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IN THIS ISSUE

Salerno—
A Defender's View

By Winfried Heinemann

6

Arabic Sands

By Jimmy J. Jones

20

The U.S. Army
and Contemporary
Military History

By Gregory Fontenot

26

ARMYHISTORY

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Cover Photo Credit:

U.S. Air Force photo by S. Sgt. Samuel Bendet

Table of Contents Photos

Top: Ships docked at Palermo, Sicily, prepare to load troops and equipment of the 45th Infantry Division to reinforce the Allied forces in the Salerno beachhead, 14 September 1943

Middle: A party that includes senior U.S. Army officers prepares to depart aboard a Black Hawk helicopter in Afghanistan, 2005.

Bottom: Maj. Gen. J. L. T. Hawkesworth, commander of the British 46th Division, on a beach south of Salerno, 9 September 1943

EDITOR'S JOURNAL

This issue of *Army History* opens with an article by Col. Winfried Heinemann, director of research at the German Armed Forces' Military History Institute in Potsdam, Germany, that examines the German response to the landing made by British and U.S. forces at Salerno Bay in southern Italy in September 1943. The German diaries and unit records that underlie Heinemann's presentation view the hard-fought battle that followed this amphibious operation from a very different perspective than do American accounts. Heinemann's sources focus primarily on attacks on the northern portions of the beachfront. His article provides a careful examination of German strengths and vulnerabilities in this encounter.

The issue then offers the second-prize winning essay in the 2007 James Lawton Collins Jr. Special Topics Writing Competition. In this essay, then-Chief Warrant Officer Jimmy J. Jones described a dangerous encounter with treacherous weather experienced by the crews of two Black Hawk helicopters flying in tandem in northern Iraq in 2005. The essay illustrates how the emergency flight skills of a pair of Army pilots overcame a combination of enemy threats and the challenges imposed by nature.

A response to a review essay by Dr. Richard Stewart, now the Center of Military History's chief historian, that appeared in the Winter 2006 issue of *Army History* forms the third major element of this issue. Retired Col. Gregory Fontenot, coauthor of *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, one of the books Stewart reviewed, takes issue with some views Stewart expressed on what is required to produce quality works of military history and challenges the Center of Military History to produce historical accounts of recent military operations promptly. I hope to present to the military history community a series of thought-provoking commentaries on the study and use of military history that will challenge our thinking and, ideally, present new ways to approach old problems.

Charles Hendricks
Managing Editor



THE CHIEF'S CORNER

DR. JEFFREY J. CLARKE

During the last three months, our collective efforts to ensure historical coverage of the Army's two major fronts in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), Iraq and Afghanistan, have developed renewed momentum. The number of military history teams deployed to these countries has now risen to six—five Army military history detachments and one Navy team. This represents the largest number of such units in the field since 2003. The deployment of a military history detachment to Afghanistan in September 2007, the first to operate in that country since 2005, is especially gratifying, as is the continued deployment of historians from the Center of Military History to some of the major Army headquarters in Iraq and Kuwait. All of these personnel are heavily involved in collecting electronic records and interviewing key participants, tasks that continue to be extremely critical due to the absence of any effective records management system in the service. In this effort, our hats go off to U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Col. Mike Visconage, who has so ably guided our field efforts in Iraq as the Multinational Corps and Force historian, and to his successor, Army Lt. Col. Shane Story, who recently deployed from the Center. We are also proud of the service of Col. Gary Bowman, a Reservist with the Center who is now undertaking historical functions for the Third Army in Kuwait.

Somewhat similar collection teams have begun dispersing from the Center throughout the United States, targeting those active and reserve component units that have served abroad and returned to their home stations. The work of these teams complements the more focused collection efforts of Army historians at Fort Leavenworth, Carlisle, Fort McNair, and elsewhere who are pursuing research for specific GWOT historical projects, and of those unit historians and historically minded soldiers of all ranks who have preserved their records for posterity. The job is immense and its actual dimension is difficult to discern right now. However, our laborious and ongoing analysis of the many gigabytes of electronic records that have made their way to the Center—only one of

many collection hubs—suggests that we have made a significant start.

The number of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (Afghanistan) historical works that have been published or are currently under way throughout the Army Historical Program is also encouraging. While most are no more than rough first cuts at historical description and analysis, “place holders” until more definitive accounts are possible, each tends to generate its own records collection and interview effort, further enriching our general source base. In this area, I am confident that the Combat Studies Institute's “On Point II,” covering the post-conventional conflict in Iraq, will be available later this year, along with several Center anthologies highlighting small-unit actions and the oral testimonies of key commanders. As always, the process takes time and requires much hard work at many different levels. It also tends to be iterative, resembling a series of building blocks: collecting initially the raw documents, the autobiographical oral testimonies, and the first after-action reports, followed by the initial command histories and chronologies, and so forth. Yet already pundits are speculating, for example, on the success or failure of “the surge,” the merits of the various strategic plans developed and decisions made in both countries, and the very nature of the two conflicts, including their relationship to larger GWOT concerns, all with limited factual support. In the end, however, it will be the foundation that we are laying now, in terms of historical documentation and historical expertise, that will enable us and others to challenge the misconceptions currently being generated and to produce the balanced, comprehensive, and insightful products demanded by both the Army and our professional peers.





Spring 2008



Features



- 26 **Commentary**
- 32 **Book Reviews**
- 38 **Chief Historian's Footnote**

Articles

6

SALERNO— A DEFENDER'S VIEW

By WINFRIED HEINEMANN

A German perspective on the battle that followed the landing of British and U.S. troops on the beaches of Salerno Bay in September 1943.



20

ARABIC SANDS

By JIMMY J. JONES

A U.S. Army helicopter pilot relates how an Iraqi dust storm challenged the crews of two Black Hawks on an otherwise routine 2005 evening.



NEWSNOTE

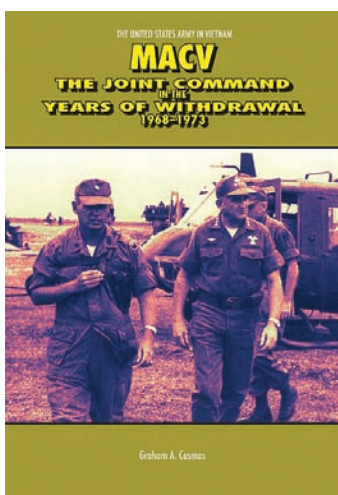
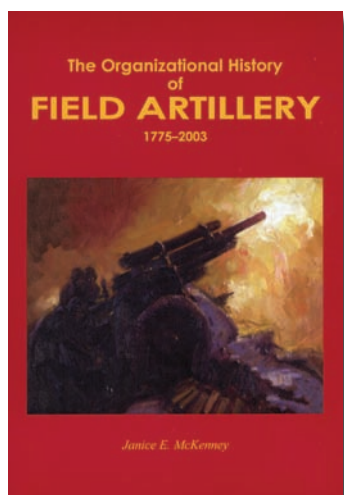
CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY ISSUES NEW BOOKS

