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Craig L. Symonds, *Neptune: The Allied Invasion of Europe and the D-Day Landings*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014. Pp. xvii, 422. ISBN 978–0–19–998611–8.

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In *Neptune*, prolific naval historian[1] and longtime US Naval Academy professor (now emeritus) Craig Symonds describes in fascinating detail Allied planning and preparation for the defeat of Germany in 1944. His account begins before the US entry into the Second World War and culminates in Operation Neptune, the initial Allied landing phase of the Operation Overlord invasion of Europe in June 1944. As in his previous work, *The Battle of Midway*,[2] Symonds devotes most of his book to an in-depth chronological examination of events, policymakers and their decisions, and Allied organization, planning, and resolution of differences. His focus throughout is on naval aspects of the strategy, planning, logistics, and especially the shipping needs of the operation. Although he touches on the landings on the British beaches, his primary concern is with the two US beaches, Omaha and Utah. The book comprises a prologue, fifteen chapters, and an epilogue.

Much of *Neptune*'s subject matter has, of course, been treated in excellent earlier histories of naval operations in World War II;[3] however, they deal chiefly with battles between Allied and Axis fleets. By contrast, Symonds dedicates the lion's share of his primary research and writing to the problems of meeting shipping requirements for the conduct of amphibious operations. His meticulous inclusion of material on the period leading up to Operation Neptune will enhance his readers' understanding of the actual landings themselves.

Symonds describes the planning for Neptune, beginning in March 1943, by British Maj. Gen. Frederick Morgan and his staff (COSSAC—Chief of Staff, Supreme Allied Commander). The wealth of detail here exceeds anything available in previous work on Operation Overlord. Symonds's book both draws on and complements the most comprehensive scholarship on shipping requirements.[4]

> [General Morgan] began by identifying an appropriate landing beach for the assault and then calculating the number of divisions needed to secure it.... [He] had to send his aide to scrounge around London bookshops for Michelin travel maps. These were then cut up and taped together on the wall at Norfolk House. The resultant montage ... triggered an epiphany. By spreading out the coastal maps from Spain to Holland, he saw that instead of being an island on the periphery of Europe, England was really at the center of a giant arc of possible targets. Nevertheless, after much study, Morgan and his team narrowed their focus to two sites on the French north coast: the Pas de Calais, where the English Channel narrowed to only nineteen miles, and the coast of Normandy east of the Cotentin peninsula, an area known as Calvados and famous for its potent apple brandy. (107)

Although both sites had strengths and weaknesses, Morgan chose Normandy because it offered a much greater likelihood of achieving surprise.

In chapter 7, Symonds turns to the Allied leadership's prewar and early wartime efforts to ensure adequate shipping resources.

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1. He is the author or editor of twenty-two books, including the Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt Prize-winning *Decision at Sea: Five Naval Battles That Shaped American History* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2005), and *Lincoln and His Admirals: Abraham Lincoln, the U.S. Navy, and the Civil War* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2008), which won the Barondess, Laney, Lyman, and Lincoln prizes for 2009.

2. NY: Oxford U Pr, 2011.

3. E.g., Ronald H. Spector, *At War At Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century* (NY: Viking Penguin, 2001), and Nathan Miller, *War at Sea: A Naval History of World War II* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1997).

4. In particular, naturally, Samuel Eliot Morison's fifteen-volume *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* (1947–62; rpt. Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 2010); see also his *Two Ocean War: A Short History of the United States Navy in the Second World War* (1963; rpt. Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 2007).

> From the very day of Pearl Harbor and even before, Allied strategic planning had been severely circumscribed by the scarcity of available shipping. As [British Gen. Alan] Brooke noted in January 1943, "The shortage of shipping was a stranglehold on all offensive operations." ... As early as 1936, the United States had begun subsidizing the construction of fifty new merchant ships a year under the Merchant Marine Act. Three years later, the government doubled the number of subsidized ships to one hundred, and doubled it again the next year. In January 1941, nearly a full year before Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt had declared an "unlimited national emergency" and used that to justify an even bigger shipbuilding program. Nevertheless, once the war began, the need to supply both Britain and Russia while simultaneously fighting a war in the Pacific revealed just how desperately short of shipping the Allies were. And it got worse. During 1942, German U-boats sank more than a thousand Allied ships in the North Atlantic. For a time it seemed possible that this U-boat onslaught might elimi-eliminate Allied sealift capability altogether. (146)

Symonds devotes chapter 7 to the problem of sealift needed to carry out an amphibious operation on the scale of Neptune.

> Even more than the production of tanks, trucks, or planes, shipbuilding requires a particularly long gestation period that begins with the accumulation of raw materials and leads through steel mills, fabrication shops, machine shops, and assembly plants before eventually arriving in the building ways. It is a complex puzzle involving tens of thousands of interconnected parts. As a result, decisions made about construction priorities in 1943 decisively affected what was operationally possible in 1944. The American industrial colossus was impressive, but it was not infinite. If Neptune-Overlord was to become a reality—if those hundreds of thousands of soldiers crowding into southern England were to be lifted across the Channel and deposited on the beaches of Normandy—the Allies had to produce the thousands of landing craft needed to carry them there. (148)

Symonds observes that the task of producing sufficient landing craft for the Normandy landings was complicated by the simultaneous need to build destroyers, destroyer escorts, auxiliary aircraft carriers, and cargo ships, all in large quantities.

