

be reinforced by 3 Greek Mountain Brigade when the latter arrived from the Middle East. At the time the attack went in the New Zealanders were moving from the Siena area to concentrate between Falconara and Iesi.

Fifth Army had three Corps in line, accounting for the remaining nine divisions, four of them British. 13 Corps, on the right of the Army front, held the area from the Pratomagno range to about two miles west of Florence. In the line were 1 Infantry, 6 Armoured and 8 Indian Divisions, supported by 1 Canadian Armoured Brigade. II Corps held a narrow sector of about four miles immediately on the left of 13 Corps; it had three infantry divisions under command, the 34th, 88th and 91st. All these were in reserve and the front was held by an independent Japanese-American Regimental Combat Team. On its left was IV Corps, responsible for the line of the Arno from due south of Prato to the sea; under command were the 1 Armoured and 85 Infantry Divisions, a Regimental Combat Team of 92 (Negro) Infantry Division, which was in process of arriving, and "Task Force 45", the improvised formation I have already referred to. 6 South African Armoured Division was moving to come under command of IV Corps to relieve 85 Infantry Division, which was to pass to II Corps. Like Eighth Army, therefore, Fifth Army had its greatest strength on its right; IV Corps duplicated the rôle of 10 Corps in holding a long defensive sector with minimum forces.

As will be seen, we had all our goods in the shop window and it was impossible for me to create a central reserve with which to influence the battle. This was less important than it might seem, however, in view of the nature of the plan. The two Armies were fighting, in the opening stages, essentially separate battles and each of them had a strong striking Corps, 5 and II Corps, with plenty of reserves. In a sense, Fifth Army might be regarded as the Army Group reserve, for in the two-handed strategy which I planned its blow would be held back until the moment seemed right.

#### *Opening of the Offensive.*

Eighth Army's attack went in as planned an hour before midnight on 25th August. The opening stages were silent but a barrage was fired at midnight to cover the advance from the bridgeheads over the Metauro river. By dawn on the 26th all the five assaulting divisions were deep across the river, more or less without opposition. It soon became obvious that we had caught the Germans in the middle of a fairly complicated withdrawal and regrouping movement; their intention was to pass 278 Division back through 1 Parachute Division and bring it across to the western flank of LXXVI Corps where it would relieve 5 Mountain Division which was to move to the French frontier to relieve 90 Panzer Grenadier Division. The enemy was, therefore, prepared to yield ground and the fact that he was falling back voluntarily as we advanced made it difficult for him to detect the greater weight of our attacks on this occasion compared with the following-up attacks by which the Poles had up to now been pressing him back up the Adriatic coast. Eighth Army's secret concentration had completely escaped his notice; the presence of some new troops in the former Polish sector had indeed been established but, having overestimated the Polish casualties in

the battle for Ancona, where his own losses had been heavy, he had in any case been expecting the Poles to be relieved. Moreover, there was still some twelve miles to go before the "Gothic" line was reached and the Germans probably expected us to delay our formal attack until we had actually reached it.

The effects of this German misappreciation lasted for some time and it was not until the 29th that the German Corps Commander issued a strong Order of the Day which showed that he had at last realized that a serious attempt at a break-through was intended. In spite of this on the 30th elements of both 5 Corps and the Canadians crossed the River Foglia and captured the advanced positions of the "Gothic" line before the enemy had time to man them. On 31st August and 1st September a further advance gave us a stretch of the main defences some twenty miles long, from the coast to Monte Calvo. The works were not manned, many of the minefields were still carefully marked and set at safe and in one case some recently arrived troops were actually captured while sweeping out the bunkers which they were to occupy. The parachutists, all of whom had acknowledged, by initialling, an order from Kesselring stating that the "Gothic" line was the last hope in Italy before the Brenner and that they were to hold their positions for three weeks, pulled out of Pesaro on the night of 1st September and raced back behind the Conca. In the fighting so far they had suffered very heavily, up to half the strength with which they went into action; it was only their hasty retreat which prevented them from being encircled by an outflanking move of the Polish Corps.

As always the Germans were quick to recover from their surprise. By 29th August a regiment from 26 Panzer Division, brought across from west of Empoli, had arrived and gone into action on the River Foglia; it was soon followed by the rest of the division. This was a standard manoeuvre; we had seen before, for instance in the Anzio crisis, the rapid transference of this division, now Kesselring's only armoured division, from one flank of the Army Group to the other, but this time it was committed so hastily and so unprepared that it suffered unduly heavy losses. At the same time 98 Division was committed from Army reserve. It fought with great vigour in this its first action in Italy and its casualties too were heavy. A regiment from 162 Turkoman Division was a less useful reinforcement. Finally, with that readiness to accept risks which had marked Kesselring's strategy throughout the campaign, and had gone far to retrieve the initial disasters to German arms which his invariable misreading of our intentions always incurred, the enemy Commander-in-Chief now removed his last reserve from the centre and left, 29 Panzer Grenadier Division, and despatched it in haste eastwards. The first elements of the division were in action by 4th September, but the bulk did not arrive until the 6th. On the latter day also a regiment of 5 Mountain Division, which had been taken out of the line on its way to the French frontier, was halted and brought back into the line.

It had been a great success for Eighth Army. By a combination of surprise in preparation and dash in the attack they had swept through a fortified line which had been twelve months in