

# ‘... They could be a Jolly Nuisance’:<sup>1</sup> The Littorio-Class Battleships and RAF Bomber Command’s Bombing of Spezia, January-June 1943

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**Abstract:** RAF Bomber Command’s attacks on Italy remains a curiously neglected topic. This is a considerable oversight given that Harris’ strategic bombing force made a considerable number of attacks on Milan, Turin and Genoa, with these operations being conducted during particularly critical junctures of the Mediterranean war, namely Autumn 1942 and Spring and Summer 1943. The focus of this article is on Bomber Command’s attacks on the major Italian naval base of Spezia. It will explore the reasons as to why these raids were undertaken, how the Spezia operation evolved over time, and how Bomber Command was able to operate in a theatre where it was not subject to the authority of any commander. So how, therefore, were operations against Italian targets allowed to take place? The article will explore this issue and will show that Harris proved a lot more compliant over ‘diversions’ than has commonly been presumed.

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**Disclaimer:** The views expressed are those of the authors concerned, not necessarily the MOD.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from J. Greene/A. Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943* (Chatham, 2002 ed.), p.285.

## Introduction

The Italians apparently are afraid of air attacks upon their naval units, as they moved quickly out of Taranto and Naples after the first attacks. It is believed they would go to Trieste if Spezia were heavily-bombed.<sup>2</sup>

*Buften to Bottomley, 12 March 1943*

Certain historical documents have exerted an almost magnetic effect on successive historians, in which a certain sentence, paragraph or section has been often cited. Some documents on RAF Bomber Command during the Second World War prove no exception and this has been particularly shown by the memorandum from the Commander-in-Chief Bomber Command (C-in-C) Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris to Prime Minister Winston Churchill on 3 November 1943, and its much-quoted final three lines.<sup>3</sup> Yet a closer examination of this document reveals issues that inexplicably remain overlooked. For below an inventory of German cities and towns – which Harris classified as either ‘Virtually Destroyed’, ‘Seriously Damaged’ or ‘Damaged’ – was a further list: Turin, Milan, Genoa and Spezia.<sup>4</sup> All in Italy, the attention of this article is focused on the latter target and, in so doing, raises several key questions: why did Harris undertake attacks on Spezia (twice) that he did not like; and how did the operations materialize when he was under no formal obligation to undertake them, given that Bomber Command did not come directly under any Mediterranean theatre commander’s authority? Addressing such issues allows us to examine how, and why, external pressure was exerted on Harris, and by whom, particularly as it involved the participation of a force from outside the Mediterranean theatre. In so doing, this revealed the ‘additional’ role of the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, beyond being the professional head of the Air Force. For Portal was also a member of the Chiefs of Staff (COS) Committee and was therefore involved in taking decisions that affected Britain’s other Services and their campaigns in other theatres. Moreover, Bomber Command’s operations in the Mediterranean would reveal the limits of Harris’ role as the C-in-C of Bomber Command. Harris had to cooperate and, ultimately, he did so, despite holding some valid views on ‘diversions’, for the Mediterranean theatre saw him up against the Prime Minister, the COS and the Royal Navy. Finally, this article will also examine the specific – and differing – reasons for Bomber Command’s attacks on Italian targets and their place in the Mediterranean campaign from Autumn 1942 to Summer 1943.

Bomber Command’s participation in the war in the Mediterranean has remained a long-neglected campaign. This is a consequence of the still limited historiography on the strategic

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<sup>2</sup>The National Archives [hereafter TNA], Kew, AIR20/5323, Buften-Bottomley, 12/03/43.

<sup>3</sup>This was: ‘We can wreck Berlin from end to end if the USA Air Force will come in on it. It will cost between us 400 – 500 aircraft. It will cost Germany the war.’

<sup>4</sup>TNA, PREM3/14/1, Harris-Churchill, 3/11/43. (Note: Spezia was used in this document; this article will use this and not ‘La Spezia’).

bombing of Italy – the pattern having been set by the *'British Official History'*. Comprising four volumes and published in 1961, the overwhelming focus on Germany meant the treatment of Italy amounted to no more than a handful of pages.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the writings by Harris and other senior airmen offered little on this topic either.<sup>6</sup> Given that many subsequent books on Bomber Command have relied heavily on the *'British Official History'*, together with Harris' *Despatch* and post-war account, it is little surprise that a detailed examination of the strategic bombing of Italy has continued to remain almost non-existent.<sup>7</sup> An exception is the article on the bombing of Italy by Stephen Harvey, yet while it does mention the American bombing of the Italian southern ports the operations of Bomber Command against Spezia go unmentioned.<sup>8</sup> More recently, Richard Overy's majestic account on the bombing war in Europe does contain a chapter on the bombing of Italy, though this is not tied to the wider war in the Mediterranean between the Royal Navy and the Regia Marina Italiana (RMI). Consequently, the narrative on Genoa overlooks its importance as a major naval-base while the target of Spezia is not mentioned at all.<sup>9</sup> The account by Claudia Baldoli and Andrew Knapp, though readable and very interesting, focuses primarily on the civilian experience in Italy (and France) of aerial bombardment.<sup>10</sup> Behind this is a further category of scholarship, namely those books that examine the wider conflict in the Mediterranean, but these still overlook the use of Bomber Command against the RMI's battlefleet.<sup>11</sup> This remains a significant omission, particularly as a recent article has argued the RMI 'played a greater role in shaping the Allied prosecution of the Second World War than is commonly accepted . . . Far from being seen as a 'huge joke', the RMI maintained this influence consistently over 1935-1943'.<sup>12</sup> This is certainly true, and explains why the perceived threat from Italy's battleships came to involve the aircraft of Bomber Command. Overall, the existing literature on Bomber Command's operations against Italian targets represents slim pickings. Yet under-researched should be held to not mean unimportant. On closer scrutiny, the Spezia operations highlight the decision-making process

<sup>5</sup> C. Webster/N. Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany 1939-1945, Vol. I, Preparation & Vol. II, Endeavour* (London, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> A.T. Harris, *Bomber Offensive* (Barnsley, 2005 ed.); A.T. Harris, *Despatch on War Operations 23rd February 1942 to 8th May 1945* (London, 1995); R. Saundby, *Air Bombardment: The Story of its Development* (London, 1961); A. Tedder, *With Prejudice: The War Memoirs of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Tedder* (London, 1966); D.C.T. Bennett, *Pathfinder* (London, 1988 ed.).

<sup>7</sup> D. Richards, *RAF Bomber Command in the Second World War: The Hardest Victory* (London, 1994); B. Greenhouse, S.J. Harris et al, *The Crucible of War 1939-1945: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force Volume III* (Toronto, 1994); M. Hastings, *Bomber Command* (London, 1999 ed.); H. Probert, *Bomber Harris: His Life and Times* (London, 2006 ed.).

<sup>8</sup> S. Harvey, 'The Italian War Effort and the Strategic Bombing of Italy', *History*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (1985), pp.32-45.

<sup>9</sup> R. Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945* (London, 2013), pp.510-28.

<sup>10</sup> C. Baldoli/A. Knapp, *Forgotten Blitzes: France and Italy under Allied Air Attack, 1940-1945* (London, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Greene/Massignani, *Naval War in the Mediterranean*; J. Winton, *Cunningham: The greatest admiral since Nelson* (London, 1999); D. Porch, *Hitler's Mediterranean Gamble: The North African and the Mediterranean Campaigns in World War II* (London, 2004); V.P. O'Hara, *Struggle for the Middle Sea: The Great Navies at War in the Mediterranean Theater, 1940-1945* (Annapolis, 2009); S.J. Ball, *The Bitter Sea: The Struggle for Mastery in the Mediterranean 1935-1949* (London, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> R. Hammond, 'An Enduring Influence on Imperial Defence and Grand Strategy: British Perceptions of the Italian Navy, 1935-1943', *International History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 5 (2017), pp.810-13; 824.

behind Britain's military operations and, as one Admiralty telegram stated, the 'co-ordination and policy between Naval Forces in the Mediterranean and Bomber Command targets in Italy'.<sup>13</sup> Bomber Command's strength of its growing operational flexibility and capability also proved a significant weakness, that only served to encourage the many 'diversions' and 'outside' demands on Harris' bomber force.

### **Defeating Italian Naval-Power (1940-42)**

On 4 September 1940, the last British Ambassador to Rome, Sir Percy Lorraine, wrote a minute as to how the war against Fascist Italy should be waged. In this assessment, he stated 'the proper strategical and political objective . . . is to force an Italian capitulation, and that the primary condition of success in that regard is the destruction of Italian seapower'.<sup>14</sup> Air power was soon used towards achieving this goal: in June 1940, RAF bombers attacked Naples for the first time, whilst in November 1940 the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) famously immobilized three Italian battleships in Taranto. The attack of Italy's ports was thereafter a strategy consistently pursued as the Italian battleships were stalked and targeted in their naval bases throughout southern Italy. On 8-9 January 1941, to prevent the RMI's interference with British convoys to Greece, the FAA and RAF (based in Malta) attacked the Italian battlefleet at Naples.<sup>15</sup> By the year's end, such bombing raids had only increased in importance. For 1941, it must be remembered, had been dreadfully costly for the Royal Navy's capital-ships, with the loss of *HMS Hood* (24 May), *HMS Ark Royal* (13 November), *HMS Barham* (25 November), and *HMS Prince of Wales* and *HMS Repulse* (10 December). This meant no major warships could be spared for the Mediterranean. It was little surprise the Air Ministry informed HQ RAF Middle East that 'in view of present Naval strategical situation effort should be directed to damage or destruction of Littorios at Naples'.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, this demand came just a week *before* calamity occurred in Britain's naval war in the Mediterranean. On 19 December, frogmen from the RMI penetrated Alexandria harbour and planted limpet-mines that sunk the battleships, *HMS Queen Elizabeth* and *HMS Valiant*. This action unfavourably tilted the naval balance in the Mediterranean against the British, with its all-important effects on the wider campaign, allowing the Axis to sail their convoys to North Africa unaffected by the Royal Navy, whereas the British resupply of Malta by sea became difficult. It was little wonder the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, told the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, that 'the damage to the battleships at this time is a disaster'.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, Britain entered 1942 with aerial bombardment as *the* only option to combat the RMI's battlefleet in the Mediterranean. By Autumn, as Operation Torch loomed, Allied bombers from Malta and North Africa were

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<sup>13</sup> TNA, AIR20/1081, Admiralty-N.C.X.F. rep. Air Ministry, 10/02/43.

