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AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

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THE INVASION OF SICILY, 1943

Final comments by Kesselring, written for
U.S. Historical Division

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P R E F A C E

1. Before I learned of the Canadian Historical Division's completed work "The Battle for Sicily", I had written an analysis of the further operations in the Mediterranean theatre as a conclusion to my account of the campaign in Tunisia. I refer the reader to section 17 of "The War in the Mediterranean", Part 2, a knowledge of which is necessary for the study which follows. It will answer many of the questions arising from the other works.

2. The following parts of the treatise "The Battle for Sicily" are of special value:

- (a) the general picture
- (b) the campaign of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division
- (c) the fighting for Sicily in the sector of Schmalz's Brigade

The study of the campaign of the "Hermann Goering" Panzer Division contains substantial gaps and errors.

The study by Colonel von Bonin is stylishly written, but is unfortunately somewhat too strongly biased and thereby loses historical value.

3. The following from the treatise "The Campaign in Italy", Part 1 are related to the chapter on the "Battle for Sicily":

Chapter 1 (General Deichmann)

Chapter 2 (General von Rinteln) half thereof

Chapter 3, Parts 1 and 2 (General Deichmann and Colonel Christ)

Chapter 4, Part 7 (General Westphal)

This work is on the whole valuable. What I consider to be desirable explanations or corrections have been included in special supplements.

4. I shall refrain from pure repetition. Frequently however I shall go into greater detail, where I consider it necessary for an understanding of principles and particular points.

signed: Kesselring

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1. Organisation of command and difficulties encountered in the Mediterranean theatre after the conclusion of the Tunisian campaign

The battle area ahead in this period was Italian territory. Tripolitania was also Italian territory, but a long way from the home country. There had already been also a great deal of friction and ill-feeling in the daily routine, in spite of the fact that the first Chief of the General Staff, Count Cavallero, always tried hard to preserve equilibrium. Such efforts were completely lacking with General Ambrosio.

I therefore had to recognise the claims of the Italian High Command, since it was a matter of the defence of purely Italian ground, and at the beginning only a few German Army formations were present. I never relinquished however my right to play a decisive part in all questions which affected the interests of the German troops and High Command. Questions affecting the common theatre of war could only be decided by the Italian Supreme Command with my consent. As time went by, co-operation between Ambrosio and myself became worse, yet the subordinate authorities on both sides were on equally good terms. As before, the best understanding prevailed between the Italian Naval Command (Supermarina) under Admiral Riccardi and the Italian Air Command (Superaereo) under General Fougier. When the new Commanders-in-Chief, Admiral de Courten and General Sandalli, took over, the outward relationship was certainly preserved, but inwardly estrangement crept in.

I could always count on Mussolini's strong support and it was regrettable that his influence was always being more and more curtailed by his advisers. The Crown Prince tried to maintain closer liaison with me after the fall of Mussolini, but a practical working relationship never materialised. That did not matter at all, since the Crown Prince had little influence on military operations.

I recognised the Italian right to command the Army and Navy on the island and the Apennine Peninsula for purely military reasons. Only one person could issue orders and only one person be responsible. That however did not prevent me from making sure that I exercised a vast influence on the High Command in the preparatory and executive phases.

Methods

1. The order channel through the Italian High Command (Commando Supremo) - I know of no case in which the Italian High Command refused my suggestions when suitably represented.
2. Maintenance of close liaison with the C.-in-C. at the front, by personal visits and liaison generals.
3. Direct influence on my German commanding authorities on the lines of decisions jointly taken.

Methods 2 (liaison generals) and 3 proved necessary in order not to be "outplayed". I would expressly add that I found everywhere the greatest friendliness and understanding; even with General Guzzoni, the C.-in-C., Sicily, although he was an exceptionally weak leader. The personality of the Army was Roatta, whom in contrast with the OKW I learned to appreciate on account of his objective treatment of the operational, tactical and organisation questions in which I was interested.

At one time the German High Command was in my hands; the three military attaches had direct contact with the OKH/ObdM/ObdL and OKW only as far as

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their attache duties were concerned. At one time I combined also the command of Luftflotte 2, but that was too much in the long run. I therefore welcomed the appointment to Luftflotte 2 of its own C.-in-C. which was made about the middle of June as a result of a conference with the Reichsmarschall on 5 June 1943 in his battle headquarters in Oberfranken (Upper Franconia). I had asked for Generaloberst Jeschonnek but Generalfeldmarschall von Richthofen was appointed. The Luftflotte remained subordinate to me until October. I did not consider the choice of Richthofen a happy one, since he had lost the confidence of the army commanders through his direct reports about army matters and so on to Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering. In Italy as well, there was at once a clash between Hube and Richthofen, which I was able to clear up, and eventually establish healthy relations. Richthofen was a well-known air commander of great worth, who had served with his Corps under me in the West and East. Unfortunately he had had no experience of fighting the English and American air forces. For further details see Chapter 3 of the treatise "The Campaign in Italy", Part 1.

