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AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

TRANSLATION NO. VII/97

THE CAMPAIGN IN ITALY

(Chapter VI)

A post-war study written by General von Vietinghoff
for U.S. Historical Division, December 1947.
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SECRETC O N T E N T SCHAPTER VI

The Tenth Army Campaign in Southern and Central Italy with special Reference to the Battles at Salerno, on the Volturno, Garigliano, Sangro and for Cassino

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A

German high-level estimate of the situation in Italy in August, 1943

I. Mussolini's downfall, the first consequence of the successful Allied advance on Sicily, clearly showed that the defeat in Africa had had a vital effect on the Italian people. Whatever the attitude of the new Italian government regarding the continuation of the war, one had to consider the fact that the next Allied objective would be to break up the already unsteady Axis partnership, in order to gain a foothold on the continent of Europe. This meant that the Allies had to abandon extensive plans which required long-term planning and instead, land wherever the situation permitted an operation of this type to be carried out with the greatest speed, i.e. in southern, or even in central Italy. The main effort could be made on the mountainous western coast, which offered the tempting objectives of Naples and Rome, or on the eastern coast, which was ideal for motorised troops and offered Taranto, Brindisi, Bari and the particularly important initial objective, i.e. Foggia air-base.

The German command had to decide how to continue operations unaided, or at any rate without effective assistance from the most important member of the Axis.

War in Italy would mean bringing in a larger number of German divisions which, owing to the steadily deteriorating situation, were urgently needed on the Eastern front.

On the other hand, a complete evacuation of Italy and a withdrawal to the Alpine front, which could be garrisoned more economically, would have meant not only:

- (1) A considerable loss of political prestige,
- (2) relinquishing the very important contribution made by Italian war industries and agriculture to the Axis potential,
- (3) surrendering the Po valley, where the Allied Air Force could assemble in any strength required,

but also would have caused

- (4) the complete reversal of the German over-all situation in the Balkans and in France.

This solution was therefore rejected from the very first and there remained the question of the type of defence which would best ensure absolute control of the Po Valley for a considerable period with the forces available.

II. The views of the two officers, Field-Marshal Rommel and Kesselring who were to submit suggestions to OKW for the final decision, were very divergent, as was the case in the African campaign.

The author, formerly C.-in-C. of the Fifteenth Army in northern France was first attached to Rommel's staff near Munich at the beginning of August, and then to Kesselring's staff on 9 August, and had to report to Hitler twice, i.e. on 8 and 17 August. He had, therefore, the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the differing opinions at first hand.

- 1) Field-Marshal Rommel, who was well acquainted with Italian mentality from experience in two World Wars, no longer trusted the Italians and expected them to break away sooner or later. The concentration of good Italian divisions in the Brenner Pass and Rome areas, which the Commando Supremo had placed in

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the way of fresh German reinforcements moving into Italy, as well as its efforts to move German divisions already in Italy as far south as possible, confirmed his suspicions.

Considering the German situation as a whole, he thought it necessary to make do with as few German troops as possible in the Italian theatre, and to keep these as far north as possible, as otherwise they would run the risk of being cut off by landings in the rear. He proposed, therefore, to defend northern Italy only, and to move back German motorised troops in the south in the event of an Allied landing (these would fall back slowly whilst carrying out mobile operations) in order to gain the time required to consolidate positions in the northern Apennines.

2) Field-Marshal Kesselring as usual, took a very optimistic view of the situation. Like the German ambassador von Mackensen and the Military Attache General von Rintelen, he was convinced, in his frank, trusting soldier's way, by numerous personal assurances from the King, the Crown Prince, General Badoglio and Commando Supremo, that Italy would remain faithful to the Axis partnership and would continue the war with even greater energy.

He was fully aware of the low fighting value of the Italian troops, which had been particularly evident in the Sicilian campaign, but hoped to master the situation in spite of this by the appropriate distribution of strong German units, and briefed such units for southern Italy, the Rome area and northern Italy. As a result of these considerations he recommended the evacuation of Sicily and later of Sardinia and Corsica in order to have the divisions stationed there at his disposal on the mainland, where after assembling the German forces he wished to commence defensive operations south of Rome.

3) Hitler's strategic theories had become increasingly static and primitive during the defensive battles in Russia:

"Wherever the German soldier has set foot he will remain".

Hitler never recognised and indeed did not want to recognise that the most important objective in war is to defeat the enemy army. He always strove for territorial gains, and in spite of all the failures in Russia, he persisted with almost insane delusion more and more uncompromisingly in the theory of static warfare, holding every foot of ground no matter what it cost, in a situation where successes against the colossal Russian numerical superiority could only have been achieved by flexible, imaginative leadership.

Moreover, he considered it unnecessary to make far-sighted, factual total estimates of the relative strengths of both sides and the resultant possibilities or necessities and usually only made decisions according to momentary requirements.

One would have thought that even now he would have been more inclined to accept the proposals put forward by Field-Marshal Kesselring which were nearer his own theories. This time, however, he understood the situation most clearly and made a reasonable decision.

On 17 August he told me the following:

(a) "I have positive proof from intercepted radio messages that Badoglio is already negotiating an armistice with the Allies. It is quite possible that the Italian commands at the front have not been informed of this.

(b) I expect that strong Allied forces will be landed soon on the Italian mainland.

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(c) The primary task of your new Army H.Q. will be to move back German divisions in southern Italy as quickly and as intact as possible into the area south-east of Rome. However withdrawals will not be made as early as to provide the Italians with a justification for their defection".

III. Orders issued from OKW at this time were in accordance with the above views:

(1) Preparations will be made (in absolute secrecy) to disarm the Italian Armed Forces and to take control of Rome immediately after the defection (Operation Axis).

(2) Northern Italy will definitely be defended. In accordance with Field-Marshal Rommel's proposals, therefore, positions will be built in the northern Apennines and in both adjoining coastal areas. It is intended to garrison these with infantry and mountain divisions which are moving up.

(3) German motorised divisions in southern and central Italy will make a slow fighting withdrawal northwards after the enemy has landed, delaying the enemy advance so that sufficient time may be gained to consolidate positions in the Apennines.

(4) Field-Marshal Rommel will remain in command in northern Italy for the time being and will direct the construction of positions and occupation of coastal areas. After a transitional period, the length of which has still to be determined, troops in the south will also be placed under his command.

(5) Field-Marshal Kesselring will remain temporarily in command in central and southern Italy as well as on the islands. He will then receive another appointment and his staff will be dissolved. A new Tenth Army Command under General von Vietinghoff will be set up as quickly as possible, and will consist predominately of officers released from the staff of C.-in-C., South (Field-Marshal Kesselring). It will take command of armoured and motorised divisions in southern and central Italy and will be subordinate to Field-Marshal Kesselring at first, and later to Field-Marshal Rommel.

(6) In order not to increase Italian distrust, only a small Tactical Staff will be set up for Army H.Q. for the time being. The Quartermaster General to C.-in-C., South will continue to direct supply services and will later be transferred to Tenth Army H.Q. (This order soon proved very disadvantageous, as the H.Q. Staff of an army consisting of motorised troops cannot operate without a quartermaster section).

IV. A striking feature of the chain of command to be established is that Field-Marshal Kesselring, who was best acquainted with Italian affairs and was highly esteemed by all Italians in authority by virtue of his vigorous personality and great political skill, was to be replaced as C.-in-C. by Field-Marshal Rommel. This officer also was certainly highly respected by the Italians as a soldier, but did not have so many personal associations with them.

If one looks for reasons for this decision one might suppose that Hitler, in view of the situation at the time, gave preference to the officer who was superior as a military leader for the future campaign in Italy, in all probability a very difficult one, apart from the fact that he did not want

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in this theatre an "Italophil" C.-in-C., whose yielding disposition towards the Italians he feared.

Field-Marshal Rommel was predominately, one might even say a biased soldier; as such he had proved himself a master of mobile warfare and of every type of improvisation conceivable under the most difficult conditions in the African campaign. He had always adjudged operational and tactical situations correctly with the sure instinct and sense of reality typical of a great soldier hardened by lengthy campaigns and personal experiences. He was however unable to get Hitler to accept conclusions he had drawn, especially at critical moments.

Field-Marshal Kesselring was also strong-willed, sincere and self-sacrificing to duty. Highly-gifted, versatile, a great organiser in varied fields, extremely skilful in dealing with people, he was without doubt a commanding, brilliant personality. He had distinguished himself as the commander of several Luftflotten, but he had not yet had practical, personal experience in directing larger Army formations with their much greater dependence on time and space, the much slower execution of an order issued from higher authority and other limitations. By nature an optimist, he agreed more readily with Hitler's estimate of the situation without first examining it, and was more easily convinced by Hitler of the advantages of his system of "static defence". He was, however, capable of outstanding and far-sighted organisation in this respect. For a long time Italy was the only theatre of operations where positions in the rear were built in time. Later, however, after much bitter experience, Kesselring changed his mind and likewise favoured flexible warfare which made for economy in the use of German forces, but Hitler had become so obstinate by then that even Field-Marshal Kesselring could no longer make him listen to reason.

At this point mention must be made of the fact that co-operation between Field-Marshal Kesselring and Tenth Army H.Q. was most harmonious. The few differences of opinion which occurred resulted from opposing views on static and flexible defence, as C.-in-C., Tenth Army formerly in command of armoured units, and his chief, a most capable General Staff officer in the field of strategy, were firm supporters of mobile warfare.

This will be dealt with in detail later.

B

Establishment of Tenth Army H.Q.

The situation with which the new Tenth Army H.Q. found itself confronted when it took over command on 22 August 1943 was a difficult one.

I. By spring 1943 at the latest it must have been quite evident to the highest Italian authorities, particularly Mussolini and the Commando Supremo who were in command of Axis forces in the Mediterranean area, that the fighting might shift over to the Italian mainland within a measurable space of time. It may be accepted as certain that Mussolini, influenced by Hitler, was resolved to continue fighting in Italy with every means at his disposal. Whether Commando Supremo shared this view or whether it considered further fighting hopeless is at least doubtful since the Allied troops in Italy had definitely proved themselves much superior to the best Italian divisions and also to the German troops, which were numerically weak but very experienced. In any case, the measures introduced to drive off a landing on the mainland or on the islands were extremely inadequate:

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the coasts were to be occupied by widely-dispersed Italian divisions, whose unreliability and low fighting value were a secret to nobody;

weak field defences were to be set up, and

a few coastal batteries were to be consolidated at the larger ports.

The Italian Army had practically no signals services, and the civilian telephone service was inadequate. The attitude of the civilian population to wartime duties and other things accepted as a matter of course in a total war, in no way corresponded to the seriousness of the situation, but on the contrary was reminiscent of peace-time conditions.

II. In the Sicilian campaign the Germans could not understand why the Allies did not seize the Straits of Messina, either at the same time as the initial landing or in the course of the first battles when the German troops were tied down. This could have been accomplished quite easily on either side of the Straits, in southern Calabria or in the north-eastern corner of the island. The campaign would have proceeded more quickly and could have had no other outcome than the surrender of all the troops on the island.

That this did not happen, and that even the German withdrawal across the Straits was carried out unhindered, has always been regarded as a rare stroke of luck. Not only the troops themselves with their full equipment, but also German and Italian supplies urgently needed by the troops, were brought back practically intact.

This fact was of decisive importance in the whole future course of the campaign in Italy.

Without the first-class Sicily divisions it would not have been possible to offer effective resistance on the Italian mainland south of Rome. All the divisions sent to this area from the north would have arrived too late if 6th and later 7th Panzer (or Panzer Grenadier) Divisions of the Tenth Army had not delayed the Allied advance so effectively; the major part of these divisions came from Sicily.

III. 1) Conditions of subordination for German units in Italy, which had hitherto been widely-dispersed and used to bolster up the Italian Army, were basically changed by the establishment of Tenth Army H.Q. which, of course, did not suit Commando Supremo. In spite of this the new C.-in-C. was politely, almost cordially received when he visited Commando Supremo on 21 August 1943. On this occasion, however, no questions of importance were discussed.

Formally, German Corps H.Q.'s. and divisions in Sicily and southern Italy were tactically completely subordinate to the Italian Sixth and Seventh Armies respectively, and in disciplinary matters were subordinate to C.-in-C., South, Field-Marshal Kesselring who, in turn, was under the tactical command of Commando Supremo.

Actually, however, Field-Marshal Kesselring was able, on OKW instructions, to influence tactical orders in many ways. Many difficulties, though none of major importance, resulted from this situation, as the Italian authorities were very reserved. The Germans, for their part, endeavoured to establish a friendly personal relationship and to treat justifiable sensitiveness with consideration.

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2) The situation was at last clarified when Tenth Army H.Q. took over command at mid-day on 22 August 1943. Army H.Q. was under the direct command of Field-Marshal Kesselring and was instructed to co-operate closely with the Italian Seventh Army (General Asiero in Potenza).

Chain of Command of Tenth Army H.Q.:

General von Vietinghoff (Panzer troops)
General Wentzell
H.Q. in Polla

Subordinated Units:

- (a) H.Q. Staff of XIV Panzer Corps: Under General Hube in the Caserta area.
- 15th Panzer Grenadier Division: Under General Rodt; in the Gaeta area and eastwards to the approximate line of the Volturno.
- Hermann Goering Division: Under General Conrad; in the Naples area.

The division was being re-organised after sustaining heavy losses in Africa and Sicily. There were only 2 infantry battalions, one of which had been newly formed and consisted of recruits, and only one weak tank battalion of about 30 serviceable tanks; the division however was strong in artillery:

3 artillery batteries
3 heavy AA batteries
1 assault gun company
and other heavy weapons

16th Panzer Division: Under General Sickenius; in the Salerno area; 2 battalions of the 1st Paratroop Division in Naples.

- (b) H.Q. Staff of LXXVI Panzer Corps:

General Herr; in Castrovillari, Calabria.

29th Panzer Grenadier Division: General Fries; southern tip of Calabria.

26th Panzer Division: General von Luettwitz; in the Catanzaro and Cassano All' Ionio landings (southern Calabria).

The division was at half-strength and was without the Buesing battle group (Panzer regiment, one infantry battalion, one artillery battery), which was left with 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division north of Rome, as well as a few units still being re-formed.

1 regiment (only 2 battalions) of 1st Paratroop Division in the area around Castrovillari.

- (c) Directly subordinate to Tenth Army H.Q. from about 27 August are:

1st Paratroop Division: General Heidrich; gradually assembling in Apulia, with one regiment temporarily in the Taranto/Brindisi area, the engineer battalion in Bari and one regiment moving up from Calabria.

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The following were absent:

- 1 regiment with LXXVI Panzer Corps (see above)
- 2 battalions in Naples

The 16th and 26th Panzer Divisions had been newly-created and had not been in action. The other divisions had been in action on Sicily after being re-organised and had to replenish their losses.

- 3) Co-operation with the Italian Seventh Army was inaugurated immediately on 23 August 1943 when C.-in-C. Tenth Army visited General Asiero in Potenza.

The main point of discussion was the new chain of command; the following agreements were reached:

- (a) In future, German divisions would no longer be subordinate to Italian authorities, but solely to the German Corps H.Q. Staffs, in this case Tenth Army H.Q.
- (b) Coastal areas would be occupied mainly by Italian troops; German divisions would be held in readiness for a counter-attack against landed enemy forces. In this event the stronger side (in this case the German) would, in accordance with German practice, take over command of all troops in its area.
- (c) The closest liaison would be maintained between the German and Italian Staffs; Liaison officers were to be exchanged wherever necessary.

It was possible during the discussion to transform the Italian attitude, which had been very reserved at the start, into one of confidence and cordiality. This was increased by the return visit of General Asiero with his Chief of Staff to Tenth Army H.Q. and a number of discussions between the two Chiefs of General Staff. This co-operation continued without a single hitch and with good will on both sides until the Italian armistice. When the Italian Army H.Q., itself completely surprised and shaken, had to inform us of the armistice on the evening of 8 September, it made every effort to facilitate our further movements by dispatching a liaison staff and handing over vehicles and fuel.

4) Measures taken before the allied landing

- (a) After discussion with the newly-subordinated commanders, the first Tenth Army H.Q. measure was to suggest that Italian troops carry out a fighting withdrawal on the south Calabrian peninsula and put up effective defence in the mountains north of Castrovillari from the Gulf of Palicastro to the Gulf of Taranto. The German divisions in the south, beginning with 29th Panzer Grenadier Division and the strong flak units which had hitherto been used mainly in the Messina Straits area, would immediately evacuate the peninsula and be held in readiness north of the new line.

Reasons for this measure:

In view of the many possibilities open to the Allies for their next landing, the weak and dispersed German forces had to be concentrated so that they could be moved quickly to any threatened point.

Moreover, it was not possible to maintain an effective defence of the peninsula, as all the troops fighting in the area ran the risk of being cut off by landings in the rear, for which there was ample opportunity.

The proposal was accepted and work was immediately begun on the

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construction of a new position along the line suggested, Italian construction units being brought up for the purpose. The first units of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, the Paratroop regiment and the flak units began to move back during the last days of August.

If a German Army H.Q. occupied only with the defence of southern Italy had taken over command earlier, it would doubtless have been possible to assemble the whole of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division north of the mountains before the Salerno landing. The course of the battle of Salerno would have been vitally influenced by such an action. The establishment of a headquarters of this type had, however, so far fallen through owing to opposition from Commando Supremo.

(b) 1st Paratroop Division:

Weak units of this division which had so far arrived in Apulia were ordered to deploy so that they could delay the enemy advance in the event of a landing on the peninsula, particularly at Taranto or Brindisi. Plans to defend the ports themselves had to be abandoned owing to the more than doubtful attitude of the strong Italian garrisons.

Bari, on the other hand, was to be held.

(c) German units had to be used for coastal defence in the area Gaeta/Naples/Salerno. Work was begun on the construction of defence posts, light barbed-wire obstacles and minefields and the performance of the Italian coastal batteries was improved by the introduction of German gun-crews and signals equipment.

5) Support by the other forces of the Wehrmacht

Effective support of the Army by the Navy or Air Force could not be expected. Apart from small craft, the German Navy was not represented. From previous experience it was accepted that the Italian Navy would not put to sea. The Air Force was regarded as practically non-existent after the heavy losses it had sustained in Africa, Sicily and on airfields on the mainland. At most, only a few reconnaissance and fighter aircraft and very weak bomber forces could be sent into action.

Even the flak forces in Tenth Army area were too weak owing to decreasing air defence, and many batteries from the Messina Straits had been sent straight up to northern Italy.

On sober consideration of the relative strengths of both sides, therefore, Army H.Q. could not escape the fact that, in spite of all the improvisations which had been arranged, the German forces available would not be adequate to successfully repulse a large-scale Allied landing in the immediate future. The main objective, therefore, was to delay and limit its effects as far as possible.

C

The battles in Southern Italy to the end of the Salerno battle

I. 1) When the British Eighth Army crossed the Straits of Messina and landed on the southern point of the Calabrian peninsula on 3 September 1943 a feeling of relief came over Tenth Army H.Q. staff. The landing came somewhat too early, as the regrouping of forces (and especially the moving-up of German divisions) was only in its initial stages, but on the other hand it clarified the situation favourably:

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(a) The enemy advance on the very mountainous peninsula could easily be delayed by obstacles and weak rearguards. For this reason an undisturbed withdrawal by the main German force was expected and, unless overhauled by a large-scale landing in the Catanzaro Pass, a complete withdrawal could be carried out, even by flak batteries which were partly not mobile. As far as could be determined at that time the landing equipment appeared to be insufficient for an operation like this whilst it seemed adequate for minor landings like those made in Sicily. For these we had to be prepared.

(b) The impending landing of the main Allied force was now without doubt to be expected in an area which would enable both landing groups to co-operate as quickly as possible, i.e. presumably in the Gulf of Salerno, Naples or Gaeta. More distant areas did not receive so much consideration now. For this reason, the divisions moving out of Calabria might possibly be brought into the new battle area in time.

In taking this measure the Army was quite aware that the withdrawal of German forces would cause the already low morale of Italian divisions to drop still further. In fact only a few Italian battalions, mainly paratroops, made any show of fighting.

2) Course of operations:

(a) On 2 September enemy landing craft were observed to be concentrating on the eastern coast of Sicily, so there was no longer any doubt as to enemy intentions. Army H.Q. orders to LXXVI Panzer Corps ran as follows:

"German divisions will withdraw as quickly as possible, starting with 29th Division. To prevent a swift enemy penetration, defensive positions in the western half of the peninsula will be occupied during the withdrawal, but will be held only long enough (one day each at most) to allow the most important road blocks to be set up. Only demolition troops and covering parties will be left behind on the eastern coast".

