

‘Enough to be Seen to be Onside but Hardly Substantial?’: RAF Bomber Command and Operation *Husky*

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Abstract

This article considers the operations of RAF Bomber Command in support of Operation *Husky*. Earmarked to play a considerable supporting role, the piece goes on to examine how valid operational difficulties, rather than the usual supposed notion of Sir Arthur Harris’ aversion to bombing Italy, would conspire to blunt its full participation. In attempting to get around these obstacles, Sir Arthur Tedder proposed a number of solutions, ranging from aircraft loans to having a Lancaster detachment in North Africa, but the Air Staff always supported the Commander-in-Chief Bomber Command in the continuation of the air campaign against Germany.

Keywords

RAF Bomber Command, operation *Husky*, bombing Italy, Mediterranean campaign, Sir Arthur Tedder

Introduction

Primarily cited by many historians for the overriding aim of the Combined Bomber Offensive against Germany, a less well-known paragraph of the Casablanca Directive, agreed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCoS) on 21 January, informed HQ Bomber Command that ‘at the appropriate time’ attacks on Northern Italy ‘may be required ... in connection with amphibious operations in the Mediterranean theatre’.¹ Two-days

1 The National Archives [hereafter TNA], Kew, AIR14/776, Air Ministry-HQ Bomber Command, 4/02/43.

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later, the CCoS confirmed the invasion of Sicily would be launched in July,² and planning for Operation *Husky* proceeded thereafter, with a separate Air-Plan appearing on 3 April. This promised a considerable role for strategic bombing, with an air offensive against industrial and military targets in Southern Italy 'augmented by heavy attacks from the UK against Northern and Central Italy'.³ Thus, from the outset, RAF Bomber Command was earmarked to play an important supporting role in this major military operation in the Mediterranean. Yet, some 2 months later, Air Chief-Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, the head of Mediterranean Air Command (MAC) felt compelled to ask the Air Ministry: 'Can you let me know if Bomber Command is undertaking any operations against Italy during Husky[?]'.⁴ Sent just 6 days before the Allied landings began, this seemingly straightforward message uncovers a number of important questions, which this article sets out to explore. Why was Tedder so uncertain about Bomber Command when it had already been included in the planning for *Husky*?; what had caused doubt to creep into the mind of the most senior RAF officer in the Mediterranean?; and was this cable, asking about Bomber Command's whereabouts during Operation *Husky*, yet another example of the Commander-in-Chief Bomber Command (C-in-C) Air Chief-Marshal Sir Arthur Harris' infamous obstinacy about 'diversions' from the bombing of Germany?

In fact, over the next 2 weeks Harris' force did bomb Italy but the Turin operation on 12/13 July remained a 'one-off' large-scale attack against an Italian city at this time, followed only by two 'special' operations against railway transformer stations some days later. In the end, Bomber Command's participation proved much less than many had hoped, and appeared a half-hearted and uninspiring effort. Tedder's letter to Portal on 16 July emphasised 'the unstinting help' of the Air Ministry yet contained no reference to Bomber Command,⁵ an omission which tells its own story. This was certainly very different to Bomber Command's support of Operations *Lightfoot* and *Torch* in October and November 1942. Although Harris had complained to Portal that supporting these land offensives 'would inevitably end for the foreseeable future Bomber Command's pressure on Germany',⁶ the C-in-C back then launched a two-month bombing programme that saw Italy attacked on fifteen occasions. This article therefore proceeds to examine why Bomber Command's participation during Operation *Husky* was, in contrast, so unsubstantial.

Existing works on Bomber Command provide few clues in addressing this issue. Harris' 1947 book, *Bomber Offensive*, saw little detail given on the bombing of Italy, save a couple of paragraphs on supporting *Torch* and bringing about Italian capitulation in September 1943 and, not surprisingly, his postwar *Despatch on War Operations*

2 TNA, AIR20/4536, CCS171/2/D, Operation *Husky*, Directive to Commander-in-Chief, 23/01/43.

3 TNA, AIR23/1583, Outline Air-Plan, PART I, 3/04/43.

4 TNA, AIR23/5522, MAC-Air Ministry, 4/07/43.

5 Portal Papers [hereafter P.P.], Folder 12, Tedder-Portal, 16/07/43.

6 P.P., File 9, Harris-Portal, 21/10/42. Harris was supported by the A.C.A.S.(P), Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Slessor, who wrote that 'once we concede to the Mediterranean Front any higher place than a running sore then I am sure that we will find ourselves on the slippery slope.' See TNA, AIR20/3718, Slessor-Portal, Knocking Out Italy, 25/10/42.

followed a similar line.⁷ The multivolume official history, itself a sound study, sticks religiously to the campaign against Germany and treats the bombing of Italy remarkably briskly.⁸ Given these starting-points, the treatment of Bomber Command's campaign against Italy has remained patchy ever since.⁹ Some authors merely offer slack generalisations, such as the notion of 'Harris's fury' on being ordered to bomb Italy in late-1942 or Dudley Saward comment the C-in-C was 'at no time in favour of his forces being diverted away from the prime target, Germany'; similarly, Henry Probert states Harris was 'never very enthusiastic about bombing Italy' because it represented a diversion from the main objective of attacking the Nazi state.¹⁰ These statements, whilst true enough, provide little beyond Harris' supposed vehement opposition to bombing Italy. Yet the C-in-C was only a cog – albeit a large and determined one – within the vast Allied military machine and never was the sole arbiter on British bombing policy and strategy. The key consideration, therefore, was how did the Air Staff view the role of Bomber Command during the invasion of Sicily; did they support Harris' circumspection or Tedder's enthusiasm for its considerable participation?

Defining Bomber Command's Participation in Operation Husky, February–June 1943

In early-December 1942, the War Cabinet considered whether Italy should become 'bombing target no. 1 in the immediate future', particularly as Northern Europe's winter weather frequently hindered operations against Germany.¹¹ This goal required a clear statement on the extent of Bomber Command's Italian commitment and, by implication, *how* it would be undertaken. This was addressed in a War Cabinet paper by the Secretary of State for Air, Sir Archibald Sinclair. Although endorsing Churchill's 3 December order that 'the heat should be turned on Italy', he emphasised the issue of

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- 7 A.T. Harris, *Bomber Offensive* (Barnsley, 2005ed.), pp. 140–1; *Dispatch on War Operations* (London, 1995ed.).
 - 8 C. Webster and N. Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany, vol. II: Endeavour* (London, 1961). Bomber Command's low-level attacks on the Italian transformer-stations and return attack on Leghorn is merely stated in a footnote. See p. 149.
 - 9 See M. Hastings, *Bomber Command* (London, 2007ed.); D. Richards, *RAF Bomber Command in the Second World War: The Hardest Victory* (London, 2001ed.).
 - 10 J. Maynard, *Bennett and the Pathfinders* (London, 1996), p. 100; D. Saward, 'Bomber' Harris (London, 1984), pp. 180–1. Saward's later work describes Italian operations as an 'anathema to Harris'. See D. Saward, *Victory Denied: The Rise of Air Power and the Defeat of Germany, 1920–1945* (London, 1985), p. 285; H. Probert, *Bomber Harris: His Life and Times* (London, 2006ed.), p. 256. More recent scholarship includes the excellent work of C. Baldoli who focuses on the domestic impact of the bombing of Italian cities; see 'Spring 1943: the Fiat Strikes and the Collapse of the Italian Home front', *History Workshop Journal* 72.1 (2011); and 'Bombing the FIAT: Allied Raids, Workers' Strikes and the Italian Resistance', *Labour History Review* 77.1 (2012). R. Overly's majestic work, *The Bombing War* (London, 2013), devotes an entire chapter to the bombing of Italy. See also S. Harvey, 'The Italian War Effort and the Strategic Bombing of Italy', *History* 70.2 (1985), which is generally considered to be the ground-breaking work on this topic in English.
 - 11 TNA, AIR20/8146, Bottomley-Portal, 05/12/42.

