

ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN THEATER OF WARFARE IN THE YEARS 1939-1945

The article examines the role and significance of the Mediterranean theater of war during World War II. This issue did not find appropriate elucidation in world historiography, in contradistinction to the history of the war on the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Provided a retrospective review of the interests of Great Britain, France, Italy, Greece, Spain, Turkey, Yugoslavia and other countries in the region through the prism geopolitical importance of the Mediterranean basin. Strategic plans and actions of allies on the anti-Hitler coalition and states of Axis on the Mediterranean during the years 1939 – 1945, the position of their naval forces and aviation was analyzed. Significant attention paid to the combat actions of opponents for such objects as Malta, Suez Canal, Gibraltar and others like that. The author convinces that without the victory of the Allies in North Africa, occupation of the Mediterranean Sea and offensive on the Apennine Peninsula between 1944 and 1945 would have been impossible for their victory at the Western Front, also would be another course of battles on the Eastern Front.

Keywords: aviation, navy, Gibraltar, World War II, Malta, the Mediterranean Sea, Suez Canal.

The Second World War was carried out in all the waters surrounding all continents. Because of that, the conflict of 1939-1945 turned out to be a global event in its dimension. The military operations in the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific definitely signed up in the historical memory [1].

Battle of the Atlantic perceived as a fear of German submarines trying to break up the lines of communication between the American continent and ports in the UK, has become, for many of the historians, the most important maritime war theater of World War (The best proof of this is one of the most famous studies in this respect, Clay Blair, see CC. Blair, Hitlerawojna u-bootów, cz. 1, Myśliwi 1939-1942, Warszawa 1998, cz. 2, Ścigani 1942-1945, Warszawa 1999.

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Perfectly it can also be seen on the example of the recently published book by Jonathan Dimbleby's, Battle of the Atlantic. As the Allies won World War II, Warsaw 2017 that actually is dedicated to only the war against the German submarine fleet). It was commonly said that this was the longest, most important battle of the war, and the victory for the Allies was decisive for the ability not only to survive the offensive of the fascist countries but mainly to prepare and take offensive in Western Europe known in history as «Second Front».

The Pacific War, for European historians, is less important as a side theater and definitely secondary to what was happening at the European theater of warfare. It was even emphasized when discussing the terms of subsequent meetings and conferences, not only the Great Trinity, but also bilateral Anglo-American arrangements. This is completely wrong look, lowering a huge commitment of US forces in another offensive in the Pacific (Vastness of American involvement in activities even at Iwo-Jima can be seen perfectly in the development E. Hammel, Iwo Jima, Warszawa 2009. It is worth mentioning that while American troops landed on this island, the offensive of Anglo-American and Allied forces in France and the Apennine was taking place. This also shows how great was the commitment of the United States during the Second World War). United States were able not only to support Britain or the Soviet Union in the war against the Third Reich (Without the support of the American or British, the victory of the Red Army would not have been possible. Still, during the Berlin assault, one of the Soviet Armored Guard Guards fought with only equipment acquired from the Allies under the «Lend lease act» agreement), but also to break the power of the Empire of Japan on their own. The Pacific War was much more complicated and definitely bloodier than the Atlantic. It shows very well for many years in major studies prepared by the American historians [2].

In the shade of these water areas and the warfare carried on them remains the Mediterranean Sea. It didn't come by its proper recognition and appreciation of the role it has played during the Second World War [3]. For many historians,

the Mediterranean region is a minor operating theater, which has not played a decisive time in the five years of war [4]. Truly, the fighting was conducted here from September 1939 to the beginning of May 1945, but they are not seen as having a decisive impact on the course of the war. In the meantime, it was in the Mediterranean area that the interests of the Fascist and Allied states crossed over for months, and the most intense warfare was being conducted there.

On September 3 1939 when the war Polish-German was joined by Britain and France, realizing their allied commitments (Mainly it was the result of an alliance concluded 25 August 1939 with Great Britain, France because, although the related treaty allies already in 1921, in 1939 to join the war no longer wanted. It was very popular in France in those days «N'est pas mourir pour le Gdańsk»). This meant that the conflict that had so far been a local war was becoming a world conflict. This was due to the geopolitical position of the Mediterranean and its crossing not only of political interests, but mainly of economic affairs. The main part of pre-war British trade routes was exactly passing through the Mediterranean waters, and it made these waters such an important and strategic reservoir. The geopolitical profile of the Mediterranean Sea was defined as the main marine bases of potential opponents who had already competed with each other during the period of peace in controlling these waters. It is the layout of these bases that determines the actions of all states that have access to the Mediterranean Sea. War accidents in 1939-1945 made up that the United Kingdom, France and Italy have become an important factors in this region. Definitely they have less significance Greece, Yugoslavia, Spain or even Turkey, although the last one significantly stabilized the eastern shores of the watershed, and was clearly separating from the waters of the Black Sea (After the First World War, a new secular Turkish government, led by Kemal Atatürk, carried out the necessary reforms, but the Navy was still very weak. Turkey did not intend to make a mistake from the previous World War, and this time it was not drawn into war. Spain after the civil war

