

NOTE

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H I S T O R I C A L S E C T I O N ( G . S . )  
A R M Y H E A D Q U A R T E R S

21 Oct 52

Operations of 1 Cdn Armd Bde in Italy,  
4 Jan 44 to 11 May 44

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MAP

“A” Map, “Operations and Moves, 1 Cdn Armd Bde  
1 Nov 43 to 11 May 43”.

R E P O R T NO. 55

HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)

ARMY HEADQUARTERS

21 Oct 52

Operations of 1 Cdn Armd Bde in Italy,  
5 Jan 44 to 11 May 44

1. The purpose of this report is to bridge the gap between C.M.H.Q. Reports [No. 165](#) and [No. 158](#)<sup>1</sup>. It will deal principally with the activities of the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade,<sup>2</sup> beginning with a period of training and reorganization in January 1944 and continuing up to, but not including, the operations leading to the capture of Rome.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that, to some degree this report overlaps C.M.H.Q. [Report No. 178](#), which deals with Canadian operations in Italy, 5 Jan - 2 Apr 44 but which gives little information on the activities of 1 Cdn Armd Bde.

2. This report will begin with a brief résumé of events which took place during the last two months of 1943. The first part of November found 1 Cdn Armd Bde at rest in the Campobasso area except for 12 Cdn Armd Regt (Three Rivers Regiment), which was operating under the command of 5 (Brit) Inf Div and supporting 13 (Brit) Inf Bde in an attack on Cantalupo (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, November 1943). As late as 13 Nov 43 it appeared that the units in the Brigade concentration area would be free of operations for several weeks and this period was to be used for training (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, November 1943: Appx 57, Training Directive No. 2, 13 Nov 43).

3. A clear picture of activities during this period is given by the war diary of 14 Cdn Armd Regt (The Calgary Regiment). The quiet period permitted maintenance and training

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<sup>1</sup> Hist Sec, C.M.H.Q. [Report No. 165](#), Operations of 1 Cdn Inf Div and 1 Cdn Armd Bde in Italy, 25 Nov 43 - 4 Jan 44, and Hist Sec, C.M.H.Q., [Report No. 158](#), Operations of 1 Cdn Armd Bde in Italy, May 1944 to February 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Originally known as "1st Canadian Army Tank Brigade". This formation became the "1st Canadian Armoured Brigade" in December 1943. Accordingly, the abbreviation of "1 Cdn Armd Bde" will be used throughout this report, as will the name "Canadian Armoured Regiment" in lieu of "Canadian Army Tank Regiment", also an original designation.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix "A" to this report for "Rome" and other place names used throughout..

programmes to be undertaken. The welfare of the men was not overlooked either, for entertainment and leave were now available (W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, November 1943). Another important feature of the Brigade's activities was the preparation of winter quarters. Reconnaissance for suitable quarters was made and the occupying of these quarters actually begun. In fact the Calgary Regiment had completed its move to winter quarters at S. Giuliano by 20 Nov 43. But on 14 Nov 43 H.Q. 13 Corps ordered 1 Cdn Armd Bde, less 12 Cdn Armd Regt, to move to the area west of Termoli with a view to assisting in operations along the Adriatic coast (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, November 1943: Appx 33, 1 Cdn Army Tank Bde Movement Order No. 5, 15 Nov 43).

4. It was felt that the mountainous country and winter conditions were making tank operations almost impossible on 13 Corps front, but that on 5 Corps front, in the Adriatic Sector, terrain and climate would allow the employment of larger tank forces (274 C1.013 (D4) OPS: Weekly Reports to Comd 1 Cdn Corps, Lt-Gen H.D.G. Crerar form Brig R.A. Wyman Comd 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 29 Nov 43 to 2 Jan 44). Thus it was that, beginning in mid-November 1943, the Brigade began its short but arduous trek from the Campobasso area, leaving 13 Corps and coming under command of 5 Corps, then engaged in establishing a bridgehead across the Sangro River. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 14 - 18 Nov 43)

5. The operations of the Eighth Army (of which 1 Cdn Armd Bde was a part) during December 1943 were characterized by a continual modification of plans: time schedules became more flexible and the bounds of the various phases had to be reduced. An excerpt from an operation order reads, "for all phases tanks will be used where possible but alternative plans will be made so that the launching of various phases is not dependent upon their employment". ((H.S.) 952.013 (D45C) Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Part 1, Section B, Apx "E"-9, 5 Corps Operation Order No. 5, 24 Nov 43). On 7 Dec 43 1 Cdn Armd Bde relieved 4 (Brit) Armd Bde and came under command 1 Cdn Inf Div. During the remainder of the month the Canadian armour supported units of 1 Cdn Inf Div, which forced a crossing of the Moro River, captured San Leonardo, Casa Berardi and then Ortona. The final note for December was sounded at an "O" Group held at H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div on 31 Dec: the division was to push on to the Arielli River and remain there for one month; no major effort was to be made for one month to allow for reorganization, training and administrative build-up (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 31 Dec 43).