There were no other difficulties at that time. Relations with the embassy (von Mackensen) were also on a mutually confidential basis.

2. Analysis of the situation

During the battle for Tunis and after the loss of Tunisia my view of the situation was fully discussed in section 17 of "The War in the Mediterranean", Part 2, to which I refer the reader.

3. Preparatory measures, etc. during the campaign in Tunisia

I refer here to General Deichmann's account in the chapter "The Campaign in Italy", Part 1.

In contrast to Deichmann, I had never during the Tunis fighting thought about a possible invasion of Italy or the outlying islands. The measures ordered by me concerned the period after the ending of the Tunisian campaign. That appropriate steps for such an event had to be taken, was already made necessary by the possibility of an immediate Allied follow-through to Sicily after the end of the Tunisian campaign.

My main attention at that time and during the period between 10 and 15 May was directed to the western part of Sicily, where I had transferred the elements of the "Division Sicily" (later 15th Panzer Grenadier Division), which were ready for action. On the evening of 13 May, after my most uncomfortable air-raid experience at Marsala, I welcomed the battalions and instructed them in their tasks. The fact that I did this, in spite of my injuries, shows how much I feared a bold follow-through by the Allies.

4. Deliberations and measures in the period between the capitulation of Tunis and the start of the invasion (10-13 May to 10 July 1943)

The first few days after the capitulation would have to determine whether an immediate continuation of the attack into Italy was to be expected. It was only during the early days that the absolute weakness of the defences in Sicily and Sardinia would make a surprise operation by the Allies possible. Should that not be made, then one could confidently expect only a full-scale invasion. Time was required to prepare for this, and in turn, it also gave us a chance to improve our defences. My efforts were directed to making the fullest use of this period. Here are the measures taken, briefly summarised:

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(a) Improvisation of units which until the end of May allowed us to set up a sort of security garrison in Sicily and Sardinia (See accounts by Bonin, Deichmann, and Westphal)

(b) Assembly of complete German units and provision of weapons for the Italians

The C.-in-C., South, was entrusted by the OKW with the assembly of the German formations. On the occasions of my visits to the German headquarters (OKW), - on 15/16 February, 17 May, 18 May and 4 June, - when I referred in detail to the situation, the necessity for extensive German assistance was emphatically mentioned, and the great understanding at that time of the need for unstinted aid touched me most deeply.

My verbal proposals were enlarged in frequent telephone talks. Unfortunately I perceived only the ever repeated hesitations and reservations about transferring the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division through Calabria to Sicily. For details see accounts by Deichmann, Westphal and Rintelen.

(c) Arranging training in the light of the most recent experiences in Tunisia

I personally visited each unit once or usually several times, held lectures and let them carry out practical battle exercises in my presence (with the exception of the "Hermann Goering" Panzer Division). I tried to get to know the true worth of the units and their commanders, and to pass on my ideas about the conduct of the campaign. I was therefore able to claim that the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division was a fully trained division, which was well acquainted with the battle terrain in Sicily. The commanders of the divisions were on the average good. General Konrad ("Hermann Goering" Division) had too little battle experience of modern mixed weapons.

(d) Provision of supplies (see the accounts mentioned above)

The "foolish scattering" of supplies over the whole of Sicily criticised by Bonin in his account can be attributed partly to the storing of supplies for the Tunisian campaign and the possible difficulties of removing them from vulnerable points (e.g. the petrol tanks at Augusta). That a campaign could be carried on week after week until the beginning of August without any major difficulties of supply, indicates in itself that distribution was concentrated at the right places.

(e) Improving the capacity for defence of the island and the mainland, by instruction and setting up of staffs and units (see also aforementioned accounts by Deichmann and Westphal)

I myself have seen to it that the Italian High Command were suitably stirred up and have had very detailed discussions with the Italian commanders-in-chief. The German divisional commanders carried out the details.

(f) Working out of defence plans for the individual regions

I have already mentioned in the study "Tunis" that Ambrosio had dropped the practice of mutual visiting. This made matters worse, since now the close co-operation between the authoritative Italian and German

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leaders ceased. Accordingly I do not even today know whether and to what extent the work of my staff and my personal influence were countermanded by forward headquarters. I must assume that this happened in several cases, otherwise one cannot understand for example the behaviour of the Italian division in Sicily on 10 July.

(f) 1. Sicily

Already, on 14 May, I had outlined to all the German Army and Luftwaffe commanders on the airfield at Gerbini the situation which had now arisen, described in more detail the probable course of events, and generally laid down battle procedure.

Chief points:

Preliminary work by Luftwaffe and Navy to interrupt enemy preparations,

sorties by the Luftwaffe and at least part of the Italian-German naval forces to destroy the invasion fleet from time of setting off up to landing, as well as making supply difficult by attacks on the ports and at sea.

The coastal front is the main battle line; accordingly the fighting will be along the coast in the form of immediate counterattacks by German and Italian formations.

