

Twilight of the Gods: War in the Western Pacific, 1944-45. By Ian W. Toll. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2020. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Pp xv, 879 (advance-review copy). \$40.00 ISBN: 978-0-393-08065

Toll's final volume in his trilogy on the Pacific Theater of World War II begins in July 1944 and concludes with the Japanese surrender and the return to civilian life of hundreds of thousands of American veterans. He covers the gamut from grand strategy to tactical ground and naval operations. Deftly switching back and forth between land and sea, he illuminates the key decision makers such as Army General Douglas MacArthur and Navy Admiral Chester Nimitz. Besides contrasting their personalities, he turns a similar trick with Admirals William "Bull" Halsey and Raymond Spruance. The pair alternated in commanding the American fleet carriers with vastly different approaches.

For the most part, Toll proceeds chronologically. He details the major land battles: Pelelieu (perhaps one of the most unnecessary and frustrating battles ever undertaken by American forces—on a par with the Army's struggles in Germany's Huertgen Forest which, ironically, was waged simultaneously); the liberation of the Philippines and the Japanese atrocities in Manila; the capture of Iwo Jima; and, finally, Okinawa. Interspersed are naval actions—particularly the Battle of Leyte Gulf and the submarine campaign.

Providing context for the subs, he returns to 1943. In the second half of 1944, the Boeing B-29 bomber force had expanded and moved to the Mariana Islands from China. The bombers became increasingly effective at aerial mining, which, combined with the subs, virtually choked off Japan from essential natural resources.

The *kamikaze* attacks, which began in October and reached their peak in the spring of 1945 off Okinawa, are covered in considerable detail. The firebombing of Tokyo and other cities is discussed as well, as are various naval aviation operations. However, tactical land-based air and fighter operations are largely ignored. Fans of the Army Air Forces' two leading aces, Richard Bong and Thomas McGuire, will be disappointed by their omission.

The final chapters deal with the development and deployment of the two atomic bombs and the aftermath. When appropriate, considerable space is devoted to the Japanese point of view, particularly with regard to life in Japan at the end of the war and how the path to surrender occurred.

The epilogue discusses the status of American servicemen in the Pacific Theater after the formal surrender and the changed world these men encountered after returning home.

While I missed the first two volumes, this work is highly recommended to anyone at all interested in the Pacific War. An easy read, it provides an excellent foundation for exploring various topics in more detail. Anyone teaching a class about the Pacific portion of World War II should consider this trilogy as required reading. The extensive bibliography and notes offer insight into Toll's outstanding research effort. I suspect that an index that was omitted from the advance-review copy will be included in the version sold to the public.

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