The Center of Military History has published a history of field artillery in the U.S. Army and an account of top-level military decision making during the last five years of active U.S. military action in Vietnam. *The Organizational History of Field Artillery, 1775–2003*, by Janice E. McKenney traces the evolution of field artillery guns and unit organization from the creation of the Continental Army to the beginning of the twenty-first century. This 394-page book provides detailed information about the artillery weapons used by the Army on the battlefield or designed for such use, as well as the other equipment associated with those weapons, and it carefully describes the troop units that handled them and the doctrine governing their use. The author served as chief of the Center's Organizational History Branch before her retirement in 1999, and she was the compiler of the books *Air Defense Artillery* (CMH, 1984) and *Field Artillery* (CMH, 1985) in the Center's Army Lineage Series. The Center issued *The Organizational History of Field Artillery* in a cloth cover as CMH Pub 60–16 and in paperback as CMH Pub 60–16–1.

MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968–1973, by Graham A. Cosmas complements the same author's book *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (CMH, 2006). The new book examines the execution of U.S. military strategy in Southeast Asia by the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and the formulation of that strategy by that command together with successive chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, secretaries of defense, and Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. This examination spans a period that begins in the days immediately preceding the Communists' first Tet offensive and ends with the collapse of the Republic of Vietnam. Cosmas also provides an evaluation of why American efforts achieved no more than a partial, temporary success in South Vietnam. The author has been deputy director of the Joint History Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff since 2001. He was a historian at the Army Center of Military History, where he began work on his MACV books, from 1979 to 2001. Cosmas is also the author of *An Army for Empire: The*

U.S. Army in the Spanish-American War (Columbia, Mo., 1971). *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal*, has been issued in a cloth cover as CMH Pub 91–7 and in paperback as CMH Pub 91–7–1.

Army publication account holders may obtain these newly published books from the Directorate of Logistics–Washington, Media Distribution Division, ATTN: JDHQSVPAS, 1655 Woodson Road, St. Louis, Missouri 63114-6128. Account holders may also place their orders at <http://www.apd.army.mil>. The Government Printing Office is offering *The Organizational History of Field Artillery* in a cloth cover for \$44 and in paperback for \$42. It is selling *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal* for \$46 in cloth and \$43 in paperback. The Government Printing Office has also begun to sell the booklet *Transforming an Army at War: Designing the Modular Force, 1991–2005*, for \$8.50. Its publication was announced in the Winter 2008 issue of *Army History*. Individuals may order publications from the Government Printing Office online at <http://bookstore.gpo.gov>.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Col. Winfried Heinemann is director of research at the German Armed Forces' Military History Institute in Potsdam. He holds a doctorate in history from Ruhr-Universität Bochum. His main fields of research include the German military resistance against Hitler, the history of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the military history of the German Democratic Republic. He is the author of *Vom Zusammenwachsen des Bündnisses: Die Funktionsweise der NATO in Ausgewählten Krisenfällen, 1951–1956* (Munich, 1998).

The article "Salerno— A Defender's View" is based on research conducted for a staff ride to the Salerno area with officers of Headquarters, Naval Striking and Support Forces, NATO, in Naples, Italy.

WHY WAS IT THAT AT SALERNO, UNLIKE ANY OTHER AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION, THE GERMANS SEEMED TO STAND A REALISTIC CHANCE OF THROWING THE ALLIES BACK INTO THE SEA, AND WHY DID THEY NOT SUCCEED?



An ancient colonial Greek temple in Paestum, Italy, then twenty-six centuries old, being used as a headquarters by the 480th Port Battalion

SALERNO

A Defender's View



By Winfried Heinemann



INTRODUCTION

Salerno 1943—Operation AVALANCHE, as the Allies termed it—has been the subject of a number of military history analyses. American and British authors have given us quite an insight into the peculiarities of an operation that is counted among the major amphibious landings in World War II and is certainly one that seemed to be on the brink of disaster for quite a few days.¹

What has been lost from view in this consideration is what it felt like to be at the receiving end of such a major amphibious onslaught. What were the major problems the German defenders had to face? Why was it that in this—unlike any other similar operation—the Germans seemed to stand a realistic chance of throwing the Allies back into the sea, and why did they not succeed? In fact, there has not been any major analysis of this operation from the German point of view; this is surprising, since most of the documentary evidence is readily

available in the German military archives.² This article will attempt to provide such an analysis.³ As it is based on German sources, it will also conflict with the received, and published, Anglo-American version of events. This should not surprise the reader; the fog of war extends down to war diarists and command historians, and any account based on the documentary evidence of one side will necessarily tend to be one-sided.

THE STRATEGIC SITUATION

The year 1943 marked the turning point of World War II—the defeat and surrender of the German garrison in Stalingrad, the culmination and end of the Battle of the Atlantic, the German defeat in the Battle of Kursk, and the first 1,000-bomber attacks on the Reich. And 1943 saw the German surrender of Tunis, its loss of all of North Africa, and the emerging threat to Europe's soft underbelly, Italy. In July 1943 the

Allies landed in Sicily, beginning a long and arduous campaign to wrest control of Italy from the Germans and from Mussolini's fascist regime.

In fact, operations in the summer of 1943 interacted on a strategic level. During the Battle of Kursk, for example, Hitler decided to move an entire SS panzer corps to Italy from Russia, and this move frustrated the German offensive operations on the Eastern Front. The "Führer" soon after decided to leave most of the corps' divisions in Russia after all, but the damage had been done.⁴ Altogether, one might well argue that during the course of 1943 the war had definitely been lost for Germany; but in the summer of 1943, many—indeed, most—Germans did not realize that and kept on fighting fanatically.

OPERATIONAL SITUATION

During the spring of 1943, Italy seemed the place to be if one wanted a good war. German divisions were sent there to recover or reconstitute

after heavy fighting, and the best place of all seemed to be southern Italy. For example, the *16th Panzer Division* had been annihilated at Stalingrad, but a new *16th Panzer Division* was formed from motley reserves and a few survivors of the old *16th*. Initially, the *16th Panzer Division* had been stationed in France, but it had then moved to Italy and the Adriatic coast. Its commander was initially a colonel, but Rudolf Sieckenius was soon promoted to generalmajor. (This was the Germans' one-star rank, as the German Army did not have brigadier generals.)

