

Infantry, had already been brought down into the line from North Italy. The operation, which led to the capture both of Monte Massico and Monte Santa Croce to the north, began on 28th October and was successfully completed by 4th November, at which date 46 and 7 Armoured Divisions reached the lower Garigliano between the bend opposite Monte Iuga and the sea. The enemy had intended to offer delay on this line, the southern extremity of the "Barbara" line, as shown by his reinforcing; but the dangers inherent in standing for long with a broad river immediately in rear, coupled no doubt with apprehensions of a seaborne outflanking move, decided him to pull back his right, when pressed, behind the Garigliano. In the meantime VI Corps had pushed forward up, and then across, the Volturno and driven the left wing of XIV Panzer Corps back to the "Bernhardt" line based on Monte Camino, Monte Maggiore and the hills on the north side of the Mignano defile from above Venafro (captured on 4th November) to above Isernia.

The idea of an amphibious landing continued to be entertained. On 23rd October General Clark signalled to me (I was then at the Commanders-in-Chief conference in Carthage) that he was contemplating a landing near Formia in the Gulf of Gaeta in the strength of a regimental combat team and two Ranger battalions, in connection with the attack of 10 and VI Corps. Naval opinion, however, condemned this as impracticable owing to the strength of the coast defences and minefields. The only apparent alternative, a landing between Gaeta and Sperlonga, was clearly impossible as yet, and until the forces advancing overland were within supporting distance.

Attack on the Winter Line.

On 8th November I received a new directive from General Eisenhower. It began by reaffirming the objectives given on 25th September, the capture of Rome and the maintenance, subsequently, of maximum pressure on the enemy. Rome, of course, had great political value but we did not regard it primarily as a prize to be won but rather as something which we knew the enemy intended to defend and for which we could make him fight his hardest. To draw him into battle and destroy his forces was our real object. The directive recognised that the enemy "intends to resist our occupation of Southern Italy to a greater degree than hitherto contemplated." Priority was therefore given, in the first phase, to the build-up of our land forces and of such air forces as were specifically required to assist them in their task. However, six heavy bombardment groups of the Strategic Air Force must be in Italy and operating by the end of the year for use in the bombing programme against Germany. Finally I was directed, after the capture of Rome, to secure possession by occupying a general line to cover Civitavecchia and Terni, the former being taken into use as a port.

On the same day I also issued a directive intended in particular for the guidance of Fifth Army in the operations to secure their objectives. My directive must be read against the background of the severe exhaustion of Fifth Army. The winter rains had started at the end

of September and were steadily increasing, making roads and by-passes extremely difficult and turning the open country into a sea of mud. The mountains in front were the most formidable we had yet encountered and the enemy, who had already reinforced his flanks with two fresh infantry divisions, was now bringing over part of 26 Panzer Division from Eighth Army's front. This meant that there were five enemy divisions opposing our five, and the Fifth Army troops were more tired than the enemy. The Germans were showing a stubborn spirit of resistance at all parts of the front and it was clear that a co-ordinated effort would be required to drive them from their positions. I therefore directed Fifth Army, on the completion of its present operations, to pause and regroup, allowing Eighth Army to strike first. The latter was to get astride Route 5 from Pescara to Popoli and Collarmele and be prepared to threaten the enemy lines of communication via Avezzano. Then Fifth Army would attack up the valley of the Liri and Sacco to reach Frosinone. This is the classical route for an army marching on Rome from the south and the only practicable one for a large force; the Via Appia, Route 7, becomes too involved with the Aurunci Mountains and the Pontine Marshes. Our troops, I think, got a little tired of hearing the Liri Valley described as "The gateway to Rome" during the long months when the gate was shut so firmly in their faces, but the description is true nevertheless. Finally, when the main body reached Frosinone, a seaborne landing would be made south of Rome, directed on the Alban Hills.* All available air support would go to Eighth Army in the first phase and to Fifth Army in the succeeding phase.

Between 5th and 15th November Fifth Army continued their attempts to break into the Winter Line in their sector. This enemy position, as I have already explained, was not so much a line as a belt of terrain about nine miles wide; its forward edge, in front of which our troops now stood, was the "Bernhardt" line, its rear, based on the high ground behind the Garigliano and Rapido, was the "Gustav" line, with the key fortress of Cassino. On the south the two lines coincided and the German defences utilised the plain forward of the Garigliano, the river, swift-flowing and deep, and the Aurunci Mountains to the west of it which command every part of the plain. To the north are the mountains commanding the Mignano Gap through which Route 6 passes, dominated by Monte Camino to the south and Monte Sammucro to the north; in the gap itself there are three isolated masses of high ground, Monte Lungo, Monte Porchia and Monte Trocchio, rising abruptly like rocks in a fairway. North of Monte Sammucro the mountains rise even higher to the central ridges of the Apennines, impossible country for large-scale operations.

The first objective was the Monte Camino massif, including the two subsidiary peaks of Monte La Difensa and Monte Maggiore, and the task of the assault was given to 56 British and 3 American Divisions under 10 and VI Corps respectively. From 5th to 12th November the attack was pressed against rock-hewn defences, steep slopes up which all supplies had to be man-handled, constant enemy counter-attacks

* Also known as the Colli Laziali or Latin Hills.