

CHAPTER IV * * * * *

Breaching the Gothic Line

DAWN of 13 September found Fifth Army ready to enter the critical phase of its carefully planned offensive to reach the Po Valley. Although it was not yet certain that the enemy intended to call a halt to the brief delaying actions and successive withdrawals which had marked his retreat north of the Arno River, the troops of II Corps who were to spearhead the Army attack were now up against the main defenses of the Gothic Line. Troops of the 85th Division who had moved up the previous night to take over their allotted attack zone on the II Corps right flank could pick out, through the early morning mist, the dim outline of the lower slopes of Mount Altuzzo and the series of roughly parallel ridges rising up to other peaks forming the mountain barrier east of Il Giogo Pass. On the other side of Highway 6524 troops of the 363d Infantry were studying the rugged contours of Mount Monticelli, the key bastion on the west side of the pass. These troops and others of the 91st and 34th Divisions attacking farther to the west against Mount Calvi and Mount Frassino as well as British troops of 13 Corps on the right below Casaglia Pass could measure the natural strength of the mountain barrier ahead. Staff officers, too, who had been encouraged by the speed of the Army advance into believing that the enemy would continue to withdraw, anticipated that the Germans would fight hard to hold the Gothic Line until the withdrawal could be carried out in an orderly fashion.

A. *DISPOSITION OF FORCES*

The enemy, in spite of the strength of the Gothic Line defenses, was ill prepared for the II Corps attack. In mid-August Kesselring had had five divisions in the central sector north of Florence. The 4th Parachute Division, astride Highway 65, had been flanked on the west by the 29th Panzer Grenadier and the 26th Panzer

Divisions and on the east by the 356th and 715th Grenadier Divisions. By 10 September three of these five divisions had been moved to the Adriatic coast. The gap on the west left by the removal first of the 26th Panzer Division and then of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division was partly filled by moving the 334th Grenadier Division into the portion of the Gothic Line astride Highway 6620, but there was no unit available to replace the 356th Grenadier Division when it left at the end of the first week in September. To fill the resulting gap on the east the 4th Parachute and the 715th Grenadier Divisions were forced to extend their already long fronts. The 4th Parachute Division alone was responsible for most of the II Corps attack zone, and, although over 600 replacements had arrived shortly before the II Corps offensive was launched, the division was spread thin with no available reserves. All three of its regiments were in the line: the 10th Parachute Regiment in the Mount Frassino area, the 11th Parachute Regiment in the Mount Calvi area, and the 12th Parachute Regiment in the Mount Altuzzo area. Additional complications arose from the fact that the boundary between the 4th Parachute and the 715th Grenadier Divisions east of Mount Verruca was also the boundary between the German Fourteenth and Tenth Armies, leaving the enemy with a divided command in the sector where II Corps planned to strike its main blow.

In contrast to the relative weakness of the enemy forces holding the Gothic Line, after the introduction of the 85th Division on 13 September II Corps had three infantry divisions committed and a fourth in reserve. All three of the attacking divisions were reinforced. The 85th Division, which was assigned the narrow zone east of Highway 6524, had attached to it the 752d Tank Battalion (less Company D), the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the 84th Chemical Battalion (less Companies A and D). The 19th Engineer Combat Regiment was in support to assist the division engineers in keeping supply routes open as far forward as possible, and four of the nine pack mule groups attached to II Corps were allotted to the division to supply the troops as they pushed up into the mountains. The 91st Division in the center had the 755th Tank Battalion, the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion (less Company C and one reconnaissance platoon), and Company D, 84th Chemical Battalion. The bulk of these attached units were allotted to the 362d Infantry, which was assigned the greater part of the division zone, while the 363d Infantry was concentrated on the right to make the main effort for the division against Mount Monticelli. The 34th Division on the left had the 757th Tank Battalion; Company C and one reconnaissance platoon of the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion; and Company A, 84th Chemical Battalion. Engineer support for the 34th and 91st Divisions was provided by the 39th Engineer Combat Regiment. In the course of the attack on the Il Giogo Pass sector of the Gothic Line, which represented less than one-third of the II Corps zone, General Keyes massed approximately 50 percent of his

committed infantry strength and an equal proportion of his pool of tank, tank destroyer, and chemical units, giving him an estimated superiority of three-to-one over the defending enemy forces.

