

Army had been directed (on 15th July) to prepare plans for an unopposed landing in Naples. This directive was still in force, but priority had now been shifted to the operation against Taranto. Nevertheless, the great prize of the capture of Naples still glittered; it would give us control of an area capable of maintaining any Allied force which could be placed in Italy in 1943, it would establish our armies well on the road to Rome and it would oblige the Germans to withdraw not only from Calabria but probably from Apulia as well. But if the required conditions were unfulfilled there were weighty arguments against an assault landing in so well defended an area; in particular the lack of air cover and the time which must elapse before our troops advancing from Calabria could make contact. We were likely to capture Cotrone, from which we could cover operations against Taranto, sooner than Scalea, the first place from which we could cover Naples; exploitation overland from Cotrone to Taranto would be much easier than from Scalea to Naples; for the present the priority of the Taranto operations must stand.

Fall of Mussolini.

On 25th July Radio Roma announced the fall of Mussolini, the suppression of the Fascist party and the accession to power of Marshal Badoglio. Although we had often considered the possibility of this, the actual announcement came as a surprise, for the secret of the *coup d'état* had been well kept, as was natural with so few persons involved in the plot. It was not a case of a popular rising nor even of a wave of popular discontent, for the Italian people in general was still sunk in its usual apathy; though, of course, claims to that effect were subsequently put out, mainly by Italian exiles in Switzerland. If there had in fact been any such occurrences we should have been less surprised, and so would the Germans, who were struck with consternation. We had a certain advantage over them, as we were aware of the discontent of some senior officers in the Italian services, and there had already been some cautious approaches by Italian commanders in the Balkans which showed a willingness to abandon a lost cause and a now unpopular alliance.

This dramatic news introduced a new factor into our delicately poised calculations, and one which clearly brought nearer the long hoped for collapse of Italy. That Badoglio had declared "The war continues" deceived nobody and proposals for a capitulation were confidently awaited. But the Allied side need not wait until Badoglio felt secure enough to move; the optimism of the early days of the Sicilian invasion, which had become dashed with more sober reflections as the deadlock before Catania continued, was reborn. At a conference at Carthage next day, 26th July, attended by General Eisenhower, Admiral Cunningham, Air Marshal Tedder and myself, we decided that greater risks might now legitimately be taken. Accordingly on 27th July General Clark, commanding the Fifth Army, was directed to prepare plans for seizing the port of Naples "with a view to preparing a firm base for further offensive operations." The target date was to be 7th September and an outline plan was to be submitted by 7th August. The September date was the earliest we could possibly hope

for. All our available troops were engaged in Sicily, where the two reserve divisions, American 9th and British 78th, had just been committed in order to speed up the completion of the campaign. We hoped to finish in Sicily by mid-August, after which the troops there engaged would be available, with the important exception of those earmarked for return to the United Kingdom. More decisive, for if a real opportunity had offered no doubt we could have scraped together some troops to take advantage of it, was the fact that we had no craft to move them as we were still dependent on craft for the maintenance of our forces in Sicily. It was calculated that the first week of September would be the earliest time by which sufficient would be available and serviceable. The moon would be at its most suitable between 7th and 10th September.

Plans for Assault Landing in the Naples Area.

Operation AVALANCHE, as the Naples assault was called, was to be carried out by VI United States Corps, organised as for the invasion of Sardinia, and 10 British Corps.* Theoretically each Corps consisted of one armoured, two infantry and one airborne division, but this was liable to revision in view of the difficulties of providing shipping and air lift; we knew, for instance, that we should only have air lift for at most one airborne division and would probably, as turned out, not be able to lift much more than three divisions in craft for the assault wave. There were difficulties about the British contingent. Since the plans for Calabria were still in force, and we could not yet say whether that was to be the main attack or only subsidiary, it was necessary for 10 Corps to be prepared, at short notice, to attack either Naples or Reggio, and only time could show which. The solution reached was to devise loading tables common to both plans and to ensure that 10 Corps' allotment of landing craft was not varied to meet the exigencies of one or the other.

The directive of 27th July specified the Gulf of Salerno as the site for the initial landings for the assault on Naples. This choice was much argued, both at the time and subsequently, and I think it as well to consider at some length the reasons for the decision, of whose correctness I am convinced. To sail straight into the Bay of Naples was impracticable. The sea approaches were strongly defended by minefields and net barrages and the whole area was heavily covered by permanent fortifications, including over forty coast defence guns; moreover, it was almost certain that, whatever else the Germans might do, they would hold Naples in strength to deny us so great a prize for as long as possible and to cover the withdrawal of their forces from the south. The choice therefore fell between landing north or south of Naples. The former course had many advantages and was originally favoured by General Clark. The plain of Campania, between the Volturno and Naples, is one of the few plains along the west coast of Italy not dominated by nearby mountains, a fact which would permit the rapid deployment of large forces and the full use of our armour, and a quick success

* Throughout this Despatch, Corps printed with Roman numerals (e.g. VI Corps) are American Corps and those with Arabic numerals (e.g. 10 Corps) are British Corps.