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On the night of 8 February 1904, ten Japanese destroyers set out for Port Arthur, the Russian naval base at the tip of Manchuria's Liaotung Peninsula. Although war had not yet been declared, the destroyers launched their torpedoes at the unsuspecting Russian fleet anchored in the roadstead just outside the harbor. In the ensuing conflict, Japan was victorious on land and sea. Its naval victory, orchestrated by Admiral Togo Heihachiro, was especially impressive in its economy and totality. This victory resulted from two distinctly different naval campaigns which employed distinctly different methods. The first was an eleven-month war of attrition against the Russian Pacific Squadron which ended with the fall of Port Arthur on 1 January 1905. The second was a two-day battle of annihilation which destroyed the transplanted Russian Baltic Fleet in the Tsushima Strait on 27-28 May 1905. This apparently schizophrenic philosophy of command was actually Togo's response to the constraints of two different sets of strategic circumstances.

The underlying cause of the hostilities was the exploitation of China. Japan had waged war against China in 1894-95, emerging with possession of Formosa and the Liaotung Peninsula as well as a huge indemnity. Europe, however, did not look kindly upon competition from this Asian upstart. France, Germany, and Russia intervened to force Japan to relinquish its claims upon the Liaotung Peninsula, and Russia soon began to stake some claims of its own. In 1896 Russia secured a right-of-way through Manchuria in order to extend the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Vladivostok. One year later she installed herself on the Liaotung, acquiring in Port Arthur a much coveted warm-water port. By employing intrigue, bribery, and intimidation, Russia expanded her presence in Manchuria to the point of virtual annexation.

Ronald Andidora earned his bachelor's degree in political science at the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania and his juris doctorate at the Dickinson School of Law in Carlisle. He has served as assistant counsel to the Pennsylvania Senate and currently is Director of Senate Research Staff in Harrisburg.

Meanwhile Japan bristled, enlarged her armed forces, and forged a defensive alliance with Great Britain. The 1902 treaty with England provided that one signatory would aid the other only in an Asian war between a signatory and more than one other power.[1] Thus, Japan could count on England to serve as a bulwark against the intervention of other powers in the almost inevitable future conflict with Russia. The Japanese were clearly preparing themselves for a war to avenge the insult of 1895 and regain a dominant position in China.

When the Czar's intrigues were extended to Korea, Japan felt threatened. The Japanese viewed Korea the way the British have traditionally viewed the Low Countries: as a dagger pointed at their nation's heart. Accordingly, once Japan became convinced that diplomacy alone could not keep the Russians out of Korea, she decided to seek the military solution.[2]

The Japanese intended to enter Manchuria by landing their First Army in Korea and driving north across the Yalu River. Once the Yalu crossing was made, additional armies would be landed directly on the Liaotung Peninsula. Japan's success on land was contingent upon moving swiftly; the Yalu River had to be crossed and the passes into Manchuria secured before the Russians could mass sufficient strength to block them. Therefore, the army chose to land at Chemulpo (Inchon) on Korea's western coast. But this plan would be entirely dependent upon the establishment and maintenance of command of the sea by the Japanese fleet. Chemulpo was less than two hundred and fifty miles from Port Arthur and the proposed landing sites on the Liaotung Peninsula were much closer to Port Arthur than that. Failure at sea would force Japanese armies to land at Fusan (Pusan) on Korea's southeastern coast. A drive from Pusan would require the Japanese divisions to march nearly the entire length of the Korean peninsula. This would give the Russians additional time to block the approaches to Manchuria as well as to redress their local inferiority by redeploying troops from Europe. Of course, failure to maintain sea control would also jeopardize the communications and supply of any Japanese forces which were deployed onto the Asian mainland. Thus, the responsibility for success or failure in the coming struggle rested heavily upon Admiral Togo and his fleet.

