

2019

www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

Author: Robert PALMER, M.A.



A CONCISE HISTORY OF:

15 ARMY GROUP (ALLIED ARMIES IN ITALY) HISTORY & PERSONNEL

A short history of the 15th Army Group, a multi-national command that served in Sicily and Italy from 1943 to 1945. In addition, known details of the key appointments held between 1930 and 1950 are included.

Copyright ©www.britishmilitaryhistory.co.uk (2019)

A Concise History of the 15th Army Group (History & Personnel)

Version: 1_1
This edition dated: 1 May 2020
ISBN: Not yet allocated.

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means including; electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, scanning without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Author: Robert PALMER, M.A. (copyright held by author)
Published privately by: The Author – Publishing as:
www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

15th Army Group (Allied Armies in Italy)

The campaigns in Sicily and Italy were overshadowed by that in North-West Europe during 1944 and 1945. The campaign in Italy lasted longer than that in northern Europe, some twenty months as opposed to just eleven months in North West Europe. It also involved many more nations, the Army Group being a real United Nations formation. The following countries had troops that fought at one time or another in Sicily and/or Italy:

- United Kingdom,
- United States of America,
- France (including Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco),
- Canada,
- India (including modern day Pakistan and Bangladesh),
- Nepal (Gurkha troops in the British Indian Army),
- Poland,
- New Zealand,
- South Africa,
- Brazil,
- Palestine (now modern-day Israel and the Palestinian State),
- Greece,
- Yugoslavia (now the various Balkan states),
- Belgium (a commando troop).

This Army Group was formed from Force 141, constituted for the invasion of Sicily, and came into effect on 11 July 1943, with under command the:

- British 8th Army,
- U.S. 7th Army.

It was titled as the 15th Army Group to symbolise the combination of the 8th Army and 7th Army, the number fifteen being the sum of the two parts. Its predecessor, the 18th Army Group disbanded on 1 June 1943 following the end of the fighting in North Africa. This Army Group was a joint U.K. and U.S. command, with officers from both nations (and other constituent nations) forming the headquarters staff.

On 10 July 1943, Allied forces invaded Sicily with three divisions of the U.S. 7th Army landing at the Gulf of Gela and the 8th Army with four divisions landing near Syracuse. In addition, elements of the 1st Airborne Division were landed in south-east Sicily, although many ended up in the sea. The plan was for the 8th Army to advance strongly up the eastern side of the island to Messina, with the

Americans clearing up the rest of Sicily. However, the British met increasingly stubborn resistance, so the U.S. Army worked around the flanks and entered Messina shortly before the British reached there, marking the end of the campaign on 17 August 1943.

With Sicily secured, it became known that the Italian government were seeking terms for an armistice. Allied forces crossed the Straits of Messina on 3 September 1943 (Operation 'Baytown') without any significant opposition on the same day that the armistice was agreed. The armistice between Italy and the Allies was announced publically on 8 September, with German forces disarming Italian units, sometimes by force. Sadly, the Germans killed and murdered many Italian troops as they seized control in this period of confusion, with some Italian units deciding to continue to fight with the Axis. Persuaded by Field Marshal KESSELRING, Army Group Commander South Italy, HITLER decided not to evacuate Italy but to fight to maintain control of that country for as long as possible. The factors in this decision included the desire to keep Allied air forces as far from Germany as possible, and to assist in maintaining German control of the Balkans.

The U.S. 5th Army came under command in September 1943, with the U.S. 7th Army passing to the control of Supreme Headquarters, Allied Forces Europe on 15 September 1944. On 9 September, British and U.S. divisions under command of the U.S. 5th Army landed at Salerno to the south of Naples in Operation 'Avalanche'. On the same day, British troops landed at Taranto in Operation 'Slapstick'. Neither landing was opposed initially, although a mine sank a British warship in Taranto killing several men of the Parachute Regiment. Two divisions of the 8th Army advanced steadily up the 'toe' of Italy in Calabria, while other formations secured the Province of Puglia in the heel of Italy, including the important towns and ports of Bari, Brindisi and Taranto. The Allies considered this area of Puglia important because of the number of airfields that would allow the Allies to build-up their air forces in Italy, and thereby secure air superiority, followed by air supremacy.

