



## SECOND SUPPLEMENT

TO

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WEDNESDAY, 4 DECEMBER, 1918.

War Office,  
4th December, 1918.

The Secretary of State for War has received the following Despatch from General The Earl of Cavan, K.P., K.C.B., M.V.O., Commanding-in-Chief British Forces in Italy:—

General Headquarters,  
British Forces in Italy,  
15th November, 1918.

My Lord,—

I have the honour to submit the following report on the part played by the British troops in Italy from September 15th, 1918, to the final defeat of the Austrian Army.

If reference only in general terms is made to the gallant troops of the XIth and XVIIIth Italian Corps which were under my command, it is not because their part was any less brilliant, but because this despatch is written in my capacity of Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in Italy and not in the capacity of Commander of the Tenth Italian Army.

2. Early in September, as it appeared unlikely that offensive operations would be undertaken in Italy in the near future, it was decided to assist France with some or all of the British troops in this country.

His Excellency General Diaz not only put no obstacle in the way, but further assured me that his one wish was to assist Marshal Foch in defeating the Germans with all the resources he had available.

In accordance with this idea the 7th, 23rd and 48th Divisions were reduced from 13 to 10 battalions, and the 9 battalions thus released were despatched to France on September 13th and 14th.

The 7th Division was already at rest, and it was intended to despatch this division as soon as a battle-worn division should arrive from France to replace it.

In order that it might be in a position to follow the 7th Division without delay the 23rd Division was relieved by troops of the 12th Italian Corps, the relief being completed on September 27th.

3. As a result of the tactical situation in France and the consequent demands on rolling stock the proposed exchange of divisions was postponed from day to day. The situation in Italy also changed, and finally all three divisions remained in this country.

4. On October 6th I went to Comando Supremo at General Diaz's request.

General Diaz at this interview offered me the Command of a mixed Italian-British Army

with the view of undertaking offensive operations at an early date. I expressed my high appreciation of the honour conferred on me and the pleasure it would give me to accept this new command.

General Diaz impressed on me the vital importance of secrecy. In order to make as little apparent change as possible he suggested that the 48th Division should remain in position on the Asiago Plateau and pass temporarily under the command of General Pennella, Commanding the XIth Italian Corps. To this I agreed, with the stipulation that the 48th Division should rejoin my command at the earliest opportunity.

5. On October 13th General Diaz held a Conference of Army Commanders at Comando Supremo, at which he explained his plans for the forthcoming offensive.

The general plan for the main attack was to advance across the Piave with the Tenth, Eighth and Twelfth Italian Armies—to drive a wedge between the Fifth and Sixth Austrian Armies—forcing the Fifth Army eastwards, and threatening the communications of the Sixth Army running through the Valmarino Valley.

The Fourth Army was simultaneously to take the offensive in the Grappa sector.

The task allotted to the Tenth Army was to reach the Livenza between Portobuffole and Sacile, and thus protect the flank of the Eighth and Twelfth Armies in their move northwards.

The co-ordination of the attacks of the Tenth, Eighth and Twelfth Armies was entrusted to General Caviglia, the Commander of the Eighth Italian Army.

6. On October 11th the Headquarters of the Tenth Army, the Army which had been placed under my command, were established near Treviso.

The Tenth Army in the first instance was to consist of the XIth Italian and XIVth British Corps.

The XIth Italian Corps was already holding a sector on the Piave extending from Ponte Di Piave to Palazon. The XIVth British Corps was concentrated in the Treviso area on the 16th of October.

7. The problem that faced the Tenth Army was not an easy one.

The breadth of the Piave on the front of attack was approximately one and half miles, and consisted of numerous channels dotted with islands. The main island was the Grave di Papadopoli, which was some three miles long by one mile broad. The current varied according to the channels. In the main channel it ran at a rate exceeding ten miles an hour in time of flood, and never dropped below three and a half miles an hour at summer level.

The enemy held the Grave di Papadopoli as an advanced post.

