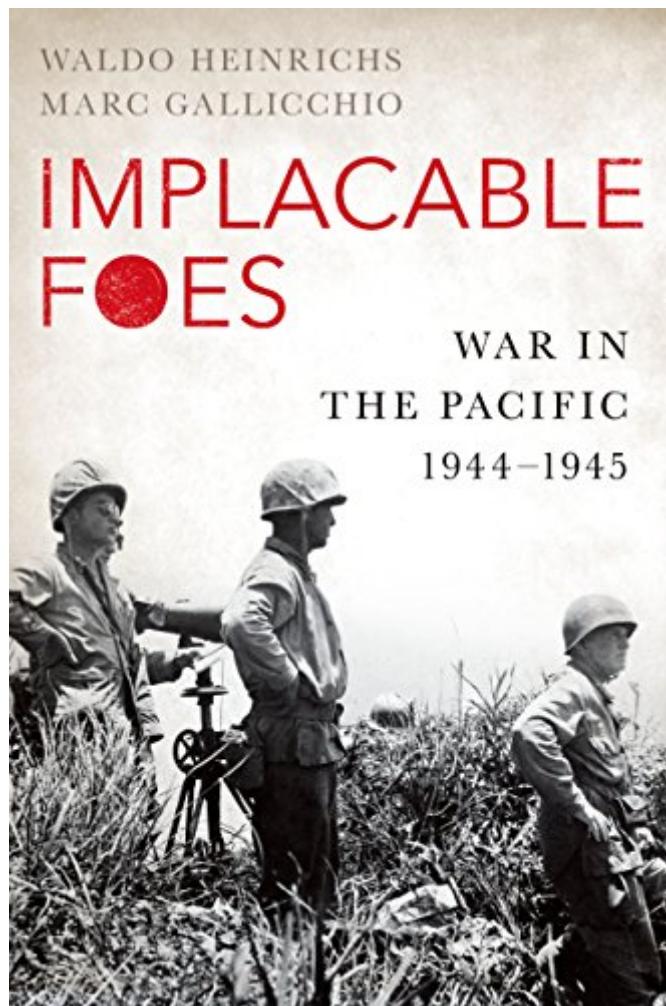


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# Implacable Foes: War In The Pacific, 1944–1945



## Synopsis

On May 8, 1945, Victory in Europe Day-shortened to "V.E. Day"-brought with it the demise of Nazi Germany. But for the Allies, the war was only half-won. Exhausted but exuberant American soldiers, ready to return home, were sent to join the fighting in the Pacific, which by the spring and summer of 1945 had turned into a gruelling campaign of bloody attrition against an enemy determined to fight to the last man. Germany had surrendered unconditionally. The Japanese would clearly make the conditions of victory extraordinarily high. In the United States, Americans clamored for their troops to come home and for a return to a peacetime economy. Politics intruded upon military policy while a new and untested president struggled to strategize among a military command that was often mired in rivalry. The task of defeating the Japanese seemed nearly unsurmountable, even while plans to invade the home islands were being drawn. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall warned of the toll that "the agony of enduring battle" would likely take. General Douglas MacArthur clashed with Marshall and Admiral Nimitz over the most effective way to defeat the increasingly resilient Japanese combatants. In the midst of this division, the Army began a program of partial demobilization of troops in Europe, which depleted units at a time when they most needed experienced soldiers. In this context of military emergency, the fearsome projections of the human cost of invading the Japanese homeland, and weakening social and political will, victory was salvaged by means of a horrific new weapon. As one Army staff officer admitted, "The capitulation of Hirohito saved our necks." In *Implacable Foes*, award-winning historians Waldo Heinrichs (a veteran of both theatres of war in World War II) and Marc Gallicchio bring to life the final year of World War Two in the Pacific right up to the dropping of the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, evoking not only Japanese policies of desperate defense, but the sometimes rancorous debates on the home front. They deliver a gripping and provocative narrative that challenges the decision-making of U.S. leaders and delineates the consequences of prioritizing the European front. The result is a masterly work of military history that evaluates the nearly insurmountable trials associated with waging global war and the sacrifices necessary to succeed.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

At a time when we understand much better what a near-run thing the American Civil War was, it is time to turn the same analytical focus upon WWII as it reached its climax in the Pacific. The level of political infighting, the competing demands of every sort -- warfighting vs reconversion, reconversion vs the possibility of economic collapse, redeployment vs demobilization of those who had seen the most but were most experienced, civilian vs military views of the way forward, inter-service battles -- and a new president -- all are covered superbly. In a sense there are two books within the covers, and the dropping down to cover tactical specifics, particularly to describe who got what medal and how, is distracting but never gets so out of control as to threaten the larger strategic analysis that is the main focus of the volume. It is an analysis which is every bit as gripping as the discussions of combat, because it brings home just how contingent was success even as most still shrug that it was all inevitable. Perhaps, say the authors, but events could have played themselves out in a far more costly even undesirable way. The atomic bombs, therefore, properly contextualized, emerge here not as the moral drama or even centerpieces advanced by some misguided analysts but as but components of a larger, astonishingly complex and messy drama, one that, fortunately for America, ended nearly as best could be hoped for.

