

NOTE

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REPORT NO. 158
HISTORICAL SECTION
CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS
OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST CANADIAN ARMOURED BRIGADE IN ITALY
MAY 1944 TO FEBRUARY 1945
PART I, THE GUSTAV AND HITLER LINES

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11-17 MAY 44.
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18-30 MAY 44.

RESTRICTED

REPORT NO. 158

HISTORICAL SECTION

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

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Operations of the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade in Italy,
May 1944 to February 1945: Part I, The Gustav and Hitler Lines.

THE PREPARATION FOR THE ASSAULT

1. A series of Reports, still in progress, have dealt with the operations of Canadian formations in Sicily and Italy. These deal mainly with 1 Cdn Inf Div (in the early phases) and with 1 Cdn Corps (after the arrival of that formation in the theatre).
2. It is necessary to deal separately with the operations of 1 Cdn Armd Bde. This formation during the greater part of the Mediterranean campaign operated detached from the main Canadian force, and its history is closely identified with those of certain British formations. It was not the least distinguished of the Canadian formations serving in Italy, and its record must take an important place in the Canadian Official History. This is the first of a group of Reports on this subject. It deals with the Spring offensive in 1944, which broke through the enemy defence lines in the Liri Valley and led to the capture of Rome on 4 Jun. These operations were dealt with in a preliminary manner in Report No 121.
3. At the end of March 1944, 1 Cdn Armd Bde had been relieved of its operational role with 8 Ind Div in the Adriatic sector and had moved across the mountains into a training area in the Volturno Valley south-east of Venafro (H-0320). On arrival, the brigade passed under command Eighth Army and then, on 2 Apr, came under command 13 Corps. Working in close co-operation with the latter, the brigade made immediate preparations for an intensive course of infantry-cum-tank training in preparation for the coming operations against the Gustav and Hitler Lines. (Hist Sec file, Italy 1944/1 Cdn Armd Bde/C/F, Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 1 and 2 Apr 44) At the same time extensive lectures and training were carried out on the subject of malaria control (all War Diaries).
4. The original intention had been for 1 Cdn Armd Bde to support 4 Brit Div in the coming operations, but by special request of Maj-Gen. D. Russell, D.S.O., C.B.E., M.C., G.O.C., 8 Ind Div, who appreciated the value of the friendship and mutual admiration which had been built up between the staffs and other personnel of the two formations during their previous association on the Adriatic side, the instruction was altered and the brigade was informed that it would be supporting the Indians. However, 8 Ind Div was not due to arrive in this area until about 20 Apr, and so, until its arrival, 1 Cdn Armd Bde was to continue training with 78 Div and 4 Brit Div. These two divisions were at this time employed in an operational role on the Cassino front, but personnel was made available from the reserve battalions, which were rotated from time to time in order that as many men as possible might take part in the infantry-cum-tank training. (Ops in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

5. Two infantry-cum-tank schools were started, 11 Cdn Armd Regt working with 4 Brit Div, and 14 Cdn Armd Regt with 78 Div. 12 Cdn Armd Regt was at this time deployed forward in a counter-attack role with 78 Div and 4 Brit Div. This resulted in their being able to carry out very little of the training which was to prove so invaluable in the ensuing conflict. A short training programme was undertaken with 4 Brit Div but no opportunity was found for any training with 21 Ind Inf Bde, with whom they were to fight (Ibid). The Canadian Brigade's report goes on to state that the objects of the training were:

- (a) To familiarize the infantry with the characteristics of the tank and normal tank tactics.
- (b) To practise various methods of inter-communications between tanks and infantry and methods of indication of targets.
- (c) To place officers and men of the armoured regiments and of the infantry units which were to fight together on a basis of familiarity one with another.

(Ibid)

The training syllabus for the infantry-cum-tank training was as follows:

- Day 1 - Coys move to the bivouac area. Regtl Comd or 2 i/c together with F.O.O's. (i) visit the armoured regimental Comd at RHQ of the Armd Regt, where the training will be discussed and the details firmed.
- Day 2 - All ranks of inf attend a lecture on the tk armament and characteristics, tk capabilities and limitations, tactical employment of troops within the sqn, intercom and target identification. The AIDE MEMOIRE will be discussed, orders issued on all levels and the inf will be shown over the tk, ride in it, etc.
- Day 3 - The attack on a two company front will take place and a discussion will follow. An evening sing-song and get-together will conclude the training.

(W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 7 May 44.
The complete syllabus may be found as
Appx 1 to Part I, Sec (a) of Ops in
Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

6. During this training period a considerable amount was done to improve communications between infantry and tanks. It was considered most desirable to facilitate this at as low a level as possible in order to assist the infantry in their

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- (i) It is usual in infantry divisions, which have three regiments of Field Artillery, for one artillery regiment always to support the same infantry brigade. Similarly the battalions have their own battery. This explains the Forward Observation Officer taking part in the infantry battalion training.

indication of targets. The outcome of much experimentation was that each tank was fitted with an outside telephone held in a clip welded to the skirting plate. This enabled anyone on the ground to communicate with the crew commander without interference from engine or other noises. The device proved very useful, but its disadvantages for target identification were that the infantryman had to expose himself considerably to reach it, and also that he could not normally see the target himself while attempting to describe it into the telephone. (Ops in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

7. The next device to be adopted was the installing of a No. 38 set in two of the three tanks of each troop. The purpose of this was to permit intercommunication between tank troop and infantry platoon. These were found to work very well. The only disadvantage reported here seems to have been one of language. An Indian battalion frequently had no English speakers at platoon level and wireless communication had to be mainly on a company and troop level. (Some of the troop commanders reported a similar difficulty, although not quite so serious, when working with Scottish battalions!) One tank in each squadron headquarters was also fitted with a No. 18 set. These were netted to their respective battalion command nets which enabled the infantry battalion commander to keep in direct touch with his squadron commander. (Ibid)

8. Other methods of target identification that were practised were: 2" mortar smoke; coloured flares fired from 2" mortars; Verey light flares; tracer bullets fired from the rifle, or from the Bren; and pointing with the rifle in the direction of the target. Of these, the two last mentioned were the most satisfactory. (Ibid)

9. Perhaps the most important benefit of all to be derived from this training period was the mingling of all ranks of the infantry and tank sub-units who were to fight together. That is, it was the troop who were to support a particular company who showed that company over their tanks, explained their characteristics, took them for rides, practised them in target identification and finally supported them with live ammunition in the sham two-company attack. At the conclusion of each course, an impromptu entertainment was held. A special rum issue was authorized and these evenings were invariably a great success. (Ibid) (ii)

10. The training with 8 Ind Div, which began on 23 Apr (iii), continued until all units of 17 and 19 Ind Inf Bdes had completed the course on 8 May 44. During this period training

(ii) The importance of these short courses both with regard to the knowledge which they disseminated and to the mutual trust and friendliness which they fostered, cannot be over emphasized. The narrator visited all units of 1 Cdn Armd Bde and talked to several officers of 8 Ind Div when this training period and ensuing operations were still fresh in their minds. The members of each formation gave most glowing accounts of the other and spoke with enthusiasm of the above mentioned period of training. This is unusual as training periods are normally considered very boring.

(iii) The summary of this training period included at the beginning of the War Diary of H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde for May 1944 states that training was carried out with 8 Ind Div as from the end of the first week in April. This does not agree with any other source and there is no doubt that it is an error.

was also carried out with Artillery O.P. planes, and methods of their assisting tanks in the spotting of targets were discussed and practised. Medium F.O.Os. were also attached for training and much mutual benefit was derived from their presence. Numerous planning conferences were held from about 20 Apr onwards and the information gained at these was immediately passed on to all C.Os. and Staff Officers to ensure that everyone was kept abreast of developments and that ample time was given for preparations. Large prints of air photographs, defence overprints and tank going maps were also distributed. These were invaluable, as they enabled everyone, right down to troop commanders, to obtain a clear picture of what they were likely to meet, both as regards ground and enemy defences. (Ibid)

11. The 1 Cdn Armd Bde report speaks of the above as follows:

It is considered that these aids (air photos, defence overprints and tank going maps) and the study given them, were mainly instrumental in the success that the armour had in knocking out anti-tank guns, S.Ps., and tanks, often before they had fired a shot.

(Ops in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

12. During the interim between the brigade's last operation on the Adriatic side and the launching of the attack on the Gustav Line, as well as the extensive training programme described above, all units carried out a considerable amount of maintenance and refitting. Numbers of replacement tanks and vehicles were received and the personnel carriers of the recce troop of each regiment were replaced by cut-down General Stuart tanks. (All W.Ds. for April 1944)

13. Although 12 Cdn Armd Regt's activities during this period had little to do with the ensuing operations, they are sufficiently interesting to warrant brief mention. On 2 Apr this regiment, less "A" Sqn, moved up to support 4 Brit Div in the bulge in the Gustav Line east-north-east of Cassino. "A" Sqn had moved up the previous day to support 78 Div in the left of the same sector. The regiment also had four troops across the Rapido River on the near slope of M. Cairo. While there was no fighting done in this sector, it was still quite hard on the troops involved, as all positions -- even R.H.Q. in the Inferno (G-937249) -- were overlooked by the enemy on M. Cairo and any movement by day brought down heavy observed shelling and mortaring. Communications also presented the utmost difficulty due to the extremely rugged nature of the country. On 21 Apr, the regiment, less "A" Sqn (which remained in position under command 78 Div until the end of the month), was relieved by 18 N.Z. Armd Regt and concentrated at S. Pietro (G-9715). After a brief period of rest and refitting, R.H.Q. and the other squadrons moved back into the line on 24 Apr -- this time under command 78 Div in the general area of S. Michele (G-9022). They also had four detached troops in the eastern half of Cassino, two tanks being driven into the Crypt only twenty yards from the enemy (Hist Sec file Italy 1944/1 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D (Docket III), Report on Ops, 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 1 Apr to 6 May 44; W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, April 1944).

14. The 12 Cdn Armd Regt Operations Report for the period gives a vivid description of this much-contested town:

Cassino is like a ghost town. It is completely demolished. The jagged remains of house walls stand up stark

and white like bleached bones in a desert and there is not a tree or a bush that is still alive. At night the enemy (iv) would emit weird blood curdling cries like the call of wild animals. The eerie silence which normally prevailed was periodically shattered by the scream and crash of an incoming salvo of shells. The whole atmosphere was most death-like and was by no means improved by the ~~porvading~~ stench of rotting corpses in the rubble of the shattered buildings.

