

vors removed the wreck of the *Royal George* over time, as it became a hazard to navigation. They employed a simple diving bell, a helmeted diver's suit, and cables in an attempt to lift the damaged hull and move it closer to shore. Finally, the gun powder used to decimate what remained produced several underwater explosions and a spectacular geyser. Another chapter addresses the ship's legacy in British maritime history and concludes with a summary of what became of many of the survivors. A William Cowper poem about the tragedy became incorporated in the Victorian and Edwardian school books and popular anthologies, thereby enshrining the story of *The Sinking of the Royal George* in British naval annals. Rubinstein's book brilliantly covers the multitude of events on many levels. Well-written in clear prose, it is an excellent resource for any maritime historian.

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Robert C. Stern. *Scratch One Flattop: The First Carrier Air Campaign and the Battle of the Coral Sea*. Indiana University Press, www.iupress.indiana.edu, 2019. xiv+314 pp., illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. US \$45.00, hardback; ISBN 978-0-253-03929-3. (E-book available.)

Anyone born after, say, 1960, totally at home with the advanced intelligence and communications technologies of our time and unfamiliar with the details of Second World War naval history will find Robert C. Stern's estimable account of the Battle of the Coral Sea perplexing, to say the least. Although occurring less than eighty years ago, *Coral Sea* belongs to a time seemingly as remote as the Napoleonic Age.

For several weeks in the spring of

1942, specifically between May 4 and May 8, Japanese and American naval task forces built around the still-relatively new weapon system called the aircraft carrier, hunted each other around the Coral Sea and related ocean spaces immediately north and somewhat west of Australia. The Japanese with two heavy and one light carrier were charged with ultimately impossible dual tasks, the first of which was to escort and protect an invasion force charged with taking the strategically important town of Port Moresby on the southwestern coast of what is now Papua, New Guinea. The second was to find and destroy any enemy carrier task forces in the area, whose presence in fact the Japanese were not absolutely certain of until enemy war planes struck the island of Tulagi which Japanese forces had just seized as a shield for their invasion activities far to the west.

Thereafter, both sides, bereft of any precise technical aid beyond the small, crude and relatively slow carrier aircraft of the time, blundered about looking for each other for over 72 hours, coming within fifty miles or so, and ultimately finding the enemy almost simultaneously. Burdened with fragmentary information at best, commanders on both sides made erroneous calculations and reached erroneous conclusions. Stern is generally understanding, if occasionally scathing, in his assessments of opportunities missed, of poor decisions and timidity, and of frustration too readily indulged.

Consider this: having earlier sunk the Japanese light carrier *Shoho*, American scout planes discovered the two-carrier Japanese task force literally within minutes of *Yorktown* and her companion carrier *Lexington* being sighted by a Japanese scout. The American sighting report read as follows. "2 V S 2 0820 BT Contact 2 Carriers 4

Cruisers many DD [Destroyers] bearing 006 120 speed 15.” As the author emphasizes, this seemingly comprehensive message obscured more than it illuminated. “It failed to mention whether the ‘120’ referred to the enemy’s course or his distance from the reference point. It also did not explicitly mention what reference point was being used, the actual known location of *Lexington* when Smith [the pilot] launched or the Point Zed reference point he was supposed to use to confuse the enemy (In this instance, Point Zed was approximately 65 miles northeast of the launching point).” (218)

Modern positioning and communications satellites are not subject to the stresses that Second World War combatants were under as they sought to transmit enemy strength and positions as tersely as possible while always under threat of detection and fiery death.

Once battle was joined over both Japanese and American task forces shortly before noon on May 8, Stern’s account shifts from the tedium of hunt and search to the gut-wrenching ordeal of naval combat. Much of it makes painful reading from an American perspective as the Combat Air Patrol comprised of woefully inadequate Douglas SBD scout-dive bombers and poorly positioned fighters was simply outmaneuvered by the initial incoming Japanese formations from carriers *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku*. Thereafter, the Americans redressed the balance in their attack on the enemy force, sinking no carriers in exchange for the loss of *Lexington*, but badly mauling *Shokaku* and badly weakening *Zuikaku*’s air group.

While the subject of quite a number of books, the Battle of the Coral Sea has found in Stern, this generation’s master story teller. His research into sources on both sides is exhaustive and he has used Japanese translators where neces-

sary and appropriate to best illuminate materials. The photographs and diagrams he has included add to an impressive you-are-there effect. As the above quoted passage suggests, he has placed us back in 1942 on every page, the best kind of history. His effort has taken years of meticulous scholarship and it shows. At the same time, the general reader will enjoy and benefit from this account of the U.S. Navy’s first serious battle of the Pacific War as much as the professional scholar.

At a time when future naval combat is envisaged in terms of hyper-advanced technologies—Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, robotics and the like—it is good to be reminded that there was a time within the living memories of a declining number of us when mass, ignorant armies clashed by day and night, vast air armadas dumped hundreds of thousands of tons of bombs on hapless civilians in often indiscriminate “area” bombings, and admirals flung their young fliers out into the void with nothing in hand save their own eyesight in chancy hopes of finding an elusive enemy.

Highly recommended.

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Evan Wilson, AnnaSara Hammar, & Jakob Serum (eds.). *Eighteenth-Century Naval Officers: A Transnational Perspective*. Cham, SZ: Palgrave Macmillan, www.palgrave.com, 2019. xxi+235 pp., illustrations, tables, maps, notes, index. Euro103.99 €, cloth; ISBN: 978-3-030-25699-9. (E-book available.)

This volume describes naval officer development in seven different nations. Of these, Britain, France, Spain and the Dutch Republic are the four which have the deepest stamp on previous