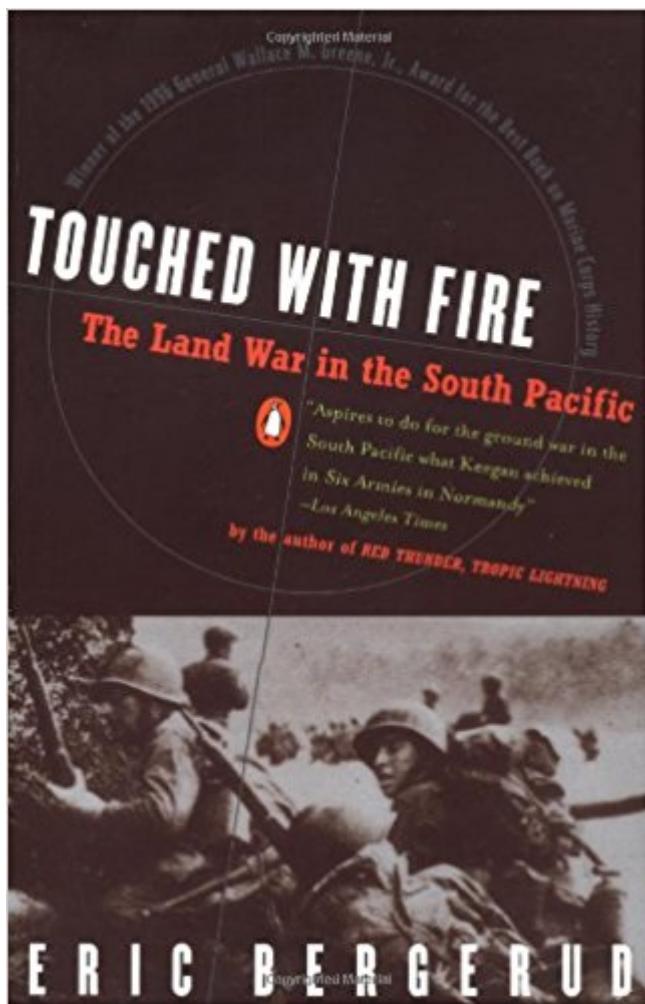


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Touched With Fire: The Land War In The South Pacific



Synopsis

A brilliant history of the land battles in the Pacific theater of World War II, with stirring personal accounts of the horrifying struggle between the Japanese and Allied forces. The horrors of WWII in the South Pacific extended far beyond the detonation of atomic bombs. In this revelatory portrayal of the lives of the regular infantrymen who struggled to contain the Japanese advance, Eric Bergerud has given us a compelling and chilling record of the incredible hardships endured by these soldiers, and the heroic efforts that resulted in the reversal of the course of the war. Bergerud spent hundreds of hours interviewing the last surviving veterans of this remarkable campaign, and he has placed their personal experiences at the center of his analysis of military strategy. Aspires to do for the ground war in the South Pacific what Keegan achieved in *Six Armies in Normandy*. •Los Angeles Times

