

Letters . . .

BRIDGING THE GULF

To the Editor—In “The Middle East: Challenges Born of Success” (*JFQ*, Autumn 95), Ambassador Freeman points out the inadequacies in security arrangements among members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Developing these nations into a collective security organization should be a top priority of U.S. policy. Providing the six GCC members with capabilities to clear mines, track submarines, and assist the United States in maintaining regional security makes sense in military as well as economic terms.

It allows Washington to help foster a standing coalition with a common goal of securing the Persian Gulf for commerce. U.S. policy in the past has been to support one power in the region, which left us at the whim of that regime and exposed us to potential Islamic radicalism and various external threats. A multinational coalition alleviates this problem as the possibility of all the GCC members simultaneously suffering internal or external strife is unlikely. And economically, each nation could contribute to the cost of collective defensive forces.

It is paramount that we take advantage of the cessation of hostilities to shuttle diplomats and defense experts to the Persian Gulf with a strategic plan on which nations in the region can agree. Freeman’s comments on the importance of developing GCC is both timely and pertinent. The next step is to make both military and economic cooperation among Gulf states a national security issue.

—LT Youssef Aboul-Enein, USNRFleet Surgical Team Six

TO BE AMONG THOSE NUMBERS

To the Editor—After scrutinizing the article entitled “Operation Downfall: The Devil Was in the Details” by D.M. Giangreco (*JFQ*, Autumn 95) which criticizes my book, *The Invasion of Japan: Alternative to the Bomb*, I wondered if he had read the same book I wrote. Giangreco reproaches me for things I did not say and views I do not hold. His aim and purpose appear to be to pillory my book because it might give aid and comfort to revisionists. A reader might come away from this article believing that my principal intention was to rehash the seemingly interminable debate over casualties and to find low casualty estimates as part of another effort to prove that dropping “the bomb” was unnecessary. This distorts both my views and purposes in writing *The Invasion of Japan*. Let me try to set the record straight.

While it is impossible to analyze plans to invade Japan without discussing casualties, that was not my chief purpose. The chapter on casualties fills only 10 of 250 pages. While the issue of casualties is the most hotly contested subject in the debate over the atomic bomb, it is far from the centerpiece of my book. Projecting casualties for an operation that never occurred and that was still in the planning stages at the end of the war obscures more than it reveals. We simply do not know what the casualties would have been, and we can never know. With that in mind, I set out merely to determine the casualties that were projected by the *military planners*. Within those limits, the documentary record is not particularly rich, but the numbers I found were not inconsistent with other major operations in Europe and the Pacific. Casualty estimates were made only for Olympic, not for Coronet. Furthermore, I found no revisions of casualty estimates as a result of the massive enemy buildup in southern Kyushu in May through July 1945. I found no original contemporary document that projected the kinds of numbers used by Stimson, Churchill, and Truman after the war (aside from the discredited “Hoover memorandum”). The absence of large casualty estimates does not indicate, however, that the military planners were unconcerned about casualties. Clearly, a major Japanese buildup in southern Kyushu revealed by Ultra intercepts in Summer 1945 shook U.S. planners because it promised to translate into higher U.S. casualties. I *do not* argue that the planners were unconcerned about casualties—only that there is no credible evidence for the large numbers cited after the war. If my numbers give aid and comfort to the revisionists, so be it.

I did not set out to write a book that conformed to a particular interpretation about the end of the Pacific War, nor do I consider myself a revisionist. In fact, I differ fundamentally with most of the conclusions of the revisionists—especially the belief that America utilized two atomic bombs on “an already defeated Japan that was desperately trying to surrender.” Though this issue is much too complex to discuss in detail here, let me say simply that the massive buildup of Japanese forces in southern Kyushu in Summer 1945 did not appear to U.S. planners as if Japan was “desperate to surrender.” Finally, my book looks at the proposed invasion of Japan from the perspective of our own military—a perspective that revisionists have largely ignored.

