

This is a significant, well-argued contribution to the battle's historiography for which, in deploying a breadth of carefully selected evidence, Cumming deserves much credit in taking the path of most resistance, an 'attack' which he undertakes in a structured and robust manner. Inevitably, his sympathies lie with the Senior Service, and at times the evidence used reinforces this, perhaps not unreasonably, as a counterpoint to the vast historiography lauding the RAF's 'finest hour'. No one doubts that the Royal Navy would have steamed in and wrought havoc with an invasion fleet, but, fortunately, it was never required to do so. Instead, it fell to the fighter and bomber boys to do the best they could, day by day, in defence of an island expecting invasion at any moment. This takes nothing away from Forbes and the Royal Navy, nor, conversely, implies that Dowding and Fighter Command were somehow underhand, or tricksters, in taking the glory for achieving 'a victory of sorts' during the battle of Britain. Warts and all, the Dowding system achieved its purpose and contributed decisively as a check on Hitler's ambitions, as acknowledged in Roskill's *The War at Sea* (1957, ch. 13) – alas, the official Royal Naval history.

**Admiral 'Bull' Halsey: The Life and Wars of the Navy's Most Controversial Commander.** By John Wukovits. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2010. xiv + 276 pp. US\$27.00. ISBN 978 0 230 60284 7

**Reviewed by:** Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, *US Naval War College*

William Halsey was a colourful figure and garnered much media attention during the Second World War. He was on the cover of *Time* magazine twice (30 November 1942 and 23 July 1945) and eventually received the fifth star of a fleet admiral, the last individual in the US Navy to be promoted to that rank. In many ways Hollywood has been kinder to him than history. He was the subject of a biographical film *The Gallant Hours* (1960), with James Cagney playing the lead. He has also been played by Robert Mitchum and James Whitmore in other films. A Halsey character has appeared in *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo* (1944), *Battle Stations* (1956), *The Eternal Sea* (1955), *Tora, Tora, Tora* (1970), *Midway* (1976), *MacArthur* (1977), and *Pearl Harbor* (2001), and in two television mini-series, *The Winds of War* (1983) and *War and Remembrance* (1989). Paul McCartney even wrote a pop song about him entitled 'Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey' (1971).

This book, though, is the first full-fledged biography of the admiral in 30 years, unless one includes the fictional study *The Fighting Sailor*, written by Jack Ryan and mentioned in the novel and film *The Hunt for Red October* (1990). 'Your conclusions were all wrong, Ryan. Halsey acted stupidly,' Captain Marko Ramius remarks in both versions.

John Wukovits brings many strengths to this project. He is a talented writer who understands the Pacific theatre, having written three other books on the subject. He has also mined the Halsey papers at the Library of Congress and found an unpublished autobiography that is significantly different from Halsey's published memoirs. He also draws upon 58 oral histories.

This biography has all the material for an important study and rewarding read, but ends up disappointing in both areas. The general historiographical representation of Halsey has

been that he was a bold, daring admiral, willing to take risks, who delivered victories to a navy and nation that were badly in need of them in the early period of the war, but that these same traits eventually led him to make bad decisions that jeopardized his command for no good reason other than a zeal to do battle with the enemy. Wukovits basically endorses this view, and tells his readers nothing new. He shows that Halsey was a media superstar in 1942 when the nation needed heroes in the Pacific. Halsey performed well in all the assignments he received, but was best when he was at sea. As the war neared its conclusion, he had never been in combat and began to ache for the opportunity to lead a fleet engagement. He began taking needless risks with the lives of his men.

This standard line has Halsey's desperation for action culminating at the battle of Leyte Gulf. His pursuit of a Japanese column seemed to offer him the opportunity for that engagement. The Japanese force was a decoy, and Halsey exposed the landing force to a direct attack by the Japanese, which failed only because of their timidity. Wukovits makes a damning case, but there were some sound reasons for the admiral's decisions that never receive the full consideration they deserve. He was going into battle in a diminished state. He had lost about 40 per cent of his air power when John McCain's carriers departed for refuelling and repair. The admiral also had intelligence, which had previously been highly accurate, that indicated what we now know was a diversion was actually the main force. Finally, American naval forces had been under air attack for a couple of days: this was not highly effective, but leaving a force of surface ships to guard the San Bernardino Strait without any air cover would have been more rash and foolhardy. Dividing an already diminished aviation asset also would not have been that clever. Leaving a task force at the strait was a move that made sense only in retrospect. This is not to say that Halsey made the right decision at Leyte Gulf, but that he had some reasons that seemed sound at the time and that make a strong counter to Wukovits's argument. The author would have had a stronger case for his own position if he had addressed and dismissed these considerations.

This biography is a bit colourless as well. Halsey as an individual never emerges, despite his powerful public remarks. His wife and family are barely mentioned. Wukovits never tells his readers that the Halseys separated towards the end of the admiral's life and that he died alone in a hotel room. Basically, the author gives his readers a biography of a career, not a life.

**The War for Korea, 1950–1951: They Came from the North.** By Allan R. Millett.  
Lawrence: University Press of Kansas. 2010. xx + 644 pp. US\$45.00 hbk.  
ISBN 978 0 7006 1709 8

**Reviewed by:** Robert Barnes, *London School of Economics and Political Science*

In his groundbreaking work on the civil and international origins of the Korean War, *The War for Korea, 1945–1950: A House Burning*, published in 2005, the pre-eminent American military historian Allan Millett claimed that this early Cold War conflict actually began in April 1948, when a Communist-led insurgency erupted on the island of Jeju-do. Millett explained that this act represented the first phase of a Maoist 'people's war' and created a