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ARMY HEADQUARTERS

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Operations of 1 Cdn Corps, 22 Sep 44 to
28 Oct 44: From the Marecchia to the Ronco

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R E P O R T NO. 25

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Operations of 1 Cdn Corps, 22 Sep 44 to
28 Oct 44: From the Marecchia to the Ronco

1. This report is a detailed account of 1 Canadian Corps' activities for the period dealt with in the Preliminary Report No. 143. It provides a sequel to Historical Section, C.M.H.Q., Report No. 187, Operation "OLIVE" to the crossing of the Marecchia River, Operations of 1 Cdn Corps 4 Jun 44 - 24 Sep 44. The present account takes up the story with the occupation of Rimini and begins with the last phase of Operation "OLIVE" which it was hoped would be a "deboch into the Valley of the Po". Apart from formation and unit War Diaries and the files in the possession of the Historical Section (G.S.) A.H.Q., frequent use has been made of reports on operations prepared by the formations and units under command H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps. Another most useful source of information on the Italian Campaign has been the series of volumes prepared by the British Historical Section, Central Mediterranean, - Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part III, The Campaign in the Northern Apennines, 10 August 1944 to 1 April 1945, Sections A to I.

THE STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL BACKGROUND

2. Ever since the Allied landings in southern Italy it had been realized that the Germans would certainly defend with the utmost stubbornness a position based on the Northern Apennines in order to deny the Allied Armies entry into the valley of the Po. The Germans had begun working on the Gothic Line that autumn (1943), but the necessity of eventually having to crack it did not become a pressing Allied problem until after the fall of Rome. It had been optimistically hoped, moreover, that heavy German losses and the rapid advance of British and American armoured formations across the open country of central Italy would drive the enemy over the Po before the pursuit slowed down or ran itself out. (Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, op cit, Pt III, Section A, Allied Strategy, p. 1).

3. The ordinary German soldier seems to have laboured under the same impression and to have expected that his next main stand would be made in front of the Brenner Pass. Hitler thought otherwise, however, and Field Marshal Kesselring was ordered to hold his ground. The latter had gained a breathing spell by his resistance in the Lake Trasimene area: the momentum had been taken out of the Allied pursuit, and the German formations had been able to regroup in the Gothic Line. Strategical common sense indicated a withdrawal across the Po to a static line on the Adige, or even back to the Alpine frontiers of Austria. Such a step would have permitted Field Marshal Kesselring to contain the Allied Armies with a comparatively small force, while the additional formations thus made available were withdrawn to North West Europe or the Russian front. But Hitler disliked giving up territory, and there were

economic, military and psychological reasons lending weight to his reluctance. It was desired to retain the industrial production of Northern Italy and the agricultural products of Piedmont and Lombardy; the airfields of Northern Italy should be denied to the Allies and a defensive barrier for the Reich maintained; finally, in order to offset defeats on other fronts it was desired to keep some sort of a front in being where at least defensive victories could be gained. (Ibid, Section H, German Strategy, p. 1)

4. Previous forecasts of future operations were nullified by the reduction in strength of the Fifth Army due to the implementation of Operation "ANVIL" and the time granted Kesselring to reinforce and reorganize his formations. The sum total was that the arrival of 15 Army Group, in positions from which to attack the Gothic Line, was overlong delayed. General Alexander was still adhering to his original plan to attack in the centre, with Bologna as the direct objective. Such an attack could be mounted with an economy of time and was favoured by the topography of the Apennines. The possibility of an attack up the east coast along the axis of Route 16 had been rejected because it crossed a series of parallel ridges and water courses at right angles to the direction of attack (Allied Strategy, op cit, pp 1-2). On 27 Jul, the G (Plans) Branch at H.Q. Eighth Army had concluded that such an attack would be difficult to mount, would not permit the necessary concentration of force nor offer good opportunities for exploitation. Moreover, "to get involved in a series of river-crossing operations is playing into the hands of a withdrawing enemy." (Ibid, p. 2). Up to the end of the month therefore, the 15 Army Group plan provided for simultaneous attacks by the Fifth and Eighth Armies against the area between Dicomano and Pistoia.

5. On 4 Aug, however, a decision was taken to abandon this plan. Instead General Alexander directed that the main thrust against the Gothic Line should be made by Eighth Army, attacking on the extreme eastern end of the line. (Ibid, p. 2). Later, Fifth Army would mount a subsidiary attack up the Florence - Bologna axis, for which purpose 13 British Corps would be placed under its command. In the opinion of General Sir Oliver Leese, Commander of Eighth Army, there were sound reasons for such a change. Eighth Army troops had neither the training nor experience necessary for a successful mountain campaign and would be unable to develop their superior armour and artillery, "the use of which in combination had been the mainstay of their successful African operations and which had again proved their effectiveness in the Liri Valley". (Ibid). Moreover, it would be easier to concentrate the forces of one Army than to try and operate two armies of different nationalities on two so contiguous axes:

On the east coast Eighth Army would have fewer mountains to contend with, the chance of employing its artillery in controlled and concentrated "set-piece" attacks and the hope of flat country ahead for its desert trained armour; above all it would be fighting its own battle without the distractions of day to day consideration of the progress of another Army moving on the same objective. To these considerations, largely psychological but weighing none the less strongly with General Leese,

considerations of topographical difficulties took of necessity second place. Nor was it possible for General Alexander, either, to overlook them. Judging it impracticable to impose on an Army Commander the conduct of an operation in which the latter was not wholeheartedly confident he sanctioned General Leese's proposed change of plan. Immediate steps were taken to put the decision into force with the least delay in order to minimize as far as possible the inevitable loss of time involved.

(Ibid, pp 2-3)

6. The breaching of the Gothic Line - Operation "OLIVE" - is dealt with in a former report, (No 187) and accordingly only a few general remarks need to be made here in order to set the background for Canadian operations - the "debouching into the Valley of the Po". By secretly switching its strength to the extreme right flank, Eighth Army gained an important advantage over Field Marshal Kesselring:

The attack had gained ground rapidly, had inflicted heavy casualties on the Germans, and had walked through the long prepared "Gothic" defences almost as if they had not been there. Only two assets remained to Kesselring to retrieve the situation: the fact that the "Gothic" line had been built on the forward edge of the range, thus leaving still one more ridge between the Allies and the plain, and the excellence of his lateral communications which allowed him to reinforce his left at the expense of his centre.

(German Strategy, op cit, p. 5)

To stop the advance of Eighth Army in the Adriatic sector, Kesselring would be forced to weaken his right and centre, which would then be in danger of being turned by Fifth Army. Any retreat or withdrawal from the Apennine Line would have to take the form of a wheeling back of the right wing in a north-easterly direction pivoting on the left. Any other axis of retreat would run the German forces into a corner formed by the Allied Armies in Southern France and the Swiss frontier, while the north-eastern approach to the Reich would be left open. The key to the German positions in North Italy therefore, lay in the Adriatic, and this sector must needs get preference, even at the expense of leaving the centre to fight against odds and losing the prepared defences on the road to Bologna. (Ibid)

7. With the capture of the Fortunato feature on 20 Sep the entry into the "Po Valley" was forced, but once again the fates smiled on the German forces. Heavy rain that night enabled the enemy to withdraw in good order across the Marecchia river. For the men of the Eighth Army, standing on its threshold, the view of the Romagna country "flat, endless, featureless, half-hidden in the fine drizzle, was infinitely depressing". (Ibid, Section B, Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles p. 40). Furthermore, a glance at the rivers and canals appearing on the map, and which would have to be crossed, offered no consolation. The only saving feature was that the enemy had lost heavily in men, tanks and guns. His reinforcement position was apparently good, but his divisions were tired and they were not likely to get relief. He had had to denude his strength

facing the Fifth Army, and the Allied problem was therefore to continue to press the enemy left so that the Fifth Army might begin an advance. (Ibid)

8. But Eighth Army had also suffered heavily and was not compensated by the relative trickle of reinforcements and material arriving in the theatre. During September some 250 tanks had been lost through enemy action, while a further 230 were bogged down or otherwise non-runners. Infantry casualties had been so high that it was found necessary to reduce United Kingdom battalions from four to three rifle companies; tactically, however, these battalions lost more than the 25 per cent efficiency which mathematically might have been expected. For the same reason it was necessary to reduce one infantry brigade of each of 1 Brit Armd Div and 56 Brit Inf Div to a mere cadre. With the exception of the New Zealand Division the fighting formations of both 5 Corps and 1 Cdn Corps were tired. The Polish Corps had had three weeks' rest, but it was a Corps in name only, consisting as it did of only four infantry brigades and one armoured brigade. (Ibid, pp 40-41)

TOPOGRAPHY OF THE ROMAGNA

9. Thus was Eighth Army situated as it entered upon that long and discouraging period of operations, entailing the crossing of numerous river obstacles under most difficult climatic conditions, which have been aptly called "the battles of the rivers". The Romagna country differs materially from any over which this Army had previously fought. To clarify the nature of the tactical problems which arose in the course of this fighting, a brief description of the area through which 1 Cdn Corps was to fight during the balance of September and October has been included. A more detailed description appears in the Eighth Army narrative previously cited. (Ibid, pp 43-46)