Another unit in Italy was the *Panzerdivision Hermann Göring*—peculiar in that it was not an army, but an air force, formation. Hitler and the Nazis had always preferred the *Luftwaffe* over the Army. To them, it signified technological progress, speed, and modernity—in contrast to the traditional Army, whose monocled, Prussian-style general staff officers the Nazis had always mistrusted. As aircraft losses grew, ground crews became redundant and some were formed into infantry units, eventually divisions, giving the *Luftwaffe* a “third army,” after the regular army and the *Waffen-SS*. Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring had claimed he could not expect his young *Luftwaffe* officers, imbued with National Socialist spirit, to serve under reactionary Army officers.⁵

Originally a regiment-sized force composed of former mobile police units, the *Hermann Göring* had grown to be a division, had served in North Africa, and with most of its elements had gone into captivity there. The new *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* was hastily reconstituted in Sicily, and as Göring's personal toy it was equipped with some of the latest in German tank technology, Mark IV tanks fitted with long 75-mm.

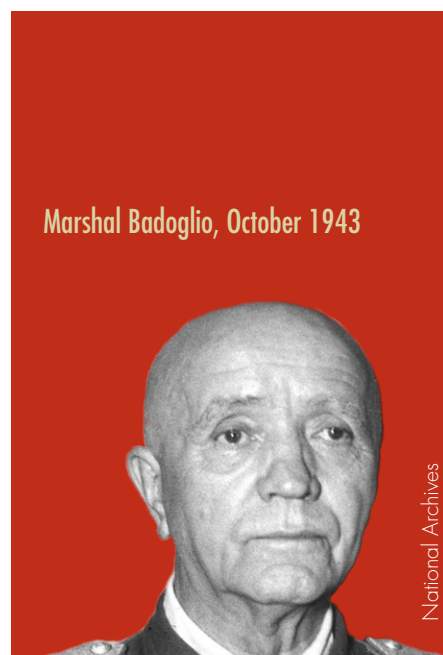
guns. The reconstituted division had an armored reconnaissance battalion with no more than 20 or 30 tanks as its only tank force, two armored infantry battalions, an engineer battalion, an assault gun company, three artillery battalions, and three air defense battalions.⁶ (Later in the war, the *Hermann Göring Division* would expand again and end up with the unlikely name of a *Fallschirmpanzerkorps* or parachute tank corps.)

Altogether, a motley collection of armored and infantry divisions was stationed in Italy—the country that once was Germany's most faithful ally. By the spring of 1943, however,

this alliance had begun to change. With the collapse of German and Italian resistance in North Africa, Axis troops in Italy had to start facing the prospect of Allied landings there. Sooner or later, war would probably come to Central Europe via the Italian peninsula. German commanders and troops were also aware of a changed mood among Italians. On 25 July 1943 King Victor Emmanuel III, with the support of Italian military leaders, removed from power the Duce of the Fascist party Benito Mussolini and had him arrested. The new Italian government established under Marshal Pietro Badoglio might well proclaim its continuing adherence to the Italo-German axis, but Hitler and most other Germans felt the Italians were planning to betray them and change sides. They developed contingency plans for that eventuality, code-named Operation *AXIS* (*Unternehmen ACHSE*).

Hitler's plan for this contingency was to hold on to northern Italy and stage a fighting withdrawal from the south, using the rugged terrain to retard the Allied advance north for as long as possible. Suggestions to withdraw from Italy altogether were discarded early on. Hitler felt he had to deny the north Italian plains to the Western Allies, as they otherwise would use them as a major air base for attacks against the Reich; giving up this area would also seriously threaten vital communications with German forces in the Balkans and might force their subsequent withdrawal as well, leaving the essential Romanian oil fields to the Soviets.⁷

So, in case of a change in Italian orientation, the idea was to have the Italian troops lay down their arms—voluntarily, if possible; by force, if necessary. Simultaneously, German troops in Italy would have to conduct a regular campaign against the Western Allies pushing up from



the south—two conflicting tasks for the motley German units stationed in the peninsula.

COMMAND ARRANGEMENTS

The new danger called for changed command structures designed, however, not to hurt Italian sensitivities. The Germans wanted to make sure that the Italians could not excuse their expected change of policy by pointing to hostile German acts against their Italian “hosts.”

Until the summer, all German formations in Italy had reported more or less directly to the German Supreme Commander South (*Oberbefehlshaber Süd*), making Field Marshal Albert Kesselring the only Luftwaffe officer to command major German Army fighting formations. The German units had not been in Italy to fight, so no operational command structure had been deemed necessary. This respected the sensitivities of the Italian high command, which had emphasized that it, and not the Germans, was in charge of Italian defenses.

Basically, Kesselring’s mission had been one of liaison with the Italian authorities. Along with other tensions, this had led to continuing friction between him and Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. The “Desert Fox,” exasperated with Italian performance in Africa, had clashed sharply with Kesselring, who was far too friendly to the unreliable Axis partners—or so Rommel believed. Kesselring, however, had had to make sure that the Italians did not quit the war prematurely, a mission that had now failed.

Following the Allied landing in Sicily, the Germans reorganized their command structure in Italy. Rommel’s *Army Group B* (*Heeresgruppe B*) was tasked with seizing northern Italy in case Operation AXIS had to be executed, while in the south, an entirely new command authority was created: *Tenth Army*, under three-star General Heinrich von Vietinghoff-Scheel. The *Tenth Army* was to be the command authority at the operational level, coordinating the

operations of two corps commands (the *XIV* and *LXXVI Panzer Corps*). This arrangement would leave the Supreme Commander South free to focus on decisions at the strategic level, notably involving political and military cooperation with the Italians.

The hasty creation of a new command, however, was fraught with problems from the outset. One major deficiency was that the new army lacked its organic signals regiment. This was a major problem for Vietinghoff, a commander who was supposed to coordinate operations over the entire south of Italy. In fact, during the entire battle for Salerno, Vietinghoff found it difficult to communicate with his subordinates as landlines failed due to Allied shelling or bombing, or from Italian sabotage. Radio messages had to be encrypted and broadcast, offering Allied intelligence valuable additional information and resulting in tedious transmission delays.⁸

Another problem was that the *Tenth Army* did not yet have its own quartermaster staff (G-4 in today’s parlance), nor any organic logistics units.

Consequently, the responsibility for keeping units supplied remained, for the time being, with Supreme Commander South in Rome. Kesselring led a joint command, controlling army, navy, and air assets and their respective logistics. What might have been a major advantage, however, ended up as a serious drawback. Failure to synchronize logistical planning with operations led to the loss of critical supplies, particularly fuel reserves, and would repeatedly slow down important operational moves.

Field Marshal Kesselring



General Vietinghoff



Signal Corps

National Archives



Naples

Mount Vesuvius

Nocera

SALERNO

Vietri

Contursi Terme

Sorrento

Amalfi

Maiori

Battipaglia

Eboli

Persano

Sele R.

Altavilla

Calore R.

Paestum

Agropoli

ITALY

Milan

Genoa

Florence

ROME

Gaeta

CORSICA

SARDINIA

Naples

Salerno

Agropoli

Taranto

Castrovillari

Palermo

Messina

SICILY

WHERE WILL THE ALLIES LAND?

