

likely to delay long on that river line but, under pressure, when and if we could apply it, he would withdraw to the Adige.* Once back on the Adige he would be able to spare divisions from Italy and instead of our containing him, he would be containing us.

Looking ahead to such a possibility, at a time when we seemed likely to break through the Apennines, I thought it advisable to consider other employment for the forces which would become surplus on our side as well as on the German, for if the Germans, on our calculations, would only need the equivalent of eleven divisions to hold the Adige line so on the Allied side we could probably only use one Army against that position. The Balkans once more offered an obvious and attractive field. The Russians were advancing in eastern Hungary and approaching Yugoslavia (Belgrade fell on 20th October) and the Partisans were clearing the ports of southern and central Dalmatia. Ever since the fall of Rome I had borne in mind the possibility of forcing an entry into Austria through the Ljubljana gap, a stroke which might even lead us to Vienna. Before the withdrawal of troops for the invasion of Southern France it had seemed likely that this could be achieved by an overland advance through north-eastern Italy, possibly assisted by an amphibious operation against Istria or Trieste. With our present reduced strength, and especially after the losses and exhaustion incurred in the battles for the Apennines, it would be impossible, after breaking through into the Po valley, to be certain of destroying the enemy south of the river and I should have to face a succession of hard fought frontal attacks against a still powerful enemy on the many river lines of Venetia: the Adige, the Brenta, the Piave, the Tagliamento and the Isonzo.† Rather than accept this it would be better to make a two-handed attack up the two opposite coasts, designed to meet at the head of the Adriatic. This would undoubtedly tie down more German forces than a frontal attack on the Adige and would give more scope for a flexible strategy and a greater chance for a decisive success.

I first brought forward the plan on 2nd October, at a conference attended by General Wilson, and it was elaborated at several subsequent conferences. In its final form it proposed that, after the Germans had been driven back to their Adige line, Fifth Army should become wholly responsible for operations in Italy, taking under command the Polish Corps, whose employment in Yugoslavia might have been politically embarrassing. Eighth Army should prepare a base in the area of the ports of Split, Sibenik and Zadar, occupying them with light forces, and then, in early spring, bring in their main forces, in the strength of at least six divisions, for a rapid advance on Ljubljana and Fiume. I would retain a Corps of two Indian divisions in Army Group reserve, ready to support either Army. A good

* Since the end of July the Germans had been at work on a line of permanent defences based on the Adige and the Euganean and Berici hills, running from the Adriatic at Chioggia to Lake Garda; it was known as the "Venetian" line and by October was already formidable. Defences were also prepared on the line of the Po—Ticino and, south of the Po, on the Santerno, Sillaro and Idice, the last-named known as the "Genghis Khan" position.

† The Germans were known to be constructing defences on the two last, in rear of the "Venetian" line.

deal of detailed planning was done to prepare for this but in the event the plan turned out to be unnecessary and was cancelled on 4th February, 1945. The main reason was the failure to capture Bologna, which meant that we continued to keep the enemy in Italy still stretched to the maximum extent. A further reason was the withdrawal, in early 1945, of the whole of the Canadian Corps to join the Canadians on the Western front and the diversion to the West of 5 Division which was intended to return to my command from the Middle East. It is interesting to speculate on what the results might have been if the plan had been carried into effect. The terrain of Dalmatia is rugged and unpromising for operations and the maintenance of the force would have met serious difficulties. On the other hand the relatively weak and inexperienced German troops would probably have offered only an ineffectual resistance to six veteran divisions of Eighth Army, assisted by strongly reinforced Partisan formations, and an entry into Austria might have been possible before the general capitulation. But the conditions which would have rendered operations in Yugoslavia possible and profitable failed to eventuate; the Germans continued to hold their extended line in the mountains and it was neither necessary nor practical for us to open a new front on which to contain them.

Final Winter Operations.

On 31st October Eighth Army crossed the Ronco near Forlì but the weather again intervened and the town did not fall until 9th November. We then had a week's fine weather and were able to drive the enemy back to the line of the Montone and Cosina by the 16th. Route 67 was now open at last but the collapse of a vital bridge prevented our using it until 21st November. A further offensive by 5 Corps and 2 Polish Corps between 20 and 25 November brought us to the line of the river Lamone but another break in the weather prevented exploitation into Faenza. In the meantime Fifth Army had been resting and regrouping its troops according to plan. I Division of 13 Corps relieved 88 Division on Monte Grande and II Corps took advantage of this to pull out for a rest as many troops as could be spared. Unfortunately the line we were holding was so extended that periods spent out of the line could only be very short although the discomforts of the mountainous terrain and the severe Italian winter were very great. During this period the remainder of 92 Division and a second regiment of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force arrived; it was not practicable, however, to employ these troops in the important II Corps sector.

Plans for the resumption of the offensive were studied in an appreciation produced by my Headquarters on 19th November, to serve as a basis for an Army Commanders' conference on 26th November. It was calculated that Eighth Army had enough artillery ammunition for about three weeks' offensive. They had one armoured and three infantry divisions resting and training in preparation for this; one infantry division at present engaged, however, (the 4th) was due to be withdrawn shortly to go to the Middle East and its relieving division (the 5th) was not due to arrive until January*. This

* In the event 4 Division went to Greece and the 5th to Twenty-first Army Group in Germany.