

which the Italians claimed to have transformed into a fortress of a strength to rival Malta.

The greater part of Sicily is mountainous with many peaks over three thousand feet. The most extensive plain lies south and west of Catania, dominated by the conical peak of Etna. All round the coast, however, except for a short stretch on the north coast, there is a narrow strip of low-lying country through which runs the main road encircling the island. The coastline is divided into a series of wide-sweeping bights, separated from each other by more or less prominent capes. Over ninety stretches of beach were enumerated by the planning staff, ranging from less than a hundred yards to many miles in length, usually of sand but sometimes of shingle; offshore gradients were in most cases rather shallow. These beaches generally admit direct access into the narrow coastal strip. The main ports, in order of importance, are Messina in the north-east, Palermo in the north-west, Catania and Syracuse on the east coast; none of these is a first class port and their daily clearance capacity was reckoned, after making due allowance for possible damage from air bombardment and demolitions, at four to five thousand tons per day for Messina, two thousand five hundred for Palermo, one thousand eight hundred for Catania and one thousand for Syracuse. Minor ports, all reckoned as having a capacity of about six hundred tons per day, are Augusta on the east coast (mainly a naval base with a good protected anchorage), Licata and Porto Empedocle on the south coast and Trapani on the west coast.

There were nineteen known airfields in Sicily when planning started, a figure which was subsequently raised by new construction to over thirty at the time of the attack. They fell into three main groups, in the east, south-east and west of the island. The first two were mutually self-supporting but could neither afford fighter cover to the western group nor be themselves covered from there. All were situated within some fifteen miles of the coast. Most important for the German Air Force was the eastern group, Catania-Gerbini; there were important supply and operational organisations here and the capture of the area would probably mean that the German Air Force could no longer operate effectively in Sicily. If we could bring these airfields into operation we could cover the Straits of Messina, only sixty-five miles away, and the German Air Force would be driven back on Naples and Brindisi, both about two hundred miles away, for the three small airfields in the toe of Italy were only suitable for use as advanced landing grounds.

It was more difficult to calculate the probable strength of the enemy defending forces. The greater part of these were known to be Italian and in January there were in the island three regular infantry divisions and five "coastal" divisions. The latter were composed of lower quality troops than the ordinary divisions, had a lower scale of equipment and were almost entirely non-mobile. Their task was to man the coastal defences and to form a covering screen to break the first impact of an assault and allow time for the intervention of the "field" divisions. The major interest centred on the latter. It was reasonable to expect that the Italians would wish to increase the garrison of so important and so obviously

threatened a portion of their metropolitan territory and, to be on the safe side, we calculated that by July the garrison would probably have risen to a total of eight mobile divisions, excluding the coastal divisions. It would be easy to reinforce, for communications were excellent, the train ferries at Messina could move up to forty thousand men in twenty-four hours or, in the same period, seven thousand five hundred men and seven hundred and fifty vehicles.

We were naturally particularly interested in the prospects of reinforcement by German troops. There were already in Sicily extensive German Air Force establishments, which included detachments for the ground defence of airfields as well as anti-aircraft gunners and the normal Air Force service troops, and there was also a fluctuating number of German troops at various points, particularly in the west, representing units in transit in Tunisia. Perhaps, when resistance ceased in Tunisia, it might be found that the Germans had been able to evacuate sufficient troops to Sicily to make a considerable difference to the strength of the island garrison. In any event it was likely that Germany would consider it necessary to reinforce the Italians and it was calculated that two out of the eight divisions expected as the strength of the garrison might be German. The Joint Planning Staff, in their original report, felt it necessary to state, "We are doubtful of the chances of success against a garrison which includes German formations." This seemed to me to be too strongly expressed, but all the commanders concerned agreed that if the Italians should be reinforced with substantial, well-equipped German forces before the attack the chances of success would be considerably reduced, not only because of the superior fighting quality of the Germans but because, if the German proportion of the garrison approached parity with the Italian, they would certainly demand a share, probably the predominant share, in the direction of the operations.

The First Plan.

When the headquarters of Force 141 was set up in Bouzarea on 12th February, 1943, the basis on which the staff were in the first instance to work was the plan drawn up for the Casablanca conference. This was accepted by me as a preliminary and tentative basis of planning, though I realised, from such attention as I had been able to give it, that it would undoubtedly need modification when I should be free to give my mind wholly to it. Certain elements were bound to remain constant. It was clear, as laid down in the plan, that for many reasons the operation would have to be a joint Anglo-American undertaking. Each nation would provide a task force of Army size commanded respectively by General Montgomery* and General Patton.† Naval and Air forces would be also jointly provided and commanded by Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham‡ and Air Chief Marshal Tedder.§ The British assault force would be mounted mainly from the Middle

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