



National Defence

Défense nationale

The Canadian Parachute Centre

Le Centre de Parachutisme canadien

PO Box 1000 Stn Forces  
Astra ON K0K 3W0

CP 1000 Succ Forces  
Astra ON K0K 3W0

1326-1 (Adjt)

8 June 2001

Director History and Heritage  
National Defence Headquarters  
MGen George R Pearkes Building  
101 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa ON K1A 0K2



#### HISTORICAL REPORT

1. In conducting some spring cleaning recently, I came upon the enclosed document which I strongly felt to be of historical value. The report deals with the Operations of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade in Italy from 25 November 1943 until 4 January 1944. Of interest was the note on the cover page from Directorate of History which leads me to believe that the enclosed may have simply been a duplicate copy of the original version.
2. To be on the safe side, however I am nevertheless returning you this copy for archive purposes.
3. Queries may be directed to the undersigned at (613) 392-2811, extension 7505.

R.J. Nichol  
Captain  
Adjutant  
For Commanding Officer

Enclosure: 1

Canada

NOTE

This is a preliminary narrative and should not be regarded as authoritative. It has not been checked for accuracy in all aspects, and its interpretations are not necessarily those of the Historical Section as a whole.

Ce texte est préliminaire et n'a aucun caractère officiel. On n'a pas vérifié son exactitude et les interprétations qu'il contient ne sont pas nécessairement celles du Service historique.

Directorate of History  
National Defence Headquarters  
Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0K2

July 1986

REPORT NO. 165  
HISTORICAL SECTION  
CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
~~DECLASSIFIED~~

Authority: DHO 3-8  
by \_\_\_\_\_ for DHist NDHO  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

NOV 26 1986

OPERATIONS OF 1 CDN INF DIV AND 1 CDN ARMD BDE IN ITALY  
25 NOV 43 - 4 JAN 44

CONTENTS

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| REVIEW OF THE SITUATION ON THE ADRIATIC FRONT, NOVEMBER 1943 | 1    |
| THE CANADIAN MOVE TO THE COAST                               | 14   |
| FIRST BRIDGEHEADS ACROSS THE MORO, 5-7 DEC                   | 19   |
| THE BATTLE FOR S. LEONARDO, 8-9 DEC                          | 35   |
| ADVANCE TO THE GULLY, 10-11 DEC                              | 51   |
| THE GULLY, 11-13 DEC   | 58   |
| CASA BERARDI, 13-15 DEC                                      | 66   |
| "MORNING GLORY", 18-20 DEC, THE CAPTURE OF THE CROSS-ROADS   | 75   |
| ADVANCE TO ORTONA, 20 DEC                                    | 84   |
| THE ORTONA EPIC, 21-28 DEC                                   | 85   |
| THE ORTONA SALIENT, 23-28 DEC                                | 94   |
| S. NICOLA, S. TOMMASO AND POINT 59, 29 DEC 43 - 4 JAN 44     | 98   |
| THE OFFENSIVE ABANDONED, 4 JAN 44                            | 100  |

APPENDICES

- "A" CAB-RANK IN THE SKY
- "B" FIGHTING STATE OF 1 CDN INF DIV ON 2 JAN 44
- "C" PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE ARMY COMMANDER, CHRISTMAS, 1943
- "D" 1 CDN INF DIV INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY NO. 30, 22 DEC 43
- "E" GERMAN PROPAGANDA LEAFLET FOUND IN CAPTURED POSITIONS

MAPS

- "A" CENTRAL ITALY
- "B" ITALY, CENTRAL ADRIATIC SECTOR
- "C" R.C.R. ATTACK, 8 DEC 43
- "D" THE MORO RIVER AND "THE GULLY" -
  - D-1 SITUATION NIGHT 9-10 DEC
  - D-2 SITUATION LAST LIGHT 13 DEC
  - D-3 SITUATION 1200 HRS 16 DEC
- "E" ORTONA AND THE ADVANCE TO THE RICCIO -
  - E-1 SITUATION NIGHT 19-20 DEC
  - E-2 SITUATION 1200 HRS 28 DEC
  - E-3 SITUATION LAST LIGHT 4 JAN
- "F" TOWN PLAN OF ORTONA

REPORT NO. 165  
HISTORICAL SECTION  
CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

RESTRICTED  
**CANCELLED**

DECLASSIFICATION

Authority: DHO 3-8  
by \_\_\_\_\_ for DHist NDHQ  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

NOV 26 1986

27 Nov 46

Operations of 1 Cdn Inf Div and 1 Cdn Armd Bde in Italy, 25 Nov 43 - 4 Jan 44

1. This report completes the definitive narrative of operations undertaken by 1 Cdn Inf Div and 1 Cdn Armd Bde in 1943. It is a direct successor to Report No. 161 of Historical Section (G.S.), Department of National Defence, which deals with operations up to the capture of Campobasso, the subsequent advance beyond the Biferno River, and the Carovilli deception scheme of 13 Corps on the Upper Sangro. The following account, covering Canadian participation in the Eighth Army's winter offensive which was abandoned at the end of the year, includes the crossing of the Moro River, the struggle for the Berardi cross-roads and the street fighting in Ortona. It ends with the advance to the Riccio gully and Point 59 which fell on 4 Jan 44. From then on the front on the Adriatic sector became stabilized until the following May. The fighting during December 1943 is treated in preliminary form in Report No. 129. The narrative is based on available sources; the War Diaries of the formations and units, both British and Canadian; the memoranda of interviews obtained by the Historical Officer, 1 Cdn Inf Div; accounts prepared by formation and unit commanders for training purposes; operation logs; and the mass of information available in C.M.H.Q. and Historical Section Files. Some of the original War Diaries for the period were destroyed by enemy action and their substitutes lack appendices which might otherwise have been available.

