

Ian W. Toll. *Twilight of the Gods: War in the Western Pacific, 1944-1945*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, www.norton.com, 2020. 926 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. US \$40.00, cloth; ISBN 978-0-393-08065-0.

Twilight of the Gods: War in the Western Pacific, 1944-1945 is the final volume of a trilogy that includes *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942* and continues with *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944*; a brilliantly written update of Samuel Eliot Morison's 15-volume classic work on the United States Navy in the Second World War.

As Toll points out, this is the story of the predictable outcome of a bloody war that should not have happened. At the start of the war, Japan was a nation with almost no natural resources. It was largely dependent upon foreign suppliers for food, industrial commodities, especially oil, and a labour force of vanquished neighbours. They opportunistically acquired territories through diplomacy, exploiting unrest in nearby countries or by outright conquest. Japan's large but vulnerable navy protected the vital sea lanes, salt water highways to their home islands. Although an emperor/man-god occupied the Chrysanthemum Throne, the political hegemony of the Asian nation was controlled by the heads of the Imperial Army and Navy, who were bitter rivals. The then-neutral United States was a trading partner, but held a tight hand on the oil, scrap metal and mineral supply that was vital for a nation at war. The Japanese military hierarchy gambled that by destroying a large part of the American naval fleet and air power at Pearl Harbor, the Yankees would not be in a favourable position to retaliate, especially if they declared war on Germa-

ny and Italy, nations half a world away. In September 1940, Japan had signed the Tripartite Pact forming the Axis nations. The downside was that this alliance with European nations could not offer much assistance to the Japanese in their Pacific war effort. They failed to sufficiently recognize America's resiliency, its vast resources and its ability to garrote or strangle Japan by cutting off their war and vital lifeline through US naval and air superiority. *Twilight of the Gods* switches between the points of view on both sides to describe how the metaphorical noose slowly tightened against the Japanese via a detailed journey drawn from American and Japanese archives. Of particular note, the author inserts many references to the diary of Admiral Matome Ugaki, a naval commander who participated in the Pearl Harbor secret attack and fought through to Japan's surrender.

In a way, Toll acts as a war correspondent, placing his readers into graphic scenes of battles while giving intimate glimpses into the character of most of the important leaders on both sides of the conflict. Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, Admirals Chester Nimitz, Earnest King, Richmond Turner, John McCain Sr., Thomas and Raymond Spruance, Frederick Sherman, colourful Joseph "Jocko" Clark plus Generals George Marshall, Holland "Howlin" Mad" Smith, and Henry "Hap" Arnold make extensive appearances. The author particularly focuses on the psycho-dynamics of the flamboyant egotistical but successful characters, the vainglorious General Douglas MacArthur, "ride out the typhoons" Admiral William "Bull" Halsey and cigar-chomping Army Airforce General Curtis LeMay. On the other side, Emperor Hirohito, Ministers Shigenori Togo, Kantaro Suzuki, and Admirals Isoroku Yamamoto, Jisabu-

ro Ozawa and Matome Ugaki (among many others) are profiled to a more limited degree.

The closing battles of the Pacific War have become iconic; the renowned assaults in Manila, Luzon, Leyte, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. The enemy fought with skill, initiative, persistence and at times, a seemingly inhuman lack of fear, in actions Toll graphically describes in blood-stained detail. Perhaps most chilling are his exceptionally vivid accounts of the horrors and destruction from the fire-bombing and the atom bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Most noteworthy are the many background stories. Among them are tales about the effectiveness of the American submarine fleet, the initial and sometimes ongoing problems with defective torpedoes, and aggressive submariner heroes like Dudley W. "Mush" Morton, Richard H. O'Kane and Slade Cutter. Then there were the men who flew high above the fray, employing their new, gargantuan weapon, the B-29s, flying out of tiny Pacific island bases. It was General LeMay who decided that instead of using his huge aircraft to bomb in the standard high-altitude way, they could come in fast and low and drop incendiary explosives to obliterate largely wooden Japanese cities like Tokyo. After the war, LeMay stated that if the Allies had lost the war, he likely would have been tried as a war criminal. The detailed story of the preparation of the B-29 atom bomb missions and their results was particularly engrossing. And then there are cameo appearances by young draftees, several of whom went on to make their mark in literature and medicine, such as James Michener and Dr. Lewis Thomas. Perhaps the most chilling and simultaneously fascinating concept was the rise of kamikazes. Famously known as suicidal aircraft pilots, kamikaze forces were also

found in miniature submarines, swift boats and as swimmers carrying a variety of explosives devices. The aircraft were the first guided one-way missiles, a devastating weapon used to fight and inflict maximum damage, but these suicide weapons required a psychological reset of the normal human survival instinct. Perhaps not unexpectedly, such tactics evolved in a warrior and civilian society and wore thin in the final days of the war.

Other fascinating side-stories involved the use and subjugation of the media during war time, devastating typhoons that preyed upon Halsey's Pacific fleet, and the varied terrain that posed challenges for various island landings as well as the subsequent building of vital airfields. Also, there was the central part that logistics played in a vast and diverse Pacific theatre and the massive Russian troop entry into the Pacific War just prior to its ending. After conquest, the author looks back upon the after-effects of an occupation of a defeated, once-proud nation and upon those who fought on both sides.

Finally, *Twilight of the Gods*, the final panel of a literary triptych, is a tour de force of writing that puts the close of the Second World War in the Pacific into a mesmerizing perspective narrated by a master maritime historian. This fairly long but extremely rewarding book should not be missed.

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Brian E. Walter. *The Longest Campaign: Britain's Maritime Struggle in the Atlantic and Northwest Europe, 1939-1945*. Oxford, UK: Casemate Publishing, www.casematepublishing.co.uk, 2020. xix+332 pp., illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, indices. UK £25.00, US \$34.95, cloth;