

2201 hours C.D. Highrs handed over to P.L.D.G., and 11 Cdn Inf Bde went into reserve. 12 Cdn Inf Bde now held the forward sector with right, P.L.D.G. near Fiumicino village, and left, 1 Cdn L.A.A. Bn with companies at the river west of S. Mauro. To the east, behind the Rio Salto, lay the Brigade reserve, Westmr R. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 2 Oct 44; W.D., H.Q. 12 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 and 2 Oct 44; W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Oct 44)

73. During the early days of October there were a few sunny hours, but generally the weather was wet and cold.

With the period of static warfare which has set in on this sector temporarily, greater emphasis is being placed on patrols, in order to recon ground, to locate enemy posns and determine their habits in the greatest possible detail so as to have a complete picture of the enemy lay-out when the weather permits us to resume offensive ops on our front again.

(W.D., H.Q. 12 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Oct 44)

These patrols were not carried out without cost, nor yet without excitement, as is illustrated by a later entry in the same diary:

The 1 Cdn L.A.A. Inf Bn and P.L.D.G. each sent out two patrols last night which ran into stiff enemy resistance. The patrols managed to cross the river and get valuable infm for us however - mostly about the nature of the river, its banks, and approaches, about enemy MMG and sniper posns and identifications of enemy units. Cas were suffered by both us and the enemy. The night's activities cost the 1 Cdn L.A.A. Inf Bn 10 cas.

The P.L.D.G. had no cas and managed to est a fwd sqn posn 20 ft from the river at 721044...

Another event during the night was a fire fight at 0300 hours between 'A' Sqn of PLDG and the enemy on our side of the river, at the same time that a LAA patrol was having a fight on the other side of the river. The situation cleared off satisfactorily though.

(Ibid, 4 Oct 44)

The advent of autumnal weather was heralded by a 12 Cdn Inf Bde Part I Order issued on 3 Oct which stated: "Effective immediately winter underwear long, as issued will be taken into wear". (W.D., H.Q. 12 Cdn Inf Bde, October 1944: Appx F, Part I Order No. 29)

74. Meanwhile, 11 Cdn Inf Bde had withdrawn into reserve, which did not, however, prevent its units and even the Headquarters coming under enemy shell fire from time to time. For a few days the brigade enjoyed leaves and limited entertainments:

Below the large house in which the HQ is located now is a very large wine cellar where movies are shown twice daily for entertainment of all. 48 hours leave to the Corps Rest Centre in Riccione started today.

(W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 3 Oct 44)

Then on 5 Oct 11 Cdn Inf Bde moved C.B. Highrs and Ir R.C. forward once again, this time to take part in the attack planned for the night 6/7 Oct. As a result of this move P.L.D.G. came out of the line, reducing the 12 Cdn Inf Bde sector to a one-battalion front. The operation was postponed several times in the hope that ground conditions might improve, and eventually was cancelled altogether. At 2200 hours on 10 Oct 2 N.Z. Div took over the remainder of the 5 Cdn Armd Div sector as part of a plan which called for the extension of the 1 Cdn Corps front to the left (see para 79). 5 Cdn Armd Div now went into reserve, and both infantry brigades moved back to the divisional rest area around Riccione. P.L.D.G., which on 10 Oct had relieved Ir R.C., came under command 5 N.Z. Bde and remained with the New Zealand brigade until 14 Oct. (Ibid, 5 Oct to 11 Oct 44; W.D., H.Q. 12 Cdn Inf Bde, 11 and 14 Oct 44; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 10 Oct 44)

5 CORPS IN THE FOOTHILLS, 6 - 10 OCT 44

75. In the meantime, the left wing of 5 Corps was making good progress in the foothills south of Route 9. Here the effect of the rains was less marked and less lasting. During the night 6/7 Oct 10 Ind Div moved over the Fiumicino and, early on the following morning closed up on Monte Farneto (6194). Under cover of darkness and in a pelting rain, the Indians stormed the formidable 1600-foot obstacle, taking the defenders completely by surprise and securing their objectives at little cost. That evening (7 Oct) 46 Brit Inf Div and the balance of 10 Ind Div attacked across the Fiumicino; the former towards Montilgallo (6399) and the latter Monte Gattona (6697). Both these objectives were captured during the course of the following day. The enemy made several unsuccessful attempts to retake Monte Farneto, and a determined counter-attack on 46 Div's open right flank on Montilgallo likewise failed. Heavy rain delayed further operations for a couple of days, but on the night 9/10 Oct 10 Ind Div pushed on northwards to the next ridge and seized Monte Spaccato (6296). The following morning 46 Brit Inf Div continued its advance from Montilgallo and, with relative ease, captured Longiano (6599), a town overlooking the upper reaches of the Scolo Rigossa. The enemy's southern flank was now in considerable danger of being turned. In its unavailing efforts against 10 Ind Div on Monte Farneto, 114 Jaeger Div had suffered heavy casualties, and it proved necessary to bolster it with a battle group of 29 Pz Gren Div in order to prevent the outflanking of the whole defensive system east of the Savio. (Eighth Army -

* The following programme of 11 Cdn Inf Bde well illustrates the activities of the division during the ensuing rest period:

...a Bde NCOs School will be started to run continuously if possible. Complete maintenance of vehs to be done, personnel to get new battle dress, haircuts, baths and generally cleaned up and rested. Aux Services Offr has entertainment laid on. There are several theatres operating in Riccione and each unit has a film projector

The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, pp 54-55; The Tiger Triumphs, op cit, pp 144-6; German Strategy, p. 11)

REGROUPING AND PLANNING - EIGHTH ARMY, 8 - 11 OCT 44

76. These successes did much to confirm General McCreery's appreciation that during the rainy season the foothills and the going astride Route 9, from the Rimini - Cesena railway south, offered better opportunities for battle than the sodden plain where 1 Cdn Corps was making such slow progress. The Army Commander therefore decided (on either 7 or 8 Oct) to make his main thrust along Route 9. (Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, p. 55). In order to carry out such an operation, however, it would be necessary to redeploy since 5 Corps was short a division. During its recent advance to the Fiumicino 56 Brit Inf Div had had heavy casualties and both its infantry brigades needed to be withdrawn for reorganization. In addition, 78 Brit Inf Div, which was to have joined 5 Corps, had been ordered away to the Fifth Army on 2 Oct and 4 Brit Inf Div, the sole division in reserve, was required to relieve 46 Brit Inf Div. Accordingly General McCreery arranged, in the course of a visit to the Canadian Corps Headquarters on the afternoon of 8 Oct, for General Burns to extend his front further to the left, to about 1,000 yards south of Route 9 and have 1 Cdn Inf Div take over the sector presently held by 56 Brit Inf Div (Burns Diary, 8 Oct 44). The latter would then withdraw into Army Reserve, leading its divisional engineers and part of its artillery as well as 43 Gurkha Lorried Inf Bde under command of 5 Corps. (Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, p. 56)

77. Apart from this change on its right flank, no other changes were immediately necessary in the 5 Corps sector, and in any event General McCreery did not want to interrupt the successful operations of 10 Ind and 46 Brit Inf Divs in the foothills. On this left flank the right bank of the Savio takes the form of an overhanging cliff, which would make a successful assault across the river in this area a very difficult proposition. It would be essential then for a 5 Corps assault on the Savio line to go in either at Cesena or in the upper reaches of the river. Apart from these considerations, it was expected that by the time 5 Corps reached the Savio the Poles should be breaking out of the mountains and closing in on the far left, while 1 Cdn Corps would be widely extended on the ground as the plain broadened out before it. It was therefore decided at Headquarters Eighth Army that from Cesena onwards Route 9 should again become inclusive to 5 Corps and that the Canadians should edge off into the poorer going on the right. Although 5 Corps was excluded from Route 9 by the tactical boundary, it was to continue to use the highway as its chief maintenance artery. For this reason, the bulk of the administrative and supply traffic of 1 Cdn Corps was to move on Route 16. Movement on Route 9 was to be co-ordinated by Eighth Army. (Ibid)

78. The outflanking movements of 5 Corps during the first days of October soon produced the effect envisaged by the Army Commander. By 10 Oct the enemy had begun to withdraw in the central portion of his front to the line of the Scolo Rigossa. On the same day 56 Brit Inf Div crossed the Fiumicino on Route 9 and by 11 Oct the Engineers had erected a class 40 bridge across it. The Canadian Corps had now

completely regrouped; 1 Cdn Inf Div had passed through 56 Brit Inf Div on the morning of 11 Oct (see para 87); 2 N.Z. Div was in position to advance in the sector immediately north of the Rimini - Cesena railway; the rest of the Corps front east to the Adriatic) was lightly held by the screening Cumberland Force (see para 102). (Ibid, p. 57)

PLANS AND PREPARATIONS - 1 CDN CORPS, 9-11 OCT 44

79. The Corps plans for the forthcoming operation, issued verbally to the divisional commanders but set down on paper for the benefit of the various G.S.Os. on 9 Oct, gave the "Intention" as:

1 Cdn Corps will extend its front to the left in order to take over the sector at present occupied by 56 Div and will est a brhead over the R. FIUMICINO on night 11/12 Oct preparatory to advancing along HIGHWAY 9 in the direction of BOLOGNA.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps
October 1944: Appx 28, Notes for
G.S.Os. on Forthcoming Operations,
9 Oct 44)

56 Brit Inf Div would remain in position, in order to prevent the enemy from learning of the "side slip", until 1 Cdn Inf Div's leading brigade group was ready either to go on through or relieve it. 2 N.Z. Div was to thin out on its existing front and move up in the rear of 5 Cdn Armd Div with the object of:

- (a) pushing through 5 Cdn Armd Div and adv NORTH of the rly and parallel to it towards BOLOGNA, or,
- (b) adv in rear of 1 Cdn Inf Div on the axis of HIGHWAY 9.

