



# **The Fleet at Flood Tide: America at Total War in the Pacific, 1944-1945**

*James D. Hornfischer*

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**An unprecedented account of the monumental Pacific War campaign that brought the U.S. Navy to the apex of its strength and supremacy and established the foundation for America to become a dominant global superpower**

Here is the extraordinary story of the most consequential campaign of the Pacific War: the U.S. Fifth Fleet's seizure of the Marianas, a relentless deployment of overwhelming force on air, land, and sea that opened the path to total victory over Japan and established a new state of the art in warfare: the first use of the forerunners of today's SEALs; the emergence of massive cross-hemispheric expeditionary operations; the flowering of American naval aviation and carrier power; and the secret training of Marianas-based air crews who would first unleash nuclear fire.

From the epic seaborne invasion of Saipan, to the stunning aerial battles of the Marianas Turkey Shoot, to the grinding combat ashore—and the largest suicide attack of the war—to the devastating bombing campaign that culminated with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Marianas were the fulcrum of the Pacific. Filled with memorable action set pieces and closely observed portraits of the naval, air, and ground-force warriors and commanders who revolutionized warfare, *The Fleet at Flood Tide* is the broadly encompassing story of the full materialization of America as a world-class military power.

## The Fleet at Flood Tide: America at Total War in the Pacific, 1944-1945 Details

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## **From Reader Review The Fleet at Flood Tide: America at Total War in the Pacific, 1944-1945 for online ebook**

### **Thomas says**

This is a magisterial view of the US Navy in the Pacific from 1944 to 1945. The author points out that were it not for the capture of Saipan, Tinian and Guam, the war would have gone on beyond 1945 with hundreds of thousands more lives, both US and Japanese, lost. The planes that dropped the atomic bombs on Japan took off from Tinian. The author gives a blow by blow account of the invasion of these three islands and of the naval strategy that led to the end of the war. He says that this book is along the lines of "How stuff works."

At one point, he is talking about Navy officers guiding troops going ashore scouting channels for them. There were two officers, one short and one tall marking paths for short and taller men. "After and forevermore, these two officers were known as Low water and High water."

He devotes considerable space to naval styles of two alternating fleet commanders, William Halsey and Raymond Spruance and makes a very good case that Spruance was a much better strategist.

He also addresses the revisionist theory that dropping the atomic bombs was not necessary. He proves this theory to be totally baseless. The idea that Soviet Union would act as a mediator in peace negotiations was "... richly Fanciful, as Moscow had already informed Tokyo that it would not renew the Russo-Japanese Neutrality Pact."

Die hard Japanese militarists refused to surrender after both atom bombs were dropped, and it was only the intervention by the Emperor who agreed to peace terms by the Allies. The author believes that the impact of these bombs on Emperor Hirohito's mind was the crucial element in the surrender of Japan.

I rate this book 4.5 stars out 5(rounded up to 5). Thanks to NetGalley for this ARC ebook.

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### **Mike Kershaw says**

This is another edition in Hornfischer's telling of the American War in the Pacific. Beginning with the campaign to take the Marianas, he chooses to focus on Admiral Raymond Spruance, the amphibious duo of General Holland Smith and Admiral Kelly Turner and Colonel Paul Tibbets, the Commander of the mission to drop the Atomic Bomb. Along the way, he further develops the story of the "Fast Carriers" Task Forces which came to dominate the Pacific War, introduces us to the Navy Underwater Demolitions Teams and gives us insight into the grueling nature of the fighting experienced by the US Marine and Army units engaged in the Saipan operation. He also manages to present the viewpoints of Japanese participants, including the famed Captain Oba who resists until after the Japanese surrender. I felt, however, that his technique of focusing on a few key actors, battles and ships to capture the narrative theme of each chapter of his trilogy was just too ambitious for this period. The seizure of Saipan dominates the story with the remainder of the campaign -- which will cost the US military over 2/3 of it's combat casualties in the Pacific -- almost a footnote. A good read but not the strongest of this series.

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### **Mac McCormick III says**

This is a book that may take some readers by surprise, you have to consider the subtitle more than you do the

title. Instead of a narrative of the final phase of World War II in the Pacific, it is a book about Total War in the Pacific. Primarily, Hornfischer looks at the Pacific War from the Marianas to the fall of Japan from the perspective of Admiral Raymond Spruance, Admiral Kelly Turner, and Colonel Paul Tibbets (others are included as well, I particularly enjoyed the story of Draper Kauffman). The perspectives of Japanese nurse Shizuko Miura and Army Captain Sakae Oba are also important.

The first part of the book goes over the invasion of the Marianas. It details the preparations and logistics of the operation and gives an account of what happened during the assaults and fights for Saipan, Tinian, and Guam and during the naval battles fought around the invasions of the islands. Hornfischer examines leadership decisions on both sea and land, explaining why they were made. Information presented during the first part about how the Japanese fought in the Marianas and what was done to and by Japanese and Japanese controlled civilians becomes important to the second part of the book.

