

THE FORGOTTEN FRONT

Prologue.

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, new commander of the German troops in Italy, had nearly ended his inspection on the front along the Gothic Line. He was satisfied enough. He had found very motivated men. They were eager to fight, they were well armed and equipped, they were protected by excellent defences. He had inspected the northern sector of the Apennines; now he was travelling from Bologna to Forlì to control the more eastern sector of the front.

On the way there was a lot of military traffic and in that zone there was a thick mist. At some point, his car met a column of military lorries. The driver began to overtake it. In the same time, from a lateral road, a big cannon was about to be brought into the main road. Focused on overtaking the column of lorries and because of the mist, the driver did not notice the cannon. When noticed it, it was too late. Kesselring banged his head against the cannon, receiving a wound in a temple. It was November 24th, 1944.

It did not seem an important thing. Instead, it was more serious than expected. Kesselring lost consciousness and did not regain it for several hours. He was hospitalized in Ferrara and from Berlin, Hitler wanted to be informed daily about his health conditions. Kesselring recovered, but only more than two months later he was able to come back at his post. Luckily for him, that period of forced absence coincided with a serious crisis of the allied armies along the Gothic Line.

According to what he wrote later about this fact, amid his soldiers this version began to spread immediately after the crash: the Field Marshal? He has suffered a tremendous blow. Now he is well. But the cannon which he hit, surely, has shattered in a thousand pieces.

The white zone.

On August 12th 1944, at Sant'Anna di Stazzema, in the Lucca's district, the clear sky was announcing a fine day. At dawn, three SS units began to get in towards the village. When the Germans appeared, the men hid themselves into the woods. The old men, the women and the children remained. There were no partisans: Sant'Anna had been declared "white zone", zone for evacuees. And at Sant'Anna there were many evacuees, coming from the nearer zones and from other districts of Italy.

Deposition given by Mario Marsili and cited in the sentence of the Military Court of La Spezia against the accused of the Sant'Anna di Stazzema's massacre.

Mario Marsili was in a locality named Vaccareccia, for he was evacuee along with his family. Despite he was six, he has reported that it was six o'clock a.m. when the Germans took them away from their abodes and led them along a path until the stables. Once entered along with his mother, his grandfather, his grandmother and a twenty of other people into one of these stables, his mother hid him between two stones behind the door, and from here he could see the blasts of the machineguns positioned outside the door and the fire, perhaps set by flamethrowers. His mother had been already hit, but she, perhaps for preventing that the Germans saw the shelter of her son, threw one of his clogs against a German soldier who was about to enter the stable. This soldier, hit in his face by the clog, opened fire with his machine-pistol, killing the woman. For this act, the Mario Marsili's mother was awarded the medal of honour, given by the President of the Italian Republic on April 25th, 2003.

The green zone.

The Apennines mountain range crosses Italy from north to south at full length. The Northern Apennine draws a northwest- south-eastern arch towards the coasts of the Romagna, then it turns southwards again, taking the name of Central Apennine (*Appennino Centrale*). In the north, the Apennines slope gently down to the plain of Lombardy and to the Po Plain; in their centre-southern part, they show a rough and tough landscape.

For the most part it is a tough terrain, crossed by gullies, streams and ravines, covered in certain points by a very thick vegetation. In Autumn the streams and the rivers swell, cause floods and landslides. Into the valleys the mist dominates and the visibility is often very poor. The erosion caused by the effects of the weather has dug the flanks of the mountains, giving shape, here and there, to some isolated and inaccessible peaks. The Apennines' heights are not very high (not like the alpine heights, at least) and they are crossed by some easy passes (Cisa, Abetone, Porretta, Futa, Raticosa, Mandrioli). With the exception of the Firenze-Bologna highway, the main roads run from west to east, following the course of the heights. Although many, the secondary roads are narrow, rough, with many bends and for this reason they are exploitable with difficulty by the military tanks and lorries. In the part occupied by the Allies, there are a couple of railways in the western side, one railway in the eastern side. The first are double track, the latter is single track. For their part the Germans can exploit the road number 9 – the ancient *Via Aemilia*- and the railway which is parallel to it for moving troops and reinforcements towards the points under pressure. However, the aerial allied superiority reduces this German advantage.

