

success and my staff worked out a plan to improvise an operation against Calabria. Assuming that Eighth Army continued to make such good progress up the east coast as it had in the first few days it would, within five days of the capture of Messina, pass a brigade from 13 Corps across the Straits, assisted by commandos and parachutists. 78 Division would then follow up into Reggio and 46 Division from North Africa would make an assault landing in the Gulf of Gioia. I agreed to this tentative plan and obtained the concurrence of Admiral Cunningham—in fact we even considered assaulting Calabria before the fall of Messina; using Catania as a port of departure—but the premises on which it was based failed to materialise. German reinforcements blocked the way to Catania and 78 Division, following the original plan, had to be thrown into the heavy fighting for Centuripe. However, the feeling of justified optimism and the positive gains represented by the lightness of the Allied casualty list still remained. It was possible to contemplate bolder strokes which promised more valuable results than the capture of the incidental objective of Sardinia or locking up the Allied forces for a winter in Calabria in circumstances reminiscent of the Allied situation at Salonica in the 1914-1918 War.

It was with these considerations in mind that I attended a conference at Carthage on 17th July with General Eisenhower, Admiral Cunningham and Air Marshal Tedder.* We then decided that "the mainland of Italy is the best area for exploitation with a view to achieving our object of forcing Italy out of the war and containing the maximum German forces." In order to retain complete freedom of action to avail ourselves of any possibilities which might offer themselves we agreed to prepare for the following eight courses of action:

- (a) A quick exploitation across the Straits by Eighth Army, assisted by one or more divisions from North Africa.
- (b) A full scale assault landing by 10 Corps to capture Reggio.
- (c) A quick exploitation from the "Toe" (Reggio) to the "Ball" (Cotrone).
- (d) A full scale assault landing by 5 Corps to capture Cotrone.
- (e) Repeated outflanking operations up the coast of Calabria by small amphibious forces.
- (f) A large-scale amphibious operation against Taranto by Fifth Army, to be known as Operation MUSKET, dependent on sufficient landing craft being available.
- (g) "Introducing a reinforcing force into Naples after the port has been captured as a result of our land advance."

In this schedule of future courses (b) was intended as an alternative to (a) and (d) as an alternative to (c), if the overland drive had become held up before it reached the Cotrone area. Course (e) reflected the healthier situation of our landing craft resources; it was expected that we should be able to unblock ourselves if halted by strong resistance and overcome the difficulties of the Calabrian terrain by swift "seaborne hooks" in brigade strength.

* Now Marshal of the Royal Air Force The Lord Tedder, G.C.B.

So far, however, there was little change from previous conceptions of the progress of future operations except that the speed of the advance was appreciated as likely to be greater; but the last two courses for which preparations were now to be made were more ambitious.

An assault on Taranto had been considered earlier but rejected on what then seemed sufficient grounds. At the date proposed, 1st November, the weather was likely to be unsuitable for beach maintenance, we should have lost too many landing craft in the three previous assaults (i.e., Sicily, Reggio and Cotrone) and air cover would be impossible since Taranto would be out of range of the majority of our fighters operating from the airfields in north-eastern Sicily. These reasons were no longer cogent. No degree of success could change the November weather in this stormy part of Italy but it would ensure our being able to mount the assault earlier, and a provisional date of 1st October could now be contemplated with some confidence. More landing craft were now available as a result of our light losses in the landings in Sicily and we had considerable hopes that it might be unnecessary to carry out one or other of the assaults at Reggio and Cotrone, perhaps even both, with a consequent further saving in resources. As for air cover we now had hopes of a rapid advance to seize the airfields at Cotrone and in any case, if the Italian defences in Apulia were as feebly manned as in Sicily (and the German forces in the area were weak), a lesser scale of air support might be acceptable. The advantages of the operation were considerable. It would give us the possession of ports through which a large force could be built up and it would place us in a geographically protected area on the same side of the Apennines as Foggia, the capture of whose numerous airfields for the use of the Strategic Air Force was one of our first objectives in Italy. On 22nd July, therefore, Fifth Army was directed to prepare plans for an operation "to seize and secure the Heel of Italy east of the line Taranto-Bari inclusive," with target date 1st October, to be carried out under my command. Planning for the assault on Sardinia had already been cancelled on the 20th and responsibility for this operation, together with that against Corsica, was handed over to the French. With this decision the western islands passed out of the strategic picture; in the event the Germans withdrew from both, with a precipitancy which they probably later regretted.

The last of the possible courses for which preparations were to be made provided for the introduction of a force into the port of Naples after it had been captured by an overland advance; this was given the codename GANGWAY. It had been contemplated already, but only as a possibility which would be open in the event of an Italian collapse. What we hoped was that, with the Italian forces disintegrating and the Germans withdrawing to safer positions further north, a small mobile force, necessarily restricted to the minimum by difficulties of maintenance, might be able to push rapidly across the tangled mountains of Calabria, Lucania and Southern Campania to seize the port for the entry of Fifth Army. In the first optimistic days of the invasion of Sicily Fifth