Mediterranean Beachheads . . .

SICILY-SALERNO-ANZIO—(Vol IX,
History of United States Naval Op-
erations in World War II, RA
S. E. Morison; Little, Brown & Co.,
Boston 1954; 413 pages, maps, pho-
tographs, index. $6.00

Another volume of Samuel Eliot
Morison’s superb History of United
States Naval operations in World
War II has appeared, and will prove
of special interest to Marines be-
cause it deals, from start to finish,
with major World War II amphi-
bious operations in the Mediterranean,
in which our Corps did not partici-
(c) pate significantly. Thus, Sicily-
Salerno-Anzio opens new horizons
and shows us both the mistakes and
the differing methods of parvum am-
phibians in a theater remote from
the great arena of the Pacific.

Few titles have so completely
summed up the contents of a book.
Sicily-Salerno-Anzio describes the
planning and execution of the land-
ings on Sicily, at Salerno and at
Anzio. In so doing, it breaks much
new ground, for the official histories
of Mediterranean operations are
mainly still to be published. For the
amphibious student, these early
landings in the European Theater
are of key significance, since they
forged (and still greatly influence)
the so-called “European” amphibious
outlook in the US forces, and cer-
tainly the amphibious methods and
philosophy of the British. The doc-
tines, organization and pattern of
Normandy found their origins in the
Mediterranean.

The characteristic features of
these assaults, as described by Adm
Morison, can be briefly listed:

I) Tri-elementalization of com-
mand (the so-called “Command
Trinity” of Navy, Army and Air
Force), though with an occasional
nodding concession to the US in-
clination toward unified command.

(2) Almost morbid insistence on
surprise (cost what it might in terms
of landing snafu, impaired fire sup-
port) and blackface get-up for the
participants.

(3) Shore-to-shore operations, sup-
ported almost entirely (when sup-
ported at all) by shore-based air.

(4) A remarkable degree of im-
provisation and experimentation,
often extending to Rube Goldberg
extremes, but nevertheless quite as
praiseworthy as noteworthy.

To this reviewer, it seemed, Sicily-
Salerno-Anzio developed 3 (possibly
4) major themes. The first theme
was the contumacious, intransigent
separation of the Allied Air Forces
(both AAF and RAF) from all land
and naval operations in the Med-
terranean—an unwillingness to play,
which undoubtedly sent many an
Allied soldier and sailor to his death.

As Morison, one of the top living
US historians, bluntly relates, “. . .
the real reason that the Allied Air
Forces refused to co-operate was the
current doctrine of their leaders that
they should not co-operate; they did
not wish to support ground or naval
forces at a beachhead. The top air
commanders of both countries were
trying to prove that air power, alone
and unco-ordinated, could win the
war. They almost proved the op-
posite.”

The second theme which Morison
evokes is the decisive role played by
ships’ gunfire in all three landings.

It is not too much to say (and Mor-
son says it, as the top commanders
and many participants did at the
time) that naval gunfire support
saved key Sicilian landings from
fiasco, and prevented both Salerno
and Anzio from crashing down in
bloody disaster. We in the Pacific
who saw gunfire support brought to
virtuosity by 1944-45 can nothing
less marvel and profit at its feats in
the Med. The great battles between
Kesselring’s panzer divisions, and the
light cruisers and destroyers of the
Eighth Fleet at Gela and Salerno
should be illustrous in American
amphibious annals.

The third theme of Sicily-Salerno-
Anzio is one of amphibious innova-
tion. Never was such a campaign
for novelties: the first AGC; first use
of bombardment rockets and roke-
craft; first high-performance (VOF)
air spotters; first periscope photo-
tography of amphibious objectives
and so on. Many things one late
took for granted were sired in the
Mediterranean.

What may perhaps be considered
the last main thesis of this history i
the sad roll of mistakes and might
have-beens. How we failed to seize
Rome by a coup-de-main; how Ke-
selring, the old pro, time and age
exuded (in his memoirs) we repeatedly failed to
realize and to exploit our command of the sea and our ultimate
command of the air; and how we
blundered into bloody Anzio with
forces entirely inadequate for their
tasks.

From all this, it should be clear
that Sicily-Salerno-Anzio is a chal-
lenging, important, most readable
piece of amphibious history. The

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book, however, is not wholly without defects. The only really serious of these is what at times seems a rather boy-scoutish attitude in dealing with tactical operations ashore and with the landing forces in general. This is perhaps natural in a blue-water book written from the viewpoint, all said and done, of the sailor. One would wish, though, that Adm Morison had sought the full-time counsel of a Marine adviser or some other highly qualified am
plious professional to assist him full time in the same way as Capt James C. Shaw USN, who lent such notable professionalism to several of Morison’s admirable Pacific volumes.

