appeared that the 48 Highrs were running into strong opposition, the movement on Molise, from which so much flanking fire was being directed, became of prime importance in order to relieve the situation on the right flank. Therefore, at 1200 hours on 26 Oct the Hastings left the road and dropped down the gully of the Rio d'Oratino towards the river. Beyond the river was a long and straight ravine ascending westwards to the left of Roccaspromonte. Lt.-Col. Lord Tweedsmuir did not wish to be caught by machine-gun fire in this corridor and decided to keep to one side of it and pass by bounds from ridge to ridge along the same general line towards Molise. (Tweedsmuir, op. cit., and W.D. Hast & P.E.R., 26 Oct).

158. No better account of the Hastings' long and difficult march, commencing with the crossing by the dam previously used by the R.C.R., can be given here than by quoting in extenso the masterly descriptive writing of the commanding officer's diary:

Punctually at 1200 hrs the long line of men moved off. A Bn on the march in line takes up over a mile of distance. The mules and their dusky custodians joined us a mile down the road. We left the road, and dropped down the side of the valley, through vineyards and orchards full of quinces. We followed the line of the stony brook in the valley bottom, our pioneers going ahead of us to look for mines. A pioneer sergeant and his four pioneers, are the only men in the Army who are allowed by statute to grow beards. I had ordered mine to grow beards, and they already had that distinguished look that one sees in pictures of Stonewall Jackson's staff. They stopped us as we neared the dam and led us along a narrow path. The place was a mass of booby traps. We got to the dam without incident, and trooped over the cement crown. The water was that curious blue grey that you only



see in Italian rivers. There were some small fish rising. We discovered later that the river was full of trout. The mules couldn't follow us here and we had to wade them through the river, and it was here that we first had misgivings about them. Our progress was slow; we sent a coy to the top of each ridge before moving from the last one. The ravines between them were steep, and it was becoming dusk when we reached the top of the fourth ridge to find a deep cleft below us, several miles in length and quite impassable in the dark. The sides of it were covered with thick oak scrub. We had no choice but to halt for the night. We settled down, partly in an oakshaw and partly on the open crest of the ridge. A German heavy gun began to drop shells six hundred yards to our right, but never came any nearer. A scout reported a big German patrol moving in the ravine below us. We lay low, as we could not afford to give away our position. I never saw a darker or wetter night. The rain started quite suddenly, and lasted until morning. It fell in huge drops that splashed on the leaves, and splashed on our faces making sleep impossible. It was then the mules decided to assert themselves. They smashed two wireless sets (the only two long range ones) and one then laid a muleteer unconscious with a well aimed kick on the head. Then they started to shake their heads. This caused their bits and bridles to jingle loud enough to wake the dead, or so it seemed to us as we crouched in that dripping forest. Our artillery opened up from behind Oratino and the winking flashes gave us comfort. They suggested warmth. (Tweedsmuir, op. cit.).

159. At first light on 27 Oct it became possible to negotiate the ravine referred to above, which appears to have been the upper part of the valley of a torrent which runs into the Biferno due south of Casalciprano. In view of the dominant situation of Molise the approach had to be cautious, but continued heavy rain and a thick fog which accompanied it allowed the leading company of the battalion to enter the town by noon. It proved to be clear of enemy and bedecked with Italian flags, but it was not long before the Hastings discovered that a considerable proportion of the inhabitants, including the mayor, were active Fascists, and for several days after their entrance they were being constantly spied upon. Almost at once the enemy's artillery fire came down on Molise, and with particular accuracy upon the slit trenches being dug on its perimeter (ibid.).

160. Torella and Molise were mean and dirty little towns, and a decided break in the weather and the fall of icy rain made the situation of the two battalions occupying them particularly unhappy. Apart from this discomfort shellfire was persistent. On the day following their entry into Molise, the East & P.E.R. lost five men killed and 14 wounded, and the 48th two men wounded and three vehicles



destroyed. From then until the end of the month this irksome situation continued and casualties mounted slowly. On 28 Oct Brigadier Graham ordered the Hast & P.E.R. to despatch a company to Frosolone, five miles south of Molise on the lateral road to Cantalupo. When the company arrived it found Frosolone abandoned by the Germans, but as soon as the troops were observed entering the town the enemy guns commenced harassing fire. On the road north of Molise, Duronia proved to be occupied and at least two self-propelled guns were located in its vicinity. But by and large the patrols of the two battalions discovered very little on their movements forward over the bleak uplands. By the end of October the F.O.Os. of the divisional artillery had begun to get the measure of the enemy's guns. 48 Highrs patrols working north to Pietracupa discovered no enemy. On the first day of November it was decided to relieve the Hast & P.E.R. in Molise because of their unexpectedly heavy casualties from shellfire and the R.C.R. were brought forward from Castropignano for this purpose. The 48 Highrs stayed on in Torella (Tweedsmuir, op. cit.; W.D. 48 Highrs, 27-31 Oct 43 and W.D. Hast & P.E.R., 28 Oct - 1 Nov 43).

#### WITHDRAWAL INTO RESERVE

161. During the night 27/28 Oct 17 Bde of 5 (Brit) Div relieved 2 Cdn Inf Bde in the area S. Elena - Spinete - Colle d'Anchise, and on the following night 13 Bde replaced the Carlt & York R. at Boiano. In order to make room for 5 Div, 2 Cdn Inf Bde withdrew the L. Edm R. from Colle d'Anchise to the brickworks near Baranello Station, and the P.F.C.L.I. moved into Busso. The Carlt & York R. were withdrawn to rest behind Campobasso between Toro and S. Giovanni. (W.D. H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 27-29 Oct 43; and W.D. Carlt & York R., 28-30 Oct 43). The stage was now set for the continuation of the advance towards Isernia, but the mined condition of all the secondary roads beyond the Biferno greatly hampered the two-wheeled drive vehicles of 5 Div and little progress was made towards Cantalupo for some days. In fact it appeared that 34 U.S. Div on the other side of the Matese mountains, which had made unexpectedly rapid progress up the Volturno river towards the Venafro, would beat 5 Div into Isernia, did not, in fact, happen for patrols of 13 Bde entered Isernia on 4 Nov after an apparently complete withdrawal by the enemy. During this advance 5 Div had been supported by 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt which had originally been brought forward and placed temporarily under the command of 1 Cdn Inf Div on 23 Oct (C.I.G.S. Summary No. 64, 5 Nov 43; and W.D. 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 23-24 Oct 43). Only one squadron of 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt remained with 1 Cdn Inf Div after 28 Oct, when the Ontarios were returned to the command of 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde and withdrew to rest and refit (W.D. 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 28 Oct 43).

162. Some explanation of enemy movements at the end of October which contributed to the easy acquisition of Isernia may be derived from the conclusions of 1 Cdn Inf Div Intelligence on 26 Oct, in the midst of the advance of 1 Cdn Inf Bde from Castropignano to the line Torella - Molise. It was appreciated that the German withdrawal from the Biferno position, from Castropignano on the left to S. Polo on the right coincided with the attack of 1 & 2 Cdn Inf Bdes:



The retirement was not local, it involved the surrender of the posn in its entire depth. Thus, in principle, the lateral road Torella - Cantalupo was conceded us in one bound. Movement on our right from Trivento to areas behind the Trigno R. suggests that the bound was given for the whole of 76 Pz Corps' front.

In detail the withdrawal was executed something like this. 22/23 Oct the guns began thinning out from the Castropignano and Bojano areas, and the few guns in the centre area (S. Elena - Frosolone) left in toto. New areas around Torella - Molise, and around Cantalupo respectively, were occupied by perhaps one half of the previous gun strength. No guns went into action in a new centre area.

The movements of the inf are more difficult to follow. This much however is clear. From night 22/23 Oct to night 23/24 Oct the central sector thinned out from Roccaspromonte 4633 to excl Colle d'Anchise in depth to the lateral through Spinete. During this 24 hours the rd Torella - Cantalupo was blown in at least three places. 24 Oct contact could still be made at S. Elena; on as late as 26 Oct a contact party of Germans was still in Frosolone. This entire area, however, was in principle evacuated by the Germans by 2300 hrs 24 Oct.

A later timing for withdrawal was given the tps covering the two main routes out of our div area: the rd Bojano - Isernia, and the rd Castropignano - Torella - Citanova. The reason for German concern about these two axes is quite clear: they are respectively the main withdrawal routes of 26 Pz Div and 29 PG Div. Reports of thorough mining, heavy shelling and obstinate MG fire in front of the Torella - Molise cross rds accords well with the appreciated importance of this nodal pt to the Germans. It is not only a comm centre through which tps from as far North as Trivento may have to withdraw, it is an axis along which the Germans will of course maintain contact in their backward movement. The same situation would develop on the left axis (Bojano - Isernia) if our tps moved fwd to seize grounds beyond Cantalupo. Civilians report two to three coys around the town.

Even at this early date before the advance to Isernia had begun, our Intelligence had appreciated that only limited forces would be maintained in front of it along Route 17 and that Isernia had lost its importance to the Germans as soon as the Biferno line had been pierced. (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F, Int Summary No. 22, 26 Oct 43).

163. In fact it would appear that Kesselring, who was shortly to take over the responsibility for all the German forces in Italy, had come to the conclusion that his



troops must now withdraw to the Winter Line following the valley of the Sangro River as far inland as Alfedena, and including Cassino, the principal bastion protecting the approach to Rome along the Liri Valley, and Minturno on the Tyrrhenian coast, which was the terminus of the Garigliano line and covered the coastal defile by which the Appian Way approached Rome from the south-east. This general withdrawal was to be accomplished under cover of a series of stubborn delaying actions from sea to sea. The enemy's resistance at S. Salvo, overlooking the mouth of the Trigno River, was an example of such an action, and 78 Div, which began its attack on 27 Oct, was not able to bring it to a successful conclusion until 3 Nov. Similar delaying actions were conducted at the head of the Volturno valley, and particularly in the narrow Mignano defile through which Route 6 approaches Cassino and the important crossing of the Rapido River; the fifth Army had bitter fighting here.

164 In early November operations on the Canadian front were confined to the far-flung patrols of 4 Cdn Recce Regt on the right flank, and efforts to make the Torella - Molise position as secure as possible. On 4 Nov the R.C.R. moved from Molise to Duronia, a small hill town situated in rolling upland country. Here it was heavily shelled on the following day, but its patrols, together with those of "C" Squadron of the Reconnaissance Regiment, chased the enemy back to Bagnoli; and their efforts were greatly assisted by the remaining battery of the Air Landing Light Regt and 2 Fd Regt, R.C.A., which employed the Air O.P. with excellent effect against hostile batteries. On 4 Nov also "C" Company of the 48 Highrs moved north from Torella to Pietracupa, and patrols subsequently ranged as far north as Salcito. From here it is possible to overlook the valley of the Upper Trigno, but the roads to Bagnoli, and from there westwards, were so thoroughly demolished that even investigation was impracticable, much less further deliberate advances. As an immediate commitment, the engineers operating in front of Torella and Molise had 80 demolitions to circumvent and repair. (W.D. H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 4-6 Nov; and Renison, op. cit.).

#### THE DEMONSTRATION ON THE UPPER SANGRO

165. With the exception of 3 Cdn Inf Bde and supporting arms which will be enumerated later, the troops of 1 Cdn Inf Div remained in reserve and out of contact until the end of November. Much valuable time was in consequence gained for resting and preparing for the bitter December battles on the Adriatic coast. But this development was not yet guessed at and preparations for winter warfare in the mountains where heavy snowfall was expected continued to occupy the attention of unit commanders and services responsible for supply and maintenance. It is now necessary to turn to the operations conducted by 3 Cdn Inf Bde Gp many miles north and west of Campobasso in the bleak and mountainous country in which the Sangro River rises. With the capture of S. Salvo by 5 Corps and the subsequent rapid exploitation to Vasto and beyond, it became necessary to exert additional pressure on the left flank to prevent the enemy concentrating against the right flank of the Eighth Army where plans were afoot for the assault across the lower Sangro. In the central portion of the Army's front a large and loosely-held



enemy salient had appeared as a result of progress along the coast towards Vasto and on the left flank towards Isernia.

