

CHAPTER VIII * * * * *

The Winter Stalemate

WITH the arrival of November, Fifth Army troops were preparing to dig in for a second winter, this time on the cold, wind-swept slopes of the Northern Apennines. For nearly 2 full months they had struggled forward from mountain to mountain in a campaign which for intensity and sustained action matched any fought by an Allied Army. Beginning in the warm, clear days of early September when the Allied forces were confident of an early end to the war in Europe, the Fifth Army drive toward Bologna gradually slowed to a halt amidst the torrential rains of late October as the strain of heavy casualties, increasing enemy resistance, and mud-clogged supply routes wore down the offensive strength of the attacking divisions. Barely 9 miles from Bologna in the center and 4 miles from the Po Valley on the right flank the forward troops of Fifth Army were within visual range of their objectives when the drive was stopped.

A. *FIFTH ARMY HALTS THE OFFENSIVE*

The preliminary steps toward halting the offensive were taken by II Corps on 26 October when the attack of the 85th and 88th Divisions from Mount Grande bogged down. On 30 October General Clark issued verbal instructions, confirmed in a directive issued on 2 November (*Annex No. 1G*), outlining the action to be taken by all units under the Army command. These instructions were based on the estimate that the Army would not be in position to resume the offensive before 1 December. The condition of the troops who had spearheaded the offensive, the shortage of replacements in the theater, the weather, and the strength of the enemy forces marshalled across the II Corps front all were contributing factors in this decision; the controlling factor was the status of the ammunition stocks available to Fifth Army.

On 14 October the Army G-4 had estimated that present stocks of ammunition, including theater reserves and current allocations to 10 November, would be completely exhausted by 10 November if the average daily rate of expenditure was continued. He further reported that theater allocations for the period 10 November-10 January would not be sufficient for any mission beyond a defensive role. Four days later, after the decision was made that an 8-day reserve should be held back to repel a possible enemy counteroffensive, the Army G-4 estimated that the offensive could not be continued beyond 25 October. Although the lack of ammunition had not yet been felt seriously, this estimate corresponded closely with the actual date when the II Corps offensive broke down. By placing restrictions as early as the 19th on all units not engaged in the attack from Mount Grande, the Army ended the month of October with a small reserve of ammunition, but with the reduced theater allocations for the period after 10 November it would take time to build up the reserves necessary to support even limited objective attacks. In some categories, such as ammunition for the 155-mm gun, production capacity in the United States was unable to meet the demand; in other categories the higher priority granted to the European Theater of Operations resulted in the reduced allocations. Under these conditions General Clark had no choice but to halt operations until December, and it was unlikely that a sustained drive could be undertaken even then.

In the interim period before the offensive should be renewed 13 Corps was ordered to maintain pressure against the enemy, withdrawing troops on the right as they were pinched out by Eighth Army, and on the left relieving troops of II Corps on the Mount Grande hill mass. II Corps would consolidate its present positions with a minimum of troops, rotating units so as to withdraw as many men as possible for rest, reequipping, absorption of replacements, and training. Every effort was to be made to provide for the comfort of the troops including, where practicable, mess buildings and winterized tentage. The 6 South African Armoured Division would continue preparations to capture Mount Sole but would attack only on Army order. IV Corps would relieve CCB with the 6th Combat Team, BEF, and then press forward along Highway 64 to narrow the zone of action of the 6 South African Armoured Division. The 92d Division, operating directly under Army control, would assume responsibility for the coastal area and the Serchio Valley. Although the Army plan called for limited operations on both flanks of the Bologna salient, the emphasis lay on drawing as many troops as possible out of the line and preparing for winter conditions. Snow had already fallen on the higher peaks and was shortly due in increasing frequency.



