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THE CAMPAIGN IN ITALY
CHAPTER VII

THE ARMY GROUP'S VERSION
BY
GENERAL WESTPHAL

BEING STUDIES
WRITTEN FOR U.S. HISTORICAL DIVISION
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(Supplement to Chapter 5: "The battles near Rome in September 1943 and the withdrawal of German troops from the islands" [Corsica and Sardinia].)

1. The situation in the Rome area

In the morning of 7 September 1943 the Italian Navy Minister, Admiral Count de Courten called on Field Marshal Kesselring to inform him that the Italian Navy would sail from La Spezia on 8 or 9 September to seek out the British Mediterranean fleet. The Italian Fleet would either be victorious or go down fighting. There was no question of there being a repetition of scuttling as at Scapa Flow. At the same time the Admiral informed the Field Marshal in detail of the fleet's intentions. At first the deep-sea forces would navigate the sea area west of Sicily. It was regarded as certain that the British Mediterranean fleet would be encountered there or further to the south. The writer took part in this conference.

On 8 September about 20 minutes before the air attack on the battle headquarters of C. in C. South, the Commando Supremo rang up and requested Field Marshal Kesselring or the Chief of Staff of C. in C. South to go to Rome at once for a consultation with General Roatta. However, it was no longer possible for the Chief of General Staff to leave for Rome as in the meantime the bombing raid had started and had already made the exit (from the HQ) impassable. The Commander in Chief South interpreted this bombing attack as the prelude to action on a large scale by the Allies, probably a landing. It was not connected with the possibility of the defection of Italy. The solemn assurances of Admiral Count de Courten of the previous day were still too fresh in the memory. On the afternoon of 8 September the Chief of Staff of C. in C. South drove with the Military Attaché, General Toussaint, to the HQ of the Italian General Staff of the Army at Monterotondo, General Roatta having returned there in the meantime. At first the two German officers were held up by Italian road blocks north of Rome. But after waiting an hour they succeeded in getting through to Monterotondo. General Roatta received the German officers very amiably. He discussed in detail with the Chief of General Staff of C. in C. South plans for the further joint campaign of the Italian SEVENTH and the German TENTH Army in southern Italy. While this conference was going on Colonel von Waldenburg rang up, as mentioned in Chapter 5, with news of the announcement of the Italian capitulation broadcast. The sense of what the Chief of General Staff of C. in C. South said to General Roatta was as follows: General Roatta knew with what deep distrust the German high command had recently come to regard the Italian government and the Italian supreme command. This radio announcement might have an irremediable effect. He therefore felt it was necessary in the interests of both sides for an official denial to be issued immediately in case the news should prove false. The senior officer present, General Toussaint,

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concurred with the assurance of General Roatta that it was simply an insidious propaganda move. As had just been discussed between himself and the Chief of General Staff, the joint struggle would be continued. By the time the Chief of General of Staff of C. in C. South arrived back at the temporary battle HQ of his Staff in Grotta Ferrata, Field Marshal Kesselring had already issued the code word "Axis", signifying the defection of Italy, to all subordinate commands.

The situation had now arisen that the German High Command had predicted, but the Commander in Chief South had not been fully convinced of its inevitability owing to the numerous protestations and assurances to the contrary.

The German High Command was of the opinion that the defection of Italy coupled with a large-scale landing by the Allies in southern or central Italy would create a problem with which the army formations of the Commander in Chief South would be unable to cope. The German High Command therefore secretly regarded these divisions - at least for a time - as for the most part lost. This view finally leaked through to C. in C. South in August. It was borne out by the fact that supplies and replacements of men, materials and weapons for C. in C. South were almost completely cut off from August 1943. All requisitions at that time met with a "We'll see, later" attitude by OKW. This exceptionally pessimistic attitude extended also to the operations of Army Group B in North Italy. They were to absorb as second-line troops all units of C. in C. South in the Apennines, which had managed to evade the combined attack of the Allies and Italians.

