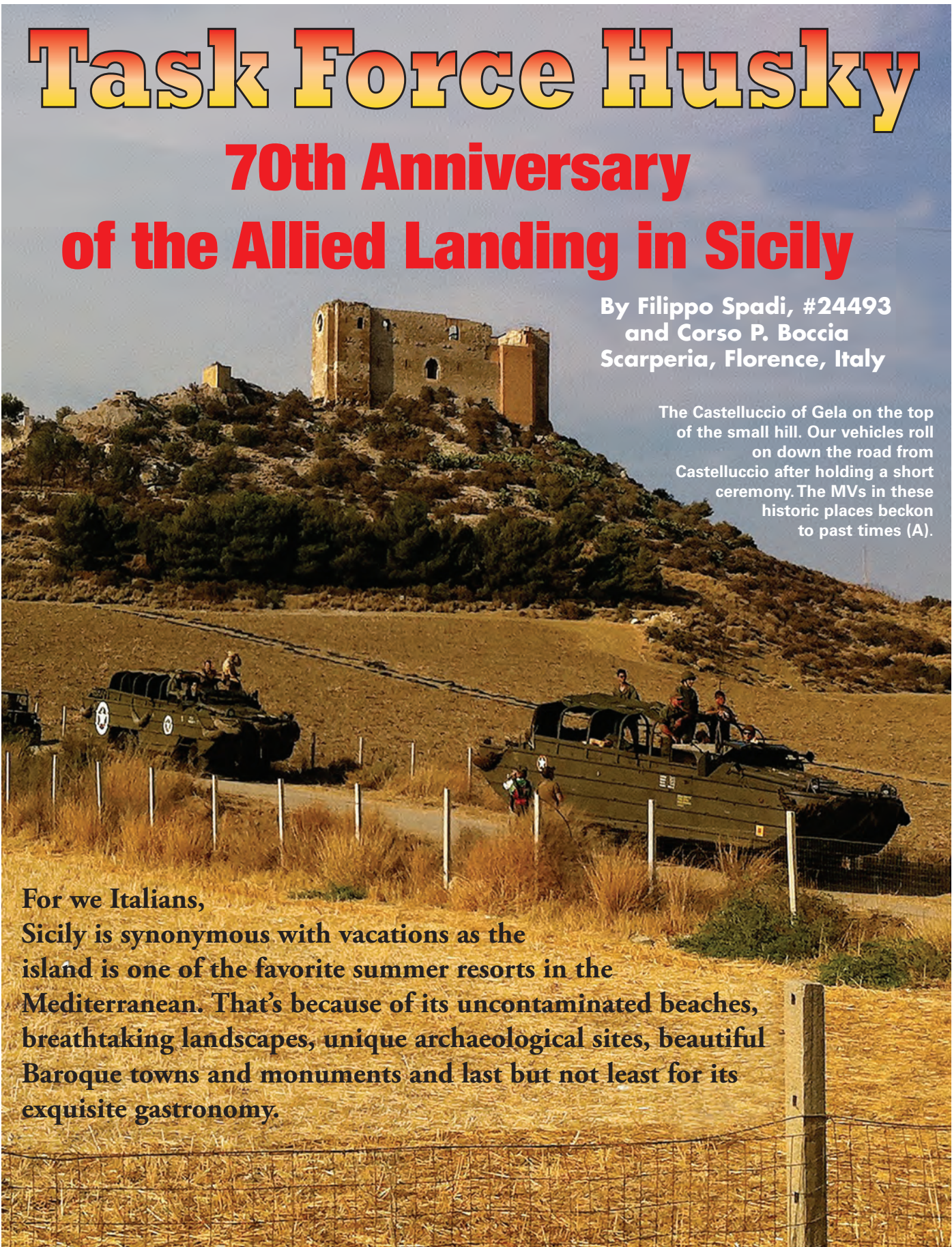


Task Force Husky

70th Anniversary of the Allied Landing in Sicily

By Filippo Spadi, #24493
and Corso P. Boccia
Scarperia, Florence, Italy

The Castelluccio of Gela on the top of the small hill. Our vehicles roll on down the road from Castelluccio after holding a short ceremony. The MVs in these historic places beckon to past times (A).