The Gothic Line – later renamed *Gruene Linie*, Green Line- exploits the natural defences of the Apennines. It starts south of La Spezia at Viareggio and ends at Pesaro, in the Marche Region. A second line- *Gruene Linie II*- extends behind the first one from Massa, in Tuscany, to Ravenna, in Romagna. The Gothic Line is not a continuous trench, but a series of fortified points deployed in depth supported by strongholds, bunkers and forts covered by anti-tanks ditches, by entanglements of barbed wires and by mine fields. The defences are stronger close to the passes. The Line had been wanted by Rommel, commander of German Army in northern Italy. According to him, indeed, the Germans should have abandoned the southern Italy in order to defend the industries and factories of northern Italy. But Kesselring, commander of German Army in southern Italy, had a different tactical and strategic vision. According to him, the Germans should have fought everywhere, for slowing the Allies' advance. That's why he had made build two lines south of Rome: the *Bernhardt Line* and the *Gustav Line*.

However, after the conquest of Rome by the Allies, also for Kesselring- appointed, in the meanwhile, unique commander of the German forces in Italy- strengthening the Gothic Line becomes necessary. By using concrete, steel and forced manpower, the Germans build fire points, strongholds and bunkers; they bring in position their deadly 88 MM guns, lay beyond ground level the turrets of their tanks Mark IV armed with the 75mm guns, prepare shelters for men and means, store food and ammunition, prepare barbed wires entanglements, dig anti-tank ditches. But in Summer 1944, despite the endeavour lavished, only some parts of the Line are finished: many others are not. But, finished or not finished, the Gothic Line is a formidable defensive position, made also more effective by the rough conformation of the places. It is the last obstacle to the Po Valley, the Ljubljana's Gap, Austria and the Balkans.

The red zone.

In the Bolognese Apennine and in other parts of the Gothic Line many partisan formations are operative. Their presence is a serious problem for the Nazi-fascists. The partisans attack the military quarters, make sabotages and coup de main beyond the lines. To contain them, the Germans must deploy troops which are necessary elsewhere. And, above all, they are forced to stay always and everywhere on alert. That is a war into the war, a ruthless war without POWs, a brutal and terrible war.

In the zone of Monte Sole, the Red Star Brigade (*Brigata Stella Rossa*) is operative. Its members come, for the most part, from the local populace and within it different policy stances are found. It is led by a chief – Mario Mosumeci, name of combat “Lupo” (Wolf) – whose immediate objectives are not ideological objectives (to fight in order to build Socialism or something similar), but practical objectives. According to him, in fact, the defeat of the Fascists and the Nazis is more important than every other political consideration. In the panorama of the time, the Red Star could be defined, by using a modern term, an “out of line” formation, deeply anti-fascist, but not ideological. Lupo, indeed, is firmly decided to save his autonomy and the autonomy of his brigade both with respect to the central organisms of control (CNL, then CUMER), and with respect to the other partisan formations.

The Red Star is supported by the most part of civil populace. By the most part, not by the whole part. The roundups are frequent and the civilians are not spared: their houses are set on fire, their cattle is confiscated, somebody is killed. For a part of that people, if the partisans were elsewhere, it would be better.

But the partisans of the *Stella Rossa* are there. They are operating in the zones of Marzabotto, Grinzana, Monzuno, Sasso Marconi, San Benedetto Val di Sambro, in zones, that are for the moment still afar from the main front. For the Germans, the Red Star partisans are a problem, not still THE problem. Then, in August 1944, everything changes. The Allies conquer Firenze and move towards Bologna. Monte Sole becomes a zone of high strategic value, both for Kesselring who wants to control the area in order to maintain alive the way of supplies and reinforcements, and for general Harold Alexander who wants to prevent that that happen.

The green zone.

