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HISTORICAL SECTION

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST CANADIAN ARMoured BRIGADE IN ITALY,
MAY 1944 TO FEBRUARY 1945: PART III: THE GOTHIC LINE

C O N T E N T S

Page

ALLIED AND ENEMY DISPOSITIONS, 1 SEP 44	1
THE APPROACH TO THE GOTHIC LINE (31 AUG - 9 SEP 44)	2
THE BREACH OF THE GOTHIC LINE (9 - 18 SEP 44)	5
THE WINTER STALEMATE	11
14 CDN ARMD REGT (1 OCT - 31 DEC 44)	12
11 CDN ARMD REGT (1 OCT - 31 DEC 44)	19
12 CDN ARMD REGT (1 OCT - 31 DEC 44)	23
THE FINAL PERIOD IN ITALY (1 JAN - 6 MAR 45)	27

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OPERATIONS OF 1 CDN ARMD BDE 11 SEP 44 - 24 FEB 45

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CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

26 Mar 47

Operations of the 1st Canadian Armoured
Brigade in Italy, May 1944 to February 1945:
Part III: The Gothic Line

1. This forms the third and final part of a series of three reports dealing with the operations of 1 Cdn Armd Bde in Italy. Of the two earlier reports (Nos. 158 and 160), the first described the Brigade's operations in the breaking of the Gustav and Hitler Lines during May 1944, while the second followed the Brigade in its advance to Florence during the period June - August of the same year. The present report gives an account of 1 Cdn Armd Bde's part in the Gothic Line operations during the autumn and early winter of 1944, and outlines the story of the Brigade's transfer from Italy to the North-West European theatre in February 1945.

ALLIED AND ENEMY DISPOSITIONS, 1 SEP 44.

2. The general dispositions across the Allied front at the beginning of September were as follows: Eighth Army, with 1 Cdn Corps and 2 Polish Corps on the right, 5 Corps in the centre and 10 Corps on the left, was extended south of the Gothic Line from Pesaro on the Adriatic coast to the 15 Easting, west of Poppi (R2062), approximately half-way across the Peninsula. The western half of the Gothic Line was opposed by formations of Fifth Army, which had under command 13 (Brit) Corps on its right covering the Florence - Pontassieve area^{*}, II Corps in the centre, and IV Corps along the Ligurian coast. The formations of 13 Corps were, from right to left, 6 Armd Div from the Army boundary to Highway No. 67, 8 Ind Div in the Pontassieve sector, and 1 (Brit) Div covering the Florence sector west to the II Corps boundary at the 76 Easting. Defending the mountain barrier on which the Gothic Line was based the German Tenth Army faced Eighth Army, while on the right flank of Army Group "C" the German Fourteenth Army opposed the U.S. Fifth Army. The common boundary of the two armies ran just west of Pontassieve. The enemy sector opposite 13 Corps around Dicomano and Vicchio was being held by 715 Inf Div (now partly recovered from its severe defeat in the break-out from Anzio) and 334 Inf Div, both of LXXVI Pz Corps; while further west, on Fourteenth Army's eastern flank, were formations of 1 Para Corps. 356 Inf Div and 4 Para Div were north and west of Florence, with 29 Pz Gr Div in reserve. (C.M.H.Q. file 4/Summ C.I.G.S./6: C.I.G.S. Summary No. 364, 1 Sep 44; Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, British Historical Section, Central Mediterranean, Part III, Section H, German Strategy, p. 2)

3. The topography of North Central Italy, where the backbone of the Apennines swings north-west across the Peninsula, had provided Field Marshal Kesselring with a natural barrier on

* 13 Corps passed under command Fifth Army on 17 Aug 44, to compensate for the withdrawal from that army of formations for "ANVIL", and to provide it with effective strength for the thrust through the Northern Apennines (Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Pt III, Sec G, 13 Corps in the Mountains, pp 1, 2).

which to develop strong defensive positions. Only three avenues of approach to the northern plains of Italy were possible for a modern army - along the eastern or western coasts, or by means of set routes which crossed the Apennines north from Florence. It was across these three avenues that the Gothic Line defences were most highly developed. Five passes traversed the Central Apennine Range within the Florence sector:

- (a) Muraglione Pass, on the road from Dicomano (R0080) to Forli (Route 67).
- (b) Casaglia Pass, on the road from Borgo S. Lorenzo (Q9088) to Faenza.
- (c) The Giogo Pass, on the road from S. Piero a Sieve (Q8589) to Firenzuola (L9007) and Imola.
- (d) The Futa Pass on the main Florence - Bologna road (Route 65).
- (e) The Mezzana Pass, on the road Prato (Q6680) - Bologna.

(Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/
1 Cdn Corps/L/F, Docket I:
1 Cdn Corps Int Summary No.87,
14 Aug 44)

4. Strong defensive positions had been constructed by the Todt Organization to bar passage to the northern plains via these highways. (Although a feeling of over-confidence in the impregnability of the Cassino position seems to have resulted in only half-hearted efforts being put forth on the construction work during the winter and spring of 1943 - 44, the collapse of the Winter Line and the fall of Rome had speeded up preparations in the Gothic Line. The delaying battles of Lake Trasimene, the Upper Tiber, Florence and Avezzo gave the enemy more time in which to complete his "Green Line" defences.) (German Strategy, op cit, p. 23). In general the defences consisted of concrete pillboxes, anti-tank walls, machine gun positions and fire trenches strategically sited in the neighbourhood of the narrow passes. Thus on Road No.67, a fortified zone had been constructed between the Muraglione Pass and S. Godenzo; the Borgo S. Lorenzo - Marradi - Faenza road was flanked by defences which extended from Casaglia south-eastward to M. Veruca and M. Stelletto; the S. Piero - Imola route was defended with pillboxes, wire and M.G. posts in the vicinity of M. Giogo; while similar defences had been erected on Route No. 65 at the Futa Pass and on the Prato - Bologna road near M. Mezzana, north of Vernio. (Ibid). It was through these defences that 13 Corps had now to force its way.*

THE APPROACH TO THE GOTHIC LINE (31 AUG - 9 SEP 44)

5. The month of September opened with 1 Cdn Armd Bde under command 13 Corps, with two regiments committed. The 11th Regiment continued under command 1 Brit Div with squadrons supporting infantry brigades in the Piesole sector directly north of Florence. The 14th Regiment was under command 8 Ind Div in the Pontassieve sector north of the Arno River (12 miles east of Florence). The 12th Regiment and brigade services remained in reserve under command 1 Cdn Armd Bde. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 1 Sep 44). 13 Corps was "leaning"

* A more detailed description of the Gothic or "Green" Line defences is given in Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Pt III, Sec H, German Strategy, Appx "A".

on the enemy, while Eighth Army was heavily engaged in the Adriatic sector attempting to break through into the Po Valley. There was no outstanding activity in either of the two forward regiments of 1 Cdn Armd Bde at this time. Contact with the enemy was maintained by infantry patrols. The terrain north and north-east of Florence was the worst which the Brigade had yet been through in the Italian campaign, and, in addition, the enemy had carried out thorough demolitions from the Arno River northwards.

The villa-studded hills, to the north of Florence, merge into rugged mountains, which extend for some fifteen miles to break abruptly into the valley of the Sieve. The few roads, skirted on one side by sheer cliffs and on the other by a precipitous drop to a narrow gushing mountain stream, wind hazardously through the mountains.

(History of the 11th
Canadian Armoured Regiment,
p. 37)

6. Often the infantry had to push on unsupported by tanks. The latter, for the most part, had to be used in a counter-attack role, taking offensive action only when infantry required determined machine gun nests neutralized. Tanks were restricted to roads and in all sectors deployment for tactical manoeuvres was impossible. 11 Cdn Armd Regt tanks were on occasion sent up to help the Royal Engineers remove trees that had been felled across the road and booby-trapped (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D: Report on Operations of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 Jul - 30 Nov 44). On 2 Sep, H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde moved to harbour area at Francavilla to conform with the move forward of main 13 Corps Headquarters. 12 Cdn Armd Regt also moved forward to the Torre a Cona area, where the regiment concentrated and remained as 13 Corps reserve. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 2 Sep 44)

7. The assault which Fifth Army was now preparing to deliver was the second punch of the two-handed attack planned by General Alexander upon the Gothic Line. Orders for the over-all offensive issued on 16 Aug had given Eighth Army the predominant role in the opening phases, and Fifth Army had been warned that it must be prepared to "launch an attack to break through the enemy's positions on the axis Florence - Bologna, using 13 and II Corps, as soon as the enemy's strength in this area had been sufficiently weakened by withdrawals to meet Eighth Army's attack". Fifth Army must be ready to launch its attack at 24 hours' notice from D plus 5 of Eighth Army's attack. (Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Pt III, Sec A, Allied Strategy, Appx "C"-2, H.Q. A.A.I. Operation Order No. 3, 16 Aug 44). Fifth Army's attack would thus be delivered between Routes 65 and 67 some time after 30 Aug, with II Corps on the left striking the main blow and 13 Corps on the right in support. The start line was the River Arno from Florence eastwards to Pontassieve and the objective Route 9 between Bologna and Forli. (Ibid, p. 3). 13 Corps was to move north-east across the Apennines by way of the main roads Dicomano - Forli (Route No. 67) and Borgo S. Lorenzo - Faenza. On the Eighth Army front 5 Corps and 1 Cdn Corps were to deliver a sweeping right hook from Rimini along Via Amelia (Route 9), which was expected to force the enemy to withdraw, leaving the mountain defences unmanned. 13 Corps expected nevertheless to face mines and heavy demolitions. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 3 Sep 44)

8. By 6 Sep the enemy was reported to be withdrawing slowly to enable his troops to take up their positions in the Gothic Line in an orderly fashion. Considerable reshuffling

was being carried out. 29 Pz Gr Div was disengaged west of Florence and was moving to the Adriatic Coast in an attempt to halt the Eighth Army. 26 Pz Div had left for the east on the night 5/6 Sep, and had been replaced by 334 Div. Prisoners from 334 Div taken on 6 Sep stated that the relief of their positions by 305 Div - which from its position opposite Eighth Army's left flank had been spread along the line in front of 13 Corps' right - and their own relief of 26 Pz Div had been very hurried and risky. When 334 Div left their sector, north of the Prato Magno - the F.D.Ls. were left vacant because the arrival of 305 Div was delayed. When 334 Div took over the new sector west of Florence they found the F.D.Ls. vacated here also. Apparently 26 Pz Div in the rush in the Adriatic could not wait for a proper relief. Such rush and confusion was evidence of the anxiety caused by Eighth Army's advance towards the Po Valley. (Ibid)

9. On 7 Sep the enemy gave up the line of heights overlooking Florence and continued his withdrawal to the north (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, September 1944: Appx 30, 13 Corps Int Summary No. 458, 8 Sep 44). By 9 Sep 356 Div had broken contact with 1 Brit Div's sector and was believed to have retreated across the Sieve River (see Map). 1 Brit Div and 11 Cdn Armd Regt prepared to move forward, establish a bridge-head across the Sieve and then attack along "ARROW" Route (the main road from Borgo S. Lorenzo through Marradi to Faenza) (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 9 Sep 44). 8 Ind Div followed 715 Div's retreat from M. Giovi (9479) fairly closely, but experienced the greatest difficulty in getting tanks forward owing to the difficult terrain, inadequate roads and numerous demolitions. It was 11 Sep before it was possible to bring sufficient armour forward to support a major attack across the Sieve (Hist Sec file Italy: 1944/1 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D: Report on Operations of 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 21 Jul - 30 Nov 44). Meanwhile Eighth Army reported heavy opposition and counter-attacks; there had been no gains on the Adriatic for five days. Poor weather and a heavy concentration of enemy defences on dominating ground had halted the drive. It now appeared that Fifth Army, including 13 Corps, would have to attack strongly to relieve pressure on Eighth Army. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 9 Sep 44)*

10. At 0530 hours on 10 Sep, II U.S. Corps attacked with the object of closing on the Gothic Line. 13 Corps conformed to this attack by advancing, with no enemy opposition, towards Borgo S. Lorenzo and the line of the River Sieve (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps, 10 Sep 44) (see Map). During the 10th, day

* On 9 Sep General Alexander signalled that Eighth Army had got definitely held up by the Coriano ridge and would take a few days to prepare a proper attack on it.

For these reasons I have decided to unleash Fifth Army who will now go ahead with their offensive in the centre. The enemy forces there are as weak as we can ever expect them to be and he is obligingly withdrawing from the high ground north of Florence without serious resistance, which saves us time and trouble. As soon as Fifth Army have forced the enemy back to the Gothic Line they will launch a full scale attack to break-through and by that time I hope Eighth Army will be just about ready for their attack on the Rimini positions and that we shall be able to prevent Kesselring from shifting reserves from one Army front to another by keeping up a series of heavy blows by our two Armies in turn. The weather has improved and I hope for a fine spell - another reason for launching Fifth Army now.

patrols from 8 Ind Div and 1 Brit Div crossed the Sieve practically unopposed and forward company positions were established 1000 yards beyond the river (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Sep 44). By the following day it was evident that the enemy had withdrawn to the main defences of the Gothic Line. Two troops of "B" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt managed to join up with the forward infantry of 3 Inf Bde in Borgo S. Lorenzo. These forward positions were overlooked by the main Gothic defences only 4000 yards to the north. By the end of the day "B" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt was reported to be 2500 yards north of Borgo S. Lorenzo in close contact with the forward infantry (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 Sep 44). Some idea of the demolitions to be expected on the roads through the Gothic Line was given by the situation at Dicomano and along the road from there to Vicchio. "Every exit from DICOMANO whether by road or by track was blown and there were ten mines in the roads between there and VICCHIO" (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps, 10 Sep 44).

