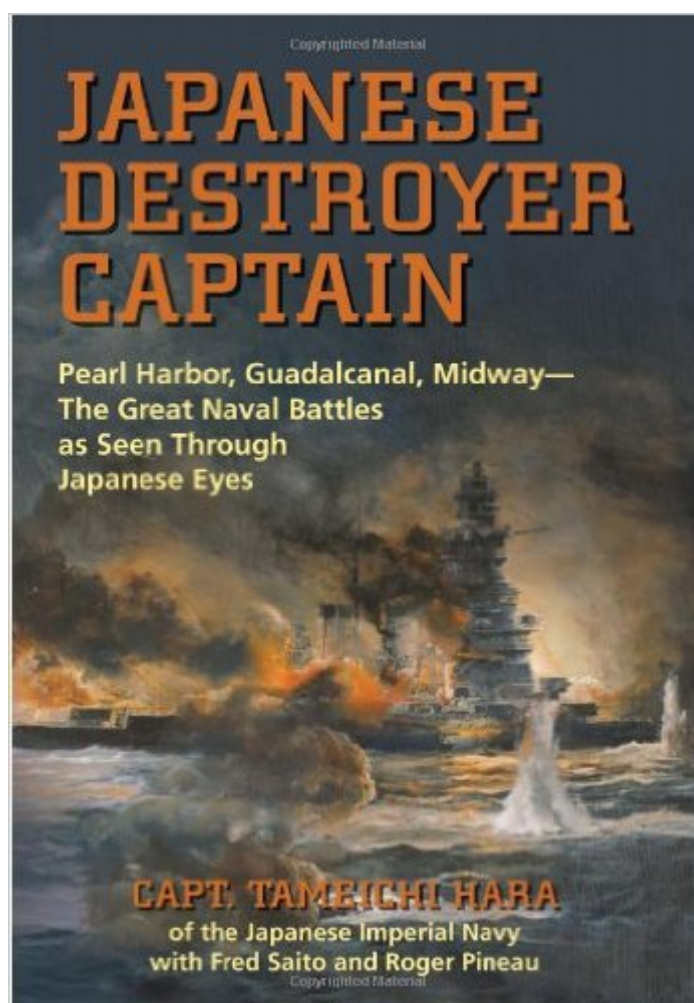


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Japanese Destroyer Captain: Pearl Harbor, Guadalcanal, Midway - The Great Naval Battles As Seen Through Japanese Eyes



Synopsis

This highly regarded war memoir was a best seller in both Japan and the United States during the 1960s and has long been treasured by historians for its insights into the Japanese side of the surface war in the Pacific. The author was a survivor of more than one hundred sorties against the Allies and was known throughout Japan as the "Unsinkable Captain." A hero to his countrymen, Capt. Hara exemplified the best in Japanese surface commanders: highly skilled (he wrote the manual on torpedo warfare), hard driving, and aggressive. Moreover, he maintained a code of honor worthy of his samurai grandfather, and, as readers of this book have come to appreciate, he was as free with praise for American courage and resourcefulness as he was critical of himself and his senior commanders.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Captain Hara discusses how he commanded a Japanese destroyer in all of the major Pacific sea conflicts during World War II: Empress Augusta Bay, Coral Sea, the invasion of the Philippines, Guadalcanal, Savo Island, and Midway. While on a re-supply mission through Blackett Strait in August 1943, upon noticing a fire-ball explosion near the destroyer "Amagiri" in front of his destroyer "Shigure", he ordered for his ship's crew to shoot at Lt. John F. Kennedy's sinking PT-109. He provides a most harrowing description -- as commander of cruiser Yahagi -- how he barely survived its sinking alongside the ill-fated battleship Yamato on their suicide mission to attack the U.S. forces invading Okinawa. He details his training of the pilots of suicide motorboats (Shinyo: "ocean shaker") that were designed to ram Allied warships approaching Japan. After I wrote to him, he sent

me an autographed photograph of himself in 1968 -- a fine keepsake from one of the luckiest Japanese destroyer commanders to have survived so many desperately fought WWII sea battles. His 312-page book was initially published by Ballantine Books in 1961.

Hara is the last samurai. He objected to compulsory suicide as official doctrine, because he saw this as a violation of bushido values. He turned pacifist BEFORE the Bomb. His personal doctrines demonstrate why the Japanese lost the war--they were inflexible; he wasn't. His doctrines were "Never ever do the same thing twice" and "If he hits you high, then hit him low; if he hits you low, then hit him high," the latter a maxim of MacArthur's, too. Hara criticizes superiors for using cavalry tactics to fight naval battles; never understanding the implications of air power; dividing their forces in the face of enemy forces of unknown strength; basing tactics on what they thought their enemy would do; and accepting a war of attrition with a foe more capable of maintaining it. His technical discussions are superb. What gives the book significance is his explication of strategy/tactics and their implications. Hara is a brave man who knew WHY he did what he did. This puts him in a minority, in any navy.

Probably one of the two books anyone interested in the Pacific naval war simply MUST have in his library (the other the brilliant 'Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy' by the unfortunately named Paul S. Dull). True experts and aficionados should overlook the occasional mis-identification of ship types (undoubtedly a result of either negligent editing or translation problems), but otherwise a superb recollection of the Pacific war from the point of view of a famous Japanese destroyer captain. Having studied this war and its naval campaigns, one thing that always struck me was the peculiar paradox of the near-deification of Admiral Yamamoto (engineer of the Pearl Harbor attack) by the Japanese at the time, and many foreign historians as well. Frankly, from any objective point of view, it was Yamamoto who almost single-handedly ensured the disastrous defeat of the Japanese navy, first, by not in fact taking out the most important targets at Pearl Harbor (the enormous fuel tank farm, and the even more important ship-repair facilities and machine shops), and secondly, by repeatedly committing vastly insufficient forces at the places of most importance, and invariably sending these elements through the most convoluted and tortuous separate routes to get there (each element could be easily defeated one at a time). Further, it appears that at no time during the war did the Japanese have the slightest interest in obtaining or using intelligence, by either method or desire, and this led them into one catastrophe after another. Guadalcanal is probably the best exemplar of this failed strategy, where neither the Japanese Navy,

nor the Japanese Army had any idea of the strength of the American presence there, apparently weren't even interested, and instead committed and lost battalions, regiments, whole divisions of troops and squadrons of ships again, and again, and again, until both the Army, and Navy were bled white. The Japanese submarine fleet was even more useless, not because of any real defect in the subs themselves, but the ridiculous manner in which they were used. This is even more stunning when you consider that not only was the Japanese submarine fleet largely founded by German engineers and specialist after the First World War, but the Japanese maintained close communications with the Germans throughout the war, even sending submarines to Germany and back several times, as well as German U-Boats sailing to Japan and being used by the Japanese Navy. Yet despite the continued availability of the very finest in submarine expertise, the Japanese apparently never bothered to discuss the topic of strategy and/or tactics with the Germans. Incredible! With all my various studies of this war, I never came across any real recognition of these fundamental flaws, until I read this book, and it is apparent that not only were these flaws as real as I thought, but that many members of the Japanese Navy itself were fully cognisant of these same mistakes, and yet, were unable to convince their own senior command of the need for changes, and so went down together. Starting to sound familiar?

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