(Ibid)

5 Cdn Armd Div would remain where it was until either 2 N.Z. Div had passed through or until the advance of 1 Cdn Inf Div along Route 9 had removed the enemy from its front. Then it would come out into Corps reserve. In the coastal sector 3 Greek Mountain Bde would carry out diversionary attacks and clean out the south side of the Fiumicino. The two medium regiments of A.G.P.A. (Army Group Polish Artillery) would remain under command of 1 Cdn Corps but the artillery of 5 Kresowa Div would rejoin 2 Pol Corps as soon as possible. The first move under this plan would take place on the night 9/10 Oct, when Headquarters 5 Cdn Armd Div would assume operational responsibility for the whole of the existing Corps front. On the following morning the leading brigade of 1 Cdn Inf Div would slip into place behind 56 Brit Inf Div; at the same time a brigade of 2 N.Z. Div would move into an assembly area in rear of 5 Cdn Armd Div. An alternative plan was devised, whereby 5 Cdn Armd Div would secure a bridgehead prior to being relieved by 2 N.Z. Div, after which the Corps attack would be launched on a one-divisional front with the New Zealanders echeloned back and to the right of 1 Cdn Inf Div. (Ibid)

80. The general idea was for an advance along Route 9 in the direction of Cesena by 1 Cdn Inf Div, with 2 N.Z. Div acting as a strong flank guard in the poorer going on the right. No pressure was to be exerted in the coastal sector, which was to be lightly held by an ad hoc composite force known as Cumberland Force (see para 102). General Burns informed the Divisional Commanders of this plan on the morning of 9 Oct; his diary states that

All Div Comds pointed out the very bad going and expressed the opinion that we might be drifting into the carrying on of an offensive in similar conditions to those of last autumn and winter, where the hard fighting and numerous cas resulted in no great gain.

I pointed out that the gen situation required the offensive action of this Corps, and that other tps in Italy and on the Western front were attacking despite bad weather conditions and mud. I later infm Lt-Gen McCreery of the Div Comds' views.

(Burns Diary, 9 Oct 44)

According to the diarist at Headquarters 1 Cdn Inf Div the troops, perhaps for more personal reasons, showed a similar lack of enthusiasm:

We are to go into the line to relieve the 5 Cdn Armd Div who with the soft and boggy ground are hopelessly mudded down. Our lads greeted the prospects with mixed feelings, our rest period has been most enjoyable and the thought of action again, particularly in the type of weather we shall meet, is somewhat depressing.

(W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div,
10 Oct 44)

81. On the following morning the Corps Commander went forward to 5 Cdn Armd Div area to look over ground conditions. It was raining heavily, and the ground was already water-logged. He therefore formed the opinion that at least two clear, fine days would be necessary before the ground would be sufficiently dry for infantry and tanks to operate. That afternoon the Army Commander arrived at Corps Headquarters and discussed the plan of operation. The 5 Corps front, because of the relatively better going there, was to be the zone of main effort, while the Canadian Corps was to adopt a follow-up role, opening up Route 9 and, if the weather improved, put in a secondary attack on the German positions. In view of the subsidiary nature of 1 Cdn Corps' task divisions were now merely to keep pace with any enemy withdrawal maintaining contact at all times. (Burns Diary, 10 Oct 44)

82. Due to the pause in operations much of 1 Cdn Corps information on enemy battalion positions was now quite out of date. However with regard to his divisional dispositions the picture was fairly clear. According to a summary issued by Corps Intelligence on 9 Oct, the formations opposing 1 Cdn Corps, from the coast to Savignano, were 1 Para Div (with 162 Turcoman Div in reserve) - 20 G.A.F. Div, 26 Pz Gren

Div in and south of Savignano - and possibly 29 Pz Gren Div in reserve. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, October 1944: Appx 30)

83. At 1100 hours on 10 Oct Headquarters 5 Cdn Armd Div assumed command of what was at that time the whole of the Corps front, from the coast to the Rimini - Cesena railway. In the meantime 1 Cdn Inf Bde was moving up to a concentration area in the rear of 56 Brit Inf Div. That night at 2200 hours 5 N.Z. Bde completed its take-over of the original 5 Cdn Armd Div sector (see para 74). At 0600 hours 11 Oct the command of Cumberland Force passed from 5 Cdn Armd Div to H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps as the Armoured division moved into Corps reserve. Cumberland Force had assumed operational responsibility for the former New Zealand front, from 722054 to the coast, at 1100 hours the previous day. ((H.S.)224Cl.013(D16): 1 Cdn Corps Sitreps, 10 and 11 Oct 44; 5 Cdn Armd Div History)

THE ADVANCE OF 1 CDN INF BDE TO THE PISCIATELLO,
11 - 17 OCT 44

84. After the completion of the Gothic Line battle, 1 Cdn Inf Div went into rest in the area Cattolica - Riccione. A period of intensive training, interspersed with leaves and local entertainments followed. All units were in satisfactory billets and thoroughly enjoying the business of getting back into condition again. Then on 9 Oct all this was ended and the division was assigned to a more active role. The new task consisted of a move across the Fiumicino and an advance north-west on the general axis of Route 9, maintaining contact with the enemy at all times. To the south 46 Brit Inf Div would be covering ground that commanded 1 Cdn Inf Div sector. For this reason the Canadian division was to conform, echeloned to the rear, with the movements of the British formation. ((H.S.)234Cl.013(D7); 1 Cdn Inf Div F. Rubicone to F. Ronco, 11 Oct to 28 Oct 44. Part 1)

85. The Divisional Commander, Maj-Gen C. Vokes, C.B.E., D.S.O., intended to carry out the operation in two phases. In the first phase 1 Cdn Inf Bde, supported by 2 Cdn Armd Regt, would move over the Fiumicino and advance to the Pisciatello. Once it reached the latter river 1 Cdn Inf Bde would go into reserve and Phase 1 would be complete. During the second phase the division would attack across the Pisciatello on a two-brigade front and exploit north-west towards the Savio. In this phase the division would advance with right 2 Cdn Inf Bde and left 3 Cdn Inf Bde each supported by a regiment of tanks from 21 Tk Bde. (Ibid). The boundaries within which 1 Cdn Inf Div was to operate, were on the right, with 2 N.Z. Div, the Rimini - Cesena railway inclusive to the latter up to and beyond the Pisciatello; on the left the 1 Cdn Inf Div zone was defined by the inter-corps boundary which from the bend in the road at 703998 ran parallel to and 1,000 yards south of Route 9. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, October 1944: Appx 32 and 33, Messages 9 and 10 Oct 44). The task of the divisional artillery was to provide direct support to the attacking brigades and in addition be ready to assist in the operations of flanking formations. (1 Cdn Inf Div Report op cit)

86. With orders to relieve 169 Brit Inf Bde on the Fiumicino during the night 10/11 Oct, 1 Cdn Inf Bde went on two hours' notice at 0800 hours 9 Oct. In the course of the following day, reconnaissance elements of 56 Brit Inf Div crossed the river on Route 9 and established a small bridgehead. Due presumably to the advance made by 46 Brit Inf Div on the left (see para 75) the enemy had already begun to withdraw in this sector. At an orders group held at Headquarters 1 Cdn Inf Bde at 2130 hours 10 Oct, the brigade commander informed his unit commanders that, because of the altered situation, instead of relieving 169 Brit Inf Bde they would push through and advance in bounds along Route 9 until firm contact with the enemy was re-established. Hast & P.E.R. would lead the attack, while 48 Highrs held a firm base and exploited forward on its immediate front. The R.C.R. would remain in reserve in Savignano. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Bde, 9 and 10 Oct 44; (H.S.)234C1.013(D7): 1 Cdn Inf Bde Battle History 9 Oct 44 - 19 Oct 44)

87. Early on 11 Oct the brigade began to move forward from Santarcangelo and by 1115 hours had taken over its new sector. By this time Hast & P.E.R. were complete west of the river, while 48 Highrs on their left had half of the battalion over with the remainder in the process of crossing. As yet neither unit had contacted the enemy, so at 1100 hours brigade headquarters ordered Hast & P.E.R. to thrust forward on Route 9 and attempt to regain contact. At this point the leading sub-units of Hast & P.E.R. were in the vicinity of the village of S. Giovanni (6901); the remaining two companies were in reserve about 1,000 yards to the rear. In this advance the battalion would be to a great extent dependent upon its own resources for protection of its flanks. For this reason and also because he appreciated that he would meet the enemy either on the Scolo Rigossa or the Pisciatello the Commanding Officer Hast & P.E.R., Lt-Col D.C. Cameron decided

...that the advance would be carried out by passing succeeding Coys through preceding Coys, who would halt and form up on definite pre-determined bounds. The Coy so halted on a bound would immediately send out patrols to either flank. The reps from the Bn 3rd Mortar Pl moved fwd with each Coy and the Mortars leap-frogged in pairs in the rear of the Bn. Tac Bn HQ, with the arty reps, moved closely behind the leading coy in two vehicles.