The landing by U.S. 5th Army at Salerno was bitterly opposed by German forces. The German 16th Panzer Division was stationed around Salerno, and in battle groups, the division caused the Allies grave problems establishing themselves in a secure beach-head. HITLER gave KESSELRING command of all German forces in Italy, so KESSELRING began preparing a series of defensive lines across the country, making best use of the topography and climate of Italy. The Germans established a defensive position along the line of the River Volturno just to the north of Naples.

The British 8th Army found the advance slow and difficult up the Adriatic coast. There were significant battles at Termoli, and then the Canadians captured Ortona after much bitter, house-to-house fighting. Although the 8th Army had penetrated the Gustav Line on the eastern side of Italy, the formations were exhausted, and the onset of winter with rain, snow and cold weather meant the advance ground to a halt by the end of 1943.

Meanwhile, the U.S. 5th Army (with the British X Corps under command) crossed the Volturno and advanced up to the main Winter Line, comprising the Gustav Line and other subsidiary defensive positions, covering the southern approaches to Rome. General ALEXANDER decided to focus the efforts of the Army Group on the western side of Italy, as it was felt that a decisive thrust up the Liri Valley towards Rome would be successful, aided by a landing behind German lines at Anzio (Operation Shingle). This proved to a lengthy and costly series of battles in terms of men and materiel before the Gustav Line was finally broken. These included the battles of Monte Cassino, which are well documented. On 11 January 1944, the Army Group was redesignated as the Allied Armies in Italy. This was changed on 18 January 1944 to Allied Central Mediterranean Force, but it reverted to Allied Armies in Italy on 9 March 1944.

As the 8th Army finally broke the Gustav Line from the south, the U.S. 5th Army broke out from the Anzio beachhead. Any opportunity to trap the German Tenth Army was missed, allowing the German forces to retreat in relatively good order back up the Gothic Line further north. Rome was entered on 4 June 1944, just two days before the focus of the media switched to the Allied landings at Normandy in France.

At this stage, three U.S. formations and all four of the French formations were withdrawn from Italy to undertake the invasion of Southern France, codenamed Operation 'Dragoon'. From June until August 1944, the allies advanced steadily up the Italian mainland, capturing the city of Florence and closing up on the Gothic Line. This was the last major defensive line in northern Italy, and it ran along the Apennine Mountains from Pisa, through Bologna to the Adriatic coast at Rimini. There was more bitter fighting that resulted in II Polish Corps capturing Ancona on 18 July.

On 25 August 1944, Operation 'Olive' commenced, this being the Allied offensive to breach the Gothic Line. Some breaches were made, but no breakthrough could be achieved through the mountains and into the plain of the River Po. The Allied advance literally ground to a halt as the weather deteriorated, and the troops on the ground ran out of steam. In December 1944, following the death of Field Marshal DILL in Washington, Field Marshal WILSON was sent to Washington to replace him. General ALEXANDER was appointed the Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean, and Lieutenant General CLARK, U.S. Army assumed command of the 15th Army Group. When Lieutenant General CLARK assumed command, the name of the formation was changed back to 15th Army Group.

The winter of 1944 was spent preparing for a major offensive in the Spring of 1945, but the I Canadian Corps was transferred to North-West Europe at the request of the Canadian government, which wanted all their troops together under one command. In addition, German forces withdrew from Greece leaving a vacuum that led to civil war between communists and royalists.

Operations recommenced in late 1945, with a limited offensive by the U.S. IV Corps, including the Brazilian Expeditionary Corps, on the western side of Italy. The main offensive began on 9 April, with a major assault by the 8th Army on the eastern side, to force the Argenta Gap and deploy armoured forces on the plain of the River Po.

Effective German resistance collapsed, and by 18 April, the 8th Army was through the gap and attempting an encircling move to trap the remaining German forces. Polish troops took Bologna on 21 April, with the U.S. 10th Mountain Division reaching the River Po on 22 April, and the 8th Indian Infantry Division the next day. By the end of April, the German Army Group C had ceased to have any effective command, leaving General von VIETINGHOFF to seek an armistice on behalf of all German and remaining Fascist Italian forces. He signed the instrument of surrender on 29 April, with all hostilities ceasing on 2 May 1945.

