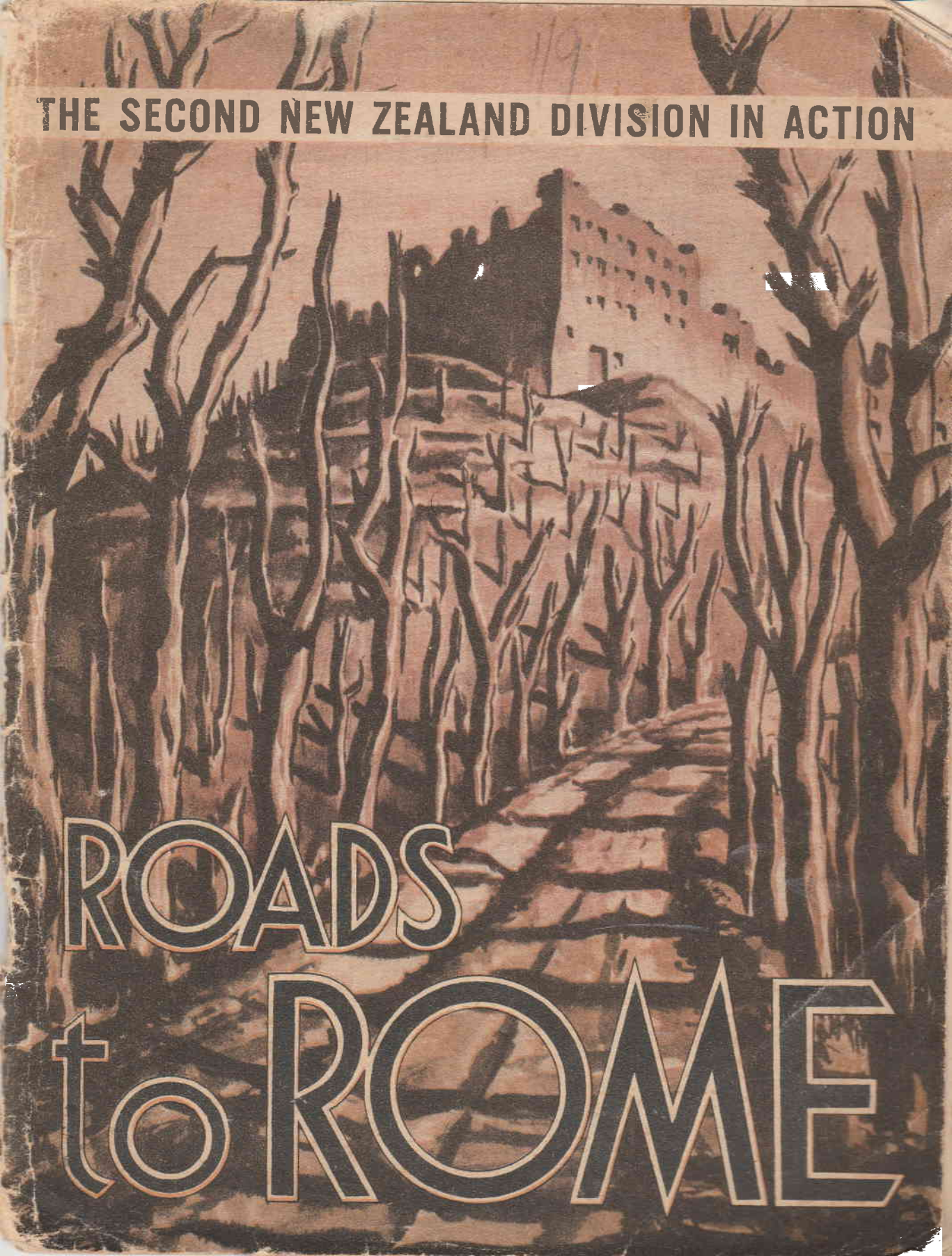
THE SECOND NEW ZEALAND DIVISION IN ACTION



ROADS to ROME

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR BERNARD FREYBERG

A portrait by Major Peter McIntyre

ROADS TO ROME

With the Second New Zealand Division from Maadi to Florence

ARMY BOARD : WELLINGTON

1946

TARANTO TO FLORENCE

This map shows the path of the Division from its landing at Taranto to the battlefields of the Sangro and Orsogna, thence back to San Severo and across the Apennines to Cassino. Upon the breaking of the Gustav Line there followed the pursuit along the Liri valley to Avezzano, and later, after a pause to rest and recuperate, the advance on Florence. An account of the secret switch to the Adriatic coast and of the final battles ending in victory will be given in the last of the series, 'One More River.'

THE END OF AN ERA

WHEN THE NEW ZEALAND DIVISION assembled in Maadi Camp after having seen the end of enemy resistance in Africa its members had cause for satisfaction. A task had been accomplished, a job well done. This they knew, with a certain understandable pride. The long and trying era of desert warfare had closed in a victory to which they as part of the Eighth Army had contributed a praiseworthy share. Yet, while the spirit of victory filled men's minds with a sense of achievement, and with relief that the hardships of the desert need not be faced again, any exultation there may have been was tempered by the knowledge that there was much still to be done.

After a brief rest, training was resumed. Throughout a hot and dusty Egyptian summer the process of attaining a peak of fighting efficiency went smoothly on. Sport in all its branches played an important part. Reinforcements were received, and long-service men went home to New Zealand on furlough. Equipment was overhauled or replaced; fire power was increased by more and better weapons; while the force as a whole was immensely strengthened by the absorption of the newly trained and equipped 4th Armoured Brigade.

This formation in itself represented no small achievement, for to bring it into being men who had already seen long service as infantry had tackled difficult technical courses with the greatest enthusiasm, and had undergone many months of hard work and constant effort while their comrades were taking part in the advance from Alamein to Tunis.

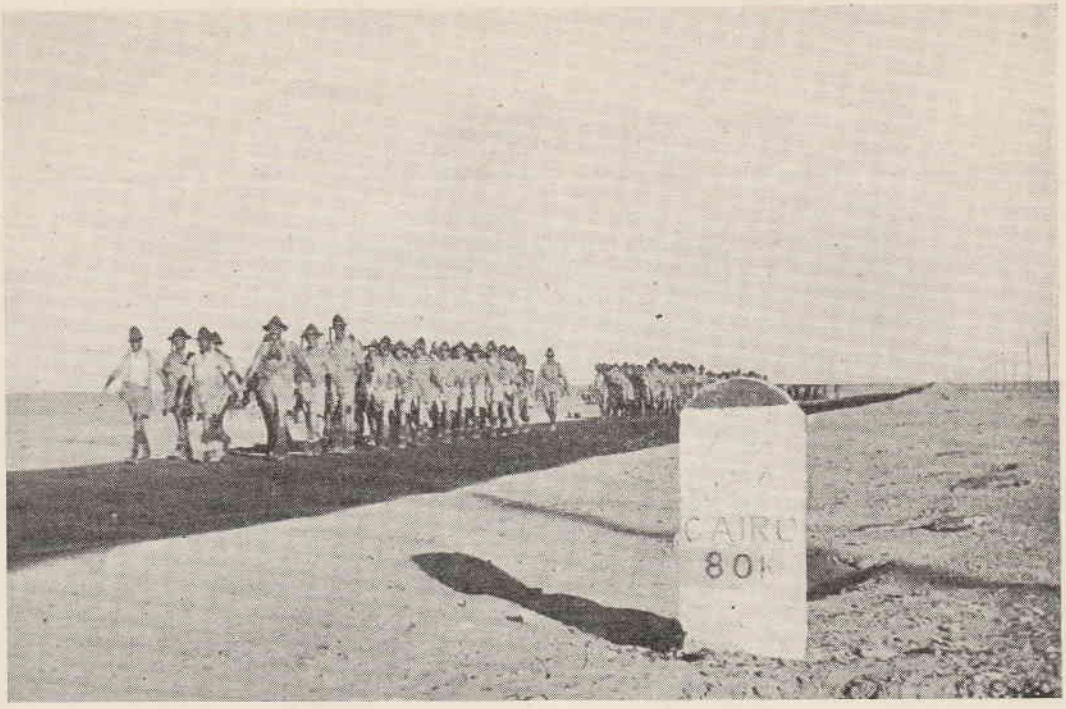
Every effort was made to prepare the force for the changed conditions it was soon to encounter while at the same time keeping the actual destination a close secret. In point of fact, mobile operations in Italy were anticipated by the higher authorities, who were engaged with the multiple problems and intricate planning necessary for the transfer of so large a body of men with all their arms, equipment, vehicles and supplies from one theatre of war to another.

Among the men, however, speculation covered both possibilities and impossibilities. Many favoured Greece or, perhaps, Crete, feeling that earlier campaigns had wrought strong bonds of sympathy between the people of Greece and the New Zealanders. Others thought wishfully of the British Isles, and others again with less enthusiasm of Burma or the Pacific. Meanwhile, the Fifth and Eighth Armies had captured Sicily.

As the divisional programme of preparation for fresh battles developed, great events were taking place. Men on brigade manœuvres in the desert heard the news that the invasion of the mainland of Italy had begun, that Mussolini had toppled from his pedestal, and that the Italians had signed an armistice. While the New Zealanders in less than a week marched the 85 miles from Mena to Burg el Arab, the Fifth Army was locked in bitter fighting at Salerno and the Eighth was pushing steadily from Taranto, through Bari, and on northwards. Naples fell on the day the New Zealanders completed battle practice with live artillery barrages, tanks, and infantry amid the swirling desert dust, and the first units began to assemble in a transit camp near Alexandria in preparation for the move to the as yet unknown theatre of operations.

Those last days in Egypt, crowded with all the thousand and one things there are to do before a move, were enlivened by an undercurrent of excitement and impatience as keen observation warned that the hour of embarkation was near. All ranks were inoculated against typhus, and the taking of mepacrine tablets as a precaution against malaria was begun.

Burg el Arab, with its excellent swimming beaches, was left behind; then in the transit camps the final preparatory tasks were done. Trial packs were held, for the load to be carried was an extremely heavy one, including personal weapons and ammunition, complete issues



EIGHTY KILOMETRES FROM CAIRO. THE MARCH TO BURG EL ARAB STARTS AGAIN IN THE LATE AFTERNOON

of both summer and winter clothing, a bivouac tent between every two men, and a 2-gallon water tin. Some had other burdens as well, picks and shovels, orderly-room typewriters, or medical supplies.

Two main convoys, or 'flights,' carried the troops, both so organised that no more than a third of any one unit was on board any one ship. Vehicles and supplies were embarked on several later flights. The first flight of troops embarked at Alexandria on 5 October, and the second on 17 October. Docks and harbour seethed with a bustling activity. On the water there were ships everywhere, transports and ships of war, vessels of every sort and size, and on the quays a seeming crowded confusion of men and equipment amidst the piled paraphernalia of war. Lighters packed to the water-line with men left for ships anchored in the stream, then scuttled back for more. The camouflaged battleships and cruisers of the surrendered Italian navy aroused great interest among the men.

Brilliant sunshine, the noise and babble of a great port, steep and narrow gangways, painfully heavy cumbersome burdens, irritating delays, all were a sore test of good humour; but it was accomplished at last and before very long Egypt vanished into the haze of distance. Not until the convoys were at sea was the destination announced. Italy.

The voyages were short and on the whole comparatively uneventful, Taranto being reached within a week of sailing. Seen from the ships it appeared a clean modern city with the tower of an ancient fortress close by the entrance to an inner harbour. This port, too, was crammed with shipping of every sort. Disembarkation was by lighters as at Alexandria.

Heavy baggage was stacked on the quays and the men marched to a divisional assembly camp among cultivated olive groves about five miles to the north of the town. It was a pleasant enough area, with trees and vineyards, garden crops and golden brown fields from which the grain had been recently gathered.

Taranto itself had little to offer. The fact that it had a history opening some 1,300 years before the beginning of the

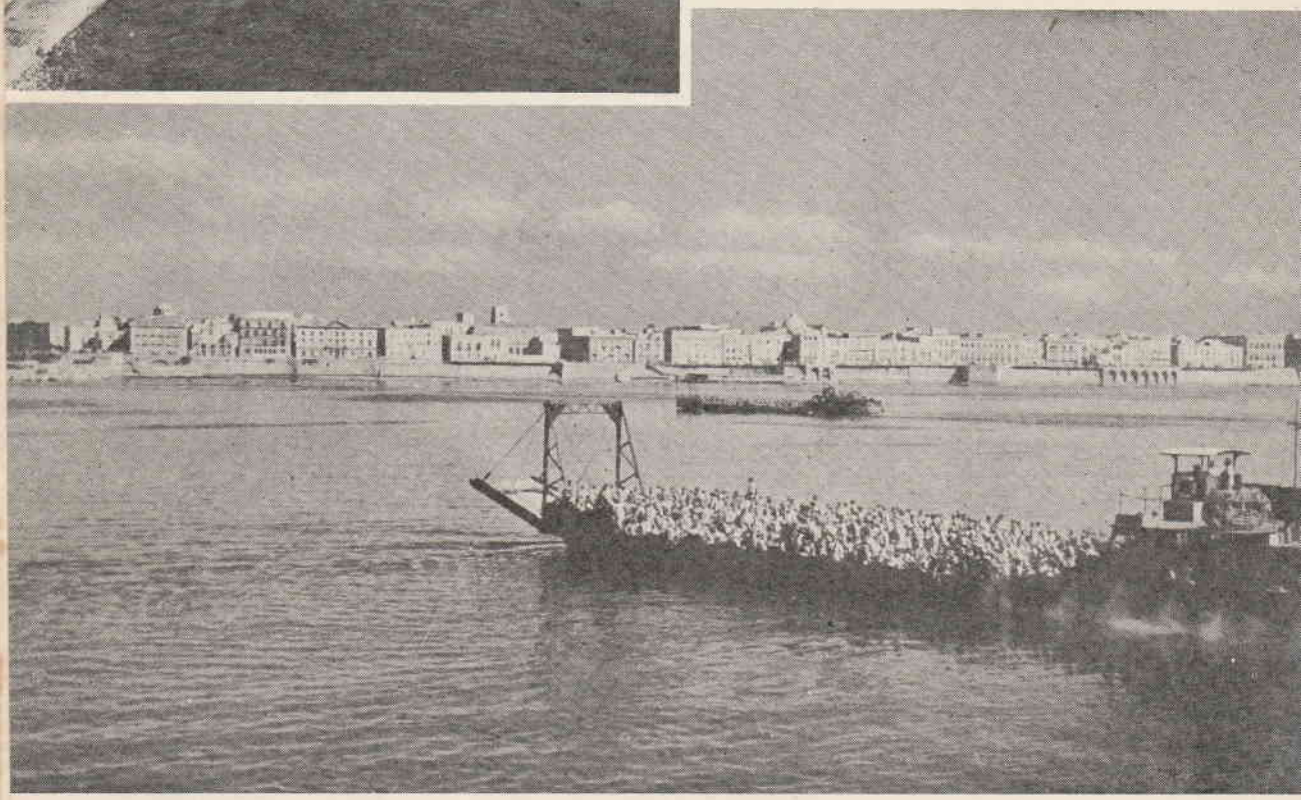
A STEEP CLIMB WITH HEAVY BURDENS

AT SEA IN CROWDED QUARTERS

Christian era was of no more than passing interest to practical minded troops who found it a place of dirty buildings and dingy streets, its shopping centre a barren vista of closed shutters in stone walls.

Training began promptly, designed to teach the fieldcraft essential for men who were soon to fight under totally new conditions. The woods, the cultivated hills, the narrow roads, the clustered villages of Italy were in striking contrast with the barren wastes of the North African battlefields.

Interest in the progress of the Eighth Army was very keen, quickened by reports from officers who, having been forward to study front line conditions, gave warning of hard fighting in rain and mud. Until it neared Termoli the Eighth Army had met comparatively little resistance, but from that town onwards there had been an increasingly stern struggle to maintain a steady advance.



TO THE MEN GOING ASHORE IN LIGHTERS TARANTO SEEMED AN ATTRACTIVE CITY

2

ACROSS THE SANGRO RIVER

TOWARDS THE END OF OCTOBER A HEAVY thunderstorm with accompanying torrential rain was a pointed reminder that the weather, too, could be an enemy. The divisional transport began to arrive while the ground was sodden, giving all ranks their first experience of the effects of deep, clogging mud. In early November the Division began to move forward by road to join the Eighth Army, which by this time had reached and crossed the Trigno river, and having captured Vasto and Casalbordino was approaching the River Sangro.

The Allies were now nearing the strongest belt of prepared defences yet encountered in Italy, a belt which took full advantage of swift-flowing river barriers, steep and muddy ridges, and the precipitous crags of the Apennines. It varied in depth up to 20 miles and spanned the waist of Italy from the north bank of the Sangro river valley to the mouth of the Garigliano river in the Gulf of Gaeta. German prisoners of war had made vague references to a 'Winter Line,' and accordingly this was the name given to the first defences in this barricade across the path to Rome.