(b) The Allied landing took pace at dawn on 3 September after a heavy artillery bombardment with strong air support. The Italian troops, including the coastal artillery, did not fire a single shot, but fled or gave themselves up. The small German force (one regiment on a front over 50 km long) fired on the boats and managed to cause slight delays at some points, but could not hold up the landing proper in the large unoccupied sectors. Some close combat actions were fought, but the isolated groups were soon pushed back from the coast. During the day the regiment withdrew according to plan into the defence line Bagnara/St Stefano as ordered, after blowing up road sections.

By the evening the Allied landing had been completed.

(c) As German troops continued their withdrawal, rearguard positions ran as follows:

29th Panzer Grenadier Division:

<u>Evening of 3 Sept:</u>	Bagnara - St Stefano - Croce di Romeo - occupied by reinforced 15th Grenadier Regiment
<u>Until evening of 4 Sept:</u>	Gioia Taura to west of Cittanova, occupied by reinforced 15th Grenadier Regiment
<u>Night of 4/5 Sept:</u>	Most of 15th Grenadier Regiment retires northwards - only one battalion remains facing the enemy.

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At the same time: Reinforced 71st Grenadier Regiment occupies the line Nicotera - Laureana and eastwards.

Morning of 5 Sept: The battalion of the 15th Grenadier Regiment which was left behind withdraws northwards through this position.

On the eastern coast the 129th Armoured Reconnaissance Unit, reinforced by one battery, took up positions on both sides of Locri with orders to cover the left flank of the division when it withdrew by delaying the enemy advance.

After 15th Grenadier Regiment withdrew on 5 September, the divisional staff of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division was also moved northwards and 26th Panzer Division took over command of the front, including 29th Panzer Grenadier Division rearguard, the Krueger battle group (consisting of the reinforced 71st Grenadier Regiment) and the 129th Armoured Reconnaissance Unit. The bulk of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division was assembled in the Castrovillari area for a further withdrawal.

26th Panzer Division:

Although the enemy had only followed up slowly so far, pressure was increased in the direction of Rosarno on 6 September. The divisional commander directing rearguard operations on the spot therefore ordered units to withdraw over the Mesima and blow up the bridge on the evening of 6 September, and to fall back on Vibo Valentia on 7 September. Whilst this movement was still in progress, strong enemy infantry and armoured forces landed at Pizzo at 05.00 hours on 8 September. An immediate counter-attack from the north-east by I/67th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and from the south-west by units of the Krueger battle group succeeded in pushing the enemy back and blocking the landing. By evening the whole of the Krueger battle group had been brought back via Serra S. Bruno and the defence zone to the north. The 93rd Engineer Battalion of 26th Panzer Division then took over operations in this sector.

If the Pizzo landing had been made a few days earlier, the movements of 29th Division would doubtless have been interrupted and delayed.

The advance of 1st Canadian Division on the eastern coast had no effect on German movements.

After the surrender of the Italian Army had been announced, the 26th Panzer Division received orders on 8 September to withdraw its main force northwards during the night. The Lagonegro area was reached early on 10 September. At the same time the Krueger battle group was transferred to 29th Division and until 12 September only the Reconnaissance Unit remained under 26th Panzer Division command.

The rearguard took over 67th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (only one battalion) and subordinated units of the engineer battalion, which fell back in stages blocking all the roads. On 9 September the main force of this unit was covering Cosenza and other detachments were at Paola.

On 10 September the rearguard was north of Castrovillari. Units were no longer in contact with the enemy owing to effective road-blocks. The group retired further and took up defensive positions along the line Buonabitacolo - Montesano on the evening of 13 September.

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II. 1) The Italian Armistice - Tenth Army H.Q. plans for the battle

On 8 September large enemy naval groups were reported proceeding north-east in the Tyrrhenian Sea. A large-scale landing was therefore expected during the night. Whilst the Commander of the Italian Seventh Army was still at Tenth Army H.Q. discussing necessary measures to be taken, the first news of the Italian capitulation came in. This, however, was denied when the Italian Commander 'phoned his Army H.Q. on account of a telephone conversation which had just taken place between Generals Roatta and Asiero. But soon afterwards the Army Group South order "Operation Axis" made everything quite clear. The situation for the German troops had been changed in a moment, even though this change had not come as a complete surprise. The few widely-dispersed German divisions stood alone in an uncertain and perhaps hostile land, practically without air or support, confronted by an impending major operation by all three arms of the Allied forces.

Fortunately, the disarmament of Italian troops in Tenth Army H.Q. area was far less difficult than had been feared. Apart from minor isolated incidents, no resistance worth mentioning was offered. The Italian Army broke up very quickly of its own accord and the roads were covered with forces streaming homewards. The Italian staffs disappeared just as quickly from the Army area. Serviceable Army equipment, especially vehicles and fuel, were taken over by the German authorities, who were assisted in this work by a liaison staff sent from the Italian Seventh Army H.Q. The only important loss was several good Italian coastal batteries in the Salerno - Naples area, especially as an ambiguous Germany Navy order had caused gun-crews to be withdrawn from several batteries manned by the German Navy at Naples, a situation which could be rectified only by Army H.Q. intervention. Apart from these and other matters of minor importance, Army H.Q. concentrated on the fight against the enemy without allowing itself to be diverted by further developments in the internal situation.

Plans and Orders:

(a) Where the landing would take place was not certain, but it would presumably be made in the Gulf of Salerno or Gaeta to ensure co-operation with the British Eighth Army.

A simultaneous major landing in the Gulf of Taranto or on the Adriatic coast was apparently not intended, as no landing fleets were reported in these areas.

(b) In view of the strength of German forces available at the time, the landing itself could not be prevented. The objective was, therefore, to force landed enemy troops back to their boats as quickly as possible by counter-attacks, or at least to limit their freedom of movement to such an extent that an operation to cut off or eliminate German forces in southern Italy would not be possible.

For this purpose, fronts not directly threatened had to be ruthlessly weakened and all available forces brought up to the landing area as quickly as possible.

(c) It has been found that small rearguards with good demolition units were sufficient to delay the British Eighth Army advance in Calabria during the decisive period. The 29th Panzer Grenadier Division and the 26th Panzer Division were to withdraw as quickly as possible. The G.O.C. and commander of the 29th Division were to go on ahead to Army H.Q. at Polla (after an air attack during the night 8/9 September, Army H.Q. was transferred to a tent camp in the hills around Polla).

(d) Units of 1st Paratroop Division in Apulia were adequate as a covering force.

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(e) XIV Panzer Corps had to send all reserves on sector not under attack to the landing area.

2) Execution of 1):

Two difficulties stood in the way of the swift execution of these decisions, and are summarised as follows:

(a) Bad Army H.Q. signals communications:

Telephone calls had to go through the civilian postal network. The agreement regarding lines of communication at the disposal of the German Forces had already been found unsatisfactory and, apart from the danger that messages might be intercepted, it was practically non-existent after the Armistice. Even wireless communications could not make up for this deficiency, as Army H.Q. had received a newly-formed signals unit which was in no way equal to the difficulties of the unusual situation. During the first days of the Salerno action, therefore, Army H.Q. had no direct signals communication at all with C.-in-C., South, and only inadequate and unreliable communication with the Corps H.Q. Staffs. For this reason C.-in-C., South or the Chief of Staff had to visit the Corps every day for detailed discussions. More time than ever was lost when movements by "Storch" had to be discontinued after several of these aircraft had been shot down.

(b) Lack of Fuel:

When the 29th Division was ready to move off from Castrovillari it was discovered, and indeed came as a complete surprise to Army H.Q., that there was only enough fuel available to cover a short distance. This situation arose for several reasons:

As had already been mentioned, Army H.Q. did not have its own Quartermaster department, but instead received only a small liaison staff from the Quartermaster General with C.-in-C., South, which supplied units by direct arrangement with Corps H.Q. Staffs. The liaison staff reported that ample fuel had been issued, but owing to inadequate signals facilities, the Quartermaster General with the C.-in-C., South did not know how much fuel had actually reached units until much later. Furthermore, the large Army stocks which had been brought across from Sicily to the Cosenza area had to be moved to the north before the landing. However, units always had to have 5 full issues of fuel in reserve, and this appeared to be ample. In estimating the amount of fuel required, the LXXVI Panzer Corps Quartermaster department did not make allowance for the fact that an issue was sufficient to cover about 100 km of flat country if engines were in good condition, but that in tropical heat only 25 - 30 km. of mountainous Italian terrain could be covered by vehicles with well-worn engines with the same amount of fuel. The 29th Division, then, had practically exhausted its 5 issues on reaching Castrovillari.

A second mishap made the critical situation worse. A naval vessel with a large fuel consignment had arrived at Sapri and was unloading on the morning of 8 September. Owing to an ambiguous signal, the captain of this vessel thought that the landing force was on the way to Sapri, whereupon he jettisoned the fuel still on board and gave orders for the fuel which had already been unloaded to be burnt.

As soon as the fuel situation of LXXVI Corps was known to Army H.Q. and C.-in-C., South, every effort was made to relieve it (fuel was dropped from aircraft, Italian stocks were used etc.). Gradually, it was possible to start moving 29th Division by battalions, but even so the most advanced

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battalion arrived at Salerno 36 hours late owing to this delay. The 26th Panzer Division was also held up through lack of fuel.

This incident had been described in detail because it had an important, perhaps decisive influence on the course of the battle at Salerno. For this reason the performance of 16th Panzer Division, which had been fighting alone until then, was all the more commendable. Furthermore, both illustrations show the difficulties (which were never encountered by the Allied commanders) with which the German Command had to reckon at all times.

3) The landing, and an appreciation of the German situation in the landing area

At 04.30 hours on 9 September Allied forces landed on a broad front at Salerno Bay. This solved the problem which had hitherto existed at Tenth Army H.Q. as to whether the landing would take place in Gaeta or Salerno Bay or even further south. Mention must be made of the fact that, owing to Allied feint manoeuvres off the Volturno estuary, and particularly in view of the large number of transports (estimated at 7-800,000 tons) lying outside Salerno Bay later, a landing in force at Naples still had to be taken into consideration. This forced Army H.Q. to leave at least the main body of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division in the Salerno Bay area.

The terrain in the landing area was not unfavourable for defence. The plain was not large and was partly surrounded by hills and mountain ranges which rose steeply above it and afforded good points of observation. However, the following disadvantages had also to be taken into account; the only possible route for reinforcements led through the Sele valley and every counter-attack would have to be made downhill on slopes which were clearly visible from the sea. In both instances, therefore, German troops could be easily observed and were exposed to the full force of the greatly superior Allied artillery, particularly that of the fleet. This fact played a decisive part in the heavy German counter-attacks in the last few days of the action.

The bay was defended by 16th Panzer Division which had arrived there 14 days beforehand from the Adriatic coast. The division, reformed after heavy losses in Russia, had been brought up to full strength and was the best-equipped in Italy. However, it had not been in action since its re-organisation and was therefore not well co-ordinated. In spite of this, the division made a splendid effort.

As a Panzer division it was hardly suited to purely defensive operations on the coast. It had only 3 artillery batteries and 4 infantry battalions (one equipped with half-track vehicles to follow up armoured attacks) i.e. one battalion for every enemy division which was landed. There was no heavy artillery at all and the few Italian coastal batteries, including one railway battery, were put out of action immediately or during the first hours of the battle.

As far as I can remember, the division had the following units in action:

Northern Sector:

64th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, supported by two batteries and with reconnaissance units on both sides of Salerno. The motor cycle company, issued with heavy weapons, was in the town itself.

One battalion on the beach south-east of the town, concentrated in front of Montecorvino airfield.

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One battalion on the beach south-east of the town, concentrated in front of Montecorvino airfield.

One battalion held as divisional reserve.

Southern Sector:

79th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, supported by one battery, one battalion on and south of the Sele, one battalion to the south, concentrating in front of Paestum.

Unit Boundary:

From the road junction east of Eboli almost vertically to the coast.

Each battalion had posted groups in small strong-points dug in the dunes, set out wire obstacles and minefields, and had withdrawn reserves for counter-attacks. When Italian units were no longer available there was no fixed defence system and defensive operations were necessarily mobile. The half-track infantry battalion and the Panzer regiment were held in reserve in the northern sector.

The most important task devolved on the Panzer regiment. Sections were placed at the disposal of the Grenadier regiments as reserves for counter-attacks. The bulk of the regiment was retained by the division for major counter-attacks and to guard the broad gap north of the Sele, even though the terrain in this area was difficult for tank movements owing to thick undergrowth and numerous watercourses.

4) Course of the battle:

The battle has been described in such detail and so accurately in the American Army Group and Fifth Army reports that there is no need to give more than a summary of the more important German measures. It must be noted that, owing to the absence of aerial reconnaissance, it was difficult, if not impossible, for the German Command, Corps H.Q. Staffs and Army H.Qs. to obtain a clear picture of the enemy situation quickly, particularly with regard to the number of troops landed and where they were being employed. The German units engulfed in battle knew only what was happening in their own particular area and usually had no idea of the situation in adjoining sectors. Even the artillery observers on high ground could only partially make up for this deficiency. For this reason the existence of a large breach between the VI and X Corps, for example, was not known to Army H.Q. for some time.

9 September:

The landing was observed in good time and all available weapons were turned against the landing craft. In spite of this the enemy soon managed to gain a foothold and overpower the weak defence posts. By making a slow fighting withdrawal, using reserve companies and making counter-attacks with groups of 10 - 15 tanks, the rate of the enemy advance was reduced considerably. German artillery fire, which was very effective at first, was soon silenced by enemy naval guns. On the right wing three American Ranger battalions landed at Majori outside the sector occupied by the reconnaissance unit and, for this reason, soon captured the heights commanding the Nocera - Pagani Pass. Attempts by the "Herman Goering" Division to dislodge them were ineffectual and the road was blocked. Advanced detachments of the "Hermann Goering" Division occupied the pass heights and blocked the Vietri - Nocera road as well.

Embittered fighting against superior enemy forces attacking from the east and west continued into the night around the town of Salerno. Finally,

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the gallant men of the motor cycle company were forced to fall back to the surrounding hills. On the beach south-east of the town the enemy advance, which was concentrated in the direction of the airfield, was held up to some extent.

South of the Sele, however, the 36th U.S. Division succeeded in approaching Hills 140 and 386 which commanded the bank of the river, but Agropoli was still held by small German assault detachments.

Tenth Army H.Q. was not dissatisfied with the situation in the evening. In spite of great Allied superiority, 16th Panzer Division had managed to prevent the enemy from gaining any substantial initial successes. If the reserves arrived in time there was hope of a favourable outcome. The first units of 29th Division were expected during the coming night.

After the day's experiences a change in command organisation was clearly necessary, as neither the H.Q. Staff of XIV Corps nor the divisional staff of 16th Panzer Division were capable of taking sole charge of operations on the extended front. The following re-organisation was ordered for 10 September:

- (a) XIV Corps H.Q. Naples Bay and the northern sector of the Salerno battle area,
- (b) LXXVI Corps H.Q. arrived meanwhile; southern sector with all units in action there at the moment.
- (c) Aim of both Corps H.Q.'s:

To bring up all available reserves as quickly as possible, XIV from its area with possible detachments from C.-in-C., South, LXXVI from Calabria.

To hold the enemy attack for the time being and to improve the German line, and then to throw the enemy back again by counter-attacks to be carried out as soon as possible.

Instead of the expected troops, only the commander of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division arrived at H.Q. on the evening of 9 September and reported that lack of fuel (as described above) was preventing his division from moving up. He was ordered to ensure that his troops would move up by battalions as soon as fuel arrived, and then to proceed to LXXVI Corps H.Q. to make preparations for the employment of his division.

10 September:

On 10 September LXXVI Corps H.Q. established south of Contursi took over command of the southern sector.

Fortunately the enemy did not exploit this favourable situation and no major attacks were made during the day. If such attacks had been made, particularly in the weakly-defended hills south of the Sele, the enemy might have gained a dangerous advantage. As it was, he contented himself with extending the front on the southern wing to the south and south-east, where there were only German assault detachments, and by making light thrusts towards Albanella.

On the northern wing the "Hermann Goering" Division, after its main forces had arrived, succeeded in advancing along the Moccera - Vietri road as far as Cava, mopping up small enemy forces in the town, occupying the heights on both sides of the road to the south and holding them during the days that followed. Immediately east of the "Hermann Goering" Division the 16th Reconnaissance

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Unit was defending the area on both sides of the road until it was relieved by one battalion of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division during the night 10/11 September. The 16th Panzer Division was then able to withdraw the unit and hold it in reserve in the area east of Eboli.

On the sector south-east of Salerno 64th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of 16th Panzer Division stubbornly defended its positions against British attacks.

Artillery observers' reports on further troops landings south of the Sele reached Army H.Q. during the day. Although nothing could be learned from these reports, (whether a new division or only reinforcements of one already recognised were being landed), it now appeared necessary to attack and clarify the situation on and north of the Sele and build up a strong defence there as protection against surprise attacks. As troops of 29th Division were still not available, the 16th Panzer Division had to carry out this task in spite of the severe strain on its front.

11 September:

In the morning the division launched a counter-attack with reserve infantry companies and tanks from the area south of Eboli in the direction of Torre Paladina - tobacco factory - Persano, the objective being at least to reach and hold this line.

The attack caught the flank and rear of the newly landed brigade group of 45th U.S. Division which was advancing along and south of the Sele towards Ponte Sele at the same time and was delivered, therefore, just at the right moment to parry a thrust which would have endangered the centre of the German front. The enemy attack was halted and advanced units of this division were cut off for a time. The battle intensified when a second regimental group (equivalent to a British brigade in strength) attacked north of the Sele during the day. Fighting continued into the night, but 16th Panzer Division succeeded in holding a line in front and east of Bivio Gioffi - tobacco factory - Persano. Meanwhile, the situation further south grew extremely serious during the day. The 36th American Division launched a heavy attack on the left wing and was able to make deep and swift advances in the direction of Altavilla against German forces of approximately only company strength. During the night the first battalion of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, which had at last arrived, was sent into the line around this town in dispersed formation and was just beginning to settle down. The unit was overrun and 36th Division took Altavilla. After heavy fighting the whole plain and Hill 424, which commanded approach routes, were also captured by the enemy. Only the remnants of the dispersed battalion and the reconnaissance unit of 16th Panzer Division stood in the path of the enemy. The latter German unit had just reached the area and was sent in west of Serre by the independent action of the commander of 29th Division who happened to be on the spot.

Heavy fighting also took place on the northern sector of the battle area during the day. The "Hermann Goering" Division successfully repulsed all attacks aimed northwards from Salerno and the area to the west. In the evening, however, the strongly-contested Montecorvino airfield was lost and the enemy penetrated into Battipaglia.

Thus 11 September ended with not inconsiderable enemy successes. The gravity of the situation was mitigated only by the constant arrival of troops from Calabria. The 29th Panzer Grenadier Division and the 4th Paratroop Regiment (2 battalions) were the first to appear. The latter had not, as originally believed, been sent back to its division in Apulia, but had also been diverted to Salerno, where it was placed at the disposal of 16th Panzer Division. The 26th Panzer Division was expected to arrive on 13 September.

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In the evening the staff of Tenth Army H.Q. was transferred to a tent camp on the wooded hills of S. Angelo.

12 September:

Because of its great importance, LXXVI Corps had been ordered to retake Hill 424 as quickly as possible. After assembling during the night, fresh units of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division attacked on the morning of 12 September. By evening they had not only driven the enemy from Hill 424, but had cleared Altavilla and the area 1 - 2 km. to the west as well.

Heavy fighting broke out again on the Sele plain, where enemy reinforcements were constantly arriving. During the night a subordinate commander of 16th Panzer Division evacuated Persano on receiving a report that fresh enemy forces were approaching his flank. Efforts to retake the town during the day were unavailing and the tobacco factory, which had been badly exposed by the withdrawal, was also lost after changing hands several times. On the northern sector, however, Battipaglia was finally retaken by a strong counter-attack.

For the first time since the Italian armistice, direct contact was established with C.-in-C., South when he visited Army H.Q. on 12 September.

A report received during the day stating that a fresh fleet of transports totalling about 300,000 tons was approaching the Gulf of Gaeta showed, as did previous similar reports of enemy landings in this bay, not only the vivid imagination of the observers, but, particularly, the extreme state of tension of the few troops guarding the bay.

During the night 12/13 September the last unit of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, the 29th Reconnaissance Unit, and the first unit of 26th Panzer Division, II/9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, arrived in the battle area. The main body of this division minus

the rearguard in front of the British Eighth Army, the Panzer Grenadier Regiment (only one battalion) in the Lagonegro area and

the Buesing battle group (with the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division in the Rome area)

reached the area east of Eboli during the course of 13 September.

