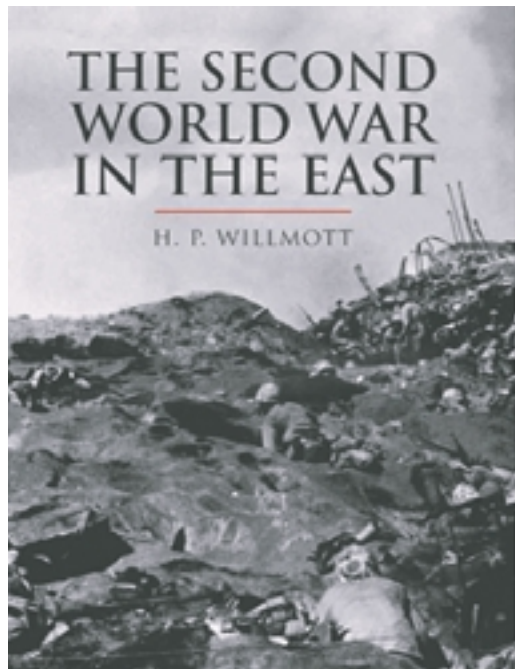


## THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN THE EAST

H.P. WILLMOTT



On 7 December 1941, after an exhausting war against the Chinese which they could not bring to final victory, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour and thus initiated a war in which ultimately they found themselves fighting the world's most populous state (China), the greatest empire (Great Britain), the most powerful single state (United States) and the strongest military power (Russia). Dr. H. P. Willmott, the author of *The Great Crusade*, which Sir Michael Howard referred to as 'the best single volume history of the Second World War ever written', explains the

success and failure of the Japanese armed forces in their quest for Pacific hegemony in *The Second World War in the East*. The author attempts to explain rather than describe the genesis and the course of war, and in that process he is faced with a paradox: 'there are few things more difficult to explain than inevitable defeat'. While the Germans had some chance of victory in the West, there was no way the Japanese could ever have prevailed in the East.

History is seldom kind to the vanquished, and this book is no different: the author systematically and comprehensively explains 'Why the Japanese Lost'. The explanation is found in the social, economic, military and political circumstances of the time, combined

with traditional Japanese mentality. In brief, the Japanese political system represented an incoherent decision making process, which by the 1930s had been reduced to a position of *minor inter pares* relative to the army and the navy. The armed forces, for their part, did not coordinate their strategic efforts in the conduct of war, and consequently, beyond the perimeter defence concept, Japan went to war without a strategic policy. 'The Imperial Navy had a doctrine, geared to fighting and winning one battle: it was a doctrine of battle that masqueraded as a plan of campaign, and the plan of campaign was a substitute for strategy'. The Japanese could only fight the battles they planned to win and could only win the battles they planned to fight, but the battles they had to fight were not the ones that they could win. Japan thought it could set the terms of reference, and moreover, the nation that had never witnessed military defeat could simply not imagine anything but success.

From Midway via Leyte Gulf, to Iwo Jima, Okinawa and the devastating strategic bombing campaign, the author guides the reader on the road to Japan's defeat, failure and collapse. In the process, strategic, operational and tactical considerations are tied into a comprehensive story of high analytical standard. The author differentiates between the nature of war and the conduct of war on the one hand, and the difference between a battle, a campaign and a war on the other. Moreover, the reader gets valuable insight into strategy, doctrine and military theory, and as attention is given to the air, naval and army dimension of warfare it amounts to a coherent whole. The book has useful illustrations and the appendices provide a unique encyclopaedic basis for further research. Although the author will surely be criticised for some of his conclusions, he discusses the 'problems of interpretation' throughout the book, and thus he allows the reader to make up his own mind about which factors were more

important than others at any given time. Willmott presents a complex matter in a very thought-provocative and readable fashion and, as his conclusions suggest multiple non-linear cause-effect links that consider the difficulties of measuring military and political effectiveness, one can only recommend this substantial work.

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