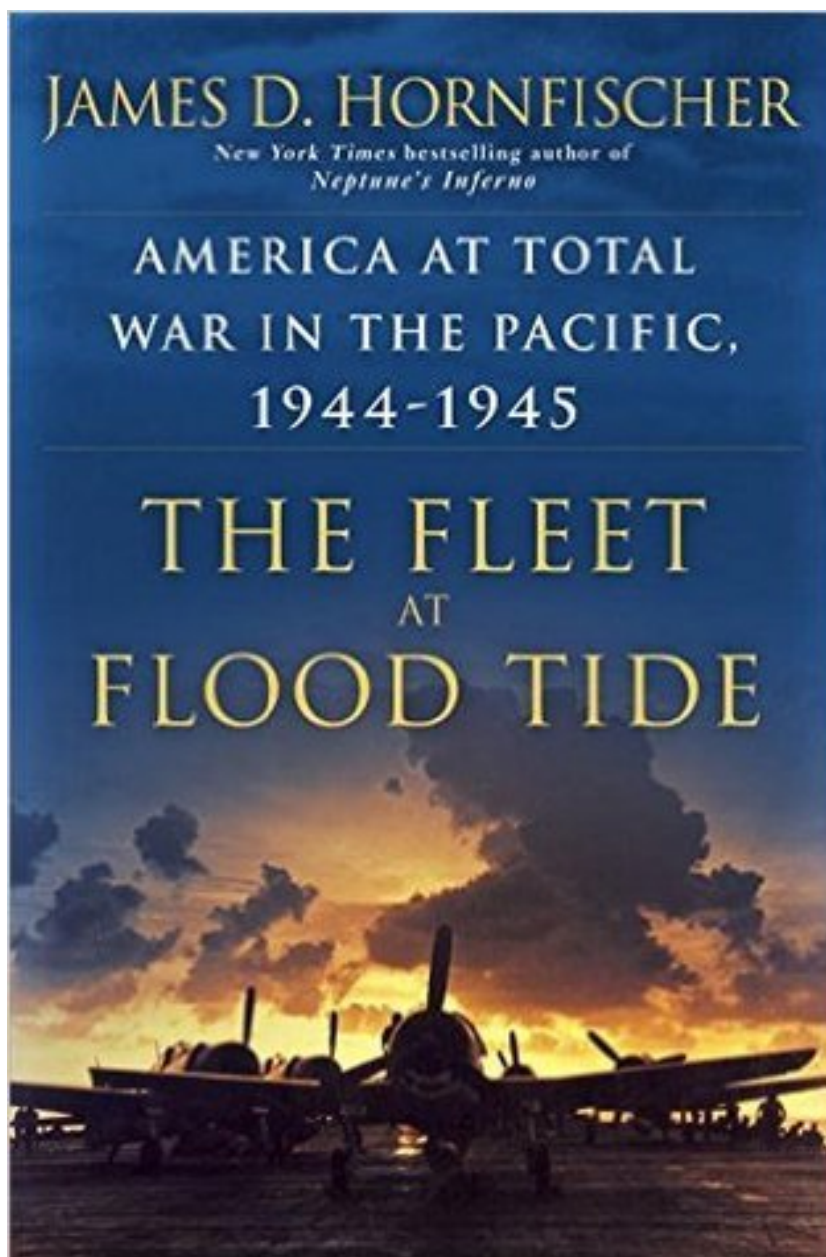


The Fleet at Flood Tide: America at Total War in the Pacific, 1944-1945 Book PDF Download



By:
James D. Hornfischer

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What people Say:

Michael

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 attack

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:

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:

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:

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,

. 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:

Tom Mathews

Full disclosure: James D. Hornfischer's first book,

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 sto

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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' 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.

(James Bradley) and

(Weiss) are creditable accounts of Iwo Jima and

(Evan Thomas) and the aforementioned

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.

happy

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

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In looking at Adm Spruance, the author also looks at the tension between Spruance and his subordinate commanders â€“ 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 Spruanceâ€™s â€œTurn on the Lightsâ€• 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.

Another storyline that I appreciated was Hornfisherâ€™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.

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 doesnâ€™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 background 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.

Sweetwilliam

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.

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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 its 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.

Jim

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.

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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! I was 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 Corp; 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.