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The Pacific War: Japan versus the Allies

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Cohen's book should be of interest to students of combat aviation. It comes full circle from the initial successes of 1948, 1956, and 1967 to the effects of the 1973 war and the resulting self-examination by the Israelis of their heavy reliance on the Air Force. It is a very good narrative and easy to follow. Sadly, it does not go into great detail on policy and decision making within the IAF but focuses on telling the slightly glorified story of Israel's air force.

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Levine, Alan J. *The Pacific War: Japan versus the Allies*. New York: Praeger, 1995. 200pp. \$49.95

Levine, a historian whose specialty is Russian history and the author of a number of works on the Soviet Union and the Cold War, has turned his attention in this work to the war with Japan, with very mixed results.

The book is divided into chapters, with subheadings concerning major events of the war. The author has chosen to include the China-Burma-India theater in his definition of the Pacific War, thereby making his task more difficult. In his introduction Levine is critical of others who have written general histories, with the implication that his book would avoid their faults. His stated aim, to treat the war as a "particular war waged by a particular Japanese regime," is not unique. This truism aside, the key question is how successful the author has been in relating the major details of this complex war.

This book's strength lies in the first chapter, where Levine traces in a concise way the events that led to U.S. involvement in the Pacific War. Other interesting and informative sections deal with

American and Japanese home fronts. However, it is evident that once Levine begins to analyze the tactical side of the war he is more at ease; his discussions of naval actions and the segment on submarines are particularly good. Overall, unfortunately, the negatives outweigh the good aspects of this work.

The major fault of the book is its length. After discussing the generalities of the U.S., Chinese, and Japanese situations before and after the war, Levine has little space left to deal with the many campaigns. He criticizes others for concentrating too much on the tactical side of war; but surely, to a large extent, that was what the war was about. The Japanese were defeated by air, naval, and land actions in a number of theaters, and any book that minimizes those actions is basically flawed.

There are many examples of oversimplification. One is Chapter Seven, which deals with the crucial period of 1944–1945: it is only eleven pages long, and three of them are devoted to a single naval action, that of Leyte Gulf. To the Marianas campaigns—which the author admits were the key to breaking Japan's inner defenses—he devotes less than a page. He even repeats the ill founded myth that the great banzai attack on Saipan overran "a poorly run army unit." The desperate battle for Guam, which ultimately became the U.S. forward base in the Pacific, is dismissed in one sentence. The longest and most complex action of the Pacific War, the nineteen-month-long Luzon campaign, is given slightly over one page.

Levine accuses another author of having "a maniacal bias" toward General Douglas MacArthur. Yet Levine himself obviously has a bias for MacArthur (though he does not vindicate MacArthur's inaction that allowed his air force to be destroyed in December 1941). He avoids criticizing MacArthur for the lack of preparation on Bataan, his decision to

use the Eighth Army in the southern Philippines, and for forcing the Australians into unnecessary fighting in the East Indies in 1945.

Levine's *bête noire* is Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell. His analysis of Stilwell's actions ignores the difficult political and military situation of the China-Burma-India theater, added to British and Chinese recalcitrance at the highest levels. The author has little to say about the 1944 Japanese offensive in China, precipitated by Chiang Kai-shek and Major General Claire L. Chennault's disregard of Stilwell's sound tactical advice. One can also debate the author's statement that the northern Burma campaign was a "mistake." He goes even farther afield when he claims erroneously that General William Slim was the only British officer who could get on with Stilwell.

The author is also gratuitous in his criticism of other military leaders. Two examples will suffice. Without explaining the difficulties involved in checking the Japanese tide of 1942, Levine pontificates that General Archibald Wavell's strategy was "disastrously bad" and even denounces (without details) his earlier Middle East policy. Later he devotes considerable ire to attacking the plans for the invasion of Japan. Levine simply assumes that naval and air action would have ended the war without an invasion. That proposition has been questioned by other authors and is still open to debate.

Measured by the objectives stated in the introduction and by the many errors of omission, this is a flawed book that adds little to the literature of the Pacific War.

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Crenshaw, Russell. *The Battle of Tassafaronga*. Baltimore, Md.: The Nautical

and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1995. 214pp. \$29.95

This history and analysis of a night engagement in World War II is an interesting, well written addition to what has already been said about the desperate naval actions in the Solomon Islands. The new ground covered in this book is mainly a perceived failure by all the commands, from Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Area (CINCPAC) and the Commander, South Pacific Force and Area (COMSOPAC), to ensure that submarines were sufficiently acquainted with the new SG surface search radar and how to best use it, particularly during night engagements.

A series of major naval battles began in the vicinity of Guadalcanal in August 1942, when the Japanese first attempted to build up their forces on that island. But after Tassafaronga they gave up the effort and began to remove them. Like most naval engagements in the Solomons, Tassafaronga was fought at night, and it was more nearly a barroom shootout than a measured and deliberate Battle of Jutland. Gunfire at desperately close quarters invited confusion and threatened the loss of command on both sides. Uncertainty as to whether various targets were friendly led to unfortunate delays in opening fire. Russell Crenshaw fought in the battle of Tassafaronga as the gunnery officer of the destroyer USS *Gwin*. Having engaged in various research projects after his retirement, Crenshaw undertook the task of finding out "what really happened" in this night action.

What actually happened was that the battle was fought by the United States with insufficient regard for the hazards of night fighting and even less for the benefits of SG radar. The Americans, with that prize, could have opened fire accurately at a range exceeding the reach of Japanese detection and have