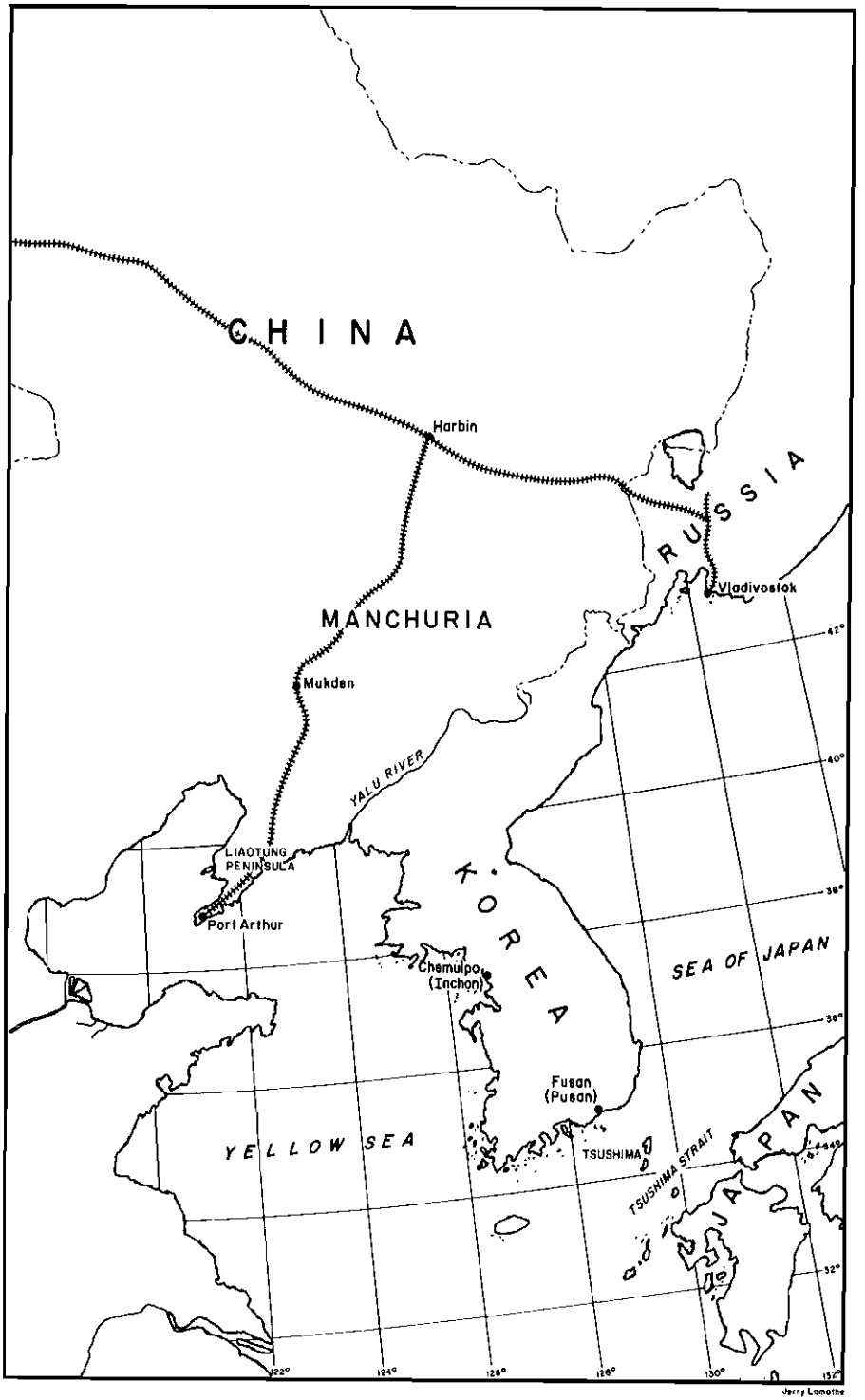
While serving as a naval cadet in England, Togo adopted Lord Horatio Nelson as his inspirational model. There were certainly elements of Nelsonian audacity in the naval war with Russia, most notably the preemptive torpedo attack at Port Arthur and the decisive victory at Tsushima. But Togo's conduct between these two dramatic episodes was judicious, often deferring the destruction of his enemy in order to minimize the risk to his own forces. Upon close scrutiny, even the boldness of the first night's operation is diminished. Togo risked only his destroyers in the surprise attack at Port Arthur. Many sources, including one of the Japanese destroyer commanders, questioned this perceived timidity, wondering if the commitment of Japan's

whole battle fleet could not have attained a decisive victory on the first day of hostilities.[3]

