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LIAISON ACTIVITIES WITH ITALIAN 6TH ARMY -
A POST-WAR STUDY BY GENERAL VON SENER UND ETTERLIN,
WITH COMMENTS BY GENERALS HALDER AND MUELLER-HILLEBRAND

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Burkhart Mueller-Hillebrand

Generalmajor (retired)

Views on Liaison Activities with the Italian Sixth Army

Before any objective opinion could be expressed on the author's statements concerning the campaign in Sicily, it would be necessary first to study in detail all available sources of information. The work to hand is based on the contemporary War Diary of the "German Liaison Officer to the Italian Sixth Army" and, when compared to the other contributions written down from memory on the operations in Sicily is therefore deserving of quite exceptional importance. Moreover, the author's person provides a guarantee that his appraisals of events and people have been subject to careful consideration. This work is a particularly valuable source for historical research into the German side of the Italian campaign.

At the same time the author makes generalised assessments beyond the sphere of his actual experience and to some extent these cannot remain undisputed.

The underestimation of the difficulties involved in defensive operations against landings (part 7) may be attributed less to the German command's thinking "exclusively in terms of land-based operations" than to the progressive spreading of Hitler's way of thinking and the era of National Socialism which, as the author himself mentions on page 27 was inclined to see things as it wished them to be rather than as they really were.

The disintegration and dissipation of the German concept of command took effect particularly rapidly in OKW (Supreme Command, Armed Forces) theatres of operations, which were more exposed to Hitler's direct influence than the OKH (Supreme Command, Army) theatre (Russia). At the same time the Army as a whole was certainly not affected to the extent assumed by the author, whose experience does not include the Eastern theatre of operations (OKH theatre). The disintegration of the concept of command came about on the one hand with a progressive suppression of individual freedom of thought and on the other with the increasing practice of replacing proven leaders with officers to whom readiness to conform and rigid military character were of greater importance than actual ability. I am in agreement with the statements regarding the findings made during Axis operations in Italy and with the subsequent conclusions concerning Germany's present situation and the importance of the Mediterranean area (parts 8 & 9). However, I cannot agree with the generalised view on page 36 that to all intents and purposes the era of rapid military decisions has necessarily vanished and that the establishment of long unbroken front lines is inevitable. The fact that this situation arose again during the last war even in Russia must be assessed as plainly indicative of the decline in the art of exercising military command. It must be admitted that this decline is indeed characteristic of the present time, in which the outpaced human mind has not yet regained control over the rapidly developing field of technology.

B. Mueller-Hillebrand

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Franz Halder

Koenigstein (Taunns)

Generaloberst (retired)

24 November 1951

Views on "Liaison Activities with the Italian Sixth Army"

The contribution to the history of the campaign in Sicily contained in the first six parts of the study is particularly valuable owing to the fact that the references to the course of events as regards both time and place - in so far as they were seen from the German point of view - are based on the official War Diary entries made during the operations. Moreover, the description of the way in which those in authority in this area (German C-in-C South, C-in-C Italian Sixth Army etc.) influenced the course of events is drawn from the author's personal observations. However, in assessing the influence which was exerted on the commanders in this area by their superior authorities (German OKW and Italian Comando Supremo) the author enters a sphere in which - apart from a brief acquaintance with OKW prior to taking up his appointment in Sicily - he cannot call upon actual experience and is therefore obliged to fall back on his own personal assumptions.

The author himself stresses in his preamble that the main substance of what he has to say is to be found in the above-mentioned first six parts and to these indeed he would have done well to have confined himself. The parts which follow descend to the level of generalised observations which the author is clearly not equipped to make. He is not aware that his sober assessment of the limited possibilities of a rigid coastal defence, which he regarded as a new revelation, had been put to Hitler in precise and clearly-defined terms by the Army General Staff as early as in 1942 on the occasion of the initial conferences concerning the Atlantic Wall plan. He also does not know that the dangers of a rigid coastal defence has also been strongly emphasised by Field Marshal von Rundstedt long before the events in Sicily. The author's claim regarding the Army Command's inability to assess these matters objectively is therefore an exaggeration and a generalisation which is invalid from the historical standpoint.

This also applies to his observations regarding the inadequate consideration given to political and psychological factors in the making of strategic decisions. The decisions which the great majority of military commanders were called upon to make were never strategic; at the most they were only of a local tactical nature in which with just title the factors of the ground battle played the leading role. Here also therefore the author's criticism is misguided if it is directed against the Army leadership in general and it would only be pertinent if it were made against Hitler himself and the advisers whose minds he dominated.

The author's remarks concerning future warfare without battle (p. 36) are so vague that it is not possible to express an objective opinion on them and with his final observation regarding the importance of the Middle East and the Mediterranean area in the event of a war with the Soviet Union he is carrying coals to Newcastle.

Franz Halder

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The Battle for Sicily

Preamble

This narrative is based on the author's activities as German Liaison Officer to Army H.Q. Staff, Italian Sixth Army from 26 June until 8 August 1943. In the capacity of "Wehrmacht commander" of German forces in Sicily, the author was at the same time indirectly responsible to OKW for the conduct of operations between 26 June and 17 July 1943, when the 14th Panzerkorps took command of German forces. The following account is therefore centred on the initial phase following the landing, that is to say on the decisive week of 10-17 July 1943.

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1. Hitler's Instructions to General von Senger at the
Fuehrer's HQ at the Obersalzberg on 22 June 1943

Hitler received me at his HQ on 22 June while attending the situation conference which took place there daily and at which Field Marshal Keitel, General Warlimont and a number of adjutants were also present. As far as I remember, General Jodl was also present, but he remained silent during the proceedings and did not speak to me individually afterwards.

The task set by Hitler was lacking in precision. He embarked upon the subject of the defensive potentialities of Sicily and, as usual, displayed a remarkable knowledge of numerous details. He enlarged upon the possibility of defending the island even in the absence of Italian military support with the aid of the two divisions which were either en route to or being formed up in Sicily, thus relying on them and the 30,000 men also stationed on the island comprising formations such as ~~Artillery~~ ~~Luftwaffe~~ ground organisation and supply services etc.

Hitler believed that a collapse in Italy was imminent and attributed this development to the "machinations of the court, persons in high places, the General Staff, etc."

He also expanded on the subject of the strategy pursued by the Allies who, "by neglecting to leap-frog over to Sicily immediately after the landing in North Africa had already lost the Mediterranean campaign".

Afterwards, General Warlimont spoke to me alone during breakfast at his quarters. He gave me a clearly-defined assessment of the situation and added that the best way of solving the task with which I had been assigned would be to evacuate the bulk of the forces stationed in Sicily to the mainland in the event of an enemy attack in force. Moreover, he admitted that there was little prospect of transferring most of the equipment to the mainland. This appreciation and assignment were, it is true, revised versions of those of Hitler, but they were certainly not given without the latter's silent assent.

On 22 June Field Marshal Keitel spoke to me privately at the Obersalzberg after the general discussion of the situation had finished. He had been informed of local conditions in Sicily by General Hube, who was stationed in Italy, and evidently entertained as little hope of a successful defence as did General Warlimont. He too however, was of the opinion - which was later confirmed by events - that the limited German forces available could not be concentrated as a mobile reserve in the interior or eastern sector of the island as it would not be possible for movements to be carried out by day owing to the extent of enemy air superiority and the state of the mountain roads.

2. The Discussions in Rome with Field Marshal Kesselring
and Field Marshal von Richthofen on 25 June 1943

The discussions with Field Marshal Kesselring on 25 June were held on a different note to those at the Obersalzberg.

Field Marshal Kesselring was originally in the Army General Staff, but soon after its formation he transferred to the Luftwaffe and had eventually commanded Luftflotte 2 in the Mediterranean area, where he had acquired considerable distinction. A large number of officers serving in Africa (among them the later General von Bonin) criticised Kesselring's over-optimistic assessment of situations as a result of which the influence of Rommel, who was in a better position to formulate an appreciation, was unduly restricted. I found that this viewpoint was valid in as much as Kesselring evidently judged the possibility of a successful defence of Sicily far too favourably.

In contrast to the clearly-defined appreciation of defensive possibilities given by General Warlimont at OKW, Kesselring was apparently thinking in terms of the successful defence at Dieppe in 1942. In the case of landings in

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particular German commanders of land forces were generally inclined to underestimate the prospects of an enemy who enjoyed superiority at sea and in the air, even though he must invariably possess the element of a higher degree of surprise and mobility. To the same extent as the majority of optimistic German commanders, Kesselring was unwilling to regard the invasion of North Africa as the first example of a landing operation organised on a large scale, as a result of which the war had entered a new phase. These persons were not prepared to appreciate this danger and drew comfort from the fact that the landings in North Africa had been carried out against an enemy who had decided not to oppose them.

Field Marshal Kesselring maintained his over-optimistic assessment of the situation throughout the Italian campaign - or at least he pretended to do so - even with a senior officer such as myself in whom he had gradually come to place so much confidence. This factor always made it extremely difficult to discuss any given situation objectively with him.

On the other hand I found that Field Marshal Kesselring's attitude towards our Italian ally was much more acceptable to me than had been the case with OKW and particularly with Hitler himself. Kesselring had recognised that however the Italians might act in the event of a landing, it would be impossible for the Germans to fight two enemies simultaneously, that is to say both the Allies and our former Axis partner, and he was therefore in favour of co-operation with the latter. Moreover, there was no political or military alternative since the alliance still existed and the governments concerned had expressly agreed that in the event of defensive operations on the Italian mainland and offshore islands the exercise of command would be the sole prerogative of the Italian authorities. Kesselring, who was better informed than OKW in this respect, had also perceived that any attempt to direct operations over the heads of the Italian authorities could not fail to have disastrous results. As may be gathered from his summing-up of "The Battle for Sicily", he had also recognised that he had in fact exercised no more authority in this action than a liaison officer whom he had seconded to an Italian Army HQ. In this respect the discussion with the Field Marshal over my assignments was entirely satisfactory.

There was little that was positive in my discussion with the C. in C. of Luftflotte 2, Field Marshal von Richthofen. Characteristically, this did not take place in the presence of Field Marshal Kesselring; instead, Richthofen spoke to me alone and expressed views which indicated that, as had so often been the case in the German Armed Forces, the Luftwaffe was once again playing a lone hand. Field Marshal von Richthofen's assessment of the situation was that the enemy would probably attempt to land in Sardinia rather than in Sicily and he had accordingly transferred his main air defence effort to the former island.

This viewpoint of Richthofen's was by no means irrational. Later, in his memoirs, also Marshal Badoglio stated that in his opinion it would have been more correct strategically to have attacked Sardinia rather than Sicily. Nevertheless the divergency between the C-in-C's concerned which was revealed in this discussion remained a regrettable factor - a divergency which is, moreover, manifest from Field Marshal Kesselring's observations on the battle for Sicily.

3. The Discussions at Enna, Sicily, between Field Marshal Kesselring, General Guzzoni and General von Senger on 26 June 1943

On 26 June all matters pertinent to the conduct of operations in the event of a landing in Sicily were discussed at Italian Sixth Army HQ at Enna by General Guzzoni, C-in-C Italian Sixth Army, Field Marshal Kesselring, with whom I had arrived, and myself.

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Field Marshal Kesselring's role in this discussion consisted primarily in making tactful advisory interjections, since the exercise of command by the Italian C-in-C, General Guzzoni, had of course been agreed by the two Axis governments and, moreover, Field Marshal Kesselring - in contrast to Hitler - was of the opinion that in the event of an Italian defection as a result of undue pressure, the prospects of a defence being conducted with the limited German forces available would reach their lowest ebb.

However, with regard to their assessments of the situation, there existed a difference of opinion between the two commanders which could only be bridged superficially. Field Marshal Kesselring's appreciation of the situation was based on his personal outlook which, as has already been mentioned, was optimistic or, as he believed, at least gave that impression, whereas General Guzzoni made painstaking efforts to conceal his more pessimistic assessment. In view of the actual ratio of opposing forces, this scepticism was fully justified, when regarded in retrospect, as will be established later.

As far, however, as the employment of German formations was concerned, General Guzzoni was inclined to give way to Field Marshal Kesselring's wishes even against his better judgment, as he regarded the German divisions as the backbone of his force and because he was aware that after all that had happened in Africa opposition on this point would be to no purpose and would only lead to such difficulties in the exercise of command that the maintenance of overall Italian authority would be illusory from the outset.