Searchlights are employed to create artificial moonlight over the front



Heavy snows blanketed the higher mountains during the winter months



Troops dig in along a secondary line of defense in the vicinity of Loiano



Patrols remained active along the front throughout the winter stalemate

B. EARLY WINTER ACTIVITY

1. *Changes in Troop Dispositions.* Shifts in command of sectors ordered in the Army directive of 2 November were carried out soon after the month began. IV Corps assumed command of the 6 South African Armoured Division sector and American troops attached to that division on 4 November. The 92d Division under Army control took over responsibility for the coastal sector on the same date. Two days earlier 13 Corps began to relieve the right elements of II Corps. The 1 Division moved up on the left of the 78 Division to take over Mount Grande, Hill 568, and Mount Cerere. By 9 November the entire 88th Division sector and the right portion of that of the 85th Division had been occupied by British troops, materially narrowing the II Corps sector and enabling the line to be held by seven infantry regiments.

The reduction in its front allowed II Corps to withdraw a large portion of its tired command to rest centers established in the Arno Valley. The largest was opened at Montecatini, former hot springs resort southwest of Pistoia. More than 30 hotels were available in Montecatini capable of housing 18,000 troops at one time; smaller rest centers at Pistoia and Sesto provided for 4,000 and 2,500 respectively. Infantry elements were rotated through the rest centers on a 10-day schedule. The first 5 days were devoted primarily to resting, bathing, and reequipping the men; the last 5 days emphasized training and conditioning as a large percentage of each division now consisted of replacements. In addition to the rest centers, II Corps units were assigned combination training and staging areas in the upper Sieve Valley.

After a period of rest following its relief by the 1 Division early in November, the 88th Division was returned to the lines on the 22d to take over from the 85th Division and right elements of the 34th Division. Two regimental combat teams and headquarters of the 34th Division relieved the right elements of the 91st Division the same day, and the 1st Armored Division relieved the left elements. On 1 December the 88th, 34th, and 1st Armored Divisions were holding the Corps sector while the 85th and 91st Divisions, earmarked for major roles in the newly planned offensive, were carrying out strenuous training programs in the rear. Units of IV and 13 Corps provided reliefs on a more minor scale.

During November Fifth Army, in addition to bringing depleted veteran organizations closer to full strength, increased its combat forces considerably by the introduction of its newly arrived units. In the first 2 weeks the BEF, which had been operating with only one combat team, committed the remaining elements of the 1st Brazilian Infantry Division. The late arrivals of the 92d Division were completely equipped and joined their parent organization, while two other combat troop units

came into Fifth Army. The 366th Infantry, a separate regiment composed of men from other branches converted into infantry, was assigned to the Army on 3 November and landed at Leghorn on 21 November. The 758th Light Tank Battalion debarked on 25 November. Both these units were attached to the 92d Division.

Approximately 5,000 replacements were received by the Army and absorbed by front-line divisions. This addition greatly increased their effectiveness although on 1 December Fifth Army divisions were still approximately 7,000 under strength. Temporarily hospitalized personnel accounted for a large percentage of this deficiency. Artillery power was increased by the training and equipping of the 1125th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (self-propelled 105-mm howitzers), which was formed from deactivated anti-aircraft units. Attachment of the 11 Battery, British 54 Super Heavy Regiment, to II Corps again provided Fifth Army with heavy artillery. One 8-inch gun of this battery was emplaced in the vicinity of Loiano where it could support a continuation of the offensive toward Bologna. The principal element lost to the Army during November was the 8th Anti-aircraft Artillery Group, which departed for the French front.

2. *Action During November and Early December.* Combat action for the first 6 weeks following the close of the fall offensive was confined largely to patrol activities and artillery duels, but some slight changes in position were made. The enemy was not always content to accept the static lines and mounted numerous small attacks to improve his positions, while at the same time stubbornly resisting our efforts to improve ours. On 24 November elements of the 370th Infantry and the 435th Anti-aircraft Artillery Battalion, operating again under Task Force 45, made a sudden thrust in the area of Mount Belvedere, 15 miles north of Pistoia and west of Highway 64, which resulted in the capture of the 3,600-foot mountain. The Germans promptly retaliated with counterattacks to regain the feature and after several failures finally succeeded. Approximately two enemy infantry battalions supported by a platoon of tanks drove the 435th Anti-aircraft Battalion off the mountain after we had held it for 5 days. In the Mount Grande sector an estimated two companies of toughened veterans of the 1st Parachute Division launched a surprise attack without artillery preparation on the night of 28–29 November against the British 1 Division on Mount Castellaro. Shortly after midnight the paratroopers overran the three platoons of the 2 Royal Scots which had been holding the position, and a counter-attack by two reserve platoons was unable to restore the lost ground. Additional attempts the next night by two companies of the 2 Foresters also met heavy opposition, and Mount Castellaro remained in enemy hands.

