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Battle Of Surigao Strait (Twentieth-Century Battles)



Synopsis

Surigao Strait in the Philippine Islands was the scene of a major battleship duel during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Because the battle was fought at night and had few survivors on the Japanese side, the events of that naval engagement have been passed down in garbled accounts. Anthony P. Tully pulls together all of the existing documentary material, including newly discovered accounts and a careful analysis of U.S. Navy action reports, to create a new and more detailed description of the action. In several respects, Tully's narrative differs radically from the received versions and represents an important historical corrective. Also included in the book are a number of previously unpublished photographs and charts that bring a fresh perspective to the battle.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

My strongest recommendation up front: buy this book, read it. There are information and insights here that you will not be able to get from any other English-language source on the Battle. This book is in my collection, and I expect to be referring to it often in the future. The author has done a great job of research, drawing on many unused American and Japanese sources, and has corrected many errors in the "standard" historical works and records. You will get information on the Japanese planning and conduct of the battle that you will not get anywhere else. My most important caveat - and the reason why I can only score the book a "4" - is that there are significant interpretive and stylistic problems in Mr. Tully's text. Care must be taken when reading this book, as I will delve into later. First, the good stuff: Mr. Tully has made a significant contribution to the history of the battle,

and has contributed to a better understanding of the objectives of the Japanese forces in this battle. He has drawn from a number of Japanese language sources that have previously been unavailable in the West, along with a number of Japanese survivor's accounts. My only complaint here is that I wish he would have quoted more extensively from these sources rather than given us the Tully-interpretation on what they contain, because, as I will go in to later, there are places where Mr. Tully's interpretations are subject to question. There are a number of "mysteries" about the battle, such as how the Japanese battleships were actually lost. Mr. Tully pulls together the available evidence - much of it new to Western readers - and does a workmanlike job in addressing the questions. In all the important areas of interpretation, Mr.

This is an excellent addition to the 20th Century Battles series, which addresses a number of relatively obscure battles. While Surigao Strait isn't particularly obscure, being part of the huge Leyte Gulf battle, it most often is referred to only as "the last battle between battleships". Mr. Tully does an excellent job of rescuing the battle from that historical ghetto. He has tapped not only previously overlooked original Japanese records of the battle, but also the memories of Japanese survivors. These sources have been added to the US records to provide a balanced view of not only the Surigao Strait battle but also the strategic and operational situations that led to the battle. The Japanese naval command sent Yamashiro and Fuso, their two oldest and slowest battleships on what was essentially a one-way mission to attack portions of the US landing force in the Phillipines, supposedly in coordination with other Japanese forces. In a nice bit of historical irony these two antiques were met by six old, slow US battleships, five of them Pearl Harbor survivors. The Japanese forces were plagued by an overly intricate plan, constantly changing orders, and communications problems. The Americans had their own confusions from split commands and communications. Through all the confusion, Admirals Nishimura and Oldendorf kept focused on their respective missions, leading to the battle in Surigao Strait. The narrative of the actual battle in Surigao Strait is very well done, and clarifies a very confused night battle in restricted waters. Mr. Tully disputes several received "truths" about the battle and provides good documentation and/or reasoning for his opinions.

Author Tully has produced an excellent work on the Battle of Surigao Strait, primarily from the Japanese side, and made a definite contribution to English literature on the Pacific War. Prior to reading Tully's book, I had thought of Nishimura as some sort of naval Kamikase following orders to no purpose. Clearly, that thought was in error. Although Nishimura's mission was a long shot to

succeed, so were many Civil War battles fought by Robert E. Lee (Chancellorsville comes immediately to mind.) And at this stage in the war, Japan was reduced to taking long shots. Nishimura took his shot and died in the attempt, but can hardly be criticized for his seamanship, decisions or valor. Shima, on the other hand, does come in for substantial criticism. He could have (but didn't) closed the gap between their task forces to produce more of a concentrated attack. Of course, that probably would not have affected the outcome except to bring about more losses on the Japanese side. In general I agree with the review written by Alan Zimm with respect to the book's style and defects, but did not find them so egregious as to lower my rating. There are many books available covering the battle from the American side, and Tully's coverage was certainly adequate to give the reader the necessary American coverage. The primary defect, and it was glaring, was the lack of good maps (probably two) on a large scale to cover the Philippine Islands to show the both Nishimura's and Shima's approaches and Shima's withdrawal. I was forced to use a world atlas as a supplement to follow the movements. There are many textual references to islands and ports that cannot be found on the author's maps, and in some cases it was difficult to obtain a concept of the distances involved.

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