

**John A. Adams.** *The Fightin' Texas Aggie Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2016. xxi + 291 pp. \$22.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-62349-422-3.

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**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

John A. Adams Jr.'s *The Fightin' Texas Aggie Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor* examines the experiences of Texas A&M graduates in one of the most ignominious defeats in US military history. It is at times a group biography, a hagiography, a unit history, and a campaign analysis. While other works have discussed the fight for Bataan and resulting prisoner of war atrocities, the last stand on Corregidor, or the experiences of Texas A&M alumni in World War II, this unique book has brought its disparate elements together in an interesting and thought-provoking fashion. The author utilizes a blend of outstanding first-person accounts with official reports, memoranda, and other primary records. These are bolstered by an excellent selection of images and custom maps.

Adams has written several works examining the history of Texas A&M University. He has an easy writing style that breathes life into the anecdotes provided to illustrate the horrors of war in the Philippines. The difficult challenge of presenting a collective biography of eighty-nine men, who served with almost every unit in the area, leads Adams to occasionally repeat facts, but for the most part, he is able to drive the discussion forward in a chronological fashion.

Although this is not explicitly an analysis of the Bataan and Corregidor campaigns, Adams covers the basics of each location well, albeit with

occasional fumbles on the details. For example, Adams has a tendency to overly focus upon the US experience in the war when making broad generalizations. He mistakenly refers to the fighting on Bataan as including "the largest tank-versus-tank battle thus far in World War II" (p. 39). While this might be accurate for the United States, it certainly ignores all of the fighting in Europe, particularly during the German invasions of France in 1940 and the Soviet Union in 1941. The author vacillates between hyper criticism and exuberant praise regarding the actions and attitudes of General Douglas MacArthur, whose defense of Bataan and Corregidor has been lambasted by decades of historical analysis. A more consistent position on MacArthur would in turn have clarified the author's opinion of the most polarizing American leader in the Pacific War, and a man whose shadow loomed over all of the subjects of this book.

Adams is certainly targeting Texas A&M alumni with this work, for whom this is a well-known story that is rife with misperceptions. The author dispels some popular A&M legends, such as the persistent belief that the remaining Aggie defenders on Corregidor held an Aggie Muster ceremony on April 21, 1942. This particular myth is often accompanied by a photograph of several dozen Aggie soldiers sitting together in front of a massive Texas A&M flag in the mouth of a Cor-

regidor tunnel. The photograph was taken in 1946, and the majority of the men in the photo had been nowhere near the island during World War II. For that matter, of the eighty-nine Texas A&M men posted to the area prior to the Japanese attack, 62 percent died during the war. Adams navigates the challenge of correcting the record quite well, and does not shy away from criticizing the perpetrators of such falsehoods.

Aggies constituted a disproportionate number of company grade officers in Bataan and Corregidor. Adams argues this was largely due to the influence of Major General George Moore, class of 1908, who had served as the commandant of cadets at Texas A&M from 1937 until 1940. He worked to transfer many of the most promising alumni from those years to serve under his command—a decision that proved fatal for the majority of the transferred troops.

While a handful of Texas A&M alumni were killed in action during the defense of the peninsula and island, the vast majority of Aggie casualties came after the surrender of the American position. Japan, which had not signed the Geneva Convention Relative to Prisoners of War of 1929, made little effort to comply with its provisions despite public claims of adhering to the agreement. Aggies, like the other American and Filipino defenders, fell victim to both deliberate atrocities and malignant negligence, with at least twenty-eight dying on the Bataan Death March or after reaching a POW camp. An additional thirty-one Aggies died on the infamous Hell Ships, most of them when their unmarked ships were torpedoed by American submarines.

The copyediting of this work leaves a great deal to be desired—there are a large number of frustrating and silly mistakes that should have been caught and corrected in the production process. For example, the twenty-seventh president of the United States is named in the book as “Howard Taft,” leaving off his first name, William (p. 1). Adams refers to the “Gibraltar of the East”

(p. 103) but thinks the appellation belongs to Corregidor rather than the correct usage, which was repeatedly applied to the British position at Singapore. There are dozens of misspellings and grammatical errors that crop up throughout the work, marring some of the value by forcing the reader to question if the same level of sloppiness might have applied to the research underpinning the work.

Ultimately, this work is of particular interest to Texas A&M alumni and the descendants of the men profiled. Scholars of the war in the Pacific will find interesting stories from unique sources, but for many, the almost exclusive focus upon Texas A&M alumni will likely prove distracting. In short, this work accomplishes what it sets out to do, which is to tell the story of eighty-nine Aggies fighting in the Pacific, without significantly transforming our understanding of the broader issues at hand.

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