



THE U.S. NAVY IN WORLD WAR II

By James Kurth

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The story of the U.S. Navy in World War II has a central role in the long history of America's wars and indeed of America itself. The story obviously had great meaning and taught important lessons to the generation that fought World War II and also to the generations that came of age in its aftermath. But even now, almost sixty-five years after the end of the war, it is a story filled with potential meaning and importance for the young students of today. For there are aspects of this story that are part of the very nature of America, and even of the human condition itself.

In this essay, we will focus upon two features of the history of the U.S. Navy in World War II: first, the way in which it recapitulates the qualities of many of the great epic stories to be found in classical literature and in world history, and second, the way in which it illustrates continuing and enduring realities about the making of U.S. military policies and strategies, and particularly about the American way of making war.

An American Epic: Struggles and Dramas

The history of the U.S. Navy in World War II is an epic story, one equivalent in its excitement, engagement, and grandeur to the great epics of classical literature and world history. It can be seen as a series of distinct and concentrated battles or events, each of them a great struggle and drama comparable to the most important and legendary events in the history of any country and at any time. These include, for example, such battles of the classical age as Marathon and Salamis, which preserved Greek civilization from Persian conquest. They also include such battles of the modern age as Trafalgar and Waterloo, by which Britain defeated Napoleonic France, not only preserving itself but also establishing both the European balance-of-power system and the British Empire upon a new basis, one which would decisively shape the character of Western civilization for the next century.

In our review of the U.S. Navy in World War II, we will primarily discuss the Pacific theater. Here, we will focus upon four great events or struggles: (1) the attack on Pearl Harbor; (2) the Battle of Midway; (3) the political struggle over U.S. Pacific strategy; and (4) the battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Of course, there were other great and well-known naval struggles in the Pacific that should also be discussed, especially the campaign to take Guadalcanal and the Solomon Islands and the campaign to re-take the Philippines; the latter included the largest naval battle in history, the Battle of Leyte Gulf, which involved more warships and a greater ocean area than any other naval battle ever. However, the complexity of these particular campaigns and battles requires a rather lengthy exposition in order to make their meaning and consequences clear, and so we will not be able to focus upon them given the space limitations of this particular essay.

We will also discuss the U.S. Navy's role in the European theater, particularly in the Battle of the Atlantic. In addition, most of the Pacific events also had a counterpart or analogue in the European theater, and so it will be useful to compare and contrast the Navy's role in the Atlantic war versus the Pacific war.

Like the great events and struggles drawn from the histories of classical Greece and modern Britain, those involving the Navy in World War II have the character of being at once strategic, dramatic, and tragic. Moreover, these events combine into a grand, unfolding narrative, one that takes the form of a classical epic.

The Character of Classical Narratives

Classical narratives, the ones that have had the most engaging and enduring power, often share particular elements or even share a particular sequence and development. The elements and sequence usually include something like the following: (1) at the beginning, a state of innocence, but also self-indulgence. This is suddenly shattered by (2) a devastating enemy assault and even disaster, followed by (3) a continuing enemy challenge which culminates in a decisive moment of truth in which one barely escapes extinction. There then follows (4) a period of uncertain recovery but firm determination, and this in turn is followed by (5) a period of long and hard testing, during which one slowly and painfully grows to strength and mastery. Finally, there is (6) triumph, redemption, and apotheosis.

For the most part, these particular elements and their sequence can be found in the great epics and histories of the classical age: the stories of the Greeks in the Trojan War, as told by Homer; of the Greeks in the Persian War; of the founding of Rome, as told by Virgil; and of the Romans in the Punic Wars. For the most part, too, these elements and their sequence can be found in some of the great national histories of the modern age. This especially seems to be the case with the history of successive British struggles with great continental powers seeking to establish hegemony over Europe and to subdue Britain in the process: the wars with Spain under Phillip II, with France under Louis XIV, and again with France under Napoleon. (The British tried to recapitulate this narrative when confronting Germany under Wilhelm II; however, its victory in World War I was so costly that it turned out to be a pyrrhic one.)

Indeed, this particular form of narrative probably has even deeper foundations within Western consciousness. Many of the same elements and much of the same sequencing can be found in the Bible, beginning with the origins of man and woman in the Garden of Eden, followed by the entry of the Serpent and the Fall, through successive people chosen by God and their subsequent falls, to final triumph and redemption (and in the Christian faith, resurrection) with the coming of the Messiah.

