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# FIFTH ARMY HISTORY

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*Pack trains supply soldiers on the line..... painted by Lieutenant Edward A. Reep*

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# FIFTH ARMY HISTORY



**PART III**

## *The Winter Line*

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*Registered Copy No.* **338**

*Lieutenant General* MARK W. CLARK

\* \* \* *commanding*

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CHAPTER I

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*Before the Mountains*

ON 9 September 1943 the American Fifth Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark, landed at the Gulf of Salerno. With the British 10 Corps on the left and the American VI Corps on the right, Fifth Army drove inland to secure a firm bridgehead and to capture Naples and its surrounding airfields. Six days earlier the British Eighth Army had landed at the toe of Italy and began to advance up the peninsula to take its place on the right of Fifth Army. German forces in Italy, some of which had been severely mauled in Sicily, were in a very fluid condition. The enemy high command had to cope with two Allied armies while consolidating rear lines of communication menaced by the Italian armistice, which had been announced by General Dwight D. Eisenhower on 8 September. Confronted by these problems, the enemy had concentrated on holding the Allies below Naples until his troops could evacuate southern Italy.

Resistance at Salerno was bitter, with XIV Panzer Corps rushing reinforcements from south and central Italy. The enemy threw his principal strength on the left of Fifth Army, where 10 Corps seriously threatened the mountain passes and highways to Naples. By 13 September he had sufficient forces to launch strong counterattacks against VI Corps as well. Every effort to drive Fifth Army into the sea failed, and by 17 September the positions of the Allied forces in Italy compelled the Germans to retreat. Fifth Army then executed a wide pivoting movement and advanced on Naples, Avellino, and other key cities. Eighth Army paralleled this advance on the east. On 1 October Fifth Army troops entered Naples, and six days later both 10 and VI Corps had reached the Volturno River. Here the enemy had planned a strong delaying action, but the two corps crossed successfully during the night of 12-13 October and took up the pursuit.

Our forces pressed the enemy closely; but as the days of October passed by and November arrived, it became more and more difficult to maintain the

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momentum of the drive. Fall rains, which had begun early in October with unusual force, made movement ever more difficult. Streams flooded and washed out temporary bridges put in on the vital supply routes, for the enemy had blown every bridge and culvert in his retreat. Vehicles and men mired deep in the mud, and morale declined as the leaden skies continued to pour down rain. The entire supply chain from forward units fighting on steep hillsides back to the damaged port of Naples, where our engineers were working at top speed to restore its full capacity, groaned under the burden of bad weather and extensive demolitions. Worst of all was the lack of reserves, for without fresh divisions a breakthrough could not be fully exploited; and as our men grew weary, they had no hope of relief.

The weakened enemy forces were strengthened by the arrival of fresh units in the line. Furthermore, behind their troops withdrawing as slowly as possible, German engineers were using forced civilian labor and all available reserves to construct fortifications which would serve as a strong holding line. Our advance units ran into the outskirts of this line early in November on the Garigliano River and in the mountains above Mignano and Venafro. The tenacity of German defense first slowed, then stopped our weary troops; and the drive, uninterrupted since 9 September, had come to a temporary halt by 15 November. The combination of terrain, weather, supply problems, and enemy opposition had finally worn down our momentum. It was accordingly time to reorganize and consolidate our gains in preparation for a renewed attack.

#### A. *TERRAIN OF THE WINTER LINE*

*See Map No. 10*

On 15 November our troops held a line running along the west slopes of Mount Massico, through Mignano, and up past the steep peaks overlooking Venafro. Before them lay a mass of mountains, valleys, and plains varying in altitude from the wide coastal plain on our left to the crags which soared more than 2000 meters in height on our right. This district, which constituted the area of the Winter Line campaign, was a north-south belt about nine miles wide. It may roughly be bounded as lying between the Garigliano River and Mount Massico on the left and between the Rapido and Volturno rivers in the center and on the right. Any division of this terrain into compartments is almost entirely arbitrary, so interlocked are the ravines, valleys, knobs, hills, and mountains. Nevertheless certain areas stood out with individual characteristics during the subsequent fighting.

On our left, in front of 10 Corps, was the broad plain stretching from Mount Massico to the coastal mountains by Minturno and Formia and reaching inland to the foothills of the Mount Camino hill mass. At its western edge this plain is bounded by the deep current of the lower Garigliano, beyond which rise steep mountains commanding every part of the plain proper. The combination of plain, river, and mountains made offensive operations on the left flank of Fifth Army very difficult; in fact this sector was the scene of little action during the Winter Line campaign.

North of the Garigliano plain the land rises in a jumble of low hills and rolling upland to the massive Camino hills, which formed the southern anchor of the Winter Line proper. In enemy hands these hills afforded observation over Mignano and the valley running southeast along Highway 6; in our hands Camino gave excellent observation over the entrance to the Liri Valley. The terrain along Highway 6 itself, in the center of our line, was more open than at any other portion of the front north of the coastal plain. As the highway approached the front, it entered a narrow valley between the formidable group of jagged ridges forming the Mount Camino feature and a belt of gentler hills rising to the northwest. This valley is the Mignano Gap. (*See Map No. 3.*) A railroad, known to the troops as "Express Highway," and Highway 6 run side by side for a few miles through the Gap, then diverge near Mignano to pass on either side of Mount Lungo, which with Mount Rotondo forms a natural "stopper" in the bottleneck entrance to the Liri Valley.