REVIEW OF THE SITUATION ON THE ADRIATIC FRONT,

NOVEMBER 1943

2. 1 Cdn Inf Div, on 25 Nov 43, received notice that it was to relieve 78 Div in the Sangro bridgehead and for future operations would form a part of 5 (Brit) Corps under the command of Lt-Gen C.W. Allfrey (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 25 Nov 43). The fighting during December was to take place in an area quite different in terrain and climate from the Central Apennines, and was to be the fiercest yet encountered by Canadians in Italy.

3. "ENCROACH" was the code name given to the operation which General Montgomery termed "a colossal crack." This new offensive by Eighth Army in the Adriatic sector begun during the last week of November, was designed to assist Fifth Army in its advance on Rome. The relief of 78 Div by 1 Cdn Inf Div did not begin until midnight of 1/2 Dec, by which time the first phases had been completed. (W.D., G.S., Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 1 Dec 43). The exchange of divisions meant that 1 Cdn Inf Div was taking the place of 78 Div in operation "ENCROACH". Some examination of the planning and initial progress, therefore, broadens the picture of Canadian activity and the conditions as a consequence of which the Allied advance during December was retarded.

4. Ever since the days when Roman legend washed the cradle of Romulus and Remus along the Tiber to the foot of the Palatine, the inhabitants of the Italian Peninsula have submitted to the power and influence of the merciless range of mountains which separates the east coast from the west. Legions of the old Empire struck beyond this unpopulated wilderness to more productive lands, scholars of the pre-Renaissance days were forced to tramp over these ranges before crossing the Adriatic to drag back from oblivion the culture of earlier eras, and even in modern times the life of the Adriatic Coastland has been separated from that of Versante Tirenno\* by this massive bulwark. In the Twentieth Century the Apennines were no less important in shaping the development of the Allied campaign. If the drive up the Peninsula was held up by the enemy defending Rome on the Tyrrhenian "slope", the only alternative would be a thrust up the Adriatic "slope".

5. The Adriatic Coastland, the narrow corridor between the Apennines and the sea, is loosely referred to as the coastal plain, though, in fact, it is a remarkably uniform band of low, flat-topped hills dissected by numerous parallel rivers which emerge from the deep canyons of the Apennines to flow north-eastwards to the Adriatic at right angles to the coast. The younger Pliocene rock of the coastal strip has been easily eroded by these rivers, resulting in the formation of a series of steep ridges and deep gorges, typical examples being the Trigno, Biferno, Sangro, Moro, Arielli and Pescara valleys. Between the rivers, remnants of the plateau spring abruptly from a narrow strip of beach, then rise gradually inland for some 20 miles before meeting the sheer barrier of the Apennines. Most of the settlement of the Adriatic has been atop these plateau remnants where the towns could be less vulnerable to malarial epidemics, free from the threat of landslips, and well defended against piratical raids from the sea. Such towns are S. Vito, Chietino and Ortona. In recent times, with the building of the railway along the coast, smaller settlements have grown up on the beaches, most of them retaining the name of the parent town on the plateau above, but adding the word Marina in order to distinguish the two. (Naval Intelligence Division Geographical Handbook, Italy, Vol I, pp 136-141 and Vol II, pp 607-611 et passim)

6. At several points along the coast, particularly at the mouth of the Sangro, alluvial plains have been formed inland from the river mouths, by large deposits washed down from the mountains. This constant silting has made the ports of the Adriatic, with the exception of Ancona, unnavitable by anything other than small fishing vessels. Many of the trans-Apennine routes into the wild and mountainous country begin from the coastal towns, and run along the transverse valleys. Between the mouth of the Sangro River and Pescara there are three such roads; one from S. Vito through Lanciano and Castelfrentano, which swings south around the Maiella; one from Ortona through Orsogna to Guardiagrele which turns north at Maiella; while the third from Pescara, is the chief trans-Apennine highway to Rome.

---

\* Tyrrhenian slope. The Italians refer to the west and east sides of Italy as the Tyrrhenian "slope" and Adriatic "slope" (i.e. Versante Tirenno and Versante Adriatico) taking as the apex the high peaks of the Apennines.

