



The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944

Ian W. Toll

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The devastation of Pearl Harbor and the American victory at Midway were prelude to a greater challenge: rolling back the vast Japanese Pacific empire, island by island.

This masterful history encompasses the heart of the Pacific War—the period between mid-1942 and mid-1944—when parallel Allied counteroffensives north and south of the equator washed over Japan's far-flung island empire like a "conquering tide," concluding with Japan's irreversible strategic defeat in the Marianas. It was the largest, bloodiest, most costly, most technically innovative and logistically complicated amphibious war in history, and it fostered bitter interservice rivalries, leaving wounds that even victory could not heal.

Often overlooked, these are the years and fights that decided the Pacific War. Ian W. Toll's battle scenes—in the air, at sea, and in the jungles—are simply riveting. He also takes the reader into the wartime councils in Washington and Tokyo where politics and strategy often collided, and into the struggle to mobilize wartime production, which was the secret of Allied victory. Brilliantly researched, the narrative is propelled and colored by firsthand accounts—letters, diaries, debriefings, and memoirs—that are the raw material of the telling details, shrewd judgment, and penetrating insight of this magisterial history.

This volume—continuing the "marvelously readable dramatic narrative" (*San Francisco Chronicle*) of *Pacific Crucible*—marks the second installment of the *Pacific War Trilogy*, which will stand as the first history of the entire Pacific War to be published in at least twenty-five years.

The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944 Details

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From Reader Review The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944 for online ebook

Rod says

Outstanding second part of the Pacific War Trilogy. Toll does an outstanding job of marshaling a vast amount of detail in a well written, logical form. Very broad scope to include the home front, the daily lives of participants (sample: Nimitz took up pistol shooting "to relieve stress").

Some takeaways

Pre war there was considerable controversy about how submarines could legally be used against civilian targets. Indeed, this was a major reason for the entry of the US into WW I. Toll points out that after Dec 7, the US Government shrugged off these concerns, and simply ordered the fleet to "Excute unrestricted air and submarine warfare against Japan." This in effect sealed the fate of the Japanese empire.

The Allies decided early on to focus on defeating Germany first, with the objective of keeping the USSR in the war. The British in particular fought any attempt to allocate resources to the Pacific. Toll brings up an interesting additional motivation:

"If the Americans closed in on Japan too early, British military power might be rendered strategically irrelevant in the Pacific, with portentous consequences for the future of the empire. Ernie King was not at all interested in the future of the British empire...."

King, BTW, pushed hard for additional resources to the Pacific to begin offensive operations as early as possible on general principles. This, while risking high losses, proved to be very successful. Post war interviews with Japanese officers indicated that the US forces always attacked before the Japanese were ready for them, in the final analysis reducing loses.

Questions, comments, nitpicks

In relating the airborne intercept and shoot down of the aircraft carrying Adm Yamamoto, Toll briefly addresses whether this act was ethical and in accordance with the laws of war. He asserts that Washington would not have ordered such a mission, nor would Lee on Grant. I'm not so sure. Preferential targeting of command units (and therefore, personnel) is a well known tactic in war. In fact, Toll notes later that US fighter pilots usually targeted the lead opponent for just this reason.

Toll reproduces the well known photograph of an exploding bomb on the Enterprise in 1942, stating it was taken at the moment of explosion. Again, I'm not so sure. The "blast" does not seem violent enough to be a result of the explosive fusing. I think it's just the result of the bomb hitting and penetrating the deck. In all likelihood the bomb would have been delayed fused anyway, not to explode until it penetrated the interior.

Is a submarine a ship or a boat? Toll states that fleet submarines were in fact ships (because of their size).

However, my impression is that in naval parlance, a ship is a vessel that carries (or can carry) boats. Boats cannot. Thus, submarines are boats!

Toll says VADM John Towers completed the first air crossing (in stages) of the Atlantic. I believe he is talking about the NC seaplane crossing. In fact, the only aircraft to complete the crossing was the NC-4, commanded by A.C. Read.

Toll says destroyers were designed and conceived as submarine hunters. Actually, the original full name of this new class of warship was "torpedo boat destroyer," shortened to "destroyer." The torpedo boats were thought to be a major threat requiring a special class of ship to counter them because of the advent of the "automotive" torpedoes they carried. This was in the late 19th century, some years before the advent of the modern submarine.

VADM Marc Mitscher ordered the fleet's lights turned on to guide the returning strike back after sunset during the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Toll objects that the order could not have been as simple as Mitscher saying (according to legend), "Turn on the lights." However, Toll also notes that the Admiral's staff had drawn up a complete plan for illuminating the fleet. The order could have been given simply by saying, "execute illumination plan." Or, by voice over the TBS ("Talk Between Ships") just saying, "Turn on the lights."

No, the Hellcat does not weigh 1,200 pounds loaded. (P302)

Peter says

A lot of WWII histories can fit into either the John Keegan mold, where there is a focus on high level and long term strategy, or the Stephen Ambrose mold, where there is more of a focus on tactics with frequent quotes and stories of the participants at all levels of the armed forces involved. Ian Toll has managed to combine both styles in a fast paced narrative of the epic struggle in the Pacific. For example, other accounts I've read of Guadalcanal or the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands will simply state that the carrier Enterprise was damaged during the battle but managed to continue to contribute to the Allied cause until it could reach New Caledonia to be repaired. Toll explains where exactly it was damaged, how the crew managed to temporarily patch the damage using mattresses and scrap wood, and how important it was that the Enterprise managed to continue to fight despite the damage. These are the types of details other books don't go into, which I appreciate finding out now.