In the course of June, I amplified this first talk by detailed discussions with the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, the "Hermann Goering" Panzer Division, the flying formations and the German Naval Command according to the general arrangement with General Guzzoni. The report from General Schmalz ("Hermann Goering" Division) in mid-June, that the Italian AOK6 wanted to evacuate the front-line on the coast without fighting, and seek a decision in the mountains painfully surprised me. At the personal talk which followed, Guzzoni was again convinced of the necessity for the campaign to be conducted as I had suggested. The fact that the Italian formations were not informed of this change in the conduct of the campaign I must put down to intervention from a high level, since I cannot believe Guzzoni capable of such wanton stupidity. The seriousness remains, whatever the reason may have been.

At the final talks with the German divisional commanders I always emphasised one point: "It makes no difference whether you receive the orders from the Army Command (Italian 6) or not. As soon as you perceive the direction of the enemy attack or its objective (Coastal Sectors), you are to counter-attack at once." I can even today hear General Konrad ("Hermann Goering" Panzer Division) speaking: "Herr Feldmarschall, jumping into an immediate counter-attack is my strong point." I took home with me the certainty that it would come out all right. I therefore placed the highest value on very swift counterattacks, since with their bases far removed, only the greatest possible speed would enable the enemy to be hit when in a really weak condition, and by day the route down from the mountains was exposed to naval gunfire.

On the occasion of one of my several visits to Enna (HQ. of the Italian AOK6) (probably on 1.7.43.) the general situation was again discussed. Guzzoni and I agreed that the greatest probability lay in an attack along the south coast, at the eastern end including Cape

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Passero. I still considered an attack on Syracuse - Augusta as improbable, whilst an attack on the lowlands behind the Gulf of Catania seemed to me to be much more likely owing to the operational effect it would have, even if more risky for the attacker. I did not attach especial importance to the west of the island in itself - see my first analysis of the situation. In spite of the almost wretched state of the defences in the western half of the island, I no longer believed, any more than Guzzoni did, in the likelihood of a full-scale landing there. But I believed more and more that the Allies would exploit the favourable conditions in the west, make a landing there and in the absence of any German resistance push rapidly eastwards via Palermo so as to give effective assistance generally to the attack from the south.

See also my views about a landing on the northern side. A bracing of German troops seemed to me essential, and without a shadow of doubt for the following reasons:

- (a) An alert German reconnaissance service must be able to determine at an early moment whether the invasion is being directed against the west side alone or as well as the south. If this (a landing in the west) is not expected, the first step of the C.-in-C. in Enna would be to recall the German division or parts of a division detailed for the west.
- (b) According to the original plan I considered three divisions necessary; two divisions had been allocated, but I thought it would be easier to have a further division (the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division) made available in view of the disposition of forces at that time, thereby regaining equilibrium as far as possible.
- (c) By incorporating the Regiment "Maucke" and transferring other units from Naples and Calabria the "Hermann Goering" Division could in any case be brought up to a strength of $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 divisions, even without the requirements in paragraph (b) being fulfilled.

For these reasons I asked General Guzzoni to take my wishes into consideration. I left it to him therefore to decide on the strength of the units to be left in the Enna area.

I now believed that the Italian reserve divisions thus bolstered by German forces would really fight to defend their country. The 54th Italian Division - in the southeastern tip - was to be taken in tow by the "Hermann Goering" Division.

To conclude, I affirm that the German Army troops had been fully briefed and knew what they had to do.

The Luftwaffe was to confine itself during the preparatory period to the following tasks:

- (a) reconnaissance (see Deichmann's account),
- (b) bombing raids on the harbours and interference with the marine preparations for the invasion and
- (c) defence against enemy air raids.

Detailed accounts have been given by General Deichmann and Colonel Bonin. Here are a few comments on this.

The assumption of command by Freiherr von Richthofen resulted in

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changes in the personnel. The Fighter Commander, Sicily (General Osterkamp), whose post had increased in importance with the air warfare against the Allies, was replaced by the Inspector of Fighters, General Galland. Neither Richthofen or Galland had had any battle experience in the Mediterranean theatre. The consequence was that the formations became less efficient and were comparatively soon smashed up.

To have to fight in the air with inferior numbers is almost worse than being inferior in numbers in a ground campaign, since an air force gets worn out extraordinarily quickly and gradually gives in altogether. A certain amount of cover tactics are therefore justified and are recognised also by the Army, when the airmen intervene at a decisive moment with visible effect, which can also be seen or felt by the soldiers. In spite of the great differences between the leading personalities, the German conduct of the air war in the Mediterranean did not vary much so far as effectiveness was concerned. The inadequate effectiveness of the Luftwaffe at that time, was not due to any particular errors or leadership, or to shortage of flying personnel, but to technical shortcomings and insufficient supplies.

In conclusion, it must be said that by the start of the invasion the close support aircraft, (fighters and dive-bombers) had been more or less put out of action and that the bombers, which were themselves too weak, were not able to counter-effect this.

