

1990

Fighting to a Finish: The Politics of War Termination in the United States and Japan, 1945

Jonathan T. Hine Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Hine, Jonathan T. Jr. (1990) "Fighting to a Finish: The Politics of War Termination in the United States and Japan, 1945," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 43 : No. 3 , Article 19.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol43/iss3/19>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Irving, David. *The Destruction of Convoy PQ-17*. New York: St. Martins, 1987. 367pp. \$4.95

This first-rate history is an updated version of a best-selling narrative that was published first in 1967 and subsequently involved in a bitter litigation. Legal action led to the book being banned, the author was ordered to pay heavy damages, and the British publishing firm was forced out of business.

For the professional, *The Destruction of Convoy PQ-17* offers a study of political expediency overriding military judgment, faulty command and control, operational intelligence failure, and poor communication. For the historical buff, it is a narration of the best and the worst of ordinary men when faced with certain disaster and probable death.

Thirty-five allied cargo ships departed Iceland with vital war materiel on 27 June 1942, bound for northern Soviet ports. They were accompanied by 19 assorted escorts and were also covered by two separate naval groups, a cruiser force and major elements of the Home Fleet. German land-based air and submarines constituted the major threat for the northern convoys, but for PQ-17 there was the added danger of heavy German surface units, notably the *Tirpitz*, lurking in the fjords of northern Norway. Thinking that the *Tirpitz* had put to sea, the Admiralty ordered the convoy and its escorts to "scatter." Scatter they did and without the benefit of an overall, on-scene

commander, each vessel was on her own, virtually defenseless.

Over the following fortnight there was hell to pay as the convoy's cargo numbers were reduced from 35 to 11. The hopelessness of it all reminds one of the battle of the Somme. Rather than infantry waves, it was cargo ships and their crews, plodding the Barents Sea, being destroyed by enemy aircraft and submarines. There was one exception. Lieutenant Leo Gradwell, skipper of the antisubmarine Trawler, *Ayrshire*, gathered three merchant ships, steamed them into the ice pack, and had the starboard side of each ship painted white to camouflage them from the German Air Force. Waiting out the worst of it, Lieutenant Gradwell then negotiated his charges down the coast of Novaya Zemlya to Matochkin Strait. There, a covering force was dispatched to escort them to Archangel.

Well researched and certainly readable, PQ-17 is an indictment of command. It should be considered a "must" reading for naval officers.

R. M. LASKE
Middletown, R.I.

Sigal, Leon V. *Fighting to a Finish: The Politics of War Termination in the United States and Japan, 1945*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ., 1988. 335pp. \$39.95

On 5 June 1988, a large advertisement for men's wear for Father's Day appeared on page six of the *New York Times*. At the left margin was

a report on the eight-year-old war between Iran and Iraq, stating that the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had given complete control of the armed forces to Speaker of the House, Hojatolislam Hashem Rafsanjani, known as a moderate of sorts in Western circles. Although the headline emphasized the supposition that this action augured a downturn in the Ayatollah's health, much of the article dealt with the setbacks Iran had suffered during the year and the loss of public confidence caused by Iraqi missile attacks on Iranian cities.

Perhaps the Ayatollah had tired of the inconclusive results of the courses of action advocated by various hardline factions. He had recently replaced his Army Chief of Staff after the rout on the Fao peninsula. The American forces in the Gulf were brooking no nonsense from either regular naval or air units or the *pasdaran* of the Revolutionary Guards. His navy sunk, his air force decimated and the army demoralized, the Ayatollah needed to regain control of the *pasdaran* and make a move to end the war. The first step was to try Rafsanjani, a man who had proven effective in dealing with the outside world. Within months, the ceasefire was history.

Readers of Leon Sigal's *Fighting to a Finish* will recognize the analogy between this war and the process of ending World War II in the Pacific. The death of Emperor Hirohito last year focused world attention on his role in the great conflict, and Sigal's

treatment sheds a refreshing perspective on the subject.

Sigal takes issue with the rational-choice approach to war termination. Articulated by such luminaries as Carl von Clausewitz, Paul Keckemeter and Fred Ikle, the now-traditional view of the process assumes that national interests determine the behavior of states engaged in ending a war. Sigal reviews the "Pacific endgame" from the rational-choice perspective and concludes that it leaves too many questions unanswered. "Implicit in Ikle's hawk-dove dichotomy are two premises: first, that officials were divided by philosophical differences . . . or disparities in priorities . . . and [that they] . . . held consistent beliefs. Yet few, if any, senior officials in Washington or Tokyo were so motivated. Most showed little consistency in their orientation toward international relations in general or toward war termination in particular. Neither hawks nor doves, they behaved like politicians and bureaucrats."

Sigal's central contention is "that the approaches of internal politics and organizational process [i.e., bureaucratic concerns] help clear up many of the anomalies in rational-choice accounts of the end of the war between the United States and Japan. [They] may also prove . . . of value in thinking about war termination in general and limited nuclear war in particular." As a former Brookings scholar (*Alliance Security: Nato and the Non-First Use Question*, and *Nuclear*

Forces in Europe), he has something to say about both.

Sigal follows a straightforward outline to make his case. He does not need to plot a historical thriller: most readers know the story. It holds their interest without his "painting the sunset." He traces in some detail the steps that the Japanese leader took in reaching the decision to accept the terms of the Potsdam declaration. Relying on postwar testimony and both official and personal records, he reports the public debates, private misgivings and secret end-runs on the President and the Emperor by bureaucrats frustrated by the superiors' position on the war.

Sigal pulls no punches in describing behavior and attitudes that might have earned war crimes trials for some of the victors. He levies no accusations, but draws out lessons for the present age. For example, he comments on General Curtis LeMay's arbitrary method of estimating when the end of the war would come. " 'So we felt that if there were no targets left in Japan, certainly there wouldn't be much war left.' "

"Such habits of mind do more than reinforce interservice rivalry, however. They identify war termination with the physical destruction of the other side and ignore the political nature of a decision to sue for peace. It is a confusion that could make nuclear war termination impossible."

More than once he reminds the reader that "Armies do not end wars, states do." He shows that "states"

are not the vague non-persons we call "they," but living, fumbling human beings injecting their best and worst features into the fray.

The lessons are timeless. We can expect that the same sort of people who struggled to end the last nuclear war will have to end the next one. I hope they read *Fighting to a Finish* by then.

JONATHAN T. HINE, JR.
Lieutenant Commander
U.S. Navy (Retired)

Halder, Franz. *The Halder War Diary 1939-1942*. Jacobsen, Hans-Adolf and Burdick, Charles, eds. Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1988. 716pp. \$35

Since their initial publication, the war diaries of Franz Halder have been an essential source documenting both the planning and execution of the *Wehrmacht's* initial victories and the eventual eclipsing of the German high command by Adolf Hitler. Their bulk—three volumes in the German original, two in a translation published by Trevor Dupuy in 1976—and the corresponding cost have until now essentially confined them to libraries and to the private collections of a limited number of specialists. Now Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Charles Burdick have successfully collaborated in a general circulation edition. Jacobsen worked closely with Halder in preparing the initial version of the diaries for publication a quarter-century ago. Burdick is a leading