

originally conceived this was a part, but an especially important part, of the general plan then in force for disrupting the enemy's lines of communication; as I have already explained, it had been found by experience that the destruction of bridges caused very much more embarrassment to the enemy than the previous policy of attacking marshalling yards. This was, however, just that period in the first week of June when it seemed likely that we should be able to force our way rapidly through the Apennines and still have sufficient force to exploit into northern Italy on a large scale, and for this we wanted to have the chance of seizing a bridge over the Po. I was in fact planning an airborne operation for this very purpose using 2 Parachute Brigade which was shortly afterwards, unfortunately, withdrawn from me for use in the South of France. I therefore decided to cancel MALLORY MAJOR; but the decision to mount ANVIL put a very different complexion on the situation. The Po would now probably be the limit of our possible exploitation after we had broken through the mountains. The Air Force plan offered an opportunity of making a virtue of this necessity; I decided to pin my hopes on being able to bring the Germans to a decisive battle between the Apennines and the Po and drive them against the obstacle of a bridgeless river. In the meantime the enemy's maintenance would suffer from the interposition of this dramatic line of interdiction.

Orders for the operation went out on 11th July; its scope was extended and all bridges, both road and rail, were to be destroyed. During the first four days of the operation, 12th to 15th July, medium bombers concentrated on the nineteen bridges from Piacenza to the sea. Favourable weather contributed to the success of the attacks. In the first two days eleven bridges were rendered impassable and by the 15th the line of interdiction was complete. In some cases, however, the damage was not considered extensive enough and repeated attacks were made until, by the 27th all bridges over the Po east of and inclusive of the one at Torreberetti, north of Alessandria, were cut.

Change of Plan.

On 4th August I recast the plan for the attack on the "Gothic" line. The principal difference was in the rôle of Eighth Army; instead of exerting its main strength on its left and driving at the centre of the line side by side with Fifth Army it would now carry out a swift but secret transfer of strength to its right and strike at the extreme eastern end of the line in order to roll up the enemy's left at the point where he was least protected by the terrain. When this attack was well under way, and depending on the extent to which the enemy had weakened his centre to meet it, Fifth Army would launch a subsidiary attack up the axis Florence-Bologna. In order to strengthen this blow and make Fifth Army more nearly equivalent in strength to Eighth Army, and to what it had been before the recent withdrawals, I proposed to place under General Clark the British 13 Corps, of one armoured and two infantry divisions.* Thus

* 6 South African Armoured, 1 British and 8 Indian Infantry Divisions. The South Africans were later put under command of IV Corps and replaced by 6 British Armoured Division. 78 Division was added in October.

Fifth Army once more regained its character of an Allied Army, which had distinguished it from the start.

The new plan, which was given the code-name OLIVE was decided on at a short and informal conference on Orvieto airfield. There were only three of us present, General Leese, General Harding, my Chief of Staff, and myself and we sheltered from the sun under the wing of a Dakota while General Leese explained the reasons which led him to urge a reconsideration of our previous intentions. The proposal for a redirection of our attack was largely his idea and arose from his judgment of his Army's capabilities and the manner in which it could be best employed. I was already concerned at the prospect of extensive operations in mountains without my best mountain troops, the French. General Leese shared this concern and represented frankly that, although he was prepared to exert his utmost endeavours to carry out whatever strategy should seem best, he had not that confidence he would like to have in his ability to break through the centre of the Apennine position. With very small exceptions Eighth Army had no troops trained in mountain warfare and, of course, no organized mountain divisions; provision of pack transport trains and other vital necessities for this kind of operation was only improvised at present and the Army as a whole had had comparatively little experience of large-scale operations in mountains. On this line of attack, moreover, it would be unable to develop to the full extent its superiority in armour and artillery, the use of which in combination had been the mainstay of its successful African operations and which had recently given proof of its effectiveness in the Liri valley. The east coast route, on the other hand, appeared to provide much more the kind of battlefield to which Eighth Army was accustomed. It would have fewer mountains to contend with and the chance of employing its artillery in controlled and concentrated "set-piece" attacks, and the hope of flat country ahead beckoned to its desert-trained armour.

Eighth Army's preference for the east coast route of attack was based, it will be seen, on reasons both strictly military and also psychological. The latter reasons, as a well-known dictum of Napoleon's lays down, are as much military factors as the former and in a case where the courses available were fairly equally balanced it was obviously preferable to choose that course which inspired the greater confidence in those who were to carry it out. It was anything but certain that our heavy blow in the mountains of the centre would take us through to our objective and if the first attack there fell short of expectations the advantage would be all with the defenders. He had by far the easier lateral communications so that, once it was clear that all our strength was concentrated at one point, he could very rapidly build up a counter concentration. On the new plan we should be able to employ what I call the strategy of the "two-handed punch" or, more orthodoxly expressed, the strategy of attacking two points equally vital to the enemy (i.e., Ravenna and Bologna) either simultaneously or alternately in order to split the reserves available for the defence.

Plans to implement this decision were made