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Fateful Rendezvous: The Life of Butch O'Hare

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Guard at War is arguably one of the best written books on the U.S. Coast Guard's role in combat operations.

DENNIS NOBLE
Sequim, Washington

Ewing, Steve, and John B. Lundstrom.

Fateful Rendezvous: The Life of Butch O'Hare. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1997. 408pp. \$32.95

Edward H. "Butch" O'Hare is among a select handful of relatively junior naval officers to achieve lasting fame for service during the Second World War. He singlehandedly denied a wave of eight Japanese bombers a clear shot at USS *Lexington* in February 1942, shooting down or severely damaging six of the attackers. The country needed heroes during those dismal early days of the war, and Lieutenant (j.g.) O'Hare's Medal of Honor-winning feat brought him instant national fame, rapid promotion, and well deserved squadron and carrier air group commands during the following twenty months. On the night of 26 November 1943, Butch O'Hare failed to return from a night mission, and the cause of his fate has been a matter of contention since.

Steve Ewing and John B. Lundstrom have written an extraordinarily complete, highly sympathetic, and easy-reading biography of one of the Pacific war's most public heroes. Steve Ewing is senior curator at Patriot's Point Naval and Maritime Museum in Charleston, South Carolina, and has written several books on naval topics, including *American Cruisers of World War II* and *USS Enterprise*. John B. Lundstrom is curator

of American and military history at the Milwaukee Public Museum and has authored two books on naval air combat in the Pacific.

Extensively researched and well documented, including new sources from the Japanese side, the authors' work apparently leaves very little of O'Hare's life and legacy unexamined. The most enlightening chapters focus on several key questions. Was Butch's appointment to the Naval Academy a "payback" for his father E.J. O'Hare's cooperation with the Treasury Department in its fight against organized crime in Chicago in the early 1930s? Why was E.J. O'Hare gunned down gangland-style in 1939? Did Al Capone order his killing as revenge for E.J.'s help in sending him to jail? How did E.J.'s son Butch nearly annihilate a formation of Bettys (Japanese bombers) inbound on an attack against the almost defenseless "Lady Lex"? What caused Butch's disappearance during night operations west of the Gilbert Islands? Was it mechanical failure, a lucky Japanese hit, or friendly fire? The author's analysis of these issues is thorough and convincing.

Besides simply being a fascinating biography, *Fateful Rendezvous* is a wonderful description of naval aviation during the period and gives the reader an excellent feel for air combat at the squadron and personal levels. Ewing's and Lundstrom's storytelling abilities bring to life this facet of the war, which is lost when one limits one's reading to the lives of the likes of MacArthur, Spruance, and Nimitz.

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