operational ‘flexibility’ in which Bomber Command could be switched quickly from Italian targets to German ones, and back again, and this was only possible if it remained based in the UK.¹² A month later, on 17 January 1943, the bombing of Italy became a formal instruction from the Air Ministry to HQ Bomber Command, in which the northern industrial centres – Turin, Milan and Genoa – were the first priority targets after the Biscay ports, Berlin and Schweinfurt.¹³ This was soon followed by the Casablanca Directive, which Harris received on 4 February, and Bomber Command’s first Italian operation of 1943 occurred that night. However, this attack on Turin, and on Milan ten-nights later, were executed less with ‘amphibious Mediterranean operations’ in mind than with the aim to worsen Italian morale given that *Ultra* decrypts indicated it had lowered considerably because of Italy’s large setbacks in Libya and southern Russia.¹⁴ Thus, bombing Italy for this reason, namely causing domestic breakdown as a prelude to final collapse, was far more palatable to Harris than undertaking Italian operations for the stated goal of supporting amphibious operations because this threatened an unpalatable precedent over the targets chosen and fulfilling the requirements of other service commands. Indeed, following the Air Ministry’s instruction to launch major attacks on the Italian naval base at La Spezia, Harris felt compelled to submit a formal protest about doing so.¹⁵ In contrast, his lengthy letter of complaint on 6 March about ‘diversions’ that pulled the bombing offensive away from Germany is noticeable for containing no stated opposition to making attacks on Turin, Milan or Genoa.¹⁶ In fact, it was the Director of Bomber Operations (DB.Ops.), Air-Commodore Sydney Bufton, who advocated stopping Italian operations on grounds that ‘the Axis war economy will be little affected by attacks on Italian industry’; bombing Italy, he argued, should instead be left entirely to MAC’s bombers.¹⁷ Yet Bottomley disagreed and informed Portal that although ‘we are fully alive to the need ... to resist diversions not within the concept of the [Casablanca] directive’, the bombing of Italy remained a commitment in support of Allied grand-strategy in the Mediterranean and simply could not be rescinded.¹⁸

This was because the Joint Planning Staff (JPS) had completed the initial plan for Operation *Husky* on 10 January 1943, in which an important preliminary goal was to erode Axis airpower, particularly in fighter strength. This was ‘to be achieved’ by Allied air operations throughout the Mediterranean and Western Europe, with ‘the object of bringing about a general weakening of the German Air Force and forcing withdrawals from the

12 TNA, AIR20/4515, WP (42) 598, The Bombing of Italy, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air, 17/12/42.

13 TNA, AIR41/43, AHB Narrative, *The RAF in [the] Bomber Offensive against Germany, vol. V, The Full Offensive February 1943-February 1944* (1950), pp. 53–55.

14 TNA, HW1/1337, Turkish Ambassador, Rome-Foreign Ministry, Angora, Italian People’s Reactions to North African Disasters, 28/01/43 [decrypted 30/01/43]. The Italian people had taken the loss of Abyssinia with ‘resignation’ but ‘feel deeply the loss of Tripoli which they regarded as an extension of the Italian Peninsula’. See HW1/1337, Turkish Military Attaché, Rome-General Staff, Angora, Italian Disasters in Tripolitania and Russia, 28/01/43 [decrypted 30/01/43].

15 TNA, AIR2/4476, Bottomley-Harris, 20/02/43; AIR20/5323, Bottomley-Harris, 13/03/43.

16 RAF Museum, Harris Papers [hereafter H.P.], H67, Harris-Portal, 6/03/43; and Enclosure.

17 TNA, AIR20/8146, Bufton-Bottomley, 09/03/43.

18 TNA, AIR20/8146, Bottomley-Portal, 11/03/43.

Mediterranean'. Under the heading 'Preparatory Measures', Bomber Command was to achieve this goal by making heavy-raids on Northern Italy from the UK, which would complement the Allied night/day-bomber effort in the Mediterranean against Axis airfields undertaken from D-21 to D-Day to achieve air superiority over Sicily.¹⁹ The JPS' plan was considered widely and HQ MAC was soon worried by its airpower weakness to achieve the allotted tasks, and advocated 'we should insist on this Theatre being reinforced ... by as many night bomber squadrons as possible'. Though conceding J.P.(43)7 Final did form 'a satisfactory basis for planning', the view from the Mediterranean was stark in warning the Chiefs of Staff (COS) that *Husky's* success was 'likely to be seriously prejudiced unless provision is made to reinforce the night bomber striking force now in the Mediterranean area, during the preparatory period before the operation is launched, and for a short time afterwards'. As it stood, MAC's existing bomber forces comprised five Wellington squadrons, producing 75 sorties per night, and 1 Halifax and 1 Liberator squadron adding another 20 sorties (see Appendix I), which was 'totally inadequate for this purpose'.²⁰ Tedder had considered using American medium-bombers in the night-bombing role but this was soon rejected because these were required for daylight bombing of tactical targets on Sicily itself, and instead a short-term loan (lasting 6 weeks) of five Wellington squadrons was requested.²¹ Thus, it was already becoming apparent that aircraft drawn directly from Bomber Command would be needed in the Mediterranean.

This became a formalised request once the Outline Air-Plan (enclosed as Appendix B to the overall plan for *Husky*) was released by MAC on 3 April. The brainchild of Tedder, who the Official History of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Campaign described as that 'brilliant airman' who possessed an 'unostentatious personality and cool and collected style of command', it revealed a conviction that 'air forces must be flexible and mobile if they were to concentrate at the right time, in the right area, and for the right purpose'.²² This viewpoint was, of course, shaped by the particular tasks his airforces had to achieve and the theatre they operated in, thus Tedder's outlook and requests could never be fully compatible with Harris' rigidly held view on the primacy of bombing Germany. Yet the latter did acknowledge Bomber Command should attack Northern Italy occasionally for the tactical reason of spreading German air-defences as wide as possible and, consequently, there was some common-ground between Tedder and Harris.

Tedder's Air-Plan for Operation *Husky* had four phases. There was no assigned role for Bomber Command during Phases II and III²³, but it was earmarked to play a significant role in the preparatory phase (Phase I). Divided into two parts, the end of the Tunisia Campaign to D-7 and from D-7 to D-1, respectively, this initial period of air operations saw Bomber Command 'co-operate' by undertaking the heaviest raids on industrial and

19 TNA, AIR20/2579, JP(43)7, Operation 'Husky', Report by JPS, 10/01/43.

20 TNA, AIR23/5501, ?-Deputy AOC-in-C, 17/02/43; [and Enclosure] Note on the Air Aspects of J.P.(43)7 Final, As Amended by J.P.(S)16 of 21 Jan. 1943. 'Husky'.

21 TNA, AIR8/1293, Algiers-RTOUSA, 16/03/43.

22 S.O. Playfair, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East, vol. V; The Campaign in Sicily in 1943 and the Campaign in Italy, 3rd September 1943 to 31st March 1944* (London, 1973).