Toll reviews the overall history of the middle years of the Pacific war, and also does an admirable job of describing the participants as individuals, on both the Allied and Japanese sides, from the well known leaders to marines, soldiers, and sailors. He also describes the situation from both sides of the conflict, with a great deal of insight into what was going on in the day-to-day lives of the Japanese. Late in the book, there is a chapter that details the media censorship requirements that the Japanese had to work with, which I had never read about anywhere else. My only complaint is that Toll will sometimes describe the experience of an individual, but then will not provide follow up details as to what happened to that person later in the war. For example, there is an interesting chapter on a particular submarine commander. He is presented as something of a maverick, though with an admirable success rate in sinking enemy ships. Yet, there is no conclusion to his story, no follow-up to explain what happened to him. This was only apparent to me since I had previously read about this submarine commander and I already knew that things don't go exactly well for him later in the war, but that information is not included in Toll's summary. This just made me wonder what else is left out, though of course, there's only so much a writer can fit in to a 600 page history of this wide ranging a subject!

Overall, this is a great addition to the library of WWII and I'm looking forward to the next volume in Toll's work.

Thanks to the publisher, I received this book as part of a Goodreads giveaway.

Sweetwilliam says

I read this book a few weeks ago while on vacation. I was accused of being anti-social because all I wanted to do was sit on the beach or by the pool and finish this book. Yes, I'm a little anti-social but the truth is I couldn't put it down.

This is Part II of Ian Toll's Pacific trilogy. Part II covers Guadalcanal to Guam. I enjoyed it more than Part I (The Pacific Crucible), because Part II covers the war instead of delving into page after page of background information about the decision makers from both sides such as Yamamoto, King, Nimitz, Roosevelt etc. Details about Yamamoto's love for his geisha were taken care of in Part I. Part II is mostly action packed.

Even though I consider myself an avid reader of Military History and a student of the Pacific, I found that there was still much to be learned from Ian Toll about the war. For example, I realize that the situation was desperate on Guadalcanal. However, I did not realize that Admiral Ghormley had given permission to Vandergrift to surrender the 1st Marine Division if necessary. Ghormley was sacked in favor of Halsey not a moment too soon. I really enjoyed the chapters on Guadalcanal but I would strongly encourage reading Hornfischer's Neptune's inferno as a supplement to the naval battles. Toll covers a few of the naval engagements very well but for others he merely scratches the surface. Likewise, if you would like to read a supplement for the air campaign than I would recommend Lundstrom's the First Team Part II, the Guadalcanal Campaign. Also, Frank's classic is a must read for a comprehensive book on the battle. But still, Toll does a solid job without devoting an entire book to that battle.

After Guadalcanal, the Japanese high command and the Imperial family had hoped for a single miraculous victory so that the United States would agree to negotiate. They thought maybe they could hold onto the monarchy and some of their territory? What became clear to me was that after Guadalcanal the Japanese did not have a razor thin chance of successfully defending any of their territory. In my mind, the Japanese high command and Hirohito were responsible for the needless sacrifice of millions of Japanese in a lost cause.

Toll charges Emperor Hirohito as being complicit and culpable for his support of this bloody war. Toll said that after the war the emperor tried to pretend that he was just a figure head or a puppet. The emperor was in on the strategic decision making. Also, after the early victories, when Japan was still drunk with success, the emperor would appear sitting on his white horse in front of the imperial gates so the Japanese people could cheer for him. He loved it.

The other new piece of information for me was that the British seemed to be selfishly urging the U.S. to slow down their progress in the Pacific because they were not ready to participate. The British wanted to be involved so that they could be seen out front and alongside the Americans while reclaiming their empire. After the success at Guadalcanal the defeat Germany first plan seemed to be compromised a bit to the chagrin of the British. The British were urging caution to slow the US down and not because they thought that caution should be heeded or resources were needed for the European theatre but because the British weren't ready to reclaim their empire. My thinking was first the British Empire cowardly surrendered Singapore without firing a shot and now this? What a disgrace.

At times the chapters read like vignettes. This is Toll's style of writing and I happen to like it very much. For example there is a very interesting chapter about the submarine war (for more information about the sub war read Clay Blair's Silent Victory) there are chapters about life on the West Coast, another about Australia,

Washington D.C., and Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor was considered one of the worst duty stations. Some of the populated towns of Australia like Brisbane were the best. The latter was because of the “Shelia’s” that were throwing themselves at the Americans. Toll gives you a feel for all of these things and there still is plenty of pages dedicated to Tarawa, Kwajalein, Saipan, the Marianas Turkey Shoot, the raid on Truck, and Guam, all tied together like only a few authors can. I rank Toll right up there with Atkinson, Hornfischer, Foote, Kegan, Catton, Sides, and Sears.

By 44, the US Navy’s Brown Shoe officers (the aviators) have wrestled away control of the carriers from the Black Shoe officers (surface navy/Big Gun Club). The Hellcat is introduced and it is a better plane in every respect to the Zero. The lessons of Tarawa were learned and applied to future battles...for example, at Kwajalein it is estimated that half of the Japanese combatants were killed by the pre-invasion bombardment. The problems with the USN torpedoes are fixed. Also, there will be no more timid US carrier demonstrations because there were always 9 or 10 carriers in theater. Any further resistance by the Japanese was just plain murder. While the resources of the Americans were increasing exponentially, Toll claims that the oxen used to pull new Zeros 20 miles to the nearest airport or shipping point were dropping dead from exhaustion and causing a bottleneck in the plant! That is how bad it was for the Japanese at this point and yet they fought on. Hirohito most rightfully should have been hanged for urging his military to hold out.

Lastly, I would like to just say a few words about Medal of Honor winner, Marine Lieutenant William D. Hawkins of Texas who was killed on Tarawa. Toll gives Lt. Hawkins his due. Hawkins single handedly knocked out several pill boxes and machine gun nests on Tarawa and he refused to be evacuated for his wounds. Instead, he commandeered a half track, gathered the remnants of his platoon and charged into the teeth of several more pill boxes and machine gun nests. Hawkins rode that halftrack like a chariot using the .50 caliber machine gun as his lance. He "jousting" with several other machine guns before his luck finally ran out. The Marines of the 2nd division who witnessed that heroic act will never forget the image of Hawkins riding that halftrack to glory. Thanks to Toll, neither will the readers of this book.

