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## Red Sun Setting: The Battle of the Philippine Sea

Michael B. Edwards

William T. Y'Blood

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tant footnote to the dramatic campaigns waged in the Atlantic and Pacific. For the most part, that assessment is correct. The Japanese were firmly entrenched in Thailand, Malaya, and Sumatra, and their warships were deployed to counter the Allies in the Pacific, operating infrequently but with impunity in the Indian Ocean from their base in Singapore. In opposition was the East Indies Fleet, a ragtag collection of ships operated more or less willy-nilly from Trincomalee (Ceylon). *Sink the Haguro!* focuses on that fleet's single moment of magnificence and a night's battle that assured their largely forgotten efforts a small place in history.

A *Nachi*-class heavy cruiser, *Haguro*, at 15,000 tons, displaced more than twice the combined displacement of the five destroyers that sunk her. She was armed with ten 8" guns, eight 5" guns, over 50 25mm guns, long-range torpedoes and two seaplanes. In contrast, the destroyers of the 26th Destroyer Flotilla—*Saumarez*, *Venus*, *Virago*, *Verulam*, and *Vigilant*—were smallish at 1,800 tons, modestly armed with four single 4.7" guns, close-in torpedoes, and primitive radar sets. However, the British had the distinct advantage of knowing the general movements of the Japanese capital ships by means of ULTRA intercepts and additionally had surveillance and attack aircraft available from the carriers that joined the fleet in 1944. Though located, *Haguro* still represented an elusive threat in the restricted waters of the Malaccan Strait and, in the end, it was a fortuitous combination of well-practiced tactics, surprise, and better maneuverability that proved to be the key elements of victory. The actual sinking is a fascinating story that has been imaginatively pieced together from ships' action narratives, message files, diaries, photographs, and postaction accounts (including those of Japanese officers assigned to *Haguro*). Winton's skills as a novelist (*H.M.S. Leviathan*) take the reader into

the action on the bridges, flight decks, action information centers, gun turrets and tubs, and down on the deckplates.

However, the battle action itself is only a small part of this fast-moving book, for Winton paints a vivid backdrop of the tedious days at Trincomalee, the frustrating life at sea seeking to engage the enemy, the trials and tribulations of World War II vintage carrier aviation, submarine warfare, and the newest invention of the war—radar. One of the Allies most productive innovations, ULTRA, played a major role in the East Indies operations and provided vital tactical intelligence that guided the efforts of the fleet.

Finally, Winton injects the book with a colorful flavor of the personalities of the fleet—from the fleet commander to the fireroom stoker, to the radar operator who tracked *Haguro* in the early morning of 15 May 1945, more than a week after V-E Day had ended the war for all but a few. Casual historians will appreciate the peculiarly British flavor of this very readable account, its first person style, and the thorough research on which it is based.

J.P. MORSE

Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

Y'Blood, William T. *Red Sun Setting. The Battle of the Philippine Sea.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1981. 257pp.

"The Battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944 was a naval action equal to Midway in tactical interest, and decisive on the outcome of the war, for it was the greatest carrier action of all time." So states Rear Adm. Samuel Eliot Morison in his famous *History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II*. Taking his cue from Admiral Morison, author Y'Blood gives us an hour-by-hour account of what became known as the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot" and what was clearly one of the

most decisive 2-day battles in military history.

To his credit, the author tries to tell both the Japanese and American stories. Calling on a tremendous variety of sources, ranging from war diaries, action reports, oral histories, and eyewitness accounts to an extensive number of other books both American and Japanese, the story is meticulously told from the formulation of both sides' tactical plan, through the incredibly exciting air actions, to the perhaps inevitable recriminations which followed.

