Royal Air Force (RAF) despite its equipment would dominate the skies. A war changed the equation, but in the next year, the Germans and Italians engaged in the British operations in Greece, of supply. Regarding the latter, of the use of broken codes does on to do a good job describing the attention to the bombing from Italy (by the U.S., and aspects that will disappoint some, the makes clear how the RAF survived the inferiority until the summer of a fighter aircraft that was equivalent to an effective way of explaining how superior British in serviceability. He also makes accounts, that during the last two air attacks destroyed only to 31 for the RAF. Ehlers aircraft designed as fighters into dive bombers, the outdated and that Allied success was achieved on land, and sea forces. side from criticism. He faults the North Africa, the lack of emphasis in operations, and the Allies’ Cassino and was even more error prone. as, their lack of effort to obtain air. The author opines that the defeat on the part of German air, lack of imagination, ineffective author as command, control, communications, and information. The book contains 405 pages which should have been useful to small to be easily read. Although not discussed—despite a photo capturing the beachheads, attacking invasion Torch and every subsequent landing at least distortions. Ehlers writes that the Fifteenth Air Force managed to get 60 percent of its bombs aimed by visual means within 1,000 feet of the mark, implying this was over a period of time, not explaining that this figure was for just one month (April 1945, the unit’s best monthly record). More precisely, over the last year of the war the Fifteenth’s visual bombing average was 40 percent within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. More significantly, the author mistakenly claims that crews using radar aiming “often outperformed crews using conventional methods” (visual aiming) (p. 364). The airmen used non-visual aiming only when they could not use visual aiming and the accuracy of visual bombing was measured in hundreds of feet while that of radar bombing was measured in miles. But these criticisms are minor compared to the book’s virtues.

On balance, The Mediterranean Air War is a well-documented, detailed, solid study of a heretofore neglected topic in a neglected theater. The author contends that “The war may have been won elsewhere, but the Allies could have lost it here” (p. 4). He concludes that, despite criticism of the Mediterranean Campaign, it was worthwhile as it inflicted more casualties on the Germans than the Allies sustained and because the invasion of Italy secured the Foggia complex which permitted the Allies to use strategic bombers against targets that were out of range of British-based bombers. In addition the Mediterranean Campaign diverted German forces from other areas, sped the Soviet advance on the Eastern Front, and shortened the war. Air power was significant in winning this war. Ehlers is to be commended for this valuable contribution.

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Scholars have devoted considerable attention to World War II, yet few writers provide a comprehensive, straight-forward theory that explains the Allied victory. In his book How the War was Won, Phillips Payson O’Brien, Director of the Scottish Centre for War Studies at the University of Glasgow, argues that the air-sea campaign determined the outcome of the Second World War. With the exception of the Soviet Union, all the major powers devoted the majority of their industrial strength to producing airplanes, naval transports, and warships. The British and Americans produced more and better air and sea units but they also developed, over time, a coherent and effective doctrine for employing them. The Allies in turn crushed Axis transportation systems, demolished vital industries, and immobilized opposing ground forces. In the end, O’Brien argues, the Allies prevailed by paralyzing the Axis via overwhelming air and sea power.

Impressively researched and well-written, How the War was Won provides rich insights into the nature of World War II. O’Brien expertly describes and analyzes a complex series of inter-related research, production, and deployment systems
to show how the Allies won the air-sea war. In addition to out-producing their adversaries, Britain and the United States developed vastly superior training and maintenance practices that significantly amplified the superiority of their navies and air forces. Decisively defeated in the air-sea war, Germany and Japan suffered appalling losses of equipment in the pre-production, production, and deployment phases of the conflict. They could not move raw materials, fuel, or finished equipment through the space they controlled. The sum of their non-combat losses vastly exceeded the damage suffered during active combat. Overall, air and sea forces, not ground units, decided World War II. A broader acceptance of this fact among Allied leaders would have shortened the conflict, and prevented costly strategic errors such as the re-conquest of the Philippines.

Specialists may take issue with certain parts of O'Brien's book. While praising U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's determination to produce an enormous number of aircraft, for example, the author describes U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall as "the least important and effective" senior U.S. military leader of World War II (p.150). O'Brien fails to recognize Marshall's role, as global commander of all U.S. Army ground and air forces, in building the supply, training, and maintenance system necessary to operationalize those aircraft. Roosevelt easily talked about the airplane numbers with advisors and journalists; Marshall had the tough job of building a balanced, multi-dimensional force necessary to bring those aircraft and related ground units to bear on the adversary.

This issue, ultimately, concerns O'Brien's larger, more provocative conclusion: Allied air and sea power decided the war. From the beginning, the author explicitly dismisses ground combat as non-essential to understanding the Allied victory, thereby marginalizing the contribution of the Soviet Union. The Red Army plays a small role in O'Brien's history of World War II, a fact that will excite some historians.

Soviet ground forces, O'Brien explains, encountered success only after the German air force abandoned the Eastern Front to contest Allied bombers over central Europe. The air war, moreover, did not hinge on individual heroism or sacrifice. It was a contest of research, development, production, and deployment. The author therefore dismisses the experiences of individual service members as "not important in understanding victory and defeat" in World War II (p.16). O'Brien's account is one of graphs and tables, mechanical innovation, and production schedules.

None of this detracts from the historiographic significance of the book. In fact, the author's confidence and clarity heighten its value. Teachers will regret that How the War was Won is too long for the classroom. They will likely remain content with Richard Overy's classic Why the Allies Won (1995). Nevertheless, scholars and students will be discussing the O'Brien thesis for years to come—and for this reason all readers interested in World War II should add the book to their personal libraries.

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