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OPERATION HUSKY  
THE CAMPAIGN IN SICILY: A CASE STUDY

BY

Lieutenant Colonel Jon M. Swanson  
United States Air Force

92-15892

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The Axis defense of Sicily marks one of the finest examples of defensive warfare in history. Greatly outnumbered and outgunned, the Germans were able to effectively delay the Allied advance for weeks, buying valuable time for other German units to be brought in to reinforce Italy. The campaign concluded with a brilliant evacuation of the all of the German and much of the Italian forces on Sicily, along with their equipment. Although once defeated, these forces were able to immediately re-enter the fight on the mainland.

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OPERATION HUSKY

THE CAMPAIGN IN SICILY: A CASE STUDY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

BY

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## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Jon M. Swanson, Lt Col, USAF  
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The Allied decision to invade Sicily following the successful operation in North Africa was crucial to the conduct of World War II. The commitment of such a large force to continued operations in the Mediterranean theater meant that the cross-channel invasion from Great Britain into northwest Europe would have to be delayed. If Sicily was chosen as the next step, it would come at the expense of other options favored by many political and military leaders.

The American military commanders strongly favored the cross-channel invasion at the earliest possible opportunity. This meant that this invasion force would be the first priority for troops, shipping and equipment. On the other hand, the British favored an indirect approach that would see a major effort continue in the Mediterranean. At the Casablanca Conference the Mediterranean was the choice and Operation Husky was on.

Operation Husky was the largest amphibious operation ever conducted up to that time. As could be expected, such a complex operation encountered a number of serious problems that the Allies had to learn to overcome. In this sense, Operation Husky was a valuable proving ground where shortcomings in leadership, doctrine, training, equipment and command and control were revealed. These were all problems that the Allies would eventually solve and benefit from in later operations.

The Axis defense of Sicily marks one of the finest examples of defensive warfare in history. Greatly outnumbered and outgunned, the Germans were able to effectively delay the Allied advance for weeks, buying valuable time for other German units to be brought in to reinforce Italy. The campaign concluded with a brilliant evacuation of the all of the German and much of the Italian forces on Sicily, along with their equipment. Although once defeated, these forces were able to immediatly re-enter the fight on the mainland.

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## SETTING THE STAGE

Why did the Allies decide to go to Sicily after their victory in North Africa? This decision was very important to the overall conduct of the war because the commitment of such a large Allied force to Operation HUSKY carried with it lost opportunities to meet the Axis threat in other areas - lost opportunities to challenge the Axis for other objectives. To go to Sicily meant that the cross-channel invasion from Great Britain into northwest Europe, desired by the American military, would be delayed. What strategic objectives were to be gained in Sicily? What would follow? Was Sicily the proper next step?

The answer can be traced back to the initial decisions that resulted in Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa. These decisions were taken at a time when the strategic setting facing the Allies posed a very serious threat. The war had been going badly on all fronts, with no indication where the Allies might first stem the tide. Hitler had driven Great Britain from the European mainland and had driven France out of the war. Elsewhere, Great Britain had suffered setbacks in Norway, Burma, Hong Kong and Singapore. Germany had come to Mussolini's aid in North Africa and was threatening England's hold on Egypt and the Suez Canal. German submarines in the North Atlantic were sending thousands of tons of Allied ships to the bottom.<sup>1</sup> In the Pacific, Japan had followed up its attack against the United

States and was effectively tightening its grip on the Southwest Pacific. There was a lot of news, and it was all bad for the Allies. What could the Allies do?

The basic American priority for global conduct of the war was already taking shape. While American public sentiment and passion was aimed at Japan and the Pacific, President Roosevelt had decided that Germany must be defeated first.<sup>2</sup> Even before the United States entered WWII, President Roosevelt was committed to England's survival and postwar freedom of action.<sup>3</sup> However, with Japan's attack came several difficult questions that would have to be answered. What shape should America's own mobilization take? Which service and what capabilities should have priority? How would MacArthur be supported in the Phillipines? How would the Allies keep Russia in the war? How would aid reach China? What should have priority? While it is beyond the scope of this paper to address these questions, the issues were relevant to North Africa and, in turn, to Sicily. The answers shaped America's role in the war.

The initial decisions were announced at the Arcadia Conference in Washington D.C. in Dec, 1941 by the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS), a body made up of President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and their chief military advisors. At the Arcadia Conference, fundamental differences between British and American strategy surfaced. Churchill argued for an Allied attack in North Africa aimed at relieving pressure on the Russian front and the British 8th Army in Libya/Egypt. Churchill argued

that a strong Allied move in the Mediterranean would force Hitler to divert men and equipment to meet this challenge, thereby drawing forces away from the Russian front. Success in North Africa would open the Mediterranean to Allied shipping, thus saving thousands of shipping tonnage. Further, there was a good possibility that if the Allies established a strong presence in French North Africa the Vichy French forces there might join the Allies and bring France back into the war.<sup>4</sup> This plan would be called Gymnast.<sup>5</sup>

While the United States military leadership recognized the advantages of a North African campaign as a means to prevent the Axis from penetrating the French held areas of North Africa and securing the Mediterranean supply routes, they still strongly opposed this option. General Marshall, in particular, favored an early cross-channel invasion from England into Northwest Europe aimed at the heart of Germany. General Marshall's view was that the Allies should concentrate their available forces for the main effort and not allow that force to be fragmented and used piecemeal.<sup>6</sup> If the Allies were to be able to mount a major cross-channel offensive in 1943, this operation must be given top priority. Shortages in manpower, shipping, landing craft and the need to get on with the war in the Pacific all argued against going to North Africa, particularly since all agreed that victory in North Africa would not be decisive. The United States saw North Africa and the Mediterranean as a side show which would not yield strategic advantages commensurate with its tremendous

costs. The main concern was that an operation such as the one proposed by the British would gain its own momentum and would forever compete with the cross-channel invasion for the same scarce resources.<sup>7</sup>

Churchill and his military leaders opposed a commitment to the cross-channel invasion at the Arcadia Conference. While agreeing that the main effort ultimately must come in the form of a cross-channel invasion as recommended by the U.S., Churchill instead proposed a strategy that called for attacking Germany on the periphery. His goal was to wear them down, believing this would give the Allies a better chance of victory when the main assault came.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps because of England's experience in WWII, the fact that they had already been pushed off the mainland once at Dunkirk, the fact that their army was already engaged in North Africa and the fact that the United States had not yet proven itself in battle, made the notion of an early cross-channel invasion seem too risky to Churchill and the British military leadership.

The Allies emerged from the Arcadia Conference with this much of the basic strategy agreed upon:

1. Germany to be defeated first - Japan contained
2. Wear down the Axis by tightening a ring around Axis held territory as Allied resources permit.
3. The means to include a naval blockade, all-out aid to Russia, a strategic bombing campaign, cultivate underground opposition movements in Axis held territory, limited offensives

along the perimeter where Allied strength could be focused, all in preparation for a final major offensive.<sup>9</sup>

Despite this agreement, however, world events and Allied misunderstandings that carried over from the conference would result in months of continued debate and inaction.<sup>10</sup> Some in the United States believed that Churchill's motives were to preserve Britain's colonial influence in the Mediterranean and status as a world power. American leaders were not ready to commit U.S. forces to that goal.<sup>11</sup> While they agreed that Germany must be defeated first, the war against Japan would not wait too long. Japanese advances in the Pacific, Allied shipping losses to German U-boats in the North Atlantic and Russia's needs were creating great pressure for scarce resources.

Throughout early 1942, General Marshall continued to press President Roosevelt for an early cross-channel invasion. Rather than commit to the Mediterranean, General Marshall supported modifications to Operation Sledgehammer, a plan first proposed by the British which called for a cross-channel invasion in 1942 should Russia or Germany suddenly be on the verge of collapse.<sup>12</sup> The President was already convinced that the United States must soon take action in the European theater to focus American public attention on that area vice the Pacific.<sup>13</sup> Realizing that as time wore on into the summer of 1942, resources simply could not be mustered for a cross-channel invasion that year, Marshall switched his emphasis to Operation Bolero, the build-up of Allied forces in England for the invasion in 1943 (called Operation

Roundup).

President Roosevelt, in response to Marshal's urging, sent representatives to London to gain agreement on a plan of action. Responding to U.S. pressures, the British agreed in principle to Bolero but would not commit to Roundup at the expense of Gymnast. The political process resulted in a military compromise that favored the British point of view. The British knew that since a cross-channel invasion would not be launched in the near future, it would have to be North Africa or there would be no offensive against Germany in 1942.<sup>14</sup> The issue finally came to a head when British setbacks in Libya caused Churchill to quickly return to England from the second Washington conference in June and publicly declare that North Africa represented the only opportunity to strike at Germany in 1942.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately President Roosevelt overruled his generals and, on 25 June, agreed to Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa. By doing so, the President effectively killed any chance of a cross-channel invasion in 1943.<sup>16</sup>

## CASABLANCA AND OPERATION TORCH

Operation Torch was a very ambitious plan which called for the Allies to land at three main points, ranging from Casablanca to Oran and Algiers. The choice of such widely dispersed landing sites reflected another disagreement between allies who could not agree on strategy for the war. On the one hand, the Americans, concerned that a landing deep in the Mediterranean could be jeopardized if Germany advanced through Spain and closed the Straits of Gibraltar, favored a landing on the Atlantic coast of Africa. On the other hand, the British desired a landing closer to Tunisia with the objective of quickly seizing the ports at Tunis and Bizerte to deny their use to the Axis for bringing in reinforcements. These new Allied units would then combine with the 8th Army to destroy the Afrika Corps.<sup>17</sup> The problem was solved as it would be many more times in the future; by compromise.

The Torch landings provided a litany of lessons to be learned for the Allies. The ships, many of which had sailed directly from the United States, were not loaded to facilitate their rapid offload. There were serious communication problems and equipment failures. The beaches chosen resulted in the loss of many landing craft due to rough surf.<sup>18</sup> Had the landing been more bitterly opposed by the French, Allied casualties could have been very high.

Hitler responded to Torch by rapidly reinforcing Tunisia under General Nehring and the XC Corps with about 25,000 men. Meanwhile, Rommel and the Afrika Corps were still retreating west from Egypt before Montgomery's 8th Army. The Axis goal was to delay the Allies long enough to allow them bring in their reinforcements and link up with the retreating Afrika Corps. Nehring was able to establish an effective perimeter that blocked the Allied advance from the west and Rommel made it to the Mareth Line west of Tripoli.<sup>19</sup> The Allied effort to reach Bizerte and Tunis ahead of the Germans had failed.

While the Allies had landed over 117,000 troops, Eisenhower could not bring them all to bear. Transportation and logistical problems hampered operations throughout the campaign, making it impractical to employ all the forces they had landed, particularly those U.S. forces on the western shore of Africa. The weather was another factor hampering operations. The rainy season at the end of 1942 turned Tunisia into a quagmire of mud which so restricted the Allied advance that the entire timetable was upset.<sup>20</sup> It would be March before the Allies were ready to resume the offensive. Rommel was ready sooner.

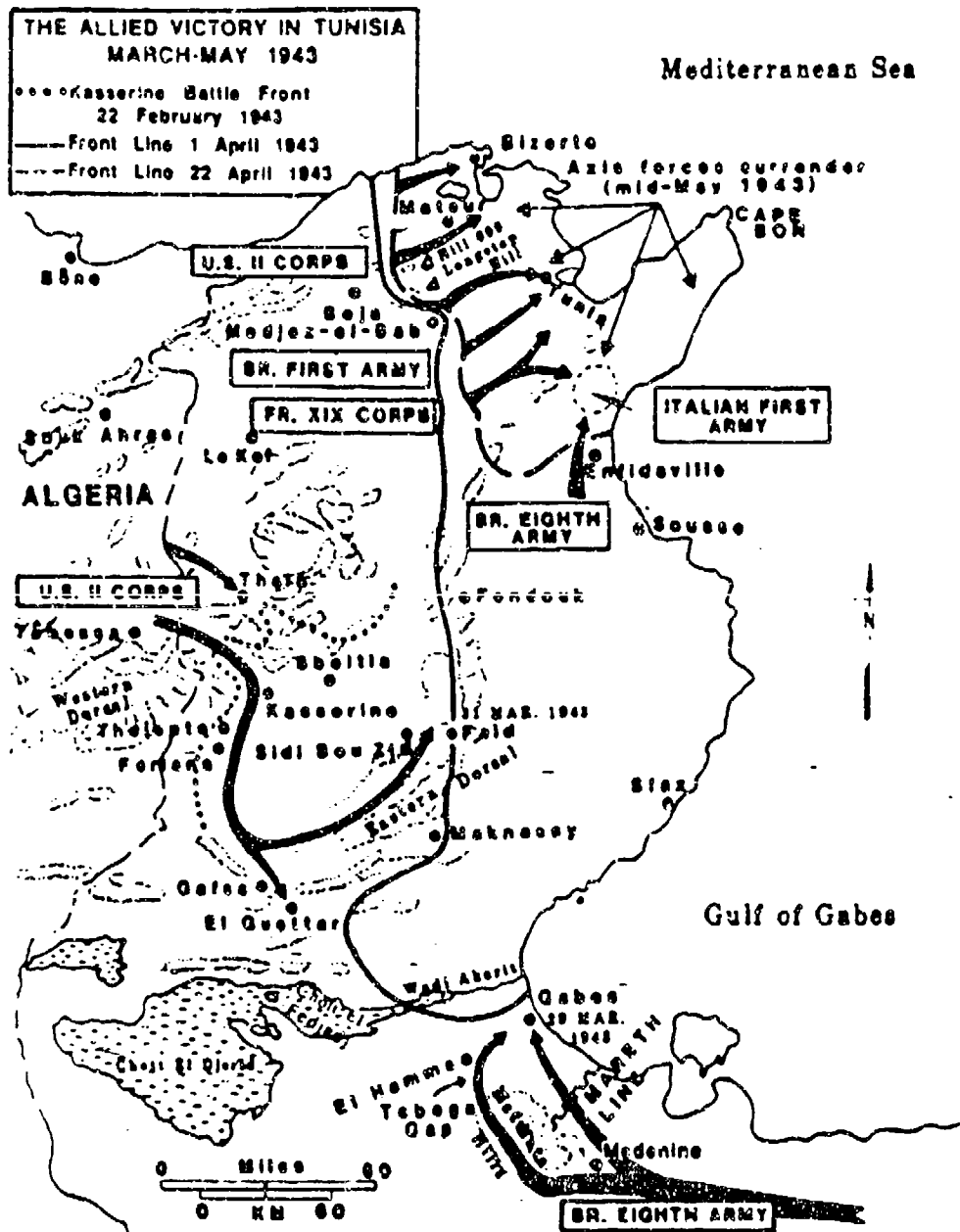
In February, 1943, Rommel's forces advanced northwest from the Mareth line against American defensive positions in Tunisia. The fighting lasted several days and included the battle at Kasserine Pass where the U.S. forces were badly beaten. This defeat cost the U.S. alone over 6,000 casualties and revealed serious deficiencies in American training, leadership and

equipment. Later, the U.S. 34th Inf Div failed to capture its assigned objectives while assigned to a provisional British Corps. This, and other incidents, seriously damaged the reputation of the American troops in the eyes of the British, particularly General Alexander.<sup>21</sup>

The relationship between the British and American staffs was strained from the beginning. Although both countries share a common language, their military traditions, doctrine and practices varied considerably. Among Eisenhower's primary goals, and perhaps his greatest contribution, was his ability to bring together the combined forces of these two powers, along with the French forces that had joined him, into an effective team. However, to one extent or another, Eisenhower's methods irked the many American commanders whom Eisenhower would not allow to criticize the British. He was less successful in controlling British criticisms and comments to the press.<sup>22</sup>

During the final push toward Tunis Generals Alexander and Montgomery's low opinion of the American's fighting ability caused them to assign secondary missions to the U.S. divisions. Bradley strongly protested and was assigned a much more important role; the advance north to the coast at Bizerte to prevent the Axis from breaking out of the box the Allies were closing around them (see map 1 on next page). The Allies were successful in this final push and handed the Germans their final defeat in North Africa, taking over 250,000 prisoners (100,000 were German).<sup>23</sup> However, despite the American's success against a

## The Battle For Tunisia



Map 1<sup>26</sup>

determined defense, General Alexander's distrust of American forces continued and would influence his decisions during Operation Husky.

The Casablanca Conference, held in January 1943, was a crucial meeting between Roosevelt, Churchill and their respective senior advisors and military leaders. Here the Allies had to decide where to go after operations in Tunisia were completed and here the fundamental differences between American and British strategic views surfaced again. The outcome was to influence the course of the remainder of the war. The way the outcome was reached hardened American attitudes toward the British.

The outcome of the Casablanca Conference greatly favored the British point of view. As previously stated, the focus of British strategy was to attack the Axis along the southern periphery in the Mediterranean. To insure the outcome stayed true to this course, the British came to the conference with a large staff who had done their homework well. British Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Alan Brooke, was their spokesman. The British had come to Casablanca with their internal differences of opinion settled and they presented a unified approach to the Americans.<sup>25</sup>

The United States delegation, on the other hand, had come to the meeting with a much smaller delegation and had not come equally prepared. Differences between senior U.S. leaders had not been resolved before hand and these surfaced at the conference, greatly weakening their arguments with the British.

General Marshal, although he still wanted the major effort to be the cross-channel invasion, came to the conference resigned to the fact that the momentum in the Mediterranean would have to be continued. He was prepared to support Sicily as the next step. Admiral King, on the other hand, came to the conference to argue for a greater effort in the Pacific. Admiral King's control of the allocation of landing craft gave him a bigger voice than he might otherwise have had. Probably most damaging was the fact that the military chiefs had only one meeting with Roosevelt prior to the conference.<sup>26</sup> The Americans simply were not as well prepared as the British and felt on the defensive throughout. They vowed to never let that happen again.

The primary British objective that came out of the Casablanca Conference was to knock Italy out of the war by exploiting the advantages from the Tunisian victory. Toward this end, the British were willing to compromise with Admiral King and agreed to U.S. operations in the Pacific (within existing resources). However, the agreement on a European strategy came only after four days of heated debate. An agreement was finally reached through compromise that included the decision to implement Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily.<sup>27</sup>

Sicily was seen as an interim step toward larger strategic objectives which had not yet been clearly defined. Therefore, the upcoming campaign had rather limited objectives of its own. Specifically, these were 1) to secure Allied lines of communication in the Mediterranean, 2) divert as much German

strength as possible from the Russian front and, 3) pressure Italy to drop out of the war.<sup>28</sup> The specific military objective for the campaign would be to capture and control the island as a base for future military operations.<sup>29</sup>

Among the greatest failings of the Allied effort in WWII was their inability to fully agree on strategy and put aside what were sometimes nothing more than petty differences. On the other hand, many consider it remarkable that two great nations at war, each with their different national policies and objectives, could work together at all, much less as well as they did. The basic difference between the American desire to focus on a cross-channel invasion and the British emphasis on the Mediterranean, complicated by the demands of the Russian front and the Pacific, made it politically impossible to draft a long term strategy. The result was a process that evolved, step by step, without a clear vision of the end result. This step-by-step process which started with Torch, because nothing else was available, naturally led to the invasion of Sicily. Once there, Italy became the logical next step, not so much because it was the next step in a carefully laid plan, but because it was there.