To break through this line the Eighth Army concentrated its main effort along the front between the confluence of the rivers and the Adriatic, simultaneously attempting to deceive the enemy into believing that an attack was about to be made on the mountain front. An elaborate deception programme was carried out, including careful camouflage of new dumps, gun positions, and troops in the Sangro valley area. False gun positions and dummy supply points coupled with ostentatious patrol activity drew the enemy's attention to the mountain front between Castel di Sangro and Alfedena. False wireless traffic was maintained there, while the forces building up for the attack kept wireless silence. It was hoped that when bridgeheads across the Sangro had been established a swift break-through would follow ending with the cutting of the important lateral road between Rome and Pescara, and perhaps with the fall of Rome itself. The New Zealand Division, having taken up positions secretly, was to cross the river and press on with all speed, cutting the enemy's prepared Winter Line positions, capturing Castelfrentano, Guardiagrele, and Orsogna, and finally Chiete. The latter was the key to the main road to Rome. Such were the ultimate objectives. The 8th Indian and 78th British Divisions had similarly ambitious tasks nearer the coast.

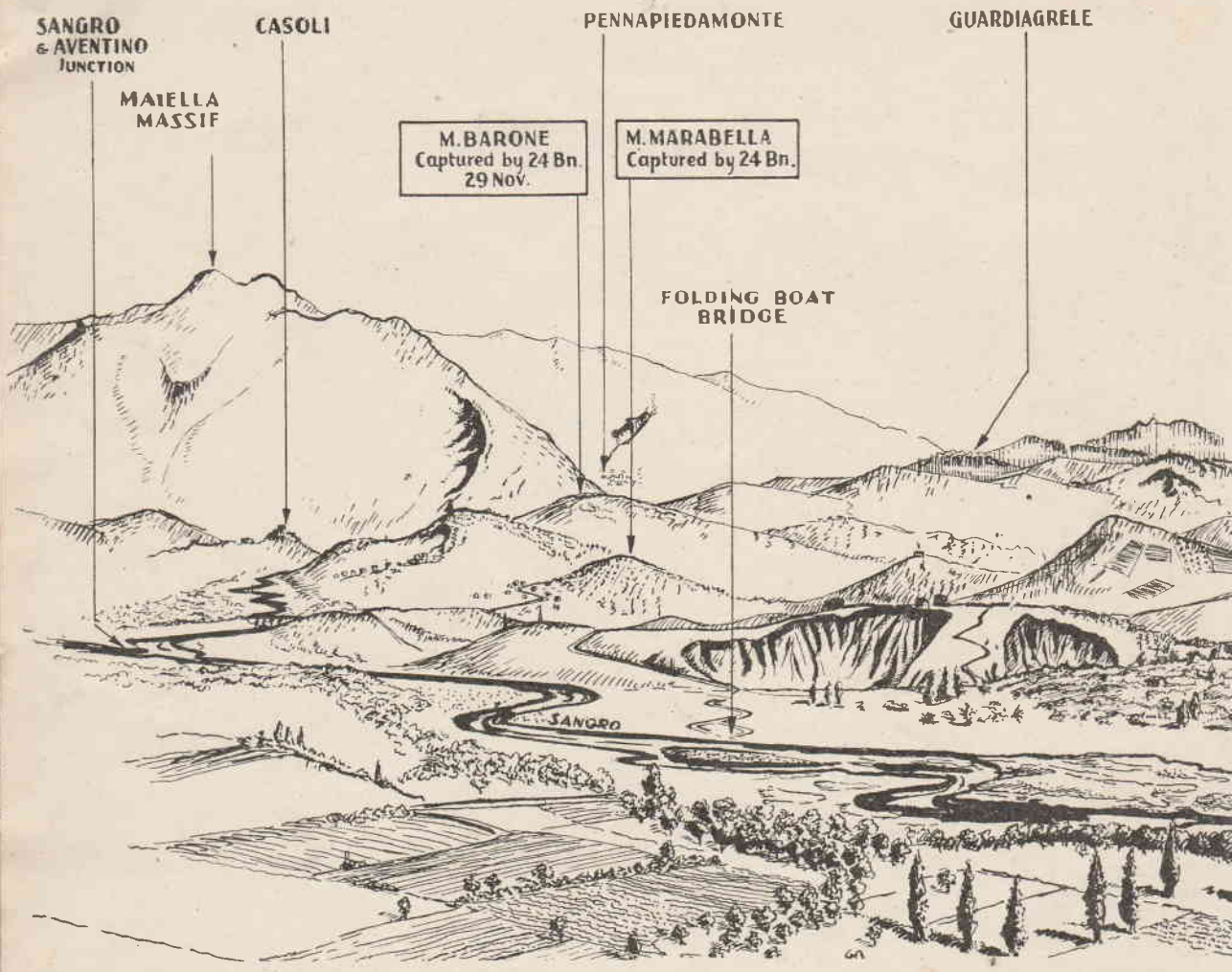
Sangro Battlefield

On the Adriatic sector the territory through which the Eighth Army was fighting its way was a land of tumbled hills, steep ridges, and deep river valleys, gentler near the coast but rising by ripples and folds to the dominating heights of the Maiella Massif, an 8,000-foot mountain block, part of the Apennines. Cutting through these hills two major rivers traced in their courses a rough outline of a somewhat florid capital *T*. The stem of this letter was formed by an arm of the Sangro which flowed almost due north for some 14 or 15 miles until at its junction with the Aventino it turned to the north-east, the two rivers thus crossing the *T*.

Before assembly for the attack could be completed the ground enclosed in the angle of the *T* between its stem and the sea had to be cleared. Much of this country was overlooked by the high ridgetop towns of Tornareccio, Archi, and Perano. These towns were still in enemy hands when on 14 November the New Zealand Division assumed responsibility for the sector of the Eighth Army line formerly held by the 8th Indian Division. In order to keep the arrival of the New Zealanders a secret until the last possible moment, the 19th Indian Infantry Brigade was placed under New Zealand command and given the task of driving the enemy off the ridges and across the river.

Tornareccio was captured by the Indians on the night of 14/15 November in an

Roads to Rome—Inset.



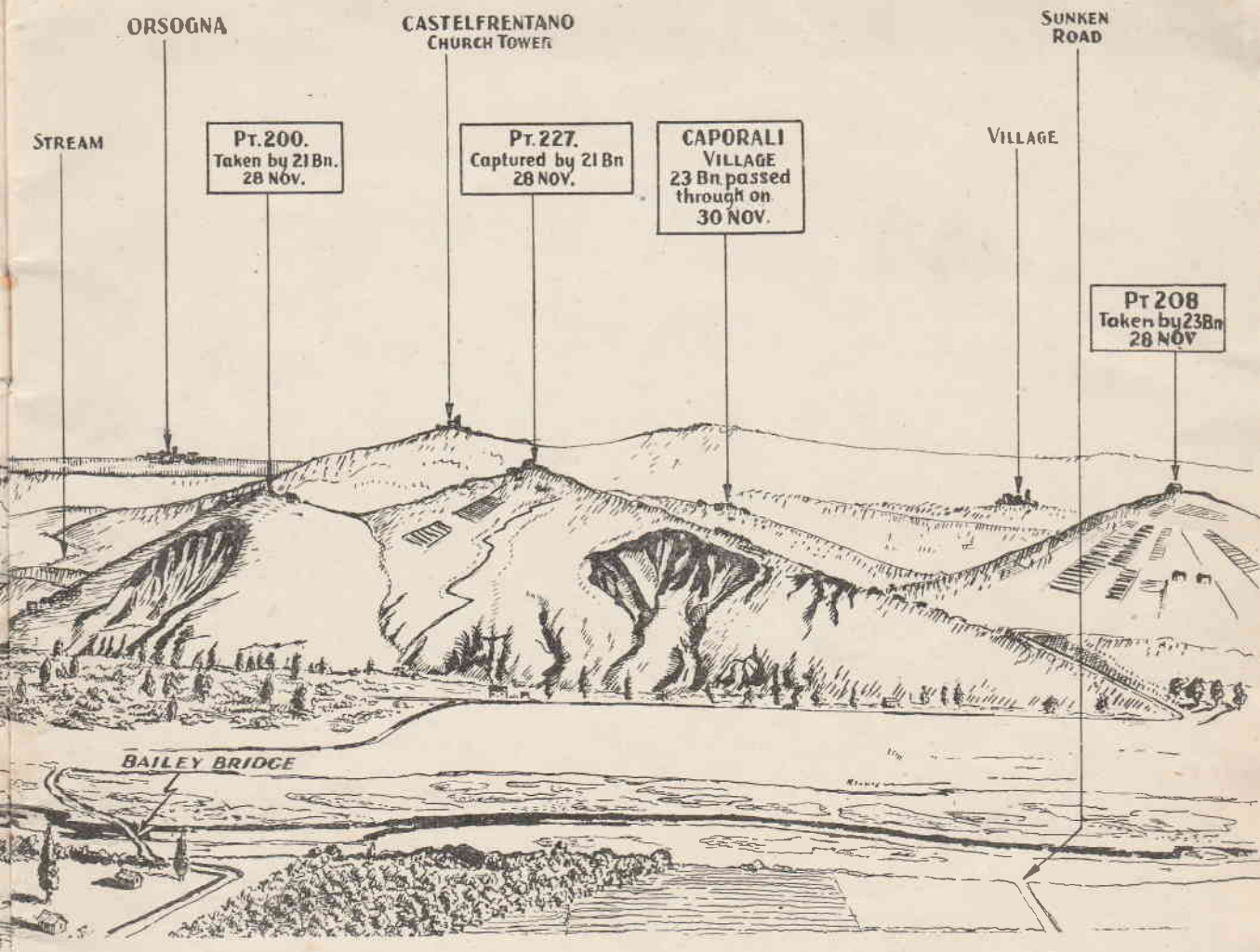
A PANORAMA OF

advance which continued while the forward elements of the Division moved up to support them. Under skies of dreary grey the Divisional Cavalry, the artillery, and part of the armoured brigade prepared for action. Long convoys climbed winding, narrow hill roads, jostling for room with other convoys moving back.

After frequent showers of heavy rain there was mud everywhere; fine creamy mud inches deep spraying from beneath the countless wheels on the crowded roads, and stiff, sticky, clinging mud fighting all movement off the roads. Many times deviations had to be made where the enemy had blown up bridges. Progress was slow and very difficult.

Guns had first to be man-handled into position, shoved and shouldered through the mud or hauled along with drag ropes, but on the evening of 15 November two batteries of the 5th Field Regiment were able to fire in support of the 6/13th Punjabis, who drove the enemy from the hill village of San Marco, just below Atessa. Three days later New Zealand armour was in action for the first time as tanks from the 19th Armoured Regiment led the 3/8th Punjabis to the capture of Perano, aided by fire from the 4th and 5th Field Regiments.

While the attack on the town itself was in progress under heavy, accurate shellfire from enemy guns on the high hills to the west, part of the tank force advanced along the slopes below in a direct threat to the enemy's only remaining bridge across the Sangro. Cleverly concealed



SANGRO RIVER FRONT

German tanks and anti-tank guns engaged the New Zealanders at close range, destroying five tanks and putting another out of action. Nevertheless the enemy withdrew, then demolished the bridge, thus giving a tacit confession that no major forces remained on the Allied-held banks of the river.

That night, and during the early hours of 19 November, the 6th Infantry Brigade moved up to occupy front-line positions overlooking the road and the river flats between two tributary streams, the Pianello and the Apello. Transport brought the men from an assembly area near Furci through Gissi and Casalanguida to the bed of a stream near Atessa, whence they went forward on foot four or five miles, halting before dawn and going on again at night. It was a nightmare journey. All day on the 18th the trucks had struggled over crowded, tortuous mountain roads deep in mud, with painful slowness negotiating deviation after deviation, then in a darkness made darker by misty rain they had climbed the final series of corkscrew bends and turned off the road down into the stream bed. There the mud resembled soft, foot deep plasticine. Progress was won a few feet at a time by backing a little, then surging forward, backing and surging, backing and surging.

While the infantrymen were completing their march during the night of 20 November, the Indians, under a blanket of mist, occupied Archi, and so, by the morning of the 21st, New Zealand troops were securely

THE ARTILLERY AT THE SANGRO RIVER. MANHANDLING LIMBERS THROUGH THE MUD, AND (RIGHT) A GROUP OF GUNNERS

established on the southern edge of the Sangro river flats without the enemy being aware that a powerful assault force was assembling there.

From its confluence with the Aventino to the sea the Sangro river was about 12 miles long, and it had formed an alluvial plain between one and a half and two miles wide. The course of the river was such that in the New Zealand sector the greatest extent of flat land was on the south bank, while on the north there was but a narrow strip ending at escarpments of bluish clay 150 feet high, beyond which cultivated ridges climbed towards Castelfrentano.

The river bed of scoured shingle was about 900 yards wide. Within this bed the river itself ran in several channels which at various points united to form one main stream. These channels varied in width between a few feet and 40 or 50 yards and in depth from inches to three or four feet.

The attack was to have been launched on the night of 21/22 November with one brigade, and in concert with British and Indian divisions on the right flank. Appalling weather made it impossible to cross the flooded, fast-flowing river on the New Zealand sector, though near the coast British troops did cross in the face of fierce opposition. Despite heavy casualties they held a firm bridgehead by 24 November.

Men of the 19th Indian Infantry Brigade made a crossing on the night of 22/23 November, then fighting in rain and mud began to clear the heights on the left flank from which the enemy could overlook the scene of the proposed divisional crossing. Supporting fire was given by New Zealand artillery and by a company of machine gunners which crossed on the 24th. Altino had fallen by the 26th, but Casoli, another similar cluster of white stone buildings capping a minor peak, remained in enemy hands.

If the weather was appalling for the Eighth Army it was so too for the enemy. In a letter home a German soldier later captured on the New Zealand sector described the night of the Indian crossing in these words: 'If I am still alive to-day it is by a miracle of God. On the evening of the 22nd I was with my men in one

of the most advanced dugouts. It was pouring with rain, and the water was rising in our rat holes. We kept emptying it out with our mess tins, but we were wasting our time. It kept rising and reached knee level. We were almost weeping with desperation and cold. The whole night went by like this. At five in the morning the enemy shot up our position with shells. Down I went in my hole, as deep as I could get. The water came all over me, and only my head was above water. The fire became more and more violent. Amid the shellbursts I heard the screams of one of my men gravely wounded . . . I had been so glad I was sent to Italy, but I sometimes wonder if it can be worse in Russia.'

During this wait for the level of the flood waters to fall the 5th Brigade moved into position on the right flank of the 6th. Small patrols were constantly active seeking out possible crossing places for the infantry and armour. When the weather permitted, the Allied Tactical Air Force carried out numerous raids.

On the night 27/28 November the attack began, the Eighth Army moving against the German Winter Line with three divisions, the 2nd New Zealand, which had the 19th Indian Brigade and some Royal Artillery units under its command, the 8th Indian, and the 78th British.

It was a dark and dreary night, black rainclouds lying low over the hills. All was quiet. It seemed that the front was asleep, disturbed only by an occasional fitful start of firing. In this silence and darkness the New Zealand infantrymen began wading the river soon after midnight, helped by ropes which guided and supported them when the icy current reached to their waists. The varying streams were crossed, the shingle and the sodden flats of the north bank passed, and the long straight lateral road reached safely. There, on the enemy's side of the river, the force was formed up, and then at a quarter to three came the thunder roll of the opening artillery concentrations.

Five battalions advanced along a front of 6,000 yards, some climbing the steep clay walls which were the ramparts of the river. At the foot of this escarpment the 6th Brigade lost several men while crossing a minefield. Overhead the air throbbed to the whistle of passing shells, while the night was vivid with the flash of gunfire. Medium machine guns were firing, too, and the tanks of the 4th Armoured Brigade sent stream after stream of tracer into the enemy lines.

Taken by surprise, the enemy offered only slight opposition, so that by daylight the infantry battalions were firmly established on the north bank. Tanks from the 19th Armoured Regiment and the armoured cars of the Divisional Cavalry had begun to ford the river soon after zero hour, but they encountered the greatest difficulty in reaching the road across a stretch of ploughed land. At first they could give only very limited support.

Meanwhile the engineers had been working at top speed. Two bridges had to be assembled and launched, a river ford constructed, mines lifted, and roads built. A Bailey bridge was successfully completed, but the second bridge, of folding boat equipment, was still under construction when daylight revealed it to enemy artillery directed from Casoli. Accurate shelling killed and wounded many engineers and forced temporary abandonment of this task. It was, however, completed during the night of 28/29 November.

The river, the escarpments, and the mud presented the most serious problems of the advance. Mules were used to supply the forward troops with food and ammunition; mortars and anti-tank guns could be brought up only after a slow, hard struggle, while tanks and other heavy vehicles which were firmly bogged had to be dragged out with winches. There could be no immediate further advance, so the day of 28 November and the following night were spent in building up strength. Enemy fighter-bombers made several attacks on the bridges and a number of dogfights resulted. Counter-attacks were repelled, but nevertheless fresh weapons and materials continued to arrive in the bridgehead.