The Japanese plan was called "Operation A-GO." Its intention was to draw the Americans into what the Japanese commander called "a decisive battle . . . to attack and destroy the enemy force." Because Vice Admiral Ozawa recognized that his fleet would be numerically inferior, a critical element of the plan was that his carrier-based aircraft would be augmented by a whole series of land-based bombers and fighters from various bases in the Marianas. That this planned key to his success would result in utter failure came to haunt Ozawa throughout the battle, especially since every other element of the initial plan worked. Sortieing northeast from bases in New Guinea via the Philippines, the Japanese made the initial attacks concentrating on the American carriers. They had the lee gauge advantage for launch and recovery and even had the Americans tactically squeezed up against the western side of occupied Guam cutting off their sea room, keeping them well within range of the land-based Japanese aircraft. Just before the battle, the combined Fleet Commander Admiral Toyodo recalled the famous Japanese victory over the Russians at Tsushima with Admiral Togo's exhortation to Ozawa, "The rise and fall of Imperial Japan depends upon this one battle." The quote was perhaps prescient and, even more, ironic as Ozawa confidently

launched his young pilots against the Americans.

The American plan was "Operation Forager," and its primary mission amphibious landings throughout the Marianas, principally in Saipan, Guam and Tinian. Adm. Raymond A. Spruance commanded Forager, which included two major amphibious task forces plus the large carrier Task Force 58 under Vice Adm. Marc A. Mitscher. The principal mission of TF 58 was to destroy enemy ships, planes, and troops; however, it also had the additional responsibility of protecting the amphibious forces from attack. This "double mission" of on the one hand defending the amphibs and protecting the troops ashore, while on the other hand being responsible for aggressively seeking out the enemy, would ultimately haunt Spruance.

But the battle belonged to the American pilots. It was not for nothing that the action came to be called the "Turkey Shoot." The author, a commercial pilot himself, describes in great detail, from air after-action reports, the hundreds of engagements fought by the adversaries. Sighting what was probably the single advantage for the Americans, training and experience, the author relates how the young pilots fought off four massive Japanese attacks on the first day, splashing literally hundreds of raids in actions so fast and furious it was impossible to follow from the ships. On the second day, after stretching their air legs to the maximum and reversing the roles from defense to offense, the Americans made their famous attack into the setting sun against the Japanese Fleet, sinking two carriers and splashing most of the defenders. This incredible action was then immediately followed by an agonizing nighttime flight home to the carriers and a night recovery which was the first for many of the Americans.

The losses for the Japanese were incredible. Besides the two carriers,

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Ozawa lost over 400 planes and aviators from his fleet plus over 50 of the land-based planes upon which so much had depended. The Japanese Naval Air Force had, in 2 days, suffered a blow from which it would never recover. For the Americans the losses were relatively light. Although over 100 planes were lost, many had simply ditched, out of fuel and unable to make the night carrier landings, but because of some superb rescue work by the destroyers, only 16 pilots and 33 crewmen were lost.

The recriminations after the battle dealt primarily with what some called the American failure to deal an even more decisive blow to the Japanese Fleet. The author criticizes Admiral Spruance for being too cautious and defensive, thus losing the opportunity to do more because he was not an aviator and therefore misunderstood

the more "free-wheeling" tactics of the carrier force. Indeed, experience had already shown that a mobile and aggressive carrier force was in fact most effective; however, it seems excessive to this reviewer to criticize Spruance when at least part of his mission was to protect the invasion force ashore. Noting that Admiral Spruance himself stated after the war that it would have been more "satisfying" to have won an even greater victory, it certainly would have been no less dissatisfying to have gone off on a tail chase with the Japanese Fleet leaving the troops ashore vulnerable to Japanese land-based air attack. In any event this book is a balanced, thoughtful and insightful account which is at once scholarly and readable.

MICHAEL B. EDWARDS  
Commander, U.S. Navy

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Students of American military history will be interested in this probe into the effects of the Progressive Era (1880-1920) on the transformation and modernization of our country's armed forces. Abrahamson describes how the United States, which was a minor military force at the end of the 19th century, had become a great military power by the end of the Great War. He explores the reform efforts of such military greats as Generals Sherman, Schofield, Pershing, and Wood; and Admirals Porter, Luce, Dewey, and Fiske. The book assesses the military's awareness of trends that were reshaping both domestic conditions and the world order and the likely effect of those transformations on America's military institutions and policies.