

the coast between Catania and Gela. This raised serious doubts as to whether it would be strong enough at the crucial point, the landing at Avola; it was vital that there should be no risk of failure here, for the whole enterprise depended on seizing the ports of Syracuse and Augusta, and if possible Catania, very soon after landing. The plan entrusted this task to one division and one brigade, only a third of the total force, and it was apparently impossible to increase this except by abandoning one of the other landings. The obvious solution was to divert the division which it was intended to land at Gela, and this was suggested by General Montgomery. On the other hand Air Chief Marshal Tedder pointed out that Ponte Olivo, the airfield centre inland from Gela, had been developed into a first class air base and unless it were captured for our use our air forces would labour under an intolerable situation. Admiral Cunningham agreed, from the naval point of view, that the risk of allowing the enemy air forces to operate from the south-eastern group of airfields would be unacceptable.

This was a serious dilemma since both the arguments for strengthening the east coast assault and for the early capture of the airfields inland from Gela were overwhelmingly strong. My first solution was to transfer to the Avola assault the division assigned to Gela and entrust the latter assault to an American division, transferred from the landings at Sciacca-Marinella, which would therefore have to be cancelled. It was not a satisfactory solution, for I was unwilling to put an isolated American division under command of Eighth Army, but it seemed the best available. Air cover for the assault on Palermo would now have to be given from the south-eastern group of airfields, when captured, and this would cause some delay. I recommended this change of plan to General Eisenhower on 19th March and at a conference on 20th March he agreed to it. My staff continued, however, to explore the possibility of mounting another British division and by 6th April it had been found possible to provide one from Middle East which would stage at Malta. I therefore, in the new plan which was presented on 6th April, restored the American assault at Sciacca-Marinella, added an armoured brigade to the Avola landing and still left the Eastern Task Force with a reserve division which could either be used for the landings south of Catania, as originally planned, or, as now seemed more likely, put in to support the main landings on the south-eastern coast. The western, American, assaults were put back a little, the Sciacca-Marinella landing to D plus 2 and Palermo to D plus 5 or later.

So far changes which had been adopted had represented only modifications of the plan as prepared by the Joint Planning Staff in London but as the time for a final decision approached I began to consider more and more the dangers presented by the dispersal of our forces. It was particularly difficult to estimate the likely scale of enemy resistance, and even our calculations of the fighting value of enemy troops seemed possibly subject to error. General Montgomery shared the same views. In a signal to me on 24th April he said: "Planning so far has been based on the assumption that the opposition will be slight and that Sicily

will be captured relatively easily.* Never was there a greater error. The Germans and also the Italians are fighting desperately now in Tunisia and will do so in Sicily." Indeed it was only natural to expect that the Italians would show some reasonable spirit in defence of their own soil for they were at that time, to our surprise, stubbornly resisting the Eighth Army attack on the Enfidaville positions. The estimate on which we were working, as already stated, assumed an enemy garrison of two German and six Italian mobile divisions and five Italian coastal divisions, against which we were bringing a force of just over ten divisions with two more in reserve. From the point of view of numbers, therefore, we had no actual superiority and such advantages as we enjoyed—the initiative to attack where we chose, command of sea and air, and a certain superiority in equipment, at least over the Italians—would be diminished by dispersion. Moreover, it must be remembered when considering the frame of mind in which we set out on this expedition that this was the first large-scale amphibious operation in the war against a defended coastline and opponents equipped with modern weapons. I am not belittling in any way the landings of 8th November, 1942, but the description I have given above could not be applied to the resistance met on that occasion and we could not expect the fighting in Sicily to cease as quickly as it had done in Algeria and Morocco. No care was too great to ensure that our first landing in Europe should be successful beyond doubt.

With the end of the fighting in Africa the enemy picture had become clearer. One extra Italian mobile division had been added to the garrison and the German forces in the island were reckoned as the equivalent of one division; but none of the forces in Africa had escaped and any further reinforcement must come from the mainland of Italy, from Germany and from enemy-occupied countries. There was still time, and excellent communications, to admit of such a reinforcement. The whole question of comparative strengths was due for discussion at a new conference on 27th April in Algiers.

The conference was eventually called, after some mishaps, on 29th April and attention was at once directed to proposals for strengthening the assault in the south-east. General Leese† represented Eighth Army's point of view. He argued that the Army was, on the present plan, divided into two halves which were too widely separated to be able to support each other and possibly too weak for either to be able to achieve their respective objects. He therefore proposed that both Corps should assault the east coast, one in the area of Avola and the other on either side of the Pachino peninsula (Cape Passero); this would give a firm base for the conquest of the island. Admiral Cunningham did not approve of the suggested change. Apart from his conviction, on general grounds, that in amphibious operations the landings should be dispersed, he considered it essential to secure the use of the south-

* Actually planning had been based on the appreciation that the mobile part of the garrison of the island would be more than doubled and I myself thought that the Joint Planning Staff had taken a rather unduly pessimistic view.

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