By the 29th the assault could continue. Further objectives were taken, with support from the artillery and the tanks of the 19th Armoured Regiment, while the Divisional Cavalry probed the narrow lanes on the right flank. Perhaps the most important gain was Mount Barone, a steep, partly wooded, partly cultivated hill which guarded Highway 84, the main road from the river bed to the ridge upon which the town of Castelfrentano perched.

Practically without a halt the advance went on, by day and by night. Climbing, always climbing, digging in, then climbing again, hampered at every step by mud that clung to boots and saturated clothing, the infantry pressed forward. Casoli on the left flank was vacated by the enemy by 30 November. On that afternoon, too, the engineers completed the 'Tiki Bridge,' a second Bailey bridge near the first, capable of carrying tanks.

Shermans from the 18th Armoured Regiment which had crossed by 'Tiki Bridge' with infantry from the 22nd Motor Battalion began a demonstration attack up Highway 84 during daylight on 1 December. It was hoped that the enemy would think this armoured thrust the main effort of the Division and that attention would thus be diverted from the infantry and tanks converging on Castelfrentano. Enemy shelling destroyed several tanks, but meanwhile Castelfrentano was occupied by the 24th Battalion after heavy fighting on the approach to the town.

3

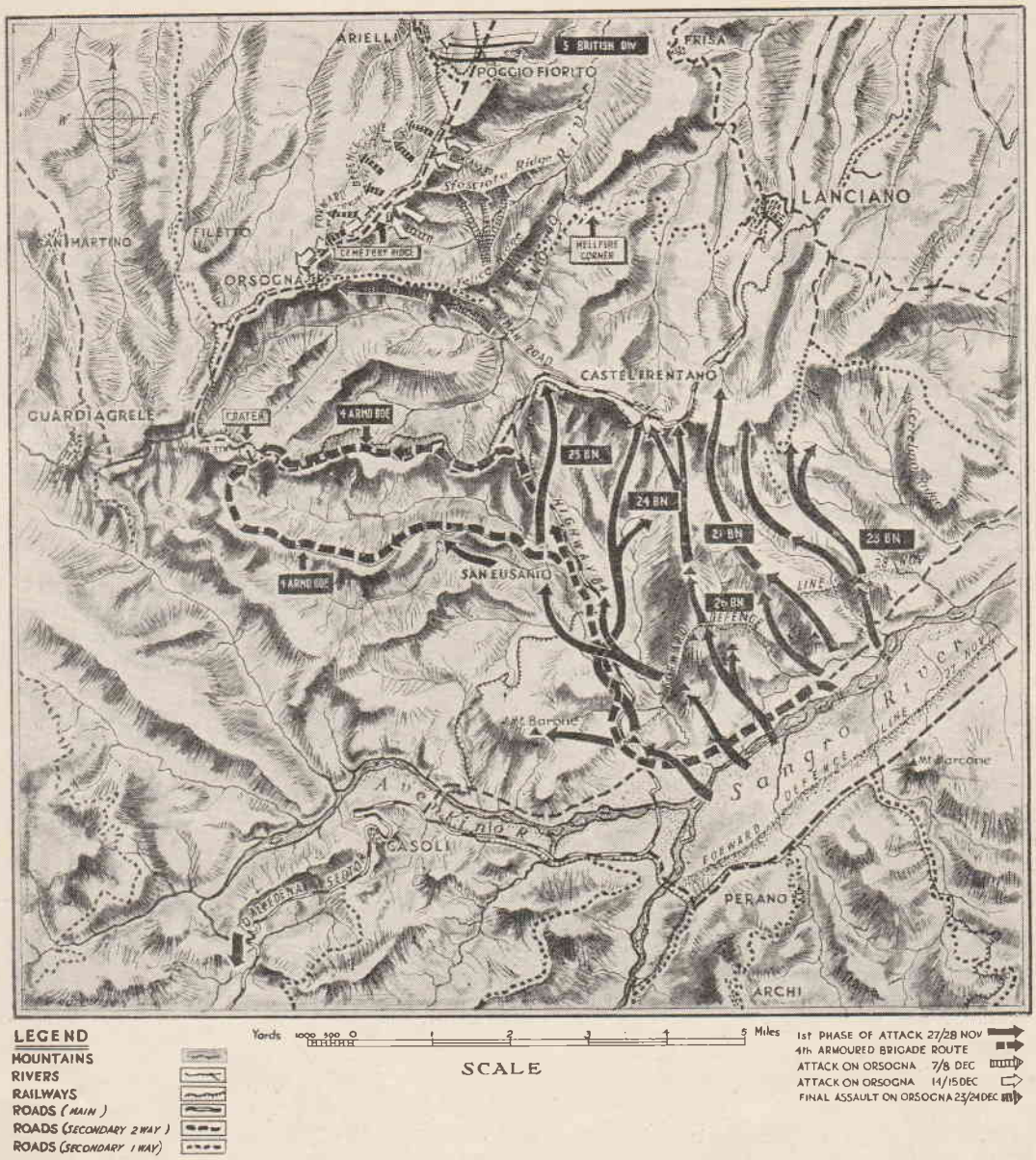
THE STRUGGLES FOR ORSOGNA

THE SECOND DAY OF DECEMBER THEREFORE saw the Division astride the first of the series of ridges which ran out from the Maiella Massif like the spokes of a wheel, a ridge upon which were the towns of Guardiagrele, Castelfrentano, Lanciano, and San Vito. From these new positions the New Zealanders could look down into the deep and steep-sided valley of the Moro river, and across this gulf at the town of Orsogna, which was stretched along a second ridge. This second ridge, too, hinged upon Guardiagrele, whence it ran through Orsogna to the coast at Ortona. An Italian burial ground on the crest suggested the significant title later adopted—Cemetery Ridge.

Though the positions known as the Winter Line had now been penetrated, there was to have been no halting until the ultimate objective of the road to Rome was reached. Accordingly the Division began to advance across the Moro on Orsogna and along the high ground towards Guardiagrele, while on the extreme right flank the Divisional Cavalry probed towards Lanciano, in which direction the 8th Indian Division was also attacking.

Two columns from the 4th Armoured Brigade attacked Guardiagrele, one along a secondary road through the village of San Eusanio del Sangro and the other along the main road from Castelfrentano. Both roads were exposed to enemy shell-fire, and on both there were demolition craters and mines. Eventually both columns were halted by a crater which was more than 40 feet across and upon which the enemy had accurately ranged his artillery. Beyond the demolition strong enemy forces opposed any infantry attempts to pass.

During this fighting on the Guardiagrele road, infantry from the 6th Brigade and tanks of the 18th Armoured Regiment on the morning of 3 December attacked



Orsogna along the line of the Roman road which climbed a subsidiary ridge from the Moro to enter the town from the east. Hidden by darkness, D Company of the 25th Battalion advanced silently, to reach the central square before the enemy became aware of its presence. Prisoners were taken as the first houses were cleared; then came German tanks, an armoured car, and strong parties of infantry. For some time D Company men held out against increasing odds, hoping for the arrival of their own armour, but the New Zealand Shermans were halted by the mud and by accurate shellfire. Neither tanks nor anti-tank guns could be brought up the steep hillsides to the town and eventually the Company had to withdraw as best it could.

The enemy had checked the advance. Now awake to the peril on their eastern flank the Germans were hurrying reinforcements along the very road the Eighth Army had hoped to cut. New positions were being hastily prepared on

the forbidding ridge which ran from Guardiagrele through Orsogna to Ortona and the sea. At this critical stage the weather, never very friendly, played heavily in the enemy's favour.

For several days, days of utmost value to the enemy, there was no offensive movement. Tanks could not negotiate the muddy slopes down to and up again from the Moro until tracks had been made and bridges built. This the engineers were doing, working with a persistence and skill deserving the highest praise. At the same time the Sangro was again in flood. For two days no bridges along the whole front could be used and the already great difficulties of supply were seriously increased.

Ridgetop Fortress

Both sides were feverishly active, the one fighting the weather and the difficult ground to prepare for an attack, and the other strengthening its defences to meet it. There were constant exchanges of fire from every type of weapon, while Orsogna and Guardiagrele were both bombed and shelled. The Allied Air Force also bombed and strafed the enemy's lines of communication as often as rain, cloud, and mist would permit.

During this time, and throughout the weeks that followed, Orsogna was the dominant feature of the soldier's landscape. Like a fortress it squatted on its ridge as though on the edge of a sheer cliff. Wherever men moved on the exposed roads and tracks, Orsogna seemed to be watching. With the black rain clouds behind it, as they so frequently were, it was a lowering, ever-present menace.

On the flanks of the Division the cavalry patrols reached points beyond Lanciano, while other armoured cars kept watch on the roads west of Casoli. Enemy patrols in this area carried out vicious destructive raids on Italian mountain villages. On the immediate left flank the increasing strength of the enemy was countered by the arrival of the 2nd British Independent Paratroop Brigade, which after coming under the command of the Division placed troops in position near San Vincenza covering the approaches to Guardiagrele.

By day on 7 December the attack on Orsogna was resumed. A heavy barrage of artillery began at half past one. Thirty minutes later the infantry advanced behind a moving curtain of shellfire, part hidden in the murk of rain, mist, and drifting smoke. Low cloud prevented successful air support.

From the beginning enemy shell and mortar fire was intense, but the 24th Battalion having climbed along the crests of the ridge that carried the Roman road entered the town at about five o'clock in the afternoon. In the fierce fighting that followed enemy tanks began to demolish houses in which the New Zealanders had created strongpoints. A combination of shellfire on the exposed ridgetop road, mines, and demolition craters held up the Shermans of the 18th Armoured Regiment until after nightfall, when it was found that an enemy tank both blocked and commanded with fire the only possible entrance to the town.

During the drive into the town itself, the Maori Battalion reached the road along Cemetery Ridge to the north-east of Orsogna. Soon after the leading company began to dig in, the enemy counter-attacked boldly, led by a tank and a flame-thrower. Without their supporting weapons or tanks, which had not been able to climb the sodden hillsides, the Maoris had no choice but to withdraw. A bridgehead across the Orsogna–Ortona road, gained after a gallant advance, was thus lost.

Withdrawal of the infantry in Orsogna was likewise ordered, for both tanks and infantry were in positions that were swiftly being made too costly to hold. Meanwhile the 23rd Battalion, though also without anti-tank support, had reached another steep-sided ridge, the Sfasciata, which led down from and offered a possible way of access to the principal ridge. This placed the battalion well ahead of the rest of the Division, but fortunately there was no enemy attack. During the following three nights mines were laid and anti-tank weapons and tanks of the 18th Armoured Regiment were brought forward.

All this made extremely heavy demands on the engineers, who, in most strenuous

efforts to assist the attack, had worked under fire to lift enemy mines and repair demolitions. A track was built from the Moro up the Sfasciata ridge, the river crossings were improved, and bulldozers helped haul tanks and guns through the mud.

While this essential preparatory work was being done, aggressive patrols went out every night. Orsogna and the ridge-top road to Ortona were constantly shelled by both the Divisional Artillery and British medium regiments, and though hampered by the weather the Air Force kept up bombing and strafing raids. The enemy, however, steadily built up strength in the Orsogna sector.

Finally by the night of 14/15 December all was ready for another attack. This time there was no direct assault on Orsogna, but instead the Division, strengthened by British infantry and artillery, planned to seize a bridgehead astride the road to Ortona.

Once again the enemy resisted with every means in his power. The New Zealand casualties were heavy, yet, despite intense fire from mortars, machine guns, and artillery, the objectives were taken. Before dawn the 21st and 23rd Battalions were firmly holding a considerable section of the road along Cemetery Ridge. Tanks from the 18th Armoured Regiment were on the road in time to help repel counter-attacks before first light.

Throughout the day enemy fire remained heavy, but by dusk the 20th Armoured Regiment had also arrived in position and there were between 30 and 40 New Zealand tanks on the ridge and road. A tank advance along the high ground towards Orsogna was halted by anti-tank guns which were skilfully placed and well camouflaged. Several Shermans were destroyed.

Enemy Flame-throwers

About three o'clock next morning German infantry counter-attacked in strength supported by tanks and two flame-throwing tanks. Their efforts cost them dearly. A murderous fire from every weapon available, tanks and artillery, machine guns and mortars, burst upon them, and within a few moments the scene was that of some unreal, yet horribly vivid nightmare.

As the unholy harmony of noise swelled and faded, then swelled to fade again, the flame of gunfire and shell-burst flashed and flickered along the ridge. Flares of red, green, white, and purple from time to time bathed the battlefield in macabre light. Soon there were enemy tanks burning on the roadside and the billows of orange fire that had rolled terrifyingly towards the New Zealand lines when the flame-throwers went into action were seen no more. The enemy withdrew leaving behind many dead, besides the blackened hulls of three tanks and both flame-throwers.

A few hours later tanks from the 20th Armoured Regiment and infantrymen from the Maori Battalion worked their way along Cemetery Ridge towards Orsogna. Enemy fire was too heavy. The force was unable to silence the hidden guns, and during the afternoon it withdrew.

There followed over a week of offensive patrol activity, frequent exchanges of fire, and all the nerve-racking work and watching of static warfare. The enemy shelled exposed roads and tracks and responded fiercely to any attempt to probe his lines. Tanks from the 18th Armoured Regiment were effectively opposed when they shelled Arielli, while a task force of tanks from the 20th Armoured Regiment and men of the 26th Battalion met intense fire when it tested the enemy's strength in Orsogna by a thrust along the Roman road.

Rain and mist handicapped the Allied Air Force during most of this period. Nevertheless on several occasions the bombers broke through low cloud and long columns of black smoke from bursting bombs rose above the shattered buildings of fortress Orsogna.

Meanwhile a Canadian Division had joined the Eighth Army and was advancing in the coastal sector, while on the New Zealanders' right flank there was the 5th British Division. The Army was still hammering at the barricade across the road to Rome.

Yet another attempt to achieve a breakthrough was launched on the night of 23/24 December by the 13th Corps. First

the 5th British Division attacked and occupied an area on the right of the New Zealanders including the town of Arielli, then before dawn on the 24th the main action, aimed at turning Orsogna from the north, began. Behind a creeping barrage from an exceptionally heavy concentration of artillery, the Maoris, the 21st and the 26th Battalions with tanks of the 20th Armoured Regiment in support advanced from Cemetery Ridge road.

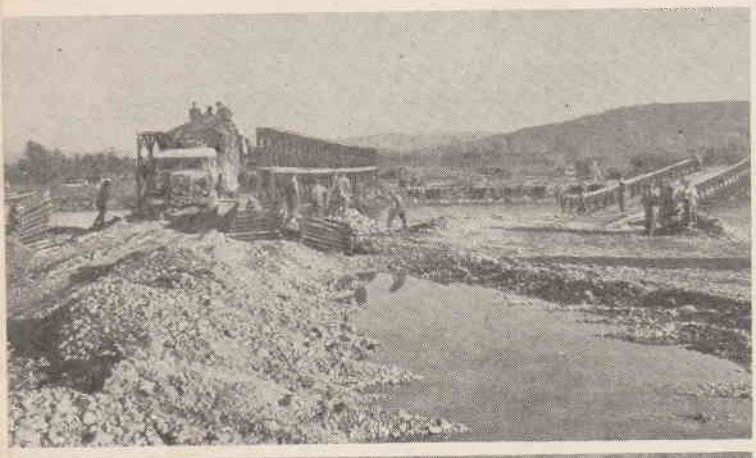
In readiness to take full advantage of success a striking force from the 4th Armoured Brigade was standing by. But there was not to be a break-through. Over that sodden ground every step was a struggle with the mud, and it was soon found that the tanks could make no progress once they had left the road. Enemy resistance, considerably strengthened by fresh paratroops put opposite the New Zealand Division, was fiercer than ever; his Spandau tracer cut ribbons of fire through the night and his mortar bombs hammered down.

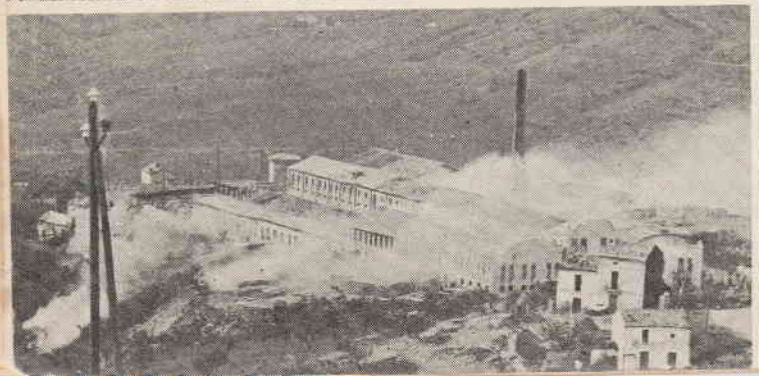
The attack ended with the New Zealand bridgehead deepened and extended, but with the enemy successfully holding up all further movement. On the left flank of the Division the 40-foot demolition on the road to Guardiagrele remained an effective barrier. It was plain that in that sector at least there could be no decisive battle for months to come. The weather had taken charge. However, on the coast the Canadians drove the enemy from Ortona after desperate, costly fighting.

