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Scratch One Flattop: The First Carrier Air Campaign and the Battle of the Coral Sea

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BOOK REVIEWS

WAR WITHIN AND WITHOUT

Scratch One Flattop: The First Carrier Air Campaign and the Battle of the Coral Sea, by Robert C. Stern. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2019. 328 pages. \$44.99.

The Battle of the Coral Sea often gets overlooked in history, taking place as it did a month before the much more dramatic Battle of Midway and its exceptionally lopsided outcome. Coral Sea, though, was the first battle between aircraft carriers. It also was a much more even contest than Midway, with both the Americans and Japanese losing one carrier. Robert C. Stern sets out to correct this historical imbalance with *Scratch One Flattop*. His book is an impressive undertaking and certainly will stand out as one of the more important books on the Pacific naval campaigns for a decade or two—or maybe even three.

Stern brings a good deal of experience to the task, having written numerous books on World War II naval history in both the Atlantic and the Pacific. More importantly, he develops the Japanese side of this engagement, using the official Japanese history, the 102-volume *Senshi Sōsho* (War History Series). Such books often are more a compilation of military documents than an analytical or narrative account; nonetheless, Stern is able to develop the Japanese side of this engagement relatively well.

As a result, Stern does a good job of showing the interaction between the two opposing task forces. What one did affected what the other could do. He also understands and shows, without confusing his readers, that both the Americans and the Japanese were operating with incomplete and often inaccurate information. Other factors got in the way as well, including sea conditions and other weather-related aspects.

The coverage ranges from the tactical to the strategic. The stories of individual pilots on both sides often are quite compelling—sometimes better than anything Hollywood could create. Major themes include how technology often failed the Americans and how the Japanese failed to anticipate the losses of personnel that are inevitable in combat or to plan for their replacement.

Stern rejects the judgment of Samuel Eliot Morison that Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher lost the battle at the tactical level. Fletcher, Stern argues, had more-achievable orders than his Japanese counterparts, Vice Admiral Takeo Takagi and Rear Admiral Chūichi Hara. Stern sees Fletcher as cautious, inconsistent,

and unsure of himself—but also lucky, in that he made fewer mistakes than Takagi and Hara. More importantly, the Japanese needed to maintain their momentum, and that required an outright victory. Much of Japan’s strategic failure was the fault of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, the fleet commander, who did not give his men in the field enough carriers to overwhelm the Americans at a time when it was still possible for the Japanese to do so; instead, it was an even fight. “It had been his best (and would prove to be his last) chance to achieve an easy strategic victory over the Americans, and he simply overlooked it. Simply stated, this was a battle the Japanese could have and should have won, but chose not to; the opportunity would not come again” (p. 282).

The book is not unblemished. For example, Stern seems overly fond of military acronyms. However, most of its faults lie with the publisher rather than the author. At forty-five dollars, *Scratch One Flattop* seems to be priced too high. Moreover, the quality of maps, photos, and diagrams leaves something to be desired. Still, all told, Stern offers an intriguing and valuable read that will be of interest and use to students of World War II at all levels.

NICHOLAS EVAN SARANTAKES



Artificial Intelligence and Global Security: Future Trends, Threats and Considerations, ed. Yvonne R. Masakowski. Bingley, U.K.: Emerald Publishing, 2020. 187 pages. \$99.99.

Grappling with the technological, policy, planning, and ethical issues attendant to the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) is a daunting task

and, given the complex nature of this interdisciplinary science, a challenge that can boggle the mind (pun intended). *Artificial Intelligence and Global Security* is a trim volume of interrelated chapters, skillfully edited by Dr. Yvonne Masakowski, that provides a timely primer on the moral, ethical, and policy implications associated with AI. While ostensibly a book about technology, this is not a technological book. Rather, Masakowski and the contributing authors serve up thought-provoking and relevant discussions that will challenge the reader’s notions about AI when juxtaposed against theories of just war doctrine, individual and societal morality, and the ethical constraints and opportunities within the context of the global security environment.

With her education and experience in psychology and philosophy, and her recent professorship in the College of Leadership and Ethics at the Naval War College, Masakowski is uniquely suited as editor of this volume. She has assembled a clowder of established scholars who are predominantly trained in ethics and philosophy and has interspersed a brace of programmatic and technical experts. Together, these chapter authors examine a broad swath of philosophical and ethical issues, including in individual chapters on the ethical dilemmas of AI and privacy, AI and moral reasoning, and the particular challenges of AI and space warfare, as well as several discussions of future considerations for AI from both ethical and policy perspectives.

Among the book’s most engaging chapters, William Casebeer’s discusses the building of an artificial conscience and the prospects for a morally