

II. In Europe

On all three European battlegrounds the past summer saw a general withdrawal of the far-flung German fronts. At the beginning of summer the German lines of defense resembled strong dikes to protect Europe from the onrushing floods. Because of their many thousand miles of length, these dikes could only be manned by a thin line of guards. The precariousness of the German situation resulted from the fact that a dike is good only as long as it holds in its entire length. A single breach too large for immediate repair exposes wide areas of the hinterland to the flood, depriving the rest of that section of dike of its usefulness and forcing the defenders to withdraw to new dikes raised far to the rear. The dikes of Europe were pierced this summer in three places: at Cisterna on May 24, in the Vitebsk/Jlobin area on June 23, and at Avranches on July 31. What followed in all three cases was not a question of defending the rest of the dike but of saving the guards from the flood and manning new, shorter dikes.

THE ITALIAN FRONT

(May 11 to August 31, 1944)

By the middle of November 1943 the Allied armies in Italy got stuck near the line which runs from the mouth of the Sangro on the Adriatic to the mouth of the Garigliano on the Tyrrhenian Sea, and for a long time the Anzio-Nettuno bridgehead established on January 22 did not alter the general situation, all attempts at establishing a connection between the bridgehead and the main front being foiled.

To break the deadlock, the Anglo-American forces were regrouped. As the main part of the US 5th Army was needed to consolidate and reinforce the Anzio-Nettuno landing head, a large portion of the British 8th Army was transferred from the Adriatic sector to occupy the Allied left wing with the rest of the US 5th Army. By the beginning of May a formidable strength was ready for action along the Allied left wing and in the bridgehead south of Rome.

THE SUMMER OFFENSIVE

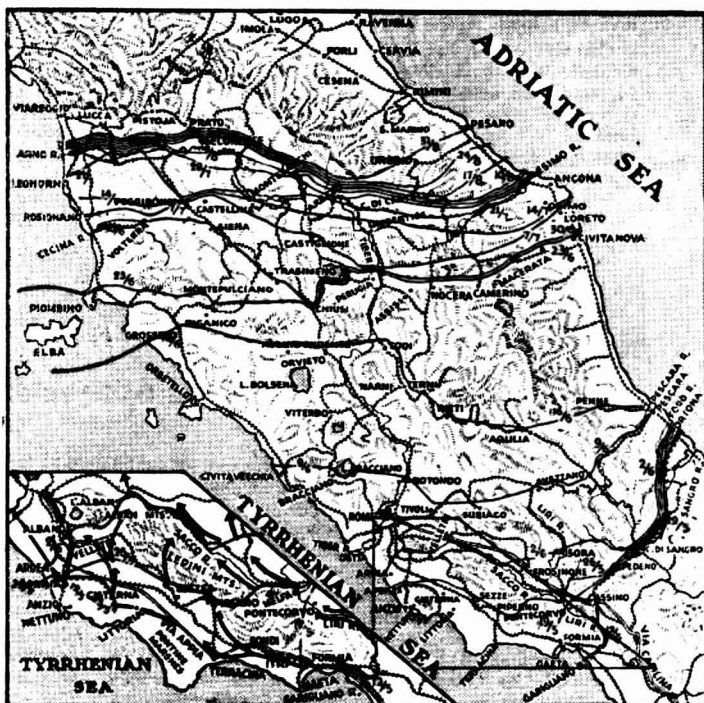
On May 11 at 11 p.m., after an extraordinarily heavy artillery barrage, the Allies, some ten divisions strong, began to attack along the 30-mile stretch from the Cassino sector to the Tyrrhenian Sea, thus intoning the prelude to the great summer battle for Europe.

But the defenders made the most of the mountainous terrain, and the Allies, who had an overwhelming superiority in numbers and material, suffered very heavy losses. Slowly the Allies gained ground. On May 17, the Germans evacuated Cassino, the scene of one of the most heroic defensive battles in this war. When the Allied left wing had reached the Terracina area, the Anzio-Nettuno landing head came to life with a violent artillery barrage early on May 23. The aim was to join up with the formations advancing from the south and, by a northward push, to cut off the withdrawing German divisions operating in the Liri valley. They succeeded in their first object on May 25, four months after the first landing south of Rome, but they failed in the second. While the Germans were fighting a violent delaying battle on the slopes of the Alban and Lepini

Mountains, their lines to the southeast and east were systematically taken back. On June 5, the Eternal City was evacuated in order to spare its invaluable treasures and monuments.