166. On 5 Nov, it was decided to bring 13 Corps closer to the German "Winter Line" by the capture of Forli Del Sannio ten miles north of Isernia. Divisional tasks were allotted to make the advance in a northwesterly direction on a Corps axis Lucera-Vinchiatturo-Cantalupo. 5 (Brit) Div troops were to maintain close contact with the retreating enemy, and capture La Caprara Hill overlooking Rionero, and Hill 1210 on the west side of the Isernia-Castel Di Sangro highway. One brigade group of this Division was to remain in the Carpinone area until permission was given from Corps to move it forward. 1 Cdn Inf Div were immediately to extend their patrols over to Sessano, Pescolanciano and Carovilli, and keep them there. In addition, a brigade group was to be prepared to move to the Carovilli area at 48 hours' notice. The task of this brigade would be to move in and hold Carovilli; to patrol northwards towards 8 Ind Div as far as Castilgione; and to patrol northwest as far as the Sangro at San Angelo and Ateleta. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps, November 1943, Appx "D1", Operation Order No. 7.) Extensive demolitions on the few roads that existed in that area made allotment of axes difficult. 5 Div was to use the main corps axis, but one suitable for 1 Cdn Inf Div had yet to be reconnoitred. (Ibid.). Junction points of 5 Div and 1 Cdn Inf Div were Sessano and Roccasicura. (Ibid.) Any advance in this region was dependent on the progress of the engineer companies. Allotment of responsibility for repair and maintenance gave 1 Cdn Inf Div Engineers the Isernia - Castiglione lateral road from Sessano to Castiglione and the route back to Campobasso through Bagnoli and Castropignano. (Ibid.).

167. 4 Cdn Recce Regt patrols, with mules, were sent over the mountains towards Sessano to join up with those of 5 Div. They were also ordered to press on in the direction of Carovilli and Pescolanciano. (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/E: Ops Message Log, Serial 5724 and 5873). The officer commanding 4 Fd Coy, R.C.E., was sent to H.Q. 5 Div to discuss the problem of opening the Carpinone - Sessano road. (W.D., 4 Fd Coy, R.C.E., 5 Nov 43).

168. On 5 Nov 43, Brigadier Gibson and his Brigade Major attended an "O" Group at Divisional H.Q. in Campobasso. A tentative plan for the forthcoming Carovilli operation was outlined and the brigade and attached troops warned to be ready to move on 48 hours' notice. The group would be under the command of 13 Corps. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Nov 1943). The following day at 1000 hrs. the Brigade Commander held a conference which was attended by all unit and sub-unit commanders in the brigade group. (Ibid.)

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\* The Germans referred to their proposed defences as the "Winterstellung" or Winter Line (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F, Intelligence Summary No. 23, 10 Nov 43).



The group was composed of the three infantry battalions of 3 Cdn Inf Bde, R. 22e R., Carlt & York R., and West N.S.R.; 1 Fd Regt, R.C.H.A.; Brigade Support Group (Sask L.I.); 54 L.A.A. Bty, R.C.A.; 57 A. Tk Bty, R.C.A.; and 2 Bty, 1 Air Landing Light Regt R.A. (Ibid.) During the conference it was decided that a Brigade Tactical H.Q. would move behind the advanced guard. The following allotment of supporting arms from the Brigade Support Group was decided upon: one platoon of Gerlikons with each battalion and one with Brigade Headquarters; and one platoon of medium machine-guns with the advanced guard. At noon the Brigade Commander, Brigade Major and Commanding Officer of 1 Fd Regt R.C.H.A. climbed the high ridge south-east of Sessano to reconnoitre the town (Ibid.).

169. At this stage the moving of the brigade from its position around Campobasso through the mountains of the Central Apennines was a task that fell largely to the engineers. The enemy demolition programme had accounted for all the bridges from Campobasso to the Sangro River. (War Office Weekly Intelligence Review, No. 13, 10 Nov 43.) Furthermore, heavy rainfall had widened and deepened the river to treacherous rapids and had made the diversions steep dangerous banks of clay and mud. On 8 Nov 43, it was decided that the Brigade Group would move to Carovilli through Civitanova as soon as the route was opened by the Engineers. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Nov 43.). The Brigade Commander after making a reconnaissance was of the opinion that the roads would not be open for several days.

170. A patrol of Gordon Highlanders from 5 Div reported Forli clear of enemy on 8 Nov (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, Ops Log 9 Nov 43, Serial 5912). In the afternoon the G.O.C. 1 Cdn Inf Div came to Brigade Headquarters and advised that the Brigade Group would not move until further orders were given from Division. (W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Nov 43).

171. During the first ten days of November a coordinated thrust on both flanks of the Allied line had brought the Fifth Army to the Garigliano, seventy miles from ROME, while in the North the Trigno bridgehead had expanded towards the Sangro. Preparations were under way to attack the Winterstellung, an operation which was to develop eventually into the bitter struggles at Ortona and Cassino. Opposition had stiffened, with frequent counter-attacks against the Fifth Army which suggested that the enemy were anxious to avoid a battle of movement along the Cassino - Frosinone approaches to Rome. (C.I.G.S. Summary No. 69, 10 Nov 43). As the enemy withdrew to his prepared positions his order of battle appeared to be, from East to West, 65 Inf Div, 16 Pz Div, 1 Para Div, 305 Inf Div, 26 Pz Div, 3 Pz Gr Div, 15 Pz Gr Div and 94 Inf Div. Of these 65 Inf Div and 305 Inf Div were fresh arrivals in the process of replacing 16 Pz Div and 3 Pz Gr Div respectively. 305 Inf Div, taking up its defensive role in the Castel Di Sangro position, would be the first German Infantry Division to confront the Canadians, whose previous engagements had only brought them up against Parachute, Panzer Grenadier, and Panzer Divisions. (Ibid., and Hist Sec File Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/T, Int Summary No. 23, 10 Nov 43). While this did not seem to be a heavy array in men, the enemy had in his favour both the weather and an



apparently inexhaustible supply of demolition charges. A drive up the east coast by the Eighth Army would cut the Rome - Pescara highway and leave the German divisions in the Abruzzi in danger of being cut off. This would also bring the Eighth Army into a position well north of Rome. General Montgomery explained this before the offensive began in a personal message to all troops under his command.

The time has now come to drive the Germans north of ROME. The Eighth Army is not advancing on the direct ROME axis; it is the Fifth American Army which is on that line. But our help is vital if the Fifth Army is to secure ROME.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, November 1943, Appx 46.)

172. To provide this assistance two courses lay open for the Eighth Army: a drive up the centre directed towards Sulmona, or an attack up the coast between the Maiella and the sea. The latter alternative was chosen. At that time the Eighth Army front was held by 13 Corps on the left from Isernia to Agnone, and 5 Corps on the right from Agnone to the sea. 5 (Brit) Div, on the extreme left of the Army front, with 1 Cdn Inf Div made up 13 Corps. On the right of the Canadians were 8 Ind Div, and on the Adriatic, 78 Div under command of 5 Corps. 4 Armd Bde was in reserve south of Vasto. The battle-hardened 2 N.Z. Div had come over from North Africa in early October, strict security measures being taken to keep its presence a secret. (C.I.G.S. Summary No. 69, 10 Nov 43.) 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde was passing from under command 13 Corps to 5 Corps. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 14 Nov 43.)

173. Accordingly a deception operation was planned to give the enemy the impression that the main attack would be launched on 13 Corps' front and not that of 5 Corps.

The deception plan for the Sangro battle aims at persuading the enemy that the main attack will be made by 13 Corps on the left flank and not by 5 Corps on the right. Further it is intended that the enemy should think that the main attack is due two days later than it is really taking place.

(W.D., Main H.Q. Eighth Army, November 1943, Appx "Z", Outline Deception Plan 10 Nov 43)

An infantry brigade group from 1 Cdn Inf Div was to play an integral part in this scheme (Ibid). 3 Cdn Inf Bde was chosen for the task since, with the exception of the Carlt & York R., it had been battle-free since 12 Oct (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, November 1943). Moreover, the brigade had been preparing to protect the right flank of 5 Div during the capture of Forlì, but because of demolitions beyond the Biferno had been unable to reach the positions around Carovilli.

174. Success of the deception was dependent on concealment of preparation in 5 Corps area where the build-up and reshuffling were taking place. Contraction of 78



Div front, brought about by the insertion of 2 N.Z. Div on the left of 5 Corps, was to be curtailed by active patrolling of 78 Div troops on its former wide front. Gun positions and dumps were to be camouflaged. The move of 8 Ind Div to its new concentration area would be covered by leaving 19 Ind Bde behind in the Castiglione - Agnone area. 2 N.Z. Div, replacing 8 Ind Div, was to take particular care to prevent the enemy from knowing it had arrived in Italy. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, moving over to the East coast, was to maintain absolute wireless silence. (W.D., Main H.Q. Eighth Army, November 1943, Appx "Z".)

175. It was the task of 13 Corps to make false preparations for an attack on the Alfedena - Castel Di Sangro positions, leading the enemy to believe that 8 Ind Div would be under command in its old position on the right of the Canadians. To assist in giving this impression, wireless plan "Chinchilla" was drawn up at Army Headquarters. This included opening up wireless links of Army Tactical H.Q. in the Vinchiatturo area, and emission of reports in Urdu and English in the Agnone area, whence 8 Ind Div was to move. Coupled with this, a false reconnaissance of a site for a new Army Tac H.Q. in the Vinchiatturo area was to be made, with a liberal posting of Army H.Q. tactical signs. 2 N.Z. Div, moving up to the front, was to take the route into 13 Corps area by day, and to its allotted place in the Castiglione area by night. Aircraft supporting Eighth Army were to carry out reconnaissance flights opposite the 13 Corps sector, and were to provide a heavy bombing programme in the same area. False extensions were to be built in the 13 Corps Forward Maintenance Centre on the edge of Campobasso. Canadian troops were to move over from their positions north of Campobasso and patrol in the sector held by 5 Div. Dummy gun positions were to be erected, and an active counter battery policy pursued (Ibid.) If successful, the plan would present the enemy with a completely wrong picture of what was actually taking place. 13 Corps Order of Battle would appear to be 5 Div, 1 Cdn Div, 8 Ind Div plus 2 N.Z. Div and 1 Cdn Armd Bde, whereas actually it was 5 Div and a brigade group of Canadians.

176. By 14 Nov, the task of 3 Cdn Inf Bde Group as the kingpin in the deception plan had been defined. It was to gain control of the Upper Sangro, including Agnone, Ateleta, Carovilli, and Castel Di Sangro; to be prepared on 21 Nov to launch an attack in the Roccacinquemille area; to be ready to follow up with an advance on the axis Castel Di Sangro - Sulmona. This attack would be preceded on 18 Nov by a 5 Div attack on the axis Castel San Vincenzo - Alfedena. Artillery was allotted accordingly, and 75 Med Regt Group R.A.,\* consisting of 75 Med Regt R.A., 78 Fd Regt R.A. and 165 Fd Regt R.A., was to be under command of 5 Div until 20 Nov when it would pass to 1 Cdn Inf Div. (W.D., Main H.Q. 13 Corps, November 1943, Appx "D4", 13 Corps Operation Order No. 8, 14 Nov 43). The opening of a tactical headquarters of 1 Cdn Inf Div in Pescocostanzo would add further support to the deception. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 14 Nov 43). The main divisional headquarters in Campobasso was to become an "outstation" in the divisional W.T. network thereby misleading enemy interception. (Ibid.) Tactical Headquarters was set up in Pescocostanzo by 1400 hrs on 16 Nov. (Ibid., 16 Nov 43).

\* This grouping of artillery under the command of C.O. 75 Med Regt R.A. was a temporary measure in the absence of H.Q. 6 A.G.R.A. (Ibid.)



177. The story of the Carovilli deception plan essentially begins with the engineers. Normally their work is overshadowed by the more spectacular undertakings of the other arms. In this particular engagement a brigade group was to operate in a mountainous sector which it could enter only through the valleys of the Fonte La Gatta or the Upper Trigno. At Castropignano, eight miles northwest of Campobasso, the Biferno River threw a barrier across the route which rose daily as the rainfall continued, and the danger of the bridges being washed away became more apparent. Therefore, the successful movement of the Brigade -- and in its proper perspective, the Sangro battle itself -- depended on the two groups of engineers preparing the two entrances to the Upper Sangro.

178. The first of these two routes from Campobasso followed the Termoli-Isernia lateral road through Vinchiaturro and Boiano. Ten miles beyond Boiano, the lateral road is joined by a secondary road from Carpinone. This latter route climbs up from the valley of the Rio through Castelpetroso to Carpinone where it joins the Isernia-Carovilli road and then ascends the narrow pass of the Fonte La Gatta through Sessano to Pescolanciano. The road at this point turns through the broader valley of the upper Trigno to join the Isernia-Vasto lateral highway a mile east of Carovilli. The other route, a secondary road from Campobasso, along which the Division had advanced in late October and early November, ran through Castropignano to Torella where it divided; one branch continuing north to Pietracupa and the other striking west to Molise. This latter town is linked to Duronia and Bagnoli by a narrow, poorly-surfaced road, and a similar one runs west from Duronia up the valley of the Trigno through Civitanova to meet the Carpinone-Carovilli road halfway between Pescolanciano and Sessano.