As a result of this reluctant compliance, Field Marshal Kesselring reached a decision which both General Guzzoni and I considered to be wrong and in respect of which it cannot even be definitely stated that Field Marshal Kesselring himself regarded it as correct, for his hands were also tied. The commander of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, who was also present, regarded Kesselring's decision as incorrect, although he was probably influenced by factors concerning the interests of his division as well as by objective considerations.

General Guzzoni had in mind a plan to concentrate the two available German divisions in the eastern sector of the island as his most mobile and powerful reserve. This plan was based on his intention of carrying out a delaying action with the weak Italian Napoli and Livorno divisions and then launching both German divisions in a concentrated counter-attack against the enemy wherever such action promised the greatest prospects of success.

From the German point of view there were two considerations to be raised against conducting operations along these lines. The first was based on the theory that an enemy landing should be driven off with concentrated fire power during its most vulnerable phase, that is to say while the landing craft were still at sea. This theory arose from the realisation - in itself correct - that in view of their inferiority the Axis forces would not be capable of pushing the enemy back into the sea if landings were made at a number of points. On the other hand, however, this principle automatically precluded the conduct of operations on a mobile basis and exposed any formations employed directly on the coast to the devastating fire of the enemy's naval artillery, against which the Axis nations were powerless owing to their lack of naval and air forces. The other factor against concentrating the German divisions too heavily as far inland as Caltanissetta was that in the absence of cover on the narrow mountain roads they would be exposed to such heavy air attacks that movement by day would not be possible.

On this occasion the discord which was later to prevent the unified direction of operations in the Normandy landings was heralded in different terms, a discord which was not to be reconciled and sealed the fate of the defenders from the outset. The choice was either to conduct a rigid coastal defence contrary to all the principles of the art of warfare and incurring the possibility of annihilation by the enemy's naval artillery or to hold back the main reserve which, however, would doubtless be too weak to push the enemy back into the sea once he had secured a foothold at a number of points and had come through the critical landing phase.

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In face of such considerations the compromise desired by Field Marshal Kesselring was reached.

Contrary to the wishes of General Guzzoni, Field Marshal Kesselring arranged for the two German divisions to be assembled separately, one in the eastern and the other in the western sector of the island, where they would constitute the most powerful mobile reserves available. Accordingly, 15th Panzer Grenadier Division was transferred to the Salemi area in gradual stages while the Hermann Goering Parachute Division, which was still in the process of being transported to Sicily, was assembled in the Caltagirone area. (Other versions are incorrect.)

I agreed with Field Marshal Kesselring's views in his study on the Sicilian campaign that in the event of their being attacked first it was necessary to prevent the Axis forces in the eastern sector from being outflanked by other (enemy) forces assembled in the western sector. After studying the campaign and the contributions of other German commanders I cannot agree even now with Field Marshal Montgomery's opinion that the defeat of the Axis forces on Sicily was brought about as a result of their being dispersed. Moreover, the later course of events proved that in addition to landing superior forces on the south-eastern tip of the island the enemy was very much in a position to put forces of practically the same strength ashore simultaneously in the western sector. A thrust along the northern coast from the western sector could not have failed to lead to the destruction of the forces engaged on the south-eastern tip of the island.

However, that part of Field Marshal Kesselring's decision which seemed open to criticism was the actual selection of the divisions for the two separate assignments.

15th Panzer Grenadier Division had been on the island for some time and had become thoroughly acquainted with the local conditions and population. It had organised coastal patrols and its infantry and armoured strength was at least sufficient to enable a delaying action to be carried out with some prospects of success. As long as it had been on its own, the division had concentrated the bulk of its 3 regiments each comprising 3 battalions in the eastern sector and had detached a regimental group to provide the above-mentioned indispensable flank protection in the west. These measures were in accordance with the situation and German principles of strategy and the divisional commander was a proven leader with General Staff training. Thus, the main task, that is to say defensive operations in the eastern sector of the island, should have been assigned to this division.

In contrast, considerable deficiencies were apparent in the leadership and composition of the Hermann Goering Division. In the first place it possessed absolutely no infantry of any appreciable strength, disposing of only two battalions in addition to the armoured troop-carrying battalion. Whether additional battalions were being formed or were en route could not be ascertained. Admittedly, the division possessed an armoured regiment but the Tiger company, which was stationed on the island as an army unit, had already been associated with 15th Panzer Grenadier Division for some time both tactically and as regards supply - an additional factor in favour of leaving the latter division in the eastern sector. However, the deficiencies in the division's leadership, of which the superior authorities had no clear conception at that time, were even more serious. As Field Marshal Kesselring himself remarks in his study, the divisional commander had "too little experience of operations by modern mixed arms". Apparently, as a former police officer, he had not received training such as to satisfy the other Army requirements for this task. Immediately after operations commenced it was necessary to replace his two regimental commanders who were most essential to the action since they were incapable of exercising command, the infantry regiment commander being relieved by the divisional commander himself and the Panzer regiment commander by myself. Similar failings became evident among other ranks. In contrast to this weakness in its leadership, the division enjoyed considerable prestige everywhere and especially with our Italian allies, a factor which might well be attributed to its name and the reputation established during the war by the paratroop arm, to which the division, in accordance with its name, professed to belong. In fact the

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division had nothing to do with the paratroop arm and, as far as I know, was formed from the A/A artillery which was also part of the Luftwaffe. However excellent its achievements in its own specialised field, this arm was nevertheless quite incapable of training leaders for such a difficult operation as a landing action.

In these circumstances it must be concluded that the entrusting of the Herman Goering Division with the more important task of defending the eastern sector of the island was a mistake, the magnitude of which was not fully appreciated by anybody at the time as nobody had been fully informed of the standard of the division's personnel. That with such action a serious blunder had been committed all clear thinking authorities concerned were well aware, knowing, as they did, that the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division's experience on the island was more extensive, that it possessed a stronger force of the indispensable infantry and that it had had a longer association with the Tiger Company, whose importance was furthermore overrated at that time.

Whether a direct order from ~~Reichsmarschall~~ Hermann Goering was involved - as is maintained by the commander of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, General Rodt, who took part in the discussion - or whether Field Marshal Kesselring believed that he was obliged to comply solely with the wishes of his Luftwaffe superiors cannot be determined as these matters were dealt with behind the scenes. It is however certain that this decision exemplified what General Westphal, who was then Chief of Staff of Army Group "South-West, later portrayed in his book "Army in Chains", namely that this was a decision which was reached on the basis of personal rather than objective considerations and which all of the senior officers concerned were probably powerless to prevent. Had the newly-formed Hermann Goering Division been a normal Army division the standard of its personnel would doubtless have been higher but not even then should it have been assigned the more difficult task in preference to the more established division.

The decision thus reached had become even more controversial owing to the fact it was necessary to redress the Hermann Goering Division's glaring lack of infantry by detaching a regimental group of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division to the Catania area, where it was placed under command of the former division's Gruppe Schmalz.

4. The Discussions at Enna between Field Marshal Kesselring, General Guzzoni and General von Senger on 12 July

On 12 July Field Marshal Kesselring appeared at Italian Sixth Army HQ at Enna. The "landing battle" was in its third day and he had two reasons for undertaking this flight. During these three critical days he had been supplied with only very inadequate information. As his liaison officer at HQ Italian Sixth Army, I had at my disposal only one or two wireless stations which had been lent by units and with which it was not possible to reach Rome. Instead, these stations were for the most part fully occupied in transmitting orders to German units during the landing action. However, C-in-C South (the designation C-in-C "South" still applied at that time) was in constant touch by telephone with the so-called II Fliegerkorps (General Buelowius) which was based on the east coast of the island and, although it no longer possessed any aircraft strength, still had at its disposal the extensive signals network with which it had operated while its squadrons were still stationed in Sicily to protect the sea routes to North Africa. This Fliegerkorps put about alarming reports which it happened to receive in a somewhat indiscriminate manner and without being in a position to check their accuracy. Thus, C-in-C South, who was apparently no longer receiving information from Comando Supremo either, was unable to assess the situation although he had nevertheless been made responsible for the conduct of operations on Sicily by OKW.

However, apart from this technical deficiency, Kesselring's decision to fly to Sicily was also prompted by his profound disappointment at the way in which operations were shaping. Not only had Field Marshal Kesselring approached this task with his usual glowing optimism, but he had also started under the illusion that an enemy force which had just landed would be so weak that it could

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easily be defeated if the island's defence forces appeared on the scene promptly. His conception of the nature of such actions becomes evident in the following passage in his study on the Sicilian campaign:- "In conclusion I say that the German (GHQ) troops had their marching orders in their pockets and knew what they had to do."

What had in fact happened and what was there to report to the Field Marshal at this discussion on the situation?

The landing on 10 July did not come as a surprise, as may be observed from the following extracts from the diary of the German Liaison Staff to the Italian Sixth Army:

9 July, 1820 hours: Signal received from II Fliegerkorps, according to which six convoys comprising 150 - 200 vessels are active in the sea area north of Malta and Gozo.

2005 hours: Signal from C-in-C South: 150 landing craft north of Malta on northerly course at 1630 hours.

2315 hours: Chief of Staff Italian Sixth Army to General von Senger: Italians expect dawn attack against Catania and Gela.

At 0500 hours on 10 July the first reports were received of landings by paratroops in the Comiso and S. Pietro areas and between Caltagirone and the coast. Landings were also made at Augusta by enemy troop-carrying gliders. The Hermann Goering Division reported that the enemy was disembarking from 20 transports at Gela.

According to the German Liaison Staff War Diary the situation had developed as follows at 1000 hours:

"Enemy infantry and a few tanks landed at Gela and are being supported by disembarkations from 20 - 30 vessels. The bulk of the Hermann Goering division is attacking this force on a front from Nescemi to Biscari. Paratroops are being engaged in places in the area around Caltagirone. HQ Italian Sixth Army fears that pressure on Syracuse and Augusta will be intensified. Kampfgruppe Schmalz will remain in reserve north-west of Catania to cover the Catania plain. As yet there have been no incidents in the western sector of the island."

At 1425 the following entry was made in the War Diary:

"The enemy has landed at numerous points between Syracuse and Licata. Centres of main effort have developed at Avola and Gela. The Hermann Goering Division is in action in the Gela area, but detailed reports are not yet available. Kampfgruppe Schmalz is being moved southward in the direction of Scordia - Lentini, 15th Panzer Grenadier Division is being moved up into the area east of Enna. Livorno Division has been ordered to attack in the direction of Gela."

On this day the Hermann Goering Division had indeed attacked according to plan, but had not succeeded in throwing the enemy back into the sea. This was due both to the paratroops who had landed in their attack zone and who, although they did not succeed in operating as a cohesive force anywhere, were nevertheless able to carry out considerable harassing activity, as well as to the terrain, which was terraced and interspersed with olive trees, thus making tank movements so difficult that neither side could consider the employment of armour in force.

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Mention has already been made both by Field Marshal Kesselring and earlier in this work by myself that there also existed considerable deficiencies in the Hermann Goering Division's leadership, which originated in the composition of the division's personnel and its lack of experience in the field of land warfare.

(Notably enough the dates in a report by the divisional operations officer, Oberstleutnant Bergengruen, were rubbed out for this reason. He transferred the date of the landing to 11 July because the division did not actually go into action until this day.)

On the evening of this day the following entry in the War Diary indicates the situation as it appeared at HQ Italian Sixth Army:

"10 July, 2345 hours: The enemy has advanced through Licata about 10 km along the road to the north. In the Gela area the enemy is in possession of all heights within a radius of 6 km. In the south-eastern area of the island enemy landing forces have not advanced beyond the coastal sector. According to findings made personally by General von Senger at 1800 hours, the Gela - Vittoria road had already been reached by the Hermann Goering Division during the morning in face of frontal defence and fire by heavy naval artillery, the Panzer group advancing south of Niscemi and the Grenadier group west of Biscari. Enemy paratroopers are being engaged between the two groups. After mopping up the intermediate area, both groups of the division will attack in a south-westerly direction to retake Gela and the coastal sector on the morning of 11 July at the latest."

As soon as became evident that the landing was being developed, that is to say towards noon on this day, the C-in-C Italian Sixth Army, after consultation with myself, decided to bring up again 15th Panzer Grenadier Division from the west. Admittedly, a deliberate risk was taken with this action, but this bringing forward of the formation was appropriate to the situation and in accordance the overall assessment of C-in-C Italian Sixth Army, with which I agreed and which will be referred to again at the conclusion of these memoirs.

