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# Utmost Savagery: The Three Days of Tarawa

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the serious student of the war will find this book valuable in providing a clearer picture of the clash between these armies, the general reader may be numbed by the details (unit designations, effective strength, etc.) that appear on seemingly every page.

*Zhukov: The Rise and Fall of a Great Captain* is a paperback edition of William J. Spahr's 1993 biography of arguably the preeminent military figure of the Second World War. Spahr, formerly a senior analyst and branch chief of the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence and a specialist in Soviet military policy and doctrine, seeks to undo five decades of Party misinformation that sought to diminish Georgii Konstantinovich Zhukov's role in the achievement of Soviet victory over Nazi Germany. Additionally, he fills the void that existed in the story from 1946 until Zhukov's death in 1974.

Spahr uses as his principal source the recently published tenth edition of Zhukov's memoirs, which purportedly includes material that was missing from the original manuscript. Spahr points out passages Zhukov was required to include to get his memoirs published in the first place. As Spahr tells the story of Zhukov's life, he tests the veracity of the Marshal's version of events against the recollections of other key personalities and archival material now becoming available. The result is a readable, balanced, and generably favorable portrait of this Hero of the Soviet Union, who twice attained the pinnacle of his profession only to be dumped by a paranoid Stalin in 1946 and a jealous Khrushchev in 1957.

Zhukov emerges as profane and proud, a true and loyal communist who

played a critical role in every military crisis and opportunity that the Red Army faced in its struggle with Germany. Organized chronologically, this biography consists of short, essay-like chapters that portray Zhukov as a ruthless, hard-driving superior and an opinionated, uncowed subordinate. In this way, Zhukov became his own worst enemy. Stalin and his cronies recognized his talent but resented his independence, and bitter subordinates were eager to settle old scores. When the wartime crisis passed, these forces combined, seeking to tar Zhukov's loyalty to the regime and his reputation as a general.

*Zhukov* complements a detailed military history such as *When Titans Clashed* by providing a glimpse of the political and personal struggles away from the front. One of the most interesting aspects of this biography is that it reveals Stalin's constant involvement in making military strategy, as well as his "hands-on" approach in day-to-day operations.

While *Zhukov* is more suited than *Titans* to a wide audience, both books are highly useful in that they take a new look at a theater of the Second World War that is largely a blank spot for many American readers.

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Alexander, Joseph H. *Utmost Savagery: The Three Days of Tarawa*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995. 328pp. \$29.95

This is a history book that focuses exclusively on one tactical engagement in November 1943. In and of itself, that is not unusual; there have been numerous histo-

ries written about specific battles. Gettysburg, for example, was a three-day battle that has been the subject of several books.

What makes this book unusual is that its academic quality (its balanced and exhaustive treatment of the subject, set precisely within the context of the overarching strategic and operational considerations of global war), is nicely complemented by its literary quality (its vivid, haunting Leon Uris-like style, scene, and character development). It reads like a novel and at times you will wish it was. However, its characters are real heroes. It is a good, solid, professional history that you will not have to hide under the magazine rack in your office.

One might wonder why Colonel Alexander would choose to write this kind of book at this particular time. As Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, Marine Corps, Retired, points out in the foreword, there have been several fairly good books on the battle for Betio Island. Robert Sherrod's *Tarawa: The Story of a Battle*, published in 1944, is considered the definitive work on the subject. He was one of the many journalists who went ashore with the Marines, and his vivid, moving account still remains in print. (Betio, by the way, is the name of the actual island where most of Alexander's action takes place. It forms part of the *Tarawa* atoll which, in turn, lies within the *Gilberts* island chain. Betio, which rhymes with "ratio," proved difficult for American's to master phonetically, so the tactical engagement became known, however erroneously, as the battle of *Tarawa*. *GALVANIC* was the code name for the operation to seize the *Gilberts*.)

