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# "To bury the dead and to feed the living"

## Allied Military Government in Sicily, 1943

Cindy Brown

*"It was also obvious, to the early planners, that many strategic and tactical events and conditions could not possibly be anticipated – a situation which made all phases of CA/MG more difficult to estimate, operate and maintain."*<sup>1</sup>

In the 70 years since Allied soldiers landed on the island of Sicily many accounts have been published about the genesis and conduct of the campaign. Few, however, consider the effect the intense military operations had on the Sicilian people and the measures taken by the Allies to reduce the impact on civilians. In fact, the few references to Allied Military Government (AMG) highlight the role the Allies played in re-introducing known *mafiosi* back into the Sicilian social and political landscape after Mussolini was reportedly successful in his campaign to rid the country of the crime organization.<sup>2</sup> It is true that civil affairs officers were forced, due to a lack of resources, to rely on existing, anti-Fascist administrators which opened the door for certain unsavory individuals to seize opportunities and positions of power. The scenario emerged out of necessity, however, and should not discount the impact AMG had on the health and welfare of the civilian population during and after the Sicilian campaign. The elaborate AMG administrative structure was designed to facilitate Allied operations on the island by relieving fighting troops from the

**Abstract: This article examines the little-known Allied effort to provide for the needs of the Sicilian civilian population during Operation Husky. Allied Military Government (AMG) was created in January 1943 to support the strategic aim of knocking Italy out of the war by creating and maintaining a benevolent atmosphere on the island. The duty of civil affairs officers was to relieve the fighting troops from the challenge of delivering humanitarian aid or dealing with a hostile population. Despite some mishaps and missteps on the part of planners, civil affairs made a significant contribution to the success of Operation Husky.**

problem of delivering humanitarian aid or dealing with a possibly hostile population. These measures, despite mishaps and some underestimations, made a significant contribution to the success of Operation Husky. For the longer term, AMG allowed for the rehabilitation of the apparatus of the Sicilian government, and other infrastructure essential to deliver the basic necessities of day to day life; these underpinnings of civil society had been degraded by decades of Fascist mismanagement even before the severe damage resulting from the military operations.

Unprecedented in scope and its multi-national nature,<sup>3</sup> AMG was a complex organization intended to restore peace and stability to a population ravaged by war and twenty years of Fascism. The cost of the planning and execution of Allied Military Government in Sicily was significant, drawing on the already limited resources available for the secondary effort in the Mediterranean. It was also a dangerous assignment for the civil affairs officers who often worked close to the front lines. In the end, the effort devoted to AMG paid off. Although Allied Armies were entering enemy territory, the population accepted Allied soldiers as liberators. This was fortunate for civil affairs officers as the implementation of military government in Sicily was a trial run for the organization that would soon have to be developed in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Many lessons learned in Sicily were integrated into plans for future operations.

This article looks at the planning, application, and then briefly considers the follow on operations and lessons learned from the Sicily operation. Allied Military Government in Sicily was predominantly staffed

by American and British soldiers. Although the Canadian Army only played an ad hoc role in the military governance of Sicily, the function carried out by civil affairs officers was still required in their area of operations, as the article will demonstrate. In the absence of civil affairs contingents in the Canadian sector, Canadian regiments were required to fulfill the role.

The plan for Allied Military Government of Sicily was born at the Casablanca conference in mid-January when the decision was made to return to German-occupied Europe via the Italian island, leaving less than six months to define the organization and recruit and train personnel. The objective for the military governance of Sicily was first and foremost to relieve

combat troops from "the necessity of providing for civil administration." The second objective was "to restore law and order and normal conditions among the civil population as soon as possible."<sup>4</sup> All of this was in support of the overall Allied goal of knocking Italy out of the war. There were a number of indications that the Italian people were tiring of the Fascist-led war and Allied planners believed that the population would be "responsive to a just, efficient, and disinterested administration." Planners thought that the best course of action was to inform Sicilians that the Allied attack was intended to deliver them from the Fascist regime and "to restore Italy as a free nation."<sup>5</sup> In spite of intelligence that indicated that Italians were tired of war, planners could not be certain that Allied

force, seven reinforced divisions and elements of two airborne divisions, would be welcomed as liberators by the Sicilians. The German presence throughout Italy meant the German army could seize control of factories and workers and disarm soldiers at the first sign of an Allied invasion.<sup>6</sup> This fact weighed heavily on the minds of Allied planners who understood that the threat posed by the well-placed and strong German forces could deter Italian cooperation. Much of the planning for AMG was based on the best available evidence and a great number of assumptions about what a campaign on the island of Sicily might bring.

Despite the uncertainty about the Sicilian reaction, the Allies planned for the best case scenario. Although the debate at Casablanca wavered

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**Officers of the London Metropolitan Police were recruited to mentor the Italian Carabinieri in occupied Sicily. Italian Carabinieri worked with civil affairs officers to maintain peace in the towns and villages of Sicily.**

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"To bury the dead and to feed the living" Allied Military Government in Sicily, 1943



**Sicilian children.**

between the choices of direct or indirect Allied control in Sicily, the lack of personnel necessitated plans for a system of indirect control. Under this system, civil affairs officers were appointed to oversee and advise on the administration of large territories. Civil affairs officers were responsible for determining if existing administrators, including mayors, prefects, and even teachers, were suitable to remain in their posts. It was expected that the majority of the existing Italian administration would remain intact. When possible, willing anti-fascists would be appointed to positions of authority in the provincial administration.<sup>7</sup> The decision to implement indirect rule still had a heavy personnel requirement: the operation required 400 civil affairs officers, approximately one for every 10,000 Sicilians.<sup>8</sup> Many of these civil affairs officers had little to no prior

experience in military government or with the military in general.

