

## B. FROM THE PO TO THE ALPINE FOOTHILLS

24-26 APRIL

On 24 April the sands were running out for the Italian branch of the Wehrmacht. Eight days of life remained to a once proud army, 8 days of frantic efforts to escape a relentless, powerful pursuer, 8 days of disintegration of leadership, organization, and the will to resist in the face of inevitable defeat. As they fled back across the Po, the German armies in Italy were but a pale, ineffectual shadow of their former selves. They were in ignominious flight; their center north of Bologna was completely smashed, yielding thousands of prisoners and masses of equipment, and the forces on either flank, though still in fair condition, were no longer attempting to give battle south of the river; they were concerned rather with efforts to prevent the spread of the penetration to the east or west while they made good their escape. Fifth Army at the Po was nearer the Alpine exits than the enemy forces on either side.

Plans for a set piece assault crossing against a strongly defended river line were abandoned when the disintegration of German forces became apparent. Victory was nearly within reach, and General Truscott ordered the attacking divisions to cross as soon as possible and to drive as far as they could. Infantry crossings were begun by the 10th Mountain Division on the 23d in the face of determined although insufficient opposition, and by the 24th the operation was in full swing; the 85th Division put its first forces across that day without firing a shot; ferries were established; and assault barges placed in operation. On the 25th two bridges were completed at San Benedetto and another the next day at Ostiglia. By that time the chase north of the river was in full cry.

1. *Plans and Bridging.* The 10th Mountain Division was already building up a bridgehead across the Po at San Benedetto and the 85th Division was preparing to move across on 24 April when General Truscott in a message to his Corps commanders outlined the next stage in the offensive. On the left IV Corps, employing initially three divisions north of the river, was to drive north on the axis San Benedetto—Mantua—Verona with the important Villafranca Airfield and the city of Verona, the Fascist capital of Italy, as the main objectives. (*See Map No. 6.*) At the same time IV Corps was to dispatch strong fast detachments straight north to the Alpine foothills where they would turn west to drive along the northern edge of the Po Valley through the cities of Brescia and Bergamo and so block the routes of egress from Italy between Lake Garda and Lake Como; the 34th Division would likewise drive northwest along the southern edge of the valley to block the Apennine passes. II Corps on the right was to move north along the axis of Highway 12, which enters Verona from the south, to seize the west bank of the Adige River from Legnago north to Verona. Four large towns and road junctions, Nogara, Isola, Cerea, and

Bovalone, forming a rough quadrangle in the II Corps zone were also to be captured. Full achievement of the objectives would block escape routes to the north between Verona and Lake Como and would place Fifth Army in position to assault in strength from Legnago to Lake Garda the last major defensive system left to the Germans in Italy, the Adige River line. Of great importance for future air operations in north Italy was the seizure of the Villafranca Airfield, 10 miles southwest of Verona.

Long before the spring offensive began the problem of the Po crossing had bulked large in all plans for completing the task of driving the Germans out of Italy. In preparation therefore Fifth Army troops were given training in river crossing operations with detailed and special training for engineer troops and for the 85th Division, which was to have the job of establishing the bridgehead if enemy resistance necessitated a formal assault crossing operation. During the winter Fifth Army accumulated a large stock of assault and bridging equipment. Prior to D Day one group of II Corps combat engineers was trained to use all available types of river-crossing equipment; those engineers were to support the operation of either II or IV Corps, depending upon which made the main effort. Army plans were general and based upon the requirements of two divisions; enough assault equipment to supply two regimental combat teams was to be kept on wheels in the Bologna area and issued when it became clear what units were in position to cross; in addition one bridge, assault equipment for two more regimental combat teams, and a second bridge were to be assembled on wheels in the order named.

Deterioration of the enemy situation made unnecessary a formal assault crossing operation. The Germans, unable to delay the advance to the Po, proved also neither able nor willing to make a strong stand at the river. The worst they produced were delaying actions along some division fronts; other divisions crossed without firing a shot. In view of the success of the advance to the river and the prospects of complete enemy collapse General Truscott ordered a "scramble" crossing whereby each division was to cross without delay and continue its drive. IV Corps had a head start, and on the 23d all three of its leading divisions arrived on the river banks ahead of any units in II Corps. On the morning of 23 April all readily available II Corps bridging equipment, consisting of assault equipment for one regimental combat team and one M-1 Treadway bridge, was diverted to IV Corps. Additional personnel and equipment diverted from II to IV Corps during the Po bridging operation on the left comprised operators for storm boats and Quonset barges, the 404th Engineer Combat Battalion, the 1554th Heavy Ponton Battalion intended originally to replace the M-1 bridge already sent to IV Corps, a company for operating floating equipment, and about half the II Corps Brockway trucks on which the diverted M-1 bridge was loaded.

