

- (d) Immediately before the attack, G (Int) gave a lengthy sitrep which enabled the Partisan leader to act en connaissance de cause.

(Ibid)

Whilst talking to a party of British Members of Parliament in January 1945, a senior Canadian officer is reported to have paid this tribute to the work of the partisan forces in Italy, "Without their efforts, big and small, our task of defeating the enemy in Italy and liberating the country would have been doubly difficult and three times as costly in men and materials". (Allied Strategy: Appx "G"-2, p. 92)

ACTIVITIES OF 5 CDN ARMD BDE ON THE
RIGHT FLANK, 6 - 10 DEC 44

119. 5 Cdn Armd Bde - apart from 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.) which was under command 12 Cdn Inf Bde - had shared in the initial stages of the December offensive in an artillery role only. The original Corps plan had called for the armoured brigade to take over and hold the sector along the Lamone River north of Route 16, while Porterforce shifted left and relieved 5 Cdn Armd Div on the same river south of the main highway.* Now, however, 5 Cdn Armd Div intended to force the crossing of the Lamone in the area of Villanova using 11 Cdn Inf Bde for the purpose while 5 Cdn Armd Bde with Porterforce under command would take over the whole of the right flank from inclusive Mezzano to Porto Corsini. (See Map 7).

120. On 6 Dec Ld S.H. moved forward to the Mezzano area and by nightfall had completed without incident the changeover with Ir R.C. At last light the Strathcona's had one squadron in that part of Mezzano lying east of the Lamone, with another covering the lateral road south of Route 16 as far as the village of le Ammonite (4742) and a third at the sugar factory (4843) south-east of Mezzano facing north towards the river. During the same day G.G.H.G. came under command 5 Cdn Armd Bde and took up positions on Route 16 near Osteria. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 6 Dec 44)

121. At an Orders Group held on 7 Dec, Brigadier I.H. Cumberland, D.S.O., E.D., informed his unit commanders of his intentions. These were, first, to clear out any enemy remaining south or east of the Lamone River, secondly to cut the lateral road running east from San Alberto along the north bank of the Canale di Bonifica to the sea. 2 Cdn Armd Regt (Ld S.H.) would close up to the Lamone River and provide right flank protection for 11 Cdn Inf Bde. In the centre 3 Cdn Armd Recce Regt (G.G.H.G.) with 5 Cdn Assault Tp C.A.C. was to move up to the lateral road on the north side of the Canale di Bonifica and consolidate facing left. At the same time Porterforce was to advance to the same road and face up to the right. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 6-7 Dec 44; (H.S.) 244C5.013(D4): 5 Cdn Armd Bde Account of Ops from 30 Nov to 14 Jan 45)

* See outline of Corps plan in 12 Cdn Inf Bde Report on Operations 1 Dec to 6 Dec 44 ((H.S.) 244C5.013(D4) and entry in W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 6 Dec 44)

122. On the same day both Ld S.H. and G.G.H.G. patrolled actively on their respective fronts. Patrols from the latter unit moved along the tramway and crossed the canal Fossa Carlina. There enemy machine gun fire from the railway bridge over the Lamone, sweeping across the flat open country, prevented any further movement in that direction. Farther east on the Fossa Carlina, at the Strada Antica del Bosco crossing, G.G.H.G. patrols contacted a P.P.A. post and learned that the latter had suffered casualties in attempting to reach the Lamone in that sector. Patrols from the Lord Strathcona's covered the 4,000 yard stretch of the Lamone between Route 16 and the point where the river bends to the east and reported it clear of the enemy. As Ld S.H. was now responsible for some 7,000 yards of river front, the Commanding Officer appealed to Brigadier Cumberland for assistance and received under command that afternoon (7 Dec) 2721 Sqn R.A.F. Regt. The latter unit was at once assigned to the sector from the river bend east to the railway crossing (5146). (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 7 Dec 44; (H.S.) 244C5. 013(D4); 2 Cdn Armd Regt (Ld S.H.) Account of Operations 27 Nov 44 - 16 Jan 45; W.D., 3 Cdn Armd Recce Regt (G.G.H.G.), 7 Dec 44)

123. In the course of the next three days all units strengthened their F.D.Ls. and patrolled widely across the front. On the right a P.P.A. patrol, along the road leading north from Ravenna towards Mandriole, worked to within a 1,000 yards of the Canale di Bonifica.

Here they were shelled by an SP and encountered a group of some thirty mixed Germans and Fascists. On sighting POPSKI'S men some of the enemy put their hands up and were beckoned in by POPSKI'S patrol. They (the enemy with the uplifted hands) immediately threw themselves on the ground and the remainder of the Germans opened fire. A brief exchange of small arms ensued, then both patrols withdrew.

(W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 8 Dec 44)

On the same day, 8 Dec, 27 L. established an advanced post on this road near the canal Il Fossatone (588480) (*ibid*).

124. Late on 7 Dec the Commanding Officer of G.G.H.G., Lt-Col A.K. Jordon, E.D., decided to develop the Strada Antica del Bosco as his forward axis and the following day established a troop position on this road at the Fossa Carlina. Throughout 8 Dec G.G.H.G. worked feverishly lifting mines and filling in craters in preparation for an advance along the Strada Antica. During the night however a joint G.G.H.G./R.C.E. patrol discovered that, although the Fossa Carlina and another small water obstacle to the north of it could easily be fixed for the passage of tanks, unfortunately the ground in the vicinity of the Lamone was flooded on both sides of the Strada Antica and the last 100 yards of the road itself was washed out. Accordingly the plan to push the regiment's armour over the Lamone via this route was abandoned. On the left by last light on 8 Dec Ld S.H. was in complete control of the east bank of the Lamone as far north as the bend in the river where 2721 Sqn was now established around Le Torri (4946). In this sector the task was now simply to hold and harass the enemy on the far bank with fire. ((H.S.) 244C4.013(D4): Operational History of Governor General's Horse Guards for December 1944 and January 1945; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 8 Dec 44)

125. Shortly after midday on 9 Dec enemy infantry attacked the 27 L. post, established the previous day, on the Mandriole road near Il Fossatone. Using the woods lying to the north and east of the position, the enemy succeeded in nearly surrounding the buildings occupied by the Lancers. Eventually elements of P.P.A. became involved in the fight and a request for assistance was sent to G.G.H.G. The latter immediately sent off a troop of tanks and an R.A.P. Stuart.

Lieut Murphy was despatched post haste from C Squadron, travelling down the Highway to the lateral road north of Ravenna, where he swung east to the 27th Lancers road. He arrived at the beleaguered position, which was then surrounded, at 1515 hours, and at point blank range demolished an enemy house, which was occupied by thirty German infantry. While the tanks were firing, the Lancers withdrew. Cpl Hoy, in his R.A.P. Stewart, moved up and evacuated the casualties, under intense machine gun fire and without any assistance, as the Lancers had left the position. Lieut Murphy continued to fire until they were firm a mile and a half to the south. He then retired to their new position and remained for the night.

(G.G.H.G. History, Chapter VIII)

In this action Porterforce suffered six casualties, among whom was Maj Popski (see footnote para 30), the enemy an estimated 25. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 9 Dec 44)

126. On 9 Dec Bulow's partisans, as previously mentioned (para 116), began to concentrate in Ravenna. Although they were now under command of Brigadier I.H. Cumberland, due to the refit and rest programme arranged for them, they would not be available for use in operations for several days. To ensure good liaison Bulow moved to Brigade Headquarters from where he directed the operations of his force. Apart from the Ravenna group some 125 partisans from the Mezzano district were now working with Ld S.H. Due to a certain reluctance on the part of the majority of these latter to patrol into enemy territory, the Strathconas were employing them mainly as fatigues, kitchen duties, local sentries, etc. About 20 volunteered for patrol duty, of whom a few who went out on patrol, proved to be "pretty stout fellows" in the opinion of the unit officer concerned. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 9 Dec 44; McAvity, Lt-Col J.M., D.S.O., O.B.E., Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) A Record of Achievement, p.168)

127. At 1840 hours on 10 Dec Staff Duties 1 Cdn Corps issued the following message:

PORTER FORCE is disbanded effective immediately Units under command excl 168 London Inf Bde Sig Sec and two secs 53 Mob BU pass under comd 5 Cdn Armd Div... Various att Offrs and ORs and tpt on loan will be returned to parent units. Ord Stores will be returned to 1 Cdn HQ Corps Tps Ord. All DUCKS held will be retained by 5 Cdn Armd Div.

((H.S.) 224C1.015(D2): 1 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 10 Dec 44)

At the time of disbandment Porterforce was holding on the right, Porto Corsini and, on the left, the line of the Scolo via Cerba to inclusive the Mandriole road. In over six weeks of operations it had advanced from the Ronco to Porto Corsini, a distance across country of about 13 miles. During this period Lt.-Col Horsbrugh-Porter's men had taken 220 of the enemy prisoner and killed or wounded at least that many more. Their own casualties were considerably less - as noted earlier in this report (para 37) for the period up to 25 Nov they numbered 56 British and 30 Canadians.

128. There was little activity apart from routine patrols in 5 Cdn Armd Bde sector during daylight on 10 Dec. In the afternoon the Air Force bombed and strafed Mezzano. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Dec 44; 1 Cdn Corps Ops Summary No. 48, 10 Dec 44). Maj-Gen Hoffmeister, who personally witnessed this attack, sent off the following message of appreciation:

From G.S.O.1, 5 Cdn Armd Div. GOC wishes to convey his thanks to the Air Force for the bombing and strafing of Mezzano. It was most satisfactory. Forward troops are very enthusiastic.

(1 Cdn Corps Operations Log, 10 Dec 44)

129. That night (10 Dec) 1 Cdn Corps attacked across the Lamone River on a two-divisional front. To divert attention from the 5 Cdn Armd Div assault, made in silence by 11 Cdn Inf Bde, the two flanking brigades of that division staged fire demonstrations. At Mezzano, 5 Cdn Armd Bde, using a variety of weapons put on an elaborate show.

Lord Strathcona's received orders to create a diversion, with as much firing as possible, especially of small arms, with a view to creating the impression that the main attack was to be at Mezzano. Accordingly, for one hour commencing at "H" plus 45", almost every weapon in the Regiment was firing: L.M.G's, dismounted Browning M.G's and rifles cracked off simultaneously all along the river dyke, while 9 troops of Shermans, only a few hundred yards from the river, fired on fixed lines on the roads leading away from the river on the enemy side, at suspected enemy H.Q's, mortar and gun positions - firing both 75 mm and .30-inch Brownings. The 105mm. battery fired "H.F." at rapid rate on Highway 16 beyond Mezzano. One troop of 40 mm. Bofors was attached to the Regiment for the night and they fired two streams of brilliant tracer - about 500 yards apart, parallel to the highway at Mezzano.

