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Sunburst: The Rise of Japanese Naval Air Power, 1909–1941

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essay, Jeffrey Record points out that those who emphasize the failures of civilian policy makers in Washington ignore both the achievements of Vietnamese revolutionaries and “the defective professional U.S. military performance in Vietnam *within* the political limitations imposed on the use of force.” If politicians were stabbing the military in the back, “the military also was shooting itself in the foot.” He concludes that it is unlikely that the United States could have done more than increase the price of an enemy victory. John Prados analyzes the uses of intelligence by both sides, emphasizing the difficulties of the Americans and South Vietnamese in collecting accurate information, and the extent of North Vietnamese and Vietcong penetration of the Saigon government and army. Gilbert challenges the views of Harry Summers, Jr., and William E. Colby, both of whom, he believes, fail to understand that America in Vietnam was betrayed “by its own collective limited vision of the nature of the war and the requirements of victory.” Andrew Rotter examines the respective economic cultures of America and North Vietnam that shaped each side’s response to the war, while Marilyn Young explores the impact of the American peace movement, suggesting that whatever its effect on the length of the conflict, widespread protests “increased the price to the government of continued prosecution of the war.”

In a thoughtful reflection on these essays, Lloyd Gardner writes that “the reality of Vietnam was as elusive to American policymakers as the enemy forces were to the men they sent to this hall of mirrors. They saw only their own reflections, multiplied over and over.” Like policy makers at the time,

many historians have also been in a hall of mirrors, preoccupied with the American side of the struggle. It is the great strength of this volume that, at least in part, it suggests the insights that can be gained by moving beyond the American perspective.

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Peattie, Mark R. *Sunburst: The Rise of Japanese Naval Air Power, 1909–1941*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2002. 392pp. \$36.95

This work compellingly describes how Japanese naval aviation, both land and carrier based—like that of its principal adversary in the Pacific War, the United States—grew to maturity through trial and error. Its maturation period extended from the earliest days of powered flight through the bloody crucible of war with China. The story of U.S. naval aviation during this time is a familiar one, but that of the Japanese is less so, due to the formidable barrier posed by language. As more scholars equip themselves with the tools necessary to mine riches from the sources and publications of a former enemy, however, the other side of the story is becoming known. One such diligent student of Japanese naval history is Mark R. Peattie, familiar as the coauthor (with David C. Evans) of the highly praised *Kaigun: Tactics and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887–1941* (Naval Institute Press, 1997). Holder of a doctorate in modern Japanese history from Princeton University and author, coauthor, or editor of seven other works, Peattie brings unique qualifications to the daunting task.

Sunburst's meat lies in seven chapters that discuss the early development of Japanese naval aviation (1909–21), Japanese naval aircraft and the tactics developed for their employment (1920–36), the design and construction of Japanese aircraft carriers and formulation of doctrine for their employment (1920–41), the Japanese aircraft industry and the design and construction of aircraft (1937–41), and Japanese naval aviation, both land and carrier based during the undeclared war with China (1937–41). Paralleling the wartime experience is a chapter on the development of Japanese naval air power in projecting the empire's power as it prepared for the Pacific conflict. The final chapter, "Descending the Flame," begins with the attack on Pearl Harbor and with the destruction, at sea and under way, of the British battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and battle cruiser HMS *Repulse*. It ends with the battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944, after which "the Japanese Navy never again launched a significant effort to contest the hegemony of the skies over the Pacific."

Augmenting the text are nine appendices: biographical sketches of those mentioned in the text; a glossary of naval aviation terms; the generic organization of Japanese naval aviation; naval aviation ships (carriers, seaplane carriers, and the like); naval air bases and air groups; principal naval aircraft; aircraft designation systems; principal engines; and a description of the "turning-in" maneuver. A common thread found in the graphics that appears throughout the text is the superb work of Jon Parschall, who renders tactical maneuvers, ordnance, aircraft, and ships with equal facility.

Sunburst, which Peattie affectionately dedicates to his former coauthor,

concludes that the "catastrophic collapse" of Japanese naval air power lay in the Imperial Navy's failure "to anticipate the kind of air combat it would be obliged to wage," its failure "to make the right kinds of decisions" to cope with the realities of a "new kind of air war," and, importantly, "the inability of Japanese industry and technology to support Japanese naval aviation against the emerging numerical and qualitative superiority of American air power." In that connection, this reviewer was particularly pleased with how Peattie disposes of the most common of persistent Midway myths, that the battle resulted in the catastrophic loss of aircrew. While heavy, the loss of pilots and observers by no means equaled the loss of the "trained maintenance personnel," invaluable to maintain modern naval aircraft, who went down with their ships. "Similarly," he contends, "the loss of skilled ground crews, often abandoned to their fates when the navy evacuated remaining aircrews from islands under siege, substantially weakened the land-based air groups."

"In the end," Peattie concludes, "the Japanese naval air service was outproduced, outorganized, outmanned, and outfought." Yet in the ashes of defeat, however, "the precision, skill, and . . . technical mastery" with which the Japanese crafted the Zero fighter "gave wings to the phoenix of postwar Japanese technology." Students of the Pacific War will find *Sunburst* (based on an impressive array of Japanese sources, including the official war history volumes and a variety of book or article-length studies) invaluable for its insights on an important subject.

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