

# CHAPTER VII \* \* \* \* \*

## *The Final Effort*

IN the three successive phases of the II Corps offensive beginning on 1 October with the attack on the Monghidoro line of defenses and ending on 15 October with the breaching of the Livergnano line the Fifth Army drive toward Bologna had carried to within 10 miles of its objective. At many points our troops were within visual range of the Po Valley. Yet, although the final objective was near, the bitter fighting and the meager advances which had marked the third phase of the October offensive left the final outcome in doubt. Time was running short. Our troops were nearing the point of exhaustion, and with each successive day new German units appeared opposite the II Corps salient. On 14 October the Army G-4 reported to General Clark that the supply of ammunition available in the theater would soon be reduced to a critical level. He estimated that if the current daily expenditure of ammunition was continued the Army would be forced to adopt a defensive role by 10 November. Battle casualties, fatigue, lack of adequate replacements, an approaching reduction in artillery allotments, and the fall rains, together with the steady arrival of enemy reinforcements, made necessary an early decision. With two regiments of the 34th Division concentrated east of Highway 65 to add weight to its attack in the center II Corps was ready on 16 October to make the final effort.

### A. II CORPS PLAN OF ATTACK

*See Map No. 10*

The II Corps plan of attack, issued on 13 October, called for the main effort to be made in the center of the Corps front. The confused nature of the enemy's order of battle opposite the 85th Division and the capture of the dominating height of Mount delle Formiche suggested the possibility that this area would prove a weak

point in the enemy defenses. Accordingly, General Keyes assigned to the 34th Division a narrow zone lying directly to the north of Mount delle Formiche. The left boundary of the division would run almost due north on a line approximately  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles east of Highway 65; the right boundary would follow the Idice River, turning gradually more to the northeast as it approached Highway 9. After taking Mount Belmonte, the key height in its zone, the division would drive down the Idice Valley to cut Highway 9. Corps artillery was to be prepared to mass the bulk of its fires in support of the 34th Division attack, and the division was to receive priority in the allotment of air targets.

The assignment of the portion of its zone west of the Idice River to the 34th Division restricted the front of the 85th Division in the first stage of the attack to the ridge beyond the Monterenzio hill mass. Three miles north of the Sillaro River, however, the right boundary of the division was changed to run almost due eastward to Highway 9. After assisting the attack of the 34th Division the emphasis of the 85th Division attack would shift to the east along the boundary with the 88th Division. In turn the zone of the 88th Division was directed more to the east along the axis of Highway 937. Its first major objective was Mount Grande near the boundary with the 85th Division. Once this key terrain feature was secured, the division could launch an attack toward Castel San Pietro in conjunction with 13 Corps. The zone and the mission of the 91st Division remained unchanged. It would continue attacking astride Highway 65 with the first objectives of assisting the 34th Division operations against Mount Belmonte and of capturing Mount Adone near the boundary with the 1st Armored Division. The latter would assist the 91st Division attack on Mount Adone and maintain contact with the 6 South African Armoured Division. Although the initial direction of the Corps attack was to the north, the shift of the 34th Division east of Highway 65 and the zones allotted to the divisions on the right flank aimed at a break-through to the Po Valley southeast of Bologna.

## B. *THE THRUST IN THE CENTER*

16-19 OCTOBER

1. *Attack of the 34th Division.* For the attack of the 34th Division (minus the 135th Infantry) north of Mount delle Formiche, where II Corps was making its major bid for victory, General Bolte employed the 168th and 133d Infantry abreast. On the right the 168th Infantry would attack astride the broad ridge forming the divide between Zena Creek and the Idice River. Its first objective was Mount della Vigna, a 1,512-foot knob,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles directly north of Mount delle Formiche. Until this mission should be completed the regiment would be responsible for over three-fourths

of the division front. Beyond Mount della Vigna where Zena Creek makes a turn to the northeast, the ridge narrows and the zone of the 168th Infantry would gradually be reduced. The 133d Infantry, after passing through elements of the 363d Infantry at the eastern end of the Livergnano escarpment, would strike north for 2 miles along the western side of Zena Creek to seize Mount Belmonte, the key terrain feature opposite the central portion of the Corps front. In addition to assigning a narrow attack zone to the 133d Infantry General Bolte directed the bulk of his allotted artillery and air support toward smothering the enemy defenses on Mount Belmonte.

The 168th Infantry jumped off at 0500, 16 October, with all three of its battalions committed. The 1st Battalion, in the center, was stopped in its first attack on Crocetta, a hamlet on the ridge trail north of Mount delle Formiche. With Company B providing a base of fire, Company C and Company A, 757th Tank Battalion, attacked again at 0900. When 400 yards from the village, one of the tanks was hit by a German antitank gun. The disabled tank blocked the trail preventing the others from moving on; Company C was pinned down and could withdraw only a portion of its men. Aided by a smoke screen Companies B and C made another attempt at 1300; artillery and small-arms fire again forced a withdrawal. Colonel Hine then sent Company C around to the left and ordered Company B, reinforced by a platoon from Company A, to attack after dark. This attempt also failed although Company C reached positions from which it could outflank the village. The 3d Battalion on the right was blocked by a steep escarpment and equally determined opposition. Only the 2d Battalion on the left managed to break through the enemy's outpost line. Leading elements of Company G had reached the outskirts of the village of Tazzola to the northwest of Crocetta when friendly tank fire forced a slight withdrawal.

While the 133d Infantry on the other side of Zena Creek moved up to its line of departure south of the village of Querceta, Corps artillery and fighter-bombers pounded Mount Belmonte. Directing a total of 137 sorties against Mount Belmonte, fighter-bombers dropped 72 tons of bombs and 94 fuel tank incendiary bombs on gun emplacements, wooded areas, and bivouacs. At 2000 the 2d Battalion, 133d Infantry, followed by the 1st Battalion, launched a night attack from below Querceta. Before the advance was well under way Company F was nearly disorganized by a mortar barrage. Company E passed through it and the advance continued. The night was dark and cloudy, but the troops received some assistance in their cross-country march from the diffused glow of anti-aircraft searchlights located in the Corps rear near Monghidoro. An experiment in creating artificial moonlight to aid blackout driving near the front, the use of the searchlights later became standard practice in II Corps.

