



**Seven Stars: The Okinawa Battle Diaries of Simon
Bolivar Buckner, Jr., and Joseph Stilwell
(Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military
History Series)**

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Battle diaries are essential for understanding what generals are thinking as they work their way through the fog of battle. Nicholas Sarantakes juxtaposes the diaries of two very different generals who both fought at Okinawa: Lt. Gen. Buckner, a by-the-numbers man who favored the use of artillery and tanks to reduce entrenched positions, and Gen. Stilwell, a prickly outsider who preferred maneuver to set-piece battles. Sarantakes identifies individuals, includes explanations of important events alluded to by the generals and provides glossaries of main characters and military terms. The result is a record of how Buckner and Stilwell came to grips with the problems of command on a war-torn island at the end of a long logistical tether.

With the background information provided by Sarantakes, the diaries of these men become accessible to the reader. Buckner is the more restrained, a southern gentleman whose career was average and whose diary entries are interspersed with letters to his wife. He shuttles between forward command posts and shipboard conferences, noting how much rain has fallen, how many enemy have been killed, and how many aircraft have been shot down.

Stilwell is a self-styled outsider, a brilliant warrior with the social graces of a porcupine. He dislikes Buckner and has little patience for his irreverent humor. Stilwell writes, “Buckner is tiresome. I tried to tell him what I had seen, but he knew it all. Keeps repeating his wise-cracks. ‘The Lord said let there be mud,’ etc. etc.” (June 5, 1944). Stilwell’s entries are peppered with frank and often acrid observations about everything and everybody. He dismisses the British as “hoggish, inconsiderate” Limeys and atomic scientists as “temperamental bugs.”

The battle for Okinawa was a pivotal event in World War II and has the distinction of being the single bloodiest conflict in the history of the United States Navy. The diaries of these two men provide a new perspective from which to evaluate the events. This book is a fascinating exploration of the art of leading troops in battle and will interest scholars and students of the Pacific War.



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