

at Capua, as had been feared, was unable to force a crossing. VI Corps, however, got across in the more mountainous area east of Capua and by the use of its bridges 56 Division also crossed on the 15th. By the 25th both Corps had firmly consolidated their bridgeheads and were ready to engage the next enemy delaying line, based on the ridge of mountains from Monte Massico on the sea coast, through Monte Santa Croce to the Matese Mountains on the boundary between Fifth and Eighth Armies. Only two passes pierced the line of hills, at the two defiles followed by Routes 6 and 7 and called after Mignano and Sessa respectively.

On 4th October I moved my headquarters to the small village of Santo Spirito, north-west of Bari. I intended to move eventually to the Naples area but there was no hope of accommodation there for the moment and if I wanted to move to Italy, as was clearly necessary, the relatively undamaged areas of Apulia offered the only suitable sites.

Plans for the Winter Operations.

Both at Termoli and on the Volturno the Germans had shown a new determination and stubbornness, and this, together with the slowness of our build-up, made the decision as to the correct strategy to be adopted in Italy still more difficult. My most recent directive from General Eisenhower, called for the capture of air bases in the Rome area; the general directive under which all forces in the Mediterranean, and mine in particular, were working was to tie down and divert from other fronts the maximum German strength; it was not easy to see how, with the forces available or in prospect, either of these objects could be attained or to what extent the pursuit of one might hinder the achievement of the other. One thing was certain; for either purpose it was essential to retain the initiative which we then had. It would mean a hard and costly fight, now that it was known that the Germans no longer intended to withdraw by stages to the north, but for the sake of the greater objects in view it was necessary to accept this cost and not give the enemy any rest.

I reviewed the situation in the light of these considerations on 21st October. In Southern Italy eleven Allied divisions were opposing nine German in a position eminently suitable for the defence, while in the north there were some fourteen more, a known total of twenty-three divisions.* Eleven against nine was no great numerical superiority and with their great resources in the north, where the internal security commitment was now quite unimportant, the Germans could easily convert it into a positive inferiority; at the least they could carry out constant reliefs of their formations in the battle area and oppose our attacks with constantly fresh troops. This was what they

proceeded to do. There was no practical limit to the number of troops they could bring into Italy; it was calculated that their lines of communication were adequate to support up to sixty divisions should they wish to employ such a force there. Our build-up, on the other hand, was severely limited, as I have already explained; we expected to have thirteen divisions by the end of November, fourteen or fifteen by the end of December and sixteen to seventeen by the end of January. Since the Germans had decided to stand we were committed to "a long slogging match" with no possibility, in view of the shortage of landing craft, actual or about to exist, of amphibious operations against the enemy's flanks.

Admittedly the disparity of our relative strengths showed that we were doing our duty in containing the enemy. Indeed he seemed to be going out of his way to assist us in attaining that object; I pointed out in my appreciation "the German reinforcement of Italy seems greater than warranted by the internal situation or by purely defensive requirements".* There was a serious possibility, which I had to consider, that if he saw a chance of seizing an easy success in Italy he would take it, for its psychological value at such a time would be very great. Any relaxation of effort on our part would allow him to seize the initiative and use it either, as just suggested, for a strong counter-offensive—aiming for instance at the recapture of Naples, a glittering prospect—or to reduce his forces on the defensive front to a minimum and make available for elsewhere the divisions thus saved. This same result, the relieving of German forces from Italy for the Eastern or, subsequently, Western front, would also follow, and in greater measure, from a successful enemy counter-offensive, provided it were delivered before the spring of 1944. On the other hand, if we could keep the enemy "on his heels" until then, we should be certain of retaining in Italy the divisions already there; we might even (and this, though unexpected, actually occurred) draw still more into the theatre, while still keeping him sufficiently off-balance to be unable to seize the initiative from us; finally, if he were to launch a great counter-offensive next spring, we should welcome it, for the more successful it was the more troops it would draw off from the defence of France, and success there was well worth the price of a possible set-back in Italy.

I presented this appreciation at a conference at Carthage with the Commanders-in-Chief on 24th October. It was agreed by General Eisenhower and signalled to the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The conference agreed that it was essential to retain the initiative and approved my plan of campaign which I reported at the same time. Eighth Army's advance up the east coast was running into a *cul-de-sac* of rather unimportant country; but General Montgomery was of the opinion that if he could establish himself on the high ground north of Pescara, after crossing the Trigno, Sangro and Pescara rivers, he could then strike south-westwards down Route 5, the Via Valeria, to Avezzano and threaten Rome from the east. In conjunction with this south-westerly attack by Eighth Army, Fifth Army

* Not all these were in fact available to Kesselring whose actual strength available for Italy was nineteen divisions and one brigade group. There was a good deal of movement going on in North Italy at the time: one infantry and three armoured divisions were in process of moving to Russia and three infantry divisions were moving into the country to take their place. There was also some doubt whether the two divisions in the Alps on the Franco-Italian border, which actually came under C-in-C West, were not to be considered as available for Italy and a motorized division which had moved down into the area between Nice and Modane was also regarded as a likely arrival. A certain amount of over-estimation was in the circumstances not unnatural and in any event the disparity of strength was striking enough.

* Actually the Germans were over-estimating our strength, as usual; captured German sources show that they credited me in November with three more divisions than I in fact had.