

eager and confident for battle. I also welcomed 78 Division, the most experienced of First Army's divisions. As will appear, Eighth Army had to face the heaviest opposition from the Germans and had some of the hardest fighting of the campaign in their struggle for the plain of Catania. The stubbornness of the German defence was more than equalled by their stubbornness, and their skill and endurance in the heat of a Sicilian summer brought them the success they thoroughly deserved.

I must add here my thanks to my own staff. Most of the senior British officers had come with me from Middle East when I set up the headquarters of Eighteenth Army Group in Tunisia; of the Americans some had also served on that staff, some came from Allied Force Headquarters and elsewhere. They made a fine team, headed by my Chief of Staff, General Richardson and his American Deputy, General Lemnitzer.*

In the circumstances, therefore, it was natural for me to feel that everything that could possibly be done to make the operation a success had been done. We had a team of commanders and men who since the previous autumn had known nothing but success. I had no illusions that the task would be easy but I had confidence that we were bringing to this task the best that Great Britain and the United States could provide.

On the afternoon of 9th July the various convoys from both ends of the Mediterranean began to arrive in their assembly areas east and south of Malta and from there, when assembled, to move north to their landing areas. That afternoon the wind began to rise and the sea became suddenly choppy with the characteristic short, steep swell of the Central Mediterranean. It was a bad omen for the assault at dawn, but I was assured that these sudden storms were liable to drop as suddenly as they arose, and it would certainly be too dangerous to attempt a postponement at this stage. We had quite clearly, contrary to all reasonable expectations, achieved strategic surprise and evidence appeared to show that the Germans were, as we had hoped, thinning out in the assault area to reinforce western Sicily. After dusk that night I went down to Cape Delimara, the south-eastern point of Malta, to watch the gliders fly past for the landing in support of Eighth Army. As the tandem-wise pairs of tow and glider came flying low, now in twos and threes, now in larger groups, with the roar of their engines partly carried away by the gale and their veiled navigation lights showing fitfully in the half light of the moon, I took note that the first invasion of European soil was under way. On my right the quiet expanse of Marsa Scirocco waited for the Italian fleet which, two months hence, was to anchor there in humble surrender.

Shortly after midnight the wind began to fall off and the swell to subside. These conditions had favoured us in one respect, for at many places along the coast the hostile garrisons, which had been on the alert for weeks, were lulled into a sense of security by the bad weather and, believing that no one would attempt a landing under such conditions,

relaxed their vigil.* Resistance was slight on the beaches on both Army fronts and by first light it could be said that all landings had been successful at the cost of very small casualties. The airborne attack had been less fortunate. The wind was still blowing at some forty miles per hour when the parachutists were dropped and the gliders slipped, and many of the pilots of the transport and tow aircraft, who had had no previous experience in actual operations, ran into difficulties with their navigation or were disconcerted by enemy anti-aircraft fire. The result was that the American airborne troops were scattered in small parties over an area of some fifty miles from Licata to Noto; in Eighth Army's area nearly fifty of the hundred and thirty-four gliders of 1 Airlanding Brigade which took off from Tunisia came down in the sea, about seventy-five came safely to land somewhere in south-eastern Sicily and only twelve landed in the correct dropping zone. The force which actually reached the bridge south of Syracuse, the Brigade's main objective, only numbered eight officers and sixty-five men, but they held the bridge until 1530 hours on D-day, when nineteen survivors were relieved at the last minute by 5 Division troops. However, in spite of this miscarriage, the effect on the nerves of the none too steady Italian troops of the descent of these airborne forces all over south-eastern Sicily was of the utmost value to the assault. Small isolated units of parachutists seized vital points, attacked roads and created widespread panic which undoubtedly disorganised all plans for defence.

Owing to the swell raised by the gale of the previous day some of the landings, especially on the more exposed Seventh Army beaches, suffered a slight delay; but the weakness of the defence soon allowed us to make up any time which had been lost. On the right 13 Corps made good its initial bridgehead, seized the high ground overlooking the coast road and, advancing over the bridge captured by 1 Airborne Division, entered Syracuse at 2100 hours on the evening of D-day. This was a particularly fine feat of arms. It involved a landing on a defended coast followed immediately by a march to a flank without waiting to consolidate the beachhead and, owing to the partial failure of the airborne operation, it had to be carried out in less strength and without the tactical advantages which had been planned. 30 Corps had captured all its beaches by 0545 hours, Pachino landing ground by 1000 hours and the town of Pachino by 1330 hours. During the first day Eighth Army made no contact with any of the Italian mobile divisions or with any German troops; the men of the coastal divisions who were met made little difficulty in surrendering after slight resistance. Seventh Army had met equally poor opposition and easily seized all its D-day objectives. Licata, Gela, Scoglitti and Marina di Ragusa were all in our hands and in the afternoon the floating reserve was ordered to disembark in the Gela area. This was the centre of the Army's front which now consisted of three separate bridgeheads: 3 Division at Licata, 1 Infantry and 2 Armoured at Gela and 45 Division on the right at the south-eastern end of the Gulf of Gela. The Gela bridgehead, now strengthened by the

* Major-General Lyman L. Lemnitzer

* It was also of assistance in helping the craft to cross the off-lying sand bars which formed "false beaches" on some of the American beaches.