

REVIEWS

***Pacific Blitzkrieg: World War II in the Central Pacific* by Sharon Tosi Lacey. Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 2013, ISBN 978-1-57441-525-4, 282 pages, \$27.95.**

The United States successfully conducted global warfare in World War II. Yet, it began the effort, in the words of historian Martin Blumenson, “in a hasty, largely improvised, almost chaotic and painfully inadequate manner.” Moving from that state of affairs to one that witnessed total victory was the result of an evolutionary process involving dynamic leadership, operational brilliance and tactical supremacy. Commanders initially faced an almost insurmountable series of tasks in the Pacific Theater of Operations. How they met the challenges by developing division-level organizations, mastering the art of amphibious warfare and resolving interservice cultural differences is the subject of Dr. Sharon Tosi Lacey’s *Pacific Blitzkrieg: World War II in the Central Pacific*.

The book examines the five major Central Pacific battles in which both Army and Marine units participated. These were the battle of Guadalcanal, the invasions of Tarawa and Makin in the Gilbert Islands, the struggle for Kwajalein and Roi-Namur in the Marshall Islands, the conquest of the Marianas island of Saipan and the fight for the island of Okinawa.

Lacey explains her organization of

material by writing, “Comparing, to the greatest degree possible, similar events, functions and outcomes, in various engagements over a three-year period requires a certain degree of analytical standardization.” To this end, each chapter is identically structured and contains a brief introductory review of worldwide events followed by a discussion of the strategic setting, operational planning, pre-combat training, review of the units involved, the operation itself, enemy action, landing operations, battle summary and an analysis section. The analysis section includes an examination of the planning, intelligence, training, casualties and commanders. The final two sections provide lessons-learned and effects on future operations. By using this systematic format, the contribution each of the five battles made to final victory can be more fully appreciated. Footnotes, a detailed bibliography, photos and maps will further enhance the value of the book to joint-force maneuver commanders.

The process of creating and employing a joint force to defeat the Japanese was not without growing pains. There were “service cultural difference[s]” which hindered the realization of a seamless fighting force striving to achieve a common goal. There were members of both the Army and the Marines who were combative and uncooperative with each other. For example, writing on

Marine MG Holland M. Smith’s attitude following the 1943 invasion of Tarawa and Makin islands, Lacey comments that Smith “never saw this difference in outlooks as one of doctrine. Instead, what the army considered a prudent approach to combat, he viewed as cowardice and indecision.” Yet, wiser and more adaptable leaders by 1944 “managed to fuse together a truly joint team that was able to overcome interservice issues for the good of the mission.”

Lacey’s even-handed analysis of the leadership styles of corps and division commanders who “demonstrated a genius for pragmatism that was to drive their forces to victory” makes this book a fast-reading, fascinating view of the development of joint operations. Her clear understanding of both enemy and friendly tactics and techniques, coupled with a thorough examination of weapons and training procedures, augment her conclusion that after the passage of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Reorganization Act, “the army and marine corps had finally seen the fruits of the small vine planted on the shores of Guadalcanal [70] years ago.” This book is an enthralling and important account of the development of joint operations. As such, it will appeal to anyone involved in interservice cooperative ventures.

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