Company G, leading the 2d Battalion, was approaching the crest of Mount Belmonte at dawn when it encountered intense fire from enemy troops supported by tanks. Deep mud prevented the 2d Battalion from bringing up its antitank guns or attached armor. At noon the Germans counterattacked. Fog concealed them until they were so close our artillery was unable to fire. Company G was surrounded and part of Company E was cut off. The counterattack was beaten off but only after Company G lost the better part of two platoons. The battalion fell back to a small ravine on the southwest slope of the mountain to reorganize. When all efforts to bring up the 57-mm guns failed antitank mines were laid across the trail leading down from the mountain. Farther to the rear the 1st Battalion reached the village of Zena where a bridge crosses Zena Creek; the 3d Battalion, ordered forward to add weight to the attack, moved up on the right of 2d Battalion.

Although the mules had not yet arrived with rations and ammunition, the 2d and 3d Battalions resumed the attack before dawn on 18 October. Heavy fog made it difficult to coordinate the actions of the companies, and the troops were constantly under mortar and artillery fire. Self-propelled guns and heavy Mark VI tanks were spotted at several points, but the visibility was so poor that it was impossible to direct accurate artillery fire on them. By midafternoon it was evident that the attack had bogged down. Forward elements were unable to orient themselves in the maze of ridges and gullies and repeatedly reported themselves ahead of their actual positions. Colonel Braun ordered the two battalions to reorganize their units, bring up supplies, and get set for a night assault.

To the east of Zena Creek the 168th Infantry was engaged throughout 17–18 October in fighting for control of the knobs and clusters of stone houses on the slopes of Mount della Vigna. The 8,000 rounds of artillery laid down on the 16th by the division artillery, supplemented by Corps artillery and tank and tank destroyer fire, apparently induced the Germans to give up their outpost line. Early in the morning the 2d Battalion found Tazzola unoccupied; later in the day the 3d Battalion found Crocetta abandoned. The 1st Battalion, after swinging around to the west of Crocetta, regrouped at Tazzola and then went on to seize Hill 461, the summit of Mount della Vigna, before noon. Five hundred yards to the southeast the 3d Battalion occupied an east-west ridge. Although contacts with enemy troops were few, artillery and mortar fire continued to harass the troops throughout 17 October. Two hamlets on the forward slope of Hill 461 were taken the next day by the 3d Battalion, but four successive attempts to continue the advance along the ridge failed to gain ground.

All three battalions of the 133d Infantry were employed in the night attack on 18–19 October: the 2d and 3d Battalions against Mount Belmonte and the 1st Battalion against an old castle above the village of Zena. None of the attacks made

appreciable gains, and both the 2d and 3d Battalions suffered casualties from enemy tank fire. In spite of continuous work on the part of the engineers to open up the trail north of Bigallo, the tanks and tank destroyers supporting the 133d Infantry were still too far behind to offer any assistance on 19 October, and those supporting the 168th Infantry could supply only indirect fire. Enemy artillery and mortars were matching the fire of the 34th Division round for round. The terrain facing the division consisted of a confused mass of hills, knolls, and rocky outcroppings which made it difficult to prevent a battalion or regimental attack from breaking down into isolated company attacks. To halt these piecemeal actions General Bolte designated a line of stabilization and ordered the 133d and 168th Infantry to regroup. Instead of finding a weak point in the enemy defenses the 34th Division was facing the tanks and infantry of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, one of the best German divisions in Italy. Elements of the 71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment held Mount Belmonte, and at the end of 19 October the 168th Infantry identified the 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment on its front.

2. *Action on the flanks of the 34th Division.* To the left of the new 34th Division zone and astride Highway 65 the 91st Division committed all three of its regiments for the Corps attack on 16 October. Its mission was to open Highway 65, assist the 34th Division against Mount Belmonte, and capture Mount Adone. These two hill masses overlook the highway from both the east and west; they would have to be secured before a deep penetration in the center could be achieved. Division plans called for the 363d Infantry to seize the ground to the west of Mount Belmonte; the 361st Infantry would continue to advance along Highway 65 in the center; and the 362d Infantry would enter the line just west of the highway. Instead of making a direct assault on Mount Adone it was planned that the 362d Infantry would bypass the height and then turn back to strike from the northeast in conjunction with an attack to be launched by the 1st Armored Division.

Jumping off at 0500, 16 October, without artillery preparation, the 1st and 3d Battalions, 363d Infantry, advanced 1,000 yards north of Querceta along the trail leading north to Mount Belmonte. As the regiment was well ahead of the troops on its flanks, it consolidated the ground won in preparation for the 133d Infantry to pass through. Arrangements were made for the 1st Battalion to attack at 2000 together with the 2d Battalion, 133d Infantry, but difficulty in maintaining contact during the night and fear of firing on friendly troops held back the 1st Battalion. During 17 October, while the 133d Infantry fought to secure a foothold on Mount Belmonte, the 1st and 3d Battalions advanced another 500 yards along parallel ridges 1 mile to the west of Zena Creek; the next day neither battalion made appreciable gains. Exposed to continuous fire from Mount Belmonte and hampered by an open left flank, Colonel Magill decided on 18 October to call a halt to the attack.

Like the 34th Division the 363d Infantry was experiencing difficulty in getting anti-tank guns and armor forward to support the infantry. When prime movers and oxen failed, bulldozers were sent up; one antitank gun was worked into position on 17 October, and five more were brought up in the next 2 days.

