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The banner, shown courtesy of the Schwind Collection to Pēteris Cedrinš, is the personal banner of prince Avalov, commander of the West Volunteer Army (Западная добровольческая армия), a White Russian anti-Bolshevik and pro-German force created by Germany Gen. von der Goltz in August 1919 merging the rest of German Freikorps in the Baltic States and some Russian POWs with the Special Russian Corps raised in November 1918 by Gen. Graf Fëdor Arturovič Keller and by Cossack Gen. Pavel Bermond, later Prince Avalov, both Knights of the Russian Branch of the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem (SOSJJ). The Corps lent allegiance to Kolchak's white government and later to a Latvian puppet government supported by Berlin, and fought against both the Bolshevik and the Latvian democratic government supported by the Entente, being disbanded in December 1919. The Banner front shows the imperial coat of arms. On the reverse, the Black Maltese Cross with Crown of Thorns memorializes General Graf Keller, murdered by the Bolsheviks

<http://www.theknightsofsaintjohn.com/History-After-Malta.htm>;

<http://www.vexilloграфия.ru/russia/beloe.htm>;

<http://lettonica.blogspot.com/2007/11/bear-slayers-day.html> (Pēteris Cedrinš, *Bear Slayer's Day*, 11 November 2007). Cedrinš posted the image of the Flag's recto on wikipedia commons.

On Contested Shores

Historical Lessons on Contemporary Amphibious Warfare

BY RICCARDO CAPPELLI



The Marine Corps University Press in Quantico (VA) has released in 2020 and 2024 the first two volumes of its *On Contested Shores: The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare* series. These volumes were edited by Timothy Heck, an artillery officer with a master's degree in war studies from King's College London; B.A. Friedman, a U.S. Marine Corps Reserve officer with a master's degree in national security and strategic studies from the Naval War College at Newport; and, for the second volume only, Walker D. Mills, a serving U.S. Marine officer. The authors aim to offer an examination of the evolution of amphibious operations in military history (since the 16th century) and to emphasize their continuing relevance in the warfare scenario today and in the future. In doing so, they draw avowed inspiration from Bartlett's

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previous book on the subject, which housed no less than 51 contributions that ranged from a discussion of the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. to the 1982 Battle of the Falklands/Malvinas. It is no coincidence, then, that the two volumes reiterate what Bartlett had already stated in his analysis of historical cases, namely that «the projection of sea power ashore - an ‘assault from the sea’ - remains a reasonable option of naval warfare»¹. Reasonable, but still complicated considering that modern amphibious operations require special forces and equipment, as well as a rudimentary interagency organization and careful planning. Simplifying - and quite a bit - you need to choose ships; select ports of embarkation for troops; train invasion units; amass logistical supplies; choose target beaches considering hydrographic, meteorological, and military aspects; calculate travel times; think about feints and deceptions; bombard areas to be assaulted; coordinate the possible launching of paratroopers to the rear; embark the expeditionary force; de-mining the waters facing the enemy coastline; ensuring adequate air and sea escort; organizing waves of landing craft; laying smoke screens; fighting knowing that retreat is virtually impossible; assisting and evacuating the wounded; managing the beach (clearing it of obstacles, mines and debris, setting up command, control and communications centers, preparing logistical supply points, laying metal grids to create trails, etc.).

The Navy-Army dualism is usually put to the test during amphibious operations, as General Smith reminds us after the experience of Operation Galvanic in 1943:

«There are many conflicting elements involved in the execution of an amphibious operation. The Naval Commander is concerned primarily with his ships, the Army Commander with the shore operations, while between these two extremes there are many problems involving landing craft, difficult beaches, and conflicting evaluation of time and space factors required for the dissemination and execution of orders»².

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- 1 M.L. BARTLETT (ed.), *Assault from the Sea: Essays on the History of Amphibious Operations*, Annapolis (MD), Naval Institute Press, 1983, p. xx. Twenty years earlier a book of this kind had appeared, again with a similar conclusion: «The advance of amphibious operations continues, since the planning and refining of this form of warfare cannot be allowed to drift into the discard despite the prospect of atomic attack or the threat of push-button conflict», see A. WHITEHOUSE, *Amphibious Operations*, New York, Doubleday & Co., 1963, p. 312.
 - 2 R.C. SMITH, *Participation of Task Force 52.6, 27th Division, in GALVANIC, (MAKIN) Operation*, San Francisco (CA), Headquarters Twenty-seventh Infantry Division, 11/12/1943.

WAR DEPARTMENT FIELD MANUAL
FM 31-5 - CONFIDENTIAL

This manual supersedes FM 31-5, 2 June 1941, including C 1, 23 January 1942, and Supplement,
4 October 1943

LANDING OPERATIONS
ON
HOSTILE SHORES

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However, the threat of an amphibious assault also complicates life for the defender, who will have to commit tangible and intangible resources to protect himself. This is not an easy task considering that the fundamental problem, already accurately identified by Japanese military doctrine in World War II, is the shortage of men and firepower to cover all potential landing points, while the enemy, by choosing the landing site, can concentrate its forces at a given time and place. This problem can be solved in two basic ways: the defender can try to stop a landing on the coast (with the variant of defense in depth), or he can maintain a mobile reserve and try to defeat the hostile forces, after landing, with a counterattack. One can also try to combine these two solutions, attempting to mass troops in the areas of most likely enemy action and, at the same time, maintain a mobile reserve to cover the less likely landing areas³.

Aware of NATO's air and naval superiority Soviet military thinkers simplified the solution to the coastal defense problem by envisioning the use of full-scale atomic and chemical weapons. Such weapons of destruction were even to be employed against any paratroopers operating in the rear to prevent them from joining the landed troops, a likely indicator that the Soviets did not expect landings on home soil, but only in the European territories eventually occupied after a military offensive⁴.

While the first volume is organized chronologically, the second is organized by theme (Doctrine and Logistics, Technology and Innovation, Organization and Training, Policy and Interoperability and, finally, Military Materiel and Personnel). The essays contained in the two volumes (table 1) are mainly a mix of descriptions of amphibious operations, theoretical controversies, amphibious doctrines, planned and never realized landings, amphibious vehicles, as well as a look at what is happening in the camp of the enemies of turn, China and Russia. Wisely, the authors have chosen to limit the analysis of the American experience during the World War II, already the subject of multiple studies, favoring that relating to lesser-known operations. Obviously, not all contributions have the same

3 MILITARY INTELLIGENCE DIVISION, *Japanese Defense Against Amphibious Operations*, Special Series no. 29, Washington DC, War Department, February 1945. To learn more about issues relating to coastal defense, see T.L. GATCHEL, *At the Water's Edge. Defending against the Modern Amphibious Assault*, Annapolis (MD), Naval Institute Press, 1996.

4 A. LUKASH, «The Problem of Coastal Antilanding Defense», *Military Thought*, 79, 3, 1966 (FOIA doc. no. CIA-RDPRDP10-00105R000201310001-9).

scientific quality, even if the average still remains high. A negative element of the first volume is certainly the accompanying maps, which are not standardized and some are really of poor quality, while in the second volume the graphic aspect improves. Finally, some images taken from the historical period covered by the various essays enrich the exposition.

