

~~SECRET~~

RESTRICTED.

Copy No. 5

R.A.F. NARRATIVE
(First Draft)

Downgraded to RESTRICTED - AHB1 (RAF) / S259 11/12/73

THE SICILIAN CAMPAIGN
JUNE - AUGUST 1943

Air Historical Branch (1)
Air Ministry

SECRET

SECRET

i

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
CHAPTER 1. PLANNING THE OPERATION	1
Directive to Allied Commander-in-Chief - The Planning Staff - Strategic Considerations - The Evolution of the First Plan - The Possibilities of Success against a German Garrison - The Evolution of the Second Plan - The Final Plan - Tasks of Eastern and Western Task Forces - Presentation of Plans - Cover Plans - The Naval Task - Naval Covering Forces - The Eastern Task Forces - R.A.F. Planning - The Air Force Plan - Strategic Bombing Operations - Communication Targets - The Assaults - Protection of Shipping - Build-up and Reduction of the Island.	
CHAPTER 2. PREPARATIONS FOR THE ASSAULT	25
Mediterranean Air Command's Bombing Policy - Operational Policy of Tactical Air Force - Disposition of Tactical Air Force - Malta's Part in the Invasion - Protection of the North African Coastal Convoys.	
Air Operations from the Fall of Tunis to 30 June 1943 ..	31
The Reduction of the Islands of the Pelagie Group - Importance of Pantelleria - Planning the Capture of Pantelleria - The Air Plan - Air Cover - Estimation of the Bomber Effort Required - Air Forces available for Operation Corkscrew - The Capture of Pantelleria and Lampedusa - The Offensive against the Axis Airfields - Air Operations against Communications and Bases.	
The Air Offensive Intensified	40
The Initial Phase - Strategic Night Bombing - Operations of the Tactical Air Force at the Beginning of the Assault Phase - Pre-dawn Airborne Assault - Further Air Operations on the night 9-10 July.	
CHAPTER 3. THE ASSAULT AND ADVANCE TO CATANIA	49
Axis Preparations - The Approach to Assault Beaches - The Assault - British Landings at Acid and Bark Beaches - American Landings on Cent, Dime and Joss Beaches - Allied Air Activity on D-Day, 10 July 1943 - The Enemy's Situation - Recognition Difficulties - The Forward Control Links - Air Activity against Enemy Road Movements on D-Day - Enemy Reinforcements - The Enemy Attack at Gela, 11 July - Fighter Operations, 11 July - Air Support Operations - Night Operations - Further Airborne Operations - The Situation in the Southern Area - No. 72 Squadron in Action - Action in Support of the Eighth Army - The Enemy Reinforce - The Defeat of the Axis Air Forces - The First Fighter Wing in Sicily - The Landing of XII Air Support Command - The Air Effort 10 to 16 July (inclusive) - An Enemy view of the situation in Sicily - Allied Change of Plan.	

CHAPTER 4. THE ALLIES' FIRST CONQUEST

Page
71

Rapid progress of the American Seventh Army -
Enemy Air Effort - Changed Air Plans - Operational
Areas - Tactical Bomber Assistance - Communication
Difficulties - Operations by the Coastal Air Force -
Air Effort for the Week Ending 23 July - Rome
Bombed - The Light Bomber Squadrons Move to Malta -
The Enemy Situation in Sicily at the end of
July 1943 - The Battle at Catania - Allied Forces
Regroup - Change in the Heavy Bomber Policy -
The Allies suspect the enemy's intention - The
Progress of the Seventh Army - The Battle of
Troina - Formation of Task Force 88 - Advent of
Tactical Bomber Force. - Strategic Air Force
Bomber Operations - Bomber Command Attack on Italy -
XII Air Support Command in Sicily.

The Final Phase

86

The Junction of the Armies - Enemy Withdrawal -
The Importance of Randazzo - The German Plan for
Withdrawal - Allied Intelligence at Fault - No. 205
Group's Night Operations against the German
Evacuation - The Seventh Army Commander's Proposal -
The Pursuit and Final Reduction of the Island -
Difficulties in the Pursuit.

SECRET

iii

APPENDICES

1. Directive to Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Force in North Africa, 23 January 1943.
2. Order of Battle, Mediterranean Air Command, 10 July 1943.
3. German Air Force Order of Battle, Mediterranean Theatre, 10 May to 10 July 1943.
4. Italian Air Force Strength, 18 May to 9 July 1943.

MAPS

1. The Sicilian Campaign

SECRET

1

CHAPTER 1

PLANNING THE OPERATION

Minutes of
'Symbol'
Conference.
C.O.S. (43) 33
(o) 28 January
1943

The decision to undertake the conquest of Sicily was made at the conference held at Anfa camp on the outskirts of Casablanca in January 1943, by the Combined Chiefs of Staff in consultation with the President and Prime Minister. The conference had met to determine the basic strategy for the year 1943, and although British and American Chiefs of Staff were agreed that priority must be given to the Allied effort to destroy the European members of the Axis, it was by no means clear what particular operation would best serve their purpose. Rommel was on the run from Egypt and Tripolitania, but victory in Tunisia was still far off and the probable junction between Rommel(1) and Von Arnim(2) for the defence of the Axis Tunisian bridgehead did not make the prospects of victory any brighter. Nevertheless, the conference decided that the crucial stage would be reached in Tunisia in a few weeks and that it must consider what major operations should be undertaken once the North African shore had been finally cleared of the Axis.

C.C.S. 58th
Meeting 16 Jan,
1943

The real question at issue was whether to undertake any major operation at all in the Mediterranean, after the conclusion of the Tunisian Campaign. There was very general agreement that something must be done as soon as possible to relieve the strain on Russia, and it was clear to everyone that an operation against Sicily could be mounted far sooner than any effective invasion of Europe by northern France, because of the great availability, at that time, of shipping and manpower in the Mediterranean area. Such an operation, however, could not divert as many German forces from the Russian front as a direct assault on the continent, and unless it could be accomplished early enough in the summer to give a reasonable prospect of an advance into the Italian mainland and hence of an early Italian collapse and surrender by early autumn, it might be better to throw all resources into the build-up for a thrust against the Continent from the United Kingdom at the earliest possible date.

C.C.S. 60th
Meeting

The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff came to the conference with a strong preference for continental as opposed to Mediterranean operations, to be attempted in 1943, which was strengthened by the discovery that the British Joint Planning Staff considered that operations against Sicily could not be begun before 30 August 1943 or mid-August at the very earliest. The U.S. Chiefs of Staff were opposed to a Sicilian campaign as late as that, and they objected to a major effort against Sardinia at any time. The British Chiefs of Staff, for their part, were convinced that continental operations from the United Kingdom in 1943 were impossible; and that new operations in the Mediterranean should be begun as soon as possible. Since their Joint Planning Staff set August as the earliest date for an assault upon Sicily, and since operations against Sardinia could be started in May, the British Chiefs of Staffs urged the adoption of a plan to attack Sardinia.

The decision reached was characteristic of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, who directed the Second World War. The British point of view that all the available resources in the

-
- (1) Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, Commander of German Forces in Western Desert.
 - (2) General Jürgen Von Arnim, German Commander of Forces opposing Allied Expeditionary Forces in Tunisia.

SECRET

2

Mediterranean area should be used for further major operations in that area, as well as the American contention that to attack Sardinia would be to attack the soft spot while making the hard spot all the more difficult in the long run, was recognised in the decision to make the next major objective of the Allies a campaign against Sicily.

On 19 January, the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed on offensive action in the Mediterranean in 1943 for the conquest of Sicily should be undertaken with the objects of -

- (a) making the line of Allied communications in the Mediterranean more secure;
- (b) diverting as much German strength from the Russian front as possible, and
- (c) intensifying the pressure on Italy, in the hope that such results might create a situation in which Turkey could be enlisted as an active Ally.

C.C.S. 66th
Meeting p.5

The following day, the Combined Chiefs of Staff directed the planning staffs of both countries to examine all possible expedients which would advance the date of the operation and to report the earliest feasible date. Two days later they resolved that the target date should be set provisionally for the favourable period of the July moon.⁽¹⁾ This decision was necessarily tentative, because of the variety and complexity of the factors to be considered, none of which lent themselves readily to scientific measurement, and all of which were so interdependent as to make separate estimates impossible. There were the questions of landing craft, both for training and mounting, of the ports to be used for mounting; and relevant to both questions was the further problem of the approximate date when it would be reasonable to suppose the North African shore and ports would be cleared of the Axis.

The decision to launch the attack in the July moon period was based on the hypothesis that the Tunisian Campaign would be ended by 30 April. The V.C.I.G.S. explained that the later date of August calculated by the British Joint Planning Staff (J.P.S.) was based on their preference that the British share of the expedition be mounted from North Africa, in order to save escort vessels, and to avoid the enormous risks of sending a convoy from the United Kingdom through the Sicilian narrows on D-Day. The British J.P.S. in their appreciation, had assumed that none of the Tunisian ports would be available to them, either for training or for mounting, both because there could be no certainty of their being cleared of the Axis in time for adequate training, and because the United States forces might require the Tunisian ports as well as the Algerian.

In these circumstances the British would have been confined to the Middle East ports of Haifa, Alexandria, Port Said, Tripoli and to Malta. The Middle East mounting would have meant a saving of 65 escort vessels of the total of 190 required if the expedition were mounted in the United Kingdom,

-
- (1) It is a remarkable fact that given the uncertainty of the general military situation and the tremendous complexity of the planning of a major amphibious operation, the Conference should have decided, six months in advance, even tentatively on the exact period when the attack was to have been made. - Narrator's Note.

but the training bottle-neck in the Middle East ports would delay the target date nearly a month beyond that required for an expedition mounted from the United Kingdom. In the latter case the British J.P.S. thought an early August date possible, although reluctant to assume the additional costs in terms of escort vessels and of increased risks. The V.C.I.G.S. felt himself, as he told the conference, that the target date could be advanced to July even on the same set of assumptions. The British J.P.S., however, did agree that the date might be advanced if Tunisia had been cleared of the Axis forces before 30 April and if ports both in Tunisia and further west could be made available to them. The U.S. Chiefs of Staff were willing to guarantee that British forces might use Bizerta and the other Tunisian ports to the East, when they were cleared, and with this much leeway the combined Chiefs of Staff tentatively decided on the favourable period of the July moon as the target date for the Sicilian operation.(1)

Directive to Allied Commander-in-Chief(2)

C.C.S. 171,2/D
23 January 1943

The supreme command of the Sicilian operation was given to Lieutenant General Dwight D. Eisenhower, with General Sir Harold Alexander as Deputy Commander-in-Chief, in direct command of the ground forces, with Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder as naval and air commanders respectively. The Allied C.-in-C. was charged with the over-all responsibility of the detailed planning, of the necessary preparations and of the execution of the actual operation.

The Planning Staff

The Combined Chiefs of Staff had decided that the task of preparing detailed plans should be undertaken by a special operational and administrative staff, with its own Chief of Staff, which would be free of the responsibilities of the Tunisian Campaign. It was understood that in view of the wider sphere of the activities of the Allied C.-in-C., the Deputy C.-in-C. would assume immediate command of the Sicilian operation but since both were entirely preoccupied with the Tunisian campaign, a special planning staff was established under General Gairdner, Chief of Staff to General Alexander, who was succeeded in the early part of May 1943 by General Richardson. Since the operation was ultimately to come under the direction of a British general, the Combined Staff was organised according to the British system, just as in 'Torch' the American commander's staff had been set up on American lines.

A nucleus staff was got together on 10 February but because of the crowded conditions at the Hotel St. George, was established in the Ecole Normale at Bouzarea, a suburb of Algiers. It took along with it, however, some of the flavour of the Hotel St. George, because it received the official designation as 'H.Q. Force 141' derived from the number of the hotel room in which the members of A.F.H.Q. had first met to discuss the possibilities for a Sicilian expedition. It was the embryo from which the Fifteenth Army Group Headquarters grew, but for the time being it remained a sub-section of G-3 at A.F.H.Q. In the absence of a special intelligence section at Bouzarea the staff was specially dependent on G-2 A.F.H.Q. for its intelligence, which had to be obtained by a special

-
- (1) The final date was not fixed until 13 May.
(2) See Appendix No.1.

SECRET

4

liaison section; this resulted in a not altogether satisfactory distribution of intelligence in the earlier period.

Nor was the major difficulty of organized planning, that of bringing together all the personnel concerned with the various aspects of a complicated operation, involving land, sea, and air elements ever completely satisfactorily solved. As in the planning for the North African landings, Army and Navy staffs were widely separated during some phases of the planning with resultant misunderstandings and loss of time in reaching decisions. There was a comparable scattering of Army and subordinate headquarters dependent on H.Q. Force 141, some of them being as much as a thousand miles from each other with similar results; loss of time in communication in an effort to co-ordinate planning by telegram.

The U.S. members of the staff were drawn from Fifth Army Headquarters, I (U.S.) Armoured Corps, and Atlantic base section, with a few from A.F.H.Q. and from the United States. The British members came from the United Kingdom, Middle East and A.F.H.Q. The staff grew steadily as planning became more and more detailed and by the 1 May had almost attained the size of an operational staff. On 15 May, H.Q. Force 141 officially became an Operational Staff, independent of but subordinate to A.F.H.Q. Throughout the planning A.F.H.Q. attended to the details of implementing Force 141 plans by coordinating the enormous effort of mounting troops in the widely scattered areas of the United States, the United Kingdom, Middle East, and North Africa itself.

Strategic Considerations

The Island of Sicily forms a natural bridge between the tip of Tunisia and the Italian mainland, shaped like a jagged arrowhead with the broken point towards the west. The western point, Cape Boeo Lilibeo, is only ninety miles north-east of Cap Bon in Tunisia; the south-eastern barb, Cape Passero, points south to Malta only fifty-five miles away; and the north-eastern barb, Cape Peloro, is separated from the Calabrian Peninsula at the Toe of Italy only by the Strait of Messina, which narrows to a width of barely two miles.

It was obviously easy for the Axis to get men into Sicily. There were six train ferries operating daily across the Strait of Messina with four termini in Messina itself, and three on the Italian side - two at San Giovanni and one at Reggio. The capacity of this service was estimated at 40,000 men or 7,500 men and 750 vehicles every twenty-four hours. In addition there was a steamer service, whose capacity was estimated at 12,000 men every twenty-four hours, and a shuttle air transport service with an estimated capacity of a thousand tons daily.

There were in May 1943 nineteen known enemy airfields in Sicily divided into three groups, east at Gerbini, south-east at Gela and west at Castelvetro, of which the eastern and south eastern groups were mutually supporting.

Messina was the most important objective on the island, but it was out of the question to launch a direct assault on the Strait of Messina, or at any point between Messina and Palermo to the west, or between Messina and Catania to the south. The Strait was completely closed to Allied shipping and beyond the range of fighter cover, and the same was true of the areas immediately west and south of Messina. Possible areas of disembarkation were limited to the beaches where direct fighter cover could be provided, between Avola and Gela

SECRET

in the south-east, and between Sciacca and Marinella in the west, and in these areas there were no major ports to provide unloading facilities. In these circumstances the advantages of the terrain lay chiefly with the Axis.

The beaches, on which the Allies had to land were of gentle gradient and of soft sand. They were, moreover, relatively narrow, and apart from the wide coastal plain at Catania which was criss-crossed by canals and dykes, in the eastern central section of Sicily, they led quickly into mountainous country, particularly in the centre of the island, and in the north-east, where Mount Etna provided a magnificent bastion in a defence line protecting Messina. The bareness of the central uplands provided very little cover for the attacking troops, and in order to break through to Messina, the Allied forces would have to traverse a country admirably suited to the enemy's genius for mining and demolition.

The Evolution of the First Plan

J.P.(43)7
10 Jan. 1943 and
C.C.S. 161/1
21 Jan. 1943

The decision taken at Casablanca to invade Sicily was based on an appreciation and outline plan prepared by the J.P.S. in turn. This outline plan constituted the general basis of the planning for Force 141. The main features of the plan were two distinct and separate assaults one by a British force on the east of the island, and the other by an American task force in the west.

British Assaults (two phases)

	<u>Time</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Force</u>	<u>Mission</u>
(i)	D-Day	Avola to Gela	3 divs.	To secure S.E. airfields, Syracuse and Augusta.
(ii)	D plus 3	Catania	1 div.	To secure Catania port and airfields.
(iii)	Follow-up	Catania	1 div.	Reserve.

American Assaults (two phases)

	<u>Time</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Force</u>	<u>Mission</u>
(i)	D-Day	Sciacca-Marinella	1 div.	To secure airfields to cover assaults on Palermo.
(ii)	D plus 2	Castellammare-Cape Zaffarano	2 divs.	To capture Palermo port and airfields.
(iii)	Follow-up	Palermo	1 div.	Reserve

No clear cut plan for the development of a third phase to reduce the island was proposed and J.P.S. stated 'we are doubtful whether this could usefully be done at this stage.'

On 12 February H.Q. Force 141 issued Planning Instruction No.1, which dealt chiefly with the mechanics of planning, and stated that preliminary study by Force 141 indicated that the provisional plan would follow, in general, the tactical plan prepared by J.P.S. It designated the U.S. force to be

mounted from North Africa as the Western Task Force (W.T.F.), and the British force to be mounted from the Middle East as the Eastern Task Force (E.T.F.). In the meantime Lieutenant General George S. Patton and General Sir Bernard Montgomery were recommended to the C.C.S. as Commanders of the W.T.F. and E.T.F. respectively.

Between 12 February and 12 March, H.Q. Force 141 developed an outline plan that, in general terms, was the same as that produced by J.P.S. In the appreciation attached to their plan, however, H.Q. Force 141 laid stronger emphasis on the great tactical importance of the south-eastern corner of the island than did J.P.S.; and H.Q. Force 141 at once considered the idea of launching both task forces against that portion of the island, in order to achieve concentration and resultant speed in the development of a threat to enemy communications with the mainland. The idea was rejected, however, on the grounds that a force of ten divisions, which was agreed to be necessary to compete with the anticipated garrison of eleven Italian and two German divisions, could not be maintained through the ports along the south-eastern seaboard. The early capture of Palermo, as well as Catania and Syracuse, was deemed essential for the maintenance of the force.

The plan prepared by Force 141 therefore differed from the J.P.S. plan only in the following points:-

- (a) A force reserve was provided from D-Day.
- (b) Formations were as far as possible employed as such and not split.
- (c) Airborne troops were to be used to neutralise the beach defences, instead of landing on the Toe of Italy to raid enemy reinforcement routes.
- (d) The Eastern and Western assaults were not simultaneous.

This plan was presented to General Eisenhower, General Alexander, Admiral Cunningham and Air Chief Marshal Tedder in Algiers on 13 March and received their approval. Task force commanders had already been summoned to attend a meeting at Algiers on 18 March at which the plan would be explained to them.

On 15 March C.G.S. Force 141 received a telegram from General Montgomery declaring that in his opinion the London plan broke every commonsense rule of practical warfare, was completely theoretical, had no hope of success, and should be completely recast. He was sending Lieutenant General Dempsey as his representative to Algiers to state his views as to the lines on which planning should proceed. As a result of this message no further steps were taken to publish the outline plan approved on 13 March pending a statement of General Montgomery's views at a conference to be held at H.Q. Force 141.

Commander's
Meeting at H.Q.
Force 141
18 March 1943.

Diary of events
and correspon-
dence relating
to Planning.
(E.T.F.
objections to
plan put forward
by H.W. Force
141)

General Alexander, who was unable to attend owing to the press of duties in Tunisia where the battle of Mareth was about to start, was represented at the meeting by General Gairdner. Admiral Cunningham presided; Air Chief Marshal Tedder also attended. The E.T.F. Commander was represented by Lieutenant General Dempsey and Admiral Ramsay, and W.T.F. Commander by Major General Keyes and Vice Admiral Hewitt. General Dempsey stated that the

E.T.F. Commander's principal objection to the plan related to the weakness of the assault at Avola. The success of the operation depended upon the Allied forces capturing the ports of Syracuse, Augusta and Catania very soon after landing. Avola was the nearest point of assault to these objectives, but only one-third of the total force was to make the assault and the small number of landing craft allotted to it did not permit of a sufficiently rapid rate of build-up there. One additional division was needed to give this assault the weight and speed of attack necessary to make up for the probable loss of strategic and tactical surprise by the enemy's discovery of the invasion convoys.

In the ensuing discussion it appeared that the additional division for Avola could be provided only at the expense of one of the other assaults, and the Gela assault, which employed one division, was not necessary to the development of the army plan. But since the purpose of the Gela assault was to capture the important landing grounds round Ponte Olivo, which together with the rest of the south-eastern airfields had to be denied to the enemy, or better still captured, in order to achieve the degree of air supremacy necessary to protect the troops in the assault and the ships conveying them, Admiral Cunningham and Air Chief Marshal Tedder could not think of abandoning this assault.

The conflicting requirements of air forces and army could not be reconciled, and it was agreed that Major General Gairdner should visit General Alexander and acquaint him with the objections to the plan. Meanwhile Air Chief Marshal Tedder agreed to re-examine the necessity for capturing the Ponte Olivo landing grounds. Air Chief Marshal Tedder's final views were conveyed to General Alexander in a letter dated 18 March, in which he stated that the latest intelligence disclosed that Ponte Olivo had been developed into a first class airbase and in consequence it could not be left in enemy possession. Unless the Ponte Olivo landing grounds were captured, the Allied Air Forces would labour under an intolerable situation. Consequently they must be captured. He went on to say that the suggestion had been offered that the W.T.F. should be directed against Gela Bay, leaving Palermo to be captured later.

Generals Gairdner and Dempsey and Air Commodore Foster visited General Alexander in Tunisia on 19 March. After considering the objections raised by E.T.F., General Alexander decided that E.T.F. needed an extra division and that this division could not be provided from E.T.F. resources. He reasoned that the south-eastern corner was the most important part of the island to capture since it contained the principal airfields. It also contained sufficient ports to supply the forces necessary for the capture of these airfields and their protection. The preliminary assault of W.T.F. at Sciacca he did not consider essential, and he felt that the defences of Palermo could be so softened by an air offensive based on the south-eastern airfields that a force of two divisions would suffice to capture it even if the airfields at Castelvetro and Sciacca were left in enemy hands. He therefore proposed to resolve the differences over the plan by abandoning the Sciacca assault, transferring one U.S. division from W.T.F. to E.T.F. for the assault at Gela and holding the remainder of W.T.F. in reserve until a suitable opportunity arose to use it to capture Palermo.

These recommendations were made to General Eisenhower by letter delivered by General Gairdner on the evening of 19 March. At a conference on 20 March General Eisenhower

called on General Gairdner to explain the reasons which led General Alexander to recommend a change in the military plan. After a full discussion, and after Air Chief Marshal Tedder agreed that long-range air support could be provided from Sicilian airfields for a landing in the Palermo area, General Eisenhower gave his decision in favour of allotting an American division to E.T.F. This decision was based on the assumption that sufficient landing craft could not be produced for mounting an additional British division and was conveyed to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 20 March.

On 23 March General Eisenhower cabled to the Combined Chiefs of Staff the substance of the outline plan which he had approved and on which planning was going forward.

The main features of this plan were:-

E.T.F. (two assault phases)

<u>Time</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Force</u>	<u>Mission</u>
(i) D minus 1 Day	Avola	1 para. bde.	To soften beach defences
	East of Gela	1 para. bde.	
	Gela	1 (U.S.) para. regt.	
(ii) D-Day	Avola to Gela	4 $\frac{3}{4}$ divs.	To secure S.E. airfields, Syracuse and Augusta.
(iii) D plus 3 or after	South of Catania	1 div.	To secure Catania port and airfields.
(iv) Follow-up before D plus 28	Catania	1 bde. gp. 1 div.	Reserve

W.T.F. (one assault phase)

<u>Time</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Force</u>	<u>Mission</u>
(i) After preliminary air offensive from S.E. airfields.	Castellammare to Cape Zaffarano	2 divs. 1 CC	To capture Palermo port and airfields
(ii) Follow-up			
D-Day		1 R.C.T.	Reserve
D plus 28	Palermo	1 div. less 1 R.C.T.	

On 25 March the British Chiefs of Staff cabled to the Combined Chiefs of Staff their objections to this plan. They were strongly opposed to cancelling the U.S. assault at Sciacca - Marinella since the purpose of that assault was to secure the airfields at Castelvetro and Sciacca from which fighter cover could be provided for the attack on Palermo on D plus 2. They considered that the Palermo port should not

GOS(W) 546
25 March

be left open to the enemy for a moment longer than D plus 2 and that it would be disadvantageous to leave the enemy air forces in western Sicily free to operate against the E.T.F.

The British Chiefs of Staff suggested that an additional division be provided by hook or by crook, in one of four ways, viz:-

- (a) A British division from North Africa.
- (b) A U.S. division from North Africa.
- (c) A U.S. division from U.S.
- (d) A British division from U.K.

Courses (a) and (b) seemed to them the best solution, but both depended whether port facilities would be available for mounting yet another division from North Africa, or, whether the additional shipping and landing craft could be supplied. It was suggested that General Eisenhower be asked for his views on above and for his absolute minimum requirements after every expedient and economy had been explored.

On 26 March General Eisenhower informed the Combined Chiefs of Staff that the outline plan sent them on 23 March was not yet firm and that the possibility of employing another division within the existing shipping and craft allotment was still being examined. Between 26 March and 6 April the difficulties of mounting an additional British division, and, the necessity for diverting 3rd (U.S.) Division from Sciacca to Gela was averted. The division was to be provided by Middle East; it was to be mounted from Malta so as to reduce to a minimum the distance over which it had to be transported. It was to be ferried in some of the shipping used in the original assaults and consequently could not be employed on the first wave of the attack, although it would be available from D plus 1. This assumed a less conservative, but still not unduly light estimate of sinkings in the assault, and required the provision of only six additional MT. ships from Allied resources.

This solution enabled Force 141 to produce a plan which satisfied the stated requirements both of E.T.F. and of the air forces, and on 5 April Major General Gairdner took it to General Alexander in Tunisia. The following day General Alexander, accompanied by Major General Gairdner, visited General Montgomery and the plan was agreed. It was presented to General Eisenhower on 6 and 7 April who at once approved it and sought the concurrence of the Combined Chiefs of Staff which was given in due course. General Gairdner, however, left for London on 7 April since the new plan involved certain decisions about the nomination of British and Dominion divisions taking part.

Details of the new plan were as follows:-

SECRET

10

E.T.F. (one assault phase)

<u>Time</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Force</u>	<u>Mission</u>
(i) D minus 1/D night	Avola Scoglitti Gela	3 para. bdes.	To soften beach defences.
(ii) D-Day	Avola and Gela	4 $\frac{1}{3}$ divs. one armd. bde.	To secure S.E. air- fields, Syracuse and Augusta.
(iii) Follow-up from D-Day		1 div.	Reserve
Later		1 tk bde. 1 div.	

W.T.F. (two assault phases)

<u>Time</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Force</u>	<u>Mission</u>
(i) D plus 1/ D plus 2 night	Sciacca - Marinella	1 U.S. para regt.	To soften beach defences
(ii) D plus 2	Sciacca - Marinella	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inf. regts. 1 C.C.	To secure airfields
(iii) D plus 4/D plus 5 or later, night	Palermo area	1 U.S. para regt.	To soften beach defences
(iv) D plus 5 or later	Castellammare to 2 divs. Cape Zaffarano	2 divs.	To capture Palermo port and airfields and join up with force round Sciacca.
(v) Follow-up		1 div.	Reserve

This plan restored the assaults of W.T.F. in the western part of Sicily as originally planned. It gave E.T.F. the additional strength of one division to meet the objections that the Avola assault lacked weight. And it provided for the capture of the south-eastern airfields regarded as essential by the air force and the navy.

The Possibilities of Success against a German Garrison

There seems no doubt that the course of the planning narrated above was much influenced by the consideration in the minds of all concerned that the operation could not succeed against a German garrison of over two divisions. In his telegram of 28 March, despatched after General Montgomery's objections to the plan had been heard, General Eisenhower felt it his duty to inform the Combined Chiefs of Staff of the unanimous conviction of his staff, and to suggest that, if the Germans were to concentrate substantial forces, the project should be abandoned.

The Combined Chiefs of Staff at once telegraphed expressing their entire disagreement, and, after an interval

of about a fortnight, during which General Gairdner visited first General Eisenhower and then General Alexander and very probably raised this question, General Eisenhower reiterated his statement, saying that Admiral Cunningham, General Alexander and he himself were agreed on its correctness. He felt that loss of strategic and tactical surprise was inevitable for, if German troops preponderated, the land forces in the area would be under German command, with a consequent stronger will and capacity to resist them than might be the case under Italian command. It was probable, too, that German formations would be retained as a mobile reserve for a counter-attack, when it became known where our forces were landing. The dangerous periods would be between D-Day and D plus 2 during which time immediate counter-attacks might take place, and between D plus 3 and D plus 6 when the enemy commander would have appreciated where the Allied landings were and their strength, and would be able to commit his central reserves to a deliberate counter-attack.(1)

On 10 April the Combined Chiefs of Staff replied that the statement implied that the forces of the United Nations could not undertake operations except with absolute superiority. Combined Operations across the English Channel had been undertaken where the defences were far stronger than that likely to be encountered in Sicily. They considered that the dispersion of the assaults would in itself ensure success at some points, that loss of surprise was not certain, that loss of tactical surprise was highly improbable and that the numbers of formations were not a correct standard of comparison since some of the enemy divisions were under strength. Finally they would not in any circumstances consider abandoning the operation.

The production of plans was naturally not interrupted by this exchange of views. But the matter did not end there, for very soon after the publication of the new plan on 10 April General Montgomery was proposing a further change on the same grounds.

The Evolution of the Second Plan

On 23 April the Eighth Army ceased to play the leading role in the struggle in Tunisia and General Montgomery was free to return to Cairo. The next day he telegraphed to the Deputy C.-in-C. saying that for the first time he had been able to examine the problem confronting the E.T.F., known as Force 545. As a result of his examination, he objected to the plan because it was based on the assumption that the capture of Sicily would be relatively easy. He felt that the Italians as well as the Germans were likely to fight as desperately in Sicily as they had been fighting in Tunisia. The dispersion of effort which was the main feature of the plan would result in disaster. This criticism however, was not entirely destructive for he proposed a plan modified to embrace his objections.

Notes on
Conference in
Twelfth Army
War Diary
27-30 April.

A conference was called for 27 April in Algiers at which General Montgomery was to present his objections to the existing plan and his new proposals to General Alexander, Admiral Cunningham, and Air Chief Marshal Tedder. After several delays this conference convened on 29 April. General Montgomery was unable to attend because of a high temperature and was represented by Lieutenant General Leese

(1) It is to be noted that A.C.M. Tedder was not associated with this point of view.

who stated that General Montgomery was of the opinion that the existing plan took into account only weak Italian opposition and was of no value against German forces or against Italians backed up by Germans. He realised that the plan he proposed did not provide for the capture of the south-eastern airfields, but believed that even if he were to capture them he could not hold them or prevent the enemy bringing long-range artillery fire to bear upon them. The existing plan was unacceptable to him because the Eighth Army would be divided into two halves, neither of which would be able to fulfil its role. He proposed retaining the assaults near Avola and using the other corps on the Pachino peninsula, thus uniting the army, which would then have a firm base from which to set about reducing the island.

Ibid

Admiral Cunningham did not approve of the suggested changes. Apart from being convinced that landings should be dispersed in amphibious operations, he considered it essential to secure the use of the south-eastern airfields in order that shipping might lie off the beaches; with the airfields in enemy hands the time for which ships could be off-shore would be very limited. This contention was supported by Air Chief Marshal Tedder who objected that the proposal took no account of air force requirements. It would be impossible to neutralise by air action alone the thirteen airfields which General Montgomery's new plan would leave uncaptured. Furthermore, it was necessary to take them for our own use, since the air forces could not compete with the tasks expected of them if they were based on Malta. Unless the army could capture these airfields, he was altogether opposed to the operation. Pointing the argument, Air Marshal Coningham explained that, if the enemy were permitted to use the airfields, enemy aircraft could operate over the area of the assaults for forty-five minutes in every hour, whereas our own aircraft based on Malta could only operate for one-third of that time. From a purely military standpoint General Alexander agreed with the Eighth Army's plan, but was assured by Admiral Cunningham and Air Chief Marshal Tedder that for their part the proposal was unacceptable.

The fundamental points at issue were that when the Eighth Army got ashore it must be in a position to fight; and for that purpose it required both ports and airfields. Without the use of the Comiso, Biscari, and Ponte Olivo airfields the airforces could not afford the degree of support needed by the Army and Navy. The forces available under the existing plans would not permit the Army to capture both the ports and the airfields. The possibility of providing yet another division and the question whether that would be a solution acceptable to General Montgomery were discussed at length. Maintenance difficulties would be increased thereby but it was agreed that Force 141 should examine the means of overcoming them. Meanwhile General Leese departed to H.Q. Eighth Army to show General Montgomery the difficulties raised by his proposal with a view to finding some means of meeting them.

The day after this conference General Alexander, accompanied by Major General Gairdner, visited H.Q. Eighth Army, where he conferred with General Montgomery. As a result of this meeting General Montgomery telegraphed General Eisenhower to say it was 'much best to have everything out in the open court' and suggested calling another full-scale conference in Algiers on 2 May.

Ibid
2 May

Notes on
Conference at
Algiers 2 May.

A second conference was held at Algiers on Sunday 2 May. General Eisenhower, Admiral Cunningham, Air Chief Marshal Tedder, General Montgomery and Major General Gairdner attended. General Alexander and Air Marshal Coningham were prevented from attending because low clouds interfered with their journey by air from H.Q. 18th Army Group. At this conference General Montgomery showed that, if the Eighth Army had to capture the airfields for the air forces, it could not carry out its military task. He reverted to the suggestion that the only solution was to throw the entire American effort into the south-eastern assault on the left of the Eighth Army and to abandon the north-western assaults. This plan was tentatively adopted after much discussion and General Eisenhower awaited only General Alexander's approval and a solution to the problem of supplying the Seventh Army as well as the Eighth in the south-east.