23 Phase I – Preparatory Measures; Phase II – The South Eastern and South Western Assaults; Phase III – Capture of Catania and Palermo and Phase IV – Reduction of the Island.

communication targets in Northern Italy. Described as a phase of ‘steady pressure’, MAC’s bombing of the towns and ports of Sicily and Southern Italy – ‘with the object of breaking Italian morale and of interfering with the movement of shipping and supplies’ – was to be complemented by Bomber Command’s attacks on the north ‘to pin down Axis aircraft in areas far from Sicily’. This was necessary because, as Robert Ehlers notes, Tedder faced 1560 Axis aircraft on Sicily (810 being German), all packed over a narrow front of land operations, and a need therefore arose for pulling these enemy air-forces by attacking all parts of Italy. Moreover, as Playfair notes, it was important ‘the [bombing] attacks were to be distributed [widely] so as to withhold for as long as possibly any hint of where the invasion would be made’. Thus, whilst aircraft based in the Mediterranean would target Axis airfields on Sicily, from the UK Bomber Command was to begin ‘an intensive air offensive’ on targets in North Italy, Germany and German-occupied Europe ‘with the object’ of pulling as many Axis fighters away from the Mediterranean as possible. As D-Day neared, Harris was to make an even greater effort against ‘Italian industrial and communication targets’, the Air-Plan stated, the heavy-bombing of which was likely to ‘have a valuable effect on the morale of the people’. Later, under Phase IV, the overall aim had evolved into ‘prevent[ing] reinforcements reaching the Island of Sicily, and to develop our heavy bomber offensive against Italy proper’. For Bomber Command this meant a concentrated effort on city targets partly because they contained large railway facilities and marshalling yards and partly because the Allied invasion of Sicily was ‘likely to have a notable effect on the Italian people’. With morale already low, so MAC claimed, ‘heavy attacks on industrial areas should lower it still further’.²⁴ Tedder’s planning, therefore, showed that Bomber Command was to be assigned a considerable role in Operation *Husky* but how far, in practice, this would translate into definite participation remained to be seen.

Operational Limitations and the Allocation of Resources

In mid-April 1943, Harris, obeying his Air Ministry instructions, carried out two heavy-attacks on the Italian naval base at La Spezia. Yet these raids, perhaps inadvertently, came to highlight an important operational consideration in the bombing of Italy, namely that ‘the length of darkness’ precluded such attacks after 13 April²⁵, which carried fundamental implications for Bomber Command’s support of *Husky*. It meant that, unless some other way was found, the light nights of a Western European

24 Robert S. Ehlers, *The Mediterranean Air War: Airpower and Allied Victory in World War II* (Kansas, 2015), pp. 294–5; Playfair, *Mediterranean and the Middle East*, vol. V, pp. 32–50; TNA, AIR23/1583, Outline Air-Plan, PART I, 3/04/43. Bomber Command’s targets were divided into City Targets (Milan, Turin, Genoa and possibly Rome); Oil Targets (Leghorn and Porto Marghera, nr. Venice); Industrial and Power Target (Terni, nr. Rome); and Rail Communications (Bologna railway-junction). MAC’s targets during the preparatory phase were Axis airfields in Sicily, submarine-bases at Cagliari, Palermo and Messina, railway-targets at Messina, Palermo, Reggio and San Giovanni, industrial targets in Naples, and the oil-refinery at Bari. NWAAF’s bombers then became tied to supporting the invasion itself and providing assistance ‘in the reduction of the island.’ See AIR23/3494, Plan for the Employment of North-West African Air Forces, 14/04/43.

25 TNA, AIR8/777, Portal-Pound, 19/03/43.

summer would prevent attacks on Italy for many months. Indeed, HQ Bomber Command told the Air Ministry that 'a sufficient period of darkness' was not available until 16 August for night operations against Turin, Milan and Genoa.²⁶ Thus, the short hours of darkness thwarted Bomber Command's intense support of *Husky* – if, of course, its attacks were to be mounted solely from the UK.

For an alternative idea had, ironically enough, been resurrected by Harris' cooperation on bombing La Spezia. This was called the 'shuttle-bombing' method, which had been considered and rejected in November 1942. Yet its reconsideration had come about because three flak-damaged Lancasters had been forced to make emergency landings in North Africa. Tedder was hardly slow to capitalise on this development. On 16 April, he asked the Air Ministry for permission to use these aircraft to bomb Italy on their return-flight to the UK.²⁷ This was granted and, critically, tallied with thinking within the Air Ministry at this time on the precise level of Bomber Command's support of Operation *Husky*. On 23 April, Bottomley told Medhurst that 'preliminary examination' of the Air-Plan had led him to formulate some points which 'I think should be cleared [up] as soon as possible', particularly the fact that Bomber Command's 'heavy and sustained attacks on Italy' made from the UK during the preparatory phase were negated because of the light summer nights. The only methods for doing so were instead harassing-attacks by Mosquitoes, a 'shuttle-service' to and from North Africa, and occasional full-scale attacks in which Fighter Command escorted the bombers across the French coast at dusk.²⁸ Bottomley soon focused on the second option, less as being the best alternative but more because it seemed the least unpromising. He informed Harris that

It certainly has grave disadvantages and we at the Air Ministry are not suggesting it. When, however, the short hours of darkness prevent ... we may find ourselves compelled to undertake certain shuttle operations.²⁹

This was hardly promising and showed that an intense level of support, on the scale undertaken during *Lightfoot* and *Torch* that saw Genoa, Milan and Turin attacked multiple times, would be very difficult. Yet Tedder soon submitted his own proposals, which seemingly not only got around this problem but also his own command's lack of bombing 'punch'.

In fact, Tedder initially championed the 'reinforcement option' by submitting a 'shopping-list' of additional bomber aircraft required, which comprised two American Bomb Groups and five more Wellington squadrons. The MAC commander's Air-Plan contained a *fait accompli* with regard to the US reinforcements for these bombers had

26 TNA, AIR20/5324, HQ Bomber Command-Air Ministry, 13/04/43. This was in response to a message received from the Air Ministry earlier that day; '[The] Information', it was stated, was 'urgently required'. See AIR2/7197, Air Ministry-HQ Bomber Command, 13/04/43. The Air Ministry also asked MAC whether the B.17 and B.24 could reach the Turin-Milan-Genoa area from North Africa and, if so, with what bomb-load. See AIR2/7197, Air Ministry-MAC, 13/04/43.

27 TNA, AIR20/1632, Air Ministry-HQ Bomber Command, 16/04/43.

28 TNA, AIR20/4531, Bottomley-Medhurst 23/04/43.

29 H.P., H47, Bottomley-Harris, 25/04/43.

already been included to fulfil the aim of reducing Axis air strength during the ‘critical’ period of D-7 to D-Day. ‘I do not feel that we are in a position to question the Air Commander’s Heavy Bomber requirements’, the ACAS(P) wrote, worried a refusal might push the Americans into diverting all bomber reinforcements to the South-West Pacific. This request was therefore sanctioned but only as a detachment to MAC lasting six weeks. ‘Unless we are unequivocal on this point a temporary loan may develop into a permanent one’,³⁰ a comment by Medhurst that no doubt tallied with Harris’ long-held suspicions about the Mediterranean Theatre’s appetite for one-way aircraft transfers. Indeed, with the Air Ministry having also given its agreement to sending three RCAF Wellington squadrons in May 1943,³¹ Harris soon submitted a strident protest about his resources being poached by MAC. This overseas command had 3000 aircraft, he stated, which represented a chronic ‘over-insurance’ in ‘a secondary theatre of war’ and reduced the number of aircraft available for bombing Germany; Harris recommended MAC should instead use Mitchells and Venturas for the night-bombing role.³² But this proposal was soon scotched by the Air Ministry’s Directorate of Bomber Operations. The restricted range and bomb-load of these types, at 950 miles with 3000lbs and 925 miles with 2,500lbs, respectively, compared unfavourably to the Wellington’s capability of carrying 4,000lbs over 1470 miles. The withdrawal of the Wellington squadrons from the bombing offensive against Germany was therefore justified precisely because it remained ‘[the] one means of continuing the night offensive against Italy which will otherwise be denied to us by the short hours of the Spring and Summer months... In any event we are committed to this course [under the Casablanca Directive]’.³³ Portal therefore ordered Harris to ‘accept the decision’,³⁴ which the C-in-C did.