10. The process of reclaiming the southern portion of the North Italian Plain had been going on since the Middle Ages but, in essence, it was still a marsh when Eighth Army appeared on the scene. The method used had taken the form of attempting to confine the principal rivers and streams between large floodbanks, which had the effect of canalizing them to ensure a rapid removal of flood waters during the rainy seasons. In addition, through the years, the region has benefited from alluvial deposits; the Apennine rivers when in flood carry down considerable quantities of silt to the plains. Thus man and nature had combined to produce a well defined flat stretch of countryside, distinct from the rest of the Northern Plain - "bounded on the east by the sea, on the south by the Northern Apennines, the slopes of which descend to the level of the plain before Route 9 is reached, and on the west and north by the River Reno" (Ibid, p. 43). The path of the Eighth Army's advance thus lay across a series of canalized rivers, separated by flat, low-lying ground which was cut by a network of dykes and occasional irrigation ditches for use in dry weather. Ditches had been dug in the larger raised dykes to carry off surface water, for irrigation or for draining into the larger streams; the smaller dykes were equipped with pumps to help disperse the surplus water (see illustrations in The Tiger Triumphs, H.M. Stationary Office, London, 1946,

pp 172-173). Along the coast the lowest land had been reclaimed solely by pumping. (For descriptions of specified areas see (H.S.) 903.003 (D2) Italy, Topographical Notes made during visit by D.D.H.S. September - November 1948).

11. As a result of the efforts of man to improve on nature the Romagna can be divided into five distinct belts with varying characteristics. A comparatively narrow belt of sand dunes, covered by pine woods and broken where the canalized rivers pass through, skirts the Adriatic Sea. Immediately inland lies a belt of reclaimed swampland which the enemy was promptly able to flood merely by stopping pumping operations. The central belt, stretching from these converted swamps, almost to Route 9 between Rimini and Bologna is an area of flat, lightly treed, country, very liable to flood during heavy rain, should the flood banks of the larger streams become breached. On either side of Route 9 the land is considerably higher and better drained; although the country here is still extremely flat, the rivers rarely rise above the level of the surrounding fields even during spring flood. South of Route 9 is the fifth belt - the foothills of the Apennines, the "spurs of which extend from the main mass of hills to fall abruptly into the alluvial plain within a short distance of Route 9, giving good observation over that road and the country on either side of it". (Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, op cit, p. 44)

12. For the most part, south of Route 9, the rivers running across these belts were not infantry obstacles except during flood; in many places they were not even tank obstacles. The spurs on either side of the river valleys, however, were generally so precipitous that the real military problem was not crossing the stream but scaling the heights beyond. North of Route 9, the larger rivers gradually became more and more the dominating feature of the landscape,

...their floodbanks rising in places as much as forty feet above the surrounding plain. Very few fords exist here so that all of them are tank obstacles; in the autumn and winter they are frequently infantry obstacles also. Many of the innumerable smaller water-courses between them; all running more or less parallel to the main streams, (referred to as "Fosso" or "Scolo" locally) constitute military obstacles, but a not inconsiderable number are both tank and infantry obstacles in a greater or less degree.

(Ibid)

13. The only possible main axes of advance across the Romagna plain were Routes 9 and 16; these were embanked and thus safe from flooding. Although there was a fairly extensive network of secondary roads between these two highways, none were "well founded" and most were wide enough for only one-way traffic. There were few bridges except on the two main roads, so that the secondary roads formed merely more or less independent communication systems between successive river crossings. Lateral roads between the two main axes were relatively plentiful - and on the whole good, following as they did the line of natural drainage. The best

however, were liable to destruction by cratering. South of Route 9 the road system in the foothills, although extensive in places, was extremely primitive. Where the spurs were steep, overlooking a number of the streams, not even a track was found to support operations on an axis parallel to Route 9.

14. Throughout the Romagna the soil and sub-soil are of clay. In dry weather, therefore, thick clouds of fine dust rise to a considerable height, obscuring vision and impeding movement. But after even a single shower the surface becomes greasy and slippery, treacherous to both men and vehicles; in really wet weather, or following floods, the ground becomes a morass into which men were to sink over their ankles and vehicles up to the axles.

15. From the Allied Planners' point of view, only the high ground on either side of Route 9 was a possible avenue of advance during even moderately wet weather. To permit such operations, the high ground to its south would have to be seized, and to do this would create considerable engineering problems. Only during comparatively dry weather could the country between Routes 9 and 16 be used for a main thrust forward. Again, engineering construction and maintenance would here have to play a major part.

16. Two further features of the area influenced the tactics employed by friend and foe. The countryside was thickly populated here, dotted with small villages and farms, which provided the enemy with excellent strong points and snipers' posts; when shelled to ruins they merely became more readily defensible. With the coming of autumn visibility became more restricted by the vine-covered wire trellises and laden fruit trees (spaced 10 feet apart and permitted to grow to a height of 15 feet). Not only did these impede the view of a commander, but after breaking through two or three such trellises a tank was likely to have its tracks become cluttered with vines and wire. Forward visibility was limited, since the trellises were usually planted in rows some 30 yards apart, parallel to the streams and at right angles to the line of Allied advance. Flank observation was another danger: as long as the foliage remained, the enemy enfiladed alternate rows with his machine guns and anti-tank guns so as to account for both advancing infantry and tanks:

Thus, when our tanks advanced in front of the infantry, they missed the enemy machine guns, which held their fire, and were then engaged by an anti-tank gun in the next row, while the unlocated machine gun opened up on our infantry who were thus without tank support. It was no better if the infantry preceded the tanks, for the tanks were still unable to locate the enemy machine gun.*

(Ibid, p. 45)

* Accordingly control had to be decentralized to the troop leaders. In 2 Cdn Armd Regt, for instance, the following methods were used:

Every advantage was also taken by the enemy of the opportunities offered by the numerous water obstacles; by systematically destroying the small bridges and culverts over these the movement of Allied heavy equipment and tanks was greatly impeded. He, of course, suffered from no such disability in bringing up supplies and reinforcements. As a result bridgeheads had to be seized by the infantry and held without support from anti-tank guns or armour until the engineers had made the stream or river passable to the heavier weapons. During this intervening period such a position, backed up by no heavier weapon than the PIAT, was extremely vulnerable to armoured counter attacks. (Ibid).

17. For understandable reasons, the valley of the Po had held an inviting fascination for members of the Eighth Army, who could see their armoured formations racing across its wide open spaces in pursuit of the slower moving enemy; unfortunately this illusion was based on an appreciation of the Bologna sector, which was vastly different from that of the Romagna. That even the topographical intelligence section at Headquarters Eighth Army had not fully appreciated the real condition of the Romagna may be traced, partly at least, to the speed with which the switch in plans had been made (see para 5); instead of studying the terrain immediately in front, the Planners had been obliged to cast their thoughts forward to the problems which would be raised by the crossing of the Po River itself. By the beginning of October it was realized that planning had been too ambitious and the special task force of engineers organized for the bridging of the Po was disbanded and given more immediate tasks.

1 CDN CORPS PLAN FOR THE ADVANCE BEYOND THE MARECCHIA

18. On 15 Sep the Commander 1 Cdn Corps, Lt-Gen E.L.M. Burns, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., went to Headquarters Eighth Army, where he discussed with General Leese the plan

(Footnote cont'd from page 6)

- (a) Tanks moved from hedge to hedge in caterpillar fashion endeavoring always to have no tank move without at least one other tank in position to provide covering fire.
- (b) Troop leaders halted beside houses every few hundred yards and from the top floor examined the country ahead with glasses. This was not very satisfactory since one could only see the same vines, trees and houses from a slightly different angle.
- (c) Tank commanders and bow gunners (armed with T.M.C.) carried out recce on foot. This was a slow procedure.

((H.S.) 244C5.013(D7): 2 Cdn Armd Regt (Ld S.H.)
Account of Operations, 11 Sep 44 to 27 Sep 44)

for operations subsequent to the capture of the San Fortunato feature.

Briefly, it was that the armd divs were to be passed through as soon after the capture of the S. FORTUNATO feature as practicable, having regard to the state of the tps of the two inf divs after this fighting. If possible, the inf were to capture brheads over the MARECCHIA, but the armd divs were to be ready to pass through before and to continue their fighting adv.

(Personal Diary of Lt-Gen E.L.M. Burns,
15 Sep 44)

Two days later 1 Cdn Corps Operation Instruction No. 31 was issued. According to this instruction the intention of 1 Cdn Corps was to:

...attack the high ground SAN FORTUNATO R. 8294, high ground R. 8093, est a brhead over the R. MARECCHIA and exploit in the direction of RAVENNA and CASTEL MAGGIORE L. 9157.