<sup>14</sup> TNA, PREM3/242/11A, Minute by P. Lorraine, 4/09/40.

<sup>15</sup> TNA, AIR2/7397, Coryton-Harris, 18/01/41. (Note: Harris was the DCAS at this time).

<sup>16</sup> TNA, AIR2/7397, Air Ministry-HQ RAF Middle East, 10/12/41.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from V. O'Hara/E. Cernuschi, 'Frogman against a Fleet: The Italian Attack on Alexandria on 18-19 December 1941', *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (2015), p.133.

fully engaged in attacks on the naval bases of southern Italy. It now became necessary to encourage RAF Bomber Command to attack the ports of the north.

### **The Strategic Bombing of Italy from Autumn 1942**

As documented within Appendix I, this article identifies that Bomber Command's campaign against Italy comprised six phases, with each phase having its own particular aim that influenced the target(s) selection and demonstrated the contours of the wider military and naval campaign in the Mediterranean from Autumn 1942 to Summer 1943.

Common throughout were a high-level of civilian and naval influence/control over target-selection, the gradual increase in the bombing's intensity and geographical scope, and ever-present political objections to attacks on certain targets (such as Rome). Harris undertook attacks on Italian targets with little dissention, though he was dismissive about the operations of Phases IV and V – the bombing of Spezia.

At the beginning, the aim of attacking the RMI was enshrined in the bombing programme that was scheduled to begin five days prior to Operation Torch. Under this, Mediterranean-based aircraft were to bomb either Taranto or Naples, 'whichever port the main body of the Italian Fleet is assembled'. In anticipation of the possible movement of the Italian battleships to Italy's northern ports, Bomber Command was to simultaneously conduct mine-laying operations off Genoa and Spezia. Tellingly, Admiral Cunningham told Admiral Pound that he would 'be grateful if you would bring these requirements to the notice of the Chiefs of Staff, so that all possible direct assistance to Torch may be given by Air Forces outside the Torch area'.<sup>18</sup> This was recognition that Bomber Command's participation had to be ordered by the British military's highest authority. In a letter to Air Chief Marshal Portal, on 21 October, Harris displayed a scepticism about Bomber Command's involvement in the Mediterranean and railed against 'the ever-increasing dispersion of our bombing effort by piece-meal instructions' – with Torch being the key example – that spelled 'the end of our effective Bomber offensive against Germany proper'.<sup>19</sup> However, such sentiments fell on unsympathetic ears, given the Mediterranean's central place in Britain's war strategy at this time. A day later, Churchill told [General Sir Harold] Alexander that 'Torch [is proceeding] steadily and punctually [but] all our hopes are centred upon the battle you and Montgomery are going to fight'.<sup>20</sup> It would be the 'Battle for Egypt' that took centre-stage first. As a result, Harris was forced to switch the focus of his bombing effort away from Germany and on to Italy in order to support General Montgomery's offensive at El Alamein (Operation Lightfoot), which began on 23 October. So began Phase I of Bomber Command's operations against Italy and, given that the Axis armies in North Africa were reliant on supplies delivered by maritime convoys, the major port of Genoa – with its large docks and shipbuilding yards – was bombed on 22-23 October by

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<sup>18</sup> TNA, AIR20/4515, Cunningham-Pound, Operation Torch – Air Action against Italy, 19/10/42.

<sup>19</sup> Christ Church College Archives, Oxford, Portal Papers [hereafter PP], File 9, Harris-Portal, 21/10/42.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from M. Gilbert, *Road to Victory: Winston S. Churchill 1941-1945* (London, 1986), p.241.

112 aircraft from 5 and 8 Groups causing ‘very heavy damage’ to the city centre and eastern districts.<sup>21</sup> Genoa was attacked again the following night, before Harris made a switch to the war industries of Milan on 24 and 25 October,<sup>22</sup> which concluded the opening phase of Bomber Command’s attacks on Italy.

Nevertheless, attacks on Italian targets would be set to continue. On 24 October, Churchill wrote that until Summer 1943 the focus of the war ‘will be waged in the Mediterranean theatre’, with the invasions of Sicily and southern Italy.<sup>23</sup> For one senior airman, this prospect was hardly pleasing. The Assistant Chief of the Air Staff Policy Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Slessor wrote that ‘once we concede to the Mediterranean Front any higher place than a running sore . . . I am sure that we will find ourselves on the slippery slope’.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the Air Staff was itself divided between those who, like Slessor, thought purely in terms of the air force’s interests and Portal who, as a member of the COS Committee, also had to consider the wider strategic context of the war that included the wishes of the other Services. As the Mediterranean campaign progressed, the Chiefs pressed for greater effort by the Air Force on Italian targets, in response the CAS produced a memorandum that promised more of the same. Attacks by Bomber Command on northern Italy would be intensified while Malta-based aircraft would continue the bombing of Taranto and Naples in the south. ‘I will arrange for targets in Italy to be bombed’, Portal promised, ‘if we get conditions as we did on the night 22-23rd October’.<sup>25</sup> As a result, Harris received a Directive from the Air Ministry that stipulated a week-long bombing programme against:

- (i) First priority sea-mining of ports Genoa and Spezia . . . (ii) Second priority bombing Genoa, Milan and Turin up to scale of your recent operations against these targets.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, this was the operational schedule for Phase II of Bomber Command’s offensive against Italy. The instruction was modified to be the ‘first priority sea-mining commitment’ at Spezia only; Genoa was instead ‘transferred [purely] to bombing’.<sup>27</sup> The effort got underway on 6-7 November and lasted until 15-16 November, designed to support the simultaneous Torch landings. The target was no surprise. For given the need to thwart Axis reinforcements to North Africa, the Admiralty informed the Air Ministry that ‘great importance is now attached air attack on Genoa where there is a heavy concentration potential transports [and it] . . . is necessary to deter these from sailing’.<sup>28</sup> Bomber Command had bombed Genoa on

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<sup>21</sup> M. Middlebrook/C. Everitt, *Bomber Command War Diaries* [hereafter *B.C.W.D.*] (Leicester, 1996), p.318.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, AIR20/5304, [Draft Paper], November 1942.

<sup>23</sup> Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, p.242.

<sup>24</sup> TNA, AIR20/3718, Slessor-Portal, 25/10/42.

<sup>25</sup> TNA, AIR20/4515, COS(42)346 (Revise), “Torch” – Air Action against Italy, Note by the CAS, 29/10/42.

<sup>26</sup> TNA, AIR20/4515, Air Ministry-Bomber Command, 2/11/42.

<sup>27</sup> TNA, AIR20/4515, Air Ministry-Bomber Command, 5/11/42.

<sup>28</sup> TNA, AIR20/4515, Admiralty-Air Ministry rep. Bomber Command, 7/11/42.

6-7 November and this port city would be attacked a further three times over the next nine days in what one might term as the 'Battle of Genoa', Harris had certainly complied; he had little choice. This showed that bombing Italy – the timing of the operation, the effort required, and the choice of target – had been forced on Bomber Command by senior figures from outside the Air Force.

For Harris, the raids on Italy remained a useful diversion when weather conditions prohibited further attack against his prime objective, Germany. However, it should be noted that this did not signify any change in British bombing policy.<sup>29</sup> This may account for the focus purely on a single Italian target during Phases II and III, be it Genoa or Turin respectively. For attacks on multiple locations, including the mining of Spezia harbour, could have given the appearance that an intense bombing offensive against Italy was now taking place. Harris always believed that Italian targets – which were designed to complement the land-sea campaigns of the other Services in the Mediterranean – were a distant second to the cities of Germany, if not to be attacked at all. Such opinions were always going to be an awkward fit especially as, at this time, Churchill was very much in 'a Mediterranean mood' when it came to British strategy. On 17 November, Churchill told the COS the goal was to push the Axis out of North Africa so that airbases could be established there to facilitate the bombing of 'the under-belly of the Axis', particularly against targets in southern Italy. All this would be the prelude, after the fall of Tunis, to the capture of either Sardinia or Sicily – Churchill believed the latter was 'by far the greater prize'<sup>30</sup> – before the invasion of mainland Italy itself. Whatever Harris thought, the defeat of Italy was *the* priority in British strategic thinking in late-1942 and therefore operations against Italian targets were an inescapable commitment for Bomber Command during this period. If Harris had not complied then this would have placed him on a collision course with The Prime Minister, the Chiefs of Staff, the Navy and the Chief of the Air Staff.

Consequently, Phase III began on 18-19 November and lasted to 11-12 December 1942. Tellingly, the Assistant-Chief of Air Staff-Operations (ACAS Ops) Air Vice-Marshal Sir Norman Bottomley admitted 'the directive issued to the C-in-C Bomber Command for the attack of objectives in Italy to assist in 'Torch' operations was for a period of seven days and there had been no extension of this period'. The C-in-C's continuance of attacks on Italian objectives is presumably *as a result of some direct order from the CAS*<sup>31</sup> (author's emphasis). Once again, Portal was acting in the wider remit of the COS. However, this time Harris concentrated his effort on Turin rather than on Italy's northern ports, such as Genoa. This change no doubt reflected the C-in-C's wishes in attacking targets in Italy (such as industrial cities) that conformed to the strategy of strategic bombing as opposed to attacking those targets that simply aided the Navy's strategy in the Mediterranean. Indeed, this switch of target far from pleased Cunningham, now the Naval Commander Allied Expeditionary Force (NCXF)

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<sup>29</sup> TNA, AIR8/777, Harris-Portal, 13/11/42.

<sup>30</sup> Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, pp.258-9.

<sup>31</sup> TNA, AIR20/5304, Bottomley-Medhurst, 27/11/42.

for North Africa and the Mediterranean, who believed the priority of operations in the Mediterranean was shaped by the fact that ‘the enemy is getting supplies into Bizerta and Tunis by sea’ and was therefore ‘the vital factor in determining whether or not the Axis are to be evicted completely from Africa.’<sup>32</sup> As a result, the NCXF advocated a concerted effort by Allied sea and air forces in order to ‘strangle’ these supplies, which, for Bomber Command, meant a continuation of attacks on Genoa. For Harris this represented following the naval lead far too much. In his view, operations against Italy had to remain consistent with *air force strategy*, which meant the bombing of Italy’s major cities to destroy war industry and weaken civilian morale. The ports of Genoa, Spezia and Leghorn were therefore ignored by Bomber Command at this time. Instead, Turin – with its Armeria Reale, Fiat factory and Lancia works – was bombed a total of eight times over the next five weeks in yet another ‘battle’ by Bomber Command against an Italian city.

