

272. The bulk of the 766 sorties in the tactical area on the 13th were devoted to direct support of the amphibious landing on the right flank. One notable incident during the day was when Spitbombers saw a Tiger tank disappear into a house. They bombed the house and produced a large explosion.

273. A Brigade Commander, commenting on an attack on a strong point by fighter-bombers, said, "The resistance was completely broken. My own troops were able to advance 1,000 yards without resistance and 100 prisoners were taken after the bombing attack."

Night 13th/14th April—8th Army Front.

274. Heavy bombers of No. 205 Group were again airborne to attack the town of Porto Maggiore which was another key point on the route through the Argenta Gap to the Po River, which the retreating Germans would have to use. Desert Air Force's contribution to the night's effort was aimed at harassing enemy movement in and behind the battle area. Motor transport, barges, the Po River crossings, and the road junction at Consandola were the targets. During the night a Mosquito night-fighter destroyed one F.W.190 and damaged another.

Day 14th April—8th Army Front.

275. At dawn the 2nd New Zealand Division attacked over the Sillaro River due east of Massa Lombarda and towards Medicina, and by mid-day had established a firm bridgehead. To the north, Conselice was finally occupied, while to the south, the Polish Corps captured Imola on Route 9, and swept on towards Castel San Pietro.

Summary of the First Phase.

276. Thus by the 14th April the first three of the river lines on which the enemy depended had been breached, and the Eighth Army's advance was gathering momentum. On the right flank the threat to the Argenta gap was growing, and the ground forces would soon be able to break out along Route 16 to the Po River. On the Eighth Army's left flank good progress was being made along Route 9 towards Bologna.

277. The time had therefore come to launch the Fifth Army into the Po Valley to be the left thrust of the pincer movement aimed at encircling the enemy south of the Po. On the morning of the 14th April the Fifth Army joined in the general offensive.

THE FIFTH ARMY OFFENSIVE.

Day 14th April—Fifth Army Front.

278. The attack was opened by the IV Corps at 09.45 hours some 20 miles south-west of Bologna in the mountainous country just west of Highway 64, which follows the upper valley of the Reno River. It was aimed at Mt. Pero, Vergato and Montese. The attack was preceded by a forty-minute "set piece" air attack by fighter-bombers, and during the day XXII T.A.C. flew a total of 514 sorties, of which all but 55 were on army support.

Day 15th April—Fifth Army Front.

279. A tremendous effort was made by the heavy bombers of 15th Air Force in the afternoon. Every available aircraft that could

possibly be used—even some which had previously been considered unfit for operations—was pressed into service. A total of 1,790 bombers and fighters were airborne. This force was given two tasks. The first was to attack 21 targets nominated by the Fifth Army, such as command posts, dumps and enemy-occupied areas, in the area south of Bologna; the second was to attack communications and stores targets further north. Some 1,600 tons of bombs were dropped by the first force, and some 800 tons by the second. The effort by the heavy bombers was augmented by that of 258 medium bombers of Tactical Air Force, which attacked enemy reserve areas at Praduro on Route 64, and at Medicina, though the latter was more intimately concerned with Eighth Army operations. Meanwhile, XXII T.A.C., in missions against targets along the front, including ground positions, command posts, occupied buildings and dumps, flew just under 500 sorties.

280. By the evening of the 15th, Vergato and Montese had been captured, and during the night, the Fifth Army II Corps, on the right of the 4th Corps, joined in the attack.

Ground and air effort, 16th to 19th April, Fifth Army front.

281. During these four days, all the Fifth Army forces were engaged in heavy fighting among the mountains which the enemy held so strongly, but gradual progress was made towards Bologna. Immense assistance was given in this task by both Strategic and Tactical Air Force aircraft, and the heights guarding the approaches to Bologna became universally scarred and pitted with bomb craters.

282. The planned assistance of the Strategic Air Force was largely foiled on the 16th by cloud over the Bologna area which prevented positive identification of targets, and only some 200 tons of bombs were dropped. In the meantime, XXII T.A.C. again directed almost its entire effort of some 500 sorties against battlefield targets to the south and south-west of Bologna. On the 17th and 18th weather conditions were more favourable for accurate bombing, and in the course of the two days, XVth Air Force aircraft dropped a total of 2,700 tons of bombs on tactical targets ahead of the advancing Fifth Army troops. The objective, as in the preceding attacks, was the maximum disorganisation of enemy forces, and the destruction of equipment and installations, prior to an attack by Allied ground forces. As in the case of previous attacks, virtually every building in the areas attacked was destroyed or heavily damaged. This effort was supplemented by that of the medium bombers, while XXII T.A.C. continued to devote almost all its attention to close support work.

283. The night of 16th/17th April provided No. 205 Group with another communications target of importance. Casalecchio, which is located three miles south-west of Bologna, offered an excellent opportunity for the interdiction of the flow of German reserves from Bologna which was attempting to stem the Fifth Army advance. The raid was successful, the road bridge in the town being destroyed, and much other damage being caused.