was very weakened, and despite the establishment of General Franco's government in favor of fascist states, the government of Francisco Franco also maintained neutrality in 1939-1945. Greece and Yugoslavia could play strategically important roles in the Mediterranean, but they were too economically and militarily too small to play this role. Eventually they became only the subject of a great game).

It was important for the Mediterranean Sea to have control over the regions that connect this watercourse with other surrounding areas. From the west for centuries this role was played by Gibraltar, since the eighteenth century located in the hands of the UK (J.W. Gerard Peace of Utrecht. Historical Review of the great treaty from 1713 to 1714 and of the principal events of the war of the Spanish succession, New York-London 1885). This allowed not only to control all the forces entering the Mediterranean Sea from the Atlantic, but also to block any attempt of enemy ships trying to leave the Mediterranean Sea. During World War II, Gibraltar played a strategic role in the British fleet. Not only was it able to take over the French tasks, after the defeat of that country in June 1940, but also to block the Italian fleet. Only single submarines of the Italian Navy managed to pass through the Straits of Gibraltar and join the German forces fighting in the Atlantic (Italian submarines mainly operated from the base of Bordeaux, forming combat team «BETASOM – XI Gruppo Sommergibili Atlantici». They operated from August 1940 to September 1943, when the Italian state surrendered to Allied forces. Actually, however, some Italian crews still decided to fight at the side of the Third Reich and, as part of the naval forces of the Italian Social Republic, Salò, continued to serve in the Atlantic). The possible departure of the Italian navy to ocean waters could have led to a complete change in the Atlantic war. The fact that such a risk has never been real was because of the British domination of Gibraltar. At the same time from this base they were sent warships to both actions pursuit against the «Bismarck» (See even B.F. von Müllenheim-Rechberg, Pancernik «Bismarck», Gdańsk 2000 and M. Skwiot, T. Prusinowska, Operacja Rheinübung.

Polowaniena Bismarcka, Gdańsk 2004), support Atlantic convoys, while still running new convoys towards Malta, whose survival against the Italian-German offensive, fortunately for the Allies mainly air, was one of the most important tasks for the Royal Navy for long war months (Malta, which is now an independent state, was for many years one of the most important base for the British Navy. And this often came to a fight in her defense).

The opening of the Suez Canal contributed to a sharp increase in the importance of the Mediterranean and caused that a substantial majority of the British transport routes from the Asian region, from that moment no longer went around Africa, but exactly by the canal and Mediterranean waters (Suez Canal was the result of work of the Anglo-French consortium. It was opened in 1869. Very soon the British took action to remove the French side from the International Canal Association. In 1939 the channel formally belonged to the Egyptian state, independent since 1922, but was in fact completely controlled by the British). Dominating on the Suez Canal was as important for the United Kingdom as the control of the Strait of Gibraltar. Here however the situation was much more complicated. As long as the northern entrance to the canal was fully secured by the Royal Navy, mainly thanks to the Alexandria base, the southern section was not as comfortable. It was the place where Mediterranean Sea was connected with the Red Sea, the area where Italy had their colonies, and their stationed fleet teams [5]. They could be a serious threat to the future routes of warfare. This was mostly increasing the Mediterranean opera theater and clearly linked it with the Indian Ocean and also the Atlantic. An attempt to assess the importance of the war in the waters of the Mediterranean without consideration with events in the waters of both of the oceans and how these reservoirs were connected to it must be regarded as incorrect (Indian Ocean in the Polish historiography, as well as the Mediterranean area, has not lived to see a serious and comprehensive study. There are only minor editions of Rafał M. Kaczmarek,

Jozef W. Dyskanta, or Zbigniew Flisowski, who entered this area into the fate of other World War II opera houses).

