

Operation Husky, Eighth Army Landings in Sicily July 10th 1943

By Griffin Turton

Introduction

Although overshadowed by the Normandy Landings the following year, "Operation HUSKY the invasion of Sicily in 1943 was actually the largest amphibious operation of World War II in terms of the size of the landing zone and the number of divisions put ashore on the first day of the invasion" ([Sicily 1943 U.S. Army Centre of Military History](#)).

"The forces assembled for the invasion of Sicily were enormous. Never before had the numbers of ships and men been equalled in an amphibious operation. The Armada of 3,200 ships assembled for Husky was in fact the most gigantic fleet in the world's history" (from *Bitter Victory, The Battle for Sicily 1943* by Carlo D'Este).

Organisation of Allied Invasion Force for Operation Husky

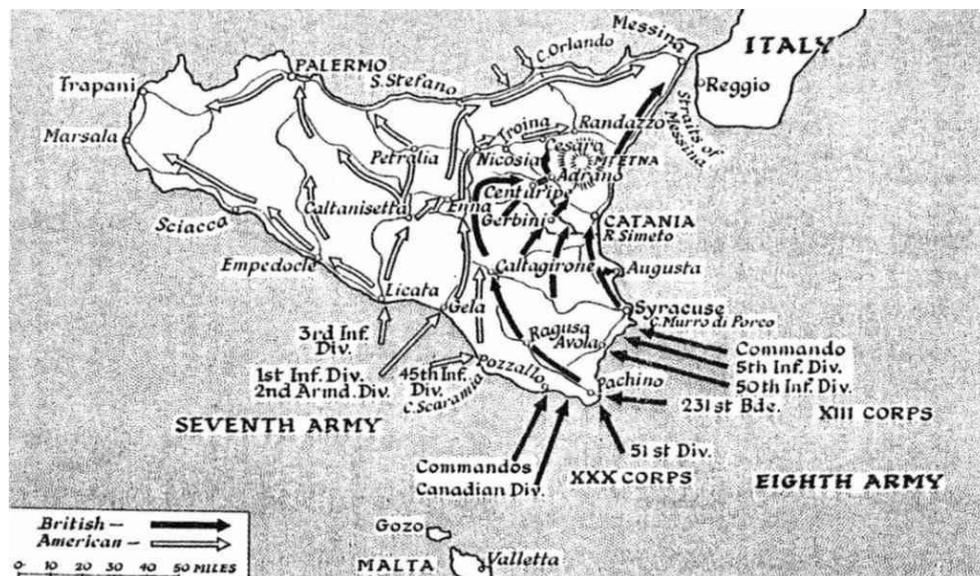
In overall command of the allied forces for Operation Husky was the Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces in North Africa **General Dwight D. Eisenhower**, the Deputy Allied Commander-in-Chief and Commander-in-Chief 15th Army Group was General Alexander whilst Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder RAF was Air Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Air Command and the Commander in Chief of the Allied Naval Forces was Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham RN.

The 15th Army Group that fought in Sicily consisted of the British Eighth Army commanded by General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery and the Seventh United States Army commanded by Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Jr.