The main coastal road, which links these lateral routes, crosses the Sangro two and a half miles inland, and passes through Fossacesia, Rocca S. Giovanni, S. Vito, S. Leonardo, Ortona, Francavilla and Pescara. Similarly, a secondary road edges along the base of the Apennines, linking the lateral routes farther inland. These roads in ascending from river to plateau take less difficult gradients back and forth parallel with the feature. From three to six miles inland there are numerous hamlets and villages, and it is only at the base of the Apennines that large towns like Chieti and Penne are found. The highest mountains in the whole Apennine range, Il Gran Sasso (9560 feet) and Maiella (9165 feet), tower over the southern half of the coastal strip. (Ibid)

7. When Eighth Army arrived at the line of the Sangro River it was advancing on a two-corps front with 5 Corps on the coast and 13 Corps directed towards the headwaters of the river in the high mountains around Castel di Sangro. For some time the enemy had been preparing positions north of the Sangro, and by the beginning of November had sufficient confidence in these defences to designate them as his Winter Line. No less confident was he of the ability of those formations opposite Fifth Army to exploit the flooded Garigliano\*. The capture of Rome had become the objective of 15 Army Group in Italy. With the increased opposition against Fifth Army, it fell to General Montgomery to direct operations most likely to result in a reduction of resistance against General Clark's forces. This task would involve breaching the Winter Line and positioning Eighth Army sufficiently far to the North to jeopardize the enemy formations defending Rome. (Field Marshal Montgomery, El Alamein to the River Sangro, pp 149-150)

8. The Eighth Army Commander found three possible methods for launching an offensive against the Sangro: an attack on the left flank up the two roads leading north to Popoli and Avezzano on the Rome-Pescara Highway; an attack in the central sector astride the roads from Atessa to Casoli and Castelfrentano; or a thrust along the coastal axis through Fossacesia to Lanciano and S. Vito, thence northwards to Pescara and Chieti. In his selection of the coastal axis, General Montgomery appreciated that an attack on the left flank would be faced with enormous difficulties in the high mountains where soon roads would be blocked with snow; although one division could advance along each of the roads, the lack of lateral communications would prevent mutual support; heavy cloud and mist would reduce the effect of the available air power. The second alternative was eliminated because of the poor communications south of the River at Atessa, although on the far bank an assault would give quick access to the lateral road to S. Vito. (Ibid, pp 141-143)

9. The choice, therefore, was to strike with 5 Corps on the coastal axis. 2 N.Z. Div was brought up on the left of 5 Corps to mount an attack north of Atessa with the intention, if operations were favourable, of thrusting to the West of Chieti and thus being in a position to turn west towards Popoli and Avezzano. The ultimate objective of 5 Corps would be to establish a bridgehead across the Pescara River. Orders subsequently issued were based on achieving surprise and deceiving the enemy as to the sector in which the main thrust would develop. 13 Corps was ordered

---

\* See Maps "A" and "B".

to operate strongly towards Castel di Sangro and Alfadena\*, while 5 Corps closed up to the River and prepared for the attack. (Ibid)

10. As outlined in Report No. 161 of Historical Section (G.S.), Department of National Defence, continual rain prevented this offensive from being launched until 26 Nov. The first operation order was issued from 5 Corps Headquarters on 16 Nov. Formations under command 5 Corps were: 78 Div, with under command 4 (Brit) Armd Bde; 8 Inf Div; and 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, December 1943; Appx 47, 5 Corps O.O. No. 3, 16 Nov 43). The intention was:

5 Corps will capture the enemy positions from both incl Fossacesia (3904) to Santa Maria and will advance to F. Pescara on the axis Ortona - Francavilla - Pescara (1728).

(Ibid)

11. At the mouth of the Sangro, the silty plain stretches a mile to the North before it is broken by a high escarpment. As a preliminary phase to the operation, 78 Div was, by patrolling, to keep this plain clear of enemy, and by the night of D-2/D-1 secure the start line on the escarpment: on D-1 it was to lie-up and be prepared during the night of D-1/D to prevent enemy interference with the forming up for the main attack (Ibid). Two security precautions were taken during the preliminary stage; 8 Ind Div, which had moved from the Upper Sangro, was to lie-up south of the river and to reconnoitre with British personnel only; and the full effort of air and artillery bombardment was not scheduled to begin before D-1 since an earlier start might give the enemy an opportunity of moving his reserves in time to oppose the assault (Ibid).

12. The attack was broken into three phases:

Phase I. 8 Ind Div was (a) to capture the Li Colli feature to the West of the coast road, and afterwards clear the area of S. Maria and Mozzagrogna, two hamlets on the south-west edge of the feature; (b) establish a firm base in the area of S. Maria, and advance with one brigade group to the road junction south of Lanciano, and be prepared to operate either north or south as ordered.

Phase II. 4 Armd Bde (less one tank regiment) supported by one infantry brigade of 78 Div was to follow up the attack in Phase I and carry out a tank attack in an easterly direction on the axis of the road S. Maria-Fossacesia, destroying all enemy between them and the sea. The attack was to be put in with the minimum of delay whether or not 8 Ind Div had secured all its objectives.

Phase III. After resistance at Fossacesia had been broken, 78 Div, with under command 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde (less one regiment), was to advance on the coast axis to the Pescara River. 8 Ind Div was to remain in the area Lanciano-S. Maria while 78 Div moved forward, thus providing flank protection for the Sangro crossings. When the lateral road from

\* These operations by 13 Corps involved 1 Cdn Inf Div, and became known as the Caroville deception scheme. See Report No. 161 of Historical Section (G.S.), Department of National Defence.

