



Newsletter Vol. IV, No. 4, Autumn 2023

The USS Midway Museum Welcomes Symposium '24



Just like last year's gathering, which featured keynote speaker Norman Friedman, scheduled to appear in 2024 will be presenters from the Naval War College, the Navy History and Heritage Command, the National War College, King's College, London, and much more covering a constellation of topics celebrating naval history and our shared interest in conflicts at sea. Prior to Saturday's and Sunday's programming, the WNHA will host a mixer for all attendees on the Midway's fantail starting a 6 pm Friday. See our special announcement for details!

The WNHA's social highlight of the year is our annual symposium, to be hosted for the fifth time by the USS Midway Museum this coming February. Please join us for our fantail social mixer Friday evening on the 16th, and enjoy our programming on Saturday and Sunday, the 17th and 18th.. As in prior years, paid members attend free and it's first come first serve so send your 2024 dues now. See details below.



Book Review: *Mediterranean Naval Battles that Changed the World* by Quentin Russell, reviewed by John Burt

The Mediterranean has been a focal point of civilizations – and their conflicts – for centuries. Empires grew, fell and others replaced them. As such, many of the world’s most important battles took place in and around the Med. Which brings us to Quentin Russell’s book, *Mediterranean Naval Battles that Changed the World*. (Pen & Sword, 2021.) He takes a close look at six seminal battles that took place there.

The battles he discusses are Salamis (480 BC), Actium (31 BC), Lepanto (1571), Aboukir Bay (1798), Navarino (1827) and Cape Matapan and the battle for Malta (1940-42.) He starts with a nice overview of the period he is covering in his Introduction, where he lays out why he chose the battles he did for his “changed the world” nomination. In all cases, with the possible exception of the last, his reasoning holds. For example, Actium saw Augustus Caesar “change” the Roman Republic to Empire. The battle for Malta certainly changed World War II, but I would say the Eastern Front did more to “change the world” than the naval battles in the Med.

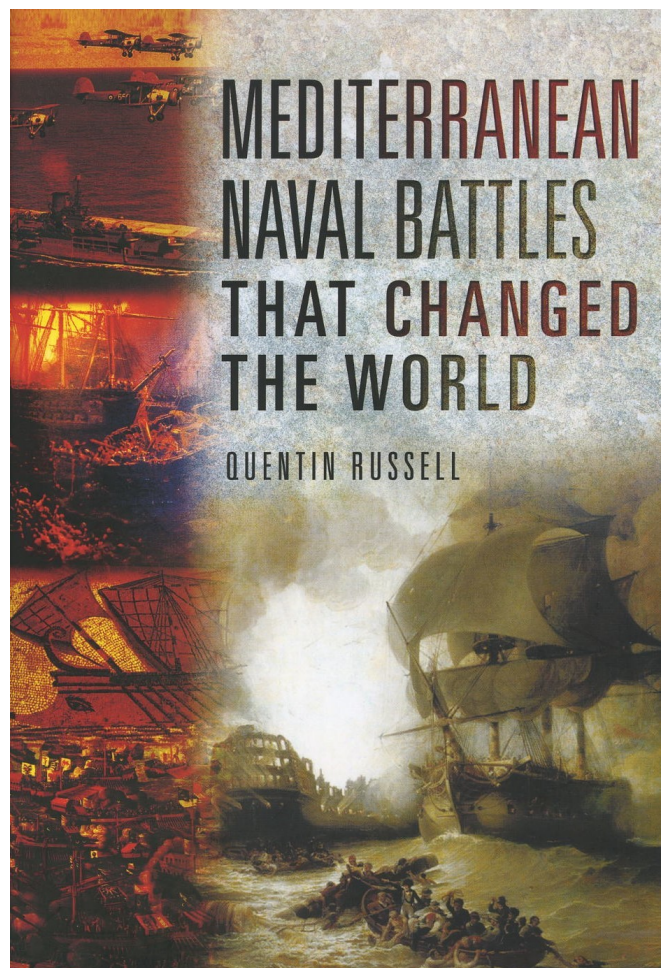
Russell follows his introduction with a very succinct overview of naval warfare in the Med. Following that he analyzes each of the individual battles in their own separate chapter.

