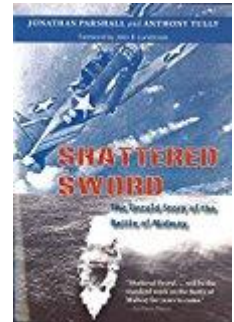


Jonathan Parshall, Anthony Tully. *Shattered Sword: The Japanese Story of the Battle of Midway*. Dulles: Potomac Books, 2005. xxvi + 613 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-57488-923-9.



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The Battle of Midway: A Needed Corrective

If this excellent book had been published fifty years ago, two generations of English-speaking historians would have been spared countless errors, large and small, about what happened at Midway. As it is, *Shattered Sword* corrects those mistakes--about the proximate and fundamental causes of the Japanese defeat--and then puts the battle and the larger failure of the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) into perspective.

The key to this book's importance is spelled out in the subtitle: this is the Japanese story of the battle. It is not another retelling of how the U.S. Navy won at Midway, filled out with Japanese sources. It is an attempt, by two American historians, to tell what the IJN did, and why--and most especially, to get inside the head of Admiral Nagumo Chuichi as he commanded the *Kido Butai* ("Mobile Force," or the Japanese carrier task force). This is an impossible task, since Nagumo died on Saipan in 1944 without leaving a memoir, and his after-battle report did not disclose what he thought during the fighting. But, by making use of Japanese sources (ranging from the official history to recent

e-mail interviews with surviving veterans), Jonathan Parshall and Anthony Tully present the battle in an entirely new way.

The authors divide the book into three sections: "Preliminaries," "Battle Diary," and "Reckonings." The first section, which includes a recapitulation of the first six months of World War II, the genesis of the IJN's battle plans for Midway, and an introduction to the major Japanese commanders, demonstrates several key characteristics of *Shattered Sword*. First, despite the book's massive length, Parshall and Tully do not waste space describing what others have done well: the American code-breaking, a critical factor that helped put Nimitz's carriers in position to attack *Kido Butai*, was recounted in Edwin Layton's *And I Was There* (1985), so here it is summarized in a few paragraphs. Second, they emphasize doctrine: each World War II navy built, armed, and operated its carriers according to carefully formulated plans--and these doctrines were usually followed slavishly. Third, given their potential readers, Parshall

and Tully take care to discuss their Japanese sources.

Battle Diary traces, hour-by-hour, and often minute-by-minute, what happened between the morning air raid on Midway Island on June 4, 1942 and the somber homecoming of the shattered *Kido Butai* ten days later. Although the narrative centers on Admiral Nagumo and his decisions, dozens of Japanese, from pilots to damage-control officers, are brought to life and followed through the battle. Some of the surprising characteristics of this section include the importance of the design of the IJN's carriers, particularly their enclosed hangars; the significance of Japan's decision to train officers--and not enlisted men--for specialties such as damage control; and, again, the crucial role played by IJN doctrine. In the last sixty years, American historians have repeatedly asked why Nagumo did not attack the USN carriers sooner. Parshall and Tully explain how IJN doctrine, alone, virtually ruled this out.

"Reckonings" ranges farther than the other parts of *Shattered Sword* to consider not just why Japan lost at Midway, but what difference that defeat meant to the subsequent course of the war in the Pacific. The authors also deal again with how historians have treated Midway, and underline the unfortunate effect that Fuchida Mitsuo's 1955 book *Midway: The Battle that Doomed Japan* had on historians outside of Japan. They conclude with a brief recounting and dismissal of some of the myths surrounding Midway, at least in the English-language history. The doomed American torpedo pilots did not bring the Japanese combat air patrol Zeros down, sparing the dive-bombers that would deliver the fatal blows: faulty Japanese pilot discipline, and the *Kido Butai*'s air search system were instead at fault. A more important myth is that the U.S. victory was a "miracle," a triumph against steep odds. Actually, as the authors point out, the Americans, between their three carriers and Midway Island's airfield, boasted more planes than *Kido Butai*, and Midway could not be sunk.

Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku had made the cardinal mistake of attacking a superior force while at the end of his own supply lines.

Parshall and Tully deserve special praise for the "extras" in the book: photographs are sparse, but were chosen either to illustrate things mentioned in the text, or because they are not known to Western readers; the appendices, index and bibliography are all well done; and the endnotes are unusually thorough. Some readers will be put off by their colloquial language: it was not necessary to describe Yamamoto's staff as having "an attitude problem," nor the Japanese torpedo bomber as "a pig." Readers should be cautioned that *Shattered Sword* cannot stand alone as a history of Midway. One also needs a book, such as John Lundstrom's *The First Team: Pacific Naval Air Combat from Pearl Harbor to Midway* (1984), that presents the American side of the fighting. And, to provide the background for the often shocking deeds and thinking of the Japanese, they should read Mark Peattie and David Evans's *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887-1941* (1997), along with Peattie's *Sunburst: The Rise of Japanese Naval Air Power, 1909-1941* (2003).

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