Ortona had been reached it was thought that it would be possible to advance on a two-division front. (Ibid)

13. In the opening stages all artillery was to be under command C.C.R.A., 5 Corps, who would ensure that only such guns as would indicate the presence of 78 Div would fire before zero. The task most difficult to fulfil fell to the Chief Engineer, 5 Corps, who by the night of D-1/D had to provide two crossings over the Sangro for wheeled vehicles, two for tanks, and one for carriers, all of which were to be between the coast road and a point one mile farther upstream. In addition, two all-weather crossings on the sites of the demolished bridges were to be constructed as soon after the attack as possible. (Ibid)

14. Two cruisers and four destroyers of the Royal Navy were to be available for bombardment tasks as requested by 78 Div during the advance to Fossacesia and up the coast. On the night of D/D plus 1, a feint landing at Pescara was planned to tie down local enemy reserves until the afternoon of D plus 1. Arrangements were made for maximum air support on D-1 and D.\* 2 N.Z. Div was to operate north-west across the Sangro on the left of 5 Corps. (Ibid)

15. Before the battle the Sangro River line in this sector was held by 16 Pz Div and 65 Inf Div. The history of 16 Pz Div was a sorrowful one. Annihilated at Stalingrad, it was reconstituted, and first appeared on the Italian front as the backbone of the counter attacks at Salerno in September, but after severe engagements was placed in a reserve position opposite Fifth Army. This rest was short, and following the successful Allied landings at Termoli on 3 Oct it was rushed over to the Adriatic with orders to retake the town. Instead, it had been pushed back in heavy fighting across the Trigno to the Sangro and did not withdraw across the latter until 19 Nov when it was finally thrown out of a small bridgehead around Perano. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, December 1943: Appx 47, 5 Corps Int Summary No. 222, Appx "A"). In its battle-weary state the exact function of 16 Pz Div in the Winter Line was a matter of conjecture, but it appeared that for a while at least this division would have to fill the gap between 65 Inf Div on the coast and 1 Para Div in the mountains. (Ibid)

16. The merits of 65 Inf Div were doubtful. Never having been committed to battle, and equipped with old weapons and, like all German infantry divisions, with horse-drawn vehicles, the task of blocking the corridor along the Adriatic was a difficult first performance. This division, formed in the summer of 1942, drew its personnel from three categories; nineteen year olds, over thirty-fives and Poles and Jugo-Slavs from the incorporated areas of Upper Silesia and Lower Styria. In early October 1943, it was brought south to dig and occupy the positions in the eastern extremity of the Sangro Line, and it was here that 78 Div found it with 16 Pz Div the sole defenders of the Winter Line. In the first three days of contact eight deserters showed that the Division's morale was not at its best for such an undertaking (Ibid), despite an Order of the Day<sup>\*\*</sup> issued on 6 Nov by the

\* D-Day and zero hour for Phase I were to be notified later. From pencilled annotations on the operation order which is included in an appendix to the War Diary of H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, it would appear that D-Day was to be 21 Nov.

\*\* Translated from a captured document.

Divisional Commander, General-Major von Zielberg.

Very soon the Division will make contact for the first time with the enemy, the Anglo-American adversary who wishes to deny to Germany her living space in Europe. The Division is facing its first test. We possess all the requirements for the fulfilment of our task. To hold on to the positions entrusted to us. For:

- (1) Our position is naturally very strong and rendered considerably stronger by our numerous and excellent defensive works.
- (2) We have perfected our training during the last few months and are masters of the weapons entrusted to us, we know the capabilities of the other weapons in the Division, and we have confidence in one another.
- (3) We have in our ranks numerous officers and other ranks who have been tested in the most varied theatres of war. To all those who will now be hearing the whistle of enemy bullets for the first time they will be an example in the battle, an example which the others will strive to follow.
- (4) We are a great community of warriors. We are inspired by that fighting spirit, that readiness for battle, that belief in victory which makes us superior to all our opponents.

Thus we are well equipped to carry out all the tasks that confront us. We believe in ourselves. We believe in our just fight under the leadership of the Fuhrer. We believe in the future of our Fatherland. God will be with us.

(W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde,  
December 1943: Appx 47, 5 Corps  
Int Summary No. 238, 30 Nov 43)

17. The positions occupied by 65 Inf Div consisted of well dug trenches lying to the South of the Fossacesia-Lanciano road, with outposts on the escarpment overlooking the Sangro plain. These outposts and trenches, woven into a pattern of minefields, extended northwards in considerable depth. In these constructions the Germans had taken advantage of the steep gorges by building dug-outs on reverse slopes. Von Zielberg in a directive covering the building of the defences said:

Dugout entrances on steep reverse slopes are difficult to get at with gunfire. Enemy planes, however, attacking from the rear, are capable of dropping bombs at the entrances. How accurately they bomb is, I trust, already known to every soldier of the Division. Consequently these entrances, which might be thought secure from attack, must not be too large, and the tunnel leading to the living quarters should change direction not far from the entrance.