The low trough beyond the Gap, which the highway next penetrates, is dominated by hills of the Mount Camino mass on the south and by the towering cliffs of Mount Sammucro on the north. In the center of the trough rise first the bald back of Mount Lungo and then in succession, like violent waves in the level valley floor, Mount Porchia and Mount Trocchio. Past Trocchio is the wide Liri Valley, the "gateway to Rome," which formed the objective of our next attack. The gateway, however, is well protected by all the advantages that nature can bestow. Mountain masses bound it on either side; these masses in turn are guarded by the terrain features of the belt under discussion, such as Mount Camino and Mount Sammucro.

On our right flank a tangled mass of mountains nine miles wide stretched north from Mount Sammucro past Venafro to the main ridge of the Apennines and effectively guarded the approach to Mount Cairo on the north side of the Liri Valley. As far as the Colli-Atina road this belt is a wild mixture of bare knobs and brush-covered swells, scantily inhabited and poorly provided with natural avenues of approach. North of the Atina road the mountains rise swiftly to the sheer cliffs and towering peaks of Mount Mare (2021 meters) and Mount

Cavallo (2070 meters). On this flank as on the extreme left down by the sea offensive operations would be most hazardous.

The road system leading forward to the area of the Winter Line campaign contains only three first-class highways. Highway 7, the coastal route to Rome, was useful to 10 Corps almost to the Garigliano. Highway 6, running northwest through the Mignano Gap and up the Liri Valley, was the axis of our main effort. Highway 85 branches off from Highway 6 four miles south of Presenzano and leads to Venafro, then turns sharply northeast toward Isernia. Apart from these three roads Fifth Army could also employ a secondary route on its left flank through Cancellò and Mondragone, and another secondary road up the Volturno Valley from Caiazzo through Alife and Capriati. Lateral roads were plentiful behind the shield of Mount Massico on our left flank, but in the center and on the right the rugged terrain handicapped lateral movements. From Venafro a secondary road winds through olive groves, climbs southwest to Cepagna, bends sharply to cross the saddle between Mount Sammucro and Cannavinelle Hill, then follows the slopes of Mount Sammucro to San Pietro and on to Highway 6. This tie-road between Highways 6 and 85, however, could not be used until we had captured San Pietro. From Highway 85 north of Venafro two roads branch off, one a minor route through Pozzilli and Filignano to Cerasuolo and another along the west bank of the Volturno to Colli and on to Castel San Vincenzo. Both of these roads, again, were partly dominated by the enemy until the initial advances of our Winter Line attack.

Apart from Highways 6 and 7 only two roads led directly toward the enemy, traversing the wild country west of Venafro. One of these stems from the Pozzilli road and cuts west to Sant'Elia; the second runs generally west from Colli some sixteen miles to Atina. Both of these eventually met the main German north-south road leading from Atina down the Rapido Valley to Cassino and then on to Minturno. Our engineers did their utmost to supplement the inadequate road system close to the front by constructing numerous jeep and foot trails; but problems of supply and movement continued to hamper tactical plans throughout the campaign.

Only a few important rivers traverse the Winter Line area. The Rapido River, rising high in the mountains north of Cardito, plunges southwest past Sant'Elia and flows south through a rolling upland valley past Cassino into the Gari River. The latter meanders lazily until it joins the Liri River, which drains the Liri Valley as far west as Frosinone. By their junction the Liri and the Gari form the Garigliano, which continues south another 15 miles to flow into the Tyrrhenian Sea. Numerous small streams, draining about one-half of the Winter Line, are affluents of the Rapido-Garigliano system. The eastern portion of

the area is drained by a complex network of creeks which flow into the Volturno River. None of these streams was an important obstacle to the Winter Line campaign, since no serious attempt was made to cross either the Garigliano or the Rapido before 15 January; but the Volturno hampered our supply activities on two occasions by washing out the upper bridges near Venafro.

## B. ENEMY USE OF TERRAIN

From the end of October German prisoners of war talked vaguely about their "Winterstellungen" or Winter Line, which was being prepared to the rear of their immediate front. The German High Command apparently had decided by the middle of October, on the basis of the successful delaying action in progress, that our forces could be held south of Rome for the winter. It had therefore set about the construction of a defensive line from the Tyrrhenian Sea straight across to the Adriatic Sea. Conflicting reports, however, made it difficult for us to determine the exact course of this line, and the subsequent fighting showed that not one but two German belts of fortifications awaited our troops.

