

immersing ourselves in the dreadful realities of war can we fully understand the plight of ordinary infantrymen coping with nightmarish situations.

In *Flags of Our Fathers*, Bradley voices his bitterness regarding the term “hero” and ascribes his father’s self-imposed silence to this “misunderstood and corrupted word.”<sup>17</sup> James regards the flag raisers of Iwo Jima not as “immortals” but as “boys of common virtue,” emphasizing that they were “ordinary men” who fought just to protect their war buddies.<sup>18</sup> The final scene of the film *Flags of Our Fathers* is the flag raisers cheerfully stripping down and running into the sea, which the dying John Bradley implies is his happiest memory at Iwo Jima. If this is what *Flags of Our Fathers* teaches us to think about war, nothing would be more humane than to cherish the very ordinariness of America’s sons and daughters. ■

## NOTES

1. This phrase is the main title of James Wright’s *Those Who Have Borne the Battle: A History of America’s Wars and Those Who Fought Them* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012).
2. James Bradley and Ron Powers, *Flags of Our Fathers* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), 137.
3. Ken Burns, “Praise for *With the Old Breed*,” in *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*, E. B. Sledge (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), i.
4. The phrase “assault into hell” is the title of chapter four in *With the Old Breed*.
5. Sledge, 153.
6. Makoto Oda, *The Breaking Jewel*, trans. Donald Keene (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
7. Shigeru Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths* (Montréal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2011), 26, 233, 350–51, 356.
8. Bradley, 5.
9. Laura Hillenbrand, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* (New York: Random House, 2009), 375. On the sixth day without water, Zamperini vowed to serve God if He would quench the thirst of the three castaways. The following day, the sky miraculously opened up and poured rain, 152.
10. *Ibid.*, 346–47. The Bataan Death March in the Philippines, for example, is chronicled in Michael Norman and Elizabeth M. Norman, *Tears in the Darkness: The Story of the Bataan Death March and Its Aftermath* (New York: Picador, 2009).
11. Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, “Introduction to a Lost War,” *Japan at War: An Oral History* (New York: The New Press, 1992), 15.
12. Shohei Ooka, *Fires on the Plain*, trans. Ivan Morris (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2001). The film version is Ichikawa Kon’s *Fires on the Plain*, which is available from the Criterion Collection.
13. For another challenge to the idea of the “good war,” see John Bodnar, *The “Good War” in American Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).
14. The video is on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRv7PXU-l2E>.
15. *The Pacific* is based on Robert Leckie, *Helmet for My Pillow: From Parris Island to the Pacific* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010) and Sledge, *With the Old Breed*.
16. Notable books include William Manchester, *Goodbye, Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002); John Wukovits, *One Square Mile of Hell: The Battle for Tarawa* (New York: NAL Caliber, 2007); Gail Charfield, *By Dammit, We’re Marines! Veterans’ Stories of Heroism, Horror, and Humor in World War II on the Pacific Front* (San Diego: Methvin Publishing, 2008); R.V. Burgin and Bill Marvel, *Island of the Damned: A Marine at War in the Pacific* (New York: NAL Caliber, 2011).
17. Bradley, 396.
18. *Ibid.*, 503, 531, 533–34.

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## Joe Rochefort’s War

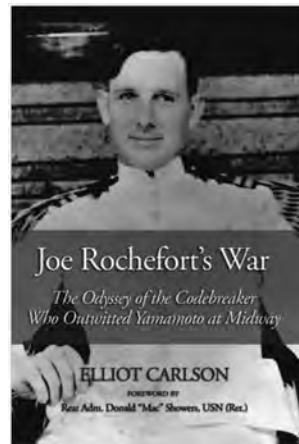
### *The Odyssey of the Codebreaker Who Outwitted Yamamoto at Midway*

By ELLIOT CARLSON

NAVAL INSTITUTE PRESS, 2011

616 PAGES, 978-1612510606, HARDCOVER

Reviewed by Shelton Woods



Elliot Carlson’s *Joe Rochefort’s War: The Odyssey of the Codebreaker Who Outwitted Yamamoto at Midway* is a literary masterpiece. This is a long overdue biography of an individual who helped shape the events of the Pacific War following Japan’s raid on Pearl Harbor. It is not a light read, as each of the 456 pages is packed with first-rate research and brilliant analysis. Carlson’s online audio and video descriptions of his book are helpful for teachers and the general reader. But for this reviewer, it is best to understand this lengthy biography by following the three main themes Carlson weaves in and out of the thirty-chapter narrative.

From the outset, Carlson presents Rochefort as an individual who eschews convention. Ignoring his parents’ desire that he become a Catholic priest, Rochefort quit high school in 1917, lied about his age so he could enlist in the US Navy, and subsequently took another year off his age to be eligible for special training. He married a Protestant (ignoring his parents’ protests) and became a naval officer, despite his meager formal education. Rochefort also exposed professional incompetence—even of higher-ranking officers, calling them “clowns” and “stuffed shirts.” Still, Rochefort dramatically progressed in the navy until, in 1941, he found himself in charge of the decryption unit in Pearl Harbor known as Hypo Station.

