

Location of 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", Carlo D'Este, Bitter Victory, The Battle for Sicily.

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.

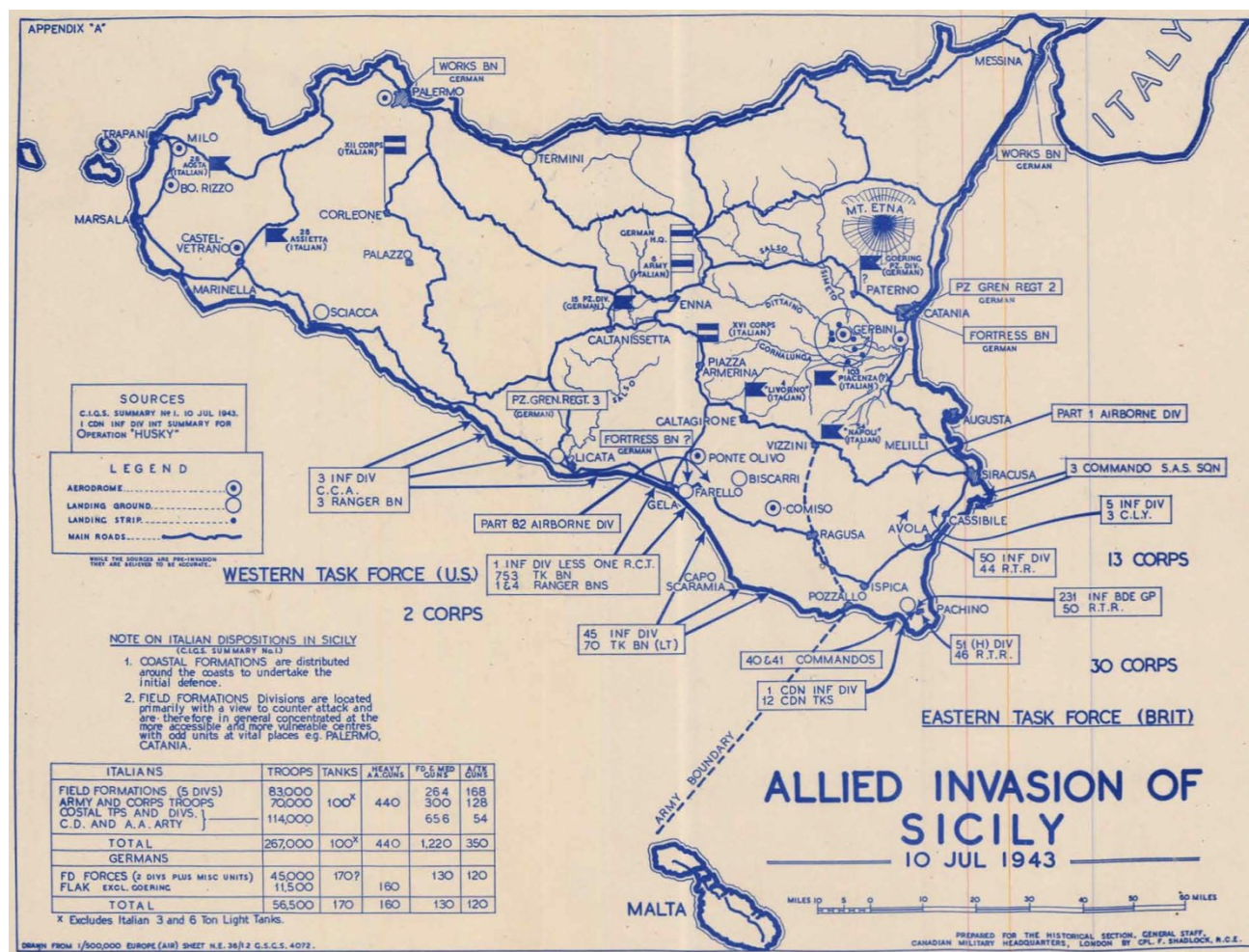
The allied naval force that landed the 15th Army Group on Sicily was divided into two task forces, the Eastern Naval Task Force commanded by Vice Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay RN and was predominantly Royal Navy, landed the British Eighth Army and the US Navy, Western Naval Task Force commanded by Vice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

The Eighth Army in Sicily was made up of XXX Corps and the 13th Corps. XXX Corps was commanded by Lieutenant General Sir Oliver Lease and initially consisted of the 1st Canadian Division, the 51st Highland and the 251st Malta Brigade plus reserve formations. The 13 Corps was commanded by Lieutenant General M C Dempsey and consisted of the 50th and 5th Divisions (see Volume IX of History of United States Naval Operations in World War II by Samuel Eliot Morison, Sicily – Salerno – Anzio, January 1943 – June 1944).