The planned structure for military governance in Sicily included six administrative divisions. These divisions, legal, finance, civilian supply, public health, public safety, and enemy property, accounted for all facets of civilian life. Providing the expertise for this diverse organization was no small feat. Once the decision was made to invade Sicily, the Allies had less than six months to recruit and train enough civil affairs officers to staff AMG. From the outset, AMG was a fully integrated multinational Allied effort<sup>9</sup> which allowed for both the British and the Americans to draw on their own experience and expertise.<sup>10</sup> The British had a number of personnel who had prior military government experience in North Africa while the Americans recruited a number

of their civil affairs officers from the large Italian-American population, many of whom still had connections to Italy. Italian-Americans of recent origin had language skills and knowledge of Italian culture which proved infinitely valuable.<sup>11</sup> In June and July 1943 approximately 300 soldiers participated in training programs but the learning curve was steep as very few had prior military experience. Two-week civil affairs courses were held in North Africa to provide personnel with instruction in the Italian language, a basic understanding of military government with particular emphasis on the situation in Sicily and Italy, specific knowledge related to the divisions of expertise, and physical training.<sup>12</sup> The two-week training program was designed to be comprehensive, but such a short course could hardly prepare these

civil affairs officers to enter hostile territory and assume control of civil administration.

The structure created for military governance in Sicily was based on detailed assessments, including but not limited to how much food should be available from local agriculture in the summer period, what proportion of the Italian administration could be continued, and, as we have seen, estimates about how well Allied troops and military government might be received. The reality of the situation proved much different from the projections in important instances. On the ground, the structure of the six divisions and their operations evolved on the basis of practical day to day experience. To understand how events unfolded it is useful to look at the specific responsibilities of the six administrative divisions. The breadth of these responsibilities shows that Allied planners intended to provide comprehensive support aimed to restore Italy to its pre-fascist state.

The legal division was responsible for ensuring commanders worked within the limits of international law including the Hague Conventions during the administration of military government. In addition, CAOs of the legal division issued proclamations declaring the authority of military

government and describing how it worked; they created military courts to try war crimes and ensured existing civilian courts functioned properly.<sup>13</sup> The finance division administered all matters relating to currency and exchange. As a temporary emergency measure, the first task of the Finance Civil Affairs Officer upon entering a town or city was to close the banks to prevent mass withdrawals which could lead to financial collapse. Once the situation was deemed stable, the Italian banks were to be permitted to re-open, under appropriate Allied supervision. The finance division also instituted an Allied currency for procuring supplies which, in the event, had the effect of causing rampant inflation both on Sicily and the mainland.<sup>14</sup>

One of the main tasks of AMG was to ensure that the occupied populations would remain peaceful and orderly. This was partly achieved by the legal and finance divisions which mitigated the risk of chaos by ensuring the legal components of civil life continued and by the temporary closure of banks. The public safety division, responsible for civil police matters, provided the final deterrent to crime and chaos. The lack of personnel, however, meant that AMG personnel were forced to rely on the existing national police

force, the *Carabinieri*, technically part of the Italian Armed forces but traditionally loyal to the monarchy and not the Fascist head of state.<sup>15</sup> To solve this problem, AMG formed a special detachment of the London Metropolitan Police designated as Civil Affairs Police Officers (CAPOs) who acted as mentors and liaisons with the *Carabinieri*, a role which foreshadowed the recent use of Police Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (POMLTs) in Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup> In the course of operations, the work of the London Metropolitan Police in their mentoring role had the added effect of restoring faith in the national police force.<sup>17</sup>

The public health and civilian supply divisions were both concerned with the health and welfare of the Italian population. The timing of the Sicily operation, planned for the height of summer, had its advantages and disadvantages. Casualties were expected from Allied bombing operations throughout the spring and summer of 1943 and the dead trapped beneath crumbled buildings threatened the health of the survivors in the hot and humid Sicilian summer sun. Public health was responsible for ensuring those bodies were recovered and properly buried to prevent widespread disease. In addition, public health was responsible for all issues associated with the welfare of civilians, including mass relief, disease prevention (including venereal disease) and ensuring civilian hospitals were assessed and, when possible, opened and staffed by Italian doctors and nurses. Feeding the population and providing other necessary commodities was the role of the civilian supply division. Intelligence indicated that Sicily




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**The lack of personnel and resources meant that civil affairs officers had to rely on the labour of local civilians to repair battle damage in villages.**

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was self-sufficient in wheat and the landings would happen around the harvest time. In spite of this, the civilian supply division was expected to organize a 90-day emergency store and to control rationing.<sup>18</sup> As will be seen, even these essential tasks were hindered by the shortage of resources and organizational issues.

The final division, enemy property, at first sight seems somewhat outside the scope of AMG. It would prove, especially as the campaign in Italy progressed to the mainland and the Italian nation became co-belligerents in the fight, very important in maintaining good relations with the Italian populace. The main task of enemy property was to restore goods to the rightful owners. In addition, the division was responsible for the protection and conservation of Italian property. Within the enemy property division was an educational advisor, responsible for assessing local schools and curriculum and an advisor on fine arts and monuments. The latter was given the task of assessing and protecting sites, monuments, and archives of cultural, religious, and historical importance as far as it was militarily feasible. The Allies intended to distinguish themselves from the Germans through their efforts to protect Italy's historical and cultural treasures.

Limited resources and personnel, minimum training, and the diverse responsibilities of the six divisions meant that the use of existing Italian institutions became an important solution for the successful operation of Allied Military Government in Sicily. Although initially a pragmatic decision due to lack of resources and personnel, the use of existing Italian institutions had the effect of rehabilitating the civic nature of Italian society and restoring the faith of the people in an Italian-run administration. Moreover, the nature of the divisions and their assigned tasks proved the Allies

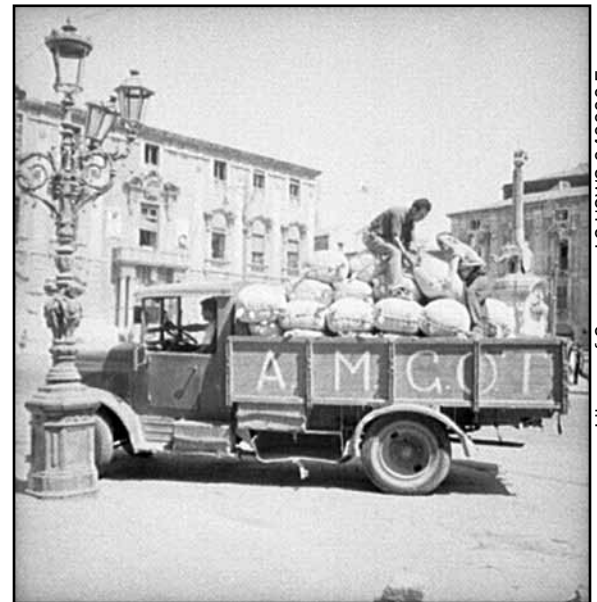
intended to treat the Italians in a benevolent manner despite the fact that the Italian nation was both Fascist and enemy in July 1943.<sup>19</sup> From the outset, the plan was to encourage the Sicilians and Italians to cooperate by insisting that Mussolini was the enemy, not the Italian people. The assaulting troops carried with them a message from General Eisenhower that stated that Allied troops were occupying Italian territory, not as enemies of the Italian people, but to overturn the German and Italian tyranny, and restore the traditional laws and traditions of the Italian people.<sup>20</sup> A further message from President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill was drafted to be broadcast to the Italian people after the Allies had gained a foothold on the island and could be reasonably sure of the success of the mission. Roosevelt and Churchill placed the onus on the Italian people:

