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Sharon Tosi Lacey, *Pacific Blitzkrieg: World War II in the Central Pacific*. Denton: Univ. of North Texas Press, 2013. Pp. xviii, 282. ISBN 978-1-57441-525-4.

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This book's imposing title—*Pacific Blitzkrieg*—cannot help but raise expectations. The author, US Army officer Sharon Tosi Lacey, sets out to trace the evolution of American amphibious assaults and joint operations in the Central Pacific during the Second World War in this revision of her doctoral dissertation (Univ. of Leeds, 2012).

According to Lacey, “No one has yet investigated the detailed mechanics behind the transformation of the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps during the course of the war.” Claiming that her book “fills much of the gap by examining the often neglected details behind the three-year maturation of the joint army-marine force” (xiii), she focuses on cooperative efforts between the two services at the division and corps levels. With the notable exception of the “Smith vs Smith” controversy in mid-1944, covered in her fourth chapter, Lacey argues that Army-Marine Corps planning, preparation, and doctrine grew increasingly harmonious over time. She concentrates first on the planning and training elements prior to amphibious assaults and then on the post-battle doctrinal changes and lessons learned. By design, she devotes only a few pages in each chapter to actual combat operations.

The book's organization will be more familiar to military officers than to most academic historians. In each of her five chapters, the author employs as a structural template for her historical interpretations the four elements of the US Army's “Battle Analysis Methodology”: (a) “describe the subject” in terms of time, place, and opposing forces in battles or campaigns, and evaluate primary and secondary sources; (b) “set the stage” by considering factors like strategy, climate, force structure, logistics, technology, leadership, intelligence, morale, conditions, doctrine, training, command, control, communications, and initial dispositions of opposing forces; (c) “describe the action” by tracking the opening movies of opposing forces, key turning points, and each battle's outcomes; (d) “assess significance of the action” by analyzing these results and relating lessons learned to the “principles of war,” “constants of war,” or other functions or concepts of military force.¹

Following a brief overview of prewar amphibious doctrine, the aptly entitled chapter 1, “Guadalcanal: The Ad Hoc Operation,” treats the six-month fight for Guadalcanal (August 1942 to February 1943). Evaluating the leadership and training of the Army Americal Division and the 1st and the 2nd Marine Divisions, Lacey finds that these units were inadequately trained and prepared. After a short narrative of the amphibious and inland operations, she demonstrates that the American forces suffered from poor planning, intelligence, and coordination with their Navy counterparts. She does, however, also show that the Army and Marine Corps units benefited from strong leaders on the ground and better coordination with the Navy after Vice Adm. William Halsey assumed theater command in October 1942. Even so, American forces barely secured victory on Guadalcanal.

In chapter 2, “The Gilberts: Parallel Operations,” Lacey turns to her first case study in the Central Pacific, specifically, the 2nd Marine Division's costly assault on Tarawa and the less well known operation on Makin by the Army's 27th Infantry Division. She highlights the contrasting personalities of Maj. Gen. Ralph Smith of the 27th, Maj. Gen. Julian Smith of the 2nd, and Lt. Gen. Holland M. Smith, commander of V Amphibious Corps, which comprised these two divisions. Lacey portrays Ralph and Julian Smith as quiet and effective men, and their superior, Holland Smith, as well deserving of the nickname “Howlin' Mad.”

1. See US Army Command and General Staff College, “Basic Battle Analysis” – www.miwsr.com/rd/1502.htm.

The opening amphibious assault on Tarawa by the Marines did not go as planned, because of a surprisingly low tide and devastating Japanese fire. Reinforcements and effective leadership eventually saved the day, but not without grievous American casualties. Though the 27th fared no better in its assault phase, its inland operations proved less costly because they were conducted against a much smaller Japanese defense force. Like previous historians, Lacey sees poor intelligence gathering as a major problem in both operations. She also notes that friction between Holland Smith and Ralph Smith even this early in the Central Pacific campaign foreshadowed subsequent confrontations between the two generals.

Chapter 3, “The Marshalls: The Perfect Operation,” concerns American assaults on Kwajalein and Roi-Namur—the most effective instances of Army-Marine Corps coordination in the entire war. The Army’s 7th Infantry Division and the 4th Marine Division overcame the Japanese defenses on the beaches and quickly took each island with relatively few casualties. These successes revealed how essential naval gunfire, better communications, and new equipment were to achieving victory. However, Lacey writes, even though “the Marshalls had proved once and for all that the Americans had got it right ... the fundamental character of future operations would change. Although there were some ‘smaller scale’ operations in Peleliu and Iwo Jima, the operations on the Marianas and on Okinawa would harken back to Guadalcanal” (124). It is hard to accept that Peleliu and Iwo Jima were “smaller scale” operations in duration, manpower, casualties, or scope, except that Army units did not participate in all phases of combat on these islands.

Chapter 4, “Saipan: Smith versus Smith,” examines the twenty-four-day battle for Saipan in mid-1944. Lacey carefully details the controversy caused when Holland Smith relieved the Army’s Ralph Smith as commander of the 27th Infantry Division. Lacey believes this occurred in part because Holland Smith did not like his subordinate or the Army as a whole. During brutal combat on Saipan, Ralph Smith’s unit was impeded by rugged terrain, poor radio communications, and withering enemy fire. An angry Holland Smith blamed him for the 27th’s performance and relieved him. Lacey persuasively defends Ralph Smith, pointing to Holland Smith’s own poor leadership traits, irascibility, and long-standing distrust of the Army as the main reasons for his decision. Resentment reverberated in the Army for decades thereafter.