In Carlson’s narrative, the bombing of Pearl Harbor opens chapter thirteen—almost 200 pages into the book. Thus, almost half of the book is devoted to introducing Rochefort and the history of code-breaking. Yet, Carlson’s prose keeps the reader engaged, and one wishes for even more information before the volume turns toward the Battle of Midway.

The great mystery of Carlson’s book is not how Rochefort and his team broke the Japanese code (known as JN-25-b), but rather how it was that within months of America’s victory at Midway, Rochefort was unceremoniously removed from his position and reassigned to a dry dock in San Francisco. In short, the second theme of Carlson’s book is the war within the war, i.e., US naval politics. Rochefort was an atypical US Navy officer. He did not receive a commission by attending a college, and he remained an outsider to the fraternity of Naval Academy-educated officers. Such officers viewed someone like Rochefort as a maverick who had not paid his dues in proper colleges where the future officers’ rough edges were chipped away through the discipline of academic and military training. Rochefort openly acknowledged that his mouth got him in trouble,

*The American largely responsible for changing the course of the Pacific War was a high school dropout, but one who never underestimated the need for education, particularly the study of foreign cultures and languages.*

and he probably would have learned to fit in within the military bureaucracy had he attended the Naval Academy. But as noted above, he didn't even finish high school!

There are villains in Carlson's book, and they are not the Japanese. Rather, the scoundrels who derailed Rochefort's career and denied the recommendation that he receive a medal were the officers at OP-20-G, the navy's main cryptography station in Washington, DC. These officers resented Rochefort's direct reporting to Admiral Chester W. Nimitz at Pearl Harbor and wanted Hypo to simply pass on to Washington the intercepted and translated Japanese messages. But, based on his understanding of Japanese language and culture, Rochefort was confident in his abilities to figure out the plans of the Japanese. Carlson notes that Rochefort "reached his verdicts [on what the JN-25-b messages meant] by a combination of deduction and guesswork and an uncommon ability to fill in blanks." (269) But Rochefort's biggest crime against his superiors in Washington was that

he was correct in predicting the Japanese attack on Midway. This meant that OP-20-G officers were wrong in believing it was almost impossible that a large Japanese force would converge on the tiny atoll of Midway. For being right, Rochefort was quietly discredited by his enemies in Washington. Though Admiral Nimitz recommended that Rochefort receive the Distinguished Service Medal immediately following the Battle of Midway, he did not receive it until 1986—ten years after his death. According to Carlson, this was because of naval politics and petty jealousies.

The third theme in this biography focuses on education and particularly linguistic studies. Carlson includes several subtle, yet poignant, examples of how important it is to be multilingual. In 1929, Rochefort moved to Japan and immersed himself in language and culture for three years. Rochefort was a bit unique in this assignment because his wife and son lived with him in Japan. Carlson writes, "of the fifty-five officers who passed through the Japanese language course in Tokyo from 1910 through fall 1941, only three were married". (49) Domestic distractions were to be avoided at all costs because of the time and discipline needed to learn another language and culture.

In another passage, Lieutenant Commander Edwin T. Layton, Rochefort's best friend at Pearl Harbor, recalls the 1925 day when, as an ensign, he and five colleagues were assigned to escort six Japanese midshipmen who had sailed into San Francisco:

*Three [of the Japanese] spoke perfect English, the other three perfect French. 'But here is the real kicker—there wasn't one single US official—no naval officer, or anyone on our side, who could speak one word of Japanese!' Layton recalled. 'I felt ashamed for the United States, feeling that we should have had someone there who could speak Japanese.'* (51)

The American largely responsible for changing the course of the Pacific War never underestimated the need for genuine education, particularly the study of foreign cultures and languages. Perhaps Carlson is challenging our education system with this book. Rochefort was an educated man because he was disciplined, loved to learn, and immersed himself in another language and culture. Yet he never walked down an aisle to receive a high school diploma.

The Battle of Midway is not the focus of Carlson's book. It occupies a relatively small portion of the text. Rather, this book is about a man who was often at the right place at the right time. An individual who enthusiastically walked through professional doors that were opened to him. It is about the underbelly of politics in the US Navy and how Joe Rochefort's personal discipline and love of learning that changed history.


In the classroom, *Joe Rochefort's War* is appropriate for AP high school courses as well as undergraduate lower-division classes. Teachers will particularly appreciate the multidisciplinary character of Carlson's work. For example, there are elements of communication, political science, psychology, engineering, history, and other subjects that are integrated into the narrative. By reflecting upon this book, teachers and students will also appreciate the necessity for understanding history from both sides of the Pacific Ocean. ■

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