(Report on Ops, 12 Cdn Armd Regt,
1 Apr to 6 May 44)

15. 12 Cdn Armd Regt continued to support 78 Div in this area until the first week in May. By 6 May the whole regiment was out of the line and concentrated in the area of Mignano (G-9811). (Ibid)

16. It had been foreseen that some engineer assistance would be invaluable to the brigade, and a platoon attached from 1 Cdn Corps Tps joined in the training programme with 8 Ind Div. The attached engineers were divided into three groups of eighteen, one group being sent to each regiment. These were again sub-divided and six were sent to each squadron. Each of these sub-sections was provided with two cut-down Stuarts from the Recce Troops, the drivers and co-drivers of which were specially trained to assist the R.C.E. personnel in any engineering task. Each tank was loaded with such necessary stores as picks, shovels, mine detectors, explosives and so forth. (The complete list of stores carried may be found in Ops in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944, Appx "B" to Part I, Sec (a).) The advantage of this breakdown was that a squadron would normally be able to deal with its own obstacles and not have to wait for engineers to come from R.H.Q. which might be some distance away, especially when the three squadrons were supporting different infantry battalions (v) (Ops in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944; all W.Ds., April 1944).

17. For several weeks prior to the assault on the Gustav Line, 1 Cdn Armd Bde had taken part in a vast deception scheme, the object of which was to deceive the enemy by pointing to a full-scale attack in another part of Italy and at a time later than that at which the real attack would go in. It was appreciated that everyone was aware that the present intensive training was preliminary to a large-scale operation to be launched in the near future. The essential thing to conceal was the time and place. Enemy photo reconnaissance was to be expected and he also had excellent observation posts on the forward slopes of the hills and mountains which he occupied. Enemy agents and wireless interception were also likely to be active and it was probable that he would make every effort to capture prisoners. Consequently security in all its aspects was a matter of the greatest concern. (13 Corps Planning Notes No. 3, 24 Apr 44, to be found as Appx 49 to W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

(iv) 1 German Para Div.

(v) All sources speak most favourably of this arrangement.

18. With reference to the necessity for appearing to continue training as usual, Planning Notes No. 3 says:

The completion of battalion training by 4 Div and 8 Ind Div in the first days in May would give a pointer to the enemy if he found out. To cover this, all brigades in the line prior to "D" Day will prepare and issue relief and training programmes down to and including 21 May. These training programmes will include further training in river crossing and tank co-operation by battalions then in the line. This programme will be made known to the troops.

(Ibid)

Other points mentioned were that formations and units moving from the training area would leave a sufficient number of vehicles, tents and bivouacs in place to give the impression of continued occupation; tactical signs would be left in position and no signs or numbers placed in forward areas until the last possible minute. Civilian movement forward of the Volturno River was to be rigorously controlled and all strangers taken into custody. All forward movement of vehicles would take place at night; gun positions were to be dug well in advance and camouflaged, and guns moved into positions previously unoccupied were to remain silent except in cases of emergency. As tanks moved forward, their places were to be taken by dummy tanks camouflaged as before. (Ibid and Unit War Diaries)

19. All the camouflage officers in Eighth Army plus No. 1 Camouflage Company (Palestinian) were put to work arranging and supervising camouflage within their formations. The results were so successful that a very considerable degree of tactical surprise was achieved. Despite the enormous number of troops and the vast weight of material that was gradually eased forward, there was no noticeable increase in enemy shelling on this sector up until the moment of the assault. The interrogation of enemy P.W. also showed that the enemy had no conception of the strength that we had built up. (Ops in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944; 1 Cdn Corps, Concealment of Concentration, Exercise "Honker", to be found as appendix to W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1944)

20. The Gustav Line cut right across the mouth of the Liri Valley from Cassino to S. Apollinare. It roughly followed the right bank of the Gari River down as far as its junction with the Liri and thence down the Garigliano to the sea. The river on the 8 Ind Div sector presented a complete anti-tank and infantry obstacle as it was about 60 feet wide, and from seven to eight feet deep with a very rapid current. The banks on either side were flat and provided no cover for several hundred yards. The soil here, as in most of the valley, was sand or gravel with a certain amount of volcanic ash. The tank going could be expected to be fair to good. The exposed banks, however, were completely dominated by the enemy defences on the high ground west of the river. The village of S. Angelo occupied a dominating ridge approximately in the middle of the line, and it was here that the enemy's most dangerous observation posts were sited. His defences consisted of well-prepared infantry, anti-tank and field gun positions sited in depth up to about 4,000 yards or approximately as far back as Pignataro (G-8214). The emphasis, however, was on machine guns, mortars and field and medium artillery rather than on anti-tank weapons, as he was relying very heavily on the anti-tank obstacle offered

by the river. These defences, it might be noted, had already withstood two major assaults. (Hist Sec file Italy 1944/1 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D, Narrative by Brigadier W.C. Murphy, 24 May 44; 11 Cdn Armd Regt. Op Order No. 1, 8 May 44, to be found as Appx 44 to 11 Cdn Armd Regt War Diary, May 1944; Defence overprint, to be found as Appx 49 to W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944; also recent conversation between Narrator and Adjutant of 11 Cdn Armd Regt)

21. Although so much was known of the ground and enemy defences on the 13 Corps front prior to the launching of this operation, comparatively little seems to have been known for certain of the enemy's actual strength or dispositions. It was estimated, however, that he had roughly eleven battalions in the line between M. Cairo and the Liri River. These, reading from north to south, were 4 Mountain Battalion, two or three battalions from either 1 or 3 Para Regt, with 4 Para Regt defending Cassino and the monastery (G-8420) and possibly a Para M.G. Battalion from there south to the 19 Northing. South of this along the banks of the Rapido were likely to be found No. 2 Battalion of 115 P.G.R. (Panzer Grenadier Regiment) and the two battalions of 576 Regt of the Bode Battle Group. A tactical reserve was presumed to be provided by three to four battalions of Paratroops whose role would likely be to stiffen the defences in the hills north-west of Cassino and to be available to counter-attack down Route 6. (vi) The enemy's main gun areas in the Liri Valley were known to be between 76 and 81 Eastings; his heavies being west and south-west of Pontecorvo (G-7217). Most of his Nebelwerfers were concentrated around Pignataro (G-8124) and along the road from S. Giorgio to Vallemoio (G-8011 to G-8407). (13 Corps Int Summary No. 390, 10 May 44, to be found as appendix to W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps, May 1944) There were also expected to be about one battalion of tanks and another of assault guns (S.Ps.) in the Liri Valley (13 Corps Int Summary No. 389, 8 May 44, to be found as Appx 30, W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944). It was appreciated that these would not likely be sited to cover the river itself but would probably be further back covering the approaches from the river. This subsequently proved to be the case. (Ops in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

22. The grouping for the assault on the Gustav Line was:

Right	POLCORPS
Centre	13 Corps
Left	CEF (French Expeditionary Corps)

(13 Corps Op Order No. 17, Operation "Honker", 30 Apr 44, to be found as Appx 49 to W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

In Army reserve behind 13 Corps was 1 Cdn Corps (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 11 May 44). The 13 Corps grouping was:

Right	4 Brit Div
Left	8 Ind Div (with under command 1 Cdn Armd Bde)

(vi) The information contained in the current intelligence summaries regarding the disposition of enemy formations and units in the Liri Valley is even more conjectural than usual. The statements are nearly always made as suppositions and are couched in generalities. It is also seldom possible to solidify the material by cross reference as the summaries of one formation are invariably based on those of the next higher formation, and the whole is sufficiently vague that it is very difficult, even after the event, to know whether they were right or wrong.

Reserve 78 Div

(13 Corps Op Order No. 17)

8 Ind Div's task was to:

Establish a bridgehead across the Rapido to include the S. Angelo Horseshoe (see Map "A") (vii) as a preliminary to operations against the Adolf Hitler Line.

(Ibid)

The 1 Cdn Armd Bde intention was to:

Assist 8 Ind Div in seizing and holding the S. Angelo Horseshoe with a view to further advance.

(1 Cdn Armd Bde O.O. No. 1, 7 May 44, to be found as Appx 49 to W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

The operation was to be carried out in three phases. (For boundaries and objectives see Map "A")

Phase I - Crossing of the Gari River (viii)
Phase II - Securing a bridgehead
Phase III - Seizing and holding the S. Angelo Horseshoe

(Ibid)

Phase I

The initial assault was to be carried out by:

Right - 17 Ind Inf Bde with in support 11 Cdn Armd Regt.
Left - 19 Ind Inf Bde with in support 14 Cdn Armd Regt.

(Ibid)

(vii) The S. Angelo Horseshoe was the name given to the area enclosed by a series of rises in the ground forming the shape of a horseshoe: Point 51 (G.852164) - Point 70 (G.847163) - Point 82 (G.833158) - Point 66 (G.845143) - Point 60 (G.853143). (British Historical Section, Central Mediterranean, Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 Sep 43 to 2 May 45, Part II, Section B, Eighth Army Advance to Rome, p. 27)

(viii) This river flows from north to south. It joins the R. Liri at the point of the so-called Liri Appendix and from there to its mouth it is known as the Garigliano. Above S. Angelo the river is usually called the Rapido, and below that village, the Gari. Inconsistency in the various scales of maps accounts for the indiscriminate use of the two names which one normally meets.

Each brigade was to advance two battalions up -

- Right - 1 R.F. (Royal Fusiliers) to cross at 866165 with objective the line of the road approximately 1000 yds west of the river.
- 1 F.F.R. (Frontier Force Regiment) to cross at 864147 with objective point 57 (856153)
 - (1/5 R.G.R. - Royal Gurkha Rifles - to follow up and deal with S. Angelo)
- Left - 3/8 Punjabis to cross at 861144 with objectives point 63 (857146) and point 58 (852141).
- I A. & S. H. (Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders) to cross at 862138 with objectives spur 852138 and road leading south-east from Panaccioni.
 - (6 R.F.F. Rif - Royal Frontier Force Rifles - to follow behind 3/8 Punjabis)

(Ibid)

(Ibid)

The artillery programme in Phase I was to consist of both concentrations and barrages. (Ibid)

Phase II

The objectives for Phase II were:

- Right - Line of high ground Colle Romano (848164) to Colle Vittiglio (845154) to spur 845148.
- Left - High ground west of road junction 840144 to Point 68 (842138) to Panaccioni to cross roads 859133.