THE BREACH OF THE GOTHIC LINE (9 - 18 SEP 44)

11. The plan for 13 Corps' attack on the Gothic Line itself called for the initial assault to take place on 13 Sep. 1 Brit Div supported by 11 Cdn Armd Regt was to attack along and open up "ARROW" Route (along the Marradi road). On the right 6 Armd Div was using Route 67 as its axis. 8 Ind Div was ordered to attack along the watershed between, and thereby outflank the defences of the passes on either road. The Division would attack on a one-brigade basis; 21 Ind Bde supported by "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt would establish a bridgehead over the Sieve River in the Vicchio area and push on to capture dominating ground north-east of that town. This 13 Corps offensive was to be launched in conjunction with an attack on the Gothic defences by II U.S. Corps to the left of 13 Corps (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 12 Sep 44, and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps, 11 Sep 44). In analysing the prospects facing 13 Corps in the battle, the Corps Commander, Lt-Gen S.C. Kirkman, C.B., C.B.E., M.C., observed:

...The forthcoming operations are unlikely to develop into a battle in anyway comparable to those which this Corps has fought in the past. The enemy defences on our front, formidable as they are in parts can be of little use to him when he has not the men to man them, and those he has are of indifferent quality.

(W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, September 1944: Personal message from the Corps Commander to all officers of the rank of Lt-Col and above, 12 Sep 44, Appx 8, paras 1-3)

In estimating the opposition likely to be faced the Corps Commander noted that:

The Corps is opposed only by 715 Div, an indifferent enemy division of seven inf bns, holding a front of 2700 yds. Possibly 356 Div has left behind two bns to assist. There is also reason to believe that the enemy regards the Gothic Line only as a delaying position, though there is no doubt that he will hold it temporarily with such troops as he has available.

(Ibid)

12. On 11 Sep the Fifth Army Commander decided that both 13 Corps and II Corps had closed up sufficiently to the main Gothic Line for the Army assault to begin (13 Corps in the Mountains, op cit, Chap II, p. 20). Next day the main headquarters of 1 Cdn Armd Bde was moved to Fiesole. By 1430 hours "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt, in support of 1 Mahrattas of 21 Ind Inf Bde, were established 300 yards north of the Sieve River, 1000 yards south of Vitigliano. Opposition was not heavy, since the enemy had broken contact for most of the time during his withdrawal from M. Giovi. The remaining two squadrons of the 14th Regiment moved forward to the Vicchio area on the southern bank of the Sieve, and prepared to act as close support artillery. Meanwhile, "B" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt joined the forward infantry of 3 Inf Bde and pushed slowly ahead with 1 Brit Div's advance. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 12 Sep 44)

13. On the night of 12 Sep Eighth Army re-opened its attack on the Coriano Ridge, and in the early morning of the 13th Fifth Army began the assault of the main Gothic Line positions. This marked the beginning of a week of the heaviest fighting on both fronts that either Army had yet experienced. On the Fifth Army front the main offensive by II Corps began with a thrust to the east of the Florence - Bologna road (Route 65) up the Firenzuola road using the Giogo Pass. To achieve surprise the II Corps attack was delivered with four divisions through 13 Corps' own sector. 13 Corps was to apply its main weight to assist II Corps and open the road through Marradi. Initially the 13 Corps attack made little progress against the fanatical resistance of 4 Para Div, but in the centre of the Corps front 8 Ind Div advanced across the trackless mountains and established positions on the watershed. (Allied Strategy, op cit, p. 10)

14. 21 Ind Inf Bde, supported by "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt, led the advance in the 8 Ind Inf Div's sector. "B" Sqn found the terrain increasingly difficult, and finally was unable to move further with the forward infantry of 21 Bde. The 1 Mahrattas drove through to capture the M. Veruca spur. In this advance "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt fired 400 rounds of high explosives indirectly, which neutralized M.G. positions on the dominating heights and allowed 1 Mahrattas to advance practically unmolested. At last light 1 Mahrattas and 3/15 Punjabis had consolidated on M. Veruca and M. Citerna respectively. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 13 Sep 44). In the sector occupied by 1 Brit Div, 66 Inf Bde moved through 3 Inf Bde at first light on the 13th, and by 1000 hours had managed to get troops to Campo di Prete, north of Ronta. "B" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt supported the Brigade's advance in a manner similar to that of the 14 Cdn Armd Regt squadron with the Indians. It assisted 2 R.S. to advance to M. Giuvigiana and consolidate positions on the height without being subjected to harassing M.G. fire. "C" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt, advancing to the area of Borgo S. Lorenzo, drove north-east along "ARROW" Route towards M. Carzolano. Summarizing the results of the day's fighting, the War Diary states:

During the day our troops had bumped the main GOTHIC LINE defences in almost all sectors on the 13 Corps front. Opposition was not as heavy as had been anticipated owing to the thinning out of enemy troops to hold 8 Army's advance in the ADRIATIC sector.

(Ibid)

The whole Corps situation was given as follows:

The general picture is an advance against moderate opposition by 8 Ind Div in the centre, little progress against heavy opposition by 1 Brit Div on the left and active patrolling by 6 Brit Armd Div on the right to test enemy strength...

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps,
13 Sep 44)

15. On the 14th moderate advances continued against light opposition. In 1 Brit Div's sector "B" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt gave indirect fire in support of 66 Inf Bde as it advanced to Montolano. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 14 Sep 44). On the following day they continued to give artillery support in neutralizing enemy M.G. nests as the infantry made a very difficult attack up the slopes of M. Paganino and M. Faggota. By last light "A" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt had moved forward to a concentration area at Borgo S. Lorenzo and was prepared to support 2 Inf Bde when it relieved 66 Inf Bde (Ibid, 15 Sep 44). Meanwhile 8 Ind Div continued to push forward on the right. 1 Mahrattas took Le Scalleta, while 1/5 R.G.R. moved on towards Femmina Morta - 8 Ind Div's final objective in this phase of the battle (Ibid, 15 and 16 Sep 44). Throughout the advance so far the enemy had time and again deserted highly defensible positions. Many of these were extremely well prepared and would have caused endless trouble had he chosen to defend them more stubbornly (Report on Operations of 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 21 Jul - 30 Nov 44). A 13 Corps Op Instruction issued on 15 Sep commented:

There is now little doubt of our ability to break through the enemy's line in the mountains as long as he is not greatly reinforced. The difficulty is to maintain our forces and to get forward supporting arms.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps,
September 1944: Appx D.6,
13 Corps Op Instr No. 18,
15 Sep 44)

16. On 17 Sep 1 Cdn Armd Bde received word from 13 Corps that approval had been granted for 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts to withdraw all but one squadron from each regiment, to permit personnel to go to Rome and Florence on leave. "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt and "C" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt were assigned to continue in support of 8 Ind Div and 1 Brit Div respectively. The remainder of each regiment went into divisional reserve and was placed on 72 hours' notice for operation. A few weeks later the Brigade War Diary reported that:

Everyone succeeded in getting at least one 7 day leave plus a 48 hrs and where possible more... This timely break was the first of any length and with such facilities which this brigade had enjoyed since leaving England.

(W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd
Bde, 29 Sep 44)

12 Cdn Armd Regt remained in 13 Corps reserve and carried out traffic control duties on 13 Corps routes.

17. On 18 Sep, troops of 8 Ind Div captured Femmina Morta after fierce fighting. This height gave the Indians commanding ground over the whole of the divisional sector. Its capture, together with the Division's earlier successes and 1 Brit Div's

winning of M. Faggeta, meant that the defences of the Casaglia Pass on "ARROW" Route were now outflanked on either side. On the previous day (17 Sep) II Corps, after having been held for four days by 4 Para Div, took M. Altuzzo (Q9098), and with it the possession of the Giogo Pass (13 Corps in the Mountains, p. 25). On the right of the 13 Corps front, the leading brigade of 6 Armd Div, after three days of protracted fighting, had reached M. Peschiera (R0789), three miles north of S. Godenza, but was unable to make further headway towards clearing the Muraglione Pass on Route 67. The Corps was now firmly planted on the watershed, but the terrain that lay ahead was just as difficult to contemplate as that over which fighting had taken place so far. Instead of the steep slopes that characterized the southern face of the Apennine barrier, the mountains ran northwards in gradually descending spurs separated from each other by the valleys of swift rivers draining into the Lombardy plains. There was little room for deployment or manoeuvre, and Fifth Army's advance now became a fight for each successive ridge, and "each feature as it was gained was found to be as much commanded by as it commanded the next". (Ibid, p. 27)

18. In support of 1 Brit Div's advance 11 Cdn Armd Regt sent a reconnaissance party forward along "ARROW" Route to seek a road suitable for tanks. The task that lay ahead can be appreciated from the following description of "ARROW" Route (through Ronta, Crespino, Marradi, S. Adriano, Brisighella to Faenza):

This was tortuous mountain road ideally suited to demolitions of every sort and off-road going was impossible to anything save lightly equipped inf. It was soon found that demolitions had been carried out on a grand scale. Every bridge was blown. Overhanging rock faces had been blasted down into the road and corners where the road twisted around a mountain face had been thrown down into the valley below rendering the construction of Baileys next to impossible. It showed every sign of being an enormous job for the engineers and so it proved to be. The enemy also left behind small lightly equipped rearguards to harass the R.E. in their work.

(Report on Operations of
11 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 Jul -
30 Nov 44, para 8)

"C" Sqn moved a troop forward to cover an R.E. party repairing a road through Gattia Pass near Razzala, south-west of Casaglia (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 18 and 19 Sep 44).

19. The advance continued on 1 Brit and 8 Ind Div sectors against light enemy resistance (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps, 20 Sep 44). The enemy had now withdrawn to M. Pollaio and M. Finocchio. His position in the Apennines along Route 67 was quickly becoming very vulnerable. Eighth Army had advanced to the outskirts of Rimini and the opening to the Lombardy plains was close at hand. If a break-through on the Adriatic sector were obtained, the three mountain divisions between 13 Corps and Eighth Army's main thrust would be entirely cut off. In this sector only, the enemy began to disengage and prepare to evacuate the Apennine heights. On the left of 1 Brit Div, II U.S. Corps reported very little opposition and good progress. 85 U.S. Div had advanced to M. Frena only two miles south-east of Firenzuola (L9006) and were thus half way through the Apennine range to Bologna (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 20 Sep 44). On 24 Sep 1 Div occupied Palazzuolo with 66 Inf Bde, and Marradi with 2 Inf Bde. On the same day 19 Ind Bde, brought up on

the right to widen 8 Ind Div's front, captured S. Benedetto in Alpe, to join up with 6 Armd Div's delayed advance. (13 Corps in the Mountains, pp 29 - 30)

20. Supply routes continued to be a constant difficulty. Mountain roads and tracks had easily been made useless by two or three well-placed demolitions every three or four miles. Supplies and ammunition had to be carried forward by mule teams to the advancing infantry. Tanks and artillery were constantly held up and on many occasions were of little use to the forward companies. "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt and "C" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt were of course road bound, but they continued to cover the R.E. working parties and to provide some artillery support to the infantry. One troop of "C" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt carried out an infantry-cum-tank training scheme with a newly arrived Jaipur Battalion of 8 Ind Div.*

21. By 24 Sep enemy opposition began to stiffen throughout the 13 Corps' sector. This was due to an extensive enemy reshuffle in which three fresh divisions were thrown into the line in an attempt to check an advance which by this time had carried our forward troops, at one point, to within 13 miles of the Rimini - Bologna road.** 88 U.S. Div was reported to be shelling this main road from positions on the left of 13 Corps (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 24 and 25 Sep 44). The enemy on the 13 Corps sector was deployed north of Marradi in an arc covering "ARROW" Route from M. di Castelnuovo on the right, in front of M. di Grizzano to M. Gamberaldi on the left (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps, 26 Sep 44).

22. After the loss of S. Benedetto, Marradi and Palazzuola the enemy opposite 13 Corps held a strong double line of natural defences based upon the many mountain ridges between the watershed and Route 9. His front line, anchored on M. Bataglia (M0617), ran south-east to M. Gamberaldi (east of Palazzuola) and thence to Portico on Highway 67, north-east of S. Benedetto. It included the strong positions of M. Cece, M. Romano and the heights around Tredozio. Further north, and presenting as great a series of natural obstacles, was the strong Vena del Gesso position from Tossignano, on the Firenzuola - Imola road, to Brisighella, on the Marradi - Faenza route. There was little doubt that the enemy was prepared to cling tenaciously to these and many other positions of great strength. (13 Corps in the Mountains, p. 31)

23. It was now decided to change the axis of advance for both 8 Ind Div and 1 Brit Div. In order to carry out the role of right flank protection for II U.S. Corps, 1 Brit Div was to

* The 1 Cdn Armd Bde War Diary notes in passing that:

...unlike [most] garrison troops this JAIPUR BN was exceedingly eager to learn and picked up this new type of training very quickly.

(W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde,
23 Sep 44)

** These enemy reinforcements consisted of 362 Div brought from XIV Pz Corps in the west to cover Firenzuola; 44 Div moved from LI Mtn Corps to protect the Firenzuola - Imola road; and 305 Div, which was now given the Dicomano - Forli road as its responsibility (German Strategy, p. 7).

move north and along the Palazzuola - Castel Bolognese road, which followed the course of the Senio River. This route now became "ARROW" Route and the main axis for 1 Brit Div. 8 Ind Div took over the original 1 Brit Div axis (Marradi - Faenza) which now became known as "SWORD" Route. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 25 Sep 44). On 22 Sep 8 Ind Div had reported that patrols sent out from Femmina Morta had discovered a lateral road from S. Benedetto to Marradi ("PLANET" Route) linking Route 67 with the former "ARROW" Route. It was decided that 17 Bde of 8 Ind Div should maintain right flank protection for 1 Brit Div, which was moving through the Casaglia Pass, while the remainder of the Division was to clear Route 67 from S. Godenza to S. Benedetto and follow this lateral road through to Marradi. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 22 Sep 44). By 28 Sep 8 Ind Div had succeeded in clearing "PLANET" Route of enemy.

