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## Guadalcanal: Starvation Island

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fully covered, there is no hint that any of these decisions were other than right and proper. In his service to his country, it is clear that President Roosevelt relished his role as Commander in Chief and found in it his ultimate fulfillment. His life had qualified him very remarkably for wartime leadership, and his understanding of the Constitution and our democratic process insured his political success, whatever his military genius. He proved himself global in scope, brilliant in conception, sensitive to logistics and timing, perceptive in selecting major leaders, and effective in delegating. Only in Guadalcanal did he interfere directly with a military operation after it was underway. He insisted that the JCS direct every possible force to save that shoestring campaign, and his intervention proved correct.

As World War II fades into the past, especially for today's military and political leaders, this book is most timely, reminding us of such major war requirements as mobilization, rules of engagement, battle readiness, and strategic plans. *Commander in Chief* should be required reading for every War College student and military commander, every member of Congress, and every media reporter.

The tools may have changed, but the global and personal dynamics of war remain the same. This book reminds us of the fundamentals of war—the human factor, the irrationalities, the raw courage, the glories and squabbles of services and allies, the untried and variedly successful

theories, the mobilization of production, and above all, the essentiality of publicly supported objectives and an agreed basic strategy.

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Hammel, Eric. *Guadalcanal: Starvation Island*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1987. 435pp. \$24.95

For several years the Naval War College's warfighting courses have used the battles for Leyte Gulf as the primary case study of World War II. There, an overwhelming superiority of U.S. power determined the outcome—tactical brilliance and errors notwithstanding. The battles on and around Guadalcanal from August through December of 1942 offer far more thought provoking and valuable material for contemporary military leaders and planners. In today's world we no longer have a dominance of power. The early months of any future war may well resemble those months of confusion and bloodshed to control an island of no strategic importance where, as Hammel states, a "confluence of events" focused the military might of two great nations.

To his credit, Eric Hammel does not become pretentious in attempting to provide strategic overviews or draw historical implications. What he does do very well, and in chronological order, is portray small pieces of this campaign as viewed by those in the jungle, in the cockpit, and on the decks of the naval units involved.

The action is vividly captured but not overblown; the fear, hunger, filth, disease, stupidity, improvisational brilliance, and sheer bravery of the combatants at Guadalcanal could not be overstated. This book should be read by all who train for warfare for the same reasons stated eloquently by Ernest Hemingway in his introduction to *Men At War*, published in the same year this battle occurred: "So when you have read it you will know that there are no worse things to be gone through than men have been through before."

Battles in the Coral Sea in May and off Midway in June had been costly strategic victories, their value not clearly perceived despite the successful containment of Japanese expansion. The British, Australians, and New Zealanders, who had the most at stake in the Solomons, were overtaxed defending the Empire elsewhere. Japanese attempts to build an airfield on the Lunga Plain forced changes in U.S. strategy and focused attention on Guadalcanal.

U.S. ground, sea, and air units had been stripped of the personnel trained to provide cadres for newly built units. Surviving on captured food, troops suffered from fungal and jungle diseases, and tolerated clothing inadequate for jungle warfare. Our torpedoes were totally ineffective while those of the Japanese could tear off a cruiser's bow or disintegrate a destroyer in seconds. Our Navy still steamed in close line ahead and tried to cross the "T" long after those torpedoes had made this the worst possible tactic. Fighter aircraft

designed for export to Europe were diverted to the theater without support or even directions for assembly. Their oxygen systems were inoperative and could not be flown above 14,000 feet to take on the Zeros, Vals, and Bettys which operated well above that ceiling. Ships sailed into battle without doctrine, communications, or knowledge of the others on their team. Admirals worried about conserving scarce carrier assets while men died on the beach. At one time there were no fully operational carriers in the theater. The sheer violence of some battles still ranks as the worst of all time; the events at Bloody Ridge and the early hours of Friday, 13 November, off Savo Island, should never be forgotten.

The litany could be extended over several pages but more important are the human traits pictured so well by Hammel: the bravery, ingenuity, dedication despite frustration, endurance, and sheer guts under the worst possible conditions. Many of the names he mentions have lived on in history: Puller, Walt, Edson, Foss, Scott, Callaghan, Vandegrift, Halsey. Thousands more never made the history books though their gallantry was fully as great. He introduces a few and permits us glimpses of the conflagration through their eyes, glimpses that remain starkly vivid despite the years.

Warfare is more than arrows drawn across a map, more than long-range high-tech weapons. It concerns dedicated men and women who may find themselves in a situation such as

Guadalcanal, fighting a determined enemy at a distance of only a few feet or yards, with weapons designed for long-range use, and where tactics will fail and operable strategy will become clear only in hindsight. Eric Hammel has written a concise, readable, colorfully descriptive but unassuming tribute to those who served their nation with distinction at that difficult time. To have been at Guadalcanal was the mark of a tested hero for many years. These men, pictured so well by Hammel, would agree with Hemingway's words from that same year, "I have seen much war in my lifetime and I hate it profoundly. But there are worse things than war; and all of them come with defeat. The more you hate war, the more you know that once you are forced into it, for whatever reason it may be, you have to win it."

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Coffman, Edward M. *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986. 412pp. \$35

This standard work, first published 19 years ago, is reprinted in paperback without change, a fitting decision because no alternative interpretation has materialized. Coffman's book remains the best single history of the American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) during World War I. He sought to produce an account "more comprehensive than earlier histories"

by moving beyond traditional headquarters narratives and bringing in "the people who were actually involved . . . at all levels." In this respect he anticipated John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* and aspects of the "new social history."

Nevertheless, the book culminates rather than inaugurates a historiographical effort. Like predecessor accounts that it replaces, the book concentrates on the A.E.F. of 1917-1918 and the celebration of its achievements. Although more candid and less partisan than earlier accounts written closer to 1917-1918, the book—like other such works—is essentially an operational history of the A.E.F. Limited analyses of national policy and strategy are subordinated to operations, although mobilization and logistics receive measurable coverage. The book approaches its subject from the national perspective, minimizing treatment of the larger struggle of which the American contribution was a part.

We leave Coffman's pages with the feeling that despite all manner of difficulties, including unpreparedness and obtuseness on the part of the Allies, the A.E.F. became a splendid fighting force and made the difference in the war. The youthful, vigorous, and pristine republic was successful in its effort to resolve the conflict that had exhausted decadent Europe. General John J. Pershing emerges as the hero of the enterprise—taut, disciplined, seasoned, and determined—the embodiment of what it takes to win campaigns