But MAC’s requirements did not end with these Wellington reinforcements, however. Further demands were submitted over the forthcoming weeks, including the sending of Halifaxes in sufficient numbers to equip four squadrons. Yet the aircraft’s high losses during the Battle of the Ruhr saw the Air Staff sanction the sending of just ten Halifaxes in May and June.³⁵ Not surprisingly, Tedder was disappointed by this very modest reinforcement, which came after being informed he was not to receive additional Liberators because these were needed in the South-West Pacific and for anti-U-Boat operations in the Atlantic. Told simply ‘to accept the position’, Tedder was instructed to ‘[simply] limit your H.B. [heavy-bomber] effort to coincide with [the] flow of 5

30 TNA, AIR20/4538, [Briefing Note by A.C.A.S.(P) for] COS(43)45th Meeting, 4/04/43.

31 TNA, AIR8/1293, Air Ministry-MAC, 16/04/43.

32 P.P., File 10, Harris-Portal, 26/04/43.

33 TNA, AIR20/4538, Bottomley-Portal, 27/04/43.

34 P.P., File 10, Portal-Harris, 29/04/43. In his memoirs, Tedder wrote that: ‘I understood how difficult it must be to adjudicate between rival claims, and how hard it was, once units had been transferred from one theatre to another, to secure their recall or replacement. After all, we had had a good deal of experience in this line during my time in the Middle East, where we had not been guiltless ourselves.’ See A. Tedder, *With prejudice: The war memoirs of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Tedder* (London, 1966), p. 460.

35 TNA, AIR23/7739, Air Ministry-MAC, 5/05/43. See also AIR23/7739, Halifax Quotas for Middle East, 6/05/43.

Halifaxes per month pending resumption [of the] flow [of] Liberators'. Such an instruction was a clear reflection the British were increasingly 'obliged' to rely on the Americans to undertake their heavy-bomber effort in the Mediterranean, which was a situation the Air Ministry itself described as 'not satisfactory' but 'fear we have no option'.³⁶ Yet Tedder himself believed there *was* an alternative option, namely to draw more directly on Bomber Command's resources.

He was no doubt emboldened to do so because the Overall Plan for *Husky* had just been approved by the CCoS at the Washington Conference (*Trident*) on 13 May.³⁷ This meant the four-part Air-Plan was no longer merely provisional but a definite plan of operations, and requests for additional aircraft and assistance could now be made formally. On 24 May, Tedder, therefore, sent the Air Ministry a lengthy telegram that began by stating he was 'anxious' to have Bomber Command's full support during *Husky* because the 'moral and material effects of heavy air-attacks on Northern Industrial Centres is considered very important here'. This involved breaking Italian morale, interrupting railway-traffic from Germany and Northern Italy to Sicily, destroying the oil-refineries at Leghorn and Porto Marghera, attacking the steel works at Terni, and fulfilling naval demands for raids on the ports of La Spezia and Genoa. But with MAC's existing Wellington force limited by numbers and, moreover, restricted to bombing targets in Sicily and southern Italy, Tedder concluded by emphasising 'the important operational advantages' which Bomber Command could provide, either by regular 'shuttle' operations or by sending a 'temporary detachment' of 100–130 Lancasters to North Africa.³⁸

The 'shuttle method' and temporary detachment had been ideas already considered – and rejected – as techniques for bombing Italy some six months before. Back in early-November 1942, the Axis' worsening position in North Africa saw the War Cabinet request from Portal a review on the means by which Italian targets could be extensively bombed.³⁹ The CAS asked Harris for his opinion, and also requested from Bottomley 'an independent appreciation of the same problem', although both largely came to the same conclusion.⁴⁰

The C-in-C's long memorandum expressed opposition to both methods because of the maintenance difficulties of servicing complicated machines outside the UK, the problem of unserviceable aircraft becoming wastefully grounded in North Africa, the drain of manpower for establishing maintenance organisations and headquarters in that theatre, and the Lancasters' vulnerability on Algerian airbases to Axis air-attack. The 'temporary detachment' moreover possessed an even more serious drawback, namely the complete loss of these aircraft from bombing Germany. Harris therefore advised the 'Best Course' for 'attaining the aim at the smallest cost' was for Bomber Command to continue to attack Italy from its home bases because it was the least administratively disruptive method, and maintained operational flexibility for attacking both Italy *and* Germany. That UK-based bombers could only reach targets in Northern Italy was considered less

36 TNA, AIR23/7739, Air Ministry-A.O.C.-in-C. ME, 22/04/43.

37 TNA, AIR41/52, AHB Narrative, *The Sicilian Campaign June – August 1943*, undated.

38 TNA AIR8/1293, MAC-Air Ministry, 24/05/43.

39 TNA, AIR20/5324, Extract from the 151st Conclusions of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held on the 9 November, 1942.

40 TNA, AIR20/5324, Portal-Harris, 9/11/42.

significant because the overwhelming proportion of Italy's war industry – 65% – was located there. In contrast, Lancasters from North Africa had fewer industrial targets to attack, with 26% in Central Italy and just 9% in the south, which Harris believed could be attacked by those bombers already based in the Mediterranean.⁴¹ Portal accepted all of Harris' arguments, and informed Churchill accordingly.⁴²

Yet the circumstances of November 1942 were very different to those pertaining in May 1943. Back then, the bombing of Italy was still an ad hoc commitment, all of which allowed Harris greater wriggle-room by offering assessments over what could or could not be done. By spring 1943, in contrast, Bomber Command *had* to give its support to amphibious operations in the Mediterranean owing to the Casablanca Directive and it was for this reason why Tedder maintained the pressure on it doing so.

Nonetheless, Tedder's request of 24 May represented a considerable ask that meant a considerable change in Bomber Command's operations for some time, in which Harris faced the prospect of losing some of his best squadrons (5 Group's Lancaster units) to another theatre. Yet this reflected Tedder's belief that resolving the conundrum of the light nights preventing the bombing of northern Italy from the UK was for Bomber Command to transfer aircraft to him. In making this demand, he was far from being on weak-ground. The recent surrender of the Axis in Tunisia saw Tedder receive a personal message of congratulations from Churchill on 'the splendid exertions of the Allied Air Forces under your skilful and comprehending direction'. His 24 May request, moreover, came the day after meeting the prime minister in Algiers for discussions on preparations for *Husky*, so it seems likely that Tedder had already received Churchill's verbal consent for this proposal.⁴³

The Air Ministry's Directorate of Bomber Operations soon examined the effect of Tedder's requirements on Bomber Command and his overall objective of ensuring no part of Italy should be 'free from the threat of bombing' by attacking a variety of targets (see Appendix II). Yet the investigation ruled-out all targets except for the northern industrial cities, which they considered to be the most 'profitable' for bombing because that 'would cause embarrassment to the [Fascist] administration and a general lowering of National morale'. However, the Air Staff calculated the range involved in bombing Turin, Milan and Genoa from North African bases meant only modest H.E. bombloads could be carried, whilst the Lancaster detachment was itself too small to produce effective fire-raising on cities that were described as 'relatively invulnerable to incendiaries'. 500 sorties, they postulated, would see only 1,400 tons of H.E. bombs dropped in seven major attacks over the 14-day detachment period, which hardly seemed worthwhile. Yet the most critical implications of Tedder's request for a Lancaster detachment being sent to North Africa came in a sub-section titled 'Affect on the Offensive against Germany'. Although the Air Staff were aware of Tedder's high-

41 P.P., File 9, Harris-Portal, 13/11/42; [and Enclosure:] 'An Appreciation on the Employment of Bomber Forces to Carry Out Heavy Scale Attacks Against Objectives in Italy', 13/11/42. See also TNA, AIR20/4515, Portal-Churchill, 24/11/42; [and Enclosure:] 'Summary of A.O.C.-in-C. Bomber Command's Views of the Bombing of Italy', 24/11/42.