As CAS, Portal still prioritised attacks on Italy’s naval bases. On 29 November, Portal informed The Prime Minister that ‘on the assumption that Italy is to be treated as Target No.1’ (once the fighting in North Africa had finished) bombing attacks ‘should be concentrated against a selection of the most important cities *and naval bases*’ (author’s emphasis), namely Milan, Rome, Naples, Turin, Genoa, Taranto, Spezia and Brindisi.’<sup>33</sup> Attacks on the southern ports had already been undertaken by RAF Wellingtons (based in Malta) and American heavy-medium-bomber groups (based in North Africa). As for Bomber Command, The Prime Minister – clearly in a vengeful mood against Italy – wanted something much more extensive. He was dissatisfied by the Air Ministry’s Directive to Harris of 2 December<sup>34</sup> because it advocated a form of ‘light-bombing’ against Italy’s war production and civilian morale, not an all-out assault. The following day, Churchill expressly stated ‘the heat should be turned on Italy’<sup>35</sup> and, in response, the Secretary of State for Air, Sir Archibald Sinclair, produced a paper for the War Cabinet that advocated a more sustained bombing programme against Italy. He wrote that the utilisation of bomber forces based in the UK, North Africa and Malta meant ‘all important Italian towns will have been brought within the range of effective attack’.<sup>36</sup> This, of course, included Spezia. Once again, this showed how the timing, intensity and target selection of the bombing campaign against Italy were determined more by others, especially Britain’s civilian and senior military leadership, rather than by the C-in-C Bomber Command. Yet Harris did comply, for some willingness to attack Italian targets seemed a small price to pay in exchange for Churchill’s support of a bombing Directive that would give Harris considerable latitude to attack Germany’s cities throughout 1943. Indeed, provision for

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<sup>29</sup> TNA, AIR8/777, Harris-Portal, 13/11/42.

<sup>30</sup> Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, pp.258-9.

<sup>31</sup> TNA, AIR20/5304, Bottomley-Medhurst, 27/11/42.

<sup>32</sup> TNA, AIR20/1081, NCXF-Admiralty, 24/11/42.

<sup>33</sup> P.P., File 3, Portal-Churchill, 29/11/42.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, AIR14/778, Air Ministry-Bomber Command, 2/12/42.

<sup>35</sup> TNA, PREM3/14/3, Churchill-Sinclair, 3/12/42.

<sup>36</sup> TNA, AIR20/4515, WP(42)598, The Bombing of Italy, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air, 17/12/42.

both the bombing campaign against Germany and the requirements of the Mediterranean campaign for bombing attacks on Italy would be seen in the subsequent Casablanca Directive.

## The Target

Italy possessed several naval bases on which the prosecution of both its naval war in the Mediterranean and land war in North Africa were heavily dependent. In November 1942, a draft paper by the Air Staff, under the heading 'Objectives in Italy', listed the major cities of Milan, Rome and Turin alongside the ports of:

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|-----------------|---|
| <b>Naples</b>   | chief port of Italy and exceeded only by Milan, Turin and Genoa as an industrial base.        |
| <b>Genoa</b>    | seaport and centre of Ansaldo industries.   |
| <b>Taranto</b>  | chief naval base for the Ionian Sea, and second only in importance to Spezia as a Naval base. |
| <b>Spezia</b>   | most important Naval Base in Italy; many industries, mostly connected with shipping.          |
| <b>Brindisi</b> | seaport having best anchorage for large vessels on West side of the Adriatic. <sup>37</sup>   |

At these locations, the RMI's battleships would be anchored before their deployment on missions to protect the Axis supply convoys sailing to North Africa.

Specifically, the port of Spezia was built on the Gulf of Spezia (see Map I) and lay about 50 miles from Genoa on the Ligurian Coast. Its harbour entrance, between Tino Island and Corvo Point, was 5 miles wide, while the distance from the breakwater to the head of the harbour was 5,200 yards. Spezia was therefore a large harbour able to accommodate numerous major warships. According to the Regia Marina's Disposition Plan at the outbreak of war, it was the home port of the 2nd Naval Squadron, which was made-up of heavy cruisers (*Pola, Trento, Bolzano, Trieste*), light cruisers (*Eugenio di Savoia, Duca d'Aosta, Attendola, Montecuccoli*) and various destroyers; the 1st Submarine Group (comprising 26 vessels); and the Upper-Tyrrhenian Sector group that comprised a number of motor torpedo boat squadrons.<sup>38</sup> Beyond the harbour, by early-1943 the surrounding dockyard area contained a host of important naval facilities: shipbuilding yards,<sup>39</sup> two major arsenals, a torpedo factory, a submarine base, a submarine building-yard, and an oil-refinery and storage tanks.<sup>40</sup>

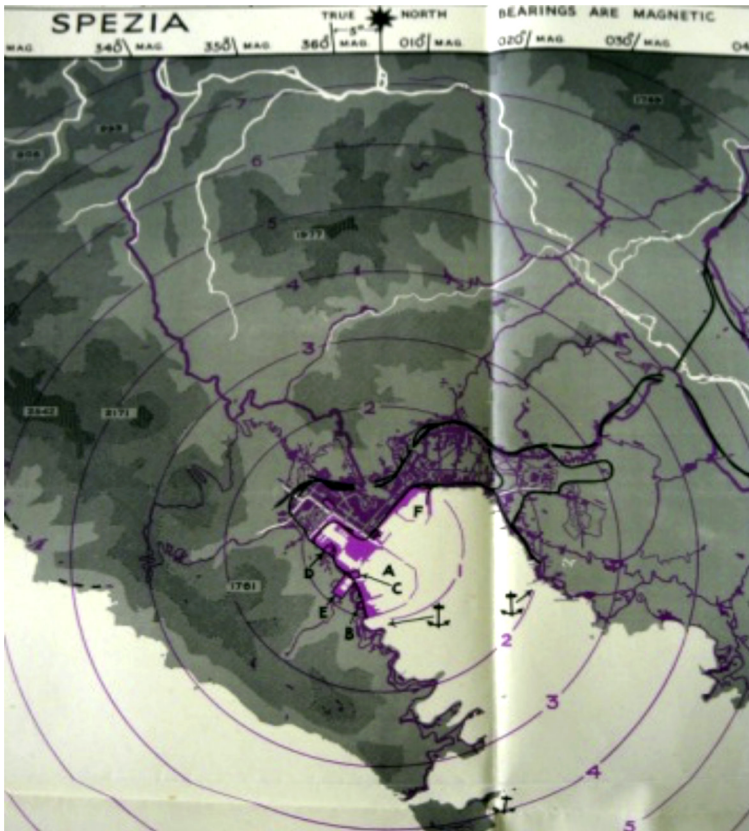
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<sup>37</sup> TNA, AIR20/5304, [Draft Paper], November 1942.

<sup>38</sup> R. Mallett, *The Italian Navy and Fascist Expansionism 1935-1940* (London, 1998), pp.197-204.

<sup>39</sup> These had built some fine dreadnoughts for the RMI, such as the Conte di Cavour (1915) and Andrea Doria (1916).

<sup>40</sup> TNA, AIR2/4476, Bottomley-Harris, 20/02/43.



Map I: Plan of Spezia Naval Base<sup>41</sup>

By April 1943 the target-intelligence section of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF) had labelled Spezia as 'the most important Italian Naval Base ... [and] one of the biggest manufacturer towns for the Italian maritime war'.<sup>42</sup> In fact, British attention had already focused on this port because Allied air attacks on Italy's southern naval bases had forced the RMI's most modern battleships, together with the remnants of its battered heavy cruiser fleet, up to Spezia during Winter 1942-3. This movement was considered serious because just as the *Tirpitz* tied-up major units of the British Home Fleet (including three ships of the King George V-class) so the Littorios continued to keep the Royal Navy's battleships in the Mediterranean, denying a possible reinforcement of the Home Fleet or deployment to the Indian Ocean (see Appendix II). For Churchill and the Admiralty, the modern Italian battleships were no idle threat. Designed to match the French Navy's *Strasbourg* and *Richelieu* battleships, the Littorios were ordered in 1934 and 1938 (see Appendix III) and constituted an impressive combination of firepower, speed and protection – a real testimony to Italian warship design. Representing a

<sup>41</sup> TNA, AIR40/1711, [Attached Map to] Spezia Information Sheet, 15/03/43.

<sup>42</sup> TNA, AIR51/240/3898, Spezia – Italy, [Target-Briefing, M.A.A.F. Intelligence Section, undated].

serious violation of the Washington Treaty's limitations, the Littorios weighed over 45,000 tons (fully-loaded) and carried nine 15-inch guns housed in three turrets. Their only possible weaknesses were the thickness of their armour protection, a limited-range (4,580 miles at 16 knots) and restricted ammunition storage for the main guns, although given that their likely operating zone was the central Mediterranean these weaknesses mattered less because the battleships would always be close to their home-bases in Italy.

For once war broke out, the Littorios were to challenge the Royal Navy's battleships for command of the sea, particularly in the central Mediterranean south of Sicily where the Italian convoy routes to North Africa were dissected by British maritime communication-lines to Malta.<sup>43</sup> On 20 November 1942, Admiral Cunningham told Admiral Pound that 'the Italian Fleet will be a constant nuisance and menace to through convoys in the Mediterranean and it must be our object to render it ineffective as soon as possible.'<sup>44</sup> Such was the concern, Pound asked the COS for an increased number of long-range reconnaissance aircraft precisely because 'of the importance of locating the Italian battleships'.<sup>45</sup> By January 1943, photographic evidence had revealed that two vessels, *Littorio* and *Vittorio Veneto*, had moved to Spezia after having been damaged by American heavy bomber attacks on Naples. Further reconnaissance showed they had soon been joined by a third battleship, *Roma*,<sup>46</sup> and also the presence of two heavy cruisers, the *Bolzano* and *Gorizia*, two light cruisers and 19 submarines.<sup>47</sup> To British naval-planners, a significant build-up of Italian naval power had developed at Spezia and now had to be neutralised, particularly in view of the Allied amphibious operations that were set to take place in the Mediterranean during mid-1943.

### The First Spezia Directive (January 1943)

On 20 January, a telegram from Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee, both senior members of the War Cabinet, informed the absent Churchill (then at the Casablanca conference) that 'knowledge of all rough stuff coming to them' would have a drastic effect on Italian morale.<sup>48</sup> Epitomising part of this 'rough stuff' was the appearance of two Directives concerning the bombing of Italy. The first, dated 20 January, concerned the attack on Italian targets by heavy-bombers based in North Africa, which were designed to help with the eviction of Axis forces from North Africa and to support the invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky) later on.<sup>49</sup> The following day, a second instruction was approved, namely the

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<sup>43</sup> Willmott, *Battleship*, pp.144-5.