Snow fell on the night of New Year's Eve 1944 and was followed during the day 1943 by strong winds, sleet, and more snow. Signal lines were broken, bivouac tents collapsed on top of their sleeping occupants, gun pits and trenches filled with icy slush, roads were blocked, and bridges closed. Men in the line knew all the misery of soaked bedding, sodden clothes, and bitter cold.

Under such conditions the Division settled down to a policy officially described as 'offensive defence' with the forward units being regularly relieved. Mule trains were frequently the only possible means of getting food and ammunition up the muddy slopes. Though static, the front

SCENES FROM THE SANGRO RIVER FRONT: TIKI BRIDGE, THE BRICKWORKS, AND CASTELFRENTANO





A NEW ZEALAND SAPPER; (RIGHT) THE ARTILLERY'S GREETINGS TO THE ENEMY. EACH LETTER WAS STAMPED ACROSS THE SNOWY SLOPES BY SHELLFIRE

was far from quiet. From the Fontegrande feature, which soon became known to all as 'Jittery Ridge,' it was sometimes possible to hear the enemy moving about less than 300 yards away. There were many alarms and frequent bouts of machine-gun and mortar fire. Patrols from both sides were very active, but the Germans were particularly bold. The artillery, too, kept up a thunderous duel, while the Allied Air Force made good use of the rare intervals of suitable flying weather. Orsogna was hammered repeatedly both from the air and by artillery.

Driven to seek protection from the cold, the troops found the many scattered stone houses in the front lines a blessing. These became bases in which men rested after manning weapon pits and slit trenches and from which patrols went forward by night. Often civilian families still clung to their homes which war had converted to strongpoints.

Immediately behind the lines life in the towns of Castelfrentano and San Eusanio del Sangro was a strange mixture of war and peace. Hourly the church bells would ring out, to be answered across the snowy ridges by the bells in enemy-held Orsogna and Guardiagrele. Crowded civilian populations rubbed shoulders with resting troops with whom they shared their houses. Soldiers played with the children. Occasionally there would come the scream and crash of shellfire, and civilians and soldiers alike would suffer.

Throughout this time the engineers worked magnificently, keeping open the narrow muddy traffic lanes. The sound of chains on vehicle wheels and the swish of creamy mud were always background to movement. To every soldier, but to drivers in particular, such places as the 'Mad Mile,' a long, steep stretch of road climbing past a brickworks to Castelfrentano, were commonplace trials of daily life. No one lingered on the 'Mad Mile.' It was under enemy eyes and throughout its length a constant target for shells. The significance of 'Hellfire Corner' on the road across the Moro was likewise unpleasantly clear.

THE MONASTERY. A PHOTOGRAPH FROM A PRE-WAR ITALIAN GUIDE BOOK

4
WITH THE FIFTH ARMY

MEANWHILE ON THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE Apennines, American, British, and French troops of the Fifth Army had won forward to the immensely strong enemy line based on Cassino. During November and December they too had shared the Eighth Army's hopes of a quick break-through to Rome, but progress had been slow and costly.

Hill and mountain positions admirably suited for defence had been held tenaciously, while the weather, though not as severe as that on the Adriatic, was yet handicap enough to be described as 'abominable.' The coming of winter therefore saw a virtual stalemate along the whole Allied front.

This could not be permitted to endure. The enemy must not be allowed leisure to strengthen his already powerful defences. It was vitally necessary to retain full command of the initiative in Italy as part of the overall preparations for the invasion of Europe, and for the same reason an outstanding victory was most desirable. Accordingly, despite unfavourable weather the Allies decided to continue making every effort to achieve the capture of Rome. Between them and their objective, however, lay a formidable barrier.

The Gustav Line

In general terms the enemy barricade, only the outer fringes of which had been broken down in the bitter fighting of the previous months, crossed the peninsula at its narrowest point where the ground could scarcely have been more favourable to the defenders. Rugged hills, rising inland to mountain peaks, stretched almost from coast to coast in a series of splendid natural obstacles, which on a line between Ortona on the Adriatic and Minturno on the Tyrrhenian Sea were manned by a foe who fought with stubborn courage and skill.

For the Allies there was no easy way. The Gustav Line, as the barrier had been

named, could not be outflanked except by sea, while on land there was only one route along which an army could hope to approach Rome. This was the valley of the Liri river, the entrance to which was dominated by Cassino and the heights beyond the town.

Snow and ice closed the roads across the Apennines, so the Eighth Army front became of secondary importance. An uneasy lull began as the forces there concentrated on the task of tying down as many enemy troops as possible while the Fifth Army prepared for a major offensive. Four thrusts were planned, one directly into the Liri valley itself, and two turning movements, one on either side of the valley. Simultaneously there was to be a landing from the sea aimed at seizing control of the enemy's communications with the main front, thus forcing his withdrawal.

Because of the complete mobility and hard hitting power of the New Zealand Division it was decided to switch this force from the Eighth to the Fifth Army front. When the way into the Liri valley was clear the Division was to take swift advantage of the break-through by pursuing and harrying the retreating enemy.

The move was carried out in the strictest secrecy. In mid-January the 4th Indian Division relieved the New Zealanders, who had been led to believe that they were being withdrawn for a long period of rest and training. Only a few senior officers knew the facts until the long, fast convoys were well on their way.

In the utter blackness of nights of fog and drizzling rain and in silence, forward positions, many within hearing of the enemy, were handed over. Guns were dragged out through the mud and slush, then on the following night column after column of vehicles, travelling without lights, slowly and with great difficulty followed the familiar narrow, muddy roads back across the Sangro and so southwards.

Once beyond sight or sound of the enemy it was possible to use lights and to travel by day. The roads improved, speeds increased, and within a very few days the plains of Foggia lay behind, the Apennines had been crossed, and the Division had assembled again in the general area of Piedimonte d' Alife, some miles south of Cassino. The new surroundings were a pleasant change from those of the eastern battle area, and for a time at least units enjoyed the peaceful quiet of camps among the olive groves and oak woods of the Volturno valley.

Most units had assembled by 21 January. By this date the Fifth Army offensive was at full fury. In the turning movements the 10th British Corps had secured holds among the foothills of the Arunci range, and the French Expeditionary Corps was attacking in the mountains on the right flank, while the 2nd United States Corps was attempting to cross the Rapido river to take Cassino and enter the Liri valley.

All three attacks met extremely fierce opposition, but the New Zealand Division was held ready to act on their success. There was no quick break-through. Gains were made despite strong counter-attacks, yet the price was high. Finally before dawn on 22 January the 6th United States Corps landed at Anzio. A bridgehead was secured, but the enemy effectively prevented its expansion.

Early February saw bitter fighting on all sectors of the Fifth Army front, where Cassino, and Monastery Hill, the craggy spur above it, had become the principal objectives. Repeated gallant efforts had been and were being made to take them, but without success. North of the town where the village of Cairo and some of the surrounding hills had been captured was the only area in which there had been any real progress.

Formation of the New Zealand Corps

At this stage in the battle the 4th Indian Division came from the Orsogna sector to join the New Zealand Division and with it form the nucleus of a corps which was placed under the command of General Freyberg. A particularly strong concentration of British, Indian, and American artillery units, and an American armoured force, Combat Command 'B,' were included in the Corps. The 78th British Division was warned to be ready to join it when required.

Major-General H. K. Kippenberger was appointed to command the New Zealand Division while General Freyberg directed the New Zealand Corps. Unfortunately, on 2 March General Kippenberger received wounds when he stepped on a German mine, which resulted in the loss of both legs below the knee. His command then passed to Brigadier G. B. Parkinson.

The initial task of the new corps, which officially came into being on 3 February, was to support the continuing American assault on Cassino and to exploit success. However, it was understood that if the fortress was not captured by 12 February the New Zealand Corps would assume responsibility for the sector.

Guns of the Divisional Artillery were in action by 6 February, and by the early morning of the following day the 5th Brigade had completed the relief of units of the 36th United States Infantry Division along the line of the Rapido and Gari rivers south of Route 6, the main road to Rome. An armoured force was held ready to assist the Americans attacking Cassino.

Two American forces were employed in a pincer movement. While one attacked the town from the north in an advance along the west bank of the Rapido the other struck over the mountains with the object of approaching Monastery Hill from the north-west. Their final attack began at 11 o'clock on 11 February, a last supreme effort of many days of the most bitter warfare. It did not succeed, and command of the sector duly passed to the New Zealand Corps.

Failure was in no way a reflection on the valour of American arms. Just before they themselves entered the line New Zealand troops were able to study the ground the Americans had already taken along the approaches to Cassino. Crags of naked rock rose sheerly from the plain, scarred by and littered with fragments of twisted metal. Every acre of flat ground was pitted with a hundred shell craters. Trees and saplings were grotesque skeletons tortured by fire. Mines lay in piles where they had been lifted. In the chipped rocky faces of the mountains, in the piles of empty shell-cases, and in the shallow, rock-walled holes in the ground where men had lived and slept and fought for days on end it was possible to read the story of the struggle.

A new appreciation and a new understanding of their ally in the minds of the New Zealand fighting men was later strengthened and deepened. When they were relieved the men of the 2nd United States Corps had endured ten weeks of almost continuous fighting. All units had lost heavily in dead and wounded, and the survivors as they marched back showed the marks of exhaustion and of the strain of long weeks of battle and exposure.

To the New Zealand Corps, then, fell the task of capturing Cassino, the crag and the Monastery. General Freyberg had no illusions as to what lay ahead. 'We are undoubtedly facing the most difficult operations of all our battles,' he reported in a cable sent at that time to the Government of New Zealand.

'Impregnable' Cassino

For many years this natural fortress had been a classic example for study at the Italian Military Staff College and it had long been regarded as practically impregnable even without artificial defence works and in favourable weather. The enemy had further fortified it with pillboxes of steel and concrete and with gun-pits and trenches blasted out of the rock.

Monte Cassino, or Monastery Hill, the most important of the mountain features, was a rocky spur which rose steeply from the plain to a height of about 1,700 feet. It was crowned with a Benedictine Monastery which stood on the extreme edge of the spur and which had been occupied by the enemy. To the north of it there was a deep chasm, and to the north-west the mountain ridge along which the Americans had advanced, almost reaching the fortified hill top, Point 593. Beyond this again was the majestic snow-capped Monte Cairo.

Eastwards from the Monastery the steep slopes were guarded by extensive field works. A little to the north-east, and actually a part of the main spur, there was a prominent crest upon which stood an ancient castle. This was Castle Hill; at the foot and partly up the slopes of

it was built the town of Cassino. Other outcrops of rock which became of particular significance as the battle progressed were Hangman's Hill, so called because of a scaffolding with a marked resemblance to a gibbet, Point 165, and Point 202. These latter two were saddles between bends in a corkscrew road from the town to the Monastery.

The road to Rome, Route 6, passed through the town itself, while the railway to Rome ran a little to the south. From the east the only way of approach was a narrow plain, flooded, thickly sown with mines, and overlooked by the Monastery. In fact the Monastery dominated the entire battle area. From it the enemy had an excellent view of everything that went on below. As a primary barrier protecting the entire defensive system there were the Rapido and Gari rivers. The former had to be crossed before the town could be reached and the latter lay in the path of progress through the buildings. Both rivers, swollen by the heavy rains, had flooded large areas on either side.

Cassino was a town built almost entirely of stone and brick. Its houses had immensely thick walls, and beneath them there were deep cellars. The Monastery, too, was built like a fortress. It had served just that purpose during the early nineteenth century.

Both Cassino and the Monastery were places of considerable historic interest. The former was founded in the fourth century BC by the Romans, while the latter was the original home of the Benedictine order.

It was a centre of art and learning during the darkest days of the middle ages and even in modern times was a treasure house containing many valuable ancient manuscripts, books, and paintings.

Before war came the Monastery was the abode of quiet peace with a serene beauty all its own. Then, the hillsides and the stone walls were softened by the green of shrubs and trees. But when the New Zealanders saw it, naked rock, that splintered to the crack of shellbursts, and bare walls looked frowningly down through a haze of dust and smoke upon the guns and the crater-pocked fields of the plain.

5

THE NEW ZEALAND CORPS ATTACKS

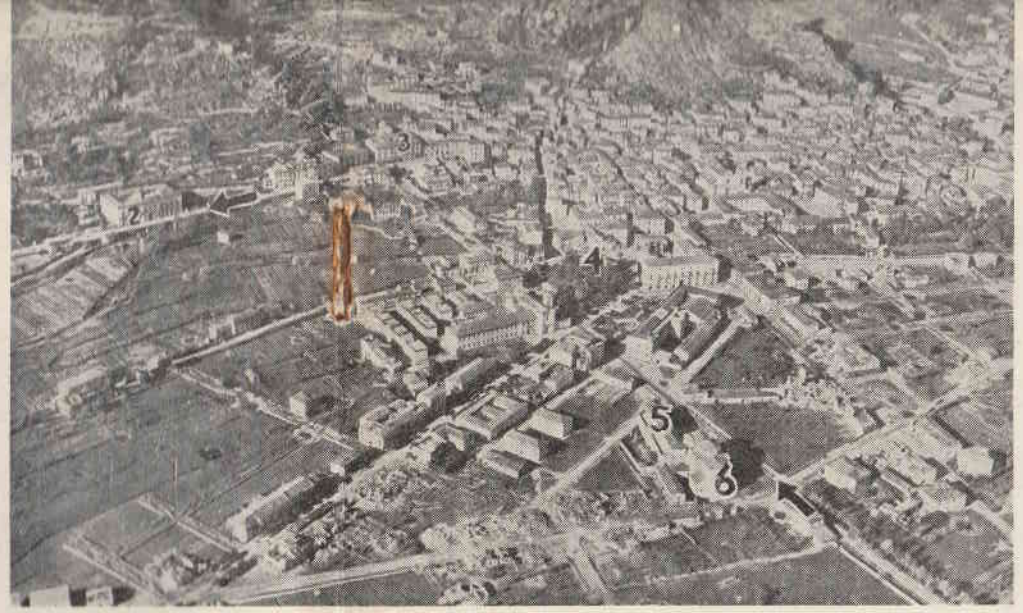
WHEN THE NEW ZEALAND CORPS ASSUMED command the Allies held only a few houses on the eastern outskirts of Cassino, but to the north the 2nd United States Corps had reached Point 593 and had captured part of yet another peak, Monte Castellone. In spite of repeated enemy counter-attacks the Americans expressed the opinion that an attack from the north-west with fresh troops could take the fortress.

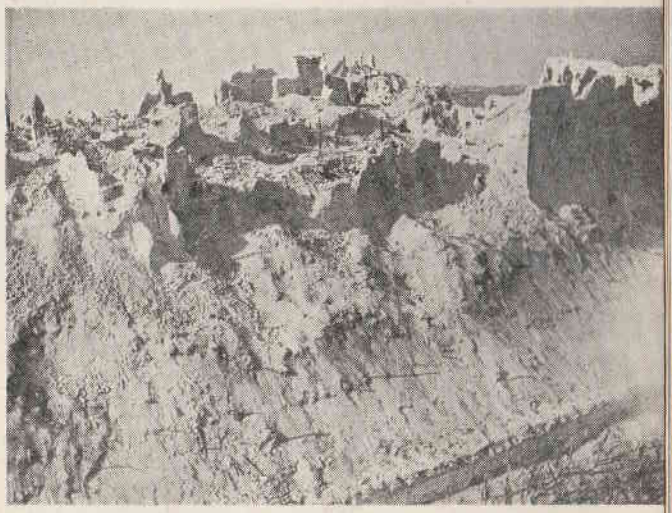
With this in mind the New Zealand Corps planned to resume the advance where the Americans had been compelled to leave it. The 7th Indian Brigade was to take the Monastery by the north-western approach along mountainous ridges while the New Zealand Division established a bridgehead across the Rapido south of the town. When this was achieved the Indians and the New Zealanders were to co-operate in the capture of the town, and an American and New Zealand armoured force was then to advance into the Liri valley.

Unfortunately the Indians experienced great difficulty in taking over. First they had to undertake a long, hard climb over a rough mountain track which was under enemy shell and mortar fire throughout its length. Then they found that the most forward positions were within a few yards of the enemy and overlooked by him. German troops still held an old fort on the summit of Point 593.

A great deal of careful thought was given to the problem of the Monastery. It had become a powerful strongpoint and every day that it remained unmolested Allied soldiers died under gunfire directed from it. Reluctantly a decision was reached. The ancient home of the Benedictines would have to be sacrificed.

