

The Thrust Toward Imola

THE breaching of the Gothic Line at Il Giogo Pass, followed by the rapid advance of the 85th and 91st Divisions to the Santerno Valley, presented General Clark with two alternative lines of action. He could concentrate all of the strength of II Corps to the north along the axis of Highway 65 in an effort to break out into the Po Valley at Bologna or he could divert a portion of II Corps to the northeast down the Santerno Valley to reach the open plain at Imola. The capture of Bologna and the clearing of Highway 65 would give Fifth Army a first-class supply route across the mountains and in addition would make possible the fulfillment of Fifth Army's portion of the original Allied plan for trapping the German Tenth Army south of the Po.

The success of the Allied plan, however, depended in part on the outcome of the Eighth Army offensive along the Adriatic coast. After falling back to the Coriano ridge south of Rimini the retreating forces of the German Tenth Army had received sufficient reinforcements to slow and then halt the British attack on 4 September. The transfer of enemy units from the central front which had so greatly benefited Fifth Army made it possible for Tenth Army to organize an effective defense and even to counterattack in strength. Rimini, the gateway to the Po Valley, was not taken until 21 September, and even with a foothold secured on the plain the beginning of the fall rains, together with the exhaustion of its troops, prevented Eighth Army from making gains of over a few hundred yards a day. Thus, although Highway 6528 was an unfavorable route over which to move a large force and though a break-through into the Po Valley at Imola promised a more limited success, General Clark decided upon this plan because (1) it was the shortest thrust that Fifth Army could make to reach the Po Valley; (2) defenses here were less developed than on the routes farther west; (3) Fifth Army successes here could give immediate help to Eighth Army; and (4) again there was a possibility of catching Kesselring's

forces off-balance in their troop dispositions. Orders were issued to II Corps that, while continuing the attack toward Radicosa Pass, a thrust was to be made down the Santerno Valley in conjunction with the 13 Corps attack toward Faenza. At the same time CCA of the 1st Armored Division was made available to II Corps to provide a mobile armored force, and all units were instructed to be prepared to exploit fully any collapse of enemy resistance.

A. *THE DRIVE DOWN THE SANTERNO VALLEY*

21-30 SEPTEMBER

The II Corps plan of attack issued on 5 September called for the 34th, 91st, and 85th Divisions to converge on the mountains flanking Radicosa Pass as soon as the Gothic Line phase of the offensive was completed. The 88th Division was to be in reserve prepared to pass through or support any one of the three attacking divisions. On 16 September, when the 85th Division was forced to commit its reserve regiment in the flanking attack on Mount Pratone, the 88th Division was ordered to prepare plans to employ one regiment to back up the 85th Division either at Mount Altuzzo or at Mount Pratone. This support proved to be unnecessary when the 85th Division succeeded in breaking through the Gothic Line and reaching the Santerno Valley without assistance. Orders were then issued on 20 September assigning to the 88th Division the task of making the main thrust toward Imola. It was to concentrate in the vicinity of Mount Altuzzo, prepared to pass through the right elements of the 85th Division and attack at 0500, 21 September. The 760th Tank Battalion, one company each of the 805th Tank Destroyer and the 84th Chemical Battalions, and the 12th, 16th, and two sections of the 13th Pack Mule Companies were to be attached. The right boundary of the 88th Division zone would be the boundary between II and 13 Corps; the left boundary adjoining the 85th Division would be approximately 1½ miles west of and parallel to Highway 6528. The 88th Division attacked on schedule on 21 September, and at the end of the next day, when the 91st Division secured Futa Pass, it was moving rapidly through the hills on each side of the Santerno River.

1. *Terrain of the Santerno Valley.* (See Map No. 7.) After entering the mountains just to the east of Firenzuola the Santerno River and Highway 6528, which parallels it, twist and turn through a narrow gorge flanked by high mountains for over half of the 30 miles separating Firenzuola from Imola before the river valley broadens out as it approaches the plain of the Po. The heights on each side of the river are steep and broken only by narrow ravines cutting down to the river. Highway 6528 is a two-way, black-topped road which would provide an adequate sup-



Air view of the Santerno Valley from the vicinity of Firenzuola



Troops of the 88th Division cross the Santerno near Castel del Rio



Artillerymen drag ammunition trailer from the rain-swollen Santerno



Tired, mud-caked German prisoners captured in the drive toward Imola

ply route once it could be repaired, but short of Castel del Rio no road and few trails feed back into the mountains; beyond Castel del Rio the situation improves only on the left side of the river.

The division right boundary followed generally a high-peaked ridge forming the divide between the Santerno River and Senio Creek. Beginning with Roncaccio Hill, a peak 3,424 feet high, the ridge, surmounted by a narrow trail, parallels the Santerno River for 6 miles to Mount Puntale, where it swings east into the 13 Corps area. A second ridge branches off to the north to Mount della Croce, then swings northeast nearly 3 miles past Mount Acuto to Mount Carnevale, and ends 2 miles farther east with Mount Battaglia. Mount Carnevale and Mount Battaglia were the last major heights to be cleared before the ground begins sloping down through broadening valleys and receding hills to the plain. West of the Santerno Valley the division zone included a series of transverse ridges and deep ravines. Most important of these ridges was Mount Pratolungo, a great hill mass dominating the approach to Castel del Rio. Since control of the river valley and the highway was dependent on control of the mountains on each side, the 88th Division was faced with the necessity of fighting along the ridges where supplies could be brought forward only with great difficulty.

2. *Initial Successes.* The task of seizing the commanding ground southeast of the Santerno was assigned by General Kendall to the 350th Infantry, commanded by Col. James C. Fry. During the first 3 days after the jump-off on the morning of 21 September the regiment met only scattered resistance and intermittent shell fire, and by the night of the 23d it had reached Mount della Croce. Poor supply routes, extremely rough terrain, and an exposed right flank proved more serious obstacles than the enemy, who was still disorganized by the defeat he had suffered in the Gothic Line fighting. Supplies reached the forward troops by way of a single-lane secondary road from Highway 6524 across the head of the Viola Creek valley to the mountain village of Moscheta where regimental dumps and mule heads were located. From Moscheta all supplies were carried by mules or pack boards over the ridge trail for 10 miles to the troops on Mount della Croce. The open right flank was a source of trouble as well. The 88th Division moved forward much more rapidly than the British 1 Division on its right, and the gap between the two divisions extended to as much as 3 miles. In the first days responsibility for guarding the flank was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 350th Infantry; when the situation continued and the 1st Battalion was needed in the line, 130 men from the 760th Tank Battalion were converted to infantry and posted as flank guards.