<sup>44</sup> TNA, AIR8/719, Cunningham-Pound, 20/11/42.

<sup>45</sup> TNA, AIR20/4508, Extract from COS(42)344th Meeting, Long-Range Photographic-Reconnaissance Aircraft, 14/12/42.

<sup>46</sup> At Spezia, the *Roma* replaced the *Littorio* as the fleet-flagship.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, AIR23/6984, Photographic-Interpretation Report No. A.14, Summary of Recent Activity, Spezia, 5/05/43.

<sup>48</sup> Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, pp.301-2.

<sup>49</sup> TNA, AIR20/3720, CCS 159/1, The Bomber Offensive from North Africa, Memorandum by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, 20/01/43.

Directive for the Anglo-American strategic air forces based in the UK. Known as the Casablanca Directive, its primary focus was on the Combined Bombing Offensive (CBO) against Germany, but on Italy it specifically stated that:

... you [Harris] may be required, at the appropriate time, to attack objectives in Northern Italy in connection with amphibious operations in the Mediterranean theatre.<sup>50</sup>

This was in fact a reference to providing support to the other part of the ‘rough stuff’ destined for Italy, namely Operation Husky.<sup>51</sup> All this fitted together of course: Italy’s unconditional surrender was to be facilitated by the invasions of Sicily and southern Italy, which in turn meant the need for Allied bombers to attack Italy’s major ports. For the Joint Planning Staff (JPS) had already observed that:

... an Allied convoy in the Mediterranean will not meet with strong opposition from Italian surface forces if it is heavily escorted. Sicily, however, is close to the heart of Italy, and an increased boldness on the part of the Italians must therefore be expected.

Consequently, they recommended that a concentrated bombing effort designed ‘to inflict the maximum damage’ on the RMI’s battlefleet had to be undertaken because should it ‘interfere with either of the simultaneous landings at Catania and Palermo, it will be necessary to provide a second covering force of somewhat similar strength, or, alternatively, to delay the Palermo landing [altogether].’<sup>52</sup> ‘The RMI’, as Hammond comments, had consequently been ‘re-designated as a primary target for air attack, in order to immobilise it or force it to take refuge in the Adriatic.’<sup>53</sup>

Given the primacy of attacking Italy’s battleships, it was little surprise the Air Ministry’s Targets Committee was informed by the Admiralty representative, Commander Stileman, that the presence of the Littorios at Spezia meant ‘great importance’ was attached to the bombing of this naval base.<sup>54</sup> The Air Ministry agreed – no doubt influenced by Portal who continued to see things from the COS’ perspective – and on 17 January a Directive was sent to Bomber Command that stated the industrial centres of northern Italy, namely Milan, Turin, Genoa, were the first-priority targets after Berlin and an ‘important German objective’ (probably Schweinfurt). As Air Marshal Bottomley told Harris, this instruction constituted a direct order from the Minister of Defence (Churchill). Moreover, The Prime Minister – clearly concerned about Italian naval power – had also specifically requested that Harris should ‘examine the

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<sup>50</sup> TNA, AIR20/4476, Bottomley-Harris, 4/02/43.

<sup>51</sup> W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War* [hereafter: *T.S.W.W.*]: Vol. IV, *The Hinge of Fate* (London, 2005 ed.), pp.665-7.

<sup>52</sup> TNA, AIR20/4531, J.P.(42)944, Operation “Husky”, Report by J.P.S., 11/11/42. The British believed the RMI by late-1942 consisted of 6 battleships; 2 heavy-cruisers; 6 light-cruisers; 16 destroyers; and 1 aircraft-carrier.

<sup>53</sup> Hammond, *Enduring Influence*, pp.827-8.

<sup>54</sup> TNA, AIR20/4772, Report of the 81st Meeting held at the Air Ministry on Friday, 15th January, 1943, 19/01/43.

feasibility of extending your operations to Spezia' without violating Swiss airspace.<sup>55</sup> The C-in-C's response came a week later; a heavy-attack on Spezia without encroaching on Swiss neutrality was 'considered feasible'.<sup>56</sup> Once again, this demonstrated that pressure on Harris came right from the top when it came to Italian targets.

It now remained for Spezia to be placed formally on the target-list of the Italy Directive. On 29 January, Stileman further told the Targets Committee that notwithstanding the 'concentration of naval units', the port facilities, oil-refinery and storage installations 'constituted most important targets'. The Navy clearly wanted *all* aspects of Italian naval power destroyed, not just the battleships. As a result, Spezia 'should take precedence over Genoa'. The Committee's Chairman, the Deputy Director of Bomber Operations (DDB Ops) Air Commodore Sydney Bufton, replied that, as HQ Bomber Command 'had now confirmed the feasibility of attacking Spezia from this country', he now would approach ACAS(Ops) about adding it to the target-list of the 17 January letter.<sup>57</sup> Bottomley told Harris that Spezia normally came behind Milan and Turin in order of priority, though 'a concentration of enemy naval units within the base would automatically increase its relative importance'.<sup>58</sup> Thus, in allowing little scope for debate (Harris had only been asked to confirm Spezia's 'feasibility' not to express his reservations), an attack on Spezia had quickly become enshrined in an Air Ministry Directive. Yet Bottomley was also being disingenuous here. The 'concentration' of the Italian battleships at this major naval base had already occurred, as the ACAS(Ops) well knew. By implication – and owing to some degree of sleight of hand – Harris was now confronted by Spezia having in effect become the first-priority Italian target.

Bottomley had done this for good reason, however. For the Air Ministry's instruction on Spezia had come at the end of a period of nearly 12 months in which the C-in-C had received many irritating – and ever-increasing – demands from the Navy. Harris' antipathy towards the Navy's wishes generally, and bombing ships specifically, had roots that stretched back to the beginning of his tenure as C-in-C Bomber Command in February 1942. Only a month into his new command, Harris produced a paper on bombing warships, which he described as 'a difficult one' owing to the ineffectiveness of the weapon carried, the location of the target, and the weather. His preference was instead for 'the use of magnetic mines in a sustained indirect offensive against enemy warships'.<sup>59</sup> The rest of 1942 was riddled with 'spiky' disputes between HQ Bomber Command and the Admiralty over a variety of issues, such as a perceived lack of recognition by the Navy of Bomber Command's attacks on the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen* (moored at Brest, Kiel and Gdynia respectively).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> TNA, AIR20/6109, Bottomley-Harris, 17/01/43.

<sup>56</sup> TNA, AIR2/4476, Saundby-Street, 24/01/43.

<sup>57</sup> TNA, AIR20/4772, Report of the 82nd Meeting held at the Air Ministry on Friday, 29th January, 1943, 2/02/43.

<sup>58</sup> TNA, AIR14/1220, Bottomley-Harris, 29/01/43.

<sup>59</sup> P.P., File 9, Harris-Portal, 25/03/42; Enclosure: 'The Attack of Enemy Naval Ships by Aircraft of Bomber Command', 19/03/42.

<sup>60</sup> P.P., File 9, Harris-Portal, 24/04/42.

By Autumn, Harris was condemning the Navy for draining everything (including American heavy-bomber reinforcements) away from the bombing of Germany ‘for the futile purpose of bombing impenetrable concrete submarine pens on the West Coast in support of that Operation [Torch].’<sup>61</sup> At the time of being asked to bomb Spezia, therefore, the C-in-C was railing against the Navy’s demand for the bombing of U-boat bases on the French West Coast. On 27 January, Harris stated it was a ‘mis-employment of my force on a type of operation which cannot achieve the intended object[ive]’ and it remained ‘a vast waste of bombing effort . . . [on a] useless operation.’<sup>62</sup> At the heart of this was the C-in-C’s major concern – held with good reason – that the efforts of his force (now being prepared for the commencement of the ‘Main Offensive’ against Germany), was in danger of becoming subordinate to the Navy’s ever-growing list of requirements, be it for the anti-U-boat war in the Atlantic, the sinking of Germany’s remaining capital ships or for support of the Navy’s operations in the Mediterranean.

### **The Second Spezia Directive (February 1943)**

By 4 February, the Axis armies had withdrawn from Tripolitania to a position on the Mareth Line in southern Tunisia. To drive home their defeat in Libya to Italy’s population, Harris attacked Turin that night.<sup>63</sup> The clear weather allowed the Newhaven technique to be used – visual ground-marking – and this achieved ‘a fair concentration of bombing’, which ‘devastated’ 415 acres of Turin including the Fiat Works. Yet that night’s operations also included an attack on Spezia.<sup>64</sup> Only four Pathfinder Lancasters took part, in what was a ‘test’ of a new-type of proximity-fused 4,000-lb. bomb – an early form of air-burst weapon. This exploded between 190-600ft. above the ground precisely in order ‘to widen the effects of the resulting blast’ and have a more detrimental effect on civilian morale.<sup>65</sup> A split-attack on Italy was repeated on 14-15 February (to coincide with German-Italian counter-offensive against the Americans at the Battle of Sidi Bou Zid), in which another four Pathfinder aircraft dropped air-burst bombs on Spezia. The main raid was on Milan, which left ‘many well-concentrated fires . . . being visible up to 100 miles away.’<sup>66</sup> The post-raid report on Spezia noted ‘severe local destruction’

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<sup>61</sup> P.P., File 9, Harris-Portal, 21/10/42.

<sup>62</sup> RAF Museum Archive Collection, Hendon, Harris Papers (hereafter H.P.), H27, Harris-Street, 27/01/43. Such sentiments about the “utter waste” of bombing French ports continued into the Spring. See P.P., File 10, Harris-Portal, 30/03/43.

<sup>63</sup> The anti-aircraft defences of Turin were strengthened during Winter 1942-3. Largely for political reasons, Hitler had agreed to send 150 Flak-batteries to Italy, which included one-hundred batteries of the ferocious “88s” and fifty searchlight-batteries (this decision was rescinded in Spring 1943). One airman recalled the air-defences of Turin had become as strong as Düsseldorf’s. See Air Ministry, *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force (1933-1945)* (London, 2008ed.), p.284; D. Charlwood, *No Moon Tonight* (London, 1990 ed.), pp.120-1.