Limited advances were made in the high mountains all along the IV Corps sector, mainly to the north of Highway 12 and in the Serchio Valley. The 92d Division pushed its forward troops up Highway 1 on the west coast to within 3 miles

of the town of Massa. Gains by Eighth Army on the right flank of 13 Corps enabled the 8 Indian Division to improve its lines and withdraw some elements as they were pinched out by the advancing 2nd Polish Corps. Positions of II Corps throughout the month were virtually unchanged. With the exception of troops engaged in patrolling or in guarding the outpost line, activity was largely confined to elaborating defenses, keeping the roads open, and improving living conditions.

The use of artificial moonlight, first attempted on the night of 16-17 October, became standard practice during the period of the stabilized front. Sixty-inch searchlights were so placed behind the forward lines that the light from their low-angled fixed beams cast a dim glow over most of the mountains. The light assisted patrol activities and was also an aid to drivers as they inched their black-out vehicles along the narrow, twisting trails. Poor weather in some respects improved this system since the lights reflected well off low-hanging clouds. This type of weather, however, was no aid to the troops in the foxholes and to artillery observers. Six days of November were listed as good, 10 were fair, 10 poor, and 4 had zero visibility as low fogs hung over the mountains. On only 9 days of the month were reconnaissance planes able to take pictures. Many of our forward areas which were under close enemy observation were provided with smoke screens on clear days. This practice was continued during the entire stabilized period.

Air activity over the Apennines was greatly reduced by the storms, and XXII TAC flew only 879 fighter-bomber sorties during the month of November. Targets close to the front were principally gun emplacements, command posts, occupied houses, and enemy troop areas. Longer range objectives attacked were bridges, rail and highway traffic, and dumps in the German rear areas, where the weather usually was better. German air force activity was restricted to small-scale dusk or dawn raids by single planes or planes in groups of three or four. There appeared to be no coordination between the enemy air and ground activity, and most of the Luftwaffe's efforts were confined to bombing and strafing roads and installations near them on the few moonlight nights.

C. ACTION OF EIGHTH ARMY

7 SEPTEMBER-15 DECEMBER

At the start of the Allied offensive to break through the Northern Apennines in mid-August all planning was predicated on the assumption that the main effort would be made by Eighth Army along the Adriatic coast. This attack, beginning on 24 August, resulted in a clean breach of the Gothic Line defenses above Pesaro

near the end of the month, but before the last of the mountain ridges guarding the approach to Rimini had been secured enemy reinforcements and the early September rains slowed the offensive. By 6 September enemy troops holding the Coriano ridge had succeeded in stabilizing a line, and the initiative in the Allied offensive passed to Fifth Army. Although the transfer of enemy troops to the Adriatic aided the Fifth Army assault on the Gothic Line, Eighth Army was delayed until the late fall rains precluded an armored break-through across the Po Valley.

In early September the Eighth Army front extended 60 miles inland from the Adriatic. Along the coast 1 Canadian Corps was responsible for a narrow zone varying from 3 to 6 miles in width with 5 Corps driving up a 6-mile corridor on the left. Nearly 50 miles of the front, comprising mountainous terrain too rugged for extensive operations, were lightly held by 10 Corps. The main effort continued to be made along the coast with the objective of reaching the plain beyond Rimini. In addition to the 1 Canadian Infantry and 5 Canadian Armoured Divisions, 1 Canadian Corps included the 4 Division, the 2 New Zealand Division, a Greek motorised brigade, and a Greek mountain brigade. The 5 Corps forces comprised the 1 Armoured Division, the 46 and 56 Divisions, and the 4 Indian Division. The long 10 Corps front was held by the 23 and 9 Armoured Brigades on the right and center and the 10 Indian Division on the left in contact with 13 Corps.