For we Italians,
Sicily is synonymous with vacations as the island is one of the favorite summer resorts in the Mediterranean. That's because of its uncontaminated beaches, breathtaking landscapes, unique archaeological sites, beautiful Baroque towns and monuments and last but not least for its exquisite gastronomy.



Map showing the key locations visited during the **Task Force Husky** event. The bracketed letters e.g. (A) in the article refer to the map locations.

For history buffs, however, Sicily is also where the Allied armies began their long and bloody trek to liberate Europe. The British, from their initial alliance with the US, had always advocated the roundabout way to Germany via Southern Europe. In late 1942, with strong British persuasion that strategy was accepted by the Americans, as the buildup for the projected European invasion was going much slower than expected and the Soviets were insisting on a 'second front' to distract Axis resources from the Eastern Front.

On the night of 09 July 1943 the largest amphibious assault of WWII, code-named '*Husky*,' landed on the southern and eastern coasts of Sicily where the British and Americans established their beachheads.

In the US zone the troops of the Provisional Corps – soon to become the 7th US Army – under the command of General George S. Patton, disembarked between Gela (A) and Scoglitti. Their mission was to cover the left

flank of the 8th British Army commanded by General Bernard Law Montgomery, which landed between Pachino and Syracuse.

Very few people today know that the number of troops composing the Sicilian operation was the largest of WWII amphibious operations, never again equaled in the ETO or the Pacific theatre. Overall, the Allied forces deployed in Sicily amounted to 478,000 men, 14,000 vehicles, 600 tanks, and 1,000 artillery pieces. Axis forces comprised about 260,000 men, 260 tanks, and a proportional number of artillery pieces. The airborne phase of the invasion, with the drop of the 82nd US Airborne Division, as well as smaller British parachute units, was also the first test of a mass combat jump by the Allies. It involved the use of about 400 transport aircraft and 144 gliders. Another *first* of the Sicilian invasion was the use of DUKWs, which received their extremely successful baptism under fire.

Its attractiveness notwithstanding, Sicily is located far from Italy's traditional areas of military vehicle collecting, which is largely located in the central and northern regions. And, while collectors may easily get to the island by air, transporting vehicles there is much more complicated and expensive, especially when heavy vehicles are considered. For these reasons nobody before had attempted to bring a significant number of heavy vehicles and reenactors to the historical places of the Sicily beachheads. The occasion for doing that presented itself on 10 July 2013 – the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Sicilian campaign. We had received a proposal by several local governmental authorities and private sponsors who had been impressed by accounts of our *Column of Liberation 2013* in Verona (see *Army Motors* #145).

In less than two months, our project – named *Task Force Husky* – passed from a few pencil notes on a piece of paper to the real thing. Adding to the fast pace of events was the fact

Task Force Husky
10 Luglio 1943
10 Luglio 2013

PROGRAMMA
70° Anniversario dello sbarco in Sicilia

10 Luglio 1943: Sbarco anfibi storici a Gela ed esposizione veicoli.
10 Luglio 2013: Arrivo dei veicoli.
11 Luglio 1943: Visita al campo di battaglia della piana di Gela con sosta a Castelluccio.
11 Luglio 1943: Sosta a Ponte Dittilo, traghetti a Scoglitti e arrivo a Marina di Ragusa.
12 Luglio 1943: Sosta a Capo Carini, trasferimento a Ragusa ed esposizione veicoli.
12 Luglio 2013: Partenza in direzione Catania via Francotese Lanciai.
13 Luglio 1943: Sosta nella zona del paese di Pitroneo, arrivo dei veicoli a Catania presso il Museo Sibarico dello Sbarco in Sicilia.
14 Luglio 1943: Visita del Museo Storico della Sicilia e sfilata dei veicoli nel centro di Catania.
14 Luglio 2013: Esposizione dei veicoli presso via Etnea e sotto la piazza Università.

