

INNOVATION AND THE IMPERIAL JAPANESE NAVY

A Book Review by

THOMAS G. MAHNKEN

Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887–1941

by David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie

Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997.

661 pp. \$49.95

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Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887–1941, fills a void in the literature of both military history and strategic studies. It can be read as an account of the development of Japanese naval technology, a study of bureaucratic battles over new weapons, concepts, and doctrine, or a history of Japanese naval strategy and operations. The text is lavishly illustrated with photos, figures, and maps. Above all, the authors provide a thoroughly researched work of that will interest the historian and military professional alike.

The evolution of Japanese naval power in the five decades leading up to World War II was a significant event. The Imperial Fleet was founded in the wake of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, which unified Japan. Although they lacked the infrastructure of Europe or the United States, over the next forty years the Japanese managed to construct a navy that was strong enough to decisively defeat a regional power, China, as well as a great European power, Russia. By 1920 Tokyo had the third largest fleet in the world. Despite continuing industrial inferiority—and with an economy that was one-ninth the size of America and heavily dependent on imports of raw materials—Japan was sufficiently powerful to directly challenge the U.S. Navy in the Pacific by 1941.

The Japanese navy emulated foreign practices and evolved innovative concepts of its own. Not surprisingly, Tokyo looked to the world's most powerful fleet—the Royal Navy—as the model for

Thomas G. Mahnken is an associate professor in the Department of Strategy and Policy at the Naval War College.

Heavy cruiser *Atago*, 1926.



Naval Historical Center

modernization. Evans and Peattie describe efforts by Japan to purchase the best naval technology and to build an impressive domestic arms industry. By the early 20th century, this process yielded a fleet that was better organized, trained, and equipped than any other in the region.

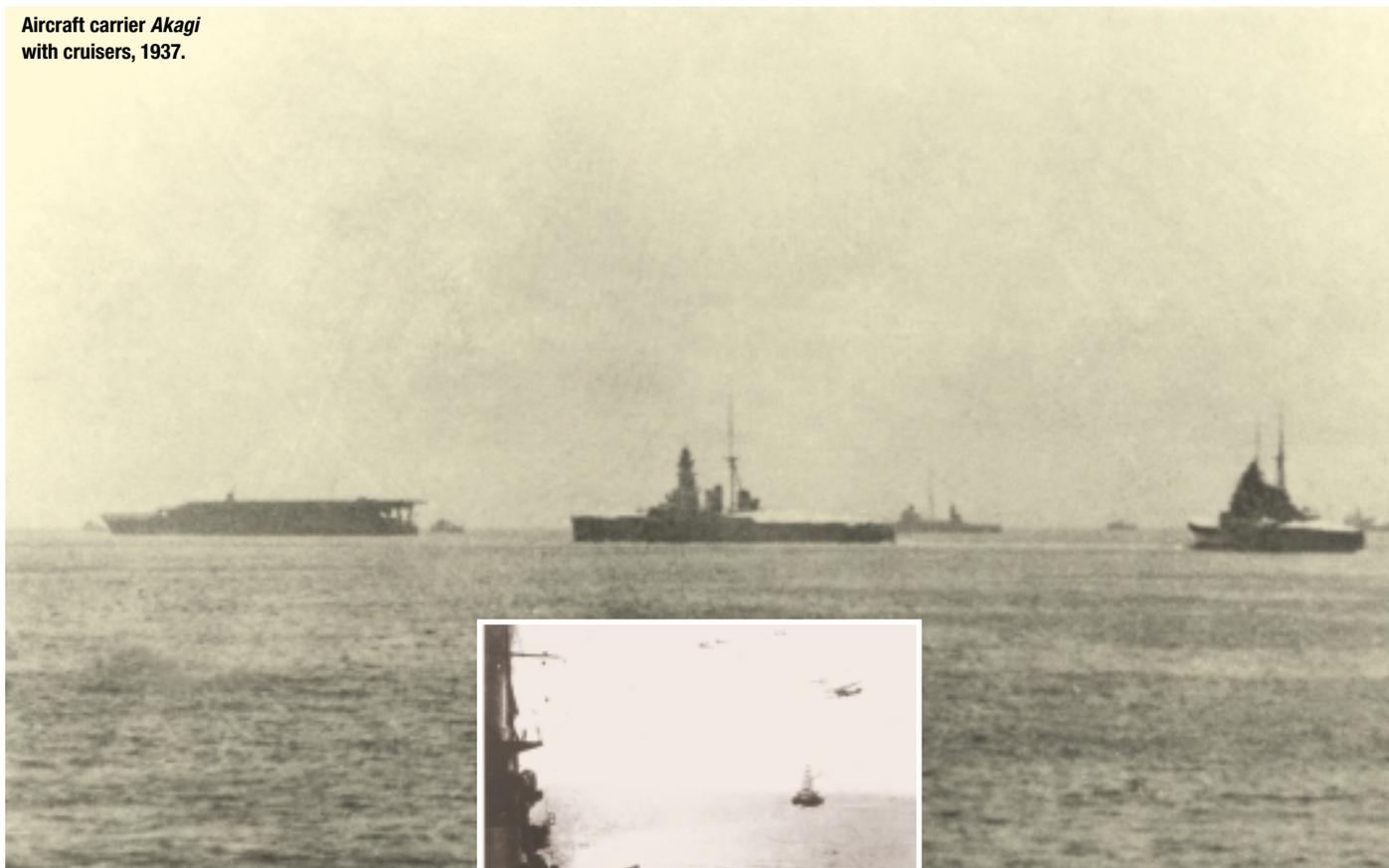
The book sheds new light on the performance of the Imperial Fleet in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars. Drawing on the Japanese secret history of the latter conflict, for example, the authors offer new details on the Battle of Tsushima, one of the most decisive naval actions of the century. The result is a more balanced account of performance during the war, highlighting the success of Japan against Russia while revealing various miscues. Evans and Peattie also describe how these two conflicts spawned a unique Japanese approach to naval thought that dominated strategic and tactical discussion up to World War II.