For the first 2 weeks of September Kesselring continued to concentrate troops opposite Eighth Army until 10 German divisions had been grouped in the Rimini area on a front roughly as many miles wide. During the retreat to the Coriano ridge the 1st Parachute Division, which was badly cut up near Pesaro, with the 26th Panzer, the 71st, 278th, and elements of the 98th Grenadier Divisions opposed 1 Canadian and 5 Corps. These units were reinforced by the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier, the 44th, 356th and 162d Grenadier, the 20th GAF, and a combat team of the 5th Mountain Division. Elements of the Monte Rosa Division saw some action in the mountains opposite 10 Corps together with the 305th Grenadier Division. At its strongest in mid-September, the enemy force opposite Eighth Army was gradually reduced as the II Corps offensive became the greater threat.

With fresh troops available to strengthen the Coriano ridge defenses the German Tenth Army held firm for 9 days after it was first attacked by 1 Canadian Corps on 4 September. The 56 Division made the first breach when it took Gemmano, the southern bastion of the line, on the 9th and then held it against repeated tank-infantry counterattacks. Following up this success, 1 Canadian and 5 Corps launched a coordinated attack on the 13th. The 5 Canadian Armoured Division seized Coriano, and the 1 Armoured Division on the right flank of 5 Corps won control of the village of San Savino. With the loss of Gemmano, San Savino, and Coriano, the key points on the ridge, the enemy was forced to fall back toward Rimini. The

battle had cost the 98th Grenadier Division 200 prisoners, and the 26th Panzer, 29th Panzer Grenadier, and the 44th Grenadier Divisions all suffered heavy losses.

Although General McCreery's main forces were now overlooking Rimini, a week of steady fighting remained before the city was taken. Flooded streams and village strongpoints offered favorable delaying positions, and additional enemy troops were available to strengthen the line. It was not until 21 September that 1 Canadian Corps fought its way across the last of the open fields and ditches to enter the city. No resistance was met in Rimini. Outflanked, the enemy also withdrew from strong positions to the west where 5 Corps, attacking with four divisions abreast, had made no progress.

The capture of Rimini presented two first-class highways as avenues of advance to the north: Highway 16 along the coast to Ravenna and Highway 9 to Bologna. As Eighth Army spread out across the rain-soaked flatlands of the plain these two highways provided the main supply routes. Had Eighth Army reached the plain 3 weeks earlier it would have been possible to employ armor on a large scale; now the late fall rains were beginning to render movement over the marshy flats even more difficult than in the mountains. In spite of extensive minefields and stiff resistance offered by the 1st Parachute Division, the 2 New Zealand and 4 Divisions crossed the Marecchia River on the 21st to the north of Rimini. To the southwest tanks of 5 Corps were counterattacked by enemy tanks, and a bridgehead was established only with great difficulty. Along the 10 Corps front a varied command of independent battalions, after relieving the 10 Indian Division, brought up the lagging left flank.

On 27 September, 1 Canadian Corps, inching forward along Highway 16, and 5 Corps, now advancing up Highway 9, reached another enemy delaying line, Caesar's famous Rubicon. This modest creek, also known as the Fiumicino, was now a roaring torrent. Elements of both corps which managed to cross on the 28th were counterattacked by tanks and infantry, and a brigade of the 56 Division was forced back to the north bank. Heavy shelling prevented strengthening the elements on the north bank; in the center of the 5 Corps zone the enemy was still on the south bank in sufficient strength to force the 4 Indian Division to stage a withdrawal. Rain and mud brought operations almost to a standstill on 2-3 October as fords over the Marecchia and Morano rivers became impassable. It was estimated that close to 400 artillery pieces, excluding 150-mm Nebelwerfers, antitank, and light anti-aircraft guns, were facing Eighth Army.

