The German Side of the Hill:
Nazi Conquest and Exploitation of Italy, 1943-45

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ABSTRACT

The view that German and Allied forces fought a senseless campaign for Italy during the Second World War prevails in many histories of that conflict. They present the battle for Italy as a bitterly-contested, prolonged fight up the peninsula, wasting Allied men and resources.

Evidence contradicting this judgment shows that *Italy's political, economic, geographic, and military assets between the years 1943 and 1945 made it a prize worth winning*. Allied leaders never grasped this fact nor made an effective effort to deny Germany this valuable asset.

The German defense of Italy secured the loyalty of Axis allies in Eastern Europe and permitted the establishment of a Fascist Italian puppet state under Benito Mussolini.

Moreover, Germany reaped an enormous harvest of agricultural and economic products in Italy. German estimates that Italy contributed between fifteen and twenty-five percent of total output in late 1944 show that it was truly *a prize worth winning*. The Italian economy provided large quantities of consumer goods for Germany, freeing up industrial plants in the Reich for military production. In late 1944, Italian manufacturers shifted operations and directly supported German forces fighting in Italy. Italian skilled labor contributed substantially to the German 'economic miracle' of 1944.

The battle for Italy further aided Germany in pressuring Switzerland to supply vital goods and keep open rail lines through the Swiss Alps without which German troops could not have survived in Italy. The Swiss, surrounded by German forces, used their
isolation as a convenient reason to reject Allies entreaties that they reduce assistance to Hitler.

Occupation of northern Italy also kept Allied air forces far from the Reich's southern boundaries and allowed the continued German exploitation of the natural resources in the Balkans, a key asset that fed the German war machine.

Finally, Germany enlisted substantial numbers of Italian laborers and troops who supported its fighting forces and served in antipartisan units. Italian workers kept vital rail lines repaired while Fascist Italian divisions supplemented defenses in coastal and Alpine sectors. Moreover, Italian military equipment captured in 1943 assisted in rebuilding German units crippled in the summer campaign of 1944.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The enigmatic history of Germany caught my fancy many years ago. A childhood experience in a Mainz, Germany toy store set me on the path that I still follow today. At the age of six, I gazed out the rear window of that small shop and discovered a disturbing vista of ruins hidden from the street by new construction. When I asked my mother why it was so, she hushed me. Later, she told me that "we" had done this to the Germans during the Second World War, "we" being the American Air Force, in which my father then served.

The mystery of why "we" had done such a thing to the Germans, who to me were the pediatrician who cared for me through serious illness and the kindly gentleman who ran the candy store where my D-Mark could still buy a fortune in sweets in 1963, inspired my lifelong desire to know and understand Germans and their nation.

Others have stood by me while I sought to slake that thirst for knowledge. My wife, Gayle, and son, Nathaniel, deserve thanks for understanding my preoccupation with Germany and its history. They endured my absences and supported me at times when I was ready to give up the quest.

The congregation of Rapidan Baptist Church in Wolftown, Virginia deserves my special thanks. They bolstered this effort in every way, sharing their pastor with his graduate studies for the past six years. These good people tolerated my absences on study leave and watched over my family when I was away.

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Studies authored by German figures after the Second World War. It was a joy to return to the George C. Marshall Museum and Research Library where I spent a happy undergraduate year as a Marshall Scholar. Conversations there twenty years ago with Maxwell Taylor and J. Lawton Collins encouraged me to continue my historical work.

Abroad, archivist Kate O'Brien and her staff at the Liddell-Hart Centre for Military Archives at King's College, London, uncovered a treasure trove of helpful materials. In Germany, the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich, the Bundesarchiv/Koblenz, and the Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv at Freiburg all graciously helped me wade through the massive corpus of their collections.

I dedicate this work to my mother, Virginia Frances Reese Saxon Porter, who not only first aroused my interest in German history, but also gave up so much of her life to four children after her husband died young in military service. She relinquished a college scholarship to marry my father and raise a family. May the completion of this dissertation after so many years show her that her dream of finishing her college degree is still possible, no matter how long it takes!
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<td>ADAP</td>
<td>Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGB</td>
<td>Army Group B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGC</td>
<td>Army Group C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWP</td>
<td>Armaments and War Production</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAK</td>
<td>Bundesarchiv Koblenz</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAMA</td>
<td>Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv, Freiburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMH</td>
<td>Center for Military History, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAF</td>
<td>German Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>Gruppi de Azione Patriotica (Groups for Patriotic Action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.M.S.O.</td>
<td>Her Majesty's Stationery Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>H.Qu.</td>
<td>Hauptquartier (Headquarters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFAF</td>
<td>Italian Fascist Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFZ</td>
<td>Institut für Zeitgeschichte, München</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMT</td>
<td>International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg</td>
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<tr>
<td>IWM</td>
<td>Imperial War Museum, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTB</td>
<td>Kriegstagebuch (War Diary)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LHCMA</td>
<td>Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, London</td>
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<tr>
<td>M.A.A.F.</td>
<td>Mediterranean Allied Air Force Allied Surrender Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>National Archives II, College Park, Md.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NARA</td>
<td>National Archives and Records Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSA/CSS</td>
<td>National Security Agency/Central Security Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OB</td>
<td>Oberbefehlshaber (Supreme Command/er)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ob.d.M.</td>
<td>Oberbefehlshaber der Marine (Naval Supreme Command/er)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OBS</td>
<td>Oberbefehlshaber Süd (Supreme Command/er South)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OBSW</td>
<td>Oberbefehlshaber Südwest (Supreme Command/er Southwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCMH</td>
<td>Office of the Chief of Military History, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKW</td>
<td>Oberkommando der Wehrmacht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Public Records Office, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKL</td>
<td>Seekriegsleitung (Naval High Command)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Schutzstaffel</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAMHI</td>
<td>United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.</td>
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The Mediterranean Theater of Operations

- Germany
- France
- Spain
- Sicily
- Sardinia
- Corsica
- Italy
- Yugoslavia
- Greece
- Crete
- Cyprus
- Turkey
- Libya
- Egypt
CHAPTER 1
ITALY 1943: A PRIZE WORTH WINNING?

Subjugating the enemy's army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence. Thus the highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy's plans; next is to attack their alliances; next to attack their army; and the lowest is to attack their fortified cities.
Sun-tzu, *The Art of War*

INTRODUCTION

Military historians have long contented themselves either with neglecting the grand strategic dimensions of the Italian campaign or railing against the ineptitude of a favorite villain. This distortion stems from the fragmentary state of the historiography of the Italian campaign. In particular, after the passage of a half century, we still lack a serious study of the German 'side of the hill.' This fissure running through previous accounts effectively and seriously distorts the historical record.

This dissertation does not present a complete account of German military operations in Italy between 1943 and 1945. Instead, it examines German operations while asserting a strongly revisionist thesis that opposes the currently held 'gospel'

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2 See the forthcoming volume of *Das Dritte Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg* by Gerhard Schreiber containing the relevant chapters on Italy.
concerning the Italian campaign. *Given Italy's political, economic, geographic, and military assets between the years 1943 and 1945, Italy was a prize worth winning.* Nazi Germany, in the person of a capable and persistent foe, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, both thwarted Allied strategic goals in Italy and achieved its own.

Archival records show that Italian resources materially assisted German prosecution of the war after 1943. The German takeover of Italy, fairly described as the *Wehrmacht*’s last victory, ensured that the war wound down more slowly than it otherwise would have. If this argument can be proven, then it stands to reason that the Italian campaign was neither a necessary evil nor a misuse of Allied forces better employed elsewhere. In fact, the Allies employed too few troops in Italy. Defective strategic analysis before and during the long battles up the Italian peninsula caused them to miss a strategic prize of great value.

**RECENT HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN**

The German conquest and occupation of Italy remained controversial long after the end of the Italian campaign. Many Germans seeking a historical account of their nation's occupation of Italy found it hard to establish the record. German historians and participants in the Italian occupation long cast Nazi actions in the mold of Italian treason and German response.³ They argued that German brutality could

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³For an example of German attitudes at the time of the Italian surrender see "Der Verrat Italiens," in: Luftflottenkommando 2/Fü Abt 1c Bild/Stabsbildabteilung, "Durchführung von Landungsunternehmen - Die engl.-amerikanische Grosslandung im Raum Salerno am 9 Sept. 43," Frames 257-298, OKL/2600, Roll 89, T-311, RG 242. (College Park, Md.: National Archives II [Hereafter NAII]), 294-95.
only be understood in light of Italy's treacherous betrayal of the Axis alliance.

Proponents of this view justified German behavior toward Italians by casting
Germany as the true victim, meting out to Italians the harsh punishment that they
deserved.

No one seriously challenged this interpretation until the early 1980s. A new
generation of critical German historians attacked the presumptions of Italian treason
and cowardice. They argued that Italy had not treacherously abandoned its German
ally simply to avoid the punishment that fell on Germany after the war. Research
showed that Italian civilian and military leaders acted in keeping with Italian
national interests. Italy's exhausted economy and its battered armed forces made
further resistance hopeless.

Benito Mussolini recognized this and sought modification of German strategic
priorities. Given Italy's weakened state in 1942, he pressed Hitler to transfer Axis
forces fighting in Russia to the west. Mussolini correctly judged that Italy could not
defend itself unless the Axis strengthened its western defenses. When Mussolini fell
from power, unlike the German populace, Italians chose not to follow Adolf Hitler
and fight the war to its bitter end. A new generation of German historians have
argued that Italians acted more rationally and sensibly than did Germans. Italy did
not betray Germany. Italian officials acted in their nation's best interests after

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring's views are revealed by comments in *Kesselring: A
having correctly estimated the hopelessness of the Axis position. 4

Recent historians of the Italian campaign have built upon this new approach to more accurately account for the German occupation of Italy. Richard Lamb's War in Italy 1943-1945: A Brutal Story uncovered evidence of widespread German atrocities. Using long-neglected Italian records, Lamb demolished postwar efforts seeking to rebuild the moral reputation of Field Marshal Albert Kesselring. Lamb effectively refuted the assertions of Kesselring and his defenders that this great soldier was unaware of and unsullied by his troops' atrocities.

Lamb had trained and served with Italian troops who fought as allies of the Anglo-American forces. He used that experience and Italian military records to counter German denigration of Italian military performance during the chaotic days following Italy's surrender in September 1943. Detailing the skillful Italian defense of Rome, he documented that surrender came only after Kesselring threatened the aerial destruction of that great city. Italian officers knew that Kesselring's aircraft had bombed the historic center of Rotterdam in 1940. They dared not risk Rome's ruination, given the failure of Allied forces to assist the city's defense. German troops marched into Rome only after Italian defenders capitulated rather than see its

4For an excellent analysis of this historiographical change of course, see Jens Petersen's analysis, "Deutschland und Italien 1939 bis 1945," in Der Zweite Weltkrieg, ed. Wolfgang Michalka (Munich: Piper, 1989), 116. Petersen correctly credits Erich Kuby's seminal work for inspiring much of this movement away from blaming Italians for pursuing a rational course in their own best interest. Erich Kuby, Verrat auf Deutsch: Wie das Dritte Reich Italien ruinierte (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1982).
inhabitants and monuments destroyed.\textsuperscript{5}

Jens Petersen, James Sadkovich, and Gerhard Schreiber have similarly aided in this reappraisal of the German campaign in Italy.\textsuperscript{6} Their work leaves most American accounts of the campaign in need of revision. The work of American military historian Carlo D'Este underscores the necessity of updating American accounts of the war in the Italian theater. Speaking to a recent conference on the role of Italian-Americans in the Second World War, D'Este described this campaign as "bitter and indecisive." He portrayed it as having been fought without clear strategic goals. His views indict Allied leaders on a charge of squandering their soldiers' lives in a campaign unworthy of their sacrifice.\textsuperscript{7} While it may be true that generals on both sides wasted lives, those losses served a greater strategic purpose than is often recognized. German losses bought Hitler time to delay the end of his 'Thousand-Year Reich.'

\textbf{THE LINGERING WOUNDS OF WAR}

On March 23, 1944, \textit{Gruppi de Azione Patriotica} (Groups for Patriotic Action)

\textsuperscript{5}Lamb, \textit{War in Italy}.


\textsuperscript{7}Carlo D'Este, "The War in the Mezzogiorno -- 1943-1944, A 50 Year Personal Perspective" (Hartford, Ct., April 21-23, 1995), Paper delivered at "Italy and America, 1943-44: Italian, American and Italian-American Experiences of the Liberation of the Mezzogiorno," 2.
partisans struck a bold blow against the German garrison occupying Rome. Nazi officials had previously declared Rome an 'open city.' The illegal German occupation infuriated the men and women of GAP. Moreover, daily SS Police parades through city streets constantly reminded Italian partisans of the occupiers' brutality. GAP partisans took advantage of the German failure to vary march routes. After careful study, a GAP unit positioned explosives in a street sweeper's cart along the chosen thoroughfare. The ensuing explosion wreaked havoc among the men of a SS Police company, killing thirty-three.

News of the attack outraged Adolf Hitler, who demanded swift retaliation. Herbert Kappler, head of SS forces in Rome, complied by hastily gathering and executing 335 Italian hostages. Kappler found 280 victims by emptying Rome's jails of political prisoners, many members of various partisan forces. Kappler's chosen scapegoats also included a substantial number of Jews. When Pietro Caruso, Rome's Fascist police chief, fell short of his quota, he made good the deficit by summarily arresting men and boys from the city's streets.  

8Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe's interrogation of Field Marshal Albert Kesselring on 13 March 1946 included Kappler's report of the categories of "offenses" present among victims of the massacre. 176 had "committed acts punishable by death." Twenty-two had had their cases marked closed, but were executed anyway. Four had been condemned to death. Four had been arrested near the scene of the crime. Kappler is said to have told Kesselring that he added 57 Jews to the final number of hostages. When asked to justify the ratio of Italian victims to German dead, Kesselring argued that the unsettled situation at the front required the exaction of such vengeance. See Kesselring's testimony in: Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg, Germany, 1948) [Hereafter IMT], IX:232.
The condemned Italians traveled from Rome's Regina Coeli prison to the nearby Ardeatine caves on March 24. Executions of the bound hostages, marched to their death by fives, required four hours and lasted from 2:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. Kappler murdered an indeterminate number of hostages with his pistol. After the killings, Kappler's men drowned the memory of the massacre in brandy as German engineers tried to wipe out evidence of the atrocity. Their efforts to seal the caves failed. Italians quickly discovered the site and sought permission to bury dead family members. German authorities responded by sending troops to secure the location and to prevent exhumation of the dead for burial.

In November 1946, a British military court convicted several high ranking German military officers for their role in this crime. In May 1948, the Rome Military Tribunal tried Kappler and five others, convicting Kappler and jailing him for life. The former SS officer served his sentence in an Italian prison until he escaped to Austria in 1977. Kappler died in 1979, still free and unrepentant.

The wounds of the Ardeatine caves' massacre lingered in Italy a half century later. Italian leaders marked the occasion annually with services of mourning at the site. Italian prosecutors persisted in their efforts to find and punish Nazis

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9Maria de Blasio Wilhelm details the Ardeatine caves massacre from the Italian partisans' viewpoint in *The Other Italy: The Italian Resistance in World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1988), 101-103. Richard Lamb's research implicates Field Marshal Albert Kesselring in the massacre. Lamb's exhaustive research of Italian records provides a guide through the tortuous legal aspects of the events and subsequent trials arising from the massacre. See *War in Italy, 1943-1945: A Brutal Story* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 56-64.
responsible for the killings long after World War Two ended. Pressured by angry
Italians, prosecutors demanded and received the extradition of a principal
participant in November 1995. Argentinian officials expelled to Italy an eighty-two-
year-old German, SS Captain Erich Priebke. The long-sought Priebke had
previously avoided facing charges stemming from his role in the executions.

Priebke had escaped from British custody in 1946 and joined other Nazi war
criminals fleeing to South America. He evaded authorities searching for him and
settled in Argentina. Priebke maintained his true identity while resident in
Argentina, confident that he was beyond the reach of prosecutors. Investigators
later discovered that Priebke made annual visits to the German Embassy in Buenos
Aires to revalidate his German passport. He used that passport twice to visit Rome.
German diplomatic officials never disclosed his travels, nor did Argentinian
authorities offer to extradite Priebke. In 1994, Priebke finally blundered when he
admitted his role in the Ardeatine massacre to ABC News reporter Sam Donelson.
Priebke's declaration caused a public outcry that forced the Argentinian government
to expel him as a war criminal.

Priebke insisted that he had merely 'followed orders' in conducting the
massacre. His justification of the atrocity enraged Italians familiar with the events of
March 1944. Nonetheless, the families of victims declared that they were not seeking
vengeance by demanding that Priebke be tried fifty years after his crimes. Instead,
they hoped for an accurate account of the Ardeatine killings. Priebke's advanced age
and his extended period of freedom in Argentina ruled out the possibility of real
justice. Most Italians feared that Priebke, like Kappler, would ultimately escape punishment.10

The events of this trial, labeled as the last serious Nazi war crime trial likely to be conducted, show the lingering scars of the bitterly-fought war for Italy, now more than half a century distant. However, before we can understand the events that birthed this abiding anger, it is first necessary to understand the circumstances that existed in the central Mediterranean in late 1942 and early 1943.

GRAND STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS OF THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN

Like its counterpart in Burma, the Italian theater remained an orphan theater in Allied strategic planning. The inadequate initial commitment of forces and frequent shifting of veteran troops to other battlefronts designated Italy as a backwater after late 1943. Nonetheless, a close examination of the strategic stakes in Italy reveals that it should not have become the ‘Burma’ of the European Theater.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Mussolini’s Italy correctly occupied a prominent position in Allied grand strategy in early 1943. The defeat of Italy represented an opportunity to strike an important political blow against the Axis. Its swift conquest would remove Germany’s only real ‘partner’ from the war. As 1943 began, significant numbers

Italian troops still fought in Russia and North Africa. Italian forces also occupied Greece, the Balkans, and southern France. German leaders would be hard-pressed to replace Italy's military forces in the event of a surrender.

Allied leaders also hoped that Italian capitulation would undermine the loyalty and will to fight of Germany's allies and bolster Anglo-American international prestige. Italian surrender endangered Hungary and Romania by positioning Allied forces closer to them and by raising the threat of Turkish entry into the conflict as an Allied partner. Moreover, if Turkey, Spain, and Switzerland adopted a stricter interpretation of their neutrality, the loss of exports from the three nations would constrict German war production.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

More lay at stake in Italy than dealing a body blow to the Nazi Reich. Historians frequently note Italian economic weakness before the Second World War. Italy's 2.7 percent of global industrial production compared poorly with either Britain's 9.2 percent or Germany's 10.7 percent. Mussolini used Italian economic and military weakness to justify his abrogation of duties incurred under the 1939 Pact of Steel. Hitler's sudden announcement of his intention to invade Poland angered Mussolini. The Duce had not expected the next European war to begin before 1943. Surprised

and worried by his German counterpart's accelerated plan of action, Italy did not
join Hitler's war against France, Great Britain, and Poland. Mussolini argued that
Italy's poor economic and military condition precluded early intervention. Count
Galeazzo Ciano backed up his leader's argument by presenting Hitler with a fantastic
shopping list of raw materials and arms that Italy required as its price for supporting
the German conquest of Poland. The Italian ploy discouraged Hitler from further
pursuing Italian participation in the conflict.12

A different picture of Italy's economic status emerged after the German takeover
of northern and central Italy in 1943. Despite an exhaustive survey of the Italian
economy in May 1943, a positive picture of Italy's industrial capabilities emerged.13
German officials quickly inspected the modern northern Italian industrial base
occupied during the Italian surrender in September 1943. To their surprise, they
discovered large, carefully-hoarded stockpiles of raw materials.

12Hermann Burkhart Mueller-Hillebrand, Germany and Its Allies in World War
II: A Record of Axis Collaboration Problems (Frederick, Md.: University Publications
of America, 1980), 72-73; Gerhard L. Weinberg, A World at Arms: A Global History of
World War II (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 38; Peter
Calvocoressi, Guy Wint and John Pritchard, Total War: The Causes and Courses of the
Second World War, 2nd edition (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 100; Ferdinand Siebert,
"Der deutsch-italienische Stahlpakt: Entstehung und Bedeutung des Vertrages vom

13Oberkommando der Wehrmacht W Stb (Ausl), "Die Wehrwirtschaft
Italiens," Document AL 2890 (OKW W Stb (Ausl) 2/La Az 3 i 10 Nr. 3901/43
g.Kdos.) (Imperial War Museum, London [Hereafter IWM]).
The extent of the stockpiling astonished all involved in the assessment. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring charged the Italians with pursuing "a deliberate policy of hoarding quite beyond my comprehension. The discovery, after the defection of the Italians in 1943, of vast stores of unused war material is alone sufficient proof of this cheese-paring." Major General Burkhart Mueller-Hillebrand confirmed this after the war. He explained how Italian industrialists had built their stockpiles.

Italy, for instance, would make counterrequests for large quantities of raw materials and coal. In this connection, moreover, as was discovered after the defection of Italy in September 1943 when the Italian armament industry was more strictly controlled by German agencies, the Italian government had never been in full control of its industries. Raw materials sent from Germany for armament purposes were found hoarded for post-war purposes.

Hans Henrici later told Allied officials that northern Italy possessed "a sufficient number of highly modern factories." Moreover, they had "the best and most modern machines of German, American and Swiss origin." Production in Italy had the further advantage of lessening demands on an already strained

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15 Kesselring, A Soldier's Record, 119.

transportation net. Every item manufactured in Italy reduced shipping requirements by 700 to 1,200 kilometers. Henrici noted that Italy possessed large numbers of workers skilled in producing items vital to the German war economy.17

German officials, led by Albert Speer, quickly and energetically reorganized Italian farming and manufacturing. Production from the factories and fertile fields of northern Italy thereafter greatly benefitted the German war economy, totaling fifteen-plus percent of total German war production during 1944.18 Italian factories served the German war machine for many months after the Nazi takeover. They churned out highly specialized items that had long formed bottlenecks in German war production. Italian manufacture of fuses, cartridge and shell casings, long-barreled antitank and antiaircraft guns, and vehicles helped make up the German deficit of such items.19 More will be presented later detailing how Germany profited

17Henrici, "The Use of Italian Industry in the Service of German Munitions Production, 1-2.

18Deutschlands Rüstung im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Hitlers Konferenzen mit Albert Speer 1942-1945, ed. Willi A. Boelcke (Frankfurt am Main: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenagon, 1969), 308. György Ránki adds that: "Speer, in a speech given on July 11, 1944, claimed that "25 to 30 percent of the German war production had been furnished by the occupied Western Territories and Italy." According to our data, in terms of armament-production [sic] this seems to be an overstatement. However, in the broader sense it was close to reality." Speer estimated that Italy contributed as much as one-half of all production from the occupied nations of western Europe if Italian production stood somewhere between 13-15% of all German war production as late as July 1944. György Ránki, The Economics of the Second World War, ed. Helmut Konrad, Böhlau Zeitgeschichtliche Bibliothek, vol. 21 (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1993), 342.

19Hans Henrici, "The Use of Italian Industry in the Service of German Munitions Production," 3; R. L. DiNardo, Mechanised Juggernaut or Military
from stockpiles of rubber, finished steel, and war materials. The Germans either quickly returned critical materials to the Reich or used the stockpiles for Italian war production, outfitting German units fighting in Italy.

The discovery of hoarded raw materials challenges interpretations of Italian economic weakness as emanating from a shortage of such goods. Italian arms producers could not match German output item for item. Nonetheless, Italian factories could have significantly increased armament production using the uncovered materials. Italy's defeat in the production war stemmed more from weak state control of the industrial sector than it did from a shortage of raw materials. The Italian cornucopia of hoarded raw materials assisted in the rapid expansion of German war production in late 1943 and early 1944.

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20See David Fraser, Knight's Cross: A Life of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 450. Rommel bemoaned the discovery of “immense quantities of Italian military equipment, all dating from the period when he had been assured by Comando Supremo that they had nothing with which to improve the material of their men in North Africa, that the cupboard was bare.” For specific lists of arms seized from Italy see: Der Oberbefehlshaber Süd Führungsabteilung Ic-Entwurf, "Bericht über das Ergebnis der Entwaffnungs-Aktion und die Haltung der Italiener im Bereich O.B. Süd," RH19 X (Heeresgruppe C), Band 12, OB Südwest 18.Juni 1943 - 23.Februar 1944 Abt. Ic (Bundesarchiv\Militärarchiv, Freiburg, Germany [hereafter BAMA]: Microfiche), 204-05. For a comparison of the war booty seized in Italy with previous campaigns, see: Gerhard Schreiber, Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich 1943 bis 1945, Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte, vol. 28 (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1990), 219.

The German war effort also benefitted from control of northern Italy's rich agricultural regions, especially the fertile Po Valley. A steady stream of agricultural produce flowed from the provinces of upper Italy to Germany and to Wehrmacht forces fighting in occupied Italy. By December 1943, Italian sources had provided 41,500 tons of rice to support the German war economy. In 1944, Italian fields, orchards, and vineyards supplied wheat, rice, corn, oats, rye, potatoes, sugar, fruit, vegetables, meat, fat, fish, and wine for German consumption.

The German war economy similarly benefitted from the large pool of skilled Italian labor. Italians worked in the factories of northern Italy or as forced labor in Germany. Moreover, German authorities employed Italian military internees as slave labor. Estimates of their numbers have ranged from 600,000 to 1,000,000. Many Italian workers labored under horrible conditions, while interned members of the Italian armed forces suffered virtual enslavement. The difficulties under which internees labored contributed to an estimated 40,000 deaths among them. Nazi labor authorities shipped some skilled Italian laborers from the great industrial belt of northern Italy to Germany. The majority of skilled workers remained in Italian factories producing goods vital to the German war effort until Germany's war

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economy collapsed during the winter of 1944-1945.\textsuperscript{24}

This brief purview of the Italian economy shows that the conquest of Italy yielded Germany substantial gains. Stockpiles of raw materials, modern industrial plant, large pools of skilled labor, and agricultural production, all located close to the fighting front, substantially boosted the output of the German war economy. Although optimal performance was never achieved, the occupation and exploitation of Italy more than paid the victors' costs.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

After the Second World War, Field Marshal Kesselring and Lieutenant General Siegfried Westphal, who served during 1943 and 1944 as Army Group C's Chief of the General Staff, characterized the Italian front as having played a secondary role in German strategic planning. Italy had received priority in shipments of men and materiel only during crises, such as the January 1944 Allied landing at Anzio-Nettuno.\textsuperscript{25} Both Adolf Hitler and American military leaders alike treated the Mediterranean conflict as a matter of secondary importance. Only the threat of

\textsuperscript{24}The 600,000 figure represents a consensus of opinion among most researchers at this date. Henrici, "The Use of Italian Industry in the Service of German Munitions Production," 1; Ulrich Herbert, "Labour and Extermination: Economic Interest and the Primacy of Weltanschauung in National Socialism," Past and Present, no. 138 (February 1993):180-81; IMT, XVI:452; Petersen, "Deutschland und Italien 1939 bis 1945," 116-18; Gerhard Schreiber, Die italienischen Militärinternierten, 230-31.

\textsuperscript{25}Europe Foreign Military Studies Branch Historical Division Headquarters United States Army, "German Strategy During the Italian Campaign," Foreign Military Studies, Series B, B-270 (n.d.), 1-2.
defeat prevented them from completely neglecting its needs.

By 1943, Adolf Hitler no longer nurtured his mistaken prewar notion of Italy as a world power awaiting its call to greatness. His Italian partner's bungled attempts to achieve the status of a world power encumbered Germany's war effort. Italian defeats in Greece and North Africa had consumed the country's military might. Italian dreams of glory had led Mussolini to spread the war into regions that Hitler preferred left undisturbed.26

The vulnerability of the Balkans to Allied assault lay uppermost in Hitler's Mediterranean plans in 1943. The German war economy would have collapsed sooner than late 1944 had it been deprived of the flow of bauxite, chromium, and copper from the region's mines. Moreover, an Allied move into Yugoslavia threatened to sever lines of communication with Romania. Romanian fields and wells provided Hitler with essential supplies of wheat and oil. Those commodities traveled to Germany on Yugoslavian and Hungarian railroads. Trains bearing troops and supplies for German garrisons in Greece and Crete journeyed back down the twisting railways of the region. German forces there faced virtual extinction if the Allies moved boldly and cut off supply lines transiting the Balkans.27 Without

26Petersen, "Deutschland und Italien 1939 bis 1945," 112.

exaggeration, Kesselring justified the German occupation of Italy in his memoirs with the statement that "[w]hoever controlled the Brenner and the roads and railways running eastwards into Austria and the Balkans and westwards into France had a stranglehold on Germany." 28

The Swiss role in the Italian campaign comprises a further crucial geographic consideration rarely emphasized by historians. Swiss acquiescence in Axis railroad transit traffic materially assisted the Axis cause during World War II. The terms of Switzerland's October 13, 1909 agreement with Italy and Germany required passage of nonmilitary rail traffic on Swiss railways. 29 That traffic played a central role in the German exploitation of the Italian industrial base. As late as January 1945, Germany received shipments in excess of 7,000 tons of clothing, fabric, and foodstuffs from Italy over Swiss railways. Reverse shipments of German chemicals, iron ore, iron, and coal sustained Italy's output of finished goods.

Protected passage of vital 'nonmilitary' goods along Switzerland's excellent

28 Kesselring, A Soldier's Record, 208.

railroads enabled German employment of the French Mont Cenis and Italian Brenner passes for the movement of essential military supplies and troops. The Brenner proved the only practical route for moving war materiel to and from Italy. Difficulty in transiting the Mont Cenis pass rendered shipment of most military goods across it impractical. Nonetheless, German retention of northern Italy long depended on the efficient rail movement of goods across Switzerland.

Germany encircled Switzerland after occupying Italy. This encirclement pressured Swiss government officials to continue rail transit traffic. The German presence on Swiss borders counteracted Allied demands that Switzerland halt Axis train movements. German threats to cutoff vital shipments of coal and other goods ensured that the Swiss continued exporting high-quality war materials to Germany and Italy. The German position remained a strong one until Allied forces arrived on the Franco-Swiss frontiers in late 1944 and eliminated the German threat to Bern’s security.

The turn of the tide against Germany in Russia and North Africa in late 1942 and early 1943 increased Germany’s need to control Swiss railroads. In March 1943, fear of German invasion rose to a fevered pitch among the Swiss as warning of an assault leaked to Swiss authorities. Disagreement still exists about the seriousness of German intentions to move against Switzerland. Nonetheless, Swiss mobilization and preparations to demolish strategic rail lines and tunnels highlighted German

vulnerability to Swiss defensive measures. German authorities may have settled for the uncertainty of Swiss control rather than kill the railway still transporting the golden eggs.\textsuperscript{31}

German control of northern Italy encouraged Swiss exports of scarce goods to the \textit{Reich} throughout 1943 and 1944. Optical and watch-making parts, railroad switching engines (in great demand given Allied attacks on the German transportation network during late 1944 and early 1945), munitions, explosives, and high quality machine tools poured into the \textit{Reich}. The Swiss government not only permitted the production of war materiel for the German \textit{Reich}. Swiss credits up to 1943 totaled 600 million marks and helped finance Swiss exports to the Reich.\textsuperscript{32}

Conversely, Allied pressure on Switzerland increased in effectiveness as German fortunes waned in late 1944. The Swiss government reacted by adopting a policy that assisted the Allies' gradual strangulation of German forces in Italy. Closure of the Simplon Tunnel to German transit traffic and cessation of raw material and munitions exports occurred in October 1944. Nonetheless, not until February 1945, did the Swiss, facing ever-increasing German indebtedness, cease all trade with Nazi Germany. Swiss officials conveniently blamed their termination of exports on the


German failure to provide materials due to Switzerland as payment for past shipments.\textsuperscript{33}

By early 1945, the imminent economic and military collapse of the Third Reich freed Switzerland from the threat of German retaliation. The Swiss quickly adapted themselves to the rules of the "New World Order" of 1945. Nonetheless, Swiss goods flowed into Hitler's Germany from the summer of 1943 until the spring of 1945. This flow resulted in part from the presence of German forces on Swiss borders threatening the tiny republic's security. Any net assessment of the Italian campaign from a German perspective must add the economic benefits derived from Switzerland to the balance sheet.

MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS

Determining the Italian campaign's outcome requires an appraisal of the participants' goals before its initiation and during its course. This necessitates a comparison of stated Allied and German military goals if the outcome is to be accurately appraised.

A 'Germany First' policy guided Anglo-American strategic thinking after America's December 1941 entry into the Second World War. Crises in the Pacific theater reduced the level of forces earmarked for the European theater throughout the war. Nonetheless, the goal of first defeating Germany and then dealing with

\textsuperscript{33}Helmreich, The Diplomacy of Apology, 27, 29; Ránki, The Economics of the Second World War, 342.
Japan remained paramount in Allied plans.\textsuperscript{34}

Implementation of the plan to defeat 'Germany First' proved that 'the devil is in the details.' American leaders grew more confident as their military resources expanded. They quickly extended the sinews of American military power around the globe. This newly confident American leadership sought a direct and immediate confrontation with the \textit{locus} of German power in Europe. American military leaders believed that only a contest of strength with the German army in France would defeat the Third \textit{Reich}.

American military leaders feared British strategic designs. British strategic thinking represented a significant threat to American plans for an early landing in France. Winston Churchill argued that peripheral operations near to the European heartland offered great rewards. His American counterparts worried that launching a major campaign in the Mediterranean could tie down forces necessary for the invasion of France. American officials feared that a sizable commitment of forces to the Mediterranean would delay or force the cancellation of the main Allied assault against northwestern Europe.\textsuperscript{35} Americans took the British preference for Mediterranean operations as evidence of British timidity when faced with the need


to close with and destroy the German armed forces.

British civilian and military leaders viewed operations through a different prism. Their views reflected the accumulated experience of two world wars. A rapidly diminishing pool of manpower and materiel made the British hesitant to directly confront German forces occupying France. Winston Churchill's predilection for peripheral operations, dating back to his service as First Sea Lord during the First World War, shaped British strategy. Churchill had championed various schemes designed to win quick victory. His hare-brained plans ranged from the capture of the Dutch islands of Ameland, Borkum, or Sylt to one eventually accepted, the forcing of the Dardanelles by British battleships. All of Churchill's scenarios promised short cuts along the torturous road of war. But Churchill's daring schemes shared a common defect. Their author consistently miscalculated the true cost of his plans. 36

In 1942, Churchill again underestimated the difficulty of winning victory when he pressed for an assault upon the Axis's Mediterranean 'soft underbelly'. Experience established that it was a 'tough old gut'. Nonetheless, American commanders unfairly discounted the intertwined web of factors that drove the British to press for the continuation of Mediterranean operations. Britain's Mediterranean commitment dated back to the Seventeenth century. After centuries of effort, Britain possessed an extensive infrastructure constructed to defend its

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Mediterranean interests. This enormous base, which supported British armies, fleets, and air forces, could not be moved as easily as the men, ships, and aircraft that it undergirded.

The global structure of interests and possessions, crucial to the continuation of Britain's war effort, complicated British operations. By 1939, British power emanated from the flow of Middle Eastern oil and supplies of men and matériel provided by India, Southeast Asia, and the Anzac powers. Mediterranean transit routes linked these vital interests together. Control of the Mediterranean ensured that the stream of men and war matériel passing between the British Empire's many parts would continue.

In June 1940 Italy threatened this route and compelled a British response. Britain would lose its grip on the Middle East if Italian warships closed the central and eastern Mediterranean. Britain would have lost its oil supply if it had lost the Middle East. The petroleum fueling the British war effort would have instead sated the voracious thirst of the Axis mechanized war machine for lubricating oil and gasoline. Moreover, closure of this artery would have forced the diversion of Allied shipping around the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa. Lack of shipping limited the scope of Allied operations throughout the Second World War. An increased requirement for shipping in support of Middle and Far Eastern operations might well have been the straw that broke the British camel's back in

Japan entered the war in December 1941 and rapidly defeated British forces in Malaysia. After that traumatic blow, British leaders redoubled their efforts to control the Mediterranean route to India. Defeat in the Mediterranean would not only herald the loss of the Middle East and its vital oil fields. Loss of the Middle East meant the meeting of Japanese and German forces in India. An Axis linkup there denoted loss of the war for the British and Soviets. German and Japanese forces could conduct joint operations against an encircled Soviet Union. The defeat of the Soviet Union would have opened the Eurasian heartland's vast treasure house of resources for Axis exploitation. This resource base in Russia and India would have tipped the scales toward the Axis in the war of production. From the British point of view, Mediterranean operations were anything but peripheral. Operations designed to ensure British control of the Mediterranean basin formed the foundation of British strategy. The closure of the Mediterranean in 1941 carried with it the certainty of British defeat.38

The strategic divergence that developed between Great Britain and the United States concerning the Mediterranean's importance shaped Anglo-American operations in the theater. The 'tug of war' between British and Americans leaders inhibited planning, the deployment of forces, and the development of operations. Consequently, the Allies missed chances to exploit Axis weakness. After the Axis

38Howard, Studies in War and Peace, 124, 131.
defeat in Tunisia, the door to the Mediterranean stood unguarded. Allied planners
failed to foresee this situation arising or to capitalize on this opportunity. Anglo-
American leaders acted timidly again after the conquest of Sicily. Hitler planned to
withdraw up the Italian peninsula and defend the line of the northern Apennines.
Allied commanders knew of Hitler's intentions from Ultra messages, deciphered
radio intercepts of German communications encoded by the Enigma apparatus.\textsuperscript{39}
Moreover, information in Eisenhower's hands provided a clear picture of the pitiful
state of German forces during the days before Italy's surrender. Inaction let swift
victory slip from his grasp.\textsuperscript{40}

Success in North Africa, which released from battle the largest and most
battleworthy Allied army in existence, compelled the continuation of Mediterranean
operations. Should not the Allies have struck a grievous blow against the Germans
with this army? Circumstances in May 1943 dictated a swift invasion and conquest
of Italy. Only this type assault would have removed Italy from the Axis alliance.
Why did that not occur? The failure to conquer Italy resulted from defective
strategic cooperation. The quarrelsome relationship between British and American
leaders impeded bold action. Lack of strategic vision blinded the partners to the
opportunities awaiting them. German forces in Italy benefitted from the Anglo-
\textsuperscript{39}Martin Blumenson, "Will 'Ultra' Rewrite History?" \textit{Army}, August 1978, 44-45.

\textsuperscript{40}Ralph Bennett, \textit{Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy} (New York: William
Morrow and Co., 1989), 221.
American conflict throughout the Italian campaign.

ALLIED GOALS IN ITALY

Allied leaders focused on several goals while planning operations in Sicily and Italy. First, they sought to tie down German forces in the theater that might have been employed against the Soviet Union. German troops fighting in Italy could have been used against Operation OVERLORD, the Allied plan to invade northwestern Europe. Moreover, employment of Allied troops in the Mediterranean would prepare them for future operations, as their combat experience in North Africa had done.41

Defeating Italy stood high on the list of Allied military goals promising large returns. Italian divisions occupied large areas of southern France and the Balkans. Removing Italian occupation troops from the Axis order of battle would weaken the perimeter of ‘Festung Europa.’ Soviet and Anglo-American forces had destroyed large numbers of Italian divisions in North Africa and Russia. Nonetheless, an extended pause in operations might have given Italy time to reconstitute its divisions for service at home and abroad.

Italian surrender offered the additional dividend of neutralizing the Italian navy. Two problems confronted the Italian navy during the winter and spring of 1943. The destruction of the Italian Air Force in the Mediterranean and the

inadequate German *Luftwaffe* forces available for port defense exposed the remaining capital ships of the Italian navy at Taranto and La Spezia to Allied air strikes. A series of raids drove Italian naval forces out of Naples, Messina, Cagliari, and Navarino between December 1942 and the early months of 1943. Moreover, by early April 1943, the worsening oil situation had nearly immobilized the five battleships, eight cruisers, and thirty-seven escorts that constituted the remnants of the Italian navy.  

Despite the *Regina Marina*’s weakened state, its elimination offered the Allies an opportunity to shift the balance of naval power in their favor. The surrender of the Italian navy would permit a global reshuffling of naval forces to other theaters and a potential savings of merchant shipping in excess of one million tons.  

Finally, capture of part of Italy would permit the expansion of the Allied Combined Bombing Offensive against Germany. Plans made at the Casablanca conference in January 1943 envisioned the opening of a second air front in the Mediterranean. Capture of the Italian airfields on the plains bordering the southern Italian city of Foggia would allow the movement of Allied North African Air Force strategic bombardment wings to Italy. Mediterranean-based bombers, in concert

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with the Royal Air Force and the 8th U. S. Army Air Force attacking from England, could then conduct an 'around the clock' bombardment of Italy and Germany.

From Italian bases, Allied bombers could wage a more efficient air campaign against southern Germany than had been possible from airfields in North Africa. Many German factories had been built or had shifted operations to southern Germany hoping to escape Allied air raids. From new bases in Italy, Allied planes could strike these targets at only half the distance of raids staged from Benghazi and Alexandria. Airfields in southern Italy likewise increased the vulnerability of production centers in northern Italy, southern France, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria to the wide-ranging Allied strategic bombers. Their new location meant that they could augment the bombing load carried to target. Fighters accompanying the vulnerable B-24 Liberators and B-17 Flying Fortresses from airfields in Italy also could dramatically extend their range. The decrease in warning time to Axis fighter units would further hinder German defenses against Allied air raids.⁴⁴

After the conquest of Sicily and southern Italy, Luftwaffe Field Marshal Erhard Milch lamented that the "south and south-east are now in the firing line as well . . . Our "safe" has been blasted open . . . the distance from Foggia to Vienna is shorter than from London to Berlin."⁴⁵

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GERMAN GOALS IN ITALY

The defeat of Rommel's forces at the battle of Alam Halfa in Egypt (August 30-September 7, 1942) ended German offensive operations aimed at driving British forces out of North Africa. Other than limited tactical offensives, such as that conducted against Allied forces at the Kasserine Pass in Tunisia (February 14-24, 1943), the Axis thereafter adopted a defensive operational posture in the Mediterranean theater.

What strategic goals remained paramount in Adolf Hitler's mind from the battle of Alam Halfa until the Allies invaded Sicily in July 1943? Although defeat loomed on the horizon for Axis forces in North Africa, defense of the northern Mediterranean rim did not assume the highest priority in German strategic planning. 46 Hitler's 'crusade' against Russia remained all-consuming, despite the


46 As evidence of this see: Aufzeichnung über die Unterredung zwischen Reichsmarschall Göring und dem Duce im Palazzo Venezia am 23. Oktober 1943. Göring notes Hitler's overriding concern with the battle for Stalingrad at that time. Germany. Auswärtiges Amt, Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945. Aus dem Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Serie E (1941-1945), vol. IV. 1. Oktober bis 31. Dezember 1942 (Göttingen: Vandenhoek und Ruprecht, 1975), 162-63. Matters had not changed as demonstrated by the Hitler-Jodl discussion concerning the need for more Italian troops in Russia and Tunisia, 12-15(? ) March 1943, and the Lagebesprechung bei C h e f S k l. for 1 May 1943. Admiral Dönitz, commander-in-chief of the German navy, days before the Axis surrender in North Africa, argued against Italian policy. He faulted the Italian plan that reserved naval forces to parry an
threat of an Allied landing on the Reich's southern flank during the spring of 1943. Polite refusals greeted Italian requests for German weapons in early March 1943. Tanks, heavy artillery, and antitank weapons went to rebuild German units decimated by the winter's fighting in Russia or to units deployed in the ever-shrinking Tunisian bridgehead. Only after the fall of Tunisia in May 1943 did Hitler finally offer Mussolini six first-line German divisions for Italy's defense, an offer which Mussolini initially resisted for a variety of domestic reasons.47

Hitler's view of the Mediterranean's secondary status emerges clearly from the Hitler-Mussolini talks of the period. Late in 1942, Mussolini had pressed Hitler to shift the Axis's center of gravity from Russia to the Mediterranean theater. Having accurately predicted the impending Allied invasion of French Northwest Africa, Mussolini implored Hitler through the German representative in Rome, Enno von Rintelen, either to break off fighting with the Russians to seek a negotiated peace or to withdraw to a shorter, well-fortified defensive line. Count Ciano's mission in December 1942 bore the same request. Unfortunately, Hitler's preoccupation with


47Siegfried Westphal and Baron von Humboldt-Dachroeden, "The Reinforcement of the German Army and the development of the ground situation in Italy up to the latter's defection," Kesselring 9/24/117 (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, London [Hereafter LHCMA], 1947), 3-4.
the struggle for Stalingrad handicapped operations in the Mediterranean. As will be seen, Hitler rejected this and other appeals to strengthen Mediterranean defenses.\footnote{Enno von Rintelen, \textit{Mussolini als Bundesgenosse: Erinnerungen des deutschen Militärattachés in Rom 1936-1943} (Tübingen und Stuttgart: Rainer Wunderlich Verlag Hermann Leins, 1951), 180, 186.}

Mussolini, ever the pragmatist, wanted a revision of German strategy based upon a realistic analysis of the forces confronting the Axis. At Schloß Klessheim in April 1943, Mussolini again beseeched Hitler to make peace with Russia and to employ the German forces released from that theater to defend the West. Mussolini did not mince words, arguing that he now believed it impossible to conquer Russia. If so, then a compromise peace in the East might guarantee the defense of the West.\footnote{Max Domarus, \textit{Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945} (Wiesbaden: R. Löwit, 1973), vol. 2, part 2, 2004; Melton S. Davis, \textit{Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 - September 8, 1943} (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), 28.}

Mussolini's entreaties fell on deaf ears, not surprising given the Nazi dictator's fundamental understanding of the war as a racial crusade against \textit{Untermenschen}. As Zeev Sternhell argues, Fascist and Nazi ideologies may have shared much in common, "but they differed on one fundamental point: the criterion of German national socialism was biological determinism. The basis of Nazism was racism in its most extreme sense, and the fight against the Jews, against 'inferior races,' played a more preponderant role in it than the struggle against communism."\footnote{Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, \textit{The Birth of Fascist Ideology}, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4-5.} Given Hitler's view of Russia as a Jewish-Slavic-Communist state,
he could not compromise. Peace with Russia meant the defeat of Nazism's bedrock belief in German racial superiority.

Mussolini's appeals for peace with Russia and a strengthened defense against the Western powers also represented ideological defeat of Hitler's ambitious design for gaining Lebensraum. Hitler's biological determinism excluded assimilating 'inferior races.' Preservation of pure Aryan bloodlines prevented the expansion of Germany by adding 'corrupt and inferior' Jews and Slavs to the Reich. Agreeing wholeheartedly with Bismarck, Hitler's nationalism cast about to solve the dilemma posed by the Nazi doctrine of 'grow or die.' Hitler found his solution in a grandiose plan to seize new territories. Expansion alone would permit the German people to grow and ultimately ensure their survival. Not by accident did the German conquest of Russia's vast hinterland result in genocidal behavior by German occupiers. Only a Social-Darwinist racial war employing extreme measures of 'enslavement and eventual annihilation' against Jews, Slavs, and Communists would gain the Lebensraum Hitler required.51

Hitler's twin goals of racial purity and fulfillment of the 'Drang nach Osten,' excluded compromise with Stalin. After the expenditure of so much German blood, Hitler could not call off his crusade. Moreover, he always viewed the Mediterranean as a sideshow that diverted precious resources from the Russian front. This view effectively crippled the German defense of Italy by ensuring that operations had to

be conducted with limited resources and often contradictory orders. Mussolini
plied in vain with Hitler to act upon strategic realities rather than racialist ideology.
The two dictators held diametrically opposed world views that could not be
reconciled.

Nonetheless, Hitler did not write off Italy or the Mediterranean basin during
the time period between the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942 and
the Sicilian landings in July 1943. Hitler still hoped to retain his Italian ally. He
understood Italy’s important role in successfully defending the theater and Italian
peninsula. Hitler contemplated surrendering most of the Italian mainland to the
Allies only after the July 1943 coup against Mussolini. This willingness to withdraw
stemmed from his belief that Italy could not be defended without a stalwart Italian
ally, not from a plan to wash his hands of the Mediterranean theater.

Other problematic policies complicated the strategic situation and made
retention of Italian loyalties a difficult proposition by late 1942. Germany had
established its position as leader of the Axis alliance. Losses incurred during the
defeats in Egypt and Russia left Mussolini unable to reconstitute his lost divisions.

His report to the Fascist Chamber’s Judiciary Committee in December 1942

52Shelford Bidwell, "Kesselring," in Hitler’s Generals, ed. Corelli Barnett (New
York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), 274.

53Blumenson, "Will 'Ultra' Rewrite History?", 45.

54Schreiber, Stegemann and Vogel, Germany and the Second World War, III:756.
highlighted the severity of Italian losses thus far in the conflict. He noted that 230,738 Italians had been captured, 40,219 killed in action, 85,968 wounded, and 37,713 reported missing in action. 55

Heavy losses of men and matériel had long since forced Mussolini to surrender his fantasy of conducting a ‘parallel war’ independent of German control. But German political and economic interference in the Balkans, an area that Italians had long considered their sphere of influence, increasingly turned Italian officials against maintaining the Axis alliance in its present form. Growing German influence in the Balkans indicated to Italians that living in a German-dominated Europe would at best be an unpleasant experience for their nation. 56

Fear of an Allied takeover of Italian naval and air facilities that could be used for operations against the German homeland heavily influenced Hitler’s decision to defend the Mediterranean rim. Field Marshal Keitel told interrogators after the war’s conclusion that the Germans conducted a forward defense in Italy because the “further you keep fighting away from the heart of the country the less danger to the heart.” He emphasized that the German High Command worried that Allied air forces would exploit Italian airfields and interdict German supply lines. Allied planes based in Italy could have wreaked havoc on the Wehrmacht’s already strained


56 Deakin, The Brutal Friendship, 7-8.
Field Marshal Kesselring, a highly competent commander of both air and land forces, echoed similar sentiments in comments that he later made to interrogators. He added that German strategy had to consider the pressure that an Allied push in the Mediterranean would exert on both Eastern and Western fronts. An Allied drive into Italy potentially opened the door to the Balkans, threatening the Reich's survival.

Having seen that the combined strength of German and Italian forces had proven inadequate for defending the North African bridgehead, the Axis leadership confronted the daunting task of preparing defenses for numerous potential landing sites. This list included southern France, Sardinia, Corsica, Sicily, the Italian mainland, Greece, Crete, and the Greek isles.

German efforts to prepare an effective defense became the unwitting target of clever and successful Allied deception plans. These plans ultimately caused the redeployment of Axis forces into areas not targeted for invasion. Hitler, distracted by preparations for the critical summer offensive in Russia, at first relied on the analysis of the Operations staff of the armed forces (Wehrmacht Führungsstab). General Walter Warlimont's officers correctly estimated that the Allies would move

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next against Sicily.\textsuperscript{59} Despite this warning, Allied deception plans led a bewildered Hitler to change defensive plans for the Mediterranean. Relying on Allied 'disinformation,' Hitler shifted German forces away from Sicilian beaches to Sardinia and the Balkans, his highest priority in southern Europe.\textsuperscript{60}

Field Marshal Kesselring arrived at a different conclusion. Unlike Hitler, he thought an Allied invasion of Greece and the Balkans less probable than a move against Sicily or Italy. The deployment of Allied forces at the end of fighting in Tunisia indicated greater danger to targets directly opposite Tunisia.\textsuperscript{61} Kesselring worried that an Allied move against Sardinia might lead to flanking operations against northern and central Italy as well as southern France, targets of great value to the Germans. Securing Sardinia would increase the safety of Allied convoys transiting the Mediterranean from German air attacks. \textit{Luftwaffe} units would have to conduct future raids from northern Italy or southern France. The installation of


\textsuperscript{60}Allied deception efforts included the infamous 'Operation Mincemeat' in which British intelligence duped Hitler by releasing a corpse of an apparent Royal Marine officer into the Mediterranean Sea off Spain bearing a copy of the plans for an invasion of Greece. Debate raged over the veracity of the plans recovered by the Spanish and passed on to the Germans but Hitler grudgingly accepted the documents as authentic and shifted his defensive plans accordingly. The classic account of "Operation Mincemeat" remains: Ewen Montagu, \textit{The Man Who Never Was} (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1954).