13 September:

It was known that enemy forces north of the Sele were continually receiving reinforcements. In view of this threat, LXXVI Panzer Corps concentrated all available units, particularly those which had just arrived, for a counter-attack (from the area south of Eboli in a southerly and south-westerly direction) against the extended flank of 6 U.S. Corps. The attack was opened in the early afternoon by units of 16th Panzer Division with all serviceable tanks. II/9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of 26th Panzer Division, the 129th Reconnaissance Unit and 71st Grenadier Regiment of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, the latter operating on both sides of the Tenuta di Persano road. At the same time the 4th Paratroop Regiment attacked westwards on both sides of Battipaglia to cover the right flank. Units of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division west of Altavilla were also to carry their attack further forward.

The main attack was very successful. Units penetrated the strongly-contested tobacco factory - Persano area, crossed the Sele and thrust into the area between the Sele and Calore rivers until they were brought to a standstill at the burnt-out bridge over the Calore (above the point of entry into the Sele) by powerful defence (close-range artillery fire). Troops of the

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45th and 36th U.S. Divisions caught in this area were dispersed. Many prisoners were brought in and the remnants streamed towards the rear. Units reported: "Enemy on the run".

Troops in the hills west of Altavilla, where the German morning attack had at first broken down in face of a strong enemy counter-attack, also joined in this movement.

The paratroops attacking at Battipaglia had not gained much ground and no progress had been made north of Salerno.

Reports received at Army H.Q. until evening indicated certain success, but Army H.Q. took a more sober view of the situation. Certainly, success beyond all expectation had been achieved, enemy losses and the number of prisoners were unusually high and the American bridgehead had been considerably reduced. It was therefore improbable that the forces already landed would be able to take up the offensive with any prospect of success against German troops who had recently been reinforced. But only the next few days could decide whether the enemy would abandon the Salerno operation or send in more troops after this set back. The reported brisk activity by landing craft left both possibilities open.

In any case, H.Q. ordered attacks concentrated in a westerly direction to be continued on 14 September with the aim of cutting through the American and British bridgehead.

14 September:

Morning attacks encountered increased resistance everywhere. At least 16 - 18 battleships, cruisers and large destroyers lying in the roadstead subjected the advancing troops to a bombardment of unprecedented violence and directed their fire with astonishing precision and manoeuvrability on every possible target with overwhelming effect. In addition, large formations of aircraft carried out non-stop attacks. Both these factors made every movement on or towards the battlefield extremely difficult.

In spite of this difficulty local successes were gained. Groups of tanks broke through advanced lines and into the coastal area on several occasions, but were unable to hold their ground and suffered losses.

All this was understandable, as even if the Allies had decided to evacuate Salerno Bay, large bridgeheads would have to be held to cover embarkation.

The last German reinforcements had now arrived. Remaining units of 26th Panzer Division (with the exception of the rearguard opposing the Eighth Army and the Busing Battle Group) and one reinforced regiment of 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division from C.-in-C., South were in the battle area. The latter unit had fortunately moved up before the enemy paratroop battalion dropped in the Avellino area during the night 14/15 September had been able to delay its movements. This operation, therefore, was virtually ineffective, and, with the exception of harassing raids on a few supply formations during the days following, the battalion was inactive.

Army H.Q. decided to make a final attempt with the fresh forces after thorough preparation, this time against the British sector. The following orders were issued:

- (a) The 26th Panzer Division will move up on both sides of Battipaglia and will make preparations for an attack along the road to Salerno on Pontecagnano. There it will link up with the "Hermann Goering" Division which, with the subordinated regiment of 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, will make a simultaneous attack west of the Picentino valley.

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(b) Both attacking forces will be allocated all serviceable tanks and motorised heavy weapons. Arrangements will be made for strong artillery support by the Corps.

(c) The attack will be launched on the morning of 16 September.

15 September:

The day passed with local actions and preparations for the attack. Heavy fire from warships and non-stop air attacks continued unabated.

16 September:

Units to be brought up to 26th Panzer Division arrived very late owing to roads being jammed. Guiding parties lost their way, artillery observers were unable to find infantry units they were supposed to escort, tanks and artillery did not reach the assembly areas before dawn. For these reasons the attack planned for dawn could not begin before 09.00 hours, i.e. in full view of enemy artillery and aircraft. The 4th Paratroop Regiment advancing over open terrain south of the road was halted by heavy naval artillery after a few hundred yards and did not even reach the enemy positions. The 9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment attacking north of the road over terrain offering more cover made some progress (one battalion advanced almost 1 mile), but was then attacked on all sides at once and temporarily encircled.

Enemy positions were not penetrated at any point and German losses were heavy. Enemy counter-attacks with tanks broke through our lines and could be halted only with the greatest difficulty.

The attack on the Hermann Goering sector, directed by Oberst Schmalz, also miscarried. The Grenadier Regiment of 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division did indeed, under his skilful direction, take the enemy positions on the ridge east of Salerno in a night raid, but came in full view of enemy artillery observers whilst descending the other side. The ensuing bombardment by guns of all calibres was so heavy that the regiment, in action for the first time, was thrown into disorder, mainly due to the fact that 2 battalion staffs were put out of action immediately.

Deployment for attack was restored only with difficulty and delay. Owing to a misunderstanding, tanks assembled to support the fresh attack moved forward too early along the road leading into the Picentino gorge and were likewise by artillery fire. Thus the attack on the "Hermann Goering" Division sector was also halted. (See Appendix).

Army H.Q. had received news of the failure of both attacks by midday. The situation was now clear:

The enemy did not intend to evacuate Salerno Bay, but had received reinforcements and withstood the crisis. More troops would be brought in. Nothing further could be expected from German attacks and units had suffered heavy losses.

There was no question of going over to purely defensive operations, as the Tenth Army had to defend the whole of Central Italy as far as the Adriatic as well as this area.

Owing to the fact that one reinforced battalion had kept the British Eighth Army away from the battle area, no pressure had as yet been exerted on the Salerno battle from this quarter. On 16 September the battalion was in contact with enemy advanced detachments south of Auletta, whilst the main

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force of the 13 British Corps had only just reached the Sapri - Lagonegro area. Nevertheless, the Army must have passed through the main demolition zone by now and would soon go into action. Preparations had to be made for this eventually.

Thus Army H.Q. decided to break off operations and, holding the right wing on the Sorrento peninsula as a base for the movement, to pivot north and north-eastwards. Authority for the execution of the movement from C.-in-C., South, who had already been approached and approved the plan, arrived as precautionary orders were being issued to Corps H.Q. Staffs.

The end of the Battle of Salerno

Even though it had not been possible to attain the objective fixed during the first days of the action, namely to force the enemy back to his ships, the newly-formed Tenth Army regarded its first battle as a success. In spite of the apparently hopeless dispersal of German forces and the difficulties arising at a critical moment from the Italian armistice, German troops had been brought together for successful defensive operations, their movements had been organised and an efficient command set up whilst two enemy armies were attacking. A basis had thus been created for the continuation of operations in Italy.

In order to be able to form a correct opinion of the performance put up by German units at Salerno, the following facts must be taken into account:

21 German infantry battalions (figures up to and including 16 September) were in action as compared with approximately 42 Allied battalions. A large proportion of the German battalions had not been in action before.

The number of land batteries cannot be estimated owing to lack of data; if the amount of available ammunition is also taken into account, the Allies must have been 100% superior.

The overwhelming force of the Allied naval artillery and Air Forces which the German forces could in no way equal, was decisive in this action.

For the first time it had been clearly demonstrated that in modern warfare an army without air or sea support cannot score decisive successes against an enemy whose three arms of the service co-operate perfectly. This knowledge influenced the plans of the German command in Italy for future operations in this theatre.

If Hitler and OKW had not ignored this insight so obstinately, their decisions for the conduct of operations in France would probably not have had such disastrous results.

The colossal material superiority of the Allies displayed at Salerno doubtless caused a fall in the morale of the young Tenth Army troops at first, but the feeling that the German soldier had the right to be proud of his performance at Salerno soon returned. The fact that Allied losses were considerably greater than ours proves that both sides put up a stubborn fight. If commanders and troops had previously been under the impression that they were confronted by an almost insurmountable task, they faced future battles with confidence after Salerno.

III. 1) During the fighting on Sicily the German command thought that the next major Allied landing would take place near the newly-acquired base, i.e. in the Tyrrhenian Sea. As we knew that the Allied command was accustomed to

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methodical planning and to excluding the element of risk wherever possible, it was thought that there was less likelihood of major landings on the Adriatic coast, but the possibility of auxiliary operations, particularly in the Gulf of Taranto, still had to be taken into account.

C.-in-C., South decided, therefore, to leave the defence of Apulia and the northern half of the Gulf of Taranto to the Italians and to withdraw 16th Panzer Division, which had been stationed in the area until then, to defend Salerno Bay.

When doubts regarding the attitude of the Italian government increased, however, OKW ordered the 1st Paratroop Division to occupy the most important points in Apulia in view of the dangerous effect which any landing at Taranto or on the Adriatic coast must have on operations on the western coast.

This division had suffered heavy losses in the African and Sicilian campaigns and had been further weakened by the release of personnel to LXXXVI Panzer Corps and the Naples area, but was particularly suitable for independent operations in small groups.

2) What remained of the division was assembled in Apulia until the beginning of September, the divisional staff being based at Altamura. It was ordered to delay the advance of any enemy force which might land, so that it would not be able to threaten the expected major operations on the Tyrrhenian coast.

The division used the following units:

1st Paratroop Regiment: on broad front north of Taranto,

3rd Paratroop Regiment: adjoining 1st regiment to the west, arriving somewhat later.

Each regiment had only 2 battalions.

The originally planned defence of the harbours of Taranto and Brindisi had to be abandoned as the attitude of the strong Italian garrisons was uncertain, and to some extent thoroughly hostile.

The Engineer battalion was in Bari.

Units, 1 - 2 battalions strong, were to defend airfields in the Foggia area.

3) After the armistice Italian soldiers and civilians attacked German patrols and single vehicles on a number of occasions, inflicting casualties. In general, however, the Italians maintained a passive, although distinctly unfriendly attitude.

During the afternoon of 9 September a clash with enemy patrols confirmed the rumour that enemy troops had landed at Taranto. These were later recognised as the 1st British Paratroop Division.

On 10 September enemy infantry attacked Mottola on the Taranto - Gioja del Colle road; patrols were also sent out in the direction of Ginosa. In general, however, the British held back and appeared to have no immediate plans for an attack in force.

Nevertheless, the local attacks increased in strength, mainly in the direction of Gioja del Colle and the few strong-points to the north. For this reason German paratroops decided about 9 September to withdraw their left wing to a new defence line running approximately between Laterza, east

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of Santemaro, Acquaviva, and the coast. The right flank stayed at and west of Ginosa. The enemy followed up slowly.

IV. A critical review of this period reveals the following points:

1) Being subordinate to the Italian Commando Supremo, the German command could not group its weak forces before the landing in Calabria so that, in the event of an enemy landing, they could be quickly concentrated in the threatened area. In spite of all the misgivings caused by the low fighting value of the Italian troops and the uncertain attitude of the Italian government, German divisions were still dispersed as though both Axis armies were going to carry out a united defence, i.e. they were spread out as "props" right down to the southern tip of the "boot".

2) This might have had disastrous results for the German troops if the Allied command had succeeded in bringing both of their vastly superior armies together in a united action. Fortunately for us this did not happen. The solution chosen by the Allies was the most favourable the German command could have wished for as, apart from releasing X Corps for operations at Salerno, it was able to prevent the British Eighth Army from influencing the main battle in any way.

The objective of the landing at Salerno, to gain a secure bridgehead and capture Naples as a base for further operations, shows that the Allies did not make the landing for strategic purposes, but considered it necessary to first create a solid foundation on the mainland. They had apparently greatly over-estimated German strength in Italy at the time.

3) It is doubtful whether a landing in the Gulf of Gaeta would have been more favourable, as many critics maintain, than the landing at Salerno. Although in many ways favourable for an attacking force, the Naples plain has one great disadvantage: it is thickly covered with orchards, most of which are surrounded by hedges, which make observation very difficult. For this reason it would not have been possible to direct the overwhelming naval artillery fire and air attacks with such accuracy and manoeuvrability as was done with decisive success on the open Salerno plain, quite apart from the fact that in this area bomber support from Sicily was no longer an absolute certainty.

On reconsideration of the deployment of landing forces at Salerno, it seems unfortunate that the bulk of the 45th U.S. Division was not first sent in north of the Sele, so as to close the pass south of Eboli by a quick forward thrust. This would doubtless have had a decisive influence on the course of the important first days of the battle and might even have prevented the crisis which arose later.

4) There was one solution which the German Command had to fear most of all; it was a bold plan but not a rash one considering the detailed knowledge the Allies had about the German situation in Italy and it would have been the easiest to carry out.

(a) A surprise landing, if possible a combined sea- and air-borne operation, at Rome instead of Salerno with feint manoeuvres in the Gulf of Gaeta.

No resistance would have been encountered on the first day, as both German divisions were engaged in occupying the area around Rome and in guarding the Alban hills, and in the event of a situation such as this, the Italian divisions would not have surrendered but fought (against the Germans). These units and forces from Naples could not have taken action before the second or third day, and then only gradually.

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At the same time:

(b) A landing by the Eighth Army on the Adriatic coast, the further north the weaker the defence. The Gulf of Manfredonia was the best area for a landing by the main force, as the important air-base (Foggia) could have been taken immediately. Units could then have pushed forward at once from this area and blocked the few roads in the interior.

(c) If this had been done at least the following would have been accomplished:

An easy landing and the blocking of German supply lines, most of which passed through Rome. This would have reduced the freedom of movement and fighting value of German divisions in southern Italy to such an extent that the Allies would have had ample time to stabilise and expand their bridgeheads.

German units would probably have broken through to the north eventually, but only with heavy losses owing to lack of fuel.

In this case the main battle could only have been joined north of Rome, presumably with the main defence line in the northern Apennines, so that nearly a year of heavy fighting would have been saved. Moreover, the occupation of Rome at such an early moment would have brought about a fundamental change in the political situation.

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The Withdrawal from Salerno to the Occupation of the
Bernhard Line (Winter Line)

I. 1) Plans and orders of Tenth Army H.Q.

After the Salerno action had been broken off the old order came into force again for Army H.Q., namely to hold up the Allied advance in central Italy as much as possible to gain time to consolidate the main defence line in the rear, which at this time was still planned to be set up in the northern Apennines.

This meant withdrawing the divisions concentrated at Salerno from close contact with the enemy and forming a defence line about 150 km long linking up with the 1st Paratroop Division which was fighting on the Adriatic coast.

It must not be forgotten that the American Fifth Army would immediately resume its offensive and follow up withdrawals, although the British Eighth Army was not capable of exerting strong pressure during the next few days. In order to be equal to the more difficult task, therefore, the right wing of the Army had to be made as strong as possible at the expense of the left.

Orders for the night 16/17 September merely stated:

Hold present positions whilst withdrawing particularly exposed units, prepare for the disengagement planned for the night 17/18, survey etc. of the new defence line, routes to the line and the evacuation of all dispensable equipment to the rear.

The future conduct of operations was settled during a briefing at Tenth Army H.Q. in St Angelo wood on 17 September.

(a) Main points:

Delaying operations against both Allied Armies on front from the western to eastern coasts of Italy. For the time being the right wing will be held on

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the Sorrento peninsula as a turning-point for the pivot movement so that the large German supply dumps in and around Naples can be evacuated and the destruction of the harbour and all supply installations of use to the Allies completed.

(b) Deployment of Forces:

Right: XIV Panzer Corps with 15th Panzer Grenadier Division,
"Hermann Goering" Division,
16th Panzer Division.

Left: LXXVI Panzer Corps with the 26th Panzer Division,
29th Panzer Grenadier Division,
1st Paratroop Division.

Boundary line between the Corps runs approximately between Avellino and Avezzano.

Units which are mixed at present will be organised and the Paratroop battalions in particular will be sent back to their division.

In spite of the fact that several divisions urgently needed a rest, no Army reserves were to be held owing to the length of the front and the difficulty of moving units in the mountainous terrain.

(c) To ensure that operations proceeded according to plan, defence lines were designated and dates were issued from time to time denoting the minimum period for which these lines were to be held. It was decided that the first defence line to be held for a longer period would be the artillery position Volturno - Calore - Fortore or Biferno, which was not to be evacuated before 15 October. Work was to begin on its consolidation immediately.

The enemy pursuit was to be delayed by the methodical destruction of all lines of communication between the defence lines.

Main defence lines particularly favoured by the terrain were fixed by C.-in-C., South, intermediary lines by Tenth Army H.Q. which also reserved the right to evacuate them.

(d) After the withdrawal began Army H.Q. transferred its headquarters to the Naples area north of Caiazzo.

2) Execution of 1):

(a) First phase, up to 28 September

American Fifth Army front:

XIV Panzer Corps: The "Hermann Goering" Division with subordinated units of the 3rd and 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions had to defend their present positions obstinately for the time being.

The 15th Panzer Grenadier Division was transferred to the western wing of the Volturno position and was ordered to send out advanced detachments as far as the area north of Naples. Naples itself and the coast around Vesuvius were already occupied by 2 battalions of the 1st Paratroop Division which were to establish contact with the "Hermann Goering" Division.

The 16th Panzer Division, all units of which were mixed with other divisions, had to be assembled behind the front and was then also sent into position on the Volturno. It occupied the sector east of the road to Rome via

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Capua, which was expected to be the point of main effort, to prepare defences in the difficult hill terrain at leisure.

LXXVI Panzer Corps: The 26th Panzer Division disengaged the enemy on the evening of 17 September in accordance with orders and reached the new line between Montecorvino and Oleana. The division at last linked up with the "Hermann Goering" Division on the right and also established loose contact with the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, which was withdrawing on both sides of Route 91 (Contursi - San Angelo). Both divisions left strong rearguards behind to face the enemy, who followed up very slowly.

XIV Panzer Corps: The 10 British Corps attacked on 23 September, the main effort being made on 46th Division front on the Vietri - Nocera road. The "Hermann Goering" Division offered stubborn resistance and Cava was held. The town remained in German hands for the next few days and only slight losses were sustained. The 56th Division did not succeed in taking the important Monte Stella position (east of the Salerno - Avellino road) before 26 September. On 27 September the "Hermann Goering" front was pushed back to the line Camerelle - Baronissi, and at the same time Ranger battalions occupied the northern slope of the hill-chain. Attacks were also made at Nocera by units of the newly-landed 7th British Armoured Division.

LXXVI Panzer Corps: The 6 U.S. Corps quickly completed its re-grouping for the new advance after the hard-hit 36th Division had been relieved by the recently-landed 3rd U.S. Division, a formation which proved itself to be first-class and well-led in later battles.

On the evening of 19 September 26th Panzer Division had to withdraw its hard-pressed left flank to the area south of Acerno. During the night the 4th Paratroop Regiment was sent off to its division. The 67th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (minus the 2nd battalion), which had hitherto been carrying out rearguard operations against the British Eighth Army, arrived on 20 September. On the evening of the same day the 2nd battalion of this regiment (from the Buesing battle group) and the 3rd Battery of the 93rd Artillery Regiment also appeared. All the units of this division were assembled now, with the exception of the Panzer regiment still in the Rome area and another in Germany.

The division took over the left wing of the "Hermann Goering" Division and units of 3rd and 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions were relieved by the 67th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. The divisional boundary line, which at the same time separated Corps areas, ran west of Avellino to the point where the Calore flows into the Volturno.

The front was quiet on both days and re-grouping proceeded without interruption. On 21/22 September the advanced line had to be withdrawn in face of strong attacks to the Sabota line, and then to the heights south and south-west of Montella. The heaviest pressure was exerted on the left flank above Acerno. By moving over open country the 3rd U.S. Division sought to by-pass positions, most of which were situated on both sides of the road, and reached the southern edge of Montella (held by German forces) on 24 September. In the evening 29th Panzer Grenadier Division reconnaissance unit, which was still with 26th Panzer Division, was sent to occupy Nusco and thereby returned to its division.

Since 24 September pressure of attacks had also increased on the right wing of the division. On 25 September Monte Monna, one of the most important observation points in the area, was lost, causing a withdrawal to the general line between Baronissi and the heights south of Solofra and east of Volturara.

The 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, starting with the left wing, also disengaged the enemy on the evening of 17 September and withdrew along Route 91.

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The rearguard had to fight hard, first at Contursi and then at Oliveto, which was occupied by the 45th U.S. Division on 22 September. This division followed up closely and took the rearguard position at Teora on 26 September.

