



In May 1943 the Allies began an operation to seize and occupy the Italian island of Pantelleria, a small but vitally strategic stronghold in the central Mediterranean that gave the Axis domination of the sea and air routes between North Africa and Sicily. Seen as a pre-requisite for the Allied invasion of Sicily, the reduction of Pantelleria was achieved by means of an experiment in warfare: it was to be the first time that an attempt was made to

overcome a strong defensive position by air attack alone. In three weeks of intense aerial bombardment the Allies dropped some 6,600 tons on the little island, completely pulverising its defences and shattering the garrison's morale to such extent that it actually surrendered before an assault landing was made. Here a planning officer points out Pantelleria during a briefing at the Pentagon in Washington in April 1943. (USNA)

Pantelleria is a small volcanic island in the central Mediterranean, located about half-way between Cap Bon in Tunisia and the island of Sicily. Elliptic in form, it is approximately 23 kilometres (16 miles) long and 9 kilometres (six miles) wide, with an area of 83 square kilometres (45 square miles). Rugged, with sheer cliffs rising out of the sea, the countryside is hilly bare rock with few level areas, the highest point being Montagna Grande, which rises 836 metres above sea level.

Lying in the channel between North Africa and Sicily, close to the main shipping route from east to west in the Mediterranean, the island is of prime strategic importance. The Italian government first began to reinforce Pantelleria's natural defences in 1920 and in 1926 Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini declared it a prohibited military zone. In 1935, during the friction between Italy and the League of Nations over the Abyssinian war, he took measures to greatly increase its defence works, ordering the construction of coastal and anti-aircraft batteries and an airfield. Developing it into a fortress island, he envisaged Pantelleria as Italy's answer to Britain's strategic stronghold island in the Mediterranean, Malta, which lies 120 miles further to the east.

Declared a prohibited military zone by Mussolini in 1926, Pantelleria had been developed into a fortress island from 1936 onwards. Well aware of its potential threat, the British kept a watchful eye on the military developments on the island. This oblique of the north-western part of the island was taken in 1936 by an RAF Supermarine Scapa of No. 202 Squadron flying from Malta. In the foreground is Porto di Pantelleria, the island's main port town. The harbour's outer breakwater pier, already under construction when this picture was taken, was still uncompleted by 1943. (PRO)

PANTELLERIA

By Marco Belogi and Elena Leoni

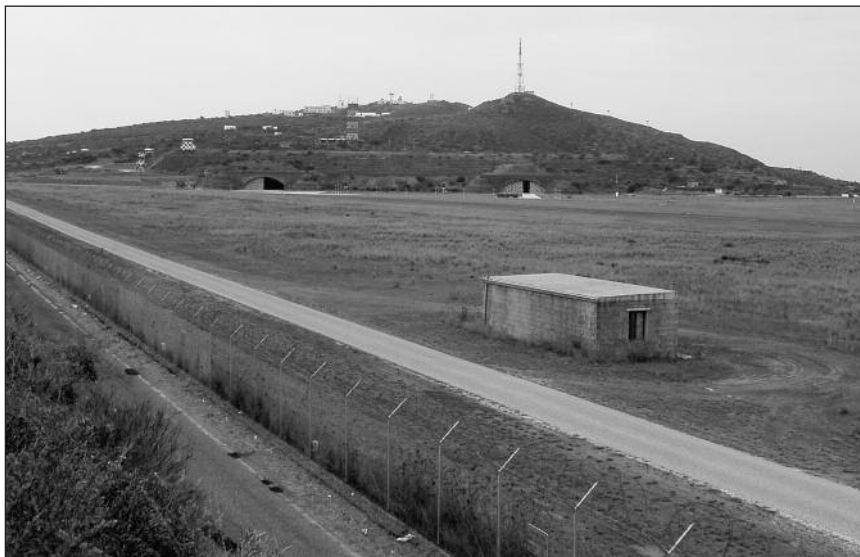
The British were of course well aware of Italy's growing aspirations with Pantelleria and from June 1936 kept a close watch on the island, Supermarine Scapa aircraft from Malta's Kalafrana airfield conducting regular reconnaissance flights to it. In an attempt to

stop this, on February 26, 1937 the Italian government issued a decree prohibiting any flights over Pantelleria and its relative territorial waters. This however did not deter the British aircraft, which continued observing the island from a six-mile distance.





Left: Pantelleria's main military asset was the aerodrome with its capacity of about 80 aircraft and its underground hangar, which had been cut into the side of a hill and was thus impregnable. This picture (taken after the Allied capture of the island) gives a good view of the hangar and its two entrances. In the foreground are three wrecked Italian aircraft: (L-R) a Savoia Marchetti 82, a Fiat G12 cargo aircraft and a Savoia Marchetti 79 torpedo bomber. The triple-engined G12 belonged to the 48^o Stormo (Wing) and was destroyed by the Italians themselves after it had been damaged in a landing accident on May 14 while attempting to bring in supplies for the besieged island. (IWM)



The wrecks have been cleared away and the perimeter fence been modernised but otherwise little has changed. The Margana airfield is still in use by the Italian Air Force and our comparisons there were taken by Captain Attilio Zenobi with special permission from the Stato Maggiore Aeronautica (Italian Air Staff).