The reason I read books like this in part, is to learn about men from the greatest generation that gave their last full measure of devotion for their brothers in arms. Their actions guaranteed basic rights like free speech and the right to bear arms. When you get to heaven, remember to thank Lieutenant Hawkins for his service.

I can’t wait for the third installment. Does anyone know when it will be released? Read the book.

Peter says

The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944 is the second in Ian Toll’s masterful Pacific War Trilogy. *Pacific Crucible* (reviewed) covered Pearl Harbor and its immediate aftermath in 1942 through the Battles of the Coral Sea and of Midway. This history continues from that point, starting with the action in the Solomon Islands, particularly the invasion of Guadalcanal, and proceeding through 1944.

Toll’s primary focus is on the Navy, but he certainly includes the Marine Corps—the Navy’s most important arm (take that, swabbies!). The Army’s role was two-fold: it was an occupying force on the conquered islands taken, and the Army Air Forces were the punishers of the Japanese mainland late in the war. But for the most part the USMC was the invading force. [Note for dogfaces: yes, there were some island invasions spearheaded by the Army.]

The Marines had a provincial view of the other services, exacerbated by the age-old feud with the Navy and

by the Army's late appearances on many islands in relief of the Marines. A modified version of the chorus to "Bless Them All" is one example:

Fuck them all! Fuck them all!
The long and the short and the tall;
Fuck all the swabbies and dogfaces too,
Fuck all the generals and above all fuck you!
So we're saying goodbye to them all,
as back to our foxholes we crawl;
There'll be no promotion on Macarthur's ocean,
so cheer up marines, fuck them all!

We often think of Guadalcanal as a land battle, but it was also a vicious naval contest: a fleet of over 80 U.S. Naval warships gathered for the Guadalcanal invasion and 5,000 of the 7,100 Allied naval and ground forces killed (many Marines by disease) were naval; another 7,000 marines and swabbies were wounded or downed by disease. The Marines landed on a north side beach adjacent to the then-under-construction Japanese airfield (later called Henderson Field; they met no resistance—Japanese forces had expected the invasion elsewhere and had concentrated to the west and east.

But after the landing a "sneak attack" by Japanese naval warships led to major U. S. naval losses just offshore. This was the first of seven naval battles as the Japanese constantly tried to reinforce the island until, finally, they abandoned the island in February, 1943. Admiral King, the mean SOB who masterminded the invasion (his daughter said he was very even tempered, always angry) said that first naval battle was the "blackest day of the war." It certainly was for him!

Fighting on Guadalcanal was more guerrilla warfare than pitched battles. Beyond disease and sleep deprivation, the major threats were Japanese shelling of Henderson, nighttime attacks by the Japanese, and jungle ambushes. The most vicious setpiece engagements on the island were the Battle of the Tenuru River in late August, and the Battle of Bloody Ridge in September. When the Japanese left in February of 1943 the Allies had set an imprint on the Pacific war for the first time. The Battle of Guadalcanal, and the larger Battle of the Solomon Islands, was a turning point in the Pacific land war, just as Midway was a turning point in the naval war earlier in 1942.

After the foothold at Guadalcanal was achieved, MacArthur and Halsey combined to move up the Solomon chain, bypassing some islands and leaving their Japanese occupants stranded—they even bypassed the major Japanese position at Rabaul. Ultimately the Japanese lost their hold over the large islands around Australia (New Britain, New Guinea, and New Ireland) and the action moved northward toward the Philippines and the Marianas Islands: Betio on the Tarawa Atoll in the Gilbert Islands, Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands; Truk in the Caroline Islands, the Marianas Islands, where Guam, Saipan and Tinian became major airfields for the new B-29 bombers that began hitting the Japanese mainland in late 1944, and finally, Iwo Jima—a forward air base for bombing the mainland and a halfway airfield for injured B-29s returning to the Marianas. At each island an airfield was either taken over or built for the step to the next chain.

The Japanese war plans were long predicated on a "decisive" naval battle. That battle was the Battle of the Philippine Sea, occurring in June of 1944 about 400 miles west of Guam, the southernmost of the Marianas Islands. It occurred while the well-entrenched Japanese occupiers on Saipan (the Marianas northernmost island) were in a vicious battle with U.S. Marines. The Battle of the Philippines *was* decisive: U.S. naval aviators destroyed over 400 Japanese planes in the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot," and the Japanese fleet was severely battered. At this point, the Pacific War was all over but the shooting.

Toll goes far afield from the tactical events in the Pacific War. Among his many topics are the strategic disputes between Britain and the U.S. over the “Germany First” policy, the impact of the U.S. buildup in Hawaii on the quality of life there, and the characters who led the action: Admirals Nimitz, Halsey, Kincaid, and others on the U.S. side, and Admiral Yamamoto for the Japanese. His accounts of both carrier and submarine warfare in the Pacific are vivid. Toll gives a more positive impression of Douglas MacArthur than one usually finds: egomaniacal, yes, but he was also brilliant, daring, and surprisingly flexible—Admiral Halsey was surprised by MacArthur’s willingness to reconsider his position if faced with a cogent argument; the two worked well together because Halsey would openly disagree with MacArthur.

Some of this material is carried over from Toll’s first book, but repetition is the essence of education so there is little harm from the redundancy. Toll’s *forté* is his ability to place us in the middle of land and naval actions, much of it drawn from official records, diaries and letters. Toll’s descriptions are invariably lively and informative, and the depth of his research is impressive; as a former Marine steeped in the tradition, I learned a great deal about the geography and the island-hopping campaigns of the Pacific War from the excellent maps,.

Some have said that this second in his trilogy is not quite as good as the first, and that has some truth. But I attribute that to the raised expectations enjoyed by readers of the first in this marvelous trilogy. This is an excellent history matching its prequel in scope and style!

