

knocked out and a prisoner bag of 13 officers and 1219 ORs.* But still the enemy, aided by the nature of the terrain, had retained the initiative, and on ground of his own choosing, the high and commanding dykes of the Senio River, awaited the next battle.** But before this occurred, however, much remained to be done on both flanks of the Corps. Between 1 Cdn Inf Div and 5 Corps the enemy was still up to the Naviglio and to the north he still controlled the area south of the Valli di Comacchio. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, December 1944: Appx 96, 1 Cdn Corps Int Summary No. 188)

CHRISTMAS RELIEFS - 1 CDN INF DIV, 22-25 DEC 44

258. During the ten day period between 22 Dec and the end of the year a series of reliefs gave all units of 1 Cdn Inf Div a short period of rest and an opportunity to share the Christmas rations out of range of the enemy artillery and the noise of battle. While these reliefs were in progress units on the left flank of the Division continued to press forward against heavy enemy opposition on the Cotignola front. Combined pressure on the salient between 1 Cdn Inf Div and 5 Corps succeeded in forcing the enemy from the Lamone but he continued to hold, first at the Vecchio and, later, on the Naviglio in the area of the inter-corps boundary. It was not until the first week in January that the enemy defences in this latter area were broken, and units of both Corps reached the Senio. (Summary of Ops, by Div Hist Offr, 22-31 Dec 44; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 22 Dec 44)

259. On 22 Dec, H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div was confronted with the double task of arranging relief for its tired units and of carrying on, at the same time, the operations to clear the enemy from its left flank. While the complicated schedule of reliefs was being worked out 1 Cdn Inf Bde was ordered to patrol vigorously to determine the enemy's F.D.L's. and the engineers to complete the removal of mines and open up routes for armour and other support arms. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 22 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 22 Dec 44). Both R.C.R. and Hast & P.E.R. reported the enemy on their front still holding the near bank of the Senio (W.D., R.C.R., 22 Dec 44; W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 22 Dec 44). On the left flank, where our F.D. L's followed roughly the line of the Via Madrara between the Naviglio and the Lamone, 48 Highrs and R.C.D. were also in contact with the

* Prisoners taken since the beginning of the campaign on 30 Nov totalled 14 officers and 1653 Other Ranks, and of that total 1 officer and 434 Other Ranks were taken prior to December 11th. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, December 1944, Appx 42: Int Summary No. 176)

** The onerous flood bank is 35 feet high, 150 feet from bank top to bank top. River a dirty, muddy stream. One ledge is 10 yards wide, then the banks slope straight down to river.

{Italy - Topographical Notes, p. 31}

enemy. On the right flank of the Division, where Seaforth of C. was holding the line of the Senio from 1 Cdn Inf Bde right flank north to the 5 Armd Div boundary, there was little activity on 22 Dec. With the exception of a few pockets on the near side of the river, the bulk of the enemy was licking its wounds behind the high river dykes. Patrols went out during the day, and minor clashes occurred between them and isolated enemy elements on the near side of the river. No attempt was made, however, to climb the dykes or reconnoitre the river area. (W.D., Seaforth of C., 22 Dec 44; W.D., 48 Highrs, 22 Dec 44). Nearly three miles to the south, elements of 5 Corps meeting with only light opposition, reached Pieve di Cesato (3729) during the day. Throughout the day our artillery and aircraft engaged numerous targets west of the Senio. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, December 1944: Appx 95, Ops Summary No. 60; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 22 Dec 44)(See Map 6)

260. During the night 22/23 Dec active patrolling on the Seaforth front confirmed that the enemy still held firm positions on the near side of the Senio in the area of S. Polito (360401) (W.D., Seaforth of C., 23 Dec 44). On the left flank of the division 1 Cdn Inf Bde put in a "Crocodile" attack on a group of houses near the Senio about one mile north of Cotignola. This attack, carried out by an R.C.R. platoon and one flamethrower from "C" Sqn 12 R.T.R., was the first crocodile attack in Italy.

At about midnight the crocodile moved forward, picked up the infantry platoon on the way and proceeded into the little village. The effect was stupendous; the midnight sky was lit up for miles around and the houses blazed furiously.

((H.S.)234C1.013(D22): Account of Operations
29 Nov 44 to 11 Jan 45 by 12 R.T.R.)

The infantry platoon, no doubt a bit wary, was slow in following up the attack, and the enemy (if there were any)* escaped across the river. Leaving behind a standing patrol, the remainder of the platoon withdrew from the area, then under heavy mortar fire from the enemy side of the river. (W.D., R.C.R., 22 Dec 44)

261. During the morning of 23 Dec R.C.D. attempted to establish contact with 9 R.F.** of 56 Inf Div, which was then at the inter-corps boundary on the Lamone opposite Le Tombe, but was stopped just south of the Russi - Granarolo railway bridge by strong machine gun fire. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 Dec 44; 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 23 Dec 44). At this time the pattern of enemy opposition encountered by

* No bodies, referred to as "Roasts", were found in the burnt out area. Possibly the arty fire, prior to the attack drove the enemy off before the flame thrower reached the houses. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, December 1944: Appx "A", Ops Summary, 23 Dec 44)

** 9th Battalion Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment)

R.C.D. and by patrols from 48 Highrs indicated the presence of a new "Switch Line" a short distance forward of the 1 Cdn Inf Bde F.D.Ls. (W.D., 48 Highrs, 23 Dec 44). West of the Naviglio in the course of the same day Hast & P.E.R. succeeded in extending its left flank southward to the line of the Via Madrara. (W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 23 Dec 44)

262. Meanwhile, at Divisional Headquarters, a lengthy programme of reliefs, scheduled to take place during the Christmas season, had been drawn up (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 Dec 44). The first step towards carrying out this programme took place during the morning of 23 Dec when 3 Cdn Inf Bde withdrew into reserve. Brigade Headquarters was established in a house on the outskirts of Godo but, due to the shortage of suitable accommodation, its three battalions were scattered over an area extending as much as four miles to the north and N.E. The weather was clear and cold and an occasional snow flurry gave a Christmas atmosphere to the new surroundings. To the survivors of the "Ortona Crossroads and Casa Berardi" battle this Christmas season presented a striking contrast to that of the previous year when, after hurriedly consuming their festive fare in the battle area, they had gone forward to complete the bloody Ortona job. Here, a year later, away from the noise of battle, the whole brigade entered into the Christmas festivities with the feeling that it would be their last away from home, and everything possible was done to make it a happy one. In this area the tired infantry were able to find shelter and share the fire of the Italian villagers (R. 22e R. was billeted in Piangipane, Carlt & York R. at Santerno and West N.S.R. at S. Michele), while Christmas mail and parcels brought news and bits of Christmas cheer from loved ones thousands of miles away. Cocktail parties in the officers' messes started the festivities on Christmas Eve, followed by midnight Mass for the R.C. personnel. Early morning services for the Protestants on Christmas Day followed by a turkey dinner for all and a C.W.A.C. concert party in the evening completed the festive round. No doubt the Italian "Vino" helped to cheer many of the "old timers", and accounted in part for the frequency of such remarks as "my best Christmas in five years" reported by the diarist of Carlt & York R. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 23-25 Dec 44; W.D., R. 22e R., 23-25 Dec; W.D., West N.S.R., 23-25 Dec 44; W.D., Carlt & York R., 23-25 Dec 44)

263. But the troops of 3 Cdn Inf Bde were not the only ones to enjoy a happy Christmas. For, by careful manipulation of the remaining units in 1 Cdn Inf Div, General Foster was able to bring three other battalions out of the line for the holiday season. R.C.D. was reorganized as two forces of two squadrons each, known as VICTOR FORCE and SUGAR FORCE, and ordered to take over the 2 Cdn Inf Bde sector. Each force had the equivalent of one infantry company, formed from personnel of 2 L.A.A. Regt, under command, while Regimental Headquarters R.C.D. had one squadron of 12 R.T.R. and one coy Sask L.I. available in support. R.C.D. took over the front during the night 23/24 Dec with "Sugar Force" on the right and "Victor Force" on the left. (W.D., 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 23 Dec 44). P.P.C.L.I. and L. Edmn R. then passed into reserve, and Seaforth of C. shifted left and relieved R.C.R. and Hast & P.E.R. of 1 Cdn Inf Bde. One company of R.C.R. remained in the line on the extreme left flank of the Division, where it had taken over from R.C.D. Thus by 24 Dec the 1 Cdn Inf Div had regrouped so as to leave a minimum of troops in the F.D.Ls. (W.D., H.Q.

2 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 Dec 44)

264. During the night 23/24 Dec L. Edmn R. moved by T.C.V's all the way to the sea-side town of Cervia where they remained until 26 Dec when they returned to the line and relieved the Seaforths. P.P.C.L.I. moved back a much shorter distance to Borg di Stecch (4137) on the morning of 24 Dec where they were soon relatively comfortably situated. Although Bagnacavallo was out of bounds to all troops, and the area provided no local places of amusements, the battalion organized its Christmas on a grand scale. A conducted theatre party visited Bagnacavallo on Christmas night, and the "Sally Ann" organized a sing-song in the battalion area. Like L. Edmn R., Hast & P.E.R. spent their Christmas well out of the battle area in Cattolica where they enjoyed the more varied recreational facilities of the Adriatic coastal towns. (W.D., L. Edmn R., 23-25 Dec 44; W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 23-25 Dec 44; W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 23-25 Dec 44)

265. On 24 and 25 Dec there was little activity on 1 Cdn Inf Div front. The enemy made no effort to disturb our positions, and our forces in view of their reduced numbers made little effort to provoke him. During the night 23/24 Dec an R.C.R. patrol contacted 9 R.F. (at 378315) between the Vecchio and the Lamone about a mile south of the railway but saw no sign of the enemy.* (W.D., R.C.R., December 1944: Appx 17, Battle Narrative "D" Company). At this time 48 Highrs, like R.C.R., had only one company in the line with the remaining companies in the rear (but within the Bde area) where they were able to get a good night's sleep and have their Christmas dinner with some degree of comfort. In the case of 48 Highrs, the forward company's dinner was carried in to them before daybreak in hay-boxes. (W.D., R.C.R., 24-25 Dec 44; W.D., 48 Highrs, 24-25 Dec 44). Seaforth of C. and R.C.D., however, whose companies were widely extended and in close contact with the enemy, made arrangements to have their Christmas dinner at a later date. R.C.D. reported on Christmas Day a complete lack of shell and mortar fire, as if a planned truce had been arranged. (W.D., 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt (R.C.D.), 24-25 Dec 44; W.D., Seaforth of C., 24-25 Dec 44)

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDER 1 CDN CORPS

266. On Christmas Day personal messages from both the Army Commander and the Commander 1 Cdn Corps were distributed to all ranks. Gen Foulkes, in his message, congratulated his men for their part in bringing certain victory within sight, and reviewed their accomplishments during the recent campaign. His message in part follows:

A year ago, the end of the war with Germany seemed remote. Today, the fight has been carried into Germany itself, and we can feel reasonably certain that on Christmas Day 1945 the war with Germany will be over. You who have been fighting for a year and a half in Italy may think that your part in bringing a certain victory within sight has been overshadowed by more spectacular fighting on the Western front. I can assure you that your comrades in Belgium and Holland realize how much

* See Map 6

you have contributed to the defeat of the Hun. The Fifth and Eighth Armies are containing more than twenty-five German divisions, divisions which Hitler desperately needs to defend Germany itself. Since the bitter Christmas Day at Ortona, you have smashed through two strong prepared German defence lines, the Hitler and the Gothic Lines, and have carried the fighting onto the plains of Lombardy, making it possible for allied aircraft to bomb Germany from Italian bases.