(McAvity, op cit, p. 169)

The enemy responded vigorously to the Ld S.H. fire - one squadron commander reporting that in one short session some 200 enemy mortar bombs landed in his squadron area (ibid; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Dec 44; 1 Cdn Corps Ops Summary No. 48, 10 Dec 44)

THE GENERAL SITUATION - EIGHTH ARMY, 2 - 10 DEC 44

130. Across the whole of the Eighth Army front, the winter offensive had made good progress during the first week of December. In three days 1 Cdn Corps had thrown the enemy back to the Lamone on a front of three miles and secured Ravenna, one of the main objectives of the offensive. This was a promising start but, due to the costly setback suffered by 1 Cdn Inf Div on the 5th and the advent of bad weather, the time gained by these initial successes was largely lost. During the same period both the central 5 Corps and the left-flanking Polish Corps had achieved limited successes. After a short postponement the offensive opened on that part of the front on the night 3/4 Dec.⁸ North of Route 9, 56 Inf Div made feints which drew the enemy's attention away from the main thrusts which went in on the higher ground to the south of the main axis. There 46 Inf Div, with its objective the Pideura ridge (2321), crossed the Lamone River at Quartolo (2520). Initially the 5 Corps attack developed without much interference, but as the attack reached the high ground on which the main defences of the German 305 Division lay, it met with increasing resistance. Moreover the broken nature of the ground made it difficult to manoeuvre and to deploy sufficient forces to dislodge the enemy, while the lack of suitable roads impeded the supporting tanks. By the 7th, however, the 46th Division had taken Pideura village although the enemy retained his grip on a ridge to the north of it. Meanwhile a Polish division which had crossed at San Ruffillo a mile upstream from Quartolo had made somewhat better progress. On the 4th the Poles had seized Montecchio (2219) and on the following day Monte San Rinaldo (2019) and the high ground to the south, thus securing the left flank of 5 Corps. (Eighth Army etc, pp 87-8)

131. Probably because he appreciated that a full-scale offensive by both Allied armies was imminent, the enemy showed a certain reluctance to commit his reserves against Eighth Army. By the 8th, however, he had decided that his Adriatic front stood in urgent need of reinforcements and brought in 90 Pz Gren Div from reserve to aid the hard-pressed 305 Inf Div. On the following day the panzer grenadiers began a series of attacks all along the line of the bridgehead, making a particularly violent and reckless thrust south of Celle (2725) against a recent extension of the 46 Inf Div bridgehead. Fighting with great skill and determination the 46th Division not only held the enemy attacks but by the end of the day (9 Dec) had so severely damaged the 90th and 305th German Divisions that neither was capable of further operations for the time being. But the victor was in no position to take advantage of his opponent's discomfiture. Clearly it was out of the question for 46 Inf Div to continue the attack unaided.⁸⁸ 5 Corps had, therefore, to halt the

⁸ The British Historical Section, Central Mediterranean, was unable to discover the reasons for this postponement. (Eighth Army, etc p. 88)

⁸⁸ Besides Eighth Army had now to release this division for service in Greece. One of its brigades has moved to that theatre in November and the division had fought its December actions with one brigade of 56 Inf Div under command. (Eighth Army etc p. 86; Allied Strategy, pp 16 and 23)

offensive and regroup. South of Route 9, the British Corps depended for communication chiefly on a single route seven miles in length from the point where it left the highway until it reached Quartolo on the Lamone, in places little more than a track and requiring 12 hours daily for maintenance. Barely sufficient before, it was utterly inadequate to bear the increased weight of traffic imposed by the reliefs. Not until 14 Dec did 5 Corps complete its regrouping. By that date 10 Ind Div had taken over the left of the bridgehead while 2 N.Z. Div held the right and the near bank of the Lamone east of Faenza. 56 Inf Div remained in the quiet sector north of Route 9. (Ibid, pp. 88-9)

PREPARATIONS FOR 1 CDN CORPS ASSAULT ACROSS THE LAMONE

132. With the British and Poles both across the Lamone and heavily engaged by the enemy, it was now more necessary than ever for the Canadian Corps to push forward with determination its attack. The failure of 1 Cdn Inf Bde to establish a foothold across the Lamone on 5 Dec did not alter the intention of the Corps Commander to get forward as quickly as possible. During the afternoon of the 5th, General Foulkes, in discussion with his divisional commanders, laid plans for a fresh assault on the river line. The operation was first planned for the night 6/7 Dec and was to be a coordinated attack by 11 Cdn Inf Bde and 3 Cdn Inf Bde on their respective divisional fronts. Both divisions completed plans for the assault during 6 Dec but, due to the state of the weather, neither attack took place. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 5 Dec 44; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 5 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 6 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 6 Dec 44)

133. On the evening of 6 Dec meteorological reports indicated such bad weather in the mountains that the rivers might become impassable. Not only was there the danger of a rise on the Lamone River which might cause great difficulty in the attack, but there was a danger of roads and bridges over the Montone being washed out. Beyond the Lamone the water obstacles athwart the line of advance were more thickly concentrated than any others previously encountered. The strongly dyked canal Naviglio (which linked Faenza with the sea), flanked on either side by small drainage canals - the Fosso Vecchio and the Fosso Munio - and further to the northwest the formidable areas of the flood-banked Senio, all paralleled one another within a zone of three or four miles. The Army Commander, realizing these difficulties, decided to delay the attack until such time as the operation could be ensured of reasonable success. "The Army Commander had no intention of asking us to fight both weather and enemy". (W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, December 1944: Appx 6, Message Comd 11 Cdn Inf Bde). On 7 Dec General McCreery visited General Foulkes at H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, and a conference, including the divisional commanders, took place later in the day at 1 Cdn Inf Div H.Q. It was decided that because the rain, particularly in the mountains, was causing the rivers to rise, thus increasing the difficulties of bridging, the operation would have to be postponed until the water level in the rivers had dropped. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 6-7 Dec 44)

134. During this period of waiting both divisions confined their efforts to active patrolling and reconnaissance along the river and small actions against the few enemy pockets still remaining to the east of it. On 6 Dec dis-mounted R.C.D. elements supported by tanks of 12 R.T.R. attacked an enemy pocket of infantry which was still holding out south of the river in the area of the Russi-Granarolo railway. After the supporting armour battered the houses in which the enemy was positioned a squadron of the R.C.D. occupied this last enemy-held position east of the Lamone. On both sides the mortars and guns were intermittently active. (W.D., 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 6 Dec 44; Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Part III, Sec "E", 1 Cdn Corps Operations, p. 74)

LAMONE AND NAVIGLIO ASSAULTS - 1 CDN INF DIV,
10 - 16 DEC 44

135. Following the repulse of 1 Cdn Inf Bde at the Lamone on 5 Dec several changes of command took place in 1 Cdn Inf Div. Maj-Gen H.W. Foster, who officially succeeded Maj-Gen C. Vokes, C.B.E., D.S.O., when the latter left this formation (para 14) arrived at Divisional Headquarters on 6 Dec. General Foster was no stranger to 1 Cdn Inf Div having held the appointment of G.S.O. 1 in England in 1942. He later commanded 7 Cdn Inf Bde in England and 13 Cdn Inf Bde Gp on its expedition to Kiska in the Aleutians in 1943. He returned to England and led 7 Cdn Inf Bde into Normandy on D Day and assumed command of 4 Cdn Armd Div two months later. Brigadier Smith, A/G.O.C., handed over command of 1 Cdn Inf Div to General Foster on the 9th and on the same day took command of 1 Cdn Inf Bde from Brigadier Calder. Lt-Col J.W. Ritchie also gave up command of R.C.R. on the same day to Lt-Col W.W. Reid, D.S.O., E.D.* (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 6-9 Dec 44; W.D., R.C.R., 9 Dec 44)

136. The period of waiting which began with the postponement of the Lamone assault on 6 Dec (para 133) came to an end on the 10th. At an "O" Group called at Div H.Q., at 1100 hours on 10 Dec, a divisional plan was presented, which called for an assault crossing of the Lamone with Bagnacavallo (3838) as the chief objective (see Map 2). The attack was to begin at 2130 hours with the assault crossing assigned to 3 Cdn Inf Bde and having as an objective a bridgehead about 2½ miles wide and 1½ miles in depth i.e. from Traversara to a point about 900 yards south of the Russi-Bagnacavallo railway crossing and in depth to include the bridge over the Fosso Vecchio.** After completion of this phase, 1 Cdn Inf Bde would pass through 3 Cdn Inf Bde,

* Enemy propaganda based on these changes in command may be found in W.D., Ir R.C., December 1944: Appx 14.

** The securing of a bridgehead across the R LAMONE between 429373 and 410345 extending to road and canal crossing 405375 by 3 Cdn Inf Bde Gp.

(1 Cdn Inf Div Operation Order No. 1,
10 Dec 44)

cross the Fosso Vecchio and advance north to gain a lodgment over Canale Naviglio below Bagnacavallo. In the third and final phase 2 Cdn Inf Bde would cross the Lamone and advance to the Senio on the left flank of the Division. The timing of the second and third phases would of course depend on the measure of success achieved in the preceding phases. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, December 1944: Appx 20, 1 Cdn Inf Div Op Order No. 1, 10 Dec 44)

137. At the conference held at H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div at 1100 hours on 10 Dec, final arrangements for artillery, armour, anti-tank, engineers, M.M.G. and mortar support were completed. The over-all Corps plan was the same as previously arranged for the night of 6/7 Dec and called for a simultaneous assault by both 1 Cdn Inf Div and 5 Cdn Armd Div; that of 5 Cdn Armd Div to go in the area of Villanova. A feint attack by 43 Ind Lor Inf Bde on the right of 5 Corps in area of the inter-corps boundary was to begin at 1900 hours and continue until 2100 hours. Artillery support for 1 Cdn Inf Div included the Divisional Artillery plus one or two medium regiments. In addition 12 R.T.R. would position tanks on the railway and engage targets west of grid line 40 during the first hours of the attack. The air plan included Timothy targets and the usual air support weather permitting. (Ibid)

138. Although the 3 Cdn Inf Bde assault would be made in the same area in which 1 Cdn Inf Bde had been routed on 5 Dec postponement of the operation to the night of the 10th gave the former time for a more careful reconnaissance of the area than the latter had been able to carry out. Apart from this 3 Cdn Inf Bde intended to cross the river on a three battalion front, holding a fourth battalion in readiness to go in and deepen the bridgehead. For that purpose 48 Highrs was placed under Brigadier Bernatchez' command on 6 Dec. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 6 Dec 44). In the first phase of the brigade attack, Carlt & York R., on the right, would gain a lodgment 1,000 yards across centring on the Via Albergoni crossroads with, as a further immediate objective, a house on that road about 500 yards from the river; in the centre, West N.S.R. would secure the vicinity of the lateral road, between Carlt & York R. and the railway bridge, to a depth of about 700 yards; 48 Highrs, on the left, would seize the railway bridge and objectives at the 90° bend in the river, 1,000 yards to the south, and on the road paralleling the railway, some 800 yards from the river.* Upon the completion of the first phase, R. 22e R. would pass through, in the centre, to expand the bridgehead between the Via Albergoni and the railway as far as the south-eastern edge of the settlement of Borg di' Stecch (4137). At the same time, Carlt & York R. would take action to widen and deepen its holdings on the flanks. In the final phase, West N.S.R. would come up on the right of R. 22e R. and, acting in concert, the two battalions would secure the near bank of the Vecchio in the area of the Via Albergoni bridge. Assault boats and Olafson bridges were allotted to each battalion and sufficient Mae Wests to protect