It may now be becoming evident that the story of the Navy in World War II, and particularly in the Pacific theater, fits this form of classical narrative. On the eve of its entry into the war, America is characterized by a state of innocence and self-indulgence. The devastating enemy assault comes on December 7, 1941, with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The enemy relentlessly presses this challenge during the first half of 1942, culminating in the decisive Battle of Midway in June. There then ensues within the U.S. government and between the U.S. military services a political struggle over Pacific strategy, along with bloody and arduous battles at Guadalcanal and the Solomon Islands. Then comes the long and hard period of testing and the slow and painful growing in strength, which culminates in the terrible but decisive battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Finally, there is triumph and redemption, ending with the apotheosis of September 2, 1945 – the majestic surrender ceremony on the deck of the battleship U.S.S. Missouri anchored in Tokyo Bay.

American Realities: Patterns and Issues

However, the history of the U.S. Navy in World War II not only presents a grand epic in the classical form. It also presents a series of vivid illustrations of some recurring and enduring patterns and issues in the making of U.S. military policies and strategies. These patterns and issues have long been central in the analyses of American political scientists and military historians, and they provide excellent and engaging topics for the teaching about American wars.

In this essay, we will focus upon six of these patterns and issues: (1) bureaucratic identities and intelligence failures; (2) service competition and party politics; (3) the classical American Way of War and its manifestation in the U.S. Navy of the 1940s; (4) personal honor and moral choice; (5) national morale and political will; and (6) the play of fate and chance. As it happens, each of the Pacific war events which we have listed exemplifies one or more of these themes.

The Attack on Pearl Harbor

Indisputably one of the most dramatic events in American history, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor also presents an archetypal case of a recurring and enduring American reality – the functioning – and the malfunctioning – of the U.S. military and intelligence bureaucracies.¹

To begin with, the circumstances leading up to Pearl Harbor illustrate the perennial conflicts which occur within the U.S.

¹ Good accounts of the attack on Pearl Harbor are given by Max Boot, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History, 1500 to Today* (New York: Gotham Books, 2006), chapter 8; and Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War With Japan* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), chapters 3-5.

Navy between its different component services, each with its own distinct *bureaucratic identity*. In the case of Pearl Harbor, this was a conflict between the battleship service and the carrier service. Although the naval aviation and aircraft carrier part of the Navy had been growing in importance and influence since the 1920s, in 1941 it was still subordinated to the battleship admirals. These of course saw the battleship as the only true capital ship, and they not only believed that carriers would remain marginal in U.S. naval strategy but that a successful attack by Japanese carrier aircraft upon Pearl harbor would be impossible. This conception represented a classic case of how bureaucratic identity and interests shape (and distort) bureaucratic perceptions and plans.

The attack on Pearl Harbor also presents a classic case of *intelligence failure*. In particular, crucial intelligence – and more importantly the interpretation of intelligence – fell between the gap between different intelligence services. For example, State Department officials in Washington knew that Japan would initiate hostilities on December 8, 1941 (which would be December 7, U.S. time), but they thought that any attack would occur someplace in Southeast Asia. Conversely, Navy officers in Pearl Harbor knew that Japan could initiate an attack on Pearl Harbor, but they did not know when it would be (and in any case did not believe that it would be successful). In short, Washington knew the date of the attack and Pearl Harbor knew the place, but no one knew both.

Pearl Harbor also illustrates the crucial role of *chance* in warfare. As it happened, on December 7 all of the eight battleships stationed at Pearl Harbor were in port, but the two aircraft carriers stationed there were away at sea. Consequently, the battleships were sunk, but the carriers survived. This instantly accomplished a bureaucratic and strategic revolution within the Navy: not only had Pearl Harbor demonstrated the effectiveness of aircraft carriers, but it rendered them the only remaining basis for U.S. naval strategy.