With the occupation of Rome the Allied left wing speeded up its advance across the plain to the north of the city in order to outflank the German troops in the interior of the peninsula. But Marshal Kesselring succeeded in frustrating all such designs. His 10th Army gradually withdrew toward the north, where the Apennines form a barrier across the northern bottleneck of the peninsula and where his numerically weaker forces had a better chance of defending themselves. The weekly front lines on our map show the absence of any Allied breakthrough after the occupation of Rome.

While fighting abated during the first three weeks of August along the entire front in Italy,



with only some activity in the Florence and Arezzo sectors, major breakthrough attempts on a broad front were launched in the Adriatic sector later during that month. The right wing of the British 8th Army had been strengthened considerably for this purpose, for here the Allies no longer faced difficult mountain barriers on their way into the Po valley. Preparations were also made for an attack by the 8th Army's left wing, from the area east of Florence. A breakthrough into the Po valley would give the Allies far better chances to use their material superiority; it would give them access to the agricultural and industrial riches of that densely inhabited part of the country—two fifths of Italy's population live there—and it would threaten the German positions in the mountains further to the west with envelopment from the north.

The Allied landing in southern France on August 15 and the German evacuation of that region have denuded Marshal Kesselring's right wing. The Alps form a steep precipice there on the Italian side, and the Germans must try to hold the passes and their western approaches. Fighting for them has already flared up. In view of Allied naval supremacy, the defense of the Nice gap will be extremely difficult. Besides, the Allies may yet carry out another landing in the Gulf of Genoa.

RESULTS

It has been one of the Allied aims to tie down large German forces on the Italian front. But the German High Command has preferred to give up territory rather than throw reserves into battle in an area which is isolated from the rest of Europe by the towering wall of the Alps. German troops may even have been withdrawn from that theater of war as the territory to be protected grew smaller and the lines of communications shorter, and as mixed German-Italian formations under the command of Marshal Graziani—which were trained and equipped in the Reich—arrived on the scene.

On the other hand, the stubborn German resistance has tied down very considerable Allied forces in an area where they can hardly hope to determine the outcome of the great European battle. While giving the Allies some political prestige, the occupation of southern and central

Italy is no economic asset, this territory being dependent on outside food supplies and virtually without industry. Although General Alexander has seen to it that English and American blood was spared as much as possible at the expense of Polish, French Colonial, De Gaulle's, and other auxiliaries, heavy losses have been inflicted upon the Anglo-Americans too. According to a statement by War Secretary Henry Stimson, US casualties in Italy up to May 27 aggregated 55,150, while Churchill admitted a total of 73,122 British casualties in Italy including those of Dominion and Indian troops up to June 5. To this must be added casualties suffered since the beginning of June as well as losses en route and officers and sailors lost by the combined navies. Politically speaking, the Anglo-Americans have also been faced by difficulties in Italy. Moscow is utilizing the dissension among the Italian population, which has been increased by Allied maladministration, as a fertile ground for planting its doctrines. One third of the Italian fleet had to be handed over to the Soviets. And the Bonomi Cabinet, which succeeded that of Badoglio and includes in its ranks a number of Communists, has reflected the confusion and bitterness felt in Allied-occupied Italy. In his letter of resignation from the Cabinet, the famous Italian liberal Benedetto Croce flayed the indifference of the Italian people, who "listen to none of us," and characterized the Allied armistice terms as "terrible and merciless."

The battle of the last few months has been fought on ancient historical ground covered with more monuments of past splendor than perhaps anywhere else in the world. Names of cities antedating Rome have been mentioned in communiqués, as have been the flourishing centers of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Some of the most venerated monuments of the Occident, among them the Abbey of Monte Cassino, have been destroyed despite all endeavors on the part of the German High Command to spare such irreplaceable treasures. It is to the credit of the defenders that, through the early evacuation of such cities as Rome, Siena, and Florence, a substantial part of this rich legacy has been saved, although their defense might have offered the Germans military advantages.

THE EASTERN FRONT

(June 22 to August 31, 1944)

THE two great German offensives of the summers of 1941 and 1942 were followed by four great Soviet offensives (winter 1942/43, summer 1943, winter 1943/44, summer 1944), the last of which is the subject of this survey, although it has not yet come to a close. After the first Soviet offensive had brought the success of Stalingrad, the second and third ones lacked the hoped-for breakthrough and resulted in a forcing back—sometimes fast, sometimes slow—of the German lines which on the whole remained intact. It was only the fourth offensive

which succeeded in achieving a breakthrough of considerable depth in one sector of the German central front.

THE BREAKTHROUGH (JUNE AND JULY)

With a sentimentality one would hardly expect from them, the Soviets began their summer offensive this year on June 22. Within a few days the Red Army tore up the German front over a width of 300 kilometers. The bastions of the German defense in this sector fell into their hands