The main belt, called the Gustav Line, ran along the Garigliano River from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Gari River, then followed the west bank of this river to Cassino, and extended along the forward slopes of the hills behind Cassino toward Atina. On this line the Germans planned to halt us definitively; but in front of it, to protect the fortification work and to gain time, they constructed a temporary belt, which eventually was called the Winter Line proper. Though this second line was planned only to delay us, the success of the enemy in stopping our advance units at its outskirts at the beginning of November led to a decision to hold it as long as possible before falling back to the main belt.

However temporary in original plan, the Winter Line was a formidable barrier to operations of the Allied armies. (See *Map No. 2*.) On the Eighth Army front the Germans held along the Sangro River from the coast inland to Castel di Sangro, effectively barring the way to Chieti and Highway 5 leading west to Rome. No armies could operate in the highest peaks of the Apennines, which form the backbone of the peninsula and also marked the boundary between the forces of General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery and General Clark. On the Fifth Army front the line ran roughly south from Mount Marrone along the hills above Venafro to the gap at Mignano between Mount Sammucro and the Maggiore-Camino hill masses, both of which were held in force. The Winter Line

continued along the east and south slopes of Mount Camino and then jumped across the Garigliano to join the Gustav Line. The entire line was a belt of defenses in depth without any single key. There was no opportunity for a brilliant stroke that could break it. Each mountain had to be taken, each valley cleared, and then there were still more mountains ahead and still another line to be broken by dogged infantry attacks.

German engineers made very skillful use of terrain and fortifications to hold the Allies at bay. They laid mines on the roads, trails, the natural cross-country routes of advance, and even in stream beds. All bridges and culverts were destroyed, and more mines were buried in the possible by-passes. Machine-gun and mortar emplacements, many of them dug four or five feet into solid rock, covered nearly every approach to enemy positions. Not even intense artillery concentrations could smash these defenses. On the slopes of mountains, behind stream beds, and across narrow valleys dozens of mutually supporting machine guns were sited to weave a pattern of death. The gullies, draws, and treacherous trails that led into the mountains could be held by small forces against strong attacks. Where terrain features were not sufficient barriers to military movements, the enemy constructed strongpoints, especially in the relatively flat land of the Mignano Gap. These strongpoints were combinations of minefields, wire, and log-and-earth bunkers, and were protected by expertly sited machine guns. The Winter Line depended primarily upon hasty defenses that made maximum use of mountainous terrain. Concrete and steel pillboxes did not make their appearance on this belt of fortifications, which everywhere were simple though effective.

Howitzers and long-range guns, often self-propelled and usually defiladed behind protecting crests, could reach nearly every area held by our troops. The trails and roads we had to use, bivouac sites, and the front lines were all subjected to harassing fires. There had been plenty of time for the enemy to plan unobserved artillery fire which made the roads dangerous at all times. Peaks such as Mounts Camino, La Difensa, Sammucro, Pantano, and Marrone provided posts from which forward observers could see every movement by our forces in daylight. Only above Venafro, where our troops had pushed the Germans off the hills at the head of the Volturno Valley, were we able to deny the enemy full observation. Rain, snow, and fog limited visibility elsewhere for the enemy much of the time, but still most of our movements had to take place under cover of darkness. The enemy, safe behind the mountain barrier, could supply his troops with relative ease and could maneuver almost at will to reinforce the relatively small detachments that manned the individual defenses.

# CHAPTER II \* \* \* \* \*

## *Plans for the Campaign*

### A. ENEMY TROOPS AND POSITIONS

*See Map No. 1*

DURING the first few days of November the enemy increased his strength in front of Fifth Army from three to five divisions. This reinforcement seems to have been dictated by a plan to hold along the Winter Line after having been driven back from the Barbara Line, which ran generally south from Presenzano through Teano and Mount Massico to the sea. Our tactical air reconnaissance early in November reported heavy motor traffic in the rear areas, an indication of reinforcements being brought forward. This appreciation proved to be correct when elements of the 305th Grenadier (Infantry) Division were located on the right flank of Fifth Army. Most of this division, however, opposed the left flank of Eighth Army northwest of Colli. At the same time the 94th Grenadier Division had come into the line on the left flank of Fifth Army.

By 7 November the Hermann Goering Panzer (Armored) Division had been withdrawn from its positions astride Highway 6, and two days later the 26th Panzer Division sideslipped from the Eighth Army front to a sector northwest of Venafro. Thus by 15 November the enemy forces were disposed as follows: on his right flank the 94th Grenadier Division defended along the Garigliano River from the coast to about two miles east of Castelforte; the 15th Panzer Grenadier (Armored Infantry) Division held the sector on its left to within a mile of Mignano; the 3d Panzer Grenadier Division occupied a sector between Mignano and Venafro; from Venafro to Filignano the line was held by the 26th Panzer Division; and the enemy's left flank, from Filignano on into the Eighth Army zone, was defended by the 305th Grenadier Division.

