

1985

## A Special Valor—The U.S. Marines and the Pacific War

Thomas Pollock

Richard Wheeler

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Pollock, Thomas and Wheeler, Richard (1985) "A Special Valor—The U.S. Marines and the Pacific War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 38 : No. 4 , Article 22.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol38/iss4/22>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

resulting Forrestal-Patterson agreement disturbed Vandegrift greatly. Instead of providing that the functions and duties of all the Services be written into the basic law, the agreement left these to be defined by executive order. Vandegrift and his stalwarts perceived the Navy as willing to sacrifice the Corps to save naval aviation.

To prepare himself for the next round of Congressional hearings, Vandegrift formed a new "Board to Conduct Research and Prepare Material in Connection with Pending Legislation," less ponderously known as the "Edson-Thomas Board" for its two senior members, Brigadier Generals Edson and Gerald C. Thomas. (Thomas had been Vandegrift's chief of staff on Guadalcanal.) The third ranking member was the ubiquitous Colonel Twining.

Marine Corps objectives with regard to the impending National Security Act were about as follows:

- Continuance of the Service secretaries, preferably with Cabinet rank.
- Avoidance of a single chief of staff.
- Statutory protection for the Marine Corps including a voice in the JCS and preservation of Marine Corps aviation.

The National Security Act of 1947 as finally passed by the Congress and approved by the President met most of these objectives. Particularly important to the Corps was the language stipulating that the Corps included "fleet marine forces of

combined arms, together with supporting air components."

However, the Marine Corps was still left without a voice in the JCS. This would come, at first, as legislated in 1952, limited to matters of direct Marine Corps concern, and then full membership in 1978.

Keiser began this study as his master's thesis in 1971 while a graduate student in political science at Tufts University and completed it some ten years later while a student at the National War College.

In his last paragraph he leaves us with a thought to be remembered. The fight for survival has been invaluable, he says, in one respect: "The doubt, apprehension, and sheer exertion have served to keep the Corps introspective, organizationally lean, and rooted in traditional military values."

EDWIN H. SIMMONS  
Brigadier General  
US Marine Corps (Retired)

Wheeler, Richard. *A Special Valor—The U.S. Marines and the Pacific War*. New York: Harper and Row, 1983. 448pp. \$24.95

Richard Wheeler, who fought and was wounded at Iwo Jima in 1945, has written a good series of short stories about most of the Pacific island battles fought by the US Marine Corps during World War Two. Unfortunately, the book claims to be about the entire Marine effort in the Pacific War—by its own measure it is disappointing. Although the book follows the different battles fought by the Marines, one after the other, it is

disjointed because Mr. Wheeler switches between the MacArthur and the Nimitz campaigns without sufficiently orienting the reader as to what role the Marines played in the strategy of each commander or in how the demands for their resources shaped their development. Mr. Wheeler tries to give the book a unifying theme where one is not necessary.

Nonetheless, Mr. Wheeler does a creditable job in describing the battles for Wake, Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Tarawa, Saipan, Guam, Peleliu, Iwo and some parts of Okinawa. In fact, the account of each battle is almost a complete story in itself. The reader not only is given the necessary tactical information, which is easily followed with well-drawn maps, but also is given the story from the human point-of-view.

The best part of Mr. Wheeler's book is his narration of the battle for Guadalcanal. This is the first book I have read which describes adequately the American problem in holding on to Guadalcanal. As Mr. Wheeler relates, the US Navy was still too weak to engage in a Mahanian showdown with the Japanese Navy and thus left the Marines inadequately protected and supplied. What saved the Marines was, according to Mr. Wheeler, poor planning, poor communications, and the lack of resolve on the part of the Japanese high command to retake the island; the great distances—this problem was particularly severe for the Japanese fighter aircraft who had to do battle at their extreme range and thus could

not provide any real air support for their land and sea forces; and the excellent job the Seabees did in building and sustaining Henderson Field.

Mr. Wheeler aptly describes Japanese strategy to defend Okinawa in 1945 and how the decision not to contest the Americans on the beaches affected their tactics inland. The American advantage of overwhelming material and technical superiority could only be upset where stiff Japanese resistance disrupted the Americans' ability to coordinate their forces effectively. Yet, the author fails to make clear why the American forces suffered 25,000 casualties in a battle the reader is led to believe was relatively easy. There is a dimension about the battle's true ferocity which is left undeveloped.

Another major problem with the book is Mr. Wheeler's own Corps bias, as he credits every major accomplishment of the Marines to the fact that "they were Marines." That reason may explain a lot, but it is hard to believe it explains everything. *A Special Valor* will not meet every reader's needs, but it will serve those primarily interested in specific battles or in the Nimitz campaign.

THOMAS POLLOCK  
Waltham, Mass.

Gardiner, Robert, ed. *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1947-1982*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, Part I: *The Western Powers*, 1983. 298pp. \$34.95. Part II: *The Warsaw Pact and Non-Aligned Nations*, 1984. 210pp. \$34.95