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MUTINY AT SALERNO: An Injustice Exposed

Saul David

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In late September 1943, nearly 200 veterans of Montgomery's Eighth Army were arrested for refusing orders to join units of the US Fifth Army at the Salerno beachhead in southern Italy. Within six weeks, all but one had been found guilty of mutiny, their sentences ranging from five years' penal servitude to death.

Fifty years on, Saul David became the first military historian to gain access to the court martial papers normally restricted for 75 years.

In addition to crucial defense documents and the testimony of eyewitnesses, these papers enabled David to expose: How poorly equipped Eighth Army veterans, some still recovering from wounds and illness, were needlessly sent as reinforcements to Salerno when Fifth Army men were available. How transit camp authorities deliberately deceived the reinforcements as to their destination. How the defense team at their trial was forced, by lack of time, lack of witnesses and the hostility of the court, to offer a case based on no evidence and doomed to fail. How, after the humane intervention of the Adjutant-General and the suspension of sentences, insensitive staff officers and victimization in their new units caused many mutineers to desert. How, as a result of their convictions, the former war heroes were stripped of their campaign and gallantry medals and branded as cowards.

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