



## Taranto 1940: A Glorious Episode"

*A J Smithers*

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In the long history of the British Isles few years can stand in comparison with 1940 in terms of unrivalled gloom. The fiasco in Norway, the evacuation of the BEF from Dunkirk, the fall of France and the entry of Italy into the war were hardly offset by the success of the Royal Air Force in the Battle of Britain and the failure of the Italian troops in their attempted invasion of Egypt. Near the end of the year, however, there occurred an event which is remarkable not only for its dramatic effect on the course of the war but for the fact that it has virtually disappeared from public memory. This was the sinking of the better part of the Italian Fleet in Taranto harbour which, at one stroke, gave the Royal Navy control of the Eastern Mediterranean, somewhat ironically referred to by the Italians as Mare Nostrum. Perhaps even more remarkable, as A.J. Smithers describes in this book, enlivened as always and as critics have frequently remarked, by his mordant wit and extraordinary breadth of knowledge, was the means by which this feat was achieved. In November, 1940, the aerial torpedo was in its infancy, while its carrier, the Swordfish, known as the 'Stringbag', looked more like something left over from the previous war. But, flying at night and against all the odds, the pilots and observed achieved their objective and with one mighty stroke totally altered the balance of maritime power in the Mediterranean, at last for the foreseeable future.

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