

*Eighth Army Landings in Calabria.*

While the negotiations for the armistice were in progress planning for 13 Corps' assault had proceeded rapidly under great pressure and overcoming continual crises. It was difficult to work strictly within the craft limitations imposed by the necessity of giving priority to the Salerno operation and there were times when there were considerable differences of opinion between the military and naval staffs. Every effort was made to mount the attack as early as possible; for some time it looked as though the night of 4th/5th September would be the earliest, but we managed eventually to put it forward to 0430 hours on the 3rd. The attack was a complete success. Opposition was light and we met no Germans; by the morning of D-day Reggio had been captured and in the evening of the same day Bagnara was in our hands. The reinforcement and supply of our forces were exceeding expectations. Demolitions were the main factor delaying our advance and there was reason to hope that if these enemy tactics were continued, and providing Eighth Army pressed resolutely forward, it would not be as far out of supporting distance of Fifth Army's Salerno landings as had been feared. It must be emphasized, however, that the roads were few and inferior, the Army was on a light scale of transport and the further it advanced the more difficult would be its maintenance. I will deal with this point later, when I come to discuss the administrative crisis which developed late in September.

Attention and interest could now be switched to the major operation impending on the 9th. In order to exercise proper control, I found it necessary to move back to Bizerta where I opened a small Tactical Headquarters on 7th September. This was dictated mainly by the necessities of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, who wished to control naval operations from his command ship there, H.M.S. LARGES. It was also convenient for the air forces who were already established at La Marsa, where was also General Eisenhower's Command Post. It was vital to have the closest contact with the Naval and Air Forces during the difficult initial stages of an amphibious operation, but I planned to return to my Main Headquarters in Sicily as soon as possible.

*Further Operations to Exploit Italian Surrender.*

With our limited resources it was inevitable that we should have to pass over many opportunities for exploiting the situation brought about by the Italian surrender which in other circumstances would have looked most attractive. Certainly with Badoglio's signature in our pocket we looked out on a very different map of the Mediterranean from that to which we had long been accustomed and to the superficial observer we might seem to be faced with an embarrassing number of choices. Areas of vital strategic importance garrisoned by Italian troops would now go to the first claimant. The Dodecanese, for example, which ever since 1940 had so often been described as a ripe plum ready to fall into our hands, was now in fact ready to fall but the hands which would gather it would be German. Crete was not in the ripe fruit category as it was mainly garrisoned by Germans already but there would certainly be an interregnum in the Western Balkans which would offer tempting opportunities of

easy gains at small initial expense. I was particularly reluctant to see Corfu go by default. But none of these subsidiary operations would bear close examination; however inexpensive they might appear in the early stages the subsequent cost was bound to be high and, above all, by dispersing strength to secondary objectives we should offend against the great principle of concentration. With an assault force of only three divisions a commander must choose carefully his course and, when chosen, persevere in his choice without dissipating his resources. "War," said Wolfe, "is an election of difficulties." I have given the reasons why we had decided on the mainland of Italy as our next objective and we had no troops to spare for any other objective, however attractive. Every available man who could be lifted in every available craft was already earmarked for the Salerno operation and there was no-one who did not from time to time fear that even this might prove too little. AVALANCHE had already been weakened by the withdrawal of 82 Airborne Division for the Rome operation; it would be impossible to weaken it any further.

There were, however, two other areas where action on the small scale possible for us could have useful and lasting results. Sardinia and Corsica had already been prepared for, as I have explained, and General Giraud's task was likely to be made much easier by the Italian surrender as there were four Italian divisions to one German in Sardinia and three to a German brigade in Corsica; encouraging odds since in these islands, if nowhere else in Italy, the Italians would be in direct touch with Allied sea-power. But over and above the forces the French could scrape together for the liberation of Corsica (and these could not have been used elsewhere) there was one Allied formation available, 1 British Airborne Division. It was available because there were only sufficient transport aircraft in the theatre to lift one division, and 82 American Airborne Division had been the one selected to support Fifth Army. There were, of course, no craft available for it either and it could not, therefore, make an assault landing; but if the Italians could ensure for it an unopposed landing at a suitable port it could be transported there in warships. We did have some warships available, for the cruisers and attached destroyers of the 12th Cruiser Squadron would now not be needed to help cover the Salerno assault convoys from surface attack by the Italian fleet.

I decided, therefore, to use 1 Airborne Division to seize Taranto. We had always considered it essential to capture and bring into use as early as possible the south-eastern ports in order to provide for Eighth Army's maintenance, which would eventually have to be shifted to the Adriatic coast to follow the Army's proposed axis of advance. It was not in any way a diversion of effort, for it would be pointless to put any more troops into Calabria, rather it was an acceleration of Eighth Army's build-up. The chances of success were high, since the Germans were known to have no more than the equivalent of a regiment of parachutists in the whole area south-east of Altamura. General Hopkinson,\* commanding 1 Airborne Division, was therefore summoned to my headquarters on 4th September and instructed to prepare to land

\* The late Major-General G. F. Hopkinson.