(W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 11 Oct 44)

88. For several hours the battalion moved smoothly along its axis without meeting any enemy on the ground, although it ran into a number of fairly heavy artillery concentrations, which caused a few casualties. Then, at 1615 hours they reported first contact with enemy troops. They were now within 200 yards of the crossroads lying immediately east of the Scolo Rigossa on Route 9 (666031). According to the unit diary "A fierce fight ensued and the enemy withdrew leaving a few killed and four P.W." (Ibid, 11 Oct). The battalion consolidated for the night with one company deployed around the crossroads and the others to the right and left rear for flank protection. During the day 48 Highrs leap-frogged forward between Route 9 and the inter-corps boundary, and at last light were approaching La

Crocetta (678011) and the road linking the village with the Via Emilia. Due to the slowness of the New Zealand advance (see para 100), in order to safeguard the right flank R.C.R. began moving up Route 9 south of the railway to the line of the small stream, Rio Baldona. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, October 1944: Appx 72, 1 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 11 Oct 44; W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 11 Oct 44; 1 Cdn Inf Bde History, op cit)

89. Patrols from Hast & P.E.R. crossed the river in the night and destroyed an enemy M.G. post. Early in the morning a number of buildings on the right flank were cleared by personnel of the same unit assisted by fire from 3" mortars and the divisional artillery, and at the same time the troops working forward on the main axis reached the river bank. In the afternoon elements of the battalion moved over the Rigossa and established themselves in the vicinity of the road junction on Route 9 about 500 yards north west of the river (660033). To the rear one company of R.C.R. reached the vicinity of the railway south-east of the town of Gambettola, where they came under heavy M.G. fire. Meanwhile, patrols of 48 Highrs operating in the bend of the river south of Route 9 had found no sign of the enemy. As a result, shortly after midnight this unit commenced another bound forward in this sector. Sharp artillery and mortar fire came down on the Hast & P.E.R. area but as the greater part of the personnel were in buildings of some sort casualties were few; according to the unit diary there were two killed and seven wounded. (1 Cdn Inf Bde Report; W.D., R.C.R., 12 Oct 44; W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 12 Oct 44; W.D., 48 Highrs, 12 Oct 44)

90. Throughout the daylight hours of 13 Oct Hast & P.E.R. were engaged in mopping up and improving their positions west of the Scolo Rigossa. Enemy resistance had stiffened considerably and the unit made slight progress during the day. To the north the town of Gambettola and the line of the railway were still in enemy hands, as was the village of Bulgaria (656044), from which flanking fire was coming down on the right forward company of the advancing battalion. In the evening Lt-Col Cameron received orders to seize Bulgaria and the line of the lateral road, running through this village across the divisional front to the inter-corps boundary. As the Bulgaria position controlled the enemy's main outlets from Gambettola, it was appreciated that it was probably held in company strength. As outlined by Lt-Col Cameron at an "O" Group held at 2000 hours the operation was to take place in two stages. In the first one company would secure the crossroads of Route 9 and the lateral - thought to be lightly held. Once this was secured a second company would pass through to the right and assault Bulgaria. A squadron of Ld S.H., which had arrived east of the Rigossa the previous day, would support the operation. Artillery fire would be provided by the divisional artillery supplemented by one medium regiment; with closer support from a platoon each of M.M.Gs. and 4.2" mortars of Sask L.I. In addition close support aircraft had attacked Bulgaria four times on 13 Oct. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 13 Oct 44; W.D., Hast & P.E.R., 13 Oct 44 and Appx 4: The Approach towards Cesena)

91. Along the main axis of advance, between Savignano and the Rigossa, the enemy had planted a number of road blocks, some of which were booby-trapped, and in addition had blown the culvert over the Rio Baldona. By the 12th the divisional engineers had already cleared the obstacles and bridged the Baldona with an Ark. On the same day two officers of 1 Fd Coy made a reconnaissance of the bridge over the Scolo Rigossa and reported that it was only partially demolished and fit for use by jeeps and carriers, and also that in the immediate vicinity of the bridge was a suitable location for an Ark (667023). That night (12/13 Oct) the engineers brought two Arks up to the Rigossa, and although the first overturned on the dyke wall, they succeeded in placing the second in the gap. Daylight, however, revealed that all was not well with the crossing. Due to the bogged Ark and an eight-foot drop on the far dyke wall, the tanks could not get across. Unsuccessful efforts were made to remove the obstacle and improve the exit. At 0530 hours on 14 Oct Ld S.H. decided to try the Ark. The first tank got safely over the stream, but the second bogged down. Although the engineer reconnaissance on the 12th had found the existing bridge too narrow for tanks, Ld S.H. decided, in view of the impending infantry action to take the risk. Fortunately the original report was inaccurate by several feet, and the first Sherman to attempt it, successfully made the passage. This unfortunate error had caused the loss, temporarily at least, of two Arks and a Sherman, and had consumed a great deal of time. ((H.S.)234C1.013(D7): The History of the Royal Canadian Engineers, 1 Canadian Infantry Division, in action between 10 Oct and 25 Oct)

92. At 0730 hours, with two troops of tanks available west of the river, Hast & P.E.R. commenced the opening phase of the attack. As anticipated, the opposition proved to be light and within 20 minutes the leading troops were on the crossroads. By 1100 hours they were able to report the objective cleared and the tanks were released to support the move on the next objective - the Bulgaria feature. Tank ammunition was running low, however, so it was decided to delay the second phase of the operation until it could be replenished. In the interim period the artillery and mortars laid down a slow harassing fire on the village and the ground immediately in front along Route 9. At 1130 hours Ld S.H. reported themselves ready to resume the advance. (The Approach towards Cesena op cit)

93. The artillery programme was timed to recommence at 1210 hours. Accordingly at this time the second company moved off, passing through the scene of the morning's fighting where they linked up with Ld S.H. For 20 minutes, as the infantry advanced up the road to the village, the artillery brought down harassing fire on the enemy positions. Then the guns lifted on to pre-arranged targets some 300 yards beyond. In the build-up area, the enemy offered stiff but unavailing resistance. Working in very close harmony the infantry and armour methodically cleared the houses:

The method of house clearing was for the tks to shoot up a designated building with HE then fire the Besa at it and the dug-outs beside it. The inf tossed out yellow smoke, then went in as the tks switched to a flank, and the next building. This process was slow and methodical, and continued during the afternoon. By 1630 hours the Coy Comd reported that all the houses were cleared and that he was consolidating.

(Ibid)

In the event that the enemy might attempt to infiltrate back into some of the buildings during the hours of darkness Battalion Headquarters sent a troop of M.10's and an additional platoon of infantry into the village. Owing to enemy shellfire the battalion anti-tank guns were unable to reach this position and remained well forward on the main axis. (Ibid; W.D., G. (Ops), H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, October 1944; Appx 72, (G) 1 Cdn Inf Div Operations Log, 14 Oct 44)

94. About 1700 hours 14 Oct a Panther tank, one of several reported as approaching from the direction of Gambettola, entered the area and fired one shot:

Immediately, Corporal Lodwick... engaged the intruder (a PANTHER) with his 75 mm. - at the same time calling to Sergeant Johnston who was manning one of the newly-received 17 pounder tanks. With the target neatly indicated by Corporal Lodwick's rounds, Sergeant Johnston put four rounds of 17 pounder A.P. into the PANTHER before it could fire a second shot.

This action took place at about 400 yards' range. After seeing this example of fine marksmanship and alertness, the commander of the German tanks must have changed his plans, for, from that moment, nothing more was seen or heard except for spasmodic shelling and mortaring.

(McAvity op cit, p. 157)

Apart from this the night passed quietly. In case the enemy armour should return, Ld S.H. remained in the area in harbours protected by the infantry. It was a comparatively costly affair for the enemy; prisoners numbered about 60 while his killed and wounded were at least double that figure.[■] On the other hand Hast & P.E.R. losses amounted to only six killed and 17 wounded. As a further result, the enemy now withdrew from Gambettola

■ An entry in the divisional operations log at 1437 hours 14 Dec gives 15 as the number of prisoners captured.

(W.D., G. (Ops), H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, October 1944; Appx 72)

(see para 101). (The Approach towards Cesena)

95. Although the brunt of what opposition there was in the opening phase fell on Hast & P.E.R., advanced elements of 48 Highrs were in contact with parties of the enemy from noon on 11 Oct onwards. Operating south of Route 9 on the very edge of the foothills, 48 Highrs complained that they were having to move against the grain of the land:

...instead of moving up or astride roads we were in many cases crossing them. At best, using a zig-zag route, our lines of communication would not have been first class, but with 'blows' from demolition and shelling and mines laid in considerable density, the supplies and evacuation of casualties were a constant problem.

(W.D., 48 Highrs, 14 Oct 44)

Notwithstanding these trials, the unit made fair progress. By first light on 13 Oct one company, under cover of a screen of scouts and snipers, established a foothold west of the Scolo Rigossa at 655026. This company was ordered to keep 'winkling' forward until firm contact was made. During the afternoon (13 Oct) it organized an attack to take place at 1800 hours on an enemy position east of the village of Calisese (6402). Later Headquarters 11 Cdn Inf Bde was informed that Headquarters R.C.A., 1 Cdn Inf Div had designed a diversionary fire plan for that evening in support of a 46 Brit Inf Div operation. Accordingly 48 Highrs were instructed to make their move under cover of the divisional shoot. Unfortunately there was some confusion concerning the timing which necessitated a last minute postponement. As a result, while forming up the Highlanders were counter attacked and became somewhat disorganized, losing some of their positions west of the Scolo Rigossa. However by 0100 hours the company had restored the situation. On 14 Oct the battalion patrolled forward beyond the Bulgaria lateral, and one company took up a position about 500 yards west of it towards Calisese. By the end of 15 Oct 48 Highrs, moving along the edge of the high ground were midway between Calisese and Route 9 in the general area of the O4 Northing. Here they turned west towards the Rio Donegaglia, a tributary of the Pisciatello, now about 1,500 yards distant. During the morning of 17 Oct they reached the river on a two-company front between 625052 and 623047. (Ibid, 13 Oct to 17 Oct 44)

96. On the morning of 15 Oct General Burns visited Headquarters, 1 Cdn Inf Div, where he conferred with Maj-Gen Vokes and Lt-Gen Freyberg:

...we discussed the method of carrying out the ops planned, which were for both divs to adv towards the crossing of the PISCIATELLO river... gaining contact with the enemy, driving in his outposts, and if his resistance stiffened mounting an attack. Maj-Gen Vokes proposed to bring fwd his 2 Bde to attack northwards on the rd from BULGARIA to RUFFIO and this was tentatively agreed to but this idea was later

discarded since the 2 N.Z. Div felt that they could adv rapidly adhering to the original bdy.