42 TNA, AIR20/4515, Portal-Churchill, 29/11/42.

43 Tedder, *With prejudice*, pp. 436–8.

reputation at this time, especially with Churchill, Harris' stock was also considered equally good given the destruction his force had then been inflicting on the Ruhr.

In fact, the Air Staff viewed the detachment as a significant diversion of Bomber Command's strength from the Ruhr air campaign; moreover, they (like Harris) remained concerned the transfer of aircraft might become permanent, as previous experience had shown when bombers had been sent to the Mediterranean Theatre. Indeed, they worried that once in North Africa the Lancasters might be perceived by local air commanders as a substitute for the three 'on-loan' American Bomb Groups that were set for withdrawal on 20 July to commence training for attacking Ploesti's oil-refineries (Operation *Tidalwave*). Tedder's demand was, therefore, weighed-up against the reduction in bombing effort on Germany at what the Air Staff perceived to be a critical moment. For they believed, somewhat optimistically, that 'morale in the Rhur [sic] is already badly shaken and considerable disorganization has been caused' and it remained vital 'to exploit to the full the results already achieved [by] continuity of attack'. Relaxation of effort, even for a short time, would result 'in a disproportionate loss of effect', and the recovery of morale and industrial output in the foremost centre of the German war economy. Reduced to a simple equation, the Air Staff calculated the 1400 tons destined for Italian cities would be unlikely to precipitate Italy's collapse, and not worth the effort when the Ruhr's morale and industrial production seemed 'so on the ropes'. A temporary reduction in the bombing of Germany could only 'be accepted' if the effort against Italy was critical to *Husky's* outcome, which the Air Staff believed was unlikely.⁴⁴ Thus, notwithstanding *Husky's* importance for Allied grand strategy, in the calculation between the effect of bombing Germany and the possible results accrued from bombing Italy, the Air Staff placed emphasis on the former. However, Bottomley told Evill on 27 May, a concession of Bomber Command from its UK bases risking one or two attacks on Northern Italy during the short summer nights was still being examined.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, in reply to Tedder's request two replies were drafted. The first was certainly more critical, describing his 'project' as 'uneconomical' and a 'diversion' they could ill-afford to make from the 'crescendo against the Ruhr'. He was also told, rather bluntly, that the tonnage dropped by a 120-strong Lancaster detachment would 'have negligible effects' on *Husky's* success, and 'the effects on Italian morale' would 'be small' when compared with the larger attacks on Northern Italy made from the UK. In essence, Tedder had to make-do with his existing bomber force and the Wellington and American reinforcements already earmarked.⁴⁶ Yet, it was a shorter, more conciliatory message, which contained the same message on not diverting forces from the bombing of Germany but without the overt criticism of Tedder's proposal, that was actually sent.⁴⁷

Yet as a possible concession to MAC, the Air Staff continued to explore the possibility of making some attacks on Northern Italy from the UK during the summer. There were two options to do so, namely going through the weaker defences of Western France

44 TNA, AIR20/3372, Proposal to operate a Force of Lancasters from North Africa against targets in Northern Italy, undated.

45 TNA, AIR20/3372, Bottomley-V.C.A.S, 27/05/43.

46 TNA, AIR20/3372, Air Ministry-HQ MAC [draft], undated.

47 TNA, AIR8/1293, Air Ministry-HQ MAC, 27/05/43.

across to the Bay of Biscay on the return journey or on the outbound one by traversing Northern France at dusk with fighter-escort. On 28 May, Bufton discussed these possibilities with the Senior Air Staff Officer (SASO) at HQ Bomber Command, Air Vice-Marshal R.D. Oxland. Reiterating his superior's objection to wholesale 'diversions' to the Mediterranean, Oxland conceded that Italian operations could be undertaken if the homebound journey crossed the Bay of Biscay during the light summer morning – a route that was adopted on 12/13 July – but *only* for one or two occasions. This was because losses were expected to increase owing to the *Luftwaffe's* greater chance of interceptions on a long and predictable route.⁴⁸ The other method soon re-examined was the 'shuttle-attack'. On 14 June, HQ MAC informed HQ NWAAF that although the Air Ministry remained 'reluctant' to sanction any shift away from the Main Offensive against Germany, the need could arise 'when Bomber Command heavies on missions over Germany land in N. Africa, they will be bombed-up for striking targets in support of *Husky* on return flight'.⁴⁹ This subtle change in attitude had come about because of developments behind-the-scenes.

For one thing, Churchill, already displeased by Bomber Command's poor operational record up to mid-June that had been followed by a four-day 'lull' in operations whilst *Monica* and a newer version of *Oboe* were installed into its aircraft,⁵⁰ was not impressed by its absence from 'the prolonged preparatory bombings' of Pantelleria, particularly as 'the softening effects' of bombing on a garrison was the subject of a specialist study being conducted, no doubt with the invasion of Western Europe in mind. In especially pointed criticism, Churchill wrote that Harris 'is influenced' by the opinion of concentrating 'everything' on Germany and that 'the opening of large-scale military operations in Europe a disaster'. 'This may be natural from his point of view', he continued, 'but we must not allow such localised opinions to obstruct our thoughts'.⁵¹ Such criticism shows that, by mid-June 1943, Churchill's backing of Harris was far from complete nor automatic, especially if he continued to show such disinterest in supporting amphibious operations. This situation no doubt led Portal to ask Harris to clarify his intentions on future bombing targets. In a long reply, dated 16 June, the C-in-C expressly stated that:

within the limitation of the available radius as dictated by the hours of darkness, it is most essential to spread attacks over a given area as widely as possible otherwise as we have found to our cost, the enemy quickly concentrates his defences⁵²

Yet 'for such reasons' he favoured the occasional 'shuttle-attack' to North Africa precisely because it made the more remote towns of Germany accessible to attack, in which

48 TNA, AIR20/3372, Bufton-Bottomley, 28/05/43.

49 TNA, AIR23/3282, HQ MAC-HQ NAAF, 14/06/43.

50 TNA, PREM3/11/12, Portal-Churchill, 15/06/43.

51 TNA, CAB80/70/25, C.O.S.(43)305(O), Overseas Operations – Preliminary Air Bombardment, Minute by the Prime Minister, 14/06/43. Bomber Command's 'immense power' being so close to the Channel ports made 'it is essential that full consideration should be given to this newly emerging and important factor', Churchill noted, and whether 'the stunning and blast effects of a short 'blitz'' or 'the prolonged type', in which 'for a fortnight people get hardly any sleep and perhaps are short of food and water', was more effective.

52 P.P., Folder 10, Harris-Portal, 16/06/43.

their populations were liable to 'protest vociferously if they are denuded of their anti-aircraft defences'. Stating that he had hoped to have 'done more' of such attacks over the previous month but that the weather had been poor,⁵³ a 'shuttle-attack' soon occurred on 20/21 June (Operation *Bellicose*), with Friedrichshafen on the German-Swiss border being raided before the aircraft landed in North Africa. MAC informed HQ NAAF about the imminent arrival of these 50 Lancasters, although they emphasised 'these aircraft are not repeat not being placed at our disposal for Husky'. Tedder had, however, been given a free hand by the Air Ministry to decide the target for the return journey and chose La Spezia where the three Littorio-class battleships remained at anchor.⁵⁴ Expressing gratitude to Harris 'for your Lancaster party', Tedder described *Bellicose* as 'most useful to us at this juncture', to which the C-in-C replied that 'we hope to repeat our visit'. Bomber Command would do so again but just twice in the week after *Husky* began.⁵⁵