The authors point out that there are five main types of amphibious operations - the assault, the retreat, the raid, the demonstration, and the support of other operations - denouncing that too often the focus is only on the assault. Admittedly, administrative landings have less appeal than those against defended shores, but they retain important military significance. This addressing of the “amphibious problem” in its entirety is surely one of the merits of *On Contested Shore* and, once you have read the over 700 pages, you have the feeling that almost every war has had its amphibious aspect. It should not be forgotten that much of what is needed for a landing on a marine coastal area can also be used for movement and combat in lake or river areas.

It should be noted that the publication of these volumes falls within a period of profound reform of the American Marine Corps, which has always been grappling with the syndrome of “organizational paranoia”, that is, it is fighting to maintain an otherness from the army that allows its survival as an institution⁵. So, as an historian aptly said, «the Corps has had to take missions that no one else wanted, and it has had to perform them better than anyone else could»⁶. Thus, the identity pendulum has swung from the imperial police-style operations of the early twentieth century to the amphibious apotheosis of the World War II, from the unfortunate hybrid war in Vietnam to the easy conventional victories in Iraq in 1991 and 2003. However, the Marines disliked being involved in the bitter counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. So much so that even before the famous statue of Saddam Hussein was torn down in April 2003, their headquarters was pushing «to retrograde Marine forces as quickly as possible to reset the force and ensure that Marines did not become consumed by occupation-type

5 T. TERRIFF, «Innovate or Die’: Organizational Culture and the Origins of Maneuver Warfare in the United States Marines Corps», *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29, 3, 2006, pp. 475-503.

6 M. BOOT, «The Corps should look to its small wars past», *Armed Forces Journal*, 3, 2006, pp. 17-21, p. 17.

duties»⁷. Therefore, it is not surprising that in recent years a *vintage* thought has asserted itself, which calls for a return to maritime origins, more boots on the sand than on the ground⁸. It is therefore necessary to get rid of the heavy armaments, tanks and towed artillery first and foremost, characteristic of the poorly digested wars waged alongside the army in recent times.

Contaminated by the innovative atmosphere linked to the newfound prospect of war against near-peer or peer enemies, the US Navy has produced an operational concept called Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO), for the use of its own resources and those of the Marine Corps (which is formally dependent by the Navy). The DMO is designed for combat operations against an adversary, particularly China, that has significant warfare resources and is capable of spotting and attacking American naval forces. The basic principles that will have to inform the American organization and operations are the dispersion, the increase in the diffusion of weapons and technological sensors on multiple air and naval platforms to favor the survival of combat capabilities, the increase in drones and long-range weapons and, finally, the creation of resilient communication networks⁹.

Under the shadow of DMO, other operational concepts were born, partly overlapping, such as Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment (LOCE), Expeditionary Advanced Based Operations (EABO) and Stand-In Forces (SIF), which are discussed extensively in the essays of Mills¹⁰. In particular, EABO

7 D. THIEME, «OPLAN 1003V - Operation IRAQI FREEDOM from a Planner's Perspective», *Naval War College Review*, 76, 4, Article 4, 2023, p. 39. In the three-year period March 2003 - March 2005, the Marine Corps had deployed its resources in Iraq to the extent of approximately 15% of personnel, 22% of the fleet, 40% of land equipment, over 50% of communications equipment and 20% of aviation, exposing everything to accelerated wear and tear, see W.M. SOLIS, *Defense Logistics: Preliminary Observations on Equipment Reset Challenges and Issues for the Army and Marine Corps*, Testimony Before the House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittees on Readiness and Tactical Air and Land Forces, Washington DC, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 30 March 2006; L.J. KORB - M.A. BERGMANN - L.B. THOMPSON, *Marine Corps Equipment After Iraq*, Report, Washington DC/Arlington (VA), Center for American Progress and Lexington Institute, 2006.

8 For a critical analysis of how Marine leadership attempted to cope with the demise of the Soviet Union by imagining new threats and planning the restructuring of the Corps, see T. TERRIFF, «Of Romans and Dragons: Preparing the US Marine Corps for Future Warfare», *Contemporary Security Studies*, 28, 1, 2007, pp. 143-162.

9 R. O'ROURKE, *Defense Primer: Navy Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO) Concept*, IF 12599, Congressional Research Center, 26/06/2024.

10 U.S. MARINE CORPS, *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment (LOCE)*, unclassi-

are forward bases, small in size, hidden, often also suitable for hosting military aircraft, from which the forces present on site (stand-in) increase the capabilities in terms of logistics, firepower, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, targeting and electronic warfare of forces operating remotely (stand-off). The SIF are reinforced platoons of around fifty marines equipped with advanced armaments (including anti-ship missiles), mobile, light, capable of operating dispersed, in austere conditions and in a persistent manner. SIF must be pre-positioned in times of crisis in allied countries in the Indo-Pacific area, evidently to reduce the risks of a disputed insertion. They are relatively simple to maintain and support, they are experts in camouflage, they are designed to operate within a contested area and under enemy fire, as the vanguard of a maritime defense in depth in order to hinder enemy plans by giving life to a sort of insular guerrilla warfare¹¹. Replacing the Army in operations in the Pacific theater was one of the alternatives suggested already in the 1970s to ensure the marines' future¹². It is therefore not surprising that in the pre-doctrinal manual dedicated to the EABO, only two skimpy lines are dedicated to the contribution the Army and Air force can make to the air and missile defense of the coastal area¹³.

In a 2021 article, the then Marine commander Berger clarified that the SIF's main tasks are reconnaissance, i.e. gathering information on enemy resources and activities, and counter reconnaissance, i.e. denying enemy observation¹⁴. The expert reader cannot fail to notice the similarities with the *Krulukian* Hunter Warrior experiment of 1996:

«Hunter Warrior was a force-on-force experiment that consisted of a battalion-sized marine force, comprised primarily of dispersed, squad-sized

fied, Washington DC, Department of the Navy, 2017; Idem, *Force Design 2030*, Washington DC, Department of the Navy, 2020; Idem, *A Concept for Stand-in Forces*, Washington DC, Department of the Navy, 2021.

11 More explicitly: «A portion of future U.S. forces could follow the Vietnamese example by making a virtue of proximity, stealth, ambiguity, simultaneity, and quantity to close with and destroy enemy forces before they can bring their own advantages to bear», see A. CORBETT, «Stand-In Forces. Disrupting the current struggle for dominance», *Marine Corps Gazette*, 103, 2, 2019, pp. 27-29.

12 M. BINKIN - J. RECORD, *Where Does the Marine Corps Go From Here?*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution, 1976, pp. 133-140.

13 U.S. MARINE CORPS, *Tentative Manual For Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 2nd Edition, Washington DC, Department of the Navy, May 2023.

14 D.H. BERGER, «Preparing for the Future Marine Corps Support to Joint Operations in Contested Littorals», *Military Review*, CI, 6, 2021, pp. 6-13.

teams, pitted against a mechanized regimental-sized ‘opponent force’ (...) The essence of the Hunter Warrior operational and tactical concept, very simply put, was to test the effectiveness and viability of small squad-sized units acting as reconnaissance teams that searched out larger enemy formations and then directed supporting fires to attack and destroy those formations. The experiment modelled and simulated the C4ISR that was starting to emerge at the time as a means to connect reliably the marine on the ground with the increasing precision capability of indirect fires, whether air, artillery or naval»¹⁵.