<sup>64</sup> Spezia’s flak-defences were very-light – astonishing when one considers it was the RMI’s major-base. One recent account suggests the anti-aircraft battery was nicknamed ‘*la Tosca*’ because, like Puccini’s melodramatic heroine, ‘it never harmed a living soul’. See Baldoli/Knapp, *Forgotten Blitzes*, p.202.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, AIR14/3409, Report on Night-Operations, 4-5th February, 1943, undated; Middlebrook/Everett, *B.C.W.D.*, pp.351-2.

<sup>66</sup> TNA, AIR14/3440, Report on Operational-Sorties for Period Ending 0730 Hours 15th February, 1943, undated.

and minor roof damage over a wide-area.<sup>67</sup> These two split-attacks show that, although Harris had cooperated in attacking Italian targets, there was a limit to his effort to assist the Navy's objectives in the Mediterranean. Italy's war industries and civilian morale remained Bomber Command's true targets, not its naval bases.



Photograph 1: Reconnaissance photograph of Spezia harbour (note: two battleships can be seen top left)<sup>68</sup>

Nonetheless, these raids on Spezia, as light as they had been, complemented the simultaneous bombing campaign of Mediterranean Air Command (MAC). On 28 February, Portal was informed this had comprised attacks on Palermo, Messina and Naples – the latter having suffered 11 attacks since December 1942.<sup>69</sup> The net had clearly tightened around Italy's ports yet despite – or, perhaps, because of – the intense effort against these targets by MAC, the Admiralty felt that Bomber Command's efforts against Spezia had simply not been

<sup>67</sup> TNA, AIR14/3409, Report on Night-Operations, 14-15th February, 1943, 5/05/43.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, AIR14/1772, Attached Reconnaissance-Photograph, Interpretation Report No. KS.78A, 21/02/43.

<sup>69</sup> TNA, AIR20/788, Dry-Crawford, 28/02/43; Enclosure: Resume of Overseas Operations December, 1942 to 24 February, 1943, undated.

good enough. It was particularly galling to the senior Naval Staff because Bomber Command now seemed to possess the technological means to undertake large-scale attacks against enemy ports successfully. For the 11-12 February operation against Wilhelmshaven had shown that the Pathfinders could use H2S to identify and mark the Aiming-Point; the Main Force of Bomber Command had then accurately bombed the target-markers causing widespread devastation to the dockyard area.<sup>70</sup> As a result, the Admiralty pressed for a major attack by Bomber Command on Spezia – and, in so doing, they made a further demand.

On 7 February, Cunningham requested that, owing to ‘the effect’ that bombing ‘usually has on the movement of [the] Italian Fleet’ (attacks on Naples had after all driven the Littorios up to Spezia in the first place) he had to ‘be forewarned’ about an impending heavy bombing attack so that submarines could be deployed to outside Spezia’s harbour to lie in wait for the departing battleships.<sup>71</sup> This request was examined by two committees on 15 February. The first was a meeting of the Vice-Chiefs of Staff, and here the Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff (VCNS) Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Moore explained that the NCXF’s request for a warning had come about because ‘the Admiralty feared that the very light scale of attack may only cause the Littorio battleships to scuttle for shelter to the embarrassment of our Naval forces in the Mediterranean’; in contrast, a heavier attack might ‘drive the battleships out of Spezia’ and into the path of the waiting submarines. Consequently, ‘Spezia should not be tickled up by a small number of bombers’, the VCNS stated, ‘but should be dealt with by an overwhelming attack’.<sup>72</sup> In an attempt to force Bomber Command’s compliance, the matter was then discussed in a second meeting that day, namely at the Chiefs of Staff Committee. Here, Moore reiterated that:

While heavy air attacks might achieve considerable damage to the battleships, very small-scale attacks might only make the battleships move . . . Admiral Cunningham had raised this matter in order that, with prior information of an air attack on Spezia, he could arrange his submarine patrols in case the battleships put to sea. . .<sup>73</sup>

Reading between the lines, the Admiralty were presenting Bomber Command with a stark choice: agree to issue a prior warning of an impending small-scale attack (to allow for British submarine deployment outside Spezia) or proceed with a large-scale attack on the battleships and port. In response, the Vice-Chief of the Air Staff (VCAS) Air Vice-Marshal Charles Medhurst discounted giving a 24-hour warning to Cunningham about an impending attack on grounds that the weather forecast meant it was difficult to sanction a bombing operation so far in advance.<sup>74</sup> It was therefore clear as to which way things were going. As shown by his response

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<sup>70</sup> PP, File 4, Portal-Churchill, 15/02/43. Churchill replied: ‘Good’.

<sup>71</sup> TNA, AIR20/1081, NCXF-Admiralty, 7/02/43.

<sup>72</sup> TNA, AIR20/2565, Medhurst-Bottomley, 15/02/43.

<sup>73</sup> CAB79/25/40, COS (43) 40th Meeting, Item 2: Bombing of Spezia, 15/02/43.

<sup>74</sup> TNA, AIR20/2565, Medhurst-Moore, 16/02/43.

the following day, the VCNS did not hesitate to take the opportunity to press for a major attack on Spezia. In so doing, Moore presented the target as a whole: Spezia was not just about the Littorio-class battleships but a naval base that contained many important installations. Therefore, 'a full-scale attack should be delivered against the port as early as possible', the VCNS argued, because light-scale raids would 'achieve very little' beyond warning the Italians 'we are interested in the place' and result in strengthened air-defences and the escape of the Littorios into the Tyrrhenian Sea unhindered by submarine attack. Should this happen, the VCNS concluded, '[this] would have important repercussions on our future operations'.<sup>75</sup>

As a result of the Admiralty's request, behind which lay the authority of the COS, Bottomley sent Harris a Directive on 20 February that ordered 'a heavy scale attack' on the Spezia naval base because of its shipbuilding yards, two arsenals, torpedo factory, submarine building yard, submarine base and oil refinery and storage tanks. This part of the Directive was, of course, tantamount to promoting the virtues of area-bombing for destroying the many war-related activities of the port area. Much less palatable to the C-in-C was its second part, with its emphasis on helping the Navy and its wider strategy of the Mediterranean war.<sup>76</sup> Initially unmoved by this instruction, Harris attacked ports in Germany instead, namely Bremen (21-22 February) and Wilhelmshaven (24-25 February), and finished the month with attacks on Nuremburg (25-26 February), Cologne (26-27 February) and St. Nazaire (28 February-1 March). Yet simply ignoring this Directive – owing to its high-level backing – could not be continued indefinitely. Consequently, on 4 March, Harris formally registered his opposition to heavy-attacks on Spezia. Tellingly, this letter was not addressed to Portal but to the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Air, Sir Arthur Street who, the C-in-C felt, would give his objections a fairer hearing. Harris stated that past operations against enemy battleships, namely on the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* at Brest, showed 'the chances of doing serious damage to the naval units at Spezia during a single attack would be negligible'. Notwithstanding the tactical objections of attacking enemy battleships, the heart of Harris' argument was that the order to bomb Spezia was 'only one of several such proposals for diverting effort from our main objective, Germany, which have recently been received'. Such a judgment was in fact a very correct one, for by this time the Air Ministry had dispatched fresh bombing instructions on an almost weekly basis. To quash this particular 'diversion', Harris argued forcefully that 'the project of bombing Spezia is ill-advised and inconsistent with agreed policy as to the proper employment of our Bomber Force'.<sup>77</sup> This 'agreed policy' referred, of course, to the primary objective of the Casablanca Directive, namely the attack on the German military, industrial and economic systems, and civilian morale. Harris was about to undertake the 'Main Offensive' against Germany but he was on shaky ground in arguing this: the Casablanca Directive had, after all, contained provision for attacks on Italy.

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<sup>75</sup> TNA, AIR20/2565, Moore-Medhurst, 17/02/43.

<sup>76</sup> TNA, AIR2/4476, Bottomley-Harris, 20/02/43.

<sup>77</sup> TNA, AIR14/778, Harris-Street, 4/03/43.

Further complaint about the multitude of Directives that he had received over the previous six months was contained in another letter by the C-in-C Bomber Command. Though originally dated 4 March, Harris would send it to Street two days later as, by that time, he had commenced the ‘Battle of the Ruhr’. This only served to add greater sharpness to his criticism about ‘the lure of alternative objectives which, however attractive in themselves, contribute nothing to our primary object’ (particularly cited were the French U-boat bases). Harris concluded by stating emphatically that Bomber Command ‘should be adamantly protected against further ill-conceived and ill-considered distractions which cripple our offensive effort without inflicting noticeable damage on the enemy’.<sup>78</sup> This view drew a more sympathetic response from Bufton who agreed entirely ‘with the C-in-C’s theme – concentration on Germany’, which remained ‘our real enemy . . . [requiring] every ounce of effort we can muster’. The War Cabinet and COS, he continued, did not understand fully ‘the great [bombing] effort needed to produce really damaging results, and hence the vital need to concentrate all available effort on the task’, rather than on ‘the innumerable requests from many sources for the attack of a wide variety of targets’. Therefore, Bufton recommended the abandonment of attacks on Italy, which ‘should be left to the MAC’, and the curtailment of the bombing of U-boat pens in France. Of course, the DDB Ops possessed his own, ever-strengthening, view about the direction of British bombing policy, namely the need for a concentrated effort on German aircraft production (a source of bitter dispute with Harris later on).<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, Bufton was fully alive to the Navy’s increasing demands; indeed, the following day he reiterated his view about ‘time-wasting maritime diversions’ in the Mediterranean in response to a proposal from Cunningham for the bombing of Toulon and Marseille. The DDB Ops wrote:

We know from bitter experience the waste of effort involved in the attack of submarine bases and naval units in harbour. Although it may be important to upset the Axis’ naval plans in the Mediterranean, it is unsound to attempt to do it by bombing . . . In my view, the Admirals are squandering our bomber force against targets for which it is quite unsuited.<sup>80</sup>

However, this should not be read as meaning the Air Ministry and HQ Bomber Command were in complete agreement. Though all were agreed on the principle of no unnecessary ‘diversions’, privately the Air Staff believed Bomber Command’s operations needed some flexibility. This showed the difference of opinion between most of the Air Staff, who embraced fully the Casablanca Directive *and* its provision for legitimate ‘diversions’, (that included attacks on Italy) and the C-in-C Bomber Command who interpreted his instructions

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<sup>78</sup> H.P., H67, Harris-Street, 4/03/43.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, AIR20/8146, Bufton-Bottomley, 9/03/43.

