

The consequences of this policy were expounded in a letter to both Army Commanders dated 10th October. For the reasons given the offensive must be continued, but it was already necessary to plan ahead and consider the question of when to call a halt; that it would be necessary to call a halt was deduced from the fact that there was no certainty of the war against Germany ending in 1944 and that a major offensive in 1945 would therefore be necessary. In order to meet that requirement it was vital, in view of the close approximation of the opposing strengths, to make a pause at some time to rest, reorganize and train our own troops. During this pause Eighth Army was to plan, and prepare to carry out, operations across the Adriatic. If north-west Italy were cleared it would be occupied by a British District Headquarters with one division under command (6 South African Armoured Division was tentatively nominated). The conclusions drawn were: that active operations with all available forces should continue as long as the state of our own troops and the weather permitted in the hope that by then we should have at least succeeded in driving the enemy back to the general line of the Adige and the Alps and in clearing up north-western Italy. Secondly, when full-scale operations ceased, there should be a period of active defence during which the minimum forces would be committed against the enemy and the maximum attention paid to the rest, reorganisation and training of all formations in preparation for a renewal of the offensive as soon as the weather should permit.

This appreciation was brought up to date on 23rd October in a further letter to Fifth and Eighth Armies. In this, operations in Yugoslavia were brought more into the foreground for the major rôle in the proposed spring offensive and the question of when to halt the offensive in Italy was more closely studied. Between 10th and 23rd October the fiercest fighting on Fifth Army front had left us still short of Bologna, the exhaustion of our troops had increased and the lack of replacements, both British and American, had made itself felt. In this second paper, therefore, it was assumed that we were unlikely to have driven the enemy back to the line of the Adige by the time that it became necessary to halt the offensive; instead our immediate objectives were limited to the capture of Bologna and Ravenna. The plan proposed was that Eighth Army should continue their offensive with all available forces at least until 15th November in order to capture Ravenna and to draw off the enemy from Fifth Army. The latter was to go on to the defensive forthwith (this was ordered on 27th October), withdraw forces from the line to rest and prepare them for one more offensive effort and then launch them as secretly as possible in a final attack on Bologna. If this plan was unsuccessful, then we should have to accept the best winter position that could be managed; Eighth Army must endeavour, however, to capture Forlì and open Route 67 to improve lateral communications between the two Armies. I held a conference at my Headquarters to discuss this plan on 29th October. The principles of the plan were agreed to but I decided to advance the date at which the offensive efforts of both Armies must cease from 15th November to 15th December; Fifth Army's final attempt to

capture Bologna was accordingly postponed until about 30th November. Eighth Army was to continue to attempt the capture of Ravenna and should be in a position to launch an attack with that object also by 30th November. I laid down, however, that the offensives were only to be launched if the weather was favourable and there appeared to be a good chance of success.

A critical shortage of artillery ammunition was among the other difficulties of this period. To a force which relied so much on artillery, the only effective superiority we possessed for a campaign in an Italian winter, this was a most serious matter, the more so as it was not an isolated phenomenon but a world-wide shortage both on the British and United States side. It had naturally been aggravated by our heavy expenditure during the "Gothic" line battles. The root cause, however, as I was informed by a signal from the War Office on 17th August, was a reduction in ammunition production all over the Allied-controlled world. This was a condition of affairs which could not hastily be improved and, although I was on 20th October authorized to draw on the Supreme Allied Commander's reserve up to the full extent which the operational situation might necessitate, there was a serious danger that not only would current operations be severely limited but there might not be sufficient stocks on hand for the spring offensive. I drew this conclusion in a letter to General Wilson on 13th November:

"As far as I am able to forecast I have just enough British ammunition for the current operations of Eighth Army and for an all-out offensive in December lasting about fifteen days. American ammunition is, however, only sufficient for about ten days intensive fighting between now and the end of the year. Deliveries in the first quarter of 1945 in the case of both British and American types are so limited that it will be necessary to exercise the strictest economy for several months to build up large enough stocks to sustain a full-scale offensive in 1945".

I have referred to plans for operations in Yugoslavia as part of our proposed spring offensive and although the necessity for such operations did not arise the plans themselves are of interest in illustrating the strategic problems which faced us in the autumn of 1944. If we were wholly successful in our attack on the Apennine positions we should be faced with a situation resembling that of September, 1943, before the German decision to stand south of Rome: that is the enemy would be withdrawing at his leisure to a prepared position in rear and we should be unable to make him stand in Italy. Just as in the preceding September, therefore, I turned my eyes to the other side of the Adriatic, where we could be certain of bringing the Germans to battle on ground of our choosing rather than theirs. From the point of view of containing the maximum number of German divisions, the line of the Apennines on which the Germans found themselves in October was the best suited to my purpose. Once driven off that, any other line they could stand on, or at least any other line north of and including the line of the Po, would require less troops to hold. It was considered that, once Bologna fell, the enemy would withdraw to a line based on the rivers Po and Ticino, abandoning north-west Italy, and that he was not