Pearl Harbor also illustrates the crucial role of *choice* in warfare. The commander of the Japanese fleet ordered two successive air strikes on Pearl Harbor. After the second strike, the returning head pilot reported that the battleships had been destroyed, but that there had been no sign of the carriers. The Japanese commander had planned a third strike to destroy the oil and gasoline storage facilities servicing the U.S. fleet, but now he became concerned that the U.S. carriers might be able to undertake a counterattack upon his own fleet. Consequently, he ordered his forces to withdraw and to steam back to Japan. This left the crucial oil and gasoline supplies available to service the U.S. fleet during the first six months of the Pacific War.

Finally, Pearl Harbor famously illustrates the role of *national morale and political will* in warfare. As is well known, the Japanese attack instantly united the American public, which had previously been greatly divided over the issue of U.S. entry into World War II. It produced an extraordinary national morale and political will for prosecuting the war (at least the war with Japan), which the Roosevelt administration could never have achieved on its own or by any other way.

The Battle of Midway

With its ultimate outcome in suspense until the very end, the story of the Battle of Midway in June 1942 is one of the most gripping tales ever told in military history. It also nicely illustrates several of our patterns and issues.²

To begin with, Midway, like Pearl Harbor, demonstrates the crucial role of intelligence. In this case, however, it is a story of *intelligence success*, rather than intelligence failure. Through ingenious methods and dogged persistence, U.S. Navy intelligence specialists had cracked a Japanese code which indicated movements of the Japanese fleets. This allowed U.S. naval officers to determine that an immense Japanese carrier and invasion task force was heading toward Midway Island and to thus send out the U.S. fleet (which was significantly smaller than the Japanese one) to disrupt the Japanese and prevent the conquest of the strategically-crucial island.

Once the opposing American and Japanese fleets encountered each other and the battle was joined, Midway becomes an intensely human story, one exemplifying such qualities as *personal honor, moral choice*, and the play of *chance*. The U.S. attack on the Japanese fleet began with a courageous but sacrificial assault by American torpedo aircraft. Despite the personal heroism of their pilots, this assault failed to cause any damage to the Japanese ships.

However, the U.S. torpedo effort did succeed in drawing down to a low altitude the Japanese fighters which were protecting those ships. It was at this point that chance played its decisive role. As a result of a set of two or three very improbable coincidences, U.S. dive bombers now arrived on the scene, at the very moment when the Japanese carriers were most vulnerable. In the ensuing dive-bomber assault, three Japanese carriers, the bulk of the force, were sunk, providing the Americans with an amazing victory.

The Battle of Midway was not yet over, however. The Japanese commander still held a large fleet in reserve to the west, which was unknown to the Americans. He expected to lure the unsuspecting U.S. fleet into a trap and a night-time battle, which was

² A detailed and vivid account of the Battle of Midway is given by Michael Bess, *Choices Under Fire: Moral Dimensions of World War II* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), chapter 7.

the kind of operation in which the Japanese navy excelled and in which U.S. carrier aircraft could not effectively operate.

The U.S. commander, the thoughtful and sensible Admiral Raymond Spruance, was under intense pressure from his staff to pursue and destroy the Japanese ships which remained from the earlier daytime battle and which were now retreating to the west. However, Spruance discerned that the U.S. had already accomplished its objective of destroying the Japanese carriers and preventing the occupation of Midway Island and that any further U.S. fleet action would be for little gain but with substantial risk. Demonstrating impressive moral character, he withstood the pressure from those around him, and he decided that the battle was over and ordered the U.S. fleet to return eastward to a more secure position.

The Political Struggle over U.S. Pacific Strategy

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor certainly united the American public and produced a strong political will and firm determination to prosecute a relentless war against Japan. In 1942, however, there was not yet a similarly strong and firm commitment to wage a relentless war against Germany, even though Hitler had formally (and foolishly) declared war against the United States on December 11, 1941, immediately after Pearl Harbor. In fact, there remained throughout much of 1942 serious political divisions within America with respect to how to prioritize the war (or, in some ways, the different wars) with the two different enemy powers and between the Pacific and the European theaters. This was the famous debate between a Pacific (or Japan)-first strategy and a Europe (or Germany)-first strategy. The ensuing political struggle provides an excellent example of *party politics and service competition*.³

On the Pacific-first side was much of the Republican Party and the Mid-Western and Western regions of the United States. Another, and crucial, part of this Pacific-first coalition was the U.S. Navy, especially its erascible and strong-willed Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest King. Conversely, on the Europe-first side was much of the Democratic Party and the Eastern and Southern regions of the United States. Another and crucial part of this Europe-first coalition was the U.S. Army, especially its highly-capable and widely-admired Chief of Staff, General George Marshall.