179. 4 Fd Coy, R.C.E. left Campobasso on 7 Nov to commence work on the Carpinone - Sessano road. The West N.S.R. were detailed to send one company and two sections of mules to Sessano to give protection to the exposed engineers. (W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde). While the Engineers were establishing themselves in Carpinone a reconnaissance party returned with a grim picture of demolition on the road to Sessano. At the road junction on the outskirts of Carpinone there was a blown bridge but a diversion had already been prepared by the Engineers of 5 Div. For the next half-mile towards Sessano the road ran along a rock ledge under a sheer cliff. A landslide, which had been dynamited from the cliffs 150 feet above, obstructed the road. Just beyond this landslide there was a U-turn into the face of the cliff. Here 150 feet of road had been blown away. One hundred feet further another demolished bridge required a 60-foot Bailey span, the sheer drop presenting no opportunity for building a diversion. Later came a series of three craters none of which was difficult to repair, and beyond them the road had been blown away again, leaving a gap that also required a Bailey bridge. All these obstructions lay within a mile and a half of road. From civilians it was learnt that there were no more demolitions on the remaining two miles into Sessano. (W.D., 4 Fd Coy R.C.E., November 1943).

180. Tasks were allotted to each platoon, and work commenced on the afternoon of 7 Nov. The delicate operation of boring into the cliff face at the U-turn was given to a



detachment of No. 1 Tunnelling Coy, R.C.E. Because it was impossible to bring bridging up to the gaps in the road beyond, progress depended on the efforts of the Tunnellers. Further reconnaissance was made to find a route by which this bridging could be brought up without waiting for them. The railway tunnel running parallel to the road presented an attractive alternative. The Officer Commanding, Major Pritchard, went through this tunnel on the morning of the 8th. The trip was, however, fruitless, there being only a mule track at the far end. The Tunnelling Company began diamond drilling and estimated that their work would take another 48 hours. One more gap was discovered before Sessano. On the next two days the weather was wet and the temperature dropped. The tunnellers found their work more difficult as it progressed, and they were not expected to blow the charges they were laying until the 11th. (Ibid.)

181. Competition was developing with 1 and 3 Fd Coys R.C.E. working up through Civitanova, the goal being the road junction half way between Pescolaniano and Sessano. 4 Fd Coy reconnoitred to Carovilli on the 10th. The men returned in the afternoon with the news that they had lifted their motorcycles over 14 blows between Sessano and Carovilli, a distance of eight miles. On the morning of the 11th, the Divisional C.R.E., Lt.-Col. G. Walsh, arrived to see how the work was progressing. He emphasized the importance of the Carovilli route to the forthcoming operation. The deadline for reaching the junction with the Civitanova Road was the 14th. Whether this could be achieved depended largely on the tunnellers, who at 0130 hrs on the 12th blew charges amounting to 2000 pounds of explosives. The results were, however, disappointing. Work continued all night with compressors, picks and shovels and smaller charges. The C.R.E. came personally to supervise the task. The Chief Engineer, 13 Corps, also arrived and suggested that six-pounder anti-tank shells might dislodge the loose rock that remained clinging to the face of the cliff. An anti-tank gun from 17 (Brit) Inf Bde was brought up and twenty-four rounds were fired into the cliff-face. A great deal of loose rock fell but the result was negligible. The work continued again with explosives and continued through the night and the next day. No. 2 Platoon during this period was despatched to Sessano to begin working on the road into Carovilli. Bridging arrived from Campobasso on the 14th and by the following night two 50-foot bridges and one 60-foot bridge were constructed across the three major gaps in the road. Constant vigilance had to be kept to ensure that the ground on which the bridges rested did not give way during the heavy rain, and in some cases the bridges were jacked up and the "bankseats" reinforced. (W.D. 4 Fd Coy R.C.E., 7 - 14 Nov 43).

182. At the same time the combined efforts of 1 and 3 Fd Coy, R.C.E. were concentrated on opening a route through Civitanova. On the 7th, 1 Fd Coy had been given the task of opening the road as far as Bagnoli, while 3 Fd Coy took over the 250-foot crossing at the Biferno River below Castropignano. The road through Torella - Molise - Duronia presented little difficulty with two blown culverts, a felled tree and one small crater. (W.D. 1 Fd Coy R.C.E., 7 - 8 Nov 43). Finally, 13 Corps Engineers relieved 3 Fd Coy at the Biferno crossing. A thousand yards south of Bagnoli the road from Civitanova forks into the road up from Duronia.



From this point to Carovilli, reconnaissance showed that there were 19 demolitions and obstructions. Between Bagnoli and Civitanova there were three blown culverts and five blown bridges; from Civitanova to the junction with the Pescolanciano - Sessano road two blown bridges and one culvert; and from the junction to Carovilli eight blown bridges. Five of these demolitions were bridged and the remainder overcome with diversions and by-passes. A system of leap-frogging was evolved by 1 and 3 Fd Coys, one passing through the other as tasks were completed and bridging could be brought up. By 0800 hrs 12 Nov, 3 Fd Coy was able to get beyond Civitanova to begin the two bridging tasks before the junction. By noon 1 Fd Coy had constructed a 40-foot single-single Bailey span in the town itself.

183. By the morning of 14 Nov, 4 Fd Coy had leaped forward to Pescolanciano after having built a 130-foot Bailey outside the town. Heavy rain on 15 Nov made many of the diversions impassable, and the C.R.E. directed that all efforts should be made to maintain them. (*Ibid.*) This heavy rain also caused the Biferno to rise and during the afternoon the crossing below Castropignano was washed away, necessitating further postponement of the move (Hist Sec File Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, Ops log 15 Nov 43, Serial 6148). With this exception the road to Carovilli was opened by 16 Nov. Corps Troops Engineers, who were maintaining the crossing at the time, then began to construct a Bailey Bridge (W.D., 1 Fd Coy R.C.E., November 1943 Appx 6). The work accomplished during the past week represented a magnificent achievement for the Engineers of 1 Cdn Inf Div and brought praise from all ranks of the Brigade Group as they passed through.

184. While the engineers were repairing the roads to Carovilli, the Brigade Group waited in its concentration area around Campobasso. Liaison Officers were despatched daily to report on progress. 4 Cdn Recce Regt, now covering the entire front between 8 Ind Div and 5 Div, had established a standing patrol in Carovilli on 9 Nov (Hist Sec File Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, Ops Log 9 Nov 43, Serial 9505). By 11 Nov, Agnone had been reported clear, although no contact had been made with 8 Ind Div (*Ibid.*, Serial 6019). Over to the left, patrols of 5 Div had been met in Roccasicura (*Ibid.*, Serial 6003). "C" Coy, West N.S.R., which had been sent with the engineers to Sessano, was on 13 Nov ordered to maintain a standing patrol with 4 Cdn Recce Regt in Carovilli (*Ibid.*, Serial 6099). A further "C" Group was held at Brigade Headquarters on 13 Nov. The remainder of West N.S.R. were ordered to join "C" Coy in Carovilli on 15 Nov, and the bulk of the Brigade Group were to follow the next day (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Nov 43). This move was cancelled after the collapse of the Biferno pontoon bridge and arrangements were made with Corps H.Q. to carry out the moves through Vinchiatturo and Boiano rather than wait until the damage had been repaired (Hist Sec File Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, Ops Log, 9 Nov 43, Serial 6209). On 16 Nov, West N.S.R. was in position in the valley east of Carovilli, Brigade Headquarters had opened in the town, and Tac Div H.Q. was established in Pescolanciano (*Ibid.*, Tac H.Q. Ops Message Log Serial 1, and W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 16 Nov 43). 1 Fd Regt, R.C.H.A., which had been concentrated on the north side of the Biferno in Roccaspromonte, was not held up by the crossing, and moved to the valley east of Carovilli on 16 Nov (W.D., 1 Fd Regt, R.C.H.A., 16 Nov 43).



185. The Tactical Headquarters which was formed to give the impression that the entire Division was involved in these operations as well as to provide a genuine administrative link, was made up of 12 officers and 121 other ranks. Included, besides the G.O.C., were: G.S.O. 2; two G.S.Os. 3; one Intelligence Officer; part of the A.A. & Q.M.G. staff; the complete Headquarters of the Divisional Engineers; B.M.R.A.; part of the Defence Platoon; and half a section of Provost (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 16 Nov 43). Lt-Col. J.N. Lane, O.C. 1 Cdn Fd Regt, R.C.H.A., went to H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde to act as C.R.A. of all the artillery units attached to the group. (W.D., 1 Fd Regt, R.C.H.A., 14 Nov 43).

186. North of Carovilli, between the Vasto lateral road and the Sangro River, is the broad valley in which rise the Trigno and the Vandra rivers. The Trigno flows to the Adriatic and the Vandra flows south to join the Volturno. Many smaller streams cut across the valley in all directions through heavy woods and around high rocky peaks. Highest of the numerous peaks is La Capraro, six miles north of Carovilli. The Vasto lateral road runs north from Carovilli across the valley to Agnone. It is met four miles north of Carovilli by two secondary roads leading towards the Sangro: one running north-west through Vastogirardi, south of La Capraro to San Pietro Avellana. The other goes north through the defile formed by La Caprararo and Monte Il Campo by way of Capracotta.

187. On the Upper Sangro the German winter defences were designed mainly to protect the two bottle-neck roads Castel Di Sangro - Sulmona and Alfedena - Gioia as long as the left flank in the coastal plain remained secure. As early as 9 Oct, interrogation of refugees had revealed that the Germans were conscripting civilian labour to work on the defences in the Castel Di Sangro area (Hist Sec File Italy/1944/ 1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F, 1 Cdn Inf Div Interrogation Reports, 9 Oct 43). A German prisoner had stated that orders had been received to hold this line for eight weeks (W.D. G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps November 1943, Appx "F2", Intelligence Summary No. 291, 11 Nov 43). At Rivisondoli on the Sulmona road a minefield was enfiladed by positions from the hill-sides. The river-crossing at Castel Di Sangro, and the defile to the North, were covered by positions in the hills. Around Monte Greco, to the south-west, near Alfedena the defile was blocked by anti-tank ditches and diggings. The area forward of these positions afforded ample opportunity for weapon pits, gun positions and the other usual German defences. However, in the Upper Sangro sector there were fewer signs of such developments than might have been expected, indicating that the enemy was more concerned with his vulnerable left flank than the centre. In this area the enemy was relying on winter conditions, difficult ground and demolition rather than elaborate defence. (Hist Sec File Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F, Int Summary No. 23, 10 Nov 43). His defensive scheme was supplemented by a complete "scorched earth" policy in a distinct belt south of the Sangro where our troops were expected to be held up during the winter. Typical German thoroughness was shown by S.S. Troops in enforced evacuation and labour, removal of food stocks and cattle, and destruction and burning of towns and villages.



188. By 15 Nov, 29 Panzer Gr Div was withdrawing and 26 Pz Div moved westwards leaving 1 Para Div to occupy the Sangro line between the Maiella and Castel Di Sangro. 305 Inf Div remained in its position west of Castel Di Sangro. German troops were living in farmhouses and woods, and were armed with light automatic weapons, infantry guns, and mortars. As in Sicily with the Etna bulwark, the enemy had shown wise appreciation of the value of mountains in replacing troops. Between Alfedena and Roccasicura the buttress of Monte Greco completely divided the German line, while farther north the massive Maiella with its ragged southern face held part of the line itself (W.D. 3 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A., November, 1943 Appx 4, 1 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No. 24, 16 Nov 43). The first phase of 3 Cdn Inf Bde's operation would be to clear the enemy outpost patrols from the south bank of the river (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Nov 43). The dispersal point for the troops moving up from Campobasso was the junction of the Carovilli-Agnone road with the two running southwards from Vastogirardi and Capracotta (W.D. Carlt & York R., November 1943, Appx 9). The Carlt and York R. and the R. 22e R. arrived at this dispersal point on 18 Nov and having taken, as had the West N.S.R., the southern route from Campobasso through Vinchiatturo and Boiaivo (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 18 Nov 43).

189. Until 18 Nov, when the greater part of the brigade group arrived at the dispersal point, the West N.S.R. had taken over the patrol commitments of 4 Cdn Recce Regt. Standing patrols were sent to Vastogirardi and Roccasicura. Information had been received that about 20 Germans were occupying the farm buildings two miles west of Vastogirardi in the defile between Monte Miglio and Montagnola, and these positions were to be reconnoitred with a view to shelling them. (W.D. West N.S.R., 16 Nov 43.) At 1500 hrs, 17 Nov, an enemy patrol approaching Vastogirardi was surprised by the Canadians and withdrew leaving four dead who were later identified as belonging to 1 Para Div. After this incident, the standing patrol in Vastogirardi was strengthened by one more platoon. Pagliarone, three miles along the railway northwest of Carovilli, which had been missed by the enemy in his "scorched earth" activities, was occupied by a platoon of "A" Coy in order to prevent his returning to destroy the town. (W.D., West N.S.R., 17 Nov 43). Upon the arrival of the remainder of the brigade, the West N.S.R. patrol in Vastogirardi returned to the battalion area below Carovilli. One platoon of this regiment was ordered to make its way into San Pietro, but at the base of Monte Miglio they met a strong enemy patrol and during the short skirmish that followed, the enemy lost three men, and one Canadian was fatally wounded. The Canadian patrol commander, realizing that his small force was opposed by one considerably stronger, withdrew, but as they were returning in the direction of Vastogirardi, they met a company of the R. 22e R. also moving to San Pietro. The Forward Observation Officer with the French Canadians called for artillery fire on the enemy patrol which immediately broke up and retired towards the river. (W.D. West N.S.R., 18 Nov 43).