A new amphibious vehicle, the D.U.K.W.(1) provided the answer to the problem of supply which had hitherto made it seem imperative to capture the port of Palermo. Large quantities of these vehicles had been ordered from the United States on 22 March, and when they arrived it was discovered that the claims made for them were fully justified by their performance. By placing great reliance on beach maintenance using D.U.K.W.s, the concentration of the two armies in the south-east, which had in the first instance and on at least one subsequent occasion appealed to many of the planners as the correct mode of capturing the island, was seen to be practicable.

A.F.H.Q./9022
3 May Alexander
to Montgomery

General Alexander was therefore able to agree to the plan on his arrival in Algiers on 3 May. Relying on D.U.K.W.s however, to a large extent for maintaining the Seventh Army involved the acceptance of larger risks, as General Eisenhower pointed out, when he telegraphed to inform the Combined Chiefs of Staff of his decision to accept the new plan. But the necessity for concentration learned in Tunisia warranted the taking of increased risks. In no other way could the Allies make certain of capturing the east coast ports and the Ponte Olivo landing grounds at the same time.

C.C.S. to
Eisenhower
13 May.

The final plan was approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 13 May. At the same time they suggested making a feint or diversion against the western end of the island in order to pin enemy forces to that area during the first critical hours and supporting the feint by strong air attacks on the western airfields to prevent the enemy aircraft based in that area from opposing the main operation.

The Final Plan

On 19 May H.Q. Force 141 issued Operation Instruction No.1 and on 21 May issued Operation Instruction No.2.. These operational memoranda, set forth the final plan as adopted and carried out. The object of the operation was to seize and hold the Island of Sicily as a base for future operations. It was to take place in five phases. In the first phase preparatory measures were to be made by the air and naval forces to gain air supremacy, and to neutralise enemy naval efforts. The actual assault was to consist of pre-dawn attacks by sea and ground forces with the objectives of seizing the airfields and the ports of Syracuse and Licata.

(1) An amphibious vehicle, making its first operational appearance.

It was to be preceded by airborne landings. The third phase was the establishment of a firm base from which to conduct operations for the capture of the ports of Augusta and Catania and of the Gerbini Group of airfields and the fourth, the capture of these ports and airfields. Finally, with these in their possession, the Allies could then proceed to the reduction of the island.

Tasks of Eastern Task Force (Force 545)

A.F.H.Q. File
3394

The Eighth Army (British) was to assault the area between Syracuse and Pozzallo, supported by such parachute troops as could be lifted in one third of the available transport aircraft. Their main objective was the capture of the port of Syracuse and the landing ground at Pachino. They were then to establish a front on the general line Syracuse - Pozzallo - Ragusa and gain touch with the Seventh Army. They were then to push forward as rapidly as possible to take the ports of Augusta and Catania and the Gerbini group of airfields.

Tasks of Western Task Force (Force 343)

The assault of the Seventh Army (American) was to be directed against the area between Cape Scaramia and Licata, supported by such parachute troops as could be lifted in two thirds of the available transport aircraft. Their main objective was to take the port of Licata and the airfields of Ponte Olivo, Biscari and Comiso. They were then to establish themselves so that they gained contact with the Eighth Army at Ragusa, to protect the airfields they had already taken, and to prevent enemy reserves moving eastwards against the flank of the Eighth Army.

A.F.H.Q.
File 6693
Planning
Invasion of
Sicily

To fulfil the tasks allotted to them, the Eighth Army devised the following plan. The Eighth Army was grouped for the assault into XIII and XXX Corps. XIII Corps consisted of the 5th and the 50th Divisions with the 1st Airborne Division initially under command. XXX Corps consisted of the 1st Canadian and the 51st (H) Division and 231st Brigade. A force reserve consisting of the 78th Division and a Canadian tank brigade was held initially in North Africa.

The plan was that XIII Corps would assault on a three-brigade front in the Avola area, secure a beachhead, advance rapidly to capture Syracuse, then to capture Augusta, Catania, and the Gerbini airfields. XXX Corps would assault on the Pachino peninsula and capture the Pachino landing ground, advance north to relieve XIII Corps first in the Avola area and then in the Syracuse area, at the same time advancing north-west on the axis Spaccaforno - Ragusa to establish contact with Seventh Army at Ragusa. Diversions employing naval, air and airborne forces were planned against Catania early on the night of the assault in order to contain enemy reserves in that area.

Ibid

Likewise the Seventh Army made its plans in accordance with its instructions. The Seventh Army was grouped in two sub-task forces for the assault: II Corps and the 3rd Division (reinforced), and a floating reserve consisting of 2nd Armoured Division and one combat team of the 1st Division. A further army reserve consisted of the 9th Infantry Division, 82nd Airborne Division, and a parachute battalion. II Corps consisted of the 1st and 45th Divisions, two Ranger Battalions, and a parachute task force from the 82nd Airborne Division.

A.F.H.Q.
File 3394

The plan was that II Corps would assault between Sampieri and Gela to capture the airfields at Ponte Olivo, Biscari and Comiso, and to establish contact with Eighth Army in the vicinity of Ragusa. The 3rd Division (reinforced) would assault in the Licata area, capture the port and airfield at Licata and protect the left flank of the army from interference from the north-west. The floating reserve would sail with the assault convoys and be prepared to land in support of any of the assault forces. The 9th Infantry Division, in army reserve, would have one combat team and the entire divisional artillery ready to move to Sicily on call after D plus 8. The 82nd Airborne Division would concentrate in Sicily by successive lifts by D plus 7 in either the Licata or Gela area.

A parachute task force consisting of the 905th Parachute Combat Team (reinforced) from 82nd Airborne Division would be landed during the night D to D plus one in the area north and east of Gela to capture and secure the high ground in that area, disrupt communications and the movement of reserves, and to assist the 1st Division capture the Ponte Olivo landing grounds.

Presentation of Plans

The plans of the task forces and the naval, air and administrative plans were presented to the Allied Commander-in-Chief and the Joint Commanders at a 'Presentation of Plans' Conference on 24 June at Force 141 Headquarters near Algiers. Major General de Guingand, representing General Montgomery, presented the Eighth Army plan and represented a request of the army commander that notwithstanding the overriding importance of using the available air support for the protection of shipping lying off the beaches and for neutralising enemy airfields, the Eighth Army should have a call on a certain amount of air support with which to block the movement of mobile German forces to the high ground in the vicinity of Avola, which if captured by the Germans on D-Day would seriously affect the security of the XIII Corps beachhead. After discussion it was agreed that certain additional squadrons of the Tactical Air Force based on Malta would be allotted to the support of the Eighth Army to take care of this contingency.

On 26 June the main headquarters of Force 141 opened at La Marsa, Tunisia and on 8 July a tactical headquarters for the assault phase opened at Malta. On 10 July Force 141 officially became the Fifteenth Army Group, Force 343 became the Seventh Army, and Force 545 became the Eighth Army.

Sicilian
Campaign in
A.F.H.Q.
File 6657

On D minus five the disposition of the ground and airborne forces under Fifteenth Army Group were as follows (all forces concerned were either afloat or concentrated in their mounting areas); the 45th U.S. Division, which had arrived a few days previously direct from the United States, was at Oran, the 1st U.S. Division was at Algiers; the 3rd U.S. Division was in the Bone, Bizerta Area; the 2nd U.S. Armoured Division, a floating reserve, was afloat; the 1st Canadian Division which was recruited direct from the United Kingdom, was afloat off Malta; the 51st British Division was at Sousse; the 5th and 50th British Divisions were in the Alexandria area; and the 1st and 82nd U.S. Airborne Divisions were in Kairouan area. The 9th U.S. Division and the 78th British Division were in Tunisia, prepared to move into their mounting areas.

Cover plans

Deception and
Cover Plan
A.H.B./ILJ5/86/
74.

The movement of all assault convoys until D plus one was designed to conform to the normal routes of through convoys in order to support the cover plan (Barclay) which provided a false D-Day and false destination for the assault forces. The purpose of the plan was to make the enemy suspect that two operations were intended, one against the Balkans by a mythical British 'Twelfth Army' from the Middle East, and one by General Patton's American forces from North Africa against southern France; and that these attacks intended for the moonless periods of the month, had already been twice postponed.

By 21 June, it was hoped that the enemy would have been convinced that Western Crete was to be assaulted on 24 July, the Peloponnesus on 26 July and Sardinia and Corsica on 31 July, and southern France - to synchronize with an attack on western or northern France - on 4 August. Each of the units in the Task Forces had been provided with a specific cover destination which would fit the general plan.

The assault Group, by following the normal convoy routes close to the North African coastline prior to the genuine D-day would converge in the area south of Malta and suggest a threat towards Crete at the same time Force 'H'(1) would manoeuvre in the Ionian Sea and threaten the coast of Greece. That night they were to turn north and approach the shores of Sicily in darkness.

By such a ruse it was hoped to retard the reinforcement of Sicily by German troops, reduce the intensity of air and naval attacks on Allied shipping from D minus one, and keep the Taranto squadron of the Italian fleet east of the Strait of Messina. But, in view of the vastness of the armada the Allies were planning to assemble, neither strategic nor tactical surprise were to be expected for the assault on Sicily.

The Naval Task

Naval undertakings in connection with operation Husky started perforce long before D-Day. The first convoy bringing troops from the United States left on the 28 May and the last on the 12 July, all these were bound for ports in North Africa.

Convoys to arrive off Sicily on D-Day were to sail originally from ports in the Mediterranean. Thus, the Eastern Task Force Troops for the landings at Acid and Bark were to be brought from Alexandria and from Sfax; and others from Malta. Those which composed the Western Task Force were to be unloaded at African ports such as Oran, Algiers, Bizerta Tunis and Sousse; these latter forces were intended for the landings at Cent, Dime and Joss.

Outline naval
plan in A.F.H.Q.
3394

The naval task fell into four main headings.

- (a) The cover of the whole operation against interference by surface forces.

(1) A Diversionary Naval Force.

- (b) The close escort of the convoys to their destination and the delivery of the troops to the beaches.
- (c) The close support of the landings by gunfire.
- (d) The maintenance by sea of the forces landed, including the protection of shipping off the beaches.

Naval Covering Forces

Force 'H' consisting of four battleships, four cruisers, two aircraft carriers and some eighteen destroyers was to be concentrated in the Ionian Sea by D minus one. An additional force of two battleships, two cruisers, and six destroyers was to be based in the Algiers area as cover for the convoy on the North Africa coast, and as a reserve for the reinforcement or relief of Force 'H' if required; and a light covering force (Force 'Q') consisting of cruisers and destroyers was to be detached on the afternoon of D minus one to cover the northern flank of the eastern assaults.

The Eastern Task Forces

A Support Group (Force 'K') consisting of four cruisers and six destroyers was to be based on Malta. It was intended that this force should cover and assist in the escort of the south-eastern assaults to their beaches and would form the cover of the gun support of the Acid and Bark landings. Destroyer and escort vessels of all types had been detailed to escort the convoys, and a proportion of these ships were to be available to provide gun support and A.A. protection at the beaches. In order to conceal the intention as far as possible from the enemy, assault convoys were to be routed to conform to the normal movements of ship traffic through the Mediterranean.

R.A.F. Planning

C.-in-C. R.A.F.
Med./M.E.
planning for
operation Husky
A.H.B./ILJ1/90/
271

The circumstances in which the operation was mounted were peculiar. The Eighth Army was still engaged in fighting in Tunisia during the early stages of the planning, and subsequently moved its headquarters to Cairo. The details of the British assault were planned in Cairo and the assault was loaded and launched mainly from the Middle East. Divisions were, however, located in the Delta, in Tripoli, and in Tunisia, and were loaded in these several localities.

The American Seventh Army had its headquarters in Morocco, partly at Oran and partly at Mostaganem, some thirty miles away. During the later stages of the planning the headquarters were all located at Mostaganem. The details of the American assault were planned at that Headquarters. The Divisions of the Seventh Army were located at various places in North Africa, and were located at Oran, Algiers, and Tunis.

The North-west African Air Forces and the Desert Air Forces were deeply involved in the battle of Tunisia during the early stages of the 'Husky' planning, and on its conclusion had to be hurriedly withdrawn for refitting and preparation for the new campaign. As the Desert Air Force was administered and maintained from the Middle East where all its spare equipment etc. was located, it was withdrawn to the Middle East. Air Force units, equipment and supplies which were to go with the assault and follow-up convoys had to be moved to the various ports between the Nile Delta and Oran, in which the loading was taking place. Additional Air Force

service units and equipment were coming from the United States and the United Kingdom for movement direct into Sicily.

To make things more complicated, the American Services of Supply was responsible for loading American convoys, and the loading of British convoys was the responsibility of the Middle East, but in order to make the best use of the various airfields in Sicily, some British units and equipment had to be loaded in American convoys and some American in British convoys.

The Air Force commands which were going to fight the battle could not undertake the planning because they were fully occupied with the current operations. In these circumstances, the Air Force planning staff established with Force 141 had to be formed from United States and British officers who could be made available from various sources.

Ibid

There were various radical changes of plan, each of which caused a complete revision of the outline Air Plan. When the Final Army Plan was approved, it was obvious that in the initial stages of the assault the front would not be wide enough to warrant two Air Forces controlling headquarters. As the initial fighter operations were being undertaken mainly from Malta, the Air Officer Commanding in Malta was made responsible for controlling these operations and the Air Officer Commanding the Desert Air Force was made responsible for the initial operation of units in Sicily. This still further complicated the Air Force planning. Further complications were caused by the fact that American Army procedure for the planning of the assault differed from that of the British Army. The American Army expected to find Air Force representatives actually located within the headquarters of each of its formations as part of the staff, and able to enter into Air Force commitments, down as low as divisional level. In the circumstances, this was obviously not possible.

There was at that time a dearth of experienced United States air force officers able to undertake the necessary planning. Those officers who were so qualified were for the most part fully occupied in current operations, so that most of the planning for the 'Husky' operation was done chiefly by British officers.

An American planning staff, which was intended to be located at an early stage with the headquarters of the Seventh Army for detailed planning, remained in fact at Algiers until a relatively late stage, with the result that the British officers responsible for the close support planning maintained insufficient contact with the Headquarters of the Seventh Army at Mostaganem. The planning of the operation was made more difficult and complicated by the armies concerned who made no attempt to centralise their planning, and expected the air forces to break what was essentially an over all air problem requiring careful co-ordination into a number of detailed and unco-ordinated tasks, each of which were expected to be discussed with minor army formations spread over North Africa and the Middle East.

The alteration in the assault plans for the land forces did not materially affect the preparatory air operations which were intended to neutralize the enemy forces. But the decision to capture the Islands of Pantelleria and

Outline air
plan A.H.B./
ILJ5/83/42

Lampedusa(1) before the Husky operation took place was of great importance.

Pantelleria would afford a much needed airfield, with an operational capacity of about one hundred fighters, from which additional support could be given over the western operational area. Lampedusa, although an indifferent airfield and not well placed to assist the land operations, would be useful for convoy protection duties. The possession of these islands would permit the development of valuable radar facilities as well as denying them to the enemy. They could also be used as Air/Sea rescue and navigational aid centres.

The new plan had some advantages in that the assault area was limited to the south-east corner of the island and the dispersion of air effort in covering assaults in the Palermo area had been eliminated. Although the distance from the western-most head (Licata) to the eastern-most (Avola) was sixty miles, the air protection of the beaches and the shipping lying off them was made less difficult. There was however, still a shortage of forward airfields from which short range fighters could operate effectively over the battle area. Malta's airfields, although it was planned to use them to their full capacity, were insufficient; even when action had been taken to construct a temporary airfield on Gozo Island which would permit the operation of a further eighty to one hundred fighters from the Malta Command more accommodation would be needed. Fighters and light bombers based in Tunisia could operate effectively only over the most western assaults and would not be able to give any direct assistance to the assaults planned for the beaches east of Licata.

The Air Force plan

The air plan was to be developed in three phases:-

- (a) Preparatory measures.
- (b) The assault.
- (c) Reduction of the Island.

Strategic Bombing Operations

Outline Air
Plan A.H.B./
IIJ5/83/42

As soon as the enemy had been cleared from Tunisia, preparatory bombing for operation 'Husky' was to be initiated. Only steady pressure was to be applied until about D minus seven, as many units required to be rested after the Tunisian campaign, and extensive aerodrome construction was in progress in northern Tunisia to provide for the many airfields required for the operation.

These earlier bombing attacks were to be confined to more distant targets of strategic value and to shipping strikes when such targets were offered. It was important to interfere with any build up of strength which the enemy might be attempting in Sicily; especially in Messina. The most important targets, apart from airfields, were considered to be the ports of Naples, Messina and Palermo.

(1) Pantelleria and Lampedusa form a separate study. See Chapter 2.

Period from D minus seven to D-Day

Ibid. During this period the Allied Air Forces were to direct their offensive against the enemy air force in an attempt to prevent it offering serious opposition to the projected landings in Sicily. Airfields where the Luftwaffe were based were to be the principal targets, in preference to those occupied by the Italian Air Force, but the latter were by no means to be ignored. On principle, attacks were to be directed on those enemy airfields from which operations against the Allied seaborne assault would be made. Attacks were not to be made on airfields further afield except when photographic reconnaissances had shown exceptional concentrations of aircraft. A list of enemy airfields which were to be attacked had been issued and orders were given that daily photographic reconnaissance of them was to be maintained. By the end of the period it was hoped that the enemy's first line strength of aircraft in the Sicilian theatre especially in fighters would have been reduced considerably. It was realised that this aim could not be accomplished solely by the bombing of airfields, but previous experience had shown that sooner or later these tactics compelled the enemy to come up and fight. It was then, it was hoped, to inflict heavy casualties.

Ibid. Forecasts indicated that the G.A.F. was likely to find it difficult to find reinforcements(1) especially if the Russian front continued to be active. Heavy scale air operations against western Europe were being undertaken by aircraft based in the United Kingdom which would impose an additional severe strain on the enemy's air resources and make it unlikely that he would be able to reinforce the Mediterranean theatre without weakening himself dangerously elsewhere. It was therefore permissible to hope that after these attacks, the enemy would be unable to maintain his air strength at a standard high enough to be a decisive factor in the Sicilian assault.

Communication Targets

Increasing attention was to be paid to land, sea and air communications leading into Sicily. The ports Palermo, Messina and Catania were important to the enemy and were to be attacked in accordance with information photographic reconnaissance gave. At a favourable time near the approach of D-Day a maximum scale of day and night bombing attack would be directed against Messina, with a view to neutralising it as a supply base and as a channel for reinforcements.(2) If heavy increases in rail traffic were to be observed on the Naples - Reggio line, attacks would be made to disrupt it. The most profitable point of attack for this purpose was considered to be the marshalling yards at Naples, but intruders operating against trains might also prove effective. As road and railway communications in Sicily itself afforded no major targets, attack there would only be made on exceptional targets or by intruders on patrol.

Targets to be attacked by land bombers based on the United Kingdom.

At the same time as the Mediterranean air forces were attacking targets directly connected with the Sicilian

-
- (1) See Appendix 3.
(2) The N.W.A.A.F. never did in fact neutralise Messina, See Chapter 4.

assault, Bomber Command would co-operate by making attacks on Italian industrial and communication targets. Heavy bombing of such targets, it was considered, would have a valuable effect on the morale of the Italian people. Possible targets were:-

Cities: Milan, Turin, Genoa (and possibly Rome).

Oil: Leghorn and Porto Marghere (near Venice).

Industrial and Power: Terni.

Rail Communications: Bologna: (important for communication with Germany).

Revised air
outline plan
in A.F.H.Q.
2403

Phase II - The Assaults

After the assaults had been launched, the main effort would still be aimed at denying the air to the enemy's air forces and the primary bombing target would remain the enemy airfields in Sicily. The capture of airfields on the island and the threat to others from the proximity of the Allied forces after landing would progressively reduce the number of airfield targets on the island. It was expected that the airfields at Comiso, Ponte Olivo, Biscari and Pachino, would be either captured or denied to the enemy by D plus one. This would enable the Allied air forces to develop, on D plus two, a heavier scale of attack against those airfields still occupied by the enemy. In addition to these attacks, bombing action was to be taken to prevent the enemy from reinforcing Sicily or moving forces from west to east within the island.

During the night preceding the assault, paratroop attacks, mounted from the Kairouan area, were to be launched in support of the assaults. Additional paratroop operations were to be undertaken between D-Day and D plus three.(1)

Protection of Shipping

Throughout 'Husky' and particularly on D plus one, the protection of shipping would be a very heavy commitment. On D plus one it would be necessary to reduce the employment of fighters on offensive roles to meet this, and both the Tactical and Strategic Air Forces would have to supplement the resources of the Coastal, Middle East, and Malta Air Forces. As far as possible Malta was to be relieved of responsibility for the protection of shipping, in order that aircraft based on the island could be employed on offensive tasks. In general Coastal Air Force would be responsible for the protection of shipping sailing from North African ports, and the Middle East Command for shipping leaving from ports in the Middle East. In both cases, however, Malta would have to supply escorts towards the end of D minus one day when the assault convoys would be converging on the island.

Until such time as both single and twin engined-fighters were established in Sicily day and night fighter protection was to be provided from Malta and Pantelleria; supplemented by day twin-engined fighters based on Tunisia. Balloons were to be used to provide additional protection.

(1) See A.H.B. Monograph, 'Airborne Forces'. A.P.3231.

Throughout the operation it would be necessary to maintain regular general reconnaissance patrols in the Tyrrhenian and Ionian seas, and special photographic cover of the Italian fleet. At night A.S.V. patrols were to be maintained to keep the ships under observation and report any attempt they might make to slip out of port. Owing to the necessity of operating the maximum number of fighters from Malta during the assaults, the main torpedo-bomber striking force was to be based in Tunisia and would refuel in Malta if required to operate in the Ionian sea.

Phase III - Build-up and reduction of the Island

By D plus three the airfields at Pachino, Licata, Ponte Olivo, and possibly Comiso were expected to be ready for occupation, Biscari perhaps a day or two later. As soon as they were ready to receive aircraft, squadrons up to the following strengths were to be flown in depending upon the condition of the airfields concerned:-

Pachino	4 S.E.F. Squadrons R.A.F. (from Malta)	
	1 Tac/R Flight R.A.F.	Spitfires
Comiso	5 S.E.F. Squadrons R.A.F.	- do -
Biscari	3½ S.E.F. Squadrons R.A.F.	- do -
Ponte Olivo	1 S.E.F. Group U.S. (from N. Africa, Gozo or Pantelleria)	- Spitfires
	1 Observation Squadron U.S.	- do - Mustangs
Licata	1 S.E.F. Squadron U.S.	- do - Spitfires

Bomber Operations

After the first fighter squadrons had left Malta they were to be replaced, as airfields became available, by five Royal Air Force squadrons and two United States Air Force Groups from Tripoli, all equipped with Kittyhawk aircraft. These units were to operate in support of the land forces as required.

The main task of the bomber force based on the mainland was defined as:-

- (a) Neutralise those airfields in Sicily still held by the enemy.
- (b) Prevent the movement of enemy reinforcements in Sicily from west to east by attacks on communications.
- (c) Prevent enemy reinforcements entering Sicily via Messina and Palermo.
- (d) Provide direct support to the land forces.

Shipping protection

The movement of shipping at this stage could not be foreseen, fighter protection would be provided by single engined fighters based on the mainland, Malta, Pantelleria and possibly Lampedusa. The single-engined fighter commitment would be reduced wherever possible by the use of the twin-engined fighters of the Middle East Command. During this period there would be a large number of ships lying-off the

SECRET

23

beaches. To relieve squadrons based in Sicily of responsibility in the protection of their ships, this commitment would be met as far as possible by single-engined fighters based on Malta and Pantelleria.

Capture of Catania

It was estimated that Catania might be captured between D plus seven and D plus fourteen. When airfields in that area were fit for use, the following squadrons would move in:-

From Comiso and Biscari - $9\frac{1}{2}$ S.E.F. Squadrons (Spitfire)
11 S.E.F. Squadrons (Kittyhawk)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ T.E.F. Squadron (N) (Beaufighter)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ TAC/R Squadron (Spitfire)

The squadrons transferred from Comiso and Biscari would be replaced by:-

Comiso	2 Group U.S.	A.36 (Mustang)
Biscari	1 Group U.S.	Kittyhawk

all from North Africa.

Reduction of the Island

Forces available:-

By D plus fourteen or shortly afterwards, the following forces were expected to be operating in Sicily:-

Pachino/Catania/Gerbini Area

23 S.E.F. Squadrons R.A.F.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ T.E.F. (N) " "
1 TAC/R " "

Comiso/Biscari/Ponte Olivo/Licata Area

4 or $4\frac{1}{2}$ S.E.F. Group U.S.
1 Observation Squadron U.S.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ T.E.F. (N) Squadron R.A.F.

Further, as soon as the administrative situation allowed, there would be airfield accommodation for the remaining Kittyhawk units of the Tactical Air Force and a small number of light and medium bomber squadrons.

The greater part of the bombing force would remain in North Africa, but fuel and explosives for the operation of medium and light bomber aircraft would be available in Malta, and it was planned to build up stocks in Sicily for these types of aircraft as far as supply difficulties would permit. The immediate tasks of the Allied bomber forces would be to provide support for the land forces in Sicily, to continue to neutralize airfields remaining in enemy hands, and to prevent the arrival of enemy reinforcements. In addition, the Allied heavy bomber offensive against Italy proper would be intensified.

CHAPTER 2

PREPARATIONS FOR THE ASSAULT

Outline Air
Plan
A.H.B./II J5/83/
42

There was no radical change in the pattern of command which had worked so successfully in Tunisia. The Air Commander-in-Chief (Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder) would control all air operations during 'Husky' from his Command Post at La Marsa near Tunis. The Commanding General North West African Air Forces (Major-General Carl Spaatz U.S.A.) was to establish his headquarters adjacent to the Air Commander-in-Chief's and from there would control the operations of his air forces throughout the operation. To facilitate this, the operational staffs of both commands would be merged into the combined staff. The headquarters of the North West African Tactical Air Forces together with the advanced operational headquarters of the Strategic Air Force (Lieut-General James Doolittle, U.S.A.) and the Coastal Air Force (Air Vice-Marshal Hugh Lloyd) would be set up in proximity to the Command Post.

The Air Officer Commanding the Tactical Air Force of which the basic components were the Desert Air Force and XII Air Support Command and the Tactical Bomber Force would have operational command of all air forces providing direct support to the British and American assaults. The Air Officer Commanding Malta (Air Vice-Marshal Sir Keith Park) was to be subordinate to the A.O.C., T.A.F. during the opening phases of the operations, but was to control all air forces operating from Malta.

As soon as the air forces were established in Sicily, their operational control would be centralised under the Air Officer Commanding the Desert Air Force. Subsequently, when the assault area had been enlarged sufficiently to permit the operation of two controls, the XII Air Support Command would take over the control of the air forces operating with Seventh (U.S.) Army and the Desert Air Force would command the air forces operating with the Eighth Army, both as subordinate commands of the Tactical Air Force.

Mediterranean Air Command's Bombing Policy

On 17 June Mediterranean Air Command issued an operational directive to the North-west African Air Force (N.A.A.F.) laying down the bombing policy for the period immediately preceding the forthcoming operation. The time before D-Day was divided into two periods (i) from the date of the issue of this directive to D minus ten and (ii) D minus ten to D-Day. During the first period, the selection of targets was to be determined by considerations of enemy supply and morale, and above all the destruction of the enemy air force. The scale of effort, however, was to be circumscribed in scope to allow units to build up to full strength for the invasion of Sicily. Some days prior to the start of the second period a detailed directive would be issued covering the period D minus ten to D-Day. During this phase, it was expected that the primary considerations would be to afford direct support to the operation. The number of sorties per day would be increased culminating in an absolutely maximum number on D minus three day and maintaining that scale of effort until the initial landings had been accomplished.

The heavy bombers and night bombers from North Africa and the Middle East were normally to be employed on targets on the mainland of Italy and the Messina Strait. The principal types

of targets were to be enemy air and supply organisations, airfields, air bases, erection and supply facilities of the German Air Force, supply and communication centres, shipping and port facilities. A list of particularly important targets, the air forces detailed to attack them, and an indication of the division of responsibility between N.A.A.F. and the Middle East Command was issued. This programme left approximately twenty per cent of the effort available to be diverted for cover plan purposes in each command.

The medium bombers were to have two objectives. Firstly they were to neutralise the Sicilian ports (except that of Messina) paralyse communications, and destroy the enemy air forces, and secondly they were to support the cover plan by conducting the same type of operations over Sardinia. It was estimated that only one third of the medium bomber effort would be expended on Sardinia, and it was considered desirable that the procedure of picking up fighter escorts at Malta should be thoroughly tested during this period. Light bombers were to be used on appropriate targets, preferably 'counter air force' within their range in western Sicily. Similarly the procedure of picking up escorts from Pantelleria was to be tested as soon as the airfield on that island had become operational. As a final word it was emphasised that developments in the operational situation and intelligence information from various sources might require some temporary alterations to the general principles as stated and to the bombing effort allotted to and within each phase.

Operational Policy of Tactical Air Force

R.A.F.
Directives
to Force
Commanders
A.H.B./ILJ5/83/
67

On the 19 May 1943, the A.O.C.⁽¹⁾ Tactical Air Force, made known to his subordinate commanders the policy he had adopted for the Tactical Air Forces in the forthcoming invasion of Sicily. In the preliminary stage operational control of air force units located in Malta and Pantelleria would be undertaken by A.O.C. Malta, under the direction of the A.O.C. Tactical Air Force.

Units located on the mainland would be under the operational control of the Tactical Air Force. This control would be exercised through the Tactical Bomber Force, the rear Headquarters, echelon of advanced headquarters of the Desert Air Force and XII Air Support Command. It would therefore be necessary for the rear Headquarters of these formations to have both operational and administrative echelons. When both the Desert Air Force and XII Air Support Command were located in Sicily the operational control of these units would be undertaken by the Air Officer Commanding the Desert Air Force under the direction of the Tactical Air Force until it was practicable to operate a second executive formation, when XII Air Support Command would become a separate entity with its direction of effort and co-ordination undertaken by the Tactical Air Force. The operational control of the units remaining on the mainland would continue as in the preliminary phase.

In the preliminary phase the Tactical Bomber Force would undertake escorted light bomber attacks by day and night bombing (when the moon gave assistance) against selected objectives on the western area of Sicily and medium bomber attacks against objectives on the western area. Escorts would be provided from the mainland for light bombers and from Malta for medium bombers.

(1) Air Vice-Marshal A. Coningham.

The fighter force in Malta would be employed in air fighting and was to use every artifice to induce the enemy air force to come up and fight. On D minus one a heavy convoy protection commitment would be imposed on these fighter units. When the air forces moved from Malta and Sicily the heavy protective commitment for the beaches would be reduced and fighter bombers would then become available for support bombing operating from bases in Malta at first, and, later from Sicily. At this stage escorted light and medium bomber effort by day, for pre-arranged attacks, would become practicable. At night light and medium attacks would be continued against selected objectives.

In the preliminary phase fighter control by day would be undertaken by Malta, but when the air forces had moved into Sicily the control of all fighters in the battle area would be undertaken by the Air Officer Commanding the Desert Air Force through No. 211 Group main and forward controls. XII Air Support Command would provide homing facilities and protect its own airfields. At night, during the preliminary phase, Beaufighters would be controlled from Malta. In the assault stage Malta would continue this control and in addition subsidiary controls would be established with G.C.I. on landing craft at the main assault beaches and wherever possible with G.C.I. established on shore.

Disposition of Tactical Air Force

Ops.N.A.T.A.F.
A.H.B./IIJ5/92

At the end of hostilities in Tunisia, the initial task of the Tactical Air Force had been to move units into suitable airfields for the undertaking of operations against Sicily. The first necessity was to build up Malta's air strength as soon as possible with fighters of high performance in order that a strong fighter force could be established on the island before the start of the operation to provide the protective cover which would be required eventually for the shipping and beaches, and in the meantime, a force capable of dominating the enemy in air fighting and of giving escort to bomber formations attacking Sicily. Consequently, the Spitfire Wings from No. 242 Group (Nos. 322 and 324) were moved from North Africa to Malta at the beginning of June and these were followed by No. 244 Spitfire Wing of the Desert Air Force. The advent of the new units filled the existing Malta airfields to capacity with twenty fighter squadrons.

It was considered that this force was insufficient for the protection of eight beach landings over a front of about one hundred miles, and it was thought desirable that more fighter squadrons should be brought within range. Airfield space constituted the difficulty. The capture of Pantelleria, however, on the 11 June permitted an American Group of Kittyhawks (33rd Fighter Group) being located there to cover the two western assaults; and during the preliminary phase these fighters would also be available to escort bombers operating from Tunisia and for shipping protection. In addition, a new airfield was constructed, in the short space of twenty days, on the Island of Gozo on which it was proposed to base another American fighter group, the 31st, equipped with Spitfires. Thus the fighter strength which could be used to cover the assaults was very greatly increased.

Equally important was the location of units which were to operate from bases in Tunisia. The Cap Bon peninsula was the nearest point to Sicily. Hence, in this area, and as far south as Hergla, a total of twelve airfields were either newly

constructed or ex-Axis airfields, which had been improved for the use of units of XII Air Support Command and of the Tactical Bomber Force which would be operating from Tunisia. By the end of June, these airfields were fully stocked for intensive operations and linked by telephone to control headquarters.

Meanwhile, the Desert Air Force had been withdrawn to the Tripoli area for rest and re-fitting, with the exception of the bomber component which had been attached to the Tactical Bomber Force. No.244 (Spitfire) Wing had moved almost immediately to Malta, leaving No.239 Wing, 57th and 79th (U.S.) Groups - all Kittyhawk fighter-bombers - in the Tripoli area.

It was the intention that this fighter-bomber force should be held at immediate readiness for the direct support of the ground forces, and that it should move into Malta when airfields were vacated by the Spitfire units moving into Sicily. It was important that this fighter-bomber force be kept at a high state of operational readiness, but as the resources for fighter escort for the Tactical Bomber Force were very limited, plans were made for the movement of the 57th and 79th (U.S.) Groups to the Cap Bon area should the need arise. Fortunately, it was not found necessary to put the plan into operation. Events proved later that owing to the lack of enemy air opposition, Malta airfields were able to accommodate fighter-bombers in addition to Spitfires, and consequently these units were moved forward to Malta for operations immediately the landings had been completed and while the bridgehead was being enlarged.

