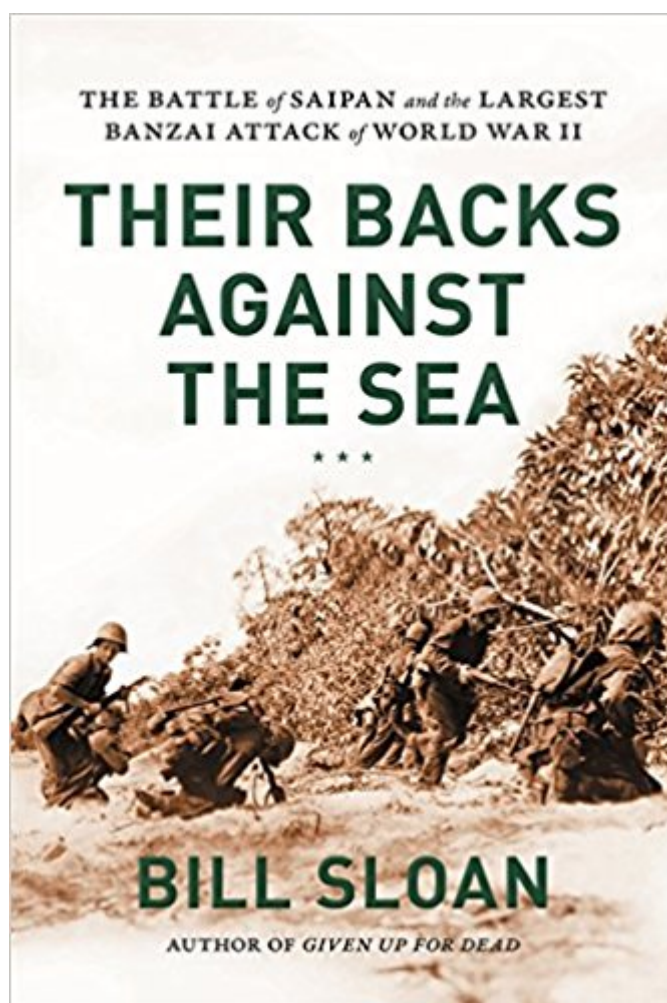


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# Their Backs Against The Sea: The Battle Of Saipan And The Largest Banzai Attack Of World War II



## Synopsis

In the midst of the largest banzai attack of the war, US Army Lt. Col. William O'Brien, grievously wounded and out of ammunition, grabbed a sabre from a fallen Japanese soldier and flailed away at a small army of assailants, screaming to his men, "Don't give them a damn inch!" When his body was recovered the next day, thirty dead enemies were piled around him. The Battle of Saipan lasted twenty-five hellish days in the summer of 1944, and the stakes couldn't have been higher. If Japan lost possession of the island, all hope for victory would be lost. For the Americans, its capture would result in secure air bases for the new B-29s that would put them within striking distance of the Japanese homeland. The outcome of the war in the Pacific lay in the balance. In this gritty, vivid narrative, award-winning author Bill Sloan fuses fresh interviews, oral and unit histories, and unpublished accounts to describe one of the war's bloodiest and most overlooked battles of the Pacific theater. Combining grunt's-view grit with big picture panorama (and one of the ugliest inter-service controversies of the war), *Their Backs against the Sea* is the definitive dramatic story of this epic battle--and an inspiring chronicle of some of the greatest acts of valor in American military history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Bill Sloan is a renowned military historian and the author of more than a dozen books. His narratives of World War II's Pacific War have been praised by readers, reviewers, and veterans alike for their accuracy and their vivid writing. A former investigative reporter and feature writer, Sloan lives in Dallas, Texas.

It seems the commanders, when planning these invasions, always underestimated the time and effort it would take. Howlin Mad Smith was a real piece of work; the type of leader you really don't want. The 27th Division did a great job under extraordinary circumstances. As the author states, all the participants in this battle were heroes.

Good coverage of the Army's 27th Division that fought there. Not the old USMC bull that General H. M. Smith put out.

