

**The British Anti-Shipping Campaign in the
Mediterranean 1940-1944: Comparing Methods of
Attack**

Submitted by Richard James Hammond to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Maritime History, August 2011.

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Abstract

From the Italian declaration of war on 10 June 1940 through to the end of December 1944, the British and their allies waged a major campaign against Axis shipping in the Mediterranean. Uniquely for the British, this campaign took the form of a combined arms offensive throughout its conduct, and utilized all four methods of attacking shipping; surface vessels, submarines, aircraft and mine warfare. This thesis approaches the campaign thematically, examining each of the four methods individually.

The priority given to the campaign, the forces and equipment available throughout, the tactics used and their development, the successes achieved in numbers and tonnage of merchant vessels sunk and the losses in numbers and casualties are all considered for each method. By examining these factors and the relevant quantitative data, the efficacy of each form of attack is determined and a final comparison of the four different methods made. The thesis concludes that overall, torpedo aircraft were the most effective method due to their ratio of high success and low number of personnel casualties, despite considerable losses of aircraft. Submarines were also very successful but ultimately more costly. The thesis demonstrates that mine warfare might well have achieved significant results had a greater priority been placed on it and that surface vessels no longer retained the ability to operate successfully for sustained periods in an anti-shipping role unless in an area of aerial and naval superiority.

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