In short, therefore, the air position of the Tactical Air Force operational units was:-

- (a) The main fighter force located at Malta, Gozo and Pantelleria.
- (b) A small fighter force, under XII Air Support Command, retained for tactical bomber escort and located on airfields on the eastern side of the Cap Bon peninsula.
- (c) Tactical Bomber Force located at airfields on Cap Bon peninsula.
- (d) Fighter-bomber force under Desert Air Force retained in the Tripoli area.
- (e) Lightning Group of Strategic Air Force temporarily allocated to the Tactical Air Force at Mateur (North Africa).

Malta's Part in the Invasion

During the preparatory plan, the air forces based on Malta were to begin operations in co-operation with air forces based in North Africa - designed to reduce the effectiveness of the enemy air forces based in Sicily and southern Italy. During the assault the aims of the air forces in Malta were to be twofold. First they were to afford the maximum protection against air attack to the Allied naval and military forces engaged in the operation; and secondly they were to locate, shadow, and report any hostile surface forces which menaced the Allied expedition.

Op. Order
No. 52
A.H.B./IIJ5/83/
99

All air forces operating from Malta and Pantelleria would be under the operational command of the Air Officer Commanding, Malta, until such time as air force control was established in Sicily. Thereafter selected units would be despatched from Malta to operate in Sicily under the command of the Air Officer Commanding, Desert Air Force. Control of all air forces based in Malta would be exercised by the Air Officer Commanding, Malta, from his Operational Headquarters in Valletta. Aircraft would be detailed by and despatched to their tasks through the normal fighter control channels. Fighter controllers were to be located in headquarters ships which were to accompany the assault forces. The fighter control ship was to be equipped with radar and V.H.F. for communication with fighter patrols. Fighter controllers in these ships would, as necessary, take over the local control of fighter patrols detailed to their area and would then, by radar or visual means, direct fighters to intercept enemy aircraft within range.

Forces making passage to and from the assault areas were to follow the routes indicated in their convoy diagram. If the situation required it, a 'fighter box' could be mounted on D minus one between the south-eastern Sicilian airfields and the convoys approaching from the south. This 'box' would be maintained as a standing patrol to intercept hostile bombers on their way to attack shipping. Similarly fighter aircraft proceeding to and from their patrol areas in the vicinity of Sicily would, as far as possible, be routed to cover the shipping lanes in use, but fighter escort would not be provided for shipping proceeding to and from the assault areas. Escort would, however, be provided for selected convoys in passage during D minus one while within 50 nautical miles of Malta. All warships, while in company with convoys on D minus one were to display the first and last letters of the convoy in white deck stripes on the forecastle. For example, the convoy K.M.P.F. 18 was to show the letters 'K.F.'.

Control of A.A. fire was carefully laid down. By day ships were not to fire on single-engined aircraft unless these were identified as hostile or apparently of hostile intent and were to engage all multi-engined aircraft not recognised as friendly. The horizontal danger areas round ships was from 12,000 yards in the case of cruisers to 1,500 yards in the case of merchant vessels. At night 'Fortu' procedure was to be initiated by any control despatching night fighters into another area or seeing night fighters about to enter another area. When 'Fortu' procedure was in force, Royal Navy ships might fire on any aircraft not known to be friendly. Merchant ships were not to open fire by day or by night unless the target was first engaged on by H.M. ships.

The strength and distribution of fighter controls could not be detailed in advance as it would naturally depend on the scale of enemy opposition which, in turn, would depend on the effectiveness of the Allied bombing offensive during the preparatory period. If the Allied bombing during the 'softening up' period had been effective, it might be possible to extend offensive patrols to cover the greater part of the ten daylight hours. If, on the other hand, the enemy's air force were still capable of strong opposition the strength of the Allied fighter sorties would at times have to be proportionately increased, particularly during the more critical daylight hours, thus reducing the total number of hours during which aircraft from Malta could provide cover. Owing to the very limited capacity of the landing grounds in

Malta, it would be necessary to operate fighter squadrons as far as possible to a pre-arranged programme, to avoid congestion on the airfields. Fighter aircraft were to be allocated for the defence of Malta by night and subsequently for the protection of shipping and other vulnerable points in Sicily as they were established. The primary task of night fighter intruder aircraft through all phases of the operation was to be the destruction of enemy aircraft in the vicinity of their bases. Their secondary task was to be the disruption of the enemy's night flying organisation, and their third was to be to interdict the enemy's transport system leading to the Strait of Messina.

Photographic reconnaissance was to be flown daily to locate the position of major naval units of the enemy and to reconnoitre enemy airfields to determine the position of his forces. They were to fly such strategical reconnaissances as might be required by the military commander. They were further to record bomb damage resulting from the Allied bombing attacks.

In the case of action by the Italian fleet, Baltimore aircraft on Malta were to stand by to locate and shadow such major units of the enemy fleet as might put to sea. At night Wellington aircraft would carry out 'block patrols' as necessary of Messina and Taranto. They were to be ready, also, to shadow such major units of the enemy fleet as might be located at sea. A tactical reconnaissance squadron was included in No. 248 Wing under the instructions of the Army Commander.

The Story of
the N.A.
Convoys
A.H.B./ILJ1/
236/11
and O.R.B.
No. 242 Group

The Protection of the North African Coastal Convoys

The fall of Tunis on 12 May 1943 marked the beginning of the through convoy period and was a landmark in the history of war time shipping in the Mediterranean. Convoys could now use the direct route and this meant the saving of over 8,000 miles between Liverpool and Alexandria and 4,500 miles between Liverpool and Bombay. The enemy occupation of North Africa had forced the Allies to use the route round the Cape when supplying the Middle East forces or sending convoys of troops to the Far East. In May 1943 two large convoys bound for the Middle East had passed through the Sicilian Strait unmolested from the air and from any other form of attack. On 23 June the largest convoy up to that date passed through unhindered, the Mediterranean route to the east was once again opened.

The Luftwaffe Air Striking Force in North Africa had escaped the fate of the German and Italian land forces and had managed to effect their retreat to Sicily and the Italian mainland. Here, the enemy had organised his anti-shipping units, and prepared to attack Allied convoys between Algiers in the west and the Malta Channel in the east. For this purpose he planned to use bases in Sardinia, Sicily or the south of Italy.

The fighter defence of the Allied convoys passing from the western Mediterranean into the central Mediterranean was in the hands of No.242 Group.(1)

Air Operations from the Fall of Tunis to 30 June 1943

The end of the North African campaign with the Axis surrender on Cap Bon gave the land forces a respite before proceeding to their next objective. For the air forces there was little rest, the successful invasion of Sicily implied major commitments for the Allied Air Forces before the actual landings. Some units of the Tactical Air Force did find time for refitting but for the rest there was no break in the operations. The function of the North African Air Forces was almost exclusively tactical in nature; they existed to provide support directly or indirectly to the ground forces. It must be noted that, in the wider context of the war as a whole, there was little difference in function between the strategic and tactical air forces in the invasion of Sicily. The operations, however, of the North African Strategic Air Force did take on some aspects of strategic bombing. These operations were continuous and only imperfectly punctuated by the successive phases of the ground campaign. In the assault on Sicily the tasks of the Strategic Air Force were to attack the enemy in advance of the assault forces, to soften their objective and to assist in isolating the battlefield.

The Reduction of the Islands of the Pelagie Group

A.H.B /IIJ5/86/
22
Encl.5A and 1A

Sicily had been attacked more or less continuously since February 1943 by B-17's of the N.A.S.A.F. and by B-24's of the Ninth Air Force operating from the Middle East by day. At night the attacks were continued by R.A.F. Wellingtons from the Middle East. Almost as soon as the Tunisian campaign was ended, Allied Air Forces switched the main weight of their attacks on to the main island of the Pelagie group, Pantelleria. The importance of this island in the proposed invasion of Sicily had been foreseen as early as February 1943 and its capture was regarded as essential from the air force point of view.

Importance of Pantelleria

A.H.B./IIJ5/86/
22
Encl.5A

The possession of Pantelleria was necessary for the proposed operations preceding and during the assault. Otherwise air support for the Eastern Task Force would have had to be reduced substantially to ensure sufficient cover being available over the Licata and Gela beaches. The island would provide excellent radar facilities for the Allies as it had done for the Axis and its possession would simplify the problem of protection to convoys to and from the assault beaches. The

-
- (1) No.242 Group was transferred on 22 May 1943 from N.A.T.A.F. to N.A.C.A.F. whose headquarters at Bizerta controlled fighter squadrons at Tunis and Sousse. This fighter organisation was put to its first test on 26 June when the important east-bound convoy 'Tadworth' was attacked by over 100 enemy aircraft - Ju.88's, Cant.Z.100's and F.W.190 fighter bombers. The attack which started in daylight and continued into the hours of darkness was a complete fiasco. The only damage suffered by the ships was caused by near misses. No direct hits were registered on any of the ships. The enemy striking force was broken up, six of their aircraft being destroyed and two damaged. Most of the attacking aircraft were forced to jettison their bombs before reaching the convoy.

A.H.B.IIJ5/86/
22

intensive day and night air effort which would be required to neutralise the island, even for a short time, would be saved and the efforts of the air force could be devoted to offensive rather than defensive operations which the neutralisation of Pantelleria implied. Lastly, if the island remained in enemy hands, his reporting system would be a constant embarrassment for the assaulting Allied forces. It would be very difficult to eliminate his Freya radar stations by air action alone. All the Allied sorties would have to be routed as a consequence to avoid the radar cover of Pantelleria; and this would apply especially to the paratroop operations and to the night and day sorties of the heavy bombers.

The arguments in favour of capturing Lampedusa were not so comprehensive as those for Pantelleria, yet its possession would give the Allies the use of a small airfield which would be invaluable for convoy protection during the invasion and follow-up period. As a radar station, it would be most valuable to the enemy, although its corresponding value to the Allies would not be as great. Both islands could provide subsidiary advantages such as navigational aid centres, air sea rescue bases and emergency landing grounds in the assault period.

Appendix I to
Encl. 3 to Air
Report on
Pantelleria
A.H.B./IIJ1/
168/1

Pantelleria has been variously described as an Italian Gibraltar or as an Italian Heligoland. The pre-war Fascist press had made much of the impregnability of the island and, as its capture was regarded as an essential preliminary to the assault on Sicily, the Allies seemingly faced a difficult task. The island lies 53 miles from Cap Bon. Its coast is irregular and featured by steep cliffs with an absence of beaches suitable for landing. There was only one possible landing area for an invasion, near the town and harbour of Porto di Pantelleria at the north-west end of the island. But even there the harbour is small and too shallow to accommodate vessels except those which draw less than 10 feet of water; the currents are tricky and the surf runs high. At the northern end of the island an airfield had been constructed large enough for four-engined bombers to operate. On its south-east side a huge hangar had been built underground, complete with electric light, water supply and repair facilities.

Since 1926 the island had been a forbidden military area and information about its defence was scanty. Photographic reconnaissance, during the Tunisian campaign, had revealed the presence of more than 100 gun emplacements, some hewn from rock, others of concrete covered by lava blocks. The largest concentration was in defence of the harbour, with the others so positioned to sweep the few other places where landings might possibly be made. A number of the guns were of sufficient size to present Allied warships with a difficult target to neutralise. These strong-points were supplemented by pill-boxes, machine-gun nests, scattered among the mountains and embedded in the faces of cliffs.

Allied Intelligence estimated the number of the garrison at approximately 10,000 men. With its natural and man-made defences, manned by such a large garrison, Pantelleria might well prove to be so formidable as to require a major effort for its reduction but, in the garrison lay the island's chief defensive weakness. None of them were battle tested nor conditioned to withstand the intensive bombing such as the combined Anglo-American forces were capable of in the last days in Tunisia. The island was isolated from the Italian mainland and its garrison could hope for little assistance either in the way of air protection or in the form of

replacements. Allied Intelligence assessed the garrison's morale as doubtful, a conclusion demonstrated by the poor showing of aircraft units based on Pantelleria against Allied air attacks near the close of the Tunisian campaign.

Planning the Capture of Pantelleria, (Operation Corkscrew)

A.H.B./IIJ1/168/1

The basis on which the operational planning was conducted, was the appreciation that an assault on the island was impracticable if the garrison offered a determined resistance because of the strong fortifications and the restricted beach landing areas. Consequently the main structure of the plan was that the garrison should be weakened by continuous bombing on an increasing scale prior to the assault. In addition the beach defences in the assault areas were to be neutralised by air attack and naval bombardment and a blockade of the island was to be maintained. The final assault was then to be made by one British division.

Outline Plan -
Corkscrew

The Air Plan

A.H.B./IIJ1/166/
41

The objects of the air operations prior to D-Day were to reduce the morale of the garrison, to destroy those defences which might have opposed or impeded the Allied assault, and to maintain a blockade of the island to prevent reinforcements reaching the garrison from Sicily.⁽¹⁾ To enable the air forces under its command to fulfil their object, a bombing schedule was drawn up by Headquarters, North African Air Forces, whose Commanding General was in charge of the operation.

Attacks by N.A.S.A.F. and N.A.T.A.F. were to be in accordance with the following schedule:-

<u>29 May - D minus 6</u>	<u>150 Sorties</u>
NASAF 50 bombers	(29 May through D minus 6)
50 fighter-bombers	(29, 30, 31 May)
NATAF 50 bombers & fighter-bombers	(1 June through D minus 6)
<u>D minus 5</u>	<u>200 Sorties</u>
NATAF 100 bombers & fighter-bombers	(Dawn - 1200: 1900 - Dusk)
NASAF 100 bombers	(1200 - 1900)
<u>D minus 4</u>	<u>400 Sorties</u>
NATAF 150 bombers & fighter-bombers	(Dawn-1200: 1900-Dusk)
NASAF 250 bombers & fighter-bombers	(1200 - 1900)
Wellingtons.	
<u>D minus 3</u>	<u>600 Sorties</u>
NATAF 250 bombers & fighter-bombers	(Dawn-1000: 1900-Dusk)
NASAF 350 bombers & fighter-bombers	(1000-1200: 1800 - 1900)
Strong Wellington Effort	
<u>D minus 2</u>	<u>600 Sorties</u>
NATAF 250 bombers & fighter-bombers	(Dawn-1200: 1900-Dusk)
NASAF 350 bombers & fighter-bombers	(1200 - 1900)
Wellingtons	

(1) The garrison belonged to the Italian Sixth Army, which was stationed in Sicily.

SECRET

34

D minus 1

1700 Sorties

NASAF 200 B-17's

(0900-1200: 1500-1800)

400 mediums

100 Wellingtons

400 fighter-bombers

NATAF 200 mediums

(0500-0900: 1800-Dusk)

200 light bombers

200 fighter-bombers

Wellingtons

Note: No bombing between 1200 and 1500 on D minus 1.

D-Day

NATAF 100 light bombers

(Dawn - 1000)

100 mediums

(Dawn - 1000)

NASAF 100 B-17's

(1000 - 1230)

100 mediums

(1000 - 1230)

1 squadron P-38 fighter-

bombers & Cover

(1130 - 1330)

Note: 1. After 1230 on D-Day all forces would be available for extensive operations, should the necessity arise.

Note: 2. Night bomber operations would be planned to cover as much of the period of darkness as is practicable.

D-Day

All available forces would be employed in support of the assault. The Air Command Post of the NAAF would remain at Constantine. However, the detailed air plan for direct support of landing and subsequent operations would be worked out at combined Headquarters Sousse in conjunction with the Army and Naval Commanders. It was to be on the following lines. The attack would be maintained from dawn, the maximum possible intensity occurring during the approach and landing of the assault force. Thereafter the Tactical Air Force would provide maximum effort on close support of the land forces and Strategical Air Force would attack pre-determined targets inland.

Air Cover

The Coastal Air Force would assume full responsibility for providing air cover for Allied vessels approaching and withdrawing from the Island of Pantelleria.

It would be the responsibility of the Coastal Air Force to notify Headquarters, N.A.A.F., Headquarters, N.A.T.A.F., and Headquarters, N.A.S.A.F., of the presence of enemy or friendly vessels pertinent to the plan of operations. N.A.T.A.F. would be responsible for the interception and the destruction of any enemy air and sea transport endeavouring to reinforce the Island of Pantelleria. Reconnaissance and shipping sweeps would be carried out by the N.A.C.A.F. Operations against enemy shipping by the Tactical Air Force were to be co-ordinated with the N.A.C.A.F.

Estimation of the Bomber Effort Required

The scale of bomber effort necessary to reduce strong defences was primarily determined by the degree of bombing

accuracy which could be expected in the face of ground and air opposition against targets as small and difficult to identify as gun positions and pill-boxes. Such targets were vulnerable to direct hits and close near misses. Very strong concrete defences, in the case of even a direct hit by our 1,000 lb. G.P. bomb, might not cause significant damage. To overcome these difficulties it would be necessary to achieve a greater bomb density on the targets of the area than was normally called for in attacks on other types of targets. The neutralisation of strongly prepared defence positions manned by determined troops was a risky commitment for bomber forces. Operation Corkscrew, the code name for Pantelleria was in effect a test of the tactical possibilities of this form of air attack and an exercise in the most economical disposal of the available air strength.

A.H.B/IIJ1/
168/1
Encl.3

The problem was examined by a Ministry of Home Security expert. His conclusions, based upon a scientific analysis of the task concluded that while the heavy bomber effort was not sufficient to reduce more than five of the batteries which would have to be put out of action, the extra effort provided by medium, light and fighter bombers should be adequate to accomplish the rest of the task. Any extra strength available should be directed against pill-boxes in the harbour area of the town, against the defence positions on the slopes rising towards the airfield, and against any other strong points which subsequent Intelligence might reveal.

The basis of this analysis was a 50 per cent level of destruction which, he stated, was unquestionably very high. If 50 per cent of the guns in a battery were destroyed directly it was almost certain that the remaining posts would be rendered unserviceable as a result of the concentration of bursts around them. It was impossible in advance to make allowance for the secondary destruction that would be caused by flying debris and the numerous shocks to which gun and predictor equipment would be subjected as a result of bursts, which, while not close enough to destroy them directly, would nevertheless affect them. Since the island would be under an almost continuous air attack until D-Day, there was little chance of major damage to batteries being repaired. No definite allowance could, however, be made for casualties or for the effect on morale, both of which might prove to be important factors.

Ibid.

The main recommendations this study afforded were three in number. Individual batteries should be taken as aiming points and the attack continued from day to day until it was reasonably certain that they had suffered 30 - 50 per cent destruction; only batteries in the northern half of the island were to be taken as targets and, of those, the highest priority was to be given to those round the harbour. Secondly, until D minus 3, the forces available ought to be concentrated on only 4 - 6 batteries a day. Lastly, a strict analysis of the results of each day's effort should be made. This meant that full details about the sorties despatched, about the bombs dropped and targets aimed at should be available at Headquarters.

Results of the day's bombing should be estimated from sortie claims, direct photographs and daily photographic reconnaissances. Every bomb burst was to be plotted on a grid map and attention was to be paid to:-

- (a) The relation of bombs identified in the photographic cover to total number dropped.
- (b) The position of the bursts in relation to the gun positions.
- (c) Any damage caused.

Aiming points for each day's operations were to be determined on the basis of the information thus provided. If the operations were controlled in this way it would be possible to determine day by day whether the effects achieved were in accordance with the limited chance laws used in the analysis or whether the bombing would prove more accurate than had been assumed.

Air Forces Available for Operation Corkscrew

N.A.T.A.F.
Operation
Instruction
No.98, 30 Nov.
1943

The forces available for the operation were the North African Strategic Air Force and the North African Tactical Air Force.(1) However, for operation Corkscrew, A.O.C., N.A.T.A.F. had only XII Air Support Command and Tactical Bomber Force at his disposal. Two United States Kittyhawk Wings from the Western Desert Air Force were retained and, in addition, XII A.S.C. was reinforced by two new units, the 99th (U.S.) Fighter Squadron(2) and the 27th (U.S.) Group, equipped with A.36 Mustangs. Broadly speaking XII Air Support Command Units were located on the east side of the Cap Bon peninsula and the T.B.F. units at the base of the peninsula extending as far south as Hergla.

All the units of N.A.S.A.F. except two Wellington Wings, were committed to the operation. They were stationed in the Constantine Souk-el-Arba, Djedeida areas.

The Capture of Pantelleria and Lampedusa

N.A.T.A.F.
Operational
Instruction
No.98
Annex A.

Towards the end of the Tunisian campaign Pantelleria, like Sicily had been attacked more than once. Between 8 and 11 May, the attacks of light and medium aircraft denied the Axis the use of the airfield to enemy fighters. Immediately after the Axis surrender on 14 May, M.A.C. ordered a blockade of the island with intermittent air attacks for 'nuisances purposes'. The real air offensive however, began on 18 May with raids by medium and fighter bombers under a plan which called for fifty sorties by both types till D minus 6 (5 June). From 23 May these attacks were regular and were directed principally against Porto Di Pantelleria and the Marghana airfield to prevent the enemy building up reserves of aircraft.

The second phase began on 6 June. The plan demanded a continuous bombardment throughout the twenty-four hours. The weight of attack rose continuously till the 10th when N.A.A.F. operated all its aircraft. Only two attempts, on 6 and 7 June, were made by Axis air forces to defend the island but with no effective result. Between 31 May and 5 June the Allied air attack was supplemented by naval bombardment. The island was

-
- (1) On completion of the Tunisian campaign, No.242 Group was located at N.A.C.A.F. and its two Spitfire Wings were in the process of moving from North Africa to Malta in preparation for Operation Husky, as were the Desert Air Force returning to their base area around Tripoli.
 - (2) The coloured fighter squadron.

twice offered a chance to surrender: on 8 June three aircraft of 33rd Fighter Group dropped leaflets calling for unconditional surrender and a second summons on D minus 1 (10 June) met with no reply.

After the failure of the second attempt the final preparations were made for the ground assault. On the night 10/11 June the 1st Infantry Division (Br.) embarked at Sousse and Sfax in three convoys two fast and one slow. The fast convoys, protected by fighters of N.A.C.A.F. and by surface vessels were met by a British naval squadron off Pantelleria.

Throughout the night of 10/11 June and up to 1000 hours on the 11th Allied aircraft bombed continuously. Formations of medium bombers with fighter escort attacked every fifteen minutes. During the lull in the Allied air operations, the landing craft started shorewards at 1030 hours. Up till then, the enemy air force had made only sporadic attacks upon the assault forces but they now made their greatest effort. A large mixed formation of F.W.190 and Me.109 attempted to strike at the assault forces but were driven off by the escorting P-40's (Kittyhawk).

At 1100 hours ships of the 15th Cruiser Squadron opened fire on the island. A few minutes later as the landing craft were on the point of beaching, a formation of B-17 (Fortresses) gave an exhibition of pattern bombing. Between 1130 and 1200 hours, a destroyer and several aircraft reported a white flag flying; a P.R. aircraft was despatched to obtain confirmation. Meanwhile landing operations proceeded. The Allied forces met no opposition, except on one beach, where enemy small arms fire was quickly extinguished. 'In effect active resistance on Pantelleria had ceased when the amphibious forces arrived.' At 1735 hours the formal surrender was signed in the underground hangar.

Before the formality was concluded the air effort was switched to Lampedusa. Bad weather hampered operations on the 12th, but on the morning of the 18th the island passed under Allied control.

The Offensive against the Axis airfields

The number of enemy airfields in Sicily and Sardinia was estimated to be nineteen in March 1943. By the end of June the enemy had at least thirty, and was constructing more. It was estimated that the enemy airfield system could accommodate about six hundred fighters distributed equally between Sardinia, eastern Sicily and western Sicily.

In May the majority of the Allied attacks on airfields had been directed against those in Sardinia. Appreciating the significance of the vast amount of shipping assembled in North African harbours, Fliegerkorps II ordered an attack on Oran harbour to take place on 19 May. Bombers were to use the advance landing grounds of Villacidro and Decimomannu on Sardinia, returning to their bases on 21 May. Attacks were carried out on both Villacidro and Decimomannu, on the three days the bombers were there, causing serious damage to both landing grounds. On 21 May Decimomannu was

Sicilian
Campaign
A.F.H.Q.
2473

'An appreciation
of the effect of
Allied Air Force
attacks on Axis
airfields in
Sardinia, Sicily
and Italy.'

A.H.B./1101/69
and German
documents.
A.H.B.6.

reported to be unserviceable owing to numerous bomb craters and delayed action bombs. Direct hits had been made on administrative buildings, fuel dumps had been set on fire and the airfield perimeter lighting had been put out of action. At Villacidro the airfield lighting was put out of order and the flare path destroyed, making the landing ground unserviceable for night use. A further raid was made on Villacidro landing ground on 27 May, putting the airfield perimeter lighting out of action, destroying two Italian Ju.87's and setting fire to large quantities of fuel.

These concentrated attacks on airfields and other targets in northern Sardinia convinced the Germans that the Italian fighters available in the area were quite unequal to the task of protection of the northern sector. Consequently, arrangements were made to transfer a German fighter Gruppe of 48 Me.109's to Venafiorita in order to protect the supply port of Olbia, which was vital for supplying all Sardinia.

A.F.H.Q.
2473
Sicilian
Operation

On 12 June bombers of the Strategic Air Force began an intensive bombardment of the airfields in the west of Sicily, both to protect Allied movement in taking over Pantelleria and Lampedusa, and to inaugurate the campaign to drive the enemy from the advanced air bases in Sicily. Castelvetro, Sciacca, Milo and Boccadifalco, several miles west of Palermo, were hit repeatedly in a succession of raids which continued until 30 June, and on 28 June the Sardinian airfields were also heavily attacked. In many cases large numbers of enemy fighters were caught on the ground; Boccadifalco received two hundred and twenty tons of bombs in one week and largely ceased to operate as a fighter base. Enemy opposition to the attacks was surprisingly light.

By far the most serious damage was sustained at Castelvetro. There were four attacks against the airfield including one at night. The first of these was on 12 June by 39 Fortresses, resulting in very considerable damage which included the wrecking of the night flying installations, the setting on fire of an ammunition dump, and the killing and wounding of numerous station personnel. This raid was followed by a night attack by 10 Wellingtons, when the runway was completely wrecked, many fires were started in the dispersal areas, and an explosion occurred which could be seen from about fifty miles away. The following day 55 Fortresses attacked in two waves. Many hits were made on the airfield perimeter and dispersal areas and fires were seen in the personnel living quarters. On the 20th a further attack, this time by 40 Marauders, effected considerable damage to the barrack buildings.

Another airfield which suffered much damage was Milo. There were nine raids on this airfield and, although each attack contributed to the devastation, it is significant that the airfield remained in a serviceable condition until the last of these attacks on 30 June, when a raid by 33 Marauders rendered all aircraft on the airfield unserviceable.

Attacks were also made on 12 June by 40 Fortresses on Boccadifalco, and the next day 24 Liberators raided Gerbini, destroying several aircraft on the ground.

There were only six raids by the Allied Air Forces on Sardinian airfields during the month of June, of these the two most successful were those against Venafiorita and Alghero/Fertilia, in the case of the former besides damage to the airfield a number of station personnel were killed and wounded, whilst in the latter attack, barracks and administrative

A.H.B/IIG1/69

buildings were damaged and several aircraft were destroyed and damaged, among these being three aircraft in blast bays.

The only heavy attack on an Italian airfield in June was made on the 4th when 52 Liberators (B.24) raided Grottaglie. The airfield was well covered with bombs, including the hangars and the administrative buildings. Air fighting took place during which the bombers claimed four enemy aircraft destroyed and two probably destroyed. In addition, 11 German aircraft were destroyed on the ground.

The Allied aircraft losses for the month of June as a result of these attacks were, in air fighting, nine destroyed and five damaged; through 'flak' action, two destroyed and 57 damaged.

Air Operations against Communications and Bases

The campaign of the Strategic Air Force against the Axis communications concentrated on the Naples area, the Sardinian harbours of Cagliari, Olbia and Golfo Aranci, and on the vital communication facilities at Messina. During the month of May, Messina was attacked at night by Wellingtons on four separate occasions. 'Many vessels were sunk or seriously damaged' in these raids. Four attacks on Olbia, and six attacks on Cagliari produced similar results. A raid on Leghorn on the 28th by 92 B.17's caused immense damage in the port and in the city. One naval auxiliary, one destroyer, two torpedo boats were sunk and a steamer loaded with munitions set ablaze. In addition two destroyers were seriously damaged, while all buildings near the harbour also suffered serious damage.

N.A.A.F.
Int/Opsum
A.H.B./IIJ15/10

Italian Air
Ministry
'Weekly Information
Bulletin'.
23 - 29 May.
(A.H.B.6)

Ibid 30 May -
5 June

N.A.A.F.
Int/Opsum
A.H.B./IIJ15/10

Italian Air
Ministry
Weekly Information
Bulletin
under 18 June.
(A.H.B.6.)

In the first week of June, until air bombardment of Pantelleria claimed the energies of the Strategic Air Forces, their main target was Naples, which in the course of six raids, mainly by Wellingtons at night, suffered severe damage. In the port two steamers were sunk, another was set on fire and a further two severely damaged. The barracks of the submarine flotilla and the general supply depots were completely destroyed. At Pomigliano several Alfa - Romeo workshops and eight Me.323 aircraft were destroyed, while eight others were severely damaged. After 12 June the Strategic Air Force turned its attention to airfields and harbours and lines of communications in Sicily, Sardinia and Italy. Notable among these attacks is that on 18th on the harbour at Olbia when 105 B.26's, the largest force of the type to operate in any area at that date, scored hits on three M.V.s. One steamer was sunk while two steamers, the wharf, the landing stage, H.Q. were hit. This day saw the enemy's most intensive effort to intercept the Allied bombers. The marshalling yards at Naples, Cancelli, Salerno, and Battipaglia were successfully bombed on 21 June. The enemy reaction ~~reaction~~ to the growing strength of Allied raids varied considerably. Whereas on 25th 136 B.17's despatched to attack Messina were attacked by close on a hundred enemy fighters, on 29th 109 B.17's attacking Leghorn met no opposition.

The Air Offensive Intensified

N.A.T.A.F.,
O.R.B.
Appendices
July 1943

The operations of the Tactical Air Force during the month of July, can be divided into the following phases, all of which formed part of operation 'Husky' and involved heavy scale air effort in support of bombing operations aimed at the capture of Sicily:-

- (a) The initial phase: 1 July - 8 July. Counter enemy air action, the bombing of landing grounds in Sicily in conjunction with the Strategic Air Force.
- (b) The assault phase: 9 July - 14 July. Maximum effort by fighters and fighter-bombers to assist the bombing operations.
- (c) Intermediate phase: 15 July - 31 July. Continued effort by fighters and fighter-bombers directed against enemy communication targets. Bombers employed by day, at Army request, on similar targets and by night mainly against road movement or selected static objectives.

Throughout all these phases the operation of the Tactical and Strategic Air Forces were closely co-ordinated. From D-Day two Lightning Groups were allocated to the Tactical Air Force from the Strategic Air Force. During the month the opposition of the Axis Air Force steadily decreased, and as a result the Allies were able to direct a greater proportion of the air effort against ground targets.

The Air Officer Commanding the Tactical Air Force accompanied the Fifteenth Army Group Headquarters to Malta on D minus four day and directed the employment of the air forces located in Malta through the Air Officer Commanding Malta and returned to the mainland on D plus six day. The operations from the mainland were controlled by the Tactical Air Force Headquarters at La Marsa which were in continuous contact with the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief at the Mediterranean Air Command Post.

The Initial Phase

By July the 33rd Fighter Group (Kittyhawk) had been moved to Pantelleria and the 31st Fighter Group (Spitfire) to Gozo Island. By 3 July all Spitfire units had been transferred to, and placed, (until they moved to Sicily) under the operational control of the Air Officer Commanding Malta, for their part in operation 'Husky'. The fighter-bombers of XII Air Support Command, the bombers of the Tactical Bomber Force, and the 324th Fighter Group, remained stationed on landing grounds in the Cap Bon area.

From these airfields operations by the Tactical Bomber Force began on 1 July on a small scale, covered by Kittyhawks based in North Africa, making daily raids on landing grounds in western Sicily, while Mustangs of XII Air Support Command bombed German troop concentrations reported in the Marsala area. These raids were opposed by enemy fighters which continued to operate throughout this phase from three landing grounds in western Sicily. Sweeps were made from Malta over the south-eastern end of the island with the object of wearing down the enemy fighters and affording cover for the medium and heavy bombers of the Strategic Air Force based in North Africa during the preliminary bombing of Axis landing grounds in the Comiso and Gerbini areas.

N.A.T.A.F.
Int./Opsum
No.87, 3 July.
A.H.B./ILJ1/
311/4/5.

On 3 July operations were intensified and despite intense 'flak' over enemy airfields repeated attacks were made by aircraft of the Tactical Bomber Force escorted by Kittyhawks of the 33rd and 324th Fighter Groups (U.S.). Eleven Bostons of the 47th Bomber Group dropped nineteen 300 lb. bombs and one hundred and fifty 20 lb. fragmentation bombs on Sciacca which started a large fire followed by a series of explosions.

Ibid

At Milo, 12 Bostons, and 12 Baltimores of No.3 (S.A.A.F.) Bomber Wing scored hits on aircraft shelters and damaged the landing area of the airfield. Thirty-six Mitchells of the 340th Bomb. Group dropped 300 lb. and 250 lb. bombs on Comiso. Twelve Kittyhawks of the 33rd Fighter Group escorting the raid on Sciacca engaged 12 to 15 Me.109's which singly and determinedly attacked the bombers, ignoring their own 'flak', and, followed them for twenty miles out to sea on their return journey. The escorts to the raid on Milo were intercepted before reaching the target by 12 Me.109's and F.W.190's. 324th Fighter Group's Kittyhawks engaged successfully, but in the second attack two Baltimores were shot down as the bombers were reforming. At the end of the day claims were made of four Me.109's destroyed and five damaged. Allied losses were four Baltimores, one Boston, and one Kittyhawk.

