

Archived Content

Information identified as archived on the Web is for reference, research or record-keeping purposes. It has not been altered or updated after the date of archiving. Web pages that are archived on the Web are not subject to the Government of Canada Web Standards.

As per the [Communications Policy of the Government of Canada](#), you can request alternate formats on the "[Contact Us](#)" page.

Information archivée dans le Web

Information archivée dans le Web à des fins de consultation, de recherche ou de tenue de documents. Cette dernière n'a aucunement été modifiée ni mise à jour depuis sa date de mise en archive. Les pages archivées dans le Web ne sont pas assujetties aux normes qui s'appliquent aux sites Web du gouvernement du Canada.

Conformément à la [Politique de communication du gouvernement du Canada](#), vous pouvez demander de recevoir cette information dans tout autre format de rechange à la page « [Contactez-nous](#) ».

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE / COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES
CSC 31 / CCEM 31

MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES

**COORDINATION AND COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN AXIS
POWERS IN THE NAVAL WAR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN 1940-1943**

By /par KKpt/LCdr/Capc Andreas Krug

This paper was written by a student attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.

La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense national

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	1
Abstract	1
I. Introduction	2
II. Strategic situation in the Mediterranean before the Outbreak of the Second World War	8
III. The Axis Naval War in the Mediterranean – a Combined War?	11
A. The Relationship between Italy and Germany before the Outbreak of the Second World War	11
1. Italian-German Relationship at the political level	11
2. Military relationships between Italy and Germany	14
B. A Combined War?	20
1. The Italian “ <i>Non-belligeranza</i> ”	20
2. Before the arrival of the <i>X. Fliegerkorps</i> in December 1940	26
3. Until the German occupation of Greece and Crete, May 1941	32
4. The struggle to supply North Africa, summer and autumn 1941	37
5. On the offensive, winter 1941-autumn 1942	39
6. On the defensive, November 1942- 8 September 1943	42
IV. The Axis Naval War in the Mediterranean – a Joint War?	47
A. Relationship between the Regia Marina and the Regia Aeronautica	47
B. Relationship between the Kriegsmarine and the Luftwaffe	50
C. Influence on the conduct of operations	56
1. The arrival of the <i>X. Fliegerkorps</i> in December 1940	59
2. The invasion of Greece and Crete, April/May 1942	63
3. The arrival of the <i>II. Fliegerkorps</i> in December 1941	65
V. Command and Control	67
A. Structure	67
1. Command structure of the Italian Armed Forces	67
2. Command structure of the German <i>Wehrmacht</i>	71
B. Impact on the conduct of operations	75

Table of Contents

II

VI. Conclusion

83

Bibliography

88

Abstract

The Axis powers ultimately failed to achieve their objectives in the naval war in the Mediterranean, although Italy's strategic location in the Central Mediterranean provided an excellent basis for successful conduct of the war. Cooperation and coordination between Italy and Germany from the pre-war era to the Italian capitulation on 8 September 1943 were too inefficient to fight a successful modern coalition war. The deficiencies in the combined and joint conduct of the war as well as the command and control relationships were the leading causes behind the Axis defeat in the Mediterranean. This essay argues that inter-service rivalries and the different strategies of the two Axis Powers undermined effective coordination and command relationships between the Axis powers in the Mediterranean theatre. As a result, they fought in a parallel manner rather than in a coordinated effort. The effects of their inefficient coordination and command relationships were that the Axis powers failed in their efforts to deny the Allies the use of the Mediterranean and to protect their own sea lines of communications to North Africa. Ultimately, they even failed to protect the Italian coast against the Allied amphibious landings in Sicily and on the Italian mainland.

I. Introduction

Coalition war is not a recent invention nor does it represent an exception in history. Nearly all past large-scale wars were fought in coalitions and fighting in a coalition today is regarded as the standard, even in minor conflicts. Certainly the two World Wars in the last century are examples of grand coalition wars from which valuable lessons for future coalitions can still be drawn. To be victorious in a coalition is much more difficult than to fight a war alone because several conditions must be met to hold the coalition together. It is especially important that each member is equally represented, even if the contribution to the war effort varies from one member to another. The coalition must reflect the needs and strategic goals of its members and must also respect cultural and linguistic differences. These *sine qua non* have to be reflected in the pre-war era, in the planning for the war, and in the actual conduct of the war. In particular, command and control of a coalition is a special challenge because each member and its interests have to be respected and included in the planning as well as the direction of operations, no matter how small the actual contribution might be.¹ These challenges render it very difficult for a coalition to achieve the military principle of unity of command. But without respecting these conditions the member's support for a coalition will not exist and the cohesion of the coalition is at risk. These challenges further increase when the war requires a joint effort of army, navy, and air force because the command structure must reflect inter-service differences and must be able to mediate them. In the Second World War, the

¹ R.L. DiNardo and Daniel J. Hughes, "Germany and Coalition Warfare in the World Wars: A Comparative Study", *War in History* 8, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 166; http://content.epnet.com/pdf13_15/pdf/2001/31d/01apr01; Internet, accessed 7 January 2005.

Allied Powers provided an example of a successful coalition while the Axis provided an excellent example of a failed one. Since it is easier to deduce lessons from failure than from success, this paper analyzes the joint and combined aspects of the Axis conduct of naval war in the Mediterranean from the Italian declaration of war on 11 June 1940 to the Italian capitulation on 8 September 1943, as well as the history, which led to the flaws in coalition warfare in the Mediterranean theatre.

While most literature about the naval war in the Mediterranean during the Second World War concentrates on the examination of the battles and war actions of the different navies fighting in this theatre of war, little attention has been given to the coalition aspects, such as command relationships, cooperation between the Axis navies, and jointness.

The first to address the problem was the German Vice-Admiral Eberhard Weichold in his contributions to the Allied essay-writing-project of senior German officers and officials. These essays have to be regarded under the circumstances of the time, as they were written just after the Second World War by German officers and officials, who were heavily involved in German conduct of the war. Therefore, they tend to defend their own decisions during the war and to attribute all errors to Adolf Hitler and National Socialism or to flaws inherent in the system. Furthermore, they are only based on the surviving German records in Allied possession and personal memory. Even with these caveats, these essays provide a valuable insight into the German view of problems during the war, in particular Eberhard Weichold's essays "Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943", "Why Germany lost the Second World War", and "A Survey from the Naval Point of View of the Organization of the German Air Force for

Operations over the Sea, 1939-1945”.² Weichold expressed his opinion that the failure of both Italy and Germany to prepare and conduct the war in a coalition was one of the main reasons for the defeat of the Axis. Later on, he expanded his essays into a book which due to his death was never published. After his death, the historian Walter Baum used the work of Eberhard Weichold, expanded by his own studies on the naval war in the Mediterranean and using current historical research, to publish the book “Der Krieg der Achsenmächte im Mittelmeer-Raum. Die Strategie der Diktatoren.” While some parts of this book still contain word for word passages from the essays of Admiral Weichold, other parts were totally rewritten by Walter Baum, which makes an exact attribution of many ideas quite difficult.³

More recently, the naval historian Gerhard Schreiber analyzed the problem of the Italian-German relationship in the Second World War and the inter-war era using intensively German and Italian sources. He published his research in his comprehensive and well-documented book “Revisionismus und Weltmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch.-italienischen. Beziehungen 1919-1944.”⁴ He opposes Weichold’s view that by not concentrating all efforts in the Mediterranean theatre in 1941 Germany missed the opportunity to defeat Great Britain. In Schreiber’s opinion this reasoning totally overstates both the influence of the *Kriegsmarine* on strategic affairs and the importance

² All essays contained in Scholarly Resources Inc., *Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II* (Wilmington, DE,: Scholarly Resources, n.d.).

³ Concerning the contributions to the book cf. Walter Baum and Eberhard Weichold, *Der Krieg der „Achsenmächte“ im Mittelmeer-Raum. Die „Strategie“ der Diktatoren* (Göttingen, Zürich and Frankfurt: Musterschmidt, 1973), 9.

⁴ Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1978).

of the Mediterranean for Great Britain's survival. It also totally neglects Adolf Hitler's vision of *Lebensraum* in the east, which led Hitler to regard the Mediterranean as a peripheral theatre of war for Germany.⁵ In order to analyze the role of the German *Seekriegsleitung* (SKL), her strategic vision, and her relationship with the German *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) in the Mediterranean, the research of Michael Salewski provides the best insight. He published the result of his research in his books *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945, Band I-III* which are still the basis of all recent research on this subject.⁶

Regarding the joint aspects of the Axis naval war in the Mediterranean, in addition to the earlier mentioned essay by Eberhard Weichold, two essays by Walter Gaul concerning employment of the Naval Air Force and the relations between the *Kriegsmarine* and the *Luftwaffe* provide an analysis of the problematic cooperation between the *Luftwaffe* and the *Kriegsmarine*.⁷ Generally both authors reach the same conclusion that due to different strategic visions of both services cooperation was largely non-existent and among the major flaws in German preparation for a naval war.

⁵ Gerhard Schreiber explained his reasoning very convincingly in his essay „Der Mittelmeerraum in Hitlers Strategie 1940.“ Gerhard Schreiber, “Der Mittelmeerraum in Hitlers Strategie 1940,” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 1980, no. 2: 69 - 99.

⁶ Michael Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945. Band I: 1935-1941* (Frankfurt a. Main: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1970), Michael Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945. Band II: 1942-1945* (München: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1975) and Michael Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945. Band III: Denkschriften und Lagebetrachtungen* (Frankfurt a. Main: Bernard & Graefe verlag, 1973).

⁷ Walter Gaul, *Navy-Air Force Planning and Build-up of the Naval Air Forces; Their Disbandment, and the Transfer of Naval Air Commitments to the Operational Air Force*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., n.d.) and Walter Gaul, *The Development of the Naval Air Force Up to the Outbreak of the 1939-1945 War and Its Activity during the First Seven months of the War*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., n.d.).

Among the chief problem for historians is objective evaluation of the Italian side of the naval war in the Mediterranean. While many of the mentioned German and English-speaking authors used Italian archives at least to some extent, most works by Italian historians were not been translated to English.⁸ To analyze the Italian side of the Axis, the book “The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940 – 1943” by Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani provides a balanced account of the naval war in the Mediterranean and a valuable analysis of the Italian sources, as the books concentrates on the Italian war efforts⁹ Moreover, James J. Sadkovich provides in his book *The Italian Navy in World War II* valuable insights into the Italian war effort. Though his narrative of the war actions is excellent, his revisionist approach concerning the Italian Armed Forces, whose efforts are in his opinion underrated, led him sometimes to neglect German contributions and somewhat exaggerate conclusions concerning Italian successes, which detracts from the overall value of his research.¹⁰

Concerning the preparation of the Regia Marina for the war and its involvement in an Italian expansionism Robert Mallett provides in his well-documented book *The Italian Navy and Fascist expansionism, 1935-40* valuable insights.¹¹ He opposes the view that Mussolini was just an opportunist and argues eloquently that Fascist Italy followed a national strategy to win supremacy in the Mediterranean.

⁸ Gerhard Schreiber assessed that he was the first non-Italian historian to have an unrestricted access to the Italian Archivio Ufficio Storico della Marina It

Coordination and command relationships between the Axis powers in the Mediterranean theatre, although existent, were never really efficient due to both inter-service rivalries and the different strategies of the two Axis Powers. As a result, they fought in a parallel manner rather than in a coordinated effort.¹² The effects of their inefficient coordination and command relationships were that the Axis powers failed in their efforts to deny the Allies the use of the Mediterranean and to protect their own sea lines of communications to North Africa. Ultimately, they even failed to protect the Italian coast against the amphibious landings in Sicily and on the Italian mainland.

¹² To counter Gerhard Schreiber's argument that the war in the Mediterranean cannot be dubbed a parallel war due to the neglect of the common strategic objectives of Italy and Germany in this case, parallel is here used in contrast to combined. Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*, 13.

II. Strategic situation in the Mediterranean before the Outbreak of the Second World War

Cooperation between Italy and Germany started rather late in the 1930s because the Berlin-Rome Axis was not the only option for Italy. The existence of several options for Italy before actual signature of the Pact of Steel in 1939 influenced directly the lack of preparation of the two Axis Powers for common conduct of the war. Extensive, traditional links between Great Britain and Italy still existed due to their coalition during the First World War. But after Benito Mussolini rose to power, these links weakened as Italy secretly sponsored conflicts in British possessions in the Mediterranean from the late 1920s onwards.¹³ Through the expansion of its colonies in North and East Africa, Italy even opposed the British Empire, while at the same time Germany and Italy became closer as fascist governments governed both. Italian economic disputes with Germany also decreased. Therefore, a political, military, and economic coalition with Germany was in Italy's interest.¹⁴ On paper the British position in the Mediterranean still seemed strong with naval bases in Alexandria, Malta and Gibraltar, but the inter-war years had prevented strengthening these bases.¹⁵ Consequently, the British government tried to appease Italy.

¹³ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani list the following conflicts: Palestine, Egypt, Gibraltar, Malta and Yugoslavia. Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 10.

¹⁴ Enno von Rintelen, *Mussolini als Bundesgenosse. Erinnerungen des Deutschen Militärattachés in Rom 1936-43* (Tübingen und Stuttgart: Rainer Wunderlich Verlag, 1951), 12.

¹⁵ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 11.

The turning point in relations between the former Allies of the First World War, Italy, Great Britain, and France was the Abyssinian crisis in 1935. This crisis nearly brought Italy into direct conflict with Great Britain while France tried to remain neutral. As a direct result of the Abyssinian crisis Great Britain tried to strengthen its position in the Mediterranean. Great Britain concluded a treaty with Egypt that enabled Great Britain to maintain control over the Suez Canal and Alexandria for twenty more years and started a massive rearmament program in response to a resurgent Germany and an aggressive Japan.¹⁶ These tensions, between Italy on the one side and Great Britain and France on the other side, increased over the Italian support of General Franco during the Spanish Civil War. France feared the transition of Spain into either an Italian or German vassal and thus a new enemy at its own western flank. Moreover, France's interest in the Mediterranean was to protect its strategic sea lines of communications with Syria and the French North African territories against an Italian threat. Therefore, the French Navy actively sought to coordinate its efforts with the Royal Navy. But the Royal Navy was not overly interested in close cooperation with France at the time, as they were still attempting to reach an understanding with both Italy and Germany.¹⁷ This development would hamper the Allied naval war efforts in the first months of the Second World War, but when Italy entered the war in late June 1940 once France's defeat was certain, it did not affect the later British conduct of the naval war in the Mediterranean.

¹⁶ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani argued on that subject: "But Britain, no matter how small the actual Italian naval budget was, was not building for war with Italy but against the more immediate threats of Germany in Europe and Japan in the Far East." *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁷ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani concluded: "[a]s late as 1938 Anglo-French naval discussions concerning the Mediterranean were still precluded by Britain as she sought to seek form of accommodation with Italy and/or Germany. Not until 1939 was this policy reversed." *Ibid.*, 20.

The civil war in Spain brought Italy and Germany closer together as they more or less openly supported the nationalist side. The common German and Italian support of the nationalists brought France and Great Britain closer together, so that by the outbreak of the war they were planning on a common conduct of the war in the Mediterranean.¹⁸

After the Spanish Civil War, the future coalitions became evident, though as late as 1938 tensions between Great Britain and Italy decreased once more as they signed a treaty about mutual information about their intentions in the Mediterranean. But this move mostly reflected Mussolini's policy of wanting to keep as many options open as possible.

Nevertheless, the British military examined the possibility of a war with Italy at nearly the same time. In February 1938 the Chiefs of Staff analyzed in their "Mediterranean Appreciation" that Italy was reliant on its sea trade to receive important raw materials to fight a prolonged war and that the lack of raw materials would prevent Italy from replacing war losses on a large scale. While the Royal Navy assessed the operational capabilities of the Italian Navy, the *Regia Marina*, not very highly, the British overrated the operational capabilities of the Italian Air Force, the *Regia Aeronautica*. In the end they concluded that Italy was a regional power benefiting from an excellent strategic location.¹⁹ This analysis led later on to the offensive posture of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean theatre because they realized that the *Regia Aeronautica* was not as powerful as thought.

¹⁸ Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy between the Wars Vol. II: the Period of the Reluctant Rearmament 1930-1939* (London: Collins, 1976), 460-461.

¹⁹ Lawrence R. Pratt, *East of Malta, West of Suez* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 108-117.

III. The Axis Naval War in the Mediterranean – a Combined War?

A. The Relationship between Italy and Germany before the Outbreak of the Second World War

1. Italian-German Relationship at the political level

The Rome–Berlin Axis was not the only option for Italy as proven on several occasions in the 1930s when Italy confronted Germany. There was a long contest before the actual signature of the Pact of Steel in 1939. Only as late as the Abyssinian crisis in 1935 and the Spanish Civil War did relations between the two nations improve. Actual cooperation between the Armed Forces started later, and represented a leading cause of poor cooperation later in the war.

As late as 1934 Italy mobilized several Army divisions against Germany on the occasion of the Nazi-Putsch in Austria on 25 July to prevent any German-Austrian unification. Later on, when Hitler declared German rearmament on 16 March 1935, Mussolini stood at the side of France and Great Britain in the “Front of Stresa”, as he was at the time negotiating with France on military cooperation.²⁰ Adding to the tension was also the Anglo-German naval treaty of 1935 because the Italians feared France would construct a greater fleet in response to the lifting of the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty on the *Kriegsmarine*. As France was still perceived as the most probable enemy at the time, the *Regia Marina* would have had to start a huge shipbuilding programme of its

²⁰ Hans Meier-Welcker, “Zur deutsch-italienischen Militärpolitik und der Beurteilung der italienischen Wehrmacht vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg,” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 1970, no. 1: 59.

own, but was impossible to do so due to the economic situation in Italy.²¹ Therefore, the *Regia Marina* did not welcome lifting of the Versailles restrictions.

