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## Bull Halsey

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helped to build "The Bridge over the River Kwai."

In conclusion, two quotations illustrate the irony, paradox and unpredictability of a world of continuing human conflict, and the enduring greatness and nobility of the human spirit.

The first from a February 1986 letter from a military historian and political scientist:

Japan is now winning the Battle for Kentucky. We are being colonized by Japan . . . . When Toyota decided to build its major new plant in this area, I was suddenly swamped by demands from the local business community to provide instruction in how to get along with our new Japanese business neighbors.

The second from p. 141 of Winslow's book:

. . . Seconds later the *Houston's* courageous captain expired. They covered him with a blanket and then helped a wounded signalman over the side.

Smith and Levitt were about to abandon ship, when looking back they were astonished to see someone sitting cross-legged on the deck cradling the captain's body in his arms. They returned to find the captain's plump Chinese steward, Ah Fong, good naturedly known to all hands as Buda. The ensigns implored him to leave the sinking ship, but he ignored them. Rocking slowly back and forth he held Captain Rooks as though he were a little boy asleep, and in a voice over-

burdened with sorrow repeated over and over, "Captain die, *Houston* die, Buda die too." He went down with the ship.

HENRY E. ECCLES  
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

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Potter, Elmer B. *Bull Halsey*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1985. 421pp. \$19.95

E.B. Potter's biography of Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey is an inspired and dynamic volume bringing new life to World War II and the Navy's accomplishments therein. By mainly objective reporting and careful documentation the author makes it possible for readers to reach their own conclusions concerning Admiral Halsey and his role as the number one seagoing hero of the Pacific. There are two principal exceptions to this objectivity. Potter is almost flat-footed in his reaction to Spruance's handling of the Fifth Fleet at Saipan (condemnatory of his not advancing against the Japanese Fleet), and too liberal in his justification of Halsey at the Battle of Leyte Gulf. That neither was an "open and shut" situation can be accepted, but the recitals are a little too pat for the *points* of view expressed.

We are fortunate to have a biographer of Mr. Potter's ability to address such a colorful and controversial major historical figure. Halsey's autobiography was too close to WWII and too subjective to do justice to his own brilliant career. Potter, having done both a naval history of WWII

and a biography of Fleet Admiral Nimitz, as well as having taught that history for years, brings a feel for the significance of events and the uniqueness and originality of Halsey's approach to the military challenges of the Pacific. The writing is sharp and specific with a good feel for action, suspense and achievement.

The biography brings into focus Admiral Halsey's role in boosting morale following Pearl Harbor through his own vigorous fighting spirit and his willingness to innovate. His raids on the Gilberts and Marshalls in January 1942, followed by those on Wake and Marcus in February and March, and then his team-up with Doolittle's B-25s for the raid on Tokyo in April, helped enormously to give the Pacific Fleet and the public the feeling that the Japanese would not long have everything their way. Though others continued to conserve our scarce assets, Halsey had a feel for the calculated risk and the virtue of bold action. These qualities endeared him to Nimitz as *the* commander on whom he could rely in those shaky days when we were trying to recover from a major setback. Later MacArthur would comment that Halsey was unusual in that he would not be deterred by the loss of a ship. He told Halsey at his departure call at the end of the war: "When you leave the Pacific, Bull, it becomes just another damned ocean!" The tendency has been to focus on Halsey's final year of the Pacific War covering Leyte Gulf and the two typhoons, overlooking the magnifi-

cent achievements from November 1941 through October 1944 that brought Halsey deservedly to his top fleet command.

Historically, the material has a freshness and level of detail out of the ordinary in a work of such scope. I attribute most of this to the careful research of the author and to his extensive use of the excellent oral histories now available. Nonetheless, there are occasional minor errors of fact, attesting to the faultiness of memory in oral histories, and some distracting editing oversights.

One of the greatneses of this biography is the introduction provided to all the key figures of the Pacific theater. Even though one is familiar with the biographies of most of these leaders, still there is enough new and arresting material offered to make the book "must" reading. Similarly, Potter rounds out many lesser names with top-notch sketches or anecdotes to make them living parts of this gripping war history.

As the years go by, WWII grows more important for our new generations of officers to know and study. The oceans were vast battlegrounds, on, above, and under the surface. It was a unified war. It demanded the best of every service. Events tested maritime, continental and strategic bombing strategies. The war saw the birth and development of a joint and combined staff system. The war necessitated a unified command structure, one still essentially in place. And the war put a premium on innovation at the strategic and tactical level. Much that was brought forward from

WWI proved useless, or in error. This challenge of sorting out the relevant from the passé, the still viable from the OBE, is facilitated by a firm grasp of what the specific item's history is. Mr. Potter's *Bull Halsey* provides such history, and a classic sea yarn to boot!

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Ross, Bill D. *Iwo Jima: Legacy of Valor*.  
New York: Vanguard Press, 1985.  
359pp. \$22.50

In this extraordinary history of the battle that was to become a Marine Corps legend, B.D. Ross tells the story of Iwo Jima in a manner that is both gripping and exhausting. The reader lives each danger-filled moment on that island where "uncommon valor was a common virtue," with almost disbelief at the intrepidity and endurance, both mental and physical, graphically described by a man who, as a Marine sergeant combat correspondent, was there.

This is not a book for the timid. Few of us, even those in the ships close aboard Iwo (or other island invasions), had any idea how savage an amphibious assault could be. After reading Ross' account, a former Marine colleague of mine who went ashore at Iwo on D-day, commented that he had of course known it was rough but until he read this account he didn't fully appreciate just how bad it had been for many units. In reading the day-by-day, almost hour-

by-hour account, some may temporarily be depressed by the tragic, ever-building "body count"—to use a term popularized in a different war. The cumulative effect of all these stories, that too often end sickeningly in death and a posthumous Medal of Honor, is to reraise the question that demands attention after each military engagement—could the same ends have been accomplished with less loss of life; was there an easier way? No definitive answer is provided, though we understand the urgency of taking Iwo to protect the B-20 routes to Tokyo and as a staging base for the final push to the Japanese mainland.

Ross also highlighted the controversy that raged before, during and after the battle on the adequacy of naval ship bombardment and carrier airstrike support. This question does not have an easy answer either. In an amphibious assault the need for ship and airborne firepower is indisputable, but how much is needed and at what point is it time to stop waiting for more are open arguments. At Iwo there were bitter recriminations between Marine generals and the Navy high command over the decision to go in with a minimum of preinvasion softening up.

Others still wonder how much good more would have done. I was a gunnery officer in a battleship at Tarawa and remember how surprised we were later that our pre-H-hour D-day bombardment had accomplished so little. Obviously more was needed and more was applied at subsequent beachheads. But at Iwo