((H.S.)224C1.013(D9): The Gothic Line Battle and The Advance to F. Ronco, 1 Cdn Corps, 21 Aug to 28 Oct 44: Appx "J")

The operation was carried out in four phases, of which the first three covering the plan of attack up to and including the establishment of bridgeheads over the R. Marecchia have already been dealt with in detail. (Report No. 187, op cit.) In the Fourth Phase, envisaged as an armoured pursuit of a "beaten enemy" beyond Rimini (Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, p. 41), the plan was as follows:

...2 N.Z. Div will pass through the brhead formed by 1 Cdn Inf Div and will adv in the direction of RAVENNA. 5 Cdn Armd Div with under command the R.C.Ds. will pass through the brhead formed by 4 Brit Armd Div and will adv in the direction of CASTEL MAGGIORE L. 9157.

(The Gothic Line Battle, op cit)

However, as it transpired, weeks were to pass before this ambitious program was fulfilled. The exhausting and slow advance of Eighth Army across the Romagna plain was hardly the armoured romp visualized by the planners.

19. On the left 5 Corps was to cross the Marecchia, seize Santarcangelo, and advance astride Route 9 to Bologna. Between the Marecchia and the Fiumicino the inter-corps boundary ran from the former river to Route 9 at the track junction 767984, then north to the road and rail junction 764990. From there it ran north-west to the outskirts of S.Mauro, the town itself being inclusive to 1 Cdn Corps, then almost due west to the Fiumicino at 722031. (Ibid) (See Map 1)

20. Enemy formations opposing 1 Cdn Corps at this time, according to information received by Corps Intelligence up to 2200 hours, 22 Sep, consisted of 162 Turcoman Division,

1 Parachute Division, 29 Panzer Grenadier Division and either 20 G.A.F. Field Division or 26 Panzer Division, or both of the two last-named formations, all under LXXVI Corps of Tenth Army. The German dispositions behind the Marecchia were believed to be as follows:

1..303 Regiment* on the coast up to Route 16, the parachutists as far as about 80 Easting, probably not now with all their troops in the line, and what remains of 314 Regiment* on their right, 29 Panzer Grenadier Division, now a battle group worth about three battalions, holds a 2,000 yard front further west, with either 20 G.A.F. Division or 26 Armoured Division on its right.

(W.D., G.S. Branch, H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, September 1944:
Appx 57, 1 Cdn Corps Intelligence Summary No. 121,
22 Sep 44)

21. On the night 20/21 Sep the enemy withdrew from in front of 1 Cdn Corps under cover of a heavy rain. The next day, in heavy going, but with improved weather conditions, 1 Cdn Inf Div moved forward and crossed the river Marecchia near the coast. Rimini was occupied and the Tiberius bridge captured intact. On 22 Sep 2 N.Z. Div began to pass through the 1 Cdn Inf Div positions, upon which the latter went into reserve. During the night troops of 4 Brit Inf Div gained a footing on the far bank of the same river south-east of Santa Giustina (7898). The stage was now set for 5 Cdn Armd Div to take up the advance on the left of the New Zealanders, when 4 Brit Inf Div would follow 1 Cdn Inf Div into Corps reserve. (Report No.187, pp 129-32)

22. In general terms 5 Cdn Armd Div intended to pass 12 Cdn Inf Bde through the 4 Brit Inf Div position, across the Uso, picketing S. Mauro should it be strongly held, and seize a bridgehead over the Fiumicino. 11 Cdn Inf Bde and the bulk of the armour would follow closely, and once the former had secured its final objectives would move through it and continue the advance, with the armour leading if possible. Throughout the action strong armoured elements would keep well up to exploit any soft spots revealed in the enemy's defences. In order to maintain the momentum of the advance 12 Cdn Inf Bde would by-pass and picket enemy strong points, leaving them for the attention of the follow-up brigade (W.D., H.Q. 12 Cdn Inf Bde, September 1944; Appx 3, Report on Operations 12 Canadian Infantry Brigade, Period 22 Sep 44 to 27 Sep 44)

THE ADVANCE TO THE USO BY 12 Cdn INF BDE, 22-27 SEP 44

23. In formulating the Brigade plan, Brigadier J.S.H. Lind, D.S.O., E.D., Commander 12 Cdn Inf Bde, had to bear in mind that of his three battalions two, P.L.D.G. and 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn, had received only six weeks' training as infantry, and further that the third, Westmr R. (Mot) must be

* Regiments of 162 Turcoman Division.

saved as much as possible for use in support of the armour in the event that a break should occur in any part of the front. Unfortunately, in view of their better training and greater experience, it seemed that Westmr R. (Mot) would probably have to bear the brunt of the operations. In addition to the infantry component the following units would be in support: 2 Cdn Armd Regt (Ld S.H.), 11 Army Fd Regt., R.C.A., 98 (towed) and 16 (S.P.) A. Tk Btys of 4 A. Tk Regt, R.C.A., and 14 Fd Coy, R.C.E. As it called for the establishment in succession of bridgeheads over three rivers - the Uso, Salto and Fiumicino - the plan fell naturally into three parts. In the first P.L.D.G., supported by a squadron of tanks, a troop of M.10's, and a troop of six-pounder, (towed) anti-tank guns, would advance to the Uso and seize a lodgment on its west bank. From there Westmr R., would take over with a similar task to perform at the next river, the Rio Salto. Upon the completion of Phase Three during which 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn would establish a bridgehead over the Fiumicino, 12 Cdn Inf Bde would relinquish the lead to 11 Cdn Inf Bde. (Ibid)

24. In a straight line the distance between the Marecchia, opposite Santa Giustina, and the Fiumicino, at Fiumicino (720048), is only slightly over six miles. Like the rest of the Romagna it is flat, featureless country, cultivated, with scattered vineyards and tree-bordered fields. There are a fair number of secondary roads and a great network of tracks. Unfortunately these roads, designed to give access to Routes 9 and 16, provided better facilities for lateral than forward movement. As both these main thoroughfares lay outside 5 Cdn Armd Div's axis of advance movement ahead tended to follow very circuitous routes.

25. The Uso, first of the three rivers on the 5 Cdn Armd Div itinerary, is a narrow meandering river with many "U" shaped bends. In the lower half of the river the banks, which are composed of a mixture of earth and gravel, are tree-lined and steep, each 8 to 10 feet high, and from 25 to 50 feet apart. Further upstream the trees thin out and the banks, varying from steep to shelving, are 5 to 20 feet high and from 35 to 110 feet apart. The wet gap which is 50 feet wide at the mouth, narrows rapidly and becomes shallower in the upper reaches. In that part of the river with which 5 Cdn Armd Div was concerned there was, except in the rainy season, only a small amount of water flowing over gravel beds, with scattered pools of deeper water. Here infantry could cross anywhere and there were a considerable number of fords passable for tanks. ((H.S.) 224C1.023(D9)): M.A.I.U. 1 Cdn Corps Topographical Report No. 10, 13 Sep 44)

26. By the afternoon of 22 Sep the roads were in a fit shape for use despite the rain of the past two days. At 1615 hours the 12 Cdn Inf Bde moved off from the Misano area and by night had concentrated on the southern slope of the Vergiano ridge (map square 8095). By this time 28 Brit Inf Bde had extended its bridgehead over the Marecchia to cut Route 9 at a point about 1,000 yards east of Santa Giustina. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report, op cit)

27. At 0400 hours the following morning P.L.D.G. began to move to their forming-up place between the Marecchia and the Canale Viserba. To the north-west on Route 9 lay the village of Santa Giustina, a strung-out community of some forty houses. The P.L.D.G. axis of advance lay along the secondary road stemming from this village and running straight to the Uso at S. Vito (763006). The immediate objective was Casale, a hamlet of a dozen houses which sat astride the brigade axis at a crossroads 1,000 yards beyond S. Giustina. Although H Hour was set for 0900 hours, due to a delay in the arrival of the armour, it was actually some minutes after this that the attack got under way. Soon after crossing the railway just north of Route 9 the forward troops came under heavy artillery, mortar and machine gun fire. For a few hours, however, the companies managed to keep moving and by 1225 hours were within a few hundred yards of Casale. To the right of the S. Giustina - S. Vito axis another sub-unit of P.L.D.G. had now reached the edge of Variano, a village lying a few hundred yards north-east of Casale. Both these places were reported to be firmly held by the enemy. To the south the enemy still held Santarcangelo, from where he was able to enfilade the Canadian positions. Due to the heavy fire to which they had been subjected from the start of the action, P.L.D.G. had become slightly disorganized. For this reason, Brigadier Lind ordered the unit to halt the attack and dig in. (Ibid; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 23 Sep 44; W.D., 4 P.L.D.G., 23 Sep 44)

28. In the meantime the remainder of the Brigade Group, less the Headquarters, had been assembled north of the Marecchia. With additional resources at hand, Brigadier Lind decided to resume the action. At 1400 hours he issued orders for the Westmr R. (Mot), supported by a squadron of Ld S.H., two troops of anti-tank guns and an R.C.E. party, to carry out a "right hook" by-passing the enemy in the Casale - Variano area and attacking S. Vito from the east. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report op cit)

29. At 1500 hours Westmr R. (Mot) began to move across country towards route "Ennis"[⊘], - the axis of the

⊘ The divisional tactical route. From S. Giustina it ran first north-east through Variano to the crossroads 789005 then west to the crossroads 779009, then along the road leading north to the T junction 777025. From there it followed a winding route west along the secondary roads to reach the Uso at 764034. Beyond the river, it followed a course due west, across the Salto south of Latorre, to the road and track junction at 742036. Here it went north for 1300 yards along the farm track, then, turning west again followed a straight course along roads and tracks and across fields to the junction on the river road at 722054, then south on this road to the village of Fiumicino.

