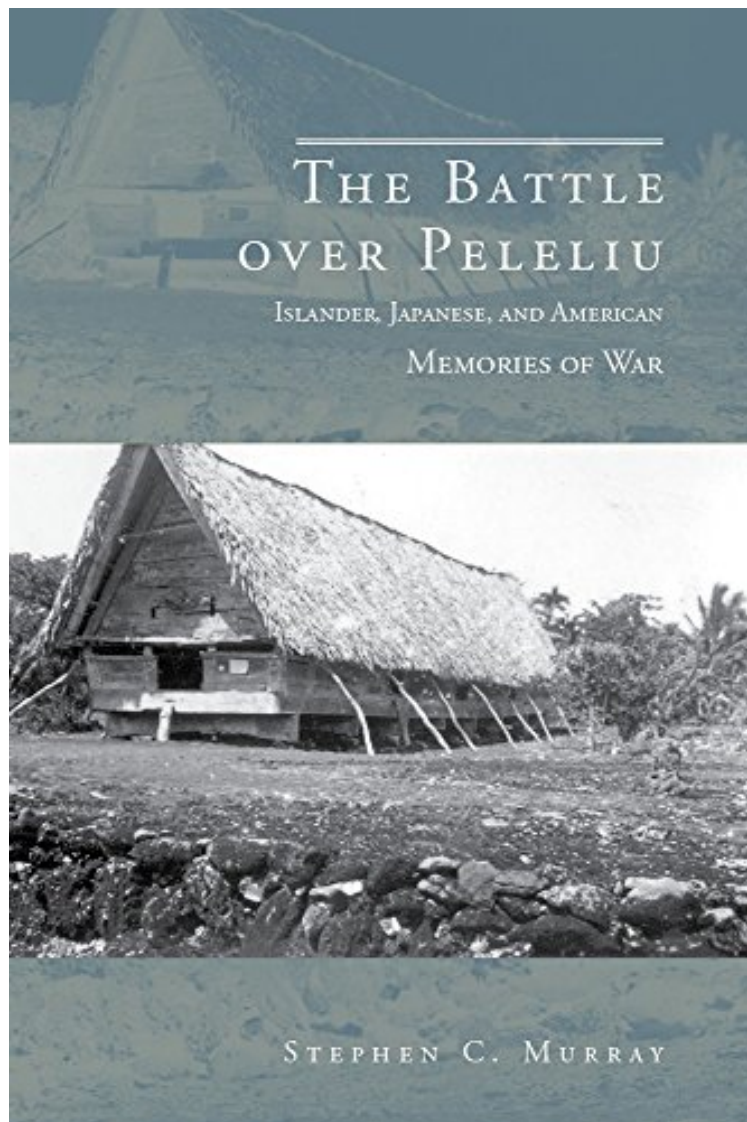


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## The Battle over Peleliu: Islander, Japanese, and American Memories of War (War, Memory, and Culture)

*Stephen C. Murray*

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**Stephen C. Murray : The Battle over Peleliu: Islander, Japanese, and American Memories of War (War, Memory, and Culture)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Battle over Peleliu: Islander, Japanese, and American Memories of War (War, Memory, and Culture):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A "Must Read" for an understanding of this battleBy David K.

Mcquillen This is a "must read" for those with a serious interest in the WWII battle for the island of Peleliu. I have a personal interest in the Peleliu battlefield as a close family member died there. I've read most--if not all--of the books about the battle written in English and am familiar with the island. Sometimes I'm asked for a reading recommendation and generally it comes down to E.B. Sledge's "With The Old Breed" and the USMC monograph, "The Assault On Peleliu" by Frank Hough. "The Battle Over Peleliu" is now on--if not first on--that short list. The story it tells of the destruction by the warring nations of this small island and the impact of the war on the inhabitants (continuing to this day) is authoritative, well-written and highly readable. I highly recommend it to those who want to understand the battle for Peleliu and the impact of war on local populations. As a bonus, the author includes a critical survey of the literature on the Peleliu battle.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This is the culmination of a lifetime of study and ...

By John Giarratana This is the culmination of a lifetime of study and passionate, scholarly effort concerning the place and the people of Palau. The flora, the fauna, the culture and history of the islands and the islanders make an in depth backdrop to the central theme of the book. Murray focuses on the events leading to the WW2 battle for the island of Peleliu and the aftermath of that conflict. The period is viewed from the varying perspectives of the Japanese, the Americans, and the people of Palau. It is an eye opening analysis and a fascinating read.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Three ways of interpreting history, and maybe the Palauan approach is best. A thought-provoking book.

By lyndonbrecht This is a complicated book, and an exceptionally good one. It's partly military history, partly anthropology/ ethnology, part personal retrospective. Murray has deep knowledge of this place, going back to his Peace Corps days decades ago, and he seems to have family connections with the people on the island. Murray bases the book on American and Japanese documents, many interviews with Palauans (Peleliu is part of Palau, note that spellings vary). The weakest spot, and I don't think it's much of a weakness is that he does not read or speak Japanese and so relied on materials translated, some of them by Japanese fellow researchers. I have not read a book quite like this, but in a general way it's similar to some of the work of John Dower. Murray is laying out three differing interpretations of events, within the context of describing the way people in Peleliu and Palau view history--and just maybe their way is better than ours. Murray will make the attentive reader think. There's also the element of was the battle really necessary? Current historical views tend to think not.