But an examination of the mission and resources of the Japanese navy shows that Togo's policy was prudent rather than timid. As an island nation, Japan needed to establish and maintain sea control in order to project her land forces onto the Asian mainland. Of course, by destroying the enemy fleet, he could alleviate any threat to the army's—and the country's—communication and supply. But if he suffered great losses in the process, Japan could still lose the war when Russia's Baltic Fleet was redeployed to the Pacific. The Japanese had no reserve fleet and no capacity of its own to build ships larger than destroyers. Except for two recently purchased armored cruisers then in transit, Togo would have to fight the whole war with only those ships currently on hand. Those ships were formidable, giving the Japanese commander local superiority in both quality and quantity. The six battleships and six armored cruisers of Togo's battle line were faster and hurled a heavier aggregate broadside than Russia's seven battleships and four armored cruisers.[4] In addition, the three most capable Russian cruisers were ice-bound at Vladivostok when hostilities commenced. Japan also had a substantial edge in protected cruisers and torpedo craft.[5] Japan's material superiority was further enhanced by the superior training and morale of her naval personnel. The Emperor's ships were manned by well-trained, confident crews and commanded by officers whose devotion to their profession bordered on fanaticism. This was in stark contrast to the Czar's vessels where sullen men were led by officers who owed their positions to family connections and had little inclination to learn the skills of their profession.[6]

The generally positive state of Japan's naval affairs still contained one troubling aspect. Togo's advantage in firepower, other than that which was attributable to the proficiency of his gunners, was based primarily upon his secondary armament and the quick-firing eight-inch batteries of his armored cruisers.[7] This translated into more guns which could fire faster, but at a shorter range. His material meshed nicely with Nelson's doctrine of "hail of fire," to which the Japanese adhered in their tactical thinking. Its stated objective was to close on the enemy and overwhelm him with a superior volume of gunfire.[8] But, acceptance of this doctrine magnified Togo's strategic dilemma. In closing on the enemy, he would expose his battle fleet, Japan's *only* battle fleet, to extensive damage before the bulk of his own armament could be effectively employed. Throughout his operations against Port Arthur, Togo never judged this to be an acceptable risk. Instead, he chose to neutralize the Russian fleet without seeking a decisive engagement.

Togo opened his naval campaign by sending a cruiser force to Chemulpo to cover the landing of the army's advance parties. News of the amphibious operation was never communicated to the Russians at Port Arthur due to the cutting of Chemulpo's telegraph cable. Thus, Port Arthur's defenses were


CHINA
Harbin
RUSSIA
Vladivostok
MANCHURIA
Mukden
YALU RIVER
LIAOTUNG PENINSULA
Port Arthur
KOREA
Chemulpo (Inchon)
SEA OF JAPAN
Fusan (Pusan)
YELLOW SEA
TSUSHIMA
TSUSHIMA STRAIT
JAPAN
42°
40°
38°
36°
34°
32°
122°
124°
126°
128°
130°
132°
Jerry Lamothe

unprepared for Togo's torpedo attack which damaged two battleships and a cruiser, rendering them temporarily unseaworthy. The assault also produced a paralytic psychosis among the officers and men of the Czar's Pacific Squadron. Togo sought to prolong this condition by establishing his fleet as a debilitating omnipresence in the Russian psyche. Japanese destroyers continuously prowled the waters around the Liaotung and the battle fleet appeared periodically to subject Port Arthur and its naval contingent to long-range bombardment. Also, on three occasions, the Japanese tried, though unsuccessfully, to bottle up the Russian fleet by sinking merchant ships in the harbor's channel. Although the channel remained open, it was not much used. Togo's tactics succeeded in keeping the Russians in such a demoralized state that the sea lanes were surrendered to the Japanese largely by default.

Togo was aided in his efforts by a Russian naval strategy which accepted no risks whatsoever. The proper employment of the Russian Pacific Squadron would have been to assume a limited tactical offensive against Japan's maritime supply lines while preserving itself as a fleet-in-being until it could be combined with the Baltic Fleet. However, the Russian naval leadership at Port Arthur generally remained in the harbor and employed its ships as a "fortress fleet." There were benefits to this strategy, as it added naval guns to the town's defense and preserved the fleet as long as the town held out. But by allowing unhindered Japanese deployment and supply, the strategy also facilitated the success of Japan's armies, thereby speeding up the capture of the port and the loss of the fleet's sanctuary. Furthermore, the inactivity served to further erode the morale of the Russian crews and, conversely, elevate that of the Japanese to an unshakable ascendancy.