#### POST-OFFENSIVE PHASE - ADRIATIC SECTOR JANUARY-APRIL 1944

6. Beset by bad weather and suffering considerable casualties inflicted by a determined enemy, the main Eighth Army offensive on the Adriatic front came to a halt at the end of 1943. Thereafter, local actions were fought from time to time to improve defensive positions and to maintain the initiative in No Man's Land. The Army Commander, General Sir Oliver W.H. Leese, planned to prepare his army for a late winter offensive and also to keep as

many of the enemy as possible held down, away from the Fifth Army front. Operations of British...Forces in Italy, Part 1, Section B, Ch XVI, paras 1, 2, 14, 20 and 33)

7. Within the framework of this overall plan 1 Cdn Armd Bde was employed in a counter-attack role. On 7 Jan 44 the Brigade Headquarters and its regiments were under command 1 Cdn Inf Div. A detachment of 11 Cdn Armd Regt (The Ontario Regiment) was committed to holding Point 59 (Torre Mucchia( north of Ortona; 12 Cdn Armd Regt was established in the Ortona area, occupied in maintenance and scheduled to dispatch a squadron to 3 Cdn Inf Bde for infantry-cum-tank training. 14 Cdn Armd Regt, harboured in the S. Leonardo area, also commenced a comprehensive training programme (W.Ds., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 11, 12 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts, 1-4 Jan 44). 1 Cdn Armd Bde drew up a schedule to cover training in infantry-tank cooperation. For this purpose 11 Cdn Armd Regt was to train with 3 Cdn Inf Bde, 12 Cdn Armd Regt with 2 Cdn Inf Bde and 14 Cdn Armd Regt with 1 Cdn Inf Bde. However operational necessity did not allow for the implementing of this plan and the Brigade was obliged to supply armoured support for 1 Cdn Inf Div, 8 Ind Div, and 5 Brit Inf Div on an “as required” basis (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 4-8 Jan 44). In spite of changes, cancellations and postponements of plans the armoured regiments’ maintenance, training<sup>4</sup> and rest<sup>5</sup> continued as far as was practicable. “B” Sqn of The Ontario Regiment remained at Point 59, “A” and “C” Sqns moved back to rest and refit on 9 Jan 44. Meanwhile, 14 Cdn Armd Regt moved from the San Leonardo area to Villa Jubati to assume a defensive role under the command of 8 Ind Div. The regiment attempted a local shoot in the Casa Vezzani area, MR 2912, on 12 Jan, but this proved unsuccessful and resulted in the first tank casualty since the fighting at San Leonardo. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 8 Jan 44 and W.D., 14 Cdn Armd Regt, 8-13 Jan 44)

8. Participating in the reduced scale of fighting 1 Cdn Inf Bde in “The Arielli Show” in mid-January (17 Jan 44) and again shared with The Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment in an attack along the Villa Grande-Tollo Road, 30-21 Jan 44. These activities are described in C.M.H.Q. [Report No. 178](#), Canadian Operations in Italy, 5 Jun - 21 Apr 44, paras 6-43.

9. Concurrently with other activities, reorganization was carried out and in January there came a change which affected the whole of 1 Cdn Armd Bde. On 21 Jan 1 Cdn Armd Bde Operation Order No. 1 stated, “1 Cdn Armd Bde will provide tank support to 1 Cdn Div and 8 Ind Div of 5 Corps and 4 Ind Div of 13 Corps”; the Brigade war diary added:

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<sup>4</sup> For example 12 Cdn Armd Regt despatched Lt. E. Hodson to The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada to lecture on armoured tactics (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 8 Jan 44).

<sup>5</sup> Recreational facilities were established in the San Vito area, similar to those previously organized at Campobasso, where 48-hr leave parties could rest (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 8 Jan 44).

It has now become necessary for the Brigade to supply and administer all tanks operating on the Eighth Army front.

The 4 (Brit) Armd Bde and the NZ Tank Regt have both been withdrawn from the front. Accordingly the Brigade will be divided into two forces.

Operational command and responsibility for administration within the scope of operations, of 1 Cdn Armd Bde (less elements under command 4 Ind Div) will pass to Lt.-Col. C. Neroutsos [O.C., 14 Cdn Armd Regt] with effect 0900 hrs, 22 Jan.

Responsibility for matters of policy and general administration will remain vested in Brig. R.A. Wyman, E.D. (the Bde Comd).

(W.D., HQ 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 21 Jan 44)

10. The two headquarters commanded by Brig Wyman and Lt.-Col. Neroutsos then became known, respectively, as Tac I H.Q. and Tac II H.Q. The latter, which included command of 12 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts plus a portion<sup>6</sup> of the original brigade Tac H.Q., was placed under command 5 Corps. The remainder of Tac H.Q. Staff and administrative personnel together with 2 and 11 Cdn Armd Regts came under command 13 Corps in the Lanciano area. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, January 1944: Appx 82, 1 Cdn Armd Bde O.O. No. 1, 21 Jan 44)

11. Against a changing background<sup>7</sup> 1 Cdn Armd Bde continued to play a small but important part and was again subjected to a change of command. On 1 Feb Tac I H.Q. of the Brigade came under command 1 Cdn Corps. The Corps made its debut by officially taking over from 5 Brit Corps at midnight 31 Jan/1 Feb when the latter retired into Army Group reserve at Naples. 1 Cdn Corps was then organized as below:

1 CND CORPS

8 IND DIV

1 CDN DIV

U/C

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<sup>6</sup> The G III and L.O. were attached to Tac II H.Q.