In each he discusses the regional situation, the forces involved and then the details of the battles. I found his descriptions quite readable and the details engaging. For example, he noted that at Aboukir Bay, Napoleon faulted the French commander de Brueys for anchoring, when it was his orders that de Brueys was obeying in protecting the transports. He also adds some of the myths and legends that grew up around the battles: did Ali Pasha at Lepanto, die by his own hand, or hacked to death by the Spaniards in the melee. The inclusion of such tales adds to the color of the story, something I found enhanced the narrative.

Of the six battles, as noted above, I only found fault with the last. Cape Matapan was certainly a major victory for the British and led to a significant change in how Italy’s *Regia Marina* fought the rest of the war. But the chapter is more on the whole Mediterranean campaign rather than a single battle. Other WWII battles - the air raid on Taranto that took half

of the Italian battleships out of service (one never returning), or the raid on Alexandria by Italy’s Decima MAS frogmen which took out Britain’s only battleships in the Eastern Med, or the battle surround Operation Pedestal’s convoy– certainly rank with Cape Matapan as noteworthy battles. I was impressed, though with Russell’s even-handed discussion of the Med battles at that time. Many have shrugged off Italy’s performance during the conflict, but newer historians, Italians among them, are revisiting the conflict and finding quality.

Russell has added short but complete bibliographies of each battle for readers to look forward into them. Overall, I enjoyed the book and can recommend it to any naval reader.



Book review: *Abandon Ship* by Paul Brown, reviewed by John Burt

It's a given fact that the "real" story behind conflicts – before, during and immediately after – generally takes years to be revealed. Things are still being declassified from the Vietnam War, for instance. Another conflict that is seeing a lot of new information declassified is the Falklands War (or the Malvinas War, for South American readers) And with new information comes new books. One of the most interesting is Paul Brown's *Abandon Ship: The Real Story of the Sinkings in the Falklands War* (Osprey, 2021)

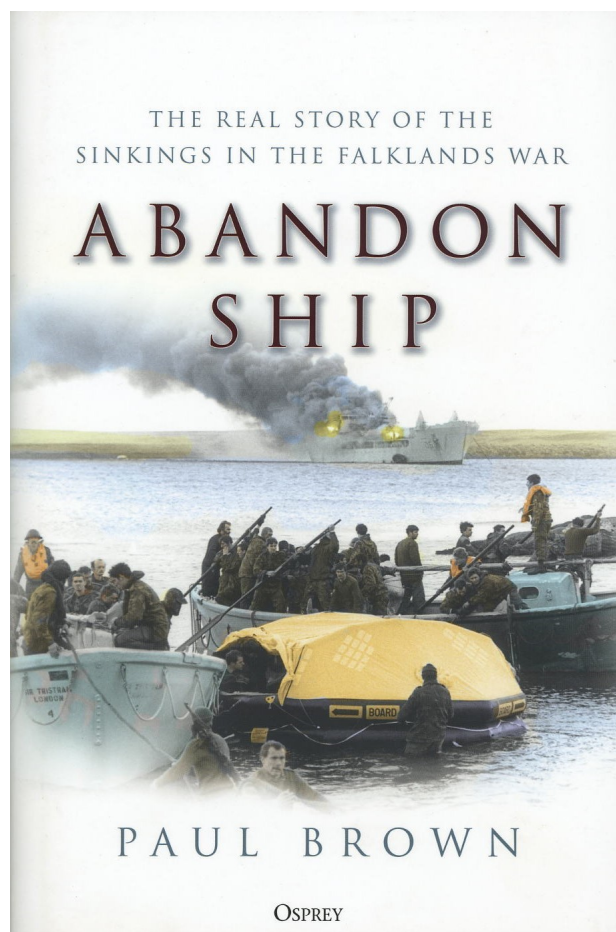
Brown delves into each individual sinking of the six British and one Argentinian ship sunk during the naval war for the islands, starting with the General Belgrano and ending with the Sir Galahad. He bookends the tales with a discussion of the approach to the war and Lessons learned chapters. Each chapter covers the ships, weaponry, tasks at the time before stepping through the sequence of events that lead to the sinking and its aftermath. This is followed by a discussion of the enquiry reports on the sinkings.