A complete assault set for a regimental combat team had been previously deter-

mined to consist of 24 storm boats with motors and crews, 46 double assault boats with motors, 4 infantry support rafts, 3 Quonset barges and 48 Dukws (later increased to 60). When the convoy hauling the bridging equipment to IV Corps started arriving piecemeal at Anzola 10 miles northwest of Bologna about noon on 23 April there were neither assault boats, Quonset barges, nor operating crews. IV Corps still had 50 assault boats of its own at Anzola—another 50 had been sent the night before to the 10th Mountain Division—and added them to the convoy, which was then sent, minus Dukws, to the 85th Division. The 60 Dukws went to the 10th Mountain Division after being emptied of the Bailey bridge matériel with which many were loaded. The assault boats, when they arrived later in the day, were sent along with a power boat to the 1st Armored Division to supplement the M-2 rafts it already possessed. The M-1 bridge convoy was dispatched first to Quingentole in the 85th Division zone but was diverted to the San Benedetto site in the 10th Mountain Division zone, where it arrived on the morning of 24 April.

At San Benedetto the morning was spent in search for a suitable site and in sorting equipment. Shortly after noon the bridge was begun while the approach roads were cleared of wrecked enemy vehicles. At 1930 that same day a heavy ponton bridge was started 3 miles upstream at the site of a former floating bridge. At 1600, 24 April, a German ferry, capable of hauling two 2½-ton trucks at once, was operating; 6 hours later two of the three Quonset barges available were at work, although by daylight only one was still running; the other two, one of which had never started, had defective motors. Work proceeded rapidly during the night, and in the morning, as the men began to slow because of fatigue, two fresh companies were put on the ponton bridge and a whole battalion on the treadway bridge. By 1230, 25 April, the treadway bridge was opened for traffic, and 4 hours later the ponton bridge was open. The first 2 bridges over the Po were complete; both, each over 900 feet long, were ready approximately 24 hours after beginning of construction despite handicaps such as inexperienced labor on the ponton job and the necessity of putting in double anchors and an overhead cable to hold the treadway in the swift, soft-bottomed river. Within 48 hours an armored division, an infantry division reinforced with armor, and part of a II Corps division had passed over without incident.

As a result of the transfer of equipment to IV Corps on 23 April, the end of the day found II Corps depleted in engineer personnel and with no available floating bridge nor assault equipment. Beginning on the night of the 23d, equipment for the II Corps bridging operation began to arrive at Bologna, and preparations for the II Corps crossing proceeded. The proposed bridge site at Ostiglia presented two possibilities: the repair of a partially destroyed railroad bridge or the construction of an M-2 treadway. Since preparation of the railroad bridge would necessitate bridging two spans and flooring the entire structure, the latter alternative was chosen;

on 26 April the treadway bridge, about 1 mile downstream from the railroad bridge, was complete. The latter had been patched up enough in the interim to serve as a satisfactory foot bridge.

The II Corps crossing problem had been complicated by the necessity for re-assembling and preparing fresh equipment with insufficient engineer personnel after IV Corps received first priority on the crossing. Equipment was found often to be still crated for overseas shipment, unsorted, and lacking vital parts such as clamps and bolts; the treadway equipment was loaded on quartermaster semitrailers rather than on Brockway trucks, and Quonset barge motors were in faulty condition. Crossing the Po was dependent chiefly on the M-2 treadway and ferries. The Quonsets were not of much use until necessary parts could be secured from Leghorn; thereafter the 6 South African Armoured Division found them satisfactory. In the II Corps area the necessity for bridging the Po, shortly thereafter the Adige, and then the Brenta, all major rivers, placed a heavy load on the engineers.