* A detailed list of the objectives for all three phases of the Brigade operation is contained in 3 Cdn Inf Bde Operation Order No.1, 9 Dec 44, a copy of which is appended to the War Diary of 48 Highrs for December 1944.

the infantry during the crossing. Searchlights were to be used half light from 1830 hours until 2400 hours, full light from 0500 hours until first light, 12 R.T.R. would position one tank on railway at first light to engage targets by observation. (W.D., 48 Highrs, December 1944: Appx 8, 3 Cdn Inf Bde Op Order No.1, 9 Dec 44)

139. The enemy units manning the defences along the Lamone in the area of the impending 3 Cdn Inf Bde attack came mainly from 356 Inf Div. An intelligence report issued late on 9 Dec placed the dividing line between this division and the neighbouring formation on its left, 114 Jaeger Division, as the Via Albergoni from the Lamone to Bagnacavallo. This would mean that the left-flank units of 356 Div would bear the brunt of the 1 Cdn Inf Div assault. The Carlt & York R. attack would actually go in along the German divisional boundary. (W.D., G. (Ops) H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, December 1944: Appx 18, 1 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No. 104, 9 Dec 44)

140. An unusual feature of the artillery plan for this attack was that the preliminary fire support was divided into two parts separated by a quiet period. As a result of the initial series of concentrations the enemy, in anticipation of an attack, would, it was hoped, commence moving forward his local reserves. If this occurred these would, on the resumption of the firing, be caught in the open and destroyed or disorganized. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 10 Dec 44). A comment on this novel artillery plan is given in the account of these operations by 12 R.T.R.:

The fire plan for this operation was somewhat of a novelty. Very heavy concentrations were brought down about one hour before the assault took place for a period of 30 minutes; a gap of 20 minutes then elapsed and the attack went in with similar concentrations. There can be no doubt that the Germans suffered very heavy casualties. They had expected the first barrage to accompany the assault and were caught in the open by the second series of concentrations.

((H.S.) 234C1.013(D22): Account of Operations 29 Nov 44 to 11 Jan 45)

141. At 2025 hours on the 10th the artillery barrage began and within the hour the assault on the enemy's Lamone defences was underway. It would appear that the enemy had expected the attack in the area between the demolished railway bridge and the road-bridge as heavy enemy M.G. and mortar fire met the advancing companies of the West N.S.R. in this area. The right and left flanks received less attention, however, and the attacks of both 48 Highrs and Carlt & York R. met with success. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 10 Dec 44)

142. 48 Highrs had prepared a plan of assault on 6 Dec and had selected two crossing points the first about 200 yards above the railway bridge (415352) and the second opposite their left objective at the river bend (411347). During the waiting period 6-10 Dec reconnaissance patrols had visited these proposed sites and on the 10th plans were completed for "A" Coy to cross left in the boats and "B" Coy right on an Olafson bridge. At H Hour 48 Highrs began crossing the river. They met with little opposition and in less than an hour had two companies complete on the far bank.

Since the Olafson bridge was found to be too short to span the gap both companies were ferried across in the assault boats. The speed of the attack combined with the artillery deception had apparently demoralized the enemy defenders of the dyke and within a short time boats returning for our own troops were bringing back prisoners. Shortly after midnight "A", "B", and "C" Coys were across and controlling the road junction south of the railway. (W.D., 48 Highrs, 6-10 Dec 44; (H.S.) 145.2H3013(D1): 48 Highrs, Extracts from "Report on Ops 29 Nov - 27 Dec prepared by Lt-Col D.A. MacKenzie")

143. On the right flank of the Brigade, Carlt & York R. were equally successful. Careful and detailed plans were rewarded by the battalion achieving a quick and decisive assault crossing. "B" and "D" Companies were ordered to cross at points (424363 and 422361) 400 and 700 yards respectively south of the road bridge. Both were to use assault boats while the pioneer platoon was ordered to erect an Olafson foot bridge as soon as possible. The artillery barrage, which was so effective in the 48 Highrs area, was equally successful on the Carlt & York R. front. At H Hour the companies began dragging the six boats allotted to each up the steep 30 foot dykes. The Support Company provided an officer, who acted as beachmaster for each assault company, and two paddlers for each boat. Ropes were used to pull the boats back to the near side of the river as soon as their occupants had disembarked. The river was only 30 feet wide but the current was very swift. Within 18 minutes of the beginning of the assault "D" Coy and its H.Q., including an artillery F.O.O., were established on the enemy side and 18 prisoners were rounded up. Although under mortar and S.P. fire "B" Coy on the left was only a few minutes behind "D" Coy. Again difficulties had been encountered in the erection of the Olafson bridge. Seven of the pioneers had been wounded as they carried it over the dyke, and later when it was put down one end sank, and it was not until the next morning that it was finally positioned. By 0215 hours the whole battalion had crossed the river and consolidated in the area of the crossroads. The battalion attack had not been unopposed but the swiftness of the assault quickly overcame the resistance. "D" Coy Commander remarked later "I have never seen so many wounded, maimed and dead Germans in another area of similar size. Most of these casualties were caused by our S.A. fire and grenades". In the battalion bridgehead a total of 84 prisoners were taken during the night at a cost of only 12 casualties. (W.D., Carlt & York R., 10 Dec 44; (H.S.) 145.2C6011 (D1): Account by Lt-Col J.A. Ensor, D.S.O., O.C. Carlt & York R., 10/11 Dec 44, and Account by O.C. "D" Coy, Carlt & York R., 10/11 Dec 44)

144. The West N.S.R. assault in the centre of the Brigade did not have the initial spectacular success of the two flanking battalions. There appears to be two reasons at least accounting for their ill-luck. First it would seem that this sector was more closely watched by the enemy as the unit experienced very heavy D.F. fire on its assembly area. Another apparent reason was the decision of West N.S.R. to depend wholly on the Olafson bridge for the assault crossing whereas 48 Highrs and Carlt & York R. had carried with them into the assault both bridge material and assault boats. As in the case of the flank battalions West N.S.R. had reconnoitered the river and located the crossing sites prior to the attack. The sites finally selected lay a few hundred yards below the railway at 419354 and 419355. When the second barrage began at 2100 hours the two assaulting companies began moving up accompanied by the Pioneer Platoon carry-

ing the Olafson bridge materials. On the right "C" Coy at once came under enemy D.F., sustained considerable casualties and became temporarily disorganized. "A" Coy, on the left, had better luck and reached the river, but the swiftness of the current demolished their bridge before it was completed, and the company was pulled back to await the arrival of assault boats which were immediately sent for. At this time, due to faulty communication as well as the initial failure of the two assaulting companies, confusion reigned at battalion headquarters. A patrol from "D" Coy attempted to cross the river near the site of the demolished railway bridge but was unsuccessful. Meanwhile, because of the immediate success of both 48 Highrs and Carlt & York R., the West N.S.R. plan was changed, and "D" Coy was ordered to cross left in the 48 Highrs area and "B" Coy right through Carlt & York R. These two would then advance toward one another along the far bank and strike the enemy on his flanks. At 0130 hours the companies began moving again. "D" Coy made slow progress being held up by mines at the railway crossing as they pushed north through 48 Highrs toward their objective. In the meantime, "A" Coy followed close behind "B" Coy through the Carlt & York R. bridgehead, and together they began clearing the dyke and lateral road to road junction 418357. This task they completed in short order taking 18 prisoners, killing a number of the enemy, and knocking out two of his S.P. guns. "B" Coy held up at the road junction, while "A" Coy pushed on and contacted "D" Coy at 0440 hours. The first phase of the brigade assault was now complete. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 10 Dec 44; W.D., West N.S.R., 10 Dec 44; (H.S.) 145.2W2011(D1): Account by O.C. "A" Coy West N.S.R. Action in Establishing a Bridgehead across River Lamone, 10/11 Dec 44)

145. To fully exploit the success of the initial assault it was essential that the bridging of the river for the passage of anti-tank guns, armour, and essential unit transport, go forward with as little delay as possible. Divisional Engineers had arranged for the building of three Class 2 crossings, one in each battalion assault area, and for the early replacement of at least one of these by a Class 9 F.B.E.* ((H.S.) 22401.3013(D2): History of Royal Canadian Engineers, 1 Cdn Corps, 1 Oct 44 - 15 Jan 45: Pt III, p. 3). Moreover, they were prepared to launch a "Brown Bridge" (see para 23) near the demolished road bridge (*ibid*, p. 6). 48 Highrs reported the Class 2 raft completed in its area at 0350 hours and Carlt & York R. their crossing at 0430 hours. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, December 1944: Appx 4, Int Log, 11 Dec 44). The "Brown Bridge", however, could not be used as the gap at the road bridge was found to be 160 feet. (History of Royal Canadian Engineers *op cit*, Part III, p. 6). Meanwhile, in preparation for the second phase of the operation, Brigadier Bernatchez ordered R. 22e R. to cross the river and pass through Carlt & York R. By 0430 hours (11 Dec) this move was completed, and H Hour for Phase II set for 0630 hours. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 11 Dec 44). At the

* In actual fact the engineers put in Class 2 rafts in 48 Highrs and West N.S.R. sectors and a Class 1½ bridge in Carlt & York R. (W.D., H.Q. R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div, December 1944: Appx 4, Engineers Sitrep, 11 Dec 44)

same time anti-tank 2-prs and 6-prs were reaching the bridge-head on the Class 2 rafts. This last was a laborious task, for each gun had to be lowered down and pulled up the steep dykes. In addition the river area was receiving considerable attention from enemy mortars and artillery. With the coming of daylight, the hostile fire so increased that it held up the construction of the Class 9 bridge all day. However, a third Class 2 crossing was completed in West N.S.R. area by 0600 hours, and all three battalions were by then completing the move of their anti-tank guns into the bridgehead.^a (W.D., 1 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E., 11 Dec 44). Everything was now ready for the advance to the Vecchio.