However, there is a significant difference with the current SIF, because these are destined to fight to obtain information. In fact, reconnaissance as understood by Berger involves an operational balance between prudent observation and aggressive action to force the enemy to reveal his disposition¹⁶. Therefore, the SIF have a greater organic consistency than assumed during Hunter Warrior, around 50 marines instead of 13, consequently increasing the chances of being discovered. Even the expected frequent use of medium-class open-deck landing ships (35 under procurement) to move the SIF around the theater seems risky: a single sinking would eliminate an entire SIF¹⁷.

The express reference made by Berger to reconnaissance recalls the experience of the patrols called Stingray in Vietnam. These were well-armed squad/platoon level units, often helicopter-borne, that infiltrated areas controlled by Vietnamese insurgents, occupied high ground, created a covert defensive position

15 TERRIFF, *Of Romans...*, quot., p. 148. The criticisms raised at the time against the concept of combat with dispersed units are always current, see J.F. SCHMITT, «A Critique of the HUNTER WARRIOR Concept», *Marine Corps Gazette*, 82, 6, 1998, pp. 13-19.

16 BERGER, quot. SIF resemble one of the military reorganization options currently being debated in Israel: «this school believes that modern intelligence technology cannot completely replace a human presence in the heart of the enemy’s deployment areas, and therefore adds the employment of a multitude of small infantry teams, assisted by ‘swarms’ of small remotely-piloted aircraft, to help uncover the enemy’s positions, communicating these by network technology to aircraft and ground-launchers that would then destroy these targets within seconds or mere minutes by standoff fire from afar» (E. HECHT - E. SHAMIR, «The Role of Israel’s Ground Forces in Israel’s Wars», in M. Weissmann - N. Nilsson, *Advanced Land Warfare. Tactics and Operations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023, pp. 301-319, p. 316). However, it does not appear that current Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip reflect this option.

17 R. O’ROURKE, *Navy Medium Landing Ship (LSM) (Previously Light Amphibious Warship [LAW]) Program: Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report no. R46374, Washington DC, Congressional Research Service, 24/04/2024.

(complete with barbed wire and reinforced shelters) and eliminated the enemy by calling via radio artillery and air support. Other times, Stingray patrols would locate the enemy, harass them with improvised ambushes, and report them to Army battalions operating in the area. From 1966 to early 1971, Marines carried out 8,317 Stingray missions, with 15,680 sightings of more than 138,252 enemies. The reconnaissance teams called in 6,463 artillery fire missions (including naval ones) and 1,328 air strikes, resulting in the capture of just 85 prisoners and 9,566 kills: about 7% of the enemy sighted (as far as statistics based on the unreliable body-count are worth)¹⁸. The greatest risk for the Stingray patrols was to be discovered and then attacked by strong enemy units or, even worse, to see the destruction of a rapid reaction force sent to their rescue¹⁹. The Vietnamese soon took countermeasures, such as dispersing their forces to limit the effects of American fire and creating special counter-reconnaissance teams to flush out the hidden Marines. However, the Stingray patrols, focused as they were on hitting the enemy, brought less informative results than the capture of prisoners and documents, essential sources for understanding the adversary's intentions²⁰. It should be noted that the Stingray patrols, to minimize the chances of being detected, operated in the jungle, in sparsely inhabited areas. This also applies to SIF which will hardly be able to act in territories inhabited by unsympathetic populations, if not relegated to uninhabited or desolate areas. Not to mention that even in allied countries there are sometimes large minorities of people of Chinese ethnic origin whose loyalty in the event of conflict would still need to be ascertained.

On Contested Shores contains some essays with various hints and reflections on this ongoing transformation. Indeed, the authors have the declared objective

18 M.L. LANNING - R.W. STUBBE, *Inside Force Recon. Recon Marines in Vietnam*, Guilford (CT), Stackpole Books, 2017².

19 E.T. NEVGLOSKI, *Understanding the United States Marines' strategy and approach to the conventional war in South Vietnam's northern provinces, March 1965-December 1967*, PhD Thesis, War Studies Group, Defence Studies Department, King's College London, 2019.

20 F.J. WEST, «Stingray '70», *Proceedings*, 95, 11, 1969, pp. 27-37; J. SHULIMSON - L.A. BLASIOL - C.R. SMITH - D.A. DAWSON, *U.S. Marines In Vietnam The Defining Year 1968*, History and Museums Division, Washington DC, U.S. Marine Corps, 1997; A. FINLAYSON, *Killer Kane. A Marine Long-Range Recon Team Leader in Vietnam, 1967-1968*, Jefferson (NC), McFarland & Co., 2013; L.J. DAUGHERTY III, *United States Marine Reconnaissance in the Vietnam War. Ghost Soldiers and Sea Commandos, 1963-1971*, Jefferson (NC), McFarland & Co., 2024.

of providing a reading of rigorous academic level that serves to inform decisions regarding the future of the Marine Corps. Decisions that have already been the subject of fierce criticism from former Marine generals and still present many open questions²¹. How to ensure logistical supplies to all dispersed units? How to prevent small formations of Marines from being identified and eliminated one by one? How to ensure coordination of the movements and actions of the different units? How to ensure prompt medical evacuation of the injured? How to compensate for the elimination of armored battalions to defend against enemy armored forces²²? How to cope with the reduction in fire support caused by the abandonment of towed artillery if air or naval resources are unable to provide it due to unavailability, range limitations or adverse weather conditions?²³ As Indian military analysts had correctly observed during the military campaigns against the Japanese in World War II

«Japanese tactical instructions constantly reiterate that by manoeuvre espe-

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- 21 P. McLEARY - L. HUDSON, «How two dozen retired generals are trying to stop an overhaul of the Marines», *Politico* (blog), 04/01/2022; J.J. SHEEHAN - J. AMOS, «Former Marine Generals: ‘Our Concerns With Force Design 2030’», *War on the Rocks* (blog), 12/12/2022; R. WORK, «The Opponents of Marine Reform Have Lost, But Won’t Move On», *War on the Rocks* (blog), 15/05/2023.
- 22 It is a recurring historical problem: «The Corps is basically a light infantry force supported by organic air power. It has few tanks, lacks battlefield mobility, and has a limited antitank capability (...) Major potential crisis areas include Europe and the Middle East. In Europe the Warsaw Pact forces are highly armored, mechanized, and mobile and are supported by a formidable arsenal of weapons (...) Most of the Middle East area states have organized their forces into mechanized and armored formations, including hundreds of tanks (...) Can the Corps, realistically, be combat effective in such an environment?», see GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE, *Marine Amphibious Forces: A Look at Their Readiness, Role, and Mission*, LCD-78-417A, Report to the Congress of the United States (unclassified), 06/02/1979, p. 12.
- 23 A. FEICKERT, «New U.S. Marine Corps Force Design Initiative: Force Design 2030», IN11281, Congressional Research Service Insight, Washington DC, 07/03/2022; D. KILCULLEN, «Stand-in Manoeuvre in a Contested Littoral Environment», *Australian Army Journal*, XIX, 2, 2023, pp. 238-260. Yet, only a few years ago the *semper fidelis* thinkers argued that «Operating terrain in the Asia-Pacific theater will differ from that of recent experience, presenting increased opportunities for tactical maneuver inshore and on littoral waterways. A balanced set of maneuver options for gaining entry and operating ashore is necessary to accomplish the full range of crisis response and contingency employments. Aircraft, small-craft, tracked-amphibians, wheeled vehicles, tanks and internally transportable vehicles all have a place», see AMPHIBIOUS CAPABILITIES WORKING GROUP, *Naval Amphibious Capability in the 21st Century Strategic Opportunity and a Vision for Change*, Report (unclassified), Quantico (VA), 27/04/2012, p. 21.