<sup>7</sup> This background is fully dealt with in Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Part 1, Section B, Ch XVI.

## 1 CDN ARMD BDE

### 1 AGRA (Brit)

However on 4 Feb Tac I and Tac II H.Qs. of the Brigade became one headquarters again. Main H.Q. 13 Corps then ordered 1 Cdn Armd Bde to come under command 13 Corps on 5 Feb, thus changing places with 5 Cdn Armd Div. Until a complete repositioning could be effected 12 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts continued to operate under command of 1 Cdn Corps and 5 Cdn Armd Div, respectively. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, January - February 1944)

12. During the months of February, March and April 1944 the tempo of 1 Cdn Armd Bde training programme quickened. January had provided a breathing spell although, as has been pointed out, minor engagements and some training did take place. The training programme was at once diverse and intense. It was as diverse as the various phases of battle, for it included gunnery, driving and maintenance, signalling and mine lifting, each with its many aspects. Infantry, armour, artillery, signals personnel, engineers and others were all involved. An examination of the war diaries of the Brigade and its armoured regiments underscores the intensity of the programme undertaken, and the peak intensity was reached at a psychologically appropriate time -- immediately prior to the launching of the assault against the Gustav Line. To build up the desired fighting efficiency the keynote of the training programme was cooperation, especially the cooperation of infantry men and tank men. To this end it was also necessary to call on the services of the artillery and the engineers. The welding of a strongly integrated whole was the more important (and the more interesting) because of the mixed<sup>8</sup> nationalities involved. (All W.Ds., 1 Cdn Armd Bde, February - April 1944)

13. On 7 Feb 8 Ind Div of 13 Corps relieved 5 Cdn Armd Div and 78 (Brit) Inf Div, and was ordered to hold the Corps sector south from 1 Cdn Corps to 2 Pol Corps. The divisional front extended in a north-south arc from east of Crecchio (MR 3010) through the area east of Orsogna, thence west of Casoli to the Maiella Mountains, a distance of about 20 miles. 5 Cdn Armd Div was on the right, 3 Carpathian Division on the left. This front was divided into five sectors, and the 11, 12 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts supported the infantry in three of these sectors (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, February 1944; Appx 38, 13 Corps Operation Order No. 15, 7 Feb 44, and W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, March 1944: Appx 10, 8 Ind Div Res Bde Counter-Attack Scheme No. 1, February 1944). Accordingly, 1 Cdn Armd Bde detailed its regiments in a counter-attack role, stressing the importance of close liaison and detailed reconnaissance, and instructing regimental commanders to arrange for their officers' participation in infantry patrols (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, February 1944: Appx 31, 1 Cdn Armd Bde Operation Order No. 1, 15 Feb 44).

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<sup>8</sup> Canadians, British, Indians, New Zealanders, Poles and South Africans.

14. In addition to their operational duties the armoured regiments prepared to take up training, which initially consisted of “marrying up”<sup>9</sup> with Indian infantry and British artillery. Many liaison trips were made between units and formations to discuss training, which then began in earnest. As has been noted in C.M.H.Q. [Report No. 178](#), “the next twelve weeks in the history of the Canadian military forces in Italy were to be devoid of major action -- weeks of static warfare, reliefs, training and preparations for the great spring assault of the Allied Armies in Italy”. February was marked by daily patrol activity and sporadic shelling, while the administrative build-up continued. Intelligence reports indicated that the Germans were also in a state of reorganization (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 26 Feb 44, and Appx 27, 8 Ind Inf Div Intelligence Summary No. 71, 14 Feb 44).

15. The Ontario Regiment remained in the general area Castelfrentano - Lanciano throughout February. Until about 16 Feb the regiment was employed in a counter-attack role with 17 and 21 Ind Inf Bdes and, therefore, it continued in this role with 6 Para Bn of 2 Ind Para Bde. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 1-16 Feb 44)

16. A highlight of February occurred when the regiment supplied a ski party to take supplies to the snowbound 56 (Brit) Recce Regt. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 6-9 Feb 44). On 19 Feb H.Q. 13 Corps requested that 1 Cdn Armd Bde provide three officers and 50 other ranks to ski with rations to snowbound troops in the Montazolli area (MR 3473) (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, February 1944: Appx 44, A&Q W. D., 19 and 21 Feb 44). The Ontario Regiment responded enthusiastically and within half an hour five officers and 63 other ranks had volunteered, while the Three Rivers Regiment supplied one regimental sergeant major.

