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## Escape from Java: The Extraordinary World War II Story of the USS Marblehead

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connection adequately. Lastly, the North Vietnamese attack on USS *Maddox* (DD 731) occurred on 2 August, not 3 August, 1964. Those nits aside, *Reflections* should grace the bookshelf of every serious student of the POW experience.

On the day that Halyburton departed North Vietnam, he did not plan revenge against his former captors; instead he internally conferred forgiveness on them. That sentiment has characterized the rest of his life. He served another twenty years in the U.S. Navy and twenty years on the faculty of the Naval War College, retiring in 2006 as Professor of Strategy Emeritus. Porter Alexander Halyburton has returned many times to Vietnam, including to the sites of his imprisonment, and he has made peace with his former enemies.

EDWARD J. MAROLDA



*Escape from Java: The Extraordinary World War II Story of the USS Marblehead*, by John J. Domagalski. Havertown, PA: Pen and Sword Books, 2022. 310 pages. \$34.95.

My favorite books are those that begin with a single topic or event and then patiently build the historical context around it. John J. Domagalski's *Escape from Java* does just that. On the surface, it is the story of the heroic crewmembers of the light cruiser USS *Marblehead* (CL 12), who somehow managed to keep their ship afloat and return home. But woven into this story line are both the historical arcs of the Asiatic theater of World War II and the singular rescue story of ten wounded men and one persistent physician. The author's fascination with the Pacific War began at a young age, when he built model

ships and read books about World War II. Now the author of five books and numerous articles, he displays in his writing the characteristics of one who has spent a lifetime studying the topic.

Domagalski begins by describing the U.S. Asiatic Fleet in Manila Bay, the Philippines, where it had been homeported since the U.S. Navy defeated the Spanish navy in 1898. In continuing its historic mission of "showing the flag" in the region, the fleet found itself outmanned and outgunned in the heart of what was enemy territory, considering Japan's desire for land and material resources. One sailor remembered later, "We were aboard outdated, outclassed fighting ships; but with spirit and good morale. Most of us felt that when the 'real thing' came along, we would, at best, fight a delaying action and be rescued by the main fleet" (p. 7).

In December 1941, that "real thing" arrived. Japan launched an attack against the Pacific Fleet on 7 December that was followed by multiple attacks against the Allied forces within the Southern Resources Area, which included Guam, Hong Kong, Malaya, and Shanghai. Ships from the Asiatic Fleet were deployed south to join forces with those of Australia, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. *Marblehead* and the heavy cruiser USS *Houston* (CA 30), operating largely without Allied air cover, fought the Japanese valiantly at the battle of the Flores Sea (also known as the battle of Makassar Strait) in the vicinity of Borneo in February 1942. Although badly damaged, *Marblehead* survived the battle because of the efforts of its resourceful crew. Within a month, though, Japan took control of the region. American, Australian, British, and Dutch forces fought last-ditch

efforts against those of the Japanese, but ultimately they were imprisoned or they withdrew—waiting to fight another day.

The book concludes with two remarkable rescue stories. First, because *Marblehead's* keel had been damaged beyond the capabilities of repair facilities in theater, Admiral Thomas C. Hart ordered the ship to return to America. Owing to Japanese dominance throughout the Pacific, the battered *Marblehead* sailed west to return home, putting in to British ports in Sri Lanka and South Africa before crossing the Atlantic to Brazil and up the coast of North America to the Brooklyn Navy Yard—a thirteen-thousand-mile trip. The second escape story is no less dramatic, recounting the determined and persistent efforts of USN physician Dr. Corydon M. Wassell, who delivered from Java and the collapsing situation in Indonesia to safety in Australia the *Marblehead* and *Houston* patients he had been treating.

*Escape from Java* is masterfully written. What stood out for this reviewer is the author's clear understanding of the geography, history, and geopolitical conditions that shaped the early days of the war. He uses maps to help the reader see where actions took place. While other histories, such as the late James D. Hornfischer's *Ship of Ghosts* (2006), have recounted the Navy's efforts in Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula, the present volume is as clear and unencumbered an account as one might desire. I also appreciate how the author depicts the splendid morale, determination, and resilience of the sea warriors who were faced with impossible odds against their survival. Several members of *Marblehead's* crew received the Navy Cross for their actions fighting the enemy, repairing their ship,

and safely navigating its return through treacherous waters to America. Yet it is the unassuming yet persistent Dr. Wassell who provides the finest model of resilience. *Marblehead's* executive officer stated, "No matter what new or unforeseen difficulties would arise, Commander Wassell always seemed to have something in reserve" (p. 244). The doctor's story was so encouraging that President Franklin D. Roosevelt included it in his "fireside chat" with the nation on 28 April 1942. It also was made into a book, then a 1944 movie by the popular American filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille. *The Story of Dr. Wassell*, starring Gary Cooper, premiered in New York City on 6 June 1944—the same day that Allied forces landed in France.

Wardrooms and chiefs' messes would enjoy reading and discussing this book, as it holds both historical and contemporary significance. Sailors need exposure to their heroic Navy forebears who overcame great adversities in the early days of the Pacific War. Given the importance of the Seventh Fleet in today's context, this book also provides an excellent overview of the nations of Southeast Asia and Oceania, with insight into their geopolitical histories, resources, and cultures.

SCOTT CAUBLE



*Armed Guests: Territorial Sovereignty and Foreign Military Basing*, by Sebastian Schmidt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2020. 270 pages. \$82.

*Armed Guests* by Sebastian Schmidt may have a revelatory feel for military and government practitioners and planners who too often have traveled and deployed abroad without asking