

Husky's Hidden Hand: A Compass for Change Agency and Subject Matter Expertise in Large Scale Combat Operations

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Headquarters Department of the Army (HQDA) Department of the Army Pamphlet (DAPAM) defines Army Warrant Officers 600-3 (2023) as not only technical experts and trainers, but also as both combat leaders and advisors. In both the combat leader and advisor role, they must use their immense expertise to ensure that vital lessons of the past are not needed to be relearned the hard way by today's commanders as the Army expands its wartime focus to prepare for Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) involving the pacing threat of potential peer and/or near-peer state actors. Twenty plus years of operations in the Global War on Terror have empowered most of the Army's modern leaders to be well versed and prepared for counter-insurgency operations (COIN), but the emergent focus on pacing threat actors and their peer/near-peer capabilities have created a training and readiness vacuum (Cooper, 2023; Flanick, Fox, & Smith, 2025). Army Warrant Officers must effectively develop their dynamic teams by leading up and down the chain, through competent advising of leaders above them and unmatched expertise in their tactical and technical craft as they train subordinate leaders.

Operation Husky, the 1943 Allied invasion of Sicily and largest amphibious assault of the entire World War II conflict represents a virtual cornucopia of lessons learned to be exported to the United States Army's renewed emphasis on LSCO involving potential peer and/or near-peer threats. It is not the intent of this paper to sow seeds of decent or doubt on the strategic success and importance that Operation Husky played in the war effort. However, leaders must examine the operation in its totality through an inspective lens, to identify both success and folly so that improvements are made at the Strategic, Operational, and Tactical levels of future operations. In viewing Operation Husky through this lens, two main lessons learned can be identified. The first lesson was that while intelligence was crucial in the prediction of German Tank movement and maneuver, disruption of intelligence created gaps that affected commander decision making processes (Woislaw, 2021). The other major lesson learned from Operation Husky involved the joint and multi-domain nature of the operation in that the lack of command, control, and coordination between Allied forces not only negatively affected scheme of maneuver and decision dominance of on ground leaders, but also introduced significantly enhanced potential for fratricide which directly resulted in decreased available forces to the operation's endeavors (Barr, 2019). At the surface level, these points appear to be affected at echelons far beyond the reality known to the Warrant Officer Cohort; however, it is the intent of this article to address these lessons from the locus of control for which an Army Warrant Officer operates.

Army Warrant Officers are uniquely postured to shape and affect the Army's future operations in the LSCO battlespace. Doctrine speaks to Warrant Officers at all ranks and levels of responsibility, it charged Warrant Officers to be experts in their field, to include the Warrant Officer 1-level, they then progress to increasing levels of responsibilities as advisors and trainers and are consistently defined as experts in their field (HQDA, 2023) which pursue virtuosity in their craft. Doctrine aside, there is ample anecdotal evidence speaking to the vitality of Warrant Officers as both technical experts and trusted agents that can shape the development of the force positively, as role models, standard bearers, and guardians of the Army process (Asare, et al., 2024; Harvey, 2024). While the breadth and scope of Army Warrant Officers has evolved significantly since World War II and Operation Husky, WWII had approximately 57,000 Warrant Officers actively serving and today we see a broader range of career fields and a smaller number of Warrant Officers at approximately 16,000, the refined role of the modern era Army Warrant Officer is specifically suited for preparing the Army for LSCO (DMDC, 2025; WOHF, 2015). Thus, Army Warrant Officers are unparalleled in their fit for leveraging the lessons learned from Operation Husky and ensuring our commanders of the future are prepared for the challenges of LSCO.

Lesson Learned 1: Overcoming Intelligence Gaps and Enabling Commanders

The value of intelligence does not necessarily lie with what knowledge it provides as much as the value resides within the timeliness and accuracy of the information received. This view on the value of intelligence is echoed by Fanik, Fox, and Smith (2025) in their focus on the importance of dissemination of intelligence in the Targeting Process and by Woislaw's (2021) analysis of Major General Allen's 1st Infantry Division's performance in Operation Husky when the intelligence they received was accurate and timely. Woislaw (2021) also presented an intelligence value based upon the intelligence information's ability to provide situational awareness to ground commanders to enable decision making and in its ability to predict adversary actions, both of which enable commanders to identify opportunities to exploit. In the end, accurate and timely intelligence enables decision dominance, despite if it is provided by Paul Revier riding around the country side announcing the arrival of the British or if it is a modern era J3.2 Hostile Air Surveillance Track message produced by an electronic intelligence hit and published to the Joint Data Network in CENTCOM representing a Group 3 Drone operating on a Loitering Munition/Kamikaze Drone mission set on its way to a U.S. Forces base.