The time has now come for you, the Italian people to consult your own self-respect and your own interests and your own desire for a restoration of national dignity, security and peace. The time has come for you to decide whether Italians shall die for Mussolini and Hitler – or live for Italy and for civilization.<sup>21</sup>

Fortunately, the gamble paid off and the Sicilian population regarded the Allies as liberators. The troops and civil affairs officers were welcomed for the most part with enthusiasm and, in some cases, wine.<sup>22</sup> The critical lack of resources, Allied bombardments, and the inexperience of many of the civil affairs officers could have led to disaster had the population not been so receptive. One of the most important lessons learned in the first few days was the



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**Allied trucks deliver flour to the main piazza in Catania, Sicily.**

requirement for civil affairs officers to advance with the fighting troops. As the fighting troops penetrated into the island they encountered Sicilian populations who were sometimes, but not always, enthusiastic and receptive but at other times a threat to the advance. Civil affairs officers were hindered from the beginning because of the lack of integration with the fighting forces. In the initial landings on 10 July 1943, only a minimal number of AMG personnel were permitted to land on the beaches with the first waves of assault troops.<sup>23</sup> These CAOs were expected to assess the local situation



**Top: Although language was a barrier, Allied soldiers found a way to communicate with local civilians. Here French Canadian troops speak with an Italian soldier (middle) in French. That Italian soldier was later recruited by civil affairs to serve on a local firefighting crew. Above: To avoid financial chaos, civil affairs closed all banks as soon as they entered a city. With the cooperation of local civilians and the Carabinieri, the banks were re-opened when the situation in a particular city was deemed stable. By September 1943, all banks on the island of Sicily were re-opened.**

and begin the process of forming the provincial administration in the area of occupation.<sup>24</sup> These CAOs were often left with few resources to accomplish their task. Lieutenant-Colonel Gerald Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, was part of the first wave of civil affairs officers that landed with the assault forces on D-Day. Wellesley and his fellow civil affairs officers came ashore about ten miles south of Syracuse. Their landing was virtually unopposed and the only casualties were the result of mines. Wellesley's instructions were to wait until Syracuse was liberated and then assume control of the military administration of the town until his successor arrived. The critical lack of transport left no vehicles for civil affairs detachments and Wellesley was instructed to hitch-hike the ten miles into the city.<sup>25</sup> Wellesley's situation was typical for the civil affairs officer in Sicily who, once on the beach, was left "abandoned to fend for himself" with "no food, pay, mail, batman, or transport."<sup>26</sup>

Wellesley's mission in Syracuse was temporary; his primary task was

to oversee military administration of the city of Catania. Sitting at the eastern base of Mount Etna, Catania had a population of approximately 250,000 inhabitants in 1943. Wellesley's experience in Catania offers an example of what civil affairs in Sicily looked like and insight into the type of lessons learned. The Germans put up stiff resistance at Catania and for three weeks the city was subject to Allied bombardment from the air and the sea. On 5 August, parts of the city were liberated. Wellesley arrived to set up military administration and make his initial assessments. Three weeks of bombardment and heavy fighting in and around Catania caused unprecedented damage; telephone and tram wires were lying on top of the rubble of blown out houses; tram cars were stopped in streets blocked with rubble, and great amounts of waste paper littered the streets from blown out office buildings.<sup>27</sup>

Wellesley's first task was to contact what remained of the local administration to get a situation

report. He met with the town mayor and the local prefect and determined that only 25 percent of the populace remained in the city. Food and electricity were non-existent and the water supply was cut by the Germans in their retreat. The other significant problem encountered in Catania was the massive number of unburied dead. Although a problem in many parts of Italy throughout the war, the situation in Catania was particularly acute because the town cemetery was located next to the port and the train station, the location of the heaviest Allied bombardment. Conditions were too dangerous to approach the area and the dead piled up during the weeks of bombing. To make matters worse, nearly half of the remaining population was living in air raid shelters and subjected to unsanitary conditions.<sup>28</sup> The dead needed to be buried and the living properly fed and housed in order to avoid an outbreak of disease. The dire situation in Catania caused Wellesley to proclaim that the primary task of civil affairs in Italy was "to bury the dead and to feed the living."<sup>29</sup> The

phrase would become the mantra of civil affairs as the campaign progressed through Italy.

Feeding the living and burying the dead was a complicated task that required a great deal of organization and labour on the part of civil affairs detachments. Finding transport to remove dead bodies or to bring in grain to feed the living was a challenge for Wellesley and his fellow civil affairs officers. When civil affairs detachments were able to scrounge transport, it was quickly seized by the troops.<sup>30</sup> In Catania, Wellesley was able to bring in grain enough from nearby Lentini using military trucks to meet immediate needs. But finding food was only half the battle. The mill in Catania was still under German fire and Wellesley could not risk sending military trucks loaded with grain. To solve the problem, Wellesley organized labour to remove the grain from the trucks, transfer it to carts and take it to the mill where it was ground, then transported back to the bakery where it was made into bread before it was distributed to the local population.<sup>31</sup> The problem of feeding the population only worsened as the campaign continued. On 21 August, Wellesley needed 27 tons of wheat to feed the population. Three weeks later, the requirement was closer to 100 tons.<sup>32</sup>