N.A.T.A.F.
Int/Opsum
A.H.B./ILJ1/
311/4/5

That night the Tactical Bomber Force, helped by a waxing moon, began an increased scale of effort against airfields. Comiso was attacked by 15 Bostons of No.326 Wing and 22 Mitchells of the 12th (U.S.) Bomb. Group. One hundred and forty-eight 250 lb., one hundred and twenty 40 lb., and fifty-six 300 lb. bombs were dropped as well as seven hundred 24 lb. incendiaries. One Boston and two Mitchells were lost.

The next day, 23 Bostons of 47th (U.S.) Bomb. Group successfully bombed Sciacca despite meeting with 20 enemy aircraft over the target area. Forty-six Mitchells of the 12th and 47th (U.S.) Bomb. Group raided Comiso, and at Milo 12 Baltimores of No.232 Wing started a large fire on the airfield on which 40 single-engined and twin-engined aircraft were seen. Twenty-four Mustangs of the 27th (U.S.) Bomb. Group also shot up the airfields at Milo and Sciacca encountering heavy 'flak'. Twelve Mustangs from the same group strafed the airfield at Castelvetro. The escort to the bombing raids on Sciacca and Milo, some 60 Kittyhawks of the 324th (U.S.) Fighter Group were attacked by more than 30 Me.109's and ten M.C.202's. Seven enemy aircraft were claimed destroyed or damaged for the loss of four Kittyhawks.

The Strategic Air Force bombed the Catania - Gerbini area from 1100 hours until 1700 hours, escorted by relays of Spitfires from Malta. Strong enemy fighter opposition was encountered and by the end of the day nine enemy aircraft were claimed for the loss of three Spitfires.

At night 24 Bostons, 6 Baltimores and 23 Mitchells released 39 tons of bombs on Sciacca landing-ground. Pathfinders illuminated the target prior to the attack and incendiaries kept the illumination going but the bombing was rather scattered owing to bad visibility. Some enemy night fighters were seen but no contact was established.

On 5 July Fortresses of the Strategic Air Force attacking the main airfield at Gerbini encountered over 100 enemy aircraft and claimed to have destroyed 45 of these against the

loss of three Fortress aircraft. Thirty-six Mitchells of the 340th (U.S.) Bomb. Group bombed Comiso with two hundred and eighty-seven 250 lb., and one hundred and twenty-six 300 lb. bombs meeting slight opposition from six enemy aircraft. In the afternoon 24 Mitchells of the 12th (U.S.) Bomb. Group dropped one hundred and ninety-four 250 lb. and ninety-six 300 lb. bombs on Biscari landing ground. Malta controlled fighters escorted both these raids. Thirty-six Mustangs of the 27th (U.S.) Bomb. Group were unable to locate Sciacca landing ground owing to haze. Twelve of these bombed the harbour instead while the remainder attacked railway bridges but claimed no hits. On the night of the 5/6 July 21 Mitchells and 7 Bostons bombed Biscari. Fires were seen in the target area and an ammunition dump was exploded. Twelve Bostons and five Baltimores raided Milo. Pathfinders again illuminated the targets and several enemy night fighters were seen.

The next day, 6 July, 86 tons of bombs were dropped by Bostons, Baltimores and Mitchells on Sciacca, Milo, Comiso and Biscari. Seventy Kittyhawks provided an escort to the Milo/Sciacca raids where no opposition was met; four Me.109's intercepted the raid on Comiso but without result. The Strategic Air Force again attacked Gerbini landing grounds and made another raid on Biscari. Very heavy 'flak' was reported over all these targets except at Gerbini. Five separate sorties were made by a total of 59 Mustangs on enemy radar stations. The bombing was reported as successful and several direct hits were claimed. The weather was bad on the night of the 6/7 July so that the Tactical Bomber Force made only one raid in which seven tons of bombs were dropped on Sciacca.

During the next day (7th) the Force raided Milo, Biscari, Comiso and Chinisia/Borizzo airfields with excellent results. Twenty-four Kittyhawks of the 324th Fighter Group escorting the Bostons to Chinisia Borizzo successfully intercepted 12 Me.109's. Earlier in the day 24 aircraft of the same group together with 23 Kittyhawks of the 325th (U.S.) Group (N.A.S.A.F.) escorted the Baltimores to Milo. These encountered 11 Me.109's and M.C.202's and foiled an attack on the bombers. Four enemy aircraft were claimed for the loss of one Allied fighter.

The attack on the radar station at Marsala was continued by seven Mustangs. Photographs(1) showed that the area had been heavily cratered, the Freya middle station damaged, and the Giant Wurzburg probably damaged by near misses. Porto Empedocle was also attacked by Mustangs of the 27th (U.S.) Bomb. Group and claims were made for two direct hits on gun positions. In the night Wellingtons of the Strategic Air Force bombed Comiso and Catania causing fires and explosions, while the Tactical Bomber Force dropped 26 tons of bombs on Comiso and Sciacca airfields.

On the 8th 111 tons of bombs were dropped on Sciacca, Comiso and Biscari by 12 Baltimores of No.232 Wing, 11 Bostons of No.85 Squadron, 46 Mitchells of the 340th (U.S.) Bomb. Group and 24 Mitchells of the 12th (U.S.) Bomb. Group. Thirty-six Kittyhawks of No.342 Group escorted the Baltimores to Sciacca and in the afternoon 35 Kittyhawks from the same

(1) Taken by the 111th (U.S.) Squadron.

Group escorting Bostons were attacked over Sciacca by more than 35 Me.109's and F.W.190's. Seven enemy aircraft were reported destroyed or damaged for the loss of three Kittyhawks plus one damaged.

Fortresses of the Strategic Air Force made a series of attacks on Gerbini and its satellite landing grounds escorted by Lightnings. One sortie was attacked by 20 Me.109's, but the others were not opposed. Fifty-nine Strategic Marauders also attacking Gerbini were attacked by two Me.109's and claimed to have destroyed one of them. Twenty-four Lightnings strafed radar stations at Pachino peninsula and one to the south of Catania. Mustangs had a very successful day in strafing and bombing attacks on railway junctions, road intersections, power plants and radar targets. By the end of the day 15 enemy aircraft were claimed as destroyed, the Allied total losses being two Kittyhawks, one Wellington and two Fortresses.

Intelligence reported that three more satellite landing grounds were in use at Gerbini and a new landing ground near Canicatti had been discovered. At night 67 Wellingtons of the Strategic Air Force raided Catania, Comiso and Gerbini airfields and the Tactical Bomber Force dropped 34 tons of bombs on Milo and Sciacca.

The next day, the 9 July (D minus one day) activity was confined to the morning when 73 tons of bombs were released on Sciacca, Milo and Biscari by 32 Bostons of the 47th (U.S.) Bomb. Group. Eight enemy aircraft were encountered, one of which was destroyed and three damaged. One Boston was lost and seven damaged. 'Flak' over Sciacca and Milo was reported as intense and accurate. A suspected enemy headquarters at Taormina was attacked by Mustangs of the 27th and 86th (U.S.) Fighter Groups. One hundred and eighty-six 600 lb. bombs were dropped with good results and direct hits were made on the hotel which accommodated the enemy staffs. Fifty-four Maureaders raided Palazzolo, Piazza and Armbuni without loss. Twenty-three Lightnings bombed the Pozzallo area and the radar station at Cape Passero. In all 23 enemy aircraft were claimed as destroyed or damaged for the loss of ten Allied aircraft.

N.A.T.A.F.
Int./Opsum
No.90.
A.H.B./IIJ1/
311/4/5

As a result of this phase of the operations the enemy air force was mainly confined to the use of Milo and Sciacca airfields in the west and the Gerbini airfields in the east. Castelvetro, Palermo, Chinisia/Borizzo and Biscari were practically abandoned. The enemy fighters were virtually defeated and enemy air opposition largely neutralized by losses and by the damage to the Sicilian airfields. The enemy's communication facilities for the supply and reinforcement of Sicily had been seriously impaired.

As the Allies moved into the Sicilian airfields after the invasion they were able to count the number of enemy aircraft left behind on the landing grounds for various reasons. The total number amounted to nearly one thousand and comprised for the most part German single-engined and twin-engined fighters with Me.109's much in the majority, augmented by a good many Italian aircraft especially M.C.200's and 202's.

The following instances are cited:-

Airfield	Number of Aircraft	Remarks
Sciacca	122	Half German and half Italian.
Castelvetro	121	Rather more German than Italian.
Comiso	108	Very few Italian.
Biscari	35	Majority F.W.190's.
Milo	130	Only a few Italian.
Chinisia/Borizzo	90	A number of Me.110's.

It is of course possible that some of these aircraft had been destroyed or rendered unserviceable by the enemy to prevent them falling into Allied hands. But the results were the same and can be fairly described as losses 'due to enemy action.'

Strategic Night Bombing 1 July - D Day.

On 1 July the objectives of No.205 Group⁽¹⁾ were the marshalling yards and military installations at Palermo and Cagliari. On the 2nd Trapani and Olbia, on the 3rd Trapani and Cagliari were ordered but bad weather conditions were forecast for Cagliari so that the whole effort was diverted to Trapani while three aircraft from No.331 Wing distributed a million leaflets over Rome.

On the 4th night attacks were made on shipping in Catania harbour and on the landing ground at Villacidro. Over Catania there was 7/10 cloud at 11,000 feet and some more low cloud and thick haze below that and the bombing was not very accurate. Over Villacidro the weather was so bad that only one aircraft claimed to have identified the target.

The weather was still bad on the night of the 5/6 July so that the Group effort was reduced to ten aircraft from No.236 Wing and twenty from Nos.330 and 331 Wings combined. These aircraft attacked the Gerbini landing grounds but the amount of damage effected was problematical.

On the 6/7th attacks were made on Palermo, Villacidro, Milis and Pablionis but bad weather still hampered the operations.

On the night of the 7/8th 90 aircraft were^{to be} employed, 25 ~~thirty six~~ from No.231 Wing, 12 from No.236 Wing, 25 from No.330 Wing and ~~28 same number~~ from No.331 Wing. Nos. 231 and 236 Wings attacked the Gerbini landing grounds and buildings were seen to be on fire but results generally were unobserved.

(1) No.205 Medium Bomber Group (Wellington) under the command of Air Commodore J. H. T. Simpson was, at the end of June 1943, composed of the following units:-

No.231 Wing Nos. 37, 40, and 70 Squadrons.
 No.236 Wing No. 104 Squadron.
 No.330 Wing(1) Nos. 142 and 150 Squadrons.
 No.331 Wing(1) (R.C.A.F.) Nos. 420, 424, and 425 Squadrons, and No.2 Mobile Photographic unit (detached from the 3rd Photographic Group). This Group operated under the control of the Strategic Air Force its role being night bombing, night photography, and the dropping of leaflets. Its airfields were located in the Kairouan area.

Catania airfield was attacked by 27 aircraft of No.331 Wing. Most of the crews identified the target visually with flares and were satisfied that the bombing was successful.

Twenty-four Wellingtons of Nos.330 and 231 Wings attacked Comiso airfield, but only seven crews claimed that the bombing had been at all accurate.

N.A.T.A.F.
Int./Opsum
No.90.

The next night 8/9th the same targets were again ordered to be attacked by a total of ninety aircraft. Three waves of 10 aircraft each were to attack the airfields at Gerbini, Catania and Comiso exactly at the times allocated namely at 2320, 0145, and 0230 hours. Haze again made identification of targets difficult but 21 aircraft succeeded in finding and bombing Gerbini, 25 attacked Catania and 26 bombed Comiso. Only the Comiso attack was regarded as a 'fairly certain success', most of the other aircraft on the other two targets bombed on 'estimated positions'. Two Wellingtons were reported as missing as a result of all these night operations.

Ibid

On the night of the 9/10th July (D minus one day), over 100 Wellingtons of No.205 Group operated. Fifty-five attacked the Syracuse Isthmus in clear weather and good visibility. All bombs were reported to have been dropped in the target area though 'no other results were noticeable.' Five Wellingtons attacked the seaplane base there most successfully, direct hits being obtained including one on a hangar. Nineteen aircraft bombed Catania and bursts were seen across the town and docks but 'results were not seen.' In addition, 15 Wellingtons attacked suspected enemy concentrations at Palazzolo, Caltanissetta, Canicatti and Caltagirone. Very little opposition was encountered and good fires were started.

Protection of 'Husky' Convoys.

Spitfire squadrons based on Malta provided fighter cover and also escort for approximately 2,000 ships which converged on Malta from the west, south, and south-east during their approach to Sicily. The general plan was to employ two-thirds of the available fighter effort on the close escort of the convoys when they came within 50 miles west of the south of Malta. The remainder of the fighter force was employed over enemy airfields in the south of Sicily, giving close escort and top cover to bomber formations operating from north-west Africa. These commitments required each squadron to fly two squadron sorties during the day, which left the pilots and ground crews fresh for the assault on the following days. None of the convoys were attacked from the air during the hours of daylight, nor were they reconnoitred.

Ibid

To protect the convoys after dark, fighter intruders operated throughout the night over occupied enemy airfields in Sicily and southern Italy. A.I. equipped Beaufighters and half a squadron of A.I. Mosquitos were employed throughout the night on a service between the enemy airfields and the advancing convoys. These aircraft operated under the G.C.I. Stations operating on Malta, and also under the G.C.I. Station carried in the Tank Landing ships.

Operations of the Tactical Air Force at the beginning of the Assault phase.

N.A.T.A.F.,
O.R.B.
Appendix
and Int/Opsum
No.93

On 9 July (D minus one day) Tactical Air Force fighter-bombers concentrated on objectives calculated to dislocate the enemy's communications and to prevent the movement of enemy reserves to the assault area. During the day road and rail transport, the enemy headquarters at Taormina, anti-aircraft positions and port facilities on the south coast were the main objectives. Attacks on airfields and enemy occupied towns behind the launching beaches were made by the Tactical Bomber Force and the Strategic Air Force. Much air fighting took place and claims were made that ten Me.109's and one F.W.190 had been destroyed. An additional 12 Me.109's were reported as damaged. The Allies lost four Bostons, four Kittyhawks and two Mustangs.

N.A.T.A.F.
Int/Opsum
No.94

During the night the Tactical Bomber Force concentrated operations in raids on Milo airfield, where a petrol dump fire was started which could be seen from seventy miles away; other good fires were started as a result of another raid on Sciacca. Diversions in connection with the dropping of paratroops and bombing of the communication centres at Canicatti, Caltagirons, Palazzolo and Niscemi were undertaken with excellent results; targets being located in a clear moonlight night and many fires being started. An incendiary attack on Ponte Olivo to make a beacon for the paratroops was highly successful. Dummy parachutists were dropped by the Tactical Bomber Force in the Ponte Olivo area and near Catania.

The Pre-dawn Airborne Assault

The seaborne invasion, timed to begin at first light on 10 July, was preceded by an airborne assault by the Troop Carrier Command. (Operation Ladbroke and Husky I).

A.H.B./IIJ5/81

The object of the Ladbroke sortie was to release glider-borne troops of the British First Division (Airborne) to attack and hold strategic positions south of Syracuse. One hundred and thirty-seven towcraft hauling the same number of gliders were employed, taking off from airfields in the neighbourhood of Kairouan. Fighter cover was provided by Beaufighters, Hurricanes, and Airacobras of the First Air Defence Wing (Malta). No aircraft was lost but a wind stronger than had been expected made operations hazardous and 50 gliders failed to reach the shore. As a diversion to Ladbroke, and seventy minutes before release time, Catania was subjected to a naval bombardment and an air attack by 11 Wellingtons. Forty minutes later dummy parachutists were dropped by the Tactical Bomber force as has already been described.

Ibid

The object of Husky I was to drop parachute troops of the American 82nd Airborne Division to neutralize pill-boxes and gun positions and hold strategic points in the Gela area. Two hundred and twenty-six Dakotas escorted by fighters of the First Air Defence Wing were employed and only eight aircraft failed to return. Diversionary bombing and the dropping of dummies was also employed for this sortie and Malta provided visual and radio aids for both operations.

Both these airborne operations were a comparative failure, but the few airborne troops and parachutists who landed in the right places at the right time contributed to the success of the landings.(1)

(1) See A.H.B. Monograph, 'Airborne Forces' - A.P.3231.

Further Air Operations on the night 9 - 10 July

Report by A.O.C.
Malta
A.H.B./IIJ5/101/5

From Malta during the night, Mosquitos intruded against enemy bomber airfields in Sicily and Italy to screen the approaching invasion forces. Hurricanes operated against searchlights in south-eastern Sicily to cover the parachute landings and Beaufighters and Mosquitos flew covering patrols off the Sicilian coast. Although two Hurricanes failed to return, no enemy reaction was reported.

Radar
Countermeasures
A.H.B./IIJ5/86/49

At the same time 12 Fortresses, equipped with anti-radar devices preceded the two main parachute attacks over the coast of Sicily and then kept up a continuous patrol at a distance of about eight miles from the coast at a height of about 1,000 feet, between Licata and Syracuse. In addition six Wellingtons also equipped with anti-radar devices patrolled 30 miles from the coast between the same places and at a height of 8-10,000 feet. By these means it was hoped that the enemy radar would be rendered ineffective.

Enemy Air Reaction on the night 9-10 July

Extracts from 'Y' Service log on the night of the 9/10 July show that German aircraft were active. At 22.10 hours a night fighter reported having sighted five bombers 'apparently full of people.' At 00.15 hours a reconnaissance aircraft reported the presence of an Allied convoy ten miles south-west of Licata steering an easterly course. At 00.20 hours another reported one Allied convoy 50 miles south of Sciacca which had been seen at about midnight. At 03.20 hours 20 ships and 250 smaller craft were reported between Malta and Sicily at 02.20 hours. At 04.40 hours a German reconnaissance aircraft sighted several large ships off the coast and dropped flares. Finally at 05.35 hours a German bomber broadcast a warning of the presence of Spitfires.

CHAPTER 3

THE ASSAULT AND ADVANCE TO CATANIA

To take Sicily the Allies had to deal with an enemy air force and army of considerable potential strength and with an Italian Navy whose impotence though suspected could not be relied upon. The enemy had 267,000 Italian and 60,000 German front line troops making in all five good quality coastal divisions and six field divisions. Enemy armoured strength consisted of 180 German tanks and another 150 poor quality Italian armoured fighting vehicles. These forces were disposed so that the poorer quality troops held the coastline while the better field divisions were left in reserve inland to deal with any threatened attack.

In the air the Axis had over 300 German fighters, approximately 130 German fighter bombers and ground attack aircraft plus nearly 200 Italian fighters based in Sicily and the Toe of Italy, while within easy reach on Sardinia were a further 70 German and 130 Italian fighters. The Axis long range bomber force in southern and central Italy consisted of approximately 300 German and 150 Italian bombers. In the event of an invasion the Axis could call on reinforcements from some 400 Italian fighters based in central and northern Italy and over 100 German fighters which were deployed in the Balkans. The long range bomber force could be augmented by a further 100 German bombers in north-west Italy and southern France and approximately the same number of Italian bombers which were based in northern Italy.⁽¹⁾ These were strong forces but it remained to be seen whether the enemy would be able to keep serviceable sufficient airfields for their employment against the Allies.

Axis preparations

Malta Int.
Summary July
1943
A.H.B/IILJ5/94/1
and 'Rise &
Fall of the
German Air
Force.'
(A.M. Pamphlet
248)

On 7 July, General Galland, the Luftwaffe A.O.C. Fighters, was reported to have joined Feldmarschall Kesselring and General Richthofen⁽²⁾ at the German Air Force Headquarters in southern Sicily and Axis reports on 8 July stated that the Allied preparations were complete and that a landing was probable within forty-eight hours. The enemy, however, could not be certain of the Allied objective. He knew when but not where. Even after the first blow had fallen the Axis did not know where to expect the second and as late as 10 July the 'Transocean' reported that the main weight of the Allied attack was against western Sicily.

Ibid

This uncertainty was reflected in the widespread areas covered prior to the invasion by Ju. 88 reconnaissance aircraft which patrolled the whole of the Mediterranean between the north Algerian coast and the southern approaches to Greece and Crete. Curiously enough, Malta appears to have been neglected and the only attempt at reconnaissance before D-Day was on 2 July when seven enemy fighters made a fast high flying sweep over the island. Prisoners -

(1) See Appendices for G.A.F. Order of Battle and I.A.F. Strength.

(2) Commander of Luftflotte 2 in the Central Mediterranean.

taken later - reported that at 1600 hours on the 7th a Ju. 88 based at Frosinone took off from Crotone, its advanced landing ground, to search for invasion units north and east of Malta, but owing to engine trouble crashed into the sea. In spite of fair weather conditions, it appears that the first sighting of the Allied assembled invading forces was just before midnight on D minus one day when an Allied convoy was reported 15 miles south of Licata and steering an easterly course. Italian prisoners stated that their divisional headquarters had broadcast a state of alarm following the report of a convoy having been seen heading for Syracuse.

The enemy's lack of preparation and his failure to reconnoitre the Allied forces was demonstrated by the statement of an Italian infantryman captured near Pachino who said that although a state of alarm had been declared, similar alarms had been given so many times previously that no exceptional measures were taken.⁽¹⁾

By D-Day, the enemy had only about 200 fighters in Sicily. Five days earlier, enemy fighter strength had been about 340 but by D-Day many of these had been driven north by the North African bombers and their fighter escorts from Malta. The 200 fighters present were evenly divided between the south-eastern and north-western airfields. Frantic attempts had been made in the preceding weeks to build an airfield at Licata and to construct more landing strips at Gerbini and new ones at Termini and Carcitella but the airfield shortage had remained acute and during the Allied bombing raids German fighters on patrol had often found that they had no serviceable airfield to which they could return and land. This led to a considerable curtailment of the enemy fighter effort.

The Approach to Assault Beaches

The armada bearing the invasion forces converged on Malta during the morning of 9 July, D minus one day. Some 2,000 ships ranging from battleships and large troop transports to L.C.T.s and motor launches, moved steadily towards the island from the west, the south, and the south-east. As each convoy came within 50 miles of Malta, so fighter cover was provided continuously throughout the hours of daylight. The skies for a large radius round the island swarmed with Spitfires but no enemy attack materialised. Some two-thirds of the available day fighter force was employed continuously on the work of shipping protection. The remainder were used in close support and top cover to bombers operating from Libya and Tunisia against enemy airfields.

The Assault

The seaborne invasion was timed to reach the beaches at dawn. The area of Sicily chosen for the attack was the south-east corner of the island. Eight beaches had been chosen, and each had been given a code name. They were as follows:-

(1) On 8 July a general alarm had been sent out and cancelled and the same procedure had been observed again on the 9th.

- (i) Acid North: from Cape Murro di Porco to Avola.
- (ii) Acid South: from a point south of Avola to a point half way between Calabernardo and Marzamemi.
- (iii) Bark East: a short stretch of coast northwards from Marzamemi.
- (iv) Bark Middle: from Cape Passero to Cape Correnti.
- (v) Bark West: from Pozzallo eastward to a point on the coast south of Pachino.
- (vi) Cent: from Marpina eastward up the coast for some twenty miles.
- (vii) Dime: a short stretch of coast on either side of Gela.
- (viii) Joss: a longer stretch on either side of Licata.

Beaches numbers (i) - (v) were to be assaulted by troops from the British Eighth Army under General Montgomery, air defence being supplied by ten R.A.F. Spitfire squadrons based on Malta. Beaches numbers (vi) - (viii) were to be attacked by the American Seventh Army under General Patton, air defence being given at beach (vi) by five R.A.F. Spitfire squadrons based on Malta. At beach (vii) the 31st Fighter Group (U.S.) equipped with Spitfires and based on the Island of Gozo were to protect the landings, and at beach (viii) the American 33rd Fighter Group (Warhawks) based on the Island of Pantelleria were to perform the same service.

The landings at Acid North and South were to be made with the object of capturing the port of Syracuse. The Bark landings objectives were the taking of the landing ground at Pachino and support of the Acid assaults. The Cent landings were to be made to capture the Comiso airfield and the Dime landings to take the landing grounds at Ponte Olivo, Biscari and Gela. At Licata the task was to capture the port and the nearby landing ground.

The British Landings at Acid and Bark Beaches

The seaborne invasion forces arrived off the Sicilian coast shortly before 0630 hours on 10 July 1943, and at once under cover of heavy fire from the Eastern Naval Task Force began to get troops ashore. Opposition to the Eighth Army was confined to elements of an Italian Division which were overcome with ease; their morale was low and no real effort was made to oppose the landings. In the 5th Division sector a field of Teller mines had been laid, but the Italians had not armed them, while other mined areas still exhibited warning signs. Prisoners voluntarily helped to land stores and ammunition.

There had been little air activity. At about 1015 hours ten Ju. 88's and some F.W. 190's attacked ineffectively shipping in the Acid sector. In the afternoon a few more attacks were made but in the evening beaches and ships in nearly all sectors were bombed though very little damage was done. At about 2205 hours the hospital ship Talamba lying more than five miles out off the Cassibile beaches and fully illuminated was bombed and sunk.

Considering the size of the forces landed, the unfavourable weather, and the potentialities of the defences, the

(W.D.)
F.J.118
Sec. 4.

assault was accomplished with very small losses in men and material. The British casualties of all kinds were about 800 of which 500 were suffered by the First Airborne Division.

The American landings on Cent, Dime and Joss beaches

The Seventh Army met with greater difficulties and serious air opposition. At 0245 hours on D-Day the first waves landed on the beaches under machine gun and medium artillery fire. Supporting warships fired rockets at the batteries and destroyers engaged enemy searchlights. It was noted that the enemy air force mobile beacon near Scoglitti was still in operation assisting the return of Axis aircraft.

At 0424 hours Me.109's, Ju.88's and Italian fighter bombers began dropping flares and attacking the troops in the Cent area. Dive bombers attacked the Philadelphia and Jefferson; which compelled the cruisers to launch their spotting aircraft. A little later the air attack spread to the Joss area where the beaches and landing craft were shot up by fighter bombers and Ju.88's and the Sentinel⁽¹⁾ was hit by a dive bomber and damaged. Then the Maddox was sunk by a bomb in the Dime area. The ships aircraft did what they could to prevent these attacks but were naturally unable to accomplish very much, but the Swanson managed to shoot down a Me.110 with her anti-aircraft guns. It was not until 0515 hours that the Spitfire cover arrived and were greeted with heavy anti-aircraft fire from the American ships who engaged all aircraft indiscriminately.

At 0535 hours the shore batteries opened fire on Biscayne who retaliated by shelling the town of Licata. Other enemy batteries shelled the Dime beaches near Gela with accuracy. By 0826 hours all landings in the Cent area were successfully accomplished; German tanks advancing into the Dime area were fired on by the American warship. But enemy shelling of the town and pier at Licata made the Joss landings difficult.

In the early afternoon all the beaches were strafed by Me.109's. The Naval Commander (C.T.F.86) sent out an urgent request for fighter cover and it was reported that three of the cruiser's spotter aircraft (S.O.C.) had already been shot down. Raids by F.W.190's and Me.109's continued sporadically on all the beaches. Anti-aircraft firing was wild and uncontrolled so much so that at about 1415 hours a friendly Spitfire coming in to make a forced landing in the Cent area was accidentally shot down in flames by an L.S.T.

During the afternoon the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean arrived in the area and urgent representations were made to him for more effective air support. But the enemy continued to make attacks from greater altitudes. At 1930 hours the 1st Infantry Division reported that it had been subjected to dive bombing for over two hours and made request for more fighter cover. Enemy air attacks continued throughout the night and at 0635 hours the next morning, i.e. 11th, the transports in the Dime area were attacked by thirteen dive bombers. They achieved a near miss on the flagship Monrovia and damaged the transport ships Barnett, Orizaba and Dickman.

(1) She sank five hours later.

At 0738 hours the fighter cover arrived just after yet another raid on the Joss beaches had been completed. But at 0810 hours another six enemy aircraft again raided the Joss shipping and sank L.S.T.158 by a direct hit. Shortly after this the Savannah reported the loss of all her spotting aircraft. At about 1012 hours enemy artillery and tanks began to fire on the transport ships but were silenced by fire from the warships.

Air raids continued until at 1546 hours the Dime area was attacked by 16 F.W.200 and He.111 bombers accompanied by about eight fighters. The fighters came in low to shoot up the beaches, while the bombers made a high level attack on the shipping. Several fires were started on the beaches, and the Robert Rowan, a Liberty ship loaded with ammunition, was hit and went on fire.

The raiding continued. Enemy formations of 16 or more aircraft continually attacked the shipping including a convoy from the Joss beach after it had left Licata for Bizerta. After dark the Dime area, where the Robert Rowan was still burning brightly, was again attacked. At 2220 hours when yet another raid was developing the night fighters arrived and dispersed it. Another attack in the Cent area was also driven off at 2250 hours. But at 2310 hours there was a low flying attack on the Cent beaches, and another at 2335 hours on the Dime area. Just before midnight the 1st Infantry Division reported that heavy bombing had been experienced in the Dime sector and that the damage had been serious and costly and made requests again for more fighter protection.

Early the following morning (D plus two i.e. 12th) the 1st Infantry Division captured Ponte Olivo landing ground, (1) the taking of those at Comiso (2) and Ragusa had already been reported, but 'hit and run' raids were continued by the enemy for the rest of that day.

Author's
comment

The contrast between the air opposition offered to the British and American landings is most interesting. It suggests that the Axis expected a landing in the western part of the island and had made preparation to meet it. It is surprising to note the large number of sorties the enemy were able to make in view of the heavy scale bombing to which their airfields had been subjected in the preliminary phase of operation Husky, and finally one is forced to conclude that the American fighters failed in their task of protecting the shipping and the troops on the beaches.

Air cover

It had been decided in view of the expected enemy reaction that Malta based fighters should operate at one squadron strength (12 aircraft) but, as at this strength no continuous cover of all beaches was possible throughout the 16 hours of daylight, the following programmes were agreed:-

- (1) Valuable underground bulk fuel storage tanks were found at Ponte Olivo on D plus 3 i.e. 13 July with a capacity of 42,000 gallons.
- (2) A cache of 16,000 gallons of oil and 13,000 gallons of petrol was discovered at Comiso on 18 July. (Seventh Army Summary of Operations).

(a) Continuous fighter cover over two beaches throughout daylight.

(b) All landing areas to have continuous protection for the first two hours of daylight, from 1030 to 1230 hours and from 1600 to 1730 hours, and for the last one and a half hours of daylight.

(c) A Reserve Wing to be kept at a high degree of readiness to reinforce patrols as needed.

On the day of the invasion Spitfires and Kittyhawks flew 1,092 sorties. The cover proved effective and the actual number of ships successfully attacked by enemy aircraft was only twelve. Most of these losses occurred in the Joss and Dime areas over which the air attack was stronger than on other beaches and where the anchoring of ships as far as six miles out from the shore had over-stretched the fighter patrols and enabled the enemy to get through the screen.

Allied air activity on D-Day (10 July 1943)

Malta Analysis
of day fighter
ops.
A.H.B./ILJ5/
101/5

Malta records show that on D-Day only one engagement took place between the enemy and the American fighter units. Ten Warhawks of the 33rd Fighter Group patrolling over the beaches east of Licata during the late afternoon saw some 14 Me.109's dropping bombs on the shipping from about 8,000 feet. The Warhawks engaged the enemy and claimed to have shot down two and damaged two more. Eleven Spitfires of No. 242 Squadron (No. 322 Wing) had their first fight of the day at 0450 hours, when a He.111 machine gunning the landing craft was shot down in flames. A little later a Ju.88 was damaged, and later still one M.C.200 was shot down. No.93 Squadron (No.324 Wing), No.145 Squadron (No. 244 Wing), No.154 Squadron (No.322 Wing), No.92 Squadron (No.244 Wing), No.1435 Squadron (Malta Wing) and No.43 Squadron (No.324 Wing) were all engaged in air fighting during D-Day. Spitfires claimed to have shot down 12 enemy aircraft, probably destroyed three and damaged eleven. Allied losses were 11 aircraft.

The last action of the day took place at 1930 hours, when 12 Spitfires of No.229 Squadron (Malta Wing) on patrol over the beaches south of Syracuse attacked eight M.C.200's at sea level. The Macchi aircraft fled for home but the Spitfires had no difficulty in overtaking them and three were shot down and one probably destroyed.

Malta Int.
Summary
A.H.B./ILJ5/
94/1

Malta Spitfires throughout the day saw no more than a total of 57 enemy fighters escorting their bombers whilst their own fighter effort totalled over 1,000 sorties. Enemy effort was slight and dispirited, usually he avoided air fighting whenever possible. The Italian Fighters concentrated on standing patrols in the Catania area and on the only occasion in which they ventured to come south were met by No.229 Squadron, with the results already recorded above.

The enemy's situation

While German bombers were making ineffective efforts to penetrate the Allied fighter screen over the beaches, other Ju.88's were continuing their reconnaissance patrols off Cap Bon, in the Ionian Sea, and over the battle area. The German Command was still concerned with the possibility of an invasion of north-west Sicily. But it was too late.

Although the German Air Force was to redouble its effort on the following day Allied air supremacy was already assured. By dusk on 10 July the Army had taken Syracuse, Pachino landing ground, and Licata. The coastal troops so far encountered had been of poor quality.

Recognition difficulties

A.H.B./IJ/
101/5

An unfortunate feature of D-Day and later days was the extent to which Allied ships fired on the patrolling fighters. Patrols had been ordered at 5-8,000 feet but at these heights the aircraft were continually engaged by A.A. fire. They were thus forced up to 10-14,000 feet. Even there they were often fired upon. No Spitfire was known to have been shot down but a number were hit and damaged.⁽¹⁾ During D-Day the Malta Reserve Wing was not called upon for assistance in shipping protection but it provided cover for medium bombers attacking the south Sicilian airfields.

Ibid

The Forward Control Links

After nightfall the protection of the convoys was taken over by fighter intruder patrols which throughout the night ranged over enemy airfields in Sicily and southern Italy.

An interesting experiment was tried out in controlling these intruder aircraft, Beaufighters and Mosquitos. Three G.C.I. stations, mounted on Tank Landing Ships, off the beaches at Acid, Bark and Dime, were used as forward links for the G.C.I. Malta. The control proved extremely effective both on this night and subsequently when enemy aircraft operated in numbers against the shipping and beaches.

In addition to the floating G.C.I.s, 'Headquarter Ships' acted as forward fighter controls, thus:

- (1) Acid: Bulolo
- (ii) Bark: Largs (with Hilary in reserve)
- (iii) Cent: Ancon
- (iv) Joss and Dime: Monrovia with two subsidiary ships Biscayne and Samuel Chase.