The War Diary continues:

10 July, 1425 hours: "15th Panzer Grenadier Division will be moved up into the area east of Enna.

1821 hours: A warning against the complete removal of all German troops from the western sector of the island is given in a signal from C-in-C South.

2345 hours: C-in-C Italian Sixth Army considers himself unable to depart from his decision that 15th Panzer Grenadier Division must be brought up into the central sector. Accordingly, this formation has begun to move into the area around Caltanissetta - Barrafranda - Piazza Armerina Valguarnera."

On the basis of these records, Field Marshal Kesselring's opinion that 15th Panzer Grenadier Division was brought up too late cannot possibly be correct. Moreover, General Guzzoni and I insisted on this move by the division despite C-in-C South's objections from Rome and, as far as I remember, Field Marshal Kesselring continued in the spirit of this signal by objecting to a complete withdrawal of troops from the western sector of the island in the discussion of 12 July. He had probably considered leaving part of the division in the western sector, but he accepted the decision once it had been made, especially when the following developments in the situation occurred on 11 July:

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War Diary:

11 July, 0905 hours: "Report to C-in-C South to the effect that the Hermann Goering Division attacked at 0715 hours and has reached a point 6 km north-east of Gela with its right flank at Tenda."

As a result of these reports C-in-C South again began to believe that if a sharp attack were made the enemy might still be beaten, at least at Gela, and that success might also result from bringing up 15th Panzer Grenadier Division for a concerted attack by both German divisions on the flank of the enemy, who was advancing northwards from the south-eastern tip of the island. As may be gathered from reports by General Rodt, the commander of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, and Oberstleutnant Bergengruen, the operations officer of the Hermann Goering Division, the commanders of both divisions were also considering this plan - a plan which was in conformity with German traditions of leadership with their consistent inclination towards offensive action. The only construction which could be placed on C-in-C South's signals was that he was in no way agreeable to the front being moved back and, moreover, that he expected the Hermann Goering Division's attack, which appeared to be making favourable progress, to be continued and that above all else Comiso airfield would be held. This latter requirement seemed all the more understandable in view of the German command's justifiable apprehension that, once the first airfields were reached, the enemy's air superiority would soon become so oppressive that the movement of German troops by day would be possible only on a restricted scale.

In the meantime the critical situation was being brought to a head by events on other sectors of the front. Oberstleutnant Bergengruen's assessment of the situation is correct in that Italian troops took no part at all in the Hermann Goering Division's counter-attack and that the division had consequently become involved in a difficult situation in its attack against enemy forces east of Gela, both flanks being exposed instead of having contact on the right and left.

It had become quite clear that the Italian Sixth Army command's appreciation of the prospects of this action differed from that of C-in-C South and the official OKW assessment in that the forces available were much too weak for an offensive against two Armies which had succeeded in landing. Moreover, this view corresponded with that held by General Warlimont of OKW as it has already been stated in the description of his discussion with me on 22 June.

The Italian command was aware from the outset that, wherever it occurred, a thrust by the German divisions alone would hardly push the enemy back into the sea along the entire 160 kilometres of the front. This theory necessarily led to plans for evacuation and this in turn resulted in the early occupation of the so-called Etna position in which the Axis forces, operating in a very much smaller area, would be able to defend themselves and carry out their withdrawal across the Straits of Messina behind a system of defence lines. This plan, which was very much more in line with the actual situation than the orders to attack which were given by C-in-C South and probably officially issued by Hitler's OKW, was thus more legitimate than all the plans to continue fighting in the southern sector of the island, which exposed the German forces to the threat of annihilation if the enemy landed on the northern coast or if naval forces penetrated the Straits of Messina. Reports that the enemy was naturally gaining ground northwards at other points along the extended front during the morning gave this assessment of the situation fresh confirmation.

The War Diary contains the following situation report supplied to C-in-C South at 1315 hours on 11 July:

"The enemy has advanced to Naro and has again reached Campobello. There are no further enemy reinforcements at Gela, but the enemy is pressing forward from the south into the Ragusa area. Strong enemy pressure is being exerted from the south-east, where Noto has fallen. According to Italian opinion, German

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forces in the south-eastern sector of the island have been gradually used up. For this reason and in order to clear the area north-east of Vittoria of paratroops, General Guzzoni has issued orders for the Hermann Goering Division to break off its attack and move into the area south-east of Caltagirone."

According to the War Diary, the Hermann Goering Division made the following report at 1610 hours:

"Attack being made according to plan with one battalion of the left group. The area between the Acate river and the lake to the north has been reached. Flank protection is being provided by a reinforced battalion to the south-east from Point 60 to the road fork 8 km south of Biscara. The enemy is in some strength in the Vittoria - Comiso area and appears to be turning off to the east."

As the Hermann Goering Division report reproduced here made the division's situation appear to be generally more favourable than was indicated by its slow progress so far, I returned to this front to form my own impressions. I verified the situation report and instructed the division to exploit the advantage which it had gained by advancing eastwards in the direction of Comiso. In this way I hoped at best to cut off enemy forces further to the east which had advanced northwards and at least to facilitate the intention of breaking away from the enemy, of which I was aware, by a thrust eastwards in the direction of the threatened flank. The favourable nature of the local situation seemed to invite this action as the division was not attached in its extended forward echelon formation and the enemy had disengaged at this point as a result of the division's counter-attack.

I issued these instructions not only in the light of the local situation but also by reason of repeated signals from C-in-C South and, although they clashed with HQ Sixth Army's plans, General Guzzoni disregarded objections and accepted them in the morning.

However, any such offensive action by the Hermann Goering Division had in fact already been precluded on the same evening by developments in the situation.

The War Diary contains the following entry for 0020 hours on 12 July 1943:

"Italian 16th Corps informs HQ Sixth Army that elements of the Hermann Goering Division will not move into the specified Caltagirone area until the night of 13/14 July instead of on 12 July as had been planned. Italian Army HQ stresses the necessity of occupying this position tonight and requests support in carrying out this order. According to information obtained by Army, the Hermann Goering Division reconnaissance unit is engaging enemy armoured forces at Vizzini."

At 0110 hours the following situation report was recorded in the War Diary:

"Enemy forces attacking on the Naro - Campobello sector are being held in the area around Canicatti by Gruppe Fullriede (of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division) comprising elements of 129th and 382nd Grenadier Regiments. South-east of Gela the enemy has been pushed back into a confined coastal sector by the Hermann Goering Division's attack. The enemy carried out temporary embarkation, but was reinforced again towards evening. An enemy attack

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on the southern flank and rear of the division has taken Biscari and caused the left wing to be withdrawn northwards across the river Acate. Owing to the enemy's increasing strength, it was no longer possible to carry out the drive in the direction of Comiso initiated in the field by General von Senger at 1830 hours. German positions are being very effectively engaged by naval artillery.

North-West of Syracuse Gruppe Schmalz was forced to go over to the defensive on the Sortino Priolo line after encountering an attack by an enemy force in some strength with tanks. Small German forces are holding the heights north of Augusta, where the enemy has not yet appeared.

Plan: Herman Goering Division will attack in an easterly direction, while the Gruppe Schmalz front will be held. 15th Panzer Grenadier Division will stand by at the disposal of Army in the area south-east of Caltanissetta for commitment in the direction of either Canicatti or Syracuse according to the way in which the situation develops."

War Diary entry at 0350 hours on 12 July:

"Hermann Goering Division reports the following:

The Panzer Grenadier Regiment has been split into two groups. One of these has been reduced to remnants south of the Acate while the other is still in an operational state north of the river and intends to fight its way through to the Hermann Goering Panzer Regiment Group. Wireless contact is not available and it is therefore not impossible to attack Vittoria as the enemy is in considerable strength to the west of the town and is being continuously reinforced."

These extracts from the German Liaison Staff War Diary have been presented in detail as they formed the basis of the discussions with Field Marshal Kesselring and General Guzzoni when the former arrived at the Italian Sixth Army HQ in Enna at 0915 hours on 12 July. During these discussions it was found that C-in-C South had issued orders and directives encroaching on the authority of the Italian command as a result of consistently inaccurate reports received from II. Fliegerkorps, which were alarming in some cases and over-optimistic in others.

Field Marshal Kesselring was unable to ignore the pressing demands of the situation and agreed to the Hermann Goering Division's withdrawal to the Caltagirone - Vizzini area which had already been ordered. Moreover, he consented to the plan which was put forward to leave 15th Panzer Grenadier Division in the Piazza Armerina - Barrafranca - Pietraperzia area with orders to prevent the enemy advancing northwards.

The problem of sending further German formations to Sicily was raised in this discussion. Field Marshal Kesselring was inclined to favour this plan, especially with regard to transferring 29th Panzer Grenadier Division. Apparently he hoped that the situation would be changed and the initiative regained as a result of this move. His consistently over-optimistic assessment of the situation doubtless caused him to entertain the idea of resuming the counter-offensive. He was unable to rid himself of the belief that the landings in North Africa and Sicily were an entirely different matter to the Dieppe landing in 1942, namely that with regard to their preparation and the strength of the forces employed they were operations of the same calibre as the even more extensive landings which were made later in Normandy.

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General Guzzoni and I opposed this intention of moving in another division. A reinforcement such as this was contrary to the plan of carrying out a delaying action with the objective of transferring the personnel strength of the forces engaged to the mainland without incurring serious losses and, if it were also possible to escape without appreciable losses of material, this could be counted as a successful operation. However, as the situation stood, it was still primarily essential to make allowance for a landing on the completely undefended north coast and the possibility that all of the forces on Sicily would consequently be cut off. General Guzzoni also feared that if the enemy happened to break through in one or more places too many formations would be crowded together on the Straits of Messina and the units of both Axis powers which were to be ferried back over the Straits would consequently encounter difficulties in making the crossing.

5. The Axis Conduct of Operations between 13 and 17 July 1943

On 12 July 1943 HQ Italian Sixth Army issued the following orders to the Italian 16th Infantry Corps:

"HQ Sixth Army/No.16377/12 7 43/0910 hours.

to 16th Infantry Corps.

In view of the situation, which is characterised by the enemy's advances, further offensive action will be temporarily discouraged.

In the expectation that further units already promised will arrive from the mainland, I have made the following decisions:

- (1) The Hermann Goering Division will be transferred to the Caltagirone - Granmichele - Vizzini area to provide cover against enemy forces advancing from the south. While holding this position the division will not undertake any counter-attacks, but will delay the enemy by thrusts to the south.
- (2) With the exception of units committed in the direction of Syracuse, which will remain where they are, Napoli Division will be employed to hold Pazzalo Acreide at all costs in order to cover the left wing of the Hermann Goering Division.
- (3) Kampfgruppe Schmalz will hold its present position to drive off enemy attacks from the direction of Syracuse - Augusta.
- (4) Livorno Division will be transferred to the area between Mazzarino and S. Michele to take over the task of providing cover against enemy forces approaching from the south and west and to protect the right flank of the Hermann Goering Division.

At the same time HQ Italian Sixth Army informed the German Liaison Staff that it had issued the following instructions to the Italian 12th Infantry Corps:

Assietta Division will be transferred to the Bisacquino - Prizzi - Lercara area. (Note: places 40 km south of Palermo) 15th Panzer Grenadier Division will remain as Army reserve in its present central position at Pietraperzia - Valgernera, from which it will be able to participate in operations in the following directions:

Caltanissetta - Canicatti
Piazza Armerina - Caltagirone
Barrafranca - Mazzarino - Gela

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According to the War Diary, the following signal was sent to the Hermann Goering Division via German channels, that is to say by means of the only wireless transmitter at the disposal of the German Liaison Staff:

"Issued 0945 hours 12 7 43 - transmitted 1005 hours:

Hermann Goering Division will disengage from the enemy and fall back to the Caltagirone - Vizzini area, where it will prevent the enemy from advancing northwards.

The following supplement to this order was issued at 1005 hours and transmitted at 1125 hours:

15th Panzer Grenadier Division will take over defence on the right of Hermann Goering Division.

Operational boundary: Niscemi (Hermann Goering Division) - S. Michele - Mirabella - Aidone (all 15th Panzer Grenadier Division).

