

tables of typical data, such as performance parameters, weapons and dates of construction and similar aspects of relevance and interest.

This is absolutely not an academic book, but it can serve as a rough and ready sketch of the American submarine war against Japan. Its small bibliography can at least initiate the exploration of more comprehensive accounts, but it only represents a start. The analysis provided is high level and is fine as far as it goes but is limited with little nuance. Its merits include brevity and can serve as a quick introduction and overview to the subject. The booklet is also well produced as is typical of Osprey Publications and will find a ready audience attracted to such offerings.

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Mark Stille. *Leyte Gulf 1944 (2): Surigao Strait and Cape Engaño*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, www.ospreypublishing.com, 2022. 96 pp., illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. US \$24.00, CDN \$32.00, paper; ISBN 978-1-47284-285-5.

The October 1944 showdown between the United States (USN) and Imperial Japanese (IJN) navies in and around Leyte Gulf enjoys the distinction of being the largest naval battle in human history. The scale of it was so vast that, in writing about it for Osprey's Campaign series, Mark Stille needed two volumes to cover properly its various aspects. Whereas the first volume focused on the attempt by the warships of IJN's First Diversion Strike Force to sink the American amphibious forces stationed off of the eastern coast of the Philippine island of Leyte, the volume under review addresses the destruction of the Second Diversion Strike Force in Surigao Strait and the annihilation of the remnants of the IJN's carrier arm at Cape Engaño.

Both battles reflected the complex nature of the IJN's plan. Known as Operation *Sho-I*, it was an attempt to defend the Philippines from invasion with a single massive effort by the Combined Fleet. Though crippled by the lack of aircraft and experienced pilots, Japan's aircraft carriers were key to the plan, as they were deployed as a lure for the numerically superior American forces. Once William Halsey's Third Fleet was drawn away from the amphibious forces, the First and Second Diversion Strike Forces would converge on Leyte Gulf to destroy them. Stille is highly critical of the plan, noting that by the time the Japanese fleet was scheduled to arrive, the American troops would already have been landed on Leyte, leaving only empty ships to sink. Even if it had achieved that result, the Japanese would then have been trapped between the USN's Third and Seventh fleets and faced almost certain destruction. In this respect, the operation was more about creating "a glorious opportunity

to go down fighting, thus defending the IJN's peculiar brand of honor, than a possibility to affect the outcome of the war" (37).

Stille's focus in this volume on the ancillary aspects of the plan underscores his argument. Not only were the carriers of the deceptively-named Main Body intended as little more than targets for American airpower, but the Second Diversion Strike Force commanded by Shoji Nishimura was so small that Stille argues that it was also effectively a sacrificial decoy. Its claim to fame came in the manner of its sacrifice, as it was destroyed in the early morning hours of 25 October in what proved the last battleship duel in history. The Japanese battleships *Fuso* and *Yamashiro* that made up the core of the force were not only outnumbered by the six battleships of Jesse Oldendorf's Task Group 77.2, but they lacked the fire control radar that proved so effective for the Americans in the darkness. After running a gauntlet of torpedo-launching PT boats and destroyers that knocked out *Fuso*, it was left to *Yamashiro* alone to face the American battleships, which achieved every surface warrior's dream of "crossing the T" and subjecting Nishimura's remaining vessels to the full firepower of the battleships' main guns, as well as those of the accompanying cruisers and destroyers.

In doing so, Nishimura's force served its purpose by occupying the Seventh Fleet's capital ships, just as Jisaburo Ozawa's Main Force accomplished its mission by luring Halsey's carriers and battleships north. Here Stille engages with one of the great controversies of modern naval history by evaluating Halsey's decision to leave the amphibious ships unprotected by pursuing the carriers with his entire force. He points out that Halsey had been directed by his superior, Chester Nimitz, the commander-in-chief of the US Pacific Fleet, to make the destruction of the enemy fleet his primary goal should the opportunity present itself, an instruction the aggressive Halsey hardly needed. Stille also notes that the Americans had no knowledge that the carriers were no longer a threat, and that they believed that the Main Force's destruction would provide the decisive victory many felt had been missed at the battle of the Philippine Sea four months earlier. Yet after presenting the case for the defense, Stille renders his judgment by deciding that Halsey should have divided his forces, even though doing so flew in the face of USN tactical doctrine because it left the fleet vulnerable to defeat in detail. Nevertheless, Stille concludes that for all of the lack of imagination displayed by Halsey, the United States Navy did indeed win a decisive victory at Leyte Gulf by inflicting a "calamitous" attrition on the IJN that ended their ability to conduct large-scale operations.

Stille's book is an impressive exercise in concision, as he compresses into less than a hundred well-illustrated pages two important components of a massive naval clash. He presents the details of it with an assuredness that reflects his considerable experience writing about the Pacific war for

Osprey's various titles. Yet most scholars already familiar with the battle will find nothing that is new within its pages, as the author's bibliography consists entirely of a collection of the "greatest hits" published about it over the past 75 years. While he uses these to write a work that is a good introduction for someone new to the subject, anyone who has already read the fine books published about the battle by Samuel Eliot Morison, C. Vann Woodward, or H. P. Willmott can afford to pass on this one.

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Keith Thomson. *Born to be Hanged: The Epic Story of the Gentlemen Pirates, Who Raided the South Seas, Rescued a Princess, and Stole a Fortune.* New York, Boston and London: Little, Brown & Company, www.littlebrown.com, 2022. 371pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. US \$32.00, cloth; ISBN 978-0-3167-0-3611.

Although there have been many nonfiction books about the pirate era, occasionally one work sets a new standard for this genre. *Born to be Hanged* achieves this benchmark. It is maritime history, almost written in the style of an adventure novel. The vivid narration features graphic accounts of sea and land battles, treasure seeking, fierce storms, perilous jungle treks and river rides, mutinies, and improbable plot twists.

The book is divided into three sections: "The Sacred Hunger for Gold, The South Seas, and Straits." The main protagonist is Basil Ringrose, supported by many colourful characters such as Bartholomew Sharp, Lionel Wafer, William Dampier, Edward Cook, John Cox, William Dick, and "a cameo" featuring Henry Morgan. Ringrose was a surgeon who joined a buccaneer band led by Sharp in 1679. They crossed the Isthmus of Darien to attack Panama, and later, seized a ship to cruise the eastern Pacific. Leadership disputes erupted and the pirate alliance broke up. Ringrose and Sharp continued on sailing around Cape Horn for the first time from west to east. They journeyed to the Caribbean, and later arrived at Dartmouth, England, in 1681. As the tale unfolds, Thomson ponders the character traits of these unusual and complex characters. This account was largely based upon Ringrose's supplement to John Esquemeling's 1685 book *The Buccaneers of America* and influence by Dampier's *The Campeachy Voyages* and *A New Voyage Round the World*.

The first part introduces the maritime adventurers in the quest for riches, largely gold and silver, valuable commodities believed to be found on the isthmus of Panama in the Darien jungle. Much of this section involves the search for a kidnapped indigenous Kuna princess, and a wild trek across the jungle and tempestuous rivers from the East Coast to the west ending in the