You have now completed your part in the first phase of the present operation, under adverse weather conditions and over water-logged terrain. Since 1 Dec you have cleared the enemy from more than 145 square miles of Italian territory - sufficient for a two and one-half acre allotment for each Canadian soldier in Italy. You have forced the enemy from three strong natural defence lines, liberated a city, Ravenna, four towns, thirty villages and nearly one thousand smaller inhabited places, and you have materially assisted 5 Corps in the capture of Faenza. You have forced the enemy commander to withdraw a division from another part of the front in order to reinforce this sector and you have now severely mauled this new division.

You have taken more than 1,600 prisoners and have killed or wounded probably twice that number of enemy. All arms and services have done their part in this task. The gunners have smashed the enemy's defences with over 1200 3-ton lorry-loads of shells -- 184,000 rounds -- and on more than one occasion have broken up enemy counter-attacks. In addition to opening more than 200 miles of road, the sappers have erected more than a half a mile of bridging. Many of the twenty-nine bridges were completed under hostile mortar and artillery fire. The Signals have laid down some 2600 miles of field cable, providing communications without which control of the battles would have been impossible. Despatch riders have delivered since 1 Dec no less than 28,000 packets.

(W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt, December 1944: Appx 14)

5 CDN ARMD DIV ON THE SENIO, 21-31 DEC 44

267. The closing days of the old year saw 5 Cdn Armd Div engaged in a number of small-scale operations designed to clean-up its front along the Senio, and at the same time extend its right flank north-east between the Senio and the Naviglio towards Route 16 and Alfonsine. At this time considerable gaps existed in the line while the enemy still dominated the approaches to the east dyke, and in addition controlled the whole of the area on the right flank, north-east of Ir R.C. and Lan & Ren Scot R. F.D.L's along the Via San Antonio and G.G.H.G. advanced troop on the Naviglio (see para 196). Steps to roll back the enemy on the flank were taken that morning when two squadrons of G.G.H.G. moved into position on the Via San Antonio, one at the junction with the Via Rossetta, the other at that with

the Via Grattacoppa, and commenced to probe forward towards the next road, the Via Bellaria. In the afternoon, as 12 Cdn Inf Bde withdrew into reserve, Headquarters 5 Cdn Armd Div placed two companies of Lan & Ren Scot R. temporarily under command 11 Cdn Inf Bde as additional flank protection. By 1805 hours the Lanark sub-units had taken position near the south-eastern end of the Via San Antonio (413437 - 419433). (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 21 Dec 44; (H.S.) 244C5.016(D5): 5 Cdn Armd Div Intention, 21 Dec 44)

268. The only activity worthy of note during the afternoon of 21 Dec took place on the right flank, where G.G.H.G. made some progress. There, the right ("B") Squadron of the armoured regiment pushed forward to the vicinity of the Via Bellaria, where they occupied a number of buildings, Casa Bastogi (418446) and Casa Baldi-Randi (417448). At both these places the enemy was in evidence but withdrew without a fight as the tanks approached. A similar thrust by "A" Squadron to the east along the Via Rossetta, however, drew a spirited response from the enemy. There, he was not only dug in along the dykes on both sides of the river, but was actually occupying houses along the road itself. From all of these poured forth a heavy volume of small arms, mortar, and bazooka fire as the G.G.H.G. tanks moved up the road. Despite a close engagement of the enemy posts, the tanks were unable to silence them, so, after advancing several hundred yards, they withdrew late in the afternoon into their original positions. (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 21-22 Dec 44; G.G.H.G. History Chapter VIII)(See Map 3)

269. On the following day, 22 Dec, 11 Cdn Inf Bde effected certain changes in unit dispositions along its front. On the left, between Fusignano and the inter-divisional boundary, C.B. Highrs advanced its F.D.L's slightly (to the line 381431-377425-373420). In the centre, Perth R. relieved Ir R.C. of responsibility for the sector between the Via Chiara and Fusignano. The latter unit took over the right flank of the brigade along Via San Antonio, and at 1615 hours relieved Lan & Ren Scot R. near the Fosso Munio. The Lanarks then ceased to be under command 11 Cdn Inf Bde and moved back to Ravenna. By the night 22/23 Dec the enemy had apparently considerably strengthened his posts on the east bank of the Senio. For, along the whole front, the patrols ran into heavy M.M.G. and mortar fire and suffered a number of casualties. Despite this C.B. Highrs established an advanced post on the floodbank in the area of its left sub-unit. In this sector alone the enemy had 12 M.G. posts on the near bank of the river. (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 22-23 Dec 44; W.D., C.B. Highrs, 22 Dec 44; W.D., Lan & Ren Scot R., 22 Dec 44)

270. In the meantime, on the morning of 22 Dec, Headquarters 5 Cdn Armd Div had assigned to G.G.H.G. the task of clearing the east bank of the Senio from the right flank of 11 Cdn Inf Bde up to the line of the railway. To assist the armoured unit in driving the enemy from the built-up areas along the Via Rossetta, "B" Coy Ir R.C. was placed under its command. This combined infantry-tank force was known, from the name of its commander, Lt-Col A.K. Jordan, E.D., commanding officer of G.G.H.G., as "Jordan Force". The ground over which "Jordan Force" was to operate during the several days of its existence is described in the following passage from the G.G.H.G. history:

...bounded by the Senio on the north and the Naviglio on the south, forming a quadrilateral running four miles to the north-east, and narrowing from a width of two miles along the Via Chiara, to less than a mile at Highway 16. At each end of the Via Chiara, a main lateral road ran out to Highway 16. The Via Naviglio, along the bottom, ran north of the Canal which bore the same name and closely followed its course, but the Via Rossetta followed the Senio for only a third of the way, when it swung off at a sharper angle, reaching Highway 16 one hundred yards north of the Via Naviglio. A minor track continued below the bank. These two main laterals were joined and the area criss-crossed by a variety of tracks and footpaths, but the Fosso Munio, which ran parallel and north of the Via Naviglio was a complete tank obstacle. On the top right hand corner, the town of Alfonsine sprawled across both sides of the Senio, west of Highway 16. The whole area was flat, but the trees and hedgerows provided some cover and the ground was sufficiently firm to allow cross country manoeuvre. The weather was dry throughout most of the period, so we were seldom confined to roads.

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

271. During the same morning (22 Dec), one troop of "A" Squadron made a cross country run to the Via Bellaria and north along this road to the vicinity of the Via Rossetta, where they engaged in a fire fight with the enemy. When they had exhausted their supply of ammunition, the tanks withdrew south along the Via Bellaria to Casa Bastogi. In view of the spirited reaction of the enemy, Lt-Col Jordan decided to put in an infantry assault along the Via Rossetta that night under cover of darkness. As yet, however, the enemy, opposite "B" Squadron, had shown little inclination to hold his ground. There G.G.H.G. advanced east from the Via Bellaria and seized C. Fuschini (421443), a house on the right 400 yards from the Munio, and Casa Granaroli (422447), a building 400 yards east of Casa Bastogi. In the afternoon the D.A.F. took advantage of a slight improvement in flying conditions to put in "PIG"^x attacks along the Via Rossetta and Via Naviglio east of the forward troop positions:

These were not the succulent, little animals, looted from the Itie farmyards, but a new form of tactical air support, which involved a low level strafing

x This type of attack was improvised during the last period of ops and is best described as a "bad weather TIMOTHY". When low cloud made bombing impossible, necessity once more became the mother of invention, and attempts were made to carry out strafing attacks at under 1,000 ft. These attempts proved so successful that this method of attack became generally adopted.

((H.S.)249C5.(D15): Report on Air Operations in Support of 1 Cdn Corps, 2 Dec 44 - 5 Jan 45)

expedition on enemy targets, in extremely close proximity to the line of our forward troops. The first Pig strafed the dyke along the Via Rossetta with its cannon and machine guns, A Squadron having laid down red smoke ... to guide the planes in, and mark our forward positions. The second Pig was subject to much less preparation and came in very suddenly on the house along the Naviglio a mile north east of C Squadron. The forward troops were nicked by the beginning of the fire, and for a terrified moment, we thought the aircraft was going to attack our own troops. Fortunately no damage was done and the Pig got the enemy position.

(G.G.H.G. Regimental History)

That night the Ir R.C. company near the Munio advanced and took up new positions between Casa Fuschini and the crossing of the Via Bellaria over the Fosso Munio (423439). Thus, as "B" Coy Ir R.C. prepared to launch its attack, the only remaining enemy positions west of the Via Bellaria were those facing it astride the Via Rossetta. (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 22 Dec; W.D., G.G.H.G., 22 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 22 Dec 44)

272. At 2220 hours (22 Dec) Ir R.C. supported by "Wasp" flamethrowers opened its attack along the Via Rossetta. As they advanced eastwards the Irish encountered increasingly heavy opposition and eventually they called the "Wasps" forward to clear the way. "The horrified screams of the Germans bore loud and eloquent witness to the effectiveness of the flamethrowers" (G.G.H.G. History). In the face of this attack, the enemy had no alternative but to fall back, and by 0300 hours the Irish had reached the junction of the Via Bellaria and the Via Rossetta and established a firm position. Unfortunately as the flamethrowers had by this time exhausted their supply of fuel, the enemy were able to reestablish themselves on the dyke. Tanks of G.G.H.G. on the Via Bellaria attempted to give fire support, but so close was the fighting in the darkness that they were able to render only limited assistance. During the night, however, a G.G.H.G. squadron moved into fire positions on the Via Bellaria and the two tracks lying respectively 400 and 700 yards east of it, and after first light kept the enemy on the dyke under heavy fire. The latter replied with bazooka and mortar fire, and succeeded in knocking out one Stuart belonging to the left-hand troop. In spite of a steadily increasing fall of snow which gradually reduced the range of vision until it was almost zero, the tanks continued to fire until just before last light. At that time, although the Irish "B" Company held the road junction, the enemy had regained control of the Via Rossetta between the Via Bellaria and the Via San Antonio. (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 22-23 Dec 44; W.D., G.G.H.G., 23 Dec 44; W.D., Ir R.C., 23 Dec 44)

273. On the following morning (23 Dec) Lt-Col Jordan received a second Ir R.C. company ("C") under command, and made plans to resume the attack that night. This time Lt-Col Jordan intended to by-pass the strong enemy positions along the Senio by an advance across country to the Via Utili, 700 yards to the east of the Via Bellaria, then north along it to the Via Rossetta, and along the last-named road to its junction a mile farther to the east with the Via Bastogi.

