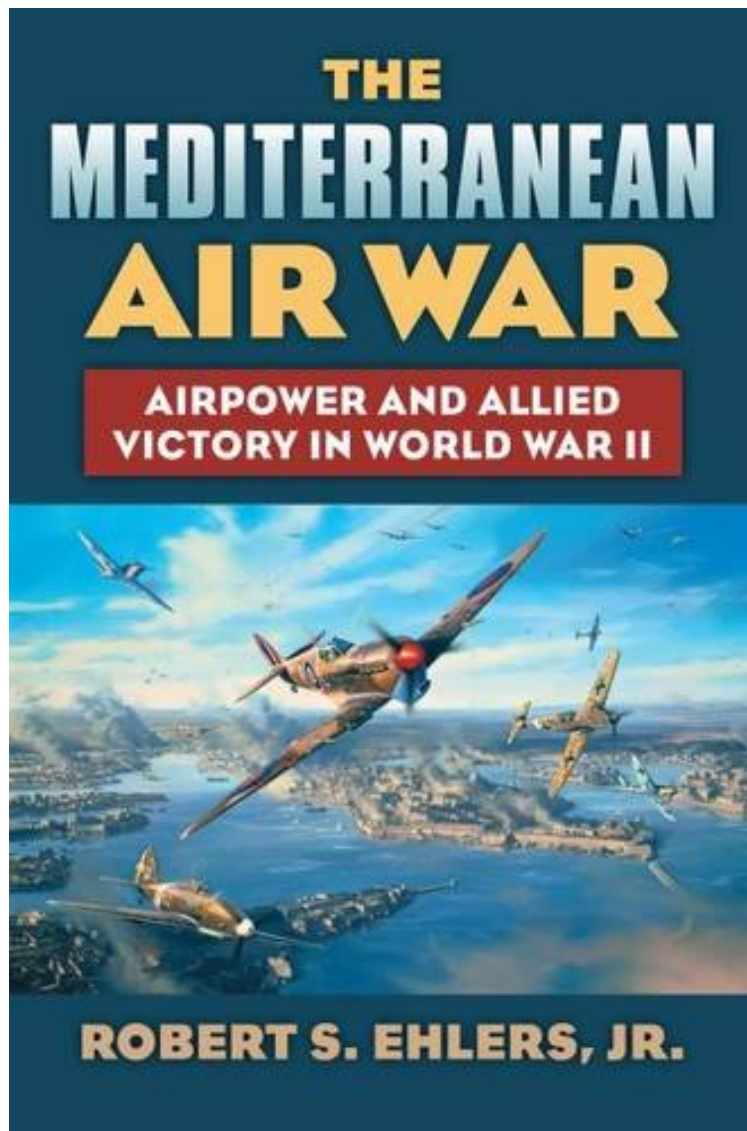


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## The Mediterranean Air War: Airpower and Allied Victory in World War II (Modern War Studies (Hardcover))

*Robert S. Jr. Ehlers*

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**Robert S. Jr. Ehlers : The Mediterranean Air War: Airpower and Allied Victory in World War II (Modern War Studies (Hardcover))** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Mediterranean Air War: Airpower and Allied Victory in World War II (Modern War Studies (Hardcover)):

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Excellent, thorough, and well-written history of the Mediterranean Air War

**By Koba**This is a very well done history of the Mediterranean air war from the middle of 1940 through the end of the war. Naturally, the majority of the book concerns the struggle in the North African desert, but it also examines Sicily, the Italian campaign, the strategic bombing campaign based in Italy, and the Anglo-American air campaign in the Balkans. As one would expect, there is considerable discussion of air superiority and close air support. The book shows that the Allies made a determined effort to gain air superiority, and – quite surprisingly – the Germans did not. (The Germans were focused on air support to their ground troops, and generally engaged in air combat only as necessary to protect CAS aircraft.) Possibly surprising to some readers is the Allied emphasis on destroying enemy aircraft on the ground through air attacks on airfields at night as well as Special Air Service ground attacks, both of which destroyed many aircraft and caused significant casualties to ground crews. The loss of air superiority had devastating psychological effects on German forces and also played havoc with German logistics, as Allied aircraft could easily destroy soft-skinned vehicles. Regarding close air support, the author shows how the British started out very weak but improved over time, mainly in the realm of command-and-control. The British rejected dive bombers for close air support; they regarded the Stuka as vulnerable and the fighter-bomber as superior. I was quite impressed at how well the book covered “other” airpower functions than air superiority and close air support. The author looks at the “foundations” of air power - installations, maintenance and repair, reinforcement (i.e., how each side's aircraft got to the theater), and how each side moved the necessary supplies from rearward bases to forward airfields. These functions are under-appreciated, and it is very clear that the Allies were better at them than the Axis. This had a direct operational impact on the number of aircraft the belligerents were able to put into the air. The book also examines the air-sea campaign - after all, the Mediterranean was a “joint” theater. Again, the Allies were better at this than the Germans, and the Axis neglect of this function was a major lost opportunity. The author examines aerial intelligence, both photographic and electronic (radar). The author has a generally positive opinion of the strategic air campaign conducted from Italy. The Fifteenth Air Force could reach fighter factories in southern Germany, the Balkan oil fields, and the transportation network of southeastern Europe. He considers that the attacks on oil and transportation had a significant effect in reducing the Wehrmacht’s mobility and facilitating the advance of the Red Army. He argues that the Red Army offensive into Romania in April 1944 failed because the attacks on oil and transportation had not yet taken effect, whereas the Red Army offensive in the autumn of 1944 succeeded after the Allied air attacks had destroyed the German logistical system. The Fifteenth Air Force “assisted the Russian advance in crucial ways, helping to shorten the war and reduce the Grand Alliance’s casualties.” Ehlers agrees with other authors such as Douglas Porch that the Mediterranean Campaign was not a senseless diversion but played a vital role in Allied victory. Ehlers, of course, highlights the role of airpower in this campaign. From the standpoint of airpower, the Mediterranean Campaign was not peripheral but decisive. In the Mediterranean and due to the attacks of the Fifteenth Air Force, the Axis lost about 20,000 aircraft. In comparison, the Germans lost about 20,000 aircraft in the West and over the Reich, and 11,000 on the Eastern Front. The author makes many other interesting and insightful points that I won’t discuss here. In conclusion, this is an excellent, thorough, and well-written book that anyone who is interested in World War II will want to read.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The Air War in a Neglected Theatre