There is a lot of detail in the chapters, some of which are stunning. The discussion on the sinking of the Belgrano by HMS Conqueror had been controversial because it occurred outside the British Exclusion Zone. It entailed a discussion between the forces on hand and the War Cabinet authorities 7,100 nautical miles away in London; it brought to mind all the problems related to "rules of engagement" that can put forces engaged in peril because of such discussions. I was also surprised to learn that during the attack on HMS Sheffield, the Anti-Air Warfare (AAW) officer on HMS Glasgow, one of the ships on point with the Sheffield, was arguing with the AAW Commander on HMS Invincible (20 nautical miles away) about whether there was, in fact an air raid in progress. And despite Glasgow's warning, the Combat center on Sheffield was essentially vacant – seemingly not taking the situation seriously enough. You also find out that the anti-air weaponry on these ships was...touchy. Several times the weapons either didn't fire, or otherwise function at the worst possible time.

The reports on the sinking are pretty harsh on the commanders and crews of the lost ships, but the goal of the reports is to make things better, so they are intended to be that way. Most found some fault with what happened on the ship, but Brown, to his credit, makes sure that the stories of heroic acts on the damaged ships is highlighted. The main exception to

these individual findings was the loss of the Sir Galahad (and needless loss of life among the Welsh Guards) which noted the ship should have never been sent unsupported and undefended into an area the Argentinians could reach.

Brown has crafted a superb treatise on naval warfare, both from the micro and macro levels. This one is highly recommended.



2024 WNHA membership is due now.

The Western Naval History Association is a non-profit association which promotes the study of naval history on all levels. Our major annual activity is our Symposium *Expanding Naval History*. We support this through membership dues. The dues this year are \$60. Please remit via Paypal to info@wnha.net or by check payable to WNHA c/o V. O'Hara 631 E J St, Chula Vista, CA 91910.

Thank you for your support!

Commandos at Castelorizzo

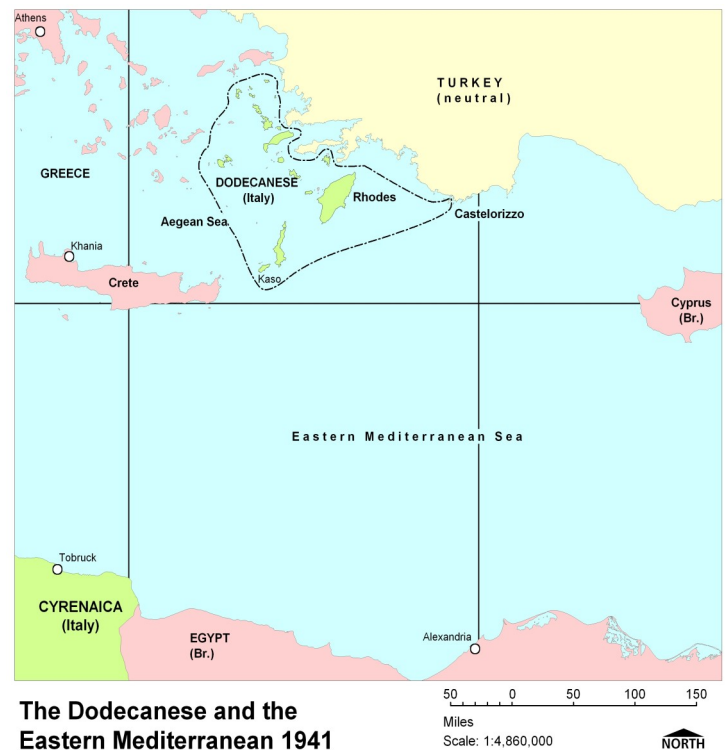
Vincent P. O'Hara

The modern concept of commando operations was born during the Second World War and today is firmly established; the U.S. military has the Delta Force and Seals, and most nations maintain one or more Special Forces units. There is a perception that commandos are super-soldiers who succeed in all but the rarest of situations. The word popularly evokes the image of a widely spaced file of soliders, faces darkened, blackclad, clutching tommy guns or gurka knives, filtering through enemy lines. However, the evolution of the commando concept saw many blotched operations and defeats. It is from these that modern doctrine has developed. One of the most instructive of the early fiascos occurred in February 1941 when British commandos attacked Castelorizzo, an isolated Italian island off the Turkish coast. What followed was a textbook case of how not to conduct commando operations; it demonstrated that elite self-contained fighting units, if used carelessly, could easily be defeated even by second-line enemy formations.