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Customer Reviews

The South Pacific campaign of World War II set new standards for savagery in modern warfare. The ground fighting reached a peak of intensity when the U.S. Marines landed at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands while the Australians repulsed the Japanese advance across New Guinea. Battling jungle rot and malaria, the Australian Army teamed with the U.S. against the Japanese, whose battle ethos demanded they fight until victory or extermination. In *Touched by Fire*, Eric Bergerud, a professor of military and American history at Lincoln University in San Francisco, restores the campaign to its rightful place of importance as a diabolical struggle for survival in World War II's most heartless terrain. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Turning his attention from the Vietnam War (Red Thunder, Tropical Lightning; The Dynamics of Defeat), Bergerud, who teaches military and American history at San Francisco's Lincoln University, focuses on ground combat in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands from mid-1942 until early 1944-a time when the South Pacific was the focal point of the land war between Japan and U.S. By synthesizing dozens of interviews with American and Australian participants into a strong analytical framework, he provides a definitive presentation of the dynamics of jungle war. Tactics, weapons, morale, medical services, human relationships in squads, platoons and companies-all are covered. The author's sources provide a vivid sense of what it was like to lead a patrol, to survive a firefight and to bury the dead. Bergerud is at his best discussing the strengths and weaknesses of American National Guard divisions that formed the backbone of the U.S. contribution to the South Pacific theater. At times, he seems too ready to take the Australians at their own, high evaluation of themselves-but he is hardly the first military historian to be seduced by the myths surrounding the Australian Imperial Forces. And if his discussion of the Japanese side doesn't match his treatment of the Allied forces, Meirion and Susie Harries's *Soldiers of the Sun* can be consulted for balance. Bergerud makes a major contribution here to our understanding not only of a specific campaign but of the nature of war itself. Maps. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book is what I consider a "Universal Problem Solver" for its subject, which is how land forces fought World War II in the South Pacific. The battles for Guadalcanal, New Guinea, and the Solomons have justly passed into legend in the United States and Australia (and New Zealand to a smaller extent) as a turning point of World War II. They were among the harshest battlefield settings of a war that was noted for ghastly scenes of battle -- thick, disease-infested jungles where large bodies of armed men could easily get lost and run into headhunting cannibals. A Japanese general died in a river flood. Hordes of Japanese troops were felled by the deadly combination of the miserable terrain and their inability to supply their men with food and medicine. On Guadalcanal, the American Marines were abandoned soon after they landed, and had to survive on captured Japanese rations for weeks -- even putting the lone Japanese bulldozer to work to finish Henderson Field. The dozer's operator slept by the vehicle with his rifle -- nobody was allowed near him or it. The book is divided into sections: how the battles were fought, the social roots and technological tools of the combatants, how they operated tactically, and how the men thought, felt, and endured their battles. Everything from medical care to machine-guns are covered, with interesting notes

about how US Marines created fake Japanese "war flags" to sell to gullible US Sailors that they believed had let them down. A good chunk of the book is how the cultures of the various armies affected how they fought the South Pacific War, which was critical. One point that Professor Bergerud makes is that the US Army had become obsessed with and mastered large-scale logistics -- if Hitler asked American generals to prepare a plan for the invasion of Russia, the answer would have been mind-numbing but critical essays on high-viscosity motor oil and anti-freeze instead of crackling Prussian Generalstab arrows on a map, leading to Leningrad and Moscow. The Americans understood that an army had to be supplied to win. *Touched With Fire* is a masterly and detailed work, focusing like a laser on the land crucible of the Pacific war. This will tell you nearly everything you will want or need to know about that war, who fought it, how, and why. Highly recommended.

One of the finest accounts of war in the South Pacific around. Not a literal history - there is a good overview of the war in the South Pacific but it is really about the three armies that fought the ground war (Australia, Japan, and the US), how they fought it, and what conditions were like fighting it. Gives a fair account of each Army. Ever see pictures of the war in the South Pacific taken after the initial landings and the men look like animals? There is a reason for that: a truly inhospitable, unforgiving climate and terrain.

While the book is a little long and repeats itself some, it's a very nice read for an area of the Pacific battle that is not always well covered or remembered except for the honored men that were forced to serve there. It's always nice to show both sides of the coin in any history book and Mr Bergerud does that fairly well. With a nice amount of eye witness stories from the men who served this book is a nice filler for any history reader. Goes well with his other book based on the airwar in the South Pacific. The book is about 50 pages too long, but that's not a real big deal.

This is truly a great narrative. It gave a large and broad picture of the South Pacific and its challenges, which was helpful for my own much more narrowly-focused research on the same subject matter. I regret that I only became aware of it a short time ago, despite its original publication in the mid-1990s, and this was only by a lucky catch. That's too bad, because there are some remarkable first-person accounts included in the text. It reads fast and is pretty accurate.

As a life long reader of World War II history, particularly of the war in the Pacific, I can safely say

that Touched By Fire is one of the best books I have ever read on the Solomons and New Guinea campaigns. I would go as far as to call it a "must read" for any student of the war in the Pacific. I learned things from this book that I never knew before, even after 40 years of reading about the war. Don't miss this one folks.

Bergerud's books on the land and air wars are unlike anything else out there. Rambling, not organized chronologically, but chock full of analysis and insights. Highly recommended.

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