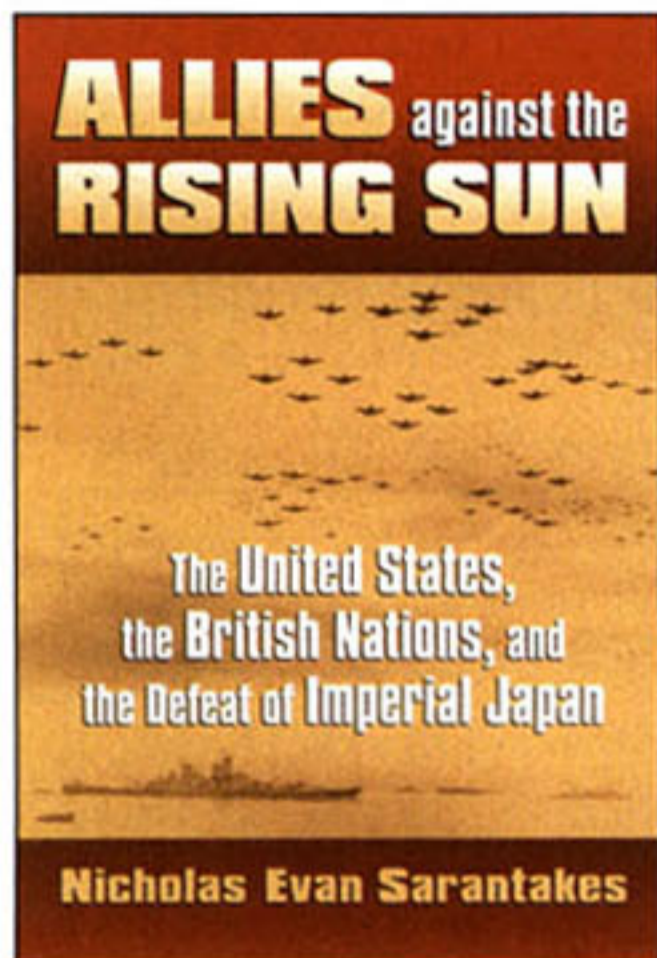


Tag-Teaming Japan in the Pacific



Allies Against the Rising Sun: The United States, the British Nations and the Defeat of Imperial Japan, by Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 2009, \$39.95

Surveys of World War II in the Pacific are not in short supply, but in *Allies Against the Rising Sun*, Naval War College professor Sarantakes covers unfamiliar

ground: the complex relations between the British Commonwealth and the United States during the war's final years.

Churchill was obsessed with retaking the British colonies invaded by Japan, and his goals during 1944–45 were to seize northern Sumatra as a base from which to reconquer Singapore, across the straits, and avenge its humiliating loss. The PM's military chiefs of staff (Viscounts Alanbrooke, Cunningham and Portal of, respectively, the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force)

reminded him that everyone at the November 1943 Cairo conference had agreed to apply the main effort directly against Japan. All other operations would merely support that strategy. Churchill's chiefs emphasized several points: Once the United States regained the Philippines, Japan's Southeast Asian conquests would become a backwater. American President Franklin D. Roosevelt detested colonialism, thus Britain's concentration on India was an irritant to Britain's most important ally and perhaps a futile course of action. Finally, if Britain wanted a major role in post-

war policy, it must participate directly in the attack on Japan.

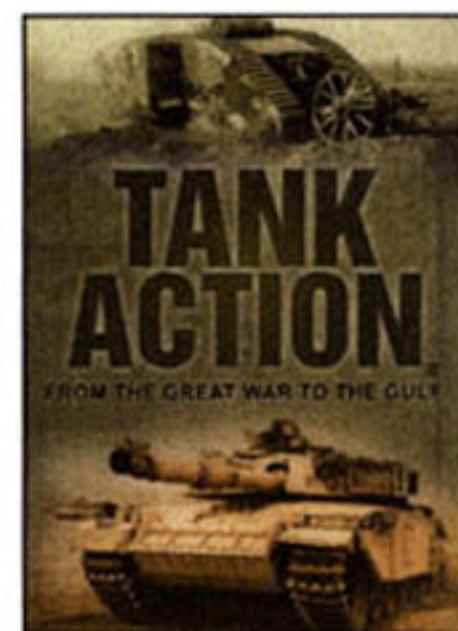
Except in his distrust of Adolf Hitler, Churchill was well behind the times, even in his nation's Conservative Party (his opposition to Indian independence as much as his opposition to appeasement kept him out of the cabinet during the 1930s). By autumn 1944, Churchill's preoccupation with invading Sumatra brought his chiefs perilously near to resigning. Then he abruptly changed his mind. Sarantakes points out that by 1945 the United States didn't need help, but the politically astute Roose-

velt and Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall understood they had to accept or explain to the nation's electorate why they preferred that only American soldiers die invading Japan. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest King loudly disagreed. Japan's unexpectedly quick surrender cut short planning for the invasion, but a large British fleet joined the Americans in March 1945.

