

Chinese naval developments and readers interested in the historical background behind contemporary Asian military affairs, as China and the United States once again dance over Taiwan.

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**Brett Mason. *Saving Lieutenant Kennedy: The Heroic Story of the Australian who helped rescue JFK*. Sydney, AUS: University of New South Wales Press, [www.unsw.press](http://www.unsw.press), 2023. 272 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index. AUS \$34.99, paper; ISBN 9781-74223-787-9. (E-book available.)**

On the evening of 7 August 1943, two Allied naval officers met on the shoreline of Gomu Island, in the Solomon Islands, and shook hands for the first time. One was a middle-aged Australian coast-watcher, operating behind enemy lines providing information to the Allied forces then locked in bitter fighting with the Japanese. The other was a young United States Navy lieutenant whose PT boat (PT 109) had been rammed and sunk by the Japanese destroyer *Amagiri* in Blakett Strait a few days before. At the time, both men had no inklings of the importance of this meeting. The Australian was Royal Australian Navy Lieutenant Arthur “Reg” Evans, and the other was Lieutenant John Fitzgerald Kennedy—a future President of the United States of America.

Evans had seen the explosion on the night 2 August when PT 109 was rammed, and the next morning dispatched groups of Solomon Islanders to investigate. Meanwhile, Kennedy and his surviving crew members swam to a nearby island with Kennedy, a strong swimmer, towing one of his badly injured crew members behind him. Eventually, on the morning of 5 August, two Solomon Islanders (Eroni Kumana and Biuki Gasa) found the survivors of PT 109 on Naru (Gross) Island. Kennedy scratched out a message on a coconut and requested this be delivered to Allied forces. This coconut with the words “Nauro Isl Commander. Native knows Pos’it. He can pilot. 11 Alive. Need small boat. Kennedy.” It later sat on Kennedy’s desk in the Oval Office as a reminder of his service in the Southwest Pacific.

On the morning of 7 August, Evans sent another Solomon Islander who spoke excellent English, Benjamin Kevu, to Gross Island with a note for the Senior Officer – Gross Is. On arrival, Kevu met the tired and dishevelled Kennedy and handed him Evans’s note detailing the rescue plan with the polite words, “I have a letter for you sir.”

Lieutenant Evans arranged for Kennedy to be brought to his island hideout and the two men then discussed the details of the plan to have the survivors extracted by PT boat. On the morning of 8 August, PT 157 rescued

Kennedy and his surviving crewmen. Kennedy was later awarded a Navy and Marine Corps Medal (the highest non-combat USN decoration for heroism), and continued to serve in the USN until he was medically discharged due to injuries he suffered when PT 109 was sunk.

Kennedy's political career took off in 1947 when he entered the House of Representatives (Boston) and by 1953 he was a Senator for Massachusetts. When he became President in 1960, his wartime exploits came to the fore and a search began for his wartime saviour. Eventually, Evans and the Solomon Islanders were located and Evans and Kevu later visited Kennedy in the White House in 1961-62. The men who saved Kennedy and his crew were later immortalised when the movie *PT 109* was released in June 1963. Kennedy also met with the commanding officer of *Amagiri*, Lieutenant Commander Kohei Hanami during a visit to Japan in 1962.

The book, however, does not just cover the lives of Kennedy and Evans or the tactical events involved in the rescue of Kennedy and his crew. Woven throughout the book is the higher-level story of Australian and American relations from 1941 onwards. Before Pearl Harbor, the average Australian knew little about the United States other than imported vehicles and what they saw in the movie theatres. This was all to change in early 1942, when the first US soldiers arrived in Brisbane in a troop convoy diverted from the Philippines. The men were the first of many thousands of US service personnel who arrived in Australia from 1942-45 and changed the strategic focus of the country from Great Britain to the United States. Author Brett Mason, a former Australian Senator, diplomat and academic, has done an excellent job detailing the shift in Australian foreign policy through the lens of the fighting in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea, where the Australian and American forces fought side by side to defeat the Imperial Japanese forces. That road was not always smooth, either tactically or strategically, but it was a path that both nations willingly chose.

My only concern with the book was the vague or poor use of some military and naval terminology, but overall it is a very good read, especially for those seeking a better understating of the background of the creation of the Australian-United States strategic alliance.

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**Andrew Monaghan and Richard Connolly (eds.). *The Sea in Russian Strategy*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, [www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk](http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk), 2023. 272 pp., illustrations, index. UK £14.99, paper; ISBN 978-1-5261-6878-8.**