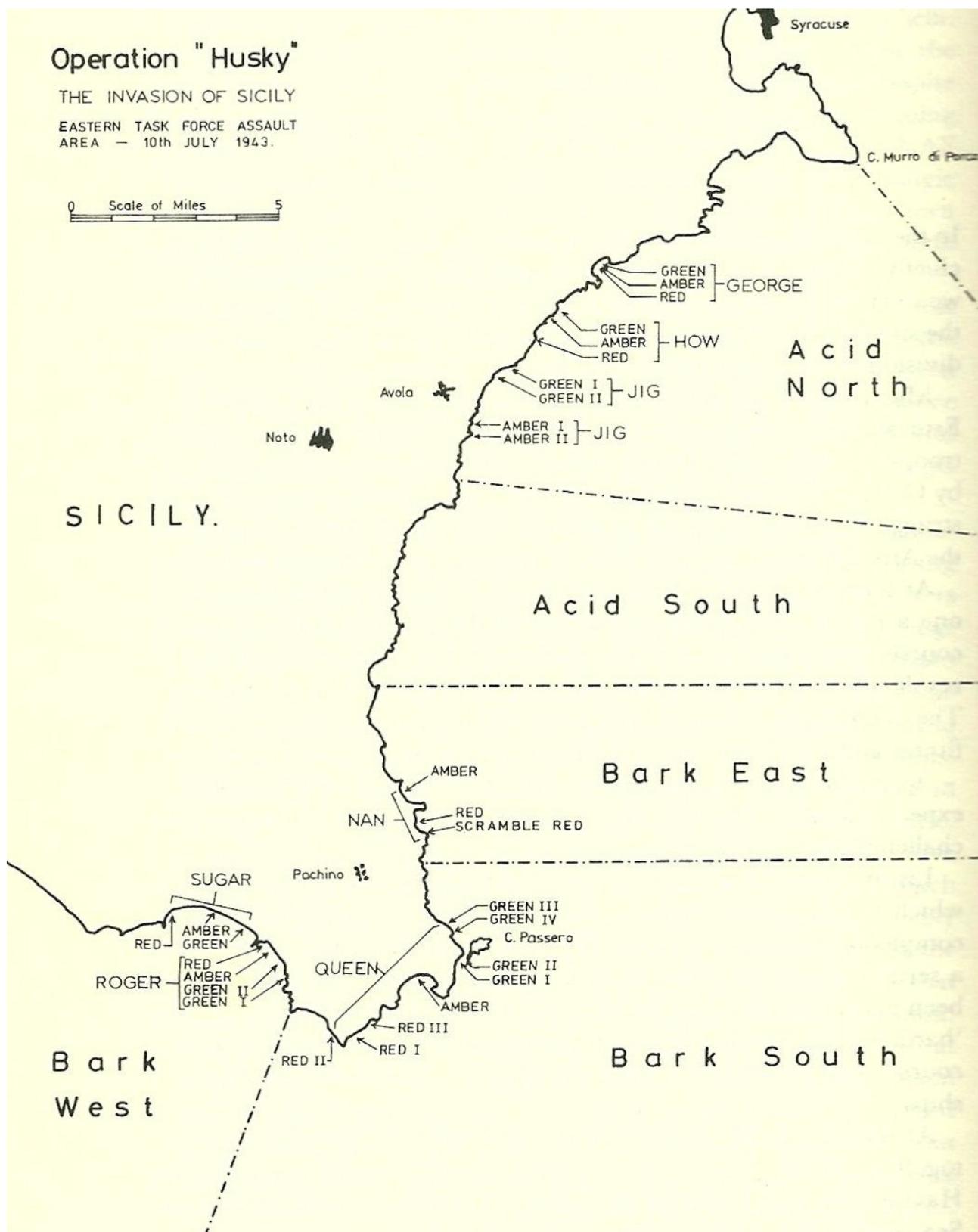
The allied naval force that landed the 15th Army Group on Sicily was divided into two task forces, the Eastern Naval Task Force commanded by Vice Admiral Sir Birtram Ramsay RN which was predominantly Royal Navy which landed the British Eighth Army and the Western Naval Task Force commanded by Vice Admiral H. Kent Hewitt which was US Navy and landed the Seventh United States Army.

The Eighth Army in Sicily was made up of 13 Corps commanded by Lieutenant General M C Dempsey and consisted of the 50th and 5th Divisions. And XXX Corps commanded by Lieutenant General Sir Oliver Lease and consisted of the 51st Highland and the 1st Canadian Division plus reserve formations.

The Eastern Naval Task Force was subdivided into three main Task Groups, Force 'A', Force 'B' and Force 'V' with a smaller Force 'N' plus the Support Force.



Map from the Beachhead Commandos by A. Cecil Hampshire



A total of seven RN Commandos took part in Operation Husky, C, E, F, G, K, M and N. All were attached to the Eastern Naval Task Force to assist the Eighth Army Landings.

US Navy Beach Battalions carried out the equivalent role for the first time, for the Western Naval Task Force landing Seventh United States Army in Sicily.

Force 'V' – Bark West

Force 'V' under Rear Admiral Sir Philip Vian RN in HMS Hilary, which sailed direct from the Clyde in Scotland with the 1st Canadian Division commanded by Major General Guy G Simonds. Attached to his division for the landing were 40 and 41 Commandos Royal Marines with a Special Service Brigade HQ, commanded by [Brigadier Robert Laycock](#). This force landed in Bark West area with the aid of RN Commando N on the 'Roger' beaches and RN Commando G on the 'Sugar' beaches.

