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The Devil's Anvil: The Assault on Peleliu

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and accurate account of each battle, well illustrated by photographs of the men, the ships, and the battles. What puts this book in a class by itself, however, is the views of some of the surviving men, and especially of the wrecked ships, as they appear today.

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Hallas, James H. *The Devil's Anvil: The Assault on Peleliu*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994. 297pp. \$27.50

Names such as Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Iwo Jima usually conjure up scenes of carnage, and levels of destruction, beyond comprehension. For some reason, perhaps because of long-awaited advances in the Philippines or events in Europe, the landing and conquest of Peleliu never received the same degree of attention. From James Hallas's history, one can only conclude that the battle was as frightful as any of the Pacific campaigns and deserves our attention and study.

The Devil's Anvil covers the complete story of the landing on Peleliu, from the initial planning through the mop-up and occupation. While inspiration for the seizure of the Palaus sprang from the perceived need to protect the reconquest of the Philippines and had both MacArthur's and Nimitz's approval, the action was not unanimously supported. As Hallas notes, it was surprising and worrisome that Admiral William ("Bull") Halsey, commander of the Western Pacific Task Forces and an aggressive and hard-driving fighter, objected to the proposed

landing, insisting that there would be a "prohibitive price in casualties." Halsey believed that Ulithi, with its deep-water harbor, was the only island of the Palau group worth seizing. His objections noted, planning for landing the 1st Marine Division went ahead. In contrast to Halsey, General William Rupertus, commander of the 1st Marine Division, predicted that the campaign would be "rough but fast." He was woefully mistaken. It took the veterans of Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester over two months to secure that small piece of coral.

The bulk of this work is a day-by-day account of the battle for Peleliu from the vantage point of private infantrymen. Extensive interviews with survivors provided Hallas with a huge amount of graphic detail, which he skillfully uses to bring the horror of island combat home to the reader. No one could read about Company K holding "the Point" through sheer willpower, or assault after assault by exhausted troops on Bloody Nose Ridge and the Umurbrogel, and not be deeply affected. Pages of ghastly, poignant vignettes have an almost numbing effect. That anyone survived is astonishing.

Central to the story is the 1st Marine Regiment, commanded by the legendary Lewis B. ("Chesty") Puller, who had joined the Corps in 1918, earned three Navy Crosses, and had a reputation as a fearless warrior. Yet he was considerably less sanguine than his commanding officer, General Rupertus, on the prospects for a quick campaign. The numbers alone gave him pause: roughly 10,500 Japanese defenders, many of them elite Imperial troops, would face

28,000 Marines, of which only 9,000 were infantrymen—far from the optimum three-to-one ratio for a successful landing. It was Puller's men who landed on White Beach 1 and 2, probably the most heavily defended part of the coast. Puller fought his troops to the utmost, insisting to the high command that they only needed a bit more time and another assault to achieve their objectives. Even when his troops had sustained crippling casualties Puller refused reinforcement. One wonders if the loss of his brother, Sam, on Guam and the pain from shrapnel left in his leg since Guadalcanal may have colored his judgment. Some of his decisions were more reminiscent of the battlefields of France in 1915 than of the Pacific campaigns of the 1940s.

At the same time, the reader might have benefited from an expanded examination of Rupertus's role in the operation. Having broken his ankle in practice maneuvers prior to the landing, he was forced to remain aboard USS *DuPage*. While Hallas deals to some extent with the effect of Rupertus's restricted participation in the early hours of the landing, a more thorough examination of his command activity is in order, as well as of his subsequent actions ashore and the performance of his staff.

This minor suggestion notwithstanding, *The Devil's Anvil* is an outstanding study of an often neglected element of the Pacific War, and it is a substantial contribution to the body of literature on the conflict.

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Foster, Simon. *Okinawa 1945*. London: Arms and Armour, 1995. 192pp. \$24.95

The current popularity of Second World War histories brought about by the fiftieth-anniversary remembrances has unfortunately cluttered the shelves with weak offerings, new titles rushed to market to cash in while the topic is hot. *Okinawa 1945* is long on detail (much of questionable accuracy), short on analysis, and offers little new insight into the bloodiest campaign of the Pacific War.

This work recounts primarily the war at sea, with just enough description of the operations ashore to keep clear the context of the overall campaign. Foster's "pro-Navy" view gets in the way of a balanced assessment of the importance of the ground war versus the naval war. He contends that the success of the Okinawa operation hinged upon the Americans retaining "command of the sea," while the ground war, although bitterly fought, "was a foregone conclusion." Foster implies that the war at sea was a near-run thing. In fact, however, after the beatings taken at the "Marianas Turkey Shoot" and later in the defense of the Philippines, the Imperial Japanese Navy was in no shape to contest American dominance. The massed suicide attacks by Japanese land-based air inflicted a horrible toll on the ships screening the island, but there is no evidence, nor does Foster offer any, that the American high command considered abandoning the waters around Okinawa because of the *Kikusui* ("Floating Chrysanthemum") attacks.