

great spur of the Apennines. From its summit a ridge thrusts out, terminating abruptly in Monte Cassino. This is a bare, rocky promontory, seventeen hundred feet high, whose sides drop sharply into the plain beneath. It had been selected for its natural strength and inaccessibility by Saint Benedict as the site of his first monastery and by the Italian General Staff as an example of an impregnable position. Before we could advance on Rome by this route, and there was no other way except by sea, we should have to storm this bastion defending the gate, for from it the Germans could command the whole floor of the valley.

Plans for an Amphibious Landing.

The desirability of employing our control of the sea in amphibious outflanking movements had been well in the forefront of all our planning ever since we first set foot in Italy. For lack of resources in men and craft only one operation had so far been attempted, Eighth Army's small-scale but successful landing at Termoli, but I had also been constantly examining the possibilities of a "seaborne hook" on the west coast where it seemed to promise still greater advantages. General Clark had endeavoured to fit in such an operation as a feature of almost all his attacks so far but, in spite of his great keenness, had been unable to find a suitable target for the resources available. Now that we were approaching the narrowest part of the peninsula the advantages of an amphibious strategy became even more obvious. With the shortening of their line and the strengthening of their defences, with only one really vulnerable point in their front, the Liri valley, the Germans could economise in troops while we, however well our build-up might progress, would have difficulty in bringing our full strength to bear. The advantages of an outflanking move were not, of course, limited to assisting the advance on Rome and extending the area on which the Germans would have to fight us; they included also the possibility of the destruction of part of the force opposing us. It was on these grounds that I had urged this strategy at the Carthage conferences on 25th October and 3rd November and it had been agreed that an amphibious landing should be made south of the Tiber when Fifth Army had advanced to within reasonable supporting distance. I had proposed to use for this 1 British Infantry Division, which had been originally intended for Eighth Army. The landing craft situation was quite uncertain. I pointed out on 8th November that, on the present programme, my Armies would still be ten thousand vehicles short by 1st January and that it would be impossible to mount an amphibious operation before 25th December. If the craft were then withdrawn it would be impossible to lift as much as a division with what would remain. However, we decided to go on planning on the assumption that sufficient might be available. The SEXTANT conference was due to open in Cairo on 22nd November and General Eisenhower agreed to press there for the retention of the landing craft which I thought necessary.

My operation instruction of 8th November had directed that in the third phase of the operations then envisaged an amphibious landing would be made south of Rome directed

on the Alban Hills. The choice of this objective was made for obvious geographical reasons. Rising just south of Rome this large *massif* of volcanic origin dominates both routes from Rome to the enemy's line on the Gargliano, Routes 6 and 7, the Via Casilina and the Via Appia. The latter can be cut with ease by landing almost anywhere on the west coast, but the Alban Hills mark the first point where the inland route is not protected by the almost trackless Aurunci and Lepini Mountains. If we could seize them the enemy's communications would be cut and Rome almost within our grasp. It would, admittedly, be rather in the nature of a bluff, for a really strong-nerved commander might still hang on to his positions—although, of course, we intended to attack them frontally in force simultaneously with our landing—and try to raise a force from somewhere else to fight his communications free. Such a course would certainly mean reinforcements from outside Italy, which would be an assistance to the other fronts, and I felt myself that, provided we got firmly on to the Alban Hills and across Route 6, Kesselring would not dare to take the risk of retaining his positions at Cassino.

With the objective thus designated, detailed planning became a Fifth Army responsibility, in conjunction with Rear-Admiral Lowry,* United States Navy, who was appointed as naval commander for the force. The code-name SHINGLE was given to the operation. On 12th November, Fifth Army set up a planning staff; they were instructed by my Headquarters to work on the assumption that the force would number about twenty-three thousand men and that the target date would be 20th December. The planning staff quickly decided on the area around Anzio as the site of the landing. This would give immediate access into relatively open terrain, though broken by water obstacles, over which good roads lead directly to the Alban Hills only twenty miles away. The beaches were definitely poor, with very shallow under-water gradients and off-lying sandbars, but they were the best to be had south of the Tiber; there were three possible landing sites, one east and one west of Anzio and one in the port itself. The beach to the west was particularly shallow and had, in fact, to be abandoned after the initial assault. The weather was likely to be bad for beach working and forecasts promised only an average of two good days out of seven. Conditions would be much improved, however, if the port of Anzio, which the Germans had been using for coastwise maintenance, could be captured undemolished. As to opposition to the landing, it was not expected that the enemy would have any large force in the area. Our estimate of the prepared defences likely to be met was made difficult by the fact that the first photographic coverage showed an enormous number of defences of all kinds in the immediate vicinity of Anzio. It was learned, however, that the area had been a much-used training ground for Italian troops before and during the war, and nearly all the defences were marked as unoccupied; in the event the masses of trenches and strongpoints which dotted the coast on the defence overprints issued to the troops played no rôle in resistance to the assault.

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