(Durns Diary, 15 Oct 44)

The following day 1 Cdn Corps issued Op Instr No. 35, which stated that 1 Cdn Corps would advance and seize bridgeheads over the River Savio and capture Cesena. In Phase One "2 N.Z. Div and 1 Cdn Inf Div will capture crossings over R PISCIATELLO within Div bdys". (The Gothic Line Battle: Appx "P")

97. At noon on 15 Oct Brigadier J.A. Calder, E.D., visited Lt-Col J.W. Ritchie at the R.C.R. headquarters and directed him to pass through Hast & P.E.R. and continue the advance along Route 9 with all possible speed. The change over took place almost immediately, and at 1400 hours R.C.R. attacked, with one company moving straight up the main axis while a second moved parallel to it but several hundred yards to the right. Apart from light brushes with enemy machine gun posts, the battalion encountered little opposition and made good progress. Drawing its reserve companies close up, the unit adopted firm positions for the night with its forward location 1500 yards east of the Donegaglia (642054 and 636048). Until dark, when they withdrew to a harbour near the Scolo Rigossa, two troops of Strathconas were in support. (1 Cdn Inf Bde Battle Report; W.D., R.C.R., 15 Oct 44)

98. Opposition stiffened during the early morning of 16 Oct as the river became visible to forward companies, and to quote from the unit's history, "55 Axis":

"B" Company was held up on the flat and sodden countryside by six machine-guns and "C" Company came face to face with a strongly held enemy position defending a road junction. The leading platoon of "C" Company, commanded by Lieut A.D. Egan, outflanked the built-up area of the crossroads and after a spirited fight killed and captured a number of the enemy and put the remainder to flight. Lieut Egan, who personally led the left flanking assault, attempted to halt the enemy's withdrawal by firing a 2-inch mortar from the upper window of one of the houses just seized but was unsuccessful. Outstanding qualities were exhibited by Pte N. Rauta in the capture of one of the machine-gun posts and subsequent house clearings, and he was rewarded with the Military Medal, but unfortunately he was killed at the Lamone River two months later without learning of his honour.

(Galloway, Maj Strome, E.D. "55 Axis"
p. 170)

The enemy subjected the leading companies and battalion tactical headquarters to severe mortar and artillery fire. Progress was poor throughout the day. On the left the battalion reached the Visano, a small stream crossing Route 9 east of the Donegaglia, but on the right it had gained only a few hundred yards when it consolidated for the night. (W.D., R.C.R., 16 Oct 44)

99. During the afternoon (16 Oct), the Seaforth, with a squadron of 12 Royal Tank Regiment under command, began moving to the right of R.C.R. towards objectives on the Pisciatello between the railway and the village of Ponte della Pietra (see para 109). On 17 Oct after overcoming considerable opposition the Highland battalion secured its objectives on the Pisciatello. On the same day the two units of 1 Cdn Inf Bde drew up to the tributary Donegaglia to complete the first phase of the divisional plan. (1 Cdn Inf Bde Battle Report)

OPERATIONS OF 1 CDN CORPS BETWEEN THE RAILWAY AND THE COAST,

10 - 18 OCT 44

100. Now it is necessary to turn to the fortunes of 2 N.Z. Div for a moment. Patrols over the Fiumicino on the New Zealand front during the night 10/11 Oct reported that the enemy had withdrawn from the banks of the river. Accordingly, before first light elements of 5 N.Z. Bde crossed the river and established bridgeheads for the protection of the engineer working parties. On the left advancing without opposition one of the two leading battalions occupied Gatteo (708036). The attack of the second unit, operating on the right flank, came to a stop in front of the town of S. Angelo (710058), which the enemy was holding in some strength. On the following day, by-passing S. Angelo, both units moved up to the first objective, the small stream Rio Baldona. Despite this the enemy gave no sign of withdrawing from S. Angelo; in fact he appeared to be digging in and strengthening his positions there. Since all the armour was road-bound and since S. Angelo dominated the forward routes, it was obvious that the town would have to be taken. A company attack against S. Angelo in the early hours of 13 Oct proved unsuccessful. An attempt made during the day to patrol to the banks of the Scolo Rigossa had a similar ending. Finally late on 14 Oct 28 N.Z. (Maori) Bn assaulted the town in artificial moonlight and within a few hours had cleared it of the enemy. By mid-day the engineers had completed a 60-foot D.S. Class 40 Bailey bridge at the road crossing over the Baldona west of S. Angelo.

101. As a result of 1 Cdn Inf Bde's capture of Bulgaria the previous day, the Germans withdrew from Gambettola before first light on 15 Oct and elements of the left New Zealand unit moved in. During the rest of this day and the next the advance continued against slackening enemy opposition, and by last light on 16 Oct the New Zealand forward line rested on the lateral road which runs from the Pisciatello at Ponte della Pietra to the Rigossa at Fatta dei Fenili. By morning 5 N.Z. Inf Bde was up to the Pisciatello north of Ruffio on the left and along the Scolo Olca on the right. On this line the brigade was relieved by 6 N.Z. Inf Bde. (2 N.Z. Div Summary, 10 to 22 Oct 44; The Gothic Line Battle; W.D., 2 N.Z. Div, 10-18 Oct 44)

102. Since 1100 hours on 10 Oct the sector between the Adriatic and the O6 northing had been held by a mixed force known as Cumberland Force from its commander, Brigadier I.H. Cumberland, O.B.E., E.D. At that time the composition and disposition of the force was as follows:

Right:

3 Greek Mtn Bde
with in support "C" Sqn 20 N.Z. Armd Regt
two tps 34 Bty (7 N.Z. A. Tk Regt)
16 Bty (4 Cdn A. Tk Regt SP) less
17 pr tp plus one tp M10
One pl 2 N.Z. MG Coy

Left:

LANDELL FORCE
consisting of WILDER FORCE (B and C Sqn 2 N.Z. Div
Cav and 33 Bty (7 N.Z. A Tk Regt)
the whole force on foot as infantry)
RCD
with in support B Sqn 20 N.Z. Armd Regt
31 Bty (7 N.Z. A Tk Regt)
2 N.Z. MG Coy (less one pl)
two pls of 4.2 M (PLF)

In Reserve

A Sqn 20 N.Z. Armd Regt

Arty Support

3 Greek Fd Regt
3 Fd Regt R.C.A.

Engrs

10 Fd Sqn R.C.E.

Services

one Sec 5 Cdn Armd Div Provost
Sec Fd Security

(W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Oct 44)

103. Until the morning of 16 Oct the enemy retained his hold on the Fiumicino in this area. On that day, however, he withdrew except opposite 3 Greek Mtn Bde, and "Wilder Force" moved up to the east bank of the Scolo Rigossa. At the same time R.C.D. were moving forward from S. Angelo, where they had relieved a battalion of 5 N.Z. Inf Bde the previous night. Light elements of "Wilder Force" attempted to establish themselves in the hamlet of Fatta dei Fenili (728085), but were counter attacked and forced to withdraw slightly. On their right R.C.D. reached and crossed the river near the Ponte Rigossa (708063), and by nightfall were 1,000 yards to the north of it and approaching Castellacio (708079). (Ibid: Appx 13, History of Cumberland Force). During this day, 16 Oct, 3 Cdn Armd Recce Regt (G.G.H.G.) came under command Cumberland Force (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, October 1944: Appx 112, 1 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 16 Oct 44). That night 27 Lancers took over the left forward sector of 3 Greek Mtn Bde and, on the following night G.G.H.G. completed the relief of this formation, which then passed into Eighth Army reserve (ibid, 16 - 18 Oct 44). On 18 Oct 27 Lancers was to swing to the left and relieve "Wilder Force", upon which the latter would return to under command 2 N.Z. Div. The whole sector would then be held by three units, G.G.H.G. on the coast, 27 Lancers in the centre and R.C.D. on the left.

(Cumberland Force History, op cit)

104. The Germans withdrew from in front of R.C.D. on 17 Oct and the latter moved forward to within 300 yards of Castellacio. On their right "Wilder Force" attempted, without success, to seize Fatta dei Fenili. Here in positions just south of the village they remained until their relief by 27 Lancers. Throughout the following day, 18 Oct, the enemy held tenaciously to Castellacio and the road running east through Sala, and Celle to Fatta dei Fenili. (Ibid)

THE 5 CORPS ADVANCE TO CESENA, 12 - 19 OCT 44

105. Meanwhile, 5 Corps had turned the defences of the Scolo Rigossa, just as it had turned those of the Fiumicino. Despite the stubborn efforts of 114 Jaeger Div at Monte Farneto (see para 75) and the arrival of a battle group of 29 Pz Gren Div, the enemy was unable to prevent the same tactics from being employed again. As a key to holding the line of the Scolo Rigossa in the plains, the enemy relied on his positions on Monte dei Pini, Monte delle Vacche and Monte dell'Erta - high points on the ridge east of the Savio, the southernmost of which is about six miles from Cesena. By 12 Oct both 46 Brit Inf Div and 10 Ind Div were threatening these ridges and that night the latter stormed and captured Monte dell'Erta. Two days of heavy fighting now followed as a result of which, on the morning of 15 Oct, the enemy threatened from three sides, abandoned Monte delle Vacche. On the same day 46 Brit Inf Div, overcoming the double hindrance of a determined enemy and a difficult terrain, seized Monte dei Pini. Thus, although the enemy had been holding firm in the plain he again fell back to avoid being taken from the rear. His next stand was on the Pisciatello. (Eighth Army-The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, pp 57-58)

106. Without pausing, 5 Corps directed its energies northwards along the high ground parallel to the Savio and closed in on Cesena. Despite the weakness of the position, the Germans continued to put up a strong fight, influenced, probably, by the fact that the Desert Air Force, aided by several days good flying weather, had been able to destroy all but one of the permanent bridges over the Savio. Attacking side by side on the night 16/17 Oct 46 Brit Inf Div and 10 Ind Div cleared Monte Romano (5902) and Monte Reale (5901), and the enemy fell back to Celincordia (5904) - Acquarola (5802). Here he held for a day, but on 18 Oct was on the move again. On 19 Oct 46 Brit Inf Div drove him from the Ponte Abbadesse (5905), the last commanding position south of Cesena, and on the following day entered the town in force. Unfortunately as the leading troops of 5 Corps approached Cesena, the Germans destroyed the sole remaining bridge across the Savio. (Ibid)