The great change in the relationship was the Abyssinian crisis, in which Great Britain and France opposed Italian aggression and Mussolini deliberately destroyed the recently achieved unity of the “Front of Stresa”. Nevertheless, the Axis was not born because of the Abyssinian crisis; instead the crisis should be seen as providing the necessary basis for the Axis.²² Successful Italian conduct of the Abyssinian war and the appeasement policy of the western states towards Hitler in the following years encouraged Mussolini to think of Italian-German supremacy in Europe.²³ Therefore, he directed his Foreign Minister Count Ciano to sign a secret protocol with Germany during a visit to Berlin in October 1936, which divided spheres of influence between the two nations in Europe.²⁴ This division had a direct impact on war planning and led subsequently to the parallel conduct of the later war.

Although tensions grew between Italy, France and Great Britain during the Abyssinian crisis and even more so during the Spanish Civil War, Mussolini’s attempt to revitalise his policy of Italy as *peso determinante* (determining weight) in European foreign relations led him as late as 1938 to sign a treaty with Great Britain to have as many

²¹ Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*, 83. Cf. p. 10-11 concerning France’s assessment of the Anglo-German naval treaty as this represents a kind of vicious circle.

²² Robert Mallett, *The Italian Navy and Fascist Expansionism 1935-1940*, 79.

²³ Hans Meier-Welcker, “Zur deutsch-italienischen Militärpolitik und der Beurteilung der italienischen Wehrmacht vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg,” 60.

²⁴ Hans Meier-Welcker concluded: “Hitler sah die Zukunft Deutschlands in der Ausdehnung nach Osten, während Italiens Lebensraum das Mittelmeer sein sollte.” *Ibid.*, 59.

alternatives as possible.²⁵ Therefore, the Italians refused successive attempts by Hitler and his foreign minister von Ribbentrop in 1938 to sign a military alliance between Germany, Italy, and Japan, because Italy waited for British ratification of the Anglo-Italian treaty of 16 April 1938.²⁶ This diffuse policy was the reason for some German suspicions concerning Italy and resulted in a degree of mistrust.

When on 12/13 March 1938, German soldiers entered Austria, Mussolini did not oppose this move as he had in 1934, because he was already linked too heavily with Hitler. As the weaker partner in this relationship, Italy had to accept German decisions at the time without having any alternatives.²⁷ At the time both nations had already left the League of Nations and due to their involvement in the Spanish Civil War they depended on each other to influence international policy. Moreover, greater economic ties with Germany increased the German influence in Italy. In the end, Mussolini's impotence in this case showed that his policy of the *peso determinante* was already doomed to fail.

This tight relationship deepened as both foreign ministers, von Ribbentrop and Ciano, met in Mailand on 6 and 7 May 1939. While both intended only to prepare the ground for a possible pact, Mussolini wanted to make a move and directed Ciano to announce publicly Italy's willingness to sign a pact with Germany. The final pact contained provisions, which automatically assured military assistance by the other partner in the

²⁵ Robert Mallett, *The Italian Navy and Fascist Expansionism 1935-1940*, 92.

²⁶ Hans Meier-Welcker, "Zur deutsch-italienischen Militärpolitik und der Beurteilung der italienischen Wehrmacht vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," 60-61.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

event of war.²⁸ In hindsight, historians contend that a great mistake on the Italian side was that no common protocol was worked out and consequently each side interpreted the document to its will.²⁹ This pact, dubbed the Pact of Steel, was finally signed on 22 May 1939.

2. Military relationships between Italy and Germany

Military cooperation between Italy and Germany started nearly simultaneously with the political cooperation. Contacts between the *Reichsmarine*, later the *Kriegsmarine*, and the *Regia Marina* in the inter-war years were nearly non-existent until the mid-1930s.³⁰ True cooperation between the two navies really began during the Spanish Civil War when the *Regia Marina* provided valuable support to ships of the *Kriegsmarine* in the Mediterranean.³¹ Nevertheless, as early as 1925 the *Reichsmarine* was interested in cooperation with Italy, as the yearly wargame foresaw the *Regia Marina* disrupting French sea lines of communications with North Africa and thus diverting a large part of the French Navy into the Mediterranean.³² But this intended cooperation mainly resulted

²⁸ Reichsgesetzblatt, "Pact of Friendship and Alliance between Germany and Italy [Pact of Steel]," *Documents on German Foreign Policy (DGFP) 1918-1945 Series D (1937-1945) Volume VI The Last Months of Peace March-August 1939*, No. 426, 561-564.

²⁹ Walter Baum and Eberhard Weichold, *Der Krieg der „Achsenmächte“ im Mittelmeer-Raum. Die „Strategie“ der Diktatoren*, 37.

³⁰ The German Navy of the Weimar Republic bore the name *Reichsmarine*. After Hitler succeeding von Hindenburg as Reichspräsident in 1935 the official name was changed to *Kriegsmarine*. Even if the exchange of military attaches between the two countries started already in 1927, the contacts should not be overestimated. Because of the restrictions of the Versailles treaty the German military representative in Italy was only an officer on special mission.

³¹ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 14.

³² Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*, 40.

from German naval ambitions to regain a blue-water navy, because for the small *Reichsmarine* it would be too ambitious to take on the expected Polish-French coalition without hoping for some kind of French diversion in the Mediterranean. But French involvement was necessary to argue for the *Panzerschiff* (pocket-battleship), which was much disputed at the time.

The first German participation in Italian fleet manoeuvres came as late as 1932. The later Admiral Boehm assessed after his participation in the summer manoeuvres of the *Regia Marina* in 1932 that the Italian fleet was technically and tactically inferior to the *Reichsmarine* and wanted to learn from it. He therefore assessed that in a German-Italian coalition, the Germans would be “those who give”.³³ Later, the German war minister von Blomberg was impressed by the presentations of the *Regia Marina* and the *Regia Aeronautica* during his visit in June 1937. This impression set the basis for all subsequent estimates of the Italian Armed Forces, even when the attachés reported differently. Hitler even ordered destroyed an estimate of the German intelligence division (*Fremde Heere*) of the General Staff about the war potential of the Italian Armed Forces and the Italian war industry, as he thought it would be inappropriate and counterproductive to give such a pessimistic picture of a future ally.³⁴ Overestimation of Italian military capabilities would cause some surprises later in the war, as the OKW and especially Hitler were not aware of these Italian limitations.

³³ Kapitän zur See Boehm and Korvettenkapitän Ritter took officially part in the manoeuvre as engineers of *Zeiss* in order to disguise their presence. Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*, 62-63.

³⁴ Enno von Rintelen, *Mussolini als Bundesgenosse. Erinnerungen des Deutschen Militärattachés in Rom 1936-43*, 55-56.

As the *Regia Marina* possessed the largest submarine fleet in the world at the time, with over 100 submarines just before the outbreak of the Second World War, great successes were expected by this part of the navy. But as the German military attaché General von Rintelen pointed out the *Regia Marina* was technically obsolete by the standards of the day.³⁵ Admiral Weichold argued that “backwardness on the technical side” was the great handicap for the Italian fleet. Moreover, Weichold regarded the *Cavour*-class of battleships, though modernized, as no real match for British battleships. Only with commissioning the *Vittorio Veneto* and *Littorio* did Italy finally possess modern battleships.³⁶ In spite of German awareness of the technical problems of the *Regia Marina*, “[t]echnical exchange between all three of the Axis nations was very limited before the war and not extensive during it.”³⁷ This flaw in cooperation between Germany, Italy, and Japan stands out as only one example of the parallel nature of their conduct of war.

After signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1937 little happened on the military side to foster cooperation between the two armed forces. In 1938 preparations were made for the first talks between the chief of staffs of the respective services but the German side was, on Hitler’s order, very reluctant to consider close cooperation. In his memorandum about the proposed German positions for military talks with Italy of 26 November 1938,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 43. As an example, Italian submarines took at least twice as long as German U-boats to dive in 1940. Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 53.

³⁶ As examples Weichold listed obsolete mines, antisubmarine equipment dating from the end of the First World War, and missing torpedo fire control equipment for night attacks. Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 2-3.

³⁷ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 14.

the Chief of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW), General Keitel, proposed that there should be no common German-Italian command structure in a war, but that each nation received assignment of its own missions and theatres of wars. The proposed mission for the *Regia Marina* should be to disrupt French and British sea lines of communication in the Mediterranean and to eliminate Gibraltar.³⁸ Thus the Germans already neglected their own propositions, as they already assigned missions to services of the other partner, as seemed fitting, without discussing them. The German tendency to request, later nearly to order action by their ally would increase over the time in the war and would cause much friction and result in Italian reluctance.

Italy, on the contrary, was keen to hold common meetings of the General staff to coordinate an eventual war, but the German side proved reluctant. Only on 11 March 1939 did the Germans approve meetings between the respective chiefs of staff to coordinate war plans. Indeed, General Keitel ordered the German chiefs of staff to avoid discussing all military-political, strategic, and operational questions and to use the talks only to provide an overview about preparations for war and to solve technical and tactical questions of cooperation.³⁹ Thus, the first opportunity to mount a coalition war was wasted through low-level discussions.

³⁸ Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (General Keitel), Memorandum “Notes for Wehrmacht Discussions with Italy,” dated 26 November 1938, *DGFP Series D (1937-1945) Volume IV The Aftermath of Munich October 1938-March 1939*. Ed. (Washington, DC: United States Printing Office, 1951), No. 411, 530-532.

³⁹ The Italian side proposed at least twice such a conference in May 1938 and February 1939. Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (General Keitel), “Directive by the Chief of the High Command of the Wehrmacht,” dated 22 March 1939, *DGFP Series D (1937-1945) Volume VI The Last Months of Peace March-August 1939*. Ed. (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1956), Appendix 1, No. IV, 1107-1108.

The opening conference of these meetings took place between the two representatives of the general staffs, General Keitel and General Pariani, on 5 and 6 April 1939 in Innsbruck. During this conference Keitel announced that the best time for a successful war against the Western Allies would be “in a few years’ time”. In response, Pariani announced 1941-42 as the year in which Italy would be ready for war.⁴⁰ In hindsight, Eberhard Weichold assessed that the “[t]alks were only of a preliminary nature” and nothing more.⁴¹ The fact that not more substantial talks were conducted before the war and that the announced timelines were not respected later on showed already the significance of these talks.

Last in this series of conferences was the conference of the two Chiefs of Staff of the navies in Friedrichshafen on 20-21 June 1939 between Admiral Raeder and Admiral Cavignari. In preparation for this conference the Oberkommando der *Kriegsmarine* (OKM) concluded in a position paper, “. . . that a direct cooperation between the two navies was hardly appropriate or just possible.”⁴² The *Kriegsmarine* presented its war plan to operate in the Atlantic while withholding its main force in home waters in the North Sea and the Baltic. Cavignari estimated that the Italians would be able to control the central Mediterranean, but would be vulnerable to attack by the Royal Navy and the French Navy in doing so. He also expressed his wish that the *Kriegsmarine* deploy

⁴⁰ 1/Skl (Korvettenkapitän Neubauer), “Unsigned Memorandum [record of information passed by Generaloberst Keitel to Konteradmiral Schniewind about conversation between Generaloberst Keitel and General Pariani at Innsbruck 4 April 1939],” *DGFP Series D (1937-1945) Volume VI The Last Months of Peace March-August 1939*, Appendix 1, No. XI, 1110-1112.

⁴¹ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 1.

⁴² Translation of the German original by author. Hans Meier-Welcker, “Zur deutsch-italienischen Militärpolitik und der Beurteilung der italienischen Wehrmacht vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg,” 71.

raiders in the Atlantic to draw Allied ships from the Mediterranean theatre.⁴³ At the end of the conference, an agreement was reached on the exchange of technical information and worldwide areas of operations were established. While Germany became responsible for the North Sea, the Baltic, the Arctic Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean, Italy was in charge of the Mediterranean, Black and Red Seas. The Indian and Pacific Oceans became a common responsibility, though even there a separation of the area of operations between the two navies was foreseen.⁴⁴ The results of this conference fostered the prospects of a parallel war and neglected the demands of a modern coalition war. The command arrangement caused much friction, until in the end the Germans neglected them.

The assessment of the strategic situation in the Mediterranean provided further reason for quarrel. As Italy feared a French major attack in North Africa, the *Regia Marina* considered their mission was to keep the Italian sea lines of communications to North Africa open, and thus the Central Mediterranean was the main operations area for the *Regia Marina*. The *Kriegsmarine* had a diametrically opposed point of view. The Germans regarded operations in North Africa as “running after all sorts of prestige targets” and demanded that the *Regia Marina* should be offensive in the Western Mediterranean to open communications with Spain.⁴⁵ These different strategic views of

⁴³ 1/Skl, “Unsigned Memorandum [record of the conversations at Friedrichshafen on 20-21 June 1939],” *DGFP Series D (1937-1945) Volume VI The Last Months of Peace March-August 1939*, Appendix 1, No. XII, 1121-1123.

⁴⁴ CdS/Skl (Konteradmiral Schniewind), “German-Italian Naval Conversations,” dated 24 June 1939, *DGFP Series D (1937-1945) Volume VI The Last Months of Peace March-August 1939*, Appendix 1, No. XIV, 1126-1127.

⁴⁵ 1/Skl (Kapitän zur See Fricke), “Memorandum by the Head

the Mediterranean would be characteristic for all following meetings and would never be solved. In the end, the subject would just be omitted to create a more harmonic environment. This prevented efficient cooperation of the two navies because the *Kriegsmarine* did not support the view of the *Regia Marina* and requested a more active role of the Italian fleet in accordance with the German assessment.

Another problem for the coalition between Italy and Germany was lack of an industrial basis for the war in Italy. Already, by 1938, Germany recognized Italy's problems in building up its military power, especially in building up its navy due to financial problems, lack of raw materials, and manning problems.⁴⁶ Therefore, they concluded that a war involving Germany and Italy had to be a short one. This conclusion proved to be very accurate as Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani pointed out: “[a]s the war progressed, equipment changed and developed, and the Italians fell slowly further and further behind, and their ally [Germany] either would not or could not supply more powerful units or equipment.”⁴⁷ While the demands of the *Regia Marina* rose over the war years, the *Kriegsmarine* was reluctant to fulfill these demands because they prioritized their own fleet.

B. A Combined War?

1. The Italian “*Non-belligeranza*”

Upon the outbreak of war on 1 September 1939, Italy declared itself to be a “non-belligerent” and used the time to continue its build-up, as it was not ready for war.

⁴⁶ Robert Mallett, *The Italian Navy and Fascist Expansionism 1935-1940*, 94-96.

⁴⁷ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 31.

But Mussolini's decision not to declare war in 1939 arguably saved Italy from a major Anglo-French attack. Italy kept the Allies on the defensive with its declaration of its “*non-belligeranza*” (non-belligerence).⁴⁸ On the other side, their German ally was very disappointed because much was expected by the Italian entry into a war. The Germans feared an Italian change of side as had happened during the First World War. Therefore, they passed information, equipment, and tactical experience only reluctantly to their Italian ally. Admiral Weichold characterized the work of the attachés in this period: “Both Naval Attachés complained of a lack of interest on the part of their Axis partner and their reports only served to increase suspicions.”⁴⁹ In May 1940 the Italian side was undecided about further conferences with the *Kriegsmarine* as they “were not fully convinced that Germany would win the war nor was it thought that the measures adopted by the German Navy would have decisive results against Britain.”⁵⁰ Therefore, time passed without anything done to prepare for an oncoming coalition war.

Hitler made his decision to invade Poland unilaterally and thus broke the Pact of Steel. When Hitler announced his intention to attack Poland on 26 August 1939 in a secret letter, Mussolini answered that Italy was not ready for war.⁵¹ Hence, Hitler delayed the attack for some days to settle the issue. Gerhard Schreiber reached the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁹ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵¹ German Reichskanzler (Adolf Hitler), „The Führer and Chancellor to the Head of the Italian Government,“ dated 25 August 1939 15.20h, *DGFP Series D (1937-1945) Volume VII The Last Days of Peace August 9-September 3, 1939* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1956), No. 266, 281-283. Mussolini's answer cf. Italian Prime Minister, “The Head of the Italian Government to the Führer and Chancellor,“ dated 25 August 1939 18.00h, *Ibid.*, No. 271, 285-287.

conclusion that Hitler totally overestimated Mussolini's power, while at the same time underestimated the importance of time in Mussolini's planning.⁵² Italy's neutrality in case of a war would be an infraction of the Pact of Steel, as was the German unilateral action to go to war without consultation of Italy.⁵³ But Italy's "*non-belligeranza*" was dictated by economic necessity and not the result of an inconsistent policy of Mussolini since more time was needed to change the economy to a war economy and to build up material reserves for a modern war. The Italian Armed Forces, and in particular the Army, were still unprepared for war. Ammunition, fuel, clothing, and provisions existed only for a few months.⁵⁴ Moreover, Italy had not been able to replace its costs for the Abyssinian campaign and its assistance for Nationalist Spain in the Spanish Civil War. Italy's gold reserves had shrunken dangerously.⁵⁵ This deficiency forced Italy to deliver industrial goods even after the outbreak of the war to France and Great Britain, much to the anger of the Germans.⁵⁶ The *Kriegsmarine* was even more frustrated that Italy used Italian ships to deliver goods to Great Britain, which the *Kriegsmarine* just tried to cut off

⁵² Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*, 190.