Allied Forces moved into Austria as occupying forces, and maintained a presence in northern Italy, in particular around the disputed city of Trieste. Headquarters Allied Armies in Italy closed in June 1945 when it became Headquarters, Central Mediterranean Force. The Headquarters C.M.F. moved from Padua to Venice at the end of June 1947.

General Officer Commanding-in-Chief

11 July 1943 – 16 December 1944

General Sir Harold Rupert Leofric George ALEXANDER, G.C.B., C.S.I. D.S.O., M.C.* , *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*¹

16 December 1944 – June 1945

Lieutenant General Mark Wayne CLARK, U.S. Army²

Chief of Staff

14 February 1943 – 29 May 1943

Major General (Temporary) Charles Henry GAIRDNER, C.B.E., *p.s.c.*

30 May 1943 – 31 December 1943

Major General (Acting) Alexander Arthur RICHARDSON, *p.s.c.*

1 January 1944 – 15 December 1944

Lieutenant General Allan Francis HARDING, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.

16 December 1944 – 1945

Major General Alfred M. GRUENTHER, U.S. Army

Brigadier General Staff – (B.G.S.)

June 1943 – 7 June 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) Terence Sydney AIREY, O.B.E., *p.s.c.*

Major General in charge of Administration

11 July 1943 – 14 October 1943

Major General (Temporary) Charles Harvey MILLER, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.

15 October 1943 – 15 December 1944

Major General Sir Brian Hubert ROBERTSON, Bt., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*

16 December 1944 – May 1945

Post Not Filled – 8th Army dealt directly with British Element of A.F.H.Q.

Deputy Adjutant-General – (D.A.G.)

1944 – 1945

Brigadier Charles Morgan PATON

Brigadier Quarter-Master-General

4 June 1943 – 18 August 1943

Brigadier (Acting) Robert Thomas COOKE, R.A.S.C., *p.s.c.*

¹ Promoted Field Marshal on 4 June 1944. Left appointment to become Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean.

² Promoted General on 10 March 1945.

Deputy Quarter-Master-General – (D.Q.M.G.)

23 October 1943 – 1944

Brigadier (Acting) Walter Henry Dennison RITCHIE,

Major General Royal Artillery – (M.G.R.A.)

4 December 1943 – 31 May 1944

Major General Eric George William Warde HARRISON, C.B.E., M.C.

1 June 1944 – 7 October 1945

Major General (Acting) Alan Hugh HORNBY, C.B.E., M.C., *p.s.c.*

Brigadier Royal Artillery – (B.R.A.)

29 May 1943 – 25 March 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) Fendall William Harvey PRATT, D.S.O., M.C., *G*.³

Chief Engineer – (C.Eng)

December 1943 – 22nd March 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) Norman Annesley COXWELL-ROGERS, C.B.E., D.S.O.

23rd March 1944 – 1945

Major General (Acting) Norman Annesley COXWELL-ROGERS, C.B.E., D.S.O.

1945 – June 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Bryan Trevor GODFREY-FAUSSETT, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C.

Director of Works

1944 – 1945

Brigadier Duncan ANDERSON, C.B.E.

Chief Signal Officer – (C.S.O.)

11 July 1943 – 13 October 1943

Major General William Ronald Campbell PENNEY, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

14 October 1943 – 11 January 1946

Brigadier (Temporary) Reginald Francis Heaton NALDER, O.B.E., B.Sc., *p.s.c.*

14 March 1944 – 1945

Major General (Acting) Reginald Francis Heaton NALDER, O.B.E., B.Sc., *p.s.c.*

Deputy Chief Signal Officer – (D.C.S.O.)

11 July 1943 – 3 November 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) William Arthur SCOTT, M.B.E., R. Sigs.

20 October 1943 – 12 September 1944

Colonel (Acting) Richard Hennis Olpherts CORYTON, O.B.E., B.A., R. Sigs.

³ Awarded the C.B.E. on 5 August 1943.

Brigadier A. E. MORRISON

Director of Supplies and Transport – (D.S.T.)

Major General WHITTY

Deputy Director of Medical Services – (D.D.M.S.)

Consultant Surgeon

Consultant Physician

Deputy Director of Ordnance Services – (D.D.O.S.)

Deputy Director of Mechanical Engineering – (D.D.M.E.)