By 1939, a military aerodrome had been completed behind Porto di Pantelleria, the harbour and town on the north-western side of the island, on a plateau 180m above sea level. Its underground aircraft hangar, 340m long and 26m wide and with a capacity of some 80 aircraft, had been hewn out from solid rock and was thus impervious to bombardment.

With war breaking out in 1939, possession of Sicily and Pantelleria gave Italy and its Axis partner Germany a domination of the air over the central Mediterranean that might have been complete had not the British held on to Malta. Many of the Axis aircraft that attacked Malta (see *After the Battle* No. 10) were based at Pantelleria.

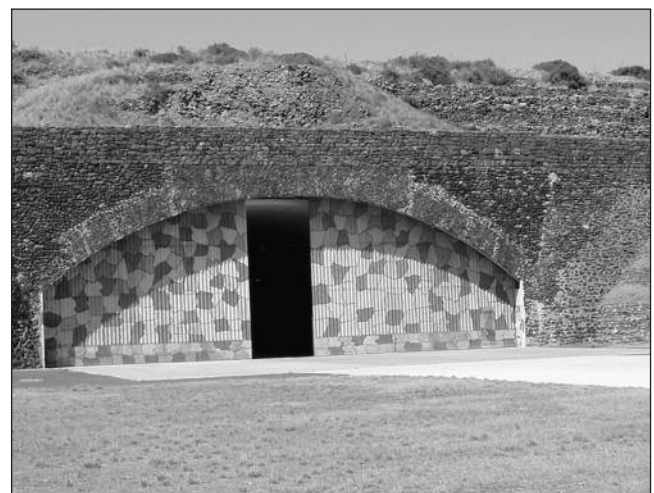
Already in 1940, the British had wanted to reduce Pantelleria in order to remove the air threat which it posed. They had been on the brink of assaulting the island in January 1941 (Operation 'Workshop'), but had given up the operation as impracticable, and then greater events had elbowed it aside. An alternative plan for the invasion of Sicily (Operation 'Influx') was abandoned in February 1941, due to the appearance on the island of German bombers of the X. Fliegerkorps in January.

British plans lay dormant until the end of 1942 when they began to receive new consideration. Still, seizing Pantelleria would not be easy, for by now the island was a seemingly impregnable fortress manned by a very strong garrison.

A total of 22 shore and anti-aircraft batteries defended the island, giving a total of 112 guns. Most of the batteries were placed in the harbour area, the guns being manned by local militia under Milizia Artigliera Marittima (MILMART) command.



Left: One of the two entrances of the underground hangar, pictured after the Italian surrender (note the damage on the rooftop caused by an Allied bomb). Designed by Pierluigi Nervi, a well-known architect of the Fascist era, the underground hall was partly dug out from the side of a hill but most of its protec-



tion was provided by a ten-metre covering of slats and earth. Both entrances could be closed with armoured doors. The vehicle in the right foreground is the only civilian car present on the island, a Fiat Balilla. Mussolini used it during his 1938 visit to Pantelleria. (IWM) **Right:** Little change 60 years later.

The inside of the big hangar, photographed probably sometime in 1942. The weight of the soil covering was supported by a reinforcement of concrete slabs. The huge hangar could shelter 60 Macchi 202 fighters and six Savoia Marchetti 79 torpedo bombers, or 30 Macchi 202 and 12 SM 79s. The bombers were held on the ground floor while the fighters were tackle-lifted to a level above. Pictured here are a German Messerschmitt Bf 110 with an Italian SM 79 on the right.



The main anti-naval power consisted of three shore batteries (Batteria Bellotti at Punta Karuscia, east of the port town; Grasso at Roncone di Salerno on the south-west shore of the island; and Rossi at Punta Limarsi in the south-east), each with four 152mm guns. In addition there were three batteries (Stroscio at Punta Spadillo in the east, Rametta in the south and Caminita on Monte Croce south of the harbour) equipped with a total of 13 of the less-powerful 120mm guns.

The mainstay of the anti-aircraft defences was provided by two batteries (at Punta Sidere, just south-west of the port, and at Punta Karuscia) equipped with a total of ten modern 90mm guns. The remaining 13 batteries had old 76mm guns, 72 in total, which were practically useless against medium and heavy bombers.

All pieces were in open concrete emplacements and defended by machine-gun posts, Oerlikon 2cm anti-aircraft guns and Breda 13.2mm automatic guns. A heavily protected telephone cable ran between the various emplacements and their fire-direction post. Many of the batteries had their own underground water tanks.