This lethargy was not in evidence during the brief tenure of Admiral Stepan O. Makarov as Russia's fleet commander. Makarov arrived at Port Arthur on 7 March and accelerated the pace of both fleet operations and repair. His destroyers immediately began to patrol against their counterparts and his heavier ships soon began to sortie in opposition to the bombardments of the Japanese battle line. Togo already knew of Makarov's aggressive naval philosophy through his study of the Russian admiral's book on tactics. He decided to exact a fee for the boldness of his new adversary by mining the harbor's passageway. On 12 April the battleship *Petropavlovsk* struck one of these mines and went down in a brilliant flash. With her went Makarov, the soul of Russia's Pacific Squadron. Gloom and inactivity soon returned as the Russian watchwords at Port Arthur.

Togo suffered his own disaster on 16 May when the battleships *Hatsuse* and *Yashima* also struck mines and sank with heavy loss of life. This dangerously reduced Japan's margin of superiority at a critical moment. The six Russian battleships at Port Arthur were now all seaworthy and the Vladivostok Squadron was cruising the Sea of Japan, sinking merchantmen. Makarov would have exploited the situation to make Togo's life miserable. But his

successor, Rear Admiral Vilgelm Karolvitch Vitgeft, was not so inclined. The new commander eschewed all maritime operations and let his fleet languish in the harbor, yielding its men and guns to the forts for their landward defense against the developing siege. When he finally went to sea under direct orders from the Czar, it was merely in an attempt to escape to Vladivostok before his ships were lost to the siege.

Placing his flag on board the battleship *Tsarevitch*, Vitgeft led his five other battleships, four cruisers and ten destroyers out of the harbor on 10 August. Togo met him in the Yellow Sea with his four battleships and four of his armored cruisers, plus his usual legion of smaller cruisers and torpedo craft.[9] (The other armored cruisers had been assigned to Admiral Kamimura Hikonojo, who was attempting to neutralize the troublesome Vladivostok Squadron.) Realizing that a decisive victory could not be obtained without unacceptable risk to his diminished force, Togo adopted a course of action which sought to block the way to Vladivostok. The Japanese commander attempted to turn the Russian line by using his superior speed to sail across its course. He maintained a distance of 7,000 yards or more while doing so. This served to limit the running gun duel to a contest between the main batteries of the battleships.

The Russian fleet did not cooperate, however. It countered the Japanese maneuvers and conducted a surprisingly effective long-range fire, while always maintaining its course towards its chosen sanctuary. But at 5:45 p.m., with only one-half hour of daylight remaining, Japanese guns found the range of the *Tsarevitch*. Two twelve-inch shells slammed into the flagship, killing Vitgeft and jamming the ship's steering wheel, causing her to circle back through her own battle line. Chaos immediately ensued among the other Russian ships. Prince Esper Ukhtomski, on the battleship *Peresvyet*, restored some order by signalling "follow me" and heading for Port Arthur. Five battleships, one cruiser and three destroyers made it back. Of the others, only the small cruiser *Novik* was sunk, the remainder finding their way to neutral ports where they were interned for the war's duration.[10] The Japanese battle line had closed on the Russian ships as they milled about in confusion, but it did not follow them toward Port Arthur. Fearing torpedo attack in the gathering darkness, Togo turned the pursuit over to his destroyers, which were unable to inflict much additional damage upon the enemy. Still, Togo had to be satisfied with the results of the action in the Yellow Sea. The Russian Fleet had been forced back to a base whose capture was now a matter of time. More importantly, the Japanese Fleet remained intact. Four days hence, Kamimura engaged the Vladivostok Squadron, sinking one of the big Russian cruisers and severely damaging the other two. Neither those ships nor those back at Port Arthur would ever again venture forth to threaten Japan's lifeline to its army in Korea and Manchuria.

