

Phase II - Seaforth of C. would pass through P.P.C.L.I., cut off Granarolo, and clear the left bank of the Naviglio north to where it passes over the Fosso Vecchio.

Phase III - L. Edmn R. was to advance directly against Granarolo from a start line east-south-east of the town with the task of clearing and occupying it.

The first phase was timed to commence at 1900 hours 3 Jan and phases two and three on orders from the Brigade Commander. An artillery barrage^x was to be laid down on the line of the canal and also along the approaches to the town to give the impression of a frontal attack during Phase I. Artillery for the other two phases was to be the normal concentrations of groups of targets. Tanks of 12 R.T.R. were to be used to thicken up the artillery shoot. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Jan 45; 2 Cdn Inf Bde, Report on Ops, 1 Dec 44 - 8 Jan 45)

318. At 1200 hrs on 3 Jan R., 22e R., supported by Wasps and Lifebuoy flamethrowing equipment, staged a two coy assault on its front, which no doubt succeeded in drawing the attention of the enemy off the main attack. This action, although supported by artillery, mortar and L.M.G. fire, failed in its main purpose, which was to gain control of the near dyke of the Senio along a 1,000 yd front just south of the Russi-Lugo railway crossing. Under cover of smoke laid by our mortars and the added protection of an artillery concentration on both banks, seven Wasps fired the river bank with good results. But the enemy were not easily routed from their strong positions on the dyke, and although driven out by the flamethrowers would return before our infantry could climb the steep banks. The action continued all afternoon, the Wasps returning to re-fuel at intervals, but it was found impossible to dislodge the enemy, and at nightfall both coys with the exception of a few outposts returned to their original positions. The battalion suffered considerable casualties, and, according to the unit diarist, the survivors of one platoon that reached the top of the dyke were taken prisoner.^{xx} Anti-personnel mines among the dyke defences

x The 2 Cdn Inf Bde Report says

...this was the first time anyone in the division had used a barrage since the days of ORTONA. In this case we had a well defined SL - perfectly flat country and very little knowledge of the enemy's position all of which appeared to make a barrage the answer. The only hitch to the plan was that none of the infantry had ever in training or in operations followed a barrage.

(2 Cdn Inf Bde Report op cit)

xx War Service Records (D.V.A.) show only two R. 22e R. personnel taken prisoner on this date but five killed or died of wounds and 18 wounded (Casualties - Italian Campaign)

accounted for a goodly number of the casualties. (W.D., R. 22e R., 2-3 Jan 45)

319. Almost as soon as the noise of battle died down in the R. 22e R. area, the barrage began on 2 Cdn Inf Bde front. During the previous night all three battalions had reconnoitred their start line which was in the F.D.L's. of the 6th Bn Cheshire Regt approximately 500 yds east of the Naviglio. Everything was done to keep the enemy in ignorance of the impending assault. There was as little vehicle movement as possible, and an extensive camouflage covered the routes leading forward from the rear. (For an account of the camouflage scheme see W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, January 1945; Appx 83.) All the attacking units remained under cover during the day in concentration areas near the Lamone in rear of the battle area where they had assembled the previous night. Barely 15 minutes before the artillery barrage commenced at 1900 hrs, P.P.C.L.I. began moving forward. When the barrage started the two leading companies followed close behind it, and at 1930 hours reached the Naviglio having met with no opposition. Both companies crossed the Canal with little difficulty, for the intensity of the barrage had driven the enemy to the refuge of houses in the area, which lay on a track about 600 yards farther west (346315 to 344312). The Patricias surrounded the houses and quickly forced their occupants to surrender taking over 50 prisoners. The attack apparently caught the enemy completely by surprise, for the Patricias sustained scarcely any casualties in the initial assault. P.P.C.L.I. now consolidated the area of houses, and at 2130 hours sent its follow-up company through to the bridge over the Vecchio (346319), on the road leading to the Senio at S. Severo (3233). There, by a flanking attack, the Patricias succeeded in capturing an S.P. gun, a staff car and five more prisoners. The bridge was taken intact. By midnight three coys were firm in the bridgehead while the reserve coy was busy assisting the pioneers to clear the road up to the bridge of mines. As these were frozen firm in the mud lifting them was a slow and difficult task. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 3 Jan 45; W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 3 Jan 45; 2 Cdn Inf Bde, Report op cit)

320. At midnight Seaforth of C. started moving into the bridgehead, and shortly after began advancing north to cut off Granarolo from the rear. Leading elements of the battalion encountered stiff opposition at once from the area of the blown bridge (351316) on the Naviglio just south of the town, but after heavy fighting succeeded in driving the enemy back and capturing an S.P. gun. As they continued the advance north from the bridge, the Seaforths again had stiff fighting with enemy holding the houses along the canal bank. At 0500 hours, however, the leading company reached the bridge into Granarolo (354321) which it found demolished. At this time Seaforth of C. brought forward its follow-up companies, and broadened the front of its attack. One sub-unit was directed west towards the bridge near the sharp bend

in the Vecchio (350324), while another was ordered to continue north along the Naviglio bank. The westerly thrust made good progress and, by daylight, the company had reached its objective and consolidated. Along the Naviglio, however, Seaforths advanced slowly, aided by artillery fire, against stubborn opposition.* About this time German infantry supported by two S.P. guns twice counter-attacked the P.P.C.L.I. positions on the Vecchio. Thrown back on both occasions he then struck at the more recently arrived Seaforth of C. where he suffered a similar repulse. Shortly after, anti-tank guns and tanks of 12 R.T.R. arrived in the bridgehead, and both units were soon in a position to withstand any further enemy attacks. At daylight L. Edmn R. moved into Granarolo where they found that the enemy had already departed. Finally at 1100 hours the right-hand company of Seaforth of C. arrived at the crossing-place of the Vecchio and the Naviglio (358326), the last of the brigade objectives. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Jan 45; W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 4 Jan 45; W.D., Seaforth of C., 4 Jan 45; W.D., L. Edmn R., 4 Jan 45)

321. Thus by midday on 4 Jan 2 Cdn Inf Bde had achieved a quick and complete success. During the morning, when 167 (London) Inf Bde on the left started to advance it met with very light opposition. P.P.C.L.I. contacted 9 R.F. at 1115 hrs, moving forward on their left, and from that time on the "Pats" were practically out of direct contact with the enemy. Opposite Seaforth of C., at the bend in the Vecchio, however, the enemy mustered another strong counter-attack, but the supporting tanks of 12 R.T.R. accounted for approximately 30 of the attackers with their Besa M.Gs. This was the enemy's final effort against the 2 Cdn Inf Bde bridgehead, although heavy shelling lasted all afternoon and caused several more casualties. (2 Cdn Inf Bde Report)

322. On 3 Cdn Inf Bde front, the enemy gave way very reluctantly. Throughout the morning of 4 Jan, while 2 Cdn Inf Bde was consolidating its bridgehead, enemy mortar and artillery fire across both West N.S.R. and Carlt & York R. front, prevented any move forward by these battalions. In the afternoon, although the enemy shelling decreased somewhat, patrols from both battalions found him still holding positions mainly in houses both along the Vecchio on the West N.S.R. front and on the Naviglio opposite Carlt & York R. West N.S.R. made two attempts to get forward in the early afternoon but made no headway. Brigade Headquarters then arranged for a formal attack to take place at 2030 hours. At that time, West N.S.R. and Carlt & York R. advanced, each on a two company front, and supported by an artillery programme. The attack met with little opposition, for the

* On one occasion during the fighting a Seaforth platoon commander approached a house covered by a Bren and with a section posted on either side. Kicking the door with a loud bang he ordered any occupants to come out immediately. A very frightened girl of about twenty years threw herself on the gallant officer with the words "Are you afraid Tenente - I am".

enemy had withdrawn from their forward positions at nightfall. At midnight both battalions were across the Naviglio. Patrols were then sent forward, and on Carlt & York R. front reported the enemy completely back to the Senio dyke, but opposite the West N.S.R. contacted them in defensive positions east of the river. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 4-5 Jan 45; W.D., West N.S.R., 5 Jan 45; W.D., Carlt & York R., 4-5 Jan 45)

323. During the night 4/5 Jan the enemy facing 2 Cdn Inf Bde also withdrew. At daybreak (5 Jan) 167 (Lon) Bde reached the road between Borghetto (343329) and S. Severo. At 0930 hrs Seaforth of C. moved one company across the Vecchio to the crossroads (353331) east-north-east of Borghetto without contacting the enemy. It was now quite certain that he had retired to the Senio dykes all along the 1 Cdn Inf Div front. By this time the advances on its flanks had squeezed 2 Cdn Inf Bde, with the exception of Seaforth of C., out of the line. During the day Brigade Headquarters ordered P.P.C.L.I. back to a reserve position near the Lamone, but kept L. Edmn R. as close support in rear of Seaforth of C. The operation on the left flank of the Division was thus completed in less than 48 hrs. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Jan 45; W.D., Seaforth of C., 5 Jan 45). In this action 2 Cdn Inf Bde had taken 75 prisoners, killed and wounded over 60 other enemy, captured two S.P. guns, five anti-tank guns, and one staff car, at **relatively light** cost to itself.* The Brigade Report on Operations calls it "One of the neatest battles that this brigade has ever had" (2 Cdn Inf Bde Report).

324. The quick and successful conclusion of the operations to clear the flanks of the Canadian Corps, by 5 Cdn Armd Div and 1 Cdn Inf Div respectively, brought messages of congratulations from both the Allied Army Commander, Gen Mark Clark, and the Eighth Army Commander, Gen McCreery:

From Gen Clark:

"My sincere congratulations on the successful attacks by your troops during past few days. The operation was thoroughly planned and executed. Despite strong enemy resistance and counter-attacks Cdn Corps and 5 Corps pressed forward taking heavy toll of enemy dead and many prisoners"

* War Service Records (D.V.A.) report the casualties suffered by the infantry units of 2 Cdn Inf Bde during the period 3-5 Jan 45 as two officers and nine other ranks killed or died of wounds and four officers and 42 other ranks wounded. (Casualties - Italian Campaign)

From Gen McCreery: "My heartiest congratulations to you and your Corps on the very successful operations on both flanks which has driven the enemy back over the SENIO and secured valuable objectives on the right up to LAGO COMACCHIO. The operation of both divisions had been carefully planned and executed with splendid fighting spirit and great skill. Heavy casualties have been inflicted on the enemy in killed and prisoners and you have destroyed or captured many AFVs. Well done indeed."