The Italian defences were strengthened to a degree by German reinforcements. A German four-barrelled 2cm FlaK 38 gun stood atop Monte Gelkhamar in the airfield area and six German 2cm guns were placed atop Monte Croce (close to the harbour area), where there were also a Freya surveillance radar and a Wurzburg D tracking radar. In total there were 600 German troops stationed on the island.

The Italian garrison was commanded by Admiral Gino Pavesi. It included the air force units, engineers, the MILMART militia, and a mixed brigade — the Brigata Mista Pantelleria — of 7,400 army troops — in all about 12,000 men. All they had to support them in ground fighting were six 81mm mortars, eight field guns and 13 tankettes. The troops were without combat experience and their morale was weak due to the recent defeats in North Africa and above all their isolation from mainland Italy.



A perfect comparison, taken by Captain Zenobi with special clearance from the authorities.

To service the military garrison, fortified storages had been built, two for ammunition and one for fuel. The wireless station was in a tunnel at Monastero on the western side of the island. The supply warehouse, mill, bakery and power station had also been protected. To secure the provision of water, the army had constructed three wells, with a combined capacity of 200,000 litres per day, and three big water storage tanks. In addition there were two wells in the town, one privately owned which sold water to the Army and to civilians, and one to supply the airfield.

Almost 10,000 civilians were still present on the island, giving a total population of

some 24,000. Despite the obvious threat to the island, no plans for the evacuation of the civilians had been made.

During the final days of the Tunisian campaign, the Allied air forces made a formidable three-day air attack on Pantelleria as part of their efforts to obstruct the Axis evacuation from Tunisia. The heaviest of these attacks took place on May 8 when 13 P-38 fighter-bombers attacked the island's aerodrome. The anti-aircraft defences proved ineffective and nine Italian aircraft were destroyed or damaged on the ground. Following this attack, most of the remaining aircraft were transferred to Sicily, leaving only four Macchi 202 fighters behind.



Left: To secure Pantelleria against enemy aggression, the Italians built numerous defence works, including shore batteries, anti-aircraft batteries, bunkers and pillboxes all over the island.



This is the pillbox next to the Punta San Leonardo lighthouse, one of several in the port area, camouflaged to look like a civilian house. (IWM) Right: The pillbox survives to this day.



On May 18, the Allies began their three-week campaign to bomb Pantelleria into submission. Here, a Douglas A-20 Boston of No. 24 (SAAF) Squadron (based at Soliman airfield in Tunisia) has just released its bombs on one of the inland targets, Monte Sant'Elmo, which was the location of the island's light anti-aircraft defences command post. (IWM)

The Allies had again begun to look seriously at Pantelleria at the beginning of 1943, when they started planning Operation 'Husky', the invasion of Sicily from North Africa (see *After the Battle* No. 77). In early February, General George C. Marshall, the US Army Chief-of-Staff, informed Lieutenant-General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Allied Forces Commander, that the US Navy could not provide eight auxiliary aircraft carriers requested for air cover of the American assault on Sicily. Marshall suggested instead that Eisenhower seize Pantelleria for its airfield, from which Allied fighters could support the Sicily operation.

Though Eisenhower at first was not impressed, he set his Allied Forces Headquarters staff to prepare a plan to reduce Pantelleria, but only 'if the capture became necessary'. The conclusion of the planners was unfavourable. Pantelleria posed difficult problems even if unlimited resources were available. With preparations for Sicily limiting resources sharply, Pantelleria seemed altogether too tough. Pantelleria could be taken only at the expense of postponing the Sicilian assault, and planners felt that the importance of Pantelleria to the success of 'Husky' was too small to justify delay.

So the matter rested until May, when a revision of the invasion plan moved the entire Allied assault to the south-eastern corner of Sicily. General Eisenhower again considered seizing Pantelleria. He admitted that there were disadvantages in such an operation: possible heavy losses in men, ships and landing craft, which could be ill afforded on the eve of the Sicilian invasion; the fact that a successful defence of Pantelleria would put heart into the Sicilian defenders at a time when 'we sought to break it'; and the fact that the operation would point rather obviously to the next Allied move in the Mediterranean. Yet Eisenhower now saw great

advantages in having the island: better air cover for the American landings; removal of a serious threat to Allied air and naval operations during the Sicilian invasion; the use of Pantelleria as a navigational aid for Allied aircraft and for bases for Allied air/sea rescue launches; denial of Pantelleria as a re-fuelling base for enemy E-boats and submarines; and elimination of enemy radio direction-finder and ship-watching stations to insure a better possibility of achieving tactical surprise for the Sicilian invasion.

Intelligence reports were promising. Only five Italian infantry battalions, for the most part untested in battle, defended Pantelleria and they were supported mainly by anti-aircraft batteries manned by militia troops. The only evidence of the state of their morale was 'the poor display of the anti-aircraft gunners when our forces raided on May 8'.

