

C O N F I D E N T I A L

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By V NARA Date 3/28

HEADQUARTERS 85TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
Office of the A.C. of S., G-2

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G - 2 REPORT OF ENEMY OPERATIONS

APRIL - 1945

Period 0100B 18 April - 30 April.

As the elements of the Division were committed in the sector north of Vergato (L698256) on 18 April it was known that the enemy to their front consisted of elements of the 8th (formerly the 157th) Mountain Division and the 94th Infantry Division. The breakthrough of the enemy's lines in this sector by other IV Corps troops in badly cutting up the German forces had confused his organization, and no clearly defined order of battle was evident as our troops made their first contacts with the enemy. Elements of these two German divisions were nevertheless discovered to be the chief forces remaining in this sector, and no reinforcements were met with initially.

Our troops advancing in the right half of the Division sector were at first harassed by long range machine gun fire coming from the hills east of the Reno River, but the chief hindrance to the advance was caused by the last of the extensive fields of mines the enemy had laid in the Vergato area. Numerous Schu and Topf mines were found in road craters and in the river bed. Little if any artillery fire was received on the first day. On the left, the resistance was negligible. As was to be expected, the enemy had no air power with which to attack our troops, and the single enemy plane which bombed and strafed Highway 64 near Vergato on the night of 18 April caused no damage.

It was immediately learned through Air OP's and the first prisoners that the enemy was withdrawing to the north in haste. Large numbers of foot troops and some vehicles and artillery were observed crowding the road, and from the 39 prisoners taken during the first day, some of them stragglers, it was learned that all the elements of the 94th Division were withdrawing. The assembly point for many of them was reported to be Boora (L739357) where there was to be some attempt to reorganize, but a large part of these were cut off and captured by troops moving in from the west. Enemy convoys and columns were taken under fire by our artillery, and our infantry continued to advance, discovering several spiked guns the enemy had left behind.

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Field kitchens were found with the food in the pot still warm; bakeries with warm fresh bread, and a hospital fully equipped and staffed. A relatively small part of the equipment was wrecked by the enemy so that we and the Italians could make no use of it.

Thousands of the troops were trapped. Some lost heart in the vain flight, lagged behind, and gave themselves up or were captured. And all the time the enemy was being harassed and hunted out by the Partisans. Many of the enemy were by-passed by our rapidly advancing forces, and might have offered a threat to the speed of the advance. But this threat was largely nullified by the zealous and effective action of the Partisans who scoured the countryside, turning their prisoners over to the Division authorities and collecting and assembling the enemy equipment.

Advancing between the 682 and 643 Eastings the Division reached the Po in the middle of the morning of 23 April. Several villages on the south bank were undefended, but a few snipers were cleared out at other points, and a fire-fight developed at Revere (F7411), opposite Ostiglia. Between Ostiglia (F7412) and San Benedetto Po (F5810), in the sector of the Division on the left, troops from nearly every German Division in Italy had been making desperate efforts to cross the rapid current, in ferries, by swimming, and using the remains of bridges and some temporary bridge equipment. Some of the men drowned in attempting to swim the river, and while many of the troops succeeded in getting across, there was no adequate means of transporting the mass of their heavy equipment. The majority of the troops who escaped towards Verona were now without artillery and retained only a few mortars. The Po itself, in the Division sector, was not defended.

Before 23 April the Division had been taking between two and four hundred prisoners each day. But as the Germans crowded against the Po and were trapped, prisoners were taken by the thousand. During the 24-hour period ending 24 April, 2543 prisoners passed through the Division Cage, and the next day 1791 were taken.

The flight from the defenses north of Bologna in fact signified the collapse of enemy resistance. At first he took to the roads only at night, but since 20 April he had been fleeing in open daylight in defiance of our aircraft. Within the Division sector this did not appear to be a fatal decision, since there was comparatively little evidence of enemy losses due to air attack.

The remnants of the enemy were now heading for Verona (F6554) and the Alps. Troops of the Division, crossing the Po first on the morning of 24 April, met no resistance, and in the pursuit found it difficult to maintain contact with the enemy. Several of the groups of enemy now overtaken had received orders to occupy positions on the elaborate Adige River Defenses beyond Verona.



But as the retreat continued it became apparent that even this line of defenses could not be manned. From 23 to 26 April the enemy offered only occasional, scattered resistance. Verona itself, which the Division entered on 26 April was defended only by a few small groups. Improvising hasty methods of crossing the Adige our troops immediately advanced into the foothills of the Alps, quickly cutting the undefended Adige Line and the important highways leading into Verona from the east and west. The enemy was now heading into the mountains and towards the Brenner Pass, and while large numbers of prisoners were being taken there was still no sign of an organized line of resistance, and every sign of nearly complete confusion. On 26-27 April prisoners were taken from the 65th, 94th, 148th, 155th, 278th, 305th, 334th, 362nd, and the Brandenburg Infantry Divisions; the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions; the 26th Panzer Division; the 8th Mountain Division; and the 1st and 4th Parachute Divisions.

