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Howlin' Mad vs the Army

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McLynn, Frank. *Invasion: From the Armada to Hitler, 1588-1945*. New York: Methuen, 1987. 224pp. \$39.95

The last successful invasion of Britain took place in 1066. In the time since, although many enemies either singly or in alliance have made elaborate plans for invasion, all such attempts have been turned aside.

In a study of wide-ranging scope, Frank McLynn describes the essential conditions which allowed Britain to repel invasion over the long course of history. The weather, always a key, unpredictable factor, aided the defense of the realm and gave rise to the legend of a "Protestant wind" which seemed to favor only the defenders. An excellent supply of experienced sailors, crafty naval leaders, and apparently unending good luck also assisted immeasurably in the English ability to resist invasion.

The development of the Royal Navy might appear to have been a guarantee against invasion. McLynn, however, points out a little understood consequence of the rise of British sea power. The development of the Royal Navy, together with the birth of modern imperialism, were inducements rather than deterrents to invasion. According to McLynn, since 1066, the imperial, not the continental, factor precipitated most threats of invasion. The political significance of the navy also increased as it became the principal means of defense against enemies intent upon attacking the English heartland to

redress British worldwide naval and imperial hegemony.

McLynn also describes how the eclipse of empire during the twentieth century may have resulted in a loss of motive for invasion. The consequence of this decline, as McLynn suggests, is that because Britain is no longer a first-class imperial power, the reason for any future plan of invasion would seem to lie in Britain's role as "America's aircraft carrier."

As a *tour d'horizon* of invasion schemes over the centuries, McLynn's book provides a useful source of examples for naval historians to examine the ways in which problems have influenced, shaped, and sometimes hindered strategic thinking. The book is also a helpful reminder that, despite over four centuries of invasion attempts, there was nothing unique about any of the problems faced and schemes proposed by would-be invaders from the Armada to "Sea Lion."

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Gailey, Harry A. *Howlin' Mad vs the Army*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1986. 278pp. \$17.95

"A grain of sand is not a beach." A trial lawyer frequently pursues this simple truth in defending a client. He painstakingly examines and cross-examines every miniscule act committed and every word uttered as pertains to the critical event that led to the charge against

his client. His object, of course, is to disassemble the “beach”—whatever it is the client is accused of having done—grain by grain.

As each “grain” is held up to light and scrutinized, the question is asked, “Just a grain of sand. That’s not a beach, now is it?” And the witness has to respond, in all truthfulness, that it is not. Bit by granular bit the case against the client is dismantled so that all that remains are individual grains of fact.

Such is Harry A. Gailey’s approach in *Howlin’ Mad vs the Army*. The central conflict—the “beach,” if you will—is the relief of Army Major General Ralph Smith from command of the Army’s 27th Division by Marine Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith. The occasion was the invasion of Saipan in 1944. Holland M. Smith commanded the V Marine Amphibious Corps, of which the 27th Division was a part.

As students of the Marianas operations already know, plans for the capture of Saipan called for a three-division advance across, then up, the island’s axis. The Second and Fourth Marine Divisions flanked the offensive; the 27th Division formed its center.

However, as the flanks advanced, the center faltered, then halted, and gaps emerged where the Marines’ and soldiers’ flanks should have tied. Gaps developed into pockets of organized, fanatical resistance by the Japanese, and so the Marines, of necessity, slowed their advance. To H. M. Smith the problem was an absence of aggressiveness in the

Army’s leadership; he relieved Ralph Smith in the field. “The rest,” as they say, “is history.”

Gailey prefaces his book with this disclaimer: “I . . . never intended this work to be a type of legal brief presenting General Ralph Smith and the 27th Division’s case by reporting on a point-by-point basis what H. M. Smith had written earlier [in his memoir, *Coral and Brass*]. I hope it does not appear so to the reader.” It so appears to this reader.

Howlin’ Mad vs the Army conjures up a mental image of the awful events on Saipan being recreated in a courtroom with the aid of instant-replay television. As every event relating to the 27th’s failures to advance is recounted, the author effectively asks by implication, “Contrary to what Holland M. Smith wrote and said, that wasn’t General Ralph Smith’s fault, now was it?”

The author’s ultimate point appears to be that Holland Smith was unsuited by temperament, experience, and ability to command a joint-services campaign, that he expected too much of the Army, and that he sorely maligned Ralph Smith particularly and the U.S. Army generally. The point the author fails to explain away is that, in combat especially, all men are judged ultimately by their results—the 27th Infantry Division did not accomplish its missions under Ralph Smith; it did under his replacement.

I cannot fault Gailey for lack of thoroughness in research. He exhausted published, archival, and original source materials in preparing

this book; copious research notes are included as an appendix.

However, I failed to discern any military lessons to be learned from *Howlin' Mad vs the Army*; the book's greatest utility perhaps may be as a ready reference for any point-counterpoint argument one may have as to whether Holland Smith was justified in relieving Ralph Smith. If you face the spectre of that issue raising its ugly head anytime in your career, you might find *Howlin' Mad vs the Army* useful; otherwise, however, your professional library will be complete without it.

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Vaux, Nick. *Take That Hill! Royal Marines in the Falklands War*. Elmsford, N.Y.: Pergamon, 1987. 256pp. \$21.95 paper \$13.75

Major General Nick Vaux, Royal Marines, has written a marvelous story about his experiences as commanding officer of 42 Commando during the recent Falkland Islands campaign. The book begins in April 1982 when then Lieutenant Colonel Vaux and his commando were alerted to a crisis in the Falklands and ends with their triumphant return to England in July.

It covers the severe hardships they endured as a result of the extreme weather and terrain conditions in those South Atlantic islands, their valiant fight under adverse conditions, the administrative and logistics problems inherent in any distant

operation, especially one organized on an *ad hoc* basis, and the successful completion of their mission.

Although the emphasis is on 42 Commando, the author gives appropriate credit to the other units involved: the entire Commando Brigade, various British Army formations (especially the two parachute battalions), the Royal Navy, and the commercial ships and their crews.

As noted by other commentators, this is not a book on strategy. Rather, it addresses fighting from the company level down to the individual level; how well the Marines performed.

There are many examples of tactical brilliance, individual heroism and endurance, and battlefield humor; Argentine POWs thought that the arrival of a British chaplain meant that they would receive the last rites before being executed. Decisions made in the comfort of Northwoods in England were not always appreciated in the wind and rain of the islands. Once again, the complexities of amphibious operations and the detailed planning required for them are well-illustrated. In this case the illustrations include the importance of civilian shipping, the scarcity of air and logistics support, and the terrible weather. Tactically, 42 Commando landed as the reserve, moved forward to become a front-line unit and, finally, seized their assigned objective, Mt. Harriet. These maneuvers required the commando to overcome a variety of tactical problems, not the least of