⁵³ Hans Meier-Welcker, "Zur deutsch-italienischen Militärpolitik und der Beurteilung der italienischen Wehrmacht vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," *Militärhistorische Mitteilungen* 1970, no. 1: 64.

⁵⁴ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, 1-2. Only the *Regia Marina* possessed a strategic reserve of 1.8 million tons of oil, which was already consumed by autumn 1941. Walter Baum and Eberhard Weichold, *Der Krieg der „Achsenmächte“ im Mittelmeer-Raum. Die „Strategie“ der Diktatoren*, 27.

⁵⁵ Enno von Rintelen, *Mussolini als Bundesgenosse. Erinnerungen des Deutschen Militärattachés in Rom 1936-43*, 30.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 80. Italy even exported ammunition, mines aircrafts, and torpedo boats to France in order to earn foreign money. Walter Baum and Eberhard Weichold, *Der Krieg der „Achsenmächte“ im Mittelmeer-Raum. Die „Strategie“ der Diktatoren*, 27.

from its sea lines of communications.⁵⁷ Much frustration and anger occurred on the German side, which made them very reluctant to give anything to their Italian ally.

As the Italians did not want to get involved in a war that was too early for them but were obliged to enter the war under the provisions of the Pact of Steel, they sought an elegant solution to this dilemma. They demanded huge amounts of raw materials and war equipment to enter the war in the calculation that the Germans could not fulfill these demands and therefore request Italy to stay neutral.⁵⁸ Hitler reacted as they predicted and asked Mussolini only to prepare for war and to declare Italy's neutrality just after the attack.⁵⁹ This strategic charade achieved its objective, but the Germans were from now on very suspicious of their Italian ally.

The SkI regarded the Italian “*non-belligeranza*” as not very helpful in the conduct of war against France and Great Britain, because with a non-belligerent Italy the Allies could withdraw most part of their fleets of the Mediterranean as their sea lines of communications were not threatened in this theatre at the time. Thus, the expected diversion of Allied capital ships into the Mediterranean just did not happen. Therefore, the *Kriegsmarine* planned for a short time even sending some of their U-boats into the Mediterranean in order to force the Allies to leave a substantial part of their fleet in this

⁵⁷ Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*, 216.

⁵⁸ Walter Baum and Eberhard Weichold, *Der Krieg der „Achsenmächte“ im Mittelmeer-Raum. Die „Strategie“ der Diktatoren*, 43. Concerning the letter see Italian Prime Minister, “The Head of the Italian Government to the Führer and Chancellor,” dated 26 August 1939, *DGFP Series D (1937-1945) Volume VII The Last Days of Peace August 9-September 3*, No. 301, 309-311.

⁵⁹ German Reichskanzler (Adolf Hitler), “The Führer and Chancellor to the Head of the Italian Government,” dated 26 August 1939, *Ibid.*, No. 307, 313-314. Mussolini followed this request until the 31 August, when he informed the British ambassador, Sir Percy Loraine, about Italy's neutrality in the case of a German attack against Poland. Enno von Rintelen, *Mussolini als Bundesgenosse. Erinnerungen des Deutschen Militärattachés in Rom 1936-43*, 72.

area. Nevertheless, the *Kriegsmarine* demanded logistic support of the *Regia Marina* for this deployment and even asked to buy some of the Italian submarines just under construction. In their response to the German request the *Regia Marina* expressed that logistical support of German warships would have to respect Italian neutrality and could only happen outside Italian territorial waters in the area of Tobruk-Benghazi. The Skl was very disappointed by this response and even compared the Italian position to the one of Spain.⁶⁰ Mistrust in the relationship between the *Kriegsmarine* and the *Regia Marina* in late 1939/early 1940 can also be proved by the German equipping their merchant ships in the Mediterranean as supply ships for U-boats without notifying Italy of this action. When the *Regia Marina* received knowledge of this German action the *Regia Marina* felt fooled and in consequence the German naval attaché was not invited to *Supermarina* anymore.⁶¹ In evaluation, the *Regia Marina* attempted not to provoke the Allies, and at the same time to help the *Kriegsmarine*. But in the view of the *Kriegsmarine*, the *Regia Marina* did not uphold its commitment and this failure proved a heavy burden for the relationship in the next months.

In the outline of the strategy of the *Regia Marina* of 11 April 1940 Admiral Cavignari assessed that Italy was in a disadvantageous geographic position, enclosed by the Royal Navy in an inland sea, and as the Allies had already stationed their fleets respectively for war, expected initial successes could not be expected anymore. Further on, Cavignari expected the British Mediterranean fleet to retire to the Western and Eastern

⁶⁰ As on 11 and 12 November 1939 *U 46* operated unsuccessfully in the Mediterranean, the *Kriegsmarine* decided to use its scarce U-boats in regions with more expectation of success Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*, 206-210.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

Mediterranean and to leave the Central Mediterranean for the *Regia Marina*, thus making it impossible for the *Regia Marina* to hope for any successful offensive operations and strangling Italy in the long run. If the Royal Navy took an offensive posture, he expected an inevitable decisive battle between the Italian fleet and the British Mediterranean fleet with losses on both sides, which the *Regia Marina*, contrary to the Royal Navy, could not replace. Therefore, he concluded that a defensive posture was the only possible course of action for the *Regia Marina* and he feared that Italian losses would be so huge that “. . . Italy could take part in peace talks without any territorial security, but also without any fleet and eventually even without any air force.”⁶² This assessment was totally contrary to that of the *Kriegsmarine* and thus the Germans pressed over and over again for more offensive action by the *Regia Marina*. Ideas on the post-war period in the case of a defeat were also totally opposite to German thinking which preferred a “total war”.

On 5 June 1940, just before the Italian entry into the war Hitler issued a directive ordering closer contacts between the armed forces of the two states in the case of Italy entering the war, but stressed complete independence for each nation in operational matters.⁶³ Since Mussolini intended to conduct a “parallel war” this directive coincided with Italy’s plans.⁶⁴ Thus, the necessary close cooperation for a successful coalition war was again renounced and it took long into the war until the first cautious measures of cooperation actually happened.

⁶² *Ibid*, 266.

⁶³ Seekriegsleitung, *Kriegstagebuch der 1/Skl Teil A Heft X 6 June 1940*, US Naval Historical Center, roll TM 100-B, 48.

⁶⁴ Enno von Rintelen, *Mussolini als Bundesgenosse. Erinnerungen des Deutschen Militärattachés in Rom 1936-43*, 83.

When Italy entered the war on 10 June 1940, Mussolini had reached the conclusion that France had already lost and that in order to get his territorial claims against France fulfilled he had to enter the war before a French capitulation.⁶⁵ But he failed to achieve the support of the Italian population and parts of his military with his propaganda. After the Italian declaration of war, there was no enthusiasm for this war within the population. In some instances, the Italian bureaucracy was even surprised and did not apply wartime measures in due time.⁶⁶ With his ill-fated invasions in Egypt and Greece in the early stages of the Italian war, he had to consider the support of the population and decide accordingly. This necessity was sometimes very hard to understand for the Germans and led to some quarrel in the Axis.

2. Before the arrival of the *X. Fliegerkorps* in December 1940

In his orders of 31 March 1940 to the *Stato Maggiore Generale*, the Italian Supreme General Staff, Mussolini ordered the Italian Army to attack French Djibouti from Abyssinia and to take a defensive posture on all other fronts.⁶⁷ The *Regia Marina* was ordered, against the convictions of the *Supermarina*, to take the offensive.⁶⁸ The *Supermarina* was reluctant to order any offensive operation and started only with some

⁶⁵ Walter Baum and Eberhard Weichold, *Der Krieg der „Achsenmächte“ im Mittelmeer-Raum. Die „Strategie“ der Diktatoren*, 31.

⁶⁶ For example, large parts of the Italian merchant fleet outside the Mediterranean did not get the word of the Italian declaration of war until they were confiscated. Eberhard Weichold even mentioned the absence of volunteers, characteristic for Italy after the declaration of the war as a proof for the missing support of this war in the Italian population. *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁷ The Italian Supreme General Staff was called Staff *Stato Maggiore Generale* until the reforms of Generals Cavallero in June 1941, after which it was called *Commando Supremo*.

⁶⁸ Interestingly the Germans were not informed about these intentions. Enno von Rintelen, *Mussolini als Bundesgenosse. Erinnerungen des Deutschen Militärattachés in Rom 1936-43*, 88.

prudent moves. The first offensive operation of the *Regia Marina* in the war against French shipping, from 22 to 24 June 1940, already demonstrated lack of support from the *Regia Aeronautica*.⁶⁹ Therefore, the *Regia Marina* found itself in a double parallel war with its German ally, who until now had shown little interest in sharing information and technical equipment, and now also with its sister service, which was more interested in conducting strategic attacks on British bases. This parallelism hampered the Italian conduct of naval operations throughout the war.

Mussolini also committed large parts of his already stretched navy and air force in other theatres to help his German ally and to show his determination to the Axis. Consequently, Admiral Cavignari expressed in his memorandum about the Italian conduct of the war to the OKM of 24 July 1940 that the *Regia Marina* planned to send 25 to 40 submarines into the Atlantic and was willing to operate there under German command, as laid down in the conference of Friedrichshafen. Furthermore, he proposed to coordinate planned operations of capital ships of both navies in order to achieve a maximum effect of diversion, though he excluded common operations.⁷⁰ At least the *Regia Marina* was willing to cooperate, but was not yet ready for a real coalition war.

The *Kriegsmarine* at the time had not yet recognized the importance of the Mediterranean, but assessed that the situation in the Mediterranean provided opportunities for the *Regia Marina*. Admiral Weichold, for example, expressed the German point of view concerning the naval situation in the Mediterranean:

⁶⁹ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 55.

⁷⁰ Comando Supremo, "Memorandum Zusammenarbeit der deutschen und italienischen Marine," official German translation, dated 24 July 1940, 4-7; as included in SkI, KTB 1/SkI Teil C, Heft XIII *Italienische Kriegführung*, 43-49, National Archive and Records Administration College Park RG 242 T 1022 Records of the German Navy, 1850-1945, Microfilm, PG 32211, roll 1773.

From the relative strength and characteristics of the opposing navies it was apparent that at the outbreak of the war in 1940 neither had a definitive superiority over the other. Everything would therefore depend on which side could more successfully exploit the other's weaknesses in order to achieve naval supremacy.⁷¹

As the *Regia Marina* remained on the defensive and the Royal Navy was able to put ships and convoys through the Strait of Sicily, the Germans did not think that the *Regia Marina* exploited the opportunities as necessary. Thus, the SkI concluded after the inaction of the Italian fleet during the transfer of British reinforcements to Alexandria in early November that “[t]he British fleet carries out its movements with amazing confidence close to the Italian Naval and Air Force bases, as though the Italian Fleet did not exist.”⁷² By autumn 1940 Admiral Wagner pointed out in his study “*Kriegführung gegen England bei Ausfall Seelöwe*” that Italy was not able to take the necessary measures to achieve success and therefore demanded greater German influence on the naval war in the Mediterranean.⁷³ This demand would be requested over and over again by the *Kriegsmarine* and led to rising German pressure on the *Regia Marina*. The *Regia Marina* resisted this pressure as much as possible and friction between the two navies increased over time.

The failure of recognizing the challenges of a coalition war in 1939 cost the Axis heavily. No institution existed to coordinate the war efforts of the two states, and it much

⁷¹ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 6.

⁷² SkI, KTB 1/SkI Teil A Heft 15 9. November 1940, 65, ed. Werner Rahn and Gerhard Schreiber (Herford and Bonn: Mittler, 1990), PG 32035, 120.

⁷³ 1/SkI I a (Admiral Wagner), “Kriegführung gegen England bei Ausfall der Unternehmung ‘Seelöwe’,” 7-8, as included in SkI, KTB 1/SkI Teil C, Heft XIII *Italienische Kriegführung*, 74-81, NARA T 1022, PG 32211, roll 1773.

depended on the initiative of the officers involved. The first common commission was installed as late as winter 1941/42 to coordinate the shipping of supplies to North Africa.⁷⁴ On the highest level, the Germans demanded greater influence but blocked every opportunity to establish close coordination on an equal basis; meanwhile, at the lower levels coordination occurred, as forced by the situation and only as far as necessary.

In mid-July 1940 the *Regia Marina* proposed to discuss the further conduct of the war against Great Britain, but the *Kriegsmarine* rejected this proposal under the pretext of being busy planning the invasion of Great Britain. In reality they feared that the *Regia Marina* would come with another long list of demands of equipment and they did not expect any valuable input from the *Regia Marina*.⁷⁵ Thus, another opportunity to coordinate the conduct of the war between the two navies was wasted.

Eberhard Weichold reported that the SkI concluded in early September 1940 that “[i]t is essential to provide effective support by the German Armed Forces and a strong German influence on the [Italian] conduct of operation.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, they estimated that “the Mediterranean and North Africa problem were so important to the outcome of the war in general that Germany must in no way permit her own interests pushed away

⁷⁴ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 132.

⁷⁵ 1/SkI I m, “Vermerk über die Besprechung zwischen Admiral Fricke und dem Verbindungsoffizier der Seekriegsleitung beim Admiralstab der Königlichen italienischen Marine, Admiral Weichold,” dated 24 July 1940, 2, as included in SkI, KTB 1/SkI Teil C, Heft XIII *Italienische Kriegführung*, 38-40, NARA T 1022, PG 32211, roll 1773.

⁷⁶ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 14.

where Italy was concerned.”⁷⁷ Contrary to this assessment, Hitler consistently underestimated the importance of the Mediterranean theatre.⁷⁸ Hitler, the OKW and the different services each had a different strategic vision for the future German conduct of war and as there was nobody who could coordinate these different perceptions, it was in the end Hitler, right or wrong, who prevailed. But until that happened, each service followed its own strategy which only confused the Italians.

The results of the British attack on Taranto on the night of 11 to 12 November 1940 represented another disappointment for the Germans. After the attack Weichold concluded that “[t]he balance of power at sea had swung to Italy’s disadvantage” because the force ratio of available capital ships had now turned in favour of Great Britain. In his report to the SkI after the attack, he wrote the following assessment:

The heavy blow inflicted on the Italian fleet in harbour, while it was unable to retaliate, must be regarded as the inevitable outcome of the Italian Naval Staff’s entirely defensive policy. This policy has assisted the British to build up their strength for offensive operations in the central Mediterranean. . . . The completely passive attitude of the Italian naval authorities blinde [sic] them to a clear realisation of the situation and to the logical course of action to be followed. It cripples their ability to make decisions, undermines the morale of the Italian Fleet, and encourages the British to intensify their offensive in Italian waters. . . . If the war at sea in the Mediterranean continues to develop along these lines it will be impossible to avoid serious repercussions on the war as a whole, and more particularly on the fighting in Greece and North Africa. Italy’s conduct of the war must undergo a fundamental change. [omissions in the original]⁷⁹

⁷⁷ SkI, KTB 1/SkI Teil A Heft 13 19 September 1940, 133, ed. Werner Rahn and Gerhard Schreiber (Herford, Bonn: Mittler, 1989), PG 32033, 120.

⁷⁸ An example of his neglect of the Mediterranean theatre was his directive no. 18 of 12 November 1940, which precluded sending any German troops to the Mediterranean until the Italians reached Mersa Matruh, which was expected for mid 1941. Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, “Directive No.18”, *Hitler’s War Directives 1939-45*, ed. Walter Hubatsch, ed. and trans. H. R. Trevor-Roper (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1964), 42.

⁷⁹ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 18.

Assessing the defensive posture of the *Regia Marina* was chiefly responsible for the outcome of the attack, Weichold reinforced German demands for an offensive posture of the *Regia Marina* with a stronger German influence of the operations of the *Regia Marina*.

Shortly afterwards, in late 1940, Admiral Weichold wrote on the war in the Mediterranean during the first six months:

It [the war in the Mediterranean] had been fought solely under Italian leadership and exclusively by Italian forces. German aid or influence on the conduct of affairs had been deliberately rejected, and indeed information on operations had been deliberately withheld from German authorities. The responsibility was therefore Italy's alone.⁸⁰

This conclusion is apologetic, because if the *Kriegsmarine* had shared its technology earlier and not stood opposed to sending anti-shipping formations of the *Luftwaffe* to the Mediterranean, the results could have been more positive at the end of 1940. He acknowledged so much after the war in his essays:

The refusal of the German Navy to send either reinforcements or supplies to the Mediterranean left the Italians in sole charge of the naval war in that theatre. Thus, when the second phase [in 1941] of the war began, Italy was still receiving only piecemeal aid from the Germans.⁸¹

Thus he recognized a German failure to help his Italian ally with its known deficiencies, but at this time of the war, all blame was laid on the Italians and the Germans chided the Italians over and over again on how to conduct the war without helping them. With this attitude, a real foundation for a coalition could never been established.

⁸⁰ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 22.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

In this strategic environment the Chiefs of Staff, General Keitel for the OKW and Marshall Badoglio for the *Stato Maggiore Generale*, met on 14 to 15 November 1940 in Innsbruck. They reviewed the areas of influence of the two powers and discussed the possibility of a German attack on Gibraltar. Furthermore, Badoglio accepted the deployment of a Fliegerkorps of the *Luftwaffe* to the Mediterranean. During this conference Keitel evaded all questions concerning the German-Russian relationship, hiding from his ally the planned invasion of the Soviet Union.⁸² Again it became evident that the Axis powers withheld information from each other. They represented merely reluctant allies, and to a certain extent mistrust of the other ally characterised the relationship. German-Italian mistrust was clearly not a good foundation for a coalition.