A coordinated attack to secure crossings over the Rubicon was planned by 5 Corps for the period 6-7 October. The 10 Indian and 56 Divisions were to jump off at 2000 on the 6th while the main thrust would be made by the 46 Division the next day near Highway 9. The latter attack would be in two phases: first to establish

a bridgehead over the Rubicon, and second to capture Cesena, 8 miles beyond the river. When the crossing points for the tanks were found to be unsuitable by H Hour, the 10 Indian Division jumped off alone on the extreme left flank near the headwaters of the stream. The Indian troops took Mount Farneto, a 1,500-foot height 2 miles beyond the Rubicon on the 7th; the 46 Division crossed the river and covered half the distance to Cesena before bad weather again bogged down the offensive. On the Army right flank 1 Canadian Corps, reinforced by the 56 Division, resumed its drive on Ravenna, reaching the banks of the Savio to the northeast of Cesena before it was stopped on the 20th. On the left 2 Polish Corps took over the 10 Corps zone on 16 October and began converging on Highway 9 from the southwest. Cesena fell to 5 Corps on the 20th, placing all units up to the line of the Savio.

After holding the Savio line for 4 days the enemy staged a withdrawal to a line formed by the Bivano and Ronco rivers. Eighth Army engineers quickly put in bridges across the Savio and rapid advances were made up Highway 9 to within 5 miles of Forli and up Highway 16 to a point less than 10 miles from Ravenna. The torrential rains of late October now came to the aid of the enemy. Strong elements of the 4 Division and two battalions of the 10 Indian Division which had established bridgeheads over the Ronco were completely isolated. By 28 October, 5 Corps Headquarters reported that all units beyond the Ronco had presumably been liquidated by the enemy. Two days later the 10 Indian Division succeeded in crossing. Bridges continued to wash out, but by operating ferries the troops were kept supplied. At the end of October 1 Canadian Corps was 8 miles from Rimini along Highway 16, 5 Corps had covered over half the distance from Cesena to Forli, and 2 Polish Corps, due in large part to the decision of the enemy to shorten his lines, was less than 10 miles below Highway 9.

During the month of November increasingly severe weather more than balanced the transfer of enemy units to the Fifth Army front which had gone on throughout late September and October. Tanks supporting the Eighth Army attacks were unable to keep up with the infantry, particularly at river crossings where the banks were usually steep and muddy. In spite of these obstacles Forli was captured on 9 November after a full-scale attack launched by 5 Corps. The enemy was then holding his line with the 162d Grenadier, the 26th Panzer, the 20th GAF, and the 278th, 356th, and 305th Grenadier Divisions extended along an arc stretching southwest from below Ravenna to the mountains behind Forli. In the mountains the right flank of Tenth Army was being seriously threatened by the steady advance of 2 Polish Corps. After taking the hamlet of Monte Fortino, on a height only 4 miles southeast of Faenza, the Polish troops were counterattacked in strength on 18 November. The enemy succeeded in retaking the height only to lose it again 3 days later to the 2 Carpathian Brigade. In the subsequent mopping-up operation the

brigade took 100 prisoners, 15 88-mm guns, and 5 heavy mortars. Farther to the east the enemy was forced back to the Montone River just south of Ravenna.

Although the weather in December promised no improvement over that of the past month, the importance of pinning down enemy forces in Italy at a time when the German High Command was straining every resource to hold off the Allied drives on the western and eastern fronts led General Alexander on 28 November to order a new offensive. Eighth Army would make the main effort with the initial objective of driving the enemy west of the Santerno River which crosses Highway 16, 15 miles above Ravenna, and Highway 9, 10 miles above Faenza; it would then push on in a more northerly direction to outflank Bologna from the east. It was anticipated that Eighth Army would reach the Santerno about 7 December. At that date Fifth Army would join the attack if the weather permitted and if the offensive on the right was going favorably.