(Ibid)

The artillery for this phase was to be a barrage and then D.F. (defensive fire) to protect the bridgehead. (Ibid)

Phase III

After the bridgehead had been secured, both leading brigades would exploit by sending patrols to the edge of the S. Angelo Horseshoe, establish outposts and take every opportunity to seize more ground. 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts were to assist in this. 21 Inf Ind Bde and 12 Cdn Armd Regt were to liquidate the Liri Appendix as soon as possible after the completion of Phase II. (Ibid)

The task of the armour was to assist the infantry in Phases I, II and III. In addition 12 Cdn Armd Regt was to supply three troops to assist by direct fire from the near side of the River Gari -- first, 17 Ind Inf Bde immediately before and during

their crossing of the river, and then 19 Inf Ind Bde, from first light on D plus 1, by fire directed on the Liri Appendix until it was liquidated by 21 Ind Inf Bde and the remainder of 12 Cdn Armd Regt. (Ibid)

23. A rear assembly area had been reconnoitred west of Route 6 and just south of S. Vittore (G-9417). The move up took place on the nights of 9/10 and 10/11 May and by first light 11 May both Main and Rear Brigade H.Qs. and 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts were complete in this area and thoroughly camouflaged. Despite the mass concentration of tanks and other vehicles that had been moved up under the very noses of the enemy in Cassino and on the mountains behind, the only incident that occurred in the 1 Cdn Armd Bde area was an attack on Rear Bde H.Q. by a single enemy aircraft which dropped a stick of anti-personnel bombs inflicting a small number of casualties and causing some slight damage to vehicles. There was no shelling anywhere in the brigade area. (W.Ds., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 10 and 11 May 44)

THE BREAKING OF THE GUSTAV LINE (11 - 17 MAY 44)

24. The artillery concentration of over 1,000 guns (ix) opened up at 2300 hrs, 11 May, and the infantry assault went in 45 minutes later. The initial crossing was entirely an infantry affair as the river was a complete tank obstacle throughout its length. The only immediate assistance that could be given by the tanks was by the three troops of 12 Cdn Armd Regt which, during the artillery concentration, moved up to positions near the 1 F.F.R. crossing and supported them with H.E. and M.G. fire. These troops had previously done extensive training in night firing which included adapting the tank telescope for night use by the outlining of the cross hairs with luminous paint. (x) (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 11 and 12 May 44).

(ix) Nearly all sources agreed on this figure, but it seems probable that it applies to the whole sector, i.e. from Cassino to the coast. W.D., G.S., 13 Corps, 12 May 44, states that there were 650 guns in support of 8 Ind Div and 4 Brit Div.

(x) There are contradictory accounts of the success of this direct support of infantry by tanks at night which was a new experiment. Brigadier Murphy states:

These troops fired 250 high explosive shells and many thousands of rounds of Browning when covering the crossing. The Brigade Commander of 17 Ind Inf Div stated that their assistance was invaluable.

(Narrative by Brigadier W.C. Murphy,
24 May 44)

The 12 Cdn Armd Regt War Diary, 12 May 44, on the other hand, says that the night was so dark that these troops could do no effective shooting.

25. The whole success of the plan depended on the rapid construction of tank-bearing bridges to enable the armour to rush across the Gari to assist the infantry in securing and holding the bridgehead. Four main bridges were to be built. These were Cardiff bridge north of S. Angelo at G-866165; London bridge on the site of the demolished road bridge at the south end of S. Angelo (not to be built until night of D plus 1/D plus 2); Oxford bridge south of S. Angelo at G-866147; and Plymouth bridge south of Oxford bridge at G-862143. Besides these there were to be constructed during the first night three rafts class five and eight rafts class two. (1 Cdn Armd Bde, Op Order No. 1, 7 May 44)

26. The infantry assault went in at four points simultaneously (see Map "A") and some degree of success was achieved in each case. However, on reaching the far bank the attackers were instantly pinned down by extremely heavy M.G. and mortar fire. Work on the bridges was undertaken at once and it had been hoped that one or more bridges would be in and ready for use by 0400 hrs, 12 May. This was not to be the case, however. The 1 R.F., who crossed to the right of S. Angelo, were only able to establish the most precarious foothold on the opposite bank and little headway was made with the construction of the bridge. The work was delayed by fog, our own smoke screen which blew back on the crossing, and the difficult approaches. Finally, despite the heroic efforts of the Royal Indian Engineers, who continued working under the withering enemy fire, the whole project had to be abandoned at first light. The work on Oxford bridge continued though also greatly hampered by weather conditions, smoke and enemy fire. It was reported back that this bridge would likely be ready for use by 0730 hrs. It was not actually completed until 0830 hrs. Plymouth bridge on the left, which was a new experiment in assault bridging, after nearly meeting with complete disaster was finally in position by 0955 hours. (All W.Ds. and Narrative by Brigadier Murphy)

27. In the meantime, shortly after midnight, the leading squadrons of 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts had moved up to their forward assembly areas preparatory to crossing the Gari. Routes forward to Oxford and Plymouth bridges were swept and taped by the Recce Troops and the squadrons moved forward at 0730 hrs. At the same time a second squadron and the R.H.Q. of each regiment moved into the forward assembly area. Oxford bridge was completed at 0830 hrs and "B" Sqn, 11 Cdn Armd Regt began to move across to assist the 1 F.F.Rs. They were clear of the bridge by 0850 hrs, but as the route forward to the lateral road had not been swept they had to move left down the far bank to Plymouth bridge and thence up to the lateral. On the way they contacted some infantry who were pinned down by extremely heavy fire from the high ground to the south-west. They engaged the enemy in these positions, assisted the infantry up on to the road and greatly relieved the situation. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 12 May 44; Report on Ops of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 to 30 May 44, to be found in Hist Sec file Italy 1944/1 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D, folio 2)

28. "C" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt was to have crossed on Cardiff bridge and to have assisted 1 R.F. on the right. But as work had been suspended on that bridge, they were now ordered to follow "B" Sqn over Oxford bridge and to push north through S. Angelo and on up the far side of the Gari to the relief of their infantry who were having a very bad time. Unfortunately the ground on the other side of Oxford bridge was marshy. This resulted in both "B" and "C" Sqns having half their tanks bogged before they could reach the lateral road. In view of this, "C" Sqn were ordered to halt until

they had recovered their tanks and "B" Sqn, who had by this time recovered most of theirs, were ordered to remain in the area and give covering fire to both 1 F.F.R. and to the L.A.D. and dismounted personnel engaged in recovering "C" Sqn's tanks. By this time 1/5 R.G.R. had crossed the river and were attempting to fight their way into S. Angelo. They were meeting extremely heavy opposition. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 12 May 44; Report on Ops, 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 to 30 May 44)

29. Although the bridgehead would remain precarious as long as the enemy occupied S. Angelo and the high ground west of the river, the most critical point may be said to have been passed when the first tanks got across the Gari. 8 Ind Div had only succeeded in rafting over one anti-tank gun during the night. The enemy was known to have a considerable amount of armour in the Liri Valley and so a strong counter-attack supported by tanks prior to the completion of the bridges might well have proven disastrous to the bridgehead. (Narrative by Brigadier Murphy)

30. At 1430 hrs both "B" and "C" Sqns 11 Cdn Armd Regt were subjected to very heavy shelling from the line of the second objective and from the right sector of the first objective. The tanks at once called down artillery fire on these areas and the enemy weapons were silenced. "B" and "C" Sqns now supported 1 F.F.R. up on to the line of the first objective and then attempted to push north into S. Angelo. The lateral road beyond the river was the only approach to S. Angelo, due to the ground being boggy between the road and the river and too rough and steep for tank going west of the road. A small bridge was blown about 300 yards south of the town and each attempt to get around it resulted in another tank becoming bogged. Arrangements were made with a Royal Engineer officer for a Bailey bridge but this did not materialize. In the meantime, the situation had become critical at Cardiff where the enemy had large numbers of machine-guns and mortars on the far bank of the river and the high ground to the west. One troop of "A" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt (this squadron being still in the forward assembly area) was now detached and sent to shoot up the enemy from the near bank. "B" and "C" Sqns in the meantime continued clearing up isolated enemy positions in the area of the first objective south of S. Angelo. Elements of "B" Sqn managed to push north and contact 1/5 R.G.R. who were deployed west of the town. They were not able to contact 1 R.F. pinned down at Cardiff but by evening they were so positioned that they could assist them in the event of an attack by enemy tanks. (W.Ds., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 11 Cdn Armd Regt; Narrative by Brigadier Murphy; Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944; Report on Ops, 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 May to 30 May 44)

31. In the meantime, on the left, 14 Cdn Armd Regt had also done much to relieve the pressure on their infantry brigade and to ensure the holding of their bridgehead; this after a most inauspicious start. Plymouth bridge was a new experiment in assault bridging developed by Captain H.A.G. Kingsmill, O.C. No. 61 L.A.D.; attached to 14 Cdn Armd Regt, working in conjunction with a Royal Engineer officer from 8 Ind Div. A Bailey bridge was constructed well back from the river bank and carried forward on two specially fitted Sherman tanks, the forward tank having the turret removed and being fitted with rollers to allow the free forward and backward movement of the bridge. The rear tank was fitted with a bracket which supported the hind end of the bridge. The two tanks moved forward together, the front tank driving into the river while the rear tank, continuing to move forward, would slide the bridge forward until it came to rest on the far bank. The rear tank would then disengage and the bridge would be ready

for use. Numerous experiments in the Volturno Valley had met with great success. In this, its first operational trial, however, things went badly from the start. Firstly, the mist and smoke delayed the bringing up of the bridging supplies and the construction of the bridge, then, when it was finally completed and the tanks began to carry it forward to the bank of the river, the front tank bogged down in the soft ground. The 3/8 Punjabis had been able to establish only a very shallow bridgehead and the crossing was under continual heavy fire. Working under extremely adverse conditions it took the bridging party nearly three hours to dig out the forward tank. By 0930 hrs all was ready for a second attempt and under cover of smoke and H.E. fire the bridge was launched and in position by 0950 hrs. The enemy were holding positions only 250 yards from the bridging site and under such circumstances no other type of tank-bearing bridge could have been launched over a gap of 57 feet. (W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 12 May 44; Narrative of Brigadier Murphy; Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944, Part VI)