The book's preface explains what factors inspired Colonel Alexander's reexamination of *Tarawa*, an undertaking encouraged by the late Robert Sherrod. The first was the availability of new information drawn from recent translations of Japanese books and documents, personal accounts fostered by the occasion of *Tarawa's* fiftieth anniversary commemoration, and newly declassified *ULTRA* radio intercepts available in the National Archives. Secondly, *Tarawa* is generally considered the watershed event in the development of amphibious warfare doctrine, with *Gallipoli* on one side and *OVERLORD* on the other. Today's "Operational Maneuver from the Sea" is firmly rooted in lessons learned from *Tarawa* and subsequent Second World War amphibious assaults. The more precise picture of this battle afforded by the new information warranted a close reexamination of those lessons with regard to how they affect today's evolving amphibious assault doctrine. The third factor that Alexander believes makes this book relevant is what he calls *Tarawa's* spiritual legacy. There were 3,407 American casualties and 1,115 deaths during a seventy-six-hour period on a battlefield no larger than the Pentagon and its surrounding parking lots. The fighting was particularly close-in and savage, but in the end the Marines triumphed over a disciplined, determined, well equipped, and well led foe. It was a high price to pay, but it was deemed worthwhile. As a result, the United States steeled itself to the realities of war in the Pacific and proved ready to make the sacrifice necessary to obtain the ultimate victory. While true that the will of the people is often the Achilles' heel of modern democracies, it can also be an immense source of strength.

If Vietnam left an American legacy on this point, so did Tarawa.

*Utmost Savagery* is not about the Second World War. It is not even about the war in the Pacific. It is about the battle of Tarawa and its relationship to the rest of the war, its lessons and legacies, and its heroes, both Japanese and American. Although many characters leap from its pages, the most central character is a young Colonel David M. Shoup, USMC, commander of the 2nd Marine Division, who later became Commandant of the Marine Corps. Part action thriller, part war story, part detailed history, this book is everything but boring. *Utmost Savagery: The Three Days of Tarawa* is definitely bound for the Marine officer's professional reading list. It should also be of interest to any student of history, leadership, war, amphibious doctrine, planning, or operations. It will particularly enthrall anyone interested in the battle of Tarawa itself and should garner respect from other historians as well. Simply put, it's a good read.

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Boyd, Carl, and Akihiko Yoshida. *The Japanese Submarine Force and World War II*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995. 272pp. \$32.95

With an ever-deepening hostility of more than thirty years, earlier in this century two great fleets, one based on North America's west coast, the other on islands off Asia's east coast, faced each other across six thousand miles of salt water.

As time went on, those fleets came to resemble each other in their strategic concepts, the nature of the forces of which they were composed, and their combatant strengths. Among other things both fleets, those of the United States and Japan, had powerful submarine forces, made up of long-range, fast (on the surface) boats. Those submarines were intended to seek out the opponent's fleet, report on it, ambush it, and in all ways contribute to its destruction before, during, and after the anticipated decisive battle between the rival fleets. Secretly and independently, each fleet agreed with the other that the decisive action would take place in the waters between Japan, the Marianas, and the Philippines. As it turned out, before the end of the anticipated war, which began in 1941, there would not be one great battle between the fleets in those waters, but two. Both came in 1944.

The opposing submarine forces took part in both battles, but with markedly different results for each. Indeed, by the time those battles took place the fortunes of the two submarine forces had already been decided. As its title makes plain, this book is about one of those forces.

When the war began, Japan's submarine fleet consisted of ships that were larger, faster (on the surface), and better armed than those of the Americans. Though the United States had many more submarines than the Japanese, on average Japan's ships were more modern and, unlike the Americans', all of them were in the Pacific. Carl Boyd and Akihiko Yoshida tell us that when Japan's carriers attacked the dangerously exposed ships of the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, twenty-five of Japan's submarines were deployed north, south, east, and west of that harbor in order to attack whatever