This attack, which began at midnight, made good progress until 0215 hours when three of the tanks struck mines. The force was at that time within a few hundred yards of the Via Utili-Via Rossetta junction, and Lt-Col Jordan ordered them to consolidate for the night while the Irish pioneers found a way through the minefield. (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 23-24 Dec 44; G.G.H.G. Regimental History, Chapter VIII; W.D., G.G.H.G., 23-24 Dec 44). On the following morning, 24 Dec a second squadron of G.G.H.G. left its harbour area on the Via Bellaria and struck off across country towards the Via Bastogi. By 1000 hours it was on this road and moving south towards the Fosso Munio. In the vicinity of the Munio the squadron was for a time under artillery fire, and the assault troop accompanying it encountered anti-personnel mines which caused some casualties. During the afternoon Jordan Force took up firm positions covering the line of the Via Bastogi between the Via Rossetta and the Canale Naviglio. That night the Engineers, after constructing a barrel culvert over the Munio and sweeping for mines, opened the Naviglio - Bastogi route for traffic. (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 24 Dec 44; H.Q., R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 24 Dec 44; G.G.H.G. Regimental History Chapter VIII). During the day Ir R.C., using "Wasps" and with a troop of tanks in support, attacked east along the Via Rossetta, and shortly after last light linked up with its company at the Via Bellaria junction. (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 24 Dec 44)

274. During the intervening period Perth R. and C.B. Highrs continued to mop-up enemy positions along the east bank on their respective fronts. During 23 Dec, C.B. Highrs, supported by the tanks of Ld S.H., cleared the enemy from east of the Senio between the Fusignano bridge and the boundary with 1 Cdn Inf Div. In Perth R. sector, however, the enemy proved somewhat harder to budge. By 1950 hours, 23 Dec, the Perths had secured the river line between the Via San Antonio and the Via Chiara, and, on the following day, moved against the enemy positions on their left. At 0555 hours on 24 Dec one platoon reached Casa Tesselli (391441), where it encountered heavy machine gun and mortar fire. Bringing down mortar fire on the buildings, the Perth platoon, supported by a troop of tanks, put in an attack, and by 1350 hours had occupied the place and reached the dyke behind it. But an enemy post in another house (398439) on the Via Rossetta several hundred yards west of Casa Tesselli barred further progress that night. On Christmas Day, in the afternoon, the Perths seized this latter place, and that night faced up to the Senio near the Fusignano bridge. Between them the three units of 11 Cdn Inf Bde now controlled nearly 6,000 yards of the east bank of the Senio, from the inter-divisional boundary to opposite the Via Rossetta - Via Bellaria junction. In these positions until their relief by units of 12 Cdn Inf Bde on 27 Dec, they occupied a holding role only, patrols, sniping duels and interchanges of mortar and artillery fire being the chief activities. (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 23-24 Dec 44; W.D., C.B. Highrs, 23-27 Dec 44; W.D., Ir R.C., 23-27 Dec 44)

275. At Headquarters, 5 Cdn Armd Div, and in the unit lines of 12 Cdn Inf Bde, the divisional artillery and most of the armoured units, Christmas Day 1944, the sixth of the war, was celebrated in the usual fashion. Typical of the unit dinners was that of Ian & Ren Scot R., at which, according to the unit diarist:

Each man received 2 bottles of beer, chocolate and punch as he came through the meal line. The meal consisted of turkey and other fowl, the usual vegetables with plum pudding and sauce for dessert. At the tables there were oranges, nuts, fruit cake and mince pie for everyone. Though it was crowded the first Christmas party of the Lanark and Renfrews was a success. The plentiful supply of beer and punch made the situation very fluid.

The C.B. Highrs pipe band was pressed into service for the men's dinner and later appeared at the Sergeant's and Officer's dinners.

(W.D., Lan & Ren Scot R., 25 Dec 44)

The Headquarters and battalions of 11 Cdn Inf Bde, however, spent the day in the line. There, although the men enjoyed the traditional Christmas fare, the surroundings were not so pleasant. At H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, in fact, officers were warned "to wear their flannel long underwear in case sufficient heat is not obtained in the Mess by dinner time". (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 24 Dec 44). The food came forward in the ration trucks, and was consumed mainly in company lines. This was 11 Cdn Inf Bde's first Christmas so spent and, for this reason, was accepted as their due - the unit diarist of C.B. Highrs records:

This, our second Christmas in a theatre of operations and our first in the line, will certainly be the least celebrated we've had yet, but it is hoped it will pass without much enemy activity, and no doubt it will. However, we have to take our turn at these things and all ranks are taking it in good part.

(W.D., C.B. Highrs, 25 Dec 44)

Certainly C.B. Highrs had no intention of disturbing the peace on the 25th, and their commanding officer gave orders that the artillery and mortars in that sector would not fire except in retaliation (*ibid*). In the event, except on the Perth R. front, all unit areas remained quiet during the day, as both sides made the most of this, at best, cheerless Christmas.

276. On the evening of 27 Dec, at 2200 hours, 12 Cdn Inf Bde relieved 11 Cdn Inf Bde of all its commitments along the east bank of the Senio between the boundary with 1 Cdn Inf Div and the line of the Via Bastogi. At the same time Ld S.H. and 82 A. Tk Bty R.C.A. (plus one 17 pr tp) passed from under command the latter to under command the former brigade. Unit takeovers - Lan & Ren Scot R., 4 P.L.D.G., and Westmr R. relieving C.B. Highrs, Perth R. and Ir R.C. respectively - were in all cases completed without incident by 2300 hours. At this time all three battalions of 12 Cdn Inf Bde were organized on a three company basis, for P.L.D.G. and Lan & Ren Scot R. had not as yet received sufficient replacements to make up for their losses in the December fighting - Westmr R. of course was normally so organized. Thus, while 11 Cdn Inf Bde had had 12 rifle companies with which to hold the line and form unit reserves, 12 Cdn Inf Bde had only nine with which to carry out the same tasks. Accordingly certain changes had to be made in unit sectors. On the left, Lan & Ren Scot R., by forming a

reserve from their support company, were able to take over, company for company, from C.B. Highrs. In addition, they extended to the right to occupy the former Perth post near the Fusignano bridge.* P.L.D.G. also shifted right to include 1,000 yards of the Senio bank to the north-east of the Via San Antonio within its sector. On the right flank Westmr R. moved into the positions previously occupied by the three Irish companies at the Via Rossetta - Via Bellaria road junction and at the opposite ends of the Via Bastogi. Upon completion of the relief, the Headquarters and units of 11 Cdn Inf Bde moved back to Ravenna into the former billets of 12 Cdn Inf Bde for a well-deserved but, in the event, short period of rest. ((H.S.)244C5.013(D4): Report on Operations 12 Cdn Inf Bde period 27 Dec 44 to 8 Jan 45; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 27-28 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 12 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Dec 44; (H.S.) 244C5.013(D4): Lan & Ren Scot R., Report on Operations, 27 Dec 44 to 8 Jan 45)

277. During its first two days in the line, 12 Cdn Inf Bde made a special effort to obtain fresh identifications of the enemy troops in this sector. For German activity on the night 26/27 Dec had led to the belief that he was carrying out reliefs. Intelligence 1 Cdn Corps felt that:

Something odd is going on in our Northern sector. This evening at 1900 hours heavy vehicle movement including tracks was heard ... on the lateral roads N of the SENIO. At 2000 hours heavy mortar fire, MG and arty fire, opened up NE of Fusignano. The general impression was that this was a well tied in fire plan designed to hide vehicle movement. Last night, similar tactics were used on a smaller scale.

It may be that a relief is going in 114 Jaeger Div's sector, but the only very skimpy clue, apart from the very heavy traffic reported both by day and night, was the employment of phosphorous projectiles fired at 4145. This may be significant, as phosphorous had not been used on our front until now.

(W.D., G.S. Branch, H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, December 1944: Appx 114, 1 Cdn Corps Intelligence Summary No. 191, 26 Dec 44)

Further support was lent to this belief on 27 Dec by a civilian report received by "A" Squadron G.G.H.G. that S.S. troops had moved into La Margharita (439463), a house on the Via Rossetta 700 yards to the northeast of them. In an attempt to confirm this report, a Westmr R. company, supported by the guns of "A" Squadron, put in an attack on this place on the following day (28 Dec). This attack, in which the Westminsters suffered eight casualties, proved unsuccessful, due to the minefields and the strong opposition encountered. That night, although all units patrolled extensively in an effort to obtain prisoners, they failed to make contact. Finally on the night 29/30 Dec an enterprising Lan & Ren Scot R. patrol killed two enemy in a slit trench and brought back their uniform and documents. From these a battalion of 16 S.S.Pz Gr Div Reichsfuhrer was identified in the sector opposite the brigade left flank. Although this indicated that the new division had relieved 98 Inf

* Upon the completion of the reliefs the three battalions of 12 Cdn Inf Bde were located as follows: P.L.D.G. at 396435, 395439 and 402445; Lan & Ren Scot R. 371421, 384423 and 384428; Westmr R. 434459, 438452 and 414452. (5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 27 Dec 44)

Div, it did not entirely discount the earlier civilian report of S.S. troops on the brigade right flank, and it remained possible that the S.S. division had also replaced 114 Jaeger Div south of Alfonsine. If this was so, the Jaeger Division, with a shorter line, would be in a position either to thicken up its more vulnerable areas or provide an immediate reserve. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report, op cit; 1 Cdn Corps Intelligence Summary No. 195, 30 Dec 44; 5 Cdn Armd Div Intelligence Summary No. 100, 31 Dec 44; W.D., Westmr R., 28 Dec 44)