The second part of the book gets into the Total War that fight against Japan began. The battles for Iwo Jima and Okinawa are briefly explained, showing how the acquisition of those islands would be beneficial to operations against the Japanese home islands. At this point, the Hornfischer gets into what would be needed to defeat the Japanese and bring them to surrender; based on what happened in the Marianas, at Iwo Jima, and at Okinawa it would not be easy and it would not be like the war in Europe was. This second part of the book not only explains how the atomic bombs were used, it goes into why. The final chapter gets into a philosophical discussion on the use of the atomic bombs and ends with how the United States treated Japan in defeat.

The Fleet at Flood Tide is a book I'm glad I read. It's wonderfully written and delves as much into the why as it does the how, which is really what History is all about. It doesn't glorify the victory at the Marianas or the use of the atomic bombs, it presents the tragedy involved as well. If you're interested in why the atomic bombs were used, this is a must read as it lays out the case that the U.S. leadership used and shows what could have happened had there been an invasion of the Japanese Home islands. It also gets into the minds of Spruance, Turner, and Tibbets as well as some of the other personalities involved. The stories of Miura and Oba add much to the book by presenting the Japanese mindset. I highly recommend The Fleet at Flood Tide regardless of how much you have read on or know about World War II in the Pacific.

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## **Jim says**

I have long been a student of US and US military history. Having had two now deceased uncles who both served in the European Theater and several family friends and parishioners who served in both the European and Pacific Theaters, books about the Second World War have always interested me.

When I saw James Hornfischer's book, *The Fleet at Flood Tide* (TBP 2016 by Bantam) was available for request and review, I requested it thinking that it would be another great book on the exploits of the American Navy and Marines as they moved to defeat Imperial Japan.

But I was wrong... wrong in a very good way. For what I received from this book was an education about the emergence of US military doctrine that was formed as the US faced an increasingly suicidal enemy which caused the terrible deaths of both military and civilians. The doctrine of Total War.

Yes, book is also about those who led American forces into Guam, Tinian, Saipan and onto Okinawa and Iwo Jima and ultimately the atom bomb to Japan. People such as Marc Mitscher and Ray Spruance of the

Navy; Holland Smith of the Marine Corps; and Paul Tibbets of the Army Air Corps. It also about those who defended these islands such as Yoshitsugu Saito of the Imperial Japanese Army and Chuichi Nagumo of the Imperial Japanese Navy. And Hornfischer's introduction of Shizuko Miura, a civilian nurse and Captain Sakae Oba who held out along with several hundred civilians and military on Saipan until December 1, 1945 when he surrendered, added an new dimension for me to understand what went on during those battles.

Detail descriptions of the movements and tactics abound throughout the book as Hornfischer describes the evolution of amphibious operations developed in the larger campaign as well as the introduction of now common military outfits and munitions. Groups like SEAL's and weapons like napalm.

But it is the result of what American forces witnessed on these islands, no less than mass suicide, and the kamikaze attacks on US ships, that forces the doctrine of total war to be implemented which ultimately led to the still controversial decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki Japan to avoid the high death count of both American troops and Japanese civilians. Hornfischer's narrative on this decision making process as well as the detailed accounts of the Japanese surrender on September 2, 1945 and how Japan was occupied in the weeks and months following its surrender adds depth and understanding to this time of both American and world history.

The Fleet at Flood Tide is a comprehensive look at American military policy and operation in a way that I have never read. It raises the issues of how war was and is conducted and what happens when moral lines, because of battlefield realities, are crossed to try to save life and not destroy it. This book will continue the debate over the use of the atomic bomb but it should also bring to light the realities of a similar mindset in this day and age of those for whom death is an honor and not something to avoid. How do we deal with such a mindset?

I enjoyed the Fleet at Flood Tide and I think that it would be a welcomed addition to history classes about the ethics of war as well as a comprehensive look at the final year of war in the Pacific.

I gave this book a five-star rating on Goodreads.

Note I received a galley copy of the book from the publisher via Net Galley in exchange for a review. I was not required to write a positive review.

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## **Maria says**

Hornfischer uses primary sources and individual experiences to weave together the vast story of the war in the Pacific starting with the U.S. invasion of the Mariana Islands in June 1941. While the scope of the book is huge, the glimpses into Japanese and American fighting forces helps ground the action in reality, detail and humanity.

Why I started this book: I was thrilled that Hornfischer was writing another book. I had enjoyed his other books *The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors: The Extraordinary World War II Story of the U.S. Navy's Finest Hour* and *Neptune's Inferno: The U.S. Navy at Guadalcanal*.

Why I finished it: This was a massive audio book, my favorite kind. I need to ponder his justifications and

reasons for dropping the atomic bombs on Japan. I do agree that there is little way of knowing just what influenced Emperor Hirohito, as he was very careful not to write things down... Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan. Paul Ham, an Australian historian argues in Hiroshima Nagasaki: The Real Story of the Atomic Bombings and Their Aftermath that Hirohito and his cabinet didn't care about the bombs, they were worried about Russia. But Russia jumped into the war, because they knew about the bombs from their spies and wanted a piece of the action before Japan surrendered. Hirohito just used the bombs as a face saving excuse. So the bombs did end the war... by influencing Russia to rush in for the kill.

