

Review in *World War II History Magazine* by Christopher Miskimon [Captain, Field Artillery, Colorado National Guard]

JAPAN'S VAST WAR

Imperial Japan waged World War II from the jungles of Burma to the steppes of Manchuria and the Arctic

On April 12, 1942, thunder sounded across the waters surrounding the island of Corregidor. It was not a natural storm, however, but a conflagration of steel. That day artillery belonging to the United States military and the Empire of Japan began dueling for ultimate control of the island, which, if the Japanese succeeded, would signal the end of the Philippine campaign. In the beginning the American guns, were as large as 12 inches, causing great damage among the enemy's emplacements. Corregidor was a tough target, heavily armed and fortified; some thought it impregnable.

The position of apparent strength was largely a façade, however. American General Douglas MacArthur had failed to stock the island with sufficient provisions as prewar plans required. There were not enough trained troops to man all the defenses. Over the next two weeks the Japanese guns pounded Corregidor systematically, gradually wearing down the defenders, and silencing their artillery. By the end of April, the American troops could barely return fire even though they had plenty of ammunition. By early May most of the American guns lay silent, and the troops awaited the inevitable enemy landings. When they came, it was over within two days. The Japanese military had achieved another victory, though by year's end its winning streak would be over.

The meteoric rise and ensuing fall of the Japanese Empire is a complex and long story spanning almost two decades. Many Japanese referred to the period as the Fifteen Years War, placing the conflict's start in China at the Mukden Incident of 1931. From there the Japanese nation was embroiled in a series of conflicts that continued until 1945, when it lay shattered and broken under Allied boots. Japan took a complex path to war, some of it deliberately planned and other aspects more reactionary to events. The full story of this momentous occurrence is covered in extraordinary detail in Francis Pike's new book *Hirohito's War, The Pacific War 1941-45* (Bloomsbury Press, 2015, 1152pp, online link to maps and photographs along with other material, notes, bibliography, index \$45.00, hardcover).

This book strives to convey the full breadth of Japan's war experience. Japanese history up to the 1930s is recounted in brief but nonetheless detailed fashion, giving background to Japanese attitudes and thoughts. There is also extensive space dedicated to explaining Japanese decisions in context to world events and the actions of Japan's foes, particularly the United States. Their war decisions and preparations are neatly organized and mixed with what their eventual opponents

were doing, giving insight into what the Japanese could see and interpret from their position. There are interesting sections on Emperor Hirohito's war guilt and level of involvement in decision taking. The author argues that while he was not in complete control, Hirohito was more than just a bystander and knew much about what his soldiers and sailors were doing in his name. When they were winning he joined in the revelry and only later appeared unenthusiastic when fortune turned against his country.

Moving into the war itself, the various campaigns and engagements are divided into chapters to enable the reader to digest each battle's meaning and how its outcome affected the war as a whole. The influences of technology and new tactics are discussed as well. For example, the author goes into detail about how the development of fire control systems and anti-aircraft weapons affected the outcome of the Great Marianas Turkey Shoot during the Battle of the Philippine Sea. While in some books this seems a digression from the main story, here it is woven into the narrative effectively. The book continues through all the campaigns and regions of the Pacific War until reaching the penultimate finale in the skies over Hiroshima and Nagasaki along with the surrender itself.

The book, at 1,152 pages, can seem daunting to the reader at first, but upon opening the cover one can see it is organized with this length in mind. Each of the 37 chapters is easy to read on its own, and within them the text is cleverly divided into easily digestible blocks so a reader with only a few minutes can read through the next section while one with more time can read at length. This volume appears intended to be the definitive work on the Pacific War and succeeds in being just that. The book can easily serve as the single source on its subject in a library and still leave the user feeling informed in depth. The publisher, in an interesting twist, has put the entire book's related map and photographs on a website the reader can view at will for easy reference.