The Commander in Chief South also took a serious view of the situation. But in his opinion it could under certain circumstances be mastered, and the further south the expected large-scale landing was made, the sooner this mastery would be achieved. But if the enemy landed from the sea and from the air in the greater Rome area, it was hardly to be expected that the TENTH Army would be able to prevent themselves being cut off. The two divisions deployed near Rome were quite inadequate not only to eliminate the strong Italian forces, but also to beat off the enemy landing and at the same time to keep the open rear lines of communications of the TENTH Army through Italian - and Allied-held territory. Already on 9 September it became unpleasant apparent that Italian forces were blocking the TENTH Army's supply roads leading to Naples. The Army could not have endured this position for long. The Commander in Chief South was therefore greatly relieved when 9 and 10 September passed without enemy landings by air on the airfields round Rome being made. Such air landings supported by Italian ground troops was expected hourly during both these days by the German command. And there is no doubt that an air landing of this kind would have boosted the morale of Italian troops and the war-weary civilian population. The tension of the situation in Rome relaxed completely after those in command of the Italian forces agreed to the German offer to capitulate. This removed the danger to the supply lines of the TENTH Army. Furthermore, the German command in Italy was freed from the nightmare necessity of using its weapons against its former allies. The capitulation guaranteed Italian soldiers an immediate return to their homes, and this was strictly enforced. This compromise had a sequel because it conflicted with the orders of the German High Command which required all Italian soldiers to be made prisoners of war. There can be no doubt that compliance with these orders would have given no incentive to the Italians to accept the German offer.

The fact that Rome no longer need become a battle-field was a further relief to the German command in Italy. In the capitulation agreement

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C. in C. South undertook to treat Rome as an open city. He gave an assurance that Rome would be held by two companies of police only to guard telephone exchanges, the Kommandantura, etc. This was in fact scrupulously observed till the end of the German occupation. As a result of the capitulation it was possible to restore signals circuits to OKW which had been broken since 8 September. A further result of the elimination without bloodshed of the Italian forces was that reinforcements could be sent immediately from the Rome area to the TENTH Army. These were units of 3rd Panzer Grenadier division and the units of 26th Panzer division (regimental HQ staff and the II Tank Battalion) which had been retained in Rome on Hitler's orders.

Thus the situation in Rome which had caused so much initial anxiety was resolved in a manner that could not have been more satisfactory.

2. The withdrawal of German troops from the islands

Included in the pre-arranged measures to be taken in the event of Operation "Axis" being put into effect, was the evacuation of German troops from the islands of Sardinia and Corsica. Every effort was to be made to save the large quantities of ammunition, fuel and food stored on both islands. The German commanders of the island forces were given verbal instructions to prepare for such a possibility. The transportation of troops and supplies to the islands was discontinued from August 1943.

It was clear to C. in C. South that it was very questionable whether evacuation operations could be carried out successfully in the face of enemy counteraction by sea and air. But astonishingly enough, these counter-measures did not materialise. Enemy interference did not assume menacing proportions until only rearguards of the German forces on both islands were assembled on Corsica. Thus in spite of the limited number of ships and transport aircraft available and the absence of any worth-while protection by light naval forces, not only German troops of a total strength of about 30,000 men, but also their weapons, artillery and tanks, thousands of vehicles and the bulk of the stored supplies were successfully brought back to the mainland. Experience gained in the evacuation of Sicily was usefully applied in the new evacuation operations. As in the case of the transportation of personnel to Africa, the majority was sent by air. The credit for the complete success of these evacuation operations was due primarily to the prudent and clear-sighted leadership of the Army Commander of Sardinia-Corsica, General von Senger und Etterling; a contributory factor was the splendid work of the units of the German Navy in Italian waters and of the Luftwaffe.

According to all reports that were received, the returning troops maintained exemplary discipline. 90th Panzer Grenadier Division and the SS. Assault Brigade "Reichsfuehrer-SS." were soon completely ready for action again after being reorganised in the Pisa area.

The Commander in Chief South kept in continuous contact with General von Senger during the evacuation operations by radio-telephone and by frequent visits to Corsica of his Chief of General Staff.

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S U P P L E M E N T T O C H A P T E R 6

"The Campaign of the TENTH Army in Southern and Central Italy with special treatment of the battles at Salerno, on the Volturno, on the Garigliano and on the Sangro and the battles for Cassino."

In the following notes only those points will be dealt with, relating to the period of time and phase of the campaign covered by Chapter 6, which appear to be especially worthy of mention from the Army Group's standpoint. It is not proposed to add anything in detail to the battles of the TENTH Army from September 1943 to the beginning of March 1944. The opinions of the Army Group and the Army regarding the appraisal of situations, the making of decisions and their execution during this period generally coincided. The personal relationship between C. in C. Army Group and C. in C. TENTH Army was one of great mutual confidence and they worked in close co-operation with one another. Co-operation between the two headquarters was also very good.

