

of the war brought a technical efficiency and capability to naval air power that rapidly eclipsed the awesome, traditional power of the battleship. The aircraft carrier had emerged as the new capital ship. Nevertheless, as a visual manifestation of sheer power, the battleship had an aura of omnipotence which the carrier could never quite match” (136).

Yamato is a slim book with an abundance of excellent illustrations. Knowles provides an assortment of technical information about the ship assembled in a coherent way and background data to place the Pacific conflict in its historical perspective. The author vividly narrates the battles of Leyte Gulf and Ten-Go mostly from the Japanese standpoint, but also integrating it with the American counter-narrative or viewpoint. This is different from the classic Samuel Eliot Morrison Pacific Theatre Second World War book and the more recent and similarly compelling trilogy by Ian Toll. A major problem is the use of only one confusing map to illustrate the locations of the warship manoeuvres and counter-manoevres in the naval battles among the participants. Still, Daniel Knowles’s book is a valuable addition to the library of maritime historians, especially those interested in the design, building, and demise of the largest and most powerful battleship(s) to ever put to sea.

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Mark Lardas. *B-25 Mitchell vs. Japanese Destroyer. Battle of the Bismarck Sea 1943.* Oxford, UK; Osprey Publishing, www.bloomsbury.com, 2021. 80 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index. US \$22.00, CDN \$30.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-47284-517-7.

Air warfare in the Pacific in the Second World War is often thought of as US Navy (USN) aircraft taking off from aircraft carriers to do battle with Japanese aircraft, both land- and carrier- based. Less well-known are the accomplishments of the US Army Air Force (USAAF) in the Pacific—particularly in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. In *B-25 Mitchell vs. Japanese Destroyer. Battle of the Bismarck Sea*, Mark Lardas relates one critical engagement between the USAAF (and aircraft of the Royal Australian Air Force) and destroyers of the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN).

The battle of the Bismarck Sea was a series of encounters between Allied aircraft and Japanese destroyers and convoy ships. In a three-day battle, USAAF B-25 Mitchell medium bombers, RAAF Beaufort torpedo bombers, and RAAF Beaufighter fighter bombers engaged and sank 75 percent of the destroyers and transports. The key to the successful outcome of the battle was the USAAF’s adoption of skip bombing and mast-top bombing. Early in

the Second World War, it was thought that a bomber at higher altitude could sink an enemy ship; experience showed that success using that approach was doubtful at best. The USAAF developed skip-bombing—flying a bomber at low-level, releasing its bombs which would then skip over the water into or near an enemy ship (a similar technique to skipping a flat stone over a pond or lake). Mast-top bombing involved a bomber flying just overhead of an enemy ship and dropping bombs on it. Both skip-bombing and mast-top bombing proved very effective tactics.

The B-25 Mitchell was a medium bomber – a class of aircraft that was meant to attack targets such as railroad yards, enemy emplacements, and the like. The medium bomber was speedy, fairly lightly armed, and carried a payload of 3000 pounds. Experience showed that the Mitchell's defensive armament was inadequate for strafing. Accordingly, the USAAF in the Southwest Pacific modified B-25s (and another medium bomber, the A-20) with up to eight added .50 caliber machine guns in the aircraft's nose and sides. Future versions of the B-25 carried a 75 mm cannon in the nose, as well as the eight machine guns. The result was an effective anti-ship armament that could clear the decks of most enemy ships and their anti-aircraft gun crews.

The B-25's adversary in the Bismarck Sea battle was the Japanese destroyer. The IJN put priority on its destroyer fleet – with heavy main guns and torpedo tubes. Japan had three classes of destroyers in the Bismarck Sea battle, but all had similar characteristics in size, speed, and weaponry. Due to their heavy armament, IJN destroyers were effective in battles in the Solomons (especially in night actions against the USN). But the destroyers had a fatal flaw; the IJN's emphasis on offensive armament in destroyers meant that anti-aircraft weaponry was neglected, both in hitting power and gun crew protection. Both types of IJN anti-aircraft guns – a 13 mm machine gun and a 25 mm cannon – were too light in hitting power to bring down enemy aircraft. IJN destroyers also lacked central fire control, so anti-aircraft fire was not concentrated. Further, skip-bombing and mast-top bombing proved almost impossible for the IJN to counter – the bombs struck the ships before the destroyer could manoeuvre, while the machine guns in the nose of the B-25s suppressed anti-aircraft fire.

In late February/early March 1943, the Imperial Japanese Army needed to transport troops and supplies to the Japanese base at Rabaul. Eight IJN destroyers escorted eight IJN transports, all loaded with troops and supplies. On 1 March, USAAF aircraft spotted the convoy. B-17 and B-24 bombers attacked the convoy but only sank one transport. On 3 March 1943, the USAAF and RAAF attacked the remaining ships in the convoy. By the time the battle ended that night, four of the IJN destroyers and all seven remaining transports had been sunk or put out of action. The following day, USN PT Boats sank

the on-fire hulk of one transport. On 5 March, the PT Boats and USAAF and RAAF aircraft shot at and strafed Japanese soldiers and sailors still afloat – an activity that continued for two more days.

This book is part of Osprey Publishing's *Duel* series, and it follows the series format. The narrative starts with an introduction, followed by a chronology of the Bismarck Sea battle, analysis of the design and development of the B-25 and IJN destroyers; technical specifications for the B-25 and the IJN destroyers, the strategic situation pertinent to the Bismarck Sea battle, analysis of the combatants (the USAAF aircrew were well-trained while the IJN ships' crews were made up of conscripts and not well-trained in their duties), the battle itself, statistics and analysis, and the aftermath of the battle. The book contains many germane photographs, a map, excellent drawings of the B-25 nose armament, and the bombs used. Lardas writes well and the narrative flows.

This is a good book for those studying the Pacific War. This reviewer has one comment – Lardas describes the B-25 Mitchell as “a run-of-the-mill medium bomber with an unimpressive record” (78). While the USAAF modifications turned the Mitchell into a superior weapon of war, American, British/Commonwealth, and Soviet aircrew, who had flown the Mitchell prior to the Bismarck Sea battle, might disagree with Lardas' judgment. Still, students of the Pacific War will enjoy this volume.

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Hans Lengere and Lars Ahlberg. *Fubuki-Class Destroyers In the Imperial Japanese Navy During World War II*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Books, www.schifferpublishingltd.com, 2022. 128 pp., illustrations, tables, notes. US \$35.99, cloth; ISBN 978-0-76436-287-3.

In exploring the design, construction, and role of the Fubuki-class destroyers, authors Lengere and Ahlberg provide a solid and comprehensible technical analysis of an important class of destroyers within the Imperial Japanese Navy during the Second World War. This class of destroyers was once considered to be the most powerful in the world and the first “modern” destroyers. Japan originally built 24 of the Fubuki-class and all but one fought in the Pacific War. The authors systematically take apart these destroyers discussing a myriad of aspects that can be applied to the design of any number of warships.

The book opens with a discussion of the design requirements and considerations that went into a warship that had to meet the unique needs of the Imperial Japanese Navy in the 1920s. They then explore the construction,