The danger of the exposed flank was made clear on the first night after the jump-off. The 1st Battalion set up its headquarters near the division boundary in a house below Mount di Fabbro. Companies B and C moved into positions 200

yards north and northeast of the house, and Companies A and D pulled up later to the south and southeast, leaving only the inner left flank open. At approximately 2030, while Company A was still moving into position, advance elements of the 2d Battalion, 132d Grenadier Regiment, blundered upon the house from the inner and supposedly safe left flank. When an American guard spotted the Germans, a fire fight developed. The combination of a dark night, American sounding machine guns used by the enemy, and several English speaking Germans confused the troops outposted about the area; no information was received from the beleaguered staff because the communications personnel and their equipment on the lower floor of the house were captured before any messages could be sent. The battle proceeded from room to room until the Americans were cornered and driven out with explosives. Twenty-three officers and men, including the battalion commander and nearly the whole of his staff, were captured.

Astride the highway and in the mountains to the northwest of the Santerno the 349th Infantry under Col. Joseph B. Crawford also encountered only rear guard detachments of the enemy in the first 3 days of the attack, although enemy artillery inflicted a number of casualties. On the afternoon of 22 September General Clark, in a visit to the division command post, approved a proposal to extend the 88th Division left boundary to include Mount La Fine, a high ridge to the northwest of Mount Pratolungo, which overlooked the route of advance of the 349th Infantry. The regiment then turned north, and by 1700, 23 September, the 3d Battalion had occupied the objective. Since this shift of the 349th Infantry to the left opened a gap in the center of the division zone, the 351st Infantry under Col. Arthur S. Champeny was committed. By nightfall of the 23d the three regiments were approximately abreast on a line extending from Mount La Fine to Mount della Croce. The next day the 350th Infantry met immediate resistance to its efforts to take Mount Acuto, and both the 349th and 351st Infantry were vigorously counterattacked.

The rapid advances made by the 88th Division in the first 3 days of its attack were due not only to the general disorganization of the enemy forces but to the fact that the bulge formed by the right flank elements of II Corps had served to open an ever widening gap between the weakened 4th Parachute and 715th Grenadier Divisions. The arrival of the 362d Grenadier Division by 22 September alleviated the situation north of Firenzuola, but as the 88th Division drove forward the bulge extended deeper into the enemy's lines and he made frenzied efforts to head off the threat. To the 305th Fusilier Battalion, elements of the 132d Grenadier Regiment, and rear-echelon personnel of the 715th Grenadier Division already identified by the 85th Division before the 88th entered the line, there were added a company of the Italian Bersaglieri, elements of the 1028th Grenadier Regiment (attached to

the 715th Grenadier Division), and the remainder of the 44th Grenadier Division. All three regiments of the 44th Grenadier Division had arrived by 26 September; with these substantial reinforcements the enemy was able to offer increasingly stiff resistance.

3. *Seizing the Last Heights before Imola.* On 25 September preparations were made to attack Mounts Pratolungo, Carnevale, and Battaglia. These three heights, forming a chain extending from west to east through Castel del Rio, together with Mount Cappello to the north of Mount Carnevale, were the last commanding peaks in the zone of the 88th Division. Loss of these heights would deprive the Germans of the strongest defensive position between Castel del Rio and the Po plain. In order to concentrate the whole of the 88th Division for the attack II Corps changed the division's left boundary to make the 85th Division again responsible for Mount La Fine. The 337th Infantry relieved the 3d Battalion, 349th Infantry, on the mountain during the night of 25 September, permitting the latter to join the 1st Battalion, 349th Infantry, in its attack on Mount Pratolungo. After taking Mount Pratolungo the 349th Infantry was to cut Highway 937, which leaves Highway 6528 beyond Castel del Rio to reach the Po Valley at Castel San Pietro, and Highway 6528; the 351st Infantry in the center was to clear Castel del Rio and then move eastward to seize Mount Cappello; and the 350th Infantry was to clear the ridge stretching from Mount Acuto to Mount Battaglia. H Hour for the attack was set at 0600, 26 September.

The 349th Infantry, after a hard fight, seized Mount Pratolungo before dark on the first day of the attack. The opposing 1st Battalion, 134th Grenadier Regiment, suffered heavy losses before it succeeded in extricating itself. Among the missing were the battalion commander and 52 men who were captured by the 2d Battalion, 349th Infantry, when it overran the enemy battalion command post on the north side of the mountain. Continuing along the ridge running north from Mount Pratolungo, the next day the 349th Infantry took Hill 434, placing it in position to dominate Highway 937. To the right the 351st Infantry took Castel del Rio on the morning of the 27th. The 3d Battalion then moved on to take the high ground lying in the V formed by the junction of Highway 937 with Highway 6528 while the remainder of the regiment swung northeast to capture Mount Cappello, a task which required 2 days of hard fighting and was accomplished only on 30 September.

Southeast of Castel del Rio the 2d and 3d Battalions, 350th Infantry, reached positions on the ridge north of Mount Acuto during the first day of the attack; the 1st Battalion on the right seized Mount del Puntale. As the regiment moved forward the gap between it and the British 1 Division increased to as much as 8,000 yards. The dismounted tank crews from the 760th Tank Battalion were not ade-

quate for such a long front, and it was found necessary to draw a portion of CCA from Army reserve. Beginning on 26 September, the whole of the 14th Armored Infantry Battalion was gradually committed, followed on the 28th by the 6th Armored Infantry Battalion. Under the command of General Daniel the two battalions then assumed complete responsibility for the exposed flank, assuring the 350th Infantry that its supply lines would remain open.

During the morning of 27 September the 2d Battalion, 350th Infantry, surprised the enemy in the act of digging in on Mount Carnevale. After a brief skirmish in which 20 prisoners were captured, the battalion cleared the hill and prepared to move on toward Mount Battaglia as soon as the 3d Battalion came up. Meanwhile contact was made with a partisan band which claimed it was in sole possession of the mountain. Guided by the partisans, who had located a covered route along the southeastern side of the ridge, the battalion advanced on Mount Battaglia, reaching the crest at 1535. Although well armed with Sten guns, which had been dropped by Allied planes, and with German machine pistols and grenades, the partisans had set up no organized defense. The 2d Battalion immediately remedied this situation and under orders from General Keyes prepared to hold its ground until the 351st Infantry could come abreast on the left. The most important feature in the line of hills blocking the road to Imola had been taken without a struggle.