The Salerno Battle

The special circumstances referred to in Chapter 11 resulted in the C. in C. South being able for the time being to obtain but little information of the progress of the battle at Salerno. Telephone communication through the Italian postal network was broken off after the Italian capitulation. It could not be restored quickly as up to the time of the capitulation Germans were not permitted to obtain an insight into the technical workings of the Italian telephone system. At first, radio communication could not be established owing to the lack of experience of the newly assigned radio operators of HQ. TENTH Army with the special atmospheric conditions obtaining in the south. General Staff officers sent by Storch aircraft could get only as far as the HQ. of XIV Panzer Corps. Thus the C. in C. remained in troubled ignorance of the situation at Salerno during the first few days. He could not have helped much except by continually urging the employment of all available units of the Luftwaffe in support of the ground forces, and by sending reinforcements from the Rome area. (See paragraph 1, page 4.) The great anxiety as to whether the German troops in transit from Calabria would arrive in time and the unnecessary difficulties regarding fuel supplies that had been caused through the lack of a QM detachment at HQ. TENTH Army, meant that C. in C. South was obliged to look further afield for reinforcements for the Salerno battlefield. He looked to Army Group B for assistance. The Chief of General Staff of C. in C. South therefore requested the Armed Forces Operational Staff at OKW to order the transfer of 24th Panzer Division and the Panzer-Grenadier-Division "Leibstandarte SS-Adolf Hitler" from the Mantua area to Rome. This proposal, and a request made to Army Group B direct, were turned down because the forces would arrive too late and because they could not be spared by Army Group B. It is easy to see that the latter reason was not a valid one. Nor would the former reason bear scrutiny. C. in C. South, OKW and Army Group B learned of the Allied landing at Salerno in the morning of 9 September 1943. The two Panzer divisions of Army Group B could have been ready to move off within an hour or two. The distance by road from Mantua to Salerno is roughly 700 km. If the motorised units of the two divisions had left the Mantua area at about 1400 hours on 9 September, while the tracked vehicles were moved by rail, they could have covered 100 km. on 9 September and 150 km. per day on the succeeding days. In this way their leading units would easily have reached the Siena area on 10 September, the area north of Rome on 11 September, the area north of Naples on 12 September and the Salerno area on 13 September.

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Thus it would have been quite possible for them to have gone into action at the height of the battle. In this connection the following must be taken into consideration:

1) At that time it was still possible to move troops by day. Even the troops approaching from Calabria could proceed in daylight as apparently the entire enemy air force was concentrated in the Salerno area.

2) (a) 24th Panzer division was mainly composed of elite troops of regular officers, N.C.Os. and men of the Cavalry.

(b) The fighting strength of the Leibstandarte SS-Adolf Hitler, which was particularly well equipped with heavy weapons of all kinds, was equivalent to $1\frac{1}{2}$ normal divisions.

3) Tracked vehicles could be moved at that time by rail, even by day, at least as far as the Rome area, though during this period locomotives, etc., had to be manned by German personnel. The eclipse of the Luftwaffe and the lack of any kind of defence against naval artillery were the primary reasons for the unfavourable outcome of the Salerno battle. A third and equally important reason was the lack of ground forces. However, it must be conceded that an effective fighting strength equivalent to more than $2\frac{1}{2}$ ordinary divisions would have completely overcome this shortage.

The writer is of the opinion that if the two divisions had been promptly dispatched, the situation at Salerno could have been turned to the Germans' advantage by 13 or 14 September.

Incorrect assessment of the situation on the part of the High Command, above all in regard to their order to send in two army groups piecemeal, one after the other, prevented all available forces from being rushed to the real battlefield in Italy. If there had been only one supreme commander - no matter whom - responsible for the conduct of the war in Italy, if he had acted correctly he would certainly have brought these two formations into the decisive battle. It is necessary to emphasise what great significance the failure of the Salerno landing would have had.

General Jodl later told the writer that it was regrettable that the request of C. in C. South could not be granted at that time.

