



**D. M. Giangreco. *Hell to Pay: Operation Downfall and the Invasion of Japan, 1945-47*. Revised Edition. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017.**

**1stLt Walker D. Mills**

At 0900 on 2 September 1945, the Japanese government signed the instrument of surrender on the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. The war in the Pacific was over, and America had already begun the occupation and disarmament of Japan. *Hell to Pay*, the updated and expanded masterwork by D. M. Giangreco, details the Allied plans for the invasion of the Japanese Home Islands if there had been no surrender. The work is a no-holds-barred assault on the argument that America did not need to drop the atomic

bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end the war. Exhaustively researched and substantiated, the book leaves the reader limping from an emotional beating, numb from casualty estimates that indicate America would have paid for a limited invasion of Japan with a generation of young men and at least another twelve months of slaughter in the Japanese Home Islands.

Giangreco is a long time lecturer on military history and author of award-winning articles and books on American military history. He pointedly resists what he terms a “seductive call for counterfactual analysis,” instead insisting that because the invasion was already planned, there is ample enough evidence for a “*profactual*” analysis. The Allied invasion of the Japanese Home Islands was always the end goal of MacArthur’s Island Hopping Campaign. It was the next step after the establishment of American B-29 squadrons on Okinawa. Operation Olympic, initially scheduled for 1 November 1945, was the invasion of Southern Kyushu. Olympic would create a staging base for Operation Coronet, the invasion of Tokyo and the Kanto Plain tentatively scheduled for 1 March 1946. Because Olympic was less than three months away when Japan capitulated to the US, most of the planning for the invasion had already been completed. Troops were already redeploying from Europe and massive stockpiles of material were being gathered for the invasion. Giangreco draws heavily from the operational plans and material buildup, as well as the Japanese plans for defense in his work.

*Hell to Pay* builds chronologically – almost as if the reader were watching the invasion unfold. He starts by detailing Japanese plans in advance of the Allied invasion, Japanese redeployments of forces from China and Manchuria, and Allied redeployments from Europe. From Truman’s draft calls for an additional 100,000 inductees a month to the Japanese commitment to pressing every citizen into ‘Home Defense’ units, the sheer scale of the impending battle rattles you. It is powerful foreshadowing—the reader cannot help but imagine vast armies of light and dark marshaling for a final cataclysmic battle, which is exactly how many potential participants saw it. It ends with a forecast of combat on the beaches of Tokyo Bay, across the Kanto Plain and into the foothills. Even the weather, both what was anticipated at the time and the storms that actually struck in November and April of 1945 and 1946 respectively, are examined.

The casualty estimates Giangreco quotes are sobering. “We shall probably have to kill at least 5 to 10 million Japanese. This might cost us between 1.7 and 4 million casualties including 400,000 to 800,000 killed.” They land like body blows to the reader, offered up with shrewd analysis. Who published what and when? What source were they drawing on? Is this figure based on the Saipan ratio or the experience in Okinawa? The reader has trouble truly grasping the magnitude of the numbers. What is the difference between 800,000 and 900,000 casualties? A weakness of the work is the lack of granularity—at points the reader will feel like an accountant, tabulating the cost of unfought battles. But this may be inherent in examining battles that never took place, and there are a few places where color and personality seep through the figures. The substantiating evidence is never far from the text. The hefty 552 pages of *Hell to Pay* are somewhat deceptive. Nearly half of the volume is taken up by appendixes, the index and exhaustive notes.

As if sensing the reader’s fatigue with casualty predictions, Giangreco follows them with chapters on items that are far more tangible. He shares the estimate for how much blood would be needed for the initial invasion (100,000 pints) and details the complex and highly vulnerable supply chain for the perishable liquid. Next he tells the story of how the military ended up with 500,000 extra Purple Heart medals at the end of the war, medals intended to be given to casualties of the invasion. Unused in the invasion, the same medals were issued to US casualties through the 1990s.

*Hell to Pay* also pushes the argument that if the Japanese had not capitulated after the second atomic bomb was dropped, Truman and his generals would have employed future weapons tactically—in support of the invasion and probably on the invasion beaches hours before the troops landed. The argument continues, though more lightly substantiated than other claims, that America was preparing to use chemical weapons if necessary.

The first of the additional chapters in the re-release is “To Break Japan’s Spine,” which details Soviet-American cooperation in the Pacific theater. The focus is on the Lend-Lease support provided to the Soviets to facilitate their Manchurian offensive. The second, “The Hokkaido Myth,” is Giangreco’s argument that the Soviets lacked the capability and the desire to conduct a serious landing on Hokkaido any earlier than 1946. Both chapters are enlightening and as well researched as his others but mostly

serve as background. Also added is an appendix that summarized Operation Blacklist (MacArthur's occupation of Japan), a fitting epilogue.

*Hell to Pay* is the definitive work on the planned invasion of Japan. Giangreco sets the standard for a historical argument and includes his key sources in the appendices. The book is powerful and sobering, offering a glimpse of a road not taken but with the discipline not to stray into fantasy or what ifs. Sobering, Giangreco makes an unassailable case that the American bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with the atomic bomb and resulting Japanese surrender was not only the right choice at the time, but a deliverance for both nations.

*1stLt Mills is a Weapons Platoon Commander with 2d Bn, 1st Marines and is currently pursuing an MA in International Relations and Contemporary War at King's College London.*