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Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943, by Carlo D'Este, and Decision in Nonnandy

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for the miracles of logistics it took to mount the landing and for the Navy's role in getting it all there. The generals in the story, with the exception of Eisenhower, come across as cardboard figures—which is hard to do with the likes of Patton and Rommel. Nor do we get much feel for what the campaign was like for the average GI or Tommy; the one map, good as it is for an overview, does not help tell their part of the story.

Make no mistake, *Desperate Venture* is an enjoyable read. The photographs add a lot, and the research is solid—as far as it goes. I just wish Norman Gelb had written a more ambitious book.

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D'Este, Carlo. *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943*. New York: Harper, 1991. 666pp. \$14.95

D'Este, Carlo. *Decision in Normandy*. New York: Harper, 1991. 557pp. \$14.95

Amphibious operations are conceded to be the most difficult to plan and execute. Their success requires the fullest coordination of land, sea, and air forces; each is at great risk unless that coordination is achieved. Successful coordination permits the strengths of each component to offset the weaknesses of the others.

Operations involving two or more sovereign states also represent a high level of risk and reward. They are difficult because the forces are dependent on one another to achieve results that neither can achieve alone.

Lieutenant Colonel Carlo D'Este, U.S. Army, Retired, discusses two of the largest amphibious operations in the European Theater in World War II: Operation HUSKY in Sicily, July 1943, and Operation OVERLORD in Normandy, June 1944. Both studies illuminate the problems encountered by the British and the Americans in their bilateral and joint operational planning efforts.

The author emphasizes the importance of operational planners being in close communication with each other and with those who execute their plans. It is therefore critical that all planners speak the same doctrinal "language," which can otherwise be a barrier between forces of the same nation or divide those of different nations, even if they speak the same actual language.

Mark Twain's observation that the Americans and the British are two people divided by the same language was, during World War II, true in more ways than one. The two allies often used different terms for the same concept, and their combat doctrines differed as well. Moreover, the Americans (except for Patton) were either unable or unwilling to participate in a seminar offered by the British about what they had learned fighting the Wehrmacht between 1939 and 1942.

As the war progressed, the planning and execution of bilateral amphibious operations grew in quality and extent. Their beginnings—in Operation TORCH of November 1942, conducted along a dispersed front on the Atlantic and Mediterranean—had been

158 Naval War College Review

poor. D'Este points out that although planning was deficient from the outset, TORCH succeeded because the landings were far from the concentrated Axis forces to the east. On the other hand, both HUSKY and OVERLORD were conducted against an enemy who was ready and waiting. Greater force had to be applied to ensure the success of the landings, which meant using air power to isolate the battlefield. There was far less room for inadequate planning.

Because Sicily is an island, Operation HUSKY required the use of tactical air power to blockade the sea lines of communication between the Axis and the Italian mainland. For its part, OVERLORD, which was executed against mainland France, required a larger, more prolonged air effort to achieve maximum possible isolation of the battlefield before and during the landing operation.

D'Este does not hide the blemishes in men who have become legendary after half a century. For example, George C. Marshall comes across as naive in pushing for a landing in France in 1942. On the other hand, early in 1942 it was Marshall who suggested to Eisenhower the option of a hasty landing in Sicily to take place as soon as possible after the conclusion of operations in Africa but before the Axis could be ready to defend it. D'Este remarks that his suggestion (which became HUSKY) "held no appeal to Eisenhower's conservative nature." This operational conservatism functioned in tandem with an organizational

predilection to use firepower rather than maneuver to defeat Germany.

A conservative outlook in planning HUSKY is understandable, given the complexities of the bilateral amphibious operation and the tenuous success of TORCH, but less comprehensible is that planners were hampered by a lack of communication with the senior decision makers. The latter were occupied with the final offensive against the Axis in northeast Tunisia until mid-May 1943, but, as D'Este points out, they should have improved their division of labor between near-term and future operations. The author sees Montgomery (never a favorite with Americans, at that time or since) as superior to the other major figures since he at least paid attention to the planning effort. He saw it as leading to complete disaster; HUSKY succeeded in large part because Montgomery agitated for major changes in the operations and got them. But his abrasive behavior toward those whom he regarded as neophytes was not an endearing quality. In fact, most of Montgomery's British and American colleagues fell into that category. D'Este believes that personality conflicts played a large role in operational history.

When planning for OVERLORD began in late 1943, some of these conflicts had not abated, and they hindered both operational planning and execution. On the other hand, planners were able to learn and apply many of the lessons of HUSKY as well as the landings at Salerno and Anzio. Of especial importance was the need for planners to

have access to the senior officers who would be responsible for its execution. Planning was also centralized for OVERLORD, as opposed to HUSKY, with some half-dozen locations from Washington to Cairo.

Operations HUSKY and OVERLORD have produced a shelf of books over the last half-century. Most are popular histories, which look at strategic issues, tactical anecdotes, or both, but avoid operational details of little interest to the nonprofessional. The British and American official histories do get into the minutiae of planning, but they tend to gloss over the role of dominant personalities, especially when unflattering, and the contributions of the other partner, respectively. D'Este has brought these elements into balance in works that are highly readable, professionally informative. They are strongly recommended for inclusion on one's "purple" bookshelf.

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McKee, Alexander. *Against the Odds: Battles at Sea, 1591-1949*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991. 268pp. (No price given)

Stephen, Martin. *The Fighting Admirals: British Admirals of the Second World War*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991. 209pp. (No price given)

Both these books deal with leadership in war at sea. Both are written by British authors and draw heavily, though not exclusively, on the British experience. The *dramatis personae* are, to a considerable extent, common to both books and

the authors have a shared interest in many of the same historical events. That said, the purposes of the two authors are very different, and their works are aimed at very different readerships.

We have little sympathy these days for the "gallant attempt." Heroic failure somehow seems to have lost its romantic appeal. Therefore, many may find that *Against the Odds* has a strangely Edwardian ring to it. The author gives us an anthology of gallant attempts from the history of naval warfare (twenty-six episodes in all), some familiar (*Revenge*, 1591 and *Bismarck*, 1941) and others too often neglected, like Admiral Cowan's raid on Kronstadt in 1919.

Alexander McKee is a noted marine archeologist, with a score of books to his credit, and a prolific author on maritime subjects. He is a compelling storyteller with an eye for the dramatic and a nose for contemporary scuttlebutt—a trait which, in fact, both authors share. Readers should look on McKee's work as a collection of rattling good yarns. If there is a deeper message, it is a simple one: that individual ingenuity or, failing that, dour intransigence can beat the odds. McKee favours the David-and-Goliath formula, but other conventions of the storyteller's art are in evidence too. His heroes win in spite of (or lose because of) irresolute and ignorant superiors, deskbound admirals, and the arrnchair strategists who jog their elbows. Philip of Spain, Louis XIV, Winston Churchill, Jackie Fisher, and Dudley Pound are, for McKee, all of a piece.