All in all this was a fascinating book and I enjoyed the perspectives from civilians, Japanese militants and American combatants. Plus I liked that it also covered the initial occupation of Japan. For more in depth coverage read Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II.

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## **Sweetwilliam says**

I had been waiting for the release of the Fleet at Flood Tide with great anticipation and this book did not disappoint. This is the fourth book I have read by this author and like the others, the Fleet at Flood Tide deserves each of the five stars that I have awarded it.

In his previous three books, James Hornfischer established that he has his finger on the pulse of Naval campaigns in the Pacific during WWII. In the Fleet at Flood Tide, Hornfischer demonstrates equal skill in describing the land campaigns on Saipan and Tinian as well as the corresponding sea campaign, the Marianas Turkey Shoot. But the Fleet at Flood Tide has a higher purpose than merely describing the air and land campaigns of the Marianas. This book provides the evidence that justifies the use of the atomic bomb. For me, this is the major take away of this book.

Yes, the atomic bomb is a horrific weapon of mass destruction and it was used to destroy two cities. However, Hornfischer states that the invasion of Mainland Japan would have cost 720,000 US casualties. The Japanese casualties – both civilian and military – were predicted to be far worse. The corresponding naval blockade would have starved and brought disease to millions of non-combatants. The dropping of the two bombs broke a stalemate in the Japanese cabinet. The Japanese were prepared to defend themselves and they did not lack manpower. They lacked skilled pilots but they had more than enough aircraft (~10,000) and willing volunteers to crash them into troop transports. Japan also had stockpiles of chemical weapons. It would have been a protracted bloody mess with famine and disease that would have killed most likely millions more than several atom bombs in the name of humane battle ethics.

I have argued that the atomic bombs ended the war without the necessity of invading mainland Japan. Once, someone rebutted my argument by stating that the Japanese contacted the Soviet Union and that they were ready to surrender. This book presents multiple reasons to refute this argument. Hornfischer writes that Japan contacted the Soviet Ambassador on July 13th. Japan desired to send Hirohito's brother to the Kremlin with a letter from the Emperor seeking to end the war. The Kremlin did not want to act as an intermediary because now that Japan was on it's last leg, Stalin wanted to declare war on Japan to claim territory in Manchuria. Also, the Japanese were not willing to surrender unconditionally. They wanted Hirohito left in power and they refused foreign armies of occupation. There is no way that the US and Great Britain were going to accept these terms.

Hornfischer argues that after the bombs were dropped, Hirohito told Togo, "Now that a weapon of this devastating power has been used against us, we should not let slip the opportunity....Tell Prime Minister Suzuki that it is my wish that the war be ended as soon as possible on the basis of the Potsdam Declaration."

There is little doubt that the atom bomb broke the stalemate in the Japanese war cabinet. Hornfischer warns the reader that the history revisionists and other bodies are always going to villainize the United States for using this weapon.

Paul Tibbets was a pilot from the 509th air group that dropped the first bomb over Hiroshima. Hornfischer claims that he never felt any guilt over dropping the bomb. As he got older and the free world became more guilt-ridden, Paul actually became less nuanced in explaining why dropping the Atom bomb was a necessity. Hornfischer asks the reader “was it the job of a combat pilot to educate a free people that were too lazy to read for themselves?” I think these are wise words.

This book is a must read.

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### **Kathy Heare Watts says**

I won a copy of this book in a Goodreads giveaway and have now passed the book onto my son who is in the military. This book encompasses the final year during World War II and pivotal turning points that helped bring an end to the war.

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### **Michael says**

This is an excellent narrative account of the second half of the war in the Pacific, from 1944 to the end. Its military focus is balanced by the human side of things with character portraits of a select set of participants, including certain Japanese soldiers and civilians. The major topic is the fighting for the Marianas islands (Saipan, Guam, and Tinian) and the bombings of Japan made possible by those victories, the horrific firebombing of major cities and the culmination in the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As much as I or you might want to say we shouldn't have done these things, it's important to bear witness and appreciate the mindset of the time. Weigh the argument that hundreds of thousands of more lives on both sides would have been lost if we were forced to fight on the Japanese homeland. Come to some kind reckoning that a large fraction of their people were under some kind of powerful brainwashing to make them willing to keep fighting or die before facing the dishonor of defeat. And as implausible as it sounds to pathologize Imperial Japan as a form of cult, the amazingly peaceful cooperation and harmony they showed under MacArthur's occupation forces after Hirohito abdication seems to prove some such sociological phenomenon was at play.