The swift advance by the right wing of 3rd U.S. Division and the use of fresh forces (later identified as 34th U.S. Division) between it and the 45th Division had pushed the 26th and 29th Divisions back to the line Montemarano - S. Angelo by the following evening.

British Eighth Army Front:

1st Paratroop Division: After the 26th Panzer Division rearguard on the western flank of the British Eighth Army was withdrawn (i.e. since 19 September) only the weak 1st Paratroop Division (the 4th Paratroop Regiment was sent to join it on 20 September) confronted the whole of the British Eighth Army. Its left flank was extended far to the south towards Apulia and a wide breach existed between the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division and its right wing, which at the time consisted of the small garrison at Foggia airfield. It was now of primary importance to unite the division with the rest of the Army. Fortunately the main Eighth Army forces, the 5th British and 1st Canadian Divisions moving up from Calabria, did not take advantage of the favourable situation. A swift thrust on or north of Foggia against negligible defence forces would have put the whole of the Paratroop Division out of action and made the Tenth Army's position untenable. As it happened, advanced detachments of 13 British Corps had only reached the Auletta - Brienza - Potenza area by 20 September and had paused there in order to close up and organise supply. The painstaking road-blocking operations by German engineers had therefore proved worthwhile.

Meanwhile, the situation in Apulia had developed more rapidly. On about 20 September Santeramo and Acquaviva were relinquished owing to constant pressure on the sparsely occupied northern wing of the 1st Paratroop Regiment. The right wing (3rd Paratroop Regiment) was also forced to withdraw as the battle group of 1st Canadian Division advanced slowly from the south and on 23 September the enemy was in possession of the line Gravina - Altamura - west of Acquaviva. On the same day a landing by a new division was reported from Bari.

Owing to the effect of this division (the 78th British) and the development of the situation at Potenza and Salerno, it was useless to hold such an advanced position for any length of time. For this reason a withdrawal behind the eastern Ofanto sector in front of Cerignola was ordered. During the course of 24 September the paratroops moved behind this sector just in time to escape a dangerous outflanking thrust by mobile troops of 78th Division which could have easily cut off a further withdrawal. These troops had reached Barletta by 24 September, but were held up by demolished bridges over the Ofanto and could not resume their advance before 25 September. As a result of this they were not able to prevent the paratroops withdrawing to the Cavaro sector, which was also held for only a short time. On 27 September Foggia was lost after hard fighting and Canadian forces from Potenza occupied Melfi. The Paratroop Division withdrew through the intermediary position Lucera - S. Severo - coast to the Fortore - Colletorto position - Serracapriola line.

Thus the special paratroop operation ended. Fighting in small, independent groups in open terrain, they had held down superior and continuously reinforced enemy forces for almost three weeks, and had prevented them from influencing the main battle area. In this time they had covered almost 200 km, carrying out difficult withdrawals smoothly and without serious losses, and continually forcing the closely-pursuing enemy forces to a standstill. They had carried out their orders to the letter and had once more lived up to their reputation as first-class independent fighters.

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3) The general situation of the Tenth Army had developed according to plan in this first phase of the withdrawal up to 28 September in spite of the continuous severe strain on the troops.

The "Hermann Goering" Division had held the base for the pivot movement long enough and evacuation and demolition operations at Naples were nearly complete. The initial deployment on a broad front of divisions from the Salerno area had been carried out in spite of enemy attempts to interfere, but tension was still strong and the divisions were only loosely connected.

The 1st Paratroop Division had also been able to bring back and assemble its dispersed forces on the same level. There was, however, a wide breach between it and the main front, and this had to be filled before the British Eighth Army attacked. This would take time, as owing to the demolition of a number of bridges, the main force of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, which had been allotted this task, had to be diverted via Benevento, and units of 26th Panzer Division were moving in this area at the same time.

On 27 September, therefore, Army H.Q. ordered the Army to fall back to the A position during the night 27/28 September, leaving strong rearguards behind to face the enemy.

(b) Second phase, 28 September to 8 October

The withdrawal to the Volturno of most of the troops facing the enemy was carried out without interference during the night 28/29 September. The first of the positions held by rearguards for a short time was on Vesuvius in the "Hermann Goering" Division sector. The western slope of the volcano was held by paratroops at Torre del Greco. On the following day the two units fell back slowly to the Regi Lagni on both sides of Acerra and to Naples in face of advanced detachments of the 7th British Armoured Division and the 82nd Airborne Division moving up west of Vesuvius. Minor disturbances took place in Naples during the evacuation from 29 to 30 September, and the city was entered by armoured reconnaissance units of the 7th British Armoured Division on the morning of 1 October. The city and the harbour area in particular had already been badly damaged by the Allied Air Forces; ships were sunk at piers and in the harbour basin as a further impediment, but the excellent Allied technical services managed to put it into working order again in a surprisingly short time. The same applied to the city supply installations which had been put out of action.

The Acerra line was evacuated about the 3 October and the enemy was prevented from following up closely by bridge and road demolitions and the indiscriminate laying of mines. The last halt was made on Marcianise hill to enable troops to move across a temporary bridge south-west of Caiazzo on 3 and 4 October. On 5 October spearheads of the 7th Armoured and 56th Divisions reached the southern bank of the Volturno at Canello and Capua.

The 26th Panzer Division rearguard, the 26th Armoured Reconnaissance Unit and II/67th Panzer Grenadier Regiment had also slowly fallen back from one defence line to another and, after fighting a number of hard and successful actions in which prisoners and equipment were captured, was holding the line Airola - Montesarchio - southern edge of Benevento on 2 October. The unit was received there by advanced detachments of the 9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. Reconnaissance units of the 34th and 45th U.S. Divisions felt their way forward in this area and in the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division sector and occupied Benevento during the night 2/3 October after forming a bridgehead on the northern bank.

On 6 October the enemy was in full possession of the southern bank of the Volturno - Calore sector. During 7 October hard local actions were fought

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south-east of Telese, where an enemy detachment had crossed the Volturno during the night, and by the bridge at Ponte, in the course of which the enemy succeeded in gaining and holding bridgeheads. Not a single counter-attack was successful.

After this, the hope that a defence position which could be held for some time had been found on the Calore had to be abandoned. The sector was too long (almost 30 km for 4 battalions and a reconnaissance unit) for a weak Panzer Division without its Panzer regiment, especially as I/67th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, which had been withdrawn as Corps reserve, had to be sent into line north of Benevento. The positions were only partially consolidated and, as observation was difficult owing to the terrain, the possibilities of using artillery effectively were too limited. In view of this the division (holding the right wing at Amorosi) was brought back to a new defence line running approximately north of the Guardia - Pontelandolfo road on October 7.

British Eighth Army Front

The 29th Panzer Grenadier Division had been withdrawn to the north-east through Benevento about the 30 September to take over the Fortore sector up to the right wing of the 1st Paratroop Division at Colletorto. The 71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment occupied the southern part of the sector on both sides of S. Bartolomeo and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment took over the northern section, concentrating on both sides of Route 17. These troops arrived just in time to counter the 1st Canadian division advancing from Lucera. Halted by stubborn defence north of S. Bartolomeo, at S. Marco and Colletorto on 2 October, the Canadians had to deploy and prepare for a proper attack. Rain delayed their movements and the attack was not launched before 6 October. Gambatesa was reached on 8 October. Meanwhile, developments on the 1st Paratroop Division front had made the withdrawal of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division necessary on 8 October.

Fighting had meanwhile taken place on the 1st Paratroop Division front which was to have an important influence on the general situation when the 16th Panzer Division had been brought up. The advancing British 78th Division had reached the Fortore sector on 30 September. The town of Serracapriola, situated on high ground, was occupied by small forces of the 1st Paratroop Regiment, the bridge was down and the river in flood. However, the 78th Division succeeded in fording the river, and on 1 October the town was taken by an attack from the south-east and north. The paratroops fell back to the next defence line on the ridge east of Casacalenda - S. Martino in Pensilis - coast, but units in the northern part of the position were soon pushed back over the Biferno.

The 1st Paratroop Division front was very long (over 40 km) and, until the arrival of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, covering parties were also spread over the area from Colletorto southwards to Motta. The division had formed a battle group numbering about 100 men from the remnants of various units, police etc. to defend the small harbour-town of Termoli, situation on a plateau behind the German front. The group had only a modest fighting value and was under the command of a Major Rau. Although this officer had been repeatedly warned of the possibility of a landing he showed that he was in no way equal to the task which had been set him. Consequently, his unit was completely surprised when British troops made the first landing west of the town on the morning of 3 October, and he and his troops were taken prisoner before they could fire a shot. The enemy quickly formed a bridgehead and established contact at the demolished Biferno bridge with the 78th Division on the opposite bank.

As the main front of 1st Paratroop Division was already undermanned, only small reserves could be withdrawn to counter this new threat. LXXVI

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Panzer Corps also had only one battalion available, namely I/9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and this was sent off immediately. As it was fairly certain, however, that the successful initial landing would be quickly followed by others, C.-in-C., South ordered 16th Panzer Division to move northwards immediately for a counter-attack from the Volturno. After a forced march through over 150 km of mountainous terrain, during which most of the tanks temporarily fell by the wayside, the Panzer Grenadier regiments reached the battle area late on the morning of 4 October. Meanwhile, fresh troops had been landed and the bridgehead enlarged, but a counter-attack by I/9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment on the western flank and stubborn defence by the garrison of S. Giacomo and the engineers brought forward from Guglionesi had limited its growth. The newly-arrived regiments attacked immediately and were supported by a few German bombers which took the place of the tanks which had been left behind, but in spite of this their progress was slow.

On 5 October the attack was resumed in a more methodical manner with 2 battle groups from the south, including about 30 tanks, and a small group from the west. It coincided with an enemy attempt to break out, but in spite of this good progress was made in face of stiff opposition and the enemy was pushed back to the town from the west and south-west. However, German troops were not able to take the town itself, or at least cut it off from the Biferno ford.

In the evening fresh enemy forces, including tanks, were landed. The bridge over the Biferno was in use again by the following morning through the unsparing efforts of the imperturbable British engineers, some of them working under machine-gun fire. Thus the attack resumed on 6 October ended without a breakthrough $\frac{1}{2}$ km away from the coast in strong counter-attacks by fresh enemy forces. It was too late for the success which had beckoned on the evening of 5 October.

The 16th Panzer Division had had more than its share of bad luck. Still not completely recovered from the difficult days at Salerno, where it had to bear the brunt of the fighting, tired out by the long forced march, rushed into action without sufficient preparation and grouping, this experienced division had not quite been able to get the better of the difficult situation. Furthermore, the thought that the hard-won territory would have to be relinquished again in a short time to conform with general strategy had probably weakened their will to attack, otherwise they might have succeeded in wiping out the bridgehead altogether.

After this reverse Army H.Q. approved the LXXVI Panzer Corps proposal to take the left wing back to the next defence line Casacalenda - Palata - Montencro - coast. On the evening of 6 October slow withdrawals to this position commenced.

II. 1) The successful Tenth Army defensive operation at Salerno and the withdrawals to establish a broad front between the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic Seas had proved that, contrary to expectation, German troops were capable of putting up effective resistance in southern and central Italy, areas generally favouring defence, against the greatly superior Allied armies. C.-in-C., South therefore suggested to OKW that the plan to make a fighting withdrawal to the northern Apennines should be discarded and that suitable positions further south should be consolidated and effectively defended. The first of these positions to come under consideration was the general line Garigliano - Cassino - Maiella massif - Sangro. OKW approved this plan and, changing its initial decision, proposed making Field-Marshal Kesselring C.-in-C. in Italy and giving Field-Marshal Rommel another appointment.

Two aspects played an important part in forming this decision:

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(a) A purely military aspect: To keep the front, and also enemy air-fields, as far away from the southern frontier of Germany as possible;

(b) A political aspect: To maintain the newly-formed Italian Fascist Republic under Mussolini with Rome as capital and City of the Holy See and thereby give it an important moral boost in the eyes of the Italian people and of world opinion.

The assumption of command in northern Italy was to take place in the middle of November and the former "C.-in-C., South" was to be renamed "C.-in-C., South-West and C.-in-C. of Army Group C".

Reinforcements required for defence were immediately sent to Field-Marshal Kesslering from Field-Marshal's command area. They were the following:

also 94th Infantry Division: C.O. General Pfeiffer,
 305th Infantry Division: C.O. General Hauck,
 65th Infantry Division: C.O. General von Ziehlberg
 in exchange for 16th Panzer Division which was to be released
 for service in the East.

These divisions arrived about the middle of October and were immediately sent into the new position to consolidate it:

94th Infantry Division on the right wing behind the Garigliano,
305th Infantry Division in the hills south of Alfedena,

i.e. at points where no decisive attacks were expected and where the divisions could acquire battle experience on a quieter front.

The 65th Division was sent into the Adriatic sector behind the Sangro where this possibility did not apply.

Furthermore, there was the prospect of obtaining Army troops of all types, in particular the urgently required artillery.

The principal object was to garrison the front with infantry and mountain troops so that mobile division could be held in readiness as strategic reserves for the front and the open flanks on the seaboard. The consolidation of positions by construction units, engineers and detachments from divisions in action at the front working under special construction staffs was to be speeded up so that the Bernhard position (winter line) would be ready to defend from 1st November.

2) Tenth Army Situation: The Army front was now consolidated and the dangerous gap between Benevento and the 1st Paratroop Division closed. In spite of this, however, the incidents on the Calore and at Termoli had shown how insecure the situation still was.

Relative strengths were still too unequal, there were 6 German divisions (also the 16th Panzer Division until its release) on a front 150 km long. These had been in action or withdrawing almost continuously since 3 - 9 September. Only a small percentage of the losses had been replenished, there were still no artillery replacements, few serviceable tanks and, apart from a few bombers, no Air Force.

The Allies had the American Fifth Army with 6 divisions at the front, the British Eighth Army with 4 divisions (after the 8th Indian Division was sent up), both equipped with every weapon a modern Army needs, and in addition they were supported by a strong Air Force.

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The terrain was more favourable than in the former defence line. Owing to heavy rain the Volturno was in flood, but its bed was deeply cut away in places, which resulted in dead ground for German weapons. At other places the enemy bank was considerably higher than the German, but positions were set back from the river, decreasing the disadvantage. Hill terrain east of Route 6 (via Capua) and north of the river impeded observation and greatly limited the effect of German weapons, especially the artillery.

The adjoining mountain area to the north favoured delaying operations but offered no real "position" behind a natural barrier. Furthermore, no preparations had been made in this area as had been done to some extent on the Volturno.

In view of this, Army H.Q. was quite aware of the fact that resistance on this line also might be very short-lived once the enemy attack got underway.

An important point must first be taken into account regarding occupation of the line. Tenth Army H.Q. was of the opinion, with which C.-in-C., South agreed, that the Allies would make their main effort on both sides of the road to Rome via Capua - Cassino - Valmontone. In this case, enemy successes at other points would not be really effective unless they influenced the fighting in this area.

For this reason the German main effort also had to be made in this area with regard to both occupation of the line and the employment of construction units on positions in the rear. Consequently a number of advanced positions in front of the main defence line were under construction at Cassino on this road too.

Army H.Q. had not withdrawn 16th Panzer Division from the front and transferred it to the Volturno merely for a rest, but to allow it to prepare for defence undisturbed by the enemy in the difficult terrain north-east of Capua. This was the main danger area for the Volturno position. Army H.Q. therefore objected when C.-in-C. South ordered 16th Panzer Division to proceed to the bridgehead after the landing at Termoli.

A success at Termoli would indeed have raised the troops' spirits, but for practical purposes it made little difference whether LXXVI Panzer Corps had to withdraw its left wing at once or a few days later. It was therefore sufficient to send just enough reserves to block the bridgehead and allow a methodical withdrawal to be carried out. The most suitable unit for this operation was the regiment of the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, which had previously been in action with the "Hermann Goering" Division and was available at short notice. If the necessity had arisen, the whole division could have been used. In view of the reasons just stated, the 16th Panzer Division was of considerable importance on the Volturno front. Moreover, so many tanks would drop out on the long march through the mountains that it was doubtful whether the small infantry forces at its disposal (only 4 battalions) would be able to push the enemy back into the sea unaided.

C.-in-C., South insisted on his orders being carried out and 16th Panzer Division moved off on the morning of 3 October. Unfortunately, the fears of Army H.Q. were fully realised.

The 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division moving up to the Volturno (the reinforced regiment came first and then the remainder of the division in separate groups from about 10 October) could not take the place of 16th Panzer Division. The regiment had already shown itself to be very inexperienced at Salerno and, in spite of a very able commander, General Graeser, did not come up to the standard of the other Panzer and Panzer Grenadier Divisions during the rest of the campaign.

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The fact that the main body of the division did not arrive in the difficult sector until the enemy had reached the southern bank and had begun attacking made its task particularly exacting. In addition, the situation made it necessary for the boundary of 26th Panzer Division adjoining the Grenadier Division on the left to be moved back to the ridge Cerreto - L. d. Matesa - Gallo, 12 km to the north. A delaying action was to be carried out in this area by only the reconnaissance unit of 26th Panzer Division under artillery commander General Viebig, reinforced by one battalion. This, of course, did not provide sufficient cover on the flank, as a whole American division was attacking in this area, and later 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division had to use its own forces on the other side of the Volturno. For these reasons the division had to operate under particularly unfavourable conditions, and it is no wonder it could not accomplish its difficult task as 16th Panzer Division would presumably have done after three weeks of undisturbed preparation in the area.

The two other divisions in the XIV Panzer Corps were:

15th Panzer Grenadier Division: from the coast to Grazzanise: 129th Panzer Grenadier Regiment on the river, 104th in reserve and for coastal defence. The division had rested and was in good condition. After its re-organisation in Sicily the division still had a third, i.e. an extra regiment, the 115th. This was to be disbanded and split up between the other regiments as replacements, but was still indispensable at the time. It was temporarily attached to the "Hermann Goering" Division.

"Hermann Goering" Division: held the adjoining sector as far as Piana di Caiazzo. It had 2 battle groups in action: the Corvin group with 2 "H.G." battalions, the Mauke group with 2 battalions of the 115th Regiment, both reinforced by a third battalion with heavy weapons.

In addition to its 4 infantry battalions, the division had a small armoured group and a large number of motorised assault guns and AA of all calibres and its firepower was superior to that of the other divisions.

LXXVI Panzer Corps

26th Panzer Division:

For transfer of right boundary see above. The Viebig battle group was placed under XIV Panzer Corps command on 12 October. I/9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment was Corps reserve, being at Termoli at the time. The Panzer Regiment (minus the 1st battalion) did not join the division until 14 October. The division defended the area on both sides of Route 87/17 (Pontelandolfo - Boiano - Iserna) with the remaining 2 battalions.

29th Panzer Grenadier Division:

held the adjoining sector to the north up to the approximate line S. Elia a.P.

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29th Panzer Grenadier Division
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- north of Trivento. The division was up to full strength and was of a particularly high standard.

1st Paratroop Division:

and 16th Panzer Division holding a narrow front to the north defended the difficult sector up to the coast. As opposed to the mountainous terrain further south, there were good roads in this area and the British had an excellent opportunity of making full use of their superior armoured forces.

The Paratroop division now had its 3rd Infantry Regiment back again, but had only one light artillery battery and had to be reinforced by Army artillery. The 16th Panzer Division had still not replenished its losses and was very weak in infantry. For this reason it was limited to a small sector and was to be withdrawn from the front after the next battle.

Tenth Army H.Q. were moved to Pozzilli near Venafro.

3) Course of Operations up to about 18 October(a) XIV Panzer Corps

Fortunately for German defence, American Fifth Army preparations for the attack had been slowed down by rain. It began during the night 12/13 October, before midnight on the 10 British Corps sector. The splendid 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, commanded at the time by Oberst Bade, who was later to prove himself one of the most able leaders whilst in command of 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, and the Corvin group of the "Hermann Goering" Division scored an absolute defensive success in this area. The attack opened with a strong thrust by the British Armoured Division at Grazzanise. Several attempts to cross the river broke down in face of German fire, but eventually a few groups managed to gain and maintain a foothold in the deep river-bend.

In the 56th British Division's sector all attempts to cross at Capua failed completely. In a secondary attack west of Triflisco small groups succeeded in crossing the river and in forming a bridgehead, but were forced to evacuate during the same night by a counter-attack.

The point of main effort of the 10 British Corps attack lay on its west wing (46th Division) where naval support was also to be expected. The attack opened somewhat later than the others, without warning or artillery preparation. Covered by darkness, the enemy succeeded in gaining a foothold at three places on the northern bank namely at Castel Volturno, about 2 km to the east and directly west of Cancellò. The latter bridgehead was broken up by a counter-attack on 13 October and the retreating enemy suffered heavy losses. The enemy managed to hold the other two bridgeheads, which were compressed into a small space, but was unable to expand them to any extent and so that remained useless.