3. Until the German occupation of Greece and Crete, May 1941

As planning proceeded for an attack on the Soviet Union, the situation of the Italian ally became a real concern for Hitler. Having failed to mount successful operations against Great Britain in the Mediterranean, the Italian Armed Forces stumbled from one disaster into another: the attack on Taranto, the ill-fated invasion in Greece and the terrible defeat in North Africa in 1940 to name a few. Hitler was forced to help the Italians in Greece in order to secure his southern flank for the invasion of the Soviet Union and to secure the Axis' access to the vital oil fields in Romania. Once the British occupied Crete as a reaction to the German invasion in Greece, it became evident that the Axis had also to occupy Crete, from which British bombers could easily reach the oil

⁸² OKW, "Besprechungen Generalfeldmarschall Keitel/Marschall Badoglio," dated 20 November 1940, as included in SkI, KTB 1/SkI Teil C, Heft XIII *Italienische Kriegführung*, 112-116, NARA T 1022 PG 32211, roll 1773. Concerning omission of Soviet Union cf. Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 131.

fields of Ploesti.⁸³ Thus the Germans were forced to intervene more and more in what they once considered only an Italian theatre of war. But nevertheless, the Italians critically regarded these German interventions as they saw their influence decreasing in what they regarded as their own area of interest.

The next chance to lay a sound plan for a coalition war between the *Kriegsmarine* and the *Regia Marina* came during the meeting in Meran between Admiral Raeder and Admiral Riccardi on 13 and 14 February 1941. The Italians were at first reluctant to hold a conference as they did not want the Germans to become involved in their theatre of operation, but after the disappointing results of the Italian operations in the first six war months they could no longer resist German pressure.⁸⁴ Raeder wanted tighter cooperation between the two navies, which from his point of view, meant the *Regia Marina* should adopt the German strategy of offensive operations in the Mediterranean. Riccardi rejected this point at once because, like his predecessor Cavignari, he saw the main tasks for the *Regia Marina* to serve as a fleet in being to divert British capital ships and to protect the Axis' sea lines of communications to North Africa.⁸⁵ With regard to operations this conference did not change anything. The participants were well aware of this fact as Admiral Weichold assessed that “[t]he discussions ended in repeated expositions of these opposing views, neither side having made any attempt to solve the

⁸³ Skl, KTB 1/Skl Teil A Heft 15 4 November 1940, 23, ed. Werner Rahn and Gerhard Schreiber, PG 32035, 37.

⁸⁴ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 142.

⁸⁵ The Germans tried to convince Riccardi about their interpretation of maritime strategy so evidently that he later wrote in his report that he got a lesson in maritime strategy. Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*, 302-307.

differences of opinion or to agree on future operations in the Mediterranean.”⁸⁶ Thus another chance to lay down a sound basis for a combined strategy for the naval war in the Mediterranean passed without changing anything.

The Germans achieved at least one objective. Better integration of the liaison staffs into the operational planning of the partner navy took place.⁸⁷ But this objective could only be intermediate as the Germans already planned to create a headquarters to command all Axis naval forces in the Aegean Sea and the Dodecanese after the expected German victory in Greece. This German headquarters, dubbed *Admiral Südost*, was put forth as a model for future cooperation with the *Regia Marina*, implying German control over all Italian ships.⁸⁸ This occasion was the first time that the Germans breached the agreed areas of pre-war responsibilities and represented a huge concession from the Italian side. These plans clearly neglected the agreed principles of the Mediterranean as an Italian theatre of war and would have reduced the *Regia Marina* to a German vassal navy.

German pressure imposed in Meran manifested itself a little later on with disastrous results for the *Regia Marina*. In February 1941 the Italian Fleet commander, Admiral Iachino, who was annoyed with Italian inaction, suggested with Admiral Weichold's strong support offensive naval operations with a fast battle ship and cruisers against Allied shipping routes in the Eastern Mediterranean. Conceding to the combined

⁸⁶ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 29.

⁸⁷ Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*, 306-308.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 310-311.

pressure of the *Kriegsmarine* and its subordinate Iachino, the *Supermarina* finally approved the operation.⁸⁹ After the disastrous outcome of the battle of Matapan the Skl gave up its pressure for a short time and concluded that efficient cooperation with Italy would only be possible under German leadership in the Mediterranean.⁹⁰ Under German pressure the *Regia Marina* went with its surface fleet just once on the offensive, and with the resulting disaster the Italians convinced themselves of the validity of the defensive strategy of a fleet-in being.

After the disastrous result of the battle, the *Supermarina* showed little interest to participate in Operation “Merkur”, the invasion of Crete. When the Germans asked the *Regia Marina* for a diversion with their fleet, the *Supermarina* denied this proposal and also refused to support the invasion with destroyers or torpedo boats. After these refusals, the Germans totally neglected the *Regia Marina* in further planning, and even did not inform them on the date of the actual invasion.⁹¹ The only available Italian warships for the invasion were the Italian ships under command of *Admiral Südost*. Twice, on 21 and 22 May 1941 Italian torpedo boats covered caiques loaded with German soldiers against British attacks and prevented major German losses.⁹² While

⁸⁹ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 145.

⁹⁰ The Italian fleet lost three cruisers and two destroyers. Admiral Weichold expressed his conclusion that German officers should be involved in decisions of Italian Fleet very explicitly in his report to the Skl. Chef Marineverbindungsstab Italienischer Marine, “Ergebnis Seeoperation italienischer Marine am 28./29. März 1941,” dated 29 March 1941, in Skl, KTB 1/Skl Teil C, Heft XIII *Italienische Kriegführung*, 160-162, NARA T 1022, PG 32211, roll 1773. The reply of the Skl showed the frustration. Skl, “Einfluß auf Maßnahmen italienischer Seekriegführung auszuüben,” dated 4 April 1941, in *Ibid.*, 163.

⁹¹ *Supermarina* received the first information about the German invasion from an intercepted British radio message. Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 42.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 44.

critical of the conduct of the war by the *Supermarina*, the Germans honoured the actions of these torpedo boats, and assessed them as proof that a successful cooperation under German control was achievable.

In the situation analysis conducted by the *Supermarina* and the Skl after the seizure of Greece and Crete, they agreed on the situation but reached totally different conclusions. While the Germans still demanded offensive actions mostly with light forces, the Italians still feared irreplaceable losses and therefore maintained their defensive posture.⁹³ But as before, these different strategic assessments were not discussed and everyone continued as before blaming each other if something went wrong.

The next disaster for Italian-German cooperation happened only shortly afterwards. On 15/16 April 1941 a British destroyer squadron attacked the 20th German convoy to Tripoli and caused heavy losses of equipment and soldiers. The Germans blamed the *Regia Marina* for the loss because the convoy sailed without cruiser protection as demanded by the Germans in case of the presence of British warships in Malta.⁹⁴ The protection of convoys to supply the German *Afrikakorps* would become from now on a main concern for the Germans. Hence, German reliance on the *Regia Marina* for the protection of convoys on the *Regia Marina* would provide much friction between the two nations and especially the two navies.

⁹³ For the analysis of the SKL see 1./SKL, "Betrachtung über die strategische Lage im östlichen Mittelmeer nach der Bestzung Griechenlands und Kreta," 9-11, in Skl, KTB 1/Skl Teil C, Heft XIV *Deutsche Kriegsführung im Mittelmeer*, 29-41, NARA T 1022, PG 32213, roll 1774. The German translation of the Italian analysis is included in *Supermarina*, "Die strategische Lage und operative Möglichkeiten im Mittelmeer," 2-3, 5, in Skl, KTB 1/Skl Teil C, Heft XIV *Deutsche Kriegsführung im Mittelmeer*, 42-51, NARA T 1022, PG 32213, roll 1774.

⁹⁴ The convoy is referred to often after the name of its main escort, the Italian destroyer *Tarigo*, as *Tarigo*-convoy. Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 38.

4. The struggle to supply North Africa, summer and autumn 1941

After Riccardi's negative reply to a German memorandum calling for more offensive operations the SkI assessed that “. . . we cannot rely upon the Italians changing to a more active and offensive policy in the Mediterranean, unless strong German pressure is brought to bear and Germany herself assumes wider responsibility.”⁹⁵ To achieve this aim they proposed to send German liaison officers to each Italian formation above unit level, leaving Italian officers nominally in command.⁹⁶ With this attitude the *Kriegsmarine* proved again unable to conduct a coalition war, as they could not accept the *Regia Marina* as an equal allied navy, even more so as the *Regia Marina* had proven in the eyes of the *Kriegsmarine* over and over again to be second rank.

Moreover, successful Royal Navy engagement of the Italian convoy on 8/9 November made the Germans doubt the morale and reliability of the Italian Armed Forces, and the *Regia Marina* especially. In his report to the SkI, Admiral Weichold saw the defeat “as a result of inadequate tactical training of the Italian naval forces and the shortcomings of their command.”⁹⁷ Once more the Germans assessed that the *Regia Marina* was unable to fulfill its tasks, and demanded greater German influence on operations, even, if in this case, clearly tactical errors of the Italian commander on the scene were responsible for the disaster.

⁹⁵ 1/SkI I b, “Vorläufige Stellungnahme I b zur Lagebetrachtung des italienischen Admiralstabes,” dated 29 July 1941, 3, in SkI, KTB 1/SkI Teil C, Heft XIII *Italienische Kriegführung*, 198-200, NARA T 1022, PG 32211, roll 1773.

⁹⁶ 1/SkI I b, “Überlegungen der 1. SkI zur Frage der Unterstützung der Italiener,” 3-11, in SkI, KTB 1/SkI Teil C, Heft XIII *Italienische Kriegführung*, 270-281, NARA T 1022, PG 32211, roll 1773.

⁹⁷ The convoy is often referred to as *Duisburg*-convoy. Befehlshaber Marinekommando Italien, “Zusammenfassende vorläufige Beurteilung des Marinekommandos Italiens betreffend der Vernichtung 51. Seetransportes am 9. 11. 1941,” dated 15 November 1941,” 2, in SkI, KTB 1/SkI Teil C, Heft XIII *Italienische Kriegführung*, 258-259, NARA T 1022, PG 32211, roll 1773.

The British also did their best to foster mistrust between Germany and Italy. Since the British forces used ULTRA information to find the Axis convoys, they disguised the source of the information by confirming the position of the convoy by reconnaissance aircraft before the actual attack on the convoy. Nevertheless, the Axis intelligence began quickly to wonder about the accuracy of the British reconnaissance. But the conclusions taken worked in the British favour because the Germans made Italian leaks or traitors responsible and the Italians claimed that the Germans were responsible.⁹⁸ Nobody suspected the cipher was broken. In this air of mistrust both sides provided information reluctantly and only as necessary which hampered cooperation.

As the British were heavily attacking the Axis supply routes to North Africa, Hitler decided to give his Italian ally more support and ordered deployment of U-boats and the *II. Fliegerkorps*, which was of no more use in the Russian winter, to the Mediterranean. Later, the Germans made Feldmarschall Kesselring *Oberbefehlshaber Süd*, the Commander in Chief of German forces in the Mediterranean.⁹⁹ The *II. Fliegerkorps* became operational in late December 1941 and together with the U-boats and the Italian SLC-attack on Alexandria they would change the tide of the war in the Mediterranean and gain temporarily sea control over the Central Mediterranean.¹⁰⁰ Now for the first time in the war the Axis enjoyed great superiority, but this superiority i

By late 1941 the OKW declared the Central Mediterranean as a “focus of Axis strength.”¹⁰¹ But as Weichold pointed out, this declaration was not followed by actual action as Germany just deployed some U- and E-Boats. The Skl and especially Dönitz opposed deployment of U-Boats to the Mediterranean, which they regarded as a diversion of efforts from the decisive battle of the Atlantic. The Skl was also reluctant to send E-boats, minesweepers and MFPs (*Marinefährrahm* – self propelled ferries) to the Mediterranean, but in the end Hitler ordered deployed these assets as well moved by rail in sections and assembled.¹⁰² This reluctance proved again that at least the *Kriegsmarine* was not fully committed to a coalition war.

5. On the offensive, winter 1941-autumn 1942

The conference in Garmisch from 14-15 January 1942 between Raeder and Riccardi had a very harmonic tone, but the agenda addressed only strategic and logistical subjects. Problematic areas, like actual operations and command relations, were intentionally left out.¹⁰³ Both agreed that Malta was a major concern for the security of the Axis’ supply routes to North Africa which had to be neutralized using air power, mines, and Italian Special Forces attacks. Furthermore, Riccardi expressed concerns over the fuel situation of the *Regia Marina*. Raeder, though knowing the OKW was unwilling to fulfill this request, did not want to disappoint Riccardi and transferred some fuel out of the reserves

¹⁰¹ Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, “Directive No.38”, *Hitler’s War Directives 1939-45*, ed. Walter Hubatsch, ed. and trans. H. R. Trevor-Roper, 105-106.

¹⁰² Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 64-65.

¹⁰³ Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*, 338-339.

of the *Kriegsmarine* to Italy.¹⁰⁴ In the end, it was evident that all subjects which might raise concerns between the two navies were avoided. Therefore, this conference again represented another missed opportunity to coordinate the war effort of the two navies.

Another question much debated by historians refers to the often claimed German reluctance to deliver radar (*DeTe*) technology to the Italians. At the outbreak of the war Italy possessed some radar prototypes, but radar development for the *Regia Marina* was hampered by the selection of the appropriate wavelength. When the Italians requested German *DeTe*-equipment Raeder ordered delivery of this equipment, but due to German shortcomings delivery took until March 1942.¹⁰⁵ Apparently, the *Regia Marina* became interested in radar due to the night time losses of convoys to North Africa. But the *Regia Marina* was slow to recognize that obsolete optical directors as well as a lack of training were as responsible for these losses as a lack of radar.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the *Regia Marina* was probably the navy least prepared and trained for night actions in the Second World War. Moreover, it was not only German reluctance but also the resistance of the leadership of the *Regia Marina*, which led to the late introduction of radar technology in the Italian fleet.

Hitler and Mussolini met at Klessheim 29-30 April 1942 with their respective military staffs to discuss Axis strategy for the next year in the Mediterranean. The agreed upon strategy included an operational pause after the capture of Tobruk for the army in

¹⁰⁴ 1/Skl I b, "Ergebnis der deutsch-italienischen Besprechungen am 14. und 15. Januar 1942 in Garmisch," 1, 5-7, in Skl, KTB 1/Skl Teil C, Heft XIV *Deutsche Kriegsführung im Mittelmeer*, 46-60, NARA T 1022, PG 32214, roll 1774.

¹⁰⁵ Skl, KTB 1/Skl Teil A Heft 10 3 June 1940, ed. Werner Rahn and Gerhard Schreiber (Herford, Bonn: Mittler, 1989), PG 32030, 21.

¹⁰⁶ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 210-212.

North Africa in order to conduct an invasion in Malta. Once Malta was taken, Rommel would launch the final attack on the Suez Canal. To plan the invasion of Malta a combined Italian-German staff stood up. This was the only time in the Mediterranean theatre that the Axis conducted combined planning for an operation. The capture of Malta would guarantee the security of Rommel's supply-lines through the Mediterranean.¹⁰⁷ On 15 June 1942 Raeder urged Hitler to support the invasion of Malta as he recognized the first signs of dwindling Axis air superiority in the Central Mediterranean and feared new supply shortfalls for the *Panzerarmee Afrika*. In his response Hitler made clear that he saw no possibility for the invasion of Malta during the summer offensive on the Eastern front.¹⁰⁸ Again Hitler's perception of the Mediterranean as a peripheral theatre played a major role in this decision.

But the Italian leadership was also not totally committed to the assault evident by Riccardi's declaration at the conference in Garmisch that the invasion would only take place under favourable conditions.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, both sides only reluctantly committed to this invasion, which resulted in Mussolini's quick assent to Hitler's request to postpone the invasion after the capture of Tobruk. This reluctance on both sides prevented the invasion from happening, which could have altered the war in the Mediterranean.

Concerning the question of the invasion of Malta Admiral Weichold concluded that “. . . the important point about the problem of Malta is not the much disputed question as to

¹⁰⁷ Genralmajor Schmundt (Diensttuender Adjutant), “Bericht über Besprechung Führer und Duce am 30.4.1942 auf dem Berghof,” 7-12, in SkI, KTB 1/SkI Teil C, Heft XIV *Deutsche Kriegsführung im Mittelmeer*, 178-189, NARA T 1022, PG 32213, roll 1774.

¹⁰⁸ Germany, *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939-1945* (London: Greenhill Books, 1990), foreword by Jak P. Mallmann Showell, 285.

¹⁰⁹ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 223.

who formulated the idea of invading the island, but rather one of who shall bear the responsibility for abandoning the project.”¹¹⁰ In the end a promising opportunity was wasted due to unwillingness on both sides to commit any troops.

The summer of 1942 saw the last major battle between Axis naval and air forces and British forces during the Operation “Pedestal”, a British supply convoy to Malta. Due to the lack of air cover by the *Luftwaffe* and under the pretext of a lack of fuel it was agreed not to commit the capital ships of the Italian Fleet, but only to use minor forces against the convoy. The *II. Fliegerkorps* in Sicily coordinated the planning of attacks with the sector command of the *Regia Aeronautica* in Sicily, but the attacks were carried out independently. During the night of 12 to 13 August 1942, combined German and Italian torpedo attacks of *Schnellboote* and MAS provided one of the rare examples of cooperation between the *Regia Marina* and the *Kriegsmarine*. However, these attacks were not coordinated, occurring as opportunity dictated.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, these attacks nearly wiped out this convoy and only the fact that the damaged tanker *Ohio* finally reached Malta with two months worth of fuel made the British losses worthwhile. But this tactical victory represented the last for the Axis in the naval war in the Mediterranean.