## ALLIED PLANS

General Dwight Eisenhower was named Allied Commander in Chief for the invasion of Sicily, code named Operation Husky. While this decision placed an American in the top position, all of Eisenhower's principle deputies were British. General Alexander was named deputy commander and ground force commander, Admiral Cunningham was placed in charge of all naval forces and Air Chief Marshal Tedder was placed in charge of all Allied Air Forces. The invasion forces themselves were organized around two main task forces.<sup>30</sup> The eastern task force was placed under the command of Montgomery and included all British and Canadian air, ground and sea units. Patton was named commander of the western task force with all American sea, air and ground units under him.<sup>31</sup> The Allied command arrangements are shown on the next two pages.

## ALLIED COMMAND STRUCTURE<sup>32</sup>

Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ)  
Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces North Africa

Commander: General Dwight D. Eisenhower

Deputy: General Sir Harold Alexander

Allied Ground Forces  
General Sir Harold Alexander

15th Army Group  
General Sir Harold Alexander

- Eighth Army (Force 545) - General Bernard Montgomery
  - 13th Corps - Lt Gen Miles Dempsey
    - 5th Div
    - 50th (Northumbrian) Div
    - 1st Airborne Div
  - 30th Corps - Lt Gen Oliver Lease
    - 51st (Highland) Div
    - 1st Canadian Div
  - Reserves
    - 46th Div (not used in Sicily)
    - 78th Div
- 7th Army (Force 343) - Lt Gen George Patton
  - II Corps - Lt Gen Omar Bradley
    - 1st Inf Div
    - 45th Inf Div
    - 3rd Inf Div
  - Reserves
    - 2nd Armored Div
    - 82nd Airborne Div
    - 9th Inf Div

## Allied Naval Forces

Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham

- Eastern Task Force - Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsey
  - Force A - Supporting 5th and 50th Divs
  - Force B - Supporting 51st Div
  - Force V - Supporting 1st Canadian Div
  - Force K - Support Force
- Western Task Force - Vice Admiral H. Kent Hewitt
  - Joss Force (TF 86) - Supporting 3rd Inf Div
  - Dime Force (TF 81) - Supporting 1st Inf Div
  - Cent Force (TF 85) - Supporting 45th Inf Div

## Allied Air Forces

Mediterranean Air Command

Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur W. Tedder

- Northwest African Air Forces - Maj Gen Carl A. Spaatz
  - Northwest African Strategic Air Force - Maj Gen Doolittle
  - Northwest African Tactical A F - Air Marshal Coningham
  - Northwest African Coastal Air Force
  - Northwest African Troop Carrier Command
  - Northwest African Air Service Command
  - Northwest African Photo Recon Wing
- Malta Air Command (RAF) - Air Vice-Marshal Sir Keith Park
- Middle East Air Command (RAF) - Air Chief Marshal Douglas
- Ninth U.S. Air Force - Maj Gen Brereton
  - under operational control of Middle East Air Command

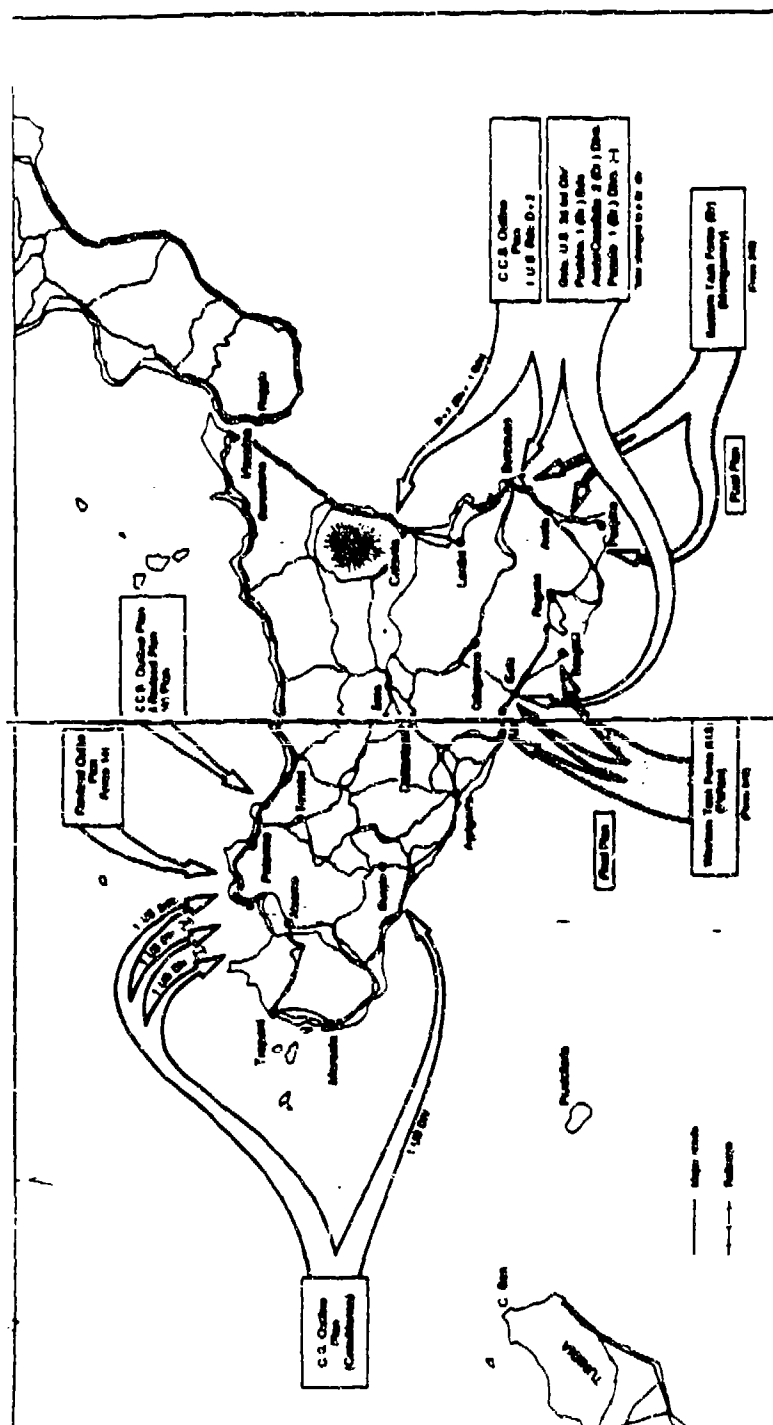
## Task Force Commanders

|           | Eastern                  | Western         |
|-----------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Ground CC | Gen Montgomery           | Lt Gen Patton   |
| Air CC    | Air V Marshal Broadhurst | Col L.P. Hickey |
| Naval CC  | Admiral Ramsey           | Vice Adm Hewitt |

For Eisenhower, the British committee system he inherited was frustrating and ineffective, but he lacked the political influence at this time to change it.<sup>33</sup> This arrangement was further handicapped by the fact that the various headquarters were geographically separated by hundreds of miles, including Cairo, Morocco, London and Washington. In January, Eisenhower established a dedicated planning staff for Husky at Algiers. Called Force 141, the planning staff, in effect, had no "commander" until the campaign in Tunisia was over. In the interim, the Chief of Staff, Major General Gairdner (a British officer brought in from India), was in charge.<sup>34</sup>

Planners for Husky had difficulty from the beginning. In addition to the geographic distances between key decision makers and their preoccupation with on-going operations, Gairdner and his staff were not experienced in this type of planning, nor did they explore options beyond those that were suggested to them. Their first effort produced plans to assault Catania or Palermo or both at the same time.<sup>35</sup> See map 2 at page 19. Suggestions were made, both at this time and later, to assault Messina and close the straits to both reinforcement and escape. Later, Marshal even suggested that they look at mounting a small operation against Sicily before the fighting in Tunisia was over and before the Axis could build up their defenses there.<sup>36</sup> These bolder moves were never seriously considered. Instead the plans put forward reflected Eisenhower's conservative preference

## Operation Husky Plans



Map 2<sup>37</sup>

with emphasis on capturing the ports and airfields needed to sustain the large force thought necessary.

The plan approved by Eisenhower on 13 March called for 3 British divisions to land at separate points along a 100 mile area from Syracuse to Gela. Sixty miles west of Gela one American division would go ashore, followed two days later by another American division to land near Palermo. On D+3 another British division would land at Catania. The landing would be augmented by airborne forces assigned to capture key airfields.<sup>38</sup> General Montgomery strongly objected to this concept and opened a debate that would continue for the next several weeks. The debate hinged on which task force would land at Gela and capture the airfields there, the shortage of landing craft and the perceived need for another division.<sup>39</sup> Neither Alexander nor Eisenhower provided effective leadership during this critical stage and had to be spurred on by Churchill and the Combined Chiefs of Staff to overcome their pessimism.<sup>40</sup> As time passed and Alexander continued to focus on Tunisia at the expense of providing guidance for Husky, support for the plan being developed began to evaporate.

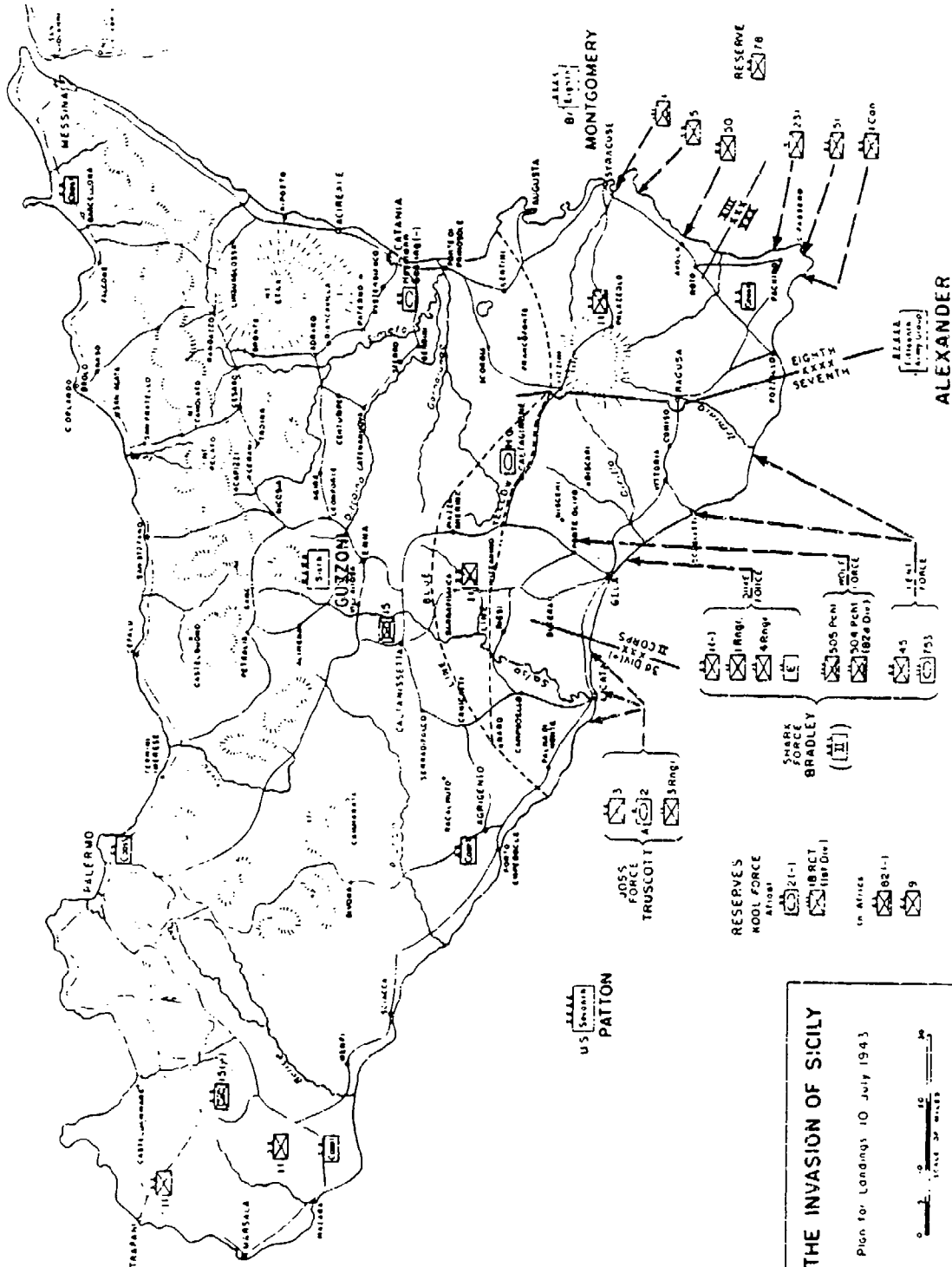
No progress was made over the next several weeks. Montgomery remained very outspoken, not only as a critic of the plan itself, but of his fellow generals as well. He took particular aim at General Anderson, commanding the British 1st Army, and was privately critical of Alexander and Eisenhower for not taking more effective charge of the Husky planning.

Montgomery went so far as to order his own staff to make their own plans for Husky.<sup>41</sup> The debate raged between senior officers creating much ill-will. This entire episode highlighted serious weaknesses among the Allied generals and their command relationships that were to continue to hinder Husky. The hard feelings born here between Tedder and Montgomery continued throughout the war and after when both became chiefs of their respective services.<sup>42</sup>

Fully aware of the political pressure to have Husky go no later than mid-July, Eisenhower finally weighed in and approved the plan presented by Montgomery. By doing so, Eisenhower took Alexander off the hook. This plan called for the American Western Task Force to land at Gela and Scoglitti and capture the airfields at Ponte Olivo, Biscari and Comiso. A smaller U.S. force was to take the port at Licata. Patton accepted this secondary role to protect Montgomery's flank but he didn't like it and considered Eisenhower too much an Ally and too little an American.<sup>43</sup> One change that Eisenhower did make was to elevate Patton to a status equal to Montgomery by redesignating Patton's I Armored Corps as the U.S. 7th Army.

Montgomery was to have the primary task of moving up the east coast and take Messina. He elected to divide the 8th Army into two corps. The 13th Corps, made up by the 5th and 50th divisions, would land in the Gulf of Noto (see map 3 next page). Once ashore, the 13th would take Syracuse and Augusta as rapidly as possible and move on to Catania. The 30th Corps, made up of

## The Allied Landings



Map 3<sup>4</sup>

the Canadian 1st and British 51st (Highlander) divisions, plus the 231st Inf Brigade, would land on both sides of the Pachino Peninsula and advance northwest, linking up with both the 13th Corps and the 7th Army.<sup>45</sup> In reality, with the 1st Div landing on the western side of the peninsula, the British were divided into three landing forces.

Patton's force would land west of the British along the south central coast near Gela along a 70 mile stretch. Patton's objectives were to seize and hold the previously mentioned airfields and the port at Licata and protect Montgomery's flank. Patton saw the high ground directly above the town of Gela as a key position to secure his beachhead and this became a major objective for the landing force. Both landings were to be preceded by airborne and glider assaults the night before which were intended to secure key objectives and disrupt enemy communication and transportation.<sup>46</sup>

Logistical support for the operation was a major concern. To land the force the Allies would muster the largest armada in history, up to that time, totaling over 3,200 ships.<sup>47</sup> This was needed to land a force ordered to take with it enough supplies to be self-sufficient for 7 days. Facilities to bring supplies ashore were to be operational by D+8 at the latest. Even with this large number of ships, however, planners could not take everything they desired and they had to prioritize missions, units and equipment.<sup>48</sup>

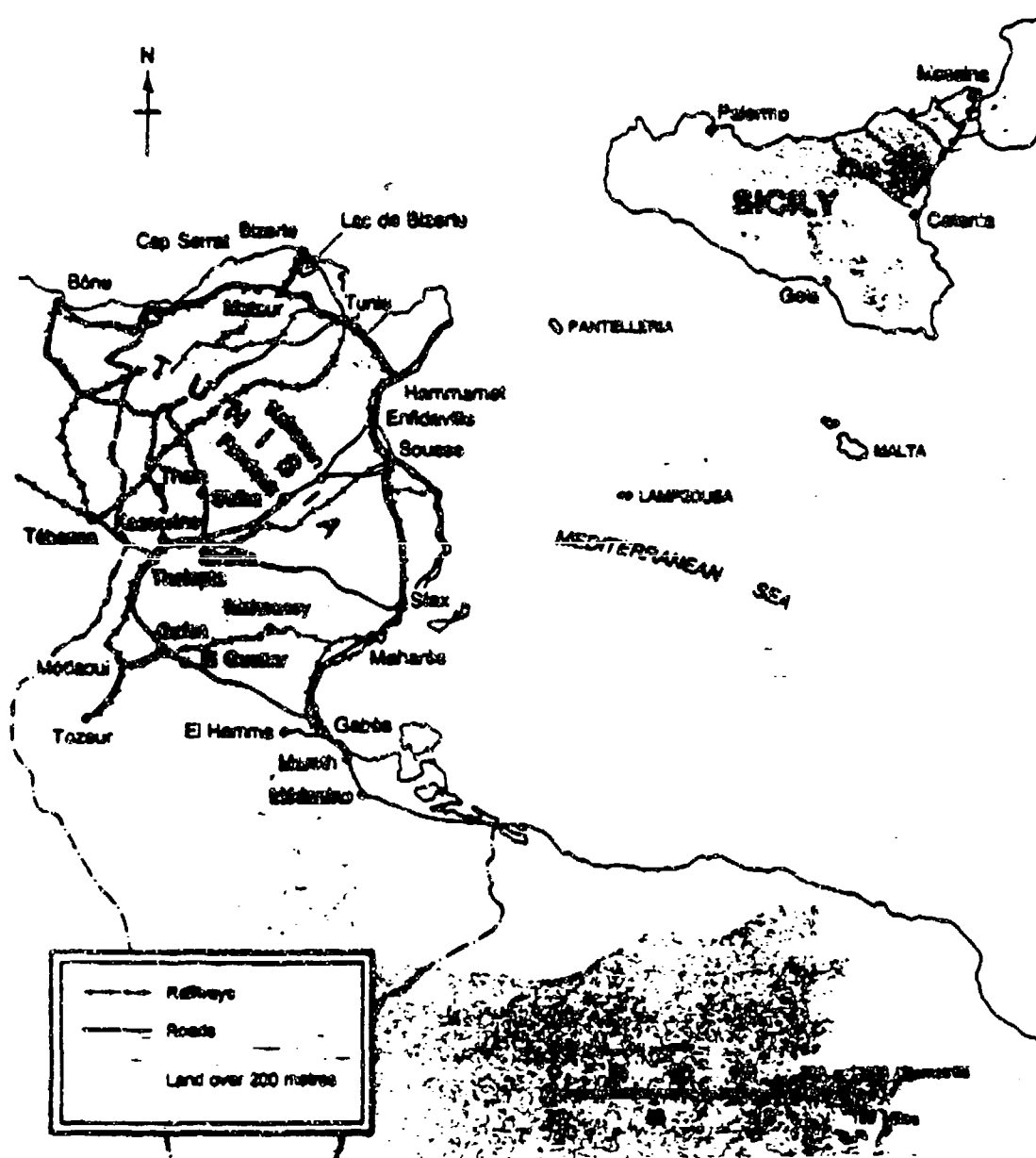
Before Husky could be launched it would be necessary to

neutralize the Axis forces on the island of Pantelleria and the Pelagian group. Of these, Pantelleria was the more important. Located just 53 miles from Sicily (see map 4 next page), the small island was the site of a German Freya radar position and a 5,000 foot runway which the Axis had been using during the North African campaign. From here, the Axis could harass the invasion fleet. The island had been placed off-limits to foreigners since 1926, and it was known to be heavily fortified.<sup>49</sup>

