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# Hell to Pay: Operation DOWNFALL and the Invasion of Japan, 1945–1947

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY

*Hell to Pay: Operation DOWNFALL and the Invasion of Japan, 1945–1947*, by D. M. Giangreco. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017. 584 pages. \$35.

Since August 1945, historians have debated President Harry S. Truman's controversial decision to use the atom bomb—a catastrophic new military technology—to force Japan's Emperor Hirohito to surrender and avoid a costly Allied invasion of the Japan home islands. In his well-researched *Hell to Pay* (first published in 2009, but newly updated and expanded in October 2017), D. M. Giangreco weighs in on the traditional side of the debate, arguing that Truman based his decision on reasonable casualty estimations and sound military planning.

Two schools of thought have framed the debate. Traditionalists maintain that Truman's claims were justified, while revisionists argue that use of atomic force was unnecessary because Japan's sea, land, and air forces were largely destroyed and Soviet entry into the war against Japan tipped the scales toward inevitable defeat. Giangreco, however, disagrees with revisionist historians such as Bernard Bernstein who contend that Truman exaggerated casualty projections. Giangreco provides readers with a rich stream of lesser-known

dates, facts, and figures, including with regard to troop movements, Selective Service needs, and medical supplies. Both the United States and Japan scrambled to organize land, sea, and air resources, drawing inexorably toward a hellish, last-ditch fight to the finish.

*Hell to Pay's* seventeen chapters flow chronologically from 1944 through the end of the war in 1945, then continue with events up to 1947. In this revised edition, Giangreco adds two new chapters (chapter 11, "To Break Japan's Spine," and chapter 17, "The Hokkaido Myth") and an appendix that provide facts pertinent to the Soviet entry into the war. In addition to these new chapters, several others stand out as especially noteworthy.

In chapter 2, "Spinning the Casualty Numbers," Giangreco gives details on how U.S. military leaders calculated total casualty numbers and how, when, and why they chose to publish them. The U.S. government wanted public support for Selective Service, but also did not want to reveal its deployment plans to the enemy. Although many

strategists argued at the time that the number of replacements needed that U.S. leaders published was inflated, the author argues that strategists actually intentionally *underinflated* the numbers, using mostly conservative estimates. U.S. troops, for example, were familiar with repeated announcements that at least five hundred thousand replacements were needed to continue the war in Japan, whereas on March 9, 1945, *Yank* magazine published figures for U.S. losses from the beginning of World War II through February 7, 1945, of “782,180, including 693,342 for the Army alone” (p. 20). In addition to exploring the various methods of estimation, Giangreco gives evidence that Truman based his decision to avoid invasion on conservative, not inflated, casualty estimates.

In his fifth chapter, “Not the Recipe for Victory,” Giangreco documents U.S. and Japanese reallocations of troops among various areas of operation. Despite Allied attempts to deceive the enemy with misleading communications campaigns, Japanese military leaders correctly anticipated the time and location for the planned initial Allied invasion of Japan’s home islands: October 1945 in Kyushu, southern Japan. Accordingly, the Japanese transferred thirteen divisions to Kyushu before the end of the war in August, whereas General Douglas MacArthur and U.S. planners expected only six to ten Japanese divisions. MacArthur anticipated outnumbering Japanese troops by a comfortable margin, but the thirteen divisions transferred made the probable ratio closer to 1 : 1. Giangreco emphasizes that, since “planned superiority” was no longer likely, Truman’s assertion that five hundred thousand lives would be lost probably was too conservative.

One of the most significant chapters in the book is chapter 6, “The Decision,” referring to Truman’s decision to drop the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Giangreco traces factors from the summer of 1944 to August 1945 that affected the decision, including the casualty surge from the earlier ratio of more than 4.5 Japanese casualties to every U.S. casualty to a more even ratio of 2 : 1 or even 1.2 : 1 in recent campaigns, such as Iwo Jima. This surge was one of Truman’s considerations when he requested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) provide a projection of casualties that would result from an invasion of Kyushu.

The aforementioned new chapters 11 and 17 contribute facts and research regarding Soviet entry and participation. Giangreco provides evidence that MacArthur and other military advisers supported Soviet entry into the war against Japan soon after Pearl Harbor. Accordingly, the author reasons that Truman did not drop the bombs to minimize Soviet participation; contrary to such a narrative, U.S.-Soviet cooperation in defeating Japan was an extension of Lend-Lease arrangements and planning. Although Giangreco argues that it always had been the intent of the JCS to incorporate the Soviets into U.S. war-termination plans in the Pacific, his research aligns in at least one instance with revisionists who argue that Truman wanted to minimize Soviet participation as much as possible: while MacArthur always argued for Soviet entry as the best plan, other JCS advisers, such as Admiral Ernest J. King, told Truman that the United States could defeat Japan without Stalin’s help.

Contemplation of the locations, participants, and numbers involved in this story can be daunting, but a dedicated

reader gains a nuanced mental picture of the moving parts on both sides of the conflict. Scholars and researchers who desire in-depth information will benefit from Giangreco's research, and the appendices and bibliography include numerous primary sources that have received little or no attention in past traditionalist-versus-revisionist debates. This work is a must-read for those interested in U.S. and Japanese military and political historiography and strategy in the final year of World War II and the critical factors contributing to war termination in the Pacific.

GINA GRANADOS PALMER



*Progressives in Navy Blue: Maritime Strategy, American Empire, and the Transformation of U.S. Naval Identity, 1873-1898*, by Scott Mobley. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018. 432 pages. \$34.95.

Judging Scott Mobley's *Progressives in Navy Blue* by its cover, it might seem a bit esoteric. The parallels with the modern U.S. Navy, however, quickly become apparent in this well-written and -researched history of the transition of our Navy from sail to steam and from constabulary force to national fleet. This is Mobley's first book, but in a thirty-year career as a nuclear-trained surface warfare officer, including command of two ships, he lived the same "warrior-engineer" dichotomy that was central to the late-nineteenth-century American naval culture around which this book revolves. The U.S. Navy between the Civil and Spanish-American Wars engenders limited historical discourse owing to the lack of naval combat, but Mobley asserts that the progressive

currents that the naval officer corps debated during this period marked a pivotal shift in ideas on naval professionalism and strategic thinking.

The Gilded Age Navy, in relation to its time, was not an anachronistic organization wedded to outdated ideas, as it often is portrayed. Indeed, in many ways, the Navy of the 1870s and 1880s preceded the national Progressive movement. Even as the Navy addressed the massive challenges involved in incorporating emerging technology into an organization steeped in tradition, the service simultaneously had to deal with the emergence of national strategic thought. The idea that America should maintain a navy for war during peacetime ran counter to a century of tradition. Mobley asserts that this change in strategic focus drove the cultural shift in the Navy officer corps. In this he challenges previous scholars "who attribute the Navy's revival to a mix of commercial expansionism, hegemonic aspirations, and imperial ambition" (p. 12). *Progressives in Navy Blue* adds to the scholarship by considering the "influence of strategic ideas, beliefs, values, and practices upon the Navy's professional culture and identity" (p. 14).

With the marked exception of the Civil War, within the service's first century "decades of overseas service, policing, and promoting America's maritime empire fundamentally shaped the U.S. Navy as a constabulary force led by mariner-warriors" (p. 37). The post-Civil War American navy emphasized single-ship operations, with limited to no opportunity for multiship training. Naval officers and civilian leaders saw no need to dedicate resources to homeland defense, believing that the frigate-and-coastal-fort system in place