These Headquarters Ships directed fighters mainly by the 'informative' method, passing information from radar plots or visual observations, supplemented by 'Y' service information. They played a similar role after darkness, handing the night fighters over to the G.C.I.s, either floating or ashore, as necessary. The Fighter Controllers were linked to Malta and the other Headquarter Ships by R/T.

By the evening of D-Day, a G.C.I. station had been disembarked and came into operation that night. This station and the others still operating from L.S.T.s proved of great assistance in forward fighter control, effectively extending the range of the Malta control. This extension

(1) The A/A ship H.M.S. Delhi was in position off the Acid beaches and H.M.S. Colombo off Gela.

was of increased value when enemy night bombers began to operate in growing numbers, against Syracuse, Augusta and the Acid beaches. Malta's night intruders were extensively employed in this area from the night 10/11 July onwards.

On the other hand, medium night bombers from Tunisia were frequently used against Catania, Messina and San Giovanni. In a relatively small area were mixed up streams of night bombers and fighters, Allied and the enemy's. It was inevitable that the exact filtering of these plots occasionally broke down and several times Allied night fighters were vectored onto their own bombers, once or twice with fatal results. Control would have been easier if Malta had been kept fully informed of projected night bomber operations by their own forces. Lacking this information, mistakes were inevitable.

On the night of 10/11 July Malta's night fighters were out over southern Sicily, and one Mosquito of No.23 Squadron made an intruder patrol over Rome, without incident. The force consisted of No.600 Squadron (Beaufighters), a flight of No.108 Squadron (Beaufighters) one flight of No.73 Squadron (Hurricanes), supported by No.23 Squadron and a flight of No.256 Squadron (both Mosquitos). They claimed to have destroyed two Ju.88's and one Cant.Z.1007. In addition two Ju.88's were claimed as probably destroyed.

Air activity against enemy road movements on D-Day

During the rehearsals for operation 'Husky' it had been found that the rate of disembarkation of supporting arms for the land forces had been very slow, and the Army had submitted that enemy movements towards the assault area must be attacked and delayed from the air while disembarkation was in progress.

This proposal was made too late to be included in the agreed air outline plan, but the commitment was met by the allocation of two groups of Lightning fighter-bombers (1st and 14th Fighter Groups) from the Strategic Air Force to the Tactical Air Force for the assault period, to reinforce the two Mustang Groups (27th and 86th). The plan for the employment of these groups was to cover the main routes from as soon after first light on D-Day as possible and attack all movement seen.

Formations of 12 aircraft were dispatched every 30 minutes throughout the day. For these attacks, the Lightning aircraft were allotted the eastern area of Sicily and the Mustang groups maintained a similar programme over the western and central areas.

At the outset, targets were scarce but traffic tended to increase as the day wore on and a large number of mechanical vehicles were destroyed. These attacks prevented the development of traffic and the scale of road and rail movement was quickly reduced to small proportions. During the subsequent days this employment of the groups was continued widespread over the whole island, and resulted in the complete dislocation of enemy movement. By night the Tactical Bomber Force also operated against road movement leading to the assault areas. In the east the enemy air force withdrew to the Gerbini area and were quickly followed up by the Strategic Air Force, which sent a force of 71 Fortress aircraft to bomb the landing grounds.

Ops. NATAF
A.H.B./IIJ5/
92

Ops. NATAF
A.H.B./IIJ5/
92

Ibid

Ibid

Enemy reinforcements

Malta Int.
Summary
A.H.B./IIJ5/
94/1

By the next day (11 July) the enemy had become aware of the size and direction of the Allied attack and had to consider the question of reinforcements. Of the four Italian field divisions, two in the Palermo and Sciacca areas were retreating before the attacks of the American Seventh Army whilst of the other two divisions in the Syracuse and Vizzini areas, one was in process of disintegration and the other was being pushed north along the east coast by the British Eighth Army. But in spite of the ill success of their forces Italian reinforcement of Sicily was negligible.

The two German divisions, though suffering at first from a shortage of mechanical transport, were more mobile than the Italians and moved quickly into the battle area. While the 15th Panzer Grenadier division moved eastwards from the west of Sicily, the Hermann Goering division launched a major effort to drive the Allied invaders back into the sea.

The enemy attack at Gela 11 July

At 0800 hours, both German and Italian units counter attacked II (U.S.) Corps, their greatest weight coming to bear on the first Division near Gela. Twenty Mark IV tanks attacked towards the south on the Ponte Olivo - Gela road, breaking through the infantry and approaching to within 1,000 yards of Gela, before being stopped by artillery fire. Enemy infantry following the tanks was driven off by small arms fire. Another force of about 40 tanks were stopped only by the combined fire of rocket guns, anti-tank grenades, tanks and artillery. A lighter attack by Italian infantry and ten Italian tanks was repulsed with little difficulty.

These attacks lasted until about 1630 hours when the last of the day was launched down the Butera road against Gela. This attack was broken up by the combined action of naval gunfire, infantry troops, and an Engineer Shore Group which had to be taken from their beach duties and sent into action.

The left flank of these enemy attacks against II (U.S.) Corps extended across the Acate river and was directed against the infantry of the 45th Division and Parachute Combat Team. In this sector, also, the enemy attack was repulsed. On the extreme right of the II (U.S.) Corps front, Comiso and Ragusa were taken. In the Licata sector, the 3rd Division extended its beachhead beyond the town and reached its first designated objective.

Fighter operations 11 July

Malta Analysis
of day fighter
ops.
A.H.B./IIJ5/
101/5

Air fighting began at 0505 hours on 11 July when two Spitfires of No.43 Squadron patrolling over the beaches south of Syracuse sighted a Me.210 flying north at 5,000 feet. They chased it for 50 miles and finally shot it down near Cape Armi.

The American Spitfire squadrons, especially those of the 31st Fighter Group based on Gozo Island, were fully employed on preventing enemy air attacks on Allied shipping. No.60 (U.S.) Squadron's (33rd Fighter Group) Warhawks operating from Pantelleria while on patrol over the beaches east of Licata during the afternoon saw more than

SECRET

58

25 Ju.88's attacking shipping off the Gela beaches. They were warned by the G.C.I. too late to prevent the bombing attack but intercepted the Ju.88's on their return journey over Ponte Olivo, where they claimed to have shot down four and damaged another. On returning over the Licata beaches another fight developed with eight Me.109's in which one enemy aircraft was probably destroyed. As a result of this action one Warhawk was reported missing and another damaged.

At about the same time in the afternoon Spitfires of No.92 Squadron (No.244 Wing) while on patrol between Cape Scalambrì and Gela saw A.A. bursts south of Gela. Upon investigation 12 Ju.88's were found at 10,000 feet escorted by 30 unidentified fighters flying stepped up to 15,000 feet. The Spitfires intercepted the bombers and claimed to have shot down four Ju.88's and damaged one; for the loss of one Spitfire missing.

Air fighting continued all that day, the last action late in the evening being between No.72 Squadron (No.324 Wing) and an enemy formation over Syracuse. Three M.C.200's were shot down and three damaged.

At the end of the day enemy casualties had risen sharply, for the loss of only one Spitfire and one Warhawk, Allied pilots had claimed to have shot down 28 aircraft, probably destroyed five, and damaged sixteen.

Air Support Operations

Between 1000 and 1100 hours the Kittyhawks based on Malta so as to provide close support for the ground forces went into action for the first time. Nos.112, 3, and 250 Squadrons (No.239 Wing) escorted by No.243 Squadron (Spitfires) were despatched to attack vehicles on the Catania - Lentini road. Twenty-two vehicles were seen and attacked; fifty-eight 250 lb. bombs being expended with very little result. The Kittyhawks continued to operate during succeeding days, but suitable targets were scarce, and Army calls for support were few.

The fighter bombers (Mustang) of the 27th and 86th Fighter Groups dropped two hundred and one 500 lb. bombs and strafed mechanical transport concentrations and convoys heading south from Palermo. Bombs were also dropped on a road junction at Bolognetta, and convoys and trains in central Sicily were shot up.

The really heavy bombing, however, was provided by the bombers of Strategic Air Force. One hundred Fortresses dropped 259 tons of bombs on Catania and Milo. At Catania explosions and fires broke out in dumps and marshalling yards. A merchant vessel in the harbour was hit. Twenty-two enemy aircraft were encountered of which four were destroyed. At Milo the Fortresses escorted by 48 Kittyhawks bombed the runway and dispersal area of the airfield, they were met with intense 'flak'.

Caltanissetta was bombed with good results by 39 Mitchells. Sciacca landing ground received 42 tons of bombs from 35 Mitchells which were escorted to the target by 23 Lightnings. Gerbini satellite landing ground number eleven was attacked by 23 Marauders which dropped 27 tons of fragmentation bombs. Not much air opposition was met but 'flak' was reported as 'intensive' at Ribera, Milo and Sciacca.

NATAF
Int/Opsum
No.95

Italian Air
Ministry
Weekly
Information
Bulletin.
(A.H.B.6)

Night operations

A.H.B./IIJ5/
101/5

During the night 11/12 July Mosquitos and Hurricanes continued intruder operations over the enemy's air bases in north-eastern Sicily and southern Italy. One unidentified bomber was shot down over Crotone landing ground, but little other activity was seen. Enemy bombers were, however, active against Allied shipping off the landing beaches, and Allied night fighters claimed to have shot down two Ju.88's and an He.111 and damaged a P.108.

The important airfield at Comiso was occupied by Seventh Army troops during the night and work was at once started upon it by moonlight.

Thirty Wellingtons of the Strategic Air Force⁽¹⁾ attacked Marsala, Trapani and Mazzara.

A.H.B./IIJ5/81

On the same night (11/12th) the Troop Carrier Command launched its second parachute attack (Husky II), aimed at dropping paratroops of the 82nd Airborne Division in front of the Allied forward units in the Gela area. It was even less successful than the earlier attack and out of the 144 Dakotas which were despatched 23 failed to return. Many obstacles were encountered and difficulty was experienced in following the flight course through lanes of 'safe transit' which had to be co-ordinated with all the combined operations of the Allied armies and navies. The unarmoured aircraft met with intense 'flak' and repeated attacks by enemy aircraft. It was unfortunate that the arrival of the transport aircraft occurred at a time when naval ships off shore were being bombed from a high altitude and some aircraft, particularly No.53 Squadron ran foul of naval anti-aircraft fire and losses were severe.⁽²⁾

A.F.H.Q.
5618A

In point of fact the ships were entitled to shoot at the transport aircraft. The question of the rules for the engagement of aircraft off the beaches, had been frequently debated during the planning and the orders had been twice altered by agreement with the Air Force Staff. As finally framed, ships were free to open fire at night at aircraft whose approach indicated hostile intent, and it had been agreed that if friendly aircraft were obliged to fly over the Allied convoys they would do so at heights above 6,000 feet.

All troop carrying aircraft had been routed in lanes to avoid the Allied convoys on the night of D minus one day, but in the second attack on D plus three they had flown low over the Gulf of Noto. It was understood that the Mediterranean Air Command had obtained the agreement of the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean to this procedure some hours earlier and signals had at once been sent out by the latter to all ships and forces concerned. It was not certain that they did in fact reach all the merchantmen and by an unfortunate chance a small number of enemy aircraft were in the vicinity at the time the Allied aircraft were approaching.

(1) From No.205 Group.

(2) See A.H.B. Monograph - 'Airborne Forces' - A.P.3231.

As might have been expected, firing started spasmodically and soon became general, and it is difficult to blame the ships for engaging low flying enemy aircraft which appeared to be menacing them during an air raid. It was considered that only in very exceptional circumstances should ships be deprived of their right to open fire at low flying aircraft approaching them and that the solution must be always to route transport aircraft clear of Allied shipping.

Further Airborne Operations

Three small and one large scale operations followed in quick succession. The first operation (Chestnut I) took place on the night of 12/13th and was an attempt by two Albemarles of No.38 Wing to drop a small detachment of the British First Airborne Division detailed to attack and harass the enemy lines of communication and rear areas in north-west Sicily. Another attempt (Chestnut II) was made on the following night on the same scale and with the same objects. In the first operation one aircraft was lost; in the second prearranged ground signals were not visible and both Albemarles returned to their base. On the night 13/14th a third operation (Fustian) was launched, the object of which was to drop a detachment of the First British Paratroop Brigade to secure an important bridge over the Gornalunga river at Primo Sole and, at the same time, attack, and hold strategical positions near Catania.

'Husky' Small
raiding parties
A.H.B./IIJ5/
86/82

The carrying force consisted of 105 Dakotas, 23 Albemarles (R.A.F.) and 8 Halifax (R.A.F.) aircraft, the latter two types towing 11 Horsa and 8 Waco gliders. The venture was costly but a vital objective was secured and held. Once again trouble was experienced through anti-aircraft fire from the Allied shipping. Twenty-six aircraft returned early due to engine trouble and intense 'flak' both off shore and over the Dropping Zone. Pilots reported 'flak' from the time they left Malta to their return. The total losses were ten Dakotas, one Halifax and three Albemarles. A repeat of this operation (Chestnut III) was made on the following night (14/15th). No aircraft was lost and the sortie was completely successful. (1)

The situation in the Southern Area

By 12 July the Allies had established operational bases along the whole southern area from the central invasion beachhead at Licata to the port of Augusta. Advanced units had reached and were holding Ragusa and Palazzolo. Comiso had been occupied on the night of the 11th and Ponte Olivo and Biscari on the 12th.

A.H.B./IIJ5/81

On that day General Eisenhower boarded a destroyer in Malta and set out to survey the situation on the Sicilian shore. 'I reached the westernmost point of the landings at Licata about dawn, and during the remainder of the morning steamed eastward about two miles off shore. There was hardly a shell or a bomb to be heard, and the outstanding impression was one of complete serenity. Landing craft were proceeding on their lawful occasions from ship to shore; it looked more like a huge regatta than an operation of war.' He returned to Malta and once the U.S. Seventh and British Eighth Armies were well established ashore the immediate direction of the campaign became the responsibility of the Fifteenth Army Group Commander, General Alexander, and of his two army commanders, Generals Patton and Montgomery.

Despatch
Eisenhower
A.H.B./IIJ5/
83/132

(1) See A.H.B. Monograph, 'Airborne Forces'. - A.P.3231.

No.72 Squadron in action

No.72 Squadron
O.R.B.

While General Eisenhower was remarking on the peacefulness of the scene as viewed from a destroyer off the beaches, No.72 Squadron (No.324 Wing) Spitfires, had been engaged in heavy air fighting all day (12th). In three sorties over the Acid beaches, one in the early morning, one at midday, and one in the late afternoon the squadron claimed to have destroyed 13 enemy aircraft (eight M.C. 200's, four Me.109's and one Ju.52), probably destroyed three Me.109's and damaged (ten Me.109's, four M.C. 200's and one F.W.190), without the loss of one of their own pilots. This outstanding exploit was rewarded by an immediate message of congratulation from the Air Officer Commanding in Malta, from whose airfield, Hal Far, the squadron was at that time operating.

Action in support of the Eighth Army

Ops. Malta
A.H.B./ILJ5/
101/5

Nor were the other squadrons inactive. At about 0800 hours on the same day in response to a request from the Eighth Army, which was held up in its advance from Syracuse to Augusta near Priolo for an attack on enemy gun positions in that area, Nos.3 (S.A.A.F.), 250 and 112 (Kittyhawk) Squadrons escorted by No.601 Squadron (Spitfires) bombed the targets from a height of between 1,500 and 3,000 feet. Haze and dust made observation of result difficult but one fire which gave off black smoke was started. A direct hit was made on a building, and two lorries were destroyed by machine gun attacks. Later reconnaissance reported explosions and fires apparently from ammunition dumps in the area. This sortie expended seventy-two 250 lb. bombs.

The Enemy Reinforce

Malta Int.
Summary
A.H.B./ILJ5/
94/1

The German divisions were obviously insufficient to bear the brunt of the attacks by the Allied Forces, which eventually totalled 160,000 troops and 600 tanks and accordingly, on the night of the 12/13th two parachute battalions of the Seventh Air Division were flown by gliders from the south of France via Naples for immediate employment as infantry in the Catania plain. Whilst the enemy need for infantry was supplied by this Division, the need for tanks and armoured units was met by gradual reinforcements from the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division which were ferried across the Messina Strait.

Ibid

To ship these reinforcements, the Axis relied on a spasmodic train ferry service improved on 10 July by the arrival of a second train ferry which had previously been under repair at Taranto. Other supplies, including some from Naples, were brought by fifty 'F' boats, Siebel ferries and landing craft, into ports in the north-east of the island. Approximately thirty-six thousand tons of merchant shipping was unloaded during the month in these ports, principally in Messina and Milazzo. Apart from occasional afternoon exercises, the Italian fleet remained immobile having no aircraft carriers to defend its battleships from torpedo aircraft and lacking the strength to protect them from the Allied naval units.

D.D.I. 3
Appreciation
& German
documents
(A.H.B.6)

The reaction of the Axis Air Forces to the Allied invasion was slight. As a result of the Allied air offensive which had begun on 3 July, both the German and Italian Air Forces were seriously weakened by the time of the initial landings. The necessity of having to divert a proportion of their fighter forces to defend their airfields against

heavy Allied air attacks led to a serious reduction in the scale of offensive operations. Their reaction was hesitant and the Luftwaffe failed to display that flexibility in defence which it had formerly shown in attack.

The movement of some 50 fighters and over 30 bombers and dive-bombers from northern to southern Italy was not reflected in the scale of effort mounted by the Italian Air Force which can only be described as negligible. German efforts to reinforce their fighters on Sicily proved inadequate because of the heavy losses Allied fighters were inflicting upon the Luftwaffe.

The defeat of the Axis Air Forces

The speed with which the Spitfires established air supremacy over southern Sicily was reflected in the rapid decline in the enemy scale of effort. Luftwaffe operations from the very start only reached a moderate scale. Between 10 and 12 July total daily sorties of the Luftwaffe averaged 275 - 300, but from that date onwards their effort averaged only 150 sorties per day. During the first four days of the attack the Luftwaffe had suffered heavily, 151 of its aircraft having been destroyed and 43 damaged. Ninety-one of those destroyed were shot down in combat, whilst attacks on Sicilian and southern Italian airfields destroyed a further 25 and damaged 16. Seventeen fighters were blown up by the Germans themselves on airfields around Catania on 13 July, to prevent them falling into Allied hands.

Ibid

The bulk of the sorties flown against the landings was carried out by the Luftwaffe's fighter and fighter bomber forces. These, however, did not use the aircraft they had available to the best advantage, dissipating their effort in small scale raids on widespread targets and consequently suffering heavy losses. The other outstanding weakness of the Luftwaffe during the campaign was the failure of its long range bomber force based on the mainland. Although this force was never less than 250 - 300 bombers, it could not maintain a sustained effort, its average daily sortie rate being 25 - 30. Only on the night of 12/13 July did the bombers operate on any appreciable scale, when 115 Ju.88's and He.111's augmented by a small number of Italian Air Force C.Z. 1007's set out to attack Allied shipping in the Syracuse area. Both German and Italian bombers continued to attack at night on a limited scale, supported by a small force of Italian torpedo bombers and some thirty torpedo-carrying Ju.88's and He.111's, which, at the time of the initial landings, were in process of returning to Grosseto after a refresher course at Salon and Montpellier.

The successes of both torpedo and bombing aircraft were few and their losses extremely high. Those aircraft which reached the beaches were easy targets for the Allied Mosquitoes and Beaufighters, and prisoners reported that they had been forced to fly very low because of their fear of the night fighters with the result that they had presented an easy target for the naval anti-aircraft guns.

The most outstanding feature of this period was the success of these night fighters. The Allied night fighters in the battle area claimed a total during the month of over 70 enemy aircraft destroyed. An important contribution to operations against the night bombers was made by the Allied Mosquito Intruders which maintained constant patrols over the southern Italian airfields.

Malta Int.
Summary
A.H.B./ILJ5/
94/1

Italian
documents
(A.H.B.6)

In spite of the fact that the Italian Air Force had over 300 fighters available in Sicily, Sardinia and southern Italy and over 150 bombers available in central and southern Italy, they never succeeded in mounting any worth while scale effort, due to a large extent to the very low standard of serviceability. Our fighters, however, did have one notable success against the Italians. Not as wily as their Axis partners, who had moved all their Ju.87 dive-bombers out of range of Allied fighters much earlier in the year, the Italian Air Force moved its Ju.87 units from the Milan area to Gioia del Colle in Apulia by 11 July. On 13 July 12 Spitfires of No.243 Squadron on patrol over Gerbini intercepted a formation of twelve Ju.87's flying northwards in line abreast of ten thousand feet, without fighter escort. The Spitfires shot down five and damaged the remaining seven without incurring any losses.

By 16 July withdrawal of the Axis Air Forces was in full swing. The Luftwaffe strength on Sicily on this date was 120 aircraft. Two days later the total had sunk to 25 and by 22 July every German aircraft that could be moved had left the island. The Italian Air Force was also withdrawn during this period, a force of 28 fighters, of which only four were serviceable, remaining on 22 July. By 26 July only 13 Macchi 202's were left, not one of which was serviceable, and two days later Italian Air Force returns made no mention of Sicily.

The First Fighter Wing in Sicily.(1)

No.244 Wing
O.R.B.

On 7 July the Advanced Headquarters of the Western Desert Air Force decided that No.244 Wing was to be the first to land in Sicily and that it should take control of all air units in the Pachino area 'until things settle down,' and that the Squadron Leader Administrative should take command of the Station Commander's party which was to land on D-Day to supervise the organisation of the wing landing ground and exercise administrative control.

Accordingly, on 9 July this party set out for Sicily in an L.C.T. The party landed at about 1130 hours on the following day. They next located the Servicing Commando Unit, and the R.A.F. Regiment anti-aircraft squadrons, which

-
- (1) No.244 (F) Wing had been formed in February 1942 as a 'mobile offensive fighter wing, which will control three mobile fighter squadrons at any required location.' Since then the Wing had come a long way over the Western Desert with the Eighth Army and at the end of the Tunisian campaign had been operating from Ben Gardane airfield over the Cap Bon peninsula against enemy air and sea transport. From 1 - 19 June 1943, the Wing became non-operational while its ground personnel and transport were gradually transferred to Malta. By 20 June it was making offensive sweeps over south-eastern Sicily. It is interesting to note that on that date No.92 Squadron, equipped with Spitfire IX's had an encounter with three Me.109's at a height of thirty feet. During the softening process on Sicily the Wing was employed on escort duties for Mitchells and Marauders which were engaged in bombing Comiso and Gerbini airfields.

had both been put ashore without their vehicles and met the chief engineer of No.15 Airfield Construction Group on Pachino landing ground during the afternoon. The landing ground had been ploughed up but it was promised that it would be ready for the use of ten squadrons on the morning of 13 July. As yet, however, no transport, petrol or ammunition had been landed.

The Station Commander's party moved into Pachino landing ground at 0830 hours on 11 July. The Servicing Commando unit, and the two anti-aircraft squadrons were in position but still without transport. Then an Air Formation Signals detachment, No.1 M.P.R.U. and No.3 A.L.G. Signals section also arrived.

Ibid

About 1000 hours General Montgomery himself appeared in a D.U.K.W. and, despite the absence of any airfield construction plant, gave orders that the landing ground was to be ready for operations by the next morning, the 12th. This naturally gave an impetus to the proceedings and by 2200 hours that evening two lorries had brought up fifteen thousand gallons of aviation fuel, but there was still no ammunition ashore. 'A serious and bungled state of affairs if the squadron were to land at first light next morning.'

Ibid

During the morning an aircraft of No.72 Squadron had landed short of petrol. It landed down wind over the half levelled plough furrows without mishap, and when it had been refuelled, took off again using the road which ran alongside the landing ground. In the afternoon two other Spitfires landed and after being refuelled took off again for Malta. While they were on the ground, six Me.109's made a low flying attack. In spite of the fact that they were not engaged by the ground defences until they had opened fire the total casualties were three wounded and one Spitfire slightly damaged.

From dawn on the 12th, D.U.K.W.s streamed into the landing ground bringing ammunition and petrol - 'much of it not for R.A.F. use.' This was due to the loads being put direct into the D.U.K.W.s from the ship, which meant that they were not checked by the R.A.F. 'Spotters' in the 'Brick' organisation. The D.U.K.W. system was excellent but the R.A.F. 'Spotters' should have been present when the vehicles were loaded from the ship. It was distressing to find 4.7 mortar shells and army tank fuel being delivered for use in aircraft.

In the afternoon the Air Officer Commanding the Desert Air Force landed in his Spitfire, and stated that three squadrons would fly in at first light on the 13th. Other Spitfires came in to refuel on their way back to Malta and two pilots forced landed in damaged aircraft. In Malta, the main parties of the Wing Headquarters, Nos.1 (S.A.), 92 and 145 Squadrons embarked for Sicily.

The Commanding Officer of No.244 Wing arrived early on the morning of 13th at Pachino and was followed soon afterwards by the aircraft of the squadrons as each finished its first patrol. The aircraft were serviced by the Commandos and advanced parties of squadron ground crew; but the Commandos were not trained to service Spitfire IX's, so that the bulk of the work had to be done by the squadron parties.

Control was exercised by No.2 Mobile Plotting Unit, and aircraft were ordered into action by the Skeleton Wing

Operation Room which was housed in one of the 3 ton lorries which had been brought over by the Station Commander's party. As the squadron main parties had not yet arrived, the pilots were messed at the Wing Headquarters. Rations and water had been brought for this purpose by the Station Commander's party as had also bivouacs for all the pilots.

In the course of the day (13th) the main party and the Signal Section of the Wing arrived complete with all transport. Within a few hours the Signals Section was established and took over from No.3 Advanced Landing Ground Section. Petrol and ammunition had arrived in such large quantities that the Officer Commanding, No.121 M.U. decided to take over its issue and receipt. Throughout the day six aircraft were kept at readiness for local defence but were not required to go into action. In the evening news came of the fall of Augusta.

The Landing of XII Air Support Command

Provisional
Report Adv.XII
A.S.C. to 7th
Army
A.F.H.Q. micro-
film 68 F(19)

The Advanced Headquarters of XII Air Support Command under the command of Colonel L.P. Hickey which had been accommodated in U.S.S. Monrovia came ashore at 1600 hours on D plus two (i.e. 12th). Control of the fighters was handed over to U.S.S. Ancon temporarily until the early hours of D plus three. The 309th Squadron started preparing the Ponte Olivo landing ground for use by the air echelons of the 31st Fighter Group. Telephone and wireless facilities were installed and work was started to connect the Headquarters with Licata airfield which had been inspected and found suitable for use by a fighter group.

Day and night cover was maintained over the beaches. Fighters were used for shallow reconnaissance to provide information of immediate value to the divisions the principal interest being centred on the front of the 1st and 45th Divisions. Enemy air activity was very slight only four attempts were made to reach the beach landing area. Three of these were turned back and one enemy aircraft was shot down. One Me.109 however, managed to penetrate the screen and attacked the beaches at Gela.

Ibid

Tactical reconnaissance was continued over the rear areas during daylight hours, and at night over selected bottlenecks in the road system. This was generally concentrated over roads leading to western and northern Sicily. Very little movement was seen. The 111th Observation Squadron flew 36 sorties by day and 52 night reconnaissance sorties were completed. At the same time fighter-bombers from Tunisia attacked road movements north and west of the line Vizzini - Caltagirone - Canicatti - Agrigento to prevent daylight movement of supplies and reserves. The 31st Fighter Group and the 111th Observation Squadron arrived on Ponte Olivo landing ground in accordance with the planned programme.

On the next two days 14th and 15th there was very little enemy air activity, and on the 16th the 33rd Fighter Group landed at Licata, two days in advance of the programme. That night the airfields at Licata and Ponte Olivo were attacked on a small scale by enemy aircraft dropping high explosive and anti-personnel bombs. Very little damage resulted.

The Air Effort 10 to 16 July (inclusive)

A.H.B./IIJ5/81

The Strategic Air Force flew 1,720 bomber sorties of which 1,031 were against enemy positions and lines of communications; and 827 fighter sorties of which 524 were on bomber escort.

The Tactical Air Force flew 768 bomber sorties of which 510 were against enemy positions and lines of communication; and 7,036 fighter and fighter-bomber sorties, of which 270 were by fighter bombers. 4,877 fighter sorties by day and 216 fighter sorties by night were flown from Malta. Effort before the invasion was concentrated on airfields and landing grounds, but after the landings it was immediately switched to enemy positions and L. of C.

During the same period fighters of the Coastal Air Force flew 1,205 sorties on convoy escort, 307 on defence patrol, 47 on Air/Sea rescue, one sortie on sea recce and two on anti-submarine hunts - a total of 1,562 fighter sorties. Coastal-type aircraft also flew 487 sorties, of which 203 were anti-submarine hunts and shipping strikes, 124 convoy escort, 74 reconnaissance and 86 Air/Sea rescue. Night-fighter strength had now been augmented by Nos. 414 and 415 Beaufighter Squadrons.

Much valuable work was accomplished during the week by recce squadrons; N.A.T.A.F. Spitfires, N.A.S.A.F. Mustangs from North Africa, P.R.U. Spitfires and G.R. Wellingtons and Baltimores all playing a vital part in building up the daily picture of enemy activity. A total of 315 sorties were flown. Air/Sea rescue craft searched continually for missing aircrews.

Serviceability over the week

Percentage

<u>Type of Aircraft</u>	<u>Sorties Effective</u>	<u>Service-ability Percentage</u>
Heavy bombers	443	75.00
Medium bombers	1,688	84.12
Light bombers	357	78.00
Fighter-bombers	1,320	69.14
Fighters	2,742	77.46

Figures exclude 335 non-effective bomber sorties. In addition to the above, 5,093 fighter sorties and 270 fighter-bomber sorties were flown from Malta.

Bomb Tonnage Dropped

During the week 10 - 16 July a total load of 4,530.25 tons was dropped on enemy objectives in this theatre.

Review of position at end of first week

At the end of the first week of land fighting Allied Forces were occupying approximately one-third of Sicily; the south-east portion of the island along a general line of the Gornalunga River - Piazza Armerina - Canicatti - Agrigento.

It is worth at this stage examining how closely operations compared with the Air Plan, a plan in which the following assumptions were made:-

- (a) That the airfields Comiso, Ponte Olivo, Biscari and Pachino would be captured or denied to the enemy by D plus 1; enabling on D plus 2 heavier scale attack against aerodromes still occupied.
- (b) That, inter alia, bombing action would prevent reinforcement of Sicily and movement of forces from west to east across the island.
- (c) That by 14 July the use of Catania and Gerbini airfields should be effectively denied the enemy.
- (d) That by 16 July Catania and Gerbini might be in our hands and ready to receive aircraft on that day or the day after. When this stage had been reached air superiority over the battle area should be assured.
- (e) The western airfields of Sciacca, Castelvetro, Milo, Chinisia/Borizzo and Boccadifalco may be occupied by 24 July if things go well.

The airfield at Comiso was occupied on the night of 11th (D plus one); Ponte Olivo and Biscari on 12th (D plus two); Pachino by noon of D-Day. All these airfields were serviceable except Biscari by 13 July (D plus three). The important centres of Caltanissetta, Canicatti, Agrigento, Valledlunga, Enna, Barrafranca, Piazza Armerina and Lercara Friddi, all on the main roads across the island, and San Giovanni on the Italian mainland, an Axis point of embarkation for reinforcement were heavily bombed. The airfields at Catania and Gerbini suffered continuous attack and were untenable to the enemy by 14 July (D plus four).

Ground forces, however, failed to cut the north coast road, and the first of the inland roads, and along these, despite the light and fighter bomber effort by N.A.T.A.F., the Axis were able to redistribute their forces and reinforce the Mt. Etna area from the north and north-west. In consequence of this, the envisaged possibility of the fall of Messina before Palermo did not materialise. As the result of the withdrawals from the west side of the island and the power of the air attack, U.S. Forces rapidly took over Sciacca, Castelvetro, Marsala, Trapani and Palermo.

An enemy view of the situation in Sicily

'The Battle for Sicily' -
Col. von Bonin
February 1947
(A.H.B.6-R.156)

On 15 July Colonel von Bonin was appointed Chief of General Staff of the fourteenth Panzer Corps and was interviewed by the then Chief of the Armed Forces Operations Staff, Generaloberst Jodl. The latter gave an appreciation of the situation in Italy and the following orders for General Hube, the Commander of the XIV Panzer Corps:-

'In view of the great numerical superiority of the Anglo-American forces, and especially in view of the great difficulties of supplying even the relatively small German force on Sicily (chief causes of difficulty being the small capacity and the vulnerability of railroads in southern Italy, the insecurity of sea transport, and the possibility of a blockade of the Strait of Messina), it is not to be contemplated that we can continue to hold the island. It is, however, important to fight a delaying action and gain further time for stabilising the situation on the mainland. The vital factor, however, is under no circumstances to

suffer the loss of our three German divisions. At the very minimum, our valuable human material must be saved.'

Colonel von Bonin reported on 17 July to General Hube at his tactical headquarters which were situated on the north slopes of Mount Etna, between Randazzo and Linguaglossa. The situation at that time was: the Germans had succeeded in establishing a continuous defensive front between Mount Etna and the coast south of Catania. This front was at the time quiescent after heavy fighting in which both sides had incurred severe losses. Their chief concern was whether they could get the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division across the Strait of Messina in time to fill the gap which existed between the western flank of their line and the north coast of the island at San Stefano. This was accomplished successfully, contrary to all expectations, and without opposition, in the next few days.

The Germans next move was to withdraw their anti-aircraft and supply troops from the Palermo area and install them in safety in the east of the island. All that remained of the 5th Italian Division, still many thousands of troops, were concentrated in the north-east extremity of Sicily and organised as well as they could be in large tented camps far behind the front.