Allied intelligence was incomplete, but they had determined Pantelleria was occupied by at least 10,000 Italian soldiers who had built over 100 gun emplacements and other fortifications. While it posed a formidable obstacle, the Allies believed that the low morale of the Italian troops elsewhere was an indication that the resistance might not be as tough as it could be. The Allies began heavy bombardment of the island on May 18 as well as a naval blockade. The Allies flew over 3,600 sorties and dropped over 4,800 tons of bombs in June alone. When it was attacked on June 11, the island garrison gave up to the small force that assaulted it.<sup>50</sup>

The nearby island of Lampedusa, which had also been subjected to a heavy aerial bombardment surrendered its 4,300 men the next day. Linosa surrendered without a fight on 13 June, and Lampione was not defended. Although these installations were not supported by Mussolini after they came under attack, their surrender further damaged Italian morale and lowered their prestige in the eyes of the Germans.<sup>51</sup>

# Pantelleria and Lampedusa



Map 4<sup>52</sup>



## THE AXIS DEFENSE

The Axis powers knew that the massed Allied forces, now victorious in North Africa, would soon move against them. However, there was considerable debate over where that attack would be aimed. This question carried considerable importance because the answer would guide the disposition of the available forces, and to what extent the Russian front would be drawn down. Many decision makers were convinced somewhere other than Sicily would be the target.

Hitler expected the Allied invasion would be aimed at the Balkans for several reasons. First, Germany depended upon the region for many strategic minerals including bauxite, antimony, copper, chromium and oil. Second, Greece, in particular, would be much tougher for the Axis to defend, especially because the Axis would be restricted to a single rail line extending over 800 miles through territory vulnerable to air attack and partisan action. Italy, on the other hand, had a much better road and railroad network available to the Axis. Third, Hitler was the victim of a carefully laid deception plan.<sup>53</sup>

Operation Mincemeat was the name given to a fictitious Allied plan to invade Greece. A key element of this deception plan involved a British Major named William Martin - although Martin was a fictitious person. "Major Martin" was actually a British civilian who died of pneumonia, whose body was given

false identity, dressed in the uniform of a Royal Marine, and released from a submarine near Gibraltar with a briefcase chained to his wrist. In the briefcase was a letter to General Alexander explaining that forces he expected to be assigned were instead going to Greece. The letter also described Sicily as the diversion for Operation Mincemeat.<sup>54</sup> "Major Martin" washed ashore and was discovered by Spanish authorities who, just as the British anticipated, turned the plans over to the Germans. These plans ultimately found their way to Hitler who, perhaps already disposed to expecting Greece to be the objective, became convinced. Undoubtedly, this deception contributed to the German decision to send 13 divisions to the Balkans, vice 6 in Italy and Sicily combined.<sup>55</sup>

Other German generals thought the Allied strike would be aimed at Sardinia. They felt that once Sardinia was taken, Corsica would also fall and together would offer air bases to threaten all of the Italian mainland, especially the Po River region, southern France and portions of Germany itself. Luftwaffe Field Marshal Baron von Richthofen (nephew of the WWI ace), believing the attack would be aimed at Sardinia and acting against the desires of Field Marshall Kesselring, drew down the fighter strength on Sicily in the critical months of May and June.<sup>56</sup>

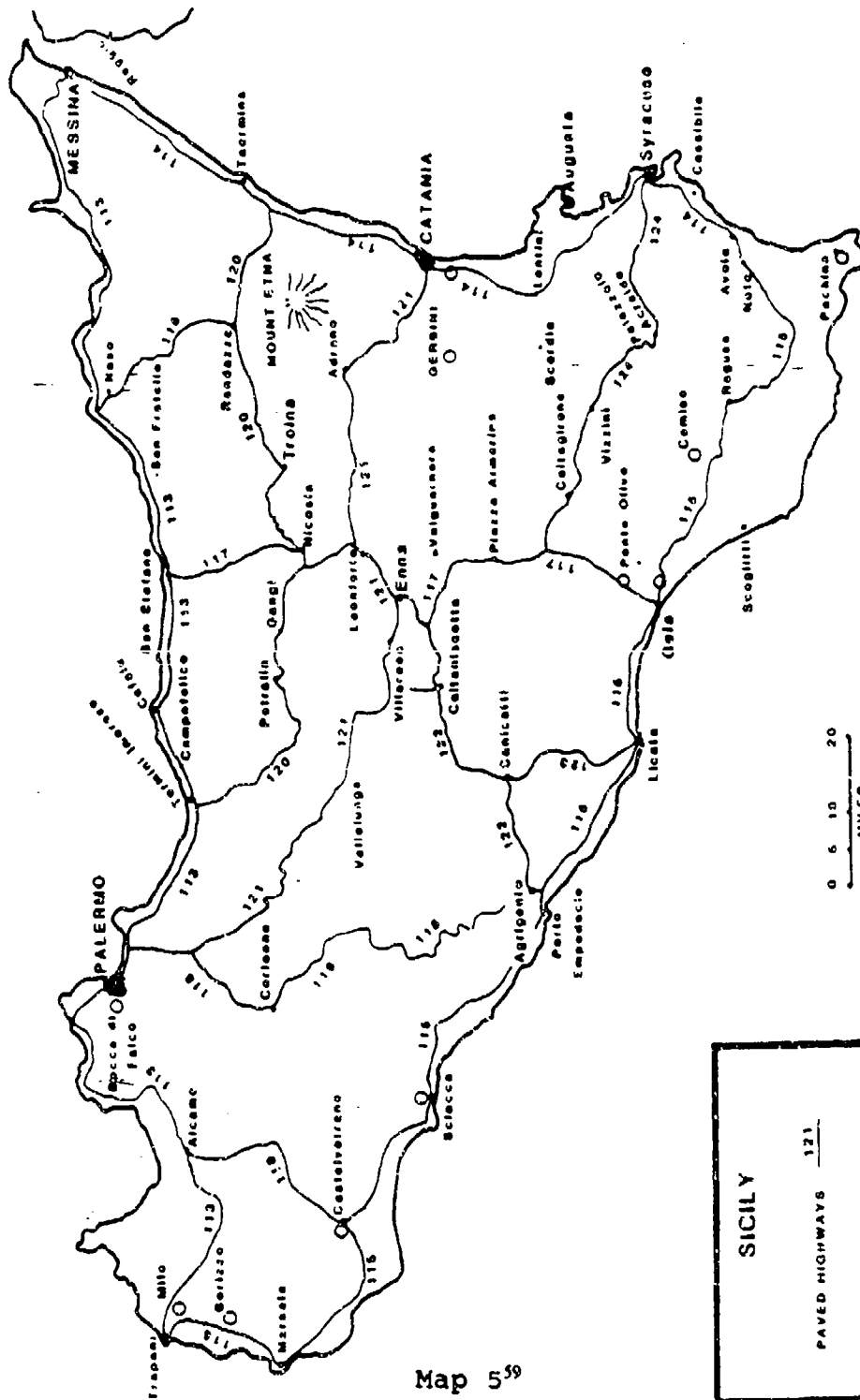
Still others believed the attack would be aimed at the southern tip of Italy itself. Perhaps taking council of their fears, some Italian generals were concerned that all Axis forces

on Sicily would be cut off if the Allies invaded the mainland at the toe of Italy. Therefore, this area would have to be defended as well. Additionally, the Axis leadership did not rule out a direct assault against southern France.<sup>57</sup>

Field Marshal Kesselring came to believe the next Allied effort would be aimed at Sicily, or possibly Sardinia. Based upon the limited amphibious operations experience of the Allies and his expectation the Allies would not operate beyond the range of land-based fighters, Kesselring focused on Sicily. Another reason supporting this theory was the expected benefit to the Allies if the Mediterranean could be opened to Allied shipping. The British press was reporting that the Allies would save two million tons of cargo space if the Mediterranean were secure. Kesselring ordered plans to defend Sicily to go ahead.<sup>58</sup>

The island of Sicily is shaped like a triangle, with the northern and southern coasts approx. 170 miles long, coming together at the western tip (see map 5 next page). The east coast, approx. 140 miles long, is dominated by Mt. Etna whose steep sides channel traffic along the eastern shore along a narrow strip between Catania and Messina. A ridge of mountains runs west along the northern coast, sloping toward the south. This gentle slope continues south beyond the shore making the beach area too shallow in many places for heavier landing craft to reach the beach. There are only three areas on the entire island suitable for airfields. The best is the Catania plain along the eastern shore. The second is along the south central

## The Island of Sicily



shore near Gela. The third is a small area in the northwest near Palermo. The entire country is hilly, rocky and difficult for vehicles when off the roads. The climate is hot and dry, especially in July.

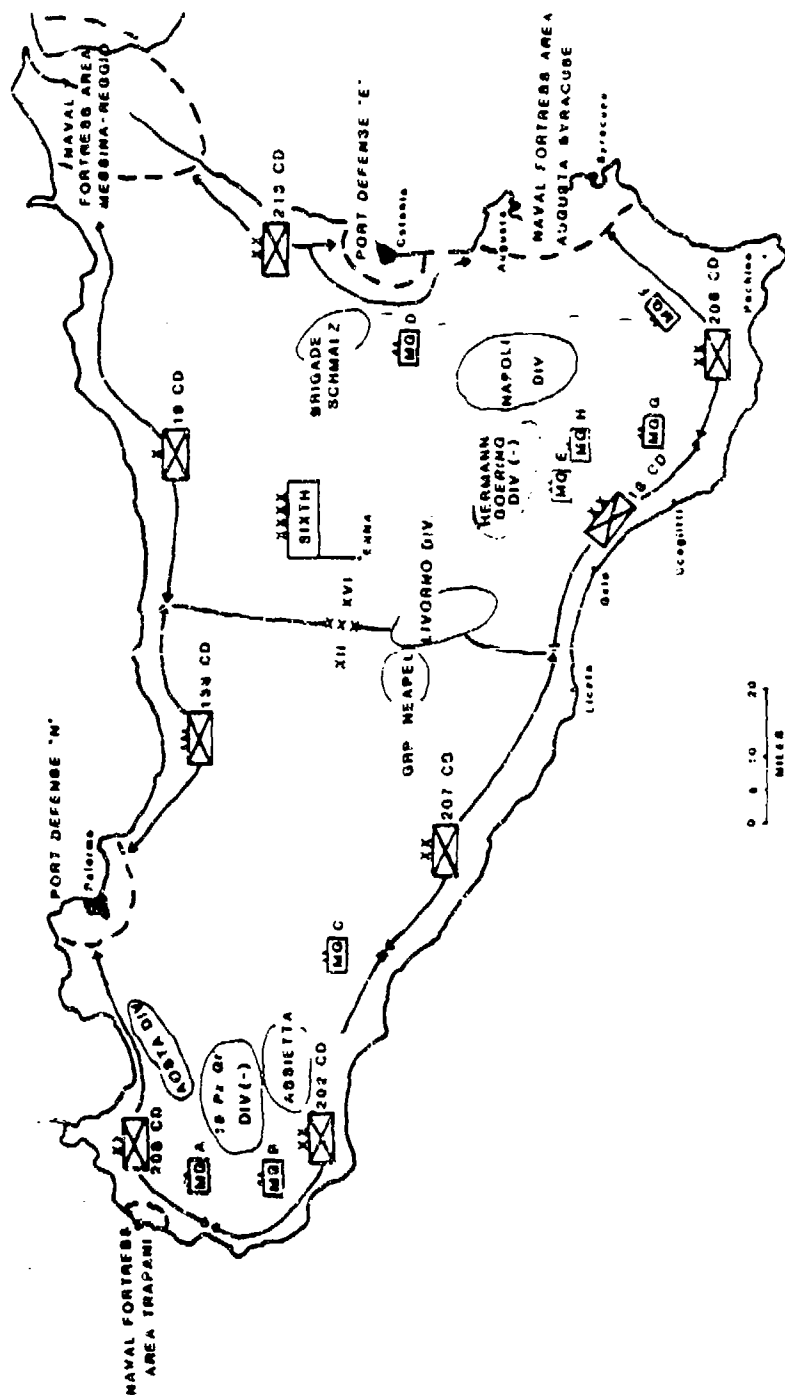
Sicily, in 1943, was inhabited by approx. four million people, with only 10% of the population living in the cities. Their relationship with the Italian government has historically been very troubled, and the war had already brought much destruction to Sicily. As a result, the morale of the civilian population was very low. During the campaign in North Africa, Sicily had been a frequent target of Allied bombers intent on disrupting the flow of Axis supplies, resulting in extensive damage to Sicily's cities. The damage done and threat of invasion had displaced much of the urban civilian population from their homes and disrupted their already weak economy. To make matters worse, both Mussolini and some of his military leaders made remarks which led Sicilians to believe Mussolini would not vigorously defend Sicily. Many of the troops on Sicily, under the command of Italian generals, were Sicilian. Most of these were assigned to the six coastal defense divisions who were very poorly led, trained and equipped. Like their civilian counterparts, their morale was very low and both the Italian and German generals doubted their reliability.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to the coastal defense divisions, General d'Armata Alfredo Guzzoni had four mobile Italian divisions assigned to his 6th Army in Sicily. All were under strength and

poorly equipped. They were the Aosta (28th), the Napoli (54th), the Assietta (26th) Infantry Divisions and the Livorno (4th) Assault and Landing Division. The 4th was considered the best of them. They were all lacking adequate stocks of ammunition, fuel and communication gear.<sup>61</sup> There were also three Naval Fortress Areas, which were not under 6th Army control. These areas were Trapani, Messina-Reggio and Syracuse-Augusta. While these areas were equipped with large caliber coastal defense guns, anti-aircraft batteries and torpedo boat units, they were old, manned by reservists and also short on ammunition.<sup>62</sup>

The German Army also had units on Sicily. During the Tunisian Campaign, the Germans had been using Sicily as a staging area for replacements headed to North Africa. However, when it became apparent that all was lost in Tunisia, the local German commander stopped sending those troops forward and began organizing them into combat units. Among the soldiers in Sicily at the time were many combat veterans who formed the nucleus of what became the refitted 15th Panzer Grenadier Division that had been part of the Afrika Corps in North Africa. The disposition of Axis forces on 9 July is shown on map 6. The 15th was commanded by Major General Eberhard Rodt.<sup>63</sup> The other Afrika Corps Division, the 90th Panzer Grenadiers, was reconstituted in Sardinia. However, a second German division was sent to Sicily. The Hermann Goering (HG) Panzer Division, was formed from units in Italy also intended for North Africa. The new HG Div remained

Axis Dispositions, 9 July 1943



Map 6<sup>4</sup>

under strength, especially in tanks, and did not come up to its full complement by the time of the Allied landings. More importantly, it was commanded by a grounded Luftwaffe officer, General Paul Conrath. Neither he, nor his subordinate commanders were considered on a par with the 15th.<sup>65</sup>

The Luftwaffe was having more than its share of difficulty in the months preceding the invasion of Sicily. From November 1942 through May 1943 the Luftwaffe had lost more than 2,440 aircraft in the Mediterranean area. This figure represents over 40% of the forces on hand in November.<sup>66</sup> During the same period, Allied strength was steadily increasing to a 2.5 to 1 advantage. More than just outnumbered, the Axis air forces were plagued with supply problems and the crews were becoming dangerously fatigued. To rush replacement pilots to the field, Germany had made large reductions in the amount of flying time allocated to new students in training; down from 75 hours in 1940 to 25 hours in 1943. At the same time, American pilots were receiving 125 hours of flying training before reporting to operational units.<sup>67</sup> Allied aircraft production was also outrunning Germany's at more than a two to one pace.<sup>68</sup> The Italian Air Force was considered ineffective, owing mainly to their obsolete aircraft. The Allied air campaign was aimed at isolating the Sicilian battlefield and doing as much damage as possible to the Luftwaffe and its airfields.<sup>69</sup> While the Allies failed to prevent German army units from reaching Sicily, they were successful in gaining air superiority.

On 26 June, 1943, several key Axis military leaders met at Italian 6th Army Headquarters at Enna, Sicily to discuss plans. Among those present were Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, Commander In Chief, South (OB South) and General d'Armata Alfredo Guzzoni, Commander 6th Army who discussed plans for the defense of the island. Also present was General von Senger, the German liaison officer to the Italian 6th Army.<sup>70</sup> General Guzzoni was convinced that the Allied attack would come in mid-July and would be aimed at the southern coast of Sicily. Guzzoni planned to place the Assietta and Aosta Divisions, three and a half coastal divisions and a reinforced regiment from the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division (at Kesselring's insistence) under the Italian XII Corps in the western half of the island. He planned to place the Napoli Division and the remaining two and a half coastal divisions in defense of the eastern portion of Sicily. He would assign the HG Panzer Div and the remainder of the 15th Div as Corps reserves. The Livorno Div (the best of the Italian units) would be held as 6th Army reserves. Axis forces on the island totalled over 350,000 men.<sup>71</sup> General Guzzoni's intent was to have the Italians conduct a delaying action while the reserves were positioned for a strong counterattack to drive the Allies into the sea.

