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Roger Letourneau, Dennis Letourneau. *Operation KE: The Cactus Air Force and the Japanese Withdrawal from Guadalcanal.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012. Illustrations. xx + 370 pp. $42.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-59114-446-5.

Reviewed by Jason McHale
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The evacuation of Guadalcanal (Operation KE), in early 1943, stands out as one of the few bright spots for imperial Japanese forces following the setbacks and failures of the previous six months. *Operation KE* by the father-son team of Roger and Dennis Letourneau examines, in great detail, the planning, implementation, and execution of the Japanese evacuation from Guadalcanal. Using source material from both the American and Japanese sides, they present a new perspective about the success of the operation.

The main focus of *Operation KE* is the air battles fought over the "Slot" before and during the evacuation runs. By starting with a thorough look at the preliminary operations, from fighter sweeps and base suppression missions to various naval operations conducted by both sides, the Letourneaus set the stage for the main event. They recount many of the aerial battles in detail and present a balanced accounting of the events. The retellings are also followed by reviews of claimed kills and actual losses that present a stark picture of how the intensity and confusion of aerial combat often led to exaggerated claims by pilots of each side. By focusing on the air aspect, the Letourneaus seek to challenge the conventional wisdom that the Americans let the Japanese get away. Based on their research, quite the opposite was true. The Cactus Air Force fought valiantly to hinder the Japanese operation. However, because of effective planning and cooperation between the normally rivalrous Japanese army and navy, Operation KE was successful beyond Japanese expectations.

While the main focus is on the aerial campaign and evacuation effort, chapters are also devoted to the aircraft and doctrine used by both sides in combat. While not as detailed as similar sections found in Eric Bergerud's *Fire in the Sky: The Air War in the South Pacific* (2000), these chapters are beneficial to newcomers who might not be familiar with the variety of aircraft that operated in the Solomons region.

The Letourneaus' research, in particular interviews with veterans of the operation, allows them to post a different argument about the success, and fight to stop, Operation KE than previous work by scholars. The narration of the aerial combat is detailed and well executed; however, at times, the chronology becomes confusing given the multiple points of view presented. These issues are minor in comparison to the immense amount of information presented. The final chapter, which is an analysis of why Operation KE was so successful under these circumstances, is a well-written piece that ties the Letourneaus' argument together in a succinct fashion.

Operation KE is a detailed study of an understudied, and often overlooked, operation. The new research conducted by the father-son team helps them present a thorough picture of the battles that waged over and around the Solomons at the end of the Guadalcanal campaign. *Operation KE* is a welcome addition to Pacific War literature and to historians' bookshelves.

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