In addition to normal division artillery, each of the attacking divisions received direct support from one corps field artillery group. Support for the 34th Division was provided by the British 10 Army Group Royal Artillery (10 AGRA), consisting of three 5.5-inch gun/howitzer regiments; for the 91st Division, by the 77th Field Artillery Group, consisting of two 155-mm howitzer battalions, one 155-mm gun battalion, and one 4.5-inch gun battalion; and for the 85th Division, by the 178th Field Artillery Group, consisting of three 155-mm howitzer battalions and one 4.5-inch gun battalion. The 85th Division was also aided by the three 105-mm howitzer battalions of the 88th Division. For long-range counterbattery fire and particularly for the work of knocking out the strongly reinforced enemy bunkers and pillboxes the 423d Field Artillery Group, consisting of two battalions (less one section) of 240-mm howitzers, three sections of 8-inch guns, and two battalions of 155-mm guns, provided general support along the whole of the Corps front. As soon as the engineers opened up Highways 65 and 6521 the long-range artillery moved into positions around the village of Vaglia on 11 September while the bulk of the medium range corps artillery was concentrated closer to the Sieve River. Air strips for the artillery observation planes also were located in the Sieve Valley. By 12 September the corps and division artillery units had moved into firing positions, and the work of softening up the enemy defenses was well under way.

B. *THE ASSAULT ON IL GIOGO PASS*

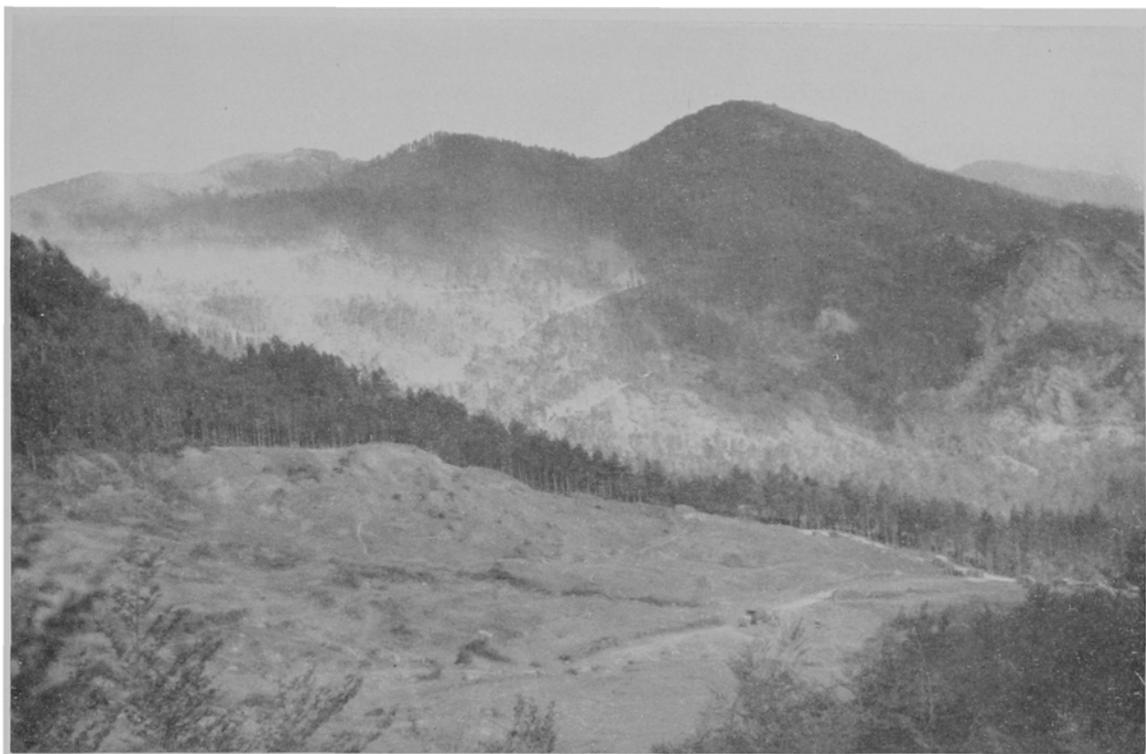
13-22 SEPTEMBER

Although the Fifth Army plan for breaching the Gothic Line called for a coordinated attack in which all three corps were involved, the critical zone of operations was limited first to the portion of the line assigned to II Corps and the 1 Division lying between Vernio on Highway 6620 and Casaglia Pass on Highway 6521, and then further to the Il Giogo Pass area where the 85th Division and the 363d Infantry were initially committed. It was in the latter area that the Army plan called for the breach in the Gothic Line to be made, and it was there that General Keyes had concentrated his main striking force. The attacks launched by the units on the right and left of Il Giogo Pass had the primary purpose of pinning down enemy troops which might otherwise be shifted to meet the main attack and the secondary purpose of paving the way for a rapid exploitation once the breach was made. The success of the Army plan rested on the outcome of the battle for Il Giogo Pass.

