



Battle for Sicily: Stepping Stone to Victory

Ian Blackwell

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On the night of 9-10 July 1943, an Allied armada launched the invasion of Sicily, a larger operation than the Normandy landings the following year. Over the next thirty-eight days, half a million Allied servicemen fought the Germans and Italians for control of this rocky island, which was to become the first part of Axis homeland to fall during World War II.

Despite their success in capturing the island, inter-Allied and inter-service divisions and rivalries robbed them of the opportunity to inflict a crushing defeat on the Germans and Italians, who were able to conduct a fighting withdrawal to the Italian mainland and save sizable forces to continue the war. Regarded by some as a "blind alley" and by others as the way into Europe via the "soft underbelly", the decision to invade Sicily was and remains controversial. Notwithstanding the campaign's failure to achieve its potential, invaluable lessons were learned which contributed to success in France later. Many of the leading generals who were to take prominent roles in northwest Europe – amongst them Eisenhower, Montgomery, Bradley and Patton – brought with them the experience of Sicily.

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