4. *The Defense of Mount Battaglia.* Mount Battaglia, or Battle Mountain as it was known to the 88th Division troops, was aptly named. The bold thrust of the 2d Battalion, 350th Infantry, had placed the battalion on the height before the Germans were aware of the depth of our attack. Quick to realize the tactical importance of the breach, the enemy assembled all his available troops in an effort to retake the mountain before the 88th Division could exploit its success. During the ensuing battle the topography of the mountain and the surrounding terrain together with the isolated position of the 2d Battalion gave the enemy many advantages. The 2,345-foot summit of Mount Battaglia is the last major height on the long ridge stretching northeast from Mount della Croce. From the summit and from a spur extending to the northeast the mountain slopes steeply to the northwest; to the east and south the slope is more gradual but the mountain side is deeply indented by the fingerlike tributaries of Senio Creek. Well ahead of the 13 Corps units on its right and the 351st Infantry on its left the 2d Battalion, 350th Infantry, was exposed to attacks from the northwest, east, and south, while all supplies and reinforcements were channelized along the narrow ridge to the southwest where they were subject to harassing artillery fire. The enemy was further aided by a series of rainy, foggy days which were admirably suited to his tactics of infiltration and which largely nullified our superiority in artillery. On most days air observation

planes were grounded, and neither Rover Joe nor the artillery ground observers could operate.

During the afternoon of 27 September while Company G was digging in around the ruins of an ancient castle on the summit of the mountain the sky clouded over, and heavy rain accompanied by thick fog drenched the tired troops. Less than 1 hour after the first troops had arrived on the mountain and before Companies E and F were completely in position along the northeast spur elements of the German 44th and 715th Grenadier Divisions launched a counterattack in company strength. Fighting in a driving rain, Company G held its positions. All through the night the enemy shelled the mountain; then at 0530, 28 September, behind an artillery and mortar barrage, he struck again. The forward outposts of Company G were overrun, and the attacking troops were beaten back only after they had reached within a few yards of the crest. Several minor attacks developed during the morning as groups of 30 to 40 Germans attempted unsuccessfully to infiltrate through the lines.

In the afternoon the enemy attacked in force. Beginning about 1400, artillery and mortars to the front and right rear began a concentrated shelling of the summit of the mountain which continued without let-up until 1700 when a force of approximately four battalions from the 715th and 44th Grenadier Divisions launched a coordinated attack. An estimated battalion attacked from the open right flank while the remainder struck at the Headquarters Company and Company G positions near the castle. Carrying pole charges and flame throwers, the enemy troops again fought their way almost to the summit before they were repulsed. Our troops were nearly out of ammunition when Company K arrived at 1930 accompanying a mule train with a partial load of ammunition and rations, the first that had reached the 2d Battalion. Company K was committed with Company G in the summit positions, which were receiving the heaviest pounding. The reinforcements helped to relieve the critical situation, but nothing could be done to make the men more comfortable in the shell fire, cold rain, and flooded foxholes.

The artillery fire continued through the night of 28-29 September while the 2d Battalion and Company K worked at improving their positions and taking out the wounded. Problems of evacuation and supply over the narrow ridge trail to the rear were staggering. Movement was virtually impossible in daylight because the ridge was under enemy observation and subject to being cut by enemy patrols. At night troops using the trail had to maintain physical contact to avoid getting lost or falling off cliffs. Under these conditions bringing up adequate rations and ammunition was impossible. Wounded had to be evacuated by a litter carry of 4½ miles. Not until 29 September was Colonel Fry able to secure sufficient emergency litter bearers to relieve the evacuation problem by setting up emergency relay posts at intervals along the trail.

The night of 28–29 September gave way to another gray day enveloped in fog and rain. After a concentration of artillery fire at 0700 an enemy force estimated at a regiment in strength used the fog to cover its advance up the steep northwestern slope. By 0900 the attack had carried to the crest, and a few of the Germans penetrated all the way into the castle before they were driven back with hand grenades. Enemy shelling continued after the attack with over 400 rounds landing on the mountain between 0700 and 1000. The situation of the 2d Battalion had become so serious on the morning of the 29th that General Kendall turned over the defense of the right flank and the Mount Carnevale ridge supply route to the armored infantry of CCA and ordered Colonel Fry to move the whole of the 350th Infantry onto Mount Battaglia. Before the reinforcements arrived the 2d Battalion was forced to beat off another attack, and in the early morning hours of 30 September, in a repetition of the previous morning's action, a German with a flame thrower penetrated into the castle. By 0945, after fighting at ranges so close that supporting artillery could give little aid, the enemy was again beaten back. For the rest of the day enemy artillery continued to pound the mountain with little fear of counterbattery fire. In the fog our artillery observers could see nothing, and sound ranging in the echoing ravines was utterly unreliable. Our troops continued to hold the mountain but only at great cost. Company G, reduced to approximately 50 men, had to be relieved; cases of exhaustion were becoming alarmingly numerous. Colonel Fry had dry socks, blankets, and shelter halves brought up and spent the day preparing for the next counterattack.

The attack on 1 October, beginning as usual at 0600 when the enemy was concealed by the fog and semidarkness of the early morning hours, ended disastrously for the Germans. In less than 1 hour they were driven back down the mountain. Late in the day when they assembled for another attack they were dispersed by accurate artillery fire. Aided by clear skies in the afternoon the 338th Field Artillery Battalion fired 3,398 rounds during the day, and for the first time the threat of counterbattery fire reduced the volume of enemy shelling. The addition of the 1st and 3d Battalions on the mountain had considerably improved the ability of the 350th Infantry to put up an effective defense; with the capture of Mount Cappello by the 351st Infantry on 30 September and the arrival of British units on the right, the enemy was no longer able to attack from the flanks.

Despite costly setbacks, the enemy also had greatly strengthened his forces opposite Mount Battaglia. By 1 October the 350th Infantry had identified elements of the 334th Grenadier Division brought over from the 34th Division front, the 44th Grenadier Division from opposite 10 Corps, elements of the 715th and 305th Grenadier Divisions from before 13 Corps, and one regiment of the 98th Grenadier Division from the Adriatic coast. These forces proved insufficient to retake Mount

Battaglia, but they effectively blocked the road to Imola. Once the enemy had succeeded in building up sufficient forces to slow the rate of advance of the 88th Division the balance of logistics was all in his favor. Recognizing that the initiative had been lost and that the corridor through which the 88th Division was attacking was unsuitable for a larger force, General Clark shifted the emphasis of the II Corps offensive back to Highway 65.

Although the immediate tactical importance of Mount Battaglia to Fifth Army diminished after the decision was made to abandon the drive to Imola, the enemy attempts to retake the mountain continued into the first days of October. On 2 October the weather was again foggy and overcast; in a 6-hour period 1200-1800 the 88th Division reported that 1,100 rounds of enemy artillery fell within the division zone. The next evening at 2030 the 2d Battalion, about to be relieved, had to fight off a strong counterattack. While the 350th Infantry was beating off the last enemy attacks, plans were carried out for its relief by elements of 13 Corps which had come up on the right. The 2d Battalion, after 7 days of continuous action, left the mountain on the night of 3-4 October, and the remainder of the regiment was relieved the following evening. From 21 September, when the 88th Division entered the line, to 3 October, inclusive, the division suffered 2,105 battle casualties. The drive of the 88th Division toward Imola, and in particular the defense of Mount Battaglia, came close to equaling the total casualties of II Corps during the 6-day period of the breaching of the Gothic Line.