(H.S. 244C5.013(D7): 5 Cdn Armd Div History of Operations from F. Metauro to F. Bevano 30 Aug to 27 Oct 44: Appx J Maps)

attack lay on "Ennis" up to the crossroads 779009 - advancing without opposition, the battalion made excellent progress. Later the pace decreased somewhat as the attackers, under sporadic machine gun fire, ran into several minefields. By 2040 hours, however, the leading companies were within four hundred yards of the crossroads on "Ennis" at 779009. During the hours of darkness the unit continued to push towards S. Vito, and by 0530 hours the next morning (24 Sep) had only six hundred yards to go. About this time they encountered enemy infantry, with tanks in support, in position along the lateral road east of S. Vito. As a result Westmr R. withdrew slightly and by 0800 hours had consolidated astride the forward axis about 400 yards from the enemy line. (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. 12 Cdn Inf Bde, September 1944: Appx 1, Ops Log, 23-24 Sep 44; (H.S.) 244C5, 015 (D3): 5 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log, 24 Sep 44)

30. Meanwhile Brigadier Lind had ordered P.L.D.G. to improve their positions by taking Casale and clearing the enemy from Variano. During the evening of 23 Sep the unit occupied the south-east corner of Variano. In order, however, to give the medium artillery time to provide a supporting fire plan the battalion commander requested and obtained permission from Brigade Headquarters to delay the assault on Casale until 0600 hours the following morning. At that time P.L.D.G. attacked, meeting with little opposition, the supporting tanks quickly dealing with the few enemy machine guns. At 0715 hours the unit reported the village under control. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, op cit, 23-24 Sep 44; W.D., 4 P.L.D.G., 23-24 Sep 44)

31. It was now apparent from the strong stand being made by the enemy in front of S. Vito that, to gain the desired bridgehead over the Uso River, a set-piece attack would be necessary. As an essential preliminary to an assault over the river, it would be necessary to establish a firm base on the east bank. By the use of a second right hook Brigadier Lind hoped to secure for this purpose the lateral road running north from S. Vito and parallel to the Uso. To carry out these tasks, the only fresh troops remaining at his disposal were those of 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn. As Brigadier Lind intended using only two companies of this battalion to secure the line of the lateral road, he would still have fresh infantry available for the ensuing main action, the river crossing. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report)

32. Shortly after midday, 24 Sep, 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn moved off towards their first objective, the road junction on "Ennis" about 600 yards beyond the small Rio Fontanaccia. But the attackers quickly ran into difficulties. The enemy, making full use of the ample natural cover afforded by the vineyards surrounding the objective, soon checked the Canadians' supporting tanks.

After clearing several machine gun nests, 4th Troop reached the half-way objective ahead of the infantry. There, two of their tanks were hit by A.P. fire and "brewed" ... Once again it was impossible to see from whence the fire had come. The infantry were held up just short of this objective by heavy mortar and M.G.

fire. Another troop of tanks came forward, then another company of infantry endeavoured to get past this road junction - all in vain.

(McAvity, Lt-Col, J.M., D.S.O., M.B.E.,
Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal
Canadians) A Record of Achievement,
p. 148)

At 1510 hours the advance of 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn came to a complete stop. At that time the leading infantry were still over a hundred yards short of the objective. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; (H.S.) 24465.013(D7): Report on Operations of the Lanark and Renfrew Scottish Regiment of Canada for period 1 Sep 44 to 11 Oct 44)

33. During the night, 24/25 Sep, 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn, using for the purpose the two companies previously held in reserve, made a second attempt to reach the river. Moving on a course midway between Westmr R. and the scene of the afternoon's fighting, the unit at first made good progress. Between 2210 hours, when the attack began, and 2335 hours the leading troops advanced to within 300 yards of the fork in the lateral road (768014). In the course of the next fifteen minutes, however, they became involved in confused fighting in the darkness with strong enemy patrols. For a while they continued to make headway and one sub-unit actually reached the lateral road but, due to the pressure exerted by their opponents, were unable to maintain their position. At this stage 12 Cdn Inf Bde ordered the battalion commander to break off the action and withdraw. 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn then pulled back east of the Rio Fontanaccia. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 24-25 Sep 44)

34. At 0800 hours, 25 Sep, 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn made its third attempt and this time achieved success. Within two hours of beginning the attack one company had cleared the enemy from the road junction on "Ennis" beyond the Rio Fontanaccia and a second was approaching the fork in the lateral road. By midday the battalion was holding a 500-yard stretch of the river lateral from the fork north to 768018. At the same time Westmr R., which had moved forward in conformity with the advance of the 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn, reported that they were now firmly established at the crossroads (767008) on the northern outskirts of S. Vito. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 25 Sep 44; W.D., 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn, 25 Sep 44)

35. During the night 24/25 Sep P.L.D.G. had patrolled actively between S. Giustina and the Uso River. One of these patrols had worked through and beyond Bargellona, a village lying mid-way between Route 9 and S. Vito and had reached the vicinity of the latter village before making contact with any enemy troops. As a result P.L.D.G. started one company moving forward along the road to S. Vito at 0420 hours, 25 Sep. Advancing without opposition, the company reached the road junction south of S. Vito at 0740 hours. At this time the rest of the battalion was still in the Casale area awaiting the

results of a road reconnaissance. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 24-25 Sep 44)

36. A rather amusing incident occurred during the afternoon of 24 Sep when a party of fifteen men, under Lieut "Tommy" G. Forman, was sent forward by "C" Company of the Westminsters to investigate a story by B.S.M. Gray of 11 Army Fd Regt R.C.A. that a German unit wished to surrender. The patrol remained at the German outpost, holding hostages, while Lieut Forman and two men were taken back to the enemy company commander and eventually to Capt Baron von Malapert, then commanding III Bn 15 Pz Gren Regt.

...There ensued a lengthy discussion of the world war situation during which Lieut Forman pointed out how obvious it was that Germany was losing and how sensible it would be for Capt Malapert to surrender his unit. However, the German only laughed and agreed that the war would soon be over, but that the Germans were going to win and told Forman that he should surrender his unit before it was wiped out. He also made some references to our shooting of German prisoners which gave Forman a few bad moments.

At 1845 hours Malapert finally agreed to Forman's release. The party were blindfolded and allowed to go. The Baron gave Lieut Forman a note to bring back - "Come over here, nothing will happen to you: there were three of your soldiers with us - signed Malapert".

(W.D., Westmr R. (Mot), September 1944: Appx 10, Exploits of Lieut T.G. Forman)

37. The situation on the morning of 25 Sep was this: 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn had four companies employed, two in contact and the remainder echeloned back to protect the Brigade right flank. In the centre the Westminsters, with only three companies, had two of these 300 yards east of S. Vito flanking the road and one in reserve. On the left, as already noted, P.L.D.G. had one sub-unit at the road junction just south of S. Vito with the balance of the battalion between Casale and S. Giustina. In the course of the day, these latter squadrons consolidated on the east bank of the Uso, south of S. Vito, two of them occupying the hamlet itself. At this stage Brigadier Lind issued orders for the capture and consolidation of a bridgehead over the River Uso. P.L.D.G. and 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn would cross the Uso and establish a firm base, then Westmr R. would pass through and exploit towards the Salto River. The final objectives of the two assaulting battalions lay in two parallel lateral roads lying about 1,000 yards beyond the Uso and joined to it by a series of regularly spaced tracks. The P.L.D.G. would secure the southern extremity of these roads and 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn a 500-yard stretch due west of their present positions. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report)

38. On the left, south of S. Vito, P.L.D.G. began crossing the Uso at 1800 hours on 25 Sep. Earlier in the afternoon patrols of this unit had reached the near bank of the river; one of these actually crossing and operating on the enemy side. By midnight P.L.D.G. had one company west

of the river with the remainder in the process of moving over. In the course of the night 25/26 Sep they completed this phase of the attack and by 0355 hours the leading troops were approaching the final objective. Up to this point the battalion had been advancing without opposition, under comparatively light shelling and machine gun fire; now, however, the enemy began to offer stronger resistance. Fortunately, in view of the presence of enemy armour, tanks of Ld S.H. had arrived in the bridgehead shortly after first light. During the morning P.L.D.G. had several brushes with the enemy. The unit War Diary contains a laconic description of this fighting:

D Sqn gets involved in a fire fight and one of their supporting tanks gets KOd. Shortly afterwards C Sqn gets involved and a fair battle results. We knock out a Mark IV, so the advance continues and more fire is encountered.