Even with hindsight, the German generals could not understand why the Allies had not immediately seized the Strait of Messina when landing in Sicily—as it was, German troops on the island had managed to escape with almost all their equipment intact. These divisions were to form the backbone of the German defense of southern Italy throughout the autumn of 1943.⁹

It was obvious that after taking Sicily, the Allies would advance and land on the Italian mainland. However, as with all amphibious operations, the initiative regarding time and place would rest with the landing forces, and the joint German-Italian defenders would have to wait first, and then react swiftly once the Allied thrust had been located.

On 3 September, the British Eighth Army landed in southern Italy by crossing the Messina strait. The German *Tenth Army* anticipated, however, that another, mainly American, landing would soon follow. In fact, the British amphibious operation near Messina effectively ruled out the option of a large, combined Allied landing much further north that would attempt to cut off German forces in the south by pushing across the narrow Italian peninsula—a daring move which, until then, the German High Command had believed quite possible. Vietinghoff was now certain that the second landing would occur at some place where an operational connection with the British landing in the south could be quickly established. In other words, the next operation would probably aim at the Gulfs of Salerno, Naples, or Gaeta.¹⁰

As Italy was still nominally an ally, coastal defense was based on the general concept that Italian troops would be stationed along the beaches, with German motorized formations available as mobile reserves. The *16th Panzer Division* had been moved into the region around Eboli, only a dozen kilometers inland from the Gulf of Salerno.¹¹ The *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* had been allotted the defense of the Gulf of Naples. While



Signal Corps

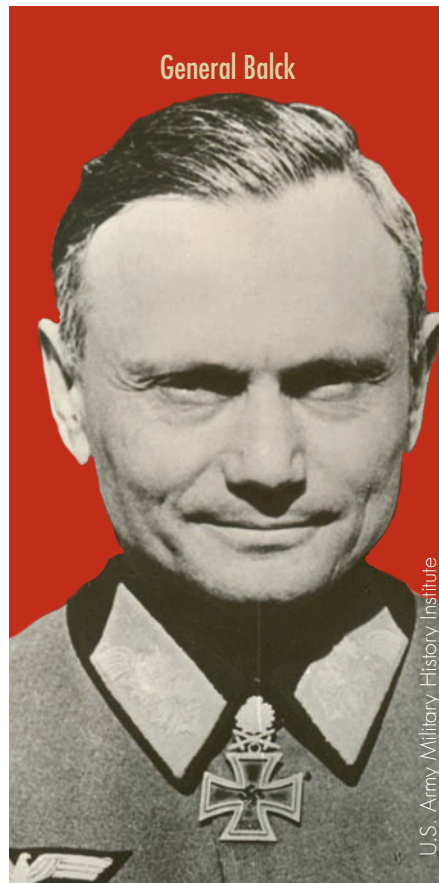
Looking west toward the city and harbor of Salerno, November 1943

the division as such was garrisoned around Caserta, north of Naples, radio outposts had been stationed at strategic locations within its area of responsibility to give early warning of an incoming amphibious assault.¹² Both divisions were under the control of the *XIV Panzer Corps*, commanded by Generalleutnant (two-star) Hermann Balck, in lieu of General der Panzertruppen (three-star) Hans Valentin Hube, who was on leave.¹³ The *Tenth Army's* other corps, the

LXXVI Panzer Corps commanded by General der Panzertruppen Traugott Herr, was conducting defensive operations against the British Eighth Army's thrust from the south.

THE ALLIED LANDING AROUND SALERNO AND GERMAN OPERATIONAL DECISIONS, 7–11 SEPTEMBER

On 7 September, German aerial reconnaissance over the Mediterranean reported that Allied convoys had left North African and Sicilian ports on a northerly course. As a consequence, during the night the *XIV Panzer Corps* put all its units on extended alert.¹⁴ More reconnaissance reports arrived on 8 September, creating an overall picture. According to German intelligence, a fleet of some 80 to 100 transports and 90 to 100 landing craft, covered by ten battleships, three aircraft carriers, and several cruisers and destroyers, was heading north from Palermo and could be expected to launch an amphibious landing within the area of the *XIV Panzer Corps* on the following day, 9 September. However, General Balck still could not tell whether the attack would hit the Gulf of Naples covered by the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* or the *16th Panzer Division's* sector in the Gulf of Salerno. In any case, the *Tenth Army* ordered General Herr's *LXXVI Panzer Corps* to release one of its two divisions, the *29th Panzer Grenadier Division*, and send it north towards Salerno as quickly as possible.¹⁵ While the *XIV Panzer Corps's* two divisions in the area as yet remained immobile, waiting to see which one would be hit first, on an operational level the concentration of German forces to



U.S. Army Military History Institute



A British tank advances through Salerno, 10 September 1943

repel the anticipated Allied landing had started nearly two days before the first Allied soldier set foot on the beaches of Salerno.

German minds were also occupied by other momentous developments. On 8 September, Italian and Allied radio stations broadcast the news that Italy had surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. At 2000, Hitler ordered Operation AXIS into effect. German units all over Italy sprang into action, securing strategic locations and disarming Italian troops. Rommel's *Army Group B* started invading Germany's former ally from the north, across the Alps, securing Italy's western coastline first in case the Allies decided to land further north, after all.¹⁶

However, they did not. During the morning of 9 September, three Allied divisions landed in the Salerno area, the British 46th and 56th Divisions, just south of Salerno, and the American 36th Infantry Division to their right, further south.

The Germans had believed the terrain of the Gulf of Salerno to be rather propitious for the defender. In the north, the Amalfi coast rose steeply from the Mediterranean, and only a few roads led through narrow gorges to the crest of the Sorrento Peninsula, from where they dropped down again toward the Gulf of Naples. From Vietri and Salerno itself, a mountain pass leading northwest to Naples carried the major road and only rail link. South of Salerno, a large bay stretched down to the Paestum and Agropoli region. This entire basin, while initially flat and affording good landing beaches, was fronted by a

mountain ridge that offered German artillery ideal observation and firing positions. Any landing force would thus confront well-directed artillery fire until it could reach far enough inland to control the heights.

While the major Allied force did indeed land along the plain south of Salerno, light troops attacked into the mountains west of Salerno. U.S. Rangers first captured the coastal village of Maiori, and British

Commandos took Vietri. Both then quickly ascended the dorsal mountain ridge of the Sorrento Peninsula, wresting control of a section of the ridge from the Germans and seizing the heights overlooking the Naples-Salerno road, along which mechanized reinforcements would have to pass. The Germans had not anticipated any assault on these heights and had left the area virtually undefended. Part of their counterattack would now have to be diverted to regain control of the mountainous Sorrento Peninsula.