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, January 1945:
Appx 26, G.O.C. 6-0-1)

In passing these messages down to divisions for conveyance to all troops, Lt-Gen Foulkes added the following personal message:

I wish to add at this time my sincere congratulations to all ranks of the Cdn Corps and the 9 Armd Bde who have fought so well during this stage of the operations. You have shown what can be achieved by careful planning and speedy execution of a sound plan. I appreciate much the way that all soldiers have conducted themselves during these operations. (Ibid)

THE WINTER LINE - PLANNING

325. Immediately following the completion of the operations to clear the Senio from the inter-corps boundary (335338) to the Valli di Comacchio, 1 Cdn Corps commenced the preparation of a line of defence upon which to halt during the winter months. For the combined Winter Offensive which had been planned at the Army Commanders' Conference on 26 Nov (para 7) had now, after several postponements, been finally abandoned. Although German activity in the Serchio Valley was the immediate cause of the postponement on 28 Dec 44 of the Fifth Army offensive,^{*} Lt-Gen McCreery had several

* Whatever the enemy's intent had been in his Serchio Valley attack, it contributed to conditions which influenced the decision further to postpone the projected push against Bologna. On 28 December Fifth Army Operations Instruction No. 38 announced postponement of the assault and placed all Army troops on a 9-day alert for resumption of offensive operations.

(Fifth Army History, Part VIII: p. 19)

days earlier, in a letter to the Commanding General 15 Army Group, requested that the timing for the coinciding attack by Eighth Army be reviewed. The Eighth Army Commander pointed out that "the ammunition position of the Eighth Army has deteriorated steadily during the month of December as a result of the heavy fighting during the first half of the month" (Eighth Army etc: Appx "J-3", Lt-Gen McCreery to CG 15 Army Group, 25 Dec 44). Only 612,000 rounds of 25-pr ammunition would be available for operations between 25 Dec and the end of January. During the intensive period of operations in the first half of December 500,000 rounds of this calibre were expended. In the season of the year now at hand it would be impossible to count on air support on more than one day out of three with the result that an increased demand for artillery support might be expected. In view of these facts Gen McCreery advised Gen Clark:

I am fully aware of the importance of the forthcoming operations and the issues at stake but feel it my duty to warn you that large scale operations beyond the Santerno river will not be practical unless the enemy carries out a withdrawal in front of Eighth Army.

(Ibid)

Further the original target date set for the Fifth Army attack was 7 Dec, but since then Eighth Army had had three weeks fighting thus automatically reducing its capacity to fight simultaneously with Fifth Army by that length of time. In consideration of this situation and with regard to the ammunition position previously set out, Gen McCreery put forth the suggestion that the Eighth Army attack be timed to take place some days later than the attack by Fifth Army. (Ibid). Further consideration, however, brought the decision on 30 Dec to abandon the offensive until the spring.

326. By mid-January the enemy was holding a main defensive line^{*} behind the Senio along the whole of the Eighth Army front, with the exception that from Alfonsine north to the Reno he continued to hold a strong salient forward of the river. Although the enemy defensive works on this line were in an advanced state of preparation, he apparently lacked confidence in his ability to hold it. In reaction to the Canadian drive towards Comacchio, which he interpreted as the prelude to a further full-scale offensive, the enemy increased his efforts to strengthen his Adriatic flank. To replace the disorganized remnants of 114 Jaeger Division, 42 Jaeger Division moved into the sector between the F. Reno and the Valli di Comacchio, and a regimental group of the newly-arrived 710 Infantry Division (footnote para 310) took over in the narrow isthmus between the lagoon and the sea. South of Route 16, 362 Infantry Division came into the line also opposite 1 Cdn Corps. By the middle of January he had eight and a half divisions, of which five and a half were fresh, opposing Eighth Army, whereas at the beginning of December he had had only six, none of them fresh. But the double advantage of ground and numbers had been insufficient to save him in the recent fighting, in which he had lost 4000 men as prisoners and probably at least an equal number in killed and wounded against the Eighth Army's total casualties of just under 6,500. (Eighth Army etc, pp 98-99)

* Named by the Germans the "IRMGARD LINE"

327. Although the enemy's reserves would hardly permit a counter-offensive on the lines of von Runstedt's thrust in the west, the possibility of some form of an attack being launched could not be disregarded by Eighth Army Headquarters. Such an attack down the axis of Route 16, where the Lamone River was the only major obstacle, might result in the loss of Ravenna, and enable the enemy to swing down on Forli, cut the Via Emilia and close Route 67.* (See Map Florence - Rimini - Bologna Sector). On 9 Jan, Gen McCreery held a conference of Corps Commanders to discuss the matter and lay down a defensive policy. Three days later the policy decided upon at this meeting was published by Eighth Army as Operation Instruction No. 1447. As defined in this instruction the intention was to defend the existing line and prepare to resume the offensive.**

* The account prepared by the Historical Officer at Headquarters Eighth Army suggested that such a possibility was very seriously considered by Corps, as evidenced by heavy demands for demolition materials, but that this anxiety was not shared by Headquarters Eighth Army, since the German reserves appeared weak. (An estimate of German reserves was six divisions; 162nd (Turcoman) and one Italian Republican, both practically valueless; 98th, 114th, and 26th Panzer, all badly in need of rest and below strength; one division only recently raised to first-line status).

(Eighth Army etc, footnote p. 99)

** One of the principal problems of the defensive phase was to keep the enemy in a state of nerves as to our intentions. One method which had early been decided upon and ordered was to prepare a number of local offensive operations to be mounted at short notice. In fact, apart from a few small raids, only a small number of operations took place that did not contribute directly to the mounting of the Spring Offensive; those that were undertaken were almost all designed to clear the enemy from the eastern floodbank of the Senio. This was hardly enough to achieve the object desired; accordingly on 18 January Headquarters 15th Army Group produced a plan, going by the code name "Oakleaf", intended to induce in the enemy more positively a state of anxiety. This required not only aggressiveness on the part of forward troops, but that they should be informed that the offensive would be resumed in the near future; that leave parties should be spread over all formations to conceal the fact that some of them were resting; and that formations leaving the Army area should do so in wireless silence, while the same level of wireless traffic was maintained within the Army area. There were many difficulties in complying with this order, however, if formations were to get the rest and training they required. The dearth of accommodation, in particular, made it necessary, to send many formations out of the Army area for rest and training in that of No.1 District. Representations were therefore made to Headquarters 15th Army Group, who agreed to relax their requirements to such a degree that little remained of the plan; but every effort was made to ensure that the level of wireless traffic should fall as little as possible below what was customary.

(Eighth Army etc, pp 101-2)

On 18 Jan 13 Corps would come under command and Eighth Army would then have three Corps in the line, left to right 13 Corps, 5 Corps and 1 Cdn Corps, and 2 Polish Corps in reserve.

The defensive tactics to be employed were to hold the line with as few troops as possible and to rely on immediate counter-attack. Although the defence was based primarily on the obstacle presented by the River Senio, in most cases the most advantageous forward positions would be some little distance back from the eastern floodbank, enabling a reasonable field of fire to be obtained, casualties to be avoided, and economy in men to be effected; but these positions would have to be close enough to prevent the enemy building up across the river with impunity. Should penetration occur, there would be no withdrawal on the flanks, and to seal it off two stop lines were to be prepared on the lines of the Rivers Lamone and Montone with switchlines between them. Forward of these two lines was to be a primary belt of prepared demolitions, and between them a subsidiary belt for which the charges were to be stored locally. Later on 23 January, the demolition policy was altered in view of the diminished likelihood of enemy attack, only one demolition belt, forward of the Lamone, being kept with the charges in position, except for the important bridges over the Fiumi Riuniti Ravenna.*

(Ibid, pp 100-1)

With the assumption of the defensive, the control of all stocks of artillery ammunition passed to Allied Force Headquarters. At the same time (8 Jan 45) a drastic reduction was made in the allotment of artillery ammunition to Corps, fixed at 10 rounds per gun per day for field artillery and five for medium artillery. Out of these allotments the Corps had to make provision for such local offensive operations as they might wish to undertake. (Ibid, p. 101)

328. Unfortunately these restrictions on the use of artillery coincided with a similar reduction in the amount of air support available. As part of their preparations to rest and train for the spring offensive, the Air Force proposed to reduce the number of daily sorties. This saving to be effected mainly by a reduction in the number of those made in close support of the Ground Forces. As a result of this proposal the two services entered into prolonged and at times heated negotiations. Finally, however, towards the end of January an agreement was reached which called for all direct support targets to be closely scrutinized by the Air Force before acceptance.

These differences, however, had no effect whatever on the spirit of co-operation between the two Services, which resulted during the defensive phase in useful advances in the technique of air support and in the final offensive in a closer integration of effort than had ever before been achieved.

(Ibid)

* Should read "Fiumi Uniti south of Ravenna". The second of the two demolition belts followed the line of the Fiumi Uniti and Montone River.