8. On October 21st the XIVth British Corps took over the northern portion of the XIth Italian Corps front from Salletuol to Palazon.

Orders were issued that all troops visible to the enemy should wear Italian uniform, and that no British gun should fire a single shot previous to the general bombardment. By these means it was hoped to conceal the presence of British troops from the Austrians.

9. On the date of relief the Piave was in full flood, which not only made reconnaissances of the river bed impossible, but also raised the probability of changes in the main channels.

This added considerably to my anxieties as regards bridging requirements.

10. Lieutenant-General Sir J. M. Babington, K.C.M.G., C.B., Commanding the XIVth British Corps, at once suggested the advisability of occupying the island of Grave di Papadopoli previous to the general advance.

With this opinion I concurred.

11. On the night of October 23rd/24th, the 2nd/1st Battalion of the Honourable Artillery Company and the 1st Battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, without any previous artillery preparation, crossed the main channel, surprised the Austrian garrison and occupied the northern half of the island.

The attacking troops were transported in small flat-bottomed boats, each holding six men, and rowed by two Italian pontiere. The movement owed its success to the careful arrangements made by the 7th Division, the untiring energy of Captain Odini, of the Italian Engineers, and of the Italian pontiere under his command and to the fine leading of Lieutenant-Colonel R. N. O'Connor, D.S.O., M.C., Commanding the 2nd/1st Honourable Artillery Company.

Both in the transport of the troops by boat and the subsequent bridging of the river, the pontiere gave us an assistance whose value it is impossible to over-estimate.

12. On the night of October 25th/26th the conquest of the island of Grave di Papadopoli was completed by a combined movement of the 7th British Division from the north and the 37th Italian Division from the south.

This very successful operation put the main channel of the Piave behind us and enabled us to begin our bridges and preparations for the main attack in comparative security, although the garrison of the island was subjected to a very heavy shelling all day on the 26th.

13. At 11.30 p.m. on the night of October 26th the bombardment of the hostile positions opened along the whole front. The fact that no single British gun had opened previous to this hour deserves special mention. Both heavy and field artillery were registered by the 6th Field Survey Company, R.E., and the fact that the bombardment and the subsequent barrage were excellent in every way reflects the greatest credit on all ranks of this company.

14. At 6.45 a.m. on October 27th the attack of the Tenth Army against the enemy defences east of the Piave opened.

On the right the XIth Italian Corps under General Paolini, attacked with the 23rd Bersagliere Division under General Fara on its right, and the 37th Italian Division under General Castagnola on its left.

On the left the XIVth British Corps attacked with the 7th British Division under Major-General T. H. Shoubridge, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., on its right and the 23rd British Division under Major-General H. F. Thuillier, C.B., C.M.G., on its left.

15. The enemy offered considerable resistance in his front line, but the defenders were overwhelmed after a hard fight, and the advance was pushed forward by all units with the utmost determination. I would especially commend the action of the 22nd Battalion Manchester Regiment and the 11th Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers in this assault.

Unfortunately we lost a number of gallant men by drowning; the difficulty of keeping a footing in a strong current being very great when loaded with rifle and ammunition.

By the night of October 27th a large bridge-head had been gained and firmly held, and Stabiuzzo, S. Polo di Piave, Borgo Zanetti, Tezze, Borgo Malonotte, C. Tonon were all in our hands.

16. The bridging of the Piave was proceeding rapidly, though much interfered with by hostile airmen. The strength of the current was such that if a break occurred there was a great danger of the whole structure being washed away. Both bridges were frequently broken.

17. On the front of the Eighth Italian Army, but at an interval of ten kilometres to our left, a landing had also been effected, but difficulties in throwing bridges had been encountered, especially at the point of junction with my Army. Comando Supremo therefore allotted me the XVIIIth Corps, under the Command of General Basso, with a view to passing it across by our bridges and attacking northwards and so clearing the front of the Eighth Army.