The Volturno battle was to be decided, as had been feared, on the left wing of the "Hermann Goering" Division and on the sector held by the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, which was just settling down, by the 6 U.S. Corps and in particular, by the very cleverly planned and forcefully executed attack of

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3rd U.S. Division. After a feint attack away from the main crossing point, the attacking columns crossed the Volturno on both sides of the bend southwest of Piana di Caiazzo while it was still dark. They avoided the mistake made at Salerno i.e. waiting to clear up pockets of resistance, and instead pushed forward to the north regardless of the threat to their flank. In heavy fighting with the stubbornly-resisting Grenadiers of the Mauke battle group they reached the dominating M. Maiulo and the slopes running down to Caiazzo in the afternoon. In spite of a number of attacks only the projection at Triflisco could be held. Thus, in the first wave of attack, a large enemy bridgehead had been created, into which fresh enemy forces poured continuously.

At the same time the 34th U.S. Division had also launched its attack against 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division west of the Calore estuary. A successful crossing was made all along the front but only slow progress was made at first. Caiazzo and the hills to the east remained in German hands until the morning of 14 October.

As already mentioned, the situation was made even more difficult for 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division as the 26th Panzer Division had to assemble its main force on Route 87 on the other side of the Volturno. Under pressure from Canadian forces attacking from the east (their wing reached S. Croce d.S. on 11 October) the division had to keep withdrawing its left wing as well. Thus only the weak Viebig battle group stood in the path of 45th U.S. Division attacking westwards from north of the Calore. American forces had already reached the slopes east of S. Salvatore on 12 October, were approaching M. Aereo on 13 October, and the heights near Faicchio and the Volturno on 14 October.

The XIV Panzer Corps had no reserves even to reinforce 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division flank on the other side of the Volturno, and could give only limited help by moving the artillery concentration further towards the left wing. On the evening of 14 October, therefore, Army H.Q. had to order the withdrawal of the left wing of the Corps and the dispersal of the rest of its front to prepare the next defence line.

Owing to the thinning-out of its front, enemy forces on the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division sector succeeded in pushing their bridgeheads forward as far as the deep Agnena Nuova canal on 15 October, but were not able to cross it (near the main highway) before the evening of 18 October.

The 7th British Armoured Division also struggled forward laboriously in the narrow river bend, took Brezza on 16 October, and pushed on slowly in the direction of the canal.

No further attempts to cross the river were made on the 56th British Division front; on the contrary, fresh troops, later identified as belonging to the 56th Division, were observed crossing the bridge at Triflisco and moving north-westwards on 15 October. On 17 October the heights near Villa Volturno were lost after heavy fighting, and the town itself on 18 October. The enemy followed up on the road to Formicola. Other units of this division moved forward north of the Volturno on the flank of the garrison of Capua on the 17 October.

In view of the situation, it was expected that the withdrawal along the whole of the Volturno plain front would proceed slowly and according to plan. The development of the situation on both sides of the Volturno was still of great importance in this respect. Here in rough, difficult mountainous terrain on the western side, the 3rd U.S., and at a somewhat slower pace 34th Divisions were resolutely fighting their way forward in face of the equally determined resistance of the Mauke battle group and the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division and in spite of the all-out demolition and mining efforts

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of German engineers. Although weak, the skilfully directed and manoeuvrable artillery of both German divisions played an important part in this fighting. The few German bombers available also sought to support their comrades on the ground by untiring and determined attacks on bridges and crossing-places.

In spite of everything the 3rd U.S. Division, advancing on both sides of the Triflisco - Liberi road, reached Cisterna on 15 October, the heights at Liberi on 16 October (in face of strong German counter-attacks) and the town itself, which was evacuated during the night, and Villa on 17 October. On the evening of 18 October Roccaromana and the heights at Dragoni were also evacuated by rearguards.

On the same day the 34th U.S. Division captured the flat river bank as far as Alvignano hill from weak defending forces. On the other side of the Volturno the Viebig battle group had also carried out a fighting withdrawal. During the night 15/16 October the T. Titerno sector (including Faicchio) was evacuated. The stream sector leading to Gioia was also given up during the following night so that defensive positions could be taken up in the adjoining sector to the west by the evening of 18 October.

In view of the situation on the left wing of XIV and the right wing of LXXVI Panzer Corps, Army H.Q. decided on the evening of 16 October to give XIV Panzer Corps permission to withdraw along the whole of its front. The timetable, which provided for defence of the Volturno line until 15 October, had been followed.

Tenth Army H.Q. was moved to its winter quarters at Massa d'Albe (north of Avezzano) in order to complete the establishment of its staff.

(b) LXXVI Panzer Corps

Until 11 October the 26th Panzer Division had fallen back slowly in close contact with the right wing of the advancing 45th U.S. Division. Then, however, the Viebig battle group went over to XIV Panzer Corps, and the division had to make closer contact on both sides of Route 87 with 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, whose right wing had relinquished S. Croce d.S. to the 1st Canadian Division on this very day. On the evening of 12 October a LXXVI Panzer Corps order to withdraw directed the division to make preparations for the defence of the Biferno sector on both sides of Boiano. Leaving rearguards in battalion strength, the regiments fell back to this position on the evening of 15 October. The enemy followed up slowly, pushing the rearguards back to the battle outposts by 18 October. The commanding officer of the Viebig battle group reported to his division again on the evening of the same day. The reconnaissance unit was to be left at Gallo Matese and to the north-west to cover the right flank and II/67th Panzer Grenadier Regiment was to rejoin its regiment. All was quiet during the next few days, and the time was used to consolidate positions. The 1st Canadian Division had made only slow progress on the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division sector. In accordance with the Corps order, the division evacuated Campobasso and fell back over the Biferno during the night of 14 October. The 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, which withdrew first, took up positions in the northern sector, and the 71st Panzer Grenadier regiment in the southern sector.

On the left wing of the Corps the 1st Paratroop and 16th Panzer Divisions held the former defence line, but here too units of the 1st Paratroop Division were withdrawn behind the Sangro to prepare defences. On the coast positions were taken up behind the Trigno until 17 October, whilst to the south rearguards still remained on the ridge east of the river, but these fell back after a short while in face of enemy attacks.

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The 65th Infantry Division, which arrived as reserves for 16th Panzer Division, was used to construct positions behind the Sangro between the coast and the spurs of the Maijella mountain range.

4) Up to the Bernhard (winter) line

The principal object of further movements after the abandonment of the Volturno line was to gain time to consolidate the Bernhard line and thereby fight "cheaply", i.e. to inflict as heavy losses as possible on the enemy, whilst at the same time making economic use of German troops, most of whom were to be sent immediately into the main defence line again without the prospect of more than moderate reinforcement. Thus, the main burden of the fighting during the ensuing period would have to be borne by the artillery and engineers, whilst the infantry would be used sparingly, in deep echelon or leap-frogging, to ensure that the other two units would have enough time to carry out their tasks. This applied particularly in the southern sector, whilst in the area west of the Volturno and on the broad sectors held by divisions of LXXVI Panzer Corps, where observation was more difficult, infantry had also to be brought up in greater strength.

The terrain was not unfavourable for this kind of defence. Numerous mountain peaks and rocky ridges, which provided good observation points, countless watercourses and small canals offered every opportunity for short-term defence. Long-term defence was not feasible, however, as the enemy would have soon infiltrated into the deep gorges behind the German front. These German tactics were assisted by rain.

(a) XIV Panzer Corps:

The enemy forces facing 15th Panzer Grenadier Division and the right wing of the "Hermann Goering" Division were slow to begin following up. The Agnena Nuova canal and its northern branches made all movements difficult and small rearguards were adequate to provide cover. The 56th British Division exerted the greatest pressure, and had worked its way forward to the line Montanaro - Calvi Risorta - Rochetta by 24 October. The 7th Armoured Division and the 46th Division had also made contact in this area. On 29 October fresh attacks were launched which apparently had M. Massico and M.S. Croce as their objectives. Our rearguards were still only weak; detachments of increasing strength were withdrawn from 15th Panzer Grenadier Division to consolidate the Bernhard line and the "Hermann Goering" Division had to concentrate on the left wing. In this way stronger resistance could be put up at first, but not against the concentrated attack by the 3 British divisions which soon developed; 46th Division was identified to the south adjoining 56th Division with 7th Armoured Division on the coast. On 31 October Cascano, Teano and on the coast Mondragone were lost.

The enemy followed up closely along the whole front between the coast and Route 6 and by outflanking attacks on both sides was able to take M. Massico and M.S. Croce without much difficulty. By 4 November enemy patrols had reached the Garigliano and the southern slopes of M. Camino respectively all along the front.

"Hermann Goering" (left flank) and 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division

The 3rd U.S. Division had immediately continued its mopping-up operations in the hills east of Route 6 and reached their north-western slopes by about 28 October. It then slowly worked its way forward to the Mignano Pass. The 29th Panzer Grenadier Regiment also had to fight hard against strong units of 34th U.S. Division pushing forward towards the bridge at Dragoni. The bridge was blown up in time, but several enemy battalions had already crossed the river south of Dragoni during the night 18/19 October. Fresh attacks

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were launched east of the river on 20 October. Only slight opposition was encountered, as the Viebig battle group had rejoined its division and only the remnants of the 26th Panzer reconnaissance unit could be left in the area. In addition, the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division had been able to bring only part of one regiment over the river. Hard fighting for S. Angelo d'Alife and Raviscanina continued until both places were evacuated during the night 23/24 October. The American advance to the west was held up again, and finally German forces withdrew behind the R. Lete on 28 October. The enemy reached Capriati a Volturno and the surrounding heights during the period from 1 - 3 November.

Surprising the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, enemy troops crossed over from the eastern side of the Volturno during the nights 2 and 3 November and pushed northwards along the river valley from the Sesto Campano area (below M. Cesima). Advanced detachments of the German main position based on the height were routed. Further units of 45th U.S. Division followed up and reached Venafro and Pozzilli on 4 November.

At the same time the 34th U.S. Division made a crossing south of Roccaravindola. The river was fordable at any point in this area and the valley difficult to defend owing to impeded observation. There were only German battle outposts in this area, but on the other hand the ground was thickly sown with mines. These caused most of the casualties when the enemy worked his way up the slopes of the German Bernhard position.

(b) LXXVI Panzer Corps:

After the withdrawals carried out up to 18 October a comparative lull set in on this front; as far as could be ascertained from the meagre results of radio interception and aerial reconnaissance, the British Eighth Army was re-grouping and preparing for a fresh attack.

On the 26th Panzer Division sector the attack opened all along the front on the morning of 23 October, the enemy concentrating at Colledanchise and Casalciprano. The 1st Canadian Division succeeded in breaking in and extended their penetrations even though German tanks were sent in against them. The right wing repulsed the attack. In the evening the 26th Panzer Division withdrew 2 - 4 km to a foot-hill position, leaving rearguards on the main road.

On 26 October the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division was also compelled to withdraw its right wing to Duronia in face of strong Canadian attacks, and this necessitated a further withdrawal by the left wing of 26th Panzer Division. The enemy followed up slowly, held up by the flexible and well-directed artillery fire of both divisions.

On 31 October the 5th British Division, which had just appeared in the area, launched heavy attacks on the right flank of 26th Panzer Division; Gallo Matese was lost.

On the centre of the front Frosolone was held on 1 and 2 November, as was Monterudni on the right wing, against which the enemy made unsuccessful attacks throughout the day.

On the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division sector the Canadians limited their activity to patrols. The division began to withdraw units.

Owing to the influence of fighting in progress further south, both divisions were withdrawn leaving strong rearguards behind on the evening of 2 November. The 26th Panzer Division was to take over its sector in the Bernhard line and the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division was to become Army Group reserve. On 5 November the last units also withdrew over the Volturno after

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carrying out all the demolitions which had been prepared. Advanced detachments of the 13 British Corps followed up and reached the heights east of the Volturno.

Fighting in the northern sector of LXXVI Panzer Corps had been much heavier during this period. The point of concentration lay on the coast, where the particularly battle-experienced 78th Division of the 5 British Corps launched an attack against 16th Panzer Division on the Trigno sector. A surprise attack on the night of 23/24 October aimed at capturing the coastal-road bridge intact was unsuccessful and it was blown up just in time. However, small groups quickly made their way across the shallow but heavily-mined river and formed a small bridgehead which was filled up by larger units on the following day. In spite of this, every enemy attempt to expand the bridgehead during the days that followed was frustrated.

Meanwhile the 8th Indian Division had moved up against 1st Paratroop Division rearguards in the south and by 27 October had reached the river bank at the heights at and north of Montefalcone after fighting which lasted several days.

The engineers units of the Paratroop division had made good use of the lull by destroying the road network. Moreover, rain made all enemy movements difficult. For these reasons the two divisions did not launch a combined attack over the Trigno before the night of 2/3 November. As had been expected, the attack was concentrated on the coast and west and north of Montefalcone. The enemy had considerably superior tank and artillery forces at both places; on the coast the attack was also supported by warships, not to mention the co-operation of strong air forces in both sectors of attack, whilst the Germans could send up only about a dozen bombers occasionally.

Throughout the day bitter fighting for S. Salvo and the adjoining ridge took place against enemy forces which were being continually reinforced. The advancing enemy was forced down from the heights by a number of energetic counter-attacks and the Panzer Grenadiers fell back behind the canal during the night. The fighting continued there at the same pitch, but the enemy superiority became more and more noticeable. On the evening of 5 November the area up to Cupello had to be relinquished to the enemy.

On the southern sector several attacks at Tufillo by 8th Indian Division carried out between 2 and 4 November were repulsed by the paratroops with heavy enemy losses. Following developments on the coast, the gallant defenders were withdrawn during the night 4/5 November.

Further withdrawals over the Sangro were covered by small rearguards and carried out without difficulty. The 78th British Division reached the banks of the Sangro by about 9 November and the 8th Indian Division a few days later.

The 16th Panzer Division was brought back through the 65th Infantry Division and soon moved away to the east; it had fully proved itself as a fighting unit in three particularly arduous battles. The 1st Paratroop Division took over the sector south of 65th Infantry Division and strong units remained east of the Sangro for some time in the mountains south-east of Casoli.

5) Final Observations:

The task of the Tenth Army, namely to enable the Bernhard (winter) position, the first line chosen for long-term defence, to be constructed by

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at least 1 November, was now accomplished. Army H.Q. had repeatedly considered the possibility of concentrating all its force for a surprise counter-attack against one of the two enemy armies instead of retreating along the whole front at an even pace. This could have been done, for example, whilst the British Eighth Army was still not grouped in readiness for an attack or in the middle of November as it was finally approaching the Sangro. Apart from the practical results, this would have had a great moral effect on both German and enemy troops and their leaders. Although C.-in-C., South and OKW agreed to these solutions in principle, such plans were frustrated by the fact that it was not possible to obtain the requisite temporary aircraft reinforcements, especially as regards fighters. Without these any attack would soon break down in face of mass operations by the Allied Air Forces.

In the subsequent unavoidable "delaying action" the 7 divisions of the Tenth Army fought with distinction and adapted themselves with ever-increasing skill to the difficulties of this type of fighting in spite of the fact that they were constantly in action and the discouraging thought that however successful their operations might be they would still have to keep falling back. Now, lacking experience in this type of fighting and without the necessary equipment, they had to prepare themselves quickly for the demands of stubborn defensive operations in the mountains.

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The Battles for the Bernhard (Winter) Position

I. 1) Construction of the position:

At the end of September 1943 Field-Marshal Kesselring ordered a special constructional staff under General Bessel to build a fortified position. It was to follow the general line Garigliano - Mignano - course of the Volturno - Maijella massif - Sangro, being strongest below the Cassino valley, on the Garigliano, at the southern spurs of the Maijella range and on the Adriatic plain. It was not to be a single line, but a system of positions organised in depth which would allow possible enemy penetrations to be sealed off. Several intermediate lines were planned between Mignano and Cassino, as in view of the grouping of enemy forces, the main attacks were still to be expected in this area. For this reason the construction of a second main position on both sides of Cassino was soon taken in hand. This ran from Castelforte on the slopes west of the Garigliani to the valley north of the Liri behind the Garigliani, through the town of Cassino, along the Rapido and linked up with the first line west of Colli. The advanced line, which the Americans called the "Winter line", was designated the B (Bernhard) position and the second line running through Cassino the G (Gustav) position.

A little later C.-in-C., South ordered the construction of coastal defence positions to protect the flanks. Work on defences from Gaeta to Terracina (excluding town) was to be speeded up. Unfortunately, the 94th Infantry Division was allotted this task and construction battalions were withdrawn from the Mignano strong-point sector, which delayed even more the completion of positions under construction there. Moreover, work on the M. Cesima massif (between Routes 6 and 85) which was to be an advanced bastion, could no longer be carried out as extensively as had been planned.

In preparing coastal defences on the right wing, the Lago di Fondi was dammed and the plain extending to the railway south of Fondi and the canal leading to Fondi from the south was flooded (as was done everywhere later) with fresh water to avoid impairing its future use for agriculture.

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A little later positions of this type were created on the Adriatic coast by special coastal defence units.

The construction of the Bernhard position is fully explained in General Bessel's report, which is to be found in the files of Historical Division MS/D 013. It is sufficient to note here that all aspects of the position were surveyed by officers detached from all branches of divisions which were later to fight there. Lack of engineers and materials delayed construction, and when the positions were occupied at the beginning of November at best 50%, but in general only 25% of the planned installations had been completed.

The use of forced civilian labour in Tenth Army command area was strictly forbidden by agreement with C.-in-C., South. On the other hand, the enlistment of voluntary workers, who received high wages (tobacco and food bonuses), for the construction of positions in the rear of the Army command area was carried out with great success. The Church, mayors, etc. supported recruiting for this type of work, which later assumed very large proportions in northern Italy.

The construction battalions made available by the Italian government received the same bonuses and were treated with such skill for which especial credit is due to General Bessel and his staff, that even during the retreat to the Apennines oases of desertion were relatively slight.

To prevent unnecessary casualties amongst the civilian population, a zone 5 km wide in front of and behind positions was evacuated by the Italian authorities, the German Army supplying the transport. It should be mentioned at once that valuable art treasures and libraries were also moved to safer places by order of Field-Marshal Kesselring and were taken care of later by a special Art Commission. Thus the treasures of Cassino monastery, for example, were moved to the Vatican by German Paratroops and handed over the Holy See in solemn audience. It was therefore somewhat peculiar when an exhibition of fine art, "stolen" by the Germans, the highlight of which was the Cassino monastery treasures, was recently opened in Rome.

To save the famous monastery itself from destruction, Field-Marshal Kesselring issued an order to the effect that no German soldier was to enter it and that no defences were to be set up in or around the monastery. This was strictly enforced and the Vatican was notified of the order.

At first the occupants refused to leave, but later, when the monastery was bombarded and they had to evacuate, Army H.Q. tried in vain to arrange a short cease-fire for the purpose. Led by their old abbot, the monks and the women and children of Cassino who had fled to them had to go down the steep path under enemy artillery fire, and casualties, although fortunately only slight, were caused.

2) Deployment of German forces:

Tenth Army H.Q. in Massa d'Albe north of Avezzano. General Lemelsen took over command of the Tenth Army from 6 November to 28 December when the C.-in-C. fell ill. XIV Panzer Corps, whose staff had been taken over by General von Senger und Etterlin instead of General Hube, who had been nominated Army Commander in the East, had the following in the smaller southern sector:

94th Infantry Division,
15th Panzer Grenadier Division,
3rd Panzer Grenadier Division and the Corvin battle group
of "Hermann Goering" Division.

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LXXVI Panzer Corps in the northern sector with the following:

26th Panzer Division,
 305th Infantry Division,
 1st Paratroop Division,
 65th Infantry Division.

The boundary line ran approximately north of Venafro - Avezzano. Later it was moved further north to the Castel di Sangro area after XIV Corps had also taken over the 44th and 305th Infantry Divisions.

In general, the divisions had to use all their infantry battalions at the front, their reserves consisting usually of the reconnaissance unit or one battalion. Even Corps H.Q.s could not detail more than one battalion at most as reserve. Army H.Q. had no reserve, but when compelled by heavy enemy attacks, withdrew forces, generally whole divisions, from quieter sectors to strengthen the threatened front. Army Group had detailed the "Hermann Goering" Division (minus the Corvin battle group) in the Frosinone area and 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, temporarily at Velletri south of Rome, as reserves and for coastal defence.