24. On 25 Sep "C" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt, in their protective role with 2 Inf Bde on the right of 1 Brit Div, engaged and knocked out an enemy S.P. in the Marradi area. This was the first direct offensive action that the tanks in this brigade had been able to carry out since the crossing of the Sieve some four weeks earlier. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 25 Sep 44). Meanwhile "B" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt prepared to support 17 Ind Bde of 8 Ind Div during their assault on M. Grizzano. The remainder of 11 Cdn Armd Regt was to move forward to the area of Palazzuola when road conditions allowed track movement (*Ibid*, 28 and 29 Sep 44). The transport situation remained, however, extremely difficult. Seventy-five per cent of the routes were dirt tracks which with frequent rains were becoming completely impassable. As the 13 Corps War Diary observed:

If the progress made by the Corps be considered slow it is rather the fault of nature than of the enemy.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps,
26 Sep 44)

25. On 30 Sep 1 Cdn Armd Bde was notified of revised plans for the advance into the Po Valley by Fifth U.S. Army. 88 U.S. Div on II Corps' right had advanced rapidly along the heights of the watershed between the Senio and Santerno Rivers, outstripping 1 Brit Div on 13 Corps' left. The American formation had occupied M. Battaglia on 27 Sep, and the forward positions of II Corps were some six miles nearer to the Lombardy plains than were those of 13 Corps at Palazzuola. It was decided that Route 65 offered a better avenue of advance for II Corps than the more restricted Firenzuola - Imola road. Route 65 became the new II Corps axis, and the inter-corps boundary was shifted westwards to include the Firenzuola - Imola road to 13 Corps. A corresponding adjustment on 2 Oct moved 13 Corps' right boundary with Eighth Army to "a line parallel to and roughly one mile east of Route 67". (13 Corps in the Mountains, p. 34). In order to strengthen 13 Corps in its new responsibility along the Imola axis, General Alexander decided on 2 Oct to allot it 78 Inf Div, recently returned from the Middle East, which had been intended for 5 Corps in Eighth Army (Allied Strategy, p. 13). The main thrust of Fifth Army was thus now to be made northward towards Bologna instead of pushing to Imola in order to cut the Via Amelia. 1 Brit Div was to replace 88 U.S. Div on the left of 13 Corps. Thus both 8 Ind Div and 1 Brit Div were eventually to have a brigade advancing on each main road:

A policy of more or less 'leaning' on the enemy was to be carried out while the main divs struck out for BOLOGNA directly along Route 65. Thus as the

month...closed it appeared as though the Brigade may have a considerable period of counter attack roles and reserve duties.

(W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 30 Sep 44)

THE WINTER STALEMATE

26. Although Fifth Army had now bitten deep into the Apennines, it was becoming evident by early October that there was little likelihood of an early break-through into the Po Valley:

The initiative remains with us, [but] the courses open are largely dictated by the enemy. On this day for instance progress was made in those places which the enemy had decided not to hold. At the core of his resistance, namely, the area S. MARTINO - M. ROMANO and at the sides in the area N.E. of M. DI BUFALO and around M. CECO the enemy showed no indication to give ground.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps, 2 Oct 44)

27. This became the familiar pattern of the days and weeks and months of the struggle in the Apennines in the winter of 1944 - 45. The enemy, aided by terrain ideally suited for defence and by weather which made mobile warfare virtually impossible, fought a stubborn and, it must be admitted, courageous rearguard action through the Apennines. The Allied Forces pressed on grimly and with unremitting determination throughout a heartbreaking winter. Ahead lay almost certain victory, but how far ahead and at what cost in toil and blood? The Commanding General of the Fifth Army felt it necessary to warn his men frankly of the situation which faced them:

Due to the very material successes which the Allied Forces have accomplished on all fronts during recent months, an impression has gained ground that the war against Germany is practically won and will soon be over. Although the ever-increasing Allied superiority in troops, morale and material will produce complete victory which we shall eventually achieve, there is no substantial basis of assurance that this total victory may not take a considerable time to achieve with a great deal of bitter and difficult fighting before hostilities cease.

Throughout the War the Germans have fought with unvarying determination, and have employed every means at their disposal to defeat us. They now know that the Allies will accept nothing but unconditional surrender with its consequent disastrous effect on the Nazi military machine, prestige and aspirations. Therefore, we may assume that from now on the German Army and the German people will fight with the ferocity of an animal at bay which knows that it has no alternative but to stand and slug it out. We of the Fifth Army have encountered this form of fanatical resistance during our recent break through of the Apennine position.

(W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, October 1944: Appx II, Lt-Gen Mark V. Clark, Commanding General, Message to Officers and Men of the Fifth Army, 5 Oct 44)

28. What had begun in September as a general assault on the Gothic Line became in October and succeeding months a multi-pronged probing action. Each separate thrust sought tirelessly to force its way through one of the mountain passes and to locate a weak spot in the enemy's defence: each became bogged in more or less static warfare. As the War Diary of 14 Cdn Armd Regt observed:

Long term persistent mountain warfare as opposed to set-piece attacks, involved much shifting of plans, changing of pressure points from one feature to another, as a wrestler [tries] one hold and then another to overcome his opponent. Thus the detailed picture changed slightly each day.

(W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt,
13 Oct 44)

29. By early October each of the three regiments of 1 Cdn Armd Bde were committed to the support of one of the trans-Apennine thrusts. 14 Cdn Armd Regt continued to fight with 8 Ind Div on the right of 13 Corps. In late September they had taken over the former 1 Brit Div axis of advance up "SWORD" Route (Marradi - Brisighella - Faenza) - down the valley of the Lamone River. 11 Cdn Armd Regt supported 1 Brit Div on "ARROW" Route along the Senio (Marradi - Palazzuola - Casola Valsenio - Rivola to Route 9 at Castel Bolognese). 12 Cdn Armd Regt came out of 13 Corps reserve on 3 Oct to support 78 Brit Div on an axis of advance up "ACE" Route, which followed the course of the Santerno River (Firenzuola - Castel del Rio - to Route 9 at Imola). Each of the three campaigns is a separate and distinct, yet in many respects an almost identical story. In the following narrative the operations of each regiment during the period 1 Oct - 31 Dec will be dealt with in turn.

14 CDN ARMD REGT (1 OCT - 31 DEC 44)

30. 17 Ind Bde was the first formation of 8 Ind Div to reach Marradi. Because of the extreme difficulty in moving tanks across from the old axis (Pontassiove - Forli), tank support for 17 Ind Bde was temporarily supplied by 11 Cdn Armd Regt, who were already in the Marradi area working with 1 Brit Div. 8 Ind Div's intention now was to advance with one brigade moving up "SWORD" Route and with one or both of the remaining brigades making a parallel thrust along the valley of the Tramazzo to Modigliana. The division's objectives were M. Romano on "SWORD" Route, Abeto in the centre, and Treozio on the right. The capture of the last two places would give 8 Ind Div the use of the two roads to Modigliana. (Report on Operations of 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 21 Jul - 30 Nov 44)

31. On 2 Oct "A" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt moved over to Marradi and three days later "B" Sqn also harboured nearby at BiForco, while "C" Sqn remained at Vicchio. It was the intention once the M. Cavallaro - M. Alto positions had been cleared by 21 Bde, that one squadron would swing right, along the S. Adriano lateral, and support the advance to Modigliana (Ibid). Unfortunately very heavy rains set in which effectively prevented the use of tanks. As the 13 Corps War Diary observed at this time, "the weather reports from Air S.C. were remarkable for their consistency in forecasting rain and the consistency with which their promises were filled" (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 13 Corps, 8 Oct 44). As well as its effect on tank movement, the weather seriously restricted the movement of supplies and ammunition from the rear area (Ibid, 11 Oct 44). On 10 Oct, 21 Ind Bde

put in an attack on M. Casalino. The attack was unsuccessful and the Indians suffered very heavy casualties. With the enemy still established on these features, work could not be carried out on the S. Adriano lateral without bringing down devastating fire. (Report on Operations of 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 21 Jul - 30 Nov 44)

32. The enemy's stubborn retention of M. Casalino was not only blocking the advance of 8 Ind Div, but was holding up progress by 13 Corps as a whole. 88 U.S. Div could not begin another II Corps offensive until 13 Corps had done more to clear the American right flank. The 13 Corps Commander "again emphasized that no obstacle that could possibly be overcome should be allowed to prevent the Corps' main purpose of giving protection and support to the right flank of II Corps from being fulfilled". 8 Ind Div was ordered to seize M. Casalino, and then, while maintaining the momentum of its attack, to take as much ground as possible to the north of the mountain before the enemy should have a chance to prepare a new defence line. (13 Corps in the Mountains, p. 40). "A" and "B" Sqns 14 Cdn Armd Regt remained for some days in the Marradi area, unable to support the infantry due to the continued rain. On 17 Oct "A" Sqn managed to get two troops forward of Marradi and supported an attack by 17 Ind Bde astride "SWORD" Route and towards M. Casalino. The tanks brought down heavy fire and silenced enemy M.Gs. and mortars in S. Martino. After a bitter fight the 3/8 Punjabis wrested M. Casalino from a stubborn German garrison who fought until all but eight had become casualties. (Report on Operations of 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 21 Jul - 30 Nov 44). On 22 Oct, after putting in one or two determined counter-attacks the enemy began to pull back. The regimental war diary recorded hopefully, but as it later proved, inaccurately, that "the closing stages of the long night of tank inactivity were taking place" (W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 22 Oct 44). On 23 Oct "A" Sqn advanced up the axis as far as S. Adriano, where they encountered numerous mines and came under shell fire. "B" Sqn followed, and on reaching S. Adriano swung right along the lateral road. The next day they were in position and bringing fire to bear on M. Budrialto north-west of Abeto. They supported an attack on the feature, which proved unsuccessful. On the morning of 25 Oct two troops of "A" Sqn moved up to S. Cassiano, where they fired at targets in the M. Rigonzano area and remained in a counter-attack role (Ibid, 25 Oct 44).

33. On 27 Oct the Fifth Army Commander decided to suspend the offensive. Bad weather, exhaustion and lack of men whereby to reach his objectives in the face of a well-placed and greatly reinforced enemy had compelled this decision. Exceptionally heavy rain had fallen from mid-September throughout October, dispelling all hope of the narrow and tortuous over-burdened roads drying out before the ice and snow of winter claimed them. Artillery support was hampered both by lack of roads along which guns could be moved, and by a shortage of ammunition. The enemy, on the other hand, always holding the advantage in rear-line lateral communications, had been able to increase his resources in artillery, and his fire in particular was causing the Americans heavy casualties. Allied superiority in air power, which might have had a decisive effect on the enemy's roads and gun positions, was neutralized by the bad weather. The rate of sickness in Fifth Army increased with the deteriorating weather, and, with the exception of 78 Div, the reinforcement situation in II and 13 Corps was becoming critical. A tremendous strain had been imposed on artillery, engineers and infantry, who, apart from occasional brief brigade and battalion reliefs, had fought for two and a half months under conditions of extreme hardship. (13 Corps in the Mountains, p. 51)

34. Fifth Army would hold at all costs the vital ground that had been won. II Corps had gained possession of the important M. Grande heights, only five miles short of Route 9. This sector would form a base for a new offensive which the Corps was to launch after a month's rest. Towards this end 13 Corps was ordered to give up the sector astride Route 67 to 2 Pol Corps, which had been operating on Eighth Army's left flank in an attempt to clear communications towards Forli. At the same time 1 Brit Div would take over the M. Grande sector from II Corps, thereby relieving 88 U.S. Div for a much needed period of rest and refitting. In general, 13 Corps' orders were to hold the ground that had been gained, take advantage of any further enemy withdrawal, press back the enemy in conjunction with the Polish Corps at the eastern end of the Corps front, and provide its weary troops with whatever rest was possible (Ibid, pp 51, 52). The various reliefs that had been ordered were effected between 27 Oct and 12 Nov (Ibid, p. 52).

35. The Divisional plan for 8 Ind Div now was to exploit up the main axis ("SWORD" Route) towards Faenza with 19 Ind Bde supported by "A" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt as the main striking force. It was anticipated that the heaviest opposition would be encountered on this road. On the right sector of the Division's front "B" Sqn was to support 17 Ind Bde up the road from Abeto and Tredezia, converging on Modigliana. 21 Ind Bde were to carry out strong patrolling through the mountains left of the main axis without tank support. On 26 Oct "C" Sqn moved up from Vicchio to Marradi, where they went into harbour until such time as they should be needed (Ibid, 26 Oct 44). A three-brigade advance continued for some days with little opportunity for action by the armour. There was much fog and rain, both of which seriously hampered the use of tanks (Ibid, 1 Nov 44). The advance up "SWORD" Route was chiefly an infantry operation, with "A" Sqn's tanks being held up by demolitions sometimes for days. "B" Sqn got rather more shooting. On the night 5/6 Nov they supported 1/5 Royal Gurkha Rifles in an attack on M. Monsignano. After a bitter fight in which both sides suffered fairly heavy casualties, the Gurkhas were forced to withdraw. The following night, however, an R.G.R. patrol found the positions unoccupied, and at first light on the 7th they occupied a position 1500 yards forward of their previous objective. Later that morning "B" Sqn tanks started to bring fire to bear on observed enemy positions on M. Pompegno. Next day "B" Sqn fired 600 rounds of H.E. into these same positions. (Ibid, 6 and 7 Nov 44)

36. The main divisional offensive was transferred on 8 Nov from "SWORD" Route to the 17 Ind Bde sector in a drive directed on Modigliana, which was to conform with that of the Poles on the right. Essential preliminaries to the assault on Modigliana were accomplished on 9 Nov with the capture of M. Budrialto and the destruction of the enemy pocket south-east of La Ville. On 10 Nov an organized attack was prepared against Modigliana to be led by 17 Ind Bde supported by "B" Sqn. The following day, however, the Lovat Scouts, working under Pol Corps on the right, entered Modigliana and found it clear. The attack went in notwithstanding, as there was at least one strongly held feature short of the town. At last light on the 11th the advance was halted by very heavy M.G. and S.P. fire from Mount S. Bartolo. Tank fire was brought to bear on the enemy positions and that night 1/5 R.G.R. assaulted the feature, only to be thrown off with heavy casualties. Attacks launched on 12 and 13 Nov also proved both costly and unsuccessful. (Ibid, 12, 13 Nov 44). Our tanks continued to pound enemy positions, and several direct hits were observed on enemy strongpoints. The following day, after a bitter struggle, the Gurkhas succeeded in establishing themselves on the feature and subsequently cleared it.