At the start of the offensive on 16 October the 361st Infantry held the Livergnano area from Highway 65 to Savena Creek with the 1st and 2d Battalions north of Livergnano and the 3d Battalion 1 mile to the west near the hamlet of Casalino. The 362d Infantry in column of battalions attacked through the 361st Infantry with the first objective of seizing the hamlet of Lucca, 1,000 yards north of Casalino. There was room for only one company to operate along the narrow ridge leading to Lucca, and it was not until the afternoon of 17 October that Company I, after suffering 37 casualties in the first day of the attack, took the objective. While this action was in progress the 3d Battalion, 361st Infantry, continued to advance west of Casalino to protect the left flank along Savena Creek, and the 1st and 2d Battalions drove north on Highway 65. At 2200, 16 October, the 2d Battalion passed through the 1st Battalion with orders to attack at dawn the next morning. Enemy tanks along the highway prevented any forward movement, and the day was largely devoted to bringing forward our own tanks and tank destroyers to force back the enemy armor.

The presence of both the 16th SS and the 29th Panzer Grenadier Divisions on the II Corps front presented the danger of a powerful armored and infantry spoiling attack against the Corps left flank. General Keyes on 17 October warned the 1st Armored and 91st Divisions that such an attack might develop either in the Monterumici or Livergnano areas. He ordered that no action be taken which would interfere with the continuance of the II Corps offensive, but that defensive fires be prepared and antitank guns be kept well forward. This order coincided with the 91st Division plan to draw the 1st and 2d Battalions, 361st Infantry, into reserve. During the night of 17-18 October the relief was carried out by the 1st and 2d Battalions, 362d Infantry, and at 0530 the next morning the offensive was resumed. A daylight attack followed by one at night, in which both sides took advantage of the highway to make full use of their armor and self-propelled guns, brought the two battalions to positions astride the highway approximately 2 miles north of Livergnano. On the left flank of the 362d Infantry the attached 3d Battalion, 361st Infantry, was held up by extensive minefields west of Casalino.

In the 4-day period 16-19 October the 91st Division gained only 1 additional mile to the north of Livergnano, and the enemy still held a strip of ground on the east side of Savena Creek below Mount Adone. CCA and the 135th Infantry, located to the south and east of the Monterumici hill mass, launched a coordinated attack on 17 October which hardly dented the enemy defenses. Neither the 91st

nor the 1st Armored Division was yet in position to assault Mount Adone. In addition to a marked increase in the use of tanks and self-propelled guns the volume of fire laid down by the enemy artillery had more than doubled from that experienced in September. The heaviest fire was concentrated on Livergnano, which the enemy set out to demolish systematically in an effort to block the flow of supplies along Highway 65. Faced with the danger of a possible counterattack in force and unable to achieve a significant breach at any point in the enemy lines, the 91st and 1st Armored Divisions by 19 October had shifted gradually from the offensive to what was in effect an aggressive defense.

The 85th Division, attacking on the right flank of the 34th Division, concentrated its strength on the high ground east of the Idice Valley. North of the Monterenzio hill mass the main ridge lying between the Idice and Sillaro rivers turns gradually to the northeast for 2½ miles; it then splits, one branch turning east to Mount Grande in the 88th Division zone and another to the north. Leading down from the main ridge toward the Idice Valley is a series of massive spurs and deep gullies which cut across the axis of the 85th Division advance. General Coulter ordered the 339th Infantry, which had been in action north of the Monterenzio hill mass since the night of 13-14 October, to continue to the northeast along the crest of the ridge; the 338th Infantry, after being relieved on Mount delle Formiche by the 168th Infantry, would be responsible for the division left flank in the Idice Valley and for the capture of Mount Fano, a dominating peak on one of the spurs branching off from the main ridge.

Following up a night attack, the 1st Battalion, 339th Infantry, captured Hill 622, the highest knob on the main ridge, on 16 October, and organized it for defense while the 3d Battalion pushed on to the next knob. To the left rear the 2d Battalion fought until the early morning hours of 17 October to take Hill 518, 1 mile to the north of the Monterenzio hill mass. It then passed to reserve, and responsibility for the zone north of Hill 518 was assumed by the 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry. The latter struck north toward Mount Fano while the 3d Battalion, 338th Infantry, cleared Highway 6531 in the Idice Valley. After 2 days of fighting from one enemy strongpoint to another the 338th Infantry reached the lower slopes of Mount Fano on 19 October and consolidated positions on a line extending west to the hamlet of Canovetta in the Idice Valley; the 339th Infantry reached the fork in the main ridge on the 18th and then swung east in response to orders that it was to aid the 88th Division attack on Mount Grande. At the end of the period the 85th Division was ahead of the 34th Division on its left and in a favorable position to join the 88th Division in an attack to the northeast.

3. *The 88th Division Approaches Mount Grande.* At the start of the Corps offensive on 16 October the units of the 88th Division were scattered over a wide area. Two

battalions of the 350th Infantry were over 1 mile north of the Sillaro River, the 349th Infantry was in the process of attacking Mount delle Tombe and at the same time moving troops across the river, and the 351st Infantry on the Gesso ridge was preparing to pass into reserve when relieved by the British 78 Division. To enable the 88th Division to concentrate on the capture of Mount Grande, General Clark on 15 October had ordered 13 Corps to take over the Gesso ridge as rapidly as possible and to attack northward to seize Mount Spaduro. The new intercorps boundary, which became effective at 2330, 16 October, passed between Mount delle Tombe and Mount Spaduro and then skirted the south side of the Sillaro Valley. The effect of the shift was to reduce considerably the zone of the 88th Division, but until Mount delle Tombe and Mount Spaduro should be taken General Kendall would be forced to maintain a part of his forces south of the river.