Transportation issues plagued civil affairs officers throughout Sicily. In Licata, on the southwest coast, AMG officers were forced to use a hearse to transport grain to the local mill, only to find out that the mill was run by electricity, which was not functioning. The grain had to be loaded back onto the hearse and taken to a nearby town which had a steam-powered mill. When Messina was finally liberated in August,

AMG transported grain by sea on tank landing craft (LCTs) and small Italian craft from Palermo.<sup>33</sup> Back in Catania, Wellesley was able to meet immediate needs only because of the reduced population. As more locals returned to the city, he could not find sufficient grain to feed everyone. In addition to the immediate needs of food and the removal of the dead, civil affairs organized sapper teams to remove mines and repair water mains and signalmen to restore electricity. It took two to three weeks to restore water and electricity in Catania. While the engineer and signals units took care of restoring water and electricity, Wellesley recruited local labour to clear the streets of rubble to allow for military traffic.<sup>34</sup> Wellesley was pleased with the efforts of the locals, commenting that the streets were cleared within 24 hours.<sup>35</sup>

Wellesley's efforts in Catania meant that the army commanders could focus on their main task of waging war against the Germans. Catania was among the largest Sicilian cities and planners expected the cities, especially those subject

to regular bombardment, would require more supplementary food and supplies in order to maintain a minimum standard.<sup>36</sup> The smaller towns and rural villages were expected "to live off their own fat and off the surrounding country."<sup>37</sup> This philosophy, in addition to the rapid movement of the campaign in some sectors, the minimal amount of resources, and the lack of integration of civil affairs with the troops meant that, in some cases, the fighting forces had to deal with problems that were normally the responsibility of civil affairs. Inland of the Pachino landing beaches, Canadian troops found an abundance of fruit trees and olive orchards but were immediately struck by the local squalor and "the hordes of natives (who) were returning from further inland by foot and donkey wagon which added very considerably to the already heavy road congestion."<sup>38</sup> Organizing and screening refugees kept civil affairs detachments busy throughout Sicily and Italy. The abundance of local agricultural products meant these refugees, for a time at least, would be able to feed themselves until



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**The damage to Sicilian towns was extensive**

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military governance was organized in the sparsely-populated area of southeastern Sicily.

After debarking at Pachino, Canadian troops advanced into the Sicilian interior. The towns, such as Ispica, Modica, and Rosolini,<sup>39</sup> had been targeted by air and naval bombardment to soften German and Italian defences. By all accounts, Allied attempts were successful:

The town of SPACCAFORNO (ISPICA) is built on a rock cliff towering sheer to a height of 150 feet and heavily defended by extensive

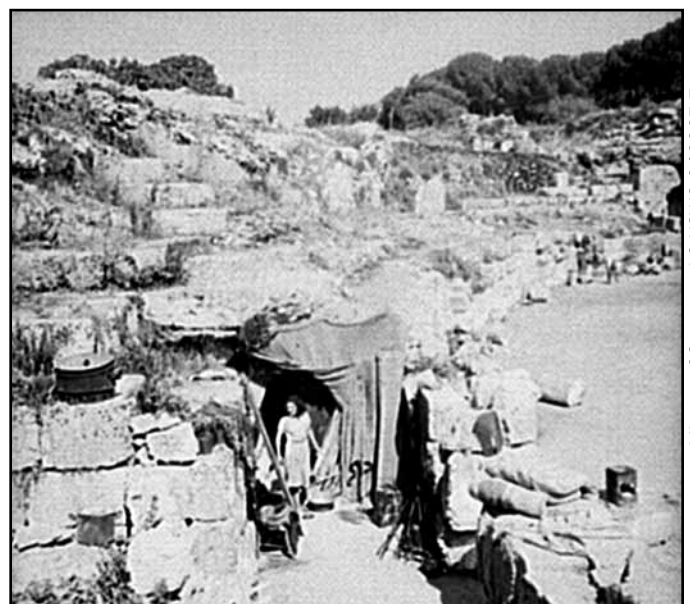
barbed wire fields. The groundworks on approaches to the town are good but artillery and tanks have completely ruined them. The town is old world, with a population of about 2000 souls. It is built on the stepped-up terraces well up on the crest of the rocky cliff. Towering above all is the town church in the early Italian Renaissance style of architecture. It is unfortunate that this town had to have a baptism of the effectiveness of the Allied Air Forces and deadliness of their efficiency is clearly seen [sic].<sup>40</sup>

Many of the towns suffered damage to their infrastructure due to both the construction of Italian and German defensive works and Allied bombing. The repair fell to civil affairs. The lack of transport and organization meant that civil affairs officers were not always immediately available to assume control of a town. The job of civil affairs was to ensure "there is no interference with the military operations and with the fighting forces by the civilian populations because of disease, or want, or hunger."<sup>41</sup> In the absence of a civil affairs detachment, the fighting forces did not ignore the requirement to care for the most urgent needs of the civilian population. When C Company of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada entered Pozzallo, on the southeast coast of Ispica on 11 July, they discovered that the inhabitants were starving. The Fascist mayor

**Left: Approximately 2,000 civilians took refuge in the catacombs in Syracuse in July and August 1943.**

**Below left: Extensive war damage forced some Sicilians to find makeshift shelter. Here a family lives in a Roman amphitheatre.**

**Below right: Many civilians fled the cities. Civil affairs had to organize the refugees as they returned home.**





**Left: Italian and British soldiers work together restore electricity to the towns.**  
**Right: The cities suffered extensive damage from Allied bombings and German destruction.**

had fled at the first sign of invasion and abandoned the town.<sup>42</sup> With the help of a priest and the postmaster, the Seaforths located the granary, broke into it and distributed its contents to the people to alleviate the situation.<sup>43</sup> Such a feat in the middle of an advance took time and effort to organize by the Seaforths, whose time would be better spent in continuing the fight or resting and recovering for the next phase. In spite of this, their actions received the approval of the corps commander, Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese.<sup>44</sup>

The absence of a civil affairs detachment embedded with the advanced troops meant that there was a lack of security in occupied towns. In a few cases, the fighting troops encountered snipers and had to clear and re-clear the towns and villages before they could continue operations. After an artillery bombardment the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry accepted the surrender of the occupying troops in the town of Modica in the early hours of 12 July. A few hours later, a corporal from the Seaforths entered the town and was surrounded by