The Eastern Naval Task Force

The Eastern Task Force, with HMS Antwerp as headquarters ship, included three assault convoys. They came from three different directions – Force A from the Middle East under Rear-Admiral Troubridge, Force B composed entirely of landing ships and landing craft from Tunisia under Rear-Admiral McGrigor and Force V from United Kingdom under Rear-Admiral Vian.

Force A from the Middle East had an escort of 58 warships of all classes including 14 destroyers and 11 fleet minesweepers. Force B from Tunisia had an escort of 20 warships including ten destroyers and eight minesweepers. Force V from the United Kingdom had the most numerous escort with four ships in the headquarters group, 21 destroyers, four groups of corvettes, frigates and the like totalling 30, and seven minesweepers, a total of 62. The three forces plus HMS Antwerp therefore numbered 141 warships plus the many hundreds of landing ships and landing craft of the assault forces (Admiralty: The War At Sea VOL IV Part II January December 1943 - p1355 The Assault Convoys: Eastern Task Force).



In addition a total of seven RN Beach Commandos C, E, F, G, K, M and N were attached to the Eastern Naval Task Force and all took part in Operation Husky to assist the Eighth Army Landings. The US Navy Beach Battalions carried out an equivalent role for the Western Naval Task Force landing the Seventh United States Army in Sicily.