37. That evening patrols entered Modigliana and found the bridges blown but the town itself unoccupied. There were, however, still a number of M.G. posts and snipers around the north and east sides of the town. These were not finally cleared until 18 Nov, when 1/5 R.G.R. and two troops of "B" Sqn occupied the town (Report on Operations of 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 21 Jul - 30 Nov 44). The following day "B" Sqn's remaining two troops and 1/2 F.F.R. moved into Modigliana to prepare for the next stage of the advance. Enemy shelling and mortaring, which had been fairly heavy in the area, were considerably lessened when our own counter-mortar fire came into play. On the 20th reconnaissances were carried out for tank crossings over the Marzeno River. Two possible crossings were found. These required some preliminary work, but our troops were able to cross by the following day. They quickly joined F.F.R. and immediately engaged the enemy positions about 1000 yards due north of the town. (Ibid). No further advance was made on the 17 Ind Bde sector until 25 Nov, when the two troops of "B" Sqn with the F.F.R. advanced on M. Pruneto. On the following day at 0800 hours an assault was launched against the feature heavily supported by tank fire. Severe casualties were inflicted, and the infantry succeeded in gaining a foothold on the hill, but not in clearing it. That night there was heavy rain followed by mist of which the enemy took advantage. The continued advance of Eighth Army had decided him to make a further withdrawal, and he now pulled back all along the 8 Ind Div front leaving M. Pruneto and other features to be occupied by our forces (Ibid).

38. The divisional front was now narrowing considerably because of the convergence of Fifth and Eighth Armies. As it became increasingly clear that there would be a long period of static warfare, the Commander 13 Corps decided on 16 Nov to regroup his forces in order that all infantry in the Corps should spend an equal time in the line. Six days later these changes were completed, and the Corps was disposed from right to left as follows: 8 Ind Div had 17 Bde in the Modigliana sector, 19 Bde astride the Faenza road, and 21 Bde on either side of the Castel Bolognese road. Along "ACE" Route 6 Armd Div was disposed north of Fontanelice, in the Acqua Salata area. 78 Inf Div held a front from M. dell' Acqua Salata north-westwards to the lower slopes of M. Grande. 1 Brit Div had brigades on M. Grande and the neighbouring M. Cerore. (13 Corps in the Mountains, pp 55, 56)

39. On 28 Nov, 17 Ind Bde, which was the right brigade of the Fifth Army, was withdrawn from the line and "B" Sqn was sent back to Modigliana to rest. During this period "A" Sqn, which was with 19 Bde on "SWORD" Route, had been largely inactive, and on 29 Nov it was pulled back to join "C" Sqn, now in the area of S. Martino. Thus the end of November found all three squadrons temporarily out of the line. (Ibid). 14 Cdn Armd Regt, as its War Diary observed, was now literally "embedded in the Apennines".

From the highest forward positions it was possible to see the blank pall of mists which denoted the PO Valley... while admin and supply sqns at CASAGLIA were nearer to FLORENCE than the BOLOGNA pole... Thus it was a day's travel from one end of the Regiment to the other, though if the traveller were beset by an extravagance of rain and provost restrictions he might sleep the night en route.

(W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt,
1 Dec 44)

Extensive reconnaissances were made in succeeding days of both "SWORD" and "ARROW" Routes, but all reports indicated numerous demolitions and little possibility of further progress without extensive bridging. The engineers undertook to lay "tankable bridges" on "SWORD" Route as far as Fognano. (Ibid, 4 Dec 44)

40. Meanwhile all squadrons took advantage of the lull to overhaul their tanks. Other peaceable activities filled the days. There were lectures of general interest; a rehabilitation survey by the Padre; a limited number of leaves were granted to the three-day University Course at Florence. A semblance of barrack life crept back into the life of the unit, with the morning inspection of billets, parades and training lectures. The prospect of early action diminished steadily. The advance of the Poles through Brisighella north-west to the ridge beyond cut out all sectors except that of 21 Ind Bde. For 8 Ind Div the prospect was a series of shifting moves north-west to keep within "the shrinking half moon of frontage". "But for the tanks", observed the 14 Cdn Armd Regt Diary, "who could move neither forward nor sideways or in the case of "B" Sqn backwards either, the prospect was obscure". (Ibid, 6 Dec 44)

41. It remained now only to acknowledge the inevitable. On 8 Dec the Regimental War Diary recorded in fatalistic tone:

Both weather and events had by this time ended another section in the Regiment's story. First mountains had held tanks to the roads. Once we had begun to branch out the rains gave little pause before binding us to the roads once more. Swollen and even torrential streams washed away the endeavours of the sappers who attempted to bridge the demolitions. Mired roads delayed the arrival of bridging equipment. Thus by the time tanks arrived at any given point, targets had already receded from range. This would have been enough to cope with in a straight advance up the main highway. But now the 8th Army was crowding across our right flank (Modigliana) then centre (Brisighella) and finally left flank, (San Cassiano 1718) [sic] and to reach the enemy we would have had to cut North-West into the mountains and bare escarpments. This we could not do, despite recesses from Fognano 1815 to Zattaglia 1517. Our usefulness to 8th Indian Division was ended.

(Ibid, 8 Dec 44)

42. Throughout December, 21 Ind Bde continued to creep through Zattaglia and Casola Valsonio. The westerly advance of 2 Pol Corps once more narrowed the 8 Ind Div front, which by 17 Dec was held by 17 Ind Bde alone. (13 Corps in the Mountains, p. 59). Two days before Christmas the Brigade occupied the M. Tondo - M. Volpe ridge to the right of "ARROW" Route, while on the left they pushed up to, but not on to, the Gesso escarpment (Ibid). But none of these actions involved 14 Cdn Armd Regt. For practical purposes the limit of the regiment's operations in this campaign was Modigliana - San Cassiano.

43. It was the intention of the Commanding Officer, Lt-Col C.A. Richardson, to concentrate as much of the regiment as possible at Marradi Station. This plan had been delayed for some eight days, since it was necessary to await vacancies in that area. Bridges were finally completed on "ARROW" and "SWORD" Routes, allowing an exodus of other units from the S. Martino locality.

On 10 Dec "C" Sqn moved from the Station to a nearby mansion, R.H.Q. moved from MARRADI to the station, and supply Sqn moved from Casaglia to MARRADI. From R.H.Q. (135053) "A" and "C" Sqs were five minutes walking distance, Supply Sqn at MARRADI a 20 minutes drive, "B" Sqn 235100 and Admin Sqn CASAGLIA a 1 to 2 hrs drive depending on the weather.

(W.D. 14 Cdn Armd Regt,
10 Dec 44)

44. The regiment, completely in a static role, now set about making itself as comfortable as circumstances would permit:

With the approach of Xmas and the advent of cold weather, considerable efforts were made by all ranks to arrange comfortable quarters. Stoves were manufactured by fitters in wholesale lots for use in rooms without fireplaces, a charger was obtained for lighting purposes, ovens were installed for baking, recreation halls found, repaired, heated and decorated, Mess halls furnished by tables made by the carpenter, a cinema screen improvised in "A" Sqs "auditorium". In two or three days artistry, ingenuity and practicability turned what might have been a collection of dreary billets into a warm and social community. To date this harbour represented the peak of refinement in the laudable and growing habit of living pleasantly rather than unpleasantly. It is constructive, self-entertaining, and produces individual pride in the unit's appearance. Thus after nineteen months out from England, natural nostalgia did not prevent the Regiment being as happy as, and perhaps happier than, it had ever been before: and this without any deterioration in discipline.

(Ibid, 12 Dec 44)

45. On 14 Dec, four tanks were moved to A.D.R. (Armoured Delivery Regiment) (near Borgo S. Lorenzo) to be exchanged for 17-pr and 105-mm radial Shermans (i.e. Shermans Mk IC and Mk IB respectively).^{*} It was intended as new equipment became available to re-equip the entire regiment. 14 Cdn Armd Regt was to get twelve 17-pr, six 105-mm and approximately thirty-four 76-mm (Mk IA) Shermans, all with radial engines. To minimize the dislocation which would inevitably accompany this change-over it was arranged to substitute only a few tanks at a time. As soon as a crew picked up a new tank it was to drive the vehicle to a new Brigade school near Borgo S. Lorenzo (at S. Agata 871925) to take a three-day gunnery and range course before returning to the regiment with the new tank. Grouping and use of the new weapons was to be initially a matter of individual squadron experimentation. (Ibid, 14 Dec 44). A regimental N.C.Os.' school was established at Biforco on 18 Dec.

46. The capture of M. della Volpe on 23 Dec was the final operation of 8 Ind Div on the 13 Corps front. Before the division could make further progress the threat of a German counter-offensive on the west coast of Italy caused Fifth Army

* 1 Cdn Armd Bde Order of Battle (1 Dec 44) includes "A" Sqn 25 Cdn Armd Del Regt (Elgin Regt) (W.D., 1 Cdn Armd Bde, December, 1944). Presumably this is the A.D.R. referred to. See para 58.

to regroup its forces. 8 Ind Div, less one brigade, was placed under direct command of Fifth Army, and responsibility of its sector passed to 17 Ind Bde. The division was ordered to move to Lucca on 24 - 25 Dec, and 14 Cdn Armd Regt remained with 17 Ind Bde. The regimental war diary noted that this action

...severed all but a thread of our 9 months association with the Indians... The relationship between Indian infantry and Canadian tanks was throughout unmarred by failures or differences, and this unusual partnership will hold a permanent and high place in the annals of the regiment.

(Ibid, 23 Dec 44)

47. Christmas proved to be one of the happiest days the regiment had spent in Italy. Careful planning and storing away of supplies made it possible for all ranks to eat and drink "to the point of surfeit" (Ibid, 25 Dec 44). On 26 Dec the Commanding Officer attended a conference called by the Brigade Commander to discuss withdrawing the unit for rest, refitting and training (Ibid, 24 and 26 Dec 44). On his return he reported that the regiment was to move to a rest area at S. Donato, eight miles south-east of Florence, where 14 Cdn Armd Regt would be responsible for the organization of a Corps Recce School. There was also the welcome announcement that arrangements had been completed for 100 men and ten officers per week to proceed on leave to both Rome and Florence until 12 Jan 45.

48. On 27 Dec a message was received from 1 Cdn Armd Bde ordering the advance party to leave for the new area the next day, with the remainder of the regiment to move on 29 and 30 Dec. The move is described as "one of the most prolonged, difficult and dangerous moves this regiment has ever experienced - the actual test of patience and endurance which ensued was never anticipated" (Ibid, 30 Dec 44). At 0200 hours 30 Dec, "A" Sqn pulled out along rutted, frozen and glazed roads towards Borgo S. Lorenzo. The steel tracks, despite the 30-ton weight they carried, refused to grip on the glazed surfaces, and revolved without the tanks moving more than inches. The true distance to Borgo S. Lorenzo was 18 miles; track speedometers averaged 65 to 70 miles. The journey took 17 hours - a working convoy speed of just one mile per hour. One of the regimental officers gave this graphic description of the trip:

As the sun went down and crews stood by to move, a bank of jagged clouds came up in the west. We were afraid the weather wouldn't hold. But once the tanks started it wasn't the broken moonlight that harried them. It was the driving wind. And the ice, which lay like a sheet over the mountain road.

At first only one or two of each crew walked in front of the tanks as guides. Soon all were walking except the drivers - trudging behind the rear exhaust for warmth.

By morning the last tank had gone a mere five miles. Daylight brought snow, swirling across the heights to blind drivers and make the road more dangerous.

Those walking would suddenly stop and hold their breath while tons of steel - with a man inside - slid ponderously, helplessly towards a 300-foot drop. It always gathered speed as it went, like loose wreckage on a ship's deck. But something always held at the last second: A frail bank of frozen mud, a little gravel to grip the tracks, an accidental rock. Then everyone would give a low whistle of relief and walk on.

At the pass, the highway became treachery itself. Enveloped in constant wind and snow, the road became worse with each hour. Here the commanding officer organized all labor in the area to repair shoulders and spread crushed rock before each tank.

For the convoy commander ... the descent held another problem. Even in low gear, machines were uncontrollable, skidding not only sideways but forward as well.

After an 18-mile trip, speedometers registered 70 miles. In other words, for every foot tanks moved forward, they slipped a yard.

If there was any grumbling, I didn't hear it. Even after a gale had cut through great-coat and leather jerkin for 10 hours, some met you with a smile or a wise crack...

At the end of the mountain road they were all grinning. And why not? Only the men who had fought for 17 hours could appreciate the Shangri-laian vista of sunny flats and still-green vegetation before them as this strange caravan of frozen steel wended its way out of the land of storms.