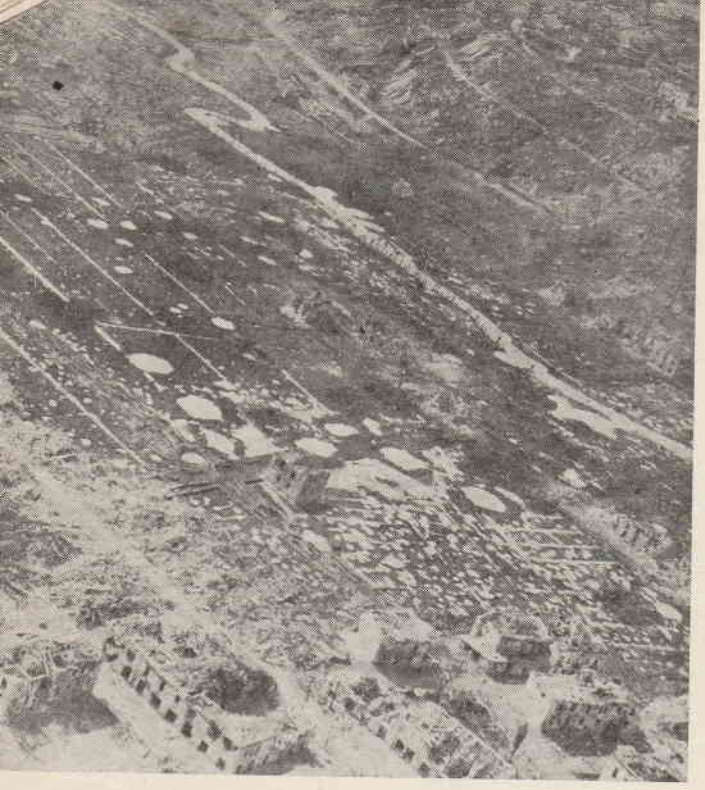
Leaflets fired by Allied artillery gave ample warning of what was to come, and urged the monks to leave, taking with them all that they could of their treasures.





CASSINO

The above aerial photograph of Cassino was taken in November 1943. It shows (1) Castle Hill (or Point 193), (2) Hotel des Roses, (3) Continental Hotel, (4) Botanical Gardens, (5) Nunnery, (6) Church and crypt. The arrows indicate Route 6. The town after the bombing is shown below and the ruins of the Monastery on the right. On the left a Tommy-gunner covers an enemy strongpoint; a medical orderly goes forward to collect wounded; and, below, shafts of sunlight pierce the smoke screen. At top right, infantry attack; below is a group of men who took part in the fighting.



'THE CRATER-POCKED FIELDS'

Then on the morning of 15 February, at half past eight, the first waves of bombers arrived. Before nightfall over 350 tons of bombs, including 140 tons of 1,000-pounders and 66 tons of incendiaries, had been dropped. The buildings lay in ruins, but the immense walls, though partially breached at many points, still defiantly stood.

That night the 1st Royal Sussex Regiment attempted to complete the capture of Point 593, and again the following night. Both efforts failed, and both were costly, the regiment losing 40 per cent. of its strength under intense enemy fire. More bombing raids on the Monastery took place on 16 and 17 February, bringing the total weight to nearly 500 tons. Then on the night of 17/18 February the Indians launched a full-scale assault while simultaneously the Maori Battalion attacked across the Rapido along the railway.

Firstly Point 593 was attacked by the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles, who fought with a tenacious courage worthy of the highest praise. They lost many men and all but two of their officers and were able to clear only one side of the hill. Counter-attacks came at once and fierce fighting raged until dawn when the attempt to continue the advance had to be abandoned.

On the left of the Indian line the 1/2nd Gurkha Regiment advanced on the Monastery while the fighting on Point 593 was at its height. Within a few minutes the Gurkhas were caught in a thicket of thorny scrub and most of the men in the leading companies were struck down at once by accurate machine-gun fire and by grenades thrown from steel and concrete fortifications. The survivors, many of whom were already wounded, pressed on. Some of the enemy positions were taken, but the unequal struggle ended when the last gallant handful of men received the order to retire.

Maori Battalion Thrust

In conjunction with this major engagement fought by the Indians the New Zealand Division, with an American armoured force under command, began the operation of establishing a bridgehead across the Rapido and Gari rivers preparatory to launching an advance into the Liri valley. An extremely heavy artillery bombardment was fired, then at nine o'clock at night two companies from the Maori Battalion led the attack, following the general line of the railway embankment. Almost at once they came under fire from mortars and machine guns, but they pressed on across sodden, swampy ground sown with mines.

Two arms of the Rapido were crossed by wading and with the help of assault boats, then near the station barbed wire and strongly defended positions were encountered. Very fierce fighting ensued, but before dawn the station had been captured. One vital strongpoint nearby remained in enemy hands; a rocky outcrop approximately 50 yards long and 30 feet high which later became familiarly known as the Hummocks. Machine guns, mortars, and rifles could pour down a withering fire from it, and the Maoris were prevented from reaching it by barbed wire, mines, and a stream swollen by floods to 20 feet or more wide.

Owing to the flooded countryside the railway embankment was the only possible

route by which tanks and anti-tank weapons could be brought forward. New Zealand engineers working under fire had already done much towards making this into a passable roadway. Four of a total of 12 demolitions had been repaired, but on the night of the attack six gaps in the embankment varying between 40 and 80 feet in width had to be filled in and two bridges built, one over each arm of the Rapido.

Fully aware of the importance of the embankment, the enemy had sown it with anti-tank and deadly anti-personnel mines. Almost its whole length could be swept by fire from very many weapons of every type, yet despite the danger and countless difficulties the sappers completed all but two of their major tasks before dawn. Daylight brought disaster. From the Hummocks, from houses on the outskirts of Cassino, and from the heights above the town came fire so intense that it would have been suicidal to continue. The two gaps in the last few hundred yards of embankment could not be filled in.

Smoke laid down by the Allied guns began to drift over the battlefield in rolling clouds of greyish fog as soon as it was light enough for the enemy to see. This offered some protection, but throughout the morning and early afternoon the Maoris remained under fire, particularly from the Hummocks. Then at four o'clock enemy tanks and infantry counter-attacked. After stubborn resistance without the support of tanks or anti-tank weapons the Maoris were obliged to withdraw over the Rapido. There they were relieved by the 24th Battalion. Tanks of the 20th Armoured Regiment which had been waiting, under shellfire, to go to their assistance also retired to a safer area. Hard fighting by both Indians and Maoris and a magnificent engineer effort thus ended in failure.

Outstanding gallantry was shown by a wounded Maori officer. Left behind on his own orders he feigned death. Then, despite a shattered leg, he dragged himself across more than a mile of battlefield to his own lines. The journey took 17 hours, every moment of which must have been a moment of agony.

6

OPERATION 'DICKENS'

WHEN THE FIRST NEW ZEALAND CORPS' attack did not succeed no time was wasted in preparing for a second offensive. It was agreed after careful consideration that the difficulties facing the Indians in the mountains to the north-west of the Monastery were too great, so the idea of another attack from that direction was discarded. All the alternatives bristled with problems, but eventually a plan was decided upon and given the code name *Dickens.*

Its objectives were the capture by the New Zealand Division of Cassino town, Castle Hill, and the railway station. Monastery Hill was to be seized by the Indians, who were to take over from the New Zealanders on Castle Hill and then go on to take Hangman's Hill and finally the Monastery. When the gateway to the Liri valley had thus been opened New

'SMOKE-OH'

Zealand armour and infantry were to co-operate with Combat Command 'B' in the final break-through.

This time the town was to be approached from the north, taking advantage of the fact that American troops already held the northern outskirts. An air bombardment heavier than ever before used for such a target was to be directed against the town and the hillsides. Immediately afterwards the infantry were to advance under cover of a creeping barrage fired by every available gun.

On the night of 21/22 February the 6th Brigade relieved the 133rd United States Infantry Regiment in the outskirts of Cassino while tanks from the 19th Armoured Regiment were placed in support. By 24 February all was ready for *Dickens.* Then came the rain. Day after day it rained. Sheeted water acccumulated on the plains, and dirty, muddy water filled the countless shell and bomb craters. Black clouds and grey mists hung heavily over the hills.

'No Dickens To-morrow'

And day after day the word was signalled from Corps Headquarters to every unit, 'Dickens postponed,' 'No Dickens to-morrow,' 'No Dickens . . . ' 'No Dickens . . . ' It became almost a legend, 'No Dickens to-morrow.' Men in the intelligence sections used to say ironically that even the Italian civilians were asking, 'When will Dickens be? Is it to-morrow?'

Not until the second week in March did the weather show any signs of improvement. Throughout this time the men in the line lived amid mud and slush under the eyes and guns of the enemy. There was never silence. Seldom an hour passed unmarked by an exchange of fire. A constant strain of waiting was imposed on every man. Conditions were particularly difficult on the mountain sector held by the 7th Indian Brigade. The forward positions were merely shallow holes scraped in the rock and closely watched by the enemy. Supplies had to come by mules and porters over trails that were under fire, while on the heights there were sleet and snow. An average of 60 men a day died or were wounded, or were sent back sick as a result of hardship.

At last, however, the weather was adjudged suitable. The airfields were usable, the skies were clear enough for the bombers, and the ground had dried sufficiently to allow the movement of men and armour. Enemy pressure on the Anzio beach-head now made it imperative that the attack begin as soon as possible. 'D' Day was named. The 15th of March.

The day dawned bright and clear. All along the front there was a strange calm as though the god of battle was not yet awake. The valley, the square, white buildings of the town, the Monastery, and the hill slopes were quiet and peaceful. Men waited expectantly, their ears attuned for only one sound. It came at about half past eight, a distant murmur that swiftly grew to the unforgettable threatening music of a great air fleet overhead.

Smoke and flame mushroomed out from among the buildings of the town as the first wave of aircraft unloaded its bombs. Thereafter until midday blow upon crashing blow was delivered at intervals of between ten and 20 minutes upon the town and the slopes beyond. Squadron after squadron attacked. Dust, smoke, and gouts of fire erupted from the trembling earth as though from a volcano, while the sound of the bombs roared and thundered through the hills.

More than 500 heavy and medium bombers from the American Strategic and Tactical Air Forces dropped just over 1,000 tons of bombs on an area considerably less than one square mile. At the same time approximately 200 Warhawks, Invaders, and Thunderbolts of the 12th Air Support Command attacked the enemy to the south and south-west of the town. Boston bombers and Kittyhawks from the Desert Air Force engaged enemy guns, while high above the bombers, Lightnings and Royal Air Force Spitfires kept constant guard.

Precisely at noon the last of the medium bombers dropped their loads, and as the amazing spectacle of the air bombardment ended, an equally amazing demonstration of artillery power began. As the

black columns of smoke from the last five bombs erupted on the flat, the whole hillside became a mass of fleecy white puffs marking the bursting of shells on almost every yard of ground from the town below to the Abbey above. In all, 610 guns of all calibres fired 1,200 tons of shells within four hours. American, British, Indian, Free French, and New Zealand gunners all co-operated.

Into Cassino

Behind a creeping barrage the 6th Brigade, with the 25th Battalion leading, began the advance. Positions on the outskirts, from which all troops had been withdrawn before the bombing, were retaken without difficulty, and the infantry went on deeper into the ruins, one company turning to the west to clear the enemy from Castle Hill.

Difficulties were encountered immediately. Streets and roads had either vanished beneath masses of rubble or were gapped by giant bomb craters. Even men on foot found movement hard, while tanks of the 19th Armoured Regiment were unable to get beyond the northern fringes.

The garrison was formed by the enemy's toughest and finest soldiers, paratroopers, and though at first there was little opposition, pockets of determined, well-armed foes began to appear, sometimes in ground that had already been cleared. It was thought likely that some of these men had survived in the cellars beneath the rubble, later digging themselves out to become a menace.

Unexpectedly strong opposition developed in the south-west corner where the enemy held a thin line of ruined buildings along the base of the hill. In particular the Continental Hotel and a building about 400 yards to the east of it were most troublesome. The 24th Battalion went forward after the 26th to assist in clearing these places. Castle Hill was found to be sheer rock on its northern side, too steep to climb, but there were ways up the north-eastern and southern slopes. After a hard climb followed by sharp fighting, men from the 25th Battalion captured Point 165 and cleared the castle.

By the end of the day, despite the difficulties, it appeared that the action might yet succeed. Castle Hill had been taken, and though they were unable to leave men in every building the New Zealanders had penetrated into most of the town. Only a few isolated strongpoints remained to be cleared. And then the weather, so often unfriendly, became decisively an enemy.

Moonlight had been counted upon for the night operations. There was none. Heavy rain began soon after dusk and an inky blackness broken only by stabbing flashes of gunfire cloaked the battlefield. Communications were disrupted, companies lost touch with their neighbours, men fell into water-filled craters, stumbled over twisted iron girders and heaps of masonry, or lost their way among the crumbling debris.

The roar of tank engines could be heard as the armour struggled to find a way to the assistance of the infantry and tank crews worked with picks and shovels to clear a passage. They could not do so. In the general confusion no progress could be made with the clearance of the town, whereas the enemy, helped by the night and by intimate knowledge of the ground, was able to undo much that had been achieved earlier in the day. Houses which had been cleared but of necessity left untenanted were reoccupied by German snipers. New strongpoints developed and others were reinforced. The planned attack on the railway station had to be delayed.

Under these circumstances the 5th Indian Brigade moved forward to pass through the New Zealand lines, take over on Castle Hill, and press on up the steep, rocky spur leading to the Monastery. Heavy enemy shellfire fell continually on the approaches to the hill, but in spite of this, and conditions in the town, the 1/4th Essex Regiment relieved the 25th Battalion troops in the castle by half past ten.

Two companies from the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles were next to reach the castle, but the remainder of the battalion lost

its headquarters and all its officers as a result of shellfire. Only one company of the 1/9th Gurkhas was able to make any progress. While the rest of the Gurkhas were pinned down by heavy fire these men actually passed several strongly-held enemy positions, probably without either seeing them or being seen in the darkness, and occupied Hangman's Hill.

A labour of Hercules faced the engineers. The rain had knitted the rubble into masses of dough-like material that refused to yield to bulldozing, while bridges between 50 and 70 feet long were needed to cross bomb craters in the roads. Throughout the night this work went on. New Zealand and American sappers bridged the Rapido on Route 6 and several of the giant craters.

As daylight came on the 16th, smoke clouds were laid about the Monastery and on the flat to screen the bridges from enemy gunners. More smoke covered an attempt by the Rajputs to advance from Point 165 up the spur to a rocky knoll, Point 236, which dominated the hillside. Machine guns and mortar fire met every movement, so these efforts failed, while on Hangman's Hill the Gurkhas were isolated by day.

The Call for Armour

Within the town progress was very slow for infantry movement was fired upon from above, while the enemy was well entrenched behind thick walls and great masses of rubble. Tanks were urgently needed to demolish masonry-protected strongpoints sometimes within a few yards of the New Zealand infantry.

Six tanks succeeded in edging sufficiently far forward to engage and destroy targets pin-pointed by the 25th Battalion during the morning. Other tanks, after their efforts on the previous night were bogged, buried in immense craters, or halted by masses of rubble. The Continental Hotel remained a centre of bitter resistance. About 400 yards to the east of it buildings flanking an open marshy space that had once been a botanical gardens were also strongly held and the 26th Battalion could not pass them.

Since movement on the hillside was impossible by day, the 5th Indian Brigade had to make the most of the hours of darkness. During heavy fighting the garrison on Hangman's Hill was reinforced. Point 236 was attacked and a hairpin bend in the road just below it was attained by the Rajputs. A strong counter-attack at dawn drove them back to Point 165.

Shellfire directed against the armour was distressingly accurate, yet on Route 6 bridge-laying tanks were able, under fire, to put bridges across some of the craters so that before long the 26th Battalion was receiving close support. From the windows of a convent or nunnery only 50 yards away across Route 6 German snipers began firing on the leading infantry with rifle grenades. They were eradicated after shells from the tanks had prepared the way, and the crypt later became the 26th Battalion headquarters. More tanks were brought up during the night and the 6th Brigade reorganised before resuming the attack by day. The 25th Battalion, with a company of the 24th, assumed responsibility for the Botanical Gardens and for the advance towards the Continental Hotel, while the 26th, with tanks from the 19th Armoured Regiment, prepared to strike towards the railway station.

Assisted by fire from a squadron of the 19th Armoured Regiment, troops from the 24th and 25th Battalions attacked on the morning of 17 March. The Botanical Gardens were cleared, but very little more progress could be made eastwards. This initial success, however, made the 26th Battalion's right flank secure and permitted it, with more tanks, to attack the railway station. At 11 o'clock tanks from the 19th Armoured Regiment led the attack on the railway station, some advancing from the vicinity of the crypt along an embankment which was from eight to ten feet above a marshy plain. They were followed a little later by the leading infantry platoons. Before long the first tank was a blazing wreck; the second was hit and on fire when only 20 yards past the first, and the third, too, was hit, to capsize off the embankment. Neverthe-

less two tanks reached the station within 40 minutes of beginning the attack. A few of the leading infantrymen were not far behind, but the remainder were delayed by shelling, mortars, and machine guns.