2. *IV Corps—From the Po to the Adige.* In accordance with Army instructions General Crittenberger on 24 April issued orders for the attack. The 10th Mountain Division, screened on the left by the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron, was to drive around the east side of Mantua, across Highway 10 east of that city and Highway 62 north of there, seize Villafranca Airport before it was destroyed, and thence advance on Verona; Highway 11 west of that city was to be cut, and the escape routes to the Brenner Pass between Verona and Lake Garda were to be blocked. The 10th Mountain Division was instructed also to allow one combat command of the 1st Armored Division to pass through at San Benedetto with provision for the possible later passage of the whole division. The 85th Division on the IV Corps right was to cross the Po at Quingentole and advance straight north toward Verona. The 1st Armored Division, still south of the Po protecting the Corps left and blocking as far west as the Taro River northwest of Parma, was to continue its left flank protection and mopping-up south of the river with one combat command and to move the other across the river either to block escape routes along the north edge of the Po Valley or to assist at Verona.

South of the Po River along Highway 9 IV Corps was engaged in an effort to trap several enemy divisions bypassed in the Apennines by the main attack. There the 34th Division, which on the 23d had been relieved of the occupation of Bologna and assigned to IV Corps, was ordered to move northwest along the axis of Highway 9 to seize Parma, Fidenza, and Piacenza. The BEF, just emerging into the Po Plain at Vignola on the left of the 34th Division, was to move northwest, relieving 34th Division elements as it advanced, and to protect the left flank of IV Corps on the south while blocking Apennine exits. West and south of the BEF the 371st Infantry, relieving left flank elements of the BEF as it progressed north, was to move out of the

mountains along Highway 12. The 365th Infantry, formerly to the left of the 371st Infantry, had previously been detached from IV Corps to guard prisoners.

The 10th Mountain Division put all three of its regiments, including artillery, across the Po River on the 23d and 24th. In preparation for the forthcoming thrust a task force to spearhead the division drive to Verona was formed under the command of Col. William O. Darby, former commander of the Rangers, who had succeeded General Duff as assistant division commander. The force comprised the 13th Tank Battalion, attached from the 1st Armored Division; the 86th Mountain Infantry; Company B, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company B, 751st Tank Battalion; the 1125th Field Artillery Battalion; the 605th and 616th Field Artillery Battalions; and elements of the 126th Engineer Battalion. The force did not get under way, however, until completion of the Corps bridges at San Benedetto on 25 April permitted the crossing of heavy vehicles. Meanwhile on the 24th the beachhead was expanded, and small though troublesome delaying forces in stone houses in the vicinity were cleaned out by the 85th Mountain Infantry. During the night of 24–25 April many reports of enemy withdrawals were received from patrols and the partisans. Therefore, at about 0100, 25 April, the 85th Mountain Infantry began movement northward toward Villafranca Airport just south of Verona. At 0945 the 1st Battalion of the regiment radioed that it was in the airport and in a fight with a small detachment on the field. The field, although damaged, was not beyond repair. With no assurance of immediate support behind them, these men had marched almost 20 miles, most of that in darkness, through strange country, and without adequate maps. The daring of this advance was the climax of the entire drive by the division.

At dusk Task Force Darby caught up with the leading elements of the division at Villafranca Airport. From there the task force moved cautiously toward Verona during the night of 25–26 April to find upon arrival at 0600 that the 88th Division had entered it some 8 hours before. During the day, as a result of subsequent orders for future advances, Task Force Darby started from Verona to follow the road along the east side of Lake Garda. With the 85th Mountain Infantry at Villafranca, Task Force Darby moving along the east side of Garda, and the 86th Mountain Infantry resting at Verona, the escape routes to the Brenner between Verona and Lake Garda were tightly closed.

