

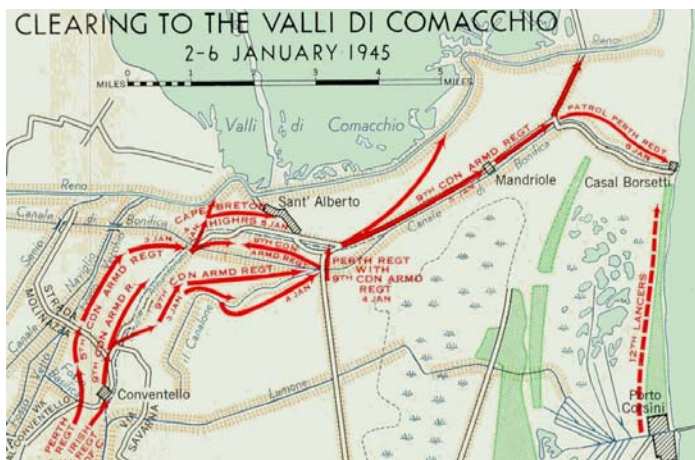


## "Crack Canadian Troops"

Clearing the South Bank of the Valli Di Comacchio

2 – 6 January 1945<sup>1</sup>

Lieutenant-Colonel Mike Cessford, CD



*Operation SYRIA was one of the last engagements fought by the Canadian Army in Italy in the Second World War. As such it is illustrative of the very high level of tactical expertise common to Canadian units in the last year of the war.*

By December 1944, the Allied advance into northern Italy had ground to a halt. Exhausted and understrength, the troops of the US 5th and British 8th Armies (15th Allied Army Group) could do no more. Four months of heavy fighting had brought the Allies across the Apennines and into the Romagna Plain. A combination of miserable weather, difficult terrain and fierce resistance had, however, stopped the offensive short of its objectives. On 30 December, the 8th Army ended offensive operations, adopting defensive positions along the line of the Senio River. Planning then focused on a spring offensive which would clear German forces from northern Italy and bring the Allies to the border of the Greater German Reich.<sup>2</sup>

The 1st Canadian Corps anchored the 8th Army's eastern flank. Its two divisions, with two attached British brigades, manned a 32 kilometre arc that ran west from the Adriatic coastal town of Porto Corsini before curving sharply south along the bank of the Senio River to the town of Cotignola. The British 9th Armoured Brigade Group screened the Adriatic marshes on the Corps' right flank. The 12th Infantry Brigade, 5th Canadian Armoured Division, held the centre of the Corps' defence. To the west, the 1st Canadian Infantry Division, reinforced with the British 21st Tank Brigade, defended the remainder of the Canadian line, from Fusignano to Cotignola.<sup>3</sup>

The German 10th Army's 73rd *Infanterie Korps* faced the Canadians. Newly activated from a coastal defence command, the *Korps* lacked armour and artillery. Nevertheless, the Corps' two infantry divisions, the 114th *Jaeger* and 356th *Infanterie* took advantage of northern Italy's excellent defensive terrain. German infantry manned defensive positions along the raised banks of the numerous canals and streams which laced the Romagna. Behind these ready-made tank obstacles, the 73rd *Korps* massed its few tanks and self-propelled guns, ready to counter-attack any penetration of the German defence. These tactics served the Germans well in their slow retreat from the Apennines.

The positions held by the 73rd *Korps* also offered the potential for offensive operations. The 114th Division held a narrow strip of land south of the Valli di Comacchio. This lodgement threatened the city of Ravenna, a mere 10 kilometers beyond the forward German piquets. A spoiling attack along this axis would have threatened the 8th Army's exposed lines of communication. This was a threat the Allies could not ignore. German forces in Italy, were demonstrating a renewed aggressiveness, possibly influenced by accounts of German successes in the Ardennes offensive<sup>4</sup>. On 26 December, the German 51st *Gebirgs Korps* had attacked the US 5th Army, driving five miles into the Serchio valley. The German advance had threatened the key port of Leghorn, forcing the deployment of Army Group reserves into the area.<sup>5</sup>

Canadian fears were further aroused when, on the night of 26/27 December, considerable activity was reported in the German lines near the town of Alfonsine. German artillery was unusually active and Canadian outposts heard the sounds of significant vehicle movement<sup>6</sup>. It appeared that the 73rd *Korps* had been reinforced, possibly as a prelude to an attack.