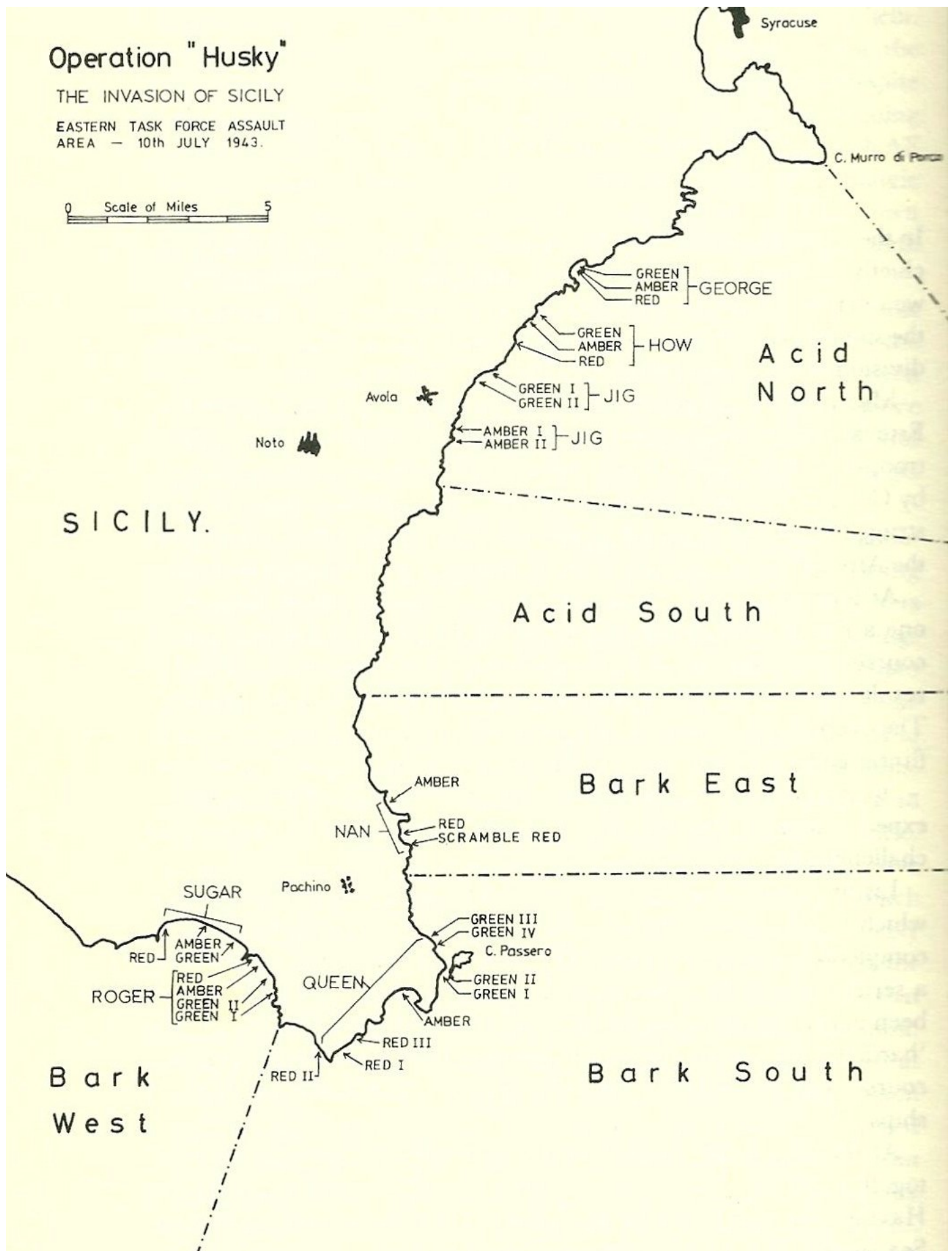
Eighth Army Landings Sites

The Eastern Task Force assault area was divided into smaller 'Assault Areas' (though these are also referred to as Sectors or Beaches) from the east working anti-clockwise these were Bark West, Bark South, Bark East, Acid South, Acid Centre and Acid North.

The Assault Areas were further split into 'Sectors' and each sector was allocated an identifying word from the US phonetic alphabet, in use at that time. The sectors in turn were further divided into 'Beaches' and in the Eastern Task Force assault area these were named from left to right, as you look at the shore Red, Amber and Green. Where there was more than one beach allocated the same colour they were numbered, for example Green I and Green II. See the map on the next page from the Beachhead Commandos by A. Cecil Hampshire.

For example the Assault Area for Force V landing the 1st Canadian Division was Bark West and the Canadian 1st Brigade landed in Roger Sector, with the 48th Highlanders of Canada landing on Green Beach I.

Note there was also a 'parallel system' of 'Beach Numbers', these were normally allocated to a single sector but were also allocated to more than one adjacent sectors, as in the case of Beach 57 that incorporated both the Sugar and Roger sectors of Bark West.



Note George, How and Jig Sectors were actually in Acid Centre not Acid North

Eighth Army Assault Areas

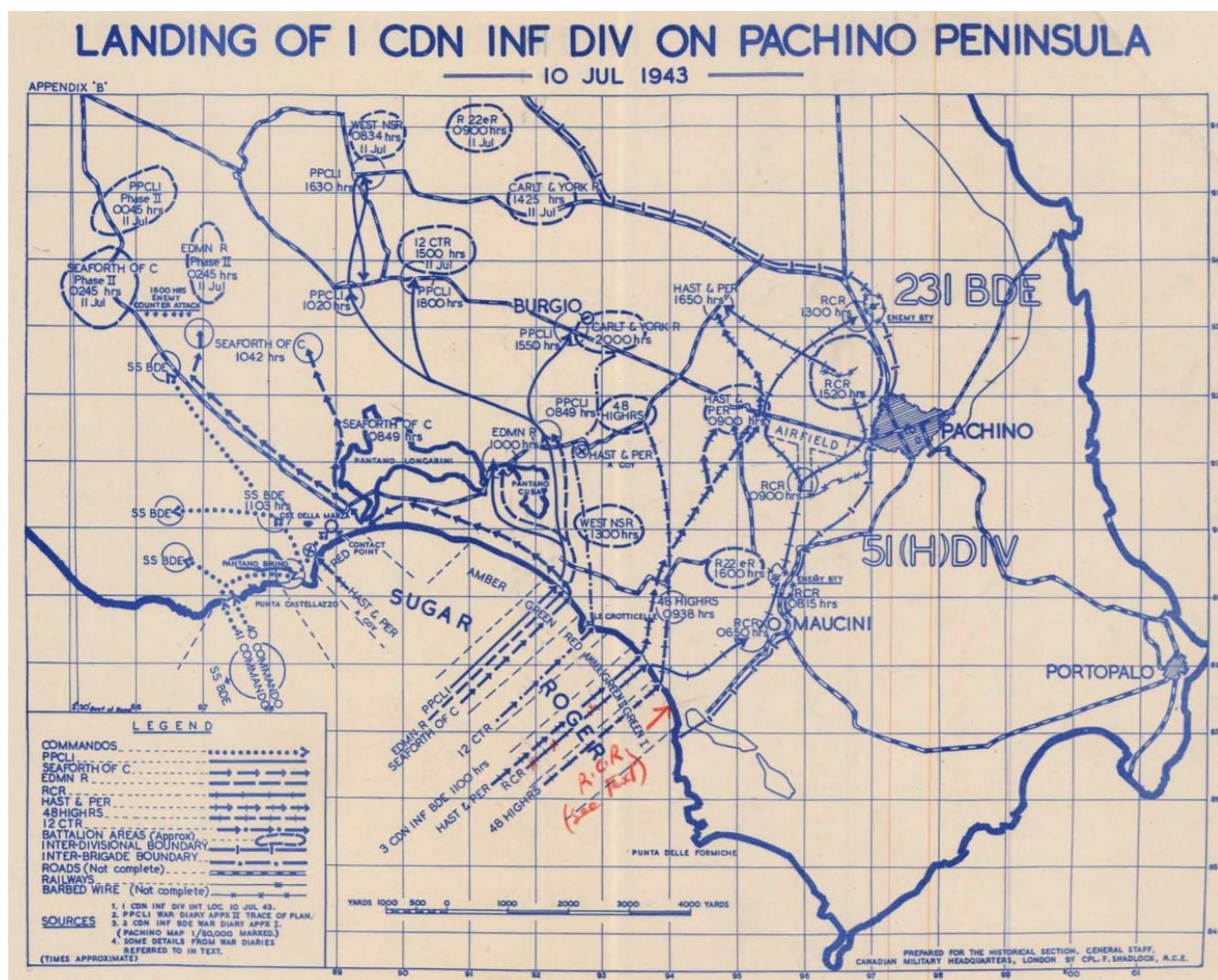
On the 10th of July 1943, the Eighth Army's XXX Corps was landed in the assault areas, Bark West, Bark South and Bark East, whilst the 13th Corps was landed in Acid Centre.