General Balck's *XIV Panzer Corps* reacted by ordering its *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* to advance into the area, with its armored reconnaissance battalion sent in advance of the main body to operate under the *16th Panzer Division's* command until the headquarters of the *Hermann Göring Division* reached the area. In particular, the reconnaissance battalion was to stop the Allied advances from Maiori and Vietri. Now, this was no easy task for an armored unit, as the ridge rises steeply on both sides to heights of over 1,000 meters (some 3,300 feet) above sea level, and the roads were narrow, winding, and difficult to negotiate—ideal terrain for Rangers and Commandos, but not for tanks,

Maiori and the mountains of the Sorrento Peninsula, 1944



especially tanks hampered once again by fuel constraints.¹⁷

By about noon, the battalion's advanced elements established contact with the *16th Panzer Division's* organic reconnaissance element, the *16th Reconnaissance Battalion*, north of the ridge at Nocera, about 13 kilometers (8 miles) northwest of Salerno, as the latter battalion had been pushed that far back during the morning. The *Hermann Göring Division's* reconnaissance battalion then tried to dislodge the Rangers from the ridge south of Nocera but throughout the entire day failed to do so. The push along the road toward the town of Salerno ended at Cava de Tirreni, four or five kilometers north of the objective.¹⁸ To reinforce this battalion, the *XIV Panzer Corps* tasked Col. Wilhelm Schmalz, the *Hermann Göring Division's* deputy commander, with forming a regimental-size combat team to assist the *16th Panzer Division*.¹⁹ As this would leave the *Hermann Göring* sector weakened in the face of a possible subsequent Allied landing further north, the corps ordered the *15th Panzer Grenadier Division* to send replacements from the Rome area.²⁰

In the area immediately east of Salerno, the British had run into rather strong German resistance and had not progressed far. Further south, however, the Americans gained more ground. A German counterattack south of the Sele River had to be cancelled and troops diverted into the Eboli region for fear of an American breakthrough there.²¹ This made it all the more urgent for the *29th Panzer*



A U.S. Army tractor burns on the beach near Paestum after being hit by a German artillery shell, 9 September 1943.

Grenadier Division to come from the south and reinforce the *16th Panzer Division's* left wing. Where were its leading elements?

The *29th Panzer Grenadier Division* had by now reached Castrovillari, still in the Calabrian peninsula, and was stuck there for lack of petrol. The inexperienced quartermaster staff had calculated petrol consumption without taking into account the murderously hot climate, the mountainous roads, and the worn-out engines. A German Navy tanker tasked with supplying the division had been scuttled when word went round that supplies were to be destroyed in the face of the

U.S. Army troops wade onto the Salerno beachhead, September 1943.

British advance and that a land-based naval petrol dump had burned its fuel without orders to do so.²² What was more, the lack of reliable communications was beginning to have an effect. News about the division's precarious situation did not reach the *Tenth Army* staff until later in the day, so neither operational planning nor additional supplies could be immediately arranged.²³ Until now, the impact of the lack of military communication lines had been overcome to some extent by the use of civilian Italian telecommunications, but after Rome's decision to quit the war, local authorities cooperated reluctantly, if at all. The *Tenth Army* command might well fume at the delay, but its orders were being transmitted too slowly to have an immediate effect on the battlefield and the German forces in the southern portion of the landing area continued to be too weak to stem the American advance.

German artillery had opened fire on the naval units in the bay, on the landing craft, and on the Army elements on shore. Initially, this barrage had been quite effective, but soon the German gunners began to feel the effect of Allied naval counter-battery fire. This came as a rude surprise because the Germans had not yet learned to appreciate the deadly effectiveness of heavy naval guns. What they had believed to be ideal terrain for their own artillery firing from the heights now turned out to be an almost perfect shooting range for the Allied naval vessels. Any move on the ground, or any fire from German batteries, would invariably





U.S. Navy

provoke an Allied response in the form of heavy shelling.²⁴

German Army commanders were positively unhappy with their air support—not so much that they were not getting enough focused on the Allied forces on the beachhead, but that they would have preferred to have the Luftwaffe attack the Allied naval vessels in the bay so as to silence the naval bombardment.²⁵ On the other hand, Allied air superiority, a major factor in later invasions, did not play a decisive role here. Salerno had been selected as a landing beach in part because it was just within range of Allied fighter planes operating from Sicily.²⁶ However, the long distances involved meant that Allied planes would have little time in theater, and this reduced their effectiveness. To some extent, this problem could be overcome by fighters operating off carrier decks, but they could carry only limited payloads from these waterborne platforms. What most hampered German operations, though, was a lack of airborne reconnaissance and other intelligence assets. General Vietinghoff, in memoirs written in 1947, deplored the fact that for a very long time the German High Command did not notice the large gap north of the Sele River between the British and American troops, which would have been a natural avenue for counterattack. Again, the hasty organization of the German command and the Germans' deficient communications structure took their toll on the quality of leadership the German commanders could exercise.²⁷

In the aftermath of a German missile hit, smoke arises from the USS *Savannah*, which is largely hidden behind a transport ship in this photo, 11 September 1943.

Sailors killed by a German missile attack on the USS *Savannah* lie covered on its deck, 11 September 1943.

During the day, the main body of the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* arrived in the area between Naples and Salerno, concentrating around Nocera. As the *16th Panzer Division's* armored reconnaissance battalion was already fighting in that area, Vietinghoff placed it under the *Hermann Göring Division's* operational control. As Vietinghoff also expected the *LXXVI Corps'* lead element, the *29th Panzer Grenadier Division*, to come up quickly from the south, he decided to reorganize his command structure. His assumption was that a single corps command would be unable to control the defense of the large semicircle between the Amalfi coast in the west and Paestum in the south. He therefore decided to place the *16th Panzer Division* under the orders of the *LXXVI Corps*, while the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* remained under the control of the *XIV Corps*. For the remainder of the battle, the line between those two divisions would also be a corps boundary. Under Vietinghoff's reorganization order, General Herr would move his *LXXVI Corps* headquarters to Contursi Terme, east of Eboli.

On 11 September, the Luftwaffe began to change its patterns of attack. A German plane struck the heavy cruiser USS *Savannah* off Salerno with a radio-controlled bomb that



U.S. Navy

killed roughly 200 of the ship's crew and left its forward section badly damaged, putting the vessel out of action for the rest of the operation. The Germans could not know that the Allied navies were screaming for air cover and not getting it, but they made optimum use of the situation.²⁸

During the day, elements of the U.S. 45th Infantry Division, which had begun landing on the southern beachhead the previous day, attacked toward Eboli, where the German defense had been reduced to a single company, and for a while they took the town. American troops on the flank of this attack also threatened a promising German push toward the sea between the U.S. and the British sectors, forcing it to be abandoned. By afternoon, however, the first elements of the *29th Panzer Grenadier Division* began to appear on the battlefield. In the evening, the *16th Panzer Division* retook Eboli and established solid control of the road from Eboli east toward Postiglione.²⁹

In the north, despite their determined attacks, the Germans were unable to improve their situation. Heavy naval surface fire stalled yet another attack towards Vietri, this one conducted by a battle group from the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* led by Col. Franz Haas.³⁰ Again, calls went out for the Luftwaffe to take on the naval assets in the bay, and on top of this, a 17-cm. (7-inch) gun battery was dispatched to assist.