The Royal Marine Commandos landed at Commando Cove, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade landed on the Sugar beaches and the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade landed on the Roger beaches.



Photograph from Sugar Beach of the Bark West sector close to Pachino, where the 1st Canadian Division landed, with Roger beach in the distance, where NAN Commando landed in Sicily on the 10th July 1943.

A beach marker is visible on the right hand side, centre right is the beach HQ and further to the left is the gap initially made by beach commandos and later widened by for tanks etc by army sappers. (Picture taken by Frank Royal)

Force 'B' – Bark South

Force 'B' under Rear-Admiral R.R. McGrigor RN in HMS Largs sailed from Tunisian ports with the 154th Brigade of the 51st Highland Division commanded by Major General D N Wimberley.

The 154th Brigade landed on a four-battalion frontage split into two groups for the landing, the brigade group and the Gordon's group (see [51st Highland Division website](#)). This force landed in the Bark East area with the aid of RN Commando M on the green and amber 'Queen' beaches and with the help RN Commando K on the red 'Queen' beaches.

Force 'N' – Bark East

The Smaller Force 'N' under Captain Lord Ashbourne RN in HMS Keren had also sailed from the Middle East and had with them the [231st \(Malta\) Infantry Brigade](#) commanded by Brigadier R E Urquhart. This force landed in the 'Bark East' area with the aid of RN Commando C on the 'Nan' Beaches.

Force 'A' – Acid North

Force 'A' under Rear-Admiral T.H. Troubridge in HMS Bulolo sailed from the Middle East with 13 Corps plus No.3 Army Commando. This force landed in the 'Acid North' area with the aid of RN Commando E on the 'George' beaches and RN Commando F on the 'Jig' Beaches.

[Return to Royal Naval Commandos 1942-45](#)

Sources

Introduction

[Sicily 1943 U.S. Army Centre of Military History](#)

Bitter Victory, The Battle for Sicily 1943 by Carlo D'Este

Sicily – Salerno – Anzio, January 1943 – June 1944, Volume IX of History of United States Naval Operations in World War II by Samuel Eliot Morison

The Beachhead Commandos by A. Cecil Hampshire

Beachhead Assault by David Lee

Force 'V' – Bark West

[London Gazette - Invasion of Sicily - published on the 28th of April 1950](#)

Force 'B' – Bark South

[51st Highland Division website](#)

Force 'A' – Acid North

The Green Beret by Hilary St. George Saunders

Annexe A

Identifying on what beaches each of the RN Commandos landed on.

RN Commandos N and G are identified specifically as landing on Roger and Sugar beaches respectively of Bark West in the [London Gazette - Invasion of Sicily - published on the 28th of April 1950](#) (p2091)

RN Commando M is identified as landing at Cape Passero on the Green and Amber 'Queen' beaches, in Beachhead Assault by David Lee (p80).

RN Commando K are identified as landing also at Cape Passero, in The Beachhead Commandos by A Cecil Hampshire (p93), which indicates they would have probably been on the Red 'Queen' Beaches.

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RN Commando C cannot be placed on any specific beaches, however it is unlikely the 231st Malta Brigade would have landed without a Naval Beach Party to assist it and by a process of elimination it was most likely RN Commando C, putting them on the 'Nan' beaches.

The History of "Naval Beach Control Parties (formerly Royal Naval Beach Commandos)" from the [National Archives](#) which includes the [Royal Navy Beach Commando 'Charlie'](#) page has the following paragraph.

"After its return to the UK from North Africa it was attached to 'Force W' (afterwards 'Force 'G') sailing for Suez via the Cape in March 1943 before taking part in the Invasion of Sicily, Operation Husky' in July 1943."

This would have allowed RN Commando C to prepare prior to the landing with the 231st Malta Brigade in the Middle East and embark with them for Sicily.

RN Commando E is identified as landing on the 'George' beaches, in Beachhead Assault by David Lee (p78).

RN Commando F is identified as landing on the 'Jig' beaches, in Beachhead Assault by David Lee (p78).

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