The division plan of attack called for the 350th Infantry to continue north to seize Mount Cuccoli, a high point on the ridge to the west of Mount Grande; the 349th Infantry would employ one battalion to clear the ridge north of Mount delle Tombe and the remainder of the regiment north of the river for an attack on Mount Grande. After relieving the 1st Battalion, 351st Infantry, on the lower slopes of Mount delle Tombe during the night of 15–16 October, the 2d Battalion, 349th Infantry, attacked in the early morning hours. Company E, striking from the west flank, reached the crest before dawn and then fought off an enemy counterattack while Company F was moving up from the south. The 3d Battalion, with Company A attached, crossed the river and moved up onto Hill 373 behind the 350th Infantry. At 2000 the 88th Division launched a general attack. The 1st Battalion, 350th Infantry, disorganized by friendly artillery fire, made no progress toward Mount Cuccoli; Company K, 349th Infantry, pushed east from Hill 373 to the outskirts of the village of San Clemente but was driven back by German tank and machine gun fire. The other elements of the 349th Infantry were more successful. Company L cut the dirt road north of San Clemente by midnight and went on 500 yards to the east to take Hill 435 before dawn. Company A moved up to join it and Company I took the next height to the north. To the south the 2d Battalion cleared the ridge beyond Mount delle Tombe, crossed the river, and at noon entered San Clemente. A road block was established east of the town, and a German counterattack was beaten off early in the afternoon. Before the close of 17 October the 349th Infantry had come abreast of the 350th Infantry.

The next 2 days were devoted to bringing up reserves and working up the parallel spurs leading to the Mount Grande—Mount Cuccoli ridge. After the remainder of the 1st Battalion, 349th Infantry, joined Company C behind Hill 435 on 18 October, the regiment launched a night attack which brought the 1st Battalion to within 1 mile of Mount Grande. On the left the 350th Infantry, with all three of

its battalions north of the Sillaro, had elements near the crest of the ridge. The 2d Battalion, attacking at 0315, 19 October, along the spur leading up to Mount Cuccoli, reached positions within 500 yards of its objective before dawn; 1,000 yards to the west on a parallel spur the 3d Battalion came within 200 yards of the trail along the crest of the ridge. Later in the day contact was made with the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, attacking eastward along the trail. Before the close of 19 October the 339th, 350th, and 349th Infantry were ready to converge on Mount Grande.

### C. *SHIFT TO THE RIGHT FLANK*

20-26 OCTOBER

1. *New Orders.* The failure of the 34th Division and of the units flanking it in the center of the II Corps front to make appreciable gains in the period 16-19 October forced a modification of the Corps plan of attack. By continuing to hold the Monterumici hill mass and Mount Adone the enemy was gradually constricting the zone in which II Corps could maneuver freely. At the same time the arrival of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division and a continued eastward shift of the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division gave the enemy a strong force with which to resist any further attacks in the central zone. There was even a possibility that he would launch a counteroffensive against the II Corps left flank. In order to force Lemelsen to spread his troops over a wider front and thereby reduce the concentration of units opposite the nose of the II Corps salient General Clark planned to attack on the flanks. The first step in this plan called for the main effort to be made on the right flank where the 88th Division was approaching Mount Grande.

On 19 October General Keyes issued new instructions outlining an offensive in three phases. In the first phase the 88th Division would capture Mount Grande and Mount Cerere, the high point on a spur to the southeast of Mount Grande. The division would be reinforced by the 337th Infantry on the 20th, and it was expected that the final attack would be made on the night of 20-21 October. The 85th Division would continue its attack along the ridge as far as Mount Cuccoli so as to provide assistance from the west as well as flank protection. Once the Mount Grande area had been secured, 13 Corps would relieve the 88th Division, permitting the latter to pass into Corps reserve near Highway 65. While the attack on Mount Grande was under way the 34th Division would continue its efforts to take Mount Belmonte, and the 91st Division would improve its positions on the east side of Savena Creek. In the second phase the emphasis would be placed on developing the enemy defenses in the central area and below Mount Adone; in the third phase

an attack would be launched to take Mount Adone and Pianoro in the 91st Division zone, thereby broadening the Corps front to the west as well as to the east.