Contact will be established with Napoli Division and Gruppe Schmalz. The latter will hold its present line at all costs. Reserves arriving in the Caltagirone - Vizzini area will be placed under command of Hermann Goering Division."

Although the Hermann Goering Division reported at 1436 hours on 12 July that the line "south of Niscemi - Acate river and the sector north of Biscari-Vizzini is defended by sections along the roads leading north and is firmly in our hands", the impression existed at HQ Sixth Army that the division was carrying out its movements very slowly and apparently under difficulties. At 1630 hours the German Liaison Staff reported to C-in-C South in Rome that "Hermann Goering Division's disengagement is proceeding according to plan in the absence of appreciable enemy pressure."

In order to speed up the Hermann Goering Division's withdrawal again, the order that "the transfer into the Caltagirone area is to be expedited as a matter of urgency" was once more transmitted to the division by wireless.

Army HQ's general inclination to expedite the Hermann Goering Division's withdrawal to the line already mentioned on numerous occasions was thoroughly justified in that the Italian divisions, with which the Hermann Goering Division should have been able to link up, had withdrawn more rapidly and were to some extent out of sight, as well as with regard to the fact that the division had itself reported an enemy landing at Augusta as early as 1101 hours. Consequently, a timely withdrawal to the Etna position and thus the entire evacuation of the island according to plan were endangered, whereas it had now become pointless for the division to remain south of the line Caltagirone - Vizzini any longer in the absence of appreciable enemy pressure.

Moreover, the War Diary contains a note entered at 2240 hours that Gruppe Schmalz had moved forward again to the Solarino - Priolo line. At 2310 hours the following situation report to C-in-C South was entered:

"Enemy pressure is heaviest at Canicatti. 15th Panzer Grenadier Division has been entrusted with covering the right flank of the Army. The enemy is not exerting pressure northwards from Gela. Hermann Goering Division's movements are proceeding according to plan. A battalion which had become separated rejoined the division in the morning. Gruppe Schmalz is in position along the line Sortino - Villamundo - Augusta peninsula."

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The first appreciable reinforcements arrived on the island during 12 July. The 2nd Battalion of Panzer Grenadier Regiment 382 was sent up to Vizzini to join the Hermann Goering Division while the 3rd Paratroop Regiment of 1st Paratroop Division and the Reggio Battalion were assigned to Gruppe Schmalz.

13 July was marked by the temporary disruption of HQ Italian Sixth Army at Enna, which had been subjected to a heavy air attack at about midnight during the preceding night of 12/13 July. With the exception of wireless channels, most of the signals communications had been put out of action, and it had become absolutely essential to transfer the HQ. For a while General Guzzoni considered remaining in Enna "to share the fate of his troops", but was dissuaded by his Chief of Staff and myself.

According to the assessment of the situation by HQ Italian Sixth Army and myself, a major landing in the west was apparently no longer to be expected, but small-scale landings on the northern coast were likely. However, the most probable eventuality - from the point of view of both German and Italian concepts of strategy - appeared to be that the enemy would soon be obliged to attempt the capture of Catania. If he had already abandoned an outflanking movement from the sea, then the choice of a centre of main effort appeared to fall on the east coast, which was the most direct route to Messina, and thus once again on Catania, where the main defence line planned by the Axis command could be unhinged on the southern slope of Etna.

The enemy had already gained ground on 15th Panzer Grenadier Division's front during the morning and had reached the Serradifalco - S. Cataldo line as early as 1100 hours, thus threatening to outflank the Hermann Goering Division on this sector as well. Even though the division was in no immediate danger, its slowness and ponderousness in the field, which had meanwhile become unmistakably evident, rendered this threat all the more acute. On 13 July, therefore, the division was once again ordered by wireless for the third time to assemble as rapidly as possible in the Vizzini area under cover of night.

These instructions served as a basis for the further intention of withdrawing the division to the Etna position as soon as possible. As early as 12 July the German liaison officer to 15th Panzer Grenadier Division had issued the following instructions in the form of a general directive: "in the event of heavy enemy pressure and subject to individual phases of movements being specially approved by the German liaison officer, a withdrawal will be made to the general line Cangi - Leonforte - Agira. The Hermann Goering Division, reinforced by elements of 1st Paratroop Division, was to link up with the division's right flank on this line, while its left flank was to be based on the coast south of Catania.

The immediate movement of elements of the Hermann Goering Division into the Catania area seemed all the more urgent as there were no longer any appreciable reserves available in this sector and the enemy landing at Augusta, which had been timed to follow up the main landing, indicated that the enemy would shortly repeat this type of tactical outflanking movement from the sea. At 1430 hours on 13 July, therefore, HQ Sixth Army ordered the Italian 16th Infantry Corps to transfer elements of the Hermann Goering Division to the Catania area "to stabilise the situation there".

On the afternoon of 13 July a similar assessment of the situation by G-in-C South and his concern for this extreme left flank caused him to arrange for the machine-gun battalion of 1st Paratroop Division to land by parachute at the Simeto estuary, where it was placed under command of Gruppe Schmalz.

On the evening of 13 July the War Diary stated that the situation was as follows:

"15th Panzer Grenadier Division is holding its positions on the line Serradifalco - south of Caltanissetta - Pietraperzia - Barrafranca - south of Piazza Armerina. Enemy reconnaissance is feeling

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"its way forward on this division's sector, especially in the centre and on the right flank. Enemy artillery activity is increasing and frequent air attacks are being made on positions and transport on roads.

The Hermann Goering Division has been moved back to the Caltagirone - Vizzini line. Enemy artillery is operating in some strength at Vizzini. No fresh reports have been received from Gruppe Schmalz.

Assessment of the enemy situation along the entire front: the enemy is closing up and preparing to resume the offensive. HQ Italian Sixth Army will be transferred to the Passo Pisciero area (east of Randazzo) in the late evening of 13 July, as will the German liaison officer during the night of 13/14 July. The present HQ is no longer tenable."

On 14 July the War Diary provided the following picture at 1025 hours:

"Gruppe Schmalz is holding its positions on the line Francoforte - Lentini - Agone, but violent attacks by tanks and infantry were made in places on 13 July. In the early hours of the night an enemy paratroop force of unknown strength was dropped north of Lentini. An enemy attack in some strength is expected in the Vizzini area."

The fact that enemy paratroops had been dropped during the night at the most seriously threatened point of the front which was to be newly occupied lent weight to HQ Sixth Army's demand that elements of the Hermann Goering Division should be assembled and sent into action in this area. However, in spite of comparatively slight frontal pressure at this point, the division considered that it was too heavily committed to be in a position to disengage from the enemy. Nevertheless, the situation was eased to some extent when elements of the machine-gun battalion of 1st Paratroop Division, which had been dropped at practically the same place about 12 hours previously, succeeded in destroying the enemy forces which had landed north of Lentini without undue difficulty. At 1300 hours the Hermann Goering Division was again ordered to despatch units to Catania.

C-in-C South in Rome, who, when assessing the situation, relied extensively on reports from II Fliegerkorps at Taormina, which were in some degree either inaccurate, over-optimistic or too pessimistic, and probably paid to them too much attention owing to their Luftwaffe origin, unauthenticated as they were, issued a directive by wireless on the afternoon of 14 July, which was entered in the War Diary at 1515 hours as follows:

"C-in-C South directs that a further reinforcement of the left wing is of decisive importance and will be carried out by drawing on the centre. Moreover, the withdrawal of all forces to a support position on the general line S. Stefano - Adrano - Catania will be prepared in such a way that it may be commenced tonight in the event of a further deterioration in the situation on the eastern flank."

At 1545 hours I replied by wireless:

"that the left flank had been relieved by dispatching the Hermann Goering Division to Catania, but that the consequently weakened central sector and Gruppe Schmalz would not be able to withstand renewed attacks from the south and that the western wing was exposed to the

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danger of being turned. A withdrawal to the Etna position had therefore been prepared and would probably soon be necessary."

On the evening of this day 15th Panzer Grenadier Division was still positioned on the line Serradifalco - S. Cataldo.

At 2330 hours the following situation report was dispatched to C-in-C South:

"In view of the threat to the right flank and wing of the German front, the dangerous situation at Vizzini, the weak spot at Francoforte and the inadequate mobility of the latest reinforcements, an immediate strengthening of the eastern wing is not possible. The Chief of the German Liaison Staff has therefore ordered the withdrawal of the entire Hermann Goering Division, which will at the same time destroy the enemy forces at Catania. In addition, 15th Panzer Grenadier Division will be withdrawn to the line Nicosia - Leonforte as it will otherwise be exposed to the threat of being outflanked on both sides."

On 15 July the crisis which had reigned in the Axis command since the landing on 10 July underwent a change. It could now be assumed that the enemy would not make further landings either in the western area of the island or on the north coast. If such landings had been planned as an alternative to costly attacks by the forces which were slowly advancing into the interior of the island, they should have been made by 15 July at the latest.

The concern that the enemy would decide to employ the bulk or at least appreciable elements of General Patton's Army to sweep round to the west across the line Lercara - Termini and then eastwards along the northern coast for a menacing thrust against the unprotected right flank of the Axis forces could also be regarded as past

The increasing pressure on the left wing, that is to say on Gruppe Schmalz and the Hermann Goering Division, indicated that the enemy would seek a decision at this point.

As was frequently the case in overcoming such critical situations, a state of intensified anxiety arose at the German command which originated in the belief that an even more favourable result could have been achieved had different measures been taken. The chain of command, which had presented enough difficulties in view of the military and political situation in this coalition war, assumed a chaotic nature in some respects. As a Luftwaffe officer, Field Marshal Kesselring considered himself especially responsible for the Hermann Goering Division and probably had to expect special instructions from Reichsmarschall Goering in addition to orders from OKW. In one case the former intervened personally in the conduct of operations by means of an order. Moreover, by virtue of both superior signals communications and his personal connections, Field Marshal Kesselring was in contact with II Fliiegerkorps, which was still superfluously based on the island without aircraft and from which he received not only reports but also suggestions regarding the conduct of operations.

A Luftwaffe specialist was assigned the task of forming so-called alarm units and for a while it was planned to allot him a sector designated as "Eastern Sicily". The plan to form alarm units was one of OKW's pet ideas to make good diminishing strengths by drawing on forces which were committed at other places and by indispensable supply tasks during a major action. These measures nearly always proved to be illusory as the alarm units possessed no real worth and rapidly melted away. In this particular case all of the supply units were still tied down by the movement of stocks from the western sector of the island, which was still feasible and had been already set in motion not long after the Tunis disaster.

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First and foremost, however, C-in-C South ignored the Italian Sixth Army HQ and intervened directly in the conduct of operations to an increasing extent and was apparently encouraged to do so by OKW, for it was gradually becoming clear that a defection on the part of our Italian ally was imminent and the German command was obliged to prepare to continue the fight alone, to which end the occupation of the Etna position and the bringing up of further German forces offered a possible means.

Meanwhile, the Italian Army HQ continued to conduct operations along the same lines as before, for it was nominally in sole authority and therefore bore full responsibility from a historical point of view. I transferred my advanced battle HQ to the area north of Catania, from which point I was able to communicate with C-in-C South by telephone, establish personal contact with Gruppe Schmalz and the Hermann Goering Division and keep an open eye on the battlefield south of Catania.

On the morning of 15 July the Hermann Goering Division was still able to drive off attacks on Caltagirone and Grammichele, but was pushed back northwards to an increasing extent during the course of the day.

In the evening the division was in position along the line Radusa - Castel di Judica - Fiume Dittaino - Gorna Lunga river (as far as its estuary). The War Diary contains the following entry for midnight:

"Enemy pressure is particularly strong on the east wing, where a breakthrough in the direction of Messina is apparently intended. It is presumed that small groups of enemy paratroops have again been dropped today at and west of Acireale and naval artillery support is being maintained for this reason. South of the Catania plain Paratroop Regiment 3, which has been closed in upon in separate battalions, is offering stubborn resistance while sustaining heavy losses."