As the siege ring tightened around Port Arthur, the ships in the harbor suffered increasingly at the hands of Japanese artillery fire. The fall of 203 Metre Hill on 5 December gave the Japanese a position capable of direct observation of the harbor and its denizens. Later that month, Togo hiked to the top of 203 Metre Hill to assess the situation. The battered hulks which now filled the harbor convinced him that he could finally retire his fleet to Japan for much needed rest and overhaul. Characteristically stoic, it is not hard to imagine that his moment's joy and relief was somewhat reduced by the fact that it was the guns of the army, rather than those of his battleships, which had administered the *coup de grace* to the Czar's Pacific Squadron. But this was the culmination of the strategy which Togo had pursued from the start. He had controlled the sea lanes, supported the army and destroyed local Russian sea power while preserving his Emperor's fleet for future operations. But one must wonder if beneath this inscrutable mask of discipline there was a longing to attain a more decisive verdict at sea. At that very moment, a second Russian fleet was groping its way around the world to give him that opportunity.

The Russian Baltic Fleet, now redesignated the Second Pacific Squadron, began its eighteen-thousand-mile journey into oblivion in October. Admiral Zinovi Petrovich Rozhestvensky's force included four brand new battleships. These vessels were superficially impressive, but included needless modifications which had increased their displacement, making them unstable and reducing their speed.[11] Russian personnel were an even greater liability than the design flaws of their ships. The fleet's complements had been filled with conscripts, reservists and merchant seamen, many of whom possessed a revolutionary strain which would surface in numerous mutinies and disturbances.[12] Skilled officers might have salvaged the situation, for even the Russian seaman worked well under good leadership. But Russian officers were more concerned with personal pleasure than naval proficiency and were usually either too lax or too harsh in imposing discipline upon their crews. The few good officers which Rozhestvensky could recruit were spread so thinly throughout the fleet that they had no impact on its ability to function.[13] The forty-two vessels which set out for the Pacific were not a fleet at all, but rather a collection of individual ships, united by neither purpose nor practice. After reaching Singapore in April, the armada proceeded to Camranh Bay in French Indo-China to await the arrival of the Third Pacific Squadron which had been dispatched from the Baltic to reinforce it. Rozhestvensky had no illusions about the value of his "reinforcements." Built around an old battleship and three coast defense ironclads, they would only serve to reduce his speed. This was especially detrimental since the fall of Port Arthur left Rozhestvensky with no viable option other than a run for Vladivostok in the hope of establishing himself there as a threat to Japanese lines of communication and supply.

Togo had not been idle in the interval following his descent from 203 Metre Hill. After overhauling his ships, he put their crews through hours of intensive gunnery drill. Togo awaited his new adversary under circumstances which were more amenable to boldness than those which governed his earlier operations. The Baltic fleet was Russia's last offering and Japanese experience against its predecessors was convincing evidence of Russia's inadequacies at sea. In addition, although the Japanese army had captured Port Arthur and won a series of victories elsewhere, it had failed to destroy the Russian army in a decisive battle of annihilation. After each defeat, the Russians had managed to fall back along their main line of communications, the Trans-Siberian Railway. This overburdened length of track was, to say the least, a clogged artery. Nevertheless, Russia's vast reserves of manpower were using it to flow east at a slow but steady pace. Time favored the Czar if he had the will to continue the struggle. Japan, on the other hand, possessed a reservoir of spirit, but faced material and financial exhaustion. Her army had no significant reserves left and her treasury was nearly bankrupt. She needed to end the war quickly to consolidate her territorial gains and avoid an impending fiscal collapse.[14] The establishment of a Russian naval force at Vladivostok would not be conducive to this goal.

Therefore, Togo's main concern now was to find the Russian fleet and bring it to battle before it could slip by him. There were three possible routes to consider: the La Perouse Strait, the Strait of Tsugaru, and the Strait of Tsushima. Because either of the first two would require the Russians to make a long journey around Japan's east coast, Togo deployed his entire fleet to intercept the Russians at Tsushima. This was risky, but his interior position, coupled with the long sailing time required to reach the other passages, would give him a chance to redeploy to block them if necessary. His judgment was vindicated when he received intelligence reports that Russian auxiliaries, including colliers, had arrived at Shanghai. The Russian commander would need his colliers to make any long voyage around Japan. Clearly, the Russians had shed some of their support baggage to make their run through the Straits of Tsushima. (Rozhestvensky did retain with him those auxiliary ships which he felt were essential to support his future operations from Vladivostok.)