6. On the defensive, November 1942- 8 September 1943

Until the actual Allied invasion in North Africa, the Axis had failed to plan any defensive measures against such an operation even though at the time a landing on the

¹¹⁰ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 80.

¹¹¹ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 242-260.

Atlantic coast of French North Africa and even in the Mediterranean was expected.

Admiral Weichold assessed this as “the last serious omission in Axis policy in the Mediterranean war.”¹¹² This failure to plan cost them dearly as the defence of

Tripolitania had to be organized hastily. Again, the lack of Axis foresight and planning contributed to a new crisis.

The Axis powers, especially Italy, had sent their best troops and equipment to North Africa. In consequence, the troops left behind in Italy were mostly equipped with obsolete equipment and poorly trained. This fact would help the Allies much during their later invasion of Sicily. In hindsight, it would have been a wise decision to retreat with all forces from North Africa at the end of 1942, but decisions by Hitler and Mussolini were just the opposite with more valuable troops and equipment sent over just in time to surrender there on 13 May 1943.¹¹³ However any other course represented a concession of a defeat, which both dictators were unable to admit.

As Dönitz met with Mussolini and Admiral Riccardi in Rome from 12 to 15 March 1943, he reached far reaching concessions from the Italians. A German Operations Staff was created in the *Supermarina* and shared responsibility for convoy operations to North Africa with respective Italian departments. Moreover, German officers were appointed to the ports of loading to control the loading process. Furthermore, the contribution of the

¹¹² Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 108.

¹¹³ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 282.

Kriegsmarine to the naval war in the Mediterranean was increased.¹¹⁴ But it was too late for these changes to have any significant impact at all.

When in spring 1943 the supply situation for the Axis troops in Tunisia became desperate, Dönitz requested that the *Regia Marina* use its cruisers to transport fuel and supplies to Tunisia. The *Commando Supremo* refused this request as they assessed that the last Italian ships lacked the power to fight their way through the Allied ships and were too valuable for the defence of Italian mainland.¹¹⁵ In their perception of a “total war” the Germans failed to understand the Italian long-term perspective, which included the current defence of Italy as well as the time after the end of the Second World War. As the *Kriegsmarine* put more and more pressure on the *Regia Marina* to commit its surface fleet, they produced only more and more resistance from the Italians.

After the surrender of the Axis in North Africa it was evident that an Allied invasion in Italy was to be expected. The Germans predicted that the Italians would surrender in this case sooner or later. Therefore they started planning a German invasion in Italy as early as 20 May 1943, of course without informing the Italians.¹¹⁶ From then on, German mistrust would rule the Italian-German relationship.

In this final phase of the war the *Regia Marina* encountered more problems than ever explaining their defensive and cautious posture to their German allies. The Italians used only light naval forces and not her six operational battleships against the Allied invasion

¹¹⁴ Germany, *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939-1945*, 320-327. Interestingly, the same demand of sending more U-boats to the Mediterranean Dönitz rejected as BdU.

¹¹⁵ Germany, *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939-1945*, 324.

¹¹⁶ Germany, *Hitler directs His War. The Secret Records of His Daily military Conferences*, selected and annotated by Felix Gilbert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 32-36.

fleets during the invasion in Sicily and even later on in Italy. One reason for this might be that Italy expected the end of the war soon and wanted to preserve their fleet for the peacetime afterwards.¹¹⁷ Dönitz urged Riccardi to commit the Italian battle fleet but Riccardi refused, arguing that without air cover there was no sense.¹¹⁸ Even at that late stage of the war, no real cooperation between the two Axis navies existed.

On 25 July 1943 the Grand Council of Fascism voted against Mussolini and subsequently King Victor Emmanuel III replaced him with Marshall Badoglio as Prime Minister. Badoglio wanted to end the war for Italy, but at the same he did not want to alert the Germans of his intentions.¹¹⁹ After replacement of Mussolini, the Germans began to take over Italy in order to prevent Italy from changing sides and to profit from the war industry in Northern Italy. Germany deployed ten divisions to Northern Italy without asking the Italians, who could not have done much about it at the time. At the same time the Italians negotiated secretly with the Allies to obtain an armistice.¹²⁰ The Axis was already doomed and both sides took actions on the strategic and sometimes even the operational level without the consent of the other ally.

The Italian government decided on 31 July to enter talks with the Allies, and General Castellano started the negotiations on 12 August 1943. As early as 29 July 1943 the Germans were aware of the Italian contacts with the Allies, and subsequently Hitler issued orders to take over Italy on 7 September 1943, before the announcement of the

¹¹⁷ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 289.

¹¹⁸ Germany, *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939-1945*, 344.

¹¹⁹ Pietro Badoglio, *Italy in the Second World War*, trans. Muriel Currey (Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press, 1976), 55-56.

¹²⁰ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 297-298.

armistice. The announcement of the armistice therefore surprised the Italian armed forces more than their German ally, who generally was already aware of this evolution.¹²¹ As the news of the armistice reached the Italian ships, their commanding officers faced difficulties explaining this situation to their crews because they left the Italian ports expecting to fight their last battle. The crews were more inclined to scuttle their ships than to surrender them to the Allies.¹²² The Italian Armed Forces were as surprised by the armistice as by the declaration of war in 1940. Again, lack of preparation, at least by the *Regia Marina*, was evident.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 300-301.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 305-306.

IV. The Axis Naval War in the Mediterranean – a Joint War?

In pre-war years in both Germany and Italy, a struggle between the respective navy and air force took place over the control of naval aviation. In both countries, the air force which argued for a single or unified air force won the struggle in the end. During and after the war navy officers in both countries complained about insufficient support to naval operations by their sister air service.

A. Relationship between the *Regia Marina* and the *Regia Aeronautica*

As early as the 1920s the struggle between the *Regia Aeronautica* and the *Regia Marina* over control of naval aviation had started. In order to solve the issue the heads of the *Regia Aeronautica* and the *Regia Marina* met on 27 January 1928. At the time Air Minister Marshall Balbo had the advantage of being regarded as Mussolini's "crown prince" and therefore he insisted that all combat aircrafts should be controlled by the *Regia Aeronautica* and would only be tasked in the support of either the navy or the army. To achieve this end, he pressed the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Burzagli, to renounce an independent naval air arm.¹²³ The *Regia Marina* realized after this meeting that they had to rely upon the *Regia Aeronautica* for air support. The short-comings of this ill-fated cooperation were already apparent in the first battles of war, such as the miserable performance of the *Regia Aeronautica* in the Battle of Punta Stilo.¹²⁴ The absence of adequate air support for naval operations was the main failure of the *Regia Aeronautica* in the Second World War. The *Kriegsmarine*, facing similar problems in Germany recognized this fact during the war, but could not do much about it, as Admiral

¹²³ James J. Sadkovich, *The Italian Navy in World War II*, 4.

¹²⁴ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 112.

Weichold assessed that “[t]he main weakness of Italy’s conduct of the war at sea lay in the form of her Air Force organisation.”¹²⁵ In hindsight, the need for either proper maritime air support under control of the *Regia Marina* or for efficient cooperation between *Regia Marina* and *Regia Aeronautica* was clearly evident, but Italy possessed neither during the war.

The main reason for this poor support was that the *Regia Aeronautica* had totally adopted the theories of General Giulio Douhet on air power and therefore used most of its scarce resources to develop a strategic bomber air force to attack enemy industry and population, thus neglecting the cooperation with both the army and the navy. The long-standing rivalry between the *Regia Aeronautica* and the *Regia Marina* made cooperation even more difficult.¹²⁶ The development of torpedo bombers was one perfect example for this rivalry, which had severe consequences for the Italian conduct of the war. The *Regia Aeronautica* started as late as 1933 a program to develop an air-launched torpedo, but failed at the same time to develop a dedicated air plane for this task. Therefore, it took until 1935 for the two services to agree to establish a training center and to start training for torpedo attacks. Start of training, however, was severely hampered by a reluctant *Regia Aeronautica* who still considered high level bombing as the attack method of choice and feared the high costs of torpedoes.¹²⁷ Moreover, in 1940 there was no possibility of acquiring any air launched torpedoes in Italy as Germany, facing similar problems with its F5 air-launched torpedo, had just ordered 300 torpedoes from

¹²⁵ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 3.

¹²⁶ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 17.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

Whitehead to fulfill its needs.¹²⁸ Therefore Italy entered the war without an adequate stock of air-launched torpedoes and without experience in their employment. It took several months of the war to overcome this flaw. In these months the British fleet operated in the Strait of Sicily nearly unmolested and could bring necessary reinforcements to the theatre.

Moreover, the standard attack method of the *Regia Aeronautica* was high-altitude bombing, although this method in combination with the small Italian bombs proved in the summer exercises of 1935 to be a failure. As James J. Sadkovich pointed out, “[a]ir power was clearly overrated, and in 1935 the RAI [*Regia Aeronautica Italiana*] failed to hit two ships, even though they were dead in the water.”¹²⁹ The *Regia Aeronautica* recognized the ineffectiveness, but did little to change it. These flaws became evident in the first months of the war in the Mediterranean and prevented Italian air power from controlling the Strait of Sicily, much to the frustration of the *Regia Marina* and the Germans, and much to the surprise of the British.

Even though, the *Regia Aeronautica* was the *primus inter pares* of the Italian Armed Forces, it “indulged in the illusion that air forces were the appropriate instrument of war especially for poorer countries.”¹³⁰ In the struggle for inter-service supremacy the *Regia Aeronautica* under the leadership of Marshall Balbo tried to cut down the size of the army and the *Regia Marina* to its own advantage by taking over much of the missions of

¹²⁸ James J. Sadkovich, *The Italian Navy in World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 11.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³⁰ Gerhard Schreiber, Bernd Stegemann, and Detlef Vogel. *Germany and the Second World War. Volume III: The Mediterranean, South-east Europe, and North Africa 1939-1941. From Italy's declaration of non-belligerence to the entry of the United States into the war*, trans. by Dean S. McMurray, Ewald Osers, and Louise Willmot (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 81.

the sister services.¹³¹ Therefore, the *Regia Aeronautica* was the Italian service, which had received most of the resources before the war, and most expectations were laid on the *Regia Aeronautica*, which would be largely disappointed in the first months of the war.

Another criticism often levelled at the *Regia Marina* was neglect of aircraft carriers.¹³² But the *Regia Marina* regarded the Mediterranean as an inland sea and therefore came to the conclusion that aircraft carriers were less important in this theatre than elsewhere. Furthermore, Italy with its bases in North Africa and on the Italian islands was regarded as an aircraft carrier in itself, much like Malta¹³³ With France in the 1930s as the most probable enemy, the *Regia Aeronautica* reasoned that there were enough islands available from which land-based aircraft could operate.¹³⁴ Therefore, Italy was by 1938 the only major power not possessing any aircraft carriers, nor having any plans to build one. Under these circumstances and under the tight Italian financial and industrial realities it was difficult to argue for an aircraft carrier.

B. Relationship between the *Kriegsmarine* and the *Luftwaffe*

The struggles in Germany over the control of aviation went much in the same way as in Italy, only years later as the Versailles Treaty prohibited military aviation in Germany.

Although the *Reichswehr* and *Reichsmarine* worked secretly on plans for military

¹³¹ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 112.

¹³² For example, Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani argued that “Italy’s failure to adopt the aircraft carrier before the war, . . .to develop a powerful naval air arm were important contributing factors to her defeat in the Mediterranean naval war.” Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 109.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹³⁴ James J. Sadkovich, *The Italian Navy in World War II*, 8.

aviation, only when the National Socialists reached power on 30 January 1933 was the development of a separate air force started. Hermann Göring, who was appointed as Reichsminister without portfolio and Reichskommissar für Luftverkehr, intended to create a Luftfahrtministerium after the Italian example introduced to him by Air Marshall Balbo during a visit to Italy in 1932.¹³⁵ Hence, the same problems between the navy and the air force as in Italy would soon arise in Germany.

On 1 March 1935 the *Luftwaffe* was officially recognized as a third service, but at the time it was not able to insist on control over all aircraft and had to agree on a solution which largely met the wishes of the *Kriegsmarine*. This solution envisaged creation of a special branch for naval operations in close cooperation with the *Kriegsmarine* and controlled by the *Kriegsmarine* in wartime.¹³⁶ Walter Gaul assessed:

[i]n 1935, therefore, a naval air service was coming into existence, entirely manned by naval personnel and supported by a supply and ground organization, naval in character. C-in-C German Air Force thereby recognized the need for a special branch of the German Air Force to serve the German Navy in naval warfare¹³⁷

The *Luftkommando (See)* [Air command (Navy)], first named *Luftkreis VI (See)*, was subsequently created. Although subordinate to the command structure of the *Luftwaffe*, the officer in command of the flying units, *F.d.Luft*, was tactically subordinate to the

¹³⁵ Horst Boog, “Das Problem der Selbständigkeit der Luftstreitkräfte in Deutschland 1908-1945,“ *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 1988, no. 1: 42.

¹³⁶ Eberhard Weichold, *A Survey from the Naval Point of View of the Organization of the German Air Force for Operations over the Sea, 1939-1945*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 3.

¹³⁷ Walter Gaul, *The Development of the Naval Air Force Up to the Outbreak of the 1939-1945 War and Its Activity during the First Seven months of the War*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 4.

command chain of the *Kriegsmarine*.¹³⁸ Nonetheless Göring did not like the involvement of the *Kriegsmarine* and he strived to obtain control over all air operations, including over the sea. Training and joint exercises should balance the disadvantages of a diversified command.¹³⁹ But, this aspiration never happened on a large scale and cooperation between the *Luftwaffe* and the *Kriegsmarine* was a concern for both services throughout the war.

In 1938 the Skl demanded an expansion of the Naval Air Arm because they assessed that it was insufficient for a war against a naval power like Great Britain. The Skl believed these new squadrons should include land-based bombers:

[i]t is doubtful however, whether bomber formations of the operational Air Force, which are used for large scale massed attacks on special concentrations at the front, could be released at any given time for such a special task [attack on shipping and naval installations].¹⁴⁰

At a meeting on 24 November 1938 between the 1/Skl (operational branch of the Skl), represented by Admiral Fricke, and Generalmajor Stumpf of the *Generalstab der Luftwaffe* both agreed to build up 13 bomber-squadrons for naval warfare. The 1/Skl requested “tactical subordination” of at least these bomber squadrons because they assessed that in a case of a war against France and Great Britain the resources of the *Luftwaffe* would be so stretched that otherwise they would not have the necessary support for the naval war. The *Luftwaffe* rejected these requests and announced further disbandment of the *Luftwaffenkommando (See)* which had the consequence that the

¹³⁸ Walter Gaul, *Navy-Air Force Planning and Build-up of the Naval Air Forces; Their Disbandment, and the Transfer of Naval Air Commitments to the Operational Air Force*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 3.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

Kriegsmarine lost all “independent control” over naval aviation.¹⁴¹ The SkI opposed this change in the command structure vigorously, but could reach no compromise.¹⁴² It was quite evident that the *Kriegsmarine* would depend totally on the support of the *Luftwaffe*. The lack of this support during the war, especially at the beginning, would cause much friction between the *Kriegsmarine* and the *Luftwaffe*.

The dispute between *Luftwaffe* and *Kriegsmarine* about the control of naval aviation would only be settled as late as 27 January 1939 during a meeting between Göring and Raeder. The memorandum agreed upon during the conference stated the *Luftwaffe* would become responsible for “England and those sea areas in which naval forces were unable to operate.”¹⁴³ Reconnaissance, meanwhile, would remain the sole responsibility of the *Kriegsmarine*.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, Göring confirmed disbandment of *Luftkommando (See)* and that instead a General of the *Luftwaffe* would be appointed to the OBdM. This individual would assume the same responsibility and would in peacetime tactically report to the OBdL and in wartime to the OBdM.¹⁴⁵ But there was no need for such a position as there were no tactical problems, as all operational affairs were solved between the Naval Group Commanders and the Naval Air Commander. Walter Gaul assessed “[i]n reality, the creation of the ‘Air Marshall’ [*General der Luftwaffe beim OBdM*] was a

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁴² Walter Gaul, *The Development of the Naval Air Force Up to the Outbreak of the 1939-1945 War and Its Activity during the First Seven months of the War*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 6.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴⁴ Walter Gaul, *Navy-Air Force Planning and Build-up of the Naval Air Forces; Their Disbandment, and the Transfer of Naval Air Commitments to the Operational Air Force*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 16-17.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

measure taken by the C-in-C German Air Force to soften the blow dealt to C-in-C Navy by the dissolution of German Air Force Area Command VI [*Luftwaffenkommando (See)*].”¹⁴⁶ The *Kriegsmarine* regarded this protocol as unsatisfactory because it restrained the Naval Air Arm to reconnaissance and intervention in tactical engagements, while the *Luftwaffe* secured large areas of responsibilities in the area of naval warfare. But recognizing Göring’s influence in German politics at the time, the *Kriegsmarine* had to agree.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the *Kriegsmarine* was frustrated as the enlargement of the Naval Air Arm was no longer a subject, and the post of the *General der Luftwaffe beim OBdM* was largely an administrative rather than a truly liaison position. The *Kriegsmarine* had from now on to rely not only on the knowledge and effectiveness of the air crews, but also on the assistance of the Generalstab der *Luftwaffe*. Willingness to cooperate at higher levels was, however, lower than ever.