17. The ski party moved off from the regimental area near Castelfrentano about 1430 hrs on 19 Feb and arrived at a transit camp in Atessa (MR 3485) by 1700 hrs, where it was outfitted with ski equipment. 13 Corps received additional help next day when 11 Cdn Armd Regt dispatched a cook, a helper and utensils to augment the ski party. On 20 Feb the ski party proceeded to Tornareccio (MR 3481) where a base was set up. Here the party was advised that a squadron of 56 (Brit) Recce Regt was stranded at Colledimezzo (MR 3376), and two other troops at Castiglione (MR 3763). The skiers were then formed into two sections, one of which set out for Colledimezzo. Travelling as far as possible by truck, the section completed the journey on skis without difficulty, each man carrying 50 pounds of food. It was found that the road had been cleared by bulldozers shortly before their arrival. A second party, larger than the first, left for Montazzoli and succeeded in getting all the way through, as the bulldozers had again got through and met the plough that was sent out from the other direction. (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 19-21 and 26 Feb 44, and Appx 30, Report of Canadian Ski

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<sup>9</sup> The expression “marrying up” is used in army parlance to denote the bringing together of different units or arms, and making them one, at least temporarily, for administrative, operational or training purposes.



Detachment; also W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 19-21 Feb 44)

18. 13 Corps requested the continued use of the ski party, which then moved to H.Q. 56 Recce Regt at Castiglione. Next day they proceeded to the Agnone Area (MR 3056). The party was now divided into three sections which were to carry ammunition and LMGs by man-pack and sledges to a Polish recce squadron near Pescopennataro (MR 2465). The round trip for this last relief, a distance of seven kilometers, was completed in less than nine hours. On 24 Feb the ski party prepared to return and, after handing in the ski equipment, they finally arrived back in the regimental lines on 26 Feb. (Ibid)

19. The distance travelled by the ski party was roughly 80 miles for the round trip from the regimental area. Judging by the account of actual reliefs, and by inference from recommendations in the ski detachment's report, the expedition met with only qualified success. The war diary of 12 Cdn Armd Regt states that only one of three sections completed the trip to Pescopennataro, but this statement is not confirmed by the report of the Ontario Regiment's ski detachment. In two instances ski party relief was not necessary, since the roads had been cleared prior to the arrival of the ski parties. The recommendations afterwards made suggested that the skiers found themselves rushed for time, their loads too heavy and that the hauling of the sledges a hindrance. However the expedition could still be considered successful since the assigned tasks were accomplished without mishap. (Ibid).

20. The activities of 14 Cdn Armd Regt were much the same as those of the 11 Cdn Armd Regt. On 1 Feb The Calgary Regiment assumed a defensive role at MR 282001, near Castelfrentano, having two squadrons forward, near Orsogna, and one in reserve. Enemy shelling of this regiment occurred from time to time throughout the month but was rather ineffective. Since it was understood that the regiment would remain in position for a month or more, and since bad weather and poor ground prevented the use of tanks for attack, training periods were organized. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Reg, February 1944)

21. On 2 Feb "C" Sqn captured three prisoners, the first since San Leonardo. In mid-February "A" Sqn was split into two groups, one going to each of 2 Ind para Bde and 19 Ind Inf Bde. Still later in the month (21 and 28 Feb) tanks of "A" and "C" Sqns shot up enemy houses (MRs 247073) and 237996) with some success. Two grenade accidents, which killed four men and injured seven, marred an otherwise fairly tranquil month. (Ibid)

22. During February the activities of the Three Rivers Regiment differed little from those of 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts. Nothing very remarkable happened. On 1 Feb the regiment was established about four miles south of Ortona (near San Leonardo), but the unit moved, four days later, to the area MR 343044 near Treglio. The regiment received a new commanding officer, Lt.-Col. F.F. Bingham, and carried out training and internal reliefs while standing ready in its counter-attack role, which has already been referred to in paragraph 13 of this report. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, February 1944)

23. On 16 Mar 1 Cdn Armd Bde and the Three Rivers Regiment parted company and the latter unit entered a period of increased operational activity. Consequently, the remainder of the narrative will run in two more or less distinct channels. Early in the month, 7 Mar, the Brigade passed from under command 13 Corps to 5 Corps and was placed in support of 1 Cdn Inf Div and 8 Ind Div. This arrangement placed 11 Cdn Armd Regt under the command of 1 Cdn Div, 12 Cdn Armd Regt in Corps reserve and 14 Cdn Armd Regt under the command of 8 Ind Div. (All W.Ds., 1 Cdn Armd Bde, March 1944)

24. On 12 Mar The Ontario Regiment moved from Lanciano to the Ortona area, taking over positions from 2 Cdn Armd Regt in support of 1 Cdn Inf Div; subsequently (18 Mar), headquarters and "A" Sqn moved to Villa Rogatti (MR 3209) as Corps reserve, leaving "C" Sqn in support of 1 and 3 Cdn Inf Bdes and "B" Sqn in support of 2 Cdn Inf Bde. This sector was very quiet, the enemy contenting himself with artillery and mortar fire. Beginning on 24 Mar arrangements were made for the relief of 11 Cdn Armd Regt by 40 R. Tks of 23 (Brit) Armd Bde; the relief was completed on 29 Mar. Meanwhile, the Calgary Regiment spent a quiet month near Castelfrentano carrying out training with British artillery and Indian infantry units and engaging in a few shoots on Orsogna and isolated buildings, until it too was relieved by 23 (Brit) Armd Bde. (Ibid)