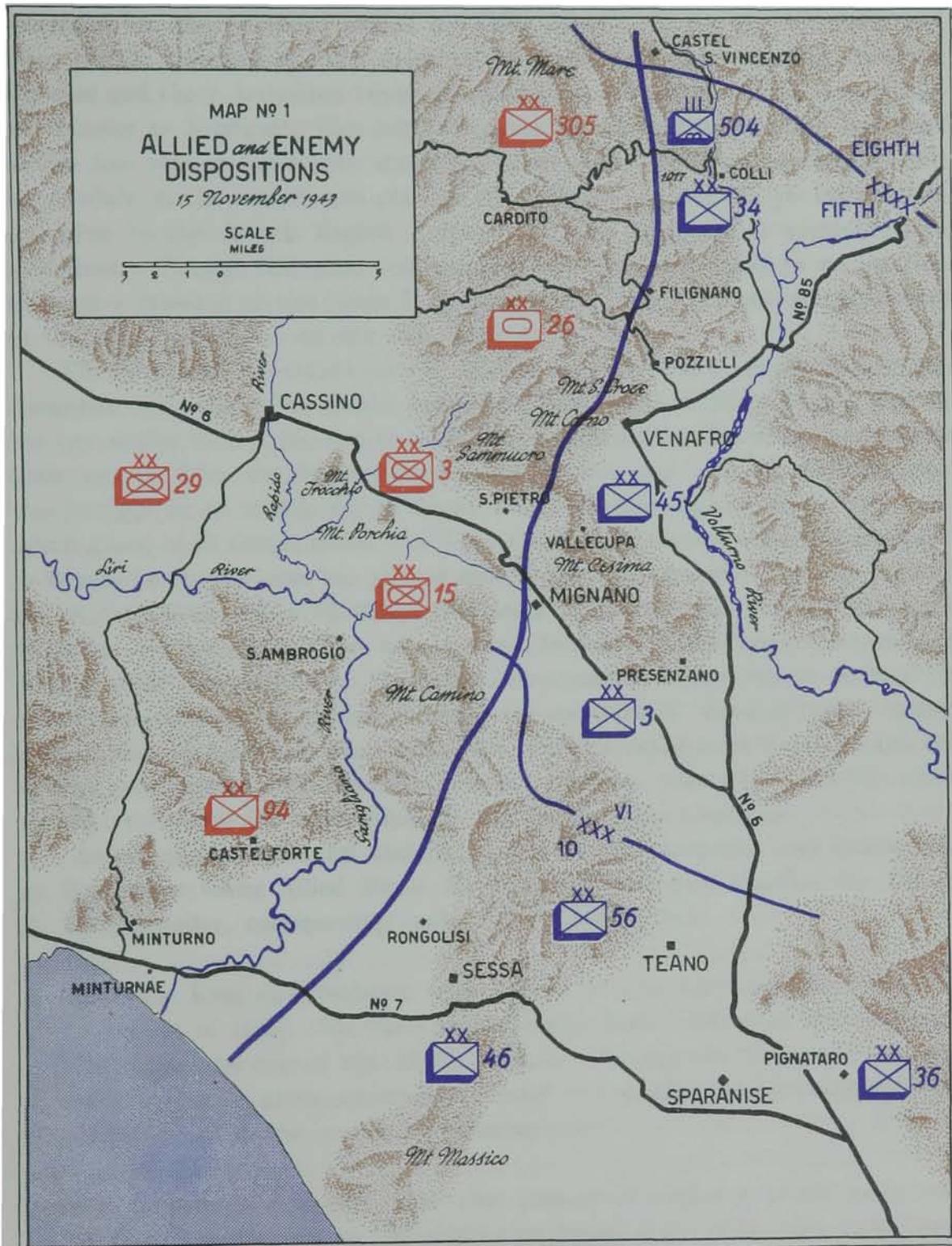
This arrangement of enemy forces continued to undergo further changes during the progress of the Winter Line campaign. On 17 November the 3d Panzer Grenadier Division was withdrawn for rest, and the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division moved from the Eighth Army front to take over its sector. At the end of

November the 44th Grenadier Division, reformed after having been decimated at Stalingrad, relieved the 26th Panzer Division. The beginning of Fifth Army's drive early in December brought elements of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division back to the Mignano Gap, and by the middle of December the 5th Mountain Division had come in west of Filignano. For the next four weeks Field Marshal Albert Kesselring shifted units back and forth as he struggled with problems of reserves to bolster the weaker parts of the German Tenth Army line. At the beginning of January 1944 four divisions—the 94th Grenadier, 15th Panzer Grenadier, 44th Grenadier, and 5th Mountain—were in the line, with elements of the 29th Panzer Grenadier, Hermann Goering Panzer, and 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions available for reinforcements.

## B. ALLIED TROOPS AND POSITIONS

1. *The Forces Available.* (See Map No. 1.) Fifth Army approached the Winter Line campaign with the same organization as that which had prevailed through October. The British 10 Corps, commanded by Lt. Gen. Sir Richard L. McCreery, held the left flank with 2 divisions on a front of approximately 16 miles from the sea to Caspoli. The left flank of 10 Corps was defended by the 46 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. J. L. I. Hawkesworth. On 15 November the 7 Armoured Division was withdrawn from the extreme left flank and placed in 15th Army Group reserve preparatory to movement out of the theater, and the 46 Division extended south to take over its sector. On the right 10 Corps had the 56 (London) Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. G. W. R. Templer in the line.