Five stars.

RATING SYSTEM:

- 5 = I would certainly read another work by this author
- 4 = I would probably read another work by this author
- 3 = I might read another work by this author
- 2 = I probably would NOT read another work by this author
- 1 = Never! Never! Never!

happy says

In this second volume of a proposed trilogy of the World War Two in the Pacific, Mr. Toll gives the reader a well-researched, and for the most part well written look at the middle two years of the war. The author covers the time from the beginning of the planning for the invasion of Guadalcanal in July of 1942 through to the fall of the Tojo Government after the U.S. take the Mariana Islands in the summer of 1944.

Mr. Toll looks at all aspects of the war – the naval war, the air war and the island assaults by the Marines, assisted by Army forces. He also looks at the affect the war had on the home fronts, esp Japan. In telling the story of the war, the author brings to life many of the men who had to make and carry out the decisions made at the highest level.

In telling the story of the various commanders, Mr. Toll does a good job of comparing and contrasting their talents and abilities. This is especially true of Ghormley and Halsey at Guadalcanal. He also does a good job of telling the tensions between Spruance and his carrier commanders later in the war during the Mariana Islands campaign. To say the carrier commanders chafed at being told to support the people on taking islands and not go out searching for the Japanese carriers is an understatement.

In covering the Battle of the Philippine Sea, Mr. Toll looks at Adm Marc Mitscher's famous decision to "Turn on the Lights" so his returning strike aircraft could find their way home. He makes a point of saying that this decision was not made on the spur of the moment and was well thought out, and at the time was not particularly controversial or thought to be very dangerous to the ships involved.

In addition to explaining the various battles that occurred and the strategy behind them, Mr. Toll contrasts the American and Japanese way of war. One of the ways he does this in explaining how the two Navies recruited and trained Naval Aviators. At the start of the war the Japanese were unquestionably the best naval aviators in the world. However due to the selectivity of their system, they did not have enough replacement pilots and were unable to quickly revamp their system to train more as the combat losses piled up during the Solomon Island campaign. The Americans on the other hand were able to rapidly expand their pilot acquisition programs and by 1944 totally out matched their Japanese counterparts.

The author also looks at how Japan managed the war on the home front. In looking at Japan's industry he cites several examples of poor resource management. Probably the best is the Mitsubishi aircraft plant in Nagoya. The plant was not near an airfield and completed aircraft had to be towed more than twenty miles by ox team to be accepted by the Navy. Mr. Toll also looks at how the civilian population was given war news and how they learned to read between the lines as the war dragged on.

The main problem I had was that sometimes the narrative doesn't flow well. Mr. Toll will change subjects with not much of a segway. This was especially noticeable on his chapter on the U.S. Navy's submarine campaign.

To sum up my feelings, this is not quite as good as the first book in the trilogy, but an excellent overview of the middle two years of the War in the Pacific never the less. However it does suffer a bit from a choppy narrative. A solid 4 star rating.

Matt says

When I finished Ian Toll's *Pacific Crucible* in 2013, I had only one wish: to win the lottery. Secondly, I hoped that Toll would write a sequel. As it turns out, one of my wishes came true.

The Conquering Tide is the follow-up to *Pacific Crucible*. More than a mere sequel, it is actually the second in a proposed trilogy covering the Pacific Theater of Operations during World War II. Volume I covered 1941-42 and focused chiefly on the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway. Volume II covers the years from 1942 to 1944 and follows the United States as she shifts from a defensive to an offensive posture.

Like its predecessor, *The Conquering Tide* masterfully delivers on all levels, from strategic considerations to biographical sketches to battle narrative. It is a worthy follow-up in just about every respect. Moreover, unlike other series such as Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and Caro's *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, this one is actually on schedule for completion.

The Conquering Tide picks up directly where *Pacific Crucible* ends, in the wake of the great American victory at Midway. The Battle of Midway proved disastrous – though not fatal – to Japan. The Japanese Navy lost four aircraft carriers, nearly 300 planes, many of her best pilots, and the sense of invincible inevitability she had carried since Pearl Harbor. Despite its obvious importance, Midway was not the

“turning point” that history has made it out to be. It was a defensive fight, dictated by Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto who conceived the vast design as a way of forcing America to the bargaining table.

A map of the Pacific Theater Area of Operations. A lot of blood was shed for specks you can barely see

The United States’ defensive alignment in the Pacific kept with President Roosevelt’s Europe-first principle. According to the President’s wishes, the fight against Germany received priority in men and materiel. That did not sit well with the U.S. Navy, which wanted a bigger role. Prodded by the steely, belligerent Admiral Ernest King (“direct to the point of obnoxiousness” and – in Eisenhower’s words – a “mental bully”), the United States began consolidating its forces to strike back.

The first blow would fall in the southern Solomon Islands, at a place no one had ever heard of called Guadalcanal. The location was chosen to deny the Japanese use of the Solomons, from which they could threaten Allied supply lines to Australia. The invasion of Guadalcanal gained impetus when the U.S. learned that the Japanese were building an airfield on the island. What followed was a protracted and wide-ranging fight, in the jungles, at sea, and in the air. For the Japanese, it became a south-of-the-equator Verdun; the more men they sank into it, the more valuable it became. For the Americans, it was a costly proving ground. Ashore, poorly supplied Marines were stretched to breaking. At sea, the Japanese skill in night fighting resulted in several stunning victories in battles reminiscent of the muzzle-to-muzzle slugfests of the 19th century.

The Guadalcanal Campaign is *The Conquering Tide*’s big set-piece, taking up the first several hundred pages (out of 542 pages of text). It is the most detailed of the campaigns that Toll covers. After Guadalcanal, MacArthur and Halsey mopped up in the Solomons while Nimitz unleashed his amphibious Central Pacific push against the Gilbert, Marshall, and Marianas Islands. *The Conquering Tide* concludes with the bloody invasion of Saipan and the naval Battle of the Philippine Sea. Saipan is a fitting bookend, portending the fearsome island-fighting to come at places like Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.