**By A. A. Nofi**A summary of the review on StrategyPage.Com "There have been a number of books on the air war in the Mediterranean theatre, but Prof. Ehler (Angelo State) gives us a very good overview of air operations from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean over the entire war, and offers some excellent strategic analysis. To begin with, although still giving the British more attention than the Germans or Italians, Ehlers does a generally better job of looking at the Axis air effort, particularly that of the Luftwaffe. He gives the reader a good mix of the strategic, operational, and at times even tactical aspects of the campaign; taking pains to include the often complex logistical side and fitting the events within the framework of a global coalition war. He argues, rather effectively, that Axis, more specifically German, efforts in the theatre were ultimately frustrated by several strategic blunders, such as failing to take Malta, failing to fully exploit the capture of Crete, and even more importantly, postponing the Mediterranean effort to await the never realized victory in Russia. While Ehler may not settle the argument over the criticality of the Mediterranean in the war, he has certainly made an excellent case for the Middle Sea’s importance. For the full review, see StrategyPage.Com

6 of 9 people found the following review helpful. A One-Sided View

**By Sepp Dietrich**Can we trust a massive well documented work which uses the inflated claims of the RAF and the USAAF against its opponents the Luftwaffe and the Italian Air Force to bolster his thesis that the Allies used the correct principles of air-sea-ground operations? The Author, Robert Ehlers, does a good job covering the top level debates in the use of combined operations and that the RAF discovered the correct principles from 1941 on in the Mediterranean theater of war and that the USAAF copied the strategy and tactics of the RAF eventually while the Axis powers failed to unite their armed forces for the common objective in conquering the the Mediterranean theater and the Middle East. The Western Allies did defeat the Axis forces but it was more a matter of overwhelming military air, sea, and ground forces. The Germans had already defeated the Allies in Western Europe with combined arms, including ground and air, in Poland, Western Europe and the Balkans. The campaign in Norway was the first air, sea, and ground victory so the Germans were well acquainted with combined arms campaigns. The author never even mentions the Norwegian

campaign as an influence on the future conduct of the Allies. When I purchased the book, I was hoping to have a more thorough and complete coverage of the air war in this theater of operations. I was disappointed in this aspect although the coverage of the strategic aspects are also interesting. The lack of coverage of Luftwaffe attacks on Allied shipping is a disappointment, especially since there was no mention of the December 2, 1943 attack by 105 Ju 88s on the Allied port of Bari, Italy where 28 ships were destroyed and another 12 damaged (see Wikipedia for the names of the vessels). Another disappointment was the defeat of British forces in the Aegean Sea in the second half of 1943 which has been called Churchill's Folly. But this would weaken Ehlers's thesis that the British and Americans were better than the Germans. Ehlers uses the exaggerated claims of the Allies to try to prove that the Germans were not as effective in combat as the British and Americans. This includes the claims of the SAS and LRDG. Ehlers states that the latter destroyed 27 German aircraft on the airfield of Wadi Tamat on Dec. 24, 1941. He has the date wrong. It should be the 15th of December. The actual loss was 5 Italian aircraft (See the volumes of Christopher Shores dealing with the Mediterranean Air War). Ehlers states that on June 17, 1942, the RAF attacked the German airfield at Gazala and destroyed 30 Bf 109s. Nothing could be further from the truth. In actuality one Bf 109 was damaged and another damaged beyond repair. On Nov. 17, 1942, 37 German aircraft are claimed destroyed at Derna. Actually, the attack occurred at Benina where 12 Axis aircraft are destroyed for the loss of two P-40s. One Bf 109G collided with a P-40 and both are listed in these losses. USAAF claims are also exaggerated. Ehlers list the Oct. 1, 1943 raid on Wiener Neustadt and he states that more than 25 German fighters are shot down. In actuality, the Luftwaffe lost two Bf 109s (one each from JG 27 and JG 77) for the loss of 13 bombers. Ehlers had also claimed that only three bombers were lost. Ehlers states that on Nov 3, 1943 in another raid on Wiener Neustadt that more than 50 German fighters were shot down for the loss of 11 bombers. The raid actually occurred on November 2 and only nine fighters were lost by the Luftwaffe. One last example. The author claims that on Feb. 25, 1944, during Big Week, the 15th AF shot down more than 80 German fighters for the loss of 32 bombers. The history of the 15th AF by Kevin Mahoney lists the loss on this date of 40 bombers and 4 fighters. The Germans lost 27 fighters (Jochen Prien). In the 21st century there is no excuse not to use German records. To rely on wartime claims by the Allies is not only inexcusable but unforgivable. The first clue in the book that Ehlers was using wartime claims was his listing of aircraft destroyed, probably destroyed, and damaged. There is no such category as aircraft probably destroyed in German records. An aircraft is either destroyed or damaged, with the pilot being killed or missing, wounded, or safe. To rely on Allied claims and not recorded German losses is to make this work less than desirable.