The battle fleets, which sighted one another on 27 May 1905, each boasted twelve capital ships. Togo's *Mikasa* led the four battleships and two armored cruisers of the First Division, while Kamimura followed with the six armored cruisers of the Second Division. Rozhestvensky led the four new battleships of his First Division from the *Suvorov*. His Second Division contained the three older battleships and one armored cruiser which had initially departed the Baltic that previous October. The four relics of Rear Admiral Nicholas Nebogatoff's Third Division struggled to keep up. In pure numbers, the Russians held a slight advantage in heavy guns, while secondary armaments

were roughly equal.[15] But the Japanese battle line could sail much faster than Russia's, and its more modern and better manned guns could fire nearly three times as fast.[16]

Togo's battle fleet appeared out of the mist at a moment when the Russian ships were in a confused muddle due to a botched attempt to change their formation. His ships were heading on a course which was parallel, but opposite to that of Rozhestvensky. This necessitated a reversal in course to guarantee that the Russians would not disappear into the same mist after the initial exchange of broadsides. Togo could have done so by executing a simultaneous turn movement in which each ship individually turns one hundred and eighty degrees. Such a maneuver would have placed the armored cruisers in the van and left the battleships trailing the pack. This realignment was unacceptable as it would force Japan's lightest armed and least protected capital ships to bear the brunt of the initial Russian salvos. It would also place the Japanese commander in the awkward position of "leading" from the rear of his column. Alternatively, Togo could maintain the order of his battle line by turning his ships in succession. A turn to starboard would allow the Japanese to change course beyond the range of the Russian guns, but might also give the Russians time to sort out their confusion and disappear into the poor visibility. Instead, Togo made his turn to port, towards the enemy. This course precluded Russian escape, but also entailed great risk to the Japanese. As each ship made her turn, she would present herself as a virtually stationary target for the Russian gunners. Since each ship turned at the same spot, the enemy would need only to find the range of the turn's "knuckle" and concentrate their fire at that point. In addition, each Japanese ship would have her own guns masked by the preceding ships until she completed her turn. No one knows how Togo calculated all the factors involved in his decision. In later years, he would only comment, "The way to win a naval engagement is to strike hard at the right moment; the ability to judge the opportunity cannot be acquired from books, but only from experience."[17]

Every ship in the Japanese battle line made the turn successfully, although the armored cruiser *Asama* was soon thereafter forced to retire to repair damage. Oddly enough, this damage had been inflicted by the ancient guns of the Russian Third Division. But soon the inferior speed of these ships forced them to fall behind, out of the main action. Togo's First Division concentrated on Rozhestvensky's new battleships, while Kamimura's cruisers dealt with the Russian Second Division. Unlike his conduct at the Yellow Sea, Togo now chose to heed the Japanese saying, "If your sword is too short, take one step forward."[18] Using his superior speed to dictate the course of battle, Togo closed on his enemy and took full advantage of his secondary armament and quick-firing guns. Fighting at distances of less than three-thousand yards, the Japanese gunners rained shells upon their opponents. Their battle line was twice able to cross the Russian "T," delivering the full weight of its broadside

to enemy ships which could only respond with guns facing forward. The Russians wilted so quickly in the face of this onslaught that their gunners scored no hits after the first half hour of battle.[19] Three Russian battleships went down under the weight of this barrage. Two more were pounded into floating hulks which were finished off by torpedoes during the night. Japanese torpedo boats and destroyers also damaged three more capital ships so extensively that they had to be scuttled. The remaining two battleships and two coast defense vessels surrendered the next morning. Togo was "astonished and somewhat disappointed" that they had not gone down fighting.[20]