To understand the British view of the Mediterranean, it is also necessary to remember the importance of Malta. This island located in the middle of the mentioned area not only giving a better control of its own trails, but was a blast of Italian transport routes. Of course Italian state was holding in these waters the largest and most powerful battle fleet before 1939, but it was limited to this water area (In the Italian fleet, only four cruise lines were included in the most important classes, two in the final stages of equipment, seven heavy cruisers, 12 light cruisers, and 113 submarines. In addition, more than 1,700 combat aircraft of different classes could formally cover it. The main fighter of the Italian fleet, the Royal Navy, carried 5 Mediterranean liners, 1 aircraft carrier, and 9 cruisers in Mediterranean waters, with its combined aviation forces in the region barely more than 3). True, it had colonies outside the Mediterranean, but had no free paths with them, so that the teams kept outside the Mediterranean were comparatively few. Major Italian colonies were located in North Africa and on the Turkish coasts, thanks to the takeover of control at the end of the First World War over the Dodecanese archipelago. Forces deployed in Malta could not only control the actions of the Italian and also, in case of start of the war, make attempts to break Italian routes (At the outbreak of the war, however, there was a lack of both aviation and a strong naval and submarine warfare team. During the war months, the number of fighter and bomber-torpedo aircraft stationed on this island increased. At the same time, from the base of Malta, 10 Submarine Flotilla was planned to operate, which was registered with gold during the war. It was also from this base that operated light forces, ie Force K, which seriously threatened the Italian transport routes to the ports of North Africa. The plan of the capture of Malta, ie Operation Hercules, although well prepared as a combined Italian-German landing operation, has never been completed, M. Gabriele, Operation C3: Malta, Rome 1965). Of course, the strength of the Italian fleet at the ports of

Taranto, Naples or even the northern ports of the Italian Peninsula, Genoa, La Spezia or Venice, was so great that Malta could be neutralized. However, as it had to show long war months, it turned out to be not an easy task and in the longer term, actually impossible to perform without taking control of the island.

The Mediterranean region in the operational and strategic concepts of the interwar period is a common responsibility of France and the United Kingdom. All concepts of future, possible war were developed in cooperation with the fleet of these two states. It was assumed that the French fleet will be responsible for the security of the western part of the basin, using their bases in Toulon, whether on the coast of North Africa, such as Oran and Mers-el-Kebir, the British and the eastern part of the water area (The French navy has played the role of 4-5th forces in the world since the Washington Conference. During the twentieth century, the interwar period developed at different rates. Its main opponent formally was the Italian fleet, but the largest modern warships were introduced only in the second half of the thirties. These were the «Dunkerque» and «Strasbourg» cruisers, which were to be the response to the German battleship Gneiseanu and the Schranhorst, as well as the «Richelieu» and «Jean Bart» cruisers, Response to the new Italian Littorio liner ships, as well as the German new «Bismarck» liner ships). At the same time, the British-French joint forces were strong enough to neutralize the theoretical advantage of the Italian fleet, and thus gain the balance of power expected by their political allies. Unfortunately, these concepts broke down in reality and the real war in the Mediterranean began. The defeat and capitulation of France in June 1940 not only broke all previous plans and concepts, but quickly led to the outbreak of the Franco-British conflict [6]. For British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's possible acquisition of the French fleet by the German side was a deadly threat [7]. He do not hesitate to take any French ships that were in British ports, but also to shoot the French team at Mers-el-Kebir (3 juillet 1940 (17h): attaquebritannique de la flottefrançaisedans le

port de Mers El-Kébir. Photographie prise à bord du cuirassé Dunkerque. Au premier plan le cuirassé Provence. En arrière – plan les cuirassés Strasbourg et Bretagne sont en flammes, cote: DM-ALF 001 vue 20, Ministère de la Défense France, Service historique de la défense). These events did not end the conflict, but only an initial stage of it. British ships have not only attacked later Dakar, aiming to flood the French ship line «Richelieu» (For the destruction of this unit, the British deployed the «Barham» and «Resolution» and Ark Royal aircraft carriers, not counting the smaller units. The artillery duel did not bring success to the British and at the same time the operation ended with the defeat of the forces of «Free Frenchmen») but also rolled intensive campaign with Marine Nationale on the Syrian-Lebanese waters.

The French navy during the Second World War in the Mediterranean had gone from disaster to disaster, and if it sought a fleet that had suffered a complete and final defeat in the course of the war, it was the French fleet. Its symbolic end and culmination of the tragic fate became scuttling in Toulon (G. Perrier, *Le suicide de la flotte française*. Toulon, 27 novembre 1942, Paris 2010).