Without what the Allies learned in the Mediterranean air war in 1942–1944, the Normandy landings—and so, perhaps, the Second World War II—would have ended differently. This is one of many lessons of *The Mediterranean Air War*, the first one-volume history of the vital role of airpower during the three-year struggle for control of the Mediterranean Basin in World War II—and of its significance for the Allied successes in the war's last two years. Airpower historian Robert S. Ehlers opens his account with an assessment of the pre-war Mediterranean theater, highlighting the ways in which the players' strategic choices, strengths, and shortcomings set the stage for and ultimately shaped the air campaigns over the Middle Sea. Beginning with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, Ehlers reprises the developing international crisis—initially between Britain and Italy, and finally encompassing France, Germany, the US, other members of the British Commonwealth, and the Balkan countries. He then explores the Mediterranean air war in detail, with close attention to turning points, joint and combined operations, and the campaign's contribution to the larger Allied effort. In particular, his analysis shows how and why the success of Allied airpower in the Mediterranean laid the groundwork for combined-arms victories in the Middle East, the Indian Ocean area, North Africa, and the Atlantic, northwest Europe. Of grand-strategic importance from the days of Ancient Rome to the Great-Power rivalries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Middle Sea was no less crucial to the Allied forces and their foes. Here, in the successful offensives in North Africa in 1942 and 1943, the US and the British learned to conduct a coalition air and combined-arms war. Here, in Sicily and Italy in 1943 and 1944, the Allies mastered the logistics of providing air support for huge naval landings and opened a vital second aerial front against the Third Reich, bombing critical oil and transportation targets with great effectiveness. The first full examination of the Mediterranean theater in these critical roles—as a strategic and tactical testing ground for the Allies and as a vital theater of operations in its own right—*The Mediterranean Air War* fills in a long-missing but vital dimension of the history of World War II.

"Robert S. Ehlers has given us another important study of an underappreciated topic. His examination of air power in the Mediterranean theater in the Second World War is far more than a study of aviation in war: it is an analysis of the development and implementation of combined arms warfare, and the leverage it affords when done properly. The book is brimming with insights about command, control, leadership—indeed all the challenges posed by inter-operating military instruments in a theater of war. These insights are just as useful for contemporary practitioners and defense analysts as they are for students of history."—Tami Davis Biddle, author of *Rhetoric and Reality in the Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914–1945* and Chair of Aerospace Studies, U.S. Army War College "Robert Ehlers has assembled a perceptive, skillful, and comprehensive account of the air

dimension of World War II's pivotal Mediterranean campaign."—Douglas Porch, author of *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II*"Robert S. Ehlers Jr., is a rising star in the field of airpower history. . . . Most of the Axis' difficulties resulted from poor strategic choices, a primary focus for Ehlers and a fine analytical structure around which to organize each chapter."—*Military History Quarterly*"Robert S. Ehlers has given us another important study of an underappreciated topic. His examination of air power in the Mediterranean theater in the Second World War is far more than a study of aviation in war: it is an analysis of the development and implementation of combined arms warfare, and the leverage it affords when done properly. The book is brimming with insights about command, control, leadership—indeed all the challenges posed by inter-operating military instruments in a theater of war. These insights are just as useful for contemporary practitioners and defense analysts as they are for students of history."—Tami Davis Biddle, author of *Rhetoric and Reality in the Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914–1945* and Chair of Aerospace Studies, U.S. Army War College"Robert Ehlers has assembled a perceptive, skillful, and comprehensive account of the air dimension of World War II's pivotal Mediterranean campaign."—Douglas Porch, author of *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II*About the AuthorRobert S. Ehlers, Jr., professor of security studies at Angelo State University (San Angelo, Texas), is a retired colonel in the United States Air Force and formerly a professor of airpower history at the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies at Maxwell Air Force Base. He is the author of *Targeting the Third Reich: Air Intelligence and the Allied Bombing Campaigns*, also from Kansas, winner of the Air Force Historical Foundation's "Best Airpower History Book" award.