That British fleet participated enthusiastically despite crushing logistical problems. Accustomed to fighting in Europe with ports only days away, British warships were not designed for months of cruising. Fortunately, American naval staff from Admiral Chester Nimitz down ignored King's hostility and generously shared supplies. American commanders initially rolled their eyes at British aircraft carriers, whose heavily armored decks slowed them down, but they changed their minds when kamikazes arrived. A suicide strike on an American carrier's wooden deck was always a catastrophe; British sailors swept off the debris and resumed operations.

Political maneuvering dominates the book, but Sarantakes' account remains lively, and chapters on wartime Australia, New Zealand and Canada will be new to most readers. Journaling was common among his subjects (Alanbrooke and Cunningham did),

RECOMMENDED



Tank Action: From the Great War to the Gulf, by George Forty

Through detailed study of 42 battles spanning 80 years of armored warfare, Forty—director of The Tank Museum [www.tankmuseum.org] at Bovington, England—offers a fascinating and comprehensive look at the development, evolution and tactical employment of armored fighting vehicles and their impact on the conduct of land warfare.



Knight, by Michael Prestwich

Written by a noted British historian and subtitled *The Medieval Warrior's Unofficial Manual*, this informative “how-to” guide examines in exhaustive detail—and with tongue planted firmly in cheek—what it took to become a mounted knight and live in a world both dangerous and chivalrous.

so the author can contrast the recorded reasonable debates between British chiefs and their mercurial prime minister with the rage that filled their private thoughts. American military chiefs had little trouble with Roosevelt but more trouble working together than did their British colleagues.

Niche histories provide a unique view of familiar events, and this is a fine example. Much of the controversy and bitter personal conflict occurred over issues that never came to pass, but the book is an entertaining reminder that politics no less than war is mostly a waste of energy.

—Mike Oppenheim

The Poison King: The Life and Legend of Mithradates, Rome's Deadliest Enemy, by Adrienne

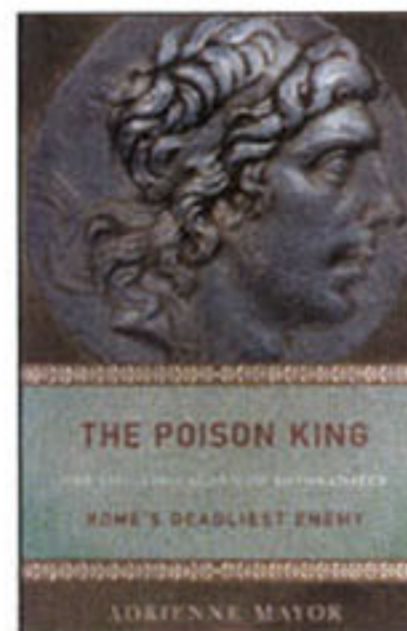
Mayor, Princeton University Press, 2009, \$29.95

This is an enjoyable but strange book. The introduction claims it is “the first full-scale biography of Mithradates, from birth to death and beyond, in well over a century,” ignoring Philip Matyszak’s 2009 volume *Mithradates the Great: Rome’s Indomitable Enemy*, which the author cites in her bibliography.

The subject of this book is Mithradates VI, king of Pontus from 119 to 63 BC, who fought three wars against the Romans, almost driving them from their Asian and Greek provinces. Mithradates is most familiar to history as a student of poisons, which he employed against ene-

mies, his own family and even on himself in an effort to immunize his body against being poisoned.

To deter Rome from moving against him, Mithradates carried out one of the most successful terrorist acts in history. He secretly recruited agents in most of the towns in Greece and southern Anatolia in which Romans and their families lived. In the spring of 88 BC, those agents killed from 80,000 to 150,000 Roman men, women and children in only a few days. Defeated by Pompey, Mithradates escaped over the Caucasus and sought to regain his crown, raise an army and invade Italy. All three plans failed, and Mithradates killed himself rather than fall captive to the Romans, whom he had harassed for almost half a century.



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