

of delay, there were at present as many fit for battle as the means of transport could deal with. An estimate prepared for me on 6th September showed that by the end of the month we should have available in the Mediterranean one armoured and eleven infantry divisions and an airborne brigade; this figure did not include the divisions due to return to the United Kingdom but included one division earmarked for operations against the Dodecanese.\* By 1st January this figure should have risen to twenty infantry divisions, five armoured divisions and possibly one airborne division. I must emphasise, however, that this was the total for the whole theatre and out of it must be deducted the four divisions required for the garrison of the Middle East and North Africa and the forces intended and promised for the support of Turkey if that country should enter the war.† Our position is therefore clearer if we contrast these forces not merely with the nineteen German divisions already in Italy but with the fifty-odd in the Mediterranean theatre from South France to the Balkans.

Our build-up in Italy could not be very fast. A paper prepared on 2nd October estimated that by mid-October we should have on the mainland ten infantry divisions, one and a third armoured divisions, two airborne divisions and the equivalent of five independent brigades. Three of the infantry divisions had had heavy casualties and were considered only seventy-five per cent. effective; one armoured division and one airborne division were due to be withdrawn to the United Kingdom and in the event the other airborne division went also, leaving only a brigade group behind. By February, 1944, we expected to have in Italy eighteen and a half divisions (of which two were armoured). In actual fact we managed to increase this figure to the equivalent of over twenty-one divisions (as against a German total of twenty-three) but of these, two infantry divisions and an armoured brigade were only in process of arriving and an infantry division was leaving. This increase was due to the allotment of extra shipping and the delaying of the move of the Strategic Air Force. The move of the latter represented a serious slowing down of our build-up and required a very nice adjustment of priorities.

It had originally been intended to move the Strategic Air Force to bases in the Rome area when captured but on 15th September this was changed and it was now to be moved to Italy as quickly as possible and based on the many airfields around Foggia. It was planned to move the whole of the Tactical Air Force, the whole of the Strategic Air Force, elements of the Coastal Air Force, the Photographic Reconnaissance Wing and the Troop Carrier Command, together with most of the Service Command and the supporting services, to the Italian mainland by the end of December, 1943. This could only be done at the expense of the Army, both the build-up of the formations already engaged and the reinforcing formations. The Tactical and Coastal Air Forces, the Reconnaissance Wing and Troop Carrier Command were, of course, of vital importance to the

success of the campaign in Italy; the move of the Strategic Air Force, on the other hand, was dictated by considerations of general European strategy outside Italy, that is the furtherance of POINTBLANK, the strategic bombing programme against German Europe which was in full swing from the United Kingdom. In itself, therefore, from the purely local point of view, the move represented a positive disadvantage to the progress of the Italian campaign, though the capture of Foggia and its employment in this manner had been one of the main objects of the invasion of Italy. The necessary lift for the Strategic Air Force came to rather more than the equivalent of two divisions and their maintenance requirements were nearly as great as those of Eighth Army on the east coast. We eventually decided to slow down the move and spread it out until March, with the proviso that six heavy bombardment groups (equivalent to about two hundred and fifty four-engined aircraft) should be in Italy and operative by the end of the year.

The vital question in all discussions of build-up was the availability of shipping. I have already pointed out that the Mediterranean now took second priority to western waters and that, besides surrendering eight veteran divisions, we were to lose most of our amphibious equipment. The effect of the reduction was to remove eighty per cent. of our Landing Ships, Tank and Landing Ships, Infantry and two-thirds of our assault craft of all natures. The loss of Landing Ships, Tank was most serious for we could move a vehicle across the Mediterranean in a week by craft that would take a month to do so by ship. The careful destruction by the Germans of Italian lighters had left us terribly short of small craft for harbour working. We wanted a minimum of fifty-eight Landing Craft, Tank but it looked as though we should, on this programme, be reduced to nine; by vigorous representations I got this increased to twenty-four but even this was still below the number required. I mention these details not with any intention of querying the decision to concentrate the maximum resources in the west, which was obviously the right one, but to show more clearly the difficulties of our position in Italy and, in particular, why we were unable to make greater use of our command of the sea.

#### *Enemy Change of Plan.*

Up to the beginning of October we had been planning on the assumption that the Germans were intending to withdraw by gradual stages to a line in the northern Apennines but in the first week of that month we became aware that a radical change had been made.\* Hitler had decided that the withdrawal should stop and Kesselring was to hold a line as far south as possible in Italy. There had been time enough to recover from the gloomy apprehensions with which the Germans had regarded the situation on the Southern Front at the time of the Italian surrender. The country was perfectly quiet, except for the north-east where the Slovenes were giving trouble, so that the internal security commitment was much reduced, and a better knowledge of the Allied Order of Battle showed

\* In addition on 13 October I was promised 5 Canadian Armoured Division and 1 Canadian Corps Headquarters with its complement of Corps troops.

† We were at the time pressing hard to get Turkey to declare war and two armoured divisions were standing by in the Middle East for her defence.

\* German sources show that the definite order to stand on the line Gaeta-Ortona was given on 10 October but this apparently confirmed an order which had been given slightly earlier.