1. *Terrain.* (See Map No. 5.) The enemy defenses protecting Il Giogo Pass were designed to take full advantage of an integrated series of 3,000-foot peaks forming the watershed between the Sieve and Santerno Rivers, which flow in parallel courses before turning respectively south to the Arno and north to the Po Valleys. The 85th Division, attacking on the east side of the pass, was faced with four prominent peaks: Mount Altuzzo, Mount Verruca, Hill 918, and Signorini Hill, arrayed shoulder to shoulder from west to east. Due to the eroding effect of mountain streams draining south to the Sieve Valley the southern slopes of these hills have been broken up into a series of roughly parallel ridges and deep gullies. The narrow, knife-edged ridges are covered with stunted brush and scattered patches of pines except where bare rock outcroppings and sheer cliffs furnish no foothold for vegetation. There are few trees on the forward slopes of Mount Altuzzo, but parts of Mount Verruca are heavily wooded with pines and chestnuts. North of the crests there had been thick stands of pines before the Germans began cutting them to build defenses; many more on the south slopes were felled to provide barriers as well as to clear fields of fire; and artillery shells tore away most of the remaining trees during the course of the action.

The portion of the Gothic Line just west of Il Giogo Pass where the 91st Division was to make its main effort is shaped like a huge amphitheater with two wings extending south from the main east-west divide. Mount Calvi, a smooth, dome-shaped hill, forms the end of the west wing, and Mount Monticelli, the key objective west of the pass, forms the tip of the east wing. The rough floor of the amphitheater is divided by a secondary ascending ridge running north from the village of Sant' Agata to the main divide. The same confusion of brush-clad ridges and gullies which characterizes the approaches to the heights east of the pass is true of those on the west, although the upper slopes of Mount Monticelli are more even and are almost devoid of cover. Other than Highway 6524, no road crosses the divide and only narrow trails penetrate beyond the lower slopes of the mountains. To open the highway it would first be necessary to capture Mount Altuzzo and Mount Monticelli, the two heights dominating Il Giogo Pass. These two objectives were in turn subject to observation and crossfire from the adjoining heights. If the enemy made good use of the mountains and his prepared defenses, which in fact proved to be much more extensive than preliminary air photos had indicated, only a coordinated attack against the heights on both sides of the road could achieve success.

2. *First Attacks.* During 12 September the 363d Infantry, advancing astride Highway 6524, had reached the approaches to both Mount Monticelli and Mount Altuzzo. Small-arms fire from enemy outposts and increasing mortar and artillery fire had slowed and then halted the leading companies, but the division was still hopeful that the two mountains could be gained before the 85th Division took over



Looking across Il Giogo Pass toward Peabody Peak and Mount Altuzzo



Artillery fire destroyed these pine trees on the heights near Il Giogo Pass



German positions were designed to take full advantage of the rugged terrain



Troops of the 338th Infantry climbing a narrow trail up Mount Verruca

the zone to the east of the highway. While the 85th Division was moving up into position a night attack was launched by the 1st Battalion, 363d Infantry, against the southwestern slopes of Mount Monticelli; at the same time the 3d Battalion sent two companies against the southeastern slopes of Mount Monticelli and one company to take Mount Altuzzo. At 2115, when the attack was supposed to begin, the 1st Battalion communications were out, and Company C failed to make contact with Company A, which was leading the advance. In the darkness Company A lost formation just short of the hamlet of Casacce, 1,000 yards short of its objective, where it was forced back by mortar and flanking machine gun fire. Company I, leading the 3d Battalion attack, advanced along the east side of Highway 6524 to a point on the southeastern slope of Mount Monticelli 600 yards north of the hamlet of L'Uomo Morto. The troops were constantly under fire, and at daylight a German counterattack forced them back to the shelter of the houses in the village. Company K, supporting the attack to the left rear, reached parallel positions in the draw south of Hill 763.

The night attack launched by Company L to take Mount Altuzzo met with no better success. Due to the darkness and unfamiliarity with the complicated maze of ridges and gullies which rise up to the crests of Mount Altuzzo and Mount Verruca, Company L lost its way. After reaching Hill 617, one of the knobs on the main ridge leading to Mount Verruca, the company commander detected his error and drew back to the hamlet of Volpinaia. He then started up the ridge leading to the crest of Mount Altuzzo, reaching Hill 578 before daybreak. A dawn attack carried the tired troops forward another 100 yards before machine gun fire from the front and flanks forced a halt. From his position below Hill 624 the company commander was unable to see the crest of Mount Altuzzo, and he erroneously reported his position as just short of the summit. At 0600, 13 September, when a general Corps attack was scheduled to start, neither Mount Monticelli nor Mount Altuzzo had been taken, and the 363d Infantry had only confused reports on the location of its forward units.

