



The Forgotten Epic of the X MAS: When Italian Torpedo Boats Hunted Soviets on Northern Lakes

Published on 08/08/2026

During World War II, the **Regia Marina** of Italy was the protagonist of an extraordinary and unusual logistical and military feat: the dispatch of four **MAS** (Armed Torpedo Boats) of the **12th Squadron** to the eastern front, in the icy and remote waters of **Lake Ladoga**, to disrupt Soviet supplies headed to the besieged city of Leningrad.

Summary of the Operation

- **Period:** Spring – Autumn 1942.
- **Commander:** Corvette Captain Giuseppe Bianchini.
- **Forces employed:** 4 MAS of the 500 class (MAS 526, 527, 528, and 529) and 99 men including officers, non-commissioned officers, and sailors.

- **Strategic objective:** To disrupt the main supply line of the Soviet lake fleet supplying Leningrad (the “Road of Life”), supporting the German and Finnish forces in the “International Naval Detachment K”.

An Unprecedented Logistical Feat

Transferring 17-meter hulls from the Ligurian Sea to the heart of Russia represented one of the most complex logistical challenges of the conflict.

- **The journey:** Departing from La Spezia on May 25, 1942, the torpedo boats were loaded onto railway platforms, hauled through the Brenner Pass to Innsbruck, transported to Stettin, embarked on the German steamer *Thielbeck*, and moved along canals and land routes.
- **The destination:** After **twenty-six days and three thousand kilometers** traveled, the MAS reached the shores of Lahdenpohja, on the banks of Lake Ladoga, ready to operate in a completely unknown operational theater characterized by dense fogs, poor visibility, and extreme environmental conditions.

Operations and Operational Challenges

Integrated into Detachment K, the Italian MAS carried out a total of **37 missions**, clashing with the Soviet fleet composed of gunboats, minesweepers, and transport vessels.

- **The first success:** On August 15, 1942, MAS 527 and 528 intercepted enemy units, sinking the Soviet gunboat *Bira* (900 tons) with a torpedo.
- **Structural limitations:** The extremely shallow waters and the low draft of the Soviet vessels drastically reduced the effectiveness of the Italian torpedoes. The MAS were often forced to use machine guns and operate as fast gunboats, a role not intended for them, which exposed them to high risks due to the highly flammable fuel.
- **The epilogue:** With the arrival of winter and the freezing of Lake Ladoga, naval operations became impossible. On October 29, 1942, the squadron was withdrawn. By June 1943, the 12th MAS Squadron was definitively disbanded and the vessels were handed over to the Finnish Navy, which kept them operational until 1961.

Source: I MAS italiani sul lago Ladoga: una battaglia dimenticata al largo di Leningrado - il Giornale

<https://www.ilgiornale.it/scheda/arte-e-storia/i-mas-italiani-sul-lago-ladoga-una-battaglia-dimenticata-a-largo-di-leningrado/>