On May 10, perhaps still stung by an earlier rebuke by General Marshall about his 'lack of adaptability', Eisenhower decided to seize Pantelleria, but without expending heavily in men and matériel. To obviate a full-scale assault, he thought of making the operation 'a sort of laboratory to determine the effect of concentrated heavy bombing on a defended coastline'. He wished the Allied air forces 'to concentrate everything' in blasting the island so that damage to the garrison, its equipment and morale, would be 'so serious as to make the landing a rather simple affair'. Constant artillery pounding on the defenders of Corregidor in the Pacific in 1942 (see *After the Battle* No. 23) seemed to have had that effect and Eisenhower wanted 'to see whether the air can do the same thing'.

The British 1st Infantry Division, supported by appropriate naval forces, was to follow the bombardment and seize and occupy the island. The smaller nearby Pelagian Islands — Lampedusa, Linosa and Lam-

pione — were also to come under attack. All three services established a headquarters at Sousse in Tunisia and went to work on what was christened Operation 'Corkscrew'.

The task of battering the island into submission was assigned to the North-West African Air Force, commanded by American General Carl Spaatz. Its two main forces, the North-West African Strategic Air Force under American Major General James H. Doolittle, and the North-West African Tactical Air Force under British Air Vice Marshall Sir Arthur Coningham, together could muster 12 American bombardment groups — four with B-17 heavy bombers, four with B-25 and three with B-26 medium bombers and one with A-20 light bombers — one group of A-36A and three of P-38 fighter-bombers, plus one group of Spitfire and four of P-40 fighters. The British contributed No. 205 Group equipped with Wellington bombers, four squadrons with A-20 Bostons, two with Baltimores, and one with Hurricane fighter-bombers. In total, almost 1,000 aircraft.

The 'Corkscrew' planners reckoned with considerable enemy opposition in the air. Despite the losses suffered at the end of May, the Axis still had sizeable air power left. Italian fighter strength on Sicily had been reduced to 90 aircraft: 52 Macchi 202, 23 Macchi 205 and 15 obsolete Macchi 200, plus seven Messerschmitt Bf109s operating under 1° and 53° Stormo (Wing). Luftflotte 2, still under Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, could muster around 130 Messerschmitt Bf109s under JG27 and JG53, around 80 FW190s under Sturmgeschwader 10 and Schlachtgeschwader 2, some 30 Bf110s under Zerstörergeschwader 26, and 20 Ju88s under NJG2 and Aufklärungsgruppe 122 — in all some 250 fighters and fighter-bombers.

To help in the planning of the bombing operation, on May 27 General Spaatz called in the help of his scientific advisor, British Professor Solly Zuckerman. Using statistical data compiled earlier in the war and available intelligence on the Pantelleria defences, within 36 hours Zuckerman produced rough numerical estimates on the bombing effort required. Taking into account the strength of the fortifications and the destructive power of various types of bombs, he calculated that 15 to 60 bursts in a 100-yard square were needed to silence a gun. With the current state of bombing accuracy this meant that as many as 400 bombs needed to be dropped on each of the 100-odd guns in order to ensure its destruction — or, in other words, 2,000 tons per square kilometre. As this was clearly beyond the air forces' capability within the time allowed, Zuckerman advised that the bombing be concentrated solely on those gun batteries which threatened the proposed landing sites.

To monitor the bombing campaign, Zuckerman and his small team (dubbed the Operations Analysis Unit) organised a rigorous registration of the number of sorties to and bombs dropped on each target. Ordering daily photo-reconnaissance sorties by Lieutenant Colonel Elliot Roosevelt's 248th (PR) Wing, and with the help of the local unit of photo-interpreters, they immediately assessed the results of each raid. If the target had been destroyed another would be selected. If not, the bombers would keep returning until the job was finished.

On May 13, Allied aircraft dropped leaflets over Pantelleria town warning the civilian population of the coming onslaught and giving them a five-day respite to evacuate their homes.

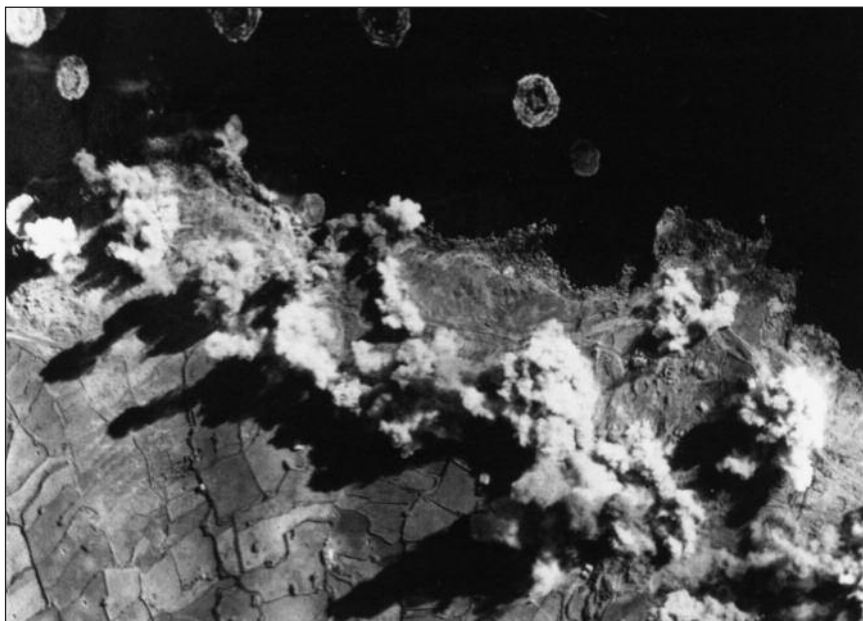
The Allied air offensive against Pantelleria was conducted in two stages. In the first phase, which lasted from May 18 to June 5, only the North-West African Strategic Air Force was engaged. Around 50 medium bombers and 50 fighter-bombers were sent out each day, while Wellington bombers