THE CROSSING OF THE PISCIATELLO AND THE ADVANCE TO THE SAVIO,

17 - 20 OCT 44

107. On 16 Oct after a discussion with the Army Commander, General Burns made some changes in the Corps plan, involving chiefly certain adjustments in the inter-divisional boundaries. 1 Cdn Inf Div would now swing to the north of Cesena at the same time maintaining steady pressure on the town from the east. The boundary between the Canadian Division and the New Zealanders now followed the road running north from Bulgaria through Ruffio (648076) to the Pisciatello (648082), inclusive to the 2 N.Z. Div. It was the intention of 1 Cdn Inf Div to continue to push along the Via Emilia with 1 Cdn Inf Bde, and bring in 2 Cdn Inf Bde to seize the new frontage on the Pisciatello. (Durns Diary, 16 Oct 44; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 16 Oct 44)

108. In the first phase of the 2 Cdn Inf Bde operation Seaforth of C. would advance and seize the line of the Pisciatello river between the railway bridge and the road crossing at Ponte della Pietra, a village on the west bank (637071), reconnoitre for crossings, and if possible gain a footing on the far side. The second phase would consist of an attack over the Pisciatello by L. Edmn R., if Seaforth of C. were unable to continue, followed by a thrust to the Cesena - Cervia road with objectives in the general area S. Egidio (611085) - Le Chiaviche (620096). The fire plan would consist of a series of concentrations available to battalions on call. The action was to begin at 1700 hours, 16 Oct, when Seaforth of C. and the supporting armour, a squadron of 12 Royal Tank Regiment, would pass through the crossroads south of Bulgaria on Route 9. (Ibid)

109. By 2000 hours the forward companies of Seaforth of C. had crossed the railway and secured their first objective (buildings at 645061). Due to the rain which had fallen during the late afternoon, the tanks accompanying the infantry experienced some difficulty in moving across country. By midnight the right company, which had continued from the first objective along a track leading north, had reached the road running west through Ponte della Pietra to Cesena. During the night, 16/17 Oct, the unit continued to push forward and by early morning was up to the river on a two-company front between Ponte della Pietra and the junction of the Rio Matalardo with the Pisciatello. Throughout 17 Oct patrols of Seaforth of C. attempting to cross the river were turned back by direct enemy machine gun fire from the far bank. South of the railway both R.C.R. and 48 Highrs had now reached the tributary stream Donegaglia. In the course of the afternoon the enemy shelled the 1 Cdn Inf Div front heavily, particularly in the sector held by Seaforth of C., the latter suffering about 21 casualties from shelling alone on that day. (W.D., Seaforth of C., 16-17 Oct 44; (H.S.)234Cl.013(D7): 2 Cdn Inf Bde Report on Ops Savignano to F. Ronco, 14 Oct to 28 Oct 44; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 16-17 Oct 44)

110. At 1430 hours, 17 Oct, Maj-Gen Vokes arrived at Headquarters 2 Cdn Inf Bde, where he discussed with the Brigade Commander, the C.R.A. 1 Cdn Inf Div, and the Commanding Officer L. Edmn R., the plan for the crossing of the Pisciatello. That decided upon called for L. Edmn R. to make a silent attack over the river in the vicinity of the railway bridge and then, working north, to seize the village of Ponte della Pietra. The proposed bridgehead would eventually extend from the river 1,000 yards north of the village west to the road junction at 634078, then left to a road junction some 1,000 yards west of Ponte della Pietra at 627071, and back to the river at the railway bridge. In support the artillery would be prepared to lay down a series of concentrations, partly on a timed programme, partly on call, on known enemy defences. Counter battery and counter mortar programmes would accord with the main fire plan. (2 Cdn Inf Bde Report op cit; (H.S.)234Cl.013(D7); L. Edmn R. Report on Operations, 14-18 Oct 44; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 17 Oct 44)

111. Because of a heavy rain that had been falling during the day, the G.O.C. had left the decision as to the advisability of launching the attack with Lt-Col J.R. Stone, D.S.O., M.C. of L. Edmn R. However, by late afternoon, the weather had improved, and Lt-Col Stone informed Headquarters, 2 Cdn Inf Bde that the attack would go in as planned. At 1830 hours, the battalion marched to the assembly area, where Battalion Tactical Headquarters was ready to operate by 2010 hours. Shortly afterwards, the first wave moved off and at 2215 hours reported a successful crossing, with as yet no sign of the enemy. Within the next hour they reached the buildings on the Canale del Molino (634064). Here they came into close contact with the enemy. Although the fighting was now quite close, progress continued to be so satisfactory that shortly after midnight Lt-Col Stone despatched a second company. This reached the far bank at 0045 hours 18 Oct, and ran into immediate opposition. By 0300 hours, L. Edmn R. had consolidated the position near the canal, but on the left were still engaged in mopping up enemy infantry and machine gun posts. Between now and daylight the forward companies carried on a ding-dong battle with the enemy for the possession of a bridgehead approximately 500 yards square. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 17 Oct 44; W.D., L. Edmn R., 17-18 Oct 44)

112. At 0600 hours 18 Oct, Brigade Headquarters received the report of an engineer reconnaissance party on a ford at 634063. This lay 400 yards downstream from the railway bridge and, once L. Edmn R. had cleared the immediate vicinity, the tanks and anti-tank guns were to have proceeded via this route to their support. However, the reconnaissance revealed that because of the soft, sandy nature of the river bottom, the ford was not passable for armour; nor was it considered practical to attempt to bridge the river at that point with an Ark. It now appeared that the infantry on the far side might have to spend the day without anti-tank protection. Accordingly the acting Brigade Commander, Lt-Col M.P. Bogert, D.S.O., O.B.E., sent orders to the L. Edmn R. to hold their present positions if possible, with the proviso that Lt-Col Stone might if he wished withdraw one company. At the same time he ordered the M.10's, presently in support of the Seaforth, to be sent to the river's edge to give a measure of support to the bridgehead troops. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 18 Oct 44)

113. During the morning, Lt-Col Dogert went forward to the Tactical Headquarters of the L. Edmn R. and reviewed the situation with the battalion commander. At that time the position of the two companies was not unsatisfactory. Both had cleared the enemy from their respective sectors, although they were still coming under considerable sniper and machine gun fire from their front and flanks. As a result of the Brigade Commander's visit, the L. Edmn R. were to undertake operations designed to enlarge their holdings during the afternoon. In the meantime, an officer of 12 R.T.R. had reconnoitered the ford, mentioned earlier, and decided that his Churchill tanks could negotiate it. In the light of this information Lt-Col Stone decided to increase his strength west of the river. As a result at 1400 hours a third company of L. Edmn R. with one troop of 12 R.T.R. in support, moved into the bridgehead. By 1830 hours the lodgment area had been considerably expanded; Ponte della Pietra had been cleared, and on the left the forward line had been extended to Casa Stirighi, a building about 800 yards west of the river. (Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces op cit, Section E - 1 Canadian Corps Operations, p. 64; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 18 Oct 44; W.D., L. Edmn R., 18 Oct 44)

114. At this point, Lt-Col Stone sent his remaining sub-unit forward to Ponte della Pietra, where it arrived at 2145 hours. It was intended to move this company some 1000 yards up the road leading north out of the village to the road and track junction at 634077. Unfortunately, however, the tanks which were to support the attack were unable to get around a large crater in the river road south of the village. Attempting to advance without the armour, the L. Edmn R. ran into heavy enemy fire and were unable to continue. In a change of plan it was decided to work along the river road and strike the objective from the east. In the process of this action the company cleaned out a number of enemy machine gun posts which had been delaying the movement of engineer equipment to the bridging site at Ponte della Pietra. By 0430 hours, 19 Oct they had gained their objective and in addition had cleared the enemy from the river bank between the village and the road and track junction about 1000 yards to the north-east. With the bridgehead thus effectively secured, the Engineers started building the bridge at Ponte della Pietra. (2 Cdn Inf Bde Report; W.D., L. Edmn R., 18-19 Oct 44)

115. Meanwhile, further south, both forward battalions of 1 Cdn Inf Bde were still in close contact with the enemy on the line of the Donegaglia. Late in the afternoon of 17 Oct in order to maintain pressure, the Brigade Commander ordered his two forward units to attack over the river under cover of darkness. On the left 48 Highrs had as their objective Point 39 (619053) on the secondary road running north to Route 9. By the early hours of the morning, 18 Oct, they had made the crossing and consolidated on their objective. An attempt to clear and occupy some buildings lying a few hundred yards to the west achieved only temporary success, for the houses proved untenable due to strong enemy S.P. gun fire. Under cover of a smoke screen the company withdrew to its original objective, where it remained for the balance of the day. During the same morning

R.C.R. had attacked in the triangular shaped strip of land lying north of Route 9 between the two main tributaries of the Pisciatello River. After some slight initial progress, the R.C.R. were forced, in the face of stiff enemy opposition, to withdraw to the line of the Donegaglia. (1 Cdn Inf Bde Battle Report)

116. During the afternoon, 18 Oct, 1 Cdn Inf Bde was informed by Divisional Headquarters that it was to be relieved by 3 Cdn Inf Bde. The relief was to begin at dusk that day and was to take place in the positions then held. Hast & P.E.R. were to remain where they were and pass temporarily under command of 3 Cdn Inf Bde. Early on 18 Oct 3 Cdn Inf Bde began moving forward from Cattolica and by midnight the West N.S.R. and R. 22e R. had taken over the battalion areas of 48 Highrs and R.C.R. respectively. Command of the sector passed to Headquarters 3 Cdn Inf Bde at 0030 hours 19 Oct. That morning 1 Cdn Inf Bde withdrew into a reserve area behind Santarcangelo. (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 18 Oct 44; (H.S.)234Cl.013(D7): 3 Cdn Inf Bde Operations in Italy, 17-28 Oct 44; 1 Cdn Inf Bde Battle Report)