Valuable intelligence on the enemy armor's posture and scheme of maneuver enabled the 1st Infantry Division to cease initiative and break out of the Gela Beachhead. While that is merely a single situation in the overarching conflict, it is worth noting that the general analysis of the operation found that when the tactical intelligence was appropriately disseminated it enabled the ground commanders' decision dominance, shaped the conflict, and contributed to the success of the amphibious assault. However, while Operation Husky benefited from timely and accurate intelligence at times, it also suffered from inaccurate, untimely, and poorly disseminated intelligence that negatively affected the operation (Woislaw, 2021).

There were two main points of Operation Husky's land domain fight for which intelligence failures can be cited. One intelligence failure was the misidentification of German units which directly led to underestimation of the size and availability of German forces by Allied forces. Allied forces developed an underestimation in Axis forces capabilities based on poor intelligence, this flawed assumption underprepared the ground forces for units' ability to reinforce and reorganize. Another intelligence failure was ground commander battlefield situation obscuration due to higher echelons withholding of intelligence or fragmented dissemination of intelligence. In both cases, intelligence failures were overcome, and victory was obtained, but this paper's thesis is that the Army Warrant Officer must leverage this knowledge to prevent future operations from enduring the same pitfalls.

Army Warrant Officers can leverage their roles as integrators and technical experts to overcome future LSCO-based intelligence concerns of the likes that were experienced during Operation Husky. The HQDA (2023) defined Warrant Officers as technical experts across their rank structure. In this capacity, Army Warrant Officers would need to leverage their technical expertise (despite their career field) to analyze received intelligence. Fragmented information needs to be filtered and examined through a stronger scope. Then enemy forces will be more accurately identified and thus, their posture and constitution more correctly predicted. This better parsing of intelligence data allows commanders battlefield clarity and decision dominance. Further examining these lessons from the lens of the HQDA (2023) definition, Warrant Officers are described as integrators of emergent technologies. In this capacity, the Warrant Officers role would be focused on the management of intelligence gathering systems and timely distribution of products and/or insertion of intelligence products to planning systems. In both cases, Army Warrant Officers embodying the Warrant Officer definition would add value to their organizations and aid in overcoming this lesson learned in the LSCO environment.

Lesson Learned 2: Communications and Chain of Command in the Joint Fight

Barr (2019) captured a major lesson learned that defines a modern concern for LSCO in, "...greater attention to efficient liaison and co-ordination before the operation began would have smoothed the Allies path in Sicily and may have prevented some of the more egregious errors and misunderstandings that developed. (p.28)". Field Manual [FM] 3-0 (2025) clearly states that Army Operations are multi-domain in nature and that leverage Joint and Army capabilities to achieve objectives. Operation Husky was multi-domain for its era including amphibious landings and naval support from the maritime domain, application of air power and airborne assets from the air domain, and the application of maneuver tactics on the land domain. However, a combination of the absence of an Army Group Headquarters on the island for a significant portion of the operation and poor communication and coordination between Allied and Joint forces played significant roles in the delay of friendly forces scheme of maneuver directly resulting in Axis forces having improved decision dominance and reaction time (Bar, 2019). Today's modern force structure provides a Joint Forces Commander (JFC) placed in command of a Joint Task Force (JTF) for a theater in crisis (HQDA, 2025). Within this JTF each domain gets a Component Commander (CC), Maritime (MCC), Air (ACC), Land (LCC), etc. This Joint operations-centric force structure further supports that Army operations are multi-domain operations, and this creates the potential for the pitfalls of Operation Husky to rear their ugly head in future operations.