Before World War Two most nations shunned irregular warfare as exotic and incompatible with their military codes of honor. During the 1940 Norwegian campaign, however Great Britain developed specialized forces to practice what Great Britain's Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, graphically described as a "butcher and bolt" policy. As one of the pioneers of commando operations theorized, special units practicing "guerrilla warfare" could destroy the enemy's "brains," that is the commanders and headquarters, from within, as well as his supplies and means of communication." After the fall of France confronted Great Britain with enemy strength it could not hope to match through conventional means, the commando concept—with its promise of big results from small investments—gained even more appeal.

Churchill was eager to use his new special forces in the Mediterranean where, as one historian put it, he saw an opportunity to win early victories to encourage an embattled British nation. Since October 1940 he had been championing an operation dubbed Workshop to capture the small Italian island of Pantelleria, which lay midway in the Sicilian Channel be-

tween Tunisia's Cape Bon and Sicily's western nose. The prime minister felt that "if successful, [Workshop] would be electrifying." Admiral A. B. C. Cunningham, commander of Britain's Mediterranean Fleet, did not share Churchill's enthusiasm. His forces could barely keep Malta provisioned and he protested that adding Pantelleria to his burdens would exceed his capabilities. Instead Cunningham had his eyes on the Italian Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea off the Turkish coast. It appeared that Churchill, not Cunningham, would get his way, but when German aircraft appeared over Malta in January 1941 the British Chiefs of Staff vetoed the Pantelleria venture and authorized Cunningham's plan shortly thereafter.



The force immediately available to Cunningham was 50 Middle East Commando—which he described as "400 thugs" he could use to make at start in "biting off the lesser isles" in the Aegean. It was, in fact, a volunteer, company-sized unit formed in July 1940. The Middle Eastern Headquarters had cancelled the commando's first operation, a raid on an Italian seaplane base, at the last moment due to Italy's declaration of war against Greece in October 1940. Instead 50 Commando relocated to Crete where it cooled its heels and practiced amphibious operations using expedients like orchard ladders for ship-to-boat transfers. Here it was readily available for Aegean operations.

Admiral Cunningham decided 50 ME Com-mando should capture Kasos, the island guarding the Dodecanese's western approach, in order to secure the supply route to Greece which ran through the channel between Kasos and Crete. On the night of January 16/17 a section of troopers boarded the old sloop HMS *Derby* to scout the defenses. The ship had reached its

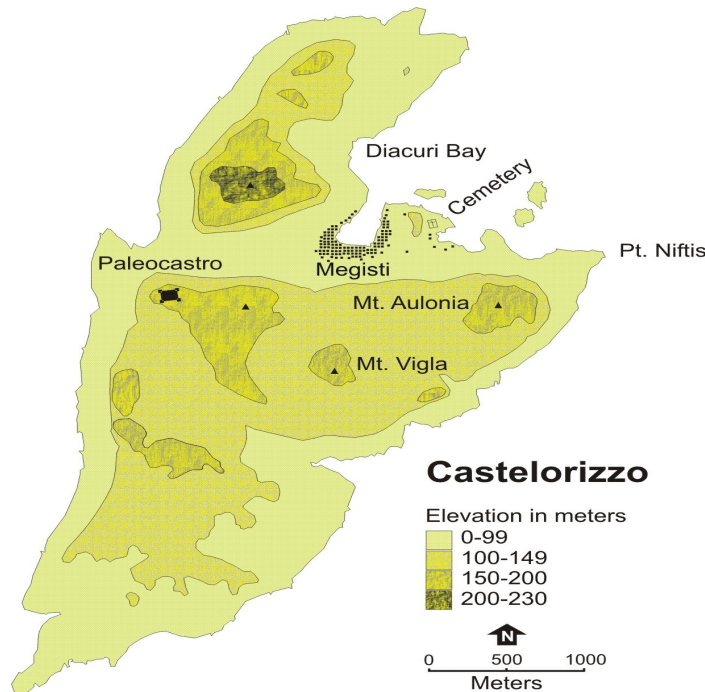
clouds rolled away and there was a large gun emplacement waiting for the unwary. The Royal Italian flag was hoisted by the *Derby* as a *ruse de guerre* and we sailed away to Crete."