Acting on the reports of activity, the 8th Army decided to remove the German threat at Ravenna. The Canadian Corps was ordered to clear the south bank of the Valli di Comacchio, destroying the forward positions of the 114th *Jaeger* Division. The Corps Commander, Lieutenant-General Charles Foulkes, gave this mission to the 5th Canadian Armoured Division. The Divisional Commander, Major-General "Bert" Hoffmeister received his orders on 27 December. Ordered to clear the south bank of the Valli di Comacchio, from Sant'Alberto to the Adriatic coast the operation, codenamed SYRIA, began at 0500 hours, 2 January 1945.

The 5th Armoured Division was one of the veteran divisions of the 8th Army. Four months before, it had spearheaded the 8th Army's attack into the Gothic Line. Attacking from the line of march, the 5th Division unhinged the Gothic Line, catching the German defenders before they had fully manned their positions. The loss of the Gothic Line ended German hopes of containing the Allies in the Apennines and almost precipitated a German withdrawal to the Po River<sup>7</sup>.

Hoffmeister had earned a reputation as an outstanding divisional commander. He had commanded an assault battalion during the invasion of Sicily, had guided the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade through a very tough battle at the Moro River and Ortona and had led the 5th Division in the Liri Valley and Gothic Line battles. He was a tough and dynamic officer who had consistently demonstrated a rare tactical flexibility. After almost continuous contact with some of the finest German formations in Italy, his subordinate commanders and staff were equally experienced<sup>8</sup>.

At Valli di Comacchio, the 114th *Jaeger* Division defended a sector over 15 kilometres in length; a task almost beyond the capabilities of the Division which had only been upgraded from an anti-partisan formation in 1943. With only two infantry regiments, the 114th Division lacked the third regiment common to most German infantry divisions<sup>9</sup>, however, the nature of the terrain did, to some degree, compensate for the Division's lack of strength. The Adriatic marshes stretched almost eight kilometres inland, effectively blocking any advance along the coast. This allowed the 114th Division to echelon its two regiments in the more open terrain found in its west sector. The 721st *Jaeger* Regiment, reinforced with Panther tanks, self-propelled anti-tank guns and elements of an independent machine-gun battalion, held the German forward line. The Regiment's three battalions were dug-in along the Lamone River and a small canal, the Fosso Basilica. These two obstacles formed an effective anti-tank barrier, broken only by a kilometre wide corridor of open terrain between the villages of Grattacoppa and Convetello. The 3rd Battalion, 721st Regiment was ordered to block this key axis, the easiest approach to the Valli di Comacchio. The 114th Division's remaining regiment, the 741st *Jaeger* Regiment, occupied a series of positions in depth northeast of Convetello, centered around the village of

Sant' Alberto. The divisional reconnaissance battalion, the 114th *Aufklaerungs* Battalion, was in reserve.

Canadian planning initially focused on the positions held by the 114th Division. This emphasis shifted as Canadian intelligence identified a build-up of German forces around Alfonsine, five kilometres west of Conventello. The heavy shelling and vehicle noise heard on the night of 26/27 December had, in fact, signaled the arrival of the 16th SS *Panzer-Grenadier* Division (*Reichsführer SS*). A powerful formation, it was one of only four German mobile divisions in Italy. The 16th SS Division entered the line between the 114th and 356th Divisions and was well placed to strike the flank of the planned Canadian advance<sup>10</sup>.

The first report of the arrival of SS troops came from an Italian civilian on 27 December. The identification was confirmed on the night of 29/30 December when a patrol from the Lanark and Renfrew Scottish (12th Brigade) raided German lines south of Alfonsine. Documents and insignia taken from the bodies of two sentries confirmed the presence of the 35th SS *Panzer-Grenadier* Regiment of the 16th SS Division. On 31 December, prisoners and deserters were taken from the 36th SS Regiment and the 16th SS *Pioniere* Battalion. These identifications left little doubt that the complete Division had reinforced the 73rd *Korps*<sup>11</sup>.