Two companies had to reach Battalion headquarters in the crypt before they could begin the advance. They found that the enemy had recaptured positions covering their route and that there was a 200-yard stretch of fire-swept open ground to be crossed. Men set off at intervals in a mad race with death. One section was wiped out before it had well begun. Many men were shot as they rose to start again after resting in bomb craters for a few moments. The snipers were without mercy. Brave men who went out again to bring in wounded lost their lives, but still rescue parties came and went until further efforts were of necessity forbidden. There was but a brief rest within the comparative safety of the crypt before the last stages of the advance were negotiated, fortunately without more heavy losses. The concentrated fire of 12 field regiments was directed on enemy strongpoints, and by the end of the day the station and the Hummocks—scenes of the Maoris' desperate fighting a month before—were securely held.

During the night of 17/18 March the New Zealand engineers made a particularly fine effort despite snipers and mortar fire. A second bridge over the Rapido near Route 6 was built, and an additional 200 yards of the roadway itself rendered passable. Work begun over a month before on the railway embankment was completed so that tanks could reach the station. Inside the town every attempt to work drew mortar fire, so little progress could be made there.

The Continental Hotel was the key to the enemy's defences along the foot of Castle Hill. Since it could not be reached from the north or from the east, an attack from the rear was decided on. Under cover of darkness, C Company from the 24th Battalion moved through the Indian positions on Castle Hill and Point 165, then crossed the rocky slopes to Point 202, below Hangman's Hill.

GERMAN PARATROOP PRISONERS AT CASSINO

Machine-gun fire prevented it from getting any closer to the Continental.

In the murky light of early dawn on the 18th the enemy followed an artillery pounding of the station area with a determined counter-attack. One New Zealand soldier described the scene thus: 'Through the darkness streams of tracer from a Spandau sited on a promontory to our left splashed in a great circle of fire on the walls of a building over the railway line. In the light of a flare I caught a glimpse of a Hun officer who stood up and called, "Come on, Kiwis. Come on out with your hands up." A voice thick and hoarse with excitement replied, "Go to hell, you b——!" And the fight was on.' Grenades were bursting, and automatic weapons rattled in gust after gust of noisy firing. Friendly smoke shells began landing and in the thickening haze the enemy retired. 'That was a pity,' an officer said, 'for they were easily killed.' There were 23 dead in front of the 26th Battalion lines.

For those elsewhere daylight on the 18th brought the disheartening discovery that the darkness that had helped the troops on to Point 202 had also covered the arrival of enemy reinforcements. Fresh strongpoints had been occupied at the foot of Castle Hill. Tanks knocked down several houses with gunfire during the day, allowing both the 24th and 25th Battalions to make slight gains.

A Renewed Assault

Stubborn resistance was still continuing in Cassino by the evening of 18 March, and it was decided to begin a fresh combined assault early on the 19th. The 26th Battalion positions at the railway station were taken over by the 78th British Division, and the Maori Battalion joined the infantry already in the town.

It was intended that the 5th Indian Brigade should reinforce the Gurkhas on Hangman's Hill with the 1/4th Essex Regiment so that at dawn the two battalions could attack the Monastery. Simultaneously there was to be a diversionary tank attack towards the Monastery from the 7th Indian Brigade's lines in the mountains to the north-west. The New Zealanders were to complete the occupation of Cassino.

Three hours before dawn the Maori Battalion attacked from the direction of the Botanical Gardens. Bitter house-to-house fighting took place, and by daylight the Maoris had reached Route 6 and were face to face with the Continental Hotel, a few yards away across the street. Many prisoners were taken and numerous strongpoints captured, but the Continental, and strongpoints facing the 25th Battalion to the north of it, were still resisting as fiercely as ever at the end of a hard day's fighting.

Meanwhile, on the slopes of Monte Cassino the Indians were meeting reverse after reverse. While the Essex Regiment was on the way to Hangman's Hill in the first preparatory phase of the attack on the Monastery, the enemy suddenly seized the initiative. Short but intense artillery and mortar fire preceded a counter-attack which recaptured Point 165 and threatened Castle Hill.

Two companies of the Essex Regiment caught on the slopes were reduced to the strength of one platoon before they could reach Hangman's Hill. In the castle troops were pinned down by machine-gun fire directed at the only exit from the building. No attack could be made on the Monastery.

Better fortune at first attended the diversionary tank attack. This action was carried out by a force including Sherman tanks from C Squadron of the 20th Armoured Regiment, light tanks from the reconnaissance troop of the 7th Indian Brigade, and light tanks and self-propelled guns from an American tank force.

These tanks approached along a mountain road which had been constructed by New Zealand engineers working in close co-operation with Indian troops. This route, named Cavendish Road, was the fruit of ingenuity and great daring for in parts it ran along slopes exposed to enemy guns. Here, section by section had been built under cover of camouflage so skilfully used that in all probability the Germans were unaware that the road existed.

Once past the end of the approach road the tanks found the route increasingly difficult. They had astonished and greatly alarmed the enemy, as intercepted wireless reports showed. A tank attack from that direction had been considered impossible. Unfortunately, mines and the nature of the ground prevented the thrust from being pushed fully home and the armoured columns withdrew. There were nine New Zealand tank casualties. On the slopes below the Monastery the Indian infantry was not sufficiently strong to take advantage of the Germans' momentary consternation.

Isolated Troops

No substantial gains, then, resulted from the combined assault of 19 March. In fact the reinforced enemy troops at the base of Castle Hill attacked the Castle from strongpoints already engaged by the New Zealanders.

On the slopes of Monte Cassino there were two isolated groups, the Indians on Hangman's Hill and C Company of the 24th Battalion on Point 202. To any casual observer it seemed beyond the bounds of possibility that any form of life could survive upon that rocky hillside, yet many men lived and fought there. Some sheltered in shallow depressions round which a few rocks had been scraped together, and others in a culvert under the corkscrew road to the summit.

Reorganisation of the Corps' front was carried out during the night of 19/20 March. The 5th Brigade became responsible for the whole of the town north from Route 6, including the Continental Hotel and the strongpoints north of it, while the 6th Brigade took over a line from Route 6 down to and including the railway station. Southwards from the station the Divisional Cavalry held a line as infantry, with part of the 78th British Division on the southern flank.

Above the town the 6th Royal West Kents, detached from the 78th British Division, took over the castle from the battle-weary and depleted garrison. The troops on Hangman's Hill, who now consisted of the 1/9th Gurkhas, a company of the 4/6th Rajputs, and the survivors of two companies of the 1/4th Essex Regiment, were not relieved. The New Zealanders, too, remained on Point 202.

These men were in desperate straits. The New Zealanders lost touch with the Corps' lines when their wireless set was destroyed by a shellburst. For three days they were without food or bedding; then supplies including a wireless set were dropped from the air. From that time until they were at last relieved their morning signal to their comrades in the town always began with the words 'Morale high.' Wounded were successfully evacuated under the protection of a Red Cross flag.

There was no improvement in the general situation on the 20th, when the Maoris and the 23rd Battalion were again engaged in house-to-house fighting. Indeed, it appeared that the enemy was stronger than ever. The western fringe of strongpoints had been reinforced yet again, while the volume of shell and mortar fire was increasing.

Excellent observation from above, and quite possibly direction from hidden watchers in the town itself, enabled the Germans to bring down artillery fire on particular houses. To move in the open by day was to invite Spandau fire, while noise or even loud talking would frequently bring a deadly response. By night, too, fire was heavy and the engineers suffered casualties in maintaining the bridges and attempting to improve routes for the tanks.

Fresh operations designed to link up with the isolated garrisons and cut the enemy's lines of communication with the strongpoints in the town were planned for the night of 20/21 March. The 78th British Division took over the railway area from which the 26th Battalion moved into the town, and the 21st Battalion, which had been held in readiness to co-operate with the American armoured forces in the Liri valley, was brought forward for an attack to cut the southern entrance to Cassino and join the troops on Point 202.

Heavy opposition met the 21st Battalion, but by nine o'clock on the morning of

21 March positions were held within 100 yards of Route 6 south of the Continental. There the Hotel des Roses and the buildings just above it formed the principal barrier. Later an enemy tank was discovered (and destroyed) hidden in a building actually occupied by 24th Battalion troops. Its wireless set was in good order and had doubtless been in use for several days to direct the enemy artillery.

As the day wore on and fighting continued a vast pall of smoke blotted out the Monastery and its barren, fire-swept hillside. A wall of fog shot with the winking flash of shellbursts was laid by the Corps' artillery to blind the enemy. Only for the few moments needed by aircraft to parachute supplies to the isolated garrisons was the smoke screen allowed to thin. Yet there were no important gains.

Again on the 22nd, while the artificial night of dense smoke shrouded the high ground, there was fierce fighting involving all the battalions in Cassino. For a time it was hoped that there might yet be an eleventh-hour victory. This was not to be. One company from the 21st Battalion supported by tanks and artillery engaged the enemy strongpoints on the western outskirts, while men from the 23rd Battalion advanced on the lower slopes, but in both cases only limited progress could be made.

By this time both the New Zealanders and the Indians had been in the line for six weeks and had endured eight days of almost continual offensive action under conditions beyond the imagination of any but those with knowledge born of experience. Enemy fire had ceased neither by day nor by night. Never for a moment had the strain of battle eased. There had been no chance to sleep, except as animals do, with nerves alert. Hot meals were usually out of the question. Some of the dead could not be buried, and the wounded could be evacuated only at night.

It was clear that a decisive break-through could not be achieved. As flesh and blood neared the limits of endurance, further offensive action became impracticable. Several alternative plans for making the break-through were reviewed by the Corps and Army Commanders, but none appeared to offer reasonable hopes of success. Finally on the evening of 23 March, orders were given for the offensive to be temporarily abandoned. The New Zealand Corps was to reorganise its line in order to hold its gains securely.

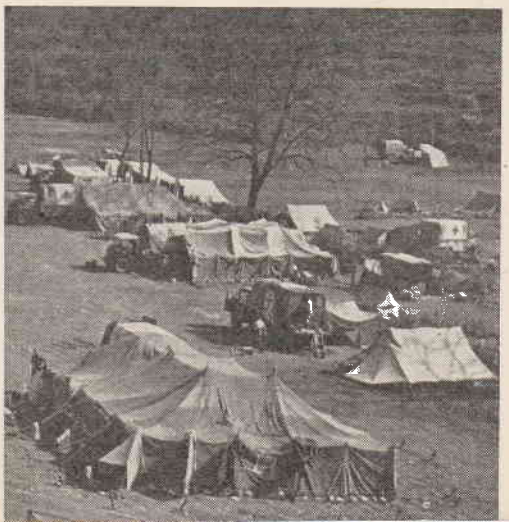
When this decision was made it became necessary to withdraw the isolated garrisons. On the night of 24/25 March artillery fire was directed on to enemy positions between them and the main Corps' lines. The moment the shelling ceased the garrisons began to move back along the ridge and before the enemy was aware of what was happening they had reached comparative safety.

Thus when the battle ended the road to Rome was still barred. Nevertheless, there had been substantial gains and the operation as a whole was far from being a failure. A firm bridgehead had been established over the Rapido river, nine-tenths of the town captured, and a foothold obtained on Monastery Hill, where Castle Hill was firmly held. Then, too, pressure on the Anzio beach-head had been relieved.

The New Zealand Corps was disbanded on 26 March.

A general reshuffle of troops in the Cassino sector followed the disbandment of the New Zealand Corps. The 6th Brigade assumed command of the town itself and the railway station, while the 5th Brigade occupied a line facing into the Liri valley from the eastern bank of the Gari river. On the right flank of

FIELD AMBULANCE DRESSING STATION



the New Zealand Division was the 78th British Division. The 19th Armoured Regiment was relieved and withdrawn for a badly needed rest, its tasks being taken over by the 18th Armoured Regiment. Some 20 tanks had been lost by the former regiment.

Even to hold Cassino was no easy task. Men lived in a state of constant nervous tension, always harassed by the guns and mortars directed from the heights. Snipers and patrols were active, and there were frequent skirmishes among the shattered ruins. Rats, which foraged among the scraps of food and piles of empty tins, and the stench of unburied dead were a nauseating nuisance. When it rained, dust from the rubble turned to slimy, porridge-like mud which seemed to penetrate into clothing, bedding, and food alike.

The battle had reached a stage when it might have been aptly described as the 'Battle of the Smoke.' Both sides used smoke extensively, and men found living under an almost constant greyish pall peculiarly depressing. Yet if the screen thinned, down would come enemy fire in fierce fury. Maintenance of the smoke was an important but highly dangerous task involving the carrying, dumping, and firing of many thousands of shells. All day and every day that wind and weather permitted a murky haze lay over the whole area.

Shell damage to bridges was frequent, the engineers suffering casualties nightly while keeping them in repair. Linesmen, too, seldom saw a day go past without enemy fire breaking signal wires, until communication was almost entirely by wireless. Supply was a difficult and dangerous business, accomplished by jeep trains and carrying parties which took food, mail, and munitions into the ghostly shambles of Cassino by night.

A final clash occurred in the station area on the night of 30/31 March when the enemy attacked with great determination. A company of the 26th Battalion holding the Hummocks was driven back, but later recaptured its lost ground after bitter fighting in which the enemy suffered severely.

7

APENNINE INTERLUDE

IN PREPARATION FOR A RENEWED OFFENsive against the Gustav Line the Allied armies in Italy began a major regrouping programme at the end of March. The Eighth Army became responsible for some four-fifths of the front across the peninsula of Italy and began to concentrate its greatest strength on the sector from and including Cassino to the Liri river. South of the Liri, and the Anzio beach-head, were the responsibilities of the Fifth Army.

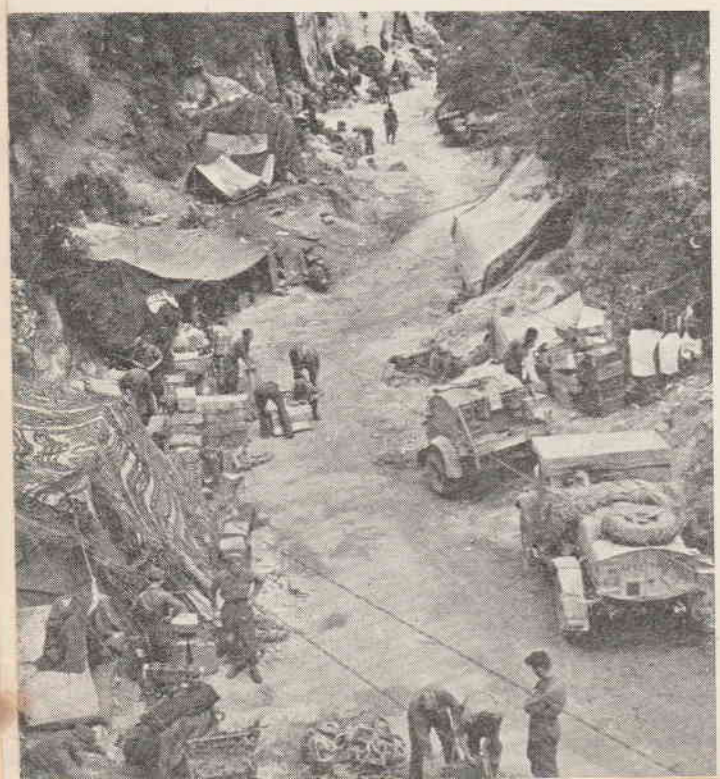
Early in this programme the sorely tried infantry brigades of the New Zealand Division were withdrawn from Cassino to take over from the 2nd Polish Corps the less arduous task of defending a part of the line across the Apennine mountains. There were various preparatory changes in the dispositions of New Zealand units in Cassino, but by 13 April the relief was complete and the 6th British Armoured Division was in command of the sector.

After a short rest near Presenzano in the valley of the Volturno river, the 6th Brigade began to relieve the 5th Kresowa (Polish) Division in the mountains while the 5th Brigade rested at Isernia. The 4th Armoured Brigade, under the command of the 6th British Armoured Division, held part of the Rapido line south of Cassino with troops from the 22nd Motor Battalion. Command of the new sector was formally assumed by the New Zealand Division on 15 April.

Other units were allotted to the Division and its sector was subdivided into three. In the Monte Croce sector to the north there was the 6th Brigade; in the centre the 11th Canadian Brigade group which included an Italian Marine unit, the Bafile Battalion; and to the south the 28th British Infantry Brigade group. On the northern flank of the divisional line an Italian Alpine formation, also part of 10 Corps, was fighting with considerable ability against its former allies. Polish

THE JEEP TRAIN READY TO MOVE OFF

A SECTION OF THE HOVE DUMP



troops held the mountain approach to Monte Cassino on the southern flank.

Reliefs and changes in disposition were numerous so that some troop movement was in progress almost every night. Eventually the 2nd Independent Paratroop Brigade took over the northern sub-sector on 20 April, the 6th Brigade went to a rest area, and the 5th Brigade replaced the 28th British Infantry Brigade in the Terelle, or southern, sub-sector.

