

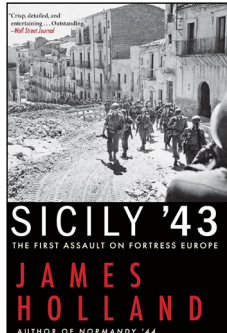
us who are veterans, it offers reflection, and for students of military history and biography, it connects personal experiences to historic events. This book should be considered the introduction for anyone studying Ike's military life.

Sicily '43: The First Assault on Fortress Europe

By James Holland

New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 640 pages, 2021

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The 80th anniversary of the end of World War Two (WWII) (2 September 1945) and the 85th anniversary of the U.S. Army's first official parachute jump (16 August 1940) provide a unique opportunity to highlight a book about one of the largest air, land, and sea campaigns of WWII. James Holland's *Sicily '43* deftly describes the actions of the combined American, British, and Canadian airborne and seaborne armies, navies, and air forces during the 38-day campaign to liberate Sicily, known as Operation Husky.

Holland is an English historian, prolific author, broadcaster, and podcaster (*We Have Ways of Making You Talk*). *Sicily '43* is the first of Holland's three books about the Allied Italian Campaign. His accompanying books are *The Savage Storm: The Battle for Italy 1943* (2023) and *Cassino '44: The Brutal Battle for Rome* (2024). Although a hefty 640 pages, *Sicily '43* provides the modern military leader some timeless lessons about the complexity of combined and joint operations, the value and fragility of special operations and airborne troops, and the requirement for air superiority and conditions setting during joint forcible entry operations (JFEO).

On 10 July 1943, 160,000 Allied troops assaulted Sicily by air and sea during Operation Husky. Following Operation Torch, the first U.S./UK combined campaign that defeated the Germans and Italians in North Africa, Operation Husky was the first Allied campaign onto the European continent since the fall of France in 1940. Holland argues that this was the largest amphibious assault of WWII due to the number of troops that landed on the first day of the invasion. The airborne and amphibious assaults were supported by more than 2,500 ships and 3,500 Allied aircraft. Holland's style, like that of Stephen Ambrose, combines a rich patchwork of first-person accounts by American, British, Canadian, Italian, and German flag officers, junior officers, NCOs, and troops alike. He complements these accounts with those of local Sicilians and his expert understanding of the force composition, weapons, and tactics of both the Allied and Axis forces. Holland's books lie on a bedrock of primary source research and physical battlefield studies.

JFEOs may be the most complex of all military operations, and Holland captures those complexities well — most importantly, the need for both air and naval superiority. The success of Operation Torch allowed the Allies to base fighters and bombers in North Africa, thus facilitating air superiority in the southern Mediterranean. This air superiority was then conducive to the establishment of naval superiority between North Africa and Sicily. Without both air and naval superiority, the airborne and amphibious assaults on Sicily would not have been possible. However, the range limitations of the fighter aircraft (U.S. P-38s Lightning and UK Spitfires) forced the Allies to attack in the most obvious location, Sicily. Bypassing the island and landing on the Italian peninsula itself could have achieved both operational and tactical surprise. Holland does an excellent job of highlighting the high-level tensions between the U.S. and UK flag officers that were caused by the constraints and limitations of air and naval assets. He also highlights the famous rivalry between Patton and Montgomery that allowed 40,000 German troops to escape to mainland Italy.

Holland does an excellent job of portraying the difficulties of conducting airborne operations. He uses the knowledge of U.S. and UK parachute and glider operations gained while writing his book *Normandy '44: D-Day and the Battle for France* (2019) to describe the technical, tactical, and personal human challenges inherent in airborne operations. These challenges became evident when only 12 of 137 British gliders hit their landing zone (many ditched in the sea) and when the 82nd Airborne Division's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment landed far and wide of their drop zone. Holland does a good job linking lessons learned from airborne operations in Sicily to more successful, although not perfect, glider and parachute drops in Normandy on D-Day.

In summary, James Holland's *Sicily '43* is a fresh look at the Allies' first campaign to attack the "soft underbelly" of the Axis powers. His expertise in WWII history, detailed first-person narratives, and engaging narrative style make for an excellent book that memorializes a true turning point in the European theater of operations of WWII. This book also provides pertinent lessons for the modern student of JFEO.

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