The author's first volume, “The Last of the Tin-Can Sailors”, covered the battles of Pearl Harbor, the Coral Sea, Midway, Guadalcanal, and Tarawa. This second volume was better for me in the cohesiveness of presentation and in its emotional and educational outcomes. I didn't expect that to be true. In the period after Pearl Harbor, I felt like I was rooting for the underdog and that with the definitive victories of Midway and Guadalcanal from 1942 to 1943 the tide had turned toward American victory. But this was not like a football game where being a few touchdowns ahead at the half undermines the meaning of the rest of the game. The game metaphor itself turns out to be pathetically inappropriate except where it comes to the idea of the Monday morning quarterback projecting what he would have done to be more “surgical” in defeating the armed forces without inhumane (unsportsmanlike) slaughter of civilians.

Saipan is a mountainous island 20 miles long and 2,000 miles south of Japan and 2,700 west of Pearl Harbor, well prepared with protected artillery emplacements, tanks, and lots of caves to hide the defenders. The assault involved a massive amphibious invasion by 71,000 troops far from any American base, and thus more impressive in some ways than the invasion of Normandy in the same month of June 1944. The underwater demolition teams were especially brave and ingenious at their dangerous work to clear mines and barriers and scout out the routes for the various craft in the flotilla of troop and equipment transports. Despite the more than 100,000 naval artillery shells, aircraft bombs, and napalm poured onto the island, there were still plenty of the enemy safe in the caves, whose story we get from the eyewitness accounts of a civilian nurse and an army captain who kept fighting. Under decree from the Emperor and enforcement by the army, the civilians were pressured and led to join in the fight, often using homemade spears. The American soldiers took recourse in wholesale blasting the mouths of the caves with artillery or using flamethrowers. Very few civilians could be persuaded to surrender. By the time Saipan was secured three weeks later the Americans sustained about 13,500 casualties with 3,400 deaths and the Japanese lost over 23,000, mostly deaths that included many civilians. The author's preface eloquently captures the special brutality of this battle and significance for the future of the war:

*What happened on this unprecedented intersection of cultures would transform the character of the war effort—and stand as a dramatic rationale for the pitiless strategic air campaign that the United States engaged from the Marianas.*

*Japanese soldiers had been demonstrating their preference for death over surrender since 1942. But a deeper madness revealed itself on Saipan, where Americans confronted the horror of civilians—women, children, entire families—leaping to their death from high cliffs into the sea. The Japanese army had so terrorized them so thoroughly that they, too, preferred suicide to capture. They blew themselves up with hand grenades and killed their own children. When the tragedy repeated itself on Tinian and Guam, it was clear that the horror had been no accident of local circumstance.*

*American commanders were quickly alive to the implications of this cruel perfidy. They viewed it as a preview of what awaited them further to the west. In response, with a subtle cue from their commander in chief, they passed a threshold into total war. To force voluntary surrender from a people who would resist to the end entailed the crossing of a moral threshold.*

There are no monsters served up in this narrative, only many brave men on both sides doing their creative best by the forces of honor and courage that drove them. We spend little time with their political masters and instead stay with the operations of infantry battalions, naval squadrons, aircraft missions. For higher levels of command Hornfischer stays closely with two leaders: Admiral Raymond Spruance, the commander of the Fifth Fleet, who was a technocrat who treated war as an intellectual challenge, but was compelled to stay close to the action; and Vice Admiral Kelly Turner, who tirelessly directed in all the myriad of the joint Marine and Army elements of the amphibious forces, dealt continually with the serious problems of interservice rivalries, and struggled with alcoholism when the action slackened. A lesser focus is given to Admiral Marc Mitscher, who commanded the Fast Carrier Task Force 58. The latter was charged with defending the invasion force and providing air and artillery support of the campaign, but got they called out to defend against a full court attack by the Imperial Combined Fleet, known as the Battle of the Philippines Sea, the biggest carrier battle in history. This was the most thrilling part of the book and quite a clear victory, with the Japanese sustaining three carriers sunk, about 600 aircraft destroyed, and 3,000 lives lost versus American losses of one battleship damaged, about 120 planes lost, and 109 men killed. No wonder the victors came to call it irreverently "The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot."

Key characters of lesser rank subject to detailed presentation include: Holland Smith, Turner's corps commander on Saipan and several subsequent campaigns; Draper Kauffman, founder of the Underwater Demolition Teams; David McCampbell, the Navy's leading ace pilot and air group leader; and, later in the saga, Paul Tibbetts, the Army Air Force colonel who helped with the development of the B-29 Superfortress



bomber, planned and led the world's first nuclear strike force, and personally flew the plane out of Tinian that incinerated Hiroshima, the "Enola Gay", which he oddly named after his mother. The stories of these men, their personalities and actions, make for powerful reading indeed. In the history of warfare, the work of men like these "brought about the supremacy of U.S. naval aviation, the coming of the age of the Marine Corps, the debut of Navy underwater demolition (a byword for today's Navy SEALs), and the aborning atomic age."