Cunningham responded to these setbacks by instead deciding to attack Castelorizzo, home to two thousand Greek civilians and a minuscule Italian garrison. This rocky, three-square-mile island lay three miles off the Turkish coast, 80 miles east of Rhodes and 180 miles west of Cyprus. Cunningham calculated it could serve as a forward motor-torpedo boat base for the Rhodes operation, but its real attractions seemed to be its isolation and a weak garrison. In fact, it was these qualities that made it an unsuitable target. Whereas possession of Kasos would have provided extra security to important shipping lanes and threatened Italy's whole position in the Dodecanese, capturing Castelorizzo did nothing to advance the British position or harm Italy's.

Confident that his "thugs" would have no problem, Cunningham ordered the landing to take place in a few days and placed the operation into the overworked hands of the 3rd Cruiser Squadron's Rear Admiral Edward de Faye Renouf. The admiral had had an exciting war to date; a few weeks before his flagship had been sunk—the fourth time he had come under enemy attack. He was also sick, suffering from an acute stomach ailment. Cunningham wrote, "he undoubtedly has too much imagination, but he has brains and his nerve has not suffered."

Renouf needed brains and imagination because he had to develop his plan based upon hearsay from Air France, which had used Castelorizzo's harbor as a seaplane base, one Italian chart and some picture post-cards. He decided to use destroyers escorted by his cruiser squadron to deliver the Commando. The troops would capture the island while the warships cleared the area to avoid air attack. The next night a company of regular infantry would relieve the commandos and form Castelorizzo's permanent garrison.

On February 23 the destroyers HMS *Hereward* and *Decoy* put into Suda Bay. They embarked 50 Commando's commander, Lt-Colonel Peter Symons, and his 200 men and set sail escorted by the cruisers *Gloucester* and *Bonaventure*, and the gunboat *Ladybird*. The squadron arrived off Castelorizzo before dawn on the 25th. The destroyers each carried five whalers with a capacity of twenty men each, which



destination when suddenly orders arrived straight from London canceling the operation. Churchill had decided that the capture of Rhodes was urgent and had so ordered. Three full commandos of 500 men each had embarked on landing ships and set sail from Britain on the twelve thousand mile voyage to the Eastern Mediterranean via the Cape of Good Hope and the Red Sea.

When Cunningham protested the delay to his offensive plans this wait would entail, he received permission to have another crack at Kasos as long as it did not interfere with the main affair. Elements of 50 ME Commando set forth aboard *Derby* once again to scout the island. However, the minesweeper dropped them off on the wrong beach. Unable to find the guides they expected, they rowed back to the ship, where one participant remembered:

"The captain of HMS *Derby* had a very unpleasant bull terrier which bit me in the backside and started to bark its head off just as Commander Nicholl was returning from a reconnaissance. The

forced the troops to land in two waves.

Several boats in the first wave missed the landing point and entered the narrow harbor where the surprised garrison greeted them with gunfire. This reception forced a hasty retreat back to the destroyers. The rest made it ashore, however. They engaged an Italian patrol with Bren guns and advanced into the town. The garrison consisted of less than fifty men, a mixed bag of customs guards, police, marines, and a few airmen and soldiers. The Italians retreated to Fort Paleocastro, an old crusader castle perched six-hundred feet above the harbor, and radioed for help while the rest of the commando came ashore.

At dawn *Decoy* and *Hereward* withdrew—their orders required them to be well clear of the island by daylight—but *Ladybird* nosed into Megisti Harbor, the island's only port, and landed twenty-four Royal Navy marines. The old gunboat's shallow draft presented no problems in the narrow harbor and her two 6-inch guns provided powerful fire support for the commandos, lofting 100-pound shells up and into the castle. Most critically, however, the commandos were equipped with just one short-range radio and *Ladybird*'s powerful wireless was to provide the communications link to Cyprus.