The issue for the Allies is the following: where and why to attack the Gothic Line. Originally, general Alexander had thought to attack it in the centre by a pincer manoeuvre: the Eighth Army was to move towards Bologna, the Fifth Army towards Pistoia or Lucca for reaching then Modena. Goal: forcing the Germans to withdraw troops from the French front. And – why not? – reaching quickly the Ljubljana Gap.

But on August 4th, this plan is changed: the first blow will not be brought in the centre, but eastwards, along the eastern sector of the Line, there where the hills slope gently down to the Romagna's plain. It is the Eighth Army's commander, Lt general sir Oliver Leese, who suggests it to Alexander and to his Chief of Staff, general Allan Francis “John” Harding, summoned at the Orvieto airport under the shade of a Dakota bomber's wing.

His reasoning is the following: the French divisions have left Italy and along with them also their mountain troops have left the Peninsula. Without these troops, attacking in the centre is very difficult for us. But, if I attack with the Eighth Army in the eastern part of the front, there where the hills of the Apennines are more accessible, I can reach the Romagna plain easily enough, exploit fully the fire power of my tanks and the mobility of

my troops, launch a series of decisive actions in the zone between the rivers Marecchia and Foglia, surprise the Germans. An amphibious landing around Ravenna and a naval bombardment from the sea, at last, will contribute to increase my possibilities of success. Alexander sees in the Leese's plan the opportunity to bring a decisive one-two punch able to knock down the Germans and to shorten the war in Italy. Seven divisions have been recalled elsewhere for realizing the operation *Anvil-Dragoon*, the invasion of the southern France in support to *Overlord*; some Brazilian, Greek and Italian units have arrived, but they are inexperienced: it is necessary to exploit every favourable occasion before the Germans strengthen their position. Alexander knows that Leese wants to take his revenge on Clark, to whom he has not forgiven the "snatching" of the conquest of Rome, but he knows also that in the central sector of the front, the terrain thwarts the use of the tanks. And without tanks, the Allies can not exploit at full range their fire power. So, an attack in the eastern part of the front could have success.

And here is the plan: Leese will move towards Rimini and will go down in the Romagna's plain with two Army Corps, the First (Canadian) and the Fifth (British). Once in the plain, the two Corps will advance on the enemy's left flank towards Bologna. When Kesselring will have moved troops from the central to the eastern sector of the front, Clark with his Fifth Army will advance towards Pistoia. Once broken the line, the two branches of the pincer will join in Bologna, for marching toward the Po Valley.

It seems reasonable, it seems feasible. However, not all the allied commanders are mad about that solution. General sir Henry Maitland Wilson, commander in chief of the Allies troops in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East, for instance, is not convinced at all. He claims: we are underestimating the difficulties of this operation. A landing around Ravenna is nearly impossible, seen the conformation of the coast. And, in addition, we would have not the necessary landing craft.

Others have more than one suspicion: is perhaps the Churchill's obsession to arrive to the Balkans before the Russians the real reason of the Leese' plan and of the Alexander's acquiescence? For his part, Clark agrees, but he wants to have at his orders also the general Kirkman's 13th British Corps, tasked to cover the Fifth's Army right flank. At first, Leese balks, then gives up. It is easy to guess how much willingly. On August 13th, the plan becomes operative. Code name: *Operation Olive*.

The problem, now, is how to move the Eighth Army eastwards, without alarming the Germans. Two weeks before, the General Anders' Poles had made several operations in the zone of Misa river near Senigallia. Supported by the air force, the Carpathian Division and the Fifth *Kresowa* had been able to clear the area between the Misa and the Cesano rivers. Leese can use this area, relatively far from the range of the German artillery, for gathering his Army, in sight of the attack planned on August 25th.