Short of this; of inevitable minor lapses in abbreviations and terminology; and of a bete-noire for this reviewer—failure to include tactical maps of many places mentioned in the text—short of these things Sicily-Salerno-Anzio is a great success. I recommend it, as I have recommended all its fine predecessor volumes, for edification and for enlightenment, with no punches pulled.

Reviewed by LtCol R. D. Haeltl, Jr.

Final Days . . .

THE DEATH OF HITLER’S GERMANY
—George Blond. 299 pages illustrated with maps. New York, New York: The Macmillan Co. $4.50

Three men stood in the room, as if taking leave of each other after a long conversation. Behind his desk stood Gen Olbricht, Deputy Chief of the Army of the Interior; facing him Col von Stauffenberg, Gen Fromm’s chief of staff and Lt von Haeften. Each of them had a big leather brief case, and Col von Stauffenberg held in his free hand a handkerchief with which he was mopping his brow. It could be seen that this hand had only three fingers, while the right one, which was holding the handle of the brief case, was made of flexible metal.

His perspiring face produced a painful impression, because the left eye was missing, and because the features were hollow and strained. Everyone knows that heat has a bad effect on recent or imperfectly healed wounds. Col von Stauffenberg’s were still suppurating, especially the stump of his right hand, which had been blown off when he stepped on a mine in Tunisia. Moreover, for several days he had been subject to almost unbearable nervous tension. The brief case which he held in his artificial right hand contained a bomb intended to blow up Hitler.

Commencing with this description of preparations for the third attempt on Hitler’s life, The Death of Hitler’s Germany takes the reader, in a brilliantly written narrative, through the German defeat in the West, the fierce combat for the bridges at Arnhem and Nijmegen, the Battle of the Bulge, seen through German eyes, including the battles for St Vith and Bastogne, the Russian invasion of Germany and finally, the last days of Hitler and his intimate associates, within the command bunker in dying Berlin.

Using a technique which places the author in the position of an eye witness, George Blond has set up his observation post in Berlin, the center of German power, and has shifted the focus of his observation from the West to the East until there emerges the clearest view of the converging eastern and western invasions of Germany and of the people who played the major roles in each. Combining the talent of a novelist, the eye of a dramatist and the dispassionate attitude of a historian, the author has brought forth a vivid, exciting and detailed word picture of the final days of a great European tragedy.

Reviewed by Maj. G. P. Averill

En: Major Averill’s letter from 3d Bn, 6th Marines in the Med read in part, “. . . Enclosed, you will find a review of the book. I hope that it can be used for publication for the book is a very fine one indeed, and one which I think should be required reading for Marine officers. I was fascinated by the entire narrative, and learned a great deal from it.

“You might be interested in what can happen to one of your books when it is sent half way across the world for review. I believe that your letter said that the book was mailed on the 3d of January. It arrived in Naples on the 17th of February, having been missent to 2d Bn, 2d Marines, (why, no one will ever know) has survived an airplane crash, dropped overboard, waterlogged, mildewed and partially torn apart . . . However, it did arrive finally, and has been read.”

Marine Corps Gazette • May 1955

No. 1 Hobgoblin . . .


Some of our syndicated seers and parochial pundits are inclined to credit the Russians with almost supernatural powers. It is hard to tell sometimes whether these soothsayers are for Democracy, or simply afraid of the USSR. To find a writer who confirms my belief that the Russians still put their trousers on one leg at a time, is a pleasant change. Let me tell you how such writers come into being.

Take one senior British officer who has spent the past 20 years studying the language, history and evolution of Russia; mix well with an urbane sense of humor, a keen mind, and the ability to write in an easy, readable style and you will have the author of Close Contact—Brigadier Claude H. Dewhurst, OBE.

Having been the Military Attaché in Belgrade at the time Tito broke with the Kremlin, Brigadier Dewhurst was next assigned as Chief of the British Mission to the Soviet Occupation Forces in East Germany. As such from 1951-58, he probably spoke with more Soviet authorities than any living Westerner and his name became almost legendary in Berlin. I would dearly love to see the Soviet dossier on the Brigadier—it’s probably a good 6 inches thick and even then I rather imagine that he remained a complete enigma to the Russians. But the important thing for us is that the Russians are not an enigma to Brigadier Dewhurst. Quite the contrary. To paraphrase the publisher’s note, “he has been able to look behind the iron mask of Ivan the Terrible and has seen the frequently ludicrous face of Ivan the Timid.”

Don’t think for a minute that Brigadier Dewhurst underestimates the danger represented by the Russians or the Communist ideology. He fully appreciates these twin imposters, but he is neither cowed nor deceived. In the course of over 2 years daily dealing with Soviet officials, both military and diplomatic, he added immeasurably to his already extensive knowledge of the enemy. His observations and conclusions, based on that knowledge, form the foundations for his book.

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