The emergence of a plane over the battlefield during the First World War meant a revolution which true and full dimension could be seen twenty years later in the years 1939-1945. Aircraft became one of the most important war tools during World War II, both on land and at sea. Seaplanes, flying boats were the output of an aeroplane into a new operational zone. However, the advent of airborne aircraft, through the introduction of aircraft carriers, was the moment of revolution in the war at sea. It can be seen especially during the Second World War in battles in the Pacific, but also in the Mediterranean this type of armed forces was to be an extremely important [8].

The Mediterranean Sea is a reservoir set between Europe and North Africa. This mostly effects on the ability of the aviation to operate it. The development of military aviation, the introduction of increasingly modern types of aircraft, contributed to their operation throughout the Mediterranean.

It was very early in the Second World War that there was no safe area in the waters to which the enemy's aviation did not reach. Submarines could be flown to ports where they could not feel safe, as was most evident in the fate of the Italian naval fleet in Taranto, and the submarine forced to stay under water, which severely limited their effectiveness. The plane became as dangerous as modern warships, and at the same time was much cheaper and more universal. The same plane could gain control of the air, control of the seas and control of the land theater. The ship, however, was largely devoid of these opportunities (Some of these views are also found in the reflections of other authors, see J. Black, *Narzędziawojny. Bronie które zmieniły świat*, Poznań 2008).

On what the war will look like, the strategists of all sides of the conflict have prepared themselves in a limited way. Not for the first time justifying the truthfulness of the idea that the army is preparing for the war that was already before, not the one that is yet to come. The Italians completely underestimated the need for the development of their naval aviation forces. They did not deploy one aircraft carrier, and the development of modern torpedo was only in its infancy. Also France did not look good in this regard. Although that the aircraft had «Bearn», but it was an old unit and of little use on the modern battlefield [9]. The fact that marine aviation does not consider itself as an important factor in its own forces proves to be the best in the French air fleet of a modern torpedo bomber which would be capable to operate over the open Mediterranean Sea.

The British consistently developed their fleet of aircraft carriers during the interwar period, introducing increasingly modern craft into service. The new British aircraft carriers, not without reason, sometimes called the armored, were constructed so that they can operate in areas with high prevalence of aviation opponent, and so confined waters or coastal (A. Perepeczko, *Brytyjskie lotniskowce typu Illustrious*, Warszawa 2005). Their powerful armor plates were the result of conceptual work demonstrating that they could face with such a opponent, and therefore a strong enemy land aviation.

This was so much to confirm too precisely in the Mediterranean. It is also worth mentioning that in this respect British aircraft carriers proved extremely durable, because although repeatedly hit, damaged, but did not drown under the blows of aviation. The only loss suffered by the Royal Navy in this class of ships in those waters, were the result of enemy submarines actions (Two British ships of this class, the Eagle and Ark Royal, sunk in these waters, have sunk as a result of torpedo attacks by German submarines).

The British appreciated the role of their own aviation. Their aircraft operated not only from carrier decks, but also from Malta bases, Gibraltar airports, North Africa, and during the time gained control of the Mediterranean operational theater. Without gaining that dominance, the Royal Air Force, supported by American aviation, would not be able to provide cover for landing in Sicily, southern Italy, or eventually in Corsica or in southern France. The war in the Mediterranean had to be won not only on water and under water, but also in the air. The symbol of these struggles became the ancient-looking fighter biplane Gloster Gladiator [10], the three pieces of first undertook the defense skies over Malta and equally archaic-looking torpedo bomber Fairey Swordfish (W.A. Harrison, *Fairey Swordfish in action*, Carrollton 2001), who made a night attack on the Italian war fleet at Taranto (D. Wragg, *Swordfish. The story of the Taranto Raid*, London 2003).

When in June 1940 France was defeated, the main and practically sole opponent for the German-Italian alliance remained the United Kingdom. It is true that the British forces were supported by Poles, Czechs, or «Free Frenchmen» centered around General Charles de Gaulle's character, but the main war effort fell on Great Britain. After the battle for England, the first to halt the expansion of Italian-German forces in Europe, the Mediterranean became the most important theater of war.

