

could have done it. With the defenders showing such spirit the heaps of rubble raised by the bombardment were actually an assistance to them, not least in preventing the use of tanks. However, we succeeded in clearing the greater part of the town and capturing Castle Hill. That night, contrary to the forecast, the weather broke; torrential rain turned the valley, with its mass of craters, into a bog and deprived the night attack of the advantage of the moon. The same spirited defence was made on the mountain as in the town beneath. "Hangman's Hill", a small knoll protruding from the glacis of Monte Cassino a short way below the Monastery, was captured by 4 Indian Division on the 16th; this marked the limit of our gains in the heights above the town. Fighting continued in the town and by the 18th most of it was in our hands; but on the 19th an enemy counter-attack re-took a point between "Hangman's Hill" and the Castle hill. Our garrison of the former, which had been reduced by casualties, was cut off and progress in the town was halted.

On 20th March I informed both Army Commanders:

"The slow progress made so far in attacking the town of Cassino with the consequent delay in launching the attack on the Monastery, combined with the necessity of preparing the maximum forces for a full-scale offensive in the second half of April, makes it essential to decide in the course of the next twenty-four or thirty-six hours whether (a) to continue with the Cassino operations in the hope of capturing the Monastery during the next three or four days or, (b) to call the operations off and to consolidate such gains of ground as are important for the renewal of the offensive later".

Renewed attacks on the 21st and 22nd again made no progress and on the 23rd the attack was called off. The decision was taken to consolidate Castle Hill and the eastern part of the town; as a result the isolated troops on "Hangman's Hill" were withdrawn on the night of the 24th, and 4 Indian Division was relieved by the 78th. On 26th March 13 Corps took command of the sector and the New Zealand Corps was dissolved.

The three attacks on Cassino had failed to achieve what we had hoped from them but they left us with solid advantages. We had the greater part of the town, which gave us a bridgehead over the Rapido to use when we could concentrate the proper force for a renewed offensive. We could look forward to the next phase with confidence. Not only had we the Cassino bridgehead but we also held a large salient into the enemy's southern flank, won by 10 Corps' attack in January, which was of the very greatest value to Fifth Army in May; above all we had established, far in the enemy's rear, a strong Corps of good troops well supplied, in a position to cut all the enemy's communications when they should break out, or to threaten directly the possession of Rome on which the Germans set such value.

It was natural, perhaps, that some disappointment should be felt at home in view of the length of the pause which we now proposed before renewing the offensive. I felt it necessary to explain, on 2nd April: "The date is

influenced by our ability to regroup the necessary formations for battle, marshal our forces and prepare the stage for an all-out, sustained offensive which will best assist OVERLORD in drawing in and destroying the maximum number of German divisions which would otherwise be employed against the Western invasion". It could indeed be said, reviewing the results of the winter campaign, that the Allied Armies in Italy were already making the greatest possible contribution consistent with their strength to the plan of diverting German attention to what was now a secondary theatre. Twenty-three German divisions, including many of the best in the German Army, were held down in Italy; Anzio alone had meant the equivalent of four divisions being lost to other fronts. The size of the German garrison in the Balkans was also influenced by the potential threat from Italy and by aid to the Partisan movements which could be provided from Italian bases. All this was achieved without our once having that numerical superiority usually considered necessary for offensive operations, with a mixed force of many nationalities and with little opportunity of flexibility in their employment. And it was already likely that the enemy, now forced on to the defensive in so awkward a two-fronted position, would be unable to meet our next offensive without drawing once more on his dwindling central reserve to prevent a great disaster.

PART III.

THE CAPTURE OF ROME AND THE ADVANCE TO THE ARNO.

Regrouping for the Spring Offensive.

In planning the strategy to be used when the Allied Armies in Italy should be able to resume large-scale operations I had laid down at the start that "to have a reasonable chance of effective penetration against organised defences in Italian terrain, it is necessary for the side that takes the offensive to have a local superiority of at least three to one in infantry". It was to the attainment of this prior condition that I devoted my attention during the month of April. My general superiority in divisions in May would be of the nature of just under one-and-a-quarter to one; these were, however, the best odds I ever enjoyed in Italy. But to convert this slight overall superiority into a local superiority of three to one at the critical point would not be easy. Neither side enjoyed any particular advantage in ease of lateral communications and, if Kesselring correctly appreciated our intentions, he could concentrate his strength opposite the threatened point as fast as we could. And it must surely be easy for him to form a correct appreciation; we could not be going to attack up the Adriatic, which led nowhere; our main effort must come somewhere west of the Apennines and almost certainly on the axis of the Liri valley. So much was obvious from the configuration of the ground and would be confirmed by the move across to the west, which we could not hope to conceal, of Eighth Army Headquarters and the majority of the British troops under its command.*

* Captured enemy documents show that they were aware of the move of Eighth Army Headquarters though they placed it some twelve miles from its true location, presumably by an error in Direction Finding.