A civilian helped from her hiding place on the island of Saipan. Saipan cruelly prefigured the devastating slaughter at Okinawa

(Admission: I think I liked this a bit less than *Pacific Crucible*, and it’s mostly because of the amount of time spent at Guadalcanal. A lot of this story felt already-told. Much of this ground has been well covered by very vivid writers, such as James Hornfischer in *Neptune’s Inferno*).

More than just the tactics, Toll covers a seedier side to the war, the glory-hoarding, glory-hunting inter-service rivalry between the Army, the Navy, and the Army Air Force. The bitter squabbles of service roles is a major theme of Toll’s work. It’s not an unremarked upon feature in other histories. In Europe, for instance, much has been made of the rivalry between Bradley and Patton on one hand, and Bernard Montgomery on the other. Here, though, it is Americans bickering with Americans over who is going to win the laurels. MacArthur and the Army wanted to roll up the northern Solomons, recapture New Guinea, and finally return to the Philippines, where MacArthur had infamously promised to return. Nimitz wanted a thrust in the Central Pacific. Both eventually got their way, leading to the obvious questions regarding necessity. Did young men die because generals and admirals wanted bigger budgets, shinier medals on their chests, and promotions? The answer is yes. The military is like any other profession, filled with ambitious strivers seeking to achieve the most from their career. Unlike other jobs, though, decisions made by military men have lethal consequences. Of all the men Toll writes about, it is Admiral Nimitz who comes out looking the

best. He is the Pacific counterpart to Eisenhower, a man not especially known for tactical brilliance, but of supreme temperament.

Admiral Nimitz. He liked to play horseshoes and looked funny in shorts

Toll is at his absolute best when he finds the stories within the stories. Throughout the book, he will give you a mini-arc about an individual or group of men that brings home the immediacy of war. For example, he starts the book with a gripping portrayal of coastal watchers in the Solomons. These men were able to both elude the Japanese soldiers hunting them, while also passing on vital intelligence to the Allies. In the middle of *The Conquering Tide*, Toll follows the crew of the submarine *Wahoo* as it embarks on an eventful war patrol. Did this journey by a solitary submarine win the war? No. But it is a white-knuckle ride that is fascinating to read, while also demonstrating the larger importance of submarines in the victory over Japan.

Beyond the battles (which he does extremely well) Toll does not neglect other aspects of the Pacific War. He does a great job contrasting U.S. armaments production and shipbuilding (assembly lines, technological innovation) with that of the Japanese (who, as Toll describes, had to use ox-teams to drag completed Zero fighter planes to embarkation points). Military history is often written as the story of small groups of heroic fighters. There is some truth to that, of course. But in World War II, it was logistics that ultimately won the day. That was never clearer than in the Pacific, where the U.S. Navy began multiplying like rabbits, while the Japanese fleet withered, some of her biggest vessels kept in harbor due to dwindling oil stocks.

Speaking of contrasts, Toll also gives us a comparison of ports-of-call. His descriptions of liberty in Brisbane or Melbourne verses San Francisco is pretty entertaining. The so-called Battle of Brisbane, a drunken riot between U.S. and Australian servicemen, is a humorous interlude in an otherwise grim war.

The Conquering Tide advertises itself as a comprehensive land-sea-air treatment. This is technically true. Toll does describe the various fights on land; however, this is done in a far more cursory fashion than the naval engagements. (I mean, how do you devote hundreds of pages to Guadalcanal without a single reference to the 7th Marine's Chesty Puller?). This is definitely more a naval history than anything else. That's not a critique, just an observation.

A bomb explodes on the USS *Enterprise* during the Battle of the Eastern Solomons

The only thing I really would have liked is chapter titles. I know, this seems like I'm reaching, but hear me out. The book is broken down into a prologue, and epilogue, and fourteen numbered chapters. That doesn't give you any idea where the you are going, or where you have been. A good table of contents provides a roadmap for the reader. *The Conquering Tide* is pretty accessible, but it's still telling a lengthy and complicated story that could have used such a framework.

Also, it's worth noting (at least for WWII buffs) that Toll is far more interested in narrative momentum than in analyzing/arguing various controversies. Toll doesn't neglect the tactical or moral debates that arose during the war, such as Admiral Fletcher's decision to move his carriers from Guadalcanal, the operation to assassinate Yamamoto, or Admiral Mitscher's celebrated move to turn on his lights to guide his airplanes home, but he doesn't give these disputes a very thorough airing. This is to the advantage of WWII newcomers, since some of these topics are insider baseball. Readers who've already consumed Samuel Eliot Morrison's 15 volume *History of Naval Operations in World War II* might wish for more depth.

It's a little thing. When the bar is high, the little things matter.

Books about World War II exist in numbers rivaling the stars. The trouble isn't finding a book to read on the subject, it's finding a *great* one. It can be hard to know which titles stand apart. This is one.

Recently, Rick Atkinson finished his Liberation Trilogy covering the American Army in North Africa, Italy, and Europe. It's uncontested quality and readability will make it a standard reference for years to come. Toll is on the verge of doing the same thing for the Pacific Theater of Operations. I am confident that his final volume will complete a project that will stand in very good company.

Lizzy says

The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944 is the second book in Ian W. Toll's trilogy covering the War in the Pacific. The first book Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942, covered the initial phase of war - Pearl Harbor to Midway, besides the prelude to the war. This book reviews the bulk of the Pacific campaign after Midway, during which Japan's position deteriorated from their peak ascendancy, with America reeling. The author covers the time from the beginning of the planning for the invasion of Guadalcanal in July of 1942 through to the fall of the Tojo Government after the U.S. takes the Mariana Islands in the summer of 1944. *The Conquering Tide* ends in 1944, leaving us expecting Toll's third volume to cover the end of the war, the planning for an invasion of Japan that never happened, the atomic bombs, and the war's aftermath.

