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Stanley Coleman Jersey, *Hell's Islands: The Untold Story of Guadalcanal*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008. Pp. xx, 514. ISBN 978-1-58544-616-2.

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The historiography of the Pacific campaign of World War II has often been overshadowed by scholarship on the European theater. Further, while major works have been devoted to such famous places as Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and Guadalcanal, there remain many gaps in the history of the Pacific war.¹ Stanley Coleman Jersey's *Hell's Islands* helps further our understanding of the land campaign for Guadalcanal and nearby Florida, Tulagi, Gavutu, and Tanabogo islands, a campaign that was "a key to control of the South Pacific area" (xiv). Jersey stresses that a full understanding of the campaign is not possible without taking both Japanese and American perspectives into account and thus draws extensively on both American and Japanese sources and oral histories.

Jersey served as a medical evacuation officer in the South Pacific during World War II. *Hell's Islands* represents his first major monograph and can be called a labor of love. It originated from an oral history project that Jersey undertook in the mid-1980s among former Australian coastwatchers, who played an important role throughout the South Pacific campaign. Besides the coastwatchers, Jersey includes insights from men on both sides of the conflict.

The book focuses solely on the land campaign between 7 August 1942 and 9 February 1943. The introduction states that the air and naval campaigns at Guadalcanal have been the subject of other works and lie outside the scope of the volume (xv). One interesting, and often overlooked, aspect of the campaign is the efforts by the Australian military from 1939 till the outbreak of general war in the Pacific in 1941 to fortify the Solomon Islands and the early efforts of Japan to reconnoiter these islands. Jersey demonstrates that the Solomon Islands were indeed key objectives for the Imperial Japanese forces in their plans to cut off the lines of communication between the United States and Australia from the very beginning of the war.

The title of the work implies the revelation of hitherto unknown aspects of the Guadalcanal campaign. A reader looking for this will be disappointed. True, *Hell's Islands* highlights some overlooked segments of the seven-month long battle, such as the actions of the 2nd Marine Division, often overshadowed by those of the 1st Marine Division, but it presents nothing previously unknown to historians. Jersey attempts as well to place his work in the expansive historiography that explores the human experience in combat, "revealing the very

¹ See John Costello, *The Pacific War* (NY: Rawson, Wade, 1982); Ronald Spector, *Eagle against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (NY: Free Pr, 1985); Jonathan G. Utley, *Going to War with Japan, 1937-1941* (1985; rpt. NY: Fordham U Pr, 2005); John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (NY: Pantheon, 1986).

human, non-strategic side of war” (xv).² His extensive use of memoirs and oral history collections on both the American and the Japanese sides makes his work far more successful in this regard.

The book follows a standard chronological narrative format with little commentary or analysis. It is clearly intended for a general audience, although historians with an interest in more traditional campaign histories will find the details of unit movements quite useful. However, lay readers or historians preferring a more non-traditional approach to military history may be confused by the numerous company and unit designations as well as the plethora of individual characters who make only brief appearances.

Jersey mostly allows Japanese and American soldiers and marines to tell their own story in their own voices. The use of these sources adds a richness to his account that is sometimes missing from traditional studies of Pacific campaigns. It is here that Jersey is at his best. His narrative of the “Battle of the Ridge” on 12 September 1942 makes ample use of Japanese memoirs outlining preparations for the offensive and giving accounts of the brief, but bloody, battle that reveal the commonality of the experiences of both Japanese and Americans. For example, one Lt. Shotaro Maruo, a company commander during the assault, notes that “one of our planes dropped a bomb in the midst of the 1st Company, 124th Infantry, killing one and wounding four. It was meant for the Americans” (229). So too, Jersey supplies numerous examples from the American side of misdirected bombs and “friendly” artillery fire. The memoirs give evidence of the horrific nature of the combat on Guadalcanal.

What really set us off was that our unarmed corpsmen [were] nothing but a target, despite the Red Cross band on their arm. I saw two Corpsmen killed trying to care for one of our wounded. While we were halfway up the hill one of our men was wounded. A Corpsmen [Robert Wilson] came to his aid. They shot Wilson, pulled him inside a cave and started cutting him up one piece at a time. First a hand, then an arm. We could hear him screaming above all the other noises of rifle, machine gun and explosives. There was no alternative but [to] blast the caves with TNT, killing all [Louis Carr, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Division] (174).

By its consistent use of Japanese language sources, *Hell's Islands* broadens the perspective of American historiography of the Pacific War. However, this is a double-edged sword in that Jersey too often fails to elucidate the importance of the materials he presents. The presentation of long passages from memoirs without comment on their significance in the larger picture of the campaign gives the book a strongly anecdotal quality. Take, for example the following diary entry outlining supply problems facing Japanese forces on Guadalcanal.

² Major works in this field include Lee B. Kennett, *G.I.: The American Soldier in World War II* (1987; rpt. Norman: U Oklahoma Pr, 1997); Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1989); Gerald F. Linderman, *The World within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II* (NY: Free Pr, 1997); John C. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood: The American Combat Soldier in World War II* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1998); Peter Schrijvers, *The Crash of Ruin: American Combat Soldiers in Europe during World War II* (NY: NYU Pr, 1998) and *The GI War against Japan: American Soldiers in Asia and the Pacific during World War II* (NY: NYU Pr, 2002); Peter S. Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers: Ground Combat in the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2003).

Even during the four-day lull in the battle we had only five *shaku* [about 0.15 pint] of rice per man per day and had to escort the wounded. After that we were continuously marching and escorting the patients. Our daily ration was from seven *shaku* [0.21 pint] to one *go* [0.318 pint] of rice. Moreover, daily rains and bad roads made the officers and men extremely fatigued [1st Lt. Kozaburo Miyazawa, 29th Infantry] (302).

Jersey presents no discussion here of the troubles the Imperial Japanese army encountered keeping its forces supplied. Nor does he offer any insight into the important role this played in the Allies' eventual victory. By contrast, excellent examples of how to incorporate oral histories and Japanese language sources into an analytical framework can be found in the works of Peter Schrijvers and John Dower.³

Jersey has compiled a wide-ranging bibliography of primary resources, including records from the National Archives, the Marine and Naval Historical Centers, and the Australian War Memorial. *Hell's Islands* is thus a fine supplementary work on the Solomon Islands campaign but one that falls far short of being a central work on the subject, chiefly by its isolation of the Guadalcanal campaign from the larger events of the Pacific War. There is little discussion, for instance, of the friction between Douglas MacArthur and Chester Nimitz and its effect on the allocation of men and materiel to the Pacific and specifically for the Guadalcanal campaign. Also problematic is Jersey's exclusive concentration on the ground campaign. For example, though he acknowledges that the struggle for Guadalcanal was intimately linked to the fate of Henderson Field, he ignores the decisive importance of the sorties Marine pilots carried out from the airbase to the outcome of battles between Japanese and American ground troops.

Jersey's work is valuable because it offers an excellent base of primary sources—especially Japanese sources—for future historians of the Pacific campaigns to draw on. It is at times entertaining and certainly provides insights into the experiences of the men who fought at Guadalcanal. In the end, however, *Hell's Islands* cannot overcome serious shortcomings of analysis and contextualization.

³ See notes 1 & 2 supra.