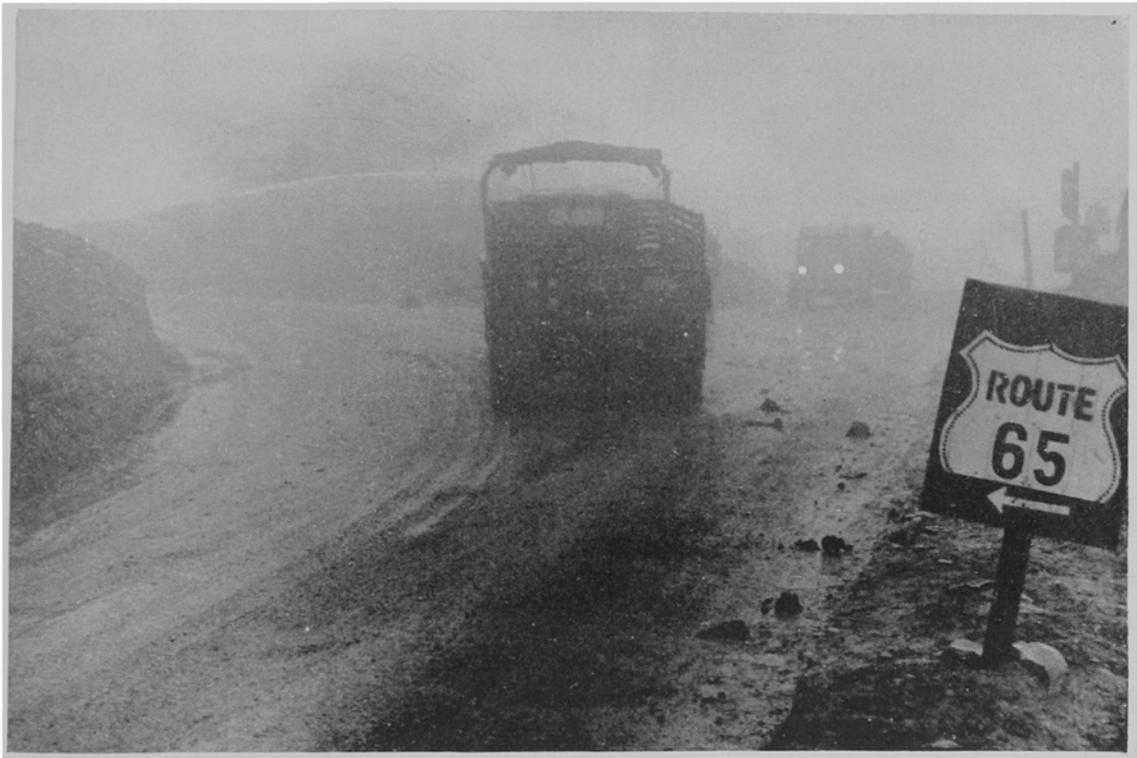
2. *Assault on Mount Grande.* The development of the enemy defenses in the Mount Grande area was approaching the final stage before the II Corps order was issued. During 19 October fighter-bombers, flying 158 sorties, saturated the area with high-explosive and fuel tank incendiary bombs. The planes took off at 15-minute intervals to strike targets which the 88th Division Artillery marked with colored smoke. Division and Corps artillery pounded the area from Mount Cuccoli east to Mount Cerere. The artillery preparation began at 1700 with concentrations fired at 5-minute intervals until 1800. The 88th Division Artillery was reinforced by 2 medium batteries each from the 248th and 178th Field Artillery Battalions and 7 light batteries and 1 medium battery from the 85th Division. In all, 42 targets were struck by 5 battery volleys of light artillery and 4 battery volleys of medium artillery. During the same period 23 tanks and tank destroyers fired harassing missions on targets to the north and east of Mount Grande to bring the total to 8,100 rounds fired in 1 hour. Beginning at 1800 Corps artillery fired an extensive counter-battery program on all known enemy gun positions.

Following up the artillery preparation the infantry attacked. On the right flank Company A, 349th Infantry, striking north from Hill 450 in a blinding rain, captured Mount Cerere and 11 Germans without firing a shot. Companies B and C moved up to join it, and before dawn the 1st Battalion was firmly entrenched on the eastern bastion of the Mount Grande hill mass. The 2d Battalion to the left had to beat off an enemy counterattack on the lower slopes of Mount Grande, but once it had reached the ridge line to the west of Mount Cerere it was slowed only by the mud, rain, and artillery fire. At dawn Company F reached the summit of the mountain 24 hours earlier than either II Corps or the enemy had anticipated. Although Company F was forced to fight off a counterattack within ½ hour of arriving at the summit, the Germans were no better prepared to attack than they had been to defend the mountain.

A partial explanation for the surprise achieved in the attack on Mount Grande was the fact that hitherto the principal fighting had occurred along the ridge stretching west from Mount Grande into the zone of the 85th Division. Both the 339th and 350th Infantry had been heavily engaged for 2 days before the attack on Mount Grande was launched, and they were still fighting when the 349th Infantry reported it had secured its objective. Mount Cuccoli, the major height on the ridge, was not taken until the early afternoon of 20 October when Company I, 350th Infantry, reached the summit; it was dark before the 2d Battalion secured the village of Farneto, 500 yards to the east. In the next 2 days the 337th Infantry, attached to the 88th Division in accordance with the Corps plan, took over the portion of the ridge lying



*Mud-clogged roads contributed to the slowing down of the II Corps drive*



*Fog and mist forced drivers to move slowly even on the main highways*



*A jeep fails to ford the Sieve River during the late October floods*



*Engineers prepare to remove a trestle bridge which has been undermined*

west of Farneto, permitting the 350th Infantry to aid in the consolidation of Mount Grande.

The capture of Mount Grande, like that of Mount Battaglia in September, represented a serious tactical loss to the enemy. During a visit to the command post of the 349th Infantry on the day the mountain was taken General Clark warned Colonel Crawford that a counterattack in force could be expected. Identification of German prisoners revealed that in addition to reconstituted elements of the 44th Grenadier Division which had recently gone back into line to aid the 98th Grenadier Division, the 361st Panzer Grenadier Regiment (90th Panzer Grenadier Division) had been rushed over from the Eighth Army front. It could be anticipated that the remainder of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division would soon arrive to provide additional infantry and armored support. To meet the threat of a counteroffensive fighter-bombers on 20 and 21 October bombed and strafed all approaches to the Mount Grande area, and both corps and division artillery carried out an extensive program of harassing fires. Although limitations had already been placed on ammunition for the 155-mm guns, the swift capture of Mount Grande left the 88th Division Artillery with an ample supply for its immediate needs.

3. *Preparations to Renew the Attack.* While the 88th Division, assisted by the 85th Division, was seizing and then consolidating its hold on Mount Grande, the remainder of the II Corps front remained virtually static. All efforts of the 34th Division to take Mount Belmonte or to advance along the ridge south of Zena Creek failed; the danger of an enemy counteroffensive against the corps left flank was, if anything, more acute. Since the right flank was the only area where the enemy had failed so far to stabilize his lines General Clark decided to abandon the second and third phases of the II Corps plan of attack and to concentrate on expanding the bulge northeast of Mount Grande. The main effort now would be made by the 88th and 85th Divisions, assisted on the right by 13 Corps.

Verbal instructions were issued to II Corps on 22 October that it was to advance its right flank to a general line extending from Mount Castelazzo in the 88th Division zone to Ribano Hill in the 85th Division zone. These two heights, approximately 3 miles northeast of Mount Grande and an equal distance from Highway 9, represented the last possible defensive line short of the Po Valley. West of the left boundary of the 85th Division the Corps would regroup its troops to permit the withdrawal from forward positions of two infantry regiments and the necessary supporting units of one division. These troops would then be placed in reserve in such a position as to be available to repel any counterattack against the Corps left flank. Once the Mount Castelazzo—Ribano line had been reached II Corps would be prepared to cut Highway 9. It was expected that the troops drawn into reserve would be available for this phase, but they were to be committed only on Army order. Plans for

the establishment of a bridgehead in the Po Valley would be prepared to conform in general with Operations Instruction No. 35. Instructions issued to 13 Corps called for the massing of at least four brigades north of the Santerno River and an immediate attack on the chain of hills south of the Sillaro River with the objective of aiding II Corps in opening Highway 937 to Castel San Pietro.

In order to form the reserve called for in the Army instructions General Keyes was forced to reshuffle the units in the center and left flank of the II Corps front. It was decided that the 362d and 363d Infantry would be drawn out of the line and the zone of the 91st Division narrowed to include the area between Savena Creek and a line drawn just east of Highway 65. To assist the 361st Infantry in holding this front the 135th Infantry would be detached from the 1st Armored Division and attached to the 91st Division. The portion of the original 91st Division zone lying east of Highway 65 would be taken over by the 34th Division in a series of night reliefs designed to conceal the withdrawal of any major units from the line. It was not planned that the 34th, 91st, and 1st Armored Divisions would do more than maintain an aggressive defense from their existing positions, but General Bolte was given permission to continue his attack on Mount Belmonte so as to develop a more defensible front.

The two attacking divisions were to jump off on the night of 22–23 October with the first objective of taking a series of high points to the north and east of Mount Grande. The 88th Division would first strike north 1,000 yards to take Hill 568, which dominates an important crossroads. It would then send a force east  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Hill 568 to the high ground around the village of Vedriano and a second force from Mount Cerere to Hills 309 and 339 which guard the approach to the Sillaro Valley. The 85th Division would take Hill 459, 1 mile to the northeast of Mount Fano, and a series of heights to the west and north of Hill 568. When these objectives had been secured the two divisions would drive on to the Mount Castellazzo—Ribano Hill line.

4. *Expanding the Bulge.* For the attack north of Mount Grande the 88th Division introduced the 351st Infantry. The 3d Battalion reached Hill 568 before dawn on 23 October, and by 0730 it had completed the task of mopping up all enemy troops on the height. Caught off balance, the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division responded vigorously. Before 1015 the 3d Battalion had beaten off two counter-attacks, the second involving approximately 200 troops representing elements of the 200th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, the 117th Grenadier Regiment, and the 557th Grenadier Regiment (305th Grenadier Division) which had been hurriedly moved the previous night from the 13 Corps area. A mile to the west of Hill 568 the 2d Battalion, 337th Infantry, reached the crest of Mount Castellaro on the night of the 22d and dug in. The 1st Battalion prepared to pass through the next morning

toward Ribano Hill, the objective of the 85th Division, but was held up by the need for wiping out enemy pockets of resistance on Mount Castellaro. A mile farther to the west Company B, leading the advance of the 1st Battalion, 339th Infantry, took Hill 459, the last important knob on the ridge running north from the Monterenzio hill mass. At dawn on the 23d enemy troops dug in on the reverse slope of the hill counterattacked. The majority of the men in two platoons of Company B were killed or captured, and control of the hill passed back to the Germans. Our attacks on Hill 568, Mount Castellaro, and Hill 459, if not completely successful, provided an outpost line approximately 1 mile to the north of Mount Grande as well as a line of departure for a continuation of the drive.

The next phase of the Corps plan called for the 88th Division to take the village of Vedriano, 1½ miles to the east of Hill 568 and an equal distance from Mount Castellazzo. The village, located on a flat-topped hill, lies just above a secondary road which runs from the crossroads below Hill 568 eastward along the high ground forming the divide between the Sillaro River and a series of small streams which drain to the north. Spearheading the attack of the 2d Battalion, 351st Infantry, on the night of 23-24 October, Company G found a gap in the enemy lines and pushed forward along the road all the way to Vedriano. At dawn the village together with 40 Germans had been captured. Unfortunately Companies E and F were held up by bypassed strongpoints 1,200 yards to the west of Vedriano and were unable to exploit the tactical success achieved by the night attack.

Intercepted German radio messages indicated the enemy considered the loss of Vedriano a decisive defeat and that he was marshalling his reserves to wipe out the dangerous salient. A minor counterattack was beaten off early in the morning; then messages from Company G came intermittently. At 1400 it was reported that the Germans had three battalions ready to counterattack and that the enemy had offered to permit the company to withdraw in exchange for the captured German troops. Colonel Champeny ordered that the village be held at all costs. Artillery was laid down to the north and east of the church where the company was concentrated; air support was requested from Rover Joe, and the 2d Battalion was ordered to get tanks and tank destroyers forward to assist Companies E and G in knocking out the enemy strongpoints blocking their advance. None of these efforts proved sufficient to save the troops trapped in Vedriano. Late in the afternoon the Germans closed in on the village and captured what remained of Company G. At the end of the day they were again in possession of Vedriano and were now fully prepared to defend it.