This modest number of 'shuttle-attacks' was not due to Harris' refusal to cooperate but was, in the first instance, down to opinion in the Air Ministry. On 24 June, the Air Staff's morning conference saw agreement reached that although these types of attacks had 'considerable value' in allowing Bomber Command to reach more distant German targets, a regular tempo of 'shuttle-attacks' was 'not practicable' because 'we cannot afford to lock-up in North Africa the necessary personnel and facilities'.⁵⁶ Within the Mediterranean Theatre itself, some airmen even came to dislike the sudden appearance of Lancasters on their airfields. At HQ NWAAF, one officer described such operations as 'a very unsatisfactory project' owing to the lack of maintenance personnel for servicing Bomber Command's complicated aircraft, especially if 'considerable attention' was needed. Moreover, 'we have no personnel qualified or experienced in the bombing up of the Lancaster'.⁵⁷ Some days later, Spaatz told Tedder the 'whole operation [is] ill-conceived' owing to the strain on local maintenance teams and groundcrews. '[T]he magnitude of the commitment for servicing 33 Lancaster airplanes would have required work during the night regardless of any prior plans that may have been made', the American airman complained, a situation which was worsened by the Lancaster's prodigious appetite for fuel and bombs.⁵⁸ Even when the July 'shuttle' operations were undertaken, HQ NWAAF felt a need to re-emphasise that 'maintenance of the Lancaster aircraft from Bomber Command has caused considerable disruption in [the] servicing and maintenance of aircraft required for this Command'.⁵⁹ Given the lukewarm feeling in the Air Ministry and the hardly concealed dislike among some officers in North Africa, it is little surprise

53 P.P., Harris-Portal, 16/06/43. On receiving this detailed explanation, Portal told Harris this query was not motivated by 'criticism' but from both 'personal interest' and 'questions from other quarters', no doubt a veiled reference to Churchill. See P.P., File 10, Portal-Harris, 18/06/43.

54 TNA, AIR23/7345, HQ MAC-HQ NAAF, 15/06/43. MAC had to adhere to strict conditions laid down by the Air Ministry: only targets in north-west Italy could be selected, the aircraft had to clear northern France before twilight, and the attack would be cancelled should the Lancasters encounter a 25mph headwind.

55 TNA, AIR20/782, Tedder-Harris, 27/06/43; and AIR20/782, Harris-Tedder, 29/06/43.

56 TNA, AIR20/3372, Minutes of A.C.A.S.(Ops.) Conference 24 June 1943, 24/06/43.

57 TNA, AIR23/3282, Minute in HQ NWAAF, 16/06/43.

58 TNA, AIR23/3304, HQ NWAAF-HQ MAC, 26/06/43.

59 TNA, AIR23/3282, HQ NWAAF-HQ NAAF, 20/07/43.

the 'shuttle-attack' was utilised only rarely, which was ironic given that Harris was more favourable to this type of special operation than might initially be supposed.

Bombing Turin During Operation *Husky*: The Attack, Effects and Aftermath

Late on the opening day of the invasion, Tedder told Portal that although operations were 'progressing satisfactory' the 'air battle is, however, far from over, and we may well have some difficult times during the next 48 h'.⁶⁰ Tedder's pessimism was well-founded. For the landings caused the Axis High-Command in Rome to order persistent air-attacks, and on 11 July 198 Italian and 283 German aircraft flew missions against the crowded beach-heads.⁶¹ It was imperative for the Allies to continue the overall task of keeping as many Axis fighters away from the Sicilian landing areas as possible. Should fulfilment of this primary aim 'go well', Tedder stated, the next objective was to undertake 'really heavy blows' simultaneously on 'three vital centres', with the American Liberators and Fortresses to bomb Naples and Rome respectively, whilst Harris' Lancasters should make another 'shuttle-attack' on a 'suitable target' in Northern Italy. 'Feel moral[e] effect of such operations might be vital especially if an attack by shuttle service included', he told Portal.⁶² Tedder, hardly holding back in the ruthless application of airpower, believed that attacking these railway targets would hinder the German reinforcement of Sicily and have the added effect of worsening civilian morale. The USAAF attacks on Naples and Rome went ahead on 14 and 19 July respectively; Harris meanwhile had gone further than launching a solitary 'shuttle' operation.

On 11/12 July, he chose Turin for that night's target but a forecast of bad weather forced a late-afternoon cancellation.⁶³ The following day he took the mid-afternoon decision to switch that night's target to Turin because something called the 'alternative programme' had been quickly 'adopted'.⁶⁴ Intended as a 'maximum effort', predictions of poor weather over France on the outbound-route, which was to be flown at low level before a long climb over the Alps, saw the Halifaxes and 3 Group's Lancaster IIs removed from the Battle-Order.⁶⁵ Moreover, the greater distance of this Turin operation, readily apparent when compared with the previous attack on 4/5 February (see Appendix III), was the only way a large-scale attack on Northern Italy could be made at this time, yet cancelling the other bombers was necessary because the 2,000-mile round-trip had the bombers returning over north-west France during the breaking summer morning. '[T]he night', the AHB Narrative noted, 'was [just] too short for the slower types of aircraft'.⁶⁶ Time-keeping was, furthermore, absolutely critical because any delay in clearing the Channel area allowed the *Luftwaffe* to use its day-interceptor (the Focke-Wulf Fw.190) against the returning bombers. For reasons of routeing, fuel-consumption, speed and

60 TNA, AIR20/3372, Tedder-Portal, 10/07/43.

61 C. D'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily 1943* (London, 2008ed.), pp. 302–4.

62 TNA, AIR20/3372, Tedder-Portal, 10/07/43.

63 TNA, AIR14/1819, Reasons for Major Night Operations Not Taking Place – 11 July 1943.

64 TNA, AIR14/1819, Reasons for Major Night-Operations not taking place – 12 July 1943.

65 National Archives of Australia (hereafter N.A.A.), A9652, Box 35, HQ 1 Group-1 Group Bases, 12/07/43.

66 TNA, AIR41/43.

the short hours of darkness therefore meant only 295 aircraft from 1, 5 and 8 Groups – Harris' entire Lancaster force – were dispatched. The operation, as Harris predicted, did not come without cost and was the highest operational loss for Bomber Command against an Italian target, with 13 Lancasters (4.4%) failing to return. This caused HQ Bomber Command to believe the operation was a risk not worth repeating. The operation's sheer distance of nearly 2,000 miles – caused by that long inbound journey across western France to the Bay of Biscay – saw casualties from fuel starvation and the *Luftwaffe's* Fw.190s based in northern France (see Appendix IV).

In exchange for these losses, good weather over Turin saw 734 tons of bombs dropped 'on and around the aiming-point'.⁶⁷ The post-raid report noted 'an excellent concentration' slightly north of the aiming-point and although the bombing later drifted into open country, fires, explosions, and smoke-plumes were observed throughout north and north-eastern Turin, either side of the Dora Riparia (see Appendix V). Here the Fiat Steel Works, the State Arsenal, the city's Gasworks and the Main Railway Station suffered major damage.⁶⁸ Intelligence officers at HQ Bomber Command noted the Italian High Command's communiqué that stated 'the town centre [has] considerable damage'.⁶⁹ Certainly, this attack, one contemporary Italian observer noted, was 'the most violent (bombing) suffered by the city', with the destruction being half of that achieved from the seven attacks made on Turin during November and December 1942.⁷⁰

Yet this outcome, assisted by the aiming-point's position, clearly reflected Harris' approach towards bombing cities, namely placing it over the built-up city centre, rather than reflecting Tedder's wish for it to have been directly over Turin's railway facilities. With ultimate jurisdiction over all aspects of his Command's operational practice, there could be little doubt that Harris' preference would be the case. 'Railways are extraordinarily difficult and unrewarding targets for air attack', he wrote in 1947. 'Main lines can be repaired in a few hours, and through lines in wrecked marshalling yards in a few days'.⁷¹ The C-in-C instead viewed Turin purely as a large industrial city containing a large working-class; the bombings of November 1942 had already caused 400,000 people – half the city's population – to have already fled. Located on the Lombardy Plains, Turin was the 'Home of FIAT' and probably *the* most vital centre in Italy's armaments industry, epitomised by the company's giant, modern factory at Mirafiori, with its iconic roof-mounted test-track, and which had begun war production in 1940. This site was in fact one of ten Fiat factories located in the city that together with the two Lancia Works, produced aircraft, aero-engines,⁷² aircraft components, military transport,

67 TNA, CAB80/40/4, COS(43)200, Weekly Resume No.202 (8 July 1943–15 July 1943), 15/07/43.

68 TNA, AIR14/3410, Bomber Command Report on Night Operations, 12/13 July 1943. Turin, 29/09/43.

69 TNA, AIR24/257, Bomber Command Intelligence Narrative of Operations No. 644, 13/07/43.

70 Archivio di Stato Turin, Busta 14, President of the Fascist Union of Merchants of the Province of Turin, Situation after 13th July Bombing, 17/07/43. I am grateful to Professor Claudia Baldoli and Ms. Sara Dellapiana for their kind assistance with this document.

