

early encounters with the Royal Navy, improving their performance in subsequent engagements. Nor did they uniformly display the boldness characteristic of a great navy. The author rightly takes the US Navy to task for its failings in the early going in the Pacific, likening US setbacks to those suffered by the Regia Marina. But the US Pacific Fleet continuously reassessed and improved its doctrine, operating practices, and tactics – probably because Pearl Harbor put the Mahanian battle fleet out of action, forcing commanders to use the implements remaining to them creatively. Whatever the case, the contrast the author draws between the Italian and American fleets ends up casting the Regia Marina in an unfavourable light.

And fairly or not, the Italian Navy will be forever tainted by association with Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, whose clownish handling of war in the Mediterranean sets the tone for any history of Italian strategy and operations. That is the lesson from students' ridicule of Italy in the Second World War. The Regia Marina, for instance, performed well in one of its main missions, keeping sea communications with the North African theatre open. But that theatre was disastrous for the Italians, prompting their German ally to send forces across the Mediterranean - in part, bizarrely, to salvage Mussolini's prestige. At most, the navy executed its functions well in support of a debacle. Even so, we have to salute Vincent O'Hara's valiant attempt to correct historical injustices – even if, like the Regia Marina's, his ultimately turns out to be a losing cause. This book is strongly recommended for both specialist and non-specialist audiences.

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Nicholas Evan Sarantakes *Allies against the Rising Sun: The United States, the British Nations, and the Defeat of Imperial Japan*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009. Pp. xxi. 458. US\$39.95.

Over the past three decades, academic presses have churned out numerous accounts of the conduct of the Second World War in the Pacific. Several major works, and scores of minor studies, have critically examined the Truman administration's decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945; America's strategic bombing of Japan; the intelligence dimension of the war; the efficacy of Allied diplomacy in the Far East; and the cultural and racial contexts of the conflict in the Pacific. Indeed, the voluminous and carefully crafted set of footnotes that accompany Sarantakes' narrative, and which stand as valuable historiographical vignettes in their own right, testify to the richness of the literature in this field.

All of which, as Sarantakes readily concedes in his introduction, invites the question: do we really need another book on the end of the Second World War in the Pacific? In asserting that we do, Sarantakes argues that his study adds a new and much-needed international dimension to the preponderantly US-centric accounts of the Pacific War available to date, and moreover, casts fresh light on the utility of the Anglo-American relationship between 1941 and 1945. These are ambitious claims, but ones that, on the whole, prove justified. In essence, Sarantakes sets out to answer three questions related to the British Commonwealth's participation in the closing

stages of the Pacific War. Namely, what motivated Britain's desire to participate alongside the United States in the invasion of Japan? Why did the British dominions of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand conclude that it was in their interest to do likewise? And, why did US policymakers agree to incorporate British Commonwealth forces in their plans for the final assault on the Japan's home islands when strong military arguments existed to do otherwise?

In many senses, Sarantakes' book takes its lead from the earlier path-breaking multi-archival study of Anglo-American diplomacy in the Pacific War produced by Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain and the War against Japan, 1941–1945* (1978). However, whereas Thorne is at his best and most incisive when unpicking the complexities of Allied diplomacy, Sarantakes appears more comfortable and convincing in dealing with the military aspects of the Pacific conflict. The accounts provided of the American strategic bombing campaign against Japan and the Allied assault on Okinawa, in particular, are authoritative, lucid and gripping. To his credit, Sarantakes also provides a timely reminder of the extent to which relationships between key individuals can impact upon the successful operation of a military coalition. Vivid characterizations are provided of the major Allied policymakers and the lesser-known US and Commonwealth military commanders, and careful thought given to the nature and significance of their interaction.

Sarantakes' conclusion that Washington saw British participation in the denouement of the war against Japan as a precondition for the survival of a post-war Anglo-American alliance, and as such, primarily a political rather than a military imperative, is convincing but hardly novel. His attempts get to grips with the complexity of Britain's relationship with its Dominion partners, as suggested by the use of the somewhat awkward nomenclature 'British Nations', are less assured. Surprisingly little emphasis is placed on the extent to which Canada, Australia, and New Zealand had forged separate and distinct national identities by the early 1940s. Antipodeans and North Americans alike can be expected to raise an eyebrow at Sarantakes' assertion that their fellow countryman considered, 'that Canada, Australia and New Zealand were simply extensions of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland' (p. 358). More evidence is needed, for example, to support the claim that the Dominions' decision to participate in the invasion of Japan was motivated, to a substantial degree, by their desire to bolster British power in the Pacific. Had not officials in Ottawa, Canberra, and Wellington recognized long before 1945 that the locus of power in the Pacific, as elsewhere, had shifted decisively toward Washington, and adjusted their policymaking accordingly? In short, room still exists for a more nuanced analysis of the interaction between Britain and its Commonwealth partners in the war against Japan.

That said, this is a well researched, useful and lucidly written book. Sarantakes acknowledges that in style and structure his narrative was heavily influenced by Barbara Tuchman's classic account of the outbreak of the First World War, *The Guns of August*. In this sense, Sarantakes' fast-paced, lively and engaging history of the British Commonwealth's role in the final phase of the Second World War in the Pacific does not disappoint.

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