



# Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan

*Ronald H. Spector*

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## **Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan** Ronald H. Spector

Only now, almost forty years after the surrender of the Imperial Japanese Empire on the deck of the battleship *Missouri*, can the true scope of the American war in the Pacific be understood. Historian Ronald H. Spector, drawing on newly declassified intelligence files, an abundance of British and American archival material, Japanese scholarship and documents, and the research and memoirs of scholars, politicians, and the military men, now presents the most complete, up-to-date, single volume narrative of this conflict yet published.

Spector reassesses U.S. and Japanese strategy and offers some provocative interpretations. He shows that the dual advance across the Pacific by MacArthur and Nimitz was less a product of strategic calculation and more a pragmatic solution to bureaucratic, doctrinal, and public relations problems facing the Army and Navy. He also argues that Japan made its fatal error not in the Midway campaign but in abandoning its offensive strategy after that defeat and allowing itself to be drawn into a war of attrition.

Combining impeccable research with electrifying detail, Spector vividly recreates the major battles, little-known campaigns, and unfamiliar events of this brutal 44-month struggle. He reveals that the U.S. had secret plans to wage unrestricted submarine warfare against Japan months before Pearl Harbor and demonstrates that MacArthur and his commanders ignored important intercepts of Japanese messages that would have saved thousands of lives in Papua and Leyte. He skillfully takes the reader from top-secret strategy meetings in Washington, London, and Tokyo to distant beaches and remote Asian jungles with battle-weary GIs. Throughout, Spector contends that American decisions in the Pacific War were shaped more often by the struggles between the British and the Americans, and between the Army and the Navy, than by strategic considerations. Revealing what really happened in the course of a conflict that ended with the most deadly air raid ever, this contribution to WWII history adds a new dimension to our understanding of the people and forces that determined its outcome.

## **Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan Details**

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# From Reader Review *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan* for online ebook

## John says

This must receive five stars, as it accomplishes its mission perfectly. I wouldn't recommend it to everyone; if you are not into the history of WWII I see no reason why you would ever read this book. But it is the first book I would recommend to anyone wishing to learn about the Pacific theater of WWII. It appears to cover absolutely everything; it is understandable and quite readable; the chapters are just about the perfect length; and the author does not shy away from his own opinion, so when he believes a commander did something stupid (and he thinks MacArthur was pretty stupid at times) he is up front about it.

This provided me with a lot of detail I never had before, especially about the war in New Guinea and the Philippines. I never knew anything about the war in the Philippines. I watched that whole miniseries "The Pacific" and I don't think they mentioned it once. I had heard of the Bataan Death March, but the fact that the U.S. forces recaptured the islands, amidst massive naval battles and heavy fighting in Manila, I never heard about that. Spector said that Manila saw almost as much damage as Warsaw during the war, which is quite a lot.

I also appreciated Spector's attention to the Japanese point of view: their war plans, strategy, ideals, etc. He has much more information on the Allied side, but he does his best to include as much information on Japan as possible. Too often we act as if the Japanese didn't have a war plan, as if the only plan was to fight to the death. This is not true. The Japanese planned and strategized just as the Americans did, the difference was that the American strategies worked better, and the Americans could improve technology and replace losses much more effectively than the Japanese could.

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## Mike says

If you are not familiar with the war against Japan, you can hardly go wrong starting with this one. A very thorough account of the lead up to and conduct of the war. The only major flaw is the lack of maps to guide you through the various theaters and engagements. **4 Stars** due to this oversight but it is a compelling, exciting read nonetheless. This book covers all the major players, not just the US forces. A good deal of time is spent on lesser known actions, such as the New Guinea campaigns; the China-Burma-India theater; and other topics, such as blacks and women in the military; intelligence both in code-breaking and behind-the-lines agents and networks, etc. Keep a notepad handy as this book will give you plenty of ideas and vectors to explore in future reading. The best part of the book is his effort to show each significant engagement (and many lesser known ones) and how it affected a subsequent action or caused a reaction that led to other outcomes. The battles are not just described in isolation. *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War With Japan* deserves a permanent place on the war shelf, a superb reference for one half of WWII.