Hornfischer especially admires Spruance for his humility in not grubbing for credit and acclaim, in contrast to his counterpart in Admiral "Bull" Halsey, who alternated command of the fleet every few months. Though Spruance did not have the tendency like Halsey to take major risks in pursuing a showdown of a ship-to-ship battle against an enemy of unknown strength, he did take a minor risk for such glory associated with the aircraft attack of the Truk Island stronghold. In pounding a Japanese destroyer until it sank with hundreds aboard, he could not gloat, reflecting such a brutal outcome as "war at its worst." But when one of his destroyers fatally damaged a Japanese sub chaser and a lieutenant, after failing to get about survivors in the water to come aboard rescue boats, unleashed depth charges to kill them, Spruance did not condemn the action:

*If his pursuit of a heavy metal battle line fantasy proved to be quixotic, giving way to the brutish reality of a messily conducted mercy killing, so be it. Philosopher's ideals about "proportionality in killing" were starting to seem quaint. This had long ago ceased to be a gentleman's war.*

Okinawa proved to be even more costly than Saipan: 12,520 Americans killed in action, 55,162 wounded; for the Japanese about 65,000 regular soldiers killed, 28,000 Okinawan conscripts, and, and 94,000 civilians. With about 2.5 million soldiers on the home islands, the prospects were for more losses on each side than all the Allied deaths in Europe. In the later face of criticism of the necessity of nuclear attacks by the likes of Supreme Chief of Naval Operations Chester Nimitz and others, Spruance's views were characterized by Hornfischer as the following:

*"The sob fraternity" he had called them. There was a war to be won, and it had long since crossed beyond all ethical and moral boundaries heretofore known.*

Ultimately, the Japanese government did not concede defeat, but the Emperor did on behalf of the people. The Imperial Army representatives on the Cabinet were of the "fight to the last man" school. The transformation of the defeated Japanese people into a peaceful society and harmonious partner of the U.S. after the war is still somewhat wonderful mystery to me, delved into much deeper than here in the excellent book by Dower on the role of racism in the war, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. The narrative in the present book steered clear of MacArthur's campaign as Commander of the Southwest Pacific to take New Guinea and then the Philippines, but it does follow his effective and humane efforts as director of the occupation force, repatriation to Japan of over 5 million Japanese from their Pacific empire and prison camps, and rebuilding of their infrastructure and economy. Hornfischer concludes with this praise:

*Douglas MacArthur, whose messianism vexed the Navy all along, commanded the stage at the end. With his deft handling of the surrender and occupation of Japan, working by, with, and through a defeated emperor, MacArthur as anyone else shaped the legacy of the war beyond the end.*

The close of Hornfischer's preface makes a fitting conclusion to his admirable effort with the book:

*I wish to avoid a wiser-than-thou pose, for a full consideration of the stakes of the war and of the decisions made in its midst should recommend humility on the part of all. Neither triumphalism, condemnation, nor apology does intellectual or emotional justice to the brute reality of this savage war, the outcome of which could not have been known in the moment. For the narrative historian, recreating those moments is the aim.*

*I want readers to appreciate how fallible, striving human beings responded to them. In the Marianas campaign, and from there on outward, America mastered the vast geopolitics of the Pacific. But all history remains a human story.*

This book was provided by the publisher for review through the Netgalley program.

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## happy says

In looking at the final year of World War II in the Pacific, Mr Hornfischer has written a superb account of the Marianas campaign and the ensuing bombing campaign that was launched from those islands, including the dropping the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and finally the early occupation of the Japanese homeland. In telling the story, the author focuses his story on the commander of the US Fifth Fleet, Raymond Spruance and the man who dropped the Bomb on Hiroshima – Paul Tibbets.

In looking at Adm Spruance, the author also looks at the tension between Spruance and his subordinate commanders – esp his carrier admirals in TF58. Spruance took the stance that his job was to protect the invasion forces, while his carrier admirals thought their job was to hunt out and destroy the Japanese Fleet, esp their carriers. Spruance's view is proven correct at what comes to be known as the Battle of the Philippine Sea, AKA The Great Mariana Turkey Shoot. The Japanese aircraft/pilot loses effectively destroyed Japanese Carrier Aviation, even though only the American aviation did not sink any Japanese carriers. Following the Turkey Shoot, Spruance finally lets his carrier admirals have their way when scout planes locate the Japanese fleet. The Americans launch a strike late in the day on the Japanese carriers that results in Spruance's "Turn on the Lights" order that enables the strike force to find their way home.

One of my favorite anecdotes from the book occurs during the early aerial attacks on the Japanese Naval base at Truk before the Marianas operations. (view spoiler)

Another storyline that I appreciated was Hornfischer's telling of the development of UDT teams, the forerunner of the modern Navy Seals. In telling this story the author trace the career of the founder of the teams, LCDR Draper Kauffman. (view spoiler)

The story of the Japanese civilians on Saipan is another excellent storyline. The author tells this story through the eyes of a 17 yr old young lady. She came to the islands with her parents and as the war comes to her home, she is drafted as a nurse for the Japanese Military. As the battle progresses, the Japanese military puts extreme pressure on the civilians to commit suicide along with those soldiers actively opposing the American Marines and Soldiers. This culminates with many civilians, including women and children, jumping off the cliffs at Marpi Point to the horror of the Americans observing.