Corps plans called for a coordinated attack in which the 34th, 91st, and 85th Divisions each was to commit two regiments. Farther to the east the 1 Division, in accordance with Army orders that 13 Corps support the II Corps offensive by applying pressure along its left flank, also was prepared to attack, employing the 66 Brigade west of Highway 6521 toward Mount Pratone. In the Il Giogo Pass area the 363d Infantry was still faced with the task of taking Mount Monticelli while the 85th Division was now in position to assume responsibility for the zone east of Highway 6524. General Coulter planned to employ initially the 338th Infantry under Col. William H. Mikkelsen to pass through the 363d Infantry on Mount Altuzzo and the 339th Infantry under Col. Brookner W. Brady to take Mount Verruca. The 337th

Infantry remained in division reserve. In spite of the fact that the night attack launched by the 363d Infantry had failed to achieve its objectives and that the situation on both Mount Altuzzo and Mount Monticelli was confused, the Corps attack was launched as scheduled.

For the attack on Mount Altuzzo, Colonel Mikkelsen employed the 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry, astride Highway 6524 and the 1st Battalion up the main ridge leading to the crest of the mountain. During the morning no preparatory or supporting artillery fire could be used until the advance units of the 363d Infantry were accurately located; in effect the day's action was restricted to feeling out the enemy defenses and occupying ground from which new attacks could be launched. At the end of the day the 2d Battalion had reached positions to the right and to the left of the highway in the vicinity of L'Uomo Morto while Company A, leading the 1st Battalion, took up positions on the west side of the mountain. When the early morning haze lifted at 0800, Company B, following behind Company A, was at the edge of an open field exposed to enemy observation; it failed to reach the mountain. Company A, working its way up the west side of the ridge, passed by Company L, 363d Infantry, without making contact and then pushed on as far as a trail northwest of Hill 624 before a barbed wire entanglement and heavy machine gun fire forced a halt. In the afternoon Company L was driven back by friendly artillery fire and played no further part in the battle for Mount Altuzzo.

The 339th Infantry on the right jumped off from positions near the village of Grezzano 2 miles short of the crest of Mount Verruca. The 1st Battalion on the left moved over the foothills to the western arm of the mountain while the 2d Battalion attacked the eastern arm. In the early morning progress was hindered only by the ascending slopes, and by 0715 Companies A and B were on Hill 617, the knob at the end of the western ridge. Here they were stopped by cross-fire from the eastern slopes of Mount Altuzzo and from a strongpoint on Hill 691 farther up the ridge. Companies F and G went up the right arm of the mountain with the first objective of taking Hill 732. Company F was stopped at the head of a draw just below a strongpoint built around three houses south of the objective; Company G, moving up the main draw to the right of Hill 732, was stopped by fire from positions on a nose covering the draw from the north. To the east of Mount Verruca Company E started up the ridge leading to the crest of Rotto Hill only to be forced to seek cover in the draw to the left of the ridge by small-arms and mortar fire which resulted in over 30 casualties. A night attack by the 2d Battalion failed to make further gains, and by the end of the day it was evident that Mount Verruca was as well fortified as Mount Altuzzo. Attacks directed against either Hill 691 or Hill 732 were subject to cross-fire from the strongpoint on the other hill as well as to flanking fire from Mount Altuzzo and Rotto Hill.

For the 363d Infantry, on the lower slopes of Mount Monticelli, the Corps plan of attack for the morning of 13 September was confused by the action of the previous night. At 0600, when the attack was to begin, the 3d Battalion was being driven back by an enemy counterattack, and it was unable to do more than hold its positions at L'Uomo Morto. Farther to the west the 1st Battalion reorganized before dawn and repeated its attempt of the previous night. Companies A and C established communication and jumped off together. Company A again followed the draw toward Casacce but was beaten back by accurate mortar fire, which killed 5 and wounded 17 men; Company C reached only the southwestern slopes of Al Pozzo Hill. Colonel Magill then ordered the 1st Battalion to hold fast while the 2d Battalion was committed on its right at 1600 with the objective of seizing Hill 871, the eastern summit of the mountain. The battalion, screened by smoke, was to proceed from Al Pozzo Hill northeast over Hill 763 to the summit. After passing through Company C southwest of Al Pozzo Hill, Company F, leading on the right, struck a minefield in the saddle between Al Pozzo Hill and Hill 763. The exploding mines gave away the position of the troops to the Germans, who immediately covered the area with fire, and it was dawn before the company had worked its way through and around the minefield to resume the attack. As the troops climbed the steep slope of Hill 763, machine guns from eight pillboxes on and to the left of the hill caught them in a concentration of fire so intense that before noon the 3d Platoon was reduced to nine men and one noncommissioned officer and the company was forced to halt.

