

Sicilian Campaign Overview

The purpose of the Sicilian Campaign was to open up the Mediterranean Sea for Allied shipping purposes and to create a direct route for an Allied invasion into Italy. The American assault force, including the Big Red One, invaded Sicily on the beaches of Gela on July 10, 1943. According to the Naval Historical Center, “the beach was defended by machine guns on its flanks, batteries 7,000 yards inland, another battery just west of the town, and another 18,500 yard north-northwest. Wire, pillboxes, and antitank guns defended the town itself.”¹ In addition to the fortification issues, the U.S. army was forced to navigate around sand dunes and mountainous conditions as it marched toward the town of Gela. Despite these obstacles, the Americans, along with the British forces, were able to take the beaches around Gela without much direct resistance from the Axis forces. The Axis forces did not mount an effective resistant effort because of leadership problems that crippled the strategic effectiveness of the Axis powers. Specifically, Axis military leaders did not coordinate the movement of the two army divisions (the Italian Mobile E and the Hermann Goering Division). Moreover, the Axis armies were forced to drive tanks through the mountainous regions from Caltagirone, Sicily to Niscemi, Sicily where the Axis and Allied forces met in battle. Although the Axis forces were able to inflict numerous casualties on the Allies, the Allies succeeded in holding their position in Sicily.

¹ Office of Naval Intelligence, *The Sicilian Campaign: 10 July-17 August 1943*, (Washington D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1993), 61.