(W.D., 4 P.L.D.G., 26 Sep 44)

However, the advance did continue and at 1025 hours the unit reported the final objective secured. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; (H.S.) 244C5.013 (D7): Report on Ops of the 4 P.L.D.G. for period 29 Aug 44 to 14 Oct 44; 5 Cdn Armd Div, Ops Log op cit, 25-26 Sep 44; 12 Cdn Inf Bde, Ops Log 25-26 Sep 44)

39. Meanwhile, on the right flank, things were not going too well. As already noted (see para 34), 1 Cdn L.A.A. had secured a firm base from which to attack across the Uso by 1105 hours, 25 Sep. The battalion commander had hoped to have two companies over the river by 1300 hours, but it was nearly five hours later that these, crossing at the bend in the Uso north of S. Vito, reached the far bank and began moving towards their objective. Without anti-tank or tank support, the attackers ran into some difficulty and became somewhat disorganized. By 1945 hours advanced elements of the battalion were no more than 150 - 200 yards west of the river. Due to the strength of the enemy resistance on the flanks it was deemed impossible to get ahead by infiltrating and a deliberate attack was considered necessary. In a message to the battalion commander at 2210 hours, Brigadier Lind directed that every possible effort be made to improve the situation by an advance of 300-400 yards by first light, and emphasized the need for having anti-tank guns in the bridgehead at that time. To ensure this he placed all available engineer resources at the disposal of the battalion. (Ibid; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Report)

40. In order to get the anti-tank guns forward the Engineers (14 Fd Coy R.C.E.) constructed a barrel culvert at 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn crossing-place (765013); although completed by 2300 hours it was washed out half an hour later by the rising river. Despite this setback 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn put in their deliberate attack as planned (at 0433 hours). This time things went more smoothly and by first light the battalion was in positions due east of the hamlet of Alberazzo, along the first of the two lateral roads (754020 to 754014). Except for a few isolated machine gun posts and garrisons in the towns of Savignano and S. Mauro the enemy seemed to have vacated the area. Early optimism was followed by uneasy hours due to the threatening presence of groups of

enemy infantry and armour to the north and west of them. In the meantime one enterprising troop of 16 A.Tk Bty had prepared a fording place and manhandled their guns over the river. By this time the engineers had a scissors bridge in operation over which passed a number of tanks of Ld S.H. By nightfall the scissors had been replaced by a 40-foot S.S. Bailey (Class 40) (see Appx "C"). (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div, September 1944: Appx 5, Engr Sitrep, 26 Sep 44; W.D., 14 Fd Coy R.C.E., 26 Sep 44; W.D., 4 A.Tk Regt R.C.A., September 1944: Appx 4, 26 Sep 44; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 26 Sep 44)

41. On the right flank of 12 Cdn Inf Bde, during the previous morning (25 Sep), two squadrons of 3 Cdn Armd Recce Regt (G.G.H.G.) had commenced operations, under divisional command, to clear route "Ennis" (see footnote, para 29) of the enemy and secure the crossing over the Uso at 764034. As soon as 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn had cleared the enemy from the road junction (776016) north of the Rio Fontanaccia (see para 34) the armour began to move forward. Apart from demolitions and mines they advanced without opposition, until early afternoon, when, within a few hundred yards of the river, they bumped enemy infantry on the east bank, protected by a minefield. A reconnaissance of the river revealed an alternate site, suitable for a crossing and more lightly defended, nearly a mile to the south at 763018. About this time, 1800 hours, the armoured unit was joined by a company of Westminsters, which had been despatched earlier from S. Vito to take part in the G.G.H.G. operations. As nothing further could be accomplished that day, the tanks went into harbour for the night protected by the infantry. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; W.D., Westmr R. (Mot), 25 Sep 44; W.D., 3 Cdn Armd Recce Regt (G.G.H.G.), 25 Sep 44)

42. Early on 26 Sep, the company of Westminsters moved off, and using the alternate site, were over the river by 0850 hours. However, the armour did not follow, for, shortly after they left the G.G.H.G. received orders to make the crossing where originally planned. During the morning additional infantry strength was added to the force with the arrival of the remaining two companies of the Westmr R. It was now intended to make the attack over the river on "Ennis", using a company of the Westminsters and a squadron of G.G.H.G., and in conjunction with the company already on the far bank, to establish a bridgehead.

43. At 1400 hours with the tanks leading, the attackers moved off. As the column approached the river bank the front tank struck a mine and blocked the passage. Pushing around the armour, the infantry continued the advance and by 1500 hours, against only light opposition, had secured a firm position astride "Ennis", about 500 yards west of the river (757036). Here the company which had made the earlier crossing now joined them. At this time, G.G.H.G., who were having great difficulty in clearing the minefield, were still on the opposite side of the Uso. Work on lifting these mines had been halted temporarily when an explosion of several mines, set off, it was believed, by a trip wire, caused 20 casualties, 16 of them fatal. As an alternative measure, a squadron of tanks started south at 1600 hours, with the intention of using the original Westminster route. Finding this unsuitable for armour they continued on to S. Vito, where they crossed on the 12 Cdn Inf Bde bridge. Once over the

Use the squadron turned north, and moving across country at full speed, under heavy shellfire and involved in crossfire between Ld S.H. and the enemy, reached the Westminster positions at last light. Meanwhile the Engineers continued to work on the "Ennis" location, and by 1630 hours had completed an assault crossing for the armour. On the following day, 27 Sep 1 Fd Sqn R.C.E. erected a 60-foot D.S. Bailey bridge at this site.

(12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 26 Sep 44; W.D., H.Q. R.C.E., 5 Cdn Armd Div, September 1944: Appx 5, Engrs Sitrep, 27 Sep 44; (H.S.) 244C5.013(D7): Governor General's Horse Guards Operational History, September 1944; W.D., 3 Cdn Armd Recce Regt (G.G.H.G.), 26 Sep 44; W.D., Westmr R. (Mot), 26 Sep 44)

44. During the afternoon, 26 Sep, H.Q. 12 Cdn Inf Bde was informed that it would be relieved that night, in the positions then occupied, by 11 Cdn Inf Bde. With this in view, Brigadier Lind ordered his units to consolidate on the line of the parallel laterals, from inclusive route "Ennis", on the right, to south of the secondary road S. Vito - Savignano, on the left. At 1500 hours, the battalions began moving and by 1630 hours the Westminsters were in a firm position on the crossroads (752035), 500 yards east of the Rio Salto. Shortly afterwards 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn reported that they were at the road junction (749018) on the west lateral, with the remainder of the unit echeloned back to the river. By last light P.L.D.G., on the left flank, was also in position, with its four companies grouped south of the road S. Vito - Savignano (map square 7500). Each of the two last mentioned units had one squadron of Ld S.H. in support; and a squadron of G.G.H.G. was now with the Westminsters. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report)

45. During the morning of 26 Sep the relieving units of 11 Cdn Inf Bde began to move forward, and by 0030 hours that night (26/27 Sep) Ir R.C. had completed taking over from 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn. A bad river crossing and heavy shelling, however, delayed the relief of the Westminsters by C.B. Highrs until 0445 hours. In the meantime command of the sector had passed to H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde at 0045 hours (5 Cdn Army Div Ops Log, 27 Sep). P.L.D.G., however, remained under command 11 Cdn Inf Bde to provide left flank protection until late on 27 Sep. Thus finished the second action for the newly-formed 12 Cdn Inf Bde. In its report of this operation the following passage appears:

Although we have had less physical contact with the enemy than in our first action, the unprecedented amount (for him) of arty and sp guns in this sector and the close nature of the ground made every foot gained a difficult and well earned one.

Our opposition consisted at different times of elts of these divs. 1 Para Div, 29 Pz Gren Div, and 20 German Air Force Fd Div.

These, especially 20 G.A.F. Div provided us with a fair crop of deserters and P.W., but on the whole the enemy fought well and stubbornly and made the fullest use of every natural feature and all vegetation to conceal himself and so surprise us with hidden A. Tk guns, M.G.'s. snipers and minefields.

Lessons confirmed. While the enemy continues to follow his present policy in the use of mortars and arty, consideration must be given, in the planning of each phase, to silencing the weapons or dispersing the fire or a combination of both.

(12 Cdn Inf Bde Report)

According to this report casualties were 30 other ranks killed and seven reported as missing; 13 officers and 207 other ranks were wounded. P.L.D.G. had seven officers and 100 men wounded and 10 men killed, while the Westminster had four officers and 70 other ranks wounded and 13 other ranks killed. Ld S.H. had five tanks burned out and three damaged by shell fire during this fighting. ((H.S.) 244C5.013 (D7): 2 Cdn Armd Regt (Ld S.H.) Account of Operations, 11 Sep 44 - 27 Sep 44)

THE ADVANCE OF 11 CDN INF BDE TO THE FIUMICINO, 26-28 SEP 44

46. Appreciating that the enemy was carrying out a general withdrawal, covered by rearguards, and that there was no indication that he would make a real stand on any line, the G.O.C. 1 Corps ordered both 5 Cdn Armd Div and 2 N.Z. Div to press their advance night and day in an effort to maintain contact with the enemy main body. This order, contained in a message issued on 27 Sep, continued as follows:

...where the gen adv is slowed up by river lines crossings will be made with a force adequate to penetrate deep into the enemy defences in order to ensure maintenance of contact. Where it is NOT possible to get supporting arms across obstacles immediately in rear of assaulting inf the inf must be prepared to push ahead without supporting arms particularly at night when the value of the enemy's close sp weapons is greatly reduced.