(dropping 4,000lb 'Blockbuster' bombs) and Hurricane fighter-bombers attacked at night. On May 21 P-40s and P-38s destroyed the Wurzburg radar, and on the 23rd the Freya installation was evacuated. This rendered the Axis fighters operating from Sicilian airports basically blind. The initial raids had been aimed at the harbour, the airfield and the gun batteries in general but, following Professor Zuckerman's advice of May 29, all attacks were concentrated specifically on the batteries along the northern shore. On June 1, the heavy B-17 bombers joined the onslaught. That same day, despite the loss of the radars, Axis fighters multiplied their defensive efforts, with little success. By the end of the first phase, 1,500 sorties had been flown and 900 tons of bombs been dropped on Pantelleria's port and aerodrome, plus another 400 tons on the gun batteries.

In the second phase of the air offensive, a six-day period which began on June 6, the bomber attacks were stepped up even further, the number of sorties growing from 200 on the first day to 1,500 on June 11. All squadrons of the North-West African Strategic Air Force (except the Wellingtons) and all bomber and fighter-bomber squadrons of the North-West African Tactical Air Force took part, maintaining almost continuous attacks. Between June 6-11, a staggering 5,324 tons were dropped in 3,712 sorties.

The increasingly heavy air pounding reduced Pantelleria to shambles. Casualties on the island were relatively few in number, but damage to housing, roads and communications was severe. By June 7, the port was in ruins, the town practically destroyed, and the electricity works knocked out, and several of the gun batteries destroyed or out of action. Despite efforts to re-supply the island by sea and air, shortages in water, ammunition and supplies began to have serious effects on morale.

Meanwhile, a British naval task force comprising the cruisers *Aurora* (command ship), *Newfoundland*, *Penelope* and *Orion*; the AA cruiser *Euryalus*; the destroyers *Waddon*, *Troubridge*, *Tartar*, *Jervis*, *Nubian*, *Laforey*, *Lookout* and *Royal* and the gunboat *Aphis* sailed for Pantelleria from Sousse and Bône. On June 8 the force took up station off the



From May 29 the bombing concentrated on the shore batteries on the island's northern coast. This is the Bellotti Battery at Punta Karuscia east of the port town being pounded. By June 11, only one of its four 152mm guns was still workable. (IWM)

island and opened fire on its shore batteries with the aim to test the latter's combat power. (There had already been smaller naval shoots by single cruisers on the nights of May 31/June 1, June 1/2 and June 2/3 and on the morning of the 5th.) The bombarding ships were assailed by Axis aircraft, enduring three Italian and two German attacks, but the reply from the shore-based guns was weak and inaccurate. From this the Allies concluded that at least one battery had been reduced to silence and that the others had suffered severe damage.

As had been planned, immediately after the naval shoot, the island was offered a chance to capitulate. Surrender leaflets were dropped by aircraft. Members of the Italian garrison brought copies to the island com-

mander but, as Supermarina (Italian Naval Command) proudly reported to Comando Supremo (Italian High Command) in Rome, Admiral Pavesi did not reply to the Allied ultimatum, Pantelleria would resist to the utmost. When, after a six-hour interval, the required surrender signals — a white cross on the airstrip and a white flag in the port area — did not materialise, the Allied air assault was resumed.

The call for surrender was repeated on June 10 but again fell on deaf ears. The single radio station working assured Comando Supremo that 'despite everything Pantelleria will continue to resist'. Successive telegrams, as many as 20 that night, told of Pantelleria's crumbling endurance, but none mentioned surrender.