All three corps of Eighth Army were committed. On the right the 5 Canadian Armoured Division entered Ravenna on 4 December; on the left the 46 Division and the 1 Carpathian Brigade succeeded in crossing the Lamone. Then enemy resistance stiffened, and the attacking forces were unable to meet the schedule of reaching the Santerno by the 7th. German counterattacks supported by tanks and self-propelled guns north of Ravenna, well defended positions on the high ground southwest of Faenza, and weather marked by fog and rain combined to prevent further advances. The flooded Lamone River washed out a bridge in the 5 Corps zone and two more in the 2 Polish Corps zone on the 9th. At the same time the enemy delivered strong counterattacks against the bridgehead. Fifth Army attempted to aid the advance along Highway 9 by an attack on Tossignano in the Santerno Valley. The 6 Armoured Division did its best to carry out this mission on 15 December without success. While the enemy staved off the attack in the Santerno Valley, the 2 New Zealand and 10 Indian Divisions cut Highway 9 to the northwest of Faenza, forcing the enemy to fall back to Senio Creek. The Eighth Army front now described a 40-mile arc extending from just southwest of Faenza to the Adriatic Sea some 6 miles northeast of Ravenna. As a result of the 30-mile advance made in the past 3 months, Eighth Army was nearly abreast of Fifth Army, and a firm base had been established from which to launch another major offensive.

D. SUMMARY OF FIFTH ARMY ACTIVITY

16 AUGUST-15 DECEMBER

In mid-December 1944 the Fifth Army front, blanketed in snow, was all but quiescent. With the exception of routine patrolling and an occasional limited-

objective attack launched by our troops or by the enemy, no activity had disturbed the lines since the end of October when General Clark halted the fall offensive. Four months earlier in the hot summer days of mid-August the front also had been stable. No forward progress had been made for nearly 1 month after our troops first reached the Arno on 18 July. Between these two quiet periods, however, Fifth Army had experienced one of the most bitterly contested and costly phases of its battle studded career; it had broken through the Gothic Line, the strongest belt of German defenses in Italy, and it had fought its way, in spite of rain and mud, through 40 miles of rugged mountainous terrain.

Final planning for the attack on the Gothic Line and the drive to the Po Valley began on 16 August when General Alexander ordered Eighth Army to launch an offensive along the Adriatic coast to break out into the Po Valley at Rimini and Fifth Army, as soon as the main offensive on its right had drawn off sufficient enemy troops to weaken the Gothic Line, to punch through the mountains north of Florence toward Bologna. Reduced in strength by the loss of VI Corps and the French forces for the invasion of southern France, Fifth Army was allotted the British 13 Corps and the 6 South African Armoured Division to build up its force for the attack. Eighth Army jumped off on 24 August and initially made rapid strides toward the eastern gateway to the Po Valley. (*See Map No. 12.*) By 4 September it had reached the last ridge separating it from Rimini, but here its offensive slowed down as Kesselring pulled back from the Arno line and rushed troops to meet the threat to his left flank. Following up the withdrawal in the center and right of the enemy front, IV Corps and 13 Corps crossed the Arno on 1 September and secured a line of departure for the Fifth Army attack. Behind the screen formed by 13 Corps, II Corps secretly concentrated its forces north of Florence. By the evening of 9 September the stage was set for Fifth Army to launch its drive toward Bologna.

Passing through the left flank of 13 Corps on the night of 9–10 October, the 34th and 91st Divisions struck swiftly across the Sieve Valley to the outpost positions of the Gothic Line. Early on the morning of 13 September II Corps introduced the 85th Division on its right flank, and Fifth Army, employing both II and 13 Corps, smashed against the main defenses of the Gothic Line. For 6 bloody days our troops launched attack after attack to gain possession of the chain of mountains guarding Il Giogo Pass. Weakened by the transfer of troops to the Adriatic coast and caught by surprise, the enemy was unable to rally his forces in time to prevent a breakthrough. The 85th Division took Mount Altuzzo on the 17th, the 91st Division captured Mount Monticelli the next day, and II Corps poured through Il Giogo Pass to the Santerno Valley. Futa Pass fell to one battalion of the 91st Division on the 22d when the enemy discovered that this strongpoint which he had constructed as the key to his defenses had been completely outflanked. Brilliantly conceived and per-

fectly timed, the assault on the Gothic Line rendered useless in less than 1 week a line of defenses on which the enemy had expended huge quantities of matériel and months of labor.