Chapter 5, “Okinawa: The Final Victory,” describes how Army and Marine Corps leaders patched up their differences after Saipan and before operations commenced on Okinawa (1 April 1945). Lacey credits Tenth Army’s commander, Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner Jr., for working effectively with his Marine subordinate, Lt. Gen. Roy S. Geiger, commander of III Corps. Indeed, when Buckner was killed in action, Geiger briefly took charge of the Tenth Army. Most critically, no serious controversies occurred between the Army and Navy. American Soldiers and Marines doggedly destroyed one Japanese position after another on Okinawa over a ten-week campaign of attrition. Having honed their defensive tactics, the Japanese killed and wounded as many Americans as possible by forcing them to attack heavily fortified, interlocking positions in the hills of the southwestern part of the island. Lacey refers to Okinawa as the “capstone” of the American military’s lessons learned since Guadalcanal.²

All along the 5,000-mile route from Hawaii to Okinawa, the blood of tens of thousands of American soaked the reefs, beaches, and jungles of dozens of islands. There had been no playbook for the kind of war fought on these islands, only some general principles and a determination to master the deadly practice of amphibious warfare. Along the way, the American military built and refined the concept of modern joint operations. It would have been difficult for a homogenous force to educate and prepare itself for the challenges faced by the U.S. military in the Central Pacific. It was doubly difficult when it became necessary to merge army and marine units into a single fighting force. Their respective leaders not only had to build a professional force out of a mob of untrained civilians, but simultaneously assimilate diverse—and distinct—service cultures in a cohesive force. (210–11)

Some of the author’s comments here need scrutiny. To claim there “had been no playbook” and “only some general principles” for amphibious warfare in the 1930s disregards the Marine Corps’ *Tentative Manu-*

2. In the last paragraph of her book, Lacey briefly points to successful joint actions during the Pacific War as antecedents of more recent cooperative efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

al for Landing Operations, its amphibious-focused Fleet Marine Force, and its development of specialized assault craft. In the 1920s and earlier, such Marine officers as Earl “Pete” Ellis, Robert Dunlap, John H. Russell, and Thomas Holcomb had worked to meet the challenges of the amphibious mission outlined in War Plan ORANGE. Moreover, the US Navy and Army borrowed from Marine Corps’ doctrine in FTP 167 *Landing Operations Doctrine* (1938) and FM 31-5 *Landing Operations on Hostile Shores* (1941), respectively.

The strengths of the book include its explanations of Army and Marine Corps divisional structures, leaders, and pre-assault preparations. Lacey also clarifies the integral roles played by flag officers like the Marine Corps’ Alexander Vandegrift and Holland Smith and the Army’s Simon Bolivar Buckner Jr. and Alexander Patch in facilitating joint efforts. She also astutely demonstrates how time and again the personalities, experiences, and skills of senior leaders decisively affected the outcomes of battles for good or ill. Lacey contributes to existing literature by writing the US Army back into the Pacific War narrative—no reader of her book will fail to understand that men of both services fought, bled, and died on Japanese-held islands. *Pacific Blitzkrieg* thus stands as a valuable corrective to Marine-centered histories of the war.

Lacey’s use of battle analysis methodology has mixed results. It ensures that each chapter has a consistent format, allowing comparisons and contrasts to be made easily over the course of the war. But it can also take on a formulaic, almost circular character: important lessons are identified, contexts are sketched to highlight those lessons, combat operations are narrated to lend force to the chosen lessons, and finally the lessons are gleaned from the battle narratives. This process runs the risk of becoming too subjective as historiographical debates are set aside or certain historical factors given preference. Consequently, additional or alternative lessons are obscured. In chapter 1, for example, Lacey correctly observes that 1st Marine Division’s battalions worked well with the Army’s 164th Infantry Regiment in 1942–43. She concludes that “the ability of army forces to seamlessly blend in on the ground pointed toward a more active role in future operations. Indeed, as preparation began for the next offensive, the army played an equal role in the planning and execution” (45). But in the rest of the book, the author adopts division- and corps-level perspectives, problematically equating coordination between higher echelon staffs with the joint actions of battalions fighting on the same ground. Indeed, Army and Marine Corps divisions fought on different islands (Tarawa or Makin) or in designated division-sized battlespaces (Saipan and Okinawa). Differences in echelon and location may be missed in battle analyses that overlook distinctions among battalion, regimental, division, and corps levels.

The book suffers, too, from inadequate documentation. Endnotes give only partial provenance for archival sources, for example, in collections like Record Group 38 at the National Archives, which contains more than sixteen million cubic feet of materials relating to the Chief of Naval Operations.³ Partial citations make it hard verify or replicate Lacey’s diligent research in more than twenty repositories. Admittedly, this may be due to the publisher’s desire to save space. One must also take exception to the word “Blitzkrieg” in the book’s title. The Americans’ three-year campaign in the Central Pacific was no “lightning war” like that in Europe in 1940. “Juggernaut” might be a more accurate word choice.⁴

Sharon Tosi Lacey’s *Pacific Blitzkrieg* will appeal especially to military personnel because of its battle analysis methodology. It could also furnish nuanced supplementary reading in courses on the Pacific War if assigned in concert with indispensable earlier chronological and analytical studies.⁵

3. Guide to Federal Records, Statistical Summary of Holdings, Record Group 001–Record Group 100 – www.miwsr.com/rd/1503.htm.

4. The sexier “Blitzkrieg” may reflect an attempt by the publisher to lure more readers.

5. E.g., Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 1951), and Joseph H. Alexander, *Storm Landings: Epic Amphibious Battles in the Central Pacific* (Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 1997), both of which appear in Lacey’s bibliography.