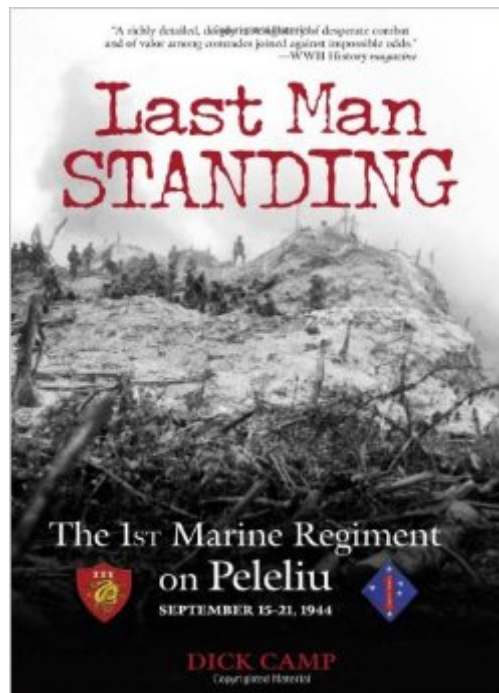


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Last Man Standing: The 1st Marine Regiment On Peleliu, September 15-21, 1944



Synopsis

One of the bloodiest battles in Marine Corps history, Operation Stalemate, as Peleliu was called, was overshadowed by the Normandy landings. It was also, in time, judged by most historians to have been unnecessary; though it had been conceived to protect MacArthur's flank in the Philippines, the U.S. fleet's carrier raids had eliminated Japanese airpower, rendering Peleliu irrelevant. Nevertheless, the horrifying number of casualties sustained there (71% in one battalion) foreshadowed for the rest of the war: rather than fight to the death on the beach, the Japanese would now defend in depth and bleed the Americans white. Drawing extensively on personal interviews, the Marine Corps History Division's vast oral history and photographic collection, and many never-before-published sources, this book gives us a new and harrowing vision of what really happened at Peleliu--and what it meant. Working closely with two of the 1st Regiment's battalion commanders--Ray Davis and Russ Honsowetz--Marine Corps veteran and military historian Dick Camp recreates the battle as it was experienced by the men and their officers. Soldiers who survived the terrible slaughter recall the brutality of combat against an implacable foe; they describe the legendary "Chesty" Puller, leading his decimated regiment against enemy fortifications; they tell of Davis, wounded but refusing evacuation while his men were under fire; and of a division commander who rejects Army reinforcements. Most of all, their richly detailed, deeply moving story is one of desperate combat in the face of almost certain failure, of valor among comrades joined against impossible odds.

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Customer Reviews

Let me give you another side of the story that you've probably never heard before. In September 1944, my father, Charles N. Manhoff, was a regimental scout in H&S Company, 1st Marines, 1st MarDiv. He landed on the third wave in Peleliu where he spent the morning attached to the 2nd Battalion. In the afternoon, he made his way to the regimental CP where he spent the remainder of the battle. Since there was no role for scouts during the battle (the Japanese were never more than 300 yards away and shooting at you all day long), Puller sent most of the scouts to line units. My father, however, was assigned to be Puller's runner for the battle and spent most of his time outside the CP "tent" (actually just a poncho on sticks) standing guard. As a result, he had a view of the battle decisions that not even the battalion commanders, Honsowetz and Davis, had. According to my dad, nobody, and I mean nobody, thought charging Bloody Nose Ridge was more stupid than Puller himself. My dad heard Puller raging on the field phones to Division day after day. He on more than one occasion walked up to, and past, the line of insubordination in trying to get his Marines out of these pointless charges. He asked for reinforcements for the devastated regiment. Division said no. He asked to pull out and try an amphibious flanking maneuver just as he had done on Guadalcanal. Division said no. Dad was there when the III MAC commander, General Geiger, bypassed Division and spoke with Puller directly. He was there when Geiger countermanded Division and ordered the 81st Division to relieve the regiment. Honsowetz and Davis never saw this, according to Dad. After each rejection, Puller would hang up the phone and pass the order to commence the next day's attack without comment to his battalions.

"THE LAST MAN STANDING" is in my opinion one of the two best books ever published about one of WWII most horrendous battles. (The other a historical fiction account of this battle is briefly discussed below). The author articulates precisely the planning (or lack thereof) and the fighting that raged for nearly a month on the small Island of Peleliu in the Western Pacific. Unfortunately for those who took part in this battle, both Naval and Marine Corps commanders at the highest levels exhibited a dearth of command competency. Their pre-invasion planning efforts and the equipping and training of the troops were minimal; followed by flawed command decisions during the battle which needlessly endangered the lives of subordinates. An American force of nearly 10,000 Marines were sent ashore against an estimated 20,000 professionally trained enemy combatants. The Japanese force was properly equipped and entrenched in a vast network of underground bunkers nearly impenetrable to naval gunfire or the bombing efforts of the U.S. Military. Thus when members of the U.S. Marine Corps' First Division landed on the shore of this small island they found themselves in the middle of a killing field where hundreds of young men died before they ever

reached the beach. Once ashore, the level of Marine casualties became near catastrophic; still the commanding officer who was eventually relieved of command, refused to allow the Army to assist his beleaguered troops. One battalion commander mimicking the commanding general's misguided endeavors, after losing half his force, rejected the advice of his own staff and refused to accept assistance from other units. He ordered his men to carry out repeated attacks upon a Japanese strong point, all of which failed.

While the Marine Corps have existed for well over 200 years, this unique combat arm defined its glorious legacy over a four year period, 1942-1945. Between the miserable jungle-affair of Guadalcanal and iconic, glorified sacrifice at Iwo Jima falls the particularly brutal battle for the coral-encrusted island of Peleliu. In *LAST MAN STANDING*, Dick Camp recounts how this bitter (and unnecessary) operation almost wiped out the First Marine Regiment. With the lessons of Tarawa still not learned; the decision to take Peleliu and its airfield from the grip of a sizeable, capable and dug-in Japanese Army was a risk in-and-of itself. Securing the island was designated as a means of shoring up the eastern flank of MacArthur's operation to liberate the Philippines and serve as a jumping board for any future invasion of Japan ... the overall strategic value of Peleliu was arguably negligible for the Americans. The Japanese, on the other hand, considered the island to be defensively strategic, expected an American invasion and masterfully prepared a defensive strategy designed to grind and bleed the attackers. If an American victory was inevitable, it was assured to be a pyrrhic victory. Camp does a great job in thoroughly prepping readers for the eventual clash of arms by providing an educational background of all aspects associated with the battle. Starting with the controversial and political decision to take Peleliu, we are given ample information as to how both the Americans and Japanese prepared for the oncoming battle. The book is riddled throughout with sidebars that enhance the reader's knowledge about a specific issue, weapon or individual ... I found this to be quite helpful (most of the time).

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