



**Timothy Heck, and B.A. Friedman (eds.), *On Contested Shores: The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare*. Quantico: Marine Corps University Press, 2020.**

**Tim Olinski, Queen's University**

The average person, when asked what an “amphibious operation” is, typically will refer to World War II’s Operation Overlord without much hesitation. The two terms are almost universally linked in the Western mind. This conflation is what Timothy Heck and B.A. Friedman have set out to change in their work, *On Contested Shores*. An edited volume of papers all addressing the topic of amphibious operations within the broader umbrella of the history of warfare, *On Contested Shores* sets out to break the monopoly that the Normandy invasions seemingly have on the history of amphibious warfare. The content of *On Contested Shores’* chapters aims to expand the

---

general knowledge base available about such operations. They discuss historical engagements and dissect the elements that contributed to an effective operation: training, equipment, reconnaissance, etc. Heck and Friedman bring together the works of a varied group of academics and veteran servicemen ultimately with the intent to show that focusing on Operation Overlord does a great disservice to both history and modern-day instructional curricula. The main thrust of their work is that, rather than focusing on Normandy as the definitive case study on amphibious operations, to the near exclusion of all others, a more balanced and broader study is needed. As stated, Heck and Friedman have done their best to make it clear that such operations have a diverse history, and have brought together a unique offering of historical research, both in terms of authors and the content they present.

In that sense, they have succeeded in their endeavours. *On Contest Shores* boasts twenty-three separate chapters on highly varied content from a unique mixture of academics and practitioners. The confluence of these varied submissions produces a worthy successor to the work of Lt. Col. Merrill L. Bartlett's *Assault from the Sea* (1993), which Heck and Friedman acknowledge as their inspiration in crafting this volume. *On Contest Shores* provides case studies on events from sixteenth-century Italy, the American Revolution, the American Civil War, Cold War-era engagements on Cyprus, and beyond. These chapters focus on engagements, developments within the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) Officer training curricula, as well as future developments in amphibious warfare units (e.g. the UK Royal Marines).

Heck and Friedman are themselves representative of that joining of varied backgrounds. Heck is an artillery officer with an academic background. He secured an MA from King's College, London, and currently, his work focuses on the Red Army during and following World War II. He is also a graduate of several military staff schools. Friedman, on the other hand, is a military analyst and an officer in the USMC reserve. He attained a BA in History from Ohio State University, and an MA in National Security and Strategic Studies from the US Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. He is also a founding member of the Military Writers Guild. With such a mixed background themselves, combining both academic and military service backgrounds, it is hard to think of a better pairing to edit a volume of this nature.

Further, Heck and Friedman's work also sets out to satisfy the overarching mandate of the USMC Commandant – that the USMC itself needs to re-focus after over two decades of acting as a supporting body for the US Army in largely land-based operations. The USMC has been tasked with re-discovering its *raison d'être*, and Heck and Friedman in many ways have provided a forum to explore that uncertain future. What is more, they have shown that not only is the USMC not alone in having its operational mandate questioned, but also that this is not the first time that it has needed to justify its existence. Much as *On Contested Shores* explores in its diverse chapters, in the inter-war period, the USMC was tasked with justifying its existence and exploring future campaign plans. As mentioned, beyond exploring the future of amphibious warfare practitioners, *On Contested Shores* also presents these historical studies as evaluations of the competent application of amphibious warfare operational doctrine. In this way, *On Contested Shores* could be seen as an operational guidebook for future USMC curricula, while also providing an effective link between academics and practitioners. It presents the beginning of a conversation between the two and shows that, while disparate in their approaches, the two have much to contribute to the success of the other.

Therein lies some of the greatest strengths of this volume. The varied contributors and content provide a wide array of topics and specialties, showing that amphibious operations have been, and will continue to be, a key part of military history. While such discussion could potentially be highly inaccessible, or hard to navigate, due to the wide array of military jargon employed, Heck and Friedman provide a glossary to encourage accessibility. Every chapter provides unique lessons about successful operational conduct. How the operation succeeded, where it failed, how things went wrong, and even where dumb luck played a role in determining the outcome. The scholars involved are not afraid to identify errors, reward initiative, and point out key aspects for improvement – all within the broader scope of the historical narrative and as a pedagogical tool for future practitioners. The source base they draw on is varied, depending on the time period, ranging from official reports, news articles, and correspondence, to personal diaries, memoirs, and, in the context of Renaissance-era events, artwork. While varied, it is typically well employed, though at times the motivations of the authors or creators of the sources examined are left unexplored.

Beyond the different approaches in relation to their sources, the only real weakness in Heck and Friedman's work is the level of accessibility that each chapter presents. While glossaries can help one to parse the alphabet soup of military jargon, the varied authorship of the contributions means that some chapters present more of an obstacle to their audience than others. Some chapters are elegant works of seasoned scholarship, while others give the feeling of a terse after-action report. Both approaches have their strengths and reflect the varied background of the contributors. The latter sets out the facts in succinct detail but leaves little to no room for discussion or reflection. This can benefit the reader in that the degree of operational detail is high, but it does tend to present events in a vacuum, disconnected from occurrences before and after. The former tends to provide detailed context and outcome, as well as discussing what lessons can be learned, but usually presents the events in much vaguer detail. In the cadence of each chapter, one can often detect with some level of accuracy the operational background of its author (i.e. veteran, academic, or both).

While it has some minor flaws, *On Contest Shores* presents a very well-written, broadly sourced, and authoritatively constructed volume that draws on the expertise of its contributors. It sets out to expand the knowledge base on amphibious operations in the broad category of the history of warfare and succeeds. Although it may have benefitted from a focus outside of the Western world, or even pushing its envelope further back in time, the editors have proven two things. First, amphibious operations have a much more substantial history that far exceeds the Normandy landings or Gallipoli. Second, such operations primarily succeed or fail based on expertise and adaptability, which the USMC was built upon. Heck and Friedman's work effectively shows us that whatever course amphibious operations take in the future, the USMC is, and always has been, uniquely suited to face it.

*Tim Olinski is a sixth-year PhD student in the Department of History at Queen's University. He did his undergrad at the University of Guelph, an MA in History at the University of Nottingham, and an MA in Classics at Queen's.*