25. Until 16 Mar, the activities of 12 Cdn Armd Regt, in support of the reserve brigade of 8 Ind Div (near Lanciano), paralleled those of the other two regiments. Then the regiment was ordered to move to the Avellino - Benevento area to come under Headquarters Eighth Army for administration and 13 Corps for planning, thus heralding the subsequent move of the parent formation to the western wing of the Eighth Army. The move was made without incident and was completed on 20 Mar. The regiment harboured temporarily in the Prata Sannita area (MR 1614), about ten miles southeast of Venafro. Headquarters 13 Corps then placed 12 Cdn Armd Regt, less one squadron, under the command of 4 Brit Div. This division had relieved French troops in the task of ensuring the security of the Belvedere feature (MR 8428-8327) and preventing enemy penetration into the Rapido Valley. "A" Sqn, 12 Cdn Armd Regt, was assigned to 78 Brit Div. The disposition of the regiment, in the immediate future, was to be as follows:

- (a) "A" Sqn with 78 in deliberate counter-attack role in the area MR 906228, about three miles east of Cassino.
- (b) "C" Sqn in support of 12 Bde of 4 Div.
- (c) "B" Sqn, less one troop, in regimental reserve near Acquafondata, MR 9626.
- (d) One troop of "B" Sqn under command 10 Bde of 4 Div at MR 845270, about four miles north of Cassino.

(e) Tac H.Q. in the 'Inferno' valley, MR 910248, four miles northeast of Cassino.

(W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, March 1944: Appx 11, 12 Cdn Armd Regt O.O. No. 1, 31 Mar 44)

Thus March, like February, was operationally a quiet month and on 31 Mar 1 Cdn Armd Bde, relieved by 23 (Brit) Armd Bde, moved into the Army reserve in accordance with the general policy of strengthening Allied forces west of the Apennines. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts, Mach 1944)

#### PRE-OFFENSIVE PHASE - CASSINO SECTOR (APRIL - 11 MAY 1944)

26. The trend of events was indicated early in April, when C.-in-C. Allied Armies in Italy, General H.R.L.G. Alexander K.G., G.C.B., G.C.M.G., C.S.I., D.S.O., M.C., informed his Army Commanders of his intentions for the spring offensive

...to destroy the right wing of the German Army; to drive what remains of it and the German enemy to the Rimini-Pisa line, inflicting the maximum losses on him in the process.

The successful execution of this plan would not only force the withdrawal of the enemy far to the north, giving the Allied Air Forces bases close to Central Europe, but would also lead to the capture of Rome -- a city of great political and symbolic significance. (Operations of British...Forces in Italy, Part II, Section B, Ch. 1, para 17)

27. In April 1 Cdn Armd Bde, less 12 Cdn Armd Regt, left the Adriatic sector and moved to a training area (MR 106069) beside the Volturno River, a few miles east of Presenzano. From this time onwards intensive training was undertaken, principally by 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts. The move from the Adriatic to the Cassino front was completed by 4-5 Apr and the regiments harboured in adjacent areas. Throughout the month these two regiments trained with 4 Brit Div, 78 Brit Div and 8 Ind Div. The Ontario Regiment trained with units of 4 Brit and 8 Ind Divs while the Calgary Regiment trained with units of 78 Brit and 8 Ind Div. (W.D, 11 Cdn Armd Regt and 14 Cdn Armd Regt, April 1944) Since both 4 and 78 Brit Divs had almost three complete brigades committed in the line it was necessary to withdraw battalions from the line in order to adhere to the training programme. The Three Rivers Regiment was included in this programme even though, as previously noted, this regiment was committed in support of Brit Div. The intention was that the unit's reserve squadron would be used for training purposes. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 7 Apr 44)

28. Training emphasized target indication by infantry for tank crews and infantry-tank communication in battle. The courses given took the form of lectures and demonstrations, followed by tactical exercises and concluded by discussions. Stress was laid on cooperation

between infantry and tanks: the tanks advancing on M.Gs. and small arms, the infantry on anti-tank guns (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 8 Apr 44: Address given by Lt.-Gen. S.C. Kirkman, C.B.E., M.C., Comd 13 Corps). F.O.Os. and A.O.Ps. trained in conjunction with infantry and armour (W.D., 11 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 and 17 Apr 44); in addition armoured corps personnel trained in during and maintenance, gunnery, wireless procedure, cooperation with engineers in mine detecting, and other types of training. Of interest, too, was the equipping of the armoured regiments with “General Stuart” (“Honey”) tanks, which replaced the universal carriers in a reconnaissance role. (W.Ds., 11 and 14 Cdn Armd Regts, April 1944) Aside from the advantage that, in the process, personnel of different arms got to know one another and so were able to build up a greater spirit of comradeship and understanding which was to pay dividends at a later date.