The troops had absolutely no experience of mountain warfare and did not know how to build positions on such terrain. Moreover, much of the equipment required for this work was not available. Special training courses for suitable instructor personnel with engineer battalions were necessary.

Winter clothing and equipment were also very scarce, partly due to transport reasons and partly because OKH administration was slow to grasp the fact that these were necessary in "sunny" Italy. Supplies had to be carried by mules etc., and C.-in-C. South successfully effected this change in a relatively short time. Special arrangements had also to be made for the removal of wounded. These questions are dealt with in detail in the special chapter entitled "The Supply Situation".

3) Relative Strengths of the Opposing Forces

5 German divisions with another two in reserve faced the American Fifth Army with 8 divisions, of which 3 were in reserve, on fronts of equal length. The Eighth Army with 5 divisions was opposed by 2 German divisions.

It should be noted that German Infantry and Panzer Grenadier Divisions had only 6 infantry battalions compared with 9 infantry battalions in Allied divisions.

Battalion establishments were also considerably lower; a battle strength of 300-400 men was considered good and was seldom attained, replacements were limited and were usually insufficient to replenish losses. This also applied to loss of weapons of all types.

Artillery reinforcements, including 2 smoke regiments, had arrived, but in spite of this Allied artillery superiority, particularly as regards ammunition supplies, continued to be very great.

Armoured inferiority was of no consequence in the mountains, but was by comparison all the more noticeable in the broad tracts of land on the Adriatic coast which were especially suitable for the use of tanks.

Later, when the American Fifth Army was able to make full use of its tanks, the Germans considered a ratio of 1 - 10 quite favourable, i.e. they hoped that with the aid of defensive weapons an armoured breakthrough could be prevented.

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The Allies still maintained their superiority in the air. The few German aircraft available were unable to show themselves in the front-line area except at night or when visibility was poor. It was therefore impossible to carry out any troop movements on the battlefield or in the rear by day, and this proved a serious disadvantage when reserves had to be brought up. On the other hand, supplies were never prevented from reaching the front. As these also had to be brought along a few, easily-located roads and through well-known passes, just the same as large-scale movements of reserves, for example, from the Adriatic to Cassino, the Germans could never understand why the otherwise excellently directed Allied Air Forces did not have more success in this respect. Night movements along narrow mountain roads were certainly a great strain on drivers, but on the other hand losses due to enemy air activity were of no great consequence.

Absolute defencelessness against the Allied Air Forces had a particularly demoralising effect on troops, although they could deal with superiority on the ground provided the terrain were favourable.

In conclusion it should be mentioned that most German divisions could never be placed in reserve for a rest and re-equipment. If any of the main divisions, e.g. the Panzer or Panzer Grenadier divisions, were withdrawn for this purpose, they usually had to be sent back to another sector of the front within a few days.

II. 1) The XIV Corps sector from Mignano to Venafro

(a) Shortly after the withdrawal from M. S. Croce the 56th British Division launched a strong attack from the south on the left wing of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division at M. Camino. This was supported by the 3rd U.S. Division with a flank attack on Point 960 from Caspoli. After the outpost positions on the southern slope at and west of S. Clemente were captured, the real attack started on the afternoon of 6 November; it was not to reach M. Camino. The battle surged to and fro on the southern slope in several days of hard fighting. The British Guards made small gains and the German Panzer Grenadiers carried out successful counter-attacks. Even British reinforcements which had been brought up could achieve only temporary successes. Similarly, the eastern flank was held against strong attacks by the 3rd U.S. Division.

On 12 November the enemy ceased attacking and withdrew to his jumping-off positions during the days that followed. The brave defenders of the bare, unsheltered mountain suffered great hardships, having only thin summer uniforms to protect them against the cold, wet November weather, without relief or adequate supplies, but in spite of this they had scored an absolute defensive victory. The 15th Panzer Grenadier Division had once more lived up to its reputation as a tough and reliable unit.

(b) The fighting on the other side of the Mignano Pass, however, on the sectors held by the 3rd Grenadier Division and the Corvin battle group, which had already suffered heavy losses at the hands of the 3rd U.S. and 34th U.S. Divisions, took a turn for the worse. During the night 5/6 November one regiment of the 3rd U.S. Division made a frontal attack in the pass on the long bare ridge of M. Lungo and the peak of the commanding Hill 1170. A second attacking force, by-passing the hill through the Volturmo valley, moved forward on M. Rotondo from Rocca Pipirozzi. Both attacks were repulsed by alert defending forces.

The attacks, supported by an extremely heavy artillery concentration, were repeated on the foggy morning of 8 November and were successful this time.

The eastern attacking force, by-passing M. Cesima to the north, broke through to and captured M. Rotondo. At the same time the south-eastern

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promontory of M. Lungo fell into enemy hands and contact with M. Rotondo was established. Counter-attacks were unavailing and the enemy held on to his gains. The troops defending M. Cesima were threatened with encirclement. A counter-attack from the north to re-establish contact with M. Cesima by a Paratroop battalion brought up by C.-in-C. South in view of this threat broke down after heavy losses had been sustained. (This unit was to have formed the core of a new Paratroop division).

However, the troops defending the mountain succeeded in breaking through to M. Lungo.

With the loss of M. Cesima and M. Rotondo important strong-points in the defence of the northern wing of the Mignano Pass had fallen into enemy hands and M. Camino was also outflanked. M. Camino, M. Lungo and the S. Pietro heights were now the last strong-points blocking the way into the Liri valley.

(a) Fighting also continued on the left wing of the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division after the winter position had been reached. On 5 and 6 November, whilst the troops were still settling in, the 45th U.S. and 34th U.S. Divisions moved forward from Venafro and to the north on the heights on both sides of Conca Casale and through Pozzilli to the north. The widely-dispersed units of 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division were unable to offer effective resistance. The 26th Panzer Division in the adjoining sector to the north had to be taken out of its positions to restore the situation. Only the reconnaissance unit, the construction battalion and one artillery battery were left behind to hold the position, whilst the Panzer regiment, which could not be used in this sector, was sent off to the Cassino valley. Held up by newly-fallen snow and ice-covered roads the 9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, the advance detachment of the division, was sent in to counter-attack from Filignano through Valle immediately after it arrived on 6 November. The enemy attacked from this direction at the same time and the regiment was forced to carry out hard defensive actions at both places until the divisional commander ordered it to fall back on the evening of 8 November and rejoins the division, which had meanwhile moved up through S. Elia. A counter-attack carried out by the 67th Panzer Grenadier Regiment during the night 8/9 November broke down after heavy losses had been sustained. Troops lacked experience in mountain warfare and the necessary equipment and the artillery had also not yet accustomed itself to the unusual conditions.

Fortunately this situation was improved during the ensuing 3-day lull, and artillery reinforcements arrived too. The next enemy attack on 12 November made little progress, German counter-attacks were successful and German artillery slowly gained the upper hand and broke up further enemy assaults, mostly whilst troops were still being assembled.

Thus a comparative lull had set in on this sector as well. Enemy gains constituted no great threat and every step forward into the mountainous terrain merely increased his difficulties.

On 22 November the 26th Panzer Division was relieved by the 44th Infantry Division, which had been brought down from northern Italy, and was sent off to the Adriatic sector to LXXVI Panzer Corps on 25 November.

2) LXXVI Panzer Corps on the Sangro and Moro

Prefatory note:

Only the 26th Panzer Division reports on the battle are available. The author saw the 65th Division position in October before fighting started, but was then on sick leave in Germany. The report is based mainly on the British description. Extracts from the study written for the Canadian Army by

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General Wentzell, formerly Chief of Staff of Tenth Army H.Q. have also been used. A copy of this report can be found in the archives of the Historical Division.

(a) The 65th Infantry Division Defence Position

The terrain on the Adriatic coast west of the Sangro was not so advantageous for defence as it may have appeared at first. With its numerous long undulations extending from the coast to the Maijella mountains, it resembled a sea transfigured in a high wind. As the highest undulation stretched west of the Sangro in a general line on and in front of the Ortona - Guadiagrele road, there were indeed good artillery observation points here and on the heights at Casoli as far as long-range vision was concerned, but as the numerous smaller undulations in front of them could be only partially observed a skilful enemy could approach unseen by using dead ground (small valleys and ravines).

The main infantry defence position was based on the ridge on and in front of the Fossacesia - Castell Frentano road with defence in depth back to the mountains. The northern wing was the strongest as regards terrain. Strong battle outposts had been set up at the most favourable defence points right down to the Sangro, particularly in the S. Eusanio - Casoli area. As the sector was too long for a continuous defence line, groups of battalion strength were formed to hold certain points and the undefended areas covered by machine-guns on their flanks. The slope to the position rose so steeply that armoured attacks in any strength were not expected away from the road.

It was particularly difficult to choose the most suitable positions for the installation of strong-points for infantry and advanced artillery observers. The foremost edge of the broad ridge afforded good observation of the Sangro valley, but as there was not much scrub on the slope it could be just as easily observed by enemy spotters and could therefore expect the full weight of observed enemy artillery fire. The reverse slope provided more protection for the troops, but was of no use for observation, except for the previously mentioned observation position in the rear. However, the foot of the steep slope in front of the position could not be observed from this point and for this reason enemy troops could have worked their way up to the main position practically undisturbed.

The division, which had no previous battle experience, decided to put the strong-points on the foremost slope and the main dugouts on the edge of the reverse slope. The ground there was not very firm and there was considerable danger of dugout entrances being blocked by shell or bomb hits. The strong-points were not far away, but the ground to be covered to reach them would be under the heaviest enemy fire during an attack.

At the end of October the author discussed his criticism of this type of lay-out with the divisional commander when he inspected the positions, which were already well on the way towards completion. As it was too late for a basic alteration of the defence system, orders were issued to the effect that the forward positions were not to be manned too strongly and that as many strong-points as possible were to be set up further back in the position.

(b) Course of the Battle

The deployment of enemy forces remained uncertain for some time, but it was learnt from brisk patrol activity immediately in front of the position and from other indications that an attack on 65th Division was imminent. The main effort was again expected on the coastal sector together with operations, at any rate artillery fire, from the sea. No attacks of any consequence were expected in the mountains at this time of year.

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Army H.Q. had no reserves at the time to reinforce 65th Division as all available forces were still held down by fighting at Mignano and to the north. It could merely speed up the relief of 26th Panzer Division as much as possible. C.-in-C., South had only 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, which had been brought across from Sardinia and re-organised, at his disposal, but this could not yet be regarded as sound. The "Hermann Goering" and 29th Panzer Grenadier Divisions were the last reserves for the Cassino sector and could not be spared yet. Thus, 90th Panzer Grenadier Division had to be sent down from northern Italy to the Adriatic in forced marches; fighting was already in progress when it arrived in the battle area.

After patrol clashes of increasing violence, strong units of 5 British Corps on the coastal sector started to move over the Sangro and form bridge-heads on about 19 November. Counter-attacks were unsuccessful. Heavy falls of rain brought about a short lull, then troops crossed the Sangro further south. Severe air attacks, which caused heavy damage to positions, indicated that the main attack was imminent.

Air attacks and artillery fire intensified during the days that followed. When the main attack by two divisions was launched against the left wing of 65th Division on 27 November sizeable losses had already been sustained and many strong-points and dugouts destroyed or badly damaged. The first objective was Mozzagrogna, which was lost after heavy fighting during the night 27/28 November. The town was retaken in a counter-attack, in which a few tanks of 26th Panzer Division participated, but was finally secured by 8th Indian Division after a fresh attack during the following night. The 78th Division launched its attack at the same time and had taken S. Maria by the afternoon. Thus two key points in the position fell on 29 November and the ridge had been scaled at a commanding place. There was no longer any 65th Division reserves available in this sector.

Fortunately the first units of 26th Panzer and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions arrived at this critical moment and units of 1st Paratroop Division were being released from the mountainous area around Rivisondoli. The two divisions came just in time to prevent the threatened breakthrough. The first battle group, consisting of 90th Panzer Grenadier Division infantry and 26th Panzer Division armour, was sent in immediately to retake Mozzagrogna, but the counter-attack broke down after heavy losses had been sustained. Co-ordinated employment of units of 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, which were arriving in separate groups, was rendered more difficult by the fact that not only the former commander of this sector, the C.O. of 65th division, but also the Senior Staff Officer of 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, who had arrived early to establish contact with him, were both seriously wounded one shortly after the other. This inevitably caused difficulties which influenced the further course of the battle.

By 30 November the whole of the position from S. Maria to the coast was in enemy hands. On 1 December 78th Division began to move forward on the Moro sector, which was reached on 4 December after minor actions, but the advance was brought to a standstill there by strong defensive activity on the part of 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, which had meanwhile occupied the position. The Indians had also extended their sector, occupying the area around Lanciano.

At the same time 2nd New Zealand Division, operating a little further to the south, reached the evacuated town of Casoli and the heights on both sides of Castel Frentana without encountering much opposition. Thus the last part of the 65th Division position was taken and the division itself badly weakened.

The 9th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, reinforced by the 2nd battalion of 1st Paratroop Regiment, occupied the new defence line behind the Moro from the

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right wing south of Guardiagrele to a point north of Eusanio. No fighting of any consequence developed, and the unit fell back slowly maintaining contact with 65th Division. On 29 November the rest of 26th Panzer Division and its divisional staff arrived. The 4th Mountain Battalion, recently attached to the division, took up defensive positions on the northern edge of the Majella hills on the steep height south-east of Pennapedemonte and 67th Panzer Grenadier Regiment north of 9th Regiment on both sides of Frisa to receive the remnants of 65th Division. The 90th Panzer Grenadier Division held the adjoining sector to the north as far as the coast.

The heavy fighting for Orsogna began during the night 2/3 December. New Zealand troops made a penetration at first but were driven out again with heavy losses in tanks and prisoners by 26th Reconnaissance Unit. Many more attacks with fresh troops were made until the middle of December, but they were all repulsed in the same way.

For the first time since the Sangro battle opened an important defensive success of some permanence had been scored and enemy breakthrough attempts at a decisive point brought to a standstill.

The remnants of 65th Division were assembled in the rear and sent in on the less-threatened right wing of 26th Panzer Division which took over the central section of the front to a point south of Canosa.

Units of 1st Paratroop Division took up positions in and south of Ortona in support of 90th Panzer Grenadier Division.

On 8 December fresh troops, 1st Canadian Division, launched an attack on the coast. A bridgehead was formed in face of stiff opposition and S. Leonardo entered. On advancing further, however, the enemy troops encountered such determined resistance by the paratroops that they suffered very heavy losses in day-long battles without gaining any ground. On the other hand penetrations were made further south on 90th Panzer Grenadier Division front, forcing LXXVI Corps to bring up the 26th Panzer Division reserves for counter-attacks and to move the boundary between the two divisions further north. Moreover, the front in the sector north of Orsogna to the coast had to be withdrawn behind the road.

The battle for Ortona became particularly bitter at Christmas time. After severe house-to-house fighting the paratroops were eventually forced to relinquish the town to the Canadians. The enemy suffered such heavy losses however, that they did not follow up. The last action of this battle at Villa Grande followed a similar course.

Effective use of artillery by the LXXVI Panzer Corps played a particularly meritorious part in the success of the defensive battles.

The enemy offensive finally came to a standstill at the end of December. German losses were heavy, but the troops felt with pride that the enemy had been prevented from reaching his objective (Pescara) and from effecting a strategic break through.

(c) Final observations:

In retrospect the following points are apparent:

As regards the Germans 90th Panzer Grenadier Division was not brought up quickly enough. This might also apply to 44th Infantry Division in relieving 26th Panzer Division. Enemy intentions were fairly clear by 10 November at the latest. If the divisions had arrived and gone into

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action earlier many difficulties and losses could have been avoided on the battlefield.

As regards the enemy, two divisions were inadequate for a decisive break through. There was no likelihood of German counter-attacks from the Maijella hills and moderate covering forces in front of the Alfedena Pass would have been sufficient. These might have been provided by the American Fifth Army. If a German flank attack from the northern edge of the Maijella had been attempted, as had actually been planned at one time, there would have been little prospect of success against the 5 divisions of the British Eighth Army. Moreover, the German Command had the impression that the initial success was not exploited with sufficient impetus and that the forces at the front were inadequate. Experience has shown that the objective of an offensive can be attained more easily if the immediately opposing forces are completely routed and deprived of their artillery at the outset by energetic attack and fluid advance. The success of the whole offensive depends on an advance of sufficient depth being made in the first few days, thereby causing a wide breach in the front. In this case reserves cannot link up with strong-points or with remnants of units holding the front in the first instance. A gap of this type, therefore, is more difficult to close.

The new main defence position in this sector of the Bernhard line was set up directly north of the present front extending in depth to Chieti. As the whole civilian population of the district had gathered in Chieti it was declared a hospital centre and apart from hospitals was not occupied by troops nor included in the defence system.

The Adriatic sector of this position was never manned as no fighting of any consequence took place on this wing up to the time it was withdrawn in June 1944. This fact enabled the German Command to withdraw forces from the left wing of the Tenth Army for use at crucial points along the front. The newly-formed and untried 334th Infantry Division was put into this sector to gain experience, releasing units of 65th Infantry Division still there.

The young troops of 334th Division, under their excellent commander General Boelke, were broken into battle conditions by numerous raids and later became one of the best fighting units. After being brought up to strength 65th Infantry Division and particularly 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, under its energetic new commander Colonel Bade, adequately proved themselves in later battles.

Owing to the nature of the terrain and weather conditions, no fighting of any importance took place on the central sector of the front (Maijella mountains). Thus, in this sector too, more and more units from battalion strength upwards could be used on other sectors, either by the indirect methods of regrouping or by direct allocation. The Pescara - Popoli - Avezzano - Sora - Acre road was the main route for all movements in the Bernhard - Gustav position and, in the view of the German command, the Allied Air Forces did not make sufficient allowance for this fact.

The German command could not deploy its forces correctly on every occasion as it lacked the necessary clear picture of the enemy situation. The absence of signals intelligence in the enemy rear proved an ever-increasing disadvantage. Generally the German command was able to identify enemy units and use this information as a basis for decisions only when they were in or near the front line. More detailed intelligence was obtained only in special cases.

Italy being an Axis partner, Hitler forbade the establishment of an intelligence service before the campaign began. When the campaign started, therefore, there was no counter-intelligence at all on the Italian mainland. For this reason no intelligence services could be left behind during the withdrawal.

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Information was usually obtained only from wireless interception, occasional deserters and refugees, whose reliability was very questionable. In most cases unit insignia on vehicles provided the only source of information.

The Allied command, on the other hand, was continually receiving information from the Italian authorities up to the highest level as well as from their own services. Moreover, its air reconnaissance completely covered harbours, airfields, roads and positions, whilst this advantage was as good as lost to the German command. Information derived from signals intelligence and prisoners, who generally had little to say, usually arrived very late and this resulted in practically all German movements being carried out hurriedly, often making a piece-meal use of forces unavoidable.

1) Monte Camino

III. 1) The heavy losses it had suffered in previous battles and the considerable progress made by the American north of Mignano necessitated the withdrawal of 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division. The 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, which was not withdrawn until the beginning of November, had to be brought forward again into the Cassino area on 11 November and on 13 November 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment was sent in to counter attack from S. Pietro. The relief was completed during the next few days, the right wing of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division being based on M. Lungo, adjoining 15th Panzer Grenadier Division and the left wing on the Pozzilli road, adjoining 44th Grenadier Division (Hoch- und Deutschmeister). The latter had been re-formed in France from the remnants of the first-class 44th Division, which suffered heavy losses at Stalingrad and was the only division to receive 3 infantry regiments each with 3 battalions. In Italy the division was dogged by misfortune. It was immediately involved in the severe Cassino battles and soon had to be withdrawn by regiments after sustaining heavy losses and used on quieter sectors of the front. Afterwards some regiments fought very well, but the division as a whole, the commanders of which frequently changed, could not be brought together again for several months in spite of every effort on the part of Corps H.Q. and Army H.Q. and even then did not come up to standard again.

305th Infantry Division, adjoining 44th Division to the north, formed the left wing of XIV Panzer Corps: after becoming accustomed to battle conditions on quieter sectors of the front it developed into a constantly reliable, prominent (main defence) division.

The XIV Panzer Corps concentration area on the Mignano sector was characterised by the narrower divisional fronts, the presence of most of the artillery, including that of the "Hermann Goering" Division, and by the concentration of AA guns in the Liri valley, which later had also to participate frequently in the ground fighting.

(b) Course of Operations

After preliminary skirmishing and local attacks south and north of the main front which naturally could not conceal the real objective, the attack on M. Camino opened on 2 December with an artillery and air bombardment of unprecedented violence which lasted several days. Although the troops were protected to a certain extent by fox-holes and dugouts and losses were therefore not heavy, they were completely cut off from the rest of the world by this bombardment and left entirely to their own resources; small tactical reserves could not be moved and even irregular supply was no longer possible.