By the end of 13 September the possibility that the enemy would withdraw from the Gothic Line without fighting was gone. On the contrary the battle for Il Giogo Pass had already begun to assume the proportions of an exhausting and bloody slugging match. On the night of 12-13 September the 91st Division had sent two battalions to seize the summits of both Mount Monticelli and Mount Altuzzo. Twenty-four hours later with all three of its battalions committed against Mount Monticelli alone, the 363d Infantry had succeeded only in making contact with the enemy's prepared defenses. Those defenses had not yet been dented at any point, and casualties in the assault units had begun to mount. The 338th and 339th Infantry were meeting equally stiff resistance from Mount Altuzzo and Mount Veruca, and similar reports were coming in from units all along the II Corps front. The enemy was fighting a skillful defensive action, laying in his mortar fire in every gully where our troops sought cover and sweeping the open slopes of the mountains with automatic fire. His defenses too were proving more extensive than previous reports had indicated. Their location was exposed only as the forward troops came within range of the hidden machine gun emplacements or when artillery fire plowed up the earth and tore away the protective camouflage. The attacks on 13 Sep-

tember, although they failed to attain their objectives, served to locate many of these positions; the work of reducing them had hardly begun.

3. *Wearing Down the Enemy.* The strength of the enemy defenses and the determination on the part of the 4th Parachute Division to hold its positions at all costs left no alternative open to General Keyes but to feed additional companies and battalions into the attack while concentrating every available weapon on the enemy defenses. Where possible antitank guns, tanks, and tank destroyers were brought up to employ direct fire on pillboxes, and the heavy-caliber 8-inch guns and 240-mm howitzers fired with precision adjustments to destroy emplacements out of range of these weapons or too strongly constructed to be disposed of by light or medium artillery. Corps medium artillery, in addition to firing on located enemy defenses and supporting the division artillery, kept up a 24-hour a day schedule of harassing fires on the reverse slopes of the mountains in an effort to isolate the area under attack from supplies and reinforcements. The effect of this fire could not be felt immediately, and the experience of the Cassino fighting was proof that, when well dug in, troops could withstand prolonged periods of shelling without suffering heavy losses. It remained for the infantry to drive the enemy from his positions and to hold the ground won against his quickly organized counterattacks. So far as possible the attacks were coordinated at the Corps and division level and were launched simultaneously on a broad front, but in most cases the fighting resolved into a series of small-unit actions which resulted less in ground gained than in the gradual wearing down of the enemy strength.

For the attack on Mount Altuzzo the 338th Infantry continued to employ the 2d Battalion astride Highway 6524 and the 1st Battalion up the main ridge line. On the morning of 14 September Company G reached the lower slopes of Mount Monticelli, and a platoon of Company E got as far as the bare rock slope of Peabody Ridge, a secondary peak just west of the summit of Mount Altuzzo. Both companies suffered heavy casualties, and the advance platoon of Company E had to be withdrawn that night. The 2d Battalion was in the difficult position of being constantly under fire from both Mount Altuzzo and Mount Monticelli, neither of which was in its zone of operations, and it could do little beyond matching the progress of the units on its flanks.

The 1st Battalion made a spectacular but abortive advance on the 14th. Company B, after failing to contact Company A, followed the wrong ridge and found itself on the exposed rocky peak of Peabody Ridge. Unable to exploit its success the company clung to the peak until dark when it was ordered to pull back. Company A, which had no communications with the battalion and had failed to receive the attack order, achieved only slight gains along the main ridge. The next morning Companies A and C continued the advance along the main ridge under the cover of

a smoke screen, preceded by an intense artillery concentration which lasted for 1 hour before the attack. A pillbox on Peabody Ridge and one on Mount Altuzzo were destroyed by the 240-mm howitzers in the morning, and the big guns continued to pound the summit and the rear slope of the mountain throughout the day. The two companies jumped off at 0900. Initial progress was good, and the lead platoon of Company A had reached the base of Hill 962 before it was stopped temporarily. It appeared possible that the summit would be reached until our own artillery fire began landing among the men of Company C, forcing a withdrawal to defiladed positions. The initiative in the attack was lost, and at the end of the day the summit of Mount Altuzzo was still firmly in enemy hands.