29. When the first winter offensive ended on 23 Mar 44 the Commander-in-Chief decided to concentrate the weight of the Allied Armies west of the Apennines, holding the central mountains and the Adriatic with as few troops as possible. In the regrouping, British-equipped divisions, which included Indian, Dominion and Polish formations, were placed under the command of Headquarters Eighth Army, while the (American-equipped) remainder, including French troops, became part of Lt.-Gen. Mark Clark’s Fifth United States Army. The Eighth Army took over a front approximately 85 miles long and the Fifth Army commitment, apart from the Anzio bridgehead, became the narrow sector on the west coast from the confluence of the Liri and Gari Rivers to the Tyrrhenian Sea. (Operations of British...Forces in Italy, Part II, Section B, pages 1-13)

30. It was estimated that in the spring of 1944 the enemy had in Italy about the equivalent of 23 divisions. Opposing the Eighth Army in the Liri Valley and in the Cassino area were the 15th Panzer and 1st Parachute Division’s respectively. (It will be recalled that 1 Para Div had savagely defended Ortona during December 1943) At the beginning of the attack that was soon to come there were in the Liri Valley only five German infantry battalions with approximately one battalion of tanks and another of assault guns. Yet the Germans had concentrated on constructing defence lines to cover the approaches to Rome west of the Apennines. The first of these was the Gustav Line, held during the winter; the Adolf Hitler Line was an alternative defence system. Both lines were anchored to Monte Cairo, the Gustav Line being designed primarily to guard the entrance to the Liri Valley. From Monte Cairo these defences stretched along the high ground to Monte Cassino and then followed the west bank of the River Gari in its course across the mouth of the valley. In the mountainous country south of the River Liri the Gustav Line continued along the eastern foothills of Monte Majo and turned southwestwards at Castelforte to follow the high ground north of Minturno to the sea. (Ibid)

31. From his strongly fortified Monte Cassino and Monte Cairo positions the enemy enjoyed an uninterrupted view across the Liri Valley and deep into the surrounding country. Enemy hill positions were thoroughly prepared for all-round defence and the most strongly fortified part of the Gustav Line extended from Cassino across the mouth of the River

Liri. The approaches could be covered by artillery and mortar fire of which about 230 out of 400 guns and nebelwerfers could fire into the Cassino sector. The defence of the Monte Cassino complex and of that portion of Cassino still in enemy hands was entrusted to the 1st Parachute Division -- fanatical, highly trained and resourceful soldiers. (Ibid)

32. Allied Air Forces enjoyed virtually complete supremacy while the Luftwaffe could muster a force of only 700 aircraft in the whole Central Mediterranean theatre. The Allied forces were also greatly superior in armour and artillery. Only in infantry were the opposing forces fairly equal. (Ibid)

33. The Eighth Army continued its regrouping throughout April. On 4 Mar 13 Corps passed temporarily from the command of Eighth Army to that of Fifth Army, in one of the first major steps to strengthen the Allied left wing. The French Expeditionary Corps also came under the command of the Fifth Army. However, the main change was the relief of the 2nd Polish Corps by the 10th British Corps in the northern sector on 13 Apr. 13 Corps remained responsible for both the Cassino and Liri Valley sectors until 27 Apr when 2 Pol Corps came out of rest and assumed command of the Monte Cassino sector. Three corps were thus ready for the opening of the offensive: 13 Corps on the left, 2 Pol Corps in the centre and 10 Brit Corps on the right. 13 Corps had the following formations under command: 4 and 78 Brit Inf Divs, 8 Ind Div, 6 Brit Armd Div and 1 Cdn Armd Bde. Of the latter, 12 Cdn Armd Regt had already come under command of 13 Corps by 1 Apr and was moving into support of 4 and 78 Divs as indicated in para 19 of this report. (Ibid)

34. Taking up positions to support the British infantry was no easy matter for the Three Rivers Regiment. "A" Sqn came under the command of 78 Brit Div on 31 Mar and took up a position about three miles east of Cassino (MR 906228). During the move the squadron had four tank casualties because of bad roads, but these tanks were later recovered. Immediately upon arrival the squadron completed a very thorough camouflage job as their area was on a forward slope in full view of enemy observation from Monastery Hill and Monte Cairo. Subsequently No. 1 troop moved on foot to MR 833225, about one mile north-west where they manned 3 New Zealand tanks in support of 38 (Irish) Bde of 78 Div. On 3 Apr No. 2 troop took up positions near MR848242, approximately two miles north of Cassino. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 1-3 Apr 44)

35. On the night of 2/3 Apr "C" Sqn, in support of 4 Div, moved into a position about three miles north-east of Cassino (MR 889243). No. 3 troop of "B" Sqn, under command of 10 Inf Bde of 4 Brit Div moved on the night of 1/2 Apr to the area MR 845273 near Terelle and four miles north of Cassino. The remainder of "B" Sqn, in regimental reserve at Acquafondata (MR 9626), was ready to move to fire positions overlooking the approaches north-east and north-west of S. Elia (MR 8826). On 3 Apr Tac H.Q. of 12 Cdn Armd Regt was moved from Acquafondata to MR 937249 along "Inferno" track, near Vallerotonda, and was established in a somewhat crowded area directly adjacent to 4 Brit Div headquarters. The

high hills on either side afforded protection but the narrowness of the gorge necessitated the dispersal of camouflaged vehicles wherever convenient parking places could be found. (Ibid)

