

APPRECIATION

by

AIR GENERAL STUDENT

Commanding 11 Air Corps

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1. OBJECT.

To determine the probable roles of United Nations Airborne Troops in an attack on SICILY.

2. FACTORS.

(a) Strength.

(i) Troops.

It is confirmed that one American and one British Airborne Division are training in N Africa, the former in the OUJDA area and the latter S.E. of ORAN.

Both Divisions are of approximately equal strength and each comprise two Para Regts of three Bns each, a glider Regt of three bns each, para and glider Arty both light, A.A. and A/Tk, Engineer and Airborne supply organisations.

(ii) Aircraft.

The British have done little or nothing to produce suitable transport and troop carrying aircraft. It is presumed, therefore, that reliance will be placed in the main on American Douglas Aircraft, with some British converted bombers.

The estimated number of aircraft required to transport two Airborne Divisions in one lift is approximately 300 and it is known that a large number of Douglas troop carriers is in the N. African Theatre of operations. However, 400 - 500 is reckoned as the number available.

The civil version of the Douglas has neither armour, armament nor self-sealing tanks, but it is presumed that at least the latter deficiency has been made good.

(iii) Gliders.

The British Horsa glider has not yet been identified in N. Africa. From examination of those captured by us, it is certain that they can carry a load of over 6,000 lbs and would normally carry a sub-unit of each arm. It is very doubtful whether the Douglas would tow a fully loaded Horsa in summer temperature in the Mediterranean.

The American fifteen place glider is being identified in increasing numbers and this glider will no doubt be used for both the British and American Airborne troops.

The number available is not known but between two and three hundred can be taken as the likely figure.

Conclusion. Owing to lack of aircraft and the fact that the British and American Airborne Divisions will probably be used in support of their own countrymen, the Airborne assault will be equally divided between two main assaults or the operation will be staggered to allow of a major effort by each Division.

(b) Efficiency and Morale.

The raid at BRUNEVAL demonstrated the fact that the British Airborne troops have learned a great deal of what we can teach them and it is appreciated from our own conclusions and the raids carried out up to date, that their technique is good, and the attack can be made at night.

From experience of our troops during the fighting in front of TUNIS, the British Airborne Troops are of high morale and most formidable opponents.

The American Division has not yet been in action. It is composed of picked troops and though green and without operational experience will no doubt fight well.

(c) Radius of Action - Douglas Aircraft.

The normal operational radius of action of Allied Airborne Troops is up to 600 miles. With a load of between 4,000 and 5,000 lbs, the number of parachutists which can be carried is between 15 and 20.

(d) Terrain.

(i) Beaches and Ports.

In considering Airborne Operations against SICILY, it is necessary first to determine the likely beaches for seaborne assault. With the aircraft at the Allies disposal, it will not be possible to attempt the capture of the island by Airborne attack alone.

It is essential for the enemy to capture ports as early as possible to achieve the necessary build-up of his forces. It is unlikely, however, that he will attempt frontal assaults against defended ports, but will land as close as the suitable beaches allow and attack the ports from the landward side.

Airborne troops may well be used to land near the ports to capture them by surprise attacks.

The most suitable beaches for landing craft are from (incl) SYRACUSE - (incl) GELA in the S.E., the West coast from CAP ST MARCO - MAZZARO DEL VALLO and from CAP ST VITO - (excl) PALERMO. The ports of SYRACUSE, AUGUSTA and CATANIA are within striking distance of the beaches in the SE, while PALERMO is vulnerable to the beaches in the N.W.

(ii) Parachute Troops.

In the Western, Southern and S.E. parts of the island, there are many areas where Parachutists can be landed on suitable ground. On the East coast except for the area around and West of CATANIA, there is only a narrow coastal belt of flat ground suitable for landing.

On the North coast, except in the Western part of the Island, there is still only a narrow strip of suitable ground. Owing to the lack of beaches for seaborne landings, the landing of parachutists is not a profitable undertaking in the North.

There are many landing areas for small sabotage parachute forces in the Island.

(iii) Gliders.

The areas for landing gliders correspond very closely to those for parachutists, the Western end of the Island, the CATANIA plain, the PACHINO peninsula and around GELA being the most suitable.

(e) Airfields.

The SICILIAN airfields are grouped in three areas, one group WEST of CATANIA, another N.E. of GELA, and the third group in the Western end of the island, with one airfield at PACHINO in the extreme S.E.

In order to give close air support to his armies NORTH toward CATANIA and EAST toward PALERMO, it is essential for the enemy to capture the Western groups, the GELA groups and PACHINO as early as possible in his assault.

(f) Airborne Bases for Operations.

The area on the N. African coast in which the enemy's Airborne forces must be sited, owing to range, extends from about MISURATA in the SOUTH, to BONE in the WEST. They may be either concentrated or dispersed. The latter method disperses his aircraft and helps to keep us in the dark as to his objective, but entails complications in command and communication which will be difficult enough in the recently captured area in which he is moving, and the great distances with which he is confronted.

To base his airborne troops and aircraft EAST of GABES would give away the fact immediately that his objective was SICILY. Bases anywhere between GABES and BONE constitute a threat to SICILY, SARDINIA, or SOUTHERN ITALY.

(g) Timing.