Among those peaks and valleys it was not possible to hold any continuous line of defence. Men occupied sangars built into the steep slopes with timber and rock, and by frequent patrols kept watch for any signs of enemy penetration. Enemy raiding parties could, and sometimes did, take advantage of the swirling mountain mists to inflict short, sharp surprise thrusts upon Allied troops, but neither side attempted any major offensive action.

Many picturesque little villages perched, in improbable fashion, on the summits or at the foot of the ridges. From countless vantage points the opposing armies could look, as it were, 'into each other's front doors.'

Supply and the control of movement were perhaps the greatest problems to be faced. There were two principal roads serving the divisional line. Both were closely observed by the enemy and under fire, while one, the Inferno Track, was also the main route serving the 5th Kresowa Division. It was capable of carrying only one-way traffic. The strictest control of traffic was essential, and in this the Divisional Provost Corps carried out splendid work.

Aptly named, the Inferno Track was in places barely wide enough to allow the passage of a single vehicle at a time. It was exceedingly steep, full of sharp bends, and ran along shelves on the mountainside or through deep chasms in the rock. It was unwise to linger anywhere along its length. Few Devil's Speedways could offer as nerve-racking a journey. Similarly the North Road was 20 miles of twisting, twining, corkscrew bends which dropped 2,000 feet into the valley, then climbed again 2,000 feet to Terelle. This was called the 'Terelle terror ride.'

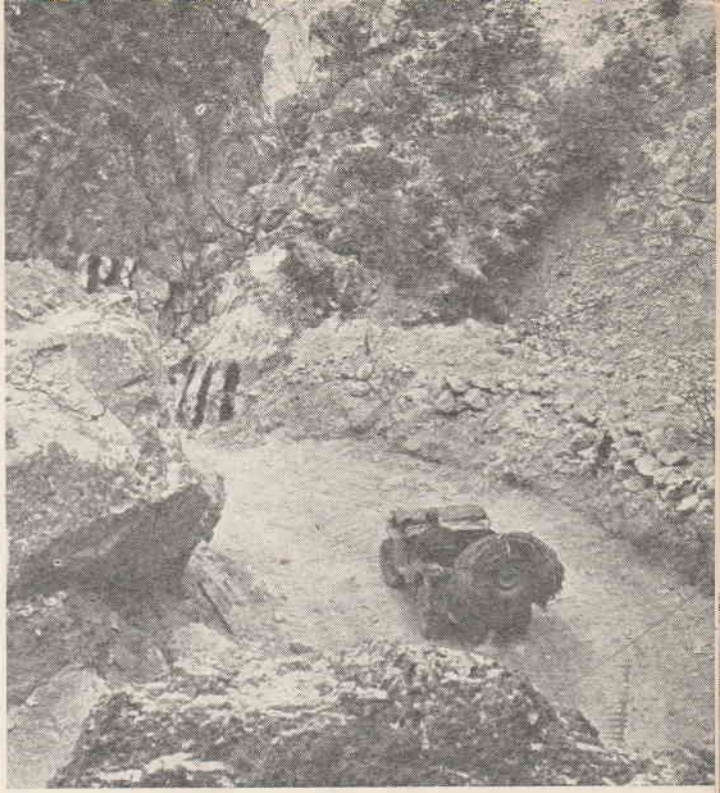
Aquafondata basin was the nearest point to the front that could be safely reached by day. In this area there assembled every night a great mass of troops and transport, including the vitally important Jeep train. The Jeep train, a long line of jeeps and trailers loaded with stores, carried supplies for the forward positions to comparatively sheltered spots known as the Jeep-heads, whence all further movement was on foot or by mule train.

As soon as darkness fell, organised convoys would be despatched to a strict time-table so planned that they could be back before daylight. From darkness to midnight traffic was outwards bound, and from midnight to dawn homewards bound. For the men there was a night march from the debussing point to a lying-up area, and thence another night march by scarcely visible mountain tracks to the forward positions.

The most forward supply and petrol dump was at the end of the Inferno Track in a deep, clay-walled gully. This was officially named the Hove Dump, and was in use when the 6th Brigade first took over in the Terelle sector. It was the first assembly point for the Jeep train, but on 7 May enemy shelling started a grass and scrub fire which sent up a column of smoke clearly visible for many miles.

Ranging on this smoke marker the enemy began to shell in earnest. Soon trucks were on fire and piles of stores were burning as shell after shell scored direct hits in the gully. Rescue teams went to work at once. Most of the vehicles of the Jeep train, which was waiting ready and loaded, were safely removed, but all control of the flames was lost when the petrol dump and a pile of high-velocity shells also caught fire. Seething flame filled the gully and billowed out high above it, turbulent with the fury of exploding ammunition and bursting petrol containers. Orange flame, black smoke, and the roar of explosions informed the enemy of his success. Naturally enough, Aquafondata hereafter became the most forward dump and terminus of the Jeep train.

In spite of the fire, supplies were delivered to the forward troops as usual that night.



A JEEP ON THE INFERNO TRACK

NEW ZEALAND LINESMEN AT WORK

8

BREAK-THROUGH AND PURSUIT

DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF MAY ALLIED preparations for an all-out attack on the Gustav Line neared completion. The Adriatic front was lightly held by the 5th British Corps, and the Apennines by the 10th British Corps, which included the New Zealand Division. On the mountainous approaches to Monastery Hill and Cassino there was the 2nd Polish Corps, while the 13th British Corps faced Cassino town and the Liri valley. South of the Liri river the American Fifth Army had the French Expeditionary Corps and the 2nd United States Corps. The 6th United States Corps was at Anzio.

In reserve the Eighth Army placed the Canadian Corps, of which the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade then serving under New Zealand command was a part. Accordingly, during the final readjustments this unit was withdrawn from the mountains and replaced by the 12th South African Motor Brigade, newly arrived from Egypt.

While the 5th and 6th Brigades were taking turn about at holding the forward positions in the mountains the 4th Armoured Brigade had been left in the Cassino area. It was released on 22 April and by early May was resting amid lovely surroundings in the vicinity of Pietramelara. Some elements of the New Zealand armour, however, continued with a variety of duties, including the manning of tanks sited in the ruins of Cassino and the supply of crews for a number of Canadian tanks immobilised in the Terelle sector.

Thus when the attack began New Zealand troops were distributed: the 4th Armoured Brigade, with exceptions, resting at Pietramelara, the 5th Brigade resting in the Volturno valley, and the 6th Brigade holding the Terelle sector in the Apennines.

Shortly before midnight on 11 May New Zealanders near Terelle watching from splendid vantage points saw the whole front on their left flank erupt.

THE STAFF CONFERENCE

Left to right: Brigadiers K. L. Stewart, C. E. Weir, E. D. Queree, General Freyberg, and Brigadier G. B. Parkinson

Over 1,000 guns were in action on the 2nd Polish and the 13th British Corps' sectors alone, and they spoke in a continuous thunder roll while mountain and hill, valley and plain were lit by the lightning flashes of their firing.

Simulated attacks designed to confuse the enemy had been carried out by troops on the New Zealand front assisted by artillery fire and much noisy movement on the part of six tanks, and the Divisional Artillery went into action supporting the Poles in their attack on the Monastery. Little more than these actions was anticipated until the enemy began to withdraw when the Division was to follow up, but on the night of 13 May there was an unexpected call for armour to support the 4th British Division in the Liri valley.

Immediately after a hurried night move from the rest area to the vicinity of Cassino the 19th Armoured Regiment had tanks across the Gari river. A British infantry attack across the Pioppelo stream was successfully supported on the evening of 14 May, then during the following few days New Zealand armour led the infantry in a 'left hook' thrust which cut Route 6, the best way of withdrawal from Cassino.

Fighting was severe, for the enemy showed the utmost daring. Men hiding in scrub and long grass fired rocket projectors at the tanks from close range. They paid for their courage with their lives. The crew of one tank counted 35 dead within their field of fire, while there were over 150 German bodies lying among the crops in front of one squadron after a night battle.

Cassino was attacked on the morning of 18 May. It was found that the enemy had withdrawn and this scene of so much bitter fighting fell with scarcely a shot fired.

Meanwhile the Poles, with New Zealand artillery answering their calls for fire, had encountered resistance as deadly as that which had halted the Indians of the New Zealand Corps on the same ground. They, too, could make only slight progress at heavy cost. On the Fifth Army front, however, French Moroccan troops were forging ahead in spectacular fashion, driving across the Arunci mountains and into the Liri valley from the north. These tough fighters were known as the Goums, and before long word was circulated through the New Zealand lines that the French had 'Goumed their way right off the map.'

Thus threatened by the French the enemy began to withdraw and a second Polish attack on the Monastery was successful. While New Zealand tanks stood guard over the clearing of Cassino on 18 May the Polish and British flags flew over Monastery Hill. On the Anzio beach-head, too, there were successes, and in the Liri valley British and Canadian troops advanced steadily.

On the Move Again

By 25 May the barrier that had stood across the road to Rome since October 1943 had been completely smashed and the pursuit of the enemy up the peninsula of Italy had begun. A mighty modern cavalcade of arms rolled forward up the Liri valley below Cassino.

In the Apennines, where the 5th Brigade was now in the line, heavy and haphazard shelling on the night of 24 May combined with the roar of demolition explosions warned that the Germans were about to withdraw. Patrols on the evening of 25 May found the enemy gone. It was then a case of treading on the heels of his retreat, and this the 5th Brigade proceeded to do, advancing under occasional shellfire.

Almost wholly without opposition the mountain strongholds of Terelle and Belmonte were captured and the surrounding heights cleared. By the evening of 27 May Atina too was clear and the leading New Zealand troops were hurrying on to cross the Melfa river. Mines and demolitions were the chief obstacles, but the sappers had long since attained a skilful speed in dealing with these. The cratered roads were made fit for traffic, bridges were built, and culverts mended. Tanks and guns went through. The chase was on.

As the long columns of guns and vehicles passed over the mountain's shoulders men looked down upon the

BIVVY —*By E. T. Lewis*

rooftops of Atina, then northwards across a valley so wide and flat that it might have been better described as a plain enclosed by hills. It was a fertile land, rich with a wealth of grape-vines, fruit trees, and broad fields of grain brightened by wild flowers and already tinted with the first signs of an early harvest. Spring was in the mountains and summer in the valley.

Floury dust rose like smoke clouds wherever there was vehicle movement, but neither dust nor sharp clashes with enemy rearguards lessened the elation felt throughout the Division as the pursuit went on. Tanks from the 20th Armoured Regiment closely supported the infantry of whom one battalion and then another was in the van. The 6th Brigade followed up the advance from Colle al Volturno through San Biagio to Sora, being held up by numerous demolitions. The Divisional Cavalry searched tracks and by-roads on the flanks. Often there were extraordinary scenes in small country villages as the New Zealand troops passed through. As soon as the Germans had gone civilian crowds lined the roads to cheer, to shower flowers on the vehicles, and to urge gifts of food and wine upon the men.

Near Sora, a small town spread out at the foot of a high, steep hill on the summit of which there was a medieval castle, resistance stiffened. However, the Maori Battalion crossed the Fibrino river, then after heavy fighting drove the enemy from Brocco, a hilltop village which dominated the main road. Counter-attacks in this area were beaten off and despite shelling the engineers completed a bridge over the upper Liri river enabling the tanks to cross.

Maori infantry and armour entered Sora at noon on 31 May. They experienced mortar fire, but within four hours the town was firmly held. That afternoon 23rd Battalion men attacking a ridge to the east were at first delayed by fire, but by 1 June the enemy had once more slipped away.

From Sora, a main highway, Route 82 ran north-westwards to Balsorano and Avezzano closely following the banks of the upper Liri river. On the right bank of the river first the Maori Battalion and then the 21st Battalion led the advance, while the 24th Battalion followed the left bank. Though exceedingly beautiful the valley was narrow and flanked by high hills which near Balsorano formed an escarpment that could have been made a formidable defensive position. There the enemy held up the advance while the bulk of his forces gained time to get away.

For four days, during which the 21st Battalion made several offensive thrusts while the Divisional Artillery and the tanks engaged the enemy with fire, no progress could be made. Then on 6 June there was no answer to the New Zealand guns. The Divisional Cavalry found the town free of Germans and it was formally occupied by troops from the 6th Brigade. At this point the 6th Brigade took over the pursuit, the 26th Battalion advancing with tanks and armoured cars in support. There was practically no resistance, and few delays except those imposed by mines and demolitions. By 9 June the first troops were in Avezzano, a town on the main lateral road between Pescara and Rome. From the hills about this town hundreds of escaped prisoners of war came in, including men from the United

Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, America, Russia, and India. Some brought with them their Italian wives; some a wife and a 'bambino.'

While the New Zealand Division was pursuing the enemy along the upper Liri valley the 8th Indian Division was doing likewise on its left flank, with New Zealand armour in support. The 18th Armoured Regiment crossed country thought to have been impenetrable to tanks, and from 25 May until 4 June fought with whichever of the Indian brigades was in the van of the advance.

Elsewhere on the Allied fronts all had been going well. Rome had fallen on 4 June, and the victorious armies swept on with scarcely a halt. Two days later came the event for which the fighting in Italy had been but a prelude. The invasion of France had set the seal upon the final defeat of Germany.

VINO SHOP, MONTAGNANO —*By J. Figgins*

9
ONWARDS TO FLORENCE

WITH THE FALL OF AVEZZANO THE DIVISION had completed its share in the battles for Rome, and for the first time since it began fighting in Italy a complete rest was possible. By 16 June all units had assembled in the vicinity of Arce, far from the sound of gunfire, amid the now quiet, peaceful beauty of the lower Liri valley.

Though much valuable training was done, there were also gymkhanas and sporting activities of every kind. Regular entertainment was provided by the Kiwi Concert Party and by similar British units, while almost every evening mobile cinemas operated in the open air. In Rome one of the finest hotels had been transformed into a club for New Zealanders. Leave to the Eternal City, to Naples, and to the lovely island of Ischia was arranged as liberally as possible.

Then began the advance to Florence, an advance which was to excite the imagination of the whole Division. Even those who knew nothing of the history of Renaissance Italy could see that they were fighting in one of the most historic regions in the world. Some would remember that Garibaldi retreated over the hills at Arezzo; when they passed that way all would see and appreciate the beauty of hills covered with woods of oak and pine on the road from Chianti, and of Sienna, where the brick walls glowed 'Sienna red' in the morning sun. The 5th Brigade fought in vineyards famous for some of the finest wine in the world, Chianti. Some troops had to guard masterpieces of painting which had been hidden in the houses outside the city of Florence.

The magnificent villas of the Florentine merchant princes had their suits of armour and their art galleries, their terraced gardens, and their noble avenues of trees. The 23rd Battalion lived in one famous villa after another. When a company headquarters was in the house of Machiavelli at San Andrea, battalion headquarters was established in a mansion once occupied by Paul I of Russia and later used by Pope Pius VII on his way to meet Napoleon. From the observation post among the tiles the artillery observers saw over the tops of the fir trees Giotto's Tower and the Dome of the Cathedral glistening in the lucent heat which was the glory of that Italian summer. When the battalion advanced again it was to a villa designed by Michael Angelo and listed as a national monument to be spared in time of war. Below it lay the valley of the Arno and Florence.

Moving secretly at night the Division travelled 250 miles northwards through the outskirts of Rome and so on to an area just south of Lake Trasimene. On the night of 9/10 July the first convoys left Arce and three nights later the 6th Brigade was once more in the line, 15 miles north of the lake, ready to attack the mountain heights overlooking the approaches to Arezzo.

By this time opposition had considerably increased along the whole Italian front as the Germans fought for time to strengthen their next important barricade across the peninsula. This was known as the Gothic Line, and ran from Massa on the Gulf of Genoa, north of Florence to Pesaro on the Adriatic. Before this line could be attacked a series of strongly defended positions had to be overcome.

It was the Allied intention to hasten the enemy's withdrawal as much as possible, thus denying him the opportunity of taking full advantage of the Gothic Line. The New Zealand Division was required by the 13th Corps to clear the way for the advance of the 6th British Armoured Division and the Brigade of Guards through Arezzo to the river Arno. To do this a heavily wooded arc of ridges and peaks from which the enemy could dominate the British routes forward had to be captured.

During a daylight advance on 13 July the 26th Battalion occupied the first two of these peaks without difficulty, namely, Mount Castiglion Maggio and Mount Cavadenti. That night, however, 24th Battalion patrols exploring the next height northwards, Mount Camurcina, met intense fire from machine guns, mortars, and rifles. Much of this came from Mount Lignano, which was the last in the line of hill features. Despite the opposition one company captured Point 845, one of the four summits which formed the mountain as a whole, only to be forced off the point a little later by vigorous counter-attacks.

