

1983

Sea Battles

W.R. Pettyjohn

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Recommended Citation

Pettyjohn, W.R. (1983) "Sea Battles," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 36 : No. 2 , Article 16.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol36/iss2/16>

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The commanding officer of the 37th Division ordered surrendering Japanese shot; Admiral Halsey's chief of staff saw concern over the sinking of Japanese hospital ships as "an unnecessary refinement to worry too much about"; the Commander, US Army Service Forces recommended germ warfare against the Japanese (in October 1944, the Vice Chief of the Japanese Navy General Staff asked for plans to launch bacteriological bombs from submarines against West Coast cities). The stage was surely set for the kamikazes and the atomic bombs.

The tactical effectiveness of the suicide weapons varied widely. Suicidal infantry charges were forlorn hopes; human bombs were not effective; the suicide submarines had some successes, but were not well enough developed technically; it was the kamikaze pilot that was the effective weapon. The Warners quote several admirals on the seriousness of the threat to naval operations. The gravest assessment was that of Admiral Nimitz who on 25 May 1945 suggested to Admiral King that the proposed invasion of Kyushu on 1 November be postponed "unless speed is considered so important that we are willing to accept less than the best preparedness and more than minimum casualties" Twenty-seven ships sunk and 225 hit in the first seven weeks of the Okinawa operation had to be a sobering factor in any commander's thinking about an amphibious assault on the Japanese home islands; the 1982 Falklands travail of the Royal Navy with Exocets was clearly foreshadowed by the suicide planes off Okinawa.

The book concludes with an appraisal of the chances for the Kyushu invasion. It is a rather overly pessimistic one. Eventual success was foreseen, but with a real possibility of Soviet occupation of substantial parts of the home islands

(there is a novel on the Kyushu invasion, *Lighter than a Feather*, by David Westheimer, author of *Van Ryan's Express*, which also sees heavy casualties and eventual victory).

J. K. HOLLOWAY
Naval War College

Howarth, David. *Famous Sea Battles*.
Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1981.
185pp. \$22.50

To begin with the less than positive comments: This is a puzzling book. Its large format and beautifully reproduced artwork and photographs (including the jacket whose front is a painting of "The Battle of the Nile" and whose back is a photograph of the flight deck of HMS *Indomitable* in 1945) seem to mark it as one of what we have come to call coffee-table books. There is, however, much too much text for a display book. On the other hand the text thoroughly, accurately, objectively and, at times, compassionately describes the background, ships, weapons, actors, tactics, and results of the chosen sea battles—but does so with a very nearly complete lack of the scholarly apparatus we have come to expect of serious history. There are acknowledgements in respect of the sources of the artwork and there is an appendix but no footnotes, references, or bibliography. Some books, even others of naval history by the well-known David Howarth, provide some clue to their aim, purpose, and intended audience in their front matter—their foreword or preface or some sort of prologue. Not here. We move from cover to title page to table of contents then bang into the first battle.

With little exception, Howarth devotes one chapter to each of the battles he considers "famous." Had his title been *The Most Famous . . .* or *The Most Important . . .* we might quibble with his

selections. As it is we must accept his choices—they *are* famous and if the English or Royal Navy figures large in most of them that fact reflects less the ethnocentric views of the author than the course of the naval history of the world, particularly since the mid-sixteenth century.

The book begins with the Battle of Actium in 31 BC. The opposing commanders were Antony and Cleopatra on one side and Gaius Octavius, soon to be Augustus Caesar, on the other. As with all the other battles, Howarth sets the scene so that there can be some understanding of the reason for the battle and why it was fought where it was fought. Geography is described sufficiently to permit understanding its importance (or lack of importance) to the battle. The personalities of the leading characters are outlined, frequently with anecdote, their plans and proposed tactics (when known) are traced, their ships and weapons described, and the story of the battle told in clear objective prose. In the preface to another of his books David Howarth, quoting Robert Louis Stevenson, has written, "there is only one way to be clever, and that is to be exact." Whatever the connection between them, Howarth is clever without being precious and exact without being staid.

The first chapter of *Famous Sea Battles* touches on a few other battles after Actium and ends with the 1571 Battle of Lepanto, the last great battle fought between fleets of galleys and the first in which the use of gunpowder was other than a haphazard isolated novelty.

The next famous battle is the Spanish Armada followed by The Four Days' Fight. Non-specialist Americans may not be familiar with this English-Dutch engagement of 1666 but perhaps they should be. One of the war's few positive

results was the Dutch conceding an English claim to Manhattan.

The Nile, Trafalgar, Navarino, Tsushima follow in their order and then Coronel and the Falklands (the 1914 edition), Jutland, River Plate, and the sinking of the *Bismarck*. The US Navy finally enters in the book's last two chapters, Midway and Leyte Gulf. (I was disappointed not to find the battle between USS *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia* famous enough for inclusion.)

In a half-page Epilogue, looking at today's navies, Howarth permits himself the one statement in the book liable to disagreement by many of today's naval professionals. He says, ". . . the only practical use of the carriers in the future will be in simply existing, not in fighting . . ." Well, maybe.

I recommend *Famous Sea Battles* to all naval professionals, whether active or vicarious. Only obliquely could it be said to teach any currently useful lesson of strategy, tactics, management, or leadership so its value lies elsewhere. There is a connection, however metaphysical, between those whose battleground was the sea and those whose battleground is or may be the sea and this book of classic sea stories well limns that connection. Whether we call it connection or tradition, sense of service or something else, it is an unquantifiable but essential and civilizing element in the naval professional's makeup.

W. R. PETTYJOHN
Ingram, Texas

Burt, R.A. and Trotter, W.P., MC.
Battleships of the Grand Fleet, A Pictorial Review of the Royal Navy's Capital Ships in World War One. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1982. 96pp. \$19.95

For the entire course of the first world war two enormous fleets, each centered