passing in review

BOOKS OF INTEREST TO OUR READERS

Mediterranean Beachheads . . .

SICILY-SALERNO-ANZIO—(Vol IX, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, RAdm S. E. Morison; Little, Brown & Co., Boston 1954; 413 pages, maps, photographs, index. $6.00

Another volume of Samuel Eliot Morison's superb *History of United States Naval operations in World War II* has appeared, and will prove of special interest to Marines because it deals, from start to finish, with major World War II amphibious operations in the Mediterranean, in which our Corps did not participate significantly. Thus, *Sicily-Salerno-Anzio* opens new horizons and shows us both the mistakes and the differing methods of parvenu amphibians in a theater remote from the great arena of the Pacific.

Few titles have so completely summed up the contents of a book. *Sicily-Salerno-Anzio* describes the planning and execution of the landings on Sicily, at Salerno and at Anzio. In so doing, it breaks much new ground, for the official histories of Mediterranean operations are mainly still to be published. For the amphibious student, these early landings in the European Theater are of key significance, since they forged (and still greatly influence) the so-called "European" amphibious outlook in the US forces, and certainly the amphibious methods and philosophy of the British. The doctrines, organization and pattern of Normandy found their origins in the Mediterranean.

The characteristic features of these assaults, as described by Adm Morison, can be briefly listed:

(1) Tri-elementalization of command (the so-called "Command Trinity" of Navy, Army and Air Force), though with an occasional nodding concession to the US inclination toward unified command.

(2) Almost morbid insistence on surprise (cost what it might in terms of landing snafu, impaired fire support) and blackface get-up for the participants.

(3) Shore-to-shore operations, supported almost entirely (when supported at all) by shore-based air.

(4) A remarkable degree of improvisation and experimentation, often extending to Rube Goldberg extremes, but nevertheless quite as praiseworthy as noteworthy.

To this reviewer, it seemed, *Sicily-Salerno-Anzio* developed 3 (possibly 4) major themes. The first theme was the contumacious, intransigent separatism of the Allied Air Forces (both AAF and RAF) from all land and naval operations in the Mediterranean — an unwillingness to play, which undoubtedly sent many an Allied soldier and sailor to his death. As Morison, one of the top living US historians, bluntly relates, ". . . the real reason that the Allied Air Forces refused to co-operate was the current doctrine of their leaders that they should not co-operate; they did not wish to support ground or naval forces at a beachhead. The top air commanders of both countries were trying to prove that air power, alone and unco-ordinated, could win the war. They almost proved the opposite."

The second theme which Morison evokes is the decisive role played by ships' gunfire in all three landings. It is not too much to say (and Morison says it, as the top commanders and many participants did at the time) that naval gunfire support saved key Sicilian landings from fiasco, and prevented both Salerno and Anzio from crashing down in bloody disaster. We in the Pacific who saw gunfire support brought to virtuosity by 1944-'45 can nonetheless marvel and profit at its feats in the Med. The great battles between Kesselring's panzer divisions, and the light cruisers and destroyers of the Eighth Fleet at Gela and Salerno, should be illustrious in American amphibious annals.

The third theme of *Sicily-Salerno-Anzio* is one of amphibious innovation. Never was such a campaign for novelties: the first AGC; first use of bombardment rockets and rocket craft; first high-performance (VOF) air spotters; first periscope photography of amphibious objectives; and so on. Many things one later took for granted were sired in the Mediterranean.

What may perhaps be considered the last main thesis of this history is the sad roll of mistakes and might-have-beens. How we failed to seize Rome by a coup-de-main; how Kesselring, the old pro, time and again evacuated uninjured German formations from the jaws of annihilation (his withdrawal across the Straits of Messina is a classic); how the Allied armies stubbornly refused to employ prelanding gunfire support — and how they paid for that refusal; how the great Montgomery inched tardily through southern Italy; how (as Kesselring hammered home in his memoirs) we repeatedly failed to realize and to exploit our command of the sea and our ultimate command of the air; and how we blundered into bloody Anzio with forces entirely inadequate for their tasks.

From all this, it should be clear that *Sicily-Salerno-Anzio* is a challenging, important, most readable piece of amphibious history. The

book, however, is not wholly without defects. The only really serious of these is what at times seems a rather boy-scoutish attitude in dealing with tactical operations ashore and with the landing forces in general. This is perhaps natural in a blue-water book written from the viewpoint, all said and done, of the sailor. One would wish, though, that Adm Morison had sought the full-time counsel of a Marine adviser, or some other highly qualified amphibious professional to assist him full time in the same way as Capt James C. Shaw USN, who lent such notable professionalism to several of Morison's admirable Pacific volumes.

