

Naval War College Review

Volume 35
Number 5 *September-October*

Article 17

1982

The Pacific War

Kenneth W. Estes
U.S. Marine Corps

John Costello

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Estes, Kenneth W. and Costello, John (1982) "The Pacific War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 35 : No. 5 , Article 17.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol35/iss5/17>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Costello, John. *The Pacific War*. New York: Rawson, Wade, 1981. 657pp. \$24.00.

It may seem strange that the first synthesis of the Great Pacific War is being published at this late a date. Despite the plethora of "war as I knew it" memoirs, service histories, battle studies, branch histories (e.g. carriers, amphibians), and biographies related to this "theater," no study of the Great Pacific War rivals those of its European counterparts, Hitler's War with the West and the Russo-German War, both chronicled by many able scholars and writers. The extent of journalist Costello's path-finding may be grasped by scanning the Library of Congress *Subject Headings* and finding no entry for "World War, 1939-1945—Pacific," although most libraries fabricate such a classification.

The reason why no such synthesis has emerged relates to the historiography of the Great Pacific War. American forces and commanders monopolized the campaign, hence the bulk of the official historical writing fell to the Americans as well. Our Second World War official history was then written by the separate services, spawning further derivations according to special arm, theater, commander, battle, and so forth. All this institutional myopia brought scattered views of a conflict in which the biggest losers were not the Japanese, but the Dutch, French, and British.

The Pacific War surveys this conflict lucidly, balancing the Japanese, American, British, and Chinese viewpoints, with less successful attention to Australian, New Zealand, Dutch and French policies. The author integrates soldiers and sailors well and recognizes the uniqueness of the aviators in each camp. His commentary on the influence of the European wars and their strategies upon the conduct of the Pacific campaign

is excellent. Indeed, Costello's global interpretation of the war matches that of Robert Love's essay in Kenneth Hagan's *In Peace and War*. But Costello also points out the inadequacy of this view when carried beyond the Washington command post.

Naval readers will suffer over the book's numerous superficial errors. Chief of the Naval General Staff Nagano Osami is crossed with Vice Admiral Nagumo Chuichi, an operational commander (p.111ff). Japanese aerial torpedoes were not oxygen-fueled "long lances" (p.132). Japanese cruisers, not destroyers, fired the fatal torpedoes into Dutch cruisers in the Java Sea battle (p.208). Cates and Rockey, conquerors of Iwo, were Marine major generals, not majors (p.540). And so it goes. Still, these remain mere distractors as Costello artfully weaves his narrative and analysis.

More serious shock awaits the reader when he apparently finishes the book as "MacArthur's tenure as 'Shogun' of Japan was ended," (p.604) only to find two chapters of postscript tacked on, calculated to raise the old "whodunit" of culpability for the Pearl Harbor surprise. Obviously an afterthought, these chapters stemmed from Costello's contact with the avalanche of declassified materials now emerging from National Security Agency files, all at the eleventh hour of completing his manuscript. With a journalist's eye for both scoop and deadline, Costello obviously dismissed any notion of arresting his work for a few years' study and integration of the new materials and instead opted for a concentrated study of the Pearl Harbor case with an eye to revisionist interpretation. Alas, the best he can do is raise more questions than he answers:

"So if all or part of Yamamoto's Secret Operation Order No. 1 had been in British or American hands by November

26, it would have provided unambiguous proof that Japan was preparing to strike, as anticipated, in Malaya and the Philippines. But it does not explicitly outline the extent to which an attack on Pearl Harbor was the cornerstone of the Combined Fleet's battle plan. So far no original of this document in Japanese has been found among the records, nor any indication of the date on which this translated operational order (copy No. 145) reached American hands. While this in no way proves that it *was* in fact the War Warning received on November 26, its existence and the lack of any clear picture of the degree of the threat to Hawaii in it, fits the hypothesis that its contents could well have been the evidence of Japanese treachery that so shook the President that morning." (pp. 636-37).

This is great stuff for the publisher, of course, who can adorn the coverleaf with such goodies as "Due to the declassification of nearly 200,000 pages of vital documents . . . Costello has . . . cast new light on the causes of the war and the crucial decisions made by the Japanese and the Allies."

But in fact such language only obfuscates the true value of this work as an excellent synthesis of secondary literature published over the last 40 years, attested to by Costello's notes section. As such it begs attention from the officer and the academic alike.

KENNETH W. ESTES
Major, U.S. Marine Corps

Seabury, Paul. *America's Stake in the Pacific*. Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1981, 82pp. \$4

This short and gracefully written book argues convincingly that the Pacific is at least as important as Europe to the United States and continues in measured

tones with an area-by-area Asian strategic status summary. It concludes with a list of principles to shape US Pacific doctrine. The message is that the Free World is still alive and fairly well in East Asia, especially if the United States adheres consistently to a comprehensive policy for the entire Pacific Basin and reestablishes its reputation as a predictably reliable ally.

Seabury regards the Sino-Soviet dispute as both a boon and a threat. The boon, a modest one, is 44 Soviet divisions tied down along the 7,000-mile frontier with China. The threat, greater than the boon, is that the conflict between the Communist giants tends to erupt outward as each attempts to gain flanking advantage by force in areas adjacent to each other. He cites Herman Kahn's interesting observation that this rift in the Communist world may parallel in some ways the Reformation that split Christianity. Violent discord may once again spur the evangelical zeal of the contesting halves of a shared faith and revive an increasingly moribund Communist ideology to the detriment of Asia and the rest of the world.

Seabury warns us to avoid using the "China crutch" as aid in maintaining a military balance with the Soviets who have always been an East Asian power but are now becoming a true Pacific power. Instead, he advocates a cautious policy of limited parallelism with Communist China in the relatively few areas where it serves our national interest. He fears that the Communist Chinese may be attempting to use the United States as the Soviets did in their temporary "opening to the west" in the 1920s when the Bolsheviks sought and got US capital to build tractor factories and steel mills and to electrify the country.

He characterizes the lesser Asian Communist nations, Vietnam and North