

the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The Casablanca conference treated the invasion of Sicily as a continuation of the clearance of North Africa and looked no further ahead; its orders were clear-cut and definite. The "Trident" conference which met in Washington, in May 1943, took a wider view. On 26th May, the Combined Chiefs of Staff informed the Supreme Allied Commander* in the Mediterranean of their decision that the major attack on Europe would be made from the United Kingdom, probably in the early summer of 1944. He was therefore instructed to plan such operations in exploitation of the conquest of Sicily as would be best calculated to eliminate Italy from the war and to contain the maximum number of German divisions; which of the operations should be adopted and thereafter mounted would be decided by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Here were no geographical objectives pointed out but two *desiderata*, one political and the other, the containing of the maximum number of German divisions, from its very nature indefinable. It is essential that this directive be constantly borne in mind, for it continued to rule all strategy in Italy up to the final surrender of the German armies in the field, and the campaign can only be rightly understood if this is firmly grasped. The campaign in Italy was a great holding attack. The two parts of the directive aim at the same purpose: the diversion of German strength to a theatre as far removed as possible from the vital point, the Channel coast. To eliminate Italy would mean the loss to the Axis of fifty-nine divisions amounting to some two million men†; they were admittedly not good troops but they were useful as garrisons in occupied territory. To replace these, and at the same time to provide the troops which would have to be sent to hold the line in Italy, would represent a formidable commitment for Germany at a time when she was faced once more with war on two fronts. The comparison with the contribution of the Peninsular War to the downfall of Napoleon is hackneyed but fully justified.

In order to carry out the tasks assigned by this directive the Supreme Allied Commander was allotted all the ground forces available in the Mediterranean theatre except for four American and three British divisions, which were to be held available for return to the United Kingdom by 1st November,‡ and two British divisions held in readiness to fulfil our commitments to Turkey. These forces were estimated at the equivalent of nineteen British and British-equipped divisions, four American and four French, but of these many were under strength in men and material and others were not fully trained. Other divisions, again, had to be retained for internal security duties in the Middle East and for garrisons of the principal ports of North Africa, while the threat

* General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower. (The title of his appointment was "Commander-in-Chief, Allied Force." Another title frequently used was "Allied Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Theatre". On 9th March, 1944, when General (now Field-Marshal Lord) Wilson held the appointment, the title was altered to "Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theatre". For the sake of clarity the later title is used throughout the Despatch).

† Figures as of May 1943; the Italian Army remained at a round figure of some sixty divisions until it capitulated.

‡ The formations eventually selected were: British 50 and 51 Infantry and 1 Airborne Divisions; United States 2 Armoured, 1 and 9 Infantry and 82 Airborne Divisions; 7 British Armoured Division, was later added to this list.

of a German attack through Spain, though already remote by now compared with 1942, could not be entirely disregarded. Our air strength, though slightly reduced, particularly in heavy bombers, would remain adequate for the support of operations*. On the sea we were now not likely to meet the Italian fleet and fully confident of our ability to defeat it if met. More serious was the intention to withdraw almost all the landing craft from the theatre for use in the west; this programme did not take effect until later but it represented a severe curtailment of our amphibious mobility.

A further contrast between the campaigns in Sicily and in Italy is provided by the nature of the planning which proceeded them. For Sicily we had had a period of almost six months to study in detail a problem which was not, in its essentials, a complicated one. For the operations in exploitation of success in Sicily we were in the first place not given any definite geographical objectives and the problem of deciding between the available alternatives was complicated by a number of unknown factors which would only be resolved by the outcome of the preceding campaign. It was realised from the first that the decision between the various courses of action which would then be open to us would have to be deferred to a later date and might have to be taken rapidly. Our aim in planning was therefore extreme flexibility and I think it is fair to say that few operations of war of this magnitude have been so distinguished by the speed with which they were mounted and the shortness of the time between the decision to undertake the invasion and its launching. This speed was made possible by the flexibility of strategy permitted by the nature of amphibious operations and the geographical configuration of the theatre, and it was encouraged by the challenge of a constantly changing military and political situation. A certain amount of preliminary planning began as soon as the plan for Sicily was firmly established. This was done in the first place at Allied Force Headquarters, since my own staff were fully engaged on the Sicilian operation. I shall therefore pass over this preliminary period as briefly as possible, but in order to understand the background to the operations carried out under my command it is necessary to give some account of the way in which the problem of an invasion of the Italian mainland was first approached and the basic reasons for the strategy which was eventually adopted.

General Considerations Governing Operations against Italy.

To carry out the terms of the directive from the Combined Chiefs of Staff one course of action had obviously pre-eminent advantages. Italian troops could be found and fought at any point of the deeply indented northern coastline of the Mediterranean from Thrace to the Pyrenees, or in the many off-lying islands, but to eliminate Italy from the war an attack on the mother country offered clearly the best solution. We were already committed to the conquest of Sicily, for reasons, as I have explained, of African and Mediterranean strategy,

* War Office footnote:—Strategic attacks by the Air Forces which were later based on Italy, and other strategic aspects of the campaign, are described in the Supreme Allied Commander's Reports on the Italian Campaign (Part I—8th January, 1944 to 10th May 1944; Parts II and III—10th May, 1944 to 12th December, 1944) by Field-Marshal Lord Wilson.