The American VI Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. John P. Lucas, held a front of more than 20 miles from Caspoli through the Mignano Gap to Venafro and north to the vicinity of Castel San Vincenzo, just over the boundary between Fifth and Eighth Armies. The 3d Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., was on the left of VI Corps in the Mignano Gap sector. In the center the 45th Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Troy H. Middleton extended from Vallecupa to Filignano. The Army right flank was held by the 34th Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Charles W. Ryder and by the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Thus on 15 November Fifth Army had two British and more than three American divisions in the line. The 36th Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Fred L. Walker was in bivouac near Pignataro, and the 1st Armored Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Ernest N. Harmon, was still coming into Italy; the rest of the 82d Airborne Division was policing Naples.



2. *Plans for American and Italian Reinforcements.* Fresh divisions were necessary for any extended attack by Fifth Army. Of the six American and three British divisions in Fifth Army on 15 November, two—the 82d Airborne Division and the 7 Armoured Division—were to be withdrawn in the near future for transfer to England. This left only seven divisions, five of which had been in the line almost constantly since the battle of the Salerno beachhead, and for a while in October it was planned to shift the 46 and the 56 Divisions in 10 Corps to the British Eighth Army to simplify supply and administrative procedure. Though this plan was dropped, 10 Corps felt itself in no position to force a crossing of the lower Garigliano in the face of enemy emplacements in the steep mountains on the west bank of the river.

The brunt of the attack on the Winter Line therefore would fall on the American divisions in the center and on the right flank of Fifth Army. During the two weeks' halt at the end of November the three divisions which had fought their way up from the Salerno plain received some rest, and the 36th Division was brought in to relieve the 3d Division opposite the Mignano Gap. The command group of II Corps, under Maj. Gen. Geoffrey T. Keyes, arrived from Sicily in October and took over the 3d and the 36th Divisions in the center of the line on 18 November, while VI Corps continued to control the 34th and the 45th Divisions on the right. The 1st Armored Division, which began to arrive at Naples about the middle of November, remained in Army reserve until a favorable opportunity for the use of armor presented itself. General Clark's urgent request that at least one more American infantry division be brought into the theater was granted; but the 88th Infantry Division, which was selected, could not arrive in time for employment in the Winter Line campaign.

Active participation by Italian troops in the campaign was forecast on 27 September when Allied Force Headquarters informed General Sir Harold R. L. Alexander, commanding 15th Army Group, that:

both the King and Badoglio have offered to help the Allies drive the Germans out of Italy. We have accepted this offer. This does not mean that Italy becomes one of the Allied Nations. Italians are ready to co-operate and to give us every assistance to meet our operational demands and have been accorded the status of cobelligerent.

General Alexander, believing that "for reasons of policy it is necessary that Italian troops participate in the entry into Rome and... that they should take part in the forthcoming battles," conferred with Marshal Pietro Badoglio and agreed to the commitment of one Italian regimental combat team. The 1st

Motorized Group (1. Raggruppamento Italiano Motorizzato), commanded by Brig. Gen. Vincenzo di Pino, was already completely equipped and in bivouac south of Bari. In response to an inquiry from General Alexander on 6 October if such a force could be used in Fifth Army, General Clark stated his willingness to accept an Italian contingent which would be employed in the advance from the first phase line (Isernia–Mount Passero–Garigliano River). He also urged that a regiment of Italian infantry be made available immediately to guard supply installations and the line of communications. On 31 October the 1st Italian Motorized Group came under command of Fifth Army. After having gone through intensive training at Avellino and Limatola the group, with a strength of 5486 men, was attached to II Corps and took over a narrow sector in the Mignano Gap on 7 December. In addition to these combat troops the Italians also provided various service companies and pack units which proved to be of great importance in solving the supply problem in the mountains.

3. *Formation of the French Expeditionary Corps.* According to plans prepared by 15th Army Group, the French Expeditionary Corps (Corps Expéditionnaire Français) was scheduled to arrive in Italy during the latter part of December and come under command of Fifth Army. General Alphonse Juin, commander of the Corps, conferred with General Clark at Fifth Army Headquarters on 1 October. At this conference General Clark expressed his desire to have French troops brought to Italy at a date earlier than that proposed by 15th Army Group. Even one French infantry division would be invaluable as a relief for and supplement to the battle-weary divisions of Fifth Army. French troops in Tunisia and Sicily had already earned high praise in action against the enemy, and their skill in mountain fighting was well known. Since General Juin and the French High Command were agreeable to the proposal, General Clark persuaded 15th Army Group to schedule the 2d Moroccan Infantry Division (2<sup>e</sup> Division d'Infanterie Marocaine) to arrive in Naples by 1 December, with the 3d Algerian Infantry Division (3<sup>e</sup> Division d'Infanterie Algérienne) coming in by the end of the month. The first of these divisions was given priority because of its high state of battle preparedness.