The achievements of command and troops in the Salerno battle have always been fully recognised by C. in C. South. Experience and knowledge of tactics gained were extensive and valuable. Just two points need to be noted here:

1) The enemy must be thrown back into the sea at one point as soon as possible and all available forces must be brought up for this purpose.

2) Enemy air superiority makes it necessary for formations to be used in a counter-attack to be kept close enough to the coast to permit them to go into action after not more than a night's journey.

The lessons learned were, of course, immediately passed on to the German troops. Moreover, Field Marshal Kesselring felt that it was necessary, in view of the expected large-scale invasion on the Atlantic coast, to communicate them as soon as possible to the commands on the Western Front. They were explained to the Chief of the Armed Forces Operational Staff in conferences lasting several hours when he paid a visit to the front. They were committed to writing and given to General Jodl for further transmission to C. in C. West. As Chief of General Staff of C. in C. West, the writer later discovered the lessons learned

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at such great cost at Salerno had not been passed on to commands on the western front.

The Situation on the Adriatic Coast

The report on the far-reaching operational opportunities open to the British EIGHTH Army on the Adriatic coast can be fully endorsed from the standpoint of the Army Group. Any landing on the Adriatic coast promised success, and the further north it took place, the greater must be its effect.

The single-handed fight and the command of 1st Fallschirmjaeger Division in Apulia merit the widest recognition. In this connection, it must specially be borne in mind that the division was only partially motorised and that it had only a light artillery battery of guns of the type used for airborne landings. The use of these guns was very inconvenient as they could easily be spotted by their bright muzzle flash.

As far as the writer remembers, the order for the dispatch of 16th Panzer division to the Termoli area was given by Field Marshal Kesselring himself during his presence at HQ. TENTH Army. Thus it is not possible to comment on this matter in detail. But it seems certain that a more concentrated use of the Division would have achieved much more. This was the opinion of C. in C. South at the time which has since been confirmed from British sources. Furthermore, at that time C. in C. South did not know what a difference existed between the fighting qualities of 16th Panzer division and 3rd Panzer-Grenadier division. The latter had a first-rate commander, but he alone could not counterbalance the shortcomings of this division, smashed at Stalingrad and then re-formed.

The High Command Reverses its Decision

As already mentioned in Chapter 11, before the defection of Italy the German High Command was of the opinion that under certain circumstances, the co-operation of the Allies and Italians would mean the loss of the mass of German troops in southern Italy. It was therefore believed that the enemy advance could not be finally halted until the Apennines had been reached. In consequence to these considerations, the High Command attached great importance to getting the forces of the TENTH Army to the north of Rome as soon as possible. After it had drawn near to the Apennines, the TENTH Army was to be placed under the command of Army Group B which would thus take over command of the whole Italian theatre. The Staff of C. in C. south was to be relieved.

When the situation in southern Italy developed more favourably for the Germans than had been expected, the High Command wanted to create a defence line, if possible not as far back as the very broad Apennines as had been decided originally, but further forward in the narrow positions south-east and east of Rome. The advantages of such a solution and also the attendant risk were obvious. The possibility of continuing to keep Allied air bases at a distance from Germany played an important part in these considerations. OKW hoped above all that the front to be established in the south would not require more than 7 infantry divisions. In addition, two mobile divisions were to be made ready behind both flanks as reserves. In contrast to this, the strength required for manning the Apennine positions was at least 20 infantry divisions.

In October 1943 Field Marshal Rommel was requested to give his views on this question. He expressed himself as being in general disagreement with the plan to establish the front further south, but the writer does not know the detailed reasons for Rommel's rejection of it. However, the main