Both the 85th and 88th Divisions issued orders for a renewal of the attack on the night of 24-25 October. The 337th Infantry was to strike northeast from Mount Castellaro; the 351st Infantry would continue its attack on Vedriano; and the 349th

Infantry, which had reached the village of Frassineto on the ridge east of Mount Cerere, would take Hills 309 and 339. The 1st Battalion, 337th Infantry, reached the first height north of Hill 568 by dawn on 25 October and secured its positions; elsewhere the attacks were almost uniformly unsuccessful. The 1st Battalion, 351st Infantry, passed through the 2d Battalion and got as far as a cluster of houses at the base of the Vedriano hill when it was stopped by fire from enemy mortars and self-propelled guns. During the daylight hours the troops were unable to move. Tanks and tank destroyers, which had been worked forward to Hill 568, together with the artillery poured fire into Vedriano to soften up the enemy defenses, but the rain-soaked ground and fire from enemy self-propelled guns made it difficult to get armor within close supporting range. To the south the 3d Battalion, 349th Infantry, managed to place troops on both Hills 309 and 339. Company I reached the top of Hill 339 before dawn. One platoon was cut off while attempting to drive the enemy from a cluster of houses, and the remainder of the company was driven back. Company L on Hill 309 lost all of its officers, became disorganized, and likewise withdrew. Dark clouds clinging to the mountains made it difficult for troops to call for accurate artillery support; cold rain and mud added to the misery of infantrymen already approaching the point of exhaustion.

5. *The Attack Bogs Down.* After dark on 25 October the 351st Infantry made a final effort to capture Vedriano. Companies E and F marched northeast to protect the left flank; Company B moved between them and Vedriano to strike from the north in conjunction with an attack by Company A down the road; Company C provided a base of fire. Company B got part way up the hill to Vedriano when enemy machine guns opened up. Most of the men were replacements who had only recently joined the division. Rain and fog, added to the darkness and the enemy fire, confused them, and the attack disintegrated. Only a few men found their way back to Company F or to Company A, which was held up at the group of houses west of the village. After dawn on 26 October the rain continued to pour down, and a blanket of fog reduced visibility to 200–300 yards. Taking advantage of the confusion resulting from the breakdown of the 1st Battalion attack and the poor visibility, the Germans counterattacked. Almost all of Company F and the remnant of Company B which had joined it were killed or captured. Company E was rushed forward to assist Company F, but although contact was made with the enemy force all efforts to retrieve the captured troops failed. With three companies now virtually destroyed and others at less than half their normal strength the 351st Infantry had no choice but to give up the attack.

At other points around the Mount Grande salient the 85th and 88th Division units were in no better condition to continue. North of Hill 568 two outposts manned by troops of Company A, 337th Infantry, bore the brunt of an enemy counterattack

on the 26th which resulted in heavy casualties; east of Mount Cerere the 349th Infantry was still in the process of regrouping after its unsuccessful attack of the previous day. It had been planned that the 362d Infantry, which had assembled south of the Sillaro on the 25th, would be passed through the 349th Infantry for an attack down the Sillaro Valley. Any immediate prospect of using this reserve force, however, was ended by the torrential rains on the 26th. A flash flood took out all the bridges across the Sillaro River, cutting off the 362d Infantry and nearly isolating the 88th Division from all supplies. The 313th Engineer Combat Battalion constructed a breeches buoy at one point and put across several footbridges, but all transport was tied up south of the river. Ammunition and rations had to be hand carried to reach the troops on the north bank. Once across the swollen river supplies moved over washed-out jeep trails to reach Mount Grande, and from there only mules could reach the forward troops. In view of the situation General Keyes on the afternoon of 26 October issued verbal orders to the 85th and 88th Divisions to pull back to defensible ground and dig in.

The final bogging down of the II Corps offensive on the 26th was due to more basic causes than a flash flood or the loss of individual units. In the past II Corps had demonstrated repeatedly that bridges could be rebuilt in a matter of hours and units reformed after a few days of rest. What could not be restored overnight was the offensive power of divisions which were understrength and worn down from over 6 weeks of bitter fighting. At the end of each phase of the October offensive the balance of statistics had leaned more heavily in favor of the enemy. Only the hope that one more attack would carry them through the last few miles of mountains separating them from the Po Valley had kept our troops from halting earlier.

The clearest picture of the relative strength of II Corps at the end of the offensive may be obtained from the casualties suffered by the four infantry divisions which had borne the brunt of the fighting. From the start of the offensive on 10 September through 26 October the 34th, 85th, 88th, and 91st Divisions sustained a total of 15,716 battle casualties. The 88th Division, which was spearheading the last attack from Mount Grande, alone had 5,026. There were not enough replacements available in the theater to make up these losses. General Kendall reported on the 26th that he was short approximately 115 infantry officers, and at the end of the month the division was understrength by 1,243 officers and men. Strenuous and emphatic representations had been made by Army and Mediterranean Theater G-1 to obtain combat replacements from the United States. Priorities elsewhere dictated that these replacements could not be made available in Italy in time to take part in the current campaign. When the situation became desperate 3,000 men were flown to Italy from France, but due to the stormy weather during the last week of October these troops arrived too late to take part in the attack from Mount Grande.

The effect of the heavy casualties was felt most seriously by the rifle companies, upon whom fell the brunt of the fighting. At the end of the September-October offensive companies attacked with as few as two or three officers. Platoons were often at half-strength and made up, to a large extent, of replacements who had been with the unit for only a few days. Furthermore, the troops were tired to the point of exhaustion. To the burden of carrying machine guns and mortars up the steep mountain slopes were added clinging mud, rain, and the bitterly cold nights of approaching winter weather. The issue of improved winter clothing including new type shoepacs, combination wool sweaters and cotton field jackets with hoods, and sleeping bags left the troops better prepared for the inclement weather than during the previous winter, but there was no possibility of keeping dry during an attack when the rains lasted for days on end. Under such conditions even the strongest men reached the limit of their physical endurance, and the number of nonbattle casualties rose steadily.

II Corps estimated that by the end of October the enemy had as many, and possibly more, infantry troops with which to hold the line than we had available for the attack. To the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, which bolstered the central portion of the front at the middle of October, were added on the II Corps right flank the whole of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, elements of the 305th Grenadier and of the 42d Light Divisions, and finally the 1st Parachute Division. Separate units, such as the 400th Fusilier Battalion, crack troops who had formed the personal bodyguard of Kesselring, were used to fill gaps in the line or were broken up to rebuild depleted divisions. When II Corps had opened its attack on the Gothic Line it was faced by one full division and elements of two others; at the end of October this force had grown to seven divisions and elements of three others. Some of these divisions, such as the 4th Parachute and the 44th and 362d Grenadier, had been nearly annihilated, but the enemy succeeded in providing sufficient replacements to keep them functioning, and they had the advantage of fighting from prepared positions.

