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Reevaluating Major Naval Combatants of World War II

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in overall charge. Smith was also concerned with the concurrent conquests of Saipan and Tinian and these campaigns moved slowly, so marine General Roy S. Geiger, an aviator of repute in direct charge of the Guam operation, was able to run the program with minimum interference. He was in command of III Amphibious Corps, which conducted the Guam invasion and included the army 77th Division headed by Major General Andrew Bruce.

The invasion was launched against the west side of Guam in the vicinity of Apra Harbor, and three weeks passed before the final organized resistance was officially overcome. In the process 1,500 marines, 177 U.S. Army soldiers, and well over 10,000 Japanese were killed.

Professor Gailey goes out of his way to defend General Geiger against criticisms leveled by General Smith, who often criticized Geiger as being too cautious. Smith did not fully understand the problems of terrain, heat, lack of water, and the unexpected difficulties of transporting supplies over the reefs; the two were very different personalities.

This book may not make exciting reading for the military buff, because the tactical interest is overwhelmed by the unnecessary killing on both sides. The Japanese were imbued with *bushido* and the need to die rather than surrender; in the heat of battle, aware of Japanese atrocities, the American forces readily obliged them.

Guam is the only island of the three previously owned by the United

States that was reclaimed during the war. It went on to become the U.S. Pacific command center for the last year of the war and the major staging center for the B-29 strikes against mainland Japan.

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Sadkovich, James J., ed. *Reevaluating Major Naval Combatants of World War II*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1990. 203pp. \$42.95

This is a collection of essays by eight competent naval historians intended to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the war and profit from scholarship subsequent to it. The contributors agreed to attempt "to achieve a balance between the demands of academic rigor and popular writing" and in this they succeeded, so well in fact as to commend the book to anyone who is interested in the strengths and weaknesses, both strategic and tactical, of the major naval participants.

The navies covered are those of the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, and, somewhat more narrowly, the submarine forces of the Soviet Union. The book's goal is a no-holds-barred fresh look by each author—Malcolm Muir, Jr., Harry Stegmaier, Jr., Marc Milner, Mark P. Parillo, Claude Huan, Keith W. Bird, James Sadkovich, and Rolf Erikson—covering respectively each major navy in turn.

Revisionist histories usually have an axe to grind or an exposé to tout,

but in this instance the self-proclaimed “re-evaluation” is neither condemnatory nor particularly startling. When there is fresh insight it is as likely to be laudatory as critical, as Milner’s essay on the Royal Canadian Navy illustrates. Canada’s navy was disparaged by the most-read contemporary naval historians, the British. That tiny navy, as it expanded early in the war, could hardly have been other than green at the outset, but Milner persuasively argues that by 1942 the Canadian navy was pulling its weight. “Canadian adherence to the primacy of escorted convoys, however inadequately protected, was vindicated (over early American objections). . . . While it is an easy matter to count losses, it is more difficult—but equally necessary—to speculate on how many ships were saved because the escorts needed to run the convoys were there.” Milner points out that “it was the expansion of the RCN and its willingness to run the fleet beyond its limits that allowed for the (seldom noted) withdrawal of USN forces” from the Atlantic SLOCs in the spring of 1942, so that the Americans could shift attention to the Caribbean, our East Coast, and very soon to the Pacific.

In so sweeping a treatment, everyone will have objections, and I have mine. Prominent among them is Parillo’s conclusion regarding the Japanese: “Like the samurai sword, the Japanese navy was a mighty weapon, but an obsolete one. Founded on outdated strategic conceptions and riddled with outmoded

social values, the Imperial Navy disappeared under the onslaught of opponents attuned to twentieth century realities.” Parillo’s samurai sword is the fleet and its tactics, which he (and I) see as superb. But he believes an archaic, feudalistic faith in spiritual strength drove the Imperial Japanese Navy to strategic excess and was the source of their several strategic errors. The Japanese navy’s faith in *élan* is well known, but if they hoped to maintain morale what else did they have on which to base a victory? Fighting spirit sustained them, in victory as they ran wild in 1942, and in defeat. As Yamamoto himself foresaw, the IJN was likely doomed, and to understand both its strategy and tactics one must grasp the knowledge held in that navy even before the war: that victory must come from daring and resourceful tactics and winning against superior odds. If the *bushido* code sometimes drove them to fight instead of think, it was a flaw no less prevalent in the navy than in the Japanese army. If the navy’s faith in aggressive spirit was excessive, then the excess and the penalties imposed were slight compared with the crushing damage done by an excess of *élan* in the French army at the beginning of World War I. Parillo’s reevaluation is unconvincing.

But in these eight essays the revisionist slant is never cant and is always factually argued. It perhaps comes as no great surprise that after fifty years the U.S. Navy comes across as the exemplar of competence. In the

introduction, Sadkovich observes that our success was “the fruit of affluence” but that our operations were also notable for innovations to exploit our industrial productivity. Before the war the U.S. Navy overemphasized the big-gun ship, but so “did everyone else, including the Soviets.” In his essay on the American navy, Malcolm Muir establishes his thesis with the first sentence: “Simply put, the United States Navy was the most successful major military organization of World War II.” Without powdering over the U.S. Navy’s blemishes, Muir puts his theme of competence against the broad canvas of the war and proceeds to argue his case factually and well.

Muir’s case for U.S. naval excellence is hardly revisionist, but has seldom been so unreservedly expressed by an historian. It is one of the gems that justifies the reading of this book. *Reevaluating the Major Naval Combatants of World War II* is, as it aims to be, a readable, scholarly, fresh look at the naval side of the war.

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Handel, Michael I. ed. *Intelligence and Military Operations*. London: Frank Cass, 1990. 464pp. \$18.50

This overpriced book is a mixed bag of collected essays that were originally presented at several international conferences held at the U.S. Army War College between 1985 and 1988. Most of the authors are well qualified to write on their intelligence-related

topics, but the quality of presentation varies greatly from excellent to boring. The book is dedicated by its editor (a professor at the Army War College) to the late Patrick Beesly, whose article on the famous and disastrous Convoy PQ17 to Russia in 1942 is one of the best of the collection.

The closest thing to a central theme is a plaint from intelligence specialists that their work is not valued as highly as the more glamorous products of the operations divisions of modern general staffs. As these specialists point out, perhaps the most serious result of this is that many potentially good military intelligence analysts are discouraged from joining the profession. This point is made perhaps too frequently in the long but otherwise excellent introductory article by Professor Handel. Another result, which is also pointed out frequently in the book, is that in wartime a very high proportion of good intelligence staffs is made up of bright young civilians who are in uniform only for the duration. This, indeed, may be a good result.

A not-too-well-written article by Yigal Sheffy on deception in Allenby’s brilliant 1917 and 1918 campaigns in Palestine is an unconscious confirmation of the slender theme noted above. It focuses on the purely operational matter of deception by Allenby and his operations staff (unquestionably the most interesting and glamorous aspect of the campaigns) with only the barest incidental relevance to intelligence. This article is the most egregious example of a somewhat annoying flaw