
Section V

RETURN TO ITALY - MASSA TO GENOA
END OF THE WEHRMACHT

Debarking at Leghorn, which it had fought for many months before, the Combat Team moved to a Peninsular Base Section staging area near Pisa, and drew entirely new equipment. It then moved, under control of IV Corps, to an assembly area at San Martino, near Lucca. Finally, on 3 April, the Combat Team was detached from Corps, assigned direct to Fifth Army, and attached to the 92d Division for operations. General Almond assigned the Combat Team the sector from Highway One east to include the Folgorito ridge line, a 3,000-foot hill mass which rose abruptly from the coastal plain, dominating Massa, Carrara, and the great naval base of La Spezia.

The mission of the 92d Division with the 442d and 473d Infantry Regiments attached was to launch an offensive some time before the main weight of the Fifth Army was hurled at Bologna. It was believed that such a move would lead the enemy to divert some of his central reserve, then massed in the Po behind Bologna, to meet this threat to his flank.

Under cover of darkness 3 April, the 100th Battalion moved into a forward assembly area in the vicinity of Vallechia. The 3d Battalion detrucked at Pietrasanta, and marched eight miles over mountain trails to Azzano, a mountain village which was under full enemy observation during daylight. There the unit remained hidden until the next night, when it moved out, led by a Partisan guide, and gained the ridge line between Mount Folgorito and Mount Carchio.

This move had been a long gamble on the part of Colonel Miller, the regimental commander. It was necessary that the troops achieve this ridge line without detection since it was a Herculean task in itself merely to scale the sheer mountain walls. It would have been an impossibility to take the positions by storm. Success meant that a position which had resisted the 92d Division for six months would

probably fall in two days. Failure meant that the regiment would be forced to make a costly frontal attack on these same positions. Our troops did not fail.

Gaining the ridge line, the 3d Battalion jumped off at 050500 April, enveloping the enemy from the rear. At the same time, the 100th Battalion attacked the enemy positions on the ridge line which ran southwest from Mount Folgorito to the coastal plain.

The attacking battalions, having moved toward each other for 24 hours, made contact on Mount Cerretta late the following day. They had been supported by three battalions of artillery plus a very effective air strike, and enemy casualties were extremely heavy. Exploiting the initial advantage, the 2d Battalion had followed the route of the 3d during the night of 5 April, and at 061000 swung north from Mount Folgorito to seize Mount Belvedere. This was a long mountain top, having a knoll at each corner and forming a rough rectangle. Resistance was heavy and the mountain was not occupied by nightfall.

On the 7th, the 100th consolidated its gains, while the 3d made an attack on the Colle Piano spur, and the 2d resumed its attack on Mount Belvedere. Elements of the 3d Battalion missed direction and ended up attacking the town of Strinato, but in doing so, captured four heavy enemy mortars, so the time was well lost. These operations continued through the following day, with the 3d Battalion finally clearing Colle Piano and moving down to occupy the valley community of Montignoso. The 2d Battalion launched an early morning attack, cleared Belvedere, and moved on to take Altagnana. In attempting to take Pariana, on the same slope and to the west of Altagnana, F Co. was met by violent resistance and was forced to withdraw until the following morning. Supported by mortar fire, the company then made a coordinated assault, took the town and wiped out the remainder of the crack Kesselring Machine Gun Battalion, which had already been badly mauled.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the 2d Battalion advanced to the Frigido River line on the 9th. The 3d Battalion advancing abreast and on the left of the 2d, reached a point two miles from the river after reducing an enemy position on Colle Tecchione. The 100th remained

to garrison the Mount Folgorito-Mount Belvedere ridge against enemy positions known to be to the east, or regimental right rear. The advance continued for the next two days with light opposition, the 100th coming from reserve on the 11th to take over the 3d's place in the line. The 3d Battalion then swung to the west and entered Carrara, which had already been partly secured by Partisans. The Anti-Tank Company established blocks on main roads to the east. The engineers, trying desperately to keep supply routes open to the advancing troops, lost four bulldozers, all being blown up by deeply buried demolition charges.

After consolidating its positions and allowing a little time for supplies to catch up, the regiment continued the attack on the 13th.

Elements of the 100th Battalion swung toward the coastal sector to make contact with the 473d Infantry, but ran into strong enemy pockets that had been by-passed and a stiff fire-fight developed. Meanwhile, the remainder of the battalion assembled in Gragnana, from where B Company was sent to Castelpoggio to reinforce the 2d Battalion, which had launched an attack on Mount Pizzacuto.



The COMBAT ENGINEERS worked long and hard to keep the supply net open.

