

confident relationship with the Commander and staff of Eighth Army. Both Armies thus had their own administrative organisations, and the function of Fifteenth Army Group was limited to general supervision and co-ordination and the rendering of advice to the Army Group Commander.

No base depots holding large buffer stocks were established in Sicily, nor was Sicily ever considered as a base for future operations. We did, however, dump fairly large stocks at Syracuse, Catania, Messina and Milazzo which were used to provide initial maintenance of the forces to be mounted from the island. After 25th August, 1943, supply convoys, which hitherto had come from North Africa and Middle East, began to arrive direct from the United Kingdom and United States. This shifting of the base back to the producer countries meant that it was necessary to submit long-term forecasts of requirements sometimes weeks before arrival. The effect was a loss of flexibility with a consequent waste of shipping and congestion of ports, due to convoys arriving with stores which were not immediately needed, or in excess of current requirements.

Initial Maintenance

After much study the administrative plans for the initial major landings were settled. Troops landing in the Reggio area would be supplied by coasters carrying standard loads from North Africa and Sicily, petrol and stores ships sailing direct from the Middle East and the United Kingdom, and landing craft ferrying stores from Sicily to the mainland. Up to D plus 14 detailed requirement demands were made by 13 Corps Headquarters, and after that date responsibility rested with Eighth Army; Army demands in turn were submitted by Fortbase to A.F.H.Q. thirty days before they would be delivered. The arrangements for SLAPSTICK, the landing by 1 Airborne Division at Taranto, were necessarily of a more improvised nature. It was agreed that the force should be maintained initially through Taranto itself, but that subsequently the ports of Brindisi and Bari would be opened and used. A programme was worked out based on the shipping available and an arbitrary calculation of requirements for six weeks' maintenance and fifteen days reserve. After the initial pre-loaded shipments had been exhausted demands would be made via Fortbase to A.F.H.Q. The landings at Salerno were to be maintained initially over the beaches, but it was planned to develop Naples and the adjacent ports as soon as possible after their capture. Fifth Army retained a line of communication that went back through NATOUSA⁽¹⁾ and was exclusively American; while, to deal with British administrative matters, a British Increment was added to its headquarters.

The system of command and supply that had been thus hastily evolved showed certain practical difficulties when applied to operations. The absence of any large stocks close at hand and the congestion in the North African ports meant that the situation was bound to be delicate until considerable supplies had been built up on the mainland; and, until this was so, the situation there was ripe for a serious breakdown if an emergency arose before a

satisfactory system of overall working had been evolved by trial and error. Such an emergency did occur very soon.

The initial Eighth Army landings went according to plan and rapid progress was everywhere made, troops in the Toe being maintained easily through the several small undamaged ports there. In the Heel matters were not so satisfactory, since there had been insufficient time to make adequate arrangements, and troops there had to be placed on short rations for a few days, but their capture intact of the major ports of Taranto and Brindisi was of the utmost importance and was shortly to be the means of averting the complete breakdown which otherwise might well have occurred. For, when it was apparent that the Fifth Army at Salerno was meeting heavy opposition, Eighth Army was ordered to move to its aid with all speed; and its subsequent advance across a country with poor communications—although justified by the operational results—yet inevitably caused a breakdown in the supply system. The decision was therefore taken to switch the Army's supply line to the Heel, where the existence of railways, better roads and far better ports offered security for the future. This decision, involving the transference of stocks from Calabria to the Taranto area at the same time as the Army had to be supplied in its continual advance, placed a very great strain on the services involved, but its advantages were considered to outweigh its drawbacks. By the end of September there were signs of improvement. The ammunition position was satisfactory but petrol—particularly cased petrol—remained in poor supply owing to the shipping situation, and there was a grave shortage of transport.

Fifth Army meanwhile had been experiencing difficulties of a different kind. The landings at Salerno had met stiff opposition, and the accumulation of supplies had to be made under enemy fire; but the administrative planning had been very thorough, and the arrangements made proved very satisfactory until bad weather on D plus 12 stopped all unloading for three days. Salerno port, though soon captured, was initially rendered unusable by enemy shell-fire, and the harbour at Castellamare was found to have been so damaged as to be useless; but the small port of Torre Annunziata was captured in good repair by the end of September and this, with the use of Salerno and of various beaches, sufficed thereafter until the opening of the port of Naples. When this city was entered on 1st October it was found that the port had been most systematically obstructed and the facilities there destroyed. The resuscitation of the port was immediately put under way, with such ingenuity and to such good effect that by the second week of October it was already discharging 5,000 tons per day. This was sufficient to keep Fifth Army supplied with essential commodities but owing to the accelerated arrival of new formations and the partly unforeseen demands of the civilian population reserve stocks were not built up according to schedule.

Reorganisation of Administrative Command

The necessity for some new organisation of administrative command was obvious. An actual breakdown seemed now to have been averted, but the margin of safety had been a very narrow one and Eighth Army was forced to halt on the Termoli line to allow its supplies

⁽¹⁾ North African Theatre of Operations, United States Army.