

divisions, incorporated as replacements in three of the original divisions, are counted. Summing up I said:

"To put it briefly, we shall have to continue the battle of Italy with about twenty divisions, almost all of which have had long periods of heavy fighting this year, and some for several years, against the twenty German divisions committed to the battle front, with the prospect of four more German divisions, and probably two Italian divisions, joining in the battle at a later stage. We are inflicting very heavy losses on the enemy and are making slow but steady progress, but our losses are also heavy and we are fighting in country where, it is generally agreed, a superiority of at least three to one is required for successful offensive operations. It will be small wonder, therefore, if we fail to score a really decisive success when the opposing forces are so equally matched".

I was naturally fully conscious that by thus battling on against odds we were fulfilling our function in the grand strategy of the war, whatever the cost and even though we were to make no progress on the ground at all. I was repeatedly reminded that this was the crisis of the war and that now more than ever it was vital to hold down the maximum forces in Italy, away from the vital theatres in east and west.* From this point of view the balance of strength in Italy was definitely in our favour and I was determined to keep it so; but I could not help considering the question of how long I could keep up the pressure. With the present relationship between the opposing forces, even though enemy casualties exceeded ours, it would be impossible to continue hammering away at full stretch indefinitely, and to suspend operations, if the suspension were long extended, would be to renounce the whole object of the campaign. The first relief I could expect would be from the newly formed Italian Combat Groups; they were still an unknown quantity but would at least be useful in a defensive rôle. The first was expected to be ready by the end of October, the second by the middle of November; two more by the middle of December and two by January. In the event only five were formed; Cremona, Mantova, Folgore, Legnano and Friuli. Cremona was the first to see active service, in January 1945. The Brazilians were also an unknown quantity, though they were well equipped and in good strength. They gave a good account of themselves in the final offensive of the following spring. The coloured troops of the United States 92 Infantry Division proved unsuited for modern combat conditions; the division was eventually reorganized, and made into an effective formation by incorporating one Japanese-American and one white American Regimental Combat Team, the latter formed from converted anti-aircraft gunners.

Eighth Army enters the Romagna.

I have already alluded to the difficulties of operations in the Romagna and the fact that water was now the main obstacle to Eighth Army's advance rather than high ground. The whole area is nothing but a great reclaimed swamp—and not wholly reclaimed in some parts—formed by the lower courses of numerous

rivers flowing down from the Apennines in their new north-easterly direction. The principal rivers are, in order from east to west, the Uso, the Savio, the Ronco, the Montone (these last two after their confluence take the name of Fiumi Uniti), the Lamone, the Senio, the Santerno, the Sillaro and the Idice; these are only the principal rivers and there are hundreds of smaller streams, canals and irrigation ditches in between them. By these, and by canalization of the main rivers, the primitive swamp had been drained after centuries of patient effort and, as the water flowed off, so the level of the ground sank; the river beds were thereby left higher than the surrounding ground and as soon as they descend into the plain all these rivers need high banks on either side to keep them in their course and to guard against the sudden rise of level which heavy rainfall in the mountains invariably causes. Even in the best drained areas the soil remembers its marshy origin and when rained on forms the richest mud known to the Italian theatre. It will be seen, therefore, that under autumn conditions we should have difficulty in making full use of our armoured superiority. Tanks were hampered also by the intensive cultivation, and in particular by the vineyards. The Germans had prepared fieldworks and well-studied plans for defence on all the main water lines and were determined to offer the most stubborn resistance in this vital sector. To Kesselring his eastern flank was the pivot which, if a withdrawal was forced on him, he would have to hold firmly in order to swing back his right into a position blocking the approaches to Austria through north-eastern Italy, whether that position was based on the line of the Po and Ticino or the Adige. The pivot was not, however, in serious danger until he was forced back to a line between the Valli di Comacchio, a large lagoon on the Adriatic shore, south of the Po, and Bologna in the south-west. Before that position was reached he had reason to hope that the cumulative effect of so many opposed river crossings and the deterioration of the weather would bring Eighth Army's offensive to a standstill.

The Canadians crossed the Marecchia by Rimini on 21st September and the next day the New Zealanders passed through 1 Canadian Division to exploit up the coast. 5 Corps also reached the river on the 22nd, having mopped up the Coriano area, and on the 23rd exploited forward to make contact with the ridge between the Marecchia and the Uso. By the 25th the enemy was generally back behind the Uso but not in very good order and advances were made all along the Army front. In the plains we had cleared the whole eastern bank of the Fiumicino by 29th September but the enemy was still holding out in the foothills south of Route 9 when the rain descended with great violence for four successive days. All the fords over the Marecchia and Uso became impassable and the approaches to the bridges, necessarily more congested, were in very bad condition; the Fiumicino, normally a shallow trickle, swelled to a width of thirty feet and its speed and depth made it impossible for infantry patrols to cross. Going off the roads became quite impossible. The enemy took heart from this to maintain a steadfast resistance and it was not until 5th October that the

* General Eisenhower's forces first crossed the German frontier on 11 September.