146. At 0630 hours, 11 Dec, R. 22e R. began moving forward on a two company front supported by M.M.G., mortar, and artillery fire, on pre-arranged targets. In spite of determined enemy opposition the battalion made progress taking a number of prisoners each time the enemy yielded ground. "B" Coy, on the right, at 1013 hours had passed through Borg di' Stecch and were thus only 1000 yards short of the brigade's final objective on the Fosso Vecchio. On the left, however, enemy resistance had stiffened and, despite assistance from the artillery in knocking out M.G. posts and anti-tank guns, the pace of the advance had slowed. At 1440 hours Brigadier Bernatchez issued instructions for the final phase of the brigade operation. R. 22e R. would continue on its present axis and secure the area of the Via Albergoni bridge over the Vecchio. West N.S.R. in the centre would move over the railway and push on in a south-westerly direction towards the Vecchio. At the same time 48 Highrs would extend south from the line of the railway between West N.S.R. and the Lamone. (3 Cdn Inf Bde Int Log, 11 Dec 44; W.D., West N.S.R., 11 Dec 44). Supported by artillery fire R. 22e R. resumed its advance at 1600 hours. Although it immediately came under heavy enemy artillery and small arms fire it pressed on. By 1920 hours the battalion was within 500 yards of the Vecchio with one company on the Via Albergoni and another 500 yards to the left along a track leading forward to the stream. There, in the face of very heavy fire from the banks of the Vecchio, R. 22e R. was forced to halt its advance. Artillery D.F. tasks were then arranged against possible counter attacks and the battalion ordered to dig in for the night. (W.D., R. 22e R., 11 Dec 44)

147. In less than 24 hours 3 Cdn Inf Bde had achieved almost complete success. From his strong defensive positions along the Lamone the enemy had been driven back to a much less secure line along the low lying dykes of the Fosso Vecchio.^{aa} For this success some credit was due to the Air Force which throughout the day had closely supported the attacking ground force. Meanwhile the 5 Cdn Armd Div attack had also met with success, and 11 Cdn Inf Bde had reached the Vecchio. During the afternoon 1 Cdn Inf Bde moved forward in the area between the two Brigades. With his right thus protected Brigadier Bernatchez now placed the weight of

^a At daylight on the 12th the engineers had two Class 9 bridges operating in the bridgehead one at 415351 and the other at 425363 (History of Royal Canadian Engineers, Pt. III, p. 6)

^{aa} The Fosso Vecchio has slight dykes - 4 foot - although the ditch itself is 30 foot deep and 50 foot wide at the top of banks. (Italy Topographical Notes, p. 30)

his Brigade on his left flank and, during the night 11/12 Dec, directed West N.S.R. south to secure the road junction on the Via Boncellino (398355), midway between the railway and the Lamone River. Encountering only light opposition West N.S.R. reached its objective at 0355 hours, on the way taking several prisoners. During the same period 48 Highrs advanced west along the river road towards the hamlet of Boncellino which it secured by 0700 hours again meeting with little resistance. These night operations of 3 Cdn Inf Bde conformed with General Foster's order at 2055 hours on 11 Dec, which assigned to 3 Cdn Inf Bde the task of protecting the left flank of 1 Cdn Inf Bde while the latter prepared to carry the divisional attack across the Naviglio. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 11 Dec 44 and 3 Cdn Inf Bde Int Log, 11-12 Dec 44; W.D., West N.S.R., 12 Dec 44; W.D., 48 Highrs, 12 Dec 44)

148. By midday on 11 Dec plans were being made at H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div for Phase II of the divisional attack. Brigadier Smith conferred with General Foster during the morning and 1 Cdn Inf Bde began at once to prepare for its attack on the right of 3 Cdn Inf Bde. For this purpose Carlt & York R. passed to command 1 Cdn Inf Bde at 1200 hours. Brigadier Smith intended to face up to the Vecchio on a two battalion front, Hast & P.E.R. right and R.C.R. left, between the Via di Traversara and the Via Albergoni, then, using R.C.R., establish a bridgehead in the area midway between the two roads. ((H.S.) 234Cl.013(D10): The Royal Canadian Regiment Report on Operations, December 1944 and The Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment Report on Operations, December 1944). While 1 Cdn Inf Bde was assembling for this advance, both 3 Cdn Inf Bde and 11 Cdn Inf Bde were nearing the Vecchio, and Partisans had reported Traversara (4237) clear of enemy (*ibid*). By mid-afternoon both R.C.R. and Hast & P.E.R. were moving forward. As the former neared the Vecchio they encountered enemy fire and held up to await the arrival of their anti-tank guns. Hast & P.E.R. also met with little opposition until they reached the Vecchio. There they came under M.G. fire and suffered several casualties. Patrols to the Vecchio from both battalions after dark reported 15-30 foot dykes with depth of water three feet. Hast & P.E.R. also made contact with Ir R.C. on its right. (*Ibid*; R.C.R. Report, *op cit*; Hast & P.E.R. Report, *op cit*; W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 11 Dec 44)

149. During the night 11/12 Dec 1 Cdn Inf Bde crossed the Vecchio on both battalion fronts. Apparently the enemy had already withdrawn in this sector, for although both units came under heavy mortar and shell fire they experienced little close contact with the enemy. Shortly after it crossed the Vecchio Hast & P.E.R. contacted Ir R.C. of 11 Cdn Inf Bde on the right. At 0830 hours leading elements of both these units reached the near bank of the Canale Naviglio (at 408399) about 2,200 yards north of Bagnacavallo. Anti-tank guns were brought up, and the balance of Hast & P.E.R. took up a defensive position behind the leading company. R.C.R. dug in on its left flank 500 yards short of the canal, and due east of the town (at 408392) having made no contact with the enemy. (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 12 Dec 44; W.D., R.C.R., 12 Dec 44; 1 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 12 Dec 44; R.C.R. Report; Hast & P.E.R. Report)

150. By midday on 12 Dec it was apparent that the enemy had withdrawn his main forces to the line of the Canale Naviglio along that part of the Corps front extending from Bagnacavallo north to Route 16 (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps December 1944: Appx 50, Ops Summary No. 50). On the 12th a new enemy unit, Field Marshal Kesselring's Machine Gun Battalion, made its appearance opposite 1 Cdn Corps. This battalion, believed to be heavily equipped with automatic weapons, consisted of four companies. Of these, three, each with an estimated strength of 100-110 men, were on the Naviglio in the area of the impending Canadian attacks. ((H.S.)244C5.023 (D1): 5 Cdn Armd Div Intelligence Summary No. 84, 13 Dec 44). Originally organized in the North of Italy as a bodyguard for the Field Marshal it was instead sent to the 1 Cdn Corps front with the order "Hold to the last man and last round" (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, December 1944: Appx 51, Int Summary No. 178). In addition, as a result of the counter-attack against 5 Cdn Armd Div on 11 Dec (see para 177), it was known that 190 Recce Bn of 90 Pz Gr Div, equipped with Tiger tanks, was on the Corps front (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, December 1944: Appx 27, Int Summary No. 105).

151. Although its two forward units were in position by daybreak and Carlt & York R. had moved up behind them by midday, 1 Cdn Inf Div's assault across the Naviglio did not take place during the daylight hours of 12 Dec. (W.D., Carlt & York R., 12 Dec 44). The lack of supporting armour on 1 Cdn Inf Div front coupled with the known presence of enemy armour was an important factor in causing this delay. Although 5 Cdn Armd Div had tanks in its bridgehead early in the morning of the 12th, the engineers did not complete a heavy bridge in 1 Cdn Inf Div sector until midnight 13/14 Dec. (History of Royal Canadian Engineers, Part III, p. 6). 51 Bty 1st A. Tk Regt, however, had their guns up with the 1 Cdn Inf Bde units and were available to support the assault. (W.D., 1 A. Tk Regt R.C.A., 12 Dec 44)

152. The task of making the initial attack over the Naviglio was assigned to Carlt & York R. which was ordered to cross the canal through Hast & P.E.R. on the night of 12 Dec.^{*} As the enemy were dug in on both sides of the dyke, a close reconnaissance was impossible but according to civilian reports the canal was dry, the enemy having stopped the water to provide a better water obstacle at Faenza.^{**} (1 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 12 Dec). As a precautionary measure, however, a supply of Olafson bridging material was made available. A limited bridgehead was to be established by Carlt & York R. after which Hast & P.E.R. would cross and expand the right flank while the former would extend to the left. Artillery support would include a ten minute medium and field gun

* The crossing site was near a demolished bridge at 408398.

** The Naviglio has ceased to be a canal. From Bagnacavallo north it is now a weed-filled ditch - and bridges have been replaced by fills. Locals say there has been no water in the canal since the Germans dammed it below Faenza. (Italy-Topographical Notes, p. 30)

concentration on both sides of the Canal bank, after which the mediums would lift and the field guns would provide a creeping barrage for the infantry. One squadron of 5 Cdn Armd Div tanks would be available to 1 Cdn Inf Bde at daylight 13 Dec (*ibid*). With preparations complete Carlt & York R. moved up behind Hast & P.E.R. and at 2200 hours went into the attack. (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 12 Dec 44; W.D., Carlt & York R., 12 Dec 44; Account by Lt-Col J.A. Ensor, D.S.O., O.C. Carlt & York R., 12-13 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. R.C.A. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 12 Dec 44)

153. Artillery again played a very important part in establishing the bridgehead over the Naviglio. The canal, as previously reported, was dry and proved a negligible obstacle to the advance. Carlt & York R.'s two leading companies crossing close behind the barrage, and against what the battalion's C.O. called light opposition, soon overcame the enemy defences. From the dykes and nearby houses the battalion took 45 prisoners. By midnight with two companies across the canal in control of the west bank for several hundred yards on either side of the crossing site, Lt-Col J.A. Ensor, D.S.O., A.B.E., commanding Carlt & York R., was ready to start extending his flank of the bridgehead south towards Bagnacavallo. In succession he now passed his third and fourth companies across the Naviglio. The former reached the secondary road running from the dyke 700 yards south of the bridging site where they were cut off by some enemy who came in between them and the canal. Although shortly after the fourth sub-unit came forward to this road neither company was able to make any further headway and both began to dig in. Between 0300 hours and first light sounds of enemy troop and vehicle movements were heard on all sides of the bridgehead. (Account by Lt-Col J.A. Ensor; W.D., Carlt & York R., 12 - 13 Dec 44; (H.S.) 28101.013(D10): The Carlt & York R. Account of Operations in Italy, 1 Dec - 23 Dec 44)

154. Meanwhile shortly after midnight Hast & P.E.R. followed Carlt & York R. into the bridgehead. Meeting only light opposition they made gains of several hundred yards on the right flank. By 0415 hours the Brigade held a bridgehead some 1100 yards in width and in depth extending to the lateral road 700 yards west of the canal-bank where Hast & P.E.R. was then engaged in a fire fight with several M.G. posts.* (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 12 Dec 44). Behind Hast & P.E.R. four anti-tank guns of 51 Bty 1 A. Tk Regt R.C.A. were moved over the canal (W.D., 1 A. Tk Regt R.C.A., 13 Dec 44). At 0300 hours divisional Intelligence warned H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde of a "Possible counter attack by 190 Recce Regt may be with Tks from north" (1 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 13 Dec).