B. *THE ATTACK ON RADICOSA PASS*

23-30 SEPTEMBER

The commitment of the 88th Division for the drive down the Santerno Valley necessitated only minor changes in the attack plans of the other II Corps units. With the partial exception of the 85th Division, which was to assist the 88th Division, the mission of the 85th, 91st, and 34th Divisions remained that of converging on the line of mountains protecting Radicosa Pass. (*See Map No. 8.*) The 85th Division was to take Mount Canda, on the east side of the pass; the 91st Division was to take Mount Oggioli, just west of the pass; and the 34th Division, concentrating its efforts along its right flank, was to take Mount Bastione. These three mountains form a part of the main divide of the Northern Apennines; in general they are higher than the peaks of the water divide on which the Gothic Line had been constructed: Mount Canda measures 3,798 feet, Mount Oggioli 4,231 feet, and Mount Bastione 3,903 feet. Although lacking the fixed defenses of the Gothic Line, the steep, often completely bare slopes of these heights protecting Radicosa Pass offered a potentially

strong defensive line. Their capture was essential if II Corps was not to be robbed of the fruits of its hard-won victory at Il Giogo Pass.

1. *Condition of Enemy Forces.* The ability of the enemy to hold Radicosa Pass depended in large part on his ability to reinforce the weakened 4th Parachute and 334th Grenadier Divisions. In the period 10–24 September there were identified in the Fifth Army prisoner of war cages 8 officers and 810 enlisted men from the 4th Parachute Division, 6 officers and 508 enlisted men from the 334th Grenadier Division, and 3 officers and 227 enlisted men from the Infantry Lehr Brigade, which had been thrown in to support the 4th Parachute Division. Since few prisoners were taken by II Corps until the end of the Gothic Line fighting, it may be assumed that enemy losses in killed and wounded were much higher than the count of prisoners. Reports from prisoners indicated that many companies were virtually wiped out. Nor was it possible for the enemy to withdraw more than an occasional regiment for reorganization and recuperation as he lacked the mobile reserves to relieve them; he could only patch up broken units with replacements and rear-echelon personnel while shuffling the divisions already in the line.

By drawing units from the IV Corps front Lemelsen succeeded in establishing a stable line at Radicosa Pass on 25 September. After its relief by the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, the 362d Grenadier Division was rushed to the Firenzuola area, and by 22 September the 1059th and 1060th Grenadier Regiments, reinforced by remaining elements of the Infantry Lehr Brigade, had taken over the area east of Highway 65 opposite the 85th Division. Between Highway 65 and Highway 6620 were the depleted 4th Parachute and 334th Grenadier Divisions, facing the 91st and 34th Divisions. Hardly had this line been established when the capture of Mount Battaglia by the 88th Division presented the enemy with a new crisis requiring swift countermeasures. Elements of both the 362d and 334th Grenadier Divisions were moved east to join in the counterattacks against the 350th Infantry, and the equilibrium gained at Radicosa Pass was again upset. Faced with the necessity of continually regrouping its forces, the German Fourteenth Army could fight only delaying actions to hold off the 85th, 91st, and 34th Divisions as they struggled forward through the rain and mud of late September to reach their objectives.

2. *The 85th Division Captures Mount Canda.* The II Corps orders to the 85th Division called for an attack along the division right boundary toward Mount La Fine to assist the drive of the 88th Division down the Santerno Valley and on the left toward Mount Canda in conjunction with the attack of the 91st Division on Radicosa Pass. In the first phase of its attack the 88th Division moved so rapidly that it outstripped the 339th Infantry on its left, and on 22 September the division boundary was changed to place all but the western ridge of Mount La Fine in the 88th Division zone. The next day the 337th Infantry took over the zone of the 339th Infantry,

and the 2d Battalion, together with the attached 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, completed a difficult cross-country march to occupy the western portion of the mountain. On 25 September the boundary was again changed, and the 337th Infantry brought up its 1st and 3d Battalions to take over the whole of the mountain. For the remainder of the month the 337th Infantry consolidated positions on Mount La Fine, cleared Highway 6529 to the north of it, and sent patrols into the hills beyond the highway. In the meantime the main action on the division front centered around the efforts to take Mount Canda on the left.

Until 25 September the 338th Infantry, hampered by fire from enemy self-propelled guns and mortars and by heavy rains on the 24th which turned fields and roads into mud, moved forward slowly through the rolling hill country northwest of Mount Coloreta. By the end of 24 September these short advances brought the regiment in position for a concerted attack toward Mount Canda. To avoid a frontal assault against the steep escarpment forming the southwest face of Mount Canda General Coulter ordered the 338th Infantry to concentrate its efforts on taking Torre Poggioli, a smooth-sloped height to the northeast, and then swing back to outflank the mountain from the north. The attack, spearheaded by the 3d Battalion, jumped off in the early morning hours of 25 September; by 0800 the lead company had reached the lower slopes of Torre Poggioli northeast of the village of Sambuco. Before the rest of the battalion could move up the forward company was counterattacked, and enemy fire prevented any forward movement. Employing tanks in support of the infantry, the 1060th Grenadier Regiment struck back repeatedly during the day, and after dark the 3d Battalion was forced to withdraw. Efforts of the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, to lend assistance by moving over from Mount La Fine were checked by fire from the village of Montarello where elements of the Infantry Lehr Brigade were dug in on the left flank of the 1060th Grenadier Regiment.

Before dawn on 26 September the 1st Battalion, 339th Infantry, and the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, supported by tanks from the 752d Tank Battalion attacked Torre Poggioli while the 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry, attempted to take the village of Sambuco and the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, repeated its effort to reach Montarello. In the face of intense mortar and artillery fire the two battalions in the center reached Highway 6529 below the crest of Torre Poggioli. On the left no progress was made in reducing the fortified houses in Sambuco, but the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry on the right, captured Montarello and continued on to the north during the night toward the heights above the highway. The next morning the two battalions in the center fought their way to the crest of Torre Poggioli under the cover of artillery and tank fire. The tanks, after struggling up the muddy slopes, had reached the highway and were close enough to employ their machine guns as well as high-explosive shells against the enemy positions along the crest. During the afternoon,

while still under fire from enemy self-propelled guns and long-range automatic weapons, the two battalions consolidated their positions on the summit of Torre Poggioli and made contact with the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, on the high ground to the east. On the left Sambuco also was taken when tanks were brought up and the stone houses were systematically leveled.

