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THE ALLIED ARMIES IN ITALY FROM 3RD SEPTEMBER, 1943, TO 12TH DECEMBER, 1944.

PREFACE BY THE WAR OFFICE.

This Despatch was written by Field-Marshal Lord Alexander in his capacity as former Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in Italy. It therefore concentrates primarily upon the development of the land campaign and the conduct of the land battles. The wider aspects of the Italian Campaign are dealt with in reports by the Supreme Allied Commander (Field-Marshal Lord Wilson) which have already been published. It was during this period that the very close integration of the Naval, Military and Air Forces of the Allied Nations, which had been built up during the North African Campaigns, was firmly consolidated, so that the Italian Campaign was essentially a combined operation. The very intimate relationship between the three Services was undoubtedly one of the governing factors in securing victory.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War on 19th April, 1947, by HIS EXCELLENCY FIELD-MARSHAL THE VISCOUNT ALEXANDER OF TUNIS, K.G., G.C.B., G.C.M.G., C.S.I., D.S.O., M.C., former General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Fifteenth Army Group.

I have the honour to submit my Despatch on the Allied Armies in Italy during the period from 3rd September, 1943, to 12th December, 1944.

The Despatch is divided into the following four parts:

Part I—Preliminary Planning and the Assault.

Part II—The Winter Campaign.

Part III—The Capture of Rome and the Advance to the Arno.

Part IV—The Gothic Line Battles.

PART I.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING AND THE ASSAULT.

Strategic Basis of the Campaign.

The invasion of Italy followed closely in time on the conquest of Sicily and may be therefore treated, both historically and strategically, as a sequel to it; but when regarded from the point of view of the Grand Strategy of the war there is a great cleavage between the two operations. The conquest of Sicily marks the closing stage of that period of strategy which began with the invasion of North Africa in November, 1942, or which might, on a longer view, be considered as beginning when the first British armoured cars crossed the frontier wire into Cyrenaica on 11th June, 1940, the morrow of Mussolini's declaration of war. The invasion of Italy was part of the next period in European strategy which was destined to culminate in the invasion of the West and the destruction of the German armies. When the last German fled across the Straits of Messina the first aim of Allied strategy had been achieved: to clear the enemy from Africa and to open the Mediterranean to the shipping of the United Nations without fear of interruption; in the next phase the Mediterranean theatre would no longer receive the first priority of resources and its operations would become preparatory and subsidiary to the great invasion based on the United Kingdom. It was now called on to break up the victorious team of armies trained in its hard school and to surrender to the West the picked divisions which were to form the spearhead of the assault on the beaches of Normandy.

The nature of the break between the Sicilian and Italian operations is clear from the contrast between the directives for them issued by