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reason was that he felt unable in the long run to justify such a risky undertaking. This gave rise to the thought that perhaps after all Field Marshal Kesselring should be left as supreme commander in Italy. Hitler hesitated for a long time. The fact that Kesselring had been out of favour since the loss of Tunis played a part in these deliberations. He was accused of giving false information regarding the real situation in the African theatre of war. Apart from this, he was not regarded as the right man for the job because of his pro-Italian attitude. But now they listened to him. He declared that he was in a position to take over the direction of the defence south of Rome. He did not disguise from himself the difficulties that would be encountered in carrying out such a scheme. In addition to other factors, as an expert he ascribed special importance to the need of denying the enemy the use of the air bases in central Italy. Apart from this he was of the opinion that the total available forces were insufficient to hold the Apennines. If they could not be held, sooner or later the whole of Italy would be lost, the enemy would be at the southern borders of Germany and the air-bases in northern Italy would be in his possession. But Field Marshal Kesselring believed he would be able to keep the enemy from the Apennines for at least another 6 to 9 months of fighting. Hitler could not make up his mind until well into November. Then he decided, however, to leave Field Marshal Rommel in command and to transfer full responsibility to him. The appropriate order was being transmitted by teleprinter when Hitler suddenly reversed his decision and gave Field Marshal Kesselring supreme and sole military command in Italy. This order came into effect on 21 November 1943. The command hitherto known as Commander in Chief South was re-named "Commander in Chief South West" (HQ. Army Group C), Army Group B left the Italian theatre of war, and was replaced by HQ. FOURTEENTH Army which was placed under command C. in C. South West.

Another question in connection with the chain of command should be dealt with briefly at this point. Italy was the only theatre of war in which Germany had a Combined Services Command (Wehrmachtfuehrung) in 1943. For tactical purposes, not only the army formations but also Luftflotte 2 and the German Naval Command in Italy were under command C. in C. South. Thus he was not under instructions to co-operate, as was usually the case, but could issue orders direct to the Luftwaffe and Navy without first submitting a request for their services. At the instigation of Goering, who held the opinion that he was better able to judge the operations of Luftflotte 2 from East Prussia than the Supreme Commander of the theatre of war (himself a member of the Luftwaffe), the command of Luftflotte 2 was withdrawn from C. in C. South at the turn of September/October 1943. This took place just at the time when a unified command was more urgently needed than ever before. During this period a serious difference of opinion arose between C. in C. South and Luftflotte 2. The operational units of Luftflotte 2 had suffered considerable losses at Salerno. The Commander of Luftflotte 2 therefore considered a longer respite free from all operations was necessary, in order to refit and rest. C. in C. South, on the other hand, was of the opinion that in view of the obvious air superiority of the enemy, the army could not be expected to do without the help of the bomber groups for several weeks. Nevertheless, as Luftflotte 2 was no longer subordinate to C. in C. South, it was rested accordingly to plan and for more than 5 weeks in September and October 1943 no attacks by bomber groups were carried out. The Navy followed the procedure of the Luftwaffe. The subordination of the German Naval Command in Italy to C. in C. South was discontinued. From now on Luftflotte 2 and the German Naval Command in Italy were instructed only to co-operate with C. in C. South (later C. in C. South West).

One should not, however, fail to mention that generally speaking the Luftwaffe and Navy always agreed to the requests of Army headquarters willingly and with understanding. This applies particularly to the local commanders of anti-aircraft artillery. The high esteem in which he was held and the personal

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influence of Field Marshal Kesselring contributed in a great measure to reducing to a minimum the inevitable ill-feeling brought about as a result of the other services not being placed under the supreme commander of this theatre of war. But the conditions could never be regarded as ideal. For this reason the German command in Italy always regarded with envy the clear-cut chain of command of the Allied forces. The enemy had one Commander in Chief to whom all the services were subordinate. The German Supreme Commander of the theatre of war was such in name only. In Italy there were 8 co-ordinated organisations of equal status. These were: the army group, the Luftflotte, the German Naval Command, the G.O.C. German Armed Forces, the senior officer of the SS and police, the Plenipotentiary of the Greater German Reich, and the commissars of the "Alpenvorland" Operational Zone and Istria. The Commander of the Army Group in his capacity of Supreme Commander of the Italian Theatre of War could issue orders to the other organisations named only in the event of a large-scale landing or in circumstances of the greatest danger. Otherwise he was to all intents and purposes no more than primus inter pares (first among equals).

The Winter Line

The construction of the winter line by the Bessell special pioneer HQ. was planned with foresight, well-directed and, in general, satisfactorily carried out and completed. The TENTH Army won the time that was necessary for its construction by fighting a delaying action forward of the B-line. It was realised that it would not be possible to gain more time. The loss of too great a fighting strength by troops forward of this line had to be avoided at all costs as they would have to hold this defence line for a considerable time.