(W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde,  
December 1943: Appx 47, 5 Corps  
Int Summary No. 238, 30 Nov 43  
and No. 227, 19 Nov 43; 1 Cdn Army  
Tk Bde Int Summary No. 40, 3 Nov 43)

18. The artillery support to these defences was made up of two field batteries, one medium battery, and one battery of self-propelled and one heavy troop of 17-cm guns. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, November 1943: Appx 37, 5 Corps O.O. No. 3, 16 Nov 43). 65 Inf Div had committed both its regiments by allotting the area from the sea to Lanciano to 145 Inf Regt and from Lanciano to the West to 146 Inf Regt. This disposition meant one infantry regiment opposing 5 Corps. III Bn 145 Inf Regt held from the sea to excluding S. Maria, II Bn from S. Maria to Lanciano, and I Bn in reserve at S. Vito. (Ibid)

19. As 65 Inf Div lengthened its line beyond Castelfrentano it became more apparent that the future of 16 Pz Div would be to act as a mobile reserve with two battalions of infantry and ten to fifteen tanks, and from a position north of Lanciano could be thrown into the battle within twelve hours (Ibid). Such a force appeared light to withstand the weight of 5 Corps concentrated on the south bank. But even in normal circumstances exploitation of a breakthrough would be hampered by the scarcity of roads and the consequent bottlenecking of traffic. Circumstances at this time of year, however, were not normal or favourable to an advancing army, and the launching of the operation was delayed until 26 Nov.

20. Because of this deterioration in the weather, the Army Commander found it necessary to modify the scope of his plan. "... it did not seem feasible to launch a major break-through operation which would carry us straight to the Pescara Line." (Montgomery, op cit, p. 144). While the replanning was taking place, 5 Corps was ordered to strengthen its positions on the river plain. By 22 Nov five infantry battalions of 78 Div had established a firm bridgehead astride the coast road, while Engineers struggled to bridge the flooded river (W.D., G.S., Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 22 Nov 43). At the same time it was impossible for Tactical Air Force to begin a heavy bombing programme. From 15 to 21 Nov most of the bomber and fighter-bomber missions planned had to be cancelled, and several of those attempted proved abortive. (Hist Sec file Italy: 1943/RAF/S/F, Air Operations in Italy 1943)

21. The new plan, issued by H.Q. 5 Corps on 23 Nov contained a modification of the intention and a more flexible method, capable of adjustment to changing weather conditions.

Intention: 5 Corps will destroy the enemy on the high ground both incl Fossacesia and S. Maria, and secure the general line crossing 4008 - crossing 3607, rd junc 3202, exploiting the crossing over R. Moro at 3311.\*

(W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, November 1943: Appx 38, 5 Corps O.O. No. 4, 23 Nov 43)

22. This attack was to be made in two phases from assembly areas on the north bank. The boundary between 78 Div and 8 Ind Div was the stream running through the woods which lay to the South of the coast road; 78 Div to the North-east of the stream and 8 Ind Div to the South-west.

Phase I. 8 Ind Div, with under command 50 R. Tk R. were: (a) to pass through 36 Bde during the night of D-1/D and capture in succession Mozzagrogna, S. Maria and the high ground R. Li Colli; (b) establish a firm base

\* A general line from the Lanciano crossroads along the river which flows around the North of Rocca S. Giovanni; exploiting any crossing over Moro River in the vicinity of the bridge leading to S. Leonardo.

with a brigade group in the area of S. Maria; (c) advance with one brigade group to the road junction before Lanciano and be prepared to operate from there either north or south as ordered. The start line was to be on the lateral track north of the river about a mile south-west of the coast road.

Phase II. 4 Armd Bde, less one tank regiment, and supported by one infantry brigade of 78 Div, was to follow up Phase I, by carrying out a tank attack in an easterly direction down the axis of the S. Maria-Fossacesia road, destroying all enemy between them and the sea. The start line was to be selected provisionally by 78 Div on the Phase I objective astride the axis, and this start line was to be capable of adjustment as the result of Phase I. The Commander of 78 Div, in conjunction with the Commander of 8 Ind Div, was to select a provisional zero hour for the Phase II attack, but this was subject to adjustment in accordance with information from the Commander of 4 Armd Bde. (Ibid)

23. 78 Div was to exploit the successful conclusion of Phase II by striking northwards on the axis Rocca S. Giovanni - S. Vito - Moro crossing. 36 Bde which had established and maintained the bridgehead since 20 Nov, was not to be withdrawn by 78 Div until the permissive order was given from Corps Headquarters.

24. By 23 Nov some success at bridging the Sangro had been achieved, with the construction of three crossings on the Corps front; one at the coast road and one on either side about a mile apart. In addition it was hoped by D-Day to have a maintenance bridge on the site of the demolished bridge on the coast road. The responsibility of feeding traffic over these crossings rested with 20 Beach Group under the command of 5 Corps; all traffic forward of Casalbordino was to be controlled on a priority basis. The plans for artillery and R.A.F. support remained unchanged, and the feint landing at Pescara by the Royal Navy was still included in the operation. Because it was hoped that its presence on the Adriatic had not been compromised, 8 Ind Div continued its wireless silence. (Ibid)

25. The weather on 24 Nov did not improve, and it was obvious that the plans for Operation "ENCROACH" depended too much on the employment of armour, particularly the 4 Armd Bde thrust to Fossacesia. Moving tanks or vehicles into the bridgehead was impossible and the troops already on the north bank were being supplied by D.U.W.Ks., but even these new creations were helpless in the torrent that the Sangro had become (W.D., G.S. Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 24 Nov 43). Consequently the operation was again replanned, and on 24 Nov the final instructions were issued. In these orders the intention remained the same, but the method made allowances for the expanse of bog in which the tanks would have to operate.

