



Struggle for the Middle Sea

Vincent P. O'Hara

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The Mediterranean Sea was the most fiercely contested body of water throughout the Second World War. Its strategic importance was at the centre of Naval and wider military thinking on the part of both Allied and Axis powers, and its waters witnessed a huge variety of actions and operations. These included carrier strikes, battle-line shootouts, cruiser-destroyer engagements, convoy attacks, coastal actions, amphibious assaults and bitter submarine campaigns. Despite such immense significance, however, most recent literature concerned directly with the Mediterranean war has been sparse and incomplete. This book is a fresh study of the conflict, analysing the respective actions and performances of each of the five major naval powers involved in the Mediterranean - Britain, Italy, France, the USA and Germany. This takes place within the broader framework of a chronological, operational narrative of the entire five year campaign and further, examines without partisanship, the national imperatives that dictated much of the action. As a result, many of the popular myths that surround the modern view of the Mediterranean naval war are dispelled - for example, that Britain enjoyed a moral advantage over Italian forces, that the French were merely puppets of the German command, and that the North African campaign contributed to the eventual Allied victory. While the book concentrates on the key 1940-43 period, it also expands in scope to document the Kriegsmarine's improvised but remarkably successful fighting withdrawal at sea until 1945, an aspect of the later stages of conflict which has widely been ignored. Such fresh viewpoints, depth of detail and wider perspectives - not to mention some controversial (though well-substantiated) conclusions - are supported by extensive research drawn from Italian and French as well as British, US and German sources. It will appeal to Naval professionals and historians as well as attracting a popular readership, and contains numerous lessons concerning littoral warfare and use of the sea that have particular resonance today.

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