I tried in *The Invasion of Japan* to have the documents speak and base conclusions solidly on their contents. While readers of Giangreco’s article would not know it, the purpose of my book was not

only to examine casualties and connections between the invasion plans and the bombs but to answer some intriguing, long-ignored questions. Why did JCS choose a strategy of invasion? What were the invasion plans? How were they made? What was to be the role of the Soviets and the British, French, Canadians, and Australians? To what extent did the invasion plans depend on redeploying forces from Europe? No author can account for the intellectual baggage readers bring to his book. I invite Giangreco to reread my work. Perhaps then he will see more balance in it.

—John Ray Skates

To the Editor—D.M. Giangreco provided a spirited critique of John Ray Skates’s recent book in your Autumn 95 issue. For my part, I want to respond to a few points on pre-invasion thinking and sources as well as the use of the atomic bomb. Giangreco states that Marshall, presumably on July 25, 1945 at Potsdam, informed President Truman that total U.S. casualties for the invasion of Japan “could range from 250,000 to 1,000,000.” Giangreco also defends the alleged recollection by Truman, supposedly based on Marshall’s advice, which Skates has challenged.

There is direct evidence on this recollection which neither Skates nor Giangreco consulted that bears directly on the matter: What did Truman recollect, and did Marshall advise him of the possibility of a million U.S. casualties? The relevant evidence has been available for over a decade in the files of the President’s secretary at the Truman Library. They reveal that the famous January 12, 1953 letter by Truman to Air Force historian James Cate (found in volume 5 of *The Army Air Force in World War II*, pp. 712–13), which is the basis of the “million” recollection, was not really by the former President. In a handwritten reply in late 1952, he told Cate: “[At Potsdam] I asked General Marshall what it would cost in lives to land on the Tokio plane (sic) and other places in Japan. It was his opinion that 1/4 million casualties would be the minimum cost as well as an equal number of the enemy. The other military and naval men present agreed.”

In early January 1953 a White House aide, troubled by Truman’s low numbers, decided to inflate them to bring them in line with a claim by ex-Secretary of War Stimson (published in *Harper’s*, February 1947) that military advisors before Hiroshima had estimated a million or more American casualties in the invasion of Japan. The aide acknowledged that Truman’s initial recollection of a quarter million or more U.S. casualties “sounds more reasonable than Stimson’s, but in order to avoid conflict [with Stimson’s claim], I have changed the wording to read that General Marshall expected a minimum of a quarter of a million casualties and probably a much greater number—as much as a

million.” That is how and why the final letter, signed by Truman, greatly inflated the numbers to include a million casualties and therefore is not a reliable source.

Strangely, Stimson’s postwar claim is unsupported by reliable pre-Hiroshima sources that any scholar has unearthed. Admittedly, President Hoover in Spring 1945 did twice suggest very high casualties, but his numbers were quickly dismissed by Army planners, including notably General George A. Lincoln, with whom Marshall agreed. On one occasion, a physicist suggested very high U.S. casualty figures, but there is no evidence that this estimate ever reached Stimson or that the physicist would have been accepted as a credible source on issues which he admitted were beyond his purview. But McGeorge Bundy, Stimson’s ghost writer during the period in question, tactfully acknowledged in *Danger and Survival* (p. 647) that the numbers probably were inflated: “Defenders of the use of the bomb, Stimson among them, were not always careful about numbers of casualties expected.” In short, don’t trust Stimson’s figures.

Importantly, postwar claims by Stimson—both in the *Harper’s* article and a 1948 memoir, *On Active Service*—never included any statement that Marshall was the source for the million-or-more estimate. There is substantial indirect evidence—Admiral Leahy’s diary for June 18, 1945, Truman’s “Potsdam” diary, and Marshall’s August 7, 1945 cable to MacArthur—that Marshall did not make such an estimate before Hiroshima. No scholar (including Marshall biographer Forrest Pogue or the editor of the Marshall papers, Larry Bland) has found any pre-Hiroshima estimate by Marshall that reaches a million or even a quarter million. The highest available number is 63,000. Whether Marshall in fact gave Truman any estimate at Potsdam is even unlikely. No contemporary archival source provides direct substantiation. There is oblique evidence in Truman’s “Potsdam” diary entry for July 25, 1945: “At 10:15 I had General Marshall come in and discuss with me the tactical and political situation. He is a level headed man—so is Mountbatten.” Whether the phrase “tactical and political situation” even referred to the forthcoming Olympic operation (the invasion of Kyushu) is unclear. It may

only refer to the use of the bomb. The evidence is simply inadequate to allow more than a cautious surmise.

Hence, to conclude as Giangreco does that Marshall gave Truman advice on July 25 about a possible million U.S. casualties seems highly questionable. The date of any such counsel, even much lower numbers, is suspect. Moreover, though going somewhat beyond Giangreco’s claims, it is unlikely that Truman ever had a formal meeting at Potsdam with his top military leaders—Marshall, Leahy, King, and Arnold—on probable casualties or the question of using the atomic bomb. None of the available diaries (the archival versions) for Potsdam, including those by Leahy, Arnold, and Truman, as well as those by Stimson and McCloy, mentions such a meeting. Only Truman, well after Potsdam, ever claimed that such a meeting occurred.

At one point Giangreco, apparently conflating casualty with fatality estimates, claims that Skates stated Olympic would not have cost more than 20,000 casualties. Elsewhere, Giangreco admittedly got matters right and notes that Skates foresaw no more than 60,000–75,000 total U.S. casualties, including that upper limit of 20,000 dead, in the entire Olympic operation.

Giangreco is probably correct, as another reviewer of Skates’s book has suggested, that the work could have benefitted from a detailed discussion of how the author arrived at the estimate of 60,000–75,000 casualties. But perhaps such reasoning, with counterfactual scenarios, appeared to be both cumbersome and distracting for an operation that never happened. Nevertheless, Skates’s substantial explanation of his numbers would have been valuable.

In his final sentence, Giangreco mentions possible U.S. fatalities, contends that even a pre- or post-Hiroshima estimate of 20,000 would justify the use of the atomic bomb, and warns against “assuag[ing] the guilt of the revisionists.” One wonders if he is counting Eisenhower, MacArthur, Leahy, King, Nimitz, and other World War II leaders in the ranks of those “revisionists.”

—Barton J. Bernstein
Department of History
Stanford University

SOMALIA LESSONS

To the Editor—I am grateful for the letter from GEN Downing (*JFQ*, Winter 95–96) clarifying the point that SOCOM was not included de jure in the odd command relations which characterized TF Ranger operations in Somalia (though SOCOM de facto involvement probably awaits the future judgment of historians). However, we disagree on the assertion that the chain of command during UNOSOM II was somehow justifiable under current joint doctrine or the Goldwater-Nichols Act. These doctrinal and legislative authorities make CINCs the focal points of operational command in order to give them the greatest possible flexibility in matching command arrangements with unique mission requirements. Of course, neither doctrine nor law can prevent mistakes, such as the one in which CENTCOM decided to retain operational control of a joint force over nine thousand miles away.

The conclusion to draw from that experience is noted in a UNOSOM II after action report: “Unity of command and simplicity remain the key principles to be considered when designing a JTF command architecture. The warfighting JTF commander must retain operational control of all forces available to him in theater and to posture those forces as allowed under UNAAF doctrine.” Even though GEN Downing apparently favors a loose form of “coordination and de-confliction,” in my view on-scene command authority should include control over all assigned forces, including those from SOCOM. While command relationships may vary with every mission, the JTF commander must always be able to say, “You get off the plane, you work for me.” Yet until that concept becomes a standard for delegating combatant command authority, we will have “lessons identified” rather than “lessons learned.”

—COL C. Kenneth Allard, USA
Institute for National Strategic Studies
National Defense University

put your pen to paper . . .

JFQ welcomes your letters and comments. Write or FAX your correspondence to (202) 685-4219/DSN 325-4219, or over the Internet to JFQ1@ndu.edu