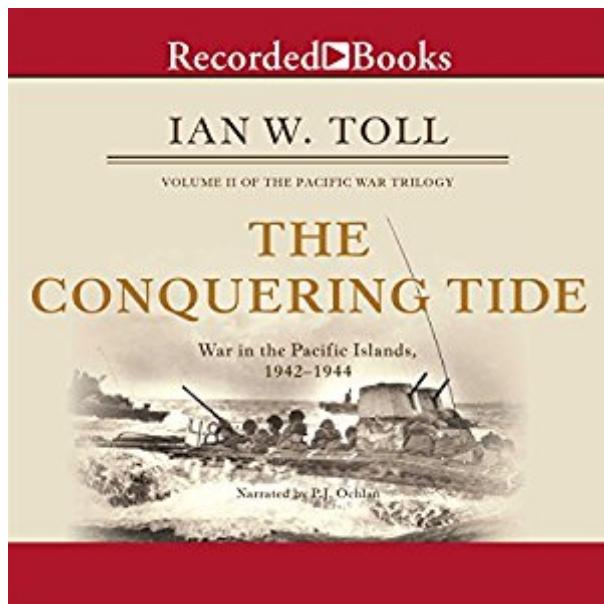


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The Conquering Tide: War In The Pacific Islands, 1942-1944



Synopsis

The devastation of Pearl Harbor and the American victory at Midway were prelude to a greater challenge: rolling back the vast Japanese Pacific empire island by island. This masterful history encompasses the heart of the Pacific War - the period between mid-1942 and mid-1944 - when parallel Allied counteroffensives north and south of the equator washed over Japan's far-flung island empire like a "conquering tide", concluding with Japan's irreversible strategic defeat in the Marianas. It was the largest, bloodiest, most costly, most technically innovative and logistically complicated amphibious war in history, and it fostered bitter interservice rivalries, leaving wounds that even victory could not heal. Often overlooked, these are the years and fights that decided the Pacific War. Ian W. Toll's battle scenes - in the air, at sea, and in the jungles - are simply riveting. He also takes the listener into the wartime councils in Washington and Tokyo, where politics and strategy often collided, and into the struggle to mobilize wartime production, which was the secret of Allied victory. Brilliantly researched, the narrative is propelled and colored by firsthand accounts - letters, diaries, debriefings, and memoirs - that are the raw material of the telling details, shrewd judgment, and penetrating insight of this magisterial history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ever since I became aware this spring of the release of the second installment of Ian Toll's narrative of the war in the pacific, I have eagerly anticipated this release much as I would the release of a new CD from my favorite artist or the anticipation of a must-see movie. (I was fortunate enough to acquire a copy of THE CONQUERING TIDE at my local bookseller a few days before the book's

official release date). THE CONQUERING TIDE, WAR IN THE PACIFIC, 1942-1944 is the second installment of a projected three-part chronicle of that war following up the critically acclaimed and highly satisfactory PACIFIC CRUCIBLE, WAR AT SEA IN THE PACIFIC, 1941-1942. I've read this first book twice finding it to be superb - history writing at its finest. THE CONQUERING TIDE is every bit superb and satisfactory as its predecessor. I won't take the space to describe the contents of the book here. Suffice it to say that this book deals with the beginning of the American offensive at Guadalcanal to the irreversible defeat the Allies handed the Japanese in the Marianas. As a writer, Toll has the capacity to bring the story alive, to make you feel as if "you are there." For example, the author gives a description of Nimitz's flight aboard a PB2Y Coronado flying boat to Guadalcanal during that campaign for an inspection tour. After describing the challenges of navigating over vast expanses of ocean, Toll writes, "Nothing provided a more visceral sense of the immensity of the Pacific than flying across it in a World War II-era aircraft." Indeed. Flying across that vast expanse in a modern airliner is adequately daunting. Toll engages the reader immediately in the prologue with the story of Martin Clemens and the role he played in warning the Allies of Japanese activity on Guadalcanal. Toll's clarity and lucid prose describing events occurring over 70 years ago has an immediacy that gives the reader a sense of reading a newspaper story of events that happened yesterday. You get a sense of what it was like to be in San Francisco or Honolulu in the early 1940s (in many ways not too different than it is now in the case of the latter), or what it was like to be onboard the USS Wahoo submarine with an aggressive skipper whose sanity his shipmates questioned (The fascinating and successful exploits of the USS Wahoo are used as a showcase for the silent service). Toll has the capacity to provide a micro perspective of a particular campaign, of Guadalcanal in the Solomons for example - what the day-to-day existence of a Marine at Lunga Point was like - but then widens the lens to give a rendering of the military/political atmosphere in Washington D.C., i.e. which theater should get the most immediate attention, the European or the Pacific. Later the author focuses the lens closely again and takes us along with Admirals Nimitz and Spruance (both of whom the reader becomes well acquainted with throughout the book) as they travel to Oahu's North Shore for swimming and hiking, or listening to classical music records together in the evening sitting in armchairs. This is just the sort of detail that I love reading about in history books. It provides the necessary reprieve from the narrative of the many grueling campaigns. I look forward to continuing to read and learning about this period of the Pacific Campaign. I highly recommend this book to students of World War II in general and of the Pacific War in particular. Hopefully it won't be too many years before the concluding installment rolls off the press. Scott Garner Salt Lake City