The Italian offensive against the British colonies in the Red Sea and North Africa towards the Suez Canal was at that time the greatest threat. Malta was isolated and the British fleet, like never before since the 17th century, experienced a

dramatic lack of free warships. The first naval battles in which British forces clashed with the Italian fleet, such as the clash in Cape Stilo [11] or Cape Spada (R. M. Kaczmarek, *Bitwa koło przylądka Spada*, Warszawa 2007), showed that a quick and easy victory in this war does not receive any of the parties. The operational initiative was formally in the hands of the British, but it was a rather illusory predominance. Wars cannot be won at sea, because you have to win on land. Hence it was much more valuable to defeat the army of Italian Marshal Rodolfo Graziani by British in North Africa, than to damage a single Italian liner ship near Cape Stilo.

It was fighting in North Africa now to focus the interest of all parties in the conflict. Referral to fight in this region, *Deutsche Afrika Korps* under General Erwin Rommel was important not only for the Mediterranean region, but during the months affect the course of the fighting on the eastern front, opened in June 1941, after the aggression of the Third Reich on the USSR (M. Kitchen, *Pustynna wojna Rommela. II wojna światowa w Afryce Północnej 1941-1943*, Warszawa 2014). The forces that the Germans and Italians had to fight in the area could not be used on the eastern front. And this was not only true of land forces, armored ones, but also of aviation and even the navy. The tremendous amount of effort, not only counted in the thousands of human lives, but the millions of tons of oil, spent ammunition, the forces and resources that were channeled into the region, remained unimportant in the east and from 1944 also in the west after landing of Anglo-American forces on the beaches of Normandy (V. Milano, B. Conner: *Front w Normandii*, Poznań 2013).

The course of the war, but also the political decisions and subsequent views of historians caused them, contributed to the push of the Mediterranean theater of war of 1939-1945 into the shadows of events on the eastern and western fronts. There seems to be one of the major misconceptions that still exists in contemporary historiography and makes it impossible to properly assess the role and importance of fighting in the Mediterranean for the Second World War. Without attempting to go into more detailed analysis as a

result of the limited nature of the present study, it is worth noting that no other WWII tank has performed such powerful convoy operations in these waters. Operations, which were taking several months, of supplying planes to Malta, which have engaged a significant part of British forces, have no comparative scale in other waters. Nowhere during the war is possible to find the operation that could measure the convoy «Pedestal», where several ships to bring food and fuel to a single island, it was decided to refer to the fight dozens of warships, including aircraft carriers or battleships and aircraft (F. Mattesini, L'Operazione britannica «Pedestal». La battaglia aeronavale di mezzo agosto 1942, Roma 2014). The fight for this convoy is not often presented as a breakthrough moment in the war on the Mediterranean. The moment in which the resistance of Italian-German forces has been broken, more and more limited logistic capabilities, in particular oil stocks [12].

Often historiography returns about the attempt to sink the German liner «Tirpitz» by British miniature submarines, or use German live torpedoes of the «Neger» type during the Allied landings in Normandy. However, these are only episodes and it is very pale in its scope to use the Italian assault forces in Alexandria or Gibraltar. Italian live torpedoes actually did a strong hit to the Royal Navy and for several months they shook the balance of forces in that area. Often we are excited by the actions of the kamikaze, who in their frenetic attacks attempted to stop the US fleet gaining the atoll from the atoll of the Pacific. Their courage was as gigantic as crazy. Courage Italian sailors for almost the entire war on torpedoes operating in the port of Gibraltar and melting secret base Allied ships in its waters, remains to be unmatched [13]. They set out in almost suicide missions, but came back from them, showing that one could lose the enemy without wasting human life. Maybe their result does not come to the consciousness of the next generations as easily as the fate of the kamikaze. However, it does not diminish their heroism.

Without the victory in North Africa, the capture of the Mediterranean, the offensive in the area of the Italian Peninsula, it would be impossible to win on the Western Front

between 1944 and 1945, and also at the same time the course of the battle on the Eastern Front could have a different course. The Second World War was a global conflict, one operating theater influenced the remains, contributed to the intensification or the end of fighting on them. This, however, requires the proper display of the role and significance of the Mediterranean theater of warfare in the years 1939-1945.

1. In Polish historiography, it is these two basins lived to see the full studies, see Z. Flisowski, «Burzanad Pacyfikiem», tom 1-2, Poznań 1986-89 i A. Perepeczko, BurzanadAtlantykiem, tom 1-4, Warszawa 1999-2002.

2. To this day, the most important development involving the whole of the American military effort in the war carried out at sea during the Second World War remains the SE Morison, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol 1-15, 1947 in Boston.