36. The “Inferno” track, which ran from Acquafondata to Pratalungo (MR 9524) and Portella (MR 9024) by way of a natural gorge and canyon, was of special significance. French forces had found that the normal route from Acquafondata to S. Elia (MR 890265) was of little use for supplies because it was under direct enemy observation and fire. But the forward battalions had to have supplies and so French engineers had built “Inferno” track. A road was drilled and blasted down the sheer rock gully, by workmen hidden behind huge camouflage nets from the prying eyes of the enemy. Shelling occurred once the operations were detected; but in spite of this, and the magnitude of the task, the job was duly completed -- a narrow, twisting, treacherous track limited to one-way, small-vehicle, traffic. Little else but jeeps could pass this way and then only under the strictest traffic control. All along the way, where the track opened out, were foxholes and tents and it even harboured a CCS and a water point. Camouflage tents were hung where sections of the road lay in full view of the enemy. The road ran along between jagged walls and around right-angled turns until finally, at the end, it came to a sandy-bottomed, 100-foot wide stretch known as “Hove” dump. Here ammunition, petrol and other supplies were dumped. It was “jeep head” for long convoys of jeeps that nightly assembled to take supplies to the men above Cassino, in front of Terelle and below Belmonte. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 5 Apr 44)

37. The Three Rivers Regiment continued to man its forward positions in support of 4 Brit Div until 12-15 Apr 44 when the 2nd New Zealand Division of 10 Corps and 11 Cdn Inf Bde of 5 Cnd Armd Div took over command from 4 Div. “C” Sqn came under the command of 11 Cdn Inf Bde until 20 Apr when the tanks were relieved by a squadron of the 18th New Zealand Armoured Regiment. 12 Cdn Armd Regt, less two squadrons and two troops (but with seven tanks from 1 Cdn Armd Bde under command) then came under the command of 2 N.Z. Div. Meanwhile, “A” Sqn continued to support 78 Brit Div until 24-28 Apr, when this formation was relieved by a division of 2 Pol Corps. “B” Sqn, less two troops, but including R.H.Q. tanks carried out infantry-cum-tank training with elements of 21 Ind Inf Bde in the area of Viticuso (MR 976244) near Acquafondata. The personnel of the two remaining troops of “B” Sqn were relieved by 18 N.Z. Armd Regt on 20 Apr; the tanks remained in position. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 1 Apr - 5 May 44)

38. On 22 Apr Tac H.Q. of the Three Rivers Regiment moved back from “Inferno” to MR 968160, near S. Pietro and just south of Acquafondata. Then, on 24 Apr, the regiment relieved the 20th New Zealand Armoured Regiment in a counter-attack role in the vicinity of Cassino, thus aiding the infantry to hold the town and railway station. On 5 May there was yet another change when 12 Cdn Armd Regt, relieved by 18 N.Z. Armd Regt, pulled back to the Mignano area (MR 988097), there to await their forthcoming action against the Gustav Line. (Ibid)

39. Although April, like the three preceding months, was a month of static warfare it was an extremely trying period for 12 Cdn Armd Regt. "A" Sqn in particular was subjected to severe and frequent shelling, which produced some casualties. The strain was greatest on the troops manning tanks in outpost positions close to the enemy. In one instance Canadians manned two tanks taken over from the new Zealanders in the Cassino "Crypt", only 20 yards away from the enemy. Here there was no sleep for fear of being surprised and overcome<sup>10</sup>, and fresh troops manned the tanks every third night. Much the same pattern existed for the tanks in other forward positions. Constant vigilance was imperative. All possible precautions were taken to escape observation and all ranks had to lie up by day to prevent detection. The utmost care had to be taken in the concealment of tanks and other vehicles and in squadron areas movement was reduced to a minimum. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, April 1944 and (H.S.) 141. 4A12011 (D1) Ops-12 Cdn Armd Regt, Lessons Learned in the Gustav and Hitler Line)

40. Roads and tracks were under direct enemy observation in every case, necessitating rigid traffic control and creating an acute supply problem, so that supplies were best carried by jeep, mule and man-pack. Moreover, the extremely rugged country presented a serious communications problem. To maintain wireless communications between some squadrons and regimental headquarters intermediate stations had to be set up on intervening mountain tops. Wireless communication to Brigade never was established. (Ibid)