cially by superior morale small forces can overcome large ones. The effect of this tactical doctrine has been a tendency to attempt to attain objects out of all due proportion to the forces in hand. The striking successes obtained early in the East Asia War by small forces against ill-trained or demoralised troops have probably helped to confirm this Japanese tendency»²⁴.

This problem is still current and destined to emerge when the maneuver warfare of small marine units, albeit aided by theoretical quality fire support, will collide with a trained enemy with high morale, may be defensively deployed in depth and well armed too.

Finally, one of the operational assumptions on which the entire conceptual apparatus relating to EABO/SIF is based remains more than questionable, namely that:

«During armed conflict, the combination of stand-in and stand-off engagement capabilities places the adversary on the horns of a dilemma: while the adversary seeks to discover and engage friendly stand-off forces, he exposes himself to the sensing, nonlethal, and lethal capabilities of stand-in forces»²⁵.

In fact, it is not a given that the enemy will give chase in the sequence envisaged by the Marines: it could refrain from doing so and remain camouflaged in ambush, or reverse the sequence, or even attack both nearby and distant forces at the same time.

From reading the main official texts dedicated to EABO/SIF it is not clear “how much” these will be used, whether they are just an additional tactical capability, as common sense would lead to conclude, or destined to become a distinctive feature of the Marines, if not also their dominant system of organization, deployment and combat in the Indo-Pacific area.

The search for lightness returns cyclically among the thinkers of Quantico, made oblivious by the fascinations of the theory of maneuver warfare at all costs²⁶. The vision of the Marines as the tip of the spear to seize advanced bases

24 INDIAN MILITARY INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE, *Japanese in Battle*, 2nd Edition, 9329 K/G. S. I. (t) (1), General Headquarters, Delhi, Manager Publications, August 1994, p. 1.

25 U.S. MARINE CORPS, *Tentative Manual...*, quot., p. 1-4.

26 Those fascinations are still active: «The principles of maneuver warfare and mission command and control must permeate all actions of littoral forces conducting EABO, from planning through execution», see U.S. MARINE CORPS, *Tentative Manual...*, quot., p. 2-5. The Marine manual that defines maneuver warfare is the now dated *MCDP 1 Warfighting*

or to forcefully enter enemy territory and leave the subsequent heavy ground combat to the army is an image dear to American planners that dates back to the Advanced Base Force concepts of the Thirties (see Mills' essay in the first volume). The only problem is that it almost never worked: in fact, only rarely did the Marine Corps play the role of "kicking down the door" and then was replaced for prolonged operations by the U.S. Army or allied forces. It is probable that limiting the function of the Marines to defeating the enemy's front line and then allowing the army's "bouncers" to do the rest would likely mean revising their consistency: in fact, over 180,000 Marines to act as spearheads and then retreat, or simply used to do a little of island guerrilla warfare, it seems like too much. The lesson of history, however, is that the Corps, if it is to be a truly ready and employable force, must maintain the ability to carry out mechanized ground operations²⁷. The current abandonment of armored protection therefore raises doubts about the survival of the Marines on the beach, presumably exposed to enemy artillery fire, and their ability to break through the first defensive lines. Not only that: coastal military operations often involve clashes in urban centers, where it is certainly better to have heavy equipment on hand. Even the Grenadian skirmishes of 1983 underlined the tank's continuing usefulness during amphibious operations:

«the advancing Marines actually passed through a hidden force of Grenadian soldiers who were so frightened by the Marines' tanks that they let them travel through their lines essentially unopposed. The Marine column consisted of 5 tanks and 13 amtracs, but the noise that these machines made carried through the night. The 18 tracked vehicles sounded like an armored battalion to the ears of their enemy... 'If I had known then what I know now, I would have landed five tanks off Point Salines, and that would have done it,' [Vice-Admiral] Metcalf later said. 'They had nothing set up to deal with that, and people are afraid of tanks'»²⁸.

Paradoxically, the reduction in heavy armament of Marine units may make them more suitable for counterinsurgency operations, precisely what they aim to

from 1989 (revised 1997).

27 O.E. GILBERT, *Marine Corps Tank Battles in the Middle East*, Philadelphia & Oxford, Casemate, 2015, pp. 261-262.

28 P. KUKIELSKI, *The U.S. Invasion of Grenada: Legacy of a Flawed Victory*, Jefferson (NC), McFarland & Co., 2019, pp. 103 and 105. Representatives of the U.S. Army were quick to suggest the use of Army tanks on the shoreline instead of Marines' ones, see M.W. GRAHAM, *Tanks in the Surf: Maintaining the Joint Combined Arms Landing Team*, Land Warfare Paper 147, The association of the United States Army, 2022.

avoid. This is shown, on the contrary, precisely by the experience of the Marines in Vietnam who conducted 62 amphibious assaults at the battalion or regiment level in the period 1965-1969, the vast majority of which proved ineffective and did not involve any significant contact with the enemy. Without contact, the operational objective of destroying opposing units could not be achieved. Faced with little enemy resistance, Marines usually went straight from landing to advancing toward the elusive enemy, the notorious seek-and-destroy. But once landed, the amphibious formations were too bulky, often slowed by armored vehicles, to trap the Vietnamese fighters. The accumulation of supplies on land for such large units further limited mobility, particularly during the first, crucial moments after a landing, when it was necessary to make the most of surprise²⁹. In summary: armored vehicles may or may not be useful, but taking them away means reducing the tactical options at your disposal.

Without obviously reviewing all the numerous essays contained in the two volumes, let's glean a little between them. For the 19th century, American amphibious operations against Mexico (Overton, Menking) and Korea (Armstrong), Confederates against the Union fort of Fort Pickens (Hagerty) and the deterrent aspects of Union naval policy (Fuller) are taken into consideration³⁰. Armstrong's essay, in particular, stimulates reflection on the relationship between political objective and use of force. Despite the tactical victory highlighted by 35 times higher Korean losses, the American position in the Western Pacific was weakened and xenophobic elements in Korea, China and Japan strengthened.