Generals Clark and Juin also agreed that a French section of the Fifth Army General Staff, to be called the French Increment, should be organized in North Africa and that liaison officers should accomplish the necessary groundwork for the operations immediately. French liaison officers arrived in Italy in October and established contact with the various Fifth Army sections. Other French officers arrived to study American field procedure in regard to hospitals, air support tactics, evacuation of the wounded, and other techniques. Preparations were made to receive the French troops at Naples where Base 901, organ-

ized in North Africa, would operate in co-operation with the Peninsular Base Section as a supply and reception unit for French forces. The French High Command at Algiers approved the plan for a French Increment and prepared to embark a dozen staff officers and appropriate personnel, vehicles, and materiel during the first part of November. The first priority, composed of troops of the 2d Moroccan Division under Maj. Gen. André W. Dody, the 4th Group of Tabors (native troops from the Atlas Mountains), two mule companies, and a limited number of Corps and service troops, began to embark at Oran on 17 November. Officers of the French Increment arrived at Naples on 18 November, followed the next day by the first section of Base 901. General Dody's division and its attached units debarked at Bagnoli and Pozzuoli 20 November-1 December, and went into bivouac in the vicinity of Caivano just north of Naples.

The general staff of the FEC arrived by air on 25 November and immediately began to acquaint itself with the situation in view of eventual Corps operations. Brig. Gen. Georges Beucler, Chief of the French Increment, was named Deputy Chief of Staff of Fifth Army, with Col. Marcel Maunier-Condroyer as his assistant and Maj. Frédéric Souard as Executive Officer. General Clark placed the 2d Moroccan Division under VI Corps effective at 0001, 1 December, to relieve the American 34th Division. This relief was effected between the night of 8-9 December and 13 December. On 3 January 1944 the FEC took over the VI Corps zone. During the next six days the 3d Algerian Division came into the line to relieve the 45th Division.

Thus, at the end of the Winter Line campaign Fifth Army had American, British, French, and Italian troops under its command. This truly international army increased the problems of liaison and supply which had to be surmounted in order to provide an effective fighting force.

### C. PLANS FOR CONTINUING THE ATTACK

1. *15th Army Group Strategy.* (See Map No. 2.) Capture of the symbolic city of Rome remained the principal objective of 15th Army Group. Though our retention of the offensive might prove costly and relatively unproductive, the alternative of settling down to the defensive until spring was never seriously considered by our high command. Political reasons dictated the capture of Rome as quickly as possible. As a token of complete destruction of the Rome-Berlin axis and as an indication of Allied military power to the subject countries of Europe, such a conquest would have its value. Furthermore, it was

desirable to contain the maximum number of German divisions in Italy, both to draw men and supplies from the Russian front and also to weaken the available enemy strength for the expected invasion of western Europe in the spring of 1944. The main question before our high command was not whether to continue the attack but rather how best to carry it out.

General Alexander planned a co-ordinated effort by Fifth and Eighth Armies to break through to Rome. In Operations Instruction No. 31 (*See Annex No. 2A*), issued by 15th Army Group on 8 November 1943, General Alexander outlined three phases for future operations. In Phase I Eighth Army was to gain control of the roads in the area Pescara–Popoli–Collarmele, and so threaten the enemy line of communications behind Fifth Army. If Eighth Army could drive up the coast to Chieti and then swing west on Highway 5 toward Rome, it might so imperil the German main forces on the west side of the peninsula that the enemy would be compelled to pull back well north of Rome. In accordance with this plan Eighth Army proceeded to regroup its forces for an attack through the Winter Line on the lower Sangro River. In Phase II Fifth Army was to drive up the Liri–Sacco Valley to Frosinone. Phase III, an amphibious operation south of Rome directed on Colli Laziali, would then follow. The main Eighth Army thrust was to begin not before 20 November. In the meantime Fifth Army was to prepare for Phase II. If the amphibious operation south of Rome (Phase III) did take place, it was to be timed so that Fifth Army was within supporting distance of the landing. All available air support was to be given Eighth Army in Phase I, and then shifted to Fifth Army in Phases II and III. These plans did not envisage any considerable change in the over-all strategy of the Italian campaign, and each army was to continue its main line of advance.

2. *Early Plans of Fifth Army.* Though the ultimate goal of Fifth Army lay beyond Rome, the immediate objective was the control of the entrance to the Liri Valley, the so-called “gateway to Rome.” The fact that Fifth Army issued four operations instructions during the period 20 October–24 November, each with a different plan of attack, indicates the difficulty of gaining this first objective of its drive.