(W.D., H.Q. 14 Cdn Armd Regt,
January 1945: Appx 10,
Extract from "The Maple Leaf",
16 Jan 45, Article by Licut
P.S. Millar, 14 Cdn Armd Regt)

49. The move to S. Donato was completed without casualty of any kind. The only damage to equipment was a broken stub shaft. In a letter to the Commanding Officer of the 14 Cdn Armd Regt, commenting on the successful completion of the operation, Brigadier W.C. Murphy, D.S.O., E.D., wrote:

I consider the feat of your regiment one of the finest it has performed, and I bear in mind in saying so the most outstanding work which it has performed in the face of the enemy from SICILY to the Northern APENNINES.

(W.D. 14 Cdn Armd Regt,
January 1945, Appx 10)

50. The morning of the 31st was bright and fresh - "as an awakening from a bad dream" (W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 31 Dec 44). Those who had arrived in the dark now saw a rest harbour of many possibilities, including the prospect of reasonable accommodation. From the surrounding hills they could see the tower and dome of Florence lying like a fairy town in the distant valley. (Ibid)

11 CDN ARMD REGT (1 OCT - 31 DEC 44)

51. As we have seen, in late September "ARROW" Route had been switched to the left and now ran through Marradi - Palazzuolo - Casola Valsenio - Riolo to Route 9 at Castel Bolognese. 11 Cdn Armd Regt was to continue to support 1 Brit Div in an advance up this new axis. Due to the extreme difficulty experienced by 14 Cdn Armd Regt in moving tanks to support 17 Ind Bde (of 8 Ind Div) in its drive up "SWORD" Route forward of Marradi, 11 Cdn Armd Regt supplied 17 Ind Bde for a time with two troops of "C" Sqn. The other two troops of "C" Sqn moved to Palazzuolo in order to be able to support 3 Inf Bde on its advance along "ARROW" Route. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 2 Oct 44). By 30 Sep the 17 Ind Bde advance up "SWORD" Route had reached Popolano.

Here one troop of "C" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt went forward to act as an O.P. for the other, which was bringing fire to bear on the enemy positions on M. Romano. The forward troop came on an enemy patrol at a bridge near S. Adriano, engaged them and drove them off. The tanks then went back and brought up infantry, who removed the charges which had been set in the bridge. Later in the day this troop came under heavy shell fire and had to withdraw to Popolano. One tank received a direct hit by an H.E. shell and had to be evacuated. The advance was now halted on this route and little progress was made for about a fortnight. The enemy had the road completely covered from the mountains on both sides of it and any movement brought down devastating shell fire. For the moment the tanks were no longer required on "SWORD" Route and so they pulled back into Marradi. (Report on Operations of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 Jul - 30 Nov 44)

52. On 2 Oct 1 Brit Div took over the right hand sector of the 88 U.S. Div front as the latter eased over to the left (see para 25). The relief took place at Castagno and tanks of 11 Cdn Armd Regt moved up to join 1 Brit Div there the following day (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 3 Oct 44). The advance continued slowly up the new "ARROW" Route. On 4 Oct one troop of tanks moved up to Mercatale to support the infantry in an unsuccessful attack on M. Cece*. This mountain dominates the road in the Senio valley down which 3 Inf Bde was advancing, and its capture was thus essential. Successive attacks were put in by 3 Bde on the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th with the same negative result. The feature was held by about two companies of enemy infantry who seemed to have inexhaustible supplies of ammunition. Heavy rain had fallen which made it impossible for the tanks to leave the road. (Report on Operations of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 Jul - 30 Nov 44). On 8 Oct another attack was launched and this time five platoons succeeded in remaining on the feature. Before sundown they had been reinforced and were firmly dug in. The taking of M. Cece cost 3 Inf Bde approximately thirty per cent casualties (Ibid). One of our tanks had been knocked out by A.P. from an S.P. gun and another by a direct hit from an H.E. shell. Five more tanks were sent up to reinforce them, but one of these was knocked out by H.E. on the way. During the next few days the infantry on M. Cece repelled several severe counter-attacks, while the tanks continued to support them and to exchange fire with enemy S.P. guns. Shelling was fairly heavy on both sides though our own artillery was seriously restricted in its expenditure of ammunition because of the extreme difficulty of transportation. The enemy eventually withdrew and protected his retreat by blowing two bridges. Replacement work was started on these at once and carried on under intermittent shelling. The new bridges were completed by 23 Oct but were not yet strong enough for tanks (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 Oct 44). The infantry went ahead with their lighter vehicles, however, and the enemy pulled back to about two miles south of Casola Valsenio, in what proved to be a general enemy retreat of an average distance of one mile along the entire 1 Brit Div sector. (Ibid, 24 Oct 44). On the 26th the bridges were ready for the tanks, which now pushed on as far as Baffadi, where they were again halted by a blown bridge (Report on Operations of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 Jul - 30 Nov 44)

53. 1 Brit Div now had two brigades up with 3 Inf Bde on the right and 66 Inf Bde on the left of the axis. On 28 Oct 2 Inf Bde began relieving 66 Bde and the latter started pulling back to Borgo S. Lorenzo. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 28 Oct 44). At this time heavy rains caused the Senio River to flood and a bridge at 076125 was damaged. Continued floods hampered the engineers in their repair work with the result that 2 Bde did

* In British and American reports this is spelled M. Cece.

not complete the relief of 66 Bde until 31 Oct (Report on Operations of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 Jul - 30 Nov 44). That evening word was received that 1 Brit Div was to relieve 88 U.S. Div on M. Grande. The latter were to pull back and 1 Brit Div was to hold the ground until such time as the Americans attacked through them towards Route 9 and Bologna. The positions to the right of "ARROW" Route were to be taken over by a brigade of 8 Ind Div (this relief was completed by 2 Nov), and the left sector by elements of 6 Brit Armd Div (completed 4 Nov). The relief of 80 U.S. Div was completed on the 8th (Ibid).

54. On that day "A" Sqn sent eleven complete crews to take over eight American tanks and three M-18 Tank Destroyers (76-mm) on M. Grande (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 8 Nov 44). This was done because it was considered impossible either to move the U.S. tanks out or to move ours in, a fact which is in itself a sufficient commentary on the prospects for mobile warfare in the ensuing campaign! On the 9th "B" Sqn sent four crews to man four more U.S. tanks at a road block at 008262. Most of these tanks proved to be "dead" and could not have been moved even if the ground had permitted. (Report on Operations of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 Jul - 30 Nov 44). For several succeeding days there was little activity on the divisional front except for artillery and mortar exchanges and active patrolling in the 2 Bde sector (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 Nov 44). "C" Sqn, which had been continuously in action for almost two months, now moved back into reserve in the area of Ronta and sent a large number of personnel on leave to Florence. (Ibid)

55. On the night of 15 Nov eight "B" Sqn tanks were moved up to the divisional Gun Line and took up positions in area 9726 (about six miles north-west of Castel del Rio) (Ibid, 15 Nov 44). They were to be used to "thicken up" the fire of the artillery who continued to have great difficulty in bringing forward sufficient ammunition. The tanks were fired at ranges of from 8000 to 11,000 yards and in order to get sufficient elevation on the guns it was necessary to tilt the tanks by running their noses up on the banks (Report on Operations of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 Jul - 30 Nov 44). On 26 Nov "B" Sqn sent four additional tanks up to the Gun Line to supplement the artillery (Ibid).

56. There was now little or no day-to-day change in the 11 Cdn Armd Regt positions. The tanks in the Gun Line were engaged in long range indirect firing, while those on M. Grande were in a defensive role and fired no tasks. Since they were in an extremely exposed position, the latter were subjected to almost continuous sniping, M.G. and mortar fire. The men could not so much as put their heads outside their tanks during hours of daylight, and at night they were still subject to mortaring and M.G. fire on fixed lines. Nearly all the batteries were dead, and consequently there was no wireless communication. When a man was wounded it was impossible to get word out until night-fall. (Ibid). Some of these tanks were in much more hazardous positions than others and, because of the nervous strain, the crews were switched around every fourth night. Every sixth night two new crews were taken up and two brought back. The regimental war diary records that, "two crews that went back to Borgo S. Lorenzo after being forward for twenty consecutive days and nights in their tanks said it was the toughest time they had ever experienced". (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 24 Nov 44). On the night 28/29 Nov the enemy made a two-company attack on a 66 Bde position on M. Castellano and overran two companies of the Royal Scots. The attacking force killed or captured about fifty men and succeeded in remaining on the feature, a success which did not make the position of the tanks on M. Grande any easier. The situation was now static and seemed likely to remain so for some time. (Report on Operations of 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 Jul - 30 Nov 44)

57. The general policy during December on the 1 Brit Div front was to "lean" on the enemy until an attack could be launched by 78 Brit Div, 6 Brit Armd Div and II U.S. Corps in conjunction with Eighth Army. II U.S. Corps was on seven days' notice for the attack (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 15 Dec 44). The three squadrons of 11 Cdn Armd Regt were now disposed as follows: "A" Sqn continued the monotonous nerve-racking task of sitting in their tanks north of M. Grande. "B" Sqn, north-west of Castel del Rio, continued to fire with eight tanks at enemy targets. The crews of these tanks were fairly comfortable, as they had made deep dugouts underneath the tanks and banked a layer of earth, shell-casings and sandbags round the tanks. (Ibid, 22 Dec 44). "C" Sqn at 944943, in reserve, near Ronta, had done a great deal of work on their harbour area and were very comfortable in their new quarters (Ibid, 1 Dec 44). On the divisional fronts activity was confined to patrols and to occasional exchange of shell and mortar fire, while the infantry carried out battalion reliefs. With the heavy rains, the roads continued to deteriorate and traffic had to be very carefully restricted. The foundations of a number of bridges were in need of repair, but such work could not be undertaken until the rain had stopped for at least 24 to 36 hours, in order that the ground might drain.

58. On 4 Dec 19 Ind Inf Bde came under command of 1 Brit Div and 3/8 Punjabis moved forward to relieve 1 Loyals of 2 Brit Inf Bde. By 6 Dec the weather had turned very foggy, with the result that "B" Sqn was unable to shoot, while "A" Sqn and the forward infantry had to stand-to for the greater part of the day. The whole divisional front was extremely quiet, the only action consisting of very limited patrolling. On 7 Dec one crew from each of "A" and "B" Sqns and two crews from "C" Sqn went to "A" Sqn 25 Cdn Armd Del Regt and took over four new Sherman tanks equipped with 17-pr guns. Crews reported that although there was not as much room in the turret, they were very happy to have this new gun in the tanks, since it was more effective against enemy tanks at 2000 and 3500 yards than the 75-mm gun. The crews with their new tanks proceeded to the Brigade Gunnery School for training. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 7 Dec 44). On 9 Dec thirty men were lent from the regiment to work as pioneers for 1 Brit Div to assist in the maintenance of roads. A number of landslides of various sizes had occurred which were partially or completely blocking roads (Ibid, 8, 9 Dec 44). On 10 Dec 2 Brit Inf Bde took over command of 3 Brit Inf Bde sector. Enemy patrols and raids became somewhat more frequent on 12 Dec and on the following day 37 enemy dead were counted from F.D.Ls. as a result of operations the previous day and evening (Ibid, 13 Dec 44). On 16 Dec two crews from each squadron took over from "A" Sqn 25 Cdn Armd Del Regt six more new Shermans equipped with 105-mm guns (Ibid, 16 Dec 44).

59. On 17 Dec 66 Brit Inf Bde took over the 2 Brit Inf Bde sector and 3 Brit Inf Bde began its relief of 19 Ind Inf Bde. On 23 Dec 19 Ind Inf Bde passed back under command 8 Ind Inf Div in a new re-grouping move. The entire divisional front continued to be very quiet until the end of the month. Christmas found troops of "A" and "B" Sqns spending a very cold time in their tanks, their second successive Christmas in action; the eleven crews from "A" Sqn were particularly uncomfortable, as they were hardly allowed to move even to keep warm. The unit war diary notes "as a matter of interest" that "their opponents this Christmas were the same as a year ago, namely, 'Maj-Gen Heidrich's Green Devils of 1 Para Div'". (Ibid, 25 Dec 44). The remainder of the regiment, however, spent a very happy Christmas in the vicinity of Ronta. On 29 Dec battalion reliefs were carried out by 36 Brit Inf Bde of 37 Brit Div. This brigade was now under command 1 Brit Div. On the south sector of the divisional fronts there was increased enemy M.G.,

mortar and artillery fire. On 30 Dec "C" Sqn, in reserve at Ronta, provided tea all day and refuelled the vehicles of 14 Cdn Armd Regt who were making their hazardous trek to Florence (Ibid, 30 Dec 44).

