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John J. Domagalski. *Lost at Guadalcanal: The Final Battles of the Astoria and Chicago as Described by Survivors and in Official Reports.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2010. viii + 224 pp. $38.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-5897-4.

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On August 7, 1942, a hastily assembled American invasion force appeared off the coast of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. Its mission was to capture and secure the Japanese airfield being constructed on the island. Over the next seven months, American and Japanese forces clashed in seven major naval engagements, numerous land battles, and almost daily aerial combat. Both sides paid a heavy price in the campaign, each losing more than two dozen major warships and more than four hundred aircraft apiece. Two American warships lost off Guadalcanal, USS *Chicago* (CA-29) and USS *Astoria* (CA-34), are the focus of John J. Domagalski's *Lost at Guadalcanal*.

Products of the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty, *Chicago* and *Astoria* point to the compromises and hard decisions designers had to make in the balancing of armor, speed, and armament to meet the treaty requirements. Commissioned in 1931 and 1934 respectively, both cruisers joined the navy in the darkest days of the Great Depression and served in the Pacific throughout their careers. After providing background for the ships and some of the crew members, Domagalski begins a number of personal and report-based narratives centered on bringing these two cruisers to the waters off Guadalcanal. These narratives are based on survivor interviews and official reports from *Astoria*'s and *Chicago*'s time before and after arriving off Guadalcanal.

Domagalski's *Lost at Guadalcanal* has both strengths and weaknesses depending on the knowledge base and interest of the reader, and should be used with discretion. Using multiple first-person recollections and narratives, supported by official navy reports, Domagalski successfully creates a more complete picture of the events surrounding the loss of both ships than scholars have offered in the past. Readers interested in a detailed recounting of these two cruisers' actions off Guadalcanal will be impressed. However, this style also lends itself to confusion. The complexity of Domagalski's approach will affect readers who are unfamiliar with the topic; they may have difficulty following and unraveling the various layers of events due to the sheer number of reports and eyewitness accounts that Domagalski examines. In addition, this style results in unnecessary and problematic repetition. For example, Domagalski discusses the *Astoria*'s initial moments during the Battle of Savo Island from every available perspective, presenting a thorough view of those first minutes, but also bogging down the overall narrative.

Domagalski provides a consolidated primary reference work for those specifically interested in or researching these cruisers or their role in the Battle of Guadalcanal. However, less versed or general readers will have difficulty due to a lack of background or introductory information surrounding the larger actions and events leading up to and occurring at Guadalcanal. For the well-studied scholar and historian, the book does not offer as much as it could in the way of new information on the battles or the events onboard the two ships. Instead, *Lost at Guadalcanal* seeks to tell the story of the *Astoria*'s and *Chicago*'s final battles through as many eyes as possible, and with this narrow focus, the work succeeds. Those interested in the naval battles and Guadalcanal campaign as a whole should look elsewhere.

The campaign for Guadalcanal was a costly one, especially for those at sea. Historian James D. Hornfischer remarks that for every American infantryman killed on land, three of their comrades at sea were lost.[1] Seven major naval engagements, including two of the war's five aircraft carrier battles, were waged because of ongoing operations centered on Guadalcanal. The *Astoria* and *Chicago* were but two of the twenty-four major American warships lost in the waters surrounding the island during the seven-month campaign. The story of how they fought, and were lost, was one worth retelling and Domagalski is to be commended for weaving so many narratives together to add fidelity and detail to some of the

lesser-known vessels and their contributions.

Note

[1]. James D. Hornfischer, *Neptune's Inferno: The U.S. Navy at Guadalcanal* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011), xix.

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