

Meanwhile 65 Infantry Division, which was re-organising at Genoa after its losses on the Sangro, was hurried down to the west of the bridgehead to assist Gehricke, and advanced elements of 715 (Motorized) Infantry Division had already arrived. Command was exercised by Fourteenth Army, General von Mackensen, with two Corps Headquarters, I Parachute and LXXVI Panzer Corps. The tank strength available amounted to above one hundred and eighty and the artillery deployment was already formidable.

The first attempt to enlarge the bridgehead position was on 25th January when 3 Division advanced towards Cisterna. This attack was halted by the Hermann Goering Division after gains of up to two miles. The advance was resumed on the 27th but was again halted well short of its objective; 3 Division was still three miles from the town and it was evident that a more concentrated and better prepared attack would be necessary. 1 Division in the meanwhile was endeavouring to push up the main road from Anzio to Albano with Campoleone as its first objective. An attack on the so-called "Factory Buildings" (actually the first buildings of Mussolini's new town of Aprilia) was successful on the 25th, though it met strong resistance from 3 Panzer Grenadier Division; but we could only advance a mile and a half beyond the "Factory" and it was clear that Campoleone, like Cisterna, could only be taken by a strong and consolidated attack. I had returned to the bridgehead on the 25th, after being there on D-day, and as a result of my observations ordered General Clark on the 27th to press the advance with the utmost energy before the enemy reinforcements could arrive; they were then suffering considerable delay from our air attacks on communications. I told him I considered that, with the prospect of the balance of 45 Division arriving in the bridgehead shortly, risks must be taken and I suggested that all efforts should now be concentrated on full-scale co-ordinated attacks to capture Cisterna and Campoleone, followed by a rapid advance on Velletri.

General Clark, who had set up an Advanced Command Post at Anzio, replied that the main attack could not be launched, for various reasons, before 30th January. The results of the attack were disappointing. 3 Division failed to capture Cisterna and suffered heavy losses, particularly among the Ranger battalions which were under command. 1 Division reached the railway embankment at Campoleone, a difficult obstacle, but was unable to advance beyond it, leaving itself in a dangerous salient protruding into the enemy lines. On 31st January I again visited Anzio by destroyer, returning on 2nd February. It was clear to me that until we had captured Cisterna and Campoleone it would be impossible to undertake any important offensive operations. I therefore ordered a renewed attack on Cisterna in full strength with a properly prepared Corps plan and all possible concentration of artillery and air attacks. Next my plan was to gain ground on the left of 1 Division, clear up our centre and organise our communications so as to be able to mount a solid offensive to cut Route 6.

Before these instructions could be carried out the Germans on 3rd February launched a

counter-attack on the salient which 1 Division had established, stretching north from Carroceto to Campoleone. The position, held by 3 Infantry Brigade, was untenable against a heavy attack and it was only by committing 168 Brigade of 56 Division, which had landed as a reinforcement on 3rd February, that it was possible to extricate our troops from the salient by the night of the 4th/5th to a line covering Carroceto and the "Factory". VI Corps then went over to the defensive in preparation for the enemy counter-attack in force, of whose imminence there was strong evidence. Two positions were to be prepared in rear of the present front lines; the last, corresponding with the initial bridgehead, was to be the final line. 1 and 3 Divisions, both reinforced, plus the newly arrived 1 Special Service Force and a regimental combat team of 45 Division, were in the line; the remainder of the 45th and 1 Armoured Division, less one Combat Command, were in reserve. As the dimensions of the enemy threat became more apparent I decided that more reinforcement was necessary and sent in the remainder of 56 British Division; this arrived between 13th and 18th February and relieved 1 Division on the 13th. On 25th February 18 Infantry Brigade, from the British 1 Armoured Division in North Africa, began to disembark at Anzio.

Renewed Attack on the "Gustav" Line.

Although the attempt by 10 Corps to envelop the southern flank of the "Gustav" line had been halted after an initial success by the enemy's counter-attacks, and the frontal attack by II Corps across the Rapido had failed, it was still vitally necessary to break through as soon as possible in order to gain the maximum advantage from the Anzio landings. There was little chance of a further advance through the Aurunci Mountains for the enemy were strongly posted and prepared and we had had to weaken 10 Corps by withdrawing 56 Division for Anzio. I therefore decided to strengthen the northern arm of my pincers and ordered II Corps to shift its weight to its right flank and, in conjunction with the French Expeditionary Corps, to seize the high ground above Cassino and envelop the position from the north. If we could seize Cassino, the northern bastion, we should be able to advance up the valley without worrying about the southern flank.

It was difficult for Eighth Army to provide much distraction to tie down the enemy on their front. When General Leese took over he found that the heavy battles from the Sangro to Ortona had left the enemy, though no longer in his planned winter positions, still strongly posted on an easily defensible line and our own troops severely depleted in strength. There was no vital objective within our grasp on this front; the enemy could easily afford to give ground if really necessary and had already prepared strong defensive positions in rear. On 22nd January General Leese told me that he hoped to be able to mount a major operation, using 4 Indian, 1 Canadian and 78 Divisions, by mid-February. I replied that this would probably be too late and that what we needed was to prevent the enemy withdrawing troops from opposite Eighth Army, which he was doing at that very time. On further consideration, however, I saw clearly that that was impossible and I therefore decided, on 30th