Even with his strong fighter forces based on MALTA, the launching of a large scale airborne assault in daylight would be very hazardous in face of our fighter force based on SICILY. Added to this he must face our strong flak defences. An assault at dusk runs the same risks, while an assault at dawn necessitates the disadvantages of night take-off and the ensuing time lags in landing with the threat of fighter attack increasing as it grows light.

A night attack with a half to three quarter moon setting between midnight and 0200 hrs is the most likely timing, especially in view of the possibility of the seaborne attack being landed in darkness before dawn.

It is not known to what extent the enemy have trained glider pilots to land at night. It is unlikely that they can do so without some form of flare path.

It is possible that smoke screens may be used to cover a day assault either airborne or seaborne as at DIEPPE, but owing to the relative fighter strength in the initial phases and the urgent necessity of fighter protection over his vulnerable shipping, daylight airborne assaults covered by smoke are not considered probable.

(h) Weather.

During June, July and August the weather is settled and although there are local high winds creating a rough sea there is little likelihood of airborne operations being affected by weather.

(i) Deception.

Dummy airborne attacks may be launched both as a preliminary phase and as part of the main airborne effort. However, there is no indication that the British or Americans have yet considered the use of dummy parachutists.

3. COURSES OPEN TO THE ENEMY.

From the factors discussed above it is presumed that airborne operations, certainly in the initial phases, will be carried out at night. Follow up operations may take place in daylight depending on the air situation. The courses open to the enemy airborne troops can be confined to four.

(a) Attack on the ports from the landward side.

(b) Attack on the beach defences including coast batteries from the landward side.

(c) Capturing ground considered essential to the general plan and which denies the swift movement of our reserves to support the port and beach defences.

(d) Attack on airfields.

Sabotage of communications and R.D.F. stations must be accepted as forming part of any plan.

(a) Attack on ports.

There are suitable landing areas to the West of SYRACUSE, AUGUSTA, CATANIA and PALERMO.

The defences of these ports are strong to seaward and mobile reserves are readily available, while CATANIA is protected to the WEST and SOUTH by a large concentration of heavy and light flak round the airfield.

Attacks on these ports are a likely role for airborne troops to be given. The defences on the landward side of ports require overhauling and adapting to deal with this form of attack.

(b) Attack on Beach Defences.

This form of attack requires a very strong airborne force, as the beaches, although on the whole indifferent for seaborne assault, are extensive.

In order to compete with all the beaches which powerful seaborne assaults must use, the attack must be made on a wide front and entails a wide dispersion of airborne troops. Furthermore, the defences must be overcome and silenced in a few hours, since, if fighting is still going on when the seaborne assault goes in, great confusion will be caused between the airborne and seaborne troops. Although certain highly important beaches may be dealt with in this manner it is not considered that the number of airborne troops, and the other important tasks to be performed, warrant this role being given. Coastal batteries only may well form important subsidiary tasks but should not be allowed to detract from the main weight of airborne effort.

(c) Capturing ground considered essential to the general plan and to deny the free movement of reserves.

In a seaborne assault it is vital to gain and maintain at the earliest possible moment positions covering the beaches in order to build up the flow of troops and supplies, and gain room for manoeuvre. If the weight of seaborne assault is heavy and concentrated the beach defences will be overcome. The swift action of defending reserves, however, especially armour, can prevent the landing of heavy armour and weapons and drive the enemy into the sea.

During this initial phase the seizure of commanding ground to cover the beaches and block the reserves is a role for which airborne troops are suitable, though they must be quickly reinforced with seaborne troops and heavy weapons. The capture of the bridge leading to CATANIA across the SIMETO is a very likely operation to be attempted as this river blocks the Eastern coastal plain SOUTH of CATANIA. The cutting of roads leading from the high ground in the centre and S.E of the island to the coastal plain may well be considered. But it is doubtful if the airborne troops available are sufficient in view of the more direct support required against the ports and for the bridgehead.

(d) Capture of Airfields.

The capture of airfields is a wasteful use of airborne troops unless they can be very swiftly reinforced by seaborne troops. In addition the petrol and stores for setting up fighter bases must come by sea in view of the number of troop carrying or transport aircraft available.

On the other hand small and determined units can deny the use of airfields during a critical period.

Until the main assault has enveloped the airfield to a depth of field gun range at least, its use as an enemy fighter base would be hazardous in the extreme.

To undertake the capture of the group of airfields N.E. of GELA and the PACHINO airfield would use up a large proportion of the airborne troops and is not considered a likely role, except for an attack on PACHINO which can be very quickly reinforced by sea.

Conclusion

I consider that the roles given to the Allied Airborne Troops will be in the following order of priority.

(a) To seize the approaches to the ports and either to attack the ports unsupported or to attack them supported by seaborne troops landed at neighbouring beaches.

It is essential, therefore, that the likely landing areas near the ports and the landward defences of the ports overhauled and organised against this threat.

(b) To seize and hold commanding ground covering the beaches to prevent reserves interfering with the landings.

(c) Attack coastal batteries.

(d) Attack PACHINO airfield and possibly GELA landing ground.

The only specific operation which can be named as a most probable objective under (a) above is the bridge over the R. SIMETO, SOUTH of CATANIA.

Widespread sabotage against communications and R.D.F. will be included whatever other roles are given.

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