71 Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, pp. 197–98.

72 For example, the license-built Daimler-Benz DB.605.

AFVs, tanks, railway rolling-stock, and ball bearings. The city's sizeable and numerous factories, not surprisingly meant, Turin was a bastion of communist and trade union activity, and the British viewed the atmosphere there as being particularly restive and steeped in anti-regime feeling as shown by mass strikes in spring 1943, a discontent that further area-attack would heighten further.⁷³

In contrast, Tedder viewed Turin more as a vital junction in Northern Italy's railway system, in which the main-line running from France (through the Mt. Cenis Tunnel) met the main-line eastbound route to Milan. Turin also lay at the northern end of a railway system that ran to Genoa and Rome and on down to Naples, which the Germans were using as their main land-based reinforcement and supply route to the Sicilian battlefield. Within the city itself, all rail-bound traffic funnelled through the large junction and marshalling yard at Lingotto, located in the southern-half of Turin. This site had numerous sidings for railway-traffic from the north and south, around which were located two locomotive sheds, repair-shops and Fiat-owned storage sheds. The Lingotto marshalling-yards also lay next to Fiat's Motor and Aero-Engine Works and ball-bearing factory. Southern Turin was therefore an attractive location for area-bombing precisely because its 'collective whole' comprised a vast transportation facility and several large industrial sites, with workers' housing surrounding it.⁷⁴ Notwithstanding, Harris maintained the aiming point was over the city centre probably because adjusting it to conform more with Tedder's wishes carried unpalatable precedents. Yet curiously the Air Ministry's press-bulletin would emphasise the attack as having been made to devastate a railway target of critical importance 'at an opportune moment'. 'Last night', it stated, 'Bomber Command intervened in the Sicilian campaign by attacking a railway centre through which supplies pass from France and Germany'.⁷⁵

So what practical support for Operation *Husky* did Bomber Command's operation against Turin actually provide? Were Axis air-defences actually stretched? Did the attack restrict the movement of German troops? Addressing such questions only serves to highlight the degree to which lessons drawn from *Husky* could help with the planning of future landings, particularly *Overlord*. In fact, the specific effect of Bomber Command's attack on Turin in assisting the battle for Sicily was negligible. Axis air-power was hardly pulled-up in droves to Northern Italy; instead, the bulk of it was destroyed on its airfields or eroded in battle over Sicily itself. With regards to German supply routes passing through Turin, post-raid damage reports indicate that though the 'main weight' of the attack had fallen on the city's industrial areas, rather than around the Lingotto marshalling-yards, the movement of rail-traffic was assessed to have been 'considerably restricted'. This was because, as late as 15 July, fires had continued to burn throughout *northern* Turin owing to 'the great shortage of water'⁷⁶ – breaking a

73 Baldoli, 'Bombing the FIAT', pp. 75–92. Documents later found on Mussolini's desk show the British were perfectly correct to believe so. See TNA AIR20/5383, Province of Turin; Situation during the month of May, 1943.

74 AFHRA, Reel 269, Information Sheet: 31st March 1943, Turin (Lingotto).

75 N.A.A., A9652, Box 35, Operations No.460 Squadron, 12th July 1943.

76 TNA, CAB80/40/4, COS(43)200, Weekly Resume No. Weekly Resume No.202 (8 July 1943–15 July 1943), 15/07/43; CAB80/41/1, COS(43)219, Weekly Resume No.204 (22 July 1943–29 July 1943), 29/07/43.

city's water mains being an important feature of area bombing. Yet the effect of bombing Turin should not be over-exaggerated. Complete immobilisation of Italy's railways was achieved much further south, Ehlers notes, where the American attacks on Naples and Rome had created 'a 200-mile 'gap' from north of Rome to south of Naples, which stopped railway-traffic for several days causing 'serious' logistical difficulties to the Germans.⁷⁷

Moreover, Professor Zuckerman's report of December 1943 identified that, although destruction and damage to rolling-stock and repair-shops had been achieved in just six places (Naples, Foggia, San Giovanni, Reggio, Messina, and Palermo), the major repair facilities and large concentrations of locomotives were found only 'in a few large centres', namely Naples, Palermo and Turin. 'Major falls in [railway] traffic could have been achieved more rapidly had it been possible to expend a larger effort on large railway centres',⁷⁸ he claimed. Therefore, the implied message, as far as Bomber Command was concerned, was that greater effect would have materialised had Harris persisted in attacking specific railway targets in Turin. Doing so meant the aiming-point being placed over Lingotto for 'repeat attacks', Harris' favoured tactic for the destruction of large industrial cities at this time (as seen by the attacks on Cologne in June/July 1943 and the *Gomorrhah* raids on Hamburg). Indeed, a paper by HQ Bomber Command dated 5 July pointed out 'the immense advantages, both material and morale, which accrue from a policy of repeated raids' in causing cumulative damage to both. To achieve such results, it was stated, it 'may be much more profitable to bomb one city repeatedly'.⁷⁹ Yet valid operation restrictions meant bombing Turin during mid-July was considered not possible however, and Portal was soon recommending the Lingotto marshalling-yard as a target for the USAAF.⁸⁰

Yet Harris still assisted the Sicily battle by switching over to 'special' low-level precision strikes against a number of railway transformer-stations (T/S) in Northern Italy on 15/16 and 16/17 July. Back in November 1942 Harris, despite acknowledging the T/S were 'an important bottle-neck in the electric supply system in Italy', had rejected bombing these targets because they required 'considerable effort... at a time when I want to direct the weight of our attack on such targets as Milan, Turin and Genoa'. He also believed that simultaneous attacks were needed on numerous T/S for widespread disruption to be inflicted.⁸¹ By July 1943 the situation was different, however. Then Harris had specially-trained Lancaster units within 5 Group (including 617 Squadron) for undertaking this type of special operation. Bombing the T/S, moreover, complemented the wider strategy of attacking the electrified railway lines of Northern Italy that the Germans were now utilising considerably.

In the subsequent attacks, the Lancasters bombed a number of T/S from between 800 and 2700 ft., with some aircrews using machine guns to strafe the surrounding light-flak positions. Results proved mixed, however. At Bologna and San Polo D'Enza

77 Ehlers, *Mediterranean Air War*, pp. 303–4.

78 Zuckerman, *Apes to Warlords*, pp. 406–7.

79 TNA, AIR20/8148, "Repeat" Attacks by Bomber Command, 5/07/43.

80 TNA, CAB80/72, COS(43)414, The Attack of Strategic Railways Between France and Northern Italy, Note by the Chief of the Air Staff, 27/07/43.

