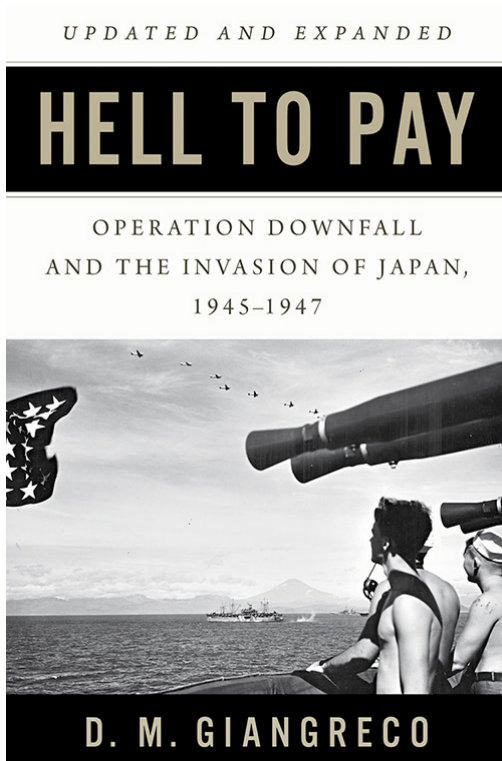


Book Reviews



Hell to Pay: Operation DOWNFALL and the Invasion of Japan, 1945-47 (Updated and Expanded Edition)

by D.M. Giangreco
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Reviewed by Sean M. Maloney

The historical debate over the decision by the American President to employ atomic weapons against the Japanese Empire in the Second World War has, until the 21st Century, been dominated by those who either revile the decision on moral grounds; believe there were a variety of sinister and nefarious American motives for the decision; apologists for Imperial Japanese and even Nazi behaviour; or those who bought into Cold War Soviet-supported anti-nuclear information operations. The arguments employed to critique the decision boil down to the belief that there were viable alternatives to end the war in Japan that did not involve strategic air warfare.

A key pillar of that argument was that casualty estimates for an Allied invasion of the Japanese home islands were grossly exaggerated, thus implying that an invasion was a viable alternative. This debate eventually moved from narrow historical venues into public policy debate in 1994-1995, when a new Smithsonian Institution display of the Enola Gay B-29 bomber was accompanied by distorted data that reflected this view. That event led to a robust veterans response and the subsequent sacking of some Smithsonian personnel.

The original 2009 edition of this book was, in part, a response to that debate, and its author, Dennis Giangreco, was subsequently impugned from several quarters by those whose arguments were later proven false or irrelevant. Although the original argument was sound and soundly supported, substantial new information has become available since the initial publication that dramatically augments and enhances it. *Hell to Pay* is the result of these labours, and it establishes new high ground in this ongoing debate.

As an historian who has written about the importance of battles that did not happen, I am in complete sympathy with Giangreco's approach. Discarding Operation DOWNFALL (the planned invasion/occupation of Japan), and its sub-operations, OLYMPIC (the assault on the southernmost Home Island, Kyushu), and CORONET (the planned 1946 attack 500 miles north into the industrial heartland), and the detailed Japanese defensive plans, such as KETSU-GO, as merely-unexecuted contingency plans for the invasion and defence of Japan is narrow-minded, and it denies us a significant and crucial vantage point with which to view larger arguments related to strategic air warfare and its effectiveness, war termination, and longer-term effects on the Cold War. What would the impact upon the post-war world order have been of a besieged but undefeated Japan, and an exhausted America? With the British Empire bankrupt, there would have been no NATO, and Western Europe would have been dominated by Stalin and his successors. Perhaps those who retroactively oppose the atomic bomb use against Japan are subtly engaged in a form of lost cause nostalgia.

Giangreco's approach is multi-faceted, but each point relates to the nature of the war that would have been fought in Japan. The horrendous casualty estimates, central to the debate (estimated 700,000 Allied combat deaths, 10-to-15 million Japanese deaths), are re-examined in light of new numbers, including Japanese estimates and better contextualization of those numbers. But that is not the only area where the work shines. It rests in Giangreco's examination of the operational and tactical aspects of the projected invasion campaign, and the Japanese defensive measures that provide overwhelming support to those estimates. The most important revelations relate to the incorrect US intelligence assessments of Japanese airpower, particularly strategic fuel stocks, and the effectiveness of the Special Attack Forces (Kamikazes) mustered to repel DOWNFALL. Indeed, Giangreco's uncovering of the Japanese understanding that light wooden aircraft operating at night were impervious to radar, as well as the overlooked trio of successful attacks conducted by them against USN destroyers in the last days of the war, is notable.

Critical to the argument is that the Japanese leadership carefully assessed American public opinion in 1944-1945, and concluded from media analysis that the American population was weary of further casualties. The KETSU-GO defensive plans specifically included new doctrinal terminology that translates into blood letting operations. One wonders if the North Vietnamese took a page from the Japanese book.

The crucial aspects of terrain, weather, season, and time, things overlooked by almost all other examinations of this subject, give one pause, especially Giangreco's terrain analysis. OLYMPIC would have been Okinawa replayed on a large scale, while CORONET would have looked like Korea crossed with Vietnam. Indeed, the use of nine atomic bombs against operational-and tactical-level Japanese targets was planned for CORONET.

Importantly, the unsung support services, overlooked in many histories, are examined herein, as they are crucial to the narrative. *Hell to Pay* provides details on the extensive medical support planned for DOWNFALL, including ships converted to blood plasma refrigerators; salvage plans with specialized ships to open ports defended by hold-outs on half-sunken ships; and Project IRONHORSE, a Mulberry Harbour planned for CORONET.

This work completely demolishes the body of scholarship revolving around assertions that strategic bombing was ineffective. It dissolves the papier mache argument that the Japanese were already beaten, and that a ground invasion would have been a cake walk. It detonates the assertions that the atomic bombs were dropped to intimidate Stalin: there was massive American materiel and logistical support for Soviet forces in the Far East to help them defeat the Kwangtung Army in China, and then assist them with assaulting Hokkaido. We are finally moving away from the ideologically-driven and emotionally-tainted

history dominated by the anti-Vietnam, anti-nuclear movement in the 1970s-1980s, and into a new era where properly contextualized primary sources provide us with a dramatically improved and detailed perspective with respect to issues related to strategic air warfare and nuclear weapons, particularly their use in 1945.

Giangreco's updated work is a superb example for future historians in this regard, as it hits square at the Schwerpunkt [Centre of Gravity Ed.] of the critics' arguments, arguments that continue to proliferate virtually unchallenged in mediums such as Netflix, the Internet, and through those who continue to distort history in the service of peace. It is an increasingly-unavoidable truth that is inconvenient for some: the atomic bombing of Japan saved millions of lives. And among them would have been Canadian lives from the 6th Canadian Division, and RCAF Tiger Force Lancaster crews committed to Operation OLYMPIC.

Sean Maloney, Ph.D., is a Professor of History at the Royal Military College of Canada, and he served as the Historical Advisor to the Chief of the Land Staff during the war in Afghanistan. He previously served as the historian for the 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade, the Canadian Army's primary Cold War NATO commitment after the reunification of Germany, and at the start of Canada's long involvement in the Balkans. Maloney has extensive field experience in that region, especially in Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. He has authored several books on the Cold War, including, *Learning to Love the Bomb: Canada's Cold War Strategy and Nuclear Weapons, 1951-1970*.

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