

National Archives



## Perilous Fight For Peleliu

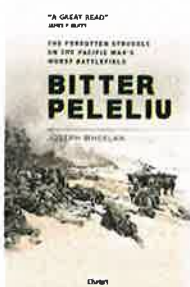
The battle for the rugged island of Peleliu, fortified by Japanese defenders, was costly, and the necessity of the operation is still debated today.

### THE CACOPHONY OF NAVAL GUNFIRE PROVED SO THUNDEROUS IT LEFT

some marines in a stupor. Dark smoke roiled thousands of feet in the air from the bombardment of Peleliu, a small island in the Palau Islands. It was September 15, 1944. Marines in amtracs and

Higgins Boats moved steadily toward the landing zones on the island's southwest side. BAR man Pfc. Sterling Price watched a flight of Hellcats roar overhead, their machine guns chattering. Once they were close enough, the water around the landing raft chattered from the impacts of bullets and shrapnel. The shellfire had not killed all the defenders; the Marines were in for a fight.

The amtracs struck a coral reef hard enough to knock most of the Marines off their feet before the tracks found purchase and ground their way over them. Corporal James Young saw a boat take a direct hit from a shell. "Marines were spinning around in the air just like in slow motion, flopping back into the water." Men in the later assault waves recalled seeing dead Marines all around the coral reef. The



A Marine shares his water with a badly wounded fellow Marine during the fight for Peleliu. Although less well known than Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, the battle was no less brutal.

survivors went grimly forward; there was nowhere else to go.

Even the famed Colonel Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, a veteran of Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester, found the landing a harrowing experience. He got out of his amtrac "up and over that side as fast as I could scramble and ran like hell at least twenty-five yards before I hit the beach flat down," he later stated. To his left sat a large promontory, soon to be known as "The Point," which seemed so far untouched by gunfire or aerial bombs. Atop this position sat five reinforced concrete pillboxes armed with machine guns and 47mm cannon, which the Japanese used to great effect on the beaches below.

Puller sprinted across the beach as shrapnel and coral splinters flew through the air. Looking back, he saw the amtrac which had brought him to shore explode, killing most of its crew. "Crossing the beach was like running between raindrops," Pfc. Joe Clapper recalled, "You just got the hell off the beach." So many Marines lay wounded that the cries for corpsmen filled the air between explosions of mortar bombs and grenades. Soon Japanese soldiers began to cry "Corpsman!" as well, hoping to lure the lifesavers into the sights of a sniper or machine gun team. As bad as it all was, the first wave made it to shore with relatively few casualties. Japanese fire increased afterward against the following waves, causing even more death and injury among the Marines struggling to reach shore.

The Pacific War is notable for the horrible, unrelenting combat which occurred across scores of islands during the myriad landing operations. Peleliu stands out even among them as an example of how difficult, terrifying, and deadly the island-hopping campaign in the Pacific could be. Even so, it is less well-known than Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and other battles which were equally bad. *Bitter Peleliu: The Forgotten Struggle on the Pacific War's Worst Battlefield* (Joseph Wheelan, Osprey Books, Oxford, UK, 2022, 336 pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, \$30, hardcover) sheds light on an action which deserves to be as heralded for the sacrifice and

courage of the Marines and soldiers who fought there.

The author examines the reasons for Peleliu's relative obscurity, including Allied intelligence failures, strategic miscalculations and a shift in Japanese tactics designed to bloody any invader. Aside from

an insightful analysis of the higher-level planning and decision making, the book also delves into the experiences of the men on both sides who struggled on this island for well over two months, where 38.5 percent of the Americans engaged became casualties. The writing is well constructed and the narrative equally well crafted. This book is a good choice for those who wish to know more about Peleliu, why and how it was chosen for invasion and how the men who fought there struggle through to a hard-won victory.



**Captain Chaos: Navy Cross Recipient Warner V. Tyler, Carrier Air Group Nineteen, and the Battle for Leyte Gulf** (Steven E. Maffeo, Focslie Press, Annapolis MD, 2022, 318 pp., maps, photographs, appendices, bibliography, \$25, softcover)

The Battle of Leyte Gulf was the largest naval battle of World War II, and by most measures the largest in history. It involved 200,000 people, 280 ships and 1,800 aircraft. Among all those ships and men, Ensign Warner Tyler, later to bear the sobriquet "Captain Chaos," flew a Grumman TBM-1C Avenger torpedo bomber through heavy enemy fire to launch his torpedo at the Japanese hybrid battleship/carrier Ise. For this, he earned the Navy Cross, the service's second highest award for valor, while his enlisted radioman and gunner each received the Distinguished Flying Cross. Though their part in Leyte Gulf was but one small piece of a massive, concerted effort by the U.S. Navy, it contributed to the aggregate and overarching goal of defeating the Imperial Japanese Navy.