On June 8, an Allied naval task force of five cruisers and eight destroyers shelled Pantelleria's coastal batteries. Conducted so as to appear to be the overture to a real assault, the bombardment's main aim was to test the shore batteries' strength and alertness after the three weeks of sustained bombing from the air. Of the 16 batteries that could have engaged the ships, only two returned fire throughout, one till it was silenced, and three

others fired occasionally. This picture of the coastline east of Pantelleria harbour (note the large crane on the port's Nuovo Mole (new pier) in the far distance on the right) was taken from the cruiser *Aurora*. Observing the naval shoot from aboard this ship were General Eisenhower, the commander-in-chief of Allied Forces in the Mediterranean, and Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, the commander of Allied naval forces. (IWM)



Above: Three days later, on May 11, the British 1st Infantry Division made an assault landing on Pantelleria, putting troops ashore at three places in the harbour area (the only location along the island's rocky coastline suitable for seaborne invasion). The landing met negligible opposition, the Italian island commander, Admiral Gino Pavesi, having taken the decision to

surrender three hours earlier. Here troops disembark from an LCI (infantry landing craft) on the beach at Punta della Croce, in the western half of the harbour. Pantelleria town can be seen in the background with Monte Sant'Elmo in the far distance. (IWM) **Below:** The same waterfront, photographed for us by Captain Zenobi.

Meanwhile, the British 1st Division and supporting units had begun boarding at Sousse and Sfax. Most of the infantry troops embarked on three infantry landing ships, the *Queen Emma*, *Princess Beatrix* and *Royal Ulsterman*, with others being carried on LCIs while and tanks, guns and equipment were put on LSTs and LCTs. During the evening of June 10 the assault force under Rear-Admiral Rhoderick McGrigor set sail for Pantelleria in three convoys, two fast ones and one slow.

Next morning, June 11, the invasion fleet halted about eight miles off the harbour entrance of the port of Pantelleria while the ground troops boarded the assault craft. The weather was good, the sea calm. Only a few low-hanging clouds flecked the sky. Pantelleria itself was cloaked in the haze and dust raised by air bombardment earlier that morning.

That morning Admiral Pavesi had followed his usual custom of holding a conference with



Left: Italian prisoners are being collected in a narrow street in the eastern part of the town. The building in the left background is part of Pantelleria's former internment settlement for



Right: This is one of the few streets in the town where the original houses remain.

his staff even though Allied aircraft were plunging the island into a 'hurricane of fire and smoke'. Billowing dust clouds already blocked a view of the ocean, and the island commander was unaware of the Allied fleet offshore. Discussion at the staff meeting soon showed everyone in agreement that the situation had become untenable because of lack of water, communications, ammunition, and also because of the danger of disease. Furthermore, no Axis aircraft remained on Pantelleria; help from outside could not be expected; and the 24,000 people on the island had about reached the end of their endurance. Since Admiral Pavesi had wired Supermarina several hours earlier that 'the situation is desperate, all possibilities of effective resistance have been exhausted', he ordered his air commander to display a white cross on the airfield. Because it would take almost two hours for the order to reach all the posts, Pavesi set the time for the cessation of hostilities at 1100 hours. Shortly after he made his decision, the smoke and dust dispersed revealing the presence of the Allied ships offshore.

At about that time, the landing craft started their final run to the beaches. There was a strange stillness, the only noise being the pounding of the assault craft, the drone of fighters orbiting overhead. Cruisers started to fire at shore battery positions around 1100, and 30 minutes later escorting destroyers added their fires. No reply came from the island. At 1135, Flying Fortresses bombarded the island in 'the most perfect precision bombing of unimaginable intensity'. At 1145, the assault echelon commander released the craft.

Landing in the first wave was the 3rd Brigade (1st Duke of Wellington Regiment, 1st Shropshires, 2nd Sherwood Foresters), reinforced by a tank squadron of the 2nd Lothian & Border Horse and a battery of 2nd Field Artillery Regiment. If enemy resistance proved tough, the follow-up force — 2nd Brigade — would land aiming for Monte Sant'Elmo at 1255. In floating reserve were the 2nd Coldstream Guards (detached from the 1st Guards Brigade).

By noon the first wave was ashore on three beaches in the port area. Shortly afterwards white flags appeared on many of the buildings. Italian batteries ceased fire at 1130, while Allied naval bombing ceased at 1155. Between 1130 and 1200 the destroyer *Laforey* reported having spotted a white flag on Monte Sant'Elmo and aircraft reported a white cross on the airfield. For this reason, all further air and naval bombardments were cancelled at 1245.



Most of the old town was obliterated by the bombing. These soldiers are making their way across the rubble in Via Cagliari, just off Piazza del Municipio near the port. (IWM)



Today Pantelleria is a holiday destination reached by air from Palermo or boat from Trapani in Sicily.

At 1220, the 3rd Brigade gained a stronghold inside the town. The unit suffered only one loss, Corporal Sanderson of the 2nd Sherwood Foresters, who was hit by a mule and died. Shortly after 1330 Major-General

W. E. Clutterbuck, the division commander, came ashore and found that most of the Italian garrison had already been taken prisoner. At 1730 the official surrender was signed in the underground hangar.