Method: Owing to weather the plan for "ENCROACH" as given in 5 Corps Operation Order No. 4 had had to be altered.

(W.D., F.Q. 1 Cdn Army 4 Armd Bde, November 1943: APPX 39, 5 Corps O.O. No. 5, 24 Nov 43)

26. The attack was now to take place in four phases each with an objective and a "target date" by which time the objective should be reached.

Phase I. One battalion of 8 Ind Div was to secure the high ground to the South-east of Mozzagrogna (target date, 26 Nov).

Phase II. One brigade (less the battalion committed in Phase I) of 8 Ind Div was to capture S. Maria and Mozzagrogna (target date, 28 Nov).

Phase III. One brigade of 78 Div was to occupy the high ground of R. Li Colli (target date 29 or 30 Nov).

Phase IV. The same brigade employed in Phase III was to strike north-eastwards to capture Fossacesia as soon as possible after Phase III.

During all phases tanks were to be used whenever possible, but the launching of the various phases was not to be dependent on their employment. Exploitation was to be on the axis of the coast road with a view to establishing a crossing over the Moro. Artillery and Engineer programmes remained the same, and arrangements were made for Tactical Air Force to support all phases. The feint landing at Pescara was not included in the operation order, nor was there any mention of the relief of 78 Div by 1 Cdn Inf Div. (Ibid)

27. Until 26 Nov\* when the operation began the bridgehead was strengthened. General Montgomery, in a message to General Alexander, reviewed the difficulties in establishing this bridgehead and outlined his immediate intentions:

After several days' fighting in the most appalling conditions of mud and rain I have now secured a bridgehead across the Sangro on my right flank which is 1,000 yards long and 2,000 yards deep. Enemy has made repeated counter-attacks to drive me back, but he has failed to do so and bridgehead is now firmly held. Sangro is in flood and my bridges have several times been washed away. The troops have been magnificent as always in quite disgusting conditions. My advance northwards will now be carried on and I am developing operations to clear the enemy from the high ground overlooking the Sangro valley. These operations begin on 26 Nov and will continue thereafter intensively for several days. Once I have secured the high ground I will have to pause for a few days while I get the Sangro valley organized for movement. Then forward again. My chief trouble is the weather and not so much

---

\* Field Marshal Montgomery in El Alamein to the River Sangro, p. 146, gives 28 Nov as the opening date of the Battle of the River Sangro. The building up of the bridgehead had been taking place during 19 - 25 Nov. 26 Nov was the target date for Phase I of Operation "ENCROACH" as finally planned by H.Q. 5 Corps. It would appear that the Army Commander considered Phase I as a preliminary, and Phase II, with 28 Nov as the target date, as the beginning of the main effort.

the enemy. Inform my old friend as above.\*

(W.D., G.S., Main H.Q. Eighth Army, November 1943: Appx "Z", Personal Message from General Montgomery to General Alexander, 25 Nov 43)

28. General Montgomery, as was his custom before the beginning of all major offensives, addressed a personal message to all troops under his command. The message before Operation "ENCROACH" was circulated on 20 Nov, and had to be cancelled when the attack was replanned. This premature announcement of an impending operation presented an obvious security danger, and steps were immediately taken to caution those troops to whom it had been read before the cancellation order had been received. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, November 1943: Appx 35). Finally on 25 Nov the message was released and the whole of Eighth Army was told:

1. The Allies have conquered about one-third of Italy since we invaded the country on 3 September. But the Germans still hold the approaches to Rome, and that city itself.
2. The time has now come to drive the Germans north of Rome. The Eighth Army is not advancing on the direct Rome axis; it is the Fifth American Army which is on that line. But our help is vital if the Fifth Army is to secure Rome. And we will do our part in a manner worthy of the best traditions of the Eighth Army and the Desert Air Force.
3. The enemy has been outfought by better troops ever since we first landed in Sicily, and his men don't like what they are getting.
4. The Germans are in fact in the very condition in which we want them.

WE WILL NOW HIT THE GERMANS A COLOSSAL CRACK.