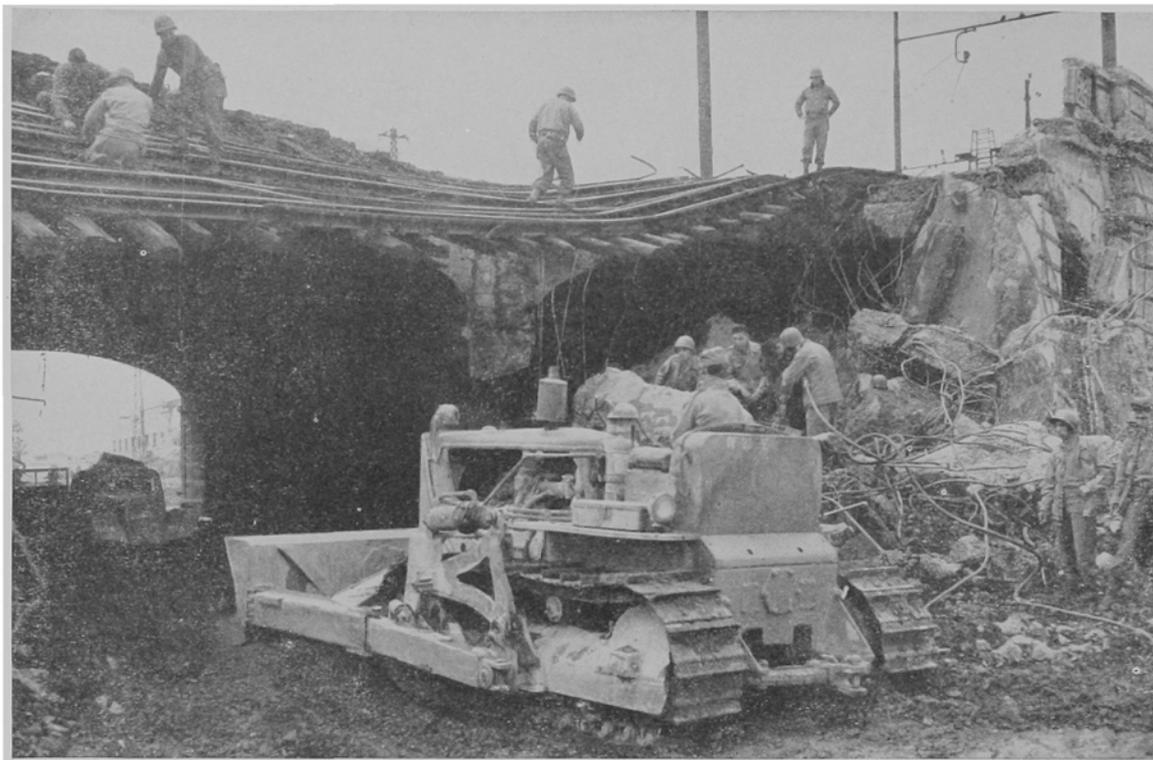
On the IV Corps right the 85th Division crossed the Po at Quingentole on the 24th and 25th. With the exception of the medium artillery, the supporting armor, and later supplies which came over on the San Benedetto bridges, all the combat elements of the division crossed on four infantry support rafts, three rafts improvised by the 310th Engineer Battalion, Dukws, and assault boats. The 337th Infantry started over at 0830, 24 April, behind a mortar smoke barrage on the north bank



*The 91st Reconnaissance Squadron passes through the Verona railroad station*



*Prisoners and the dead at the junction of Highways 12 and 62, Verona*



*Engineers of the 85th Division open a railroad overpass at Verona*



*Infantry of the 88th Division hunt snipers at the edge of Vicenza*

and a 15-minute preparation by 96 artillery pieces. At 0844 the first wave of assault boats hit the north beach. The river defenses were completely unmanned, and the bridgehead was secured without firing a shot. The 338th Infantry then moved up and crossed in the afternoon, and the 339th Infantry started across before daybreak the following day.

Before noon on the 25th the 338th and 339th Infantry, moving abreast, passed through the 337th Infantry bridgehead lines 2 miles north of the river and began the advance north. Few demolitions and road blocks were encountered, and the lack of enemy resistance was almost unbelievable. Although in smaller numbers than south of the Po, many Germans surrendered themselves rather than fall into the hands of the partisans, who were everywhere ferreting out the common enemy. After an uneventful advance against minor opposition the two attacking regiments took up defensive positions for the night 5 or 6 miles east and south of Villafranca from which they continued the attack at 0600 the following morning. At 0815, 26 April, advance elements of the 339th Infantry entered Verona to find it previously occupied by the 88th Division. After crossing the Adige, the 339th Infantry on a foot bridge west of Verona and the 338th Infantry on the railroad bridge south of the city, the 85th Division advanced north during the afternoon and night into the hills and the defenses of the Adige Line.