(The Gothic Line Battle, Appx K)

47. Both forward units of 11 Cdn Inf Bde patrolled to the Rio Salto during the night (26/27 Sep). From the railway near Savignano to its junction with the Uso this stream is a definite tank obstacle. The bed of the river is "U" shaped, with banks partially tree-lined, four to seven feet high, and 12 to 35 feet apart. In addition one of the few bridges, that spanning the stream near the hamlet of La Torre (749035), had been blown by the enemy. Early in the morning of 27 Sep 11 Cdn Inf Bde began to move up to the Salto on a two-battalion front; with right C.B. Highrs, and left Ir R.G. ((H.S.)244C5.013(D7): 5 Cdn Armd Div History of Ops from F. Metauro to F. Bevano, 30 Aug to 27 Oct 44, Part II; (H.S.)224CI.023(D9): M.A.I.U. 1 Cdn Corps Topographical Report No. 10, 13 Sep 44)

48. On the left, Ir R.C., advancing from the positions taken over from 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn, moved north-west along the road to S. Mauro, a town lying mid-way between the Salto and the Fiumicino, the meeting point of a network of secondary roads. By midday the leading troops, having negotiated the passage of the Salto without difficulty, were approaching the outskirts of the town. Up to that time S. Mauro was being heavily shelled by our artillery. Due to the activity of snipers, and to avoid involving the unit in house-to-house fighting, Headquarters 11 Cdn Inf Bde ordered them to by-pass the town and push on to the Fiumicino. Circling around to the north of S. Mauro Ir R.C. continued the advance, with the intention of seizing a bridgehead over the Fiumicino River now only about 1,000 yards distant, that night. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 27 Sep 44)

49. While Ir R.C. were advancing on S. Mauro C.B. Highrs were forming-up in the area of La Torre. Early in the afternoon they crossed the Salto, and moving along "Ennis", reached the Venè (a small stream a few hundred yards west of the Salto), where they contacted the enemy. The latter withdrew, however, without offering opposition and the advance continued. At Villa Grappa, a hamlet situated about 1,500 yards due north of S. Mauro, the situation changed, and the enemy began to offer strong resistance to any further forward movement. At first light on 28 Sep C.B. Highrs were still in the vicinity of Villa Grappa, with elements west of the village, about 500 yards from the Fiumicino. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 27 Sep 44; (H.S.) 244C5.013(D5): Summaries of Ops by the Hist Ofcr, 5 Cdn Armd Div, 16 Sep to 30 Sep 44; W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, September 1944: Appx 9, 11 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 27 Sep 44)

50. Until the afternoon of 27 Sep, P.L.D.G. were responsible for the protection of the Corps left flank. During this time, although they patrolled extensively in the area within the Corps sector east of the Salto, they found no sign of the enemy. Upon their relief by a squadron of 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt (R.C.D.), the battalion returned to under command 12 Cdn Inf Bde. (5 Cdn Armd Div History, op cit). With the task of forcing crossings over the Salto, if possible, the armoured cars at once moved off into the country south-east of S. Mauro. Although due to the nature of the ground a considerable amount of reconnaissance had to be done on foot they made good progress. As the Salto proved to be impassable for vehicles, R.C.D. spent the night on the east bank, about 800 yards from S. Mauro. (Ibid; W.D., 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt (R.C.D.), 27 Sep 44). On the right G.G.H.G. were similarly held up, and spent the day on the same side of this river, awaiting the completion of the bridge at La Torre. (5 Cdn Armd Div History; G.G.H.G. History, op cit)

51. "The day had been one of steady progress slowed down by the difficulties of the crossings..." (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 27 Sep 44). Without close support from the armour, none of which passed beyond the Salto during the hours of daylight, operations lacked weight. In the case of C.B. Highrs, even their wheeled vehicles moving up on "Ennis" did not begin to pass the Uso until 1300 hours, and the Salto five hours later, when the engineers completed their bridges over these rivers. In the course of a mid-day conference with the G.O.C. on these matters the C.R.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div (Lt-Col J.D. Christian) made the following points regarding the Engineer bridging role in an attack:

(i) that attempting to put heavy class 30 crossings in within a few hundred yards of the leading infantry was just not on, most especially where these crossings were at main junctions, and would undoubtedly be registered targets.

(ii) that in my opinion infantry must be prepared to push on at least 3,000 yards in order to force enemy mortars to move back. They must get their own anti-tank guns across and that we would give them what advice and assistance we can to get a few light vehicles across. Heavier crossings can then be put in and tanks brought forward when necessary.

(iii) that when tanks are leading and are held up by an obstacle or mines the present drill of screaming for sappers is again not on. Infantry must pass through and form a bridgehead for the sappers to either sweep or construct a crossing.

(iv) that Sapper resources were limited and that once a plan was made it must be adhered to and that it is just not possible to construct more than two crossings per obstacle; and in many instances, only one would be possible.

(W.D., H.Q. R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div,
27 Sep 44)

The Divisional Commander fell in with this reasoning and agreed to discuss the points raised with his Brigadiers.

52. During the night, 27/28 Sep, "A" Company of Ir R.C. reached the west bank of the Fiumicino, and by 0825 hours were in position east of the town of Gatteo at 720028. Initially it was reported that they were accompanied by two troops of 8 N.B.H. This was later denied by the armoured unit, who stated that the tanks, in question, were at that time, still east of the river, between it and S. Mauro. (5 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log, 28 Sep 44; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, op cit, 28 Sep 44). The company was counter-attacked by infantry and tanks, and communications with them broke down. In the early afternoon, "B" Coy Ir R.C. arrived at the river, and the Commander, Major W.E. Armstrong, accompanied by a platoon of his own men, went forward to the last reported position of the silent company to try and establish contact. They found nine bodies and one wounded man, but of the rest there was no trace; evidently they had been overrun and the personnel killed or captured. Upon reporting his findings to battalion headquarters, Major Armstrong was ordered to withdraw his command to a position south of S. Mauro, on the road leading from that town to Savignano. Here he contacted British troops of 5 Corps, and was in close touch with the squadron of 8 N.B.H., which had provided covering fire for his movements during the afternoon. The main body of Ir R.C. consolidated, for the night, in the area of S. Mauro. (W.D., Ir R.C., 28 Sep 44; Hist Offr, 5 Cdn Armd Div op cit)

53. In preparation for an attack over the Fiumicino, planned for the night 28/29 Sep, Brigadier I.S. Johnston, C.B.E., D.S.O., E.D., Commander 11 Cdn Inf Bde, ordered his third battalion, Perth R., to move into position

on the right of C.B. Highrs and secure "Ennis" route, where this met the river some 600 yards north of the village of Fiumicino. At the same time C.B. Highrs were to push on with all possible speed to the village itself, and if possible seize the bridge over the river intact. (11 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 28 Sep 44; (H.S.) 145.2C5013 (D1): Report on Operations of the C. B. Highrs for the period 26 Sep to 10 Oct 44). To ensure that the move of Perth R. took place without interference from the enemy, brigade headquarters ordered a squadron of G.G.H.G. to take up a position on the right flank 1,000 yards to the east of the Perth objective (7305). During the afternoon of 28 Sep Perth R. began moving forward, and by last light had secured their objective. Apart from heavy artillery and mortar fire, which unfortunately caused some casualties, the move was uneventful. (W.D., 3 Cdn Armd Recce Regt (G.G.H.G.), 28 Sep 44; W.D., Perth R., 28 Sep 44; (H.S.) 244C5.013(D12): 5 Cdn Armd Div Sitrep, 28 Sep 44).

54. Additional impetus was given to the C.B. Highrs struggle to reach the river by an early air reconnaissance report that the bridge at Fiumicino village was still intact. Although making every effort to get ahead, their forward line was still 500 yards short of the river at 1100 hours. Moreover, they were now right in the thick of the enemy defensive artillery fire, which he continued to bring down, more or less continuously, for the next seven hours. Movement forward was now most hazardous, and during the remaining hours of daylight, the companies were unable to make any headway. Under the protective cover of darkness, the battalion made better progress, and by 2200 hours was on the objective. Unfortunately they were too late to save the bridge, which was blown by the enemy that morning (28 Sep) at 0825 hours.† (W.D., C.B. Highrs, 28 Sep 44; C.B. Highrs Report op cit)

55. Throughout 28 Sep it rained heavily and the night assault across the Fiumicino planned by 11 Cdn Inf Bde had to be cancelled. By the morning of the following day, most of the roads had become impassable, either from mud or by reason of washed out bridges or culverts. All the fords over the Rivers Marecchia and Uso were rendered useless and the approaches to the bridges damaged. In a short space of time the Fiumicino, from a shallow stream, became a torrent, 30 feet wide, too deep and fast for patrols to cross. During the day, the battalions of 11 Cdn Inf Bde were engaged in

† But local inhabitants declared, in October 1948, that the bridge was destroyed by the Germans on the morning of 25 Sep, three days before Canadian troops took the town. They also stated definitely that a patrol of six Canadians, including a captain, were lodged in Fiumicino from 25 to 28 Sep. ((H.S.) 903.033 (D2) Italy, Topographical Notes, op cit.)

patrol and mopping-up activities in the area east of the river, and in consolidating existing positions. On 30 Sep the German Air Force bombed the headquarters of 11 Cdn Inf Bde and Perth R. while his ground forces shelled and mortared the sector all day. During the next ten days intermittent rain was to keep operations at a minimum, and the Fiumicino was to be the limit of forward movement. (Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, p. 49; The Gothic Line Battle; W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Sep to 30 Sep 44). 1 Cdn Corps was now holding the line of the Fiumicino from north Savignano to the sea, for on 28 Sep 2 N.Z. Div had reached the river on a two-brigade front.