41. In Cassino itself, at the end of April, the regiment was opposed by the depleted, but still tough, 1 Para Div which carried out determined raids. The attitude was "no holds barred", and they resorted to whatever trickery they could to maintain themselves in their positions, including the use of Red Cross flags to carry out reliefs and bring up supplies. Of the town there remained nothing but the rubble, the shattered buildings and the stench of decaying corpses. The silence was disturbed occasionally by shelling. The Canadian tanks remained concealed, not firing a shot -- but ready for instant action. Nevertheless, this preoccupation with operational activities did not prevent "B" Sqn, then in reserve, from training with the infantry. When the regiment began to receive its "General Stuart" tanks on 10 Apr personnel were sent back to 11 Cdn Armd Regt, near Venafro, for training with the new vehicles. An interesting feature of this training was the inclusion of engineer personnel in the tank crews; the sappers were to be immediately available at all times for casual mine clearing and for crossing other tank obstacles. (Ibid)

42. May, the month of another great offensive, arrived. Once again 12 Cdn Armd Regt was relieved (5 May); the unit concentrated in the Mignano area and reverted to the

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<sup>10</sup> A raid by troops of German 1 Para Div wiped out an entire infantry platoon position on one occasion ((H.S.) 141.4A12011 (D1) Ops - 12 Cdn Armd Regt (TRR) Lessons Learned in Gustav and Hitler Line Ops - 12 Cdn Armd Regt).

command of H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde. The remainder of the Brigade continued training in the Voltorno Valley until 10 May, when it moved up to the general area MR 9514, two or three miles south of San Vittore. Minutely detailed precautions were taken as the regiments of the Brigade moved into positions from which they would eventually take the offensive. To give the enemy the impression that 13 Brit Corps was thinning out in the Cassino sector tents were struck and erected daily under cover of darkness. No forward movement on roads under enemy observation was permitted by day. Supply convoys moved forward by night and often returned by day. Everything that could be camouflaged was camouflaged and for the most part there was a silent counter-battery policy. The men rested, the stage was set. Then, on the morning of 11 May, all ranks were briefed on the entire plan. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 28 Apr - 11 May 44)

43. According to the plan 1 Cdn Armd Bde was to come under command of 9 Ind Div of 13 Corps. 4 Brit Div were to be on the right of 8 Div and the 1st Moroccan Infantry Division of the French Expeditionary Corps was to be on the left (as part of 5 U.S. Army) while 78 Brit Div was in reserve. The intention was that 1 Cdn Armd Bde would assist 8 Ind Div in seizing and holding the S. Angelo "Horseshoe" for a further advance. The attack was to be in three phases:

- I - Crossing the River Gari;
- II - Securing a bridgehead;
- III - Seizing and holding the S. Angelo "Horseshoe".

In the assault 17 and 19 Ind Inf Bdes were to be on the right and left respectively, of 8 Ind Div; 21 Bde was to have a follow-up role. Initially, 11, 14 and 12 Cdn Armd Regts were allotted in support of 17, 19 and 21 Ind Inf Bdes, respectively. (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt: Appx 13, 1 Cdn Armd Bde O.O. No. 1, 7 May 44)

44. The initial tasks of The Ontario and Calgary Regiments were to help the infantry brigades to:

- (a) secure a bridgehead;
- (b) seize and hold S. Angelo "Horseshoe";<sup>11</sup>
- (c) liquidate the "Liri Appendix."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A horseshoe-shaped feature of high ground to the north-east of Pignataro, MR 8214 (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt 11 May 44).

<sup>12</sup> The neck of land enclosed by the Rivers Liri and Gari shortly before they join some six miles south of Cassino (Operations of British...Forces in Italy, Part II, Section B, para 4).



Three troops of the Three Rivers Regiment were to give direct support to

- (a) 17 Ind Inf Bde immediately before and during their crossing of the river; and to
- (b) 19 Ind Inf Bde from first light, D plus 1, directed on the Liri Appendix until it was liquidated.

(Ibid)

45. At 2300 hrs on 11 May 44 the counter-battery and counter-mortar programme opened up -- a great concentration of nearly 1000 guns of all types, and at 23345 hrs the assault went in. The offensive against the Gustav Line had commenced, (Operations of British...Forces in Italy, Part II, Section B, para 26)

#### CONCLUSION

46. From the capture of Ortona in December 1943 until the assault on the Gustav Line on 11 May 44 there was much activity but little fighting for 1 Cdn Armd Bde. during this period the Brigade moved from the Adriatic sector, on the right wing of the Eighth Army, to the west of Italy before Cassino. Throughout the period the formation supported many units; but, for the most part, the Brigade role was a passive one of holding already established positions, carrying out a few local engagements and maintaining one or more regiments in a counter-attack role. In addition, training and the administrative build-up required constant attention.

47. Senior commanders were well pleased with the performance of 1 Cdn Armd Bde. Their satisfaction may be illustrated by the following extract from a letter to the Brigade Commander, Brigadier W.C. Murphy, E.D. written by Lt.-Gen C.W. Allfrey, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., G.O.C.-in-C., 5 Brit Corps.

You started on this side [Adriatic] by coming up to assist 78 Div at Termoli when things were awkward. After this action word went round that the Canadians were full of guts.... Since then ... you have always been prepared to go all out... whether in small parties or as squadrons.... You have established the fact that you will see any infantry through a fight.

(W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, April 1944: Appx 7, Pt I Orders, No. 34, 5 Apr 44)

48. This report was prepared by Lt. C.A. Larson.

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Director Historical Section