12 CDN ARMD REGT (1 OCT - 31 DEC 44)

60. 12 Cdn Armd Regt had been in 13 Corps reserve from 7 Aug to 3 Oct 44. On the latter date, while harboured in the Quintole area, the regiment received a warning order that 78 Brit Div was to relieve 88 U.S. Div in the Castel del Rio area and that 12 Cdn Armd Regt was to pass under command of the former division (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 3 Oct 44). Highway 66, covered by 4 Para Div, which had been badly mauled on the Gothic defences, was considered a relatively weak spot in the enemy line. Consequently II U.S. Corps (comprising 85, 88, 34 and 91 U.S. Divs) was to shift west and thrust along this road (see para 25). Meanwhile 78 Brit Div supported by 12 Cdn Armd Regt was to replace 88 U.S. Div and to "lean" on the enemy. (Ibid, 3 Oct 44)

61. On 5 Oct, extensive reconnaissances were carried out for a forward concentration area for the regiment at Scarperia (Report on Operations of 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 7 Aug - 15 Dec 44). The reconnaissance party reported that the roads were "terrible" and harbour space "extremely scarce" (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 5 Oct 44). As only one squadron was wanted at the moment, "C" Sqn was chosen to go forward, and on 6 Oct they began to move to an area north of Scarperia. On 7 Oct one troop of "C" Sqn reached Castel del Rio to support 2 Inniskillings of 78 Brit Div. Meanwhile on the 9th the remainder of the regiment struggled their way into harbour in the general area of Scarperia. Two days later the balance of "C" Sqn joined their fellow troop at Castel del Rio (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 Oct 44). On 13 Oct "A" and "B" Sqns moved up to Firenzuola and the same day "C" Sqn went to S. Apollinare in support of 11 Inf and 38 (Irish) Inf Bdes in that area. During this move on roads described as "narrow, windy, muddy and rough", one of "C" Sqn's tanks slipped off the road at 007172 and fell one hundred feet. One member of the crew was killed and two injured. As might be expected, the tank was not recoverable. (Ibid, 13 Oct 44)

62. 78 Div was now operating on a broad front, with its three brigades up and in addition with 1 Gds Bde on the right under command. "A" Sqn 12 Cdn Armd Regt was supporting 38 (Irish) Inf Bde, "B" Sqn was with 36 Inf Bde and "C" Sqn with 11 Inf Bde. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 15 Oct 44). An attack was prepared for 15 Oct to be put in by 5 Northhamptons supported by two troops of "C" Sqn. The objectives were Pts 453 (029237), 508 (029240) and 401 (028246). The tanks moved up to Gesso during the night 14/15 and the attack went in at first light on the 15th. The infantry and tanks advanced together under very heavy shell fire, but in the face of mounting casualties to the infantry the attack was called off and the tanks were ordered to pull back to Gesso. Two tanks had received direct hits from H.E. shells and a third had become bogged. One officer and one O.R. were killed and two O.Rs. wounded in attempting to recover damaged tanks, which finally had to be abandoned. The crews stayed in them until darkness to cover the withdrawal of the infantry. The tanks were not finally abandoned until every round of ammunition had been fired. The same evening the Surreys put in a second attack on Pt 508 but were again thrown back. The enemy was using portable flame throwers with good effect. (Report on Operations of 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 7 Aug - 15 Dec 44)

63. On 16 Oct, Regimental Headquarters of 12 Cdn Armd Regt moved forward and harboured on the northern outskirts of Castel del Rio. Here they were only 3000 yards from the F.D.Ls. and were subject to frequent enemy shelling (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 16/17 Oct 44). On the left, II U.S. Corps who had now resumed the offensive with very great vigour, were at this time advancing from feature to feature and by 17 Oct were reported to be 15,000 yards from Bologna. They frequently called on 13 Corps to give them right flank protection but the latter were at the time "stopped cold". It was to meet this situation that 78 Div supported by 12 Cdn Armd Regt had been called into the line. As limited attacks on the feature hinging on M. Pieve (Pt 508, O30240) were proving unsuccessful, a divisional plan was drawn up to be put into effect on the night of 18 Oct (Ibid, 18 Oct 44). On 17 Oct Brigadier R.K. Arbuthnott, A/Comd 78 Div, had issued a special order of the day regarding the division's next objective, which was "to breach this cornerstone of the enemy's defence by capturing Monte Pieve and then moving on to Monte Spaduro". He emphasized that:

...the Pieve feature (Incl Pt 508) is one which the enemy is determined to hold. Its importance to him lies in the fact that, so long as he can hold it, the salient that the U.S. Corps are driving towards Bologna is bound to remain narrow and restricted and their task of breaking into the plain so much more difficult.

(W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt,
17 Oct 44)

64. At 0100 hours, 19 Oct, all guns in the area opened up for 36 Bde's attack. Surprisingly enough the attack "met thin air" and by morning our forces held all their objectives including M. Pieve. (Ibid, 19 Oct 44). It seemed evident from the reports of patrols that the enemy had withdrawn to the line of hills and ridges M. dell'Acqua Salata - M. del Verro - M. Spaduro. An attack was at once prepared on the M. dell'Acqua Salata and M. del Verro features. On the night of 19/20 Oct 5 Buffs attacked Acqua Salata without tank support and were pushed back with heavy losses. At the same time 1 R. Ir F. put in an attack on M. Spaduro. They succeeded in getting two companies on to their objective, but they had by-passed some enemy, isolated in a tiny hamlet called Spinello. These enemy forces later completely cut off 1 R. Ir F. (Report on Operations of 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 7 Aug - 15 Dec 44). On the 20th a troop from "C" Sqn shot up Spinello from Gesso and that night 8 A. & S.H. captured M. dell'Acqua Salata, still by-passing enemy resistance in Spinello "where a suicide outfit [was] grimly hanging on in the rubble piles" (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 22 Oct 44). Our forces continued to pump shells into Spinello and many hits were observed on enemy-occupied buildings (Report on Operations of 12 Cdn Armd Regt). The village finally fell on the 23rd to elements of 38 Bde. That evening 11 Bde took M. Spaduro and several other features in the same area (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 23, 24 Oct 44).

...the key heights of M. Grande, M. Cerere, M. Pieve M. Spaduro, M. Aquasalata and M. Del Verro were all captured with heavy losses to the enemy. For the moment it looked as if we had the enemy off-balance and might be about to turn the key to the Po Valley - Bologna. But just at this stage of the game, General Mud put a dirty foot-print across Allied Operation plans and stopped everything cold. Already the repercussions of the success of a few days earlier were being manifested in the enemy's faster than usual withdrawal up Route 9, towards Bologna. This too, was stopped.

(Ibid, 31 Oct 44)

65. The 78 Div front at this time ran from the Santerno River (excl) on the right to the Sillaro River (incl) on the left, with 38 Bde right, 36 Bde centre and 11 Bde left. On 23 Oct "B" Sqn 12 Cdn Armd Regt moved up from Firenzuola to Sassaleone to support 11 Bde. Practically no roads were available in the 78 Div sector at all and the country was still extremely rugged. Vehicles could move with great difficulty as far as Sassaleone, but from there forward everything had to go by mules to 38 and 36 Bdes. 11 Bde on the left could be supplied by the Sassaleone - S. Clemente road, which was in 88 U.S. Div sector. The movements of tanks over the existing mountain tracks could only be accomplished in dry weather, and then only with the greatest difficulty. On 24 Oct "B" Sqn crawled up the S. Clemente road to 969274 and sent a troop on forward to Ripiano, from where it could support 11 Bde. (Report on Operations of 12 Cdn Armd Regt)

66. Heavy rains now prevented further advance, and 78 Div, including 12 Cdn Armd Regt, settled down to build and improve roads. It became a full time job to keep themselves supplied and to hold the ground already in their possession. The unit war diary provides the best explanation for the stalemate in which the division and the armoured regiment now found themselves:

To appreciate the slowness of the advance, and the terrific difficulties which the troops - infantry in particular, are encountering, these mountains and Italian rains must be seen. The peaks are very irregular, many of them sheer and rocky; all of them steep and mainly trackless. They rise to as high as 700 metres. Their rocky composition offers poor comfort to an assaulting infantry, who must fight positions dug into the rock and try to dig in when the enemy counter-attacks with shells and mortars.

The gorges and gullies are precipitous and run into narrow, canyon-like valleys. The one, and sometimes two, third class roads follow the valley down, cross and re-cross the river and so present excellent opportunities for demolitions. The enemy has carried out these demolitions with a devilish proficiency, and made the advance one for Engineers alone.

Now the rains have come; and one is reminded of the movie of the same name. The clouds just let go for twenty-four hours on end, and every gorge and gully becomes a little torrent of water. The bunkheads for Bailey Bridges soften up, roads are cut up, landslides come down and the results are almost impossible to cope with. Tonight the following bridges are impassable: 986227 (Bailey now being built), 965268; road at 968273 is washed out and the river near it is an obstacle to all vehicles. This will cut all communication with "B" Squadron for an estimated 48 hrs., other than wireless of course. And a 'land-slide' has rendered road Castel del Rio to Penzola impassable till 1000 hours tomorrow.

(W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt,
26 Oct 44)

67. 78 Div with three brigades up hold a line roughly M. Spaduro - M. dell' Acqua Salata. The infantry carried out strong patrolling to control the ground to their front, but for over a month 12 Cdn Armd Regt tanks were not employed in a fighting role, except when a troop of "B" Sqn did several shoots at enemy M.G. positions. During the greater part of November 100 men of the regiment were employed on road work. (Report on Operations of 12 Cdn Armd Regt)

68. As winter set in, the regimental war diary records the changes it brought in the life of the men of 12 Cdn Armd Regt:

...To-day 12th C.A.R. made a radical departure from its usual means of supply, and resorted to the faithful and unbeatable old mule. "A" and "C" squadrons were each allotted 10 mules from an Italian mule coy. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 2 Nov 44)... We are seeking a horse for the use of Lt.-Col. F.L. Caron the Commanding Officer ... even jeeps cannot make some of the roads and tracks. (Ibid, 7 Nov 44)... Capt. R.H. Heggie represented 12th C.A.R. at a conference to discuss mule routes, pack tpt, etc, at 36 Bde H.Q. at 1000 hrs today. He reports they are contemplating making sleighs for the mules, and also that the Provost Officer had purchased a pair of skis in Florence. (Ibid, 11 Nov 44)

Every unit has men out on the roads seeking to build them up and dig ditches along the sides for drainage. 12th C.A.R. is out in strength doing its share. Each squadron is supplying twenty men daily to work under the C.R.E.'s direction. And "A" and "B" Echelons put 10 each on the road daily. Today the Echelon crew were busy felling trees in the pass over the mountains above Scarperia; these to [be] used to build up the road where to was fast disappearing altogether. (Ibid, 9 Nov 44)... This morning (10 Nov) saw our first snow of the year in the Apennines. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 10 Nov 44)

69. Besides daily work on the roads, all units were busily occupied in making dug-outs and various types of shelters for the winter. The war diary contains the following description of the results of their efforts:

Most of the troops forward of Castel Del Rio have built themselves very substantial and comfortable shelters. Some are dug into the side of banks or knolls, and then the sides are "walled up" with ammo tins filled with dirt and fine rock. In some cases these have been further strengthened with another wall of sandbags. Roofs are composed of beams of lumber covered by more wood, and finally rendered "waterproof" with a pup tent or tarpaulin. Inside the boys have their beds laid out and usually a small stove set up. These latter are "home made" from rectangular ammo tins or five-gallon oil containers. The men are very comfortable and safe from all except a direct hit. They would not mind staying during the hibernation.

(W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt,
22 Nov 44)

70. By 1 Dec it was becoming evident that tanks could make little further progress in this sector until spring, and that if snow should come they would probably be unable to get out. 78 Div boundary was again shifted left to include the S. Clemente road, and "A" Sqn was pulled back to Sassaleone in preparation for a thrust up this new axis. 12 Cdn Armd Regt was now supporting two divisions, 78 Inf and 6 Armd Divs (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 2 Dec 44). On 4 Dec one troop of "A" Sqn was sent back to Castel del Rio and up the Imola road, where it took up fire positions at 033205 and carried out a most successful shoot on enemy positions in caves on M. Penzola. As a result

of their success 6 Brit Armd Div, who were now to attack up the Imola road, asked to have a squadron to support their thrust. On 8 Dec "C" Sqn, less the two troops at Gesso, moved to a harbour (at 046217), near Fontanelice. The two troops at Gesso were unable to move due to the condition of the roads, which had become impassable even to mules. A day or two after arrival, one of "C" Sqn's troops moved to fire positions a mile beyond Fontanelice. The intention was for the tanks to support a 6 Armd Div attack on Borgo Tossignano and on Tossignano itself. The attack was put in the night of 12/13 Dec, however, without fire being called for from the tanks. Infantry of 6 Armd Div were successful in seizing Borgo and the north-west corner of Tossignano, which they attempted to hold with four platoons. (Report on Operations of 12 Cdn Armd Regt). On the morning of 13 Dec the two troops at Gesso fired 400 H.E. shells into enemy-occupied positions on the Camaggio ridge and that evening 36 Bde put in a two-battalion attack on the feature. They were beaten back, however, by a strengthened enemy opposition.