The Italian headquarters on Rhodes, meanwhile, reacted energetically to the British attack. Beginning at 8:00 a.m. Savoia 81 bombers, Savoia 79 bombers and Caproni 42 fighters appeared overhead. At 9:50 a.m. an S.81 landed a bomb on *Ladybird*'s 3-inch gun, seriously wounding two men and disabling the weapon. However, this aerial intervention was not enough to offset the British advantage in numbers and the garrison surrendered at 10:00 a.m. after losing a quarter of its strength (six men killed and seven wounded) in the struggle.

At 10:15 a.m., after Symons advised the gunboat of the fort's capture, *Ladybird*'s captain decided to withdraw to Cyprus with the Royal Marines. The situation seemed well in hand, and the cost of staying and being sunk at anchor seemed greater than the risk involved in leaving the island out of touch for fifteen hours until the regular garrison arrived.

Italian aircraft continued to strafe and bomb *Ladybird* as she withdrew, and the captain radioed to Admiral Renouf that, while the operation was a complete success, the company of 'Sherwood Foresters' who were coming in a slow landing ship, should land after dark. Admiral Renouf accepted this recommen-

dation and timed his arrival for 3:00 a.m. on February 26.

The Italian air force harassed the island all day, leaving the commandos unbloodied, but, as the unit's second in command, Major Stephen Rose reported, "with ringing ears and splitting headaches." Nonetheless, the tired troopers, were confident as they posted



Megisti and harbor. The Turkish mainland is visible in the distance.

sentries and turned in to sleep that night. Their optimism proved premature when, at 9:00 p.m., a bright light woke the men quartering in the town. Major Rose remembered:

"On looking through the window toward the open sea we were blinded by a searchlight beam which unmistakably came from a warship . . . two shells had struck the building before we were all clear and several more followed as we leapt down the steps outside and dived for a narrow side street. . . . The noise and blast effect of this point blank range shelling was extremely frightening. . . . We spent the rest of the night expecting a landing and avoiding searchlights by lying behind rocks. It was extremely cold and rain made matters worse."

The searchlights and shells came from the Italian torpedo boats *Lupo* and *Lince* loaded with fifty-two black-shirts of the 201st Battalion and seventeen other soldiers under the personal command of Rear Admiral Luigi Biancheri, a popular and energetic commander who was also an ex-boxing champion. The destroyers *Francesco Crispi* and *Quintino Sella* stood off the island in support. His aircraft had reported the gap in British naval coverage and Biancheri saw an opportunity to mount a reconnaissance in force, hopefully to snatch some prisoners, rescue friendly personnel, and recapture secret codebooks kept in a safe at the municipal palace. As the black-shirts came ashore, the commandos retired east toward the cemetery to protect their embarkation beach near Niftis Point. A crowd of Italians emerged from hiding places within the town and boarded the friendly warships.

Meanwhile, *Hereward*, sailing ahead of Renouf's force received a garbled report from Colonel

to destroyers. He radioed *Hereward* to engage the enemy warships, but the British destroyer had already withdrawn forty miles, steaming to concentrate with *Decoy*. It reversed course upon receiving the admiral's orders but the Italian warships had vanished.

In fact, the Italians knew a British force was approaching. At 2:00 a.m. they finished re-embarking their troops and pushed off for Rhodes.



Men of 50 Commando practice ship to shore movement from HMS *Derby* with an orchard ladder.



Highlands of Castelozorizzo. Mt. Viga is to the left, and the monastery to right is where the Italian prisoners were locked up until liberated by the 13th Company.

Symons that two enemy ships were attacking and possibly landing troops. This news alarmed the admiral. The Foresters were not trained in amphibious operations—even in port it had taken four hours to embark the company. He calculated he had about two hours to get them ashore if he were to have time to load the commandos and be gone before daylight. The sea was rising and the men beginning to suffer from seasickness. Now, there appeared the possibility of a surface action. The admiral decided to play it safe by returning to Alexandria where he could transfer the troops

After a wet and sleepless night the men of Command 50 looked forward to their relief. They had no idea that Admiral Renouf had returned to Alexandria, thus extending their mission by two days; and, with just one radio set with a range of fifty miles, they had no way of finding out. The British troops waited. There were problems with the local Greeks, who began looting the town. The Italian air attacks continued, but with less intensity. Lookouts scanned the horizon. As the sun went down, the disappointment was great, but at least the second night on the island passed quietly.

