



Willem Rimmelinck, ed. and trans.. *The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016. 672 pp. \$87.50, cloth, ISBN 978-90-8728-237-0.

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The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies might be considered an “unofficial” official history. The reaction to the original series, written in Japan between 1967 and 1980, provides a lens into that country’s relationship with public memory of the war. Beyond this, the text itself provides a useful source of information about a campaign that stood at the center of Japanese strategic goals in World War II. Its new availability in English is therefore of considerable importance for the accessibility of World War II histories.

The War History Office of Japan’s National Defense College began recording the events of Japan’s part in World War II in 1967. Since the end of World War II, Japan has struggled with its conception of that war, and as the English edition editor Willem Rimmelinck notes, this extends even to a tendency to avoid calling it World War II and instead refer to the conflict “as ‘The Late War’ ... unless ... speaking in an international context about the ‘Second World War’” (p. xiii). Historical consensus outside Japan is that Japanese strategists waged war against the Dutch East Indies, the United States, and the British Empire primarily so that Japan could seize the oil fields of what is now Indonesia and dominate the Pacific Ocean in order to assure safe transportation of the seized oil (and other raw materials such as rubber) back to the Japanese home islands. Indeed, the authors of *The*

Invasion of the Dutch East Indies acknowledge that “the principal aim of the southern operation lay in getting hold of the Dutch East Indies oil resources” (p. 4) and that “it is no exaggeration to say that the Greater East Asian War was launched for the oil in Palembang [Indonesia]” (p. 269). Such admissions were still so controversial that although the work was compiled by a government entity, the work was “neither commissioned nor endorsed” by the government (p. xiii). The original Japanese publisher even included a statement that “explicitly denies the claim made in the present book that the war was all about oil” (p. xiii).

Several points about the work earn comment. First is the care in translation and contextualization that Rimmelinck provides as the editor-translator. Additional information appears in brackets quite frequently and usually serves to provide important additional or clarifying material. On other occasions, Rimmelinck is able to compare the information of this particular volume with that of one of the other 101 volumes in the Japanese series. This is of inestimable importance. There are also a few times when the Japanese version does not match the records of Allied official histories, and again the editor-translator ensures that both sets of information (such as the number

or type of warship in a particular engagement) are available to the reader.

As is typical of an official-style history, *The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies* was originally written in pieces by multiple authors. The geographical expanse of the topic, the shifts and changes that are the universal result of Clausewitzian friction, and the numerous authors all contribute to the work's continual reference to material explained in earlier passages and the brief resummarization of what earlier passages had already described. This is more evident than in other official histories, such as the US Army's "Green Books" for World War II or in Canada's single-volume official history of World War I.

The authors do, however, deliver a meticulously detailed account of the operations themselves and also of concepts and debates that went into the making and revising of operational plans. The granularity of these accounts constitutes a very valuable resource to historians seeking information about Japan's actual conduct of operations in the then-Dutch East Indies.

The mood of the book is shaped by the granular detail regarding planning and actual operations, which are most notably characterized by the aggressive spirit of the Southern Army commanding ground forces; the struggle of personnel to conduct operations with barely adequate resources, ranging from a shortage of friendly naval escorts to the primitive condition of newly captured airfields; and the competition between the navy and army planners in deciding whether the ground-dominated "counterclockwise" push through Malaya or the naval-dominated "clockwise" push through the Philippines could reach and attack the Dutch East Indies more quickly. Among the vignettes of interest are the accounts of Japan's "first ever paratroop operation" (p. 183), the use of prisoners of war as hostages and drivers of "commandeered motor vehicles" (p. 478) to accelerate Japanese advance along the few

useful roads, and the rapid fall of Bandung at the close of the campaign (pp. 531-35).

The closing sections of the book are virtually triumphal, as the Dutch East Indies abruptly collapses in the face of multiple bold Japanese incursions and the unsustainability of the last Allied stronghold at Bandung. The book's concluding sentence notes that "with [Japan's] tankers necessary for the transport destroyed or sunk one after another by the Allied forces, submarines in particular, Japan ended up continuing the war, again suffering from an extreme shortage of fuel" (p. 589). This short passage does not overtly dwell on the fact, but the message remains that Japan's entire operation described in the volume, and the entirety of its war against Britain and the United States as well, failed with the inability to bring Indonesian oil to Japan. The volume was openly scorned, even by its publisher, in response to that objective conclusion.

The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies is a valuable resource for historians of WWII who are interested in the campaigns of the southwest Pacific, and the availability of this text in English is good news for many such scholars.

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