For a year, since El Alamein, German troops had been continuously on the retreat. Often they were ordered to defend. But always, sooner or later, such an order was followed by new withdrawing movements. Under these circumstances, would the German troops now take the order to defend the B-line seriously and would they really try to obey it? That was the great, puzzling question facing the German command in Italy. But in this it was not disappointed by the divisions of the TENTH Army. It was no doubt a considerable achievement on the part of the divisional and regimental commanders to have convinced their troops of the military necessity of holding the enemy back at this point. It shows that they had their divisions well in hand. Without this inner conviction the troops would never have held on to this line for so long.

Apart from this, the change-over to defence necessitated the complete reversal of the tactics employed hitherto. The tactics of defence, particularly in regard to the use of heavy weapons and artillery, were quite different from the tactics involved in a delaying action. The troops adapted themselves surprisingly quickly to the new requirements. This applies to all arms, not least of all the artillery. The latter again became accustomed to close co-ordinated operations and to the rapid switching of the fire of numerous batteries from one target to another. In this way it played an important part in the smashing of many attacks. Defence necessitated the increased utilization of corps artillery commanders and higher artillery commanders who in the preceding period had had little to do. To increase fire-power, the Army Group issued the artillery regiments with large numbers of Italian guns for the creation of special defence batteries.

Mountain warfare made a change in tactics necessary, especially for the infantry. Training designed to increase the use made of light infantry weapons, of rifles and of machine guns and the training of snipers, etc., was vigorously carried out. These efforts proved successful as the

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expenditure of rifle and MG ammunition which so far had been infinitesimal, now increased very appreciably.

The inequality of the opposing forces has been described. Not only was the number of the German divisions smaller but their fighting strength, division for division, was much lower than the American and British forces. This was caused not merely by the smaller number of battalions but also by the fact that they were equipped with fewer guns. The establishment of 44th Infantry division (12,000 men) was 25% less than that of 39th Infantry division (16,000 men). The actual strength was, of course, even less. It averaged between 10,000 and 11,000 men. Thus by earlier standards, the German infantry divisions of 1944 did not have much more than the fighting strength of a brigade. In autumn 1943 their artillery regiments had only two light and one heavy batteries each. The third light battery was not formed in the regiments until late autumn 1943. Though the supply of trained personnel was not entirely adequate for all the services, it was nevertheless considerably better than on the Eastern Front or later, after the invasion, in the West. In any case, it was possible to avoid the complete exhaustion of the divisions in Italy until early in the summer of 1944. To this extent the attitude of the Army Group to the question of the replacement of personnel differs slightly from that described in Chapter 6. The tank inferiority was urgent, especially as the TENTH Army had no Army tank battalions (Abteilungen) or regiments (that is, armoured troops) available, apart from the units of the Panzer Divisions, with which to provide close support to the infantry.

The constant lack of forces necessarily caused a corresponding scarcity of reserves. Whenever, in spite of everything, new danger points were recognised it was somehow always contrived for at least small reserves to be sent to them. This was an achievement of the command which deserves special mention.

The statement made in Chapter 6 to the effect that the allied air forces ought to have achieved more by their attacks in the forward areas and especially against road traffic, needs only to be emphasised. In the writer's view, this statement can be applied to the entire Italian campaign.

In short, from the Army Group's standpoint, it may be stated that the TENTH Army fulfilled its task of maintaining defensive warfare in the area south of Rome in spite of all the difficulties it encountered.

The Sangro Battle

Only 65th Infantry division was available on the left flank of the TENTH Army on the Sangro. Field Marshal Kesselring and the writer were with the division on the day before the attack. The ranging fire of British artillery reinforcements and the exceptionally lively fighter-bomber activity were clear indications of the events to follow. The divisional commander, who on the very next day was to sustain serious wounds and lose an arm, reported: 65th Infantry division is expecting a large-scale enemy attack. The division, newly reformed after the battles of Stalingrad and not yet battle-tested, was very confident. It had not yet seen any action on the battle-field nor experienced the effective fire-power and the obstructive, concentrated effect of the enemy's artillery and air force. The British method of attack, knocking out battalion after battalion by concentrated artillery fire and air bombardment, was as simple as it was successful. By the evening of the second day of the attack the division to all intents and purposes no longer existed.

26th Panzer division appeared as soon as was possible to give support. 90th Panzer Grenadier Division could not go into position behind the Sangro front earlier because it did not come under the Army Group until 21 November 1943.