32. Meanwhile, at 0830 hrs, "C" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt had been ordered to cross by Oxford bridge and then come back down the far bank to join the 3/8 Punjabis. As soon as they moved off, the situation became critical at Plymouth. The enemy appeared to be closing in on the very shallow bridgehead and it seemed that, when the bridge was finally in position, he would be able to blow it up. "A" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt was rushed up to save the situation and arrived just after the bridge was in place. The leading troop and the first tank of the second troop got across, after which the bridge was hit by a shell and rendered unserviceable. (xi) The remainder of "A" Sqn were then immediately sent across at Oxford with orders to push down the west bank of the Gari, join the four tanks already across and contact the A. & S. H. whom they were to support. "C" Sqn had meanwhile run into serious difficulty with soggy ground and mines and only four of its 16 tanks managed to reach the lateral road. These at once engaged the enemy on the high ground to the west and enabled the Punjabis to enlarge their bridgehead. Due to the very heavy enemy fire and the dispersion of the infantry, however, the tanks were unable to tie in with the latter and so they pushed on alone to Point 63 (See Map "A"). Continually shooting up enemy positions and inflicting very heavy casualties they pushed on over the high ground. By 1400 hrs they had reached the road junction 200 yards north-west of Panaccioni and had lost four tanks on mines. "A" Sqn worked its way south well into the A. & S. H.'s bridgehead (it went as far as G-859138) but was unable to contact the infantry. "A" Sqn then pushed out on to the high ground just south of Panaccioni and made contact with the "C" Sqn tanks north-west of that village. Here they remained, shooting up enemy positions and transport seen moving west out of Pignataro. "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt was also sent across Oxford bridge during the afternoon. They took with them two companies of 6/13 R.F.F. Rif and established a firm base on the lateral road in the general area of Point 63. Towards last light it became apparent that neither infantry brigade was going to be able to get forward to its tanks and

(xi) W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde says that six tanks got across before the bridge was damaged. It is alone in this contention and four would seem to be correct.

so the latter squadron was ordered back and it concentrated in the defensive area established along the lateral road by "A" Sqn and the R.F.F. Rif. Here it remained for the night prepared to support 3/8 Punjabis and 1 F.F.R. in the event of a counter-attack. (W.Ds., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde and 14 Cdn Armd Regt, Narrative by Brigadier Murphy; Report on Ops of 14 Cdn Armd Regt, to be found in Hist Sec file Italy 1944/1 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D, folio 4)

33. The situation was now fairly good. Although S. Angelo was still in enemy hands and neither 1 R.F. on the right nor A. & S. H. on the left had succeeded in reaching the line of the first objective, there were now the greater part of two infantry brigades and five squadrons of tanks across the river. All the counter-attacks that had been launched during the day had been driven off and the force was now in a reasonable position to withstand the full-scale counter-attack which it appeared certain the enemy would launch on the night of 12/13 May. Nearly all the bogged tanks were recovered and a supply and ammunition dump was established forward of Oxford bridge by the Recce Troops. No counter-attack occurred during the night and apart from some haphazard shelling of the bridge areas, all was quiet. There seemed no doubt that the enemy was considerably disorganized by his heavy losses. Another indication of this was that batches of prisoners taken in the same spot sometimes contained men of several different units which showed that he was being compelled to fight in make-shift groups and was committing his reserves piecemeal as reinforcements. The construction of London bridge which had been planned for the night 12/13 May had, of course, to be postponed as S. Angelo had not yet been cleared. Repairs were carried out on Plymouth bridge and it was again in operation by first light on 13 May. (W.Ds., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts; 13 Corps Int Summary No. 193 of 13 May 44)

34. During the greater part of the day of 13 May there was hard and bitter fighting to enlarge the bridgehead. Visibility was poor in the early morning and so not much could be done. At 1000 hrs "C" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt gave covering fire to elements of 1 F.F.R. who cleared the enemy out of the area of the cemetery (G-855151) about a thousand yards southwest of S. Angelo. (xii) The remainder of the morning was spent shooting up sniper and machine-gun positions and assisting the infantry to consolidate the first objective. A full-scale attack by infantry and tanks on S. Angelo had been organized for 1200 hrs. The artillery concentration came down and 1/5 R.G.R. moved off to the assault. The tanks were still cut off from the town by the blown bridge in the lateral road, for the Bailey bridge promised the previous day had still not materialized. A Scissors bridge was sent forward from H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde but was not in position until 1800 hrs. One of the two troops of "B" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt, which had been

(xii) Cemeteries were very often used by the enemy as strong points as they were surrounded by high and substantial walls. These were normally lined on the inside by small but very strongly built family mausoleums. The whole structure provided excellent protection from shell fire. Added to this the little mausoleums made comfortable sleeping quarters and cooking fires could be lighted in them at night without being observed by our ground troops. In the Sicilian campaign and the early part of the Italian campaign it had been an Eighth Army order that churches and cemeteries should not be shelled. However, this order had to be cancelled. (Conversation between Narrator and Brigadier G. Kitching, D.S.O.)

detailed to go in with 1/5 R.G.R. made still another effort to get around the obstacle on the low ground to the right -- this despite the five tanks that were still bogged in that area from the previous day's efforts. This time, however, one tank, commanded by B.60852, Cpl. L.J. Toye, did get through and reached S. Angelo just behind the leading elements of the infantry, destroyed a Mk IV positioned in a cellar, shot up numerous fortified houses and contributed greatly to the successful clearing of the town. About two hours later another "B" Sqn tank managed to get through to assist the infantry and at 1500 hrs the town was reported clear. These two tanks pushed on with strong infantry elements and proceeded to clear the small plateau just to the north. As soon as the Scissors bridge was in position "C" Sqn moved up through S. Angelo, contacted 1 R.F. and helped them up on to the line of the first objective. After some heavy fighting, mainly against enemy infantry, this area was cleared and at 2010 hrs they pushed on together against little opposition, reached the line of the second objective and had consolidated in the area of Colle Romano (See Map "A") by 2200 hrs. By last light "B" Sqn and 1/5 R.G.R. had also reached the line of the second objective near Colle Vittiglio (See Map "A"). The enemy did not at this time appear to be strong in anti-tank weapons and very few mines were encountered. It was obvious that he had never expected tanks to get across the Gari and of course they were playing havoc with his infantry strongpoints. (W.Ds., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde and 11 Cdn Armd Regt; Narrative by Brigadier Murphy; Ops in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

35. In the 19 Ind Inf Bde sector the plan for 13 May was for "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt to support 6/13 R.F.F. Rif in an attack along the brigade's right boundary (See Map "A") with the road junction (G-855145) about 300 yards south-west of Point 63 as their objective. "C" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt and 3/8 Punjabis were then to recapture the road junction 200 yards north-west of Panaccioni. Two companies of R.F.F. Rif and two troops of "B" Sqn were then to enter and clear Panaccioni and finally, if daylight permitted, the same force was to push south and east and clear the Liri Appendix, which it was thought would not be strongly held. (W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 13 May 44)

36. About 0800 hrs the mist began to clear slightly and Plymouth and Oxford bridges began to be heavily shelled and mortared. Some of this was observed fire and one or other of the bridges would almost certainly have been damaged had not the R.E. smoke parties got to work at once and cut them off from the enemy's view. The R.F.F. Rif and "B" Sqn attack got under way at 1000 hrs and went very well indeed. The tanks knocked out numerous M.G. posts and the area was consolidated by 1300 hrs. The second attack, that of "C" Sqn and the Punjabis, went in immediately after the successful conclusion of the first. This time much heavier opposition was met, for, although the objective had been occupied by some of "C" Sqn's tanks during the previous afternoon, they had been ordered to pull back in the evening and the enemy had re-occupied the area during the night of 12/13 May and now had considerable infantry and anti-tank defence. There was fierce fighting for about an hour and the Punjabis suffered quite heavy casualties before the enemy was forced to withdraw. "C" Sqn's tanks destroyed three S.P. guns (xiii). After they had occupied the position these tanks reported seeing quantities of enemy transport pulling out of the Liri Valley west from Pignataro. The attack

(xiii) Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944, also mentions two Mk IV tanks destroyed by 14 Cdn Armd Regt during 13 May. But it does not say which squadron destroyed them or during which attack.

on Panaccioni went in at 1730 hrs following a ten-minute artillery concentration. Very heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy; he put up a stubborn resistance but the town was soon taken and with it a complete battalion headquarters of 576 Infantry Regiment (xiv). Both squadrons now consolidated for the night with their infantry in the positions they had reached, i.e. elements of "B" Sqn and of R.F.F. Rif in the area of the road junctions 300 yards south-west of Point 63 and the remainder in Panaccioni; "C" Sqn and the Punjabis in area 200 yards north-west of Panaccioni. (W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 13 May 44; Report of Ops 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 10 May - 28 May 44)

37. Morale in the brigade was now running very high. The bridgehead was well established with a depth of 1500 yards on a three thousand yard front. The enemy continued to shell the bridges and crossing areas but he no longer commanded the high ground immediately west of the river and had no satisfactory observation posts, and so his accuracy was poor. (The crossing areas were easily screened from Monastery Hill by smoke.) Further supplies were brought over by both Oxford and Plymouth bridges during the night and plans were made for passing 12 Cdn Armd Regt and elements of 21 Ind Inf Bde through the 19 Ind Inf Bde bridgehead on the 14th. Allied aircraft had also been very active over the area during the day bombing and strafing enemy transport pulling out to the west. "A" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt still remained at the forward assembly area east of the Gari as there was not room for them to manoeuvre in the 17 Ind Inf Bde bridgehead. (W.Ds., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts, G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps, all 13 May 44)

38. During the night 13/14 May, 78 Div (the reserve division of 13 Corps) crossed over into 8 Ind Div's bridgehead and pushed north-west between 8 Ind and 4 Brit Divs with a view to cutting Route 6 and isolating Cassino and Monastery Hill. The resulting vehicle congestion on the totally inadequate roads was considerable. (Narrative by Brigadier Murphy)

39. In the 8 Ind Div sector the main effort for 14 May was to be put in by 21 Ind Inf Bde supported by 12 Cdn Armd Regt. The plan was for 3/15 Punjabis, supported by "C" Sqn 12 Cdn Armd Regt, to attack through 19 Ind Inf Bde in the direction of Colle D'Alessandro (See Map "A") to cut the Cassino - Pignataro road. The thrust was to be carried out in three bounds securing in succession:

Point 66	(See Map "A")
Massa Evangelista	" " "
Colle D'Alessandro	" " "

The attack went in at 0500 hrs and did not go particularly well at first. The ground was hilly and rough, cut by ravines and contained a lot of scrub and other cover. There were no roads except the occasional sunken wagon road and these were worse than useless as they provided the enemy with excellent defensive positions. Added to all this it was foggy during the early part of the day and it was extremely difficult for the tanks to maintain contact with the infantry. They also had to contend with large areas of boggy ground and a most determined enemy, now well equipped with anti-tank weapons. "C" Sqn fought hard all day as did the Punjabis but very little headway was made. On three occasions the tanks got up on to the first objective but the infantry were unable to get up to them due to the severity and accuracy of the M.G. and mortar fire. Often

(xiv) Report on Ops, 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 10 May to 28 May states that two German battalion headquarters were captured in Panaccioni.

