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## The Battle of Tassafaronga

Charles O. Cook Jr.

Russell Crenshaw

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use the Eighth Army in the southern Philippines, and for forcing the Australians into unnecessary fighting in the East Indies in 1945.

Levine's *bête noire* is Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell. His analysis of Stilwell's actions ignores the difficult political and military situation of the China-Burma-India theater, added to British and Chinese recalcitrance at the highest levels. The author has little to say about the 1944 Japanese offensive in China, precipitated by Chiang Kai-shek and Major General Claire L. Chennault's disregard of Stilwell's sound tactical advice. One can also debate the author's statement that the northern Burma campaign was a "mistake." He goes even farther afield when he claims erroneously that General William Slim was the only British officer who could get on with Stilwell.

The author is also gratuitous in his criticism of other military leaders. Two examples will suffice. Without explaining the difficulties involved in checking the Japanese tide of 1942, Levine pontificates that General Archibald Wavell's strategy was "disastrously bad" and even denounces (without details) his earlier Middle East policy. Later he devotes considerable ire to attacking the plans for the invasion of Japan. Levine simply assumes that naval and air action would have ended the war without an invasion. That proposition has been questioned by other authors and is still open to debate.

Measured by the objectives stated in the introduction and by the many errors of omission, this is a flawed book that adds little to the literature of the Pacific War.

HARRY A. GAILEY  
San Jose State University

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Crenshaw, Russell. *The Battle of Tassafaronga*. Baltimore, Md.: The Nautical

and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1995. 214pp. \$29.95

This history and analysis of a night engagement in World War II is an interesting, well written addition to what has already been said about the desperate naval actions in the Solomon Islands. The new ground covered in this book is mainly a perceived failure by all the commands, from Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Area (CINCPAC) and the Commander, South Pacific Force and Area (COMSOPAC), to ensure that submarines were sufficiently acquainted with the new SG surface search radar and how to best use it, particularly during night engagements.

A series of major naval battles began in the vicinity of Guadalcanal in August 1942, when the Japanese first attempted to build up their forces on that island. But after Tassafaronga they gave up the effort and began to remove them. Like most naval engagements in the Solomons, Tassafaronga was fought at night, and it was more nearly a barroom shootout than a measured and deliberate Battle of Jutland. Gunfire at desperately close quarters invited confusion and threatened the loss of command on both sides. Uncertainty as to whether various targets were friendly led to unfortunate delays in opening fire. Russell Crenshaw fought in the battle of Tassafaronga as the gunnery officer of the destroyer USS *Gwin*. Having engaged in various research projects after his retirement, Crenshaw undertook the task of finding out "what really happened" in this night action.

What actually happened was that the battle was fought by the United States with insufficient regard for the hazards of night fighting and even less for the benefits of SG radar. The Americans, with that prize, could have opened fire accurately at a range exceeding the reach of Japanese detection and have

out maneuvered them to maintain the advantage. There was no need for the suicidal infighting that had distinguished earlier battles. Nevertheless, this battle, once started, soon degenerated into a melee.

The burden that was put upon the officer in tactical command (OTC), the commanding officers, and some others at that moment, particularly if the officer was a newcomer to this kind of mayhem, seems not to have been fully recognized. Indeed it seemed to take a little exposure to this hellish environment before an OTC or commanding officer could keep his wits about him. The deafening crash and blinding flashes of one's own guns, the reports of casualties, and other matters to do with the battle all crowded in on one's ability to make decisions promptly, in logical order, and wisely. At least a little disorientation in a novice was almost inevitable, and that night the American OTC was Rear Admiral Carleton Wright, a novice—a fact that must have been known to COMSOPAC, who himself was a novice.

Crenshaw suspects that both CINCPAC and COMSOPAC were remiss in not instituting a vigorous, ad hoc training plan for SG surface search radar, however modest. By such means, a satisfactory doctrine for night engagements might have been established. But it finally happened only after Tassafaronga.

This little book provides an informative and satisfying opportunity for this member of the Black Gang of one of COMSOPAC's other cruisers to learn more about what went on topside on one of those runs up the Slot.

CHARLES O. COOK, JR.  
Captain, U.S. Navy, Retired  
Bristol, Rhode Island

Rose, Lisle A. *The Ship That Held the Line: The USS Hornet and the First Year of the Pacific War*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995. 309pp. \$34.95

*The Ship That Held the Line* describes the one-year career of USS *Hornet* (CV 8). Best known as the means of launching the Doolittle Raid against Japan in April 1942, *Hornet* survived barely six months thereafter before being lost in the battle of Santa Cruz.

Lisle Rose obviously cares a great deal about his subject. It is an interest that was inspired by Alexander Griffin's wartime offering *A Ship to Remember*. Building on that foundation, Rose succeeds in fleshing out the institutional personality of CV 8, and he is particularly good in describing living conditions aboard a wartime aircraft carrier. From its captain to the aviators to the engineering gang, the author provides a look at the various departments that made *Hornet* run. Oddly, though, we are not told the ship's commissioning date until nearly the end of the book; the carrier sank one year and one week after breaking out its pennant.

As well as he describes *Hornet*, however, it is obvious from the first chapter that Rose is unfamiliar with naval aviation itself. The text contains more than two dozen factual or technical errors, including erroneous phraseology and descriptions. For instance, in describing an arrested landing, the author gets it backwards by stating that an aviator "made a shaky catch of number five hook." Other examples abound, including the reference to nonexistent wing guns in SBDs and other aircraft. Nor is the author better versed in organizational matters. Throughout, he refers to "Air Group 8" when he means "Hornet Air Group." The first numbered air group was CVG 9, established in March 1942; the actual CVG 8 stood up in June 1943 and had no connection with *Hornet*. Similarly,