Meanwhile Italy's Aegean headquarters considered the situation. The first appraisal, communicated to Rome on February 26, was that British naval superiority and the island's insignificance, made an effort to retake Castelozorizzo too risky. Then, reports of Admiral Renouf's ships returning to Alexandria, transformed the situation. Headquarters realized it had time to improvise an operation free from significant air or naval opposition. Accordingly it quickly assembled troops and loaded them aboard Admiral Biancheri's vessels and stepped up aerial reconnaissance to give early warning of any unexpected British moves. The Italian force sailed early on February 27

to arrive at daybreak.

With dawn on the third day, the 27th, Major Rose remembered, “the troops were becoming a little restive and the ‘barrack room lawyers’ were holding forth pessimistic theories.” Food, water, and ammunition were all in short supply. Working parties climbed the mountain to salvage rations from the fort. Then, at 9:00 a.m. a runner breathlessly arrived at the town with news that two warships had been sighted on the other side of the island. Shortly thereafter the vessels rounded the headland. The Italians were back. “This was a most unexpected surprise and caught us quite unprepared with men all over the place—patrols, fatigue parties, men filling water bottles in the town, sentry posts in the town etc.”

Admiral Biancheri’s flotilla included the torpedo boats *Lupo* and *Lince*, the destroyers *Francesco Crispi* and *Quintino Sella* and the motor-torpedo boats, *MAS 541* and *546*. They carried 175 troops of Company 13, IV Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 23 men from an antitank platoon with a pair of 47-mm rifles, 4 communication specialists, and 88 sailors to man the garrison.

A torpedo boat and destroyer entered the harbor at 10:00 a.m. and began landing two platoons while the other torpedo boat disembarked fifty men just north of town. The warships supported the troops with gunfire while aircraft crisscrossed overhead, strafing and peppering British positions with anti-personnel bombs.

The only resistance the commandos offered came from an eight man patrol occupying the town cemetery. They hosed the soldiers coming ashore with their Bren guns and mortally wounded the 13th Company’s commander before falling back. As the commandos gave ground, the Italian occupied the town and began pushing cautiously toward the cemetery. Colonel Symons positioned troops between the cemetery and Niftis Point to protect the re-embarkation beach. A reinforced section held Paleocastro Castle. The majority of the Italian 13th Company, supported by the antitank section and naval gunfire, climbed the steep slope toward the castle and two platoons launched an attack. Despite the position’s strength, the castle fell at 1:45 p.m. after a forty-five minute fight.

As the Italian tricolor replaced the Union Jack over the municipal *Palazzo del governo* the 13th Company reorganized and, at 3:30 p.m. began travers-

ing the high ground toward Niftis Point. *Lupo* ranged offshore, her guns barking in support.

Major Rose later asserted that the Italian troops opposing him were poor soldiers. “They stood on the skyline [of a ridge about a thousand yards in front of the British line] like a lot of tourists, sightseeing. Their advance was very sticky and we heard an N.C.O. . . . [reprimand] one of his men for a lack of determination.” This may have been true as the Italians were garrison troops pressed by need into an offensive role, but if so, it made their swift capture of the castle and subsequent advance all the more remarkable. The bombing, naval gunfire and pressure from the ground troops, including another landing by twenty men directly at Niftis Point, forced Colonel Symons to concentrate his entire force on Aulonia Mountain.

As darkness fell, fire tapered off. The commandos, having lost forty men, having expended most their ammunition, and having little food or water contemplated, with the coming of dawn, surrender or a suicide fight to the finish.