In the early chapters of THE CONQUERING TIDE, author Ian W. Toll spends a lot of time lingering in liberty ports. Not actually, of course, but the narrative takes long pauses where it stretches out and fills the reader in on what it was like to be a sailor on the beach in San Francisco, in the sleazy dive bars of Honolulu, or courting the grateful local girls of Sydney. It's something of a curious choice; what the sailors, pilots and Marines of the Pacific War did on their downtime is interesting, and often colorful, but not what you would call vital to the overall story. And what a story it is. THE CONQUERING TIDE is the second of three books in a trilogy that purports to tell the whole story of World War II in the Pacific, from the first air raid report on Pearl Harbor to the last echo of MacArthur's pen scratching paper on the deck of the USS Missouri. The book starts in mid-1942, with the run-up to Guadalcanal, and spends most of its time on the island-hopping campaign, where the American forces contested Japanese occupation of Tarawa, Kwajalein and Saipan. "Island-hopping" is a fair descriptor for the campaign, but it doesn't properly connote the incredible distances of ocean that each hop had to cross or the ferocity of the individual battles. Toll begins his story with the high-level debate about whether to challenge the Japanese occupation of Guadalcanal, and the massive naval and land battle that ensued.

Toll's focus here is primarily on the air battle and the Japanese attempts to eradicate Henderson Field, home of the ragtag Cactus Air Force. Even in a book the size of this one, there ought to be a little more room in there for a full discussion of how the Navy lost the Battle of Cape Esperance, for example. And as a New Jersey resident, I was more than a little exasperated to find no mention of the Garden State's John Basilone, who held off 3,000 Japanese troopers with his machine gun on Guadalcanal. But these are minor quibbles. THE CONQUERING TIDE more than lives up to the scope of its subject. Although it occasionally gets bogged down in Navy political and technical details (mostly regarding the faulty torpedoes that plagued both air and submarine forces), it does an outstanding job of setting the stage for each conflict and presenting it in rich and powerful detail. For example, Toll does an outstanding job of illuminating two of the war's turning points. He profiles intrepid submarine commander Mush Morton, whose aggressive submarine tactics aboard the USS Wahoo set the standard for what the Silent Service would become. Toll compares the timid approach taken by Morton's predecessor with the wildly dangerous --- and wildly successful --- ambushes that Morton and his Wahoo crew pulled off in their first cruise. Morton returned to Pearl Harbor with a broom tied to his periscope to signify a "clean sweep," and submarine commanders who followed his example swept the oceans free of Japanese merchant shipping. Toll then outdoes himself with his narrative of the brief,

sharp and incredibly bloody battle for Tarawa, which cost the lives of over 2,000 Americans and resulted in the utter devastation of Japanese resistance on the island. When Toll writes about the courage and bloodshed of battle, the prose is at turns lyrical and forceful, telling the story in a remarkably realistic and readable way. And so it's just as well that Toll takes the occasional time out from telling the story of the bloody conflicts of the Pacific War to tell the stories of the liberty ports where the warriors let off a little steam before heading back into the maelstrom of battle. Everyone deserves a little rest and relaxation, especially authors engaged in huge projects. I hope it's not too much longer before Toll completes his trilogy. Reviewed by Curtis Edmonds

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