Air One CUSTOM
DN
HVM Italia
Regione Sicilia, Comune Gela, Comune Ragusa, Comune Catania, Provincia Regionale Catania, Museo Storico della Sicilia, Museo Pitroneo



The official *Task Force Husky* poster.

Top. Some of the vehicles parked in Villa Peretti, our HQ in Gela (A). All our MVs arrived from Catania Harbor (H), Sicily along with some of our trailers. We chose a significant representation of WWII vehicles but no tanks on this long trip

Villa Peretti HQ in Gela. The Polizia Stradale, a friendly and efficient police service escorted all convoy movements. The convoy impressed the police who had never seen anything like it before (A).





The Convoy, on promenade Federico II di Svevia, approaches the landing area where we met the US Ambassador and Italian authority. All vehicles were escorted by policemen on foot (A).



Gibertini's first DUKW just after it landed on the beach. Note the Coast Guard building in the background with the authorities on the terrace. The Carabinieri also escorted our MVs on the beach (A).



The two DUKWs on the historical landing beach followed two half-tracks used to compact the soft sand (A).

this would be the first event organized by the newly born military vehicles club *HMV Italia*, an MVPA affiliate (www.hmvitalia.it). We picked about thirty selected HMVs as the core of the event. This included two DUKWs, one M8 Greyhound, three 2-1/2 ton trucks, one WC54 ambulance, as well as its more rare WC64KD offsprung, one Canadian F60 Ford truck, one 1-1/2 ton Chevy, one Canadian C8A Radio van, and two half-tracks. The list went on to include several other WC51, WC52, WC53 Carryall, WC56 Command car, MBs and GPWs, WLA and BSA motorcycles, etc.

The vehicles, transported by seven semi trailers, were loaded on a cargo ferry in Ravenna and sailed to Catania (H) under constant surveillance. On 09 July 2013 the loaded transporters were moved from Catania to Gela (A), while vehicle owners and other participants, totaling about 70 people, flew from several Italian airports to our common destination in Sicily. The rendezvous point was the Villa Peretti Hotel in Gela, a comfortable lodging that afforded secure parking with ample space for all our vehicles.

We spent 09 July inspecting our vehicles, carefully checking and preparing them for the parade on the following day by adding military equipment and details etc. At dinner, hosted by the Gela sailing club, we had the opportunity to socialize and network, which is a fundamental part of our successful events.

July 10, 2013 was a hot, sunny Sicilian day that marked the 70th anniversary of the landings. On that date, seventy years before the little town of Gela (A) awoke to naval gunfire when US troops from the 1st Infantry Division (*Big Red One*) and the US Ranger battalions, with other attached units, landed close by. During the night, the 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers were dropped along the whole southern coast of Sicily – their mission to seal off the beachhead

from the Italian and German units grouped in the interior of the island.

Gela (A) was also the official site where the celebrations of this historic date would take place in the presence of the US Ambassador to Italy, David Thorne, as well as the president of the regional government in Sicily, Rosario Crocetta, a native and former mayor of Gela. During the official gathering in Palazzo Mallia, our HMV Italia club president, Senio Moscadelli, had the honor of presenting Mr. Thorne with a plaque. The US Ambassador appreciated our president's short speech about the reasons for our attendance, of honoring the men and women who fought for our freedom, and noting how that historical date in 1943 on the beaches of Sicily marked the beginning of a new, fruitful relationship between a reborn Italy and the USA.

Once the formal celebrations were over the first parade of our column took place along the seaside avenues in Gela. It was impossible not to notice the imposing number of special ops law enforcement units, who were there in case the few usual protesters, who often rally against the construction of the MUOS communication system at the nearby US Base in Sigonella, choose to become belligerent towards the US and Italian authorities. However, nothing happened and our part of the show went on as projected with a long parade on the Lungo Mare Federico II di Svevia. Then we reached the place where our two DUKWs, escorted by the half-tracks, entered the sandy beach in front of downtown Gela and became seaborne in the Sicilian waters much to the thrill of the on looking crowd who cheered.