As the river crossings proceeded on the IV Corps right the 1st Armored Division discharged a dual mission: Combat Command A, less the 13th Tank Battalion attached to the 10th Mountain Division, assembled to cross the Po to block enemy escape routes to the Alps west of Lake Garda; and Task Force Howze continued the job of blocking escape routes south of the Po as far west as the Taro River northwest of Parma. Combat Command B, after being relieved by the 34th Division at the Secchia River south of Highway 9, assembled north of Reggio to replace Combat Command A in that area. Task Force Howze ran into numerous clashes on the 24th, but the state of enemy organization had so deteriorated that the frequent fights which developed resulted almost invariably in disproportionate losses to the enemy. The task force moved as far south as Parma but did not enter the city in the face of strong opposition. Later in the day elements went as far west as the Taro River, but in view of the extended nature of their position they were pulled back to the towns of Brescello and Colorno, north and northeast of Parma, to form road blocks during the night.

The next day, while Combat Command A crossed the Po, activities south of the river continued. The 81st Reconnaissance Squadron, moving along the south side of the Po River, seized two bridges over the Taro intact and made a small penetration west of that river. Elsewhere several fierce engagements ensued as enemy columns desperately attempting to force their way out of the trap were caught and destroyed by our forces. The patrolling and mopping-up continued north of Parma and even

slightly beyond the Taro until the 26th when 1st Armored Division forces south of the river were assembled to follow Combat Command A, which had started its advance that morning toward Highway 11 and northwest Italy.

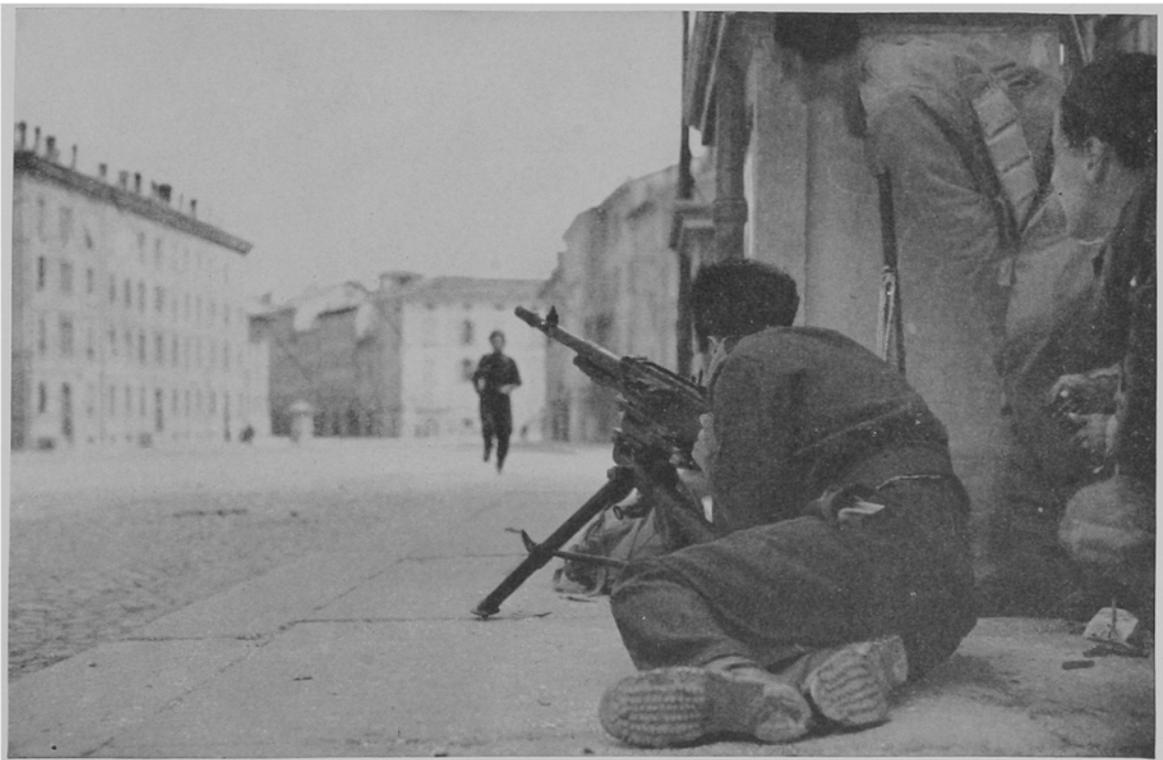
3. *The 34th Division and the BEF on the Left.* On the 23d, when the 34th Division was attached to IV Corps, the 133d Infantry, followed by the 168th Infantry and the 135th Infantry in that order, was moved to Modena. From there the 133d Infantry, joined later by the 168th Infantry on the right north of Highway 9, attacked on the axis of the highway with the town of Reggio, 15 miles away, as the first objective. It took some fighting to drive the German delaying forces, elements of the 114th Light, the 334th Grenadier, and the 94th Grenadier Divisions, out of the town of Rubiera at the Secchia crossing west of Modena, but early on the 24th the outskirts of Reggio were reached. The 168th Infantry continued its advance around the north side of the city, and the 133d Infantry moved in to attack. The garrison, an estimated 400 men from an infantry training school, resisted strongly and held out until evening when they were forced to abandon their positions.

