

the enemy would withdraw, and I was convinced that our spring offensive would find him still offering a most determined resistance. It was for this reason that I considered a regrouping absolutely vital to bring our full strength to bear at the critical point, while a continued attack in our present circumstances would merely weaken us to no good purpose. First, however, I would try once more to eliminate Cassino and seize some kind of a bridgehead; this would mean that there would be no serious lull in the fighting. Commenting on the air plan I limited myself to hoping: "that the weather will improve in time to give our air forces a chance to carry out their part of your plan. At present it is atrocious and shows no sign of change".

I explained my plan, on the lines of the appreciation of 22nd February, to the Army Commanders at a conference at Caserta on the 28th. We decided to relieve 5 British Division in 10 Corps by 88 United States Division at once and the former should then move to Anzio to relieve 56 Division. 56 Division had been severely reduced in fighting value during its short period in the bridgehead; General Truscott on the 26th reported it as inadequate to hold its present front.* We decided further that, at a later date, 34 United States Division should also move to Anzio. Steps were also taken to prepare the major reorganisation of the front for the coming offensive.

Fourteenth Army's Second Offensive at Anzio.

While the weather held up our renewed attack at Cassino it was already clear that the enemy was preparing another offensive at Anzio. He no doubt calculated that he had time enough before our threat to the "Gustav" line became serious and experience had given him a justified confidence in the strength of his defences there. His renewed attack could not be made in the same force as the first; there were large gaps in his divisions and morale had suffered the inevitable depression that follows the failure of an offensive of which much had been hoped. Mackensen therefore planned an attack on a smaller scale, using LXXVI Corps only; it was designed to narrow down the bridgehead by driving a wedge into the eastern flank to cut off the troops defending the Mussolini canal. If this were successful a further process of attrition might reduce the bridgehead to dimensions too small for safety. Four divisions, including two panzer divisions, were to make the assault, with a mobile division in reserve: it was to be combined with diversionary attacks on both flanks. VI Corps was prepared for the attack on 29th February and it was a complete failure: artillery fire and the firm defence of 3 Division broke up most of the attacks, a small penetration was made but was soon ironed out and by the afternoon of 1st March the enemy had acknowledged defeat.† He never again resumed the offensive and I now could consider the Anzio bridgehead secure, especially after we had captured Fourteenth Army's order of 4th March directing the assumption of the

defensive. In March three German mobile divisions, 26 Panzer, 29 Panzer Grenadier and Hermann Goering Panzer, were withdrawn from the line, followed by 114 Jaeger. On the Allied side 5 Division relieved the 56th between 5th and 11th March and on the 28th 34 Division relieved 3 United States Division, which had been sixty-seven days continuously in the line. 56 Division went to the Middle East but the 3rd remained at Anzio in Corps reserve.

I reported on the situation after the repulse of these attacks in a signal on 5th March, when I had returned from another visit to Anzio. It was now much improved and, I added, "a more healthy feeling of confidence prevails throughout". I took the opportunity of summing up the balance of the six weeks fighting with reference to the rather misleading accounts which had been given publicly:

"From various reports I have read from home it appears that public opinion imagines that after the initial landing no effort was made to advance further. This is most distressing to me and the troops. Reference should be made to the many casualties sustained by the British in taking Campoleone where they were finally held at the foot of the Colli Laziali, and also the losses suffered by the Americans in trying to take Cisterna, where all attacks failed. After this, superior German forces attacked us in strength and threw us on to the defensive and we had a bitter struggle to maintain the bridgehead intact after being driven back from Campoleone. A man may enter the backdoor of a house unperceived save by the kitchenmaid who raises the alarm. But unless the inhabitants hide upstairs there will be a fight in the passage for the possession of the house. We are now fighting in the passage".

Third Battle of Cassino.

All this time the New Zealand Corps, now strengthened by the addition of 78 Division, was waiting for suitable conditions for the next attack on Cassino, which was intended to be our last attack before the spring offensive. In order to give our experiment in the use of heavy air attack its best chance we had laid down two conditions: there should be three fine days before the attack to ensure that the ground was dry enough for the use of tanks, especially in the exploitation into the Liri valley, and there should be good visibility on the day of the attack for the benefit of the bombers. For a fortnight after the repulse of the second German offensive at Anzio General Freyberg waited at twenty-four hours notice until, on the 14th, these conditions appeared likely to be fulfilled and the attack was ordered for the next day. The total weight of high explosive showered on Cassino amounted to over eleven hundred tons of bombs and nearly two thousand rounds of artillery fire, but when the New Zealanders advanced into the town they found the enemy still resisting. This was an extraordinary feat and much to the credit of 1 Parachute Division.* After personally witnessing the bombardment it seemed to me inconceivable that any troops should be alive after eight hours of such terrific hammering, let alone should be able to man their defences. I doubt if any other division in the German Army

* As I have already explained, it was well below strength when it went to the bridgehead, and had been fighting continuously since 9 September.

† Kesselring ordered at 1840 hours 1 March all concentrated attacks to be halted; Mackensen had already called off the offensive. German losses in the two days amounted to 2,215 (excluding 362 Division's losses for 29 February).

* The first elements of the Parachutists had arrived for the second battle, in February, when they held the heights, including Monastery Hill. For the March assault they were responsible for the town as well.