155. Previous to the receipt of this advice, Brigadier Smith had taken steps to strengthen his bridgehead and at midnight had ordered two companies of R.G.R. to move forward to the Canal opposite the left flank of Carlt & York R. Now he asked Divisional Headquarters to arrange for an armed reconnaissance (air) to operate from first light

* Hast & P.E.R. locations as reported to Brigade Headquarters at that time were "H.Q. 403392 - Coys at 407405, 408400, 410403, other sub-unit engaged in SA fight with several M.G. posts at 403404" (1 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 13 Dec)

over the area between the Senio and the Naviglio and north-east of the Bagnacavallo - Lugo railway. (1 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 13 Dec). At the same time he instructed Hast & P.E.R. and Carlt & York R. to remain within limits of their bridgehead (*ibid*); - no doubt to await the arrival of 9 Cdn Armd Regt tanks. Meanwhile the divisional plan was changed. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, instead of attacking on the left flank of the division where enemy resistance had increased, was instructed to prepare to pass through 1 Cdn Inf Bde's bridgehead. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 12 Dec 44)

156. At daybreak 13 Dec the expected counter attack was launched by enemy infantry on both flanks of the bridgehead. During the last hours of darkness the attacking force had closed in apparently using the dykes as cover for their advance and no doubt intending to cut off our infantry which had penetrated to a depth of several hundred yards. The force of the blow fell on the right flank where the enemy attacked supported by tanks. Artillery D.F. was brought down which dispersed the infantry for a time but did not affect the tanks. Within a short time, however, the enemy reformed his ranks and commenced a fresh round of attacks. This time he managed to penetrate between Hast & P.E.R. and Carlt & York R. where our artillery was less effective. 51 A. Tk Bty engaged two tanks and knocked one out, but the German infantry succeeded in surrounding "B" Coy Hast & P.E.R. and, at 0915 hours, overran it taking most of the company, including its commander, prisoner. After it became apparent that "B" Coy Hast & P.E.R. was cut off, the commanding officer of that unit ordered his remaining companies to drop back to the river line under cover of artillery fire and smoke. By 1005 hours this battalion had withdrawn behind the canal dykes. In the meantime, however, Carlt & York R. with artillery support had managed to beat off the attack with heavy losses to the enemy. (1 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 13 Dec; W.D., Carlt & York R., 13 Dec 44; W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 13 Dec 44; Account by Lt-Col J.A. Ensor)

157. There was now a lull in the fighting on Carlt & York R. front and ammunition was sent forward to the companies. Shortly after 1000 hours, however, following a heavy enemy barrage three tanks appeared at the north end of the secondary road on which lay Carlt & York R. left flank positions. These tanks, one of which was a Tiger, engaged "A" Coy and forced it to retire to the dyke. They then turned on "D" Coy and engaging the house occupied by Coy H.Q. brought it down on their heads forcing them to evacuate. Although now back to the dykes, Carlt & York R. with the help of heavy artillery D.F. managed to hang on. (W.D., Carlt & York R., 13 Dec 44). Meanwhile the squadron of tanks that had been assigned to assist the infantry in the bridgehead had been held up while the bridge over the Vecchio on the Via di Traversera was being completed. Difficulties in getting the bridging material forward and shell and mortar fire during the construction stage were the cause of the delay. Finally at 1030 hours, just as Carlt & York R. were being forced back to the Canal, the bridge was completed, and "A" Sqn B.C.D. moved up to the Naviglio. (W.D., 1 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E., 13 Dec 44; W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.), 13 Dec 44)

158. With B.C.D. armour still east of the Naviglio, however, the situation of Carlt & York R. continued to be extremely precarious. At 1248 hours "D" Coy reported that the enemy tanks, two Panthers and a Tiger, previously observed at the north end of the secondary road were now moving

down towards the dyke. Under the direction of Capt. D.E. Smith, M.C., O.C. "C" Coy, a 6-pr anti-tank gun, with a mixed gun crew of Carlt & York R. and 51 A. Tk Bty, was towed by a jeep into "D" Coy's position where it engaged the leading Panther. As the gun was being positioned enemy infantry moved in across the fields towards the canal. While the companies along the dykes and the artillery engaged the advancing infantry, the anti-tank gun knocked out the Panther. At that moment the first Sherman entered the bridgehead, and again the enemy was driven off. (Account by Lt-Col J.A. Ensor, D.S.O.; W.D., Carlt & York R., 13 Dec 44; W.D., 1 A. Tk Regt R.C.A., 13 Dec 44). Shortly after Hast & P.E.R. were also counter attacked by tanks but artillery D.F. prevented any further penetration on that flank (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 13 Dec 44).

159. With the entry of B.C.D. into the bridgehead the situation was somewhat relieved but both Carlt & York R. and Hast & P.E.R. were by this time unable to muster sufficient strength to regain the lost ground. During the day the two battalions had repulsed in all 13 counter attacks, the combined effort of 190 Recce Regt and Kesselring's M.G. Bn. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, December 1944: Appx 39, Int Summary 107; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Dec 44). The brunt of the enemy attacks had been against the left flank where his armour had a direct approach down the short road to the dyke. Only the fierce resistance put up by Carlt & York R. kept the German from reaching the canal fording place. Later, from the narrow lodgment retained by the New Brunswick unit, 1 Cdn Inf Div launched its attack to regain the original bridgehead. From the Army Commander, Lt-Gen R.L. McCreery, next day came the following congratulations to both battalion commanders:

My best congratulations on the splendid achievement of your Bn in capturing and holding a bridgehead over the CANALE NAVIGLIO against repeated infantry and tank counter attacks. Great gallantry, endurance and determination by all ranks won this important success. The fierceness of the enemy's resistance clearly shows the importance of this ground to the enemy. Well done indeed.

(W.D., Carlt & York R., December 1944: Appx 18;
W.D., Hast & P.E.R., December 1944: Appx 5)

160. Immediate action was taken at H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div when word was received that 1 Cdn Inf Bde had been forced back to the canal dyke. Gen Foster placed L. Edmn R. under command of 1 Inf Bde at 1100 hours, and this battalion was ordered to enter and regain the original bridgehead. (1 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 13 Dec 44). Upon the completion of L. Edmn R. task 2 Cdn Inf Bde would then take over from 1 Cdn Inf Bde and continue the advance (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Dec 44). The whole of B.C.D. would be available in support. By midday plans were completed at H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde for the L. Edmn R. attack which was set for 1600 hours with "C" Sqn B.C.D. in support. The enemy was now putting up fierce opposition all along the Canadian Corps front. On the right 12 Cdn Inf Bde had been driven back across the Naviglio while 3 Cdn Inf Bde, in front of Bagnacavallo, had identified a new formation, 98 Inf Div, on its front. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, December 1944: Appx 57, Int Summary 179)

161. With the aid of artillery, mortar, and M.M.G. fire, the Edmontons got away to a good start. Smoke was used to help conceal the movement of the tanks. Within half an hour the company on the left reached the area of the junction at the north end of the secondary road (40C398), but without close tank support as B.C.D. was unable to get around the Panther knocked out earlier by Carlt & York R. Eventually, however, the tanks by-passed the obstacle and joined the infantry at the road junction. On the right the Edmontons met stiff opposition from infantry and an S.P. gun holding some houses on the dyke road 300 yards below the bridging site. One of the B.C.D. tanks was knocked out by the S.P. gun, but the western infantry outflanked the houses and after a six hour fight drove off the enemy and secured the position. In the centre of the bridgehead L. Edmn R. advanced to the lateral road west of the canal by 1915 hours, taking 19 prisoners in the process. By midnight the original bridgehead had been regained and consolidated with two squadrons ("A" and "C") of B.C.D. in the area. The C.O., L. Edmn R., reported "Support from tanks, M.M.G., mortars and artillery was excellent". ((H.S.) 145.2E2011(D1) Consolidation of 1 Cdn Inf Bde Bridgehead over the Naviglio Canal by Lt-Col J.R. Stone; W.D., L. Edmn R., 13 Dec 44; W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.), 13 Dec 44)

162. At 2100 hours, 13 Dec, L. Edmn R. returned to under command H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde. Brigadier Bogert had now completed his plans to take over the bridgehead, and had moved Seaforth of C. up to the Naviglio. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Dec 44). By midnight the latter unit was moving across the canal through L. Edmn R. Enemy artillery fire in the area of the crossing was the only form of opposition encountered, and by 0600 hours on 14 Dec the two leading companies were in position along the road 200 yards west of the road junction on the left flank secured earlier by L. Edmn R. (see para above). There they anxiously awaited the armour which was due to join them at first light. For enemy tanks were still in the vicinity scouting through the vines for a convenient shot. At daybreak L. Edmn R. and Seaforth of C. were holding a firm bridgehead, in approximately the same positions as those occupied by Hast & P.E.R. and Carlt & York R. 24 hours before. This time, however, the infantry had two squadrons of tanks as well as anti-tank guns with them, and in addition one company of the Edmontons was lying in reserve behind the dyke. A hot reception would now meet any counter attack the enemy might launch. (W.D., Seaforth of C., 14 Dec 44: Appx A, Op Report; W.D., L. Edmn R., 14 Dec 44; W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.), 14 Dec 44; W.D., 1 A. Tk Regt R.C.A., 13-14 Dec 44)

163. But the enemy launched no counter attacks during the morning, although his tanks continued to lurk about the bridgehead. All our anti-tank resources including armour, medium artillery, and anti-tank guns, were used to good effect. One 6-pr of 57 A. Tk Bty scored a hit on a Tiger, but it made good its escape. Although 2 Cdn Inf Bde made no attempts to move forward during the morning, at 1000 hours Westar R. accompanied by one squadron of Ld S.H. passed through L. Edmn R. and proceeded north to clear the west bank of the canal on 5 Cdn Armd Div front (see para 188). By this time, Carlt & York R. and Hast & P.E.R. had been withdrawn into reserve. Generals Foulkes and Foster visited Brigadier Bogert's Headquarters during the morning and discussed the situation with him. Following this meeting the

latter made plans to push out his right flank behind Westmr R., advance for about 800 yards, send the Seaforths forward slightly, and bring P.P.C.L.I. into the bridgehead to expand it to the west. Before he could put his plan into execution, however, the enemy made a fresh move. Shortly after midday the forward companies of both battalions came under very heavy artillery fire, and soon after enemy tanks were heard moving in from the north. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 14 Dec 44)

164. At 1330 hours the enemy launched a strong attack on L. Edmn R. and at the same time commenced to move in on the Seaforths from the south. Under a heavy artillery concentration covering the whole bridgehead, four enemy tanks with strong supporting infantry began moving down on the Edmontons right flank in the area of the dyke road. The ensuing action lasted for two hours but the Edmontons with strong support from the mortars, M.M.Gs., and, eventually, artillery from both divisions, held firm, and the enemy finally withdrew. It was an expensive success for L. Edmn R. which suffered some 28 casualties, but according to prisoners, who said their reserve company in particular was badly knocked about by our artillery D.F., an equally costly failure for the enemy. Meanwhile, the Seaforths had driven off similar, but less determined, attacks. There a single Tiger tank supporting the German infantry reached within 60 yards of a Seaforth position. Although the tanks and anti-tank guns were unable to get a shot at it, the infantry got one PIAT bomb hit, and a rifleman shot the tank commander. The tank then withdrew. By 1550 hours the enemy seemed to have had enough, and withdrew out of range. A number of prisoners were captured all being from 98 Inf Div which was now moving in on both sides of Bagnacavallo. During the attack our air force gave very close support to both battalions. (W.D., L. Edmn R., 14 Dec; W.D., Seaforth of C., 14 Dec 44 and Appx A, Report on Ops)

165. With the cessation of the counter attacks, Brigadier Bogert put into motion his plan to expand the bridgehead. At 1630 hours the Patricias moved through the Seaforths and began advancing south along the dyke road, and the next lateral road to the west, and by 2015 hours were within 800 yards of Bagnacavallo.^{*} By 0230 hours they had taken an enemy post on the lateral road 200 yards farther south, and on the left cleared an additional several hundred yards of the west bank. This advance netted the Patricias the five-man crew of a Panther tank and 11 enemy infantry as prisoners. (W.D., G.S. Branch, H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, December 1944: Appx 138, Midday Sitrep, 15 Dec 44; W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 14 and 15 Dec 44). On the right flank, meanwhile, L. Edmn R., taking advantage of the gains made by the Westminsters, considerably improved their positions. (W.D., L. Edmn R., 15 Dec 44). At this time the bridgehead was several hundred yards in depth and extended from near the outskirts of Bagnacavallo north-east for nearly two miles.

