

to one employing five times the force, intended to be self-supporting for an indefinite period, combined with the fact that the enemy withdrawals which had left the coast clear at Anzio had reduced the chances of rapid progress by the main body, undoubtedly contributed to the decision to secure first, and consolidate, a sound defensive perimeter before proceeding to the main objective, the capture of the Alban Hills. The increase in the size of the force no doubt persuaded the Corps Commander that it was now practicable to proceed, if not cautiously at least deliberately, rather than hazard a dash inland at the very beginning of the operations. There was a mechanical factor making in the same direction; the beaches were so bad that the landing of the guns, tanks and heavy equipment was delayed beyond our expectations and it was some time before the troops could be wedded to their supporting weapons.

At the time, therefore, I considered that our progress in the first days of the landing had been rather too slow. On the other hand, now that we have the inestimable advantage of wisdom after the event and know what steps the enemy was prepared to take, I find it interesting to speculate whether a deep and rapid thrust inland, ignoring what the Germans could bring against us, would have been successful or not. Certainly my experience of German reactions on such occasions has been that, though they are easy to deceive, they are not easily panicked. Every time we attacked Kesselring in Italy we took him completely by surprise, but he showed very great skill in extricating himself from the desperate situations into which his faulty Intelligence had led him. I feel now that he would not, in these circumstances, have altered his dispositions on the main front to any great extent until he had tried every means to eliminate the threat in his rear. The risk in such a course is obvious; on the other hand, VI Corps, with the resources available to it, would have found it very difficult both to be secure on the Alban Hills and at the same time retain the absolutely necessary communications with the sea at Anzio. There are too many hypotheses involved to make further speculation valuable; but such conclusions as can be drawn are at any rate satisfactory: that the actual course of events was probably the most advantageous in the end.

The area of the bridgehead, as decided on previously, was about seven miles deep by fifteen miles wide with a perimeter of twenty-six miles. On the left the flank rested on the Moletta river and was covered by a system of *wadis*. In the open central sector the line ran across fields to meet the western branch of the Mussolini canal south of Padiglione, and then along its course eastwards to Sessano and southwards to the sea. The canal between Sessano and the sea is a considerable obstacle, with steeply sloping sides like an anti-tank ditch, and a shallow stream in the middle sixteen feet wide. The right flank was therefore very strong and could be held with minimum forces. This original beach-head line was reached all along its extent by the evening of the 23rd after some small actions on the night of the 22nd on the Mussolini canal with elements of the Hermann Goering Division. The British beaches on the western flank had been found wholly unsuitable

and abandoned after the landing of the first assault troops; but the port of Anzio had been opened, practically undamaged. Ninety per cent. of the personnel and equipment of the assault convoy had been landed by midnight on D-day and the return and follow-up convoy programme was running to schedule.

Enemy reactions to the landing were rapid. Kesselring's first decision was to build up as hastily as possible, and with every available means, some form of blocking force to contain the beach-head. There were already in the Cisterna area some elements of the Hermann Goering Division, notably part of the divisional tank regiment with some artillery; a regiment of 3 Panzer Grenadier Division, which was on its way to Eighth Army front, was halted and brought back to the Alban Hills where it was joined on the evening of the 23rd by a regimental group from 15 Panzer Grenadier Division, the successful defenders of the Rapido. The latter two forces were put under command of a regimental commander of 4 Parachute Division, Colonel Gehricke, and were rapidly joined by the remainder of this division which came down by battalions at a time from Perugia, where it was in process of forming. The rest of the Hermann Goering Division came up from the lower Garigliano, where the offensive it had joined in on the 22nd was called off by the end of the day. It was clear that the enemy intended both to hold the "Gustav" line, where he had now blunted our first attacks, and to seal off the bridge-head in his rear with a view to destroying it later if possible. This intention was soon reinforced by an order from the Fuehrer's Headquarters which was directed to be read out to all ranks: "The 'Gustav' line must be held at all costs for the sake of the political consequences which would follow a completely successful defence. The Fuehrer expects the bitterest struggle for every yard". This verbal intervention by Hitler was followed by more fruitful actions than was to be usual later; the Italian theatre was to be reinforced. Kesselring was informed that he would receive two semi-motorized infantry divisions, three independent reinforced regiments and two heavy tank battalions, together with an extra allotment of G.H.Q. medium and heavy artillery. Further, he was told he could retain in Italy for the present the Hermann Goering Division. With these reinforcements he was expected not merely to contain but to eliminate the Anzio bridge-head. Not only was this essential militarily in order to continue holding in Italy with the minimum forces but also psychologically and politically it would be a most valuable gain to defeat ignominiously the first seaborne landing made by the Allies in 1944, a year which was fated to see other and still more dangerous landings.

By 30th January there were already elements of no less than eight divisions assembled south of Rome. Admittedly these forces were extremely mixed and hastily organised, but they were in the main experienced troops and accustomed by now to working independently of their parent formations. The first four divisions represented were, as already stated, 3 and 15 Panzer Grenadier, 4 Parachute and Hermann Goering. They were joined by 26 Panzer Division which was rushed across at top speed from the Adriatic sector, bringing with it three battalions of 1 Parachute Division.