278. Late on 28 Dec a squadron of Ld S.H. replaced the G.G.H.G. sub-units with Westmr R., and the Horse Guards then withdrew into reserve and rest at Piangipane. Then on the following day at 2200 hours Westmr R. moved out, handing over its positions to 1st Battalion Welch Regiment of 9 (Brit) Armd Bde. Westmr R. then concentrated near Villanova, where they were on short notice to go forward, in the event of an enemy attack, and establish a firm base on the Fosso Munio. Command of the sector lying north-east of the Via San Antonio now passed to 9 Armd Bde, leaving 12 Cdn Inf Bde a greatly reduced front. Still, however, the Canadian brigade remained very thin on the ground in the forward sector. Through the consequent gaps between unit and sub-unit areas, the enemy infiltrated to reestablish weapon posts on the east dyke, and harass the scattered Canadian positions. During the afternoon of 30 Dec, P.L.D.G., using portable flamethrowers (Life-buoys) and with tank support, knocked out four such M.G. posts on the east bank near Casa Tesselli. That night enemy fighting patrols crossed to the east bank in two places and attacked platoon positions of Lan & Ren Scot R. Both these attacks, which came in on the brigade left flank between the Lanarks and R.C.D., were beaten off with loss to the enemy. On the next night (31 Dec) the Germans struck at the left forward company of P.L.D.G. This attack was preceded by a 20 minute artillery concentration on the company area and caused battalion headquarters, in anticipation of a stronger enemy effort than proved to be the case, to order all companies to stand-to. Then at 2200 hours, just as the attack came in, an enemy demolition party blew down one wall of the company headquarters burying the line set and wireless set and cutting all communications. The situation became quite obscure, and Brigade Headquarters alerted Westmr R. placing them on immediate notice to move forward. Actually the P.L.D.G. sub-unit concerned had restored the situation by 2240 hours, and driven the enemy, estimated to be about 28 in number, back across the river. (W.D., G.G.H.G., 28 Dec; (H.S.) 274B9; 008(D1); W.D., H.Q. 9 Armd Bde Gp, 29 Dec 44; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; W.D., P.L.D.G., 30-31 Dec 44; W.D., Lan & Ren Scot R., 30-31 Dec 44; W.D., Westmr R., 31 Dec 44)

279. As the old year came to a close both sides put on an artillery display; the enemy firing anti-aircraft tracers and flares into the air, the Canadians artillery shells into the German positions. On 30 Dec Army Group Headquarters decided to call off the offensive, and ordered Eighth Army to halt on the line of the Senio for the winter months. On the same day, Headquarters 12 Cdn Inf Bde ordered its units to construct a defensive lay-out by sandbagging, wiring, and laying minefields. (W.D., Lan & Ren Scot R., 31 Dec 44; W.D., P.L.D.G., 31 Dec 44; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 1 Jan 45)

MINOR OPERATIONS AGAINST THE ENEMY SALIENT ON THE LEFT FLANK
1 CDN INF DIV, 26 - 31 Dec 44

280. Although the enemy withdrew on 21 Dec in the central sector of the front, he retained two important salients on either flank of 1 Cdn Corps. That in the 1 Cdn Inf Div sector ran from just north of Cotignola, where the Naviglio runs only 800 yards from the Senio, along the canal to the Via Madrara bridge then east to the Fosso Vecchio and south to the inter-corps boundary. (See Map 6). The enemy forces holding this salient were believed to be from 278 and 356 Infantry Divisions. At Christmas the possibility of a Canadian attack across the Senio still existed and a safe left flank was thus of vital importance to 1 Cdn Inf Div.* Accordingly Headquarters 1 Cdn Inf Div ordered 1 Cdn Inf Bde to take immediate steps to clear the salient. (W.D., G.S. Branch, H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, December 1944: Appx 123, Intelligence Summary No. 193; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 25 Dec 44)

281. On Boxing Day, 1 Cdn Inf Bde, using R.C.R. supported by a troop of tanks, thrust south between the Vecchio and the Naviglio in an attempt to turn the enemy's Vecchio defences from the rear. At first light, R.C.R. attacked and, at 0800 hours, reached the track 500 yards south of the Via Madrara. There, after a stiff fire fight in which both sides suffered casualties, Lt-Col Reid's men cleared a number of enemy-held houses (at 368341) lying about 200 yards from the Naviglio. At 0930 hours the enemy, preceded by artillery and mortar fire, counter-attacked and retook the position. R.C.R. then withdrew to the Via Madrara. (W.D., R.C.R., 26 Dec 44). During the same morning 48 Highrs moved into position south of the railway and due east of Granarolo. In the afternoon the Highlanders probed forward towards the crossing of the Naviglio and Vecchio** but came under heavy small arms fire and, after two attempts to continue had failed, withdrew. It was apparent that the enemy was determined to hold all along the 1 Cdn Inf Bde front, and that, if he was to be driven back, a more powerful attack would be necessary. At once Brigade Headquarters made plans for the two battalions, supported by tanks and flamethrowers and artillery and mortar fire, to put in a strong attack that night. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Dec 44; W.D., 48 Highrs, 26 Dec 44). R.C.R. was to open the attack with one sub-unit accompanied by tanks directed against the houses at the scene of the morning's action. Following this a second company using flamethrowers would move up the west bank of the Vecchio and strike the enemy there on the flank. Once R.C.R. was underway 48 Highrs would advance to the Vecchio on its front. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, December 1944: Appx "A", 1 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 26 Dec 44)

* The plan of an intended attack across the Senio in the Cotignola area is given in the War Diary of 48 Highrs (W.D., 48 Highrs, 25 Dec 44).

** The upper reaches of the Fosso Vecchio lie west of the Canale Naviglio but a few hundred yards north of Granarolo it passes under the latter canal and thereafter follows a course to the east of it.

282. The attack began at 2300 hours and met with misfortune from the beginning. The tanks moving up on the Via Madrara had difficulty in getting across an ARK (378341) spanning the Vecchio. While the R.C.R. company was awaiting the arrival of the armour in its F.U.P., it came under enemy D.F., became disorganized, and suffered considerable casualties. Enemy S.P. guns, apparently moved into the area prior to the attack, controlled the woods, and the tanks and flame-throwers were able to give very little support. Although R.C.R. endeavoured to get forward without support, the opposition proved so strong that it made no headway. On the left, 48 Highrs again encountered stiff resistance at the Vecchio, and sustained 15 casualties. By daybreak both battalions were back in their former positions. Apart from more clearly defining the enemy F.D.Ls., the attack had achieved nothing. (W.Ds., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, R.C.R., 48 Highrs, 27 Dec 44)

283. At Divisional Headquarters, several plans for continuing the advance across the Senio were being discussed but, due to the uncertainty at Army level (see para 325), no single plan was firm. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 27 Dec 44). On 26 Dec, L. Edmn R. relieved Seaforth of C., the latter regiment going into reserve in the town of Russi for its "Christmas" rest. On the 27th, after the failure of 1 Cdn Inf Bde attacks, H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde was ordered to prepare a full scale attack in this sector, but no definite date was set for its beginning. Regrouping in preparation for the intended attack began almost immediately. That night, 27/28 Dec, 3 Cdn Inf Bde commenced the relief of 1 Cdn Inf Bde - from right to left Carlt & York R. and West N.S.R. relieving R.C.R. and 48 Highrs - and, at midday on the 28th, assumed command of the sector from the Russi - Lugo railway crossing over the Senio, where R. 22e R. took over from L. Edmn R. of 2 Cdn Inf Bde, to the inter-corps boundary on the Lamone. On the completion of the relief, 1 Cdn Inf Bde moved into reserve with its headquarters at Godo. The divisional intention was that in its new sector 3 Cdn Inf Bde would operate in a holding role only, while preparations were made for 2 Cdn Inf Bde to attack through it against the enemy salient. The latter formation was now resting, with its headquarters at Bagnacavallo, the Seaforth of C. and L. Edmn R. in the Russi area, and P.P.C.L.I. at Borg di Stecch. The last two units, however, were kept at one hour's readiness to move forward in the event of an enemy attack. For the divisional front was still thinly held, especially on the right where R.C.D. continued to hold an extensive sector. Fortunately activity in that area was confined to patrol clashes and artillery exchanges. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 27-28 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 26-28 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 27-28 Dec 44; W.D., 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt (R.C.D.), 26-27 Dec 44)

284. Immediately on taking over the left divisional sector, Brigadier Bernatchez ordered active patrolling on all battalion fronts. On the left, during the night 27/28 Dec, West N.S.R. contacted the Royal Fusiliers. Enemy vehicle movement on 3 Cdn Inf Bde front during the day indicated the possibility of an enemy counter attack, and caused 1 Cdn Inf Div to take steps to meet any such eventuality. For purposes of defence, the divisional front was now organized in two sectors, right R.C.D. and R. 22e R., and left Carlt & York R. and West N.S.R., while, as noted above, two units of 2 Cdn Inf Bde were available on short notice to act in a counter attack role. In addition the bridges over the Vecchio and

Lamone were prepared for demolition. For at this time the German offensive in Northwest Europe was in full swing, while on Fifth Army front the enemy had penetrated the American defences to a depth of several miles. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 27-30 Dec 44). The forward units made careful preparations to fight a defensive battle; from battalion headquarters R. 22e R. the following message went out to all companies:

There has been a considerable amount of enemy vehicle movement on our front today and it is believed the enemy may put in a counter attack at any time. In the past few days 5th Army troops have fallen back a distance of nine kilometers in the face of strong German counter-attacks; so a counter attack on our front is also very probable. All companies will be on the alert at all times. Fire plans for 2" mortars and LMGs will be laid down and platoon defences organized. Each company will keep one platoon in reserve to be used as a counter attack reserve. An additional 2,000 rds SA Ammunition, 1 box 36 grenades, flares illuminating and 50 HE 2" mortar bombs will be sent to each company. The Anti-tank platoon is now being used as an infantry company. If at any time the enemy starts a heavy bombardment on our front, every one will take up positions in slit trenches ... Breakfast will be served at first light only. Arty, 4.2" Mortars 3" Mortars and MMG DF tasks have all been laid down. Under no circumstances will there be any retreat. The P.P.C.L.I. is now formed up as counter attack reserve.

(W.D., R 22e R., 28 Dec 44)

285. During the last three days of the old year, although 3 Cdn Inf Bde carried out no full scale attacks on its front, all three battalions kept up pressure on the enemy by organized coy attacks and fighting patrols. On 29 Dec, Carlt & York R. extended its battalion front to the right, and relieved the left coy of R. 22e R. Brigade Headquarters then ordered the latter battalion to take up positions on the east dyke of the Senio, and dominate the river in its area. Using flamethrowers R. 22e R. drove the enemy from a number of his weapon pits along the dyke, but, due to the aggressive nature of the enemy defence, found the captured positions almost untenable. By using under-water foot-bridges the German continued to have access to the east dyke, and clashes between patrols and defended posts, in which both sides suffered prisoner losses, were comparatively frequent. Meanwhile Carlt & York R., despite attacks at company strength on the 29th and 30th, had failed to dislodge the enemy on their front. West N.S.R. activity was limited entirely to active patrolling during this period. Contact with 5 Corps was maintained, and tanks in the brigade sector made daily shoots on enemy positions in Granarolo. (W.Ds., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, R. 22e R., Carlt & York R., West N.S.R., 28-31 Dec 44)

286. In the right divisional sector R.C.D. made no effort to occupy the Senio dykes, but its fighting patrols clashed with the enemy daily on the narrow "No-Man's Land" along the approaches to the east dyke of the river. The odd

prisoner was acquired during day and night forays into the enemy outposts, and interrogation of these confirmed the presence of units of 16 S.S. P.G. Div Reichsfuhrer (see also para 277). By continuing to use R.C.D. and 2 L.A.A. Regt in an infantry role with responsibility for nearly half the divisional front, 1 Cdn Inf Div was able to give its tired infantry component a much greater opportunity to rest. R.C.D. was by this time quite accustomed to operating as infantry, for it had had considerable experience of dismounted action since the beginning of the month.* 2 L.A.A. Regt., on the other hand, had been drafted into an infantry role as recently as 24 Dec. An excerpt from the unit war diary indicated, however, that the unit reacted favourably to the new assignment:

Major C S MacKay is called to Div Arty and comes back with the news that we are going into the line tomorrow as infantry to relieve our 1 Div Infantry who deserve a rest more than we do.