Field Marshal Kesselring opposed this plan and insisted that the 15th be sent to the western sector to protect Polermo, except for a regiment of the 15th which would be assigned to the Catania region. Although the majority opinion was that this would

fragment the strongest combat unit on the island, Kesselring prevailed. In their book, "The Battle of Sicily", authors Samuel Mitcham, Jr. and Friedrich von Stauffenberg believe this decision took away the 6th Army's ability to effectively respond to the attack and doomed the Axis forces to failure.<sup>72</sup> However, in his book "Bitter Victory", author Carlos D'Este offers another viewpoint. He suggests that Kesselring wanted to keep the German forces better dispersed in the event the Italians suddenly dropped out of the war and it would become necessary to disarm them.<sup>73</sup>

Concerned that the loss of Italy would draw still more German forces away from the Russian front, Hitler wanted to send three additional German divisions to Italy right away to bolster his faltering ally.<sup>74</sup> Initially, Mussolini balked at the idea. He finally was convinced by his senior military advisors that Germany's help was vital. In mid-May he agreed to allow these three divisions to enter the country, but refused the offer of two more at that time.<sup>75</sup> The Hermann Goerring Division was ordered to Sicily, but, as already mentioned, was still understrength by the time the Allies landed.

## INVASION AND COUNTER-ATTACK

D-Day for Operation Husky was set for 10 July, 1943. As planned, the invasion force was divided into two main elements; the British 8th Army on the right and the American 7th Army on the left. Also as planned, the invasion began with a massive airborne assault the night before.<sup>76</sup>

Both troop carrier units tasked to support the airborne assault were inexperienced, and had little time to practice. The same was true for the crews that were to pilot the Waco gliders that were part of the British assault. Many Waco pilots had as little as five hours in this glider type.<sup>77</sup> To avoid the air threat posed by the Luftwaffe and the air defense artillery, the assault would have to be at night. Unfortunately, on the night of the assault, a strong storm moved into the area and threatened to force Eisenhower to cancel the operation. He elected to continue the mission knowing the weather would be a major factor that would make the airdrop very challenging. These inexperienced crews would have to fly over water, at night, at low altitude, in poor visibility, in high winds against an air threat that included flak and spotlights. Not surprisingly, they experienced serious problems.<sup>78</sup>

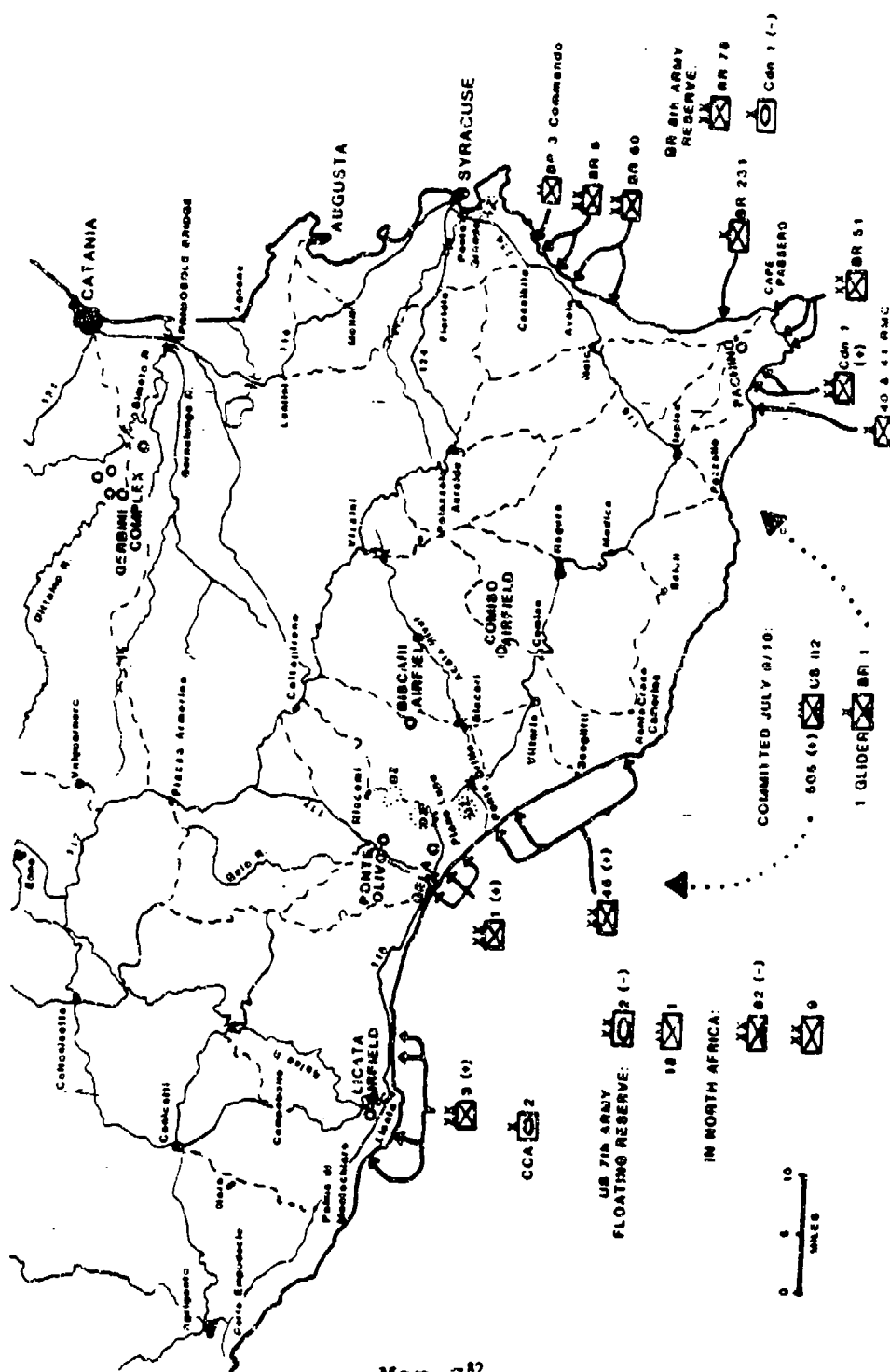
Destined for the British sector were elements of the 1st British Airborne Division who were ordered to assault their objectives in 137 Waco gliders.<sup>79</sup> For the reasons mentioned, the

formation could not maintain position and scattered the gliders over a wide area. Sixty-five of them crashed into the sea. Fifty-nine others were scattered over a 25 mile area of southern Sicily. Only twelve gliders landed near their objectives. The paratroopers overcame these tremendous difficulties and managed to gain their primary objective, the Ponte Grande bridge, with only a handful of troops.<sup>80</sup>

The next day at 2:45 AM, the British landing began. Going ashore just south of Syracuse were the British 5th and 50th Div and the 3rd Commandos. As was typical of amphibious landings, there was some confusion on the beach, and the landings were slowed due to a limited number of landing craft available. Nevertheless, the force was formed and moved off the beach toward their objective - Syracuse. Although Syracuse was one of the three most heavily fortified areas on the island, the Italian defenders did not account for themselves well. A near panic started among the Italians when a German unit was ordered to move out of Syracuse. Before the Italians came under direct fire they began destroying their own gun emplacements, fuel and ammunition dumps and hundreds of soldiers and sailors deserted. When the British forces arrived in the city, they met little resistance and found the port facility undamaged.<sup>81</sup> The British secured Syracuse and pushed on to the north and northwest on the first day. Both the British and American beaches are shown on Map 7.

The remaining British force went ashore further south along both sides of the Pachino peninsula. Once again, the Italian

## The Allied Landings



Map 7<sup>82</sup>

defenders did not put up much of a fight and the initial objectives were quickly taken. However, the 1st Canadian Infantry Division, which landed on the west side of the peninsula, had a more difficult time owing to the rough sea conditions. Once ashore, however, they also quickly gained their objectives including the small Pachino Airfield. Although the Italian Napoli Div was in the area, it did not put up a determined fight. Overall, the British landings were a total success.

Meanwhile the Americans were assaulting their objectives along the south center of the island. On the night of 9-10 July elements of the 82nd Airborne Division parachuted onto the island. The same weather conditions that hampered the British gliders also played havoc with the American airdrop. Soldiers were again widely dispersed, with several landing as far away as the British sector. Despite the fact their units were broken up, the paratroopers formed themselves into whatever fighting formations they could. These small units were especially effective as they disrupted the defender's communications and ambushed many couriers. General Guzzoni concluded as many as four divisions of paratroopers had been dropped.<sup>83</sup>

Shortly after midnight the American amphibious landings began. The American beaches were more exposed to the prevailing winds causing very rough sea conditions. As a result, many landing craft came ashore well away from their intended landing sites. The beaches also had a prevailing shallow gradient that

extended well away from the shore. This caused the heavier landing craft, particularly the LSTs, to ground on the false beaches that were formed underwater. However, the water between the false beach and the actual beach was still deep, requiring the LSTs to be supported with pontoons to get their tanks and other heavy loads ashore. This resulted in the heavier vehicles and equipment, particularly tanks, coming ashore much later than planned.<sup>84</sup> This factor would contribute to putting the landing force at risk when the Germans counterattacked. Despite these difficulties, the landings continued.

The 45th Infantry Div went ashore on the American right on the designated Cent beaches.<sup>85</sup> As mentioned, the rough seas, combined with inexperienced boat crews, caused many problems for the Americans. The 45th Div boats were scattered over a wide area and it was not possible to maintain unit integrity. Fortunately for the Americans, the Italian coastal units were equipped with French artillery pieces and Italian ammunition. Unable to put up an effective resistance, most of the Italian units in the entire 206th Coastal Defense Division left their positions.<sup>86</sup> Despite their difficulties getting ashore, the 45th Div was able to rapidly advance inland on the first day.

The 1st Infantry Div came ashore in the center of the American line in the Dime objective area. The 1st Division's objective areas on D-Day were the Gela port facilities and, in conjunction with the 82nd Airborne Div, the Ponte Olivo Airfield. From their intelligence gathering efforts, the Americans

concluded the port area was not mined because photos showed there were many fishing boats along the beach. What they found were old boats that had been there for some time and the beach was, in fact, heavily mined and covered by enemy pillboxes. Those units coming ashore found themselves facing an unexpectedly tough opponent and casualties were heavy. The Italians held on for more than four hours, and managed to destroy the steel pier at Gela before they were forced to surrender. Other elements of the 1st Division had an easier time of it and, once again, managed to make excellent progress on the first day. While the 1st Division commander, Major General Allen, was unaware of how badly scattered the 82nd's airdrop had been, he remained confident of his situation, despite what would be long delays in getting his tanks ashore.<sup>87</sup>

The U.S. 3rd Division landed on the left side of the American line in the Joss beach area. The portion of line was too far east to be threatened by the Axis defenders positioned in the western part of the island which contributed to the 3rd's rapid advance. Those Italian coastal units that were in the sector did not put up a determined defense. By day's end the 3rd Division had reached all of its objectives and had taken over three thousand prisoners.<sup>88</sup>

While the army was enjoying success on the beaches despite the weather difficulties, they did so without support from the Allied air forces. Although they enjoyed both the air superiority and numerical advantage that had been achieved over

the preceding weeks, Allied air yielded the airspace over the beaches to the Axis. Air Marshal Coningham, commander of Allied tactical air forces, had established a cumbersome and unresponsive system to provide air cover. He was reported to be "indifferent and even hostile to requests for air support from ground units" and would not authorize many well justified requests even if made in advance.<sup>89</sup>

Many complaints had surfaced concerning the lack of support the Army felt it was getting. In an effort to address this problem, XII Support Command Commander, Colonel Thomas Hickey, who was charged to support Patton's force, moved his headquarters next to Patton. Marshal Coningham viewed Hickey's move as a weakness that would result in the loss of control of the air arm to a ground commander. Hickey was fired.<sup>90</sup>

The outcome of Coningham's policies was to allow the relatively small Axis air force, whose logistical problems were severe, to operate over the D-Day beaches and attack the landing force. Although the actual damage done was relatively minor, the presence of unopposed Axis aircraft over the beaches added to the existing difficulties already imposed. Specifically, the air threat further slowed the offload of tanks and other heavy equipment and it prevented Allied spotter aircraft from operating. These spotter aircraft were important both to direct naval gunfire and to warn of the enemy's possible counterattack.<sup>91</sup>

General Guzzoni was reacting to the Allied landings as best

he could. Throughout, Guzzoni had made many accurate judgements concerning Allied intentions. He had correctly anticipated that Sicily would be the invasion target and the approximate date and general locations of the landings. After the landings had begun he had correctly determined that the British would not be landing north of Catania on the eastern shore and quickly ordered the forces in that sector to move south. Within hours he assigned his strategic reserve division (Livorno) along with two independent units to the XVth Corps and ordered them to counterattack the landing force at Gela.<sup>92</sup> General Guzzoni made these decisions based upon the information that he had. However, the situation in the east was very different than he thought.

The Allied paratroopers, although widely scattered and many far from their planned objectives, were effective in disrupting the communication nets. This added considerable delay and confusion to the problem of directing and coordinating the Axis response to a still unfolding and confusing picture of the situation. The most damaging piece of information that failed to reach General Guzzoni was the fall of Syracuse. As this fortress was under the "independent" control of the Navy, no one thought to pass the critical news of its collapse to 6th Army HQ until the next day. By then Guzzoni had committed himself.

The Hermann Goering Division was in a good position to react to the landings in the southeast, and was warned several hours in advance that the Allies were on the way. However, instead of attacking the British sector, General Conrath's response was to

divide his division into two groups and move to counter the landings at Gela and Scoglitti in the American sector. Further, he delayed moving out until his plan had been approved by 6th Army HQ and when he did move it took his forces much longer than planned to cover the 25 to 30 miles to their objectives. Dawn was breaking as he approached the landing areas, still in column formation on the highway.<sup>93</sup>

General Rossi, the XVIth Corps Commander (which included the Hermann Goering Div), also reacted quickly. He directed the Hermann Goering Div to continue its advance against the American right and committed the additional forces now assigned to move against Gela. The Livorno Div was to attack Gela from the northwest, but would have to move along a secondary road to reach it. Mobile Group E, equipped with Renault-35 tanks armed with 37mm guns, was split into two forces. One group was ordered to expel the American paratroopers from the high ground they had taken around Piano Lupo and attack Gela from the northeast. The other group was to move down past the Ponte Olivo Airfield and attack Gela from the north. Owing to the poor communications that now existed, the uncertainty of the Allied strength and the movement that was confined to poor roads, this attack was sure to have problems.<sup>94</sup>

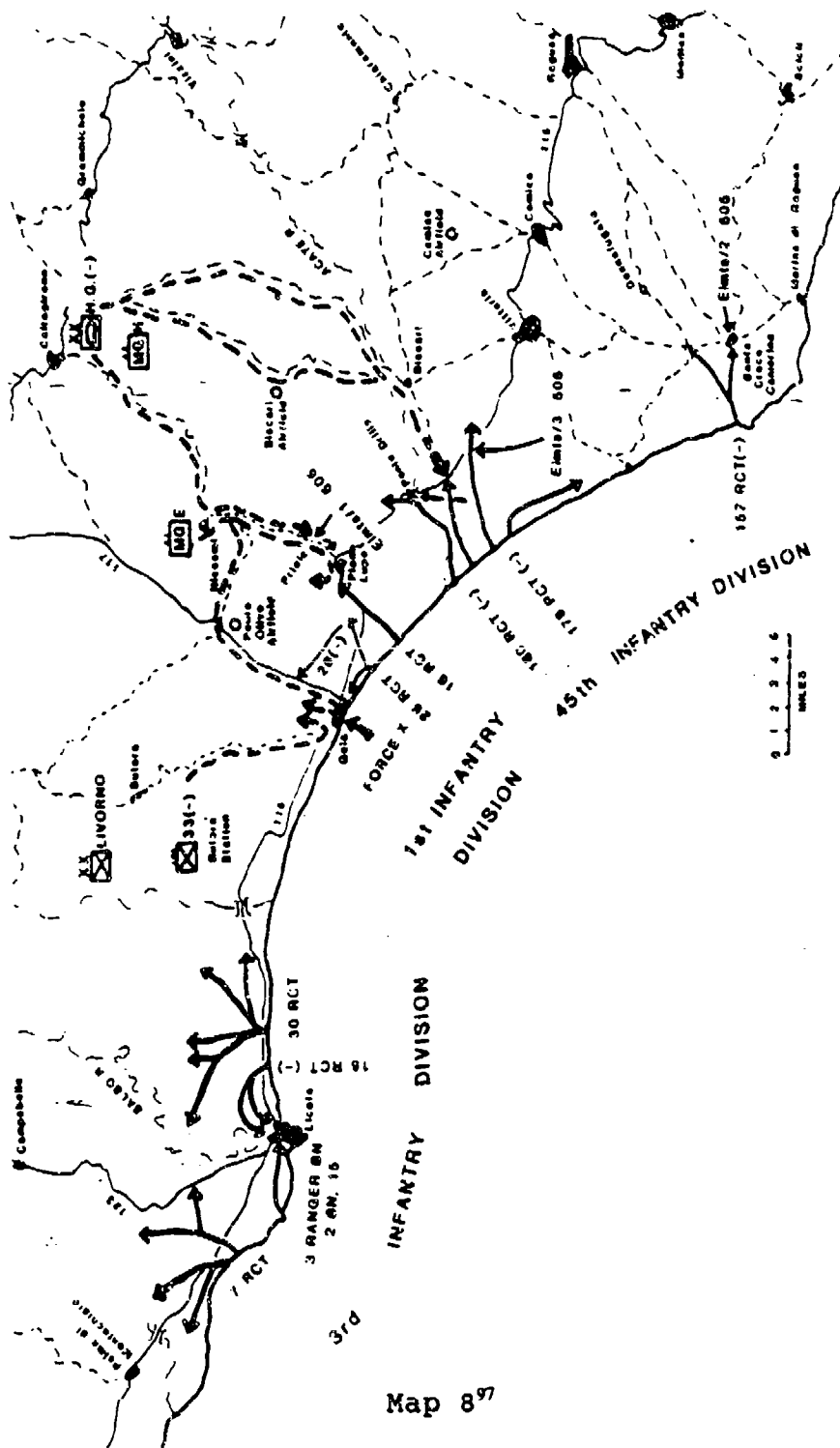
As the left hand column of Mobile Group E was moving south on the road it was ambushed by a small group of paratroopers at Piano Lupo. This action deserves comment here because it illustrates the contribution made by the paratroopers during the

initial phases of the landings while the force was still extremely vulnerable. In this case, the paratroopers had collected as many men and as much of their equipment as they could from the widely scattered airdrop and went to work. During the night they cut telephone lines and attacked a fortified farm house where they killed and captured 55 Italians. They also gained possession of additional machine guns and ammunition which they added to their own limited stockpile of weapons that had nothing larger than two 60-mm mortars. Still in their trucks on the road, the Italian infantry suffered many casualties before their tanks were brought up.<sup>95</sup> Map 8 depicts the Axis moves.