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## Aristotle Webb Katanos says

*Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan* by Ronald H. Spector

The first book I've managed to finish in over two months was a very entertaining one. Spector's *Eagle against the Sun* (my battered original copy of it) is the very first full scholarly piece on the Pacific War. I've been exposed to the history of the theater my whole life, I live in one of the nations which fought it directly, I've read about it in small and large doses in other books and have had hundreds of hours poured in video games, movies and TV shows on the topic. HBO's *The Pacific* is one of my favorite TV mini-series ever made.

So how does the book shape up? Quite well. For a book written in 1984, a time where the historiography of the conflict was still in a very unsure place, it holds some very modern viewpoints and discourse on the wider and more controversial points of the war. The chapters, while strange in their listing of references in each one, are very well structured and give the perfect amount of time to each topic without leaning too heavily on any specific section of the war. Conversely I did have some small problems with the book's design, however this was the only issue I had with the piece.

In a majority of the documentaries and chapters I've read on the Pacific War, a lot of focus is often given to American operations between 1944 and 1945, with smaller coverage of early events and rare coverage of events experienced by other parties such as the UK and Australia. Mind you I haven't read any other books focused solely on the Pacific War so my view is skewed here. In *Eagle against the Sun*, he goes to good lengths to cover almost all notable actions and elements of the conflict, as well as provide well measured discussion on some of its more tender points. He shows a good and often rare capability to look at the war from a non-American point of view and provides credence to more nuanced viewpoints.

In 570 pages, Spector does well to keep everything to the point. Paragraphs flow well and information links across the entire book. I did find it odd and outdated that the sources for each chapter were listed at the end of the chapter rather than altogether at the end of the book, but it wasn't something that detracted from the book. Otherwise, structurally, it was wonderful to read.

As mentioned the only real issue I had with the book was its complementary design. Aside from very rudimentary ones on the book's internal cover, the book contains no maps. The Pacific War was possibly the most geographically challenging and unique conflict not just in the wider Second World War but in all of history. Without even one accurate map to trace the operations being described, it can be difficult to fully enjoy the information being delivered without having to turn to the internet. Otherwise the book did have a gallery of photographs which suited well, but due to my issue I can't give the book a perfect score so I'm leaving it with an 8/10.

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## Paul says

Spector's single-volume history of the Pacific campaigns in World War II is a marvel of breadth and clarity. He begins with American and Japanese societies just prior to the war and ends with the unconditional surrender following the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Spector is mostly concerned with the conduct of the war itself, so he only hints at its larger significance: the change in the balance of power between Japan and China, the rise of a democratic Japan, and the demise of European influence in Asia. "The existence of the strong and stable independent nations of Asia is perhaps the most important and lasting legacy bequeathed by the men and women who perished in the American-Japanese war."

A volume of this scope will necessarily be skimming on details, but there are still plenty to savor. The rivalry between Nimitz and MacArthur, both personally and as proxies for the power struggle between Army and

Navy, is a constant theme. Spector also agrees with Yamamoto that, almost inevitably, American industrial dominance proved the deciding factor in a long war.

I'm sure Spector struggled daily to keep a host of undoubtedly interesting details from bloating or derailing his narrative. Thankfully, his bibliography points the way for the interested reader to keep reading about this crucial time in twentieth-century in American history.

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### **Erik Graff says**

Dad was involved in the invasion of the Philippines so I've long held an interest in that theater of the war. From this, a military history, I wasn't expecting much--maybe some mention of Dad's unit (yes), his command (yes) and his ship (no), certainly a third opinion about the Pearl Harbor attack (yes, albeit inconclusive) about which I'd recently studied. Otherwise, I expected the work of a professional military historian to be detailed...and dry.