18. During the night of October 27th/28th portions of the 56th Italian Division, under the Command of General Vigliani, and the 33rd Italian Division under the command of General Sanna, both of the XVIIIth Corps, crossed the Piave by various bridges in the XIVth Corps Area and took over the front from Borgo Malonotte to C. Tonon.

19. At 9 a.m. on 28th October the attack was renewed. During the night of 27th/28th October many of the bridges had been broken, and as a result the XVIIIth Italian Corps had been unable to deploy all the troops required. General Basso, with soldierly instinct, did not hesitate to continue the advance, which was resumed with splendid dash. By dark the Tenth Army had reached the line Roncadelle-Ormele-Tempio-Rai-C. Bonotto-C. Milanese-S. Lucia di Piave-Ponte-Priula. Patrols had been pushed in advance of this line towards and up to the River Monticano.

20. The success of these operations at once brought about the desired effect. The enemy's hold of the high ground about Susegana weakened, and the passage of the right of the Eighth Army about Nervesa was accomplished during the night 28th/29th October.

Having accomplished the rôle assigned to it, the XVIIIth Italian Corps reverted to the Eighth Army on the morning of 29th October.

21. On the morning of 29th October the attack was again renewed, and during the day the advance was carried up to the River Monticano from the neighbourhood of Fontanelle to Ramiera. The XIVth Corps Mounted Troops, under Lieutenant-Colonel Sir C. B. Lowther, D.S.O., Bart., acting vigorously in advance of the infantry, secured the bridge over the Monticano between Vazzola and Cimetta intact, although it had been prepared for demolition. This resolute action undoubtedly saved us many hours of delay in the pursuit.

By this date the enemy's defence showed manifest signs of weakening, and numerous fires in rear of his lines suggested that a far-reaching withdrawal was contemplated.

22. On 29th October the 23rd Bersagliere Division passed to the Third Army, with a view to clearing the front of that army by an attack southwards. Its place in the XIth Italian Corps was taken by the 10th Italian Division

under General Gagliani. The 31st Italian Division, which included the 332nd American Regiment, under General de Angelis, had meanwhile joined the XIVth British Corps.

The enemy had rapidly occupied the line of the River Monticano, and on this line he offered his last serious resistance. During the evening of 29th October and the morning of 30th October passages were forced, and the enemy skilfully manœuvred out of the remainder of his defences, chiefly by very gallant work on the part of the 8th Battalion, Yorkshire Regiment.

From this moment the defeat became a rout.

23. By the evening of 30th October the Livenza was reached, at Francénigo and Sacile. On 31st October this river was reached, and crossed between Motta di Livenza and Sacile.

On this date the XVIIIth Italian Corps was again placed under the command of the Tenth Army.

The advance had, on the 30th, already caused the enemy to weaken on the front of the Third Army, and crossings of the Lower Piave were effected at a number of points on this date. On the 31st the Third Army was advancing rapidly to the Livenza.

24. 1st November was mainly devoted to bridging the Livenza, the pursuit of the enemy being entrusted to the Italian Cavalry Corps.

25. On 2nd November the advance was resumed, and on that date the Tenth Army reached the line Villotta-Praturlone-River Meduna (east of Pordenone)-S. Quirino-Aviano.

26. On 3rd November the Tagliamento was reached from S. Vito to the north of Spilimbergo, a little opposition being met with. On 4th November the 332nd American Regiment had their baptism of fire when forcing the passage of the Tagliamento. They took over 100 prisoners and suffered a few casualties when attacking the enemy rearguards, an operation which they carried out with the same dash as has always been shown by American troops.

27. At 3 p.m. on 4th November, when the armistice came into effect, the line of the Tenth Army was Basagliapenta-Meretto di Tomba-Coseano-S. Daniele-Pinzano.

28. It is difficult to say with certainty the number of prisoners captured by the Tenth Army, as, after 1st November, the cavalry passed back many prisoners through our cages, which had already proved inadequate to hold such vast numbers.