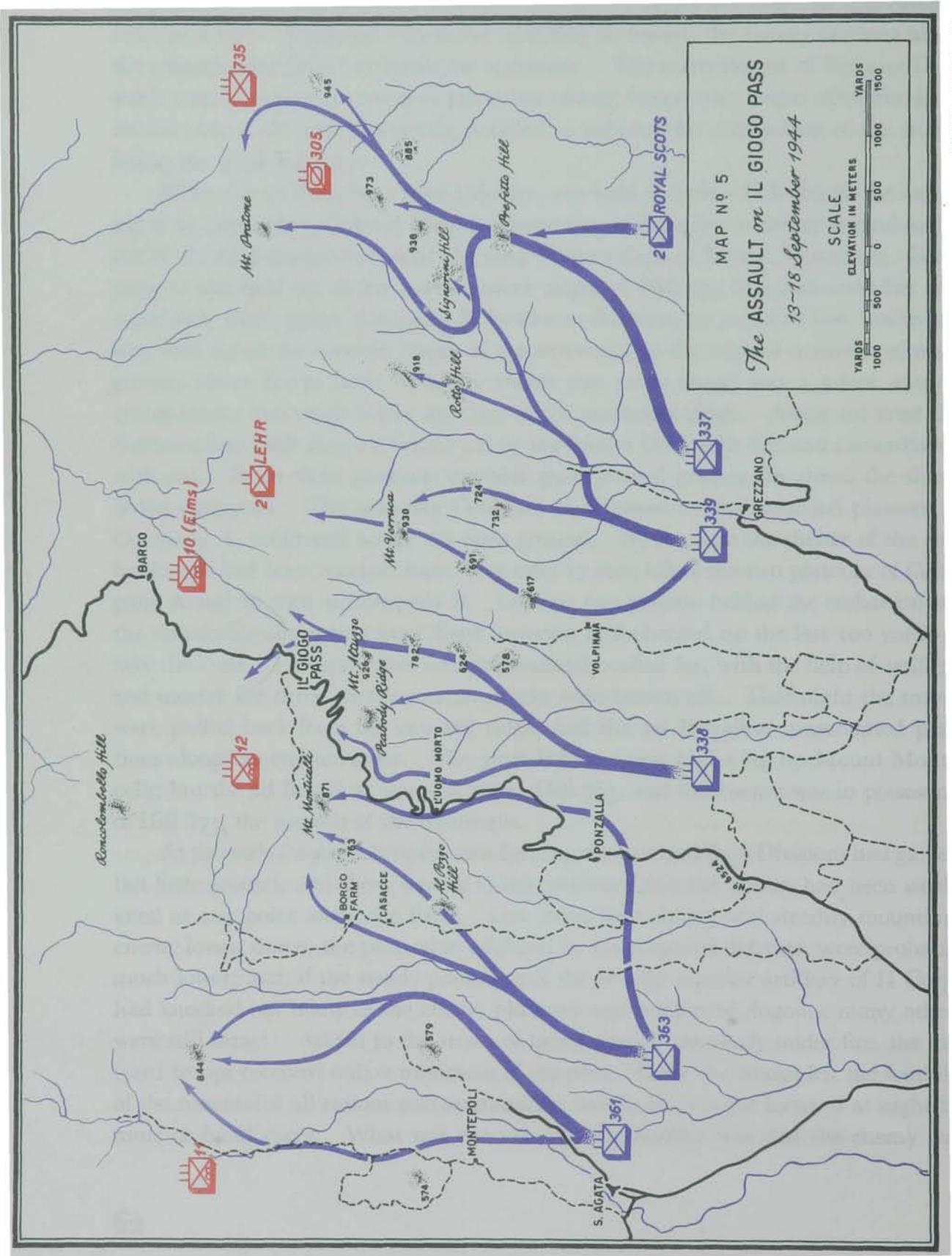
The 339th Infantry, unable to gain ground in its attacks against Mount Veruca, concentrated its efforts on 14 September toward knocking out the enemy defenses. Division artillery and the Cannon Company shelled the heights, and direct fire was placed on each visible pillbox. The 1st Battalion brought up 37-mm antitank guns on Hill 617, and tanks of Company C, 752d Tank Battalion, were ordered up to fire on pillboxes on Hill 691; artillery and tank destroyers tore up the three-house strongpoint below Hill 732; and in the afternoon fighter-bombers hit the reverse slope of the main ridge directly to the north and Mount Pratone to the northeast. A regimental attack was then launched at midnight and continued the next morning in an effort to take Hill 691 and Hill 732 by storm. The troops were unable to get through the mines and barbed wire protecting the enemy positions, and they were repeatedly driven back by mortar and machine gun fire. Although little ground had been gained, the enemy defenses were gradually being pounded to pieces by the continuous shelling, and the infantry attacks gave the enemy troops no respite.

