

Corps' Commander decided to commit his reserve division, 4 British. 78 Division succeeded, in very fierce hand-to-hand fighting, in clearing Sanfaticchio on the 21st but they had made no progress against Vaiano and the South Africans met most violent resistance in their attack on Chiusi. Only the Armoured Brigade was forward; they managed, after three days of heavy fighting, to get a company into the centre of the town early on the 23rd but the Germans counter-attacked and by the end of the day were again firmly in control. 78 Division now decided to put in a full-scale attack on the lower ground on their right, to carry the defences of the Pescia and exploit to Castiglione, in the centre of the west shore of the lake. The attack went in on the morning of the 24th and by the evening had secured a small bridgehead over the Pescia; but heavy rain delayed the armour which was to have supported the leading troops. As a result progress was slow on the 25th and by the 26th it was necessary to call a halt until 4 Division could close up on the left flank. They had had a hard struggle for Vaiano, which was not cleared until the 25th, and did not draw level until the 26th. In the meantime, however, the divisional reconnaissance regiment had pushed round the north shore of Lake Chiusi and in face of this threat the Germans withdrew from the town; the South Africans entered on the morning of the 26th but were held up by very extensive demolitions on all the exit roads.

The direct route up the west shore of the lake was still blocked by the strong defences of the line running west-south-west from Castiglione and 78 Division was unable to make any progress here. This meant that 4 Division would have to force the pace. It took a consolidated attack by four battalions to carry Frattavecchia in the centre of the line. By the end of 28th June the major part of the ridge north of the Pescia had been cleared and the Germans had been driven off the Trasimene Line. They had won a welcome respite, though at heavy cost in casualties which had severely depleted the 1 Parachute and 334 Divisions. They now had to fall back fairly rapidly on their next delaying position, covering Arezzo, but the flooded condition of the Val di Chiana would give them reasonable time for this and allow them to make firm dispositions. They could remain a little longer in the more broken ground immediately west of the lake and gave 4 Division a hard fight for Petignano on the 30th. On 2nd July 78 Division cleared the northern shore of Lake Trasimene.

East of the lake 10 Corps could do little more than maintain pressure and keep level with 13 Corps' advance. The strong mountain positions north of Perugia, extending almost to the east shore of the lake, were unsuitable for operations by 6 British Armoured Division; the Germans rapidly appreciated this and were able to withdraw 15 Panzer Grenadier Division to the west side of the lake to oppose 13 Corps. They also pulled out 94 Infantry Division and sent it back to North Italy to re-form completely with fresh drafts. On 26th June 10 Corps regrouped; 10 Indian Division arrived and 6 Armoured was sent across to reinforce 13 Corps. The same day 8 Indian Division scored a gratifying success by the capture of Monte Pilonica, east of the Tiber. Between the river and the lake the Germans now began, on 27th June, to fall back

as a result of their failure to hold 13 Corps. 10 Corps followed up, advancing as rapidly as their means permitted into the mountains either side of the Tiber. On their right the Poles, who came under command of Eighth Army on 29th June, continued to make preparations for the assault on the German position behind the Chienti but discovered that the general withdrawal on the night of the 29th applied to their front also; they therefore proceeded, although their concentration was by no means complete, to pursue across the river.

New Plans of Campaign.

So far I had been conducting operations on the assumption that the forces which had been withdrawn provisionally for ANVIL, or which were still to be withdrawn, might yet be returned to my command for the exploitation of the Italian campaign if the decision went against ANVIL. As the time lengthened during which that decision hung in the balance it became urgent to plan what could be done with the forces available on either hypothesis. I therefore called a conference of my Army Commanders on 23th June and explained what my plans would be if I were assured the same forces as at present. The object of operations in Italy must be to invade southern Germany by an overland advance through north-eastern Italy and the Ljubljana gap. By this means we should strike directly at territory which it was vital for the Germans to defend, even at the cost of diverting strength from other fronts, and have the possibility of joining hands with the southern wing of the Red Army and with Marshal Tito's partisan forces. The alternative, an advance into Southern France across the Maritime Alps, would be less profitable and more difficult. I appreciated that the enemy intended to hold the Northern Apennines until driven from that position in overwhelming force but, with the troops then available to him, he would be unable to do so and would be risking certain disaster, provided we could bring our whole strength against him. Coming down to tactical details, I considered that the "Gothic" line should be attacked in the centre both for topographical reasons, which I shall discuss later, and because that would lead most directly to the important objectives in Northern Italy. The conference agreed to the plan as outlined but took note that if ANVIL were launched it would not be practical. In particular the administrative organisation of the Allied Armies in Italy would be "hamstrung", in General Robertson's expression. General Clark also made the point about the bad effect of the present state of indecision on the morale and efficiency of the troops now engaged.

It is interesting to speculate what would have happened if I had been allowed to carry out this plan and had appeared with two strong armies on the southern frontier of Germany and at the gates of the Danube basin in the autumn of 1944. The effects would probably have been considerable, not only militarily but also politically. My plan was, however, fated to be stillborn though the final decision was not taken until the beginning of July and the discouraging feeling of uncertainty continued to hang over the battlefield. The demands of ANVIL had grown: the troops to be withdrawn included not only the whole French Corps and three United States divisions but also a considerable