Force 'V' Bark West

Force 'V' under Rear Admiral Sir Philip Vian RN in HMS Hilary sailed direct from the Clyde in Scotland with the 1st Canadian Division and landed in the 'Bark West' area on the left wing of the Eighth Army.

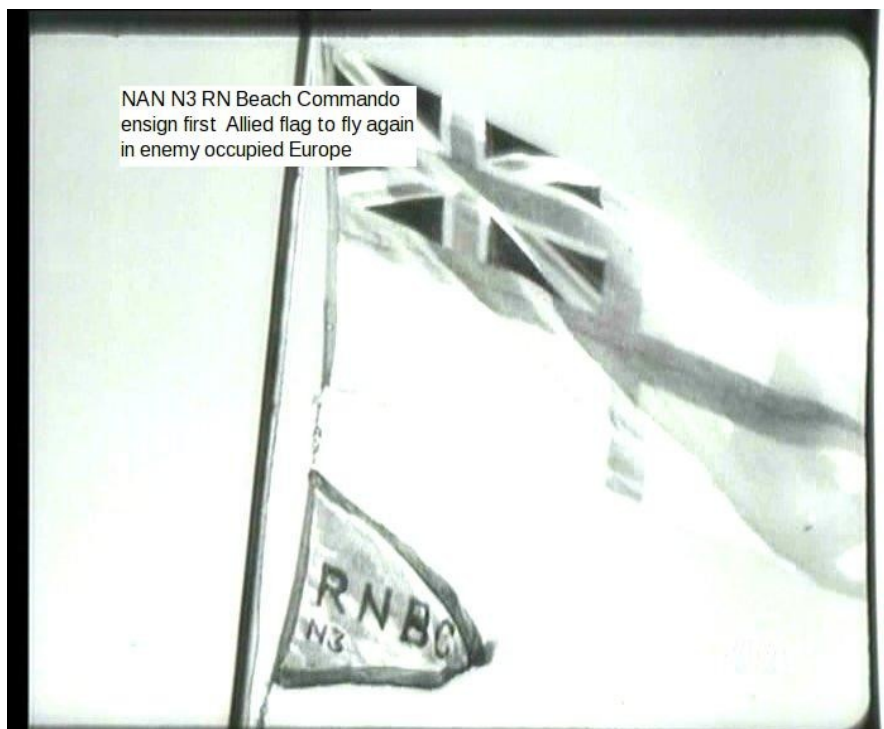
General Guy Simonds commanded the 1st Canadian Division consisting of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigades and formed the left wing of the Eighth Army. Also under his command for the assault landing was a Special Service Brigade commanded by [Brigadier Robert Laycock](#) (later a Major-General and Chief of Combined Operations). The Special Service Brigade that landed in Bark West was composed of 40 and 41 Royal Marine Commandos.

