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Barbara Brooks Tomblin. *With Utmost Spirit: Allied Naval Operations in the Mediterranean, 1942-1945*. Lexington : The University Press of Kentucky , 2004. 578(+) pp., index, maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 0-8131-2338-0.

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The Mediterranean theater of operations is an often forgotten and neglected area of Second World War historiography. With few exceptions--such as Samuel Eliot Morison's multi-volume History of United States Naval Operations in World War II--Mediterranean naval operations have rarely been addressed. There may be the occasional popular history or scholarly journal article on Mediterranean warfare, but seldom a significant book-length work. Now respected author and historian Barbara Brooks Tomblin delivers a detailed account of Allied naval efforts in this often ignored theater, and pays proper tribute to Allied forces involved.

California-based Tomblin is the author of several military history articles, as well as *G.I. Nightingales: The Army Nurse Corps in World War II*. She taught military history at Rutgers University . As she explains, the Pacific theater has received the lion's share of attention from US naval historians, to the neglect of other navel theaters. Tomblin therefore decided to invest her intellectual energy in a proper assessment of Allied operations in the Mediterranean . With personal ties to participants, the author spent a good deal of her lifetime studying the subject, interviewing veterans, and preparing this volume. It was clearly a labor of love, consuming over thirty years.

With Utmost Spirit is an in-depth tactical and operational history of specific operations

from 1942 to the war's conclusion in 1945. She examines both British and American efforts, as well as "joint" and "combined" operations. This titanic struggle began with Royal Navy's--and later US Navy's--efforts to wrest control of the sea lanes and Mediterranean Sea from German and Italian air power and submarines. In order to put later operations into context, she quickly reviews already well-known British naval activities, such as the siege of Malta , various fights with the Italian Navy, and the securing of convoy routes to the Suez Canal . But Tomblin spends the bulk of her book on the invasion of North Africa (November 1942) and subsequent amphibious campaigns.

Her narrative provides detailed, accurate accounts of the five major amphibious invasions of North Africa (Torch), Sicily (Husky), Salerno (Avalanche), Anzio (Shingle), and Southern France (Anvil-Dragon). Each of these operations is examined in fair detail with respect to logistics, anti-submarine ops, counter-mine measures, naval gunfire support, air cover and close air support, ship to shore movements, beachhead establishment and support, follow-on port activities, and future naval actions. Major decisions involved the allocation of combat vessels, landing craft, carrier air support, and ground forces to the various, competing theaters of war.

Tomblin's well-documented utilization of US archives and official histories is only a start: her use of primary source documents is the strength of this book. She effectively uses vivid personal accounts, such as diaries and letters, interviews, after-action reports, and ships' logs document the triumphs and tragedies of individual soldiers, sailors, airmen, and civilians. Having started her research in the 1960s, Tomblin was able to interview many of the surviving senior naval officers who took part in operations from both a planning and command perspective. This integration of personal documents gives life to every page and almost every paragraph. The author does a nice job of intermixing individual combat accounts, yet keeping sight of the bigger picture, and of describing the battles at both the tactical and operational levels. Her passionate style reminds the reader of Stephen Sears and his superb narratives of the War Between the States.

Throughout all this action, there were intra- and inter-service rivalries competing for ships, planes, and men. Some Allied leaders—most prominently General George Marshall—considered the Mediterranean Theater to be a sideshow and unnecessary use of finite resources, especially in comparison to the Northwest Europe Theater. However, this main effort would never have been possible had it not been for the combat experiences of Allied air, sea, and ground forces in the Mediterranean .

The British and Americans commands faced enormous complexities in joint and coalition warfare. The Allies had to fight what was, arguably, the most effective military force in history, the Wehrmacht. Recent efforts by distinguished authors such as Rick Atkinson have studied US Army operations in North Africa , our mistakes, and lessons learned. Military classics such as Carlo D'Este's works on the Sicily and Anzio campaigns described our successes and failures during subsequent operations, particularly failures in intelligence planning and combined arms integration.

In this continuum of warfare, Allied forces developed ever-more effective air, sea and land battle doctrines, while constantly attiring Italian and German forces. But what Churchill described as the "soft underbelly of Europe " did not prove to be soft at all. Important lessons were learned, especially with regard to amphibious operations. Although the efficacy of our efforts in the Mediterranean in general, and the Italian campaign in particular, has and will long be debated, the invaluable combat experiences in this "minor theater" afforded greater and ultimate success in northwest Europe . Each operation was an important stepping stone in the Allied march to victory.

Tomblin provides fifty three pages of notes and a lengthy bibliography. This section is worth the price of the book alone! However, the sources are almost entirely in English, and mostly American. Primary source British documents are not utilized to nearly the same degree. French, Italian, and the very extensive German WW II archives are virtually ignored. Operations in the eastern Mediterranean and Adriatic are given little attention. Maps could be better marked and more maps would be advantageous. There are a handful of editorial mistakes in the book, leaving the reader occasionally wondering

what was meant by a passage. Fortunately, these are few. Glaring errors are fewer still. Nonetheless, given her goal of concentrating on US naval operations, she still achieves her objectives.

Proper attention is given to the personalities and complexities of those in command. Training before invasions, logistics, intelligence, and minesweeping operations are included to a degree rarely found in other books. Tomblin also discusses the transformation of the French navy from an enemy combatant during Torch to an able ally during Anvil-Dragoon. Her last chapter covers lessons learned. It would be time well spent for today's modern warrior to read this chapter alone.

This book is highly recommended to the serious scholar of WW II. With her judicious scholarship, Barbara Tomblin has now achieved what may be the definitive account of American and British naval operations in support of the five major amphibious operations in the Mediterranean .



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