On 30 December, Hoffmeister issued his orders. The 11th Infantry Brigade would assault the gap between the Lamone River and Fosso Basilica, destroying the forward elements of 721st *Jaeger* Regiment and seizing Grattacoppa and Conventello. 5th Armoured Brigade would then exploit 11 Brigade's break-in, attacking through the 741st *Jaeger* Regiment to take Sant' Alberto<sup>12</sup>. The capture of Sant' Alberto would place the 5th Division on the south shore of the Valli di Comacchio, effectively isolating the 114th Division and splitting the 73rd *Korps* in two. Having secured Sant' Alberto, the 5th Brigade would pivot east to drive to the Adriatic coast, effectively "rolling up" the remaining German defence along the south bank of the Valli di Comacchio. With the ground still frozen and the 5th Division attacking along the axis of the canals and streams flowing into the Adriatic, Hoffmeister planned to use his armour in mass to rapidly gain his depth objectives. The 12th Infantry Brigade and the attached British 9th Armoured Brigade Group would reinforce the shoulders of the Canadian assault, ready to block any threat from the flanks or augment the advance<sup>13</sup>.

The Irish Regiment of Canada and the Perth Regiment would lead 11 Brigade's attack. The Cape Breton Highlanders, with a tank squadron from the 8th New Brunswick Hussars, would form the Brigade reserve. Field Engineers, Crocodile flame-throwing tanks and self-propelled anti-tank guns were retained under Brigade command, ready for commitment as the situation warranted<sup>14</sup>.

The 11th Brigade moved into its assault positions in the early hours of 2 January 1945. At 0500 hours the assault battalions began their advance, moving behind an artillery barrage fired by one medium and three field regiments of artillery. At 0510, as the infantry closed on to their initial objectives, the guns began counter-battery fire against the German mortars and artillery pieces which had responded to the 721st *Jaeger* Regiment's desperate calls for assistance. German artillery caught one company of the Irish moving forward, inflicting some casualties and slowing their advance. The other companies pressed on and by 0800 hours the first objectives were in Canadian hands. The reserve companies were ordered forward and the two battalions fought their way into the German defences around Grattacoppa and Conventello. The reserve Hussar squadron then joined the battle with two troops placed under command of each of the assault battalions<sup>15</sup>. At 1315 the Perths reported the capture of all objectives, including Grattacoppa. The Irish, had engaged the bulk of the 3rd Battalion, 721st *Jaeger* Regiment, in and around Conventello and it took until 1800 hours to secure their objectives<sup>16</sup>. By day's end, the strength of the 3rd *Jaeger* Battalion was estimated to have been reduced to less than 50 personnel<sup>17</sup>. One Panther tank was destroyed in Conventello and two 75mm anti-tank guns captured.

The way was now clear for the 5th Armoured Brigade. At 1330 hours, the Brigade began deploying from concentrations three kilometres southwest of Conventello. The Brigade advanced with two regiments forward, the Hussars (less one squadron) on the left and the British Columbia Dragoons on the right. The Cape Breton Highlanders, 11 Brigade's reserve, came under command of 5 Brigade as the Canadian tanks passed through the assault battalions. Throughout the last hours of 2 January, the Hussars and Dragoons overran desperate rearguards of German infantry, self-propelled guns and Panthers. The German's resistance, coupled with the difficult terrain, slowed the Canadian advance and by last light the lead squadrons were three kilometres short of Sant' Alberto. The Cape Breton Highlanders advanced behind the tanks to link-up with the armour at 2200 hours, capturing 22 prisoners en route<sup>18</sup>.

The 5th Brigade's axis paralleled the Senio River and was vulnerable to a thrust into its exposed western flank. A successful counterattack by the 16th SS Division from the direction of Alfonsine would have sealed off the narrow Canadian penetration, isolating and pinning the 5th Brigade against the Valli di Comacchio. Well aware of this threat, the Irish and Perth quickly established defensive positions to guard the shoulders of the Canadian penetration. It was a measure of the Division's concern that a squadron was withdrawn from the Hussars to reinforce the Irish around Conventello. During the night of 2/3 January, the Perths established a screen of patrols to the west, covering the Fosso Vecchio canal. The Irish continued to widen the eastern shoulder of the breach, securing crossings over the Lamone River and linking up with elements of the British 9th Brigade Group.