329. Preliminary planning for the defence of the Winter Line was already under way at Headquarters 1 Cdn Corps. On 4 Jan Corps Headquarters received word that an Italian Combat Group, the Gruppo Cremona,* would be placed under command in the near future. Gen Foulkes intended to use the Italian formation to hold the right sector between the railway and the coast, and to divide the rest of the front into two sectors with 9 Armd Bde in the centre and one of the Canadian divisions on the left. This would enable him to withdraw the remaining Canadian division into reserve for rest and training. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 23, 1 Cdn Corps Operation Instruction No. 38, 5 Jan 45). On 12 Jan Corps Headquarters issued a detailed instruction for the occupation of the Winter Line. This differed slightly from the original plan in that it placed the whole of the front left of the railway under 1 Cdn Inf Div with 9 Armd Bde remaining in the centre sector but under command 1 Cdn Inf Div. As laid down in this instruction the defensive battle would be fought in the F.D.Ls., and each unit would maintain in readiness a local counter-attack force, including tanks, for immediate use in the event of any localities being over-run by the enemy. In addition each division would have available one battalion and a squadron of tanks as divisional counter-attack force. To ensure that forward units could hold out for at least 24 hours they would store additional ammunition, rations, and water, in company positions. In case of penetration by the enemy in neighbouring sectors, divisions would prepare switch lines to cover their flanks. Similar steps would be taken to isolate penetrations within divisional areas. In Corps immediate reserve would be one brigade of 1 Cdn Inf Div, one regiment of 21 Tk Bde, and R.C.D., in main reserve 5 Cdn Armd Div. To build up a complete picture of the enemy's dispositions and intentions formations were ordered to adopt a vigorous and energetic patrol policy

* The two regiments which made up the infantry component of the Gruppo Combattimento "Cremona" were first founded as volunteer units from Lombardy and took part in the War of Independence of 1848. Eventually they became the Brigata "Cremona" and following the wars of 1866 became a part of the regular army losing their local associations but not their name. The formation continued as part of the regular forces and in 1939, with the addition of a field artillery regiment and other units, became the "Cremona" Division. In September 1943 the division was stationed in Corsica, and following the armistice succeeded, with the aid of the civil population, in expelling the German and Fascist troops from the island. In September 1944 the division moved to Southern Italy. Here it was reformed as the Cremona Combat Group and equipped with British weapons and transport.

((H.S.)224Cl.011(D1): Account of the
History and Operations of the Gruppo
Cremona)

for the winter months. Formation commanders would carefully plan a series of small offensive operations on the scale of one operation per sector each two weeks, each attack to employ one or two companies adequately supported by artillery fire. In addition to keeping the enemy in a state of anxiety and destroying his more troublesome positions these operations would serve to keep the troops offensively minded, and practice the staffs in the planning of operations. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 4 Jan 45 and Appx 55, 1 Cdn Corps Operation Instruction No. 39, 12 Jan 45)

DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS OF 5 CDN ARMD DIV, JANUARY 1945

330 To return now to 12 Cdn Inf Bde which, although it had had no part in the offensive carried out by 5 Cdn Armd Div during the first days of January, had nevertheless been in daily close contact with the enemy in the course of improving and maintaining its defensive positions along the Senio. These positions remained basically the same as those taken over on 27 Dec from 11 Cdn Inf Bde although some improvements were effected. On 2 Jan 45 Lan & Ren Scot R., supported by the combined fire of the tanks, mortars, and artillery, attempted to clear a particularly strong enemy lodgment on the east bank in the vicinity of the demolished Fusignano bridge. The Lanarks succeeded in gaining control of an additional stretch of the dyke at the bulge in the Senio south of the bridge (382434), but so strong was the enemy fire from the vicinity of the bridge itself that they were unable to complete their task. This constituted the principal effort of the brigade during the remainder of its stay in the line. Both sides carried out patrols while the mortars and artillery had no dearth of targets. The snipers were very active; those of P.L.D.G. claimed 17 kills and 12 probables, Lan & Ren Scot R. 30 kills and 50 probables. Although the troops on the dykes did not have to undergo the mortaring and shelling which their comrades farther removed from the enemy had to endure, they were continually engaged in bitter, close, fighting. The 12 Cdn Inf Bde Report states that:

Fierce grenade duels were frequent and as a novelty our tps rolled bangalore torpedoes down the bank and threw 75 grenades with 36 grenades attached. In retaliation the enemy rolled fused teller mines down our side of the bank.

(12 Cdn Inf Bde Report)

On one occasion, according to the diarist of Lan & Ren Scot R.:

...a German dug through our dyke right into one of our slits. The German then threw a grenade which shook our lads up considerably.

(W.D., Lan & Ren Scot R., 3 Jan 45)

The patrol activity of the Canadian units was confined in the main to contact and standing patrols, the latter providing protection for the large parties which were continually at work laying mines, trip wires, defensive wire and generally improving defences. On several occasions, however, enemy fighting patrols raided platoon and section localities. Due to the determined stand of the troops on the spot and the quick

counter-action of supporting weapons, however, these attacks failed to dislocate the defence to any extent. (W.D., H.Q. 12 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Jan 45; 12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; W.D., Lan & Ren Scot R., 1-8 Jan 45; W.D., P.L.D.G., 1-8 Jan 45)

331. 12 Cdn Inf Bde remained in the line until 8 Jan, when as part of the plan for preparation of the Winter Line, it was relieved and withdrawn into reserve at Ravenna. On that day Seaforth of C. took over the positions held by Lan & Ren Scot R., and at 2322 hours command of the sector passed to 2 Cdn Inf Bde. P.L.D.G., however, remained where they were, coming under command the 1 Cdn Inf Div brigade until 14 Jan. R.C.R., which had replaced Westmr R. as 12 Cdn Inf Bde reserve in Villanova on 3 Jan, now reverted to under command 1 Cdn Inf Bde. Westmr R. remained with 11 Cdn Inf Bde until the relief of that formation on 12 Jan by the Gruppo Cremona. (12 Cdn Inf Bde Report; W.D., G(Ops), H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, January 1945; Appx 75, 1 Cdn Inf Div Operations Log, 3 and 8 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. 12 Cdn Inf Bde, January 1945; Appx 3, 12 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 8 Jan 45)

332. East of the railway, 5 Cdn Armd Div continued to hold the line until 14 Jan. Over most of the front during this period there was little contact with the enemy. Unit diarists of the four infantry battalions comprising 11 Cdn Inf Bde - the fourth Westmr R. under command since 3 Jan 45 - record only two instances of patrol clashes. On the first occasion a fire fight which occurred between patrols ended without casualties, on the second an enemy fighting patrol overran a Perth standing patrol killing the corporal and taking the two men prisoners. On the right, however, in the sector east of San Alberto between the Canale di Bonifica and the Fiume Reno, where G.G.H.G. had taken over from 12 L. on 7 Jan, there was considerably more activity. To hold this large area, the reconnaissance unit had two squadrons (the third had remained in Mezzano) one disposed along the north bank of the Bonifica between Mandriole and the Strada Antica bridge, the other based at the Bonifica astride the road leading north to the Reno ferry. Later the third squadron moved up from Mezzano to form a regimental reserve. Late on 7 Jan an enemy force crossed in assault boats near the Reno ferry, drove in a G.G.H.G. listening post and for a few hours, until driven back by artillery and tank fire plus the efforts of dismounted personnel of G.G.H.G., dominated the area of the near dyke. At this time G.G.H.G., because of mines, had no defensive positions on the south bank of the river. Following a second enemy raid in the early morning of 8 Jan, however, G.G.H.G. manned the dyke with a full troop, and since the near bank overlooked the far bank was then able to command the whole area. Thus when on 9 Jan the enemy made a third assault over the river, he met with such a fusillade of fire from the defenders, that he broke and

withdrew in utter confusion.* During the morning of 10 Jan a group of some 30 partisans, then operating with G.G.H.G., accompanied by a Stuart tank to provide a wireless link and give support, attempted to investigate the narrow neck of land lying between the sea and the Reno River. When the Italians reached the base of the spit, however, enemy troops in some houses commanding the area opened fire, and within a short time the partisans were streaming south in some confusion. Two days later G.G.H.G. sent a force consisting of an assault troop and a troop of tanks to clear the enemy from the spit. This attack achieved complete surprise, due partly no doubt to the fact that one of the first rounds of H.E. destroyed the enemy's communications centre and killed their company commander. Following a one-sided fight in which they killed a number of the enemy and took 48 prisoners, the Horse Guards destroyed all the habitable buildings in the spit and withdrew. (Ibid; W.D., 3 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 7-12 Jan 45) (See Map 7)

333. In 11 Cdn Inf Bde sector, preparations for a line of defence for the winter months had now commenced. In an operation instruction issued on 7 Jan, entitled "Defence of the Lamone Abbandonato", Headquarters 11 Cdn Inf Bde informed its units that:

The sector now held by this brigade will be prepared for static defence forthwith. As the area will be taken over from time to time by various formations with different establishments, the area will be treated as one sector. The sector will be defended by a back stop along the line of LAMONE ABBANDONATO, a series of nodal points about 500 yards in front and outposts maintained about 200 yards in front again with roving patrols working to the RENO - PIGNATTA - VECCHIO - VETRO respectively. There will be two reserve bodies - one NORTH and one SOUTH of the BONIFICA.

(W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, January 1945:
Appx 5, 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operation
Instruction No. 1, 7 Jan 45)

* The performance of the Germans in this attack, according to the Regimental Historian of G.G.H.G.:

...smacked of gross amateurism, as they had begun firing wildly, as soon as they landed, and appeared to have a very hazy idea of what they were trying to do. After first light, we began rounding up the stragglers, who had not been able to return, one of them being a Norwegian, who claimed to have joined the Wehrmacht in order to escape to our lines and seemed to be genuinely bona fide. He gave us a picture of the lack of experience of the Norway Division, by relating the story of his German companion, who had begun shooting hysterically as soon as he disembarked and in answer to the Norwegian's demand to know at what he was firing, made the classic and rather pathetic reply, "I don't know. I'm just scared".

((H.S.)141.4A1013(D3): Regimental History of 3
Cdn Armd Recce Regt (G.G.H.G.), Chapter IX
(ms))

At this time the units of 11 Cdn Inf Bde were disposed as follows: on the right, north of the Canale di Bonifica, in positions covering the bridge over the canal and San Alberto, was C.B. Highrs, in the centre, between the Strada Molinazza and the canal were on the right Perth R. and on the left Ir R.C., while the left flank position was still held by Westmr R. During their remaining few days in the line, in the absence of enemy activity, apart from periodic shelling and mortaring, all units were able to concentrate on strengthening and improving these positions. Defended localities were wired, occupied buildings fortified, and a number of tanks supplied by 5 Cdn Armd Bde dug-in as pillboxes. The engineers laid minefields, prepared the bridges over the Lamone for demolitions, improved existing routes, and prepared the road north from Ravenna to San Alberto, as an alternative route to the more exposed Via Lamone.