There is value in the examination of Operation Husky's failures in command, control, coordination and liaison efforts to define specific areas for which Warrant Officers have a locus of control and scope of effect that will help to avoid their potential presentation in future LSCO situations. General Harold Alexander's 15th Army Group Headquarters' location and support of the operation was cited as a point of contention in the campaign, as it was the campaign's coordinating headquarters. Bar (2019) explains that General Alexander chose not to establish headquarters forward on the island in the early part of the campaign. Bar (2019) continues and assigns significant responsibility to this decision in that the two forward subordinate Armies, the 7th and 8th Armies, were deprived of coordination and liaison efforts for their multi-domain support needs from the Joint force. While the modern battlefield mitigates much of this concern by providing enhanced situational awareness through Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) feeds from drones or other intelligence gathering systems and tactical data flows across the world via beyond line-of-sight (BLOS) Tactical Data Links (TDLs); in the era of Operation Husky this lack of support was costly. The other major failure in this arena of command and control was an insufficient level of Army command-level coordination and liaison between Allied forces. While the lack of communication and coordination between the land component maneuver forces of the 7th and 8th Armies and how that caused significant delays that favored Axis elements decision making and scheme of maneuver; the fratricide event that cost the lives of 318 U.S. personnel during the 504th parachute infantry regiment's insertion stands out as a very serious consequence of the overarching lack of coordination between Allied forces. In one case, plans were not developed for the two Armies scheme of maneuver for the exploitation phase in the other poor information dissemination set the stage for weary gunners to engage low flying aircraft unknowingly taking American lives (Bar, 2019; St. Clair, 2007). In both cases, the characteristics and duties assigned to the modern-day Army Warrant Officer provide mitigations for these potential follies in a future LSCO campaign.

From the Warrant Officer perspective, a key takeaway for modern LSCO planning with respect to the failures in command and control, lack of liaison and coordination, and the resultant fratricides of Operation Husky is that there is a critical need for professionals with the technical expertise and knowledge of integration of systems to provide robust communications across the Joint environment and various domains of operations. While systems have been emplaced across the Department of Defense to improve these gaps, as an example the Joint Task Force formation to align Joint forces interoperations and the Theater Air Ground System (TAGS) for coordination of Joint fires across various domains; it is the Army Warrant Officer that will play a critical role in integration of systems in LSCO as

they are described as the innovative integrator of emergent technologies in the very definition of the cohort (Asare, et al., 2024; HQDA, 2023).

Synthesizing information from Harvey's (2024) article, the Warrant Officer's advisory capacity has been developed from a legacy of trust that enables them to recommend to commanders and other leaders on the integration of systems, placement of key nodes or Command Posts, and advise on the operations of systems that enable communication. As an example, recommending that TDL capable systems are integrated to the Joint Data Network will enhance both situational awareness of the Command Post and leadership, but this also will mitigate fratricide potential through the inherent sharing of Precise Position Location Information (PPLI) message. There is an incredible proliferation of TDL capable systems that are operated by or are operated within proximity of various Army Warrant Officer career fields. Gebara (2006) identified this need when he quoted VADM Arthur Cebrowski, "If you are not Link 16-capable, you will not be welcomed on the U.S. Battlefield... You will be considered a Blue-on-Blue engagement generator: A threat to friendly and coalition forces." Army Warrant Officer need to advise and liaise with leaders at all echelons and across the Joint force on the integration of their systems to ensure the appropriate level leadership and Command Post have the most timely situational awareness of their subordinates' actions despite geographic location, that operational information is appropriately disseminated to key elements, and that systems are operating on the Joint Data Network to aid in fratricide prevention.

Conclusion

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. (Santayana, 1905)" While it is very easy to Monday-Morning-Quarterback the events of Operation Husky and admittedly plenty of researchers have examined this campaign in significant depth and breadth; it is far harder and vastly more important to take the lessons learned and apply them to the future of LSCO campaigns. The modern-day Army Warrant Officer is well positioned to act as an agent of change when it comes to the prevention of recurrence of the historic mistakes of Operation Husky. The Army's renewed focus on LSCO involving pacing threats uniquely place the Army Warrant Officer in a space where they must leverage their expertise to ensure the lessons from the past, such as the intelligence and command failures of Operation Husky, are not relearned. Army Warrant Officers must accomplish this immense task by appropriate advising of leaders and effective training of subordinate teams, using the inherent deep tactical and technical knowledge to fill readiness gaps and prepare the force for future challenges in the LSCO battlespace.

Furthermore, a key aspect of the Army Warrant Officer's role that was repeatedly addressed in this paper is that they are innovative integrators. But the cohort must ask itself, what does it mean to integrate innovatively? This thought exercise can empower the cohort to understand that these are more than just words they were forced to memorize in Warrant Officer Candidate School, these words mean something! Innovative integration means that Army Warrant Officers have more than just the technical proficiency to administer, manage and integrate diverse Army systems across operational domains, but that they think outside the box in the integration process. LSCO will challenge the systems the Army knows and uses, it will be a forcing function for Army Warrant Officers to race to out innovate the enemy. Army Warrant Officers must learn from the past, examine lessons learned, and develop innovative solutions in the integration of systems to overcome the intelligence and communication gaps that will be inherent in the LSCO battlespace involving peer and/or near-peer threat actors. The Army Warrant Officer is the key to the problem set that has plagued complex and multi-domain military operations of the past.

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