On the west side of Highway 6524, the 91st Division was experiencing similar difficulty in reaching the crest of Mount Monticelli. After the first efforts failed on 13 September it became necessary to concentrate the whole of the 363d Infantry on Mount Monticelli, leaving the 362d Infantry with a front of nearly 5 miles. In an effort to relieve some of the strain on the 362d Infantry and to apply pressure on the west side of Mount Monticelli, General Livesay committed the 361st Infantry, commanded by Col. Rudolph W. Broedlow, along the ridge line north of Sant'Agata. The 361st Infantry entered the battle at 0530, 14 September, with the mission of passing through the left elements of the 363d Infantry and swinging around Mount Monticelli to the portion of the divide lying to the northwest of it. The regiment attacked on a two-battalion front, the 3d Battalion moving up on the west side of the central ridge and the 1st Battalion on the right. Supported by artillery fire directed against enemy positions on Roncolombello Hill to the north of Mount Monticelli and aided by a smoke screen, the 1st Battalion progressed steadily until it had reached the southeastern slopes of Hill 844, the focal point of the enemy defenses on the cen-

tral ridge line. There it was held up by fire from both Hill 844 and Roncolombello Hill. The left flank of the 3d Battalion was stopped at Hill 574 north of the hamlet of Montepoli, leaving the two battalions strung out across the ridge on a northeast-southwest line. Repeated efforts the next day to breach the enemy defenses along the central ridge failed to break the stalemate. The commitment of the 91st Division's reserve regiment served to pin down enemy troops who might otherwise have moved over to Mount Monticelli; it failed to achieve the outflanking of the troops facing the 363d Infantry.

When the 2d Battalion, 363d Infantry, was held up below Hill 763 on the morning of 14 September, Colonel Magill ordered the 1st Battalion to swing around to the left of the 2d Battalion and seize the long western slope of Mount Monticelli. Company C was held up on the lower eastern slopes of Hill 579 by small-arms fire and made only slight gains; Company B, farther to the west, by nightfall had worked its way well up on the western slopes of the mountain to the edge of a stretch of open ground above Borgo farm. Plainly visible 200 yards ahead was a 5-foot natural embankment 100 yards below the crest of the northwest ridge. Along the crest the Germans had built dugouts reinforced by log frames filled with dirt and camouflaged with sod. From these positions machine guns poured grazing fire down the slopes of the mountain. The next day Company B, followed by two attached platoons of Company A, infiltrated across the open ground. By the time the shelter of the embankment had been reached there were only 17 men left of the two platoons of Company A and 80 men in Company B. Leaving one platoon behind the embankment, the remainder of the tiny force fixed bayonets and charged up the last 100 yards to take the crest. Defensive fires were immediately called for; with the help of artillery and mortar fire three enemy counterattacks were beaten off. That night the troops were pulled back from the exposed ridge, and the 1st Battalion consolidated positions along the embankment. The 363d Infantry now had a leg up Mount Monticelli; but the 2d Battalion was still below Hill 763, and the enemy was in possession of Hill 871, the summit of the mountain.

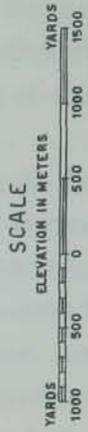
At the end of 2 days of continuous fighting the 91st and 85th Divisions had gained but little ground, and there was no visible evidence that the enemy had been weakened at any point along the front. Our losses were heavy and steadily mounting; enemy losses, due to the protection afforded by his prepared defenses, were probably much lower; and, if the steady pounding of the greatly superior artillery of II Corps had knocked out many of the enemy pillboxes and reinforced dugouts, many others were still intact. Added to the strain of being almost constantly under fire, the forward troops received only a minimum of supplies. Once the troops left the foothills of the mountains all rations and ammunition had to be brought forward at night by mule or hand carry. What was not immediately evident was that the enemy was



MAP No 5

The ASSAULT on IL GIOGO PASS

13-18 September 1944



experiencing ever greater difficulty in supplying his troops and particularly in getting replacements and reinforcements forward to the 11th and 12th Parachute Regiments, which were attempting to hold an area extending from west of Mount Calvi to Mount Verruca. The two regiments had been engaged from the beginning of the II Corps offensive, and the losses suffered in the costly war of attrition being fought all along the II Corps front rapidly reduced their strength.

