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Combined Fleet Decoded

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Prados, John. *Combined Fleet Decoded.* New York: Random House, 1995. 803pp. $35

John Prados's *Combined Fleet Decoded* is a history of American naval intelligence with respect to the Japanese navy in the Pacific in World War II. He is the author of the well received book *The Soviet Estimate: U.S. Intelligence Analysis and Soviet Strategic Forces* and the coauthor of a volume on military history, *Valley of Decision: The Siege of Khe Sanh.* His *Combined Fleet Decoded* describes how the massive contributions of U.S. naval intelligence formed the crucial edge for victory over a very competent Japanese navy and naval air force. Prados supports his assertions with evidence obtained through massive research.

This work has many strong points. It is an inclusive study of American naval intelligence, not limited to signals intelligence, that explores the contributions of prewar work by American naval attaches in Japan, interrogations of Japanese prisoners of war, photo reconnaissance and interpretation, the capture and translation of documents by Nisei (second-generation Japanese immigrants) and American spies, technical intelligence, the use of coastwatchers, and the development of intelligence estimates. (The last item is the precursor of today's national intelligence estimate, probably the most important document produced by the American intelligence system.) The author repeatedly shows the effectiveness of American naval intelligence, not only at Midway but in countless other examples. For instance, in 1942 U.S. naval intelligence knew as early as 17 April of Japanese plans to capture Port Moresby in early May by way of the Coral Sea. He casts new light on the repercussions of General Douglas MacArthur's loss of the Philippines at the beginning of the war—namely, the island of Luzon had been a "major center" in the U.S. effort to break Japanese naval codes.

Combined Fleet Decoded contains excellent biographical sketches of senior Japanese naval officers. The author also includes a careful description of Japanese naval intelligence and its various weaknesses, buttressing the latter discussion with numerous examples of failures. For example, in 1941 Japanese intelligence regarding Australia was "thin" despite the possibility that Japan would invade it, and Japanese intelligence officers had little information about American carrier groups. Japanese aerial reconnaissance was deficient during the early part of the war, because there were no specialized reconnaissance planes in the naval air force.

Although its virtues predominate, this book does have several weaknesses. Prados goes into too much detail at times. For example, his description of Admiral Isoroku Yamato's quarters on the *Nagato* before the attack on Pearl Harbor and what food he ate in them adds nothing to the narrative. The maps are not of good quality, certainly not what one would expect. Also, Prados occasionally goes beyond his evidence: he writes of what was running through the mind of Radioman Second Class

Stewart T. Faulkner when the Japanese bombed Guam 7 December 1941, but Faulkner is not listed among those whom the author interviewed. However, these minor flaws should not detract from one's appreciation of this excellent work.

This study is of considerable importance for the national security community, as a skillful integration of intelligence and military history—something of a rarity until the recent appearance of Gerhard L. Weinberg's *A World At Arms* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994). John Prados also reminds us that force without the imaginative use of intelligence is "sterile"—a truth ignored for the most part and to its detriment by the German army when it invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 with minimal knowledge of that country. Finally, the author points out that intelligence interpretations at headquarters are often less acute than those of officers in the field. For instance, after the Doolittle raid on Tokyo the leadership of Op-20-G (Communications Security Section, U.S. Navy, Washington, D.C.) expected a retaliatory Japanese raid on the U.S. West Coast—a notion that, fortunately, Commander Joseph Rochefort in Hawaii ridiculed on the basis of the lack of Japanese support forces for such an escapade. An analogy for the Eastern front is that Soviet deceptions were taken seriously by German Army Headquarters but were quickly seen through in the field.

I strongly recommend this book to those interested in either naval intelligence or naval history. For those who insist that these two fields are inseparable, this book is a gem.

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Winton, John. *Ultra in the Pacific: How Breaking Japanese Codes and Ciphers Affected Naval Operations against Japan, 1941–1945.* Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1994. 247pp. $22.95

Declassification of voluminous U.S. government records related to cryptologic operations in World War II has led to significant revisions in our understanding of that conflict. British author John Winton has made an important contribution to the growing body of books on the subject. With excellent credentials as a historian and writer strengthened by fourteen years of service in the Royal Navy, Winton has skillfully used both American and British sources to craft a readable and persuasive case for the invaluable role of U.S. and Allied codebreakers in the sprawling naval war against Japan.

ULTRA was the cover name for the intelligence product derived from exploitating military communications through breaking codes and ciphers, in conjunction with traffic analysis, high frequency direction-finding (HFDF), and radio "fingerprinting." U.S. naval cryptologic operations were conducted by the Communications Security Group, Op-20-G—the lineage of which can be traced to the Code and Signal Section of the Office of Naval Communications, established in 1924. Winton provides excellent coverage of