The manoeuvre succeeds. The Germans can not make fly their spotter planes and, for this reason, they are without information; Clark has increased the pressure in the central sector, making believe that a massive attack toward the Futa Pass is imminent; Leese has made advance the Anders' men between the Cesano and the Metauro rivers, in order to open the way to his assault troops; the logistic services make a kind of miracle, the supplies are ensured. In nearly two weeks, the Eighth Army reaches its positions without being spotted by the Germans. To find a similar thing, we have to go back in the centuries, at the times when the Roman consul Gaius Claudius Nero had moved, *magnis itineribus*, on forced marches, his legions along the Adriatic coast from Apulia to Metauro river to intercept Hasdrubal.

Between Metauro river and Marecchia river (final goal of the first stage of the offensive) there are several rivers, streams and irrigation ditches . There are also some not very high heights controlled by the Germans. The allied tank drivers and infantrymen have the task to cross the rivers and to secure the hills. In practice, from when they have landed in Italy, they have crossed rivers and mountains. Now, here, very close to the wide Po Valley, there

are another rivers to be crossed and another mountains to be climbed. But it could be the last time.

The white zone.

Deposition given by Enio Mancini (at those times he was six) and cited in the sentence of the Military Court of La Spezia against the people accused of the Sant'Anna di Stazzema's massacre.

After some time, another patrol arrived. The German soldiers(seven or eight) caught them, drew them up in columns and headed with them along a unknown path towards the church. Some soldiers were at the head of the column, the prisoners were in the centre and other soldiers –who were beating the civilians with the stock of their rifles- were at the end of the column. Despite these blows, the civilians were unable to walk quickly and thus the Germans went away , leaving with them only a very young soldier, a blond-haired aged 17 or 18. This young soldier was trying to communicate, but only with many endeavours and by gesticulating, he made understand that they had to be silent, to escape, to come back. At this point, they went backward and headed home. Behind them, the German soldier shot a blast with his rifle, simulating their killing.

The green zone

Just before midnight of August 25th , in order to exploit the surprise effect, Leese launches his attack without a preventive artillery fire. The First and Fifth Corps' vanguards cross the Metauro river, meeting a weak resistance and establish the first bridgeheads. Once the bridgeheads have been established , the guns and the warplanes make drop on the German positions thousands of bombs. At dawn of August 26th, the whole assault force is beyond the river and is advancing with decision against the enemy positions. The allied air force makes hundreds of missions; a couple of destroyers and an armed boat are hammering the German left flank from the sea; the reaction is very weak. The 76th Panzer corps, in fact, is not in line: it has been withdrawn beyond the Gothic Line in order to be reorganized.

On August 27th, the allied divisions have cleared the zone around the Arzilla stream and are about to advance toward the Foglia river. On August 29th, they reach the heights over the river. In the same day, the Poles enter Pesaro. Alexander declares: our forces are penetrated inside the Line, as if the Line itself were inexistent.

And the Germans? The Germans are confused and disoriented. The Tenth Army's commander, general von Vietinghoff, is on leave. And he is not the sole. For his part, Kesselring is nervous, hesitant, wavering. Is the Canadian and British's attack the main attack, or is it a diversionary move? He hesitates to move troops from one sector to another sector; he fears to fall into a trap. Von Vietinghoff, come back from his leave and informed by his Staff, has got clearer ideas: no doubt, this is the main attack. But Kesselring is still hesitating. But when a copy of the Leese's message to his troops ("We will fight to reach Vienna") fall in German hands, every doubt vanishes.

On September 2nd , the Chief of Vietinghoff's Staff, General Fritz Wentzell, reaches the front in order to collect fresher information. Under the Allies' pressure, General Traugott Herr has withdrawn his troops along the Montecalvo-Monte Gridolfo- Tomba line. This latter locality has fallen in allied hands and a wide gap had been opened between the 26th Panzer and the First Parachute Division. If the Allies exploit that gap, the whole line is in danger to collapse.

General Wentzell tries to contact his headquarter to inform it about the danger. He is unable to do it. Then, on his own initiative, he moves the 29th Panzer Division from west to east in order to close the gap between the 26th Panzer and the First Parachute. And also Herr, on his own initiative, sends his tactical reserves to close another gap opened because of the conquest of Monte Gridolfo by the Canadians. This latter is a risky move: there are no reserves and if the Canadians broke through, nothing and nobody could stop them. Only Kesselring could give Herr other reserve troops, moving some units from the central front to the eastern front. Is he going to do it?