Italian soldiers and civilians who were desperate to surrender the town lest it be subjected to another bombardment. The corporal took a representative with him back to divisional headquarters. Later that same morning, small detachments from the Royal Canadian Regiment and from the Seaforths again entered the town, believing it to be cleared. They were ambushed in the main piazza. The FOO ordered an artillery bombardment, after which the Seaforths and RCR cleared the surrounding houses, taking more than 80 prisoners and capturing several enemy guns. The Edmonton regiment placed a platoon in the town to maintain security.<sup>45</sup> After the town was cleared, C Company of the Seaforths "...had established a flour mill, opened up a bread line, elected a new town council, and had collected, with civilian help, a large dump of captured enemy equipment" all within hours. On 14 July, arrangements were made for the company to rejoin the Seaforth Regiment.<sup>46</sup>

In Ragusa, the Edmonton Regiment suffered seven casualties

as a result of sniping when they entered the town on 15 July. Thirty Corps headquarters sent an officer to the town "with instructions to mark down 6 or 12 hostages who will be shot if this happens again."<sup>47</sup> A civil affairs detachment, if present, would have organized local administration and security upon entering the town, relieving the troops to go about their task of fighting the Germans and Italians. To his credit, Lieutenant-General Leese recognized the error of not including civil affairs officers in early loading schedules.<sup>48</sup>

Incidents in Ragusa, Modica, and Ispica, like those described above, led 1st Canadian Division to make arrangements for civil affairs. On 14 July, orders came down to station a platoon of reinforcements in each of the three towns for garrison duties.<sup>49</sup> Between 16 July and 3 August, Lieutenant Syd Frost was the town major for Ispica. His experiences, about which he writes in his memoirs, reveal the suffering of local civilians, the delicate job of a civil affairs officer, and the welcome Canadian soldiers received in the towns of south-eastern Sicily.<sup>50</sup> Frost, unlike



**Left: Upon entering a town, the civil affairs officer in charge posted a series of proclamations in Italian and English outlining the terms of military government. Right: Carabinieri on duty in Sicily.**

the American and British officers working in Sicily in July and August 1943 to deliver aid and keep the peace in the rear was not trained in matters of civil affairs. Frost's reflections show how lonely but rewarding the job of civil affairs was. He writes:

At the ripe old age of 21, I had taken over the administration of a town of more than 13,000 inhabitants, without any real authority from my superior officer or from anyone else. During the new two weeks I ran the town with hardly any outside help, not even from the headquarters of my own 4 Battalion, still 15 miles away in Pachino, near the beaches. But I thoroughly enjoyed every minute and concluded that perhaps a benevolent dictatorship was not, after all, a bad thing!<sup>51</sup>

His cheery outlook in some passages was balanced by his recognition of the dire situation that faced the Sicilian people:

Soon the people started to return from their caves in the cliffs. First to appear were the ones who had been wounded from our bombardment or

from handling grenades by their own soldiers. One person had both hands blown off; another an arm; another a foot. We did what we could with our inadequate medical supplies. From early morning until late at night (even though I had imposed a curfew) a constant stream of Sicilians begged our help.<sup>52</sup>

On 26 July, Frost was visited by an American civil affairs officer assigned to take over duties in the town. A week later Frost rejoined the Patricias but only after a heartfelt goodbye to the townspeople. He and his platoon made a significant impact and it seems clear from his memoirs that the people of Ispica were sad to see him go. In Ispica, Frost had a unique experience as a Canadian soldier; he had the fortune of seeing the people, impacted by twenty years of Fascism and three years of war, restored:

In only a few weeks I had seen the people of Ispica shake off the terrible yoke of Fascism and make a fresh start on the road to democracy. They had worked hard to rebuild their town and their Sicilian way of life;

they had found new confidence and hope for the future.<sup>53</sup>

The town of Ispica was only one Sicilian town impacted by the war. As the months progressed, more Italian towns and villages faced war. The job of civil affairs was not finished and the state of Italian towns only worsened as the war became more bitter after July and August 1943.

It took a little bit of good luck, but overall military government was a success in Sicily.<sup>54</sup> Many important lessons were learned from the execution of civil affairs and implemented on the Italian mainland and later in other theatres of war. The first and foremost outcome of the Sicily campaign was the realization that it was necessary to convince lower formations of the need for civil affairs detachments. This led the Civil Affairs Staff Centre to begin a campaign that sold civil affairs and what it could do to the troops.<sup>55</sup> There was little time to promote the organization between January and July 1943 prior to the Sicily operation. With only six months to plan, there was not much time to integrate civil affairs officers with the assault force

units before D-Day or convince the troops of the need for civil affairs support. For follow-on operations in Italy, a permanent group of officers was attached to 5th and 8th Armies and they advanced with combat troops. These civil affairs officers worked to install military government immediately behind the front lines.<sup>56</sup> This eliminated problems of the type experienced in Modica where three different Canadian regiments had to clear and re-clear the town wasting valuable time and resources and suffering (and inflicting) unnecessary casualties as a result. The second lesson learned was that civil affairs needed more resources. No longer would the civil affairs officers be left abandoned with no support as Wellesley was south of Syracuse. The need was recognized for additional enlisted clerks, drivers, and transport for civil affairs detachments on the mainland.<sup>57</sup>

The assessment of military government in Sicily in advance of the Allied landings on the mainland at Reggio Calabria, Taranto, and Salerno in September 1943 did not mean the end of military government/civil affairs in Sicily. Much work was done after September 1943 even as the Allies advanced further into southern Italy, extending the territory for which civil affairs was responsible and stretching resources and available personnel further. Although the success in Sicily was the result of good fortune and the positive reception and cooperation on the part of the Sicilian people, the experience prepared Allied civil affairs for the more desperate problems they would face on the mainland of Italy. In Naples, the Germans completely destroyed and booby trapped the town before leaving, having learned the lesson in Sicily that the Allies would expend significant time and resources providing humanitarian aid.<sup>58</sup> In addition to continued work in Sicily and more severe circumstances on the mainland, the

Italian armistice of September 1943 changed Italy's status from enemy to co-belligerent. As a result of the armistice, the Allies agreed to gradually restore liberated territory in the south, including Sicily, to the Italian government. In addition, civil affairs in Italy transformed from an organization of military government to an advising body in the Allied Control Commission, in all areas except those immediately behind the front lines.