> All of the agreements solemnly accepted by the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the heads of government about invading occupied France on May 1, 1944, would be meaningless if the Allies could not produce the thousands of landing ships and landing craft needed to carry the invasion force to the beaches. Landing craft had constituted a bottleneck for the Torch landings [in North Africa], and again for the invasion of Sicily and Italy. The invasion of France would require far more. Without literally thousands of new landing craft, any talk of a cross-Channel operation was simply fatuous. (147)

Symonds specifies in detail the various designs and functions of the ships and landing craft the United States and Britain designed and built. His account of the roles these vessels played in the amphibious operations and follow-on landings at Normandy adds to our appreciation of what was achieved on D-Day and just how it was made possible. Although he briefly describes the British version of the Higgins landing craft, that is, the Landing Craft Assault (LCA), he does not mention that the Rangers and first wave of US troops at Omaha Beach were conveyed to their respective sectors by British Royal Navy LCAs and crews.[5]

Symonds also examines the amphibious training conducted in England and Scotland in order to identify and correct potential problems in preparation for Neptune. He provides a comprehensive account of Exercise Tiger at Slapton Sounds in April 1944, the final full-scale rehearsal for the landing of VII Corps on Utah Beach. He describes the horrific German E-boat attack on US ships engaged in the exercise in the early morning hours of April 28: three LST (Landing Ship, Tank) ships were sunk and 639 soldiers and sailors killed, more than died during the actual landings at Utah Beach.

In his telling of the D-Day landings, Symonds concentrates on the difficulties of moving men, vehicles, and equipment to the beaches under heavy German rocket, artillery, mortar, and small arms fire. In so doing, he provides many details not discussed in previous histories of D-Day, again complementing the work

5. See Joseph Balkoski, *Omaha Beach: D-Day, June 6, 1944* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2004) 119–20. The LCAs were armored, unlike the US LCVP (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel), and provided protection from small arms fire, some limited overhead cover, and benches for the troops to sit on. The LCAs lacked the front ramps of the LCVPs; instead, a narrow steel door allowed no more than a single file of soldiers to exit. LCAs carried British troops to Gold and Sword beaches and Canadians to Juno Beach.

of other scholars.[6] In his final assessment, Symonds credits the success of history's largest amphibious invasion to the Allies' planning and execution more than their advantages in men and material.

Allied leaders recognized from the start that landing areas at Normandy had to be near a port facility capable of providing reinforcements and logistical support for subsequent operations in the region. The nearest such port was Cherbourg, on the northern tip of the Cotentin peninsula. Chapter 15 recounts the capture of Cherbourg by VII Corps, stressing the critical importance of Allied naval gunfire. As an interim measure, the Allies had already built two artificial harbors, called Mulberries, to support actions on Omaha and Gold beaches.

A weakness of the book is its omission to discuss the development of the specific amphibious doctrine for Neptune. Symonds glosses over the debated question of whether the landings should have been carried out under darkness. Amphibious operations against Axis forces in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy had deliberately been conducted in darkness with minimal preliminary fire support in order to achieve tactical surprise. Landings in the Pacific against sometimes stout Japanese resistance took place in daylight after overwhelming barrages of naval guns and aerial bombardments. The Normandy landings did not conform precisely to either method; they were conducted in daylight with minimal naval gunfire and aerial assaults in order to achieve surprise. The crucially important aerial bombardment of German positions above Omaha Beach was rendered ineffective by cloud cover, with dire consequences for the landing forces.[7]

Symonds also gives short shrift to the airborne operations by US and British parachute and glider-borne troops. Granted, his emphasis is on the maritime aspects of Neptune, but the airborne landings deserve more than the three sentences he allots them.

These shortcomings aside, Craig Symonds's *Neptune* fills a lacuna in D-day literature by its unusually thorough treatment of the naval requirements for the successful invasion of northern Europe. And, too, his extensive use of archival materials and relevant personal papers and documents allows him to elucidate the naval planning, preparation, and organization for Operation Neptune in far greater detail than do previous works.[8]

6. E.g., Balkoski, note 5 above, and *Utah Beach: The Amphibious Landing and Airborne Operations on D-Day, June 6, 1944* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2005); and John C. McManus, *The Dead and Those About to Die: D-Day: The Big Red One at Omaha Beach* (NY: NAL Caliber, 2014).

7. See Adrian Lewis, *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Pr, 2001). Lewis addresses amphibious doctrine and its application in the Mediterranean and Pacific theaters and at Normandy, drawing upon in-depth archival research.

8. Although the book has been carefully proofread, I note one small slip: for "Friedrich von Paulus," read "Friedrich Paulus" (103).