The 20th century accounts for the lion's share of coverage³¹. Of note is Ota's piece on the importance of military cooperation in times of peace (one of the conceptual cornerstones of EABO). Indeed, such relationships allowed the United States to mobilize for World War II, while local security forces (in the case study, Samoa and Solomon Islands) provided an important immediate Allied advantage

29 C.A. MALKASIAN, *Charting the Pathway to OMFTS: A Historical Assessment of Amphibious Operations From 1941 to the Present*, Report CRM D0006297.A2, Alexandria (VA), Center for Naval Analysis, 2002.

30 For the review relating to the amphibious operations from the 16th to the 18th century covered in the two volumes, see M. MOSTARDA, «Four Recent Essays on Amphibious Warfare between the XVI and the XVIII Centuries», *Nuova Antologia Militare*, 19, 5, 2024, pp. 575-593.

31 For the air aspects of the amphibious operations covered in the two volumes, please refer to the review by Basilio Di Martino in this issue.

over key terrain in the Pacific, as well as a useful information contribution for amphibious operations.

An essay of great interest is the very detailed one by Salt dedicated to the daring adventures of the 47th Royal Commando in Normandy during the capture of Port-en-Bessin in June 1944 defended by the 1st Battalion, 726th Grenadier Regiment of the 716th German Infantry Division composed of many Italian volunteers and armed mostly with captured war material.

Another compelling essay is Strahan's on the controversies that arose around the choice of the most suitable landing craft in the period 1934-1942. Thus we meet an extraordinary character, Andrew Jackson Higgins, an unscrupulous naval entrepreneur fighting against the U.S. Navy establishment. At times one has the impression of reading a Hollywood screenplay. In fact, Higgins didn't go too soft when it came to dealing with orders. He first expanded his shipbuilding plant by illicitly appropriating part of a cemetery, then he purchased an old barn for carriage horses and transformed it into a factory using the adjacent road as a temporary warehouse. Thus, the residents of the closed block could not drive home, the garbage trucks could not carry out their service and the owner of a brothel complained of industrial noise which, in his opinion, destroyed romance and killed business! Finally, when everything was ready for the mass production of landing craft, Higgins realized that numerous bronze rods to be used as propeller shafts were missing. He then located a manufacturer of shafts in Texas, but he refused to supply them. Given that there was no time for the Navy to expropriate the material, Higgins sent his son with some workers to Texas. Having forced the door of the warehouse overnight and loaded the rods onto the company truck, the "criminals", with the Texas police on their heels, crossed the Louisiana state border, where the Louisiana police cars were waiting and escorted them to in New Orleans (the Texan owner then received regular payment for the material). Beyond the adventure aspects, without Higgins' obstinacy the American soldiers would have been forced to use poor quality landing craft, chosen for them by incompetent and unpatriotic (if not worse) military bureaucrats. Instead, Higgins Industries produced over 20,000 boats and ships critical to the Allied war effort.

Another interesting contribution is that of Güvenç and Uyar dedicated to the Turkish attack against Cyprus in July 1974, a modern and joint amphibious operation, accompanied by parachute launches and heli-landings, full of valuable

tactical lessons. Despite this, the authors denounce - rightly - the lack of academic interest in this conflict, even though there is a wealth of memoirs by Turkish, Greek and Cypriot veterans to draw on. The decade it took Turkey to build amphibious and airborne assault capabilities led to ultimate success. Even if the list of shortcomings and problems recorded during the war is long, this did not prevent Ankara from achieving most of its military objectives, a result that was not at all obvious on the eve.

Also worth reading carefully are Li and Salo's contributions on Chinese power projection and the related evolution of the Marine Corps. After the evacuation of the remnants of General Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist army in October 1949, the Chinese People's Army put Taiwan in its sights. However, with a typically Eastern strategy, before taking the "big bite" Mao decided to conquer one by one the dozens of coastal islands still in the hands of the nationalists. Thus during the 1950s, through amphibious landings, over thirty islands were wrested from the control of the Nationalists. CIA analysts foresaw the inevitability of such conquests, however such "salty" communist victories did not prejudice the correct appreciation of the eventual resistance of the Taiwanese fortress

«The Chinese Communists are poorly prepared to cope with the problems involved in a large-scale amphibious operation. Their previous amphibious experience has been limited to short overwater hauls and coastal movements. The Communists have few conventional landing craft and consequently must employ a heterogeneous assortment of vessels including junks. Loading and coordinating the movement of this fleet would present formidable problems. Air support for such an operations would be hampered by the lack of Communist experience in air-naval-amphibious operations. Furthermore, disembarkation of troops and equipment would have to be accomplished without off-shore naval support. Finally, the Communists would have to seize port facilities on Taiwan before a significant part of the invasion fleet could be off-loaded (...) The Chinese Communists would face serious logistical difficulties in supporting a large-scale assault against Taiwan»³².

32 CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, *Chinese Communist Capabilities and Intentions With Respect To Taiwan*, NIE-27/1, 25/03/1952 (FOIA doc. no. CIA-RDP79R01012A000700020004-7); Idem, *Material on Chinese Communist Capabilities and Intentions with respect to the Nationalist-held Offshore Islands*, O/NE, Office Memorandum, 23/02/1953 (FOIA doc. no. CIA-RDP80R01443R000100020002-8); Idem, *Communist Capabilities and Intentions with Respect to the Offshore Islands and Taiwan Through 1955, and Communist and Non-Communist Reactions with Respect to the Defense of Tai-*

The Chinese junks mentioned by the CIA experts were often used as improvised landing craft, but, lacking the surprise factor, they were easy prey for the Nationalist air and naval forces, as reported by Li when dealing with the attempted landing on the Quemoy Islands on 24 October 1949. Curious that the danger of the junks still tormented U.S. intelligence analysts in 1982. In fact, the CIA paid attention to a press article which cited an assessment by the Defense Intelligence Agency relating to the 400,000 junks potentially under control of the Chinese navy, each capable of carrying 40 men and thus pouring - with mechanistic certainty - well 16 million infantrymen on Taiwanese beaches³³.

Today China deploys 30,000 marines divided into 7 brigades, useful for defending its compatriots and growing economic interests abroad, as well as continuing to threaten Taiwan, the islands of the South China Sea and perhaps even the Japanese Senkaku. The Chinese marines can conduct limited autonomous amphibious operations or act as the vanguard of the much more robust army units. According to Salo, another piece needed to put together the puzzle of China's great maritime power.

As regards the other perceived enemy, Russia, the amphibious threat described by Ahlness today appears contained and limited to the Arctic areas and surrounding areas. This is in continuity with the perceived traditional lack of danger of the Soviet amphibious component, reiterated in Claremont's contribution. The latter, however, clarifies that studies on the Soviet marines have only just begun and a lot of work is still needed by historians. Therefore, it will not be superfluous to add some details. The Soviet naval infantry was decommissioned at the beginning of the 1950s and the tasks of the amphibious attack were entrusted generically to the army. But in the mid-1960s, after at least one failed amphibious exercise that used Red Army infantry in the initial phase of the assault, military decision-makers revised their beliefs and reconstituted the specialty of marine infantry³⁴. The latter, as reported in the essay by Ginor and Remez, would have been involved in a

wan, NIE 100-4-55, 16/03/1955 (FOIA doc. no. CIA-RDP79R01012A006300030018-2).