Despite more severe circumstances on the mainland, largely due to the stagnation of the fighting south of Rome and an evolving German scorched earth policy, efforts to put Sicily back together again after the 38-day land campaign continued well into 1944. Civil affairs officers worked to restore the Italian public health and education systems, and the civil administration infrastructure. Much of this work was facilitated by cooperation and assistance by the Sicilians themselves. For example, local doctors and nurses were instrumental in preventing the widespread outbreak of disease.<sup>59</sup> The finance division reopened all Sicilian banks by 18 September despite issues with inflation and the black market. Many of the problems dealt with by civil affairs were symptomatic of the broken civil society caused by 20 years of Fascism and the overall war rather than specifically by the Allied invasion. Inflation and the rising cost of living exacerbated the food and commodity supply issue and was accompanied by a rise in cases of venereal disease as Sicilian women became desperate to feed their families. Despite projections that Sicily was self-sufficient in wheat, the 1943 harvest was poor and by October, AMG was dealing with food riots in Palermo and Catania provinces.<sup>60</sup>

Civil affairs was established as a military necessity to relieve combat troops from dealing with the needs of the population, but

the organization, even with limited resources, went above and beyond in its efforts to restore Sicily, and later Italy, to its pre-Fascist state. Although suspicions that Sicilians were not particularly enamoured to Fascism were found to be true, AMG went to great lengths to ensure the Fascist problem was truly resolved. In the end, AMG arrested and interned only 1,500 Fascists and most were soon released. One of the major problems faced in expunging Fascism from Sicily was the degree to which welfare organizations "had become inextricably intertwined in the web of Fascist measures."<sup>61</sup> Many of these welfare organizations, including the Italian Red Cross, needed to be purged of their Fascist influences before they could effectively work with AMG to deliver aid in Sicily and Italy. The education system, at least on the surface, had also been influenced by Fascism and new, suitable textbooks were required before education programs were re-commenced. In addition, many of the schools had been damaged, some beyond repair, by Allied bombings. In November 1943, AMG was working to determine the state of schools and plan for their repair, find replacement textbooks, and screen available teachers but no determinations could be made for when schools might be reopened in Sicily.<sup>62</sup> Military government ended in early 1944, when Sicily and a number of the southern Italian provinces were restored to the administration of the Italian government. While the battle for Sicily lasted a mere 38 days, the battle to restore Italian civil administration and Sicilian society lasted seven months.

The stability mattered greatly to the Canadian Army. In late 1943, eastern Sicily became the staging and base area for the newly arriving 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps troops.<sup>63</sup>

Allied Military Government in Sicily did not work perfectly. It is true that civil affairs officers recruited



US Air Force Photo 67111 AC

**Under the supervision of American soldiers, Sicilian civilians unload 75 mm Howitzer ammunition and stack it at a supply dump near Gela, Sicily.**

some anti-fascist *Mafiosi* and placed them in positions of power. But AMG was not responsible for the restoration of the mafia in Sicily. What the critics of AMG do not mention is that Mussolini's battle against the mafia was not as successful as the dictator claimed. In fact, the campaign against the mafia ended in 1929 with the declaration that the problem had been solved; the mafia was defeated. The Fascist-controlled press was ordered to follow the party line and avoid mentioning the mafia at all. Continued incidents of crime, violence, and lawlessness went unreported. Many of those gangsters jailed in the four year campaign were released and the mafia problem became worse in the 1930s.<sup>64</sup> The main criticism of AMG in Sicily is unfounded in fact.

Despite its flaws AMG was a useful attempt at a multi-national civil affairs model that would be used, and adapted, throughout the latter part of the Second World War. The reception accorded to the Allies by the Sicilian, and later Italian people, facilitated this model of civil affairs, enabling civil affairs officers to adapt and improve their ability to provide the needed support. To date, most historians have ignored the role of civil affairs in Sicily and Italy. Even this cursory glance<sup>65</sup> at AMG in Sicily reveals a great deal about Allied policy toward the Italians,<sup>66</sup> the weak hold Fascism had on Sicilians, the need to consider the civilian population when waging war, the utility of taking a benevolent attitude toward the civilian population, and the difficulties presented by the

intricate nature and vast organization of Allied Military Government in a campaign already taxed for resources.

### Notes

1. "Education and training of Allied officers for duty with Civil Affairs Section - Part I: Introduction on military government," p.3, undated and unattributed, The National Archives (UK) [TNA], WO 219/3790.
2. Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), pp.622-633. D'Este devotes an entire section to how the Allies consulted known gangsters like "Lucky" Luciano for intelligence and recruitment purposes in what D'Este called a "strange union." AMG, according to D'Este relied on local anti-fascists, many of whom D'Este claims were *Mafiosi*, who took advantage of the opportunity for their own insidious criminal purposes. D'Este makes a big deal out of the role AMG took in restoring the mafia in Sicily. What he does not