With the infantry dug in on Torre Poggioli and tanks operating along Highway 6529, which leads into Radicosa Pass behind Mount Canda, the enemy positions on Mount Canda were untenable. After 2 days of hard fighting to hold the eastern anchor to Radicosa Pass, the 362d Grenadier Division, taking advantage of the heavy rains beginning on the night of 27–28 September, pulled back to the north. First indication of the withdrawal came with a lessening of the fire received from self-propelled guns and mortars on Mount Canda; the report was confirmed at noon on 28 September when the 3d Battalion, 338th Infantry, found the crest of the mountain unoccupied. For the next 24 hours the division consolidated its gains and wherever possible provided the forward troops with dry clothes, blankets, and hot food. At the end of the month it was sending out patrols to make contact with the retreating enemy and was preparing for the next phase of the Corps offensive.

3. *The 91st Division Captures Mount Oggioli.* The 91st Division, after securing Futa Pass and establishing outposts across the Santerno River on 22 September, spent the next day resting its troops in preparation for resuming the advance. The division zone lay astride Highway 65 to the twin peaks of Mount Freddi and Mount Beni, which guard the approach to Mount Oggioli. Here the zone narrowed to a strip only 2 miles wide on the west side of the highway until beyond Mount Oggioli where the boundary with the 85th Division again ran east of the highway. Although the division could concentrate its strength on a narrow front, both Mount Freddi and Mount Beni are rocky peaks over 4,000 feet high offering little cover and no concealment from enemy guns on the flanks located on Mount Bastione and Mount Canda. If held in strength, the twin heights would offer the 4th Parachute Division a strong delaying line short of Mount Oggioli. General Livesay planned to attack with two regiments abreast: the 362d Infantry would skirt the west side of the Sasso di Castro feature, a high, ridge-topped mountain just west of Highway 65, to reach Mount Freddi, while the 361st Infantry would attack along the east side of the highway to clear the village of Covigliaio in preparation for an attack on Mount Beni.

The two regiments jumped off at 0530, 24 September. Two hours later Company K, leading the 361st Infantry, had reached Covigliaio, but it took until after dark to clear the town. All through the day the troops were under artillery and mortar fire, and the enemy had to be driven out house by house. On the left the 362d Infantry reached parallel positions on the west side of the Sasso di Castro

feature where the enemy had left only a few outposts. Continuing the advance the next morning, the 2d Battalion, 361st Infantry, supported by tanks from the 755th Tank Battalion, attacked Mount Beni. Opposition was surprisingly light. After the tanks had assisted in neutralizing machine guns, Company G succeeded in placing two platoons on the crest of the mountain. The 363d Infantry, which relieved the 362d Infantry during the night of 24-25 September, moved more slowly due to artillery fire from Mount Bastione. Clear weather on 26 September permitted the 77th Field Artillery Group to employ observed counterbattery fire which effectively silenced the enemy guns and helped pave the way for a successful attack on Mount Freddi. At the end of 26 September both Mount Beni and Mount Freddi had been secured, and the division was in position to launch a coordinated attack on Mount Oggioli.

Supported by Corps and division artillery, the 361st and 363d Infantry attacked from the northern slopes of Mount Beni and Mount Freddi at 0630, 27 September. In spite of the concentrated artillery fire, eight fighter-bomber missions, and support from tanks and tank destroyers operating along Highway 65, enemy resistance coupled with the rough mountain slopes held the leading battalions to slow advances. When elements of the 361st Infantry reached the top of the mountain on the morning of 28 September they found the enemy positions abandoned. Like the 362d Grenadier Division to their left, the elements of the 4th Parachute Division holding Mount Oggioli had taken advantage of the rain on 28 September to conceal a full-scale withdrawal. During the night the 362d Infantry passed through the 361st Infantry and together with the 363d Infantry reached positions astride Highway 65 approximately 2 miles north of Radicosa Pass on 29 September. Thick fog reduced visibility to a few yards and slowed the advance, but few contacts were made with the enemy; it appeared probable that he had withdrawn his main forces to a line running through Monghidoro, nearly 4 miles beyond Mount Oggioli.

4. *The 34th Division Attacks on the Left.* The 34th Division, in the process of following up the withdrawal of the 334th Grenadier Division from the Gothic Line, had all three of its regiments in the line on 23 September. The 133d Infantry, preparing to pass into division reserve, held Montepiano on Highway 6620; the 168th Infantry was on Mount Tronale; and the 135th Infantry on the right was just north of Mount Citerna. Reinforced by a fresh battalion of the 362d Grenadier Division, the depleted 334th Grenadier Division fell back to Mount Coroncina and then fought a series of defensive battles as the 34th Division drove forward toward Mount Bastione, the objective set for the division in the II Corps plan of attack on Radicosa Pass.

In the early morning hours of 24 September the 168th Infantry struck north toward Mount Coroncina. Elements of the 2d Battalion, hidden by fog, reached

the summit of the mountain and held there all day against repeated counterattacks hastily organized by service personnel from the 755th and 756th Grenadier Regiments. The 1st Battalion swung west to Highway 6620 to protect the exposed left flank of the regiment while the 34th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop assumed responsibility for patrolling west of the highway so that the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron would be available for use on short notice by II Corps. The 133d Infantry also passed to division reserve. To the east of Mount Coroncina the 135th Infantry under heavy fire pressed north through the village of Roncobilaccio. The enemy apparently expected the main attack to come down Highway 6620, for during the day 1,000 rounds of heavy caliber shells were poured into Montepiano, a volume of fire heavier than any received during the Gothic Line fighting.

After consolidating its hold on Mount Coroncina, the 168th Infantry swung northeast to assist the 135th Infantry in its drive toward Mount Bastione. Progress was slow on the 25th, and the next day when the 2d and 3d Battalions crossed Gambellate Creek, 3 miles southwest of Mount Bastione, the enemy counterattacked vigorously from the heights above the stream. On the right the 135th Infantry near the village of Bruscoli also met stiff resistance. For 1 more day the enemy continued to fight back at isolated points; then he withdrew, and both the 135th and 168th Infantry moved forward as fast as the troops could negotiate the swollen streams, muddy valleys, and steep mountain slopes. The 135th Infantry occupied Mount Bastione before noon on 28 September; the next day the 2d Battalion reached the village of Fornelli, 3 miles to the north. There it was relieved by the 3d Battalion, 168th Infantry, at 1800. The only resistance met during 29 September was at Montefredente, southwest of Fornelli, where the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry, repulsed an enemy counterattack. On the last day of the month the 168th Infantry probed forward along the division front while the 135th Infantry passed the division reserve and the 133d Infantry moved up to Fornelli prepared to enter the line.

During the 3-day period 27-29 September the 168th Infantry advanced approximately 6 air-line miles from southwest of Gambellate Creek to beyond Fornelli. The fact that in the same period the regimental wire crews laid 55 miles of wire gives some indication of the discrepancy between map distances and the actual distance traveled by the troops. Furthermore, until the 28th when the engineers opened a road from Futa Pass on Highway 65 to Bruscoli, all supplies were carried forward from beyond Mount Coroncina by mules. Similar conditions existed all along the II Corps front where problems of logistics, difficult at best during the Gothic Line phase of the offensive, became continuously more complicated as the front line was pushed deeper into the mountains and the warm, clear days of early autumn changed to cold, rainy weather.