Mount Lignano was attacked by the 25th Battalion with artillery support beginning at one o'clock on the morning of 15 July. Tanks from the 18th Armoured Regiment and armoured cars from the Divisional Cavalry patrolling on the right flank could not give close support. Nevertheless the mountain was firmly held by New Zealand troops when daylight came on 15 July, though Mount Camurcina was still in enemy hands.

A two-battalion attack was launched against Mount Camurcina during the morning of 16 July, whereupon it was at once obvious that the enemy had withdrawn. There was no opposition to the 24th and 26th Battalions, while the British armour which moved forward at daylight found Arezzo also clear of the enemy. The Eighth Army advance continued, and for a few days the Division went again into reserve.

With its right flank on the slopes leading up to the 4,000- to 5,000-feet high peaks of the Pratamango range the 13th Corps was now advancing across the wooded hills of Tuscany along a front of more than 40 miles. Between the mountains and the right bank of the river Arno there was the 6th British Armoured Division, on the left bank the 4th British Division, which had the Chianti Mountains between it and the 6th South African Armoured Division; and on the left flank there was the 8th Indian Division.

It soon became clear that the best route to Florence was through the country on the left flank along the general line of Highway 2. Accordingly the Corps' Commander decided to make his principal thrust there. The New Zealand and South African divisions were to be employed to drive a narow wedge through to the Arno south-west of Florence, the city itself having been declared an open city.

The approaches from the .south and south-west were through a ring of hills so that the roads and valleys were dominated by the high ground on either side of them. Stubborn resistance was offered by the enemy, who retired only under heavy pressure from one to another of a series of excellent defensive positions. His best troops, including the 4th Parachute Division and the 29th Panzer

Grenadier Division, faced the New Zealanders. They were well supported by artillery, mortars, and the Germans' best armoured weapons, 60-ton Tiger tanks.

Troops of the French Moroccan Infantry Division, in the San Donato area, between the Indians and the left flank of the South Africans were relieved by the New Zealand Division on the night of 21/22 July, with the 5th Brigade in the line. The advance was begun immediately in the face of determined opposition, with the 23rd Battalion to the right and on the Pesa river, and the Maori Battalion on the left. Progress was steady despite counter-attacks, while excellent support was given by tanks of the 18th Armoured Regiment and by the Divisional Cavalry.

Great clouds of choking white dust attended all vehicle movement on the macadam surfaced roads, while the enemy kept up an almost constant programme of harassing shellfire. By its very presence a numerous civilian population helplessly caught in the turmoil which destroyed its homes and scarred its land made the fighting seem the more bitter.

The 5th Brigade continued to advance astride the Pesa river and Route 2, the main road to Florence. Divisional Cavalry patrols watched both flanks, while a composite force named Armcav consisting of tanks, armoured cars, anti-tank guns, engineers, and one company of infantry probed along Route 2 and along the road leading north-westwards to San Casciano. At this latter town, which was spread over the summit of a hill dominating Route 2, there was a brief hold up on 26 July. Aircraft of the Desert Air Force heavily attacked the town during the day. That night the 21st Battalion launched an attack along a ridge to the west, overlooking the Pesa river. A great weight of artillery and mortar fire was laid down in support of this action, but as the New Zealand infantry approached the enemy withdrew along the whole front. As a result of the 5th Brigade's drive the west flank of one series of defended positions, the Olga Line, had been broken, and the enemy began the defence of a new series, the Paula Line, to the north of the Pesa river.

It was deeply to be regretted that the visit of His Majesty the King to the divisional area on 26 July should coincide with this bitter fighting, as the majority of units were heavily committed in battle and it was impossible for the King to meet more than a small proportion of the Division.

The Paula Line

Snipers were left in the outskirts of San Casciano, but infantry from the 22nd Motor Battalion entered practically unopposed on the morning of 27 July. Later, as tanks from the 4th Armoured Brigade moved in there was heavy shelling directed from hills to the north, which were still strongly held. By this time the 5th Brigade had completed an advance of over ten miles across the most difficult country and had brought the Division into contact with the Paula Line. At night men on the hilltop could clearly see the lights of Florence only ten miles away.

The Paula Line was based upon the semi-circle of hills surrounding Florence. In the New Zealand sector the line of summits curved north-west from the valley of the river Greve to the Arno and lay across the path of advance. At the town of Cerbaia the Pesa swung to the north-west, parallel with the main ridge from which the hills sloped down to its banks. One main road followed the Pesa while a second followed the valley of a tributary north-eastwards through the hills to join Route 2 at Galluzzo on the edge of the Arno plain. Route 2 pierced the hill barrier by way of the valley of the Greve.

Before any advance could be made along the roads the enemy had to be driven off the dominating summits. This the Division now set out to do. The 6th Brigade was brought forward, supported by the 19th Armoured Regiment, swung to the west of the enemy-held hills north of San Casciano and established a bridgehead across the Pesa at Cerbaia. With this movement the main divisional line of attack changed from north-westwards along the Pesa to north and north-eastwards across the hills to Florence. On its left flank the 8th Indian Division

closed up to the line of the Pesa, while on the right the 6th South African Armoured Division advanced along the Greve valley as rapidly as the New Zealanders' clearance of the heights made possible.

At about one o'clock on the morning of 28 July the Division attacked on a two-brigade front, threatening the enemy's entire defence system south of Florence. With the 26th Battalion on the right and the 24th Battalion on the left the 6th Brigade advanced from Cerbaia, but after limited successes it met fierce counter-attacks which compelled a withdrawal.

The 4th Armoured Brigade attacking from positions to the north of San Casciano with the 22nd Motor Battalion and the 20th Armoured Regiment captured a high, steep ridge upon which was the town of Faltignano. The tanks were delayed by mines and demolitions, but later were able to support the infantry on the forward slopes of the ridge. Enemy shelling was particularly heavy. Three tanks were destroyed, and that afternoon it was necessary to withdraw into the valley south of the ridge.

Epic of San Michele

Across a river gorge to the west of Faltignano ridge was another similar ridge upon which stood La Romola, and to the west of that again was the hilltop village of San Michele. From these heights the enemy made the most determined efforts to drive the New Zealanders back across the Pesa. An artillery force capable of firing 40,000 shells a day was brought against him, and a series of counter-attacks was beaten off during the day of 28 July. Though communications were cut and the situation at times seemed precarious the 6th Brigade held on.

San Michele overlooked the Cerbaia bridgehead, threatening the flank of any move against La Romola ridge. Therefore it had to be taken before any further progress could be made. The attack was carried out by D Company of the 24th Battalion with a troop of tanks from the 19th Armoured Regiment, a troop of guns from the 7th Anti-tank Regiment, and a section of medium machine guns from the 27th Machine Gun Battalion in support. There was fierce opposition during the advance up the lower slopes, but before dawn three strongpoints in the village had been firmly established, including one in the church.

There followed a day of bitter fighting. Enemy shell and mortar fire was constant and accurate, while there were repeated counter-attacks. Obviously the Germans, knowing that while they controlled the village the New Zealand advance would be held up, considered San Michele vital. Fighter-bombers of the Desert Air Force made over 100 attacks in close support of the garrison, while concentrations of artillery fire, coupled with the fire from the village itself, were successful in breaking up every enemy effort.

Finally the Germans made a desperate assault. Lorry-borne infantry made a sudden furious charge and were into the village before artillery fire could be directed at them. Self-propelled artillery and tanks, including the formidable Tiger, followed. The New Zealand Shermans, after receiving direct hits which rendered them unable to fight back, were withdrawn, while the anti-tank guns were destroyed in the first violent enemy artillery preparation. D Company was left in three isolated sections.

There were many gallant acts of individual heroism. One soldier faced an enemy tank as it depressed its gun to fire into the doorway of a building from a distance of a few yards. Though moment by moment expecting the gun to destroy both himself and his comrades, he fired four shots from a Piat causing the Germans to withdraw. Another soldier, a machine gunner, kept up a stream of fire from an upper window of the church until armour-piercing shells crashing through the walls drove him down.

Bravery alone was poor defence against heavy armour and close range shellfire. D Company could do little more than call for artillery assistance. New Zealand shellfire drove the German infantry back and kept the tanks unable to do more than continue firing into the now unyielding masses of rubble which protected the garrison. San Michele was assuredly not a German prize.

KING GEORGE VISITS THE DIVISION

PARTISANS IN FLORENCE

THE APPROACH TO SORA

MR. FRASER AND GENERAL PUTTICK VISIT A UNIT

Soon after midnight, on the morning of 30 July, a crushing weight of shells from the Divisional Artillery fell on San Michele. Following infantry from the 25th Battalion found the enemy gone, and the garrison in the crypt of the church shaken but secure. A second strongpoint had collapsed on top of its defenders, who had to be dug out, while the occupants of the third had been safely withdrawn.

While the final successful advance on San Michele was in progress, the 23rd Battalion captured the village of San Andrea, famous for having been the birthplace of the statesman Machiavelli. In both towns enemy attacks were driven back during the day. Then at night the 4th and 5th Brigades again attacked. Additional artillery support had been made available and the divisional line shortened by the formations on each flank.

After a night of very heavy fighting the 22nd Motor Battalion captured La Romola ridge. The supporting tanks were unable to make progress during the attack, but all objectives were taken by the infantry, which also seized an undamaged Tiger tank and its crew. Faltignano ridge fell to the 23rd Battalion on the right and the Maori Battalion on the left. Over 100 fighter-bomber sorties were made during daylight on 31 July while the infantry completed the work of securing the high ground. Farther to the north, on the Pian dei Cerri and La Poggiona ridges, the summits that formed the spine of the barrier, the enemy continued to offer fierce resistance.

A daylight advance on 1 August towards La Poggiona by the Maori Battalion and tanks of the 20th Armoured Regiment was effectively opposed. On the 4th

Armoured Brigade front tanks, carriers, and infantry probed in daylight towards La Tavernaccia, north-east of La Romola, but the enemy resisted strongly and neither column reached the objective.

The enemy had now been driven back to the last line of hills before the Arno, and, as the two tentative movements on 1 August showed, he was prepared to exert the utmost effort to retain his hold. It was decided therefore to attack these final ridges with three brigades, on the left the 6th Brigade, in the centre the 4th Brigade, and on the right the 5th Brigade. A unit from the 6th South African Armoured Division, the First City of Capetown Highlanders, was under New Zealand command to protect the right flank. The Divisional Cavalry watched the left flank.

On the night of 1/2 August the decisive battle for Florence began. Shortly before midnight the 25th Battalion with a company of the 26th and tanks from the 18th Armoured Regiment advanced to capture the highest of two peaks forming La Poggiona ridge. This was Point 382 which was connected by a saddle to Point 361. While the 25th Battalion was fighting its way up the lower slopes to Point 382 the 22nd Motor Battalion began an advance on the eastern peak, Point 361. One company reached this before daylight, but in the face of a counter-attack had to withdraw slightly. Point 382 was securely held by the 25th Battalion.

Throughout the day of 2 August, fighter-bombers and artillery hammered at the enemy, paying particular atention to the spur leading up to Point 361. At times aircraft of the Desert Air Force struck at targets only a few hundred yards ahead of the foremost troops. In the meantime the Divisional Cavalry on the left flank was making progress and reported that the Pian dei Cerri was clear, but on the right of the 4th Armoured Brigade 5th Brigade troops were held up. The 21st Battalion had passed through positions held by the Maori Battalion with the intention of driving the enemy back along the road to Galluzzo. Before the battalion could begin its advance heavy opposition developed. In the confused fighting that followed little progress was made.

On the evening of 2 August the 4th Armoured Brigade returned to the offensive, advancing over steep, thickly wooded country. Against tenacious opposition a company of the 22nd Battalion with tank support gained one side of the spur leading to Point 361 and captured it. The enemy held the opposite slopes and for some time a contest raged for the crest of the spur. The 4th Brigade could not cross the ridge until later that night when the 21st Battalion had pressed forward along the line of the Galluzzo road. By one o'clock on 3 August the battalion was passing the flank of La Poggiona whence the enemy facing the 4th Armoured Brigade then withdrew.

This ended the battle for the Paula Line and decided the fate of Florence. New Zealand troops were firmly atop the final line of hills and on the point of breaking through down the slopes leading to the Arno. Up to this time the South Africans had been unable to make more than slight headway along the valley of the Greve through which ran the main road to Florence, but with the Paula Line pierced by the New Zealand Division the enemy had no choice but to abandon his ositions south of the Arno.

Along the greater part of the front the Germans withdrew precipitately and the South African armour began to forge swiftly ahead along the main road to the city. The South Africans entered Florence early on the morning of 4

THE DIVISIONAL WATER-POINT, NEAR SORA

August. Some hours later, while the 5th Brigade pressed on down the hill slopes towards the banks of the Arno, a New Zealand column, including engineers, four platoons from the 23rd Battalion, and tanks from the 19th Armoured Regiment, entered the south-western outskirts.

An almost hysterically joyful welcome from civilian crowds greeted the advancing column. The armoured vehicles were garlanded with flowers and were soon carrying a motley crowd of wildly excited partisans. Embarrassed soldiers were soundly hugged and kissed. Gifts of wine and flowers were thrust at them, but this enthusiasm was suddenly rudely shaken. Enemy snipers and machine gunners on the north bank of the Arno opened fire; just as a noisy action was developing the column was recalled.

Florence lay on both banks of the Arno, with the greater part of the city on the north bank, and many bridges connecting the two. All but one of the bridges had been destroyed, and this, the historic Ponte Vecchio, had been closed by great masses of rubble from buildings which had been destroyed at its entrance. Despite the fact that Florence had been declared an open city, the enemy maintained many strongpoints among the buildings on the north bank. There were frequent exchanges of fire within the city, while all about it the artillery of the opposing armies kept up a constant duel.

Two companies from the Maori Battalion occupied houses in the eastern outskirts by one o'clock on 4 August, and there they remained until 5 August. The Divisional sector in the environs of Florence was taken over by the 1st Canadian Infantry Division. The 5th Brigade was relieved by the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade. The New Zealand Division moved farther to the west, where it relieved the 8th Indian Division and continued with the work of clearing any remaining pockets of enemy troops from the south bank of the Arno. Patrols from the 4th Armoured Brigade on 8 August found the villages as far west as Montelupo unoccupied by the Germans.

During the next few days 'mopping up' patrols with tanks and armoured cars steadily eliminated post after enemy post along the south bank. There were a number of short, sharp engagements, particularly in the long line of stone buildings which formed the town of Empoli. By 14 August this town had been cleared of the last of the snipers that had infested it for several days, and New Zealand troops were holding houses overlooking the river and enemy positions on the opposite bank.

Patrols accompanied by American representatives searched for suitable crossings over the Arno. On occasions enemy territory on the north bank was probed. On the left flank the 23rd Battalion linked up with American troops of the Fifth Army during 14 August.

On the night of 14/15 August Fifth Army troops began the relief of the New Zealand Division, completing occupation of the sector by the 16th. All New Zealand units were then withdrawn from action and assembled in the vicinity of Castellina, a town some 30 miles to the south of Florence.

It was in this area that Mr. Winston Churchill paid a brief visit to the Division on 24 August. He drove to Divisional Headquarters along a dusty road lined with men from the various units. At a lunch party given in his honour by General Freyberg the Prime Minister proposed the following toast:—

> *'I cannot leave without raising my glass to the gallant New Zealand Division whose name is honoured and cherished among the United Nations. Its career and record is one that will live not only in the history of New Zealand but in the history of the British Empire as an example to the youth of the Empire, an example of duty, valour and honour. For four and a half years you have been in the forefront of the battle. I myself have visited you four times in theatres of war—in England in 1940, in the desert at Alamein, at Tripoli and now in Italy. Everything is going well and I hope it will not be long before you can rest on your laurels and return to your beautiful country. I wish you all the very best of luck. I drink to the New Zealand Division.'*

E. V. PAUL, Government Printer, Wellington.

CASSINO

IS STILL IN GERMAN HANDS

in spite of

HUGE ALLIED LOSSES!

For weeks and weeks the Allies have been throwing all their resources into the battle of Cassino.

BUT ALL IN VAIN!

The heaviest bombardment of the Italian campaign, by artillery and from the air, was to blast away the German defenders.
And in fact about 800 Allied bombers dropped more than 2500 tons of H. E. s on the little town of Cassino in the space of a few hours!

But when the pounding from the air and the nerve-wracking barrage had ceased, the Germans rose from their foxholes and repelled in hand-to-hand fighting the massed attacks of the 2nd. New Zealand and 4th. Indian Divisions, who were supported by numerous tanks.

Day after day the 2nd. New Zealand Division repeated their attacks, and although they call themselves the best division in the Empire, they failed to make the slightest headway. Their old foe, the German paratroops, who had driven them from Crete in 1941, proved themselves "tops" again and simply mowed down the 4th. Indian Division.

Could that be the German soldier, who according to Allied press and radio reports, is war-weary in the fifth year of this conflict?

AND NOW WHAT ABOUT THE NETTUNO FRONT?

IS THE SLAUGHTER TO BE REPEATED THERE?

GERMAN PROPAGANDA LEAFLET