334. In the meantime arrangements for the relief of 5 Cdn Armd Div by the Cremona Battle Group went forward. On 9 Jan Italian reconnaissance parties arrived in the brigade area, and a few days later the first of the reliefs commenced. During the morning of 11 Jan, 27 L. took over from 1 K.R.R.C. in the sector along the Via al Conventello to the left of Westmr R., and simultaneously came under command 11 Cdn Inf Bde. The boundary between 11 Cdn Inf Bde and 9 Brit Armd Bde then shifted south to the line of the railway. On 12 Jan units of 21 and 22 Regiments Cremona Battle Group (Gruppo Cremona Combattimento) took over the brigade defended localities south of the Canale di Bonifica, I and II Battalions 21 Regiment relieving Ir R.C., Westmr R., and 27 L., and II Battalion 22 Regiment relieving Perth R. Early on 13 Jan the Perths moved off to Cattolica, the Westminsters to Villanova, and the Irish across the Lamone River to Le Torri (4946). Until 16 Jan when it also moved to Cattolica the latter unit remained at Le Torri in support of the Italians but under Corps command. At 0600 hours 14 Jan command of 5 Cdn Armd Div sector passed to H.Q. Gruppo Cremona. During the afternoon of 15 Jan the remaining two battalions (I and III) of 22 Regiment relieved C.B. Highrs and G.G.H.G.; the infantry battalion moving to Cattolica that night, the reconnaissance regiment to Cervia on the following day. Between 12 and 14 Jan the North Irish Horse relieved 8 N.B.H., and the latter then pulled back to Cervia. Thus by 16 Jan 5 Cdn Armd Div had withdrawn all its troops out of the line and had all but a few odds and ends back in 1 Cdn Corps Reserve Area on the Adriatic coast; the Headquarters at Riccione, 5 Cdn Armd Bde and the armour at Cervia, 11 Cdn Inf Bde at Cattolica and 12 Cdn Inf Bde at Camerino. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, January 1945; Appx 125, 1 Cdn Corps Operations Log, 14 Jan 45; W.Ds., G.G.H.G., H.Q. R.C.E. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 7-14 Jan 45; 11 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 10 Jan 45; 5 Cdn Armd Div Operations Log, 13 Jan 45; see also W.Ds., H.Qs. and Units of 5 Cdn Armd Bde and 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 7-16 Jan 45)

THE OPERATIONS OF 1 CDN INF DIV IN THE WINTER LINE,
6 JAN - 27 FEB 45

335. Although 5 Cdn Armd Div had now completed, as it turned out, its operational tour in Italy, 1 Cdn Inf Div continued to hold for some weeks longer a large section of the Eighth Army front. During the period 6-15 Jan, the division consolidated its positions along the Senio, at the same time, gradually extending its right flank to the north. Prior to the relief of Lan & Ren Scot R. by Seaforth of C., the

latter unit was relieved in its positions on the divisional left flank by a unit of 56 Inf Div, and the inter-corps boundary moved north to the line of the Granarolo - Cotignola railway. On the 6th and 7th P.P.C.L.I. and L. Edmn R. took over the right and left halves of the R.C.D. sector respectively, and on the following day 2 Cdn Inf Bde assumed command of this and the 12 Cdn Inf Bde sector on the right, taking 4 P.L.D.G. under command at the same time (see also para 331). 3 Cdn Inf Bde, now the left flanking brigade, remained in the line until 11 Jan, when it handed over its sector to H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde - R.C.R., Hast & P.E.R. and 48 Highrs relieving R. 22e R., Carlt & York R. and West N.S.R. respectively. Following its relief 3 Cdn Inf Bde concentrated in the Russi - Godo area with the role of Corps immediate reserve. On 10 Jan H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps placed 9 Armd Bde under command H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div thus extending the divisional front north to the line of the railway. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 6-14 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 6-14 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 6-14 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 6-14 Jan 45)

336. Except along that part of the front which lay between the Fossio Vecchio and the Senio south of Alfonsine, the line which 1 Cdn Inf Div had to defend during the coming weeks followed closely the east bank of the River Senio. The system of defence followed was as laid down in a divisional operation instruction issued on 11 Jan.

Def system will consist of -

- (a) Where possible properly wired-in strong outposts along EAST bank of SENIO which will be fully manned at night but may be occupied as OPs by day.
- (b) FDL to run approx 300 yds from SENIO with killing ground to front and between coy localities. Coys will be capable of all round def and pls mutually sp.
- (c) Areas between coy localities not covered by observed SA fire will be mined with anti-personnel mines.
- (d) On that portion of the front not facing up to the SENIO, a thick minebelt will be laid in front of FDL.
- (e) A high degree of alertness will be required particularly at night. Full use should be made of illuminating flares incl trip flares.
- (f) Initially bn sub sectors will be held three coys up. Res coy with in sp one tp tks to be held as an immediate counter-attack force.

There will be no WITHDRAWAL on the part of any tps in the FDL.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div,
January 1945; Appx 19, 1 Cdn Inf
Div Op Instr No. 3, 11 Jan 45)

Holding the 13-14 miles of divisional front were three brigades.* Apart from the local reserves mentioned in sub-para (f) above all three were fully committed. In the case of the two Canadian brigades each had in support two squadrons of tanks, one company of M.M.Gs., a 4.2" mortar company and an anti-tank battery. A fourth brigade plus R.C.D. and a regiment of tanks from 21 Tk Bde constituted the Corps immediate reserve, less one infantry battalion and one squadron of tanks available as divisional immediate reserve. (Ibid; W.D., G.S. H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, January 1945: Appx 20, 1 Cdn Inf Div Op Instr No.4, 11 Jan 45)

337. "Nothing of importance goes on", a diarist at H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div writes on 10 Jan, adding "no doubt lower formations, particularly units in the line will be able to fill their diaries with small incidents, to them full of meaning" (W.D., G.S., H.Q., 1 Cdn Inf Div, 10 Jan 45). The nature of these small incidents is revealed in the following extract from the L. Edmn R. report on operations:

The days were much alike here. Any enemy movement drew fire. The bn snipers accounted for many Germans seen digging along the dyke top. The Arty F.O.O. and all the mortar F.O.Os. engaged small targets regularly. In the right forward posn PIATs and 36 grenades and 2" mortars were used effectively. Contact patrols were frequent and wire was extended and improved. Movement by day at the fwd pls was avoided. Enemy harassing fire with mortars and guns was regular.

((H.S.)145-2E2013(D2): The Loyal Edmonton Regiment Report on Operations from Granarolo to the End of the Italian Campaign)

In many cases opposing outposts lay within grenade range of one another. Seaforth of C., whose F.D.Ls. were in places only 15-20 feet from the enemy, found that employment in such close quarters had quite a different effect on unit morale than they had anticipated:

It was thought that extreme proximity to the enemy over a period of time would be both costly and wearing to the morale. Exactly the reverse has been found to be the case. With a fifteen foot "No mans land" on the R. SENIO dyke, the strangeness soon wore off our men. They became increasingly bold until gradually, the Canadian inability to take war seriously turned the whole thing into a joke. Improvisations ranging from grenades tied together up to bicycles and even a motor car loaded with HE have been costly to the taxpayer but probably damaging to Hun morale and undoubtedly of greatest possible value to our own.

* Roughly the three sectors were (1) from the railway Ravenna - Alfonsine to the Via San Antonio (2) from Via San Antonio to railway crossing 3638 and (3) from there to the inter-corps boundary, the railway crossing 3533.

The end of the SENIO tour will find the regiment in better spirit than for a long time.

((H.S.)145.2S5013(D1): The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada Operational Report Capture of Granarolo and the Senio Winter Line)

Enemy positions on the east bank, linked with the opposite side of the river by footbridges, enabled him to dominate with observed fire large areas of the flat ground leading up to the river. This, coupled with his defensive alertness, greatly handicapped Canadian attempts to establish new positions on the dyke.*

339. Canadian and German activities during the first half of January consisted chiefly of patrolling, small scale raids, and further improvement of defence works. Apart from contact patrols, all patrol activity was coordinated at Brigade Headquarters level, and followed normally a certain pattern. In the first place a reconnaissance patrol went out to establish the presence or otherwise of the enemy and to reconnoitre routes. This was followed by either an ambush patrol to waylay enemy traffic to or from the post or a fighting patrol to drive him out of the position. During the early hours of 6 and 7 Jan enemy patrols attacked and drove in outposts of R. 22e R., inflicting some casualties. On the evening of 8 Jan a slightly larger German force surprised a West N.S.R. forward position, capturing six men and a portable flamethrower equipment. Two nights later a West N.S.R. fighting patrol attempted to take out enemy positions in the vicinity of the railway bridge south of Cotignola (357339), but withdrew in the face of strong enemy small arms and mortar fire. Late on 11 Jan the enemy made a fairly strong effort to clear and occupy the left forward positions of P.L.D.G. According to prisoners captured in this fight the enemy plan had been to make a three-pronged assault, each 25 strong, against the 5 Cdn Armd Div unit. In the event only one of these thrusts penetrated the P.L.D.G. defences. This came in over the dyke near Casa Tesselli where the enemy succeeded in surrounding some buildings occupied by a troop of P.L.D.G. setting them on fire and forcing the latter to withdraw. On the following day, after a counter-attack by infantry and tanks had failed to restore the situation, Lt-Col Bogert approved a plan to set up a new defensive line in rear of the former dyke positions. In this action enemy killed were estimated to number 25-30 while P.L.D.G. casualties of all types were about half that number. Late on 14 Jan 1 Welch relieved P.L.D.G., and command of that unit sector passed to 9 Armd Bde. A sharp action took place in L. Edmn R. sector on 15 Jan, when that unit attempted:

* Commenting on this problem, the Brigade Major 3 Cdn Inf Bde (Major W.G. Robinson, O.B.E.) stated:

In establishing positions on the dyke our experience has been that the position can be established without much trouble by blasting our way in with lots of fire power. But right behind the assaulting party must be a party to do digging mining and wiring. Jerry is so active that he will flush the position out if this is not done.