* "A" Coy right at 395394 and "B" Coy left at 397390. (W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 14 Dec 44)

166. Brigadier Bogert now began planning for a general advance by all three battalions. Enemy activity, however, during the daylight hours of 15 Dec was sufficient to delay the plan until late in the afternoon. At 0830 hours three enemy tanks were reported moving in on L. Edmn R. A heavy stonk was laid on the approach area and the attack repulsed with one Panther disabled on one of our protective mines laid by the pioneers.* The infantry then attacked the disabled tank with PIATs, killed the crew and captured its commander. Although the hostile armour continued to lurk about on the brigade front during the rest of the day, keeping the units of the brigade in a state of tension, there were no further attacks.** During the morning P.P.C.L.I. lost four men, and an officer, in a clash between one of their patrols and an enemy post at a road junction north of Bagnacavallo. Late that afternoon Brigadier Bogert ordered all three battalions forward to secure a very limited expansion of the bridgehead. The Seaforths were to make the first move followed by L. Edmn R. at 2000 hours and finally P.P.C.L.I. before daylight on 16 Dec. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 15 Dec 44; W.D., L. Edmn R., 15 Dec 44; Consolidation of 1 Cdn Inf Bde Bridgehead op cit; W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 15 Dec 44; W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.), 15 Dec 44; W.D., Seaforth of C., 15 Dec 44)

167. Seaforth of C. objectives lay on the lateral road, lo Stradello, at the crossroads (393399) a mile north of Bagnacavallo, and at Casa Zaboni (394403) a building 500 yards farther north on the same road. At nightfall the two forward Seaforth sub-units made an uneventful advance to these objectives, while to their rear the remaining two companies took over the positions they had just vacated. The supporting tanks were unable to reach the right forward company, but anti-tank guns were, however, brought up, and mines laid covering the road approach to the company's position. (W.D., Seaforth of C., 15 Dec 44 and Appx A, Report on Ops). In between Seaforth of C. and Westmr R. left flank (see para 195), L. Edmn R. attempting to reach the road junction at 403408 experienced some opposition. Finally a company attack including tanks and with light artillery and mortar support was arranged. Although its

* Of the laying of these mines, the War Diary of H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde states:

Another outstanding feature of the operation has been the use of British Mk V A Tk mines. This is the first time that the infantry of 2 Cdn Inf Bde have laid the mines during battle and without sapper help. The experiment has been most successful.

(W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 17 Dec 44)

** The War Diary of B.C.D. on this date (15 Dec 44) makes the following comparison between the German and the Allied tanks:

His armour is definitely superior in cross-country performance and his tanks are able to move about almost at will whereas ours, although greatly superior in numbers, are very largely road-bound.

(W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.), 15 Dec 44)

supporting tanks were unable to get forward due to a knocked-out enemy tank obstructing the road, the Edmontons successfully rushed the position, capturing several prisoners. The enemy continued to be very active in the vicinity but by midnight the tanks and a Wasp flamethrower had joined the Edmontons, and the latter had firmly consolidated the area. (W.D., L. Edmn R., 15 Dec 44; Consolidation of 1 Cdn Inf Bde Bridgehead). The final move in accordance with the Brigade Commander's plan took place in the early hours of the 16th. At 0500 hours in a short and very successful action P.P.C.L.I. seized and occupied a number of buildings (392395) lying about 500 yards due south of the cross roads on lo Stradello. In this attack the Patricias suffered no casualties against the enemy's five killed and 23 prisoners. (W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 16 Dec 44 and Appx 44, History of "A" Company, 15-16 Dec 44)

168. Throughout the 16th the enemy armour was in evidence on the perimeter of the bridgehead but was kept at a safe distance by the guns of the medium artillery. The divisional commander had now decided to shift 2 Cdn Inf Bde to the quieter sector east of the town of Bagnacavallo held by 3 Cdn Inf Bde, and to bring the latter formation into the Naviglio bridgehead in its place. That night between 1800 hours and 0140 hours the changeover took place. Of the period spent in the Naviglio bridgehead, the report of 2 Cdn Inf Bde states "...never before has the shelling been heavier or his counter attacks stronger". ((H.S.) 234C1,013 (D10): 2 Cdn Inf Bde Report on Operations, 1 Dec 44 to 8 Jan 45)

5 CDN ARMD DIV, THE CROSSING OF THE LAMONE, AND THE ADVANCE TO THE FOSSO MUNIO, 10 - 15 DEC 44

169. It is necessary at this point to turn our attention to 5 Cdn Armd Div, and examine the manner in which that division planned, prepared, and executed, its share of the Corps offensive over and beyond the Lamone River. As will be remembered the corps plan was for simultaneous assaults by both divisions on single-brigade fronts. 5 Cdn Armd Div intended to cross the river in the vicinity of Villanova (4541) and exploit in a north-westerly direction. The divisional plan issued on 6 Dec directed that 11 Cdn Inf Bde, with under command B.C.D. and 16 Bty 4 A. Tk Regt R.C.A., would carry out the operation. In support would be 10 Fd Sqn R.C.E., 14 Fd Sqn R.C.E., Mortar Coy 12 Cdn Inf Bde Sp Gp (P.L. Fus), and the divisional artillery. Timed originally to commence at 2030 hours 6 Dec, the brigade assault would take place in silence on a two battalion front, C.B. Highrs on the right and Perth R. on the left. Crossing the river in assault boats the two units would seize a bridgehead extending, on the right to the area of Macello (460424), on the left to Borgo di Villanova (4440), and in depth to the Via Aguta, which lay parallel to, and 1000 yards beyond, the river. In the second phase, according to the divisional plan, 11 Cdn Inf Bde would:

Phase II - exploit towards FUSIGNANO
3744 via x rd 4341 rd junc 421426

towards BAGNACAVALL0 3838 via rd junc
440401 - rd junc 412393

((H.S.) 244C5.015(D3): 5 Cdn Armd Div
Operations Log, 6 Dec 44)

that is along the Via Cocchi towards Fusignano and the Via Cogollo towards Bagnacavallo. To divert the attention of the enemy from the area of the main action, two flanking brigades, 12 Cdn Inf Bde and 5 Cdn Armd Bde, would stage fire demonstrations at Borghetto di Traversara and Mezzano respectively. In addition 5 Cdn Armd Bde would relieve Ir R.C. and Perth R., and 12 Cdn Inf Bde would place one battalion on one hour's notice from 0600 hours 7 Dec to come under command 11 Cdn Inf Bde. For the river passage each unit would receive 12 assault boats and one Class 2 raft. The handling of the former would be the responsibility of the infantry, and of the latter that of 16 Battery. 200 yards upstream from the demolished bridge at Villanova, the divisional engineers planned to erect a Class 9 F.B.E., and a Class 40 raft. The estimated time of completion of these was to be 16 and 24 hours respectively after "H" hour. As the initial attack was to be a silent one there would be no artillery concentrations fired, except for certain harassing tasks along the line of the Fosso Vetro. If surprise were lost, the codeword "BEDLAM" would be passed, and the artillery and mortars would open up on pre-arranged targets along the perimeter of the proposed bridgehead. In brigade reserve Ir R.C. and B.C.D. would be prepared to pass through either Perth R. or C.B. Highrs. ((H.S.) 244C5.013(D4): History of Operations 5 Cdn Armd Div, 2 Dec 44 to 12 Jan 45, Part II; W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, December 1944: Appx 5, 11 Cdn Inf Bde Op Order No. 10, 6 Dec 44)

170. Between the Lamone and the Senio Rivers, the country has much the same physical characteristics as that covered previously by 5 Cdn Armd Div in its operations at the beginning of the month (see para 81), except that the water courses west of the Lamone are dyked and embanked and would be more difficult to cross. Within the space of one mile four of these, Fosso Vetro, Fosso Vecchio, Canale Naviglio, and the Fosso Munio, ran across the divisional front. Due to the height of the embankments, especially in the case of the Canale Naviglio, and the seasonal lack of cover, the enemy had a commanding view of the ground on this sector. West of the Naviglio cover was more plentiful. Although east-west roads to the Senio were not plentiful in the 5 Cdn Armd Div zone of operations, lateral communications were somewhat better, some four routes running in a north-easterly direction across the front to link up with the Via Reale (Route 16). Since the enemy would undoubtedly endeavour to demolish the bridges carrying the forward routes over the several water barriers engineering tasks would be heavy. ((H.S.) 244C5.013(D4): Report on Operations 12 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 to 21 Dec 44)

171. Intelligence reports, at this time, named 114 Jaeger Division as the formation opposing 5 Cdn Armd Div, with 741 Jaeger Regt holding the sector from south of Route 16 to Borghetto di Traversara. Prior to the attack the intelligence staff at Headquarters 5 Cdn Armd Div gave the following as the probable disposition of this regiment:

South of Highway 16 no further PW have been taken and can only assume that 741 has taken up posns in a like manner to its MONTONE dispositions, that is with III/741 to the NORTH then I/741 and II/741 to the SOUTH. However, 11 Bn has suffered heavily in losses and could be taken out for reorganizing and reinforcing. I/721 which came quickly over several days ago to stop-gap NE of RUSSI, has not been identified since crossing the river and may well be soon destined again to rejoin its own regt.

Certainly if the weather remains bad for a few days the German will take full advantage of any quiet period to reshuffle his formations. 114 Recce is believed to be still the right-flanking bn of the Div.

((H.S.) 244C5.023(D1): 5 Cdn Armd Div
Intelligence Summary No. 78, 7 Dec 44)

The three battalions of 741 Jaeger Regt were estimated to have a total strength of between 425 and 475 men. (Ibid) 5 Cdn Armd Div Intrep No. 27, 7 Dec 44; (H.S.) 224C1.023(D11): 1 Cdn Corps Intelligence Summary No. 173, 7 Dec 44)

172. During the day, 6 Dec, 5 Cdn Armd Bde relieved Perth R. and Ir R.C. along Route 16 between Osteria and Mezzano. On the left elements of both Lan & Ren Scot R. and Westmr R. were up to the Lamone opposite Borghetto di Traversara. In the morning Brigadier I.S. Johnston, Commander 11 Cdn Inf Bde, held an orders group at which he briefed his unit commanders and the representatives of the supporting arms. However, late that afternoon, as noted earlier in this report (para 133) the operation was postponed; in the event for several days. In the intervening period 5 Cdn Armd Div activity along the river was limited to reconnaissance and fighting patrols. During the night 5/6 Dec patrols of C.B. Highrs submitted the following reports on the Borgo di Villanova and Villanova sites respectively:

- (1) Recce patrol 1 offr 2 Ors plus covering party of 6 to river at 448408. Heard half track vehicles moving into Borgo Villanova and along road on opposite bank of river. Height of river bank 35-40 ft. Work parties heard along river bank. Width of river approx 50 ft, depth over 6 ft. Current slow drift. Reported as inf obstacle - A. Tk guns could not be man-handled across.
- (2) Same composition as above, to river at 453415. Report voices from opposite bank and mov vicinity demolished bridge. Height of river bank 20 - 25 ft, width 70 ft. A Tk guns cannot be manhandled across at this point.