33 J. ANDERSON, «Junk Power», *The Washington Post*, p. F23, 06/02/1982 (FOIA doc. no. CIA-RDP90-00965R000100150130-4).

34 CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, *Recent Developments in Soviet Amphibious Forces. An Intelligence Assessment*, SOV 85-10158 IA 85-10057, Office of Soviet Analysis - Directorate of Intelligence, 1985 (FOIA doc. no. CIA-RDP86T00591R000300430001-4).

series of military plans and actions against Israel in the period 1967-1970, during the Six Days and Attrition wars. Unfortunately, the cited essay is based almost exclusively on the recollections of Soviet veterans and lacks official documentation. If this Soviet intervention were confirmed, we will have to appreciate its boldness considering that at the end of the 1960s Moscow's amphibious capacity was still poor. In fact, analysts from NATO estimated that Soviet amphibious assault capabilities were very limited. In practice, some action could be attempted in the North Sea (one battalion), in the Baltic Sea (two regiments) and in the Black Sea (two battalions), while the amphibious capability of the Warsaw Pact allies was practically nil³⁵. Note that accompanying atomic bombing was theorized and that Soviet exercises and wargames indicated the need to change plans for such nuclear support once or twice a day due to the predictable fluid situation in the littoral battle area³⁶. Toward the end of the Cold War in 1985, the CIA estimated that the 20,000 Soviet marines still had a modest ability to conduct amphibious assaults, due primarily to a lack of organic fire support, inadequate tactics, and poor air support and unrealistic training³⁷.

Finally, here and there in the text of the two volumes there are also references to the current doctrine of the U.S. Army, Multidomain Operations. In particular, skepticism emerges in Dickson's writing, for which this doctrine is ill-defined, does not take into account the operational level and the objective set, the moral collapse of the opponent, is simply unattainable³⁸.

While reading the various contributions, the ever-current list of errors that afflict - in varying degrees - amphibious assaults drawn up by General Norman Cota, one of the heroes of Omaha Beach, comes to mind:

- «a. Confusion during the planning stage
- b. Confusion as to command
- c. Faulty distribution of orders and other instructions

35 NATO, *The Soviet Bloc Strength and Capabilities*, SG 161/13, Bruxelles, North Atlantic Military Committee - Standing Group, 1968.

36 F. SAVELYEV - O. SHULMAN, «Organization of a Landing of Amphibious Forces», *Military Thought*, 91, 3, 1970 (FOIA doc. no. CIA-RDPRDP10-00105R000100610001-8).

37 CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, *Recent Developments...*, quot.

38 For some reflections on the issue, see my article «La nuova dottrina militare dell'esercito statunitense», *Affari Esteri*, LXII, 193, 2020, pp. 133-140.

- d. Faulty combat loading
- e. Faulty beachhead organization and maintenance
- f. Lack of flexibility of military landing plan
- g. Lack of early availability ashore of an integrated, controlled fighting team, prepared for prompt exploitation of success
- h. Assault troops landed overloaded with equipment thereby reducing their combat effectiveness
- i. Lack of provisions for protecting beachhead, especially anti-aircraft weapons
- j. Lack of adequate fire support
- k. Lack of training, especially of landing craft crews, communication personnel, and beach maintenance personnel»³⁹.

The solutions are obvious - better intelligence, more training, more resources, suitable equipment, careful organization, flexible planning, clear line of command, etc. - and emerge clearly in the concluding paragraphs of the various essays that make up *On Contested Shores*. Also not to be underestimated is the possibility of improvising using various types of vessels. In fact, numerous times in history we have seen more or less extemporaneous solutions: we have already talked about the Chinese junks, we could add the fishing boats and other small boats which Schultz recalls were used by the Germans during the conquest of the Dodecanese islands and also tugboats and barges that Liedtke tells us were widely used, again by the Germans, during naval evacuations on the Eastern Front in 1943-1945. As Claremont recalls, the improvisations also included the plethora of boats used by the Soviets during their amphibious actions on the German flanks in the World War II. What cannot be improvised, however, is training. This is a fundamental problem: are specialized troops needed for amphibious operations or is normal infantry enough? Perhaps the authors of the two volumes covered by this review took the answer for granted, given that this dilemma remains in the background of their discussion. Yet from reading the various essays, the need to have units specifically organised, equipped and trained to conduct contested amphibious landings emerges clearly. It is still useful to quote what the

³⁹ N.D. COTA, *Infantry in a Landing Assault*, in U.S. Army, *Conference On Landing Assaults*, U.S. Assault Training Center, Special Report no. 38, European Theater of Operations, 24 May - 23 June, I, 1943, pp. 1-17, p. 2.

aforementioned General Cota wrote in 1943:

«It may be argued that the Madagascar, Guadalcanal and North Africa operations showed that our regularly organized divisions can make successful landings and conduct successful exploitations. Let us not forget that in none of these instances did the attacking troops encounter:

- a. A well organized and prepared beach defense
- b. A well organized and trained air force
- c. A well organized and trained mobile military force.

As a result, heavy casualties in personnel and equipment were not received during the initial stages of the operations»⁴⁰.

Moreover, even the good performance of the 30th New Zealand Infantry Battalion, which distinguished itself in the action against the Green Islands in 1944, which Mawdsley's essay deals with, was achieved against meagre Japanese resistance. However, it remains a result that cannot be taken for granted, considering that the infantrymen of the 30th still lacked combat experience, even though they were trained in night landing tests on hostile beaches, creation of bridgeheads and night perimeter defense, silent digging techniques, information collection and beach reconnaissance. In general, it can be said that the more prepared and pugnacious the defense is, the more specialized means and soldiers are needed to disrupt it.

The feeling you get at the end of reading the two volumes is that the large-scale amphibious assault against a fierce defense must now be consigned to history. The trends already underway in the Cold War have now come to maturity: the advent of anti-ship missiles, precision weapons and the related increase in the destructiveness of the air force - to which we can now add the threat of drones and the constant increase in the range of artillery fire - introduced a potentially fatal threat to the naval contingent engaged in an amphibious landing⁴¹. Therefore, it is no coincidence that, globally, large landing ships are increasingly recycled into all-purpose containers: minelayers, hospitals, mine countermeasures, missile launchers, aircraft carriers (manned and unmanned), command and control

40 Ibidem, p. 3.

41 MALKASIAN, quot. Another factor identified by Malkasian, the use of helicopters and tiltrotors instead of amphibious landing craft to transport soldiers to enemy coasts, no longer seems to be so attractive considering the lethality of today's stratified anti-aircraft defenses.

centers, anti-aircraft defense, prison for pirates, etc.⁴². And even suppliers of hotel services (showers, hot meals, laundry, relax), as happened with the *Kanimbla* landing ship during Operation Astute, the Australian intervention in East Timor in 2006⁴³.