4. Good luck to you all. And good hunting as we go forward.

B.L. MONTGOMERY  
General,  
Eighth Army.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, November 1943: Appx 46)

29. Although the plan for "ENCROACH" was altered three times, it remained consistent in the choice of Mozzagrogna as the point for the initial piercing of the Winter Line. The fall of this town would open the way to Lanciano and the lateral road behind the main defences, while the north-easterly thrust along the top of the plateau towards Fossacesia in the second phase would, in effect, be ripping through the defences from end to end. Although restricted by unfavourable flying weather, Tactical Air Force was able to carry out, before the offensive began, several heavy bombing

\* The last sentence apparently refers to Mr Churchill. The Prime Minister at the time was in North Africa attending a conference with President Roosevelt and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek (The Times, 2 Dec 43)

missions along the whole of the coastland sector (Air Operations in Italy, 1943)

30. By the early morning of 27 Nov, a battalion of 8 Ind Div had completed the first phase by securing the spur to the south-east of Mozzagrogna (Hist. Sec file Italy: 1943/1 Cdn Inf Div/C/H, November: Ops Message Log, Serial 6807, 27 Nov 43). Throughout the day, tanks, carriers and anti-tank guns crossed the river to support the attack on Mozzagrogna and S. Maria, intended for the night 27/28 Nov\* (Ibid, Serial 6825, 27 Nov 43). This attack was met by strong opposition and it was only after fierce fighting that the Indians were able to force their way to Mozzagrogna. The enemy, quick in appreciating this threat to his laboriously constructed defences, replied with a savage counter-attack in which were used flame throwers mounted on tanks. The Indians, lacking the support of armour and anti-tank guns, which had been held up because of three cunningly placed craters outside Mozzagrogna, were forced back to their original positions. Meanwhile, 2 N.Z. Div on the left of 5 Corps had also joined the offensive with the establishment of another bridgehead farther upstream. (Ibid, Serial 6855, 28 Nov 43; and W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, December 1943: Appx 47, 5 Corps Int Summary No. 236, 28 Nov 43). The restoration of the German line at Mozzagrogna was not to last long. 17 Ind Bde the following night again attacked under a barrage produced by all the artillery available. By 0130 hrs, the town was occupied, and by daylight tanks had arrived to strengthen the newly-won positions. (1 Cdn Inf Div Ops Message Log, loc cit, Serial 8289, 29 Nov 43). At the same time, a battalion of 78 Div had fought its way to the top of the Li Colli plateau, and had cut the S. Maria - Fossacesia road. 86 tanks of 4 Armd Bde had by now crossed the Sangro. (Ibid, Serial 8904, 29 Nov 43). To check the movement of enemy reserve during this crucial stage, convoys were despatched from Bari, Barletta and Termoli to feint landings farther up the coast, while H.M. Destroyers "Loyal" and "Quilliam" bombarded enemy positions (W.D., G.S., Main H.Q. Eighth Army, 29 Nov 43; and C.I.G.S. Summary No. 91, 2 Dec 43). By 1200 hrs, 30 Nov, the German Winter Line had been overrun; S. Maria was occupied by 78 Div troops, and those of 4 Armd Bde were in Fossacesia. Heavy counter-attacks were made by the enemy, but they did little to impede the progress towards Rocca S. Giovanni. 2 N.Z. Div, striking out from its bridgehead, had captured Castelfrentano. (1 Cdn Inf Div Ops Message Log, loc cit, Serial 8917, 30 Nov 43). This sudden collapse between 28 and 30 Nov was hastened by the good flying weather which allowed light bombers and fighter bombers to give what the airmen themselves termed "most intimate support." This onslaught, amounting to more than 1200 sorties over the three-day period, prevented the enemy from massing sufficient forces to deliver a successful counter-attack. (Air Operations in Italy, 1943)

32. The main enemy attempt to reduce the momentum of the Allied advance came from the Lanciano area where the hastily gathered remnants of 16 Pz Div's armour, reinforced by elements of 26 Pz Div, were striking back at Mozzagrogna in an effort to break through to the river, but 8 Ind Div had strengthened their positions sufficiently to block these counter attacks. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, December

\* Montgomery, op cit, p. 146, is slightly ambiguous in the account of 8 Ind Div's attack on Mozzagrogna. "The weather on 28 November was fine and the assault began at 2130 hours." That 2130 hrs, 27 Nov is meant, is clear from the context.

1943: Appx 47, 5 Corps Int Summary No. 238, 30 Nov 43). By midnight on 1 Dec, the advance along the coast road had passed through Rocca S. Giovanni, and was approaching S. Vito (1 Cdn Inf Div Ops Message Log, loc cit. Serial 920, 1 Dec 43)

33. In this narrow strip of plateaux and valleys, with armour and wheeled vehicles sharing the one unmetalled road, progress could be nothing other than slow and difficult. Weather controlled essential air support, a flooded river the fate of bridges.

34. The meagre forces allotted to the German Tenth Army in Italy during the Autumn of 1943 reflect the dilemma with which the enemy High Command was faced when its offensive energy was exhausted, and that of the Allies had been released on the Eastern Front and in the Mediterranean Theatre. General Jodl, military adviser to Hitler, in a lecture delivered to the Gauleiters of the Reich in Munich on 7 Nov 43, revealed the seriousness of the threat which was approaching the Fatherland itself. In speaking of the Italian campaign and the effects of the overthrow of Mussolini, he said that these events came at a time "when the Eastern Front, subject to severe assault, was begging for reserves more urgently than ever", and at a time, too when "the Command cannot close its eyes to the fact that the brand is now held in readiness at some time or other to start a conflagration in the West which if not extinguished then and there will pass beyond control." It is not surprising, then, that there found their way to Italy formations reconstituted after defeat on the Russian front, and brought up to strength by the man-power reserves in the territories occupied by the German Army. (War Office Weekly Intelligence Review, Nos 108 and 109, 21 Nov and 5 Dec 45)