Short of this; of inevitable minor lapses in abbreviations and terminology; and of a bete-noire for this reviewer—failure to include tactical maps of many places mentioned in the text—short of these things *Sicily-Salerno-Anzio* is a great success. I recommend it, as I have recommended all its fine predecessor volumes, for edification and for enlightement, with no punches pulled.

Reviewed by LtCol R. D. Heinl, Jr.

Final Days . . .

THE DEATH OF HITLER'S GERMANY —George Blond. 299 pages illustrated with maps. New York, New York: The Macmillan Co. $4.50

Three men stood in the room, as if taking leave of each other after a long conversation. Behind his desk stood Gen Olbricht, Deputy Chief of the Army of the Interior; facing him Col von Stauffenberg, Gen Fromm's chief of staff and Lt von Haeften. Each of them had a big leather brief case, and Col von Stauffenberg held in his free hand a handkerchief with which he was mopping his brow. It could be seen that this hand had only three fingers, while the right one, which was holding the handle of the brief case, was made of flexible metal.

His perspiring face produced a painful impression, because the left eye was missing, and because the features were hollow and strained. Everyone knows that heat has a bad effect on recent or imperfectly healed wounds. Col von Stauffenberg's were still suppurating, especially the stump of his right hand, which had been blown off when he stepped on a mine in Tunisia. Moreover, for several days he had been subject to almost unbearable nervous tension. The brief case which he held in his artificial right hand contained a bomb intended to blow up Hitler.

Commencing with this description of preparations for the third attempt on Hitler's life, *The Death of Hitler's Germany* takes the reader, in a brilliantly written narrative, through the German defeat in the West, the fierce combat for the bridges at Arnhem and Nijmegen, the Battle of the Bulge, seen through German eyes, including the battles for St Vith and Bastogne, the Russian invasion of Germany and finally, the last days of Hitler and his intimate associates, within the command bunker in dying Berlin.

Using a technique which places the author in the position of an eye witness, George Blond has set up his observation post in Berlin, the center of German power, and has shifted the focus of his observation from the West to the East until there emerges the clearest view of the converging eastern and western invasions of Germany and of the people who played the major roles in each. Combining the talent of a novelist, the eye of a dramatist and the dispassionate attitude of a historian, the author has brought forth a vivid, exciting and detailed word picture of the final days of a great European tragedy.

Reviewed by Maj. G. P. Averill

ED: *Major Averill's letter from 3d Bn, 6th Marines in the Med read in part, ". . . Enclosed, you will find a review of the book. I hope that it can be used for publication for the book is a very fine one indeed, and one which I think should be required reading for Marine officers. I was fascinated by the entire narrative, and learned a great deal from it.*

"You might be interested in what can happen to one of your books when it is sent half way across the world for review. I believe that your letter said that the book was mailed on the 3d of January. It arrived in Naples on the 17th of February, having been missent to 2d Bn, 2d Marines, (why, no one will ever know) has survived an airplane crash, dropped overboard, waterlogged, mildewed and partially torn apart. . . . However, it did arrive finally, and has been read."

No. 1 Hobgoblin . . .

CLOSE CONTACT—Brigadier C. H. Dewhurst, OBE Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1954. 173 pages; illustration. $4.00

Some of our syndicated seers and parochial pundits are inclined to credit the Russians with almost supernatural powers. It is hard to tell sometimes whether these soothsayers are for Democracy, or simply afraid of the USSR. To find a writer who confirms my belief that the Russians still put their trousers on one leg at a time, is a pleasant change. Let me tell you how such writers come into being.

Take one senior British officer who has spent the past 20 years studying the language, history and evolution of Russia; mix well with an urbane sense of humor, a keen mind, and the ability to write in an easy, readable style and you will have the author of *Close Contact*—Brigadier Claude H. Dewhurst, OBE.

Having been the Military Attaché in Belgrade at the time Tito broke with the Kremlin, Brigadier Dewhurst was next assigned as Chief of the British Mission to the Soviet Occupation Forces in East Germany. As such from 1951-53, he probably spoke with more Soviet authorities than any living Westerner and his name became almost legendary in Berlin. I would dearly love to see the Soviet dossier on the Brigadier —it's probably a good 6 inches thick and even then I rather imagine that he remained a complete enigma to the Russians. But the important thing for us is that the Russians are not an enigma to Brigadier Dewhurst. Quite the contrary. To paraphrase the publisher's note, "he has been able to look behind the iron mask of Ivan the Terrible and has seen the frequently ludicrous face of Ivan the Timid."

Don't think for a minute that Brigadier Dewhurst underestimates the danger represented by the Russians or the Communist ideology. He fully appreciates these twin imposters, but he is neither cowed nor deceived. In the course of over 2 years daily dealing with Soviet officials, both military and diplomatic, he added immeasurably to his already extensive knowledge of the enemy. His observations and conclusions, based on that knowledge, form the foundations for his book.