<sup>80</sup> TNA, AIR20/8146, Bufton-Bottomley, 10/03/43. See also TNA, AIR20/8146, Bottomley-Portal, 10/03/43. The A.C.A.S.(Ops.) told the C.A.S.: ‘I feel it would be wise to scotch this with all the force we can at the outset . . . The C-in-C. Bomber Command has already written a strong letter . . . protesting at the many diversions which are made from . . . the primary task of attacking Germany . . . [The] attack of submarine bases in the Mediterranean has therefore no place in the directive of Bomber Command’. See also TNA, AIR20/1081, M.A.C.-Air Ministry, 8/03/43.

as meaning the exclusive bombing of Germany – a point of divergence that became ever wider throughout 1943. As the Casablanca Directive *had* stipulated that attacks on northern Italy could be requested, Harris' complaints about bombing Spezia were dismissed.<sup>81</sup> Consequently, on 12 March Bottomley was informed by Bufton, now promoted to Director of Bomber Operations (DB Ops), that a response to Harris' letter of 4 March had been crafted. The DB Ops had now, seemingly, fallen into line with the thinking in the Air Ministry, for the reply avoided disputing the rights or wrongs of bombing Spezia and highlighted instead the likely consequence of the operation. The Italians, 'afraid of air attacks upon their naval units' given that they had 'moved quickly' out of Taranto and Naples after the first raids, would probably move the Littorios to Trieste should Spezia be heavily attacked.<sup>82</sup> Bottomley concurred; and it was now up to him to tell Harris that the operation, despite being a 'diversion', could be ordered *legitimately*. The following day, the ACAS(Ops) informed the C-in-C that:

Whilst it is realised that such an attack [on Spezia] is not at the moment within the general directive issued to you under cover of Air Ministry letter . . . dated 4th February 1943, the occasion may arise when it is necessary to attack objectives in Northern Italy in connection with amphibious operations in the Mediterranean theatre – see paragraph 3 of the directive.

Harris' objections had simply been overridden by a particular clause of the Casablanca Directive, and he was now forced to work more closely with the Naval Liaison Officer at HQ Bomber Command in keeping the Admiralty informed of an impending attack.<sup>83</sup>

Harris' objections had been dismissed not a moment too soon because a more practical issue had to be quickly resolved. Owing to the distance between the UK and Spezia, it had to be ascertained the last night by which an attack on this target could be made under the cover of darkness. On 19 March, Bottomley informed Portal that HQ Bomber Command had stated this would be 15 April. Any night up-to-then allowed about 'twenty minutes to half an hour over the target'<sup>84</sup> – a vital consideration given the need for the visual identification of the battleships and key installations around the dockyard area. This date was passed onto Pound later that day.<sup>85</sup> Thus, the stage was set for a heavy attack on Spezia, with Phase V of the bombing offensive against Italy having to be carried out sooner rather than later.

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<sup>81</sup> TNA, AIR2/8694, Bottomley-Portal, 11/03/43. In reply, Portal wrote 'I don't understand what the C in C has to complain about. He is given tremendous latitude for 9/10ths of his bombing'. See TNA, AIR2/8694, Portal-Bottomley, 11/03/43.

<sup>82</sup> TNA, AIR20/5323, Bufton-Bottomley, 12/03/43.

<sup>83</sup> TNA, AIR20/5323, Bottomley-Harris, 13/03/43.

<sup>84</sup> TNA, AIR20/5323, Bottomley-Dry, 19/03/43.

<sup>85</sup> TNA, AIR8/777, Portal-Pound, 19/03/43.

## Phase V: The Heavy-Attacks on Spezia (April 1943)

The urgency of attacking Spezia was not just because of the onset of the lighter nights after mid-April, but also because of the strategic requirements of the conflict in the Mediterranean by this time. The war in North Africa – then entering its final phase – had now centred on the elimination of the Axis bridgehead in Tunisia. Specifically, the British perceived the destruction or surrender of much of the German and Italian armies, which had a combined strength of some 250,000 soldiers, was considered vital to the success of Operation Husky. They could not be allowed to escape and deployed in the tough terrain of Sicily where, in Churchill's words, 'the still numerous Italian Army might fight desperately in defence of its homeland'.<sup>86</sup> On 2 April the Prime Minister therefore stated at the Chiefs of Staff Committee that:

It now becomes a matter of capital importance to prevent any large escape of the enemy from the Tunisian tip by sea. No doubt this is engaging the attention of the North African High Command in all its branches. But that is not enough.<sup>87</sup>

The words 'not enough' was Churchill's way of stating that *all* relevant branches of the Allied armed forces should be used to prevent the Axis escape from Tunisia. And one major force from outside the Mediterranean theatre that could provide some assistance was, of course, Bomber Command.

Specifically, heavy attacks on Spezia would thwart the deployment of the RMI's battleships and heavy cruisers as escorts for the troopships taking the Axis armies from Tunisia back to Sicily. This conformed to the Casablanca Directive's clause about attacks on northern Italy being undertaken 'in connection with amphibious operations in the Mediterranean theatre',<sup>88</sup> although in this case it was not about supporting Allied amphibious operations but instead about jeopardising the maritime evacuation of Axis forces from Tunisia. In so doing, Harris' force would be complementing the efforts of the US Ninth Air Force (based in North Africa), whose B-24 Liberators were conducting intense attacks on the ports of Catania, Messina, Naples, Palermo and Bari during April 1943.<sup>89</sup>

At 09:35 on 13 April, Harris finally took the decision to bomb Spezia during the morning conference at HQ Bomber Command. That night, a total of 207 Lancasters from 1, 5 and 8 Groups, together with four PFF Halifaxes, undertook the operation.<sup>90</sup> Though considered by the aircrews to be another 'soft' target in Italy, an attack on Spezia still had its challenges. The flight engineer needed to carefully regulate the fuel load for the long distance involved

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<sup>86</sup> Churchill, T.S.W.W.: Vol. V, Closing the Ring, p. 23.

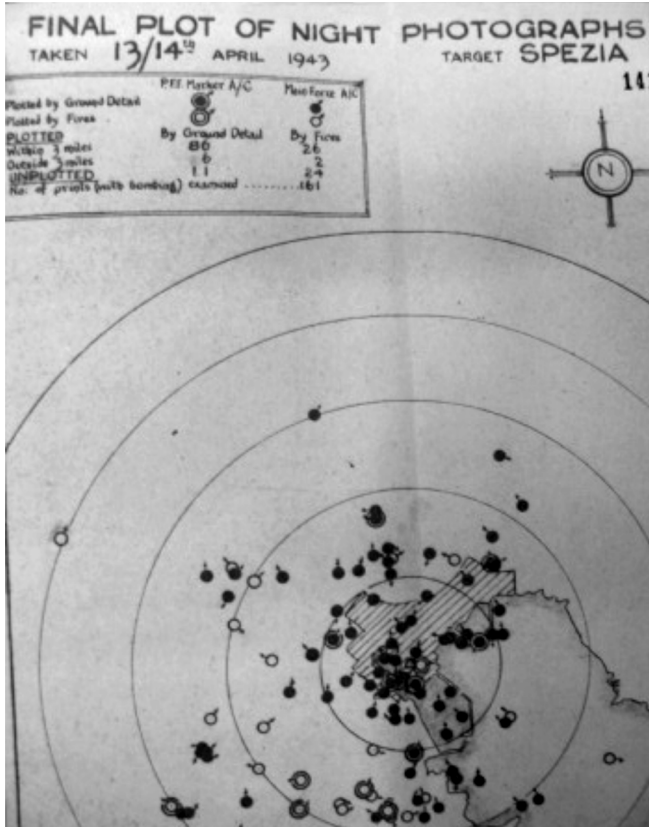
<sup>87</sup> Churchill, T.S.W.W.: Vol. IV, p. 840.

<sup>88</sup> TNA, AIR20/4476, Bottomley-Harris, 4/02/43.

<sup>89</sup> TNA, AIR23/925, Operational-Research Section (Middle East) Report No. R.39, Review of Bomber Operations in the Middle East, April 1943, 9/06/43.

<sup>90</sup> TNA, AIR14/3440, Report on Operational-Sorties for Period Ending 0730 Hours 14th April, 1943, 1943, undated.

(even a Lancaster was at the maximum extent of its range) while making sure all four engines worked properly to safely navigate a heavily-laden bomber over the formidable barrier of the Alps.



Map II: Bomb-Plot chart for 13-14 raid<sup>91</sup>

Once at Spezia, the Operational Plan (OPLAN) stated it was to be a concentrated-attack of 17 minutes' duration (from 0130-0147 hours) with the stipulation that 'if the ships lying to the south of the aiming point in the dock area could be seen they were to be attacked with HE, and the incendiaries reserved for the dock area'. Ten Lancasters of 5 Group were also to lay mines 'to prevent the battleships in the harbour from escaping [out to sea]'. Despite 'an effective smoke screen', evidence showed that a 'fairly accurate attack' had been carried out (see Map II). Indeed, daylight reconnaissance revealed the devastation in the dock area that included five acres of storehouses and hits on the heavy cruiser, *Gorizia*.<sup>92</sup> There was also damage to the shipyard industries, residential areas and the town's gasworks, but there were

<sup>91</sup> TNA, AIR14/3409, [Attached Map to] Report on Night-Operations, 13-14th April 1943, 21/07/43.

<sup>92</sup> *Gorizia* was the third ship of the Zara-class heavy-cruisers, the others being *Zara*, *Fiume* and *Pola*, which were all sunk at the Battle of Cape Matapan (29 March 1941).

no hits on the three Littorio class (battle)ships.<sup>93</sup> One hundred and seventy-three Lancasters from 1, 3, 5 and 8 Groups, and five PFF Halifaxes, returned five nights later.<sup>94</sup> The post-raid report observed that ‘a good concentration, a little north west of the aiming point, was achieved’ (see Map III) in which ‘the Naval Dockyard and the town suffered more severely than on the night of 13-14th April’. Through a combination of HE and incendiary bombs, serious damage was done to the industrial and residential areas of the town, with direct hits on the San Vito arsenal and main railway station. A ship of the RMI was sunk but it was an Orlandi-class destroyer (*Aviere*), not a Littorio-class battleship, which all went unharmed again.<sup>95</sup>



Map III: Bomb-Plot chart for 18-19 raid<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> TNA, AIR14/3409, Report on Night-Operations, 13-14th April 1943, 21/07/43. See also TNA, AIR20/3366, Bomber Command Digest No. 53, For Week ending 1200 hours, Sunday, 18th April 1943; and Middlebrook/Everitt, *B.C.W.D.*, p.376. For a descriptive account, see W.R. Thompson, *Lancaster to Berlin* (Manchester, 1997 ed.), pp.90-6.

<sup>94</sup> TNA, AIR14/3440, Report on Operational-Sorties for Period Ending 0730 Hours 19th April 1943, undated.

