



ISLAND INFERNOS: THE  
U.S. ARMY'S PACIFIC WAR  
ODYSSEY, 1944

BY JOHN C. MCMANUS

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REVIEW BY CHRISTIAN A. GARNER

As tensions continue to rise and competition activities increase in the United States Indo-Pacific Command Area of Responsibility, American military leaders continue to grapple with the implications and necessities of how to project and sustain a combat-credible force capable of operating in the unforgiving region. Having to contend with the vast Pacific Ocean and the disparate, archipelagic nature of the various land masses, modern military practitioners have realized that the lessons learned in combat in Europe and the Middle East over the past four decades do not translate cleanly there, if at all. Instead, operating in the region requires a joint force capable of conducting distributed command and control while embracing the tenets of mission command to synchronize multiple operations in time and space. Arguably, World War II offers the last large-scale example of sustained combat operations in the theater and offers lessons aplenty to those interested.

The importance of the sea and air domains within the region remains readily apparent,

but one cannot discount the ground domain and the scores of soldiers required to campaign and fight in the challenging terrain. Although the Marines immediately come to mind when considering Pacific operations, John C. McManus's *Island Infernos* rightly identifies the U.S. Army as the primary executor of ground operations in the region and captures the essence of the Army's role in the crucible of ground combat in the Pacific during World War II. The second work in his three-part series on the Army in the Pacific during World War II, the author devotes this book to Army operations in 1944 and the actions that ultimately led to the Allied advances across the theater. At the core of *Island Infernos* and its narrative, McManus details the transition of the Army from a force previously put on its heels at the onset of hostilities to one battle-hardened by tough fighting against a tenacious enemy in demanding terrain.

McManus takes the reader through each operation in that year, offering a blow-by-blow perspective of the tactical and operational actions that achieved overarching strategic objectives. With an overall structure to the work that is both chronologic and thematic, the reader quickly becomes familiar with Army operational names like FLINTLOCK, GALAHAD, and FORAGER and how these operations fit within the greater strategic vision of theater-level commanders General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. Likewise, the author examines the motives, decision-making, rivalries, and interpersonal relationships between the various commanders at echelons within the theater. Although their actions often were dwarfed by those of outsized personalities like MacArthur or General Joseph W. "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell, McManus introduces the reader to corps, division, and battalion commanders who executed the orders on the ground and how their interactions with each other and their joint service counterparts enabled or hindered operational execution.

While covering the commanders and decisions to launch each operation, the author also provides the tactical perspectives of the soldiers who patrolled and fought throughout the Pacific. Having to grapple daily with an environment as hostile as the enemy it faced, U.S. soldiers incurred a tremendous psychological and physical cost to defeat their adversary. McManus admirably conveys the stress, fear, and

trauma experienced by the soldiers who stormed the beaches, patrolled the jungles, and created the necessary infrastructure to campaign in the region, all while being under the constant threat of contact from opposing Japanese forces. The result is a rich narrative that seamlessly weaves individual perspectives from soldiers of all ranks and experiences across the theater. It is a comprehensive account that humanizes the war by portraying the experiences of those who lived through the Pacific ground campaigns of 1944. Although not purposefully discounting the importance of any individual operation or the associated cost in human casualties, the length and treatment of each chapter and its associated operation starkly depict the time and human capital invested during each operation of 1944.

With an invaluable understanding of the ground war in the Pacific and the commanders who led in the theater, McManus's work will serve as the authoritative, modern account of the Army's contributions during World War II. Accessible to both the casual reader and the academic environment, *Island Infernos* is the definitive account of the soldiers who, in 1944, tenaciously fought through the mountains, jungles, and sand to bring the war to the doorstep of the Home Islands and set the conditions to bring Japan to its knees. Although on the verge of ultimate victory, combat operations by nearly 700,000 Army soldiers in the Pacific Theater offered "troubling portents of the American postwar future . . . rapidly modernizing, ever deadlier weapons, flawed alliances, and the labyrinthine struggle for influence in Asia and the Pacific, a crucial enterprise that the United States has never yet mastered nor relinquished" (2). For these reasons, modern American military leaders would be served well by studying the struggles and successes that McManus highlights. The Pacific Ocean remains vast, and any future conflict or campaign will require the Joint Force's full capabilities to project, support, and sustain combat power. The U.S. Army will once again be the choice to execute sustained ground combat in the disparate geography and inhospitable terrain within the region.

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