



The Battle for Tinian: Vital Stepping Stone in America's War Against Japan

Nathan N. Prefer

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In July 1944, the 9,000-man Japanese garrison on the island of Tinian listened warily as the thunder of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, Army and Air Corps, descended on their neighboring island, Saipan, just three miles away. There were 20,000 Japanese troops on Saipan, but the US obliterated the opposition after a horrific all-arms campaign. The sudden silence only indicated it was now Tinian's turn.

By the time the US 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions switched their sights to Tinian, the island had already been bombarded for a month; meantime both sides had learned their lessons from the previous island-hopping invasions. The Americans had learned the arts of recon, deception, plus preliminary firepower so as not to suffer the huge casualties they'd suffered at Saipan, Guadalcanal, and Tarawa; the Japanese, for their part, had learned not to contest US strength on beaches but to draw it further inland where terrain and bomb-proof fortifications could assist.

When the battle for Tinian finally took place the US acted with great skill. Historian Samuel Elliot Morrison called it "the most perfectly executed amphibious operation of the entire war." Nevertheless, the Japanese resisted with their usual stubbornness, and the already decimated US Marines suffered hundreds of more casualties.

During the battle Japanese shore batteries were able to riddle the battleship Colorado, killing scores, plus make multiple hits on a destroyer, killing its captain. On the island itself the US used napalm for the first time, paving the way for Marines painstakingly rooting out strongpoints. One last Banzai attack signaled the end to enemy resistance, as Marines fought toe-to-toe with their antagonists in the dark.

In the end some 8,000 Japanese were killed, with only 300 surrenders, plus some others who hid out for years after the war. But those Japanese who resisted perhaps performed a greater service than they knew. After Tinian was secured the US proceeded to build the biggest airport in the world on that island—home to hundreds of B-29 Superfortresses. Among these, just over a year later, were the Enola Gay and Boxcar, which with their atomic bombs would quickly bring the Japanese homeland itself to its knees.

REVIEWS

"Tinian was the last time the enemy would use defense at the water's edge, as the bloody struggles at Iwo Jima and Okinawa would later illustrate. Nevertheless, however easy one might say Tinian was, it is sobering to walk among the graves of the 328 who paid the ultimate sacrifice."

—WWII History

"...Prefer delimits it well: evaluations of previous island assaults; improved beach and inner-island reconnaissance, intelligence gathering and assessment; combined planning; superb preparation and organizational logistics; staging; the actual bombardments and Marine attacks; perfect monitoring during the fighting; and the final evaluation by all for the next campaign. In short, there was absolute determination not to repeat the unnecessary casualties suffered on Tarawa, Guadalcanal, Guam, and Saipan. With the

publication of "The Battle For Tinian -- Vital Stepping Stone in America's War Against Japan", author Nathan Prefer has established himself as a first-rate military historian. Few know how to blend sound knowledge, military temperament, and combat atmosphere in placing the reader in the actual engagements -- leaving this reviewer anxious to read his next effort due this Fall, an account of the U.S. Army's operations on Leyte."

Don DeNevi

"...Tinian has received relatively scant attention from historians. Deemed one of the most successful amphibious assault landings in US military history, the swiftness and perceived ease of the operation has caused it to be overshadowed by more storied battles in the Pacific Theater. It has been dismissed as a rout conducted by a superior American force against a small garrison of demoralized Japanese troops, who had already been bombed into submission. Prefer gives the battle its due, beginning with the planning stage and concluding with mass suicides carried out by enemy troops and civilians. The author rescues Tinian from being a mere footnote to WWII history."

Toy Soldier and Model Figure

"...a concise, informative, well balanced narrative that will introduce readers to an often overlooked battle that paved the way for US victory over Japan...a clear, accessible and engaging story...most engrossing in its analysis of the options available to US Navy and Marine planners invading the island, the details of the plan they ultimately chose for the amphibious attack and the actual execution of the invasion...I recommend the BATTLE FOR TINIAN to all readers for the light it shines on an otherwise neglected campaign.

Michigan War Studies Review

"...a competent account of the Tinian operation, placing it in its proper strategic context and giving appropriate emphasis to the planning and execution phases, with detailed descriptions of the decision making, the day by day tactical operations and the conditions under which the battle was fought...an instructive book, and easy read...liberally illustrated with extensive appendices. It is well worth the time..."

Journal of America's Military Past

an excellent examination of the battle and planning. Persons interested in World War Two in the Pacific will enjoy its direct and easily understood style. The author is a master communicator. I highly recommend the book. Not only is it the tale of how to plan and execute a battle, it is a model on how to write the history of a battle.

Kepler's Military History

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Tony Partee:

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Garry Brown:

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