It was not until 14 September that the enemy realized the strength of the attack on the Il Giogo Pass area and took hurried measures to reinforce the two parachute regiments. It was then too late to bring up more than small units. The 4th Parachute Division utilized every available man, sending up units from the 4th Antitank Battalion, the 4th Parachute Replacement Battalion, and miscellaneous headquarters and service personnel. When these reinforcements proved inadequate the 10th Parachute Regiment was pulled out from in front of the 34th Division and thrown in behind Mount Altuzzo and Mount Monticelli. Units also arrived from other divisions. The 305th Fusilier (Reconnaissance) Battalion (305th Grenadier Division) was rushed over from the Rimini area to reinforce the elements of the 715th Grenadier Division below Mount Pratone; the 2d Battalion, Infantry Lehr Brigade, which had been attached to the 65th Grenadier Division, was ordered to relieve the 3d Battalion, 12th Parachute Regiment, on Mount Verruca on the night of 16-17 September; and a Lithuanian labor battalion was sent up to provide replenishment for the 1st Battalion, 12th Parachute Regiment. The bulk of these replacements did not arrive until 16-17 September, when the battered paratroopers were approaching a state of exhaustion. The curtain of harassing fire laid down by the II Corps artillery permitted only a trickle of supplies and ammunition to reach the beleaguered troops, and many of the replacements either failed to arrive or were too demoralized to offer substantial support.

4. *The 85th Division Breaks Through.* When the attacks of the 338th and 339th Infantry on 15 September failed to take Mount Altuzzo and Mount Verruca, General Keyes ordered the 85th Division to commit the 337th Infantry on the right of the division in an effort to outflank the enemy defenses by seizing Mount Pratone, a massive height to the northeast of Mount Verruca. It was then to drive northwest through the zone of the 339th Infantry. The initial attack was to be made by the 66 Brigade, which had reached Prefetto Hill, 1½ miles south of Mount Pratone, on 15 September. Support for the attack was to be provided by II Corps and 85th Division artillery, and Company K, 339th Infantry, was to be shifted east to take Signorini Hill. The 337th Infantry would follow the British troops by bounds, prepared to pass through them as soon as Mount Pratone was taken. After some delay occasioned by the difficulty of loading mules in the darkness the 3d Battalion, 337th Infantry, began moving up at 0630, 16 September. By noon it had reached

the positions of the 2 Royal Scots, the leading element of the 66 Brigade, on Hill 938. Since the British attack had made only limited advances, command of the zone was passed to the 337th Infantry. The 3d Battalion then attacked at 1300, moving along the ridge leading to Mount Pratone until fire from Hills 973 and 885 to the north and east forced a halt 1,000 yards short of the objective. Efforts of the 339th Infantry to take Signorini Hill also failed. The attempt to outflank the enemy had succeeded only in broadening the division front and in stepping up the process of attrition.

On the night of 16–17 September ⁽¹⁾ the focus of interest shifted from the flanking thrust against Mount Pratone back to Mount Altuzzo where the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, repeated the attack made on 15 September. Following an hour-long concentration of artillery fire on the summit and partly concealed by a smoke screen, Companies A and C jumped off at 1630. In the absence of Colonel Mikkelsen, who was sick, Brig. Gen. Lee S. Gerow, Assistant Division Commander, took control of the action. He ordered the 3d Battalion to move up in readiness to pass through the 1st Battalion before dawn. In this instance the attack went according to plan. The enemy's power of resistance, worn down by days of shelling and repeated infantry assaults, finally cracked. At 0330 the 1st Battalion reported that it was on Hill 926, the higher of the two peaks marking the summit of Mount Altuzzo. Bypassed pockets of enemy resistance and fire from the north side of Highway 6524 kept the 3d Battalion engaged throughout the day, but a night attack completed the work of clearing the mountain and the heights across the highway. By the morning of 18 September the 338th Infantry had achieved a clean break at the most important point in the Il Giogo Pass defenses.

The capture of Mount Altuzzo on 17 September was accompanied by a general collapse of enemy resistance all along the 85th Division front. The 2d Battalion, 339th Infantry, attacking on the right of the regimental zone, took Signorini Hill with one company at 0300 and after dawn captured Hill 918 on the ascending ridge above Rotto Hill. The 3d Battalion, in the center, took Hill 732 and Hill 724, the bitterly contested knobs on the eastern ridge of Mount Verruca, while the 1st Battalion on the western ridge captured Hill 691 and then went on to take the summit of Mount Verruca by noon. The 2d Battalion, Infantry Lehr Brigade, which had arrived on the night of 16–17 September to relieve the battered 3d Battalion, 12th Parachute Regiment, was caught just as it was taking up its new positions. Already disorganized by artillery fire on its way up the mountain, the battalion was almost completely destroyed by the 339th Infantry; what was left of one company of the 12th Parachute Regiment surrendered.

⁽¹⁾ At 0300, 17 September, Army time changed from B Time, 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Standard Time (Z), to A Time, 1 hour ahead of Greenwich Standard Time.