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## The Italian Navy in World War II

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seemly message. This too may well be Mulligan's fate. Despite his sterling scholarship, Mulligan subscribes in this work to a canon that may well rankle some German veterans: the German navy started the war by bombarding Polish territory; Admiral Dönitz was a Nazi ideologue and a war criminal; and National Socialism launched "a sea of crimes," including Auschwitz and the final solution. That such a canon should startle anyone today attests to the discomfort that an unresolved past can still cause in some quarters of German society. In many respects, U-boats and U-boat aces are the litmus of German naval tradition.

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Sadkovich, James J. *The Italian Navy in World War II*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1994. (No price given)

The pattern among historians writing in English about operations in the Mediterranean theater during the Second World War has been to emphasize the success of British forces, whose skill and determination, combined with the aid and assistance of the United States, allowed them to stem and eventually outmatch the numerical and material superiority of their Italian and German opponents. The Italians especially have been ridiculed for cowardice and ineptitude, not only compared with their British opponents but also in contrast to the performance of their German allies. Virtually all works in English, with the exception of the translated *The Italian*

*Navy in World War II*, by Marc'Antonio Bragadin and Giuseppe Fioravanzo, have particularly noted the failures of the Regia Marina Italiana (RMI), whose originally favorable strategic position and numerical and material superiority were dissipated by hesitant leadership, an ineffectual officer corps, and incompetent crews. James J. Sadkovich's purpose is to overturn this paradigm completely. His method is to attack, at every opportunity, the premises upon which this conclusion is based.

Sadkovich commences by reexamining the accuracy of the consensus view of prior Italian superiority. He highlights the RMI's lack of an organic air arm, the absence of aircraft carriers, and the fleet's failure to secure effective cooperation from the Regia Aeronautica Italiana (RAI) for its operations. He notes also that the RMI's prewar development had been conditioned by the expectation of contesting control of the Mediterranean against the French rather than the British, a factor that exerted a powerful influence on the design of its vessels. The author assesses Italian warships to have been comparable in quality to those of the British, with the exception of destroyers and some older, rebuilt battleships. He notes, however, such dangerous deficiencies as lack of radar, no doctrine or equipment for night-fighting, limited antisubmarine warfare capability, an inadequate industrial base, and a chronic lack of bunker fuel. Overall, he contends that these factors gave the qualitative edge to the Royal Navy.

Sadkovich also disputes that the strategic advantage lay with the RMI.

He emphasizes that the Italian fleet's operations were restricted geographically to within the Mediterranean and were tied completely to maintaining the essential flow of supplies to North Africa. Its difficulties were further exacerbated by limited dock facilities in Libyan ports and inability to gain access to French North African harbors. The British, on the other hand, could readily reinforce the Mediterranean Fleet and their ground and air forces through exterior lines secure from Italian attack, and they could amass overwhelming force to support the resupply of Malta.

In general, Sadkovich considers the RMI to have acquitted itself well in combat. He emphasizes the readiness of the Royal Navy to disengage whenever it lost the tactical advantage, and also the success, for much of the war, of the Italian fleet in convoying supplies and troops, both Italian and German, to North Africa without excessive casualties while inflicting considerable losses on British forces. He notes that major Italian combat losses occurred only during actions for which the RMI was ill equipped, untrained, or outnumbered. Sadkovich also highlights the refusal of the Germans to cooperate fully with the Italians and the disastrous consequences of the Italian adoption of German coding machines, which allowed the British from mid-1942 to use ULTRA to devastate Axis naval operations.

Sadkovich presents a strong case. However, he displays a tendency to overreact and attempts to rebut every earlier accusation against the RMI's war record. He also has not been well served by his editors—his text is riddled with

typographical and grammatical errors. This monograph argues that Italy would have been well advised to avoid involvement in World War II, yet that the Italian fleet nevertheless fought creditably with its inadequate tools.

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Allen, Thomas B. and Polmar, Norman.  
*Code-Name Downfall: The Secret Plan to Invade Japan and Why Truman Dropped the Bomb.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995. 351pp. \$25

Thomas B. Allen and Norman Polmar have once again demonstrated their impeccable timing when writing on controversial subjects. Previous topics tackled by this team include Admiral Rickover (shortly before his retirement), the Walker spy ring (not long after it had been exposed), and the first history of the Gulf war (written for CNN). In *Code-Name Downfall*, Allen and Polmar examine President Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb in the overall context of Allied planning for the invasion of the home islands of Japan.

*Code-Name Downfall* begins with a brief depiction of the Doolittle Raid, the Allies' first attempt to strike back at the Japanese homeland. The authors then proceed to an analysis of War Plan Orange, the prewar American assessment of a potential war with Japan. The main difference between plan and reality was the importance and effectiveness of naval and ground-based airpower. Yet as the authors demonstrate, the new tool of strategic bombing simply did not