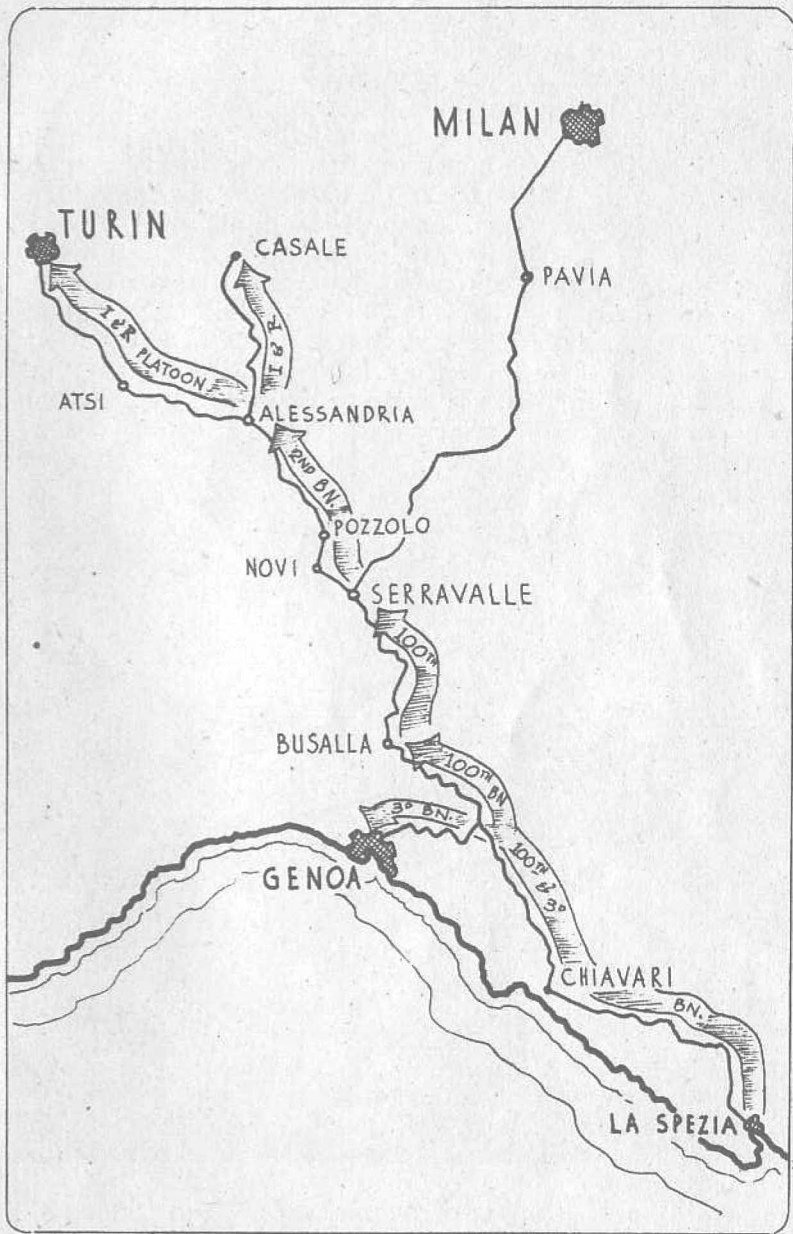
On 14 April, the resistance in the 100th sector had been cleared only after a full-scale attack by C Company. Early that morning the enemy launched a strong attack on Castelpoggio, thinking that only the 2d Battalion command group was in the town. On being greeted by a hail of fire from B Company men stationed in strategic buildings, the enemy withdrew in rout after a fierce fire-fight. An entire enemy battalion was badly mauled in this abortive attempt to cut off the 2d Battalion. Assault companies of the 2d then took Mount Pizzacuto at 0900 hours.

Our troops were now committed over so wide an area that it was necessary to call on the 232d Engineers to lay aside their bulldozers and occupy La Bandita ridge, which dominated the supply route through Castelpoggio. The engineers relieved I Company in position and held the ridge, successfully driving off one counterattack. The attack continued, Mount Grugola being taken by the 2d Battalion while the 100th assisted the 473d in clearing the town of Ortonovo. The 3d Battalion then relieved the 2d and pushed on to Mount Tomaggiora and Pulica, where the advance was stopped.

The enemy held this line desperately until the 20th, having heavily organized this last high ground before Aulla, vital communication center, through which ran all roads from La Spezia to the Po Valley. On the 20th, the 2d and 100th Battalions swung to the right of the 3d Battalion to cut Highway 63 and turned west to take Aulla and envelope the resistance holding up the division advance.

Both battalions ground out a slow costly advance until 23 April, when elements of the 2d Battalion executed a brilliant flanking movement and seized the town of San Terenzo. This move resulted in the capture of 115 enemy and the rout of a greater number. Many of these prisoners were Italian. It therefore became evident that the Germans were pulling out, leaving their former ally to hold the sack. This was confirmed when the 3d Battalion took the strong point at Mount Nebbione the same day and found only a holding detachment left there.

A task force, composed of Companies B and F, was then formed to exploit the apparent breakthrough. This force drove down to seize the high ground south of Aulla, which fell on the 25th with comparatively little resistance



as the task force and 2d Battalion linked up. For the next two days as much of the regiment as trucks could be found for followed the advance of the 473d, which had exploited the breakthrough and was now driving on Genoa. Finally, on the 27th, the regiment was ordered to flank Genoa from the north, seize Busalla, and block the pass at Isola del Cantone to the north, so as to cut off the enemy's escape route to Turin. The 100th immediately moved out on this mission, occupying Busalla at 1000 hours of the 28th after an all night foot march, inasmuch as it was impossible to repair bridges in time to get trucks across. Late the same afternoon, the 3d entered Genoa, riding commandeered street cars. Elements of the 3d had also accepted the surrender of a thousand enemy in the hills directly to the southeast even as Genoa was being entered. The battalion then set up defensive positions to the north and west of the city, where it remained in occupation until the cessation of hostilities.



END of THE WEHRMACHT.

On the 29th, the 100th moved into regimental reserve at Bolzaneto, while the 2d passed through its positions and occupied Alessandria, where it accepted the surrender of over 1,000 enemy from nearby towns. The following day, the regimental Intelligence and Reconnaissance platoon, with a section of H Company's machine guns attached, raced north and entered Turin, which was held but not entirely subdued by the Partisans. While this had been going on, by-passed pockets of enemy had outdone each other in the race to surrender to the Americans.

At long last, on 2 May, the end came to the Wehrmacht in Italy. To the once great army that had fought so bitterly from Salerno to the Po, that had used every stratagem in the book to delay the inevitable, there were no tricks left; only the bitter taste of final defeat.

For the men of the Fifth, among them the 442d, the long hard years were over; with victory came the hope that now, if they were lucky, they might live out their lives in peace, peace that so many had suffered and died for.