

Books

Recent Offerings for Military Readers. Books
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Battle for a Beachhead

Had *Betio Beachhead** come out at a time closer to the conflict it describes, it might well have helped its readers toward a more thorough understanding of what takes place prior to and during an amphibious landing against beaches well defended by a fanatical enemy.

In the decades to come, when historians become curious to tell the complete story of the battle for Betio, this book will contribute its part along with the scores of others which will be dragged from dusty corners, each to provide contributing bits of information.

Almost invariably in the battle tales we read, when an author attempts to allot credit to particular battalions, those battalions completing the defeat of the enemy come in for far more than their share of glory. This book is no exception in this respect. For example, of all the infantry battalions landed on Betio, the ones which did not land against enemy opposition have received the greatest number of words describing their action. Of course, there are good reasons for this. Of those who came just to see, fewer people are looking when the going is toughest. And in the early hours, those that came to fight are fighting, and so only know about an extremely small part of their own battalion's zone of action. Too, there is generally a greater number of those with a "recording for posterity" urge travelling with the reserve elements of a landing force.

Doubtless, the author has had access to at least some of the official records and, by reason of this, the book has a rather authentic odor. In fact, it smells much better than some stories on the same subject which are now circulating.

Among the Marine and Naval personnel who read this book, there will perhaps be many who could pose some tough questions for the author to answer. Notwithstanding these probabilities, the true spirit of the Marines as they approached and engaged in this battle emanates from this account of the battle for Betio.

To me, this book seems to sum up that spirit in the feeling one gets that every Marine knew that with both God and the U. S. Navy in direct support of the Second Marine Division, there

* *Betio Beachhead* by Captain Earl J. Wilson and Marine Combat Correspondents MT/Sgts. Jim G. Lucas and Samuel Shaffer, and S/Sgt. C. Peter Zurlinden. (G. P. Putman's Sons, \$2.50)

Colonel David M. Shoup, who reviewed *Betio Beachhead*, was awarded the Navy Cross for extraordinary heroism during the initial landing on Betio Island, on November 20, 1943. The citation accompanying the award states in part: "When his troops temporarily hesitated in the face of withering fire from enemy shore emplacements, Colonel Shoup, realizing the urgent need for reinforcing our thinly held lines, courageously placed himself in an advanced position and, by his valiant disregard for his own personal safety, inspired the men of his command to charge the heavily fortified beach and secure an advantageous position for further attacks."

could never be any doubt that Betio would be taken. However, they all knew there would be considerable haggling over the exact price which was to be paid for this bit of coral sand.

Some of the methods of barter are well described in *Betio Beachhead*.—D. M. S.

Three Decades of Aerial Combat

A pictorial history of combat aviation is presented in *Fighting Wings**, which covers the 30-year period from 1914 to 1944. Since aerial warfare is such a recent development, the authors have had available an abundance of source material, and this they have used well. Their compilation of more than 250 photographs and accompanying text tells a graphic story of the phenomenal growth of combat in the air.

Contrasting the mammoth bombers of the present war with the flimsy flying machines of World War I, it is hard to realize that only three decades have passed since those early Taubes, Spads, and Breguets flew in combat. It is even more difficult to picture what another 30 years will bring forth, though significantly the book ends with a discussion of robot bombs and jet propelled planes.

The book contains an interesting reminder of this country's tendency to fall behind in utilizing technological developments:

"Between 1908 and 1916, fifty-nine planes in

* *Fighting Wings*, by Gilbert Paust and Milton Lancelot. (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 256 p., \$2.75.)

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