

future planned frigates. Richard Beedall's focused chapter on rebuilding the Royal Navy strikes an optimistic note if the planned naval programme is realized by 2030, but acknowledges many problems and potential challenges in the meantime. The Italian navy, minus the nuclear components, compares favourably with relatively new FREMM frigate additions to the surface fleet and a capable submarine force, four of which are Type 212A. Alejandro Vilches, another contributing editor, showcases the force structure and warships of the *Armada Española*, Spain's navy, which faces replacing an aging fleet with new warships and submarines during a period of fiscal restraint and reassessment of the country's role in the defence of Europe. Germany and Turkey continue to add modern warships to their respective fleets through domestic shipbuilding and participate in the competition for foreign export orders. A host of smaller European countries are also covered in basic detail in the remainder of the section.

Seaforth World Naval Review 2022 continues the beloved annual series with a clear layout and beautiful, well-chosen pictures in colour and black and white. The book is recommended for both general and professional audiences interested in the latest developments in contemporary navies around the world. It ranks with Brassey and Janes as a credible authoritative reference source in the field.

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Joseph Wheelan. *Bitter Peleliu: The Forgotten Struggle on the Pacific War's Worst Battlefield*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, www.ospreypublishing.com, 2022. 336 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography. UK £25.00, US \$30.00, hardback; ISBN 978-1-4728-4950-2. (E-book available.)

The Battle of Peleliu, waged during the autumn of 1944, constituted one of the bloodiest clashes of the Pacific Theatre. Overshadowed by larger engagements including Iwo Jima and Okinawa, the battle for Peleliu nonetheless established the tactical template for Japanese forces during the closing months of the war. Moreover, the decision to carry out the battle was controversial at the time; among historians, Peleliu remains one of the most heavily debated debacles of the Second World War.

The grueling fight that would unfold for Peleliu had ironically been born of American success. By the summer of 1944, the tide of the war in the Pacific had clearly turned against the Japanese Empire. On New Guinea, Japanese forces were on their heels in the wake of successful Allied campaigns. In February, the Americans had largely neutralized the vital Japanese naval base

at Truk in the Caroline Islands. During the summer, American forces had seized the Mariana Islands, affording the US Army an ideal base from which to launch B-29 attacks directly on the Japanese homeland.

But the precise route to final victory remained in dispute. General Douglas MacArthur, who had been forced to evacuate Corregidor in 1942, not surprisingly favoured an invasion of the Philippines, followed by the seizure of Okinawa. For his part, Admiral Chester Nimitz considered the Philippines a non-essential target, and advocated for an invasion of Formosa and Okinawa in preparation for a direct attack on Japan. Ultimately, the Roosevelt Administration opted to implement MacArthur's preferred approach.

The Palau Islands, however, posed a potential threat to MacArthur's advance on the Philippines; a Japanese airfield on Peleliu Island was of particular concern, and considered an unacceptable danger to American shipping. Although initial plans called for amphibious landings on the entire island chain, by the middle of September 1944, the strategic landscape had changed.

Sweeping carrier-based strikes had established American air superiority over the region, and Admiral William Halsey, arguing that the Japanese airfield on Peleliu no longer posed a substantive threat, called for the entire operation to be scrapped. Admiral Nimitz was forced to make one of the most difficult, and ultimately controversial, decisions of the war. Although Nimitz agreed to cancel the planned landings in the northern Palaus, the invasion of Peleliu would proceed as planned.

The landings took place on 15 September 1944 and the American 1st Marine Division established a secure toehold on the island by nightfall. But at Peleliu, the Imperial Japanese Army unveiled a radically new tactical approach. At the outset of the war in the Pacific, a Japanese focus on aggressive fighting spirit had ultimately contributed to a string of crushing defeats. Japanese field commanders and enlisted men had been encouraged to throw overwhelming force against American troops and attempt to repel enemy attacks on the beaches. Mass frontal assaults, the "banzai" charge of legend, were bloody, and ultimately futile, attempts to halt the American tide.

In order to negate the overwhelming advantage that the Americans enjoyed in manpower, materiel, and firepower, the Japanese developed an intricate and highly coordinated defense-in-depth. Rather than squander their own limited manpower reserves in pointless banzai attacks, the Japanese would fight a war of attrition and exact a grim toll of blood for every inch of ground.

Although abandoning the strategic initiative was a radical departure from long-standing Japanese military doctrine, the core of the new approach involved the concept of "fukkaku," which constituted a heavy focus on fighting from prepared defensive positions. At Peleliu, skilled Japanese engineers supervised

the construction of a dizzying maze of tunnels and caves which honeycombed key positions on the island. The underground defensive works offered Japanese troops a good measure of protection from American bombardment and were mutually supporting in case one position came under attack.

The new Japanese tactics came as a complete surprise to senior American officers at Peleliu, and as their men became mired down in rugged terrain on the island's central highlands, they had few fresh ideas. Major General William Rupertus, commander of the 1st Marine Division, insisted on aggressive direct attacks into the Japanese stronghold, with predictable results. Rupertus persisted under the notion that Japanese defenses would collapse under repeated attacks and had no idea how to adapt to changing enemy tactics.

Largely due to a lack of tactical flexibility in the senior command, Marine infantry suffered ghastly casualties. Not until October would American commanders fully understand that the Japanese were waging a grim battle of attrition and change their own approach accordingly. Increasingly, infantry attacks would rely heavily on overwhelming firepower including armour, artillery, and close air support. This measured, combined-arms approach finally reduced the island's Japanese garrison, and likewise reduced the numbers of American casualties.

Author Wheelan pens a riveting account of one of the Pacific Theatre's least understood battles. His research relies heavily on primary sources including official correspondence, after-action reports, and Japanese records; the text likewise includes numerous veterans' descriptions of the horrific fighting of the two-month-long battle. *Bitter Peleliu* consequently contains a judicious mix of scholarly analysis and riveting combat accounts.

As such, Wheelan's book will appeal to seasoned students of the Second World War as well as casual readers with an interest in military history. Although further research on the battle is undoubtedly in order, *Bitter Peleliu* constitutes a worthy contribution to the historiography of the epic war in the Pacific.

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Klaus Willmann. *Screams of the Drowning. From the Eastern Front to the Sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Greenhill Books, www-pen-and-sword.co.uk, 2021. xvi+192 pp., illustrations, notes. UK £19.99, US \$34.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-78438-598-9.

In *Screams of the Drowning*, Klaus Willmann tells the story of German soldier Hans Fackler during the Second World War. He also briefly sheds light on the sinking of the SS *Wilhelm Gustloff* during that conflict.

Willman opens with an exploration of Fackler's childhood and his take on