

by General de Larminat,* advanced up Route 2 on the right of Fifth Army with two divisions, 1 Motorised and 3 Algerian. On the 11th they seized Montefiascone and on the 18th stormed the strong position of Radicofani, the highest point on the road from Rome to Florence. By the 20th advanced elements were on the Orcia river, a tributary of the Ombrone. Our main forces had now reached the line on which the enemy had decided to stand but on the Adriatic they were not yet up with that line which in this sector was the River Chienti. On 16th June I had instructed the Poles to press on with all possible speed to secure the capture of Ancona. The Polish advance was indeed rapid and by the 20th they had crossed the River Aso and captured Fermo and Pedaso. On the 21st they even managed to secure a small bridgehead over the Chienti but next day this was destroyed by a heavy enemy counter-attack. It was clear that to force the Chienti would require a full Corps attack. General Anders† decided that in view of the time needed for concentration and for bringing up the necessary supplies and ammunition the probable date would be 4th July. I agreed to this plan and proposed to stage the attack in such a way as to be able to press directly on from the Chienti to Ancona, some twenty-two miles beyond the river.

On 14th June I divided my headquarters, and, leaving the bulk of the administrative branches and services in Caserta, to follow to Rome when space was available, I created a small Advanced Headquarters, consisting of my operational staff only. This was the system on which I had worked in Tunisia and Sicily and, now that the comparatively static period of the winter was over, I was anxious to be as close behind the Armies as possible. On 14th June I opened this advanced headquarters at Frascati, using for offices a small building which had previously been used for the same purpose by Field-Marshal Kesselring. This was soon left too far behind by the speed of our advance, and on 25th June I moved to a camp site on the eastern shores of Lake Bolsena.

The capture of Elba, early plans for which I have already mentioned, took place about this time. I originally wanted this operation to be launched if possible before the spring offensive opened but it had been postponed to a date between 20th and 25th May. On 16th May I was informed that it had been further postponed till mid-June. This removed almost all the value of the operation as by that time our troops, advancing overland, would be almost level with the island and on 12th June I asked whether the forces earmarked for Elba could not rather be used for a landing on the mainland in support of Fifth Army. However, this was considered unacceptable as the French would not consent to the use in Italy of 9 Colonial Infantry Division, which they wanted to keep for the landings in France. The operation therefore went in as planned in the early morning of 17th June; the occupation of the island was complete by the afternoon of the 19th. Steps were taken to emplace medium guns in the north-eastern corner of the island to command Piombino but the town fell on 25th June without the necessity for their use.

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The Battle of the Trasimene Line.

It was clear that Kesselring had now decided not merely to stiffen his delaying resistance but to make a stand, although he was approaching the broadest part of the Italian peninsula. He calculated that the momentum of our pursuit, after the exhilaration of the chase north from Rome, now left a hundred and thirty miles behind, must be starting to flag and that he had his own troops well enough under control again to rally them for a defensive action on a coherent front; by thus imposing a pause on us he would gain time and space to prepare the "Gothic" line. His decision began to make itself felt about 20th June. The chosen line was based on the east coast on the River Chienti; west of the Apennines the key points were the high ground north of Perugia, Lake Trasimene and Chiusi, from where the line continued eastwards along the River Astrone to the Orcia and the upper Ombrone. By now the Germans were to a certain extent reorganised and regrouped and both armies were on the same line and fairly well balanced in strength. They had nineteen divisions, admittedly nearly all under strength, in the line and six in reserve; as against this we were maintaining the pursuit with nine only. The Army boundary ran through Montepulciano with Tenth Army east and Fourteenth west. On the Adriatic Tenth Army had LI Mountain Corps of four divisions, rather under strength. From the Tiber to the Army boundary was LXXXVI Panzer Corps with seven divisions, including the good 15 Panzer Grenadier, 1 Parachute and Hermann Goering Divisions; it was this Corps which was given the task of delaying our 10 and 13 Corps either side of Lake Trasimene. In Fourteenth Army 1 Parachute Corps, between Montepulciano and Montalcino, had four divisions in the line, including 26 Panzer and 29 Panzer Grenadier. XIV Panzer Corps, on the west coast, was weaker; it had five divisions but only two, the 3rd and 90 Panzer Grenadiers, were of good quality and the other three were definitely poor. As the situation here deteriorated this Corps had to be reinforced with battle groups from two other divisions, 16 S.S. and 42 Jaeger. The general situation, however, was hopeful for the Germans; their best divisions were equally spaced at the vital points and had received heavy drafts of reinforcements and 34 Division was in process of arriving from the Russian front.

The line selected for a stand had been well chosen, in spite of its length.* There were no very obvious natural obstacles to our advance, except the river lines on the two coasts, and no prepared defences; but the country is hilly and in general thickly cultivated, especially in the vine-growing areas in the centre of the line. Our own lines of communication were severely stretched and these difficulties would not be eased before the capture of Leghorn and Ancona. The reconstruction of the railways was being pushed ahead with good speed but at the moment Eighth Army railhead was back at Roccasecca, two hundred miles from the battle front. The time had also been well chosen for two reasons, one of which was a most unusual spell of bad weather between 17th

* The position was apparently reconnoitred in August 1943 when the Germans considered holding a line Grosseto—Monte—Amiata—Perugia—Ancona.