\textsuperscript{61}Westphal and Humboldt-Dachroeden, "The Reinforcement of the German Army and the development of the ground situation in Italy up to the latter's defection," 1-2.
Allied air forces on Sardinia also represented a serious threat to German and Italian lines of communication throughout the theater. Kesselring excluded an aggressive Allied move against northern Italian ports (Livorno, Genoa, or Venice), concluding that they were situated too far from Allied land-based air cover.62

Since Hitler possessed at best a murky overall strategic conception to guide future operations, he kept his options open. One plan contemplated answering an Allied invasion of Italy with a rapid withdrawal to the Alps. This alternative abandoned Mussolini and his Fascists to the mercies of the advancing Anglo-American armies. A variant of this plan foresaw fighting a delaying action while retreating up the peninsula, thereby buying time to shore up southern Germany's defenses. German forces could defend the peninsula as they were defending Russia. German divisions could establish linear defenses across the peninsula, surrendering ground only when necessary to preserve the irreplaceable fighting forces in Italy. But defending southern Italy left both Axis flanks hanging in the air. Allied air forces dominated the skies of southern Italy and provided cover for Allied ground forces. Allied leaders could be expected to exploit their domination of the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas by transporting troops around German flanks, thereby isolating and destroying Hitler's armies.

Although confusion reigned in the highest German quarters about strategic goals and anticipated responses to Allied moves, painting a bleak picture of the

62Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 3.
German strategic position during the first half of 1943 inaccurately represents the Reich's capability to prosecute the war. Despite crippling German losses in Russia and North Africa, the overall situation had improved. The maximum number of German men had been mobilized for service in the armed forces. They came from fine-tuned factories producing increasing numbers of weapons with fewer personnel. The mobilization of an army of prisoners-of-war and slave laborers released additional German manpower for military service during 1943.\textsuperscript{63}

The \textit{Wehrmacht} immediately benefitted from this effort. 1943 proved to be the peak year of German numerical strength during the Second World War. Army strength rose to 6.55 millions from the 1942 level of 5.75 millions. The \textit{Wehrmacht}'s total manpower increased from 8.41 millions to 9.48 millions during 1943.\textsuperscript{64} As dire as the German position was at the beginning of 1943, the disintegration and rot in combat units that took place during 1944 and 1945 had not yet taken its toll. Well-trained, veteran officers and noncommissioned officers led the now battle-hardened German \textit{Landser}. Many new recruits had more than a decade of Nationalist Socialist military training that had prepared them for the call to colors. The Allied forces ranged against them, especially the hastily-formed American divisions, required a heavy expenditure of blood and trial by combat to compensate for the German lead

\textsuperscript{63}Weinberg, \textit{A World at Arms}, 587.

in combat experience and unit cohesion.

1943 also provided a staggering reminder of the untapped potential of the German war economy when mobilized for total war. A stream of weapons and supplies flowed from the Reich's factories to German combat units. As Chart I-1 demonstrates, Speer's version of a German 'economic miracle' occurred as factories drove production of tanks, aircraft, small arms, and munitions to unimagined levels.65

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total prodn.</th>
<th>Weapons</th>
<th>Tanks</th>
<th>Aircraft</th>
<th>Munitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>97</td>
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<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>137</td>
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<td>166</td>
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<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>216</td>
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<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>306</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan '45</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Not only more weapons, but better weapons poured from German factories.

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New tanks with improved combat capabilities had been developed, replacing older models on which German Panzer units had relied since 1939. The Panther tank, sporting sloping armor plate and equipped with a high velocity 75mm cannon, proved capable of defeating all but the heaviest Allied armor. Tiger tanks with 88mm guns struck fear into opponents wherever the lumbering vehicles appeared. As they materialized in combat units in 1943, the fighting power of German formations rose significantly. American commanders accepted the loss of five M-4 Shermans, the workhorse of Allied armored formations, for every Panther destroyed. Although serious ‘teething’ problems with the new Pansers lay ahead, the combat power of German Panzer and Panzergrenadier divisions increased dramatically as the new weapons replaced ancient Pzkw IIIIs and IVs on the battlefield.

CONCLUSION

Despite German strategic confusion, Anglo-American forces in the Mediterranean confronted a potent German army throughout 1943. Allied planners could not take lightly the riposte that German divisions would make against the

66John Ellis, World War II: A Statistical Survey: The Essential Facts and Figures for all Combatants (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 277. As Ellis's Table 87 shows, German production of tanks and self-propelled guns rose from 6,180 in 1942 to 12,063 in 1943. What may have proved more important for Allied forces was the even more dramatic increase in the numbers of German armored fighting vehicles now wielding a gun with a bore of 75mm or larger. Production of such German vehicles rose from 2,841 in 1942 to 11,349 in 1943. See also Max Hastings, Overlord: D-Day & the Battle for Normandy (New York: Touchstone, 1984), 193-94.
invading battle-weary British and inexperienced American divisions. They could do nothing about that contest.

Allied leaders could have grasped the magnitude of the opportunity they faced. Italy, whole and aligned with the United Nations, would have provided an excellent base for prosecuting an air war against Germany. Its men could have eased demands on a shrinking pool of Allied personnel. Italian factories and farms could have produced supplies that filled shipping needed to wage global war. No such vision filled the minds of Allied leaders and, because they saw no further than OVERLORD, Italy and its war potential fell firmly into the grasp of the German Reich.
CHAPTER 2

GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG IN THE DESERT

INTRODUCTION

On May 11, 1943, Allied forces completed their reduction of the Axis North African bridgehead. The Italian San Marco marine regiment served as the rearguard for the remaining Axis forces. The marines provided time for Axis engineers to demolish port facilities and sink the shipping that choked the harbor of Tunis upon the Allied arrival.67 The withdrawal of the San Marco regiment, a unit destined to meet the Allies again at Anzio, heralded final victory for the Western Allies. Italian Field Marshal Rodolfo Graziani’s inept and ill-fated invasion of Egypt in September 1940 had marked the beginning of the North African campaign. That campaign ended thirty-three months later with the unconditional surrender of Italian and German troops, stranded on the North African shore by Adolf Hitler’s equally maladroit leadership.

A correct understanding of the Italian campaign requires an examination of the months immediately preceding the Axis surrender in Tunisia. Events during that period shaped the ensuing campaign in Italy. The British victory over Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Afrika-Korps at El Alamein unhinged the Axis North African front. Anglo-American landings in Morocco and Algeria threatened the Axis with catastrophe, creating a two-front war in North Africa.

THE AXIS RESPONSE TO OPERATION TORCH

Strategic miscalculation by Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini precipitated a large-scale troop commitment to Tunisia's defense in late 1942. The Axis dictators mistakenly believed that they could match Allied strength in Tunisia with like force. It proved ironic that only as defeat loomed in North Africa did Hitler finally commit massive, if still inadequate, forces to the Mediterranean. Too late did Hitler send German divisions to North Africa that might have swayed the course of battle just months earlier. Their commitment at this late date proved a colossal mistake.

The battle for Tunisia became a quagmire, sucking German and Italian troops into a virtual prison camp. Hitler decided to commit German troops and prestige to a battle of attrition in Tunisia when he could least afford it. Hard-pressed by the Red Army at Stalingrad, the Wehrmacht found its military resources falling to dangerously low levels as the North African fighting rose to a fevered pitch.68

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Hitler now suffered the consequences of his most important strategic choice of the war: the decision to invade Russia in June 1941. Requirements for the imminent invasion of Russia had overridden all others in February 1941. The priority given Russian operations severely limited German assistance to Mussolini’s routed forces in North Africa. Erwin Rommel’s Afrika-Korps, ostensibly operating under Italian command, lacked the strength to drive British and Commonwealth troops out of Libya and Egypt. Operations against Russia hamstrung Rommel’s efforts to strike a decisive blow against the British 8th Army throughout the campaign. This strategic limitation effectively strangled efforts to seize Britain’s vulnerable choke point at Suez. Rommel’s attempts to convince the German dictator that North African operations should be accorded a higher priority in the division of men and matériel failed. Hitler rejected every entreaty. Throughout 1941 and 1942, the German commitment of forces and logistics to North Africa remained static in numbers and insufficient for the conquest of Egypt.  

The priority of the Russian front over Rommel’s operations continued throughout 1941 and 1942 despite the serious threat that loss of control in the Mediterranean represented to German security. Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, commander-in-chief of the German navy, had long sought priority for operations in the Mediterranean theater. Like Rommel, Raeder failed to gain Hitler’s agreement

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in February 1942 to enlarge the *Afrika-Korps* and despatch it to conquer Egypt. Raeder believed that conditions in Egypt were ripe for the overthrow of British rule. He bolstered his case by claiming that the Axis conquest of Egypt would result in 40,000 Egyptian troops joining the Axis cause. Hitler rejected the plan as too fantastic even for him.70

Raeder appealed to Hitler anew in August 1942. The admiral warned that the weakness of German forces in the theater endangered Germany’s entire strategic stance. He argued that Allied moves against North Africa threatened to completely unhinge the German position in the region. Unless Germany took immediate measures to strengthen defenses, disaster lay ahead. Raeder believed that Germany must either make this effort now or risk future Allied moves against Italy or Greece from a secure North African base.71

Hitler’s focus remained fixed on Russia throughout the first two critical years of the North African campaign. The war in the desert seemed distant and disconnected from events in Europe. Did he not understand the changing balance of power in the region, which in late 1942 tilted in favor of the Allies? Field Marshal Kesselring stated in his memoirs that Hitler paid scant attention to this theater's requirements. The *Führer* never grasped its importance nor the effect that a collapse

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would have on the general Axis position.\textsuperscript{72}

Ironically, while insisting on miracles from his meager forces in the region, Hitler halted the deployment of forces that might have tipped the balance in their favor. Why did Hitler hold this theater in such low regard? He mistrusted the Italian armed services. Hitler believed that Italy had sufficient forces to capture North Africa. Only the muddle of Italian military administration and command, which resulted in passivity among Italian combat units, prevented victory.\textsuperscript{73}

Hitler's disdain for North Africa and distrust of his ally precluded the establishment of joint strategic planning by the Axis partners. Italian and German commanders failed to coordinate their war efforts between 1939 and 1941.\textsuperscript{74}

Mussolini initially welcomed this free hand in the Mediterranean. Italian prospects seemed bright after entering the Second World War in June 1940. Disasters in Greece and North Africa quickly eliminated Italy's ability to conduct a 'parallel war' independent of Germany. Italy's dependence upon its German ally finally became apparent even to Italians.

By 1942, Italian military weakness threatened the Fascist state with disaster.

\textsuperscript{72}Kesselring, \textit{A Soldier's Record}, 164, 177.


In October, Mussolini attempted to persuade Hitler of the grave situation developing in the Mediterranean theater. The Duce warned his partner that the Allies would soon move against French North Africa. Hitler mistakenly believed that the next Allied stroke would fall on Rommel's exposed rear areas at either Tripoli or Benghazi. By landing in Libya, Anglo-American forces would isolate and eliminate Axis forces bogged down at El Alamein. Mussolini disagreed with Hitler. He foresaw that the Allied conquest of French North Africa meant a future assault on the Italian peninsula. Events later proved Mussolini correct.\(^{75}\)

Three factors converted Mussolini from a true believer in final Axis victory into a defeatist. Britain's decisive victory at El Alamein in early November 1942 led to the near annihilation of Italy's North African army. The retreating German Afrika-Korps added to this blow by abandoning Italian foot soldiers. On November 12, 1942, Count Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law and Italian foreign minister, noted in his diary that:

Rommel continues to withdraw from Libya at breakneck speed. There is a great deal of friction between Italian and German troops. At Halfaia they even fired on one another, because the Germans took all our trucks in order to withdraw more rapidly, leaving our divisions in the middle of the desert, where masses of men are literally dying of hunger and thirst.\(^{76}\)

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\(^{76}\)The *Ciano Diaries 1939-1943*, ed. Hugh Gibson (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., 1947), 543.
German mistreatment of Italian soldiers worsened relations between the two allies, already strained by Italian doubts concerning Hitler's 'strategic genius.'

In November 1942, Allied air forces initiated a bombing campaign against Italy. Combined with Britain's victory at El Alamein, this aerial assault shattered Mussolini's belief that the Axis would win the war. His support for the war wavered just as a serious physical illness weakened the dictator's control of the Italian government. Fearing the next Allied blow, Mussolini formulated a set of strategic priorities separate from those voiced by Hitler.

Italian commitments abroad had denuded Italy of defenders. As 1942 ended, troop deployments to Russia, North Africa, the Balkans, and southern France tied down most Italian divisions. The few soldiers left to man Italy's defenses clearly could not repel an Allied invasion. Italian weakness led the normally reticent King Victor Emmanuel to express concern to Count Ciano. He begged that troops be returned to defend Italy. The king noted that even the Grenadiers of the royal guard had been pressed into duty elsewhere. Mussolini and other members of the Fascist government saw that only a compromise peace with the Soviet Union offered the


79 Deakin, *Brutal Friendship*, 42.

80 *Ciano Diaries*, 545-46.
hope of returning Italian forces back to defend Italy.

The rapidly changing balance of power altered Italian attitudes toward the Axis alliance. Many Italians worried that a victorious Germany dominant on the European landmass might prove as grave a threat to Italian security as an Allied invasion. Hostility toward Italy's alliance with the Third Reich mounted as Germany coopted the Balkans into its sphere of influence. Italians had retained their traditional view of the Balkans as a region reserved for Italian aggrandizement. As Germany's raw-material requirements swelled, its war economy drew heavily upon the region's resources to feed the German populace and sustain production in its factories. The simultaneous German failure to deliver promised raw materials to Italy and the harsh conduct of German officials toward Italian guest workers lengthened the list of problems developing between the two nations.

Relations sank further as the year wore on to an exhausting end. An exchange of representatives between the two powers failed to bridge the rift growing between them. Aldo Vidussoni, Secretary of the Fascist Party, visited Hitler and Göring on October 7, 1942. He found the duo focused on Russia even as the situation worsened in North Africa. Vidussoni, recently returned from visiting Italian troops on the

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81 James J. Sadkovich, "German Military Incompetence Through Italian Eyes," *War in History* 1, no. 1 (March 1994):60-61. Mussolini and Ciano "sought to secure as much for Italy as possible so that in a postwar Europe dominated by Germany they would not become their ally's 'servants.'"

Russian front, warned Hitler that all was not well in Italy. The harsh conditions of the last winter portended a disastrous Italian harvest in the new year. Hitler commiserated with Vidussoni and expressed the hope that after three difficult winters the coming season would prove milder. Later at tea, Hitler told Vidussoni to report to Mussolini that as Germany's leader he remained absolutely optimistic about the war's favorable outcome for the Axis powers. 83

Both Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler and Göring visited Rome later that month. They offered further platitudes about eventual German victory in Russia that failed to quiet Italian concerns. 84 Fürst Otto von Bismarck, Minister of the German Embassy in Rome, reported that October 23 to the German Foreign Ministry that Italian fears concerning Allied moves against North Africa were on the rise. Bismarck noted that the Allies obviously intended to conquer North Africa. The next logical step would be the defeat of Italy, the weaker of the two Axis partners. 85

Operation Torch, the Allied landing in North Africa, further exacerbated Italo-German relations. On November 28, Rommel flew unannounced to Hitler's headquarters at Rastenburg, East Prussia. Rommel requested the immediate


85Klinkhammer, Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung, 28.
evacuation of Germany's North African forces to Italy. Given that Axis shipping could not supply forces already there, withdrawal from North Africa was urgent. Supported by Göring, Hitler sharply rebuked the exhausted Field Marshal. Blind to conditions in North Africa, Hitler upbraided Rommel as a defeatist. "I no longer want to hear such rubbish from your lips," he declared. "North Africa will be defended as Stalingrad will. Eisenhower's invading army must be defeated at the Italian front door and not in the Sicilian parlour."86

Göring blithely promised that his air forces, already stretched to the limit airlifting supplies into besieged Stalingrad, would also supply Tunis. Hitler indulged Göring's fantasy that North Africa could be supplied by air. Hitler proclaimed that the Reichsmarshals had assured him the air trip to Tunis was merely 'a short hop' for his flyers. The Führer rejected outright Rommel's entreaties to withdraw German forces.87

Hitler ordered the departing Rommel to accompany Göring to Rome. The


87Fraser, Knight's Cross, 392-94; Walter Warlimont, Inside Hitler's Headquarters 1939-45 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 307-08. Field Marshal Kesselring claimed to support Rommel's analysis of the situation and his plan to withdraw from El Alamein. Although delayed by a balky engine at Crete, he sent a telegram to Hitler backing Rommel. "Smiling Albert" Kesselring, as always, maintained an overly optimistic view of the situation in North Africa throughout this period. He opposed Rommel's plan to pull his forces back from El Agheila to Gabes in Tunisia. It would take further experience with the Allies growing might to temper and improve Kesselring's judgment of the capabilities of Axis forces. Kesselring, A Soldier's Record, 177.
duo was to reassure Mussolini's worried government of German support. Rommel, however, left Hitler's headquarters a changed man. The Desert Fox departed Rastenburg enraged at his leader's incompetence and unwilling ever again to trust Hitler's 'strategic genius.' The ensuing visit to Rome only further unsettled Italian officials. Göring blamed the 'inadequate Italian organization' for the defeats in North Africa, which did little to reassure Italian leaders. As the Italians feared, promises of air support for Mediterranean operations proved illusory. The looming catastrophe at Stalingrad again deprived the Mediterranean theater of forces critical to its support.

A decisive moment had thus passed in the drama of the battle for the Mediterranean. Hitler's irrational strategic decision to mount a defense of North Africa with inadequate force weakened the Axis hold on the Mediterranean. His hastily-made decision ensured that the Axis forces necessary to repel a future Allied landing in Europe would instead suffer ignominious defeat and captivity.

THE SLIDE TO SURRENDER: ITALIAN STRATEGIC WEAKNESS

Italy's position throughout this period justified Mussolini's increasing concern for his nation's declining war potential. Threats to the survival of his

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regime loomed ever larger as the specter of defeat jeopardized what little support remained for Fascist rule in Italy. The royal family's December 1942 bid to negotiate peace with Britain demonstrated the decline in support for Mussolini. British officials rejected the private offer. They stated that negotiations were impossible until Italians first removed Mussolini as head of the Italian government.\footnote{Weinberg, \textit{A World at Arms}, 588.}

Mussolini sought by all means possible to prevent this situation from ever arising. He communicated to Hitler a second time that Italy desired a separate peace with Russia. This message, conveyed to Hitler through Göring in early December, did not move the Führer to alter his Russian policy.\footnote{Irving, \textit{Göring}, 373.} Mussolini also dispatched Count Ciano to exchange views with Hitler later that month. Mussolini instructed Ciano to press Hitler to make peace with Russia. Failing this, Ciano should seek the Axis forces' withdrawal to a strong defensive line. Moreover, Mussolini wanted the Führer to know that Italy lacked the forces necessary to repel an Allied invasion. Ciano's goal, Mussolini demanded, must be the immediate transfer of Axis divisions from Russia to Africa, the Balkans, and the western theater.\footnote{Ciano Diaries, 555-56.}

Ciano and Marshal Ugo Cavallero, head of the Italian Supreme Command, attended the resultant conference at Hitler's headquarters in Germany. Hitler opened the December 18 meeting with a lengthy statement. He laid out his views
concerning the development of Axis operations in 1943. Hitler's remarks showed that he remained focused upon operations in Russia and the Near East. Only near the end of his monologue, did Hitler finally address Tunisia's defense. He viewed the occupation of Tunis as a great advantage to the Axis cause. Possession of the French ports of Tunis and Bizerta permitted the movement of supplies between Italy and Tunisia. Hitler later qualified his remarks by stating that this advantage could be lost unless the Axis grasped the key to the entire campaign. They must work to establish secure lines of communications between Europe and Tunisia.

Ciano responded with a direct and succinct reiteration of Mussolini's instructions to him. Mussolini foresaw Anglo-American forces conducting operations dangerous to Italy during 1943. Given this threat, a compromise peace with Russia should be explored. Peace with Russia, even a harsh one along the model of the 1918 Brest-Litovsk treaty, would end the two-front war that threatened eventual Axis defeat. If a separate peace with Russia proved impossible to conclude, Mussolini suggested the occupation of a strong defensive line on the Eastern front. The Duce offered this proposal to permit the rapid transfer westward of Italian and German forces. Only in this way would the Axis possess strength sufficient to defend North Africa and Italy in 1943. Ciano concluded with Mussolini's recommendation that Japan be used as intermediary in the peace talks. The Duce counseled buying Russian acquiescence to his proposal by offering them a free hand in Central Asia.

That Mussolini's appeal had only the slightest chance of German approval can
be seen from Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels's diary entry of December 20, 1942. Goebbels reported Hitler's willing acquiescence to Italian demands for concessions in France. However, Goebbels emphasized Hitler's firm demand that the Italian fleet secure the sea lanes between Italy and North Africa. Italian hopes for peace with Russia received scant notice. The Nazi Propaganda Minister correctly reported the conference's outcome as Hitler rejected Mussolini's diplomatic initiative.\(^{94}\)

THE ITALIAN DILEMMA

Why had Mussolini proposed this dramatic break with Hitler's stated aim of defeating Bolshevik Russia? The steadily deteriorating situation in Italy forced Mussolini to grasp for alternatives short of outright defeat. He ventured a diplomatic solution to the Russian war because Italian forces were unable to defend their homeland. The campaigns in Russia and North Africa had decimated the Italian military. Allied bombing raids that autumn produced a steady stream of casualties in Italian cities. On October 24, a daylight raid on Turin by eighty-eight

Royal Air Force Lancaster bombers killed 171 civilians. Fires burned throughout the city for days after the raid's end. Allied warplanes again struck hard at Turin and Naples as the year ended. The situation worsened in early 1943 as raids launched from England killed thousands in the period preceding the Allied invasion of Sicily. Although Rome remained untouched until July 19, the Allied air forces' destructive power brought the war home to Italians. The raids made the populace restive and less supportive of the Fascist regime's stated policy of continuing the war.95

More than just Allied bombers cast a dark shadow over the Italian landscape. Looming famine darkened Italy's future. Instead of the glory and conquest promised by Mussolini, Italian citizens found themselves near starvation. Food rationing did not alleviate shortages. High prices and diminished harvests sharply reduced Italian fare in comparison to its German counterpart. (See Chart II-1) Unless relief came quickly, many Italians faced starvation during 1943.96

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHART II-1</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weekly German Adult Ration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat</td>
</tr>
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</table>

95Stephen Harvey, "The Italian War Effort and the Strategic Bombing of Italy," *History*, no. 70 (February 1985): 40.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fats</th>
<th>215 grams</th>
<th>94 grams</th>
<th>94 grams</th>
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</thead>
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Figures are for German adults for May 1943, Italian statistics are for April 1943. Records show that meat ration not issued in June and had not been restored thereafter.


Italy's faltering economy pressured Mussolini to end the war before both Italy and his regime collapsed. If Italy were to defend itself in 1943, it had to reconstitute the forces lost along the Don River and at El Alamein. But Italy had not yet mobilized its economy for total war. It could not replace losses of matériel as quickly as Germany could in the coming year. The destruction of ten additional Italian divisions in early 1943 merely escalated the deficit in combat-ready divisions that Italy had to make good. 97

Italian dependence on German weapons to replace lost equipment that the Italian economy could not produce intensified after November 1942. Hitler authorized the shipment to North Africa of 560 88-mm anti-aircraft guns crewed by German soldiers. The guns strengthened the defense of Tunis and Bizerta but hurt Italian pride. This deployment represented a stark admission that Italy could no longer provide rear-area defenses capable of coping with the Allied air forces. German anti-aircraft guns later defended Italian cities until Italian crews had hastily

trained in German schools. German officials promised additional support for the rebuilding of Italian divisions from French military stockpiles. They stipulated, however, that the Italians must find and collect the weapons from France, adding to Italy’s burden in reconstituting its divisions.

Mussolini’s lack of control over Italy’s war industries lay at the root of this crisis. One scholar describes the Italian effort at mobilizing national resources during the Second World War as ‘trifling’ when compared with that of the First World War. An examination of economic figures bears out this assertion. Moreover, as recent research affirms, no shortage of raw materials precipitated Italy’s poor production record and eventual defeat. What explains Fascist Italy’s poor performance? Mussolini’s government failed to impose a strict regime demanding

98 Ciano Diaries, 546; Georg Thomas, Geschichte der deutschen Wehr- und Rüstungswirtschaft (1918-1943/45) (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1966), 377-78.


100 Harvey, "Italian War Effort," 34-35. Harvey notes that "certain non-strategic industries were virtually unaffected by the war: private expenditure on furniture for example was 5,837,000,000 lire (1939 values) in 1939 and had dropped only slightly to 5,282,000,000 lire in 1942. It is illuminating to compare national economic investment in the First World War with that in the Second World War. Statistics for the ratio between consumption and investment show that mobilization of national resources 1939-45 was trifling compared to 1915-18:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>-7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>-21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>-30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>-30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>+2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
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</table>
maximum production. This failure, not a dire shortage of raw materials, constitutes the primary economic factor contributing to Italian defeat in the Second World War.101

Italian Armed Forces Chief of Staff Marshal Ugo Cavallero proved one of the few Italian leaders to take the ‘war of production’ seriously. In 1942, he authorized the German Waffenamt’s use of idle Italian factories for military production. Cavallero also wanted German arms produced in Italian factories. German armor had established a clear superiority over its Italian counterparts. Cavallero advocated using Italy’s industrial base to manufacture German weapons. This approach offered the best route for rapidly increasing the fighting power of Italy’s remaining forces. Cavallero later discovered that his cooperative ventures with the Germans had undermined his position within the Italian hierarchy.102

Cavallero and German officers coordinating attempts to increase Italian war production found themselves quietly thwarted by the resistance growing within the Italian government. General Ernst Ritter von Horstig, the German officer assigned to coordinate production with Italy, reported on conditions there to his superior,103


102 Rintelen, Mussolini als Bundesgenosse, 190-91. The Germans often prevented the coordination of production with the Italians by obstinately demanding a large portion of weapons produced under German license in Italian factories. For an example of the German attitude, see the inability of Italy to obtain production rights to German PzKw III and IV tanks from 1941 until 1942 as recounted in: Sadkovich, "German Military Incompetence," 61.
General Georg Thomas, in early 1943. He accused the Italian armed forces' leadership and civilian officials of actively sabotaging attempts at economic cooperation.\textsuperscript{103}

Italian actions had already caused Thomas to hesitate before providing German assistance in augmenting Italian war production. The notion that Italy might be hoarding large quantities of German-supplied war materials for peacetime production had worried Thomas at the end of 1942. His November meeting in Rome with Cavallero simply gave the Italians an opportunity to complain that Germany had failed to ship finished goods and raw materials in promised quantities and on schedule.

Shipments to Italy of steel and raw materials for making steel were the most critical items on the agenda. Germany produced 28.7 million metric tons of steel in 1942. Italian industry managed an anemic figure of only 1.7 million tons.\textsuperscript{104} Cavallero sought a significant increase in German shipments. Thomas urged him to achieve greater efficiency in Italy's steel usage. Cavallero argued that Italy could not maintain current production levels, much less rebuild Italy's decimated tank force, given current allotments of German coal and steel. The Germans continued to ship low-quality steel to Italy. Coal deliveries had dropped to critical levels, and Italian steel production had fallen sharply. Under these conditions, rearmament to replace

\textsuperscript{103}Thomas, Geschichte der deutschen Wehr- und Rüstungswirtschaft, 377-78.

\textsuperscript{104}Ellis, World War II: A Statistical Survey, 276.
Italian losses exceeded the capacity of Italian industry. Thomas refused the Italian request, suggesting that they ask again later for an increased allocation of German steel.\(^\text{105}\)

The assay of Italian raw material stocks made after the German occupation of Italy confirmed Thomas's suspicions. At the very time when Cavallero pressed Thomas for a larger allotment of German steel, Italian steel producers possessed large quantities of raw materials and finished steel in their warehouses. After \textit{OPERATION ACHSE} in September 1943, German officers discovered stores of steel equivalent to three times Italy's entire supply in 1940.\(^\text{106}\)

Despite this hidden wealth of materials, Italian officials requested increased raw-material shipments up to the Italian surrender in September 1943. Given this situation, it can be argued that the Italian collapse rendered a significant service to the German war effort. Germany gained control over Italian production and raw material caches after the Italian surrender. German control of Italian production facilities permitted the determination of the Italian war industry's true raw material requirements and led to the transfer of raw materials back to Germany.\(^\text{107}\)

\(^{105}\)Raspin, \textit{Italian War Economy}, 359-61.

\(^{106}\)Ceva and Rochat, "Italy," 585, 586.

\(^{107}\)For an example of continuing Italo-German negotiations concerning shipments of raw materials to Italy see: "Auszugsweise Abschrift der Abschrift von der \textit{Niederschrift} über die vom 18. bis 21. 5. 1943 im Paris abgehalten deutsch-italienischen Besprechungen über der Aussatzung Südfrankreichs für die deutsche und italienische Kriegswirtschaft," Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Reichswirtschaftsministerium, R7/755, 133-134.
In late 1942, German military officers in Italy also made a concerted effort to determine the strength and disposition of Italy's army. The German High Command required this information to ascertain how far Germany should assist Italian rearmament efforts in 1943. A survey conducted in November 1942 revealed seven Italian army commands. They directed twenty-eight army corps disposing of ninety divisions. *Comando Supremo* had assigned twenty-three Italian divisions to coastal defense and occupation duties. Eight Italian divisions had been lost in the battle for North Africa. Another division in the theater had suffered significant losses. An amazing fifty-two of the fifty-eight remaining Italian divisions served outside of Italy, leaving only six combat-ready and mobile units for Italy's defense. This German observer warned that "[all] of these divisions -- even the best outfitted ones -- have only the combat strength of a brigade."

The report's author attributed the weakness of Italy's fighting forces to the inability to replace either personnel or matériel losses. Losses dating back to the 1941 Yugoslavian campaign still had not been made good for Italian occupation divisions in Slovenia and Dalmatia. Additional troop casualties in Africa and Russia made reinforcement of existing Italian units unlikely. Divisions serving in North Africa and Russia, virtually annihilated before the Sicilian invasion in July 1943, represented the most capable forces remaining to the Italian army in November 1942. The report concluded with an ominous warning that a "lack of reserves capable of counter-attacking on the Italian mainland is, given the present situation, a
considerable weak point."\textsuperscript{108}

The Italian navy appeared stronger than its brother service. The majority of its capital ships remained intact in late 1942. \textit{Supermarina} disposed of a variety of cruisers and destroyers representing a credible threat to the conduct of future Allied operations. Despite its apparent power, the Italian navy did not loom large in German calculations. Surface warships consumed vast quantities of fuel when conducting operations. Hitler's obsession with capturing the Russian Caucasus during 1942 arose from Germany's deteriorating fuel situation. The demands of operations in Russia and the need to reserve fuel for German warships held at the ready to defend Norway against an Allied invasion remained the top German priorities. Little fuel could be spared for Italian naval operations.

Discussions of the fuel situation had hindered planning for the Mediterranean as far back as January 1942, when the Axis powers' naval staffs had gathered for discussions at Garmisch, Germany. With German reserves nearly

\textsuperscript{108\textsuperscript{a}Bericht über Zustand des ital. Heeres. Stand 20.11.1942," Anlage zu der Deutsche General beim Hauptquartier der Ital. Wehrmacht. Ib Nr. 5239/42 gKdos.Chefs., RH2 Oberkommando des Heeres/Generalstab der Heeres, Band 470 Verschiedenes v. 9.11.40- 2.7.44 - Chefs (BAMA: Microfiche), 62-64. Sadkovich estimates Italian battle losses at "over 80,000 dead and missing in Russia; 75,000 in Italy; 49,900 in the Balkans; and 22,000 in Africa. Sadkovich, "Understanding Defeat," 35. This estimate of 227,000+ dead and missing from a pre-war population of 43,800,000 (1 in every 192 Italians) far exceeds American dead of 405,000 from a population of 129,200,000 (1 in 319 Americans). German losses were 3,250,000 combat deaths from a population of 78,000,000 in 1938 (1 in 24 Germans). Ellis, \textit{World War II: A Statistical Survey}, 253-54. Although Italian losses did not exceed German, they exhibit a ratio that refutes the prevailing view of Italian units breaking and running in combat. Sadkovich in particular has shown the value of Italian armored units, which saved Rommel's vaunted \textit{Afrika-Korps} on several occasions.
exhausted, the Italian fleet's immobilization would soon follow. Remaining fuel reserves could be expended only for the most important operations.\textsuperscript{109}

The Italian navy used its mighty battleships after June 1942 as little more than fuel barges for merchant shipping and escorts. This employment richly illustrates the paralysis that gripped the Italian fleet during the second half of 1942.\textsuperscript{110} The situation improved somewhat after the surrender of Tunisia in May 1943. German supplies of fuel to the Italian navy increased as the fear of invasion rose.\textsuperscript{111} The dearth of fuel for Italian naval operations must be weighed against Hitler's complaints of its inactivity. Immobilized by empty fuel bunkers, the Italian navy remained a tethered guard dog during Allied naval operations in the Mediterranean throughout late 1942 and early 1943.

Additional weaknesses weighed heavily in German calculations of the Italian navy during late 1942 and early 1943. Naval operations supporting the Axis North African bridgehead claimed an alarming number of Italian escort vessels. Having lost thirty-six destroyers from all causes by June 1943, the Italian navy lacked escorts. The remaining destroyers were clearly insufficient to shield its capital ships against Allied submarines and destroyer flotillas during future operations. Of twenty destroyers still carried on the rolls, approximately half were laid up for

\textsuperscript{109}Salewski, \textit{Seekriegsleitung}, 57-58.

\textsuperscript{110}Sadkovich, “The Italian Navy in World War II: 1940-1943,” 147.

\textsuperscript{111}Marc'Antonio Bragadin, \textit{The Italian Navy in World War II} (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1957), 258-59.
repairs in Italian ports. Moreover, the cruiser force also had suffered serious losses. With thirteen cruisers sunk, just ten remained afloat. Of that pitiful number, four cruisers required repairs that immobilized them in Italian shipyards.

Of the five Italian battleships, only two would be fully capable of operations when the Allies moved against Sicily. *Littorio* and *Roma*, each armed with nine 15-inch guns, sat at the ready in La Spezia. A sister ship, the *Vittorio*, had yet to complete repairs to damage incurred during an Allied air raid in June 1943. The *Caio Duilio* and *Andrea Doria*, at 24,000 tons smaller sisters to their 35,000 ton counterparts at La Spezia and Genoa, faced two additional months of repairs before their 12.6-inch guns could be brought to bear against an Allied invasion fleet.\(^{112}\)

German worries about the strength and condition of the Italian navy are better appreciated when compared with the Allied armada arrayed against it. Allied naval forces in the Mediterranean, increasing steadily despite the demands of the naval war in the Pacific, consisted of six battleships, seven carriers, twenty cruisers, and one hundred destroyers. Nonetheless, knowledge of Allied worries concerning the Italian 'fleet-in-being' would have comforted the Germans.\(^{113}\) The presence of a fleet capable of making a one-way sortie against the new and unseasoned Anglo-American amphibious forces preparing for the invasion of Sicily weighed against a bold Allied invasion of Sardinia, Corsica, or northern Italy. By preventing such


moves, the Italian 'fleet-in-being' contributed significantly to defending the Mediterranean throughout this period.

The Italian air force chief related the *Regia Aeronautica*’s predicament to Count Ciano in December 1942. General Rino Corso Fougier described his service as unable to conduct "any kind of serious military operation." His squadrons were outfitted with obsolescent equipment in numbers insufficient to contest Allied air supremacy over either Tunisia or Italy.

The Italian air force no longer possessed either the will or means to turn the tide of battle to Italy's advantage. German complaints that Italian flyers remained inactive throughout February 1943 revealed the Italian air force's near-collapse. Italian fighters refused to escort German aircraft on mine detonation missions. Kesselring took this complaint and one concerning *Comando Supremo*’s failure to reinforce Italian units in Tunisia directly to its new commander, General Vittorio Ambrosio. Ambrosio's reply hinted of the Italian air forces's declining morale when he instructed it to make sure that all combat capable aircraft flew missions several times daily.\(^{115}\)

Consideration must be given to Italian aircraft losses before judging performance. Italian losses between November 2, 1942 and June 30, 1943 wrecked

\(^{114}\)Ciano Diaries, 559.

the *Regia Aeronautica*. 2,190 aircraft, including 1,600 bombers of all types, had been destroyed. Damage sent another 1,790 aircraft to repair shops. Few emerged for further service. Many of the aircraft carried as on active duty were likewise unready for combat.\(^{116}\)

Operational strength slowly increased until it totaled an estimated 1,695 aircraft one week prior to the invasion of Sicily. But a substantial portion of this meager force could not be counted as combat-ready for operations against the overwhelming array of Allied air power used against Sicily. The Italian air force carried 220 planes stationed in Italy as incapable of operations. Another 335 aircraft operated from airfields in Albania, Greece, Yugoslavia, Rhodes, and the Aegean islands. 1,140 Italian air force planes remained available to *Comando Supremo* in Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, and Italy when the blow fell at last in July 1943.\(^{117}\)

\(^{116}\)Karl Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe im Mittelmeer 1940-1945*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe III, Geschichte und ihre Hilfswissenschaften (Frankfurt am Main: Peter D. Lang, 1981), 599.

\(^{117}\)Sadkovich estimates *Regia Aeronautica* strength at 1,360 front-line aircraft in late 1942 and 620 planes as of July 1943. The contradictory estimate in this dissertation derives from a SUNSET or ULTRA summary dated 2 July 1943. Although the Italian air force did not use ULTRA, Allied intelligence apparently benefitted from German reports of Italian air force strength throughout the period covered in this chapter. Information accompanying the SUNSETS, a weekly summary of vital information gleaned from ULTRA, notes only that they passed across the desk of key figures at the highest levels. These summaries remain the only ULTRA items containing information pertaining to the war in the Mediterranean currently available to scholars in the United States. Unfortunately, large gaps in SUNSET coverage occur during the period of operations covered in this chapter. Still restricted British copies of ULTRA intercepts giving complete coverage of the ground war in Europe resist all attempts at opening them for scholars wishing to offer a view other than that of Hinsley or Bennett. "Sunset No. 72. 2nd
THE GERMAN SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Events on the Russian front again occupied Hitler's attention as 1942 concluded. Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist's Army Group A hastened its escape from an exposed position in the Caucasus, pursued by Soviet forces threatening to cutoff and annihilate it. Massive battles raged from November 1942 through March 1943 as Russian assaults drove German back. Soviet attacks regained Rostov and Kharkov. Field Marshal Erich von Manstein saved his forces on the southern wing of the Russian front only by defying a Führer directive. His jealously hoarded Panzer forces at last stabilized the front when they first cut off and then destroyed a Russian tank army between Izyum and Dnepropetrovsk. Manstein followed up this victory by retaking Kharkov on March 15, 1943.

Winter's end found the German front line reestablished not far from the positions used to launch the ill-fated assaults on Stalingrad and the Caucasus the preceding year. The enormous bulge in German lines at the important rail center of Kursk dominated the dormant front. Until late summer 1943, Hitler's desire to amputate this protrusion played an important role in reducing forces sent to defend the West.

The German situation in the Mediterranean steadily deteriorated during the early months of 1943 despite earlier Allied reverses. Eisenhower's forces bogged

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down as the Tunisian winter arrived. Icy rains, muddy conditions, and the lack of rail and road transport wreaked havoc on the poor overland lines of communication. 118 As winter weather caused a lull in North African operations, American and British leaders met at Casablanca (January 14–24, 1943). Churchill, Roosevelt, the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and their Mediterranean commanders, Alexander and Eisenhower, made important modifications to Allied grand strategy. They agreed to continue the American daylight strategic bombardment of occupied Europe in concert with Royal Air Force night attacks. Allied leaders also mediated a political reconciliation between Charles de Gaulle and Henri-Honoré Giraud, leaders of French factions competing for control of the French government in exile.

One particular decision produced a measurable effect on the course of the Italian campaign. The conferees agreed that the policy of ‘unconditional surrender’ would form the basis for terminating hostilities with the three Axis powers. An argument can be made that this policy hardened German attitudes, causing many to fight the war to its bitter end. 119 The Allied decision at Casablanca to continue Mediterranean operations after the Tunisian campaign ensured that the Allies would soon confront this sentiment among German forces in Sicily.

Substantial changes in Italian direction of the war also took place at this time.


Aware of his government's increasing unpopularity, Mussolini reorganized it. His critics particularly sought removal of the pro-German Marshal Cavallero. In January, Mussolini replaced the detested head of the Comando Supremo with General Vittorio Ambrosio. The Duce followed up the change in military leadership with a wholesale cabinet purge on February 9. Sacking nine cabinet ministers, Mussolini installed replacements he judged more loyal to his regime. His own son-in-law, Count Ciano, fell victim to the second purge. Mussolini correctly suspected the foreign ministry of disloyalty. But Mussolini's efforts at reform proved vain. The shuffling of cabinet chairs provided no substitute for the change most Italians wanted. Mussolini himself represented his regime's major problem. Only his removal would satisfy the majority of Italians.120

Hitler likewise reorganized the German command structure in January 1943. On January 30, raging against the poor performance of German surface units off Norway, he sacked Grand Admiral Raeder. Karl Dönitz added overall responsibility for the Marine, while continuing to direct the submarine war against Allied shipping.

A restructuring of the German command structure in the Mediterranean also occurred that month. Field Marshal Kesselring had long labored under a command arrangement subordinating him to Italian commanders. Initiated upon Kesselring's November 1941 arrival in Italy, it placed him under the direction of the Italian king

and Mussolini.\textsuperscript{121} Hitler broadened Kesselring's command responsibilities on January 5, 1943. He assigned Kesselring command of Luftflotte 2, German liaison officers to the Italian armed forces, all naval forces in Italy, the German forces in Tunisia, and miscellaneous forces throughout the Mediterranean. Given a \textit{Wehrmacht} staff to assist in his new responsibilities, Kesselring took command, assisted by a Chief of the General Staff and his Supreme Command South (Oberbefehlshaber Süd, hereafter OBS) staff for the three German armed services. OKW also assigned transport and quartermaster staff to Kesselring's headquarters.\textsuperscript{122} Although he still operated under Italian oversight, Hitler had erected the foundation for German continuation of the war after the Italian surrender.

Kesselring's expanded command responsibilities proved beneficial during the German campaign in Italy. When first implemented, his new role seriously hindered the Axis fight for North Africa. Kesselring's unbounded optimism caused him to mistakenly report the Tunisian situation to Hitler. Kesselring made a positive report on Tunisia to Hitler on January 12, 1943 and again in February. Kesselring's opinions overrode Rommel's more pessimistic estimates throughout this period. By the time that Rommel's forces fell back to Tunisia's borders, Hitler had filled his thoughts with fantastic schemes for resuming the offensive. General Walter

\textsuperscript{121}Kesselring, \textit{A Soldier's Record}, 116-17.

Warlimont's early February report on conditions, issued after an extensive journey throughout the region, failed to halt Hitler's offensive plans. Kesselring's unexpected appearance at the conference during which Warlimont, Deputy Chief of the OKW Operations Staff, was to report, prevented any assessment other than Kesselring's optimistic appraisal from being heard. 123

In late February, General Vittorio Ambrosio, the new head of Comando Supremo, sent the Italian estimate of equipment requirements to General Warlimont. He sought 750 tanks, 1,322 artillery pieces and antitank guns, 7,400 trucks, 500 fighter and bomber aircraft, and fuel for their operation. 124 This request from the new Italian military commander, who was sharply anti-German in his views, got a hostile reception.

That reception would have worsened considerably had the Germans seen Ambrosio's estimates of the war situation on 17 and 21 February 1943. Accurately appraising the likely course of operations for 1943, Ambrosio foresaw a complete loss of Axis initiative unless the Germans abandoned their dream of conquering Russia. Only a period of defensive inactivity in Russia, permitting increased Axis efforts in the Mediterranean, could redeem the situation. Ambrosio candidly warned Mussolini that "the Germans must change their operational objectives and must come to our aid, otherwise we shall not be obliged to follow them in their erroneous

123 Warlimont, Inside Hitler's Headquarters, 308-10.

124 Raspin, Italian War Economy, 369-70.
As Axis troops deployed to Tunisia, conditions worsened for Italy. In early March, workers of the Fiat Mirafiori plant at Turin went out on strike. Their example ignited a wave of strikes across the north Italian industrial belt. Industrial laborers, suffering from inflation and the unremitting pressures of wartime production demands, united around their calls for peace. In scenes reminiscent of the Fascist rise to power, squadrons of Blackshirt thugs attempted to beat workers back to work. Mussolini's regime learned that unwilling workers did not make the best industrial base for war production. Production levels in key war industries fell radically after the strikes ended. Italy's armed forces, rebuilding already depleted stocks of matériel, fell further behind in their defensive preparations for the impending Allied landing.\(^{126}\)

The strikes infuriated Hitler, who discussed them with his staff in mid-March. He bemoaned Mussolini's failure to use sufficient force in suppressing the strikes. Had not the Germans supplied Italian divisions with the weapons for this task, he wondered? The Italian failure to provide additional divisions for service on the Russian front also vexed the \textit{Führer}. Hitler left unmentioned the destruction of Italian divisions, poorly-equipped and unsupported by German mobile forces,

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\(^{125}\)Quoted in Deakin, \textit{Brutal Friendship}, 166.

during the preceding months. In a repetition of events in North Africa after the German defeat at El Alamein, German forces in Russia either abandoned their Italian counterparts or escaped in Italian vehicles seized at gunpoint. The German disdain for Italian forces assisted many Italian officers in making the psychological break necessary for their coming 'betrayal' of their German ally.\textsuperscript{127}

Mussolini continued to pepper Hitler with pleas that the \textit{Führer} make peace with Russia. Mussolini's letter of March 9 appealed for Hitler to limit the stakes being wagered in the bloody Russian campaign. Mussolini reminded Hitler of the growing strength of the Western allies. The \textit{Duce} asked for the construction of an ‘\textit{Ostwall}’ that would serve as a bulwark against the Red Army and buy time to negotiate with the Anglo-Saxons.\textsuperscript{128}

As the Allied offensive pushed deeply into Axis lines in Tunisia during late March, Mussolini made his plea once more. He warned Hitler that events in Russia had shown the difficulty of mastering Stalin’s empire with its limitless territory and inexhaustible manpower. Unleasing the full weight of argument, Mussolini boldly asserted that not even an attack on Russia's rear by the Japanese would turn the tide


in the favor of the Axis. The laborious summer advances and winter retreats could not be repeated endlessly. Some understanding with Russia had to be reached if the Axis were to amass forces sufficient to reclaim the initiative both on land and in the air. Mussolini appealed for a daring strategy designed to crush Allied forces in Tunisia before their victory there gave the Allied cause a tremendous psychological boost. He called for Italo-German resistance against the Allies in Tunisia while moving against them in Spain and Spanish Morocco. Such a stroke would reverse the Allied strategy of autumn 1942 by falling on the Allied rear. Cut off at Gibraltar, Allied forces would face annihilation by Axis forces transferred from the east. 129

Hitler paid scant attention to Mussolini's appeals. The Führer later justified the commitment of substantial, if still inadequate, forces for the defense of Tunisia. The Tunisian campaign, he argued, had served the strategic purpose of winning time to prepare the defenses of the Mediterranean's northern shore. The actual conduct of the campaign and the severe losses inflicted on Axis forces puts the lie to this grand delusion.

Axis land, air, and naval forces finished the Tunisian campaign in worse condition than they had begun it. Hitler substantially weakened German land strength by committing most of the Mediterranean theater's mobile forces to Tunisia. Rommel opposed the deployments even after his November 1942 confrontation with the Führer. Rommel knew that this commitment endangered

German prestige and weakened Italy's defense. He wrote on March 10, 1943 that he had emphasized as strongly as I could that the ‘African’ troops must be re-equipped in Italy to enable them to defend our southern European flank. I even went so far as to give him [Hitler] a guarantee - something which I am normally very reluctant to do - that with these troops, I would beat off any Allied invasion in southern Europe. But it was all hopeless.\(^{130}\)

The insane strategy of defending the Tunisian bridgehead continued to the end of the campaign. Instead of preparing a strong defense of Italy and the Balkans, Axis reinforcements practically deployed into captivity.

By March 1943, the hopelessness of the German position in North Africa had become clear to members of Hitler's entourage. Joseph Goebbels recorded the views of the formerly optimistic Reichsmarshall Göring on March 2.

Goering says we must either try to achieve a decisive success in Tunisia or else swallow the bitter pill of giving up North Africa. He believes we'll lose Africa to the Americans anyway. Should we succeed, however, in breaking through in the East, our loss of Africa would not be irreparable. Goering certainly thinks very highly of the military power and war potential of the Anglo-Saxons. He has no illusions about those.\(^{131}\)

Hitler, however, took little strategic advice, even from members of his inner circle.

\(^{130}\)Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War*, 419.

\(^{131}\)Goebbels Diaries, 263.
Africa. German Vice-Admiral Friedrich Ruge later estimated that between two and four divisions could have been saved from among those sent to Tunisia. Such troops would have made any future Allied invasion in the Mediterranean a risky proposition. The loss of both Afrika-Korps veterans and the best Italian troops remaining after the winter's debacle on the Don Front in Russia weakened the ability of the German and Italian high commands to defend anywhere in the Mediterranean. Hitler, by not reinforcing or withdrawing from North Africa at appropriate moments, had left Italy and the surrounding islands open to a swift Allied descent.  

German land forces in North Africa suffered losses rivaling Stalingrad when the Allies conquered Tunisia. 238,000 Axis troops surrendered to Allied forces in May 1943: 101,000 Germans, 90,000 Italians and 47,000 of indeterminate nationality. The German 10th, 15th, 21st, and Hermann Göring panzer divisions plus the 164th and 999th light divisions comprised the bulk of German losses. Hitler could not replace the armored and motorized formations before the Allied invaded Sicily. An inestimable measure of combat experience vanished from the Mediterranean  

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theater upon their surrender. The deficit of combat veterans and first-rate matériel proved costly. The inept counterattacks of ad-hoc German units against Allied landings on Sicilian beaches in July 1943 disclosed the price of Hitler's folly in Tunisia. Although bearing the proud designations of the 15th Panzergrenadier and Hermann Göring divisions, those units were but shadows of the veteran units lost in Tunisia.\textsuperscript{134}

Germany lost more divisions at Stalingrad than it did in Tunisia. But the losses in Tunisia can be said to have played a greater role in defeating Germany than those at Stalingrad. The losses in North Africa, especially of mobile forces, represented the forces that could have driven an Allied landing in Sicily back into the sea. The result would have been no second front of any kind until much later than 1944. Russia would have found itself threatened by an even greater deployment of German forces thereafter. Tunisia may not have been the absolute equal of Stalingrad, but the result stands as a true catastrophe for Germany's overall strategic position.

\textsuperscript{134}John Ellis, \textit{Brute Force: Allied Strategy and Tactics in the Second World War} (New York: Viking, 1990), 306. John Ellis notes that more Axis troops were captured in Tunisia than at Stalingrad. He adds that "[a] more meaningful comparison, however, is that between the numbers of German divisions destroyed in each battle. The records show that in North Africa the Germans lost 3\frac{1}{2} panzer divisions, 3 light divisions, 1 infantry division and some paratroopers. In the Stalingrad pocket were lost 3 panzer divisions, 3 motorised divisions, 1 jäger and thirteen infantry." Ellis's argument seems to contradict the main point of his book. If Germany's effort in Russia all but overwhelmed in scale efforts in the west, then would not significant losses in Tunisia play a much greater role in defeating Germany than like ones in Russia?
Luftwaffe losses in the Mediterranean between 1 November 1942 and 1 May 1943 included the 19th and 20th Flak divisions plus 2,421 aircraft, exclusive of air transport losses. The loss of aircraft equaled the authorized strength of twenty wings (Kampfgruppen).

Those losses represented a significant drain on German air resources. Between November 1942 and April 1943 the German aircraft industry produced 1,604 Ju-88 medium bombers. Approximately one of two aircraft constructed (723 or 45% of production), went to Luftflotte 2 in the Mediterranean. Of 3,194 Me-109s built, 1,226 (38%) served in the Mediterranean theater. Given the demands of the Russian front and the increasing intensity of the air war over Germany, it is hard not to agree with Karl Gundelach. He concludes that given the “complete picture of the strategic situation in the air, the defeat of the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean was of decisive significance - if not completely irreparable - for the further conduct of the air war.”