The author also tells the story of the other two landings in Marianas, Tinian and Guam, but not the depth of the fighting on Saipan. He also really doesn't cover the landings on Iwo Jima and Okinawa. After the fall of the Marianas, he goes into their development as bomber bases. He discussed the early problems the XXI Bomber Command had in bombing Japan from high altitude, and the shock Curtis LeMay had on the crews when he decided to change tactics and go in at very low altitude and at night. The story of the conventional bombing is mainly setting up the story of the 509th Composite Group and Paul Tibbets. In this narrative, Mr. Hornfischer makes the case for the use of the Atomic Bombs. I felt he was very convincing. The author feels that one of the back ground reasons for the use of the bombs was the civilian suicides on Saipan. He states that when senior American commanders, including Adm Nimitz, saw the bodies bobbing in the surf it

changed how they viewed the Japanese people, resulting the acceptance of the wholesale bombing of Japanese cities and ultimately Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Mr. Hornfischer also goes into what the governing councils of Japan were thinking. To sum it up, even after the bombings, they were not about to quit the war under anything but their own terms, including no occupation and the preservation of the emperor. The bombs changed one mind – the emperors. Mr. Hornfischer also makes a good case the bombs not only saved American lives, but Japanese. Even under the best case scenario of blockade and literally starving Japan to surrender, more Japanese would have perished than did with the two bombings. The author also addresses the radiation question. He basically states that no one knew the effects of exposure to gamma rays, so the illness and deaths resulting from the radiation came as a surprise.

The final section of the book covers the early occupation of Japan by MacArthur's forces and how he remade Japan into what the US wanted.

The only problems I had with this book are rather niggling. Mr. Hornfischer just barely touches on subsequent operations in the Central Pacific, Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and totally skips the battles in the Southwest Pacific and the Philippines. He also doesn't really go into the controversy that happened when the Corps commander, Marine General H.M. Smith, relieved the Army's 27th ID commander, Ralph Smith. This affected Marine/Army relations for years and even today there is still some effect. Even with that this is still a 4.5 star read, rounded up for Goodreads.

For any interested, here is a link to Mr. Hornfischer discussing the book

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?417270-...>

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## **Sherwood Smith says**

This extraordinarily well-written history of the second half of the war in the Pacific continues on from an earlier book by the same author (which I have in paperback, and will be reading).

This one begins in 1944. It's off to a slow start as we get caught up on the details of ships, material, training, and leaders among the Americans, and the background lives of some Japanese, both military and civilian.

The mass of information pays off when we get to Spruance's fleet encountering the Japanese at last.

I really appreciated the clarity with which Hornfischer describes strategy and tactics on sea, land, and in air, especially the evolving strategic arena concerning aircraft carriers. Admirals themselves weren't always certain what was going to work, especially in serving basically as moving air bases for an air war.

The air battles are vividly described—exhilaratingly so, capturing the bravado and reckless determination and individualistic humor of the air aces. He draws heavily on reports and memoirs to bring the fight to the individual level before zooming back to show fleet movements, both in air support and in land support when the attack on the islands began.

Equally vivid, and a whole lot more grim was the unflinching description of the yard-by-yard fight for Saipan, made much more horrendous by the Japanese command's insistence on suicide missions for the honor of the emperor—and on convincing the civilians that Americans would rape all the women and eat their babies. And when the end came, the soldiers used the civilians as shields, and then forced them into

mass suicide.

Hornfischer draws on a variety of reports by Japanese from command to civilian, most notably Yoshitsugu Saito of the Imperial Japanese Army, Chuichi Nagumo of the Imperial Japanese Navy, Shizuko Miura, a civilian nurse, and Captain Sakae Oba who held out along with several hundred civilians and military on Saipan until December 1, 1945 when he surrendered. The addition of these people's stories helped to understand what the Japanese thought during those terrible battles and immediately afterward.

Hornfischer describes the evolution of amphibious operations as well as the invention of newer and more effective weapons, like napalm, who wanted to use them, who didn't, and why they finally did and where.

Hornfischer is developing a point: the result of what American forces witnessed on those islands—the mass suicides, the many Japanese terms for suicide attacks culminating in the kamikaze attacks on US ships—is that the Japanese high command considered that only total war, to the death, would satisfy their honor.

And so American strategy makers finally came around to the conviction that surrender would only happen if they shocked Japan. The atom bombs would do that—two of them, one after the other, so that the Japanese would believe that America had an arsenal of them.

Hornfischer's painstaking development of the decision making process behind the atom bomb dropping, and his follow-up about the reactions of those in charge as well as the effect on the Japanese, was sobering in the extreme. Especially considering how relatively blasé people seem to be about mass weapons these days.