Command Paymaster

Assistant Director of Dental Services

Provost Marshal – (P.M.)

1943 – 18th December 1944

Lieutenant Colonel REES-REYNOLDS,

18th December 1944 – 1945

Post abolished within British Army – Filled by U.S. Army.

Deputy Director of Labour

Command Education Officer

Command Welfare Officer

Bibliography and Sources

The Monthly Army List January 1930

Available From: Your Old Books and Maps

<http://youoldbooksandmaps.co.uk/british-army-lists-1901-1950.htm>

The Monthly Army List July 1937

Available From: Your Old Books and Maps

<http://youoldbooksandmaps.co.uk/british-army-lists-1901-1950.htm>

The Half Yearly Army List for the period ending 31st December 1938

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylisthalfjan1939grea>

The Monthly Army List April 1938

Available From: S & N Genealogy

<http://www.genealogysupplies.com/>

The Half Yearly Army List for the period ending 31st December 1939

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylisthalfjan1940grea>

The Monthly Army List April 1940

Available From: S & N Genealogy

<http://www.genealogysupplies.com/>

The Quarterly Army List July 1940

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylist1940grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjul21940grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List October 1940

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/stream/armylistoct1940grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Half Yearly Army List for the period ending 31st December 1940

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylisthalfjan1941grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List April 1941

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistapr1941grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistapr21941grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List July 1941

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjul1941grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylist1941grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List October 1941

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoct1941gre>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoct21941grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Half Yearly Army List for the period ending 31st December 1941

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylisthalfjan1942grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List January 1942

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjan1942grea>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjan21942grea>
[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List April 1942 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistapr1942grea>
Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistapr21942grea>
[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List July 1942

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjul1942grea>
Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjul21942grea>
[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List October 1942

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoct1942grea>
Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoct21942grea>
[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List January 1943 Part I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjan1943grea>
Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjan21943grea>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjan31943grea>
[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List April 1943 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaprpart11943grea>
Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaprpart21943grea>
[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List July 1943 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart11943grea>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart121943grea>
Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart21943grea>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart221943grea>
[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List October 1943 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart11943grea>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart121943grea>
Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart21943grea>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart221943grea>
[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List January 1944 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart11944gre>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart121944gre>
Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart21944gre>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart221944gre>
[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List April 1944 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaprpart11944gre>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaprpart121944gre>
Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaprpart21944gre>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaprpart221944gre>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List July 1944 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart11944grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart121944gre>

Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart21944gre>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart221944grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List October 1944 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart11944gre>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart121944grea>

Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart21944gre>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart221944grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List January 1945 Part I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart11945grea>

Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart21945grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart221945grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List April 1945 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at:

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaprpart121945grea>

Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart21945grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaprpart221945grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List July 1945 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart11945grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart121945grea>

Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart21944gre>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjulpart221945grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List October 1945 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart11945grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart121945grea>

Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart21945grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoctpart221945grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army list January 1946 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart11946grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart121946grea>

Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart21946grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjanpart221946grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List April 1946 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaprpart11946grea>

Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaprpart21946grea>

<http://www.archive.org/stream/armylistaprpart221946grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List August 1946 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaugpart121946grea>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaugpart11946grea>

Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistaugpart21946grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List December 1946 Parts I and II

Part I available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistdecpart11946grea>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistdecpart121946grea>

Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistdecpart21946grea>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistdecpart221946grea>

[Accessed 29th May 2011]

Services of British Army Officers & cc 1939 – 1945

Published by Savanna Publications 1999 as reprint of the Half-Yearly Army List January 1946
90, Dartmouth Road, Forest Hill, LONDON. SE23 3HZ [ISBN 1 902366 02 6]

Orders of Battle Second World War 1939-1945

Prepared by Lieut-Col H. F. JOSLEN

First Published by the H.M.S.O. in 1960 Reprinted 1990 The London Stamp Exchange Ltd
[ISBN 0 948130 03 2]

World War II unit histories and officers

<http://www.unithistories.com/>

[Accessed 19th November 2011]

Generals.dk The Generals of WWII

<http://www.generals.dk/>

[Accessed 19th November 2011]

Land Forces of Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth.

Author: T. F. MILLS

Available on-line at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20070622075214/http://www.regiments.org>

[Accessed 19th November 2011]