Besides a detailed analysis of the various operations and battles, *Toll* does not neglect other aspects of the Pacific War. As in *Pacific Crucible*, he brings to life the main high-level decision-makers both American and Japanese; the leverage afforded by intelligence originated on the different islands; and the technological and strategical advancements that give US crucial advantage:

"By the fall of 1942, an American ship could land its first salvo on an unseen enemy without the benefit of searchlights or flares. That was a valuable technical advantage over the Japanese, and it largely offset the superior skill, training, and torpedo weaponry of the Japanese surface fleet."

The author also covers the impact the war had both in the US and Japan, and he does not portray Japan as unconditionally evil or the U.S. as unquestionably the *good-guys*, just presents his account of what set these powers against each other and how they went at it. So we read how the political situation in Japan impact its own capacity to carry on successfully the war effort:

"The Guadalcanal campaign had exposed all of the internal rifts and rivalries that divided the Japanese military regime and paralyzed its ability to craft coherent strategies."

The American situation, on the other hand, enhanced with the passing of time after the first impact of Pearl Harbor. Dominance, among other circumstances, was supported through the fulfillment of its enormous industrial capacity.

Further on, *Toll* explains how the situation in Japan becomes ominous and how it affected the Japanese population. And he does it all extremely well. By nature accustomed to trusting and obeying their leaders,

the Japanese people nonetheless were neither shortsighted nor passive, and while the military dictatorship strictly controlled the press and allowed only stories of glorious victories, later on of *strategic withdrawals*, then of "*luring the enemy closer in order to destroy them once and for all*" to be announced, the civilian population eventually realized that the war was not going well. As Japanese propaganda became increasingly detached from reality, it only undermined trust, especially as deprivations became more severe and civilians were told to eat less and work more, even while it was common knowledge that the army ran the black market and high-ranking officers lived with ostentatious extravagance.

But most of the book is about the military campaign, and while there is still plenty of ship-to-ship and air combat action, in the period between 1942 to 1944 we read about the bloody island hopping phase of the war, as American Marines and Japanese Imperial soldiers die by the thousands on tiny atolls none of them could name or locate on a map. Living conditions are terrible, the climate and native flora and fauna makes life miserable, and the fighting is horrible:

“Colonel Shoup, who wore a mask of dust and dirt like every other marine on the island, summed up the situation that afternoon: “Well, I think we’re winning, but the bastards have got a lot of bullets left. I think we’ll clean up tomorrow.” He was plainly exhausted, having slept not at all the previous night. He was still bleeding through his bandage. His report to General Julian Smith would enter Marine Corps lore: “Casualties many; percentage of dead not known; combat efficiency: We are winning.”

Ultimately, conquering of the Marianas was essential to American objectives. And the Tinian island was to be the major airbase to the Twentieth Air Force, which would eventually operate more than 1,000 B-29 Superfortresses:

"Though Americans were slow to appreciate it, they had just won the decisive victory of the Pacific War. Capture of the Marianas and the accompanying ruin of the Japanese carrier airpower were final and irreversible blows to the hopes of the Japanese imperial project."

To conclude, I found *The Conquering Tide* an excellent overview of the middle two years of the War in the Pacific.

Patrick Ewing says

Magnificent! Will become the standard work on the Pacific War by which all future books will be judged.

Nooilforpacifists says

Not as good as the first book in the trilogy, but well worth reading. Much of it felt like repeating old ground...uh...ocean. Still, a magnificently written history that reads like a novel. I look forward to the final installment.

But I had some beefs with Toll's narrative.

On the "did Fletcher pull the carriers out of Guadalcanal early" issue ("one of the livelier controversies of the Pacific War"), Toll makes a waive at a fair hearing, and repeats Samuel Elliot Morison's damning post-war discovery of the actual fuel state of each ship in the task force--showing Fletcher had well more than he either believed or was told.

On the other side, Toll explains that Fletcher's carriers could not have prevented the next evening's catastrophic Battle of Savo Island, and may not even have had sufficient time to launch air groups for a retribution strike on the retreating Japanese surface ships. And, yes, there were all those provisions never unloaded--though the boat tenders assigned were inadequate to do the job in 3, 4 or even 5 days; the beach plan was FUBAR from the start.

Yet, inexplicably, Toll fails seriously to explore the calculus of keeping the only two Pacific carriers in an essentially static state at "torpedo junction". This, as Fletcher, Nimitz and even Vandegrift knew, was unwise in the extreme. Other American ships soon would be slaughtered in the same spot. At that point in the war, flattops were more valuable than Jarheads; sorry about that. Omitting this discussion is the most serious flaw in Toll's book--and my initial beef.

In the end, though, Toll rightly concludes the carriers' departure schedule was so serious a tactical issue, it should have been decided in advance at a higher level--by the hapless Ghormley, if not by Nimitz himself. So, even were the carriers' withdraw precipitous (and I for one am not sure it was) it wasn't solely, or even mostly, Fletcher's fault.

Secondly, I found it odd that although Toll reported Captain Bode of Chicago was censored for his conduct in the Savo Island battle, I saw no mention in text or footnote of Bode's fate: shipped Stateside, shot himself in the temple and died immediately on April 19, 1943. Surely, this fact is relevant to the story, both on a personal level, and on the level of stress Captains of Heavy cruisers (and other surface ships) were under defending daily the slot from "the Tokyo express".

"No one event of the Guadalcanal campaign lifted morale so much as the arrival of those first planes...Vandegrift, overcome with emotion, took the hand of Major Dick Mange, commander of Marine Bombing 332, and said, "Thank God you have come."

"More than any other major military commander of the Pacific War, Halsey wore his emotions on his sleeve. He wept openly, frequently, and without pretense."