The story of Ensign, later Captain, Tyler and his fellow naval aviators aboard the USS Lexington is well-told in this new work. The author is a retired naval officer who served with Tyler postwar, allowing him to gather accurate information on his subjects. However, this is not a simple collection of the pilot's war stories. The book is well researched with pilot's narratives woven into a coherent whole using credible source material.



**Gavin at War: The World War II Diary of Lieutenant General James M. Gavin** (Edited and annotated by Lewis Sorley, Casemate Books, Havertown, PA, 2022, maps, photographs, appendices, index, \$34.95, hardcover)

James Gavin began his wartime service as the

commander of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment during the Sicily operation, before assuming command of the entire 82nd Airborne Division for the remainder of the war.

He was the first out the door on four combat jumps, earning two Distinguished Service Crosses, two Silver Stars and the Purple Heart for his courage. Neither enemy fire nor weather

## New and Noteworthy

**Alarmstark South and Final Defeat** (Patrick G. Erikson, Amberley Press, 2022, \$35, hardcover) The third book in a trilogy on German fighter pilots of World War II, this volume focuses on the Mediterranean from 1941-44 and Western Europe in 1944-45.



**Churchill's Arctic Convoys: Strength Triumphs over Adversity** (William Smith, Pen and Sword, 2022, \$42.95, hardcover) The convoys which supplied the Soviet Union experienced extreme hardship fulfilling their duties. This work examines the political, naval, and logistic aspects of the convoys.

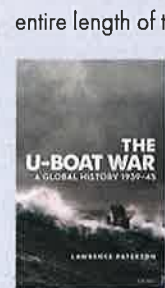
to the most modern designs. The book covers small arms, armored vehicles, and artillery.



**Red Army Weapons of the Second World War** (Michael Green, Pen and Sword, 2022, \$34.95, hardcover) The Soviet military used a wide variety of weapons, from Great War relics



**12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend: From Formation to the Battle of Caen** (Massimiliano Afiero, Casemate Books, 2022, \$28.95, softcover) The infamous "Hitler Youth" Division fought viciously at Normandy but eventually suffered defeat. This book describes the unit's creation and combat action.

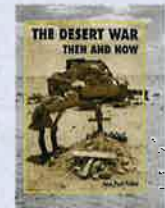


**The Fleet Air Arm and the War in Europe 1939-1945** (David Hobbs, Seaforth Publishing, 2022, \$68, hardcover) The Royal Navy's air force had an impact which far outweighed its size. Its operations during the war in Europe spanned the



entire length of the conflict.

**The U-Boat War: A Global History 1939-45** (Lawrence Paterson, Osprey Books, 2022, \$35, hardcover) The author shows how the war against the German submarine force was a wide-ranging campaign intertwined with the rest of the war's events.



**Dünkirchen 1940: The German View of Dunkirk** (Robert Kershaw, Osprey Books, 2022, \$30, hardcover) This new work makes clear the various German tactical and operational errors which allowed the Dunkirk evacuation to succeed as well as it did. The author's assertions are clear and well supported.



**Foreign Panthers** (M.P. Robinson and Thomas Seignon, Osprey Books, 2022, \$19, softcover) This new title examines the use of the German Panther tank by the British, Soviet, French and other armies both during and after World War II. The book presents a number of interesting case studies.

**F6F Hellcat: Philippines 1944** (Edward M. Young, Osprey Books, 2022, \$22, softcover) Part of Osprey's new Dogfight series, this book looks at the tactics used by Grumman Hellcat pilots to win the fight in the skies over the Philippine Islands in 1944.

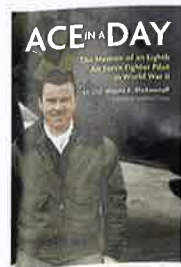
**The Desert War Then and Now** (Jean Paul Pallud, After the Battle, 2022, \$100, hardcover) A photo essay book, this new edition shows photographs from the war in North Africa contrasted with images of what the depicted area looks like in modern times.



**Meat Grinder: The Battles for the Rzhev Salient 1942-43** (Prit Buttar, Osprey Books, Oxford, UK, 2022, 463 pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, \$35, softcover)

Few in the West know about the Rzhev Salient. The fighting around Moscow and Stalingrad come quickly to mind, but this little-known salient near the town of Rzhev, roughly 100 miles west of Moscow, was so terrible it was nicknamed the "Meat Grinder." The area could have been a launching point for a new German attack on the capital, so pushing the Nazis back seemed paramount. Repeated attacks against the strong German defensive positions proved fruitless, however, resulting in heavy casualties. Millions of soldiers fought there and some two million became casualties during a series of four major Soviet offensives from early 1942 until circumstances forced a German withdrawal in March 1943.

The author is one of the foremost authorities on the Eastern Front during both world wars, and this latest work is a continuance of his high standards of research and writing. The book is comprehensive, including accounts from high-level officers down to soldiers in the trenches, tanks, and foxholes. Beyond merely retelling the horrors of the fighting, the author also studies how the Soviets learned from their failures at Rzhev and used that knowledge in their later offensives in 1944.



