

Enemy Strength and Dispositions.

It is now time to consider "the other side of the hill" and review briefly the strength which the enemy could bring to meet our attack. Since January the Axis had been reinforcing Sicily, but not on the scale which we had allowed for; it had produced the two German divisions we had expected but only one extra Italian division instead of three. My Intelligence Staff was able to follow with some success the enemy preparations for invasion. The Italian Order of Battle was fairly easily established but the German only became clear towards the end of June, a fact which reflects the tardiness with which the Germans reinforced the island. It will be realised that the task of establishing the enemy Order of Battle in Sicily was surrounded with many difficulties; normal means were not available as we were not in contact with the enemy and so good was the police and counter-espionage system in Sicily that we were unable to obtain any information direct from the island. It is gratifying to record that, in spite of these difficulties, one captured Italian general considered our Order of Battle to be superior to the official document in his possession.* I will not, however, detail the steps by which the enemy picture was built up, but give the situation as it was on the day of the invasion.

Command in Sicily was exercised by the Sixth Army (Italian), with headquarters near Enna. The Army Commander was General Guzzoni, a sixty-six year old officer who had recently been recalled from the retired list on which he was placed in 1940; he was assisted by a German liaison officer, General von Senger und Etterlin, later a Corps commander in Italy. The west of the island was commanded by XII Corps, headquarters Corleone, with 28 (Aosta) Division covering the Marsala-Trapani area with headquarters near Salemi and 26 (Assietta) Division covering the south-west with headquarters north of Santa Margherita. The eastern and central portion of the island was the responsibility of XVI Corps, headquarters Piazza Armerina; its two field divisions were 4 (Livorno) at Caltanissetta, a nodal point of road communications in the centre of the island, and 54 (Napoli) north of Palazzolo, inland from Syracuse. The coastal defences were assigned to five "Coastal Divisions" and an autonomous coastal regiment; these forces played, in the event, little part in the defence of the island and need not be further considered. It will be seen that the Italians showed a tendency to concentrate greater strength in the western part of the island, the nearest to Tunisia, and had only one division in the south-eastern corner.

The original German forces in the island consisted mainly of drafts in transit to Tunisia. When resistance collapsed in Africa they were organised into a provisional division known first as "Division Sicily" but later as 15

Panzer Division,* in memory of one of the formations destroyed in Africa. Its commander was General Baade who had commanded a regiment of the original 15 Panzer Division in Africa and was later famous in Italy as the commander of 90 Panzer Grenadier Division. It was divided into three battle groups of all arms and these were dispersed to provide extra stiffening for the Italians at points considered vital: one battle group was in the extreme west between Marsala and Mazza, a second in the centre of the island with divisional headquarters, and the third in the Catania area. There was a detachment from the central battle group covering the airfields at Biscari and Comiso. This central group, and divisional headquarters, moved west immediately before D-day in accordance with the enemy appreciation that that part of the island was our most likely target. The second German division was the Hermann Goering Panzer Division. Part of this formation had fought in Africa and been destroyed there, but the remainder, after re-forming in Italy near Naples, began to arrive in the island late in June. It was divided into two battle groups: one was in the Catania area, where it took under command the regimental group from 15 Panzer Division which was already there, and the second was established in the area of Caltagirone, from where it was able to operate against Gela or the Comiso airfields. This battle group had relieved the group from 15 Panzer Division which was moving to the west as already stated.

Besides their forces in Sicily the Germans were moving troops into other parts of the Italian homeland. By the beginning of July there were about five German divisions in southern Italy, one in Sardinia and a regimental group in Corsica. These were therefore available for the reinforcement of Sicily, though the event was to show that the Germans were prepared to reinforce the island from as far away as France.

To sum up, the enemy forces opposing me in Sicily amounted in round figures to about three hundred and fifteen thousand Italians and fifty thousand Germans, the latter total rising to ninety thousand when the reinforcing divisions which arrived after the attack began are included.†

Capture of Pantelleria.

Before the attack began General Eisenhower decided to assault and capture the island of Pantelleria and subsequently the minor islands of the Pelagian group. The original plan for Sicily had proposed that Pantelleria should be merely silenced by heavy bombardment, for any losses in amphibious equipment which might be incurred in an attempt to capture the island would directly reduce the resources available for the main operation; it was obviously more economical, however, to capture the airfield on the island for our own use rather than merely deny it to the enemy. A further

* It was not a real Panzer Division and had only one tank battalion; after the Sicilian campaign it was renamed Panzer Grenadier Division, which name it retained.

† Enemy air force strength amounted to about eight hundred German and seven hundred Italian combat aircraft counting all those based in Sicily, Sardinia, Italy and South France. The Italian battle fleet included six battleships and two 8-inch cruisers.

* One serious error was made. By an extraordinary series of coincidences a body of evidence was built up which made it appear that an extra Italian division (103 Piacenza) was in the area south of Catania. This was in fact false, but the mistake was discovered before it could have any untoward effect.