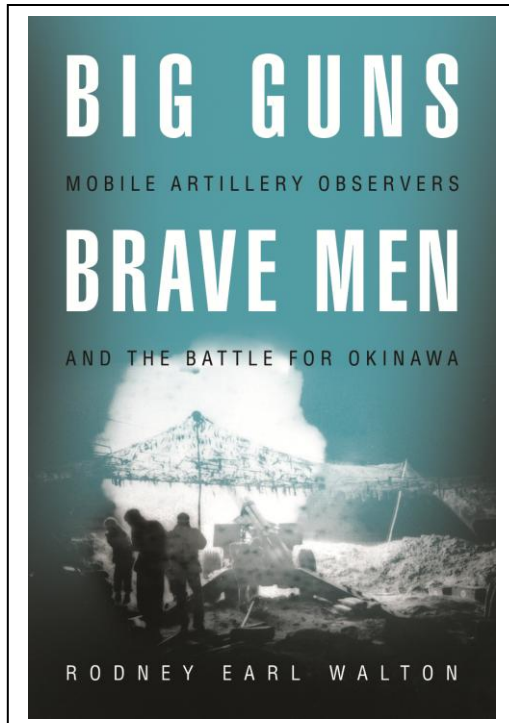




BIG GUNS, BRAVE MEN

MOBILE ARTILLERY OBSERVERS AND THE BATTLE FOR OKINAWA

By **RODNEY EARL WALTON**



“Walton’s work sheds new light on the grim struggle for Okinawa, often characterized as the grunt’s battle par excellence. This masterly account stands as testament to the previously understated role played by a small cadre of dedicated and courageous forward artillery observers and successfully captures the essence of what it meant to be an embedded specialist sharing the hardships and dangers endured by front-line combat personnel.”

—**GWYN DAVIES**, Department of History,
Florida International University

“With both military expertise and a compelling personal perspective, Walton portrays the impact on the battlefield of the Army’s innovative mobile forward artillery observers during the Pacific theater’s largest and bloodiest battle: Okinawa. Drawn to the subject by his father’s Army service in that campaign, the author mined previously underutilized archives, compiled oral histories, and introduced appropriate technical analysis to produce this extraordinary work.”

—**MAJ. GEN. RALPH S. CLEM, USAF (RET.)**

“As a World War II soldier who fought the Japanese in a rifle company of the 96th Infantry Division, I am pleased that the author, Rodney Walton, prepared this book, which describes and explains the important efforts of U.S. Army artillery forward observers during the Battle of Okinawa, Japan. These forward observers were a key element in defeating the Japanese army. Due to their excellent performance and well-trained gun crews, no ‘short’ artillery round hit my Company L. Well remembered is our forward observer, 1st Lt. Ralph Palm, Battery C, 362nd Field Artillery Battalion, who was awarded two Bronze Star medals before being wounded on May 15, 1945.”

—**DONALD O. DENCKER**, historian, 96th Infantry Division
Deadeye Association

Intended as a springboard to an amphibious invasion of Japan, the conquest of Okinawa was the largest, bloodiest battle of the Pacific War and the greatest air-sea battle in history. The scope and intensity of the desperate eighty-two-day battle, however, was overshadowed by the euphoria of VE Day, the sudden, terrifying end of the war with Japan after atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and history's focus on the dramatic fight for Iwo Jima.

While other books about Okinawa have emphasized the role of infantrymen, armor, and U.S. Marines, this work takes a fresh perspective by focusing on the vital role played by the U.S. Army's forward artillery observers. They were the eyes and ears of American artillery and among the least-recognized heroes of the war. Divided into teams consisting of four or five men led by an artillery lieutenant, these observers would spend three days on the front lines directing artillery against enemy positions, return to their artillery battery for three days, and then rotate up to the line of battle again. While trying to maximize the damage inflicted on the enemy, the men had to deal with the ever-present possibility of firing on their own forces. The ability to shift artillery fire throughout the battlefield was a new development in World War II, and its evolution is fully examined in the book. Ultimately, author Rodney Walton demonstrates that U.S. artillerymen matched Japanese gunners in intensity and surpassed them in effectiveness because their forward observers were able to provide a much shorter response time to requests for artillery support.

The son of one of the forward observers on Okinawa, Walton has spent more than twenty years investigating what happened to his father and other artillerymen during this epic battle. Interviews with the artillerymen and the infantrymen they supported are central to his story, which is filled with gripping and sometimes humorous accounts of what happened. The work stands as a stirring tribute from the "baby boom generation" to the "greatest generation."

RODNEY EARL WALTON served in the U.S. Army from 1969 to 1973, including a year with military intelligence in Vietnam. In 1976 he earned a law degree from Cornell and worked as a civil litigation attorney in South Florida for more than twenty years. In 2009 he earned a PhD in history from Florida International University, where he now teaches. He lives in Miami, Florida.

BIG GUNS, BRAVE MEN: Mobile Artillery Observers and the Battle for Okinawa

by Rodney Earl Walton

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