In Operations Instructions No. 8, dated 20 October 1943 (*See Annex No. 2B*), Fifth Army after securing the line Isernia–Mount Passero–Garigliano River would without delay continue its advance to the general line Opi (exclusive)–Alvito–Arce–Fondi, with II Corps making the main push. 10 Corps was to remain in its positions on the Garigliano, advance light forces to maintain pressure, and feint a crossing of the river at Minturno. Meanwhile II Corps (36th Division and another division) would take up the action in the 10 Corps zone



*The gateway to the Liri Valley..... painted by Lieutenant Rudolph C. Von Ripper*

to clear the hill mass between Formia and Pontecorvo on the south side of the Liri River. VI Corps with two divisions would advance generally north of Highway 6. When II Corps had advanced sufficiently, 10 Corps would go into reserve and thereafter shift to Eighth Army.

During the next two weeks the plan of shifting 10 Corps to Eighth Army was rescinded, and further consideration of the mountain masses ahead led to the formation of a new plan, given in Operations Instruction No. 9 (*See Annex No. 2C*) of 4 November 1943. The parallel advance by the two American corps up both sides of the Liri Valley was dropped, and the main effort was to be made by VI Corps on the right to take Mount Baghella and Atina, two keys to the mountain district north of the Liri Valley. II Corps, consisting of the 3d and 36th Divisions, would assist in the center in the capture of the hill mass northwest of Cassino and might be called on to employ the 1st Armored Division in the valley proper. 10 Corps on the left was to maintain pressure by harassing fires and active patrolling north of the Garigliano; it was also to be prepared to force a crossing of the river.

Shortly after this plan was issued, 15th Army Group ordered Fifth Army to take up temporary defensive positions to regroup its forces, while Eighth Army began its attack on the Sangro River (Phase I of 15th Army Group Operations Instruction No. 31, 8 November 1943). General Clark issued Operations Instruction No. 10 on 16 November 1943 (*See Annex No. 2D*), outlining the Fifth Army plan of attack. VI Corps was to relieve the 3d Division with the 36th Division during this period. Then II Corps would take over both divisions and hold the center of the line with 10 Corps on its left and VI Corps on its right. All three corps would participate in the Fifth Army attack to be launched about 30 November. VI Corps would attack generally west along two parallel axes, the Colli-Atina road on the north and the Filignano-Sant'Elia road on the south. II Corps was to breach the enemy lines along Highway 6 at the Mignano Gap; when its advance permitted introduction of the 1st Armored Division into the Liri Valley, all or part of that division would attack. 10 Corps was to assist II Corps and also force a crossing of the Garigliano in the Castelforte area. It would then be ready to operate to the north or west.

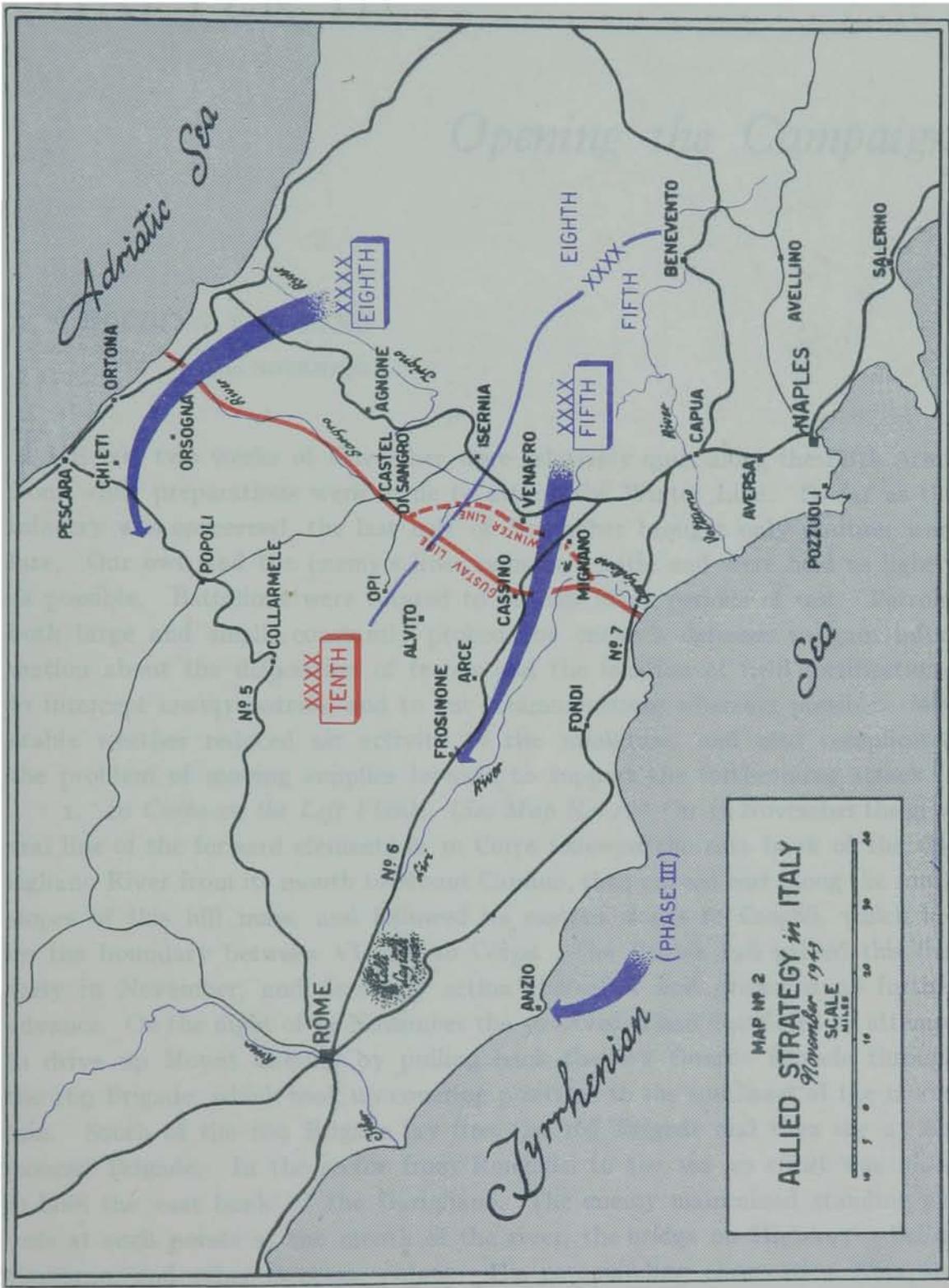
3. *Fifth Army Operations Instruction No. 11, 24 November. (See Map No. 2.)* As the G-2 Section gained additional information of the enemy defenses on both flanks of the Mignano Gap, it became apparent that Fifth Army had a very difficult task in front of it and that simultaneous attacks by all three corps would be impracticable. The result was Operations Instruction No. 11 (*See Annex No. 2E*), issued on 24 November 1943, which actually governed the attack on the Winter Line. This attack was divided into three phases:

*Phase I.* The objective of this phase was the capture of the critical terrain feature at the southeastern end of the Liri Valley: Mount Camino–Mount La Difensa–Mount Maggiore. II and 10 Corps were to co-operate in occupying this objective. In conjunction with the attack 10 Corps would conduct a feint by active patrolling, establishment of supply dumps, movement of men and vehicles, naval gunfire, and other measures to suggest to the enemy an intention of crossing the lower Garigliano River. When the whole of the objective had been captured, 10 Corps would relieve II Corps on La Difensa and Maggiore. VI Corps meanwhile was to harass the enemy to its front, especially on the north flank of the Corps, to cause the enemy to disperse widely and to prevent him from concentrating his reserves.

*Phase II.* At the close of Phase I the hill mass south of the Mignano Gap would be in our hands, but this mass was dominated by Mount Sammucro north of the Gap. In Phase II, which became operative on Army order, II Corps was to shift north and capture Mount Sammucro. At the same time VI Corps would attack west with one division on the Colli–Atina road and would make a secondary attack with another division on the Filignano–Sant’Elia road, both efforts directed toward the mountains north and northwest of Cassino in an attempt to outflank that key to the Liri Valley. 10 Corps would continue the diversionary activity on the lower Garigliano.

*Phase III.* This phase was to constitute the main attack into the Liri Valley, for both shoulders of the Mignano Gap would have been secured in the previous phases. All three corps were to take part in the drive in order to bring the utmost force to bear. Chief emphasis was given to the attack by VI Corps, which would continue its drive to seize the high ground north and northwest of Cassino with the assistance of II Corps. The 34th Division was to be relieved by the 2d Moroccan Division when available in order that VI Corps might have fresh troops for its thrust. II Corps was to attack northwest along Highway 6, with the mission of developing the enemy defenses in the vicinity of Cassino. At a favorable opportunity it was to be ready to attack west in the valley with additional elements and create an opening for an armored breakthrough. Units for this attack would come from the 1st Armored Division in Army reserve. The mission of 10 Corps was to protect the left flank of II Corps by occupying the area near Vandra, just east of the junction of the Liri and Gari rivers, at such time as to keep abreast of II Corps. When the advance of the latter was such as to permit the bringing up of bridging materials, 10 Corps was to force a crossing of the Garigliano River in the vicinity of Sant’Ambrogio and be prepared for further operations to cover the left flank of II Corps in its push up the Liri Valley.

For the next two months the attack on the Winter Line progressed generally in accordance with the plan laid down by Operations Instruction No. 11, though the advance of our units was everywhere slower and more difficult than originally estimated. In brief this plan called for a thrust on the left of the Mignano Gap, then a thrust on the right of the Gap, and finally an attack through the center up the Liri Valley supported by a simultaneous penetration on the north flank of Fifth Army. As executed by our troops, the over-all strategy of the Fifth Army plan resolved itself into the most bitter fighting from hill to hill. Though units of II Corps bore the brunt of the action, every company of infantry which tried to advance anywhere along the line could expect to meet a crafty enemy in well prepared positions. The weather and the terrain fought for the enemy and grueling weeks lay ahead for the soldiers of Fifth Army. Their progress in the Winter Line campaign must be judged not by a mile-scale on a map but by a yardstick on the cold, rock-studded slopes of the Italian mountains southeast of Cassino.



Approved by JTF-10 Staff, JCE, 1943