Force 'V' was to land the Canadians in the Bark West assault area on the west side of the Pachino Peninsula, on a total front (including that of the two Commandos) of roughly 10,000 yards. The Royal Marine Commandos landing at Commando Cove were on the extreme left wing of the Eighth Army, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade landed in Sugar sector with the aid of RN Beach Commando G and the 1st and later the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigades landed in Roger sector with the aid of RN Beach Commando N.

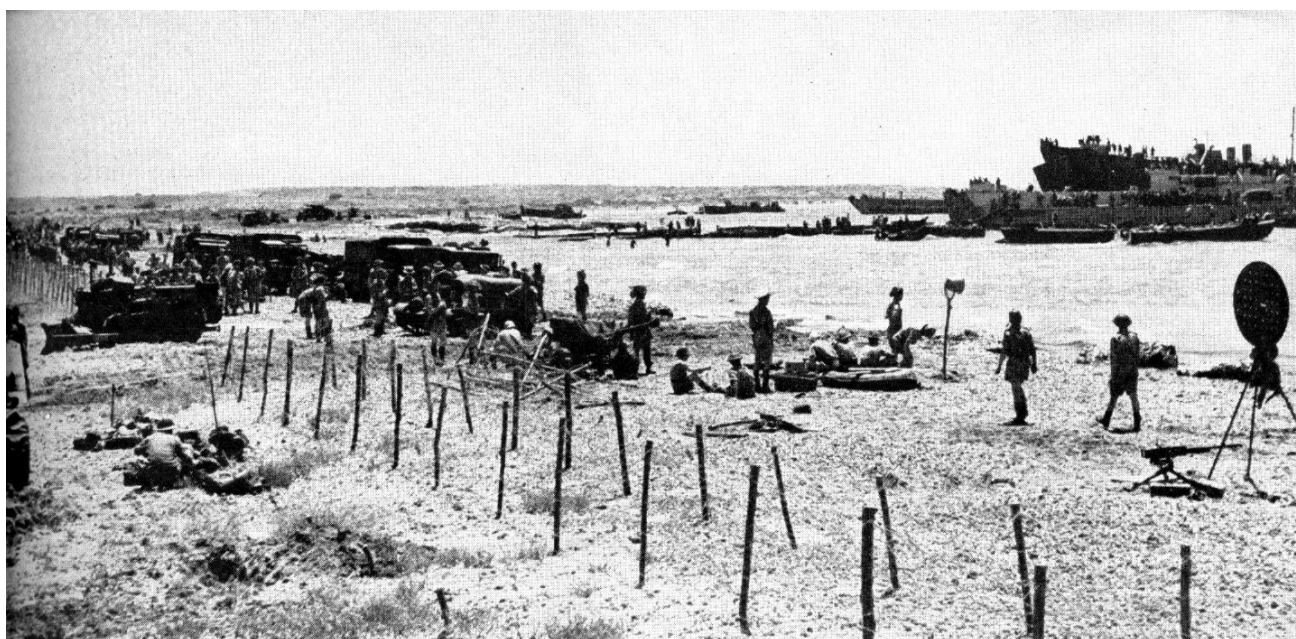


The RN Beach Commando units were sub-divided into three parties and in the case RN Beach Commando N these were N1 party, N2 party and N3 party. In Roger sector N1 party commanded Lt John Russell DSO RN was on Red Beach, N2 commanded by Maurice Redshaw was on the Green Beaches and N3 commanded [Lt Thomas Turton RNVR](#) on Amber Beach.

On "D+2" Nan Commando took over the Sugar beaches of Bark West in addition to the Roger beaches but by 20:30 on "D+4" Wednesday the 14th of July all ships were clear of Bark West and it was closed down though work continued there to salvage damaged craft. Then on the 16th of July Nan Commando moved to "Beach 56" near Portopalo, Queen sector in Bark South.



The photograph below is taken from the Sugar Sector of Bark West area close to Pachino, where the 1st Canadian Division landed on the 10th July 1943. Roger Sector is in the distance. 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 for tanks and other tracked vehicles by army sappers (picture CAN 3393 taken by official photographer Frank Royal).