117. On the 19th, 1 Cdn Inf Div began to move forward against light opposition. At 0800 hours, the engineers completed the bridge over the Pisciatello at Ponte della Pietra. P.P.C.L.I. passed through L. Edmn R. and pushed on towards the village of S. Egidio and the Cesena - Cervia road. By midnight they had cleared the area of the village and despatched a fighting patrol north to Le Chiaviche. To the left at 1800 hours advanced elements of R. 22e R. reached the same road in the vicinity of the railroad crossing. During the late afternoon Carlit & York R. with orders to send its companies straight along Route 9 joined in the advance to Cesena. As patrols of 3 Cdn Inf Bde entered the town that night troops of 46 Brit Inf Div came in from the south. The enemy, apparently having decided against an all-out defense of Cesena, had withdrawn across the Savio River. By the morning of 20 Oct 3 Cdn Inf Bde, passing through the north end of the town, were within a few hundred yards of this new river barrier. About 2,000 yards downstream from Cesena, during the same morning, two companies of Patricia's moved into positions on the river lateral near the hamlet of Martorano (5910). (W.D., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 19-20 Oct 44; 2 Cdn Inf Bde Report; (H.S.)234Cl.013(D7): P.P.C.L.I. Report on Operations, 14 Oct - 28 Oct 44)

118. In the 2 N.Z. Div sector 6 N.Z. Inf Bde relieved 5 N.Z. Inf Bde on 18 Oct. The battalions of the former brigade then closed up to the F. Pisciatello and at 2300 hours the same night attacked across the river with the intention of securing a bridgehead from Bagnarola (6708) to inclusive the road west of Casone (6508). The attack made good progress and by the early hours of 19 Oct the New Zealanders held a bridgehead 1,000 yards in depth. Two assault bridges were erected by the engineers, a scissors west of Bagnarola and a single Ark just upstream from Casone. The scissors collapsed, however, leaving only the Ark in service. Over this the New Zealand armour, consisting of 18 and 20 N.Z. Armd Regts of 4 N.Z. Armd Bde, passed in pursuit of the enemy. By noon on 19 Oct the New Zealand armour, advancing against light opposition, had reached the Mesola del Montaletto. Up to this point, the chief obstacle to the advance was the ground rather than the enemy.

evening, however, the division ran into heavy fighting along the Cesena - Cervia road between Calabrina and Osteriaccia. Early on 20 Oct the New Zealanders continued their advance and by nightfall had reached the lateral road running north from Cesena between S. Martino in Fiume(5915) and Borgo di Ronta (5912). Elements of one regiment pushed forward into the bend of the river, south of S. Martino, where they came under heavy enemy machine gun fire. Here the New Zealanders rested their advance. The division was not to cross the Savio, having already received orders to hand over the sector to 5 Cdn Armd Div on or after 21 Oct. (The Gothic Line Battle; 1 Cdn Corps Ops Summaries Nos 26-29, 18-21 Oct 44)

119. On 19 Oct, as a result of 2 N.Z. Div's attack of the previous night, the enemy facing Cumberland Force began to withdraw. Pushing on quickly in pursuit R.C.D. and 27 Lancers reached the area of the Pisciatello before regaining contact. By last light R.C.D. were positioned on the far side of this river about a mile east of Dagnarola. Further downstream the 27 Lancers had elements at Ponte Rosso (7109); with the remainder of the unit in the area Sala - Celle. Only along the coast, in the G.G.H.G. sector, was there no enemy withdrawal. Here he was still close to the Fiumicino with wire, mines and pillboxes, originally designed as anti-sealanding measures, to assist him in the defense. It was not intended, however, to engage in a costly battle for this narrow strip of land, since events elsewhere on the Adriatic front would bring about its evacuation in due course. (The Gothic Line Battle; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 19 Oct 44; Cumberland Force History)

120. The following day, 20 Oct, the enemy withdrew again; this time along the whole of the Cumberland Force front. Preceded by the commanding officer mounted on a bicycle, G.G.H.G. moved into Cesenatico. R.C.D., with a squadron of 9 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.D.) in support, advancing along the road from Montaletto to Pisignano, reached the crossing over the Rio Granarola. Here in the late afternoon, 27 Lancers relieved R.C.D., the latter going into reserve. The squadron of tanks with the Canadian unit remained with the Lancers, bringing the tank strength of that unit up to two squadrons, both from B.C.D. On the coast G.G.H.G. continued forward and by the afternoon of 21 Oct were positioned along the Mesola del Montaletto and probing towards the salt pans south-east of Cervia. Despite a short engagement with enemy machine gun posts in the morning, 27 Lancers made a considerable advance on 21 Oct. Moving astride the Pisignano road they reached positions 2,000 yards beyond the Rio Granarola crossing by last light. Both units reported that the roads were very badly cratered and that movement off the roads was impossible owing to floods and marshy ground. (The Gothic Line Battle; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Bde, 20-21 Oct 44; Cumberland Force History)

121. Meanwhile G.G.H.G., from information received from civilians and deserters, had established that the enemy was holding Cervia in some strength. Acting on this assumption the unit planned an attack to take place at dawn on 22 Oct. To create confusion and disrupt the enemy defenses they supplied a number of Partisans with weapons and sent them back behind the German lines. This operation never materialized, however, for the enemy withdrew, and G.G.H.G.

occupied Cervia without opposition on 22 Oct. Throughout this day (22 Oct), 27 Lancers moved steadily forward on the axis of the Pisignano road and the Canale di Allacciamento which parallels it to the east. Actions against scattered enemy machine gun posts and infantry rearguards occurred and progress was slow. By last light, however, the unit had seized Pisignano, while one squadron advancing along the canal was within one and one half miles of the Savio at Castiglione di Cervia. (The Gothic Line Battle; W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Dde, 22 Oct 44; Cumberland Force History)

RECAPITULATION

122. Four weeks had now passed since 1 Cdn Corps crossed the Marecchia and entered what one regimental historian has described as "The Promised Land". In readiness for an armoured pursuit of a supposedly retreating enemy, two armoured divisions, 2 N.Z. Div and 5 Cdn Armd Div, had taken over the Corps front. Three important factors, however, the enemy, the weather and the terrain caused the operations to assume the much different pattern which they actually followed. During the last days of September and all through October the weather was at the best unsettled and the few short periods of fine weather were insufficient to improve materially the resulting ground conditions. Moreover a closer examination of the terrain revealed that it was not as well suited to the employment of armour as had been thought:

...the operation that was to see our division cross the River Marecchia and, at long last, "debauch" (sic) on to the Po Valley. For weeks, we had been looking forward to this occasion; for weeks, we had been pounding over hill after hill reminded by the senior commanders ... that beyond these hills lay "The Promised Land", the "wide open spaces" where our tanks could run wild in their mad gallop to the Po.

(McAvity, pp 144-5)

The "wide open spaces" turned out to be little better than reclaimed marshes, closely cultivated, and traversed by numerous streams enclosed by dykes which, in the course of years had raised them above the level of the surrounding countryside. Apart from the two metalled highways, Routes 9 and 16, the roads were little better than cart-tracks, which soon broke down under the heavy military traffic. This was a country in which every advantage lay with the defence, and it took 1 Cdn Corps four weeks to cover the 14 miles of it lying between the Marecchia and the Savio.

123. On 23 Sep 5 Cdn Armd Div had moved forward from the Marecchia and in three days of action against his rearguards forced the enemy to give up his delaying position in front of the Uso. On the following day the New Zealand division on their right and the formations of 5 Corps to the south (the latter after heavy fighting along the ridge extending south from Santarcangelo) also came up to this river. Fresh advances made between 26 and 28 Sep brought both divisions of 1 Cdn Corps up to the Fiumicino. Again, however, 5 Corps met with stubborn opposition and did not reach the river along its whole front until 5 Oct. Rain began to fall on the night 27/28 Sep and fell steadily until 2 Oct. As a

result operations came to a standstill and the fords over the Uso and the Marecchia became useless. In the foothills to the south, however, where the effect of the rains was less marked and less lasting, the left wing of 5 Corps continued to make progress. By 10 Oct the divisions in this sector had outflanked the Fiumicino and were threatening to turn the enemy's next water line, the Scolo Rigossa.

124. During the next phase, the advance from the Fiumicino to the Savio, the operations of the Eighth Army followed the pattern set by these first successes in the foothills. There now followed a series of turning movements and as these loosened the enemy's grip on his various river lines the forces in the plains were able with comparative ease to complete the job. 1 Cdn Corps regrouped and shifted left to include the ground astride Route 9 in its operational zone. The place astride this highway was taken by 1 Cdn Inf Div, while 5 Cdn Armd Div was replaced by 2 N.Z. Div, and the former New Zealand sector was assigned to the composite group CUMBERLAND FORCE.

125. By 10 Oct, yielding to the threat to his southern flank, the enemy had begun to withdraw in the central sector of his front to the line of the Scolo Rigossa. On 11 Oct 1 Cdn Inf Div moved forward from Savignano and brushing aside light enemy rearguards covered the three miles to the Rigossa by 13 Oct. At this stage the Canadian Division was operating with an exposed right flank, the New Zealanders being held up by a determined enemy force occupying a commanding position at S. Angelo. On 14 Oct, however, S. Angelo fell and 2 N.Z. Div moved up rapidly to the Rigossa. To the south 5 Corps had again outflanked the enemy and he fell back once more, this time to the Pisciatello. Meanwhile 1 Cdn Inf Div had crossed the Rigossa, seized the village of Bulgaria and resumed its advance along Route 9. At this point the division began moving on a two-brigade front, with its second brigade on the right north of the railway. On 17 Oct both brigades reached the Pisciatello and, after heavy fighting on 18 Oct, secured a bridgehead. The next day 1 Cdn Inf Div made excellent progress and on 20 Oct arrived at the Savio. Cesena fell into the hands of Eighth Army without a struggle, for the enemy, with 46 Brit Inf Div moving in from the south and the right hand brigade of 1 Cdn Inf Div threatening to outflank him from the north, apparently decided against a protracted defence of the town and withdrew across the Savio.

