
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the first October session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Our speaker tonight is John McManus, the author of *Fire and Fortitude*. He will focus on the US Army's role in the Pacific Theater. In addition, Adrian Martin will discuss his book, *Brothers from Bataan*, and Al Lathrop will talk about his *A Surgeon with Stilwell*.

In the 1950 comedy *At War with the Army*, Jerry Lewis sang “The Navy gets the gravy and the Army gets the beans” poking fun at the rivalry between the two services during World War II in the Pacific and it was close to the truth. When the average person thinks of the Pacific War they focus on the naval battles and the Marine Corps' Island fighting, but the army did much of the fighting and dying in the Pacific.

The US Marine Corps and the US Army, two tradition bound services, began *joint* operations in World War I. Serving in the 2nd Division gave Marines familiarity with the Army's ways, but the Army retained little memory of Marine thinking. After the Great War, the two services' missions diverged. The Marines became an elite light infantry focused on amphibious operations. The Army, while retaining its colonial constabulary role, became a mechanized heavy infantry force.

During the 1930s, the Marine Corps developed the basic amphibious landing tactics and

equipment that made possible the “island-hopping” or “leap-frog” operations conducted in the Pacific Ocean (Nimitz) and South West Pacific Ocean (MacArthur) Areas. In Marine Corps theory, amphibious landings were supported by naval gun fire and close air support in an environment of air superiority. In practice, doctrine was flawed, and the navy's landing boats were cumbersome if not lethal. Marines who had seen Japanese landing in use convinced New Orleans boat builder Andrew Jackson Higgins to modify his bootlegger bayou barge with a front drop ramp – the ubiquitous Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel (LCVP).

The first test of amphibious operations was at Guadalcanal, which brought together all aspects land, sea, and air power. Oftentimes hanging on by a thread, American forces defeated the Japanese, while both sides fought the true enemy — malaria. Both the 1st Marine Division and the Army follow-on forces suffered from a lack of training before landing on Guadalcanal. Tactical and logistical lessons learned in the crucible of combat were rapidly disseminated to the forces prepared for the next invasion. All successive Pacific Ocean amphibious operations were or became *joint* operations as the army provided either the primary landing or the follow-on forces with naval transport and gun fire and aerial support.

Command personalities sometimes interfered with the overall mission of joint forces. The best example of this was the Smith-Smith controversy. Marine Corps General Holland M. “Howling Mad” Smith (considered to be the father of amphibious warfare) was one of the

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

most polarizing commanders in the Pacific. Though charged with training army personnel for amphibious operations, he held anyone not a Marine in contempt and gave little praise to any “doggy.” Obvious at Guadalcanal, Smith’s attitude came to a head at Saipan (June-July 1944) when he removed Army General Ralph Smith from command of the 27th Division claiming that he was a “weak officer, incapable of handling men under his command.” Ralph Smith had earned two Silver Stars in World War I and knew combat command and his men respected him. While accusing the 27th Division of a lack of fighting spirit, Holland Smith excused same behavior by Marine units as battle fatigue.

Despite their disparate their styles and command idiosyncrasies, American forces learned to work together to achieve their common goal of defeating the Japanese. Perhaps the singular beauty of the Pacific operations, certainly the key to the successful American military leadership, was their ability to learn from each battle and build on it. Some might say that the essence of great leadership is not merely audacity but also a willingness to learn and to adapt to the circumstances present on the battlefield. Satisfaction in victory is more important than headlines or the hash in the chow line.

FURTHER READINGS:

John C. McManus, *Fire and Fortitude: The US Army in the Pacific War, 1941-1943* (New York: Dutton Caliber, 2019).

Donald L. Caldwell, *Thunder on Bataan* (Guilford, CT: Stackpole, 2019).

James Campbell, *The Ghost Mountain Boys* (New York: Crown, 2007).

Samuel Milner, *United States Army in World War II: The War in the Pacific: Victory in Papua* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2003).

Peter Schrijvers, *Bloody Pacific: American Soldiers at War with Japan*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Adrian Martin,

Brothers from Bataan: POWs 1942-1945 (Manhattan KS: Sunflower University Press, 1992).

Announcements:

Vietnam War Roundtable - TBD - rldietrich@mmilitarymuseum.org
 Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 20 Oct. 2020 - *Gen. August Willich* - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
 St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - TBD - 715-386-1268 - rossandhaines@comcast.net
 Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble - TBD - sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com
 Civil War Symposium -TBD - info@tccwrt.com
 Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345 - 320-616-6050 - <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
 Minnesota Air Guard Museum - 612-713-2523 - www.mnangmuseum.org
 8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, Wednesdays at 1130 - <https://www.8thmn.org>.
 Friends of Ft. Snelling - www.fortsnelling.org
 World Without Genocide - 651-695-7621 - <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>
 Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN - Air show - TBD - 320-564-6644 - <http://www.fagenfighter-swwiimuseum.org>.
 Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie - TBD - 952-746-6100 - www.wotn.org
 Winston Churchill Book Club - lin.hopkins@hotmail.com
 Alliance Francaise 612-332-0436 - www.afmisp.org - Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 - crazyjer-ry45@hotmail.com
 CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 - www.cafmn.org

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2020-2021

27 Oct Nazi Strategic Failures
 10 Nov Deutsch Lecture on Walter Bedell Smith
 8 Dec Origins of the Great Pacific War
2021
 19 Jan Aerial Intelligence in Europe’s Air War
 9 Feb Struggle for Middle East Oil and War
 9 Mar Nazi Art
 23 Mar Nazi Scientists in the US Space Program
 13Apr The Tragedy of Poland: Nazis; Soviets
 11 MayThe “Mighty Eighth” and Victory in Europe

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