At first light on the morning of 3 January, the 114th *Jaeger* Division counterattacked. Two companies of the 2nd Battalion, 721st *Jaeger* Regiment, reinforced with elements from an attached machine-gun battalion, assaulted the Perth's defence but were stopped in their tracks with heavy casualties. The commander of the 114th Division, Major-General Hans Elhert, then committed his divisional reserve against the 5th Brigade. The 114th *Aufklaerungs* Battalion, with a *Pioniere* company, launched three separate attacks against the Cape Breton Highlanders<sup>19</sup>. These attacks were repulsed, leaving 20 prisoners in Canadian hands and an uncounted number of dead on the battlefield. One Dragoon tank was knocked out and the Highlanders suffered two dead<sup>20</sup>.

Unperturbed by the German counterattacks, the 5th Armoured Brigade ordered the Dragoons and Hussars to resume their advance early on 3 January. The Brigade's immediate concern was the Canale di Bonifica - a major obstacle blocking the advance towards Sant' Alberto. The Hussars, bypassing isolated pockets of German defenders, moved quickly towards the canal. The Regiment hoped to seize a bridge over the canal, establishing a key crossing over the last obstacle before Sant' Alberto. At 1500 hours, it appeared that the bridge was in their grasp. Caught off guard, the German defenders had failed to destroy the bridge. The first Hussar tank was just moving onto the bridge when a German soldier, ignoring the hail of Canadian machine-gun and tank fire, climbed under the bridge to ignite the demolition fuse. The bridge was blown into the canal but not before the German soldier was cut down. The Hussars, unable to force the canal, could only consolidate and wait for the Cape Breton Highlanders to close up. Such were the consequences of the actions of a single brave man. The frustrated Hussars could take some solace from the casualties they had inflicted on the enemy: 50 dead and 67 captured. They themselves suffered no losses and were at full strength, the squadron defending Conventello had previously been relieved by a squadron from the Lord Strathcona's Horse<sup>21</sup>.

The 5th Brigade responded quickly to the failure of the Hussar coup de main. The Dragoons, having closed up to the Canale di Bonifica, were ordered to drive east, towards a second bridge. Delayed by the old, dry Lamone riverbed (the Lamone River having been re-directed many years before), the Dragoons failed to reach the bridge before nightfall. The Dragoons then harboured, waiting for the infantry to link-up. Despite active opposition from German tanks, anti-tank guns, infantry and, on one occasion, the misguided attentions of the US Army Air Force, the Dragoons had gained four kilometres. One Sherman had been destroyed with three crewmen slightly injured. In return, the Dragoons had captured 26 personnel including a complete battalion aid post. Over a score of Germans had been killed or wounded<sup>22</sup>.

As the 5th Brigade cut into the German rear, The Perth Regiment was placed under its command. In replacement, the 11th Brigade was given The Westminster Regiment. At 1300 hours on 3 January, the Westminsters occupied the trenches dug by the Perths, assuming responsibility for the defence of the western shoulder of the Canadian penetration. The Perths, marching through the night, linked-up with the Dragoons early on the morning of 4 January. Further west, the Cape Breton Highlanders reinforced the Hussars on the Canale di Bonifica. The 5th Brigade now had two strong battle groups, each with an armoured regiment and an infantry battalion, massed along the Canale di Bonifica<sup>23</sup>.

At 0400 hours on 4 January, heavy German shelling signalled the start of a major German counterstroke. Attacking east from Alfonsine, the *Aufklaerungs* battalions of the 16th SS and 26th *Panzer* Divisions, with the 1st Battalion of the 36th SS *Panzer-Grenadier* Regiment, struck the base of the Canadian penetration. This force, designated *Kampfgruppe Maier*, had been ordered to seize Grattacoppa and Conventello, re-establishing the German front and cutting off the 5th Canadian Armoured Brigade<sup>24</sup>. This attack fell directly upon the positions held by the Westminsters.

The Canadians sliced this attack to ribbons. With German armour held-up as it attempted to cross the Fosso Vecchio, the 1st Battalion, 36th SS *Panzer-Grenadier* Regiment,

attacked without support. The result was disaster as the battalion was all but annihilated in the Westminsters' killing zones. A violent counterattack by 11 Brigade's reserve, an Irish company and an Hussar tank troop, knocked *Kampfgruppe Maier* back to its startline<sup>25</sup>. Over 150 prisoners were taken while estimates placed the number of German dead and wounded at over 200.<sup>26</sup> The Westminsters, who had borne the brunt of the attack, reported total casualties of seven personnel wounded.<sup>27</sup>

The 5th Armoured Brigade, ignoring the battle raging behind it, drove hard for the last crossing over the Canale di Bonifica. By 0850 hours, the Dragoons had one squadron overlooking the second bridge. Moving under heavy covering fire, a party of dismounted crewmen, led by their squadron commander, began to disable the bridge demolition charges. An attached engineer section quickly took over this task (presumably to the delight of the tankers) and, by noon, a Dragoon squadron and a Perth company were across the obstacle. A second squadron soon joined them, knocking out four anti-tank guns as it widened the Canadian bridgehead. This success was matched in the sector held by the Cape Breton Highlanders. An eight man reconnaissance patrol forded the canal and infiltrated the German defence, capturing 29 prisoners. The Highlanders reinforced this success, pushing two companies across the Canale di Bonifica. The Hussars, unable to cross this obstacle, advanced to the west, clearing the south bank of the Canale di Bonifica. In doing so, they captured two Panthers before linking-up with the Dragoons and Perths.

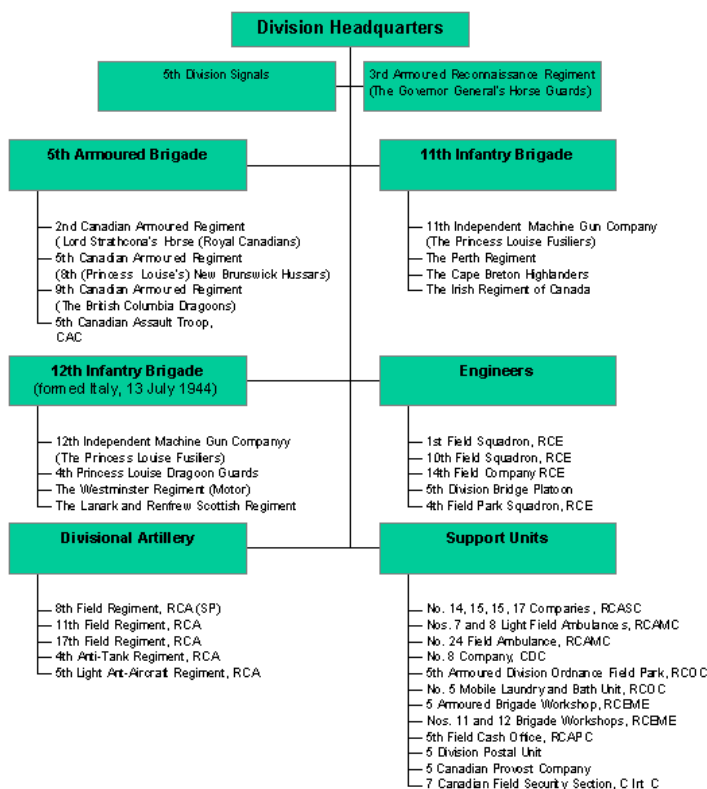
The failure of *Kampfgruppe Maier*, coupled with the 5th Brigade's successful crossing of the Canale di Bonifica, broke the back of the German defence. In the early hours of 5 January, Sant' Alberto was occupied by sub-units of the Dragoons and Perths. This battle group exploited its success, advancing quickly towards the Adriatic coast. Concurrently, a Dragoon squadron struck west, clearing the north bank of the Canale di Bonifica to link-up with the bridgehead held by the two Highlander companies. Forty-seven prisoners were taken, including some from the German 710th *Infanterie* Division. This formation, newly transferred from Norway, had been prematurely drawn into battle as the 73rd Korps sought to halt the Canadian advance<sup>28</sup>. In any case, the battle was now all but over. On 6 January, the Dragoons and Perths, in the face of diminishing resistance, captured Casal Borsetti, on the Adriatic coast. The battered 114th *Jaeger* Division was withdrawn into reserve. The 710th Division replaced the 114th Division, taking up new positions astride the narrow Comacchio Isthmus. With the capture of Casal Borsetti, Operation SYRIA came to an end. It had cost the Germans well over a thousand casualties as opposed to Canadian losses of less than 200 all ranks (including 30 personnel killed in action)<sup>29</sup>. Eight German Panthers, four self-propelled guns and 25 anti-tank and artillery pieces had also been destroyed or captured<sup>30</sup>.

Apart from the tactical successes gained, Operation SYRIA had significant operational implications. Operation SYRIA was immediately followed by a similar action, conducted by the British 5th Corps and the 1st Canadian Division. These two operations by the 8th Army convinced the Germans of the need to reinforce their eastern flank. As a consequence, the 42nd *Jaeger* and 362nd *Infanterie* Divisions were transferred from the German 14th *Armee*, south of Bologna, to take up positions on the Senio River<sup>31</sup>. In one stroke German strength was reduced by almost one half at the precise point selected by the US 5th Army for its spring offensive<sup>32</sup>. Operation SYRIA was of equal value to the 8th Army as it prepared for its own spring offensive. Possession of Valli di Comacchio's south bank gave the 8th Army a direct approach into the rear of the German defences. On 6 April, the 8th Army sent an amphibious force across the Valli di Comacchio, the first in a series of assault landings designed to turn the German east flank. The forces were launched from the area of Sant' Alberto - positions which had been won by the 5th Canadian Armoured Division. It is doubtful if the 8th Army's commander, Lieutenant-General Sir Richard McCreery, had anticipated such an operational return on so small a tactical investment.

Operation SYRIA was a comparatively minor action fought in what had become, by late 1944, a secondary theatre of war. Nevertheless, it is an instructive example of the expertise attained by the Canadian Army in the closing months of the war. The 5th Canadian Armoured Division massed its combat power to ensure the success of the break-in and the subsequent exploitation to the Adriatic. Recognizing the threat to his flanks, Hoffmeister firmly anchored the shoulders of the Canadian penetration, setting the stage for the defeat of *Kampfgruppe Maier*. And, despite counterattacks from elements of three German divisions, the 5th Division never reduced the momentum of its operations as the 5th Armoured Brigade drove hard to the Adriatic coast, eradicating the last German footholds south of the Valli di Comacchio.

In February 1945, the 1st Canadian Corps left the Italian theatre to join the 1st Canadian Army in Northwest Europe. Operation SYRIA was the last major Canadian action in Italy and a fitting end to the Canadian presence in the 8th Army.

Lieutenant Colonel Mike Cessford enrolled in the Militia in 1970, serving as an infantryman with The Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's). In 1978, he was accepted as an armour OCTP candidate, was commissioned in 1979 and joined The Royal Canadian Dragoons. He has served in both tank and reconnaissance units and recently was with G3 Plans staff with the U.S. 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Mechanized). Lieutenant Colonel Cessford holds a BA, MA and Ph.D. in history. His research has focused on the linkages between doctrine, training and operations. Lieutenant Colonel Cessford is presently serving with the Directorate of Land Strategic Concepts in Kingston.



**Notes**

Unless otherwise noted, all military documents cited are drawn from Record Group (RG) 24, National Archives of Canada.

<sup>1</sup> The term "crack Canadian troops" came from a captured intelligence **Notes**:

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<sup>1</sup> The term "crack Canadian troops" came from a captures assessment by the German 278th *Infanterie* Division. The Germans routinely classed Canadian formations in Italy as assault units possessing high morale and tactical skill. 5th Canadian Armoured Division Intelligence Summary No. 107, 8 January 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Report by Field Marshal the Lord Alexander, "The Italian Campaign, 12th December 1944 to 2nd May 1945", pp.24-25.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholson, G.W.L., *The Canadians in Italy*, (Ottawa: HMSO, 1956), p.644.

<sup>4</sup> 12th Infantry Brigade, "Report on Operations - 27 December 1944 to 8 January 1945", p.2.

<sup>5</sup> Fisher, E.J., *Cassino to the Alps*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1977), pp.407-410; Alexander, pp. 22-23.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Canadian Corps Intelligence Summary No. 191, 27 December 1944.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholson, pp.570-572.

<sup>8</sup> In the Gothic Line battle, the 5th Division had engaged, among other formations, elements of the

1st Parachute, 26 *Panzer* and 29 *Panzer Grenadier* Divisions. These divisions were among the very best in the *Wehrmacht*, let alone in the Italian theatre.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchum, Samuel C., *Hitler's Legions: The German Army Order of Battle, World War II*, (New York: Dorset Press, 1985), pp.327-328.

<sup>10</sup> On 31 December 1944, the 16th SS Division reported a strength of 14,223 personnel. The Division possessed an assault gun battalion of 45 *sturmgewehr* as well as an anti-tank battalion with an additional 27 self-propelled anti-tank guns. Bender, Roger J., and Taylor, Hugh P., *Uniforms, Organization and History of the Waffen SS*, Vol. III (San Jose, CA: Bender Publishing, 1975), p. 120. Jentz, Thomas L., *Panzer truppen*, Vol. II, (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 1996), p. 172.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Canadian Corps Intelligence Summary No. 195, 30 December, 1944.

