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Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb

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to night fighting, but the extent to which that force can be concentrated is a function of the visibility and of the ability of the units concerned to communicate effectively. The difficulties of command at night increase exponentially as the number of ships increases.

Much is said about the failure of radar, but the authors offer little space to its contemporary deficiencies or to the possible variants in radar fits. *Canberra* had recently been fitted with Type 271 radar—but of what mark? Did she have automatic aerial rotation, or was this done by hand? Had *Canberra* been fitted with a Plan Position Indicator (PPI) display? Had any USN ships? What types of radar did the Americans carry? The authors do mention that *Canberra* made a detection at sixty thousand yards, but the context is unclear. Was this the detection of the Japanese force itself or had it been a “best case” detection of known Allied units earlier in the day? The questions run on.

This is not to say that *Disaster in the Pacific* neglects to make some good points. The lack of “battle mindedness,” of which Rear Admiral Richard Kelly Turner, USN, later complained, was the real, final cause of the Allied failure and is especially well illustrated by the mass of survivors’ testimony and the progress of events they retail. The point is that to attempt a “new look” at the Second World War at sea, if it is to produce anything of value, requires considerable technical and tactical expertise as well as the exhaustive research efforts

made by the authors. The weight of material on the 1939-45 naval war awaiting treatment is considerable, both inside and outside official archives. However, it can only be offered as useful evidence when it has been examined in context.

In a historiographic sense, context is created by the deep understanding that can only result from a long and profound acquaintance with the mechanics of the subject under examination. If the value of *Disaster in the Pacific* as a new publication is judged by the extent that it enhances our understanding of the events at Savo, it fails the test.

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Feifer, George. *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*. New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992. 622pp. \$29.95

George Feifer tells us that *tennozan* means a single battle on which a ruler stakes his fate. This book then is misnamed. The battle for Okinawa, from April to June 1945, did not decide the outcome of World War II, nor the fate of either Japan or the United States. It was a horrendous mass killing, but both the battle and the American victory there were inevitable. Okinawa was one more giant step in the stepping-stone strategy that required American Marines and soldiers to assault and seize a seemingly endless string of Pacific islands, which

the Japanese army had fortified and defended to the death. This strategy was to lead to the invasion of the Japanese home islands, which would be, predictably, the most horrendous blood-letting of them all.

If the fierce battle on Okinawa, 350 miles from the home islands, cannot be called decisive, then perhaps the naval battle off its shores against 1,900 suicidal Japanese kamikazes can, for it crushed Japan's air power. The battle of Okinawa was the most massive of the Pacific war (548,000 Americans took part) with the greatest number of casualties (75,000 Americans alone).

This book's strength is in its descriptions of the daily life and attitudes, the fears and atrocities, of the soldiers on both sides during the eighty-two days of the battle. Probably nowhere else in the literature of warfare are there so many descriptions of defecation under combat conditions and the fear of soldiers losing their testicles.

The book also portrays the tragic fate of the tens of thousands of Okinawan civilians who were caught between those two monstrous military forces. The author is quite excited about his discovery that war is hell.

For the professional reader, the battle and the book treat in varying degrees of depth and clarity three major military issues.

First, the Japanese leaders' decision not to defend Okinawa on the beaches as they had done on Iwo Jima and Tarawa, but inland and in depth. Lieutenant General Mitsuru

Ushijima, commander of the Thirty-Second Army, had no hope of driving the invaders back into the sea. His mission was to dig in, hold out, give the kamikazes time to destroy the fleet offshore (they sank 36 ships and damaged 368 more), and disrupt the invasion of Japan. He executed his mission superbly.

Second, the American decision to bull straight ahead down the width of the island (and not bypass the Shuri Line defenses with the kind of flanking landing that MacArthur would try so successfully in Korea at Inchon). As there was on Saipan, this was an Army versus Marine Corps disagreement. Marine Commandant General Alexander A. Vandegrift and Marine Major General Roy S. Geiger, commander of the III Amphibious Corps on Okinawa, tried to convince Army Lieutenant General Simon B. Buckner, Jr., commander of the U.S. Tenth Army, to land the 2d Marine Division behind the enemy. However, Buckner had Anzio in his mind and slogged ahead, playing Ushijima's costly game. He executed his mission appallingly.

Third, the necessity and morality of the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Feifer takes the minority view that the bombs saved more lives than they destroyed because they persuaded the Japanese to surrender without an American invasion. Most American veterans of the Pacific war would agree. The bombs certainly made the deaths and casualties on Okinawa pointless.

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Although the author often writes as though he had marbles in his mouth and piles on the horrors of combat until one's eyes glaze over, this is a powerful book that offers post-World War II generations a clue about what combat in that war was like. This work has been criticized for focusing its attention and anecdotes on the 6th Marine Division alone, but even limited to that part of the battle it is more than long enough.

For anyone who wants to smell and sense the battle of the "grunts," this is an important book that raises difficult questions about why U.S. commanders kept throwing American lives at the already isolated and beaten Japanese.

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Author of *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*

Fuchida, Mitsuo and Okumiya, Masatake. *Midway: The Battle that Doomed Japan, The Japanese Navy's Story*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1992. 307pp. \$29.95

Lord, Walter. *Incredible Victory*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993. 331pp. \$12

Fifty years after the event, the Battle of Midway remains undiminished in its importance to the outcome of the Second World War, and its influence on the course of the Pacific War. Much has been written since these two books were first published, yet they too remained undiminished as classic works on the battle, its import, and its participants.

For the first six months of the Pacific War the Imperial Japanese Navy cut a swath through all opposition, easily rolling up victory after victory. The first setback to the Japanese advance occurred at the Battle of the Coral Sea in early May 1942, when the first carrier versus carrier battle was fought and the American forces succeeded in turning back the intended Japanese assault on Port Moresby. Japan's premier naval strategist, Admiral Yamamoto, was convinced that Japan's only hope for success against the industrial might of the United States in a protracted war rested in luring the American Fleet into a decisive battle of annihilation prior to the effective mobilization of American industry.

Yamamoto selected aptly named Midway Island as the critical strategic base in whose defense the American Pacific Fleet must sortie and engage in battle; however, the United States Navy had broken the Japanese naval codes and was privy to almost all of Yamamoto's operational plans. In the early days of June 1942, two fleets converged on the tiny atoll in mid-Pacific. The Japanese were completely confident in the quality of their machines and their warriors. They had rolled unchecked through all Allied opposition in the Pacific and Indian Oceans since the outbreak of the war, and they vastly outnumbered their adversary. The Americans nonetheless scraped together every ship and airplane available and sortied to lie in ambush northeast of Midway.