

Passing in Review

BOOKS OF INTEREST TO MARINE READERS

Marines and Their Specialty . . .

THE U. S. MARINES AND AMPHIBIOUS WAR.—

Jeter A. Isely and Philip Crowl. 636 pages. Indexed and illustrated. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

In the eyes of the American people whom they serve, the history of the United States Marines is reflected essentially as a procession of noteworthy deeds by individuals and small groups. While this is not inaccurate as a characterization of Marines, insofar as their part in history is concerned, there is another—albeit less colorful—aspect of their accomplishments which would appear in the long analysis to deserve an even more prominent place in American historical annals. This is the effort of the Marine Corps, conducted over the past four decades, to rationalize the amphibious operation in terms of modern arms and modern operational concepts. The study of the Marines' activity in this sphere is an area of historical research hitherto largely untouched, and it is to this subject that Messrs Isely, Crowl and their Princeton associates have addressed themselves in composing *The United States Marines and Amphibious War*.

The Princeton volume is a scholarly presentation of the beginnings of Marine Corps—and indeed American—thought on the subject of modern landing operations on a hostile and strongly defended shore. It develops the thesis that, in the post-World War I period when military thought in our country was largely bemused with the lessons of the ponderous war of position just ended, there was a body of sturdy souls who, in the face of budgetary parsimony and professional apathy by the other services, nevertheless applied themselves with singular vigor to the then largely abstract matters of amphibious tactics, techniques, equipment, and even strategy. That a Marine officer should, in 1921, have forecast the chapter and verse of our step-by-step march across the Pacific some 20 years later, even to estimating accurately the forces required to seize Eniwetok Atoll, is emphasized by the authors as less remarkable than logical, in consideration of the studied application of the Marines to the field of amphibious research.

Bringing their subject through the years of preparation immediately preceding the second World War and assessing the developmental efforts of the Marines, the authors conclude that, despite its continuing efforts, the Corps was by no means ready for the total challenge of

the amphibious war to come. They contend, however, that the doctrines and techniques derived from the years of painstaking effort by the Marines had the effect of placing our nation, and our allies as well, in a position of strength which was not fully apparent until the final event which took place on the quarterdeck of the Missouri some four and one half years later.

Following this absorbing prelude, the volume proceeds logically to develop the tactical application of the research efforts previously described, discussing in succession all of the operations of the Pacific War in which Marines participated. It does so in a manner which is at once technically acceptable to the military reader and understandable to the layman. This portion of the presentation, of course, is quite unlike the preceding part of the book, in that it examines material that has already been related with accuracy and in detail by other historians. In this particular it does not extend greatly the record as it already exists, although the presentation is both full and lucid. This fraction of the book is noteworthy principally for the dignity and candor with which it treats those topics that have come to be described as "controversial." The temporary abandonment of the 1st Marine Division by its naval support at Guadalcanal in mid-August 1942, the conflict of views regarding Central Pacific versus Southwest Pacific strategy, and the long standing divergences concerning landing force tactics at Saipan and Okinawa, are all related and analyzed with an objectivity that inspires both confidence and belief. On this account, the study will be welcomed by all who have, for one reason or another, sincerely sought the facts in these matters.

The position of the authors themselves as recognized historians, as well as the thoroughgoing manner in which the history was prepared, both contribute materially to the stature of the book. Operating as they were, completely without restraint, the authors appear to have succeeded in maintaining an approach which is without either passion or bias. As such, the undertaking bespeaks character in all of its aspects. Because of this, and because of its original development of the genesis of the modern amphibious doctrine, the final product emerges as more than just another book-of-battles, but proves in fact to be truly responsive to its title.

Reviewed by LtGen Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr.