

The directive on which Kesselring was acting, dating from the previous October but still in force, was to hold the Allies as far south of Rome as possible. He had been successful, at great strain and risk, in achieving this object during the winter months, but this very success had made his task more difficult. For the very reason that he had kept the Allies out of Rome for seven months the retention of Rome had acquired a still greater value for prestige, a consideration which might overrule the requirements of sound strategy; indeed for the same reason, though acting here with slightly lesser force, the Cassino position had acquired a semi-sacred character which would dictate a special effort to hold it. However, there was no reason for Kesselring to suppose that the task laid on him would be beyond his powers. He had twenty-three divisions to our twenty-eight, two of them Panzer and four Panzer Grenadier divisions. He had been receiving very strong drafts all through the winter, amounting on the average to fifteen thousand men a month, and his formations were therefore well up to strength.* New equipment, particularly an increased divisional allotment of assault guns, had arrived and the April lull had been used to good advantage in training. Morale was high and the troops could be relied on to give a good account of themselves.

Of the twenty-three German divisions in the country eighteen were in the two armies actively engaged;† as the battle developed all but one were drawn in, together with five more from other theatres. One of the two Panzer divisions, the Hermann Goering Division, was earmarked for France and was already half-way there, as it was re-forming around Leghorn, but in the event it too was drawn into the battle in Italy. 162 Infantry Division, a formation of Soviet subjects, mainly Turkomans, had been brought in from Slovenia to take over responsibility for the Tuscan coast. During the lull in April the mobile divisions in Tenth and Fourteenth Armies were pulled out of the line into reserve. The infantry divisions in the line also thinned out wherever possible; in the Adriatic sector Russian troops were employed in the line to relieve Germans and even west of the Apennines battalions were occupying sectors formerly held by regiments. The enemy, therefore, was theoretically in a good position to meet our offensive owing to the presence of strong mobile reserves. It was our prime object to see that these reserves should be directed to the wrong sectors.

One thing was clear to the enemy: the Allies would have to make an attack up the Liri valley whatever else they did, and here the German plan of defence rested on three fortified positions known as the "Gustav", "Adolf Hitler" and "Caesar" lines. The first of these was the present main line of resistance which represented the rear line of the old "winter position", dented and endangered in some parts by the Allied offensives from January to March, but in principle the same as planned. It had stood the test of many furious attacks, which had revealed as nothing

else could have done its strength and its weaknesses, and during the April lull these lessons had been applied in the form of much work on the improvement of the defences. However even before this, in December 1943, work had been started on a second line in rear which was given the name of "Adolf Hitler" until its fall seemed imminent, when it was changed to the colourless "Dora"; we usually called it the "Piedimonte—Pontecorvo line". Its function was to bar the advance up the Liri valley to a force which had succeeded in forcing the Rapido, and for this its left rested on Monte Cairo, descending to the valley through Piedimonte, and its right on the Liri at Pontecorvo; south of the Liri there were few permanent defences on this line for the country was very difficult. In the plain the defences were by May very strong; they included extensive belts of wire, anti-tank ditches, minefields and steel pillboxes, many of the latter formed by "Panther" tank turrets sunk in the ground. Against a frontal assault, therefore, the line was most formidable but it had one serious weakness: the presence of a strong Allied Corps many miles behind it at Anzio. A break-out from there, cutting Route 6, would make the "Adolf Hitler" line useless. The Germans therefore began to construct, in March, a third line of defences known as the "Caesar" line. This was a position to which Tenth and Fourteenth Armies would withdraw when, and if, the Allies forced a junction with the Anzio bridgehead; it might be called the last-ditch defence of Rome though, if it could be held, it gave reasonable depth forward of the city. Its main purpose was to block the gap between the Alban Hills and the Prenestini mountains through which run both Route 6 and the Alatri—Palestrina—Tivoli road. To the west of this gap the line continued across the Alban Hills to the left flank of the bridgehead, and to the east of it it ran via Avezzano and Celano to positions on the Saline river west of Pescara. Only the right flank of the line, where it actually covered Rome, had had much work done on it but the positions here were naturally strong.

This was, in brief outline, the problem which faced me in planning the battle for Rome. The solution eventually adopted was first given expression in an appreciation of 22nd February and the plan there proposed was agreed on at an Army Commanders' conference at Caserta on 28th February. In essence it involved making Fifth Army responsible for the sea flank, including Anzio and the Aurunci Mountains south of the Liri, and bringing the weight of Eighth Army into an attack up the Liri valley. It would mean a great effort of regrouping and would take a considerable time. This would in any case be inevitable, for all troops in both Fifth and Eighth Armies were exhausted and time was necessary, not only for them to be rested, but also for the arrival of reinforcements.

Two main problems faced the administrative staff: the maximum number of divisions which could be maintained in Italy by the existing port facilities and the practicability of maintaining the bulk of these on an axis west of the Apennines. The agreed figure for the first was twenty-eight divisions, which coincided well enough with the maximum number we actually had available. The second problem was made easier by the fact that the original plan for a

* A good example is 15 Panzer Grenadier Division. This was one of the hardest worked formations in Tenth Army and only came out of the line at the beginning of May but its strength on 6 May was 13,984 plus 915 Italians employed mainly in the divisional services.

† Appendix "F".