<sup>95</sup> TNA, AIR14/3410, Report on Night-Operations, 18-19th April, 1943, 24/07/43. For an Italian account, see TNA, AIR20/5396, Report of Enemy-Bombardments of 14th and 19th April, Spezia, 10/05/43.

<sup>96</sup> TNA, AIR14/3410, [Attached Map to] Report on Night-Operations, 18-19th April 1943, 24/07/43.

Notwithstanding these heavy raids, the pressure on Harris to continue the Spezia attacks specifically, and on naval targets generally, remained. This was proof of Harris' suspicions that raids on this target would become a more permanent commitment and, more widely, that naval influence on bombing policy was always liable to increase. In late-April, the Air Ministry's Targets Committee agreed to an Admiralty request that an up-to-date list of naval targets should be sent from the Air Ministry to Bomber, Fighter and Coastal Commands (and the US Eighth) as a weekly signal. The committee agreed to this, though the signals were to be 'purely informative' and not to alter the objectives of the Casablanca Directive.<sup>97</sup> Nonetheless these signals, known as NAVTARs, were to give the order of priority for 'general classes of naval targets', which comprised U-Boat construction yards, U-Boat operational bases, and Axis naval units and merchant shipping in harbour.<sup>98</sup> The first, second and third NAVTAR signals (covering the 7-20 May, 21 May-3 June and 4-17 June, respectively) stated a priority-target were the:

Littorio Class Battleships at Spezia – of great importance in view of forthcoming operations in the Mediterranean.<sup>99</sup>

Despite these signals, further large-scale raids on Spezia would only be undertaken by the American B-17s of the Northwest African Air Force (NAAF). Their precision-attack on 5 June saw the RMI suffer considerably: a light cruiser of the Capitani Romani-class had a large hole blown through its starboard side and one of the battleships, *Roma*, suffered bow damage and severe flooding (this was repaired in Genoa).<sup>100</sup> On 14 June, the NAAF's heavy bombers returned and scored a direct hit on the Littorio's port side (this being repaired at Spezia).<sup>101</sup> However, Bomber Command's focus remained on the 'Battle of the Ruhr' at this time. Harris would not resume heavy attacks on Spezia, but he would sanction Operation Bellicose.

### **Phase V: Operation *Bellicose* (May-July 1943)**

From May to July 1943, Fascist Italy's war entered its final stage. On 13 May, the Axis armies in Tunisia finally surrendered. As part of the increasing pressure on Italy, the Allies turned their attention towards preparations for the next move, namely Operation Husky, which, of course, included a programme of aerial bombardment.

Within the Mediterranean theatre, the RAF did have its own bomber force. But the aircraft was the increasingly dated Wellington and its limitations – in terms of range, bombload and numbers available – precluded heavy attacks on targets beyond southern Italy.

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<sup>97</sup> TNA, AIR20/775, Bottomley-Evill, 27/04/43.

<sup>98</sup> TNA, AIR20/775, Air Ministry-H.Q. Bomber, Coastal, Fighter Commands and Eighth U.S. Air-Force, draft signal, undated.

<sup>99</sup> TNA, AIR20/4772, Appendix to 89th Target-Committee Meeting, NAVTAR No. 1, undated; Appendix to 90th Target-Committee Meeting, NAVTAR No. 2, undated; Appendix to 91st Target-Committee Meeting, NAVTAR No. 3, undated.

<sup>100</sup> TNA, AIR34/429, Detailed Interpretation-Report No. D.56, Locality: Spezia, 8/06/43.

<sup>101</sup> M. Stilie, *Italian Battleships of World War II* (Oxford, 2011), pp.41-2.

Consequently, on 25 May MAC sent a request to the Air Ministry that stated, ‘we are most anxious to have Bomber Command support during Husky operation’, which included a programme of heavy attacks on the civilian morale and war-industries of Italy’s northern cities, the major railways between southern Germany and northern Italy, the oil refineries at Leghorn and Venice, and the naval bases at Spezia and Genoa. Yet the Mediterranean airmen were also aware of the limitation on Bomber Command’s operations against Italian targets, namely the short hours of darkness during the period in which Operation Husky was ‘due to take place’. As a result, Operation Bellicose – the brainchild of the C-in-C Mediterranean Air Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder – was developed. This stated that Bomber Command would attack ‘[the] targets mentioned’<sup>102</sup> through either a ‘shuttle service’ (in which the bombers used airfields in North Africa) or by a temporary detachment to the region.

In London, the senior Air Staff remained lukewarm about this operation, however. Bottomley was dismissive because it would ‘have little effect on the military situation as affecting the conduct of Operation Husky’. The decision, the ACAS(Ops) concluded, ‘turns on the extent to which the additional pressure on Italian morale can affect the political situation’ which, he believed, remained doubtful.<sup>103</sup> Consequently, the Air Ministry informed MAC that ‘we consider . . . your project uneconomical particularly the shuttle service’. The alternative, namely a temporary detachment based in North Africa, was also considered undesirable because every Lancaster was needed to maintain ‘[the] crescendo of attacks against the Ruhr’. MAC had to utilize the bombers it had already, together with the American reinforcements being sent, for these were considered ‘sufficient to meet the needs you outline in your proposal’.<sup>104</sup> The Air Ministry had vetoed the idea.

But not for long. Ironically, the Bellicose plan was soon resurrected by the need to attack an important target in southern Germany, namely Friedrichshafen. On 11 June, the Air Ministry informed MAC (and HQ Bomber Command) that ‘owing to location of target and short hours of darkness aircraft will have to land in North Africa after delivering attack . . . They will however be available to carry out an attack on an objective in Italy on the return flight’.<sup>105</sup> Suddenly, ‘shuttle bombing’ – a proposition that had so underwhelmed the Air Staff only weeks before – had now been accepted. On 23-24 June, after having bombed Friedrichshafen three nights earlier, some 52 Lancasters from 5 and 8 Groups left North Africa for their return to the UK. As Tedder had planned, these aircraft commenced a 30-minute attack on Spezia *en route* in order to keep the Littorios bottled-up in port. Though the target-marking by the PFF and selected 5 Group aircraft was inaccurate, the British then enjoyed an enormous slice of luck. A stray bomb set an oil-tank ablaze and this inferno acted as a huge ‘ground-marker’ for the other Lancasters who were then ordered ‘to bomb 500 yards north of the oil fire’. Many did

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<sup>102</sup> TNA, AIR20/3372, H.Q. M.A.C.-Air Ministry, 25/05/43.

<sup>103</sup> TNA, AIR20/3720, Bottomley-Evill, 27/05/43.

<sup>104</sup> TNA, AIR20/3720, Air Ministry-H.Q. M.A.C., undated.

<sup>105</sup> TNA, AIR20/782, Air Ministry-M.A.C. rep. Bomber Command, 11/06/43.

so, and a concentrated attack on the dockyard area was delivered,<sup>106</sup> although the Italian battleships were undamaged once again. Tedder sent to Harris his gratitude: 'Thanks for your Lancaster party. They are a fine lot and on return trip did job which is most useful to us at this juncture.'<sup>107</sup>

Given that the bombing of Friedrichshafen had provided the circumstances for undertaking Bellicose, ACAS(Ops)'s morning conference on 24 June reviewed the possibility of continuing this operation. The Air Staff agreed that Bellicose had assisted with the spread of Germany's air defences and 'enabled' attacks to be made, 'without prohibitive losses', on targets in both Germany and Italy that would otherwise have been 'off-limits' due to the limited hours of darkness during the Summer months. Yet it was decided that a regular undertaking of Bellicose operations required proper base facilities in North Africa and this was considered 'not practicable in the present manpower situation'.<sup>108</sup> The message was therefore clear; Bellicose, whilst having been a useful exercise, could not become a more permanent fixture. It was repeated on only one more occasion – and the target was not Spezia but another Italian port. On 24-25 July, the night the 'Battle of Hamburg' commenced, 33 Lancasters from 5 Group, having attacked the transformer-station at Cislago the previous week, bombed the harbour facilities and oil refinery at Leghorn (Livorno) on their way to the UK.<sup>109</sup>

Thereafter, Harris would return to the area bombing of Italian cities on a heavy scale. The long-standing British aim – namely 'to bring about the collapse of Italy by air action alone'<sup>110</sup> – and, by Summer 1943, the climatic – and most violent – phase of Bomber Command's offensive against Italy, was about to begin. Already, on 12 July, Harris had taken a mid-morning decision to switch that night's target from a German one to Turin – as part of something called the 'alternative programme' – in order to worsen Italian morale after the shock of the Operation Husky landings (these having commenced three days previously).<sup>111</sup> In late-July, Harris was specifically asked by Portal to 'heat up the fire' against Italy,<sup>112</sup> and fulfil an Air Ministry's Directive that stated:

On Demand: Targets in Italy . . . Major objectives in Milan, Turin and Genoa. Method: Scale of attack as high as possible.<sup>113</sup>

Mussolini had fallen but Italy was about to suffer its final, agonising, ordeal under the bombs of

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<sup>106</sup> TNA, AIR14/3409, Report on Night-Operations, 23-24 June 1943, 12/09/43.

<sup>107</sup> TNA, AIR20/782, Tedder-Harris (thru Evill), 27/06/43.

<sup>108</sup> TNA, AIR20/3372, Minutes of A.C.A.S.(Ops.) Conference 24 June 1943, 24/06/43.

<sup>109</sup> TNA, AIR14/3410, Report on Night-Operations, 24-25th July, 1943, 6/10/43.

<sup>110</sup> TNA, AIR20/3720, Course "B" – Air Action Alone, 14/04/43.

<sup>111</sup> TNA, AIR14/1819, Reasons for Major Night-Operations not taking place April, June, July, August 1943, undated.

<sup>112</sup> TNA, AIR20/5323, Portal-Bottomley, 28/07/43.

<sup>113</sup> TNA, AIR14/779, Air Ministry-Bomber Command, 29/07/43.

Bomber Command, as the Allies sought to pressure the new Italian government into signing an armistice.<sup>114</sup>

## Conclusion

On 3 September, at a Sicilian village called Cassibile, the Badoglio government signed a peace agreement with the Allies, which was announced publicly five days later. Under its terms, the RMI's ships were to surrender by sailing to a North African port or to Malta. On 9 September, the three Littorio battleships moved out of Spezia to comply with this order; only two ever made it. En route, the *Roma* was sunk by two German guided glider-bombs; an inglorious end to a very fine ship at the hands of Italy's erstwhile ally. The *Italia* (formerly the Littorio) was badly damaged by another *Fritz-X* but it did reach Malta.