In order to take full advantage of the enemy confusion resulting from the breakthrough into the Santerno Valley and to assist the Eighth Army offensive, General Clark ordered II Corps to employ its reserve 88th Division for a thrust northeastward to cut Highway 9 at Imola. Passing through the right flank of the 85th Division on the morning of 21 September the 88th Division pressed forward along the high ground flanking the Santerno River until the 27th when the 350th Infantry reached Mount Battaglia, within long-range artillery fire of Imola. Fully conscious of this threat to his flank, the enemy concentrated every available unit to seal off the salient, and the 88th Division was soon fully engaged in maintaining its hold on Mount Battaglia. Since the salient was too narrow to permit the employment of a larger force, General Clark, on 1 October, shifted the direction of the attack back to the Florence—Bologna axis where the 85th, 91st, and 34th Divisions were pressing hard on the heels of the retreating enemy forces. By the end of September the defenses at Radicosa Pass had been broken, and II Corps was ready to employ all four of its infantry divisions for the drive on Bologna.

Although Fifth Army was through the Gothic Line before the start of the October phase of its offensive, many miles of mountainous terrain remained to be crossed. The late fall rains, beginning in the last week of September, reduced tremendously our superiority in air power and armor. Off Highway 65, the only paved road in the II Corps zone, 2½-ton trucks and even jeeps were often bogged down for days. Ammunition and rations reached the forward troops only by mules or hand-carry. To a degree seldom reached in this age of mechanized warfare, the burden of the fighting fell to the infantry soldier. Each hill and each stone farmhouse, bristling with machine guns, barbed wire, and mines, took its toll in lives and energy. There were no reserve infantry divisions available to II Corps, and as the costly slugging match dragged on the supply of replacements available to Fifth Army dwindled. I Corps assisted by taking over as much as possible of the II Corps right flank, and IV Corps and the 6 South African Armoured Division aided on the left, but these units were holding long fronts with minimum forces. When the Eighth Army offensive lost its momentum in September, the flow of enemy troops to the east was reversed. With each mile that II Corps thrust deeper into the mountains more enemy troops and more enemy artillery were concentrated against the nose of its salient.

In spite of the difficulties of weather, terrain, and mounting enemy opposition, our troops by mid-October had broken through one delaying line at Monghidoro, a second at Loiano, and a third at Livergnano to bring the front within 12 miles of

Bologna. After a regrouping of forces in which the 34th Division was relieved by the 1st Armored Division and shifted east of Highway 65, II Corps resumed the offensive in what was hoped would be the final drive. Mount Belmonte, the objective of the 34th Division, was not secured until 23 October, but Mount Grande, a key height on the right flank, was captured on the 20th. To exploit the latter success the 85th and 88th Divisions made one more effort on 23 October. Three days later in the midst of torrential rains the exhausted troops, who had now penetrated to within 4 miles of Highway 9, were told to pull back and dig in. II Corps had reached the limit of its offensive strength.

Following the decision at the end of October to halt the offensive, Fifth Army entered a period of consolidation as troops were withdrawn for rest and rehabilitation. Critical shortages in ammunition stocks, as well as the condition of the troops, necessitated an extended period of waiting before another large-scale attack could be launched. To the troops who had slogged forward through the mud and rain of September and October and who were now facing a second winter in Italy the results of the campaign were disheartening. What many did not realize was the cost to the enemy of holding us in the mountains. Having committed himself to a defense of the Po Valley, the enemy threw in division after division to stem the Fifth Army drive. At the beginning of the offensive in September Fifth Army was faced by seven divisions. By the end of October this number had been increased to 16 — more enemy units than ever before had faced Fifth Army. By holding first-class German divisions in Italy at a time when the war in Europe was reaching the critical stage, Fifth Army was making a substantial contribution toward final victory.

