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THE INVASION OF SICILY

The following Despatch was submitted to the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force on the 1st January, 1944, by Admiral of the Fleet Sir ANDREW B. CUNNINGHAM, G.C.B., D.S.O.

*Office of the Commander-in-Chief,
Mediterranean.*

1st January, 1944.

I have the honour to forward the accompanying reports on the Invasion of Sicily. Many of these reports have been forwarded previously to the appropriate authorities in order that there should be no delay in the digestion and application of the "lessons learnt." The reports of the naval Task Force Commanders, and of the Vice-Admiral Commanding, Force "H"*, are very full and carefully compiled, giving a complete narrative of the operation in all its stages, and summarising a wealth of experience in the sound conclusions they have reached and suggestions they have offered.†

2. It is not my intention to add a further narrative to those already written nor to do more than comment on salient points of importance. Except in so far as stated in the succeeding paragraphs, I concur fully in the suggestions and recommendations of the Force Commanders.

Planning.

3. The following outstanding lesson emerged from the planning stage of this operation.

4. It is essential, if much time is not to be wasted and much confusion caused, that the responsible Commanders-in-Chief, together

with the Task Force Commanders who will be responsible for the tactical conduct of the battle, should meet at the outset for the discussion and evolution of a sound basic plan which should not thereafter be changed except for reasons of exceptional urgency, such as a complete change in the enemy's dispositions or a major strategic upheaval.

5. In the case of "Husky"* this was not done, since both General Alexander and General Montgomery were absorbed in the Tunisian battle. In consequence, although the operation was authorised on 23rd January and combined planning headquarters set up on 12th February, the final firm plan was not approved until the 12th May. Thus, although five months were available for perfecting plans for the operation, all detailed planning had in fact to be compressed into two months, resulting in some confusion and considerable unnecessary duplication in the issue of orders.

6. It cannot be too clearly recognised that a combined operation is but the opening, under particular circumstances, of a primarily army battle. It is the function of the navy and of the air to help the army to establish a base or bases on the hostile coast from which the military tactical battle to gain the object must be developed. It is upon the army tactical plan for the fulfilment of its object that the combined plan must depend. The navy and the air commanders must join with the army commander to ensure that the base or bases selected for seizure are capable of achievement without prohibitive loss in their respective elements, and that, when seized, they will fulfil the requirements of the force; but it is of no use to plan on the seizure of bases unrelated to the realities of the military situation when ashore.

Admiralty footnotes:

* Force "H"—a British naval force under the command of Vice-Admiral A. U. Willis, C.B., D.S.O., which was employed as a covering force for this operation.

† Only the report and narrative of operations of the Naval Commander, Eastern Task Force are reproduced here.

Admiralty footnote:

* "Husky" was the code name for this operation.