In response to the dire situation confronting them, Hitler and Mussolini acted before the final surrender in Tunisia and reorganized the Mediterranean command structure. Keitel's directive on 8 May 1943 instructed all three German services that Hitler and Mussolini had agreed to continue resistance in Tunisia for the maximum possible period, Mussolini's agreement coming despite his otherwise expressed wishes. Nonetheless, unmistakable Allied preparations for an invasion

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135Gundelach, Die deutsche Luftwaffe im Mittelmeer 1940-1945, 584. Also see Baum and Weichold, Krieg der "Achsenmächte," 332.
operation elsewhere in the Mediterranean compelled the strengthening of German units on the Italian islands and mainland. Keitel directed Kesselring to prepare the region’s defenses. Kesselring, facing catastrophe in North Africa, could do little more than withdraw staffs from Tunisia made superfluous by the contracting front without approval by the OKW’s Führungstab, a clear indication that difficulties lay ahead for him in preparing an effective defense of Italy.¹³⁶

Defenses in Italy were either in poor condition or did not exist. Sicily, slated for extensive fortification, remained naked of the pillboxes and strongpoints that later characterized Hitler’s vaunted Atlantic Wall. Despite the presence of a large Italian work force on the island, little had been done thus far to construct defensive works on Sicilian beaches.¹³⁷

CONCLUSION

Responsibility for the calamitous Axis defeat registered in Tunisia must be laid at Adolf Hitler’s doorstep. Hitler’s preoccupation with Russia and mistrust of his Italian ally prevented him from deploying forces sufficient to conquer Egypt before 1942. After Operation Torch, Hitler dispatched forces wholly inadequate for defending Tunisia against the growing might of Allied forces. He sacrificed the best German armored and mobile forces in a campaign doomed from its onset.

Hitler’s responsibility for this disaster grows when viewed in light of

¹³⁶Hubatsch, *Ktb OKW III(2)*, 1428.

Mussolini's and Rommel's separate appeals. They both sought measures appropriate to the strategic situation. Hitler recklessly rejected appeals to establish a defensible line or to negotiate a (temporary) peace with Russia. Rommel's March appeal to rescue battleworthy troops while still possible led to his dismissal as the Afrika-Korps's commander. Hitler also refused to undertake a large-scale reequipping of Italian forces after the debacles at El Alamein and the Russian Don. German parsimony and blame heaped upon Italian forces for these disasters combined with an inept execution of strategy at Stalingrad and Tunisia to poison Italo-German relations. The record demonstrates that the lion's share of responsibility for the debacle in North Africa lay squarely with Adolf Hitler. The Allies exacted payment for Hitler's irresponsibility when they stormed Sicily's beaches in July 1943.
CHAPTER 3

DEFEAT AND RETRENCHMENT: MEDITERRANEAN DEFENSES

INTRODUCTION

A series of crises struck the Axis between March and July 1943. Hitler could not ignore the fighting on the Mediterranean front. Despite his attempts to defer action in the region, strategic considerations could not be swept aside. March saw a ‘mini-crisis’ develop as security for railways linking Germany and Italy became a bone of contention between the Reich and Switzerland. Relations with Italy deteriorated, although Hitler held off a break with his ally by haranguing Mussolini and convincing the Duce to hold fast to policies that ultimately proved fatal to his regime.

When the Axis North African armies capitulated in May, Hitler could no longer postpone deliberation of the region’s strategic requirements. Deficits in men, material, fortifications, and plans could not be corrected without a substantial commitment of German men and resources. A lengthy and significant deployment of German strength to the theater began, but too little time remained before the Allied invasion of Sicily to correct the flawed disposition of Axis forces serving there.
Surrender in North Africa led to a period of retrenchment and set the stage for another defeat in Sicily, all of which Mussolini had foreseen with great trepidation.

**THE MARCH ALARM: GERMAN INVASION PLANS FOR SWITZERLAND**

The crumbling Axis front in Tunisia increased the value of Swiss rail links joining Germany and Italy. Since August 1940, nearly 1800 rail cars had crossed Switzerland each day on their way to Italy. German rail shipments to Italy increased in volume as *OKW* moved men and matériel into Italy and North Africa. To accomplish this, Germany and Italy shipped coal and other ‘civilian’ cargo using Swiss lines. The passage of Axis freight through Switzerland significantly reduced pressures on other routes carrying military shipments directly between the two Axis states.\(^{138}\)

Lack of access to Swiss railroads would have restricted the German buildup to using lines running into Italy from France, German Austria, and Yugoslavia. The Brenner line, serving traffic from Innsbruck to Verona, was the most important route exclusively in Axis hands. Lines served the rest of Italy from the northern Italian hub at Verona. The Brenner-Verona route's short length and difficult terrain made it easier to defend from air attack and repair than the other routes joining Germany and Italy. Moreover, being fully double-tracked and electrified, its trains

did not consume coal that Italian factories needed for production. Other lines connecting France and Yugoslavia with Italy fell far below the Brenner route’s cargo capacity.\footnote{Transportation Division The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, \textit{Rail Operations Over the Brenner Pass} (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), 3.}

Securing access to Swiss railways greatly concerned Hitler and his commanders as the Italian buildup began. They lacked alternatives to Swiss routes if Allied action closed the Brenner line. In 1942, anxious communications between Berlin and the German ambassador in Bern led to German demands that the Swiss improve their security measures along the routes. Swiss leaders also suffered anxious moments when contemplating possible German seizure of the rail links. Their commander-in-chief, General Henri Guisan, expected German concern for the rail lines to heighten as the Allied invasion of Italy neared. Guisan also knew of German worries that Switzerland might allow Allied armies to pass through the republic's cantons and attack Germany.\footnote{Jürg Fink, \textit{Die Schweiz aus der Sicht des Dritten Reiches 1933-1945} (Zürich: Schulthess Polygraphischer Verlag, 1985), 153, 160.}

A January 1943 report from Walter Schellenberg, head of the SS Foreign Intelligence Service (\textit{Amt VI} of the \textit{Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA)}), contained information from Swiss sources that focused German attention on the rail routes’ vulnerability. Informants warned that the Royal Air Force intended to bomb the Brenner line. This action would sever the flow of German reinforcements to Italy.
Swiss forces were described as preparing a defense against possible Allied attack. The information, regardless of its reliability, highlighted the insecurity facing German forces in Italy. The defense of Swiss railroads remained in Swiss hands. Hitler could not discount the possibility of Bern suddenly halting traffic and isolating his forces in Italy.\footnote{Józef Garlinski, \textit{The Swiss Corridor: Espionage Networks in Switzerland in World War II} (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1981), 111-12.}

On January 30, 1943, Swiss intelligence operatives in Germany informed their controllers of a conference held at \textit{Führer} Headquarters. They reported that Göring, Goebbels, Himmler, and Alfred Rosenberg, Nazism's ideological philosopher, had joined Hitler in planning \textit{AKTION SCHWEIZ}, the invasion of Switzerland. The account stated that Major General Eduard Dietl, conqueror of Narvik, had been given command of German forces slated to invade Switzerland. This information lent considerable weight to the report's credibility.\footnote{Hans Rudolf Kurz, \textit{Hundert Jahre Schweizer Armee} (Thun: Ott Verlag, 1978), 192-93.}

An expert in mountain warfare, Dietl was the type of officer Hitler would assign to execute a surprise attack against Switzerland. The plan, said to have been outlined by Dietl, consisted of three phases. First, air landing troops would seal entrances to the Swiss National Redoubt and prevent Swiss forces from taking up defensive positions there. Second, motorized and armored units would link up with the air landing troops. Finally, German Alpine divisions would conquer the
Redoubt.\textsuperscript{143}

Swiss officials knew of an earlier German plan to seize Switzerland. The Wehrmacht's Operational staff had rejected \textit{OPERATION TANNENBAUM}, a scenario envisioning the lightning conquest of Switzerland in October 1940. Little evidence exists that German leaders seriously contemplated attacking Switzerland at that time. German leaders, as they would for the remainder of the war, decided that the Swiss \textit{Stackelschwein} (porcupine) served German interests far better as an independent nation. Nonetheless, knowledge of \textit{OPERATION TANNENBAUM} added weight to Swiss worries in March 1943 that the Germans intended to invade their mountain republic.\textsuperscript{144}

On March 18, 1943, Swiss apprehension intensified when the Swiss 'Wiking Line' confirmed reports of an impending invasion. Well-placed sources in Stockholm, Sweden, corroborated the information already in Berne's hands. Swiss officials believed that Italy would quit the war when the Allies invaded. Given the large number of German units deploying to Italy, Guisan feared that Germany would seize Swiss railways to secure its lines of communication.


Swiss planners weighed other factors while planning their response. The timing of the crisis did not surprise Guisan and Switzerland's civilian leadership. Swiss and German trade officials were locked in contentious trade negotiations. Swiss representatives were working to limit exports and loans extended to Germany. They did not discount the possibility that Germany had leaked invasion plans to improve its bargaining position. A further report from Munich that German mountain divisions under Dietl's command had deployed along the Bavarian-Swiss border brought the crisis to a boil. The German units were described as ready to move upon six hours notice.¹⁴⁵

Two factors defused the impending confrontation. On March 18, after receiving additional information concerning German invasion plans, Guisan placed Swiss forces on the alert. His firm response provided Hitler with indisputable evidence that the republic would defend its territory. Information already in German hands further reinforced the belief that the Swiss would oppose a German invasion. Otto Köcher, German ambassador to Switzerland, reiterated previous warnings that the Republic would demolish its rail lines if the Germans invaded.¹⁴⁶ Swiss engineers had readied tracks, bridges, tunnels, viaducts, and electrical supply


¹⁴⁶Garlinski, Swiss Corridor, 5-6, 111-112.
lines for demolition. Forcing a way through the Swiss national redoubt's defenses would be costly and time consuming. Faint hope existed that the prized rail lines would be seized intact.\textsuperscript{147}

Guisan reinforced this information during secret meetings with Walter Schellenberg, head of the German Security Service's (\textit{Sicherheitsdienst}) Foreign Intelligence department. While meeting with Schellenberg on March 3, 1943, Guisan delivered notice that his nation would oppose a German invasion. In a later controversial handwritten note, the Swiss general pledged that Switzerland would resist invasion from any quarter, Allied or German.\textsuperscript{148}

Scholars still debate the earnestness of the March 1943 German invasion plan. German propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels' diary entry of 17 March 1943 reveals that Major General Eduard Dietl was not in Bavaria, but at his post in Norway.\textsuperscript{149} Moreover, German forces, spread dangerously thin in many theaters, no

\textsuperscript{147}Schwarz, \textit{Eye of the Hurricane}, 64; Packard, \textit{Neither Friend nor Foe}, 157.


"Terboven ruft mich abends spät von Oslo an. Er hat einen Besuch an der Nordfront gemacht und dort die besten Eindrücke gesammelt. Er freut sich sehr über den tiefen Eindruck, den meine Sportpalastrede bei Deitl, seinen Offizieren und auch den Mannschaften gemacht hat."

Dietl was nowhere near German-Swiss border in command of mountain troops assigned to invasion of Switzerland, even at the height of the supposed crisis.
longer possessed strength sufficient to swiftly defeat the formidable Swiss defenses. Italian forces, decimated in battle, likewise lacked the brawn necessary to penetrate the Swiss National Redoubt, even in conjunction with a German attack. Given the sorry Italian performance in 1940 against similar mountainous French and Greek border defenses, it would have been the height of folly to expect more than a repetition of past debacles. What is clear is that ‘these cursed Swiss tunnels,’ Hitler's livid response to the quandary in which he found himself, remained both worrisome to German officials and vital for Italy’s defense.¹⁵⁰

DIVERGENT COURSES

More than the Märzalarm occupied German and Italian attention in March and April 1943. The two Axis allies had embarked upon divergent courses. Hitler's pre- and early war successes had endowed him with near-absolute power in Germany. The Italian situation had evolved in a diametrically opposed direction. Burdened by illness, a weakening political base, and an unbroken string of defeats, Mussolini found his freedom of action increasingly limited by dissent within his government and by popular unrest among Italians. As the events of the April 1943 Schloß Klessheim conference demonstrated, the two dictators now occupied strikingly different personal positions within their governments.

After several failed attempts at conferring, Mussolini and Hitler met again at Salzburg's baroque Schloß Klessheim. The worsening Axis position topped their agenda. The Stalingrad disaster and annihilation of the Italian 8th Army on the Don river line had placed German and Italian forces in a precarious position. Encircled Axis forces in North Africa faced imminent defeat at 'Tunisgrad.' Not as adept at self-deception as his German counterpart, Mussolini, worried by inflated estimates of Allied strength, guessed that Allied armies would set their sights next on Italy.151

Conference participants later remarked on more than just the deteriorating strategic situation. Hitler's haggard appearance shocked the Italian delegation. The Führer's practice of remaining awake each evening until Allied aircraft had departed German airspace had sapped his physical vitality. Mussolini's health had similarly fallen prey to the ravages of war. He spent most of the rail journey to Klessheim battling a stomach ailment that had reduced him to a shadow of his former self.152

Unlike Hitler, Mussolini arrived bearing a bold proposal meant to alter Axis conduct of the war. The Duce believed that the Allies had forced the Axis onto the diplomatic defensive with the Atlantic Charter and recent statements upholding the Charter's principles at Casablanca. The Axis powers needed to regain the diplomatic


initiative. The Italian foreign minister, Giuseppe Bastianini, had given Mussolini a plan to reorganize Europe. Mussolini approved the plan and agreed to place it before Hitler at Klessheim.

Bastianini's plan envisioned the creation of an European community in which the two Axis powers would guarantee the rights of the lesser states and nationalities. The proposal would improve the Axis position by strengthening support from their allies and neutrals. By guaranteeing the smaller states' position in postwar Europe, it would ameliorate fears of a German-dominated continent. Adoption of this proposal, designed to buy Italy time to rebuild its defenses, required that the war's focal point be shifted from Russia to the Mediterranean.

Ribbentrop offered Bastianini faint hope that Hitler would adopt this ambitious design during the two foreign ministers' preliminary meetings. The incongruous stance taken by Hitler's entourage revealed the Führer's advisors' desperate desire to alter his disastrous policies. They spoke frankly of their hope that Mussolini would shift Hitler's focus from Russia, something they had failed to do.\(^\text{153}\) Hitler's associates clung to their hopes in vain. The German overlord repeated the mantra of his strategic thinking throughout the conference: Tunisia, like the Russian front, must be defended at all costs.

By early April 1943, few other options remained open to the Axis. Italian supply convoys running the gauntlet to North Africa provided defenseless prey for

\(^{153}\)Deakin, *Brutal Friendship*, 261-63, 266.
Allied submarine ‘wolfpacks’ and their sky-borne companions, guided by the expert hand of Ultra. The decimated Italian merchant fleet could not have staged an Axis ‘Dunkirk’ from North African beaches even if Hitler had ordered it. Conferees spent little time debating the issue, given the impossibility of escape.\textsuperscript{154} Hitler also stressed that peace could not be made with Russia. The Axis must hold on and win.

The \textit{Duce}, however, had more on his mind than the defeats in North Africa and Russia. The ‘March Strikes’ in northern Italy had demonstrated the regime’s growing vulnerability at home. The German defeat at Stalingrad and subsequent destruction of Italian divisions had emboldened Communists and labor unionists into open resistance. The symbolism of the strike’s birth at the Fiat Mirafiori plant, Italy’s largest and most modern factory, did not escape Mussolini’s attention.\textsuperscript{155}

Conflicting accounts exist of the two dictators’ private discussions. Perhaps unsettled by the unrest at home, Mussolini remained strangely passive throughout his conversations with Hitler. Mussolini claimed that he made a forceful presentation of the Italian program and received Hitler’s agreement to make peace with Russia. The \textit{Duce’s} description of initial discussions with Hitler encouraged Marshal Ambrosio, although the incredulous \textit{Comando Supremo} head requested that

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Mussolini repeat his fantastic news.\textsuperscript{156} Given the results and Hitler's domination of the conference's public sessions, it seems more likely that Hitler rode roughshod over Mussolini's efforts to redirect errant Axis policy while meeting in private.\textsuperscript{157}

The limited defensive aid promised Italy further highlighted the precarious German situation. Shrinking weapon stockpiles could not supply the 750 tanks, 1,322 artillery pieces and antitank guns, 7,400 trucks, 500 fighters and bombers, and fuel that Ambrosio had requested on February 27. Germany offered only sixty tanks

\textsuperscript{156}The account of the German translator at Klessheim supports the assertion that Mussolini fought for the adoption of the European community plan and peace with Russia. See "Walter Warlimont to Enno von Rintelen, 9 February 1950," Folio 7, N 433, Nachlaß Rintelen (BAMA), 15-18.

Ambrosio described Mussolini as convinced that peace would be reached with Russia. Only later did he learn from Ribbentrop that Hitler had meant that Russia was tottering on the edge of collapse and that peace would be possible after Russia's defeat. Vittorio Ambrosio and G. A. Infante, "Events in Italy, 1 February - 8 September 1943," NARA Microfiche Publication M1035, Fiche 0179, Foreign Military Studies, P-Series (RG338), P-058. (1950), 3-4; Deakin, \textit{Brutal Friendship}, 264-65.

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supplemented by an air ‘armada’ of 120 aircraft and 200 spare engines, increased
supplies of aviation fuel, and additional assistance to Italian forces occupying the
Balkans. Hitler also pressed Mussolini to form a ‘Praetorian Guard’ to ensure his
regime’s survival. Himmler and Hitler promised German equipment and military
advisors to train and equip a Militia armored division, formed from Fascist
stalwarts.

Hitler’s impassioned soliloquies left Mussolini temporarily reenergized at the
conference’s conclusion. Nonetheless, Mussolini’s short-lived revival of spirits could
not compensate for the conference’s true outcome. Hitler would pursue his ‘Russia
First’ policy, even at the cost of Italy’s collapse.

FINALE IN NORTH AFRICA: FOOLS FOR THE FÜHRER

The waste of Axis troops defending Tunisia evidenced Hitler’s determination
to act as he promised at Klessheim. This final ‘forlorn hope’ included men of the
German 15th Motorized Battalion. They were meant to seal the breech created by
advancing Allied divisions threatening to annihilate the Italo-German North African

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155 Protokoll über Besprechung in Schloss Klessheim,” OKW/WFSt/Op./
Dt.Gen.Rom Nr. 66782/43 g.K.Chefs. vom 8.4.43, MA 60 (WFSt) Akz. Nr. 1882/56
(Microfilm) (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, München [Hereafter IFZ], 9 April, 1943),
72-73; Raspin, Italian War Economy, 369-70.

159 Plehwe, End of an Alliance, 9.

160 Deakin, Brutal Friendship, 259-60; Goebbels Diaries, 352; Playfair, Molony,
Flynn and Gleave, The Destruction of Axis Forces in Africa, 409; Plehwe, End of an
Alliance, 11; Bodo Scheurig, Alfred Jodl (Munich: Propyläen, 1991), 252.
bridgehead. This crack battalion's fate, however, illustrated the consequences of Hitler's disregard for strategic principle. The *Fuhrer* dismissed as irrelevant the limited capabilities such small driblets of men possessed and ordered that they perform impossible tasks. Rather than conserving veteran troops to defend Italy and the Balkans, Hitler insisted that they be flown to North Africa's battlefields, now dominated by the overwhelming power of American, British, Commonwealth, and Free French divisions.

Italian transport planes airlifting soldiers to North Africa flew into skies filled with antiaircraft fire that punctured both the unarmored sheet-metal skins of the lumbering Italian aircraft and the fragile bodies of German *Landser*. Many of the ponderous planes succumbed to the barrage that greeted their arrival. A fortunate few survived the ordeal in the air and subsequent crash landings. Nonetheless, survival did not betoken success. The shattered remnants of this proud battalion emerged from wrecked planes and marched straight into captivity.¹⁶¹

Thus did the Axis defense of North Africa collapse. Adolf Hitler, seeking to stave off defeat, insisted upon shipping troops into the doomed North African bridgehead, even as Allied forces broke through the final Axis defensive positions. Hitler's foolish obstinacy condemned to death or captivity the veteran soldiers of the 15th Panzer and the Hermann Göring divisions at the precise moment he needed them to shore up his southern European defenses.

THE AXIS STRATEGIC SITUATION AFTER TUNISIA

After the Axis capitulation in May 1943, Hitler faced a strategic nightmare in the Mediterranean theater. Long obsessed with the Eastern front, he had doled out troops with an eyedropper to this theater. Too late in 1942 did he commit an army group to Tunisia. For this strategic folly, Hitler finally paid the full price as the summer of 1943 approached. The men and materiel lost in Tunisia forced the Axis onto the strategic defensive in the West. Allied offensives would henceforth determine Axis responses. Strategic initiative, the ability to call the tune for the war, now passed wholly from the Axis to the western Allies.\textsuperscript{162}

THE ITALIAN CONTRIBUTION

The Italian army confronted the changed strategic situation after the Tunisian surrender with a bare cupboard. Although demanding command of all forces in Italy, \textit{Comando Supremo} no longer mustered a handful of combat-effective divisions. After the destruction of the Italian 1\textsuperscript{st} Army in Tunisia, the remaining Italian armies were scattered about Yugoslavia, Greece, the Aegean, and the French Riviera. \textit{Comando Supremo} earmarked eleven divisions of the 5\textsuperscript{th} Army to defend central Italy, Sardinia, and Corsica. The 7\textsuperscript{th} Army deployed seven divisions within southern Italy. An additional eight divisions of the Italian 6\textsuperscript{th} Army defended Sicily.

With a million and a half men under arms, the Italian army still possessed on

\textsuperscript{162}Kesselring et al., \textit{German Version of the Italian Campaign}, 4; Warlimont, \textit{Im Hauptquartier der deutschen Wehrmacht}, 334-35; D'Este, \textit{Bitter Victory}, 18.
paper a substantial force with which to counter the forthcoming Allied invasion. However, only a handful of the remaining divisions retained the mobility necessary to defeat an amphibious invasion. Of the Italian 6th Army's eight formations, only two, Livorno and Napoli, were effective fighting formations. These 'combat-ready' divisions each possessed a single company of obsolete French R-35 tanks. The remaining divisions and brigades, designated 'coastal defense' units, were allocated low priority for equipment and personnel. The elderly men of these poorly-equipped units, commanded by unseasoned reserve officers, fled before the well-equipped and fully-manned Allied divisions. The only surprise is that they should have been expected to do otherwise.

Coastal defenses did not exist in Italian-held areas. As June began, the German military attaché, General Enno von Rintelen, appealed for energetic German efforts to improve this situation. He believed that proper fortifications could only be constructed under German direction. Moreover, German engineers would have to provide materials for the construction work. Building supplies still had not been shipped to threatened sectors.

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THE ITALIAN DOMESTIC SITUATION

Mussolini’s continuing illness further paralyzed preparations for a vigorous defense of Italy. The Duce’s weak stomach left him in constant pain and reduced him to a bland diet of milk and rice. Although all hope for an improvement in the dictator’s health had not been given up, hopes for Mussolini emerging from his isolation did not appear good.165

Mussolini’s declining health and influence alarmed Hitler. Rumors flying about Rome of Mussolini’s imminent overthrow exacerbated the Führer’s anxieties concerning the survival of his alliance with Italy. Indications of disloyalty to the Axis alliance among Italian leaders multiplied. German officials working in Rome reported these shifting sentiments, strengthening Hitler’s belief that the alliance would last only as long as Mussolini held power.166

The internal situation in Italy gave Hitler good reason for anxiety. Blame for the loss of North Africa and the colonies had fallen squarely upon Mussolini’s government. The losses had severely demoralized Italian public opinion. The surrender of Italian colonial possessions after decades of effort stripped Italians of the illusion that the colonies ensured a brighter future. Italians knew that they would not recover the lost territories. With invasion and defeat facing the country,

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165Ciano Diaries, 553.

166Klinkhammer, Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung, 28-29.
Italians simply hoped that their occupiers would proved humane.\textsuperscript{167}

Horrific troop losses in Russia worsened the situation. The casualty reports, Allied air attacks throughout Italy, and the poor effort at defending Italian cities, turned war weariness into hatred of the Fascists. Reports from Italy stated that Italian middle- and working-class support for the conflict had vanished. Italy was ready for peace.\textsuperscript{168}

In early March 1943, strikes by Italian workers sharply reduced war production. Work actions at Turin’s Fiat Mirafiori factory spread across northern Italy, quickly reaching Milan. Laborers, suffering the effects of inflation, demanded higher wages. The threat represented by the striking workers to Mussolini’s rule was clear. Without the support of workers in key industries, the Fascist regime possessed but dwindling hopes of survival.\textsuperscript{169}

After the strikes ceased, production in armaments factories declined sharply. Fascist police could not compel disaffected workers to enthusiastic toil. Prosecutions of political crimes rose steadily, but the regime did not use terror effectively enough to coerce workers into raising output. The ineffectiveness of


\textsuperscript{169}Mason, "The Turin Strikes of March 1943," 275-76; Raspin, \textit{Italian War Economy}, 370-71.
punitive action further established the rot eating away at Italy.\textsuperscript{170}

\textbf{"DIE WEHRWIRTSCHAFTS ITALIEN": ITALY'S ECONOMIC POTENTIAL}

Rintelen warned Berlin in May 1943 that the lack of leadership had compromised Italian combat-readiness. Although Cavallero, former head of Comando Supremo, attempted to improve war production before his dismissal, the dismal output of Italy's industrial base had not improved. OKW learned from Rintelen that the reverse was true. Production had fallen to new lows. Rintelen partially blamed the lack of improvement on Ambrosio's inherent lethargy, which kept the new Comando Supremo chief from urgent action during the crisis. Other Italian leaders likewise remained passive, accepting German advice but doing nothing.\textsuperscript{171}

Shortfalls in German deliveries to Italy undermined the reconstitution of combat-effective Italian divisions. Coal deliveries, vital for power generation and the production of steel, fell seven percent below agreed upon levels.\textsuperscript{172} Allied air raids on the Italian rail net added to the shortfall. The disrupted rail net also caused the breakdown of food distribution. In April 1943, vast numbers of rail cars sat immobilized in north Italy, unable to reach locations where the population was

\textsuperscript{170}Harvey, "Italian War Effort," 44.

\textsuperscript{171}Rintelen, "Beurteilung der derzeitige Kampfkraft der italienischen Wehrmacht," 52-53.

\textsuperscript{172}Raspin, \textit{Italian War Economy}, 371.
suffering from hunger. Shortages of food and materials reduced industrial
production and hurt the popularity of the Fascist regime, which the populace saw as
incapable of effectively managing the economy.\textsuperscript{173}

German army reports mentioned dwindling Italian civilian support for
further fighting. German troops found the populace openly antagonistic to them in
potential combat zones. Allied propaganda had effectively blamed the Germans for
the air attacks on Sicily. While hoping that Sardinians might help defend their
island home, OBS officers worried that the inability to supply civilian needs once
the battle had begun would turn Italian civilians against the Germans.\textsuperscript{174}

A May 1943 survey by the \textit{OKW} Foreign Economics Staff detailed the Italian
war economy's assets and situation. Staff officers scrutinized every aspect of Italian
consumption and production. They took particular interest in breaking down the
Italian war economy and its potential by region.

A careful reading reveals the north Italian industrial center's importance to
the Italian economy. This small region contained 50 percent of steel production, 95
percent of aluminum manufacturing, and 100 percent of the truck, automobile, and
armored vehicle industries. Two-thirds of artillery producers, 88 percent of
munitions production, 98 percent of aircraft frame and 66 percent of aircraft engine

\textsuperscript{173}Harvey, "Italian War Effort," 43.

\textsuperscript{174}Der Oberbefehlshaber Süd Führungsabteilung, "Beurteilung der Lage auf
den Inseln Sizilien, Sardinien und Korsika," Ta - Nr. 203/43 gKdos. H.Qu., den
27.6.1943, RH19 X (Heeresgruppe C), Band 12, OB Südwest 18.Juni 1943 -
production were concentrated in northern Italian factories. German researchers noted that 97 percent of GERMAN orders let with Italian factories had been placed with this region’s industrial concerns. These orders amounted to 874 million Reichsmarks through May 1943. 175

Comparisons of German and Italian war production frequently draw similar conclusions: Italian production paled in comparison with German output. Some economic historians therefore dismiss the scale of Axis war production as so inferior to their opponents’ output as to preclude any chance of Axis victory, given the explosive growth of the American and Soviet war economies. While the validity of the overall contribution of the Allied war economies should not be belittled, such analyses rarely note the useful assistance wrested from Italy after the German takeover.

The factory-by-factory OKW study of Italian armament production reveals that Italian producers possessed valuable capacity that could be enlisted in the Reich’s war effort. While Italy’s 2.7% of world production did not suffice to win Mussolini the victories of which he dreamed, it represented a substantial asset if effectively combined with German production. Italian factories could have boosted German output by 25 percent in 1943, if under German control.

Conclusive evidence of German interest in Italy’s economic assets as a factor

175 Oberkommando der Wehrmacht W Stb (Ausl), "Die Wehrwirtschaft Italiens," Document AL 2890 (OKW W Stb (Ausl) 2./I a Az 3 i 10 Nr. 3901/43 g.Kdos.) (IWM), 5.
driving the seizure of the Italian peninsula in September 1943 is lacking. Nonetheless, this survey shows that, unlike their opponents, who dismissed the Italian industrial base as a non-factor in strategic planning, the Germans recognized Italy's economic value. Subsequent German efforts to integrate Italian production into the German war effort demonstrate that retaining the north Italian industrial base materially assisted the Nazi regime's struggle to prolong the war.

**THE STRUGGLE TO DEFINE STRATEGY: AXIS PREPARATIONS FOR THE DEFENSE OF EUROPE**

The collapse in Tunisia forced the Axis to define a common strategy designed to counter future Allied operations. The Mediterranean theater offered the Allies wide latitude in choosing their next move. British and American forces, released by the Axis surrender, could conduct landings in the Mediterranean or shift to Great Britain and operate against northwestern Europe. Axis planners could only guess what the Allies would do. Would they invade the Balkans via Greece or would they descend on Sicily, Sardinia, or Corsica as a first step toward the conquest of Italy?

**ULTRA**

Allied penetration of Axis intelligence gathering and communications seriously compromised German efforts to divine their opponents' intentions and prepare a decisive repulse of the next Allied move. Moreover, British counterintelligence officers controlled *Abwehr* agents in Great Britain reporting back
to Germany.176 Allied counterintelligence had likewise ferreted out many Axis intelligence operatives in North Africa, although some transmitted accurate information to Berlin.177 Most damaging of all, Allied codebreakers had cracked codes guarding Wehrmacht communications. Transmissions encoded by the German Enigma code-typewriter had been broken by dint of often tedious, if nonetheless quite brilliant, work by Allied codebreakers. The decoded and translated messages, assigned the codename Ultra, revealed German fears and plans in detail.178

Allied deception plans before the Sicilian invasion fully exploited the advantages gained from Ultra. British and American planners employed an panoply of deception schemes that weakened the Axis defense of Sicily. Operation Barclay created the illusion of an Allied move against either southern France or the Balkans. Other deception plans manufactured uncertainty by causing Axis officials to believe


that Crete or Turkey might be the target of Anglo-American forces.  

The Allied ruses shrewdly reinforced Hitler's prejudices, which Ultra often revealed. Hitler, fearing an Italian surrender, reluctantly deployed German troops to southern Italy and Sicily. Allied planners cleverly exploited this and focused his attention on peripheral areas such as Greece. In the end, Hitler refused to send more than two divisions to Sicily. This resulted from his fear of an Italian surrender and Allied dis-information. While it cannot be said which played the larger role, skillful Allied deception plans reinforced the fears and prejudices of top German officials.

In 1942, Ultra intelligence had played a direct role in defeating Rommel's Afrika-Korps. Allied leaders hoped that Ultra would reprise its vital contribution in Sicily. Eisenhower and his commanders foresaw a similar flow of helpful intelligence during the Sicilian campaign. However, the campaign's short duration and the irregular flow of intelligence to the battlefield prevented Ultra's full exploitation during the ground campaign. The complex tasks of breaking the Enigma machine's daily code wheel settings, deciphering messages, and difficulties translating and communicating the intelligence to field commanders, kept Ultra from regularly playing a direct role in Sicily.

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180 Ibid., 92.

181 David Kahn's description of the intricacies of solving an Enigma message bear repeating for readers not fully versed on the difficulties of providing timely information to Allied commanders. "Now a basic point in understanding the operation of Ultra is to recognize that solution does not come permanently in one
The transfer of fighting from North Africa to Europe further limited Ultra's contribution. F. W. Winterbotham served as security chief for the Special Liaison Units (SLUs) delivering Ultra intercepts to Allied commanders. He assured General Alexander that the distance between Rome and Berlin would ensure a steady stream of intercepts. In practice, telex posts, using secure ground cables, often substituted for radio transmissions of orders and reports. German commanders, especially Kesselring, occasionally used Enigma for quick communication with Berlin. The poor state of Italian communication links also forced reliance on Enigma. Nonetheless, Ultra's value diminished as the frequency of intercepts, an important factor in finding the daily solution to Enigma, declined.182

Ultra occasionally provided Allied commanders with valuable tactical intelligence during the Sicilian campaign. Kesselring handed his opponents a single blow. Reading a message today does not mean that you can thereafter instantly read every message as soon as you have intercepted it. Rather there are levels of analysis. To read a message, for example, you had to do three things -- and even here I am simplifying. (1) Reconstruct the wiring in all of the rotors. (2) Know which three rotors out of the set of five were used that day. (3) Know the position the rotors were in for the start of that message. You can know one or even two of these factors and still not be able to read a single word of the original message. You must know all three. And this takes time. So you can intercept a message today, but not solve it for three weeks, by which time the message is valueless. On the other hand, sometimes things are going well and solutions are prompt." David Kahn, "The Significance of Codebreaking and Intelligence in Allied Strategy and Tactics," Cryptologia, July 1977:214-15.

priceless advantage when he transmitted a complete order of battle to OKW shortly before the invasion. As later proved true in Normandy, Ultra also provided detailed information on the arrival of German reinforcements. Allied officers praised Ultra for revealing on July 14 that the Germans would contract their defensive perimeter and pull back from the western half of the island. Moreover, Ultra revealed after July 16 that Allied air raids had forced Luftwaffe planes to beat a steady retreat from the island. Nonetheless, the swift and undetected escape of German forces from Sicily, hidden from Ultra until August 10, revealed the limitations of even the most reliable intelligence source. Given this mixed bag of contributions, Ultra did not decisively affect the campaign's outcome. Although defeated, German forces escaped their Allied pursuers.  

AXIS DEFENSIVE PREPARATIONS (APRIL - JULY 1943)

TAKING THE ENEMY'S MEASURE

OKW and Kesselring understood that Tunisia's loss had both opened the Mediterranean and released Allied shipping for amphibious operations. Allied naval forces quickly exploited the shorter Mediterranean passage to the east. The first Allied convoy dispatched on the Gibraltar to Suez route sailed May 17-26, 1943.

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Luftwaffe units, seriously weakened by losses in North Africa, failed to hinder the convoy's passage.  

Victory in Tunisia shortened the 13,000 mile voyage from Great Britain to Suez via the Cape of Good Hope to less than 3,000 miles. OKW staff estimated that convoy routes unlocked by the loss of North Africa would release two million tons of Allied shipping. General Brehon B. Somervell, the autocratic and efficient head of U.S. army logistics, calculated that the Allies would gain only 1,825,000 tons during the first five months' free passage of the Mediterranean. The actual benefit to Allied naval forces proved much less. Poor British shipping controls reduced the anticipated benefits of the newly opened route. The OKW staff could not foresee this and miscalculated Allied naval capabilities for the upcoming invasion.

The OKW Operational staff warned that increased Allied naval resources represented a direct threat to the survival of the Axis alliance. An invasion of Italy could drive it from the war. Planners therefore had to prepare the defense of Italy while anticipating Italian defection. All this remained secondary to the Operational staff's warning that weak coastal defenses, a growing partisan movement in the Balkans, and the opportunity to cut Germany off from vital Balkans resources, made

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184 Baum and Weichold, Krieg der "Achsenmächte," 328.

an assault on southwestern Europe the most likely long range Allied goal.\textsuperscript{186}

Allied deception plans magnified the apparent threat to the German position, creating an illusion of Allied strength greater than that arrayed against the Axis. Misleading estimates of Allied military strength tempered German hopes that they would gain a prolonged period of recovery after the Tunisian debacle. On June 27, 1943, two weeks before the Allied invasion of Sicily, the OBS Operational staff calculated that the Allies had readied six armored divisions, five armored brigades, eighteen to twenty infantry divisions, two air landing divisions, eighteen to twenty parachute battalions, and a number of Commando units to invade Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. Kesselring's staff warned that the Allies could simultaneously land nine to ten American or seven to eight British divisions. Strong forces of paratroops and Commandos would accompany the conventional units.\textsuperscript{187}

While not inconsiderable, actual Allied strength stood far below German estimates. Anglo-American invasion forces numbered roughly fourteen and two-thirds divisions instead of the thirty-two and one-half divisions that German

\textsuperscript{186}Warlimont, \textit{Im Hauptquartier der deutschen Wehrmacht}, 334-35.

calculations attributed to them. The ten and a third infantry divisions, two and one-third armored divisions, two parachute divisions, and assortment of American Ranger and British Commando units poised to descend upon Sicily represented a force weaker by half than the force levels OKW estimates credited Allied armies.¹⁸⁸

DEBATING ALLIED INTENTIONS

Speaking to Allied intentions in late spring 1943, Winston Churchill declared that “anybody but a bloody fool would know that it was Sicily.” Unfortunately for the Axis, a vast range of possible invasion targets, including Sicily, required defending.¹⁸⁹

From the beginning of May, Hitler’s attention focused on a possible Allied move against the Balkans. Shipments of bauxite, chromium, copper, and oil sustained the German war machine. Germany could not replace these essential war materials from any other source. Hitler thus decided that he would defend his southern flank with six mobile divisions transferred from Russia. Groups of mobile forces would be sited in threatened areas, especially Greece, to counter the expected Allied invasion. Italian hesitation and German combat requirements in Russia


¹⁸⁹Bennett, Behind the Battle, 202-03.
defeated this plan.\textsuperscript{190}

In contrast, Mussolini and the Italian military commanders held unswervingly to the belief that Sicily was the next Allied target. *Comando Supremo* believed that Sicily's conquest would gain the Allies command of the sole remaining threat to their shipping and wrest a springboard from the Axis, useful for an attack on Sardinia or the Italian peninsula. To prepare an effective defense, the Italian high command wanted its forces transferred back to Italy from the Balkans and southern France.\textsuperscript{191}

While visiting Italy in May 1943, Admiral Dönitz encountered similar views among the Italian naval staff. While they thought Sardinia a strong candidate for invasion, they expected a move against Sicily to quickly follow. Dönitz pressed his Italian counterparts to make a maximum effort to ensure that sea lines of communication remained open to all threatened sectors.\textsuperscript{192} He also found Mussolini hesitant to accept German divisions offered by Hitler. General Mario Roatta, head of the Italian army, had approved the deployment of six German mobile divisions.

Mussolini, fearful of growing German strength in Italy, wished to remain master of


\textsuperscript{191}Westphal, *Heer in Fesseln,* 216.

his house and demanded a reduction in the number of divisions. 193

_OKW_ views of potential invasion sites varied widely over the passage of time. In late February 1943 it had warned of a possible invasion of Sicily, Crete, Sardinia, or Corsica. 194 While rating Sicily highest on its list of possible targets, this estimate later changed. Operation *Mincemeat* worked its magic on German planners, the fabricated information convincing some in Berlin that Greece lay in greater danger than Italy or the surrounding isles. Hitler, influenced by the misinformation, moved the well-armed *1st Panzer Division* with its 18,000 men and 83 tanks to Greece. Although this experienced division’s men would be sorely missed in Sicily, Greece, entry way to the Balkans as it had been during the First World War, had to be defended. 195

By late spring 1943, German officers in the Mediterranean theater expected bold Allied moves against possible invasion targets given the correlation of forces favoring the Anglo-American alliance. Kesselring believed that the Allies would seize total control of the Mediterranean Sea. Any plan adopted would also have to provide significant assistance to their embattled Russian ally, while not hindering preparations for the invasion of western Europe. Kesselring saw advantages in Allied moves against Sicily and Sardinia. Bases there would threaten northern Italy


194Howard, _Strategic Deception_, 86.

195Bennett, _Behind the Battle_, 203-04, 205, 222-24.
and southern France. He later expressed his surprise over the timid invasion plan adopted for Sicily. In his view, the "Allied rejection of such a solution ... made the conduct of further hostilities easier for the German Supreme Command."

Kesselring also correctly estimated that directly assaulting the Italian mainland would prove less advantageous than seizing the islands. A bold leap to the European mainland did threaten the continuation of the Axis alliance, the collapse of which would have opened eastern Mediterranean shipping routes. Kesselring chided postwar interrogators that "[t]he decisive disadvantage of this solution [moving into Sicily] consisted in the necessity which is involved of fighting ... on the entire length of the boot of Italy with its terrain which was unfavorable for the attacker and extremely favorable for the defense."

Reflecting upon the campaign after the war, Kesselring believed that the Allies must have taken this course hoping that an Italian surrender would pay significant dividends. The successful German defense of Italy demonstrated the disadvantages of the second solution very clearly. Viewing retrospectively the Italian campaign which began at Salerno it therefore seems that the advantages of the "safe" solution did, of course, lead to eventual success, but that due to [sic] the length of the campaign total losses were doubtless higher than they would probably have been in case of the bold first solution.\(^{196}\)

General Heinrich von Vietinghoff, later 10th Army commander and Kesselring's successor in Italy, worried that Sicily would not be the Allies' sole objective. He feared simultaneous Allied assaults against Sicily and Calabria, the toe

\(^{196}\)Kesselring et al., *German Version of the Italian Campaign*, 22-23.
of the Italian boot and *sine qua non* of Sicily's defense. Dual landings would trap German forces much as they had been cornered in Tunisia. Vietinghoff believed that the Allies would assault the Italian mainland after landings on Sicily and Corsica. Allied forces could use their new island bases as a springboard from which to bound into northern Italy. From this new position, Allied forces could outflank German troops, sever their supply line to the Reich, and quickly defeat them.

Nonetheless, Vietinghoff wanted German divisions concentrated on Sicily, leaving Italian forces to defend Sardinia and Corsica. Although this meant surrendering Sardinia and Corsica to the Allies, Vietinghoff judged that the forces available could not defend the many potential targets. He sharply criticized Field Marshal Kesselring's decision to divide German forces between the islands.\(^{197}\) His judgement proved correct as support arrived too late to help the two German divisions positioned in Sicily repulse the Allied invasion.

**SITUATION IN THE AIR: LUFTWAFFE PLANS AND OPERATIONS**

By June, Kesselring's operational staff came to the same conclusion that Vietinghoff had. Staff officers noted that the *Luftwaffe* no longer controlled the skies over Sicily and Sardinia. On May 11, the day after the surrender in North Africa, II. *Fliegerkorps* reported its strength at 374 combat-ready aircraft. Only 166 of these were fighters and another ninety-one bombers. Given Italian naval losses and the absence of German capital ships, the Allies could now move at will in the

\(^{197}\) Vietinghoff, "Brief Estimate of the Overall Situation," 5-7.
Mediterranean and land where they chose.\textsuperscript{198}

The \textit{Luftwaffe} High Command (\textit{Oberkommando der Luftwaffe} or OKL) divided \textit{Luftflotte} 2 command responsibilities after the Tunisian defeat. A new formation, \textit{Luftwaffenkommando Südost}, took charge of operations in the Balkans, Greece, and Crete, while \textit{Luftflotte} 2 retained control of formations in Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. A new leader assumed command of \textit{Luftwaffe} forces in the western Mediterranean. On June 12, Field Marshal Wolfram von Richthofen departed the Russian-based \textit{Luftflotte} 4 and took up his new post. Other commanders followed him from Russia to new assignments as fighter and bomber leaders. Hitler sent the German ace and Inspector of Fighters, Adolf Galland, to personally direct Sicily's air defense. The new command structure freed Kesselring from responsibility for directing \textit{Luftwaffe} operations and allowed him more time to map out plans to defend the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{199}

\textit{Luftwaffe} units arriving in Sicily from Tunisia had suffered heavy losses fighting in North Africa. Losses from November 1942 to May 1943 totaled 2,422 aircraft, 40.5 percent of all \textit{Luftwaffe} aircraft on the books that November. Average unit casualties amounted to twice their official strength, an incredible toll of combat-

\textsuperscript{198}Gundelach, \textit{Die deutsche Luftwaffe im Mittelmeer 1940-1945}, 587.

experienced pilots and planes. Galland personally witnessed the dire condition of the remaining *Luftwaffe* units in Tunisia when he paid them a visit shortly before the surrender. Transport crews made a supreme effort bringing in troops up to the surrender and suffered accordingly. In April, seventy-six Ju-52 and fourteen enormous Me-323 transports fell to Allied guns. The few escaping planes, despite carrying irreplaceable ground crews, could not redress the lack of repair facilities and equipment in Sicily.\(^{200}\)

*OKL* substantially reinforced its squadrons defending Sicily. Aircraft deliveries to the Mediterranean took precedence over units preparing for battle at Kursk and defending German skies. *Luftwaffe* commanders transferred fighter and fighter-bomber units to the island. Unit strengths rose to 450 planes before the invasion, notwithstanding heavy combat casualties. A force of 1,280 aircraft awaited Allied moves in Italy and the Balkans. *Luftflotte 2* attained a strength of 380 Me-109s and FW-190s, the newest and best fighter in *Luftwaffe* inventories. Despite receiving 40 percent all new fighters built from early May until mid-July, as well as two new combat wings, the out-gunned *Luftwaffe* could not seize air supremacy.\(^{201}\)


The decimated survivors of Tunisia operated under depressingly familiar conditions. 4,800 Allied planes, guided by Ultra reports, rained down a torrent of destruction on Axis airfields. Ultra provided daily updates from German sources highlighting the raids' effectiveness. Allied commanders used the information and rapidly shifted their attacks to hit crowded undamaged airfields. Guided by this intelligence, B-17 *Flying Fortress* bombers with fighter escorts hit *Luftwaffe* bases at Marsala and Trapani during May and June. Carpet-bombing raids caught German fighters on the ground at Grottaglia and Vibo-Valencia. Fragmentation bombs wreaked havoc on German fighters parked at cramped Sicilian bases. Air damage surveyors later provided evidence of the campaign's effectiveness. They found almost 1,000 destroyed Axis aircraft on the island's airbases.

American and British fighter squadrons ranged across the island, downing survivors as they rose to defend their bases. The daily situation rapidly deteriorated into an enormous mismatch as Galland's squadrons struggled to put 120 fighters into the skies. Allied air forces routinely countered the outnumbered Germans, sending 300-500 fighters to meet them. During Galland's six week sojourn in Sicily, his pilots suffered 60% losses. On May 25, American P-38s dispatched eleven German fighters in a single dogfight over Capo San Vito. Sardinia, Corsica, and

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203 Rohden, "German Air Force in the Mediterranean," 76.
Pantelleria also received attention from Allied air formations. Harbor facilities, rail yards, supply depots, and factories suffered great destruction. The May raids eventually forced the evacuation of Luftwaffe bombers to safer fields in Italy.

Luftwaffe units made feeble attempts to reply in kind, attacking concentrations of Allied shipping and aircraft. The raids petered out as German fighters focused on surviving the swarms of attacking Allied fighters rather than protecting their assigned charges. Allied deception plans substantially reduced German air strength on Sicily. German uncertainty as to where the blow would fall caused significant numbers of aircraft to be held in reserve in Italy and to be spread across airfields throughout the theater. By early July, Allied air raids had rendered the point moot. Not only had the reinforcements been eliminated from the Luftwaffe order of battle, most of the fighters and bombers fell back to bases near Naples. Allied flyers had rendered their ground troops invaluable assistance. They had won air superiority over Sicily and would keep it for the remainder of the Italian campaign.204

GERMAN LOGISTICS

Knowing that the Allies controlled the skies and seas, OKW acted to ensure that combat units would find adequate supplies on Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. The German High Command wanted between two and five units (an amount sufficient for a day of combat) of ammo, twenty units of fuel, and a ninety-day supply of rations positioned on the islands. Allied attacks on Italian railroads and harbors in the months prior to the invasion of Sicily made the difficult task even more laborious. Raids on Sardinian ports destroyed harbor facilities, exacerbating a shortage of merchant shipping in the theater. Targeting key points in the Italian rail net, Allied pilots created chaos throughout the system. Trains bearing essential war materials suffered delays in transit from the Brenner pass near the German border of Italy down to the southern province of Calabria.

German commanders surmounted the looming crisis with stopgap measures. Italian civilian traffic was shut out of the rail system as German trains rushing south took priority. The vital rail ferry at the Strait of Messina remained open and helped supply Sicily, averaging 400 wagons a day on the crossing. Although serious losses in German locomotives slowed operations, operations continued. Not even the intermittent efforts of Allied submarines to interdict rail traffic by shelling coastal

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205Harvey, "Italian War Effort," 42.
railways succeeded in shutting down the effort to supply Sicily.\textsuperscript{206}

Ever enterprising, the German High Command employed the \textit{Gotha 242} gliders of the \textit{1st (Gotha) Verbindungskommando (Segler)} to augment its efforts to build stocks of supplies on Sardinia. The bulky gliders made 178 journeys to Sardinia between March and May 1943, transporting 241.8 tons of materiel.\textsuperscript{207} This early version of an airborne ‘rapid deployment force’ played a key role in the German takeover of Italy in September 1943. For now, its unique vehicles assisted in maintaining the flow of supplies to German units deploying to Sardinia.

By early July, despite the best efforts of Allied airmen and sailors, stocks sufficient for extended combat operations were in place on Sicily. Although Sardinia and Corsica had received lesser amounts in comparison with Sicily, stockpiles of ammunition, fuel, and rations on the islands met the basic requirements set by \textit{OKW}.\textsuperscript{208}

**TROOP DEPLOYMENTS**

The ever-optimistic Field Marshal Kesselring might have lost his perennial smile had he known that his opponents possessed detailed knowledge of Sicily’s

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\textsuperscript{208}Der Oberbefehlshaber Süd Führungsabteilung, "Beurteilung der Lage auf den Inseln Sizilien, Sardinien und Korsika," 49.
\end{flushright}
defenseless state in early March 1943. Bereft of combat troops and coastal defenses, Sicily was ripe for the plucking. Kesselring later wrote of his certainty that a swift Allied invasion of Sicily would have proven a ‘decisive success’.

For this respite between campaigns, Kesselring could thank Eisenhower’s lack of strategic flexibility. The vigorous Axis defense of Tunisia until May 1943 tied down Allied divisions designated for the landing far longer than planners had expected. Moreover, North Africa proved a logistical nightmare for British and American quartermasters. Having failed to quickly conquer Tunisia in November 1942, Allied forces thereafter floundered in a sea of mud. Maintaining operations and preparing for the spring offensive in Tunisia placed demands on American naval forces that they could not meet.

The shipping shortage placed an insurmountable obstacle in the way of an early invasion. Supply deliveries to Allied forces fighting in Tunisia arrived late. Grand Admiral Dönitz’s submarine ‘wolfpacks’ deserve partial credit for delaying a possible early invasion of Sicily. In March 1943, their successes against Allied convoys made the British Admiralty fear that the convoy system itself had finally collapsed under the weight of submarine assault. U-boats sent 627,000 tons of Allied shipping to the bottom, the second highest monthly total of the war. Losses dropped off sharply in April as bad weather hid Allied convoys from German eyes. The sudden turn of the tide against German submariners the next month could not

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have been foreseen. Allied naval commanders had to operate cautiously throughout March and April. Nothing extra remained for bold strokes against Sicily, a fact that frustrated General Eisenhower.\(^{210}\)

Inadequate transportation and crowded port facilities also delayed supply deliveries to Allied combat units. The rail and road net of French Northwest Africa required improvement as the existing layout barely met the needs of front line forces. Civilian requirements in liberated regions and the incessant demands of French commander Henri-Honoré Giraud for equipment to rearm his French divisions fighting alongside the Allies further complicated Allied preparations. After the Axis surrender in May 1943, Allied forces assumed responsibility for a quarter-million German and Italian prisoners. POW movements clogged railroads, delaying Allied operations. The resulting pause in activity bought Kesselring time to organize Sicily's defense.\(^{211}\)

Kesselring required every moment that the enforced Allied inaction provided. German forces assigned to Italy remained weak as Hitler kept Russia the main theater of operations. The mélange of German supply, antiaircraft, communications, and military police units were no substitute for seasoned combat


troops. The Plenipotentiary General of the German Armed Forces in Italy
[Bevollmächtiger General der deutschen Wehrmacht in Italien], General Enno von
Rintelen, organized his forces into ad hoc ‘alarm units’ that possessed minimal
combat capability.

The insistence of Comando Supremo that it command all Axis forces within
Italian borders complicated the situation. Although Italy remained unprepared for
its defense, Italian leaders limited the influx of German troops. In March, OKW
reinforced Sardinia with the newly-formed SS Sturmbrigade XI. It later provided the
foundation of the 90th Panzergrenadier Division. Eight German fortress battalions
covered key points on Sardinia, strengthening its coastal defenses and releasing
mobile forces for counter-invasion operations.

