

John T. Mason Jr. *The Pacific War Remembered: An Oral History Collection*. Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, www.usni.org, 2019. xix+373 pp., illustrations, maps, appendix, bibliography, index. US \$34.95, cloth; ISBN 978-0-87021-522-3. (Originally published 1986.)

Every naval officer should read this book. *The Pacific War Remembered* is a collection of oral histories from US Navy protagonists in the Pacific theatre of the Second World War. First published in 1986, it is easy to see why the Naval Institute Press saw fit to reissue it now. It enriches our historical memory of the war against Imperial Japan while imparting a personal touch. At the same time, it abounds with insights into our age of renewed great-power strategic competition in the Pacific. These are personal remembrances that feel ripped from the headlines.

Transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson declared that “there is properly no history; only biography.” In other words, history is the sum of the individual biographies of the people – the quick and the dead – who comprise humanity. *The Pacific War Remembered* adds to that sum by bringing in voices seldom afforded prominent billing in the history books.

Firstly, historians have a hard time writing about junior officers and enlisted folk. Official histories tend to record what high-ranking officers do in wartime. Their words and deeds are matters of public record and they often write memoirs. People occupying the lower echelons toil away in obscurity for the most part, meaning there are fewer archives to consult when researching them. They have to do something splashy to merit mention in the histories. By contrast, this collection includes accounts from enlisted sailors alongside those from captains and ad-

mirals. It also pays attention to the experiences of junior officers – albeit junior officers who achieved high rank by the time they were interviewed for this work. The book thus helps correct our tunnel vision vis-à-vis the deeds of the good and great.

Second, editor John T. Mason Jr. goes out of his way to amplify voices from beyond the US Navy’s glamour communities. It is natural for writers to accentuate the feats of carrier pilots, destroyer sailors, or submariners. They do battle with the enemy. Their stories exude human drama and sell books. Battle stories have their place in historical accounts and are present here. For example, aviator Admiral John S. “Jimmy” Thach recalls how, as a junior officer before the war, he sat at his kitchen table, night after night, devising his “weave” tactic for air combat. The Thach weave helped pairs of US fighter planes work together to offset nimble, fleet-of-foot Japanese Zeros that flew against them. US fighter squadrons deployed the weave to good effect at the Battle of Midway – hence its enduring fame. Thach goes on to describe the death of his ship, the aircraft carrier *Yorktown*, during the battle’s waning stages. This makes compelling and important reading.

Even more compelling, though – for this reader, anyhow – are testimonials from the supporting arms that made it possible for battle forces to achieve victory at sea. Navies can accomplish little without lavish logistical support and infrastructure, much of it improvised. For instance, Captain Willard G. Triest reminisces on his experience as a Naval Construction Force (soon to become known as the Seabees) officer during Operation Bobcat, a base-building project early in the Second World War. Then a lieutenant, Triest was stationed at Quonset Point in Rhode Island. He recalls how, on New Year’s Eve 1941, he was assigned to design and construct

a “supersecret” base on Christmas Island, around 1,000 nautical miles south of Hawaii. The base would furnish Australia-bound shipping its first stepping-stone across the Pacific Ocean.

Outfitting the base involved erecting infrastructure to support 5,000 army troops and refuel ships headed down under. This might sound like workaday routine for any construction corps given that such bodies exist to build things. But the timeline was daunting. Triest exclaims that all design work had to be done “and the equipment accumulated—about twenty thousand tons of it—and loaded on two ships in Quonset Point in two weeks—I repeat in two weeks!” An old German map and a movie that happened to feature the site for the facility were their guides to Christmas Island terrain. The navy lacked expertise on pipelines and tank farms, so project overseers hurriedly reached out to private industry to recruit officer and enlisted specialists. With diligent effort and timely help from higher-ups – Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest King helped the Seabees override bothersome rules and regulations – freighters laden with builders and hardware steamed off for the Pacific by the deadline.

Triest’s account sets the tone for chapters on such topics as how navy underwater demolition teams prepared beaches for US Marine Corps amphibious assaults on island strongholds like Saipan, Tinian, and Okinawa. Salvage officer Rear Admiral William A. Sullivan recounts clearing Manila Harbour of sunken ships and debris strewn about by retreating Japanese occupiers to impede efforts to return the shipping hub to service. There is even an amusing tale from a maintenance officer assigned to drydock the battleship *Iowa* for shafting work at short notice. *Iowa*’s skipper, evidently a cowboy of a shiphandler, pulled into the dock too fast, backed down hard and disturbed the blocks emplaced be-

low to support the battlewagon’s hull once the water drained out. What is a maintenance superintendent to do?

Fleet designers obsess over funding and constructing fighting ships, aircraft, and armaments. Emerson would approve of *The Pacific War Remembered* as history – but this treatise reminds posterity that there is far more to naval warfare than battle. Neglect mundane-seeming capabilities at your peril.

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Stephen L. Moore. *Rain of Steel: Mitscher’s Task Force 58, Ugaki’s Thunder Gods, and the Kamikaze War off Okinawa*. Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, www.ussnip.org, 2020. 456 pp., illustrations, notes, glossary, appendix, bibliography, index. US \$39.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-68247-526-3. (E-book reviewed.)

In his book *Rain of Steel*, Stephen L. Moore follows the exploits of Task Force 58 during the last year of the Second World War. While focusing on the kamikaze campaign off Okinawa, he also examines raids on shipping and the destruction of the last remaining elements of the Imperial Japanese Navy. He hits all the high points well known to most students of the period: the attacks on radar picket stations off Okinawa, the tremendous damage done to *USS Franklin*, *USS Laffey*, and the search for and sinking of *Yamato*, and its escorts. He examines the campaign against the kamikaze threat from multiple angles, including the efforts to build, and coordinate effective fighter screens and tactics, as well as the need to attack airfields around Japan, in order to catch planes before they could attack.

For casual students of the events of the last year of the Second World War in the Pacific, this book serves as an