He must do it. Once reached the Conca river, the Canadians have advanced, fighting, towards the village of Coriano and are very close to make the breakthrough. But they, because of the measures adopted by Herr and by Wentzell, are meeting a more and more tenacious resistance. And suddenly, without a logic explication, Leese stops them. Perhaps he thinks they are exhausted, perhaps he overestimates a sudden German counterattack, the fact remains that Leese gives the First Armoured Division – originally destined to lead the pursuit – the task to conquer the ridge. But, because of the rain, the division needs more than a day to arrive in line and only in the mid morning of September 4th the first armoured tanks move towards Coriano. Too late: all the gaps are closed and the First Division's tank drivers are forced to stop.

But the troops moved by Wentzell and, then, by Kesselring have made weaker the central front. And thus, in accordance with the plan, Alexander orders Clark to move his Fifth Army. The Americans are ready for a long time. In early September they have neutralized two massifs in German hands (Monte Pisano and Monte Albano) and occupied the town of Lucca, which had been already freed by the partisans. By Kesselring's order, the German commander of the sector, General Joachim Lemelsen, has withdrawn his soldiers behind the Gothic Line. Clark has moved his troops in order to pursue the withdrawing Germans and now he is about to attack the Giogo Pass, feigning an attack towards the Futa Pass. If he breaks through and reaches Firenzuola, situated about ten kilometres beyond the Giogo Pass, he can choose between two possibilities: to get towards Bologna along the road n.65 and via Raticosa Pass or to get Imola along a secondary road. In both cases, for the Germans the situation would be a bad situation. Clark writes on his own diary: our destiny is linked with the Eighth Army's destiny, but we are ready. On September 10th, Alexander, after having visited the Adriatic front to have an idea about the situation around the Coriano ridge, gives Clark green light.

Lemelsen is in trouble. A division of his has been sent to France, for reinforcing that front; the partisans' attacks beyond the German lines against military quarters and, in particular, against railways and roads in order to damage them, have increased; allied bombers and fighter-bombers have intensified their missions, striking command centres, storages, build-ups of troops. The heavy bombers with their mission in northern Italy have destroyed many bridges and have damaged a lot of roads which the Germans need to move reinforcements and supplies. With the forces at his disposition, Lemelsen is not able to defend everything: he deploys two battalions in the Futa's zone and one battalion close to Giogo Pass.

The Second Corps under command of General Geoffrey Keyes is heading toward the Giogo Pass. At first, after having advanced without difficulties and with few casualties, now it is about to attack the hills of Monticelli and Monte Altuzzo, towering above the Pass. Keyes has much artillery, the support of the air force and a superiority in men three -to- one. Despite the superiority in men and in materiel, Keyes meets more than a difficulty. There are mine fields which have to be cleared, barbed wires which have to be cut, strongholds which have to be attacked, ravines and gullies that have to be crossed. On that terrain, only small units – platoons or companies- can be employed in combat.

The artillery fire is impressive; the fighters and the fighter-bombers fly low and strike, but is the infantry that has the task to arrive on the top. To dislodge the Germans from

Monticelli e Monte Altuzzo six days of harsh fighting are necessary. And three thousand casualties. The Line, however, has been broken and the Germans are in trouble: their forces deployed at the Futa Pass are in risk to be encircled.

The red zone.

The fight against the partisans must be carried out with all means at our disposal and with utmost severity. I will protect any commander who exceeds our usual restraint in the choice of severity of the methods he adopts against Partisans. In this connection the old principle holds good, that a mistake in the choice of methods in executing one's orders is better than failure or neglect to act... The partisans must be attacked and destroyed"
Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, *Bandenbefehl*, June 17, 1944

On September 29th, 1944, units of the 16th *Panzer Grenadier Division* under command of Major Walter Reder began to climb up the Monte Sole's slopes.