I started wondering just how much of the book dealt with the Japanese banzai attack against the 105th Infantry Regiment of the 27th Infantry Division when I noticed that most of the photographs in the book were taken by Marines of Marines. The story of the Banzai attack begins on page 141 and ends on page 184. So if you are hoping for a lot of detail on those events, you will probably be disappointed to discover - as I was - that only twenty percent of the book covers them. Could there have been more detail - yes, if the author had plumbed more sources. As Sloan explains, the bulk of his work centers around interviews with seven veterans. He also used a number of secondary sources. As far as I can tell, he did not use any primary sources, which greatly disappointed me. As a result, I cannot recommend this book to any serious student of the Pacific Campaign.

Like another reviewer here, I am a big fan of Bill Sloan's books, and also, knew little about the battle for Saipan, so I was eagerly looking forward to this book. It is a good, compelling read, no doubt, but it kind of felt like it started in the middle. There was very little attention paid to the build up of forces or descriptions of planned strategies for attack or defense, instead an almost perfunctory beginning made of mostly of remembrances by some of the participants. All of a sudden is is D-Day on the beaches and even that part was presented almost as an anti-climax. Don't get me wrong, the personal stories are the heart and soul of Mr. Sloan's works and I like them, but there is usually a little more background, a little more flavor to them. Definitely worth the read, but not a well-rounded account of the battle for Saipan as I had hoped.

Having read many books on the Pacific war a reader develops a standard and expectation of the various authors and obviously for good reasons. I did not feel anything other than a huge letdown from Bill Sloan's book. There were many mistakes in dates, aircraft and most of all the presentation. I don't doubt the bravery of any of the men mentioned. Nevertheless, the book made me feel like I

was reading the worst 'B' MOVIE' ever. It lacked style, believability and balance. It was just plain sloppy and did not do honor to those men. Reading the journal of the Japanese Officer was a pathetic joke. The Japanese did not write with such a lack of feeling and intelligence. Neither is every dead American soldier a 'John Wayne' with dozens or hundreds of dead Japs around him. I get upset just thinking about Sloan's book. It's just cheap and corny.AMC

The back note on Bill Sloan indicates that his narratives have been praised for their accuracy. I would imagine that they either did not read this book or were not conversant with the details of the battles. Perhaps this is where editors need to step in. He talks about Pearl Harbor and the torpedoing of the Arizona, Hellcats dive-bombing at the Coral Sea or Midway, 25 millimeter machine guns mounted on U. S. aircraft, PBY's taking off a carrier and possibly a few more errors. While I enjoyed the way he brought to the forefront the participants in the battle his misinformation on the details was distracting and made me wonder about the validity of other parts of his story.

In June, 1944, the Americans began their assault on Japan's inner defensive line with the invasion of Saipan in the Marianas islands. If taken, these islands (Saipan & Tinian) could be used for bases for the large B-29 bombers to attack the Japanese home islands. Before these attacks could take place, the islands had to be taken from the Japanese. Over the course of approximately three weeks, the Japanese and Americans fought in a desperate struggle to survive. As had become the norm in recent battles, the great majority of the Japanese defenders were killed, and very few were taken prisoner. American casualties were very heavy. In addition, the Japanese lost over 300 aircraft along with three aircraft carriers during the Battle of the Philippine Sea. The title of the book deals with a last, fanatical banzai attack of the surviving Japanese garrison. Approximately three thousand Japanese ran toward the American lines, some with nothing more than a wooden spear. Chaos resulted, and hundreds died on both sides, but the Americans held. I've read several of Bill Sloan's earlier books on the Pacific War and I feel this book is a step down for him. There are several mistakes in the narrative, and Sloan relied on the stories of only seven men. There are interesting points in the book, such as the Marianas Turkey Shoot, but overall, this is not one of Bill Sloan's better works.

Many incorrect data points stated, such as the USS ARIZONA was torpedoed. Her destruction was caused by a bomb dropped from a flight of horizontal bombers. The author refers to battleships as "tin cans" - as a proud veteran of 33 years active duty in the US Navy, that term applies to

destroyers. Finally, the author discusses a Marine officer being issued a ".45 caliber revolver". By this time in World War II, no front-line combat unit would have been issued that handgun. It would have been a Colt Model 1911 semi-automatic pistol. Once I kept coming across these gross errors in basic research, I gave up and passed the book on. Not worth the cost.

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