35. In Italy, across the narrowest part of the Peninsula, it appeared that the enemy commanders had confidence that the Winter Line would hold - a confidence they constantly tried to communicate to the men whose duty it was to hold it. In the Liri and Sacco Valley approaches to Rome where the line was topographically weakest his forces were strongest; in the Adriatic coastal strip 65 Inf Div and 16 Pz Div had the onerous task of halting Eighth Army; while, at the apex of the two "slopes", 1 Para Div and 305 Inf Div relied on the comparative impregnability of their mountain strongholds. In the latter half of November with the deception attack by 13 Corps, with the increased air effort along the Adriatic and finally with the beginning of "ENCROACH", the enemy was left in no doubt that Eighth Army did not intend to pass an idle winter. Simultaneously with the preparation of 1 Cdn Inf Div to move, two German divisions were on the roads towards the Adriatic. They were 26 Pz Div and 90 Pz Gr Div.

36. 26 Pz Div was first identified on the Adriatic on 30 Nov, when, with what remained of 16 Pz Div, it took part in the counter-attacks on Mozzagrogna in an attempt to destroy the left flank of the bridgehead. This German formation, as a result of its activities in Russia, Calabria and Salerno, had a good record as a counter-attacking force, and was above average in fighting quality and morale. Whether it arrived opposite the Sangro bridgehead to relieve or support 16 Pz Div is unimportant but it did not arrive in good condition, for it left the Fifth Army sector shortly after making nine costly counter-attacks near Venafro where an American breakthrough had been imminent. It was replaced in its old sector by another Stalingrad victim - 44 Inf Div. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, December 1943: Appx 47, 5 Corps Int Summary No. 328, 30 Nov 43)

37. 90 Pz Gr Div was formed in Sardinia in the early summer of 1943 and had been previously known as Division Sardinia and 90 Light Division (Motorized) the latter name being given as an inheritance of the prestige and traditions of the famous 90 Light Division of Rommel's Afrika Korps. There appeared, however, no similarity between the two formations, other than the numbering of component units. 90 Pz Gr Div had for some time been in the Venice area, and by 2 Dec only its 361 Pz Gr Regt had been identified on the lower Sangro; but the amount of transport reported by air reconnaissance to be moving south on the roads by daylight gave ample evidence that the remainder of the division was following. (Ibid)

38. At the time when these divisions were on the move to support it, 65 Inf Div had fared badly; more than 800 prisoners were in the cages by 1 Dec, a loss which, added to the toll of dead and wounded, had reduced it to little more than a regimental group. From the time the offensive started until the arrival of 1 Cdn Inf Div, the enemy's situation had changed from a tidy line to a mixture of four divisions of which only 90 Pz Gr Div was in a fighting condition. (Ibid)

39. Enemy fighter aircraft formations of ME 109s and FW 190s made some attempt to support their ground forces during the initial stages of the offensive but were immediately pounced upon by Spitfire patrols of the Desert Air Force. On 28 Nov, two ME 109s and one FW 190 were shot down and two more enemy aircraft were damaged. Two days later, three more enemy air attacks were intercepted and the Spitfires, together with Kittyhawks and U.S. Warhawks, accounted for five FW 190s destroyed, one probably destroyed and six damaged.\* (Hist Sec file Italy: 1943/RAF/S/F, R.A.F. Mediterranean Review No. 5). This temporary activity withered completely before the 1200 sorties flown by the Tactical Air Force on 2 Dec - a record day since the ending of the Tunisian campaign. The onslaught, made possible by a short spell of good flying weather, was distributed along the whole of the front; in the Eighth Army sector it was against forward positions from Lanciano to the sea and against the enemy's lines of communication around Chieti and Pescara, while opposite Fifth Army, preparatory to a new drive up Highway No. 6 to Cassino, it was against stronghold positions around Mignano. (Ibid)

40. On the night of 2/3 Dec the Luftwaffe awoke to display some startling enterprise in a raid on Eighth Army's port and supply base at Bari. The harbour, congested with newly arrived shipping was bombed by JU 88s believed to be about 30 strong, and in order to upset radiolocation they were preceded by aircraft dropping "window" (tinfoil). Two ammunition ships were blown up and the capacity of the port facilities was reduced for some time. Allied losses amounted to seventeen merchant vessels and 38,000 tons of cargo, and casualties\*\* among personnel were inevitably high. (R.A.F. Mediterranean Review No. 6). In addition to complete Radar equipment, fighters and balloons, the anti-aircraft defences of Bari included 52 heavy and 78 light guns. In view of the failure of these defences to prevent penetration by enemy aircraft,

\* It was later announced that Spitfires engaged in these patrolling operations were led by Wing Commander Stanley Turner, D.F.C., R.C.A.F. (The Times, 4 Dec 43)

\*\* Estimated in one report to be about 1,000. (C.O.S. Weekly Resume No. 223, 2-9 Dec 43)