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Private Empire: ExxonMobil and American Power

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Werneth, Ron. *Beyond Pearl Harbor: The Untold Stories of Japan's Naval Airmen*. Atglen, Pa.: Schiffer Books, 2008. 256pp. \$59.95

Ron Werneth has gone above and beyond the call of duty to produce a detailed perspective of the Japanese airmen of World War II. Werneth spent nearly a decade living in Japan and immersing himself in its culture. He traveled extensively to obtain firsthand accounts of seventeen Japanese naval veterans.

The book is divided into three sections, providing discussions of veterans of Japanese carrier bombers (*kanbaku*), Japanese carrier attack planes (*kanko*), and Japanese fighter aircraft (*kansen*). However, not all accounts are from aviators; some are from maintenance personnel and navigators. The veterans' accounts provide details of these men's lives, an approach that humanizes them, especially for Americans who may still bear ill will toward the Japanese.

One Japanese veteran, Ensign Takeshi Maeda, was instrumental in attacking and sinking USS *West Virginia*. Takeshi Maeda tells the remarkable story of how in 1991 he was invited to the fiftieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor. At the event, which his family had not wanted him to attend, he met a *West Virginia* survivor, Mr. Richard Fiske. Maeda told Fiske that he was sorry for attacking Pearl Harbor, and Fiske responded by graciously telling Maeda that he had just been following orders and it was not his fault. Not only did this help Maeda personally, but it also provides us a larger perspective of the war, especially Pearl Harbor.

It is fascinating to learn that a number of its participants had been totally unaware of the planned attack on Pearl Harbor

until the days immediately preceding 7 December. One veteran, Ensign Yuji Akamatsu, states that he never doubted that attacking Pearl Harbor was the right thing to do, in view of the economic hardships Japan was facing. However, many other veterans' accounts explain how the attack was either a bad idea or how they were just doing their jobs for their nation, and offering their own patriotic perspectives.

Werneth has a fascinating writing style and makes the stories come alive with his carefully chosen words, explanations of details and Japanese terms, and use of illustrations. He did an outstanding job acquiring photographs of the Japanese naval airmen, both old and new, including photos of ships, planes, and actual attacks.

This book is an absolute must-read for any naval aviator or student of the World War II Pacific theater.

MAJ. JASON RAVNSBORG, U.S. ARMY RESERVE



Coll, Steve. *Private Empire: ExxonMobil and American Power*. New York: Penguin, 2012. 685pp. \$36

What is it like to lead and work for America's largest privately owned company, one that finds, transports, processes, and ultimately delivers a product essential to the operation of almost everything in the developed world? This product is found hundreds to thousands of feet below the surface of the earth, from the deserts of the Middle East to the Arctic, as well as many miles beneath the ocean. It is located in areas of the world that are isolated, disease ridden, politically unstable, and often right in the middle of armed conflicts.

When this company gets the product to where it is needed, when it is needed, and at the expected price, it is highly regarded. However, when it does not meet required standards or generates profits perceived to be higher than “reasonable,” it is the object of scorn.

The company is ExxonMobil, and the product is petroleum, primarily oil, and natural gas. Steve Coll, twice winner of the Pulitzer Prize, does a great job of taking readers behind the scenes, from the *Exxon Valdez* disaster in 1989 to the BP *Deepwater Horizon* disaster in 2011. In this extremely well-researched book, Coll uses his considerable interviewing skills and his well-developed network of sources to illuminate the interests and perspectives of key members of the company itself and officials from the administrations of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, as well as those of other nations and other energy companies.

He begins with the *Exxon Valdez* accident and details the effect it had on risk assessment and safety-control measures taken by the company worldwide, and on efforts to perfect media and public-relations capabilities. Lee Raymond, then president of the company, admits that the accident suggested the need for “perhaps a rebalancing of risk-reward in many of our operations,” which he takes to heart as he drives home many changes in the risk-assessment calculus that the company uses.

Coll describes all the places ExxonMobil must go to secure oil: Aceh, Indonesia; Chad; Equatorial Guinea; Iraq after the 2003 American invasion; Russia; Canada; and Nigeria. All these locations bring different types and combinations of risk, from security to political, corruption, environmental, and economic. This is a fascinating story of overlapping and conflicting interests, with the U.S. Department of State, and even members of the administration, in the background, waiting to help if needed.

One of the most interesting parts of this book deals with ExxonMobil’s organizational culture, influenced directly by the values of CEO Lee Raymond and his successor, Rex Tillerson, a culture that goes back to the company’s founder, John D. Rockefeller, who established it, as Standard Oil, in 1870.

This company culture is inculcated within the organization and communicated outside the firm through lobbying and deliberate efforts to communicate perspectives to policy makers and thought leaders, not only in the United States, but worldwide.

All consumers of petroleum products should read this book, to improve their understanding of the complexities and dilemmas presented by the search for and transportation, processing, and final delivery of oil and gas.

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