Furthermore, Göring proved this unwillingness by insisting that “[i]n the theatre of naval warfare the Navy and the German Air Force operate side by side with equal powers of command.”¹⁴⁸ The *Kriegsmarine* feared frictions from dual command in the operational area and therefore demanded these differences should be “bridged by identical training, combined exercises and a special close liaison between the two commands.”¹⁴⁹ But this aspiration never happened. At the outbreak of the war even the

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴⁹ Walter Gaul, *The Development of the Naval Air Force Up to the Outbreak of the 1939-1945 War and Its Activity during the First Seven months of the War*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 1.

most basic conditions for cooperation were missing. Walter Gaul described this lack of preparation as follows:

[p]ractically all conditions required for operational cooperation in the naval war were lacking . . . – there were no map grids in common, no radio frequencies . . . in common, no cypher . . . [sic] material in common, no adequate tele-communications between the operational headquarters and command stations. [omissions in the original] ¹⁵⁰

This lack of preparation for cooperation in an on-coming naval war, interestingly the same as Italy would experience nearly one year later, hampered the results severely and produced some frightening examples. Deficiencies in cooperation between the *Luftwaffe* and the *Kriegsmarine* were clearly shown in the case of the sinking of the German destroyers *Leberecht Maass* and *Max Schultz* by German aircraft on 22 February 1940.¹⁵¹ These organisational deficiencies would remain throughout the war and severely handicapped German conduct of naval war.

In the Mediterranean theatre these same organisational deficiencies were evident in cooperation between the *Regia Marina* and the *Luftwaffe*. The support of the *Regia Marina* by the *Regia Aeronautica* was even worse than support of the *Kriegsmarine* by the *Luftwaffe*. As in the German conduct of the naval war this poor relationship represented one of the major reasons for the Italian defeat in the naval war.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Walter Gaul, *Navy-Air Force Planning and Build-up of the Naval Air Forces; Their Disbandment, and the Transfer of Naval Air Commitments to the Operational Air Force*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 27-28.

¹⁵¹ Walter Gaul, *The Development of the Naval Air Force Up to the Outbreak of the 1939-1945 War and Its Activity during the First Seven months of the War*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 20-21.

¹⁵² Eberhard Weichold, *A Survey from the Naval Point of View of the Organization of the German Air Force for Operations over the Sea, 1939-1945*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 17.

Lack of long-range reconnaissance and escort fighters proved to be among the greatest problems for the Italian fleet in the naval war in the Mediterranean. In the end, Eberhard Weichold even concluded “[t]he axis war in the Mediterranean was lost principally because of the dual control of naval operations by the Navy and the *Luftwaffe*.”¹⁵³

C. Influence on the conduct of operations

The impact of the rivalry between the *Regia Marina* and the *Regia Aeronautica* and the subsequent lack of joint planning and conduct of the war showed itself already in the first encounters of the war. A near disaster in cooperation between the *Regia Marina* and the *Regia Aeronautica* occurred during the Battle of Punta Stilo on 9 July 1940. During this battle the *Regia Aeronautica* attacked British as well as Italian ships and dropped a total of 2,000 bombs on both fleets with only minor results. Due to lack of radio communication between the attacking aircraft and the Italian ships, the pilots executed the orders received before their take-off.¹⁵⁴ After the battle the *Stato Maggiore Generale* analyzed that the air attacks against the British fleet had been unsuccessful despite the reports of the air crews. Furthermore, they concluded that high-level bombing was ineffective. Therefore, they proposed the acquisition of German Ju-87 *Stuka* dive

¹⁵³ Eberhard Weichold, *A Survey from the Naval Point of View of the Organization of the German Air Force for Operations over the Sea, 1939-1945*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 17.

¹⁵⁴ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 77.

bombers to raise the efficiency of the air attacks.¹⁵⁵ The Italians were shocked by this near disaster and even Count Ciano assessed in his diary:

[t]he real controversy in the matter of naval armament is not between us and the British, but between our Air Force and our Navy. Admiral Cavignari maintains that our air action was completely lacking during the first phase of the encounter, but that when it finally came it was directed against our own ships, which for six hours withstood the bombardment of our aeroplanes. Other information also gives the lie to the glowing reports of our Air Force.¹⁵⁶

It took until August 1941 for the *Regia Marina* and the *Regia Aeronautica* to develop common frequencies. Such lack of cooperation was totally incomprehensible and cost the Italian fleet several ships. But this engagement had shown the Royal Navy the ineffectiveness of the *Regia Aeronautica* at the time. Eberhard Weichold pointed out: “[t]his first operation in the Central Mediterranean had shown the British Fleet that it could operate unhindered in these waters, which had previously been regarded as endangered by the Italian Air Force”¹⁵⁷ Given the first major Italian air attacks on the British fleet, the Royal Navy was more and more willing over the next months to take more risks against the *Regia Aeronautica* as they had shown a very poor performance.

During the Battle of Cape Spada on 19 July 1940 the Italian fleet was complaining for the first time about missing air reconnaissance.¹⁵⁸ The *Regia Marina* would suffer from missing reconnaissance or sightings with erroneous positions throughout the whole

¹⁵⁵ PRO, ADM 199/1048, n. 0112/00212, 29 January 1941, part 17. Operation M.A.5 – Bombing summary, AUS-SME, 14, bundle 10, 9, „Promemoria sull’attività delle forze navali inglesi“ as quoted in *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁵⁶ Count Galeazzo Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, ed. Hugh Gibson (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1946), 275.

¹⁵⁷ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 7.

¹⁵⁸ The Aegean Air command was not able to launch its float planes in support of this action Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 82.

war. This deficiency represented one of the major flaws in the preparation of the *Regia Aeronautica*.

Another major flaw, the missing air launched torpedoes, was solved after three months into the war. In September 1940 the newly formed torpedo-bomber unit achieved its first success as the British cruiser *Kent* was hit by one air launched torpedo and subsequently had to be towed to Alexandria.¹⁵⁹ After this event, the Italian torpedo bomber crews became more experienced and in the end, even with improvised means the *Regia Aeronautica* achieved successes. But with proper preparation these successes might have been greater.

During the battle of Cape Spartivento it became evident that for further operations of the Italian fleet, fighter cover against the carrier-borne *Swordfish*-torpedo bombers would be necessary.¹⁶⁰ But the required long-range fighters did not exist in the whole Italian inventory. The result was that the *Regia Aeronautica* was only able to provide intermittent fighter cover for the fleet. This situation only became better, when Germany deployed the *Messerschmidt* ME 110s to the Mediterranean.

The first months of the war had shown the *Regia Aeronautica* that their preferred technique of high level bombing against shipping was ineffective. Furthermore, the bombsight in use at the time proved to be too complex and inaccurate. To improve the successes of their anti-shipping attacks the *Regia Aeronautica* started to develop dive attack tactics. The Italians also ordered German 250 and 500 kg bombs to replace their

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

rather inefficient 100 and 200 kg bombs.¹⁶¹ But these conclusions could have been drawn after the summer exercises of 1935.¹⁶² Five years passed without any significant rectification of the situation.

1. The arrival of the *X. Fliegerkorps* in December 1940

The first sign of the new German involvement in the Mediterranean was the arrival of 53 Ju 52 transport planes in Foggia on 8 and 9 December 1940, followed shortly by the transfer of the *X. Fliegerkorps* (10th air corps) from Norway to Sicily. In Admiral Weichold's assessment, the *X. Fliegerkorps*, which specialised in the anti-shipping role, was ideally suited to fight the Royal Navy and the British airbases in the Mediterranean, but it was less able to support the *Regia Marina* as it lacked reconnaissance planes and escort fighters.¹⁶³ The presence of the *X. Fliegerkorps* was soon felt by the British and in Weichold's mind arrival of the *X. Fliegerkorps* challenged the British sea control won in late 1940. Its presence rendered the passage of convoys through the strait of Sicily at once dangerous, and the supply of Malta was again at risk. The *X. Fliegerkorps*'s chief problem was too many missions and as early as one month later it had to devote a large part of its elements to the support of land operations in Libya, thus shifting its focus from support of naval to the support of land operations.¹⁶⁴ It had just too many missions with too few aircraft and thus Göring and the *Luftwaffe* had to prioritize and shift the main

¹⁶¹ The S.82 was a converted civilian plane and had to load the bombs vertically instead of horizontally. Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 89.

¹⁶² *cf.* p. 49.

¹⁶³ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 23.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

effort of the formation often several times a month, so that continuous pressure could rarely be established over a prolonged period.

On the tactical level the *X. Fliegerkorps* established quite rapidly good cooperation with the *Regia Aeronautica* and first successes were achieved on 10 January, as the Germans profited from the absence of fighter cover due to previous Italian air attacks on the British Mediterranean fleet and damaged the aircraft carrier *Illustrious* heavily. As the *Illustrious* was taken to Malta for initial repairs, combined German and Italian air forces conducted continuous air attacks against La Valletta from 16 to 19 January 1941.

¹⁶⁵ During these attacks on Malta, cooperation between the Germans and the Italians proved to be very good, but back in Sicily the *X. Fliegerkorps* confronted numerous logistical problems with the Italians. These problems were caused in a large part by the fact that Italy never mobilised its population for war.¹⁶⁶ This situation continued throughout the war and caused much frustration for the Germans who did not feel sufficiently supported.

Failed cooperation between the *Regia Marina* and the *Regia Aeronautica* and even the German *X. Fliegerkorps* played a major role in the events which led to the Battle of Matapan on 28 March 1941. It is still debated whether an exaggerated report by two German He 111s on 17 March 1941, claiming to have torpedoed two battleships, led the Italians to conduct the surface raid. However, it is evident that after this report the Germans put even more pressure on the Italians. Nevertheless, the *Luftwaffe* reported

¹⁶⁵ One day later the *X. Fliegerkorps* even damaged the cruiser *Southampton* so badly that he had to be scuttled. During the same attack the cruiser *Gloucester* was also hit. Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 135.

¹⁶⁶ As an example, land for a necessary expansion of the Catania airbase had not been requisitioned until the armistice in 1943. *Ibid.*, 136.

correctly on the 27 March that there were three operational British battleships at Alexandria.¹⁶⁷ But at this time, the *Supermarina* was reluctant to cancel the operation as it took so long to get support from the *Regia Aeronautica* and the *X. Fliegerkorps*, and they wanted to show the Germans their will and ability to fight.¹⁶⁸

In the end, air cover for this operation was planned hastily and without great detail. On 26 March a meeting between the *Regia Marina* and *Regia Aeronautica*, including representatives of the *X. Fliegerkorps* was held, but Iachino was never informed about the results.¹⁶⁹ In their evaluation of the Battle of Matapan, the *Regia Marina* blamed failed cooperation with the *Regia Aeronautica* and the erroneous reconnaissance reports, especially those of the Germans. However, some positive examples of cooperation can also be found in this battle. For the first time Iachino had a liaison team of radio and signals personnel of the *X. Fliegerkorps* embarked which allowed him to receive German reconnaissance and after action reports directly.¹⁷⁰ Cooperation with the *X. Fliegerkorps* was thus far better than with the *Regia Aeronautica*, for which every report had to be passed though the whole command chain because the communication arrangements between the Aegean Air Command and the fleet, ordered by *Superaero* as late as 28

¹⁶⁷ Even though the Italian liaison officer with the *Kriegsmarine* was informed, it appears that *Supermarina* failed to inform its own fleet at sea. Walter Ansel, *Hitler and the Middle Sea* (Durham,NC: Duke University Press, 1972), 135.

¹⁶⁸ Marc' Antonio Bragadin, *The Italian Navy in World War II*, trans. Gale Hoffmann (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1957), 83.

¹⁶⁹ The *X. Fliegerkorps* committed itself to furnish reconnaissance in the operations area on the two days preceding the operation and air cover for 28 March. Furthermore, reconnaissance flights over Souda Bay and Alexandria were promised for 26 and 27 March. Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 146-147.

¹⁷⁰ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 147.

March, were only received after the battle.¹⁷¹ The Italian fleet was only able to communicate directly with *Regia Aeronautica* as late as 22 August 1941, over one year after the Italian declaration of war.¹⁷² This lack of preparation and cooperation before the war and even worse after one year in the war represented one of the leading causes of the Italian defeat in the naval war in the Mediterranean.

Though Weichold admitted that bad planning between the two services played a major role in the disastrous events, the Germans assessed that the results were “by no means inevitable.” They concluded that “weaknesses in the shore-based direction of the Fleet, insufficient training in gunnery, torpedo-firing and in tactics, together with tactical errors during action, had affected the result just as much as poor Air Force support.”¹⁷³ Nevertheless, the Italian Fleet sortied once under German pressure after false German attack reports, and lost in the end three cruisers and two destroyers due to what they believed were failures of the *Regia Aeronautica* and the *X. Fliegerkorps*. After this battle the *Regia Marina* was even more reluctant to use its Fleet in the Mediterranean, but they did nothing to rectify cooperation with the Axis air forces in theatre. Therefore, this battle had a major impact on relations between the *Regia Marina* and the *Regia Aeronautica*, and even more so between Italy and Germany.

¹⁷¹ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 154.

¹⁷² James J. Sadkovich, *The Italian Navy in World War II*, 168.

¹⁷³ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 33.

2. The invasion of Greece and Crete, April/May 1942

In preparation for the German attack on 6 April 1941 on Greece and Yugoslavia, the *X. Fliegerkorps* deployed planes further to the east to support the operations of the German army. By May Göring decided to move the remaining resources of the *X. Fliegerkorps* to Greece to support operations there and the on-coming invasion of Crete.¹⁷⁴ This decision left the resources of the *Regia Aeronautica* to protect the supply convoys, attack Malta, and support the *Regia Marina*; roles which were clearly beyond their capabilities. Though the *Supermarina* and Admiral Weichold opposed this transfer, Göring overruled them.¹⁷⁵ As this move would cost the Axis shipping to North Africa heavily in autumn 1941, the *Regia Marina* was very annoyed in not having any influence on this decision.

After completion of Operation “Merkur”, parts of the *X. Fliegerkorps* were transferred to the Russian front. This reduction weakened pressure on the Royal Navy and on Malta so considerably that losses of Axis shipping to North Africa increased. General von Rintelen and Admiral Weichold both demanded from the OKW and SkI that German aircraft be deployed again to the Mediterranean, or at least to release Italian aircraft from the Russian front, but the demands were refused by the OKW and the SkI.¹⁷⁶ Eberhard Weichold assessed:

[t]he Luftwaffe thus [by transferring the *X. Fliegerkorps* to Greece and to Russia] surrendered the opportunity of Italy’s conduct of the war of its own free will. . . . The Italian Naval Staff was also severely handicapped by the fact that the German air forces sent were employed mainly in the pursuit of an

¹⁷⁴ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 161.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

independent air war, and in support of the land operations in North Africa. In fact, the Italian war at sea broke down largely because of the lack of air support.¹⁷⁷

Again, failed cooperation between the *Regia Marina* and both air forces proved to be crucial in the Mediterranean.

During the operation against Operation “Halberd” in late September 1941 the *Supermarina* gave Admiral Iachino the order to attack the British “only in the event that it [the Italian fleet] had decisive superiority” and to remain under Italian air cover.¹⁷⁸ Left largely without air cover and without a clear picture of his opposing force, Iachino did not press attack on the convoy. Italian torpedo bombers, however, suffered severe losses and the *Regia Aeronautica* accused the *Regia Marina* of not having taken advantage of the successes of the air attacks.¹⁷⁹ Hence, service rivalry between the *Regia Marina* and *Regia Aeronautica* again played a role and accusations of failure between the two services were passed as with every other time before, preventing them from conducting a joint war.

By late November 1941 Axis troops in North Africa faced a crisis in the Cyrenaica, and the *Luftwaffe* transferred further aircraft to the Mediterranean. But Göring gave the order primarily to support land warfare, and only a secondary task to protect Axis shipping to North Africa. Therefore, the supply situation of the Axis troops in North Africa did not change and even worsened. From a navy perspective the air force, in this

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷⁸ Marc’Antonio Bragadin, *The Italian Navy in World War II*, 141.

¹⁷⁹ Although the claims of damaged British ships were exaggerated, at least the battleship *Nelson* was damaged. Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 187-191.

case the *Luftwaffe*, again adopted the wrong focus, and left them alone in the struggle to keep North Africa supplied.

3. The arrival of the *II. Fliegerkorps* in December 1941

As the first operations of the *II. Fliegerkorps* coincided with the shift of the balance of power in the Central Mediterranean end 1941/early 1942, the *Luftwaffe* claimed this result as proof of the effects of air power on the sea. This view totally neglected the successes of the German U-boats and the Italian S.L.C. in late 1941, which weakened the British sea power in the Mediterranean significantly and overrated the successes of the *II. Fliegerkorps* upon arrival.¹⁸⁰ Therefore the *Luftwaffe* was in the future more reluctant to support any operations of the Italian fleet as they assessed that with air power alone they could achieve the same result or even better results. Consequently if the *Luftwaffe* had to prioritize between own attack missions and escort missions for the *Regia Marina* they prioritized own missions as for example during the operations against Operation “Pedestal” in August 1942, much to the frustration of the *Regia Marina*

This tendency was even reinforced by the outcome of the second battle of the Sirte on 22 March 1942. In this battle the *Luftwaffe* could compensate for the indecisive result of the surface action by sinking all of the merchant ships bound for Malta. After this action the *Luftwaffe* totally lost its confidence in the *Regia Marina* and was less ready to cooperate than ever.¹⁸¹ Hence, the Italian fleet did not receive as often as before the

¹⁸⁰ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 71.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

fighter escort it requested for operations in the central Mediterranean. This caused much friction in later stages of the war as the *Kriegsmarine* demanded more operations of the Italian surface fleet, which the *Regia Marina* regularly refused due to lack of available fighter cover and lack of fuel.