The anti-aircraft forces too were unable to cope with the protection of the airfields, harbours and railways; this failure was due to numerical weakness, technical essentials and the historical fact that the anti-aircraft was not equal to standing up alone any longer against heavy air raids energetically carried out regardless of losses, in spite of considerable success in bringing enemy aircraft down. Here again the raiders have the advantage, especially when their aircraft come up to every technical requirement. This is not even contradicted by the singular success of the anti-aircraft protection in the Strait of Messina, where a very great concentration of forces, the use of the longest range anti-aircraft guns and tactically superior anti-aircraft control succeeded to a remarkable extent in holding off enemy air raids.

The communications network within the German air force was modern and equal to all demands made upon it. As communication difficulties increased owing to air raids on Sicily and on the railways in southern Italy, along which unfortunately the landline to Sicily lay, the C.-in-C. South incorporated the German Army H.Q. into the air signals network. From that time on communications between the H.Q. of the 14th Panzer Corps and the rear were faultless. On the other hand contact with Lt-Gen Senger von Etterlin, my liaison officer with General Guzzoni, broke down, with the result that I had to make repeated personal visits.

German Naval H.Q. under Admiral Mendsen-Bohlken co-operated unreservedly with me. The building and running of the ferry service in the Strait of Messina, which never broke down, was due to him, even if the engineer assault boats did excel the performance of the naval ferry lighters. The Siebel transports and landing craft too proved themselves here, just as they had done in the traffic between Sicily and Tunis.

There were furthermore no differences of opinion about the use of the U-boats in the sea area off the main invasion departure ports. The performance of the far too small number of U-boats was further cramped, because even the most important areas such as the Sicilian

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channel had to be neglected owing to the more than average danger to which ships operating there would be exposed.

Discussions went on all the time between the C.-in-C. South and Supermarina about the employment of the Italian Fleet. In spite of the readiness they often expressed, I no longer believed that they would make a sortie. See also my comments on this in my study on "The Campaign in Tunisia". However, I must add that arrangements had been made with the Supermarina for the various eventualities.

(f) 2. Lower Italy, Sardinia

I shall only briefly add here that preparations for the defence of Lower Italy, concentrated mainly in Calabria, Apulia and the Naples - Gaeta area, and of Sardinia went on in a similar way, and after many visits I reached agreement with the Italian Command. In May, and up to the time that the Italian islands (Pantellaria, Lampedusa, etc.) were captured - that is to say the middle of June - I could not leave Sardinia out of my calculations. Calabria and Apulia, especially the southern coasts, were until the full-scale landing on Sicily uncertain factors, which cramped my style all the more since the influx of German troops was not up to the demands made on them by the situation at that time. My personal inspection of the coastal defences and the impression I then gained of the readiness for action of the Italian coastal divisions further increased this feeling of uncertainty. Should a landing in the sectors mentioned not materialise, then all these pains taken would serve as a foundation for the defensive measures which would have to be carried out in these districts after the fall of Sicily.

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I must specially praise the performance of the German headquarters and troops during this period. It was difficult enough to gain the desired goal at a time when complete trust reigned between the German and Italian Armed Forces, but during the period that General Ambrosio was in command and especially after the fall of Mussolini, it meant enormous personal effort and a severe drain on one's nerves. At that time I often thought, that it would be very much easier to fight alone with insufficient forces, than to have to bear the responsibility for events which owing to very uncertain factors (for example, antipathy of the people against the war, insufficient battle experience of the soldiers, lack of confidence in our allies, etc.) made clearly defined leadership difficult.

5. The Invasion up to the evacuation of the island

(a) The accounts by General Deichmann, Zolling and others affirm that the Axis High Command was as fully informed as one could conceive by German reconnaissance services on the commencement, direction and time of the invasion.

I was more or less in the position of spectator, since everything had been prepared and disposed as far as humanly possible. Moreover the man responsible was General Guzzoni.

(b) During the early morning of 10 July, it was reported to me - by II Fliegerkorps through Luftflotte 2, I believe - that nothing could yet be seen of counter-moves, even on the part of the Germans. I ordered Konrad's division and Schmalz's brigade by radio to go into immediate action on my responsibility. It makes no difference whether, as one gathers from the other accounts, these two formations had actually gone

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into action, they moved too late anyway. The troops ought to have been ready to move at dusk and at the latest by midnight, or better still even earlier. Irrecoverable hours were thus thrown away.

I fail to understand why AOK6 in spite of a binding arrangement had to have pressure applied on them to bring in the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division. By dusk the AOK6 knew that there was no question of "Plan West" materialising. Accordingly, by this time the division which was also standing ready to move, ought to have received the order to go into action and should have gone in within the hour at the latest. Here again 20 to 24 irrevocable hours were squandered. If the Italian "Livorno" Division had been conducted properly, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division would have been at the disposal of the AOK as a second line of battle on the spot where, as far as could be seen up to then, it would have to be employed.

As the situation actually developed, it would have been better not to have moved the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division to the west, since then the "Hermann Goering" Division would have been able to fight with its right flank covered. However, I am by no means certain, that AOK6 actually released this division.