German artillery could not cover many approaches which lay in dead ground and its daytime activities were greatly limited by incessant fighter-bomber operations.

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The infantry attack began during the night 2/3 December: it was launched very skilfully as a pincer movement:-

with both divisions of the 10 British Corps moving against the south-western slopes, i.e. M. Camino itself and,

with units of the 36th U.S. Division and the 1st Special Service Force moving against the eastern and western slopes of the massif, i.e. M. La Difensa and M. Maggiore.

The 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and the Armoured Reconnaissance Unit of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division opposed this overwhelming force. A battle of unusual severity and stubbornness developed. The gallant Grenadiers defended every foot of ground and made repeated counter-attacks against the relentlessly advancing enemy. Completely surrounded and under an incessant and concentrated artillery bombardment, the few remaining defenders of the towering peaks although burnt by phosphorous shells and without supplies or reinforcements did not waver but held out to the last man. Only one runner came back to tell of this heroic stand.

On 9 December the whole of the Camino massif up to the Garigliano and M. Maggiore was in enemy hands.

Only the unimportant heights of M. Porchia and M. Trocchio remained as weak defence points to impede the enemy advance into the Liri valley.

2) On the Left Wing of XIV Panzer Corps

Whilst this fighting was still in progress, strong attacks were launched along the whole of 44th Division front and on the southern sector of 305th Division front, and were apparently aimed at a penetration into the Rapido valley from the rear by advancing in the direction of S. Elia and Atina and by-passing the mountains in the northern end of the Mignano pass.

Fighting which broke out at the end of November and took place mainly at Lagone and M. Pantano lasted about 10 days. Apart from a slight loss of ground however, both divisions succeeded in holding their positions. A lull then set in.

3) Centre of XIV Panzer Corps Front

M. Lungo and S. Pietro were held by 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and the adjoining area to the north by 71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment, both units belonging to 29th Panzer Grenadier Division. After the loss of M. Maggiore its reserve, the Panzer reconnaissance unit, and the reinforced motor-cycle company had to be sent in on the southern side of M. Lungo with front facing south to cover the exposed flank.

At first the enemy attack was directed against both cornerstones of the S. Pietro position. M. Sammucro was taken in a surprise attack at dawn on 8 December. Counter-attacks failed, but the Grenadiers succeeded in firmly holding the downward slopes of the mountain.

An attack on M. Lungo by the first battle group of our former ally to come up to the front was easily repulsed in spite of strong artillery support. An American attack on S. Pietro on the same day was also unsuccessful.

During the following days the stubbornly resisting Grenadiers of II/15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment in S. Pietro were repeatedly attacked frontally and from the slopes of Sammucro, but the enemy was driven off with heavy losses every time.

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A short lull set in.

On 15 December the attacks were resumed. After gaining a little ground the enemy was once again halted at the southern spurs of M. Sammucro, as was a fresh frontal attack north of M. Rotondo.

This battle was to be decided at another point. A regiment of 36th U.S. Division which had been brought up into the extended southern flank succeeded in routing weak units of the Panzer reconnaissance unit on the southern slopes of M. Lungo and took the height from the rear in an attack during the night of 15/16 December. German losses were considerable.

In view of this situation, 29th Panzer Grenadier Division was forced to decide on the evacuation of S. Pietro, which was now deep in the pocket and without approach roads. The withdrawal to the next defence line east of M. Porchia - S. Vittore - M. Malo was covered by a strong attack. The difficult movement was carried out without a hitch and the new position was occupied by 19 December. The enemy followed up closely and attempted to capture S. Vittore by outflanking attacks on the advanced heights to the south and north-east. After days of hard fighting which reached its climax during the Christmas period after fresh enemy troops had been brought up, the advanced heights were lost on 26 December, but M. Porchia, the town of S. Vittore itself and the adjoining heights to the north were held against all further enemy attacks. Thus the fighting came to a temporary halt.

The 29th Panzer Grenadier Division had once again overcome a difficult situation. The division was now in need of a rest so that it would soon be available again as a powerful reserve. It was therefore relieved by 44th Division which, with 9 battalions, had to enlarge the hitherto narrow sector in spite of the risks entailed by this action. Two battalions of 29th Division remained in the sector for the time being. The divisional commander, General Fries, retained command until 13 January to brief the new divisional staff, which had no experience of action on a large scale. The enemy also appeared to be relieving units.

4) Fighting flared up again all along the left wing of the Corps in mid-December. The 5th Mountain Division was sent into the extremely mountainous area between Filignano and Castel S. Vincenzo, formerly the southern sector of 305th Division, to reinforce the German front. The boundary line between XIV and LXXVI Panzer Corps was transferred to this area and 305th Division joined LXXVI Panzer Corps.

The 5th Mountain Division, commanded by General Ringel, an experienced mountain fighter of World War I, consisted mainly of troops accustomed to mountain conditions, but had been in northern Russia for over 2 years, latterly in the forests on the Vollohov. For this reason the division had to gradually re-acustom itself to mountain fighting and at first suffered reverses at the hands of 2nd Moroccan Division, a particularly experienced and skilful mountain unit which had just appeared opposite the German division. Unfortunately mountain equipment which had been stored in the rear in Russia had not yet arrived owing to misdirection during transportation and the troops had to move into the freezing mountains without it. On the other hand the French Expeditionary Corps (3rd Algerian Division was identified south of 2nd Moroccan at the beginning of January) was completely equipped for mountain fighting.

On 15 December the 6 U.S. Corps resumed its attack on a broad front on both sides of the Casale - S. Elia and Cardito - Atina roads, but had no appreciable success until S. Pietro was evacuated and the German front pushed back slightly. The enemy followed up immediately and made repeated attempts

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Mountain Infantry Regiment sector, which allowed an undisturbed, orderly withdrawal to be carried out during the night. Severe mountain-to-mountain fighting continued; German troops made the difficult crossing of the Rapido sector without mishap and the last units of the gallant Mountain troops reached the Gustav position during the night of 15/16th January. Unfortunately German losses had also been very heavy, and for this reason one battalion of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division and 3rd Mountain Battalion coming from the northern part of the Majella hills had to be subordinated to 5th Mountain Division so that the Gustav position could be manned in sufficient strength.

General Glasl's report in the records of the Historical Division (MS - 203) gives a detailed report of the fighting which took place.

2) Central Sector

During this period the main force of 44th Division (with 2 battalions of 29th Panzer Grenadier Division in the Cervaro area) had to withhold enemy attacks by 2 U.S. Corps which was advancing north of Route 6 on S. Vittore, La Chiaia and Cervaro. Here too hard fighting for particular hill-tops developed. S. Vittore was lost on 6 January after a three-day house-to-house battle, La Chiaia fell on the following day, whilst in the mountainous area to the north the heights at Cervaro were not taken until 10 January and the place itself on 12 January owing to determined resistance on the part of the Panzer Grenadiers. These troops then fell back slowly in the direction of the last obstacle in front of the Cassino valley, M. Trocchio, and linked up there with units of the 44th and "Hermann Goering" Divisions which, after a battle lasting several days, had been forced to relinquish M. Porchia and the surrounding area in face of a combined attack by American troops from the east and British troops from the south.

M. Trocchio, a bare, isolated ridge, dominated on all sides, easily observed and exposed to fire, was unsuitable for defence. For this reason it was manned temporarily to provide a support for troops fighting further north. It was evacuated on 15 January, being the last position of the Gustav line. Later, only observation posts were set up on the height by the enemy also.

II. 1) The Gustav Position:

At this time the position was well-consolidated in the Rapido and Garigliano valleys and on the rising ground west of the Garigliano, but was very weak in the mountainous area west of the Garigliano and particularly so in the 5th Mountain Division sector north of the S. Elia - Atina road, where every effort was made to speed up consolidation after the arrival of the division by its experienced commander. The delay was caused mainly by the fact that, on the basis of previous battle experience, C.-in-C., South and Tenth Army H.Q. ordered positions to be set up on the reverse slopes, a view which was also strongly advocated by General Ringel. Once the enemy has been forced to attack downhill he will be exposed to German machine-gun and artillery fire at a critical moment, whilst his own artillery will not be able to support a penetration so effectively. Moreover, positions on forward slopes can be destroyed more easily by the enemy preliminary bombardment.

The staffs which were sent out to survey positions, however, were drawn entirely from lowland divisions and made repeated attempts to find forward-slope positions, as otherwise the field of fire would be inadequate. Furthermore, many slopes which they declared unscalable were later easily overcome, especially by the French-African divisions, and offered acceptable penetration points.

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The fact that 5th Mountain Division, which understood mountain fighting, was in action in the northern part of the mountain chain had a decisive influence on the outcome of the second and third Cassino battles. The best artillery observation posts of XIV Panzer Corps, overlooking the Allied rear and able even to direct fire on assembly areas, were situated here. The observation posts south of the Liri were also good, but could not be used with the same effect as most of the fighting took place on the slopes of M. Cairo.

2) Defending Forces:

Author's note: As the German war diaries and the contributions of those who participated in these battles, most of whom are in British custody, have not yet arrived, a number of details are missing from paragraphs 2 and 3.

The advanced divisions had suffered more heavily than had been expected in the fighting for the intermediate positions. This was caused primarily by the frequently arising threat that the enemy would break through at an unobserved point on the sparsely-manned front without being observed by adjoining units and cut off troops still holding out from the Gustav position. For this reason reserves had to be used repeatedly at the most seriously threatened points, troops being drawn from 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, the "Hermann Goering" Division, and at times also from 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, just after these divisions had succeeded in assembling their dispersed forces.

Reorganisation was in progress when the new attack was launched in the middle of January.

The 94th Division was holding a very broad front on the right wing from Gaeta to the river-bend east of Castelforte.

Adjoining this division, 15th Panzer Grenadier Division with the Corvin battle group of the "Hermann Goering" Division was holding a front stretching approximately to the railway south of Cassino.

The 44th Division was in the Cassino sector, but was exhausted and in need of relief after its first large-scale action. Fortunately a new division, the 71st Infantry commanded by General Raapke, was brought up from Istria just at this moment. The foremost regiment, the 211th, took over the sector on the right, on both sides of the town of Cassino, and it was also possible to relieve the left wing valley sector towards Belmonte, thus shortening the broad 5th Mountain Division front before the battle began. Both regiments fought excellently.

The 5th Mountain Division occupied the adjoining mountainous area to the north, with 3rd Mountain Infantry Battalion on the slopes of M. Mare on its left wing. The 8th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division also remained in this area temporarily.

As already mentioned, the artillery played a vital part in the Cassino battles. All Army artillery which had arrived and most batteries of divisions in reserve were concentrated here in various groups under the direction of the XIV Panzer Corps artillery commander. The AA concentrated in the Liri valley was closely co-ordinated with this system so that, if required, its 88 mm batteries could take part in the ground fighting. It was very difficult to find positions for batteries which afforded some degree of cover against ground observation. In any case the gun-crews suffered heavily from enemy fire directed by spotter aircraft and their losses were considerable.

The favourable observation conditions have already been discussed. Besides those on the flanks, there was also a large selection of observation

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positions on the slopes of M. Cairo. For this reason there was absolutely no need to use Cassino monastery for observation, quite apart from the fact that C.-in-C., South had issued orders to this effect. The monastery was not entered by German troops until after its destruction, the rubble-covered vaults providing good shelters for the troops.

Enemy Units:

The following Allied divisions took part in the attack:

5th, 56th and 46th Divisions of 10 British Corps,
36th and 34th Divisions of 2 U.S. Corps,
3rd Algerian and 2nd Moroccan Divisions of the French
Expeditionary Corps, as well as strong armoured and
artillery forces.

3) Course of the Second Battle of Cassino

(a) On the Garigliano

In the first half of January, reports reached Tenth Army H.Q. that the enemy was planning an attack near the coast and that he had received reinforcements for this purpose. This was presumed to be the opening of the offensive against the Gustav position. In this area the enemy could use warships to support land operations and make small-scale landings behind the front, in addition to which the Allied command would presumably know that 94th Division position was relatively weakly manned. Strong reserves could not be released for this sector before it was known where the enemy would make his main effort.

The British attack on 94th Division, which had recently been taken over by General Steinmetz, opened during the night of 17/18 January.

The 5th British Division crossed the Garigliano, which was defended only by outposts, landed other units behind the river and quickly worked their way up to the defence line on the hill-sides. Other units advanced on Minturno and Tufo from the south-east and after fluctuating fighting succeeded in establishing themselves there and on the neighbouring hills to the north and north-west as far as Capo d'Acqua by the evening of 19 January. Thus a bridgehead of some size was formed.

Even more dangerous were the penetrations in the Castelforte area, where large tracts of mountain territory around Ventosa and Castelforte, in particular the mountains from there to the east projecting over M. Luga, were captured by the enemy during the first two days of the attack in spite of determined defence by 276th Regiment.

It was quite obvious that the two Grenadier regiments of 94th Division in action here were too weak to ward off an attack by two British divisions. A break-through on the Liri in the rear of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division was threatened, although the latter for its part had frustrated all attempts to cross the river at end north of S. Ambrogio, inflicting very heavy losses on the enemy.

XIV Panzer Corps threw all available reserves into the threatened sectors:

Part of the Corvin regiment, formerly with 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, was sent in partly east of Castelforte and partly into the southern area of the Ausente sector; the 44th Reconnaissance Unit was sent in north-west of Castelforte and 94th Division training Battalion at S. Vito west of the Ausente valley.

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Tenth Army H.Q. and C.-in-C., South-West were aware that these measures were inadequate. As soon as he perceived the difficulties of the situation, the latter made available from his own reserves 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, which had just been re-assembled, and 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, which had just been brought down from the Adriatic. They were to make a strong counter-attack immediately, retake lost ground, and then be withdrawn into reserve again as quickly as possible.

The 1st Paratroop Corps H.Q. (General Schlemm) was brought up south of the Liri to control operations as, owing to the main attacks anticipated further north, the area appeared to be growing too large for a Corps H.Q.

The 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, minus the Armoured Reconnaissance Unit and II/71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment which were left behind for coastal defence duties, arrived very quickly, but only parts of 90th Panzer Grenadier Division appeared at first owing to delays on the march. They were sent in on both sides of the Ausente valley, the 90th on the right and the 29th on the left, and took over command of all troops in their sector.

The counter-attack was launched towards midday on 20 January, the main effort being made in the direction of Minturno and Castelforte and to the east; the bridgehead north of Minturno was hemmed in and 29th Panzer Grenadier Division regained some ground. More extensive successes were achieved on 21 January: the hill north of Minturno was partially retaken, the enemy pushed back some distance on both sides of Castelforte, and contact established to the east with 15th Panzer Grenadier Division wing, which was still holding its old position. Thus it was hoped that the British would be pushed back over the Garigliano in the next few days as the power of the attack was steadily increasing after the arrival at the front of artillery batteries of both divisions and the regrouping of all artillery in the sector.

Just at this moment the Anzio-Nettuno landing was made (night of 21/22 January). Owing to inadequate reconnaissance, this came as a complete surprise. Thus it was clear that the attack on 94th Division had been a feint to pin down reserves, and this was confirmed by prisoners. This purpose had been served with complete success. Apart from 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division which was on the march, C.-in-C., South-West had no reserves at his disposal. After considering whether whole divisions or more readily available reserves of various divisions should be withdrawn, the latter course was decided upon in view of the need for immediate action and the following orders issued.

- (a) The counter-attack on the Tenth Army front is to be broken off.
- (b) Tenth Army will immediately dispatch the following units to the landing area:

1st Paratroop Corps H.Q.
 Corvin battle group
 1st regiment of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division
 71st Division (without the two Grenadier regiments in action at Cassino)
 26th Panzer Division, whose relief period on the Adriatic had just ended, and other smaller groups, such as the machine-gun battalion of the 1st Paratroop Division etc.
 LXXVI Panzer Corps H.Q. when relieved by LI Mountain Corps
 (General Feuerstein) } with appropriate artillery

- (c) Fourteenth Army H.Q. will take over command at Anzio; boundary between the two Armies: Terracina - Artona - west of Tivoli.

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All movements necessitated by this order were carried out with great speed, particularly as the early elimination of the bridgehead was a matter of the greatest importance for the Tenth Army itself. If the severe battles for Cassino which broke out at the same time had not tied down every man of the forces which remained behind, the Army would certainly have released more troops.

Forces were withdrawn from the Garigliano front without difficulty; the situation was even improved by small-scale attacks, but in general the situation remained unchanged, the British in Minturno and the Germans in Castelforte. A new defence front could soon be set up behind this line. The situation on M. Juga and the slopes of M. Molo alone continued difficult for a time. On 27 January 46th British Division launched fresh attacks and after fluctuating fighting succeeded in taking M. Juga and M. Ornito, adjoining it to the north, by the beginning of February. The right wing of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division which, with 267th Grenadier Regiment of 94th Division was still in its old position on the river, had to be withdrawn.

Fighting then died down all along this sector, but the mountainous district north of M. Jugo continued to be the weakest point in the German line south of the Liri.

(b) The Liri Valley

The 15th Panzer Grenadier Division position in the Liri valley was particularly well-fortified and manned, although not very strongly, by experienced troops. It therefore appeared improbable that an attack of any size would be attempted in this area. Small-scale attacks aimed at taking the bend in the Garigliano north of the Liri estuary were unsuccessful. It was therefore rather surprising when, after extremely heavy artillery preparation, sizeable groups crossed the river in the area on both sides of S. Angelo on the evening of 20 January. They met with heavy resistance and after sustaining heavy losses returned to the east bank. The attempt was repeated with greater effort on the afternoon of 21 January; the enemy succeeded in establishing small bridgeheads, but these were quickly broken up by powerful counter-attacks. By evening the enemy attack had once again broken down completely. The German Command had previously thought that these were raiding operations in strength, aimed at drawing forces and pinning them down. On the following day, when a clear picture of the situation was available, heavy enemy losses, including over 700 prisoners, showed that in fact a whole division, 36th U.S., had taken part in the attack and that 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment had achieved a great defensive victory, which was all the more appreciable in view of the relatively slight German losses.

No more attacks were attempted in this area during the following months.

The release of 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment for Anzio necessitated a number of changes in units at the front:

Units of 139th Panzer Grenadier Regiment south of the Liri were relieved by 134th Regiment of 44th Division and those on the river bend north of the Liri by 115th Reconnaissance Unit. South of the railway 211st Grenadier Regiment took over a battalion sector, the divisional boundary being moved south, and 129th Panzer Grenadier Regiment occupied the remainder of the valley sector.

(c) North of Cassino

The battles for the high ground north of the Liri valley opened with an attack by the French Expeditionary Corps on 21 January. The outposts in

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front of the Gustav line were driven back to the heights south of M. Crocc, but the attack was held up at the mountain itself. This height and small hills to the south of it were taken on 23 January, but further advances were stopped by strong counter-attacks.

Pressure was thereupon moved further south. During the night of 24/25 January the 34th U.S. Division attacked over the marshy Rapido meadows in the direction of Cairo village and to the south. Here the enemy found a weak spot in the front manned by the already exhausted 131st and 132nd Regiments of 44th Grenadier Division which had not been able to consolidate to the same extent as had been the case further south. Moreover, the position was situated at the foot of a steep hill, making the movement of counter-attack reserves by day and even of supplies by night on the steep road down to Cairo extremely difficult and exposing them to enemy fire. In spite of this the Grenadiers fought bravely and stubbornly, repulsing countless day and night attacks. Finally the Americans, continually making obstinate attacks supported by extremely heavy artillery fire, succeeded in gaining on 28 January a firm foothold between M. Villa and Cairo; and reinforcements, particularly tanks, were brought in during the days that followed. All German counter-attacks broke down. Algerian troops were also advancing on Cairo from the north and, after hard fighting the village fell into enemy hands on 31 January.

The 3rd Algerian Division had meanwhile fought its way forward north of S. Elia through the Belmonte Valley and, after an all-day battle on 27 January, established itself on Belvedere hill at the entrance of the valley. From this point it advanced slowly on both sides of the road to Terelle and blocked it to the south from the height above the Serpentine road.