too, the tanks would by-pass M.G. and sniper positions in the close country. These would then open up on the infantry, hold them up, and the tanks would have to go back to deal with them. Although they did not make much headway, they nevertheless were inflicting quite severe casualties on the enemy and when, at 1730 hrs, "B" Sqn 12 Cdn Armd Regt and the Royal West Kents were passed through, the enemy was exhausted and the second force had little difficulty in crashing through to Point 66. They had consolidated this feature and had pushed out forward elements another 500 yards to the north-west by 2100 hrs. "B" Sqn had accounted for two 75 mm anti-tank guns and a considerable number of enemy killed and as usually happens, large numbers of enemy surrendered at sight of the tanks and were handed over to the infantry (xv). (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt; Report on Ops, 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 to 26 May; Narrative by Brigadier Murphy)

40. In the 17 Ind Inf Bde sector on the right, "B" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt had supported 1/5 R.G.R. up on to Colle Vittiglio at 0840 hrs. "C" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt already had two troops firm with 1 R.F. on Colle Romano and two on Colle Lena (See Map "A"). Enemy anti-tank guns began engaging "B" Sqn from a ridge 500 yards to the south-west. Artillery was brought down on them but they were not silenced. At 1030 hrs one of "B" Sqn's tanks was hit and brewed up. At the same time about 50 enemy infantry were seen forming up around some houses about 500 yards forward of the line of the second objective between Colle Lena and Colle Vittiglio. There were also three anti-tank guns in the same area. A few minutes later "B" and "C" Sqns each reported another tank knocked out. Artillery fire was called down on the enemy's forming up place but fell short. He immediately counter-attacked in considerable strength with both infantry and tanks. The situation became rather confused and the infantry withdrew until it cleared. "B" Sqn was also ordered to withdraw, but one troop (whose commander had just been erroneously reported killed) did not receive the order and so held its ground alone. As the counter-attack came in this troop commander skilfully directed our artillery on the advancing enemy and created such havoc that the counter-attack became disorganized. "B" and "C" Sqns and their respective infantry battalions immediately counter-attacked in strength and swept the enemy right back off the high ground. By 1200 hrs both features were reconsolidated. Eight enemy anti-tank guns, one S.P. and one Mk IV tank were destroyed. Positions were further improved and by 1700 hrs the line of the second objective was secure right across 17 Ind Inf Bde's front, forward positions were established well out to the west and all was quiet. (xvi) (Report on Ops, 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 May to 30 May 44)

(xv) 12 Cdn Armd Bde War Diary, 14 May 44, mentions that the repeated loss of contact between infantry and tanks and the resultant reduction of efficiency was in part due to the infantry and tankmen not having trained together in the Volturno Valley as the other armoured units and infantry formations had done. This opinion is also expressed in Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944, Part I, Section (a).

(xvi) Not all sources agree on this account. The one given is by far the most detailed and appears to be the most accurate. Other sources dealing with the same story are W.Ds., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde and 11 Cdn Armd Regt; Ops in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944.

41. In the left sector of 8 Ind Div's front, "A" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt was ordered to assist A. & S. H. in their task of clearing the Liri Appendix. The force moved off at 0900 hrs, 14 May, in a south-easterly direction from Panaccioni. They met only scattered opposition. Some of the machine-gun positions showed determined resistance to the infantry but for the most part they surrendered at sight of the tanks. There was no anti-tank defence. A P.W. stated that the main enemy forces had pulled out of the area at 0300 hrs, 13 May. "A" Sqn and A. & S. H. now took over left flank protection of the division. Meanwhile "B" and "C" Sqns 14 Cdn Armd Regt improved their positions slightly but otherwise remained firm with their infantry in their previous day's positions. (W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 14 May 44)

42. Further advance was made along the whole 8 Ind Div front on 15 May. At 0800 hrs "A" Sqn 12 Cdn Armd Regt and 1/5 Mahrattas passed through "B" Sqn and R.W.K. in their positions between Point 66 and Massa Evangelista and advanced against lessening opposition to their final objective which was the crossroads 1000 yards north of Pignataro. "A" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt had meanwhile crossed the Garf and tied in with the 1 F.F.R. At 1000 hrs they also pushed west with the object of cutting the Cassino - Pignataro road. The force advanced two squadrons and two companies up and made good progress against moderate M.G. and anti-tank opposition. As they neared the road, however, the enemy fire became intense. A sharp fight was necessary before they gained the objective. Four anti-tank guns were overrun and a number of enemy infantry killed or captured. "A" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt and 1 F.F.R. now contacted "A" Sqn 12 Cdn Armd Regt and 1/5 Mahrattas in the area of their crossroads and themselves consolidated the line of the road from that point right to the divisional boundary. In the 19 Ind Inf Bde sector, "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt and R.F.F. Rif pushed west along the brigade boundary towards Pignataro and "A" Sqn and A. & S. H. swept north-west out of the Liri Appendix. Both forces made good progress. "A" Sqn met their first opposition at a road junction about 1000 yards south-west of Pignataro. Between there and Farnioli just to the north they lost two tanks to enemy anti-tank guns and one became bogged. A. & S. H. were pinned down by very heavy indirect M.G. fire and so they dug in around the tanks for the night. Meanwhile, towards last light, as "B" Sqn and R.F.F. Rif were approaching Pignataro from the west, artillery concentration was brought down on the town and the tanks thickened it up with their own H.E. fire. At the same time, 12 Cdn Armd Regt distracted the enemy's attention by putting in a three-squadron thrust (without infantry), which carried them about 300 yards north-west from their previous positions. At 2000 hours two companies of R.F.F. Rif supported by smoke and H.E. from "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt managed to get into Pignataro from the south and began to clear it house by house. The town was reported clear at 2300 hrs after stubborn house-to-house fighting in which heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy. The infantry and tanks then consolidated in Pignataro and at the road junction immediately to the north. (All W.Ds.; Reports on Ops, 11, 12 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts; Ops in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944; Narrative by Brigadier Murphy).

43. The night of 15/16 May passed uneventfully. There were no counter-attacks and enemy shelling was very light. At 2300 hrs there was a fairly large scale air attack in the Liri Valley and along Route 6 east of Cassino. Large numbers of flares, H.E. and anti-personnel bombs were dropped but casualties were light and no damage was done. Word had been received that the 17 Ind Inf Bde sector was to be taken over by 78 Div and the 19 Ind Inf Bde sector by 1 Cdn Div. 1 Cdn Armd

Bde (less 12 Cdn Armd Regt) were to go into 13 Corps reserve.
(W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 16 May 44)

44. There was no fighting on 16 May, due to the reliefs that were taking place across the whole 13 Corps front. 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts were relieved during the afternoon and evening and pulled back across the Gari to a harbour area south of S. Vittore (G-9417). 12 Cdn Armd Regt retained their positions north of Pignataro and at 2300 hrs passed in support of 3 Cdn Inf Bde. They tied in with them during the night and at first light on 17 May they began to exploit in a north-westerly direction. The advance was slowed down somewhat by the morning mist and by hills, ravines, boggy patches of ground and scrub. However, the infantry-cum-tank co-operation was perfect and by 1300 hrs "A" Sqn and the Royal 22e Regiment had advanced over 1000 yards against moderate enemy rearguard opposition. "C" Sqn and the West Nova Scotia Regiment then passed through the leading force and gained approximately another one thousand yards. Elements of "A" Sqn and R. 22e R. kept pushing ahead on the right against weakening opposition and got within 1500 yards of the Forme D'Aquino. "B" Sqn and Carlt & York R. then passed through and to the left of "A" Sqn's positions and secured several features within 500 to 800 yards of the Forme and overlooking it. At last light 12 Cdn Armd Regt had been reduced by 15 tanks, seven having gone up on mines, seven still being bogged, and one having broken down mechanically. (W.Ds., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde and 12 Cdn Armd Regt; Report on Ops, 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 to 26 May 44)

45. This had been a most successful day for 12 Cdn Armd Regt, and they were justly proud of their accomplishments for, albeit the opposition was weakening and the enemy exhausted, they and their accompanying infantry had managed to inflict heavy casualties on him and the tanks alone had taken 126 prisoners. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 17 May 44) With reference to the excellent co-operation which prevailed between 12 Cdn Armd Regt and 3 Cdn Inf Bde the Report on Ops of the former states:

They (R. 22e R.) kept up to us and never went to ground unless absolutely forced to and were always willing to push on when we did.

(Report on Ops, 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 May to 26 May 44)

And again, in its War Diary 12 Cdn Armd Regt says:

We admired the Indians, but co-operation was not good. They require a tremendous lot of marrying up and training to work effectively with the tanks. (xvii)

(W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 16 May 44)

(xvii)

It is worthy of note that this is the only instance of anything approaching adverse criticism of 8 Ind Div. Comment on the cordial relations that existed between 1 Cdn Armd Bde and the Indian Division comes from a Government of India publication:

The confidence reposed by the Sepoys in Canadian tanks, and by Canadian tankmen in Indian infantry, was heart-moving. When given other armour the Mahrattas enquired with feeling, "Where are our own tanks?" When asked to indicate a regiment for postwar affiliation, the V.C.Os. of the 3/15th Punjabis unanimously chose the 14th Calgary Armoured Regiment. Nor was this trust and affection unreciprocated. A young Canadian tank officer told a Canadian Press representative: "When they tell us we're going to be fighting with the Indians, we're happy as hell. We hope they feel the same way about us".

('One More River', The Story of the Eighth Indian Division, Director of Public Relations, War Department, Government of India.

It was a real thrill to see the battle-wise Van Doos march straight forward spread out and half crouching. They never dug in ...

(Ibid, 17 May 44)

The last phases of the operation against the Gustav Line had now been completed. 1 Cdn Armd Bde had every right to be well satisfied with its own contribution in what had been a hard fought engagement against a stubborn and resourceful enemy. With the S. Angelo horseshoe secured, a firm base had been established for launching the attack on the Adolf Hitler Line.