Anyway, he finishes up the history with a description of Japan's reaction to surrender and occupation, after which he gives a follow-up on the lives of his principals (those who survived). There follows an impressive bibliography.

This is easily the most readable, and thoroughly researched, book I've read about this portion of the Pacific War.

Copy provided by NetGalley

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## **Nooilforpacifists says**

Sometime between "Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors" and this book, Hornfischer morphed from a decent, but hardly exceptional author, to a masterful one, capped by in-depth research. And he's describing battles that I've not only read about but visited the (land) battlefields.

This book is split into three parts: Sea, Land and Air. The first section relates the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot", the carrier battle that destroyed Japan's carrier air arm (though sinking only two carriers). Despite being a "Navy guy," I found this the weakest part of the book--the author did a mediocre job of permitting the reader to visualize the fleet geography and movements. The second, longest section covers the amphibious warfare on Saipan, Tinian and Guam. The first-person accounts Hornfischer collected -- especially from an ethnic Japanese civilian female nurse whose botched her suicide, then was resuscitated by segregated Negro troops -- make the narrative edge-of-your-seat gripping. The final part addresses US Army Air Force B-29 bombings from Saipan and Tinian, especially Paul Tibbets and the events of 6 and 9 August 1945.

Weapons neither are inherently good or bad; it depend on the use and user. The laws of land warfare do demand a proportionate response. But after the suicide charges and civilian suicides of Saipan, the calculus changed: "Even unconditional surrender [is] held as unreasonable under the doctrine of 'jus in bello,' if not under the laws of physics, which demands that every action brings an equal and opposite reaction. What if the surrender that was achieved by use of monstrous devices ended even bloodier predations perpetrated by a militarist regime bent on race conquest?"

Hornfischer concludes that what US Marines (and a few Army units) witnessed on Saipan directly influenced the decision to drop the bomb. Bomb(s), actually, for -- as a Manhattan Project military staffer predicted -- it "was not one bomb, or two, which brought surrender; it was the experience of what an atomic bomb actually will do to a community, plus the dread of many more, that was effective." War-wusses who still argue the decision was immoral -- Japan supposedly being close to surrendering anyway -- disregard Emperor Hirohito's own Imperial Rescript basing his decision (and it was his) on the bomb. "To dismiss such a direct and contemporaneous expression of motivation in the absence of better evidence is curious practice for a historian." And what firestorm would have arisen half a million U.S. casualties into an invasion of Japan's homeland following disclosure that America possessed a superweapon parked in a warehouse next to Lost Ark?

Were America the villains modern pacifists claim, some trace of vindictiveness would have appeared in the occupation--yet there was none; indeed, compare to the deliberate starvation of Germany in winter 1945-46. "Unlike Sparta and Rome, America ministered to its enemy with surpassing mercy after it had thrown him to his knees with pitiless brutality." I just wish the exhibits at Hiroshima weren't so clownishly one-sided: the over-all impression visiting today is 'we were peacefully minding our own business, when this infernal device dropped from the heavens; we have no idea why.' Japan is lucky it did.

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## **David Eppenstein says**

I really enjoy reading history but I have to admit that the history of WWII is probably my least favorite subject area. I think the reasons for this are that this war was too clearly defined in terms of good guys and bad guys and it was too thoroughly documented and recorded. Of course let's not forget the History Channel doing this war to death with exposure. It would appear to me that any author wishing to write anything about this war must first possess the talent of restraint, knowing what to include and what to leave out, maybe for another book. Having said this I will state that this was a good book. It was thoroughly researched and well written. Unfortunately, the author lacked that talent of restraint, especially in the first half of the book. I swear that at several points in the first half of the book I expected the author to discuss whether the Marines were going to be issued boxers or briefs and then discuss the merits of each option. Reading this book I was reminded of the old saying of the guy that couldn't see the forest because of all the trees and that's my big complaint with this book. Was this supposed to be a book about the last year of the Pacific War or was this a book about all the logistical detail that went into mounting the campaigns occurring in that year along with all the front line stories of the Marines and sailors that fought in those campaigns? My assumption was that it was about the big picture events that led to the war's end. The author, however, includes a great deal, a very great deal, of information about how these individual campaigns were put together, even to the point of detailing the evolution of the various amphibious vehicles used for these invasions. Now I'm sure these logistical details are interesting to a lot of readers and may be worthy of book treatment in their own right but they sure made following the major course of the war very difficult. There are 503 pages of text in this book and I think with some serious editing a better book would have resulted at about page 400. Again, this is not a bad book but it is rather tedious to read unless logistics is an interest of yours. The second half of the book

is much better because most of the logistical problems have been solved and our Pacific juggernaut became a rather well oiled machine. Without these distractions the reading became easier to follow and more entertaining.

