

oppose this force I had in Italy seventeen divisions, four Italian Combat Groups and six armoured and four infantry brigades.*

The spring offensive began with Eighth Army's attack on 9th April on the enemy's left. It was a resumption of the battle of the previous winter, for the enemy were still on the same defence line and had been forbidden, by Hitler, to make even the smallest withdrawal. But the weather was now dry and favourable and our troops, though diminished in numbers, were thoroughly rested; the speed and weight of their blows were such that the enemy was unable to occupy any of his prepared alternative positions. The Senio and Santerno lines were breached and by the 17th Argenta had been captured and we were about to debouch through the Gap on to Ferrara. Meanwhile on the 14th Fifth Army had begun its drive on Bologna, after a two day postponement due to weather. By contrast with Eighth Army, which in the plain had been able to maintain a steady rate of progress, Fifth Army had first to burst out of the mountains. For a week the German defenders contested every height with the greatest stubbornness until the battered survivors were pushed off the last ridge of the Apennines down into the plain. Then the cost of this stubborn resistance was seen; unable to form any coherent line of defence the troops of Fourteenth Army were swept back to the Po in full flight and Fifth Army, after its slow and painful struggle in the mountains, was able to race ahead in wide sweeping thrusts. Bologna fell on the 21st, entered simultaneously by the Poles of Eighth Army and II Corps of Fifth Army. On the evening of the 22nd 10 United States Mountain Division reached the Po at San Benedetto and next day 5 Corps reached the river in strength either side of Ferrara. Between them these two thrusts had trapped and immobilized thousands of German troops and the number of prisoners was mounting to embarrassing proportions. From the Po northwards it was a pursuit, pressed with the utmost vigour against an enemy who had received a mortal blow and lost almost all his heavy weapons, but who still resisted, where he could, with the same determination and skill.

Indeed the last battle in Italy was as hard fought as the first. I was not faced with a broken and disintegrating army, nor was the outcome influenced in any degree by demoralization or lack of supplies on the German side.† It was a straightforward military operation which, by first enveloping the enemy's left wing in a classical outflanking manoeuvre and then breaking through with a sudden blow his weakened centre, drove him against the Po

and annihilated him there. The capitulation of 2nd May only sealed a fate which had already been decided. An army of half a million men had been destroyed and all forces remaining in Italy and Austria laid down their arms in unconditional surrender.

For just under two years, since the invasion of Sicily in 1943, Allied troops had been fighting on Italian soil. In this period of twenty-two months the troops under my command had four times carried out an assault landing, the most difficult operation in war. Three great offensives with the full force of an Army Group had been launched, in May and August, 1944, and in April, 1945. From Cape Passero to the Brenner is eleven hundred and forty miles by road; except for the plains of Lombardy, reached only at the end of the long struggle, that road led almost everywhere through mountains. In the course of the fighting we inflicted on the enemy casualties in killed, wounded and missing which have been estimated, largely from German figures, at five hundred and thirty-six thousand;* Allied casualties were three hundred and twelve thousand. But statistics, however striking†, are barren materials for an evaluation of the results of a campaign which must rather be considered against the background of the whole strategy of the war. In an attempt to set the campaign against that background I feel it would be least invidious to change the point of view and to consider the importance of the struggle in Italy from the German side.

From the beginning both Germans and Allies regarded Italy as a secondary theatre and looked for the main decision to be given on either the Eastern or the Western front. Both sides were therefore bound above all to consider whether this admitted "side-show" was making a positive contribution to the main object of strategy and whether it was making it at the cheapest possible cost. The Allies' avowed intention, laid down in May, 1943, and never varied, was not to occupy any particular territory but to bring to battle the maximum number of German troops; it was also the main German object (but not their only object) to contain as many Allied troops as possible and weaken by that amount the strength which could be brought to the assault of the West Wall and the Rhine. At every minute of the campaign, therefore, I had to pose to myself the question, who was containing whom in Italy? This was the vital question for the Germans also, and to them the answer can never have been satisfactory.‡ In all forty-five German divisions were employed in Italy, together with four Italian regular divisions, one Cossack division and miscellaneous formations of Czechs, Slovaks and Russians.

* The Allied Order of Battle at 9th April, 1945, is given at Appendix "I".

† We did, however, achieve our usual success in deceiving the enemy as to our plans. By simulating an intention to make an amphibious landing on the Venetian coast (which my naval advisers assured me was in fact quite impossible) we persuaded him to divert 29 Panzer Grenadier Division, his principal mobile reserve, north of the Po. Not only did this reduce his ability to resist Eighth Army's attack but also it was a great strain on enemy resources to carry out this lengthy move, eating into the meagre fuel stocks available, and then to bring the division, when the deception was discovered, back again over the Po crossings under the hammering of our air attack to be thrown too late into a losing battle.

* This does not include casualties inflicted on the Italians, when they were still at war with us, or the Germans who surrendered after the capitulation. The German figures referred to cover the period from 3 September 1943 to 20 April 1945.

† Another interesting figure is the total of nationalities under my command—twenty-six. A full list is given in Appendix "A."

‡ That is to say, the real answer had they known it, Since their faulty Intelligence continually overrated our strength they undoubtedly believed themselves to be containing forces superior to their own almost all the time. The chief advantage of our own Intelligence was that it enabled us to achieve our object with the greatest economy of force.