(c) The leadership of the "Hermann Goering" Division under General Konrad was not fortunate. At the time I severely censured the following deficiencies:-

(c) 1. moving off too late (see above),

(c) 2. the straddling of roads which were hardly suitable for movements of tanks. It is part of the most elementary preparations to reconnoitre roads, repair them sufficiently for the exercise and to direct the troops accordingly. However the main delay was not caused by that, but by the nuisance raids by enemy parachutists "blown about by the wind", who made themselves doubly unpleasant, since

(c) 3. the troops were improperly deployed. From the point of view of tank tactics, it is wrong to let the tank units move separated from the infantry, as happened here. Had they been properly formed up for the march, the infantry under cover of the trees would have been able to mop up the enemy quickly.

In conclusion I seem to remember that parts of the "Hermann Goering" Division were already fighting in the neighbourhood of Gela on the afternoon of 10 July. In my battle headquarters at Frascati near Rome, I was kept well posted on the course of the operation of this division, but I cannot now say, from whom I received my information. I suppose however, that the reports came to me through the air liaison headquarters with the army staffs from Luftflotte 2. After what Bergengruen wrote, I very much doubt if my various comments on their conduct of operations reached the Division; they were not always received in a friendly manner.

(c) 4. On 10 or 11 July it was reported to me that the "Livorno" Division had gone into action to the south, but that its advance was being greatly hampered by heavy naval fire on the mountain roads. This information reassured me inasmuch that at least one Italian division was trying to take part in the fighting. The

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complete disappearance of the "Napoli" Division, which was reported to me via General Schmalz, disturbed me equally as much.

(d) The deficiencies in the command which had arisen caused me on the 12 July to visit AOK6 in Enna and Schmalz's Brigade, so as to be at hand for the somewhat daring first airborne landing of the 3rd Parachute Regiment near Catania in the evening. General von Senger accompanied me from Enna.

(d) 1. I got the impression that General von Senger had done everything humanly possible considering the difficult relationship with the Italian chain of command, to preserve German influence in the command and to co-ordinate the leadership of the German headquarters. Views to the contrary in the other accounts are untrue. But I too clearly recognised the limitations and saw that nothing could be done in the German sense with the Italian controlling machine. The interpolation of a senior German headquarters (Army Corps) could not be avoided any longer; this was even more necessary since I felt from discussions with Guzzoni that because of the very confused foundations there was little direct control whatsoever.

I still seem to remember that the Italian divisions in the Western part of Sicily were discussed and that no agreement was reached as to their further employment. Hence my proposal to the Duce on 13 July in Rome.

Judgment on the behaviour of the Italian divisions had been remarkably conceived and somewhat rosily coloured.

(d) 2. I was very pleasantly reassured by the orderliness and safe handling of General Schmalz's command. In his account he has said everything. I told him I agreed with the measures he had taken and was able to reassure him with the news that the first elements of the 1st Parachute Division - the 3rd Parachute Regiment - had already landed that evening and were at his disposal.

I was angry at the behaviour of the garrison and commandant of Augusta; moreover Mussolini promised me that court martial proceedings would be instituted.

(d) 3. The landing of the parachutists was made under cover of fighters. I had no hesitation in allowing further units to be landed during the next few days at various places and different times.

(d) 4. General impression: The complete failure of the Italian divisions and the frivolous non-observance of the agreed plan of defence does not leave one to expect anything very much different to result in the overall situation. Certain weaknesses in the German command have made the task, which the weak German forces could barely accomplish, even more difficult. Western Sicily will have to be surrendered; perhaps the Italian troops there can be better employed elsewhere. They will have to be dragged in, since the mountain warfare which is now to be expected will eat up a lot of people. The divisions by their movements will form their own flank protection against any possible enemy encircling movements.

Whether east Sicily and the enlarged Etna bridgehead can be held, is today more than doubtful but the attempt will have to be made anyway. For this the following are essential:

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the tightening-up of German leadership,

the reinforcement of German forces, by a further German division,

the building of an Etna defence line, and

the improvement of signals communications.

From the extent of the landings in Sicily there is little probability of the operation being extended to southern Italy.

(e) The contents of paragraph (d) 4, was the gist of my proposal to the Duce and of my telephone conversation with Jodl on 13 July and days following.

Mussolini agreed to the 14th Panzer Corps being placed under AOK6 and ordered the removal of the two Italian divisions in the west to the eastern end of the island.

OKW was more stubborn and released a part of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division only on 15 or 16 July, and it was a day-to-day struggle to get them to transfer the bulk of the division.

Jodl's secret order to General Hube can be attributed to my summary of the situation, which was probably not passed on to Adolf Hitler in that form. Otherwise Hitler's later astonishment at the evacuation of Sicily is not understandable.