15th Panzer Grenadier Division was still holding the line Serradifalco - south of Caltanissetta - Barrafranca - Piazza Armerina on the evening of this day. During this period the division was justifiably concerned for its left flank, which became increasingly exposed by the withdrawal of the Hermann Goering Division and the establishment of an echelon formation to the left by the latter. An attempt to establish contact with the Hermann Goering Division or the Livorno Division, which was still presumed to be located between the two divisions, was evidently unsuccessful and it was apparently no longer possible to carry out an order to establish contact with the left wing of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division which I issued to the Hermann Goering Division at 2030 hours. Orders for 15th Panzer Grenadier Division to withdraw at the same time as the Hermann Goering Division disengaged from the enemy were deliberately withheld. The divisions had been obliged to fight without close contact since 10 July and their withdrawal into the Etna position, bringing with it the establishment of an unbroken front, was now at hand. The longer 15th Panzer Grenadier Division could be left in its present position, the less likely was it that the retreating Hermann Goering Division would be pursued and overtaken from the west. This risk was more serious than the threat to the exposed eastern flank of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division arising from the gap created between the two divisions.

A War Diary entry at 0950 hours mentions the orders issued to 15th Panzer Grenadier Division on 16 July as follows:

"An attack on Barrafranca by strong armoured and infantry forces from Mazzarino is reported by 15th Panzer Grenadier Division at 0520 hours. As yet no report has been received from the Serradifalco - Caltanissetta sector. 15th Panzer Grenadier Division

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"is now echeloned about 20 km forward of the Hermann Goering Division as a result of the latter's withdrawal. Nevertheless, 15th Panzer Grenadier Division will not be withdrawn as C-in-C South is of the opinion that the enemy cannot be prevented from turning the western wing of the Hermann Goering Division and the latter cannot therefore be afforded the requisite support unless the present line is held. In the present situation there is no question of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division supporting the Hermann Goering Division by an attack in a south-easterly direction for example as the former is committed to repelling attacks by superior enemy forces on a broad front."

At 1350 hours 15th Panzer Grenadier Division made the following report:

"A heavy attack by armour and infantry was driven off south-east of Pietraperzia. The enemy is preparing to attack with superior forces along the entire divisional front. As both the east and west flanks are threatened in considerable depth and cannot be covered owing to lack of forces, the division intends to fall back to the line Alimena - Stazione di Raddusa on 16 July in order to establish contact with the Hermann Goering Division."

At 1525 hours a further report was received from the division:

"The situation is very serious south-east of Pietraperzia. The height 3 km north-west of Mazzarino has been lost. The last reserve company is being sent into action. The division hopes that it will be able to prevent an enemy breakthrough until it falls back in the evening."

These War Diary entries indicate the fluctuating nature of the conflict in the German Battle HQ's concerning the withdrawal of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division on 16 July. I was of the opinion that the division should have freedom of movement for a disengagement on the evening of 16 July. (It is no longer possible to establish whether an order to this effect was issued. According to General Rodt's account, the division disengaged on its own initiative.)

The War Diary contains the following record for 1645 hours:

"The Chief of the German Liaison Staff held a telephone conversation at Trecastragni (advanced battle HQ) with Field Marshal Kesselring concerning his conduct of operations, in which he stressed that in the present situation the main effort was still centred on the left wing of the Hermann Goering Division and that the disengagement of the right wing of this division and the gradual disengagement of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division were broadly in accordance with the overall conduct of operations. At present the Hermann Goering Division's front may be regarded as stabilised, an outflanking movement from the west having been avoided. The Chief of the German Liaison Staff thereupon proceeded to the Hermann Goering Division battle HQ, where he issued special instructions that the advanced positions were to be held."

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16 July abounded with instructions from C-in-C South which conformed with the orders to stand fast issued by OKW. The Hermann Goering Division's withdrawal from the Gorna Lunga river position and that of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division into what had been planned as the initial Etna position, where it would be possible to establish an unbroken front for the first time, were both delayed to the absolute limit by C-in-C South's orders.

Thus, the phase of tactically correct movements approached its conclusion and was replaced by that of Hitler's stand-fast tactics.

On 17 July it was essential to establish contact between the two divisions before the main defence line was occupied. At 0040 hours 15th Panzer Grenadier Division was informed by wireless that the right wing of the Hermann Goering Division was located at Raddusa and not at Catenanuova as the former had believed. Any further withdrawal was forbidden and the establishment of a new front was ordered. Owing to C-in-C South's orders to stand fast on 16 July, this order had become necessary as 15th Panzer Grenadier Division had lost confidence in a situation in which the Hermann Goering Division had been withdrawn practically to the new main defence line south of Catania. The division, which had always been well led and also remained a reliable formation later, was slow to recover. In actual fact its advanced detachments fought for another full week in the forward area, its front had already been extended northwards to the coast before 29th Panzer Grenadier Division arrived and it then constituted a reliable centre for the entire front in the subsequent XIV Panzerkorps operations.

Field Marshal Kesselring himself ordered the Hermann Goering Division to withdraw to the prospective main defence line while with me at the Gruppe Schmalz battle HQ on 17 July. He had previously issued an order via II Fliegerkorps to the effect that the division was to hold the positions on the Gorna Lunga river which were later occupied by advanced detachments only. The intensity of the bombardment laid down on these positions, at which the warships of the Allied fleet which had entered the Straits of Messina fired their broadsides almost uninterruptedly, could be very clearly observed from the Gruppe Schmalz battle HQ.

While Field Marshal Kesselring was still at the Gruppe Schmalz battle HQ the commander of Paratroop Regiment 3 arrived, having found his way back through the enemy lines from his encircled position at Lentini with more than 900 men of his regiment, which had been cut off behind the enemy front since 14 July. There is no reason to doubt Oberst Schmalz's account that the regiment was in serious danger of being lost because, to quote Oberst Schmalz, the commander was "too proud" to carry out an order he received to disengage, for independent decisions such as this and disregard of orders were typical of the way in which the paratroops were trained. Thus, the regiment though urgently required was not available throughout the operations from 14 to 17 July and even after it had returned it could not be sent into action immediately as it had lost all of its heavy weapons.

The front of the new main defence line which was to be occupied ran from a point 5 km west of S. Stefano in the general direction of Nicosia, then south-east from Nicosia to about 5 km west of Agira, turned east towards Agira along the road to Regalbuto and about 5 km to the west of the latter where it turned south-east again in the direction of Catenanuova, from Catenanuova south-eastwards along the railway line to Catania to about 10 km south-west of the latter, from which point it ran directly eastwards to the sea.

At this time, however, the main strength of the two divisions had not yet occupied this main defence line but was still carrying out a gradual day-by-day fighting withdrawal further forward.

6. The Handing-Over of Command to XIV Panzerkorps on 17 July, 1943

The HQ Staff of XIV Panzerkorps had arrived on the island on 15 July to take over command of the German divisions the moment they linked up. In the meantime it had been occupied with a survey of the Etna position proper, which

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was to be occupied as a second phase after the divisions had linked up in the above-mentioned main defence line. This Etna position proper ran from S. Fratello directly south to about 5 km south-west of Troina, then turned in a general south-easterly direction to a point 2 km south of Adrano, from which it ran directly eastwards to the sea north of Acireale.

At 2230 hours on 16 July C-in-C South issued an order to the effect that General Hube, G.O.C. XIV Panzerkorps, was to take over command of all German forces on Sicily and that the time of implementation was to be arranged with me and reported back.

The handing-over of command took place shortly after midnight (16/17 July) at my HQ while I was at the advanced battle HQ at Trecastagni. An official handing-over of command could not take place, for although I had been made responsible for the conduct of operations by OKW, I had been officially no more than a liaison officer at HQ Italian Sixth Army, a role which I continued to retain until further notice.

However, as the gradual elimination of all Italian HQs on the island was clearly the German supreme command's intention and as the situation which had now arisen was in conformity with this re-organisation, HQ Italian Sixth Army submitted to this irrevocable development and from this time onwards constituted no more than a facade which, although it issued orders and received reports, was at the same time unable to amend or countermand in any way the orders which were now issued directly from C-in-C South to XIV Panzerkorps, despite the fact that C-in-C South had not been authorised to direct operations.

A further account of subsequent operations has therefore been deliberately omitted in this report. The German Liaison Staff to HQ Italian Sixth Army confined itself to maintaining adequately reasonable relations between the C-in-C Sixth Army and the G.O.C. XIV Panzerkorps, General Hube. This was achieved in spite of the considerable strain which was imposed on these relations by circumstances rather than by personalities.

Field Marshal Kesselring was obliged to rectify unfortunate incidents as early as 17 July when he announced the handing-over of all German troops and thus practically the entire front to XIV Panzerkorps. Serious clashes with Italian units developed - for which C-in-C South himself was probably not blameless - when completely immobile battalions were being moved up, for the German battalion commanders carried orders to make their formations mobile with vehicles belonging to Italian units which were no longer fighting. These orders resulted in outbreaks of shooting in which men were killed on both sides.

Difficulties were overcome later in as much as the Italian XII Infantry Corps continued to retain command over all elements of the Italian armed forces located in the western sector, including those in the front line. The Italian command naturally had an understandable interest in maintaining these authorities, for the organised evacuation of Italian troops across the Straits of Messina was dependent on their continuing to function. On 22 July XIV Panzerkorps made an abortive attempt to dispense with the Italian XII Infantry Corps. However, on 25 July both commanders agreed that the Italian XII Infantry Corps should retain the S. Stefano - Nicosia sector, while elements which 29th Panzer Grenadier Division had posted further forward as advanced detachments should remain under the direct command of the latter and subsequently be moved back through the Italian XII Infantry Corps lines to the main S. Fratello - Troina position where they would then come under command of XIV Panzerkorps.

Even the collapse of the Fascist regime, which occurred on the same day, made no difference to this scheme.

On 31 July General Guzzoni informed me that he had been instructed by Comando Supremo to comply with German requirements henceforth and hand over command of all German and Italian troops in the battle zone to XIV Panzerkorps.

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General Guzzoni requested clarification as to whether this reorganisation of command was in accordance with German requirements at that time. In this event he wished to place all Italian formations, which were still in the battle zone and to which XIV Panzerkorps attached importance, under command of the latter.

After C-in-C South had made an appropriate reply, General Guzzoni issued orders on 1 August stating that with effect from 1200 hours on 2 August command of all Italian formations still at the front was to be handed over to XIV Panzerkorps. He also gave orders for Italian XVI Corps to take over the entire coastal sector and Italian XII Infantry Corps to be placed at the disposal of Army HQ at the same time.

On 5 August General Hube, G. O.C. XIV Panzerkorps, suggested to General Guzzoni that HQ Sixth Army be transferred to Calabria to make room for the XIV Panzerkorps withdrawal, which had now become necessary. General Guzzoni replied that he could not propose this transfer to Comando Supremo, but that he left the submission of such a recommendation to C-in-C South in General Hube's hands.

On 8 August I was recalled from my assignment and handed over the duties of liaison officer with HQ Sixth Army, which was still on the island, to my former chief operations officer Oberstlt (General Staff) Meier Welcker.

When reporting to Field Marshal Kesselring on 11 August I attended a discussion between the latter and the newly-appointed C-in-C (or Secretary of State?) of the Italian Navy, during which it was established that owing to absolute Axis inferiority in the air the Italian naval forces at Taranto and La Spezia were to all intents and purposes blockaded and therefore could no longer be considered for an active role in driving off an Allied landing on the mainland.

7. Review of Lessons Learned on Sicily regarding the Execution and Repulse of Landing Operations

The contemporary assessment of the situation prior to the Allied landing does not differ essentially from any retrospective assessment made at the present time. Generally speaking, two schools of thought were then discernible, one of which considered the successful repulse of a major landing as hopeless from the outset, while the other believed that the enemy could be dealt a destructive blow "at his weakest moment" by means of tactical measures.

Already at the beginning of this account a description has been given of how Hitler himself did not reveal which of these two theories he supported when issuing me with instructions on 22 June. However, the fact that the instructions given by both Field Marshal Kesselring and, in particular, by General Warlimont were concerned solely with evacuation indicates that Hitler too was in no way inclined to hold Sicily for any length of time.

On the other hand it must be assumed that Field Marshal Kesselring hoped for his first noteworthy defensive victory on the island and that he therefore supported the second theory, which involved "throwing the enemy into the sea" while he was actually landing. As this theory had also been widely spread among other Wehrmacht circles - and among subordinate authorities in particular - it is worthwhile examining it on the basis of actual experience.

This theory arose as a matter of course from the inveterate weakness of the traditional German military outlook, which was almost exclusively concerned with land warfare. Considerable sections of the German political and military leadership had not come to think along the lines of a service with three arms, but were concerned exclusively with land operations. The reasons for this are well known and need no further elaboration.

