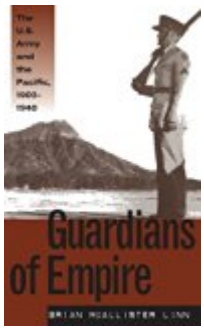
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Brian McAllister Linn. *Guardians of Empire: The U.S. Army and the Pacific, 1902-1949.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. xvi + 343 pp. $39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8078-2321-7.



Reviewed by Roger Dingman

Published on H-Diplo (November, 1997)

This book addresses an old question in a new way: Why did the United States suffer defeat at Japanese hands in December 1941 at Pearl Harbor and in the Philippines? The author, well-known for his masterful account of the U.S. Army's role in the conquest of the Philippines at the turn of the century, challenges decades of historiography about those disasters with a simple argument: Defeat was not due to intelligence failure, misperception, or the incompetence of American military commanders in 1941. It grew out of decades of U.S. Army strategic and institutional ambivalence towards the Pacific.

Linn develops that hypothesis by tracing the intertwined histories of the two principal American military forces in the Pacific--Hawaii's "Pineapple Army" and the "Caribao Army" of the Philippines. Both emerged in the wake of the war against Spain; each became, by 1913, a force distinctly different from the normal regimental and division subunits of the U.S. Army. The two armies faced a common problem: how to hold the territory they occupied against a presumably superior Japanese invasion force. And they suffered, together, the slings of neglect from their uniformed superiors in Washington and the arrows of noncooperation and rivalry from the U.S. Navy.

But the two armies were not, as Linn demonstrates in ten thematically organized chapters, simply peas in the same pod. The Pineapple Army developed into a force whose brainy leaders grasped, nearly a decade before Pearl Harbor, the implications of the threat that Japanese carrier-based airpower presented. While it failed to overcome inter-service rivalries over control of land-based air defense of its islands, it nevertheless learned from realistic exercises how to become a formidable counter-invasion force. The Pineapple Army even overcame doubts about the loyalty of Hawaii's large Japanese-American population. The worst of its pre-war interment plans, proposed by General George S. Patton in 1935, presumed the support of native-born Japanese-Americans and proposed rounding up only ninety-seven individuals out of a population of 150,000.

The Caribao Army, by contrast, was schizophrenic almost from the moment of its birth. Was its primary mission preservation of public order

in the Philippines or defense of the islands against Japan? Was the latter task, in fact, necessary and/or achievable? Linn uses Generals MacArthur, *per et fils* to show how the U.S. Army became its own worst enemy in trying devise answers to those questions. Arthur MacArthur became the progenitor of unrealistic notions about the value of Pacific empire but failed to convince his Washington superiors that its retention demanded allocation of sufficient manpower and monetary resources for its defense. His son as Philippine commander in the late 1920's prepared chimerical plans for the defense of Luzon "based on nonexistent troops, weapons, supplies, housing, and finances" (p. 193). But as Army chief of staff in the early 1930's, Douglas MacArthur declined to fight for funds needed to implement them. Then, at the end of that decade, MacArthur as Philippine Field Marshall set out to do the very thing Caribao Army commanders had resisted: create a native armed force capable of defending the islands against Japanese invaders. Linn suggests that General George C. Marshall's emergency deployment of B-17 aircraft to the Philippines in 1941 was more than a "too little, too late" gesture. It was simply the final example of pre-World War II U.S. Army's inability to conceptualize its responsibilities, prioritize them, and close gaps between its commitments and capabilities.

The foregoing summary is but a pale reflection of Linn's thoroughly researched, carefully nuanced, and clearly presented argument. Within the parameters that he sets, he has presented a model analysis of the two largest and most significant U.S. Army forces in the Pacific before the Second World War. The few flaws in his work are minor. While he excels in archival research, he sometimes fails to cite works by earlier scholars who have written on aspect of his topic. He does not include sources whose conclusions he challenges--most notably the various Pearl Harbor armed service and congressional investigations and secondary works about them--in his bibliography. At times, he stumbles with statistics, giving numbers for interracial marriage, venereal disease, rape and sodomy, and drug abuse within the particular forces he is studying without comparing them those for the army as a whole. That renders his generally positive comments about soldiers' relations with "the community" in which they were placed more subjective than they need be.

Nevertheless, American international historians will profit from reading this book as much for what it challenges them to do as for what it tells them. There is, as yet, no institutional study of diplomats or naval men in the Pacific during the first four decades of this century. Linn provides an excellent account of the Pineapple and Caribao Armies but leaves untold the story of other U.S. Army "guardians of empire"--the small force stationed in China, the attaches and language students there and in Japan, and those in uniform in Washington charged with evaluating Japan's intentions and capabilities. Future historians will also want to address the larger, cross-cultural questions that Linn leaves untouched. His guardians constituted the single largest "foreign" presence in America's conquered but culturally different Pacific empire. How did the "natives" perceive them? What difference did they make in the lives of those whom they helped govern and defend? And what effect did they have on the way the American public and policy-makers perceived the lands and peoples of the far Pacific?

If the test of good scholarship is to raise questions about accepted wisdom, provide answers that offer new insight, and pose still other questions for future inquiry, then surely *Guardians of Empire* has passed it with flying colors.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo

Citation: Roger Dingman. Review of Linn, Brian McAllister. *Guardians of Empire: The U.S. Army and the Pacific, 1902-1949.* H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. November, 1997.

URL: https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1441