(f) I was able to gather from the battle reports of the fighting troops that H.Q. of the 14th Panzer Corps had not got properly on the move. Therefore I flew on the morning of 15 or 16 July by flying-boat to Milazzo for detailed talks with General Hube (Panzer troops) at a rendezvous north-west of Etna. Until he arrived I myself issued urgent orders to the waiting officers of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division. General Hube had not yet been able to secure a foothold; we were all unanimous about the position. His task would have to be to establish a front and by taking into account territory lost to keep a closed front. I assured him of my fullest support and also placed the anti-aircraft artillery in his region under his command and promised to accelerate the transfer of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division. I also left him in no doubt as to the amount of air support he could count on. I told him too that I was considering evacuating Sicily, if it were not possible to give him generous help. I instructed him on measures for the defence of the Strait of Messina, which he would have to carry out. I told him that I no longer expected a large-scale invasion of Calabria or Apulia whilst fighting for Sicily was going on, but that one naturally must always be ready for a smaller encircling landing west or east of Cape Spartivento and in the Gulf of Squillace. He did not need to bother himself about this I told him, as I would take any measures necessary, and I must leave it to his tactfulness to work in co-operation with General von Senger without antagonising AOK6.

On the following morning with General von Senger, and also if my memory does not play me false with Hube, I visited Konrad's and Schmalz's parachute troops. I refer the reader to the accounts by the First General Staff Officer of the Division and by General Schmalz. My objections to an extensive withdrawal of the division were dictated by dissatisfaction at the operational leadership of the division. After I

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had found out by means of exhaustive talks General Konrad's motives and realised he had a clearly defined conception of leadership, I expressed my agreement with him. The objections to withdrawing the Schmalz Brigade (see account of this) to the mountain slopes were based on the following. The positions on the forward slopes had a great disadvantage; the English were able to bombard the positions with their long-range guns without our being able to do anything to stop them; as far as this was concerned it made no difference, whether I placed the defences further forward or on the slopes of the mountains. The broadsides from the English naval guns - I experienced one of them whilst I was there - on the mountain slopes were, apart from their splintering effect (fragments of rock), even more effective, because the positions could be seen from the ships and could be bombarded by direct observation. And finally there was the question of the obstacles to tank movements! However I once more gave my consent, since I had confidence in General Schmalz's leadership.

During my presence at battle headquarters the commander of the 3rd Parachute Regiment, which I had already "written off" in my own mind, reported that he had withdrawn. As far as I can remember, the regiment had not received the order to retreat, since it was hemmed in on both sides without any flanking support. I was able to congratulate the commander on the performance of his regiment. Schmalz did him an injustice.

A talk with General Stahel in Catania concluded the visit. He received orders from me to support the left wing of the "Hermann Goering" Division, and to organise the coastal defences so that enemy movements from the sea against the coast could be at once bombarded. The defences at Acireale and the task which later fell to him of organising the coastal defences on the north coast near Milazzo justify the measures he took. He was the right man for the job. Contrary to the opinions expressed in the other accounts, I have already proved, for example in Tobruk and elsewhere, the suitability of anti-aircraft guns for attacks on shipping targets.

On the whole I was satisfied. I knew that the command was in the best hands. It was now only a question of transferring the whole of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division to the 14th Panzer Corps, and relieving them in Calabria by the 26th Panzer Division. Unfortunately several days again elapsed before I received permission from the OKW. I was honestly pleased that individual Italian units, incorporated in the German formations, fought well.

(g) I did not visit Sicily any more after that. I placed my confidence in General Hube and share wholeheartedly the opinion which his chief of staff, Colonel von Bonin gave in his report. It was ideal collaboration; every day, at least once and usually twice, I discussed with him the situation, his plans and my ideas on the subject. General Hube as a rule gave me his views before carrying them out or before issuing orders, and in most cases I agreed with them, thereby accepting the responsibility. In spite of the enormous strain which Hube continuously underwent, he considered this period of leadership under my command as the best war experience he had yet had.

The main subjects of these numerous talks were:

(g) 1. the tense situation on the divisional boundaries of the 15th Panzer Grenadier and "Hermann Goering" Divisions, and later of the 29th and 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions,

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(g) 2. the worry about an encircling landing on the coast, especially in the north, which the different temporary lines caused me,

(g) 3. the disadvantages arising from our lack of ground attack and flying operations,

(g) 4. the difficulties encountered in the fighting in the mountains, especially by the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, and later on,

(g) 5. the worries about the Strait of Messina.

General Hube conducted the retreat of his divisions fighting all the way with a conspicuously cautious understanding of tactics. The crowning manoeuvre of his leadership was the crossing of the Strait of Messina.

