

Corps had reached the line of the river Pisciatello.

On 17th October 2 Polish Corps, which had taken over the sector on the left of 5 Corps previously under 10 Corps (and commanded in the interim by the Headquarters of the disbanded 1 Armoured Division) opened an attack to improve our communications in the mountains. The principal object was to clear the minor road which leaves Route 71 at San Piero in Bagno and joins Route 67 at Rocca San Casciano, crossing the valleys of the Bidente and Rabbi. Possession of Route 67 would be of the greatest importance for improving communications between the two Armies. The Poles made good progress in the mountains. Galeata, commanding the upper Bidente valley, fell on 19th October and Strada, in the valley of the Rabbi, on the 21st; here the enemy showed signs of an intention to resist more strongly. Meanwhile in the plains Cesena had been entered on 19th October and on the 20th 4 Division seized a precarious but tenaciously defended bridgehead over the Savio in the neighbourhood of Route 9. Further to the south 10 Indian Division established two more bridgeheads and in the southernmost built up rapidly for an assault on Monte Cavallo, on the watershed between the Savio and the Ronco. By the 21st there were no enemy forward of the Savio except in the coastal sector, where they still held Cervia.

Intentions now were for the Poles to press down the valley of the Rabbi towards Forli while 5 Corps advanced on the same objective on the axis of Route 9. The Polish attack began on 22nd October but made little progress until the 25th. 5 Corps also met heavy resistance to attempts to break out from its Cesena bridgehead over the Savio. 10 Indian Division captured Monte Cavallo and began to thrust northwards. Resistance ceased on the 24th, however, when the enemy carried out his sole voluntary withdrawal on this front. The tactical situation, in particular the threat from Monte Cavallo, would indeed have forced a withdrawal in the near future but an even more pressing reason was the situation on the Fifth Army front where the crisis of the defence of Bologna had now been reached. Three first class divisions, 29 and 90 Panzer Grenadiers and 1 Parachute Division, had been withdrawn in succession to the central sector and it was vitally necessary to reduce the front of LXXVI Corps to allow for this reduction in strength. The line chosen was the river Ronco. By the 25th both the Canadians and 5 Corps had made contact with this line but the rain, which was at that very time foiling Fifth Army's attack on Bologna, now reached a new high pitch of intensity. On the 26th all bridges over the Savio, in our immediate rear, were swept away and our small bridgeheads over the Ronco were eliminated and destroyed. The Poles continued to advance and on the 27th captured Predappio Nuova. The situation remained more or less unchanged, like the weather, until the 31st when the enemy was forced back opposite 5 Corps to a switch line from the Ronco at Forli airfield to the Rabbi at Grisignano.

This was a most discouraging period for Eighth Army. The weather was abominable and the country difficult. Every river and canal was subject to sudden rises and floods which not merely made the seizing of a bridge-

head in face of opposition desperately difficult but was liable also to interrupt at any moment maintenance and the movement of reinforcements. Some miles of waterlogged ground were gained but despite our best efforts it was impossible to prevent the enemy, making full use of these natural advantages, from withdrawing sufficient troops to block Fifth Army's advance. The capture of Cesena and Forlimpopoli, and even of Mussolini's birthplace at Predappio, were not sufficient recompense for the failure to capture Bologna. Eighth Army's strength was now also declining, for early in October it had to release 4 Indian Division and the Greek Mountain Brigade Group to go to Greece. This was the beginning of a process which was to cost British troops in Italy eventually two more divisions.*

Plans for the Winter Campaign.

Operations in Italy in the winter of 1944 to 1945, the bitter and continuous fighting in the Apennines and in the waterlogged plains of the Romagna, can only be properly understood against the background of the general strategic picture of the war against Germany on all fronts. The main factor determining the situation was the decision by General Eisenhower, as Supreme Allied Commander in the West, that it would be necessary to fight a winter campaign on that front the effect of which would be either to bring about directly a German collapse or at least, by the attrition caused, to ensure that result next spring. The Italian campaign from its very inception had been designed to second and supplement the invasion of the west, even before that invasion was launched, and the Allied Armies in Italy were therefore now called on once more to make a direct contribution to the winter campaign on the Western front. I considered four possible courses to make that contribution: to transfer troops from Italy to the west, to employ troops from Italy in Yugoslavia, to continue the offensive on the Italian front at full stretch to the limits set by exhaustion and material shortage or to halt the offensive now and build up for a renewal in greater strength at a later date. All these courses were judged solely by the criterion of which would have the greatest effect on operations in the west. The first was rejected because there was, on the current programme, no need for extra troops in France and the current maintenance situation would not allow any from Italy to be accepted as yet. To transfer troops to Yugoslavia was a project which I was then actively considering; it would have certain advantages, as I shall show, if we could first drive the enemy in Italy back to the Adige line, but it would have no effect on the Western front and would only begin to have one on the Eastern front next spring. Of the two courses which involved continuing to use our full resources in Italy the one which General Eisenhower considered more advantageous to him was the continuance of the offensive. I thoroughly appreciated this reading of the situation. It was for this reason that operations were pressed on in Italy despite all the difficulties of climate and terrain, of deficient manpower and material.

* One brigade of 46 Division in November; 4 British Infantry Division during December; remainder of 46 Division during January and February.