Kaigun should interest all students of military innovation. There has been an abundance of recent works on the development of doctrine, organizations, and technology to solve strategic and operational challenges. The majority have been focused on the great powers. Evans and Peattie, however, illuminate problems associated with innovation in a developing state. Indeed, readers may find the account of Japan's naval progress in the interwar period suggestive of techniques that future regional competitors may employ against the United States. Although the Japanese sought to

perfect a strategy that embraced “interception-attribution operations” to exclude the United States from the Western Pacific, future foes may attempt to deny access to forward bases.

The most fascinating section of this book deals with efforts by the Japanese Imperial Navy to develop the innovations needed to defeat the larger, more advanced U.S. Navy. Forbidden by treaty from matching America quantitatively, Japan sought to exploit operational and technological niches to inflict disproportionate damage. Under the rubric of “using a few to conquer many,” the Japanese developed comparative advantages such as long-range torpedo combat, night operations by surface units, and a tactic of outranging the U.S. fleet with subsurface, surface, and air forces. The Imperial Navy also designed and produced weapons needed to implement its strategy. During the early 1930s it deployed the first oxygen-propelled (Type 93) torpedo, whose range, speed, and payload far exceeded American and British models. In 1940 it fielded the Mitsubishi A6N “Zeke,” the world's foremost carrier-based fighter. While Japan lagged behind the United States and Great Britain in high-technology systems like radar, it built less-advanced sensors, including superior optics and searchlights. By 1940 the Japanese were much the equal of their British and American foes in training, technological innovation, and tactical proficiency.

Aircraft carrier *Akagi*
with cruisers, 1937.



Battleship *Fusō*.

While the authors detail the success of the Japanese prior to World War II, they also explain their defeat at the hands of the United States. Evans and Peattie examine, for example, how the desire for a quick, decisive victory led Tokyo to neglect unglamorous but vital dimensions of operations such as logistics and personnel policy. Because its leadership assumed that a war with America would be decided by a single battle, the Japanese ignored such capabilities as commerce protection and antisubmarine warfare, deficiencies which became crippling vulnerabilities in a long war of attrition. The authors also demonstrate Japan's weakness in intelligence and cryptology, both vital to U.S. victory.

This book clearly establishes that tactical effectiveness is no substitute for sound strategy. Japan failed to effectively harness its national resources for a war with the United States. Instead its army remained committed to a conflict in China, while its navy became increasingly enamored of an advance into Southeast Asia. In planning such a campaign, the naval leadership fell prey to circular reasoning. In the climate of

worsening Japanese-American relations during the late 1930s, the Imperial Navy expected Washington to reduce or eliminate oil exports. Since the United States was its major petroleum supplier, Tokyo would be obliged to look to the Netherlands East Indies. But conquering the oil fields of the Indies would embroil Japan in a conflict with Washington that it could not win without access to those oil fields. The authors find little evidence to suggest that national leaders ever sought

alternatives to reduce the potential for war with the United States.

