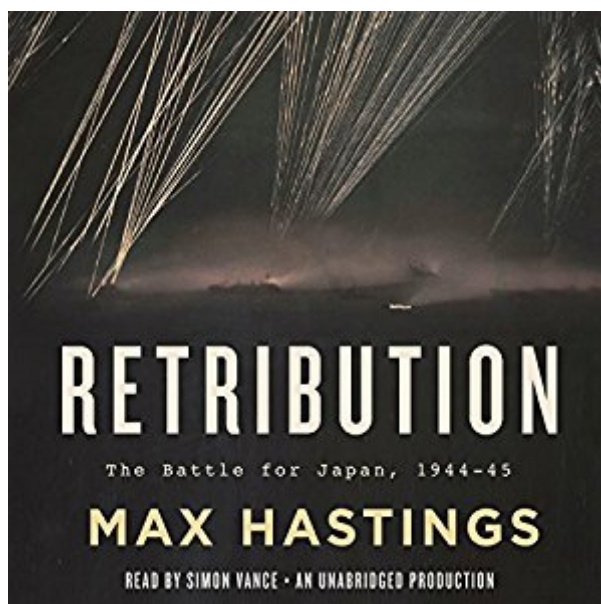


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Retribution: The Battle For Japan, 1944 - 45



Synopsis

By the summer of 1944 it was clear that Japan's defeat was inevitable, but how the drive to victory would be achieved remained unclear. The ensuing drama - that ended in Japan's utter devastation - was acted out across the vast theater of Asia in massive clashes between army, air, and naval forces. In recounting these extraordinary events, Max Hastings draws incisive portraits of MacArthur, Mao, Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, and other key figures of the war in the East. But he is equally adept in his portrayals of the ordinary soldiers and sailors caught in the bloodiest of campaigns. With its piercing and convincing analysis, *Retribution* is a brilliant telling of an epic conflict from a master military historian at the height of his powers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

With age comes a bit of weariness, and I confess that huge books with small print have begun to intimidate me just a bit. But some of them are so well-written and so interesting that page-anxiety drops away after the first couple of chapters. So it was for me with Max Hastings' *Retribution*. *Retribution*, which chronicles the final year of World War II's Pacific Theatre, is a companion to Hastings' *Armageddon*, a history of the European Theatre's final year. The new volume begins with General MacArthur's plans to retake the Philippines and ends with a quick summary of the war's effects on Japanese society and culture. In between, Hastings examines the infiltration of total warfare into everyday Japanese life; the battle for control of the sea corridors, the Burma campaign and the Aussies who fought it (which I found particularly fascinating, knowing virtually nothing about it); the air campaign over Japan, masterminded by Curtis LeMay (also an especially intriguing chapter, particularly for those who presume that the only big bomb damage in

Japan were the nuclear blasts over Hiroshima and Nagasaki); the unspeakably horrific Japanese treatment of China and Manchuria; the ferocious battles on Iwo Jima (to which Hastings devotes an entire chapter); and the behind-the-scenes negotiations that led up to Japan's final surrender. Hastings punctuates his history of the Pacific Theatre's final year with dozens of stories about individual people whose lives were affected--GIs, sailors, Japanese infantrymen and pilots, Chinese "comfort girls," generals, admirals, statesmen--and this is part of what makes his book such a fascinating read. Moreover, Hastings doesn't pull any punches in his estimation of the war's leaders.

Interested readers should not be put off by Kai Bird's misleading review for the Washington Post, which features on .com's page for this book, which, incidentally, is published under the title *Nemesis* in the UK. This is an excellent study of the last years of events in the Pacific theatre during the second world war. Kai Bird says that Hastings "abandons his critical faculties" when it comes to the book's "central theme", namely that the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was wholly justified. Bird is mistaken on one account and deliberately misleading on another. Hastings's 600 page book naturally deals with the events at hand in chronological fashion and it is not until the very final chapters that he comes to discuss the dropping of the bombs. Reading the book, I did not identify the contents of these 2 chapters as either presenting or encapsulating a "central theme" in it. In these chapters, Hastings addresses both sides of the argument as to whether the decision to drop Little Boy and Fat Man was justifiable. He is of the opinion that it was, but far from abandoning his critical faculties he reasonably presents the opposing argument and then goes on to expose the holes that he sees in it. While he acknowledges that giving the Russians a display of US might was seen as a very useful added bonus of the atomic drop, to put it crudely, he rejects the argument that this was foremost in the minds of the members of the war cabinet and the top brass when planning the drop. He also shows how, far from there being any soul searching amongst decision makers, the atomic bomb drop was more a military project that had been put in place a few years back and was at this point running its course.

Relatively few people are alive today who experienced any aspect of WWII as a teenager or older. Fewer still live in countries where the WWII experience can be freely discussed, as in the United States and UK. The Soviet Union considered the war to be a people's war and only recently have stories of individual experiences been forthcoming. In Germany, less and less attention is paid to the horrendous crimes of the German people. France dramatizes its miniscule, if even existent, role.

And in Japan, as Hastings points, out widespread denial is still the norm. As a result, accurate knowledge of WWII and its horrors and few glories is rapidly fading from human consciousness - and with that forgetfulness comes the danger of new and even more horrible wars. Max Hastings writes highly readable military histories. He eschews footnotes and the minutia of academic writing in favor of a friendly narrative style. There is considerable depth, however. In its 550 pages, Hastings covers a war that spanned the years 1931 - 1945 and a bit beyond. It covered a larger geographic area than any other conflict in history, though most of the area was the Pacific Ocean. The book opens on the saddest possible note: the dedication is to Max Hasting's son who apparently died at age 27 in 2000. And on that sad note, the deaths of millions and unspeakable cruelties at the hands of the Japanese are chronicled in the following pages. In twenty-two chapters, Hastings treats every major aspect of the war against the Japanese by the primary combatants: the United States, Britain, China and late in the game, the Soviet Union. Hastings begins with a look at the motivation and goals of the United States. President Roosevelt had announced the goal was unconditional surrender.

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