

Book Review - Intrepid Aviators

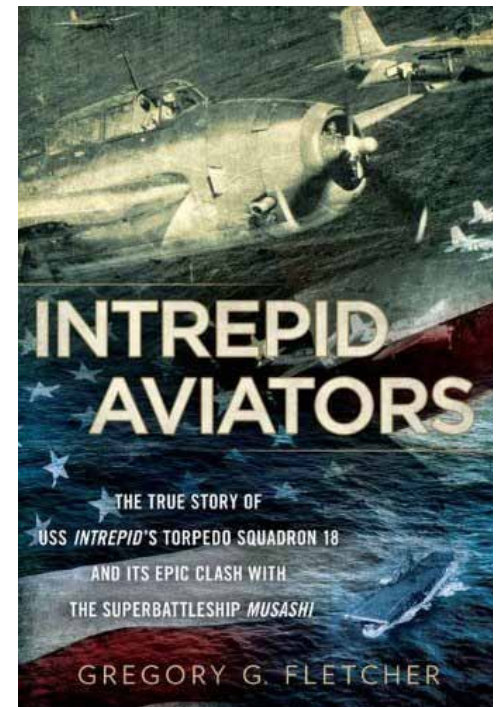
by Hal Marshman Sr

I purchased this book from Amazon.com, after reading a small blurb a friend had written about it. In my opinion, this book tells two stories, running concurrently. The first story being that of VT-18 operating from the USS Intrepid - training, and deployment with VT-18 on the Intrepid, through the attack on the Musashi. The second is that of author Gregory Fletcher's father, Will Fletcher - his shooting down, eventual days with Philippine Guerillas, and return to the U.S. In so doing, it also discusses the combat record of Air Group 18, and particularly VT-18, the torpedo bombers.

In the telling of the two stories, the author delves into great detail on such things as the start up procedure of a TBM, through both the take-off and return to carrier operations. That might sound very technical, but the author carries you through these machinations smoothly, and almost conversationally. He even makes mention of one of my favorite subjects, the Great Lakes training carriers. His descriptions of operating an Avenger even carry through an actual torpedo attack, and the ditching of a badly damaged torpedo bomber.

Fletcher introduces you to his father's squadron mates, and their commanding officers. You meet these people not only in their operational capacity, but in their relaxed party time modes, thus providing a well-rounded appraisal of these individuals. You are guided through the entire wartime deployment of VT-18, to include all their battles, and all their losses. In this telling, you are brought in on the total grand strategy of the U.S. war in the Pacific, why things were as they were, and the effect these strategies had on the unwinding of the war against Japan.

Greg Fletcher's narrative doesn't fall short as regards Japan's strategic procedures and objectives. You are informed of the strategies of the Imperial Japanese Naval authorities, the reasoning behind their decisions, and the eventual results of their thinking. You are in on the naval battles around the Invasion of the Philippines, the commanders who planned and fought them, and how each battle worked out. As a vital part of the story, the super battle-ship Musashi, and to a lesser extent her sister, the Yamato, are discussed at length, as befits these behemoths, the world's largest battlewagons ever. Of course, as part of the telling,



you find out just what it took to sink what the Japanese called the "Unsinkable".

One of the big treats for me in reading this book, was the survival of Will Fletcher, and how he made it from the middle of the Sibuyan Sea to the island of Panay, and his link up with the Guerillas on that island. Since my teen years, I've taken an interest in stories of how the Guerillas in the Philippines formed, existed, and took part in the war against the Japanese. Intrepid Aviators filled me in with a little more information to add to what else I've read over the years.

I must stress that the author tells a very readable story here, and doesn't bore you with dry statistics. From his first hand knowledge of his Dad's participation, through the grand

strategies, and battles both land and sea, he manages to rivet your attention. In addition to the narrative, there's a decent photographic section, to include several rare pictures

onboard the IJN Musashi. I most whole heartedly recommend this book.

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