Parma, at the junction of Highways 62 and 9 15 miles northwest of Reggio, was next on the list. The 168th Infantry took over the lead and drove swiftly up Highway 9 toward the city where another garrison, mainly administrative troops reinforced by a few self-propelled guns, held up the occupation of the town until 2100 when our armor, the attached 755th Tank Battalion, outflanked the town from the south. After Parma fell the 135th Infantry, under Col. John M. Breit, raced for Piacenza, 45 miles away astride the junction of Highways 9 and 10 on the banks of the Po, and met no opposition until the morning of 26 April. It was then delayed until afternoon by a small force on Nure River just 4 miles short of the objective. Thereafter the 135th Infantry moved up to neutralize and block off the city where a garrison of Italian SS and German troops was attempting to hold open the Highway 9 crossings for the 148th Grenadier and the Italia Bersaglieri Divisions. Not until the 28th did our troops enter in force. On that date patrols found partisans in control; the SS had melted away during the preceding night.

In less than 3 days the 34th Division had pushed its forces 80 miles from Modena to the Po crossings at Piacenza. This maneuver, one of the boldest in the entire drive across the Po Valley, stretched the division in a thin line from Reggio to Piacenza, across the front of the 148th Grenadier and the Italia Bersaglieri Divisions, which were caught at the edge of the Apennines south of Highway 9. One enemy division, however, the 232d Grenadier, managed to cross the highway west of Parma ahead of the 34th Division and assembled to defend itself in the Po loop south of Cremona while slowly negotiating the river by ferry. The 34th Division, strung out as it was between three relatively intact divisions, was in no enviable position, yet the very fact that we could get away with such a maneuver illustrates well enough the



*The 34th Division drives up Highway 9 to cut off the enemy in the Apennines*



*Italian partisans cleaning out a Fascist sniper in the town of Reggio*



*Fragments of the German army, in a II Corps prisoner-of-war inclosure*



*Cut off at the Po, the Germans surrendered in hundreds and thousands*

end of the German armies as an organized fighting force. The lack of communication between the three enemy divisions and their low state of morale at this juncture enabled the 34th Division during 26–28 April to block off the Piacenza escape route on the northwest, while devoting the 133d and the 168th Infantry to the systematic destruction of the 232d Grenadier Division south of Cremona. The dangerous situation on the left was eased considerably by the arrival of the BEF at Collecchio, south of Parma, on the 26th.

By the end of 27 April, after 2 days of attack from all sides, which inflicted heavy casualties in men and matériel, the 232d Grenadier Division, only part of which got across the Po, expired as a fighting force when a regimental commander surrendered with his whole command. The next day the 148th and the Italia Divisions were not even contacted; the Brazilians had them cornered in the hills to which they had withdrawn after one last half-hearted attempt to force through a road block south of Parma on the 27th. At this point the 34th Division was moved out of the Highway 9 zone, and the remaining German divisions were left to surrender to the Brazilians a few days later.

