

Lieutenant-General McCreery,* with under command 46 and 56 Divisions, was to assault between Salerno and the Sele River, seize Salerno and the Montecorvino airfield and establish a firm beach-head, including the mountain passes north-west of Salerno. When firmly established it was to advance and capture the port of Naples and the airfields at Capodichino and Pomigliano. On D-day it was to be assisted by three American Ranger battalions and two British Commandos, attacking on its left flank, and on D plus 4 it was to be reinforced by 7 Armoured Division. On the right the United States VI Corps, General Dawley,† was to assault, with 36 Division and one tank battalion, the beaches south of the River Sele, establish a firm beach-head and secure the Army right flank. The Army floating reserve consisted of one Regimental Combat Team of 45 Division under the divisional commander. As a follow-up, when shipping became available after the assault phase was over, the remainder of 45 Division was nominated, and subsequently 34 Division. In the original plan a Regimental Combat Team of 82 Airborne Division was to be dropped north of Naples in the valley of the River Volturno to seize the bridges at Trifisco, Capua and Cancelli and prevent the arrival of enemy reinforcements from the north. This drop was subsequently cancelled, to the great detriment of the operations.

It will be seen that the forces available for the invasion of a hostile coast at the extreme limit of air cover and well out of touch with any supporting force were not large, though I need not say that they were the largest we could manage. Only three infantry divisions were to make the assault, with an armoured division to start disembarking on D plus 4, and subsequent reinforcement would be slow. The provision of landing craft was now our acutest problem. Many of those needed could not be withdrawn from Sicily before 19th August, after which they had to be hastily refitted at Bizerta, undergo such repairs as might be necessary, and sail to their loading ports; the many uncertain factors in the programme made it impossible to be sure how many would eventually be available. We were prepared to strip 13 Corps of its craft as soon as it had got itself established across the Straits, in fact we took some Landing Ships, Tank, away on D-day of that operation. Convoy problems were difficult for the Navy. VI Corps was to sail direct from Oran in a single convoy, but 10 Corps had to be loaded into many different types of ships and craft and sail from Tripoli and Bizerta in a series of convoys of various speeds and composition. All convoys were to pass west of Sicily and then proceed, on D minus 1, on a northerly course, turning eastwards towards Salerno only after last light. A great part of the route would be along narrow lanes specially swept through the enemy minefields where, if

opposed, alterations of course would be impossible and the force would have to fight its way through. Force "H," comprising four battleships, two aircraft carriers and 12th Cruiser Squadron, was to cover the assault convoy from attack by the Italian battle fleet in Spezia and Genoa while two battleships at Malta watched Taranto and were available to replace casualties. A support carrier group of one light fleet and four escort aircraft carriers was to provide additional fighter cover for the landing and was itself covered by aircraft from the fleet aircraft carriers of Force "H".*

The task of the Air Forces was twofold; first and most important to neutralise the enemy air effort and secondly to disorganise his power of movement. The opening stage in the air plan was designed to force him to evacuate his air bases in Southern and Central Italy and to disrupt the Italian communication system by attacks on key-points. From D minus 7 until the bridgehead had been firmly established a concentrated effort would be made against the Naples-Salerno area to render useless the airfields there and, as far as possible, to isolate the battlefield from enemy reinforcement. When this was deemed to be accomplished, and dependent upon the measure of success attained, close bomber support would become available for general operations. Fighter cover was to be provided by a continuous patrol from bases in Sicily,† supplemented by the Seafires of the Carrier Support Group, until airfields or emergency air strips ashore were available. It was hoped that Montecorvino airfield could be captured on D-day and that seventy-five aircraft could be flown into it by D plus 1.

The orders for the Calabrian landing (Operation BAYTOWN) were also issued on 16th August. It was a simple plan which was carried out without any but minor variations. The troops to be employed were only two infantry divisions, 1 Canadian and 5 British, reinforced by an armoured and an infantry brigade and various Commando units. The artillery support for the actual crossing, however, was almost as heavy as Eighth Army had ever had, including an Army Group Royal Artillery, 30 Corps artillery and four battalions of American mediums from Seventh Army assisted by naval supporting fire.‡ In the air, the attack was to be supported by the Desert Air Force, with elements both of XII U.S. Air Support Command and of Tactical Bomber Force temporarily under its command.

* The additional fighters provided in this way by the Fleet Air Arm made a most valuable contribution to our air cover but they could not have been relied upon to the exclusion of land-based fighters for they could only guarantee eighty sorties on the first day, the number dropping rapidly thereafter, and the effort could only be sustained for a little over three days. It is clear therefore that carrier-borne aircraft alone would have been inadequate to support a landing further north.

† Provided the weather remained fine. Rain would have rendered unserviceable the hastily constructed strips in the Milazzo area and precluded the use of the land-based short-range fighters which were to provide the greater part of the fighter protection over the assault area. It was one more risk involved in the operation.

‡ Before the assault naval forces, including battleships, heavily bombarded the coast defences. The assault was supported by three cruisers, three monitors, two gunboats and six destroyers. The naval operations were directed by Rear-Admiral (now Admiral Sir Rhoderick) McGrigor, K.C.B., D.S.O.

* Lieutenant-General (later Sir Brian) Horrocks, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., had been wounded in an enemy air raid on Bizerta on 19 August. I requested the War Office to despatch Lieutenant-General (now General Sir Richard) McCreery, G.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C. by air to replace him; he had been my Chief of Staff in Middle East and at Eighteenth Army Group.

† Major-General Ernest J. Dawley, United States Army, later replaced by Major-General John P. Lucas, United States Army.