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Facing Fearful Odds: The Siege of Wake Island

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More often, however, McIntosh uses bits of several stories to describe in some detail a major OSS activity, such as research and analysis, or propaganda, or a major overseas headquarters like London, Bern, or Kandy (Ceylon). Some of the women mentioned are known today for other vocations: Julia McWilliams Child ran the OSS registries in Kandy and Chungking before becoming the famous "French Chef," and Marlene Dietrich gladly recorded songs to be broadcast for the purpose of undermining the morale of German soldiers. Some of the women went on to careers in intelligence, with varying degrees of success and satisfaction; most, however, returned to civilian life after the war. McIntosh personally interviewed many of them and questioned others by mail. It is probably unwillingness to waste the efforts of those contributors that leads her to resort occasionally to mere lists, of the "she was present" sort, when there is nothing of particular interest to say. The final chapter of the book conveys some useful information on the roles of women in the CIA today, but it suffers from being based entirely on information and contacts provided by the agency.

Most of the time, however, McIntosh conveys useful lessons about the craft of intelligence while describing the fairly humdrum lives of office workers, translators, and code clerks. In creating a comprehensive intelligence organization from scratch, the OSS developed operating principles that still exist at the CIA, including the value of open-source information, the role of neutral countries in collecting information from both open and clandestine

sources, the usefulness of the local knowledge of individuals who have lived and worked in an area of interest, and the value of serial numbers and samples. McIntosh does a nice job of linking OSS intelligence targets in the latter part of the war to postwar political developments. Also, her brief descriptions of post-OSS lives of some of the main characters add a dimension to her stories.

All in all, this book is a useful addition to the rather scant literature on the role of American women in modern intelligence.

HELENE L. BOATNER
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Urwin, Gregory J. W. *Facing Fearful Odds: The Siege of Wake Island*. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1998. 727pp. \$59.95

In December 1941, Wake Island's garrison of U.S. Marines, augmented by civilians, sailors, and a small Army radio detachment, under the command of Commander Winfield S. Cunningham, a naval aviator, endured repeated bombings and an inept amphibious assault before it was overwhelmed by a second attack supported by carrier planes. Coming on the heels of the Pearl Harbor disaster, the defense of Wake Island inspired the United States and provided it with some of its first heroes.

Gregory J. W. Urwin hooks one's attention early on, setting the tone and focus of the book by describing how Marine corporal Ralph J. Holewinski awaited the Japanese assault on Wake's

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rocky south shore. Urwin based his book on the oral histories of Wake veterans and archival documents, eschewing “conventional” campaign history, which tells the story from the top down, and relating it instead from the bottom up. He skillfully details the activities of individual Marines, sailors, Army communicators, and civilians, using primary sources in his attempt “to separate history from folklore.”

Urwin objectively analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of those who led the defense. Unfortunately, the author’s focus on the Wake contrasts sharply with his fuzzy perspective on the enemy, thus perpetuating some of the “folklore” he seeks to abolish. One myth is that VMF 211 “avenged” the loss of the battleship *Arizona* (BB 39) at Pearl Harbor when it shot down in aerial combat a Japanese carrier attack plane in which Petty Officer Noburo Kanai was the bombardier. In fact, Kanai had bombed either *Tennessee* (BB 43) or *West Virginia* (BB 48) on 7 December 1941, not *Arizona*.

Comparative unfamiliarity with enemy technology reveals itself in the description of the main batteries of the light cruisers *Yūbari*, *Tenryū* and *Tatsuta* as “turrets” when “mounts” is correct. Transport *Kinryū Maru*’s name is consistently misspelled *Konryū Maru*. One reads that the Japanese may have lost up to four hundred men in the final battle on 23 December. However, the Japanese official war history (*Senshi Soshō*, which appears not to have been consulted) lists 111 killed and ninety-seven wounded.

The lack of Japanese perspective allows to stand unchallenged the defenders’ speculation that the enemy

needed to use submarines to guide land-based bombers to Wake—when in fact the Chitose *Kokutai* (Air Group) employed superb navigation to hit the atoll on 8 and 9 December, before three submarines (not two, as the book states) were deployed on the 10th. Lack of a raid on one particular day is taken as evidence of the lack of a beacon submarine, when in fact the Japanese had attempted to find the island at night and failed. Accepting U.S. claims at face value leads Urwin to employ purple prose, describing .50-caliber bullets stitching Japanese planes that go spinning into the sea on a day when in fact no enemy aircraft were lost. Similarly, Urwin is ill served by his largely outdated Japanese sources.

One also might question the continual use of post–November 1942 terminology (Japanese aircraft designations such as Nell, Kate, Val, etc.) in scholarship. Why perpetuate anachronisms that will confuse the reader as to what is correct? A proofreader cognizant of contemporary (1941) task designations, nomenclature, and equipment could have saved the author the embarrassment of the curious “Task Unit G7.4,” “Fighting Plane Squadron” (“Fighting Squadron” is correct), and “SBD Dauntless Devastators” (“SBD Dauntless” would suffice—Devastators were TBDs).

The hefty price tag of *Facing Fearful Odds* may deter the average reader. The pre-1933 material about Wake Island could have been profitably summarized, or even omitted, thus resulting in a slimmer, more affordable volume. The book does, however, succeed in detailing the privations the individuals in the Wake garrison endured, but

lacking the key Japanese perspective, it fails to provide the proper context that would allow those men's true accomplishments to be fairly evaluated. The book's value lies in the good look it affords at how the American military, even placed in difficulty and given less than adequate tools (or leadership), can rise to the occasion, and how, even if defeated, it can make the enemy's victory costly. It also serves to remind us that it is flesh-and-blood human beings who carry out national policy, not mere pawns on a chessboard—a point always to ponder before people are sent in harm's way.

ROBERT J. CRESSMAN
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Eiler, Keith E. *Mobilizing America*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1997. 588pp. \$39.95

Keith has performed a labor of love in this biographical treatment of Robert P. Patterson, Under Secretary of War during World War II. Eiler's efforts spanned almost a quarter of a century, beginning with his doctoral dissertation in 1974 at Harvard and concluding with this publication. Eiler has researched extensively in a dozen specialized libraries, interviewed sixty-seven family members and individuals who worked with Secretary Patterson, and meticulously researched U.S. mobilization efforts for both world wars. With this work he has succeeded in shedding light on the heroic attributes and accomplishments of an unsung hero, who, while preferring to work behind the scenes, remained

involved in practically all aspects of War Department affairs.

Robert Patterson was a veteran of World War I and a successful lawyer, serving for a decade as a judge on the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. His background, plus a practical and tough-minded approach, served him well as he worked to create order out of chaos in the all-important area of wartime logistics and mobilization. Until Pearl Harbor, the American people were deeply divided on the issue of U.S. involvement in World War II. This was only one of the obstacles Judge Patterson faced in his early endeavors. National unpreparedness was another. Patterson stated in 1940 that "the dictators have a head start. Germany has been preparing for war for seven years." The United States during this period had "almost legislated its army out of existence," as one of General George C. Marshall's biographers observe.

In an academic yet highly readable style, the author details many of the prewar shortages, their causes, and the difficulties of resolving them. The primary responsibility for this fell to Patterson, and Eiler gives the reader a front-row seat as Patterson faces these challenges. Eiler deftly covers racial policies in effect at the time and the demands made for equal opportunity.

The author discusses wartime logistics, including, but not limited to, shortages and bottlenecks in basic materials, problems caused by inadequate data concerning raw materials and production, and labor issues. Eiler provides gripping examples of the unrest and absenteeism in the war industry. Those who did not experience the war years personally may find the discussion of