In contrast to the situation on the ground, the position in the air was quite hopeless. The Allied air forces had complete mastery of the air. There was no tactical or strategical support of Axis ground troops, with the exception of a few night attacks against Sicilian harbours held by the Allies. The destruction which the Colonel had seen on airfields in southern Italy convinced him that the Axis Air Force had ceased to exist, and that the battle in Sicily would have to be fought without any air support. There was, however, a strong force of anti-aircraft artillery, about thirty heavy batteries, and these were concentrated for the defence of the Strait of Messina. The Axis were chiefly concerned as to whether they could keep the Strait open as their life-line, and thereby assure, in the first place, their supplies, and later the withdrawal to the mainland. Apart from the danger of air attack, there was the enormous peril of a blockade of the Strait by an Allied fleet, or of army landing with naval protection.

Ibid

The only two batteries of heavy artillery on the island were moved over to the mainland, and deployed on both sides of San Giovanni, to protect the ferry route against Allied vessels. These two batteries, which had only a small supply of ammunition, were, up to the end of the battle in Sicily, the only (and very questionable) protection the Axis had against action by the Allied navy. There were no coastal batteries in Italy which could be used and the Italian navy had refused to lay minefields, so that there was virtually no defence against action by the Allied warships.

Ibid

The Germans began to evacuate the island, without the knowledge of the Italians, and orders were given to protect the remaining coast in the triangle Catania, Messina, San Stefano, at least in the most important points, and to form counter-attack reserves in the rear areas of both flanking divisions to minimize the danger of possible Allied landings.

Allied change of plan

On 16 July, the Fifteenth Army Group had directed that the Eighth Army were to drive the enemy into the Messina peninsula by an advance on three main axes: northward along the coast from Catania; eastwards via Leonforte-Regalbuto-Adrano; and north-east via Nicosia-Troina-Randazzo; the latter two encircling Mount Etna from the west. The Seventh Army were to protect the rear of the Eighth Army as it pivoted north-west, in two phases, first establishing a secure base with one division in the area Villarosa-Enna-Caltanissetta, and second thrusting north to hold road junctions at Petralia and south of Resuttano.

By the time the directive had been issued the Seventh Army's advance towards its initial objective had been swifter than had been anticipated, and the directive was changed by fixing the Seventh Army to 'drive rapidly to the north-west and north, capture Palermo, and split the enemy's forces.'

On the following day the Fifteenth Army Group sent the following message to the Seventh Army: -

'On capture of Petralia you will take advantage of the situation by pushing north a detachment to cut the coast road thereby splitting the island in two. As soon as you are established on the general line Campofelice-Petralia-Caterina-Caltanissetta-Agrigento you will advance westwards to mop up the western half of Sicily but this operation must not be started before you are ready to operate from a second base as given above.'

By 20 July, Eighth Army progress in the Catania plain had been virtually stopped, and from 21 July to 4 August it was at a standstill.

CHAPTER 4

THE ALLIES' FIRST CONQUESTRapid progress of the American Seventh Army

Seventh Army
Summary of
Operations
A.F.H.Q.

By 14 July the Seventh Army had taken 13,000 prisoners and the enemy had suffered 1,400 casualties, dead and wounded, had lost 85 aircraft captured, and 67 guns larger than 75 millimetre calibre captured and destroyed as well as 29 tanks of differing types. Many of the Italian prisoners expressed great bitterness towards the Germans, whom they accused of sacrificing Italians to cover their own withdrawals. On one occasion the Germans had withdrawn before the Italians and had mined the roads as they went, trapping the Italians between the Americans on their front and the minefields in their rear.

The new directive, received by the Seventh Army on the 18th, called for the envelopment of the Palermo area and this movement gathered headway on the 19th against only light enemy opposition. On the 22nd a co-ordinated attack on the city had been planned, but no resistance materialised and at 2000 hours that evening the city of Palermo surrendered. On 28 July, the first cargo ship arrived for unloading in the harbour and work was underway on the removal of sunken hulks. After the fall of Palermo, it was discovered that the standard gauge railway between Palermo and Messina was in good condition as far as Termini and that a considerable amount of rolling stock was available. On the 29th the first train was operated between Palermo and Cefalu. This enabled the main supply line for the Seventh Army to be shifted from southern ports to Palermo.

About this time the first reports of the downfall of Mussolini and the succession of Badoglio began to circulate and gave the Allies in Sicily the satisfaction of knowing that their assault on the island had already brought about the first crack in the Axis political structure. That Mussolini and the Fascists had little support had been eloquently demonstrated many times during the campaign. Almost without exception, senior officers of the Italian forces, after being captured, had shown little hesitation in voicing their disgust for Mussolini and his government; and the civilian populations of the captured towns had everywhere greeted the Americans as liberators.

The enemy began to withdraw to the Troina-San Fratello line and the Seventh Army took up its position west of San Stefano to Nicosia and prepared to attack eastward. On the 31st a directive was issued that the Seventh Army were to attack eastward along the north coastal road, the road from Nicosia to Randazzo, and thence north-east on Messina to drive the enemy out of the peninsula.

Enemy Air Effort

In the last week of July the enemy air effort was on a small scale and directed, by night, at the Allied bases in Sicily. On the night 24/25th Ju.88's bombed Augusta and Syracuse. Two of the raiders were shot down in flames by Beaufighters of No.600 Squadron operating from Malta. The enemy became increasingly aware of the shipping concentrations in Malta harbours and on the night 19/20th more than 25 Ju.88's and He.111's from the Viterbo/Pratica di Mare area operated over the Grand harbour, probably engaged in laying mines. The second big night raid occurred on the night 25/26th when

Malta
Int. Summary
A.H.B./IIJ5/
94/1

another 25 aircraft of the same types tried to bomb shipping lying off the Grand Harbour. But the losses inflicted on their aircraft by the night fighters and anti-aircraft fire were sufficient to deter them from further attacks.

On the 30th 36 Kittyhawks of the 325th Fighter Group (N.A.S.A.F.) encountered about 30 Me.109's joined later by M.C.202's, over Sardinia. A thirty minute running fight ensued and at the end the Allied fighters claimed 21 Me.109's and one M.C.202 destroyed and three more Me.109's probably destroyed for the loss of one Kittyhawk.

Changed Air Plans

As a result of the Fifteenth Army Group's change of plan Headquarters of the Tactical Air Force issued a fresh directive to its subordinate commands, Desert Air Force, XII Air Support Command and the Tactical Bomber Force. As before the XII Air Support Command was to operate in support of the Seventh Army and the Desert Air Force in support of the Eighth Army, but should the development of the situation necessitate a concentration of air effort these formations were to be mutually supporting. The Tactical Bomber Force was to provide light and medium bomber support on either sector by day and as the final attack was likely to be undertaken in the dark period night operations were to be very restricted.

The main tasks for the air forces would be the interruption of the enemy supply traffic by sea, road and to a limited extent by rail, direct support to assist the advance of the ground forces, and fighter protection by day and night over forward elements, the main ports of supply and shipping in the area of the east coast of Sicily. Within the restricted latter area, close co-ordination of air support would be essential and was to be undertaken on the following basis:-

Operational Areas

Desert Air Force was to operate against shipping in the Strait of Messina and movement on the coastal road from Messina to Catania and Catania - Randazzo - Fiumefreddo and within the area bounded by and adjoining these routes. XII Air Support Command was to operate against enemy movement on the northern coastal road from Messina to San Fratello and on the routes Capo d' Orlando - Randazzo, Nicosia - Randazzo, and in the areas adjoining these routes.

Tactical bomber assistance

The Tactical Bomber Force based in Malta (Nos.232 and 3(S.A.A.F.) Wings and No.47 Group) was to be available on call by the Desert Air Force and was to be requested through the Advanced Tactical Bomber Force in Malta through the forward bomber control with Desert Air Force Headquarters. The remainder of the Tactical Bomber Force, viz. Nos.12 and 340 Groups and No.326 Wing then located on the mainland and moving in the near future to bases in Sicily, was to be on call by the XII Air Support Command and was to be requested through the Rear Headquarters of the Tactical Bomber Force by the forward bomber control with XII Air Support Command. Requests for Tactical Bomber support were to state the place and time of rendezvous with the fighter escort. The Air Officer Commanding the Tactical Bomber Force was to arrange the mutual reinforcement of bomber effort from Malta or from the mainland to meet requests for tactical bomber assistance as required. The Commanding General XII Air Support Command was

A.H.B./IIJ5/81

T.A.F. Op.
Instruction
No.15.
21 July 1943.
A.H.B./IIJ5/94/
3(L)

Ibid

empowered to divert such air effort from this task as he considered necessary to meet the requirements of the Seventh Army to assist the conquest of Western Sicily.

Communication Difficulties

The main wireless station in Tunis was at Hammamet alongside T.A.F. Headquarters but it formed the communication centre also for the Air Command Post at La Marsa, Tactical Bomber Force at Labuel and Rear H.Q. XII Air Support Command at Korba, signals being relayed by landline to these formations. To ease the resulting congestion and delay, the move of T.A.F. to Sicily at the earliest possible moment was desirable, and attempts to establish another W/T Station on the island were made.

Ibid

No shipping was available but on 25 July, the Air Staff being anxious to proceed to Sicily at the earliest possible moment, gave instructions for an attempt to be made to fly a skeleton wireless station into the island. The attempt was made next day when a party complete with equipment were flown into Cassibile by four D.C.3 aircraft of No.216 Group. It was not until the evening of 6 August that the main wireless station for the advanced headquarters was complete and in operation, but while good communication was established with Hammamet and Malta reliable contact with forward elements was for sometime impossible.

The landlines in Sicily were in very poor condition, but eventually communication was established between the advanced headquarters of the Desert Air Force and Lentini and with that of the Tactical Bomber Force at Comiso. It was, however, found impossible to establish any contact with XII Air Support Command headquarters at Palermo. Delay had also occurred in the establishment of wireless communications by the advanced headquarters of the Desert Air Force when they arrived in Sicily for a number of reasons. Firstly the equipment was provided from the United Kingdom, and was to have been off-loaded in Catania on D plus fourteen. As Catania had not fallen by that date the equipment remained in the convoy which was held in readiness at Malta.

Secondly it had been planned that the advanced Desert Air Force should make use of No.211 Group's equipment sited at Pachino. As, however, the Eighth Army had moved forward from Pachino to Lentini on D plus seven this arrangement miscarried. Fortunately the Chief Signals Officer of the Desert Air Force, anticipating difficulties, had made arrangements with the Middle East Command for the provision of 12 reserve channels, together with personnel, to be held in readiness. Eight of these channels were ferried over from Malta and were established at Lentini in time. The site chosen at Lentini proved extremely unsuitable for the purpose, being situated on the northern slopes of a mountain and being inaccessible for wireless vehicles.

The great difficulty with which XII Air Support Command had to contend was that while their Communications Officer had been engaged in the detailed planning of operation Husky at Mostaganem, their units were at the same time conducting operations against Pantelleria from the Cap Bon area. Furthermore, certain items of signal equipment belonging to XII Air Support Command, together with the personnel to operate them, had been detached from the Command for duty in Pantelleria after it had been occupied. Thus the Command was forced to conduct operation Husky without these resources.

The only link between XII Air Support Command advanced headquarters in the early phases of the campaign had been a radio net joined by Pantelleria - U.S.S. Monrovia - Malta, and this had been very overloaded. All their operations throughout the Sicilian battle had been hampered by the fact that it had been found impossible to provide them with telephone lines communicating with the Desert or Tactical Air Force Headquarters.

XII A.S.C.
Ops and Int.
Summary

A.H.B./IIJ5/80

On 21 July, XII Air Support Command Rear Headquarters arrived from Korba and took charge of the operations. Owing to the distance of the headquarters from the airfields and the difficulties of communications, the actual operational control was taken over by the Third Air Defence Wing which was located at Gela. Instructions for the following day's sorties were dispatched daily from the Command headquarters to the wing. Direct control over the 31st Fighter Group was assumed by the Command on 27 July when its 307th Squadron moved to Palermo. By 1 August the whole of the 31st Group had been established at Termini.

Von Bonin
(A.H.B.6.-R.156)

The task of the Air Commanders in Sicily was made more difficult because of the lack of proper communication facilities, but this was inevitable in the circumstances then existing in the island. The Germans on the other hand, had a better arrangement, a then very modern radio-telephony installation operated from Mount Etna. With this apparatus they could speak to their Army Group Headquarters in Frascati, near Rome, or to their Corps headquarters in Sicily. They had no telephones, but ordinary signals communications existed.

Operations by the Coastal Air Force

O.R.B.
N.A.C.A.F.
July 1943.

During the first days of the month of July 1943, Coastal aircraft had been employed in convoy escort work, nor did this escort work slacken, when the invasion of Sicily began. Supplies had still to be carried in a shuttle service along the north-west African coast. U-boats, though present, maintained a cautious policy, having a healthy respect for attacks from land based aircraft; but they managed to torpedo and sink three Allied ships in the first week of July. In the following week two more empty westbound ships were also torpedoed, though neither sank and both were towed safely to harbour.

Reconnaissance aircraft continued to report on enemy shipping movements, their patrols extending in the Tyrrhenian Sea as far north as Toulon, and as far west as the coasts of Corsica and Sardinia. These sightings became of increasing importance as there was now a powerful air striking force in North Africa able to follow up the sightings and inflict severe damage on enemy shipping. The striking forces of torpedo and anti-flak Beaufighters by day and torpedo and bomber Wellingtons by night were most successful; their best period being between the nights 10 - 14 July, when a series of almost continuous attacks brought enemy shipping virtually to a standstill. It was estimated that 11 merchant ships, totalling some 50,000 tons were sunk or damaged. Four destroyers and a mine-sweeping trawler were also damaged and two enemy aircraft destroyed. Allied losses during this period were seven strike aircraft. Towards the end of the month when enemy shipping activity again increased additional enemy losses were incurred.

As the war was carried further into enemy territorial waters, the Air/Sea Rescue Service had additional work thrown upon it. By 31 July the numbers of live rescues effected from the Bizerta area alone had risen to seventy-four. Catalinas and Sunderlands also took part in long range rescue operations over the sea off Naples and even Sardinia.

No. 230
Squadron O.R.B.

On 18 July a Sunderland of No. 230 Squadron (No. 242 Group) searched for and found in the moonlight a dinghy containing a number of airmen about sixty-five miles south-west of Naples. Flares were dropped preparatory to landing, but the aircraft was driven off by a number of Ju. 88's. A second Sunderland went out at first light and located the dinghy and rescued six members of a Marauder crew. A third Sunderland with 16 Lightnings of the Strategic Air Force as escort making a search 20 miles south-west of Naples sighted an empty dinghy, the occupants of which had just been rescued by an enemy launch. The escort encountered 15 Ju. 52's and claimed to have destroyed them all without loss.

Wellingtons, Walrus, and high speed launches were also employed in this search and at the end of the day had rescued one man and picked up a dead body.

Air Effort for the week ending 23 July

The Air effort during this period was concentrated almost entirely on measures calculated to break the enemy resistance at Catania. Spitfires continuously swept the Catania area and, in north and west Sicily, Mustangs concentrated on smashing enemy reinforcement columns moving to the latter zone. While Mitchells raided the capital itself heavy bombers sustained a continual assault by day and night against every Italian rail and road centre and airfields essential for supplying the island with fresh equipment and personnel. It was a determined policy which did not produce spectacular results but proved, in a few days to be completely successful. By the end of the following week the tide had turned and it was clear that the enemy was reduced to fighting a desperate rear-guard action.

Rome bombed

A.H.B./IIJ5/81

On the morning of 19 July the Allies bombed Rome with a force consisting of 158 Fortresses and large formations of the Ninth (U.S.) Air Force. More than 366 tons of 500 lb. bombs were dropped in 43 minutes. Crews had been briefed to attack only military targets and little damage was caused in the town itself. But the Lorenzo rail yards, engine houses, and large sheds in the main freight depot were damaged severely. At Littorio railway centre damage was done to the marshalling yards and rolling stock. All the aircraft employed returned in safety after having been attacked by a total of nine enemy aircraft.

On the same afternoon 216 Mitchells and 105 Marauders escorted by Lightnings bombed the airfield at Ciampino, dropping sticks of bombs across the centre of the airfield and on the dispersal areas. Large fires were started in hangars and other buildings. Heavy 'flak' was encountered and of the 20 enemy fighters which attempted interception, four were claimed as destroyed. The Allied losses were confined to one Mitchell and one Marauder.

After the raid on Rome the five Liberator Groups of the Ninth Air Force (U.S.) based in Cyrenaica which had hitherto been assisting the Strategic Air Force in many of its operations, were withdrawn from participation in Husky and began to train for a low level attack on the Ploesti oil refineries. The Strategic Air Force, however, continued its attacks against communication targets in southern Italy. On 22 July 71 Fortresses of the 97th and 99th Bombardment Group raided Foggia, 48 Mitchells bombed Battipaglia and 52 Marauders attacked Salerno. The railway traffic through all three places was seriously interrupted as a result of these attacks.

From the 17th to the 23rd the Strategic Air Force attacked airfields in southern Italy. The greater part of the Axis bomber force was at this time based at Foggia, with small detachments at Grottaglie, San Pancrazio, Viterbo and Ciampino. Most of their fighter bombers and single-engined fighters were located in the southern part of Italy, while the twin-engined fighters were stationed in the Naples area. In addition to the attacks on the Littorio and Ciampino airfields in connection with the attack on Rome, the Strategic Air Force raided Pomigliano, Montecorvino, Aquino and Capodichino in the Naples area, Vibo Valentia, Crotone, Leverano and Grosseto. The effect of these attacks was to reduce the Axis air strength in the central Mediterranean and deprive their land forces of effective air support in Sicily.

The Light Bomber Squadrons move to Malta

The light bomber squadrons of the Tactical Bomber Force arrived in Malta from North Africa on the following dates:-

- 20 July Nos. 55 - 223 Squadrons (Baltimore)
- 21 " " 12 & 24 (Boston) and 21 (Baltimore)
All S.A.A.F. units.
- 23 " " 84, 85, 86 & 97 (Boston) U.S.A.A.F.

The advancing Eighth Army had been temporarily checked before Catania and it was important that the enemy's communications should be attacked to prevent him from receiving reinforcements. While the Navy was shelling the coast road east of Mount Etna the Allied light bomber squadrons were given the task of closing the only other road to Catania which ran round Mount Etna to the west. For five days Baltimores and Bostons attacked enemy positions in the Paterno, Troina, Randazzo area and, after going further afield to attack harbour installations at Milazzo for a few days, returned to the area west of Catania just before the Eighth Army launched its attack. To the fall of Catania on 5 August the one thousand sorties flown by these bombers appear to have made no small contribution.

The enemy, however, do not seem to have been much impressed. A report by the Headquarters of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division dated 24 August 1943 contains the following criticisms:-

'The enemy Air Force had complete air supremacy, the damage done however is in no relation to the magnitude of the force committed. Only on a few days did the enemy use the air force like the Russians in support of the ground forces as close support airplanes. The enemy confined his low-level attacks to vehicle traffic on the supply routes, and used massed high altitude bombing for the

Ops. Husky
Malta
A.H.B./IIJ5/
101/5

A.H.B./IIJ5/94/1

The Sicilian
Campaign.
Report 14
Hist. Sect(G.S.)
Canadian Army
H.Q.
(A.H.B.6.-R.176)

destruction of localities and the harassing of supply traffic. With the low-level attacks the enemy had a certain amount of success because where there were no anti-aircraft defences he put columns and single vehicles on fire. However, his low flying airplanes are exceedingly sensitive to anti-aircraft fire.

The only result the enemy obtained with the high altitude bombing was the complete destruction of numerous localities. In no case did he succeed in causing a prolonged blocking of the roads. Even after Randazzo had been attacked 21 times in one day with waves of 12 planes, it was possible to re-open this through traffic after only four hours. To be sure in this particular case special forces (including engineers) had been held in readiness for the purpose.'

No.244 Wing
O.R.B.

No.244 Wing (Spitfire) which escorted the bombers on some of these raids were also critical of their performance. No.1 S.A.A.F. Squadron flew to Palazzolo on 27 July to rendezvous with the Bostons, which appointment was meticulously kept and then disrupted by the Bostons streaking off southwards, their subsequent explanation being that they did not see the escort.

In the afternoon the other squadrons of the wing escorted Bostons to Milazzo, 'where the bombing appeared to be somewhat inaccurate'. Again on 30 July it is recorded 'on one bomber show No.1 S.A.A.F. were considerably mystified by the antics of the Bostons which were supposed to be attacking gun positions. After making a circuit above cloud they flew back to Lentini, one laggard straggling half a mile behind. The Bostons returned to the target area where the laggard appeared to jettison his bombs, the others not doing a thing.'

No.244 Wing
O.R.B. 31 July

An entry in the Operations Record Book of this Wing dated 31 July shows that the fighter pilots were disappointed with the course of events in Sicily - 'the Sicilian campaign has been the reverse of our anticipations. We expected the Hun to come out of his lair in droves, but though when we were in Malta there were enticing stories of formations of forty plus lurking at a judicious distance from the operations we covered and the sweeps we did, in the main he just refused to play. The conclusion is that for us the campaign was more or less over before we started. So excellently timed and so devastating were the attacks we carried out on his landing grounds that any enemy aircraft on Sicily which were not grounded for the duration at the time the invasion started, were obliged to scuttle off to safer retreats on the mainland, which for the most part put them out of range.'

The record goes on to explain that although the Wing had flown over 3,000 sorties since it became operational in Malta only 131 enemy aircraft had been intercepted and of these 11 had been destroyed and 15 damaged. Enemy formations had avoided fighting whenever possible.

The Enemy situation in Sicily at the end of July 1943.

von Bonin
(A.H.B.6-R.156)

The position of the Axis forces at the end of July in Sicily was very critical. Colonel von Bonin later wrote that he was compelled again and again to extend the west flank to maintain contact between his Panzer divisions to avoid the

danger of a wide gap in the front which once opened could never be closed. But the British had, by the beginning of August won considerable ground in the area south-west of Mount Etna, and American forces in their thrust towards Nicosia and Troina had made slow but steady progress and here too the axis forces had lost ground.

'During this period, the enemy air force had remained always active. In the heavy engagements it gave the Allied divisions effective and immediate support. On the other hand, the effect of enemy air attacks which continued day and night without cease on the Strait of Messina had surprisingly little effect. The writer cannot remember ever once to have received a report of any noteworthy interruption of the ferry service caused by enemy air attack. Much more trouble was caused us by the gradually increasing destruction of roads and railways in south and central Italy by attacks from heavy bombers. The flow of supplies began to dry up, and our supply situation on the island little by little became critical.' At the beginning of August it was decided to make all preparation for the evacuation of the island 'moving German, and if possible Italian, troops to the mainland.'

The Battle at Catania

Sicilian
Campaign
A.F.H.Q. 6657

South of the town of Catania fierce fighting continued, but in spite of the strongly defended positions held by the enemy in this sector heavy casualties were inflicted on his forces. The Hermann Goering Division was now holding on while the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division came eastwards to form up on his right flank. Even heavier fighting, however, took place on the central front to the west of Catania.

The 1st Infantry Brigade (Canadian) made steady headway in the face of determined opposition on 21 and 22 July, but the Eighth Army engaged strong elements of the Panzer Grenadier Division south-west of Agira and in the region of Leonforte. The Germans here were fighting determinedly in order to keep open the road running eastwards and in the hope of reinforcing the north-eastern stronghold with Italians. Assoro south-east of Leonforte fell to the Canadian assault on 22nd, and on the following day Leonforte was captured.

The enemy's 15th Panzer Grenadier Division was now forced to withdraw eastwards along the roads through Petralia, Nicosia, Troina and north and east of Leonforte and Nicosia under cover of heavy artillery fire and 'flak' to join up with the Hermann Goering Division. The German units suffered heavy casualties on this and the succeeding days at the hands of our land and air forces. Nicosia, ten miles north-east of Leonforte, was captured on the 24th and in the face of strong enemy opposition the Canadians, aided by Kittyhawk bombers, pushed on towards Agira which was still in Axis hands. The following day they fought their way astride the Agira road, but during the evening were forced to withdraw. During the 26th and 27th, however, the Canadians continued to maintain pressure in the Agira section supported by the air attacks on the Regalbuto area and reached positions overlooking Agira on three sides. On the 29th the town was captured.

Air Support in the Battle Area

The air plan aimed at the isolation of the main Catania position by the systematic bombing and strafing of every line of reinforcement. The ring formed by Misterbianco, Paterno,

Adrano, Regalbuto, Troina, Cesaro, Bronte, Randazzo, Fiumefreddo, Riposto and Acireale were kept under constant attack and the connecting roads were also constantly strafed. Meanwhile attacks were to be continued on Catania itself.

From 19/20 July to the end of the month aircraft under the control of the north-west African Tactical Air Force flew a total of 84 medium, 705 light and 170 fighter bomber sorties against the targets mentioned above. Meanwhile the Allied fighters flew nearly a thousand sorties on offensive patrols on all sectors of the battlefield, but no conclusive engagements with enemy aircraft were reported. The most consistent effort was directed against Randazzo, the most important road junction which connected the Axis positions in the north with those of the east coast. During the 12 days under review attacks were made by 43 medium, 46 light and 178 fighter-bombers on the town's bridges and roads in the vicinity. The most successful raid of these sorties was that carried out by 36 P.40's on 22 July when 40 enemy vehicles were claimed as destroyed and 25 damaged. Of almost equal consistency were the attacks delivered on the Troina area by 12 medium, 97 light and 135 fighter bombers; the bombers concentrated on the town and main road junction, and the fighter bombers attacked targets on the Troina - Randazzo route. The most intensive attacks, however, were those made on Regalbuto on the 26th and 27th, while the Canadians were making their thrust in the Agira sector. On the 26th night bombers flew a total of 212 sorties in attacks on Regalbuto, and these were supplemented by 22 Kittyhawk bomber sorties. Considerable damage was done to the town and roads in the vicinity. On the following day attacks were renewed by 82 more light bombers. These attacks, followed by 82 light bombers and 11 fighter bomber sorties on Centuripe farther east on 28 July, materially helped the thrust eastwards from Agira. Catania itself was attacked by a total of 150 A-36's, Warhawks and Kittyhawks.

Allied Forces Re-Group

The Allied Forces now re-grouped for the final assault in the southern Catania sector. The enemy held strongly defended positions which had been improved by wiring and digging and the whole of the Germans' right flank was in difficult mountainous country, easily defended and giving no scope for mobile tank warfare. There were three main roads only in north-east Sicily along which large scale Allied attacks could be developed:-

- (i) that circling Mount Etna;
- (ii) the Catania and Messina coast road, and
- (iii) the northern coastal road.

During the first few days of August Catania, the enemy's centre of resistance, showed signs of becoming untenable. The fall of Catenanuova on 29 July, and the capture of Regalbuto four days later, threw the enemy back while on the road Paterno - Adrano - Cesaro - San Fratello at the same time providing the Eighth Army with excellent lateral communications. On 3 August preparations for the withdrawal of the Hermann Goering Division were reported and two days later the land forces entered Catania at dawn without any enemy opposition.

The intensive air attacks on all approaches to Catania had been continued in the early days of August and they had virtually isolated the position. During the first four days

in August, in fact, attacks on targets in the Troina - Randazzo - Paterno triangle exceeded the 250 mark for medium bomber sorties and nearly 400 for light and fighter bombers respectively. In particular heavy attacks were delivered on Adrano in support of the thrust from Regalbuto.

Change in the heavy bomber policy

On 1 August the A.O.C. Tactical Air Force sent a personal signal to the A.O.C.-in-C saying that he had ordered attacks by fighter and fighter-bombers on the roads and mainland up to the Gulf of Policastro and across. In general XII Air Support Command were to make attacks on the west and the Desert Air Force on the east of the mainland. The battle area remained the first priority but he had told his forces to regard the Strait as a non-existent barrier in their hunt for mechanical transport deep into enemy territory. He considered that the Messina area 'flak' was now practically prohibitive for all aircraft except the heavy bombers.

The reply from the Advanced Air Command post the next day stated that as the position stood the heavy bombers would not be supporting the Tactical Air Force in the Messina land operation. In view of the fact that the Tactical Air Force had 19 light and medium bomber squadrons plus fighter-bomber squadrons available it was considered these were sufficient to deal with the land situation, with the exception possibly of Messina itself owing to the heavy 'flak'. But even this target was not thought to be particularly suitable for heavy bombers. The heavy bombers were required for another purpose viz 'to punch the Italian people with a view to forcing them to bring pressure to bear upon Badoglio to sue for peace'. They would therefore be concentrated upon Rome and Naples for the next four or five days with this object in view and bombers from the United Kingdom would attack cities in northern Italy with a similar aim.

The Allies suspect the enemy's intention

On 3 August 1943, Headquarters Fifteenth Army Group sent a signal addressed to the Air Officer Commanding the Mediterranean Air Command and to the Naval Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean which ran as follows: 'Indications suggest that Germans are making preparations for withdrawal to the mainland when this becomes necessary. It is quite possible he may start pulling out before front collapses. We must be in a position to take immediate advantage of such a situation by using full weight of Naval and Air Power. You have no doubt co-ordinated plans to meet this contingency and I for my part will watch situation most carefully so as to let you know the right moment to strike and this may come upon us sooner than we expect.'

On the same date the Air Officer Commanding the Desert Air Force wrote a demi-official letter to the Air Officer Commanding the Tactical Air Force in the same strain, 'I suggest that it will need a combined air and naval plan to deal with it, something on the lines of the Tunisian affair but of course, applied to the particular situation here. I quite realise that we can do a lot with the air forces immediately available, but the exceptional 'flak' on both sides of the Strait of Messina will need, I think the use of Fortresses if we are to maintain continuous air action to defeat an attempt at evacuation. Presumably the Navy will be able to prevent sea movement at night, but here again they may need some help from us.'

A.F.H.Q.
Microfilm
92(19)

Ibid.

To this Air Marshal Coningham replied the next day

'But the night is our problem, and though the increasing moon will help the air, only a positive physical barrier, such as the navy can provide, would be effective. The difficulties of operating naval surface forces in the narrow part of the Strait is obvious and I do not see how we can hope for the same proportion of success as at Cap Bon.'

T.A.F. Op.
Instruction
No. 16
6 August 1943.
N.A.T.A.F.
O.R.B.
Appendix.

To provide measures for the situation as he saw it, the A.O.C., T.A.F. issued fresh instructions. The enemy might be expected to evacuate Sicily at any moment in the near future; he might use at the outset any or all of the beaches from Milazzo to Taormina; and at a later stage, the beaches from Torre di Faro to Messina were likely to be the main evacuation areas owing to the short channel crossing and the high scale of anti-aircraft protection that could be given from that restricted area. It was also expected that the enemy would endeavour to carry out the bulk of his movement under cover of darkness.

It was estimated that the enemy air force would have available 100 fighters and fighter-bombers which could operate to cover the evacuation by day from the Crotone and Scalea areas, and that 15 night fighters were based in the Naples area. Additionally, approximately 100 long range bombers were available in the Heel of Italy and the Foggia area which could be used by day or night to assist the evacuation. It was probable that the bomber aircraft would operate mainly at night.

The main requirement was to determine exactly when the enemy evacuation began and both local Air Commanders were instructed to initiate daily reconnaissance with the object in view. The Tactical Bomber Force Commander was to initiate a plan for night reconnaissance in the area from Milazzo to Taormina. Wellingtons of the Strategic Air Force would attack Messina and the barge anchorages to the north of that town on the nights 5 to 8 August. These attacks would be continued if indications showed that the target justified it. By day Fortress formations would be diverted from objectives in southern Italy to attack Messina by the Air Commander-in-Chief occasionally. The Strategic Air Force medium bomber groups would attack landing grounds in the Crotone and Scalea areas when photographic reconnaissance showed that a profitable target was presented. Lightnings were being allocated for the attack of movement in the Toe of Italy.

As soon as the evacuation areas were discovered action would be taken. The Desert Air Force, XII Air Support Command and the Tactical Bomber Force would attack all movement to evacuation points and concentrations of troops in evacuation areas. Attacks were to be extended to the landing area on the eastern side of the Strait of Messina. Additionally the Air Forces were to extend their operational areas to include any movement in the Toe of Italy. At night the Tactical Bomber Force was to operate at maximum intensity during the evacuation period. The Force was to attack the evacuation areas at maximum strength shortly after last light and up to 2300 hours. A similar second attack was to be made after 0400 hours. Normally Mitchell groups would be employed on these attacks using aircraft of No. 326 Wing as pathfinders. The remainder of the Tactical Bomber Force was to be employed against road movement in the Toe of Italy.

The Strategic Air Force would require 12 hours notice, as a minimum, to operate against enemy evacuation targets. This notice would be given by the headquarters of the Tactical Air Force. As soon as this was given the following co-ordinated plan would be operated. At 0900 hours 72 Fortresses would attack the enemy evacuation area. This attack would be followed by a prolonged fighter-bomber attack on the same area. A second Fortress attack would follow approximately two hours afterwards and then a second fighter-bomber attack. Later a medium bomber group would be held at readiness to undertake a third bomber attack and would be dispatched by the Strategic Air Force on request by the Tactical Air Force. The Strategic Air Force were also to arrange to continue the attacks by medium groups on landing grounds in the Crotona and Scalea areas and by Lightning Groups against movement in the Toe of Italy.

The Progress of the Seventh Army

In the west the Seventh Army was re-grouping and moving east in the north coastal sector where it shortly encountered the bulk of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, which had arrived from the mainland. The weight of this division began to be felt in this sector after the capture of Castelbuono on 27 July. On that day, the Canadians were forced to fall back somewhat in the Regalbuto-Agira area as a result of heavy counter-attacks by the enemy.

Encountering firm opposition from the Germans, besides extensive demolitions and minefields, both the Americans and the Canadians pushed forward steadily during the next week. The Seventh Army took Nicosia on the 28th and continued on towards Troina. Canadians took Agira on the 28th, Catenanovva on 29th, and were fighting in Regalbuto on 1 August. On the next day the Eighth Army captured Centuripe and the Seventh beat off a heavy counter-attack west of Troina.

The battle of Troina

The First Division of the Seventh Army opened the attack on Troina on 4 August with a 50 minute artillery and air preparation at 1645 hours. Eight and a half artillery batteries were firing on enemy positions, and 72 Mustangs in two waves of 36 aircraft, each carrying a 500 lb. bomb, dropped their loads on Troina's defenders. An infantry attack followed, but was beaten off by the Germans.