3. Decidedly Anglo-Saxon historiography devotes this basin work with a very limited and synthetic character, see J. Greene, Mare Nostrum. The War in the Mediterranean, Watsonville 1990 or J. Greene, A. Massignano, The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943, London, 2011.

4. Italian historiography also failed to prepare a development that could aspire to the position of full and comprehensive synthesis of the war in the Mediterranean. The best-known studies that look, MA Bragadin, La Marina Italiana 1940-1945. Segreti e belliciscelte operative, Bologna 2011 or W. Ghetti, Storiadella Marina ItalianaSeconda Guerra Mondialenella, Vol. 1-4, Milano 1974.

5. Those were forces ComandoSuperiore della Marina Regia in Africa orientale Italiana (MARISUPAO) Cernuschi, La rivalita 'Italiana Anglo-nel Mar Rosso, part 1, «Storia Militare», n. 16, Parma, 1995, p. 31; E. Cernuschi, Il Rosso e la Mare Seconda Guerra Mondiale «Marini d'ItaliaDiario di Bordeaux», No. 11, Rome 2007, p. 29.

6. Armistice Agreement Between Germany and France, 22 June 1940, <http://www.kbismarck.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=2991> (data zdjęcia 12-07-2013).

7. *W. Churchill*, Druga wojna światowa..., t. 2, k. 1, p. 234-235.

8. I mentioned these elements in one of my sketches, see M. Franz, Lotniskowce jako nowa broń na atlantyckim teatrze wojennym w okresie od 03 września 1939 do 06 grudnia 1941, [w] Druga wojna światowa w Europie 1939-1945 – aspekty militarne, red. H. Królikowski, P. Matusak, Siedlce 2007, p. 191-210; Tegoż, Lotniskowce

w walce o panowanie na Morzu Śródziemnym (1939-1941), [w:] Historia wojskowości XX wieku. Księga pamiątkowa z okazji 50-lecie pracy zawodowej prof. dr hab. Lecha Wyszczelskiego, red. Naukowa Aneta Niewęglowska, Małgorzata Wiśniewska, Siedlce 2010, p. 293-308.

9. M. Franz, BEARN - Zapomniany lotniskowiec, [w] «Okrety Wojenne», Nr 2/93, Tarnowskie Góry 1993, p. 24-30.

10. T. Szlagor, obrońcy Malty, cz. 1, «Militaria XX wieku», nr 1, Lublin 2008, p. 4-7.

11. E. Cernuschi, Punta Stilo 9 luglio 1940. Carta (inglese) canta, «Marini d'ItaliaDiario di Bordo», nr 8/9, Roma 2014, p. 28-33.

12. G. Bukala, Włoskie zapasy ropy naftowej w latach 1940-1943, «Morza Statki i Okrety», nr 95, Warszawa 2009, p. 40-43.

13. A. Cocchia, I «Gamma» diVillaCarmela, «Notizario CentroStudiTradizioneNautiche», AnnoII, nr. 25, 2014, p. 7-10; A. E. Sanchez, LabasesecretadeVillaCarmela, «Almoraima. Revistade Estudios Campogibraltareños», nr 41, Algeciraz 2014, p. 299-313.

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РОЛЬ ТА ЗНАЧЕННЯ СЕРЕДЗЕМНОМОРСЬКОГО ТЕАТРУ ДРУГОЇ СВІТОВОЇ ВІЙНИ 1939–1945

У статті досліджується роль і значення середземноморського театру воєнних дій під час Другої світової війни. На відміну від історії війни на Атлантичному та Тихому океанах, ця тема не знайшла належного висвітлення у світовій історіографії. Крізь призму геополітичного значення середземноморського басейну подано ретроспективний огляд інтересів Великої Британії, Франції, Італії, Греції, Іспанії, Туреччини, Югославії та інших країн у регіоні. Аналізуються стратегічні плани та дії союзників по антигітлерівській коаліції та держав Осі на Середземному морі впродовж 1939 – 1945 років, становище їх військово-морських сил та авіації. Значна увага приділяється бойовим діям противників за такі об'єкти як Мальта, Суецький канал, Гібралтар тощо. Автор аргументовано доводить, що без перемоги союзників у Північній Африці, захоплення Середземного моря та наступу на Апеннінський півострів, у період між 1944 і 1945 роками були б неможливими їх перемоги на Західному фронті, а також іншим був би перебіг битв на Східному фронті.

Ключові слова: авіація, військово-морський флот, Гібралтар, Друга світова війна, Мальта, Середземне море, Суецький канал