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The Victors: Eisenhower and His Boys: The Men of World War II

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Americans or anyone else had, and their officers and men were more skillful at night warfare than were their American opponents. What was important about this was that, as it turned out, most of the forthcoming war's surface actions took place at night. Night was also the time when the torpedo was most effective.

About the same time, the Japanese navy decided to convert its ships fully from coal-fired to oil-fired boilers. But nearly all of Japan's oil came from the "inevitable" enemy. The only practical alternative source for oil was the Dutch East Indies. But in 1940 the Germans invaded the Netherlands, which made that country's government-in-exile an ally of Britain, and therefore of the United States. It was shortly after this that Japan chose to ally itself with Germany, thus making itself officially hostile to, though not yet at war with, Britain and the Netherlands. An advance by the Japanese army into southern Vietnam in 1941 led to an American and Dutch embargo on all trade to Japan, including that in oil.

The Japanese navy could not deal with this problem peaceably. The decision to seize the Dutch East Indies made war with the United States inevitable. But though they were foreseeable, the navy had not reckoned on the wartime needs for both a large number of tankers and escort forces powerful and effective enough to protect them. This failure was to prove disastrous.

As Evans and Peattie make clear, while the Japanese navy was able to overcome many difficult tactical and technological problems, it proved incapable of overcoming the enormous logistical and strategic problems that

came with war against the United States. Though it is no part of the book under review, the U.S. Navy, surprised by its tactical and technological inferiority to the Japanese in so many ways, proved able from the beginning to overcome its own daunting logistical and strategic problems in the Pacific. It was this ability that gave the Americans both the space and the time they needed to make good their technological and tactical shortcomings. In 1944 and 1945 the Americans annihilated the imperial navy and made possible the end of the world's most terrible war.

Evans and Peattie have written a splendid book on the Imperial Japanese Navy. Now it is time for some other scholar, or scholars, to do as good a job on the U.S. Navy in the same period. There are some who could do that.

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Ambrose, Stephen E. *The Victors: Eisenhower and His Boys: The Men of World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998. 396pp. \$28

As reflected in the commercial success of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, no military historian is in greater public demand than Stephen Ambrose, whose *D-Day*, *Citizen Soldiers*, *Band of Brothers*, and *Pegasus Bridge* provide the most extensive coverage of World War II in the European theater. In his latest work Ambrose has drawn from his best-selling accounts of World War II to create a single volume of the campaign from D-Day to V-E Day. The

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result is rich in drama, with tales of epic courage from ordinary men who found themselves in extraordinary circumstances. Why another book on the European campaign? Because the ground war was so vast in its magnitude, so horrific in its suffering, and so dramatic in its consequences that there is still a story to tell.

At the heart of *The Victors* is the American citizen-soldier who struggled ashore in Normandy and waged an unrelenting war against Hitler's Germany. Included are Captain Joe Dawson, the first officer to penetrate the German defenses above Omaha Beach; First Sergeant Len Lomell, the Ranger who destroyed the guns at Pointe du Hoc; and Major Dick Winters, who commanded E Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, during MARKET-GARDEN. What makes this current volume so compelling is the author's decision to allow the soldiers to speak for themselves, since only they can truly narrate the war from a rifleman's perspective. Ambrose's most impressive contribution is to weave their stories into a coherent narrative of the European war.

While America badly needed the leadership of George Marshall, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and their contemporaries, they needed more a well trained army. That army was composed of eight million citizen-soldiers. Led by junior officers and noncommissioned officers, that army helped to defeat Hitler and win World War II. In the process, however, it paid a heavy price, with casualties often exceeding 200 percent in the infantry alone. America's finest young men went down leading soldiers in battle. They were natural

leaders, and they died one by one on the blood-soaked beaches of Normandy, in the freezing mud of Lorraine, and in the snow-covered forests of the Ardennes. Perhaps one of the war's greatest tragedies was the unfulfilled promise of these young men and their generation.

Not surprisingly, Eisenhower plays a pivotal role in Ambrose's narrative, but only in the sense that he is the embodiment of a democratic society. More than any other officer, Eisenhower understood that soldiers of a democracy require a unique style of leadership, one that stresses teamwork and cooperation. As the Supreme Commander's premier biographer, Ambrose credits Ike with providing the essential elements of leadership that resulted in victory by the Western Allies. Marshall put it best: "You have made history, great history for the good of mankind and you have stood for all we hope and admire in an officer of the United States Army."

But *The Victors* is not so much the story of the Allied high command as it is the story of Eisenhower's boys. If one searches for the fitting accolades to acknowledge the soldiers whom Ike commanded, the reader only has to turn to Sergeant Mike Ranney of the 101st Airborne Division: "In thinking back on the days of Easy Company, I'm treasuring my remark to a grandson who asked, 'Grandpa, were you a hero in the war?' 'No,' I answered, 'but I served in a company of heroes.'" *The Victors* is Ambrose's tribute to all the heroes of World War II.

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