The actions of the past few days proved to Army H.Q. that the forces at present in the Cassino area were not adequate to hold the strong attacks which were anticipated. For this reason it made two difficult decisions:

- 1) On the southern wing 94th Division with its two weakened regiments had been reinforced by 90th Panzer Grenadier Division. No more large-scale attacks were expected, but all the same the threat to the exposed wing which might result from small-scale attacks on the more important sectors of the new position undergoing consolidation had to be taken into consideration. In spite of this, the risk of withdrawing 90th Panzer Grenadier Division had to be taken: Army H.Q. was particularly anxious to hand over command of the southern sector of the Cassino front to the energetic commander of 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, Colonel Bade, as the commander of 44th Division, General Franck, a reliable old officer formerly in the Austrian Army, was familiar neither with the troops nor with the conditions of the Italian theatre and could no longer manage single-handed the ever-increasing number of units from various divisions which were to be used in his area. On 1 February Colonel Bade took over command of the Cassino front between the 15th and 44th Divisions, bringing his artillery with him whilst the infantry followed up more slowly.
- 2) After the release of 26th Panzer and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions, the 1st Paratroop Division was the only battle-experienced formation left on the Adriatic. The British Eighth Army had released divisions to the American Fifth Army, but was presumably still sufficiently strong to participate in the present major operation by the Allied Army Group. Any sizeable attack on the other two divisions of LI Mountain Corps, which were supposed to hold a 70 km front, could lead to a disaster of immeasurable consequence. However, the risk had to be taken in spite of this, or Cassino could not be held. Army H.Q. therefore ordered 1st Paratroop Division to be relieved by 305th Division, whose 3rd

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Regiment and an artillery group would continue to hold the Maijella sector, concentrating on and south of the Alfedena Pass.

Moving the Paratroops to Cassino took some time, as available transport was sufficient for only 1 to 2 battalions.

(d) The February Battles for Cassino

During the opening days of February bitter fighting took place for the innumerable small rises on the ridge between Cassino and M. Cairo. The heights generally changed hands several times before they finally fell to the tenaciously advancing Americans. Heavy attacks were also made in the direction of Terelle, but the village which was situated on high ground could not be reached.

The flexible fire concentrations of the German artillery played an important part in the defence, particularly as the enemy had even brought tanks up onto the high ground. A futile attack from the north was made on the town of Cassino itself. On 3 February a critical situation existed for a time north of the monastery, but was finally overcome. The first Paratroop battalion to arrive gave valuable support to the young Grenadiers of 211st Regiment, who vied with their battle-experienced comrades. Colonel Bade personally hurried from battalion to battalion, these being in dispersed battle groups without proper communications, and was the driving force behind the defence. Whilst the other Paratroops battalions were being sent in on the southern slope, the regiments of 90th Panzer Grenadier Division reinforced the already widely-dispersed troops holding the western flank. They came just at the right moment to prevent further developments in an already menacing situation. The 2 U.S. Corps also brought up fresh forces, beginning with 36th Division, and by about 8 February equilibrium was restored. The enemy continued to make small penetrations, but was no longer capable of changing the front-line to any decisive degree. German counter-attacks also produced no lasting result. Losses on both sides were very heavy and, as a result of general exhaustion, the bitter fighting ceased on 12 February.

Meanwhile the enemy did not remain inactive; the New Zealand Corps relieved 2 U.S. Corps; Indian troops appeared on the height facing the monastery, New Zealanders in the valley. On 15 February several heavy and unexpected air attacks were made on the famous monastery, followed by bursts of heavy artillery fire. The defence was not put at a disadvantage by this action, indeed only advantages resulted. The monastery building was severely damaged, but its ruins could now be used unrestrictedly as safe dug-outs. Thus the attacks by Indian troops which followed shortly afterwards were unsuccessful. The New Zealand Division in the valley was also unable to make progress towards Cassino village. A sizeable penetration was made at Cassino railway station, an important crossing point on the Rapido, during the night of 17/18 February, but the situation was quickly restored.

(e) Final Observations

Thus the second Cassino battle ended. Owing to the Anzio-Nettuno landings it had been carried out under difficult circumstances and can be recorded as a complete defensive victory for the Tenth Army. Certainly territory had been lost on the lower Garigliano and in the mountains north-west of Cassino, but the enemy had nowhere achieved any notable success. The Gustav position had withstood its baptism of fire.

A lull of some duration set in, the time being used to consolidate positions and relieve units, as C.-in-C., South-West wished to exchange exhausted units from the bridgehead with fresher Tenth Army troops for the decisive blow against the bridgehead which had been planned for the end of February. The High Command had great hopes of this operation. Not only was the bridgehead

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to be eliminated, but counter-attacks were to be launched on the Tenth Army front immediately afterwards to clear up enemy penetrations into the Gustav position on the Garigliano and at Cassino.

The 71st Infantry Division began to relieve 29th Panzer Grenadier Division on 10 February; 1st Paratroop Division relieved 211st Regiment which fought so well at Cassino. Unfortunately, the outstanding commander of this unit was killed by a stray bullet a few days later after it had taken over a quiet sector. This was an irreplaceable loss for the division.

The 191st Regiment sector was taken over by 44th Division which in turn handed over its right wing positions to 90th Panzer Grenadier Division. Most of this division was, however, soon relieved by 1st Paratroop Division and it went to a rest area. At the beginning of March, General Heidrich replaced Colonel Bade as commander of the Cassino sector.

The 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment returned to 15th Panzer Grenadier Division so that 267th Grenadier Regiment could rejoin the 94th Division.

Only the 134th Grenadier Regiment of 44th Division had still to be relieved.

In place of General Ringel, who was due to take over, Colonel Schrank, also experienced in mountain fighting, was appointed commander of 5th Mountain Division.

As Tenth Army H.Q. feared after its experience at Salerno, the major attack on the Anzio bridgehead came to a halt after an initial success. Thus all further plans of attack broke down; unfortunately there was no apparent way of breaking the deadlock, although this might have been practicable in the 71st division sector at the expense of some ground. This was therefore the weakest point on the Army front with only one inadequate approach route for the whole division and without properly covered artillery positions.

In the middle of March the Army received the 114th Infantry Division commanded by General Bourquin. This was formerly a holding division which had sustained heavy losses at Anzio and was now to be changed into a full-strength field division. It was moved into the Sulmona sector, the Grenadier regiment of 305th Division being subordinate to it for the time being.

Meanwhile every effort was made during these weeks to press forward with the work of consolidating the position, the southern part of which had to be moved back owing to the Anzio bridgehead. More squads of Italian workers were enlisted and a Slovak construction brigade brought up.

III. During these weeks, activity at the front did not cease altogether; the enemy artillery, assisted by observation aircraft, occupied itself with the methodical destruction of battery positions and bridges. Army H.Q. ordered large numbers of smoke generators to provide some degree of protection against this, and if necessary to prevent direct observation of targets which had been hit. Unfortunately the smoke producing agent could not be manufactured in Germany to the extent required.

In spite of the many indications of a fresh attack, the opening of the 3rd Cassino battle came as a surprise. It began on the morning of 15 March with hour after hour of air attacks of unprecedented strength on the town of Cassino and the surrounding heights, followed by a heavy and concentrated artillery bombardment at midday. This colossal rain of bombs and shells did not have the expected effect. There is a difference between bombarding positions and towns on the plain and hill-side dugouts and an Italian mountain town with its cluster of hard-stone houses if the troops in these dugouts and

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houses have the courage and morale to endure such a superhuman strain. The paratroops had both. As the New Zealanders moved forward from the north into the ruins of what had once been a town they were met by a heavy machine-gun, mortar, assault gun and anti-tank gun fire from every heap of rubble. The tanks could not pass the bomb craters and were attacked with close combat weapons. The advance stopped as soon as it had begun. The paratroops achieved the mastery of the bitter individual action which ensued. On 16 March the northern quarter of the town and a few ruined houses on the eastern side were finally lost. New Zealand troops attacking from the south took the strongly-contested Castle Hill on the height above the town. Troops of 4th Indian Division relieved them and pushed on to storm the next ridge in front of the monastery. The paratroops did not waver; isolated groups even held out in captured territory. On 17 March the Indians were thrown back by a successful counter-attack, but Castle Hill itself was not recaptured. The crisis reached its climax on this day. The railway station which had so far withstood assaults from the east was taken by an attack from the north and the enemy pushed on past it a short distance to the south. The danger of a link-up between the assault groups in the valley and on the mountains was greatly increased, but the narrow intervening strip was made of steel and withstood the heaviest pressure. The paratroops leapt forward through gaps between the assault groups and surprised the enemy with fire from the flanks and rear. On 19 March another successful attack by 4th Paratroop Regiment reached the vicinity of Castle Hill and isolated the Indian troops who had advanced further south. A simultaneous enemy armoured attack on the left flank of the regiment at Albaneta Farm broke down in minefields and artillery fire. The latter provided particularly effective support for the defence, the enemy thus paying the penalty of not having eliminated the artillery observation posts on the right wing of 5th Mountain Division before this attack. The situation could be considered stabilised as from 20 March; although fresh troops were sent in, the enemy was unable to make further gains. The offensive died down; during the night of 24/25 the enemy evacuated the advanced positions east of the monastery, and on 26 and 27 March the remaining enemy outposts were cleared and positions slightly improved. Thus the 3rd Cassino battle also reached its conclusion. The 1st Paratroop Division had achieved its greatest triumph; the iron tenacity and unswerving resolution of true soldiers had overcome a concentration of material on a narrow front which probably had no precedent even in this war.

The month of April passed without any fighting of importance.

IV. Although the Allies had some success in the fighting in front of and on the Bernhard position, the gains made in the Cassino battles did not repay the heavy expenditure of men and material. In spite of the deep bulge in its rear, Cassino was not taken by storm even during the May offensive, but was reluctantly abandoned by the 1st Paratroop Division on the direct orders of Tenth Army H.Q. owing to developments in the situation in the Liri Valley. The bridgehead on the lower Garigliano was more troublesome. There can be no doubt, however, that in view of the strain on German forces after the failure of the counter-attack at Anzio, the greatly superior Allied divisions, which were prepared in every way for mountain fighting, would have broken through the front at this point even if the bridgehead had not existed.

We must therefore reconsider whether the Allies could not have attained the objective more quickly and at less cost, in some other way.

As already stated in part C, the Allied landing operations in 1943 were influenced by an over-estimate of German strength at the time. In contrast to this, Allied plans after the capture of the Naples area indicate, as far as can be ascertained from a study of American publications on the campaign

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in Italy, that German strength and terrain difficulties had been greatly underestimated.

Otherwise there is no other explanation for the transfer of the point of main effort in ensuing operations to a line which was certainly the shortest route to Rome, but at the same time the most strongly fortified in the whole Italian campaign by natural barriers, defences and troops.

From a German point of view the answer to the question whether by a different deployment of forces the Allies could have broken down the German defence in Italy (at least as far as the northern Apennines) and thus taken the capital sooner and at less cost must definitely be in the affirmative.

As the Allied Command was warned in good time of the deployment of German forces and the consolidation of positions in the rear by its excellent air reconnaissance and wireless intelligence services, it possessed the data necessary for making a decision such as this. It must have known that the broad plain on the Adriatic stretching far to the north was the most suitable area for full deployment of its great armoured and air superiority as well as for constant support by the fleet. Moreover, this area was the most weakly manned and its fortification construction the least developed in the theatre. Only two roads lead into this area from the north: the coastal road and the Macerata - Teramo - Chieti road which had a lower traffic capacity and passed through mountainous areas. Every east-west road lead over exposed passes, numerous bridges and through defiles. If the whole Air Force, including the strategic arm, had been used to carry out methodical operations, a major transfer of German forces from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Adriatic would have been prevented for a limited period or, at the very least, divisions would have been held up and dispersed on the march to such an extent that they could no longer have had any influence on the outcome of the situation.

If the necessary arrangements had been made promptly, supply could have been based on Adriatic ports of sufficient capacity and supplemented from Naples without undue difficulty.

The Sangro battle would probably have been the most promising moment for this transfer of pressure. At that time the German forces on the southern front were neither capable of a major counter-attack nor would one have produced any success worth mentioning if the bulk of the Allied Army launched a simultaneous attack on the Adriatic. About 3 divisions would have been sufficient to cover the southern area. The 65th German Division, however, would have collapsed under a mass attack such as this on the first day, thus giving the Allies a free hand. A simultaneous Allied landing in the north (at Ancona for instance) would have encountered fewer difficulties than that which was made later at Anzio-Nettuno. All available reserves belonging to G.-in-C., South and Army Group Rommel would have been drawn and pinned down, but the bridgehead could have been maintained until pressure from the south made itself felt. The German troops on the southern front could not have been saved unless they withdrew to the north as quickly as possible. Rome would have fallen without a fight.

If the British Eighth Army had turned from the Adriatic in the direction of Rome, as had often been contemplated in Allied strategy, it would, unlike the thrust to the north, have encountered the same difficulties on the main ridge of the Apennines as those experienced in the attacks on Cassino. Comparatively small German forces would have sufficed to hold the few serviceable roads in this area.

Allied tactical use of large and small forces proved to be skilful and flexible. The sound choice and exploitation of favourable ground was

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particularly striking, as was the skill of the troops in the mountains and in night attacks, this latter being in contrast to the German Army which had never taken to fighting at night and therefore rarely mastered the technique.

In the German view, Allied operational orders were over-cautious and did not allow subordinate commanders enough freedom to exploit advantages. Moreover, forward assault groups were too weak and reserves too strong, diminishing the impetus of the attack and sometimes leading to reverses which, although usually only temporary, retarded its progress.

Allied troops pressed home attacks and clung to captured ground with outstanding tenacity. The Allied command could also relinquish ground and fall back if this appeared to be in the interest of the battle, a possibility denied the Germans since Hitler took over.

The harmonious co-operation between Army, Air Force and Navy under one supreme command was regarded by the Germans with envy.

(Signed) Heinrich von Vietinghoff

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APPENDIXAn Account of the "Hermann Goering" Division at Salerno
9-17 September 1943, written by General Schmalz

After the evacuation of Sicily the "Hermann Goering" Division was in the Caserta area to rest and re-equip. A fresh Allied landing was expected. Where it would be made was uncertain. The attitude of the Italians was also doubtful. In conjunction with 16th Panzer Division reconnaissance unit at Salerno, the division posted signals detachments at Capri, Naples, Unca and on the Volturno estuary to watch the coast and report landings promptly. The troops were standing by for immediate action. On 7 September the division received an aircraft report that a large landing fleet had put to sea and was moving north-east. The course indicated Naples. A report that landings had been made at Salerno came in during the night of 8/9 September. XIV Panzer Corps immediately ordered the division to attack and destroy the enemy landing force. Owing to losses sustained on Sicily, the division then disposed of only 2 Panzer Grenadier battalions, 1 Engineer battalion, a reconnaissance unit and about 20 to 30 tanks, 1 assault-gun company, 3 artillery batteries and 3 AA batteries.

On 9 September the division left its billets at Caserta and moved up along the route Nocera - Vietri - Salerno. Contact was established at Nocera with the 16th Reconnaissance Unit patrols which had been pushed back. The two Italian divisions defending the coast had dropped out following their defection.

The enemy situation was reported as follows: Salerno - Vietri occupied by enemy. Large groups of landing vessels and warships in Salerno Bay. Main body of the 16th Reconnaissance Unit in action on northern outskirts of Salerno. 16th Reconnaissance Unit H.Q. at Pellezano. As they arrived, units of the division were sent in on the Nocera - Vietri road to hold the enemy up and later to attack. The spearheads, suffering losses from naval artillery fire, reached the area north of Cava and the hill-slopes on the right and left of the road on the evening of 9 September. A company from Camerrolle launched an attack on M.S. Angelo whilst parts of the reconnaissance unit moved forward on the Pagani - Maiore road. The division was in contact with the enemy north of Cava, on M.S. Angelo and at Campilola. Fighting was hard and costly, particularly on the road to Vietri. The 16th Reconnaissance Unit (attached to the "Hermann Goering" Division) had been pushed back several kilometres north of Salerno, where it was in action against the enemy.

The attacks launched by the division on 10 September reached the southern part of Cava, but made no further progress. Tanks could not be used effectively in the dead ground of the narrow valley. Heavy fighting broke out on both sides of the valley, which was an important artillery observation point. The weak companies fighting in the rugged mountainous terrain melted away. The enemy infiltrated through the many gaps in the front. Individual companies acting as raiding parties managed with difficulty to maintain some sort of cohesive front, although unified control of operations became extremely difficult. Losses were constantly caused by well-directed fire from warships. The 103rd Reconnaissance Unit (or one battalion of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, exact details not known) relieved 16th Reconnaissance Unit in the area north of Salerno during the night 10/11 September.

The 11 and 12 September produced no improvements or results in the proposed German plans for an attack. On 13 September XIV Panzer Corps discussed a major attack on Salerno by the reinforced "Hermann Goering" Division and in the Paestum area by 16th Panzer Division, 29th Panzer Grenadier Division and units of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division which was to

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be launched on 16 September. During 13 and 14 September the 64th Infantry Regiment of 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division with 3 battalions, 2 artillery batteries and 1 mortar brigade were brought to the division holding the Avellino - Salerno road for this purpose. The regiment was sent in north-east of Salerno at Sordina and made immediate contact with the enemy. On 15 September the "Hermann Goering" Division tanks were moved from the Cava area and brought up to S. Mango by way of S. Saverinò - Baronissi - Ogliara. The divisional plan of attack was: defend Cava, attack Salerno. The infantry was to make a surprise attack without artillery preparation during the night of 15/16 September, take the heights south of Sordina and break through to the sea. The armoured force would attack from S. Mango at dawn and likewise reach the sea via Alfani. It would then link up with the Infantry regiment and retake Salerno in a combined attack.

On the morning of 16 September the infantry surprised the enemy and took the high ground without losses and had advanced as far as the area west of Il Monte when it ran into heavy enemy artillery fire and a British counter-attack. The attack was still making progress when two battalion staffs were suddenly knocked out in close combat actions. The ensuing confusion amongst these battalions, temporarily deprived of their leaders, brought the attack to a standstill. The Panzer Grenadiers were sent in prematurely by the unexpected intervention of a senior officer. Thus they could not be supported as planned and this attack too broke down in the Alfani area. The offensive had certainly resulted in a reduction of the bridgehead, but did not lead to a split in the enemy landing front and to the recapture of Salerno. The newly-captured positions were disadvantageous and suffered heavily from artillery fire. They were held, however, until the Tenth Army order for the withdrawal to a new line arrived on 21 September. The withdrawal to the new Tenth Army line was carried out by sectors. The Volturno was to be the new main defence line and was to be reached by delaying actions. For this purpose new defence lines were sought out, occupied by advance-parties and light defences set up. Most of the troops fell back to the new positions at night, leaving strong rearguards to face the enemy. These were only to withdraw to the new main defence line if pressure became too heavy. By the time the rearguards had reached the temporary main defence line all the artillery had been brought into position and was ready for action. The enemy followed up slowly and cautiously. The time taken in bringing up artillery along the narrow mountain roads allowed our troops to prepare defences. Engineer battalions were used to blow up roads and bridges. After troops had been withdrawn demolitions were carried out without a hitch. One bridge, however, was destroyed by lightning during a very violent storm and had to be rebuilt. As withdrawals to a new position were in progress, the question whether this work would be finished in time caused some excitement. If the enemy had followed up closely at this moment the consequences would have been immeasurable. However, everything went well.

In retrospect I should like to summarise my views on German counter-measures at Salerno based on my experience of the invasion of Sicily and five river-crossing operations.

Given the element of surprise and air superiority, any well-prepared river-crossing operation or coastal landing, which is similar in some ways, must be successful. The defenders cannot expect success unless they have strongly-manned and fortified positions or strong land and air forces can be brought up to counter-attack. The defence could not fulfill these preliminary conditions either on Sicily or at Salerno. Coastal fortifications were improvised and inadequate. On Sicily the Italians holding the coast fled from their positions the moment the landing was made and they had only just deserted their allies when the Salerno landing took place. The only replac-

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ments along the whole coastal sector were German signals detachments whilst Salerno itself was held by one German company with 6 field-guns. German counter-measures could not be put into effect until troops had been brought up to the enemy bridgeheads. Owing to the urgent nature of the situation, these movements had to be made by day and were exposed to enemy air operations. There were not enough German aircraft available to make their presence felt. The "Hermann Goering" Division for example could use only two narrow mountain roads to make an immediate counter-attack, and these were covered by the enemy air force and naval artillery. High ground had to be taken from the enemy before German artillery observation positions could be set up. The enemy used the time thus lost to make further landings and bring up reinforcements. Fire from heavy naval artillery was particularly troublesome. In infantry actions the German soldier felt equal to his enemy in every way. On the other hand he was powerless against the fire of warships lying far out to sea. A battery of 17 cm guns which was at our disposal on Sicily was used with good effect against British warships. There was no such artillery at Salerno. The enemy air force did not have a decisive influence on the ground fighting in the mountainous terrain around Salerno but had a marked effect on supply routes.

(Signed) Wilhelm Schmalz

A.H.B.6. distribution:-

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