

costs. There were also two psychological factors which weighed strongly with Hitler, on whom the decision rested; the well-known reluctance, exhibited both previously and subsequently, to yield any ground without a fight, and, to some extent at least, loyalty to his old ally Mussolini. It was decided, therefore, that German troops should assist in the defence of Italy and that the Allies should be held as far south as possible.

By this time good progress had been made with the re-formation, in France, of the twenty divisions destroyed at Stalingrad, and other exhausted divisions from the Eastern Front were resting there. If the precedent of 1942 had been followed these re-formed divisions should have been employed once more in Russia; instead, any idea of a serious offensive in the east was renounced and they were to be made available for the defence of the southern front. There were no organisational difficulties in their employment in Italy for there were already in existence there the installations which had served for the transit of divisions bound for the war in Africa and Kesselring, the Commander-in-Chief, South (Oberbefehlshaber Süd), was already on the spot. The first necessity was to provide for the security of the islands; two divisions went to Sicily and one to Sardinia and an S.S. brigade to Corsica. More were to follow, when available, for the defence of the peninsula but at the Feltre conference on 19th July Hitler informed Mussolini that he could not spare more than twenty divisions and could not guarantee more than to hold northern Italy north of a line roughly from Pisa to Rimini. The first week of the Sicilian campaign had already shown the uselessness of the Italian Army.

The fall of Mussolini came as a great shock to the Germans, who had had no warning of its imminence. Orders were hurriedly issued to all German troops in Italy to avoid any behaviour which might appear provocative and many observers report how apprehensive and nervous all ranks appeared. For the moment there was no open cause for alarm since Badoglio had declared "The war continues" but it was perfectly clear that the Italians had lost confidence in an Axis victory. It was necessary, therefore, to provide for the safety, not only of the southern frontier of the Reich, but also of the German troops in Italy who might at any moment find themselves at the mercy of a hostile population and attacked in force by their erstwhile brothers in arms. The programme of reinforcement had already been laid down; it was necessary to speed it up and throughout July and August, while the German troops in Sicily were holding a line around Mount Etna and while they withdrew across the Straits of Messina into Calabria, new German forces continued to pour into Italy over the Brenner, out of France and over the north-eastern passes. The main concentration was in northern Italy, where Field-Marshal Rommel was appointed to command; he was also to be responsible for Slovenia and Northern Croatia, from which Italian troops were to be withdrawn.

The last occasion on which the Germans and Italians consulted together on their plans for the defence of Italy, as far as can be ascertained, was at Casalecchio near Bologna on

15th August, a conference attended by Roatta, the Italian Chief of Staff, and three other Italian Generals on the one hand and by Rommel, Jodl and Rintelen on the other*. After some ugly bickering between Roatta and Jodl over the question of German troops being used for the "protection" of the Brenner route the two plans for the defence of the country were produced. The Italians wished for twelve German divisions of which nine were to be in Southern and Central Italy, one in Corsica, and only two in Northern Italy and Liguria; this figure excluded the four divisions from Sicily. This plan might reasonably appear to be based on the Italian desire to have the defence of the whole peninsula provided for; but after the capitulation it was used by Hitler as the basis of a charge that Badoglio had schemed to draw the German forces far down into Italy, as far as possible from their bases, and dispersed in small groups which could be easily dealt with by the Italian troops in the same areas. The German plan for the disposition of their sixteen divisions (i.e. including the four from Sicily) put eight in Northern Italy under Rommel, two near Rome and six in Southern Italy; the latter two forces were to be under Kesselring. This plan was the one adopted in the event. Proposals for the employment of Kesselring's forces, as reported to us by General Castellano, were still fluid and would be based on the Germans' own strength when the invasion came and their appreciation of the Allies' strength. In principle they intended to defend the line of the Apennines from Massa Carrara to Pesaro, the later "Gothic" line, though if the Allies were to attack this in great strength they would withdraw to the Po. If, however, the Allies showed little strength the Germans would attempt to hold a line from Grosseto, through Monte Amiata to Perugia and thence to Ancona.† Finally, if the circumstances and relative strengths were particularly favourable, an attempt would be made to stand south of Rome on the line Gaeta, Isernia, Vasto. This was a line which the Italians had already surveyed, and defences were already being prepared at certain points.‡

There is no need to detail the various stages of the German reinforcement of Italy and I will pass on to the situation as it presented itself on 3rd September.§ For the immediate purpose dispositions in South Italy are the most important, and they were the best known at the time. Four divisions had been evacuated from Sicily; of these 29 Panzer Grenadier Division remained in Calabria, 15 Panzer Grenadier and Hermann Goering Divisions moved to the Naples area to refit and 1 Parachute Division, less certain elements, moved to Altamura in Apulia. In addition to these there were two newly formed armoured divisions south of Naples: 26 Panzer Division|| in Calabria, based on the isthmus of Catanzaro and 16 Panzer Division covering the Gulf of Salerno.

* The minutes of the meeting were found among the Mussolini papers.

† This was, roughly, the Trasimene line on which they offered delaying resistance in June 1944 on their withdrawal from Rome to the "Gothic" line.

‡ It formed the basis for the German "Winter" line of 1943-1944.

§ The German order of battle at this date is given at Appendix "B".

|| Less its armour. 1 Battalion of its tank regiment, equipped with Panther tanks, never came to Italy. II Battalion, with Mark III's and IV's, was at this time north of Rome with 3 Panzer Grenadier Division.