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Yokosuka, Base of an Empire

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Hudson Institute, New York, whose many recent publications rapidly are giving him an unrivalled reputation as a civilian expert on historical ship design and construction. Friedman writes on the *Chester*-class treaty cruisers of the 1920s; the command ship designs of the 1950s and 1960s; and the SCB-27 *Essex*-class modification program in this volume of *Warship*. These articles all reflect research in US Navy files, including material still in Navy custody as well as items that have survived to be transferred to National Archives hands. Accordingly, this work offers unique glimpses of the interaction between US Navy force planning and ship design.

Though it appears that there are few people seriously "interested in warships" to the point of wanting to know their technical history, the importance of the warship in history indicates that this number ought to be greater. But for those who are, or might be interested, *Warship*, volume 5, will be indispensable.

CHRISTOPHER WRIGHT
Office of the Secretary of Defense

Tompkins, Tom. *Yokosuka, Base of an Empire*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1981. 152pp. $12.95

Education at the time of my youth, sixty years ago, involved delving deeply into Greek, Roman, English and American history, while wholly avoiding Oriental. Scholarly involvement in that area was confined to appeals for missionary nickels in the Sunday school collection plate. Perhaps it was this abysmal lack of knowledge of the background, character, mores and capabilities of those Orientals which has allowed an earlier generation to lead us into a series of costly Far Eastern wars with concomitant shifts of world power balance not to our advantage. A check of the current local school curriculum suggests that conditions in the foregoing deficiency have not greatly improved.

It is thus with sincerity and urgency that I recommend to any US naval officer, not to say diplomat, this very objective and succinct refresher (and no doubt for many the first adventure) in Japanese historical background in general and its pivotal maritime power point, Yokosuka, in particular.

Yokosuka devotes half its text to the rise of Japan from its misty, half mythical beginnings—origins of its peoples unestablished—through the remote, early connections with already ancient China, from which Japan's earlier culture stemmed during the sixth and seventh centuries when Europe was in the Dark Ages and Arabs were overrunning the south Mediterranean littoral. From then until the 15th century, civil wars racked Japan. Buddhism was imported from China, blending with the original Shinto faith to form an easy partnership. It was during this period that the warlike samurai class evolved, a way of life which developed the spirit of Bushido—total dedication to principles of conduct that were reflected as late as World War II in the behavior of the Japanese military.

A second great influx of foreign influence followed the arrival in the 16th century of a Portuguese ship, introducing guns and Christianity. Both these manifestations of civilization flourished in a culture that has consistently demonstrated an ability to exploit foreign innovations or improve on them quickly. In 30 years, homemade guns were in wide use on Japanese battlefields. Then sublime Christian peace descended. European culture was welcomed, while Japanese travelled widely abroad. But finally, feuding Jesuits, Dominicans, and Franciscans brought doubts to Japan's

rulers as to what was the straightest road to Heaven, so that by the end of the 16th century, most vestiges of Christianity had been bloodily wiped out.

Following seizure of temporal power from the emperor by the shogunate in 1603, the closed-door policy was established. By 1663 oceangoing ships were prohibited from sailing from Japanese ports. It was not until 1841 that the closed door began to crack a little with the arrival of a Dutch mission, a connection which soon was to furnish contemporarily modern arms from Holland. Commodore Matthew C. Perry, USN, and his black ships brought the partially opened door crashing down in 1853, beginning Japan's frantic scramble to "catch up."

By 1864, Japan's new oceangoing "fleet," built in a short decade through purchase abroad, desperately required repairs and overhaul, so the French were called in to build a dockyard at Yokosuka, a well-protected cove which as a small fishing village had been recorded as existing a thousand years earlier. With French expertise and Japanese dedication, the first two ships were launched just 17 months after the yard's groundbreaking.

Concurrently with the establishment of Yokosuka's dockyard, its building ways and drydocks, the ancient Japanese system of government was about to be overturned, with the emperor restored as actual ruler, his capital transferred from Kyoto to Edo, newly renamed Tokyo. This, the Meiji Restoration, is the beginning of Japan's lightning rise to the military and industrial power it attained in its road to World War II.