190. The R. 22e R., which was advancing from the brigade dispersal point, had established battalion headquarters in Vastogirardi by 1400 hrs, 18 Nov. "B" Coy was immediately despatched to San Pietro, and after assisting the West N.S.R. platoon in its skirmish at the base of Monte Miglio, pushed on to San Pietro where positions were taken up by 1800 hrs. (W.D. R. 22e R., 18 Nov 43). Canadian



troops, by this time, had seen many towns and villages damaged in the course of operations, but San Pietro was their first sight of a town deliberately destroyed on the pretext of military exigency. During the night 18/19 Nov, "B" Coy sent a small patrol across the Sangro, but no contact was made with the enemy. While "B" Coy was moving to San Pietro, "D" Coy formed a patrol base in the narrow wooded valley between Monte Miglio and La Capraro, from which patrols were sent into Capracotta, and across to San Pietro to link up with "B" Coy. (W.D. R. 22e R., 18 Nov 43).

191. On 18 Nov, Brigadier Gibson increased the tempo of patrol activity by issuing the following instructions:

1. Enemy patrols and O.Ps. are active in this area. At least one patrol operated 17/18 Nov. in area between 3 Cdn Inf Bde and 5 Div. \*
2. In this phase of operations, it is essential that all possible information be obtained of the enemy, and at the same time deny the enemy the chance of gathering information or inflicting damage on our forces. The following steps will be enforced immediately:
  - (a) No less than one-third of the unit will be employed on patrols.
  - (b) Patrols will operate from secure bases.
  - (c) Fighting patrols must be vigorous and inquisitive and fight for information if necessary.
  - (d) O.Ps. must be established and manned during daylight hours.
  - (e) All troops in buildings must maintain alert local protective measures.

(W.D. 1 Fd Regt R.C.H.A., November 1943, Appx 11).

192. In the R. 22e R. area, on the morning of 19 Nov, a civilian reported that there were six Germans in his house about a mile and a half beyond "C" Coy's positions. Major Paul Triquet, the Company Commander, sent an officer and 15 men to force the enemy out of these buildings. The approach was well screened by woods, gullies and knolls which enabled the patrol to gain a high feature overlooking the farm house. As the French Canadians closed in on the building, they opened fire on three Germans who were calmly walking across an open field, unaware of what was taking place. One was

\* Brigadier Gibson was referring to a patrol clash in the area of Bocca Delle Roche, six miles north-west of Roccasicura, between a small German force and the Green Howards of 5 Div. (W.D. West N.S.R., November 1943, Appx 4).



killed and the other two wounded. A PIAT bomb was fired at the house, but struck the branches of a tree; it was followed immediately by a second, which hit the house, and burst inside bringing out two wounded paratroopers. After making sure that all the enemy had been accounted for, the patrol began its return journey, taking with them the least wounded prisoner, and leaving the rest in the care of civilians, who later reported that all their patients had died. During interrogation, the surviving prisoner revealed that his patrol had been sent across the river to gain information on troop positions and strengths, but, that as a result of the prompt action of R. 22e R., none was able to return. (Hist Sec file Italy 1943/3 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, "Historire Regimentaire R. 22e R., Rapport d'une patrouille de combat du Pl 13, de la Cie "C").

193. Meanwhile, Carlt & York R. had put "A" Coy into Capracotta accompanied by a Forward Observation Officer from 1 Air Landing Light Regt, a detachment of mortars, and some personnel from the Battalion Intelligence Section. The road to Capracotta had received more than its share of enemy demolition charges, and "A" Coy had to be supplied by mules while one of the reserve companies worked to repair the road. A standing patrol of the carrier platoon was left in Agnone to link up with 2 N.Z. Div in Castiglione. (W.D. Carlt & York R., 19 Nov 43). The brigade group was now in a position to extend patrols over the whole area south of the river with West N.S.R. probing towards Castel Di Sangro, the R. 22e R. north of San Pietro, and the Carlt & York R. north of Capracotta. San Pietro and Capracotta were to be strong patrol bases. (W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 18 Nov 43). Carlt & York R., however, could not establish a firm base in Capracotta until the roads were repaired sufficiently to allow jeeps through with supplies, and 2 Bty with its guns. Engineers would not be spared for these repairs, 1 Air Landing Light Regiment and "B" Coy, Carlt & York R. became "sappers" for a week, while until the road was opened on 22 Nov "A" Coy patrolled the Sangro River line north of Capracotta. (W.D. Carlt & York R., 19-20 Nov 43).

194. During 20 Nov, West N.S.R. also moved into San Pietro, and patrols were ordered for the night of 20/21 Nov. "D" Coy was to send a patrol across Schienaforte ridge into Castel Di Sangro and to reconnoitre the river line from the town to the confluence of the L'Apparotto and Sangro Rivers. At the same time, a "B" Coy patrol was to make its way down the valley, and, if possible, cross the river and attempt to enter Roccacinquemiglia, high on the opposite bank. These patrols were to be undertaken again during daylight on 21 Nov by "A" and "C" Coys. (W.D. West N.S.R., 20 Nov 43). At first light on 21 Nov, a battalion observation post was established on the high feature west of San Pietro from which it was possible to observe the roads to Roccarasso, Roccacinquemiglia and Castel Di Sangro. 200 yards north-west of this observation post, a German patrol had hidden itself behind a rocky knoll, and opened fire on the "D" Coy patrol returning to San Pietro and an outgoing "C" Coy patrol. The Canadians quickly organized an attack on the knoll, and the paratroopers were driven off, one of them being killed. (W.D. West N.S.R., 21 Nov 43).

195. The "D" Coy patrol had been successful in reaching the centre of Castel Di Sangro and stayed there for several hours without meeting any signs of enemy occupation.



On returning, however, they had been fired at from a high pinnacle 300 yards north of the town. This rugged peak, over 3000 feet high, dominated the town and the road to Sulmona. Three men were left in Castel Di Sangro to observe and return the following night. Civilians stated that point 1009, the pinnacle, was held by 20 to 30 Germans, ten of whom came down into the village during daylight on 21 Nov, but left after a brief reconnaissance. (W.D. West N.S.R., November 1943, Appx 4). The "B" Coy patrol which had set out for Roccacinquemiglia was less successful. The river was found too deep to cross, and after following downstream for some distance it returned through R. 22e R. area. (W.D. West N.S.R., 21 Nov 43).

196. On 20 Nov, "A" Coy, Carlt & York R., extended its patrols from Capracotta along the river line from Castel Del Giudice to San Angelo Del Fesco. These patrols brought back the incredible news that two bridges across the Sangro were still intact. One, a pontoon bridge half a mile downstream from Ateleta, appeared to have been forgotten; the other, two miles further downstream, was a permanent construction 17 feet wide and 125 feet long with demolition charges already prepared. Standing patrols were posted on both of these bridges to wait for any enemy who might use them to reach the south bank of the river. Orders were received from brigade headquarters that the permanent bridge was to be kept intact if at all possible, and an Engineer N.C.O. was sent to "A" Coy to move forward under the protection of a strong patrol to "delouse" it. No. 8 Platoon, which had reached the outskirts of San Angelo in the early morning of 21 Nov, and had established a standing patrol at the bridge outside the town, sent a section with 3-inch mortars to provide the screen while the sapper N.C.O. removed the charges. As they were approaching the bridge, however, a force of about 25 enemy, which had gathered on the opposite bank, prevented him accomplishing his task. Meanwhile, another patrol of No. 8 Platoon at Pescocennataro, two miles to the west of San Angelo, reported that it was occupied by approximately 50 men. The significance of the two bridges which had remained intact became apparent. The enemy still had a small bridgehead over the Sangro in this area, held, presumably, by a small force of infantry to protect his engineers while they completed a minelaying programme. The situation was aptly described in the Brigade Intelligence Summary of 21 Nov. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 21 Nov 43).

In his withdrawal behind the SANGRO the German seems to have slipped up on his staff work. The bridge at 208648 (SAN ANGELO) was left intact as a means of withdrawal for his engineer parties and covering infantry. However, we were allowed to approach and keep the bridge under observation while these parties were still operating on this side of the river. As a result approximately 50 Germans were trapped at PESCOENNATARO and had to withdraw avoiding their own minefields much after the fashion of a housewife who has scrubbed herself into the corner and cannot get out the back door because it has been locked from the outside.

(W.D. R. 22e R., November 1943, Appx 3, 3 Cdn Inf Bde Int Summary No. 18, 21 Nov 43).



197. The enemy managed to extricate himself from this position successfully because the main body of the Carlt & York R. and 2 Bty, Air Landing Light Regt, were still held up by the demolitions on the road to Capracotta. Brigade headquarters received a wireless intercept which showed the anxiety of the Germans in Pescopennataro who had informed their headquarters on the north bank that they were cut off, and would return through Borello, three miles across country to the north. The German headquarters did not agree to such a move because of the extensive minefields in that area, but consoled the trapped men by saying that an attack was being made on San Angelo to rescue them. This information was immediately passed on to the Carlt & York R., and another section was rushed to the bridge to reinforce the six men of No. 8 Platoon who were becoming alarmed at the size of the German force that had appeared on the north bank. The two sections at the bridge were forced to retire into San Angelo but could not hold the town against the 60 Germans who were attacking. No. 8 Platoon had the task of blocking this rescue attempt, and after withdrawing from San Angelo it quickly reformed and delivered a counter-attack which drove the Germans out of the town and across the river. (W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde 21 Nov 43 Hist Sec file Italy 1943 3 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Account by Capt. R.D.P. Prince).

198. No. 7 Platoon, "A" Coy, which had been sent to Castel Del Giudice as a standing patrol on the pontoon bridge, were unable to prevent the enemy from removing it during the early morning darkness of 21 Nov. The enemy had established strong defences on the north bank between Ateleta and Gamberale from where Castel Del Giudice was kept under constant machine-gun and mortar fire. The patrol suffered no casualties, but many Italian civilians who remained in the ruined town were wounded. A group of about 100 enemy were seen on the mountain slopes a mile north of Ateleta. The patrol had no artillery in support, but reported the location of the enemy groups and fire was brought on the target by 1 Fd Regt R.C.H.A. which had F.O.O. with R. 22e R. farther upstream. (W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 21 Nov 43).

199. After the Germans' attempt to rescue their men in Pescopennataro, orders were received from brigade headquarters, now in Vastogirardi, to hold San Angelo and attack the bridge, and 2 Bty, 1 Air Landing Light Regt, R.A. came under command Carlt & York R. to support the attack. "B" Coy, Carlt & York R. had been working since 18 Nov to open the road to Capracotta, and by 22 Nov, battalion headquarters, "C" Coy, and 2 Bty, 1 A.L.L.R. were able to assist "A" Coy in the attack on the S. Angelo bridge. "D" Coy was not available to take part in this action because, at the time, it was providing protection to engineers who were working on the main road from Carovilli to Agnone, an important task which would provide road communications to 2 N.Z. Div, now operating from Castiglione, and at the same time open up another lateral route across Italy from Isernia to Vasto. By 0900 hrs, the gunners were in action at Capracotta, shelling enemy outposts dug into the rocky slopes between Ateleta and Gamberale, but shortly before midnight of 21/22 Nov the Germans had blown the prepared charges on the S. Angelo bridge. Unfortunately, "A" Coy could not organize an attack before first light on 22 Nov because its patrols were strung out from Castel Del Giudice to Pescopennataro, and artillery support was not possible until 0900 hrs. "C" Coy moved



forward to San Angelo to assist "A" Coy on the morning of 22 Nov, but as they were descending to the river from the west of the town they came under heavy mortar and machine-gun fire from the opposite bank. Three men were killed and eleven wounded, and the company did not reach S. Angelo until 2200 hrs. (W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 22 Nov 43, and W.D., Carlt & York R, 22 Nov 43).

200. Meanwhile, the trapped Germans in Pescopennataro were showing great anxiety about their precarious position, and began to give up hope of being rescued until finally they were permitted by their headquarters to return through Borello. As soon as this intercept was received, a strong patrol from Carlt & York R. was sent to cut them off, but unfortunately it did not arrive in time to prevent the enemy from reaching the north bank (Prince, op. cit.).