Campanini's second DUKW waiting for permission to safely leave the sea. The DUKWs landed where US troops landed 70th years before. The soft sand did not create problems during the maneuvers (A).



Ivano Genovesi, Simone Guidorzi and Nicola Nicotera placed a wreath in memory of the fallen Italian soldiers at Castelluccio of Gela, the Italian Infantry Livorno Division HQ. Note the landing beaches in the background (A).



The Ford M8 Greyhound, M2A1 half-track and GMC DUKW enter in Licata as thousands of citizens welcomed us (B).



Carroli, Maschieri and Simonelli's 2-1/2 on GMC parked in Licata in front of the town hall where we received a very warm welcome (B).



The Convoy parked on the road at the Ponte Dirillo monument. The thirty MVs, including the heavy vehicles, were easy to handle on the better than average wide Sicilian roads (C).



Corso Paolo Boccia kitted-out in an 82nd Airborne uniform honoring those American soldiers KIA at Ponte Dirillo (C).

the tanks and infantry counterattacks by the German Herman Goering Division. We stopped at Ponte Dirillo where a few members of the local Lamba Doria historical heritage association joined us in laying a wreath for the 82nd Airborne Division at their monument. Then we moved onwards towards Marina di Ragusa (D) by way of Scoglitti, where the 45th Infantry Division had its baptism of fire. At Marina we are welcomed by Mayor Federico Piscitto and participated in a short commemoration before having lunch and – for those among us who felt like it – taking a plunge in the beautiful Mediterranean Sea at this famous resort. Before we left we were joined by a group of Canadians – participants in *Operation Husky*, a commemorative march organized by Stephen Gregory. He has championed the project of touring the very same route covered by Canadian troops in Sicily during July and August 1943 from the beaches in the south to the Canadian military cemetery on the north of the Island, by stopping at every place where a Canadian soldier fell.

On a less austere note, actor Clayton Norcross, who is a family friend of some in our group, joined us. He was not there because of some PR man's idea, but because he shares our same purposes of remembering and honoring.

We left Marina di Ragusa (D) after lunch heading towards downtown Ragusa (F), stopping along the way at the Case Cameni (E) strongpoint. There a recently inaugurated memorial honors Italian Lt. Giulio Sella,



Our convoy parked on Marina di Ragusa promenade. The crews were tired from the previous day so a quiet lunch was much appreciated. The hot temperature of 34°C. (93°F) was getting hard to take even for our hardy Italians from the mainland (D).



Federico Piscitto, Mayor of Ragusa, was presented with a gift from HMV Italia President Senio Moscadelli, by our Task Force Husky operation on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Allied landings (D).



Two Canadian Company youths who attended the 'Memory March' on the Canadian soldiers road, were photographed in front of Campanini's Chevrolet C8A radio truck (D).



A Canadian Company from Montreal, Quebec, and their president Stephen Gregory, met the convoy with pipes and drums in Marina di Ragusa (D).



Stephen Gregory (L) of Canadian Company, Luca Bambagiotti and Filippo Spadi (R) of HMV Italia exchanged gifts in front of a Canadian F60 Ford (D).



Italian authorities photographed in front of the Italian bunker in Case Camemi during a small ceremony (E).

who was posthumously awarded the Gold Medal for Valor – the Italian equivalent to the Medal of Honor – for his last stand in defense of the place against the advancing US troops. Another ceremony took place there in the presence of Italian authorities and then we again headed towards Ragusa (F). Under the hot afternoon sun

we suffered the first serious mechanical problem when the Ford M8 armored car started boiling over due to a water pump leak. It becomes necessary for our friend Luigi Pauletto to ride on top of the rear deck and continuously add water to the radiator in order to avoid serious engine damage. We parked in Ragusa in the square built by the Fascist regime in 1936 in celebration of the then newly won *Empire* in Abyssinia and proceed to dinner at the Best Western Hotel before turning in for the night.



