

# **The Allies and the Mafia - The Unexpected Collaboration that Conquered Sicily**

Essay

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## **Abstract**

On the night of July 9, 1943, one of the most important military operations of World War II began, the Allied landings in Sicily, which resulted in the occupation of the island and which would serve as a base for future Allied armies landing. "Operation Husky" was the invasion of Sicily starting with landings and major air operations in the Gulf of Gela and northern Syracuse.

To ensure the success of the invasion of Sicily, the Allies set out to provide the Germans with false information about the site of the Anglo-American invasion so that the Germans could focus their attention and resources in another direction: a large-scale invasion of the Balkans. A body of a British officer was found; he was believed to have been killed in a plane crash - along with a briefcase containing false documents indicating that the Allies were about to invade Greece and had no plans for Sicily. The carefully crafted plan was successful because the Germans had fallen into the trap and concentrated most of their resources on defending Greece. Faced with all the fierce resistance of the Germans, again confronted with the air superiority of the enemy, the Axis troops were forced to retreat. British troops attacked the eastern part of the island towards Messina, while Canadians and Americans attacked central and western Sicily, and the British successfully occupied the ports of Trapani and Marsala to reach Etna, a mountain strategically located in the north. Despite all the German preparations, the port and the Strait of Messina were conquered by the Allies. The Allies, especially the Americans, asked the Italian mafia to assist in the war against the Germans. Thus, the mafia's support for the US military was substantial enough to pave the way for Allied victories in Sicily and later in mainland Italy.

## **Keywords:**

peace, WWII, Allies, Sicily, coalition

# 1. Table of Contents

<b>1. Table of Contents</b> .....	1
<b>2. Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>3. The operation</b> .....	3
3.1. Who were the Allies? .....	3
3.2. The Allies are targeting Italy .....	3
3.3. The great trick.....	4
3.4. The Allies are advancing.....	5
<b>4. Conclusions</b> .....	6
<b>5. Annexes</b>	
5.1. List of abbreviations.....	7
5.2. List of literature.....	7
5.2.1. Books .....	7
5.2.2. Online sources.....	7
<b>6. Affidavit</b> .....	8

## **2. Introduction**

World War II was a general armed conflict of the mid-twentieth century that devastated much of the globe; it was considered to be the largest and bloodiest ongoing war in human history. There were a lot of bombs, which were widely used by the military and civilians. It is said that this war cost more money and resources than all the other wars combined. The consequences of the war, including new technologies and changes in geopolitical, cultural and economic arrangements, are unprecedented.

After defeating Italy and Germany in the North African campaign of World War II, the United States and Britain, the great allied powers, pursued the invasion of the European countries. The Allies ruled against Italy, hoping that an Allied invasion would pull the fascist regime out of the war, secure the center of the Mediterranean, and divert German divisions on the northwest coast. The Italian Allied campaign began with the invasion of Sicily in July 1943. After 38 days of fighting, the United States and Britain drove the Germans and Italians out of Sicily and prepared to attack mainland Italy.

### **3. The operation**

#### **3.1. Who were the Allies?**

The plan for Operation Husky provided for an Allied amphibious assault on Sicily, one on the southeast coast and one on the central-southern coast. The operation, therefore, required a complex command structure, including field commanders, naval and air forces.

The Allied ground forces consisted of US, British, and Canadian military units and were structured into two separate task forces.

At the beginning of Operation Husky, the Allied Air Force in North Africa and the Mediterranean was organized under the command of the Mediterranean Air Command (MAC), under the command of Air Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder. Force 9, commanded by Lieutenant General Lewis H. Brereton, operated in Tunisia and Egypt, and Air H.Q. Malta, under the command of Air Marshal Sir Keith Park, operated from the island of Malta and also provided air support. This is how Allied troops were distributed during the battle for Sicily:

#### **3.2. The Allies are targeting Italy**

When the Allies won the North African campaign on May 13, 1943, a quarter of a million German and Italian troops were stationed in Tunisia on the North African coast. Britain and the United States were faced with two options: either to transfer forces to the United States to go north to the impending invasion of Europe, or to stay in the theater to attack southern Italy. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill chose the second option. Thus, the forces of the Alliance moved towards Sicily.

Faced with the shocking image of a retreating Afrikakorps and the growing disagreement between the Wehrmacht and Italian soldiers, Mussolini probably felt that the Allied invasion of Sicily was imminent. With 140,000 Italians ready for battle.

At the same time, the US military, backed by the OSS (CIA's predecessor), was using a terrible weapon, a weapon that neither Hitler's generals nor Italy considered: the mafia.

For most, if not all of us, the mafia is the harshest and most violent form of organized crime. It is rightly said that you have to be Sicilian to fully understand the mafia phenomenon and that is because, on a small island in southwestern Italy, the mafia has been a real way of life throughout history.

Unlike the British secret services, which ignored questions about Mussolini's fight against the mafia, OSS saw dissatisfaction with civilians and the "mafia" behind this vast conspiracy. Lucky Luciano, the leader of the American Cosa Nostra, who was serving between 30 and 50 years in prison at the time, in exchange for his release, contacted his oldest acquaintance, Don Calogero Vizzini. Also eager to escape Mussolini's terror, Don Calo used all his influence to mobilize the population to support the US military. Guides to help the Allies cross the tangled mountain roads, eliminating German snipers, offering generous amounts of delicious food in Sicilian cities, were just some of the help offered by the famous Capo Di Tutti Capi to soldiers commanded by General Patton. Moreover, until the landing of American troops, more than half of the Italian soldiers under the command of Colonel Salemi, who were believed to be fighting the resistance on the west coast of Sicily, wore civilian clothes.

### **3.3. The great trick**

The invasion was aided by the provision of false information. In April 1943, a month before the Allied victory in North Africa, German agents recovered the body of a British Royal Navy pilot from the waters off a Spanish beach. Documents in a handcuffed box on the officer's wrist provided a goldmine for information on Allied secret plans, and German agents quickly sent the documents to the chain of command, where they soon reached German leader Adolf Hitler. Hitler carefully analysed the capture plans and made good use of their secret details, directing his troops and ships to strengthen the western Italian islands of Sardinia and Corsica against an impending Allied invasion. There was only one problem: the body recovered was not that of a Royal Marine, but of a homeless man from Wales who committed suicide.

When Hitler sent his army in the summer of 1943, a large Allied invasion force was sailing into Sicily. The pre-dawn invasion of Sicily began on July 10, 1943, codenamed "Operation Husky," with a combined air and sea landing of 150,000 soldiers, 3,000

ships, and 4,000 planes, all headed for the southern shore of the island. The massive offensive had almost been cancelled the day before, when a summer storm broke out, causing serious difficulties for the parachutes descending behind enemy lines that night. However, the storm also worked in favour of the Allies, when Axis defenders on the Sicilian coast believed that no commander would attempt an amphibious landing in such a storm. By the afternoon of July 10, 150,000 Allied troops had reached the Sicilian coast with 600 tanks, supported by naval battleships and air strikes from Allied positions.

Hitler was so deceived by the "trap pilot" that he left only two German divisions in Sicily to fight the Allied soldiers. Even a few days after the attack, he was convinced it was a diversionary exercise and continued to warn his officers to expect mass landings in Sardinia or Corsica.

### **3.4. The Allies are advancing**

For the next five weeks, Patton's army moved along the northwest coast of Sicily, then east to Messina, flanking Montgomery's veteran forces as they moved along the east coast of the island. The Italian fascist regime quickly fell into disrepair, as the Allies had hoped. On July 24, 1943, Prime Minister Benito Mussolini was arrested. Italy allied with Nazi Germany and immediately began secret negotiations with the Allies on the armistice.

On July 25, the day after Mussolini's capture, Italy's first armies begin to withdraw from Sicily. Hitler ordered his forces to draw up contingency plans for withdrawal, but he continued to fight fiercely against the Allied advance.

German and Italian troops tried (for several nights) to evacuate people near the northeastern port of Messina. 1,000 people with vehicles, supplies, and ammunition crossed the Strait of Messina to mainland Italy. The battle for Sicily ended, but the German losses were not severe, and the failure of the Allies to capture the fleeing Axis weakened their predicted victory.

## **4. Conclusions**

In my opinion, the Allied collaboration with civilians has had a huge impact, exponentially increasing the chances of victory in conquering the island. Although the Allies had a very strong army, they also took advantage of the dissatisfaction of civilians who hated law enforcement and the new regime and then sought their help in battle. The Sicilian Mafia, which is known to be the largest mafia in the world, has agreed to help the Allies, and in a very short time, Sicily was under new dominance, and civilians escaped previous problems. These civilian fighters even offered help to Italian soldiers, who, when in danger, were offered civilian clothes so that they could move safely to their homes. Following the collaboration between civilians and Allies, immediately after the end of Operation Husky, huge efforts were made to restore peace. Despite this, after Germany left that territory, the economy managed to recover, thus forming a solid foundation for building an economically prosperous territory. Security had been established, in the end, but mostly for the common people, because the Mafia has remained, as always, an organization that does not respect the law.



## 5. Annexes

### 5.1. List of abbreviations

WW II	World War the Second
MAC	Mediterranean Air Command
OSS	Office of Strategic Services

### 5.2. Literature

#### 5.2.1. Books

Huntley Hayes, C.J. & Moon, P.T. (1941). *Modern History*. Macmillan.

Zaloga, S.J. (2016). *George S. Patton*. Litera.

#### 5.2.2. Online sources

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<https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/cum-i-au-pacalit-englezii-pe-germani-in-vara-lui-1943> [11-01-22]

<https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/au-colaborat-aliatii-cu-mafia-siciliana-in-campania-din-1943> [11-01-22]

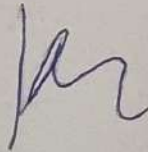
## 6. Affidavit

I declare that I have written the present essay independently and on my own. I have clearly marked any ideas borrowed from other sources as not my own and documented their sources. The essay does not contain any work that I have handed in or have had graded as a previous scientific paper earlier on.

I am aware that any failure to do so constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's thoughts or words as if they were my own – even if I summarise, paraphrase, condense, cut, rearrange, or otherwise alter them.

I am aware of the consequences and sanctions plagiarism entails. Among others, consequences may include nullification of the essay and exclusion from participation in the PSP Forum High School Student Writing Competition. These consequences also apply retrospectively, i.e. if plagiarism is discovered after the essay has been accepted and graded. I am fully aware of the scope of these consequences.

*Signature*



.....  
Denis Șițoiu

Craiova, Romania in January 2022

I hereby confirm that the author is a student of *Tudor Vladimirescu* National Military College, in the class mentioned and that the essay is the entrant's original, unaided work.

Commandant's Signature

.....  
(Colonel GHEORGHE BOBOC)

