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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 Also included in the book are a number of previously unpublished photographs and charts that bring a fresh perspective to the battle.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

Series: Twentieth-Century Battles

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Indiana University Press (October 21, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0253009715

ISBN-13: 978-0253009715

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 0.8 x 9.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 53 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #584,607 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #87 in [Books > History > Asia > Philippines](#) #868 in [Books > History > Asia > Japan](#) #1132 in [Books > History > Military > Naval](#)

Customer Reviews

"Anthony Tully has managed to trace the complicated flow of and reason for events... with a skill and aplomb that forces one to reconsider previously held views." *Naval History* "Aims to sort out the discrepancies that have crept in over time to standard accounts of the battle... a confused and complex night action. Of special interest is Tully's exploitation of fresh source materials." *Malcolm Muir, Jr., author of Black Shoes and Blue Water: Surface Warfare in the United States Navy, 1945-1975* "By giving a fuller view of the Japanese side, Tully's work forces a substantial revision of the traditional picture of the battle. Battle of Surigao Strait is not only military history based on scrupulous use of a plethora of new source materials, but is a spanking good read. Highly recommended." *War in History* "With copious endnotes, an

extensive and interesting bibliography and thorough index, this book is worth buying by serious students of the Pacific War and for institutional libraries with a strong military history focus." *Journal of Naval History*"The skillful incorporation of personal testimony from those involved is what really elevates this work above run-of-the-mill naval history and turns it into something special." *Warship*"If the vibrant international community of experts who study the Pacific War and discuss and debate it online can be seen as a mafia, then Anthony Tully is its consigliere. Whenever a question arises about the battle history of World War II in the Pacific--what really happened after the fleets collided, dive-bombers entered their dives, and shot met plate--he is the indispensable man. In this book he paints Admiral Nishimura's high-speed run into history with an entirely fresh palette of detail, from the command decisions to the after-action reports. It offers naval history buffs something fresh and easy to relish on almost every page" *James D. Hornfischer*, author of *Ship of Ghosts* and *The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors*"Tully's narrative is clear and clarifies a confused night battle in restricted waters. He disputes several perceived truths about the battle by giving the reader a complete record of what each ship was doing at each stage of the battle." *Military Review*

Anthony P. Tully is an independent scholar and historian of the Imperial Japanese Navy. He is author (with Jon Parshall) of *Shattered Sword*, a study of the Battle of Midway. He lives in Dallas, Texas.

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 Philippines, 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. We now have a very complete record of what all the ships were doing at each stage of the battle, which ended with one Japanese destroyer as the sole survivor of Nishimura's force. I would like to have seen large-scale purpose-made charts illustrating each stage of the battle. The reproductions of Japanese charts don't quite do the trick.

I really enjoyed this book, my dad was on the Bache DD 470 during this engagement, so I was able to put some details to his accounts that I didn't have before. I read the book "Battle of Leyte Gulf" by Thomas Cutler which I also found very good but it didn't have the level of detail about the Surigao Strait that this one has. I found a web page for the Bache that has the action reports and ships diary for this engagement so I pulled them up while reading this book, the book matches the action reports perfectly, plus gives me the whole picture of why the Japanese did what they did and how our forces were positioned and why. I really liked that the authors level of research even went to the statements from the Japanese officers and survivors with analysis of what the admirals would have been thinking and why.

A very thorough look at a confused battle that is often gotten wrong in the standard accounts. Tully explains a plausible theory for why the Japanese pressed on despite the long odds. He also clears up a number of mysteries, myths and misconceptions about the fighting. His account of the fate of the battleship Fuso is persuasive. Only finding the wreck will provide a definitive answer, but don't be surprised if Tully ends up being correct. Tully is helped by the discovery of previously unknown or little-known accounts by survivors from several ships that were previously thought to be lost with all hands. This is of enormous value, even if it cannot answer every question. Highly recommended.

Well written account of one prong of the largest naval battle in history. The Japanese strategy had three coordinated forces, and this was the story of the southern force. The strategy, the vessels, and the events are related from the records from both sides and personal accounts of survivors from both sides. This is crucial as the main battle action took place at night from miles away, so often the American assessment was of targets on radar screens at which multiple vessels were firing. Japanese survivors would pinpoint what hit them, on which vessel, and where it struck. I would

highly recommend reading this book in conjunction with other accounts of the battle to get the full size and scope of what was happening. This was an amazing event in history, and this book helps to clarify and tell this portion of the story.

Finally, a complete review of this part of the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Like "Shattered Sword", it is somewhat revisionist, but convincing. It rehabilitates Nishimura's reputation, and is respectful of the Japanese side. Like "Shattered Sword" it emphasizes the battle from the Japanese point of view, but not exclusively. It would get 5 stars but for some flaws. It really needs an editor/proofreader. There are a number of typos, and also a lot of clumsy syntax that distracts from the narrative. But worst of all are the maps.¹ The map of the Philippines is general, and has very few labels. Yet the author continuously refers to ship positions in relation to certain islands. One has no idea where those islands are. I had to go online and print out my own map of the PI.² The map of the approaches is tiny, and is only one of the plates in the picture section of the book. It should have been full page. Worse, the longitude is wrong. The map correctly has 120E passing thru (unlabeled) Coron Island. Then the longitude numbers decrease rather than increase as one goes Eastward. Thus it shows 115E passing thru Samar, rather than 125E.³ The more detailed map of the battle has the longitude correct, but inexplicably leaves out the initial, and very successful, torpedo attack by Coward's tin can's. That said, this is a most valuable addition to the literature on Leyte Gulf, and has found a permanent place on my bookshelf.

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