A and B Coys are formed up on parade and inspected by Major C S MacKay and it was a very impressive parade to see. All the boys with their rifles and tommy guns, web eqpt and steel helmets looking as tough as old infantrymen and still wearing a smile, determined to hold the line against anything the Germans can put up.

(W.D., 2 Cdn L.A.A. Regt, December 1944:
Appx 6, 54 Lt A.A. Bty, 23-24 Dec 44)

287. As the year 1944 came to a close it became known that the original 1 Cdn Corps plan to cross the Santerno and capture Massa Lombarda and Medicina had been cancelled. H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div on 30 Dec records that "The very near plan calls for this fmn to close up to the Senio and consolidate there for the winter". This was no doubt welcome news to the division that had fought from Ortona through three strongly defended lines (Gustav-Hitler-Gothic) almost to the valley of the Po. At this time, however, it was not foreseen that the Lamone assault was to be the last important operation in Italy, and that their next campaign would be with their fellow Canadians in Northwest Europe. The final entry in the Divisional War Diary of December sounds a note of confidence, and gives a picture of the determination and spirit of Canada's veteran Division:

So ends 1944, the fifth year of the war and as the clock strikes twelve, proud of its achievements 1 Cdn Inf Div faces 1945 with hope and confidence.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 31 Dec 44)

288. Looking forward to the campaigns of 1945, Gen Foulkes called together at Ravenna on 31 Dec all officers of the Corps down to, and including, unit commanders. In a prepared address he pointed out very frankly some of the mistakes made by officers under his command during the past

* For details on R.C.D. dismounted organization see Report on R.C.D. Dismounted Ops, 30 Nov 44 - 7 Jan 45 appended to W.D., 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt, January 1945.

month. He first referred to the fact that the Corps had sustained over 2,000 casualties in a little over three weeks of fighting, and that 22 officers and 420 O.Rs.* of that total were "missing". This he pointed out was out of all proportion, and concluded that there must be something wrong with leadership. This part of General Foulkes' remarks "hit home" to 1 Cdn Inf Div (R.C.R. and Hast & P.E.R., both having sustained severe losses on 5 Dec). The following extract from a condensation of the Corps Commander's address is of interest:

Forcing a river crossing necessitates having a carefully teed up plan. Every detail should be teed up...Our assaults go well, but get supporting weapons across fast. Part of every Comd's plan should be to get A. Tk guns across river within two hrs of crossing...A. Tk mines should be carried to posn in front of F.D.L's...Coy comds must ensure that tps when well started on objective, do not 'come back'. Make sure that sp arms are with them and tps available to back them up and Canadian troops will not come back.

(W.D., G.S. Branch, H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps,
December 1944: Appx 131, Corps Comd's
Address at Ravenna, 31 Dec 44)

THE CLEARING OF THE RIGHT FLANK UP TO THE FIUME RENO -
5 CDN ARMD DIV, 2 - 6 JAN 45

289. On 28 Dec Lt-Gen Foulkes received advice from Headquarters Eighth Army of the postponement of the Fifth Army offensive - abandoned altogether a few days later (see para 325) - and the consequent setting-back of the date for a fresh offensive by Eighth Army. For the present 1 Cdn Corps was to concentrate on the elimination of the German salients on its right and left flanks. There, at the close of the December offensive, the enemy remained east of the Senio in two places; one to the north of Ravenna, where the line ran from Porto Corsini, on the coast, across the marshes to cross the Lamone south of Conventello (4846), thence to the Senio west of Alfonsine (4547), making use of the several water obstacles south of the latter town; the other forward of the Senio between Cotignola and Granarolo and resting on the Canale Naviglio. Of first importance to Eighth Army should it resume the offensive, or, as subsequently proved to be the case, establish a winter defence line was the clearing of the first of these two areas. For

* Statistics provided by War Service Records D.V.A. in July 1949 give the casualties suffered by the Canadian Component A.A.I. during the period 1-21 Dec 44 as 32 officers and 516 other ranks killed or died of wounds, 108 officers and 1713 other ranks wounded and 13 officers and 199 other ranks prisoners of war, a total of 2,581 all ranks. Casualties of 1 Cdn Armd Bde, included in these figures, for the same period were 25 other ranks wounded. (Casualties - Italian Campaign)

the enemy sector north of Ravenna, although garrisoned only by the weak 114 Jaeger Division, covered the southern shore of the Valli di Comacchio, and afforded him a potential base from which to launch an attempt to recapture Ravenna; the bulge in the line on the Corps left was smaller and less useful to the enemy as a base for a counter-offensive or a spoiling attack. (See Map Florence - Rimini - Bologna Sector). (W.D., G.S. Branch, H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 28 Dec 44; pp 95-96)

290. The lie of the ground on the right flank favoured an attack launched in a north-easterly direction against the German switch line south of Conventello between the Lamone River and the Fosso Vecchio. Only one water obstacle, the Canale di Bonifica, lay lateral to an advance in this direction. Whereas the alternative route north from Ravenna passed through semi-inundated country, criss-crossed by numerous canals and ditches. On the other hand an operation mounted between the Lamone and the Vecchio would face the risk of an enemy counter-attack from the Alfonsine area against its left flank and rear. The risk was accepted, however, and an attack launched along this axis by 5 Cdn Armd Div on 2 Jan 45. (Ibid)

291. In preparation for the coming operation 5 Cdn Armd Div carried out considerable regrouping during the last week of December. As mentioned earlier in this report (para 276) on 27 Dec 12 Cdn Inf Bde relieved 11 Cdn Inf Bde, and the latter formation then withdrew into reserve at Ravenna. In the course of the following two days 9 Armd Bde, which, since 15 Dec, had held under Corps command the quiet sector between the railway and the coast, extended west of the Via Reale, and took over the larger part of the divisional front. The first of these reliefs took place on 28 Dec when 1 K.R.R.C.* replaced 5 Cdn Armd Asslt Tp and sub-units of 8 N.B.H. east of the Fosso Vetro between Route 16 and the Viazza Nuova. On the succeeding day 1 Welch relieved Westmr R., and the inter-brigade boundary shifted west to the line of the Via San Antonio. At 0600 hours, 30 Dec, 9 Armd Bde came under command 5 Cdn Armd Div, and the latter formation then assumed responsibility for the whole of the Corps front from the boundary with 1 Cdn Inf Div to the Adriatic. Thus the end of the year found 5 Cdn Armd Div deployed as follows: on the left 12 Cdn Inf Bde, with two squadrons of Ld S.H. in support, held the line of the Senio, with two of its battalions forward, and one in reserve behind the Munio; 9 Armd Bde held the remainder of the divisional front from the Via San Antonio to Porto Corsini; in rear, preparing for the coming attack were Headquarters 11 Cdn Inf Bde and its three infantry units at Ravenna, and Headquarters 5 Cdn Armd Bde, B.C.D., 8 N.B.H., and the remainder of Ld S.H., in the vicinity of Mezzano; in divisional reserve at Piangipane was G.G.H.G. ((H.S.)274B9,008(D1): War Diary 9 (Brit) Armd Bde, 29-30 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 28 Dec 44; W.D., 3 Cdn Armd Recce Regt (G.G.H.G.), 28-29 Dec 44)

292. In the early afternoon of 27 Dec, Maj-Gen Hoffmeister visited Headquarters 5 Cdn Armd Bde where he conferred with Brigadier Cumberland on operations to clear the right flank. At this meeting Brigadier Cumberland learned:

* 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps.

that the task of advancing NORTH from MEZZANO to LAKE COMACCHIO and SAN ALBERTO had been given to the brigade. For the operation the CBH will come under command and it is expected that the job will be done by 5 Cdn Armd Bde (8 NBH) and CBH.

(W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 27 Dec 44)

By 29 Dec, however, possibly because of the changed situation resulting from the postponement of Fifth Army offensive, divisional headquarters had changed the plan. The revised plan called for a two-phase attack using two brigade headquarters and more than double the original strength of armour and infantry. In Phase I, 11 Cdn Inf Bde would capture Conventello, and break the enemy switch line between the Lamone and the Vetro. Phase II, in which 5 Cdn Armd Bde would pass through the infantry brigade and complete the task, would follow immediately. The divisional object, to clear the enemy from east of the Fosso Vetro and south of the Fiume Reno, would remain the same. (see Map 5). (Ibid, 29 Dec 44; 5 Cdn Armd Div History Part III)

293. From information received up to midnight 1 Jan 45, the intelligence staff at Headquarters 5 Cdn Armd Div was able to confirm that the enemy forces in the Conventello area consisted of III Bn 721 Jaeger Regiment. In so far as could be determined, this battalion, with an approximate strength of 250 men, was disposed with two companies manning a line of resistance running along the tracks between the Via al Conventello (at 475469) and the bend in the Lamone (4846), and from there covering the north bank of this river as far as the demolished bridge (497467) about 700 yards farther east. A third company of III Bn, positioned in Conventello, provided an immediate reserve. On the right of III Bn, in position behind the Vetro south and east of Alfonsine, was II Bn of 721 Regt. I Bn held the rest of the divisional front to the coast at Porto Corsini. An identification made by 1 Welch on the same day (1 Jan 45) confirmed an earlier report (para 277) that a unit of 16 S.S. P.G. Div had relieved 741 Jaeger Regiment in the sector south of Alfonsine. Although the new position of 741 Regt was not definitely known, reports from civilian sources indicated that it might now be in divisional reserve somewhere between Conventello and the Fiume Reno. It was considered that the morale of 114 Jaeger Division should be high, due partly to the long quiet period they had experienced on this part of the front, and partly to the recent enemy successes on other fronts. ((H.S.) 249C5.(D49): 5 Cdn Armd Div Intelligence Summary No. 101, 2 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, December 1944: Appx 6, 5 Cdn Armd Bde O.O. No. 5, 1 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, December 1944: Appx 9, 11 Cdn Inf Bde O.O. No. 12, 31 Dec 44)

