

part of his division at Taranto on the 9th with the tasks of securing the port, airfields and other installations and making contact with the Italians in the area of Brindisi. As soon as this was achieved, and when sufficient landing craft became available, it was proposed to bring in 78 Division from Sicily, followed by 8 Indian Division from Middle East. The code-name for the operation—SLAPSTICK—an undignified term to denote the seizure of the main naval port of Southern Italy, at least illustrates happily the *ex tempore* nature of the planning. At the same time the Cotrone operation (GOBLET) was cancelled and 5 Corps Headquarters became available. I therefore ordered General Allfrey,* General Officer Commanding to prepare to move to the Heel of Italy with his Corps Headquarters to take over command of such troops as were already there (1 Airborne and such of 78 Division as had landed) and 8 Indian Division when it arrived. His task was defined as to secure a base in the Heel of Italy covering the ports of Taranto and Brindisi, and if possible Bari, with a view to a subsequent advance on my orders. 5 Corps was to come under operational command of my headquarters from 5th September, but I planned to put it at a later date under command of Eighth Army, when the latter should have advanced sufficiently to make contact with it. The result of this decision was that our build-up on the mainland of Italy, no longer restricted to the beaches of Salerno and the minor ports of Calabria, would be considerably accelerated and Fifth and Eighth Armies would each have an independent axis of supply, on the west and east coast respectively.

Situation on 8th September.

The plans for AVALANCHE were completed and the various convoys sailed on 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th September, but arrangements for the acceptance of the Italian surrender and the descent of 82 Airborne Division on Rome remained to be made, and at feverish speed. For the former the main task was to prepare instructions for Italian shipping and aircraft, to be broadcast at the appropriate moment, giving recognition signals, routes, and ports and airfields to which they were to proceed. The latter was altogether a riskier operation and it was decided that we must have first-hand knowledge of the actual situation before a final decision on its launching could be taken. It was decided, therefore, to send Brigadier-General Taylor,† of the United States Airborne Forces, to Rome to report from there the chances of success; he was instructed, if he decided against the operation, to include a specific innocent-sounding code-word in his signal. He sailed in a British motor torpedo boat from Palermo on 7th September and transferred, off Ustica, to a light Italian naval craft. At the same time details were agreed with the Italians to ensure that there should be no possibility of misunderstanding over the announcement of the armistice. We were already in direct wireless communication with Marshal Badoglio by means of a set given to Castellano in Lisbon, but in case this should break down it was arranged that the BBC should broadcast at stated times two short

talks on German activities in the Argentine as a sign that that was the day. At 1830 hours on that day (i.e., 8th September) General Eisenhower was to broadcast the announcement of the Italian surrender and simultaneously Badoglio was to broadcast a similar announcement. Immediate steps would then be taken to ensure that the news was spread as widely as possible all over Italy by radio and leaflet.

On 8th September the dispositions of the Allied invasion forces were as follows. The assault convoys for Salerno were at sea north of Sicily steering a northerly course preparatory to turning east after last light. 1 Airborne Division was concentrated at Bizerta on its warships, ready to sail for Taranto when Badoglio's announcement should have confirmed that the Italians were ready to surrender. The troops of 82 Airborne Division were at Licata in Sicily, ready to emplane for the drop on Rome. In Calabria 1 Canadian Division on the right had entered Locri, Citanova and Polistena without contact with the enemy; 5 Division on the left had reached Rosarno and the line of the River Mesima; 231 Infantry Brigade, supported by Commandos, made a landing at Pizzo, the same morning, which was intended to get in behind the enemy's rear but which actually made contact with his last elements retreating more rapidly than had been expected. Meanwhile a new crisis was brewing at Bizerta where at 1100 hours a conference of Commanders-in-Chief, presided over by General Eisenhower, was in progress.

Italian Surrender Announced.

At the end of the conference two messages from Rome were brought in. One was from General Taylor advising against the airborne operation; the pre-arranged codeword was present and the decision had to be accepted. 82 Airborne Division were stood down only a short while before they were actually due to emplane; not merely were they not used in Rome, where their presence perhaps would have made little difference to the development of the situation, but it was also too late for them to be switched back to their original rôle in support of the Salerno landings. This was a serious blow. The other message was from Marshal Badoglio. He stated that because of the presence of strong German forces in the neighbourhood he was unable to guarantee the security of the three airfields on which the airborne division was to land and therefore the landing could not be attempted; consequently it was impossible for him to announce the armistice until the seaborne invasion had proved successful. The statements in the first part of the signal were not strictly accurate, or at least exaggerated, for the Germans made no move until after the announcement of the armistice and General Taylor based his decision to cancel the airborne operation on the obvious disorganisation and vacillation in Italian military circles rather than on the danger from the Germans. As to delaying the announcement of the armistice, it was quite impossible for us to accept Badoglio's change of attitude, or rather reversion to his original attitude, since he had all along been anxious to see our hand exposed before taking the final step. The troops were at sea facing an operation whose risks were already considerable; it would be intolerable to

* Lieutenant-General (now Sir Charles) Allfrey, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C.

† Brigadier-General (now Major-General) Maxwell D. Taylor, United States Army.