The battle continued, and on the 5th the Americans renewed the attack. XII Air Support Command provided direct aid by sending three Mustang sorties against defence positions. In addition twelve Mitchells of the 12th Bombardment Group and 24 Baltimores of the Tactical Bomber Force bombed the town and road targets in the vicinity respectively. On the 6th the Americans took the town and pushed one mile east where vigorous enemy resistance was again encountered.

The capture of Troina was one of the most significant events of the campaign. After this defeat the Germans never again sacrificed large numbers of troops to hold any position, and their whole effort was bent on making a successful withdrawal of as many men as possible from Sicily. It is interesting to note that in this battle the enemy incurred the heaviest casualties of the whole campaign.

Sicilian
Campaign
A.F.H.Q.
6657

Seventh Army
Summary of
Operations
A. F. H. Q.

From this point the campaign degenerated into an engineering problem. Italian formations were almost discounted, and the problem of both Allied armies was to advance as fast as possible from delaying position to delaying position over extensive and skilfully planned German demolition and minefields.

Formation of Task Force 88

Action report
W.N.T.F.
Husky
A.F.H.Q.
6066.

On 28 July Vice Admiral Hewitt U.S. Navy had created Task Force 88, under the command of Rear Admiral L.A. Davidson, in order to 'support the eastward advance of the Seventh Army by gunfire support and by effecting advance landings of military units.' The forces available were the three cruisers Philadelphia, Savannah, Boise and some 14 destroyers, landing and escort craft. During the advance of the Seventh Army along the north coastal road the greatest assistance was given by these ships, whose gunfire, controlled by their own spotting aircraft, was directed against shore batteries and other targets indicated by the Army.

After the battle of Troina, on 8 August, the Third Division (U.S.) in conjunction with the Naval Task Force made the first of three amphibious landings two miles east of San t' Agata with the object of outflanking the German positions at San Fratello which had stopped the advance along the coastal road for four days.

Ibid

Again on 11 August, German efforts to reform and re-organise a defence system on the Capo d' Orlando-Naso line were similarly frustrated by a second amphibious landing at Brolo. During the hours of darkness early on the morning 16 August, another amphibious landing was made. This had been intended to beach east of Milazzo, but as the Seventh Army had advanced so rapidly on shore, the landings were diverted to the beaches north-west of Barcellona, which by that time was behind the advanced echelons of the Seventh Army.

Admiral Hewitt claimed that the operations of this Task Force were unique in naval history in that a combatant naval force had operated for a period of 22 days from an unprotected anchorage within easy bombing distance of enemy shore based aircraft. During the operation more than 20 enemy aircraft had been shot down, one 'F' lighter and two escort vessels, had been sunk and several 'E' boats and escort vessels damaged. The Island of Ustica and the Lipari Islands (a group of seven islands) had been taken with 140 prisoners of war, their arms and several valuable codes and ciphers.

Action report
W.N.T.F. of
Husky
A.F.H.Q. 6066
p. 78.

He was not, however, satisfied with the air cover provided. 'The operations along the north coast of Sicily were conducted within 200 miles of 15 enemy airfields, four of which were within 60 miles until the fall of Catania on 5 August. As a result, the ships and craft operating off the north coast were, until the middle of August, under repeated bombing and strafing attack by enemy aircraft. Due to the inadequate air coverage provided for the naval operations, an effort was made to limit the time the cruisers would be in the gunfire support areas. To station these vessels in daylight positions offshore, awaiting call by the Army, invited enemy air action. The continuity of the air coverage provided was inadequate to protect naval movements, and frequently enemy attacks were pressed home without interception by our fighters. The thin fighter cover provided was apparently due to an inadequate number of aircraft being available to meet all air requirements. Communications with fighter air coverage

when present were not good; this is believed to be due largely to lack of indoctrination in procedure and lack of experience on the part of both ship and air force personnel. Communications between naval commanders and the air force control station were poor. This was aggravated by the fact that the Air Support Command was not located at Corps Headquarters, where requests for gunfire missions originated. This resulted in loss of time in arranging for fighter cover and, on some occasions, resulted in none being furnished. If the XII Air Support Command had taken a more active part in the initial planning of the campaign and had been less desirous of showing its independence vis-a-vis the Army, difficulties might have been obviated.'

Colour is lent to this report by the fact that Palermo was thrice raided during this period. During the hours of darkness on the morning of 1 August more than 25 Ju.88's and Do.217's made a successful attack, rendering the best dock unserviceable, destroying rations and petrol supplies, blowing up an ammunition train, and sinking the British coaster Uskide (2708 tons). Two United States minesweepers Strive and Skill were also damaged. Casualties were light. The second attack was made on 4 August when more than 35 enemy aircraft again bombed the dock area and airfield but with less success, although two United States destroyers(1) were damaged and had to be towed to Malta for repairs. On the first raid seven enemy aircraft were claimed as destroyed and on the second four aircraft. A third attack was made in force on the night of 6/7 August, but was met by night fighters and broken up, very little damage resulting.

Advent of Tactical Bomber Force

The headquarters of the Tactical Bomber Force were established in Comiso on 6 August. This formation had been handicapped during the Husky operations for the following reasons. In the initial period the fighters had been fully committed and were therefore only able to provide escorts for a limited number of bomber raids. While the Force had been operating from the mainland only the Mitchell units had been able to reach the eastern half of the island, as the other aircraft had insufficient range. The Force had been obliged to move during the operation from North Africa to Sicily which had caused a certain amount of disorganisation and No.326 Wing was deficient in aircraft while the 340th Group was short of aircrews. All these reasons prevented the efficient operation of the Tactical Bomber Force.

Strategic Air Force Bomber Operations

The Strategic Air Force also had to reduce the scale of attack on Italian targets after the fall of Palermo because its aircrews had become tired by a long succession of operations in very hot and trying weather. General Eisenhower had asked for the temporary transfer of additional heavy bomber units (Fortress) from the Eighth Air Force in the United Kingdom to the Mediterranean theatre, but his request had been referred to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and refused by them on the grounds that these units could be more usefully employed in operations from Britain.

(1) Shubrick and Mayrant.

Husky
23 Scoru.
A.H.B./IIJ5/81

O.R.B.
T.B.F.

A.A.F. in
World War II.

U.S.FOR/A/1381
5 Aug.
A.F.H.Q.
6893

A.A.F. in
World War II.

In spite of these difficulties, the Strategic Air Force continued its offensive against lines of communication and airfields in Italy. The most important communication targets attacked were, San Giovanni, Salerno, Paola, Marina di Catanzaro, Battipaglia, Sapri and Naples on the Tyrrhenian coast, and Rome and Bologna. Attacks were also directed against airfields from which enemy aircraft might reach Sicily and the Allied lines of communication in the central Mediterranean; some of which included Scalea, Capua, Montecorvino, Capodichino, Viterbo, Aquino, Grottaglie, Pratica de Mare, Crotone, Grazzanise and Foggia. All these targets were situated in southern or central Italy. These attacks met with little opposition either from fighters or anti-aircraft fire.

In addition to the work of the heavy and medium bombers, Strategic Air Force Lightnings and Kittyhawks made extensive sweeps over Sardinia and the Toe of Italy. Lightnings of the 1st, 14th and 82nd Fighter Groups operated against targets on the mainland. From the 8th to 17 August they raided the enemy's evacuation route, bombing and shooting up trains, motor transport, radar stations and bridges with impunity.

On 13 August, a second large scale attack was made on the Littorio and Lorenzo marshalling yards in Rome. One hundred and six Fortresses escorted by 45 Lightnings, 102 Marauders and 66 Mitchells escorted by 90 Lightnings - all from the Strategic Air Force - dropped 500 tons of bombs on these objectives. Very extensive damage was inflicted on the rail system and on the airfield at Littorio. The attacks were opposed by 75 enemy fighters. American losses were two Marauders while they claimed to have shot down five enemy aircraft and five probably destroyed.(1)

Bomber Command Attack on Italy

While these attacks were being made by the Strategic Air Force by day, Bomber Command was raiding Italian cities at night. On 7, 12, 14 and 15 August a total of 880 aircraft attacked Milan; on 7, 12 and 16 August a total of 355 aircraft attacked Turin and on 7 August 72 aircraft attacked Genoa.(2) On 16/17 August 127 Fortresses of the Eighth Air Force bombed Regensburg,(3) then flew on to North African bases. A week later 34 of these aircraft returned to the United Kingdom bombing Bordeaux en route.

XII Air Support Command in Sicily

The XII Air Support Command Headquarters had been established with that of the Seventh Army, at Agrigento on 22 July and had remained with that Headquarters throughout the campaign, moving first to Palermo and then to San Stefano. On 24 July, the Third Air Defence Wing assumed the function of XII Air Support Command and conducted operations during the remainder of the campaign. The 3rd Air Defence Wing was renamed the 64th Fighter Wing on 12 August.

XII A.S.C.
Ops.
Summary
A.H.B./11J5/8

- (1) A.H.B. Narrative. 'The Italian Campaign,' Volume I.
- (2) A.H.B. Narrative. 'The R.A.F. in the Bombing Offensive against Germany,' Volume V, Appendix 10.
- (3) A.H.B. Narrative. 'The R.A.F. in the Bombing Offensive against Germany,' Volume V, Appendix 12.

The order of battle of the Wing was as follows:-

H.Q. No. 64 Wing
Summary
A.H.B./11J5/78.

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Type of Aircraft</u>	<u>Base</u>
31st Fighter Group	Spitfire	Ponte Olivo
111th Reconnaissance Squadron	Mustang	Ponte Olivo
33rd Fighter Group	Warhawk	Licata
99th Fighter Squadron	Kittyhawk	Licata
27th Bomb. Group (D)	Mustang	Gela East
86th Bomb. Group (D)	Mustang	Gela West

The advanced operations headquarters moved from Agrigento to Termini on 28 July and from there controlled all aircraft operating on the north coast. The 31st Fighter Group moved to Termini on 27 July but remained under the operational control of XII Air Support Command Headquarters. All units, except the 11th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, were used almost exclusively as fighter-bombers. The majority of sorties were either against targets located by tactical reconnaissance on the ground, or against enemy shipping which had been sighted. In the absence of other suitable targets, bomber sweeps over the roads of the north-eastern part of Sicily were flown, looking for targets of opportunity. All air support requests which could be flown with fighter-bombers were accepted.

Ibid

Notwithstanding the fact that most of their air units had had considerable fighting experience before the beginning of the Sicilian campaign, there were several regrettable incidents in which the ground forces were bombed and strafed by their own aircraft. For instance at 1345 hours on 4 August, twelve Mitchell bombers attacked the Second Devons near Regalbuto and inflicted three casualties. Another attack was made on the same day at 1700 hours when twelve United States fighters operated in a British Brigade area. In return the ground troops frequently fired on friendly aircraft and many losses occurred from this cause. There were also difficulties with the supply of bombs, and with the replacement of aircraft.

The Final Phase

The Junction of the armies

The fall of Centuripe to the Eighth Army may be said to mark the beginning of the final phase of the campaign in Sicily. It soon became apparent that the Germans were trying to withdraw all along the line from the east to the north coast, but their time-table had probably been upset by the early loss of the high ground around Centuripe.

Sicilian Campaign
A.F.H.Q.
6637

The final phase of the campaign began on 3 August, for by then the Seventh Army and the Eighth were fighting side by side. The Seventh Army were attacking to pass Mount Etna to the north, and the Eighth Army were attacking to pass it to the south and east. On the Eighth Army front the Germans were seen destroying dumps in the Gerbini area in preparation for falling back to the bridgehead position north of Catania. On the Seventh Army front stiff opposition was being offered particularly in the Troina area. On the following day the evacuation of Catania had become apparent and the Eighth Army were in the outskirts of the city.

SECRET

87

Enemy Withdrawal

By 7 August the enemy had been driven from Adrano to the foot-hills of Mount Etna. To the south-east his line ran through Nicolosi to a point on the coast midway between Catania and Acireale; to the north-west he had withdrawn behind Bronte to a line through Cesaro and up to the coast at San Fratello. Five days later he had been driven out of these positions, Riposto had been evacuated, and the Allies were at the approaches to Randazzo and Capo d' Orlando. As land and air forces hammered relentlessly at the retreating armies Wellingtons of the Strategic Air Force (1) (78 dropped 150 tons of bombs on the night 7/8 alone) struck at the evacuation beaches between Messina and Cape Peloro.

From then onwards to the fall of Messina on 16 August the air effort consisted of heavy attacks against the retreating ground forces, continuous day and night patrols, and the strafing of Siebel ferries and other craft escaping across the Strait to the mainland.

The importance of Randazzo

Randazzo was a particularly important objective as it was the last road junction connecting the Axis positions in the north with those on the east coast. With its fall the enemy would be forced to divide and retire along the coast roads to Messina.

N. A. T. A. F.
Int/Opsum
No. 120.
A. H. B. / IJ1/311/
4/5

On 7 August the Tactical Bomber Force flew 21 raids against Randazzo by 107 Mitchells, 48 Baltimores, and 94 Bostons, the units engaged being the 12th, 47th and 340th (U.S.) Bomb Groups and Nos. 232 and 326 Royal Air Force Wings. They dropped in all one thousand and seventy-six 250 lb. bombs, two hundred and ninety-three 100 lb. bombs, and one hundred and ninety-nine 500 lb. bombs. Many hits were observed on buildings. Bombs also fell on the railway line and one large fire started by the first wave of bombers was seen to be still burning at the end of the attack. 'Flak' was intense, heavy and accurate. Four aircraft were lost and 21 damaged by anti-aircraft fire.

At the same time 12 Bostons (No. 326 Wing) bombed Maletto, seven miles to the south-west with forty-eight 250 lb. bombs and 80 Marauders made a concerted attack on the road bridge over the Alcantara River across which troops were withdrawing. Mustangs and Kittyhawks continued to attack Cesaro and Randazzo as the Allied troops advanced on these objectives while Warhawks and Kittyhawks, returning from pounding the Messina ferries, joined in and shot up lines of communications in the same area.

On the next day Randazzo again felt the full weight of light and medium bomber attack. During the first part of the day fighter bombers concentrated on road targets north of Mount Etna, but later the Desert Air Force reverted to attacking shipping in the Messina Strait. The 31st (U.S.) Fighter Group flew 76 sorties to cover the Seventh Army's amphibious landing near Sant' Agata. The enemy fighter-bombers F.W. 190's and Me. 109's which attempted to bomb were intercepted and forced to jettison their bombs. Three F.W. 190's were claimed destroyed and one Me. 109 damaged. On 10 August anti-shipping

(1) No. 205 Group R.A.F.

sweeps were continued over the Strait and coastal areas. Shipping movements were observed to be less than was usual. In the afternoon bombers again attacked Randazzo.

Ibid

On the 11th Randazzo was again bombed by 48 Mitchells of the 12th and 340th (U.S.) Bomb. Group. The road and railway were hit and fires were started. Four raids were made by 12 Baltimores (No. 232 Wing) and 36 Mitchells (12th Bomb. Group) on Fiumefreddo - an important junction on the east coast road to Messina - direct hits were observed on roads and buildings. Mustangs of the 27th and 86th (U.S.) Bomb. Group with Kittyhawks of the 33rd Fighter Group were active in support of the American surprise landing east of Orlando and made five attacks on gun emplacements in the vicinity of the landings. Troop concentrations south of Orlando and a column of tanks and personnel near Brolo were successfully bombed and shot up. In raids on the communications to the area direct hits were obtained on bridges and the main coastal road and in the towns of Patti and Piraino.

This widespread bombing of towns and communications, although effective, actually slowed down the advance of the ground forces on several occasions owing to the debris blocking the streets and impeding the forward movement of the infantry.

No. 211 Group
O.R.B.

On this day the enemy reacted strongly in the air. Mines were dropped in the sea off Syracuse and Augusta. During the evening between 2240 and 2330 hours more than 30 enemy aircraft attacked the landing grounds at Lentini and Agnone, as well as the ports of Augusta and Syracuse. On the landing grounds about 30 Allied aircraft were destroyed or damaged, and Royal Artillery personnel defending the landing grounds sustained 31 casualties. These attacks were made with great determination, but the enemy lost five Ju. 88's destroyed.

The German plan for withdrawal

von Bonin
(A.H.B. 6-R.156)

The total number of German troops in Sicily was about 50,000 and the intention was to evacuate them all to the mainland. It was realised that the Navy and Air Force could make the crossing by day impossible, and that the ferry service could be maintained only under cover of darkness. With the German ferry vessels at their disposal, they required six nights for these 50,000 men with their general weapons, including machine guns, but without vehicles and all heavy weapons.

The plan based on these facts foresaw five defence lines converging on Messina, and always becoming smaller around the towns. The first of these defence lines ran from the north coast at or just east of Sant' Agata, over Bronte, to the south slopes of Mount Etna, to Acireale. The last line was just around Messina. In withdrawing to the first, and in each withdrawal to the second, third, fourth and fifth lines of defence, each division was to release a fixed proportion of its troops, and from all three divisions a total of 8 - 10,000 men was to be released at each withdrawal, and moved on foot towards Messina. On the fifth line of defence, the last remaining troops were to proceed direct to the boats in the last night before the final evacuation. Equipment was to be got out by day by the ferry service as opportunity offered. Italian troops were to be moved to the mainland, but in all cases without vehicles or heavy weapons by means of their own transport which consisted principally of a large steam ferry.

The Germans tried to get the Italian Army Headquarters to evacuate Sicily of its own free will, and thus free themselves of a mass of Italian troops. Surprisingly enough, the Italians refused to go. It appears that the Italians had had strict orders that they were not to leave the island before the Germans. All was therefore prepared for the proposed evacuation, the only question being the date on which the plan was to be put into operation.

von Bonin
(A.H.B.6-R.156)

After the decision had been taken there were some anxious days at the German Headquarters which was located at first at Barcellona and later south-west of Messina. Had the Allies realised their intention? If not when would they do so? What action would they take when the situation was clear to them? All these questions were acute and caused the German General Staff grave concern, especially as the American landings on the north coast were considered as the beginning of increased Allied activity, and the fore-warning of large scale operations.

'Nothing of the kind occurred. The plans proceeded as laid down, and without any difficulty worthy of mention. There was not even a notable increase in the attacks of the enemy air force against our ferry service, which continued without interruption by night, and of course now by day. Our hope to save not only the men but also all our equipment, and thus to attain a maximum of our aim, increased from hour to hour. In order to make it possible, another night and another complete day were gained for the divisions by holding one of the intermediate defence lines longer. It would have been quite possible to win further time as the enemy followed the withdrawal of our troops only hesitantly, and was moreover delayed in his advance by effective demolitions on the roads.'

Allied Intelligence at fault

J.I.C.(A)11/43

As late as 4 August the Allied Joint Intelligence Committee had written in a paper entitled 'Estimate of enemy capabilities to evacuate Sicily' that, 'at the present time there is no sign that the enemy intends an evacuation of Sicily and there is evidence that reinforcements still continue to reach the island.' They reported that a photographic reconnaissance on 31 July had revealed the presence of the following small craft in the areas of the Strait which could be made available for enemy evacuation

- (a) Two train ferries,
- (b) Thirty to forty landing craft or Siebel ferries,
- (c) Numerous small craft

and they estimated that it would be possible for the enemy to evacuate 60,000 troops every twenty-four hours.

A.F.H.Q.
6893
Ops. in Sicily

It was not until 2210 hours on 14 August that General Alexander from the Headquarters of the Fifteenth Army Group informed Air Chief Marshal Tedder as to the situation in a signal which ran as follows 'From general information received it now appears that German evacuation has really started'.

It is now known through the medium of captured documents that the original German plan for evacuation was that the Hermann Goering Division should begin evacuation on the 1 August, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division on the 12th, and the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division on the 15th. But this proposed

programme was upset by the Allied attacks and full scale evacuation was begun instead by the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division from Randazzo on 11 August and by the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division in the coastal sector on the night of the 12/13th.

Hist. Sec. (G.S.)
Micro Films
No. 1.

During the night 10/11th and 11/12th August the following German personnel and equipment were ferried over to the mainland:-

615 officers, and 19,924 other ranks,
34 tanks, 44 S.P. assault guns,
21 guns and 11 A/A guns,
15 heavy A/T guns,
2,185 vehicles.

The last German troops embarked from the island on the night of 16/17 August, abandoning Italian troops and a great quantity of undestroyed material and supplies.

No. 205 (R.A.F.) Group's night operations against the German evacuation

No. 205 Group
O.R.B.

The night flying Wellingtons of No. 205 Group under the control of the Strategic Air Force made a series of attacks on the evacuation beaches and Messina beginning on the night of 4/5 August. Messina was allotted to No. 236 Wing (24 aircraft) and No. 331 Wing (36 aircraft) for a heavy attack at 2200 hours. On that night they were warned particularly to confine their attention to the marshalling yards only, as anything found outside this target was to be regarded as friendly, in view of the fact that light naval surface craft would be harassing any shipping found between the mainland and Sicily. Ninety-seven tons of bombs were dropped on Messina and as the target was well illuminated by flares results were observed to have been successful. The crews saw small fires break out near the ferry terminus, and a 4,000 lb. bomb burst in the marshalling yards. The town itself was repeatedly hit.

Ibid

On the night of 5/6th, an increased effort was ordered on the beaches between Messina and Cape Peloro, the actual targets being the barges and personnel which were beginning the German evacuation. Messina itself was not to be bombed but some leaflets were to be dropped in that area. One hundred Wellingtons from Nos. 231, 236, 330 and 331 Wings dropped 157 tons of bombs. But low cloud and haze seriously interfered with the finding of the targets and although the beaches were located nothing was seen on them and the results of the bombing were considered as negligible.

A repeat attack was ordered for the night of 6/7th but owing to the bad weather only 31 of the 40 aircraft which took off found the target. Bombing results were largely unobserved. On the same night other Wellingtons of the same group bombed Naples successfully.

On the next night attacks were again made on the beaches, half the effort being devoted to the beaches between Scaletta and Messina and half to those five miles each side of Cape Barbi. Eighty-one aircraft dropped 148 tons of bombs on the beaches and nearby roads and in the towns of Bagnara and Scaletta. Direct hits were seen on some roads and in both towns; a large fire being started at Bagnara and another near Cape Barbi. Objects which might have been landing craft were seen on the beaches at Bagnara and others to the north of that

place. Two Wellingtons were seen to have been shot down in flames by enemy night fighters, but the 'flak' was negligible.

On the night of 8/9th 72 aircraft attacked the beaches between Messina and Cape Peloro from dusk to dawn in clear weather but found no visible activity there. A few fires were started but the results of dropping 138 tons of bombs appeared to be negligible. On the next night the attacks were repeated. Cloud made location difficult, bursts were seen along the roads and beaches, among enemy transport west of Cape Peloro and on buildings in Paradiso. But conclusive damage, as usual on such targets, was difficult to prove. The attack was repeated again on the night of 10/11th, although the crews reported that no obvious signs of evacuation were yet apparent. Eighty-five aircraft dropped 174 tons of bombs during the hours of darkness. Bombs were dropped amongst landing craft, on beaches and coastal roads. Photographs confirmed the success of this attack and good fires were seen between Sant' Agata and Ganzirri.

The next night, for the seventh time, the same attacks were ordered. Eighty-four Wellingtons attacked the beaches and bursts were observed along the beaches and coastal roads. Fires were seen at Ganzirri and at Messina. A small number of barges were observed inshore along the coast. A total of 159 tons of bombs were dropped and photographs confirmed that the attack had been successful.

On the night 12/13th 86 aircraft dropped 180 tons of bombs on the usual targets. A few barges were seen off shore. A large fire in Paradiso, caused an explosion, which revealed a large ship just off the shore together with some more barges. The attack continued for the whole of the night and results were believed to have been good.

On the 13th the Headquarters of the Strategic Air Force informed No. 205 Group that Intelligence(1) reported that the work of the Wellingtons over the beaches had been extremely effective and had been much appreciated by the Allied forces in Sicily. Nevertheless on the next night the Group's effort was diverted to targets on the Italian mainland.

The Seventh Army Commander's proposal

A.F.H.Q.
6893

On 10 August General Patton asked for the approval of the Fifteenth Army Group for an operation which he had already planned in concert with the formations concerned. He asked that he should be permitted to use the 509th Paratroop battalion in a combined air and sea assault on the rear of the enemy's positions near Barcellona. General Alexander approved the plan and sent it on to the Air Commander-in-Chief asking him to provide the necessary aircraft and to arrange the details of the operations direct with the Staff of the Seventh Army.

The reply came late in the afternoon of 13th. It was considered that the paratroop operation requested by General Patton against the bridges west of Barcellona was impracticable as a daylight operation because of the

(1) The G-2 report at the Daily Operational meeting at A.F.H.Q. on 14 August stated 'There was no evidence of any large-scale withdrawal of troops from Sicily. At the same time a limited and well organised evacuation was being carried out.'

concentration of anti-aircraft fire which was known to exist in that area. If an interruption of road communications was desired, this could be accomplished by a fighter-bomber or bomber attack with at least equal effectiveness and far greater economy of force than would result from an airborne operation. It was therefore proposed to arrange such an attack to fit in with General Patton's plan if required. However by 14 August the campaign was nearly over and nothing was done.

The pursuit and final reduction of the Island

Early on the morning of 13 August 1943, the Americans entered Randazzo and the campaign was at an end. There were still a few days of the final attempt to prevent withdrawal, but it was too late. The advantages of the ground were with the enemy. Even the Messina Strait presented hardly a chance to the Allies. The Germans had foreseen the value that narrow thread of water might assume and the elaborateness of the anti-aircraft defence surprised the airmen who encountered it.

On this day, air reconnaissance reported continuous activity in the Strait of Messina. Between 1300 and 1430 hours 12 Siebel ferries and between 40 and 50 barges were seen in the Strait. Most of the enemy craft was concentrated in Messina and along the beaches northwards as far as Cape Peloro. Warhawks and Kittyhawks operated all day over shipping in the Strait and the Toe of Italy. Direct hits were made on two Siebel ferries, one 'E' boat, one small merchant vessel, one large barge, and one 'F' boat. Near misses were recorded on eleven barges, six Siebel ferries, a small merchant vessel, and one 'F' boat.

There was some air opposition. In the morning Spitfires and Warhawks intercepted about ten Me.109's and F.W.190's over the Strait and claimed to have destroyed one F.W.190 and two Me.109's and probably destroyed another Me.109 for the loss of one Allied fighter of each type. Both pilots survived.

Of the 24 Mitchells detailed to attack Falcone, owing to bad visibility 17 bombed the target on 'estimated time of arrival', the remainder returned to base without having released their bombs.

In the afternoon, 39 Mitchells set out to attack shipping in the Strait and although the weather was clear could find no targets. As an alternative 93 tons of bombs were unloaded on railroad bridges north of Scaletta.

The next day shipping continued to operate in the Strait at the same intensity as on the previous day. The enemy was continuing his orderly evacuation across the Strait and dispersing to points on the mainland as far north as Gioia. Desert Air Force aircraft attacked mechanical transport concentrated at Gesso destroying 12 of them; the rest of their effort was devoted to shipping in the Strait and along the west coast of Italy as far as Gioia. Successes included a direct hit on a tug and on a large barge carrying troops. Very near misses were made on two Siebel ferries, which were believed to have been damaged, and near misses on fifteen barges and numerous other enemy vessels.

At 1600 hours Spitfires intercepted three M.C.202's at 8,000 feet with 22 M.C.202's flying above them at 17,000 feet. The latter formation took no action. Kittyhawks

N.A.T.A.F.
Int. Opsum
period 13 Aug.

Ibid

engaged a formation of about six Me.109's and M.C.202's with the result that one M.C.202 was destroyed and three Me.109's were damaged.

Ibid

'Flak' in the Messina Strait was encountered only by aircraft undertaking offensive action. This was considered to indicate that the enemy was husbanding his ammunition. On the 15th eight missions consisting of 24 Bostons, 36 Baltimores and 36 Mitchells released 90 tons of bombs on troop barges south of Cape Peloro. Direct hits were made on buildings and on boats in the lake. Intense 'flak' from the target to Torre di Faro damaged 28 aircraft. 'Flak' was also heavy along the opposite side of the Straits. The Desert Air Force continued its attacks on shipping, and Spitfires of No.31 Fighter Group made sweeps in the area Milazzo - Messina. Desert Air Force Spitfires intercepted four F.W.190's east of Catania and destroyed two for the loss of one Spitfire. The enemy air force had made attacks on shipping at Augusta, Catania, and off Capo d' Orlando. No serious damage had been reported.

By this date the Allied Headquarters in Sicily had come to the conclusion that not more than 10,000 Germans were still in the island and that these could easily be evacuated in the next two days. 'It will be surprising if more than a thousand or so Germans are caught.'

On the 16th, which was to prove the last day of the ground campaign in Sicily, air operations were continued against shipping in the Strait and on communications in the Toe of Italy. Ninety-six sorties were made by Mitchells, Baltimores and Bostons of the 12th, 47th and 340th Bomb Groups and No.232 Wing. They dropped one hundred and forty-two 300 lb., four hundred and ninety-two 250 lb., forty-seven 100 lb. and one thousand and ninety-five 20 lb. bombs on shipping in the Strait and on the beaches from north of Messina to Cape Peloro. Forty-four aircraft were damaged by 'flak' and two were reported as missing.

In view of the uncertainty of the position of the forward Allied troops, the whole of the available fighter-bomber force of the Desert Air Force was directed against shipping targets. Hits were obtained on eight barges and two Siebel ferries and other vessels, one large ship was seen on fire and emitting explosions off Messina. 'Flak' was intense heavy and accurate at the north-east corner of Sicily, at Messina and over the Italian mainland. Bursts were seen coloured red, white and black.

Four F.W.190's attacked a vessel off Taormina but the bombs missed her, although Spitfires failed to engage the enemy aircraft. Six Macchi's attacked two Spitfires over Palmi and one Spitfire was shot down. Eight unidentified fighters were seen west of Milazzo but no interception was effected.

Difficulties in the pursuit

British troops had followed the Americans into Randazzo on the 13th and during the following days had made an advance of some 20 miles. The Eighth Army made slow progress along the ribbon of road that lay between Mount Etna and the sea. Giarre, Riposto and Fiumefreddo fell into their hands during the next few days, but it was evident that here, even at that late hour, the advance was being skilfully pegged. The Germans had to make their way to Messina and the obstacle to

their chance of reaching safety was the Allied advance. The roads were being sedulously bombed; but broken bridges, every sort of demolition and mines held off the infantry.

The Seventh Army had reached Barcellona, only about 17 miles from Messina, by 15 August, and at the same time the Eighth Army were pressing through the former enemy headquarters Taormina. Though both these places were only 26 miles apart, this contraction of front favoured the operation of rear-guards. Even with the assistance of 'bulldozers' the obstacles in the path of the advance could not be overcome more rapidly. The Eighth Army made its best pace by the coast road to Messina, while the long range artillery shelled the town. The Seventh Army was nearing it, after having by-passed Milazzo; and, at 0825 hours on the morning of 17 August, an American patrol entered Messina. Only 50 minutes later they were joined by a British Commando officer of an amphibious force of the Eighth Army, which had landed behind the Germans in the Scaletta area. It was a ruined city, and it seemed a miracle that it could have been used even for evacuation.

N.A.T.A.F.
Int/Opsum

Although fighting had ceased on the ground in Sicily there was no rest for the air forces. The Desert Air Force found and continued to attack with success shipping in the Strait and the Gulf of Gioia and Mustangs attacked enemy rail communications. Six Bostons of No.326 Wing attacked the evacuation beaches from Messina to Cape Peloro bombing landing craft and shipping until the afternoon when the evacuation beaches were reported to be cleared of the enemy. The work of the air forces never ceased. Just as after the fall of Tunis there was no respite so the campaign in the air went on without intermission to prepare the way for the Armies to invade Southern Italy.

SECRET

1

APPENDIX 1

C.C.S. 171/2/D

23 January 1943

COMBINED CHIEFS OF STAFF

OPERATION HUSKY

DIRECTIVE TO COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF,
ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE IN NORTH AFRICA

(Approved by Combined Chiefs of Staff at their 69th Meeting)

The Combined Chiefs of Staff have resolved that an attack against Sicily will be launched in 1943, with the target date as the period of the favourable July* moon (Code designation HUSKY).

The Combined Chiefs of Staff have further agreed that the following command set-up shall be established for the operation:-

1. You are to be the Supreme Commander with General Alexander as Deputy Commander-in-Chief, charged with the detailed planning and preparation and with the execution of the actual operation when launched.
2. Admiral of the Fleet Cunningham is to be the Naval Commander and Air Chief Marshal Tedder the Air Commander.

You will submit to the Combined Chiefs of Staff your recommendations for the Officers to be appointed Western and Eastern Task Force Commanders.

In consultation with General Alexander you will set up at once a special operational and administrative staff, with its own Chief of Staff, for planning and preparing the operation, including cover plans.

The provision of the necessary forces and their training in time for the assault on the target date given above have been the subject of exhaustive study by the Combined Chiefs of Staff and their Staffs. A Memorandum setting out the various considerations and the outline plan for the operation which formed the basis of this study, is attached for your information. (C.C.S. 161/1). Plan A (vide para. 5 of this paper) was accepted by the Combined Chiefs of Staff for the provision of the British Ground Forces. The details of the additional forces which will be made available to you for the operation will be communicated separately by the United States and the British Chiefs of Staff.

A copy of the Minutes of the 66th Meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff held at Casablanca on 22 January, 1943, which led to the above decisions, is attached for your information.

* The Combined Chiefs of Staff have agreed that without prejudicing the July date for the operation, an intense effort will be made during the next three weeks to achieve by contrivance and ingenuity the favourable June moon period as the date for the operation. If at the end of the three weeks their efforts have proved successful, your instructions will be modified accordingly.

SECRET

2

You are to report to them not later than the 1 March, whether any insurmountable difficulty as to resources and training will cause the date of the assault to be delayed beyond the favourable July moon. In the event of there being such a delay you will confirm that the assault date will not be later than the favourable August moon.

The code designation to be communicated to you later will apply to all general preparations for HUSKY in the Mediterranean Theater, including training, cover plans and preliminary air operations. Specific operations will be given special code designations.