AMAZING; I did not know this--from the man who erected signs outside his bases saying "Kill Japs, Kill Japs, Kill More Japs":

"Halsey (of all people) publicly criticized the decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki."

My third beef: Toll's analysis of the decision to kill Yamamoto is shockingly sloppy. He asserts the only two issues were (1) whether it was wrong to "assassinate" the opposing commander-in-chief in wartime; and (2) whether it was wise, on the grounds that -- since Midway -- Yamamoto had been lethargic and incompetent.

My understanding is that those two issues factored into the decision -- but the principal question was: would it give the "Ultra" game away? In other words, would the timing of the "hit" be so unlikely that the only explanation had to be that the Americans had cracked the Japanese codes--in which case the Japanese would change them, leaving the Allies blind. Only after careful consideration of this -- possibly most important of the three issues -- did CINPAC (Nimitz himself) decide the potential gain outweighed the risk.

Oh to be an American Sailor or Marine in Sydney or Melbourne:

"Girls no older than fifteen or sixteen commandeered boats and rowed out to American naval vessels anchored in Sydney Harbour. Some learned semaphore so they could get ahead of the competition by signaling incoming ships."

By comparison to Detroit aircraft assembly lines,

"[N]ewly manufactured Zeros were still being hauled away from the plant by teams of oxen....Twenty oxen had died, and the remaining were verging on complete exhaustion....Essential wartime deliveries of replacement aircraft thus hung on the fate of underfed beasts."

Zeros needed a complete maintenance overhaul after 150 flight hours. "By 1944, most front line fighters were shot down before they ever had a chance for a maintenance overhaul."

Don't neglect the photo section at the end. It includes an amazing pic of a basketball game in the forward elevator well of the jeep carrier USS Monterey. The ball is in mid-air at its zenith between two shirtless players contesting a rebound. The player on the left is identified as a ship's athletics officer, Lieutenant Gerald R. Ford--America's future 38th President.

Christopher says

Between July 1942 and July 1944 the United States and its allies invaded North Africa, Italy, and France in some of the most complicated campaigns of the Second World War. Yet they were surpassed in their complexity by the efforts of the Navy, the Marine Corps, and some elements of the Army to roll back the Japanese empire in the Pacific. The theater was enormous covering the largest ocean in the world and several small island chains. Because of this the military strategists and politicians can be forgiven for believing that

the war would last until 1947, 48, or 49. So why didn't it? Picking up where he left off in , Mr. Toll writes the account of these critical years when American forces began its counterattack against Japan by taking Guadalcanal, decimating the Japanese air force, and securing bases in the Marianas and New Guinea to begin sustained bombing against the home islands as well as preparations for the invasion of the Philippines. Like his previous volume, Mr. Toll does a great job of alternating between the high command and the average sailors. What we didn't get to see in his previous volume was whether or not he could enter the soldiers boots as well the sailors. And with his descriptions of the battles on Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Saipan, Mr. Toll shows that he can tell all aspects of this war quite well. Yet because of the greater length of time Mr. Toll covers in this volume, some sacrifices in the narrative had to be made, and in this case the campaigns to take back New Britain and New Guinea, Gen. MacArthur's and Adm. Halsey's commands. But what is strange to me is the inordinate amount of time on the Guadalcanal Mr. Toll spends. Out of the 14 chapters in this book, not including the introduction and epilogue, Guadalcanal covers five of them. Then the next couple of chapters focus mostly on American strategic planning after Guadalcanal, with a few breaks for carrier raids and submarine attacks in between before the Marines hit the beaches of Tarawa. Though I would've liked to have learned more about MacArthur's campaigns and less about Allied strategy, these gripes do not detract from this book too much. This is a worthy sequel and I can't wait for Mr. Toll's final volume to be published.

Nick says

Second installment from Mr. Ian Toll's WWII in the Pacific trilogy. Very much enjoy his writing and the all encompassing story he tells. Focusing primarily on the military actions, but also taking time to describe the leaders in some detail and the impacts of war on the home front. Looking forward to the publication of the final volume

David says

The Conquering Tide is the second book in Ian Toll's epic non-fiction series covering the entire War in the Pacific. The first book *Pacific Crucible*, covered 1941 and 1942 - Pearl Harbor to Midway, plus the prelude to the war. This book covers the bulk of the Pacific campaign after Midway, during which Japan's position deteriorated from their peak ascendancy, with America reeling, the Dutch East Indies under Japanese control, and Commonwealth nations from India to Australia threatened by invasion, to the dire straights the Japanese inevitably found themselves in only a couple of years later, with attrition and America's vastly superior industrial might combining with frankly stupid and outmoded attitudes among the Japanese high command to bring about a defeat that Admiral Yamamoto foresaw from the beginning.

The Conquering Tide ends in 1944, leaving Toll's third volume to cover the end of the war, the planning for an invasion of Japan that never happened, the atomic bombs, and the aftermath.

This is one of those big multi-volume epics that may be daunting to someone who's not a historian, but I encourage anyone with any interest in World War II, and the Pacific War in particular, to tackle Ian Toll's entire series, of which only the first two books are out yet and this is the second. The first book had me preordering the second as soon as I finished it, and now I eagerly await the third. Large as they are, these books don't read like dense historical textbooks. They are energetic and detailed accounts of the men who fought the war on both sides, with the most attention given to the commanders, of course, but also describing battles in detail, from eyewitness accounts and after-action reports, so the reader gets a grand view of the

entire campaign, but also zooms in to the torpedo-bombing of individual ships, and the wartime lives of Americans and Japanese.

The first book included a great deal of political background - what led Japan to its fateful (and catastrophic) decision to go to war with the U.S., and how the entire country went from rising modern nation to nationalist imperial power forswearing all the civilized principles they had previously subscribed to. Everyone knows, or should know, about Japanese atrocities committed during the war, a subject Toll refers to only in passing for the most part, but what was also mentioned in the first volume was that up until World War II, and during the Sino-Russian war in particular, the Japanese scrupulously adhered to international rules of war, and were known for treating their POWs with the utmost respect. So what happened?