OPERATIONS OF 2 N.Z. DIV, 22-28 SEP 44

56. On the Canadian right, first light on 22 Sep found 22 N.Z. Motor Bn along the line of the small stream, the Fossa Turchetta, from Route 16 to the sea, while, on the battalion's left, 5 N.Z. Inf Bde had begun to advance from the railway at 0600 hours. During the day units of 5 N.Z. Inf Bde reached the Canale Viserba, where they encountered enemy armour and came under heavy artillery and small arms fire. On the right the motor battalion, despite increasing enemy opposition, pushed forward and crossed this canal. On the following day, 23 Sep, the New Zealanders resumed their advance, and despite fairly strong enemy resistance were within a short distance of the Rio Fontanaccia at last light. During the morning 6 N.Z. Inf Bde passed through 5 N.Z. Inf Bde to head the attack. Due to the activity of enemy artillery on the New Zealand front during the following day, 24 Sep, only limited advances were made. At 1945 hours that night, 6 N.Z. Inf Bde and 22 N.Z. Motor Bn, supported by tanks of 20 N.Z. Armd Regt, attacked across the Fontanaccia in artificial moonlight. Initially strong enemy opposition later weakened and all units made steady progress on the 25th. On that day the motor battalion went into reserve and 6 N.Z. Inf Bde assumed responsibility for the whole sector. Moving on a three battalion front, under mortar and artillery fire, but against only light opposition, otherwise, the brigade reached the Uso River in the afternoon of 26 Sep. ((H.S.) 234N2.013(D1): Summary of Ops, 2 N.Z. Div, 22 Sep - 10 Oct 44; The Gothic Line Battle; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, September 1944: Appx 86, 1 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 22-24 Sep 44; (H.S.) 224C1.013(D14): 1 Cdn Corps Ops Summaries Nos. 2-4; 22 Sep to 24 Sep 44; W.D., 2 N.Z. Div, 22-26 Sep 44)

57. On 26 Sep a battalion of 3 Greek Mountain Bde came under command 2 N.Z. Div, and that night took over the sector between Route 16 and the coast (1 Cdn Corps Ops Log, op cit, 26 Sep). With 6 N.Z. Inf Bde on the left, south of Route No. 16, and the Greek battalion on the right, the division resumed the attack early on 27 Sep. In both brigade sectors, the assaulting infantry soon pushed beyond the Uso, and in the left sector the Engineers had assault crossings for tanks in operation by first light. With light ground opposition and only spasmodic attention from the German artillery to consider the attackers made good headway. By mid-day the division was on the line of the Vena (in this sector, the next natural obstacle beyond the Uso; the Salto flows into the Uso and thus did not constitute a barrier to the N.Z. advance.). Although enemy resistance stiffened somewhat during the afternoon the division made considerable gains along the whole front. At 2300 hours, a battalion of 6 N.Z. Inf Bde, operating on the

left flank, reached the next small stream, the Matrice. About this time the Greek battalion arrived on the lateral road lying a half-mile south-east of the Fiumicino. During the night 27/28 Sep the New Zealanders again regrouped, as 5 N.Z. Inf Bde replaced 6 N.Z. Inf Bde. (Ibid, 27 Sep 44). In the course of the following day (28 Sep) 5 N.Z. Inf Bde moved forward into positions just short of the Fiumicino. Patrols to the river on 28 Sep reported the presence of the enemy in some strength on the far bank. With the arrival, the same day, of troops of 3 Greek Mountain Bde at the mouth of the river, the line was complete. (1 Cdn Corps Ops Summaries op cit No. 7, 27 Sep 44; 2 N.Z. Div Summary op cit)

5 CORPS OPERATIONS ON THE LEFT FLANK, 22 SEP-5 OCT 44

58. On the left the advance of 5 Corps to the Fiumicino lagged behind that of the Canadian Corps, and it was not until 5 Oct that this formation came up to the river along its whole front. At dawn on 22 Sep, patrols reached the Marecchia, and that night 5 Corps, attacking with three divisions up, secured a firm foothold on the high ground beyond. On the right, the infantry of 1 Brit Armd Div had to fight hard to retain their hold on the ridge immediately south of Santarcangelo. In the afternoon, however, as the result of the arrival of the divisional armour, the position was stabilized. Further south, along the ridge between Poggio Berni (7294) and Montebello (6988), the enemy repeatedly counter-attacked 46 Brit Inf Div and 4 Ind Inf Div, and throughout this day and the next the fighting in this sector was heavy. During the night 23/24 Sep, patrols into Santarcangelo found no sign of the enemy. Morning revealed that the enemy opposite 1 Brit Armd Div had withdrawn across the Uso but that he was still very much in evidence to the south. It was only after a hard struggle on 24 Sep that the Poggio Berni - Montebello ridge was secured. (Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, pp 46-47; (H.S.) 224Cl.013(DI2): Notes on the Operations of Formations Flanking 1 Cdn Corps, 26 Aug - 22 Dec 44)

59. On 25 Sep 1 Brit Armd Div established a bridge-head over the Uso, astride Route No. 9. Here on 26 Sep 56 Brit Inf Div took up the battle and passing through 1 Brit Armd Div moved in towards Savignano. Pushing ahead against stubborn resistance, the division made contact, on 27 Sep, with a strong German position based on the town of Savignano and extending south along the low ridge which lies just east of the Fiumicino. An attempt to dislodge the enemy from this position, made on the night 27/28 Sep, failed and the heavy rain of 29 Sep made it impossible to resume the attack. However, with 1 Cdn Corps now up to the Fiumicino, and with elements of 56 Inf Div at the river bank north of Savignano, the Germans abandoned the ridge on the night 29/30 Sep, and the British division closed up to the river. (Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, pp 49-50)

60. In the centre of the 5 Corps front, 46 Brit Inf Div, operating on the edge of the foothills, had crossed the Uso on 26 Sep. Despite an initial setback, when light forces leading the attack were counter-attacked and forced to

give ground, the town of Montalbano (6997) was reached on 30 Sep. Although by then between Montalbano and the coast the enemy's main body was west of the Fiumicino, in the foothills to the south he was still fighting stubbornly. From Montalbano there begins a ridge of high ground that rises steadily southwards through Monte Reggiano (6895), Borghi (6894), San Martino (6693), and Sogliano al Rubicone (6392), and affords a defensive position of great natural strength. After a slow and costly advance 4 Ind Inf Div had secured a foothold on this ridge east of Monte Reggiano by 30 Sep. At dawn on 1 Oct they captured Monte Reggiano and Borghi. On the following day they attempted to seize San Martino but were unsuccessful due to a violent German counter-attack. Here the British division, which had been ceaselessly engaged in fighting over very difficult country since 25 Aug, was relieved by 10 Ind Div. Continuing the operations to bring the left flank of 5 Corps up to the Fiumicino, 10 Ind Div launched two brigades in an attack along the ridge from San Martino to Sogliano on the night 4/5 Oct. After defeating several enemy counter-strokes, these brigades captured all their objectives on 5 Oct. With the loss of the last of these vital points, the Germans were forced back of the Fiumicino along the whole of the Eighth Army front. 10 Ind Div had now reached the headwaters of the river, where it would be possible to continue the advance without having to cross a major river obstacle. (Ibid, p. 50)

PLANNING AT EIGHTH ARMY, 25 SEP - 6 OCT 44

61. In the light of the situation on 25 Sep, Eighth Army appreciated that the enemy could not, and would not, try to make a prolonged stand anywhere east of the Savio once he had lost the high ground south of Savignano. The Army was now approaching a wider part of the plain and at this season none of the rivers seemed likely to constitute a sufficient obstacle to permit of a protracted defence by the enemy. In addition, there was considerable evidence to support the belief that the enemy was on the point of pulling out of Italy completely; heavy troop movements in the north, agents' reports and the statements of prisoners and deserters all pointed the same way. In the Adriatic sector, of course, it would be to his advantage, regardless of his intention, to delay as long as possible, since this wing of his armies covered his line of withdrawal to the Alps. (Ibid, p. 47)