Learned much I did not know-----great read.

This book is 728 pages long. According to my Kindle I am 42% of the way through it, but has

decided I should be finished by now so requested this review. The book evidences a granularity to the treatment of the topic not often found. It is a detailed, grinding exposition of what it was really like fighting in the Pacific from 1944 to the end of the war. The reader is treated to the experiences of even the smallest of units at times, right down to the platoon, and the terrain they fought on. The reader begins to understand the unrelenting grind of the task the ordinary foot soldier endured, as well as the experience of sudden death for the sailor. If you like the History Channel this book is not for you. There is no shorthand version of events portrayed with inaccurate or questionable footage that television begs. Instead like the soldier and sailor, the reader does the work of understanding the topic along with these well briefed authors who have plenty of footnotes to support what is said. It is refreshing to hear how opinion on the home front influenced decisions out in the Western Pacific, how personalities of the leaders shaped events, and about facts that just fail to make good television but nonetheless had a dramatic impact on the war. How does one portray, for example, the shortage of replacement US soldiers in the Philippines to replace those lost to death, wounding, disease or psychoneurosis due to the German offensive in far off Europe in the Ardennes forest in late 1944? How does one televise a shipping shortage when all the footage is of many, many ships coming off the ways in American ship yards? It cannot be done. You have to read this book to grasp the magnitude of the sacrifice of ordinary Americans, believing they have to capture all these islands in order to invade Japan. They did not know about the bomb, and this work does a good job of putting the reader in their place and seeing things from their perspective. Read *Implacable Foes* to relive the experience.

One of the best, if not the best, books I have read about the military side of WWII. The authors focus on the final year of fighting in the Pacific theater and juxtapose their narrative of the battles for Saipan, the Philippines, Iwo Jima and Okinawa against events on the homefront, where the impending collapse of the German army was fostering a sense that WWII was entering its last stages. The authors focus their analysis on the tension between the savage Japanese resistance which presaged a horrendous bloodbath when the US invaded Japan, on the one hand, and the growing war weariness in America, on the other. The detailed description of battles can confuse readers, because the maps seem inadequate to show exactly where different sectors of the battlefields were in relation to each other. This seemed a minor shortcoming to me, because the main purpose of the battle narratives was to show the reader the savage nature of the fighting and the high casualties both sides suffered. The high casualty rate among Americans stemmed from two factors: the extremely unhealthy physical environment in which they fought, and the determination of

the Japanese to fight to the death. The chapters on the homefront explore in considerable detail and with great skill the problems faced by a democracy at war. The massive demands faced by the US in supplying not only its own military needs but also many of those of its allies required unprecedented sacrifices on the part of the civilian population. The government conducted a massive education (propaganda) campaign that convinced most Americans to accept those sacrifices, but by early 1945, as the war in Europe approached its end, demands for relief from rationing grew. Congress, as the mouthpiece of the electorate, began to exert pressure on the military to curtail its voracious demand for materials and production facilities. In addition to these pressures, the military faced criticism from government officials in charge of converting the economy back to civilian production after the war was over. Many economists and government officials feared that a sudden end to military contracts after victory would trigger a severe recession, as had happened after WWI. The two threads of the narrative converge after VE Day. MacArthur needed a large army for the projected invasion of Japan, but GIs, their families and representatives in Congress demanded that as many veterans as possible (especially those with long service records) be demobilized. The plans to achieve these not entirely compatible goals, however, caused chaos, because the US lacked adequate shipping and rail facilities to transport millions of people from war theaters back to the US, and then across the Pacific to prepare for the invasion of Japan. At the same time, as intelligence reports revealed the massive build-up of troops in Japan, questions arose as to whether the battered US military could field a well-trained army of sufficient size to conquer Japan. Bitter debates over how to accomplish this daunting task, while maintaining the support of the American people for the inevitable high casualty rates, were cut short when the use of the atomic bomb abruptly ended the war. A major value of this book arises from the issues it implicitly addresses, issues which most military histories ignore. In my opinion, the most important of these questions relates to the problems faced by a democracy at war. Political and military leaders in the US (and Britain) had to pay close attention to public opinion and they had to persuade the electorate that, not only was the objective of the war worth the sacrifice, but that the strategy used to fight it made sense. This necessity made generals as well as elected officials sensitive about casualty rates, which almost certainly saved many lives. Autocratic governments, on the other hand, could sacrifice soldiers without much concern for public opinion. In Japan, for example, the military had used aspects of traditional culture to create an ethos in which death was preferable to the shame of surrender. This ability to disregard public opinion conferred a tactical advantage on the Japanese military, but at a horrendous cost in lives. In most of the island campaigns, the Japanese death rate approached 100%. My only substantive criticism of the authors relates to their failure to address the

controversy among historians over the use of the atomic bomb. From their narrative, one would certainly infer that they believe the bomb was necessary to end the war without an invasion. But it would have been helpful if they had at least discussed why they believe Russia's entry into the war did not trigger the Japanese decision to surrender. The best argument in favor of their position, I suppose, would be that, even after the use of the bombs, the emperor had to intervene to force the military's hand.

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