What threatened future German operations most was the loss of Montecorvino airfield to the British. It had no longer been used by the Luftwaffe and its loss did not disrupt German air operations, but of course Allied aircraft could be expected to try to operate out of Montecorvino soon enough. As long as German artillery continued to dominate the field, however, the Allies dared not use it.

Altogether, Vietinghoff felt that 11 September had not been a good day for his side. The only mitigating circumstance was that, by the evening, the *29th Panzer Grenadier Division* was beginning



The city of Eboli in October 1943, after sustaining damage in the Battle of Salerno

to arrive in force, supplemented by the *4th Parachute Regiment (Fallschirmjägerregiment 4)*. This not only brought reinforcements to the Germans fighting around Salerno but also indicated that the German withdrawal from southern Italy was going according to plan. The British had taken the port of Taranto in Apulia two days before, but every day the Salerno front held, fewer German troops faced the risk of being trapped in the peninsula.

GERMAN COUNTERATTACKS, 12–17 SEPTEMBER

Still, Vietinghoff had not given up hope of throwing the British and Americans back into the sea, or at least of driving a wedge between the British and the American units, so as to annihilate them separately. By the evening of 11 September, U.S. Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark, the Allied commander, felt that a massive German counterattack was being planned for the next morning.³¹

Another change in German command arrangements was implemented on 12 September. The *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* was relieved of responsibility for the Gulf

of Naples and told to concentrate on winning the battle for the heights north of Maiori and Vietri. The division managed to take and hold the heights above Vietri despite murderous naval gunfire. The *16th Panzer Division's* reconnaissance battalion, still operating as part of the *Hermann Göring Division*, pushed south to within two kilometers of Salerno, but it too encountered increasing Allied resistance during the afternoon.³²

Responsibility for retaking the beaches south and east of Salerno consequently rested with the *16th Panzer Division*, whose armored strength had by then been reduced to about 35 of its original 100 tanks, and the *29th Panzer Grenadier Division* that had arrived from the south. This, together with the changed corps boundary that had been determined the day before, indicated that the Germans were moving northward—a first indication that they did not plan to hold the Salerno area indefinitely. On the contrary, strategists in Berlin were in a way happy to see Allied naval assets concentrated around Salerno rather than have them interfering with the German evacuation of Sardinia, as Hitler had decided to regroup in the Rome region anyway.³³

In Hitler's headquarters, the impression was that Vietinghoff was attacking with two corps. The reality on the ground seems to have been

somewhat different. On 13 September only the *LXXVI Corps* attacked, retaking the village of Persano in the southern sector. Buoyed by this attack, Vietinghoff became convinced during the evening that the Allies were preparing to re-embark,³⁴ and this optimism was transmitted to the Führer's headquarters, along with a grossly exaggerated report of the capture of more than 3,000 prisoners.³⁵ However, in the *XIV Corps* sector, British and, to some extent, American attacks kept coming, supported by heavy naval gunfire. The 17-cm. gun battery allocated to the area had not yet set up, and the battleships' barrage was obviously impeding all German operations. Altogether, Vietinghoff claims in his memoirs that his corps commanders were overoptimistic, and that it was he who remained cautious. His own war diary, however, reveals that the opposite is true. The corps commanders, closer to events, did not believe the Allies were preparing to re-embark, but *Tenth Army* headquarters fed Kesselring, and eventually

the Führer, more optimistic news.³⁶ Still, during the night of 13–14 September, the Germans had almost reached the Mediterranean and the Allied situation looked so bad for the Allies that General Clark had his staff draw up plans to re-embark one of the two corps to reinforce the beachhead of the other. The Allies were fortunate that they did not have to try to implement this plan, because Clark's naval commanders found it completely impractical.³⁷

Although the Germans could report some regional successes, notably the encirclement of U.S. troops in the convent of Altavilla, their latest effort came to nothing again: all attacks aimed at splitting the British from the American forces somewhere east of Salerno met with determined resistance, naval gunfire, and, for the first time, strategic bombers carpet-bombing entire areas. As opposed to *LXXVI Panzer Corps* operations, the

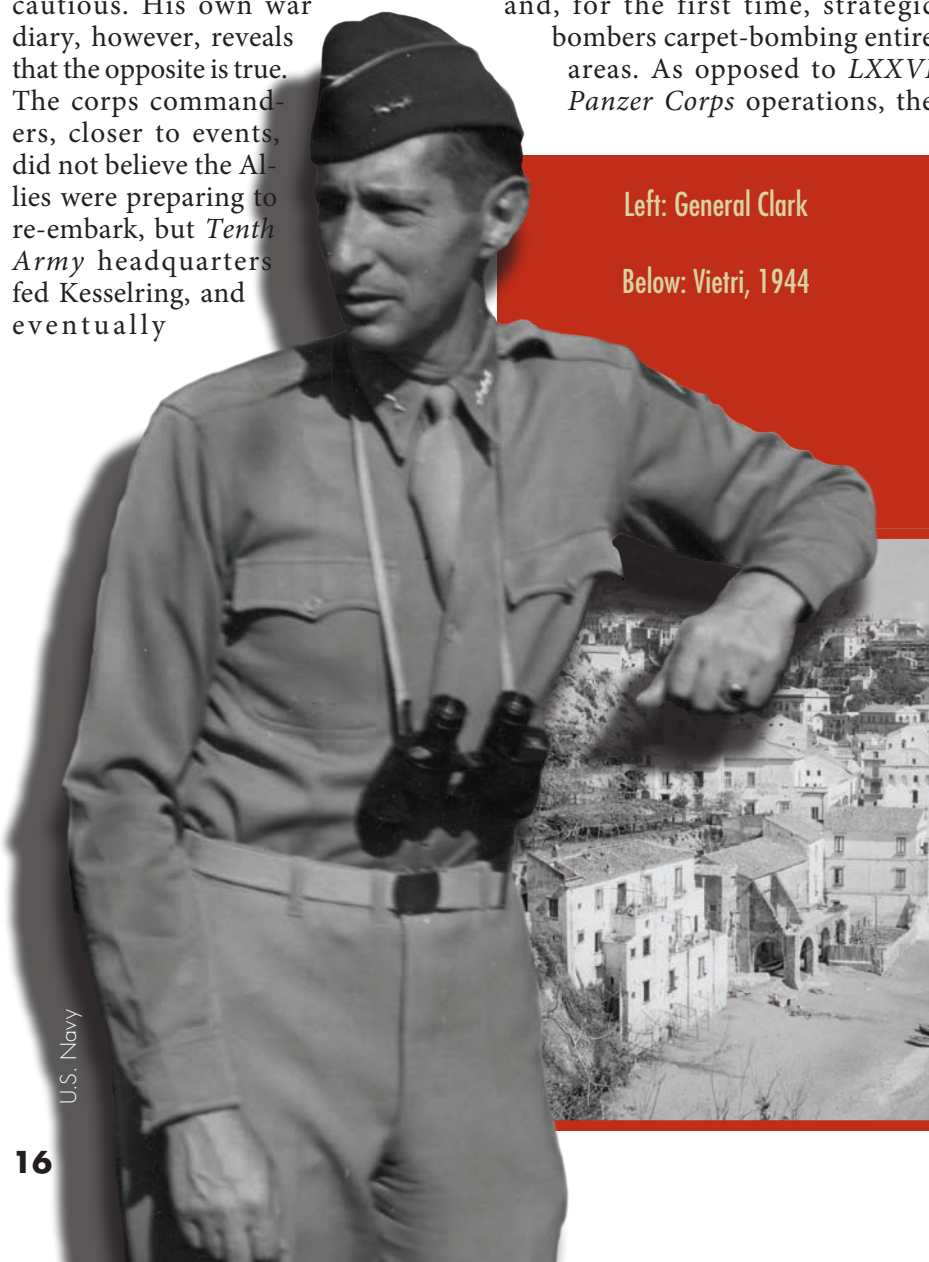
Hermann Göring Panzer Division and the *XIV Panzer Corps* reported a lull in the fighting.³⁸

