



2009.12.02

Anthony P. Tully, *Battle of Surigao Strait*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2009. Pp. xvii, 329. ISBN 978-0-253-35242-2.

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Leyte, June 1944–January 1945, published in 1958 as volume 12 of Samuel Eliot Morison's *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*,¹ provided the first detailed account in English of the Battle of Surigao Strait and has been the source for countless books and articles over the last fifty years. Now, at last, we have a monograph on the battle by Anthony Tully, an independent scholar who has written extensively on naval history.² There are striking similarities between Morison's 43 pages, and Tully's 273, and there are significant differences.

The Battle of Leyte Gulf, the largest naval battle, not just in World War II, but in history, was a series of air-and-sea engagements fought around the Philippines from 23 to 26 October 1944.³ The night action in Surigao Strait, while dramatic, was the smallest piece of the overall battle.

Morison, working from U.S. Navy records, interviews with American personnel, postwar interrogations of Japanese officers, and a limited number of translated Japanese records, seems—if Tully's detailed account is correct—to have gotten the basic history of the action right. The ships engaged, their actions the night of October 24–25, and their fates are almost all described the same way in both books. What is different is the tremendous detail Tully adds and a fundamental shift from an American to a Japanese perspective. Not only has he drawn on sections of the official history—the *Senshi sosho*, he has also obtained translations of dozens of documents seized by the United States in 1945 and interrogation reports compiled by the Allied Translator Interpretation Section after questioning five Japanese prisoners only days after the battle. These men were among the small percentage Japanese who survived the battle and included one each from battleships *Fuso* and *Yamashiro*. Morison did not make use of those records. Finally, Tully has consulted almost twenty Japanese books and articles published since Morison wrote. These sources allow him to focus on the experiences of particular individuals. All the commanders in this battle, fought at night amid frequent rain squalls, had trouble discerning where friendly and enemy ships were. The Japanese, with their inferior radar, were in an especially difficult situation.

But the increase in visibility did not happen quite fast enough, and Nishimura had relaxed his own apparent anxieties about it. About 0105 the lookouts on battleship *Fuso* saw a suspicious silhouette ahead off the port bow. This was the wrong place to be, and *Fuso*'s secondary battery officer Lieutenant Takatsugu Yamagata was taking no chances. Whether or not Yamagata asked Masami Ban's permission is unknown, but *Fuso*'s port secondary battery now opened fire, aiming for the lights. Six-inch shells hurtled out into the night...

No return fire came from the darkness, but the voice-radio circuit suddenly burst into life with emphatic shouts in Japanese: "Cease firing, cease firing! Friendly ships!" It was *Mogami*, and *Toma* was turning sharply to port to draw away and switched on his cruiser's recognition lights. Too late! One of *Fuso*'s six-inch shells struck *Mogami* aft, penetrating into the rear sickbay on the middle deck on the port side. By a great mercy, it failed to explode, but even so, the dud shell killed three *Mogami* sailors. Even more tragically, the three men were in the aft sickbay because they had been wounded by enemy strafing of the aircraft deck in the morning air attack and were being ministered to there. Having been injured by the enemy's fire, they were now slain by their own (120).

1. Fifteen volumes (Boston: Little, Brown, 1947–62; rpt. Urbana: U Illinois Pr, 2001–2).

2. See, e.g., *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2005), coauthored with Jonathan B. Parshall.

3. For excellent coverage of all the phases of the battle and the controversies about the failures of both Admiral Kurita and Admiral Halsey, see *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Battle of Leyte Gulf" <www.miwsr.com/rd/0928.htm>.

Tully carefully recounts the entire battle, from initial Japanese plans for Operation Sho-GO to the eventual sinking of most of the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) ships that survived the battle in air attacks during the week after it ended. The new detail here is mostly, but not entirely, on the Japanese side of the fighting. While Morison had information about the two Japanese admirals—Kiyohide Shima and Shoji Nishimura—and the captain of the destroyer *Shigure*, one of the few IJN ships to survive, Tully quotes dozens of Japanese officers and men. He also corrects one significant error in Morison's narrative that has been perpetuated in every subsequent non-Japanese account: the fate of battleship *Fuso*. Specifically, Morison states that "*Fuso* blew into two halves, which drifted slowly southward; the bow part sank around 0420 and the stern within an hour."⁴ Both halves supposedly burned for perhaps an hour, confusing American ships about the number of adversaries they faced. In fact, as Tully shows, the *Fuso* slowly foundered and sank, intact, as torpedoed battleships always have. Large pools of oil from the wreck remained on the surface, burning, and these confused American observers.⁵

In one respect, both Morison and Tully commit the same error of emphasis. Historically, the battle is interesting because it was the last battleship vs. battleship action, and because the Americans used a battle line formation and "crossed the T" of Nishimura's little squadron. Both Morison and Tully make much of Admiral Jesse Oldendorf's task force of old battleships, which included several veterans of Pearl Harbor. Both note which vessels had modern fire control systems, and that all the American ships were short of armor-piercing shells. They mention the "arched line of tracers" as dozens of American shells raced toward the unfortunate *Yamashiro* and the heavy cruiser *Mogami*. But the drama is misleading. The *Fuso* and *Yamashiro* both sank because of multiple hits from U.S. Navy destroyer torpedoes, not gunfire. The cruiser *Mogami* was finally scuttled the next day after surviving air attacks during withdrawal from the strait. The hundreds of 14-inch and 16-inch shells fired had little effect; the American destroyers and their slow but reliable torpedoes sank Nishimura's battleships. In fact, the Battle of Leyte Gulf was a remarkable display of USN destroyer torpedo prowess: off Samar, hits by the scratch force guarding Taffy 3's escort carriers damaged a cruiser and slowed the Japanese battleships; at Surigao, the destroyers were more effective than the large cruisers and battleships (not to mention PT boats) with which they shared the sea.

Overall, *Battle of Surigao Strait* is a fine battle monograph, carefully researched using materials old and new in both Japanese and English. Tully is even aware of what divers have found in Surigao Strait in recent years. The writing is good, and the photos, maps, and drawings clear and well chosen. This is a book for people who love reading military history and want a modern, non-partisan account of a unique fleet action.

4. Morison, *Leyte*, 220 n. 28.

5. See also Jeffrey R. Cox, "The *Fuso* Mysteries—What Happened to the *Fuso*?" *Pro Cynic* (31 Oct 2007) <www.miwsr.com/rd/0929.htm>, for a very detailed discussion.