Possibly Bark West, Roger Sector, Green Beach I

Force 'B' – Bark South

Force 'B' under Rear-Admiral R.R. McGrigor RN in HMS Largs sailed from Tunisia for Malta on the 5th of July with the 51st Highland Division, commanded by Major General D N Wimberley. The division disembarked on the 6th at Valetta where the Division moved into three camps embarking again on the 9th of July for the invasion of Sicily.

The Highland Division landed in Queen sector on a four-battalion frontage led by the 154th Brigade aided by RN Beach Commando M. For the landing the brigade was split into two groups, the 154th brigade group landing on the Red beaches and the 1st Gordon Highlanders group landing on the Green beaches. The 1st Gordon Highlanders group's objectives were the Capo Passero Island and the village of Portopalo, a tuna factory, a lighthouse and the ridge beyond dominating the approach to Pachino, these they achieved by 09:00hrs on the tenth. (details and the map on next page from [51st Highland Division website](#)).



Below Queen Sector, Red Beach II, as troops from 51st Highland Division unload stores from tank landing craft on, 10th July 1943 (IWM A 17916).



Force 'N' – Bark East

The comparatively small Force 'N' under Captain Lord Ashbourne RN in HMS Keren had sailed from the Middle East as part of Force 'A' and had with them the [231st \(Malta\) Infantry Brigade](#) commanded by Brigadier R E Urquhart. This force landed in Nan Sector of the Bark East Assault Area assisted by RN Beach Commando K.

Force 'A' – Acid Centre

Force 'A' under Rear-Admiral T.H. Troubridge in HMS Bulolo sailed from the Middle East with 13 Corps consisting of the 50th and 5th Division plus No.3 Army Commando, three RN Beach Commandos C, E and F assisted the 13th Corps to land in the Acid Centre Assault Area.

Eighth Army Beach Groups for Operation Husky

The RN Beach Commandos worked 'hand in glove' with the Beach Groups (initially referred to as Beach Bricks in the Middle East) for Operation Husky these were;

For XXX Corps

Under command of 1st Canadian Infantry Division landing at Bark West

3rd Beach Group (Pioneer Companies)

4th Beach Group (Pioneer Companies)

No 68 and 69 RAF Beach Units

Under command of the 51st Highland Infantry Division landing at Bark South
20th Beach Group (2nd/4th Battalion, The Hampshire)
21st Beach Group (2nd/4th Battalion, The Hampshire)

Under command of the 231st Malta Brigade landing at Bark East
31st Beach Brick (7th Battalion, Royal Marines, including companies from 3/10 Baluch and the 31st Beach Brick RAF Component)

For the 13th Corps

Under command of the 5th Infantry Division landing Acid Centre
32nd Beach Brick (2nd Battalion, The Highland Light Infantry, including companies from 3/12 Frontier Force Rifles and the 32nd Beach Brick RAF Component)
Under Command of 50th Infantry Division landing at Acid Centre
33rd Beach Brick (1st Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders including companies from 3/12 Frontier Force Rifles and the 33rd Beach Brick RAF Component)
34th Beach Brick (1st Battalion, The Welch Regiment including companies from 3/10 Baluch and the 34th Beach Brick RAF Component)

References; [Sicily 9th July – 17th August 1943 – British Order of Battle](#)
and [RAF Beach Unit Operation Husky](#).

Identifying the Beaches the RN Commandos Landed On

RN Beach 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 Beach Commando M is identified as landing at Cape Passero on the Green and Amber 'Queen' beaches, in Beachhead Assault by David Lee (p80). As the division was landing on a single brigade front, the landing would of required only one RNBC.

RN Beach Commando K are identified as landing off Cape Passero and having trained prior to the operation at Aqaba, Jordan, in The Beachhead Commandos by A Cecil Hampshire (p93), so would have come from the Middle East as had the 231st Malta Brigade which indicates they would have probably landed in Nan Sector of the Bark East Assault Area.

RN Beach Commando E is identified as landing on the George Sector beaches of the Acid Centre Assault Area, in Beachhead Assault by David Lee (p78).

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

RN Commando C have not been placed on any specific beaches, however logically it is likely they controlled the How Sector beaches of the Acid Centre Assault Area, as they were attached to 'Force W' with E and F RN Beach Commandos. All three sailing for Suez via the Cape in March 1943 before taking part in the Invasion of Sicily, Operation Husky' in July 1943.