((H.S.)234C1.013(D4):
Summary of Operations 1 Cdn Inf
Div, 1 to 15 Jan 45)

...to wire the foot of the dyke bank, well in front of the left and centre coys for 800 yards, to prevent enemy patrols entering the area easily by night. The plan involved a covering force of two pls occupying the near bank of the Senio. Sp coy provided **six wiring parties**. The two pls of D coy got onto the bank easily in a silent adv and took two prisoners. The dumps of barb and concertina wire were carried up and spaced below the bank at 2030 hours, but by 2200 hours the German reaction was considerable. Rifle grenades showered the near face of the dyke, and an MG to the left of the covering force opened up on the main wire dump. A Hun patrol came into the left fwd coy at 2220 hours but was driven off. At the same time B coy's pl on the bank at the right of the bn sector reported an effective German counter-measure. Four enemy carrying explosive popped up over the dyke bank, ran to the house where the fwd section was in posn and blew a large explosive charge. This put the section temporarily out of action and was followed by a small attack to clear the covering party from that area of the dyke. The wiring was proving unduly costly for 10 casualties had been inflicted on the bn by 2300 hours. The plan was therefore abandoned...

(L. Edmn R. Report, op cit)

In the left divisional sector where 1 Cdn Inf Bde on 11 Jan had taken over from 3 Cdn Inf Bde (see para 335) there was, during the remainder of the half-month, very little enemy activity east of the river. ((H.S.)234Cl.013(D4): Summary of Operations 1 Cdn Inf Div, 1 to 15 Jan 45; W.D., R. 22e R., 6-15 Jan 45; W.D., West N.S.R., 7-15 Jan 45; W.D., P.L.D.G., 7-14 Jan 45; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 52, 1 Cdn Corps Ops Summary No. 80, 11 Jan 45)

339. During the second half of January 1 Cdn Inf Div sidestepped to the right to take over a regimental sector of the Cremona Battle Group, later handing over its left brigade sector to 56 (Brit) Inf Div of 5 Corps thus shortening the Canadian Corps front by several thousand yards. Reliefs within 1 Cdn Inf Div permitted all brigades to obtain several days rest in the reserve role. On 16 Jan Carlt & York R. concentrated near the sugar factory east of Mezzano replacing Ir R.C. as tactical reserve behind the Cremona Gruppe. During 18 and 19 Jan 3 Cdn Inf Bde took over from 2 Cdn Inf Bde in the Fusignano sector (roughly between the 38 and 44 Northing); R. 22e R. relieving P.P.C.L.I., Carlt & York R., Seaforth of C., and West N.S.R., L. Edmn R. After only three days in reserve in the Russi-Godo area, 2 Cdn Inf Bde on 22 Jan relieved 21 Regt Cremona Battle Group in the sector between Pignatta and the Ravenna-Alfonsine railway. Dispositions of 2 Cdn Inf Bde in the new sector were two units forward, L. Edmn R. right, and Seaforth of C. left, and one unit, P.P.C.L.I., in reserve east of the Lamone. At this point 1 Cdn Inf Div was holding a greatly increased frontage with all its resources committed. On 29 Jan, however, 56 Inf Div took over from 1 Cdn Inf Bde, thus releasing that brigade for use as Corps immediate reserve. The inter-corps boundary was then moved north to the line of the Bagnacavallo - Lugo railway. During this period the F.D.Ls. of 9 Armd Bde were held by 1 K.R.R.C., 7 H.,^x 27 L. and 1 Welch.

x 7th Queen's Own Hussars.

On 27 Jan 12 L. passed from under command 9 Armd Bde to under 56 Inf Div, and, on 29 Jan, 2721 Sqn R.A.F. Regt replaced 2788 Sqn R.A.F. Regt, then operating under command 1 Welch.* 9 Armd Bde was due to be relieved early in February by 2 (Brit) Armd Bde, and for this purpose the latter formation on 30 Jan was placed under command 1 Cdn Inf Div. Tank support continued to be provided by two regiments of 21 Tk Bde for the Canadian infantry brigades and by 4 H** for 9 Armd Bde. (Summary of Operations 1 Cdn Inf Div, 16 to 31 Jan 45; (H.S.)274B9.008(D1): War Diary, 9 Armd Bde, 27-29 Jan 45; W.Ds., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, and Canadian formations and units under command, 16-31 Jan 45)

340. The weather during most of January was clear and cold, the ground firm. The rivers had not frozen over, but by the end of the month had increased in depth and swiftness. Very little rain fell but there were several light falls of snow, traces of which remained to the end of the month. During the second half-month patrols of both sides were again active, and clashes between them were numerous. In the new sector on 1 Cdn Inf Div right flank, the enemy had, in operations against the Italians, seized and occupied as strong points a number of houses east of the Fosso Vetro on L. Edmn R. front. Against these buildings the Edmontons put in two strong patrol attacks and one raid at company strength. One of the former went in on 24 Jan against an enemy party occupying a ruined building (481490) 300 yards west of the battalion forward posts. On this occasion the Edmontons made use of the Wasp flamethrower for the first time.

At 1945 hours, with a pl following, the Wasp worked up within 30 yards of the ruin and put light hot-shots into it. The fire was completely satisfactory. The Wasp withdrew when through firing, and mortar smoke was put down to avoid silhouetting our tps as they closed in against the burning building. Unfortunately the enemy had withdrawn from the posn.

(L. Edmn R. Report)

The company attack was made against a troublesome enemy position at Casa Baronio (487500), several hundred yards to the west of the right forward Edmonton company, which had been waging propaganda warfare against the neighbouring battalion of the Cremona Gruppe. At 0600 hours on 28 Jan two platoons of

* Concerning the relief of 2788 Sqn the war diary of H.Q. 9 Armd Bde states:

Nothing was known either at this H.Q. or the H.Q. 1 Welch about this relief. It must have been a private RAF arrangement.

((H.S.)274B9.008(D1):
War Diary, 9 Armd Bde,
29 Jan 45)

** 4th Queen's Own Hussars.

L. Edmn R., under cover of a short but heavy artillery and mortar concentration, rushed the houses of Casa Baronio. Both reached their objectives without casualties or opposition from the enemy. After firing PIAT bombs into both houses and generally shooting up the surrounding area, the platoons withdrew. During the withdrawal, unfortunately, one platoon came under machine gun fire from the Fosso Vetro dyke behind Casa Baronio, and suffered several casualties. Although the number of enemy killed in this action was not known, enemy stretcher-bearers were observed to take away, during the morning, ten wounded personnel. Against this L. Edmn R. total casualties numbered ten, including two killed and three prisoners. (1 Cdn Inf Div Summary of Operations; W.D., L. Edmn R., 23-28 Jan 45; W.Ds., G.S. H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div and Canadian formations and units under command, 16-31 Jan 45)

341. The enemy followed an aggressive policy of defence throughout this period (16-31 Jan). Between 16 and 20 Jan he was particularly active against the Italians, and on 19 Jan overran a Cremona outpost, and penetrated to a depth of about 500 yards. The Italians were unable to regain all the ground lost, and the captured positions were later the scene of a number of minor attacks by L. Edmn R. (see para above). The heaviest enemy effort of the period was made against 9 Armd Bde on the night 16/17 Jan, when a company of 36 S.S. Pz Gren Regt, broke through 1 Welch positions on the Via Rossetta (4044). Although by early morning this attack had spent its force, brisk fighting continued throughout the day. It was not until late on 18 Jan that the Welch and the tanks of 4 H., with strong support from the artillery, cleared out the last of the enemy pockets. It was a relatively costly affair for 16 S.S. Pz Gren Div whose losses were estimated to have totalled 109 of all types. On the other hand the British suffered comparatively few casualties. Actions on the scale of those noted above were exceptional, however, the German continuing to expend most of his energy in raids at platoon or lesser strength. On one of these smaller raids he used a flamethrower against our troops; the diarist of 48 Highrs recorded that on 25 Jan:

At 0500 hours "D" Coy's outpost was fired on by rifle grenades from the opposite side of the SENIO, following which 4 shots were fired from a flamethrower from the river bed. One of the outposts was temporarily knocked out by the blast effect, but the men retaliated with 4 boxes of 36 grenades and some 77 grenades, causing the enemy to withdraw.

(W.D., 48 Highrs, 26 Jan 45)

By the use of footbridges and rubber boats, the enemy retained, throughout the month, considerable freedom of movement over the Senio; an Air O.P. on 21 Jan reported some 16 footbridges in existence over that river between Cotignola and Alfonsine. The Canadian outposts along the dyke spent considerable time and material in attempts to destroy these bridges. Seaforth of C., to give an example, took five days and used a variety of weapons, including a barrel filled with explosives and rolled over the top of the dyke, to destroy one near Fusignano. R.C.R., however, found that a PIAT fired at high angle was a most effective weapon, and claimed to have destroyed several bridges in one day (18 Jan) by this method. (1 Cdn Inf Div Summary of Operations; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 72, 74 and 80, 1 Cdn Corps Ops Summaries Nos. 85, 86 and 88; W.D., 9 Armd Bde op cit, 16-18 Jan 45; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, January 1945: Appx 51, 1 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No. 118, 19 Jan 45)

342. During the month mysterious explosions to the west of the Senio, led to the belief that the enemy might be preparing to withdraw, but were later found to be associated with his preparations to defend the Senio Line. The enemy divisions facing 1 Cdn Corps remained very much the same throughout January. On the German right was 362 Inf Div overlapping into 5 Corps front and extending north to opposite S. Polito, from there to the railway at Alfonsine was 16 S.S. Pz Gren Div, between the latter and the Valli di Comacchio was 42 Jaeger Div, and lastly, astride the narrow neck of land between the lagoon and the sea were elements of 710 Inf Div. Reports received from partisan sources towards the end of the month indicated that possibly 114 Jaeger Division had again come into the line replacing the inexperienced 710 Inf Div. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 116, 1 Cdn Corps Int Summary No. 225, 29 Jan 45; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, January 1945: Appx 54, 1 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No. 119, 21 Jan 45)