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Therefore it was impossible, as was suggested in Chapter 6, for this division to be already in position behind the front by 10 November. Further delays were caused by loss of time on the march and the incompetence of the leading regimental commander. Nor was the divisional commander equal to the demands of the battle. Thus immediate changes had to be made in both commands.

Until the arrival of 26th and 90th Divisions the way to the north was completely open to the British army. For the time being there was nothing that could have held up the British EIGHTH Army. 90th Panzer Grenadier division which was hurrying to the scene, could not restore the situation without support from what had hitherto been the adjoining front. It would have been simple for the enemy to have destroyed the division while it was still on the march. The EIGHTH Army did not use this chance. Thus the serious crisis on the Adriatic was overcome relatively quickly.

In the course of the later fighting for Ortona, the town was evacuated on the express order of the Army Group to spare unnecessary losses, though the situation there did not compel the Germans to do so.

OKW Contemplate Offensive Action

After the TENTH Army front had become stabilized and the crisis on the Sangro overcome, OKW began to contemplate launching an attack. The high command wanted to take advantage of the winter months, when conditions would be unfavourable for enemy air operations, to gain the initiative at least for the time being. Prompting these considerations was the fact that - as previously forewarned by C. in C. South - the operations of enemy aircraft from the large air base at Foggia against targets in southern Germany were already beginning to make themselves felt. At the beginning of December 1943, therefore, OKW ordered theoretical preliminary plans to be made for an attack on the Adriatic coast aimed at retaking the Foggia area. As far as can be remembered in detail, the Army Group demanded the following reinforcements as the prerequisite for an operation of this nature, desirable as it was:

- 3 - 4 Panzer or Panzer Grenadier divisions,
- 2 mountain divisions,
- 1 anti-aircraft division,
- 1 ground attack Geschwader, and
- 2 - 3 fighter Geschwader.

As it was not possible for the time being to make these forces available either from the East Front or from the West Front, the attack never went beyond the preparation of various theoretical plans on paper.

OKW contemplates releasing forces for the West Front

At the beginning of 1944, even before the Nettuno landing, OKW notified the Army Group that it must be prepared to release several divisions at an early date in favour of the Western Front. In face of the enemy invasion expected in the spring of 1944, there was not only a numerical shortage of forces in France, but above all, a lack of battle-trained divisions. Consequently, the gradual withdrawal of the following divisions and their transfer to the West without being replaced in Italy, was under consideration: 3rd, 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier divisions, 26th Panzer Division and 1st Paratroop Division. According to this proposal, only two mobile formations - 15th Panzer Grenadier division and the "Hermann Goering" Airborne Panzer Division would have been left to the Army Group.

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The Army Group's view was as follows: the precedence of the Western before the Italian theatre of war was fully appreciated. If these five divisions were necessary to the West, they would, of course, have to be given up. But these five divisions represented the elite of the Army Group's formations. Without them, it would be impossible to carry on as hitherto; they were always employed at the crucial points in battles. The task of the Army Group would therefore need to be revised. Its new task could not extend in scope beyond a delaying action in front of the Apennines. Owing to their great extent, the Apennines themselves could not be held by the remaining forces of the Army Group.

OKW replied that there could be no question of changing the task of the Army Group. The latter could only answer that in that case they could not be responsible for the consequences of releasing these forces. The landing at Nettuno brought these deliberations of the high command to an end. Instead of being reinforced, the Western Front had itself to contribute forces to support the Nettuno front.

The battles of the TENTH Army in January

Regarding the transfer of 1 Paratroop Corps and 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier divisions from the Rome area to the TENTH Army front at Ausonia, and the consequence of this re-arrangement, attention is drawn to the author's treatment of this subject in Chapter 13.

The Battles for Cassino

Only two points need to be emphasised from the Army Group's standpoint:

- 1) The outstanding performance of 90th Panzer Grenadier division and 1st Paratroop division in these battles. Their tenacity in the three battles for Cassino was largely responsible for the defensive successes achieved.
- 2) The strong German effort to protect the world-famous Monastery of Cassino, regardless of tactical disadvantages. On the personal order of Field Marshal Kesselring, even the slopes of Monte Cassino were closed by military police to prevent all troops from entering.

The Situation before the Allied offensive in May 1944

Attention is drawn to the author's treatment of this in Part II, Chapter 1.

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