- understand is that Mussolini had not solved the mafia problem as he had claimed. Mussolini declared the problem solved in the 1920s, allowing no further conversation. Historian Christopher Duggan notes that the problem only got worse in the 1930s. Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy since 1796* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), pp.457-458.
3. Although the British had conducted civil affairs operations in North Africa, the scale and multinational nature of military government in Sicily was unique and informed later operations in Northwest Europe. American and British civil affairs was so successful in its integration that it is nearly impossible to talk about them separately. Such integration is unique in historiography of the Second World War, which is usually written most comprehensively from the American or British point of view.
  4. National Archives and Records Administration (US) [NARA], Records of the War Department's Operations Division, 1942-1945 [microfilm], "Bigot: Allied Military Government of Occupied Territory, Plan for Military Government of Horrified, Part I," Reel 5, Series C, frame 491, June 1943.
  5. NARA, Records of the War Department's Operations Division, 1942-1945 [microfilm]; [Policy toward Italy], Reel 2, Series C, frames 182-184. The March 1943 report from the US State Department noted that "according to all reports the civilian population which the operating forces will encounter are tired of war, resentful of German overlordship, and demoralized by the Fascist regime."
  6. The German plan for disarming Italian soldiers in France, Italy, and the Balkans. Michael Howard, *Grand Strategy*, vol.4: *August 1942-September 1943* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1972), pp.472-473.
  7. As Carlo D'Este notes, some of these willing anti-fascists were ex-mafia, allowing the mafia to gain positions of power in the new administrative order. D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, p.629. Most of the mayors or prefects who were loyal to the Fascist regime fled at the first sign of the Italian invasion. Many of those who remained were willing to work with the Allies, as the example of Lentini and Catania found in this article prove. It cannot be stated that the Allies filled all positions of authority with mafia types.
  8. C.R.S. Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy, 1943-1945* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957), p.4.
  9. General Eisenhower insisted that AMG be a 50-50 American and British initiative so that the military administration would be perceived as an "Allied undertaking." Both the British and American flag were to be displayed at AMG headquarters and all MG posts. In addition to American and British personnel, there were less than ten Canadian CAOs who operated in Sicily.
  - Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p.10.
  10. The British were able to draw on personnel who had previous experience in military government in Africa while the Americans were able to recruit from an Italian-American population with language skills and knowledge of Italian culture and terrain.
  11. The Americans were able to count on a sympathetic population in Sicily and Italy due to the large number of Italians who immigrated to the new world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
  12. Three two week courses for training in military government, specifically pertaining to the Sicilian and Italian theatres, ran in June and July 1943. Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p.25.
  13. 6-43 Op instruction 9 AMGOT "Plan for Military Government of Horrified, Part I," HQ Force 141, Operation Instruction No. 9, AMGOT Plan, June 1943.
  14. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p.6.
  15. The *Carabinieri* is a branch the Italian Armed Forces. As a result, their combat clothing is the same as Italian soldiers and this posed a problem as *Carabinieri* were forcibly arrested by the Allies in the first days of the campaign. As a result, their prestige suffered as a result in the eyes of the local population. Civil Affairs Police Officers (CAPOs) had to re-clothe them in their blue dress uniforms or supply arm bands to denote their function. To assist in the restoration of morale in the national police forces, AMG put American or British officers together with *Carabinieri* in town patrols. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, pp.52-53.
  16. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p.5. For modern use of the POMLT in Afghanistan, see Lee Windsor, David Charters, and Brent Wilson, *Kandahar Tour: The Turning Point in Canada's Afghan Mission* (John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), p.135.
  17. Most *Carabinieri* encountered in the first days of the Sicily campaign were arrested and sent off to North Africa because their dress made them indistinguishable from Italian soldiers. The Allies perceived the image of the national police force suffered in the eyes of the populace as a result. One of the first tasks of the civil affairs police officers was to secure their release, provide them with alternate dress and work to restore their prestige. Harris describes the rapport that developed between police officers from the London Metropolitan Police officers acting as CAPOs and the *Carabinieri*. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, pp.41-42, 53.
  18. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p.7.
  19. This differed greatly to the attitude that the Allies encouraged in Germany in 1945 at the end of the war. Allied soldiers were told that the Germans should be evil and should be punished for initiating the war. For more on the attitude toward the German populace, especially from the Canadian point of view, see Hugh Gordon, "Cheers and Tears: Relations Between Canadian Soldiers and German Civilians, 1944-46," (PhD dissertation, University of Victoria, 2010).
  20. Italian text of Eisenhower's message found in Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p.30.
  21. English text of Roosevelt and Churchill's message to the Italian people, which was actually broadcast on 16 July, 1943, found in Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, pp.31-32. It has also been reproduced elsewhere in this issue of *Canadian Military History*.
  22. At Ispica, the war diary of the Seaforth's of Canada reported that "the only difficulties encountered were enthusiastic greetings of the civilian population and the frantic endeavours of the military population to surrender." "Canadian Operations in Sicily, July - August 1943. Part II: The Execution of the Operation by 1 Cdn Inf Div. Section 1: The Assault and Initial Penetration Inland," CMHQ Report No.127, Historical Section, Canadian Military Headquarters, 16 November 1944, p.15. <<http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/cmhq/cmhq127.pdf>>.
  23. Approximately 50 British, 50 American, and less than six Canadian civil affairs landed within the first three days. The maximum number of civil affairs officers during the entire campaign was 450. "Civil Affairs in the Mediterranean, Jul 43 to May 45," AHQ Report No. 045, Historical Section, Canadian Military Headquarters, 21 November 1951, p.2. <<http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/ahqr-rqga/ahq045.pdf>>. Harris notes that 30 AMGOT officers were smuggled on board the ships in the initial assaults, in spite of the refusal on the part of Army headquarters to include them in assault quotas. Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy*, p.34. Research to date has not revealed exactly how many civil affairs officers landed on 10 July and how many came in the follow on waves.
  24. 6-43 Op instruction 9 AMGOT "Plan for Military Government of Horrified, Part I," HQ Force 141, Operation Instruction No.9, AMGOT Plan, June 1943, p.7.
  25. Civil Affairs Staff Centre, 2nd Senior Officers' Corse, Civil Affairs in Catania, Notes on extemporary talk by Lieut-Col. The Duke of Wellington, 27 November 1943." TNA WO 219/3687. Upon his arrival, Wellesley liaised with the town mayor and prefect regarding the local situation before turning the administration of the city over to his successor.
  26. "Section 1: The Civil Affairs Staff Centre: Wimbetown," document by Major M.A. Staniforth, pp.24-25, TNA WO 219/3790. This was later seen as a problem and would be modified for future operations, provoking the Civil Affairs Staff Centre to embark on a campaign to "Sell Civil Affairs to the Army" that included a lecture circuit to various Home Commands to inform