Reflecting intense effort, Yokosuka expanded enormously over the years, playing a very large part in the enhancement of Japan's sea power. A naval air station was established at nearby Oppama in 1912, whence a seaplane carrier was deployed in 1913 fleet maneuvers. The same carrier with her four seaplanes was employed against German-held Tsingtao in 1914. Also at Yokosuka was built the world's first true aircraft carrier, designed and constructed as such: HIJMS *Hosho*, 7,470 tons, 21 planes, 25 knots, completed in 1922. (The USS *Ranger*, our first carrier designed as such, was completed in 1934.)

A succession of drydocks was built, culminating in the monster No. 6 in 1940: 1,075 ft. long, 165 ft. wide, capable of holding an 85,000-ton ship. It was here, with the most extraordinary secrecy precautions, that the incomplete 60,000-ton superbattleship *Shinano* was converted to a 68,000-ton aircraft carrier. Unfortunately for the *Shinano*, she was sunk on her maiden voyage by the USS *Archerfish*.

Yokosuka describes in detail the operations of the great Yokosuka complex in World War II. For reasons unexplained, it was left largely alone by US bombers until the very last. Even then it suffered only superficial damage, its wretched condition on Allied takeover largely due to wartime shortages and neglect, plus some minor sabotage.

Particularly interesting and useful is the author's assessment of Japanese characteristics and of the immediate postwar easing of tensions and suspicions between the so recent enemies. It adds up to the conclusion that understanding between peoples of widely disparate backgrounds can be accomplished, even though difficulties and major accommodations are entailed in the process.

Yokosuka also covers the tremendous difficulties encountered by the occupying forces: shortages of food, building material for the enormous numbers of homeless, and the establishment of the complex Allied command structure

ashore, including the customs and habits of the Americans forced to bend with the wind in bringing about the mutual colossal shift of attitudes.

Comprehensive tables of statistics on employees, production and growth over the years complement but in no way overpower the text. Numerous full-page illustrations and many smaller ones illuminate the whole story.

The enormous aid Yokosuka offered during the Korean War is covered in depth. Eighty destroyers, 16 carriers, eight heavy cruisers and four battleships were supported. More than 40 minesweepers with Japanese crews, largely ex-Imperial Navy, swept Korean waters, the ships armed for defense.

There are few American naval officers today who have not seen or will not see this great Yokosuka base some time in their career. It behooves them all to understand what is behind it. I served three years as its commander, and am still awed by its power and potential.

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Wilson, Sloan. *Pacific Interlude*. New York: Arbor House, 1982. 317pp. $14.95

Sloan Wilson's *Pacific Interlude* joins several other recent World War II novels in capturing some of the dramatic intensity of parts of the war that fall outside the journalistic mainstream. It is a colorful and somewhat nostalgic reminiscence of the tankermen—a small group of ordinary sailors whose singularly unglamorous and volatile role in the war both afloat and ashore was never the stuff of headlines. Ferrying aviation gasoline from large tankers offshore to makeshift island airfields in the Pacific was dull, important, and deadly business.

Sly Grant, a seasoned yet idealistic Coast Guard lieutenant fresh from the Greenland patrols, assumes command of an Army oil barge, formally designated the *Y-18*, laid-up in Brisbane for repairs. He quickly discovers that the damage the ship sustained from a Kamikaze attack was not limited to the rusting and unseaworthy hull. The crew was totally demoralized, suffering from emotional shock, and without leadership. Grant is soon waging his own war on both fronts: to repair and ready the ship for sea, and to lead what has become an erratic and incredibly eccentric crew. Neither is easy.

Bureaucratic red tape (the Army's, Australia's, and the war's) bogs down essential repairs and the unmanageable crew fails to respond to either carrot or stick. With orders to take a cargo of aviation fuel from a tanker in Brisbane to New Guinea and await further instructions, the *Y-18* is finally underway. On assignment, Grant quickly learns his trade and, though initially shocked at the laid-back attitude of the other tanker skippers, comes to know that he and his crew continually operate but one step from death. Grant is deeply affected by the losses but at the same time is drawn to this unassuming command by the excitement of the war and a growing dissatisfaction with the sterility of his prewar drawing-room life. Much of the story is told through the lieutenant and the reader sees first-hand how the war matures his outlook.

Tanking is dangerous and at times, the day and night toil and close calls assume a surreal quality. When coupled to isolated and fleeting moments of the natural tranquility of rhe Pacific, the ship's existence becomes an uneasy "interlude" in the crew's lives. Wilson's story is a personal one and his prose boasts the confidence and sensitivity of someone who was there to experience the peculiar anger, tempo-