SECRET

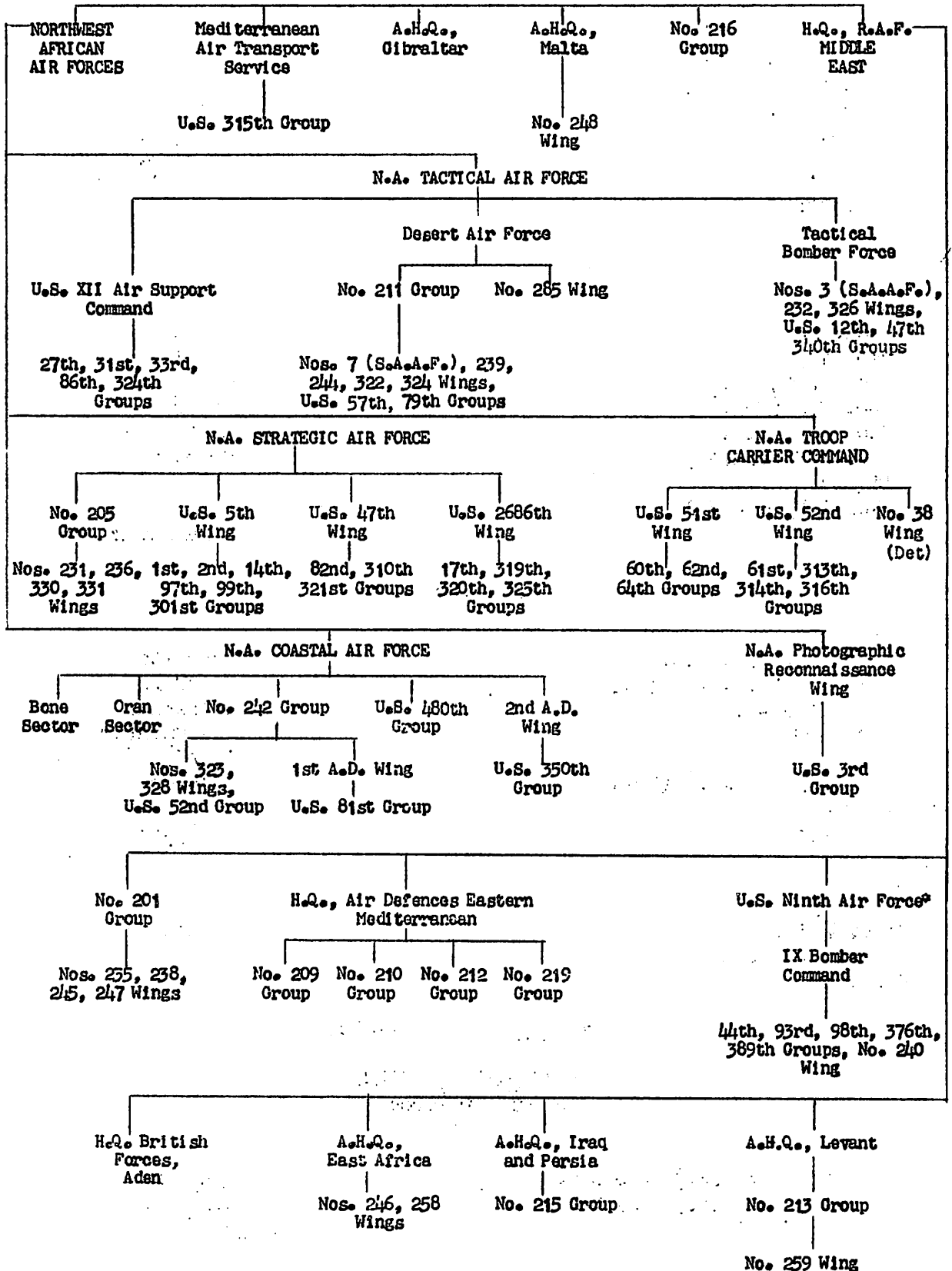
1

APPENDIX 2

ORDER OF BATTLE, MEDITERRANEAN AIR COMMAND,

10 JULY 1943

MEDITERRANEAN AIR COMMAND



Note* For details of formations see following pages
Other Ninth Air Force formations operated under N.A.A.F.

(50918)101

SECRET

SECRET

2

MEDITERRANEAN AIR COMMAND

Mediterranean Air Transport Service

U.S. 315th Troop Carrier Group

34th, 43rd Squadrons Dakota

No. 216 Group

Squadrons

No. 17 (S.A.A.F.)	Junkers 52
No. 28 (S.A.A.F.)	Anson
Nos. 117, 267	Hudson
No. 173	Lodestar, Proctor, Hurricane
No. 216	Dakota
No. 230	Sunderland

A.H.Q., Gibraltar

Squadrons

Nos. 48, 233	Hudson
No. 179	Wellington
Nos. 202, 210	Catalina
No. 248 (Det.)	Beaufighter
No. 544 (Det.)	Spitfire
No. 813 (F.A.A.)	Swordfish

Flights

No. 1403 Met. Flight	Hampden, Gladiator
----------------------	--------------------

A.H.Q., Malta

Squadrons

Nos. 23, 256 (Det.)	Mosquito
Nos. 40 (S.A.A.F.), 126, 185, 229, 249	Spitfire
No. 73 (Det.)	Hurricane
No. 600	Beaufighter (N/F)
No. 815 (F.A.A.) (Det.)	Albacore

Flights

No. 1435	Spitfire
----------	----------

No. 248 Wing

Squadrons

No. 69	Baltimore
No. 221	Wellington
Nos. 108, 272	Beaufighter
No. 683	Spitfire

NORTHWEST AFRICAN AIR FORCES

N.A. TACTICAL AIR FORCE

Desert Air Force

No. 285 Wing

No. 40 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron (Det.)	Spitfire
No. 60 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron	Mosquito
No. 1437 Flight	Mustang

No. 211 Group

No. 6 Squadron Hurricane
 No. 7 (S.A.A.F.) Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 2 (S.A.A.F.), 4 (S.A.A.F.) Spitfire
 No. 5 (S.A.A.F.) Kittyhawk
 No. 239 Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 3 (R.A.A.F.), 112, 250, 260, 450 (R.A.A.F.) Kittyhawk
 No. 244 Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 1 (S.A.A.F.), 92, 145, 417 (R.C.A.F.), 601 Spitfire
 No. 322 Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 81, 152, 154, 232, 242 Spitfire
 No. 324 Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 43, 72, 93, 111, 243 Spitfire
 U.S. 57th, 79th Fighter Groups - six squadrons Warhawk

U.S. XII Air Support Command

27th, 86th Fighter-Bomber Groups - six squadrons Mustang
 33rd, 324th Fighter Groups - six squadrons Warhawk
 31st Fighter Group - three squadrons Spitfire
 111th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron Mustang

Tactical Bomber Force

Squadrons
 No. 225 Spitfire
 No. 241 Hurricane
 No. 3 (S.A.A.F.) Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 12 (S.A.A.F.), 24 (S.A.A.F.) Boston
 No. 21 (S.A.A.F.) Baltimore
 No. 232 Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 55, 223 Baltimore
 No. 326 Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 18, 114 Boston
 U.S. 12th, 340th Bombardment Groups - eight squadrons Mitchell
 U.S. 47th Bombardment Group - four squadrons Boston

N.A. STRATEGIC AIR FORCENo. 205 Group

No. 231 Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 37, 70 Wellington
 No. 236 Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 40, 104 Wellington
 No. 330 Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 142, 150 Wellington
 No. 331 Wing
 Squadrons
 Nos. 420 (R.C.A.F.), 424 (R.C.A.F.), 425 (R.C.A.F.) Wellington

SECRET

4

U.S. 5th Wing

2nd, 97th, 99th, 301st Bombardment Groups - sixteen Fortress
squadrons
1st, 14th Fighter Groups - six squadrons Lightning

U.S. 47th Wing

310th, 321st Bombardment Groups - eight squadrons Mitchell
82nd Fighter Group - three squadrons Lightning

U.S. 2686th Wing

17th, 319th, 320th Bombardment Groups - twelve Marauder
squadrons
325th Fighter Group - three squadrons Warhawk

N.A. COASTAL AIR FORCE

Squadrons

Nos. 13, 614 Blenheim
No. 36 Wellington
No. 253 Hurricane
Nos. 500, 608 Hudson
No. 813 (F.A.A.) (Det.) Swordfish
Nos. 821 (F.A.A.), 828 (F.A.A.) Albacore

Flights

No. 1575 Halifax, Ventura
U.S. 480th Antisubmarine Group - two squadrons Liberator
Bone Sector

Squadrons

Nos. 32, 87 Hurricane
No. 219 Beaufighter
(N/F)

Oran Sector

U.S. 92nd Fighter Squadron Airacobra
2nd Air Defense Wing
No. 153 Squadron Beaufighter
(N/F)
U.S. 350th Fighter Group - three Squadrons Airacobra

No. 242 Group

No. 323 Wing

Squadrons

No. 73 Spitfire
No. 255 Beaufighter
(N/F)
Nos. 283, 284 Walrus (A.S.R.)
Nos. II/5, II/7 (French) Kittyhawk,
Spitfire

No. 328 Wing

Squadrons

No. 14 Marauder
Nos. 39, 47, 144 Beaufighter
No. 52 Baltimore
Nos. 221 (Det.), 458 (R.A.A.F.) Wellington
U.S. 52nd Fighter Group - three squadrons Spitfire
1st Air Defense Wing
U.S. 81st Fighter Group - two squadrons Airacobra

N.A. TROOP CARRIER COMMAND

No. 38 Wing (Det.)

Squadrons

No. 295 (Det.)	Halifax
No. 296	Albemarle

U.S. 51st Wing

60th, 62nd, 64th Troop Carrier Groups - twelve squadrons.	Dakota
---	--------

U.S. 52nd Wing

61st, 313th, 314th, 316th Troop Carrier Groups - fifteen squadrons	Dakota
--	--------

N.A. Photographic Reconnaissance WingSquadrons

Nos. 60 (S.A.A.F.) (Det.), 540 (Det.)	Mosquito
No. 682	Spitfire

U.S. 3rd Photo Reconnaissance Group

Squadrons

5th, 12th	Lightning
15th	Fortress

HEADQUARTERS, R.A.F., MIDDLE EASTSquadrons

No. 148	Liberator, Halifax
No. 162	Wellington, Blenheim
No. 680	Spitfire, Lightning, Hurricane

Flights

Nos. 1411, 1412, 1464 Met. Flights	Hurricane, Gladiator
------------------------------------	-------------------------

No. 201 Group

No. 701 Squadron (F.A.A.)	Walrus
No. 235 Wing	
<u>Squadrons</u>	
No. 13 (Hellenic)	Blenheim
No. 227 (Det.)	Beaufighter
No. 454 (R.A.A.F.)	Baltimore
No. 459 (R.A.A.F.)	Hudson
No. 815 (F.A.A.)	Swordfish
No. 238 Wing	
<u>Squadrons</u>	
No. 16 (S.A.A.F.)	Beaufort
Nos. 227 (Det.), 603	Beaufighter
No. 815 (F.A.A.) (Det.)	Swordfish
No. 245 Wing	
<u>Squadrons</u>	
No. 15 (S.A.A.F.)	Blenheim, Baltimore
No. 38 (Det.)	Wellington
<u>Other Units</u>	
No. 1 General Reconnaissance Unit	Wellington
No. 247 Wing	
<u>Squadrons</u>	
No. 38	Wellington
No. 203	Baltimore
Nos. 227, 252	Beaufighter

SECRET

6

HEADQUARTERS, AIR DEFENCES,
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

No. 209 Group

Squadrons

No. 46 (Det.) Beaufighter
No. 127 Hurricane,
Spitfire

No. 210 Group

Squadrons

Nos. 3 (S.A.A.F.), 33, 213, 274 Hurricane
No. 89 Beaufighter
(N/F)

No. 212 Group

Squadrons

Nos. 7 (S.A.A.F.), 41 (S.A.A.F.), 94, 123, 134, 237 Hurricane
No. 80 Spitfire
No. 108 (Det.) Beaufighter
(N/F)

Flights

Nos. 1563, 1654 Met. Flights Gladiator

No. 219 Group

Squadrons

Nos. 74, 238, 335, 336, 451 (R.A.A.F.) Hurricane
No. 46 Beaufighter
(N/F)

UNITED STATES NINTH AIR FORCE

316th Troop Carrier Group (see N.A. Troop Carrier Command)

IX Bomber Command

44th, 93rd, 98th, 376th, 389th Bombardment Groups - Liberator
twenty squadrons

No. 240 Wing

Squadrons

Nos. 178, 462 (R.A.A.F.) Halifax
12th, 340th Bombardment Groups (See N.A. Tactical Air Force)

IX Fighter Command

57th, 79th, 324th Groups (See N.A. Tactical Air Force)

H.Q., British Forces, Aden

No. 8 Squadron Blenheim
No. 1566 Met. Flight Gladiator
Catalina Flight Catalina

A.H.Q., East Africa

Squadrons

Nos. 259, 262, 321 (Det.) Catalina
No. 246 Wing

Squadrons

Nos. 209, 265 Catalina
No. 258 Wing
No. 1414 Met. Flight Lysander, Anson

A.H.Q., Iraq and Persia

No. 215 Group

No. 208 Squadron (Det.)	Hurricane
No. 244 Squadron	Blenheim
No. 1415 Met. Flight	Gladiator

A.H.Q., Levant

No. 208 Squadron	Hurricane
No. 1413 Met. Flight	Gladiator

No. 213 Group

No. 259 Wing	
No. 1565 Met. Flight	Hurricane

Abbreviations

A.H.Q.	Air Headquarters
A.S.R.	Air/Sea Rescue
Det.	Detachment
F.A.A.	Fleet Air Arm
Met.	Meteorological
N.A.	Northwest African
N/F	Night Fighter
P.R.	Photographic Reconnaissance
R.A.A.F.	Royal Australian Air Force
R.C.A.F.	Royal Canadian Air Force
S.A.A.F.	South African Air Force

SECRET

1

APPENDIX 3

G. A. F. ORDER OF BATTLE, MEDITERRANEAN
THEATRE

10 MAY - 10 JULY 1943⁽¹⁾

I - LUFTFLOTTE 2 (ITALY, SICILY AND SARDINIA)

CLOSE RECCE (ARMY CO-OP)

<u>10 May</u> <u>1943</u>	<u>Unit</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Serviceable</u>
------------------------------	-------------	-----------------	-----------------	--------------------

4/12	Decimomannu (Sardinia)	12	8
2/14	Catania	11	0

LONG RANGE RECCE

1 (F) 122	Frosinone	15	6
2 (F) 122	Trapani	12	4

S.E. FIGHTERS

Stab JG 27 } II/JG 27 } II/JG 51 }	Trapani	56	39
	Monseerrato (Sardinia)	41	29
Stab JG 53 } I/JG 53 } II/JG 53 } III/JG 53 }	Comiso	{ 40	11
	Reggio Calabria		
	Comiso	34	10
	Solaccca	38	24
Stab JG 77 } I/JG 77 } II/JG 77 }	Sicily	{ 4 22 27	3 3 11

NIGHT FIGHTERS

Stab NJG 2	Comiso	1	0
I/NJG 2	Castelvetrano	18	8
II/NJG 2	Comiso	11	10

T. E. FIGHTERS

II/ZG 1	Gerbini	32	8
III/ZG 1	Gerbini	15	6
Stab ZG 26	Trapani	0	0
III/ZG 26	Trapani	29	20
10/ZG 26	Gerbini	16	12

GROUND ATTACK

Stab Schl. G 2	Gerbini	3	1
II/Schl. G 2 (less 8 St.)	Gerbini	22	4
8/Schl. G 2	Decimomannu	10	10
III/SKG 10	San Pietro	21	2

(1) From German documents (A.H.B.6).

SECRET

2

APPENDIX 310 May
1943
Contd.

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Serviceable</u>
<u>BOMBERS</u>			
I/LG 1	Sicily	41	29
II/KG 1	Grottaglie	26	14
	(S. Italy)		
II/KG 26	Base: Grosseto	(Advance landing ground Villacidro)	43
III/KG 26			
Stab KG 54			
I/KG 54	Catania	43	22
II/KG 54			
Stab KG 76	Catania	34	25
II/KG 76			
III/KG 77	Gerbini	20	14

TRANSPORT UNITS

III/TG 1	Capodichino (Naples)	35	13
IV/TG 1	Aquino	33	9
II/TG 2	Vibo-Valentia	20	8
III/TG 2	Vibo-Valentia	24	12
IV/TG 3	Capua	26	24
I/TG 5	Pomigliano (Naples)	6	4
II/TG 5	Pomigliano (Naples)	25	10
Savoy Staffel	Lecco	12	7
Ju. 90/290 Staffel	Grosseto	7	3
II Fl. Korps Trans. Staffel	Reggio Calabria	7	5

20 May
1943CLOSE RECCE (ARMY CO-OP)

4/12	Decimomannu	13	9
2/14	Catania	10	2

LONG RANGE RECCE

1 (F) 122	Decimomannu	13	5
2 (F) 122	Trapani	15	2

S.E. FIGHTERS

Stab JG 27	Trapani	4	4
II/JG 27	Trapani	52	37
III/JG 27	Lecco	39	19
II/JG 51	Monserato (Sardinia)	40	28
Stab JG 53	Comiso	5	5
I/JG 53	Catania	47	26
II/JG 53	Comiso	43	20
III/JG 53	Soiaoca	47	20

NIGHT FIGHTERS

Stab NJG 2	Comiso	1	1
I/NJG 2	Castelvetrano	17	9
II/NJG 2	Comiso	9	7

SECRET

3

APPENDIX 3

20 May Unit Location Strength Serviceable
1943
(Contd.)

T. E. FIGHTERS

II/ZG 1	Montecorvino	29	13
III/ZG 1	Gerbini	19	7
Stab ZG 26	Ciampino (Rome)	0	0
III/ZG 26	Ciampino	37	15
10/ZG 26	Pratica di Mare	9	0

GROUND ATTACK

Stab Schl. G 2	Gerbini	5	3
II/Schl. G 2 (less 8 St.)	Gerbini	37	30
8/Schl. G 2	Decimomannu	16	12
III/SKG 10	San Pietro	40	24

BOMBERS

II/KG 1	Grottaglie	19	12
II/KG 26	Base: Grosseto { Advanced landing ground: Villacidro}	40	26
III/KG 26		14	7
III/KG 30	Viterbo	30	18
Stab KG 54	Catania	1	1
I/KG 54	Catania	17	11
II/KG 54	Catania	17	11
Stab KG 76	Catania	2	1
III/KG 76	Catania	33	15
Stab KG 77	Gerbini	1	1
III/KG 77	Gerbini	13	8

TRANSPORT

III/TG 1	Capodichino (Naples)	46	22
IV/TG 1	Aquino	30	13
III/TG 2	Vibo Valentia	22	12
IV/TG 3	Capua	34	22
I/TG 5	Pomigliano (Naples)	36	14
Savoy Staffel	Lecce	5	2
Ju. 90/290 Staffel	Grosseto	7	2
II Fl. Korps Trans. St.	Reggio Calabria	9	8

31 May
1943

CLOSE RECCE (ARMY CO-OP)

4/12	Decimomannu	12	8
2/14	Catania	11	7

LONG RANGE RECCE

Gr. Stab 122	Frosinone	1	1
1 (F) 122	Ottana (Sardinia)	8	1
2 (F) 122	Trapani	6	2

SECRET

4

APPENDIX 3

31 May
1943
(Contd.)

Unit

Location

Strength

Serviceable

S.E. FIGHTERS

Stab JG 27	Trapani	4	2
II/JG 27	Trapani	50	37
II/JG 51	Monserato (Sardinia)	37	33
Stab JG 53	Comiso	5	3
I/JG 53	Catania	44	24
II/JG 53	Comiso	35	21
III/JG 53	Sciacca	39	35
III/JG 77	Venafiorita (Sardinia)	48	36

NIGHT FIGHTERS

Stab NJG 2	Comiso	1	1
I/NJG 2	Castelvetrano	14	9
II/NJG 2	Comiso	9	8

T.E. FIGHTERS

II/ZG 1	Montecorvino	30	15
9/ZG 1	Gerbini	16	7
Stab ZG 26	Naples	2	2
III/ZG 26	Ciampino	35	12
10/ZG 26	Pratica di Mare	11	9

GROUND ATTACK

Stab Schl. G 2	Gerbini	6	4
II/Schl. G 2 (less 8 St.)	Gerbini	44	21
8/Schl. G 2	Decimomannu: Chilivani	14	10
III/SKG 10	San Pietro	42	20

BOMBERS

II/KG 1	Grottaglie	28	17
III/KG 30	Viterbo	29	21
Stab KG 54	Catania	1	1
III/KG 54	Grottaglie	32	14
Stab KG 76	Foggia	1	1
I/KG 76	Foggia	22	17

TRANSPORT

III/TG 1	Pratica di Mare	35	18
III/TG 2	Lucca	51	28
IV/TG 3	Capua	30	25
I/TG 5	Pomigliano (Naples)	16	7
Savoy Staffel	Lecco	4	3
Ju. 90/290 Staffel	Grosseto	7	5
II Fl. Korps Trans. St.	Reggio Calabria	9	8

10 June
1943

CLOSE RECCE (ARMY CO-OP)

4/12	Decimomannu	16	12
2/14	Catania	9	5

(90918)111

SECRET

SECRET

5

APPENDIX 3

<u>10 June</u> <u>1943</u> (Contd.)	<u>Unit</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Serviceable</u>
---	-------------	-----------------	-----------------	--------------------

LONG RANGE RECCE

Gr. Stab 122	Frosinone	1	1
1 (F) 122	Ottana (Sardinia)	5	3
2 (F) 122	Trapani	6	2

S.E. FIGHTERS

Stab JG 27	Trapani	4	3
II/JG 27	Trapani	31	20
7/JG 27	Lecce	9	5
II/JG 51	Chilivani	40	22
Stab JG 53	Comiso	5	0
I/JG 53	Catania	37	21
II/JG 53	Comiso	36	12
III/JG 53	Solacca	38	18
III/JG 77	Venafiorita (Sardinia)	45	11

NIGHT FIGHTERS

Stab NJG 2	Comiso	1	1
I/NJG 2	Castelvetrano	11	5
II/NJG 2	Comiso	9	8

T.E. FIGHTERS

II/ZG 1	Montecorvino	28	12
9/ZG 1	Gerbini	12	6
Stab ZG 26	Naples	2	2
III/ZG 26	Ciampino	34	22
10/ZG 26	Pratica di Mare	13	5

GROUND ATTACK

Stab Schl. G 2	Trapani	6	4
II/Schl. G 2 (less 8 St.)	Gerbini	44	26
8/Schl. G 2	Decimomannu: Chilivani	14	12
III/SKG 10	San Pietro	39	19

BOMBERS

II/KG 1	San Pancrazio: Grottaglie	24	13
III/KG 30	Viterbo (also advanced landing ground on Sardinia)	29	15
III/KG 54	Grottaglie	21	12
I/KG 76	Foggia	29	16

TRANSPORT

III/TG 1	Pratica di Mare	37	19
III/TG 2	Lucca	49	29
IV/TG 3	Capua	29	27
I/TG 5	Pomigliano (Naples)	16	7
Savoy Staffel	Grosseto	4	3
Ju. 90/290 Staffel	Grosseto	7	2
II Fl. Korps	Reggio Calabria	8	7
Trans. St.			

(90918)112

SECRET

SECRET

6

APPENDIX 3

<u>20 June</u> <u>1943</u>	<u>Unit</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Serviceable</u>
<u>CLOSE RECCE (ARMY CO-OP)</u>				
	4/12	Decimomannu	12	4
	2/14	Catania	10	5
<u>LONG RANGE RECCE</u>				
	1 (F) 122	Ottana (Sardinia)	4	1
	2 (F) 122	Trapani	7	1
	1 (F) 123	Frosinone	5	0
<u>S.E. FIGHTERS</u>				
	IV/JG 3	San Vito dei Normanni (near Brindisi)	42	19
	Stab JG 27	Leverano	3	3
	II/JG 27	Leverano	30	23
	7/JG 27	Lecce	14	11
	II/JG 51	Casa Zeppara (Sardinia)	37	30
	Stab JG 53	Comiso	3	2
	I/JG 53	Vibo Valentia	41	24
	II/JG 53	Comiso	35	19
	III/JG 53	Torrazzo (Catania)	36	31
	Stab JG 77	Trapani	4	2
	I/JG 77	Sciacca	30	19
	II/JG 77	Trapani	39	21
	III/JG 77	Chilivani (Sardinia)	44	33
<u>NIGHT FIGHTERS</u>				
	II/NJG 2	Comiso	15	12
<u>T.E. FIGHTERS</u>				
	II/ZG 1	Montecorvino	29	15
	9/ZG 1	Gerbini	11	4
	Stab ZG 26	Camaldoli (Naples)	2	2
	III/ZG 26	Ciampino: Pisa	35	25
	10/ZG 26	Praticea di Mare	14	6
<u>GROUND ATTACK</u>				
	Stab Schl. G 2	Milis (Sardinia)	6	4
	I/Schl. G 2	Milis (Sardinia)	35	28
	II/Schl. G 2	Alghero (Sardinia)	31	14
	8/Schl. G 2	Decimomannu (Sardinia)	14	13
	Stab SKG 10	Gerbini	5	2
	II/SKG 10	Gerbini	20	12
	III/SKG 10	San Pietro	28	15
	IV/SKG 10	Gerbini	25	15

SECRET

7

APPENDIX 3

20 June
1943
Contd.

UnitLocationStrengthServiceableBOMBERS

Part of I/LG 1	Foggia	18	9
II/KG 1	San Pancrazio	25	6
Stab KG 6	Istres (S. France)	4	4
I/KG 6	Istres	34	17
III/KG 6	Istres	33	16
III/KG 30	Viterbo	26	15
III/KG 54	Grottaglie	19	11
Stab KG 76	Tortorella (Foggia)	1	1
I/KG 76	Tortorella	25	10

TRANSPORT

III/TG 1	Pratica di Mare	49	36
III/TG 2	Lucca	49	36
IV/TG 3	Capua	26	20
I/TG 5	Pomigliano (Naples)	17	7
Savoy Staffel	Grosseto	5	2
Ju. 90/290 Staffel	Grosseto	8	8
II Fl. Korps Trans. St.	Aquino	6	3

30 June
1943

CLOSE RECCO (ARMY CO-OP)

4/12	Decimomannu	10	6
2/14	Catania	13	4

LONG RANGE RECCO

3 (F) 33	Ottana (Sardinia)	9	4
Gr. Stab 122	Frosinone	2	2
2 (F) 122	Trapani	14	9
1 (F) 123	Frosinone	4	1

S.E. FIGHTERS

IV/JG 3	San Vito dei Normanni	43	33
II/JG 27	Leverano	33	23
II/JG 51	Casa Zeppara (Sardinia)	38	28
Stab JG 53	Comiso	7	5
I/JG 53	Vibo-Valentia	49	32
II/JG 53	Comiso	39	26
III/JG 53	Torreazzo (Garanina)	49	35
Stab JG 77	Trapani	4	3
I/JG 77	Solacca	38	28
II/JG 77	Gerbini	41	37
III/JG 77	Chilivani (Sardinia)	39	28

NIGHT FIGHTERS

II/NJG 2	Comiso	16	12
----------	--------	----	----

(90918)114

SECRET

SECRET

8 •

APPENDIX 3

30 June
1943
Contd.

Unit

Location

Strength

Serviceable

T.E. FIGHTERS

II/ZG 1	Montecorvino	37	15
9/ZG 1	Gerbini	8	1
Stab ZG 26	Camaldoli (Naples)	2	1
III/ZG 26	Ciampino:	32	22
	Pisa		
10/ZG 26	Practica di Mare	15	11

GROUND ATTACK

Stab Schl. G 2	Milis	} Sardinia	3	0
I/Schl. G 2	Milis		37	19
II/Schl. G 2	Alghero			
Stab SKG 10	Gerbini		4	2
II/SKG 10	Gerbini		19	12
III/SKG 10	San Pietro		25	18
IV/SKG 10	Gerbini		19	11

BOMBERS

Part of I/LG 1	Foggia	32	22
II/KG 1	San Pancrazio	32	17
Stab KG 6	Istres	5	2
I/KG 6	Istres	31	15
III/KG 6	Istres	39	29
III/KG 30	Viterbo	26	15
Stab KG 54	Catania	1	1
III/KG 54	Grottaglie	25	11
Stab KG 76	Tortorella (Foggia)	2	1
I/KG 76	Tortorella (Foggia)	26	6

TRANSPORT

III/TG 1	Pratica di Mare	43	25
III/TG 2	Lucca	50	42
IV/TG 3	Capua	22	8
I/TG 5	Pomigliano (Naples)	17	2
Savoy Staffel	Grosseto	5	1
Ju. 90/290 Staffel	Grosseto	8	2
II Fl. Korps Trans. St.	Aquino	12	9

10 July
1943

CLOSE RECCE (ARMY CO-OP)

4/12	Decimomannu	9	7
2/14	Catania	12	5

LONG RANGE RECCE

3 (F) 33	Ottana	9	5
Gr. Stab 122	Frosinone	1	0
2 (F) 122	Trapani	15	8
1 (F) 123	Frosinone	4	3

SECRET

9

APPENDIX 310 July
1943
Contd.)

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Serviceable</u>
<u>S.E. FIGHTERS</u>			
IV/JG 3	Lecce	36	28
II/JG 27	Vibo Valentia	22	14
II/JG 51	Sardinia	34	23
Stab JG 53	Comiso	6	2
I/JG 53	Vibo Valentia	36	15
II/JG 53	Gerbini	23	18
III/JG 53	Catania	30	12
Stab JG 77	Trapani	3	2
I/JG 77	Trapani: Solacca	39	18
II/JG 77	Trapani:	35	3
	Gerbini		
III/JG 77	Chilivani (Sardinia)	36	30
<u>NIGHT FIGHTERS</u>			
II/NJG 2	Comiso	14	11
<u>T.E. FIGHTERS</u>			
II/ZG 1	Montecorvino	33	17
Stab ZG 26	Camaldoli (Naples)	2	2
III/ZG 26	Ciampino: Pisa	29	25
10 ZG 26	Pratica di Mare	17	7
<u>GROUND ATTACK</u>			
Stab Schl. G 2 }	At Milis (Sardinia)	1	0
I/Schl. G 2 }	in process of	32	20
II/Schl. G 2 }	transferring to	27	16
	Sicily		
Stab SKG 10	Gerbini	4	2
II/SKG 10 }	Gerbini	8	0
	Montecorvino	12	12
III/SKG 10 }	San Pietro	7	0
	Montecorvino	18	18
IV/SKG 10	Gerbini	25	11
<u>BOMBERS</u>			
Part of I/IG 1	Foggia	19	10
Stab KG 1	Airasca (NW Italy)	3	3
I/KG 1	Airasca	37	18
II/KG 1	San Pancrazio	29	17
Stab KG 6 }	Istres - moving	4	4
I/KG 6 }	to Schifara	28	25
III/KG 6 }	(Foggia)	31	27
Stab KG 26	Grosseto	1	1
I/KG 26	Grosseto	23	15
III/KG 26	Grosseto	8	5
III/KG 30	Viterbo	24	19
III/KG 54	Grottaglie	29	10
Stab KG 76	Foggia	2	1
I/KG 76	Foggia	21	8
II/KG 76	Foggia	32	20
II/KG 77	Piacenza	25	17
Stab KG 100	Morin (Foggia)	12	1
II/KG 100	Morin	42	33
III/KG 100	Morin	37	19

(90918)116

SECRET

SECRET

10

APPENDIX 3

10 July
1943
(Contd.)

Unit

Location

Strength

Serviceable

TRANSPORT

III/TG 1	Pratica di Mare	49	37
III/TG 2	Lucca	48	35
IV/TG 3	Capua	23	14
I/TG 5	Pomigliano (Naples)	21	7
II Fl. Korps Trans. St.	Aquino	8	2

SECRET

1

APPENDIX 4

ITALIAN AIR FORCE STRENGTH

18 May - 9 July 1943(1)

		<u>BOMBERS</u>		<u>FIGHTERS</u>	
		<u>Strength</u>	<u>A/c serviceable</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>A/c serviceable</u>
<u>18 May 1943</u>					
N. Italy	1st Squadra	79	28	94	50
N. Italy	2nd Squadra	77	16	93	58
C. Italy	3rd Squadra	86	30	203	101
S. Italy	4th Squadra	36	13	36	23
	Sardinian				
	Air Force	70	46	125	93
	Greece			26	7
	Sicily	34	8	221	100
	Aegean	33	19	45	34
	Albania	49	31	24	13
	Slovenia-				
	Dalmatia	16	9	19	9
	TOTALS:	<u>480</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>886</u>	<u>488</u>
	Army Co-op.	Strength:	<u>266</u>	A/c serviceable:	195
	Navy Co-op.	Strength:	<u>301</u>	A/c serviceable:	<u>181</u>
<u>12 June</u>					
	1st Squadra	52	21	112	42
	2nd Squadra	32	4	54	16
	3rd Squadra	119	47	227	113
	4th Squadra	15	3	30	11
	Sardinia	33	15	139	77
	Greece			25	12
	Sicily	8	5	219	102
	Aegean	33	20	43	37
	Albania	49	28	24	15
	Slovenia-				
	Dalmatia	18	10	17	11
	TOTALS:	<u>359</u>	<u>153</u>	<u>890</u>	<u>436</u>
	Army Co-op.	Strength:	<u>293</u>	A/c serviceable:	199
	Navy Co-op.	Strength:	<u>276</u>	A/c serviceable:	<u>130</u>
<u>9 July 1943</u>					
	1st Squadra	66	13	161	83
	2nd Squadra	31	1	38	25
	3rd Squadra	132	46	213	115
	4th Squadra	10	0	37	18
	Sardinia	17	10	127	75
	Greece			26	11
	Sicily	4	0	159	39
	Aegean	30	11	45	35
	Albania	51	31	24	16
	Slovenia-				
	Dalmatia	17	9	17	12
	TOTALS:	<u>358</u>	<u>121</u>	<u>847</u>	<u>429</u>
	Army Co-op.	Strength:	<u>295</u>	A/c serviceable:	200
	Navy Co-op.	Strength:	<u>287</u>	A/c serviceable:	<u>168</u>

(1) From Super Aereo Statistical Returns.