During the attacks on operation “Pedestal” an Italian fleet of three light cruisers and eleven destroyers should attack the British convoy from the Tyrrhenian Sea to finish all allied ships, which had survived the earlier attacks by submarines, Axis aircraft and E-boats. But the *Supermarina* assessed it necessary for this fleet to operate under friendly air cover, which due to the distance only the Germans could provide. But Field Marshall Kesselring estimated that he lacked the power to protect his own bombers as well as the Italian fleet and therefore denied air cover to the Italians. Hence, the whole cruiser operation was cancelled.¹⁸² The *Regia Marina* was frustrated by this decision as the Italians felt once more not supported by the Germans.

The attacks against Operation “Pedestal” represented a climax and also a kind of Pyrrhic victory because soon the growing American presence in the Mediterranean put the Axis under pressure and the Axis air forces were too busy to protect Italy, the *Panzerarmee Afrika* and the convoys to North Africa to mount any large-scale offensive operations anymore.

¹⁸² Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 94.

V. Command and Control

A. Structure

1. Command structure of the Italian Armed Forces

The Italian king was constitutionally the supreme commander of all Italian forces, but since March 1912 he could delegate the command to a general. On 29 May 1940 King Victor Emmanuel III reluctantly delegated his royal power to Mussolini.¹⁸³ Furthermore, Mussolini made himself Minister of War, Minister of the Navy, and Minister of the Air Force from the end of 1933 to the end of his regime on 25 July 1943. For each service Mussolini appointed an undersecretary who served as Chief of Staff of the respective service.¹⁸⁴ This centralisation of power in one person did not help coordinate decisions between the different services, as only Mussolini could finally decide and he used inter-service rivalries to prevent anyone from getting too powerful.

In order to unify the command structure a Chief of Staff of the Supreme General Staff (*Capo di Stato Maggiore Generale*) was created in 1925. This Chief of Staff was responsible for “control over the organization of the armed forces, their preparation for war. . . .” At the beginning the Chief of Staff of the Army took over responsibility as Chief of Staff of the *Stato Maggiore Generale*, but in February 1927 this officer became too powerful for Mussolini and he separated the commands making the Chief of Staff of the *Stato Maggiore Generale* only a technical advisor to him without any command function. In the late 1930s, Marshall Badoglio was only involved in general affairs while

¹⁸³ Howard McGaw Smyth, “The Command of the Italian Armed Forces in World War II,” *Military Affairs* Vol. 15, No. 1 (spring, 1951), 40; <http://www.jstor.org>; Internet; accessed 15 October 2004.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

detailed operation plans were the responsibility of the respective services.¹⁸⁵ On 15 May 1939 the *Stato Maggiore Generale* was once again reformed, but it remained a coordination element without any real power. The *Stato Maggiore Generale* was only empowered to produce general outlines of plans, with the real operation plans still the responsibility of the chief of staffs of the respective service. Generally, the *Stato Maggiore Generale* was not very respected as it did not exercise command.¹⁸⁶ These shortcomings led to great problems for Italy's preparations for war because each service had its own separate plan for the war and an overarching strategy to coordinate these different plans was missing.

When Mussolini assumed the portfolios for the different armed forces in 1933, the undersecretaries actually ran the armed forces. Like nearly all of the other leaders of nations participating in the Second World War, Mussolini was also involved in leading the day-to-day war efforts of Italy, especially, since he thought of himself as a great military leader. Unfortunately, Mussolini did not have any great military knowledge or experience and he was probably the worst national leader involved in military decisions.¹⁸⁷ But even worse, Mussolini did not follow advice in military affairs as the case of Marshall Badoglio's opposition to the invasion of Greece proved.

Though he opposed the invasion of Greece, Marshall Badoglio was made the scapegoat of this misadventure. Mussolini appointed General U

replacement although Cavallero had no great reputation in the Armed Forces due to his involvement in the *Ansaldo*-scandal.¹⁸⁸ Cavallero recognized the institutional defects of the Italian command system upon arriving in power and reformed it in June 1941. Now the *Commando Supremo* became a real joint command element with the services subordinated. An operations section was stood up and operation orders to the different services were issued. The German military attaché General von Rintelen, who was at the same time attached as liaison officer of the *Wehrmacht* and later on Field Marshall Kesselring as *Oberbefehlshaber Süd*, ensured liaison with the German OKW and the German troops in the Mediterranean theatre. Consequently, General Cavallero reduced the different services to mere force providers.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Mussolini insisted on himself being the Supreme Commander and was involved on a day-to-day basis in military decisions. While this changed general coordination, in day-to-day business the different services jealously insisted on their own command structures which prevented real joint conduct of the war, which was essential in the naval war in the Mediterranean.

Even within the different services, deficient command structures also existed. For the *Regia Marina*, historians cite two important aspects. Firstly, as *Commando Supremo* took more and more operational responsibilities, *Supermarina* started to get more involved in tactical decisions, much to the frustration of the commanders at sea. For example, the Fleet commander, Admiral Iachino, criticized the micromanagement of

¹⁸⁸ During his time as manager of the Ansaldo company Ansaldo delivered instead of armour steel plates common ones for the cruisers *Trento* and *Trieste*. Howard McGaw Smyth, "The Command of the Italian Armed Forces in World War II," *Military Affairs* Vol. 15, No. 1 (spring, 1951), 43; <http://www.jstor.org>; Internet; accessed 15 October 2004.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

Supermarina after the war.¹⁹⁰ As *Supermarina*'s orders arrived often without reflecting the tactical situation, the commander at sea was severely restricted in executing his assigned missions. Furthermore, this micromanagement prevented any initiative and mission command by the commander at sea.

Moreover, lack of a unified command for the different Italian naval squadrons proved to be a reason for concern. This specific criticism critic was often levelled by the *Kriegsmarine*: “[t]his procedure was extremely detrimental to uniformity of training in peacetime, and prevented smooth cooperation between detached squadrons during the war.”¹⁹¹ Due to the flawed command structure, the ships of the different squadrons never trained together, even though during the war the Italian Fleet mostly sortied as one fleet and operations in different squadrons being exceptions.

After Cavallero's reforms, German influence over Italian decisions rose. The different military leaders recognized this development and blamed Cavallero and his command structure. Thus, as greater German influence in the Mediterranean had only brought disaster by end 1942, Cavallero was replaced by General Vittorio Ambrosio on 1 February 1943. But realistically, a stance against German influence was no longer possible, when Italy was begging for more German help to defend Italy.¹⁹² As the disasters culminated with the Allied landing in Sicily, and even later on in Italy, the military leaders blamed from now on Mussolini and his German ally for these disasters.

¹⁹⁰ James J. Sadkovich, *The Italian Navy in World War II*, 10.

¹⁹¹ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 4.

¹⁹² Howard McGaw Smyth, “The Command of the Italian Armed Forces in World War II,” *Military Affairs* Vol. 15, No. 1 (spring, 1951), 48-49; <http://www.jstor.org>; Internet; accessed 15 October 2004.

On 25 July 1943 the Grand Council of Fascism forced Mussolini to resign as the Supreme Commander and the same day King Victor Emmanule III appointed Marshall Badoglio as new Prime Minister. Although inconsistent, Badoglio claimed to refrain from all military affairs, leaving them to General Ambrosio as Chief of Staff of *Commando Supremo*.¹⁹³ But nevertheless, it was Badoglio who conducted the armistice talks, which resulted in the Italian Armed Forces being more surprised than the Germans by the public announcement of the armistice.

2. Command structure of the German *Wehrmacht*

After the dismissal of Field Marshall von Blomberg as War Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the *Wehrmacht*, Hitler assumed supreme command himself. He created the OKW with General Keitel at the head of the organisation to help him command the German *Wehrmacht* as late as 1938. The OKW had no authority to give orders on its own.¹⁹⁴ The OKW was instead responsible for the issuing of directives from the *Führer* to the three services, the general allocation of resources, military policy, and the representation of the *Wehrmacht* in the government.¹⁹⁵ In general, the OKW was only as powerful as Hitler wanted and its power resulted from his delegation. Otherwise, the OKW possessed no power. Therefore, the OKW was unable to coordinate effectively

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

¹⁹⁴ Kurt Assmann, *Relations between the Supreme Command of Armed Forces and the Naval Staff, World War II*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II (Wilmington, DE,: Scholarly Resources, n.d.), 4.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

the three services. In case of disagreements, only Hitler could decide and mediate, and he used the principle of *divide et impera* to maximum extent to secure his hold on power.

Moreover, Hitler lacked the expertise and competent staff to give him advise on complex problems like coordination of air power for air, land and naval warfare. Therefore, it was Göring and the *Luftwaffe* as the self-claimed experts who prevailed in this area. The *Luftwaffe* and the *Kriegsmarine* never planned together, even if major operations were concerned.¹⁹⁶ Lack of joint conduct of the war proved to be one of the major faults of Germany in its war at sea.

The *Kriegsmarine*, and especially Grand Admiral Raeder, was not keen on this new OKW and insisted that Hitler should be advised in maritime questions only by the OBdM. With this position the *Kriegsmarine* in fact weakened its own position, as a more powerful OKW would have been more able to support the *Kriegsmarine* against Göring.¹⁹⁷ But in this struggle the *Kriegsmarine* remained alone, and had nearly no support from the *Luftwaffe* until it was too late.

Concerning Germany's war at sea, Grand Admiral Raeder visited Hitler every three to four weeks to discuss with him the matters which had risen since their last discussion. As Hitler normally did not interfere with naval affairs, this organisation worked unless another service with conflicting interests was concerned or the conduct of combined operations was concerned. The crucial cooperation between the *Kriegsmarine* and the *Luftwaffe* in the area of naval operations proved to be particularly difficult because

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹⁹⁷ Horst Boog, "Das Problem der Selbständigkeit der Luftstreitkräfte in Deutschland 1908-1945," *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen* 1988, no. 50 .

Göring regarded all air operations including these over the sea to be controlled by the *Luftwaffe*.¹⁹⁸ As mentioned this cooperation would remain difficult throughout the war

a specialist; otherwise he was out of favour.²⁰² With this attitude of Hitler the Skl could not influence German strategy and naval input in strategic decisions was mostly absent. This was fatal for greater German involvement in the Mediterranean.

Dönitz had a far better relationship with Hitler than Raeder and his advice was soon sought on nearly all affairs. This was supported by his natural and unaffected manners and by his unconditional support of Hitler.²⁰³ But by this time in the war, Germany had already lost the initiative and all strategic decisions concerning the naval war had been taken.

Raeder had even greater problems in dealing with Göring who was a jealous commander-in chief with excessive self-esteem and vanity. Nevertheless, it was normally easy to work with him as these weaknesses were exploitable.²⁰⁴ The change from Raeder to Dönitz also brought a great change here. In contrast to Raeder, Dönitz rapidly assessed the struggle for an independent naval air arm with the *Luftwaffe* as a waste of effort and tried instead to reach the maximum support under the existing organisational structures. Moreover, Göring saw his influence on Hitler vanishing while Dönitz's influence grew. Therefore, Göring finally ordered the *Luftwaffe* on 28 August 1943 "to comply with the wishes of the Navy, and to maintain the closest co-operation

²⁰² Walter Baum and Eberhard Weichold pointed out: "Hitler was totally land-minded, he did not understand the conduct of a naval war. The sea was kind of strange to him." Walter Baum and Eberhard Weichold, *Der Krieg der „Achsenmächte“ im Mittelmeer-Raum. Die „Strategie“ der Diktatoren*, 12.

²⁰³ Kurt Assmann, *Relations between the Supreme Command of Armed Forces and the Naval Staff, World War II*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 12.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

with it.”²⁰⁵ But by then the *Luftwaffe* generally did not possess any more the assets to turn the tide in the naval war.

B. Impact on the conduct of operations

The ineffective Italian command structure proved to be problematic in the first encounters of the war. As early as the Battle of Punta Stilo on 9 July 1940 coordination between the *Regia Marina* and the *Regia Aeronautica* proved to be faulty because there coordination procedures were in place which led to indiscriminate attacks on Italian ships as the pilots were not briefed on their presence. The chains of command of both services were too restrictive. A request for air support had to go through the local Maritime Command to the local Air sector command and sometimes even as high as *Superaero*.²⁰⁶ As a consequence, hours passed from the request to the time the aircraft actually took off, which is clearly unacceptable in a fast moving environment such as air warfare.

Often the rigid control of the *Supermarina* also hampered the Italian war effort. After 3 October 1940 when the Italian submarine *Gemma* was accidentally sunk because the she had left her assigned patrol box, the *Regia Marina* was more convinced than ever that a system of fix patrol boxes was the only way of preventing further incidents of this kind.²⁰⁷ The use of submarines in patrol boxes for reconnaissance purposes over a large area prevented subsequently any concentrated offensive tactics similar to the German

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁰⁶ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 66.

²⁰⁷ The *Kriegsmarine* used a more flexible system, thus accepting the risk of losses due to friendly fire. Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 8.

wolfpacks. Furthermore, the *Supermarina*'s tight control over submarines led to restrictive orders which prevented greater successes. Due to the fear of air attacks the *Supermarina* ordered Italian submarines to attack submerged during daylight. Thus the submarines relied solely on their hydrophones for detecting and tracking the targets. This procedure hampered the detection capability of the submarines severely.²⁰⁸ Generally, all these orders and procedures hampered the initiative of the commanding officers and prevented greater successes and must be therefore assessed as inadequate.

This restrictive control by the *Supermarina* also played a major role in the losses of the Axis convoys to North Africa. Interestingly, convoys in whose escort the sole German destroyer in the Mediterranean, *ZG-3 Hermes*, participated did not suffer as severe losses as comparable Italian-led convoys. The main reason for this discrepancy was that these convoys did not operate on the normal tight time schedule as the Italian led convoys. Therefore interception by British forces on the basis of ULTRA information was much more difficult. Later, it was not an uncommon practise for even senior Italian destroyer commandants to subordinate themselves to the Germans in order to avoid the rigid *Supermarina* timetables and procedures.²⁰⁹ The *Supermarina* was never aware of these problems and therefore nothing was changed.

After arrival of the *X. Fliegerkorps* the Germans respected pre-war areas of responsibilities only nominally. As the Mediterranean was an Italian theatre of war, each attack of the *X. Fliegerkorps* had to be sanctioned by the *Superaero* which was merely an administrative sanction. Otherwise, the *X. Fliegerkorps* had complete freedom of action.

²⁰⁸ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 268-269.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 264.

It was only subordinated to the normal chain of command of the *Luftwaffe*. Neither the Italian Army nor the *Regia Marina*, nor the respective German liaison staffs could task the *Fliegerkorps*.²¹⁰ This arrangement led to inefficient cooperation when the *X. Fliegerkorps* was tasked to support combined and joint operations.

Furthermore, coordination between the two Axis powers was far from ideal. The liaison staffs in the headquarters never proved to be an efficient means of coordination. Admiral Weichold observed “[t]he exchange of liaison staffs on the outbreak of war failed to bring about any real co-operation, the idea behind it being rather to gain as much information as possible on the plans of one’s ally without giving away anything oneself.”²¹¹ The work of these liaison staffs was severely hampered, since they had only restricted access to the operation rooms, they were not involved in any strategic planning, and they were only briefed on operations already completed.²¹² These restrictions created a climate of mistrust, which severely hampered good cooperation and coordination.

As the Germans tried to increase their influence on the Mediterranean theatre to prevent further setbacks as in autumn 1941, it became quite evident that a combined Italian-German command structure would be necessary. As Admiral Weichold assessed, “Hitler’s decision [not to install a combined command in the Mediterranean] had been a

²¹⁰ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 23.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²¹² Admiral Weichold complained about these working conditions as early as 10 July 1940. Deutscher Verbindungsoffizier beim Admiralstab der königlichen italienischen Marine, “Militarischer Bericht Nr. 2. Operation der italienischen Kriegsmarine zur Überführung eines wichtigen Transportes nach Libyen (Bengasi),” 19-21, dated 10 July 1940, in SkI, KTB 1/SkI Teil C, Heft XIII *Italienische Kriegführung*, 14-37, NARA T 1022, PG 32211, roll 1773.

contributory factor to the second collapse in the Mediterranean in the autumn of 1941.”²¹³ Göring exploited this by appointing a German Air Marshall, called *Oberbefehlshaber Süd*, who should control the Axis navies and air forces the Mediterranean theatre. The Italian Armed forces, especially the *Regia Marina*, strongly opposed this German proposition fearing to lose its independence from the “lax authority” of the *Commando Supremo*. Therefore, the Germans could not achieve their objective and the *Oberbefehlshaber Süd* got control over German assets in theatre, and only the authority to coordinate with the Italians. But cooperation with the *Oberbefehlshaber Süd* was in Weichold’s mind no substitute for a unified command structure. Moreover, the influence of Field Marshall Kesselring was limited to some Italian Air squadrons and restricted to the protection of the convoys to North Africa. Due to the resistance of the *Regia Marina* naval operations remained out his sphere of influence.²¹⁴ Since German command represented the only possible solution to the Axis’ problems in the Mediterranean in Admiral Weichold’s mind, his conclusions about a necessary unified command have to be regarded with some caveats.²¹⁵ Nevertheless, his assessment remains valid because the mentioned faulty command structures showed quite clearly that a unified command was necessary, no matter if under Italian or German command. The parallel structures in place were too inefficient and hampered the outcome of the Axis war efforts. But due to national jealousies it would take until 1943 to create such a command.

²¹³ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 66.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

²¹⁵ James J. Sadkovich, *The Italian Navy in World War II*, 285, 347.

