

addition of the reserve, was the smallest, and enemy tanks had already been seen approaching from the north-east, a presage of what was to come on the morrow.

Next day, the 11th, Eighth Army continued to press on up the east coast in the direction of Catania. 30 Corps on the left extended its bridgehead to Pozzallo and Ispica, but the main weight of interest lay with 13 Corps which pushed on a marching column to Priolo, half-way to Augusta. The heat was intense and few vehicles were as yet ashore; contact was first made that day with the Italian 54 Division, outside Syracuse. On the American front, in the meantime, a more serious battle was developing. The battle group of the Hermann Goering Division which was disposed to cover the centre of the island and the Ponte Olivo airfields made a strong and deliberate counter-attack on 1 Infantry Division at Gela. From 0800 hours to 1630 hours these attacks continued, supported by a battalion of tanks, and at one stage penetrated to the beach, but they were repulsed in hard fighting in which the direct fire of naval escort ships played a considerable part. By the end of the day landing strips were made available for our aircraft at Gela and Licata; in Eighth Army's sector we had Pachino, and the bridgehead was assuming very solid proportions.

The German Command put in the eastern group of Hermann Goering Division to defend Augusta but the impetus of our assault was such that, after being held up at Priolo all day of the 12th, 5 Division was able to capture the town next morning before dawn. Seventh Army had counter-attacked the Germans opposing them and by the 13th were firmly in possession of the three vital airfield areas of Comiso, Biscari and Ponte Olivo. Both Armies were pushing ahead impetuously and it seemed as though nothing could stop them. Ahead of the troops, the Tactical Air Force bombed intensively the lines of communication in the centre of the island to hold up the movements of enemy forces across Sicily. On my right General Montgomery was developing two thrusts, one with 13 Corps due north on to Catania, which he hoped to capture on the 16th, and one on the left with the Canadians whom he was hoping to send in a wide out-flanking movement through Caltagirone and Enna to come in behind the enemy north of Mount Etna. This meant that Seventh Army would be free to pivot on its left and strengthen its grasp on the central portion of the island, preparatory to carrying out the task for which I had designated it. 30 Corps would be advancing straight across the front of Seventh Army's right wing where 45 Division, although fresh from the United States with no previous battle experience, had been making striking progress.

I issued orders for the new plan on 13th July. The new boundary between the two Armies gave to Eighth Army the road Vizzini-Caltagirone-Piazza Armerina-Enna; it then ran due north to the north coast west of San Stefano, which was 30 Corps' ultimate objective. Eighth Army's attack on the right began on the night of the 13th, when 1 Parachute Brigade was dropped to capture the Primosole bridge over the River Simeto, at the southern edge of the Catania plain. 5 Division, followed by 50 Division, were to attack north-

wards to make contact with the parachutists, establish a bridgehead over the river and advance on Catania. The parachutist operation was successful, though only about half reached the right area, and about two hundred men with five anti-tank guns seized the bridge, removed the demolition charges and prepared to defend the position until relieved. All day on the 14th they withstood enemy counter-attacks and only withdrew after dark to a ridge to the southward from which they could still cover the bridge. Early on the 15th contact was made with the main body which had been delayed by strong German counter-attacks, in one of which Augusta had been temporarily lost. The vital bridge was intact and on the 15th we succeeded in getting some troops across, though it was not until the 17th that we could consolidate our shallow bridgehead north of the river. This stubborn and partly successful defence was due to the arrival of German reinforcements. A regiment of parachutists from 7 Air Division* was taken from Tarascon, in Southern France, and brought by air via Naples to the area south of Catania. It was these excellent troops who were mainly responsible for the defence of the line of the Simeto.

On the right, therefore, we had been only partially successful; the capture of the bridgehead over the Simeto was a considerable advantage, but we had been halted south of Catania. In the centre, the sector of 30 Corps, we had made steady progress, but the nature of the country and the exiguous road-net meant that that progress had been slow. Vizzini was captured on the 14th, after strong resistance, by 51 Division assisted by 45 (United States). The Canadians then went into the lead capturing Grammichele and Caltagirone on the 15th and Piazza Armerina on the 16th.† Their next objective was Enna, the centre of the island and meeting point of a network of main roads against which the bomber effort of the air forces had been focussed during the first five days of the invasion. Seventh Army was now re-organising in order to meet the needs of its changed directive. On 15th July General Patton created a Provisional Corps Headquarters to command the left flank of the Army, consisting of 3 Infantry Division, with under command 4 Tabor of Goums,‡ old friends from Tunisian days, and 82 Airborne Division. II Corps continued to command the right flank with 1 and 45 Divisions, while 2 Armoured Division was under Army command. II Corps had made good progress northwards and 45 Division on its right had co-operated with 30 Corps in the capture of Vizzini and Caltagirone; on the 16th, however, the Division reached the new inter-Army boundary and started to transfer to the left wing of the Corps, behind 1 Division. 3 Division in the Provisional Corps made ground westwards along the coast and inland beyond Canicatti, which it had captured on the 12th. The

* This was the original German airborne division which had been responsible for the invasion of Crete. It was at that moment engaged in splitting into 1 and 2 Parachute Divisions; 3 Regiment, which is the one in question here, was assigned, either already or later, to 1 Parachute Division.

† War Office footnote: According to official records, Caltagirone was captured at 0400 hours, 16th July, 1943, and Piazza Armerina at 0600 hours, 17th July, 1943.

‡ Goums are composed of French Moroccan native troops particularly skilled in mountain warfare. A Tabor is the approximate equivalent of a battalion.