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This land-bound outlook was naturally commensurate with an underestimation of the precarious situation of a defence force committed to a coastal sector and an overestimation of the difficulties facing a landing by an attacking force with superiority in the air and at sea.

An attack along modern lines by a service divided into three arms against an enemy equipped for land warfare only and inferior in the air and at sea is in fact easier and offers greater prospects of success than an exclusively land-based attack on positions.

At the outset the force attacking from the sea possesses the advantage of surprise. It is not true that the landing in Sicily came as a complete surprise, as General Eisenhower was informed by captured Italian generals (see page 10). However, the factors which will always constitute the element of surprise are the actual landing place, the way in which it is developed and the tactics initially adopted. Moreover, in Sicily it was not possible to know for some time whether the landing on 10 July would be followed by others elsewhere. In fact, all of the landings which I experienced - at Salerno, in Corsica and at Anzio - came as a surprise even though it was known that landing fleets were under way and the same situation occurred again in Normandy and at Inchon. The element of surprise can easily be ensured if the final movements of the landing fleet are made at night or if they are screened by feint manoeuvres or smoke. In this respect, the landing between Syracuse and Licata was just as much of a surprise as the failure to make further landings in the western sector of the island or on the northern coast.

A more important factor however in carrying out an attack by sea is the possibility of neutralising the land-based enemy by means of artillery fire. In this case the attacking force's superiority is derived from its naval artillery, which is invariably of a larger calibre than army artillery organised temporarily for defence in a coastal sector and is, first and foremost, more mobile than the latter. If caught in a surprise bombardment, it can cover itself with a smoke-screen and withdraw. Naval artillery has thus come to be greatly feared by the defender because, with the exception of his large-calibre artillery, he cannot defend himself against it with appropriate counter-fire. The immediately striking feature of such a landing operation is the absence of the preliminary artillery duel which characterises an attack on land. In the Sicilian landing the artillery of the attacking force was to all intents and purposes beyond the range of any counter-measures whatsoever on the part of the defence.

However, even the attacking infantry is not exposed to counter-measures on the scale assumed by the tactician concerned with purely land-based operations and unfamiliar with a sea-borne attack of this type, for in all even moderately well organised landings the defence has already been practically neutralised by the naval artillery bombardment before landing parties go ashore at all. The critical phase for the attacking infantry does not arise until a later stage when it has advanced inland and its communications to the rear are not yet operating smoothly. This is particularly applicable when it meets enemy counter-thrusts or counter-attacks prepared in some strength. In Sicily the infantry attacked by the Hermann Goering Division was simply able to re-embark or cease attacking in the narrow sector in which the counter-attack occurred. The fact that the Allied command was able to put tanks ashore practically at the same time as the infantry landed demonstrates how very successful the landing was tactically. Even if these tanks did not make their presence felt during the further course of the operations, it was for the same reason as the inadequate contribution made by German armour on the part of the defence, that is to say terrain completely unsuitable for the employment of armour.

The employment of the Allied air forces in the Sicilian campaign met with good fortune in so far as the destruction of German aircraft on the ground was concerned, but was ill-fated in respect of airborne troops.

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This is understandable in as much as the destruction of Axis air strength on the ground came within the sphere of activity of the bomber, which had been participating in operations for some time, while the employment of airborne troops was a novelty which, by being combined with sea-borne landing forces as well, presented exceptional problems. The airborne forces employed to capture airfields in the south-eastern area of the island, which, according to American sources, were of the strength of one division, were unable to accomplish their task. They sustained considerable losses at the hands of the German A/A artillery, which was still present in very great strength, but were nevertheless able to delay the advance of the Hermann Goering Division. According to General Marshall's report to the Secretary of State for War, both these airborne troops and those which were landed to form a reserve force two days after the landing (82nd U.S. Division) were engaged by our troops and consequently suffered appreciable losses. General Eisenhower commented upon these losses, which were all the more distressing in view of the fact that the Allies enjoyed complete air superiority. The British paratroops also, who were dropped at the Simeto estuary were easily there disposed of, as has already been described (see page 18).

From all these reverses it is evident that participation in the landing by airborne and parachute forces must be regarded fundamentally as a failure, as was moreover the case with many such ventures throughout the war. Thus, it is difficult to derive lessons for the future from these operations, as the hazards following a landing will continue to exist even if those in the air can be eliminated or at least reduced by improved training.

However, it would be fatal to take the lessons learned in another field of air participation as a basis for the future. As is well known, the essential factor governing the selection of objectives in all of the landings carried out by the Allies in Italy was that these objectives were within range of land-based fighters. Only thus can the failure to land on the northern coast and the choice of Salerno be explained. This limitation will doubtless cease to exist in any future war and the fighters will be based at sea, that is to say on the aircraft-carriers actually covering the landing. Thus, the scope of possible landing objectives will increase to such an extent that surprise attacks will have to be taken into account by every point on the coast organised for defence.

Finally, for the sake of completeness, mention must also be made of the fact that although communications to the rear constitute the weakness of a force which has just landed, supply routes at sea can be withdrawn out of range of enemy action more easily than those on land if the attacking force possesses air and sea superiority. They can be moved at any time and pulled back regardless of air cover, which they carry with them as a more or less integral constituent.

A clear conception of this absolute superiority on the part of an enemy force attacking from the sea cannot be formed unless it has actually been witnessed. On 12 July I shared this spectacle with General Eisenhower from a position a few kilometres further east along the coast and can only confirm his words to his Chief of Staff, which I now quote: "I must say that the sight of hundreds of vessels, with landing craft everywhere, operating along the shoreline from Licata on the eastward, was unforgettable ..."

The chances of both sides in a landing operation organised on a large scale have been considered initially from the point of view of the attacking force in order that the situation of the defence might thereby be assessed more specifically. The account of the sea-borne attacking force's strength was primarily intended to invalidate any conclusion that the enemy landing could not have been prevented simply because of treachery on the part of the Italian authorities or owing to the notorious difficulties existing in the Axis command or as a result of the disparity of Allied and German land forces in themselves. Rather is it always the case that the defence's failure is due rather to the tactical, material and strategic superiority of a sea-borne attack by an enemy

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possessing air and sea superiority. Added to this is the situation - hopeless according to the classic precepts of the art of land warfare - of the defence line itself. A coastline is always very extensive and for this reason makes heavy demands on available forces. The defence line of an island or peninsula is in fact so long and therefore so weak that it can be compared with a balloon, which needs only to be pricked to make it collapse. The same situation applied whether in Sicily or on the Italian mainland, whether in Normandy or in Korea.

Admittedly, the weaknesses in the defence already referred to were additional factors in this particular case. Our Italian ally did not fight and was not capable of fighting since the so-called coastal divisions possessed no modern weapons whatsoever and the four mobile divisions proved to have that inadequate armament which had only become evident on the entry of Italy into the war, a factor which would inevitably have a demoralising effect on any army.

There could be no question of continuous fortification of the coast and the batteries, inadequate numerically, were in no way a match for the naval artillery. At the same time a controversy raged over all additional batteries brought over to the island. Independent German naval HQ's demanded that they be set up far to the forefront regardless of the exposed nature of the position in the event of an exchange of fire with naval artillery, in order that the enemy might consequently "be engaged at his weakest moment, that is to say during the actual landing and therefore while still at sea wherever possible". As if any landing would be possible at all in face of very advanced coastal batteries which had not been neutralised! For this reason the Army authorities recommended that the artillery be set up as concealed troops further to the rear out of sight of the enemy naval forces. German 8.8 cm A/A guns were available on the island in considerable quantity and constituted one of the mainstays of the defence. It was, however, possible to withdraw them without notifying the principal Army authority and it did in fact become necessary to transfer a number to take over the defence of the Straits of Messina.

There could, of course, be no question of defence in depth anywhere for the coastal front, which really needed to be defended at all points was more than 800 km long. Even if no Italian "coastal divisions" whatsoever had been present - these could in fact be written off - the four divisions of the Italian Army and the two German divisions which were available could never have been allowed to be wiped out in advanced coastal positions.

The conflict therefore which arose later in France between Rommel's theory, which inclined towards a rigid coastal defence, and that supported by Rundstedt, who wished to carry out defensive operations with powerful mobile reserves, was decided here in this prelude to that invasion in favour of the latter. Fortunately, both Field Marshal Kesselring and General Guzzoni endorsed this theory, while no differences of opinion whatsoever existed between the Chief of Staff Italian Sixth Army and myself. Accordingly, the two German and four Italian divisions were concentrated as mobile reserves in the vicinity of the coast in two large forces, the Western and Eastern groups. Reference to the considerations governing this action may be found throughout section 3 of this report.

Thus, while there was agreement on the formation of these "reserves", Field Marshal Kesselring's outlook was as incomprehensible then as it is now in that he was firmly of the opinion that the German divisions "had their marching orders in their pockets and knew what they had to do" and that consequently the mobile defence would necessarily proceed more or less automatically and successfully. This personally outstanding, consistently inspiring and gallant commander can only have formed an opinion such as this as a result of the over-optimistic and therefore biased assessment of current situations which was customary in the National Socialist leadership. I remember seeing Field Marshal Kesselring in an extremely dejected state later on following the failure of attempts to push the enemy force which had landed at Anzio back into the sea.

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and again when the Allied landing in Normandy was reported. At the time in question he frequently made comments from which I could not help gathering that his assessment of the chances of an action against an enemy possessing air and sea superiority in the event of a landing differed from my views as here already stated, being much less sceptical and therefore incorrect in my opinion. General Guzzoni and myself had no doubt that the defensive action would involve a struggle to gain time and that, moreover, issuing any kind of "marching orders" to the mobile forces was pointless as command would have to be exercised in accordance with the vicissitudes of the action, which also included the actual landing operation. The instructions issued to me by Field Marshal Keitel and General Warlimont and those given to Oberst (General Staff) von Bonin by General Jodl allowed no room for doubt that the opinion of these generals regarding the chances of the operations on Sicily differed in no way from my own. In view of the state of mind of Hitler himself, it may be assumed that he occasionally fell a prey to Field Marshal Kesselring's optimism and then revised the assessment which he had already arrived at on the basis of more objective influences. As is well known, he invariably regarded people and views of an intuitively-inclined nature more highly than those of an objective and rational character.

It must, however, be admitted that Field Marshal Kesselring's views were shared by the majority of German war-time commanders, who had apparently failed to grasp that warfare had evolved from activities on land only to the decisive combination of operations on land, at sea and in the air and therefore to warfare conducted on an inter-service basis. The lower ranks were psychologically influenced by an aversion to the sea and the thought of having to make their way through enemy fire upon leaving boats or even while still aboard - a thoroughly understandable state of mind in the case of inland races. If only the conception of inter-service co-ordination had come into its own there could have been no doubt about the outcome of an action in which one side had to all intents and purposes only one arm of the service at its command, while the other disposed of all three arms in adequate proportions.

8. Experiences in the Coalition War and Delaying Action
during the Decisive Phase from 10 - 17 July, 1943

In view of the fact that all future wars will be on a coalition basis, the lessons learned by the Axis powers in this field may be of some importance.

In nearly all of the accounts of the campaign in Sicily which were dispatched to me a conspicuous feature is the contempt, distrust, disillusionment and hatred felt with regard to our Italian ally. These feelings were not unfounded. In Sicily the Italian armed forces hardly fought at all, but on the other hand they did not commit any act of betrayal. The Germans did not understand the mentality of the Italians and were cut off from them by the iron curtain of language in that neither side could understand the other's tongue, whereas every German who had received a higher education found little difficulty in conversing with any Frenchman. As a result of my knowledge of the language, I was able to delve into our ally's mentality to more than an average degree. Moreover, two years diplomatic service as a delegate to the Franco-Italian armistice commission had given me an insight into Italian military policy and the mental processes of the Italian General Staff, and it was in this commission shortly after the armistice that its best minds were to be found. This was one of the reasons for my appointment as liaison officer and subsequently Chief of the Liaison Staff in this situation with its equally delicate military and political aspects.

The Italian mentality cannot be understood unless two facts are borne in mind. The leading personalities, that is to say those in Badoglio's circle, had not been willing to enter the war at all, for they were aware that the Italian armament policy had been seriously neglected under the Fascist, or for that matter socialist-inspired, leadership. With such inadequate equipment and the consequent intensification of the Italian soldier's psychological deficiencies, they could well surmise how the role of their armed forces would compare with that played by the Wehrmacht.

