



Fortress Islands Malta: Defence & Re-Supply During the Siege

Peter Jacobs

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The introduction of Italy into the Second World War on 10 June 1940 signalled the start of the siege of Malta, and for the next two and a half years the Axis powers did all they could to batter the small island into submission. Malta's defences were initially verging on non-existent but the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, could not give up on the island. Lying at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, where the supply route between Italy and the Axis armies in Libya crossed the Allied sea route between Gibraltar and Alexandria, almost exactly at its mid-point, Malta was strategically too important and held the key to the door of the desert war being fought in North Africa.

If Malta could be held then it would allow British forces to maintain an offensive capability in the Mediterranean and prevent Axis supplies from reaching North Africa. But everything needed to fight a campaign – people, food, fuel, ammunition, medical stores, aircraft and spares – would have to be delivered to Malta in sufficient numbers and on a regular basis. It would take a monumental air and maritime effort just to survive, let alone hit back, and to manage both would require those in command to carefully balance Malta's precious and limited resources. Otherwise, it meant surrender and who knows what the outcome of the Second World War might have been had the island fallen.

Here, the accomplished military author Peter Jacobs tells the extraordinary story of the heroic defence and re-supply of the Fortress Island of Malta during the longest siege in British history.

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