

the assault. This began on 7th February and the intention was to capture the whole area in a night attack. In actual fact the stubborn resistance of 1 Division and counter-attacks by 45 United States Division meant that five days of heavy fighting were necessary before the objective was secured on the 12th. VI Corps was now back on its "intermediate" line astride the Anzio-Albano road and it was clear that this road would be the axis of the enemy's main attack. To meet it VI Corps relieved 1 Division and handed over the sector to 56 and 45 United States Divisions. On 17th February General Truscott, Commander of 3 United States Division* was appointed Deputy Commander of the Corps. He directed, with great success, the defence against the great German counter-offensive and on the 23rd succeeded General Lucas as Corps Commander. It was a new rôle, for General Truscott had made his reputation, and continued to increase it, as a dashing commander of hard-hitting offensives; indeed the defence was a new rôle altogether for our armies in Italy. The troops showed, however, that they were fully equal to the demands made on them, encouraged by the massive support of our concentrated artillery fire, which was augmented by the big guns of the Allied Navies and the bombs and machine-gun fire of the Air Forces.

By the time the German attack began two more divisions had been brought in to reinforce Fourteenth Army: 114 Jaeger from Yugoslavia and 362 Infantry from North Italy, and the three independent regiments and two heavy tank battalions already mentioned had also arrived. This gave the Germans the equivalent of about ten divisions against an Allied strength of rather less than five. German morale was particularly high; a special order from Hitler was read out to all troops before the attack in which he demanded that this "abscess" must and would be eliminated in three days. They were told that they would get massive air support from the Luftwaffe, combined with numbers of heavy tanks, employed for the first time in Italy, and would have the privilege of operating for the first time on any front the new secret weapon, the "Goliath" remote-controlled explosive tank. The plan was to attack on a very narrow front of some four thousand yards straight down the Albano-Anzio road on to Anzio itself, only eight miles away. The loss of Anzio would mean that the bridgehead would be split in half and deprived of its port; this would have made further defence hopeless and even evacuation would have been almost impossible for the beaches were already known to be entirely inadequate. The assault was to be made by four divisions, reinforced by eleven battalions, led by the crack Lehr Regiment, the Infantry Demonstration Regiment from Döberitz, pride of the German Army. Four hundred and fifty-two guns supported the attack. Two mobile divisions, 26 Panzer and 29 Panzer Grenadier, reinforced by two battalions, one of Tiger and one of Panther tanks, were echeloned behind them to exploit the success of which no one doubted.

The attack began at 0630 hours on 16th February after half an hour's artillery preparation, with massed infantry covered with smoke

and supported by tanks. By the end of the day a salient of some two thousand yards had been driven down the road in the sector of 45 Division. The airstrip at Nettuno had been rendered unserviceable by long-range artillery fire, which also destroyed four aircraft as they were about to take off; fighter cover, as a result, now had to be flown wholly from the Naples area. Before midnight the attack was resumed. Fighting on the 17th was even heavier; the enemy made fewer diversionary attacks and concentrated on his drive down the Anzio road. By now there was a wedge two and a half miles wide and over a mile deep in the centre of 45 Division's front. Against this wedge the whole of VI Corps' artillery was directed, supported by all the air resources available, some seven hundred bomber sorties. The enemy was now getting very near the "Final Beach-head Line" and General Truscott moved two brigades of 1 Division into that line in rear of 45 Division.

The 18th was the most critical day. After infiltration during the night into the shoulders of the salient the enemy moved forward under a lowering and overcast sky which prevented a repetition of the previous day's tremendous programme of air support. Once more waves of infantry attacked in the morning and in the afternoon Mackensen threw in his *Corps de Chasse*, not now to exploit a breakthrough in the Allied lines but to make one. For four hours the battle raged east of the road on the final beach-head line. The honours of the day go mainly to the United States 179 Infantry Regiment and 1 Battalion of the Loyals, and to the Corps artillery which did deadly execution in the attacking masses. The enemy was held, and that night it was clear that he was pulling back to re-organise. The time had come for the planned counter-attack. On the 19th an armoured force from 1 United States Armoured Division together with elements of 3 United States Infantry Division attacked the eastern flank of the German salient and gained some fifteen hundred yards causing disorganisation and panic. In the afternoon 2 Brigade of 1 Division cleared up some enemy penetrations and re-established the final line. A last, badly mismanaged enemy attack on 1 Loyals on the morning of the 20th, repulsed with heavy losses, was the end of the German offensive. It was clear that they would attack again, for Hitler was insistent, but their losses would render essential a pause to reorganise.*

Fresh Plans of Campaign.

The failure of the main offensive attempts by both sides, by the Allies in the second battle of Cassino and by the Germans at Anzio, left us with the same problem as before and the necessity of thinking out some new solution for it. I felt confident now that the bridgehead could be held, for, unless they could find fresh formations, a renewed German attack would have to be made in much reduced strength. I could concentrate, therefore, on Cassino and try to find some new method of taking this fortress which had twice defied our best efforts. I still had one division uncommitted, the 78th, but the weather was very bad and the Liri valley a sea of mud; it was no good putting my last fresh troops into a repetition of our former

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* German sources give their casualties from 16 to 20 February as 5,389 in killed, wounded and missing.