71. The following night on the 6 Armd Div sector, 2 Rifle Brigade got three more platoons into Tossignano, but did not succeed in clearing out the enemy, who still dominated the road into the town with M.G. and S.P. fire. A bridge (at 075233) was out and it was quite impossible to repair it due to continued enemy fire. Consequently the infantry in Tossignano had only such weapons and ammunition as they had been able to carry with them (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 14 Dec 44). Unfortunately, on the evening of 15 Dec the enemy cut off and captured the seven platoons of infantry in Tossignano (Ibid, 15 Dec 44). On the following day fighter bombers joined in the attack by bombing and strafing the town. "A" Sqn attempted to reconnoitre a tank route to Farolfi where it would be possible to fire on Tossignano from the south-east. They concluded, however, that it would take from four to six weeks to prepare a track for use by tanks. (Ibid, 18 Dec 44). "C" Sqn meanwhile endeavoured without success to find a route around the blown bridge (at 075233). To assist them the engineers proceeded with a plan to put a Plymouth bridge over the gap. Further reconnaissance, however, revealed the possibility of waterproofing the tanks up to the turret rings and using the river bed of the rather shallow Santerno River. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 22 Dec 44)

72. While these operations against Tossignano were continuing, the success of Eighth Army's attack on the right was beginning to influence operations on the 78 Div front. The New Zealanders had cleared Faenza and had moved up to the Senio River. Should the Poles succeed in crossing the river south of Faenza the enemy in Tossignano would be in a precarious position and would undoubtedly pull back his exposed flank. Thus for a moment there was a lull in planning and preparations for a further advance on the 13 Corps front, and the troops involved in the operations against Tossignano were placed on ten days' notice for the attack. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 21 Dec 44). 12 Cdn Armd Regt, however, threw itself with vigour into Christmas preparations. With the ground frozen hard underfoot and the mountains decked in a clean blanket of snow, December 25th was such a Christmas as might have been experienced in Canada. All ranks of the unit did full justice to a very ample Christmas dinner. The whole proceedings were in direct contrast to the previous Christmas, which 12 Cdn Armd Regt had spent battling in the streets of Ortona. (Ibid, 25 Dec 44)

THE FINAL PERIOD IN ITALY (1 JAN - 6 MAR 45)

73. The end of the year found 11 and 12 Cdn Armd Regts still committed, although in an inactive role, with 14 Cdn Armd Regt concentrated in the area of S. Donato (near Florence)

beginning an intensive period of training and maintenance. This situation was in direct contrast to that of a year earlier when two regiments of the brigade had been heavily committed in the Ortona sector with 1 Cdn Inf Div while the third had just completed the hectic battle of the Moro River and the capture of San Leonardo. During the twelve months' period the brigade had had at least one regiment committed continuously with the exception of a seven-day break at Aquino and a five-day interval during the pursuit to Lake Trasimene. Since the Gothic defences had been broken in mid-September, operations had been heart-breakingly slow; the terrain and weather conditions made normal tank warfare impossible, although frequent artillery shoots were carried out under the direction of the C.R.A. of the respective infantry divisions. As the year closed, the move of 14 Cdn Armd Regt to its concentration area south of Florence marked the beginning of the end of the Brigade's work in the Apennines. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 31 Dec 44). The 13 Corps sector continued into the New Year in the stalemate condition which then prevailed throughout the entire Italian theatre of operations. Plans had been underway for an attack to be launched by 2 Polish Corps of Eighth Army and 17 Ind Bde of 13 Corps in conjunction with an offensive further west by II U.S. Corps. The latter Corps, however, was considered under strength for a major offensive and Eighth Army was in the process of diverting troops to Greece. Thus the 13 Corps attack was temporarily cancelled. (Ibid, 30 Dec 44)

74. On 2 Jan 45 the Bde Comd called a conference of regimental commanders to discuss the training programme to be organized by the 14th Regt, which was to include a Brigade Reconnaissance and N.C.Os.' School. It was assumed that the spring offensive would see an armoured break-through. Winter training was therefore to stress tank and reconnaissance tactics in which armour played the "solo" part. (Ibid, 2 Jan 45). 12 Cdn Armd Regt at this time had "A" and "C" Sqns in support of 6 Brit Armd Div, while the regiment itself and "B" Sqn were under command 78 Div (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 1 Jan 45). The enemy was now using in this area a new type of rocket which he called the "V-2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Personnel of 12 Cdn Armd Regt reported that during flight this rocket gave off a trail of fire at the rear which at night made it appear as a shooting meteor, and that on landing the blast was comparable to that of an enemy 105-mm shell. Although there were no casualties suffered by the regiment as a result of the employment of this rocket, its use in laying a barrage was reported to have a considerable effect on morale (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 4 Jan 45). On 5 Jan 12 Cdn Armd Regt began to move nine more 75-mm Sherman tanks to Firenzuola from Castel del Rio to proceed to 25 Cdn Armd Del Regt, east of Borgo S. Lorenzo, where they were replaced by 17-pr Shermans. On 6 Jan the regiment experienced heavy enemy shelling in the Fontanelice area. Some damage but no casualties resulted. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 6 Jan 45)

75. Early in January 1 Cdn Armd Bde learned through 13 Corps H.Q. of the intentions for 1 Cdn Corps. Although 1 Cdn Armd Bde was not, of course, directly concerned in these plans, they were considered to provide some indication of the future of Canadian operations in the Italian theatre. It had been decided at 15 Army Group that the line as it was at this time would be the Winter Line for 1944 - 45 in Italy and that it was to be held with the minimum of troops. Consequently an Italian Division (the Cremona Group) was to take over a considerable portion of 1 Cdn Corps' front in conjunction with 9 Armd Bde, who were to be employed as infantry. This disposition would allow 5 Cdn Armd Div a six-week training and rest period, after which 1 Cdn Div was to be relieved by the armoured division, in order that it might have a similar period of training and rest. On the

following day further plans were received in conjunction with the general thinning out of the Winter Line. 1 Brit Div received orders to the effect that 85 U.S. Div would relieve them about 17 Jan. The British division was now to go to the Middle East for a period of rest and training. At the same time 11 Cdn Armd Regt was warned that it would be moved back to concentrate on Ronta. This was particularly good news to the crews of the 11th who had spent most of the past two months on M. Grande. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 9 Jan 44)

76. It was also learned that only two divisions would remain in the line of the 13 Corps sector after 17 Jan. This was the smallest number of troops that 13 Corps had committed since 1943. Only one regiment of 1 Cdn Armd Bde - the 12th, would be involved. 11 Cdn Armd Regt meanwhile would remain under command 1 Brit Div until 17 Jan. Three days later they were to be relieved by American crews and would be moved back to concentration area at Ronta. The Brigade N.C.Os.' School began instruction and preparations were continued in the establishment of the Brigade Reconnaissance School. Several unit schools were also started, including a Regimental Gunnery School operated by 12 Cdn Armd Regt in the Castel del Rio area. Seven-day leaves in Florence and Rome began again; it was intended to send all personnel of the brigade on one seven-day leave before 1 Apr. 14 Cdn Armd Regt, the only regiment in reserve, was the first to take advantage of this privilege. (Ibid, 10 Jan 45)

77. On 12 Jan permission was granted by 13 Corps to allow part of 12 Cdn Armd Regt to be withdrawn from the line and concentrated north of Borgo S. Lorenzo (Ibid, 12 Jan 45). Meanwhile nine tanks of 12 Cdn Armd Regt that had started from Firenzuola on 13 Jan destined for Cdn Armd Del Regt ran into difficulties on Route 65. Bad weather conditions producing snow and very slippery roads prevented all but two of the tanks from reaching their destination under their own power. Recovery efforts lasting five days were required to enable the remaining tanks to proceed on their way. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 13 Jan 45 ff). Supply problems also increased with further snowfalls. Roads above Castel del Rio were restricted to jeeps only and it was necessary to make greater use of skis, snowshoes and sledges (Ibid). By now there were four inches of snow in the Sieve Valley and in the maintenance areas the depth was two to three feet in many places. It was still possible to supply 11 Cdn Armd Regt on M. Grande by jeep and mule trains, but the tanks of the 12 Cdn Armd Regt at Gesso and Sassaleone were being supplied by ski and snowshoe teams. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 23 Jan 45). U.S. Forces relieved ten crews of "C" Sqn 11 Cdn Armd Regt on 15 Jan. The relief of eight tanks of 11 Cdn Armd Regt located in 1 Brit Div gun-lines had to be postponed because of the difficulties of travel down Route 65. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 13 Jan 45)

78. During the first two weeks of January 13 Corps and 1 Cdn Armd Bde had one of the quietest periods in the line they had yet experienced. On 17 Jan command of 1 Brit Div sector passed to 85 U.S. Div, and the following day 13 Corps reverted to under command Eighth Army for operations, although it remained under command Fifth Army for administration (Ibid, 18 Jan 45). 78 Brit Div and 6 Armd Div continued in the line meanwhile with "B" Sqn and half of "C" Sqn of 12 Cdn Armd Regt in support of the former, and the other half of "C" Sqn supporting the latter. Thus 12 Cdn Armd Regt, in a counter-attack role with 78 and 6 Brit Armd Div, was the only regiment of the brigade committed. It was planned to have 12 Cdn Armd Regt relieved in their forward sector, but difficulties arose owing to the request of 78 Div to keep at least a squadron and a half of tanks in support. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 20 Jan 45). As part of the general regrouping 11 Cdn Armd Regt returned under command 1 Cdn Armd Bde after a period of four months with 1 Brit Inf Div. (Ibid, 21 Jan 45)

79. On 23 Jan 1 Cdn Armd Bde learned something more of its future commitments; it was to move to the Adriatic coast, where it would come directly under command Eighth Army. There was an understandable reluctance to make the move due to the fact that all units were now under cover and reasonably comfortable. This would be the second time that the brigade crossed the Apennines, the previous move having been from the Ortona sector to the Volturmo sector prior to the Gari River crossing. The usual crop of rumours immediately followed the announcement of the transfer and the brigade diary observed:

Needless to say everyone hoped that the Brigade would be spared the shameful fate of being drawn out of its tanks and put in as infantry. Such a peculiar and unfortunate fate had occurred to other armoured formations and in such a static situation it was more than just possible that it could happen to 1 Cdn Armd Bde, in view of the lack of fresh infantry in the Senio River line.

(Ibid, 23 Jan 45)

80. On the night 23/24 Jan 11 Cdn Armd Regt began to move its tanks out of the M. Grande sector. The tanks moved in blocks of four each, and always by night. Because of the slippery roads and steep gradients on the route to Ronta, the regiment was issued with 340 "Platipus Grousers", which were attached to the tracks - approximately one to every fifth pad in the track - to provide greater traction. Recovery arrangements were also planned, as considerable difficulty was expected in moving tanks across the Apennines under such unfavourable conditions. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 21 Jan 45). At first they were unable to get beyond a steep gradient just north of Sassoleone. Grousers were attached to the tracks, however, and two tanks at a time were able to surmount the obstacle. It was estimated that eight tanks per day could be brought out to Route 65 at this rate. It took four days to complete the move of the first eight vehicles. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 24 Jan 45). "B" Sqn were greatly aided in their trek by friendly and unsolicited help from U.S. Army personnel with their large and powerful 10-wheel tow-trucks. These trucks helped "B" Sqn tanks over some 20 miles of icy and treacherous roads (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 24 Jan 45).

81. On 24 Jan, it was learned that 14 Cdn Armd Regt would be the first to depart and upon arrival would come under command 5 Corps. It was anticipated that they would leave very shortly and that their tanks would probably make most of the trip by train; it was also learned that the whole brigade would not be long in following the 14th Regt, which meant a speed up in plans to get all the forward tanks down into the Senio River area. (Ibid, 24 Jan 45) The proposed move made it necessary, of course, to cancel the Brigade schools, the seven-day leaves and the university courses at Florence. On 26 Jan, 14 Cdn Armd Regt began the first stage of its move to the Adriatic sector. The tanks began to assemble initially at Arezzo from where they proceeded by train to Jesi for transfer to tank transporters which would take them to their new area north of Faenza. The flat cars provided to carry the 14 Cdn Armd Regt tanks were not all that could be desired, and methods of shackling tanks when they were on the cars appeared to be inadequate. Most of the tanks had only railway ties placed in front and rear to hold them on. Because of a shortage of cars and trains allotted some tanks had to be back-loaded and sent with the first train load of 11 Cdn Armd Regt vehicles. The 14 Cdn Armd Regt wheeled vehicles left San Donato on 29 Jan to proceed to Dicomano and then along Route 67 over the difficult mountain

roads to their staging area in Forli. (W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 29 Jan 45). It had been expected that the regiment would, upon arrival, go straight into the line in the 56 Div area of 5 Corps. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 25 Jan 45)

It soon became obvious, however, that 56 Div and the Bays, [Queen's Bays (2nd Dragoon Guards)] which later we were to relieve, viewed the situation with little urgency. Timing at this end did not envisage a relief until the 5th Feb, and commitment itself involved no more than a holding role along the SENIO ... The quality of anti-climax grew into the entire operation, and the future became one not of great events, but of passive commitment along a Winter line such as the regiment had known a year ago in CASTEL FRENTANO.

(W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt,
26 Jan 45)

The regiment passed to under command 5 Corps on 1 Feb and remained temporarily in the Prada area, nine miles north of Forli (Ibid, 1 Feb 45).

82. Meanwhile tanks of both 11 and 12 Cdn Armd Regts continued the slow progress of shaking themselves loose from the land of snow, ice, mud and mountains. On 26 Jan a party from 1 Cdn Armd Bde H.Q. left for the new area to make all necessary "Q" arrangements for the Brigade. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 26 Jan 45). 11 and 12 Cdn Armd Regts turned in all their 17-pr Shermans and half their 105-mm (three each) to Cdn Armd Del Regt. As noted above, 14 Cdn Armd Regt took their tanks with them. (Ibid, 27 Jan 45)

83. H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde was notified on 28 Jan that, due to overcrowding at Perugia, Foligno would have to be used as a staging area. On the following day the brigade learned further details concerning its immediate future. 1 Cdn Armd Bde less 14 Cdn Armd Regt was to move on 31 Jan to Porto S. Giorgio (X8298) for rest and training. The intention was to have the brigade available in the Adriatic sector for a spring offensive and to eliminate the difficult task of crossing the mountains in the early spring. The brigade was expected to move forward into the line to take up a holding role under command 5 Corps some time in March. In the meantime it would come under 10 Corps for administration, but would be under Eighth Army for operations. 14 Cdn Armd Regt meanwhile would continue to serve with 56 Inf Div in a holding and counter-attack role in the Faenza area.