**Ace in a Day: The Memoir of an Eighth Air Force Fighter Pilot in World War II** (Lt. Col. Wayne K. Blickenstaff, Edited by Graham Cross, Casemate Books, Havertown, PA,

kept him from visiting his troops in the front lines, so they always knew he was with them. If need be, he crawled from one foxhole to another to check on his soldiers. He carried an M1 Rifle instead of the pistol or carbine most officers toted, and he was known to have used it in action alongside his men.

Gavin kept a journal during the war, which he kept secret even from his family, who discovered it after his death in 1990. Here it has been edited and annotated for the reader, giving insight into Gavin's views on his operations, fellow senior leaders, and his own life. There are two inserts of well-chosen photographs accompanying the text.

2022, 340 pp., photographs, appendices, index, \$39.95, hardcover)

Lieutenant Wayne Blickenstaff saw a group of German Messerschmitt Me-109 fighters disperse after making a run at some American bombers. He chased one, following it as it rolled and dove. His heavy Republic P-47 Thunderbolt fighter accelerated so quickly he worried his plane would go into a state of compressibility and crash. This term described air-flow over the wings approaching supersonic velocity; it could lock the plane's elevators and cause a crash. He broke off, feeling guilty for not chasing the enemy plane. Later, he confessed his "screw-up" to a friend. That friend told Blickenstaff his mission was to escort the bombers, not paint little German swastikas on the side of his cockpit. Since that Me-109 didn't get back to the bombers, the mission was accomplished. It was Blickenstaff's first aerial combat; much more lay ahead of him.

This memoir is a vivid look at the lives of American fighter pilots in the European theater. The author asserts that life or death in the air was often a matter of luck and shows this through vignettes about his experiences and those of his fellow flyers. The book is well-illustrated with many of the author's photographs, and a set of detailed appendices provides extensive background information.

LEYTE GULF 1944 (2)



**Leyte Gulf 1944 (2): Surigao Strait and Cape Engano** (Mark Stille, Osprey Books, Oxford, UK, 2022, 96 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, \$24, softcover)

The Battle of Leyte Gulf, while the largest naval battle in history, was composed of four major actions occurring over two days. The Imperial Japanese Navy staked its hopes on the outcome of the war on this fight, marshalling the bulk of its remaining strength in an attempt to defeat the U.S. Navy and prevent the loss of the Philippines, without which the war could not be won. In fact, the Japanese entered the fight with no real hope of success but felt they had to try. At Cape Engano, the Japanese succeeded in luring the main American force north, away from the landing sites on Leyte, but suffered terrible losses for their effort. At Surigao Strait, the opposing forces fought the last battleship action in history.

The author is an acknowledged expert on the Pacific War and the World War II U.S. and Japanese navies. His depth of knowledge and insight figure prominently in this new work, the

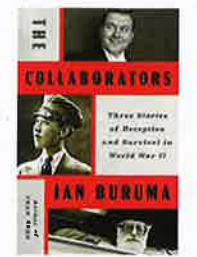
second in a compact yet thorough account of Leyte Gulf. As is standard with Osprey's Campaign series, this book is liberally illustrated with photographs and original artwork.



**The Soviet Baltic Offensive, 1944-45: German Defense of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania** (Ian Baxter, Casemate Books, Havertown, PA, 2022, 128 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, \$28.95, softcover)

The overwhelming Soviet offensives in the summer of 1944 threw the German army back. Much of the German Army Group North drew back into the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Hitler issued another of his disastrous "no retreat" orders, essentially trapping his troops, who struggled first to defend the capital cities of each of the small coastal states. Soon they were pushed into small pockets surrounding ports through which they hoped to be withdrawn. In all, some two million Germans, three-quarters of them civilians, were evacuated. The remaining forces fought until destruction, except for those in the Courland Pocket, which held out until May 1945. They were among the last German units to surrender in World War II, and 140,000 troops from there went into Soviet captivity.

The Casemate Illustrated series is relatively new, but the publisher's ability to create compact yet detailed and well-illustrated volumes is shown in this latest edition covering the Baltic fighting. The photographs are excellent, as are the maps and artwork. There is also extensive information on unit organization and leadership. The work gives the reader a complete look at one of the lesser understood campaigns of the Eastern Front.



**The Collaborators: Three Stories of Deception and Survival in World War II** (Ian Buruma, Penguin Press, New York, NY, 2023, 320 pp., photographs, notes, bibliography, index, \$30, hardcover)

Felix Kersten acted as Heinrich Himmler's personal masseur and did the job so well Himmler nicknamed the outgoing, heavy set Kersten the "Magic Buddha." Aisin Gyoro Xianyu, also known as Jin Buhui or Dongzen, or her Japanese name Kawashima Yoshiko, was the daughter of a deposed Manchu prince. She favored men's clothing and spied for the