But disappointed or not, Togo had produced a success worthy of his role model. Where Nelson had posthumously taken or destroyed nineteen of the thirty-three wooden ships which he faced at Trafalgar in 1805, Togo sank or captured all twelve of his enemy's battle line one hundred years later. Of all the Russian ships present at Tsushima, only two destroyers, one auxiliary and an armed yacht were able to avoid destruction, capture or internment. Over twelve thousand Russians were killed, taken prisoner or interned. The cost to the Japanese was one hundred and seventeen dead and three torpedo boats sunk.[21] Strategically, Tsushima eliminated any potential threat to Japan's maritime lifeline to the Asian mainland. Psychologically, its impact upon the war was even more far-reaching. News of the disaster fanned the flames of an already burning dissidence within Russia and helped to transform it into a revolutionary fire which threatened the regime itself. This deterioration of domestic security compelled the Czar to accept Theodore Roosevelt's offer to host the peace conference which finally ended the Russo-Japanese War. To the officers and men of the Japanese navy, Tsushima was the moral equivalent of Trafalgar. It gave them a legacy of invincibility which they would retain until it was smashed to pieces at Midway.

The battle of Tsushima was the crowning glory in the war that signaled Japan's emergence as a world power. As such, it must also rank as Admiral Togo's most brilliant personal achievement. But Togo's earlier campaign, while less heroic in its recounting, was no less significant in its impact. Japan's victories ashore were dependent upon the sea control which her navy maintained with only minor disruptions from the Vladivostok Squadron. This task was further complicated by the need to balance its attainment with the imperative of preserving the fleet. Although aggressive by nature, Togo was able to subordinate his personal inclinations and conform his conduct to the restrictive strategic environment. In doing so, he won an economical victory of attrition and emerged with a finely honed instrument which produced a decisive annihilating victory when circumstances permitted. Admiral Togo still stands out as an example of the consummate naval commander, possessing the insight to choose the correct strategic approach and the discipline to execute it resolutely.

Notes

1. Chitoshi Yanaga, *Japan Since Perry* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1949), p. 303.
2. Denis and Peggy Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise* (New York: Charterhouse, 1974), pp. 82, 95-98, 175.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 202 and Georges Blond, *Admiral Togo* (New York: MacMillan, 1960), p. 161.
4. Donald W. Mitchell, *A History of Russian and Soviet Sea Power* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 206-209; Reginald Hargreaves, *Red Sun Rising: The Siege of Port Arthur* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1962), p. 196; and The Military Correspondent of the Times, *The War in the Far East* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1905), p. 17.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Blond, p. 134 and Warner, pp. 10, 164.
7. Peter Padfield, *The Battleship Era* (New York: David McKay Co., 1972), p. 169; and Hargreaves, p. 196.
8. Padfield, pp. 8, 106, 136.
9. Mitchell, p. 225.
10. Hargreaves, pp. 95-96 and Warner, pp. 332-333.
11. Noel F. Busch, *The Emperor's Sword* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969), pp. 83-84; Mitchell, p. 235; and Padfield, p. 172.
12. Richard Hough, *The Fleet That Had to Die* (New York: Viking Press, 1958), pp. 20, 104-106, 137-139.
13. Elmer Belmont Potter, ed., *Sea Power; A Naval History* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1960), pp. 357-358 and Warner, pp. 164-165.
14. Warner, pp. 524-525.
15. Padfield, p. 175.
16. Blond, p. 213 and Mitchell, pp. 252-256.
17. Busch, p. 149.
18. Warner, p. 496.
19. Busch, pp. 161-162 and Hough, p. 173.
20. Busch, p. 186.
21. Mitchell, p. 265.

Painted by Bob Hobbs for this issue of the *Naval War College Review*, our cover illustration shows a moment during the Battle of Tsushima, 27 May 1905. In the artist's words, "The time is approximately 6 PM. The winds are blowing from the southwest across a choppy sea. The sun is setting and an orange glow lights up the horizon. The Russian battleship *Orel*, following the badly battered *Borodino*, leads a tattered Russian fleet northward." We are on the *Orel* looking aft just as she is hit by a heavy Japanese shell. The ships to starboard are part of Admiral Togo's well-handled battle line.

Mr. Hobbs is an illustrator in the Naval War College's graphic arts department. A Navy veteran and the son of another, Mr. Hobbs has been a professional artist for over 16 years. His award-winning illustrations have been used by military and civilian publications, businesses, and organizations nationwide. He has also exhibited in Honolulu, Japan, Newport, and New York City.