

hundred and eighty miles. Assuming that we could construct sufficient airfields in the north-eastern corner of Sicily, in the area of Milazzo and Messina, where there was at the moment only one small landing strip, this would mean that the area within which an assault landing was possible would be bounded by an arc of a circle drawn across the peninsula from west to east through the island of Capri, just north of Salerno, north of Potenza in Lucania and cutting the shore of the Gulf of Taranto some fifteen miles short of Taranto itself. The prospects within this area were not inviting. The provinces of Calabria and Lucania are the poorest and most undeveloped in Italy and yield to none in the complexity and difficulty of their mountain structure. In the whole area so circumscribed, there were no major strategic targets the possession of which would be worth the effort of a full-scale assault and whose loss would induce the Italians to sue for terms. There were two great prizes just outside the range of fighter cover; the naval base of Taranto to the east and the port and city of Naples to the north; but a direct assault on either of these heavily defended places would be sufficiently hazardous even with the fullest scale of air support and quite impossible without it.

Calabria was obviously the first objective to be considered. It was the nearest to Sicily, for one thing, and the Navy was bound to be anxious to have the Straits opened as soon as possible by clearing the opposite shore. Our forces would be operating from a firm base and, if the attack were made directly across the Straits of Messina on to the ports of Reggio and San Giovanni, the always hazardous venture of an amphibious operation would be reduced almost to the proportions of a river crossing, with full support from the artillery deployed on the Sicilian shore. If this were considered too modest an operation it could be supported by landings further up the Toe of Italy which could be given the fullest air support and which would quickly allow a junction with the force which had crossed the Straits. Calabria therefore offered a safe but not spectacular investment for the profits of Sicily. The main disadvantage was that the nature of the ground would permit the enemy to block any northward advance with the employment of minimum forces. The country is mountainous and the road-net undeveloped; and there are three isthmuses: Gioia-Locri, Francavilla-Squillace, and Scalea-Castrovillari-Villapiana, the narrowest of which is eighteen miles from sea to sea and the widest only thirty-seven. The *massifs* of Aspromonte and the Sila, both rising to six thousand feet in height, would assist the defence and the summer season would be drawing to its close before Sicily could be secured and the first landings in Calabria mounted. There was a danger of the strategic effort of 1943 finding itself stuck for the winter in a *cul-de-sac* among inhospitable mountains in the most barren and least important part of the Italian peninsula.

It was clear to me, therefore, when the first stage of planning was reached in May, that it was desirable to carry the war to the mainland at the earliest possible moment. It was also clear that a decision would have to be taken whether the landing was to be made in an area where success would be comparatively easy but unproductive or in an area at the extreme end

of our range where the risk would be greater but vital objectives within closer reach. These decisions need not and could not be taken yet; much would depend on the progress of operations in Sicily, which were planned to open in July. Only then could vital questions be answered: what would be the value of Italian troops fighting in defence of their native soil, what would be the German reaction to the increased threat to Italy, what was the value of our own amphibious technique and what resources would remain to the Allies, in manpower and landing craft, after a successful invasion of Sicily.

In the meantime there was another possible operation to be considered, against Sardinia and Corsica. This had already been studied as an alternative to Sicily and, though rejected in this rôle, still offered certain advantages. To put it on the lowest terms: if, after the conquest of Sicily, the enemy were found to be so strongly posted on the mainland that invasion would be impracticable, an operation to capture Sardinia and Corsica would at least mean that we retained the initiative and, since there was little risk of failure, would score another encouraging success. Our shipping in the Mediterranean would also benefit from the elimination of German air bases in the islands. From a superficial glance at the map it might seem that the islands could act as stepping stones for an attack on the South of France, as an alternative to an advance up the Italian peninsula. In fact, however, they offered poor bases for such a strategy and the attrition of our dwindling stock of landing craft would mean that the eventual assault could only be on a small scale. Moreover we were not anxious to attract any more German forces into France but rather away from it, into Italy and the Balkans. Admittedly it would be useful, when the invasion of Northern France began, to be in a position to make, or at least threaten, a diversionary attack on the French Mediterranean coast. We calculated, however, rightly as the event showed, that a successful invasion of Italy would not only draw German forces away from France but also give us Sardinia and Corsica with little trouble. If we locked up our whole force in the islands without invading Italy (and we could certainly not do both) it would mean a long period of inactivity until the early summer of 1944 when a threat from Corsica could begin to play its part in the grand strategy of the invasion of Western Europe. This would be to give the Germans a welcome breathing space and forgo the chance of inflicting casualties on them. To sum up: an operation against Sardinia and Corsica, though clearly feasible, would be inconsistent with the directive laid down for Mediterranean strategy. If the loss of Sicily had not caused the elimination of Italy from the war it was unlikely that the loss of Sardinia in addition would do so, and the number of German divisions contained would be small.

#### *First Stages of Planning.*

Detailed planning may be said to have begun with a memorandum produced by Allied Force Headquarters on 3rd June, 1943. It was recognised that, in view of the considerations brought out above, there were two operations which were likely: against Calabria and, as an alternative, Sardinia. For Calabria it might