That month OKW hastily despatched a term of German coastal defense
experts to review fortifications on Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. It later arranged for
a tour of German coastal defenses by Italian officers assigned the same work.\(^{212}\) Only
a thin crust of defenses covered Sicily at the beginning of May. Kesselring later
pinpointed the days following the surrender of Tunis as that island’s period of
greatest vulnerability. He claimed that “[a]n attack immediately following the
capitulation of TUNIS against Sicily had to have had a quick and decisive

\(^{212}\) Siegfried Westphal and Baron von Humboldt-Dachroeden, "The
Reinforcement of the German Army and the development of the ground situation in
Italy up to the latter's defection," Kesselring 9/24/117 (LHCMA, 1947), 4-5.
success.\textsuperscript{213}  

Gathering key commanders at Gerbini, Sicily shortly after the surrender, Kesselring laid out his plans to defend the island. A cadre of divisions would be formed from the troops available in Italy. \textit{OKW} created three new commands, one each for Sicily, Sardinia, and the mainland. The staffs and various battalions of the 15\textsuperscript{th} \textit{Panzer} (reformed now as a \textit{Panzergrenadier} division) and \textit{Hermann Göring} divisions began rebuilding their parent formations. The staff of the \textit{XIV Panzer Corps} reached Italy on May 19, while elements of the 16\textsuperscript{th} \textit{Panzer Division} moved onto the peninsula. Nonetheless, all three combat formations suffered appalling weaknesses. Hitler noted at his May 19 conference that the 16\textsuperscript{th} \textit{Panzer Division} held just eight tanks and eight unarmed command tanks in its inventories, while \textit{Hermann Göring} units disposed of only seventy-three armored vehicles. They had an authorized strength of two hundred \textit{Panzers} each.\textsuperscript{214}

Elements of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 29\textsuperscript{th} \textit{Panzergrenadier} divisions moved into Italy during June. The 3\textsuperscript{rd} \textit{Panzergrenadier} took up positions around Orveto and Viterbo and assumed responsibility for defending in central Italy. The 29\textsuperscript{th} \textit{Panzergrenadier} moved farther south to Foggia, where it protected the vital complex of airfields on

\textsuperscript{213}Kesselring, 9/24/117, 3.

the Apulian plains. The *Hermann Göring Division* moved the farthest south, ringing Caltagione, Sicily with its forces. Four Italian divisions and assorted coastal defense units constituted the Italian contribution to Sicily’s defense. Of the Italian units, only *Livorno* deployed a full contingent of up-to-strength units.

**CONCLUSION**

As the Axis braced for invasion, the embrace of the its primary partners had seriously weakened. Mussolini, politically and physically enfeebled during the past three years, no longer possessed the will or means to defend his regime. As opposition to his personal rule mounted, he struggled to maintain a precarious balance. He needed German help to defeat an Allied invasion. Italy’s depleted armed forces required a strong German contingent to defend the peninsula. But by accepting German aid, Mussolini opened the door for the eventual Nazi takeover of his state.

In contrast, Hitler’s position in Italy grew stronger with each passing day. Although the dictator feared Italian treason, increasing numbers of his divisions had entered Italy. Italian military commanders, who entertained thoughts of defection even before the Allied landing in Sicily, had no course other than to allow a growing German contingent within their borders. Hitler, almost in spite of his desires and designs, emerged the clear victor in this contest of wills. By securing his lines of communications through Switzerland and infiltrating the Italian state, he had laid the groundwork for the seizure of Italy. These developments added up to a German
victory that paid rich dividends for many long months to come.
# CHART III-1

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CHAPTER 4

THE STRUGGLE FOR SICILY

"It's better to fight the war in Italy than here at home."
Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, 3 August 1943

INTRODUCTION

The battle for Sicily revealed the Italian campaign’s future course. On the Allied side, strategic division concerning the importance and conduct of operations emerged from the invasion’s first days. British commanders seriously mistrusted American combat capabilities. An unwieldy system of command compounded a bad situation, leaving the American and British armies to conduct the campaign rudderless and suspicious of each other. On the Axis side, the campaign demonstrated similar mistrust and outright contempt between German and Italian commanders and forces. German suspicion that Italy planned to abandon the Axis alliance soared before the Allied landing in Sicily when Italian troops failed to

defend the Pelagian island chain, part of Italy proper. Suspicion grew into hostility after the landing when most Italian troops rejected the Fascist regime and continuation of the war, voting with their feet for a quick end to both. Mussolini's fall on July 25, 1943 merely confirmed what Adolf Hitler had long suspected and feared.

But this campaign demonstrated the truism again that the side making the fewest errors will emerge in a stronger position. The Allies, by not moving simultaneously into the toe of Italy's boot-like geography and blocking the route into Sicily, allowed both the reinforcement and evacuation of the island. Hitler exhibited confusion and operated as if the Balkans remained the primary target, even after Sicily had emerged as the focal point of the theater. Nonetheless, he made the right decisions and reaped significant benefits from his Sicilian investment of men and blood. Driven by anger and strategic necessity, Hitler effectively took control of the Italian state from Badoglio's tottering government and laid the foundation for OPERATION ACHSE, the occupation and exploitation of Italy that continued until May 1945.

PRELUDE TO INVASION: PANTELLERIA AND THE PELAGIAN ISLANDS

Before the assault on Sicily, Allied planners opted to seize the Italian-held Pelagian islands, situated astride the Sicilian invasion route. Pantelleria, the largest island, encompassed approximately thirty-two square miles and boasted an airfield capable of handling eighty single-engine fighters. Pantelleria's smaller sisters,
Lampedusa, Lampione, and Linosa formed the remainder of the island chain. Although fearing heavy losses of men and landing craft, Eisenhower authorized the conquest of this Axis outpost on May 10, 1943. The occupation of the Pelagian chain promised several important benefits. Italian forces on the islands, just fifty miles from the closest tip of Sicily, seriously threatened the invading forces' security during the passage to that island. Possession of Pantelleria promised to significantly improve the safety of all Allied shipping. Seizing the island also would eliminate Axis radar sites providing early warning of invasion and allow the installation of Allied radar equipment. Moreover, Pantelleria's airfields, 100 miles closer to Sicily than those currently held by the Allies, offered improved fighter coverage of Sicilian invasion beaches. Five vital fighter squadrons could be stationed on the islands. The airfield provided an invaluable haven for damaged Allied aircraft facing lengthy and hazardous journeys back to North Africa. Finally, capturing Pantelleria's airfield would drive Axis planes back to remote fields. Allied fliers then could focus greater attention on Sardinian and Sicilian airbases.\footnote{Butcher, \textit{My Three Years with Eisenhower}, 302; Garland and Smyth, \textit{Sicily and the Surrender of Italy}, 69-70; Murray, \textit{Strategy for Defeat}, 164; AFHQ G-3 Section, "9 May - 10 May. AFHQ G-3 Section. Operations undertaken as a preliminary to HUSKY. The capturing of PANTELLERIA and LAMPEUSA." "MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief of Staff," "FILE NO. 4 Volume II. SICILIAN CAMPAIGN OPERATION "HUSKY." PLANNING. PREPARATIONS. January 1943 - July 1943. Volume II: May - July 1943," WO 214/21, Item 43, (London: Public Record Office [Hereafter PRO]), 1.}

Pantelleria, long used to jail political prisoners and criminals, impressed observers as being a hard nut to crack. Mussolini had decreed the island a fortress in
the late 1930s. Italian engineers had fortified it since 1937, constructing artillery strong points, hardening aircraft bunkers, and building a desalinization plant that supplied fresh water to the garrison's 12,000 troops. Engineering work focused on the 5,000 foot-long airfield and the massive 1,100 foot-long, hardened, two-story underground hanger sheltering Italian fighters. A much-impressed Mussolini inspected their work on August 18, 1938.

In reality, Pantelleria presented less of a threat to Allied operations than expected. Antiquated coastal artillery and antiaircraft guns guarded its beaches and skies. Unlike Malta, Pantelleria had no organic air units and could not expect succor from the hard-pressed Axis squadrons defending Sicily. Land forces stationed on Pantelleria lacked modern equipment and served under the naval command structure, effectively isolating them from army commanders on Sicily. By early June, Pantelleria's 10,000 civilians inhabitants faced imminent starvation because the Allied blockade had prevented supplies from reaching them for six months.217

Allied air forces, joined by cruisers and destroyers, pounded Pantelleria unmercifully during the first eleven days of June 1943. The Luftwaffe, which lacked the resources to defend the tiny base, did not intervene.218 Despite the absence of Axis fighter cover, the 6,400 tons of bombs dropped on the Italian garrison proved


singly ineffective. Only slightly more than ten percent of the island's artillery pieces (sixteen of 130) suffered damage. The raids taught Allied staff officers the lesson that a pre-invasion attack of seventy to one hundred strategic bombers would render only a small number of fortified artillery emplacements ineffective, many of which could be brought back into service in less than six hours.\textsuperscript{219} Hindsight shows that the inexperienced troops slated to invade Sicily benefitted from the lack of proper Axis defensive positions like those encountered by the 1st U.S. Infantry Division less than a year later at Normandy's OMAHA Beach.

Kesselring's headquarters relayed to Berlin reports of the Allies' preliminary bombardment on June 8 and 9. Italian commanders indicated that prepared positions had suffered heavy damage and that the constant barrage of air and sea fire had paralyzed communications on the island. Attacks against the besieged island continued on June 10, broken only by a welcome afternoon respite when Allied planes dropped leaflets demanding Pantelleria's surrender.\textsuperscript{220}

Italian defenders proved eager to surrender their island fortress after the


\textsuperscript{220}Oberbefehlshaber Süd \textit{Führungsabteilung}, "Ic-Meldung für 8.6.43," OB Süd, \textit{Führungsabteilung/Ic: Ic-Meldungen v. 18.5.-30.9.1943}, RH19 X (Heeresgruppe C), Band 9 (BAMA: Microfiche), 32; Oberbefehlshaber Süd \textit{Führungsabteilung}, "Ic-Meldung (bis 10.6.1943, mittags)," OB Süd, \textit{Führungsabteilung/Ic: Ic-Meldungen v. 18.5.-30.9.1943}, RH19 X (Heeresgruppe C), Band 9 (BAMA: Microfiche), 34.
interminable bombardments. Supported by fire from Allied warships and heavy bombers, amphibious forces poured ashore shortly before noon on June 11.

Pantelleria's defenders fired a few artillery rounds at the approaching landing craft, and a small number of Italian troops offered resistance as the assaulting forces consolidated their positions. Kesselring's headquarters learned from the daily noon air reconnaissance that Italian artillery had ceased firing. Admiral Gino Pavesi, Pantelleria's commandant, had previously rejected two Allied demands that the island surrender. Nonetheless, at 12:34 that afternoon, he quit the fight, notifying his superiors that the lack of fresh water compelled unconditional surrender both for the sake of his forces and the island's civilian inhabitants. After a minimal effort, Allied forces captured 12,000 Italian troops, seventy-eight German communication specialists, and airfields vital for the support of Operation HUSKY.

Some German accounts have disputed the Italian explanation of Pantelleria's brief defense, rejecting the claim that a water shortage forced the island's surrender. Kesselring received reports from a German officer commanding a machine-gun unit on the island claiming that underground springs were available to the defenders.

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221 Oberbefehlshaber Süd Führungsausschuss, "Ic-Meldung (Erdlage) bis 11.6. mittags," OB Süd, Führungsausschuss/Ic: Ic-Meldungen v. 18.5.-30.9.1943, RH19 X (Heeresgruppe C), Band 9 (BAMA: Microfiche), 36-37; Mussolini, Fall of Mussolini, 16-17.

222 Siegfried Westphal's comment that "the population and garrison of the island found in the rock caves secure protection against the air attacks and an acute shortage of water was impossible." This German staff officer professed being perplexed as to why Mussolini would permit surrender knowing that the reasons offered were flagrantly false. Westphal claimed in his memoirs that Pantelleria
Allied forces found that their attacks had destroyed the island's fresh water plant and wells. While a supply of potable water remained for Italian troops, Pavesi had not manufactured his complaint that the civilian populace was suffering. Pantelleria's inhabitants, already short of food, had endured three long summer days of constant Allied bombardment without water.\textsuperscript{223}

Nonetheless, this Italian surrender of a heavily fortified position did not auger well for German forces cast as Italy's defenders, substitutes for the Italian military, which had suffered material decline since the ill-fated invasion of Greece in 1940. This quick surrender also damaged morale throughout the Italian armed forces.\textsuperscript{224} Moreover, German estimates of their Italian counterparts' combat capability and will to continue the war fell sharply after the island's quick capitulation. Some of Sicily's German defenders later recounted that the surrender of Pantelleria was "not a good omen" for them. They knew that if their Italian possessed underground streams sufficient to take care of both the garrison's and the population's requirements, a claim buttressed immediately after the war by General Paul Deichmann's somewhat confused account of the operation. Mussolini himself stated, while head of the Salo Republic, his belief that Admiral Pavesi was a traitor who did not even wait for French-manufactured water distillation equipment to reach the island. Paul Deichmann, "The Italian Campaign, Ch. 1," trans. Janet E. Dewey, in 	extit{Foreign Military Study MS T-1a}. (Carlisle, Pa. and Washington, D.C.: U.S. Military History Institute and Center for Military History, [1948] 1989), 30-32; Baum and Weichold, 	extit{Krieg der "Achsenmächte,"} 334-35; Mussolini, 	extit{Fall of Mussolini}, 18; Westphal, 	extit{Heer in Fesseln:}, 219; Siegfried Westphal, 	extit{Errinnerungen} (Mainz: v. Hase & Koehler Verlag, 1975), 215.

\textsuperscript{223}Bragadin, 	extit{Italian Navy}, 257-58.

\textsuperscript{224}Mussolini, 	extit{Fall of Mussolini}, 26.
comrades fought with the enthusiasm of their comrades defending Pantelleria and Lampedusa, which had surrendered to a stranded British air-sea rescue pilot on June 12, Sicily would be a lonely battleground for German troops. 

ASSAULT ON SICILY

The bombardment and invasion of Pantelleria introduced Field Marshal Wolfram von Richthofen to the enormous power of the Allied Mediterranean air forces. Richthofen arrived from Russia on June 12 and assumed command of Luftflotte 2, freeing Kesselring to act as theater commander. After Pantelleria's ordeal, Richthofen's meager Luftwaffe units faced an aerial onslaught aimed at

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225 Gerhard Schreiber charts falling German esteem for Italian capabilities as well as Hitler's preparation for future disparagement of them in a recent volume detailing German war crimes in occupied Italy. As of this moment, however, no significant study exists documenting the political, racial, and military elements that led to this state of affairs. Given the irrationally high status accorded the Italians by Hitler as late as August, 1939, the absence of a study tracking the subsequent decline still hinders a complete understanding of the German-Italian relationship during the Second World War. Deichmann, T1a Ch. 1, 32; Enno von Rintelen, "The Italian Campaign, Ch. 2: The Italian Command and the Armed Forces in the first half of 1943," trans. Janet E. Dewey, in Foreign Military Study MS T-1a. (Carlisle, Pa. and Washington, D.C.: U.S. Military History Institute and Center for Military History, [1947] 1989), 10; Raymond De Belot, The Struggle for the Mediterranean 1939-1945, trans. James A. Field (Jr.) (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), 209-10; Haupt, Kriegschauplatz Italien, 21; Rintelen, "Der Feldzug in Italien," 8-11; Salewski, Seekriegsleitung, 362; Gerhard Schreiber, Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen in Italien, 22-25; Johannes Steinhoff, Die Strasse von Messina (München: List Verlag, 1969), 34; Joachim Lemelsen, Walter Fries and Wilhelm Schaeffer, 29. Division (Bad Nauheim: Podzun-Verlag, 1960), 266. As early as May, 1943, Hitler blamed the 1939 Italian declaration of non-belligerency for the outbreak of war. His statements that he was concerned solely for the Duce also did not bode well for the treatment of Italians, whom Hitler felt were a bastard, mixed-race. Domarus, Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945, II/2:2016.
critical targets throughout his command. This renewed bombardment forced Richthofen to pull back the forces that he counted on most to fend off an Allied amphibious landing. The pullback of Luftwaffe and Italian air force long-range aircraft from Sicily to airfields in Italy and southern France significantly reduced the Axis counterinvasion capability.

Allied airmen rained blows on their opponents, pounding Sicily’s airfields long before the first Allied soldier set foot in Sicily. A meager 120 to 130 German pilots rose to engage between 300 and 500 Allied aircraft assigned Sicily’s reduction. Lack of fuel, engines, and construction troops to rebuild the island’s airfields after each day’s bombardment seriously handicapped Luftwaffe operations. The absence of radar warning further stymied the German fighter force’s ability to fend off the stream of attackers.\(^{226}\)

The incessant aerial assault also prevented Luftwaffe reconnaissance flights over North Africa. The fifty planes available for this mission confronted the impossible assignment of observing more than 3,000 miles of vulnerable Mediterranean coastline. Units flying reconnaissance missions encountered strong aerial opposition and suffered heavy losses.

The Luftwaffe’s remaining bombers managed only a handful of attacks against

\(^{226}\)Johannes Steinhoff, commander of Jagdgeschwader 77, vividly recounts the desperate air defense of Sicily in *Die Strasse von Messina*. His memoir details the difficulty of defending Sicily with worn-out planes, exhausted pilots, and inadequately staffed ground crews. Constant attacks on German airfields quickly forced this scarecrow force to retreat to the Italian mainland. See: Johannes Steinhoff, *Die Strasse von Messina* (München: List Verlag, 1969).
North African ports filled to the brim with Allied shipping. Constant aerial combat devoured the German air reinforcements dispatched to Sicily at an alarming rate. In May 1943, Hitler sent Adolf Galland, head of the German fighter arm, to supervise the air defense of Sicily. Even the presence of this inspirational airman could not counterbalance the odds faced by his pilots. German pilots flew from rough airfields using equipment leftover from operations in Tunisia. During Galland's six weeks of command, *Luftwaffe* combat units suffered a debilitating sixty percent loss rate. Combat casualties and transfers from Sicily to other sectors reduced *Luftwaffe* strength on the island from 415 aircraft in May to a mere 175 planes on July 10, date of the Allied landing. Allied air assaults eventually compelled the withdrawal of all Axis air units on Sicily.\(^{227}\)

**EMBATTLED ISLE: ANOTHER SICILIAN CAMPAIGN**

Sicily, the Allied target in July 1943, encompassed an area of 10,000 square miles. Its triangular sides varied in length. The 180-mile-long northern shore was Sicily's longest coastal boundary. The 170 miles of the southwestern shoreline nearly matched it. The eastern edge, smallest of the three, stretched a distance of 125 miles. The harsh Sicilian climate and barren soil restricted vegetational growth,

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creating an island whose value in 1943 consisted, as it had for the armies of Rome, Carthage, and Islam, of its location astride the shipping routes of the central Mediterranean.

Rough terrain covered the island. The rocky plains of Sicily's southeastern tip gradually rise to become the imposing heights of the Caronie Mountains, which hover over the northeastern apex of the Sicilian triangle. By choosing landing beaches on Sicily's southwestern tip, Allied forces shortened the invasion fleet's voyage but ensured themselves a bitter uphill fight for the conquest of Sicily.228

The Allied fleet could not hide its invasion preparations in the North African ports. On July 5, air reconnaissance revealed a concentration of hospital ships, sure sign of an impending invasion. An Italian agent passed on valuable information locating Montgomery's British Eighth Army near ports favoring the invasion of Sicily. II. Fliegerkorps reconnaissance flights detected the approaching armada at 4:30 p.m. on July 9. Reports informed OKW that five separate convoys, each with 150-180 landing craft and covered by a strong escort, were headed toward Sicily. Further information on the flotilla's progress made its way to Axis commanders on Sicily the remainder of the day.229

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228Garland and Smyth, Sicily and the Surrender of Italy, 52-53.

Despite advance notice, the fleet’s departure and apparent destination surprised Adolf Hitler. He had expected a move against Greece and the Balkans. Fear of a move against the Balkans long dominated German strategic plans for the theater, continuing even after the commitment of substantial Allied forces to Sicily. Hitler belatedly acted on the reports, placing the German 1. Fallschirmjäger Division on alert. This enabled the unit’s rapid movement from southern France to Sicily, where it was to fight its counterpart, the British 1st Airborne Division, upon landing.\(^{230}\)

On July 9, Allied air forces gave Kesselring additional evidence that the Allies had targeted Sicily. ULTRA intercepts during June had revealed that Kesselring’s headquarters was situated with the II. Fliegerkorps in Taormina’s San Domenico Hotel. A daring daylight raid demolished the facility, inflicting heavy casualties on the command staff. Kesselring once more escaped injury, having visited Rome that day. Nonetheless, the loss of communications with this advanced headquarters seriously the German response to the invasion the next day.\(^{231}\)

### INVASION AND COUNTERATTACKS

At 11:30 p.m. on July 9, the Hermann Göring Panzer Division’s II Panzer


Regiment, positioned near Caltagirone, Sicily, received alarming reports of paratroop attacks on division positions. Radio messages announced assaults on the divisional artillery group and antiaircraft fire at Allied air transports. The regiment readied its quick response unit at 1:00 a.m. on July 10, 1943. Commanders increased the level of alert at 3:10 a.m. after receiving reports that paratroopers had dropped at San Pietro airfield. At 5:00 a.m., after other units reported viewing transports unloading invasion troops at Gela, commanders dispatched a tank company to conduct reconnaissance west of its position and to link up with an armored engineer battalion positioned east of Gela airfield. Troops conducting this reconnaissance took prisoners from Allied airborne forces. War had come once more to the men of the Hermann Göring Division.232

The Allied soldiers struggling to seize a foothold on Sicily came ashore under a split command. British and Dominion troops landed at the southeastern apex of the Sicilian triangle. The British 5th and 50th infantry divisions, supported by 3 Commando, formed the initial British assault southwest of Syracuse. At Cape Passero, which forms Sicily's extreme southern tip, forces of the 231st Infantry Brigade, the British 51st and Canadian 1st infantry divisions landed. Royal Marine Commandos 40 and 41 provided defense for the extreme right flank of the 8th Army. Airborne forces, already engaged with German and Italian opponents, consisted of

the British 1st Glider Regiment, part of the 1st Airborne Division, and the 505th Parachute Regiment (reinforced) of the U. S. 82nd Airborne Division. The American 7th Army, commanded by General George S. Patton, landed along Sicily’s southwestern rim. The untried 45th Infantry Division hurried from its landing craft on the American right while the experienced 1st Infantry Division, reinforced by American Rangers, assaulted Gela, a port vital to the campaign’s success. At Licata on the American left, regiments of the 3rd Infantry Division dropped ramps and stormed Sicily’s beaches. Reserve forces still at sea, readied themselves to exploit initial landings and drive quickly into the Sicilian interior once assault troops had cleared the beaches.

Confusion reigned in Berlin as reports of the Allied landing arrived. Luftwaffe air reconnaissance between 1348 and 1840 hours revealed that the seaways from Licata to Syracuse were crowded with ninety-four freighters, one tanker, forty-two LSTs, and 160 large and 248 small landing craft. A battleship, two cruisers, eighteen destroyers, and three Kanonenboote escorted them. Numerous landing craft and escorts had also entered Augusta’s harbor. The bay between Augusta and Syracuse sheltered 100-200 ships, twenty to thirty of which were large ships at anchor. Shuttle traffic was observed between the ships and coast. Luftwaffe observers counted 100-150 vessels in the port of Syracuse and adjacent coastal area with German naval sources providing similar intelligence. Given the vast scale of
the Allied undertaking, the confusion in Berlin seems mystifying.\textsuperscript{233}

Nonetheless, \textit{OKW} hesitated in providing information to Hitler, unsure of the scale of the operation and its purpose. A clear picture emerged by midnight of the invasion day. Troops had located seven separate landing sites. Italian forces were reported as putting up strong resistance and the two German divisions were moving to bring their forces into battle. Reconnaissance disclosed the daunting scale of the Allied undertaking, revealing that a second wave of Allied landing ships was unloading men and cargoes, while a third was advancing from the area of Bizerta north towards Sicily.

Despite evidence of a large-scale Allied commitment to Sicily, Hitler exhibited the same uncertainty that would immobilize him in June 1944. Earlier \textit{OKW} reports exaggerating Allied strength and clever deception operations now bore fruit. The \textit{Führer} agonized over whether the stroke against Sicily was the main Allied operation or was a clever diversionary move before an operation against the Balkans. This confusion lasted for several days as the critical moments for a decisive response to \textit{HUSKY} slipped away.\textsuperscript{234}

The invasion found Mussolini near Lake Bracciano, north of Rome. Field


Marshal Kesselring, General von Rintelen, and General Antonio Ambrosio had joined the Italian leader as he inspected the progress made by the new ‘M’ (Militia) Armored Division, still in its early stages of training. The Duce seemed his old self as he inspected the recently-supplied German armor. He rushed back to Rome upon receiving news of the invasion, as did King Umberto, who had slipped away to his country estate.

Facing a deteriorating situation in Sicily, Italian officials mounted a concerted effort to pry loose German air reinforcements for the embattled island. When Bastianini’s approach on July 12 failed, Mussolini personally appealed to Hitler. Nonetheless, despite the crisis facing his nation, the Duce refrained from requesting German ground troops for Italy’s defense. Rintelen reported to Berlin that preservation of Italian prestige at home, the cost of additional German divisions to the Italian economy, and Mussolini’s faulty assessment of Italian combat capability kept him from asking for German ground forces.

While the two Axis leaders responded hesitantly to the invasion, fighting raged in Sicily. Montgomery’s British 8th Army had landed and driven north toward the volcanic slopes of Mount Etna. Patton’s American 7th Army had similarly

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236Mussolini, Fall of Mussolini, 32; Deakin, Brutal Friendship, 371, 372-373; Plehwe, End of an Alliance, 26; Rintelen, Mussolini als Bundesgenosse, 207.
assaulted Sicily's southwestern coast with the twin goals of capturing vital supply ports and protecting Montgomery's left wing.

While most American landings went off without a hitch, U.S. Army Rangers found themselves locked in the deadly embrace of their Italian opponents. Italian defenders of the 429th Coastal Defense Battalion fought fiercely from their prepared positions, inflicting severe casualties on the unsuspecting Rangers. The Italians suffered 192 men killed and wounded. This and similar firefights proved that well-led and prepared Italian soldiers remained dangerous foes, even though the cream of Italian manpower had long since vanished. 237

On July 11, German and Italian troops launched a stinging counterattack against the veteran U.S. 1st Infantry Division, which was consolidating its beachhead at Gela. The Italian Livorno Infantry Division's men and the antiquated French-built Renault tanks of Mobile Group E bitterly contested ownership of the port city, while elements of the Hermann Göring Panzer Division moved against 1st Infantry Division positions further east. Although intended to be a coordinated counterstroke, spotty communications disrupted coordination among the attacking columns.

Paratroopers of the U. S. 82nd Airborne Division kept up a withering fire that forced the Italian infantry to ground, leaving the Italian armor to continue its advance in a highly vulnerable state. The lightly-armed airborne troops relied on naval gunfire to beat off the attack, while on their left flank, a joint Ranger-Engineer

Garland and Smyth, Sicily and the Surrender of Italy, 137-38; Mitcham and Stauffenberg, Battle of Sicily, 98-99.
force met the second wing of the Italian armored assault. Small arms fire and naval
gun support obliged Italian infantrymen to desert their tanks, which advanced into
Gela. The unprotected tanks fought a series of sharp actions with Gela’s American
defenders, retreating only after losing three of their number.

German attackers joined the fighting five hours later than originally
anticipated. General Frido von Senger und Etterlin, German liaison with the Italian
6th Army, attempted to push the assault ahead. Despite Senger’s intervention, the
division’s attack stalled when it came under the combined fire of American warships
and the defending paratroops. Later efforts by the Goring Division’s vaunted Tiger
company stalled after breakdowns prevented the tanks from advancing down the
narrow road assigned them. A second effort nearly broke through to the weakly-held
beach, faltering only when an American infantry force arrived in the nick of time. At
this point, having lost half of its original tank complement, the German assault
collapsed when the men making this last effort broke and fled the field of battle.238

As the fighting showed, the Anglo-American landings succeeded because the
invaders fought with determination to keep their hard-won gains. Winning
beachheads on Sicily was a difficult task for men making their first amphibious
assault against a contested shore. A combination of luck, fierce resistance, excellent
naval gunfire support, and the fruits of Ultra determined the outcome. Had German

238Garland and Smyth, Sicily and the Surrender of Italy, 147-53; Schröder,
Italiens Kriegsaustritt, 163-64; Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, "The Sicilian
Campaign Part II," An Cosantoir 10, no. 7 (July 1950):312; Fridolin von Senger und
Etterlin, "SICILY (Note by General von Senger)," (LHCMA, 1948), 2.
and Italian forces, diverted by Allied deception operations to Sardinia, Corsica, and the Balkans, been present on Sicily, catastrophe may well have overtaken the strung-out American units defending the beachheads.

The failure to defeat the landing at the water's edge cannot be assigned solely to poor Italian performance. The doleful Axis counterattack shows that this fiasco resulted from the dearth of first-rate German and Italian combat troops. Moreover, Kesselring had insisted that German forces be scattered across Sicily, a move opposed by Italian and German officers. This strategy deprived Axis counterattacks of the mass necessary to destroy the far-flung Allied landing sites, given the two German divisions' lack of transport.239

BITTER BATTLES: FIGHTING FOR SICILY

The battle for Sicily reflected Hitler's continued indecision concerning operations in Italy. Abandoning Sicily without a fight was a bitter pill for Hitler to swallow. He had to consider the effect that surrendering Sicily would have on Italian public opinion, already teetering on the brink of collapse. Nonetheless, the developing campaign took on a life of its own, gradually pulling in German air, sea, and ground forces as Italian and German defenders successfully denied Allied forces a swift conquest of Sicily.

Luftwaffe forces attempted penetrations of Allied fighters guarding the

invasion fleet from July 10 to July 12. Richthofen's planes sank several ships, but German losses mounted after Allied aircraft occupied newly-won airfields on Sicily. Nine days after the landings, twenty-five Allied fighter squadrons were operating from Sicilian airbases. Allied fighter sorties rose rapidly to 1,200 a day, outnumbering German efforts that never totaled more than 300. Moreover, losses of 150 aircraft in the four days after the invasion wrecked German air power over Sicily. The Luftwaffe ordered Me-110s used as fighter cover for attacking bombers, a move that demonstrated the decline in German air strength. Twin-engine Me-110s had been withdrawn from similar duties after proving obsolescent while operating against Britain in 1940.

German air transports rushed men and supplies to Sicily until Allied air forces made the efforts suicidal. By a dint of a herculean labor, German airborne forces first reached the island on July 13, 1943. Their arrival did not pass unnoticed by the Allies, who greeted them shortly thereafter with a saturation bombing attack. Allied air raids on German air bases soon after forced German squadrons into a hasty withdrawal to unprepared Italian airfields in southern Italy.\textsuperscript{240} Axis naval forces made vain attempts to repel the invasion. Although the Italian navy prepared to intervene, the battle fleet never departed its harbors. The

superiority of Allied naval forces, the absence of fighter cover, and the distance from north Italian ports to Sicily forestalled the Italian naval forces' swift movement to battle. The Italian navy's two attacks with surface units, nighttime sorties by Italian cruisers on August 4 and 7, failed owing to Ultra's invisible hand. The warships broke off the missions before contacting their intended targets.  

Axis submarines attacked transports carrying Allied troops to Sicily. Four German and ten Italian submarines in the western Mediterranean moved rapidly to join the single German U-boat in the Strait of Messina. One German and four Italian submarines in the eastern Mediterranean, supported by two vessels from Toulon, shifted operations to Sicilian waters.  

Ignorance of the position of Axis minefields hindered German and Italian subs. An Italian submarine sank the 10,000 ton British cruiser Cleopatra on July 11. German naval forces later claimed the sinking of a cruiser, two destroyers, and a motor gun boat, amounting to 38,000 BRT. Submarines also reported damaging one destroyer, a cruiser, several motor torpedo boats, and two steamers, totaling 13,000 BRT. They paid a prohibitive price for their few successes. Allied antisubmarine

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242 KTB SKL, 47:198-99.

243 Morison, Sicily - Salerno - Anzio, 40-42.
forces destroyed six Italian and two German submarines.  

Facing a disaster on the ground, Kesselring told Berlin that Sicily could not be held without substantial German reinforcements. Hitler responded by strengthening the German defenders of Sicily. The 1st Fallschirmjäger Division received orders that rushed it to the island. Air transport quickly carried the 3rd Fallschirmjäger Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Heilmann to Sicily, while the remainder of the division transited Italy by rail. Similar instructions hastened the 20th Panzergrenadier Division, moving south from Eboli near Salerno since July 8, to Sicily. The divisional advanced guard crossed the Strait of Messina on July 14 and reinforced the 15th Panzergrenadier Division, which had been decimated by heavy losses during the first round of fighting. 

244Radio Intercept No. 2121/12/888/764 (12 July 1943), RG 38 Records of the Chief of Naval Operations, ND 957001, Translations of Intercepted Enemy Radio Traffic and Miscellaneous World War II Documentation, 1940-1946, Box 74, Translations of German Intercepts Chronological Files 23 June 1943 - 6 August 1943 (NAII), 1; Radio Intercept No. 2158/12/889/300 (12 July 1943), RG 38 Records of the Chief of Naval Operations, ND 957001, Translations of Intercepted Enemy Radio Traffic and Miscellaneous World War II Documentation, 1940-1946, Box 74, Translations of German Intercepts Chronological Files 23 June 1943 - 6 August 1943 (NAII), 1; Der Oberbefehlshaber Süd Führungsabteilung Ic, "Erfolgsmeldung über die Kämpfe in Sizilien v. 10.7. - 17.8.43," RH19 X (Heeresgruppe C), Band 12 (BAMA: Mikrofiche), 104-06; Helmut Fechter and Gerhard Hümmelchen, Seekriegsatlas Mittelmeer Schwarzes Meer 1940-1943 (München: J. F. Lehmanns, 1972), 106; Ruge, Der Seekrieg, 334.

245C.M.H.Q. Historical Section, "Special Interrogation Report, General Richard Heidrich, Commander First Parachute Division, Commander 1 Parachute Corps. (13 Nov 46)," U. S. Army Military History Institute Archive (Carlisle, Pa.), 1; Lemelsen, Fries and Schaeffer, 29. Division, 266, 267; Edwards, German Airborne Troops, 116; Schröder, Italiens Kriegsaustritt, 166.
Meanwhile, combat in Sicily quickly consumed the Italian divisions’ remaining strength. Of the units that did not surrender or melt away into the population, only the tattered remnants of the Assietta and Aosta infantry divisions fought on alongside the Germans. With collapse threatening, Kesselring and Roatta agreed on July 15 to establish the main line astride Mount Etna, substantially reducing their defensive perimeter. The front gradually stabilized as the Hermann Göring Panzer Division fended off the main British thrust, which Montgomery intended to quickly drive up Sicily’s southeastern coast and grab Messina. Reinforcements from the 1st Fallschirmjäger Division slowed the British assault. The 15th Panzergrenadier Division, joined by the remaining Italian troops and 29th Panzergrenadier Division, likewise stalled the American attack on the center and right of the German line.

While fighting raged on Sicily, Hitler and Mussolini conducted their final meeting on July 19 during which Mussolini served as leader of an undivided Italian state. Mussolini met Hitler at Treviso airport, after which the Duce escorted the Führer to Feltre, an hour and a half journey by rail. The Chief of the Italian General Staff, Ambrosio, had briefed Mussolini concerning the bankrupt state of Italy’s military capabilities. Ambrosio extracted a promise from the ailing dictator that he would confront Hitler with the news that Italy could not continue war.

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246 Rintelen, T1a Ch. 2, 11.

247 Mussolini, Fall of Mussolini, 49.
The conference seemed a promising opportunity for passing this information to Hitler, given the limited number of participants. Field Marshal Keitel, German ambassador to Italy von Mackensen, and Generals Warlimont and von Rintelen represented Germany. General Ambrosio, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry Bastianini, Italian ambassador to Berlin Alfieri, and Badoglio’s representative, Colonel Cesare Cordero di Montezemolo, attended for Italy.

Hitler conducted the conference as if he were the sole participant, using the convocation at Feltre’s Villa Gaggià to reiterate his warped world view. Launching into a two-hour soliloquy, the Führer dismissed fears of American war production tipping the tide against Germany. Although the Axis had failed to conquer the Caucasian oil fields, victory required nothing but summoning the will to fight and using the resources already available to the Axis. Promising a revived U-boat campaign to isolate the Allied armies in Sicily, he rejected sending Luftwaffe reinforcements to Italy. Hitler criticized Italian ground facilities for German squadrons already deployed. He warned that further exertions would tie down air resources vital to defending iron ore convoys from Sweden as well as the German factories producing the planes that the Italians demanded.

Addressing Sicily, Hitler continued his monologue, nourishing fantasies of going on the offensive and retaking the island. The situation simply required that the Italians fight to the last man while Germany rebuilt its Panzer forces. He proposed that Italian troops be concentrated for the defense of southern Italy, knowing that this deployment would empty north Italy of Axis troops and force
Italian agreement to German movement into that region. Incredibly, Hitler did not halt his remarks even when an Italian officer gave Mussolini news that Allied bombers had struck Rome for the first time. Instead, the Führer resumed his wide-ranging address, preventing the meeting from taking up issues that might have challenged his far-fetched arguments.

Despite his belief that the presentation had brought his allies firmly back into the Axis camp, nothing of the like emerged from the conference. Hitler’s lengthy monologue did not garner support for his strategic views. This time Mussolini did not fall under the sway of Hitler’s delusions. Von Rintelen claimed later that Mussolini told Hitler that Italy could not continue in the war. Reports after the conference state that the Duce spoke openly of ending the German alliance by mid-September. Nonetheless, Mussolini’s failure to defend Italian interests and fatalistic silence in the face of Hitler’s calumnies against the Italians turned many officials against the Italian dictator and contributed materially to his overthrow.248

Events in Sicily after the conference confirmed Mussolini’s growing suspicion of his erstwhile German allies. He had accepted Keitel’s demands that the German 76th and 305th infantry divisions move to southern Italy, a measure meant to secure German lines of communications with their forces fighting in Sicily. Moreover, General Hans Hube had arrived on Sicily and assumed command of

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248 Germany. Auswärtiges Amt, ADAP, E-VI, 1. Mai - 30. September 1943, 264-75; Rintelen, "Der Feldzug in Italien," 10-11; Rintelen, T1a Ch. 2, 12-13; Warlimont, Im Hauptquartier der deutschen Wehrmacht, 353-55; Calvocoressi, Wint and Pritchard, Total War, 398.
German forces there during the night of July 16-17. His new position created an awkward command structure, as the arrival of German reinforcements gradually squeezed out remnants of the Italian divisions from the front. German units, as they had in North Africa and Russia, provoked hostilities with Italian forces by stealing transport from their allies. By July 25, Italian units had all but disappeared from combat, and Guzzoni's role as supposed commander of Sicilian operations ended. Admitting defeat on July 31, *Comando Supremo* ordered Guzzoni to subordinate himself to Hube's command. Guzzoni complied with his orders, and after August 1, released his command authority over the German presence on the island.249

Rommel's appointment on July 15 to head a newly-formed *Army Group B* (*AGB*), whose staff set up shop in Bavaria, would not have elicited Italian confidence, had Italians been told of this formation's mission. Hitler ordered the new formation to ready itself to takeover north Italy and secure German communications throughout central and north Italy after an Italian defection to the Allied side.250

DENYING THE ALLIES VICTORY: THE GERMAN EVACUATION OF SICILY

Hube eliminated his command from Italian oversight just events broke like a violent summer storm. The Fascist Grand Council and King Victor Emmanuel removed Mussolini as head of government on July 25, replacing him with an


250Fraser, *Knight's Cross*, 439, 440-49.
implacable foe of Germany, Marshal Pietro Badoglio. The new Italian leader nourished little affection for the Duce, who had made the Marshal the scapegoat when the invasion of Greece went awry in 1940. Mussolini had not cared that Badoglio had opposed the venture. The new government in Rome restored the king to his post as head of the military, while retaining Ambrosio as Chief of Staff of Comando Supremo and Roatta as Chief of the Army General Staff. 251

Hitler, despite having expected this turn of events, was surprised by the coup. A policy of neglect had kept the two nations from establishing regular communications. The German embassy in Rome had fed the Führer a steady stream of information highlighting the positive aspects of the situation right up to Mussolini's fall. Hitler had no one to blame but himself for this misinformation, because he possessed a low tolerance for bad news. Direct communication with Italian officials came from less-than-capable envoys like Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler. Only after the fall did Hitler's military aides, Keitel and Jodl, find time in their hectic schedules to visit Italy and judge conditions there for themselves. 252

Badoglio's accession to power fulfilled Hitler's worst-case scenario. Badoglio and the king assured Hitler that Italy would continue as Germany's faithful ally. Nonetheless, if the new Italian government turned against the Axis cause, German

251 Rintelen, "Der Feldzug in Italien," 11.

252 Deakin, Brutal Friendship, 24.
forces in Sicily would be trapped in an island prison. Allied forces would need only to accept a German surrender to complete their triumph. Hitler received news of Mussolini’s overthrow with great trepidation, proposing to redeem the situation by having the 3rd Panzergrenadier Division, stationed north of the capital city, storm Rome. The 2nd Fallschirmjäger Division, located in southern France, would seize Rome’s airfields and isolate the city from the south. In concert with the descent on Rome, meant to capture the new Italian government, Hitler proposed abandoning Sicily and withdrawing his troops with little more than their uniforms and side arms. Naval units would seize or destroy the Italian fleet, while securing harbors vital for staging future operations.

Additional steps would be taken to secure the army’s safe withdrawal from Sicily. The 1st SS Panzer Division would depart Russia and provide an assault force in Italy. Rommel’s divisions would secure the vital French and Italian Alpine passes, through which German units would pour into Italy. Although the actions taken to defend Rome by its new government dissuaded Hitler from immediately marching on the city, he ignored the protests of the new Italian government and

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253 For Hitler’s response to the immediate crisis with Italy and information concerning his inordinate attention to the details of this projected operation, see the minutes of his Evening conference of 25 July 1943 in: Hitlers Lagebesprechungen, 309-25; Felix Gilbert, Hitler Directs His War (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1982), 47-52. See also Rintelen, “Der Feldzug in Italien,” 12.

254 Comando Supremo encircled Rome with five divisions, including the “Militia” Armored Division, now commanded by Lieutenant General Conte di Bergolo. This step-son of King Victor Emmanuel ensured that the best division left to Comando Supremo would serve the new government. Furthermore, the Italian
took the crucial step of rapidly moving eight German divisions from southern France and the Tyrol into north Italy.

These decisive actions laid the foundation for all else that transpired in Italy. When Italy finally cast aside its alliance with Nazi Germany, the industrial and agricultural areas of north Italy rested securely in German hands. German units there also controlled the Italian railway net, by which Germany could supply its forces in the south. If for no other reasons than these, the occupation of northern Italy justified the earnest effort expended in defending Sicily during July and August 1943.

Nonetheless, Hitler still worried about an Allied attack on Greece. His directive of July 26, 1943 showed that even at this advanced stage of the campaign, German attention focused on the vulnerability of the Balkans. He expected a move against the line of the Peloponese - Crete - Rhodes, perhaps in conjunction with a stroke against the eastern Adriatic coastline. To ward off these dangers, Oberbefehlshaber Südost assumed broader responsibilities in the Balkans, ‘supporting’

army quickly disbanded or assigned new officers to the remaining Fascist militia forces. Rintelen, T1a Ch. 2, 15.

the Italian *11th Army*, which occupied the region. Orders on August 3 and 8 prepared for a switch of sides by the Italians, which would have left German forces dangerously exposed to being cut off and left to wither on the vine.

Throughout August, Badoglio's embryonic government met with its German ally. On August 6, Foreign Minister Ribbentrop joined his new Italian counterpart, Raffaele Guariglia, for discussions at the Tarvis train station. During Keitel and Ambrosio's military conference, Ambrosio demanded the return of Italian control over railway security. He cast a wide net, hoping to catch the new German divisions entering Italy. Keitel rejected placing recently-arrived German units under Italian command. He deflected the Italian by insisting that currently-unemployed Italian units be moved south in preparation for the expected Allied invasion.

Roatta, unhappy with the first meeting's results, requested further discussions, which took place at Bologna on August 15. This time Hitler's other military assistant, Jodl, represented *OKW*, while Field Marshal Erwin Rommel joined the assemblage as *Army Group B* commander. Discussions again centered on Italian demands that all German divisions in Italy be subordinated to *Comando*.

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Supremo. The Italian army Chief of Staff took personal umbrage at German queries concerning the movement of two Italian divisions into the Alps, near the line of the ‘Wallo Alpino del Littorio,’ or Alpine fortifications. Roatta also argued for the return to Italy of four Italian divisions occupying southern France.

Jodl took the offensive and insisted that Kesselring command all German units serving in central and southern Italy, including Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. His new position would require him only to report to the Italian king, effectively ending Comando Supremo control over German forces in Italy. In like vein, Rommel would control German and Italian troops located in the north. The Italians grasped that agreeing to the German demand that Nazi troops be freed from Italian command was equivalent to turning Italy over to German control. Roatta rejected the German conditions, and nothing concrete resulted from the discussions, other than a widening of the breach between the two allies.258

Meanwhile, Hitler prepared his plans to seize and defend Italy. On August 8, he summoned General Heinrich von Vietinghoff, assigned to Rommel’s staff in early August, and gave him command of the newly-formed German 10th Army. Vietinghoff assumed control of German divisions assembling in southern Italy units of the XIV Panzer Corps, which was disengaging from battle and attempting to escape Sicily.259

258Germany. Auswärtiges Amt, ADAP, E-VI, 1. Mai - 30. September 1943, 412-413; Kesselring, A Soldier's Record, 207-09; Rommel Papers, 441-42; Rintelen, "Der Feldzug in Italien," 14; Fraser, Knight's Cross, 444-45; Rintelen, T1a Ch. 2, 16-17.

259Heinrich von Vietinghoff, "Assessment of the situation by the High Command as of August 1943," OCMH MS # D-117, trans. Janet E. Dewey (Austria,
On August 10, the German dictator bowed to necessity and approved the retreat from Sicily. Jodl proposed the evacuation, given the declining strength of German units, the difficulties in provisioning those forces, and the certainty that transport in Italy would come to standstill when either OPERATION EICHE or ACHSE got underway. Admiral Dönitz opposed voluntarily surrendering, believing that it would free enemy naval forces for use against southern Italy or the Balkans. Hitler’s naval commander also argued that falling back to the mainland meant the inevitable loss of Calabria and Apulia. Hitler, for once worried about his troops remaining in an exposed position, agreed that such developments were possible, but given the uncertainty in German-Italian relations, a pullback was necessary.260

The Axis evacuation of Sicily still mars the record of the Allied generals tasked with the island’s capture. Ultra offered tantalizing tidbits of information that gave Eisenhower and Alexander early warning of Axis intentions. Kesselring, having witnessed the Tunisian fiasco, refused to duplicate it in Sicily. Early in the campaign, he secured Sicily’s rear door against it suddenly swinging shut and trapping his forces.261 Kesselring tipped his hand on July 14 by appointing Colonel Ernst-Guenther Baade as commander of ‘Fortress Messina,’ with orders to ready his


troops for an evacuation. Baade received wide-ranging powers over the district, which later ensured a smooth withdrawal. Acting as commandant, he controlled the anti-aircraft batteries protecting the narrow passage through which men and equipment slipped back to mainland Italy.²⁶²

The evacuation succeeded because special staffs made a prompt and effective effort to establish and maintain a ferry service using ad hoc methods almost as varied as the British sealift staged from Dunkirk's beaches in 1940.²⁶³ The presence of roving Allied fighter-bombers forced most evacuations to be conducted at night. Kesselring insisted that the marshaling points on Messina's beaches be covered by strong concentrations of German flak guns. The Luftwaffe commander, Richthofen, so strongly opposed the measure that tears of rage filled his eyes upon being ordered to comply with Kesselring's directive.²⁶⁴

Nonetheless, the Luftwaffe made a laudable effort to cover the evacuation. Summoning up its few remaining pilots and aircraft, German squadrons flew 150 sorties a day during the crucial interval. In comparison with the Allies's 1,200 missions daily, it was miraculous that the Luftwaffe's all-out effort was not brushed off.


²⁶⁴ ObM Conference, 9-11 August, 1943, 381-82; Westphal, Errinnerungen, 217.
aside and the German retreat halted by Allied air power.  

The Sicilian campaign concluded on August 17 when the last three tanks of the Hermann Göring Panzer Division's II Panzer Regiment crossed the Strait of Messina. Lieutenant Thatenhorst's tired men departed with mixed feelings. Although they felt the sting of defeat, they could not help but remark on their good fortune at escaping Sicily. Further dangers awaited them on mainland Italy, but the men of this combat-tested division departed believing that they could meet and best any Allied divisions that they would confront.  

Between August 1-17, 1943, Italian and German naval forces conducting OPERATION LEHRGANG evacuated 39,569 German troops, 9,605 vehicles, forty-seven tanks, ninety-four artillery pieces, 2,000 tons of munitions and fuel, 15,000 tons of other war materials. 62,000 Italian soldiers also escaped from Sicily with 227 vehicles and forty-one artillery pieces.  

More than fifty years after the events on Sicily, this successful evacuation still mystifies observers. Why and how were the Germans permitted to slip out of the noose prepared for them? German forces benefitted from General Alexander's lax

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265 Cooper, German Air Force, 290.

266 "HGPD War Diaries, 2 Pz. Rgt., (9.11.42-15.9.43)," 17.8.1943.

control of operations. His reluctance to coordinate the campaign forfeited a decisive victory when Patton dashed off to Palermo, rather than drive through the island’s center and smash the German front. This lack of strategic direction when the campaign concluded meant that no plan existed to prevent the Axis evacuation. By default, this mission fell to the Northwest African Tactical Air Force, whose commander, Air Vice Marshal Coningham, shifted his heavy bombers off this task on August 11, just as the evacuation shifted into high gear. Moreover, had Allied airmen moved decisively against roads leading to Messina and the beach transit sites, the Axis withdrawal would have suffered irreparable harm.268

That the Allies made no such effort assumed a wider significance in German eyes. The ‘miracle’ of the straits allowed Hitler to retain an effective fighting force within Italy’s boundaries; not only in the vital north, but also in that nation’s southern half. Allied planners could not ignore the forces whose escape had been facilitated by faulty planning. General von Vietinghoff was right when he commented that the escape from Sicily was critical to everything that took place later in Italy. The presence of four German divisions that escaped from Sicily accounts for Allied hesitation in moving decisively against Rome and the Po valley that September.269

CONCLUSION

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268 Mark, Aerial Interdiction, 51, 78-79.

269 Ibid., 78-79.
Assessing the outcome of the Sicilian campaign still sparks controversy today. In August 1943, Anglo-American leaders praised their troops for winning a clear-cut victory. General Marshall's congratulatory radio message to General Eisenhower on August 17 reveals the Chief of Staff's pride in the fledgling American army's role in capturing Sicily.

Congratulations and my profound thanks for the brilliant success with which you have brought another tremendous job to a victorious conclusion. You have carried your vast responsibilities in a most impressive manner in the preparation, co-ordination, and direction of the Sicilian operation.270

Yet, Marshall did not have the final word concerning this campaign. Critical assessments have become commonplace among military historians. Marshall's official biographer offered a restrained assessment of the victory years later, noting that although the Allies had defeated their opponents after thirty-eight days of combat, "part of this force escaped to the mainland..."271

The official American army history wrote diplomatically that "[n]one of this should be construed to mean that HUSKY was a perfect military campaign, that there were no flaws in the planning and execution of the operation." This volume laid the blame for the failure to trap and annihilate Axis forces at the doorstep of


Montgomery's "cautious and conservative" design, which avoided "calculated risk or gamble for high stakes," betting instead on a sure-thing.\textsuperscript{272}

British historians Dominick Graham and Shelford Bidwell have argued forcefully that:

the German commanders in Sicily had with great courage and professional skill not only halted Generals Patton and Montgomery, but removed 60,000-80,000 men and much equipment across the Straits of Messina to the mainland in spite of the attacks of the Allied air forces. Wars, however, are not won by glorious retreats. The German divisions in central and southern Italy were mere wrecks, requiring to be re-manned, re-equipped and re-trained.

