
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the April meeting of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.

Tonight's speaker is Dr. Robert Ehlers, professor of security studies at Angelo State University and author of *The Mediterranean Air War*. He will be discussing the importance of the Mediterranean theater of operations and will be joined by combat veterans of air units.

Stretching from the Straits of Gibraltar to the shores of the Holy Land, the Mediterranean Sea's importance as a part of a global strategic vision has fluctuated over the millennia. A lucrative trade route for the nations along its periphery, the "Med" was at the center of naval warfare. As trade routes and power structures shifted to north and west Europe, and then to the Atlantic Ocean, dominated by Great Britain and the United States, the Mediterranean basin retained its importance. Particularly with the building of the Suez Canal in the 1860s and Great Britain's control of Egypt and the Canal, the area grew in importance as a vital link to Britain's far eastern colonies. At the dawn of the twentieth century, Great Britain controlled the access and choke points at Gibraltar, Malta, and the Suez Canal. The development of the internal-combustion engine, oil fueled ships, and the discoveries of vast oil deposits in Iraq, Iran, and

Arabia made control of the Mediterranean even more vital to the British Empire. Even as her power weakened with the ravages of the First World War, controlling the Mediterranean weighed heavy on British military planners.

Great Britain's control and strategic objectives for the area ran head long into the dreams of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, who wished to re-create the glory and extent of the Ancient Roman Empire. To the Romans and their Italian descendants the Mediterranean and always been *mare nostrum* (our sea), but how could that be true with the British in control. The Roman Empire controlled the ancient Mediterranean through its capable armies and navies. In the twentieth century Italy hoped to use a third element of air power in a combined force of arms against, Great Britain, his only nemesis. Il Duce's dream had many problems but he believed through diplomacy, opportunism, and luck he would be able to achieve his goals.

Mussolini's Italy, much like Hitler's Germany, suffered from a lack of preparation and raw materials to build the weaponry he needed. Even so, Italy was not lacking in intellectual thought on war making, especially air power. General Giulio Douhet, the 1920's Italian air chief and author of *Command of the Air* (1921), is considered one of the great early air power theorists. Douhet believed that a bomber-based "strategic" air force would make land and sea power obsolete. At the beginning of Italy's war with Great Britain, there were major conflicts within the IAF between the "Douhettani," who believed in a

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

bomber based force and the followers of Amedeo Mecuzzi, who favored fighters, fighter-bombers, and dive bombers. The war in the Mediterranean would be a “triphibious” engagement, with land, sea, and air power all being vitally important, but Italy was never able to overcome its deficiencies. While the individual Italian forces showed themselves to be up to the task, their strategic, logistical, and technological limitations made them seem worse than they actually were.

Germany attempted to prop up their Italian allies by sending military forces and logistical support to prevent the Great Britain and later the United States from gaining a foothold near eastern Europe. However, Hitler’s true objective was the invasion and subjugation of the Soviet Union not the re-creation of the Roman Empire. The Germans shared with their Italian allies bad strategies, limited logistics planning, and a lack of materiel support.

The outcome in the Mediterranean Theater was decided by the nation(s) who could use their combined arms (air, land, and sea power) most effectively. The British were the best prepared for fighting in their “lake” and would likely have defeated the Italians and the Germans with or without the Americans help.

Further Readings:

Robert S. Ehlers Jr., *The Mediterranean Air War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2015).

Barrett Tillman, *The Forgotten Fifteenth* (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2014).

Christopher Rein, *The North African Air Campaign* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2014).

Douglas Poch, *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004).

Williamson Murray, *Strategy for Defeat* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1983).

Ralph Bennett, *Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy* (New York: Wm. Morrow & Co., 1989).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table -
May 19, 2015 – *Women in the Civil War* -
www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com

St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - Apr. 27,
2015 – Patriots of Brooklyn (MN) - 715-386-1268
– rossandhaines@comcast.net

Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium - Apr. 11, 2015
- info@tccwrt.com

Rochester WWII History Round Table –
507-280-9970; www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org
Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000
Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050,
<http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser -
crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717

CAF - Commemorative Air Force -
www.cafmn.org 651-455-6942

Minnesota Air Guard Museum -
www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523

Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org
Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN,
320-564-6644, <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>

Airshow - Eden Prairie - 11/12 July 2015
www.wotn.org 952-746-6100

Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes &
Noble: 22April, 'Lincoln's & America's most
Perilous Year' sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2015

14 May Retrospective: Goals of WW2 Leaders



See our programs on YouTube at <http://youtube.com/ww2hrt>