

up the running on the heights of the Alpe di Catenaia and the weight of 10 Corps shifted to its left. On 5th August, after a swift advance across the trackless mountains, with the divisional engineers building a jeep track behind them at full speed, 3/5 Mahrattas captured the summit of Monte Il Castello. This was 10 Corps' high-water-mark. The plan for the attack on the "Gothic" line had now been changed and on 7th August, reduced in strength to 10 Indian Division only, the Corps went onto the defensive.

13 Corps in the meanwhile was operating north-westwards against Florence. It had five divisions under command, two of them armoured, but with the imminent disappearance of the French Corps it was about to take over a front of some forty miles. The original plan was to make the main effort on the right, up both sides of the valley of the Arno with 6 British Armoured Division, and along the west side of the Monti di Chianti, through Radda and Greve, with 4 British Infantry and 6 South African Armoured Divisions, the latter in the lead. 6 British Armoured Division had the advantage of the bridge over the Arno which they had captured intact the day Arezzo fell and were able to make some progress between the river and the heights of the Pratomagno. 4 Division paralleled this to the west of the river but by the 19th the Germans, now on their "Irmgard" delaying line, were able to impose a halt. The South Africans in the thickly cultivated Chianti hills had captured Radda in Chianti on the 18th. By the 20th, however, it became clear that the enemy intended to resist particularly strongly on our original line of advance, the Arno axis, with two and a half divisions east of the river and one, 715 Infantry, re-formed and brought up to strength after its disaster at Anzio, between the river and the crest of the Chianti mountains. The Corps Commander therefore decided to make his main effort on the left of his sector and employ both 8 Indian and 2 New Zealand Divisions to relieve the French Corps and press up the axis of Route 2.

By 22nd July the relief of the French was completed and the South Africans and New Zealanders were able to make good progress to the west of the Chianti chain. By the end of the 25th both were facing squarely up to the "Olga" line which ran roughly east and west through San Casciano, ten miles south of Florence. This advance loosened up the defence in the Arno valley and on the same day the right of the South Africans, and 4 British Division, were in contact with the enemy positions on Monte Scalari and Monte Moggio, the south-eastern bulwarks of the defence of Florence. This was the "Lydia" line; "Olga", on Route 2, was held by 4 Parachute Division. Leaving "Lydia" to 4 Division, 13 Corps grouped the South Africans and New Zealanders for the attack on "Olga". There was stiff fighting on the 26th but the next day the New Zealanders captured San Casciano and the parachutists withdrew to "Paula", the last line covering Florence. 4 Division had very heavy fighting, lasting three days, for Monte Scalari, which was finally cleared on the 29th. On the left of the Corps front 8 Indian Division had reached the Arno east of Empoli.

We wanted Florence as quickly as possible, not for the sake of the name but because it

is a centre of communications and the best operational base for the attack on the "Gothic" line. We planned, if possible, to capture the city by an outflanking movement on both sides of it, with our main strength on the west. The Germans were making promises to treat it as an open city but by this they appeared to mean that, while using its communication facilities themselves, they expected us to refrain from doing so when we should capture it; at any rate they had concentrated large forces immediately south of the city. From Figline on the upper Arno to Montelupo west of the city four and a half divisions, strong in artillery and heavy tanks, now confronted 13 Corps, with three and a half divisions forward. The German formations included 4 Parachute, 29 Panzer Grenadier and part of 3 Panzer Grenadier Divisions. 13 Corps decided to concentrate the New Zealanders on a narrow front west of Route 2 and break through the "Paula" line by capturing the ridge of Pian' dei Cerri, which runs roughly east and west from the main road three miles south of Florence to the Arno opposite Signa, exploiting to the river west of Florence. East of the road the South Africans would make diversionary attacks and 4 Division would protect the Corps' right flank. The attack went in on 30th July and fierce fighting continued until the late evening of 2nd August, when the New Zealanders captured the crest of La Poggiona, at the eastern end of the enemy's ridge position. This was the turning point of the battle; the roads now led downhill into Florence and the enemy began to withdraw back across the Arno. They fought a stiff rearguard action on the River Ema which crosses Route 2 some two miles south of the Arno and on the night of 3rd August disengaged again over the Arno.

The local German commander had apparently been allowed discretion about demolishing the Arno bridges and exercised it by blowing up all but the Ponte Vecchio. The Ponte della Trinità, by many considered the most beautiful in the world, was a particularly severe loss; the Ponte Vecchio, though it has a certain charm of antiquity, is not so fine a work of art and in any case is too weak for all but the lightest traffic. It has been suggested that it was spared because it reminded the nostalgic parachutists of Nuremberg; but to ensure that military requirements were not unduly sacrificed to sentiment the ancient buildings at both ends were blown up in order to block the approaches. We were not, in fact, hampered militarily by all this destruction for we never intended to fight in Florence and, once the city was cleared, could build as many bridges as we wanted without loss of time or efficiency.

With the entry into the southern part of Florence on 4th August the campaign in central Italy came to an end,\* and it was on the same day that the new plan for the attack on the "Gothic" line was decided on, a plan which involved a radical regrouping by Eighth Army. From the Garigliano to the Arno is two hundred and forty miles as the crow flies; by the shortest road it is two hundred and seventy miles. We had covered this distance in sixty-four days, breaking through three lines of prepared defences south of Rome and fighting two major battles, the Trasimene line and

\* The clearing of the Pontassieve loop of the Arno, east of Florence, lasted until 9 August.