Montgomery's failure to annihilate his foes receives but a cursory and somewhat embarrassed treatment. Nonetheless, it seems fair to note that wars are also not won by incomplete victories of the type that the Allies attained in Sicily.\textsuperscript{273}

Allied forces 'won' the battle for Sicily, driving Axis defenders from its shores. They achieved that goal by engaging and defeating the Axis divisions of the Italian \textit{6th Army} and German \textit{XIV Panzer Corps}. But the Germans did not lose Italy or the war because of the incomplete Anglo-American victory in Sicily. Patton's drive to Palermo provided American GIs with welcome column inches in the press. Nonetheless, his action dispersed the American \textit{7th Army} when a drive coordinated with Montgomery's forces might have broken the German front and gained a

\textsuperscript{272}Garland and Smyth, \textit{Sicily and the Surrender of Italy}, 419, 420.

\textsuperscript{273}Forest Pogue, General Marshall's biographer, likewise speaks of the evacuation of Axis forces on the island as an 'escape.' However, Allied planners had not included the evacuation/escape as an stage in their overall design. Pogue, \textit{Organizer of Victory}, 248; Graham and Bidwell, \textit{Tug of War}, 25.
decisive victory.\textsuperscript{274} Given that the brilliant use of deception measures and air power weakened the Axis opposition facing Allied divisions, one can only wonder what would have happened had Eisenhower, Alexander, Montgomery, and Patton faced the full might of the German war machine.\textsuperscript{275}

In contrast with Allied bungling, Hitler purchased a vital interval, during which he moved troops into Italy. Moreover, the German divisions evacuated from Sicily, battered as they were, formed the keystone upon which the Kesselring would build a series of rugged defensive lines across the Italian peninsula. Allied divisions would have many occasions on which to rue their commanders’ conservative conduct of the Sicilian campaign. The poisonous combination of strategic ineptitude and internecine conflict prevented the attainment of a truly decisive victory, upping the cost of future operations to an appalling degree.

Italian leaders correctly judged Hitler’s purpose in allowing the campaign to consume Italy’s exhausted military resources. A lengthy fight for Sicily and Italy

\textsuperscript{274}Fechter and Hümmelchen, Seekriegsatlas, 106.

\textsuperscript{275}Recent critical accounts accord the Allies at best a modest success in Sicily. Gerhard Weinberg awards the Allies a “local victory,” while Carlo D’Este’s lengthy narrative, descriptively entitled Bitter Victory, blames “the conservatism of the HUSKY plan and the failure of the senior Allied commanders to organize a joint command headquarters to administer it, [laying] the foundation for what ensued.” Mitcham and Stauffenberg, convinced the Allies made a major strategic error in moving on Sicily instead of Sardinia, close with their own sharp criticism, agreeing that the “[b]attle of Sicily had been a turning point: the Allies’ best opportunity to win a decisive victory in the Mediterranean had gone by the wayside.” Weinberg, A World at Arms, 594-95; D’Este, Bitter Victory, 524; Mitcham and Stauffenberg, Battle of Sicily, 303.
would hold back the Allied armies from Germany, while the campaign in Russia, the heart of Hitler's war, absorbed the bulk of the German effort. Italian Ambassador to Germany, Alfieri, and General Ambrosio saw in this idea the outline of German policy as it emerged in July 1943. That German planners spoke bluntly of the same would not have surprised any knowledgeable Italian commander.  

Erwin Rommel's honest (if somewhat blunt) assessment that it was better to fight the war in Italy than at home was true. The war would remain far from German borders for another year. The Germans also saved their forces from the Allies, which they had failed to do in Tunisia. This army's escape ensured that Italy could and would be bitterly defended by the Wehrmacht. Moreover, the Sicilian campaign gave Hitler an interval during which he refined his scheme for seizing Italy, an important aspect of the battle for Sicily not fully understood or explained in most histories. The slow conquest of Sicily and escape of German troops provided Hitler with the time and military force with which he won Italy's industrial and agricultural assets.

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CHAPTER 5

FROM AVALANCHE TO STALEMATE

ASSESSMENT AND PREPARATION

Germany's fortunes in the Mediterranean plummeted after its forces surrendered possession of Sicily. The remaining German divisions in Italy, most mustering a third of normal strength, were stretched thin and could cover only a small portion of the Italian coastline. Allied air forces had inflicted horrendous losses on the Luftwaffe, which lacked sufficient aircraft to contest control of Italian skies. The German navy in the Mediterranean offered little more than token support to the Italian navy. Nonetheless, appearances were deceiving. Allied leaders struggling to define their common strategic vision again allowed Hitler and his troops time to rebuild the Wehrmacht's combat prowess and infiltrate the Italian Peninsula, ultimately preventing the quick Allied seizure of the Italian heartland.

Nonetheless, events in Italy between August 1943 and January 1944 remain enigmatic and raise perplexing questions. How did the Germans overcome this dire set of circumstances? What did Hitler and his military leaders do right in Italy? How did they manage the resources that they discovered in Italy? Moreover, how did
the *Führer* reverse his expressed desire to wash his hands of most of Italy and end up retaining the Italian heartland, especially the important agricultural and industrial centers of north Italy? On the other hand, the question also must be asked, did the Allies do anything to cause this reversal of fortune? Did they fumble away their best opportunity to seize Italy in late 1943?

**THE STRATEGIC SITUATION**

Events during July and August 1943 boded ominously for Adolf Hitler. His men had suffered severe defeats in Russia and the Mediterranean. *Operation Citadel*, the long-planned offensive designed to annihilate Russian troops concentrated in the Kursk salient, failed badly. German forces fell back before a massive counterstrike unleashed by Stalin's men even before the German drive had shuddered to a complete stop. Soviet troops and tanks thereafter drove the hard-pressed Nazi divisions back through the Ukraine.

In the Mediterranean, Anglo-American troops likewise held the initiative. German forces had successfully escaped a deadly trap on Sicily. Nonetheless, Nazi hopes had suffered a serious setback as impending defeat on Sicily laid the foundation for Mussolini's overthrow. Combat on Sicily had decimated Hitler's combat divisions in Italy. In early August 1943, the *Führer's* remaining forces in southern Italy could not have repelled an Allied invasion, had the Allies swiftly followed up their Sicilian victory.

Hitler also faced a deteriorating home front, as he had long feared. The Nazi
warlord believed that the German home front’s collapse had cost his nation victory in the First World War. He therefore paid inordinate attention to his citizens’ comfort. Now, the combined weight of losses at Stalingrad and Kursk, alongside the evacuation of Sicily and the collapse of Mussolini’s government, threatened to undermine the German public’s support for the war.

In August 1943, Hitler’s security apparatus, the Sicherheitsdienst, reported that public opinion had turned sharply against the Nazi regime. The present difficulties gave heart to government opponents. Germans across the Reich were voicing their belief that the Nazi government was vulnerable to a collapse like that which had felled Mussolini's regime. The corruption and war profiteering of some Nazi leaders provided a focal point for many of the sharpest critics. Ominously, much of the growing resistance took the form of humor mocking Hitler's supposed 'infallibility.'

Horrific Allied fire raids against Hamburg during July 1943 further weakened Hitler's standing with Germans. The apparent ease with which Allied air forces devastated one of Germany's great cities threatened the complete destruction of domestic morale. The staggering death toll and poor response by Nazi officials to the catastrophe sharpened criticism of the regime. Many German leaders expressed bitterness that antiaircraft guns slated for Hamburg's defense had been diverted to

defend Italian cities.\textsuperscript{278} Reports from Italy offered little solace. The Italian populace was openly contemptuous of its German ally after Mussolini's fall from power. Taking advantage of the chaos, angry Italians targeted German consulates for attack. Subsequent reports painted a picture of Badoglio's government reestablishing control of city streets, but the tenuous nature of current conditions in Italy was apparent to Germans following events there.\textsuperscript{279}

Confusion likewise reigned among German leaders making plans to deal with Italy. Hitler adopted a policy premised upon an imminent Italian betrayal of Germany. His partner's contribution in Sicily convinced him that the average Italian had little fight left in him. Moreover, Hitler correctly estimated that moves concentrating Italian forces in northern Italy, where they could confront German troops infiltrating Italy, as well as Italian demands that German troops be assigned solely to southern Italy, pointed toward impending treason. Nonetheless, other German officials were convinced that Italy would not desert Germany, even after Mussolini's removal from power. Field Marshal Kesselring and German diplomats in Rome defended Italy as an ally that would continue to fight despite its war-weary

\textsuperscript{278}Irving, \textit{Hitler's War}, 544.

\textsuperscript{279}Der Oberbefehlshaber Süd Führungsabteilung Ic, "Lagebericht Italien vom 30.7.1943," RH19 X (Heeresgruppe C), Band 12, (BAMA: Microfiche), 81.
Ignoring the confidence of Kesselring and German diplomats in Italy, German headquarters staff in Berlin carefully laid plans to deal with an Italian surrender to the Allies, which would leave German forces exposed to annihilation. The notion that the Allies might land near La Spezia or Genoa evoked particular fear. Close to ninety Italian warships still anchored at La Spezia, guarded by four Italian army divisions assigned to defend the port. This combination of forces seriously threatened German units stationed in southern Italy. Had the Allies coordinated a landing with Italian naval and ground forces, German troops assigned to the region could not have countered it. Although staff officers considered this possibility highly unlikely, given the record of Allied conservatism, a thrust here would have quickly led the Allies into the heart of the Po River valley.

In his memoirs, Kesselring thanked Allied indecision and conservatism for permitting German forces to escape Sicily. Moreover, he viewed the delay between the Sicilian campaign's close and the initiation of operations on the Italian mainland as the key to ensuing events. This pause allowed him to reorganize and rebuild his Germans divisions. Moreover, Kesselring's staff digested lessons learned on Sicily while awaiting the next round of fighting. Kesselring concluded that German forces

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280 Westphal and Humboldt-Dachroeden, "Reinforcement of the German Army," 8-9; Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 4.

281 Ibid., 5-7.

282 Ibid., 6-7.
would not be allowed the time to muster their strength for a massive counterattack against Allied troops landing on Italian beaches. A successful response would require a defense in depth, with prepared fallback positions already mapped out. The breathtaking scope of Allied fire power would vanquish the best coastal defenses. This time he would have to correctly guess the site of an Allied invasion, and position his reserves close enough to allow them to be brought forward during the first night. If all went well, both armor and infantry would be ready to counterattack the next dawn.283

For this strategy to work, Kesselring and his staff had to divine Anglo-American intentions. Allied shipping concentrations in North African and Sicilian harbors during the late summer of 1943 provided the essential clue. Studying the deployment of invasion forces, OBS concluded that the invasion would fall upon either Sardinia or the west coast of Italy. The range of Allied aircraft operating from Sicilian airfields ruled out a landing farther north. Intelligence also led OBS to expect a secondary crossing somewhere in Calabria, the toe of the Italian boot.284

Allied intelligence officers attempted to conceal the invasion plans from the German supreme commander in the West, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, and Kesselring. Actions by naval and air units raised the possibility of an assault on France. Von Rundstedt did not succumb to the temptation presented him.

283Kesselring, A Soldier's Record, 199-200.

284Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 3-4.
Recognizing that time was too short for a successful Allied invasion of France that September, von Rundstedt redeployed his divisions to likely danger points. Of his thirty-six divisions, he had shifted twenty-seven to Italy or Russia by December and replaced them with units burned-out on the Russian front.  

Attention in Berlin also focused on the Mediterranean, with Sardinia and Corsica considered probable targets. Allied forces stationed on the two islands could have delivered decisive blows against central and northern Italy or the southern coast of France. Kesselring and his staff insisted that the Allies would attack southern Italy. The lack of ports that could handle shipping needed to sustain an invading army highlighted Naples and the surrounding region as an invader's most likely goal. Moreover, the range of ground-based Allied fighter coverage made the small Italian port of Salerno stand out on the list. The suitability of its wide beaches spotlighted it as an attractive target.

ALLIED STRATEGY AND PLANNING AFTER SICILY

As the Sicilian campaign wound down, Anglo-American strategists gathered for the Quadrant Conference in Quebec, Canada (August 17-24, 1943). Planning for future operations hinged on a simple fact. American representatives had not


286 Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 3.

287 Klinkowstroem, "Italy's Break-away," 2-3, 14.
developed a coherent strategic plan to guide Mediterranean operations. General George Marshall, the most influential American voice, merely demanded that this or another theater not be allowed to siphon off resources earmarked for invading France.

Nonetheless, Marshall did not derail plans to continue the Mediterranean campaign. His British counterparts successfully argued that the Sicilian victory must lead to further advances in Italy, Sardinia, and Corsica. Arguments that Italian operations could divert German divisions needed in Russia and France weighed heavily in calculations. Allied air forces also hoped to grab northern Italian airbases for attacks against southern German industrial areas. Marshall ultimately agreed that troops from seven veteran divisions set aside for OVERLORD could be retained for Mediterranean operations, although this delayed their refitting for the invasion of France.288

AXIS PREPARATIONS

Marshal Badoglio had become the new head of the Italian government after the coup against Mussolini. Italy's new leader did not take up the reins of power to conduct a revolution. Aware of his tenuous hold on power, Badoglio accommodated the surviving Fascist hierarchy, rather than engage in wholesale arrests and executions. His strong right arm, General Mario Roatta, employed state violence only against Italian citizens, who wrongly thought the occasion an opportunity to rid

themselves of the dictatorship's worst elements. Roatta and the Italian Secret Police, OVRA, brutally repressed peaceful demonstrations, shooting down Italian protestors without hesitation.289

In a similar vein, Badoglio did not immediately provoke a German response against his new government by publically wooing the Allies. He bought time by maintaining the fiction that Italy would remain loyal to the Axis.290 The German public stance and reaction to his reassurances showed Hitler's view of Badoglio's true intentions. German troops poured across the border, respecting neither the new government nor its cover story. Badoglio reacted by hastily dispatching representatives to meet Allied representatives, justifying his actions by an appeal to Realpolitik, placing Italy's national survival above its obligations to Germany.291

THE INVASION OF ITALY

ULTRA AND THE DECISION TO LAND AT SALERNO

The Allied invasion plan, Baytown/Avalanche, relied heavily upon the insight that Ultra provided into German plans. From Kesselring's messages to Berlin, Allied commanders learned that he expected a landing north of Naples. The


291 Ibid., 55-56.
beaches there led to a flat plain extending twenty-five miles inland to Capua and Caserta. From Capua, the fabled Via Appia (Highway 7) ran to Rome along the coast, while the inland route, the Via Casilina (Highway 6), offered an interior route through Cassino to the Eternal City.\footnote{Garlinski, \textit{Swiss Corridor}, 142.}

Magic intercepts, including those originating with Japanese officials serving in Europe, revealed the widening schism between Germany and Italy, the internal collapse of the Fascist state, and the stirring of serious dissent within the Fascist leadership.\footnote{Carl Boyd, \textit{Hitler's Japanese Confidant: General Oshima Hiroshi and Magic Intelligence, 1941-1945} (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 152-54; Alexander S. Cochran, "The Influence of "Magic" Intelligence on Allied Strategy in the Mediterranean," in \textit{New Aspects of Naval History}, ed. Craig L. Symonds et. al. (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1981), 343.} This information contributed to a growing belief in Allied quarters that Italy would soon collapse, and that this calamity would compel German forces to flee that nation or face destruction.

Ultra also disclosed that German measures focused on securing north Italy, even at the cost of writing off that nation's southern half. The allocation of potent SS \textit{Panzer} and \textit{Panzergrenadier} divisions to Rommel's Army Group B and an unwillingness to apportion Kesselring reinforcements beyond those absolutely necessary to complete his mission convinced Allied observers that little serious fighting was to be expected no matter where the Allies made their initial foray onto the peninsula. To some degree, the dreadful fight up the length of the Italian
peninsula from 1943-1945 can be laid at the door of that erroneous notion. Allied commanders relied too heavily on Ultra, as if it could somehow unveil the future. In so doing, they did not consider the possibility that Hitler might change his mind if the Allied assault did not develop sufficient speed and power to quickly drive his men back beyond Rome. 294

CALABRIA, TARANTO, AND SALERNO

On September 3, 1943, British and Commonwealth troops of Montgomery’s 8th Army launched the first Allied invasion of the European continent, crossing the narrow Strait of Messina. Montgomery’s commander, General Alexander, set two goals for Operation Baytown. First, Allied forces should secure freedom of navigation through the strait. Second, British units were to engage German forces defending southern Italy, preventing them from reinforcing Kesselring’s troops at Salerno. Montgomery’s operation faded into a sideshow because he lacked the men and naval transport necessary to race up the toe of the Italian boot. British forces secured the Strait of Messina, but failed in their second aim. Montgomery’s divisions rendered small assistance to the Allied forces at Salerno. 295

Hitler and Kesselring correctly surmised that the Calabrian landing did not comprise the main Allied effort. Moreover, Hitler worried that massive air attacks


against Germany and shipping concentrations in the West indicated an imminent invasion. Kesselring was of another mind. Although convinced that the main blow would fall at Naples or Salerno, he did not rule out an operation targeting Rome. His headquarters ordered the 3rd Panzergrenadier Division’s transfer from Orvieto to positions north of Rome, which would allow the unit to counter an invasion of central Italy.\(^{296}\)

Meanwhile, Luftwaffe bombers raided North African ports, seeking to hinder invasion preparations. The pinprick raids inspired a counterblow against Foggia by Allied P-38 fighters and B-17 bombers that left forty-seven wrecked and thirteen damaged Luftwaffe craft littering the cratered airfield complex. This and other raids weakened the Luftwaffe’s bomber force, which shrank to less than sixty-five combat-ready machines, incapable of intervening against the landings in Calabria. Richthofen conserved his strength for employment against the main assault, expected near Naples. Nonetheless, had he chosen to attack Montgomery’s forces, the lack of suitable airfields and ground support facilities in Calabria would have prevented operations.\(^{297}\)

**AVALANCHE AT SALERNO**

\(^{296}\) *Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, 9/II:445; Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 12.*

\(^{297}\) *Lee, German Air Force, 141; Gundelach, Die deutsche Luftwaffe im Mittelmeer 1940-1945, 665, 670; Mark, Aerial Interdiction, 89.*
German Deployment in Italy
1 September 1943
Colonel General von Vietinghoff commanded the 10th Army defending southern Italy. LXXVI Panzer Corps under Lieutenant General Traugott Herr controlled the 26th Panzer and 29th Panzergrenadier divisions. General Hube’s XIV Panzer Corps with Panzer Division Hermann Göring, the remnants of 15th Panzergrenadier Division, and the newly-formed 16th Panzer Division, provided Vietinghoff’s second striking force. The 1st Fallschirmjäger Division, deployed near Taranto, took orders directly from 10th Army. Troops of the Luftwaffe’s 11th Flak Corps covered Rome.298

Aerial reconnaissance on September 8 determined that the approaching Allied invasion convoys’ most likely targets lay near Naples. Kesselring took heart, having correctly forecast Allied intentions. Vietinghoff placed his men on a heightened state of alert upon receiving the warning, but undertook no further action, given the possibility of a landing in either the Gulf of Naples or at Salerno.299

Operation Avalanche, an unambitious scheme, fit in with previous landings in Calabria and at Taranto that were meant to be mutually supportive. American


299 Vietinghoff, T1a Ch. 6, 21; Gundelach, Die deutsche Luftwaffe im Mittelmeer 1940-1945, 672; Mark, Aerial Interdiction, 88.
General Mark Clark’s new 5th Army would land at the Gulf of Salerno, establish a beachhead, and seize the port city. Clark would then link up with Montgomery’s 8th Army and drive north to Naples. If successful, Allied planners did not rule out capturing Rome in 1943.

On the afternoon of September 8, XIV Panzer Corps headquarters alerted its forces that air landing and paratroop operations might be conducted in conjunction with an invasion. Warning of a possible Italian armistice with the approaching Allies also raced down the line early that same evening. The Germans would not be taken by surprise this time, a deadly fact that escaped British and American soldiers celebrating news of Italy’s surrender aboard the convoys nearing Salerno.

The Allied armada arrived during the early morning hours of September 9. Men and equipment took advantage of the weak German position, grabbing a long, shallow beachhead. 5th Army troops landed along the Gulf of Salerno’s crescent-shaped shoreline, with the British X Corps’ two infantry divisions assaulting the northern rim, inclusive of the port of Salerno. The American VI Corps landed two

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300 D’Este, Bitter Victory, 36.


additional infantry divisions further south, wading ashore at the ancient Greek temple site of Paestum.

The men of the 16th Panzer Division awaited the disembarking invasion forces. [See map below.] This newly-rebuilt division covered a front forty-eight kilometers long, stretching from Salerno to Agropoli. The unit lacked training in both repelling an invasion and mountain fighting. Neither did quartermasters have stocks of equipment for the 16th Panzer Division’s men suitable for these types of combat.  

German forces wisely avoided pinning mobile reserves to static defensive positions. Eight strongpoints, each manned by one platoon of infantry, heavy machine guns, mortars, flak, and antitank guns, covered the beaches. The division’s remaining four battalions and two and a half companies of infantry combined with armored units, providing it with a mobile reserve.

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304 Ibid., 143. The division formed three battlegroups (Kämpfgruppen) to cover Salerno: 1) KG Dörnemann (AA 16 (Reconnaissance) Regiment and subordinate units) north and northwest of Salerno. 2) KG Stempel (Regt. 64, 2nd Co. 16th Engs., III/16 Art. Regt., III/2. Pz. Regiment) occupied the sector between the city and the Sele River. 3) KG Doering (Regiment 79 with subordinate units) fortified near Paestum & Agropoli.
16th Panzer Division Situation
9 September 1943, 0330 hours

Source: Erfahrungsbericht über Feindlandung,
T-314, Roll 540, frame 000357
Widespread Allied landings created confusion in the division's ranks. Darkness prevented a quick determination of the attack's focal points. Despite the muddle, only two landings succeeded among those unfortunate enough to disembark directly opposite German strongpoints. German mobile reserves quickly moved against the disorganized invasion forces, but halted as Allied battleships and cruisers rained fire down upon them. Dawn brought further destruction as Allied air forces swept the skies and employed their limited ground attack forces against the 16th Panzers with some success.

When later assessing its performance, the divisional staff noted that the presence of more fortified troops might have impeded the invaders. They also warned that if counterattacks were to have the slightest chance of success, they must be made early enough to engage landing forces during darkness and as close to the beaches as possible. Only a rapid counterattack under the cover of night could negate the enemy's superiority at sea and in the air. Nonetheless, 16th Panzer Division's determined resistance kept British and American troops apart the first day.305

Meanwhile, the Italian fleet finally sortied during the morning hours of

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September 9, as Kesselring and Berlin had long hoped. However, it sailed not to engage the vulnerable transports anchoring off the Bay of Salerno, but to surrender to the Allies. German naval forces could not prevent the Italian battle fleet from departing. The sudden surrender caught German submarines out of position and unable to intercept the exiting Italian warships. Rommel's troops hastily occupied the port of La Spezia, but this proved poor consolation as the great prize had already escaped his grasp. 306

Admiral Bergamini, sailing with three battleships, three heavy cruisers, and eight destroyers, joined up with three additional heavy cruisers shortly after departing La Spezia. From his flagship, Roma, Bergamini ordered a course toward Sardinia. He altered his tack away from the island at 1340 hours, a move that German reconnaissance planes observed from high above the Straits of San Bonifacio. It proved a fateful moment for his task force.

The Italian fleet suffered the misfortune of operating within range of a unique German bomber force. Major Bernhard Jope's eleven Do-217-K 2s, stationed at Istres airfield near Marseilles, France, rose quickly from their base and set an intercept course for the slowly maneuvering Italian warships. Jope's command was equipped with the first guided missiles ever used in naval warfare, the FX-1400, a three-thousand pound armor-piercing guided glider bomb. The Fritz-X, product of Rheinmetall-Borsig's Dr. Max Kramer, weighed 1570 kilograms and carried 350 kg

306Klinkowstroem, "Italy's Break-away," 13-14; Franz Kurowski, Kampffeld Mittelmeer (Herford: Koehlers, 1984), 14.
of explosives. This projectile could penetrate 120 mm of armor, allowing it to easily
punch through the Italian warships’ vulnerable deck armor. 307

German airmen overtook Bergamini’s warships near the island of Asinara. Their Do-217s attacked the Roma, striking the vessel twice. One hit started a fire
that detonated the battleship’s forward magazine, breaking the vessel’s keel. It sank
quickly, taking with it 1,352 crewmen of the ship’s complement of 1,948. Admiral
Bergamini died with his sailors. Another attack damaged the battleship Italia,
causing it to ship 800 tons of seawater. Italian escorts hastened to assist the stricken
vessel, accompanying it during the lengthy voyage to Malta and internment. 308

Although Ultra had revealed operational testing of the new weapons in
August, Allied shipping in the Gulf of Salerno suffered similarly devastating attacks
by Do-217s equipped with both the FX-1400 and the smaller, 1,000 pound rocket-
powered Hs-293 guided bombs. Here planes of Kampfgeschwader 6 joined
Kampfgeschwader 100’s Do-217s, launching an average of five to ten raids daily. 309

German pilots struck the British battleship Warspite and cruiser Uganda, the
American cruiser Savannah, while the British monitor Abercrombie hit a mine. The


308 Bragadin, Italian Navy, 317-18; Fechter and Hümmelchen, Seekriegsatlas, 114; Kurowski, Kampffeld Mittelmeer, 15.

309 A Kampfgeschwader equaled an U.S.A.F. bomber wing. It normally deployed ninety-four aircraft.
availability of limited Allied fighter cover, lack of trained crews and specialized aircraft for the attacks, and teething problems inherent to the introduction of any arms technology prevented the Roma disaster from overtaking Allied naval forces in the gulf. Nonetheless, Allied commanders retained a healthy respect for the Luftwaffe's new strike capability throughout the Italian campaign, although they soon learned that laying smoke impeded the guided weapon's accuracy.  

Air attacks on the crowded shipping significantly influenced the land campaign, making it difficult to shift Allied fighters away from defending the fleet. Plans to interdict German troop movements at key road and rail junctions suffered delays as the aircraft remained over the beachhead.  

Meanwhile, German forces arrived in slow procession. Hermann Göring Panzer and 15th Panzergrenadier divisions made their way to the northern edge of the gradually expanding Allied foothold, arriving on September 11. Elements of the 29th Panzergrenadier Division took up positions south of the 16th Panzers, which then held the center of the German line.

A severe fuel shortage prevented Vietinghoff from concentrating his forces


311Mark, Aerial Interdiction, 95-96.
and counterattacking. 10th Army lacked an organic logistical staff. It relied upon the strained resources of Kesselring’s command, which struggled to maintain communications with Vietinghoff’s far-flung divisions. Daily reports moved slowly back to higher headquarters, creating delays in shipping supplies. The harsh Italian terrain and climactic conditions also degraded fuel efficiency. A normal unit of fuel that supplied a movement calculated at 100 kilometers in other theaters barely covered twenty-five to thirty kilometers when traveling in Italy. This precarious situation worsened when a tanker captain mistakenly sank his vessel at Sapri and burned fuel supplies ashore when a misunderstood telegram panicked him. Vietinghoff argued later that the lack of fuel played a decisive role in the German defeat at Salerno. 312

The fuel shortage played havoc with the 10th Army’s divisional movements to Salerno. This in turn caused the planned single counterattack against Allied forces to degenerate into a series of disjointed assaults. Although Allied forces found themselves hard-pressed to deal with each attack, Vietinghoff could not bring the full weight of his troops to bear simultaneously against the beachhead. Allied warships concentrated their fire on the piecemeal blows in quick succession, rendering them harmless and frustrated because they were unable to return fire against their tormentors. 313

312 Vietinghoff, T1a Ch. 6, 24-25.

313 Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 14-15.
Although the Allies finally united and swept forward to begin the long and difficult journey up the Italian peninsula, neither man nor fate had predetermined such an outcome. Kesselring maintained that the battle at Salerno need not have ended in the Allies' favor.

The German land combat forces in southern Italy, including Rome, eight divisions strong, were opposed by the Allies' ten divisions and several brigades and groups, two airborne divisions, and five Italian divisions--in all seventeen divisions. There were eight and a half German divisions in northern Italy which took no part in the decisive battles. Two of them would have sufficed to repel the Allied landing at Salerno. 314

Nonetheless, Allied forces were ashore. It remained to see what they would do with their expensive victory.

OPERATION “ACHSE”

PREPARATION FOR ACHSE

On July 27, Hitler ended his hand wringing over Italy. While conferring with Admiral Dönitz, he initiated plans to rescue Mussolini, reestablish a Fascist state in Italy, gain control of the remaining Italian fleet, and act so that German forces could occupy Rome and as much of Italy as was feasible. But more than concern for Mussolini and grabbing Italian territory drove Hitler's policy. His concern for the security of the Balkans overrode all other matters. While Hitler worried that he lacked the military forces to defend the Italian Peninsula, his policy of securing the economic advantages accruing to Germany from the Balkans never

314 Kesselring, A Soldier's Record, 220.
wavered. \(^\text{315}\)

**OPERATION ACHSE**, designed to secure Italian assets and use them for Germany's benefit, placed the highest priority on *Wehrmacht* forces seizing key transportation nodes. Harbors, railroads, and other communications centers were to be taken first, which would permit the rapid movement of German forces throughout Italy. Securing the Alpine passes received the highest priority, as without them, new troops could not be introduced and nor could existing forces be supplied. While Rommel's army group took control of these facilities in north Italy, German troops in southern and central Italy would fall back upon the firm base that Rommel created.

The plan also called for the disarming of Italian troops. Although the Italian Army was seriously weakened after lengthy combat, German troops still confronted a daunting task. *OKW* set events in motion July 27, ordering Field Marshal Rommel, who had been bound for Greece, to assume control of German forces based in Italy north of the Alba-Ancona line. His Army Group B would protect Kesselring's vulnerable lines of communications with Germany, prepare defenses in the northern Apennines, and ready measures to disarm Italian forces in the region.

By September 8, Rommel commanded the headquarters of the *LXXXVII* Conference, 26-28 July, 1943; 368-69; Hinsley, *Hitler's Strategy*, 228-29, 231. Although Hitler relented from his original desire to immediately attack Rome, he sketched the pattern that *OPERATION ACHSE* later followed.
Army Corps, II SS Panzer Corps, and the LI Mountain Corps. The 26th Panzer Division, 76th, 94th, and 305th infantry divisions from France, 44th and 65th infantry divisions from Germany, SS Panzergrenadier Division Liebstandarte Adolf Hitler and 24th Panzer Division (transferred from the Eastern Front), and 71st Infantry Division from Denmark, formed his command. Few had more than token strength, and reinforcements arrived from Germany (162nd Infantry Division) and from France (356th Infantry Division). OKW assigned command of the 90th Panzergrenadier Division on Sardinia and Corsica to Rommel’s army group. The 362nd and 363rd infantry divisions also began refitting under Rommel’s command. 316

Outside Rome, the German 2nd Fallschirmjäger Division confronted seven Italian Army divisions, which varied greatly in strength and combat-readiness. The German 3rd Panzergrenadier Division, located to the north of Rome, had been assigned the dual tasks of guarding Kesselring’s headquarters at Frascati and then moving to Rome. A logistical base for these operations existed in the Alban Hills. Plans called for the 90th Panzergrenadier Division to evacuate first Sardinia and then Corsica, assisted by whatever German naval resources could be concentrated. The SS Reichsführer Brigade and the 90th Panzergrenadier Division would then fall back to mainland Italy and assist as necessary. Other units would simultaneously disarm and imprison Italian forces occupying southern France and the Balkans.

German naval forces received orders to prevent the defection of Italian

316Westphal and Humboldt-Dachroeden, "Reinforcement of the German Army," 9-10.
warships and merchantmen. Naval units also had to secure Toulon and other harbors as well as to ensure sufficient sea transport to evacuate the islands and support ground operations in Italy.\footnote{Wilhelm Keitel (Field Marshal), "Stichwort "Achse,"" OKW/WFSt/Op Nr.661746/43. g.K.Chefs. F.H.Qu., den 1.8.43., RH2 Oberkommando des Heeres/Generalstab der Heeres, Band 636 "Westl. Mittelmeer - Chefs. vom 19.5.1943-11.7.44" (BAMA: Microfiche), 58-59; "Aufmarsch "Alarich,"" Adjutant des Chefs des Generalstabes des Heeres. Nr.282/43. g.Kdos.Chefs. H.Qu.OKH, den 27.7.43., RH2 Oberkommando des Heeres/Generalstab der Heeres, Band 636 "Westl. Mittelmeer - Chefs. vom 19.5.1943-11.7.44" (BAMA: Microfiche), 63; Kesselring et al., \textit{German Version of the Italian Campaign}, 8-9; Hubatsch, \textit{Ktb OKW} \textit{III(2)}, 1608-09.}

THE ITALO-GERMAN WAR FOR ITALY

Hitler received notice of Italy's surrender when Badoglio telegraphed him on 8 September. Badoglio confronted Hitler with Italy's dire situation, bad news that the German dictator had previously avoided hearing. "One cannot demand of a people that they continue the war, if every legitimate hope, I say not for victory, but for a successful defense, has disappeared. Italy, in order to avoid its complete ruin, has been forced to approach the enemy in order to make an attempt at an armistice." Unfortunately for Italy, Badoglio's botched effort at surrender resulted in the ruin that he sought to avoid.\footnote{Domarus, \textit{Hitler: Reden}, 2/II:2033-34.}

Whereas Eisenhower and Badoglio were unprepared to capitalize on Italy's capitulation, Hitler promptly ordered Rommel and Kesselring to activate \textit{OPERATION ACHSE}. The coded message, 'Bring in the Harvest,' set in motion
what Gerhard Schreiber has called "the Wehrmacht's last victory." On 7 September, OKW had prepared an ultimatum designed to force the Italians to tip their hand and reveal Italy's course. It became superfluous when Italy surrendered the next day.\textsuperscript{320} This unnecessary ultimatum might have brought to light the confusion that reigned among Italian authorities.

The Italo-Allied armistice negotiations had remained a tightly-held secret in Italian circles. Few had been initiated into this coterie other than the King and commanders at the highest levels. The sudden and unexpected announcement of surrender by Eisenhower and its confirmation by Badoglio compromised their joint response to German operations.

Badoglio and Ambrosio had laid careful plans to defend the Italian state between the time that the new government assumed power in July and surrendered on 8 September. Their strategy concentrated on defending high-value assets. They singled out the naval base at La Spezia for protection against a sudden German descent. The remaining combat power of the Italian Army consisted mainly of the seven divisions assigned the defense of Rome.

Badoglio agreed to Ambrosio's recommendation that General Carboni be given the critical task of commanding Rome's defenders. The latter had approximately five full strength and two understrength divisions. While the forces

\textsuperscript{319}Schreiber, \textit{Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen}, 40; Bidwell, "Kesselring," 279-80.

\textsuperscript{320}Baum and Weichold, \textit{Krieg der "Achsenmächte,"} 363.
defending Rome lacked the means to counter a strong German armored thrust, they were sufficient to erect a defensive perimeter around the city. Italian commanders hoped that this isolated force could defend Rome until Allied reinforcements arrived.

This design failed to account for the uncertainty regarding how soon negotiations might prove fruitful, and how officers in the Italian military would respond to the unexpected news of Italy's surrender. Badoglio lacked the ruthlessness that the situation demanded. He did not move boldly against German forces, which would have taken them unaware. Instead, Badoglio played his hand close to his chest, holding back his orders to commanders until after the surrender. Government ministers also did not receive timely warning of the capitulation. Even the chiefs of the General Staff for the Navy and Air Force learned of the plans only on September 3. Badoglio understood that many in the armed forces desired continuation of the German alliance, even in September 1943. Although the Germans later accused the Italians of treachery, the mania for secrecy stemmed as much from Badoglio's uncertainty concerning his officials' reaction to the surrender as it did from fear of German reprisals.321

Upon receiving news of Italy's capitulation, Kesselring implemented measures to capture Rome and the Italian government, evacuate the islands of Italy,

and secure his headquarters and lines of communication to Germany.\textsuperscript{322} German units encountered a variety of Italian responses as they raced to accomplish their designated tasks.

The 16\textsuperscript{th} 	extit{Panzer Division} met minimal resistance as its men replaced Italian defenders at Salerno. Most war-weary Italians in this sector proved only too happy to be disarmed and return home.\textsuperscript{323} The surrender triggered an angry response among the 	extit{Hermann Göring Division}'s men. They too found that nearby Italian units surrendered when confronted by energetic action.\textsuperscript{324} In the Balkans, Bulgarian divisions assisted in disarming Italian units, which were hampered by the presence of German staff officers serving with them and the confusion that the sudden surrender generated.\textsuperscript{325}

The situation around Rome proved different. 	extit{Comando Supremo} had assigned nearly half of the army's effective strength for the city's defense. The seven divisions, including two possessing armored forces, presented the Germans with a severe problem. Just two Nazi divisions were at hand to engage this force, and \textit{OBS} worried that they could not simultaneously capture Rome and fend off a nearby

\textsuperscript{322}D'Este, 	extit{Bitter Victory}, 38.


\textsuperscript{324}“HGPD War Diaries, 2 Pz. Rgt., (9.11.42-15.9.43),” 10.9.1943.

invasion.\footnote{Westphal and Humboldt-Dachroeden, "Reinforcement of the German Army," 7-8; Siegfried Westphal, "Chapter 7 The Army Group's Appreciation," Kesselring 9/24/117 (LHCMA, 1947), 1-3; Klinkowstroem, "Italy's Break-away," 6; Ceva and Rochat, "Italy," 594-95.} Kesselring had long argued in vain for the transfer of the Italian garrison of Rome and the Alpini Division in north Italy to the poorly-defended beaches of southern Italy. The Italian 7\textsuperscript{th} Army had thinly screened invasion sites since early September, using its 5\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division and three underequipped coastal defense divisions.\footnote{Westphal and Humboldt-Dachroeden, "Reinforcement of the German Army," 7-8.}

Fortunately for the Germans, Italian intelligence provided army commanders with an inaccurate estimate of the forces arrayed against them. The 3\textsuperscript{rd} Panzergrenadier Division, the keystone of Kesselring’s plan, deployed only three command tanks instead of the one hundred and fifty credited them by Italian intelligence officers.\footnote{MacGregor Knox, "The Italian Armed Forces, 1940-3," in 	extit{Military Effectiveness}, ed. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 3:157.} Moreover, an unexpected airborne landing at Monte Rotondo by the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion of the German Fallschirmjäger Regiment captured Italian army headquarters, further confusing the situation.\footnote{Edwards, 	extit{German Airborne Troops}, 116-17.}

Italian forces defending Rome not only outnumbered their German foes, they were better equipped. The Ariete Armored Division had been outfitted with newly-issued tanks and self-propelled guns that easily matched German armored
vehicles then fighting in Italy. Commanded by the respected General Raffaele Cadorna, the Italians gave the 3rd *Panzer grenadier Division* a hard time on September 8-9.

Badoglio's actions after the surrender seriously undermined what began well. His failure to move boldly in the chaos that followed the surrender caused command to devolve upon his subordinates. Ambrosio did not know details of the plans, having assigned that responsibility to General Mario Roatta. Command of the armored corps defending Rome rested upon General Giacamo Carboni. This officer not only held a field command during these critical days. He also oversaw *SIM*, Italian Military Intelligence, which had badly bungled estimates of German strength around Rome. None of these officers exerted their authority while the highly complex situation unraveled around them. Instead, intrigue ruled as each distanced himself from the developing fiasco and escaped the angry Germans. 330

Carboni defended Rome until ordered to cover the governmental transfer to Tivoli and then south to Bari. Many Italian soldiers quit their units in the Rome area, but others put up fierce resistance along the fabled Via Appia and at Ciampino airfield. Badoglio later defended this dishonorable decamping from the city, arguing that maintaining communications with the Allies took priority with him. Nonetheless, although defending the ancient city threatened its destruction, evading

330 Knox, "Italian Armed Forces," 171.
capture by the Germans also ranked high on Badoglio's list.\textsuperscript{331} The headlong flight from the city later cost Badoglio and King Victor Emmanuel dearly. The government's exodus threw the defenseless Roman populace upon the tender mercies of the Germans and their Fascist allies, who claimed their pound of flesh as retribution for events since that July.\textsuperscript{332} The abandonment of the city, which undermined the remaining small measure of legitimacy that the King and government possessed, contributed to the postwar problems that racked Italy.\textsuperscript{333}

The Allied invasion at Salerno boosted German efforts to capture Italy. As Field Marshal Kesselring noted, the landing at Salerno did not directly threaten the German divisions stationed deep in southern Italy. A landing at Rome, supported by Allied airborne troops, might have joined with Italian divisions resisting the Germans and taken the ancient Italian capital. The two understrength German divisions engaged there would have been isolated and without reinforcements from northern or southern Italy. Had Allied troops captured the Alban Hills, the two key roads south would have been cut, and the entire German force locked in mortal combat at Salerno would have found itself trapped at the base of the Italian boot.\textsuperscript{334}

The immediate consequence of conceding Rome to the Germans was the

\begin{itemize}
\item Badoglio, \textit{Italy in the Second World War}, 81-82.
\item Domenico, \textit{Italian Fascists on Trial}, 11, 47-48.
\item Calvocoressi, Wint and Pritchard, \textit{Total War}, 406.
\item Kesselring et al., \textit{German Version of the Italian Campaign}, 14, 23; Westphal and Humboldt-Dachroeden, "Reinforcement of the German Army," 2.
\end{itemize}
loss of communications with and transportation for the Italian army. Rome served as the focal point of the Italian communications net, and its loss meant that already mystified field commanders found themselves without instructions or any means of clarifying their situation. Moreover, loss of the central rail office in Rome kept Italian army units from concentrating and taking action. Like a victim struck with a malady simultaneously assaulting several lobes of the brain, the Italian army fell to pieces as it lost its faculties of speech and movement.\textsuperscript{335}

Westphal acted on Kesselring's behalf in overseeing negotiations for Rome's surrender. Lieutenant Colonel Giaconne of the \textit{Centauro} Armored Division represented General Carboni. Concerns over the extent of Carboni's command of the divisions at Rome slowed consultations. The German representative guaranteed fair treatment of Italian troops, although nothing was said about their internment and forced labor in Germany. Worried about possible unrest in Rome or an Allied landing at Ostia, Westphal asked that Italian forces pledge that they would prevent Rome from falling into Allied hands. In return, Westphal promised not to attack the city, nor permit reprisals against Rome's inhabitants, something forgotten later when Rome was again firmly in German hands.\textsuperscript{336}

\textsuperscript{335}Karl Theodor Koerner, "Rail Transportation Problems in Italy," OCMH MS # D-010 (1947), 6-7.

OPERATION ACHSE provided the Wehrmacht with its 'last victory.'

Kesselring's forces captured 126,634 men and a vast amount of war material. 88,285 small arms, 13,850 machine guns, 364 mortars, 247 artillery pieces, 232 antiaircraft guns, sixty-one antitank guns, 159 flame-throwers, 213 armored fighting vehicles, fifty-seven armored cars, 257 scout cars, and 1,516 trucks were seized. Horses and donkeys, fuel and motor oil, 30,000 tons of munitions, and a variety of other useful equipment also fell into German hands.337

On September 19, Rommel reported that his men had captured more than 13,000 officers and 402,600 enlisted men. An astonishing number, some 183,000, had already been shipped to Germany and shortly thereafter would be working as slave labor. Rommel's discovery of stockpiles of military equipment especially galled him, given previous complaints by Comando Supremo that its cupboard was bare.338

Offsetting this captured booty was the Italian fleet's escape. Nonetheless, the German navy commandeered the cruisers Bolzano and Taranto, destroyers Zeno, Corazzaire and Maestrale, torpedo-boats Ghibli, Lira, Procione, Cascino, and Montanari, as well as numerous smaller ships during the Italian navy's capitulation. German naval crews later repaired and outfitted many of the ships for service.339


338Fraser, Knight's Cross, 444-45, 450.

339Kurowski, Kampffeld Mittelmeer, 16.
The final tallies made in December recorded a wealth of useful material. 330,064 sidearms, 16,236 pistols, 13,906 machine pistols, 1,285,871 rifles and carbines, 39,007 machine guns, 8,736 mortars, 1,173 antitank guns, 1,581 antiaircraft guns, and 5,568 artillery pieces were added to the German inventory. German officials also discovered more than 500 tons of rubber, 24,450 tons of various chemicals and compounds for production, and 16,150 tons of metals suitable for war production. These items helped equip German and satellite forces as well as swelling the production of war materials in Italy and Germany.340

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to describe the results of OPERATION ACHSE as an unadulterated German triumph. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels portrayed the surrender as an act of moral cowardice and treason on the part of Italians, a line of reasoning that many Germans found all too comfortable and one central to Germany's postwar interpretation of September's events. But German officials at home and in Italy seriously erred when they mistakenly equated the Italian armed forces' collapse with the surrender of Italy itself. Although severely traumatized by events, some Italians immediately took up arms against the Germans and resisted the terrible catastrophe that had befallen their nation. This national mood of resistance slowly grew and matured until the war's end in May, 1945, when

Italians could take pride in their fight for Italy's freedom and national honor.  

**ECONOMIC CONTROL OF ITALY**

Conquest of Italy opened the door for the exploitation of the Italian economy. This new asset was an important addition to German war production. German production as a share of world industrial capacity in 1939 totaled 10.7%. The Italian portion amounted to 2.7 percent. Although the Allied coalition that existed in 1943 represented 70 percent of world industrial capacity, the addition of Italian production represented a potential 25+ percent increase in the German industrial base.  

This welcome gain arrived at a vital moment for Germany. On September 8, Hitler had assigned Speer, Minister of Armaments and War Production, complete authority to reorganize the German war economy. He was to rationalize production, using large numbers of foreign workers in German industry in the place of native workers, many of whom were drafted into the expanding Wehrmacht. In addition, as shall be seen, Speer concentrated arms production in Germany and shifted the

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342Schreiber, Stegemann and Vogel, Germany and the Second World War, III:29.
manufacture of consumer goods to occupied states.\textsuperscript{343}

A 'Commissioner of the Reich Minister for Armament and War Production\textsuperscript{344} oversaw Italian affairs. That official, subordinate to the Reich Ministry, worked hand-in-hand with the OKW Plenipotentiary General of the German Armed Forces in Italy. Speer's representative was assigned to work with Italian officials and industry. This announcement did not mean that Italy would supply German forces fighting there. Instead, Italy was to be integrated into the German war economy. The requirements of German forces fighting in Italy would be supplied from the entire war effort, not just from the Italian industrial base. Although Kesselring fought to change this, he failed in the short term. Speer's ministry continued this inefficient production scheme until 1944.\textsuperscript{345}

Hitler organized the administration of occupied Italy during a conference on September 12, 1943. Gauleiter Franz Hofer of the Tyrol took control of Italy south to Verona. His counterpart in Carinthia, Dr. Friedrich Rainer, became administrator of Venezia and Trieste. Hitler stipulated that Speer retain authority over industrial production in Italy.

\textsuperscript{343}Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, 9/II:447; Oron J. Hale, "Notes on Discussions with Keitel and Jodl. 26 July 1945," Government Service, War Department, Historical (Schuster) Commission Interrogation of Former German Officials, University of Virginia Special Collections (Charlottesville, Va.: Alderman Library), 2.

\textsuperscript{344}Hereafter AWP.

\textsuperscript{345}Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 20.
Hitler confirmed Speer's responsibility for Italian economic matters the next day, despite the daring liberation of Mussolini by German commandos.\textsuperscript{346} Little more than lip service would be paid to the Fascist state in matters affecting control of Italy's industrial plant. Speer's Ministry controlled production in occupied Italy and directed the economy of the Alpenvorland and Adriatic coastal region. The economic exploitation of Italy followed a path similar to that blazed in France. The AWP assigned administrative responsibility to Italian industrialists, who then organized committees that planned output, distributed raw materials, and set deadlines for production targets. Italian businessmen were permitted a modicum of control in the hope that this would maximize production.\textsuperscript{347}

General Dr. Hans Leyers led the AWP staff in Italy. His organization undertook three tasks. First, Italian industry should be adapted, integrated, and correlated with German war production. Second, Italian production facilities were to be kept from enemy hands where possible. Third, the AWP mission was to seize raw materials from Italian stockpiles and see that they were returned to Germany, where these items were in short supply.\textsuperscript{348}

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{348}]Leyers, "Italian War Production," 1-3.
\end{itemize}
Leyers used the Italian business community effectively, even though its sympathies lay with a quick end to the war and an Allied victory. He discovered that preservation of their holdings guided most Italian businessmen. Their plants had not yet fully geared up for war production, and the German occupation offered them the chance to recoup losses incurred by the Italian government’s failure to pay war contracts. However, their workers openly detested the German occupiers, which made cooperation with AWP a dangerous choice for the industrialists.

Despite this, it quickly became clear that AWP offered Italian manufacturers several advantages. Germany was the only possible source of contracts that would keep labor at work and provide a measure of social peace. Moreover, many AWP officials had long standing ties with Italian industry and protected it against arbitrary transfers of plants, equipment, and critical workers to Germany, as well as insulating the owners against Fascist attempts to replace factory management with party hacks. As long as factories met production quotas, AWP officials protected Italian factory owners.349

Three immediate and serious problems confronted German officials concerned with getting Italy’s factories up and running. Shortfalls in coal supplies and other vital raw materials, the disruption of transportation, and the delicate state of German control in Italy stymied initial efforts aimed at quickly restoring Italian

349Leyers, "Italian War Production," 32-38.
industrial production.\textsuperscript{350}

Italy had long been dependent on its ally for specialized raw materials. Shortages of chemicals and metals necessary for arms and munitions production limited the restoration of the Italian war economy. In addition, transport needed to make good critical shortages in such items constantly competed with pressing military requirements, given the sad state of the Italian rail and road net.\textsuperscript{351}

Italian railroads required immediate attention. A survey of the rail net revealed choke points at the Po River bridges and railway junctions, which, though few in number, appeared especially vulnerable to attack. Communications with central Italy rested on the maintenance of two mountain railways, lined with numerous bridges and narrow track ways exposed to air attack.

Marshaling yards at Rome and Florence offered inviting targets that would provide determined attackers with high returns for their efforts. Allied researcher Solly Zuckerman’s team of operational analysts reached this same conclusion in December 1943, after studying the paralysis of Sicily and southern Italy by similar


attacks on Naples, Foggia, San Giovanni, Reggio, Palermo, and Messina. German planners were fortunate that this study did not reach Allied commanders during operations in September and October 1943, when an aerial assault inspired by Zuckerman might have seriously diminished German forces' ability to hold off Allied ground assaults.\textsuperscript{352}

As part of planning for \textit{OPERATION ACHSE}, the \textit{Wehrmacht-Verkehr-Direktion (W.V.D.)} or Directorate of Transportation for the Armed Forces, assumed control of railroad operations, drafting 10,000 men from the armed forces and German National Railways. The lack of resistance by Italian railway workers during the takeover and their subsequent service until May, 1945 materially assisted the \textit{W.V.D.} German administrators operated from Verona with a branch station at Florence. They assigned their men and machines the task of rapidly upgrading Italian rail capacity.\textsuperscript{353}

Despite raw materials shortages and transportation bottlenecks, \textit{AWP} officials implemented their plans to exploit Italy in September and October 1943. They transferred 4,800 tons of machine tools and other production equipment, as well as 68,200 tons of raw materials, back to Germany between 15 September and 31 October 1943. Moreover, the requisitioning of 97,700 tires from Italy alleviated a

\textsuperscript{352} Koerner, "Rail Transportation Problems in Italy," 7-8; Mark, \textit{Aerial Interdiction}, 95.

\textsuperscript{353} Koerner, "Rail Transportation Problems in Italy," 8-9.
shortage of vehicle tires across the Reich.\textsuperscript{354}

German surveys uncovered a hoard of raw materials supplied to Italian industry, but still in warehouses. Leyers thought Italian industry had stored the war materials hoping to begin manufacturing operations immediately after the war ended. The lack of centralized controls on the distribution and use of raw materials had reduced Italian output, something that German officials corrected upon taking over the Italian industrial base.\textsuperscript{355}

The Italian surrender further benefitted the German war economy by bringing large numbers of Italian civilian workers and military internees under direct German control. By 1943, German officials had become well schooled in training of large numbers of unskilled foreign laborers from Ukraine and other occupied areas and quickly turning them into effective factory workers.\textsuperscript{356}

Nonetheless, the problem of securing foreign workers worsened during the spring of 1943 after Germany's defeat at Stalingrad and the intensification of the Allied air campaign against German cities. Speer shifted his plans for the war

\textsuperscript{354}Deutschlands Rüstung im Zweiten Weltkrieg, 308. See Chart V-3 for statistics from September 1943 until September 1944.

\textsuperscript{355}Leyers, "Italian War Production," 3-4; Hermann Burkhart Mueller-Hillebrand, Germany and Its Allies in World War II: A Record of Axis Collaboration Problems (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1980), 76-77.