FUTURE INTENTIONS OF 15 ARMY GROUP

126. On 10 Oct a statement of general intentions governing the conduct of operations during the autumn, winter and spring was issued by the Army Group Commander. With Bologna as the immediate objective, operations to clear the enemy from as much of Northwest Italy as possible would continue. When offensive action, due to the exhaustion of the troops or the state of the weather, was no longer possible, a period of active defence would follow, during which the Armies would be rested, reorganized and trained. A further directive on the same subject was sent to Fifth and Eighth Armies on 23 Oct. In the intervening period fighting of the fiercest nature had occurred on Fifth Army front

which had, nevertheless, left that formation still short of Bologna. The increasing exhaustion of the troops and the continuing lack of replacements now called for a closer study of when to halt the offensive in Italy. To provide formations with the necessary time for rest, reorganization and training, 15 Army Group estimated that it would be necessary to suspend the current offensive on 15 Nov:

...practically all formations of both armies have now had long periods of continuous fighting, and many have reached the stage where further effort without rest is an uneconomical proposition. On the other hand failure to secure Bologna and Ravenna before settling down on a winter line, will have the most serious adverse effect on preparations for resuming the offensive on the main Italian front in 1945. With Bologna and Ravenna in our hands, and sufficient space beyond them to make it possible to use the former as a road and railhead, and the latter as a coastwise port, we should be able to build up sufficient supplies north of the Apennines to support an attack on the Adige position as part of a continuous movement. Inability to use these areas and the communications of which they are the terminals for administrative build up during the winter may, and probably will necessitate a delay of two or more months between the capture of Bologna and an attack on the Adige position. The immediate problem therefore is to balance the advantages of securing Bologna and Ravenna against the need of the troops for rest.

(Allied Strategy, Appx "D"-5 Future Plans, 23 Oct 44)

The plan put forward by the Army Group Commander aimed at improving the Fifth Army chances at Bologna by attracting some of the enemy's forces away from that sector. To that end the following scheme was suggested:

- (a) Fifth Army to suspend active operations; withdraw say two divs to rest in the Florence area; and simulate the withdrawal of a third div and preparations for defence.
- (b) A cover plan to be initiated to the effect that Fifth Army had been compelled to go on the defensive owing to exhaustion and heavy casualties.
- (c) Eighth Army to continue their offensive with all available resources at least till 15 Nov, to draw enemy forces off Fifth Army front and to capture Ravenna.
- (d) Fifth Army to prepare a plan for a final all out offensive to capture Bologna, and then to move the divisions withdrawn to rest in the Florence area back to the front for the purpose as quickly and secretly as possible as soon as the enemy had moved troops away and the weather was propitious, or at any rate not later than 15 Nov.
- (e) Eighth Army to concentrate on the capture of Ravenna.

(Ibid)

In his reply to these proposals the following day (24 Oct), General McCreery stated that in his view three weeks was too short a time either to rest the American divisions or to lull the enemy into a sense of security on the Bologna front. He suggested that the target date be set back by a week or two for these reasons and in order to allow Eighth Army time to complete its urgently necessary programme of rest and regrouping, which was just beginning to be put into effect.[¶] (Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, pp 62-63)

EIGHTH ARMY ARRANGEMENTS FOR REST AND REGROUPING

16 - 27 OCT 44

127. During the advance to the Savio the Eighth Army had been fully committed. Although the divisions under command 5 Corps and 2 Pol Corps were still comparatively fresh, those of the Canadian Corps, with the exception of the New Zealanders, were now badly in need of a rest. Unfortunately there were no formations available in Eighth Army with which to replace them. Due to the lack of infantry reinforcements 56 Brit Inf Div and 1 Brit Armd Div were no longer operational and 46 Brit Inf Div had only recently been withdrawn from the line. Moreover the Eighth Army now had to provide forces for the occupation of Greece; late in October the Greek Mountain Brigade and the 4th Indian Division were withdrawn for this purpose. There was virtually no reserve of armour at all, although the nature of the terrain made this lack of relatively less importance. The problem therefore was to find a means of resting the Canadian Corps (Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles pp 63-64)

128. The Army Commander decided to take advantage of the obvious difficulties of advancing in strength directly on Ravenna, across the increasingly large and numerous obstacles, to replace the Canadian Corps with light forces operating under the command of an improvised

¶ The situation was reviewed at a conference of Army Commanders held at Headquarters Allied Armies in Italy on 29 Oct. At this conference the date at which the operations of both armies would cease was postponed to 15 Dec.

headquarters.* One result of this regrouping would be to throw even more emphasis on the operations of 5 Corps along Route 9 and in the hills to the south. For this reason the British Corps would be responsible for its own right flank protection and would take over 1 Cdn Inf Div sector, using the armoured car regiment of 9 Brit Armd Bde for the purpose. The remainder of 1 Cdn Corps front would become the responsibility of an ad hoc force consisting of three armoured regiments and including supporting artillery and engineers. In the event, as a result of an enemy withdrawal following the successful establishment of bridgeheads over the Savio by both 5 Corps and 1 Cdn Corps, the Eighth Army had reached the Ronco River before the relief of the Canadian Corps took place. (The Gothic Line Battle; Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, pp 63-4)

OPERATIONS OF 2 POL CORPS IN THE MOUNTAINS, 17-27 OCT 44

129. Although the decision to relieve 10 Brit Corps and replace it with 2 Pol Corps was taken on 6 Oct (see para 67) it was not until 15/16 Oct that any Polish formations were in position to start active operations. By then the main body of Eighth Army had made considerable progress and had almost reached the line of the River Savio and Route 71. This necessitated a further change in the Polish axis of advance. Eighth Army now directed the Poles to move across country towards Route 67 and along the valleys of the Bidente and Rabbi rivers towards Forli and Forlimpopoli. (Eighth Army - The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, p. 54)

130. On 17 Oct the Poles began operations to secure a base for their drive down the Rabbi valley. At the start the attack made steady progress against weak opposition. During the night 18/19 Oct they secured the high ground between the Rabbi and Bidente and entered the villages of Galatea and Civitella di Romagna (3492) without a fight. Within the next few days, however, the initial surprise effect wore off, and the enemy began to offer a more

* From an entry in General Burns' Personal Diary it would appear that by 19 Oct the Army Commander had either already decided upon or was considering the relief of the Canadian Corps. The entry of that date reads as follows:

Lt-Gen McCreery, Comd Eighth Army, came to H.Q. and discussed the development of ops and his intentions for the Cdn Corps when the river SAVIO should be reached. The task of the Cdn Corps would then be to protect the right flank of Eighth Army on the SAVIO from Highway 9 to the sea; it was presumed that the enemy would withdraw to behind the SAVIO eventually. 1 Cdn Inf Div was to establish a bridgehead in front of CESENA. 27 Lancers would probably be withdrawn to form part of an armd car bde to protect the right flank of 5 Corps between the SAVIO river and FORLI.

(Burns Diary, 19 Oct)

determined resistance. By 22 Oct the Poles had completed the capture of the Monte Grosso massif, which forms the eastern wall of the Rabbi valley. From this position attempts were made without success against the enemy holding the high ground west of this river. Until 24 Oct, when the enemy withdrew and the Poles were able to gain a solid footing beyond the Rabbi, there was little further change in this sector. By 25 Oct their patrols, working north along the Rabbi, were just short of Predappio Nuova - the birthplace of Mussolini and, more important, the site of an undamaged and valuable aircraft factory. Two days later (27 Oct) as the Polish left entered Predappio Nuova, the right, moving between the Rabbi and the Ronco, reached Rocco del Caminate (3904). A few miles to the east lay the 5 Corps bridgehead over the Ronco at Meldola (Allied Strategy, p. 16; Eighth Army. The Gothic Line and Romagna Battles, pp 59, 67-9).

2 CDN INF BDE'S BRIDGEHEADS OVER THE SAVIO, 20-23 OCT 44

131. During the morning of 20 Oct Lt-Gen Burns visited Maj-Gen Vokes at the latter's Headquarters and discussed with him the current situation and the present task of 1 Cdn Inf Div. This latter remained the same "i.e., to clear the portion of CESENA within his boundary (which was practically occupied by that time), and then get a bridgehead over the SAVIO" (Durns Diary, 20 Oct 44). General Burns also explained to the 1 Cdn Inf Div Commander "that he would probably not be required to continue the advance once the bridgehead had been established" (ibid). Following his meeting with the Corps Commander, General Vokes went to Headquarters 2 Cdn Inf Bde where he conferred with Lt-Col Bogert regarding the plan for an assault crossing of the Savio by that brigade.

Three objectives were laid down for the establishing of the complete bridgehead over the SAVIO. The first objective, the seizing of the initial bridgehead from the buildings at 589112 to 584103. The second objective is the enlargement of the initial bridgehead to the road junction 583115 to PIEVE SESTINA 579113 to the road junction at 579107. The final objective was the cutting of the road to CESENA at the fork 577113.*

(W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 20 Oct 44)

As the first step towards the gaining of these objectives, Lt-Col Bogert ordered P.P.C.L.I. to attack over the river with two companies and seize a shallow bridgehead in the bend of the river opposite the village of Martorano (5910). This would permit the engineers to commence their bridging operations, presently held up in the reconnaissance stage by heavy small arms fire from the opposite bank. Once the attack of the Patricias achieved success Seaforth of C. would push through them and on to the second objective. Details of the attack and the supporting fire plan were worked out that afternoon and H Hour. set for 1700 hours that night. (Ibid)

* (See Map 2)

132. At H Hour the two companies of P.P.C.L.I. commenced to cross the river.* There was a strong current and the level of the water was such that in some places swimming was necessary. Almost immediately the attackers ran into heavy machine gun and mortar fire. Of one company, only a portion succeeded in crossing and these, pinned down by the enemy fire and being unable to move either forward or to the flanks, withdrew after dark. ((H.S.)145.2P7011(D3): Account by Capt A.G. Robinson, 2 i/c "D" Coy, P.P.C.L.I., of their activities in the area of the River Savio). Communications with the second company had failed, but from the noise of the battle they were judged to be in close contact. Eventually word reached the P.P.C.L.I. Headquarters that the company was holding a few hundred yards of the west bank and had lost a platoon in the initial stages of the action. All the while the enemy continued to shell our forward areas on the east side of the river, and to bring down machine gun harassing fire on the lateral roads and tracks running into the river. (2 Cdn Inf Bde Report)

