

## Shattered Axes: Mussolini and the Greco-Italian War

Description: hardcover book, 450 pages, with a dust jacket showing a *fascis* broken in two, over a map of Greece.

Author: Colonel Edward Franklin, USA (ret.) Publication date: 2003. Publisher: Macmillan. The book will register as interdimensional to the appropriate scans.

It's obvious from the dust jacket that *Shattered Axes: Mussolini and the Greco-Italian War* is from an alternate timeline: not only does the blurb mention 'the war that ended Fascism,' the author photo of Colonel Franklin shows an African-American man in his sixties, wearing a US Army uniform, with the old patch of the 45th Infantry Division... the one featuring a swastika<sup>1</sup>. The words 'Nazi' or 'National Socialists' can be found nowhere in the text of *Shattered Axes*, although the Spanish Civil War is mentioned in the prologue (couched in terms of a failed Fascist revolt against the monarchy). For that matter, there are no references to the Soviet Union or Communism in general.

The book's Greco-Italian War initially followed our own timeline's version fairly closely, except that Italy had no allies (the 'German Republic,' 'Austria-Hungary,' and

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<sup>1</sup> A *Sergeant* Edward Franklin of the right age, appearance, and background (as per the author bio) served in our US Army's 45th Infantry Division, but he was killed in action in 1967.

Bulgaria are all noted as being 'studiously neutral' during the conflict). This led to a drastic shift in March of 1941, when British intervention on Greece's side led to the collapse of the Italian armies by the end of that month. Mussolini's government lasted until the end of the year, when his government was toppled in a nigh-bloodless coup; Mussolini himself ended his days in South American exile. The text itself is lively, and focuses on infantry tactics in rugged conditions. The author had a bit of a chip on his shoulder when it came to the elite status of Italy's Alpini brigades, but it's otherwise a decent alternate history read. Or interdimensional one.

It would be an otherwise *unremarkable* interdimensional artifact (as much as those can be), if it wasn't for one minor detail. On page 235, Colonel Franklin happens to mention in passing (and a footnote) how the Battle of Berati in late March put at risk the future site of the 'Pulcheriopolis Dig.' The footnote helpfully reminds the reader that this was the 1964 expedition that discovered the 'Lost Library of Byzantium,' a veritable treasure-trove of previously lost Classical Greek and Roman literature. Unfortunately, while Colonel Franklin apparently loved maps (judging from his book), he neglected to provide one of the dig. *Nonetheless*, this is useful information! Now that people know that there's something to find, they'll go and find it.

Unfortunately, your superiors are not the only people who have worked that out; there's going to be a lot of folks poking around southern Albania over this, and some of them may not be too picky about what or who they're poking. While the documents are of immense historical importance, and certainly worth a lot; they're *not* worth starting a war over. They're not even worth murdering someone over -- but there's always going to be somebody who'll disagree about that, won't there?

Your job? Keep it all down to a dull roar. Make sure the Library doesn't get destroyed by the people trying to find it. Do what you can (it should be a lot) to keep the various groups and illicit expeditions from killing each other. *Definitely* don't let the Albanians have to notice anything officially.

As to who gets the Library? ...Oh, whoever you like, really. In the long run, it's not that much of an issue.

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