

Remembering what they did...for us



The WordchipperSM

by Larry Gauper · #281

Wordchipper@Gmail.com
Blog: www.Wordchipper.com

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On May 8, 1945, Germany surrendered to the United States and its allies. WWII ended in Europe. Then, on September 2, 1945, aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* anchored in Tokyo Bay, Japan officially surrendered as Japanese General Yishijiro presented his sword to U.S. General Douglas MacArthur.

It says on the cover of the book I just read, “For the 95 days in 1945 (prior to that ship-board ceremony), a half-a-million Americans and Japanese clashed in the largest land-air-sea engagement in history. Okinawa was the last—and bloodiest—battle of the Pacific war. This is the story of the men who fought it.”

And that story is well told—a significant history of WWII brought to life in a fast-moving, dramatic way in *The Twilight Warriors* by Robert Gandt, published last year by Broadway Books.

Although it was the U. S. Marines and Army who hit the beach and were victorious in many bloody battles, this is primarily a fasten-your-seatbelt Navy story of sailors, aviators, ships and planes. If you’re a Pacific veteran, you’ll have a special appreciation for this book; if you’re not, you owe it to all of these guys to know what they went through for their country—our country. In the air, on the sea and on Okinawa itself, 12,520 Americans were killed or missing-in-action, including 4,907 U.S. Navy personnel. Thirty-four ships were sunk, while 368 were damaged. The Japanese suffered 110,000 military casualties.

Gandt builds his narrative around the experiences of the pilots who formed the fighter groups of the aircraft carrier USS *Intrepid*, which itself was seriously damaged. The author gives a detailed, yet uncomplicated, picture of what the young warriors went through in their training, bombing runs and dogfights. One Amazon.com reviewer said that “this book is detailed enough to teach even serious students of WWII something, while still being accessible to novices.” I couldn’t agree more.

In their desperation to reach a position of negotiation to end a war they knew they were losing, the Japanese military leaders came up with a last-ditch strategy involving a “special attack corps,” airmen who would crash their planes—loaded with bombs—into American ships. This approach was called *tokko*, a word that is interchangeable with *kamikaze*, which means “divine wind.” Gandt details how young Japanese males were recruited and trained to meet certain death for the sake of their country and emperor. I’ve read about kamikaze pilots before, but this is the first account that gave me a detailed picture of the why and how, the successes and failures of turning human beings into deadly weapons.

According to a description on the book’s jacket, Gandt is “a former naval officer and aviator, an international airline captain and a prolific military and aviation writer.” He lives in Daytona Beach, Florida. And this is not his first book.

All in all, I highly recommend this read, currently on the new non-fiction displays at the Fargo Public Library, and very likely part of the collection at a public library near you.

SAGE ADVICE

Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple Computer, Inc., who is currently on medical leave from his company, is known for being highly opinionated and strong-willed. He once said, “Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma—which is living with the results of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. Everything else is secondary.”

INSECTS

With our current temperatures and snow-covered ground, you’re certainly not thinking about the bugs of summer. However, here’s a rather interesting way to look at these pests: “Insects, those flying, crawling, boring, chewing and biting vexations of the backwoods, heirs to the earth when we finish tampering with it, are without question an integral part of the natural environment. Whether we like it or not, they assume their rightful place alongside us as we trek through the north woods; we are, after all, just part of the cyclical food chain once we step into the realm of nature.” I found that in a book entitled *Missinaibi: Journey to the Northern Sky...from Lake Superior to James Bay by Canoe*. The book was authored and illustrated by Hap Wilson, published in 2004 by The Boston Mills Press. Wilson has been a wilderness tripper and guide for over 30 years and is a self-taught writer, artist and photographer. He is also one of Canada’s best-known canoeists.