

of Leghorn.* To show our hand was obviously impossible; the bluff must be played out to the end for we too were deeply concerned by the German reinforcement of Italy; but unless we could do something to counter this fear of the Germans all might yet be lost. An offer was therefore made that we would fly an airborne division into the Rome area, to land on airfields already seized by the Italians, which would co-operate with the five Italian divisions around the capital† in holding it against the Germans until our invading force could effect a juncture. The risk was obvious; not only might we lose the division flown in (82 United States Airborne Division was nominated) but it would also mean that it would not be available for its very important rôle in the Salerno assault, the forces for which were already quite weak enough. We decided, however, that the risk must be taken and on 1st September General Eisenhower informed me of a message received from the President and the Prime Minister: "We highly approve your decision to go on with AVALANCHE and to land an airborne division near Rome on the conditions indicated".

An unexpected difficulty now arose because Castellano claimed he had no authority to sign the armistice and must first consult his Government. He was told plainly that our terms, including the new offer, must be accepted or rejected by the night of 1st-2nd September and that, whatever their decision, we should proceed with our plan for carrying the war to the Italian mainland. I have wondered since whether we should have been able to make good those bold words if the Italian decision had been negative, but at the time I had no doubt they would accept. On the other hand the military situation had been changing to our disadvantage every day since the plan for Salerno had first been proposed, in view of the constant arrival of fresh German forces.‡ However, the bluff was not called; within our specified time on 1st September the King and Badoglio agreed to our terms and at a quarter past five on 3rd September General Smith, on behalf and in the presence of General Eisenhower, and General Castellano, on behalf of Marshal Badoglio, signed the Military Terms of Surrender. The scene of the signature was a tent in an almond grove near Cassibile; thirteen hours before, to the thunder of six hundred guns in the Straits of Messina, the Eighth Army had begun the first invasion of the continent of Europe.

German Dispositions in Italy.

Before proceeding to an account of our operations in Italy I must complete the picture of the problems which faced us by detailing the

* Marshal Badoglio wanted us to land also at Ancona. Amphibious operations are difficult for the non-expert to understand, as has been clearly demonstrated by the published works on the Italian campaign. It may give a better sense of proportion to point out that the seaborne assault force for the Normandy landings, the supreme effort of the United Kingdom and the United States, was five divisions.

† One motorised and three infantry divisions and an armoured division in process of re-formation which was being equipped with German tanks.

‡ An alternative plan for Fifth Army had been prepared for study on 24 August, in case the increase in enemy strength should make AVALANCHE impracticable. It was suggested that Fifth Army should substitute a direct assault on the Heel of Italy for the landing at Salerno; this operation could not have been carried out before 21 September.

enemy forces opposing us and the strategy which they had decided to adopt. On the latter point we were fairly well informed and had acquired an additional source of information in General Castellano who told us all the Germans had so far revealed to their allies. In order to give a true picture I must step back a little in time and fill in the background of the general German strategic position in 1943.

At the beginning of the year the German High Command saw themselves faced with the certainty of a serious defeat in South Russia and the high probability of complete disaster in Africa. The loss of Stalingrad would tear a great gap in the southern end of the Eastern Front; the loss of Tunisia would open all southern Europe to the attack of the Anglo-American forces in North Africa. For the moment the danger in the east was the greater. Tunisia was still holding out and was expected to continue to do so; indeed both Kesselring and Jodl have since stated that they had expected to be able to retain the bridgehead in Tunisia indefinitely; all the available reserves therefore, less those already allotted and *en route* for Africa, must be sent to Russia. These reserves came, as always previously in times of stress on the Eastern Front, from France, which was still being used as the place where battered divisions were re-formed and new divisions activated. No less than nineteen divisions were despatched in January and February from France to Russia; they were successful, aided by the coming of spring, in stabilizing the front. But as the thaw on the steppes brought the long opposing battle lines to a standstill, 7 Armoured Division entered Tunis through the Bardo Gate and a German Commander-in-Chief wandered disconsolately down from the low hills of Cape Bon to surrender to an officer of 4 Indian Division. To the twenty divisions lost at Stalingrad there were now to be added over one hundred and thirty thousand men* swallowed up in Tunisia, as a final item in the balance of losses already sustained in two years of fruitless campaigning in Africa.

The first German reaction was to reinforce the Balkans. By the end of May their forces there had risen from seven to thirteen divisions and by the end of August to nineteen; in particular a strong corps of four divisions, including a crack armoured division from France, was formed in the Peloponese. It was necessary, however, to give some attention to Italy. It might be felt that the Alps were sufficient protection to the Reich without a glaxis to the south of them but there were disadvantages involved in the abandonment of Italy which rendered such a course intolerable except in *extremis*. The loss of an ally, involving the disappearance of the Rome-Berlin Axis from the political scene, the loss of useful auxiliary troops who were, numerically, playing the greater part in the garrisoning of the Balkans, the direct threat to the Balkans themselves from attack either across the Adriatic or across the relatively lower Julian Alps, the loss of airfields from which strategic attacks against Germany herself could be greatly augmented and directed against hitherto immune areas, and the loss of Italian industrial production, were dangers to be avoided at almost all

* German losses only. Total Axis prisoners in the final capitulation amounted to 248,000.