The share of the XIVth British Corps amounted to over 28,000 prisoners and 219 guns.

29. I should like to specially bring to your Lordship's notice the work of the following officers in connection with these operations:— Brigadier-General W. W. Pitt-Taylor, C.M.G., D.S.O., Brigadier-General, General Staff, XIVth Corps, and Brigadier-General C. Ogston, C.M.G., D.S.O., D.A. and Q.M.G., XIVth Corps, to whose untiring efforts the regular supply of food and ammunition was largely due; Brigadier-General R. C. Hudson, Commanding Heavy Artillery; Brigadier-General J. McC. Steele, C.B., C.M.G., Commanding 22nd Infantry Brigade; and Brigadier-General C. D. V. Cary-Barnard, D.S.O., Commanding 68th Infantry Brigade.

30. Meanwhile, as stated above, the 48th Division, under Major-General Sir H. B.

Walker, K.C.B., D.S.O., has remained on the Asiago Plateau, forming part of the Sixth Italian Army.

Successful raids were carried out on 4th, 11th and 23rd October, which resulted in the capture of 445 prisoners and twelve machine guns.

A further raid carried out on the night of 29th/30th October found the trenches facing Ave unoccupied.

This pointed to a withdrawal in the mountains, and on 30th October patrols pushed beyond Asiago found the enemy rearguards in position on the line M. Catz-Bosco-Camporevere.

At 5.45 a.m. on 1st November an attack was launched against this line. M. Catz was captured by the Royal Berkshire Regiment by 6.30 a.m., but no progress could be made on M. Interrotto.

On the morning of 2nd November the success gained on M. Catz by the 145th Infantry Brigade was wisely exploited. M. Mosciagh was in the hands of the 48th Division by 7.30 a.m., and the Interrotto position thus out-flanked. The advance then became more rapid, and by dark the advanced guards had reached Vezzena, and thus set foot on Austrian soil. This division was therefore the first British division to enter enemy territory on the Western Front.

On the morning of 3rd November the advance was again resumed, and by dark both Caldonazzo and Levico had been occupied.

At 3 p.m. on 4th November, when the Armistice came into force, the leading troops were on the line Miola-eastern outskirts of Trent.

The captures in prisoners and guns made by the 48th Division cannot be accurately ascertained; they amounted to at least 20,000 prisoners and 500 guns. Included amongst the prisoners were the Commander of the 3rd Corps and three Divisional Commanders.

It must be remembered that this division was attacking very formidable mountain positions with only a fifth part of the artillery that would have been at its disposal had the initial attack started on the Altipiano. Its performance therefore in driving in the enemy's rearguards so resolutely, while climbing up to heights of 5,000 feet, is all the more praiseworthy.

During these operations the leadership of Brigadier-General G. C. Sladen, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C., Commanding the 143rd Infantry Brigade, was particularly noticeable.

31. The infantry had been waiting for an opportunity to show that they could worthily emulate the performances of their comrades in France. When the opportunity came they fulfilled my highest anticipations.

32. The work of the Royal Artillery throughout was based on the valuable "Notes on Recent Fighting" sent to us from France, and the rapid advances in close support of the infantry were worthy of their great traditions.

33. The Royal Engineers were incessantly at work in bridging not only the Piave, but the Monticano, the Livenza, and later on the Meduna and the Tagliamento. Without their highly skilled and efficient work vigorous pursuit would have been impossible.

34. The Royal Air Force, under the command of Colonel P. B. Joubert de la Ferte,

D.S.O., took a very prominent part in the battle, harassing the enemy's retreat so effectively that many batteries and thousands of prisoners fell into our hands that would have otherwise escaped.

35. The Machine Gun Corps had frequent opportunities, which were fully taken advantage of, and their training and skill in moving warfare was well exemplified.

36. Under circumstances of the greatest difficulty the Signal Service kept me in communication with the various units under my command.

