

eastern airfields in order to give protection to ships lying off the beaches. Air Chief Marshal Tedder also entered strong objections from the air point of view. The Eighth Army plan would leave thirteen landing grounds in enemy hands, and this was far too many for effective neutralisation by air action. He considered that it was vital to success to capture these airfields for our own use at the earliest possible opportunity and gave as his formal opinion that unless this could be guaranteed he would be opposed to the whole operation. I was therefore faced with a complete contradiction of opinion between the Army view, represented by General Leese, and the views of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean and the Air Commander-in-Chief. On the existing plan it was impossible to reconcile these conflicting points of view.

I therefore decided to recast the whole plan. I took the decision on 3rd May, based on a conference on 2nd May which I had been prevented from attending by impossible flying weather, to cancel the American assault in the west and transfer the whole weight of Seventh Army to the south-east of the island, on the immediate left of Eighth Army. I decided, in fact, to take a risk on the administrative side rather than the operational risk of dispersion of effort. This was contrary to what had hitherto been regarded as one of the fundamental principles of the operation: that we must capture Palermo at the earliest possible opportunity if we were to have a hope of maintaining sufficient forces for the reduction of the island. On my new plan the only ports we should be certain of capturing in the first stage would be Syracuse and Augusta, the latter more a naval anchorage than a port, and possibly Catania; the whole of Seventh Army would have to depend on beach maintenance except for such help as it might get from the small port of Licata which, as already stated, was only rated at a capacity of six hundred tons a day.* The risk was therefore grave, but there were two factors which brightened the prospect. The first was that there was a reasonable probability of suitable weather in July for beach maintenance. The second was the coming of the DUKW. I need not describe these ingenious amphibious vehicles, which are now familiar to everyone, but it is interesting to note, in view of the great part they later played, that I had never seen one up to that time. General Miller†, my Major General, Administration, had received advance reports and had ordered large quantities from the United States on 22nd March. When they arrived it was discovered that the claims made for them were fully justified by their performance. It is not too much to say, indeed, that the DUKW revolutionised the problem of beach maintenance. Nevertheless I arranged that Eighth Army should meet the commitment of providing a thousand tons per day through Syracuse for Seventh Army from D plus 14 to supplement their maintenance over the beaches until they could capture and bring into use the port of Palermo.

In changing my plan in this way to obtain concentration of force I was proceeding on

sound strategic lines but there was one consideration which gave me some concern and which I should like to mention here. As I have said, I had decided to take a calculated administrative risk for operational reasons; but this risk was unevenly divided and almost the whole would fall on the Seventh Army. In other ways also it might well seem that the American troops were being given the tougher and less spectacular tasks: their beaches were more exposed than Eighth Army's and on some there were awkward sand bars, they would have only one small port for maintenance and Eighth Army would have the glory of capturing the more obviously attractive objectives of Syracuse, Catania and Messina, names which would bulk larger in press headlines than Gela or Licata or the obscure townships of central Sicily. Both I and my staff felt that this division of tasks might possibly, on these understandable grounds, cause some feeling of resentment. I knew, from the Tunisian campaign, General Patton's punctilious and scrupulous sense of duty and that there was no possibility of his questioning any orders he might receive from me, but in the case of so difficult and important an operation and since it might appear that an American Commander was being required to scrap the results of difficult and tedious planning and undertake a heavier burden than he had expected at the order of a British superior, I felt a natural anxiety about American reactions. I wish to place on record here that General Patton at once fell in with my new plan, the military advantages of which were as clear to him as to me, and neither he nor anyone in Seventh Army raised any form of objection. It is an impressive example of the spirit of complete loyalty and inter-Allied co-operation which inspired all operations with which I was associated in the Mediterranean theatre.

The Final Plan

The new plan was approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 12th May, the day before that on which German resistance in Tunisia came to an end. I accordingly issued on 19th May my Operation Instruction No. 1. This laid down the principles on which the plan of operations was based and the tasks of the two Armies. At the risk of some repetition of facts already given it will serve a useful purpose to set out the main lines of this instruction.

"An operation is to be prepared to seize and hold the island of Sicily as a base for future operations . . . The intention of the Allied Commander-in-Chief is to seize and hold the island by operations in five phases"

"Phase 1.

Preparatory measures by Naval and Air forces to neutralize enemy naval efforts and to gain air supremacy.

"Phase 2.

Pre-dawn seaborne assaults, assisted by airborne landings with the object of seizing airfields and the ports of Syracuse and Licata.

"Phase 3.

The establishment of a firm base from which to conduct operations for the capture of the ports of Augusta and Catania, and the Gerbini group of airfields.

* Seventh Army actually managed to raise this figure in practice to a thousand tons per day

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