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## The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign: Naval Fighter Combat from August to November 1942

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of the line of Japanese cruisers could have been missed at such close quarters—closer than one remembers from previous works on Savo.

There could have been a serious problem with this book. It is obvious this is a labor of love for the ship in which Loxton learned his craft, and for an outstanding captain and crew. The loss of the *Canberra*, and some of the haphazard comments that have been made about the ship, those who sailed in it, and about the service of which it was a part, could have contributed to a desire to overlook flaws or overcompensate in analysis. I do not believe that has happened here. Loxton has done an excellent job, and many myths about the battle of Savo Island are finally laid to rest.

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Lundstrom, John B. *The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign: Naval Fighter Combat from August to November 1942*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1994. 626pp. \$44.95

This book completes John Lundstrom's authoritative two-volume history of the development of U.S. Navy fighter combat tactics, begun with *The First Team: Pacific Naval Air Combat from Pearl Harbor to Midway*, and it reflects the author's firm grasp of primary materials excavated in multiarchival and bilingual research. It masterfully describes and analyzes the pivotal role that U.S. Navy carrier fighting squadrons played between 7 August and 15 November 1942 supporting the first Allied amphibious

offensive in the Pacific, Operation WATCHTOWER (Guadalcanal).

Lundstrom details the pioneering work of Fighting Squadron VF 5 (*Saratoga*), VF 6 (*Enterprise*), and VF 71 (*Wasp*) as they covered the landings in the Solomons on 7 and 8 August. VF 5 and VF 6 went on to fight at the battle of the Eastern Solomons on 24 August and VF 72 (*Hornet*) and VF 10 (which replaced VF 6 in *Enterprise*) at Santa Cruz on 26 October. Both were "desperate carrier slugging matches," Lundstrom observes, "whose level of ferocity was seldom equaled until the Kamikaze onslaught of 1944–1945."

After Japanese submarines sidelined *Saratoga* on 31 August and sank *Wasp* on 15 September, their respective fighting squadrons shifted ashore to ply their trade alongside Marine Corps and Army Air Force units at Henderson Field. "Nowhere else," the author writes, "did aviators fly for months from a squalid airfield perched precariously on the front lines . . . subjected to almost incessant bombing and shelling." Finally, VF 10 from the "wounded but operational" *Enterprise* helped smash the last major thrust by the Japanese to retake Guadalcanal, in mid-November.

While some individuals might complain that an author's intimate familiarity with his subject could tempt him to inundate his reader with trivia, Lundstrom smoothly integrates a wealth of human touches into his narrative. His warriors bob in their Mae Wests miles from rescue on a lonely sea or encounter potent Australian beer; some even brood over the necessity of killing.

The reassessment of the competence of Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher

(the expeditionary force commander) as a combat commander begun in *The First Team* continues, as Lundstrom dissects the admiral's decision to withdraw his three carriers to the waters immediately south of Guadalcanal on 8 August. While some recent authors attribute this to cowardice, Lundstrom sifts carefully through often ignored message traffic, showing that bad communications robbed Fletcher of the important information he needed to make informed decisions. Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner (the amphibious commander) had originally assured Fletcher that the unloading of the transports would proceed on schedule, but his later message canceling the planned withdrawal of his transports and cargo ships never reached the expeditionary force commander. Unaware of Turner's difficulties, Fletcher thus had no compunction about steaming to safer waters south of Guadalcanal (not, the author notes, as far as San Francisco). In that connection, Lundstrom shows that Fletcher, often maligned as an unimaginative surface sailor who never consulted aviators, received concurrence in the decision to withdraw temporarily from Rear Admiral Leigh Noyes, one of his task group commanders, and from Captain Dewitt C. Ramsey, *Saratoga's* commanding officer—both experienced aviators.

Some individuals have accused Fletcher of being over-solicitous of the welfare of his three fleet carriers. Virtually unable to replenish the lost men or planes in the wake of the fierce Japanese reaction to WATCHTOWER (7 and 8 August), Fletcher was forced to contemplate the possibility of wielding a

dwindling number of Wildcat fighters to defend not only his own carriers (themselves a priceless commodity) but the expeditionary force. The "First Team" had no second team to back it up. By wisely husbanding the Pacific Fleet's carriers, Lundstrom argues persuasively, Frank Jack Fletcher quite possibly saved Guadalcanal.

Ample and clearly drawn maps and formation diagrams, as well as seldom-seen photographs, complement the text, but a "dappled" effect mars some of the pictures. Ship nomenclature purists might blanch at *Atlanta* (CL 51)—class light cruisers being consistently referred to as "AA cruisers" (they were conceived as destroyer flotilla leaders but, with their potent dual-purpose five-inch batteries, came to be employed to advantage in screening carrier task forces). Two incorrect hull numbers (probably an editorial lapse) and one misspelled ship name (*Trevor* should be *Trever*) appear in the text.

*The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign's* strengths, however, far outweigh its exceedingly minor faults, and the book commands respect for its thorough research and clear prose. It deserves a prominent place on the reading list of anyone seeking to understand the Navy's role at Guadalcanal. There is nothing that matches it.

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Ballard, Robert B. and Archbold, Rick.  
*The Lost Ships of Guadalcanal*. New York: Warner, 1993. 228pp. \$39.95