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Nathan N. Prefer, *The Battle for Tinian: Vital Stepping Stone in America's War against Japan*. Philadelphia: Casemate, 2012. Pp. 238. ISBN 978-1-61200-094-7.

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Books about the Second World War continue to be published at a pace hardly abating nearly seventy years later. Because so much has already been written, many serious students of the war believe any new publication should be original or innovative in some way. But some events and aspects of the conflict, while not unknown to scholars, have too often been overlooked or marginalized by historians keying in on the major battles and campaigns. As a corrective to this tendency, historian Nathan Prefer,<sup>1</sup> in *The Battle for Tinian*, has constructed a concise, informative, well balanced narrative that will introduce readers to an often overlooked battle that paved the way for US victory over Japan. He is particularly keen on exploring the amphibious assaults and onshore combat on Tinian so often overshadowed by the contemporaneous and epic Battle of the Philippine Sea. Though the Tinian campaign has not been “lost to history,” Prefer performs a valuable service in effectively mining various sources to weave together a clear, accessible, and engaging story.

The book's thirteen chapters and seven appendices pack much information into 238 pages. The text moves from a sketch of the history and geography of the Mariana Islands to an examination of its defenders in summer 1944, the strength and organization of its attackers, and, of course, the actual combat on Tinian. Most of this is rather standard stuff, though Prefer must be commended for his astute discussion of the island's strategic value to the Allies as a base for the American four-engine B-29 bombers that ultimately pounded Japan with both conventional and atomic weapons. This alone justifies a book on an overwhelmingly one-sided and quickly decided battle far less bloody than many others fought on islands across the Pacific.

Also valuable is the treatment here of Japanese air raids against Tinian in the months after its capture, which destroyed many of the expensive bombers based there. Unfortunately, Prefer glosses over much of the fighting before and during the invasion of the island: for instance, the Battle of the Philippine Sea gets only a couple pages, belying its critical importance to the outcome of events on Tinian and its impact upon the larger war.

*The Battle for Tinian* is most engrossing in its analysis of the options available to US Navy and Marine planners invading the island, the details of the plan they ultimately chose for the amphibious attack, and the actual execution of the invasion. Prefer is especially strong on documenting the meticulous reconnaissance of possible invasion beaches. Without such attention to detail by American commanders, the Japanese defenses, with their heavy artillery emplaced to cover the most likely landing points, might have inflicted a bloodbath like those at Iwo Jima or Peleliu. Prefer's account of the exploits of Navy and Marine personnel conducting the reconnaissance while battling the elements adds rich detail to the invasion story:

Expecting a current of two knots running south, the rubber boats had cast off from the tows and angled to allow for the southerly drift of the expected current. Unknown to the swimmers, however, was the fact that the current had reversed and gained strength. The Americans soon found themselves paddling with the current. This led the group destined for White 2 to land on White 1 instead. Making the best of the situation they surveyed the beach and its approaches as best they could under the unexpected circumstances. The Marines went ashore and found exits from the beach and noted the location and size of each exit. The UDT [Underwater Demolition Team] swimmers found only a few reefs that would have to be avoided by landing craft. They also noted the location and configuration of the shelving reef just off the beach. One special group under Lieuten-

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1. He has also written *MacArthur's New Guinea Campaign* (NY: Da Capo, 1995), *Vinegar Joe's War: Stilwell's Campaigns for Burma* (NY: Presidio Pr, 2000), and *Leyte, 1944: The Soldiers' Battle* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2012).

ant (j.g.) George Suhrland crawled onto the beach above the high water mark to investigate the possibility that certain marks noted in air reconnaissance photos might be mines. (52)

This close attention to the role of very dangerous reconnaissance missions in formulating the effective assault operation is most welcome, and sets Prefer's book apart from comparable works on amphibious operations that chiefly focus on large-scale combat on the beaches during actual invasions.

In other areas, the book is more conventional in approach, for example, in its stress on the textbook nature of the amphibious assault at Tinian. Prefer quotes Samuel Eliot Morison's assertion that it was "the most perfectly executed amphibious operation of the entire war." In support of that claim, he usefully identifies several keys to success: the accurate intelligence US forces gleaned from various sources, including material found during the earlier Saipan campaign; aggressive and detailed reconnaissance of landing sites; the brilliant use of deception by the Navy and Marines to mask which beaches would actually be hit; the massive and flexible delivery of firepower, including from US Army artillery on nearby Saipan; and the reliance on experienced veteran assault commanders to carry out operations as they saw fit. Sorely missed, however, is any in-depth comparison of the amphibious assault with those conducted at Tarawa, Iwo Jima, and elsewhere; this would have clarified just why the Tinian invasion should be considered so exceptionally well executed.

Despite this shortcoming, I recommend *The Battle for Tinian* to all readers for the light it shines on an otherwise neglected campaign of the Pacific War.