

attacks unless I could produce some new tactics to give us a better chance of success. In this frame of mind I decided to try the effect of a really heavy air bombardment. General Cannon,* Commanding General of the Tactical Air Force, was anxious to make the experiment too; he hazarded the opinion that, given good weather and all the air resources in Italy, we could "whip out Cassino like an old tooth." Of course both of us regarded the plan wholly as an experiment, without any certainty as to how it would work out, for we had never tried anything on that scale before; but I was very willing to try it on for I felt that if successful we should have found a way of capturing positions like this without the loss of life which more normal methods must involve.† Accordingly, on 20th February, after discussing the plan with General Clark and General Freyberg, I decided we would next attempt to capture the town of Cassino, after a heavy bombardment, with the New Zealand Division which would then push past the southern face of Monte Cassino along Route 6, make contact with the Indians north-west of the Monastery and thus encircle the enemy positions. This would give us a big bridgehead over the Rapido and an entry into the Liri valley.

At the same time I decided to carry out a thorough regrouping of forces and reorganisation of command, the main lines of which were reported by General Harding, my Chief of General Staff, to Allied Force Headquarters in an appreciation dated 22nd February. In this the object of operations in Italy is defined as "to force the enemy to commit the maximum number of divisions in Italy at the time OVERLORD is launched."‡ To attain that object the most effective way was not merely to push back the enemy's line but to destroy enemy formations in Italy to such an extent that they must be replaced from elsewhere to avoid a rout. But, as Nelson said, "Only numbers can annihilate"; my own calculations were that "to have a reasonable chance of effective penetration against organized defences in Italian terrain, it is necessary for the side that takes the offensive to have a local superiority of at least three to one in infantry". It is important to note that I said local, not overall superiority. At the time the Germans had between eighteen and nineteen divisions south of Rome and some five divisions, including three still forming, in the rest of Italy; as against this we had about twenty-one divisions. To remedy this it was proposed to initiate immediately a scheme of reinforcement to bring the Allied Armies by mid-April up to the total of twenty-eight and a half divisions, four of which, however, would be armoured divisions, of less value than infantry for fighting in Italy.

The details of the regrouping carried out can be better described in connection with the actual opening of the spring offensive. Briefly, the effect was to bring Eighth Army Headquarters over west of the Apennines to take command of all British troops, except for a Corps on the Adriatic and the two divisions at Anzio, and with these to capture Cassino

and advance up the Liri valley. Fifth Army would attack on a parallel axis to the south through the Aurunci Mountains and from Anzio on to Valmontone to cut Route 6 in the enemy's rear. This was the plan with which we were successful in May, unaltered except for the minor point of timing that the VI Corps attack was held back until the main attack had made good progress. It was not certain that our big attack would be made from the same positions as those held in February but I was already prepared for that. This had certain advantages. A major offensive from these positions gave the best chance of achieving our object, for between the main front and the bridgehead we were certain to trap and maul so many German divisions that reinforcements would have to be sent at the expense of the resistance to OVERLORD. If, on the other hand, our spring offensive found the Germans holding a connected front south of Rome, or withdrawing up the peninsula to the "Gothic" line, they would be unlikely to need reinforcements so urgently and, indeed, in the latter case, might be able to release formations for the west. However, our regrouping would take a long time and I estimated mid-April as the earliest possible date which could be expected for the resumption of the offensive.

General Wilson, in replying to my proposals, showed anxiety about the possible effects of a pause in operations. He began by stating that as far as operations in Italy were concerned, these must be conditioned mainly by the air factor. His general plan for Italy was to use the air to deprive the enemy of the ability either to maintain his existing positions or to withdraw his divisions out of Italy in time for OVERLORD. There was indeed, considerable optimism at Allied Force Headquarters about the ability of the air forces so to damage the enemy's communications as to force him to accept the alternatives of starvation, and reduction of ammunition reserves below the danger level, or withdrawal. This was based largely on an over-estimate of the disorganisation caused by bombing attacks on marshalling yards; but even the more effective policy of creating blocks at defiles, especially by the destruction of bridges, which was subsequently adopted with the support, and, in part, on the advice of my staff, never in fact achieved this desirable result (though it did seriously reduce the enemy's margin of maintenance.* General Wilson estimated, in the signal referred to, that the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces' bombing plan would make itself felt by the end of April and the effect would be to compel the enemy to withdraw "at least to the Pisa-Rimini line". The land forces would be required to keep up a continuous pressure during this time, otherwise the enemy might withdraw and the spring offensive would be a blow in the air. I could not consider it likely, on the basis of past experience, that

* As far as Italy was concerned, the fallacy of the policy of attacks on marshalling yards, lay in the fact that these are usually on level ground and always contain a large number of parallel tracks so that any damage can be rapidly repaired and a through line established in a very brief time. A reduction in rolling stock and facilities was of little importance as for their military purposes the Germans only needed about sixteen per cent. of the total available. A broken bridge, on the other hand, meant a long delay and stores had to be ferried round the break by road, thus wasting as much fuel as would be lost from the destruction of a good-sized dump.

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† The technical experience we gained from this experiment was subsequently of great use on the Western front.

‡ I was not then aware of the proposed date for OVERLORD.