Continuing north of Verona beyond the Adige our forces found no other enemy defense lines. Scattered groups of prisoners were taken as motorized patrols and task forces moved into the mountains. The enemy had abandoned Grezzana (F673634), a few hours ahead of our arrival. Farther north the enemy was reported to be in a somewhat better state of organization, and some SS troops were known to be still in this locality on their way to the north. But Erbezzo (F664766), entered by our troops on 28 April, was already free of the enemy. Patrols to Tregnano (F788619), Giazza (F759776), San Bonifacio (F865485) and Nogarole (F883668) encountered no enemy in these places. By 30 April our forward troops were patrolling the hills as far as the 80th Northing without discovering any enemy defense organizations. At Monte Castelbarto (F676847) a radio station captured by the Partisans intact was turned over to the Division. In this area the Partisans continued to cooperate and to aid greatly in reporting the location and passing of scattered enemy forces. Here even more than in the Po Valley the Partisans succeeded in harassing and cutting off large parts of the German forces, and adding to the confusion and desperation of the rest.

Some of the prisoners now being taken were the discouraged remnants of labor battalions. One group, which gave itself up, consisted of 239 Yugo-Slavs, many of them no more than 15 years old, and a few Germans and Austrians between 45 and 60 years old. On 28 April the entire Battalion Engst, captured through a ruse of the Partisans, was turned in to the Division near Fumane (F563662). A Brigadier General and a Colonel of Czech labor battalions that had been engaged in working on the railroad between Verona and the Brenner pass surrendered themselves and their staffs. Two of their battalions also fell into our hands. Other prisoners were taken from a great variety of units - assault battalions, alarm companies, truck companies, anti-aircraft battalions, tank battalions, bridge companies, sabotage units, railroad units, assault gun brigades, reconnaissance battalions, hospital units, Nebelwerfer regiments, and the Todt Organization. Sever women military personnel were also captured. Troops of many nationalities were represented - Czechs, Yugo-Slavs, Turks, Poles, Russians, Albanians, Austrians and Italians.

At the end of the month the enemy was still retreating north.



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only in time to begin what was to be a continuous retreat. Supply and anti-aircraft units were drawn on to form an Alarm Company to support remnants of the 94th Division. Troops of the I Battalion, 276th Grenadier Regiment were pulled out of their retreating unit to reorganize and establish delaying positions, but were captured before they could dig in. Members of the 1057th Field Replacement Battalion (8th Mountain Division) and the 194th Anti-Tank Battalion (supporting the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division) were captured as they were committed. The I Battalion, 1057th Artillery Regiment was captured in its entirety, with guns intact. From noon to noon 20-21 April 465 prisoners passed through the Division cage. In addition to his loss in prisoners, the enemy's casualties in the first days of the offensive had undoubtedly been heavy. The total losses were irreparable.

The retreat degenerated into greater and greater confusion. As he fled towards the Panaro River and the defenses there he would not be able to man, the enemy put up only perfunctory resistance to the forces driving on his heels. Patrols into Budrie (L766594) captured a few Germans and Italian Fascists who were still resisting, and a small counterattack in the vicinity of the Torrente Samoggia was repulsed. In by-passing San Giovanni in Persiceto (L7664) some small arms and anti-tank fire was received, but the advance on Santa Agata Bolognese (L7267) met no resistance. Two 17cm guns which until recently had been firing from this town had already been removed.

The enemy's defense positions along the Panaro were extensive, but in the failure of any adequate reorganization he made no attempt to man the line and continued his disorderly retreat to the Po. At Camposanto (L7381), however, the stone bridge across the Panaro was prepared for demolition, and the 1097th Security Battalion had been brought from Bologna to reinforce some other troops there and to prevent our crossing at this point. Our troops saved the bridge by cutting the wires to the demolition charges, but before they were able to secure the bridge they met the first determined resistance they had encountered since Casalrecchio. The enemy resisted with small arms and machine guns, and three tanks, including two Tiger Tanks. Some light artillery and anti-aircraft fire also supported his defense of this area. This resistance was overcome on 22 April, and elsewhere our troops crossed the Panaro unopposed.

Prisoners were now being taken from the units who were retreating from the last of the Appennines defenses north of Bologna, which had fallen on 21 April. Some of their units had been nearly destroyed, but others retained a degree of organization. Prisoners were taken from the 65th, 114th, the 232nd, and 305th Infantry Divisions and the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division. As the enemy forces fled north to cross the Po the units became intermingled. The bridges across the river had long since been destroyed by the Allied bombing of the previous months, and in the search for crossing points, hurrying down the thick net work of roads, many of the troops became separated from their units. On foot, in motor and horse-drawn vehicles, and on bicycles, the retreat degenerated into a scramble. When vehicles ran out of gasoline they were abandoned, more often than not in good condition. Wagons were ditched, the horses left free to run in the fields. Tanks and SP guns which could not be carried across the river were left in the roads.

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By noon of 1 May 8563 prisoners captured by the Division passed through the Division Cage. 94 prisoners captured by the 1st Armored Division also passed through this cage. In addition, 300 prisoners taken by the Division were evacuated through the cage of the 10th Mountain Division, and 926 were evacuated directly to the Fifth Army Cage. 163 prisoners were captured in the German hospital at Quistello (F624065). In all the Division was responsible for the capture of 9952 prisoners during the period.

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