343. Early in February Headquarters Eighth Army informed Headquarters 1 Cdn Corps that, in the near future, the Canadian formations in Italy would leave that theatre for North-West Europe and an operational role with First Cdn Army. This move would be a "Top Secret" matter and in correspondence would be referred to as Operation "GOLDFLAKE".* On 8 Feb, as part of the cover plan for Operation "GOLDFLAKE", Headquarters 1 Cdn Corps issued Operation Instruction No. 41 according to which the Corps would "move into Army Gp Res during Feb and early March to train for ops in spring" (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, February 1945: Appx 24). This was followed on the 9th by a meeting in Ravenna between General McCreery and senior officers of Corps Headquarters and 1 Cdn Inf Div at which the details of the plan were discussed. (W.D., 1 Cdn Fd Hist Sec, 9 Feb 45). On 10 Jan at 1800 hours command of the Corps sector passed to 1 Cdn Inf Div, Cremona Gruppe and 1 Cdn A.G.R.A. at the same time passing from under Corps to under divisional command. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, January 1945: Appx 41, 1 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 10 Feb 45). The first "GOLDFLAKE" moves took place this same day when 5 Cdn Armd Div commenced moving its tracked vehicles by rail from Riccione, and its wheeled vehicles by road from Cattolica. Corps Headquarters despatched its first road flight from Ravenna on 13 Feb. (Historical Section C.M.H.Q. Report No. 181: Operation "GOLDFLAKE", the move of 1 Cdn Corps from Italy to North-West Europe, February-March 1945, pp 9, 11))

344. For a short period 1 Cdn Inf Div, swollen almost to Corps size - it now had, apart from its normal complement of artillery, engineers, M.M.G., and not including the A.G.R.A. and the Partisans, some 22 units under command - held under direct command Eighth Army over 20 miles of front. Fortunately there was little activity and for the "G" Staff at any rate little to do; the G (Ops) diarist complained that "The Ops Room remains dull and the day seems long" (W.D., G.S.,

* The planning and execution of this move is covered in some detail in Historical Section C.M.H.Q. Report No. 181: Operation "GOLDFLAKE", the move of 1 Cdn Corps from Italy to North-West Europe, February - March 1945.

H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 14 Feb 45). On 16 Feb 5 Corps took over the former 1 Cdn Corps sector, and the two separate commands which had existed prior to 10 Feb again came into being; 1 Cdn Inf Div (with under command 2 Armd Bde) on the left and the Cremona Gruppe on the right. During this same period a number of changes of lesser importance took place in the 1 Cdn Inf Div sector. On 3 Feb 2 (Brit) Armd Bde, with under command the Bays, 9 L., 10 H., 27 L., 1 Buffs, 1 Welch, 1 K.R.R.C., and support and service elements, relieved 9 Armd Bde.* On this same day 1 Cdn Inf Bde took over from 2 Cdn Inf Bde; R.C.R. relieving P.P.C.L.I. in the right forward position, Hast & P.E.R. taking over from Seaforth of C. on the left, and 48 Highrs replacing L. Edmn R. as brigade reserve. After six days as reserve in the Russi - Godo area, 2 Cdn Inf Bde again went into the line on 10 Feb, relieving 3 Cdn Inf Bde in the Fusignano sector; from right to left Seaforth of C., L. Edmn R., and P.P.C.L.I., relieving Carlt & York R., West N.S.R., and R. 22e R. Until the final relief of 1 Cdn Inf Div by 8 Ind Div, which commenced on 23 Feb, there were no further changes in divisional dispositions. ((H.S.)224C1.013(D6): Summary of Ops 1 Cdn Corps February and March 1945 by Maj L.A. Wrinch, Hist Offr, 1 Cdn Corps; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 1-16 Feb 45; Summary of Ops 1 Cdn Inf Div, 1-15 Feb 45)

345. Rain and milder weather, which set in at the end of the first week of February, caused the Senio to rise and ground conditions to deteriorate. Movement of traffic to and from the forward positions became very difficult, particularly in the right sector of 1 Cdn Inf Div where at least one sub-unit was supplied by mule and cart transport. Patrols, sniping duels, artillery exchanges, mortar and M.M.G. fire, constituted the chief activity of both sides during the period. In the left sector, where the opposing posts were in close proximity to one another, there was again a prolific use of grenades.** 1 Cdn Inf Div mounted only one raid at more than

* Queen's Bays (2nd Dragoon Guards), 9th Queen's Royal Lancers, 10th Royal Hussars (Prince of Wales' Own), 27th Lancers, 1st Battalion The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment).

** Being so close to the enemy provided the troops with an opportunity to try out a number of novel ideas. Two of the more successful of these inventions are described in a report of Seaforth of C.

The "V-2" is a slingshot made from a crotch of a tree and an inner tube. The stem of the crotch is placed in the ground and allowed to turn. This gives it a 360° traverse. By putting seven second 36 grenades in the pouch and firing it the job of an EY rifle is achieved with very good effect. The "V-2" has a range of approximately 100 yds with 36 grenades and 50 yds with 75 grenades. The "Dagwood" is a 36 grenade sandwiched with two 75 grenades contained in a sand-bag. The sack is swung around and when released the 36 grenade is detonated, thus setting off the 75 grenades. The resulting explosion was terrific, and reports state that they had a bad effect on the morale of the enemy.

((H.S.)145.2S5013(D1): The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada Operational Report, The Capture of Granarolo and The Senio Winter Line)

platoon strength in February. This action occurred early on the 3rd when two platoons of P.P.C.L.I. raided enemy positions at Casa Baronio - the scene of an earlier raid by the L. Edmn R. (see para 340). Although "a good plan was made with arty, M.3", M.4.2", MMG, and 95 mm's giving supporting fire" the raid was not a success. (W.D., P.P.C.L.I., 2 Feb 45).

For four minutes the arty laid down a well placed concentration on the objective and then lifted to the canal bank, as the two assaulting pls moved up from their firm base at 492499. At 0204 hrs 14 pl under Lt. Lewis, and 15 pl led by Sgt Sansom, made the assault on the building with one pl to the right and the other making a flanking attack from the left. The counter mortar fire and counter battery were good, keeping enemy fire to a minimum. As the pls approached the buildings the enemy pulled out on the double, and as a sec of 14 pl was clearing the forward house of the group, a prepared charge was set off by the enemy and most of the section were buried in the debris. The remainder of the pl started to dig them out but a well placed mortar crump caught them and many casualties were inflicted.

(Ibid, 3 Feb 45)

Casualties suffered by P.P.C.L.I. in this action - recorded by the unit diarist as six killed, 30 wounded and one missing - were disproportionately high considering the relative unimportance of the task and the number of troops involved.* (Summary of Ops 1 Cdn Inf Div, 1-15 Feb 45 and 16-25 Feb 45; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div and formations and units under command for February 1945)

346. Enemy patrols during the period had fair success in surprise attacks on Canadian posts. Two such raids on R. 22e R. cost them 14 casualties. The first of these took place on 4 Feb when a wiring party was ambushed and lost five men as prisoners. Again early on 7 Feb an enemy raiding party surprised an R. 22e R. platoon headquarters, killed a sentry and took the officer and seven other ranks prisoner. (1 Cdn Inf Div Summary of Ops, 1-15 Feb 45 and 16-28 Feb 45; W.D., R. 22e R., 4 and 7 Feb 45). R.C.R. was the next to suffer from these surprise tactics. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, February 1945: Appx 8, 1 Cdn Inf Bde Operations Log, 16 Feb 45). On 16 Feb enemy raiders penetrated an R.C.R. company defended area and took 17 prisoners without a fight. In his book "55 Axis" Major Strome Galloway, E.D. gives the following account of this incident:

The raid was cleverly conceived and daringly carried out. "B" Company was in a square formation, each corner being in a farm building. Two platoons were forward, whereas the reserve platoon and Company HQ formed the rear corners of the square. Between was an Artillery O.P. protected by a section detached

* War Service Records give P.P.C.L.I. casualties on this date as seven killed, one died of wounds and 28 wounded (Casualty Statistics - The Campaign in Italy)

from one of the forward platoons. On the second floor was a section of Medium Machine Guns. At 3 a.m. the four corners of the company position were pounded with shells, the concentrations continuing for almost forty minutes. During this time the enemy raiding party, estimated at twenty-five, overcame the sentry posts to the front and rear of the building and then rushed into the ground floor where three-quarters of the garrison were resting. These men were overcome without the chance of fighting back and were frog-marched into the inky blackness towards the German lines...Upstairs the men on the M.M.Gs. were helpless, for to sweep the barnyard with fire would like as not have killed friend as well as foe.

(Galloway, Major Strome, E.D., "55 Axis", pp 189-90)

347. During the night 24/25 Feb the enemy, making his strongest effort of the month on the 1 Cdn Inf Div front, twice attacked the 2 Cdn Inf Bde positions near the river bank south of Fusignano (map square 3742).

At approx 1815 hrs extremely heavy mortar and shell-fire came down on the rt fwd coy of the LER and the two left fwd coys of the SEAF of C. Mortar and Arty DF tasks were called for and fired but twenty minutes later the enemy attacked with two coys of inf and a pl of pnrs. The attack was directed on the LER rt flank and the SEAF of C. left and centre coys evidently aimed at penetration between the two bns to eventually seize control of the EAST bank of the river. The situation remained slightly obscure for a short time as both line and wireless comm to the LER pl was knocked out but contact was finally est by patrol. The shelling which had ceased when the attack came in commenced again at 1900 hrs but quietened down after half an hr. Although the situation was not completely restored, as small gps of enemy had managed to work through the FDLs and in rear of the fwd pls, it appeared as though the main danger was past. Strong fighting patrols from the SEAF of C. and LER scoured the coy areas and by 2100 hrs the situation was completely restored. A total of five PW were taken, three of these passing through med channels as they were wounded. It was believed that the attacking force suffered high cas, our mines and booby-traps inflicting several.

