

there would cut the communications of all the German formations in the south, perhaps forcing them to evacuate Naples before they had had time to carry out extensive demolitions. The Germans also appear to have expected us to attack in this area rather than further south; they moved two divisions there immediately after the evacuation of Sicily whereas it was only shortly before our landing at Salerno that a division was brought across to there from Apulia. But there were two serious objections to the northern assault area; the beaches were unsuitable for landings, and in parts obstructed by off-lying sandbars, and it would be well beyond effective fighter cover. The first might possibly have been accepted but the second was decisive. The plans for the landing involved sufficient risks already, as the event was to show; without fighter cover it might well have been a disaster.*

The Salerno beaches are undoubtedly the best for an assault on the whole west coast of Italy. There is a continuous strip of beach twenty miles long running from Salerno southwards; sea approaches are good and offshore gradients vary between one in forty and one in eighty, allowing landing craft to come close inshore.† The coastal defences in the area were not impressive and were almost exclusively fieldworks. From the air point of view a fine prize was within our grasp in the Montecorvino airfield, capable of taking four fighter squadrons, which lay less than three miles from the shore. Conditions for an assault, therefore, are ideal but the trouble begins inland from the beaches. The coastal plain is compressed by a line of mountains, rising abruptly at distances varying between two and ten miles from the coast, which would afford the enemy excellent observation and fire positions commanding the plain and a strong defensive position to which to withdraw if our bridgehead were expanded. Still more serious is the fact that, even if the landings should be completely successful, a formidable obstacle still bars the way to Naples: the rocky spur of the Monti Picentini which runs down into the Sorrento peninsula. Towering sheer above Salerno, this wall of bare mountain is pierced only by two passes, running through narrow gorges offering admirable defensive positions. For all these disadvantages, however, there was one decisive factor in the choice of Salerno: it was the furthest north and the nearest to Naples that we could strike without losing fighter cover.

For the present the proposed landing at Salerno took second priority to the gaining of a lodgement in Calabria, for General Montgomery‡ considered he would need 10 Corps as well as 13 Corps for the latter operation. I was already of the opinion, however, that we could exploit into Calabria on a much cheaper scale, using only the troops from Sicily, for I

felt certain that there would be no serious German resistance and that the Italians would do no better than in Sicily. This proposal was accepted at a further conference of Commanders-in-Chief on 1st August; we agreed that a lodgement in Calabria was necessary but hoped to be able to achieve it without using 10 Corps at all. In any case our strategy was flexible enough to allow us to switch 10 Corps to either objective and this was laid down in a directive issued after another Carthage conference on 9th August. The relevant paragraph directed: "every effort will be made to seize a bridgehead in Calabria with the resources available after the allocation of the necessary landing craft to 10 Corps." I informed General Montgomery on 23rd August that he would almost certainly have to undertake the operation with his existing resources and without the assistance of an additional assault landing by 10 Corps. On 13th August 13 Corps Headquarters, with under command 1 Canadian Division and 5 Division, had already been withdrawn from operations in Sicily in order to prepare for the assault across the Straits.

Final Decisions on Invasion Plans.

At a Commanders-in-Chief conference at Carthage on 16th August the final decisions were taken on which the invasion of Italy was based. The campaign in Sicily was practically over and the Germans were being more successful than we had hoped in evacuating men and light equipment over the Straits. Evacuation was actually completed by dawn next day, 17th August. It was known that new German troops were pouring into Italy, mainly re-formed divisions from the old Sixth Army destroyed at Stalingrad. By the end of the month there were to be as many as eighteen German divisions in Italy, including five armoured divisions. We should not be able to get an equivalent number of divisions into the country until December. Nevertheless, the decision was taken to proceed at the earliest possible moment to a full-scale invasion on the lines of the boldest plan which had been considered. First 13 Corps were to land in Calabria; the date, to be as early as possible and probably between 1st and 4th September, was left to my subsequent decision. Secondly, the Salerno assault was to be launched with a target date of 9th September. This date could be postponed not more than forty-eight hours if necessary. Fifth Army came under my command on 17th August, just over three weeks before it was to assault the Salerno beaches.

Fifth Army's outline plan for the operation, which it had been ordered to prepare on 27th July, was presented on 15th August. Only slight modifications were necessary and the final Operation Order was issued on 26th August. The most important change was in the use of airborne troops. We only had sufficient aircraft for one division and 82 (United States) Airborne was nominated; in the event this too was removed from the order of battle in circumstances which will be described later and there was no airborne operation as part of the assault. The troops to be employed in the initial assault only amounted to three divisions with a floating reserve of one Regimental Combat Team. On the left the British 10 Corps,

* Enemy air strength within 110 miles of Salerno was calculated at 380 German and 225 Italian day fighters and 50 night fighters (German); reinforcement within two days at 140 Italian fighters from North Italy and up to 60 German from Sardinia; bomber strength at 270 German and 275 Italian aircraft plus 120 German bombers based in Sardinia. For factors governing our own air strategy see Appendix "L"—a memorandum by Air Plans, Allied Force Headquarters.

† By contrast some of the Anzio beaches, for example, had gradients of worse than one in a hundred.

‡ Now Field-Marshal The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, K.G., G.C.B., D.S.O.