201. With the Carlt & York R. now in Capracotta, the brigade group was well able to control the whole of the south bank of the Sangro from S. Angelo to Castel Di Sangro. The only ground that the enemy still held was the high pinnacle - Point 1009 - which overlooked and dominated Castel Di Sangro from the north. In the centre of the brigade front, the R. 22e R. with headquarters in S. Pietro, had pushed "C" and "D" Coys well forward towards the river with "C" Coy on the high ridge on the east side of the road, some 100 yards from the river, and "D" Coy in a similar position on the west side of the road. These high features made excellent observation posts from which it was possible to watch enemy movement and minelaying and the increasingly helpless plight of the civilians as their homes were systematically demolished. Forward Observation Officers with these companies were able to direct effective fire on enemy machine-gun posts and headquarters as they were spotted, or as some patrol reported back from a reconnaissance on the north bank. Action on 21 and 22 Nov was mainly confined to patrolling by the infantry and directed shoots by the artillery. The main concern of R. 22e R. was to find suitable crossings along the river which in most places was over five deep. 3 Fd Regt R.C.A., which had moved up from Campobasso to augment the deceptive "loud noises", was now in support of the R. 22e R. Refugees risking the dangers of no-man's-land, crossed over from Roccacinquemiglia, Gamberale and Ateleta bringing with them pathetic stories of destruction and women being held as hostages because their menfolk refused to work on German defences. Patrols from the R. 22e R., which had crossed the river to feel out these defences, met with well concealed and entrenched machine-gun posts, and had little success in penetrating far beyond the river, but the information they brought back was valuable in planning the deception attack which the brigade group was to make on 24 Nov as a prelude to the battle on the Adriatic. These patrols were never more than platoon strength, but crossing the river and passing several hours in "hide and seek" engagements with the paratroopers was not without hardship. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 21-22 Nov 43).

202. On 22 Nov, the brigade commander and Lt.-Col. M.P. Bogert, commanding the West N.S.R., viewed Point 1009 from the battalion observation post, and it was decided to put in a company attack on the pinnacle. "B" Coy was detailed to leave the battalion area at 0100 hrs the following morning. Two hours after it left, wireless communication



was broken and nothing was heard of the company until 0900 hrs when it appeared back at the battalion area. Its commander, Capt. F.H. Burns, reported that the pinnacle had been strongly held. No. 11 Platoon, forming the spearhead of the attack, had been allowed by the enemy to gain a position on the plateau at the top of the pinnacle, on which were found a church and several houses. The attackers, after being challenged by a German sentry, whom they immediately shot, began to clear one of the houses, but had hardly started when they came under machine-gun fire from the basement of the church. The company commander then shouted from below the plateau to ask if the platoon required assistance. At the time it appeared that only the church was held, but shortly after the platoon began to attack it, the whole plateau was covered by severe cross-fire from the other houses. One of the supporting platoons attempted a flanking movement from below the plateau but could make no headway against the sheer cliff. As daylight was approaching, the company commander decided to extricate his men under cover of the fog that was now moving over the pinnacle. The platoon on the plateau suffered 23 casualties including the platoon commander, who was twice wounded and ordered his men to leave him. One section tried to jump off the ledge and several arms and legs were broken. The attack had been carried out during a heavy rainstorm, and the men, when they returned to the battalion area, were put under cover in an abandoned factory shelter. Evacuation of casualties from the plateau was a long and arduous descent through mud and slipping rock and several wounded had to be left. (W.D. West N.S.R., 24 Nov 43 and Prince, op cit).

203. In this successful defence of Point 1009 against a silent night attack by one company, the enemy had employed a new method of defence -- that of feigning weakness to avoid artillery. A Divisional Intelligence Summary, commenting on this action, said:

At Point 1009 the enemy, probably of 3 Bn, 1 Para Regt based on ROCCARASO lay absolutely doggo. Our recon patrols in the area received slight small arms fire from the point and met enemy light patrols in the neighbourhood who moved off after opening fire. A company attack was put in on Point 1009 and one platoon reached the top of the rock which stands sheer out of the hill top, without opposition. After about 7 minutes one M.G. opened fire on the top of the rock, after several minutes more, when everything seemed in hand, the approaches to the rock were suddenly swept by M.G. fire on fixed lines from the face of the rock and the top of the flat rock itself was covered by further M.G. fire leaving the platoon cut off and faced by heavy opposition. The M.G. positions were dug out of the rock and well placed. When an attempt was made to extricate the platoon hand grenades were dropped down the face of the rock. It is significant that:

- (a) The enemy gave the impression of weakness.
- (b) Fire was held until we were at the closest quarters.



(c) Only M.G. and hand grenades were employed.

It is likely that the enemy will feign weakness to avoid having our heavy artillery fire.

(W.D. West N.S.R., November 1943, Appx 3:  
1 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No. 25, 27 Nov 43).

204. The deception operation of 13 Corps was, by this time, beginning to develop. The original plan had called for two attacks, one by 5 Div on the axis Castel San Vincenzo - Alfedena, to begin on 18 Nov, and the other by 3 Cdn Inf Bde Group on 21 Nov on Rocca Cinquemiglia, but on 17 Nov, both were postponed for 24 hours. (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/E: Tac H.Q. Ops Message Log 17 Nov 43, serial 20). As the concentration for Eighth Army's main attack on the Adriatic was nearing completion, heavy and continual rain had become a daily occurrence, and the prospect of bridging the ever-rising Sangro lessened. The delay in launching these attacks on the left flank, and the bad weather which hampered the build-up caused further postponement of the main attack at the mouth of the river. General Montgomery, who always insisted that his troops should know what was taking place, prepared a personal message which was to be read out before the main attack began. On 20 Nov it was circulated to all units before the attack could be launched and had to be cancelled.

Army Commander's message not to be read to troops until further notice. If message has been read caution all troops regarding security of contents.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, November 1943: Appx 35 20 Nov 43).

205. By this time 78 Div were attempting to establish a bridgehead over the lower Sangro where the weather was proving a greater foe than the enemy. On 20 Nov three companies of 36 Bde (78 Div) occupied the escarpment on the north bank while supporting aircraft were forced to remain on the ground. One company was driven back. Although most of the tanks engaged had become immobile in the bogs of adhesive clay, 36 Bde, the following day, consolidated their bridgehead with less enemy interference. During the night of 21/22 Nov three bridges were to be thrown across the river, attempts the previous night having proved abortive. Farther upstream 8 Ind Div and 2 N.Z. Div continued to search for crossings where the current was weak and the river sufficiently shallow to cross. On 23 Nov, the Sangro rose 18 inches and carried away the ropes with which the New Zealanders were pulling themselves across the swift current. The rain rendered all the landing grounds unserviceable. (W.D., G.S. Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 20-23 Nov 43).

206. At the time when West N.S.R. was making its first attack on point 1009 at Castel Di Sangro, the first elements of 78 Div were struggling to maintain a bridgehead over the Sangro preparatory to the "colossal crack". Meanwhile, 5 Div was progressing with its deception attack towards Alfedena supported by heavy concentrations of corps and divisional artillery and air bombardment. Because of



the general delay, this operation did not start until 21 Nov. (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, Ops Log, Serial 6308). Despite the bad weather and transport problems, 5 Div advanced feature by feature, and by early morning of 23 Nov, Alfedena and Scrotone were reported clear. (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, Folio II (c), Serial 236).

207. It became increasingly important that 3 Cdn Inf Bde Gp be ready to follow this success with its part of the deception attack, and on 23 Nov, Brigadier Gibson drew up his plan. In addition to a heavy artillery programme on selected targets, particularly Point 1009, and feint attacks across the river, West N.S.R. was to launch an attack on Point 1009, and R. 22e R. was to take Roccacinquemiglia and Pietransieri. The divisional commander directed that Point 1009 be taken on 24 Nov, and Roccacinquemiglia on 25 Nov. (W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 Nov 43). The main part of the deception was to be heavy concentrations of artillery. 3 Cdn Inf Bde Gp had, at this time, 1 Fd Regt R.C.H.A., 2 Fd Regt R.C.A., and 1 Air Landing Light Regt., R.A., under command. \* Brigadier Bruce Matthews, D.S.O., C.R.A., 1 Cdn Inf Div, with the C.C.R.A., 13 Corps, arranged a harassing fire programme for 24 Nov, for the three regiments already under command of the brigade group; all of 13 Corps artillery, which included 91 Fd Regt, R.A., 92 Fd Regt R.A., 156 Fd Regt R.A.; 78 and 165 Army Fd Regts R.A., and 75 Medium Regt R.A., and all of 5 Div artillery. This harassing fire programme was the next stage after the active patrolling that had been carried out by the infantry during the last few days, and was intended to give the impression that it would be followed by an attack directed up the narrow plain of Cinquemiglia towards the Sulmona valley. (W.D. H.Q. R.C.A., 1 Cdn Inf Div, 23 Nov 43 and appx 18 - H.F. task table, 23/24 Nov 43).

208. Firing began at 0735 hrs 24 Nov, and continued all day the targets that had been noted and registered during the week. Five of the regiments concentrated on the little town of Roccacinquemiglia. The whole programme was controlled from the R.C.H.A. observation post on the Schienaforte ridge to the west of San Pietro, and corrections were passed to the Adjutant, 1 Cdn Fd Regt who then passed them to 3 Cdn Fd Regt and Tactical H.Q. R.C.A. Tactical H.Q. in turn relayed the corrections to C.C.R.A. and 5 Div. The enemy made some reply to this sudden concentration, and 19 and 77 Btys of 3 Cdn Fd Regt, located forward of S. Pietro, were heavily shelled by 15-cm pieces. Casualties were five killed and eleven wounded, and several guns were put out of action. The batteries were ordered to withdraw their guns, but to return to the same area after dusk and be in position to fire again the following morning. During the afternoon the enemy replied again, with 15-cm. shells landing on the guns of 75 Med Regt and 78 Army Fd Regt. It was found necessary to take 75 Med Regt off the harassing

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\* 1 Air Landing Light Regt, R.A. came back under command 1 Cdn Inf Div from 5 Div on 13 Nov 43 (W.D., A.A. & Q.M.G., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 13 Nov 43).



fire programme to allow it to concentrate on counter-battery work, but in a sector where the enemy's field guns were concealed on higher ground, sound and flash bearings, essential to effective counter-battery work, were almost impossible to obtain. (W.D. H.Q. R.C.A., 1 Cdn Inf Div, 24 Nov 43).

209. During this all-day bombardment the West N.S.R. put in its attack on Point 1009. Six heavy concentrations from eight of the artillery regiments preceded the attack. A total of 5,000 rounds were fired on Point 1009 between 1315 hrs and 1345 hrs, after which the barrage lifted to Roccacinquemiglia. Lt.-Col. Bogart had issued orders for the attack at 0800 hrs. "A" and "C" Coys were to take part, supported by three detachments of three-inch mortars and a platoon of medium machine-guns from the Brigade Support Company. The plan was to advance on a direct line to the objective with "C" Coy leading, followed by battalion headquarters and "A" Coy. The operation was a simple flanking movement with "C" Coy as fire company while "A" Coy scaled the pinnacle from the right. Once again, mules were used to transport the mortars, machine-guns and wireless sets. Thick mud on the mountain-sides made the expedition hazardous, but the infantry were rapidly becoming experienced in handling the mules as they stumbled and slid down the narrow tracks. Enemy artillery opened up at one stage and a corporal of the Sask L.I. was killed.

210. By 1500 hrs, "C" Coy with the machine-guns and mortars was in position on a high crest 800 yards east of the objective. When "A" Coy, moving in to attack on the right flank, came under heavy shellfire, it was decided to attack from the left; and an hour later the plateau and the houses on it, which three days earlier had been the scene of such a bitter struggle, had been taken without a shot being fired. Three wounded men of "B" Coy were found in the basement of the church, where they had survived the artillery concentrations. The enemy had withdrawn from the pinnacle the previous night, taking with him 21 West N.S.R. prisoners. (W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 24 Nov 43, and W.D. West N.S.R., 24 Nov 43). After consolidating positions on the pinnacle, "D" Coy was brought forward to take over from "A" Coy, and a carrying party was arranged to bring back the wounded across the difficult mountain tracks to the battalion area whence they could be evacuated. (Ibid.)

211. The attack on Roccacinquemiglia by R. 22e R., which was to have taken place on 25 Nov, was cancelled, and orders issued that no patrols were to cross the river without the permission of Corps Headquarters. Throughout the night 24/25 Nov and the following day, the artillery maintained the intensity of the harassing fire programme, and at 0530 hrs on 26 Nov a reconnaissance patrol of R. 22e R. left for Roccacinquemiglia. The enemy was still well dug in on the steep approaches to the town, and the patrol came under severe machine-gun fire after several of its members had already been wounded by an S-mine. Another patrol was sent to assist in the withdrawal of the first, every member of which, when it finally returned, had become a casualty. (W.D. R. 22e R., 26-27 Nov 43).



212. Two distinguished visitors, Colonel the Hon. J.L. Ralston, Minister of National Defence, and Lieutenant-General H.D.G. Crerar, G.O.C.-in-C. 1 Cdn Corps, who were, at that time, visiting 1 Cdn Inf Div, came forward to the brigade front on 26 Nov with the G.O.C. and Brigade Commander. The party spent the morning with 1 Fd Regt, R.C.H.A., and after lunch, at West N.S.R. headquarters, Colonel Ralston expressed his appreciation of the work the Canadians had been doing, in Sicily and Italy. Before leaving the Defence Minister sent a personal message to the Commanding Officers of all the battalions.

