

in the greatest secrecy and only the minimum was committed to paper. In the order I issued to both Armies on 6th August, giving the preliminary operations to be carried out, I laid down "The scope and object of operation OLIVE have been settled in discussions between the Commander-in-Chief and Army Commanders and will not be referred to in writing at present." The greater part of the planning was left to Eighth Army who were faced with a tremendous task in transferring their strength to their right wing. The mounting of the operation involved complicated and difficult moves over an inadequate road-net, carried out in conditions of great secrecy, a large-scale cover plan (and the cancellation of the cover plan previously in force) and considerable preliminary engineer work. The plan of the attack, as given in orders issued on 13th August, provided for a simultaneous assault by three Corps in line. 2 Polish Corps, on the right, was to attack and seize the high ground north-west of Pesaro; this was all the Poles could do in their present weak state and after completion of this task they would revert to Army reserve. 1 Canadian Corps, in the centre, was to attack on the left of the Poles to capture the high ground west of Pesaro and from there, squeezing out the Poles, to reach the main road at Cattolica and drive up the road along the coast directed on Rimini. 5 Corps, on the left, was to advance on an axis to the west of Rimini, directed on Bologna and Ferrara. The movement across to the east coast began on 15th August on a heavy scale and was completed, by a triumph of organization, by 22nd August. 25th August was decided on as D-day. It was not expected that we should be in contact with the "Gothic" line on that date but this was no disadvantage as we intended to press up to and through the line in one motion. This would be of assistance in the matter of surprise. 13 Corps came under command of Fifth Army on 18th August. Between its right and the left of 5 Corps the mountainous central sector was the responsibility of 10 Corps, commanding only 10 Indian Division and a scratch brigade group, mainly of dismounted armoured car regiments.

There was little of interest in the preliminary operations before the offensive opened. On the left the Fifth Army front was quiet. II Corps had now taken over the right of the Army sector, with 91 Division; the 85th and 88th were in rear areas resting and training. West of Empoli there was no change along the line of the Arno. In Florence the Germans withdrew on the night of 10th August back from the north bank of the river to the line of the Mugnone canal, running through the northern outskirts of the city. Further to the right, however, on the Adriatic coast, there were considerable advances made as the Polish Corps pressed on to clear the high ground between the Cesano and Metauro rivers. By the 23rd the Poles were established on the right bank of the latter river from the sea to Fossombrone, some fifteen miles inland, and with that the stage was set for the assault on Pesaro.

Orders for the Offensive.

The orders for the offensive were issued on 16th August. I defined my intention as "to drive the enemy out of the Apennine positions and to exploit to the general line of the lower Po, inflicting the maximum losses on the enemy

in the process." Eighth Army was to have the predominant rôle in the opening phases and to have priority in all requirements needed to obtain its object. Its task was to break through into the valley of the Po and exploit to seize Ferrara and Bologna. Fifth Army was to assist the first phases of the offensive by carrying out ostentatious preparations to simulate an imminent attack by both Armies on the front between Pontassieve and Pontedera, which was the sector originally chosen for the main attack. While these manoeuvres were in progress Fifth Army was to prepare an attack to break through the enemy's centre on the axis Florence-Bologna, using II and 13 Corps. This attack would be ordered by me as soon as it appeared that the enemy had weakened his centre sufficiently to meet Eighth Army's attack. It was naturally impossible to forecast when this would be, but General Clark was to be prepared to attack at twenty-four hours' notice, if possible, from D plus 5 of the Eighth Army attack, i.e., 30th August. The cover plan for the attack had to be radically altered and was now designed to persuade the enemy that our main blow was coming in the centre and that the Adriatic coast operations were a preliminary feint by our surplus armour.

The objectives for exploitation were given in summary form in this operation order. Eighth Army, on reaching the Ferrara area, was to secure a bridgehead over the Po in the general area north of Ferrara. Fifth Army was to secure Modena and exploit north and north-west of it as far as practicable with the resources available after returning 13 Corps to command of Eighth Army. It will be remembered that these were the eventual objectives foreseen in the original plan and the change in Eighth Army's plan made no difference to them. I dealt with further possibilities for exploitation more fully in a paper on future operations on 27th August, after the attack had begun. The new factor in the situation was the rapid advance of the invading armies in the South of France. The German resistance there had been so weak and had turned so quickly to a full withdrawal that by that date Toulon, Marseilles and Grenoble had all been captured and the Allies were pursuing at full speed up the Rhone valley. In these circumstances it seemed clear that if the Apennine line were pierced the enemy would be obliged to withdraw his forces from north-west Italy back to a line based on the Alps to Lake Garda, the Mincio and the Po, in order to avoid the risk of encirclement. This would mean that Fifth Army would be relieved of any threat to its left flank and could concentrate its weight on the right in a thrust across the Po at Ostiglia directed on Mantua and Verona. Eighth Army's main task on arriving in the plain must be to capture Venice, for until we could obtain the use of its port our lines of communication would be stretched to the limit and maintenance of any large force made most difficult. This would mean an advance on the axis Ferrara-Padua-Treviso, forcing in succession the Po, Adige and Brenta, and would certainly require the employment of all available formations, including 13 Corps. It is interesting to note that the axes of exploitation here given were those on which the Armies advanced after the great victory of Spring 1945.