Left: Five and a half hours after the landing, the formal surrender of Pantelleria was signed at the aerodrome. Here, Admiral Pavesi (left), the Italian island commander, discusses the terms with Major-General W. E. Clutterbuck (centre), commander of the 1st Division, and American Brigadier General Aubrey C. Strickland, commander of the 2690th Air Base Command, the Air Force formation set up to administer the island after its capture. Looking on are Brigadier-General Giuseppe Maffei,



commander of the Brigata Mista (Mixed Brigade) Pantelleria, and (behind him) Colonel Michele Spina, commander of the Army Engineers on the island. Right: Watched by staff officers, Pavesi and Clutterbuck sit down to finalise the conditions prior to signing the surrender document. The Italian air force officer with the peaked cap bending over Pavesi's shoulder is almost certainly Lieutenant-Colonel Francesco Raverdino, commander of air units on the island. (IWM)



British troops at the Punta della Croce gun battery, west of the port area. This was one of the 13 batteries on the island equipped with 76mm dual-purpose guns. An obsolete weapon dating from the First World War, it had a range of 12 kilometres against shipping but only reached an altitude of 18,000 feet against aircraft. The battery of four guns had already been

badly damaged by Allied bombing on May 23, which had killed seven of the crew and injured five others, but it received the final knock-out blow on May 30. The ploughed-up landscape around the battery well illustrates the technique of concentrated carpet-bombing on small targets employed by the Allies to reduce Pantelleria. (IWM)

In all, 11,621 Italians (420 officers, 620 NCOs and 10,617 troops) and 78 Germans surrendered. Total Axis casualties as a result of the bombing were 36 soldiers killed and 103 wounded (108 and 200 respectively according to Allied sources). Of the civilian population, five had been killed and six injured. Aircraft losses during the battle were 13 Italian and 10 German aircraft lost against 15 American.

With Pantelleria in Allied hands, the three Pelagian Islands followed soon. Lampedusa had also refused the Allied surrender offer, the island commander notifying Rome that 'bombardments are continuing without interruption, both from the air and from the sea. Air support required urgently'. Instead of help, only words of intended cheer arrived: 'We are convinced that you will inflict the greatest possible damage on the enemy. Long live Italy!' On June 12 the island received 268 tons of bombs besides numerous shells from bombarding ships. Disappointed, resentful, feeling they had done their duty, the garrison of 4,600 men, after being ordered to do so by the island commander, raised white flags in surrender. Linosa fell the next day, June 13. The Allies found Lampione unoccupied.

Allied intelligence had overestimated the will to resist of the defending garrisons. Despite Fascist propaganda, Pantelleria and the Pelagian Islands were hollow shells manned largely by over-age and inexperienced individuals, many of whom had their homes on the isles. When the Allies attacked, quite a few chose to go looking after their families instead of remain at their posts. But against the overwhelming power of the Western Allies, there was probably little they could have done with their inadequate and obsolete equipment.

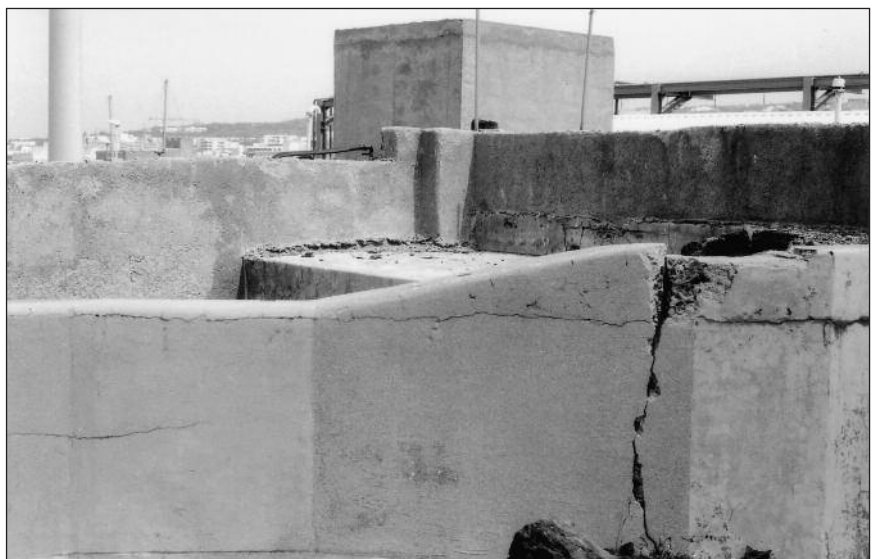
The day after the fall of Pantelleria, Professor Zuckerman and his team arrived on the island to do a ground survey of the damage wrought by the air bombardment. In the town they found the roads completely

obstructed by rubble. Whole streets had been wiped out by the debris of houses that had collapsed into them, and access from one block to another was usually over mounds of rubble. All the newer multi-storied buildings had been damaged.

In the harbour, they found the piers and pillboxes seriously damaged. The communication system had been destroyed in such a way that not a single telephone worked. The destruction of the power station had been overcome with power generators, but lack of electricity had affected water-pumping.