Southwest of Highway 9 the BEF, after emerging into the Po plain south of Modena on the 23d, swung to the northwest at the very edge of the Apennines parallel to and south of Highway 9 and the 34th Division. The change in direction pinched out the 371st Infantry, which reverted to Fifth Army control and moved to Modena to guard prisoners on the 26th. Once the plain was reached advances were rapid against slight opposition until the 26th when the town of Collecchio at the edge of the hills south of Parma was reached; there the division reconnaissance units and the 200 partisans working with them ran into elements of the 148th Grenadier and the Italia Bersaglieri Divisions, and a serious firefight developed. The town was cleared with a bag of 300 prisoners after reinforcements were brought up. This engagement was the beginning of the end of the two divisions trapped south of Highway 9. After failing in its attempt south of Parma to break through to the Po, the 148th Grenadier Division pulled back up the Taro Valley into the hills around Fornovo. Heavy fighting continued there for 2 more days as the Brazilians mopped up the recalcitrant enemy. At 1800, 29 April, the commanding generals of both the 148th Grenadier and the Italia Bersaglieri formally surrendered to the Brazilians. By the 30th over 13,000 prisoners, 4,000 horses, and 1,000 trucks were taken. Meanwhile on the 28th the BEF had assumed the 34th Division zone north of Highway 9; the 1st and 2d Battalions, 1st Infantry, advanced to Piacenza, and the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, moved up to finish off the pocket south of Cremona.

4. *II Corps—From the Po to the Adige.* As IV Corps was gathering at the Po on 23 April II Corps units were moving across the Panaro. The following day II Corps arrived at the Po three divisions abreast. In accordance with orders from Fifth Army

directing immediate crossings on a wide front and assigning objectives beyond the river, General Keyes issued an extension of previous orders which had directed the 88th, the 91st, and the 6 South African Armoured Divisions to establish a minimum of one bridgehead per division secure from enemy light artillery fire. Orders of the 24th laid out the individual division objectives beyond the Po in order to accomplish the II Corps mission of clearing the west bank of the Adige from Legnago, where Highway 10 crosses the river, north to Verona. The main effort was to be made by the 88th and 91st Divisions, each of which was to receive two batteries of 155-mm guns to support the crossing operation. The 6 South African Armoured Division on the Corps right was to establish a bridgehead, maintain contact with Eighth Army and the 91st Division on either flank, and be prepared to continue the attack beyond the Po to establish strong contact with Eighth Army at Legnago; the latter mission was to be executed if strong opposition developed on the 91st Division front. The 91st Division was to move north from Sermide to clear the area between the Adige on the east and the 88th Division on the west with emphasis upon the towns of Cerea at a Highway 10 junction, Bovalone, 6 miles north of Cerea, and Legnago, 5 miles east of Cerea. The 88th Division on the Corps left was to attack toward Verona astride Highway 12, which leads into the city from the south, and clear en route the town of Nogara at the junction of Highways 10 and 12, and Isola, 7 miles north of Nogara on Highway 12.

During the night of 23–24 April the 88th Division on the II Corps left had reached the Po astride Highway 12 which crossed the river at Ostiglia. Early in the morning of 24 April the 351st Infantry moved up to Revere between the 349th and the 350th Infantry to establish the division bridgehead. The crossing in this zone proved to be defended by several machine guns and at least three 20-mm guns. Our artillery was sited to lay down fire 300 yards beyond the contemplated bridgehead; antitank guns and two anti-aircraft multiple-mount .50 caliber machine guns were emplaced to give support. At noon a small detail of men worked their way across the wrecked railroad bridge under heavy enemy fire and knocked out two machine guns and the three 20-mm gun crews. An entire company of the 2d Battalion then crossed the bridge, and another crossed in some captured rubber boats. The 2d Battalion was across by 1600, and the rest of the regiment followed in light assault craft and LCV's from the 752d Tank Battalion. On the left the 350th Infantry established another bridgehead against some initial though short-lived resistance and moved across in Dukws and "alligators." During the night, as the two regiments prepared for the next day's attack, the enemy made several ineffectual attempts to hinder the operation with scattered bombing and strafing.

Early the next morning, while the 349th Infantry was crossing the river, the 88th Division, despite a shortage of armor which had to await the completion of the

Corps bridge, started the march for Verona by foot, jeeps, captured vehicles, and bicycles. The 351st Infantry on the right encountered the only rearguard action of any note at Nogara where 200 prisoners were taken. At 1800, 25 April, seven tank destroyers and five light tanks joined the 2d Battalion in the lead. A task force consisting of the armor and Company F was formed immediately to drive into Verona. At 2210, after a march of 40 miles in 16 hours, the force was into the southern outskirts of the city where resistance was met at the wrecked railroad yards. Other units moved up to assist in clearing the city; by daylight, despite scattered though stubborn resistance from elements of the 1st and 4th Parachute Divisions, Verona was in our hands. At 0600 elements of the 10th Mountain Division entered the city from the west.