\textsuperscript{356}Oron J. Hale, "Conversation With Hans Kehrl (Director of Planungsamt in Speer Ministry) (7 August 1945)," Government Service, War Department, Historical (Schuster) Commission Interrogation of Former German Officials, University of Virginia Special Collections (Charlottesville, Va.: Alderman Library), 5.
economy, making adjustments to compensate for the labor shortage. Starting in June 1943, he transferred consumer production from German factories to facilities in occupied Europe. This eased the twin problems of workers' unwillingness to either move to or work for Germany, if that meant manufacturing arms. The creation of "blocked factories" (*Sperrbetriebe* or *S-betriebe*), plants protected from drafts for forced labor in Germany, first in France, Belgium, Holland, and later in Italy, helped Speer avoid conflict with an increasingly restive workforce and freed up German production for military output.357

Italy was a special case, providing the *Reich* with both voluntary and forced laborers. Italian economic officials had not subjected Italian workers to centralized labor control before the German takeover in September 1943. Speer mobilized Italian workers with the same aggressive efficiency that he did Italian factories and resources. He reaped enormous benefits, and drove German production levels to new heights by using Italian military internees in arms production. Speer regarded Italian soldiers not as prisoners of war protected by the Geneva Convention, but as internees who could not refuse his demands that they labor in arms factories, as did Russian prisoners. Speer's testimony at Nuremberg documented that 400,000-

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600,000 Italian military prisoners were drafted for this work.\footnote{IMT, XVI:451-52; Mueller-Hillebrand, Germany and Its Allies, 73; Ulrich Herbert, "Labour and Extermination: Economic Interest and the Primacy of Weltanschauung in National Socialism," Past and Present, no. 138 (February 1993):180-81.}

And work they did. Laboring under conditions severe enough to evoke pity from Russians living near them, 40,000 died before the war concluded in May 1945.\footnote{Petersen, "Deutschland und Italien 1939 bis 1945," 116-18.} The deaths resulted from Italian military internees working in an environment similar to and under regulations like those that forced concentration camp inmates to work. Speer did not hesitate in requesting Keitel’s assistance in enforcing stringent rules against the Italian internees. Both guards and workers were severely punished when caught malingering. Speer also wanted attacks on German co-workers to be regarded as capital offenses.\footnote{Hancock, National Socialist Leadership and Total War, 95.}

Italian and other slave laborers provided a much needed measure of support, which helped delay the day of reckoning for the German war economy. The importance of Italy’s retention can be seen in that of 2.5 million foreign laborers recruited or forced into work between early 1943 and May 1945, 600,000 were Italian military prisoners. As labor historian Ulrich Herbert notes, “By the summer of 1944, 46 per cent of all agricultural workers and a third of the workers in mining, the metal industry, chemical and construction were foreigners. Foreign forced labor had
become the backbone of the German war economy."

The value of the Italian addition to production came into focus that fall 1943. As the Italian contribution grew, strategic plans for the first time included efforts to retain major production facilities. Italian production also made the defense of Italy possible after transportation difficulties with Germany led to Italian factories's output going directly to the support of that front.

DEFENDING ITALY

The German army did not display tactical brilliance during the Italian campaign. Fortunately, it did not need to. Here, as upon the Russian front, Hitler's divisions engaged in a protracted struggle employing a rigid defensive line. In so doing, the Führer's men relived the Western Front experiences of the First World War. The hastily-constructed defensive lines spread across the peninsula shared a lack of depth with similar defensive works in Russia, which would have gained defenders time to gather their strength and drive out penetrating forces. Unlike the vast steppes of Russia, the topography of the Italian mainland offered German forces terrain that compensated for this lack of reserves.

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361 Herbert, "Labour and Extermination," 180-81.

362 Economic and Financial Branch Field Information Agency, "Examination of Reichsminister Albert SPEER," 9-10; Leyers, "Italian War Production," 5.

The German defense after Salerno fell upon Kesselring's decimated divisions, which had suffered heavy losses among their Panzer and artillery formations. Moreover, German troops fought in a hostile Italy, whose population provided little intelligence to their occupiers. German commanders also lacked an intelligence infrastructure through which to uncover their opponents' intentions. Luftflotte 2's weakness prevented its few reconnaissance aircraft from penetrating into Allied-held regions because its planes lacked protective fighter coverage. Poor air cover left German supply lines prey to marauding Allied aircraft. Likewise, the reassuring presence of German airmen over their much-harassed comrades on the ground became a rare event.

On the other hand, Kesselring's army possessed decided advantages. Its ranks contained veteran officers and NCOs, who had wide-ranging combat experience from the tundra of Norway to the mountains of the Soviet Caucasus. Moreover, German forces in Italy served under a unified command and with a commander in whom they had the greatest confidence. Although "Smiling Albert" was at times too optimistic in his outlook, his confident attitude bolstered his commanders' and men's morale during the campaign's worst days.

German troops also benefitted from their superior equipment, even as the Wehrmacht dwindled toward ruination. Although Allied commanders often outnumbered their opponents, they frequently balanced out the life-and-death

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struggle by employing their material plenitude with little skill. John Ellis rightly highlighted the "German officer [in Italy] who complained that, though the enemy insisted on charging their Shermans right down the barrels of his battery of 88s, and were picked off one after another, he ran out of ammunition before they ran out of tanks."  

THE SWISS ROLE IN LATE 1943

Swiss cooperation with the German occupation of Italy became essential after the Italian surrender. German forces in Italy depended on ten rail routes linking Germany with Italy for their logistical support. The Brenner Pass bore the lion’s share of almost fifty percent. The two Swiss passes ran a close second, supplying another thirty-eight percent of rail capacity. Seven other railroads from France and the Balkans furnished but twelve percent. Had Switzerland closed the lines after Italy surrendered, and had the Allies moved boldly to close the Brenner Line, the Germans could not have sustained their campaign in Italy. Their forces would have faced the unpleasant choice of withdrawing or withering on the vine.

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365 Ellis, Brute Force, xvii. Michael Doubler’s perceptive work, Closing With The Enemy: How GIs Fought The War In Europe, 1944-1945 (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1994) challenges the widely held belief in poor American military performance during the Second World War. American forces in France collected and disseminated detailed tactical information about German activity there. Doubler does not deal with that process in Italy, only mentioning the development of Close Air Support (CAS) after Anzio. A similar study of how American intelligence processed and delivered tactical information on the Italian front has not been done.

366 Mark, Aerial Interdiction, 91.
Swiss officials accommodated German needs rather than move decisively to the Allied side at that time. Some Swiss forces mobilized to head off any risk of a sudden German or Fascist Italian move against their nation, but the disruption to Switzerland and its economy remained minimal. \(^{367}\) Despite the worsening Axis situation, Switzerland's industry afforded the German war economy substantial support until growing Allied pressures and the clear trend in German fortunes reversed Swiss policy in late 1943. In December, 1943, Bern judged a shift of policies in its best interest and reduced exports of vital war material and foodstuffs to Germany by some sixty percent. \(^{368}\) These policies, however, left a lingering bad feeling among groups that suffered under German occupation and contributed to the groundswell of opinion that arose in the 1990s demanding Swiss reparations for the extensive aid rendered Germany during the Second World War.

**EXTRACTING THE COST: THE DEFENSE OF ITALY, FALL 1943**

After Salerno, Kesselring's men conducted a delaying action as they fell back from the battlefield. His engineers destroyed railroads, roads, and bridges, slowing the pursuing Allied forces. Allied divisions again encountered strong resistance across the Sorento Peninsula, north of Battipaglia, and along the Ofanto river. The German willingness to offer battle to the Allied spearheads stemmed from


the need to delay Allied advances long enough to allow German engineers the chance to demolish Naples' port district and to wreck roads and railroads. Kesselring hoped that the destruction would prevent the Allies from quickly driving deep into the plains of Campania.

The German 10th Army would thereafter defend the line of the Volturno river. If Allied forces breached this line, German troops would then pull back to the G or Gustav Line, which ran along the Garigliano River and included the strong position of Cassino. Kesselring, knowing the innate strength of this final defensive line, ordered engineers to develop strong points along the river from which his defenders might dominate attackers.369

**THE EVACUATION OF CORSICA AND SARDINIA**

In August 1943, American commanders agreed at Quebec to the capture of Corsica and Sardinia.370 Churchill hoped that the Italian garrisons on the islands would assist in disarming or defeating the German troops stationed there.371

The Germans did not believe that they could hold the islands, given their troops' poorly-fortified state, and the impossibility of resupply from the mainland.

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369 Kesselring et al., *German Version of the Italian Campaign*, 15-16.

370 Pogue, *Organizer of Victory*, 243-44.

371 Winston S. Churchill, "C.C.S. 341/1 - 693-3 10 September 1943 "Combined Chiefs of Staff - Review of the Strategic Situation in Light of the Italian Collapse" (From ABC 384 Italy (9 Sept 43))" (George C. Marshall Research Library, Lexington, VA), 3-7.
Italian forces on Sardinia possessed few tanks, and the men assigned to coastal defense units were elderly reservists. Moreover, units defending Sardinia would be cut off from replacements. Defenders would fight without resupply owing to the absence of suitable shipping and the difficulty of unloading at the island's wrecked harbors. Even if men and supplies reached the island, the battered railway system could not support a major effort, despite exertions by German engineers that included shipping additional rail engines and cars to the island. If by chance men, supplies, and dock space could be found, the attempt still might flounder given the unrelenting assaults of Allied air forces.\(^{372}\)

The evacuation of Sardinia and Corsica had been foreseen and became a major concern as the invasion of Italy made the islands untenable. The fate of the nearly 50,000 German defenders on Sardinia and 4,000 on Corsica worried Hitler and OKW as fighting raged around Salerno. They launched efforts to evacuate German troops, even if that meant abandoning their military equipment.\(^{373}\) The 90th Panzergrenadier Division provided Sardinia's garrison. Its units stood at a high state of combat readiness, having received priority shipments of troops and materiel. The


*Reichsführer-SS Brigade* defended the craggy southern coastline of French Corsica. The High Command had reinforced its units after aerial reconnaissance in late August and early September revealed that the islands might be the next Allied targets.\textsuperscript{374}

*OPERATION ACHSE* dictated that the 90\textsuperscript{th} *Panzergrenadier Division* evacuate Sardinia by falling back to Corsica. Naval staff officers estimated that this movement would require between ten and fourteen days.\textsuperscript{375} German forces would then retire to the Italian mainland, using sea and air transport. When orders arrived on September 9 to execute *ACHSE*, forces on Sardinia escaped as planned. Marshal Badoglio sought Allied help during the German evacuation from Sardinia and Corsica. Allied forces could not offer assistance, and the fighting rested primarily on Italian shoulders.\textsuperscript{376} The division commander, General Lungershausen, negotiated an agreement with the Italian command of the Maddalena naval base that forestalled further attacks against his forces as they crossed between the two islands, threatening to employ force to ensure his forces' safe transit. Hitler's order to recover his last gift to Mussolini, a complete set of Nietzsche's books, almost scuttled the arrangement. Only after German officers searched the rooms in which Mussolini

\textsuperscript{374}Kesselring et al., *German Version of the Italian Campaign*, 7-8.

\textsuperscript{375}ObM Conference, 9-11 August, 1943, 381-82.

\textsuperscript{376}Badoglio, *Italy in the Second World War*, 101-02.
was thought to be held did the retreat conclude.\textsuperscript{377}

Corsica was a different story. Fighting erupted as the German exodus got underway. Corsican guerillas, supported by French forces landing on the island’s western side, attacked the departing Nazi formations. Despite originally assuring General von Senger otherwise, Italian troops under General Magli fought the withdrawing Germans, which led to several sharp encounters near Bastia. Nonetheless, German forces captured the harbor and embarked their men and equipment for Livorno, 120 kilometers away. They took with them units of the Italian \textit{Nembo Parachute Division}, which remained loyal to the Germans by whose side they had fought the past three years.

Substantial numbers of the German and Italian forces escaped the islands on the Ju-52 and Me-323 air transport that created an air bridge to the Italian mainland, covered by \textit{Luftflotte} 2's remaining fighters. During September and October, 1,580 flights carried 23,192 soldiers and 618 tons of equipment back to Italy. Nearly 100 fighters opened the way for returning German troops until driven from the air by intercepting Allied airmen. Heavy losses forced the evacuation to continue at night. Even so, when the evacuation concluded on October 5, thirty-two of the lumbering transports had fallen victim to marauding Allied fighters. German pilots were

fortunate that demands for air cover over Salerno tied down substantial numbers of Allied aircraft.\footnote{Klinkowstroem, "Italy’s Break-away," 12-13; Seibt, "Evacuation of Sicily and Sardinia," 3; Rohden, "German Air Force in the Mediterranean," 10-12; Lee, \textit{German Air Force}, 142; Fritz Morzik, \textit{Die deutschen Transportflieger im Zweiten Weltkrieg}, ed. Gerhard Hümmelchen (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard & Graefe, 1966), 119; Ruge, \textit{Der Seekrieg}, 335-38; Senger und Etterlin, \textit{Neither Fear Nor Hope}, 160.}

General Westphal, Kesselring’s Chief of Staff, summed up the mystified attitude of many Germans who witnessed the second escape of their forces from Allied clutches in as many months.

\begin{quote}
It was completely incomprehensible to us that the withdrawal of the German effectives from Sardinia and Corsica could have been carried out with almost no interference by the Allied and [sic] sea and air striking forces. This enabled over 30,000 soldiers with full equipment to be transferred safely to the mainland.\footnote{Siegfried Westphal, "General Westphal’s Replies To Questions From L.H. On The Italian Campaign," Liddell Hart Papers, 9/24/149 (LHCMA, n.d.), 5.}
\end{quote}

This second evasion of Allied forces permitted Kesselring the luxury of strengthening his front without stripping his rear areas of troops. The returning forces bought him time to slow the Allied advance, and to convince Hitler that Italy could be held on a line far south of that established by OKW.

\section*{THE DECISION WHERE TO DEFEND ITALY}

German forces in Italy operated under a divided command structure when Allied forces landed at Salerno. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel’s \textit{Army Group B} ran operations in north Italy, while Field Marshal Albert Kesselring’s \textit{OBS} conducted
them further south. This disjointed arrangement worked against a swift response to
the Allied invasion. ³⁸⁰ Why did Hitler permit its existence? A variety of factors
contributed to the adoption of this organization. Hitler and Rommel distrusted the
Italians, believing that they would soon surrender, while Kesselring did not. This
belief caused Hitler to favor defending Italy farther north than Kesselring thought
necessary.³⁸¹ Hitler also employed his ‘divide and control’ strategy in Italy, as he did
elsewhere in his domain.³⁸² He used the existing rivalry between the two men that
had begun in the North African desert to prevent either man’s building a strong
personal power base.³⁸³

Nonetheless, Hitler did not easily decide where to defend Italy. Rommel
and Kesselring held diametrically opposed views on this matter. Rommel, fearful of
Allied air superiority that he had experienced first-hand in North Africa, argued that
southern Italy could not be defended. The threat of Italian treachery meant that
forces stationed there were vulnerable to isolation and annihilation. Kesselring
presented the Nazi dictator with a more optimistic scenario. Given the necessary
forces, he might defeat an invasion. If that proved impossible, he would take
advantage of Italy’s mountainous terrain and conduct a lengthy fight up the
peninsula. This plan provided advantages in that the Italian peninsula narrows in

³⁸⁰ Bennet, Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy, 249.
³⁸¹ Fraser, Knight’s Cross, 439, 440-49.
³⁸³ Goebbels Diaries, 263; Winterbotham, The Ultra Secret, 112.
the south and holding the Allies to positions below Rome would increase Allied air forces difficulties in attacking southern Europe. Moreover, willingly surrendering Rome might fatally undermine Germany's position with its remaining allies in southeastern Europe.\textsuperscript{384}

The matter thoroughly confused Hitler, who finally took Rommel's advice. At that time, Rommel was the more experienced field general. Kesselring had shown promise as a theater commander, but some of his earlier estimates had proven overly optimistic. Hitler obstinately refused to reinforce Kesselring when the Allies landed at Salerno. North Italy alone would be defended. Kesselring's forces would fight delaying actions and fall back upon Rommel's positions in the northern Apennines.\textsuperscript{385}

Developments at Salerno and after that battle's conclusion caused Hitler to reassess the situation. North Italy now rested firmly in his hands, and Allied forces had not shown that they could exploit their hard-won victory in the south. The slow withdrawal up the peninsula showed no signs of becoming a German rout. When Kesselring proposed that his troops maintain themselves in their newly-fortified positions, the Field Marshal found Hitler agreeable to his proposal. Kesselring had not proven overly optimistic this time. Rommel had been too pessimistic in his


\textsuperscript{385}Vieitinghoff, "Assessment of the situation by the High Command as of August 1943," 3-8; Bidwell, "Kesselring," 280-81.
views. Hitler ordered a turnover of command to Kesselring, which took place on November 21, 1943.

The appointment of Kesselring as commander in Italy was the most important command assignment of the Italian campaign. Given supreme command, Rommel withdrawn to the northern Apennines, giving the Allies all they hoped for at a small cost. Designating Kesselring as commander meant that German troops would contest every inch of Italian soil. While they fought, Italy's industrial and agricultural production would fuel Hitler's war.

CONCLUSION

Winter's arrival heralded great promise for Hitler's forces in Italy. Although Allied forces had a secure foothold in southern Italy, the overall German situation was good. OPERATION ACHSE concluded with the Italian industrial base and the rich agricultural areas of north Italy firmly in German hands. As 1944 began, the value of these resources rose steeply. Allied forces had not driven as far or as fast as their leaders had hoped. Rome remained a distant prize whose cost in Allied blood and resources increased daily. Kesselring's design to stalemate his opponents had worked out in his favor. Now he wanted to maintain this advantageous position for as long as possible. Allied miscalculations and blunders greatly eased this task. The divisions that had escaped from Sardinia and Corsica provided OBS with a golden opportunity to reinforce the Italian front and defend the vulnerable flanks of the Italian peninsula.
None of this had come without a struggle and the cost had been high for the Germans. Nonetheless, the situation in Italy as 1943 ended was far better than that which Hitler had expected upon Italy’s surrender that September. The dictator would take good news wherever he could find it.
# Chart V-3

## Overview

Evacuation Totals from the Fwi Ks employed in Italy since 1 Oct. 43

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Fwi K 1</th>
<th>Fwi K 4</th>
<th>Fwi K 6</th>
<th>Fwi K 2</th>
<th>Fwi K 5</th>
<th>Fwi K 8</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 43</td>
<td>7,893</td>
<td>14,407</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>22,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 43</td>
<td>10,430</td>
<td>5,711</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>9,270</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>25,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 43</td>
<td>10,156</td>
<td>16,533</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2,022</td>
<td>41,242</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>70,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV 43</td>
<td>28,479</td>
<td>36,651</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2,022</td>
<td>50,512</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>117,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 44</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>5,591</td>
<td>5,188</td>
<td>1,684</td>
<td>9,366</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>22,489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 44</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>3,466</td>
<td>15,793</td>
<td>1,859</td>
<td>32,709</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>54,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 44</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>4,032</td>
<td>23,488</td>
<td>2,830</td>
<td>18,236</td>
<td>16,079</td>
<td>64,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I 44</td>
<td>1,813</td>
<td>13,089</td>
<td>44,469</td>
<td>6,373</td>
<td>60,311</td>
<td>16,079</td>
<td>142,134</td>
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<tr>
<td>Since employment</td>
<td>30,292</td>
<td>49,740</td>
<td>44,530</td>
<td>8,395</td>
<td>110,823</td>
<td>16,079</td>
<td>259,859</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 44</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>8,291</td>
<td>1,982</td>
<td>11,070</td>
<td>17,910</td>
<td>40,595</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 44</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>4,266</td>
<td>5,216</td>
<td>5,654</td>
<td>12,756</td>
<td>28,310</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Chart V-3

**Overview**  
Evacuation Totals from the Fwi Ks employed in Italy since 1 Oct. 43

### Amounts in Tons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Fwi K 1</th>
<th>Fwi K 4</th>
<th>Fwi K 6</th>
<th>Fwi K 2</th>
<th>Fwi K 5</th>
<th>Fwi K 8</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 44</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>5,236</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>34,035</td>
<td>14,512</td>
<td>54,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II 44</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>1,553</td>
<td>17,793</td>
<td>7,405</td>
<td>50,759</td>
<td>45,178</td>
<td>123,414</td>
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<tr>
<td>Since employment</td>
<td>31,018</td>
<td>51,293</td>
<td>62,323</td>
<td>15,800</td>
<td>161,582</td>
<td>61,257</td>
<td>383,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,986</td>
<td>3,676</td>
<td>3,181</td>
<td>9,493</td>
<td>15,841</td>
<td>34,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 44</td>
<td>2,850</td>
<td>2,345</td>
<td>1,274</td>
<td>15,527</td>
<td>7,669</td>
<td>11,836</td>
<td>41,501</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 44</td>
<td>9,093</td>
<td>1,432</td>
<td>1,206</td>
<td>17,130</td>
<td>6,108</td>
<td>7,809</td>
<td>42,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III 44</td>
<td>11,950</td>
<td>5,763</td>
<td>6,156</td>
<td>35,838</td>
<td>23,270</td>
<td>35,486</td>
<td>118,463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since employment</td>
<td>42,968</td>
<td>57,056</td>
<td>68,479</td>
<td>51,638</td>
<td>184,852</td>
<td>96,743</td>
<td>501,736</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RG242, T77 (Records of the German Armed Forces High Command, OKW Wehrwirtschafts- und Rüstungsamt, Roll 592: Italien Abtransporte Verlagerungen, Frame 1773633.)
After an arduous campaign, 1943 ended with German forces firmly in control of central and north Italy. Nonetheless, serious problems lay ahead. The full economic potential of north Italy needed to be tapped. Accomplishing this task required maintaining labor peace and providing factories with capable management that could restore production. Military problems also abounded. Defending Italy demanded a regular flow of supplies that Allied air forces sought to sever during OPERATION STRANGLE. Although the Gustav Line held throughout a series of flawed attempts to breach its strongest point, Monte Cassino, Allied naval forces could still move an invasion force deep behind the German rear, flanking Kesselring's defensive line. Partisan activity added to German burdens. Movement in undefended areas was dangerous for civilians and military alike. Roving bands of Italian patriots tied down large numbers of German forces as the situation developed ominous parallels with the 'Bandit war' raging in Yugoslavia. Hope of extracting substantial benefits from Italy looked bleak throughout the fall of 1943 and winter of 1944.
BLOODY STALEMATE AT CASSINO

German forces grudgingly surrendered ground as they fell back on the prepared positions of the Gustav Line. Initial dispositions enplaced the strongest units on the two coastal flanks. The formidable mountainous terrain of the Italian spine permitted weaker forces to hold the central sector. The western flank, where American forces operated, received special attention. German engineers laid out their defenses in depth, using the Garigliano River and nearby heights of Monte Camino, Monte Della Difensa, and Monte Rotondo to anchor this threatened flank. German commanders named their defensive position the Winter Line; Allied forces referred to it as the Bernhardt Line. Vietinghoff’s 10th Army retained responsibility for defending the vulnerable Tyrrhenian Sea coast. The eastern side, with more open terrain that tempted Allied commanders as a place to employ their greater mobility, created a dilemma for Kesselring. A breakthrough here could rapidly develop into the loss of Italy. British mechanized and seaborne forces penetrating German positions might well unhinge the entire defensive line and force him to abandon the peninsula.\(^{386}\)

German troops flooded vulnerable coastal areas along the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic seas to compensate for their weakness. 10th Army engineers enlarged the Lago di Fondi in their area, while OBSW engineers inundated suitable sectors in the Pontinian marshes, along the Tiber river mouth, and at Grossetto and Follonica.

\(^{386}\)Kesselring and et al., *German Version of the Italian*, 38-39.
Corresponding measures taken at the Po river mouth immersed large portions of the Adriatic coastline of north Italy. The carefully planned inundations used only fresh water so that salt would not prevent future cultivation.  

TERMOLI

British forces reinforced the German fear of flanking attacks from the sea when they launched a surprise assault on October 3, 1943. British commandos landed at Termoli, bypassing German attempts to reform their defenses along the Biferno river. Infantry of the British XIII Corps joined in the fighting. Kesselring worried that this landing presaged a major British effort to capture Rome. Weak units of the 1st Fallschirmjäger Division held Termoli while awaiting the reinforcing 16th Panzer Division. Heavy losses included the commander of the Fallschirmjäger battalion defending the city.

A mixup in orders impeded the arrival of reinforcements. Kesselring sharply criticized his subordinate, Vietinghoff, for not properly overseeing their movement. Many of the division's vehicles broke down in the harsh terrain, causing reinforcing units to arrive piecemeal and be chewed up by Allied forces. The battle was touch-and-go as the British defeated a determined German effort to retake Termoli that reached within 400 yards of the city while the British 38th Infantry

Brigade hastily deployed from its landing ships. After three days of bitter combat, \textit{10\textsuperscript{th} Army} pulled its forces back to new positions along the Sangro river. Allied intelligence discovered the timing of a final assault, allowing well-prepared British troops to defeat it and launch their own attack. Although the loss of the city and this strong position weakened the German defense, Kesselring learned to take personal charge in critical situations, a valuable lesson which he later drew on at Anzio.\footnote{Kesselring, \textit{A Soldier’s Record}, 227; Kesselring et al., \textit{German Version of the Italian Campaign}, 33-34; C.M.H.Q. Historical Section, "Special Interrogation Report, General Richard Heidrich, Commander First Parachute Division, Commander 1 Parachute Corps. (13 Nov 46)," U. S. Army Military History Institute Archive (Carlisle, Pa.), 1; Winterbotham, \textit{The Ultra Secret}, 112; Werthen, \textit{16. Panzer Division}, 160-69. See also the diary entries for 3, 5, and 9 October 1943 in: Item 4/1, Personal Diary of Lt. Gen. C. W. Allfrey, CB DSO MC, The Italian Campaign with 5 Corps, 11 Sept.-21 Dec. 1943, Papers of Lt Gen Sir Charles Walter Allfrey (1895-1964), (LHCMA).}

On the western flank, the capable General Senger once more took the reins as commander of the \textit{XIV Panzer Korps}. Having overseen the withdrawal of German forces from Sardinia, Senger assumed control of this sector. The forces at hand did not inspire confidence in him. He had two infantry divisions, the \textit{94\textsuperscript{th}} and \textit{305\textsuperscript{th}}, both defending zones larger than those normally entrusted to such units. Moreover, the latter division lacked the organic antitank units necessary to halt Allied armor.

Senger’s two mobile units differed greatly in quality. The \textit{3\textsuperscript{rd} Panzergrenadier Division} consisted of \textit{Volksdeutschen} enlisted from conquered Poland. Its men had tasted defeat too often and had long endured Nazi mistreatment of their families. The division’s troopers now avoided combat, seeing how few of even its bravest soldiers
received promotions. The 15th Panzergrenadier Division provided Senger with a stalwart force, stationed on the key heights of Monte Faito and Monte Camino.\textsuperscript{389}

Kesselring’s forces defended a series of parallel defensive lines on the western side of Italy. German divisions first greeted their advancing enemies from the Barbara Line, which began at the Tyrrhenian Sea and covered the entrance to the vital Mignano Gap along Highway 6. At the beginning of November, two American infantry divisions, the 34th and 45th, drove forward into the Mignano Gap. While they negotiated the approach to Monte Rotondo and seized it, their German opponents extracted a high price for the meager advance. Senger received timely assistance in the arrival of the 29th Panzergrenadier Division, which replaced the unreliable 3rd Panzergrenadier Division. The 26th Panzer Division squeezed into a narrow front, ensuring that no Allied forces penetrated vital positions. By November 15, 5th Army gave up and pulled its ravaged divisions back to refit while Allied planners rethought their scheme.\textsuperscript{390}

On November 20, British forces took up the fight when General Montgomery’s men breached the Sangro river line. Prolonged rains had raised that river above its flood crest, slowing their advance. When the rains persisted, the Sangro rose to flood stage and destroyed the bridges linking the advancing British forces with their logistical support. The German 65th Infantry Division received

\textsuperscript{389}Senger und Etterlin, \textit{Neither Fear Nor Hope}, 182-83.

\textsuperscript{390}Ibid., 185-86.
reinforcements during the pause. Fresh troops from north Italy and a division shifted from the western side of the peninsula fought the assaulting British, Indian, and New Zealand troops to a standstill. Thirty days of hard fighting and heavy casualties bought but fifteen additional miles of soggy soil.

ORTONA

The battle for Ortona brought troops of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division into combat with the remnants of the German 65th Infantry, 1st Fallschirmjäger, and 90th Panzergrenadier divisions. This town of 10,000 inhabitants lay astride the coastal road stretching from Termoli north to Pescara. Kesselring hoped to keep Ortona's port out of Allied hands as well as maintain control of this important crossroads. German paratroopers contested every street and house, hosing obvious avenues of advance with the copious numbers of automatic weapons allotted them.

Armored vehicles found advancing both difficult and dangerous as German engineers demolished houses to fill Ortona's narrow streets. Machine gun fire pinned down the Canadian infantry before antitank weapons killed the isolated and vulnerable tanks. The Canadian advance often halted as booby-trapped houses suddenly exploded, driving the attackers to ground. German forces took advantage of every gap thereby created and repeatedly infiltrated back into areas already cleared.

Allied artillery, always feared by German troops, proved little help throughout the close-in fighting. It was impossible to identify targets and delivering
precise bombardments upon a single target in the confusing warren of streets. The stout stone buildings lining Ortona's narrow avenues resisted the fire of even the heaviest guns supporting the Canadian advance.

Canadians either quickly became experts in city-fighting or died. Field guns assisted with direct fire, gouging holes in the rubble piles and allowing armor to advance. Canadian infantry, stymied by fire commanding city streets, simply blew their way from one to another of Ortona's interconnected houses. Explosive charges created interior doors between neighboring homes, allowing unwanted visitors entrance.

Ortona fell on December 27, although the vigorous German defense had drained Montgomery's men of their strength. He halted them less than ten miles south of Pescara and the intended westward turn along the good road to Rome. While German troops suffered heavy losses, Vietinghoff found his men in good spirits and was proud that they had stopped the British from either taking Pescara or breaking through German lines. The defense had fended off the British drive and bought time to consolidate the German hold on Italy.391

In early December, 5th Army resumed offensive operations, this time making better progress. The important heights fell as American, British, and French units breached the Bernhard Line and seized the all-important Mignano Gap. German forces gave up the contest and assumed positions in the Gustav Line, the maintenance of which depended upon controlling the mountains commanding the town of Monte Cassino.392

Kesselring created a small reserve force to back up this position by depleting the his overstretched forces. In late December, the 71st Infantry Division transferred from upper Italy closer to the fighting front. The 90th Panzergrenadier Division, which had provided the Adriatic front with additional muscle, also moved into reserve. These troops and units pulled from combat for rest and refitting, gave him a quick reaction force.

OKW understood the danger that a landing behind the new line in Italy represented and readied forces to rush there. The 715th Infantry Division, Panzer, and artillery units waited in France. The 114th Jäger Division would come from the Balkans. Forces to be sent from the Reich included the LXXV Army Corps headquarters and two infantry and armored infantry training regiments, supported by artillery and smoke mortar training regiments. Tiger, radio-controlled tank battalions, and two heavy antitank battalions, would supplement forces despatched from Germany. Although the units assigned this task lacked combat experience and

392Senger und Etterlin, Neither Fear Nor Hope, 186-88.
would reach Italy slowly, they were nonetheless needed.\textsuperscript{393}

In mid-January 1944, Kesselring’s depleted forces reported their strength to Berlin. Of twenty-two and one-half divisions in Italy, only twelve qualified as fit for combat. Three others were reorganizing, four were reforming, and one and one-half were suited solely for rear area security duties. An additional division handled training for formations engaged in combat. \textit{10th Army} mustered 150,000 men on the main front opposite Allied armies. \textit{14th Army}'s 71,000 troops occupied north Italy and prepared for an Allied amphibious landing. The 24,000 men of the \textit{1st Fallschirmjäger Korps} gave Kesselring an elite force that helped maintain the German grip on Monte Cassino. Forces commanded by \textit{OBSW} and carried on the roles while wounded amounted to an additional 21,000 men. The \textit{Bevollmächtiger deutschen General} had 5,000 men at his disposal with which to secure rear areas.\textsuperscript{394}

Kesselring and his Chief of Staff, Westphal, worried constantly about a possible Allied landing. An invasion behind the main line threatened \textit{OBSW} with complete catastrophe. Its forces scarcely sufficed to hold the front and maintain communications with Germany. While visiting Italy in January 1944, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, head of \textit{Abwehr}, German military intelligence and

\textsuperscript{393}Kesselring et al., \textit{German Version of the Italian Campaign}, 60-61.

\textsuperscript{394}\textit{Ibid.}, 62-64; OB Südwest Ic, "Starkverhältnisse der in italien eingesetzten Verbände (15. 1. 1944)," RH19 X (Heeresgruppe C), Band 13 (BAMA: Microfiche), 16. Claims that Ultra revealed a total of 750,000 Germans serving in Italy just before the invasion at Anzio do not agree with figures received by \textit{OKW}. See Bennett, \textit{Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy}, 254.
counterintelligence, reassured the two officers that an Allied landing was not in the cards. Allied forces were busy concentrating for the invasion of France. Kesselring and Westphal, unable to ascertain the position of Allied amphibious forces, warily accepted this information and shifted all but a scant two battalions away from guard duty at Rome’s doorstep.395

ANZIO

Just how wrong Canaris was became clear at 0300 hours on January 22, when Westphal awakened to the news of an Allied landing at Anzio. He ordered the immediate execution of *Fall Richard*, a theater-wide response to a major Allied landing in Italy. General Kurt Student took command at Anzio with the staff of his 1st Fallschirmjäger Korps (formerly the XI Fliegerkorps). Major General Mälzer, commandant of Rome, hastily armed troops recovering from their injuries in Rome. Soldiers suffering from venereal diseases likewise found themselves hustled off to fight at Anzio.

Jodl informed Kesselring that Hitler had authorized the Field Marshal to assume command of all *Wehrmacht* and SS formations stationed in Italy. *OKW* also promised divisions from southern France and Yugoslavia. Reserve Army forces in Germany swiftly loaded for rail shipment to Italy. Closer to the front, 14th Army dispatched the 65th Infantry Division from Genoa, the 362nd Infantry Division from

Rimini, and the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division from Goerz. The meager 10th Army forces available also responded. Nonetheless, the road to Rome stood open for twenty-four critical hours. Westphal held for the remainder of his life that the 36,000 Allied troops at Anzio could have taken the city.396

This long-awaited Allied turning movement caught German forces ill-prepared. Kesselring’s men were engaged in heavy fighting along the Gustav Line, fending off an Allied assault launched during the night of January 17/18. Allied forces hit the thinly-held line of the 94th Infantry Division, forcing the Garigliano river and turning this position, while British commandos crashed ashore behind the German river defenses. The fierce battle drew in German mobile reserves, tying them down far from Anzio’s beaches. The 29th and 90th Panzergrenadier divisions reinforced Kesselring’s crumbling front in the nick of time, but quickly spent their strength and could not extricate themselves for duty at Anzio. Unfortunately, three nights of standing ready for an imminent invasion had already tired German reserves throughout Italy and led Kesselring to rest them the night of the amphibious assault. Allied invaders found their advance contested only by resited German anti-aircraft batteries that normally ringed Rome.397

396 "Telegram from Jodl to OB Suedwest, 19.1.1944," 553/44 g.Kdos., RH19 X (Heeresgruppe C), Band 35 - Verschiedenes Jan.-Juni 1944, Bl. 35 (BAMA: Microfiche), 35; Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 61-62, 86; Westphal, Errinnerungen, 249.

397 Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 84; Kesselring, A Soldier's Record, 227-33; Viertlinghoff, "T1a Ch. 6," 103; Klinkowstroem, "T1a Ch. 10," 8-9, 10; Westphal, Errinnerungen, 237; David M. Toczek, "The Rapido Crossing: A
The German ability to form *Kampfgruppen* (battlegroups) paid rich dividends. General Hans Georg von Mackensen took command of the 14th Army, which originally consisted of the staffs of the I Fallschirmjäger and LXXVI Panzer corps. The new army operated north of the 10th Army, dividing responsibilities at a line drawn encompassing Terracina - Artena - west of Tivoli. Kesselring surrounded the dangerous protrusion in his rear with Eastern volunteer battalions guarding the region and hastily-improvised infantry formations, flung together from troops grabbed from trains while returning from furlough and *Luftwaffe* and *Marine* men able to bear arms. These forces provided the sole means of impeding an Allied drive on Rome. More than one German officer later expressed his thanks at not having to wage war against Lucas’ divisions with *ad-hoc* infantry formations lacking everything save rifles and entrenching tools.398

*Luftwaffe* units engaged in their own desperate holding action. Allied air forces had concentrated upon German air bases prior to the landing at Anzio, striking at airfields as far away as southern France. The Allied air strategy hindered the *Luftwaffe*’s rapid reinforcement after the invasion and eliminated air support for the embattled 10th Army. The few bombers vied with the overwhelming Anglo-American air superiority required escorts numerically stronger than the attacking

The damage to airfields slowed the buildup of planes to support German defensive operations and counterattacks at Anzio. 140 bombers slowly arrived and conducted pinprick raids against Allied shipping. Although the Allies employed three specially-equipped electronic warfare ships to defend against guided bomb attacks at Anzio, on January 23, the II. Fliegerdivision's Sonderverbände sank the British destroyer *Janus* with torpedoes, while a *Hs-293* launched by the *II./KG 100* damaged its sister ship, *Jervis*. *Luftwaffe* aircraft followed up this success on the night of 24/25 January by damaging the U.S. destroyer *Plunkett* with an *Hs-293* strike. On January 29, the British cruiser *Spartan* and a single merchant ship fell victim to *Luftwaffe* air raids. Nonetheless, during the first ten days of Anzio, the Allies lost only four ships and reported two more as damaged. The 475 *Luftwaffe* aircraft could do little when arrayed against Allied air forces that outnumbered them more than five to one.

Kesselring did not know that Lucas' inactivity stemmed from the absence of orders other than to simply capture a beachhead and see what happened. When 5th Army divisions suffered bloody repulse in the south, Allied troops at Anzio no longer served the purpose for which they had landed. The failure to breakthrough

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399 Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe im Mittelmeer 1940-1945*, 763-64.

German lines at Cassino doomed the plan that Lucas’ men would drive forward to meet Clark’s advancing divisions. British and American troops did not dare drive their limited forces toward Rome in the face of the rapid German buildup, lacking the strength to challenge their opponents and accomplish the original design by themselves.401

By early February, the 14th Army had concentrated its units and surrounded Anzio. (See Chart 6.1) The buildup had not escaped notice by Allied intelligence officers. Ultra intercepts revealed Hitler’s decision to shift nine divisions stationed in the Balkans to counter the two Allied divisions ashore at Anzio. Clark and Alexander counseled caution to their confused battlefield commander, who operated out of the Ultra loop. Aware of the growing striking power available to Kesselring, Lucas’ superiors ordered him to prepare his men for a massive German counterstroke. Hitler, sensing a great opportunity to injure Allied morale, had demanded the annihilation of the Allied position at Anzio.402

Preparations for a counterattack finally completed, the divisions of the 14th Army left the start line on February 16. ‘Sunny’ Italy once more frustrated an attacker’s plan, as a downpour bogged down the German advance in a sea of mud. The counterattack had been purposely delayed until the onset of the rainy season in


402Blumenson, "Will 'Ultra' Rewrite History?" 47-48; David Kahn, "The Significance of Codebreaking and Intelligence in Allied Strategy and Tactics," 216-17, 218; Irving, Hitler's War, 604-05.
hopes of preventing effective Allied air and naval support. Despite this wait, the lethal combination of overwhelming Allied firepower deployed at sea and on land combined with the adverse weather to crush the German assault. Nazi armor, confined to the roads that laced the swampy region, became vulnerable targets. Other German units could not assist the assault, which halted the attack after the Allies initiated their own offensive against the vulnerable German attackers.\textsuperscript{403} A second assault undertaken between February 28 and March 3 similarly foundered. The two sides suffered losses approximating 19,000 men each, while accomplishing nothing. The fighting had marked out the beachhead's boundaries, which would remain firm until May.\textsuperscript{404}

Allied commanders breathed a deep sigh of relief when Ultra revealed that Kesselring's final counterattack would not be repeated. Heavy rain and the expense of previous assaults had washed away his desire to do so. Further effort would merely waste good troops.\textsuperscript{405} Moreover, his \textit{Führer} required combat troops that March to seize Hungarian industrial facilities and the oil fields at Lake Balaton. Hitler took many of them from the 14\textsuperscript{th} Army, rendering it impotent for offensive


\textsuperscript{404}Kesselring et al., \textit{German Version of the Italian Campaign}, 90-91; Graham and Bidwell, \textit{Tug of War}, 153-54.

purposes. Nonetheless, despite bloody Allied reverses at the Rapido River and Cassino, German officers later commented that, although they had blunted the Allied drive, the southern battle enticed their forces into combat and most certainly prevented them from pushing Allied forces at Anzio back into the sea.

SUPPLY SITUATION

German lines of communications depended on the ten to twelve trains dispatched southward each day through the Brenner Pass. German logistical officers explained after the war that their forces operating in Italy could have functioned on as few as four and one-half trains daily. The 450 tons delivered by this small number of trains could sustain Kesselring's divisions. Allied air forces did not focus on the critical rail passes and never cut German forces off from the minimal logistical support necessary for their subsistence.

Before the dissolution of Army Group B, its quartermaster handled the division of supplies for the two army groups. Rommel's logisticians provisioned Luftwaffe and Marine forces. Deliveries averaged 800-1,200 tons per day, forcing the use of trains for temporary storage until Rommel's men established permanent


407Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 81.

facilities around Bolzano, Merano, Verona, Lake Garda, Mantua, the Iseo Lakes, Milan, and Laibach. Quartermasters established repair shops north of the Po River and east of Tessino, since they expected that most of southern Italy would be abandoned. Kesselring's men received urgent shipments by truck. OBS established its own supply bases, first depending on supplies originally shipped to support the North African campaign. During September 1943, OBS quartermaster troops built supply depots at Frosinone and Sulmona. 409

AGB foresaw Allied operations against rail connections to France and Germany and wanted to store supplies for fifteen to twenty days of combat. Constant operations and low stocks of supplies in Germany prevented this buildup. By fall 1943, supply depots held a two to three day reserve of ammunition and stocks of motor fuel good for five to six days travel. A thirty-day store of rations had also been amassed. The two army groups accumulated this reserve only because Berlin gave the theater a high priority, shipping it stores kept in France to ward off invasion. 410

The supply position of German forces rested on a frail framework by the spring of 1944. The coastlines of the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian seas lay exposed to Allied and partisan attacks. Control of the air rested firmly in Allied hands, making

409 Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 18-19.

transport of supplies to the front a dangerous enterprise. The German navy struggled to provide minimal logistical support as its ships dashed down the coasts, avoiding Allied naval and air forces.\textsuperscript{411}

**OPERATION STRANGLE**

As spring 1944 arrived, Allied commanders decided to break the stalemate in Italy by turning loose their air men on the vulnerable German lines of communications. Beginning on March 19, 1944, Allied air forces concentrated on disrupting German rail transportation. This air campaign, unique in the annals of warfare up to that time, sought nothing less than to defeat *Army Group C* by severing its lines of communications. Historians still debate both the effectiveness and results of this campaign. Nonetheless, this aerial assault on German communications seriously hampered operations for an extended period.\textsuperscript{412}

4,000 Allied aircraft took part in STRANGLE, averaging 1,352 sorties daily. The *Luftwaffe* countered them with 525 planes, 200 of which were fighters.\textsuperscript{413} This weakness in the air forced *Luftwaffe* commanders to depend on antiaircraft guns to neutralize the Allied aerial armada. Allied bombing missions concentrated first on railroads and bridges, trying to halt the rail traffic that provided the bulk of the

\textsuperscript{411}Hoppe, 278. *Infanterie-Division*, 7.


\textsuperscript{413}Ibid., 10-11.
4,000-6,000 tons shipped daily to the 10th and 14th armies. The targets were difficult to put out of service, with well-positioned German repair crews working furiously to restore damaged lines and bridges. Allied aircraft then switched targets to marshaling yards located at key rail centers.

Although the new targets suffered heavy damage, German communications retained a high degree of redundancy, and most trains bound for Italy were marshaled at German yards.414 When rail traffic fell off sharply, OBSW used more road transport. Trucks could not compensate for the loss of train traffic. They were too vulnerable to air attack. Nonetheless, truck shipments, moving slowly at night, evaded the swarming Allied fighter-bombers that restricted daylight movement. Allied air forces lacked a significant night bomber force capable of making precision strikes against the narrow and crowded roads. Moreover, the bad weather that turned 'sunny Italy' into a sea of mud that spring, also impeded aerial assaults on German communications.415

Despite limiting factors, Operation Strangle worked better than earlier histories have credited it. Fuel and ammunition supplies diminished to levels that worried German commanders. Ammunition stockpiles held steady only because


415"Besondere Anordnungen für die Versorgungstruppen Nr. 2," Oberbefehlshaber Südwest (Obkdo.d.Heeresgruppe C) O Qu/Qu 1 Nr. 531/44 geh., RH19 X (Heeresgruppe C), Band 35 - Verschiedenes Jan.-Juni 1944, Bl. 31 (BAMA: Microfiche), 31; Mark, "New Look," 6.
stores of Italian munitions, most not readily usable by German units, filled supply
dumps. Stocks of munitions required for combat did drop sharply. Units entering
the line as reinforcements brought their own stores, which they quickly used up.
Fuel supplies also dropped to dangerous levels, rendering troop movements
problematical. Luftwaffe forces found the situation critical enough to ground
bomber units when inadequate supplies of aviation fuel forced a choice between air
defense and bombing missions.\textsuperscript{416}

Why, then, did the German front not collapse with the beginning of the
Allied spring offensive? Allied planners, although guided by Ultra intelligence, did
not understand German logistical requirements. This lack of understanding created
ideal conditions for the German defenders. The assault rolled forward in a series of
independent attacks. The poorly-timed offensive allowed German logistics to
maintain an even flow of supplies, first to the 10\textsuperscript{th} Army, and then to the 14\textsuperscript{th} Army.\textsuperscript{417}

One factor not heretofore examined in the conduct of STRANGLE is its
effect on the Italian economy. Although targets nearer the front remained
STRANGLE's top priority, the constant assaults produced a rippling effect
throughout the Italian economy. By June 1944, the wave of attacks led to a tsunami-
like impact on transportation in Italy. Heightened Wehrmacht requirements created
obstructions from Bologna south to Florence. Vital east-west traffic throughout Italy

\textsuperscript{416} M.A.A.F. ASD, 90; Mark, "New Look," 7-13.

\textsuperscript{417} Ibid., 14-15.
screeched to a halt as Kesselring's forces demanded an ever-increasing volume of supplies and reinforcements. These requirements, on top of the damage already inflicted to the fragile Italian railroads, caused a temporary halt to both east-west traffic and essential coal shipments from the Reich, which hindered German efforts to return the Italian war economy to full-scale production. 418

ECONOMICS

Economic historian Dietrich Eichholtz accurately described the new German economic policy toward Italy as "on the one hand, the productive exploitation of their capacity; on the other, robbing and plundering." Albert Speer's right hand man in Italy, former armaments inspector Major General Hans Leyers, carried out this policy. Leyers carefully and energetically turned Italian industry into a valuable German asset. The new Italian overseer outlined his "task [. . .] in Italy [as] first of all to keep the industries in upper Italy in operation and to harness them into the service of German armaments and war production." Taking advantage of Speer's sweeping powers to transfer industry threatened by air attack, Leyers ordered the movement of major industrial concerns located in Rome to new locations in upper Italy.

Speer reported that "[t]he quick evaluation of Italian capacity for the German armaments potential is of absolutely decisive importance." After a cursory

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418 General des Transportwesens Italien, "Beiträge zum Kriegstagebuch (für den Monat Juni 1944)," RH19 X (Heeresgruppe C), Band 72 (BAMA: Microfiche), 3.
survey, another Speer assistant, Amtschaef Walter Schieber, transferred machine tools and vital production equipment from Alfa Romeo, Fiat, and other major Italian producers back to Germany. Between mid-September and the end of October 1943, 4,800 tons of vital industrial implements moved back to the Reich. 419

The economic potential of Italy included more than robbing it of production tools. The Italian chemical industry stood behind only Germany and Great Britain among its European counterparts. Although Italy lacked domestic sources of raw materials, Italy possessed 7,500 producers employing 130,000 skilled workers. The Italian textile industry and its 600,000 workers could produce a wide array of urgently-needed fabrics. Aluminum production also numbered among the areas of strength for Italian industry. Output from Italian aluminum producers helped increase Luftwaffe production. Speer’s operatives rushed factories making optical equipment back into production, a boon to the German war effort, given that this sector of Italy’s economy ranked second only to highly-regarded German producers. Strength in aircraft and aircraft engine production and naval construction also lay ready for tapping. 420

Nonetheless, a lack of efficient management for the Italian economy plagued its German overseers. German officials noted this disarray in February 1944, complaining that

419 Dietrich Eichholtz, Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 158, 159.

There isn't any oversight concerning the extent of production and the capacity in the individual Italian branches of industry, especially however in the heavy and armaments industries, in the motor vehicle works, the electrical industry, as well as in the precision engineering, optical, substitute products, and most of all, in the textile industry. 421

The muddle required renewed efforts to harness the potential of the Italian war economy to support the Third Reich.

Speer unified his control of the Italian war economy on March 14, 1944. His administrative rule superceded that of Rudolph Toussaint, the new Plenipotentiary General for Italy, whose officers and civilian officials had run Italy since the previous fall. 422 Despite Speer's newly-won powers, a variety of problems hurt the Italian economy throughout the spring of 1944. A prolonged drought reduced the output of Italian hydroelectric plants. The shortfall in electricity reverberated throughout the Italian economy, being felt most heavily in cement production. Shortages prevented the repair of critical plants as engineers diverted supplies for building fortifications. Stepped up air attacks on rail installations also hindered the war economy's smooth operation, further slowing production. 423

Nonetheless, by May 1944, Leyers could report that Italian industry had

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422 Kuby, Verrat auf Deutsch, 447.

taken meaningful strides, resulting in increased production. Shipbuilders had constructed 10 merchant ships. Military vehicles sufficient to outfit nine units had been produced during April. Rubber, paper, and motor vehicle output were up and producing valuable quantities of useful items. Both raw steel and other metal production had risen measurably. Armament factories had achieved 80% of their goals for the month.424

The German war economy benefitted in other ways as Italians also paid direct 'reparations' to their German masters. The province of Turin alone paid 2,198,651,474.24 lira to the Reich before the war ended.425 Moreover, the fertile plains of the Po valley became increasingly important as German forces lost control of the Soviet breadbasket in the Ukraine. Nonetheless, a lack of fertilizer and diverting Italian agricultural laborers to Organisation Todt projects in Italy and for labor in the Reich caused production shortfalls.426

Surprisingly, a German report in February 1944 noted that the 1943 harvest sufficed to feed both the Italian civilian population in German-occupied Italy and the Wehrmacht forces serving there. Nonetheless, the loss of 80 percent of the Italian olive oil supply from southern sources was a bitter blow that reduced the amount of


425Kuby, Verrat auf Deutsch, 448. The exchange rate had been set at DM 1 = 10 Lire.

The German economic exploitation of Italy strengthened support for both
the partisan movement and direct action by workers against the German occupation
as Italian resentment of their nation’s rape grew.\textsuperscript{428} German authorities proved as
inept at controlling Italian workers as Mussolini’s regime had been when strikes
broke out again in December 1943 at the Mirafiori factory in Turin. Laborers in
Genoa and Milan followed suit. At the height of the strike, nearly 50,000 men and
women had quit their work places, shutting down much of the Italian war economy.

Workers struck against low wages, high prices, and the threat of starvation.

One poignant picket sign carried by workers proclaimed:

\begin{quote}
With the exception of the Greeks, who are dying of hunger, no
people in Europe, is being so completely exploited by the
Germans as the Italians, not even the conquered countries.
\end{quote}

In comparison:

\begin{quote}
Bread: The \textit{Germans} have 286 g per day, the French 275 g, the
Norwegians 260 g, the Belgians 224 g, the Croatians 214 g, the
\textit{Italians} 150 g
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Meat: The \textit{Germans} have 286 g per week, the Croatians 300 g, the
Belgians 245 g, the French 180 g, the Norwegians 100 g, the
\textit{Italians} 100 g
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{427} W Stb Inland 1/III, T77/Roll 576 7.11.1944, 1754907.

\textsuperscript{428} Kuby, \textit{Verrat auf Deutsch}, 447; Klinkhammer, \textit{Zwischen Bündnis und
Besatzung}, 283-84.
Sugar: The Germans have 225 g per week, the Belgians 230 g, the Norwegians 200 g, the French 125 g, the Croatians 125 g, the Italians 125 g.

