

2020

The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies, compiled by the War History Office of the National Defense College of Japan

Nicholas Even Sarantakes

Willem Rimmelink

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

Recommended Citation

Sarantakes, Nicholas Even and Rimmelink, Willem (2020) "The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies, compiled by the War History Office of the National Defense College of Japan," *Naval War College Review*. Vol. 73 : No. 1 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol73/iss1/12>

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.

and Coast Guardsmen who served in the Arabian Gulf during OIF, for veterans of all times and services, and for the American people so that they could appreciate the sacrifices of the young heroes who stood the watch to protect their security. Furthermore, he clearly states that his mission was to pen a “leadership book with an emphasis on lessons to help” future naval leaders (p. 9). Vice Admiral Costello accomplished his mission, as did the naval forces he was proud to lead into battle during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

SEAN P. HENSELER



The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies, compiled by the War History Office of the National Defense College of Japan, trans. Willem Rummelink. Leiden, Neth.: Leiden Univ. Press, 2016. 672 pages. \$87.50.

Of the major military services of the twentieth century, the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) and the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) are two of the least understood outside their national homes. As a result, Willem Rummelink’s work in translating into English the official Japanese history of the invasion of the Dutch East Indies in 1942 is a major contribution to the study of World War II.

This book is volume 3 of 102 in the War History series (*Senshi Sōsho*) that the Japanese National Defense College—now called the National Institute for Defense Studies—produced between 1966 and 1980. It is the first of three that Rummelink plans to translate on the Dutch-Japanese war in 1942. The series is joint in that it examines the activities of both the IJA and IJN. With that said, this volume focuses primarily, but

not exclusively, on ground operations. The other two planned translations will focus on sea and air operations in and around modern-day Indonesia.

Rummelink’s translation work is impressive. This English-language volume is full and unabridged. The book includes seventy maps and probably as many photos. The quality of the maps is high, but that of the photos leaves a little to be desired; they seem to be scans of the photos printed in the Japanese originals. Extras include the Japanese order of battle, useful glossaries of military and naval terms, and indexes of personal and place-names in both English and Japanese.

The book starts off slowly, with the early chapters containing a collection of documents with a single sentence connecting one staff memo to the next; there is very little historical analysis or narrative. But if one pulls back a bit, these early chapters offer a fascinating look at a military staff at work planning real combat operations.

The Japanese enjoyed enormous and rapid success in the seizure of the Dutch East Indies. Why? The central argument of history is that the Japanese isolated the battlefield with air and naval assets. The IJA and IJN worked well together in joint operations. While the IJA had material shortages even in 1942, it overcame these problems with bold, innovative leadership. For example, the IJA conducted its first airborne operation during the invasion. The Japanese also had the support of the local population, which wanted to rid itself of the Dutch.

This history raises some interesting new questions. Many of the strengths the Japanese brought to the fight against the Dutch were the exact opposite of things they did in their war against the

Americans. What happened? Why was there such a fundamental change? Why were the Japanese unable to sustain these traits later in the war? Books that challenge the received wisdom are always fun, and this one only increases the interest in the next two translations.

NICHOLAS EVAN SARANTAKES



India's Wars: A Military History 1947–1971, by Arjun Subramaniam. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017. 576 pages. \$40.

Air Vice-Marshal Arjun Subramaniam is not a man to shy away from challenges. In *India's Wars*, he attempts to explain in one volume the creation, evolution, and employment of India's armed forces during the first quarter century of its independence. He succeeds remarkably well, and this volume likely will be the best example of its genre for the foreseeable future.

India's Wars is more than an impressive chronological discussion of battles fought and mostly won. Subramaniam also examines questions and issues of high strategy and national identity. For example, he examines how a country led by the heroically popular pacifist Jawaharlal Nehru could create a joint military consisting of former colonial regiments with long and storied traditions, elements of the Indian army that had fought alongside Japanese troops in World War II, and air and naval forces. This section of the book looks at India's martial past during the precolonial and colonial periods.

The book then follows a chronological path, examining major military actions. Subramaniam looks hard at the

first Indo-Pakistan War, of 1947–48. Responsibility for initiating the war is placed solely on Pakistan. Associated chapters feature detailed descriptions of India's attempts to hold ground in Jammu and Kashmir. Useful maps accompany every battle description.

It is easy to forget, except in the well-known example of Jammu and Kashmir, that the boundaries of modern India were not permanently established at partition. The princely state of Hyderabad chose not to join greater India and opted to continue as an independent state. Similarly, Portugal did not relinquish its city colony of Goa on India's west coast. When efforts at political solutions increasingly appeared doomed to fail, the government decided to settle both situations via military means.

The 1962 India-China war is examined thoroughly with as much attention to this Indian defeat as is given to earlier victories. Subramaniam identifies political failures on the basis of unrealistic expectations regarding Chinese intentions and miscalculation of Chinese capabilities. Mistakes in operational dispositions and tactics are faced squarely.

Subramaniam's best writing covers the 1965 war with Pakistan. He carefully explains Pakistan's strategic and operational preparation for the conflict, including an alliance with the United States, modernization of the Pakistani armed forces with U.S. equipment, and substantial improvement of such capabilities as close air support. Although Pakistan was unable to field as many divisions as India, Subramaniam makes a convincing case that the acquisition of Patton tanks, better artillery, and F-86 fighter-bombers gave Pakistan a qualitative edge. Subramaniam also makes a point