Not only was the combined command organisation far from satisfactory, the German command structure also was unsatisfactory. The *Oberbefehlshaber Süd* had neither responsibility concerning the campaign in North Africa nor any control over the organisation of the convoys as this remained the responsibility of the German liaison officer to the *Commando Supremo*. The only authority given to Field Marshall Kesselring other than in *Luftwaffe* operations was in German naval operations in the Mediterranean. Therefore, on 1 November 1941, the *Marinekommando Italien* was created which was subordinated to the German as well as the Italian naval chain of command and to the *Oberbefehlshaber Süd*.²¹⁶ Hence, even in the German chain of command no clear structure existed due to service rivalries which hampered the outcome of the war even more. Given these inefficiencies in the command structure it is astonishing that the Axis nearly defeated the British in the Mediterranean.

The planned invasion of Malta in 1942 also showed deficiencies in command and control. As Rommel advanced quickly in North Africa, he demanded to keep on the attack and not hold his forces back for the invasion of Malta. As his Italian superior wanted to restrict him to his orders, Rommel went back to Hitler to demand that Mussolini waived this restriction, which Mussolini finally did. At the time Hitler was not keen on this invasion because as Kurt Assmann assessed, “[a]s time went on, an obstacle to the plan [invasion of Malta] was that the Germans no longer trusted the Italians alone to carry it out successfully, while German interest in it was not great enough to provide

²¹⁶ 1./SkI, “Einsatz und Führung deutscher Seestreitkräfte im Mittelmeer,” 1, in SkI, KTB 1/SkI Heft XIV *Deutsche Kriegsführung im Mittelmeer*, 248-250, NARA T 1022, PG 32213, roll 1774.

powerful forces.”²¹⁷ The move by Rommel to go behind the back of his nominal Italian superior to Hitler showed clearly the German lack of confidence in the Italian command in the Mediterranean theatre.

After the successful Allied landing in North Africa, Admiral Weichold assessed that the lack of a unified command became once more very evident. He commented that “[o]nly one person with supreme powers of command could save the situation. Neither the Italian Commando Supremo nor the German Supreme Command [OKW] had sufficient authority on their own.” Hitler reacted to the crisis with just one small improvement concerning the convoy organisation to North Africa. But this change did not improve the situation significantly and the Axis war effort was still plagued with its inefficiency caused by parallel command structures.

The quarrels around the invasion of Malta and Axis reaction to the Allied landing in North Africa showed once more that a unified Axis command was necessary. On the German side, for example, the OKW did not bother to inform the SkI, and the SkI only got aware of this planned information via the German naval liaison staff in Rome.²¹⁸ This showed that the German command system was not free from jealousies and rivalries which hampered in the end the conduct of the war. Consequently Eberhard Weichold concluded in his review of the year 1942:

[b]ut still there was no unified Axis command of operations. This was the most serious error in the Axis Powers’ conduct of the Mediterranean war. The lack of a supreme commander and staff drawn from both Axis nations seriously

²¹⁷ Kurt Assmann, *Relations between the Supreme Command of Armed Forces and the Naval Staff, World War II*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 32.

²¹⁸ Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*, 363.

affected the planning and conduct of operations, and was the cause of much indecision and wavering.²¹⁹

But this unified command existed neither on the German side nor on a combined level. National jealousies and inter-service rivalries continued to hamper the Axis conduct of war, as there was nobody in power to decide on the Axis strategy and to prioritize the operations and available means.

The low morale of Italian defenders played a major role in the loss of Pantellaria to Allied forces. Furthermore, the Italian command structure did nothing to prevent this loss and was more concerned with saving its own reputation. The *Commando Supremo* withheld a memorandum criticising the surrender until the actual surrender of the island. *Supermarina* never passed the information of the oncoming landing force to the officer in command of the island. The Germans were quite surprised as they learned that lack of potable water was mentioned as one of the major reasons for surrender and their signal station on the island knew nothing in this respect.²²⁰ The Italian command system was plagued with such flawed communications throughout the war which prevented effective control over the naval war.

Even in the later stages of the war inter-service rivalries played a role in flawed command structures. When Kapitän zur See von Liebenstein took over as officer in charge of sea transport from Italy to Sicily end of May 1943 he was surprised to discover that each German service ran its own sea transport system through the Strait of Messina without coordinating movements with the other services. He quickly concentrated these

²¹⁹ Eberhard Weichold, *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*, Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II, 100.

²²⁰ Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, 287.

efforts by bringing all available transports under a unified command and was thus able to evacuate most Axis forces before the fall of Sicily. Nevertheless, the Italians ran their own sea transport system.²²¹ These parallel structures so late in the war could only be overcome by personal initiative.

²²¹ Ironically, the last unit to be evacuated was an Italian patrol in a German vessel. *Ibid.*, 296-297.

VI. Conclusion

Even though Italian and German military staffs considered a possible alliance between their two nations in their wargames since the late 1920s, development of the necessary military relationship was a slow one. It took after the Abyssinian crisis in 1935 and the Spanish Civil War to develop closer military links. But at this time both nations claimed for themselves supremacy in their respective area of interest, Italy in the Mediterranean and Germany in Central Europe. With these claims both states were also confronted with clashes of interests in Austria and especially in the Balkans and South-east Europe. It is therefore quite evident that the strategic goals of both nations diverged and that this *sine qua non* for successful coalition warfare was not met. This difference of objectives hampered the development of close cooperation and the Pact of Steel between Germany and Italy was only signed as late as May 1939. Due to this slow evolution, valuable time was lost to coordinate planning and the war efforts for an oncoming war. Neither Germany nor Italy wanted to let the other to have influence in what they regarded as their identified area of interest. Therefore the Italians opposed any German attempt, whether political, economical or military, to be involved in Mediterranean affairs. Consequently during the first talks between the respective German and Italian Chief of Staffs, Axis war efforts were based on the principle of each nation's responsibility for the war in their area of interest. Moreover, the respective armed forces were reluctant to provide information and equipment to their allied sister service. On the German side this reluctance was due to the fact that the Germans, and especially the *Kriegsmarine*, thought themselves superior to their Italian counterparts. The Italians, on the other hand, did not want to let the Germans get involved in their

sphere. Therefore, each one regarded the war efforts of its ally as a mere diversion to draw out British and French forces. Trust, the necessary basis for a coalition, was largely absent. This state was quite evident during the Italian "*non-belligeranza*" in which the Germans withheld all equipment aid from their Italian ally, and the Italians did not provide logistic support for their German partner.

Much has been written about the missed opportunity of the Axis to defeat Great Britain by expelling British forces from the Mediterranean. Raeder, in particular, was an advocate of this policy and mentioned the possibilities in the Mediterranean during his meetings with Hitler thirteen times. Many other high-ranking German officers supported this opinion in their memoirs. However, many of these arguments were made after the war and merely argued that Germany would have won the war, if Hitler had only taken military advice. But this view totally neglects the fact that Hitler was the driving factor which led Germany into war and that in the end he decided all political and military objectives in Germany. Certainly Raeder mentioned his proposal of greater German involvement in the Mediterranean but he did not push it to the end, as he was well aware at the time that Hitler regarded the war in the east as the decisive theatre and the Mediterranean only as an annoyance which used up desperately needed resources for the Eastern front.

After the outbreak of war, Italy declared its "*non-belligeranza*", claiming the economic and military necessity to build up its industry and armed forces. The Germans and especially Hitler were surprised by this announcement and suspected Italy of not honouring its obligations under the Pact of Steel. For Italy, it was simply a question of necessity as the country was not ready for war at all and its dependence on imported raw

materials was a major weakness. Both nations pursued their own strategy without hardly informing the other ally, never mind coordination of operations. The final result of this failure was the parallel war effort of Germany and Italy in the first months after the Italian declaration of war. After the resulting ill-fated Italian campaigns in North Africa and Greece, Germany was reluctantly drawn more and more into the Mediterranean to keep Italy in the war. Nevertheless, from an organisational perspective, both nations continued to conduct the war in a parallel manner. Necessary institutions to coordinate a large-scale coalition war, like the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Allied side or even regular staff talks on the strategic level never existed. The respective chiefs of staff merely met once or twice a year and normally all problematic subjects were omitted from the agenda. Consequently, the military principle of unity of command was never achieved. Moreover, as both nations created liaison staffs to headquarters on a joint as well on a service level, these liaison staffs were regarded with mistrust and information was deliberately withheld from them. The *Kriegsmarine* was totally disappointed with the Italian defensive conduct of the war in the Mediterranean and they could not convince the *Regia Marina* to change its defensive posture. The alternative for the SkI was to take over control over the *Regia Marina*. This growing German influence created more and more Italian resistance. With this attitude respect for each others' interests and representation in the command structure never existed. In the end, real cooperation on an equal basis between Germany and Italy was quickly discarded by the Germans, in particular by the *Kriegsmarine*.

Not only was the combined aspect of the conduct of the war totally missing, in both nations the respective navies and air forces struggled to control naval aviation. In both

countries the air force won in the end, but as both were more interested in their own conduct of the war, support to their respective navies was totally neglected. As an example, both air forces had to improvise aircraft specialised for naval war. In Germany especially personalities and personal relationships were significant in explaining this total disaster in cooperation and joint warfare.

Due to these different strategies and inter-service rivalries, an effective command and control structure was never established. German forces in the Mediterranean theatre were nominally under Italian control, but in the end the *X. Fliegerkorps* received its orders from Berlin. With the establishment of Field Marshall Kesselring as *Oberbefehlshaber Süd* in December 1941 German independence increased and led in the end to the German invasion of Italy after the Italian armistice in September 1943.

On the joint level the command structure was especially ineffective. The *Commando Supremo* as well as the OKW represented mere coordinating institutions which lacked real power. In the case of the *Commando Supremo* this changed in 1941, but on the German side Hitler was unwilling to delegate power to the OKW. Furthermore, each Italian service insisted on its own chain of command instead of adopting a joint command structure. This deficiency was quite evident during the battle of Matapan where cooperation between the *Regia Marina* and the German *Luftwaffe* was more effective than that with the *Regia Aeronautica*.

In the end this parallel war, resulting from different national strategies and inter-service rivalries, prevented the Axis from fighting effectively in the Mediterranean. But even so, the Axis by late 1941 and early 1942 nearly expelled the British from the Mediterranean. If they had overcome their national differences and the jealousies of the

respective services before the war or even in the early stages of the war, the probability of Axis control of the Mediterranean can only be assessed as great. After American forces joined British forces in the Mediterranean in autumn 1942, this window of opportunity was closed and the defeat of the Axis was inevitable. The difference between the effective conduct of the war between the Allies and the ineffective conduct of the Axis showed clearly the Axis deficiencies in this respect.

In today's world where coalition warfare is regarded as the standard it is important that the lessons learned from the Axis' failure are respected. In a coalition each member has to be equally represented. Each member's strategic goals and national interests as well as cultural and linguistic differences have to be respected. In a combined and joint environment a unified command structure is especially important to respect the military principle of unity of command to prevent a parallel war like the one of the Axis in the Mediterranean. Otherwise, a coalition will be confronted with the same problems as the Axis in the naval war in the Mediterranean.

BibliographyPrimary Sources

- Assmann, Kurt. *Relations between the Supreme Command of Armed Forces and the Naval Staff, World War II*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, n. d.
- Badoglio, Pietro. *Italy in the Second World War*. Translated by Muriel Currey. Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press, 1976.
- Ciano, Count Galeazzo. *The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943*. Edited by Hugh Gibson. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1946.
- Gaul, Walter. *The Development of the Naval Air Force Up to the Outbreak of the 1939-1945 War and Its Activity during the First Seven months of the War*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., n.d.
- Gaul, Walter. *Navy-Air Force Planning and Build-up of the Naval Air Forces; Their Disbandment, and the Transfer of Naval Air Commitments to the Operational Air Force*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., n.d.
- Germany. Auswärtiges Amt. *Documents on German Foreign Policy (DGFP) 1918-1945 Series D (1937-1945) Volume IV The Aftermath of Munich October 1938-March 1939*. Edited. Washington, DC: United States Printing Office, 1951.
- Germany. Auswärtiges Amt. *Documents on German Foreign Policy (DGFP) 1918-1945 Series D (1937-1945) Volume VI The Last Months of Peace March-August 1939*. Edited. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956.
- Germany. Auswärtiges Amt. *DGFP Series D (1937-1945) Volume VII The Last Days of Peace August 9-September 3, 1939*. Edited. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1956.
- Germany. *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939-1945*. Foreword by Jak P. Mallmann Showell. London: Greenhill Books, 1990.
- Germany. *Hitler directs His War. The Secret Records of His Daily Military Conferences*. Selected and annotated by Felix Gilbert. New York: Oxford University Press, 1951.
- Germany. Oberkommando der Wehrmacht. *Hitler's War Directives 1939-45*. Edited by Walter Hubatsch. Edited and translated by H. R. Trevor-Roper. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1964.

- Germany. Seekriegsleitung. *Kriegstagebuch (KTB) der 1/SKL. Teil A*. Operational Research Branch United States Naval Historical Center TM 100; Microfilm. roll TM 100.
- Germany. Seekriegsleitung. *Kriegstagebuch der 1./SkL. Teil A. Heft 1-67*. Edited by Werner Rahn and Gerhard Schreiber. Herford and Bonn: Mittler, 1988-1997.
- Germany. Seekriegsleitung. *Kriegstagebuch (KTB) der 1/SKL. Teil C. Heft XIII, Italienische Kriegsführung 1940-1942*. National Archive and records Administration College Park (NARA) RG 242. T 1022 Records of the German Navy, 1850-1945; Microfilm. PG 32211-212, roll 1773.
- Germany. Seekriegsleitung. *Kriegstagebuch (KTB) der 1/SKL. Teil C. Heft XIV, Deutsche Kriegsführung*. National Archive and Records Administration College Park (NARA) RG 242. T 1022 Records of the German Navy, 1850-1945; Microfilm. PG 32213-214, roll 1774-1775.
- von Rintelen, Enno. *Mussolini als Bundesgenosse. Erinnerungen des Deutschen Militärattachés in Rom 1936-43*. Tübingen und Stuttgart: Rainer Wunderlich Verlag, 1951.
- Salewski, Michael. *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945. Band III: Denkschriften und Lagebetrachtungen 1938-1945*. Frankfurt am Main: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1973.
- Weichold, Eberhard. *A Survey from the Naval Point of View of the Organization of the German Air Force for Operations over the Sea, 1939-1945*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, n. d.
- Weichold, Eberhard. *Axis Naval Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1939 to May 1943*. Essays by German Officers and Officials on World War II. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, n. d.

Secondary Sources

- Ansel, Walter. *Hitler and the Middle Sea*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1972.
- Baum, Walter and Eberhard Weichold. *Der Krieg der „Achsenmächte“ im Mittelmeer-Raum. Die „Strategie“ der Diktatoren*. Göttingen, Zürich and Frankfurt: Musterschmidt, 1973.
- Boog, Hans, W. Rahn, R. Stumpf, and B. Wegner. *Germany and the Second World War. Volume VI: The Global War. Widening of the Conflict into a World War and the Shift of the Initiative 1941-1943*. Translated by E. Osers, J. Brownjohn, P. Crampton and L. Willmot. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Boog, Horst. “Das Problem der Selbständigkeit der Luftstreitkräfte in Deutschland 1908-1945.” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 1988, no. 1: 31-60.
- Bragadin, Marc’ Antonio. *The Italian Navy in World War II*. Translated By Gale Hoffmann. Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1957.
- DiNardo R. L. and Daniel J. Hughes, “Germany and Coalition Warfare in the World Wars: A Comparative Study.” *War in History* 8, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 166- 190; http://content.epnet.com/pdf13_15/pdf/2001/31d/01apr01; Internet, accessed 7 January 2005.
- Greene, Jack and Alessandro Massignani. *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*. Paperback edition. London: Chatham Publishing, 2002.
- Knox, MacGregor. *Mussolini Unleashed 1939-1941. Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy’s Last War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Mallett, Robert. *The Italian Navy and Fascist Expansionism 1935-1940*. London: Frank Cass, 1998.
- McGaw Smyth, Howard. “The Command of the Italian Armed Forces in World War II.” *Military Affairs* 15, no.1 (Spring 1951): 38-52; <http://www.jstor.org>; Internet; accessed 15 October 2004.
- Meier-Welcker, Hans. “Zur deutsch-italienischen Militärpolitik und der Beurteilung der italienischen Wehrmacht vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg.” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 1970, no. 1: 59-81.
- Pratt, Lawrence R. *East of Malta, West of Suez*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Roskill, Stephen. *Naval Policy between the Wars Vol. II: the Period of the Reluctant Rearmament 1930-1939*. London: Collins, 1976.

- Sadkovich, James J. *The Italian Navy in World War II*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994.
- Salewski, Michael. *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945. Band I: 1935-1941*. Frankfurt a. Main: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1970.
- Salewski, Michael. *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945. Band II: 1942-1945*. München: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1975.
- Schreiber, Gerhard. "Der Mittelmeerraum in Hitlers Strategie 1940." *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen* 1980, no. 2: 69 - 99.
- Schreiber, Gerhard, Bernd Stegemann, and Detlef Vogel. *Germany and the Second World War. Volume III: The Mediterranean, South-east Europe, and North Africa 1939-1941. From Italy's declaration of non-belligerence to the entry of the United States into the war*. Translated by Dean S. McMurray, Ewald Osers, and Louise Willmot. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Schreiber, Gerhard. *Revisionismus und Wehrmachtstreben; Marineführung und die deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen 1919-1944*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1978.