Although the Democrats controlled the White House and also possessed a substantial majority in Congress, President Franklin Roosevelt knew that, in order to effectively prosecute the war (and especially the war that he himself prioritized, the war against Germany), he had to have bi-partisan support. The result for U.S. strategy was a sort of grand bargain, by which Roosevelt and the Democrats got their war against Germany, but the Republicans got their war against Japan. Thus, the U.S. government assigned roughly equal amounts of military resources to each of the two theaters until 1944.

Moreover, there were second, lower-level, divisions within the U.S. military with respect to the Pacific theater itself. Each of the military services had its own preferred strategy for defeating Japan. The Navy, under the command of the clear-thinking and effective Admiral Chester Nimitz, and also its brother service, the Marines, wanted an advance straight across the Central Pacific. This would entail invading and occupying a limited number of small islands along the way, a climactic battle with the Japanese fleet, and the blockade of the home islands of Japan, until it was forced to surrender. Since the Pacific was, after all, an ocean (indeed, the largest ocean in the world) and since the Navy had long been assigned overall command in the Pacific theater, it might seem obvious that the Navy would get its way.

However, the Army and also the Army Air Force (which by now had become virtually independent of the Army) each had its own and different preferred strategy. The Army forces in the Pacific were under the command of the charismatic General Douglas MacArthur. He naturally wanted these forces to play the major role in defeating Japan, with the Navy assuming a largely supporting role. This would entail an advance upward from Australia through the South and West Pacific, invading and occupying several large islands along the way, including the Philippines (where MacArthur had famously pledged, "I shall return"), and ultimately culminating with the invasion and occupation of the home islands of Japan itself.

At first glance, it might seem that MacArthur's strategy for the Army in the Pacific would have little chance of acceptance back in Washington. It promised to be more costly in American casualties than the Navy's strategy, and the high command of the Army itself much preferred to focus upon defeating Germany. However, MacArthur had long been the Republican Party's favorite general (he had even been the Army Chief of Staff under President Herbert Hoover). Consequently, in order to maintain the bi-partisan support for the two wars and the two theaters, MacArthur largely got his way. More accurately, both the Navy and MacArthur got their way, i.e., the United States pursued both strategies in the Pacific theater.

Finally, the Army Air Force had its own preferred strategy by which it would defeat Japan. Although technically still part of the Army, the Air Force developed a plan for the strategic bombing of Japan's cities that would permit it to operate almost completely independent of the Army. It would, however, have to depend somewhat upon the Navy and the Marines, because it would have to establish and use bases for its bombers on some of those islands which the maritime forces conquered during

³ Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America, revised and expanded edition (New York: The Free Press, 1994), chapters 13-14; Russell W. Weigley, The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), chapter 13.

their thrust across the Central Pacific. Those bases, and thus the basis for the bombing strategy, were available by Fall 1944, and the Air Force then began the ruthless and systematic destruction of Japan's cities, a campaign which finally culminated with the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 (which the Air Force has always claimed was the decisive action which brought the Pacific war to an end).

And so as it turned out, each one of *three* U.S. military services received enough military resources to convincingly wage its own war in the Pacific. In effect, the United States deployed enough resources to fight and win three wars against Japan; in this sense, Japan's defeat was massively over determined.

The U.S. war in the Pacific thus becomes an archetypal example of the classical *American way of war*. Many military historians have concluded that this distinctive way of war has been characterized by the effective employment of both (1) the *overwhelming mass* of military forces, with respect to both men and material, and (2) the *wide-ranging mobility* of these forces. Indeed, when he was interrogated by U.S. officers after the surrender, the Japanese wartime leader, General Hideki Tojo, said that what had surprised him about the U.S. military and what had accounted for Japan's defeat was the U.S. ability to operate its forces at great distances from their bases, to bypass and leap-frog around Japan's bases, and to continuously resupply and replace those forces.

The Battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa

The battles of Iwo Jima (February – March 1945) and Okinawa (April – June 1945) were two of the deadliest battles in American history. Coming late in the war, when many Americans thought that it was nearly over, the 7000 U.S. fatalities at Iwo Jima and 12500 at Okinawa were a profound demonstration of how costly the Pacific war was and of the even more terrible costs to come, when U.S. forces finally undertook the invasion of the home islands of Japan. Given the magnitude of these two epic battles, they certainly exemplified several of the themes which we have been discussing.⁴

To begin with the U.S. invasion forces at both Iwo Jima and Okinawa perfectly represented the overwhelming mass, far-reaching mobility, and sustained force of the classical American way of war. In each battle, the assembled and deployed U.S. naval and ground forces were comparable in scale to those that the United States had employed in the invasion of Normandy in June 1944.

Essential as mass and mobility were, however, they would not have been sufficient by themselves to produce an American victory. For that, extraordinary demonstrations of *personal honor*, and many of them, were also required. Indeed, the courage, determination and sacrifice of the Marines at Iwo Jima made that battle the finest hour in the entire history of the Corps. As Admiral Nimitz later said, "at Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue."

However, as the reality of the terrible casualties at Iwo Jima and Okinawa began to sink into the mind of the American public, it had an effect upon U.S. national morale and political will. In the immediate aftermath of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, in the late Spring and early Summer of 1945, U.S. political leaders, and particularly the new President, Harry Truman, knew how difficult it would be to sustain *national morale and political will* throughout the even more deadly invasion of Japan that was planned for late 1945 and early 1946. This prospect certainly concentrated these leaders' minds upon finding some other way to defeat Japan and to end the war. It clearly was of great weight in Truman's decision to use the atomic bombs as soon as they became available, i.e., in August 1945.

The Battle of the Atlantic

Although the Navy was the preponderant military service in the Pacific theater, the Army clearly played that role in the European theater. There, the role of the Navy was largely a supporting one, providing transport and gunfire for the Army's successive invasions, along with protecting supply convoys in their perilous journey across the Atlantic. These kinds of naval operations did not make for dramatic and climactic battles, and the Navy has not paid much attention to the European and Atlantic theaters when it teaches about World War II at its military schools and its war college. Nevertheless, the Battle of the Atlantic, particularly the campaign which the U.S. Navy waged against German U-boats from the Fall of 1941 to the Spring of 1943, does provide an engaging and gripping story and also a series of important and useful illustrations of some of the themes which we have been discussing.

Since Britain was desperately dependent upon a continuing supply of vital resources and armaments across the Atlantic, a supply continuously threatened by the growing fleet of German U-boats, the Royal Navy had begun extensive convoy-protection operations in 1940. However, by the Summer of 1941, the British naval forces were stretched thin to their limit. At this point, President Roosevelt made the decision to have the U.S. Navy assist the Royal Navy in its anti-submarine activity, particularly in the Western Atlantic. Thus began a largely secret U.S. naval war against Germany, one which was carried on

⁴ Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun*, chapters 21, 23.

for several months before the official and real war began after Pearl Harbor.⁵ This naval war was secret because Roosevelt knew that he did not yet have enough unity within the American public to provide the political will to engage in a public war. But he also knew that German U-boats would likely respond with counter-attacks upon the U.S. destroyers which were engaged in anti-submarine operations in support of British ships, and indeed this soon became the case. During September and October 1941, Germany U-boats attacked U.S. destroyers on three separate and escalating occasions, and Roosevelt then publicly denounced these encounters as unprovoked German assaults on innocent U.S. ships. Clearly, Roosevelt was anticipating that the naval war in the Atlantic would eventually escalate to the point that there would at last be enough public unity and political will within the U.S. for it to declare a full and real war against Germany.

When that full and real war did come after the German declaration of war upon the U.S. on December 11, 1941, the U-boats launched a ferocious and effective assault on U.S. shipping, not only in the broad Atlantic itself but also on the vital sea routes up and down the Eastern seaboard of the U.S. and in the Gulf of Mexico. It is now almost completely forgotten, but during the first six months of 1942, German U-boats sunk so many U.S. and Allied merchant ships that for awhile it seemed that with their U-boats alone, the Germans would be able to knock the United States out of the war.⁶ The U-boats were greatly facilitated in their attacks because American civilians living along the shore insisted upon leaving the lights of their buildings on at night, and this provided a perfect backdrop for high-lighting the silhouettes of the ships which were the U-boats' targets. This was a perfect illustration of individual choice prevailing over national morale, and it took several months before the U.S. government could effectively enforce a reversal of these American priorities.