There's less about Anglo-American politics in this book, the relationship between FDR and Churchill being largely covered in the first, but as the situation on the Japanese homefront becomes more dire, Toll describes how it affected the Japanese population. By nature accustomed to trusting and obeying their leaders, the Japanese people nonetheless were neither stupid nor passive sheep, and while the military dictatorship strictly controlled the press and allowed only stories of glorious victories, then "strategic withdrawals," then "luring the enemy closer in order to destroy them once and for all" to be broadcast, the civilian population eventually realized that the war was not going well. (The authorities also couldn't cover up all the bodies coming home, and while returning sailors, soldiers, and airmen were expected to keep their mouths shut, word got out.) As Japanese propaganda became increasingly detached from reality, it only undermined trust, especially as deprivations became more severe and civilians were told to eat less and work more, even while it was common knowledge that the army ran the black market and high-ranking officers were still enjoying fine dining and geishas.

But that's only part of the book - most of it is about the military campaign, and while there is still plenty of ship-to-ship and air combat action, in '42 to '44 we enter the bloody island-hopping phase of the war, and American Marines and Japanese Imperial soldiers die by the thousands on tiny atolls none of them could name or locate on a map. Their living conditions are terrible, the climate and native flora and fauna makes life miserable, and the fighting is horrific.

You can also see here the seeds of the eventual decision to use atomic bombs on Japan being planted. This is a debate that will probably never be settled (though I look forward to how Toll addresses it in the third book), but one of the primary justifications of the use of atomic weapons is the purported belief that Japan would never have surrendered otherwise, and that an invasion would have been even more horrifically costly, to both sides. After reading accounts of how Japanese soldiers threw themselves at the Americans in suicidal "Banzai" charges, how over and over again they chose to die rather than surrender (Japanese sailors whose ships had sunk would typically refuse rescue from American ships), how they had to be dug out of caves and bunkers the hard way, with bombs and flamethrowers, how they would booby-trap bodies or even call to American medics and then pull the pin on a grenade, and how even Japanese civilians threw themselves off cliffs after the battle of Saipan, mothers holding onto their babies, and were praised for their dedication and patriotism - it is easy to see how the U.S. came to that conclusion.

Japan never had a chance of winning the war - its fate was sealed on the morning of December 7, 1941. But one can imagine, in an alternate history, how they might have had a chance to end the war differently, perhaps with the negotiated peace that was their original plan. This volume and the one preceding it traces how and when things went wrong for Japan, leading to their inevitable utter capitulation. Several key battles, had they gone slightly differently, had luck favored one side a little more, or had commanders not made a few understandable errors, would have significantly altered the course of the war, at least in the short term. Japan was always fighting an enemy that simply had the power to replace ships and planes and men at a rate

far greater than they could ever match, with American's production growing and her military technology ever improving even as Japan's resources dwindled, but with better intelligence, and better decisions, and better use of their forces, Japan would have been an even more difficult adversary to defeat than they were. The fighting spirit of the Japanese soldier was impressive, but over the course of the war they went from being despised, untrained savages held in contempt, in the beginning, to feared jungle ninjas with supernatural powers, until eventually the Americans realized they were just men, like themselves, capable of great bravery and fortitude but also capable of being demoralized, starved, and exhausted. In the end, it was the Japanese high command that did in the IJN and the IJA - with bad decision after bad decision (starting with attacking the U.S. in the first place, of course), like maintaining a cumbersome inter-service separation, and refusing to rotate their best pilots away from the front to let them recover, and telling overworked and underfed civilians to do calisthenics to keep up their spirits.

All of this is detailed in this book. There is no portrayal of Japan as monolithically evil or the U.S. as unambiguously the "good guys," just an account of what set these powers against each other and how they went at it.

norcalgal says

When I first heard of this book, I wanted to read it mainly because I feel World War II history places an inordinate amount of focus on the European theater of war, while (if not neglecting) not respecting the Pacific theater as much as it deserves to be acknowledged and honored.

However, I must say I am disappointed in Ian Toll's narrative of the happenings in the Pacific. Perhaps it's because I inadvertently came into this not realizing it was part of a trilogy, but "The Conquering Tide" was a somnambulant, tedious read. In fact, I found it so much so, that I did not finish the book.

The final straw for me was when the book veered away from "war in the Pacific" to discussing President Roosevelt's lack of administrative acumen and the vicissitudes of domestic politics during the war.

I feel Ian Toll has the germ of a great series - and as stated earlier in my review, perhaps I'm missing part of the picture since I came into this with Book Two - but I didn't care for his style or writing. Indeed, I found it much too dry, and lacking in emotion, in a visceral pull to the subject. Too bad, as I think I would have enjoyed learning more about the Pacific Theater of WWII.

John says

Although I have read a great deal about the Pacific Theater over the years, I can't remember one that I have enjoyed as much as this one. Toll's style is eminently readable and actually downright enjoyable. I feel like I know the primary figures in the theater much better than I previously did. After reading this, I realized that I didn't know as much as I thought I did about the campaigns in the Carolines and the Marianas. I will be very likely to read anything Ian Toll decides to write in the future.

David Eppenstein says

A thorough and absorbing history of WWII in the Pacific and Now I look forward to the third addition to this trilogy. I thought the author's first book was good but this one is even better. I was especially grateful for the relatively equal treatment given to both sides of this conflict as well as the political forces and personalities that affected the directions this war took. There is much more in this book than what happened on the battlefield though there is plenty of that. Appropriate attention is given to decisions made because of elections or the biases of political or military leaders. Such attention gives wars their real human quality and strips them of their historic nobility. War is a human failing and if you read this book carefully that can be seen.
