

port cities, which were vital in providing supplies to the armies in the region. The invasion of North Africa, the defense of Malta, the invasion of Italy and the invasion of Southern France are discussed in chronological order. Here Walter's work comes into its own. Along with such well-known components of the Mediterranean war as the defense of Malta, Operation Torch, and the invasion of Italy, the author includes lesser known aspects of the conflict such as Operation Dragoon, and the conduct of the Italian Navy in the theatre. Finally, he describes how the war in the Mediterranean evolved, gradually becoming less critical when compared to other "hot spots" as the fighting moved into continental Europe, and eventually the Pacific.

Walter focuses on campaigns and events, rather than technical details of ships and weapons. He provides a broad overview of events, touching only briefly on the relative strengths and weaknesses of Royal Navy warships compared to their Italian counterparts. The role of land-based aircraft in the Mediterranean is conspicuously absent, despite their importance to the overall campaign. Nor does Walter devote much space to major actions in the Eastern Mediterranean whose ports and harbors were critical to the region.

Those looking for a general reference to the Second World War in the Mediterranean will find Walter's book extremely useful, whether they are familiar with the conflict or not. While he does not discuss any single operation or battle in extensive depth, he does mention most, if not all the major battles and operations that occurred there. His work is thoroughly referenced with a variety of both primary and secondary sources. Furthermore, he includes three separate indexes, for people, ships, and operations in the region, allowing readers to find information about any specific ships, events, or people discussed. The author puts all the major events and people into context and explains how various actions or inactions played out during the war.

Walter's book offers readers a general introduction to the Second World War in the Mediterranean and a solid basis for further examination of the war on a regional or international scale.

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Michael G. Welham. *Combat Divers: An Illustrated History of Special Forces Divers*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, www.ospreypublishing.com, 2023. 304 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index, US \$40.00, UK £35.00, CDN \$53.00, hardback; ISBN 978-1-4728-5600-5. (E-book available.)

Military combat divers put the special in special forces. Subject to rigorous selection and training, the people choosing this vocation are among the most

highly specialized elites attached to navies and armed forces. In fact, their numbers appear to be growing, as many countries—powerful, big, medium, and small—see utility in maintaining these types of forces for specific roles in and from the sea. Combat divers arguably represent a fraternity within a larger international community of special operations forces. That, at least, is the main message that Michael Welham, a former Royal Marines Commando and diving specialist, conveys in this lavishly illustrated book describing the military trade, the people who become combat divers, and some of their organization, equipment, and techniques so far as operational security allows.

The book is divided into nineteen chapters. The first four chapters detail the history of “frogmen” from the early days of the Second World War to the Cold War. The Italians were the early innovators, demonstrated by daring attacks by swimmers and chariots on British warships in naval anchorages at Alexandria and Gibraltar. They even cut a hole in an interned ship in Spanish waters to use as a base from which to operate. The British, relative latecomers, caught up with special wetsuits, canoes, human torpedoes, X-craft midget submarines, and combined operations pilotage parties. Americans used specialized diving units for clearance, ordnance disposal, and beach reconnaissance in the Pacific during the Second World, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The much-revered SEAL (Sea Air Land) teams were first formed in 1962 at the direction of President John F. Kennedy for covert operations, nominally under the navy, and were used extensively in Vietnam riverine operations. The fifth chapter deals with Soviet/Russian covert incursions into Sweden, Norway, and Finland and the Scandinavian response in the growth of special forces to counter these attacks. The sixth chapter, among the meatiest in the book, gives detailed overviews of special forces diver units across many countries, starting with the United States and moving all the way to Palestinian diving units used against Israel. Welham canvassed individual countries and armed forces about their capabilities and organization in this field, and some were remarkably forthright in describing what they do and how they do it (Philippines especially), including providing the photographs. Australia and the United Kingdom units are well documented, as well as France’s Commando Hubert, Denmark’s Frømandskorpset (frogmen corps), Germany’s Kommando Spezialkräfte Marine (KSM), and Russia’s Spetsnaz, less closely associated with that country’s naval infantry. The seventh chapter is devoted to profiles on female combat divers in several armed forces while the next chapter covers special forces diver selection and training in many of the countries mentioned in Chapter 6, only with a closer targeted focus.

The next eight chapters deal with the means of delivery, contemporary roles, and the specific equipment used by combat divers. Due to distances and equipment loads, specialized vehicles have been developed that carry divers

and can be launched from the decks of submarines, or put into airplanes and/or dropped from helicopters. Mini-submarines have also been tried with various degrees of success, though admittedly, they are expensive when manufactured in such small numbers and limited in capability. Several countries, including China, Russia, and the United States, have tracked vehicles that can crawl along the seabed and recovery vehicles for deep sea rescues from submarines. Chapter 16 looks at the use of mammals, such as dolphins, sea lions, and whales, known for their diving abilities, ability to locate objects underwater, and trainability to work alongside human divers in military endeavours. These sea creatures still outperform humans and their equipment by virtue of living in the sea and being adapted to great depths (dolphins and whales do not get bends).

The last three chapters move from the present to the future, examining remote autonomous underwater vehicles, advances in new equipment and breathing apparatus, and the use of diver special forces in sabotage and disruption operations far below the surface; for example, the rupture of a Russian pipeline in the Baltic Sea during the current war (special operation) between Russian and Ukraine. Combat diver units definitely have a future as a specialized capability sought by many armed forces and special forces.

While the text is a little uneven in parts and must fill gaps left by the non-availability of information, the real treasures of the book are the photographs, mostly in colour, depicting the day-to-day activities of combat divers, usually in action or training. These are printed on glossy paper and give full effect. The text does not provide references, but a list of further reading and bibliography appears at the end. In parts of the discussion, Welham draws upon his own experiences in the Royal Marine Commandos and subsequently in the private sector working oil rigs. *Combat divers* is recommended for readers interested in special operations forces in the maritime context, the diving community, and those interested in military elites within contemporary armed forces.

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Rif Winfield, John Tredrea, Enrique Garcia-Torralla Perez, and Manuel Blasco Felip. *Spanish Warships in the Age of Sail, 1700-1860: Design, Construction, Careers and Fates*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, www.usni.org, 2023. 464 pp., illustrations, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. US \$100.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-52679-078-1.

Previous volumes in this impressive series have covered the British, French, Dutch and Russian navies during the age of sail. This book documents the