Well, Spector is detailed as regards the events he chooses to discuss, but he isn't dry. Interspersed with the accounts of 'battles and campaigns' are excurses into biographies, technologies, theories and anecdotes, some of which are quite moving. An example: Not only were Japanese soldiers required by their official military code to fight unto the death, but civilian noncombatants also often chose to die rather than surrender. In one such instance, after the US successfully captured an island and was mopping up, the body of a woman was found floating among the thousands of civilian corpses below the cliffs from which they had jumped. She had died in the middle of childbirth, the baby's head partly emerged.--Amidst all of the listing of deaths (4,000 from one sunken boat, 100,000 from a single bombing, and on and on), this brought home to me the true horror of war.

Finally, Spector is to be commended for paying substantial attention to the Japanese side of things, detailing not only their (to us) atrocities but also their heroism.

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### **Mark says**

In the 1960s Macmillan began publishing a series entitled "The Macmillan Wars of the United States." Written by some of the nation's leading military historians, its volumes offered surveys of the various conflicts America had fought over the centuries, the strategies employed, and the services which fought them. Ultimately fourteen volumes were published over two decades, with many of them still serving as excellent accounts of their respective subjects.

As the last book published in the series, Ronald Spector's contribution to it serves as a sort of capstone to its incomplete efforts. In it he provides an account of the battles and campaigns waged by the United States against Japan in the Second World War, from the prewar planning and the assumptions held in the approach to war to the deployment of the atomic bombs that ended it. In between the covers all of the major naval battles and island-hopping campaigns in the Pacific, as well as America's military efforts in the China-Burma-India theater. He rounds out his coverage with chapters discussing both the social composition of the forces America deployed and the complex intelligence operations against the Japanese, ones that extended beyond the now-famous codebreaking efforts that proved so valuable.

Though dated in a few respects, overall Spector's book serves as a solid single-volume survey of the war waged by the United States against Japan. By covering the efforts against the Japanese in mainland Asia, he incorporates an important aspect of the war too often overlooked or glossed over in histories of America's military effort against the Japanese, one that often influenced developments elsewhere in the theater. Anyone seeking an introduction to America's war with Japan would be hard pressed to find a better book, which stands as a great example of what Macmillan set out to accomplish when they first embarked upon the series.

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### **Charlie Newfell says**

Very good one volume of the American war against Japan in the Pacific. It follows the events relatively in chronological order, with a few diversions. Most of the battles are well covered, of course not in depth, as many of the major battles have books of their own. A couple of caveats: some of the details can be bewildering. The battle for Peleliu is covered in exactly a page and a half, yet there is an entire chapter on how the American soldiers found many of the cultures they encountered so strange.

The biggest issue is a lack of maps. There is an overall map of the Pacific on the front pages and copied on the end pages. It has no detail - many of the islands are no larger than a literal dot on the page. There is not another map in the whole book. Many of the battle descriptions discuss beaches, mountains, valleys and other terrain that you can only imagine.

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### **HBalikov says**

This book, often viewed as a "classic," was published in 1985 as a part of the Macmillan "Wars of the United States Series." It covers the war with Japan from its antecedents to and beyond the surrender of Japan in 1945. (There are, at present, 14 books in the series, which seem either to address specific conflicts or the history of the individual American military services.)

At over 500 pages, this isn't an overview of the Pacific Theater of World War II. It is a very detailed look at various aspects of that war. I wanted to get more detail about the largest of American conflicts and was gratified to have my GoodReads friends point me in this direction. Spector writes effectively in mastering the details of his subject and giving the reader sufficient analysis to understand why actions and events turned out the way they did.

I particularly liked Spector's presentation of the economic conflicts between the USA and Japan that led to Pearl Harbor. I appreciated his narrative of how the "isolationist" USA of the 1930s eventually prepared for this massive conflict. I learned a great deal about China and how it was viewed (both realistically and romantically) by both Japan and the United States. This is in addition to a detailed description and discussion of the battles, strategy and tactics that form the basis for most discussions of this period.

This book can serve you well as the foundation reference for any exploration of World War II in the Pacific.

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## **Iain says**

Well done coverage of World War II in the Pacific. Spector ranges the gamut from strategic analysis down through individuals anecdotes. Although at times those anecdotes seem forced. The narrative really shines when he focuses on analysis at the operational level and higher. The book drags (as did the war) in the last several chapters and the ending is quite weak.

