

PASSING IN REVIEW

LEYTE: June 1944—January 1945

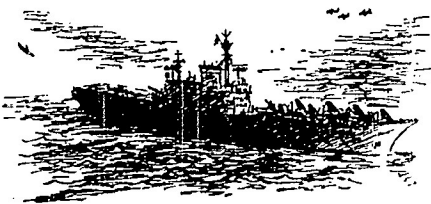
RADM SAMUEL ELIOT MORISON, USNR (Ret). 445 pages, maps, charts, index, illustrations. Little, Brown & Co., Boston. \$6.50

Leyte: June 1944-January 1945 is the twelfth volume in his history of US naval operations in WWII, by Samuel Eliot Morison, Harvard's great naval historian. For the twelfth time since 1947—when his first volume in the series appeared—Sam Morison has done it again.

After a section devoted to preliminaries (and very important ones too, such as Peleliu), the book turns to the Leyte campaign, to which all but 112 of its 445 pages are devoted. Here again, another vital subdivision: the lion's share of space goes to the October 1944 battle for Leyte Gulf, the largest and surely one of the greatest naval battles of all time. It is Adm Morison's assured, beautifully organized, and exciting treatment of this complex of actions that makes this volume the outstanding work that it is. I have reviewed his earlier handling of Midway (Vol. II), of the desperate sea fights in the Solomons (Vol. V), and of the battle of the Philippine Sea (Vol. VIII)—all critical and complicated, to say the least. Leyte Gulf, as reported in this volume, tops them all.

You name it, Leyte had it: a large amphibious landing, major carrier air operations, fierce and heroic destroyer actions against overwhelmingly stronger enemy, and that ultimate surface naval classic—an old-style battle line crossing an enemy "T." This last, the battle of Surigao Strait, was of special historical importance for two equally dramatic reasons: 1) the victorious US battle line was entirely composed of prewar battleships (5 out of 6 of whom had been sunk or damaged at Pearl Harbor); and 2) the battle marked the final line-of-battle action in the history of naval warfare. That it was

also one of the best fought and crushingly decisive of its kind sounds a fitting knell for a tradition extending back to 1655 and well exemplified by such fights as Trafalgar, Tsushima, Manila Bay and Jutland. As Adm Morison writes, "... when *Mississippi* discharged her 12 14-inch guns at *Yamashiro*, at a range of 19,790 yards, at 0408 October 25,



1944, she was not only giving that battleship the *coup de grace*, but firing a funeral salute to a finished era of naval warfare. One can imagine the ghosts of all the great admirals from Raleigh to Jellicoe standing at attention as the Battle Line went into oblivion, along with the Greek phalanx, the Spanish wall of pikemen, the English longbow, and the row-galley tactics of Salamis and Lepanto."

But the Leyte Gulf battle included other striking actions and feats. US naval history can hardly match and surely not surpass the superb courage of the destroyers and DEs off Samar, who unhesitatingly tangled by day and at point-blank ranges with Japanese battlewagons and heavy cruisers. Or the masterly, cool-headed handling of the US escort carriers caught naked under the 8 and 14-inch guns of those same battleships and cruisers. This was the fighting Navy, the Navy of Jones, Preble, Hull, Porter, Farragut, and Dewey, of men such as the ship's company of *USS Hoel* (who dueled

for 65 minutes before being sunk, against battleships *Yamato* and *Kongo* and anything else that her two remaining 5-inch guns could reach). Of those men and that ship it was written in an action report:

"Fully cognizant of the inevitable result of engaging such vastly superior forces, these men performed their assigned duties coolly and efficiently until their ship was shot from under them."

Reflecting the author's now considerable experience as a student of amphibious operations—at least from the naval viewpoint—*Leyte* presents effective pictures of the group of lightly opposed landing operations by the Army in the Philippines. These are in sharp contrast to the savagely contested assault on Peleliu by the 1stMarDiv, which, as noted, is also described in this volume. Here, as Marines, we might wish that Adm Morison had devoted more appropriate detail and length to the harder battle (Peleliu gets only 18 pages, the Leyte landings, 43). Also, that he had given an analysis of the seriously defective pre-landing naval gunfire bombardment at Peleliu (such as is found in Princeton's able *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*). Incidentally, in his characterization of the Peleliu defenses, Adm Morison reverses course 180 degrees from a highly dubious generalization found in his Volume XI, regarding the Normandy beach fortifications ("... the Germans had provided the best imitation of hell for an invading force that American troops had encountered anywhere. Even the Japanese defenses of Iwo Jima, Tarawa and Peleliu are not to be compared with these."). But in *Leyte* compare them he does, when, of Peleliu's fortifications he most correctly writes, "One shudders to think what would have happened if Hitler had built anything like this along his Atlantic Wall..."

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Another doubtful generalization regarding land combat mars this volume, viz., "not since the Guadalcanal, Buna-Gona, or Bougainville campaigns had fighting been as arduous as on Leyte." This just isn't so. The campaigning may have been hard,

but nobody can seriously contend that Leyte's fighting could be compared in arduousness with that, say, on Tarawa, or in the Marianas, or on Peleliu.