The green zone.

In the meanwhile , in the eastern part of the front, Leese blocked by the rain and by German fire in front of the Coriano ridge, plans a new plan in order to break the stalemate. Supported by the artillery and by the Desert Air Force's (DAF) fighter-bombers, the Fifth Corps (British, General sir Charles Allfrey) will make a diversionary manoeuvre towards the village of Croce, ten kilometres south of Coriano, as the Canadians of the Fifth Division and the British of the First Armoured Division under command of Lt general E.L.M Burns will attack frontally the ridge, will conquer it and will build some bridgeheads on the heights towering above the Marano river. At this point, the Eighth Army will cross the Marecchia river , will go down to the plain, will turn westward to join with the Clark's Fifth Army and to trap the Germans into a huge pocket.

On September 12th, the Canadians attack. They conquer the Coriano ridge and, two days later, reach the southern bank of the Marano river. Some units cross it and build bridgeheads on the opposite bank. General Herr takes remedial action, making shorter the front and withdrawing his men behind the San Patrignano- San Fortunato- monastery of San Martino line. The Canadians lose their momentum and the struggle turns into a bloody battle of attrition. Only on September 19th, supported by the artillery and by the air force, the Canadians are able to conquer the San Fortunato ridge. Without any cover on their left flank, the Germans lined up at San Martino are forced to withdraw. A heavy rain helps them. The tanks sink into the mud, the infantries advance at a snail's pace: the Germans break the contact and withdraw behind a swollen Marecchia river.

Lost the San Fortunato ridge, Herr is aware he is unable to hold Rimini for a long time. Thus, he asks the authorization to leave the town. The authorization is given. And along with the authorization, Herr receives a strange von Vietingoff's order: the only bridge still intact has not to be destroyed. That bridge is a stone bridge old of nearly two thousand years and built at the emperor Tiberius' times. Sparing that testimony of history and culture, for the Germans signifies to loose the advantages given them by the flood of the Marecchia river. And at this point a question arises : how is it possible to declare Rome " open city", to spare the testimonies of the Past and , from the other hand, to have no hesitation to kill innocent women and children?

On September 21st, the Third Greek Brigade enters Rimini. The town is a pile of rubbles. Only the Arch of Augustus, built in the year 27 BC is still intact. The so desired Romagna's plain , that plain for reaching which so much blood has been poured is here, very, very

close. And beyond it, there are other hills that must be climbed, other rivers that must be crossed. The rains of the Italian Autumn would have swelled them, making very difficult to cross them. And the rains, in the Fifth Army's sector, would have soon turned into snow and ice. Because of the divisions sent to Provence for the Operation *Anvil/Dragoon*, the timetable has not been respected. It has been impossible to respect it. Now it is necessary to act in a hurry. Otherwise one risks the deadlock.

The red zone.

In dribs and drabs, tired, hungry, the survivors of the Nazi-Fascist roundup reach the allied lines. Somebody is wounded. In the Monte Sole's woods are lying the corpses of the fallen partisans. Also Lupo has fallen. The Red Star Brigade does not exist any more as operative unit.

The survivors tell about hundreds of civilians killed by the Nazis during those appalling days. Exaggerations or terrible truth?

The green zone.

Conquered the Giogo Pass, Clark can head toward Bologna exploiting the route n. 65 via Raticosa Pass or get Imola exploiting the route 6528, which is parallel to Santerno river. Clark has got his own strategic and tactical opinions. One of the steadiest is to attack on the whole front. So he maintains the utmost pressure on Bologna and sends . in the same time, a division along the route 6528 towards Imola. In that sector, the two German Armies, the Tenth and the Fourteenth, join themselves and, all along, the joint point of two units is a critical point. In other words, that point is the German weakest point. If the Fifth Army could break through, could join with the Eighth Army, engaged in the meanwhile nearby Faenza.

Keyes chooses the major general Paul W. Kendall's Eighth division to get Imola. But the operation is more difficult than expected. The road 6528 is narrow; food and ammunition are to be carried, in some points of the road, by mules; the geography gives no help, the weather is poor. It is raining. Sometimes, a thick mist reduces the visibility to near zero, the warplanes can not fly; the flanks of the hills are steep and craggy; the Germans are holding strong positions.

However, despite the difficulties, the Kendall's men, fighting with bravery, are able to secure some strategic heights around the key-position of Castel del Rio, about twenty kilometres south of Firenzuola, and to reach Monte Battaglia – already in hand of the partisans- but are unable to go ahead. The aerial support can not be guaranteed; Kesselring has sent fresh troops to this zone; the Germans make more than a counterattack. Aware of the difficulties met by Kendal and, nearby Faenza, by Leese, Clark orders the attack be interrupted. Lemelsen, Tenth's Army commander, threatened on his left flank and short of experienced soldiers, gives thanks.

Once more, the Allies have arrived very close to break through in the central sector of the front, but once more, as in the eastern sector, the very bad weather conditions and the fierce German resistance have made it impossible. If they had had much men more, perhaps they would have been able to break through. But those men, those so necessary men, had been sent to Provence.

Cancelled the operation towards Imola, Clark concentrates his endeavours on Bologna, increasing the pressure on the Raticosa Pass. The Americans conquer Monte Bastione, Monte Oggioli, Monte Canda and converge toward the Pass. Kesselring, then, perceiving the danger, makes shorter the front. On September 28th, in fact, the Germans break the contact and withdraw behind the new defensive line, focused on the little town of Monghidoro.

The progress obtained by the Fifth and by the Eighth Army is remarkable. But because of the very bad conditions of the weather and because of the fierce German resistance, the main objectives have been not achieved: the Tenth Army has been not destroyed in the Po Valley, the Fourteenth Army has not been forced to withdraw behind the Po river. The times have become longer; the winter is imminent.

While amidst the gullies of the Apennines or in the flooded Plain of the Romagna, the soldiers are fighting with fury, the leaders – Churchill in particular- are trying to find a tactical and strategic sense for the “ forgotten front”. They want to continue the war in Italy and, in the same time, they would want that an amphibious landing in Dalmatia were made with the double goal to encircle the Germans and to help the Tito’s partisans, operating in Yugoslavia. But for landing in Istria, landing craft are necessary. And along with them, men and means, tanks and artillery are necessary. And in particular, aerial cover. They are impossible things: there are too many open fronts and the forces at disposal are just sufficient. It is impossible, thus, to move troops from Normandy or from Provence to help Italy.

Finally, the idea of an amphibious landing is abandoned, also because the Soviets have made understand they are not favourable to an Anglo-American operation in the Balkans. So the “forgotten front” comes back to its old function: it has to attract in Italy German divisions from France. The “forgotten front” won’t be weakened: on the contrary, the fight will have to be increased, even for defeating the two German Armies operating in Italy.

But Alexander, short of men, short of ammunition, without a three-to-one superiority able to grant the victory to him, is not sure he will be able to achieve this objective in the next future.

Epilogue.

Uncontrolled rumours , typical product of galloping fantasies in wartime , claimed till yesterday that during a police operation against a band of bandits, one hundred fifty women, children and old men, had been shot by German troops during a rounding-up in the village of Marzabotto. We are able to belie these macabre rumours and the action linked to it. We can add to the official denial also the verification made during an on-the-spot inspection. It is true that in the zone of Marzabotto, a military operation against a group of rebels has been made and that during this operation the group of rebels has suffered many casualties included many dangerous chiefs, but luckily it is not true that the roundup has caused the sacrifice and the decimation of one hundred fifty civilians. This is a manoeuvre of the usual irresponsible , destined to become ridiculous, because, one who had wanted to listen to any honest inhabitant of Marzabotto or some people returning from those places, would learned the authentic version of the facts.

From the Italian newspaper “Il Resto del Carlino”, October 11th , 1944, XXII year of the Fascist Era.

As we know, the civilians killed during that operation were not 150, but 770.