

every spare battalion, and even company, which they could detach from formations not heavily engaged, particularly from the central sector. Nevertheless we continued to make progress here also. By great efforts a bridge was completed in 4 Division sector on the morning of the 13th, the reserve brigade was immediately passed over and gains of up to two thousand yards made. By the evening both divisions in 13 Corps were only a little short of their second objectives, and the bridgehead was secure.

This completed the first phase of the operation. 13 Corps was now directed to employ its reserve infantry division, the 78th, to accomplish the second phase: to cut Route 6 and isolate Cassino in conjunction with the Poles who, having regrouped and reorganised, were warned to be ready to renew their attack on the morning of the 15th. The move forward of 78 Division was delayed by difficulties in the river crossing and congestion and bad going on the west bank. It was clear that 13 Corps would not be in a position to cut Route 6 by the morning of the 15th and the Polish attack was accordingly postponed. 4 British and 8 Indian Divisions continued to make good progress and with 78 Division moving in between them we should be able to develop a good degree of strength; but it was now certain that the latter would have to make a deliberate attack against stiffening resistance, rather than the rapid exploitation which had been hoped.

In the meantime Fifth Army was now finding the going rather easier. In the hard struggle which had marked the breaching of the "Gustav" line the two German divisions had suffered crippling losses; once forced out of their strong prepared positions their weakness was even more evident and their collapse was rapid. On the 14th the French captured Ausonia and cleared all the country to the north between it and the Liri, thus exposing the right flank of the Germans opposing 13 Corps as far west as San Giorgio a Liri. II Corps captured Santa Maria Infante, for which they had been fighting since the attack began, on the 14th; next day they were able to advance three miles beyond it and capture Spigno and Castellonorato. The whole of the German right flank had collapsed and its casualties had been such that it was never to form a coherent line again. The most significant point was the great hole which had been blasted in the centre of the line where 71 and 94 Divisions, or what remained of them, had left a gap as they fell back in different directions, one towards the Liri and the other towards the coast. Into this gap General Juin* launched his Goums, with the order to advance west across the trackless mountains north of the great ridge of Monte Petrella and cut the Itri—Pico road, far in the enemy's rear. Almost unopposed they pressed on through country regarded by the enemy as impassable; by the 16th they had captured Monte Revole and their mountain guns were shelling the road. On their right 3 Algerian Division was that day attacking Esperia.

Fall of Cassino.

In the Liri valley the Germans continued to resist unaffected by the disaster to their right.

13 Corps was now, however, almost through the "Gustav" defences and ready for the final assault, with the Poles, on the Cassino bastion. General Leese decided that the Canadian Corps would have to be employed on its left for the attack on the "Hitler" line and it began to cross the river on the evening of the 15th, relieving 8 Indian Division. Next day 78 Division opened their attack northwards through the last remaining defences of the "Gustav" line and made such progress that the same evening Eighth Army ordered the Poles to launch their attack on the morning of the 17th. The Poles had been obliged to carry out extensive reorganisation to fill the gaps caused by the losses of the earlier attack but, though their strength was reduced, they had gained experience. Once more they attacked the strong enemy positions on the ridges west of the Monastery and by 1800 hours had secured both "Phantom Ridge" and the commanding height of Colle Sant' Angelo. By the same time 13 Corps had cut Route 6. There was a narrow gap between, over the bare mountain side, which the Germans succeeded in keeping open that night long enough to pass through a large proportion of the garrison. In the morning of the 18th the town of Cassino was finally cleared and at 1030 hours the Poles raised the red and white standard with the white eagle over the ruins of the Monastery.

The fall of Cassino immediately brought a radical change in the shape of the battle in the Liri valley. The enemy now had no reason for attempting to stand forward of the "Hitler" line; indeed he had already spoiled his chances of a successful defence by his obstinacy in holding Cassino, mainly for propaganda purposes. Another incentive to withdrawal was the discovery of the original misappreciation; up to the 15th the German radio had still referred to our attack as "diversionary" but the identification of the Canadian Corps on the 16th showed Kesselring the trap into which he had fallen and the overwhelming strength of the assault which was about to be launched against the diminished garrison of the "Hitler" line. So weak, in fact, and so disorganised were they that Aquino, the northern bulwark of the line in the valley, was almost carried by a *coup de main*, on the evening of the 18th, by a small armoured force of the Derbyshire Yeomanry.

It was impossible to provide reinforcement from elsewhere. On the right 71 Division had suffered a blow from which it did not recover for nearly two months. To save the southern end of the line 90 Panzer Grenadier Division, which was intended for the valley, had to be diverted south of the river to block the Esperia defile. It came up in detail and was defeated in detail; this was to be the fate of all Kesselring's mobile divisions. 15 Panzer Grenadier Division, the next to be engaged, was split already; part was in the Liri valley; part, recalled from its coast-watching rôle, was now put in west of Formia to buttress 94 Division which was being hard pressed by II Corps, and part moved back to Sant' Oliva, at the mouth of the Esperia defile. Here they came under command of 26 Panzer Division. The latter had been originally intended as the armoured reserve for Fourteenth Army against a breakout from the bridgehead but it had been

* Général de Corps d'Armée (now Général d'Armée) A. P. Juin, K.C.B., Commander of the French Expeditionary Corps.