(5 Cdn Armd Div, Operations Log,
6 Dec 44)

R.C.E. patrols to the Lamone the same night reported the width of the river as 40 - 60 ft, with dyke approaches 15 foot high followed by a sharp drop to the river bed (ibid). Patrols of Perth R., which unit was now in position on the left of C.B. Highrs east of the hamlet of Santerno (4540), made similar findings. During the night 9/10 Dec C.B. Highrs evacuated a number of civilians, who had been living in caves along the river bank, to a safer area. Early in the morning of 10 Dec the Divisional Commander visited Headquarters 11 Cdn Inf Bde where he had a final discussion with Brigadier I.S. Johnston on the operation which was now set to take place at 1930 hours that night. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report on cit; W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 6-10 Dec 44, and Appx 10: 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 10 Dec)

173. Shortly before "H" hour on 10 Dec the guns and mortars of 5 Cdn Armd Bde and 12 Cdn Inf Bde began hammering the enemy positions on their respective fronts (see para 129 for description of the 5 Cdn Armd Bde demonstration). Midway between the two in the comparatively quiet Villanova sector infantry of C.B. Highrs and Perth R. began moving forward to their respective crossing places. At the appointed time the first boats slipped silently into the water, and the operation began. Although the leading sub-units of both battalions completed the passage of the river without difficulty, Perth R. reporting complete surprise, C.B. Highrs very quickly reported that surprise had been lost. At 1952 hours Headquarters 11 Cdn Inf Bde received the signal "BEDLAM" from this unit, and, as a result, the full weight of the divisional artillery began coming down on the perimeter of the bridgehead. Before the enemy in Villanova had time to get properly organized, however, C.B. Highrs were in the midst of his defences. By 2140 hours the village and some 43 prisoners of war were in their hands. During the next hour the Highlanders pushed through Villanova and along the Via Chiesa towards its junction (447423) with the lateral Via Aguta. Advancing at a steady rate, clearing small groups of the enemy from the houses on either side of the road as they went, the company made good progress, and at 0030 hours reported that it was on the objective. Enemy S.P.s. firing from the Via Aguta withdrew to the north as C.B. Highrs reached the road. These continued to be a source of trouble, however, so the Highlanders despatched their tank hunting platoon to hold the road junction 500 yards to the north on the Via Aguta. At 0200 hours C.B. Highrs elements on the right reached a point midway between Macello and Villanova on the road skirting the west bank of the Lamone and shortly after the unit reported all initial objectives secured. During the night Headquarters 11 Cdn Inf Bde directed Westmr R., now under its command, to cross the Lamone at 0600 hours and take over the positions then occupied by C.B. Highrs. By 0900 hours this relief was complete and the latter unit withdrawn for a rest to Borgo di Villanova. (5 Cdn Armd Div History Part II; (H.S.) 145.205013(D1): Operation of C.B. Highrs for period 2 Dec to 27 Dec 44; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 10-11 Dec; (H.S.) 244C5.015(D3); 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 11 Dec; W.D., Westmr R., 11 Dec 44)

174. As already mentioned, in Perth R. sector the initial assault achieved almost complete surprise. By 2035 hours the unit had one company on the river road (448413) 500 yards north of the village of Borgo di Villanova, while a second which had passed through the village was advancing up the Via Cocchi towards the Via Aguta crossroads. In succession the remaining two companies of Perth R. then moved into the bridgehead, the first into Borgo di Villanova to mop up enemy parties by-passed in the original assault, the second to push across country to cut the Via Aguta (at 443417) midway between the Via Cocchi and the Via Chiesa. This latter objective was reached without serious opposition by 0200 hours 11 Dec. On the left the leading company, in the vicinity of some houses on the Via Cocchi (at 440412), was still 400 yards from the crossroads, and under heavy enemy fire from the line of the Via Aguta. The Perths continued to make progress, however, until 0335 hours when they were within 100 yards of the crossroads. There despite several attempts to get forward, increasing opposition brought the advance to a halt. ((H.S.)145.2P1011(D2): Operations of the Perth R. for Period 2 Dec to 27 Dec 44; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 10-11 Dec; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 11 Dec)

175. In the meantime Brigadier Johnston had committed his third battalion on the left of the bridgehead. At 2315 hours he placed Ir R.C. on one hour's notice to move, and shortly after issued final instructions to the Irish commander, Lt-Col R.C. Clark. Colonel Clark's battalion was to cross the Lamone at Borgo di Villanova, and thrust south along the river road towards its junction with the Via Cogollo (440401) then, with the Via Cogollo as the unit axis, exploit south-west towards Bagnacavallo. At the same time Perth R., with its rear and left flank covered by the move of Ir R.C., would make a strong effort to reach the crossing of the Via Cocchi over the Canale Naviglio. The Irish began crossing the Lamone at 0200 hours, and by 0535 hours its leading sub-units on the river road were within 200 yards of the Via Cogollo. There was some fighting at the road junction but by 0615 hours the Irish had consolidated this objective and taken nine prisoners. Without pausing the battalion continued its advance moving now along the Via Cogollo. By 0805 hours after a sharp action, which cost the enemy 10 killed and 20 prisoners, the Irish reached and captured intact the Via Cogollo bridge over the Fosso Vetro (428398). Shortly after a second sub-unit arrived at the Vetro 300 yards to the north of the main axis in time to gain possession of a second undamaged bridge (427402). About this time the enemy put in two small counterattacks against Ir R.C., one in the area of the Fosso Vetro the other at the northern end of the Via Cogollo. Both attacks were repulsed and a further ten prisoners taken. At 0900 hours the 11 Cdn Inf Bde unit crossed the Vetro, and at 1335 hours, under a hail of small arms and S.P. gun fire, reached the demolished bridge over the Fosso Vecchio. At this point Ir R.C. halted and consolidated its gains in preparation for a further advance. Since it crossed the Lamone that morning the unit had advanced some 3,000 yards, in the course of which it had done considerable fighting, taken 50 prisoners, and inflicted at least that many casualties on the enemy. (W.D., Ir R.C., 11 Dec 44; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 10-11 Dec 44; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 11 Dec)

176. By this time Perth R. had secured the last of its initial objectives. During the morning an enemy tank and an S.P. kept the unit under fire until they were finally driven off by a heavy artillery concentration. Later that morning Lt-Col M.W. Andrews, commanding officer Perth R., came forward and after a rapid appreciation of the situation decided to make another attempt to seize the crossroads using two companies supported by artillery. At 1200 hours, this attack supported by mortars and small arms fire went in. By 1425 hours, having met only moderate enemy resistance, the Perths had consolidated on the objective, and taken five of the enemy prisoner. Towards evening supplies came up, and the troops received a hot meal. (W.D., Perth R., 11 Dec 44; Operations Perth R., op cit; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 11 Dec)

177. Commencing that morning and continuing into the late afternoon the enemy made a series of strong but ineffective attempts to break through Westmr R. and roll up the bridgehead from the right flank. The first of these attacks developed at 1000 hours when his infantry supported by 15-20 tanks and S.P. guns* came in on the Westminster's

* According to intelligence sources the enemy unit involved was 190 Recce Bn of 90 Pz Gr Div (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, December 1944: Appx 27, Int Summary No. 105)

positions from the direction of Route 16 down the two lateral roads paralleling the Lamone. Although supporting aircraft early appeared over the fighting zone, due to the closeness of the action, their activities were restricted to strafing attacks on the hostile armour. At the cessation of the attacks four enemy tanks remained on the field, victims of the Westminster's PIATs. Before the end of the day the enemy made two further attempts to break through the Canadian defences. At 1500 hours field and medium artillery fire broke up the first of these before it could get under way. Five hours later the infantry repulsed the second, and last, attack. Unfortunately, in spite of the intensity of the artillery fire directed against him, the enemy managed to recover the four tanks damaged in the first engagements. Several Littlejohns were available in the bridgehead by early morning, and at least two of these were with the forward troops of Westmr R. (W.D., Westmr R. (Mot), 11 Dec 44; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 11 Dec 44; (H.S.) 24405.023(D1); 5 Cdn Armd Div Int Summary, No. 83, 12 Dec 44). An entry in the regimental history of 4 A.Tk. Regt, R.C.A., however, describes these as probably having more effect on the morale than on the tanks of the enemy:

Daylight found four "Littlejohn" equipments in position in the bridgehead. An enemy counter-attack directed at the right flank of the bridgehead and supported by "Tiger" and "Panther" tanks, was successfully repulsed, more by virtue of the presence of high velocity weapons in the area than by the effectiveness of the 2 pounders which gun was soon to be abandoned.

((H.S.)142.7A4003(D1): History of 4 Canadian Anti-Tank Regiment Royal Canadian Artillery 1940-1945)

178. In accordance with the engineer plan for the assault over the Lamone River work began early on the night 10/11 Dec on the construction of two crossings, 200-300 yards upstream from the demolished bridge at Villanova. These were a Class 9 F.B.E. (at 450415) and a Class 40 Bailey Pontoon bridge (at 452415). Work on the Class 9 commenced a few minutes before midnight on 10 Dec, that on the Class 40 about 0200 hours 11 Dec. From the start hostile fire continually interrupted operations. 10 Fd Sqn, constructing the Class 9 Bridge, were unable to bulldoze on the river dyke until 0400 hours when they received an armoured bulldozer. The experience of this unit, as described in the following passage from its War Diary, was typical of the difficulties encountered by the engineers:

Enemy fire was spasmodic until daylight came when the enemy could then observe the activities on top of the dyke and throughout the entire morning, frequent heavy mortaring of the site was encountered. One stonk lasted for three quarters of an hr. Although the work was held up for short periods, Lt. Young continually rallied his men back to the job and continued work. At one stage, a sniper became quite troublesome and was effectively dealt with by a spr party. By 1400 hours mortar fire had died off considerably although the area was being shelled spasmodically but accurately. It was only Lt. Young's grim determination that work be completed and his apparent contempt for danger, that he was able to hold his men, who were by this

time very tired and considerably shaken, on the job. In spite of this shelling and occasional MG bursts from downstream, the work was pressed on, and finally completed at 1845 hours.