THE ASSAULT ON THE HITLER LINE (18 - 30 MAY 44)

46. Plans were now made to press forward with maximum speed in order to exploit the Gustav Line victory. At 1915 hrs, 17 May, orders were received from 13 Corps that 1 Cdn Armd Bde (less 12 Cdn Armd Regt) were to pass under command 78 Div the following day. The same night there was a large-scale enemy air raid on the Liri Valley. Two 500 pound bombs fell amongst the R.H.Q. tanks of 12 Cdn Armd Regt but failed to explode; otherwise the night was uneventful. The brigade once again crossed the Gari during the afternoon of 18 May and was complete in a harbour area just north-west of S. Angelo at 1700 hrs. That evening, news was received of the capture of Cassino and Monastery Hill. Later, at 1925 hrs, came the still more remarkable news that the Derbyshire Yeomanry (Recce Regt of 6 Brit Armd Div) had reached the Aquino airport (See Map "B"), without making contact with the enemy. This last had great repercussions throughout 78 Div and 1 Cdn Armd Bde. Orders were received at the latter that 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts were to move off at once for an assembly area one thousand yards south-east of Aquino airport; to be complete in this area by 0500 hrs, 19 May, and to be prepared to launch an attack with 78 Div at first light. There was not even time for the marking of routes. The harbour reconnaissance parties moved off at once and the Brigade Tac H.Q. and the two armoured regiments followed immediately afterwards. The move proved to be extremely trying. It was carried out entirely over narrow third-class roads many of which were not even shown on the maps. These were quickly cut to pieces by the tanks and became all but impassable. In one instance a small bridge broke down and 30 tanks had to be sent all the way back to S. Angelo and re-routed up another, no better, road. Progress was also hampered by a considerable amount of 6 Brit Armd Div and 78 Div wheeled traffic which was using the same roads. This frequently became bogged and had to be pulled out by the tanks before the latter could get on. Despite everything, however, the fighting elements of the brigade were complete in the new area by 0500 hrs and the regimental officers were busily tying in with their respective infantry battalions of 78 Div. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 17 and 18 May 44; Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

47. Due to the decisive defeat that had been inflicted on the enemy west of the Gari and to the subsequent loss of contact which had allowed the Derbyshire Yeomanry to reach the Aquino airport without opposition, it was assumed that the enemy would be unable to muster sufficient reserves to make

a determined stand in the Hitler Line (xviii). It had therefore been determined to breach this line at once before he had time to build up his strength.

48. The G.O.C. 78 Div had planned an attack on Aquino to be put in by 17/21 Lancers and 10 Rifle Brigade (both of 6 Brit Armd Div but temporarily under command 78 Div). This was to go in the night of 18/19 May (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 78 Div, 18 May 44). The attack was to be followed up by 36 Brit Inf Bde supported by tanks from 1 Cdn Armd Bde in case the initial force proved inadequate (Ibid). Unfortunately, the 17/21 L. and 10 R.B. attack came to nought. As their forward elements approached the village they came under fire, and due to the extreme darkness of the night, the strangeness of the ground and the total lack of knowledge of enemy strengths and dispositions the attack was called off by the C.O. of 17/21 L. - who was in command of the whole force (Ibid). A new attack was then hastily arranged. This was to be put in by:

Right

5 Buffs (36 Brit Inf Bde) and 11 Cdn Armd Regt who were to attack north-west from the Aquino airport to seize a crossing over the Forme D'Aquino just north of the town of Aquino; the road leading from the west side of the airport was to be the centre line (See Map "B").

Left

17/21 Lancers and 8 A. & S. H. were to clear Aquino and secure a crossing over the Forme D'Aquino just south of the town. (W.Ds., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps and 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 19 May 44) (xix).

(xviii) The Hitler Line had no continuous natural obstacle as had the Gustav Line. Hence it was built behind a continuous line of barbed wire stretching from the foot of the mountains (G-7722) two thousand yards east of the village of Piedimonte and zig-zagging south-west across the Liri Valley, passing in front of Aquino, crossing the Forme D'Aquino about 1500 yards below Aquino; passing about 1200 yards east of Pontecorvo and crossing the Liri 1500 yards below that town; going up the re-entrant between Monte Del Mandrone and ending at S. Oliva (G-6913). The defences were sited in depth, though not as great as those in the Gustav Line - most of them being between the wire and the Aquino-Pontecorvo lateral. Here too, having no natural anti-tank obstacles, the emphasis was more on anti-tank defence. Anti-tank ditches blocked the best approaches and there were large numbers of anti-tank guns both in emplacements and otherwise. (Defence Overprint to be found as Appx 42 to W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944. See also 1 Cdn Corps Int Summary No. 49, 9 May 44; to be found as Appx to W.D., 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 44)

(xix) All sources do not agree on the details of this plan or even on the ultimate intention. It would appear that all orders at the time were verbal and that they were frequently changing to keep pace with the tactical situation. In any case no part of any of the proposed plans was successfully carried out.

49. On arrival in 78 Div's area during the early hours of 19 May the squadron commanders of 11 Cdn Armd Regt hastened to the Battalion Headquarters of 5 Buffs. Here they were briefed by the C.O. of the latter. The plan was for "B" Sqn to support the Buffs in an attack along either side of the road leading north-west from the airport; "A" Sqn was to give covering fire and to protect the exposed right flank; "C" Sqn was to remain in reserve. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 19 May 44)

50. All was ready for the attack at 0515 hrs, 19 May, and the two leading squadrons moved off. There was a heavy early morning mist and visibility was practically nil. However, "A" Sqn reached the north side of the airport and "B" Sqn the west side without mishap. One troop of "B" Sqn was detailed to support a company of 5 Buffs in their advance on the right and one on the left side of the road leading from the airport. The tanks could do little, however, until the mist cleared. The infantry pushed on but were soon pinned by heavy fire from the cemetery to the right of the road (See Map "B"). On the left of the axis of advance some cover was provided by vineyards. These extended about half way from the airport to Aquino and fair progress was made to this point by the infantry company and tank troop on the left. By 0800 hrs the mist was clearing and this troop had pushed out ahead of its infantry and were approaching the town. When they were about 300 yards from Aquino they engaged an enemy anti-tank gun firing from the edge of the town and silenced it. At that moment a well camouflaged high-velocity anti-tank gun, in a steel and concrete pillbox, opened fire at point blank range from the right, holed all three tanks at least twice each and set them on fire (Miraculously all members of the crews escaped except one.) "A" Sqn had meanwhile crossed the railway line north of the airport and swung left with the object of coming in on Aquino from the north. 5 Buffs were still held up by heavy fire from the cemetery. Shelling and mortaring were intense in the whole area and, about this time, the Buffs' Battalion Headquarters received a direct hit and their C.O. and all their Signals personnel were killed. Contact was now lost between infantry and tanks and was not regained all day. Considerable confusion reigned. At 0930 hrs, "B" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt reported two more tanks knocked out by an anti-tank gun. "C" Sqn moved to the north edge of the airport and one troop crossed the railway behind "A" Sqn. They shortly reported two tanks knocked out and burning. All efforts to contact the infantry failed and it was found that even their own brigade headquarters had no communication with them. Orders then came from 78 Div for 11 Cdn Armd Regt to hold their ground alone. (The attack on the left never got under way). The Canadian tanks managed to hold on under intense enemy H.E., M.G. and anti-tank fire until ordered back at last light. This was only made possible by the remarkable work of 98 Fd Regt (S.P.) R.A., and the R.E. smoke parties who kept up a constant smoke screen covering the tanks from the withering enemy fire from the north and west. 11 Cdn Armd Regt continued throughout the day to engage all possible targets and at dusk pulled back to a harbour area just south of the airport where they took up defensive positions with elements of 36 Brigade. They had lost twelve tanks to anti-tank guns and one on a mine. So heavy had been the shelling and mortaring in their area that every remaining tank from "A" and "B" Sqns had received at least one direct hit by H.E. The most astounding fact was that for the whole day's activities the regiment's personnel casualties were only five. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 19 May 44; Report on Ops of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 May to 30 May 44)

51. The night of 19/20 May, 11 Cdn Armd Regt harboured with elements of 36 Brit Inf Bde just south-east of the airport. Heavy shelling and mortaring continued all night and the Tac H.Qs. of 78 Div, 1 Cdn Armd Bde and the two armoured regiments all had to move about 2000 yards east of the airport to escape it. On the morning of 20 May it was officially acknowledged that the enemy was holding the Hitler Line in strength and that it would require more than one brigade to break it. It was also apparent that the line itself was very formidable. As Operations in Italy states:

Anti-tank weapons had been so sited that they could cover every possible approach and also lend each other mutual support, and they were of such calibre and muzzle velocity that they could bring effective fire to bear at 1000 to 1500 yards range.

(Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

This much at least had been learned from the rather costly attack. Also, 11 Cdn Armd Regt had accounted for most of the infantry outposts forward of Aquino, one tank, one S.P. and some half dozen anti-tank guns. (Ibid) (xx)

52. With reference to this unsuccessful attempt to breach the Hitler Line at Aquino, W.D., G.S., 78 Div states:

It was hoped that this quick attack might find the enemy defences disorganised. -- Shelling and mortaring were particularly heavy and, although short of men, the reinforced concrete anti-tank emplacements were strongly held. The gamble therefore failed. 36 Brigade now took up defensive positions right up against the enemy wire. -- Had the ground been better known Aquino might have been taken the night of 18/19 May. However, it was later found that the Forme D'Aquino was a complete tank obstacle and so it would have been impossible to push through the Adolf Hitler Line even had they taken the village.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 78 Div, 19 May 44)

53. On 21 May it was learned that 1 Cdn Corps was to make the initial break-through in the Hitler Line further south in the area of Pontecorvo. (Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944) The same evening 12 Cdn Armd Regt reverted from under command 1 Cdn Div to under command 1 Cdn Corps and the next day it was learned that they were to be employed in a special assault role carrying the R. 22e R. on their tanks and crashing through the Hitler Line after 1 Cdn Div and 25 British Tank Brigade had made the initial break-through. This plan was later modified to include the West N.S.R. (Ibid)

54. The 1 Cdn Div assault on the Hitler Line was launched at first light 23 May. At the same time 78 Div put in a diversionary feint attack on Aquino in which one troop of 14 Cdn Armd Regt was involved (Ibid). At 0930 hrs, "A" and "C" Sqns of 12 Cdn Armd Regt moved to area G-744190 preparatory to pushing

(xx) The barbed wire shown on Map "B" was taken from the Defence Overprint included as an appendix to the War Diary of 1 Cdn Armd Bde for May 1944. It is not mentioned in any of the Canadian War Diaries or Operation Reports. It is, however, mentioned in W.D., G.S., H.Q. 78 Div.

through the gap to be made by 2 Cdn Inf Bde and the British tanks. They were heavily shelled on the way up and suffered some casualties. Their forming-up place was too far forward and, as it later proved, was under direct observation by the enemy. When the morning mist cleared, "A" and "C" Sqns watched some 30 to 40 Churchill tanks burning immediately to their front. A very fierce battle seemed to be in progress. About 1500 hrs the enemy anti-tank gunners became aware of "A" Sqn's presence and they engaged them and knocked out two of the latter's tanks in as many minutes. "A" and "C" Sqns now withdrew to be tied in with the West N.S.R. and the R. 22e R. respectively. "B" Sqn took up a position at G-746194 in the capacity both of reserve squadron and right flank protection (Report on Operations of 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 May to 26 May 44).

