

World War, but which rendered the ship obsolete at the end of the conflict. News that the ship would be scrapped was met with sadness and dismay, illustrating the deep devotion the populace had for their namesake ship, and the cultural impacts of the ship's service and disposal.

Wright's exploration of the history of the HMS *New Zealand* captures the politics, events, and technology of the Dreadnought Age. The construction of large warships at the time demanded political motivation as well as financial commitment and indicates the lengths nations would go to in the name of national prestige. Despite their naval role, warships like HMS *New Zealand* had a cultural impact on both the nation of New Zealand and on citizens of the British Empire around the globe.

Michael Razer
Ward, Arkansas

Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr. *Crushing the Japanese Surface Fleet at the Battle of the Surigao Strait: The Last Crossing of the T.* Havertown, PA: Fonthill Media, www.fonthill.media, 2022. 238 pp., illustrations, abbreviations, appendices, bibliography. UK £25.00, cloth; ISBN: 978-1-78155-873-7.

The naval history of the Second World War is full of dramatic moments. The *Bismarck's* only sortie, Midway, the Marianas Turkey Shoot, and of course, the Battle of Leyte Gulf all stand out not just because they catch the public's attention, but because of their significance to the war in general. Surprisingly, most people think of the Battle of Leyte Gulf only in terms of the sinking of the Imperial Japanese Navy's *Musahi*, or of the epic fight of the destroyer escorts against the main force of the IJN. As incredibly heroic as that battle was, and it was essential for the preservation of the invasion force, there was another side of the fighting for Leyte Gulf that many people forget. To the south of Leyte, in the Surigao Strait, the very last major surface engagement between battleships was fought on the night of 25 October 1944. Overshadowed by the fighting the next day, the battle of the Surigao Strait saw the last time naval vessels were able to cross the T on an opposing force and played an essential role in protecting the Allied landing forces in Leyte Gulf. By preventing a southern force from breaking into the anchorage, the US Navy managed to reduce the threat at Leyte and prevented an epic disaster. Yet, the battle of the Surigao Strait is almost never talked about.

Noted historian and author Walter Zapotoczny Jr. attempts to rectify this problem. Over the span of ten chapters and eight appendices, Zapotoczny sets up the Battle of Leyte Gulf and specifically, the fight for the Surigao Strait. In doing so, he brings a wide assortment of materials together to support our understanding of the events, starting with a discussion of the importance of

crossing the T and providing a background to the reader about other notable battles in which this happened. In chapter one, Zapotoczny builds upon this starting point to relay the events in the southern Leyte Gulf. Chapter two examines the strategic situation in the Pacific by 1944. Both chapters three and five examine the evolution of naval doctrine within both the American (chapter 3) and Japanese (chapter 5) navies and how it evolved over the course of the war. Chapters four and six examine the American invasion of the Philippines and the Japanese plans to counter this invasion. The remaining chapters examine the battle itself, the battle of the Surigao Strait, the after-action reports of the battle and, lastly, chapter ten provides a battle analysis. This is supported by eight appendices that examine everything from the nature of the individual fleet units to the weapons being used. They also provide biographies of three key admirals and a discussion of ship readiness and the material conditions in the fleet.

Combined, the material presented by Zapotoczny is most impressive. Well written with a lively prose and clear focus, it is an enjoyable read that provides a unique understanding of arguably one of the most significant aspects of the battle for Leyte Gulf. His inclusion of the evolution of doctrine and, by extension, training and planning for operations provides a very valuable insight into how naval technology and thinking changed during the war. It also puts the fighting within the greater context of strategic thinking at the time, something that is often not discussed by most authors. Most readers will find that to be a unique contribution to their understanding of the naval war and as such, will broaden their grasp of the subject. Yet despite that, there is actually very little about the battle of Surigao Strait. Only one chapter really deals with the battle and, despite the incredible set up to get there, it feels like a bit of a letdown. So much more could have been said about the battle, so many aspects of the fighting elaborated upon, but the reader is left with a feeling that the account is a bit too brief. Yes, chapter 9 includes many of the after-action reports of the ships involved, but this does not really help the reader at all. While interesting and a rich source of information, the after-action reports are a bit disappointing as they are not particularly well worked into the text and are very difficult to follow if the reader has limited experience with such materials. They seem like a superfluous addition to the text, something far better suited to an appendix.

Despite how enjoyable the text is to read, and the incredible material being presented to the reader, there are some serious issues here that need to be addressed. For a book on the battle of the Surigao Strait, it offers very little about the battle itself. Since it is always overshadowed by the battles to the north, that does the reader a disservice. Rather than the after-action reports, I would have loved to see a better breakdown of the battle. Supported by the

doctrinal material in incredible appendices, a thorough discussion of the battle would really have been a superb addition to the literature on the Second World War. Without it, the book misses a grand opportunity to really make us rethink its importance. This problem is only magnified by the absence of citation. How a text with such a wealth of technical material and incredible analysis cannot have a single endnote is beyond this reviewer. Certainly, it fails to meet the academic standard there. Sadly, it also undercuts the authority of the text and raises questions about accuracy and authenticity. That is heartbreaking considering the author's outstanding research.

Overall, I recommend the book as an introduction to the study of the Battle of Leyte Gulf and the naval war in general. The discussion of doctrine and the related materials make it worthwhile. I also recommend it to anyone interested in naval history as it presents many things that they will find fascinating. The reader is cautioned, however, to back up this work with other sources to help validate and support what Zapotoczny has provided.

Robert Dienesch
Belle River, Ontario