

Enemy Dispositions.

On the main front, held by Tenth Army, Kesselring adapted his dispositions to a fairly close copy of our own. On the Adriatic sector he organised a holding force which defended a long stretch of front from the sea to Alfedena, in the centre of the mountains, with three infantry divisions; this was put under General Hauck of 305 Division and called the "Hauck Group"; in function it corresponded to 5 Corps on our side. From Alfedena to inclusive Cassino was LI Mountain Corps with three divisions, including 1 Parachute in Cassino. XIV Panzer Corps commanded the Liri valley sector, the Aurunci mountains and the west coast as far as Terracina. In the valley was a "Blocking Group" in regimental strength from 305 Division (Hauck) plus a regiment of 15 Panzer Grenadier Division; in the Aurunci mountains were two infantry divisions strengthened by three battalions from a third in LI Corps and the remainder of 15 Panzer Grenadier Division guarded the west coast. Fourteenth Army, at Anzio, had five divisions, one a Panzer Grenadier division, in line and a Panzer division in reserve.

These dispositions, especially when considered together with the location of the German mobile reserves, which I shall come to shortly, were gratifying evidence of the success both of our security measures and of our cover plan. As I have already explained, in order to achieve a secret concentration against the vital point in sufficient strength to give us the necessary superiority it was essential not merely to conceal our troop movements but also to induce the enemy to believe that the troops whose whereabouts were concealed from him were intended to be employed in a totally different direction. I therefore early decided that we would take steps to simulate the intention of launching another amphibious landing on the west coast, this time directed against Civitavecchia. The fact that, as was well known to us, the enemy constantly overestimated our total strength in the theatre and, from his own lack of experience of amphibious operations, was bad at assessing the probability of such a threat, would help us in our design; moreover I considered that the surprise which had been sprung on him at Anzio would make him more than ever willing to believe such a landing possible and more cautious in guarding against a repetition of his surprise. Such a cover plan had the further advantage that Kesselring would be bound to expect that, as in January, we should begin with a strong attack on the Garigliano so that the actual opening of the offensive would not cause him to revise his appreciation. Orders to put this plan into effect were issued on 18th April. The forces which were notionally to be employed in the amphibious operations were to be 1 Canadian Corps with its two divisions and 36 United States Division. They were directed to simulate wireless traffic and take other measures to create the impression that they were training in the Naples-Salerno area for the proposed operations.

Besides the positive measures of deception it was necessary to carry out negative measure of concealment and camouflage on a very large scale. This presented great difficulties, since almost the whole of the front of attack was overlooked by the enemy and he had particularly good observation in the

Cassino and Liri valley sectors. This observation covered not only the forward areas and approaches but also many of the gun areas and ammunition dumps and even, in the case of the Poles, Corps Headquarters. In this particular sector it was necessary to erect a vertical screen over a mile long to conceal vehicles passing along the road to the Headquarters of 3 Carpathian Division, which was in full view from Monastery Hill. Many new tracks had to be constructed in 13 Corps' sector leading down to the chosen crossing sites over the river, and these had to be carefully concealed with brushwood. All moves forward were made by night and dummy tanks and vehicles were left in the areas vacated by armoured formations. The new artillery positions were so well camouflaged that hardly a shell fell on them before the battle opened, although some of the guns had carried out registration from their new positions. The French concentration was particularly well concealed. Into their Garigliano bridgehead, with a radius of only some four thousand yards, they packed twenty battalions, five batteries and two divisional headquarters; the enemy only credited them with one division forward on the whole Corps sector. An even greater feat was the concealment of the entire Canadian Corps. This was vital to the success of the whole scheme for if the enemy had discovered their true location our bluff would have been exposed.

The plan succeeded perfectly; that it had done so was clear to us at the time from Kesselring's dispositions and was confirmed by documents subsequently captured. All the available German mobile formations were disposed up the west coast. Between the "Gustav" line and the bridgehead was 15 Panzer Grenadier Division (less a regimental group); between the bridgehead and the Tiber was 90 Panzer Grenadier Division (less elements in Tenth Army reserve); north of the Tiber in the Civitavecchia area was 29 Panzer Grenadier Division. In the last area there was also 92 Infantry Division, which had not yet finished training but was fairly complete. The other two mobile divisions were on the Anzio front, one, 3 Panzer Grenadier, partly in the line and the other, 26 Panzer, in reserve; these two also were regarded as available for use against a seaborne landing.* A natural corollary of this misappreciation was that Kesselring badly underestimated the forces which we could bring against his main front. As late as 12th May, the day after our attack, he calculated that between Cassino and the west coast we had six divisions in line, against which his four should be quite adequate, considering the strength of his defences; in actual fact we had the equivalent of over thirteen. By this means we ensured that we had our three to one superiority at the vital point, that the German reserves were far away and that they were eventually committed, when Kesselring had at last realised the trap into which he had fallen, reluctantly, piecemeal and too late.†

* The Hermann Goering Division was at Leghorn, and responsible for guarding the coast in that area but for this we cannot claim the credit; the division was still earmarked for France.

† The date of the attack was also well concealed. Captured documents show that General von Vietinghoff, commanding Tenth Army, proposed to return to Germany on leave on 11 May. One of his Corps Commanders picked on 24 May as our D-day.