<sup>12</sup> The 5th Armoured Brigade was at only half strength. The Brigade's third armoured regiment, the Lord Strathcona's Horse, was then supporting 12 Brigade. The Brigade had, as well, lost its motor infantry battalion, The Westminster Regiment, when the Division had established 12 Brigade in July 1944. In Italy, Commonwealth armoured divisions had an extra infantry brigade. The Canadian Corps had formed this brigade out of its own resources, transforming a light anti-aircraft and a reconnaissance regiment into infantry and transferring The Westminster Regiment from the 5th to the 12th Brigade. After the hard autumn battles, each of the 12th Brigade's battalions manned only three rifle companies. This was the normal configuration for The Westminsters but a shortage of reinforcements had forced the other two battalions to temporarily reduce from four to three sub-units. It was probably for this reason that 11 Brigade was given the "break-in" task during Operation SYRIA.

<sup>13</sup> 5 Brigade Operations Order No. 5, 1 January 1945; 11 Brigade Operations Order no.12, 31 December 1944, 9 Brigade Operations Instruction No. 19, 1 January 1945.

<sup>14</sup> 11 Brigade Operations Order No. 12.

<sup>15</sup> War Diary, 8th New Brunswick Hussars, 2 January 1945.

<sup>16</sup> War Diary, The Irish Regiment and War Diary, The Perth Regiment, 2 January 1945.

<sup>17</sup> The 11th Brigade reported taking 73 prisoners from the 3rd Battalion, 721 *Jaeger* Regiment; this from an initial strength of no more than 250 personnel. "5th Canadian Armoured Division Intelligence Summary No. 107", 8 January 1945.

<sup>18</sup> War Diary, The Cape Breton Highlanders, 2 January 1945.

<sup>19</sup> The 114th *Aufklarungs* Battalion was a comparatively potent mixture of light armour and infantry, similar to a motorized infantry battalion. Davies, W.J.K., *German Army Handbook*, (New York: ARCO Publishing, 1977), p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> War Diary, The Cape Breton Highlanders, 3 January 1945; The British Columbia Dragoons, "Report on Operations, 2 January to 5 January 1945".

<sup>21</sup> War Diary, The 5th Armoured Brigade, 3 January 1945. It is worth noting that the 5th Canadian Armoured Division had developed a polished set of tactical groupings for either an assault ("break-in") or for subsequent exploitation. In the assault, attacking infantry battalions routinely received a tank squadron (usually from the 8th Hussars). For exploitation, battle groups consisted of a tank regiment and an infantry battalion. Cessford, Michael, *Warriors for the Working Day*, (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1989), pp. 254-258.

<sup>22</sup> War Diary, The British Columbia Dragoons, 3 January 1945.

<sup>23</sup> War Diary, The 5th Armoured Brigade, 3 January 1945.

<sup>24</sup> *Sturmbannführer Maier* was the commander of the 36th SS *Panzer-Grenadier* Regiment.

<sup>25</sup> The Irish Company alone claimed 65 prisoners while killing another 30 enemy for no loss. War Diary, Irish Regiment of Canada, 4 January 1945.

<sup>26</sup> War Diary, The 5th Canadian Armoured Division, 4 January 1945. Hoffmeister, one of the most experienced Canadian commanders of the war, stated that he had never seen such concentrated slaughter as he saw on this battlefield. Interview, 26 May 1986.

<sup>27</sup> War Diary, The Westminster Regiment, 4 January 1945.

<sup>28</sup> War Diary, 5th Canadian Armoured Division, 6 January 1945.

<sup>29</sup> This casualty figure included no less than 310 enemy dead and 620 prisoners. "5th Canadian Armoured Division Intelligence Summary No. 107", 8 January 1945; Nicholson, p. 651; Canadian Army Historical Report No. 31, "Operations of 1 Canadian Corps, 28 Oct 44 to 27 Feb 45", p. 145.

<sup>30</sup> This loss was not insignificant. On 15 March 1945, there were only 22 operational Panthers left in Italy - this after the German forces had enjoyed a period of relative tranquility. Jentz, p. 248.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander, p. 20.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*