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"Midway: The Battle that Doomed Japan, The Japanese Navy's Story" and "Incredible Victory"

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142 Naval War College Review

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.

J. ROBERT MOSKIN

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.

Each of these superb works describes the battle from widely different points of view. *Midway* is a serious and unstinting analysis of the Japanese planning for, and operations during, the battle by two professional career officers of the Imperial Japanese Navy. *Incredible Victory* is a spellbinding narrative crafted from the human impressions of the participants on both sides. Read in concert, each book enhances the other.

Walter Lord mastered in his earlier works on the sinking of the *Titanic* and the attack on Pearl Harbor the technique of weaving together the simultaneous tales of numerous eyewitnesses into a coherent and informative narrative. He is unequalled in his talent for developing a story through eyewitness accounts; as he makes history come alive and gives his reader the sights, sounds, and smells of history unfolding, along with wonder, fear, determination, comprehension, and confusion of the participants.

Both books are tales of courage, and participants on both sides noted with grudging awe the relentlessness and intensity with which enemy aircrews pressed their attacks.

Lord interviewed over four hundred veterans of the battle from both sides, setting their actions against the background of unfolding events so that he could tell history in very human terms. *Incredible Victory* remains the best popular history of this epic battle, and its collection of personal vignettes provides its great attraction to both the general reader and the serious naval historian.

Fuchida and Okumiya both participated in the battle. Fuchida was the senior flight commander for the First Air Fleet but was sidelined at Midway with appendicitis. Okumiyo served in the light carrier *Ryujo* in the Aleutians phase of the operation. Both are particularly well qualified to research and write on the battle; each had an almost unique access to Japanese navy records of the war and its aftermath.

The authors scrupulously examine the Japanese planning and execution of the Midway attack. The key flaws are identified as: a lack of centralized command and control; failure to concentrate forces; failure to conduct an effective reconnaissance of the battle space; and a lack of flexibility in the planning and conduct of operations. They also note that the leadership of the Imperial Japanese Navy had still not recognized the transition of capital ship status from the battleship to the aircraft carrier, and that overconfidence and arrogance following the remarkable series of successes since Pearl Harbor permeated all levels of the navy. The Japanese greatly underestimated the cunning, ingenuity, and courage of their American adversary.

These two classics remain must-read books for any reader interested in this epic naval battle. As Thomas B. Buell notes in his introduction to this edition, *Midway* is "still the best book generally available to Western readers on the Japanese view of the battle."

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