Michele Vernieri (L) and Luca Bambagiotti show the HMV Italia banner in Piazza Libertà in Ragusa. In the background is Andreis's SAS jeep (F).

Some of our MVs parked in Piazza Libertà in Ragusa. Note Campanini's 'Rover Joe Jeep,' the WC54 Ambulance and the WC64KD Ambulance (F).



The following morning we departed for Ragusa (F) and the last destination of our journey, the city of Catania (H). We left the coastal area and took a secondary route to the interior of the island. The landscape was beautiful, as everywhere in Sicily, and the sun got hotter and hotter while we climbed through the hills separating Ragusa (F) from the Catania plain. The two GMC DUKWs developed mechanical problems, including a flat tire and a flat spare too! The Ford M8 armored car's owner was unable to fix the water pump and it finally had to be loaded on our recovery truck. Notwithstanding these problems we reached the small town of Francofonte (G), near Lentini, where we stopped for lunch and a welcome respite from the hot sun. It allowed for the repair of the two DUKWs and a check on all the other vehicles. All seemed well until the F60 Ford truck took the stubborn attitude of a mule and decided not to start. With no lack of qualified mechanics among our lot they perform a 'field expedient' check and

identified an electrical problem, which was solved by improvising a bridging connection. It sounds easy enough but it was actually an impressive professional feat, which we looked at with sincere admiration.

At mid afternoon we reach the Primosole Bridge where the British *Red Berets* and the German *Fallshirmjaegers*, together with the Italian *Arditi* (commando units), fought fiercely seventy years before. In the presence of a representative of the mayor of Catania we laid a wreath at the monument commemorating the soldiers who died there. The last leg of our long journey took us to Catania (H), reached in the late afternoon, and parked our vehicles at the local *Historical Museum of the Sicily Landing*.

On Saturday July 13th we again assembled at the museum for a guided tour of its exhibits and collections. We were impressed by the professional way this was set up with the use of modern technology to capture the attention and interest of its visitors. It included sounds and light effects, mechanized displays etc. while at the same time keeping a scholarly level of descriptive commentary.

Norcross Clayton, an American actor (runaway hit soap opera 'The Bold and the Beautiful') and Task Force Husky Testimonial, greets all the crews (H).



Catania Battle of Sicily Museum. This diorama, with an Italian bunker and machine gun, has great sound and dynamic effects (H).



Catania Battle of Sicily Museum houses the Sicily Campaign model exhibition and photographs (H).

After the museum tour our column commenced its last parade towards the Piazza Università in the historic center of Catania (H). We parked our vehicles for most of the day among a veritable crowd of visitors and tourists who filled the area. Our group took the opportunity to patronize several local establishment offering exquisite Sicilian food while at the same time acting as guides to our 'open air museum,' by answering questions and distributing explanatory leaflets, etc. Marking the end of our event we were joined in the square by Dr. Angela Mazzola of the Catania Municipal Government and exchanged plaques in a small celebration of our joint effort. The time to leave soon came as our column proceeds to the port where our vehicles were loaded on transports for mainland Italy.

Our adventure in Sicily had come to the end. We were proud and honored to have organized this event in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Sicily landings, which marked the beginning of the liberation of Europe from Fascism and Nazism. We were doubly happy, as while enjoying our hobby and the opportunity of touring beautiful Sicily with our military vehicles, we were also able to contribute to remembering those who were killed for our freedom while respecting the sacrifice of all who died in the service of their respective countries. We will not forget our week in Sicily and the personal emotions we felt during this event – it meant more than just an enjoyable trip in our HMV's.



Light vehicles parked in Piazza Università in Catania (H).



The convoy parked in the square at Università in Catania (H) marking the end of the *Task Force Husky* tour.

Piazza Università in Catania



Luca Bambagiotti and Filippo Spadi exchanges gifts with Avv. Angela Rosaria Mazzola, Catania Alderman (H).