At the airfield, the team found the runway strewn with about 70 craters. There were 84 abandoned Italian aircraft, five of which were inside the underground hangar, which remained substantially intact.

At the gun batteries, out of the 80 bombed guns only ten were completely out of service and only 45 appeared damaged in any way. About five per cent of the bombs had fallen within the efficiency area, a result that was only half of the expected accuracy. Even so, the sea and air bombardments had achieved the desired result: the gun platforms had been raised from their posts, electric installations been damaged, range-control and communication posts been destroyed and many other guns, which could have been operational, had been covered with so much debris that days would be needed to clear them. (The data accumulated by Zuckerman at Pantelleria were later put to good use in planning the bombing of German fortifications in France prior to D-Day in Normandy.)



The gun has been removed but this is the same emplacement today.



Above: British troops moving along a recently cleared path through the port area just west of the old town. The heap of rubble on the left is what remains of the Italian Navy's torpedo storage depot which blew to smithereens after a direct hit. The detonation also damaged the western wall of the adjoining castle (off the picture to the left). On the right, still anchored at its mooring, lies a destroyed Italian motor raft. In the back-

ground stands the Cavalier Petrillo wine-factory, reduced to rubble but still with its characteristic chimney. (IWM) **Below:** The town has been completely rebuilt but largely in a modern style untypical for the island. Many inhabitants who remember the charm of the old town find the new buildings bland and ugly, and regret the loss of the nice Mediterranean atmosphere which existed before the war.

Although the Italians had made preparations for demolition of vital installations, particularly at the airfield, none of these had been carried out. This and, above all, the garrison's speedy surrender, after the war led to accusations of defeatism among the garrison command and speculations about secret collaboration with the Allies. The latter allegation cannot be upheld as declassified Allied documents do not support, even in the most concealed manner, the possibility of any surrender agreement between Admiral Pavesi and the Allies. After all, Pavesi's decision to capitulate without a fight was amply justified by the sufferings experienced by the civilian population. (In fact, aware of the island's predicament, at 1010 hours on the 11th Mussolini had telegraphed a message instructing Pavesi to surrender at 1200 hours. As it happened, Supermarina did not relay the message until 1255 by which time the admiral had already acted on his own accord.)



The pulverised defences as they remain today. Left: This is the anti-aircraft battery at Fossa del Russo which continued firing



right up until the surrender. **Right:** Stroschio Battery fire direction post with one of the four gun emplacements on the left

Surrendered Italian soldiers take a wash in the shallow water beside the inner port's short pier guarded by a British military policeman. On the right is the familiar silhouette of the town castle marking the western end of the old town. (IWM)

After the war, island inhabitants often contended that most of the destruction suffered by the town was in fact attributable to demolitions carried out by the Allies after the surrender, reputedly for propaganda purposes. Some witnesses remember seeing Allied cameramen and photographers recording houses being knocked down. Indeed, some demolition work was carried out a few days after the landing, but this was only to remove half-collapsed and dangerous buildings (the work was actually done by Italian Army engineers under Lieutenant-Colonel Michele Spina on orders from Admiral Pavesi).

However, aerial photographs from Allied and German sources taken at different dates leave no doubt that most of the destruction in the town was caused by the aerial bombing. Between May 18 and June 11 an estimated 755 tons (2,987 bombs) were dropped on the town, of which 124 tons (700 bombs) between June 9-11 alone. As late as June 4, the town appears relatively intact on aerial photos, so it is clear that most of its devastation occurred in the final seven days of the bombing. However, by that time most of the town's population had fled inland or taken shelter in rock tunnels and in the airfield hangar, so very few of them were there to witness the destruction wrought by the bombers in the final week.

As part of the 'Corkscrew' planning, the North-West African Air Force had created the 2690th Air Base Command under American Brigadier General Aubrey C. Strickland to govern the island and support the air units to be based there. Immediately after seizure of the island, the unit began clearing rubble from the harbour, opening up roads and filling craters on the airfield. On June 26, P-40s of the US 33rd Fighter Group began to operate from the airfield. Six days earlier, British aircraft had already begun flying from the airstrip at Lampedusa.

Eisenhower's laboratory experiment had been successful. Pantelleria and the Pelagian Islands gave the Allies a safer channel for shipping in the central Mediterranean and, more important, valuable airfields closer to Sicily and the Italian mainland.

For further reading on the subject, see the book by the same authors: Marco Belogi and Elena Leoni: Pantelleria 1943 — Mediterranean D-Day (Gavardo, 2002) available from Liberazioni, Via A. Leni, Gavardo (Brescia), Italy.



The Barbacane castle has been restored and small boats now line the quays.



Left: An American Army cameraman of the US 12th Combat Film Unit records the destruction in the old town. Many of Pantelleria's old inhabitants remember seeing the Allied camera-



men at work. (USNA) Right: The ruined building has been cleared away and its site turned into a small square, giving a clear view of the castle.