

Edward J. Drea. *MacArthur's Ultra: Codebreaking and the War against Japan, 1942-1945*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992. Pp. xv, 296. Cloth, \$29.95.

World War II intelligence operations in the Pacific have been of intense interest to historians since the 1940s and the debate over the Pearl Harbor debacle. But in the 1970s, and especially after the publication of F. W. Winterbottom's bestseller *The Ultra Secret*, interest in intelligence has focused increasingly on the European theater. The time now seems appropriate for a fresh look at intelligence in the Pacific, and Edward J. Drea's *MacArthur's Ultra*, though limited to the Southwest Pacific, is an excellent beginning.

Basing his work on both Allied and Japanese sources, Drea's goal is to analyze the significance of Army code breaking in the Pacific Theater as it affected MacArthur's land, sea, and air operations. Drea poses three questions: What did the Allied commanders know about Japanese intentions and capabilities? When did they know it? And what did they do as a consequence? Drea admits that his conclusions are to some extent speculation, but they are nonetheless both logical and fascinating.

The work focuses on intelligence operations at MacArthur's headquarters in Australia. It is a story that begins in confusion, secretiveness that did not allow one group to know what another was doing, and intense personal conflict among the leading personnel involved; indeed, Drea's analysis of the personalities of Generals MacArthur, Willoughby, Sutherland, and Kenney, as well as a host of others, is one of the work's strongest features. *MacArthur's Ultra* evolved gradually as a unique system whose successes came in fits and starts, sometimes by the lucky chance of captured Japanese code documents, but more often through difficult and precise work. Success was minimal until 1943, when a series of breakthroughs allowed the reading of all but one of the Japanese Army codes. The result was the most spectacular of *Ultra*'s accomplishments, its contribution to victory in MacArthur's Hollandia campaign of early 1944, though the success was partially the result of the fact that for one of its few times, *Ultra* told MacArthur exactly what he wanted to hear.

But for the next several months, *Ultra* was more or less a failure, as its mass of information made for a variety of conflicting interpretations, many of them wrong. Drea suggests that "*Ultra* had tumbled to an almost hit-or-miss proposition as the invasion of the Philippines approached." *Ultra* did contribute significantly to the Leyte victory, but missed badly in the Luzon campaign that followed.

Drea concludes that *Ultra* was a prime factor in the success of Allied air operations and in the sea war against Japanese transport, but was less effective in land operations, partly because MacArthur, unlike commanders in Europe, usually ignored it when its information conflicted with his military plans. Drea's most startling conclusion is in his chapter "Uncovering Japanese Plans for Homeland Defense." As the Allies laid plans for the invasion of Kyushu, *Ultra* revealed (accurately) that the Japanese military had by late July 1945 garrisoned the island with 650,000 men (against 600,000 invaders) and were preparing to bring about a bloodbath that would force the Allies to seek a negotiated peace. Drea believes that this information may well have tipped the scales in favor of dropping the atomic bomb. It is one of his speculations, but it has a ring of truth.

It is my experience that students, both college and secondary, are fascinated by the intelligence operations of World War II and tend to believe that the war was won not by the grunts on the battlefields, but by the mathematicians in the backrooms. This is a mistake that Drea is careful not to foster, and anyone who looks into *MacArthur's Ultra* will quickly be disabused of that idea.

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