While the Renault tanks were no match for the American Sherman, the Shermans were not yet ashore. To make up for this lack of firepower, the Americans called for air support, which they did not get. However, the Navy was more accommodating, providing fire support from ship to shore directed by a navy fire control team that had come up. As the fight was in progress the American 16th RCT had made its way up from the beaches and linked up with the paratroopers. The Italian infantry had been stopped, but several of the tanks broke through and made their way into Gela. Without additional support, and under constant attack, these tanks were ineffective and driven off.<sup>96</sup>

Shortly after Mobile Group E's aborted effort, elements of the Livorno Div appeared from the west approaching Gela. Caught in the open and without their own tank and artillery support, the Italian infantry was stopped dead. All of this occurred before

## Axis Counterattack of 10 July 1943



the Hermann Goering Div was able to move up to join the fight. When the right half of the H G Div did arrive, it had to advance across the same ground where Mobile Group E had fought. Previously registered naval gunfire and the paratroopers stopped this attack as well. The left half of the H G Div was to turn the left flank of the 45th Division, then turn to the northwest and join the fight at Piano Lupo from the rear. Initially stopped, this force of the H G Div renewed its attack and overran the U.S. battalion opposing them. However, as they proceeded southwest, they were turned back by the next battalion, less than 5 miles from the 45th Division's beaches. Overall, this poorly coordinated attack had some effect. Properly coordinated, the forces available to attack Gela might have severely punished the landing forces. Committed piecemeal as they were and interdicted before they could reach their objectives, the Axis counterattack at Gela was a failure. In this case, much of the credit belongs to the naval gunfire support and the paratroopers who were very effective in this terrain. Much of the blame goes to the H G Div commander, General Conrath, who could not muster his force to break through a relatively lightly armed defensive line.<sup>98</sup>

That night the Axis commanders made plans for their moves the next day. Still not aware that Syracuse had fallen, General Guzzoni's attention shifted to his own right flank where he saw the 3rd Division rapidly advance over 14 miles inland and gain a position which could soon threaten his own HQ. Again, Guzzoni correctly read Allied intentions and realized there would be no

landings further west than were already in progress. Therefore, he wanted to commit the 15th Panzer Div, still located west of the American force. Debate over how to use them caused delay and when word finally reached the division commander, General Rodt, he had already committed the 15th Panzer Div. against the 3rd Division, but in positions further west than Guzzoni intended.<sup>99</sup> The focus of Guzzoni's counterattack was again aimed at Gela, with the main effort to come from the H G Div north of the city. However, during the early morning hours of the 11th, and only hours before the attack was to begin, Guzzoni finally learned that Syracuse had fallen. This news forced him to change his plans.<sup>100</sup>

Instead of a counterattack that converged mass on Gela, the H G Div was now told to turn east as soon as their attack on Gela showed signs of success, roll through the American right flank and threaten the 8th Army rear. This move sprang from Guzzoni's realization that with Syracuse gone, Montgomery might be able to get all the way to Messina before he could stop him, isolating the entire Axis force. The Livorno Div was to take Gela and the 1st Division, then turn west and take on the 3rd Division, supported by the 15th Panzer Div. Guzzoni's new plan, rather than converge on Gela, now called for his force to diverge from Gela in the face of three infantry divisions who were getting stronger every hour.

The Axis knew this battle was going to be decisive.<sup>101</sup> If successful, this effort could push the Allies back in to the sea.

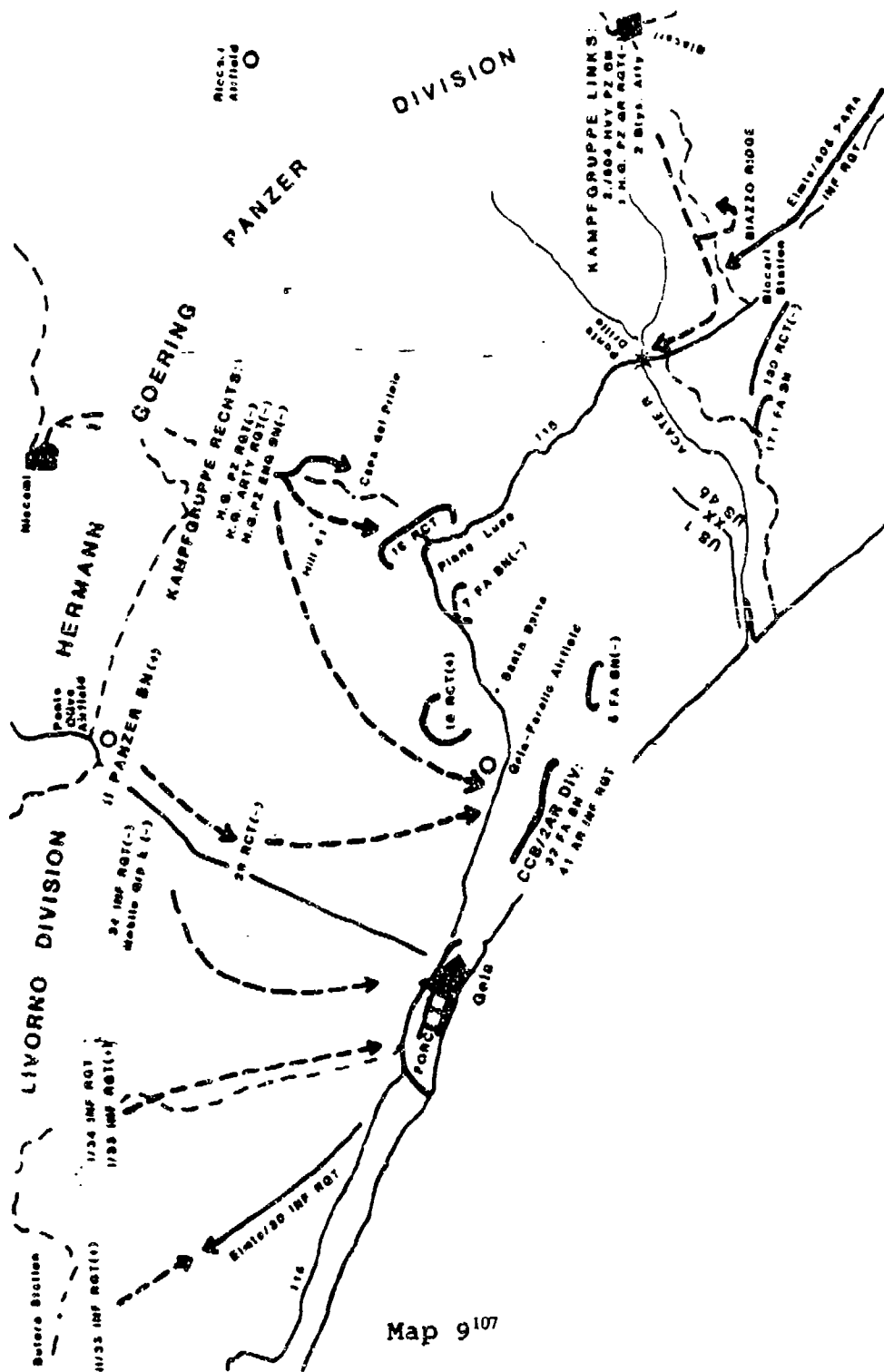
If it failed, the Axis would have spent their strength, including their principle reserves, while the Allies would continue to grow stronger with time.

Initially, the Axis attack was very successful. The weather at the Allied bases had grounded their aircraft, while the Italians were able to put bombers over the beaches during the initial stages of the attack. Sensing the threat to his force, Patton ordered his floating reserves, the 2nd Armored Div, to land near Gela to reinforce.<sup>102</sup> The Allies were still struggling to get the tanks ashore, and they would be able to only get a precious few into the fight. Other American units were short their anti-tank weapons which had been lost when their LSTs were sunk.<sup>103</sup>

Some of the Italian units approaching from the northwest reached the outskirts of Gela before being stopped by the Rangers defending the town. Again the defenders were well supported by naval gunfire, this time from the cruiser Savannah.<sup>104</sup> The attack on the German left flank also got off to a good start where they were able to penetrate the weakened 180th RCT.<sup>105</sup> The Americans along this portion of the line were driven back to a point near their own beaches.<sup>106</sup> Map 9 depicts this action.

The main German effort was coming from the middle of their lines with the objective of taking the key terrain around Piano Lupo. Initially encountering defenders near Hill 41, they continued toward Gela, bypassing Piano Lupo to the west. The situation was becoming desperate for Patton and the 7th Army.

## Axis Counterattack of 11 July 1943



The Americans were unable to get their tanks ashore, and were only able to get limited anti-tank guns into action. Once again, the navy came to the rescue, providing effective fire support against the German attackers.<sup>108</sup> Despite the navy's support, however, the Germans were able to get within a few hundred yards of the beach and were able to bring the supply dumps and landing craft under direct fire. Then, just when the Germans were in a position to bring the Americans on the beach to real grief, Guzzoni implemented the next phase of his plan and directed the attackers to break contact and move to the east and attack the 45th Division.<sup>109</sup>

At one point the Germans had closed to a point so close the navy had to hold their fire. However, as the Germans began to redirect their attack, the distance between them and the American positions widened, allowing the naval gunfire to immediately open up again. The naval gunfire caused great losses among the Germans and halted the German attack. Elsewhere along the line the Americans were able to hold as well. This action forced the German attackers to withdraw as Patton's force continued to gain strength as more men and equipment came ashore.<sup>110</sup>

## OPPORTUNITY LOST

General of Panzer Troops Hans Hube, one of the more capable field commanders of the German Army, was to play an important part in the campaign. Although he had lost an arm in WWI, Hube had managed to remain in the army through the period between the wars and had risen to command a corps on the Russian front. Highly respected by Hitler, Hube was ordered to leave Stalingrad during the last days of the campaign. Dedicated to his troops, Hube refused to abandon them and had to be escorted out of the country at gunpoint by the SS.<sup>111</sup> Now "liberated", Hitler gave him command of XIV Panzer Corps and assigned him to Rome. Hube was next moved to Sicily after the Allied invasion had begun to take command of all German troops on the island.<sup>112</sup> Guzzoni now realized that, in a practical sense, he was no longer in charge.

Hube was given two tasks. The first was to buy time for the Germans to prepare for the defense of Italy. Hitler believed that Mussolini was losing power and that Italy would not remain in the war much longer, making it necessary for Germany to defend against the Allied advance through Italy alone. Hube's second task was to get as many German soldiers as he could safely from Sicily to Italy.<sup>113</sup> Although General Alexander would not realize it at the time, his decisions would make Hube's job much easier than it should have been.

Still distrustful of the American soldier's fighting

ability, Alexander agreed to the plan proposed by Montgomery. This plan called for the British XIIIth Corps to drive from Catania to Messina east of Mt. Etna, while the British XXXth Corps was to drive north to the coast along the western side of Mt Etna. Patton's 7th Army was to essentially halt its advance, protect the British flank and then drive to Palermo after Messina had been taken.<sup>114</sup> The decision was made to assign the Americans a secondary role even though the U S 45th Div was in excellent position to continue the advance. Instead, the 45th was ordered to withdraw from positions only a few hundred yards from a key highway now assigned to Montgomery. This decision would prove to be a costly judgement and cause considerable delay in the overall Allied advance. Although Patton protested, the decision stood.<sup>115</sup>

By defusing the immediate threat posed by the 7th Army, Alexander allowed Hube time to move the 15th Panzer Div from the west and put it in line with the H G Div and those remnants of the Italian army that remained. Seeing the potential threat posed by Montgomery, Hube established his main defensive line south of Catania running northwest around the west side of Mt Etna to block the British move north.<sup>116</sup> Where the 7th Army had been successfully advancing against the Italian 6th Army in the center, Alexander's orders to halt removed the immediate pressure from the Axis in this sector and allowed them to close the gaps in their lines. This allowed Hube to concentrate his attention against Montgomery and the immediate American opportunity was

lost.

The decisive battle for the XIIIth Corps advance towards Catania took place at the Primosole Bridge located approx. 7 miles south of Catania. This area was defended by the reinforced panzer regiment, Battle Group Schmalz, which had moved down from Catania to join the remaining elements of the Napoli Div.<sup>117</sup> Guzzoni had also intended for the Hermann Goering Div to link up with Schmalz but they were late in doing so. In fact, one of Guzzoni's major concerns was the H G Div's slow movement north and the gaps in the defensive line that resulted. However, unknown to Guzzoni, help was coming from another quarter. The 1st Parachute Div had been ordered by Hitler from the mainland to be airdropped to reinforce Schmalz.<sup>118</sup> Despite Allied air superiority, the Germans completed these drops successfully.<sup>119</sup>

Montgomery's plan was very aggressive---probably too aggressive. He saw a chance to quickly reach Catania, and in at least this case, he acted quickly as well. Operation Fustian was Montgomery's plan to airdrop 1,856 British paratroopers to capture the Primosole Bridge and hold it until relieved by ground elements linking up from the south.<sup>120</sup> However, unknown to Montgomery, the German paratroopers had already arrived. Their commander correctly anticipated the British move and had prepared a strong defense.<sup>121</sup>

Once again, the Allied airdrop experienced serious problems. The formation wandered off course and was fired upon by an Allied convoy, resulting in several downed aircraft, many paratroopers

killed and wounded aboard the aircraft and a widely scattered drop. Over the drop zones the aircraft were hit again and the paratroopers found themselves jumping into the middle of the strong German defense mentioned above. Only 16 percent of the paratroopers landed near their objectives.<sup>122</sup> Although the British were initially able to take the bridge, they were unable to hold it and were forced to surrender the next afternoon (14 July) before their reinforcements could arrive. A subsequent attack by British ground forces that had come up from the south on the 17th also failed with heavy losses after a fierce battle that lasted over several days.<sup>123</sup> The battle raged for four days before the British abandoned the idea of taking the bridge, which halted the XIIIth Corps advance and ended Montgomery's bid to quickly break through to Catania.<sup>124</sup> The German defense had bought valuable time which they used to complete the deployment of most of the 1st Parachute Division and the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division to Sicily.<sup>125</sup> The German defenders, in an effort to bring up all available units, had left Catania virtually undefended. This opened a window of opportunity for the British to land behind the force defending the Primosole Bridge, trapping the Axis between two British forces. If successful, these landings would have allowed Montgomery to continue his advance north. However, the landings were not attempted and this opportunity was also lost.<sup>126</sup>

The XXXth Corps advance, intended to hook around the western face of Mt Etna, also faced serious problems. The mountainous

terrain no longer favored armored movement and the corps would be beyond range of naval gunfire support that had so far been so important to the Allies. Montgomery intended for the XXXth Corps to quickly take Vizzini and then Caltagrione on July 13. The British forces took longer than planned to come up, owing to the heat and lack of vehicle transport and were not able to attack until late in the day. When the attack did come, the Germans put up a strong defense and held Vizzini for two days. The British regrouped for another major assault on the 15th, only to find the town had been abandoned without a fight. This was a pattern the Axis were to successfully repeat many times on Sicily.

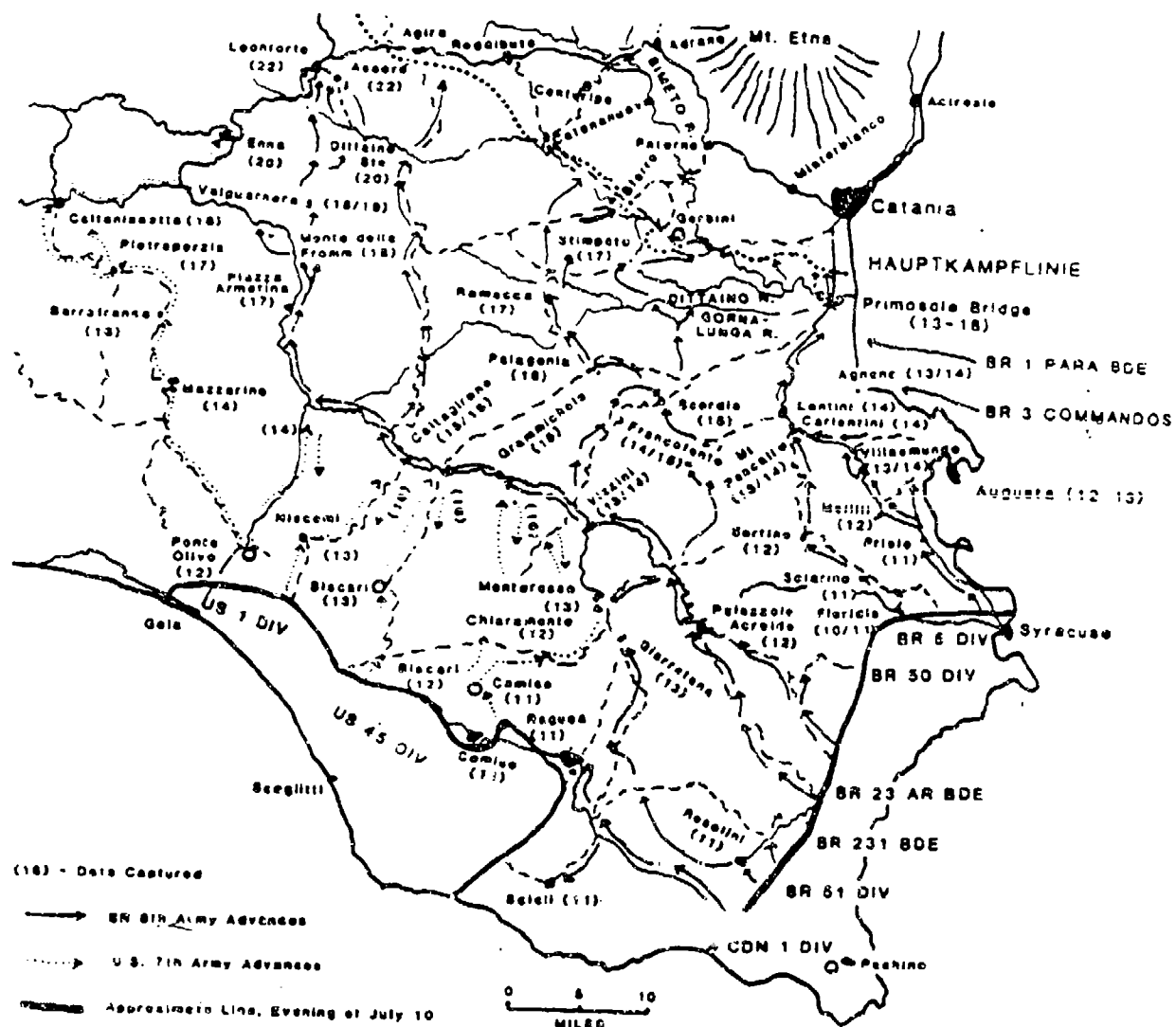
The gap between the Hermann Goering Div and Group Schmalz was a major concern for the Axis. Not sure where, or in what strength the Allies might attack, the Axis were desperately trying to consolidate their positions along the line designated by Hube. Until this time, the H G Div commander, General Conrath, had been taking his time withdrawing to the north. However, on the night of 14-15 July, Conrath decided to quickly complete his withdrawal. This news was not relayed to General Rodt, commanding the 15th Panzer Grenadier Div to the west. The result of Conrath's move was to leave the 15th 16 miles forward of the H G Div and with a gap more than 9 miles wide between them.<sup>127</sup> However, Alexander's orders to halt the American advance meant that there would be no Allied thrust through this gap. The opening would not be exploited and the 15th would not be trapped in the western part of the island.<sup>128</sup>

Meanwhile, the Canadian 1st Div, part of the XXXth Corps, was also committed. The Canadians were to advance some 70 road miles across the front of the 45th Div and take the town of Enna that had been the location of Guzzoni's headquarters.<sup>129</sup> The Hermann Goering Div had covered its withdrawal with a strong rear guard defense and the Canadian advance soon found hard going. Initially stopped at Grammichele, the Canadians were finally able to move through on July 15. They next prepared to attack Caltagrione on the 16th, but when they advanced, they found the town had been abandoned. However, the Canadian advance continued to be hampered by German mines and a lack of vehicles (many of the Canadian vehicles were also lost at sea).