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They could also guess what a loss in independence in the sphere of foreign policy would inevitably result from such disproportionate contributions.

Even if the other outlook, by nature more optimistic and ideologically closer to the German viewpoint, had in fact prevailed when it was decided to enter the war, it underwent a profound change during the course of the war. An awareness of the hopelessness of the situation was widespread among all sections of the population and constant instances of loss of prestige played their part in undermining the nation's self-reliance, while the various humiliations inflicted by its German ally intensified the trend towards war-weariness.

First and foremost, however, the mentality of the two nations was fundamentally different in that the Italian is essentially more critical and therefore more mature politically than the German. With exceptions diminishing in number all the time, the Italian had little belief in the notion that he might still win the war if he carried on with faith and optimism. The Italian intellectual was already aware that the war was lost when the offensive in Russia came to a standstill. The fact that this conviction would inevitably lead to defeatism if it influenced the man in the street, as was indeed the case, requires no special justification.

This state of mind could be appreciated only by a German who was capable of conversing with Italians and understanding it to some extent. The rest of the Germans saw only weariness, apathy towards the war effort and passivity and regarded the sum total as symptomatic of treachery. This was an incorrect conclusion. At that time even Army commanders had little opportunity or time for betrayal. The betrayal, if such a term must be used at all, began with Mussolini's downfall and the calling-in of Badoglio, who had always been against the war for the reasons already mentioned.

Even Italy's outright demand that, in contrast to the situation in Africa, she should take over supreme command herself in defending her own soil cannot be interpreted as an unqualified indication of intended betrayal. Moreover, there were even Fascist elements which also pressed for a "more energetic direction of the war", opposed the surrender of Italian territory up to the Gothic Line, but nevertheless supported the continuation of the war on the side of their German ally. If it had still been intended in any way to prevent an Italian defection then there was no other course to be taken but to make a popular cause out of the defence of Italian soil. For this however a command organisation would have been needed of the type which avoided bringing about any humiliation of the Italian Army command or creating the impression that it was solely a German war.

Hitler himself, who had ordered, or rather conceded, this command organisation, had probably been entertaining a scheme by which the Italian command could be more or less ruthlessly ousted, for prior to the discussion of 22 June, 1943 he had had a report passed to me for study by a German general who had also acted as a liaison officer in Africa after Rommel's recall and who described in a boastful manner how he had ignored and slighted the Italian command. In Africa however, the situation had been different. In that theatre the Italians had long since become accustomed as the result of Rommel's status to the fact that the war had become a German monopoly, whereas this was now the very state of affairs which they wished to terminate.

Even when Mussolini fell from power and the seeds of the "betrayal" were sown in Rome, the Italian authorities in Italy itself, or at any rate those in HQ Sixth Army, continued to work loyally with the Germans because they had been ordered to do so - perhaps for the purpose of covering this betrayal up. There is as yet no reason for assuming that the C-in-C Sixth Army himself had any knowledge of the intrigues to secure a separate peace. At all events I spoke up for General Guzzoni's loyalty to the Axis in Sicily with a clear conscience at a later stage when the Republican-Fascist puppet government set up by the Germans sought to execute him as a traitor.

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The extent to which even important military commanders failed to foresee the consequences of an Italian collapse was astonishing. ~~In their presumptions~~ they could not conceive that the two allies were comparable to men climbing a precipice and that if one fell he would drag so heavily on the rope that the other would no longer be able to go on. Disposal of the Italian ballast seemed to be the aim of many of the militarists who had anything of importance to say in this matter.

Exactly one month after leaving Sicily I was faced with the same situation, but with much more unfavourable portents, in Corsica, where the split now took place in earnest and the ally of yesterday became the enemy of today. Heavy fighting was necessary to retake the port of Bastia from the Italians, who were assisted by Free French troops, French maquis and blockading Allied warships and aircraft. In so far as it was still possible, it was essential to prevent a situation similar to that which had arisen in Sicily. The loss of Sicily was, moreover, the signal for Mussolini's downfall. If the fighting formations had turned on one another at the same time the consequences would have been incalculable.

In my own estimation yet another factor certainly had its place in this general political and military concept. Like the majority of my Italian and German friends I had realised that the war had long since been lost according to the precepts of modern warfare. The maintenance of close relations with our Italian ally, which had come about by order of OKW, kept alive the hope that circumstances permitting Hitler's regime would also be dragged down by Mussolini's fall from power - possibly by means of assassination - and that the German people would thus be spared its final agony, for it could not be expected to rise to a politically mature outlook of its own accord. In contrast to our Italian ally it lacked not only the political instinct which reveals that a war is approaching its conclusion because it has become pointless, but also any kind of national sovereignty such as was still represented by the Italian monarchy. Regarded historically and not from the standpoint of a resentful ally, Victor Emanuel performed a service to his people by his timely termination of hostilities in the Second World War which was at least comparable to that rendered by his determination to continue resistance after Caporetto in the First World War. The fact that he could never have taken this step openly with the agreement of his National Socialist ally was in the very nature of National Socialist relations with other powers.

However, even if one wished to set aside all of these political aspects, which, as is well known should never be the case with strategic considerations, the closest possible co-operation with the Italian forces still available was recommended also for purely military reasons.

Although I was entirely responsible to my High Command for the conduct of operations in Sicily, I was not in a position to direct even two divisions for, apart from two wireless stations lent by a division, I had no communications at my disposal. If the two divisions had been located in an area clear of Italian forces then it would certainly have been possible to solve this problem also. However, both divisions were under the command of the controlling Italian Corps HQs in the sectors concerned and received their orders from them, 15th Panzer Grenadier Division being subordinate to XII Corps and the Hermann Goering Division to XVI Corps. ²If the orders issued from the two sources had proved to be contradictory an impossible situation would have arisen immediately. I was therefore in a position to issue orders of identical or at least similar content to the German divisions by two routes, one being through my own limited channels and the other by means of the Italian network, for HQ Sixth Army's orders had been discussed with me in detail.

²Note: All other accounts are incorrect, including that implying that the two divisions were under direct command of HQ Sixth Army.

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This close co-operation referred to was rendered all the more workable because the Italian C-in-C was absolutely competent as far as the forming of strategic and tactical assessments of the situation and staff duties were concerned. General Guzzoni was not what is called a strong personality but in view of the situation at that time and the political circumstances this deficiency often proved to be an advantage rather than a disadvantage in that he was always prepared to negotiate and make concessions.

Close co-operation with the Italian authorities was also necessary because the Italian garrison of the island, which still constituted a very important factor numerically, had somehow to be induced to comply with the sense rather than the letter of the agreed operations. This was the only means of ensuring that the roads remained clear for important movements, that disastrous clashes did not occur and that the flow of both German and Italian formations across the Straits of Messina would be at all possible.

First and foremost, however, any account which denies that Italian forces took any part in the operations whatsoever is misleading. When the decision to evacuate was finally taken and the question arose as to whether German formation commanders wished to retain any Italian troops instead of sending them off to the mainland, a considerable force was rallied with artillery units in preponderance.

This type of command was justified by the course of operations, for it was eventually necessary to withstand the pressure of two Allied armies with two German divisions for combat purposes and at least four Italian divisions, which also had to be led, until it was possible to carry out an organised withdrawal into a defensible position on the north-eastern tip of the island. To this end it was necessary for the four Italian divisions - the "Napoli" and "Livorno" Divisions with the Eastern Group and the "Assietta" and "Aosta" Divisions with the Western Group - to be manoeuvred and placed between the German combat divisions in such a way that they simulated an unbroken front, especially where enemy air reconnaissance was concerned.

As the accounts of both Field Marshal Alexander and Field Marshal Montgomery describe the course of operations as being completely in accordance with the original planning, reference may be made to a history of the Second World War which appeared while hostilities were still in progress and was produced by the Military Intelligence Division of the War Department (Infantry Journal for February 1945) in which the plan of campaign is described as follows:

"The final plan of attack made provision for the Americans to land on the south coast, mop up the western half of the island and then swing eastwards along the north coast, where the British were to link up with them after landing on the south coast and advancing northwards along the east coast. The Allied forces were then to trap the enemy in the north-eastern corner of the island and frustrate any attempt to escape across the Straits of Messina to the mainland by cutting him off."

The justification for the way in which operations were conducted by the Italian Sixth Army may be found by comparing this plan of campaign with what actually happened. The fact that the final evacuation from the Etna position was a masterpiece of management and was carried out perfectly from a technical standpoint is indisputably to the credit of the G.O.C. XIV Panzerkorps, General Hube. On the other hand, however, it was in the initial phase from 10 - 17 July that the above-mentioned Allied plan was frustrated.

If there is any fault at all to be found with General Guzzoni's leadership then it is with the decision to transfer 15th Panzer Grenadier Division to the west. As has been described in detail in section 3 of this report, this decision was forced on General Guzzoni - and thus on me as well - by Field Marshal Kesselring. However, as the subsequent course of events demonstrated, it was in fact by no means a serious error.

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A combined attack on the enemy forces which had landed, by both German divisions in the direction of Gela for example, was not possible owing to inadequate German strength. A purely mass-effect attack of this nature would certainly have resulted in the enemy being pushed back on a fairly broad front, as the Hermann Goering Division with its slow and awkward leadership succeeded in doing. At the same time, however, it would also have led to 15th Panzer Grenadier Division being committed to a quite definite course of action and although it could perhaps have extricated itself more easily than the Hermann Goering Division this would doubtless still have been a difficult enough task.

In the event it was possible to correct this erroneous transfer into the Salemi area so promptly that the division was able to fulfil its proper task, which consisted solely in preventing the above-mentioned movement by Patton's army aimed at outflanking the Etna position until there was no longer any question of springing the intended trap in which the German forces were to meet their fate in the north-eastern tip of the island,

Instead, the outcome was frontal pressure by Montgomery's army in a general northerly direction in conjunction with mopping-up operations in the western area of the island by Patton's army and finally the establishment of a cohesive German front which could only be forced out of this north-eastern tip very slowly. The fact that the basis for the conduct of operations at a later stage was established during the period from 10 - 17 July is also evident from a report by Oberst (General Staff) von Bonin, who is in other respects extremely critical of Italian Sixth Army's leadership, of which he had no actual experience. He writes as follows:

"A cohesive defence had been successfully established with 15th Panzer Grenadier Division and the Hermann Goering Division between the Enna area and the coast south of Catania..... The main issue was whether 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, which was just crossing the Straits of Messina, could be moved up in time into the general area of S. Stefano to fill the gap between the completely unprotected western flank of 15th Panzer Grenadier Division and the north coast of the island. Contrary to our expectations, this movement was carried out successfully and without incurring counter-measures during the next few days."

9. The Sicilian Campaign from the Standpoint of
Mediterranean Strategy

A review of the Sicilian campaign would not be complete unless I added my views on the relevant controversies, especially as both the lengthy campaign in Italy and the protracted German resistance were debatable issues on both sides. Both the Allies and the Germans asked themselves "To what purpose?", for it was impossible here to bring about a decision.

Apart from any evaluation of the theatre of operations as such, the tactics to be adopted were also the subject of much discussion on the German side both before and, as is now evident, after the actual events. This issue in particular is raised in Oberst von Bonin's report on the Sicilian campaign and in Field Marshal Kesselring's reply to these criticisms.

It seems to me to be all the more necessary to express an opinion on this subject since I myself supported the point of view, which I have also sought to justify in this review, that no more than a delaying action was possible on Sicily from the outset, whereas from October of the same year I offered resistance for six months at Cassino as G.O.C. XIV Panzerkorps with a determination which was hardly equalled on any other sector during the war.

The paradox is no more than superficial for in the first place it should be obvious that Sicily was the most unfavourable minor theatre of operations for a tenacious stand. If the actual or supposed dependence of the enemy invasion force on the celebrated factor of fighter cover range had not existed,

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the Allies could also have disposed of the forces holding Sicily by landing in Calabria, commencing their advance from this point and leaving the latter to their fate. However, even if it were held that Sicily must be taken first before there was any question of further landings on the mainland, the exposed island was the most unfavourable place for a prolonged defence in view of the possibility of being outflanked from all sides.

