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James M. Scott’s *Rampage: MacArthur, Yamashita, and the Battle of Manila* is mistitled because its focus is less about American general Douglas MacArthur or Japanese general Tomoyuki Yamashita and much more on the experiences of Manila’s citizens during the Battle of Manila, Philippines, in February 1945. It would be more aptly titled *The Rape of Manila*, after the late Iris Chang’s *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (1997). Even the cover of *Rampage* is strikingly similar to the cover of Chang’s work. In the Battle of Manila, approximately one hundred thousand civilians were murdered by Japanese forces or killed by American artillery. The book includes the perspective of Yamashita and MacArthur, but the battle is largely presented through the lens of civilians who endured all forms of horrifying atrocities at the hands of Japanese forces and from American artillery. This work is part of a larger set of works on World War II that focus less on battles and more on the impact those battles had on civilian populations.

The book establishes context by beginning with the United States’ prewar influence in the Philippines, specifically looking at MacArthur’s many years spent in the Philippines, including his failed 1942 defense of the country. Scott sets up why MacArthur’s return to the Philippines, especially Manila, was so important to him. The book also looks at how Yamashita became the overall commander of Japanese forces on the Philippines after capturing Singapore and Malaya. With much more detail, Scott narrates the Philippine experience under Japanese occupation, especially as conditions worsened over time, and he describes the experience of foreign nationals and Americans imprisoned in the Santo Tomas Internment Camp.

Scott examines Yamashita’s defense of the Philippines, but he does not put the occupation or defense in the broader context of Japanese or American strategies. To Scott, it is simply important enough to know that MacArthur intended to fulfill his promise to return, against whom the Japanese would have to defend eventually. The work is not extensively cited, and he does not use
S. C. M. Paine’s works on Japanese strategy and World War II (The Wars for Asia, 1911-1949 [2012] or The Japanese Empire: Grand Strategy from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War [2017]). While he talks about the experience of the Japanese occupation, there is no connection to the larger universe of Japanese occupation policies, such as in Nicholas Tarling’s A Sudden Rampage: The Japanese Occupation of South East Asia (2001) or the case studies in Peter Duus, Ramon Myers, and Mark R. Peattie’s edited collection, The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1939-1945 (1996). There is, in short, little attempt to connect these events to the wider war or the plans of the warring governments to accomplish their objectives. Leaving out this wider context makes it seem as though the occupation of the Philippines and the battle for Manila occurred in total isolation from a larger war. As a result, the book can read more like it was designed, not the plans of man and the events of World War II, that brought MacArthur to battle against Yamashita in an epic confrontation where thousands of Filipinos paid the price.

Despite the book’s title, Scott demonstrates very little influence by either MacArthur or Yamashita on how the battle was fought. Both men were theater commanders and so it is no surprise that the battle did not receive their direct attention. Scott shows MacArthur insisting that his soldiers fight faster so that he could declare a victory, but he also denied requests of his officers to use bombers in the battle as he did not want to kill any more civilians. Scott highlights MacArthur’s personal despair toward seeing the destruction of Manila, a city to which he was so attached, more so than he does MacArthur’s military decisions. Likewise, little is said about Yamashita’s leadership and almost nothing on his thoughts about the battle for Manila, because Yamashita was organizing Japan’s larger fight in northern Luzon. Scott demonstrates how Yamashita was only concerned with delaying the American advance but points to Imperial Japanese Navy rear admiral Sanji Iwabuchi, the man responsible for defending Manila, with interpreting his orders to delay as orders to stalwartly defend the city. The seventeen thousand defenders, therefore, largely came from the Imperial Japanese Navy, not the army. While Scott questions to what extent Yamashita knew what was happening in Manila, he does concede that Iwabuchi was “doing precisely as ordered” (p. 287).

As Scott narrates the battle itself, the focus is much less about the fighting forces. There is little said about the Japanese defensive plans or the Americans’ offensive plans and little about the tactical movements of either army. The book does not narrate the ebb and flow of the battle through a military point of view. Instead, the Battle of Manila is told through the lens of the civilians almost exclusively, integrating American and Japanese fighting forces as they affected civilians. Because of the postwar trial of Yamashita and the expansive nature of Japanese atrocities, much of the book recounts these atrocities in as much detail as possible. Scott describes the experience of Americans and other foreign nationals held captive in the Santo Thomas Internment Camp and those people’s slow decline over time only to be rescued by American soldiers, followed by their slow recovery. He details the mass murders, impalings, beheadings, rapes, and arson of buildings filled with people committed by Japanese forces. Throughout, Scott reminds the reader that many civilians were also killed by American artillery, but the focus is clearly on the Japanese atrocities. This focus is because the postwar prosecution of General Yamashita required amassing victims’ statements, letters and diaries, and court testimony. Scott cannot quantify how many civilians were killed by American artillery, except anecdotally, but it is not difficult to quantify and describe in voyeuristic granular detail the many Japanese crimes and atrocities.

After detailing the destruction of Manila and its people, Scott ends the book with the postwar trial of General Yamashita for Japanese atrocities
committed in the Philippines. To be clear, this trial was over the Japanese crimes committed in the Philippines, with a heavy concentration in the capital city. Scott shows how Yamashita received a vigorous defense from American lawyers, who acknowledged the countless war crimes against the Philippine people but argued that none of those acts were ordered by Yamashita. Ultimately, as Scott points out, the defense fought an uphill battle against MacArthur’s stated preferences that the court convict Yamashita.

A person interested in urban operations should know that *Rampage* is not a battle analysis of the Battle of Manila. In this respect, it is not like Antony Beevor’s books on the urban battles of Stalingrad or Berlin, which focus on the military story and bring in civilian voices to supplement his battle narrative. Instead, *Rampage* is a narrative of the Philippine civilian perspective that integrates military movements when necessary. This work more closely follows the tone set in William Hitchcock’s *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe* (2008), Peter Schrijver’s *The Unknown Dead: Civilians in the Battle of the Bulge* (2005), and even Alexandra Richie’s *Warsaw 1944: Hitler, Himmler, and the Warsaw Uprising* (2013), which examine the grisly price paid by civilians in the European war. James Verini’s recent *They Will Have to Die Now: Mosul and the Fall of the Caliphate* (2019) about the Battle of Mosul also fits this civilian-centered mold. Toward this end, one can find better analyses of the urban battle in Thomas Huber’s essay in *Block by Block*, Alec Wahlman’s *Storming the City: U.S. Military Performance in Urban Warfare from World War II to Vietnam* (2015), and the US Army’s official history of the Philippine campaign by Phillip Ross Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines* (2015).[1]

Finally, reading about these atrocities in such lurid detail can feel voyeuristic at times. But, while not pleasant reading and devoid of any sense of American triumphalism, the book clearly demonstrates the precarious position of civilians in a modern urban battle, especially when one side cares so little about civilians or has lost control over its own forces. This book is a strong reminder that modern wars dramatically affect civilians’ lives and that their perspective should not be overlooked. Scott’s examination of the precariousness of civilians in an intense, prolonged urban battle—namely, their many difficulties, violence against them, and the effects of their presence on the larger battle—might shape how we understand the experience of civilians within Syrian and Ukrainian cities during those ongoing conflicts.

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