I'd recommend this to those interested in WWII in the Pacific, although there is much recent scholarship (for example Midway) that is lacking in this older account.

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## **Jeffrey says**

Sits alongside "Retribution" and "The Rising Sun" as one of the three most fascinating and insightful books I have ever read about World War II in the Pacific. It provides a wonderfully balanced view of the war, reserving time for under-reported aspects such as the experiences of Japanese detainees in America, WACs and the often-neglected China/Burma/India theater. Highly recommended as the best one-volume history of the Pacific War, especially for those new to the topic.

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## **Don says**

As advertised, this is a good--perhaps the best--comprehensive overview of the war against Japan in World War II. Spector does a solid job in showing the broader strategies of both the U.S. and Japan, the logistics and materials issues and the intramural turf wars, as well as the specific battles.

However, here are the flaws of the book:

1. First and foremost, this really suffers from the absence of maps. There is but one map, of the entire Pacific theater, with little detail. Spector's descriptions of various battles were, for me, impossible to follow without maps.
  2. Spector's discussions of the organization and organizational battles within the U.S. military command, as well as within the Japanese military, are very detailed and undoubtedly an important part of the military history. But these sections are too detailed, dry and ultimately just not very interesting.
  3. Although other reviewers claim that he shows what battle was like for the soldiers involved, I found this to be not true. There is little discussion of the experience of battle; this is no Steven Ambrose work.
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## **Ray says**

For my Pacific Campaign course I concurrently read Eagle Against the Sun by Ronald H. Spector and The Rising Sun by John Toland. Both books were good reads with Spector going into a more narrative approach in his work than Toland.



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## **Jim Byrne says**

### **Good read**

Many insights on the political aspects leading to the conflict as well as the strategies employed. Would recommend this book

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## **Lch says**

I've read books on The Second World War for 20 years but never really touched upon The Pacific. This had a lot to do with the geographical difficulty of all those battles and the absence of a single volume to give a readable overview. But that has been always there since 1984 when more than 30 years ago Ronald H. Spector published this magnificent book. It is very much readable and goes in chronological order from battle to battle, and explains why certain invasions were chosen and how those decisions came about. A portion of the book is dedicated to internal politics, mainly within the allies and the US itself, for those who are interested. The most important land and naval battles are covered in a few pages, and Spector dives into many aspects of the war (like the role of minorities in the US Army). This is just a perfect book to get a grip on this war and to explore it further. A flaw might be the absence of maps, except for the high-level map at the start of the book. Some specific battles are described in such detail that a map would have really helped. Finally, imagine what Spector could have achieved if he had written it in the era of the internet. But he did it without it, a marvelous achievement.

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## **Kym Robinson says**

This is a book that covers the Pacific and Asian theater of World War Two and while it mostly focuses on the United States and Japan it does manage to give some pages to the other players in this complicated and ever lasting conflict. At times it seems to want to go further into the discussions about China, Britain or Australia, etc but just pulls back when the pages nearly lose sight of the titlesakes focus.

Spector manages to fit concisely with great detail and consideration many aspects of the conflict. From the pre-war attitudes and formations of the respective belligerents, to the campaigns and battles themselves through to the interactions of personalities and politics involved. It was in his investigation into some of the near theater and at home considerations that really helped to give this book weight for those interested in learning, with a one book, about the pacific war.

Spector does not hide his disdain for MacArthur, nor does he shy away from a respect and admiration for the Japanese. Despite being an American historian with a history of service in the Marine Corps, he does not show a patriotic or service bias as far as his coverage of this history goes.

I found this book to be an enjoyable read, with an excellent balance of detail mixed with a pleasant prose.

Spector provides the reader with a great many sources and notations so as to inspire a greater detailed investigation into the many events mentioned, while also helping one form a further reading list.

I would recommend this book for any one who has an interest in the conflict, whether a novice or an expert on the subject as I am certain it will provide both and all with a splendid historical read and trip into the horrors and heroism that was the War in the Far East.

86%

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