

## Book Review

**Sharon T. Lacey. *Pacific Blitzkrieg: World War II in the Central Pacific*. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2013. 282 pp. (ISBN 9781574415254)**

Many readers of military history are familiar with the strategy of island hopping in the Pacific used by the United States during the Second World War, and the destructive battles the United States fought during these island-hopping campaigns. Fewer, however, may be aware of the cooperation that was essential between military branches in order to achieve final victory. Sharon Tosi Lacey's thesis in *Pacific Blitzkrieg: World War II in the Central Pacific* is that cooperation between the United States' Marines and Army chiefs proved essential to American victory over Japan. In support of her thesis, Lacey examines five World War II battles (Guadalcanal, The Gilberts, The Marshalls, Saipan, and Okinawa) to illustrate how well the Marines and Army worked cohesively. For evidence, Lacey relies predominantly on a multitude of primary sources such as interviews, military reports, war maps, letters, and other correspondence.

The scope of the author's work ranges mainly from 1941 to 1945. Lacey does not broadly analyze those years, however, but rather focuses on essential aspects of these battles. By breaking down each battle into various categories, she makes her argument easy to follow. Overall, Lacey's work is interesting, especially as it focuses on inter-military issues with which many lay readers may be unfamiliar.

Lacey begins with a brief synopsis of the American military's inferiority compared to Axis nations in 1941. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Lacey explains, the United States lacked much of the equipment needed to conduct modern warfare. The author further points out that not only did the United States lack materiel,

but the United States Armed Forces also lacked an effective chain of command through which inter-military coordination could operate effectively in combat. This background sets the stage for Lacey's description of the first significant instance of Army-Marine cooperation, the Battle of Guadalcanal.

With mobilization still in process on the home front, Lacey notes, the United States had few battle ready divisions. Since Japanese forces threatened supply routes to Australia, the newly created Joint Chiefs of Staff deemed Guadalcanal an essential target for American forces in the Pacific. The first major issue the armed forces confronted was who would head the chain of command. Both the Army and the Marines felt entitled to command the first large scale assault by American forces in the war, and both branches had a sufficient number of commanders ready for the task. Lacey illustrates the resulting inter-service squabbles (using various commanders' journals) and explains that the operation floundered initially due to command and planning disagreements, before soldiers had even seen combat.

The author explains that the services, through a series of complex compromises, settled the major disagreements arising from this particular operation, but these issues were not settled permanently. Guadalcanal offered the first chance for both branches to experiment with inter-service cooperation, which included having Army units replace Marine units at the front to rotate divisions. At the time, this rotation of divisions from separate branches was not popular among Marine commanders, mainly because the consensus was that the Army moved slowly "in a dramatic fashion" (36). Nevertheless, the rotation of troops insured that fresh troops from both the Army and the Marines were available for the five long months of grueling combat, and helped to establish a basis of trust between the two military branches. The United States achieved victory at Guadalcanal, but Lacey contends that only through such cooperation was victory possible.

Lacey continues by outlining the success of the Marines and Army forces in the Gilbert Islands and Marshall Islands. Given the

compromises emerging from their Guadalcanal operation, both the Army and Marines felt as if they had been shortchanged and both wanted more responsibilities. Tensions, however, reached a climax as U.S. armed forces prepared for operations against Saipan. Questions of command similar to the arguments held prior to Guadalcanal plagued the American forces while they prepared for the assault.

Despite the success of the operation against Saipan, this action led to worsened relations between the Army and Marines. Lacey outlines the inter-branch quarrel that became known as the “Smith v. Smith” conflict, which resulted in the dismissal of an army general. Many U.S. newspapers were also quick to report the feud to home front audiences, thereby exacerbating the controversy.

Ultimately, Lacey argues, the diplomatic ability of Admiral William D. Leahy smoothed over the conflict. The squabbling reached its apex with the removal of an army general; however, Leahy seized the opportunity to mediate the conflict between the branches by restructuring the chain of command for subsequent operations. Leahy’s biggest structural change was appointing General Simon B. Buckner Jr. to take command over the invasion of Okinawa. This proved successful mainly because although Buckner himself was an Army general, he had no history of clashes with the Marines. Buckner, with the support of General George C. Marshall, received full command of the forces. Ultimately, Lacey argues, Buckner’s appointment was optimal as the general had a record of inter-branch service and cooperation and was a successful mediator. Lacey further contends that the two branches now had mediators of great quality and very capable commanders to lead them through the greatest challenge yet, Okinawa.

In discussing the Battle of Okinawa, Lacey diverges from her usual outline and instead analyzes the maturation of cooperation between the Army and Marines. Although Lacey introduces previous sections of the book by detailing a skill that she would develop in a subsequent chapter, such as better Marine-Army coordination or amphibious assault tactics, in Chapter Five she recounts her previous

findings before outlining how each individual lesson, from Guadalcanal through Saipan, sequentially came together in Okinawa. Until this point, although inter-branch cooperation had existed to some degree, the branches still relied on their own commanders. The difficult situation Okinawa presented was having Marine commanders in charge of Army divisions, something which had proven problematic during previous operations. The idea behind this change was to group the most experienced generals with the most experienced divisions in an effort to reduce casualties. Despite previous troubles of inter-branch chain of command, the relationship between the Army and Marines had by now evolved to a point of mutual trust, due largely Buckner's mediation skills, and this proved essential in final operations. Lacey illustrates that Okinawa boasted the toughest set of fortifications the Americans had yet to overcome; only through the evolution of their teamwork did the Marines and Army achieved total victory over Japanese forces.

Lacey provides an insightful look into the complex world of inter-military branch relations during World War II, and she illuminates controversies that may be unfamiliar to the average reader. Lacey's thesis is sound and she argues it quite effectively, with ample support from primary and secondary sources. Lacey also succeeds in explaining the events as they transpired while avoiding the mistake of relying on hindsight. Lacey approaches the topic as a military historian, and as such, in multiple instances uses terms that are common knowledge within the military but may be unfamiliar to the average reader. Overall, the author highlights the importance of inter-branch squabbles and illustrates just how easily five essential battles in the Pacific Theater could have turned against the U.S. had the Marines and Army not learned to cooperate.

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