

yet experienced. The Canadians on the right and 5 Corps on the left of Eighth Army succeeded in getting onto the Coriano ridge in their first attack, capturing over a thousand prisoners on the first day. The second phase was to exploit across the River Marano. The Germans, though shaken, were clearly determined to expend every effort to deny us Rimini and concentrated strong forces on a line running from the mountain on which is perched the small republic of San Marino to the sea in front of Rimini; on the coast the front was protected by the River Ausa and in the centre of the position by a strongpoint on the hill crowned by the village of San Fortunato, the last piece of high ground before the plains. Reinforcements continued to arrive. Before the battle for Coriano, Kesselring had brought over three divisions to the Adriatic sector from his centre and right; he now took another infantry division from the centre, the 356th, and another from the right, 20 Luftwaffe Field Division, and on the 19th added a regimental group from 90 Panzer Grenadier Division, brought from the French frontier. Kesselring had thus doubled the strength of his forces originally facing Eighth Army by the transfer of the equivalent of five divisions, but shortly after the attack on Rimini began he had to withdraw entirely two divisions to re-form. The importance which he attached to the Adriatic sector was based largely on the fact that, if he were driven off the Apennines, he would have to withdraw in a north-easterly direction to avoid being penned up against the Swiss and French frontiers, and this sector would be the vital hinge on which to swing back his exposed right. The transfer of 20 Luftwaffe Field Division* was particularly significant for, as it passed behind the centre of the front, the first strongpoints of the "Gothic" line on the direct road to Bologna were already falling.

In spite of these reinforcements Eighth Army continued to make steady progress. They won a bridgehead over the Marano and by the 15th had advanced nearly three thousand yards north of it. The New Zealanders were now brought into the battle and a full-scale attack was launched on the 18th. After a desperate three day struggle San Fortunato was cleared on the 20th and the same night the Greeks, under command of 1 Canadian Division, entered Rimini. I was glad that this success had so early brightened the fortunes of that heroic country which had been the only ally to fight by our side in our darkest days and that a new victory in Italy should be added to the fame won in the mountains of Albania. More disheartening was a sudden fall of torrential rain, also on the night of the 20th, under cover of which the enemy withdrew across the broad and swollen Marecchia river. Only one bridge survived, the bridge built by Tiberius, nineteen hundred years ago, which had outlived the drums and trappings of many conquests, and now carried troops from the Antipodes across the river onto the Via Emilia. As our patrols pushed forward on the 21st into the plains so long hoped for and so fiercely fought for the deluge foreboded a future of clogging mud and brimming watercourses.

II Corps' main offensive on the "Gothic" line began on the morning of 13th September when 85 Division moved forward to the

attack through 1 British Infantry Division. The strongest enemy defences were at the Futa pass on the watershed crossed by the main road from Florence to Bologna, Route 65; General Clark had therefore decided to make his principal thrust to the east of this road up the Firenzuola road, using the Giogo pass. 13 Corps was to apply its main weight simultaneously to assist II Corps and to open the Marradi road. As I have already explained, the Germans had seriously weakened their forces in this sector but the fanaticism and skill of 4 Parachute Division made up for this and initially little progress was made. On the centre of 13 Corps front, however, 8 Indian Division advanced across the trackless mountains, operating by night, and by the 15th had broken through the line in their sector and reached the watershed on the Alpe di Vitigliano, looking down on the Marradi road. This was the first breach of the "Gothic" line in the centre. On the 17th combined attacks by 1 British and 85 United States Divisions, directed against the junction of the enemy's Tenth and Fourteenth Armies, captured Monte Pratone, and on the same day the enemy resistance at last broke under the weight of our attack. Poggio Signorini, Monte Altuzzo, Monte Verruca and Monticelli were all occupied, and with these heights went possession of the Giogo Pass. Now it was time for Kesselring to scrape up reinforcements for yet another part of his front. He drew them from the right of the line and from the sector between the two Allied thrusts; from the former came 362 Division, which arrived on the 19th to cover Firenzuola, and from the latter 44 Division on the 21st to take over the sector of the Firenzuola-Imola road.

Fifth Army had now, by 18th September, got both its attacking Corps firmly on to the watershed. The terrain which there faced them presented a totally different picture from that in which they had been operating hitherto. So far they had been climbing up a steep ascent where the mountains offer a nearly continuous wall running east and west at right angles to the line of advance; once the line of the passes is reached the whole grain of the country is reversed and the mountains begin to trend north-eastwards in gradually descending spurs separated from each other by the valleys of swift rivers which drain into the plains of Lombardy. For the greater part of their course in the mountains these rivers run through deep gorges which offer no scope for deployment or manoeuvre but in a few places, as at Firenzuola on the upper Santerno, the valleys open out and it is possible for artillery and transport to deploy. The mountain spurs, as I said, descend gradually, and for nearly half their total length their height is very little less than that of the watershed, with isolated higher peaks offering good command of the surrounding terrain. There was little advantage, therefore, in the fact that we were now going, according to the map, "downhill"; the immense difficulties of supply to the forward troops and deployment of our strength in artillery still remained. So bad and so scanty were the forward routes that our lines of communication, the more we advanced, became more of a drag on our progress while the enemy, as his lines shortened, reaped proportionate advantages.

In spite of the enemy reinforcement Fifth Army still retained sufficient momentum from

* Relieved by 42 Jaeger Division from Genoa.