133. At Headquarters 2 Cdn Inf Bde during the morning of 21 Oct, plans were made for a fresh assault on the river line. This would be on a larger scale than the first attack, with two battalions, Seaforth of C. on the right, and L. Edmn R. on the left making the assault. The objectives remained the same. Engineers would accompany the attacking infantry to construct at least two assault crossings, the first with Seaforth of C. in the sector west of Martorano, the second with L. Edmn R. about 1,000 yards further upstream near the Piazzia d'Armi (590094). As soon as these were ready for use, tanks and M.10 anti-tank guns would move forward to the support of the infantry. As a diversionary measure, 3 Cdn Inf Bde on the left flank was to stage a fire demonstration. (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 21 Oct 44)

134. Artillery support for the attack, over and above the normal divisional scale, would be provided by 2 N.Z. Div and 1 Cdn A.G.R.A. In all eight regiments would take part in the shoot. The C.R.A. 1 Cdn Inf Div had obtained an extra ammunition allotment and had arranged that information on the latest enemy dispositions and strong points, as obtained from Air observation and photographs, P.W. and partisans, would be available. The general idea

* Although the unit diary states that the attack went in on time, Maj E. Cutbill, O.C. "A" Coy, P.P.C.L.I. in his report on the attack states that his company was about 15 minutes late in starting ((H.S.)145.2P7011(D3): Account of the Action of "A" Coy P.P.C.L.I. in crossing the River Savio). This meant that on this company front, at least, the effect of the covering barrage which ceased at "H" hour, was largely lost.

was for a series of concentrations grouped in belts to be fired on each battalion front and so timed that they would fold back as the attack progressed. To avoid the tendency of timed artillery to run away from the infantry, either on the whole front or part of it, regiments were assigned to each belt in such a manner that the fire coming down on one sector was independent from that on any other. Thus the timing and grouping of the concentrations could be adapted to the course of the battle. Also included in artillery plan were the 4.2" mortars and the M.M.G's. of the Sask L.I., which unit was firing for the first time as a battalion. Close support would be provided by the tanks of 145 Regt R.A.C., replacing 12 R.T.R., who were being taken out of the line for a rest. (The Gothic Line Battle; 1 Cdn Inf Div Report, Parts I and II)

⇒ 135. From Cesena to the sea the Savio follows a meandering course north over the flat cultivated plain with its vineyards and tree bordered fields. These latter are interlaced with many irrigation ditches and canals, some of which are tank obstacles. According to an early air reconnaissance report the river is fordable for infantry throughout its length, but only in a few places for vehicles:

All crossings will be determined by the depth of water, and bridging will almost certainly be required.

1. The wet gap is about 60' at CESENA, narrows to 35' - 50' for the next 3 kms, then gradually broadens until along the last five kms, at the mouth, it widens from 70' to 200'.

2. The river bed appears to be mud with gravel shoals.

3. The banks are generally high and steep, rising to 30' in places although near the mouth and in the CESENA area there are sections where the bank consists of gently sloping shoal of gravel. A dyke runs alongside each bank of the river except in places between CESENA and the weir at 590173 where the bank is high enough to prevent flooding. From the weir to the sea the dykes are continuous increasing in height from 6' to 15'. The banks are overgrown with grass, brush and reeds, and in sections, trees.

The distance between banks is the same as the water gaps except at CESENA where they are, in places, about 120' apart.

((H.S.) 224C1.023(D9): M.A.I.U. 1 Cdn Corps Topographical Report No. 12, 19 Sep 44)

Reconnaissance patrols on 21 Oct reported that the water gap on the Canadian Corps front varied from 15' to 40'. However, this figure was apt to change considerably and suddenly. During one 24-hour period, for example, as a result of torrential rains, the water gap at one point increased from 45' to 300', and the current to 20 knots. Except at fords, the average depth was four feet. The banks, in places 15' to 20' high and very steep, were undoubted natural tank obstacles. To make matters worse, the approach roads did not go down to the river, and over the last 200 - 300 yards the tracks and ground were too soft to take tanks. In front of

1 Cdn Inf Div the enemy had supplemented these natural obstacles with a belt of anti-personnel mines connected to tripwires on the near bank. (1 Cdn Inf Div Report, Part I; 1 Cdn Corps Operations Log, 21 Oct; (H.S.)143.131013(D1): Account of Bridging Operations across the R. Savio, 21 Oct to 28 Oct 44, by Lt-Col E.H. Webb, C.R.E. 1 Cdn Inf Div)

136. During the day, 21 Oct, enemy shelling of the advanced positions was again heavy. Late that afternoon it began to rain and the Savio rose rapidly. At one point in the 2 Cdn Inf Bde sector, the depth of the water increased to eight feet. However preparations for the attack, including the forward movement of engineer stores of all type, continued. Meanwhile across the river, low in ammunition, food and water, under severe and accurate mortar and artillery fire, the subject of several enemy counterattacks "A" Coy of the Patricias still clung to their precarious position at the water's edge. (1 Cdn Inf Div Report, Part I; Webb op cit (HS.) 145.2P7011(D3): Account of the Action of 'A' Coy P.P.C.L.I. in crossing the R. Savio, 20/21 Oct 44, by Maj E.W. Cutbill)

137. At 2000 hours, 21 Oct, 2 Cdn Inf Bde launched its attack, and within an hour the leading troops of the two assaulting battalions, Seaforth of C. at 592102 and 592108 and L. Edmn R. at 592096 were across the river. Both came into immediate contact with the enemy, Seaforth of C. reporting that they were closely engaged and coming under heavy mortar fire. Unfortunately the commander of the Edmonton company became a casualty almost immediately, with a resultant disruption of the communications and organization of his command. To relieve the situation the battalion commander at once despatched an additional company. Due to the nature of the opposition and to allow the infantry time to get firmly established, the artillery blocks of fire were continued on the same areas until midnight. By then Seaforth of C., although still in contact with the enemy, were several hundred yards beyond the river bank, while on their left L. Edmn R. were slowly gaining ground against stiff resistance. (2 Cdn Inf Bde Report; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 21 Oct 44)

138. By 0200 hours all the rifle companies of both battalions had completed the river crossing. Already Seaforth of C., having secured their first objective - the lateral road lying 300 to 400 yards west of the river, were thrusting forward along the parallel roads leading towards the village of Pieve Sestina. The company on the left experienced little difficulty and shortly after 0600 hours reported the road junction south of the village secured. On the right, however, at 0245 hours an enemy force consisting of three Mark V tanks, two self-propelled guns and about 30 infantry fiercely counter-attacked the Seaforth of C. company as it neared the vicinity of Pieve Sestina. In the course of the fighting that followed a private soldier, K.52880 Pte. Ernest Alvia Smith, by his "dogged determination, outstanding devotion to duty and superb gallantry" greatly inspired his comrades and earned a large share of the credit for the repulse of the enemy attacks.

Under heavy fire from the approaching enemy tanks, Private Smith showing great initiative and inspiring leadership led his PIAT group of two men across an open field to a position from which the PIAT could best be employed. Leaving one man on the weapon, Private Smith crossed the road with a companion and obtained another PIAT. Almost immediately an enemy tank came down the road firing its machine-guns along the line of the ditches. Private Smith's comrade was wounded. At a range of 30 ft and having to expose himself to the full view of the enemy, Private Smith fired the PIAT and hit the tank putting it out of action. Ten German infantry immediately jumped off the back of the tank and charged him with Schmeissers and grenades. Without hesitation Private Smith moved out onto the road and at point blank range with his Tommy gun killed four Germans and drove the remainder back. Almost immediately another tank opened fire and more enemy infantry closed in on Smith's position. Obtaining some abandoned Tommy gun magazines from a ditch, he steadfastly held his position protecting his comrade and fighting the enemy with his Tommy gun until they finally gave up and withdrew in disorder.

((H.S.)173.063: V.C. Citations Canadian Army 1939 - 45)

Although one tank and two self-propelled guns had now been destroyed the area was still being swept with fire by another tank from longer range. Despite this Smith, having obtained shelter and medical aid for his wounded comrade, returned to his position beside the road to await a possible renewal of the enemy attacks. But the enemy had had enough and made no further move. Pte Smith received the coveted award of the Victoria Cross, the second such received by a member of 1 Cdn Inf Div since the landing in Sicily. (Ibid; 2 Cdn Inf Bde Report; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Bde, 22 Oct 44; W.D., Seaforth of C., 22 Oct 44)

139. On the brigade left, during these early hours of 22 Oct, the Edmontons continued to press slowly westwards in the direction of the Cesena - Ravenna road. By 0450 hours they had reached Cse Gentili (584096), a hamlet located about 200 yards west of the Savio. Here, however, the enemy put in a counter-attack and, as a result, the Edmontons withdrew leaving a number of their men behind as prisoners. Fortunately a second company had now arrived at Casa Pio (586097), a building lying about 200 yards to the north-east. From Casa Pio, at 0715 hours, the two companies put in an attack, supported by artillery,[■] and recaptured the hamlet,

■ The artillery unit concerned was 3 Medium Regiment Royal Artillery. Their Liaison Officer at Headquarters 2 Cdn Inf Bde made the following report of this shoot:

At approx 0700 hours 22 Oct 44 I received information that the inf had been counter-attacked by enemy Inf and tanks at 584097, and forced to withdraw. They asked for Medium fire to be brought down on the village before they attempted to recapture it. I pointed out that it was a very close target but they said they appreciated that and would lie low. I arranged for the Regt to fire a small fire plan at 0715 hours and following this the place was retaken. On 23 Oct 44 Lt-Col Stone, the Bn Comd of L.E.R. visited 2 Bde HQ and asked to see me. He told me that the Medium shoot on "RAWTHEY" (584097) was marvellous and