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## **Tom Mathews says**

Full disclosure: James D. Hornfischer's first book, *The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors: The Extraordinary World War II Story of the U.S. Navy's Finest Hour* is my all-time favorite book about World War II or any war fought at sea. His thrilling narrative focuses on a small yet vital engagement of the Battle of Leyte Gulf and spins a story that makes the defense of the Alamo look tepid in comparison. But being able to tell the story of a battle does not automatically qualify one to tell the story of a war. So it is with great interest that I picked up a copy of Hornfischer's latest book, *'The Fleet at Flood Tide: America at Total War in the Pacific, 1944-1945'*, which covers the Pacific Campaign starting with the U.S. Navy's air assault on the Japanese base at Truk Lagoon and running through to the end of the war, focusing largely on the amphibious assaults on the Marianas Islands; Saipan, Tinian and Guam. The conquest of these islands gave the Allies airfields from which long-range bombers could reach the Japanese mainland, unleashing a reign of destruction unparalleled in history. Hornfischer focuses on linking the occupation of the Marianas with the war's final chapter, the bombing of Hiroshima by Col. Paul Tibbets and the crew of the *Enola Gay*, which took off from Tinian. While this is not the most exhaustive account of Tibbets's career and mission, it is considerably more comprehensive than description of the mission given by the colonel on his return from Hiroshima. "We sighted a Japanese city and destroyed it; further details will be released from Washington."

Other campaigns and battles, such as Iwo Jima and Leyte Gulf are given less attention than one would expect. In his defense, though, these battles have received a lot of attention from historians. *Flags of Our Fathers* (James Bradley) and *The Heart of Hell: The Untold Story of Courage and Sacrifice in the Shadow of Iwo Jima* (Weiss) are creditable accounts of Iwo Jima and *Sea of Thunder: Four Commanders and the Last Great Naval Campaign 1941-1945* (Evan Thomas) and the aforementioned *The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors* are excellent accounts of the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

Hornfischer is as adept at describing an expanded war as he is a single battle. His extensive research relies heavily on primary sources ranging from government officials in Washington and Tokyo, officers in Navy wardrooms, pilots in their cockpits, Marines on the beach and even, despite the extreme paucity of survivors, from Japanese soldiers and civilians on Saipan.

Bottom line: Hornfischer's books read more like a Tom Clancy thriller than a history book. His skill at stitching together a story that contains all the horror and tragedy, sacrifice and heroism is unparalleled. I cannot recommend his books enough.

\*Quotations are cited from an advanced reading copy and may not be the same as appears in the final published edition. The review was based on an advanced reading copy obtained at no cost from the publisher in exchange for an unbiased review. While this does take any 'not worth what I paid for it' statements out of my review, it otherwise has no impact on the content of my review.

FYI: On a 5-point scale I assign stars based on my assessment of what the book needs in the way of improvements:

\*5 Stars – Nothing at all. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

\*4 Stars – It could stand for a few tweaks here and there but it's pretty good as it is.

\*3 Stars – A solid C grade. Some serious rewriting would be needed in order for this book to be considered great or memorable.

\*2 Stars – This book needs a lot of work. A good start would be to change the plot, the character development, the writing style and the ending.

\*1 Star - The only thing that would improve this book is a good bonfire.

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## **Edgar Raines says**

This is a beautifully written, well researched book, particularly using U.S. Marine Corps and Navy records. It is the story of the landings in Saipan, Tinian, and Guam in 1944 and the consequences that flowed from these victories. The book has two major protagonists, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, commander of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, and Col. Paul Tibbets, commander of the 509th Composite Bomb Group, which based on Tinian dropped the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The disparity in rank poses a problem. While the Navy chapters focus on war at the operational and, when the Marines are involved, the tactical level, the Air Force chapters, with Tibbets at the center, has to focus on primarily tactical issues. The author has a real insight into the Navy and Marine Corps as organizations, less, I think, of the Army Air Forces. The Fleet at Flood Tide is well worth reading, and Hornfischer's discussion of the forced (by the Imperial Japanese Army) suicides of Japanese civilians as a key event in the decision to employ atomic weapons against Japan is compelling. This is a very good book that could have been a great one but somehow does not reach that level.

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## **Jean says**

Hornfischer's new book "The Fleet at Flood Tide" is about the U. S. invasion of Saipan. The author details the fighting on shore, which he states inaugurated a new level of violence in the Pacific War. He discusses the ritual suicides of the Japanese garrison and the civilians.

Hornfischer states that the invasion of the Marianas was the critical moment in the Pacific Theatre. It marked the penetration of Japan's inner ring of defenses, it also triggered the first full-scale fleet engagement since the Solomon Islands campaign. The Battle of the Philippines Sea, the Great Mariana Turkey Shoot and the acquisition of airfields on Saipan allowed the new B-29 Superfortress bombers to reach Japanese homeland cities. Hornfischer called the phase of the war the punishment phase.

Hornfischer is eminently readable and rich in metaphors. The author discusses a number of major characters such as Admiral Raymond Spruance Marc Mitscher and Paul Tibbets. He concludes with a discussion about the use of the atomic bomb on Japan. Hornfischer is an excellent chronicler of the War in the Pacific.

The book is 650 pages and published in 2016 by Random House

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