In mid-October the enemy had 150 artillery pieces opposite the nose of the II Corps salient and another 50 located on the flanks in position to fire into the Corps area. With the arrival of additional divisions the number of enemy guns showed a proportionate increase, including a number of heavy-caliber weapons. There was also a change evident in the way the enemy employed his artillery fire. Heretofore the majority of his missions were observed, the expenditure of ammunition was controlled by higher headquarters, and when his pieces were counterbattered they moved to alternate positions. In October the enemy supply of ammunition appeared to be plentiful, and no restrictions were placed on its use. Very little fire was directed toward rear installations or supply lines; instead, most of the fire was placed

on forward troops in concentrations seldom experienced before. II Corps, on the other hand, by the last week of October had been forced to impose drastic restrictions on ammunition for medium caliber weapons, and it had no heavy artillery available after the 17th when the 697th and 698th Field Artillery Battalions were detached and sent to France. In artillery as well as in infantry the enemy had reached a basis of equality with II Corps.

#### D. *II CORPS REVERTS TO THE DEFENSIVE*

Following up verbal orders sent to the 85th and 88th Divisions on 26 October, General Keyes issued written instructions on the 28th calling for all divisions under the corps command to develop defensive positions. A main line of resistance would be established running northwest across the Sillaro River from Mount Spaduro in the 13 Corps sector to Mount Cerere, the eastern bastion of Mount Grande; the line would then curve around Mount Grande to include Hill 568 and Mount Castellaro, the northern guardians of the hill mass; then west along the northern slopes of Mount Fano and Mount Belmonte, the key features in the central area; and finally southwest below Mount Adone and the Monterumici hill mass to tie in with the 6 South African Armoured Division in the Setta Valley. Possession of Mount Grande and Mount Belmonte, which was captured by the 133d Infantry on 23 October, gave II Corps possession of the commanding heights in the area lying east of Highway 65; west of Highway 65, where the enemy still held Mount Adone, the Monterumici hill mass, and Mount Sole, the advantage was reversed.

Division boundaries remained the same as those established before the start of the attack from Mount Grande. The 362d Infantry, attached to the 88th Division, would serve as a corps reserve prepared to counterattack in either the 88th or 85th Division sectors, and one other regiment of the 91st Division would be held back to serve a similar function behind the Corps left flank. As early as 23 October all units had been instructed to prepare complete plans for defense against armored attacks to include employment of antitank and cannon companies, organic artillery, attached tanks and tank destroyers, and obstacles such as demolitions, mines, and road blocks. These measures were now to be supplemented by coordinated infantry defense plans to include wiring in of all positions, laying minefields, and the establishment of a strong outpost line. Execution of division and corps plans for the organization of the ground were to be completed as rapidly as possible so as to relieve the maximum number of troops for rest and rehabilitation. With the issuance of the order on the 28th, II Corps gave formal recognition to the end of its October offensive.

## E. *THE 6 SOUTH AFRICAN ARMoured DIVISION STABILIZES THE LEFT FLANK*

16-31 OCTOBER

In conjunction with the II Corps attack on 16 October the 6 South African Armoured Division resumed its advance along the ridge between the Reno and Setta valleys. From its line of departure north of Mount Stanco the 12 South African Motorised Brigade was to drive northeast 2 miles to Mount Salvaro and then continue on for 3 miles to Mount Sole. Capture of the latter objective would lead to the outflanking of the Monterumici hill mass and would strengthen the left flank of II Corps. For the first 2 days of the attack the RNC and FC/CTH were fully engaged in taking two knobs just north of the lateral road from Grizzana to Vergato. While they were consolidating positions on the 18th, the WR/DLR took advantage of a heavy mist to complete preparations for an attack on Mount Salvaro. Jumping off just before dawn on the 19th, the battalion reached Hill 806, 800 yards from the crest of the mountain, by 0740. Further progress was stopped by enemy mortar and artillery fire, followed by a series of counterattacks launched by the 274th Grenadier Regiment (94th Grenadier Division). The failure of the 24 Guards Brigade to take Mount Alcino, just southeast of Mount Salvaro, left the right flank of the WR/DLR exposed, and the battalion lacked the strength to do more than hold. Like many of the II Corps units its companies had been reduced to the strength of platoons.

Before dawn on 20 October the enemy resumed his efforts to drive the WR/DLR off the mountain; by noon 11 separate attacks had been beaten off, and special carrying parties had to be organized to bring forward ammunition. Late in the afternoon the 1 Scots Guards cleared part of Mount Alcino but failed to reach the crest until the next morning when the enemy gave up the height. During 21 October the ILH/Kim R moved up to relieve the WR/DLR. Rain and mist drenched the troops through the night and all day on the 22d as they pushed forward toward the summit of Mount Salvaro. When this attack failed, the RNC was moved up, and the full strength of the division and supporting artillery was massed for an assault the next morning. A break in the mist caught the troops on open, plowed ground just short of the objective, and the dawn attack was stopped. Early in the afternoon when the weather closed in again the offensive was renewed in conjunction with an attack on the right by the 1 Scots Guards against Mount Termine. At 1400 the summit of Mount Salvaro was reached, and the next morning, after clearing a path through an enemy minefield, the 1 Scots Guards occupied Mount Termine. The last 3 days of the attack had cost the 12 South African Motorised Brigade 96 casualties with an additional 87 men evacuated for exposure; it had cost the 94th Grenadier Division 112 prisoners in addition to the dead and wounded.