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**Bobby C. Blair and John Peter DeCioccio, *Victory at Peleliu: The 81st Infantry Division's Pacific Campaign*. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2011. Pp. xvi, 310. ISBN 978-0-8061-4154-1.**

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*Victory at Peleliu* is a book with a mission. Besides giving a detailed account of the US Army's battle to wipe out Japanese resistance on two tiny islands in the Palaus, Angaur and Peleliu, in 1944, historians DeCioccio and Blair want to revise the record to show how the Army's 81st ("Wildcat") Infantry Division succeeded when the 1st Marine Division had faltered. Their adversaries are the Marines and their allies and followers.

The story of the American victory at Peleliu is problematic for several reasons. The Battle of Guadalcanal (1942-43), featuring the first American amphibious landing in the Pacific, was the turning point of the war against Japan. The later conquests of Guam, Tinian, and Saipan (1944) provided bases for the B-29s that helped destroy Japan. The capture of Okinawa (1945) then set the stage for an actual invasion of Japan itself. Capturing Peleliu and Angaur and destroying their garrison of seven thousand Japanese troops led to very little other than the deaths of almost all those men, as well as 1010 Marines and 570 soldiers. Once in American hands, the islands played no significant role in the war. In fact, Adm. William Halsey and Gen. Holland Smith opposed invading the Palaus to begin with. The landings proceeded only because of strategic inertia and difficulties in the negotiations between General MacArthur, Admiral Nimitz and President Roosevelt over just which islands should be taken on the way to Japan.

The American plan was for the battle-tested 1st Marines to capture Peleliu, with its airfield, while the green soldiers of the 81st tackled the smaller island of Angaur. Neither Maj. Gen. Paul Mueller, the commander of the 81st, nor the Marines' Maj. Gen. William Rupertus, realized they were facing a new Japanese defense doctrine. The Imperial Japanese Army had learned from the Battle of Saipan that defeating the Americans at the waterline was impossible and that banzai charges were not just suicidal, but ineffective—the final charge at Saipan had succeeded only in killing over four thousand Japanese. Consequently, the Japanese adopted a so-called *fukkaku* strategy, based on multiple, interlocking defenses, with no wasteful attacks. The object was to make each island cost the Americans as much time, and as many lives, as possible.

The book explains how the Marine commanders, especially Rupertus, failed to adapt to the changed Japanese tactics, while the Army's leaders quickly learned what worked and what did not. Thus, the 81st Division eliminated all Japanese opposition on Angaur while sustaining only moderate casualties. The Marines on Peleliu, on the other hand, suffered heavy losses, and needed a regiment of reinforcements from the 81st. Eventually, it was Army commanders and their troops who completed the conquest of Peleliu, much to Rupertus's chagrin: "It might have made more sense to put the 321st RCT [Regimental Combat Team] into the central combat zone. The 321st was in much better shape than either of the two remaining Marine regiments, and it had successfully accomplished every mission assigned it. General Rupertus either still did not believe in the Wildcats' combat capabilities or, more realistically, he remained determined that only the Marines would capture Peleliu. He did not want the army to get any credit whatsoever for the victory" (146).

*Victory at Peleliu* should be read in tandem with one of the previous histories of the Peleliu campaign.<sup>1</sup> All of these accounts focus on the Marines and their bloody stalemate on the island, with little discussion of the army's role on Angaur or during the final takeover of Peleliu. By contrast, Blair and DeCioccio summarize 1st Marines' actions while relating in day-by-day detail the army's operations on both Angaur and Pele-

1. E.g., Bill D. Ross, *Peleliu: Tragic Triumph* (NY: Random House, 1991) or Frank O. Hough, *The Assault on Peleliu* (1950; rpt. Nashville: Battery Pr, 1990)—Samuel Eliot Morison's source for his pages on the Palaus campaign in his *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, vol. 12 (1958; rpt. Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 2011).

liu. They stress the soldiers' bravery and intelligence, highlighting individual acts of heroism. They also describe how the innovative use of armored bulldozers and improvised flamethrowers contributed to victory.

I fault the book only for its one-sided approach, regrettable since Japanese sources do exist.<sup>2</sup> That said, the authors' treatment of the Japanese is far from the ethnocentric, even explicitly racist, histories written during the war and into the 1950s. Japanese commanders are mentioned and described respectfully, but we learn almost nothing in depth about them or their men.

*Victory at Peleliu* is well written and features excellent maps and some useful black and white photographs. It is based on comprehensive reading of popular and official histories as well as many interviews with American veterans of the battle. Of their goal to correct military historians' disproportionate attention to the Marines' story, Blair and DeCioccio may rightfully claim "mission accomplished."

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2. Including the official *Senshi Soshō* (War History Series), a 102-volume opus; of course, the Japanese language poses a barrier for American historians, but parts of this huge work have been translated, and I have met one historian who was able to have the passage he needed translated at his own expense. In addition, dozens of Japanese soldiers and officers were captured in the Palaus, and records of their interrogations by American intelligence officers may exist. We may hope that someone will do for the Japanese side in the Pacific theater what others have done for the Soviet side in the European theater—see, e.g., David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence: U Pr. of Kansas, 1998).