Fat: The Germans have 206 g per week, the Norwegians 210 g, the Croatians 125 g, the French 110 g, the Belgians 105 g, the Italians 100 g.

That is the place, which the new German leadership has assigned Italy. Therefore you must call: HEIL HITLER!429

The new strikes had a more-developed and disturbing political undertone than seen in past episodes. Workers had added political complaints to their list of grievances. This sparked a swift and harsh German response. Ribbentrop authorized deportations and military courts for use against the laborers, allowing the execution of strike leaders as alleged communists.

When the Sicherheitsdienst and German police moved to crush the strikers, workers turned to the partisan movement for assistance. Partisans helped hide laborers facing deportation to Germany and protected strikers’ families. The Italian resistance movement also struck directly at the war economy, encouraging workers to sabotage production and the shipment of weapons.430

The broken strike turned workers into partners of the partisan movement. The workers’ strength quietly made the Milan Committee for National Liberation (CLN) the commanding voice among the many disparate groups resisting the Germans in north Italy. Aroused and organized by partisan leaders, laborers struck

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429 Kuby, Verrat auf Deutsch, 448-449.

430 Ibid., 448-449.
hard at those that they held responsible for the deportations and murders of workers, killing forty members of the Fascist squads used by German authorities to suppress the strike. 431

The failed strike did not deter plans to renew opposition at a later time. A hoped-for mass rising in Rome did not take place when the Allies landed at Anzio. Although disappointed, Luigi Longo of the CLN reminded his compatriots that previous work stoppages had demonstrated that workers possessed the ability to halt or sabotage war production. Communist leaders pressed again for a general strike in north Italy to be held in February 1944. Longo strongly felt that German repression and atrocities had turned public opinion against the occupiers. 432

Renewed calls for strikes in late February 1944 led to lock-outs the following month. Labor leaders saw the new strike as a test of their growing political strength. Nonetheless, most Fiat workers reported for their regular shifts. Having experienced the German response to the previous round of work stoppages, they took seriously threats to arrest and deport them to Germany. Laborers at many other factories answered the call and shut down production. 433

Labor and resistance leaders succeeded in stopping city buses and halted rail traffic between Turin and Milan. Although shortages of electricity had already

431 Kuby, *Verrat auf Deutsch*, 449-450.


immobilized many industrial plants, German reprisals began at once. SS police and Italian Fascist squads arrested and deported workers beginning March 4. Hitler ordered the deportation of twenty percent of the strikers. His plans unraveled when his ambassador to Mussolini, Rudolf Rahn, pointed out that the reprisals would result in the very goal sought by both labor and partisan leaders. War production could not continue if so many skilled workers were suddenly snatched away from their factories.434

Despite strenuous efforts to disrupt production, many factories slowly returned to operation, even as living conditions further deteriorated. In April 1944, German authorities again cut rations. Basic allotments per month declined to 600 grams of meat, two kilos of rice or pasta, and 300 grams of fat, oil, or cheese.435 Nonetheless, although workers did not win an amelioration of their living conditions, the mass work disruptions of February and March demonstrated to Germans the degree of opposition growing among Italians, resistance containing a strong anti-Fascist tone that bode ill for the future.436

Despite the disruptions, the German exploitation of the Italian economy paid large dividends. Speer’s plan for using the productive capacity of occupied states to manufacture consumer goods found fertile ground in Italy. By March 1944,

434Kuby, Verrat auf Deutsch, 452; Klinkhammer, Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung, 288, 295, 297.

435Kuby, Verrat auf Deutsch, 453.

436Klinkhammer, Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung, 303.
purchases of shoes, cases, and various leather goods, including shopping bags, had risen to a level of more than RM 10 million. German agents had acquired more than RM 300 million worth of textiles, 30 percent of which had already been transshipped to the Reich.\textsuperscript{437} Later valuations estimated the worth of business done in Italy from the conquest until July 31, 1944 at RM 1,989,100,000. Of this, arms production totaled RM 1,071,000,000, or fifty-four percent of orders. Consumer goods amounted to RM 870,600,000, or forty-four percent of orders placed.\textsuperscript{438}

Close inspection clearly demonstrates the increasing value of the Italian war economy to the overall German war effort. Despite labor unrest, material shortages, and partisan attacks, Italian factories contributed substantially to the steadily rising industrial output of the Third Reich, even as Allied air attacks rained destruction down upon German cities and production sites. As will be seen, the value of this contribution did much to sustain the German war effort until the collapse of coal deliveries finally destroyed this vital cog in the vast German war enterprise.

**GERMAN ATROCITIES AND THE ITALIAN HOLOCAUST**

Mussolini had long vacillated between a policy of seeking Jewish goodwill and launching attacks on Italian Jews. This awkward scheme worsened after Adolf

\textsuperscript{437}W. A. Boelcke, *Die Deutsche Wirtschaft 1930-1945: Interna des Reichswirtschaftsministeriums* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1983), 319; Rieder, "Zwischen Bündis und Ausbeutung," 676.

\textsuperscript{438}Ibid., 693-695. See Chart VI-1 for a chart breaking down the orders by category and rank.
Hitler's accession to power in January 1933. A trial of anti-Fascists opposed to Mussolini's regime concluded on March 30, 1934 with the conviction of seventeen men, a majority of whom were Jews. Mussolini sharpened the anti-Semitic elements of his ideology in late 1934 when the International Fascist Congress at Montreux adopted a resolution condemning the Jews, and again in 1938 and 1939, when a series of laws and decrees placed restrictions on the Italian Jewish community similar to those already grieving German Jews. 

Nonetheless, Italian Jews lived a protected existence when compared with their European counterparts. The Fascist regime did not seek to destroy the Jewish community, which antagonized Nazis engaged in the 'Final Solution.' The safety of Italy's Jews ended with the Italian surrender in September 1943. German officials quickly took advantage of their newly-won power in Italy. Herbert Kappler exacted a payment of fifty kilograms of gold from Rome's Jewish community that month. The city's chief rabbi, Israel Zolli, paid the sum after the Vatican agreed to loan gold if needed. Nonetheless, this payment bought small compensation as deportations of Roman Jews to Auschwitz began on October 16, 1943. Although 7,000 Roman Jews escaped the roundup, only fifteen of 1,007 deportees in the initial group survived the 

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German disappointment at the failure of their first efforts turned into close attention to the presence of some 35,000 Jews living in north Italy. A methodical drive to destroy this widespread community met with limited success. Once more, Italians assisted their friends and neighbors in escaping the clutches of SS and Fascist police. Even the transfer to Italy of experienced Nazi operatives, who would direct the effort, met with muted results. While mass transports to Auschwitz and other extermination camps began in March 1944, best estimates are that fewer than 10,000 of the Italian Jewish community died there.\(^441\)

Italian Jews did not suffer alone. Their compatriots, many of whom worked to save the Jewish community, joined them in large numbers.\(^442\) Atrocities against Italians began soon upon the heels of the Allied landings in Italy. On September 12, 1943, a unit of German paratroopers robbed a jewelry store at Matera, fifty miles northwest of Taranto. A firefight with the local *Carabinieri* ensued, during which two Germans were killed. German soldiers responded by executing fifteen Italians with explosives in the local Militia barracks. Other German troops went to the local


\[^{441}\text{Levin, Holocaust, 467.}\]

\[^{442}\text{Lamb, War in Italy, 55.}\]
power station and ordered the workers to leave the premises. After they had
complied, German soldiers opened fire on them, killing four.\footnote{MATERA ATROCITIES MAJOR. GRAF VON der SCHULENBERG," WO 310/102, WAR OF 1939-1945: REAR HEADQUARTERS BRITISH TROOPS AUSTRIA: WAR CRIMES GROUP (SEE): CASE FILES, (PRO), 1-2.} Such incidents were
merely the first in a long series of atrocities that drove Italians firmly into the Allied
camp.

The March 1944 bombing of SS policemen in Rome has already been
mentioned.\footnote{For the best account, see Lamb, War in Italy, 54-63.} The ensuing massacre of 325 civilians at the Ardeatine caves became
the most widely known of such incidents. Nonetheless, it certainly fit within the
wider context of German criminal behavior against Italians. Postwar investigations
documented the vast scale of German inhumanity in their dealings with Italians.
The outrages moved Italians to stronger support of the Allied cause, despite the air
attacks and arduous living conditions that the war forced them to endure.\footnote{For just one of many such massacres documented after the war, see:

THE BREAKOUT FROM ANZIO AND CONQUEST OF ROME

Alexander's multinational force renewed its attempts to breach the Cassino
line in March 1944. A colossal air bombardment kicked off the assault on March 15.
Nonetheless, even though Allied troops advanced under the cover of unstinting artillery fire, the attack rapidly bogged down. German paratroops, specially trained for urban combat, held fast to the ruined city and surrounding heights, defying every effort by New Zealand and Indian troops to dislodge them. Cassino's houses, stoutly constructed of quarried stone, provided natural defenses that bombardment improved by blocking streets with rubble and craters. Although the attack made headway by March 17, German counterattacks pushed exhausted Allied units back. When fighting ended on March 20, quiet fell over the landscape as opponents assembled their forces for the next round.446

By early May 1944, German fears of an impending amphibious invasion led to the destruction of numerous airfields near possible landing sites and in likely areas of exploitation. Engineers demolished eight airbases between Spezia and Viterbo, three south of Turin, and four in northeastern Italy. Luftwaffe troops also prepared to receive a FW-190 fighter-bomber and a Me-109 fighter unit to be stationed at two airfields near Florence and Pistoia.447

The supply situation worsened as April closed, owing to air attacks and partisan raids that inflicted severe damage on the railroads supporting Kesselring's forces. Ultra revealed growing German desperation when "Kesselring on 26 Apr 44

446Kesselring, "Rapido River Crossing," 1-2; Vietinghoff, "T1a Ch. 6," 113-115.

“requested urgent reinforcement of railway engineer forces, especially electrical engineers,” in view of the “continually increasing, systematic destruction of railway supply routes by Allied air forces and guerillas.” Seeing as how even this reinforcement might prove inadequate, Kesselring further requested that “Italian military engineers at present interned in Germany be brought to Italy for purpose.” The closing of many north-south rail routes left him in a highly exposed and dangerous position. The Field Marshal also pressed his naval commanders to increase sea shipment of supplies to his isolated men.

German forces in Italy faced critical shortages of men and material during the period immediately preceding the beginning of OPERATION DIADEM. During May 1944, Luftwaffe commanders reduced aircraft sorties to thirty each day. They conserved their strength in anticipation of a new Allied move in the Mediterranean. Ground officers also faced serious shortages of manpower as the Allied offensive neared. Hitler authorized the use of ‘foreign auxiliaries’ to free up German Landser for combat duty. Even Italians were to be used for such positions in the hope that removing them from Italian command might improve their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[448]“Sunset No. 548. 2 May 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAII), 6-7.
\item[449]“Sunset No. 557. 11 May 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAII), 28.
\item[450]“Sunset No. 556. 10 May 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAII), 26-27.
\end{footnotes}
performance.\textsuperscript{451} The tank return for Kesselring’s forces revealed *Army Group C*’s weakened state. His armored and mechanized divisions disposed of just 324 tanks among its seven *Panzer* units. The 26th *Panzer Division*, which had an authorized strength of 103 *Pzkw IV*s and *V*s, carried just seventy-eight tanks on its rolls, while the 29th *Panzer grenadier Division*’s armored units operated twenty percent under strength.\textsuperscript{452}

As May wound on, the renewed Allied drive led Kesselring to transfer the 90th *Panzer grenadier Division* from Ostia to support units fighting at Cassino. Conditions forced him to commit the division to combat bit-by-bit, diluting its effectiveness.\textsuperscript{453} Nonetheless, the tempo of the fighting caused urgent requests for air support for the beleaguered defenders. Forty FW-190 fighter-bombers arrived on May 13, supported by thirty Me-109 escorts. *Luftwaffe* pilots flew 185 sorties a day, but the need to conserve strength in anticipation of an amphibious landing kept German commanders from turning loose all reserves to assist ground troops struggling to hold the line.\textsuperscript{454}

Kesselring surmised that matters could only worsen when observers noted

\textsuperscript{451}Sunset No. 558. 12 May 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAIL), 31.

\textsuperscript{452}Sunset No. 561. 15 May 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAIL), 38.

\textsuperscript{453}Sunset No. 562. 16 May 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAIL), 40.

\textsuperscript{454}Ibid., 41-42.
the hurried arrival of new Allied forces in Anzio harbor. The forward movement of light artillery units heralded the likelihood of an assault from the beachhead.\textsuperscript{455} This upsetting news arrived as orders forced the removal of the 16\textsuperscript{th} SS Reichsführer Panzergrenadier Division to Hungary, weakening the German grip on the Anzio line.\textsuperscript{456} By late May, the stage had been set for the long-feared disaster confronting German forces in Italy.

**CONCLUSION**

Occupied Italy made enormous strides during the spring of 1944 and became a valuable economic asset for Nazi Germany. The successful defense of the Cassino line and hemming in of the Anzio beachhead provided the military context for this achievement. Kesselring's undermanned and ill-equipped divisions employed their meager resources to halt the Anglo-American forces' offensive drive. This victory permitted German authorities to solidify their grip on the north Italian industrial base.

The record shows that Hans Leyers and the men of the German economic apparatus made good use of the opportunity afforded them by this military accomplishment. A vast effusion of labor, production tools, agricultural products, raw materials, and finished goods poured forth from Italy to sustain operations there.

\textsuperscript{455}Sunset No. 563. 17 May 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAI), 45.

\textsuperscript{456}Sunset No. 555, 23.
and the war of production in Germany. Even though rising labor unrest and partisan operations threatened the gains that had been made, the productive flow did not cease.
## Chart VI-1

**Table 3**  
*Volume of the Roges-Geschäfte 1943/44 according to Types of Goods*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Goods</th>
<th>Value in RM</th>
<th>% of Total Goods Made</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Armaments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile Raw Materials</td>
<td>176,534,106</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine Tools</td>
<td>115,558,619</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factories</td>
<td>104,625,000</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Metal</td>
<td>65,682,827</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Metal</td>
<td>64,373,620</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather</td>
<td>39,151,479</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Industry</td>
<td>38,308,467</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Alloy</td>
<td>38,195,946</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical</td>
<td>27,787,665</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ores</td>
<td>16,662,739</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Working Industry</td>
<td>17,479,393</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral Oil</td>
<td>11,714,416</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber</td>
<td>7,515,436</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Consumer Goods</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready to Wear Clothing</td>
<td>195,674,611</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piece Goods</td>
<td>154,930,549</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td>124,289,091</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather Products</td>
<td>15,400,403</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing Machines</td>
<td>6,552,057</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Volume of the Roges-Geschäfte 1943/44 according to Types of Goods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Goods</th>
<th>Value in RM</th>
<th>% of Total Goods Made</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C. Exports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Goods</td>
<td>47,932,871</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and Agriculture</td>
<td>1,203,084</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Goods</td>
<td>1,386,433</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Imports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Goods</td>
<td>687,608</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and Agriculture</td>
<td>467,000</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Volume Completed 1,302,647,765 = 100%

GERMAN 14TH ARMY AT
ANZIO, EARLY FEBRUARY 1944

14th Army

I. Fallschirmjäger Corps
   General Ernst Student

LXXXVI Panzer Corps

65th Infantry Division

4th Fallschirmjäger Division
   (4 battalions)

99th Panzer Grenadier Division
   1 battalion

115th Infantry Division

2nd Panzer Grenadier Division
   (2 regiments)

15th Panzer Grenadier Division
   (2 battalions)

29th Panzer Grenadier Division
   (2 battalions)

71st Infantry Division
   (1 regiment)

114th Flieger Division
   (Fliegerkorps)

1st Fallschirmjäger Division
   (4 battalions)

26th Panzer Division

Hermann Göring Panzer Division

16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division
   (2 battalions)
Chart VI-3

Transfers of Goods within Italy and to Germany, November 1943

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) Sent from Italy to Germany</th>
<th>Rail cars</th>
<th>tons</th>
<th>RM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) materials</td>
<td>4908</td>
<td>96503</td>
<td>57,925,044.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) production equipment</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>12368</td>
<td>25,343,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>5721</td>
<td>108871</td>
<td>83,268,044.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The corresponding totals from September until 31.10.1943 were:

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4394</td>
<td>73168</td>
<td>86,000,000.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This results in a change in the number of cars calculated in November of c.:

|                                   | 30%       | 31%      | -3%         |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2) Sent from southern to northern Italy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) production equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3) Loadings in the area of upper Italy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) materials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4) Sent from Germany to Italy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other materials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RG 242, T77, Roll 576, Frames 1755012-1755015  
Der Generalbeauftragte für Italien des Reichsministers  
für Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion  
Br.B.Nr.: A 418/43 g.  
Mailand, den 9 Dezember 1943.
CHAPTER 7

BREAKTHROUGH TO BOGDOWN: THE FIGHT FROM DIADEM TO THE GOTHIC LINE

INTRODUCTION: DIADEM AND DEFEAT

Allied leaders met again at the end of 1943 to discuss political and military strategy. Agreements at Cairo and Teheran that November and December imposed limited goals on their forces fighting in Italy. The offensive would continue until the Pisa-Rimini line had been reached. Major operations would cease thereafter as veteran divisions withdrew for an amphibious landing in southern France. 457 Churchill consented to ANVIL (later renamed DRAGOON), an assault on the French Riviera, but pressed the case for invading Istria. He wished to keep the Italian campaign moving forward with Vienna as its ultimate goal. Despite dangling the possibility of Turkish entry into the war on the Allied side, which would open the Bosporus Straits to Allied convoys, Churchill made little headway with Roosevelt and Stalin. The modest goals of taking Rome and driving north seemed the only

game in town as the conferences concluded.\textsuperscript{458}

In Italy, after a series of badly planned and executed offensives at both Anzio and Cassino, Allied commanders at last grasped that their limited forces could not bull their way through the formidable German defenses barring the roads leading to Rome. Alexander’s forces secretly massed along the Garigliano River line, while deceiving German intelligence into believing that a future thrust would again seek to take Monte Cassino and drive on Rome via the Liri Valley. DIADEM, the Allied offensive that began on May 11, aimed at capturing Rome and driving north. Nonetheless, Allied planners made the U.S. 2\textsuperscript{nd} and French Expeditionary corps the focal point of the attack. They would push into the Aurunci Mountains and the Tyrrhenian Sea coastal plain, while the British 13\textsuperscript{th} Corps feinted against the German stronghold at Cassino.

\textbf{THE GERMAN SITUATION}

Soon after the Allies launched DIADEM, Field Marshal von Richthofen visited with his \textit{Führer}. Hitler reminded the airman that although danger clouded the immediate future, the successful defense of Italy had already paid Germany immense benefits. Fears of the previous year that German forces would fall back to the northern Apennines had not come to pass. Territorial losses now could not wipe

\footnote{\textsuperscript{458}Richard Lamb, \textit{Churchill as War Leader} (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1991), 245.}
out the gains garnered in Italy.\textsuperscript{459}

No informed or objective observer would have spoken so glibly of the situation in Italy. Although Hitler's strategic wisdom cannot be easily denied, the perilous position in which his armies found themselves in late May 1944 seemed to predict the loss of all heretofore gained. The German 10\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} armies had suffered heavy casualties while receiving minimal replacements. Forces earmarked for coastal defense lacked the combat power to carry out their assigned tasks, forcing OBSW to transfer the Hermann Goring Panzer Division to Livorno. The 29\textsuperscript{th} Panzergrenadier Division also moved into reserve, rebuilding its depleted units and guarding against partisan attacks on the Army Group's lines of communications.

A pause in combat from mid-March until mid-May allowed smaller formations fighting at Anzio to rejoin their parents units. This partial restoration of unit cohesion strengthened many divisions that would have otherwise faced the Allied offensive without vital reconnaissance and combat elements. Kesselring also improved the XIV Panzer Corps's position by shifting some of its defensive frontage to other commands. Blind to the exact timing of the imminent offensive, the German forces had barely completed changing locations before the Allies struck on May 11. This unfortunate coincidence left new troops defending sectors with which they were barely acquainted as the first blows fell. Hitler's optimism as DIADEM began seemed wholly wrong.

\textsuperscript{459}Irving, \textit{Hitler's War}, 628.
Construction troops had hastened efforts to construct the Senger Line, a switchback position for the Gustav Line. Organisation Todt, Slovakian, Italian, and reserve division engineers labored under the watchful eye of supervising officers. Allied air attacks hindered the endeavor, causing large numbers of Italians laborers to flee for their lives. Despite attempts to create reserves, restore units to their parent formations, shift troops west, and improve defensive positions, when the assault began, Kesselring simply hoped to defend the existing line, employing his reserves to reinforce threatened sectors or to seal breaches and retake lost ground.460

GROUND FORCES

The forces Kesselring depended upon to carry out this limited strategic vision would be sorely tried by the challenges that lay ahead. His divisions lacked both manpower and, in some cases, full complements of basic weapons. For the first time, large numbers of Soviet prisoners-of-war were moved into the front line. The 278th Infantry Division contained a substantial contingent of Ossetians, one of the many minority groups that populated the vast Soviet empire. The Ossetians fought well and remained loyal to their division until the end of the war.

Other groups proved less reliable in defending the Third Reich. Free Indian soldiers served in the 9th Company of Infantry Regiment 590. Recruited from prisoners taken in North Africa, they refused combat against any save British forces and were removed from the line that fall. The 162nd Infantry Division had large numbers of

460Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 119-23.
Turkomen and Azerbaijani troops. Unlike their Ossetian counterparts, these soldiers fought well only against partisans, with desertions to Allied forces a common occurrence. This later prompted Kesselring's Chief of Staff, Siegfried Westphal, to bemoan the need to reinforce the unit with German soldiers, who shored up its line. 461

The worsening manpower situation also prompted measures to use more Italians in non-combat formations and to raise Italian combat divisions from troops loyal to the Fascist regime. Italians supported Luftwaffe and Marine units, labored as construction workers, and participated in antipartisan operations. The vital role played at Anzio by Italian Bersaglieri units, paratroopers of the Nembo and Folgore divisions, and the Decima Mas marines led Kesselring to request additional Fascist Italian divisions. In late January 1944, Field Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, head of the Salò Republic's army, placed half of his 203,500 men at Kesselring's disposal. The Monte Rosa and San Marco divisions received allocations totaling 30,000 men. The new divisions were to undergo outfitting and training in Germany before returning to fight in Italy. Two more divisions would be raised soon after the first two began

461 Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 123; Klaus Bertelsmann, "Die Entwicklung der personellen und materiellen Lage der Verbände des OB Südwest vom Sommer 44 bis zur Kapitulation," N422, Bd. 26 (BAMA (Microfiche)), 17, 18; Hoppe, 278. Infanterie-Division, 11, 12-14, 27; "Letter from Siegfried Westphal to Basil Liddell Hart, 28 November 1949," Westphal Correspondence 9/24/86 (LHCMA), 1.
training.\textsuperscript{462}

The formation of Fascist Italian divisions provided significant aid to the Germans. By July 1944, 400,000 Italian Fascists had taken up arms for the Germans, even though a majority of conscripts did not answer the summons to the colors. Graziani commanded 100,000 men fighting with the SS and 80,000 in the four combat divisions training in Germany. Field Marshal Kesselring, pleased with the progress thus far made, originally intended that the \textit{Monte Rosa} and \textit{San Marco} divisions would engage in antipartisan operations when they returned. The massive drain on manpower during the Allied spring offensive altered his plans.\textsuperscript{463}

Nonetheless, much of this assistance lay in the future. Kesselring now found himself facing the demanding task of holding back the rising tide of Allied strength in Italy using the steadily dwindling pool of German manpower and the meager assistance of the \textit{Wehrmacht}'s two sister branches.

\textbf{LUFTWAFFE AND ITALIAN FASCIST AIR FORCES}

As dreadful as the manpower situation was, the \textit{Luftwaffe} found itself in far worse condition. Few fighters remained to cover German troops, for whom air attack was part and parcel of their daily existence. When the Allied offensive opened in May, protected by 4,000 Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (M.A.A.F.) aircraft, von}

\textsuperscript{462}Bertelsmann, "Entwicklung der personellen und materiellen Lage," 16-17; Lamb, \textit{War in Italy}, 94, 95-96.

\textsuperscript{463}\textit{Ibid.}, 100-01.
Richthofen pressed his fighter-bombers into ineffectual service as air cover for Kesselring’s divisions, readily sacrificing them while ground troops complained of never seeing a German plane overhead. Reinforcements were but a faint glimmer of hope, given fears of an Allied landing in southern France. Worried *Luftwaffe* leaders refused to transfer planes to Italy while Allied forces crushed the German front.464

The *Luftwaffe*’s situation deteriorated steadily throughout the summer. Axis aircraft, outnumbered ten and fifteen to one, totaled just one hundred combat-capable aircraft, which pretended to contest the armadas of Allied bombers and fighters sweeping them from the skies. (See Chart VII-1.) Allied intelligence revealed that the *Luftwaffe* mounted only 390 sorties between May 14-19, at the very time that Allied soldiers penetrated the German line.465 Aviation gasoline shortages had developed in January and forced commanders to ground their bombers in July to ensure the continued operation of smaller aircraft.466 Moreover, an exodus of bomber and fighter wings occurred throughout the spring and summer of 1944. The critical situation in Germany forced *Luftwaffe* commanders to transfer *Luftflotte 2* from Italy back to Germany where battles with Allied strategic bombers demanded the


465"Sunset No. 568. 22 May 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAII), 55.

466M.A.A.F. ASD, 90.
Luftwaffe’s full attention.\(^{467}\)

The air defense of Italy thereafter rested upon the limited assets of the Italian Fascist air force. When Luftflotte 2 handed over command of air operations to the ‘GAF General in Italy’ in mid-September 1944, Allied air intelligence took it as a clear signal that increased reliance would be placed upon IAF units. The creation of the new German post in Italy closely followed the model adopted in Finland, Hungary, and Rumania.\(^{468}\) The transfer of responsibility to the IAF did not surprise high-ranking Allied air commanders. A November 22, 1943 Ultra intercept had warned that the Germans were raising a new IAF that would defend industrial targets in north Italy.\(^{469}\)

Luftwaffe squadrons departing for France left the air defense of the Italian theater the sole province of the IAF during the war’s waning months. Combined fighter and bomber operations rarely totaled more than 150 daily missions in contrast to the 2,000 flown by Allied airmen. Against such odds, GAF and IAF planes did little more than put up a brave show that often passed unnoticed, even by their Allied opponents.\(^{470}\) That Allied losses remained as high as they did testified to the increasing impotence of the remaining fighter force in Italy. Anti-aircraft, a poor substitute for air power, inflicted the majority of Allied air losses during and after

\(^{467}\)Franz Kurowski, Kampffeld Mittelmeer (Herford: Koehlers, 1984), 17-18.

\(^{468}\)Sunset No. 687, 214.

\(^{469}\)ULTRA, MAGIC, and the Allies, 19.

\(^{470}\)Lee, German Air Force, 147-48.
the summer of 1944. 471

LOGISTICS

The conclusion of Operation STRANGLE left German forces in a precarious supply situation when the Allies launched DIADEM. Heightened demands for fuel and ammunition tested German quartermasters, compelling them to supply their forces using roads and railways already heavily damaged by Allied airmen. OBSW depots located nearest the combat zone held but a single issue of munitions, rations, and fuel for combat units. Reserve supply stocks lay south of the Po river, but required transport to the front, which presented quartermasters with a serious challenge after the Allied offensive began in May.

German supply officers depended heavily upon the Italian rail net for most of the supplies that their forces used. Allied air attacks virtually severed the central railway linking Florence and Arezzo, as well as lateral branches nearer the troops, rendering them incapable of maintaining a normal flow of supplies to the battlefield. Similar strikes interrupted passage of the Brenner line from May 13-15. Marine vessels brought forward small amounts of materiel along the two coasts, but the aggregate did not meet demand.

Formidable obstacles also ruled out increasing truck shipments. Civilian needs consumed a considerable amount of the 800 tons that trucks could move forward each day. German motor pools contained 3,000 different vehicles, each

requiring its own spare parts and maintenance. Allied air men struck a crippling 
blow that summer when they demolished the central spare parts depot located near 
Piacenza. Workers salvaged and transferred undamaged parts north of the Alps, but 
this blow, coming soon after losses of like facilities in Paris and Warsaw, hampered 
vehicle repairs. The raid and existing shortages forced the Germans on to the black 
market where they competed with desperate Italian vehicle owners.472

Makeshift measures ensured that some supplies of fuel and munitions did 
reach German forces. Quartermasters sent gasoline in containers that eased 
distribution and sent valuable tanker cars into dangerous front line areas. Quick-
working supply troops met shipments and hid or distributed them to avoid roving 
Allied fighter-bombers. Planners reduced ration shipments in favor of munitions, 
substituting local grain supplies to feed the troops. Strategically positioned, radio-
equipped officers provided up-to-the-minute information to higher headquarters, 
ensuring that materiel arrived where most needed. At the end of May, transport 
aircraft carried desperately-needed antitank weapons to Perugia and Foligno. 
German divisions had lost seventy-five percent of all such weapons since the

472"Sunset No. 569. 22 May 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 
1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAII), 59; Kesselring et al., German 
Version of the Italian Campaign, 135; Max Wehrig, "Duties and Operation of the 
Italian Section of the Chief of Wehrmacht Motor Transportation," NARA 
Microfiche Publication M1035, Fiche 0086, Foreign Military Studies, D-Series (RG 
offensive had begun.\textsuperscript{473}

The measures taken required large numbers of Italian workers, many of whom refused to assist the Germans. When Italian workers abandoned their tasks under the unremitting Allied air attacks, \textit{Organisation Todt} hastily formed a one-time truck convoy with 3,000 tons capacity. The epic trip, which began on May 20 and continued for three weeks, suffered high casualties from inexperienced drivers, desertions, partisan action, and the entrepreneurial spirit of some participants. Nonetheless, this mass shipment of fuel and ammunition offered relief during the supply crisis.\textsuperscript{474}

Additional problems developed during the summer. German equipment losses necessitated assigning priority to the replacement of tanks and other weapons. This reduced the quantity of other shipments as German forces retreated from the Gustav Line. Despite the new supply priorities, Berlin still could not provide the necessary weapons, forcing the distribution of Italian arms stockpiles to troops. Retreating German forces abandoned their old supply points and required the establishment of new ones. Quartermaster units scrambled to save supplies near the front while moving stores and equipment to new positions in north Italy.\textsuperscript{475}

\textsuperscript{473}Sunset No. 578. 1 June 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAlI), 78; Kesselring et al., \textit{German Version of the Italian Campaign}, 136-37, 138.

\textsuperscript{474}Kesselring et al., \textit{German Version of the Italian Campaign}, 138.

\textsuperscript{475}\textit{Ibid.}, 139; Sunset 569, 58.
Inevitable disruptions caused by normal troop demands, the shifting of stockpiles and bases, and heavy Allied air attacks throughout the summer hindered the maintenance of secure lines of communications.

The retreat provided a single measure of relief as German forces fell back upon supply staging points. Stores previously brought forward kept troops provisioned during periods when Allied raids wreaked havoc on road and rail communications. Time and distance requirements lessened each day during July and August as the retreat continued, increasing supply units’ efficiency. The steady drumbeat of attacks conducted by Allied aircraft against Po river crossings during July somewhat offset gains. The destruction of all road and rail bridges from Piacenza to the Po estuary had a calamitous effect on fuel shipments. Quartermasters avoided catastrophe only by shifting fuel from Milan to the front, establishing ferries that ran each night, and by cleverly using a destroyed bridge near Ostiglia to support a fuel pipe line draped across the wrecked structure. 476

THE GUSTAV LINE GIVES

German troops fought stubbornly to hold the Gustav Line. Nonetheless, significant problems undermined their efforts. Kesselring, deprived of information from air reconnaissance, succumbed to deceptive Allied maneuvers. The British Eighth Army had secretly shifted its strength westward, giving Allied forces for once a large numerical advantage over their foes. Moreover, German intelligence

476 Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 144-45.
seriously miscalculated total Allied strength in the theater, crediting them with holding back divisions sufficient to invade the German rear.\textsuperscript{477} This dubious reckoning caused Kesselring to ready forces to counter a phantom invasion. These two factors placed German forces in a precarious strategic situation.\textsuperscript{478}

On the front lines, German divisions covered abnormally large sectors. The 278\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division, understrength and ill-equipped, rushed south and reinforced the front when the offensive began. With only 75 percent of its authorized manpower and 25 percent of its transport, the division relieved two of its counterparts and defended both thirty kilometers of coastline and thirty kilometers of the battle front. The understrength and inexperienced division protected its sector, six times that normally assigned to fully-outfitted divisions, with great difficulty.\textsuperscript{479}

Allied moves on May 11 surprised German commanders. They had expected the assault to fall once more upon Monte Cassino and the surrounding hills. This time the American 2\textsuperscript{nd} and French Expeditionary Corps (FEC) struck simultaneous blows west of the ruined abbey. While the FEC thrust deep into the heart of Kesselring’s position, he refused to believe that the main Allied thrust

\textsuperscript{477}"Sunset No. 567. 21 May 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAII), 53.

\textsuperscript{478}Fisher, \textit{Cassino to the Alps}, 40.

\textsuperscript{479}Hoppe, 278. \textit{Infanterie-Division}, 15-18; U. S. War Dept., \textit{Handbook on German Military Forces} (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990 (reprint of 1945 U. S. Army manual)), 229.
would not come in the Liri Valley. First reports from the 71st and 94th infantry divisions led him to conclude that they had successfully fended off the attacks, alleviating his fears for this sector.480

Meanwhile, two divisions of green American conscripts penetrated German coastal positions while the experienced, professional mountain soldiers of the FFI battled for the Auruncan mountains. The German 71st Infantry Division belatedly discovered the French North African divisions within its lines, forcing German reserves onto the offensive. The daily bulletin to Berlin noted that “[t]he 71st Inf. Div. has fought like heroes in these battles against an enemy with overwhelming superiority (c. 4 div.). According to Army reports, individual units have fought superbly until the last round and the last man.” 481 Despite German sacrifices, Algerian and Moroccan mountaineers beat off the counterattacks, inflicting appalling losses on the Germans, who exposed themselves to Allied artillery while moving forward.482


482 Good descriptions of this crucial juncture in the Italian campaign are found in Fisher, Cassino to the Alps, 61-62, 65-80; Graham and Bidwell, Tug of War, 309-27. German reports detail this fighting in: "Morgenmeldung vom 13.5.1944," RH2 Oberkommando des Heeres/Generalstab der Heeres, Band 660, Ob. Südwest
Kesselring hastily summoned back to Italy the vacationing commanders of the 10th Army and 14th Panzer Korps, von Vietinghoff and von Senger und Etterlin. Nonetheless, the German command did not grasp until May 14 that they were facing a concentrated thrust by eleven Allied divisions, not the six that their intelligence service believed involved. The picture became bleaker still when Kesselring wrongly credited Allied commanders with holding twelve divisions in reserve, and shipping was observed at Bari. This raised fears that an amphibious landing would assault his weak Adriatic flank.

Misled by the confused intelligence picture, Kesselring slowly inserted his weak reserves at key points along the crumbling front line. The 26th Panzer and 29th Panzergrenadier divisions moved south after May 15 while Hitler authorized the transfer of the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division to north Italy. The SS troops could not be used to strengthen the disintegrating Gustav Line. The incomplete picture that Hitler had forced him to hold the SS division back as a mobile reserve that could respond to an invasion of north Italy:

29th Panzergrenadier Division belatedly entered combat upon arrival.

General von Mackensen, commanding general of the 14th Army, had delayed its departure despite Kesselring’s orders. Its men suffered the misfortune of defending

Meldungen vom 1.-15.5.44 (BAMA: Microfiche), 68.

483 Sunset 567, 53.

unprepared positions and incurred heavy losses while defending a line at Terracina and along the Lago di Fondi. American infantry and tanks from the 88th Infantry Division fought their way through the hastily established line, forcing German Panzergrenadiers to abandon the coastal city. On May 18, the 1st Fallschirmjäger Division quit its tenacious defense of Cassino and the embattled abbey. The swift advance had unhinged the German position, forcing the abandonment of hopes to reestablish a solid defense south of Rome. Moreover, this catastrophe befell Kesselring before Allied troops crowding Anzio beachhead launched the second prong of the Allied offensive on May 23. 485

The May 24 entry of American troops into Terracina, a key coastal town on the Tyrrhenian Sea anchoring the line near Lago di Fondi, paralleled the moment of crisis for the German forces ringing Anzio. Allied forces within the bridgehead broke out from positions held since February, causing von Vietinghoff to ask permission to pull his 10th Army back from the Hitler Line and defend at Valmontone. Hitler rejected the request and a breach developed between the 10th and 14th armies. German divisions retreated back to Rome, with the 14th Army suffering near annihilation. 486

485"Sunset No. 566. 20 May 1944," SRS-1869, NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAII), 51; Kesselring, A Soldier's Record, 242, 244-45; Fisher, Cassino to the Alps, 94-97.

Vietinghoff's right wing did not suffer the same fate. A fortunate decision by the American 5th Army's Anglophobic commander, General Mark Clark, to shift his advance north toward Rome, rather than send Anzio-based forces east until they linked up with his divisions advancing through the Liri Valley, saved the Germans. Clark's obsession with entering Rome first gave German forces one more narrow escape from certain destruction by encirclement. The slow pace of the Allied advance on terrible Italian roads also bought the retreating Germans time to evade their Allied pursuers. Nonetheless, the escape at Rome meant that German forces could reform a defensive line farther north.\textsuperscript{487} Given Allied experiences on Sicily, Sardinia, and at Salerno, there was no excuse this time in allowing the annihilation of the enemy's fighting forces to be subordinated to Clark's personal desire for the glory of beating the British to Rome.

THE THOUSAND YEAR \textit{REICH} LOSES THE ETERNAL CITY

As German troops retreated northward, the loss of Rome rapidly evolved into a virtual certainty. Only ambiguity concerning the date remained. Rome was the economic and transportation hub of central Italy. When Allied troops neared the city, debate broke out in the German camp concerning the disposition of its invaluable power stations and bridges spanning the Tiber, which carried gas and

water supplies for the city.\textsuperscript{488} Destroying them would impede the Allied occupation of the city and the pursuit of German units withdrawing northward to unfinished new positions in the Gothic Line.

The previous February, Hitler had ordered that Roman installations, including the city’s historic bridges, not be demolished if Kesselring’s men evacuated the city. The \textit{Führer}, who had commanded the destruction of Leningrad and a thousand lesser urbs, did not wish to secure his place in history as merely one more barbarian whose army had sacked the Eternal City.\textsuperscript{489} On June 2, Kesselring requested permission from Hitler to abandon Rome to the Allies. A favorable reply the next day, revealed by Ultra to Allied commanders, led to the city’s quick occupation by American forces.\textsuperscript{490} The capture of the first of the three major Axis capitals on June 4 represented a political triumph for the Allies, albeit one quickly forgotten in the euphoria of the Normandy landing two days later. Nonetheless, Rome’s occupation hardly justified the cost in blood and materiel expended by Allied forces. German forces, as they had on Sicily, Sardinia, and at Salerno, slipped away to fight on battlefields more to their liking.

The old burden of finding bread for Rome’s masses attended Mark Clark’s triumph through the ancient city. Securing adequate supplies to feed Italians had

\textsuperscript{488}Westphal, \textit{Errinnerungen}, 259.


\textsuperscript{490}Winterbotham, \textit{The Ultra Secret}, 117-18.
long been a problem for the Allies, prompting the Combined Administrative Committee to push for active measures that would restore efficiency to Italian fishing and agriculture.\textsuperscript{491} Providing Rome's citizens with minimal rations represented a heavy burden on the already-strained Allied supply network. The city's liberators authorized a daily ration of 150 grams of bread, ten grams of olive oil and 13.3 grams of canned meat per person. The meager allowance, supplemented by soup kitchens that fed 325,000 Romans, held mass starvation at bay. Nonetheless, most Italians, including Rome's inhabitants, remained seriously malnourished, and death by starvation was not unknown in the British and American zones.\textsuperscript{492} Italians north of the battlefront also did not grow fat on their monthly rations, reduced in April 1944 to 600 grams of meat, two kilos of rice or pasta, and 300 grams of fat, oil or cheese.\textsuperscript{493}

\textbf{THE PURSUIT}

Kesselring suffered a heavy personal blow at the moment that Allied forces entered the precincts of Rome. Siegfried Westphal, his able Chief of Staff, fell


\textsuperscript{493}Kuby, \textit{Verrat auf Deutsch}, 453.
seriously ill and escaped a Roman hospital only hours before American troops entered the Italian capital.\textsuperscript{494} General Hans Röttiger replaced Westphal.

By June 5, a thirty kilometer hole had developed between the 10\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} armies. German commanders noted a serious decline in morale among their forces as they hastily retreated northwards, hoping to escape annihilation. OKW and Kesselring lacked any other option than to fling poorly-trained new formations into the line. 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 15\textsuperscript{th} Panzergrenadier divisions had received orders transferring them to France shortly after the Allied landings in Normandy. In August, Hermann Göring Panzergrenadier Division also moved out of the theater to Poland, divesting Kesselring of three of his seven mobile divisions. 16\textsuperscript{th} SS Panzergrenadier, 162\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry, and the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} Luftwaffe divisions, moved south to fill the breach.\textsuperscript{495} But the inexperienced units suffered considerably from having their battalions flung into the fight one at a time, denying them the mass necessary to halt the advancing Allies. The 19\textsuperscript{th} Luftwaffe Division, which lacked experienced leadership, fared poorly in battle and was broken up.\textsuperscript{496}

\textsuperscript{494}Siegfried Westphal, "General Westphal's Replies To Questions From L.H. On The Italian Campaign," Liddell Hart Papers, 9/24/149 (LHCMA, n.d.), 5; Westphal, Errinnerungen, 259-60.

\textsuperscript{495}For a complete breakdown of changes in the German order of battle in Italy, May 1944-May 1945, see Chart VII-3.

\textsuperscript{496}"Sunset No. 581. 4 June 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAID), 85; "Voluntary Statements made by: General Traugott Herr General Frido von Senger und Etterlin General Alfred Schlemm General Oberst Heinrich von Vietinghoff General Joachim Lemelsen Major Fritz Hildebrandt," WO 214/64, ALEXANDER PAPERS. File
THE PARTISAN WAR

The collapse of Italy in September 1943 had birthed the Italian partisan movement, which formed the Committee for National Liberation after meetings that month in Rome, Genoa, and Turin. The Naples uprising in late September 1943 gave the Germans a first taste of the many bitter dregs that followed.\textsuperscript{497} Partisan activity surged as Allied forces intensified their pursuit of the retreating Germans. From the kickoff of DIADEM, Italian guerrilla units operated freely in the rear of German divisions, assisting Allied soldiers and creating serious headaches for German commanders.\textsuperscript{498} Siegfried Westphal nearly became a victim of a partisan attack when his evacuation train lay helpless on a rail line blocked by sabotage.\textsuperscript{499}

German propagandists had long acknowledged their failure to win Italian hearts and minds. Italians resisted German propaganda efforts, strongly preferring Allied radio as their source of reliable information. A \textit{Sicherheitsdienst} report honestly assessed the weak German position, acknowledging that they did not


\textsuperscript{499}Westphal, \textit{Errinnerungen}, 260.
comprehend the Italian mind set, and could not get Italians to give German
propaganda a hearing.\textsuperscript{500} Italian attitudes did not change when the offensive began.
German intelligence officers on Kesselring’s staff acknowledged that the populace in
central Italy supported the advancing Allies as their compatriots had done in Sicily
and southern Italy.\textsuperscript{501}

The Italian response to this propaganda failure revealed itself after the
German front collapsed. Italian resistance had strengthened and organized in the
absence of an effective German effort directed at halting its rise. By the summer of
1944, more than 100,000 Italians had taken up arms against the routed German
forces. Nonetheless, partisan numbers alone could not offset German advantages
that accrued to Kesselring’s forces as they retreated in coherent units, equipped with
heavy weapons. Many Italian partisans responded to Alexander’s call to rise up and
destroy the withdrawing Germans, only to find that the removal of Allied forces
from Italy to invade southern France took the steam out of the Allied juggernaut.
Resistance fighters paid a heavy toll when they engaged German forces, not in hit-
and-run attacks, but in toe-to-toe combat with the \textit{Wehrmacht’s} infuriated \textit{Landser}.
The summer of 1944 witnessed some of the Italian campaign’s most brutal episodes
as Kesselring looked at the spread of partisan-held areas plastering his daily

\textsuperscript{500}\textit{SD-Berichte zu Inlandsfragen}, R58/192/12.-0040/176 (Bundesarchiv
Koblenz), 35-38.

\textsuperscript{501}\textit{Sunset No. 577. 31 May 1944}, SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box
1, Part II. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NALLI), 75.
situation maps, threatening his isolated, retreating units with ruination.  

In April 1944, Kesselring had sought control of anti-partisan operations. The growth of guerilla attacks throughout the theater demanded a unified response by German and Italian anti-partisan efforts. Although Kesselring intended to entrust this effort to an SS official, Heinrich Himmler vigorously protested the measure, which would have reduced his influence and control in Italy. Kesselring’s efforts paid off as OKW decided at the end of the month to assign OBSW responsibility for anti-partisan operations in areas twenty kilometers directly behind the fighting front and thirty kilometers from the Italian coastline. The fight against the partisans elsewhere in Italy fell under the purview of the Supreme SS and Police Commander for Italy, General Karl Wolff. Wolff disposed of nearly 130,000 men assigned to anti-partisan operations. They fought in separate security zones commanded by an officer responsible for ensuring that his area remained free of activity.

The surge in resistance activity during the German retreat, in part a response to General Alexander’s appeal, overwhelmed this system. German

502 Westphal, Errinnerungen, 260; Calvocoressi, Wint and Pritchard, Total War, 409.

503 Hans Röttiger, "Die Zuständigkeiten in Italien ab September 1943," N422, Bd. 23 (BAMA: Microfiche), 21-23.

commanders reported a mournful litany of nightly attacks upon dispatch riders and trucks. Widespread assaults against rail lines accompanied unpredictable forays on vehicular traffic. German transport officers logged 225 separate bombings of key rail lines during the summer weeks. Partisans also established control over large areas of the German rear, assuming governmental functions in the liberated regions. The Germans conducted major operations to recapture wrecked bridges in partisan-held areas before the structures could be rebuilt. Senior officers, such as the 20th Luftwaffe Field Division’s unfortunate commander, Major General Crisolli, fell prey to partisan ambushes along with lowly privates. The concentration of attacks on the critical mountain passes throughout the theater created dark fears that retreating units would be cutoff from supplies and left to either the uncertain mercies of the hated resistance fighters or the advancing Allies.

On June 17, Kesselring responded to the extreme threat posed by the partisans and issued orders demanding that stringent measures be taken against their attacks.

The battle against the bandits is split into passive and active measures, the focal point of which lays in the conduct of active measures. Passive measures consist of local protective measures for important structures on railroads and roads, as well as vital facilities such as power plants, factories, and so forth. Active measures will be carried out especially where it is necessary to maintain


506 "German Instructions for Operations Against Partisans," 1-2; Werner Haupt, Kriegsschauplatz Italien 1943-1945 (Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1977), 200.
the lifeblood of the Wehrmacht. The bandits are to be attacked and annihilated.

Units interpreted his directive as permission to take immediate reprisals against acts of resistance, measures including the taking and shooting of hostages, the burning of villages, and the shipment of civilians to Germany as forced labor or concentration camp inmates.507

The pursuit conferred one unexpected benefit upon the Germans. The

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507 Haupt, Kriegsschauplatz Italien, 200, 205. "Der Kampf gegen die Banden gliedert sich in den passiven und aktiven Kampf, wobei der Schwerpunkt auf der aktiven Kämpfführung liegt. Der passive Kampf besteht in dem örtlichen Schutz wichtiger Kunstbauten an Eisenbahnen und Straßen, sowie lebenswichtiger Anlagen, wie Kraftwerke, Fabriken usw.... Der aktive Kampf wird besonders dort zu führen sein, wo es gilt, den Lebensnerv der Wehrmacht zu erhalten. Die Banden sind anzugehen und zu vernichten...."

Allied intelligence officers later found that at least one subordinate unit included verbatim portions of Kesselring’s antipartisan order in directives to their units. Compare this July 1944 operations order from the 1st Fallschirmjäger Corps with Kesselring’s original instruction:

"EXTRACT FROM AFHQ INTELLIGENCE NOTES NO. 72 HQ I Para Corps 20 July 1944 G Branch No.838/Secret \uSubject\u: Operations against Partisans - Order No.2.

3. The fight against partisans involves both active and passive measures, with emphasis laid on the former. Passive measures consist of local protection of important artistic buildings along railways and roads as well as vital installations such as power stations, factories, etc.

Passive measures must in places be curtailed around the vulnerable points, e.g. recce patrols maintaining continuous watch over the approaches [sic]. Active measures in areas infested by partisans must be particularly energetic when the main arteries of the armed forces are involved. Partisans will be attacked and relentlessly destroyed. Intelligence from inside partisan units (incl use of agents) is particularly important."

accelerated pace of Allied operations curtailed the flow of Ultra information. The heightened pace of the pursuit destroyed the value of most tactical information that signals intelligence revealed. Nonetheless, Ultra reports encouraged Allied commanders by disclosing the desperate state of the _Luftwaffe_ that summer, a time when air operations normally increased in tempo. Between July 27-30, German airmen mounted only twenty-seven sorties, in contrast with thousands conducted by Allied air forces during the same period.\(^{508}\)

Kesselring visited his commander-in-chief at Berchtesgaden on July 3. Hitler lectured the Field Marshal, repeating his old order that German troops hold every meter of ground. The Italian front commander patiently described his forces’ precarious condition, hoping to win permission to fall back upon the partially-completed north Apennines defensive line. Hitler demurred, arguing that it was the last line of defense in Italy. If the Allies broke through, north Italy would fall to them. Moreover, defeat would create a dangerous threat to the Balkans.\(^{509}\) Once again, the economics of war caused Hitler to subsume military necessity to wider strategic needs.

Nonetheless, Kesselring pressed his case, reminding his _Führer_ that he could ill-afford the loss of two armies after the catastrophes at Stalingrad and in Tunisia.

\(^{508}\)Sunset No. 646. 6 August 1944," SRS-1869. NND 947022, Entry 9026, Box 1, Part III. RG 457, Records of the NSA/CSS, (NAII), 28; Wilt, "Allied Cooperation," 220-21.

\(^{509}\)Irving, _Hitler's War_, 652.
While assuring Hitler that German soldiers would fight and die in Italy if so ordered, Kesselring guaranteed that he could slow and eventually halt the Allied advance. Doing so required the flexibility of fighting a mobile defense back to the northern Apennines. He reasoned that Hitler actually wanted this result, which would allow whatever grand strategy he had mapped out for 1945 to grow to fruition. Kesselring returned to Italy, having won the most important battle that he would fight that summer.\(^5\)

The military situation deteriorated as the pursuit continued. German divisions, short of transport, took to the roads on foot and made their way north. They filled Italy's highways every night, seeking to avoid the swarms of Allied fighter-bombers that dogged their steps during daylight hours. Engineers worked feverishly at sowing ruin behind the retreating infantry and *Panzers*, wreaking havoc on roads and bridges.

The delaying tactics worked, as they had against Montgomery's forces in September 1943. Allied forces, fearful of ambush or stumbling into a mined stretch of road, often lost contact with the retreating Germans. Nonetheless, when the Germans made a stand, they suffered severe losses. In early July at Ancona, the 27th Infantry Division lost an entire assault gun company in a single hour while engaging in a sharp fight that decimated the division's infantry.\(^5\)


Kesselring’s army rebuilt while retreating, absorbing reinforcements and replacements on the run. The severe losses already taken and the deplorable condition of the divisions arriving to firm up the front forced German quartermasters to dip into Italian equipment stockpiles. The inferior weapons available outfitted units on the front line and in rear areas.  

**DEFENSE OF THE GOTHIC LINE**

German forces fell back upon their last defensive line in Italy, the partially completed *Gothic Line*. Rommel’s engineers had mapped out this position in the northern Apennines in 1943, intending it to be the safe haven that German forces would fight their way back to from southern Italy. Although some work had proceeded before Kesselring retreated to this line in late summer 1944, he soon discovered that it was an unsatisfactory refuge. Combat forces in Italy had not participated in fixing its positions, given Hitler’s worry that troops retreated too hastily when they knew fortified positions awaited them in the rear.  