The 91st Division had begun to close in on the banks of the Po in the vicinity of Sermide at 0800, 24 April. After a day spent in clearing the enemy from the division zone, the 362d Infantry established the division bridgehead against no opposition at 2200, and movement across the river continued that night and all the next day; the 361st and 363d Infantry followed in that order. About noon on 25 April, while the 363d Infantry was crossing the river, the other two regiments took up the advance to Cerea and Legnago. The 361st Infantry advanced rapidly against only minor resistance toward the Cerea junction; there, on the night of the 25th, the regiment fought a weird night-long engagement with a large enemy column of trucks and artillery trying to force a passage north through the town. Fortunately the Germans were more confused than the 361st Infantry, and by morning they had been cut to pieces with appalling losses in equipment and personnel. Movement from Cerea to the Adige was without further incident. On the right the 362d Infantry moved on foot 12 miles against no opposition to the vicinity of Legnago where at 0330, 26 April, the 2d Battalion, 363d Infantry, hurrying forward on the right, passed through to attack the town. Although increasing opposition was met as the river was approached, Legnago was cleared by noon and the Adige River crossing began immediately.

While the advance to the Po was in progress during 24-26 April the 6 South African Armoured Division assembled near Felonica and established a bridgehead. On the 25th and 26th, the 12 Motorised Brigade group (less 240 vehicles which crossed later on the Corps bridge) crossed on Dukws, rafts, and Quonset barges. Elements of the 12 Motorised Brigade had started moving north toward the Adige on the 26th when new orders were received directing the next phase of the operation. At the time one brigade was halfway between the Po and the Adige; the 11 Armoured and 13 Motorised Brigades, plus many 12 Motorised Brigade vehicles, were still south of the Po.

By 26 April Fifth Army had split in two the German forces in Italy. In IV

Corps the 10th Mountain Division blocked off routes to Brenner between Lake Garda and Verona; the 85th Division on the Corps right was moving through Verona to attack the Adige Line defenses in the hills north of the city; and on the left Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division, was moving north past Mantua toward Brescia with the intention of swinging northwest toward Como. South of the Po River, as Combat Command B continued mopping up north of Parma, the 34th Division and the BEF had cut across the path of retreat of the 148th Grenadier and Italia Bersaglieri Divisions; the 34th Division had driven as far as Piacenza on the axis of Highway 9, and the BEF had reached positions south of Parma. On the Army right II Corps held the line of the Adige from Verona south to Legnago with the 88th and 91st Divisions, and crossings were in progress. The 6 South African Armoured Division on the II Corps right, with two brigades still to cross the Po, was advancing to Adige crossings south of Legnago with the 12 Motorised Brigade. Along the Ligurian Sea the 92d Division, after reducing the last Gothic Line position on the 25th, was racing toward Genoa. Eighth Army which had started across the Po on the 25th was pushing some elements toward the Adige in its zone.

### C. THE FINAL COLLAPSE OF THE GERMAN ARMIES IN ITALY

27 APRIL—2 MAY

As Fifth Army drew up to the Adige River on 26 April, General Truscott issued Operations Instruction No. 10 (*See Annex No. 1H*), ordering his forces to continue the advance to cut off and destroy the German forces in northwest Italy and to assist Eighth Army in the capture of Padua. The main attack was to drive across the Adige and through the defenses of the Adige Line before they could be manned by the Germans. II Corps was to swing eastward on the axis Verona—Vicenza to assist Eighth Army in the capture of Padua and to block escape routes to the mountains which might be used by enemy forces along the Adriatic. IV Corps was to send one division north along the eastern shores of Lake Garda on the axis Verona—Trent—Bolzano toward the Brenner Pass exit and into the “central redoubt” frequently mentioned in enemy propaganda as the site for the last ditch stand of the beleaguered German armies; the 1st Armored Division was to continue its drive northwest along the edge of the Alps to Lake Como; and the BEF and the 34th Division were to finish the clean-up job south of the Po. On the next day the Army Commander issued a commendation to his troops on breaking the German armies in two and scattering forces that had spent the entire winter constructing defenses and preparing to meet our attack. He then urged one last spurt: