

and 20th June. The more important reason was unknown to Kesselring: the uncertainty of the future on the Allied side which had reached its climax just at this time. I explained the situation on 28th June:

"The ghost of ANVIL hangs heavily over the battle front. For example the Americans have been ordered to send back 517 Regimental Combat Team and 117 Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron which are actually engaged in contact with the enemy. They are also required to release now an engineer regiment and other service units required for the conduct of the battle. The French do not appear to be putting their hearts into the present operations and the reason is undoubtedly because they have their eyes turned in another direction. The air effort will shortly be curtailed owing to moves of fighting units to Corsica. Eighth Army are not directly concerned with ANVIL but as long as there is doubt and uncertainty about the future so long will there be a moral weakening. Armies have a very delicate sense and they are beginning to look over their shoulders. You will no doubt remember the Biblical quotation: 'If the trumpet give an uncertain sound who shall prepare himself for battle?'. If the momentum of my offensive is to be kept up to the maximum I must receive confirmation that the Italian campaign is to be backed. If on the other hand it is decided to go all out for ANVIL then I must know so that I can recast my present plan. In the event of the latter decision I have proposed that I should fly home and take certain proposals aimed at producing the best results my emasculated forces will be able to achieve in support of the war effort."

The battles for the Trasimene line may be considered as having lasted from 20th to 30th June. They were most severe in the centre where the Germans opposed 10 and 13 Corps; on the west coast, although the American advance was considerably slowed down, as compared with the first two weeks after the fall of Rome, the Germans were unable to prevent a steady gain of ground. IV Corps on the left, with 36 and 1 Armoured Divisions leading, captured Follonica on 24th June and Piombino on the 25th. Then stiffer resistance was met, particularly inland where 1 Armoured Division, opposed by a skilful enemy and difficult country, lost seventy-one tanks in the course of these ten days. The stiffest resistance was at Cecina, at the mouth of the river of the same name; the battle for the town lasted from 29th June to 1st July and cost 34 Division, which had relieved the 36th, fairly heavy casualties. 16 S.S. Division had been brought in here to strengthen the German defence and fought with skill and fanaticism. The French, directed on Siena, were held up from the 22nd to the 26th June on the River Orcia and were able only to make an advance of some two miles. On the night of the 27th, however, the Germans began to withdraw and only delaying actions were fought south of Siena, which was entered on 3rd July. By the 7th, with the capture of Colle di Val d'Elsa, the whole of Route 68, from its junction with Route 2 to the sea, had been secured.

The rolling hill country either side of Lake Trasimene, vine-clad and thickly cultivated,

offered a wealth of alternative positions to the defenders and imposed a severe delay on 13 and 10 Corps. Eighth Army's task was to secure the general area of Florence, Bibbiena and Arezzo as quickly as possible as a base for operations against the Northern Apennines. For the attainment of this purpose the routes forward were limited: in the Army sector only one road appeared capable of carrying the weight of a highly mechanized Corps, Route 71 which skirts the western shore of Lake Trasimene and runs up the Chiana valley to Arezzo. There is a secondary road running up the west side of the valley through Sinalunga to Arezzo but east of the lake there is no route forward until the Tiber valley is reached and the road here, through Perugia and Umbertide to Sansepolcro, is narrowly confined in the river valley and unsuitable for a rapid pursuit. Looking further ahead Arezzo was likely to prove a bottleneck in the advance on both Bibbiena and Florence. The original Eighth Army plan was to send 10 Corps up Route 71 and 13 Corps by the Sinalunga road; but it was soon seen that the latter road would be quite inadequate for the task and the inter-Corps boundary was therefore altered to run through the centre of the lake. This meant that the two Corps could not give mutual support and, after the north end of the lake had been reached, their axes would again diverge.*

13 Corps had the more important task, the easier and more direct route, and met the stronger opposition. It had three divisions, 6 South African Armoured, 4 and 78 Infantry and two armoured brigades, 9 and 1 Canadian. 78 Division was due to be relieved at the end of June and leave the theatre for a short rest and reorganisation in the Middle East. It would be difficult to reinforce, should that be necessary, for all Army reserves had been left behind near railhead, for ease of administration; it was intended, however, to bring up gradually 10 Indian Division from 5 Corps. Facing 13 Corps were three German divisions, 1 Parachute, 334 Infantry (four regiments strong) and Hermann Goering, and part of a fourth to the west, 356 Infantry. Their chosen position was anchored on the east on the lake and on the west on a ridge of high ground extending north-west from Chiusi; the latter town, an ancient hilltop city of the Etruscans, was held as a strongpoint by the Hermann Goering Division. West of Chiusi the hills are steep and badly roaded and there was no chance of the French in Radicofani exercising any pressure to their right. Our attack would have to come between Lake Trasimene and Lake Chiusi and here the Germans had prepared a series of defences in depth based on small woods and farms on the north bank of the small River Pescia which proved a useful anti-tank obstacle. In front of the Pescia they held a line of outposts, the southernmost of which were the villages of Sanfaticchio and Vaiano.

We made contact with the forward positions on 20th June, when 78 Division attacked Sanfaticchio and Vaiano at the south-western corner of the lake and the South Africans began to work their way up the lower slopes of the hill crowned by Chiusi. By next day the nature of the enemy resistance became clear, and 13

* I warned General Leese not to fall into the same trap as the Romans on this spot; he assured me that he had carefully studied the records of the earlier battle and would avoid the errors of Flaminius.