(W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 24 Feb 45)

Casualties suffered by the two Canadian units involved in this affair amounted to three killed and 16 wounded. Apart from a short fire fight, when a small patrol attempted unsuccessfully to infiltrate between L. Edmn R. and P.P.C.L.I., there was no further activity on the brigade front until early the following morning. Then, from 0300 hours to 0330 hours, there was again very heavy shelling on Seaforth of C. Following this an enemy raiding party, with an estimated strength of 30, came in on both sides of a company of Seaforths opposite Fusignano. But the fire of the Seaforths caught the enemy as he was sky-lined on top of the dyke inflicting a number of casualties on him, and quickly forcing him to break off the action. Unit

reports of the night's fighting give casualties of L. Edmn R. as four killed and 10 wounded, and Seaforth of C. as one killed and 16 wounded.* Known enemy casualties were seven prisoner and six killed. In addition German stretcher bearers were busy throughout the night evacuating their wounded. For the Canadians, this minor defensive battle marked the end of the fighting in Italy. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 24-25 Feb 45; Seaforth Report; L. Edmn R. Report)

348. A particularly annoying enemy practice, during this period of static warfare, was that of sending over personnel in the guise of stretcher bearers and Red Cross workers into the area of our advanced posts in an alleged search for German wounded, sometimes in places where no action had occurred. To give an example, during the morning and afternoon of 11 Jan, white-clothed enemy bearing a large white flag possibly with a Red Cross on it made their way into houses opposite the P.L.D.G. sector. From observation of the activities of these personnel the conclusion was reached that they were not Red Cross personnel, but combat troops assembling for a raid (see para 338). Again on 16 Jan three enemy stretcher bearers walked **along top of the east dyke in front of Seaforth of C.**, openly taking note of the layout of the latter's F.D.Ls. When intercepted they were found to be without Geneva cards, and accordingly were taken prisoners. As a result of this incident pamphlets were prepared in German warning the enemy that in the future enemy Red Cross personnel would not be tolerated on our side of the dyke at any time under any circumstances. Two days later the enemy produced Geneva cards for the alleged stretcher bearers, and requested their release. Their emissary was told the matter was closed, relieved of the cards, and escorted back to his own lines.** Another incident, involving suspected enemy misuse of the Red Cross emblem, concerned a hospital in Fusignano.

In FUSIGNANO, opposite the Seaf of C sector is a large three story building marked with red crosses, presumably a hosp, however the Seaf of C, having noticed considerable mov in the upper floor felt positive that an enemy OP located in the building was responsible for the accurate fire that has been directed on them of late. Upon the Bde Comd's recommendation a request to shell the building, after having given the enemy notice to vacate, was fwd to HQ EIGHTH ARMY and received approval.

(W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 10 Jan 45)

* War Service Records give the following figures for 24-25 Feb 45: Seaforth of C. two other ranks killed, one died of wounds, and two officers 18 other ranks wounded; L. Edmn R. four other ranks killed, two died of wounds, and eight other ranks wounded (Casualty Statistics - The Campaign in Italy)

** An Italian medical officer, a deserter, interrogated on 7 Feb, revealed that the Geneva cards in question were made out two days after the capture of the stretcher bearers. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, February 1945: Appx 20, 1 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No. 126, 8 Feb 45)

A leaflet was prepared, for delivery by PIAT, throwing or patrol, giving the enemy until 1400 hours the following day (11 Jan) to evacuate the hospital. At midday on the 11th, however, H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps issued orders forbidding the shelling of the building. In the meantime, at the request of a German medical officer, a Seaforth stretcher bearer had investigated the hospital, and returned reporting no signs of military occupation. This was as expected. The matter was concluded with a message to the enemy to the effect that should it again be suspected that the hospital was being used as an observation post it would be shelled and suggesting that the evacuation of the patients begin as soon as possible. (W.D., P.L.D.G., 11 Jan 45; W.D., Seaforth of C., 16-18 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 10-11 Jan 45)

349. As might be expected both sides devoted considerable attention to propaganda and "sonic warfare" during this period. Printed matter was delivered chiefly by air or artillery, although patrols, mortars, and PIATs, were also used. Still another method used was that of recording the messages and projecting them through loudspeakers placed in the F.D.Ls. German propaganda, directed mainly at the Italians, included appeals to desert, safe conduct passes, sentimental music, the threat of new weapons, and the old theme of fighting to the last anglo-american bullet, and the last drop of Italian, Indian, etc., blood. One enemy pamphlet contained detailed instructions on methods of artificially inducing or simulating various ailments, including among many others paralysis, heart disease, and tuberculosis. Allied propaganda concentrated on bringing up-to-date news on German reverses to the front-line soldiery, and on placing safe conduct passes in the hands of would-be deserters. These latter appealed in the main to non-Germans serving in the enemy armies. Front-line news broadcasts seemed to meet with the approval of the enemy, for on several occasions he stopped the fire of his M.M.Gs. and mortars in order to listen. The equipment used for the news broadcasts was also utilized for the broadcasting of faked operational noises; recordings of patrol noises, tank and vehicle movements and reliefs. "Sonic" warfare, as this type of activity was called, was intended to attract enemy fire, lure his patrols into ambush, or cover current or pending operations. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, January and February 1945; 1 Cdn Corps Int Sums and Ops Sums, January and February 1945; Summary of Operations 1 Cdn Corps by Maj L.A. Wrinch, 16-31 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 3-4, 6 Feb 45)

350. Meanwhile arrangements had been completed for the relief of 1 Cdn Inf Div by 8 Ind Div. The handover commenced on 23 Feb when 2/12 F.R.R., 1 R.F. and 1/5 R.G.R. of 17 Ind Inf Bde relieved R.C.R., Hast & P.E.R. and 48 Highrs respectively, command of the sector passing from 1 Cdn Inf Bde to 17 Ind Inf Bde at 2250 hours.* At first light on 25 Feb units of 21 Ind Inf Bde commenced taking over the positions occupied by 2 Cdn Inf Bde in the Fusignano sector; 1/5 Mahratta L.I. relieving Seaforth of C., 5 R.W.K. taking over from P.P.C.L.I., and 3/15 Punjab R. replacing L. Edmn R.**

* 2nd Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment (P.W.O.), 1st Battalion Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment), 1st Battalion 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles.

** 1st Battalion 5th Mahratta Light Infantry, 5th Battalion Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, 3rd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment.

Apart from one incident - the wounding of three Mahrattas in the Seaforth of C. area by enemy mortar fire - the reliefs proceeded smoothly and efficiently. At 2140 hours H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div issued the following message:

0188 SECRET comd of 1 Cdn Inf Div sector passes to 8 Ind Div 252130 hrs. 3 Cdn Inf Bde comes under comd 8 Ind Div wef 252130 hrs. all infm

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, February, 1945; Appx 1, Ops Log, 25 Feb 45)

At this time the division had already commenced to move south, and the first convoys had arrived in the temporary concentration area around Fermo, a town near the Adriatic coast about 150 road miles distant. At 1800 hours on the 27th 3 Cdn Inf Bde, the last Canadian formation to hold an operational role in Italy, handed over its responsibilities as divisional reserve to 19 Ind Inf Bde, and joined the trek southward. (Ibid, Ops Log, 25 Feb, and Appx 33, 1 Cdn Inf Div Op Instr No. 6, 19 Feb 45; 1 Cdn Inf Div Summary of Operations; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 Feb 45; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 25 Feb 45; W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Feb 45)

AIR OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF 1 CDN CORPS,
DECEMBER 1944 - FEBRUARY 1945

351. During the period 2 Dec 44 to 5 Jan 45, out of 35 days, only 13 provided good flying weather. Of the remaining 22 days, almost 50% were unsuitable for any type of air operations, and flying was seriously restricted on the remainder. Total sorties flown by the Desert Air Force (D.A.F.) in support of 1 Cdn Corps during this period numbered 2625.

Of these, 2403 were fighter-bombers, and 222 were lt and med bombers. CABRANK, operated by ROVER DAVID made 122 attacks in close sp, using 635 aircraft. There were 190 sorties against brs on the Corps front and 130 arty R missions were flown of which 106 were effective.

BEAUFIGHTERS of 600 Sqn operated 74 night patrols claiming 2 Ju 87's destroyed and one damaged, and a MOSQUITO night-fighter destroyed one Ju 188 (or 1 Me 410) on the night 3/4 Jan 45.

Almost exactly 25% of the entire DAF effort in all theatres of ops was directed in close sp of 1 Cdn Corps and well over one half of this effort was directed on targets within 1,000 yds of our own troops. Considering the time of year and the state of the weather, these are surprisingly high proportions.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps,
January 1945; Appz 89, Report
on Air Operations in Support
of 1 Cdn Corps, 2 Dec 44 to 5 Jan 45)

352. On several occasions CABRANK was used to assist the ground forces in breaking up enemy counter-attacks. In the course of these actions, according to reports by ground observers the aircraft obtained several direct hits on enemy armour. Certain prisoners, who had experienced CABRANK attacks under these circumstances gave as their opinion:

...that even though it may be impossible for the aircraft to attack more than one part of the enemy's counter attacking front at one time, the presence of aircraft will send all tps to ground, and even if this is for a limited period only, the momentum of the counter attack is lost.

(Ibid)

TIMOTHY and PIG attacks accounted for 312 of the total D.A.F. sorties. From the point of view of the ground troops this type of attack, in which fighter-bombers operating usually in conjunction with a ground attack "blitzed" a selected area close in front of our own troops, had two main features:

It not only destroys various houses in which the enemy may be lodged, but its chief value is in keeping down the heads of the enemy during the initial stages of an adv over comparatively open ground. The moral effect on the enemy is fully as great as the material effect, but this demoralization does not last indefinitely. It is essential, therefore, that the ground attack be thoroughly tied in with the aerial blitz, and that the tps move fwd so as to get the greatest possible advantage from the air attack.

