

its capture of the Giogo pass to press down into the valley of the Santerno. On 21st September, 85 Infantry Division captured Firenzuola, and, pressing on north, stormed the strong position of Monte la Fine, west of the Imola road. On its right II Corps had put in, on the 21st, its last fresh division, 88 Infantry, with the task of clearing the east side of the Imola road. The 88th pressed on over desperately difficult country and on the 27th seized Monte La Battaglia, a great mountain mass dominating the Senio and Santerno valleys on either hand and only ten miles from Imola and the Emilian plain. The enemy now reacted with great vigour and began a series of most violent counter-attacks with elements of four divisions; these and the increasing difficulties of our communications brought a halt to our advance on Imola. 13 Corps during this time had had the task of protecting II Corps' right; it had still the same three divisions forward with which it had fought its way up from the Arno valley. Its sector of operations was dictated by the road-net and its main efforts must be down the roads to Faenza and Forli. On 24th September it captured Marradi on the former and San Benedetto on the latter. Meanwhile the left of II Corps had also been making good progress where 91 and 34 Divisions were advancing up the direct routes from Florence to Bologna. On the 21st the fate of the strong Futa Pass positions was sealed by the capture of Monte Gazzarro (or Guzzaso) on its eastern flank and by the 28th Route 65 was clear as far as the northern end of the Radicosa Pass, the second main pass on the Florence-Bologna road. On the Prato-Bologna road 34 Division had kept level until, on a change of corps boundaries at midnight 28th-29th September, they were relieved by the South Africans when just short of Castiglione dei Pepoli. Between them and the coast the task of IV Corps was to follow up the enemy; this had brought us by the 28th to a line some five miles north of Pistoia and running from there over the mountains north of Lucca to the coastal plain about three miles short of Massa where the western end of the "Gothic" line was secured by strong defences anchored on the sea. Viareggio was entered on 16th September by a British converted anti-aircraft battery of "Task Force 45". 6 Regimental Combat Team of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force took over a sector of the line on 16th September. This was the first contingent of an Allied South American state to see action in this war. While it was gaining battle experience it played a valuable rôle in holding an important part of the defensive front.

The "Gothic" line was now completely turned at its eastern end and pierced over a wide front in the centre. By the end of September the enemy had decided to abandon such of the prepared positions as still remained in his hands except for a small sector in the extreme west. In thus depriving the enemy of the permanent defences on which he had worked so long the Allied Armies in Italy had scored a great success, won at a great price, but it was difficult to exploit. The furthest advance had been made, as was intended, by the Eighth Army, which had advanced some thirty miles in twenty-six days. In a letter to me summing up the results of the action to date, written on

21st September, General Leese said he considered the fighting to have been as bitter as at Alamein and Cassino. The German artillery fire was very heavy and well-directed and the many counter-attacks were made in considerable strength; one village changed hands ten times. Eighth Army claimed to have "severely mauled" eleven German divisions and taken over eight thousand prisoners. The cost was over fourteen thousand casualties, of which over seven thousand in British infantry units, and two hundred and ten tanks lost. The tanks were easily replaceable, but the men were not and I was forced to take very unwelcome measures to keep up the strength of formations. 1 British Armoured Division, which had played a distinguished part in so many battles in Africa, was to be disbanded in less than three months after its arrival in Italy. A brigade of 56 Division was be reduced to a cadre basis. Finally, all United Kingdom infantry battalions were to be reorganised at once on the basis of three rifle companies.* Yet, although the price had been heavy, no one in Eighth Army doubted that a real victory had been gained, for it was confidently expected that, after breaking into the flat country of the Romagna, we should be able to exploit rapidly to the Po. It was not long, however, before, as the Eighth Army historian puts it, "the tactical implications of the local agricultural methods were realized" and the continuous water lines were found to be more serious obstacles than the mountains.

Not only the Eighth Army replacement situation but the general manpower situation of the Allied Armies in Italy was such as to give rise to anxiety. I explained the main features to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff on 21st September. After the loss of seven divisions to the invasion of Southern France the promised reinforcements to Italy, after deducting other subsequent decreases, had only amounted to one and a half divisions, including 78 Division, which would not be available until the first week in October. On that date, therefore, the net loss would be five and a half divisions. The enemy, on the other hand, had continued to reinforce Italy. Since May Kesselring had lost to other fronts three of his original twenty-three German divisions and had disbanded one other. In return he had received from elsewhere ten divisions and three divisions' worth of extra replacements; one of the new arrivals had now been likewise disbanded which left him with twenty-eight German divisions all told.† To this should be added two Italian divisions which were at least useful for internal security duties. Even without counting the Italians the net German gains were five divisions, or eight if the three "shadow"

* I had received 13,000 infantry replacements from the United Kingdom in April 1944 and was told that I should have no more. Realizing that this quota would not last beyond the end of July I set on foot a plan for creating more reinforcements from theatre resources. By disbanding Light Anti-Aircraft and some Royal Armoured Corps units I got together 17,000 reinforcements, 9,000 of which went to infantry units. In August I converted a further 5,000 gunners into infantry but even this was insufficient to make up for our losses in the "Gothic" line battles.

† 232 and 237 Infantry Divisions had now arrived to replace 3 and 15 Panzer Grenadier Divisions; the former went, in the first place, to Liguria and the latter to Istria. It will be remembered that August and September, the period when this reinforcement of Italy was set in train, were months of very severe crisis on the Western Front.