

Fiumicino was reached all along the 5 Corps front.\*

During the period while Fifth and Eighth Armies were developing their main attacks 10 Corps, acting as the connecting link between the two forces (but under command of Eighth Army), had been following up and hastening the enemy's withdrawal on the axis of Route 71, the Arezzo-Cesena road. Its frontage was very extensive for its small strength but the enemy also was weak in this sector. On 24th September the watershed was gained after a stiff fight for the Mandrioli Pass, for which the enemy put up a strong defence. After this heavy rains prevented further operations until 30th September; the division and the armoured brigade under command were transferred to the Adriatic sector and replaced by 1 Guards Brigade Group and 2 Anti-Aircraft Brigade from Fifth Army for use as infantry. With these forces, reinforced by three dismounted armoured car regiments and three independent infantry battalions, it was impossible to force the pace. The enemy, however, continued to withdraw and by 6th October 10 Corps had gained a position astride Route 71 on the upper reaches of the Savio, not much more than fifteen miles from Cesena.

#### *Fifth Army resumes the Attack on Bologna.*

The furthest point in Fifth Army's advance down the Imola road had been reached with the capture of Monte La Battaglia on 27th September. While the enemy was expending his strength in vain counter-attacks to recapture this vital position, attempts which continued until they died down from exhaustion on 6th October,† General Clark decided to take advantage of the progress made by the left wing of II Corps to concentrate the main weight of the Corps on the axis of Route 65, the direct road to Bologna. The factors which had militated against the choice of this axis for the original attack no longer applied, since we had now left well behind the strong defences and difficult terrain of the Futa Pass and were over the Radicosa Pass as well. Accordingly 13 Corps were to take over responsibility for the Imola axis and were to relieve 88 Division on Monte La Battaglia. I felt that this new drive would be the climax of our operations in the mountains; the season was already far advanced and the break in the weather had come earlier than usual;‡ unless we could get through now we were likely to be stuck in the mountains for the winter. In order, therefore, to give the maximum weight possible to the attack, and since all three divisions in 13 Corps were very tired after continuous fighting, I decided on 2nd October to reinforce it with 78 Division, my only fresh formation, just back from a restful tour of duty in the Middle East. Even with this addition, as I reported on the same date, I feared that "we may not be quite strong enough to carry it

through". General Clark's plan was to continue to press forward with the troops already in the line, resting one regiment from 85, 88 and 91 Divisions and then to bring in these rested troops on 10th October in a concentrated attack. 13 Corps was to conform by attacking on the right of II Corps with its existing forces and then, relieving 88 Division with the 78th, to attack in concert with the Americans down the Santerno valley onto Route 9 north-west of Imola.

II Corps' new drive had started on 1st October with 85 Division advancing east of Route 65 and the 91st on the road itself, supported by diversionary attacks by 88 and 34 Divisions on the right and left flanks respectively. On 2nd October the relief of 88 Division on Monte La Battaglia began, in the first place by 1 Guards Brigade. The badness of the roads and tracks in rear of the position severely hampered the relief; the rain also continued remorselessly. On the left of II Corps good progress was made. On 2nd October 91 Division captured the village of Monghidoro, twenty-five miles by road from Bologna, and on the 3rd 34 Division captured Monte Venere, a commanding height to the west of the large village of Loiano. On the right 85 Division had reached the head waters of the River Idice. By the 4th II Corps had made good an advance of some four miles in two days against strong resistance and in abominable weather. Loiano, twenty-two miles from Bologna, fell to 91 Division on the 5th. On the same day 6 South African Armoured Division came under direct Fifth Army command with the task of operating on the left of II Corps up the Prato-Castiglione road; it had under it 24 Guards Brigade, an independent Indian battalion (6/13 Frontier Force Rifles) and Combat Command "B" of 1 U.S. Armoured Division.

Slowly the advance on Bologna continued, with gains of the nature of two thousand yards in a day; for although we had now left the "Gothic" line defences far behind and were attacking, in a sense, downhill, the complexities of the mountain structure, the rain and the fanaticism of the defenders made every advance a hard fought struggle. The attack increased in intensity on 10th October when 88 Division, now completely relieved by 13 Corps, attacked simultaneously with 85 Division to the east of Route 65 and with 91 Division on the axis of the road itself. The enemy was now reinforcing fast.\* 65 Division had already been brought round from the western sector and put in in a narrow sector on the Bologna road and, on the 13th, 44 Division, which had been taken out for a rest, was re-committed. The troops were encouraged by a personal order from Hitler, read out to all ranks on 6th October, that the Apennine position was to be held at all costs. On the 14th Vietinghoff decided to run risks in his vital left sector and began to bring across 29 Panzer Grenadier Division from the front opposite Eighth Army. In spite of this our advance continued. On the 12th 85 Division captured Monte delle Formiche, a two thousand foot peak to the east of the main road and level

\* I am unable to say definitely when I crossed the Rubicon until historians decide which river it is; the Uso, Fiumicino and Pisciatello are the candidates in that order of preference.

† There was a further unsuccessful counter-attack on Monte La Battaglia on the night of 10/11 October.

‡ Although the Italian weather is regular only in its extreme variability and although heavy rainfall is a feature of every month in the calendar the rain in September and October 1944 was both heavier and earlier in its incidence than the general average of past years seemed to prognosticate.

\* At the beginning of October Field-Marshal Kesselring was seriously injured in a car accident on Route 9 and did not return until the end of December. He was succeeded in the interim by General von Vietinghoff of Tenth Army.