(Ibid)

The PIG or bad-weather TIMOTHY, differed from the TIMOTHY in that it was a strafing attack made at under 1,000 feet, and at times, as close as 100 yards from our own troops. In this form of attack, the limiting factor was that the aircraft was exposed to the fire of all types of anti-aircraft weapons, including small arms.*

* The following incident will serve to demonstrate the effectiveness of small arms fire against attacking aircraft.

A bombing attack was made by 4 Mustangs on a strong pt and after bombing the aircraft returned to straff the target. This was very thoroughly done, but in the process, 3 of the 4 aircraft were hit, the pilot, in one case, being struck in the eye. Although none of this was seen by the ground tps, who probably wondered why the aircraft flew away apparently intact, one of the planes later crashed, and the other two had to undergo repairs which kept them out of the air for 4 or 5 days.

(Report on Air Operations in Support of 1 Cdn Corps, op cit)

353. During this period, the D.A.F. destroyed six bridges on the Corps front and damaged five others, two of them badly. To achieve this result, the D.A.F. carried out 198 sorties, 144 of them being Kittyhawks carrying 1000-lb bombs. Over 30% of the air effort, however, was directed against hostile batteries, a total of 171 of these being attacked.

Due to the excellent camouflage and the use of houses and farmyards as gun areas, in only 17 of the attacks were guns seen. In a further 18, possible pits were located, but the bulk of the reports were "no guns seen". When no signs of arty are visible, the mission is forced to bomb the arbitrary pinpoint on which they were briefed. In spite of the fact that 8 figure map refs are usually given, guns are sometimes 100 yds away, and consequently the bombing, although accurately on the pinpoint, may have little or no effect on the guns. This lack of visual confirmation of the target reduces the feeling of accomplishment to the pilot concerned.

(Ibid)

Although an immediate assessment of the results was thus difficult to make, reports from prisoners indicated that these attacks, frequently achieved success. In one case, so reported, three out of four enemy guns were destroyed in an attack by four Spitfires. (Ibid)

354. By early January, with the main offensive operations of the ground forces completed, the battle area presented fewer worthwhile targets for the Air Force. It was evident that the tactical squadrons would be more profitably employed in attacks against the enemy's rear communications, dumps, supply installations, and rear establishments. As a result the Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force (M.A.T.A.F.) reduced to a minimum its activity over the battle area. (See also para 328) By the end of January the D.A.F. had lapsed into relative inactivity on the Eighth Army front. The only air operations worthy of note during February were on the 23rd and 24th when the D.A.F. flew well over 100 sorties in support of an attack by 56 Inf Div in the Cotignola sector. During this latter month the M.A.T.A.F. flew only slightly more than 1600 close-support sorties over the Fifth and Eighth Army fronts, or about three fifths of the number flown in support of 1 Cdn Corps alone during December 1944. (R.A.F. Mediterranean Review No. 10; The Invasion of Italy Part VI - Italian Finale, pp 9-10)

RECAPITULATION

355. Allied offensive operations in December were almost entirely confined to the Eighth Army front. The enemy during this phase showed great stubbornness in defence, and was prepared to stand and fight where he found himself rather than, as he had done in the autumn fighting, fall back voluntarily to the next river line as soon as he was at a disadvantage. The offensive opened with a certain air of optimism^x and some early successes gave hopes of a more rapid

x Statement by Historical Officer of H.Q. Eighth Army (Eighth Army, etc., p. 87)

advance than had hitherto been the case. On 2 Dec 1 Cdn Corps launched its attack on the enemy switch-line between the Montone and the Lamone. After some hard initial fighting 1 Cdn Inf Div by the 3rd was in Russi, while 5 Cdn Armd Div on its right had cut the Russi-Ravenna road. This advance which threw back 356 Inf Div's left placed its neighbour 114 Jaeger Div in a difficult position. With an open right flank 114 Jaeger Div quickly withdrew to the north, and by the end of 4 Dec the Canadians had cleared Ravenna, and secured the line of Route 16 as far as Mezzano on the Lamone. In the hope of gaining the full advantage from the enemy's discomfiture 1 Cdn Inf Div immediately prepared an assault across the Lamone. On the night 4/5 Dec 1 Cdn Inf Bde crossed the river on a two-battalion front. But the enemy proved better prepared than was thought, and in a few hours fighting the following morning inflicted heavy losses on the Canadians, and threw them back to the east bank.

356. 5 Corps attacked on the night of 3 Dec, in conjunction with the Polish Corps on their left, to secure the high ground west of Faenza. The attack met with strong resistance along a ridge of high ground running through Pideura and the latter place was not taken until 7 Dec. The enemy reacted strongly and promptly to the British advance. On the 9th he launched 90 Pz Gren Div, which he had brought over from Fifth Army front into a violent counter-attack against 5 Corps. The attacks cost the enemy heavy casualties and failed to bring about any improvement in his situation. Furthermore he was to discover that he had needlessly committed his 90th Div, for 5 Corps, at that point, due to maintenance difficulties and the necessity to regroup, called a halt to its offensive until 14 Dec.

357. In the meantime 1 Cdn Corps, chiefly because of bad weather conditions, had ceased its attacks following the repulse of 1 Cdn Inf Bde on 5 Dec. By 10 Dec, however, the weather had improved, and that night the Canadian Corps attacked across the Lamone with two divisions on a wide front. The attack made good initial progress, and during 11 Dec both divisions reached the Fosso Vecchio. That night the Canadians easily crossed the Vecchio and resumed the advance, 1 Cdn Inf Div to the Canale Naviglio and 5 Cdn Armd Div to the intermediate Fosso Vetro. The enemy, however, rallied at this stage, and endeavoured to stabilize his position. He brought 98 Inf Div from opposite Fifth Army and put it in alongside the weakened 356 Div, strengthened his Naviglio defences, and established a strong switchline between Bagnacavallo and the Lamone River. Both divisions of 1 Cdn Corps attacked across the Naviglio during the night 12/13 Dec but only 1 Cdn Inf Div on the left succeeded in establishing a bridgehead. The enemy struggled hard to destroy the Canadian lodgment on the 13th, and at one point was on the verge of achieving his aim when the timely arrival of the armour tipped the balance against him. With the 1 Cdn Inf Div bridgehead firmly established, 5 Cdn Armd Div renewed its efforts to get across the Naviglio on its front. To prepare the way for a fresh assault the division sent Westmr R. supported by tanks through 1 Cdn Inf Div and north along the west bank of the canal. That night, with the pressure on its front greatly lessened as a result of the rapid progress of Westmr R. the division crossed the Naviglio. During the 15th it faced up to the Fosso Munio, and extended its bridgehead to the south to link up with that of 1 Cdn Inf Div. Although the enemy no longer had a river obstacle between him and 1 Cdn Inf Div, he showed no signs of an intention to withdraw.

358. During the night 14/15 Dec 5 Corps renewed its offensive south of Route 9. The two attacking divisions made slow but effective progress on the 15th, 2 N.Z. Div secured the area of Celle (2724), and 10 Ind Div by-passed the enemy's main positions on the Pergola ridge to secure the high ground beyond. The enemy, weakened in numbers as he was, now had little hope of continuing to hold the Pergola ridge, and accordingly withdrew that night. On the following day (16 Dec) the Indian Division secured the ridge, and the New Zealanders closed up to the Senio. Troops of 5 Corps entered and cleared Faenza on the same day, but came to a halt on the northern outskirts of the town against an enemy switchline which ran from the Lamone along the Scolo Cerchia and Rimini - Bologna railway to the Senio. Supply difficulties and losses in personnel sustained in the recent fighting prevented 5 Corps from making an immediate attempt to cross the Senio or to continue against the switchline.

359. Eighth Army intention was now to complete closing up to the Senio so that it might be prepared to launch an assault over that river in conjunction with a Fifth Army offensive. Accordingly 1 Cdn Corps was instructed to advance to the river from its Naviglio bridgeheads, while 5 Corps cleaned up the enemy still holding between the Lamone and the Senio. The Canadians attempted on 18 Dec to break out to the Senio through the switchline south of Bagnacavallo, but the attack made so little progress that it was abandoned within a few hours, and the decision taken to concentrate the weight of the Corps in attacks from the Naviglio bridgeheads. The battle commenced on the night 19/20 Dec, and continued through the following day, the enemy defences having to be virtually destroyed piecemeal before he gave way. On the night 20/21 Dec he finally withdrew, and both Canadian divisions swept up to the Senio. 5 Corps, meanwhile, had commenced driving northwards between the Lamone and the Senio. The British attack made a good start but a deterioration in the weather and stiffening enemy resistance gradually slowed the pace. By the end of the year 5 Corps advances and smaller gains by 1 Cdn Corps had pressed the enemy into a salient extending, on 5 Corps flank from Felisio (3031) on the Senio south of Granarolo to the Lamone, and opposite 1 Cdn Corps from Cotignola along the Via Madrara to the Lamone.

380. Although the abandonment of the plans for a combined offensive by both armies had relieved the urgency of operations east of the Senio, Eighth Army was still concerned with clearing its front up to that river in preparation for the winter halt. Accordingly, early in the new year, 1 Cdn Corps undertook operations to tidy up the ground on its flanks. 1 Cdn Inf Div launched the attack on the Granarolo salient on the night 3/4 Jan and within 48 hours had completed its task. On the right 5 Cdn Armd Div in four days (2-6 Jan) advanced to the Fiume Reno and the Adriatic coast, in the process so badly battering 114 Jaeger Div that it had to be withdrawn immediately after the battle. This attack on his extreme left wing so alarmed the enemy that on 4 Jan he made a violent and costly counter-attack using in vain a battle group from 16 S.S. Pz Gren Div in an attempt to cut off the Canadian division from its base. Although these were the last offensive operations carried out by the Canadians in Italy, Canadian troops continued to hold for some weeks thereafter a substantial portion of the Eighth Army Winter Line. In the middle of January 5 Cdn Armd Div was withdrawn and nearly a month later H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps. The last week in February saw the relief of 1 Cdn Inf Div and the completion of the last