81 TNA, AIR14/3544, Harris-Cochrane, 13/11/42.

considerable damage was inflicted on the transformers and open-air switch gear, with felled pylons and electric lines, and torn tracks. Widespread destruction was inflicted on the marshalling yard at Arquata Scrivia when eight wagons of ammunition caught fire and detonated in an almighty explosion, causing railway traffic to be interrupted. The T/S at Reggio Emilia went unscathed, however, although the attack did cause 'some panic' in Genoa, Parma and Bologna that resulted in civilians leaving these places. The raids on the second night saw Cislago, west of Milan, severely damaged but haze caused the abandonment of the attack on Brugherio and the T/S at Reggio Emilia was chosen as the alternative. But once again this went undamaged as the Lancaster formation erroneously bombed a Wireless-Station in Parma.⁸² Despite the varied outcome, Harris had shown operational flexibility and a cooperative attitude by switching to precision attacks against the Italian railway network at multiple points, which were the very operations against communication targets that Tedder had requested on 24 May.⁸³

In addition, the Lancasters, having landed in North Africa, were held there for a week whilst discussion occurred in London over the target for the return journey. This commenced from a suggestion by Harris, no doubt seeking a quick end to the *Husky* bombing commitment, on assassinating Mussolini through bombing his villa and office in Rome (Operation *Audax*⁸⁴). Yet the idea was 'frowned on' by Churchill and Eden because of concern that the Vatican might be hit, and was turned down on 17 July.⁸⁵ The port and oil refinery at Leghorn was chosen instead, which was another of Tedder's requested targets for Bomber Command to attack to assist Operation *Husky*.

Notwithstanding his effort, the question of whether Harris would in future cooperate to support an amphibious operation remained partly because of the unenthusiastic impression he had created amongst his fellow commanders over Operation *Husky*. In his memoirs, Tedder wrote:

Eisenhower and I had many talks over the problems ahead ... [T]he point that worried him most was what his relations were going to be with Harris. Harris was by way of being something of a dictator who had very much the reputation of not taking too kindly to directions from outside his own command. Eisenhower saw rocks ahead. Bomber Command had a tremendous and greatly responsible role to play in 'Overlord'. If Harris chose to be 'difficult' in his relationship with the Air Ministry, there might well be endless scope for friction

Reassuring Eisenhower that he 'was quite certain that if Harris were given specific orders to carry out specific jobs, he [the C-in-C] would do them loyally', Tedder acknowledged this was a guarantee 'many people would not have risked'. But events during the

82 TNA, AIR14/3410, Bomber Command Report on Night Operations 15/16th July, 1943. Italian Transformer Stations, 5/10/43; Bomber Command Report on Night Operations 16/17th July, 1943. Italian Transformer Stations, 14/10/43; and AIR20/5383, Telegram 17288, Alessandria-Rome, 16/07/43.

83 TNA, AIR41/34, AHB Narrative, *The Italian Campaign, vol. I, Planning and Invasion to Fall of Rome* (1950), pp. 75–7.

84 On Operation *Audax* see P.P., File 10, Harris-Portal, 11/07/43; [and Enclosure:] 'Bomber Command Operation Order No.162', 03/12/42.

85 TNA, AIR20/5323, handwritten note by W.F. Dry, 17/07/43.

spring and summer of 1944 would prove him correct. This was no doubt because, unlike *Husky*, Bomber Command's role in the invasion of Western Europe owed much to its closer proximity to the Normandy battlefield, which meant Harris became 'locked-in' into a tighter Allied command structure. Tedder, appointed Eisenhower's Deputy Supreme Commander and charged with formulating the Air Plan for *Overlord*, could issue direct instructions to Harris because Eisenhower had been given direct control over the strategic bomber forces (under the SHAEF Directive of 15 April 1944).⁸⁶ This forced Harris' compliance in attacking the French railway system in preparation for *Overlord*, notwithstanding a twenty-two paragraph letter of complaint about having to do so.⁸⁷ In the end, 'the system of command [under SHAEF]', the AHB noted, 'worked well as far as support to Overlord was concerned'.⁸⁸

Conclusion

The story of Bomber Command's support of Operation *Husky* reveals several considerations, namely the question of cross-theatre demands, the operational difficulties in bombing Italy after mid-April 1943, the notion of Harris' supposed non-compliance over 'diversions' away from bombing Germany, the Air Staff's support of his operational policy, and the question of Bomber Command's future role in supporting invasions. In the first instance, the major difficulties revolved around the first two considerations. The considerable difficulty of bombing Italy when the hours of darkness had reduced meant other methods, such as the 'shuttle-service' operations or 'temporary detachment', were advocated to circumvent this problem and, for Tedder, to also compensate for MAC's lack of heavy night-bombers. The first method was not viewed positively because of the difficulties in administration, logistics, serviceability and maintenance of Bomber Command aircraft in North Africa, and NWAAF was dismayed by the requirements of Bomber Command's complicated aircraft on the limited stocks of fuel and bombs held on its primitive Algerian airfields. Yet, in the end, this imperfect option was used, albeit on a handful of occasions, for want of a better alternative. After all, a 'temporary detachment' of Lancasters being sent to North Africa had been rejected outright by the Air Ministry because it reduced Bomber Command's operational flexibility that saw a significant proportion of its best aircraft placed into a theatre from where it could not operate against Germany. In coming to this conclusion, the Air Staff remained firm in their support of Harris' single-minded determination on taking the war directly to the Germans. Reflecting on past experience, they also shared his belief that aircraft sent to the Mediterranean Theatre had a nasty habit of never coming back. No senior airman in the UK wanted 5 Group's Lancasters, one of the best parts of Bomber Command, to suffer the same fate particularly when the Battle of the Ruhr was being pressed-home and the destruction of Hamburg was becoming imminent.⁸⁹

86 Tedder, *With prejudice*, pp. 501–2.

87 P.P., Folder 10, Harris-Portal, 13/01/44 [and Enclosure].

88 TNA, AIR41/56, AHB Narrative, *The RAF in the Bombing Offensive against Germany: vol. VI The Final Phase Mar. 1944-May 1945* (1955).

89 The operation order for *Gomorrhah* was released by HQ Bomber Command on 27 May 1943. See TNA, AIR24/257.

Ultimately, the Turin operation and T/S attacks made during Operation *Husky* showed that Harris did cooperate with other Commands and Theatres, and was a ‘team-player’ more often than has usually been recognised. Whilst it could be said that Harris’ support was ‘enough to be seen to be onside but hardly substantial’, it becomes clear that Bomber Command’s somewhat limited support of *Husky* was not due to Harris’ vehement dislike for ‘diversions’, notwithstanding his often strident letters on this matter. Instead a very real obstacle – the long hours of daylight – was a valid reason for Bomber Command’s inability to undertake a more intensive programme of bombing operations. Harris’ support of *Husky* – always destined to be launched in the summer months – could therefore have never reached the same operational intensity as the bombing campaign against Italy in support of *Torch* and *Lightfoot* in late-1942. In July 1943, Harris did what he could, with one area attack, two ‘precision’ strikes on Italy’s railway network, and a raid on Leghorn’s oil-refinery – targets that Tedder had, in any case, recommended to the Air Ministry on 24 May. Thus, notwithstanding Harris’ acidic letters and general histrionics over ‘diversions’, Tedder’s verdict on Harris having a strong commitment to fulfilling his Directives remains a fair one.⁹⁰ Indeed, some weeks later the C-in-C recommenced operations against Italy because the hours of darkness made it more comfortable to do so. ‘[W]e intend to give them all manner of Hell’,⁹¹ Churchill told Eisenhower, and Portal sent specific instructions to Harris to ‘do his best to “heat up the fire”’.⁹² The C-in-C would do just that.


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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

90 Tedder, *With prejudice*, pp. 501–502.

91 Churchill College Archive, CHAR20/116, Churchill-Eisenhower, 29/07/43.

92 TNA, AIR20/5323, Portal-Bottomley, 28/07/43.