



Air War Malta : June 1940 to November 1942

Jon Sutherland, Diane Canwell

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This is the story of the historic air defense of Malta by the WRAF against the combined attacking forces of the Italian and German air forces. The island was poorly equipped when Italy declared war on Britain in June 1940 and its only defense against air attack at the outset of war were 34 heavy and 8 light antiaircraft guns, one radar set and four Gladiator biplane fighters.

The first air raids came on 11 July and from then on were an almost daily feature of life for the Maltese occupants and the island was in a state of siege. The loss of this strategic point in the central Mediterranean would threaten the major supply routes to the British Army in North Africa and deprive the Royal Navy of a vital base. Although hard-pressed at home and standing alone against Hitler's Europe, every effort was made by Britain's government to get supplies, munitions and replacement aircraft to enable the island to withstand the naval and airborne onslaught. Convoy after convoy attempted to get through, Hurricane and Spitfire fighters were launched from aircraft carriers with only sufficient fuel for a one-way trip to the island. Many did not survive these heroic flights. Many famous British ships were lost due to torpedo and air attack, including the carriers Ark Royal and Eagle and the battleship Barham. The siege was finally raised on 20 November 1942.

This book follows the island's wartime history, describing the heavily outnumbered WRAF defense against the many air-raids and how the small bomber force took the battle to Italian shores. It is a tale of outstanding bravery by the British forces and the Maltese people.

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