The situation was entirely different when deciding whether Italy should be defended on the shortest line drawn across the "boot" or on the very much longer Gothic Line. Once the enemy's tactics had been identified and there was no longer any need to fear deep outflanking landings on the same scale there was much to be said for Kesselring's theory of choosing the shortest defence line. By this means he dispersed the air attacks on his supply routes, enabled operations to be conducted in depth, which is of such importance for a prolonged defence, and gained time. First and foremost, however, he also did what is always necessary when on the defensive according to the lessons of this war - and I support his views in this respect - in that he offered resistance wherever the opportunity to do so arose and not on a line selected as a result of considering engineering and terrain aspects, as was the purpose of Rommel's theory. Any limitation of defence to a specifically chosen line is still essentially representative of Maginot Line tactics.

However, the primary objection to Rommel's tactics of falling back to the Gothic Line was their complete failure to take the political implications into consideration. This decision was typical of those made in previous times and particularly in the Second World War by those Germans in authority who thought solely on military lines, since the abandonment of Italy south of the Apennines could not fail to drive our ally to defection. Admittedly, the defending of the Apennines meant the relinquishing of areas of the peninsula which were not capable of providing themselves with food and retention of the economically productive Po valley, but at the same time it entailed the abandonment of our ally, his capital city and his contribution to the conduct of the war. OKW's choice of Rommel's plan to give up Italian territory below the Gothic Line, which had been forced on Mussolini, accelerated the latter's fall from power and thus struck a decisive blow at Axis war policy.

In this case the practice which I attempted to illustrate as a disastrous degeneration of war policy in the preceding chapter was carried on wholesale, that is to say strategy was formulated without considering the political aspects which are as much the basis of any strategic problem in the coalition war of today as they were in the time of Clausewitz, who strove in vain to instil this principle into his countrymen.

Four months later an entirely different situation existed. The damage which had been brought about by the initial choice of the Gothic Line had become irrevocable. This must surely have become evident to Hitler when it was too late and he thereupon expressed a preference for Kesselring's plan which, with its stand-fast tactics, was more acceptable to him in any case. Rommel's fortunes were on the wane. Formerly an enthusiastic supporter of Hitler, he suddenly showed signs of depression after his catastrophic defeat in Africa and consequently became suspect, for success and indeed fame were the elixir of life to this spirited leader who, with absolute simplicity and unpretentiousness, had handled in masterly fashion also the propaganda weapon. Persons of this kind seldom stay the same. The development of a position far to the rear, which he was obliged to advocate, was hardly a task to suit his egotism. Thus, Kesselring's position began to improve. Hitler now sought to make good the political blunder which he had committed in bringing about the downfall of his fellow dictator by deciding in favour of Kesselring's plan. He corrected his error by setting up Mussolini's puppet government and retaining his hold of half of the Italian peninsula, at the same time securing a prestige victory of which the German people were in dire need in view of the unbroken series of defeats on the Eastern Front. He even made a virtue out of necessity in that he was no longer able to make any appreciable reduction in

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the excessive number of German divisions in Italy as their transport was exposed to the threat of air attack to such an extent in other theatres that it was no longer worthwhile. Moreover, by these tactics enemy air bases in at least one theatre were kept far away from armaments-producing centres in Germany which were gradually being destroyed.

The political aspect of the strategy pursued in the Mediterranean is at the same time like the writing on the wall for the leadership of the western world of today.

By allowing its ally to fall by the wayside the German command sealed its own fate, a state of affairs which the establishment of the Fascist-Republican puppet state could do nothing to alter. Just as they had found their Petain government to be composed of upright and patriotic collaborators after the defeat of France, so also in Italy on the very eve of their defeat the Germans were able to find a compliant state and a population which bowed to the yoke of the occupying power. The compliant nature of the Badoglio government south of the Cassino line was yet another illustration of this principle of war by which a population lacking in self-determination hoped to improve its lot by ceasing resistance, although in this particular case it must be admitted that political discernment must also have contributed to bringing about the re-alignment with the winning side.

If the leadership of the Western World fails to make provision for the inclusion of the West German Republic by means of a line of defence extending along the Iron Curtain itself, that is to say if it ignores the political aspects of the strategic problem and decides upon a defence system further west along lines which appear to be more favourable from a military standpoint, then by virtue of an irrevocable principle of war it will drive the abandoned population into the arms of the Eastern aggressor. Fear of this enemy will serve only to accelerate the whole process still further. This principle could not be altered in any way even when the Italian people were partitioned between the occupying powers.

In the case of Germany, however, any abandonment to the Eastern aggressor on the part of the West would serve to bring about an apparent re-union rather than a division and would thus give the greatest possible encouragement to all of those nationalistic groups to whom in any event the Western conception of personal liberty is comparatively alien.

When Field Marshal Kesselring gave me the task of defending Corsica with the additional possibility of amalgamating the forces based there with those in Sardinia he too was wondering whether the Allies' next move from Sicily would be in the direction of the mainland or Sardinia. On these two islands in the Tyrrhenian sea were based one and a half German and several Italian divisions, all of which could have been cut off from the mainland very easily since, in contrast to the Straits of Messina, the distance involved was almost as great as that from Tunis to Sicily. In this case, however, the enemy contented himself with blockading the port of Bastia, arming the French maquis, landing several Free French Giraud battalions and making air attacks on air-fields and ports of embarkation. In spite of this blockade and the desertion of the four Italian divisions on Corsica to the enemy, the recapture of Bastia and the evacuation of the force comprising nearly 30,000 men and practically all of the war material on the two islands were successfully accomplished. In this instance capture would have been much easier than in the case of Sicily and the enemy would have had another base for the next move, possibly in the Leghorn area, where he could have pitched his landing battle 600 km further north than Salerno. By establishing a dangerous bridgehead in this area he could have unhinged the German defence system far in the rear and, if the operation proceeded successfully, cut the Germans' lines of retreat and prevented them occupying the Gothic Line. An attempt such as this to wage war against the repeatedly defeated Axis forces in the form of an encircling pursuit would not

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have been too reckless on the part of an extremely superior enemy. In the light of data now available on the potentialities of the sea-borne assault and the standards achieved today in the technique of basing fighter formations on carriers, this decision would no doubt have been regarded as more correct.

Instead, the Allies based their tactics on the theoretically correct and strategically-founded concept of a simultaneous military and political action in the form of the landing at Salerno and the separate armistice, which brought them the collaboration of the Badoglio government and the surrender of the Italian fleet. What they failed to achieve in so doing developed into a fresh success for Kesselring's tactics. By means of a mixture of political shrewdness, threats and troop movements he was able from inside to prevent the fall of Rome and thus to strengthen his position in Italy. He forced the enemy to conduct a further twenty months of prolonged, arduous warfare which was characterised by the clearing of the Italian "boot" across its entire breadth in two winter campaigns and a victory which did not beckon until every other German front was collapsing.

General Mark Clark, my adversary on the Cassino front, makes the following comment on the Italian campaign in his book "Calculated Risk": "We took a chance on Churchill's persuasive eloquence, his conviction that we should slit the soft underbelly of the Mediterranean. It turned out to be not so soft. The theory was widely held that the German armies could not fight effectively in Italy. It was believed that our superior air forces could quickly destroy the enemy's supply lines through the Alpine passes and down the long mountainous spinal column of Italy and that, being unable to maintain himself logistically, he would soon find it unprofitable to give battle. This was wishful thinking" Mark Clark comes to the conclusion that it was an arduous campaign and was too costly in terms of time, men and material in relation to the results achieved.

If the course taken by the Italian campaign gave the Allies so little satisfaction, it must be observed that in this respect it differed little fundamentally from the other offensives to crush Hitler's Germany. Did not the epoch of successful German attacks in Russia really reach its turning-point during the winter of 1941/42? If this point cannot be conceded in view of the further successful attacks in 1942, then it cannot be disputed that Stalingrad was the really decisive defeat in the East, that the initiative consequently passed to the enemy and that, in spite of this, it took another 2½ years to bring about the ultimate conclusion of the war, the outcome of which had long since been decided. The same principle applies to the Allied offensive in France in 1944. Even though it resulted in Germany being entered within a year, it should in all justice not be forgotten that with few exceptions the German command was no longer able to keep any first-class divisions in the French theatre - or perhaps did not wish to do so for political reasons and at any event not at the expense of the Eastern Front. The coastal divisions based on the Atlantic Wall were by no means capable of being first-class for the very reason that they were subject to the principle that static, inactive formations must inevitably lose any combat potential which they might originally have possessed.* Although it borders on the inconceivable, another winter campaign was also necessary in this theatre following the decisive defeat in Normandy!

The defeat of Hitler's Germany entailed prolonged and arduous fighting in all theatres of operations. Admittedly, Germany lacked a government under political control which, like the Italian government, could have mustered the moral strength actually to terminate at this stage a war which any clear-minded politician would long since have recognised as lost. This political failure cannot be justified even by citing the Allied demand for unconditional surrender.

*Note: Groups of officers from these formations sent to the Italian front by OKW to obtain experience of fighting formations could not fail to gather this negative impression.

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However, even if these anomalies inherent in the Hitler regime are taken into account, one cannot fail to recognise the historical fact which emerged from both world wars, namely that the time when a war was rapidly decided by a single strategically-planned battle is past. If the defeat of even Hitler's Germany entailed such arduous fighting, then it is all the more obvious that any attempt to conquer the Soviet Union by advancing into the interior of the Eurasian continent is hopeless. This has been proved not only by the failure of the German offensives at Moscow, Leningrad, in the Caucasus and at Stalingrad, but also by the reverse which American troops suffered in attempting to reach and hold the North Korean-Manchurian frontier. As soon as the radius of operations becomes too great the turning-point will be reached and this moment cannot be altered however many the successes and however great the battles of encirclement during the preceding offensive phase. The bringing together of gigantic modern armies - also, or perhaps especially, of motorised armies - will always necessitate the setting up of lines of defence and close contact between formations.

The view held in many cases by the German General Staff that it was only because of the stupid, obstinate and amateurish type of leadership exercised by Hitler that the offensive launched by the German army was not a decisive one, - a view which also included the theory that the war, which had been lost as far as sheer strength was concerned, could still have been won by withdrawals and regaining freedom of movement - lies within the province of failure to perceive the true nature of modern wars and over-estimation of one's own capabilities and consequently also comes within the dangerous sphere of creating a legend. This legend may become all the more dangerous if it is conducive to incorrect conclusions being drawn with regard to warding off an attack from the East with inferior forces.

The lesson which the course of the Second World War and subsequent events have handed on, however, is the realisation of the importance of modern combined-services attacks on enemy coastlines and the possibility of holding positions gained on these coastlines under cover of air and sea superiority, for this is the factor which makes it possible for Western forces to remain on the Pacific coast of the Eurasian continent and which is also probably deterring the enemy in the East from taking over the European part of it which is so far unoccupied.

Viewed from this aspect the Mediterranean theatre retains its great strategic importance, for it is the only base from which in the event of war a naval air offensive could be brought home to the heart of the Soviet land mass. On the importance of the Middle East nothing said at this juncture can be considered as wasted. The object of my putting this opinion in writing is to give a warning based on four years spent there as an observer during the war against any underestimation of this theatre.

As has been demonstrated by the examples of Dunkirk, Sicily, the Allied offensive in Italy and many other disappointments, land battles cannot be won by air power. If however, the era of decisive battles on land is now over and a matter of history, then so much the more will air and sea power constitute the major part of the potential brought to bear in the future. In this respect the role which Allied air attacks played in defeating Germany has probably been underestimated by Fuller and many others. Even if the bombing offensive against cities had no direct effect on the course of operations and the attacks on centres of armaments production caused less damage on the whole than was generally supposed, the tremendous effect of paralysing the railway network by the methodical elimination of locomotives and the destruction of bridges and tracks can never be ignored.

Control of the Mediterranean and neighbouring countries would enable the Western military command to move its air bases so close to the Russian armaments-producing area that as a result war production could probably be disrupted in a similar manner to that which occurred during the war against Germany from August 1941 onwards. The possibilities of destroying the sparse

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Russian railway network and especially the Trans-Siberian line which handles all movements across this gigantic land mass, would seem to be beyond measure.

Thus, the Mediterranean would retain its importance as a suitable theatre for "thrusts into the soft underbelly", although in a different sense to that which applied in the two World Wars.

An effective encirclement of the Soviet land mass can be implemented only by retaining the bridgeheads on the Pacific coast and consolidating the positions in the Middle East, to which the Mediterranean offers safe access.

Sgd. F. v Senger u. Etterlin

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