It was a great satisfaction to see you this morning. Will you please give to all ranks ... the warmest greeting and remembrance from their folks back home. They are all proud beyond words of the battalion's stout work. My heartfelt good wishes to you all for good health, good luck and continued success.

(W.D., Carlt & York R., November 1943: Appx 6, Message from Minister of National Defence to Lieut.-Col. J.E.C. Pangman).

213. The drive up the Adriatic coast began on 26 Nov. General Montgomery, in a message to General Alexander, reviewed the difficulties experienced in establishing a bridgehead and outlined his intention for the "colossal crack".

After several days' fighting in the most appalling conditions of mud and rain I have now secured a bridgehead across the SANGRO on my right flank, which is 1,000 yards long and 2,000 yards deep. Enemy has made repeated counter-attacks to drive me back, but he has failed to do so and bridgehead is now firmly held. SANGRO is in flood and my bridges have several times been washed away. The troops have been magnificent as always in quite disgusting conditions. My advance northward will now be carried on and I am developing operations to clear the enemy from the high ground overlooking the SANGRO valley. These operations begin on 26 Nov and will continue thereafter intensively for several days. Once I have secured the high ground I will have to pause for a few days while I get the SANGRO valley organized for movement. Then forward again. My chief trouble is the weather and not so much the enemy. Inform my old friend as above. \*

\* The last sentence apparently refers to Mr. Churchill. The Prime Minister at the time was in North Africa attending a conference with President Roosevelt and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek. (The Times, 2 Dec 43).



(W.D., G.S., Main H.Q. Eighth Army, November 1943: Appx "Z", Personal message from General Montgomery to General Alexander).

214. The Army Commander's message which had been circulated and later withdrawn was read out to all ranks on 25 Nov.

1. The Allies have conquered about one-third of ITALY since we invaded the country on 3rd September. But the Germans still hold the approaches to ROME, and that city itself.

2. The time has now come to drive the Germans north of ROME. The Eighth Army is not advancing on the direct ROME axis; it is the Fifth American Army which is on that line. But our help is vital if the Fifth Army is to secure ROME. And we will do our part in a manner worthy of the best traditions of the Eighth Army and the Desert Air Force.

3. The enemy has been outfought by better troops ever since we first landed in SICILY, and his men don't like what they are getting.

The Germans are in fact in the very condition in which we want them.

WE WILL NOW HIT THE GERMANS A COLLOSSAL CRACK.

4. Good luck to you all. And good hunting as we go forward.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, November 1943: Appx 46).

215. On the same day, 1 Cdn Inf Div received a warning order to move to the Adriatic coast to relieve 78 Div in the bridgehead across the mouth of the Sangro. (W.D. G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div 25 Nov 43). With 78 Div, 8 Ind Div and 2 N.Z. Div all having gained bridgeheads over the lower Sangro, the task of creating a diversion on the left flank was nearly completed. (W.D., Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 26-27 Nov 43). The Division's Tactical Headquarters left Pescocostanzo on 26 Nov, and 3 Cdn Inf Bde Gp came under direct command of 13 Corps. (W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Nov 43). 5 Div was to extend its front over to Capracotta to relieve 3 Cdn Inf Bde. The West N.S.R. was relieved on Point 1009 by a company of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry on 27 Nov. (Ibid., 27 Nov 43). Until the brigade began thinning out and handing over to 15 (Brit) Bde on 2 Dec, local patrolling continued along the Sangro. The R. 226 R. sent several patrols to the north side of the river to reconnoitre Roccacinquemiglia and Pietransieri, but they all reported strongly held defensive positions. One sergeant and one private were posted as an observer patrol 300 yards east of Pietransieri on 29 Nov with orders to return the following day, but as nothing was heard of them for three days, they were presumed lost.



W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Dec 43). The Carlt & York R. continued to patrol downstream from San Angelo towards Borello. On 4 Dec the handover to 15 (Brit) Bde was completed and 3 Cdn Inf Bde concentrated in the Agnone-Castiglione area prior to rejoining the division which was by this time in the Sangro bridgehead on the Adriatic. (Ibid., 4 Dec 43).

216. The brigade group moved to the coast along the Agnone-Vasto lateral Highway, and the fact that they were able to do so was a further acknowledgement of the excellent work of the divisional engineers. From 23 to 28 Nov, the three field companies were employed on opening the road as far as Castiglione, a task which the Army Commander personally directed to be finished by 28 Nov. (W.D. H.Q. R.C.E., 1 Cdn Inf Div, 24 Nov 43).

217. The road, which ran over numerous ridges and rivers, was one on which the enemy had expended much of his demolition material. Most of the damage was to permanent bridges, and once more the portable Bailey proved indispensable. Ten of these bridges were built, among them a triple-single construction crossing a gap of 180 feet, which was completed in less than 18 hours. (W.D. H.Q. R.C.E., 1 Cdn Inf Div, 24 Nov 43, and W.D. 1 Fd Coy, R.C.E., November 1943: Appx VI). The sappers, who were establishing a reputation for speed and efficiency were praised, not only by the men to whom the bridges meant rations and ammunition, but also by formation commanders to whom bridges meant the success or failure of an operation. On 25 Nov, the C.R.E. sent a letter to all ranks of the divisional engineers.

The G.O.C., 1 Cdn Div has directed me to tell you how very pleased he has been with your work during the past month under very trying conditions. I have received a personal note from the Corps Commander which I quote for you: "I am writing this note to tell you how much I admire the splendid work which you and your sappers have done recently, and to congratulate you on the results. I realize very fully the difficulties you have been up against and I would be grateful if you would tell them all how much their work is appreciated".

(W.D., 1 Fd Coy, R.C.E., November 1943: Appx 5, Letter from Lieut.-Col. G. Walsh).

218. By the evening of 28 Nov, the lateral highway to Vasto was open for traffic, and Lieut.-General Dempsey, G.O.C. 13 Corps, said he would like to address the engineers for a few minutes. (W.D. H.Q. R.C.E., 1 Cdn Inf Div, 28 Nov 43). On 30 Nov in Agnone, after a brief inspection, the Corps Commander gathered all the sappers around him, and expressed his appreciation of the magnificent work that had been done by the R.C.E. of 1 Cdn Inf Div. A march past followed, with General Dempsey taking the salute. (W.D. H.Q. R.C.E., 1 Cdn Inf Div, 30 Nov 43).



219. Throughout the time that 3 Cdn Inf Bde was away from the Division, the supply and medical services continued to function smoothly with lines of communication extended 60 miles beyond the base in Campobasso and through forbidding wilderness of mountains. 3 Cdn Inf Bde Coy, R.C.A.S.C., for the first time since the landing in Sicily, dropped its normal role of transporting rations for the division, \* and became a composite company, responsible for all three commodities (ammunition, petrol and supply) required by the brigade group. 12,000 rounds of 25-pr ammunition passed through the company's hands each day during the heavy artillery programme. (W.D. 3 Cdn Inf Bde Coy, R.C.A.S.C., 20-25 Nov 43). 4 Fd Amb, R.C.A.M.C. was detailed to join the brigade group and, during the operation, H.Q. and "A" Coy were located in Civitanova, while "B" Coy remained close to brigade headquarters in Carovilli and later Vastogirardi. Because the forward troops were far from surgery, 2 Cdn Fd Surgical Unit, R.C.A.M.C., was on 24 Nov, moved forward to Civitanova. (W.D. 4 Fd Amb, R.C.A.M.C., 22-24 Nov 43). The troops in Italy were now fighting in rain and snow, and, until the following spring, had seen the last of the "sunny Italy" so attractively pictured in advertisements and travel pamphlets. Ordnance services were fully occupied in maintaining winter clothing scales, and special consideration was given to the men on the Upper Sangro where shelter of any kind was unobtainable. (W.D. A.D.O.S. H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 20-25 Nov 43).

220. Brigadier Gibson, in summing up the brigade's activity during the latter half of November, said:

Apart from its main function of creating a diversion, the deception operation served two valuable purposes from the brigade point of view:

1. It provides battalions with an opportunity of gaining experience of intensive patrolling, ranging from stealth patrols at night to strong fighting patrols by day. It gave them an opportunity of organizing observation posts and putting into practice methods of transmitting information evolved on our course. Commanding officers agreed that they had had an opportunity of training junior officers to operate independently.

2. It provided very close co-operation with the artillery. The Forward Observation Officers working with the infantry had plenty of work to do and a fairly intensive artillery programme was carried out against enemy positions across the Sangro. Both gunners and battalion commanders felt that close liaison had been established. (Gibson, op cit.).

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\* In England, brigade companies, R.C.A.S.C., functioned as composite companies, maintaining a particular brigade with all three commodities. In Sicily, however, it was found more practicable to operate with each company responsible for supplying the Division with one commodity. (W.D. H.Q. R.C.A.S.C., 1 Cdn Inf Div, 23 Jul 43).



221. In a letter to the Brigade Commander written on 22 Nov, General Dempsey said:

I am sending you this note to congratulate you on the splendid way in which your brigade has operated during the last few days. It must be very satisfactory to you -- and you have every right to be proud of your achievement.

Good luck in the future.

222. The degree of success of the deception attack can be judged only by considering results in the light of the intention "to persuade the enemy that the main attack will be made by 13 Corps on the left flank and not by 5 Corps on the right". \* Whilst the answer can be supplied only by the enemy commanders, some points are noteworthy. By 24 Nov, a shift in German divisions had taken place, with the moving of 16 Pz Div from its coastal position to ground North of the Maiella where it could strike either to the right to help 1 Para Div, defending the Sulmona road, or to the left to support 65 Inf Div on the Adriatic. (W.D. 3 Cdn Inf Bde Sp Coy, Sask L.I., November 1943, Appx 4, 1 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No. 19, 24 Nov 43). Elements of 1 Para Div, however, were withdrawing from the Sulmona road and moving north-eastwards towards the area formerly held by 16 Pz Div. This side-slipping move explained the absence of enemy on Point 1009 at the time the West N.S.R. made its second attack, and indicated that 16 Pz Div, badly cut up in the earlier actions of October and November, was moving out of the line, probably to rest and refit before joining its Panther tank battalion which had been identified on the Russian front. (W.D. G.S. H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, November 1943, Appx 56, Int Summary No. 25, 27 Nov 43). This extension of the front held by 1 Para Div, which had started by 24 Nov, showed the enemy's confidence in his ability to hold the Sulmona road, now the only snow-free axis in the centre of the peninsula, relying not on men, but the weather and considerable artillery support. (Ibid). There is no doubt that the enemy showed wise appreciation of the difficulties in attacking up the Sulmona road compared to the wider coastal plain which offered opportunity for sea-borne

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\* It is interesting to note the German News Agency claim on 22 Nov: "Formations of the British Eighth Army opened their expected large scale attack this morning on the eastern wing of the Italian front after extensive artillery preparation and with strong air support. The fighting was extraordinarily bitter throughout the day. According to reports at hand the attacks were repelled with very heavy losses to the attackers who failed to gain any ground worth mentioning." (The Times, 23 Nov 43). The reference to "eastern wing" is vague and might mean 5 Div's attack on ALFEDENA and SCROTONE or to the struggle of 78 Div to establish a bridgehead over the mouth of the SANGRO



landings behind the forward defended localities. The only practicable way for the Allies to outflank Rome in the winter months was by attacking up the Adriatic coast. This they did, and when, with his sparse resources, the enemy had to bolster up 65 Inf Div in early December, 26 Pz Div was brought from the right flank of his front, and 90 Pz Gren Div from Venice (C.I.G.S. Summary No. 91, 2 Dec 43 and No. 96, 7 Dec 43).

#### THE VICTIMS OF "SCORCHED EARTH"

223. The technique of using a civilian population to create interference with the opposing forces had been skilfully but cruelly developed by the Germans during the campaign in France and the Low Countries in the spring of 1940. Now that the Allies had carried the war from the sparsely populated vastness of the North African desert to the crowded cities and towns of continental Europe, and because German ethics were likely to decline, if any anything, with the decline in the force of German arms, the possibility of the enemy's transforming this technique from a weapon of attack into one of defence, had to be considered. If thousands of homeless and destitute civilians were to arrive in the Allied forward areas, they would bring with them three major problems; the hampering of operations by blocking traffic on the roads; endangering the health of Allied troops by spreading disease, common because of the insalubrious living conditions in Italy; and the infiltration of German agents to the rear areas with missions of espionage, sabotage and fostering political unrest in the newly occupied areas in the South consisting of "King's Italy" and the Allied Military Government Regions (Hist Sec file: Italy/O/F Report on Administrative Situation in Southern Italy, 13 Jan 44).