84. On 31 Jan all unit tank parties (less 1 Cdn Armd Bde Wksp) got away to Foligno and 11 Cdn Armd Regt started shipping its tanks. Wheeled vehicles took the route: Dicomano - Pontassieve - Arezzo - Perugia - staging area Tolentino - D.P. (S807056) - Porto S. Giorgio. Tanks went on transporters from Rugina (R9874) down Route 65 to Florence and thence to Arezzo. All tanks would be unloaded at Jesi, where it was hoped transporters would be available to take them to Porto S. Giorgio. Eight recovery posts were set up by the Brigade Workshop and the Recovery Section, and all British recovery posts en route were at brigade disposal. The Tank Troops Workshop would be the last unit to leave. (Ibid, 29 Jan 45)

85. On 1 Feb 1 Cdn Armd Bde Wksp started the first leg of its journey to the Adriatic coast, stopping to stage at Perugia. 11 Cdn Armd Regt sent more tanks to Arezzo to be shipped by rail

* 1 Cdn Armd Bde Order of Battle for 1 Jan 45 includes 1 Cdn Armd Bde Wksp R.C.O.C., 1 Cdn Tk Tps Wksp R.C.O.C., and 1 Cdn Hy Rec Sec R.C.O.C. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, January 1945)

while its wheeled convoy prepared to move on 2 Feb. It was decided on 3 Feb that six immovable tanks of 12 Cdn Armd Regt would have to be left in the forward area. The crews of these tanks plus crews of the four American tanks manned by 12 Cdn Armd Regt personnel were to be relieved on the night of 6/7 Feb. The remaining tanks in the forward area were to come down to the Grezzano area on the same night. 1 Cdn Armd Bde learned with pleasure on 3 Feb that 98 Fd Regt R.A. would accompany the brigade on the move to the Adriatic. As the war diary observed, they had come to look upon the 98 Fd as "the 4th Regt in the Bde". (Ibid, 3 Feb 45)

86. On 4 Feb H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde received news of drastic changes in plans. H.Q. was completely packed and ready to move off on the morning of 5 Feb, when the B.G.S. 13 Corps informed the Brigade Commander that the entire move of his brigade was cancelled. A few members of 11 Cdn Armd Regt were to complete their move, which would leave 11 Cdn Armd Regt and Bde Wksp in the Porto S. Giorgio area, while the remainder of the brigade, less 14 Cdn Armd Regt, would remain in the Borgo S. Lorenzo area. This change of plans succeeded in splitting the brigade more completely than ever before in its chequered history and gave every indication of providing innumerable problems of supply, administration and intercommunication (Ibid, 4 Feb 45). Liaison trips to 14 Cdn Armd Regt were to be carried out every second day and trips to 11 Cdn Armd Regt every third day. The latter excursion necessitated a two-day journey, since the distance to be covered was slightly over 500 miles for the round trip. (Ibid, 5 Feb 45)

87. Meanwhile 14 Cdn Armd Regt continued to plan and prepare for the assault across the Senio River, in which the regiment was to support 56 Inf Div. Regimental Headquarters was established at Prada about eight miles north-east of Faenza. "C" Sqn moved into the line with 169 Inf Bde, which was holding a sector along the east bank of the Senio from a point (508327) straight north of Faenza to just north of Cotignola. "C" Sqn's sector included S. Severo, "a notorious dumping ground for Jerry artillery, mortars and even rockets" (W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 1 Feb 45). The adjacent sector along the river bank towards the north-east was held as far as the Canadian Corps boundary (362380, a point on the Bologna - Ravenna railroad just west of Lugo) by "Reforce", "a heterogeneity of 12 Lancers and 1 Skinners Horse", both acting as infantry backed by supporting arms of 56 Div (Ibid, 2 Feb 45). "A" Sqn 14 Cdn Armd Regt moved into "Reforce" area on 2 Feb, to remain there in a semi-static role for the next eighteen days (Ibid, and 20 Feb 45)

88. The first twenty days of February brought new experiences to "a regiment almost convinced Italy had nothing further to offer" (Ibid, 1 Feb 45). The regiment reported several new types of equipment to be employed in the forthcoming assault: a new armoured infantry carrier known as a "Kangaroo" was to be used in the attack on Cotignola; an infra-red light ray known as a "Toby" was to be tried out by the infantry in a night river crossing. It was expected that the "Toby" would illuminate at night up to 30 yards without betraying the presence of the user to the enemy. The "Weasel", a new amphibious vehicle, was also available for use by assaulting infantry. (Ibid, 6 Feb 45). Royal Engineers parties of 46 Div were given the use of a tank by Regimental Headquarters 14 Cdn Armd Regt to assist in experiments in the use of the Plymouth bridge, (called by the 14 Cdn Armd Regt the "kingmill" bridge after the L.A.D. Officer of the regiment) which had been used most successfully during the Gari River crossing. (Ibid, 9 Feb 45; and W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 6 Feb 45). "A" and "C" Sqns 14 Cdn Armd Regt continued to have elements in the F.D.Ls. Shelling was very light, but

heavy Spandau fire forced the crews to remain in their tanks most of the time. On 14 Feb, "C" Sqn made "excursions" close to the east bank of the Senio River and blasted enemy F.D.Ls. with 75-mm H.E. and Browning fire. These excursions involved only one troop at a time who pulled back into their forward positions when their task was completed. (Ibid, 14 Feb 45). The crossing of the Senio had been put off until the enemy should have completed thinning out his divisions in Italy, and the 14th was notified that ten days' notice for the operation would be given. (Ibid, 7 Feb 45)

89. On 11 Feb the Bde Comd left Brigade Headquarters at Borgo S. Lorenzo with a party of officers on a mission of utmost secrecy. It was not until his return on 15 Feb that it was learned that they had attended a conference in Rome. (Ibid, 15 Feb 45). Under a cloak of great secrecy all the tanks of 12 Cdn Armd Regt moved from their harbour and proceeded by transporter to a staging area just south of Florence (Ibid). On 18 Feb all heads of the brigade services and officers of Brigade Headquarters attended an "O" Group conducted by the Brigade Commander. The war diary records the contents of Brigadier Murphy's message and the reaction of the assembled officers:

The Brigadier's opening remarks produced quite an effect on the assembled group of Officers as he outlined what could best be said in two words - "McNaughton's Dream". He announced very calmly that 1 Cdn Corps and 1 Cdn Armd Bde were leaving Italy to join their brothers in arms - 1 Cdn Army. The move was expected to take place very soon - the tentative date being around the first of March and the Brigade would be taking with them their "fourth" Regt, the 98 Field. This news was received with mixed emotions due mainly to the fact that it came as a complete surprise to most and that it involved such a tremendous undertaking. Thoughts of such a scheme had always run high in this Brigade but they were always dimmed by the presence of many obstacles which stood in the way. It was always hoped that it could happen but never thought that it would happen. Now, however, that such a drastic change in strategy had come about and the re-union after nearly two years with our own people was to become an actuality it seemed to leave one in a daze, still wondering if it could be true or not.

(Ibid, 18 Feb 45)

90. Details of the move were then outlined. 14 and 11 Cdn Armd Regts (plus Bde Wksp) would move under arrangements of 5 and 10 Corps respectively, leaving the remainder of the units to move under brigade arrangements. The point of embarkation was to be Leghorn, from where the brigade would sail to Marseilles. The strictest of security measures were taken. An extensive cover plan had been devised and plans were announced for the removal of all flashes and hat badges and erasing of all vehicle identification marks. All ranks would be confined to barracks once they reached transit camp HARRODS in the vicinity of Leghorn. 12 Cdn Armd Regt's tanks had already gone to the S. Donato, staging area south of Florence on the night of 15 Feb and were now at Leghorn. 14 Cdn Armd Regt would withdraw from the line in 56 Div sector. Their relief was due to be completed on 20 Feb 45. (Ibid, 18 Feb 45)

91. On 26 Feb Brigade Headquarters, 11 Cdn Armd Regt and Bde Sigs arrived at HARRODS camp five miles north of Leghorn. All ranks were strictly confined to camp and the following day were notified of their impending destination. The news was

received with enthusiasm. Good refreshment and recreational facilities were made available within the staging area, with picture shows and other entertainments provided each evening. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 27 Feb 45). An advance party went by air to Brussels on 27 Feb to carry out reconnaissance and make arrangements for the brigade to concentrate in the Menin'Mousseron area in western Belgium. It was reported that the area allotted to 1 Cdn Armd Bde by 21 Army Group had never billeted troops during this war and that the population was most enthusiastic over the prospect of Canadian troops moving into the area. (Ibid, 28 Feb 45)

92. At 0830 hours on 3 Mar the long convoy moved out of HARRODS camp and proceeded to Leghorn docks. The L.S.Ts. were loaded by 1800 hours but remained in harbour for the night. At 2100 hours enemy aircraft attempted a raid on the port of Leghorn but no damage was caused owing to effective anti-aircraft action and the use of a smoke screen. (Ibid, 3 Mar 45). At 0700 hours on 4 Mar the initial L.S.T. convoys weighed anchor and moved out of port in bright and clear weather. By 6 Mar all regiments and units less "A" Sqn 25 Cdn Armd Del Regt and 1 Cdn Asslt Tp, had loaded at Leghorn docks. 98 Fd (S.P.) Regt and the Heavy Recovery Section were the only two units in the brigade that did not load at Leghorn. They moved south to Naples and from there embarked on L.S.Ts. All units, however, debarked at Marseilles. The only casualty suffered in the brigade during the move occurred at sea on the same day. The weather was very rough and on one L.S.T. three tanks broke loose on the lower deck and began to shift from side to side, killing one signaller of 12 Cdn Armd Regt. (Ibid, 6 Mar 45). On 9 Mar the last vehicles of the brigade to be shipped from Leghorn were off-loaded at Marseilles. 98 Fd (S.P.) Regt and the Heavy Recovery Section began on the same day to load at Naples for the sea journey to southern France. (Ibid, 9 Mar 45)

93. 1 Cdn Armd Bde had been among the first troops to land on the mainland of Italy in September 1943. During the ensuing period the brigade had earned a most enviable reputation, with to date the longest period in action of any formation in the Canadian Army Overseas. It was considered by the Eighth Army Commander as being among the hardest striking armoured forces in the Mediterranean theatre. (Ibid, 1 Mar 45). Now, united at last with 1 Cdn Corps, it went to play its part in the final stages of the operations in North-West Europe. To those who had fallen in Italy the Brigade war diary recorded this tribute:

All personnel of the Brigade remembered as they left that in gaining such a record and name, many stalwart and stout-hearted comrades had fallen. They remained in Italy [but were] not forgotten as the Brigade moved on.

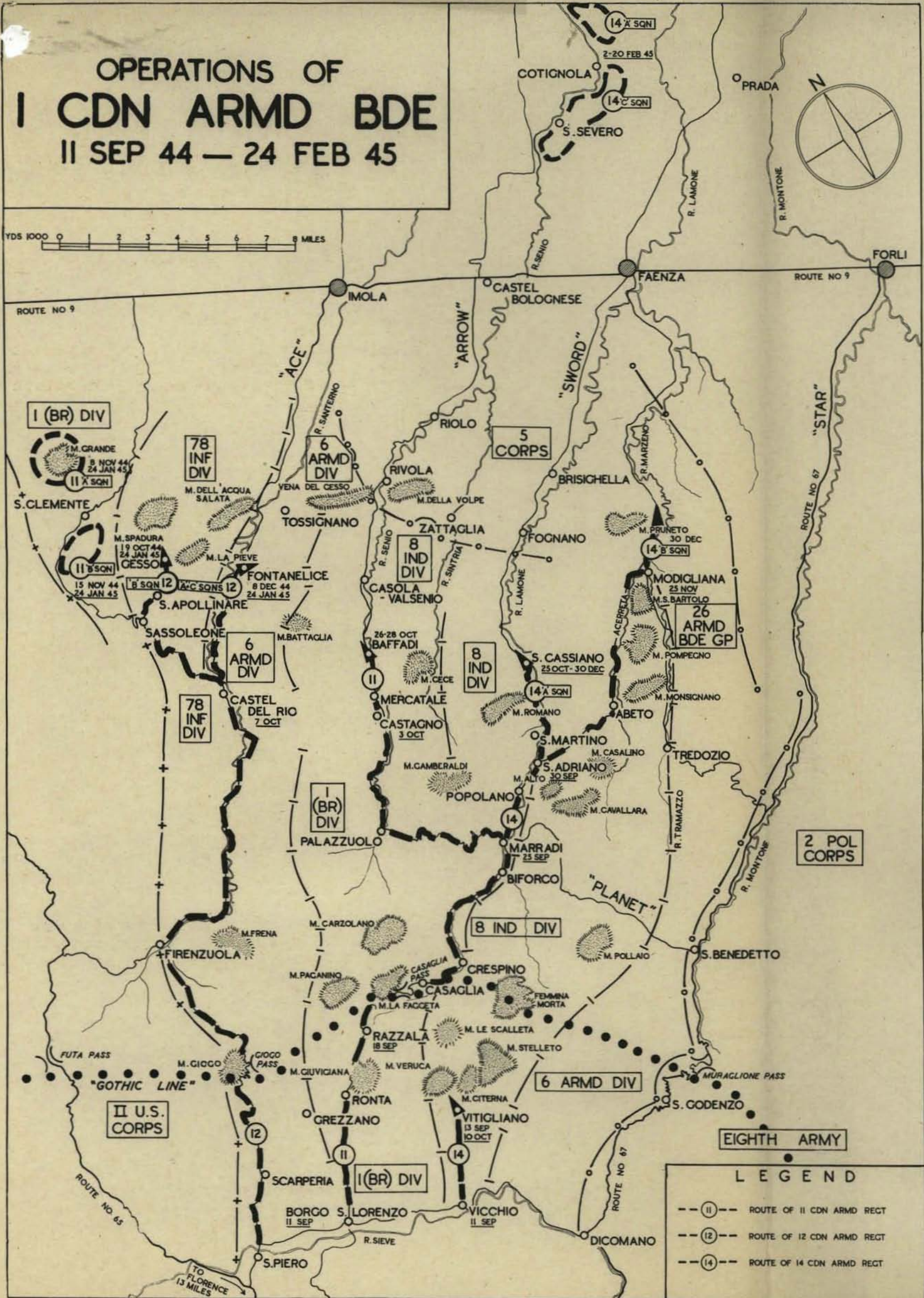
(Ibid)

94. This report was drafted by Captain R.T. McKenzie, Historical Section, Canadian Military Headquarters. It was extensively revised by Major G.W.L. Nicholson.

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for (C.P. Stacey) Colonel
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OPERATIONS OF I CDN ARMD BDE II SEP 44 — 24 FEB 45

YDS 1000 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 MILES



LEGEND

- (11) --- ROUTE OF 11 CDN ARMD RECT
- (12) --- ROUTE OF 12 CDN ARMD RECT
- (14) --- ROUTE OF 14 CDN ARMD RECT