Often opposed by only a single German battalion, the entire Canadian advance was delayed for several days by these effective German tactics. Although ordered to hold in his present position, General Rodt withdrew the 15th on the night of July 16-17 to help close the wide gap between himself and the H G Div to the east and avoid being trapped.<sup>130</sup> Map 10 depicts this phase of the campaign.

The result of these actions was to leave Montgomery's 8th Army broken in three elements. The Canadians were stopped on the left, the 51st Div was slowed in the center and the XIIIth Corps (5th and 50th Div) was held up on the right.<sup>131</sup> In the center, the 51st Div was able to advance only slowly northward.

# The Battle Of Southeastern Sicily, 10 - 22 July 1943



Map 10<sup>132</sup>

However, they were running into a German defense that was becoming more and more effective at delaying tactics while avoiding major engagements. The time gained allowed the Germans to consolidate their main defensive line (Hauptkampflinie) directed by General Hube.

A major battle developed over the next several days in the British sector. In the center, the 51st Div, without realizing it, had come up to the Hauptkampflinie on the night of the 18th, where they ran into a German defenders determined to retreat no further. The battle raged for nearly two days before it was joined by the 50th and 5th Divs on the night of July 20-21. Initially successful by the weight of their numbers, the British managed to take the Gerbini Airfield, but were unable to break the German lines elsewhere.<sup>133</sup> The Germans counter-attacked and drove the British off the Gerbini Airfield, denying its use to the British, and forced them back across the Dittaino River. By July 21 it was evident, even to Montgomery, that the offensive on the center and the right was not going to get through.

On Montgomery's left, the Canadians were advancing slowly again in the area north of Piazza Armerina. The Germans continued to harass their advance, blowing bridges and laying mines as they withdrew. As part of the general offensive ordered by Montgomery for all three of his forward elements, Montgomery ordered the Canadians to advance to Leonforte, Regalbuto and Adrano on the 17th.<sup>134</sup> Effectively slowed by the German rear guard action, the Canadians came up on Leonforte on July 20.

Although they were able to take the town late on the 22nd, the Canadians had reached their culminating point and the Germans were able to prevent their further advance. For all practical purposes, Montgomery's plan to quickly take Sicily had failed. The time had come to turn to the Americans to go to the offensive.



## PATTON'S TURN

By the third day of the invasion the 7th Army had already accomplished most of its objectives. However, as has already been discussed, the Germans were making things difficult for the 7th Army who, lacking good port facilities, were having trouble getting supplies and vehicles (particularly tanks) ashore. To help ease this problem, Patton ordered the 3rd Div to advance along the coast and take Porto Empedocle where a good artificial harbor was available. To take the port, the 3rd Div would first have to take Agrigento.<sup>135</sup>

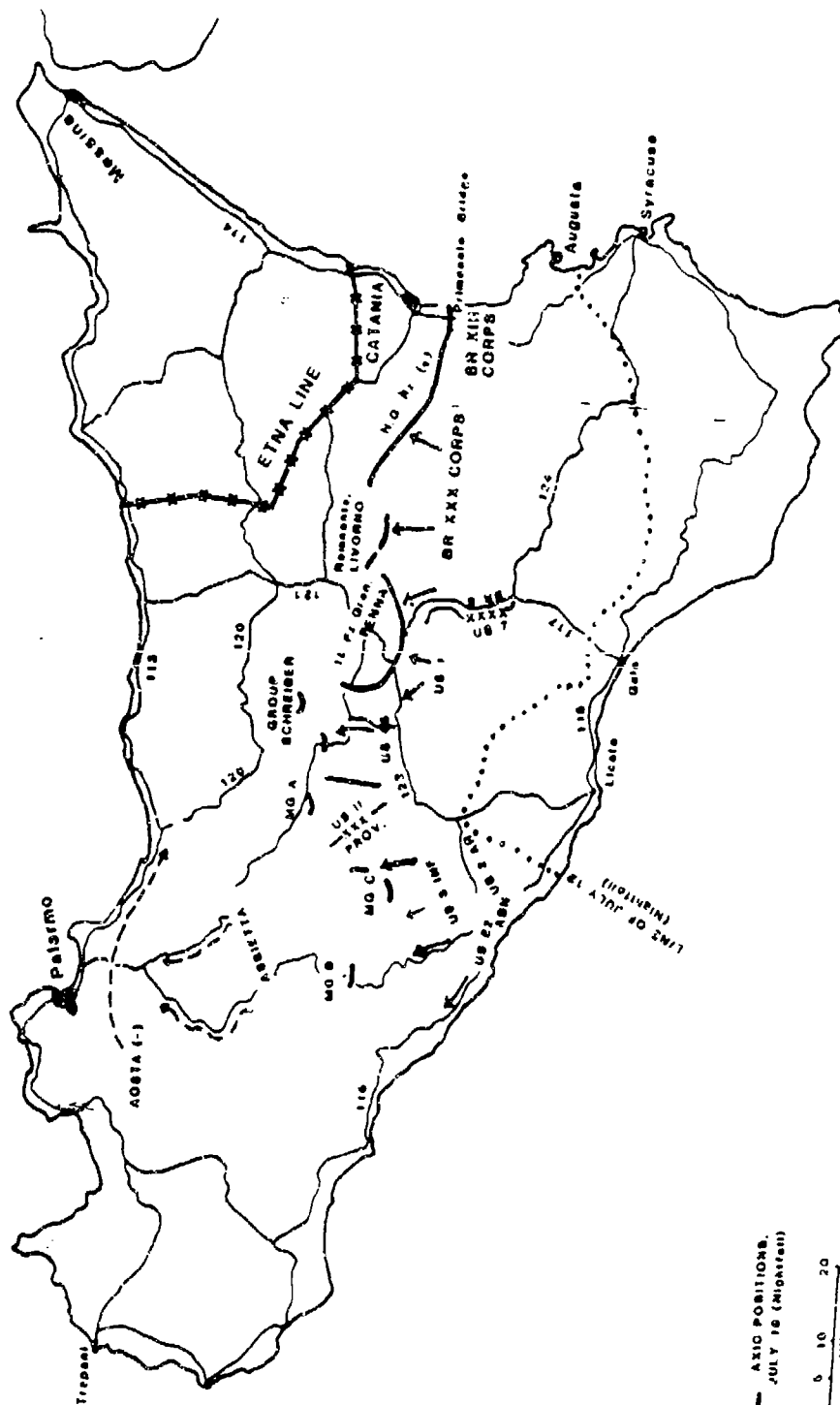
The Italian defenders recognized the importance of the town. In addition to providing access to Porto Empedocle, Agrigento also controlled important roads to Palermo. The 207th Coastal Defense Div committed all its force to hold the 3rd out of the town. Although Italian artillery was well positioned in the hills forcing the 3rd Div to slow its advance, the Americans were able to take the town and, in turn, the port as well. As was generally the case throughout the country, Italian resistance crumbled in the face of Allied forces. While there were exceptions where the Italians stood firm, typically their forces disintegrated.<sup>136</sup>

Patton had taken this action despite Alexander's intent that he not risk becoming involved in a major action.<sup>137</sup> Up to this point, Patton had been uncharacteristically willing to play

second fiddle to Montgomery. Now he was getting tired of it. On the 16th he learned from Montgomery's liaison officer exactly what Montgomery and Alexander had in mind; specifically that Patton was to advance north to the coast, but only to guard the 8th Army flank. Patton was not to proceed west to take Palermo. The angered Patton immediately called up his reserve division, the 9th Infantry from North Africa. He also arranged for an immediate meeting with Alexander. At this meeting, which was held in Tunisia, Patton argued that he be allowed to immediately set out for Palermo. Typically unable to control either Patton or Montgomery, Alexander approved.<sup>138</sup> This decision resulted in the American forces shifting their emphasis to the northwest part of the island, just at the time the 15th Panzers were moving to the east to complete their link up with the H G Div. As already noted, by the 19th, Montgomery's offensive was stalling and he was ready to call for American help, but it was too late.

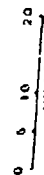
On 18 July Patton issued orders that created a new corps, called the Provisional Corps, and assigned to it the 3rd Infantry, 82nd Airborne and 2nd Armored Divisions. This corps rapidly advanced to the northwest toward their assigned objective, Palermo. Concurrently, Patton ordered the 1st Inf Div to take Enna and the road net to the west. Enna fell to the 1st without a fight. The 45th Div, on the American right, was to advance all the way to the northern coast along highway 121 and cut the roads to Palermo and western Sicily.<sup>139</sup> Map 11 shows these moves. Again there were examples of Italian and Sicilian

# Patton Moves Northwest



Map 11<sup>140</sup>

ASIO POSITIONS  
JULY 16 (Nightfall)



defenders in small units putting up a stiff fight, but overall they were unable to stem the tide.

The 2nd Armored Div was committed alongside the 3rd on 20 July and both were ordered on to Palermo. The Italian and German commanders quickly realized Palermo could not be defended and immediately ordered the evacuation of as many troops as could be saved. Although most of their equipment was lost, the Axis were able to withdraw a large percentage of troops from Palermo. Elsewhere, American units were taking large numbers of Italian prisoners. Over 4,000 surrendered on 21 July alone.<sup>141</sup>

Elements of the 7th Army closed on Palermo on 22 July. Although the Italian commander had organized the remaining soldiers at Palermo into as strong a defense as his resources would allow, they were no match for the American attackers. Captured Italian supplies were used to fuel the American advance which might have otherwise been stalled short of the city.<sup>142</sup> The city capitulated that evening as elements of the 3rd Infantry Div and 2nd Armored Div entered Palermo from opposite sides of the city. Patton himself entered the city that evening to find the civilian inhabitants of Palermo, as was often the case elsewhere, were welcoming the Americans as liberators.<sup>143</sup>

Patton's supply lines were now dangerously long. Those supplies that could be brought ashore through the limited port facilities on the south side of the island still had to be trucked over a limited, poorly maintained road network through difficult terrain. This made the port at Palermo a major

objective which Patton's engineers reopened on the 27th and had back to 30% of its capability by the 28th. Within 8 days it was back to 60% of capacity and became the offload site for the 9th Infantry Div.<sup>144</sup> Engineers also had the railroad back in limited operation in short order. These resources greatly aided the 7th Army's ability to keep itself resupplied as it advanced east along the coast toward Messina.

Elements of the 45th Div reached the coast road on the 23rd and turned east, advancing as far as Campofelice where it was stopped by advance elements of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Div. There they waited for the rest of the 7th Army to catch up. Concurrently, the 82nd Airborne Div began the process of clearing the western portion of the island. The Provisional Corps had done its job and was dissolved on 20 August.<sup>145</sup> This ended the first phase of the Allied operation. Phase two would be the race for Messina.



## THE RACE FOR MESSINA

Mussolini's reign came to an end on July 25. At a meeting with the King on that day Mussolini was informed that he must resign and was arrested as he left the palace. He was replaced by Marshal Badoglio, a known anti-Nazi. The Italian populace immediately rose up and tore every symbol of Mussolini's Fascism from display. The entire structure disappeared almost at once.<sup>146</sup> Although he was surprised at this turn of events which removed Mussolini so quickly from power, General Guzzoni pledged to continue to fight for the Axis.

General Hube remained confident that the situation in Sicily was under control.<sup>147</sup> While Hube had long seen that Sicily would have to be abandoned, there was no need to panic. Hube was prepared to remain on Sicily for some time to give Kesselring the opportunity to reinforce the Italian mainland.

The Allied leaders seem to have been caught by surprise as well. Neither Churchill nor Roosevelt were prepared to quickly approach Italy to arrange an armistice. Only Eisenhower saw the how important it was to come to terms with the new government before the Germans were able to occupy the country in force. Eisenhower ordered General Mark Clark to accelerate his plans for Operation Avalanche, the Allied invasion of the mainland. He also placed a division on immediate alert for a landing near Naples. Eisenhower believed if he acted quickly he could arrange

for an unopposed landing and bring the Italians into the war on the Allied side. If successful, this plan would isolate the German forces on Sicily. Churchill and Roosevelt rejected the plan and would not allow Eisenhower to negotiate directly with the Italian leadership.<sup>148</sup> In a speech to the House of Commons on July 28, Churchill announced that only an unconditional surrender would prevent Italy from being "seared, scarred and blackened from one end to the other".<sup>149</sup>

In fact, there were secret negotiations underway between the King and President Roosevelt to arrange for an armistice. However, unknown to the Allies, these conversations, as well as those between Churchill and Roosevelt were being monitored by the Germans. Hitler knew the score.<sup>150</sup> The opportunity presented to the Allies by Mussolini's downfall would pass before they could react.

General Hube took advantage of the lull in the fighting to consolidate his positions and strengthen his defense. His lines now stretched from San Stefano south to Mistretta, around Mt Etna to the eastern shore at a point 4 miles south of Catania. His forces included the 29th Panzer Grenadier Div along the northern coast. the 15th Panzer Grenadier Div in the center and the Hermann Goering Div along the eastern shore. Other German units and remaining Italian units were assigned to the respective division commanders. German engineers were also at work preparing a second defensive line behind the first.<sup>151</sup> Bowing to the inevitable, General Guzzoni moved his headquarters to the

mainland on 10 August, taking the XVth Corps headquarters and elements of the Livorno and Assietta Divisions with him.<sup>152</sup>

The question of Allied strategy to complete the campaign still had to be addressed and Alexander was not showing any signs of providing the leadership to get on with the task. Instead, Montgomery took it upon himself to invite Patton to visit him at Syracuse to discuss the matter. Patton accepted and met with Montgomery on 25 July. At this meeting the two commanders agreed between themselves that the Americans should have priority and Montgomery proposed that the Americans be allowed to take Messina. Patton was deeply suspicious of Montgomery's motives, but was glad to accept the mission.<sup>153</sup>

The American 3rd Infantry Div was given the task of driving along the northern coast to Messina. Now they would face a much more determined and capable defender. They would never again make 40 miles in one day. Instead, the march to Messina would take 18 days to travel the 105 miles.<sup>154</sup> As previously stated, the Germans were expertly using the terrain in defense and their engineers were effectively delaying the advance by demolishing bridges, collapsing the road along the steep hillsides and through the use of mines. The 3rd Div would have great difficulty keeping itself supplied under these circumstances.<sup>155</sup>

Patton effectively answered the challenge by using the navy. Task Force 88 was created to operate along the northern coast of Sicily to protect Palermo from an unlikely naval attack, to provide ship-to-shore fire support for the 3rd Div and to ferry

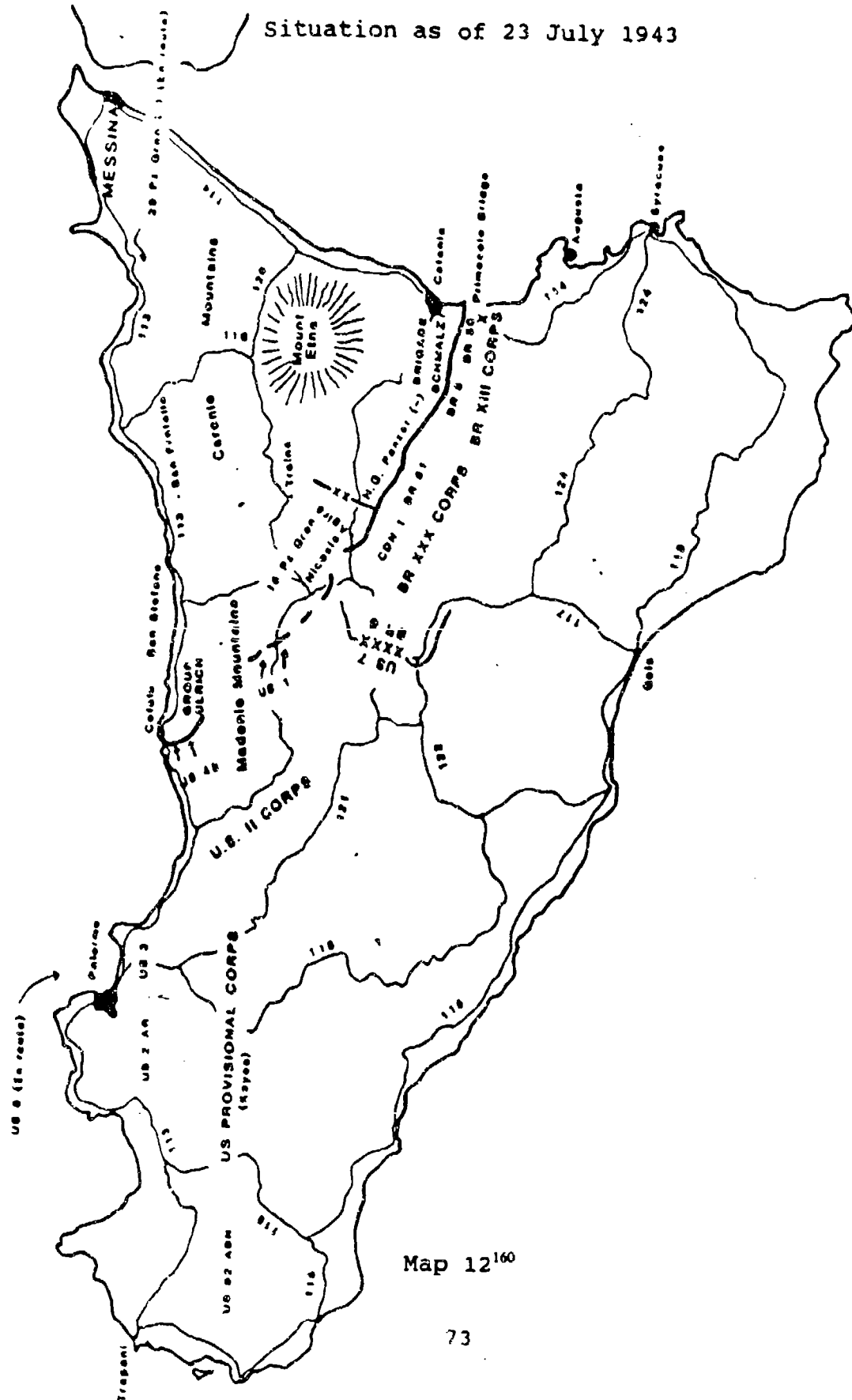
supplies forward from Palermo.<sup>156</sup> The Navy was up to the challenge, but the operation revealed once more the weaknesses in Allied air support.

