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Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941; Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War

J. E. Talbott

MacGregor Knox

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many are required, and how to drive them to mission accomplishment?

The lessons learned from Desert One are legion. Not one is new:

- Perhaps most importantly of all, the mission statement must be clear. Was the mission to rescue 53 hostages, 50? Or to rescue as many as possible? Beckwith aborts when he learns one RH-53D has hydraulic problems, leaving 5, and “the mission” requires 6. Five RH-53Ds could have carried the full complement required to rescue the 50 hostages in the chancellery. Or one RH-53D could have been recycled to pick up the remaining 13 man team trained to rescue the remaining 3 hostages in the Foreign Ministry Building. Or 13 men could have been distributed over 5 choppers (the things that were done by choppers in Vietnam that were “impossible”!). Or . . . Or . . . Or

- A raid, which is a combat operation, must have a single commander, on scene, to influence the action.

- A combat operation involving all 4 Services operating aircraft and helicopters at night over 700 miles of unfamiliar and hazardous terrain cannot be held to a precision time schedule. There must be backup helicopters and alternate plans for most reasonable eventualities.

Long on guts. Short on smarts. Read Delta Force for how *not* to do it if—God forbid—the need arises again.

MYRL ALLINDER
Colonel, US Marine Corps

Knox, MacGregor. *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941; Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 385pp. \$29.50

Over the years, Mussolini has acquired a reputation as a swaggering, almost well-intentioned buffoon, a comic-opera dictator quite incapable of the thoughts and deeds of a Hitler, the personification of 20th-century evil.

A reputation thoroughly undeserved, says MacGregor Knox in his important reassessment of the apogee of *Il Duce's* career. Mussolini lacked the means that the German state and economy put at Hitler's disposal; he may not have shared Hitler's racist obsessions. Nevertheless, previous interpretations of Mussolini's regime “have tended to underestimate its brutality, the vigor and extent of its expansionist ambition, and the degree of domestic support its aims enjoyed until their price became fully apparent.”

In building his own case, Knox takes issue: with the academic historians, whose propensity for underestimating the force of irrational motives and actions, he thinks, has led them to underestimate Mussolini's drive to achieve his grandiose ambitions; with such Italian liberals as the philosopher Benedetto Croce, who saw *Il Duce's* regime as a historical aberration, odious but ephemeral; with Mussolini's leading biographer, Renzo de Felice, who for all his penetrating insights into his subject, is inclined to see what is most unadmirable about the dictator

as most un-Italian; with some British students of fascist Italy, for whom wit and sarcasm pass for scholarly inquiry; with those political scientists whose passion for such abstractions as "totalitarianism" has caused them to stuff Mussolini into ill-fitting analytical pigeonholes; and finally, with Italian Marxists, who peer at Mussolini through Leninist lenses and see the errand boy of faceless, capitalist big shots.

In 1939 and 1940, Knox contends, in North Africa and in the attack on Greece, Mussolini demonstrated that his goals were not so different from those of his brutal and convenient friend to the north. Piggybacking on the successes of a resurgent Germany, Mussolini in 1940, launched his long-pondered assault on the Mediterranean position of the Western imperial powers. *Il Duce's* expansionist urge, Knox argues, was no less dynamic than Hitler's quest for *lebensraum*; and like the German dictator's attack on Poland in 1939, Mussolini's decision for war in 1940 derived from his own vision, not from domestic social or political pressures: he wasn't pushed, he jumped.

Thus Knox convincingly differs with the fashionable "social imperialism" thesis, which argues that modern states as disparate as Great Britain, the United States and Argentina go to war principally as a means of allaying domestic unrest. If Mussolini's ambitions for Italy and himself ended in disaster, it was not for want of trying. For instance, the Italian Navy entered the war with

113 submarines, the largest such force in the world, save the Soviet Union's.

Knox doesn't attempt to make Mussolini's regime an Italian version of Nazi Germany. The vital distinction between them was that Hitler sought world mastery; Mussolini was content with an Italian nationalist utopia.

This is not only an important book. Written with verve and wit, it is also delightful to read. "Hitler's foreign policy and military subordinates," Knox says, "rushed about like eager spaniels, each bearing the Führer a bone." A rather startling characterization for the likes of Ribbentrop and Jodl, but very apt indeed.

J.E. TALBOTT

University of California, Santa Barbara

Geraghty, Tony. *Who Dares Wins the Special Air Service, 1950 to the Falklands*. London: Arms and Armour Press, 1983. 320pp. £11.95

Ladd, James D. *SBS: The Invisible Raiders*. London: Arms and Armour Press, 1982. 283pp. £10.95

The origins and accomplishments of the Special Air Service and Special Boat Service are obscure and often the subject of violent polemics by both supporters and detractors. Supporters feel that these two organizations are useful silent servants of the state. Detractors assert that they are rogue elephants and a collection of neofascist thugs. Supporters argue that the SAS and SBS are vitally necessary to undertake missions unsuited to the capabilities of regular