

and development of these devices. The remarkably successful British team of inventors were mostly independent contractors, some of whom profited financially from their inventions during the nation's war effort through two wars. In addition, there is a chapter titled "Prima Donnas, Crackpots and Misfits," where the author discusses the contribution of "a whole host of unusual characters who would not have fitted into a purely military background". . . but "were engaging able people" (146).

This highly focused work suffers from several flaws. The author often introduces or uses technical jargon before giving its definition, which usually occurs later in the segment, sometimes in subsequent chapters or not at all. There are also photos or lists of model upgrades with little or no information about them. Among the abundant illustrations, those dealing with technical items are of marginal quality, others are difficult to read and follow, while some do not appear near the text that refers to them. Still, there is much to be learned about this important topic dealing with the history of defense issues related to submarine warfare. As stated in the first page of the book's introduction: "It is not meant to be an exhaustive account of every weapon, but rather an explanation of some of the weapons, linked to the stories of some of the men who invented them." With that in mind, *Depth Charge* is a good literary gateway for delving deeper into this often-arcane maritime history topic.

Louis Arthur Norton
West Simsbury, Connecticut

David Hobbs. *Taranto: And Naval Air Warfare in the Mediterranean, 1940-1945*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Seaforth Publishing, www.seaforthpublishing.com, 2020. xiv+440 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, appendices, bibliography, index.

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David Hobbs is a man on a mission. After a career in the Royal Navy and a decade serving as the curator of the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) Museum at RNAS Yeovilton, he has dedicated himself to chronicling the history of British naval air operations in a series of works. Starting with a book on the British Pacific Fleet (*The British Pacific Fleet*, 2011), he went on to write one about the post-war history of the FAA (*The British Carrier Strike Fleet After 1945*, 2015) before going back to the origins of British naval aviation in the First World War (*The Royal Navy's Air Service in the Great War*, 2017), after which he recounted the events of the interwar era and the early months of the Second World War through the experiences of an FAA pilot (*The Dawn of Carrier Strike, and the World of Lieutenant W P Lucy*, 2019).

Hobbs' latest volume represents a continuation of this effort, focusing on FAA's role in the Mediterranean theatre during the conflict. Readers of his previous books will find much that is familiar in it, as he provides another detailed operational history supplemented with a considerable selection of photographs, most of which are from the author's personal collection. Just as familiar is his admiration for the men who served in the FAA, as well as his lament for the opportunities lost because of prewar decisions that handicapped the senior service's aeronautical capabilities.

This comes across in his description of the origins of Operation Judgment, the airstrike against the Italian battleships anchored in Taranto harbour. Hobbs tracks its genesis to the efforts to perfect airplane-deployed torpedoes in the First World War, one that, but for the Armistice, would have culminated in an airborne attack on the German High

Seas Fleet at Kiel. The potential of the carrier-borne torpedo strike remained at the forefront of FAA planning during the interwar period and attempts by the Royal Air Force to attack German warships at the start of the Second World War provided more lessons that would prove valuable. Hobbs sees the attack on the French battleship *Richelieu* at Dakar on 8 July 1940 by torpedo-armed Swordfish biplanes as exerting the single greatest influence on Taranto strike planning, as it demonstrated the need for lower torpedo depth and speed settings than were used with torpedo attacks at sea.

When the Taranto attack was launched three months later, it was as part of Operation MB 8, a series of naval deployments taking place simultaneously throughout the Mediterranean. That the airstrike stands out is a testament to the operation's success, with three battleships disabled and three other warships damaged. While acknowledging that the number of planes – amounting to fifteen percent of the frontline Swordfish force in the entire Royal Navy – committed to the strike represented a significant allocation of force, Hobbs is nevertheless critical about the use of just one of the three aircraft carriers available in the region for the attack. For him, the failure to employ *Eagle* and *Ark Royal* was a missed opportunity that reflected the outdated thinking of Andrew Cunningham, the commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, who until that point viewed planes as adjuncts to the battle fleet rather than a powerful weapon in their own right.

The success of the Taranto attack changed this. By this point in the war, the Royal Navy was employing their aircraft carriers in the region on a variety of missions, from airstrikes on targets in Italy to ferrying aircraft to Malta. Their utility in these roles was constrained by several factors, from the

small size of their deck elevators to the limited capabilities of the navy's carrier-capable aircraft. Fortunately for the FAA, the poor coordination between the Italian Navy and its air force (which often failed to provide air cover for naval units engaged with British forces) usually ensured that the FAA's inferior planes enjoyed air superiority by default.

By the end of 1942, the FAA was given a new mission: supporting the amphibious landings in North Africa. Despite the formidable learning curve they faced, the FAA soon established itself in the role that would increasingly characterize its operations over its final two years of activity in the region, thanks to the use of new aircraft models (particularly American-built planes that were designed for carrier use) and the influx of smaller escort carriers. Above all else, though, it was a testament to the adaptability of the men of the FAA, for whom this was merely another of the challenges they overcame in order to win their war.

It is this empathy for the men of the FAA which is the real hallmark of Hobbs' work. His book is as much a tribute to them as it is a history of FAA activities in the Mediterranean. This compliments rather than detracts from his coverage of British naval air operations, as it provides the emotion underlying his solid and well-researched study. Not only has Hobbs advanced his efforts to chronicle the history of the Royal Navy's air arm one step closer to completion, he has provided an essential work for anyone interested in the naval air war in the Mediterranean and naval operations in the theatre more generally.

Mark Klobas
Phoenix, Arizona

Richard J. King. *Ahab's Rolling Sea: A Natural History of Moby Dick*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, www.