Leyte emerges as one of Morison's best. Its writing is racy and salty, its illustrations first-rate, and its maps and charts ably done. It presents the picture of a great naval battle which might seem more than the human eye and mind could compass, yet does this so simply and logically that the reader finds himself always in medias res and always in ready touch with all events as they unfold.

Reviewed by Col R. D. Heinl, Jr.

Ed: Col Heinl has been a lifelong student of naval history. He is now commencing a tour of duty as Chief of the United States Naval Mission to Haiti.

THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN

GERHARD RITTER. 195 pages. Frederick A. Praeger, N.Y. \$5.50

For years the Schlieffen Plan has been held in awe as the magic scheme by which Germany could have scored a quick victory over France in 1914, had the plan been properly executed. In this book, for the first time, the mystery-shrouded plan is brought to light in its entirety.

The book traces the growth of the Schlieffen Plan from 1891 when Schlieffen became Chief of the German General Staff until his death in 1912. It is documented with the thoroughness typical of German historical scholarship. Most of Schlieffen's staff memoranda on the subject are reprinted here and elaborated upon in light of what is known of Schlieffen's character and personality. Author Gerhard Ritter makes no final judgment of the Plan's chances of military success, though B. H. Liddell Hart, in his introduction, states, "... Schlieffen's plan had a very poor chance of decisive success at the time it was conceived."

Schlieffen decided that to insure quick capitulation of France, German troops would have to sweep through the neutral Low Countries in a great turning movement behind the French border defenses. This premeditated disregard of neutrals' rights, says Ritter, "appears to be nothing less than the beginning of Germany's and Europe's misfortunes," culminating in the world's condemnation of German militarism

at Versailles and later at Nuremberg. The General Staff had gained such power that the foreign affairs of Germany were completely dependent upon the Staff's operational plans.

Readers will enjoy studying the Schlieffen Plan as a military scheme. This book will not settle the arguments as to the Plan's efficacy, had Moltke executed it in its entirety, but will furnish ammunition to those on both sides of the conflict.

More important, however, is the question of the political implications of a nation's military planning. Another distinguished German, Clausewitz, once wrote, "It is an inadmissible and even harmful distinction to leave a great military enterprise or its planning to a 'purely military' judgment; more, it is absurd to consult professional soldiers on a plan for a war in order that they may judge from a 'purely military' standpoint what cabinets are to do." Germany violated Clausewitz' warning, and, as Ritter concludes, "The outbreak of the war in 1914 is the most tragic example of a government's helpless dependence on the planning of strategists that history has ever seen."

Junior officers will find much of interest in *The Schlieffen Plan*, even though it is a study of war planning at its highest echelon. Senior officers will find it even more valuable.

Reviewed by Capt D'Wayne Gray

Ed: Capt Gray heads the Administrative and Production Section of the Historical Branch, G-3, HQMC.

THE MILLIONTH CHANCE

The Story of the R101

JAMES LEASOR. 244 pages, photographs and index. Reynal and Company, NY. \$4.00

GRAF ZEPPELIN

The Adventures of an Aerial Globetrotter

J. GORDON VAETH. 235 pages, photographs and index. Harper and Brothers, NY. \$4.00

In the early twentieth century, several countries were interested in, and had varying degrees of success with, lighter-than-air craft. The French lost the *Dixmude* during a Mediterranean storm in 1923. The Italian *Italia* plunged in the Arctic ice in 1928. The British built their *R101* and its disastrous end we will review. The US fared little better. The *Shenandoah* crashed in 1925 in

Ohio; the *Akron* in 1933 and the *Macon* in 1935. Count Zeppelin of Germany started making and flying dirigibles in 1900 and his successors, including the famous Dr. Hugo Eckener, built and flew some 130 aircraft of this type, with only one major disaster, the *Hindenburg* in 1937 at Lakehurst, NJ.

The 2 books reviewed in joinder are opposites—success in pioneering commercial travel by zeppelin on the one hand and failure on the other. The skill and the know-how of the German zeppelin builders contrast sharply with the method and results of the other countries flying similar aircraft.

The *R101* was the greatest airship of her time ever built. She was larger than an ocean liner. Her first voyage ended in one of flying's greatest disasters. The *Graf Zeppelin's* exploits on the other hand, provided the press and the public with some of the sensational news stories of the late 1920's and early 1930's. Her flights were commemorated by the postage stamps of a dozen nations.

Obviously, these 2 books are contemporary history of air travel and provide us with lessons. These books may not sell the Department of Defense on a research and development cosmic space dirigible project but they are interesting and instructive reading.

Mr. James Leasor, author of *The Millionth Chance*, was born in 1922, educated at the City of London School and Oriel College, Oxford. His painstaking and detailed research makes vivid his telling of the story of the creation of a great airship, the political reasons which hurried its testing, the lack of a scientific approach to construction, the bungling in high government circles, and the disaster to which all the foregoing contributed.

The *R101* was 777 feet long; originally designed as a 732-foot airship, she was cut in half, lengthened and "sewed up" again. This was considered a necessary modification in order to insert more gas bags for greater lift. No 24-hour continuous flying test was ever completed. Yet, she was off for India via Egypt to inaugurate a passenger service aimed at bringing these parts of the British Empire closer together.

The *R101* was built by the British