The island is about 5 square miles, with a current population of around 550. The battle in the war saw 11,000 Japanese and 1,600 American dead. In this small space the Marines alone expended 16 million rounds of ammo, 116,000 hand grenades, with much more from naval gunfire and from the Army units replacing the Marines--to say nothing of the Japanese. The native folks had been evacuated before the battle. An important aspect is that the Palaun way of life, stretching back 2,500 to 3,500 years, is deeply intertwined with the land, and with the near-obliteration of the land, much of the base of the people's existence was destroyed. Peleliu is in some ways a memory. It gets yet more complex. The islands (all of Palau) have endured through several sets of outsiders. Spain established rule (based on old claims) 1885 to 1899 when the islands were sold to Germany, which ruled until 1914, when they were taken by the Japanese (it is widely forgotten that the Japanese were allies in the first world war). The Japanese ruled until 1945 (Americans took Peleliu but the balance of Palau was occupied by the Japanese until the end of the war). The US Navy ruled 1945-47, then a more benign civilian US administration until independence in 1994--the term "independence" has to be somewhat qualified given agreements with the US. The Japanese ruled under a mandate from the League of Nations, but treated the place as a colony, achieving considerable prosperity in the 1930s, and immigration from Japan (and Okinawa and Korea) means that the native Palauans were heavily outnumbered. The Japanese era saw an ethnic stratification of Japanese-Okinawan-Korean-Palauan remembered with ambivalence today (some Palauans have Japanese family connections). A further element is that the traditions in Peleliu and Palau reflect very complex land use patterns, administered by clan tradition. The idea of land as a commodity that can be bought and sold is vastly different. This notion together with uncertain land titles from the various colonial regimes has made a mess of ownership in the islands, still being worked out. Much of the traditional economy based on cultivation of taro was obliterated. Currently the economy is partly based on tourism.

Memory is important in the consideration of Japanese and Americans reflecting on and visiting the battle scenes. Murray notes that most Americans have bought into the "good war" concept, and that the Japanese remain deeply divided on the war. Despite American beliefs that Asians think that life is cheap, Japanese have been visiting and honoring their battle dead since the 1960s to view battle scenes and hunt for bones--apparently the US administration placed sharp limits on tourism till then. Murray describes local guides leading groups of Americans and Japanese and how they see things differently. Interestingly, Japanese memorials on Peleliu can have wording that might be politically controversial back in Japan. Memory of course is fading with the passing of the generations involved. Murray notes that the Japanese and American histories have many documents and published histories, but that the history of Peleliu by the people who live there is a different matter, and that they also have a deeply different way of telling history. From Peleliu, the view is of outsiders fighting to the death on someone else's turf--it wasn't their war, really. Relatively few died, most from the last year of Japanese rule, when Palau was cut off and starvation became real, with constant harassment by US aviation (which in this book comes across as almost malevolent).

The expansionist Japanese empire annexed the inhabited archipelago of Palau in 1914. The airbase built on Peleliu Island became a target for attack by the United States in World War II. *The Battle over Peleliu: Islander, Japanese, and American Memories of War* offers an ethnographic study of how Palau and Peleliu were transformed by warring great powers and further explores how their conflict is remembered differently by the three peoples who shared that experience. Author Stephen C. Murray uses oral histories from Peleliu elders to reconstruct the islands prewar way of life, offering a fascinating explanation of the role of land and place in island culture. To Palauans, history is conceived geographically, not chronologically. Land and landmarks are both the substance of history and the mnemonic triggers that recall the past. Murray then offers a detailed account of the 1944 US invasion against entrenched Japanese forces on Peleliu, a seventy-four-day campaign that razed villages, farms, ancestral cemeteries, beaches, and forests, and with them, many of the key nodes of memory and identity. Murray also explores how Islanders memories of the battle as shattering their way of life differ radically from the ways Japanese and Americans remember the engagement in their histories, memoirs, fiction, monuments, and tours of Peleliu. Determination to retrieve the remains of 11,000 Japanese soldiers from the caves of Peleliu has driven high-profile civic groups from across the Japanese political spectrum to the island. Contemporary Japan continues to debate pacifist, right-wing apologist, and other interpretations of its aggression in Asia and the Pacific. These disputes are exported to Peleliu, and subtly frame how Japanese commemoration portrays the battle in stone and ritual. Americans, victors in the battle, return to the archipelago in far fewer numbers. For them, the conflict remains controversial but is most often submerged into the narrative of the good war. *The Battle over Peleliu* is a study of public memory, and the ways three peoples swept up in conflict struggle to create a common understanding of the tragedy they share.

"*The Battle over Peleliu* is an important contribution to Pacific history, because it considers the significant voices, experiences and memories of the Islanders in their view of the battle for Peleliu as 'an unmitigated social, cultural, and environmental disaster'." *The Journal of Pacific History* In the field of Pacific Island ethnography, and more particularly studies of Palauan society, culture, and history, this book has no equal. Murrays focus on the people of the island of Peleliu and their relationship to the bloody battle which took place there in 1944 is particularly illuminating. Also noteworthy are his very lucid sketch of Palauan social structure and his astute analysis of the differential impact of Japanese and US colonialism on that social structure. Peter W. Black, coauthor *Conflict Resolution: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*