224. Until the occupation of Campobasso, little evidence of the enemy's intention of employing such a method had been met, and whilst the towns through which the Canadians had advanced had been destroyed by military operations, there was in most cases sufficient housing accommodation for Allied Military Government Officials to carry out a plan of "local settlement". In the early stages of the halt in Campobasso, the divisional Field Security Section, whose task it was to supply counter-intelligence protection for the formation, and in conjunction with Military Government to remove undesirable elements in local administration, encountered a refugee problem for the first time, increased by the factor that Campobasso was the largest city in the area and would, therefore, attract a great number of refugees. In and around the city, the Italians had established several large civilian internment camps, and many of their inmates had been released before a proper check could be made on them, with the consequence that thousands of persons of many nationalities were roaming at liberty in the divisional area, and whilst many were friendly to the Allied cause, there were among them those habitual malcontents who would form a potential threat to public order along the Lines of Communications. This, however, was a lesser problem compared to the thousands besieging Military Government offices for food and shelter. These persons fell into two categories; refugees whose homes in the immediate area were destroyed and who were seeking alternative accommodation, and evacuees who had been moved



by the Italian Government from the bombed areas of Naples and Foggia, and who wanted to return to their own cities.

225. When the Carovilli operation began, it was clear that the enemy had at last decided to use refugees to his own advantage, and it was necessary to set up some organization, beyond the normal allotment of Military Government Officers, to cope with the havoc. The forming of this organization rested mainly with the staff of the A.A. & Q.M.G., and 1 Cdn F.S. Sec; the first because of transportation and accommodation, and the second because, among the thousands, it was inevitable that there should be individuals whose names appeared on Allied black lists. The divisional Field Security Officer (Capt. W.A.C. Cooper) discussed the situation with Major-General Vokes, and as a result a conference was held at the Field Security Headquarters in Campobasso, attended by the D.A.Q.M.G., 1 Cdn Inf Div; D.A.Q.M.G., 13 Corps; A.P.M., 13 Corps; a sanitary officer from 13 Corps; and a refugee control officer from Eighth Army. (Hist Sec File Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/D, account by Major W.A.C. Cooper). The F.S.O. gave an appreciation of the security danger and suggested that if the Albergo Molise, which was already being used as a refugee centre, could accommodate 400 persons a night, Campobasso was the most convenient town to use as a staging area for the refugees. It was further suggested that extra Carabinieri should be brought into the city to man road blocks on all the entrances. They would be responsible for directing refugees to the Albergo Molise, and for stopping any civilians from leaving Campobasso without a permit. Because of the dubious proficiency of the Italian Police, the A.P.M. agreed to an allotment of military police to assist in the proper functioning of the road blocks. The object was that Campobasso should be the centre of attraction for refugees, who could enter freely, but could leave only in properly conducted parties. Eighth Army H.Q. supplied an interrogator to assist 1 Cdn Fd Security Sec in "screening" the crowds at the Albergo Molise, and suspect persons were detained for further questioning or arrest. It was also planned that R.A.S.C. vehicles supplying 102 F.M.C. in Campobasso were to transport refugees to the railhead in Lucera whence they would travel by train to reception centres near Bari. R.C.A.S.C. vehicles of 1 Cdn Inf Div, returning from the forward areas, were to carry refugees into Campobasso. Such a plan would ensure an uninterrupted flow of refugees to the base areas where they could be properly looked after, and provide a reasonable check on suspect persons. (Ibid.)

226. Meanwhile, the area in which 3 Cdn Inf Bde Gp was carrying out its deception attack, was proving an inexhaustible source of miserable humanity. Whether or not the deliberate and systematic destruction of villages on the Upper Sangro was a justifiable part in the enemy defence scheme is a matter of opinion, but its eventual development into an exhibition of Nazi vandalism resulted only in economic hardship for the Italian peasants. In the Canadian sector the towns which lay within the "belt" were San Pietro, Capracotta, San Angelo, Castel Del Giudice, Castel Di Sangro, Pescopennataro, Ateleta, Gamberale, Pietransieri and Roccacinquemiglia (W.D. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 20-26 Nov 43). All these towns were razed without thought of the civilian population who were herded into the mountains, and forced to leave behind all their property.



227. The average inhabitant of an Italian mountain village reckons his life accomplishments in terms of ownership which rarely goes beyond a few sticks of furniture and a donkey, or odd heirlooms, which, as a tangible link with the past, pause for a while in his possession before passing on to the next generation. Unlike the city folk, he is antipathetic to politics, and listens, not to the pompous prattling of the local Segretario, but to the bells of his church which tell him the time of day, and which, when the sound of the Angelus reaches his plot of land on the hillside beyond the town, tell him that his day's work is over. The war to these peasants had its origins in the cities, and it was to the cities that the Allied squadrons flew daily to return war to those who understood it. The cities had claimed the sons and young labourers from the towns and villages; the same cities that for twenty years had sent punitive squads of black-shirts to collect fees for the Fascist Party or the lives of those who refused to do homage to Il Duce. It was the wise men from the cities who could read and write and who sent the slogans Vincere - Vinceremo to be painted under the balconies and across the front of the Casa del Fascio.

228. As the Germans built their winter line special S.S. troops were brought from Rome to deal with the simple peasants who stood by helplessly as their homes were looted or stripped of doors and windows which were sent to Germany to repair bomb damage. Livestock and crops were exchanged for worthless chits which, the enemy said, would be honoured by the Allies. The male population was organized into groups and forced to turn the fields into tank traps and machine-gun posts, while the women were held as ransom for the "cooperation" of the men. As the Canadians approached the Sangro, all the buildings were dynamited (in some towns the churches were spared, but nothing more), and all that met our troops when they moved in were piles of rubble and broken masonry, through which the peasants, cold, hungry and disillusioned, poked and scraped to retrieve a battered "Madonna and Child" or some object of value only to themselves.

229. In conducting such a "scorched earth" policy, the enemy might have had the genuine military intention of denying winter quarters to our advancing troops who, because of weather conditions, might be forced to halt temporarily. In carrying out such a policy he had no regard for the civilian population, or no plan of evacuation before destroying the towns. If the intentions were genuine, they were prompted into callous execution by two strong forces playing on the German mind at that time: reaction to the Italian declaration of co-belligerency with the Allies; and a growing realization of the declining power of Nazi Germany and the consequent urge to supply evidence of virility in a disintegrating state. The solving of these problems was not assisted by the conduct of the Italians themselves who, simple as they were, became inconsiderate and thoughtless.

Due to much Allied propaganda through the medium of the B.B.C. most of the refugees flocking south are under the impression that the Allies are going to welcome them, feed them, clothe them, rehabilitate them, build new homes for them and set them up completely five minutes after they have crossed the lines. As a group they are unreasonable, stupid,



and entirely lacking in any form of self-control. They seem to think that they are the only refugees who ever existed.

(Hist Sec file Italy 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/L/F, Security Intelligence Report No. 12, 26 Nov 43).

230. What little scope there was for sympathy and understanding at a time when death and hardship were commonplace, was thus lessened, although even to the forward troops the peasants were a pathetic sight crossing the river from Ateleta or Gamberale during lulls in the cannonade. Many were killed in crossing, but thousands trudged into San Pietro only to find it in the same condition as their own towns. Many of them came to the Medical Officer of the R. 22e R. in San Pietro.

We have many unsheltered civilians sick and wounded. Could help be given me for evacuation or whatever action you deem necessary. Please notify me of your decision. The village is completely destroyed. (W.D. A.D.M.S. H.Q. 1 Cdn Div Appx "A", Message from R.M.O., R. 22e R. to A.D.M.S. 22 Nov 43).

The D.D.M.S., 13 Corps laid down the following instructions for the evacuation of civilian casualties:

With effect from 27 Nov, civilian casualties and serious sick may be evacuated to emergency civilian hospital at Carpinone. Major surgery available only at civilian hospital Campobasso. (Ibid; message from D.D.M.S., 13 Corps to A.D.M.S. 1 Cdn Inf Div).

Under these arrangements the refugees did not overtax the resources of the Divisional medical units, while the wounded and sick were provided with reasonable medical aid administered by their own people who understood their voluble mutterings. Immediate steps were taken to ensure that the refugees, particularly those who were fortunate enough to save their oxen and carts, did not impede traffic. Corps H.Q. issued the following order on 19 Nov:

Pending further instructions all oxen and carts will be turned off all roads. Oxen will be put on land to grass and carts left clear of roads. Refugees will be evacuated in returning M.T. and Not repeat Not allowed to use carts. No repeat No exceptions will be allowed. (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, Tac H.Q. Ops Message Log, 19 Nov 43 Serial 99).

231. A special refugee control officer was sent from Eighth Army to assist Military Government Officers in the evacuation. It was found most convenient to collect refugees in Carovilli and San Pietro where they would be picked up by R.C.A.S.C. vehicles returning to Campobasso. The Staff Captain at Brigade Headquarters kept the refugee control officer informed of the estimated number of vehicles that would be available each day. There was never a shortage of passengers, and in their eagerness to leave the forward area, the Italians often argued about priority.



It was impossible to sort out this transient conglomeration of Abruzzese peasantry, but a continual flow of it to the rear areas was maintained. In the last week of November a permanent staging camp was established outside Carovilli. As a defensive measure the use of refugees was a complete failure, but as a brief episode in the long record of Nazi brutality it was typical.

#### THE CANADIAN ADMINISTRATIVE SITUATION

232. If the stiffening of enemy resistance and the onset of unfavourable weather caused a disappointing stalemate in our hitherto rapid advance, it provided a much needed opportunity for the administrative services to tackle the array of problems which had confronted them ever since the landing at Reggio. Sufficient has been said from time to time in the foregoing narrative to indicate what these problems were and how they affected the course of operations. On all such questions the authoritative statements of the A.A. & Q.M.G. of 1 Cdn Inf Div are most valuable, and although they do not always refer specifically to the Army Tank Brigade, which, as we have seen, was widely sub-allotted within 13 Corps, on the general position of Canadian troops within the Eighth Army they applied with equal force to both the Brigade and 1 Cdn Inf Div.

233. During the month of October the most pressing problem was the adequate supply of reinforcements. Reinforcements for both formations were held during this period at No. 1 Canadian Base Reinforcement Depot - known universally as 1 C.B.R.D. - at Philippeville in Algeria. As soon as a firm lodgement was obtained in Southern Italy the process of filtering reinforcement drafts through Sicily and Calabria became noticeably inadequate and it was not materially improved by the expedient of sending them by sea to Taranto, where officers had constantly to wait and watch for their arrival while divisional transport was compelled to make a return journey from the battle area in order to lift them. Consequently, when the division reached Potenza (see C.M.H. Report No. 144) a request was made that 4 Bn C.B.R.D., the advanced echelon of the reinforcement holding organization, be moved to Taranto and thence forward as the operational situation required. From this time onwards these requests were repeated, not only to 13 Corps, but to Eighth Army, and finally by liaison officer to General Montgomery himself.

234. It is obvious that the system of priorities imposed by events upon the Eighth Army at this period operated unfavourably against early concentration of Canadian reinforcement units in Italy. 4 Bn was, however, established between Taranto and Massafra in the first week of October; but it was still necessary to send Divisional Army Service Corps vehicles a total distance of between 500 and 700 miles to pick them up and deliver them to the reinforcement camp in the Divisional Maintenance Area. The argument persistently advanced by the A.A. & Q.M.G. staff was that 4 Bn should be situated at Army roadhead or railhead. Not until November was this solution achieved, and subsequent attempts to move 4 Bn to Campobasso itself were unsuccessful. At the beginning of November the division needed 50 officers and 750 other ranks, which appears on the face of it to be a serious deficiency. However, the situation throughout Eighth Army was such that a shortage of this magnitude was by no means unusual and compared very favourably with the depleted condition of



enemy formations. (Hist Sec file Italy/1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/O/D, Account by Lt.-Col. W.P. Gilbride). \* The provision of accommodation for 1 C.B.R.D. at Avellino east of Naples, was the final outcome of the agitation, of which the burden of settlement fell largely upon the shoulders of the officer in charge, Canadian Section G.H.Q. 1st Echelon, at first Lt.-Col. D.K. Tow and subsequently Brigadier A.W. Beament.

235. The handling of casualties in the Canadian Force suffered likewise from the lengthening of lines of communication and it soon became apparent that Canadian General Hospitals at Catania in Sicily and El Arrouch in Algeria were awkwardly situated for the treatment of casualties inflicted in Central Italy. The Field Surgical and Field Transfusion Units were highly successful in their sphere, as was the organization of malaria control, but the absence of a Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, which had been asked for and refused during the planning stage of Operation "Husky", necessitated reliance upon a British C.C.S., and resulted in various differences of procedure which delayed the evacuation of Canadian casualties to their own base hospitals, or their prompt return to units. At the time, the usual procedure for the return of men evacuated to British hospitals was simple: the soldier merely hitch-hiked back to his unit with such of his kit as remained with him, in his own time and as casual transportation was offered to him. This practice caused numerous complaints from battalion commanders whose men frequently returned after protracted wanderings, without their equipment and physically unfit for battle. As a result, some units preferred to retain the equipment and kit of their casualties, and in order to regularize procedure orders were issued for all troops returning from hospital to be taken on the strength of 4 Bn C.B.R.D. and come forward in the normal reinforcement stream. (Gilbride and Johnston, op cit.). In this case also the remedy was establishment of Canadian hospitals on the mainland, which took place in due course.