Despite having won air superiority, the Allies once again did not deny the airspace over the Task Force or the coast to the enemy. The Germans were able to mount air attacks by decoying away the Allied air cover which would leave the main force to be attacked from the air unopposed. The Air Force would not allow the Navy to communicate directly with the fighter cover "lest some naval commander attempt to control its fighter squadrons".<sup>157</sup> This despite the fact that the Navy's radar operators were able to see the entire air battle. The Luftwaffe's limited attacks did cause important damage, including damage to several ships at Palermo and the destruction of an ammunition train carrying 900 tons of badly needed ammunition.<sup>158</sup>

Further south and out of range of naval gunfire support, the 1st Div was making its way east as well. The 1st was operating on the other side of the Nebrodi Mountains which separated them from the 3rd Div to the north, making it impossible for them to provide mutual support and beyond naval gunfire range. It required 6 days for the 1st Div to cover 10 miles before taking Nicosia on July 27.<sup>159</sup> Patton's easterly advance along the north coast is shown on Map 12.

Montgomery was also on the move along the east coast. By 1

Situation as of 23 July 1943



Map 12<sup>160</sup>

August there were a total of 7 Allied divisions attacking (out of 12 on the island) against Hube's understrength and exhausted defenders. Despite the odds, Allied air superiority and naval gunfire support, the Germans continued to put up an excellent defense. Much of the fighting was back and forth, with Allied units surging forward only to be knocked back by a German counter-attack. Losses on both sides were heavy.

General Hube was fully aware of his situation and directed an orderly withdrawal in front of the 8th Army. Although he was able to maintain control of his forces, his weakness was apparent to the Allies. The next attack came from the XIIIth Corps which had been delayed at the Primosole Bridge since 17 July.<sup>161</sup> On 3 August the British attacked but were stopped after advancing only a few miles. Nevertheless, the German commanders could see their weakness and abandoned Catania to the Allies without a fight.<sup>162</sup>

General Hube now fell back to his next line of defense, the Etna line. Believing reports and intelligence estimates that the Germans were greatly weakened in front of them, the American 1st Div attacked the town of Troina with the newly arrived 39th Infantry Regiment in the lead. They were stopped cold by a determined German defense. The terrain here greatly favored the Germans who were becoming expert at using this difficult terrain to their advantage. At Troina, the high ground held by the Germans gave a clear view and field of fire against the American advance below. This was a very tough position, and a total of five regiments were soon committed to the battle. This was to be

the bloodiest battle of the entire campaign for the Americans.<sup>163</sup> Over the next six days the battle raged back and forth, with the Germans launching no fewer than 24 counter-attacks. This action cost the 1st Div lost over 40% of its combat strength and its commander, General Allen, who was relieved.<sup>164</sup>

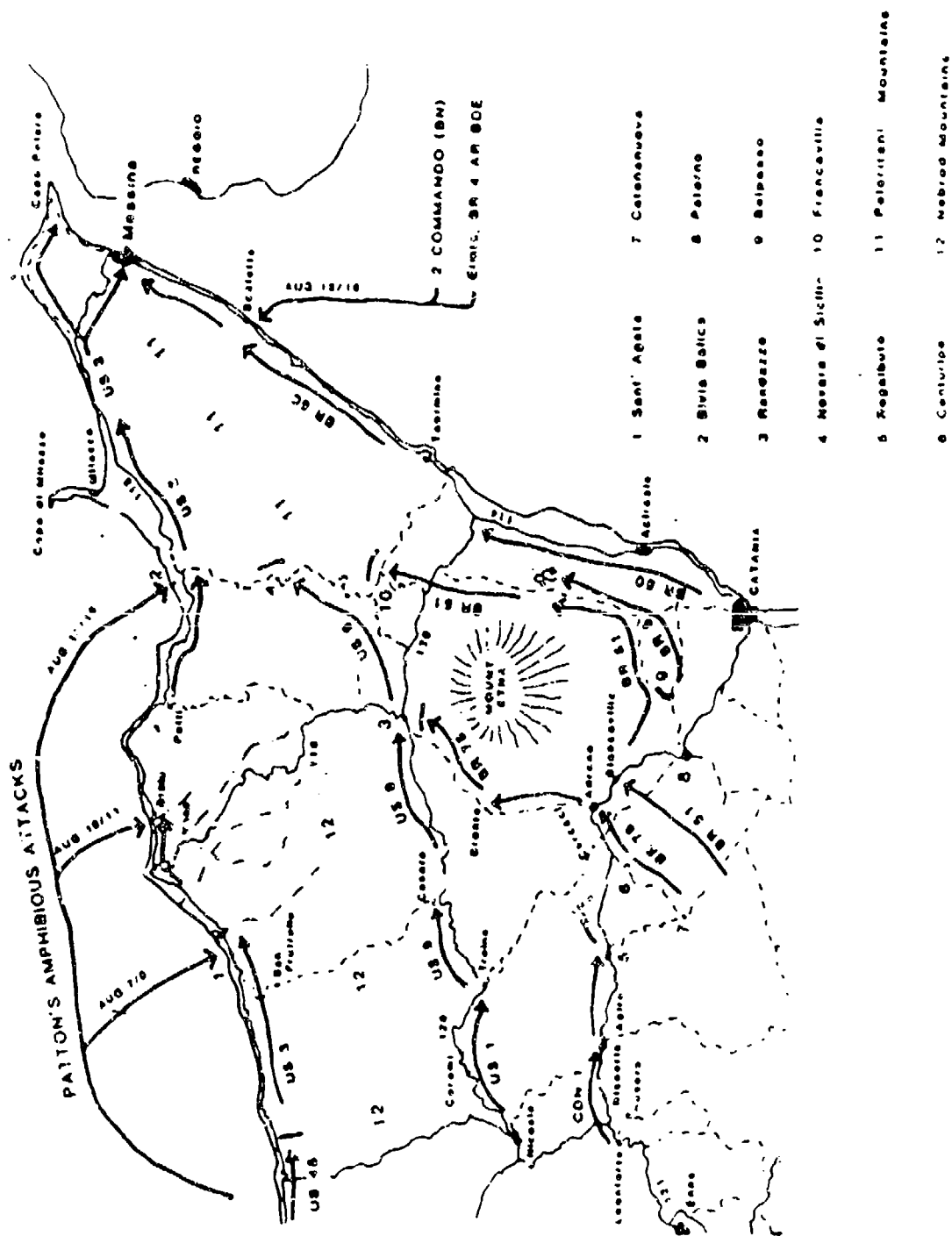
Along the northern coast the 3rd Div was also running into costly fights and its progress had been almost completely stopped at the Furiano River. Seeing the difficulty before him, Patton next ordered the first amphibious landing in an attempt to cutoff this strong German position and to trap the 29th Panzer Grenadier Div.<sup>165</sup> On August 7 the 3rd Div again went on the attack, finally breaking through the German defense. Realizing the threat to their entire line, the Germans launched one of their most determined counter-attacks of the campaign, but it failed. Aware of the Allied landing force that could come ashore in their rear at any time, the Germans again withdrew to the east. When the Allied landing force came ashore the night of 7-8 August, most of the 29th Panzer Grenadiers had escaped.<sup>166</sup> However, once again the Germans had withdrawn without telling the Italians with them of their plans (in this case the remnants of the Assietta Div). Feeling abandoned and betrayed and no longer wanting to fight for either Hitler or Badoglio, hundreds of them surrendered without a fight.<sup>167</sup>

Encouraged by this success, Patton ordered another amphibious landing for the night of 10-11 August, using the same reinforced battalion used in the first landing. Both Bradley and

the division commander objected to this operation, but Patton would not be talked out of it. The objective was the high ground at Monte Cipolla that dominated the coast highway. Anticipating trouble, General Truscott prepared the division to attack, believing he would need to rescue the landing force.<sup>108</sup>

The landing force went ashore as planned, catching the Germans by surprise and driving them from the high ground. From here the Americans again threatened to cut off the entire 29th Panzer Grenadier Div. Realizing their predicament, the Germans mounted a determined counter-attack. However, with the naval gunfire support from the ships offshore, it looked like the Americans were there to stay. At the same time, elements of the 3rd Div had broken through the main defensive line and were also making progress. Then the ship-to-shore radio, essential for controlling the naval gunfire, went out. Unable to coordinate fire and concerned that they might hit American troops, the ships of Task Force 88 withdrew to Palermo. At about the same time, a German counter-attack reached the support troops on the beach, forcing them to evacuate themselves from the beach in their landing craft, isolating the fighting force further inland.<sup>109</sup> Allied aircraft did attempt to support the landing force, however they were also unable to communicate with the ground force and mistakenly attacked both the American command post and the remaining artillery pieces that had been brought ashore. Now

## Patton's Amphibious Operations



Map 13<sup>70</sup>

armed with only rifles, it appeared the landing force would be wiped out. Fortunately for them, the Germans recognized they could do them no further harm, and left them on the hilltop as the 29th was withdrawn below them. Patton's most serious threat to upset Hube's plans was lost.<sup>171</sup> Map 13 depicts Patton's amphibious landings and Allied advances through mid-August.

As the campaign continued, the effects of Hube's plans became apparent. As the Germans continued their orderly withdrawal and steadily shortened their defensive lines, General Hube was able to begin withdrawing units without decreasing the density of troop strength. At the same time, the Allies were facing the same issue to their disadvantage - the perimeter they had forced the Germans into was too small to allow all the available Allied units into the fight. The Allies had to begin to pull divisions out of the line and place them in reserve.<sup>172</sup>

Seeing that Hitler was not going to make a timely decision to withdraw, Kesselring took it upon himself and authorized Hube on 8 August to evacuate Sicily and save as much of his corps and four divisions as he could.<sup>173</sup>

## THE GERMANS ESCAPE

The Germans knew that Sicily would have to be evacuated sooner or later and they had begun making detailed preparations well in advance of the event. Kesselring appointed Colonel Baade Commander of the Straits of Messina on 14 July, and charged him with the task of organizing all available resources to protect the two mile straits and using all available means to keep the supply lines across the straits open to the XIVth Corps. To accomplish his task, he was given authority over the combined arms in the area, including all antiaircraft artillery, artillery and naval units at Messina and in the Villa San Giovanni and Reggio sectors on the Italian mainland.<sup>174</sup>

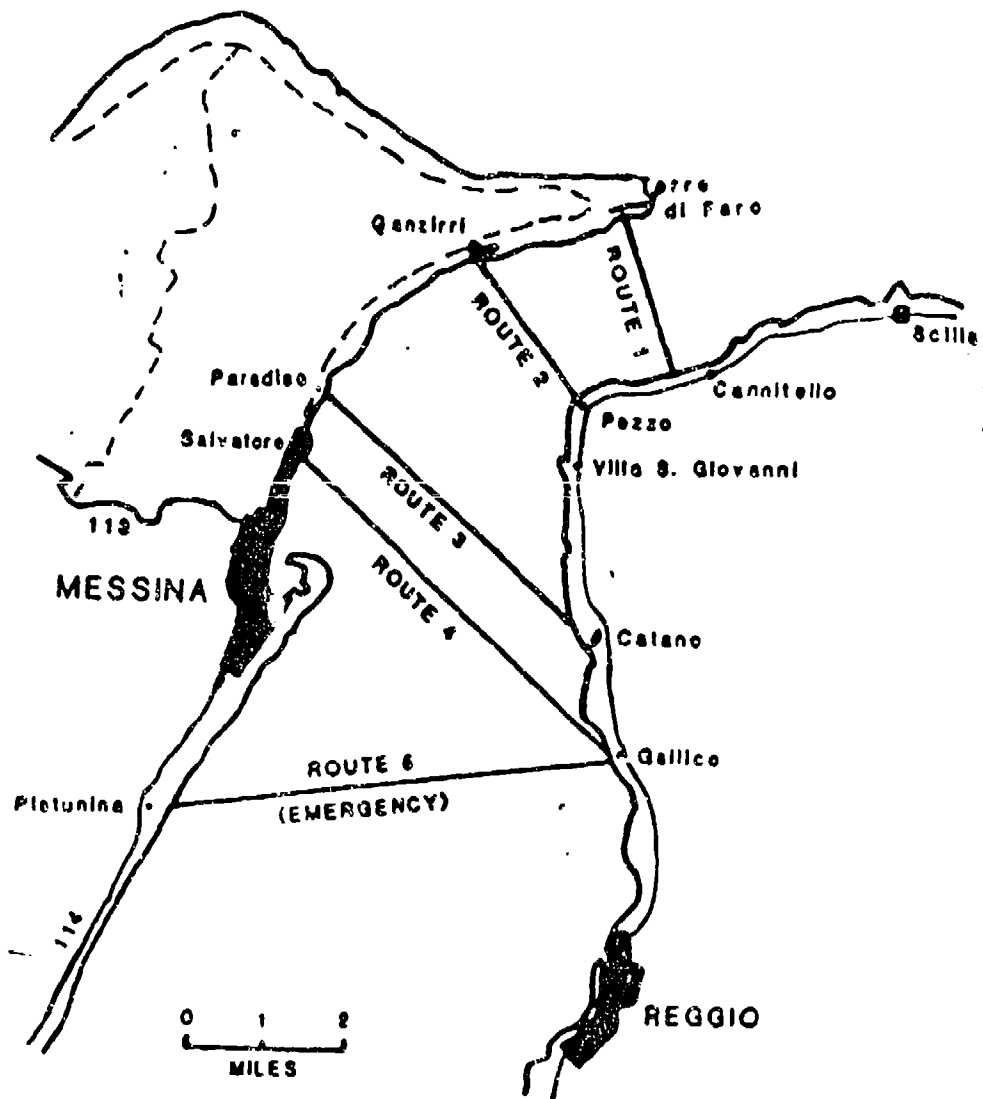
To protect his area from Allied air attack, Baade had formidable antiaircraft artillery batteries positioned on both sides of the straits. His defense included four batteries of 280-mm guns, two Italian batteries of 152-mm guns, as well as many smaller caliber weapons totaling over 330 antiaircraft pieces.<sup>175</sup> Also assigned to him was the heavy artillery battalion of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Div. Baade also had naval minesweepers, Italian mini-submarines and patrol boats which proved effective at keeping the Allied navy from trying to interdict the straits by surface action.

The Germans also had another capable commander in charge of the ferry operations. Baron Gustav von Liebenstein was

designated Sea Transport Leader - Messina Strait, and had at his disposal a large number of barges and landing craft to ferry troops and supplies. The most capable craft the Germans possessed was the Siebel ferry. This ferry was actually a motorized raft, supported by pontoons, that could be loaded from either end. Over 80 feet long, it could carry 450 men or ten loaded trucks with a weight of over 60 tons and could be armed with as many as three 88-mm antiaircraft guns. Capable of speeds up to 10 knots, it was highly maneuverable and a very capable craft for the purpose.<sup>176</sup> The Germans had 12 of these Siebel ferries, along with 33 MFPs (a smaller, flat-bottomed barge), 2 MALs, 11 L-Boats (open boats capable of carrying two trucks) and 76 motorboats.<sup>177</sup> Map 14 shows the embarkation points and ferry routes used.