37. During the battle, I was in constant touch with His Excellency, General Cavaglia, under whose general direction my Army was operating. He was always most kind and prompt in assistance and advice and I owe him very warm thanks for his generous encouragement.

The action of the XIth and XVIIIth Italian Corps has been only briefly referred to, but they bore a very noble and conspicuous part in the victory. My cordial thanks are due to their commanders for their most loyal co-operation.

My thanks are also due to His Royal Highness The Duke of Aosta and the Staff of the Third Army. The XIth Italian Corps had previously formed part of the Third Army. Careful and detailed arrangements for an attack had long been made and owing to the advanced state of these preparations little in this direction remained for me to do.

38. The fresh influenza epidemic, which broke out shortly before the commencement of the operations, threw a heavy and additional strain on the medical services. Despite this the evacuation and care of both the sick and wounded was rapidly and satisfactorily carried out. All the arrangements were most ably organised by my Director of Medical Services, Major-General F. R. Newland, C.B., C.M.G.

39. The demands made upon the Transportation Services in consequence of the rapid move of troops and material from the Altipiano to the Piave were successfully met by my Deputy Director-General of Transportation, Brigadier-General G. L. Colvin, C.M.G., D.S.O.

40. The Chaplains of all Denominations with my Force have invariably rendered the most devoted service, showing at all times the utmost solicitude for the welfare and comfort of the men.

41. Brigadier-General T. W. Hale, C.B., C.M.G., my Director of Ordnance Services, has promptly and efficiently met every demand that has been made on him.

42. The rapid advance during the operations entailed great strain on the Supply and Transport Services.

My thanks are due to Brigadier-General W. S. Swabey, C.B., C.M.G., and all ranks of these Services who maintained the supply of both ammunition and rations in spite of bad roads, hastily constructed bridges and long distances from railheads.

43. Brigadier-General C. Delme-Radcliffe, C.B., C.M.G., C.V.O., and the Staff of the British Mission, as well as the Liaison Officers, both Italian and British, rendered much valuable service. The translation of orders and the carrying of important messages threw a heavy

responsibility on these officers, and the task was carried out without a hitch or difficulty of any sort.

44. In their retreat the Austrians left many hospitals full of sick and wounded of all nationalities behind them. In many cases these hospitals were bereft of provisions and attendants. The British Red Cross, under the supervision of Colonel Sir Courtauld Thompson, K.B.E., C.B., spared no efforts to alleviate the sufferings of the inmates, and undoubtedly saved the lives of many Austrian as well as Italian patients.

45. I again desire to express my most grateful acknowledgment of the services rendered by my Major-General, General Staff, Major-General The Honourable J. F. Gatherne-Hardy, C.B., D.S.O., whose unerring judgment and readiness to help in any difficult situation did much to bring about the very decisive results of the battle of Vittorio.

I also desire to thank all subordinate members of my Staff for the smooth working of a difficult operation, and in particular my Chief Engineer, Major-General C. S. Wilson, C.B., C.M.G.; my G.O.C., R.A., Major-General W. H. Kay, D.S.O.; my D.A. and Q.M.G., Major-General H. L. Alexander, D.S.O., who

met enormous demands for food for prisoners—which far exceeded the most sanguine estimate—as well as for a starving population and a never ceasing flow of Italians, military and civil, returning to the liberated country; Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. Mitchell, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., head of the Intelligence Section; Colonel O. C. Mordaunt, D.S.O., Deputy-Director of Signals; Major The Honourable P. W. Legh, my Military Secretary; and Major-General J. A. Strick, D.S.O., Inspector-General of Communications.

46. Lastly, I have the very greatest pleasure in informing your Lordship that I have always been able to obtain the ready ear of Comando Supremo in all important matters. Their extreme courtesy and kindness to myself and to the British troops adds much to the happy memory of the campaign in Italy.

I have the honour to be, My Lord,  
Your Lordship's obedient Servant,

CAVAN,  
General,  
Commanding-in-Chief,  
British Forces in Italy.

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