62. Whatever his overall strategy, there appeared to be two possible courses of action open to his forces opposing Eighth Army. In the first place he might continue to withdraw steadily in the face of sustained Allied pressure. In this event, the Army Commander proposed to continue the advance in accordance with the existing plan: 1 Cdn Corps would be directed to Ravenna and Argenta, while 5 Corps followed Route 9 but turned north against Ferrara after reaching Dudrio. The grouping of the two corps would remain the same, except that 21 Army Tk Bde would go into army reserve for a time, and 25 Army Tk Bde would be divided so that both Corps could be supported by Churchill tanks. (Ibid, p. 47)

63. Alternatively, he might manage to stabilize strongly enough on some line to necessitate a co-ordinated attack by Eighth Army. In this case the Army would regroup and continue the attack on a three-corps front. In accordance with this plan, 1 Cdn Corps would step to the left, and 2 Pol Corps would take over the coastal sector. 1 Cdn Corps, then in the centre, would lose 4 Brit Inf Div and gain 21 Army Tk Bde. On the left 5 Corps would receive 4 Brit Inf Div and 25 Army Tk Bde in exchange for the tired 46 and 56 Brit Inf Divs and 2 and 7 Brit Armd Ddes. The two Indian divisions, 4 and 10, would remain with this Corps. Due to supply difficulties, it would be necessary to halt at Imola and again regroup. Here H.Q. 10 Corps would replace H.Q. 5 Corps and take under its command those of the tactical formations requiring only a short rest. (Ibid, p. 48)

64. During the last week of September, the German position improved slightly. In the Adriatic sector, due mainly to the break in the weather, he had regained his balance. About the same time, the Fifth U.S. Army offensive in the central section came to a halt as that army regrouped in preparation for a direct thrust on Bologna. (See Hist Sec C.M.H.Q. Report No. 175, Operations of 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade in Italy, May 1944 to February 1945: Part III: The Gothic Line, para 25). Kesselring had time to review his dispositions and reconsider his plan of defence. His intention remained the same: to hold the Apennine positions to the last. On the ground his forces were equal to, if not greater in strength than, those of the Allies. Since May he had lost three of his 23 veteran divisions to other fronts and had disbanded one other. To offset this, he had received ten new divisions and three divisions' worth of reinforcements. One of the later arrivals had since been broken up, leaving him with 28 German divisions as well as slightly more than two Italian divisions. Only four of the German formations were motorized, but in any event the nature of the terrain left little scope for the employment of mobile troops. By comparison there were only 19 Allied divisions and several independent armoured and infantry brigades. In addition the enemy enjoyed all the usual advantages of a defensive role plus exceptionally good transverse communications. (German Strategy, op cit pp 9-10)

65. By the beginning of October it was evident that the enemy forces opposite Eighth Army had made good use of the opportunities afforded them by the lull in operations. Although the total number of divisions in this sector had been reduced from 12 to nine, a considerable number of reinforcements had been received and the front was firmly held. In the flat country, from the sea to the edge of the foothills, were 1 Para Div, 26 Pz, 29 and 90 Pz Gren Divs, and (of lesser value) 20 G.A.F. Fd Div and elements of 162 Turcoman Div. Opposite the left flank of 5 Corps were 114 Jaeger Div and 278 Inf Div, and in front of 10 Corps was 356 Inf Div. The reserve consisted of one regiment of 98 Inf Div. On the line of the Pisciatello River, defences were being constructed. In addition the enemy had increased the flooded area along the coast, which soon stretched from south of Cesenatico almost to Ravenna. (Eighth Army, The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, p. 51)

66. Between 25 and 27 Sep it was decided to implement the second plan (see para 63) and advance on a three-corps front (The Gothic Line Battle: Appx L, 1 Cdn Corps Op Instr No. 32, 27 Sep 44). Starting on 29 Sep 2 Pol Corps was to take over the coastal sector from 1 Cdn Corps; 2 N.Z. Div, on relief, would pass into Army reserve. Because of the continued bad weather, at 0145 hours, 29 Sep, the move of 2 Pol Corps was postponed for 48 hours, and then, at 1800 hours the following day, put off indefinitely. (1 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 29 and 30 Sep 44)

67. ^{later} The Eighth Army was thus about to enter upon its autumn campaign when, on 29 Sep, Lt-Gen Sir Richard L. McCreery, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., formerly Commander of 10 Corps, arrived at Army Headquarters to take over the command from General Sir Oliver Leese, who was leaving to take up a new appointment as Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces South-east Asia. The first decision of the new Army Commander on assuming command on 1 Oct 44 was to postpone indefinitely the move forward of 2 Pol Corps. The continued bad weather and the extension of the flooding in the coastal sector no doubt contributed to this decision, but the principal reason was that General McCreery was considering passing the Polish Corps through 10 Corps and down Route 71 (Cesena to Arezzo). If successful, this plan would result in the outflanking of the enemy opposing the main body of Eighth Army in the plain. The country was a difficult one for the offensive, but of this the Army Commander, as a result of his experience as G.O.C. 10 Corps, was fully aware. At the time the enemy in this sector, consisting only of the understrength 356 Inf Div, was comparatively weak. The chief objection to the plan was that it meant that the army reserve would be finally committed, with nothing left to take its place. By 6 Oct the Army Commander had finally decided to send the Poles down Route 71. Various difficulties arose, however, and it was not until the middle of the month that the Corps was ready to start operations. (Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, pp 52-54)

THE HALT ON THE FIUMICINO

68. With operations at a standstill on the 1 Cdn Corps front, 5 Brit Corps attacked over a wide area on the night 30 Sep - 1 Oct. Pouring rain more than anything else hindered the progress of both 46 and 56 Brit Inf Divs; and the Germans successfully denied the passage of the Fiumicino. In this sector, until the weather improved, a further advance seemed hopeless. As previously mentioned, during the next few days as a result of successful operations in the foothills the left flank of 5 Corps came up to the headwaters of the Fiumicino (para 60). By the close of 6 Oct the enemy had been pushed west of the river along its whole length. (Ibid, p. 50)

69. Several plans were prepared to put an end to the stalemate, but continued rain and the resulting condition of the ground made operations impossible, except on a fighting patrol basis. The first of these, calling for a river assault crossing on the night 1/2 Oct, was cancelled at 1340 hours 1 Oct. After conferring with the G.Os.C. of 5 Cdn Armd Div and 2 N.Z. Div, General Burns decided that the target date would now be the night 3/4 Oct. Owing to the flood conditions

on the New Zealand front, this division was to extend its left flank and strike towards S. Angelo. Again the weather forced the abandonment of the operation, but, with ground conditions improving somewhat on 4 Oct, it was decided that 1 Cdn Corps, in conjunction with 5 Corps, would attack on 6/7 Oct. On the morning of 5 Oct, General McCreery held a conference at Headquarters 1 Cdn Corps to settle arrangements for this operation. The condition of the terrain the following morning was such, however, that after conferring with the two divisional commanders, General Burns referred to the Army Commander and got a 24 hours' postponement.

70. Briefly, the army intention was for 5 Corps to capture Cesena and a crossing over the Savio River west of Roversano (5601); at the same time 1 Cdn Corps was to attack across the Fiumicino, and attempt to seize bridge-heads over the Scolo Rigossa. Should opposition be light both divisions of this corps were to exploit northward towards the Pisciatello River. To provide additional artillery support, 1 Cdn A.G.R.A. was increased in strength to seven medium and two heavy regiments and one heavy anti-aircraft regiment - becoming the largest single A.G.R.A. to be employed in the Mediterranean up to this time. For the period 2-9 Oct the field artillery of 5 Kresowa Div also came under its command. (Personal Diary of Lt-Gen E.L.M. Burns, 1 Oct to 6 Oct 44; The Gothic Line Battle)

71. Trials with tanks on 6 Oct proved that it was almost impossible to move off roads; accordingly at 1500 hours the operation was postponed until 2000 hours 7 Oct. With little hope of an immediate improvement in the weather, General Burns discussed with the Army Commander the possibility of continuing either with the "dry weather" plan or of employing a modified "wet weather" plan, which would involve a more limited operation in shorter stages. General McCreery agreed but added, however, that should the modified project be adopted it must go in without fail on the night 8/9 Oct. By 8 Oct, however, even the roads were impassable and the Fiumicino had become an infantry obstacle. Accordingly the Corps Commander requested and obtained another 48 hours' deferment of the operation. By this time the Army Commander, having decided that he would shift the main axis of his advance (see para 76), considered that further operations in this sector would continue to be impracticable owing to the steadily deteriorating ground conditions. (Ibid; Burns Diary op cit, 6-8 Oct 44)

OPERATIONS OF 5 CDN ARMD DIV, 1 - 11 OCT 44

72. As previously mentioned, the attack planned by 1 Cdn Corps to take place on the night 1/2 Oct was cancelled. It was evident, moreover, that nothing could be done until the rain ceased, the rivers subsided somewhat, and the ground dried sufficiently to permit the employment of tracked and wheeled vehicles. With the prospect of several days' further delay before operations could be resumed, 5 Cdn Armd Div decided on 2 Oct to bring 11 Cdn Inf Bde out of the line for a rest. In the meantime 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn had relieved Ir R.C. in the S. Mauro area on 1 Oct. On 2 Oct as a result of a change in the interdivisional boundary, a unit of 5 N.Z. Bde moved into the positions occupied by Perth R. At