294. Working in close conjunction with each other and with 9 Armd Bde, 11 Cdn Inf Bde and 5 Cdn Armd Bde completed their plans of attack, and, on 31 Dec 44 and 1 Jan 45 respectively, issued their orders. The 11 Cdn Inf Bde plan called for an attack "on a 2 bn front and will be NOISY" (ibid). During the night 1/2 Jan 45 the assaulting battalions of 11 Cdn Inf Bde were to assemble in the area (464461 - 486462) between Route 16 and the Lamone River about a mile to the north of Mezzano. Then, in the early hours of the morning, the brigade, with Ir R.C. on the right

and Perth R. on the left, would launch its attack. Initially the 11 Cdn Inf Bde units would assault the III Bn 721st Regt switch-line, mentioned earlier in this report (para 293), then, pressing on, seize these following objectives: on the right, a group of houses lying just beyond the Lamone Abbandonato^{*} and immediately north of the bend in the river, and the road junction about 200 yards south of the village of Conventello; on the left, a building on the Via al Conventello opposite the south-eastern end of the Fosso Basilica, and then firm-up about 1,000 yards west of Conventello along a farm track leading from Casa Stasiol (483478) to the north side of the Fosso Basilica.^{**} Under command for this operation 11 Cdn Inf Bde would have one squadron of 8 N.B.H., two troops of crocodiles, and in addition one S.P. troop and one 17 pdr troop of 4 Cdn A. Tk Regt. The crocodiles would remain east of the Lamone until after H-hour, when they would move up, and go one troop under command each of the leading units. Similarly the squadron of tanks would not join the forward troops until first light. Working on a timed programme commencing at H-hour, the divisional artillery would bring down concentrations on the initial objectives until H plus 10. It would then lift, and engage arranged targets on the final objectives until the infantry were ready to assault them. Beginning at H plus 10, a 20 minute counter-mortar and counter-battery programme would be fired, after which all support of this type would be on call. Also included in the divisional artillery programme were, weather permitting, a smoke screen on the left flank; harassing fire on the Fosso Vetro bridges north of Conventello by two squadrons of Ld S.H., being employed as artillery; full searchlight illumination of the battle area, and directional fire by 5 L.A.A. Regt R.C.A. on the flanks of the attack. 10 Pd Sqn R.C.E. would prepare two assault up-routes from Route 16, on the left the Via al Conventello to the road junction (483474) south of the village, and, on the right, the track along the west bank of the Lamone to Conventello. On the Senio, 12 Cdn Inf Bde and 1 Cdn Inf Div would carry out diversionary disturbances from H plus 30 on. 1 K.R.R.C. of 9 Armd Bde would secure the area of the start line during the night 1/2 Jan 45. (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. R.C.A., 5 Cdn Armd Div, January 1945: Appx 7, R.C.A. 5 Cdn Armd Div Fire Plan, 31 Dec 44; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, December 1944: Appx 6, 5 Cdn Armd Bde O.O. No. 5, 1 Jan 45)

* The former bed of the Lamone River. (See also footnote para 295)

** Unit objectives as detailed in the brigade operation order were as follows:

Initial Objectives	- Right	- group of houses 487467
	Left	- groups of houses 475469 - 477469 - 481468
Final Objectives	- Right	- Conventello road junction 486473 and group of buildings 491472
	Left	- road junction 483474 and buildings 481476 - 483478

(11 Cdn Inf Bde Op Order No. 12, 31 Dec 44)

295. Immediately on the completion of Phase I by 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Cdn Armd Bde would commence the second phase of the attack. Using the Via Lamone as its axis,* 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.), supported by C.B. Highrs, would push through Ir R.C. at Conventello, and advance at the best possible tank speed to secure the bridge (513513) over the Canale Di Bonifica. For their part, C.B. Highrs would have one company mounted on carriers, and a second prepared to mount the tanks, for the dash forward if opposition along the centre line failed to develop. When this force reached the Canale di Bonifica, the infantry would cross and seize a lodgment on the far side in the vicinity of the bridge mentioned above. At the same time, 8 N.B.H. would move up on the left and concentrate south of the canal, ready to pass through the bridge-head and capture San Alberto. Less one company, left behind to guard the crossing, C.B. Highrs would follow the latter unit into San Alberto and mop-up the town. In the final stage, 8 N.B.H. would provide left flank protection between the Bonifica and the Reno, while B.C.D. covered the right and exploited towards the sea. In the rear, 11 Cdn Inf Bde would cover the remainder of the Vetro flank, and clean out enemy pockets by-passed by 5 Cdn Armd Bde. In addition to C.B. Highrs, 5 Cdn Armd Bde would have under command one battery (less one troop) of 4 A. Tk Regt R.C.A. This unit would move in rear of 8 N.B.H. with the particular task of covering the Vetro crossings south of the Canale di Bonifica. The engineers would open a route along the centre line, and have assault boats ready for use by C.B. Highrs if necessary. From first light on 2 Jan 45 close air support would be available to 5 Cdn Armd Bde, and low level attacks ("PIGS") would be made on the centre line and on the roads leading west from it over the Fosso Vetro. Other weapons and equipment, such as Valentine bridge-laying tanks and crocodiles, would be available if required. (5 Cdn Armd Bde O.O. No. 5)

296. During the early hours of 2 Jan, Perth R. and Ir R.C. completed, without incident, the move forward into the F.U.Ps. At 0500 hours, as the artillery opened fire on the initial objectives, the two units, each with two companies up, crossed the strat line (487465 - 470467) - this lay roughly 300 to 400 yards south of the German F.D.Ls. By 0545 hours Perth R. elements had reached the lateral track near its junction with the Via al Conventello (476469), and shortly after an Ir R.C. company cleared the houses (482468), on the track, midway between the Perths and the river. Both units had met with opposition, the Irish killing 10 and taking four prisoners from III/721 Jaeger Regt. On the right near the river, the Irish sub-unit came under heavy artillery fire as it crossed the start line, suffered a number of casualties,

* ...the Via Savarna (or Via Lamone). It follows the course of the abandoned Lamone Canal - the river having turned eastward (488467) to cross the Lamone flats. The road - a wide secondary one - runs on top of a 20 foot embankment overlooking the first vine-bound fields and - south of La Cilla - the broad treeless fields crossing to Via Bosco. West of the road, the canal bed has been planted with poplar rows. They look about 15 years old.

and became slightly disorganized. It quickly reformed, however, and advanced to the houses at the river end of the lateral track. There by 0800 hours after heavy fighting it consolidated. In the meantime the second company of Perth R. had encountered stiff resistance, and for a time made little headway. At 0835 hours, however, this company, supported by a troop of 8 N.B.H., achieved success. With the enemy defences along the lateral track broken, both battalions launched their follow-up companies onto the final objectives. (W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, January 1945: Appx 12, 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 2 Jan 45; W.D., Perth R., 2 Jan 45; W.D., Ir R.C., 2 Jan 45)

297. Supported by tanks of 8 N.B.H., and with Tactical Air Force giving close and effective aid, the attackers made good headway. By 1050 hours, Perth R. had cleared the junction of the Via al Conventello near the small stream, Fosso Basilica, and captured 11 prisoners. Advancing against moderately heavy opposition from the enemy, they moved to the north of the Fosso Basilica, where by 1305 hours they had seized and occupied Casa Stasiol and the houses to the south of it near the Fosso Basilica (481476 - 483478). In the meantime the Irish, on their right, had cleared the Lamone dyke to just north of the bend in the river (4846). In addition Ir R.C. now held the line of the Via al Conventello to the south of the village with leading elements of one company in the village itself. By 1445 hours, after a stiff fight in the course of which a Panther tank was destroyed by the fire of the artillery and mortars directed by the Irish company commander, Ir R.C. had consolidated at the northern edge of Conventello. This completed Phase I of Operation "SYRIA",* an eight hour action which had cost III/721 Jaeger Regt 73 prisoners plus a not inconsiderable number of killed and wounded. (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 2 Jan 45; W.D., Perth R. 2 Jan 45; W.D., Ir R.C., 2 Jan 45)

298. From Mezzano, where they had harboured the previous night, the lead squadrons of 5 Cdn Armd Bde moved into position along the lateral track in rear of 11 Cdn Inf Bde late that morning (2 Jan). Shortly after midday, with the success of Phase I assured, 8 N.B.H. on the left and B.C.D. on the right commenced the advance. By 1337 hours 8 N.B.H., following a north-north-west course across country, had reached Casa Stasiol, the most advanced position of Perth R. From there forward the rate of progress was fairly slow for, although the ground was flat, it was close

and enemy opposition was being met from both flanks as well as from the front. This consisted for the most part of S.Ps. and tks firing from behind buildings and from the dykes of the Bandonato (sic) which commanded our whole sector from the right.

((H.S.)244C5.013(D4): History of Operations
5 Cdn Armd Regt (8 N.B.H.) from 2 Jan 45 to
14 Jan 45)

On the right flank B.C.D. encountered a minefield south of Conventello which they had difficulty in by-passing, and it was 1400 hours before the unit reached the north end of the village. By that time 8 N.B.H. had reached a point only 300

* The code name assigned to the 5 Cdn Armd Div operation.

yards south of the Strada Molinazza - a road running from west of the Fosso Vetro across the brigade front to a junction with the Via Lamone. As they attempted to cross this road, the tanks encountered a ditch along its near side, which, defended as it was by "numbers of S.Ps. and Panthers firing from the north" (*ibid*), proved to be an anti-tank obstacle. As darkness approached 8 N.B.H., now two squadrons strong, consolidated south of the Strada Molinazza about 400 yards east of the Fosso Vetro. ((H.S.)244C5.015(D6): 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 2 Jan 45; (H.S.)244C5.013(D4): 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.) Account of Ops, 1-6 Jan 45)

299. In the meantime at 1640 hours, B.C.D., "having engaged all houses, barns and haystacks on the way" (B.C.D. Report *op cit*), had arrived at the junction of Strada Molinazza and the Via Lamone. There the unit halted its advance and awaited the arrival of C.B. Highrs, now ordered forward by Headquarters 5 Cdn Armd Bde. Apart from a few isolated machine gun posts, which had to be cleared from the houses on both sides of the road beyond Conventello, the move north of the Highlanders was uneventful. At 1930 hours the infantry unit linked up with B.C.D., and disposed for the night in square formation with two companies echeloned on either side of the Abbandonato, 400-600 yards north of the Strada Molinazza. Using a crossing over the latter discovered by the infantry, a troop of tanks crossed and harboured for the night with the right forward company. Later that night, to provide additional protection for 8 N.B.H., a rifle platoon of C.B. Highrs took up position with that unit. During the advance so far, 8 N.B.H. had taken 29 prisoners and C.B. Highrs 19, while B.C.D. claimed two enemy S.Ps. and a Panther knocked out. Casualties suffered in both equipment and personnel by these units were almost negligible. (B.C.D. Report; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 2 Jan 45; (H.S.) 244C5.013(D4): Report on Operations of the C.B. Highrs for period 2 Jan to 13 Jan 45)

300. For the night 2/3 Jan 45, Headquarters 11 Cdn Inf Bde ordered Perth R. to put out protective patrols on the left flank, while on the right Ir R.C. was directed to work east along the north bank of the Lamone River, and secure the ground in the vicinity of the demolished road bridge. There also the Irish would contact 7 H.* of 9 Armd Bde coming up from the south, and establish a protective screen behind which the engineers would construct a bridge. Since patrols had reported enemy posts in the vicinity of the bridge, the Irish Commander decided to put in a noisy attack using one rifle company and a troop of 8 N.B.H. with additional fire support on call from a squadron of B.C.D. and the divisional artillery. At 0100 hours the Irish pushed off with the tanks moving along the dyke on their right in close support. Meeting only light opposition the attack made good headway, and by 0320 hours Ir R.C. had secured the immediate vicinity of the crossing. At 0535 hours the Canadians contacted 7 H., and shortly after engineer reconnaissance parties arrived. By early morning of 4 Jan 45, the latter had completed the construction of a Class 30 Bailey at this place. (11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 2-3 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 3 Jan 45)

* 7th Queen's Own Hussars.