Kaigun complements other literature on this period, including *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1941–1945* by Paul Dull (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1978), and *Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History of American Intelligence and the Japanese Navy in World War II* by Hahn Prados (New York: Random House, 1995). Evans and Peattie have written a book that is far superior to previous histories. Not only do they blaze new trails by chronicling Japanese naval developments; they also explore well-worn topics such as the planning for Pearl Harbor. In short, this work will set the standard for further research on the Imperial Japanese Navy. **JFQ**

RETHINKING MODERN WAR AND TECHNOLOGY

A Book Review by

SHAWN C. WHETSTONE

The Principles of War for the Information Age

by Robert R. Leonhard

Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1998.

287 pp. \$29.95

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Serious students of military history seek to discover principles to improve the odds of winning future conflicts. Since many believe that we are in the midst of a revolution in military affairs driven by information technologies, an examination of the tenets of military thought seems particularly timely. *Principles of War for the Information Age*, skillfully accomplishes that task.

This volume advances the author's thinking on military affairs begun in two earlier books, *The Art of Maneuver: Maneuver-Warfare Theory and Airland Battle* and *Fighting by Minutes: Time and the Art of War* (reviewed in *JFQ*, Autumn 1995). Whether readers agree or disagree with him, this latest effort by Robert Leonhard should provoke discussion and further establish his position as one of the pre-eminent contemporary American military theorists.

One might expect on opening this book to find yet another treatise on information warfare. Not so. The author digs deeper to address the fundamental concepts of conflict. Unwilling to simply critique his subject, Leonhard thoroughly dissects the principles that govern warfighting doctrine, then constructs a new set of principles for warfare.

The Principles of War for the Information Age has two distinct parts. The first examines the conventional wisdom on warfighting. The second derives new principles to guide our thinking on future conflicts. Although the book reveals a discernable slant toward the Army perspective on land warfare, the ideas it espouses are applicable across service boundaries.

Shawn C. Whetstone is a research staff member in the Operational Evaluation Division at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

Despite the title of this work, the author doesn't look for answers in the wonders of information technology. Rather, the potential of technological innovation facilitates a general exploration of the principles of war themselves. And, while the ideas examined are complex, the narrative is clear and concise.

The author's devastating appraisal of current principles relies on understanding their origin and nature. Rather than disputing their validity in historical context, he artfully demonstrates why most are not principles at all and others are inadequate. Of the nine principles identified in Army doctrine (maneuver, offensive, mass, economy of force, objective, security, simplicity, surprise, and unity of command), only economy of force and surprise emerge largely unscathed.

Leonhard offers no magic solutions; he argues that none exist. Instead, he reduces a vast knowledge of military history to laws or categories of thinking. Three laws (humanity, economy, and duality) convey immutable truths that have governed military affairs throughout history. The law of humanity recognizes that warfare is basically a human activity; thus military thinkers must consider human nature in studying and practicing it. The law of economy states that resources are limited and commanders seek to meet conflicting demands within resource constraints. The law of

duality demonstrates that human conflict has two aspects. This duality is readily apparent in the seven principles which Leonhard lays out.

The first principle, knowledge and ignorance, is independent since it affects the application of the others. Three groupings contain the remaining six: the principles of aggression (dislocation and confrontation, distribution and concentration) concern the intentions of friendly forces toward enemies in accomplishing a mission, the principles of interaction (opportunity and reaction, activity and security) address the interplay between friendly and enemy forces, and the principles of control (option acceleration and objective, command and anarchy) address management of friendly forces.

These principles suggest areas to consider but don't offer solutions. Instead, they reflect opposite sides of the same coin and emphasize the need for balance. They contribute to military science by providing an appreciation of central truths and new ways to think about warfare. The practical application of these truths will prove useful to the operational art.

This book should provoke informed debate over the definition and use of the principles of war. Anyone interested in military affairs and changes introduced by the information age will learn a good deal from reading and pondering it. **JFQ**

Remember to look for

Joint Force Quarterly
on the Joint Doctrine Web site

http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/jfq_pubs/index.htm