(h) Finally I must affirm that the Axis High Command had plenty of luck in every mishap. The extraordinarily regular behaviour of the Allied forces especially helped them; I used to count on that. Here are a few examples of this:

The slow delivery of an attack in a confined area, the operational failure to make encircling landings which would have had the aim of taking Etna massif; the breaking off of strong forces towards western Sicily, which instead of fighting on the decisive wing, advanced and captured territory of little value, or - is this diversion due to the German forces reported in the west of the island? The reluctance, on the part of all the Army Groups and the Armies, which became more and more noticeable in the course of the campaign, to make encircling landings along the coast from the sea or the air; the failure to disrupt the Messina Straits crossing by combined air and sea attacks, and to open up an offensive to annihilate the Axis forces in Sicily by making landings on Calabria,

Reference has already been made to the mistakes by the Italian and German command. The opinion expressed in one account that Palermo should have been defended, would have been justified, if there had been fighting in the west, or if landings had been made in the north near Palermo. As soon as the enemy's plan of operations was perceived, and the Allied concentration in the east observed, the defence with concentrated German formations would have led to a faulty scattering of forces. It could not have been done with Italian forces. Furthermore I would add that C.-in-C., South ordered the German commandant at Palermo to use his immobile units (air and anti-aircraft forces) to hold up the hostile advance by blocks and covering fire, especially along Highway 24. It was also reported that this had been put into operation.

6. Lessons learned for the future from experience in the Sicilian campaign

A.(a) Invasions are carried out under very strong naval artillery and air force cover, therefore at first there is no need to expect operations at points far removed from naval and air bases.

(b) Tactical sea and airborne landings are at first only to be expected on the smallest scale.

(c) A planned course of operations and campaign which takes into account the present state of training leads us to expect reasonable prospects of success even in the most difficult situations.

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(d) The strength of the enemy attacks lies in the material at their command; the Allies are superior in purely technical matters (bulldozers, radio equipment, etc.).

(e) Outstanding performances by individual divisions give one to expect a gradually raised standard of all our forces.

B.(a) The coast did not appear as a main battle line, since it was not fortified and was undefended. The concentration of all weapons against the landing boats as well as against the men who have been landed still seems to be the most effective defence.

(b) There is nothing to go on as far as local reserves are concerned; one can only assume that they must be under cover and well camouflaged so as not to be annihilated by naval gunfire or bombing attacks.

(c) The main body of reserves must be closer, that is to say they must be drawn up sufficiently close to the coast that they can, if possible, enter their assembly area under cover of darkness. Chocks or casualties, which considerably impair the fighting strength, can only thus be avoided.

(d) The defence plan to cover likely contingencies must be so rigidly adhered to, and gone over in flesh and blood by the Command and the troops, that on the command "action" everything goes off automatically according to plan.

Preliminary manoeuvres on the terrain seem essential; and this requires that the forces to be thrown in are standing ready in good time.

(e) Examination and erecting positions in depth in the area are necessary complements to the coastal defences.

(f) Strong ground support and long-range bomber arms are the pre-requisites of a successful defence.

(g) A uniform chain of command is likewise essential, as is also a well thought-out and constructed signals network.

7. The course of political and other events in Italy during the period between the end in Tunis and the evacuation of Sicily.

These have been especially exhaustively treated in Rintelen's account. In amplification of each individual account I shall set forth my views where they differ, or make any additions necessary.

Here it need only be stated, that I first learned of some of the events, when reading of them in the account by Bonin and others. Here too one realises with a shock, how much Adolf Hitler tried, by means of certain parallel organisations and other dealings, to maintain reciprocal control. It was the same old story of distrust.

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The Comments of the Commander-in-Chief, South, on the views expressed by Colonel von Bonin (in the treatise "The Battle for Sicily")

I. Preliminary remark: I have come to recognise Colonel von Bonin as a general staff officer above the average. I have especially noticed his upright personal behaviour. My opinion of him was confirmed when we came together as prisoners. That I had to have him relieved of his post, because of his rigid attitude in tactical matters does not in any way influence my general opinion of him.

II. I am sorry that negative criticism has been made so often. It was not only the German authorities in Tunis who thought that Tunis could not be held. C.-in-C. South too never had nor left any doubt about it. Colonel von Bonin however was insufficiently acquainted with the relevant details, to be able to form an objective incontestable opinion. I have endeavoured to set out these facts in my study on Tunis.

I willingly concede that many mistakes were made, and also do not hesitate to hold the OKW responsible for many of them. I must however especially emphasise that C.-in-C. South and its subordinate commands were also successful in overcoming seemingly wretched and desperate situations. Just as after Tunis, where by dint of exemplary hard work and planning the defences of the island and of the threatened parts of Italy were raised to a noteworthy level in a very short time. It seems to me that these facts ought to be historically appreciated.

III. One sentence of Bonin's and its foundation I must comment on in more detail, since I consider it necessary for personal and historical considerations. He writes "... Rommel had to give up the chief command over the whole of Italy to the man who had always opposed him, Kesselring."

Whether the opinion therein expressed is correct, I leave to the judgment of the reader. Personally, I can only state that at that time, I had not been informed at all about Rommel's task, and I was not aware that I was subordinate to him. Any opposition to him was therefore absolutely impossible.

I have always specially emphasised the personality and worth of Rommel for the African theatre of war to Adolf Hitler and in the OKW, always backed him up and recommended him for the Iron Cross with Diamonds. See my previous work on the "War in the Mediterranean". I think I did him justice.