- tactical and service officers what civil affairs could do for them.
27. Civil Affairs Staff Centre, 2nd Senior Officers' Course, Civil Affairs in Catania, Notes on extemporary talk by Lieut-Col. The Duke of Wellington, 27 November 1943." TNA WO 219/3687.
  28. Civil Affairs Staff Centre, 2nd Senior Officers' Course, Civil Affairs in Catania, Notes on extemporary talk by Lieut-Col. The Duke of Wellington, 27 November 1943." TNA WO 219/3687. Approximately 12,000 people were living in the air raid shelters with no waste removal provisions, no electricity, and no running water.
  29. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p.37.
  30. In addition to plans to land only with assault scale vehicles, Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p. civil affairs officers used hearses, when they were not destroyed by the troops and even organized mule trains to transport grain and supplies to the cities and towns of Sicily. In some cases, even the mule trains were confiscated by the fighting troops for their own use.
  31. Civil Affairs Staff Centre, 2nd Senior Officers' Course, Civil Affairs in Catania, Notes on extemporary talk by Lieut-Col. The Duke of Wellington, 27 November 1943." TNA WO 219/3687.
  32. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p.39.
  33. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, pp.38-39.
  34. The Armed Forces, as a rule, provided Engineers and Signals to repair electricity and major aqueducts while AMG was responsible for organizing teams to clear rubble, repair sewage lines, and repair minor breaks in water mains.
  35. Civil Affairs Staff Centre, 2nd Senior Officers' Course, Civil Affairs in Catania, Notes on extemporary talk by Lieut-Col. The Duke of Wellington, 27 November 1943." TNA WO 219/3687. Wellesley complained that without electricity and with an insufficient amount of alternate lighting, civil affairs was inhibited in their progress, having "to go to bed as soon as it was dark." He suggested that in future operations, civil affairs officers be equipped with hurricane lamps.
  36. Cities located in strategic areas and which were the sites of stiff resistance on the part of the Germans were subjected to Allied bombardment causing civilian suffering and destruction that was dealt with by civil affairs once the town was liberated. As the last major city to fall, Messina was particularly hard hit. In addition, Messina typically imported most its resources from the mainland, still in German hands until the September 1943 landings.
  37. "Civil Affairs Staff Centre, 2nd Senior Officers' Course, Item 9, Relations Between Civil Affairs and the Army in Respect of: The Relief and Economic Aspect," lecture R.J. Spofford, 27 November 1943, TNA WO 219/3687.
  38. From the war diary of the Commander, Royal Canadian Army Service Corps quoted in CMHQ Report No.127, p.13.
  39. Ispica and Rosolini were bombed on the evening of 10 July and the morning of 11 July by the Navy and Air Force in preparation to the advance. CMHQ Report No.127, p.14.
  40. War Diary, HQ Comd, 1 Cdn Div, RCASC, 13 July 1943, as quoted in CMHQ Report No.127, p.15.
  41. "Civil Affairs Staff Centre, 2nd Senior Officers' Course, Item 9, Relations Between Civil Affairs and the Army in Respect of: The Relief and Economic Aspect," lecture R.J. Spofford, 27 November 1943, TNA WO 219/3687.
  42. This was typical. Most of the ultra-Fascist administrators abandoned their posts at the first sign of the invasion. The majority of those who were left were deemed suitable to remain in their posts.
  43. CMHQ Report No.127, p.16.
  44. CMHQ Report No.127, p.16.
  45. CMHQ Report No.127, p.18.
  46. 1st Canadian Infantry Division - Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General, 13 July 1943, Library and Archives Canada [LAC], RG 24, R112-135-3-E, Vol 13738.
  47. "Canadian Operations in Sicily, July - August 1943. Part II: The Execution of the Operation by 1 Cdn Inf Div. Section 2: The Pursuit of the Germans from VIZZINI to ADERNO 15 Jul - 6 Aug," CMHQ Report No.135, Historical Section, Canadian Military Headquarters, 4 May 1945, p.7. <<http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/cmhq/cmhq135.PDF>>.
  48. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p.35. Although Leese recognized the lack of civil affairs officers to be inconvenient, the Americans were more difficult to convince. By D+1 only 17 AMG officers were on the ground in 7th Army's territory. Despite any inconvenience they may have experienced due to the lack of the CAOs, General Patton refused to accommodate civil affairs.
  49. 1st Canadian Infantry Division - Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General, 14 July 1943, LAC RG 24, R112-135-3-E, Vol 13738.
  50. C. Sydney Frost, *Once a Patricia (Memoirs of a Junior Infantry Officer in World War II)* (St.Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 1988), pp.113-120. Frost's experiences are relatively typical for a civil affairs officer working in Sicily and Italy.
  51. Frost, *Once a Patricia*, p.114.
  52. Frost, *Once a Patricia*, p.114.
  53. Frost, *Once a Patricia*, p.117.
  54. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p.37. Major-General Lord Rennell, in a letter to Alexander, wrote that the success of military government in Sicily was based more on good luck than on good management.
  55. "Section 1: The Civil Affairs Staff Centre: Wimbetown," document by Major M.A. Staniforth, pp.24-25, TNA WO 219/3790.
  56. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p.63.
  57. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, pp.64-65.
  58. Before abandoning Naples, the Germans blew up ships in the harbor to make it unusable, destroyed the town aqueduct, and set fire to the library at Naples University, shooting Italian soldiers who tried to stop them. One of the most sinister acts was placing a delayed fuse bomb at the post office that was set to go off days after the Germans left the city. The blast claimed hundreds of victims, leaving many maimed and wounded or dead. TNA FO 371, R2854, 16 February 1944, Text of Debate from the House of Lords, p.828.
  59. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, pp.40, 56-57. The major concerns included tuberculosis, which was considered "distressingly high," venereal disease (which was a symptom of other issues including the rising cost of living and inflation), and malaria. By October, civil affairs organized more than 2,000 civilians who were working on anti-malarial projects. Incidentally malaria and venereal disease were major issues for the troops. Malarial sickness casualties were more than double battle casualties.
  60. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, pp.45-46.
  61. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy*, p.50.
  62. "Report on Present Status, Education," 1 November 1943, NARA, RG 84, Box 1.
  63. War Diary, 1st Canadian Corps, General Staff, September-December 1943, LAC RG 24, R112-135-3-E, vol.13685.
  64. Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy since 1796* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), pp.457-458.
  65. Thousands of boxes exist in NARA regarding Allied Military Government and Civil Affairs and its application in Sicily and Italy and much can be learned about civil-military relations in that nation during the war. This vast documentation reveals much to historians of war, Italian historians, and contemporary practitioners about military government, civil affairs, Italian culture and society in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, and Allied civilian policy.
  66. Allied policy differed greatly from German policy as the example of the German retreat from Naples attests.

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