Camouflaged tanks prepare to attack over open slopes near Radicosa Pass



155-mm howitzer moves up to the front under cover of a smoke screen



The late September rains turned secondary roads into morasses of mud



Troops located in Radicosa Pass welcome an issue of woolen underwear

C. 13 CORPS ADVANCES ON THE RIGHT

23-30 SEPTEMBER

The drive of the 88th Division toward Imola, like the attack of the 85th Division at Il Giogo Pass, placed the spearhead of the Army offensive along the right flank of II Corps. In each case the main effort of 13 Corps was necessarily directed toward maintaining contact with and supporting the attack on its left. During the Gothic Line fighting the Corps advance, led by the 1 Division, was directed northeast along the axis of Highway 6521. In the next phase, in order to assist the 88th Division, the 1 Division shifted more to the north to Highway 934. After branching off from Highway 6521 at the village of Marradi, Highway 934 winds northwest over the mountains to the town of Palazzuolo, where it makes a right-angle turn to follow the valley of Senio Creek to the Po plain. The first task ahead of the 1 Division was to open up the section of Highway 934 leading from Marradi to Palazzuolo so as to clear a supply route for operations down the Senio Valley. Similarly the 8 Indian Division would open a secondary road from San Benedetto on Highway 67 to Marradi so that supplies could be brought forward to support its drive down Highway 6521. The use of a portion of Highway 67 was necessary to keep the road from Borgo San Lorenzo to Marradi restricted to 1 Division traffic. On the right the 6 Armoured Division was seriously weakened by the inability of its tanks to operate in the mountains. It was tentatively planned that the 8 Indian Division would place a brigade group astride Highway 67 to guard the San Benedetto—Marradi road; the 6 Armoured Division would continue to make what progress it could along Highway 67 until 28 September when it would pass to Eighth Army. Priority for road repair would be given the new 1 Division and 8 Indian Division axes with only such facilities as were not required elsewhere to be used on the 6 Armoured Division axis.

The enemy based his defense of the Marradi—Palazzuolo road on three heights, Mounts Carnevale, Gamberaldi, and Toncone, to the northeast of the road. Elements of the 715th Grenadier Division held these heights while the 578th Grenadier Regiment (305th Grenadier Division) gave flank support from high ground along Highway 6521. The enemy made no effort to hold the area southwest of Palazzuolo, and when General Loewen sent the 66 Brigade over a mountain trail from the hamlet of Razzalo, below Casaglia Pass, to Palazzuolo it reached its objective on 25 September without difficulty. Meanwhile the 2 Brigade on the right took Mount Carnevale. Mount Gamberaldi to the northeast was attacked by the 1 Loyals (2 Brigade) during the night of 24-25 September, but enemy mortar and machine gun fire took such a toll of the attacking troops that the attempt to reach the summit had to be abandoned. The 1 Loyals then dug in along the base of the mountain

where it continued to receive heavy fire from the front and from the high ground just north of Highway 6521.

When a second attempt of the 2 Brigade to take Mount Gamberaldi failed on the night of 26–27 September, the 66 Brigade sent the 1 Hertfordshires northeast from Palazzuolo to attack Mount Toncone. After a sharp fight the height was secured, and the enemy, in danger of being outflanked, made a hurried withdrawal from Mount Gamberaldi. This action cleared the road from Marradi to Palazzuolo and opened the way for an advance down Highway 934. The 3 Brigade relieved the 66 Brigade on the morning of 30 September, and the division prepared to drive on to make contact with the forward elements of the 88th Division on Mount Battaglia.

The 8 Indian Division had reached both ends of the San Benedetto—Marradi road by 25 September. The 19 Brigade on the right held San Benedetto and a stretch of the road to the north while the 17 Brigade on the left was generally south of Marradi where it was receiving heavy fire from Mount Castelnuovo, a height to the east of the town. The 578th Grenadier Regiment had occupied Mount Castelnuovo during the night of 24–25 September as well as the high ground north of the highway, and the 576th Grenadier Regiment held the remainder of the 305th Grenadier Division sector extending south to Highway 67. Before the 8 Indian Division would be able to use the lateral road it would be necessary to take Mount Castelnuovo and clear the enemy from the central area.

An attempt by the 1 Royal Fusiliers to take Mount Castelnuovo on 26 September failed when the troops were stopped by heavy mortar and machine gun fire. The forward companies dug in on the southeast slopes, and the 1 Battalion, Frontier Force Regiment, was sent around to the right to outflank the mountain. This effort also was unsuccessful, and continuous fighting on the 27th resulted in only slight advances. In the meantime the 19 Brigade sent patrols into the hills to the east of the road, making contact with the right flank of the 17 Brigade below Mount Castelnuovo. The heavy rains on 28 September forced the division to suspend operations except for patrolling. The portion of the road from San Benedetto to the vicinity of Mount Castelnuovo became so muddy that it could be traversed only by jeeps equipped with chains; some of the trails into the mountains were impassable even to mules. Only the decision of the 305th Grenadier Division to shorten its lines by withdrawing from Mount Castelnuovo permitted the 8 Indian Division to complete the work of opening the road. At the end of the month the 17 Brigade began relieving the right flank of the 1 Division in preparation for a drive down Highway 6521.

Along Highway 67 the 61 Brigade of the 6 Armoured Division entered San Benedetto on 25 September and then sent the 7 Battalion, Rifle Brigade, down the

highway toward the village of Bucconi. Although the 576th Grenadier Regiment had only light forces in the area, extensive minefields and artillery fire hampered the advancing troops. Furthermore, the task of protecting the exposed right flank of 13 Corps required the use of troops who might otherwise have been employed along the main highway. Since 10 Corps lacked sufficient strength to screen the mountainous area on its left flank, the 1 Derby Yeomanry was sent south to patrol Highway 70 while the 61 Brigade was made responsible for patrolling southeast of Highway 67. The 26 Armoured and the 1 Guards Brigade remained in division reserve, the latter engaged in preparations for a move to the 1 Division zone. Plans for transferring the division to Eighth Army were cancelled, and at the close of the month the 61 Brigade was still operating under instructions to push forward along Highway 67.

D. IV CORPS PASSES THROUGH THE GOTHIC LINE

23-30 SEPTEMBER

During the period when the 88th Division was driving down the Santerno Valley toward Imola and the remainder of II Corps was securing Radicosa Pass, IV Corps was engaged in regrouping its forces to release the bulk of the 1st Armored Division, in trying to maintain contact with the left flank of II Corps, and in following up a series of enemy withdrawals. With the eastward shift of the 334th Grenadier Division and the complete transfer of the 362d Grenadier Division to the II Corps front, the enemy also was busy shuffling his units, and as he was pressed back in the center toward Bologna he was forced to give ground on the IV Corps front to avoid the possibility of being outflanked. Thus, although no general offensive was launched by IV Corps, its troops continued to move forward; by the end of the month the Gothic Line defenses, with the exception of the coastal stretch above Massa, had been left behind.