301. At 0500 hours on the morning of 3 Jan, the enemy commenced shelling heavily along the Lamone Abbandonato between Conventello and the church of S. Maria (498495) to the north of C.B. Highrs. This fire continued until 0630 hours, and was followed by a series of counter-attacks launched against C.B. Highrs. From the north-east down the dry river bed an enemy force, equipped with faustpatronen and with an estimated strength of 50, put in the heaviest of these attacks against the right forward company. The fighting continued until 0800 hours, by which time C.B. Highrs had beaten off all attacks, and inflicted considerable casualties on the enemy. In these actions the Canadian losses in personnel were slight, while equipment losses included an infantry jeep and a B.C.D. tank, the first destroyed, and the second put out of action, by faustpatronen fire. (W.D., C.B. Highrs, 3 Jan 45; Report on Operations of C.B. Highrs, op cit; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 3 Jan 45)

302. But these attacks failed to stop, or even to slow appreciably, the advance of 5 Cdn Armd Bde. For, shortly after the fighting ceased, both armoured units were again on the move towards the Bonifica. On the left during the night, 8 N.B.H. had discovered a crossing over the tanks obstacle on its front, and by 0830 hours had two troops across. Half an hour later the leading squadron was underway. The country, according to the unit report on these operations, was

if anything, rather worse than before. The fields were lined with rows of low pollarded trees, between which the grapevines were supported by steel wires stretched about six to nine feet above the ground. Not only was the visibility extremely bad, and limited in many places to 40 yards between rows of trees, but the wires were forever catching in the turret flaps and restricting the free traversing of the turrets.

(Operations 5 Cdn Armd Regt, op cit)

Nevertheless the tanks continued to make steady progress, and by 1349 hours had advanced some 2,500 yards north of Strada Molinazza to the track crossing at Casa Giozoi (494511). On the right, B.C.D. was now advancing on both sides of the Lamone Abbandonato. The right-hand squadron, which had participated in the Ir R.C. engagement during the night, moved off from its harbour near the Lamone at 0800 hours, and at 1005 hours reached the Abbandonato and contacted C.B. Highrs. From there the squadron followed a cross country course, for the road on the east side of the Abbandonato ran along the top of the dyke in full view of the enemy to the north and west. On the opposite side of the Abbandonato the second B.C.D. sub-unit was also making progress but against heavier opposition:

During the advance to PIGNATTA,* "C" Squadron encountered five separate groups of enemy armour, which included self-propelled guns, anti-tank guns and tanks...

(W.D., B.C.D., January 1945: Appx A,
Recommendation for the immediate award
of the M.C., 14 Jan 45)

* A building near the Abbandonato (at 502504) about 1,500 yards to the north of the Strada Molinazza junction.

By 1400 hours both squadrons had reached their immediate objective for the day, a line at right angles to the Abbandonato running through the road junction (501503) at Pignatta. (5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 3 Jan 45; Operations 5 Cdn Armd Regt; B.C.D. Report)

303. Early in the afternoon, the enemy armour on the 5 Cdn Armd Bde front began to move north towards the Bonifica, and the advance quickened in pace. On the left 8 N.B.H. decided to make a dash for the Via Lamone bridge over the Canale di Bonifica by-passing any opposition which might remain. Shortly after 1400 hours the leading tanks of this unit arrived at the canal;

As C Sqn came near the bridge they saw a large number of the enemy on the far bank, some of them dug in but others standing in the open and clearly caught by surprise. C Sqn inflicted heavy casualties on them. While the rest of the sqn covered the approaches and the far bank from the SOUTH-WEST, one tp of tks and a sec of Reece Tp looked for a suitable place to get up from the low ground to the highway and to adv to the bridge. When they found a suitable place a tp of tks adv for the br but just as the first tk was about to drive on the br, the br was blown leaving gaps of 50 and 20 feet.

(W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 3 Jan 45)

304. Upon receipt of the news of the destruction of the bridge, Brigadier Cumberland quickly altered his plan, and ordered B.C.D. to start eastwards at once, and seize intact if possible the bridge carrying the Strada Antica del Bosco over the Bonifica. As the low ground to the east was no longer passable to tanks, B.C.D. was compelled to continue forward along the Abbandonato as far as the road junction (509509) 400 yards south of the Bonifica, and there turn along the road running south-east towards the railway. At 1615 hours the squadron was at some buildings (517503) midway between the Abbandonato and the railway. There, after a short fight with enemy infantry in which it took 11 prisoners, B.C.D. halted its advance. Following a conference with General Hoffmeister, Brigadier Cumberland disposed his command for the night with two squadrons of 8 N.B.H. and C.B. Highrs south of the Via Lamone bridge; Perth R., now under his command, the remaining 8 N.B.H. squadron, and a squadron of B.C.D., covering his left and rear from the area of Pignatta; and the main body of B.C.D. along the road between the Abbandonato and the railway. In addition he ordered C.B. Highrs to attempt to infiltrate across the Canale di Bonifica during the night. (B.C.D. Report; Operations of 5 Cdn Armd Regt; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 3 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 3 Jan 45)

305. Earlier on 3 Jan, to fill the gap on the left flank which the intended move north of Perth R. would create, H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div placed Westmr R. under command H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde.* Westmr R. arrived in the Brigade area that

* At the same time R.C.R. came under command 12 Cdn Inf Bde to replace the Westminsters as brigade reserve at Villanova (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, January 1945: Appx 75, 1 Cdn Inf Div Operations Log, 3 Jan 45)

afternoon and at once relieved Perth R. The positions taken over lay about 700-900 yards back from the Fosso Vetro, and extended from the Strada Molinazza to just south of the Fosso Basilica. Three companies of 1 K.R.R.C. and elements of 12 L.* held the line of the Via al Conventello between Westmr R. and Route 16. (5 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log, 3 Jan 45; W.D., Westmr R., 3 Jan 45; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 3 Jan 45)

306. Early in the morning of 4 Jan the enemy finally launched his long expected attack against the vulnerable left flank of the 5 Cdn Armd Div advance. At about 0430 hours two enemy battalions, preceded by a half-hour artillery concentration, moved in on the 11 Cdn Inf Bde and 9 Armd Bde F.D.Ls. to the west and north-west of Conventello. Along most of the front the attackers failed to make headway, but, between the flanking companies of Westmr R. and 1 K.R.R.C., succeeded in cutting the Via al Conventello, and driving through along the track leading west to within 500 yards of the bend in the river. By then, however, the gap had been sealed off by the defensive fire of the divisional artillery, and the enemy was prevented from reinforcing his success. From the sides of the penetration Westmr R. and 1 K.R.R.C. kept up a steady volume of fire, and at 0745 hours a force composed of one company of Ir R.C. and a troop of 8 N.B.H. commenced to clean up the pocket. By 0900 hours the fighting had ceased, and the situation had returned to normal. (W.D., H.Q., R.C.A. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 4 Jan 45; W.D., 9 Armd Bde, 4 Jan 45; W.D., Westmr R., 4 Jan 45; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 4 Jan 45)

307. To carry out this operation, for which he had entertained great hopes, the enemy had set up a comparatively substantial force consisting of three infantry battalions - 1 Bn 36 S.S. P.G. Regt, 16 S.S. Recce Bn and 26 Recce Bn, under the Commanding Officer of 36 S.S. P.G. Regt, Major Maier. The first two units named actually took part in the attack, but the third, which was held in reserve to exploit a breakthrough, was never committed. The weak point in the plan, as S.S. officer prisoners admitted, was the difficulty of passing forward supporting arms over the multiple canal obstacles east of Alfonsine. This difficulty was greatly increased by the D.A.F., which from 0815 hours onwards continually bombed and strafed between the Vetro and the Senio. In the main, however, it was the skill and steadiness of the defending infantry coupled with the devastating defensive fire of the artillery that broke the attack. In this action some 200 of the enemy were taken prisoner and at least that many more killed or wounded. The defence, on the other hand, got off with very light losses; Westmr R., to give an example, reported only seven wounded. (W.D., Westmr R., 4 Jan 45; 5 Cdn Armd Div Intelligence Summary No. 103, 4 Jan 45; (H.S.) 214B8.023(D18); Eighth Army Intelligence Summary No. 862)

308. During the night 3/4 Jan, C.B. Highrs sent reconnaissance patrols to the south bank of the Canale di Bonifica on either side of the blown bridge. These reported a bank to bank gap of 80 ft with a water gap of 25 ft and some ice. Enemy troops in some strength were holding the far side. In view of this information which appeared to rule out the possibility of a quick crossing of the canal in this area, Brigadier Cumberland at 0600 hours ordered B.C.D. to resume

* 12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales).

its advance towards the Strada Antica del Bosco bridge. At once B.C.D. despatched a squadron along the road to the south-east with orders to cross the dyked irrigation canal, il Canalone, and follow the railway north to the objective. The tanks reached il Canalone without difficulty but, due to the failure of two Ark bridge tanks to arrive, were unable to get across it. Accordingly at 0715 hours Headquarters B.C.D. ordered a second sub-unit to proceed to the area of the bridge via a more direct route along the south side of the Bonifica. The latter made good progress, and by 0850 hours its leading troops were within sight of the bridge. This they reported to be still intact but prepared for demolition, with enemy defences covering the approaches from the east and south but not from the west. Although unable to reach the bridge because of the obstacle of il Canalone on their front, the tanks engaged its defences in a fire fight. When the firing had died down somewhat, a dismounted party crossed il Canalone, removed most of the detonators, and cut the wires leading from the bridge. Shortly after an engineer party arrived to complete the task, and at 1210 hours declared the bridge safe for traffic.* By this time two companies of Perth R., now under command B.C.D., were moving forward on the tanks of the reserve squadron, while the first squadron had commenced to cross il Canalone via a set of undamaged sluice gates (521497). By 1400 hours two squadrons of tanks and the Perths had reached the Strada Antica crossing. Accompanied by a squadron of tanks, a company of Perth R. at once moved over the bridge, and at 1500 hours occupied the road junction (546509) 400 yards to the north, taking nine prisoners and two horses in the progress. B.C.D. then consolidated for the night, with one infantry company and one tank squadron north of the Bonifica, and a second company and tank squadron on the near side covering the approaches from the south. (5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 4 Jan 45; B.C.D. Report; (H.S.)145.2P1011 (D2): Report on the Operations of Perth R. for period 2 Jan to 13 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 4 Jan 45; W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.), 4 Jan 45)

309. In the meantime, in the left sector, C.B. Highrs, which at 1100 hours had returned to under command 11 Cdn Inf Bde, had finally established a crossing over the Bonifica. Earlier two deserters had entered the Canadian F.D.Ls., and reported that their comrades on the north side were in a very demoralized condition. On the strength of this information, a C.B. Highrs patrol of eight men crossed the Bonifica, and at

* To secure a bridge intact in the face of the enemy was a notable achievement, but this time, according to the following extract from an R.C.E. report, luck was with the Canadians:

The two of them worked for 1½ hours and removed approximately one ton of explosives. During the operation their attention was drawn by an infantry officer to the fact that their every action was being watched by a German soldier sitting in a slit trench practically beside the bridge. He had apparently been detailed to blow the bridge but a lucky shot had cut the main leads from his exploder.