55. Although 2 Cdn Inf Bde and 25 British Army Tank Bde themselves suffered heavy casualties, they none the less gained the day, inflicted very severe losses on the enemy, destroyed his defensive positions and forced him to withdraw. When, at 1640 hrs, 12 Cdn Armd Regt were ordered to pass through the gap, they and their infantry were able to advance to the west against only scattered resistance. By nightfall they had secured a bridgehead over the Martino River and the force consolidated for the night about 1500 yards north of Pontecorvo. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 23 May 44) 12 Cdn Armd Regt had accounted for four Mk IV tanks, one S.P. gun and one 75-mm anti-tank gun. They lost six tanks to enemy anti-tank weapons and 30 personnel. (Report on Operations of 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 May to 26 May 44). That evening there were heavy thunder-showers in the whole area and all roads became impassable to wheels. However, the Stuart tanks of 12 Cdn Armd Regt's Reconnaissance Troop did a magnificent job, working all night to bring up adequate petrol, supplies and ammunition. (Ibid) Elements of 5 Cdn Armd Div began passing through 12 Cdn Armd Regt and 3 Cdn Inf Bde during the night 23/24 May; otherwise the night was quiet and uneventful. (Ibid) 5 Cdn Armd Div forged ahead during the morning of 24 May and by noon had a bridgehead across the Melfa River. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 24 May 44)

56. "A" and "C" Sqns, 12 Cdn Armd Regt, spent the day of 24 May helping 3 Cdn Inf Bde to mop up in the general area of the Hitler Line. At 1530 hrs, "B" Sqn 12 Cdn Armd Regt tied in with the Carlt & York R. and pushed through Pontecorvo, which had been cleared the previous day by 1 Cdn Div. They met little opposition save from demolitions and had advanced 4000 yards up the Liri River by nightfall. They had met some infantry opposition but it was very disorganized. The enemy soldiers were fighting in small groups, frequently without officers or N.C.Os. They usually stated that they were the sole survivors of their companies or battalions. This indeed may frequently have been the case. (Report on Operations of 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 May to 26 May 44)

57. Meanwhile, on the morning of 24 May a probing attack had been put in on Aquino. The object of this was to determine the enemy's strength and dispositions. It had been considered probable that he might have withdrawn his main forces from this sector due to the previous day's break-through north of Pontecorvo. (Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944) The plan was for 14 Cdn Armd Regt and two companies of the Lancashire Fusiliers to attack Aquino from the south and east. This was to be a probing attack only and they were ordered not to become too heavily involved. As the force approached the town, they came under withering M.G. and mortar fire. The infantry were pinned down and to assist them two troops of tanks pushed forward and began to bring fire to bear on the enemy. When they were within 400 yards of the town they were engaged

by four long-barrelled high-velocity 75-mm anti-tank guns in Panther turrets mounted on concrete. Four of the six tanks were instantly holed and set on fire (17 casualties were suffered among the crews); the remaining two tanks beat a hasty retreat as it was once more clear that the enemy still occupied the defences in strength. (Ibid, Report on Ops of 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 10 May to 28 May; W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 24 May 44)

58. Another attack on Aquino was planned for the following day (25 May). "C" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt and 5 Northamptonshires were to cross the Forme D'Aquino in the Canadian Corps' bridgehead and move up the far bank towards the town. At the same time "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt and 1/16 Surreys were to move up the near bank of the Forme; the two forces were to be mutually supporting. (Report on Ops of 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 10 May to 28 May 44) Both these attacks went in as planned and neither force met any opposition. The few stragglers left in Aquino reported that the enemy had pulled out the previous night. "C" Sqn and the Northampton at once pushed elements out to Route 6 but still encountered no enemy. (Ibid) While mopping up around Aquino "B" Sqn found a piece of paper in a dug-out. This was sent back through Intelligence channels and proved to be the operation order for No. 1 German Para Div's withdrawal to the Melfa River which had only started at 0200 hrs that morning. (xxi) (W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 25 May 44)

59. It was now decided to exploit as quickly as possible to the Melfa River with the object of gaining a crossing before the enemy had time to organize his defences. "A" and "B" Sqs passed through Aquino at 1420 hrs and pushed north up to Route 6. Here they fanned out with "A" Sqn moving to the right of Route 6 and "B" Sqn along the railway track to the left; thus, covering about a thousand yards on either side of the road, the tanks swept on towards the Melfa alone. (Ibid) "C" Sqn were to follow on later in the afternoon carrying the Northampton on their tanks (Ibid). "A" and "B" Sqs made good time although considerably impeded by mines and demolitions. They met no enemy opposition, the few stragglers who were still in the area surrendering on sight. (Ibid) At 1630 hrs, "A" Sqn reported having reached a previously designated area only 300 yards from where Route 6 crosses the Melfa. "B" Sqn reported reaching the same area 20 minutes later. Tac R.H.Q. then moved up and joined the two leading squadrons. Reconnaissance was immediately carried out for possible crossings of the river but it was found that the enemy was holding the opposite bank in strength and he now began to bring heavy small arms and anti-tank fire to bear on 14 Cdn Armd Regt's positions. (Ibid) At 1730 hrs word was received from "C" Sqn that they and the Northampton had reached the junction of Route 6 and the road leading up to Castrocielo and that the latter were harbouring there for the night (Ibid). Before this misunderstanding could be straightened out, elements of Derby Yeo (6 Armd Div) passed through 14 Cdn Armd Regt and began to cross the Melfa. They got eight reconnaissance tanks across on to the west bank but these were all destroyed and Derby Yeo were driven back. (Ibid) (xxii)

(xxi) A statement from G (Int) H.Q. Eighth Army on this subject said that it was the first time in that Army's history that an enemy operation order had been got back to Army Headquarters before the enemy had had time to complete the operation. (Ibid)

(xxii) W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde states that the Derby Yeo effort was made further left in the 1 Cdn Corps sector. However, it is felt that the 14 Cdn Armd Regt story must be accepted as they were on the spot.

60. 14 Cdn Armd Regt were now in an awkward position. Knowing that the opposing enemy were paratroopers who were quite capable of sending strong tank-hunting patrols across the Melfa during the night, the C.O. brought his tanks together into a close laager and prepared to hang on despite the absence of infantry. ("C" Sqn joined the remainder of the regiment in this laager before last light). However, the situation was later relieved when 10 R.B. (motor battalion of 26 Armd Bde) pushed out across the river with the object of forestalling any attempts to cross on the part of the enemy. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 25 May 44) On reaching the far bank 10 R.B. were instantly pinned by very heavy fire. Artillery had to be called down before they could be extricated. Nonetheless, their presence in the area was a great comfort to 14 Cdn Armd Regt. (Ibid) Shelling and anti-tank fire increased steadily in the area as the night wore on. At 2300 hrs enemy aircraft dropped flares, H.E. and anti-personnel bombs throughout the 78 Div area. At 0200 hrs, 26 May, the enemy fire ceased abruptly and patrols to the crossings at first light met only weak and scattered resistance. Prisoners confirmed the supposition that the enemy had withdrawn up Route 6 at 0200 hrs. (Ibid; W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 26 May 44)

61. Also during the afternoon of 25 May, "A" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt and elements of 56 Recce Regt had moved north of Route 6 and reconnoitred Castrocielo and Roccasecca. The former had been found clear of enemy while M.G. fire had been encountered at the latter. "A" Sqn found two abandoned Mk IV tanks in perfect condition. That evening they rejoined 11 Cdn Armd Regt in their concentration area south of Aquino airport. (Report on Operations of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 May to 20 May 44)

62. In the 1 Cdn Corps sector, 12 Cdn Armd Regt had also made progress on 25 May. "B" Sqn and the Carlt & York R. had moved off together from their previous night's harbour area north-west of Pontecorvo at first light. They reached the Melfa about noon and crossed over a ford about a thousand yards up stream from its junction with the Liri. They at once took up defensive positions on the high ground beyond. "A" Sqn 12 Cdn Armd Regt and West N.S.R. crossed over the same ford during the afternoon and took up positions to the right of "B" Sqn. The following morning (26 May) 12 Cdn Armd Regt were relieved by infantry of 1 Cdn Div and pulled back to a regimental concentration area three thousand yards north-west of Pontecorvo. (Ibid) (xxiii)

63. 26 May saw little activity on the part of 78 Div and 1 Cdn Armd Bde. Strong elements of 6 Brit Armd Div passed through 14 Cdn Armd Regt first thing in the morning and pursued the retreating enemy up Route 6 towards Arce (G-6431). In the afternoon, "C" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt and 5 Northhamptons consolidated the Route 6 crossing area and the banks of the Melfa immediately to the south. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 26 May 44) A plan was also laid on for 11 Cdn Armd Regt and 38 (Irish) Inf Bde to push north-west the following day and seize a crossing over the Liri River north of Ceprano (G-5927) (Ibid). The general plan was for the force to move along Route 6 about three thousand yards beyond the Melfa, swing left, pass south of Coldragone (G-6627) and push across country in a westerly direction (Ibid).

(xxiii) 12 Cdn Armd Regt's activities while with 1 Cdn Corps will be dealt with in greater detail in a report to be prepared on that formation's activities in the Liri Valley.

