

add to those risks. If we allowed the Italians to break the agreement with us there was a danger that, when they saw the smallness of our force, they might repudiate it altogether. It was not true that they had had insufficient time to make the necessary military dispositions, and in the frame of mind which then reigned it is doubtful if any further allowance of time would have produced a better result.

Marshal Badoglio was therefore reminded in vigorous terms of the obligations he had assumed and the dishonour which would follow their repudiation. Although the airborne operation, on his own showing, would have to be cancelled, we were eager to undertake it again as soon as possible; in the meantime his five divisions should suffice to provide temporary protection for the capital. Whatever Badoglio did, finally, the Allies would announce the existence of the armistice at the hour originally planned. No reply came to this signal and when at the appointed time, 1830 hours, Badoglio did not broadcast as arranged it seemed that the worst had happened. But it was only a final instance of vacillation; at 1945 hours he at last was heard reading in a depressed and subdued voice his statement that Italy had surrendered unconditionally. That night he and the King fled from Rome by car to Pescara and thence in a warship to Brindisi. They left no orders behind for the defence of Rome, where all was in confusion, and scarcely any response was made by the Italian armed forces or civilian population to the rather vaguely worded order in Badoglio's broadcast that, whilst ceasing resistance to the Allies, they were to resist "any attack which might come from another quarter". It was only at the last minute that Badoglio had decided that he could not honourably order his people directly to take action against the Germans.

The result was a fatal apathy and disorganisation. Only the fleet carried out wholeheartedly the surrender terms. The air force endeavoured to do so, but with only partial success. On land no real resistance was offered to the Germans and we derived little positive benefit from the armistice as a result. The five divisions in the Rome area made only a brief and uncoordinated resistance to 2 Parachute Division and the hastily summoned 3 Panzer Grenadier Division; all was quiet there by 10th September, so much so that the Panzer Grenadiers could be sent on almost immediately to the front in Campania. In North Italy the Germans were faced with a considerable logistical and organisational problem in the mere physical difficulties of taking over control of so extensive an area with so many large industrial cities; but these difficulties were not aggravated, or only insignificantly, by the resistance either of the armed forces or of the civilian population. The great city of Milan, for instance, with a strong garrison of regular troops and an allegedly turbulent and liberty-loving proletarian population, surrendered to a small force of S.S. troops. We had not expected much from the Italians; twenty-one years of Fascist corruption and inefficiency had quenched any spark of patriotic feeling in a not naturally warlike people.

The Battle of Salerno.

The news of the Italian armistice could not be kept from the troops who were even then heading up the Gulf of Salerno nor was it either honourable or advisable not to inform them that the Italians were now pledged to fight on our side. But in spite of the fact that they were warned that the assault would continue as planned and that they would certainly meet resistance on shore from the Germans there was a definite feeling of optimism among the assaulting troops. The Germans were also surprised by the news with opposite results; the shock was the greater as they had just heard that our invasion fleet was at sea. That afternoon at 1600 hours, two and a half hours before General Eisenhower's broadcast, 16 Panzer Division had been informed that thirty-six ships, escorted by destroyers, had been sighted twenty-five miles south of Capri; the division ordered "State of Alarm II."* When the news of the surrender came, however, there was still nine hours in which the Germans could act. They at once proceeded to take over the Italian coast defence positions and disarm the troops. By the time the first Allied troops landed the Germans were ready for them.

The fighting on the beaches of Salerno was among the fiercest of the whole Italian campaign, in spite of the fact that the advantage of strategic surprise enabled us to bring three divisions against one; but war is never a matter of mathematics and least of all are amphibious operations. Of the Allied formations only 46 Division had had much previous experience in action and that experience had been occasionally unlucky; 56 Division had had only a few days fighting on the Enfidaville line in Tunisia, with varied success; 36 Division was entirely inexperienced. The time available for training and planning had been very short; some units landed on the wrong beaches. This was the first time we had met real resistance, including the use of German tanks actually on the beach. The result of the tactics employed by 16 Panzer Division was that, at the cost of severe casualties to itself, it succeeded in imposing serious delay and some degree of disorganisation and thereby gained time for reinforcements to arrive. Once given this breathing space the German rate of reinforcement by land was bound to be greater than ours by sea. They determined to devote all their efforts to throwing us back into the sea and for a week they disregarded all other factors for this purpose, including the steadily growing threat from Eighth Army.

The first three days of the operation went relatively successfully though our progress was not as great as we had hoped. In the next three days the Germans launched a series of counter-attacks which produced a very serious crisis on the 14th. By the 15th the Germans had admitted defeat. It was a dramatic week.

* The Germans had three pre-arranged "states of alarm" (Alarmzustände) for troops on coast defence. Alarmzustand I meant merely that the possibility of an invasion existed and appropriate measures were to be taken; II meant that an invasion fleet was at sea, destination unknown, and all units were to make preparations to be able to move at short notice; III meant that a landing on the unit or formation's actual sector was imminent. State of Alarm II was nothing new for the German coastal troops; it had often been ordered in the past weeks, particularly by units in the Gulf of Gaeta. It is not known when, if ever, State of Alarm III was ordered at Salerno.