The relief of the 1st Armored Division for employment on the II Corps front began on 21 September with the move of CCA to an assembly area between Prato and Sesto where it passed to Army control. Three days later General Crittenger issued orders releasing the remainder of the division, less CCB. Responsibility for the division zone passed on 25 September to Task Force 92 under Brig. Gen. John S. Wood, Assistant Division Commander of the 92d Division. He had under his command the 370th Infantry and CCB, the latter including the 13th Tank Battalion, the 11th Armored Infantry Battalion, the 68th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, and Troop D, 81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. Once the necessary reliefs had

been completed on the night of 25–26 September General Wood prepared to renew the advance up the Serchio Valley and into the mountains north of Pescia.

Beginning slowly on 26 September, the attack gained momentum the next day. The 1st Battalion, 370th Infantry, following Highway 12 along the east side of the Serchio Valley, advanced 4 miles to within 1 mile of the junction of Lima Creek with the Serchio River where Highway 12 turns east. On the west side of the Serchio the 3d Battalion, meeting some opposition, made almost equally substantial gains. The 2d Battalion, in the mountains to the east of the Serchio, captured the high ground overlooking Lima Creek near Bagni di Lucca; elements of CCB by the 28th had reached the village of Lucchio, 7 miles farther up the Lima Valley. In the 2-day period 27–28 September, Task Force 92, against only slight resistance, had passed through the carefully prepared Gothic Line defenses of the Serchio Valley and had sealed off the east-west portion of Highway 12 which had formerly served as the main lateral route of communications for the enemy troops opposite the central portion of the IV Corps front.

In the zone of the 6 South African Armoured Division the action shifted increasingly toward Highway 6620 as the division sought to fulfill its mission of maintaining contact with and protecting the left flank of II Corps. The first move was made on 24 September when the 12 South African Motorised Brigade took over the sector of the line held by the 11 South African Armoured Brigade and the latter was ordered to concentrate on pushing north along Highway 6620 behind a screen of patrols provided by the NMR. The ILH/Kim R and the 4/13 FFR reached Sant'Ippolito below Vernio on the 24th, and the next day two companies of the 4/13 FFR marched cross-country approximately 6 miles to Mount Casciaio, to the west of Mount Coroncina, where they relieved the 34th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop of responsibility for screening the II Corps left flank. Following up this advance as rapidly as the demolished highway would permit, the ILH/Kim R reached positions on Mount Gatta and just below Castiglione, 2 miles to the north of Mount Casciaio, on the 26th.

Meanwhile the 24 Guards Brigade and the 12 South African Motorised Brigade continued to follow up enemy withdrawals along Highways 66 and 64 respectively. Here again the enemy had abandoned excellent defensive positions, and only the steep mountain slopes, minefields, and the numerous cuts in the twisting highways delayed the advance. The attempt to open up these different routes of advance simultaneously was too much for the division engineers; accordingly General Poole halted the 24 Guards Brigade on 26 September. By that time it had reached the point where Highway 66 turns northeast at Piastre, approximately 7 miles northwest of Pistoia and only a short distance from the headwaters of the northward flowing Reno River. Elements of the 12 South African Motorised Brigade along

Highway 64 were already over the divide. They reached the village of Collina on the 27th.

The continued advance of the 34th Division, and in particular its shift to the northeast toward Mount Bastione, led General Crittenberger to concentrate more and more of the IV Corps strength along the Corps right boundary. Anticipating a probable change in the boundary, on 27 September he ordered General Poole to withdraw the 24 Guards Brigade at once to support the attack up Highway 6620 and to relieve any II Corps units in the Mount Coroncina area. Responsibility for the zone of the 24 Guards Brigade passed to Task Force 92. The next day these instructions were implemented by a Corps field order which shifted the boundary between II and IV Corps to the line of Gambellate Creek and Setta Creek, approximately 2 miles east of Highway 6620. At the same time the left boundary of the 6 South African Armoured Division was shifted to a north-south line 6 miles east of Pistoia. All forward movement along Highway 64 was stopped, and the zone of the 12 South African Motorised Brigade passed to the 74 Light Antiaircraft Regiment, which was released from division control. As a result of these changes in boundaries the division zone was reduced to less than half of its former width, and General Poole could concentrate his efforts on driving north along Highway 6620, where he could give maximum support to II Corps. The 24 Guards Brigade moved into line to the right of the 11 South African Armoured Brigade on the 28th; by the 30th the 1 Scots Guards, fighting on the upper slopes of Mount Catarelto, were abreast of the leading elements of the 34th Division.

The drastic reduction in the zone of the 6 South African Armoured Division necessitated a redistribution of the other IV Corps units. CCB was detached from Task Force 92; with the 74 Light Antiaircraft Regiment under operational control, it took over the mission of advancing down Highway 64. Task Force 92, now reduced to the 370th Infantry, was left with a zone 16 miles wide extending from just east of the Serchio Valley to a line running due north from a point just west of Pistoia. Once the east-west portion of Highway 12 had been cleared, there was no need to place troops along the greater part of the task force front. On 30 September the 3d Battalion, 370th Infantry, entered La Lima, where Highway 66 joins Highway 12, and the regiment concentrated its efforts toward continuing the advance up Highway 12 to the northwest. The 6th Combat Team, BEF, with its eastern boundary shifted 6 miles to the east to include the Serchio Valley, was given the objective of reaching Castelnuovo, 15 miles up the Serchio from the junction with Lima Creek. The 3d Battalion, after relieving the 3d Battalion, 370th Infantry, on 29 September, reached Fornoli at the junction of the rivers on the 30th; the 1st and 2d Battalions continued through the mountains north of Mount Prano. Elements of the 1st Battalion entered Stazzema on the 29th, placing it near the foothills of the 6,094-foot

peak of the Pania della Croce feature. To the left of Stazzema the new boundary with Task Force 45 ran almost due north. Since the coast curves away to the northwest, the effect was to give Task Force 45 an increasingly broad front. At the end of September all the units under the command of IV Corps, except the 6 South African Armoured Division, had had additional territory added to their zones. Only the weakness of the opposing enemy forces permitted a continuation of the drive into the mountains.

