

Brian Lane Herder and Paul Wright (illustrator). *British Pacific Fleet 1944-45: The Royal Navy in the downfall of Japan*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, www.ospreypublishing.com, 2023. 80 pp., illustrations, tables, maps, diagrams, reading list, index; US \$31.00, paper: ISBN 978-1-4728-5677-7. (E-book available.)

The British Pacific fleet was neither needed nor wanted for the final operations around Japan, but it went anyways to fight alongside the Americans. With the surrender of the Italian fleet and winding down of the European war against Nazi Germany, the Royal Navy's battleships, aircraft carriers, and cruisers were short of useful employment, and the last opportunity for major fleet actions was now in the Pacific. Despite serious shortfalls in logistics, the British Pacific Fleet performed just enough fighting and left a favourable impression with American admirals it was associated with to get a little glory and a front-row seat to the signing of the Japanese capitulation in Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945. The British Pacific Fleet (BPF) was symptomatic of a Royal Navy that chose prestige over practical expediency at the end of the Second World War.

Brian Lane Herder, the author of several Osprey offerings dealing with the Pacific, North Africa, and US Navy battleships and gunboats, is an academically trained military historian working as a legislative librarian and contributes the research and writing behind this No. 3 *British Pacific Fleet 1944-45* in Osprey's growing Fleet series. The United Kingdom-based marine artist Paul Wright, a frequent and highly regarded Osprey illustrator, provides accompanying original artwork in colour. The book follows the standard series format – limited to 80 pages in length with four unnumbered sections, a further reading list, and an index. Colour diagrams showing formations and cruising/fighting dispositions and maps are included, common to previous titles in the series. A selection of greyscale and colour photographs come predominantly from official repositories, museums, and photograph-licensing vendors. Those highlight ships, events, and personages mentioned in the text.

The first section describes the genesis of the BPF, its principal objectives, and its eventual deployment against Japan. Earlier in the war, Britain suffered terrible losses leading to the fall of Singapore, the main British fortress and base with naval facilities in Asia. A Japanese carrier task force ranged into the Indian Ocean, forcing Admiral James Somerville's eastern fleet to fall back on the Mombasa naval base in East Africa, not Madagascar (p. 6), which remained under Vichy French control until May 1942. Herder raises USN Admiral Ernest J. King's objections to sending a British fleet to the Pacific and the political decision at the inter-allied Octagon conference to do so. The next section gives details on the fighting strength of the BPF from the largest

battleship to the smallest XE craft (midget submarines). The centrepiece was a fast carrier strike force which adopted American task force nomenclature, either Task Force 57 or Task Force 37 depending which US fleet it was working with. Due to manning shortages, the Royal Navy looked to the Commonwealth and dominions for personnel to fill out ships and air crews. Herder states fully 25 percent of the fleet air arm contingent serving in the BPF came from New Zealand. Aircraft were a combination of British and American types, each used according to its strengths and weaknesses in the combat air patrol and strike roles. A very useful diagram with a text box explanation shows the three layers of air defence above the carriers and consorts in formation.

In the third section, American influence is shown to have been very important to the command and operation of the BPF. British Admiral Bruce Fraser insisted that US Navy practices and methods be adopted wherever possible, so that the British Pacific Fleet came to resemble and act just like another task force according to the latest US Navy tactical orders and doctrine. Much depended upon the rapport established between American and British admirals on the spot who made the relationship work with some degree of humour and mutual respect. In terms of intelligence, the BPF relied heavily on American sources, and information was shared almost completely between the two navies. Perhaps the most interesting part of the book deals with logistics. The British Pacific Fleet's main base was located in Sydney, Australia, far from the main area of active operations. A service squadron, known as the fleet train and designated TF-112, provided underway replenishment, repair, and other services at sea. A diagram and text box shows the standard logistic support group replenishment formation consisting of tankers with escort carriers and other convoying warships performing abeam and astern refuelling, at times simultaneously. The Royal Navy learned quite a bit about logistics from the Americans and pioneered many of its own methods and lessons, but even with only a partially filled-out British Pacific Fleet it was barely sufficient, and only then with considerable American assistance. The BPF intended for late 1945 and 1946 to assist in the invasion of Japan was probably logistically unsustainable and it is good that the war ended sooner than expected.

The fourth section covers the battle performance of the BPF. Operations covered include air raids against targets on the island of Sumatra, participation with American naval forces in Operation Iceberg for the invasion of Okinawa, and various air strikes on Japanese airfields and other installations, including on the home islands. The Japanese resisted by launching waves of mass suicide attacks by kamikaze planes. British warships proved remarkably survivable in the type of naval warfare waged in those last months of the war. Herder gives more attention to the British Pacific Fleet's involvement in the surrender ceremony at Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945 than the multitude of tasks after

that date that challenged and engaged the British, particularly as a colonial (and earlier defeated) power trying to reassert its authority and sovereignty.

Whether the British Pacific Fleet is deserving of its own title so early in Osprey's Fleet series might be debatable, but the book furnishes a good summary of the Royal Navy's work with the Americans and its participation in the last naval operations against Japan, limited as it was. As is standard in the series, no references are given and further research can be done in the books and articles listed at the end, which includes two of Herder's other Osprey titles. The graphics and artwork stand out as the most original contributions to the topic. *British Pacific Fleet 1944-45* is recommended for readers interested in naval history, the war in the Pacific against Japan, naval carrier aviation, and the Royal Navy in the Second World War.

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Dwight Sturtevant Hughes and Chris Mackowski (eds.). *The Civil War on the Water: Favorite Stories and Fresh Perspectives from the Historians at Emerging Civil War*. El Dorado hills, CA: Savas Beattie, www.savasbeattie.com, 2023. xxx+305 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, index. US \$32.95, hardback; ISBN 978-1-61121-629-5. (E-book available.)

Although the Civil War was principally fought on land, naval and mercantile maritime operations were a crucial component of the conflict. In a letter to James C. Conkling, President Abraham Lincoln wrote that "Uncle Sam's web-feet should not be forgotten. [The enemy appears] on the deep sea, the broad bay, and the rapid river, but also up the narrow, muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp."¹ In spite of this, comparatively little has been written about the Civil War's maritime events in comparison to its many land battles. *The Civil War on the Water* is an attempt to correct this gap. This new work is a compendium. It contains 44 essays, assembled in historical order, written mostly over the last decade by an eclectic group of maritime historians. The primary editor, Dwight Hughes, is the author or co-author of 19 of these snippets of Civil War maritime history, a celebration of Emerging Civil War's 10th anniversary. The narrations are quite eclectic in their focus, but they do offer fresh accounts on both familiar and less-familiar topics. They reassess

1 Abraham Lincoln to James C. Conkling, 26 Aug. 1863, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, (1953–1955), vol. 6: 409–410.