

number of American Corps and Army troops.* I was informed that our air strength would also be reduced, probably by about seventy per cent. I expounded my views on what could be done with what was left in a letter to General Wilson on 23rd June. My forces would be much reduced, and unbalanced in infantry, but I came to the conclusion that an advance into north-eastern Italy would still be possible, though at a reduced tempo, and must be attempted.

Enemy strength was reckoned at the equivalent of about fourteen full-strength divisions; reinforcement from elsewhere might bring it up to the equivalent of between eighteen and twenty-one divisions. His intentions were correctly appreciated as to continue to withdraw fighting to the Apennines and to defend the "Gothic" line. Our troops, assuming there were no further withdrawals than those already ordered, would amount to just over fourteen infantry and four armoured divisions, with seven independent armoured brigades. For a successful assault on the "Gothic" line, carried to the Po, a total of eighteen divisions would be required, of which not more than two or three should be armoured; to follow this up as far as the Piave would again require eighteen divisions and to force the Piave and exploit to the Ljubljana gap also eighteen divisions. It would obviously be impossible, however, although the Allied strength available just equalled eighteen divisions, to use the same divisions for all these assaults, even if the rôles of offence and defence were rotated; a reserve of at least a third, or six additional divisions, would be required. Various suggestions were made as to the source from which this additional strength could be derived. In the event all the major formations I asked for proved unobtainable though some of the minor ones were made available; but a more fruitful suggestion was the recommendation that we should raise, arm and equip some Italian formations. For each phase of the attack a certain number of divisions had a purely defensive rôle, and for this the Italian "Gruppi di Combattimento" which we later raised proved most useful.

The decision to proceed with operation ANVIL was communicated by the Combined Chiefs of Staff to Allied Force Headquarters on 2nd July. As a result of the decision a new directive was issued by General Wilson on 5th July in the following terms:

1. My previous directive was cancelled and, from receipt of the telegram, operation ANVIL was to have priority of all Mediterranean resources. This priority was to hold good until the build-up of forces in the South of France reached ten divisions.

2. I was to be informed from time to time what resources were allotted to operation ANVIL and I was to take all necessary steps to have them available at the required place and time.

I was told, as a guide, that as the plan now stood not more than four French and

three American divisions plus their appropriate Army, Corps and Service troops were to be taken from my command for this purpose. I was to be allotted 92 (Coloured) United States Infantry Division and also a Brazilian Infantry Division organised and equipped on the American basis. Firm dates would be notified later but for planning purposes approximate dates would be 15th September for 92 Division and 30th October for the Brazilians.

3. The destruction of the German forces in Italy continued to be my task. I was therefore—

(a) To advance over the Apennines and close to the line of the River Po securing the area Ravenna-Bologna-Modena to the coast north of Leghorn. If possible I was to seize Piacenza, an important road centre.

(b) Subsequently to cross the Po to the line Venice-Padua-Verona-Brescia. It was thought that with the advance of our forces in Southern France up the Rhone Valley and my advances as outlined above all German formations would withdraw from north-west Italy thus making an offensive in that direction unnecessary.

4. I should receive further instructions after reaching the line defined in paragraph 3 (b) above.

5. All available resources in the Mediterranean less those required for operation ANVIL and for internal security would be made available to me for these operations.

6. Subject to the priority given to ANVIL the Air Commander-in-Chief was requested to give me maximum air support.

In order to be in a position to carry out this rather optimistic directive it was necessary to make contact, as quickly as possible, with the "Gothic" line. Now that we knew finally where we stood and what our resources would be we were at least free from the doubts and indecisions of the past month and could develop our strategy to suit our strength. The enemy was in no mood to accelerate his withdrawal, now that he was back "on balance" again; after being driven off the Trasimene line on 29th June he went back fairly steadily until 5th July but on that day he began once more to call a halt. The line selected ran from the west coast in the area of Rosignano, some six miles north of Cecina, to Volterra, thence across the Val di Chiana to the heights surrounding Arezzo; on the east coast Filottrano and Osimo were key points. The west coast was strongly defended by 16 S.S. Panzer Grenadier Division with 26 Panzer Division on its left. 19 Luftwaffe Field Division had been withdrawn from the line in this sector; it had suffered very heavy casualties and shortly afterwards it was disbanded and the survivors incorporated in its sister division, the 20th. Further east 90 Panzer Grenadier Division, with 20 Luftwaffe Field Division under command, defended the high ground around Volterra. From Poggibonsi to Arezzo, in the centre of the front, dispositions were much the same as they had been in the Trasimene line with, from west to east, 15 Panzer Grenadier, 334 Infantry, 1 Parachute, Hermann Goering and 4 Parachute Divisions. This was a formidable deployment and it was

* These included: a mechanized Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, three tank battalions, three tank destroyer battalions, eleven batteries of artillery, two engineer combat regiments and a combat battalion, and a large number of anti-aircraft units. Between 1 June and 1 August the strength of Fifth Army fell by almost forty per cent., from 249,000 to 153,000.