The price in casualties to Fifth Army was necessarily high. During the period 16 August–15 December the Army had 30,458 battle casualties of which 5,061 were killed, 22,556 wounded, and 2,841 missing in action. Broken down by nationalities the totals were:

	<i>Killed in action</i>	<i>Wounded in action</i>	<i>Missing in action</i>	<i>Total</i>
American	3,585	16,130	1,738	21,453
British	1,373	5,875	873	8,121
Brazilian	103	551	230	884
	<u>5,061</u>	<u>22,556</u>	<u>2,841</u>	<u>30,458</u>

These casualties were not evenly divided. American troops represented only 144,476 of the 331,483 men making up the total effective strength of the Army on 15 December, yet the American troops suffered 21,453 of the 30,458 casualties. By far the greater part of the losses was incurred in the period 10 September–26 October, and it was borne to a large extent by four divisions. During this period alone the 34th, 85th, 88th, and 91st Divisions suffered a total of 15,716 battle casualties. The

heavy drain on these key divisions was, in large part, responsible for the final breakdown of the Army offensive at the end of October.

It is impossible to gauge accurately what the enemy paid in casualties to hold us south of Bologna. Considering that at no time during the fighting was any large enemy unit cut off, the total of 13,946 prisoners taken was large and undoubtedly reflected a much higher total of casualties. Nor was there any evidence of large-scale desertions. A study of the prisoners taken by Fifth Army in the period 10 September–22 October shows that the unit from which the greatest number of prisoners was taken was the 4th Parachute, one of the best German divisions in Italy. At least two units, the 44th and 362d Grenadier Divisions, were reduced in strength to a point where the bulk of the remaining troops fought as small battle groups. The enemy was unable to draw divisions out of Italy for use on the western or eastern fronts; rather, he was forced to feed replacements into the Italian theater throughout the fall months.

E. *CHANGE IN COMMAND OF FIFTH ARMY*

On 16 December, while Fifth Army was resting and refitting its forces for a renewal of the offensive, General Clark left his Fifth Army Headquarters at Futa Pass to take command of 15th Army Group. His place was in turn filled by Lt. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott, Jr. As commander of the 3d Infantry Division and later of VI Corps General Truscott had been associated with Fifth Army from the period of the Salerno landings to 25 June 1944 when VI Corps was transferred to Seventh Army. The new position assigned to General Clark placed him in command of both Fifth and Eighth Armies, a position formerly held by Field Marshal Alexander who now moved up to become head of Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ).

From 5 January 1943, when he activated Fifth Army in North Africa as the first American army to be organized in the field outside the continental United States, until 16 December 1944, General Clark had guided the destinies of Fifth Army through many months of hard campaigning. Like the Gothic Line fighting of the past fall, it had been a campaign marked by brilliant victories and bitter disappointments. Fifth Army could take pride in being the first American army to invade Hitler's Fortress Europe; the first Allied Army to capture a European capital; and until 6 June 1944 the only American army opposing the German Wehrmacht. Because it was so often first and because the Allied High Command from the start gave priority to the invasion of France, it had also been a slow struggle in which limited resources had to be pitted against mountainous terrain and strong enemy forces. In spite of the obstacles in its path the Army had fought its way forward 300 miles from the beaches of Salerno to within sight of the rich Po Valley.

In a farewell message to Fifth Army troops General Clark wrote in part:

When I assumed command of the Fifth Army two years ago upon its activation in North Africa on 5 January 1943, it was with pride and confidence. I was proud of the organization I had been appointed to lead, and I had confidence in its ability to accomplish the great mission assigned to it. Subsequent events have fully justified my feelings. Much has been demanded of you in this difficult campaign. No commander could have received a more gratifying response.

In assuming command of the 15th Army Group in Italy, I do so with those same feelings. Side by side, through the bitterest fighting and against the most difficult obstacles in the history of warfare, the Fifth and Eighth Armies have driven a strong, resourceful and fanatical enemy from the extreme south of Italy to the Valley of the Po.

Your contribution to an Allied victory does not rest upon the mere liberation of an Axis-dominated land. Far more important has been your effect upon the enemy's forces and your destruction of thousands upon thousands of his troops and their equipment. It is our campaign that holds in this theater many of the enemy's best divisions which could otherwise be used against the Eastern or Western fronts. We shall continue to defeat them and eventually shall destroy them. Never underestimate the vital and continuing importance of your role in the Italian campaign.

MAP No 12
**ADVANCE of FIFTH
 and
 EIGHTH ARMIES**
10 August - 15 December 1944
 SCALE
 MILES
 0 5 10 20