Before von Liebenstein took charge, operations in the straits were a shambles. Transport was being independently operated by Luftwaffe, Navy, army engineers and Italian units without coordination. Not familiar with ferrying operations, the Axis were unloading vehicles on the Italian side and transferring the cargo by hand to the barge or ferry for the crossing. On the other side the cargo had to be transferred by hand back to a waiting truck. Vehicles were ferried across separately. Using the inherent capability of the Siebel ferry, von Liebenstein developed a roll-on/roll-off procedure where the loaded trucks were themselves loaded directly on the Siebel for the crossing. Loading and unloading time for the entire ferry was reduced to

# The German Escape Routes



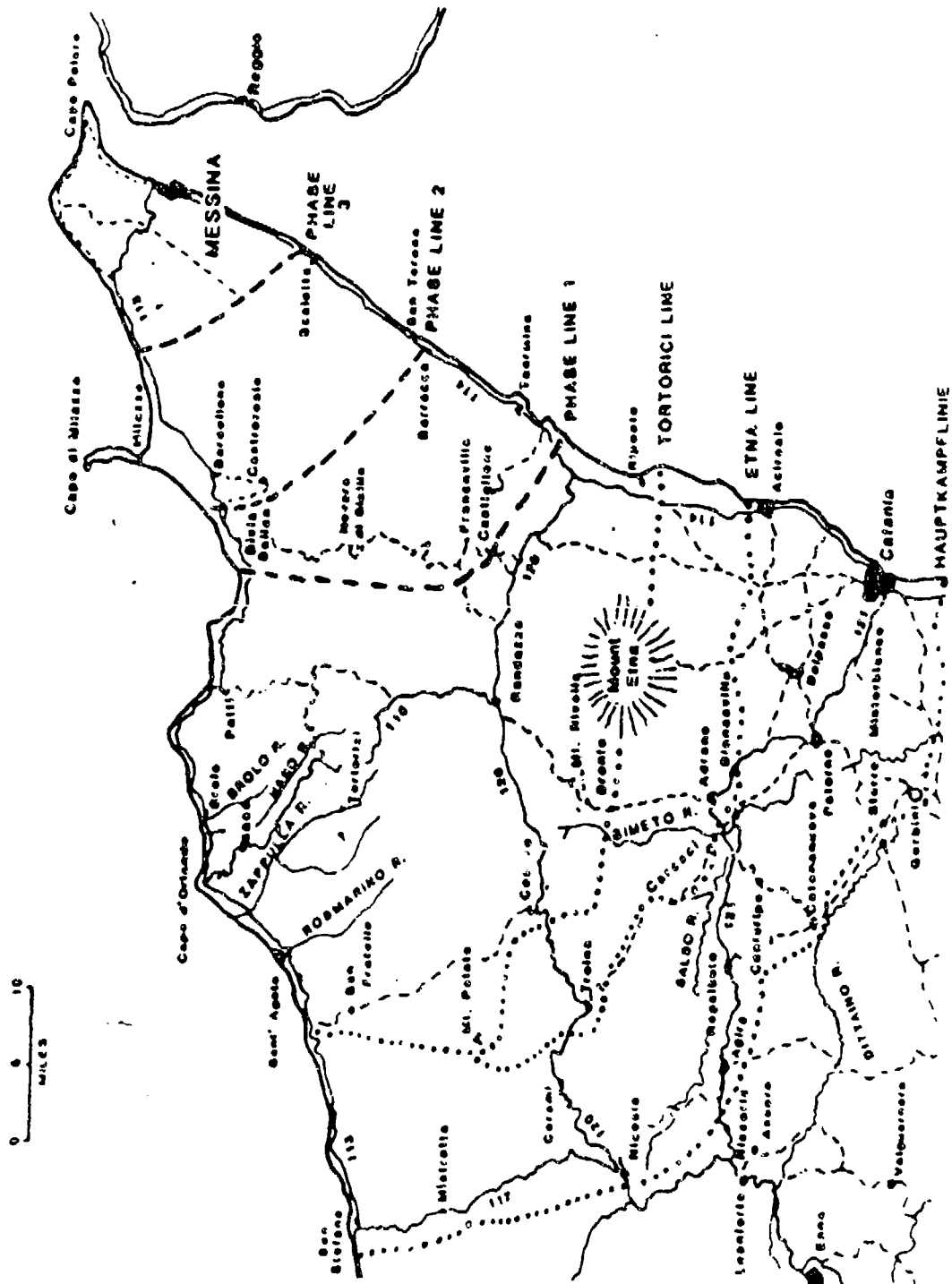
Map 14<sup>178</sup>

twenty minutes. He improved the efficiency of operations to the point that he carried as many as 3,600 men, 610 vehicles and 750 tons of supplies in a single day.<sup>179</sup>

General Hube developed a comprehensive plan to get his corps off the island under pressure from the Allies. Hube created a series of defensive lines, one behind the other, which would allow his forces to withdraw into an ever smaller triangle converging on the northeast tip of the island. Each time he drew back to the next line, the area enclosed would become smaller and his front line shorter, allowing him to withdraw forces by ferry without thinning his defense. As units were pulled from the lines, they were to go to designated assembly areas, loaded out and moved to the mainland. Hube ordered that troops could only be moved at night, but vehicles and supplies could be moved around the clock.<sup>180</sup> A priority system was developed for vehicles and cargo. What could not be evacuated was to be destroyed. Map 15 depicts Hube's successive defensive lines.

The Germans used four ferry routes to cross the straits, each with a specific onload and offload site. All of the onload sites were on the eastern shore north of Messina.<sup>181</sup> The northern most of these was designated for the 15th Panzer Grenadier Div, the next one south for the 29th Panzer Grenadier Div, the third for the Corps headquarters, smaller independent units and any overflow that might develop and the fourth site, located one mile north of Messina, was designated for the Hermann Goering Div. The plan carefully considered the highway nets and

## General Hube's Defensive Lines



Map 15<sup>182</sup>

traffic flow to minimize congestion.<sup>183</sup>

General Hube designated the embarkation sites as restricted areas and instituted very tight security. No one was allowed into the area unless under direct orders. The sites were linked by telephone with each other and with key road junctions to avoid traffic jams that might present a target to Allied aircraft. Tight discipline among the troops was maintained to prevent panic. German soldiers were threatened with immediate execution if they broke ranks.<sup>184</sup> The Italians were not included in the German ferry plans and had to fend for themselves.

The evacuation actually began in late July when Hube ordered the withdrawal of nonessential noncombatant units and supplies to the mainland. This greatly reduced the volume of work to be done and exercised the ferry operation to perfect their procedures.<sup>185</sup> The evacuation of the combat troops got underway on the night of 11-12 August. As planned, the Hermann Goering Div and elements of the 15th Panzer Grenadiers were loaded out at their designated points. However, the operation got well behind schedule due to the slow movement of troops and an Allied air attack. The operation fell behind schedule again the next night for similar reasons, so von Leibenstein took it upon himself to continue to ferry troops throughout the next day, despite Hube's orders to the contrary.<sup>186</sup> This action got the flow back on schedule. As planned, Hube ordered the withdrawal of his forces back to the successive defense lines and continued to pull units out of line for the evacuation. Despite constant harassment from the air and

problems caused by their own confusion, the Germans continued to get their troops across the straits. In the early morning hours of 17 August, General Hube and other senior commanders departed. At 06:15 the last German rear guard troops were withdrawn.<sup>187</sup>

The German evacuation was a tremendous success. Initially, Hube felt that he would be lucky to get the majority of his troops across to Italy. In the event, however, von Leibenstein was able to not only get the troops across, but almost all of their equipment. The following chart summarizes the volume of men and equipment ferried from Sicily to the mainland between 11 and 16 Aug.<sup>188</sup>

| Date<br>(Aug) | Troops | Casualties | Vehicles | Tanks | Guns | Ammo/<br>Fuel<br>(tons) | Equip<br>(tons) |
|---------------|--------|------------|----------|-------|------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| 11            | 3,361  | -          | 801      | -     | -    | 83                      | 1,128           |
| 12            | 3,249  | -          | 950      | -     | -    | 204                     | 1,370           |
| 13            | 6,142  | 440        | 1,131    | 7     | 36   | 150                     | 1,673           |
| 14            | 7,424  | 600        | 1,380    | 39    | 42   | 369                     | 1,728           |
| 15            | 4,810  | 200        | 923      | 1     | 16   | 95                      | 956             |
| 16            | 413    | -          | 44       | 1     | 34   | -                       | -               |
| Totals        | 25,669 | 1,240      | 5,229    | 48    | 128  | 901                     | 6,855           |

Overall, the Germans were able to evacuate almost 52,000 men.<sup>189</sup> The Italians were also able to evacuate a sizeable part of the forces as well, including over 62,000 personnel, 227 vehicles and 41 artillery pieces using only two small steamers and one ferry.<sup>190</sup>

The Allies could not come up with a plan in time to stop the

German flow out of Sicily. The ground units, already exhausted from weeks of fighting, could not move fast enough through the effective German rear guard troops that were there to impede their progress. Mines, blown bridges and booby traps continued to delay the advance. Allied tactical air power was used against the embarkation points with hundreds of sorties flown on some days. However, the powerful antiaircraft defense the Germans had positioned did a good job protecting their force. In the early stages of the evacuation, however, the Germans did have considerable trouble with Allied tactical air action against their forward positions that were beyond the range of the antiaircraft batteries. The Luftwaffe had lost control of the air and was unable to defend that airspace against the Allied air threat. The Allied strategic air arm was not used to interfere with the evacuation. Instead, the Allied heavy bombers were directed against targets on the mainland. The Allied navy continued to operate along the northern shore, much as it had been doing in support of the 3rd Div's advance, and shelled the coast road and German combat positions. However, the navy did not enter the Straits of Messina to engage the evacuation forces directly.

The Allies simply had not developed a plan to prevent the Germans from escaping. General Montgomery, for one, correctly predicted that the German would have to start their evacuation in early August based on the key terrain he was about to take. He asked General Alexander what was planned and did not get an

answer.<sup>191</sup> The senior Allied component commanders were still operating from separate headquarters located hundreds of miles apart and simply had not come up with a plan to react to the German evacuation. Admiral Cunningham did not think it prudent to move his ships into the area until the German coastal batteries were put out of action, presumably by air power. Air Chief Marshal Tedder did order his tactical air power against the evacuation force, but it had to operate in the face of intense flak and could only operate in daylight. Further, they were fatigued after weeks of nearly continuous action.<sup>192</sup> Apparently neither Alexander nor Eisenhower were prepared to take effective control and direct Allied forces to stop the evacuation.

The Allied ground forces continued their slow but steady progress toward Messina. On 17 August, advance elements of the American 3rd ID entered the city only hours after the last defenders had left, but not before they blew up the port facilities. Allied history addresses the "race" to Messina between Patton and Montgomery and awards the prize to Patton because American forces arrived first. Perhaps the real winner, however, was General Hube, who managed to escape with his Panzer Corps.



## UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

With Operation Husky still underway, the Allies were presented with a sudden opportunity to possibly drive Italy completely out of the war and do so while German forces on the mainland were still limited. The Allied invasion of Sicily and the bombing campaign against the mainland, along with the war weariness already wearing on the Italian people, combined to cause Italian King Emmanuel III to take drastic action. As early as the first days of July, 1943 it was evident the King's ultimate aim was to break ties with Germany, remove the Fascists from the government and end Italy's participation in the war.<sup>193</sup> The King took the first, bold steps on July 25 when he forced Mussolini to resign and had him arrested.<sup>194</sup>

One of the stated objectives for Operation Husky was to drive Italy out of the war and suddenly the Allies were presented with an opportunity to do just that. Mussolini had many detractors who wanted to see him removed, and considerable intrigue preceded the event of his departure. Both Churchill and Hitler had correctly read Mussolini's precarious situation, so his sudden departure should not have come as a surprise, but only Hitler was prepared to act. Sensing that Italy might take itself out of the war, despite consistent pronouncements to the contrary, Hitler was already taking steps to move additional troops into Italy to bolster Mussolini's position or, in the

event he was toppled, to be in position to react to his departure.

The Allies, on the other hand, in a fashion more typical than not, had not planned beyond the immediate future. Even by late July the Allies had not decided what should follow Sicily. When Mussolini was replaced as head of government by Marshal Badoglio (the King would resume his role as head of the military), Badoglio publicly declared the war would continue while privately looking for a way to end it. As Eisenhower was busy making several plans for different options after Sicily, the Allied leadership was not prepared to make the decisions that would allow Eisenhower to move quickly. The delay was caused, at least in part, by the declared Allied policy of unconditional surrender.

I believe that Allied policy makers did not look beyond the simplistic notion of unconditional surrender until forced by events. To illustrate, if Italy had surrendered on 26 July the U.S. State Department would have had nothing prepared to say except repeat "unconditional surrender".<sup>195</sup> Allied uncertainty is further evidenced by the shift from the policy of unconditional surrender to a softer attitude in response to Mussolini's departure. For example, the armistice terms drafted by General Eisenhower made no mention of unconditional surrender except for the German forces on Sicily. Instead, Eisenhower advocated offering less stringent terms expecting that would cause the Italians to add even greater pressure to their

government to end the war.<sup>196</sup> Further, when Roosevelt heard of Mussolini's downfall, he wanted to insure the Fascist government was removed and Mussolini apprehended but did not insist on an unconditional surrender at that time.<sup>197</sup> Instead, Roosevelt wanted Italy's surrender to result in every possible Allied advantage in continuing the war against Germany. This was contradicted on 27 and 28 July in public statements made by both Churchill and Roosevelt restating their demand for unconditional surrender.<sup>198</sup> The debate continued into August with the British showing more inclination to soften their position than the Americans.<sup>199</sup>

In my opinion there is ample evidence to show first that both the Italian King and populace were more than ready to end their role as a belligerent in the war even if unconditional surrender terms were imposed. Second, the Allies delayed at a critical point in late July because once again they had disagreed over critical points of strategy. Only when the opportunity was present did the Allies seriously begin the debate over what to do. As a result, by the time the Allies broadcasted a modified version of the message Eisenhower had initially proposed to the Italian people on 29 July offering them an honorable peace, it was too late. That was the same day Hitler ordered Rommel and Army Group B to enter Italy, by force if necessary, and occupy the mainland.<sup>200</sup>



## BOTTOM LINES

Operation Husky proved to be an important Allied victory, but at the same time, it was not as decisive a victory as it should have been. The Allies, still very inexperienced in combined operations and in the complex arena of amphibious landings, took a very conservative approach to the campaign that ultimately allowed the Germans to escape with an important combat battle group intact. Had the Allied leadership been more aggressive and more decisive, the ensuing campaign in Italy would have taken an entirely different direction.

Although the issue spawned great debate, the Allies were correct in choosing Sicily as the next objective following their successful campaign in Tunisia. Despite General Marshal's strong desire for an early cross-channel invasion, the Allies simply were not ready. Their performance in both North Africa and in Sicily revealed serious shortcomings in leadership, doctrine, training, command relationships and adequacy of equipment. Had General Marshal had his way, there would have been less pressure on Italy to leave their union with Germany, the Germans would have sent fewer forces to the Mediterranean theater and would have been even better prepared to meet what would have been obvious plans for Allied landings in Europe. Had the Allies pressed for a cross-channel invasion even in 1943, the results would have likely been much more costly for the Allies, possibly

even a defeat.

Operation Husky gained several important strategic objectives. First, it directly contributed to Mussolini's downfall and led to Italy dropping out of the war in September, 1943. This event, even though Hitler anticipated it, had the result of forcing the Germans to reinforce that theater. Not only did he send additional troops and equipment to Sicily and Italy, the threat against Greece and other possible targets resulted in even more troops sent elsewhere in the theater. This had the further favorable result of relieving pressure on the Russian front as was intended. Finally, hindsight suggests that Churchill's indirect approach was successful in wearing Germany down. By the time the cross-channel invasion was carried out, Germany had been further weakened. The choice of Sicily to follow North Africa proved to be a sound strategic decision.

The criticism of Operation Husky is not aimed at the decision to conduct the campaign, but rather in the timid manner in which it was carried out and the lack of strategic vision that mapped the long-range course of the war. Had the initial Allied landings been aimed closer to Messina or on the toe of the Italian mainland, the Allies would have trapped the entire Italian 6th Army and the German 15th Panzer Grenadier and Herman Goerring Divisions on the island. The campaign would likely have been shorter, less costly and, in the end, more decisive. The brilliant German evacuation would never have been an option and the Axis forces that did escape to fight another day would have

been taken out of the war. This timidity showed itself in both the initial planning and in missed opportunities that became available during the conduct of the campaign.

While there is a great deal of credit due to those that were able to bring two nations such as the United States and Great Britain together in World War II, as I have previously mentioned, these leaders were unable to agree on or articulate a common grand strategy. As a result, Operation Husky was not part of a bigger vision for the course of the war. Instead, just as Sicily followed North Africa, Italy followed Sicily. On Italy, this conservative approach would result in another prolonged campaign that saw the Allies march the entire length of the mainland and one that drew away troops, shipping and supplies that could have been made available for other theaters.

Eisenhower's and Alexander's situations demonstrated weaknesses that also hampered the campaign. In Eisenhower's case, he was plagued by a command structure that relegated him to little more than a committee chairman; a situation I believe was carefully orchestrated by the British. The problems that were encountered also point to this as indication of the learning process that both Allies needed to go through before they were ready for Overlord. Neither Eisenhower nor his principle deputies were experienced in these types of relationships or operations as the results would show. Eisenhower further contributed to the problem by allowing the respective subordinate commanders to maintain their headquarters in geographically

seperated locations, further complicating an already difficult process of command and coordination. Specifically, Allied air support for the campaign was never decisive, limited most by the command and control mechanism which allowed the air arm commanders to jealously protect their authority at the expense of the campaign.

Alexander's lack of effective leadership throughout the campaign is another criticism. He failed to provide the guidance needed throughout the planning phase that could have resulted in the needed bold stroke, failed to provide direction to his chief subordinates during the campaign, and was unable to control these subordinate commanders at critical moments of the conflict. As a result, Montgomery and Patton were given too much reign to decide matters for themselves. This resulted in an uncoordinated attack early in the campaign that saw the American 45th Div ordered back from hard won ground and yield it to the Canadian 1st Div that was unable to exploit the opportunities before it in the time available. Alexander's lack of guidance also allowed Patton to divert his 7th Army toward Palermo and the western half of Sicily and away from the what should have been the real objective; the German army. Alexander's lack of decisive leadership resulted in many lost opportunities in the conduct of the campaign and ultimately allowed the Germans to escape.

As already mentioned, the Allies failed to fully exploit the advantages of the air superiority they fought for and gained. Allied air did fly hundreds of sorties against targets throughout

Sicily, but throughout the campaign they could not solve the problem of providing effective close air support. The fault lay in the unwillingness of the air arm commanders to permit any action that hinted of a loss of control to another service. Most notable was an inability to direct tactical aircraft in a timely manner in support of ground units in contact. The practice requiring missions to be scheduled in advance and not having the ability to direct missions to meet immediate requirements doomed the Allies to be ineffective. The use of the strategic bombers against targets on the mainland during the evacuation phase is further evidence that the Allies did not have the destruction of the German army on Sicily as an operational objective.

The problems inherent in the way both naval and airpower was employed contributed to the successful evacuation from Sicily by the Axis forces. The Navy was not willing to operate in the restricted waters of the straits and the Air Force was not able to bring sufficient force to bear to interfere. The Air Force did launch several hundred tactical sorties against the evacuation, but only a relative few heavy bombers were committed. Instead, the heavy bombers were assigned missions against targets on the Italian mainland. On 5 and 6 Aug 121 B-17s were sent against Messina, but rather than attack the port and shipping, they went against the city and the approaches to it. During the height of the evacuation only 25% of the sorties flown were assigned to targets in the Messina area.<sup>201</sup> While these raids were a nuisance to the Germans, they failed to interrupt the

operation. In fact, the Germans were surprised to see they could conduct ferry operations around the clock.

Overall, Operation Husky , an important Allied victory. The advantages gained contributed to the overall defeat of the Axis, however, the campaign failed to achieve what could have been achieved had the Allied leadership been bolder and more adept at bringing their overwhelming force to bear in a more coordinated fashion.

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