

**Jeffrey R. Cox. *Dark Waters, Starry Skies: The Guadalcanal-Solomons Campaign, March–October 1943*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Books, [www.ospreypublishing.com](http://www.ospreypublishing.com), 2023. 528 pp., illustrations, maps, table, notes, bibliography, index.**

The Guadalcanal-Solomons Campaign, fought between March and October 1943, was the first Allied land victory over the Japanese in the Second World War. Beginning with a short description of the less-known *Akikaze* Massacre, the book covers the battles and events from Japan's attempts to recapture Guadalcanal, through the Japanese Operation I-Go, the ambush of Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, and finally, the Allied offensive in New Guinea. At first glance, Cox's book does not appear to have much in common with modern academic publications. It does not have a separate introduction, nor a clear statement regarding a central research question or even a central argument. This, however, does not undermine the value of the book. Its role is to dig deeply into every battle and nearly every moment during this little-known period of the war in the Pacific.

As the first victorious Allied land offensive, the Battle of Guadalcanal was second in importance to the Battle of Midway, which doomed four Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) fleet carriers. Historical attention, however, has focused mostly on the early mid-stage of the campaign, which was the initial landing of American forces and the US Marine Corps' defense against the Japanese garrison. It also included the naval battles off Savo Island. Cox examines what happened after Japan's final attempts to regain the upper hand on the island, and to resupply the troops despite losing air supremacy in daylight. What remains unclear for many readers is how the battle connects to the larger strategic picture of the Pacific War.

Cox's main research involves in-depth narratives covering this forgotten period of the war. He begins with a well-written history of the second half of the Guadalcanal Campaign as Japanese forces tried their best to turn the unfavourable tide on the island. This provides basic knowledge to those who are unfamiliar with events, plus adding context to what happened over the course of the war. He does not offer a strategic discussion of actions on either side but focuses more closely on the people involved, such as Admiral Yamamoto, USN. Admiral William Halsey Jr, and General Douglas MacArthur. But lesser, mid-ranking officers are also included, executing their orders while under pressure from those above them. For example, when narrating the IJN's November landing operation, the author emphasizes the roots and consequences of the action. Before drawing a conclusion, he explains why the Japanese were forced to adopt the inefficient, yet partially-practical "Tokyo Express," using destroyers as fast transport to land the troops before sunset. This was due to

a lack of air supremacy thanks to the loss of their airfield on Guadalcanal and the absence of another intermediate airfield in the region. Faced with such a problem, and unable to undertake the large-scale transportation required using merchant vessels, the Japanese Army and Navy were forced to admit that the Battle of Guadalcanal was hopeless.

Another example demonstrates how the author uses March-October 1943 as a bridge between the struggle in 1942 and the triumph in 1944-45. The underperformance of the USN torpedoes in the early stages of the war is well-known among naval historians, if not by ordinary readers. Cox reveals the torpedoes' inefficiency using the example of USS *Trigger's* wartime patrol during early 1943, where the weapons were either duds or missed their targets. Nevertheless, he argues that even malfunctioning torpedoes could damage IJN ships that had no effective convoy escort system at the time. Before the war, the Japanese Navy's limited number of destroyers meant that only obsolete destroyers like *Akikaze* could be allocated to convoy duty. No matter how the ineffective USN torpedoes were, every destroyer lost left the Imperial Japanese Navy one destroyer short. In the end, Japan could not overcome the losses. The IJN then switched to subchasers as a substitute for destroyer, not because they were more effective, but because they were more affordable and had a shorter construction period.

Although the book does not offer a traditional strategical analysis of Guadalcanal, Cox does include a chapter called "Dominoes," which features his strategical understanding of the battles between March and October 1943. In the opening stages of the Pacific War, Cox argues that the fall of Rabaul and Bougainville were well-planned and executed like a game of dominoes, but somehow did not result in the fall of Guadalcanal. He suggests that the Japanese failed to recognize the need to establish an airfield on Munda to support the Guadalcanal operation, and when they finally realized its importance and tried to correct it, it was too late. The author's insights about the importance of intermediate airfields should cause readers to reconsider the strategic importance of these islands.

This book is not light reading—either physically or subject-wise. It is, however, a book that should be read from the beginning to the end without any interruption. It is recommended for everyone who wants to learn more about the Pacific War in 1943.

Kater Yip  
Hong Kong, China

**Andrew Cunningham.** *A Sailor's Odyssey: The Autobiography of Admiral Andrew Cunningham.* Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, [www.usni.org](http://www.usni.org), 2022. (Originally published 1951) 720 pp., illustrations, index. US