That same morning *Decoy* and *Hero* re-embarked the Foresters and departed Alexandria escorted by the cruisers *Perth* and *Bonaventure*, and the destroyers *Hasty* and *Jaguar*. Admiral Renouf was no longer in command having reported sick and leaving the job to *Bonaventura*’s Captain, H. J. Egerton. After a twelve-hour cruise the flotilla arrived at 11:15 p.m. and, as the two cruisers patrolled around the island, the destroyers gathered off Niftis Point. *Decoy* landed a contingent of Foresters led by their commander, a Major Cooper. Almost immediately they encountered the body of a British soldier lying beside a stone breastwork. Then, two stragglers emerged from hiding and warned that the situation was desperate. Cooper immediately returned to *Decoy*. Meanwhile Symons, seeing that British ships had finally arrived, hastened down a steep footpath, found a boat and reached *Hero*. A hasty radio conference ensued. Cooper wanted to retake the town, but Egerton said he could not linger after daybreak so, faced with the prospect of no naval support, both army commanders agreed to evacuation. The 140 surviving commandos with twelve prisoners descended the narrow trail and, with fifty Foresters, were lifted off the beach with some difficulty. The steadily rising sea forced them to abandon all their gear, including the kitbags the Foresters had just lugged ashore.

There were many warships concentrated in a small area, but surprisingly only one encounter occurred. *Crispi*, *Lince*, and *Lupo* patrolled south of the island, *Stella* to the west and the MAS boats guarded the harbor entrance. During the withdrawal, the large destroyer HMS *Jaguar*, a 2,330 ton vessel, armed with six 4.7-inch guns and five torpedoes, stood in to investigate the port. She spotted shipping and emptied her torpedo tubes into the inner harbor. Her crew reported four explosions, but apparently these came from torpedoes detonating ashore. At the same time *Crispi*, after shelling the British positions, was cruising slowly east, awaiting orders when a lookout reported two large shapes, evaluating one as a cruiser. The captain snapped off two torpedoes, which malfunctioned and ran deep. As *Crispi* turned to disengage *Jaguar* came about and illuminated. *Crispi* opened fire with her main batteries, but her first salvos missed despite the close range and the advantage of surprise. *Jaguar* quickly replied and reported hitting *Crispi* twice, but in fact, she likewise missed. The machine guns on both ships rattled into action. *Crispi*'s gunnery officer felt rounds zipping past just over his head. He dropped to the deck and another burst grazed his back. A 40-mm shell snuffed *Jaguar*'s searchlight and in the darkness *Crispi* broke contact. By the time *Jaguar* fired star shell, the Italian destroyer had vanished, suffering just one man wounded by a small caliber round. *Jaguar* continued south as the evacuation was nearly completed. MAS 546 and *Lince* arrived off the harbor entrance and the MAS boat fired a brace of torpedoes at 3:13 p.m., although it was not clear what its target was.

By 3:00 a.m. all the commandos who had made it to the evacuation point were aboard and the British warships departed for Suda Bay. At least twenty-seven men, however, remained behind. A few made the swim to Turkey, more died in the attempt and the balance became prisoners of war.

Castelorizzo remained in Italian hands for the next two and a half years. This defeat embarrassed the British. For example, London's daily situation report to President Roosevelt, wrapped the withdrawal of the commandos in the guise of a minor naval victory. Churchill wrote a memorandum to the army commander that was more direct: "I am thoroughly mystified about this operation" Cunningham called it "a rotten business that reflected little credit on anyone. . . . These commandos we have out here are on a tommy

gun and knuckle duster basis and apparently can't defend themselves if seriously attacked." After reading Cunningham's report Churchill called for heads to roll. "What disciplinary or other measures are going to be taken on this deplorable piece of mismanagement after we have had eighteen months' experience of war? Cunningham blamed the defeat on Renouf and relieved him for health reasons, complaining that his subordinate had lost his nerve and "cracked."

If Churchill were in search of heads, the one to roll should have been Cunningham's not Renouf's. Cunningham ordered the operation against a secondary objective with hardly any preparation, inadequate support, and little appreciation for the capabilities of the force he was sending into action or what they were likely to face. Cunningham, in fact, fell prey to the most dangerous of all temptations—to use his special forces for the sake of using them. There was no reason the Sherwood Foresters, who demonstrated they could land from destroyers at night, could not have captured the island from so few defenders. On top of that, the enemy enjoyed air superiority, superior communications and intelligence. Under these conditions, the commandos, supposedly elite soldiers, proved no match for only an equal number of second line, garrison troops. Castelorizzo was a road map for defeat and one the British would follow several times before they began to realize true value from their special forces.

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