An abundance of new evidence demanded this reevaluation of Frank Jack Fletcher, the black shoe admiral who won his battles at sea but lost the war of public opinion. A surface warrior -- in contrast to a brown shoe naval aviator -- Fletcher led the carrier forces that won against all odds at Coral Sea, Midway, and the Eastern Solomons. These and other early carrier victories decided the Pacific War not only because they inflicted crippling losses but also because they denied Japan key strategic positions in the region. Despite these successes, by 1950 Fletcher had become one of the most controversial figures in U.S. naval history and was portrayed as a timid bungler who failed to relieve Wake Island in December 1941 and who deliberately abandoned the Marines at Guadalcanal. In this book, author John Lundstrom recalls that Fletcher once remarked, after an action is over, people talk a lot about how the decisions were deliberately reached,
but actually there’s always a hell of a lot of groping around, and notes that the goal of his study is to probe and explain the groping around. Drawing on new material, Lundstrom offers a fresh look at Fletcher’s decisions and actions. The first major reassessment in more than fifty years of the once-maligned naval officer, it provides a careful analysis of the effect of radio intelligence on decision-making in the carrier battles during the first nine months of the war in the Pacific. This new assessment is based on thousands of documents and massive dispatch files and personal papers that no historian has previously used.

**Personal Review: Black Shoe Carrier Admiral: Frank Jack Fletcher at Coral Sea, Midway & Guadacanal by John B. Lundstrom**

This account of the World War II career of Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher is a needed corrective to the misinformation that has been served up to the public over many years. Samuel Eliot Morison took a dislike to Fletcher, possibly because the admiral failed to cultivate him at the time he was writing his history of World War II. The inaccuracies, omissions, and critical tone toward Fletcher in his volumes have been reflected in the works of other authors.

By writing the latest and possibly most detailed account of U.S. Naval operations in the Pacific from the start of the war through the Guadalcanal Campaign, Lundstrom has given us an updated history of this vital period when the Pacific War often hung in the balance. Many aspects of the naval war not directly involving Fletcher are discussed. Thus this book goes much further than merely providing a defense of Fletcher, it gives us the basis of a potential successor or even replacement for the histories of the U.S. Navy in the first year of World War II written by Morison and others.

John Lundstrom is well qualified to perform this task by having written three major works on naval operations during December 1941 to late 1942. His previous work has clearly helped him make this book a success. He has done significant in-depth research of this period of the war by using original sources apparently not consulted by others. The result is a book which provides new details on many aspects of the Pacific War at sea. Minor negatives are a somewhat dry writing style and insufficiently detailed maps.

"Black Shoe Carrier Admiral" reminds us that it was Fletcher who commanded the U.S. forces at Coral Sea, the first battle to seriously slow the Japanese advance and which paved the way for the decisive victory of Midway. Fletcher, not Morison's hero Spruance, was the senior commander at Midway who made many of the critical decisions that resulted in the turn of the tide in the Pacific.

Lundstrom explains why Fletcher’s controversial withdrawal of the carriers from Guadalcanal was a wise decision. These carriers represented three quarters of the total U.S. aircraft carrier inventory and Fletcher was under
orders not to risk them unless the potential results justified it. At Guadalcanal, the circumstances did not justify that risk.

There has never been an official history of the U.S. Navy in World War II, only Morison's semi official history. While Morison's work is well written and valuable, it was produced too close to the events it describes so it contains errors and omissions. A replacement is overdue. With some revisions, "Black Shoe Carrier Admiral" could serve as the first volume of a new multi volume history of the navy’s role in World War II. John Lundstrom would be the man to do this job.

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