(W.D., 10 Fd Sqn R.C.E., 11 Dec 44)

At 1932 hours the head of a column of wireless vehicles, jeeps, and carriers, taking ammunition, rations, and anti-tank guns, forward, began moving over the Lamone on this bridge. Not until 0510 hours 12 Dec, however, when 14 Fd Coy R.C.E. completed the Class 40, were the heavier vehicles such as the tanks able to make the passage of the river. (W.D., Headquarters R.C.E., 5 Cdn Armd Div, December 1944; Appx 2, Engineer Sitreps 11-12 Dec 44; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 11 Dec 44)

179. By evening of 11 Dec Headquarters 5 Cdn Armd Div was ready to send 12 Cdn Inf Bde into the bridgehead. Orders were accordingly issued for the brigade to take over that night the right sector from inclusive the line of the Via Chiesa to north-east exclusive Route 16. Relieved of responsibility for the open right flank of the bridgehead 11 Cdn Inf Bde would press forward on the axis of the Via Cocchi and endeavour to seize crossings over the Canale Naviglio at Osteria (4242). Additionally, once the engineers had completed the Class 40 raft, 5 Cdn Armd Bde would send a squadron of tanks and two dismounted squadrons of 5 Cdn Armd Regt (8 N.B.H.) to cut the Via Reale north of Mezzano. The squadrons of B.C.D. would be assigned one to each of the two infantry brigades of 5 Cdn Armd Div and one to under command of 1 Cdn Inf Div. At 1940 hours 12 Cdn Inf Bde assumed command of its new sector. At that time two of Brigadier Johnston's battalions were already holding positions on the perimeter of the bridgehead; Westmr R., which now reverted to under his command, and P.L.D.G., which had earlier relieved C.B. Highrs in Villanova and the right-flanking company of Perth R. on the Via Aguta. By 2020 hours Lan & Ren Scot R. had crossed the Lamone and concentrated in Borgo di Villanova. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 11 Dec 44; (H.S.) 244C5.016(D1): 5 Cdn Armd Div Intentions, 11 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 11 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 12 Cdn Inf Bde, December 1944; Appx 3, 12 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 11 Dec 44; W.D., Lan & Ren Scot R., 11 Dec 44; W.D., 4 P.L.D.G., 11 Dec 44; Report on Operations 12 Cdn Inf Bde op cit)

180. During the night 11/12 Dec Ir R.C. crossed the Vecchio, and in conjunction with Hast & P.E.R. (see para 149), pushed forward to the Naviglio. In the course of the morning and afternoon Lt-Col Clark's companies attempted without success to drive out the enemy still remaining east of the Naviglio north of the line of the Via Cogollo. (W.D., Ir R.C., 12 Dec 44; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 12 Dec 44). During the night Perth R. resumed its advance up the Via Cocchi, and shortly before daybreak, reached the Fosso Vecchio. There the Perths halted and consolidated. For the enemy from positions on the high dykes of the Naviglio commanded the whole area forward of the Vecchio, and it was apparent that any further advance during the hours of day-

light would be most costly.* (Operations of Perth R. op cit; W.D., Perth R., 11-12 Dec 44; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 12 Dec 44)

181. In 12 Cdn Inf Bde sector at first light on 12 Dec Westmr R. commenced clearing the west bank of the Lamone in the direction of Mezzano. Shortly after dismounted elements of Ld S.H. crossed the river into Mezzano and finding no signs of the enemy turned south along the river road to link up with the Westminster. The latter, meanwhile, having encountered little opposition had made good progress and at 1200 hours contacted Ld S.H. at the edge of the built-up area of the town. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 12 Dec 44; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 12 Dec 44)

182. While the Westmr R. and Ld S.H. were thus engaged, 5 Cdn Armd Regt (8 N.B.H.) and P.L.D.G. had commenced operations intended to extend the right flank of the bridgehead to the north and north-east. Early that morning 8 N.B.H. crossed the Lamone and passing through Villanova moved north along the Via Aguta towards Route 16. In the latter part of the morning the Hussars reached the main highway where for a time they were under heavy artillery fire. Patrols north along the highway reported it clear of the enemy as far as the Fosso Vetro. To secure the area 8 N.B.H. now established a firm position astride the Via Reale a few hundred yards north of the Via Aguta junction and in addition put out a standing patrol near where Via al Conventello forks to the north-east. In the meantime P.L.D.G., which had commenced to move forward once the armoured regiment had passed through, had reached the Fosso Vecchio. The advance of the infantry unit took it along the Viazza Nuova, the road running from the Via Aguta over Canale Naviglio roughly midway between Via Cocchi and Route 16. P.L.D.G. met with no opposition, and at midday a patrol reached the near bank of the Naviglio where it observed enemy troops digging in on the far side. In the course of the afternoon the battalion faced up to the Fosso Vecchio with two companies, one on either side of the Viazza Nuova. Thus, last light on 12 Dec found 5 Cdn Armd Div on the general line of the Fosso Vecchio and actively patrolling forward to the Canale Naviglio along the greater part of the front which now extended from Route 16 at Mezzano to the line of the Via Cogollo. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 12 Dec 44; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 12 Dec 44; W.D., P.L.D.G., 12 Dec 44)

183. The general plan now was to assault over the Canale Naviglio during the night 12/13 Dec on a two divisional front. On the right 12 Cdn Inf Bde would put in two battalion attack over the Naviglio and firm up on the near bank of the Fosso Munio. At the same time 1 Cdn Inf Bde would cross the river and seize a bridgehead on the far side about 2000 yards north-east of Bagnacavallo. Intelligence reports

*

Between the Vetro and Vecchio, north of Via Cocchi is a bare grainfield - no vines or trees...almost a half mile square. On the south of the road is the usual pattern of small fields. The Vecchio is crossed by a 70 foot Bailey bridge. Dykes here are 8 foot high. The ditch is 15 foot deep. From its banks the much higher banks of the Naviglio are visible across open fields on both sides of the Via Cocchi.

(Italy - Topographical Notes, p. 31)

on 12 Dec indicated that the enemy recently had bolstered the strength of 114 Jaeger Division by the addition of the newly formed M.G. Bn Field Marshal Kesselring (see para 150).

184. The 12 Cdn Inf Bde plan called for Lan & Ren Scot R., on the left, and P.L.D.G., on the right, to attack over the Naviglio, using as their axis of advance the Via Cocchi and Viazza Nuova respectively. West of the canal each battalion would establish a bridgehead opposite its crossing place, facing up to the Fosso Munio; along the brigade front the distance between these two water obstacles varied from 300 yards on the right to 700 yards on the left. Once they had secured the covering position, P.L.D.G. would turn south-west, and conduct operations to clear out the enemy between the Munio and the Naviglio and link up the two bridgeheads. Lan & Ren Scot R. would secure the near bank of the Munio from (418431) roughly opposite Osteria to inclusive the Via Chiara bridge (412424), a distance of about 900 yards. In support of the operation the divisional artillery would have a series of concentrations available to the attacking units on call. Engineering problems raised by such an advance promised to be difficult and the C.R.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div informed the Divisional Commander that he "was very worried as to the success of the operation due to the fact that the sites were DF tasks of Jerry". (W.D., H.Q., R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 12 Dec 44). He stated, however, that he might have the first two obstacles passable to tanks by first light on 13 Dec, if there were no delays and no shelling. During the evening of 12 Dec Lan & Ren Scot R. moved up from Borgo di Villanova, and at 2115 hours both battalions crossed the start line on the Fosso Vecchio. (Ibid; W.D., H.Q., R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 12 Dec 44; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Report)

185. As there was only one usable crossing over the Fosso Vecchio in their sector, P.L.D.G. companies experienced a slight delay in passing the start line. Despite this, the initial attack achieved surprise, and for a time all went well. At 2225 hours the forward sub-units reached the Canale Naviglio. During the next hour, according to reports received at Battalion Headquarters P.L.D.G., both companies crossed the Naviglio. From then on, however, the situation deteriorated rapidly. Stragglers, bearing alarmist reports of the action, began to arrive at the start line. At 2305 hours one company was in position on the far side of the Naviglio, 400 yards south of the site of the Viazza Nuova bridge, with the second to the right of the bridge on the near bank. The last-mentioned company had also crossed the canal, but an enemy counter-attack forced it to withdraw leaving behind one officer and 35 men, with whom it lost all contact. Due to the lack of cover and the weight of the enemy fire, coming down all over the area, the battalion reserve was unable to move more than a few hundred yards ahead of the start line. Early on 13 Dec, at 0140 hours, Battalion Headquarters ordered all companies to withdraw to the start line. There by 0250 hours Battalion Headquarters had reformed one company and portions of two others, but the remainder were still out of touch. Of these latter one large party, consisting of an officer and 43 men, turned up at 0655 hours. A company of Westmor R. now came under command P.L.D.G. and took up a covering position on the east bank of the Fosso Vecchio. Shortly after P.L.D.G. withdrew into a concentration area south of the Fosso Vetro for rest and refitting. In this action, according to Headquarters 12 Cdn Inf Bde, P.L.D.G.

suffered 88 casualties of all types, the greater number of whom were missing believed prisoners.* ((H.S.)224C1.015(D2) 1 Cdn Corps Operations Log, 13 Dec; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 12-13 Dec 44; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 12-13 Dec 44; W.D., P.L.D.G., 12-13 Dec 44; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Report)

186. In the meantime the left arm of the 12 Cdn Inf Bde attack, although failing to reach its final objectives, had, at least, achieved partial success. During the evening of 12 Dec Lan & Ren Scot R. moved through Perth R. and at 2115 hours crossed the start line. Unit dispositions at this time were two companies forward, one in immediate rear mopping-up and the fourth in reserve ahead of, but in the vicinity of, the start line. Although enemy troops on the Naviglio kept the flat ground lying between the Vecchio and the canal under heavy small arms and mortar fire, the Lanarks made good progress and at 2220 hours the leading companies reached the near bank of the Naviglio. There, however, despite several attempts made during the hours of darkness to gain a footing on the far bank, the advance came to a halt. The situation at 0500 hours was that the Lanarks were facing the Naviglio on a 700 yard front (from 422421 to 424427) in positions astride the Via Cocchi between the canal and the ditch lying 200-300 yards to the east. Early in the morning enemy resistance began to take a more positive form and at 0740 hours counter-attacks came in on the flanks of the Lanarks position. In both cases the battalion threw off its attackers, although on the right stiff fighting continued for the better part of an hour. Although by 1100 hours the bridge over the Vetro was ready for the passage of tanks, that over the Vecchio was not opened to traffic until four hours later. From 0500 hours on, however, B.C.D. engaged targets in Osteria from fire positions along the Vetro. By mid-afternoon 13 Dec, Lan & Ren Scot R. had had casualties amounting to 31 killed and 20 wounded, while the remainder, after nearly 24 hours in an exposed position, were suffering from lack of food and rest.** Both flanks were still wide open, P.L.D.G. having withdrawn behind the Vecchio, while on the left renewed attempts of 11 Cdn Inf Bde to clear the Naviglio west bank met with little success. By last light, however, the situation had considerably improved. At that time a troop of Ld S.H., which unit had earlier relieved B.C.D., and jeeps carrying food, ammunition, and supplies, reached Lan & Ren Scot R. Due to the shortage of personnel the Lanarks now formed strong points using the remnants of three companies around two houses (423426) lying near the canal bank 150 yards north of the Via Cocchi. The reserve company remained well back near the Fosso Vecchio on the left of the centre line. In these positions, apart from shell and mortar fire, the unit spent a quiet night. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; (H.S.)244C5.013(D4): The Lanark & Renfrew Scottish Regiment Report on Operations 26 Nov 44 - 22 Dec 44; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 12-13 Dec 44; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 13 Dec; W.D., H.Q. R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 13 Dec 44; W.D., Lan & Ren Scot R., 13 Dec 44)

* War Service Records (D.V.A.) give the same total, showing 21 killed or died of wounds, 21 wounded and 46 prisoners ((H.S.)133.065 (D345): Casualties - Italian Campaign)

** Lan & Ren Scot R. casualties during the three days, 12-14 Dec were 38 killed and 73 wounded (Casualties - Italian Campaign op cit)