Even after the American public was brought into line and the Eastern seaboard suitably darkened, the U-boats continued for many months to sink large numbers of American merchant ships. A major reason for this was a feature of the *bureaucratic identity* of the U.S. Navy. The Navy had long seen itself as a rival to the Royal Navy, and this attitude was especially intense in the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest King, who was an open Anglophobe. U.S. naval officers thought that there was nothing that they could learn from the Royal Navy, which they viewed to be stuffy, old-fashioned, and overly-defensive. Unfortunately, they applied this attitude to the Royal Navy's system for protecting convoys, which was actually quite effective. Instead, the U.S. Navy tried one imaginative anti-submarine innovation after another, all of which failed, until at last by July 1942 it came to agree that the convoy system was best. The U.S. adoption of the convoy system, along with technological improvements upon it, were the major reasons why the Navy was able to win the Battle of the Atlantic by May 1943.⁷

The Atlantic War versus the Pacific War

It seems clear enough from our above account that the war in the Atlantic was very different from that in the Pacific. However, there are some interesting and illustrative comparisons that can be drawn between events and operations in the two theaters.

First, when President Roosevelt ordered a secret naval war in the Western Atlantic in the Fall of 1941, one of his purposes was to provoke the Germans into taking hostile action against U.S. ships, which in turn would provoke the American public into going to war with Germany; this interpretation is widely accepted among professional historians. However, Roosevelt's actions toward Japan in the Fall of 1941, particularly the U.S. oil embargo, served to provoke Japan into planning the attack on Pearl Harbor; it is not surprising, therefore, that over the years a small minority of historians have taken the much more controversial and dubious position that Roosevelt deliberately provoked, and even expected and welcomed, the Pearl Harbor attack.

Second, Germany's campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare against American merchant ships was widely perceived within the United States to be ruthless and immoral. However, immediately after Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt authorized the U.S. Navy to engage in unrestricted warfare against Japanese merchant ships. The only real difference between the German and the American campaigns was that the German one was at first an impressive success but eventually became a failure, while the American one at first a failure but eventually became a resounding success. (By the Spring of 1945, virtually no merchant shipping was reaching Japan.)

Third, several of the U.S. ground campaigns in the European theater had rough counterparts in the Pacific theater. The North African campaign of November 1942 – May 1943 served as an effective training exercise for the U.S. Army, converting it from an incoherent collection of inexperienced troops into a real army; the Guadalcanal campaign of August 1942 – February 1943 did much the same for both the Army and the Marines. The Italian campaign of 1943 – 1945 has often been criticized as being an unnecessary and costly diversion from the most direct and effective way to defeat Germany, i.e., across France; the Philippines campaign of 1944 – 1945, including the giant naval battle of Leyte Gulf, which the U.S. Navy considers to be one of

⁵ Millett and Maslowski; *For The Common Defense*, pp. 435-439.

⁶ Barrie Pitt, *The Battle of the Atlantic* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1977), chapter 6.

⁷ Pitt, *Battle of the Atlantic*, chapters 6-7.

the most important battles in the history of naval warfare, has similarly been criticized as an unnecessary and costly diversion from the most direct and effective way to defeat Japan, i.e., across the Central Pacific. Finally, as we have already noted, the massive and mobile U.S. logistical achievement at Normandy was later recapitulated at Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

With respect, however, to the much bigger question of which U.S. military service, and which Allied power, did the most to win the wars against Germany and Japan, there is a crucial difference between the European theater and the Pacific one. In Europe, the United States was only one of three major Allied powers (the others were the British Empire and the Soviet Union), and the U.S. Army was thus only one of three major armies fighting Germany. In the Pacific, the United States was clearly the most central Allied power, and the U.S. Navy was clearly the most central U.S. military service fighting Japan. The commanding prominence of the United States in the Pacific War, and the commanding prominence of the U.S. Navy there, means that ever since, the Navy has seen itself as forged in the cauldron of that war, shaped in its image, and bearing the legacy of that truly epic story and heroic age.

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