I did not approve in principle of Rommel's operational or tactical measures. I can only remember my strong doubts about the thrust towards the Nile, and my criticism of North Africa being given up almost without a struggle, and suchlike. In these matters I did not oppose him, but as senior German Field-Marshal in the Mediterranean theatre I represented my official opinion to Rommel, with whom I was in very close tactical liaison in various spheres, and later as his superior officer, and to the OKW. That my contrary views were not always wrong, can certainly be seen from the examples mentioned above.

Now to deal with the individual points raised by von Bonin.

Point 1. "Italy must be considered as a secondary front. Only the minimum of troops ought to be employed there." And in connection with this, his final words: "defence in the Apennines and the Alps".

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I still stand by the opinion I expressed in another part of the "Campaign in the West" that if any German soldiers at all are to be moved to the Mediterranean area, then that area must become a major front. I condemned at the time Rommel's hurry to get out of Tripolitania and Tunis as quickly as possible, and to give up Italy, since it would influence the conduct and outcome of the war. Rommel and Bonin think as Army men. I recollect that I strove to keep the war as long as possible and as far as possible away from the home area so that effective air warfare could not be carried into Germany. That had to be taken into consideration if Apulia fell into Allied hands to be used as an air base for heavy bombers and the Po plains as a base for light bomber formations. Therefore I fought for my idea by argument and action.

Minimum of forces: calculations at the time and the actual course of events have clearly shown that for the defence of the Apennines, a very large scale commitment of German troops was necessary, which would only be diminished by a few divisions for operations in the Alps. Furthermore it was well-known and has been proved in the course of the campaign that it was not easy to defend the Apennines, that troops trained for mountain warfare were required, that these were not available and could only be trained as the Italian campaign progressed, and that the positions erected by Army Group B were turned down by the troops.

Point 2. Bonin speaks here of the vulnerability of the flanks and the necessity of reducing this by shortening the flanks on the sea.

That is too obvious for one to be able to oppose in principle. We too gave much thought to this problem, probably more than Army Group B. If, in spite of the considerations mentioned under Point 1, I thought I could resign myself to them, then this was to be attributed to an assessment of the enemy command, which was gradually becoming more and more exact. The campaigns in Africa, Tunis and Sicily taught me that the Allied High Command will not take any major risks, that they will only make a landing at a spot where adequate air cover can be guaranteed, and that they will only abandon this tendency when they have sufficient battle-experienced divisions available. That time is a long way off. The course of the campaign in Italy has confirmed the correctness of my appreciation of the situation. Furthermore I must admit that at the time of the defence in the Apennines I had the same worries about a landing operation on my flank and the same difficulties in placing the divisions for the defence of the coast, as I had during the fighting in southern and central Italy.

On top of this comes the following: where one wanted to fight, reserves had to be provided. If new divisions were transferred from other fronts then they would be employed at first in coastal defence, which would be an excellent means of getting them accustomed to the change over to entirely different conditions on the southern front; this proved an efficient plan. For battle-weary divisions coastal defence duties were just the thing, since then they would not become completely alienated from front-line conditions, as unfortunately often used to be the case. I would not have willingly abandoned this system of reliefs. I willingly confess that the long coastal front represented a permanent and serious worry to me and my staff. It goes without saying that I did everything possible to ensure the readiness of the coastal defences, and it may have helped radically to curtail enemy invasion plans.

Point 3. Making fullest use of the advantage provided by the mountainous character of the country, and

Point 4. employment of the motorised formations in accordance with their special qualities.

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All the accounts of the campaign in Sicily including von Bonin's unanimously state that motorised divisions are not suitable for fighting in mountains and that mountain troops are essential. And with that alone - I personally always took a somewhat different view - judgment is passed on both points. One must, like I have done, have hung in a motor-car in the Italian mountain passes and driven through the narrow valleys, to have it indelibly impressed on one that a war of motorised movement in mountainous country against an enemy who has command of the air or at least local superiority will come to a swift end. That meanwhile became a fact, and not merely the caprice of an enthusiastic airman. I shall keep quite silent about the wear and tear on tanks in the mountains.

I even believe, contrary to Rommel's and Bonin's opinions, that I showed in my conduct of the campaign in Italy from 1943-1944 how one can in spite of difficult conditions make an ally of the mountains, although only one single mountain division was available.

Point 5. In concluding this chapter I only add that on one occasion when reporting to the Fuehrer in his HQ in East Prussia - probably on 30 September 1943 - I put forward my opinion of the situation, my ideas about the conduct of the campaign and its object, as expressed above, and unequivocally declared that the organisation of the command in Italy as it was then with two Army Groups lined up one behind the other was in the long run impossible. I said that a uniform command must be set up as quickly as possible, and that this should not fail on my account. At that time I had no knowledge of Rommel's entirely different attitude and his activity as adviser to Adolf Hitler. I could not classify my conduct in this case as opposition.

As far as I am concerned, I can claim that I laid my cards on the table and expressed my opinion to the Fuehrer and Feldmarschall Rommel without regard to any possible consequences.

signed : Kesselring

(Generalfeldmarschall

of the former German Armed Forces)

A.H.B.6. Distribution

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