64. The advance got under way at 0900 hrs 27 May and by noon the force had reached an area just south of Coldragone (Ibid). From there on the advance was less rapid due to the extreme difficulty of the country. This was heavily wooded and cut by many ravines, streams and bogs. Two troops of tanks were employed to reconnoitre the routes. These did an excellent job, and with the invaluable assistance of the attached engineers, who literally blasted a path for the tanks, leading elements had consolidated on the lateral road 2500 yards east of Ceprano by 2000 hrs. During the whole advance thus far no enemy opposition had been met. (Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

65. That afternoon (27 May) word was received that 1 Cdn Armd Bde was to be relieved by 9 Brit Armd Bde. 14 Cdn Armd Regt were relieved in their positions on the Melfa that evening and 11 Cdn Armd Regt (less one squadron) were relieved the following day (Ibid). At 0930 hrs 28 May, "C" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt and 1 Royal Irish Fusiliers moved off from the previous night's positions with the object of seizing a bridgehead over the Liri north of Ceprano (Report on Operations of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 May to 30 May 44). Ceprano had been taken by 1 Cdn Corps the previous day (Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944). However, the advance of "C" Sqn and the Royal Irish Fusiliers was still slow due to the very large numbers of mines in the area. At 1145 hrs they were temporarily halted because of a counter-attack on the right in which the enemy regained M. Grande and M. Piccolo from 6 Brit Armd Div (Report on Operations of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 May to 30 May 44). The advance was resumed as soon as that situation was cleared; the tanks and infantry moved through Ceprano, up the west bank of the Liri and consolidated with their infantry in the northern outskirts of the town (Ibid). At 0400 hrs, 29 May, this force improved its position by occupying Hill 175 one thousand yards north-west of Coprano and here they were relieved by a squadron of 3 Hussars at 1730 hrs, 29 May (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 29 May 44). 1 Cdn Armd Bde was now entirely disengaged (12 Cdn Armd Regt having been relieved on 26 May). The brigade concentrated just west of Aquino and was complete in this area by the morning of 30 May. (Operations in Italy, 1 Cdn Armd Bde, May 1944)

66. The month of May 1944 had been the most eventful in 1 Cdn Armd Bde's history thus far. The first ten days had seen the completion of the infantry-cum-tank training with 8 Ind Div which was to pay such generous dividends in the ensuing battle; at the same time, last-minute plans were tied up and perfected. Then came the two-army assault first on the Gustav and then on the Hitler Line. 1 Cdn Armd Bde played a prominent part in both attacks, their tanks giving invaluable support to 1 Cdn Corps in the Hitler Line and to 13 Corps all the way from the Gari River to the Melfa. True, this is a distance of only some 12½ miles but it encompassed three weeks of the heaviest fighting yet experienced in Italy. This period saw the routing of the German Tenth and Fourteenth Armies. The enemy is reported to have suffered seventy thousand casualties (25,000 wounded were left behind in Rome when he evacuated it on 4 Jun). (xxiv) The end of the month

(xxiv) These figures appear excessive. 1 Cdn Corps Int Summary, 19 Jun 44, gives a total of 24,334 prisoners as having passed through the cages of Fifth and Eighth Armies between 12 May and 12 Jun. This total did not include prisoners evacuated through medical channels. The Diary of Events, prepared by G.S.I., Eighth Army, speaks of Allied troops finding 8000 enemy wounded in hospitals in Rome (Italy: 1944/Eighth Army/K/F Diary of Events, 5 Jun 44).

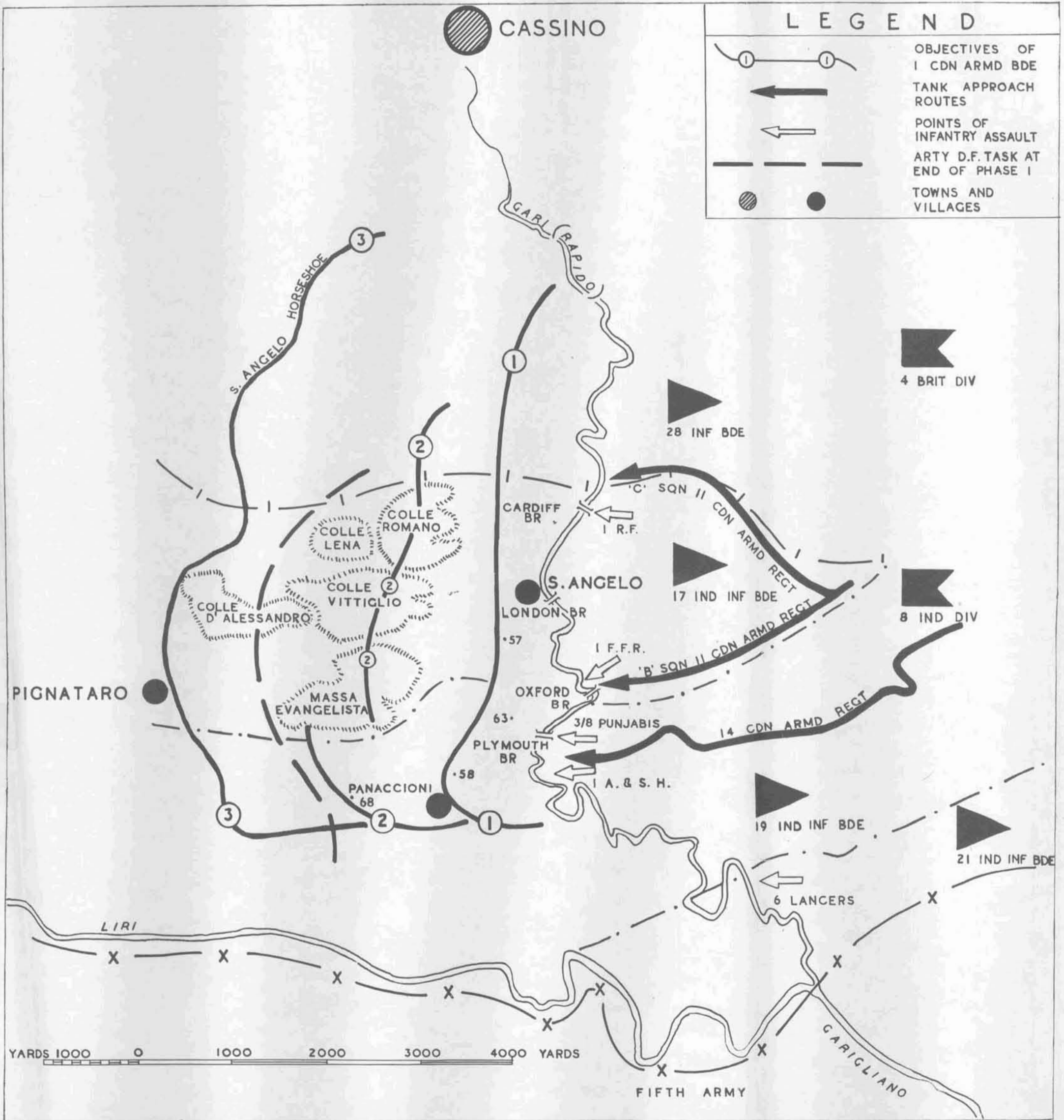
saw the Fifth and Eighth Armies linked up with the Anzio bridgehead and the former army rapidly nearing Rome in hot pursuit of a totally disorganized enemy. Meanwhile, 1 Cdn Armd Bde who had done so much to make the capture of Rome possible were sitting in their harbour area just west of Aquino licking their wounds, carrying out much needed maintenance, resting and refitting.

67. This report was drafted by Capt. R.T. Currelly, who served with 1 Cdn Fd Hist Sec in Italy during the operations described.

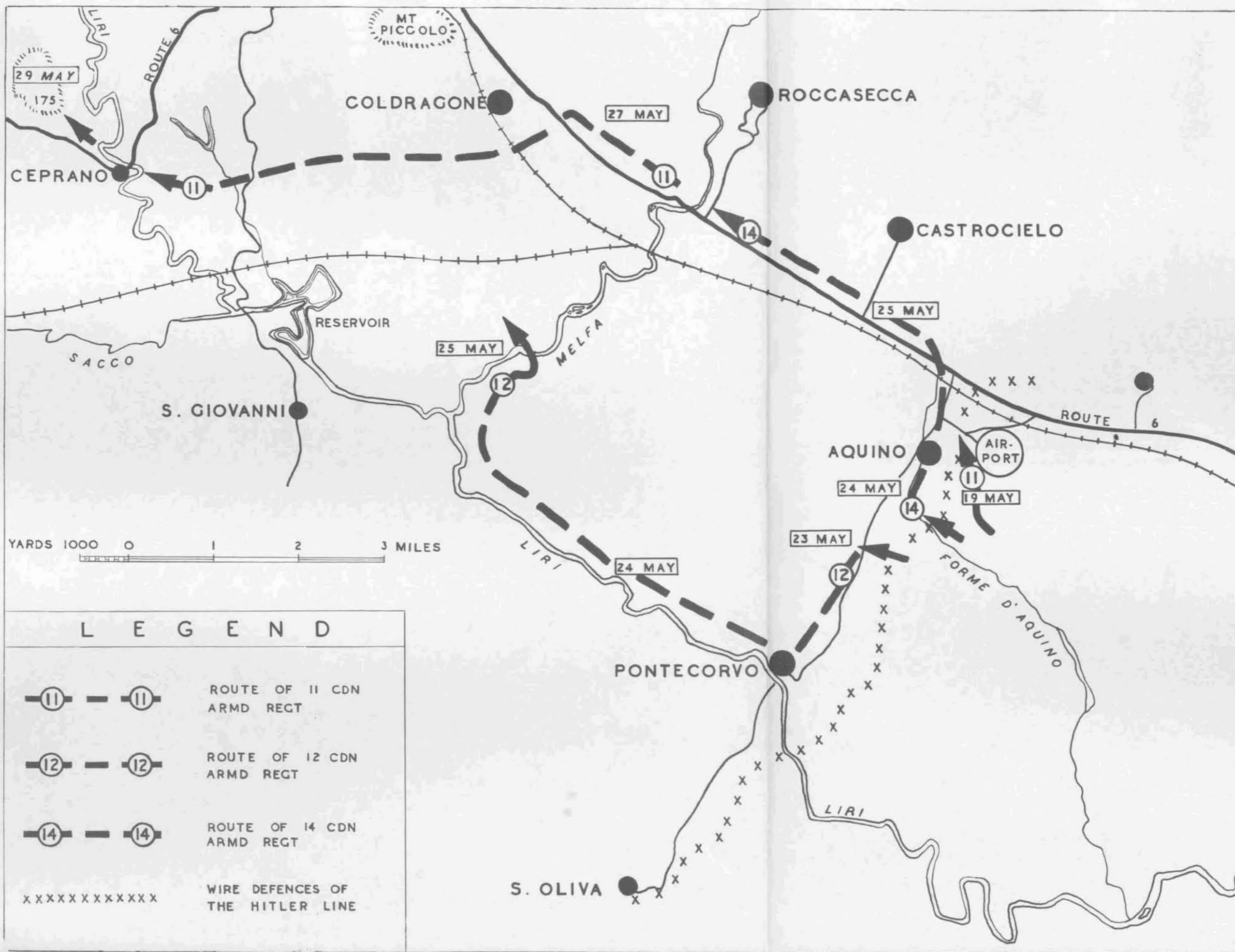
for *G.W. Nicholson Major*
(C.P. Stacey) Colonel,
Director Historical Section
CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS.

I CDN ARMD BDE GUSTAV LINE

PLAN OF OPERATIONS 11-17 MAY 44



OPERATIONS OF I CDN ARMD BDE HITLER LINE 18-30 MAY 44



LEGEND



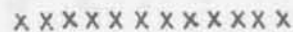
ROUTE OF 11 CDN
ARMED REGT



ROUTE OF 12 CDN
ARMED REGT



ROUTE OF 14 CDN
ARMED REGT



WIRE DEFENCES OF
THE HITLER LINE