E. *SITUATION OF FIFTH ARMY*

30 SEPTEMBER

— During the month of September Fifth Army had won control of 41 of the 65 road miles separating Florence from Bologna, and troops on Mount Battaglia were within visual range of the Po plain. The Gothic Line defenses, Futa Pass, and Radicosa Pass all lay behind the II Corps troops spearheading the attack along the axis of Highway 65; although the 88th Division had been unable to reach the Po plain in its flanking attack toward Imola, heavy artillery located in the Santerno Valley could place interdictory fire on Highway 9, the enemy's principal lateral route of communications. These were substantial successes. Nor had the momentum of the offensive been reduced. In order to stop the thrust of the 88th Division the enemy had drained troops from the Radicosa Pass area, thereby sacrificing the best defensive position north of the Gothic Line. In the period 28–30 September few contacts were made as II Corps troops occupied the commanding heights overlooking Radicosa Pass and pushed forward in an effort to measure the extent of the latest enemy withdrawal. At the end of September Fifth Army had reason to anticipate an early end to the fighting in the mountains.

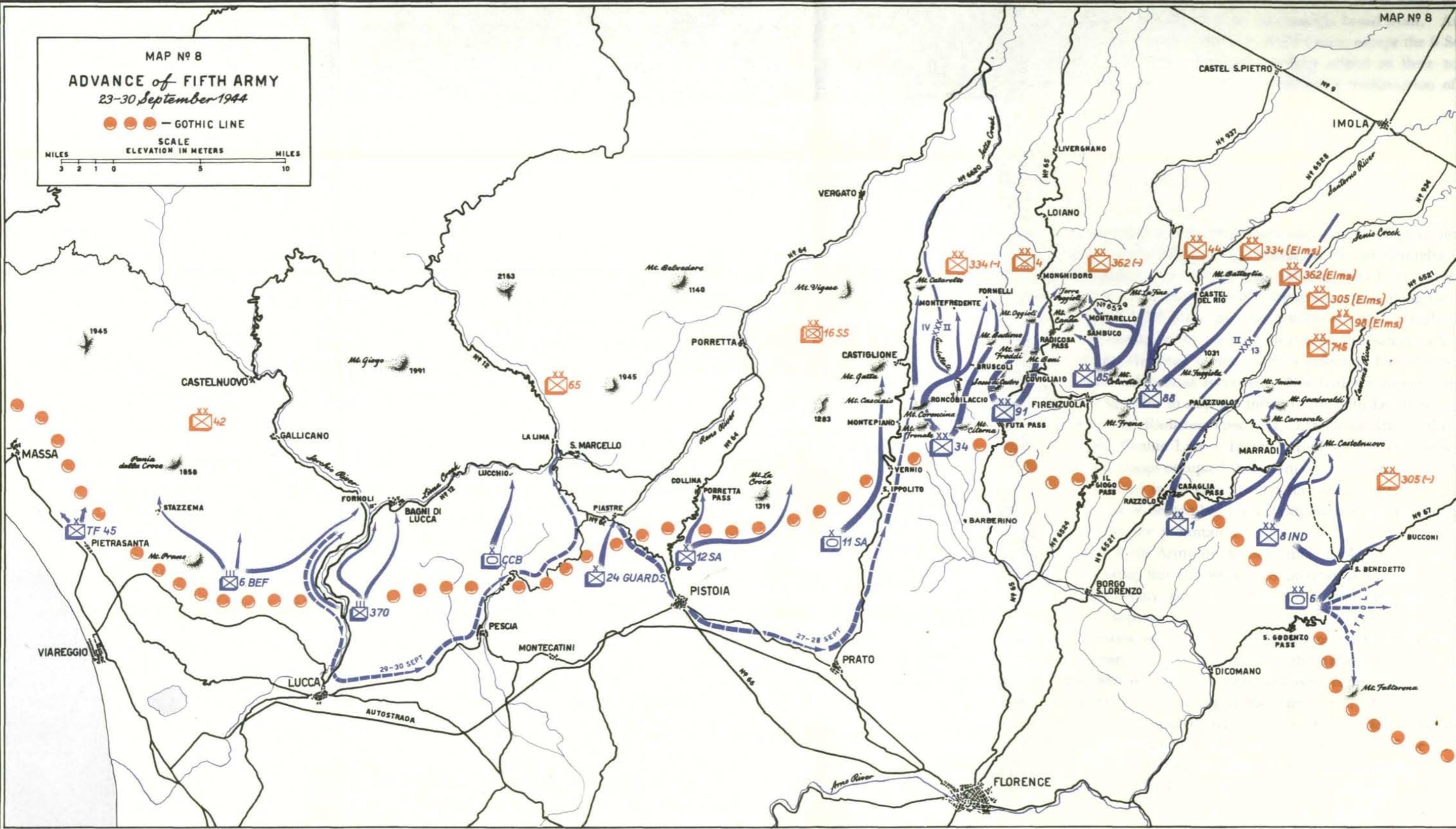
Although the situation of Fifth Army on 30 September looked favorable, certain aspects of the fighting during this last week of September gave evidence of a relative improvement in the enemy position. Mounting casualties and battle-weariness were beginning to sap the offensive strength of the attacking troops. The 85th, 91st, and 34th Divisions, which had led the attack on the Gothic Line, had all been fighting steadily for nearly 3 weeks, often with all three regiments of a division in the line, and the reserve 88th Division not only had been committed for over 1 week but had suffered heavier losses than any of the other three. Units of 13 and IV Corps, although more lightly engaged, had been in the line for 1 month or longer. The enemy too had suffered heavy casualties, but, as a result of the slowing down of the Eighth Army offensive and the inability of IV Corps to pin down all the enemy units originally on its front, Kesselring was able to shift more and more

MAP Nº 8
ADVANCE of FIFTH ARMY
23-30 September 1944

●●●●● — GOTHIC LINE

SCALE
 ELEVATION IN METERS

MILES 3 2 1 0 5 10



divisions to contain the bulge formed by the II Corps attack. From a strength of one full division and elements of two others facing II Corps on 13 September, the enemy force identified on the II Corps front had grown by 30 September to four full divisions and elements of three others with additional units on the way.

The weather also worked to the benefit of the enemy. With the beginning of the fall rains, trails and secondary roads turned into muddy quagmires, complicating supply and service functions already made difficult by the distance the Army had moved from base installations and dumps in the Florence area. Fog and mist accompanying the rains concealed enemy troop movements and did much to counterbalance our superiority in air power and artillery. Rover Joe operated on only 2 of the last 7 days of the month. XXII TAC succeeded in flying 1904 sorties in the period 20–30 September, mainly directed against Highway 65 and other lines of communication, but its planes were grounded on the last 3 days of the month when the enemy was pulling back from Radicosa Pass and shifting troops to the Mount Battaglia area. Similarly artillery observation planes were held down on many days, and even ground observers were frequently unable to direct the fire. Weather conditions promised to deteriorate further as winter approached. The success of the Fifth Army offensive depended in large part on the ability of II Corps to reach the Po Valley before bad weather and the arrival of additional enemy troops nullified its temporary advantage.