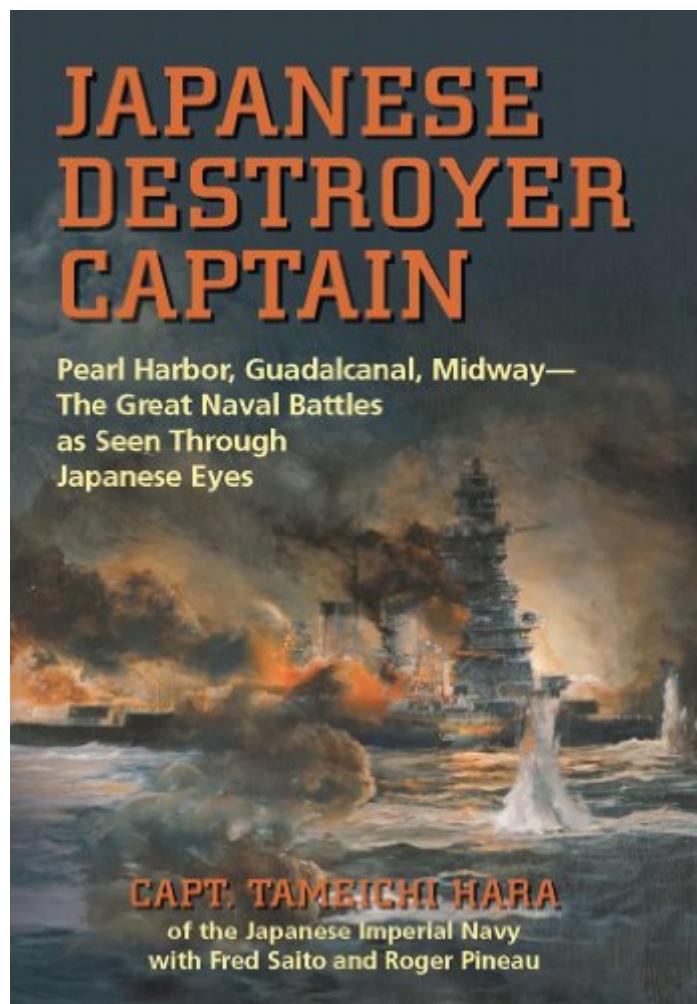


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Japanese Destroyer Captain



Synopsis

This highly regarded war memoir was a best seller in both Japan and the United States during the 1960s and has long been treasured by historians for its insights into the Japanese side of the surface war in the Pacific. The author was a survivor of more than one hundred sorties against the Allies and was known throughout Japan as the Unsinkable Captain. A hero to his countrymen, Capt. Hara exemplified the best in Japanese surface commanders: highly skilled, hard driving, and aggressive. Moreover, he maintained a code of honor worthy of his samurai grandfather, and, as readers of this book have come to appreciate, he was as free with praise for American courage and resourcefulness as he was critical of himself and his senior commanders.

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Customer Reviews

Probably one of the two books anyone interested in the Pacific naval war simply MUST have in his library (the other the brilliant 'Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy' by the unfortunately named Paul S. Dull). True experts and aficionados should overlook the occasional mis-identification of ship types (undoubtedly a result of either negligent editing or translation problems), but otherwise a superb recollection of the Pacific war from the point of view of a famous

Japanese destroyer captain. Having studied this war and its naval campaigns, one thing that always struck me was the peculiar paradox of the near-deification of Admiral Yamamoto (engineer of the Pearl Harbor attack) by the Japanese at the time, and many foreign historians as well. Frankly, from any objective point of view, it was Yamamoto who almost single-handedly ensured the disastrous defeat of the Japanese navy, first, by not in fact taking out the most important targets at Pearl Harbor (the enormous fuel tank farm, and the even more important ship-repair facilities and machine shops), and secondly, by repeatedly committing vastly insufficient forces at the places of most importance, and invariably sending these elements through the most convoluted and tortuous separate routes to get there (each element could be easily defeated one at a time). Further, it appears that at no time during the war did the Japanese have the slightest interest in obtaining or using intelligence, by either method or desire, and this led them into one catastrophe after another.

I first encountered this work thirty-odd years ago while doing some fairly extensive research on the early years of World War II in the South Pacific. My original copy of this book, now in an advanced stage of deterioration, was a paperback, and the work had been out of print for a long time; therefore I was very glad to find this hardback reprint. It's important to remember that the author is a product of a different culture, and within the context of that culture, the product of a different time; inevitably his writing style reflects those differences. Readers who anticipate the smooth style of Robert Leckie, E.B. Sledge, or Samuel Eliot Morison may find Hara's narrative a bit slower, perhaps a little more taxing. Nonetheless, the rewards are worth the extra attention. In 1941 the Imperial Japanese Navy was the queen of the Pacific. The IJN had never lost a battle. Its seamen had been forged in a crucible of exacting, intense, even brutal training, in which the deaths of sailors were considered a regrettable but otherwise inconsequential matter. They were tough, seasoned, highly motivated, and - on the surface of it at least - contemptuous of death. Moreover, Japan had already been at war for some years, so their ranks included many veterans already blooded. Hara's story as an officer, a leader of such men in the IJN, humanizes the face of the enemy somewhat, provides an alternative script to events we thought we already knew, but does not greatly illuminate the interested Western mind in those matters which have rendered the Eastern mind puzzling to us. This can be a little offputting; you know how we love explanations.

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