

was to attack north, directed on Rome. Both attacks were to be assisted, if at all possible, by amphibious flank attacks, on the east in the strength of about a brigade group and on Fifth Army's front of at least an infantry division with some armour. Since landing craft were so short the latter attack would have to wait until those used in the former had been brought round to the west coast; even then they might not be sufficient for the scale of attack I proposed. The signal to the Combined Chiefs of Staff therefore concluded: "it is certain that more landing craft will be required for a limited time if we are to capture Rome in the near future and avoid a slow, painful and costly series of frontal attacks."

A further review of the situation produced more definite proposals. On 31st October, General Eisenhower again approached the Combined Chiefs of Staff with a full review of the need for landing craft and the resources necessary to meet those needs. The tasks for which the craft were required were threefold. The first was the build-up of auxiliary units to complete formations already in Italy. Secondly it was essential to be able to mount an assault behind the enemy lines in the strength of about a division, probably on the west coast. Thirdly it was necessary to meet the demands of the Strategic Air Force, which included not only the move of the operational formations themselves but also large numbers of airfield construction and servicing units. The Foggia airfields, though the principal base in South Italy for the Italian Air Force, were not all-weather and very large quantities of steel plank had to be transported. The requirements of the Strategic Air Force had also been largely increased by the decision, communicated on 23rd October, to set up the XV United States Air Force in Italy. With our present resources, that is adhering to the existing programme of returning craft to the United Kingdom, the first of these tasks would not be completed before 15th December and there would remain only sufficient lift for one brigade or regimental combat team, which would be quite inadequate. If, however, we could keep until 15th December all the British Landing Ships, Tank (between forty-eight and fifty-six) and twelve United States, it would be possible both to complete the build-up of present formations and to mount a divisional amphibious assault. Even then only about a third of the task of establishing the Strategic Air Force in Italy would have been carried out; but if the craft could be retained for a further three weeks, until 5th January, the whole programme could be completed.

Another Commanders-in-Chief conference was held at Carthage on 3rd November. I confirmed the plan presented at the previous conference with the proviso that Eighth Army would have to make a short pause after the capture of the Pescara line before exerting pressure south-westwards down Route 5. Fifth Army was to press on up Route 6, the Via Casilina, and attempt to break through the enemy opposition on that axis coincident with Eighth Army's drive on Rome; it was hoped that it would retain sufficient impetus to reach the Frosinone area. At this point we would, if we had the means, launch an amphibious assault south of the Tiber and subsequently other assaults north of the

Tiber. In order to carry out these contemplated manoeuvres it would be necessary to move in for Fifth Army two French divisions plus the necessary services and non-divisional troops in order to maintain the impetus of the attack: the bulk of the troops in Fifth Army had been fighting continuously, and heavily, since 9th September. Moreover, their mobility and maintenance were severely hampered by the fact that about two thousand five hundred urgently needed vehicles were still held up at Bizerta awaiting landing craft to move them. In reply to a signal sent at the conclusion of the conference we were authorised by the Combined Chiefs of Staff to retain the sixty-eight landing craft until 15th December. With this, planning could go ahead with greater confidence.

Advance to the Winter Line.

After the advance to the Termoli-Vinchiato line Eighth Army continued active patrolling while they reorganised for the attack on the Winter Line. 5 Corps took over the right flank on 11th October with 78 and 8 Indian Divisions under command; the latter was a new formation, though of experienced units, but distinguished itself in this its first action. 78 Division managed to seize a bridge-head over the River Trigno, on the axis of Route 16, on the night of the 22nd-23rd, and by the next night all the enemy in the Corps sector were back behind the river. The main position here was on the San Salvo ridge, a dominant feature overlooking the west bank. The Trigno near the coast is a broad stream, liable to very sudden flooding and the ground on either bank is a very heavy clay soil in which it was almost impossible to construct a firm track. The first attack on San Salvo, on the night of the 27th, was frustrated largely owing to these difficulties, aggravated by a heavy fall of rain, and a full-scale attack was therefore necessary. This opened on the early morning of 3rd November, when 78 Division attacked San Salvo and 8 Indian Division, on their left, the village of Tufillo on a high spur above the river. There was heavy fighting for both villages but San Salvo was clear by the 4th and Tufillo by the 5th. The enemy, having now offered as much delay as possible on this line—and 16 Panzer Division, which was not fresh when it went into action, had had heavy losses—began to withdraw to his next, the "Bernhardt" line, which on Eighth Army's front ran from north of Isernia along the range of mountains forward of the Sangro. In the Sangro defences itself Kesselring had disposed 65 Infantry Division which he had brought down from the north. As a result of this withdrawal we were able to enter unopposed the important road junction of Isernia on 4th November.

On the Fifth Army front the first task, which fell to 10 Corps, was now to secure Monte Massico, the high razor-back ridge north-east of Mondragone. Apart from being an important stage in our advance northwards, this position was also vital to complete the covering screen defending Naples if it should be necessary at any time to go on to the defensive; present enemy strength and his constant reinforcement had, as I have already mentioned, brought such considerations more into the foreground. Two new German divisions, 305 and 94