Again and again the war diaries report an inability to coordinate simultaneous, two-pronged attacks on the Allied positions around Salerno or a joint offensive to split the British and U.S. forces. The overall operational concept for 14 September had again been for the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* to link up with its neighbor to the east, but as the reluctant *Hermann Göring* attack stalled and the *16th Panzer Division* could not launch its own attack in time, this failed again.³⁹ Vietinghoff's decision to divide responsibility for the battlefield among two corps that he had difficulty coordinating due to his signals problems now appeared most questionable.

During 15 September, Vietinghoff, forever the optimist, planned one last push, employing the *26th Panzer Division*, which had just come up from the south. It was the last remaining force that might have been cut off had the Allies succeeded in thrusting across the peninsula.⁴⁰ The *26th* was to attack west toward Salerno from Battipaglia and link up with the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* pushing south. The entire operation was scheduled for 16 September and initially went off as planned.⁴¹ The *26th Panzer Division*, however, also had to face heavy naval gunfire, and eventually the attack

Left: General Clark

Below: Vietri, 1944



ground to a halt. Some of the hamlets that had been captured during the day were lost again before nightfall. Further north, the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division's* tanks had first moved east and then pushed south, evidently taking the British by surprise, and the division made considerable progress despite the mountainous terrain. The British, however, recovered from their shock, retook crucial Hill 419 just east of Salerno, and prevented the *Hermann Göring Division's* armored attack in that area from either reaching the beaches or linking up with the *16th Panzer Division* on its left.⁴²

That evening Field Marshal Kesselring reported to Berlin that the success or failure of the entire operation depended on the results of the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* attack. Should it fail to reach the beaches, the *Tenth Army* would have to disengage to avoid unbearable losses. Even then, high Allied losses would probably prevent the enemy from following up quickly.⁴³

That same evening, 16 September, lead elements of the British Eighth Army made contact with the extreme southern wing of U.S. forces south of the ancient Roman city of Paestum, whose ruins had remained essentially untouched by the fighting. Thus, not only had the Germans managed to extricate their last division from the delaying action against the British for use in the Salerno sector, but the Allies, too, were now bringing in troops from the south.⁴⁴

The *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* launched yet another attack south, despite the misgivings of its commander because the commander of the *XIV Panzer Corps*, General Balck, had insisted on the operation. Again, initial gains were made, but then in quick succession two battalion command posts were lost to heavy artillery fire, and, without proper leadership, the thrust faltered.⁴⁵

General Balck pointedly noted in his war diary that the events of the day confirmed his earlier belief that the Allies were not in any mood to withdraw. On the contrary, while the long-awaited 17-cm. battery was now driving Allied battleships

further out into the bay, this was more than counterbalanced by a reinforcement of Allied artillery on the shore. In the evening, General Balck decided that pursuing the southward attacks east of Salerno was unlikely to achieve results. It would also risk a rupture between his two battle groups east and west of the Salerno-Naples road, as the Allies were beginning to push northward along that thoroughfare.⁴⁶

The *Tenth Army* agreed with General Balck. During 16 September, General Vietinghoff decided to disengage. The *XIV Panzer Corps* attacks had been well-prepared and carried out with vigor and dashing, but they had still failed to achieve an operational result. The British Eighth Army was coming up from the south, and *Tenth Army* would have to disengage and take up suitable defensive positions across the Italian peninsula to meet it, Vietinghoff reported to Kesselring, and thus to Berlin.⁴⁷ The *Tenth Army* would use the Salerno region as a hinge to swing its line northeastward across the peninsula.

Even Hitler does not seem to have been very disappointed, as Vietinghoff was promoted to Generaloberst (four-star rank) the very next day, 17 September. On the 17th, the *29th Panzer Division* attacked again in an *Endangriff*—a final attack, mostly to cover the retreat. The *16th Panzer Division* was first to disengage, moving to a line stretching east from Eboli, where it anticipated the Allied push northward would begin.

CONCLUSIONS

The Battle of Salerno had ended. On the Allied side, air power seems to have played a less important role than naval surface gunfire. The Allied ability to bring naval gunfire to bear swiftly and with precision obviously surprised the Germans. The terrain, which seemed to favor the defender—hills overlooking the beaches, marshes, and ravines—eventually afforded ideal conditions for naval fire control and thereby turned into a decisive disadvantage. Repeatedly, German

attacks pushed ahead successfully until they came within sight of the shore—and therefore within sight of naval gunners.

Other factors—notably the superior mobility of the amphibious attacker and his ultimate superiority in numbers—also played their roles, but what most marked Salerno from a German point of view was the unparalleled importance of ship-based fire support.

On the German side, the two decisive factors in the action had been insufficient logistic control and insufficient command infrastructure. The lack of proper logistics took effect mostly in the initial stages, when reinforcements repeatedly failed to arrive in time for sheer lack of fuel. The Germans had just not had enough time to change their motley collection of recovering and reconstituting divisions into an organized fighting force with well-planned supply systems.

As for communications, command, and control, the lack of sufficient signal troops was made all the more painful by Vietinghoff's decision to divide responsibility for the battlefield between his two corps commanders. Initially, the Germans seem not to have realized where the fault line between the British and the U.S. forces was, and what opportunities it might have afforded them. By the time they started pushing in that general direction, the Allies had reinforced sufficiently to maintain their tenuous link. German attacks then suffered from a persistent lack of coordination between the two corps, due mostly to insufficient communications.