236. As the weather worsened the foresight displayed by the planners of "Husky" in providing a suit of battle-dress and two pairs of boots for each man was amply

\* Canadian casualties in Italy during September, October and November, 1943, were few in comparison with those suffered in Sicily earlier, or in the fighting in the Ortona area in December. As reported to C.M.H.Q. they were:

		September	October	November
Fatal Casualties	Offrs.	3	13	6
(incl ordinary	O.Rs.	47	166	81
deaths)				
Non-fatal	Offrs.	24	31	12
Casualties	O.Rs.	159	473	180
Total all	Offrs.	27	44	18
Casualties	O.Rs.	206	639	261

(C.M.H.Q. file 22/Casualty/1).



justified. Although these stores had been an encumbrance during the semitropical campaigning in Sicily, and their inclusion in the original convoys had not been regarded with particular favour by the War Office, the need for something more substantial than khaki drill became apparent even as early as 4 Sep when Canadian troops were operating on the higher levels of the Aspromonte Mountains (see C.M.H.Q. Report No. 144). When at last, at the beginning of November, most units could be withdrawn from contact with the enemy and rested in the Campobasso area, heavy rain, increasing cold and inadequate cover were partially ameliorated by the provision of warm clothing. In contrast, the condition of all British units of 5 Div during the advance to Isernia, still clad in khaki drill, was most unhappy.

237. In the provision of special Canadian stores and equipment less satisfaction was derived from the handling of Canadian vehicles by 15 Army Group. Lt.-Col. Gilbride's account is eloquent in this respect:

In the matter of vehs, the Canadian vehs proved themselves far and away to be the best and were in highest demand by all of Eighth Army. Their cross-country performance, reliability and their sturdiness made a great contribution towards the success of the campaigns to date. We ourselves lost about 480 of these vehs through sinking and received only 118 replacements and the campaign in SICILY was fought with this shortage of tpt. Replacements that we received then and for operation BAYTOWN were mostly Bedford and Dodge 4x2s with the result that during the rains these vehs were being towed through diversions by Canadian 4x4s. The climax came when we found that the replacements for those we lost by sinking were drawn from Canadian Divs in England from No. 1 Cdn B.O.D. and were being distributed to the rest of the Eighth Army except ourselves and these vehs bore our Canadian Census serials. The strongest representations were made to Eighth Army pointing out that while we were quite agreeable to having vehs distributed evenly among the Divs, "... the greatest good for the greatest number", we did not think it fair that we should be towing 4x2 vehs through diversions when our own 4x4s had arrived and when Army Tps units operating mainly on paved highways, were using 4-wheeled drive vehs.

(Gilbride, op. cit.).

The solution to this problem did not in the event favour the Canadian point of view. When 15 Army Group was able to gather together the numerous strands of its lines of communications which involved Eighth Army dependence on G.H.Q. Middle East and Fifth Army connections with A.F.H.Q. in North Africa, not forgetting the administrative channels of the Canadians themselves, it was found necessary to introduce drastic pooling arrangements of all such stores as vehicles, clothing, petrol, oil and lubricants. Thus was avoided any repetition of such a crisis as befell the Eighth Army early in October when General Montgomery had to borrow large quantities of petrol from General Clark in order to maintain the speed of his advance (W.D. Tac H.Q. Eighth Army, October 1943, Appx "Z", 4-5 Oct 43).



238. The Auxiliary Services seized the opportunity to justify their association with the fighting troops as soon as Campobasso had been taken. In Sicily and hitherto in Italy, the advance had been too rapid to allow the development of any recreational centres. There was some indication that the three Auxiliary Services were hampered by internal rivalries and particularly by the unwillingness of the central authority to risk the despatch of valuable equipment such as moving picture projectors to a theatre of war. But by the time that Campobasso was reached these difficulties had been generally resolved and on the very day that the town was captured their representatives moved in to explore the possibilities that it presented. The Fascist Youth Centre, a modern building specially constructed for recreation, was requisitioned as a "Beaver Club" and equipped to handle 48-hour leave traffic. Campobasso's two theatres were employed for the presentation of moving pictures and subsequently of E.N.S.A. concert parties. Special arrangements were made to ensure that a high standard of discipline was maintained in the town, three sections of 1 Provost Company being detailed for permanent duty there. The mounting of ceremonial guards which, as mentioned above, was a source of some inconvenience during the days when enemy shelling was still interfering with the amenities of Campobasso, was a part of this programme and a ceremonial church parade was held on the first Sunday of the occupation. An officers' club, known perhaps somewhat infelicitously as the "Aldershot Officers' Club" and a hotel re-christened "The Royal York" were organized for the benefit of officers on 48-hour leave. A final touch, considered by some of questionable taste, was added by re-naming the streets of the town "Yonge Street", "Portage Avenue", "Piccadilly Circus" and so forth. (Gilbride, op. cit.). (The same procedure was followed at Avellino).

239. All these activities combined to make Campobasso as pleasant a haven for the tired soldier as could be contrived in the autumn weather of the Central Apennines; and the great sense of well being was reflected in the list for subscriptions to the Fifth Victory Loan. \* Relations with the civil population were agreeable throughout and recollection of many friendships was still green in April 1944 when the Division passed through Campobasso on its way to the Battle of the Hitler Line. Although on this occasion all divisional patches and vehicle signs had been removed for security reasons, the people of Campobasso had no difficulty in recognizing their liberators and gave them a warm and enthusiastic reception. Great numbers of Canadian troops, during the second half of October and the whole of November, were given 48-hour passes to Campobasso and those within reach enjoyed a liberal allotment of daily visits. When the Division moved to the Adriatic at the end of November, Campobasso was handed over to 78 Div as a going recreational concern and in due course was used as such by

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\* Nearly one and a half million dollars worth of bonds were subscribed for by the officers and men of 1 Cdn Inf Div and 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde - an amount far in excess of the estimates - while many units were still in contact with the enemy (Gilbride, op. cit.) and W.D. A.A. & Q.M.G. 1 Cdn Inf Div, November 1943, Appx I).



2 Polish Corps in its turn. Needless to say, the "Beaver Club" became the "Battle Axe Club" in the first stage of the process, but its subsequent Polish designation has not been recorded.

240. The apotheosis of the administrative services occurred on 30 Oct when the A.A. & Q.M.G. and his staff entertained in the "Aldershot Officers' Club" at dinner. The principal guest was Lieut.-General H.D.G. Crerar, commanding 1 Cdn Corps, who had recently established his headquarters at Taormina in Sicily. After the dinner, which was, as might be expected from its sponsorship, of considerable magnificence, General Crerar announced the impending arrival of 5 Cdn Armd Div at Naples, Major-General Simonds was to command it and Brigadier Vokes to succeed him as G.O.C. 1 Cdn Inf Div, a promotion for which his experience as acting commander had well fitted him. General Crerar paid a visit to all the formations of the division and to 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde at this time, and returned again on 23 Nov for his tour of inspection with the Minister of National Defence, the Hon J.L. Ralston (W.D. A. & Q. Branch, 1 Cdn Inf Div, 30 Oct 43).

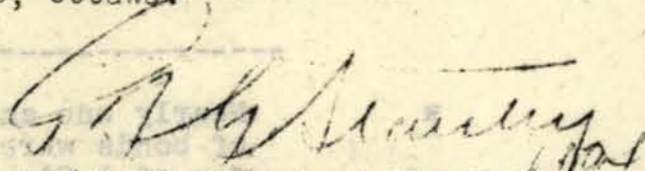
241. At the end of November 1943 a distinct phase of the operations of the Canadian force had ended and the bitter fighting that was to follow on the Moro River was very different in character from that with which this report has dealt. Preparations for the operations on the Adriatic front will be dealt with fully in a subsequent narrative.

242. The sketch maps appended to this report are illustrations only and, although correctly drawn, do not attempt to give the information available on the War Office G.S.G.S. series of Italian maps. For further reference the following maps should be consulted:

G.S.G.S. 4230 - 1:250,000 - sheets 29, 30, 31, 35, 36, 37.

G.S.G.S. 4146 - 1:100,000 - sheets 153, 154, 155, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 173, 174, 175, 176.

243. This report was written at C.M.H.Q. by Lt.-Col. S.H.S. Hughes, C. Int C., and Capt J.A. Potter, C. Int C. It was revised by Lt.-Col. Hughes at the Department of National Defence, Ottawa.

  
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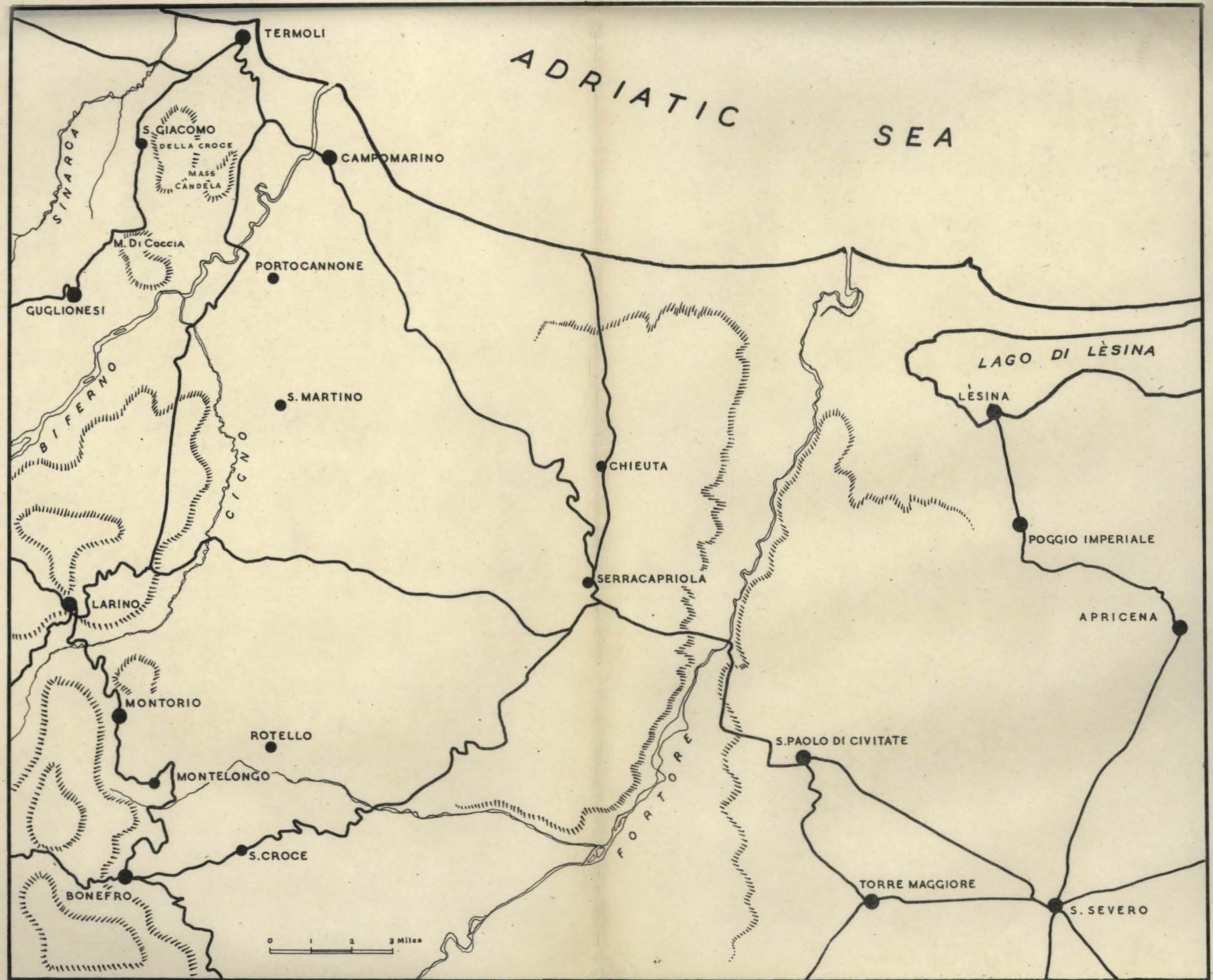
TO ILLUSTRATE CANADIAN OPERATIONS IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER — 1943





# THE LOWER FORTORE AND BIFERNO VALLEYS

TO ILLUSTRATE CANADIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE OPERATIONS AGAINST TERMOLI, OCTOBER — 1943





# LUCERA AND THE UPPER FORTORE

TO ILLUSTRATE CANADIAN OPERATIONS IN OCTOBER - 1943