((H.S.)244C5.3013(D1): Report on Work Done by R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Division on Exercise "SYRIA" from 020500 to 071800 hrs)

midday returned bringing with it 28 prisoners. At 1410 hours, Brigadier Johnston ordered the Highlanders to take immediate steps to form a bridgehead. By last light, despite strong enemy fire in the vicinity of the demolished bridge, the unit had three companies with anti-tank gun support holding a firm lodgment astride the Lamone Abbandonato. At that time also a squadron of B.C.D., which had crossed on the Strada Antica bridge, linked up with the 11 Cdn Inf Bde unit. Both bridgeheads remained on the alert for enemy counter-attacks, but the night passed uneventfully. Before first light a patrol of C.B. Highrs returned from San Alberto with a report that the enemy had withdrawn from the town. ((H.S.)145.2C5013(D1): Report on Operations of C.B. Highrs; W.D., C.B. Highrs, 4 Jan 45; W.D., 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.), 4 Jan 45; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 4 Jan 45)

310. During the following two days (5 and 6 Jan), 5 Cdn Armd Div easily completed the clearing of the enemy troops from south of the Reno and east of the Fosso Vecchio. For when the Canadians pushed out from their Bonifica bridgeheads, in the early morning of 5 Jan, their chief opponent, 741 Jaeger Regiment,* was already on the move back to the Reno. On the left, during the morning, C.B. Highrs, assisted by a squadron of B.C.D., cleared and occupied San Alberto taking 40-50 prisoners and a considerable quantity of equipment. On the right the main body of B.C.D. tanks swept east, against negligible resistance, along the north bank of the Bonifica as far as the road junction (605540) one and one half miles to the east of Mandriole. There at last light, together with the supporting company of Perths, they consolidated for the night. Meanwhile the B.C.D. squadron, which had supported C.B. Highrs during the morning had returned to under its parent headquarters, and at 1400 hours headed out of San Alberto across country near the south bank of the Fiume Reno. Meeting with no opposition, and coming under only desultory shell-fire, the squadron made good progress, and, by 1600 hours, when it halted for the night, had advanced about three miles. It was then at a track junction (579538) a few hundred yards from the Reno and north-north-west of Mandriole. During the same afternoon, C.B. Highrs took up firm positions north of San Alberto and west of the Abbandonato between the town and the Canale di Bonifica. These positions they retained with minor changes until their relief on 13 Jan. Earlier the divisional engineers had completed a Class 40 bridge at the Via Lamone crossing, over which elements of 8 N.B.H. had then moved in support of the Highlanders. (5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 5 Jan 45; Operations of C.B. Highrs; B.C.D. Report: W.D., H.Q. R.C.E., 5 Cdn Armd Div, January 1945: Appx 1, Engr Sitreps as at 1800 hrs, 5 Jan)

* That the enemy intended to hold the line of the Canale di Bonifica is revealed by the presence in the area of elements of his latest acquisition to the Italian theatre. To support 741 Jaeger Regt he sent the heavy company of III Bn 740 Grenadier Regiment down the isthmus from Comacchio. This was one of the two infantry regiments of 710 Inf Div which, according to prisoners, arrived in Italy on 15 Dec, after a non-stop move from Norway. (5 Cdn Armd Div Intelligence Summary No. 106, 7 Jan 45)

311. During the night (5/6 Jan), a Perth R. patrol probed to within 500 yards of the coast without contacting any enemy. Before first light the following morning, Perths and B.C.D. moved from their harbour, near the canal, along the road leading north to the Reno ferry (614558). About 600 yards south of the river, however, the column encountered a large demolition in the road beyond which the tanks were unable to proceed. Continuing the advance alone, the Perths reached the river at 1000 hours. There they found a large quantity of enemy equipment, including 60 pack horses and mules, but no sign of the enemy. Further evidence of the enemy withdrawal was received during the morning, when a Perth patrol reached Casal Borsetti (6352) on the coast, and found it unoccupied. To the south during the same day patrols of 12 L., operating under 5 Cdn Armd Bde command, swept the narrow coastal strip from Porto Corsini to within a mile of Casal Borsetti without sighting any enemy. Operation "SYRIA" was now finished, and at 1400 hours Perth R. and B.C.D. were relieved in the right sector by 12 L., command then passing to 9 Armd Bde. The two Perth R. companies then rejoined their unit on the Abbandonato in the area of Pignatta, while B.C.D. moved south of the Bonifica into reserve. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 6 Jan 45; Perth R. Report op cit; B.C.D. Report; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 6 Jan 45)

312. Throughout Operation "SYRIA" full use was made by the ground forces of the air support available. On the first day 176 aircraft supporting the attack of 11 Cdn Inf Bde, and the follow-through advance of 5 Cdn Armd Bde, dropped 76 tons of H.E. During the succeeding three days, in 570 sorties, they dropped a further 200 tons of H.E. Despite the fact that the targets were frequently very close to our own troops - at times less than 100 yards distant - the latter suffered no casualties during these attacks. ((H.S.) 244C5.013(D10); Report on Air Operations for 5 Cdn Armd Div for period 26 Dec 44 to 11 Jan 45)

313. The A.O.Ps. proved particularly valuable during this operation, for the F.O.Os. found it difficult to operate, due to the lack of satisfactory O.Ps., in this flat close country; at a Press conference held at Headquarters 5 Cdn Armd Div on 8 Jan, Maj-Gen Hoffmeister paid special tribute to the work of the flying O.Ps., while 8 N.B.H. in their report on the operation recommended that in the future, weather permitting, an A.O.P. be always in the air on the regimental axis. The Crocodiles followed in the wake of the tanks throughout the operation but were never used. The report of their parent unit, 12 R.T.R., speaks of the flame-throwing tanks share in Operation "SYRIA" as an "abortive visit", and complains that among various other tasks the crocodiles were told "to be prepared to engage a TIGER tank and to thaw the R. Reno" ((H.S.) 234C1.013(D22); 12th Bn Royal Tank Regiment Account of Operations 29 Nov 44 to 11 Jan 45). R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div, on the other hand, made an important and considerable contribution to the operation. In slightly less than six days, the engineers opened 46 miles of roads, erected six Bailey bridges totalling 450 feet in length, placed four ferries in operation, filled five craters, and built a barrel culvert. Among other tasks, they located and reconnoitred numerous minefields, in the process lifting nearly 300 mines of various types, and removed almost a ton of explosives from the Strada Antica del Bosco bridge. ((H.S.) 244C5.013(D3); Notes by Hist Offr 1 Cdn Corps taken at a Press Conf held at H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div at 1400 hours, 8 Jan 45; Operations of 8 N.B.H.; (H.S.) 244C5.013(D3); Notes on Operation "SYRIA", 8 Jan 45)

314. The enemy's determination to smash the Canadian thrust cost him heavily in personnel and equipment. From eight enemy battalions, elements of three divisions, committed against them, 5 Cdn Armd Div and 9 (Brit) Armd Bde took over 600 prisoners. His losses in killed and wounded were equally large; 310 enemy dead were counted in the area of operations. In contrast to this, Canadian killed numbered only 30 and wounded were in proportion of 1-3 to German prisoners. The considerable quantity of German equipment which was destroyed or captured included eight Panther tanks, 20 anti-tank guns, four self-propelled guns, four infantry guns and one 88 mm gun. (Notes on Operation "SYRIA"; Notes at a Press Conference, op cit)

CLEARING THE GRANAROLO SALIENT - 1 CDN INF DIV, 3-5 JAN 45

315. While 5 Cdn Armd Div was carrying out its successful advance to the Valli di Comacchio, 1 Cdn Inf Div was engaged in eliminating the enemy salient on the Corps left flank. (See Map 6). There, on 3 Jan, 2 Cdn Inf Bde launched an attack from within the 5 Corps sector designed to outflank the enemy defences along the Naviglio at Granarolo.* As these operations were part of a general Eighth Army plan to straighten its line along its whole front, 5 Corps sent its 56 Inf Div forward to the river west of Granarolo in conformity with the Canadian advance.

316. During the first two days of the New Year, while plans for the 2 Cdn Inf Bde attack were being completed, there was little activity on 1 Cdn Inf Div front. The first two days of January were clear and cold, and our air force kept up a constant attack on enemy targets west of the Senio. On 2 Jan, 1 Cdn Inf Div Artillery and Mortars carried out a diversionary shoot across the front in aid of the 5 Cdn Armd Div attack then going in on the right of the Cdn Corps. But the German failed to react and the front remained quiet with very little retaliatory fire. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 9, Int Summary No. 198; W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 1-2 Jan 45)

317. Meanwhile on 1 Jan Lt-Col Bogert called together his unit commanders and representatives of supporting arms and issued his orders for the 2 Cdn Inf Bde attack, which was to take place in three phases as follows:

Phase I - P.P.C.L.I. was to attack over the Naviglio several hundred yards southwest of Granarolo and form a bridghead between the canal and the Fosso Vecchio.

* On 4 Jan the following temporary tactical boundary between 5 Corps (56 Inf Div) and 1 Cdn Corps (1 Cdn Inf Div) was brought into effect: all inclusive 1 Cdn Corps 385288 - 380292 - road junction 375301 - line of road to 351315 - 348317. The new boundary would be reconsidered on the conclusion of the current operations. (W.D., G(Ops), H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, January 1945: Appx 5). This boundary change placed Granarolo but not the area of the initial 2 Cdn Inf Bde attack within 1 Cdn Inf Div sector.