The Germans switched to the defensive as they had always intended to do and began to disengage in the south. German generals, in their evaluation, could justifiably count Salerno as a successful delaying action. The Allies had not achieved an early breakthrough, which might have cut off the *LXXVI Panzer Corps* in its entirety, as the Germans had feared.

From an Allied point of view, yet another invasion of mainland Italy had succeeded, and the Allies had

eventually driven the Germans off the battlefield, even if things had looked very grim for a while. In a sense, both sides could claim a success—a rare case of a win-win situation in war.



NOTES

1. For accounts of the Battle of Salerno, see Eric Morris, *Salerno: A Military Fiasco* (New York, 1983); Des Hickey and Gus Smith, *Operation Avalanche: The Salerno Landings, 1943* (New York, 1984); and Angelo Pesce, *Salerno 1943: "Operation Avalanche"* (Naples, 1993). These more recent works have, in my view, superseded War Department, Military Intelligence Division, *Salerno: American Operations from the Beaches to the Volturno (9 September–6 October 1943)*, American Forces in Action (Washington, D.C., 1944); Martin Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino* (Washington, D.C., 1969); and the pertinent chapter (vol. 3, chap. 7) in Stephen W. Roskill, *The War At Sea 1939–1945* (3 vols., London, 1954–61).

2. The one big exception is that, as the Luftwaffe archives were mostly destroyed at the end of the war, no archival records of the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* have survived, and this division's operations must be reconstituted from corps-level records.

3. This article draws heavily on material collected for a staff ride held in March 2005 with the NATO Strike Force, based in Naples, to which its author had been invited by Commander (German Navy) Hannes Schröder-Lanz.

4. Karl-Heinz Frieser, "Schlagen aus der Nachhand - Schlagen aus der Vorhand. Die Schlachten von Charkow und Kursk 1943," in *Gezeitenwechsel im Zweiten Weltkrieg? Die Schlachten von Char'kov und Kursk im Frühjahr und Sommer 1943 in operativer Anlage, Verlauf und politischer Bedeutung*, ed. Roland G. Förster, Vorträge zur Militärgeschichte, no. 15 (Hamburg, 1996), pp. 101–35. More light will be shed on this in vol. 8 of *Germany and the Second World War*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, 7 vols. to date (New York, 1990–), forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

5. Reinhard Stumpf, "Die Luftwaffe als drittes Heer: Die Luftwaffen-Erdkampfverbände und das Problem der Sonderheere 1933 bis 1945," in *Soziale Bewegung und politische Verfassung: Beiträge zur Geschichte der mo-*

dernen Welt, ed. Ulrich Engelhardt, Volker Sellin, and Horst Stuke (Stuttgart, 1976), pp. 857–94.

6. Generalleutnant Wilhelm Schmalz, "Der Kampf der Panzerdivision 'Hermann Göring' bei Salerno vom 9. bis 17.9.1943," Fol. 1, MSg 1/2465, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg (hereafter BA-MA).

7. Generaloberst Heinrich von Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6: Die Kämpfe der 10 Armee in Süd- und Mittelitalien unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schlachten bei Salerno, am Volturno, Garigliano, am Sangro und um Cassino, 15.12.1947," Fol. 185–87, ZA 1/2300, BA-MA.

8. Armeeoberkommando (AOK) 10, Kriegstagebuch (KTB), Anlage Nr. 221, Rückblick auf die ersten 3 Tage der Schlacht bei Salerno, RH 20–10/57, BA-MA.

9. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 193.

10. Ibid., Fol. 199–201.

11. Generalkommando (GenKdo), XIV PzKorps, Tätigkeitsbericht Ia für die Zeit vom 18.8. bis 7.9.1943, Fol. 3, RH 24–14/72, BA-MA.

12. Schmalz, "Der Kampf der Panzerdivision 'Hermann Göring,'" Fol. 1.

13. Hermann Balck, *Ordnung im Chaos: Erinnerungen, 1893–1948*, Soldatenschicksale des 20. Jahrhunderts als Geschichtsquelle (Osnabrück, 1980), p. 2.

14. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, 8.9.–31.12.1943, diary entry for 9.9.1943, RH 24–14/72, BA-MA.

15. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 31, RH 20–10/54, BA-MA.

16. Richard Lamb, *War in Italy, 1943–1945: A Brutal Story* (New York, 1994); Erich Kubly, *Verrat auf deutsch: Wie das Dritte Reich Italien ruinierte* (Hamburg, 1982); Maurice Philip Remy, *Mythos Rommel* (Munich, 2002), pp. 186–88.

17. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, diary entry for 9.9.1943.

18. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 210.

19. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, p. 20.

20. Ibid., p. 21.

21. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 33; GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, diary entry for 9.9.1943.

22. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 32.

23. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 206.

24. Ibid., Fol. 208, 210.

25. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 35.

26. Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, pp. 17–19; War Department, Military Intelligence Division, *Salerno: American Operations*, pp. 2–4.

27. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 209–11.

28. Edwin P. Hoyt, *Backwater War: The Allied Campaign in Italy, 1943–1945* (Westport, Conn., 2002), p. 77; Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York, 2007), p. 219, 641.

29. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 36.

30. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps. KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 26 (11.9.1943).

31. Hoyt, *Backwater War*, p. 77.

32. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps. KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 29 (12.9.1943).

33. *Die Geheimen Tagesberichte der Deutschen Wehrmachtführung im Zweiten Weltkrieg, 1939–1945*, ed. Kurt Mehner, 12 vols. (Osnabrück, Germany, 1984–95), 8: 66.

34. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 216.

35. *Geheimen Tagesberichte*, 8: 73; Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, pp. 114–15, reports the loss of over 500 U.S. officers and men, the bulk of an infantry battalion, at and near Persano.

36. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 45.

37. Hoyt, *Backwater War*, p. 78.

38. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, Fol. 44–45.

39. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps. KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 33 (14.9.1943).

40. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 217–19.

41. GenKdo, LXXVI PzKorps, KTB Nr. 1, 22.6.1943–2.2.1944, Fol. 56–57, RH 24–76/2, BA-MA.

42. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps. KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 37 (16.9.1943).

43. *Geheimen Tagesberichte*, 8: 81.

44. Hoyt, *Backwater War*, p. 79; *Geheimen Tagesberichte*, 8: 88.

45. Schmalz, "Der Kampf der Panzerdivision 'Hermann Göring,'" Fol. 2; GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 37 (16.9.1943).

46. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 38 (16.9.1943).

47. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 49; Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 219.



U.S. Navy

The USS *Ancon*, flagship of the Allied fleet, and supporting craft in Salerno Bay, 12 September 1943, as ship at right lays a smoke screen to protect against German air attack