

## *Allies against the Rising Sun: The United States, the British Nations, and the Defeat of Imperial Japan*

Nicholas Evan Sarantakes. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009. 458 pp. Illus. Intro. Notes. Bib. Index. \$39.95

Reviewed by Ashley Jackson

**T**his is a wonderfully well-integrated work of imperial, military, naval and diplomatic history. Nicholas Sarantakes' splendid book about the political and military alliance between America and the nations

of the British Commonwealth in the Pacific during World War II has been heralded by articles in prestigious journals such as *Diplomatic History* and *English Historical Review*. His work on the fraught but ultimately successful alliance-making among the various parties in a theater of war where America was utterly dominant is both necessary and unique. He chronicles the politics surrounding the creation and deployment of the British Pacific Fleet, its operational role against Japan in the final months of the war, when its fleet carriers braved the kamikazes alongside their American allies, and the planned deployment of a Commonwealth army and air force to take part in the assault on the Japanese home islands.

This elegant, meticulously researched book is so important because it unites American military and strategic history with a rich understanding of the *British* side of the alliance and, even more impressive, of the political and strategic concerns of the Pacific dominions of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Sarantakes provides compelling commentary on the summit meetings among Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and their chiefs of staff, during which they discussed British Com-

monwealth participation in the ultimate defeat of Japan. His narrative also incorporates the views of subordinate commanders such as General Douglas MacArthur, Admiral of the Fleet, 1st Earl Mountbatten, and Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, and keeps the reader informed of the military action in the Pacific.

The book sets out to answer three fundamental questions. First, why did Britain wish to participate in the defeat of Japan (although, as is made clear, Churchill was far less keen to do this than his chiefs of staff)? Second,

why did the Commonwealth nations, which had already sacrificed more than most countries of proportionate size, and with public opinion clamoring for demobilization, wish to contribute divisions to the assault on Japan? And third, why did America agree to accept military units from these nations, especially when in most cases they would displace American ones that had greater firepower?

The answers lie in the fact that Britain and the Commonwealth had vital interests in the Pacific and, for political reasons, were loathe to allow America to take all the credit for defeating Japan. To have done so—and this was the U.S. adminis-

tration's concern, too—would have been to turn American public opinion against Britain for not having pitched in, inflaming an already well-developed suspicion that Britain was only interested in getting its colonies back.

Furthermore, institutions such as the Royal Navy, a leading exponent of British involvement in the Pacific, realized the significance of becoming involved not only for prestige, but also to gain invaluable experience in a new type of naval warfare and to give Britain a voice in shaping postwar policy in the region. For the dominions, the answer was similar and closer to home. Participating in winning the Pacific war wasn't primarily about assisting the British Empire (though this, and its developing relations with an overbearing America, was certainly part of it)—it was mainly because the dominions were themselves Pacific nations and so needed to be involved in defeating Japan.

For America, the answer lay in its need of allies. Whatever the machinations of people such as Admiral Ernest King and the quite understandable military desire to have nothing to do with foreign forces that might prove a hindrance, political and military alliances were vital. Looking forward without the benefit of hindsight and knowledge of the atomic bombs, the American public was bound to like the idea that its forces wouldn't be alone in confronting the deadly defenses of the Japanese homeland. Similarly, American servicemen facing the prospect of significant losses welcomed the support of Australian or British personnel. Throughout the war, the British Commonwealth had played a junior but vital role in fighting Japan, primarily in South Asia. Now, with the war in Europe ending and the assault on the Japanese home islands in sight, it was time to switch the weight of their effort to the Pacific, place their resources under American command, and take the incredible alliance between the British Commonwealth and America into a new postwar era.

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