The *Gothic Line* underwent hasty efforts to strengthen its defenses as Kesselring’s men drew near. Engineers focused on the eastern flank, where fewer natural obstacles existed to hinder an attacker. Worries about this weakness led to the construction of a second string of defensive strong points behind the primary

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security zone.\textsuperscript{514}

On August 15, a new strategic threat developed to OBSW when Allied forces launched OPERATION DRAGOON. The American 6\textsuperscript{th} Corps landed on the beaches of southern France, opening the western Alpines as a back door into Kesselring's theater. Although Kesselring had long-feared such a landing, he had just two divisions of raw recruits to fill the breach. The arrival in late August of the first Fascist Italian division, assigned a defensive position between Genoa and La Spezia, relieved German defenders there to rush eastwards.\textsuperscript{515} Fortune smiled brightly upon the ever-optimistic Field Marshal as the advancing Franco-American forces turned their attention westward, capturing Toulon and Marseilles, and then driving north to meet Eisenhower's forces racing across France. Kesselring's staff had accurately forecast just such a scenario and breathed a sigh of relief when it unfolded as anticipated.\textsuperscript{516}

The Anglo-American Chiefs of Staff were not the only ones robbing Peter to pay Paul that summer. Constant demands on Kesselring's threadbare formations nullified whatever advantage had accrued to him from the departure of veteran American and French divisions invading southern France. Losses of mobile forces

\textsuperscript{514}Heckel and Beelitz, "Italian Theater (23 Aug-2 Sep 44)", 3-4.

\textsuperscript{515}Ibid., 5-6; Hans Roettiger, "OB Southwest: Effect of Southern France Invasion on Italy," NARA Microfiche Publication M1035 Fiche 0321, Foreign Military Studies, B-Series (RG 338) B-0330. (1947), 8-10.

\textsuperscript{516}Ibid.
made defensive plans for the Gothic Line obsolete. Seventeen German divisions faced the daunting task of manning over 1000 kilometers of front line and coastal defenses originally marked out for twenty-three. Even full-strength, well-armed divisions would have been hard pressed to defend twice the frontage normally assigned to such units.517

Kesselring's divisions were neither up to strength nor fully outfitted. From May 11 to July 31, Army Group C had lost 13,104 dead, 41,336 wounded, 41,998 missing, and suffered 22,854 cases of illness. The 119,292 men removed from his rolls amounted to nine and one-half full-strength German infantry divisions, allocated 12,500 men on paper. The majority of the divisions reeling back to the Gothic Line had combat strengths of between 2,000 and 5,000 men.518

Nonetheless, the retreat released formations from coastal duties and the arrival of four new infantry divisions during September and October enabled Kesselring to restore the situation. The Field Marshal became a casualty on October 23, when his vehicle collided with an artillery piece, severely wounding him. Colonel General von Vietinghoff took command of Army Group C.

Allied forces launched a series of offensives in September and October aimed at capturing two mountain passes in the 5th Army sector and releasing British forces on the Adriatic coast to take Bologna. The Allied push in November and

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517Heckel and Beelitz, "Italian Theater (23 Aug-2 Sep 44)," 6-7.
518Haupt, Kriegsschauplatz Italien, 153.
December captured more territory, but halted after the terrain, bad weather, and manpower and ammunition shortages, crippled the attackers. German forces had again fought their opponents to a stalemate and bought time to exploit Italy.

**ECONOMIC ACTIVITY**

The value of Italy's economic contribution to the Reich rose sharply during the summer of 1944. Speer directed Hitler's attention to Italy's indispensable role in the war economy in late June 1944. "Advised the Führer once more on the importance of Italian armament- and war production for the total production and informed him, that about 15% of the German armaments volume will drop off if Italy produces no more for us. The Führer emphasizes that the importance is clear to him." During a speech the next month, Speer reminded his audience that German war production depended upon the Italian and western European economies for twenty-five to thirty percent of output. Moreover, purchases of essential goods from Italy between April 17-10 October 1944 had climbed to RM 299,000,000. Despite aerial bombardment, labor unrest, and raw material shortages, Italy played an invaluable role in replacing production lost in the east and west throughout 1944.519

Speer increased turnout even as the German empire shrank around him. The boost resulted from measures improving the efficiency of the war economy that redirected production from consumer to military output. Manufacture of consumer

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519*Deutschlands Rüstung*, 385, 397; Ránki, *Economics of the Second World War*, 341.
goods remained high until late 1943. German arms manufacturers then employed only 5.2 million workers, while consumer producers held on to 6 million employees, many still working at home. Speer's earlier mentioned plan to shift consumer goods production to plants in the occupied nations took hold in 1944. Much of the miraculous rise in German arms production that year can be attributed to this transfer of manufactures. Moreover, Speer's dispersal of production, many times to hardened underground facilities, bore fruit. Nonetheless, Speer failed to mobilize German women to replace industrial workers sent to war.  

What did this mean to Italian production? First, Speer's use of occupied producers to turnout consumer items freed up German manufacturers, who then shifted their expertise and labor to arms manufacturing. Every square meter of Italian cloth, every item of optical apparatus, every ounce of chemicals made in Italy directly contributed to the stunning rise in German arms production that year. Moreover, skilled Italian labor, toiling in both Italy and Germany, provided Speer with sorely-needed workers. The highly proficient Italian laborers proved irreplaceable, given the failure to mobilize unskilled German female workers. Speer testified to this at Nuremberg when he noted that:

In 1944 7 times as many weapons were manufactured as in 1942, 5½ times as many armored vehicles, and 6 times as much ammunition. The number of workers in these branches increased only by 30 percent. This success was not brought about through a greater exploitation of labor but rather through the abolition of obsolete methods of production and through an improved system

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520 Ehrman, Grand Strategy, 6-7.
of controlling the production of armament.\textsuperscript{521}

That Italy played a vital role in this achievement is undeniable.

Some German forces began using Italian equipment during this time and received replacement parts from Italian manufactures. (See Chart VII-2 for detailed information.) Between October 1943 and October 1944, Italian producers delivered more than 95,000 submachine guns, 41,000 rifles, 42,000 carbines, and 6,000 machine guns. Italian antiaircraft, antitank, mortar, and artillery pieces sustained the German defense of Italy. Moreover, thousands of Italian bicycles, motorcycles, automobiles, trucks, and tractors kept German forces moving. A few improved assault guns and tanks from Italian factories also reached the fighting forces.\textsuperscript{522}

Nonetheless, serious problems impeded Speer's campaign for greater efficiency in Italian production. By September 1944, developing shortages of key raw materials loomed on the horizon. The loss of chromium from the Balkans and Turkey meant that Germany and Italy would soon be unable to produce the special types of steel essential to modern warfare. Without such metals, all war production would halt in early January 1946.\textsuperscript{523}

\textsuperscript{521}IMT, XVI:448.


\textsuperscript{523}Oron J. Hale, "Speer. 8 Aug 45," Government Service, War Department, Historical (Schuster) Commission Interrogation of Former German Officials, University of Virginia Special Collections (Charlottesville, Va.: Alderman Library), 2.
The shrinking coal supply also hindered the maintenance of production levels throughout the *Reich* that summer. In Italy, which required 900,000 tons of German coal monthly for industry and agriculture, demands for transportation space to maintain Kesselring's embattled armies slowed coal shipments and with it, Italian factories. By September 1944, the destructive force of Allied air power in the Balkans had reduced coal stocks that powered transportation to a twelve-day supply. During October, Ultra revealed that 30 to 35 percent of all industrial concerns in western Germany had ceased operation owing to the destruction of key transportation nodes, particularly the rail marshaling centers vital to moving coal, which fueled the entire war economy. The end was not far off for Hitler's Thousand Year Reich.\(^{524}\)

Even as the *Reich* neared collapse, food made its way from Italy to Germany. Despite the transportation crisis, Italy supplied large amounts of foodstuffs to Germany between August and December 1944. Hitler's officials dispatched 5,800 carloads of Italian victuals to the Reich during this period. Italian rice, wheat, and fruits replaced losses from Russian, Polish, and Romanian farms during the *Reich*'s

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waning days.\textsuperscript{525}

Air attacks on north Italy hindered industrial efficiency during the summer and fall of 1944. Targeting of manufacturing plants declined as raids focused on transportation during OPERATION STRANGLE. The strikes began with renewed force late that summer. A raid during August destroyed the Ferrara rubber works, which threatened to shut down twenty-two other factories dependent upon its output. Leyers requested 1,100 tons of rubber from Germany lest he lose Italian capacity to manufacture 22,000 tires monthly.\textsuperscript{526}

The destructive attacks continued throughout the winter of 1944-1945, but with the addition of air raids on ammunition and arms plants, directly supporting Kesselring's forces in Italy. Steel manufacturing and rolling plants also moved higher up the list of targeted facilities. Air raids further reduced output because Italy lacked a modern warning system that could determine the raiders' intended target. This antiquated warning system caused widespread work stoppages at major industrial concerns until early 1945, when most plants had already been idled owing to a lack of coal and transportation for finished goods. The dispersal of manufacturing facilities worsened transport problems and angered Italian industrialists, who feared the loss of machine tools and other equipment.\textsuperscript{527}

\textsuperscript{525}Klinkhammer, \textit{Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung}, 116; Heckel and Beelitz, "Italian Theater (23 Aug-2 Sep 44)," 1.

\textsuperscript{526}Rieder, "Zwischen Bündis und Ausbeutung," 689.

\textsuperscript{527}Leyers, "Italian War Production," 17-19, 23-26, 27-32.
Problems plaguing transportation to and from the Reich caused a radical realignment of Italian production priorities. Speer at last accepted Kesselring's notion that Italian production would best serve the Wehrmacht forces fighting in Italy. It took the disastrous transport situation to turn that plan into reality. The northward withdrawal of fighting forces to positions near Bologna made the plan even more efficient than it would have been earlier, when German forces were fighting south of Rome. Given the effects of Allied air raids on transportation routes that fall, the plan became an imperative if German forces were to continue operations in Italy.528

The new measures gave Italian industrialists a measure of self-administration. They acquired the right to turn steel and other basic materials into finished goods, increasing the number of workers needed. Keeping more Italian workers at their jobs became important to bosses who worked hard to minimize labor unrest.529 Industrialists' efforts preserved their skilled labor force and kept it in place for postwar production.

Nonetheless, Italy served its German masters until the end of the war. Its fields and factories first filled gaps in German production and later sustained the operations of German troops in Italy when they otherwise would have collapsed because of their isolation from the Reich. The Allied failure to take the Po Valley


529Leyers, "Italian War Production," 6-7.
meant not only that they had to keep troops deployed on the French Alps and northern Apennines during the winter of 1944-45, it also meant that Germany could use Italian resources to continue fighting.

CONCLUSION

The conflict in Italy from May until December 1944 claimed thousands of lives and saw the American Fifth and British Eighth armies finally break the months’ long stalemate at Cassino and Anzio. The capture of Rome, the first capital city of a major Axis power to fall to the Allies, presaged the fall of Berlin and surrender of Tokyo. Rome’s capitulation gave the weary Allied forces a much-needed, if somewhat short-lived, reason to celebrate. The pursuit took the Anglo-American armies 250 miles up the Italian peninsula, affixing additional laurels to their rolls for the liberation of Florence, Pisa, Ravenna, and a host of lesser, if nonetheless equally grateful, Italian cities and villages.

But for all the exhilaration of the advance, what had been won? Churchill’s bold vision of a triumphant drive on Vienna turned anew into a fading chimera of dashed hopes. The agonies of the Gustav Line blurred into the torments of the Gothic Line. There was always one more muddy hellhole lying ahead, one more river, one more elusive phantom called final victory, which was always over just one more Italian hill.

Despite all the misery, bloodshed, and plain hard work, the Allies gained little wisdom from their experiences. The Allied advances added hungry mouths
needing sustenance. The German escape outside Rome meant that Kesselring’s battered *Kampfgruppen* had bought themselves the time to restore themselves into foot-weary, battered divisions. These much-reduced forces defeated the Allied push for Bologna and a real breakthrough into the Po Valley, as sunny Italy once more put on its winter guise of mud. One of the Italian campaign’s great what-if’s remains what might have happened had Alexander kept the divisions “DRAGOON”-ed off to southern France. Might not this enhanced army have pulled off the invasion of southern France in reverse, crossing the Alps to pursue German forces into France and the waiting arms of Eisenhower’s divisions at Lyon or Colmar?

The situation in Italy as 1944 ended was fundamentally unchanged from the way that 1943 had closed. German forces occupied a strong defensive position astride the mountainous north. The Po Valley beckoned to the Allies, but stayed in German hands. Another Italian harvest, the labor of Italian workers, the output of Italian factories, fed the German war machine during its most desperate days. Italy could not tip the tide for Germany, but it could feed Germans and ensure that Kesselring’s forces could stay in the field through the final winter of the war.
Chapter VII Charts

Chart VII-1

The Luftwaffe in Italy: July 1944 - April 1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arm of Service</th>
<th>20. 7.</th>
<th>20. 8.</th>
<th>20. 9.</th>
<th>20. 10.</th>
<th>20. 11.</th>
<th>20. 12</th>
<th>10. 1. 45</th>
<th>9. 4. 45</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short-range recon</td>
<td>15/9</td>
<td>34/21</td>
<td>23/20</td>
<td>27/18</td>
<td>22/5</td>
<td>25/13</td>
<td>29/23</td>
<td>24/14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-range recon Ar 234</td>
<td>22/12</td>
<td>27/12</td>
<td>25/17</td>
<td>17/10</td>
<td>22/17</td>
<td>17/13</td>
<td>16/13</td>
<td>14/12 3/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighters (Ital. F.)</td>
<td>60/47 (58/29)</td>
<td>38/30 (74/61)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>- (34/22)</td>
<td>- (28/18)</td>
<td>- (60/44)</td>
<td>- (67/31)</td>
<td>- (66/50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground attack aircraft</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14/7</td>
<td>12/9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night fighters</td>
<td>48/26</td>
<td>33/17</td>
<td>32/23</td>
<td>35/25</td>
<td>26/15</td>
<td>26/21</td>
<td>23/14</td>
<td>38/35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombers (Ital. B. And T.)</td>
<td>- (41/13)</td>
<td>62/14 (23/6)</td>
<td>- (-)</td>
<td>- (14/-)</td>
<td>- (14/-)</td>
<td>- (24/19)</td>
<td>- (13/11)</td>
<td>- (13/7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>145/94 (99/42)</td>
<td>194/94 (96/67)</td>
<td>80/60 (-)</td>
<td>93/60 (48/22)</td>
<td>82/46 (42/18)</td>
<td>68/47 (84/63)</td>
<td>68/50 (80/42)</td>
<td>79/63 (79/57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transports</td>
<td>36/36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First number: Aircraft on hand; second number: combat ready aircraft. In parentheses: Italian units.

### CHART VII-2

**ITALIAN SMALL ARMS, ARTILLERY, AND MUNITIONS PRODUCTION**

1 OCTOBER 43-10 OCTOBER 44

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapon</th>
<th>Number produced</th>
<th>Weapon</th>
<th>Number produced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beretta submachine guns</td>
<td>95,234</td>
<td>65/64 naval A.A. cannon</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.65 mm pistols</td>
<td>53,725</td>
<td>75/18 field howitzers</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91/41 rifles</td>
<td>41,850</td>
<td>75/18 assault gun howitzers</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91 a carbines</td>
<td>18,994</td>
<td>75/34 assault gun&amp; field artillery cannon</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91 b carbines</td>
<td>23,217</td>
<td>81mm mortars</td>
<td>1,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breda 30 light machine-guns</td>
<td>1,733</td>
<td>90/50 naval A.A. cannon</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breda 37 machine-guns</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>90/53 field A.A. cannon</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breda 38 machine-guns for armor</td>
<td>2,875</td>
<td>100/47 torpedo-boats cannon</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.7mm machine-guns for aircraft</td>
<td>1,699</td>
<td>100/47 submarine cannon</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breda 31 machine-guns</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>105/25 assault gun cannon</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20mm cannons for armor</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>120/50 naval cannons</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20mm naval A.A. cannons</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>135/45 naval cannons</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20mm field A.A. cannons</td>
<td>2,639</td>
<td>149/19 field howitzers</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breda 37/54 cannons</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>149/40 field cannons</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47/32 antitank cannons</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>210/22 howitzers</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47mm cannons for armor</td>
<td>188</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEPARTURES FROM ITALY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hermann Göring Panzer Division</td>
<td>Left in July 44 for Eastern Front (Warsaw)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Panzergrenadier Division</td>
<td>Left in August 44 for OB West (France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15th Panzergrenadier Division</td>
<td>Left in September 44 for OB West (France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44th Infantry Division (Hoch-u.-Deutschmeister)</td>
<td>Left in November 44 for OB Südost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188th Reserve Division</td>
<td>Left in December 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>715th Infantry Division (motorized)</td>
<td>Left in December 44 for OB Südost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71st Infantry Division</td>
<td>Left in December 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>710th Infantry Division</td>
<td>Left in January 45 for Eastern Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>356th Infantry Division</td>
<td>Left in January 45 for Eastern Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16th SS Panzergrenadier Division</td>
<td>Left in March 45 for OB Südost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Reichsführer SS”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>237th Infantry Division</td>
<td>Left in March 45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADDITIONS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16th SS Panzergrenadier Division</td>
<td>June 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th Luftwaffe Field Division</td>
<td>June 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th Luftwaffe Field Division</td>
<td>June 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34th Infantry Division</td>
<td>July 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114th Jäger Division</td>
<td>Summer 44 from OB Südost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Italian Division “San Marco”</td>
<td>Summer 44, new division from Grafenwöhr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Italian Division “Monte Rosa”</td>
<td>Summer 44, new division from Grafenwöhr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42nd Jäger Division</td>
<td>August 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>232nd Infantry Division (immobile)</td>
<td>September 44, new division raised from fortress troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98th Infantry Division</td>
<td>September 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148th Reserve Infantry Division</td>
<td>October 44, remnants of division escaped from France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157th Reserve Mountain Division</td>
<td>Early fall 44, remnants of division escaped from France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Formations Raised in Italy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>237&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Infantry Division (immobile)</td>
<td>Sept. 44, new division raised from fortress troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Italian Division &quot;Italia&quot;</td>
<td>Fall 44, new division from Grafenwöhr (understrength)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Italian Division &quot;Littorio&quot;</td>
<td>Fall 44, new division from Grafenwöhr (understrength)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement Division &quot;Schlesien&quot;</td>
<td>Fall 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement Division &quot;Ost Preussen&quot;</td>
<td>Fall 44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NEW FORMATIONS RAISED IN ITALY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Formation</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italo-German Corps Staff &quot;Lombardia&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Field Training Division</td>
<td>Jan. 45 from portions of 20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Luftwaffe Field Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinegun Battalions 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Late Fall 44 from Army Panzer Antiaircraft 400 unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Infantry Division</td>
<td>June 44 to reinforce 362&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Infantry Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Luftwaffe Field Division</td>
<td>To reinforce 20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Luftwaffe Field Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Infantry Division</td>
<td>To reinforce 305&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Infantry Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Luftwaffe Field Division</td>
<td>To form 155&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Field Training Division &amp; reinforce another division</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RENAIMING OF UNITS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Renamed Unit</th>
<th>New Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LXXXVII Army Corps</td>
<td>Became Army Liguria under Marshal Graziani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commander Adriatic Coastal Area</td>
<td>LXXXIII Army Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Reserve Mountain Division</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Mountain Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Reserve Infantry Division</td>
<td>148&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Infantry Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>278&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Infantry Division</td>
<td>Designated a Volksgrenadier Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>305&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Infantry Division</td>
<td>Designated a Volksgrenadier Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>334&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Infantry Division</td>
<td>Designated a Volksgrenadier Division</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER 8

FINALE

"What are the conclusions? The people say: the Germans are stripping Northern Italy, and won't even leave us our eyes to cry with."30

Marshal Graziani, January 1945

German forces eked out a narrow victory by turning their Allied opponents away from the gates of Bologna. Nonetheless, the successful defense of the northern Apennines could not undo the fatal damage that the Allies inflicted upon Germany at home. The loss of battles elsewhere presaged the German collapse in Italy in April and May 1945, no matter how hard German troops fought to stave defeat off or how much Italian laborers produced.

WINTER BATTLES

With the terrible summer rout and bitter fall fighting behind them, Kesselring took stock of his army. By the smallest of margins, his formations had fended off the Allied bid to breach Bologna's defenses. Had that battle continued a single day, further combat would have compelled his retreat. Despite a sense of pride in his troops, Kesselring knew how badly they were hurt. Most divisions carried fewer than 3,000 men on their rolls. With this bare minimum of manpower,

30Deakin, Brutal Friendship, 746.
the Field Marshal expected each one to cover a sector stretching more than thirty kilometers. Few reserves backed up his exhausted and over-extended units. The skeletal formations rotated men in and out of the line as a trickle of men and equipment strengthened German divisions.\footnote{Ehrman, \textit{Grand Strategy}, 37-40; Heckel and Beelitz, “Italian Theater The Fighting in the Bologna Adriatic Coast Sector,” 1-2.}

Kesselring, keenly aware that his troops had given their all, requested permission for his forces to fall back behind the Po River, while the bad weather of the winter months offered cover from the ubiquitous Allied air forces. Hitler, with Russian forces firmly established on German soil, would brook no further retreats.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 3.} He demanded that Kesselring’s men stand and fight in the northernmost Apennines. Hitler’s insistence on a static defense ensured that when the Allied spring offensive began, the immobilized remnants of Kesselring’s army would not escape Allied armored and mechanized infantry divisions penetrating the flat country of the Po Valley.

The winter halt in Italy did not mean a cessation of all fighting. Although British and American commanders lacked the strength necessary to hammer their way through the mud and German defenses, they applied constant pressure along the front, conducting what their opponents labeled ‘snail offensives.’ The incessant assaults on German positions prevented the defenders from rebuilding their
strength. Instead, the fighting in Italy degenerated into World War One-style trench warfare. German infantry dug-in and depended on their few remaining mobile units to cauterize penetrations of the line.

**DISINTEGRATION: THE ITALIAN WAR ECONOMY COLLAPSES**

**RAILROADS AND EMPTY COAL CARS**

The havoc wreaked by the Allied air offensive against transportation targets in Germany radiated throughout Hitler's shrinking empire. Aerial assaults in Italy hampered transport of men and materiel. During December 1944, the Allied air campaign against the Italian rail net and Po River bridges created 400 major breaks in the system. So widespread was the harm, that fifty breaches remained unreppaired on January 1, 1945. Between November 1944 and April 1945, Allied raiders dropped 15,000 tons of bombs on the Brenner line alone. The damage interrupted movement on the Brenner route to Bologna until February. Although repairs restored a low level of service during February and March, Allied air attacks again severed the railway in April.

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533 Heckel and Beelitz, "Italian Theater The Fighting in the Bologna Adriatic Coast Sector," 16-17.

534 Förster, "The Dynamics of Volksgemeinschaft," 3:211.

Meanwhile, on the Eastern Front, the Russians opened a massive winter offensive on January 9 and overran the rest of German-occupied Poland. Zhukov's armies penetrated Germany, seizing the Upper Silesian coal fields. The American conquest of the Saar during March further aggravated the situation. The loss of the two areas proved catastrophic, leaving the Ruhr basin as the last source of coal for empty German bins. Speer worked hard to see that remaining coal stockpiles got through. Hitler's ever-busy Armaments Minister won the enmity of the last few bureaucrats who still possessed the energy to defend their shrinking personal fiefdoms by taking over railroad operations as he saw fit. Despite Speer's extraordinary measures, the end was in sight. He projected that little more could be produced other than that for which materials were already in the pipeline.\(^{536}\)

The deteriorating situation in the *Reich* meant that coal and raw material shipments from Germany to Italy would soon cease. *OBSW* responded to its impending isolation by expanding efforts to achieve self-sufficiency. Logisticians worked to replace 50,000 tons of logistical support shipments dispatched monthly from Germany. Efforts to further mobilize Italian industry faltered when the cutoff of German coal exports took place. On January 21, 1945, Kesselring received news

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that coal shipments would soon be halted.\footnote{Hubatsch, \textit{Ktb OKW IV(2)}, 1391.}

While Allied air attacks never stopped all rail traffic between Italy and Germany, the experience of the Trento line between November 1944 and April 1945 is representative of the system's general demise. (See Chart VIII-1.) That traffic did not fall off more sharply stemmed from the herculean labors of railroad men and the local population. 11,500 workers stood ready to restore breaks along the Brenner line, and officials did not hesitate to enlist nearby residents when the situation demanded it.

German engineers dug deep into their bag of tricks, building bridges with removable spans, camouflaging rebuilt structures with painted-on bomb craters, and using an adjacent line to decoy attackers. Other officials oversaw the network by telephone, rapidly shifting traffic from damaged to undamaged routes. 350-480 antiaircraft guns defended the line, 70 percent of which were manned by Italian crews. They and the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Group of the Fascist Italian Air Force protected the route, taking a heavy toll of the Allied medium bombers assigned the drudge work of sundering the thin ribbon of steel.\footnote{The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, \textit{Rail Operations Over the Brenner Pass}, 7-10; Richard Baumgartner, "Organization of the Po River Crossings (1 Jan - 30 Mar 1945)," NARA Microfiche Publication M1035, Fiche 0136, Foreign Military Studies, D-Series (RG 338) D-207 (Washington, D.C., 1947), 12-13; USAAF, \textit{ULTRA and the History of the United States Strategic Air Force}, 181.}
Nonetheless, impromptu repairs could not substitute for a working rail system. German engineers' heroic measures could only go so far in heading off collapse. Traffic on the Trento line fell 66.6 percent from November 1944 to April 1945. A postwar survey revealed the scale of the destruction that German rail officials confronted. Rail cars clogged a two and one-half mile stretch of track between Gardano and Bolzano. More than 6,000 pieces of rail stock languished in and around Bolzano. The cars, some empty and some full, could not enter Italy nor return to the Reich. A small number of shipments slipped through, using jury-rigged railroads, but trains bearing the Wehrmacht's logistical life-blood languished.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Passenger</th>
<th>Freight</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov 44</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>1430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 44</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>1448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 45</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>1349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 45</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 45</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 45</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

on tracks leading nowhere, while German forces bled to death in Italy.\textsuperscript{539}

The failure of the rail system and continuing Allied air attacks on Italian industry seriously undermined the willingness of Italian labor to work for Germany. Wage and hunger strikes occurred frequently in the waning days of the war.

Stockpiles of hoarded raw materials vanished, either having been used in Italian factories or returned to Germany.\textsuperscript{540} One AWP official reported that air raids had severely curtailed output, halting production at many plants.\textsuperscript{541} Although Mussolini nationalized the remaining important Italian industry in March, his desperate playact merely made the collapse crystal clear.\textsuperscript{542}

**SWITZERLAND SLAMS THE DOOR SHUT**

In the fall of 1944, Albert Speer ordered production dispersed in Italy, hoping to avoid the worst consequences of Allied air attacks. Fighting had driven the front line far north of Rome, requiring the dismantling of plants in endangered areas. Transportation, as seen above, became the worst bottleneck in Speer's production scheme, slowing shipments of machine tools north to new sites in Italy and Germany. What he could not have foreseen before launching this undertaking

\textsuperscript{539}The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *Rail Operations Over the Brenner Pass*, 13-14.

\textsuperscript{540}Wehrig, "Duties and Operation of the Italian Section of the Chief of Wehrmacht Motor Transportation," 6.

\textsuperscript{541}The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *Rail Operations Over the Brenner Pass*, 12.

\textsuperscript{542}Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, 499; Deakin, *Brutal Friendship*, 747-50.
was the convergence of Allied air attacks and Swiss intransigence concerning rail shipments across that nation.

In March 1944, the Swiss government accepted Allied demands that German transit rights for fuel, requisitioned goods, and items with potential military use be reduced. The curtailment limited trade to prewar levels.⁵⁴³ Allied pressure for additional abatements of German transit rights continued that July when U.S. Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, pushed for a further cut in German-Swiss rail traffic and commerce. A month later, he demanded a complete halt to such intercourse. Hull ruled out a food blockade of Switzerland after the Allies captured France in July and August. Nonetheless, he recommended to his British counterparts that the Swiss be threatened with air raids on rail routes leading into the country, a move that would have choked off the Swiss supply of food and other necessities. British diplomats pointed out to Hull Switzerland's role in protecting Anglo-American airmen downed over Germany. This function had assumed increased importance as German civilians took out their anger on British and American fliers who fell into their hands.

Swiss officials partially placated the Americans in October, when Bern denied Germany access to the Simplon tunnel and discontinued shipments of

ammunition and explosives to the Reich. Nonetheless, German trains rolled through the Swiss Alps, taking the St. Gotthard Pass, a route off limits to Allied fighter-bombers. Swiss cooperation with Hitler infuriated the American government, which knew that German trains carried food requisitioned from Italy by its Nazi overseers. American representatives stepped up pressure on the Swiss again in November, this time halting Swiss ground and rail movements through liberated France. The handwriting was on the wall, and even the most obdurate Swiss could see it. Allied threats forced Switzerland to choose between its relationship with the crumbling Reich or its future dealings with Western powers.\textsuperscript{544}

The Swiss slowly gave ground that winter, reducing transit shipments of German iron during November and December. Similar cuts followed in cargos of foodstuffs. Swiss representatives excused their actions to German officials on the grounds that Germany had not supplied exports dictated by earlier agreements. In fact, the Swiss no longer worried about German retaliation, given the new state of affairs in central Europe.\textsuperscript{545}

The Bundesrat halted coal shipments on February 9, 1945. German coal shipments to Italy could not transit Switzerland so long as coal deliveries to the


\textsuperscript{545}Ochsner, "Transit von Truppen," 226.
Swiss were in arrears. Since Germany could not make up the deficit owed to Switzerland, this policy change ended coal transfers to Italy. Throughout March, the Swiss government applied the same principle to commercial transactions with Germany, terminating the movement of iron, scrap metals, and food. Switzerland also ended transfers of electricity to Germany. New agreements with the Western powers incrementally replaced Switzerland's lost commerce with Germany and let the Republic haul supplies of food and raw materials through France. Nonetheless, the Swiss purchased looted gold and traded secretly with Nazi Germany until the war ended.\textsuperscript{546}

A major reassessment of the Swiss role in the Second World War is under way. Those assigned this task would do well to consider the important part that the Italian campaign played in Switzerland's actions. Because Allied armies remained south of Rome until June 1944, Nazi Germany kept Switzerland isolated from other democratic states. Switzerland's isolation, its desire to profit from the war, Swiss racism, and significant sympathy for Germany in government and commercial circles, predisposed the Swiss leadership to assist Nazi Germany during the war's last eighteen months. Switzerland manufactured arms and explosives for Germany, supplied electricity to fuel German homes and factories, built locomotives and machine tools, and greased the German war machine with hard currency, urgently

\textsuperscript{546}Ochsner, "Transit von Truppen," 227-28; Bower, \textit{Nazi Gold}, 79-80; Slany, \textit{U.S. and Allied Efforts to Recover and Restore Gold and Other Assets Stolen or Hidden by Germany During World War II}. 
needed to purchase raw materials from Spain and Portugal.

Could the Allies have prevented this? Swiss-German cooperation survived the war, with Switzerland refusing to acknowledge that it had German assets and denying Holocaust survivors access to funds given safe haven in its banks.\textsuperscript{547} Nonetheless, Swiss assistance to Germany shrank substantially only after Allied troops arrived on the Franco-Swiss border. When American and British leaders threatened blockades and severe consequences after the war, Switzerland reduced German transit traffic across the Republic and slowly cut commercial ties with the disintegrating Reich. Had Allied forces made a determine effort to breakthrough to north Italy in late 1943 or early 1944, Swiss authorities might have reduced their entanglements with Germany that much earlier, which would have assisted the Allied cause.

**TOTAL WAR, TOTAL DEFEAT**

On March 11, 1945, Kesselring departed Italy to command the Western Front. He nominated as his replacement von Vietinghoff, who had been transferred from Italy to Army Group Courland on the Russian Front. Vietinghoff visited Berlin in mid-March and left convinced that Hitler had lost touch with reality. The Führer offered nothing but transparent fabrications to buck-up the visiting commander.

Vietinghoff returned to Italy and willingly assisted on-going negotiations with Allied representatives in Switzerland, which resulted in the surrender of German forces in Italy a few days before the comprehensive Reims settlement in May 1945.  

Source: Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht, IV(2), p. 1400.

\[548\] Albert Kesselring, "The Territorial Authority And Responsibilities of the Commander in Chief South-West in Upper-Italy," NARA Microfiche Publication
Vietinghoff's staff pondered possible Allied strategies for the spring of 1945. British and American forces could drive northward while simultaneously landing on the Adriatic and Ligurian coasts, trapping German and Italian units in pockets along the main battle front, in Istria, and in the western Alps. The landing would have prevented a retreat to the Po River and annihilated German forces in Italy. Vietinghoff's dismal reconnaissance capability revealed that the Allies had not built up their amphibious forces to the level that this operation required. Nonetheless, German estimates held that a landing on either flank posed a serious threat. Units were deployed for a quick response to the endangered coastal sectors, playing into the hands of Allied deception measures one last time.\(^{549}\)

Vietinghoff had sixteen divisions in the battle line before the Allied spring offensive began. He could expect little naval support, and the *Luftwaffe* and Italian Fascist Air Force could only put up a dozen planes against thousands of Allied craft. Ultra served the Allies one last time by revealing the deterioration of German forces. German divisions were still woefully short of men and equipment. Allied air attacks on Italian factories had halted ammunition production in February 1945, decreasing ammunition supplies held by combat forces to a two-day allotment. German vehicles

\(^{549}\)Kesselring and et al., *German Version of the Italian Campaign*, 175-78; Hubatsch, *Ktb OKW IV(2)*, 1392; *ULTRA, MAGIC, and the Allies*, 50-52.
had fuel sufficient to move just eighty kilometers. Moreover, Allied commanders knew that Hitler was demanding that his troops fight in place. 550

Despite the inevitability of the offensive, the British 8th Army attack on April 9 took von Vietinghoff by surprise. 551 Without aerial reconnaissance, he could not keep an eye on what was taking place behind the immediate front. A second strike by American forces so confused German commanders that they miscalculated the location of the main blow. 552

The ferocity of the Allied air assault that accompanied the offensive surprised the Germans. Roving fighter-bombers struck German positions on the Senio River with fragmentation bombs, which sent casualty counts soaring in front line units. Command and control centers, supply lines, and river crossings, received close attention. Air power for once lived up to its claim that it could decisively influence the outcome of a campaign when aircraft struck at ferries and bridges carrying fleeing German units to the north bank of the Po River. Unit cohesion broke down as the German formations retreated, seeking escape from the Allied

550 Kesselring et al., German Version of the Italian Campaign, 184-87; Hans Röttger, "Geschichte der Waffenstreckung der deutsch-italienischen Truppen in Italien," N 422, Bd. 2 (BAMA Freiburg, Germany), 4-5; Klaus Bertelsmann, "Die Entwicklung der personellen und materiellen Lage derVerbände des OB Südwest vom Sommer 44 bis zur Kapitulation," N422, Bd. 26 (BAMA Freiburg, Germany (Microfiche)), 21; Leyers, "Italian War Production," 19; ULTRA, MAGIC, and the Allies, 49, 52; Bennett, Behind the Battle, 234-35.

551 Historical Section, "Vietinghoff 9/24/146," 7.

552 Senger und Etterlin, Neither Fear Nor Hope, 298.
divisions nipping at their heels. The flat and open Po Valley offered little cover from marauding Allied fighters and bombers. It was also ideal terrain for Allied armor. German morale plummeted as defeat and disintegration overtook German units fleeing to the Po. 14th Army abandoned its equipment in the rout. 10th Army escaped with half of its weapons and vehicles.\textsuperscript{553}

Allied forces in western Germany renewed offensive operations in March, crossing the Rhine River at Remagen on March 7, breaching the last defensible position on that front. Montgomery's 21st Army Group made a set-piece crossing of the Rhine at Wesel on March 24, two days after Patton's American 3rd Army snuck over at Oppenheim, south of Mainz. Allied forces raced through Germany, with the remnants of twenty-six German divisions offering sporadic resistance. The encirclement of the Ruhr on 1 April 1945 isolated the last important concentration of German troops in the west. American spearheads reached the Elbe River in eastern Germany on April 24, where they linked up with their Russian counterparts the next day.

Russian forces, immobilized by their winter advance to the Oder River, just thirty miles east of Berlin, spent several months recouping their strength. Three Soviet fronts, each equivalent to an Allied army group, fought an intense set of battles to seize bridgeheads across the Oder from April 15-18, 1945. When the

\textsuperscript{553}M.A.A.F. ASD, 106; Baumgartner, "Organization of the Po River Crossings," 18; Bertelsmann, "Entwicklung der personellen und materiellen Lage," 21; Senger und Etterlin, \textit{Neither Fear Nor Hope}, 299-301.
assault by Zhukov’s 1st Belorussian Front encountered stiff resistance on the Seelow Heights, which guarded the direct route to Berlin, Stalin altered plans and set loose the troops of Marshal Konev’s 1st Ukrainian Front, who raced to Berlin from the south.

Troops from the two Russian fronts linked up near Potsdam on April 25, isolating Berlin. Zhukov’s and Konev’s forces continued their contest in Berlin’s city streets, with their forces often fratricidally shelling each other as the last pocket of German resistance slowly shrank. On April 29, Hitler, with the noise of battle ringing in his ears, appointed Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz as his successor and then married his mistress Eva Braun, only to commit suicide that same day.

Allied troops drew up to the Po River west of Mantua between April 22-24. The CLN called for a general insurrection against the Germans on April 25. Resistance units liberated Milan and harassed German troops fleeing for the doubtful safety of the Alps. Verona fell to the U.S. 88th Infantry Division on April 26, and the Colored 92nd Infantry Division freed Genoa the next day.

Resistance uprisings against the defeated Germans in the great cities of north Italy complicated the situation. OKW authorized the suppression of the insurrection by the ‘most brutal means,’ a phrase that haunted Field Marshal Jodl at Nuremberg. German units were too busy fleeing to worry about such orders, issued from Hitler’s bunker in Berlin. Partisans asserted their authority in areas not

\[554\] JODL Order of 28-4-45: "Use most brutal methods to suppress rising in Italy," AL 413 (IWM), 1.
yet reached by Allied forces, capturing and executing Mussolini and his mistress, Clara Petacci, on April 28.555

Neither Jodl nor Hitler knew of negotiations between SS General Karl Wolff and Allied representatives in Switzerland, which culminated in a ‘secret surrender’ of German forces in Italy. Agents of the two warring sides had conducted lengthy and dangerous exchanges since March 1945. The German capitulation in Italy preceded the yielding of all Nazi forces by only six days. Nonetheless, the process of arriving at terms exercised a profound influence on the development of postwar relations between the Western powers and the Soviet Union.

Stalin, who had conducted his own secret negotiations with Hitler during the war, worried that a German surrender in Italy was a precursor to the Western Allies arriving at a separate peace with the Nazi dictator. German forces could then have focused on holding off Stalin’s armies, preventing deeper Soviet inroads into Germany. Moreover, Stalin feared that a German surrender in Italy would weaken the position of pro-Moscow resistance groups in north Italy. If the Germans unexpectedly capitulated and cooperated with advancing Allied forces, British and American forces could establish an unassailable position and dominate postwar Italian affairs.556

555 Calvocoressi, Wint and Pritchard, Total War, 409-10.

556 The standard account of the complex negotiations preceding the German surrender in Italy is: Bradley F. Smith and Elena Agarossi, Operation Sunrise: The Secret Surrender (New York: Basic Books, 1979.) For German-Russian peace talks, see Weinberg, A World at Arms, 609-611.
CONCLUSION

On May 3, 1945, Field Marshal Kesselring requested that Hitler’s successor, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, approve the surrender of German forces in Italy, signed on May 2. Dönitz, hoping to limit Russian advances in the east, assented, concluding the long German campaign in Italy.\textsuperscript{557}

Germany lost the Second World War, and with it, the Italian campaign. Nonetheless, the battle for Italy was not a sideshow to the main event. Italian assets sustained the German war machine during the last eighteen months of conflict. Moreover, Allied leaders underestimated Italy’s importance and blundered by focusing on invading France. Germany profited from their blunder, protracting the war.

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<th>Wounded Total</th>
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<td>1,801</td>
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<td>422,615</td>
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\textsuperscript{557} Doenitz, \textit{Memoirs}, 248.
The campaign in Italy from Cape Pessaro to the Brenner Pass lasted 570 days. Allied troops suffered 312,000 casualties while conquering Italy. Their German opponents lost 422,615 men. (See Chart VIII-3.) War’s cold accounting discloses that German losses exceeded Allied by more than 110,000 men. This figure may deceive observers and lead them falsely to conclude that the Allies inflicted greater injuries on the Germans than Allied forces received. German losses included 208,209 officers and men tallied as missing. Among this group, a ratio of one casualty for each prisoner taken held steady during the war. Moreover, many Germans surrendered at the war’s end, inflating German casualty counts. By this reckoning, German battle losses roughly equaled those that the Allies suffered. Germans taken prisoner in Italy could have been captured in France, Poland, or defending the Reich.\(^{558}\)

The Allies did not enter Sicily to engage in attritional warfare. Churchill and Roosevelt wanted to defeat Italy and overthrow Mussolini’s regime. They partially achieved their aims when the Italian king and Grand Fascist Council removed Mussolini from power in July 1943. The Duce later returned to office, albeit as a German puppet, and maintained the fiction of a separate Italian state, competing with Badoglio’s unpopular government for torn Italian loyalties.

Other political goals eluded the Allies. Italy’s surrender did not entice

Germany’s smaller allies to quit the war. Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary fought alongside Nazi forces in Russia and the Balkans until Soviet military power conquered them. The threat of force is a poor substitute for actual military might. This lesson remains as applicable to Iraq, Bosnia, and Kosovo during the 1990s, as it was to Eastern Europe in the 1940s.

Allied leaders also wanted to coax the neutral states of southern Europe into the war or edge them toward a more favorable stance toward the Allied cause. The Allied campaign in Italy did not catapult Turkey into the war. Constantinople remained on the sidelines, shipping chrome and war materials to Germany until the tide turned in February 1945. Spain mirrored Turkish attitudes. Franco assisted his Italian and German mentors, for which he suffered international isolation after the war. Nonetheless, Franco cooperated up to a point with Hitler until May 1944, supplying tungsten, a key ingredient in manufacturing steel for Panzers and antitank weapons.

The plodding Allied advance in Italy did not convince the Swiss to cutoff trade with Hitler. Isolated from the Western democracies after France fell in 1940, the Swiss compromised their principles and learned to live and let-live with Hitler’s Germany. Having witnessed the brutal expansion of their Teutonic neighbor, the Swiss did not arrange to become the next German target for conquest and exploitation. Germany appeared the certain victor of the great European civil war in 1940. The Swiss government decided to deal with reality, unable to foresee how Allied fortunes would rebound by 1943.
In each case, the feebleness of the Allied effort in Italy did not win new converts or friends for the Anglo-American cause. European neutrals understood Hitler's record of redeeming disadvantageous situations and turning them into amazing victories.

Churchill spoke eloquently of taking a poke at the Axis 'soft underbelly.' He mournfully corrected himself later in the Italian campaign, declaring that the Allies had struck at Hitler's 'tough old gut' in Italy. Handicapped by American reluctance to postpone the main event in Normandy, Churchill never overcame his partner's suspicion that the United Kingdom wanted Italy as a part of its master plan to preserve the British Empire. The lonely fight in North Africa against the Italians and Rommel's *Afrika-Korps* kept Britain in the war long enough for American entry to seal the promise of final victory. American political and military leaders could not grasp how the Mediterranean served Britain, linking Middle Eastern oil fields and Indian resources to that embattled isle. Logic, not just love of empire, drove Churchill to fight in the Mediterranean, where the British military had established bases at Gibraltar, Malta, and in Egypt.

What began as a squabble between friends became an impasse between allies. Americans wanted to minimize their commitments to this British-dominated theater. Marshall's reticence kept force levels low and ensured that Allied troops never mastered their opponents. Churchill could not accept this state of affairs. He pushed for bold action, which left Allied forces hanging onto a precarious bridgehead at Anzio throughout the winter of 1943-44. American insistence that
DRAGOON proceed stripped Alexander of veteran divisions necessary to take Bologna and the Po Valley in late 1944. Only the Germans benefitted from this standoff between partners.

Germany struck gold in Italy. The recovery of hoarded materials relieved shortages curtailing German production and fed machines in Italian factories. AWPN officials transferred several hundred thousand tons of modern German, Swiss, and American machinery and raw materials back to the Reich. Germany did almost RM 2,000,000,000 worth of business with Italian concerns, providing needed relief for German manufacturers. Moreover, Speer dipped deeply into the Italian labor pool, filling openings created by German men conscripted into the Wehrmacht. The slave labor of 600,000 Italian military internees filled many gaps in the German war economy. Although Italian production required imports of German coal, hydroelectric power from Italy augmented German and Swiss output.

The farms and orchards of the Po Valley filled many railway cars with agricultural produce for the return trip to Germany. In 1944, Italian rice, wheat, fruits, and vegetables filled German bellies, replacing commodities lost when Russian forces retook Ukraine, Romania, and Poland. That Italian workers and their families lived on reduced rations worried their German overseers not one whit so long as Hitler could feed his army and German civilians.

Control of Italy kept open the passage to the Balkans. German forces depended upon Romanian oil and Yugoslavian ores, which fueled and equipped their formations. Allied forces fighting from bases in north Italy could have dominated
rails lines criss-crossing the region, eliminating the necessity of conducting a protracted and costly air offensive against the Romanian oil center at Ploesti.

During OPERATION STRANGLE, Allied airmen immobilized much of the Italian rail system located close to American and British air bases. Had this offensive been launched from north Italian airfields against routes traversing the Balkans, the effect on the German war economy might have been decisive. Hitler argued with his commanders that he could not lose the Balkans and continue the war. Allied airmen might have proven him correct in 1944.

Hitler's command of Italy also dealt him a strong hand during economic negotiations with Switzerland. The Swiss lived in isolation from the outside world for four years. Moreover, their traditional neutrality left them without allies to counterbalance Hitler's threats of invasion. While the Swiss had confidence in their military forces, their government had no illusions concerning German military capabilities after France fell in 1940. Churchill recognized this and accepted that the Swiss had to trade with Hitler to survive.

Switzerland also could not cutoff German rail transit rights, guaranteed by international treaty. Halting Nazi movements through the Swiss tunnels would have removed the one fear holding Hitler back from taking on the prickly Swiss. Released from the need to protect the German right of passage, he could have blockaded or invaded Switzerland. After the Allies landed in Sicily, German forces depended on the tunnels too much to risk their destruction. Hitler might rail against Bern, but he would not risk losing Italy to assuage his anger.
American and British demands that Switzerland ‘play ball’ with the Allies came too late to be effective. By the time Switzerland regained its confidence, Allied forces had reached the Franco-Swiss border, making the outcome in Italy a matter of lesser importance than it had been a year before. If Allied forces had pushed the Germans out of Italy in 1943, American demands on the Swiss would have carried real force and might have deprived Hitler of Italian and Swiss economic help.

A fundamentally flawed grand strategy lay behind Allied decisions in the Mediterranean. American military commanders saw the theater as a drag on limited resources. Nothing justified intensifying efforts to capture Italy. The direct route to victory lay across the traditional battlefields of France, Belgium, and the Reich. Because of this relentless focus on taking the war to Hitler and Germany, American leaders never analyzed what they might have gained from capturing Mussolini’s Italy.

After Mussolini’s fall, Germans revised their attitudes toward Italy until a single premise dominated policy. *Italy was a prize worth winning and defending.* It offered economic, geographic, military, and political assets worth the costs of a military campaign. Having assessed what Italy offered the Reich, German officials viewed Italy in this light from the earliest days of the takeover until the final shipment of goods crossed the Alps in 1945.

Italy fit well into Albert Speer’s scheme for exploiting the occupied nations. He turned the Mussolini’s rump state into a profitable German colony. Using Italy as a source of consumer goods, Speer released German manufacturing capacity for
arms production. After Allied bombers hammered German railroad marshaling yards in the fall of 1944, he revised operations and shifted Italian industrial output to support Kesselring's forces.559

German commanders understood that economic factors outweighed military necessities. SS General Karl Wolff described the tenor of the September 1944 German rout during a March 1945 discussion with Allen Dulles, noting that despite the dangers of defending Italy, economic requirements outweighed abandoning it for a secure line in the Alps.

The food supplies available in North Italy were considerable, Italian industry had some value, a great deal was then being taken out of North Italy, and advanced air bases in the Italian plain would be a serious danger to Germany. These in effect were the arguments they used at the time, and Hitler swung over and subsequently had been opposed to evacuation for the same reasons that impelled him to hold on in Norway and other such areas.560

Hitler, Wolff submitted, could not surrender Italy because its value outweighed the cost of its defense.

German Ambassador to the Salò Republic, Rudolf Rahn, noted Italy's lasting value to Germany while battling with officials fighting to annex large sections of north Italy to Germany. He argued in a December 1944 telegram that

[the Italian contribution to the war has reached a level in economics, employment of labor, and in many areas, including the military, that demands a certain recognition by the German side, and forces us to refrain from putting unavoidable hardships or [our] wounded attitudes upon the Italians. The most


difficult problem of the German-Italian relationship is the nature of the existence of the Operational Zones Alpenvorland and the Adriatic Coastal Area.\textsuperscript{561}

So important was Italy's economic contribution to the Reich, said Rahn, that Germany must hold off transferring Italian territory to the German state, lest Italian sensibilities be offended.

Military commanders lived under the long shadow of this 'gospel of exploitation' until the war concluded. In early 1945, von Vietinghoff and his staff accepted orders to defend Italy along the northern Apennines because the Italian industrial and agricultural heartland was one of the few economic assets still available to the Reich.

The Army Group Southwest was directed to defend the existing positions and to prevent the Allied [sic] from pushing into the Po Valley. This decision of the German High Command undoubtedly originated from the necessity of keeping the rich agricultural resources of the Po Valley and of the industry of the Turino-Milan area which were decisive factors for the continuation of warfare.\textsuperscript{562}

Vietinghoff informed his interrogators after the war that Germany saw the struggle for Italy as a contest for Italy's resource base.\textsuperscript{563} His observations, reflected in Wolff's and Rahn's comments, show that German military and diplomatic representatives understood that Italy was a prize worth winning and defending.

\textsuperscript{561}Rahn to Sonnleitner, "Telegramm Nr. 3448 vom 19.12.44," Akz. 2462/59, (IFZ), 1.

\textsuperscript{562}Kesselring et al., \textit{German Version of the Italian Campaign}, 185.

\textsuperscript{563}Historical Section, "Vietinghoff 9/24/146," 7-8.
If Germany reaped the benefits, Italy paid the price. The war left the Italians short of everything, except tears. They paid the cost of both German exploitation and Allied misunderstanding of the stakes in their beleaguered nation. Industrial output fell 75 percent from 1939 to 1945. Twenty percent of the industrial base was ruined, and that which remained needed extensive repair. Per capita income collapsed, falling to half that Italians earned in 1939. Many Italians suffered from serious malnutrition, their caloric intake having dropped 25 percent from prewar levels. Italians working for the Germans suffered similar heavy losses. Nearly 40,000 of 600,000 military internees died while enduring forced labor under the harshest of conditions.

Political instability dampened hopes of making a quick recovery from the ordeal of war. Ivanoe Bonomi, chairman of the Rome Committee of National Liberation, replaced Marshal Badoglio as prime minister after Rome's capture in June 1944. Bonomi governed until June 1945, when resistance leaders insisted upon the removal of Fascists still serving in the Italian government. Resistance leader Ferruccio Parri then took power, adopting socialist policies outlined during the fight against Germany.

Parri's efforts fizzled after conservatives and businessmen united to counter the occupation of factories by resistance fighters and their supporters. Allied

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commanders had the final say, supporting Italian moderates, who understood that American assistance would not be offered to Italy so long as Communists and Socialists held power in Italy. Disappointment reigned among a majority of Italians in north Italy. The long fight against the Germans had both radicalized Italian workers and raised hopes that the end of the war would usher in a period of social reform. Workers and their families did not forget the Communists' leading role in the war against Hitler and Mussolini. Many laborers, disappointed by the failed social revolution anticipated in the heady days of liberation, did not move back toward the political center until the 'economic miracle' of the 1960s took hold in Italy.566

On May 16, 1945, the last day that the war diarist of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht made an entry, he noted that the Allies had “placed 200,000 German Prisoners of War at the disposal of the Italians for the work of reconstruction.” The remnants of the German army that had won its ‘last victory' in Italy played an important role in rebuilding the Italian economy. Italian military internees, who were returning home after twenty-one months of slave labor in the Reich, must have enjoyed the bittersweet irony of this final twist of fate.567


567Hubatsch, Ktb OKW IV(2), 1498.
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