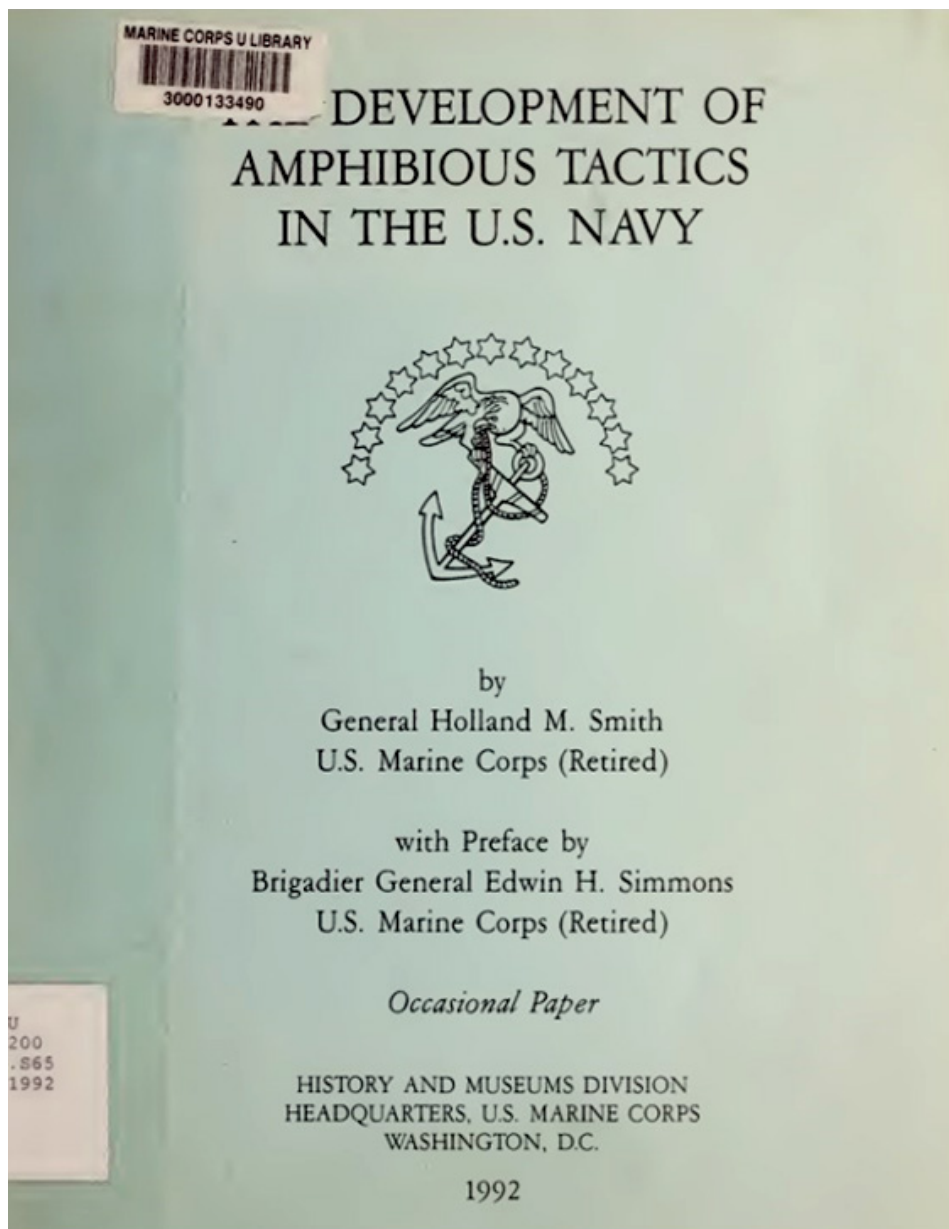
In conclusion, *On Contested Shores* offers the interested reader a historical lens to frame the changes and evolution of amphibious warfare over the centuries. The tactician and the strategist - but also the politician - will find material on which to meditate and thus fuel new discussions that will lead to new doctrines and, finally, to new more or less contested landings.

42 M. ANNATI, «Navi anfibe: contenitori tuttofare», *Rivista Italiana Difesa*, 6, 2024, pp. 30-35.

43 W. WESTERMAN, «Entry by Air and Sea: The Littoral Challenges of Operation ASTUTE, 2006», *Australian Army Journal*, XIX, 2, 2023, pp. 119-148.

Table 1 – Contents and authors

Volume 1	Volume 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An Amphibious Special Operation: The Night Attack on Porto Ercoletto, Tuscany, 2 June 1555 (J. Pessina). - The 1574 Siege of Leiden during the Eighty Years' War: Attack by Land, Relief by Sea (S. de Korte). - Amphibious Genesis: Thomas More Molyneux and the Birth of Amphibious Doctrine (A. Young). - The Delaware River Campaign of 1777: An Examination of an Eighteenth-Century Amphibious Operation (J.R. McIntyre). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vera Cruz, 1847 (J. Overton). - Courting Disaster: The Battle of Santa Rosa Island, 8-9 October 1861 (E.J. Hagerty). - Korea, 1871: The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps in Great Power Competition (B. Armstrong). - Estonian Amphibious Operations in the Eastern Baltic, 1918-20 (E.A. Sibul). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The U.S. Marine Corps and Gallipoli (A. Murray). - Ambiguous Application: The Study of Amphibious Warfare at the Marine Corps Schools, 1920-33 (B. Gudmundsson). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operation Weserubung: Early Amphibious Multidomain Operations (J.K. Greer). - The Reich Strikes Back: German Victory in the Dodecanese, October-November 1943 (J. Schultz). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Missing the Mark: Lessons in Naval Gunfire Support at Tarawa (J.P. McGrath III). - Soviet Strategic Attack and the Tactical Amphibious Failure at Merkula in 1944 (A. Del Gaudio). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning the Lessons of Port-en-Bessin, 1944 (J.D. Salt). - German Naval Evacuations on the Eastern Front, 1943-45 (G. Liedtke). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Against All Odds: Turkish Amphibious Operation in Cyprus, 20-23 July 1974 (S. Güvenç and M. Uyar). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Role of Amphibious Operations within the Multidomain Operational Construct: Background and Considerations (K.D. Dickson). - The Future Is Amphibious: The Role of Naval Special Warfare in the Great Power Competition (S. Komerath). - Uncertainty, Maskirovka, and Militarism: Russian Perspectives and Amphibious Assault Potential in the Arctic Near Future (E.A. Ahlness). - Naval Strategy and the Future of Amphibious Operations (B.A. Friedman). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The United Kingdom's Approach to Amphibious Operations: From the Cold War to the Information Age (K. Rowlands). - The U.S. Marine Corps and Advanced Base Operations: Past, Present, and Future (W.D. Mills). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Landing at Collado Beach: The Logistical Importance of the Amphibious Landing near Veracruz during the Mexican American War (C. Menking). - The Landing Craft Controversy, 1934-1942 (J.E. Strahan); - Red Tide over the Beach: Soviet Amphibious Warfare in Theory and Practice (B. Claremont). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Innovative Amphibious Logistics for the Twenty-first Century (W.D. Mills). - Amphibious Juggernaut: How the Landing Ship, Tank, and Landing Vehicle, Tracked, Created the Most Powerful Amphibious Assault System of World War II (D.E. Nash Sr.). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Union Defence Forces' Amphibious Invasion of German South-West Africa, 1914 (D. Katz). - Operation Albion: The German Amphibious Landing on the Baltic Islands, 12-17 October 1917 (E. Sibul). - Beyond Cold Shores: Inland Maneuver in Historical Polar Amphibious Operations (L.R. Blyth). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Soviet Preparations for a Naval Landing against Israel in June 1967 and Their Partial Implementation (I. Ginor and G. Remez). - Operation Husky: The Challenges of Joint Amphibious Operations (D. Johnson). - A New Zealand-led "Commando Raid" in the South Pacific: The Green Islands, 30-31 January 1944 (S. Mawdsley). - PLA Amphibious Campaigns and the Origins of the Joint Island Landing Campaign (X. Li). - U.S. Geostrategic Deterrence and A2/AD at Work in the American Civil War, 1861-1865 (H.J. Fuller). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Groundswell of Support in the Pacific: Deploying Small Wars Doctrine amid the Rise of Amphibious Warfare (E.Z. Ota). - Prelude to Stalin's Third Crushing Blow: The Kerch-Eltigen Landing, 1943 (T. Heck). - Not a Carbon Copy of the U.S. Marine Corps: The Development of the People's Liberation Army Navy Marine Corps since 1979 and What that Means for the Chinese Power Project in the Pacific and Beyond (E. Salo).



