

Capture of Naples and Foggia.

The first phase of this plan was already practically completed when I wrote and, after the pause, we proceeded with the second phase. Fifth Army had a hard struggle for the passes leading down into the plain of Naples but by 28th September 10 Corps was through and the King's Dragoon Guards entered the great city at 0930 hours on 1st October. Eighth Army's principal objective, Foggia and its airfields, had fallen four days before on the 27th. On both fronts the pursuit went on, but it was slower now. On 6th October Fifth Army stood along the line of the Volturno River and realised that it would have to force a crossing against strong resistance; Eighth Army had also left behind the early days of rapid advance across the open country of Apulia and the line ran clear across Italy through the mountains from Termoli to Benevento and Capua and down to the Tyrrhenian at Castel Volturno. My plan had been based on the German intention to withdraw to the Pisa-Rimini line and that intention had now been revoked on the highest authority; but before proceeding to discuss the effect of this new situation I must pause to describe the problems of administration which now faced us.

*Administrative Problems.**

The most serious and most urgent problem was the imminent danger of the complete breakdown of the maintenance of Eighth Army. This situation, though no doubt it should in theory never be allowed to occur, did not reflect any discredit on anyone but was the result of a deliberate decision to accept an administrative risk for the sake of urgent and vital operational advantage. It would obviously be absurd at such a time, to sit down and do nothing until our administrative resources and plans were perfect, nor was there any simple solution available, for we had rightly decided not to create a proper base in Sicily and were therefore still based on North Africa and Middle East and, to a certain and increasing extent, directly on the United Kingdom and United States. It would have been equally absurd to confine our operations to Calabria until we could build up a cast-iron administrative backing. The early days of the landings had gone smoothly enough; the small ports of Reggio, San Venere and Cotrona were put into use for the maintenance of the forces in Calabria and although the initial maintenance of the hastily planned operations at Taranto was not entirely satisfactory this was natural enough in the circumstances.† The administrative staffs were a little surprised to get their first positive confirmation of the operation simultaneously with the news of the landing but were soon mollified by reflecting on the importance of the speedy capture of Taranto and Brindisi undamaged; indeed this was of vital importance in averting the threatened breakdown. It was when I began to be worried about the situation at Salerno that I ordered General Montgomery to push ahead at all risks and he complied in spite of the warnings of his staff that so rapid an advance would risk a complete administrative breakdown. Hardly was the danger to

Fifth Army averted when the expected difficulties materialized and Eighth Army found itself with virtually no reserves at all.

Taranto and Brindisi, however, were now available so that if our administrative tail could be switched from the Toe to the Heel there would be the considerable advantage of a shorter line of communication and better roads and ports, and even railways, with which to operate. On the other hand to carry out this switch and at the same time continue to support the Army in its operations was an extraordinarily difficult task and placed a tremendous strain on the very limited resources available. It was a great achievement and it took the rest of the month of September before the situation could be said to be stabilized again, though even then it was far from satisfactory. On the 29th General Montgomery informed me that when he had reached a line from Termoli through Campobasso to Vinchiatturo he would have to pause for ten or fourteen days as he had absolutely no reserve stocks. Our administrative machinery had been overdriven and could not sustain any more shocks for the moment; as I told the Chief of the Imperial General Staff* in a signal on the 30th "Men can go hungry but a truck just won't".

Eighth Army were thus rather breathless after their splendid gallop through Calabria, Lucania and Apulia; Fifth Army had had sterner fighting but their maintenance position was much easier, for they could use the ports and beaches at Salerno and Torre Annunziata, which were close behind their front line, and would shortly be able to bring Naples into use. At first sight this looked a disheartening problem. The port had been most thoroughly blocked and all the port facilities—cranes, quays, lighters, etc.—destroyed. Ships of all sizes, including ten thousand ton cruisers, hospital ships and two large liners, had been sunk alongside nearly all the quays and in the fairway inside the moles. In all, some three hundred lighters, the total number available in the port, and all the tugs and small craft had been sunk at their berths. I need hardly mention that mines and booby traps were cunningly dispersed everywhere from the harbour gates to the water's edge. But we had had fair experience in opening demolished ports and by the second week in October the discharge capacity was already reaching five thousand tons per day. This was a splendid effort and entirely removed any apprehension as to Fifth Army's maintenance.

Our next problem, now we were firmly established in Italy, was the rate at which we could reinforce or, in the universally accepted expression of this war, our "build-up". We were definitely inferior in numbers to the Germans and their land communications would enable them to reinforce much faster than us. The solution of the problem depended on availability of formations and shipping to move them. The former consideration was not likely to influence the situation before 1944 since, although the number of formations in the Mediterranean was in fact limited, and although the majority of these were deficient in one way or another and would therefore only become available for operations with a varying degree

* See Appendix "K".

† Up to 14 September the total transport of 1 Airborne Division amounted to seven jeeps and two trailers, two requisitioned cars, one motorcycle and two bicycles.

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