Italy had come under the cross-hairs of Bomber Command from Autumn 1942 and the subsequent bombing campaign, which evolved through six-phases. At every stage these air attacks were fully complementary to Allied strategy and operations in the Mediterranean theatre, be it the 'Battle of El Alamein', Operation Torch, the fall of Tunisia, the Husky landings in Sicily, or the securing of Italy's final capitulation. In supporting these operations, Harris had little objection to the bombing of Italy's major cities – Milan, Turin and even Genoa – for he considered these were suitable targets when bad weather precluded attacks on Germany and kept the Luftwaffe's air-defences fully stretched.

Yet operations against Italian ports remained a different matter. Such attacks came from all geographical directions: in the south, the bombing of such places as Naples and Brindisi was the responsibility of British and American bombers based in Malta and North Africa; in the north, it would be Bomber Command that was assigned to attack the RMI's major fleet base at Spezia. The specific reason for doing so – namely to sink, damage or prevent the operational deployment of the powerful Littorios battleships – meant the attacks were Phases IV & V of Bomber Command's air offensive against Italy. Advocated by an Admiralty which was only too aware of its weakness in capital-ships, both in the Mediterranean and beyond (see Appendix II), the plan for Bomber Command's attacks on Spezia evolved over time from mining the harbour, to small-scale raids, to heavy attacks and, finally, to the 'shuttle-raids' of Bellicose. This varied approach towards operational planning showed, in microcosm, the operational flexibility of Britain's strategic bombing force by mid-1943.

More specifically, the operations against Spezia allow us to investigate the issue of command and control of Bomber Command during the Second World War. Harris was only too aware of presiding over the only Command in any Service that was capable of operating against a multitude of target sets in a multitude of different theatres. No other commander, Army,

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<sup>114</sup> The raids were: 7/8 August – Genoa, Milan, Turin; 12-13 August – Milan, Turin; 14-15 August – Milan; 15-16 August – Milan; and 16-17 August – Turin. See Middlebrook/Everitt, *B.C.W.D.*, pp.419-22.

Navy or Air Force, was faced with so many competing demands on his operational pie – and the C-in-C frequently lamented. Yet in the Mediterranean theatre, this problem became more complicated. This is ironic given that Harris' force did not come under any Mediterranean commander – and therein lay the problem. For the Navy's aspiration for Bomber Command's support meant the use of a force from outside the Mediterranean theatre. Such a deployment had to be sanctioned by the Chiefs of Staff, via the supreme decision-making body for British military operations, The Prime Minister and Government. Consequently, this meant that the pressure on Harris to undertake operations against Spezia came from a host of 'outside' parties: The Prime Minister; the other Service Chiefs; and the Chief of the Air Staff – powerful voices that were very difficult to 'buy off'. This was deemed a real danger, in Harris' eyes, of his Command becoming increasingly subject to 'waging war by committee'. Yet he did attack Spezia – an indication of the C-in-C's awareness as to how far he could push back against 'official' orders. Despite holding very valid views on 'diversions' generally, and Spezia specifically, Harris ultimately had a *modus operandi* that was a lot more cooperative than has been readily acknowledged. He did follow his Directives, especially when they were couched in language that was specific enough to not allow him any 'wriggle room', and Harris' record in this respect was actually very good. Spezia proved no exception.

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## Appendix I: The Phases of Bomber Command’s Strategic Air Offensive against Italy

|                  | <i>Date:</i>  | <i>Targets:</i>   | <i>No. of aircraft despatched:</i>                      | <i>Rationale for bombing:</i>  |
|------------------|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Phase I</b>   | Late-October 1942   | Genoa – 22-23 October<br>Genoa – 23-24 October<br>Milan – 24 October<br>Milan – 24-25 October   | 112<br>122<br>88<br>71                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To coincide with the start of the Second ‘Battle of El Alamein’ (23 October – 11 November)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Phase II</b>  | Early to mid-November 1942<br><br>('The Battle of Genoa') | Genoa – 6-7 November<br>Genoa – 7-8 November<br>Genoa – 13-14 November<br>Genoa – 15-16 November  | 72<br>175<br>67<br>78                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To coincide with start of Operation Torch (8-16 November) and later part of the Second ‘Battle of El Alamein’</li> </ul>                            |
| <b>Phase III</b> | Mid-November-December 1942<br><br>('The Battle of Turin') | Turin – 18-19 November<br>Turin – 20-21 November<br>Turin – 28-29 November<br>Turin – 29-30 November<br>Turin – 8-9 December<br>Turin – 9-10 December<br>Turin – 11-12 December<br>Turin – 23-24 December | 77<br>232<br>228<br>29<br>133<br>227<br>82<br>Cancelled | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To coincide with the general deterioration of the Italian/Axis position in North Africa; and</li> <li>To sabotage Italy’s war-production</li> </ul> |
| <b>Phase IV</b>  | February 1943   | Turin and Spezia – 4-5 February<br>Milan and Spezia – 14-15 February  | 188/4<br>142/4  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To worsen the resupply situation of Axis forces in Tunisia</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Phase V</b>   | April-July 1943   | Spezia – 13-14 April<br>Spezia – 18-19 April<br>Spezia – 23-24 June<br>Turin – 12-13 July<br>Leghorn – 24-25 July   | 208<br>173<br>52<br>295<br>33                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To hinder the Axis evacuation from Tunisia; and</li> <li>To aid Operation Husky</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Phase VI</b>  | August 1943   | Genoa, Milan and Turin – 7-8 August<br>Milan and Turin – 12-13 August<br>Milan – 14-15 August<br>Milan – 15-16 August<br>Turin – 16-17 August   | 197<br>504/152<br>140<br>199<br>154                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To secure an armistice from the new Italian government under Marshal Badoglio</li> </ul>  |

Appendix II: Predicted global naval balance by April 1943<sup>1</sup>

Summary of Proposals (by April '43) (Note ships thought unlikely to be in service or to operate have been omitted)

| <u>British</u>                  |             |   | <u>Enemy</u> |            |                       |
|---------------------------------|-------------|---|--------------|------------|-----------------------|
| 4 - K.G.5s.                     | 10 - 14"    | Home  | TIRPITZ      | 8 - 15"    |                       |
|                                 |             |   | SCHARNHORST  | 9 - 11"    |                       |
|                                 |             |   | SCHERER      | 6 - 11"    |                       |
|                                 |             |   | LUTZOW       | 6 - 11"    |                       |
| RENOWN                          | 6 - 15"     | Western Med.  | 3 LITTONIOS  | 9 - 15"    |                       |
| MALAYA                          | 8 - 15"     |   | 3 CAVOURS    | 10 - 12.6" |                       |
| VALLANT                         | 8 - 15" (or |   |              |            |                       |
| Home if not required in W.Med.) |             |   | STRASBOURG   | 8 - 13"    |                       |
|                                 |             |   | DUNKERQUE    | 8 - 13"    |                       |
| 3 "Rs."                         | 8 - 15"     | Indian Ocean or Atlantic depending on raider situation. |              |            |                       |
| NELSON                          | 9 - 16"     |   | YAMATO       | ) 9 - 16"  |                       |
| RODNEY                          | 9 - 16"     |   | MUSASHI      |            |                       |
| WARSPITE                        | 8 - 15"     |   | 1 YAMATO     |            |                       |
| <u>U.S.</u>                     |             |   |              |            |                       |
| S.DAKOTA                        | ) 9 - 16"   | S.W.Pacific.  | MUSU         | ) 8 - 16"  |                       |
| WASHINGTON                      |             |   | NAGATO       |            |                       |
| N.CAROLINA                      |             |   |              |            |                       |
| INDIANA                         |             |   | FUSO         | ) 12 - 14" |                       |
| MASSACHUSETTS                   |             |   | ISE          |            |                       |
| ALABAMA                         | HYUGA       |   |              |            |                       |
|                                 |             |   | YAMASHIRO    |            |                       |
| COLORADO                        | 8 - 16"     | Hawaii Force.   | KIRISHIMA    | ) 8 - 14"  |                       |
| MARYLAND                        | 8 - 16"     |   | HARUNA       |            |                       |
| NEW MEXICO                      | 12 - 14"    |   | KONOO        |            | ) in Japanese Waters. |
| MISSISSIPPI                     | 12 - 14"    |   | HIYEI        |            |                       |
| TENNESSEE                       | 12 - 14"    | " "   |              |            |                       |
| PENNSYLVANIA                    | 12 - 14"    |   |              |            |                       |
| NEVADA                          | 12 - 14"    |   |              |            |                       |
| IDAHO                           | 10 - 14"    |   |              |            |                       |
| ARKANSAS                        | 12 - 12"    | Western Atlantic.                                       |              |            |                       |
| NEW YORK                        | 10 - 14"    |   |              |            |                       |
| TEXAS                           | 10 - 14"    |   |              |            |                       |

<sup>1</sup> TNA, ADM205/14, Summary of Proposals by April 1943 [Worldwide Battleship Deployments], 5/11/42.

## Appendix III: The battleships of the Littorio-class<sup>2</sup>

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Battleship: Littorio</b><br>1934 programme. Cantieri Ansaldo, Genoa. Laid down: 28 October 1943. Launched: 22 August 1937. Completed: 6 May 1940.                          |  |
| <b>Battleship: Vittorio Veneto</b><br>1934 programme. Cantieri Rinunti dell'Adriatico, Trieste. Laid down: 28 October 1934. Launched: 22 July 1937. Completed: 28 April 1940. |  |
| <b>Battleship: Roma</b><br>1938 programme. Cantieri Rinunti dell'Adriatico, Trieste. Laid down: 18 September 1938. Launched: 9 June 1940. Completed: 14 June 1942.            |  |
| <b>Battleship: Impero</b><br>1938 programme. Cantieri Ansaldo, Genoa. Laid down: 15 May 1938. Launched: 15 November 1939. Never fully completed.                              |  |
| Dimensions:   | 780-ft./238.5-m. (Roma and Impero): 789.5-ft./241.43-m.) |
| Displacement:   | 40,714 tons (standard); 45,236 tons (full load)          |
| Main armament:  | Nine (three triple turrets) 15-in./380-mm. 50 calibre    |
| Trial speeds:   | Littorio: 31.29 knots; Vittorio Veneto: 31.43 knots      |
| Range:  | 4,580 n.m. at 16 knots                                   |

<sup>1</sup> H.P. Willmott, *Battleship* (Cassell, London, 2002), p.283.

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