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LE PAIN COMPLET

Storia Militare Contemporanea

Articoli / Articles

- *Il ruolo dell'istruzione nautica nell'Italia meridionale dal Settecento a oggi*, DI M. SIRAGO e M. RASTRELLI
- *Primo Leggero Napoletano. A Regimental History (1806-1815)*, BY ADAM WALCZAK
 - *Destrutturazione e ricostruzione: Le riforme dell'amministrazione marittima del Regno di Sardegna dopo il Congresso di Vienna (1815-1819)*, DI MAURO DIFRANCESCO
 - *Verità dimezzate. Le contrastanti versioni dei generali costituzionali sulla sconfitta di Rieti (7 marzo) e Antrodoco (9-10 marzo 1821)*, DI LINO MARTINI
- *Before Small Wars. Early Thoughts on the Strategy of Colonial Warfare*, DI MARCO MOSTARDA
- *L'assicurazione statale dei rischi di navigazione durante la Grande guerra attraverso gli atti dell'Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni*,

DI PIETRO VARGIU

- *The repatriation of Greek prisoners of war from the Turkish military camps of Asia Minor (April 1923 – April 1924)*, BY N. TOMPROS and N. KANELLOPOULOS
- *La dimensione asimmetrica delle aviotruppe in Italia dagli anni Trenta alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, DI BASILIO DI MARTINO
- *Emploi et organisation de la Regia Aeronautica en Afrique Orientale Italienne (1936-1940) vues par les attachés militaires français à Rome*, par JEAN-BAPTISTE MANCHON
- *La resa di Pantelleria (1943) fra guerra aerea e polemiche postbelliche*, DI FRANCESCO PELLEGRINI
- *La 'Nembo' a Filottrano*, DI CARMELO BURGIO
- *Dal Nembo al Folgore. I paracadutisti della RSI come risultano dagli archivi militari italiani e tedeschi*, DI FEDERICO SESIA

- *Defending the Vatican: The Palatine Guard and the German Occupation of Rome in World War II*,

BY DAVID ALVAREZ

- *L'affaire Georges Pâques (1963-64). Un haut-fonctionnaire français au service des Soviétiques pendant toute la Guerre froide*,

PAR BERNARD HAUTECLOQUE

- *L'idrovolante quadrigetto posamine Martin P6M Seamaster e la Seaplane Striking Force (SSF)*, DI ALDO ANTONICELLI

- *The Mountains as a Friend and a Foe The Indian Army in Kargil War*,

BY DIPTANGSHU DUTTA GUPTA

Strategic Studies

- *Strategic Studies and the Military.*

Insights from a Quarter Century of Teaching,

BY CONSTANTINOS KOLIOPOULOS

- *An issue pertaining to media information and privacy in the Russo-Ukrainian war*, BY JAIME A. TEIXEIRA DA SILVA

Cartography

- *Bernardino Olivieri (1770 – 1832) Un cartografo, incisore ed editore romano*, DI SIMONETTA CONTI

Insights

- *On Contested Shores. Historical Lessons on Contemporary Amphibious Warfare*, BY RICCARDO CAPPELLI

- *Air Warfare in Landing Operations*

BY BASILIO DI MARTINO

Notes

- *Un caduto dell'Armir. Le lettere dell'artigliere Roberti Luigi, classe 1921, da Piacenza a Glazov (1942-1945)*, DI ELEONORA FRASCA

- *Le radio fantasma dall'Urss*,

DI AGOSTINO PENDOLA

Persons Who Commit Military Property Theft. A Legal and Social Survey in Wartime Ukraine,

BY GANNA SOBKO, HANNA

REZNICHENKO, RUSLAN MUKOIDA,

ANDRII SVINTSYTSKYI,

ANDRII PADALKA

Recensioni / Reviews

- Peter H. Wilson, *Iron and Blood. A Military History of the German-Speaking Peoples since 1500* (DI G. FINIZIO)
- Robin Prior, *Conquest We Must. A Military History of Great Britain* (DI G. FINIZIO)
- Filippo Cappellano, *Storia dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, I, dalle origini al 1914* (DI E. DI MURO)
- Armando Tallarigo, *I Capi e la loro preparazione morale, ed. Ferdinando Scala* (DI A. TRANSFARINO)
- Paola Bianchi (cur.), *Il 'militare' nelle Italie di Napoleone. Società, cultura, istruzione*, (DI V. ILARI)
- Federico Moro, *Risorgimento Veneto 1848-1849* (DI COMESTOR)
- Pasquale Libutti, *Elenco dei garibaldini lucani* (DI A. CECERE)
- Maddalena Carli et al., *Storia del Brigantaggio in 50 oggetti* (DI A. CECERE)
- Yael A. Sternhell, *War on Record. The Archive and the Afterlife of the Civil War* (DI G. FINIZIO)
- Bernard Hautecloque, *L'irréductibilisme italien dans l'Empire austro-hongrois (1866-1915)* (DI P. POZZATO)
- Gerhard Artl, *Ortigara 1917. La battaglia di giugno sull'Altopiano dei Sette Comuni* (DI E. PINO)
- Basilio Di Martino, *L'Ombra del Bombardiere 1919-1939* (DI D. BORSANI)
- Basilio Di Martino e Paolo Pozzato, *La battaglia di Chalkin Gol 1939* (BY M. SAMUELS)
- Richard Overy, *Sangue e rovine. La grande guerra imperiale 1913-1945* (DI G. FINIZIO)
- Brendan Simms & Charlie Laderman, *Hitler's American Gamble* (BY A. SEARLE)
- Eugenio Di Rienzo, *L'ora delle decisioni irrevocabili. Come l'Italia entrò nella Seconda guerra mondiale* (DI G. CECINI)
- Pier Paolo Battistelli, *La resa dimenticata. Il II SS-Panzer Korps e l'8 settembre nel Nord Italia* (DI F. SESIA)
- Lorenzo Cadeddu, *Storia militare dell'8 settembre 1943* (DI P. POZZATO)
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