

About the *Senshi Sōsho* (War History Series)

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The *Senshi Sōsho* is a series of 102 volumes (to which two supplementary volumes were later added) on the military history of the Pacific War (including the Sino-Japanese War). These volumes contain the results of research conducted at the then War History Office (renamed the Military History Department, and later reorganized into the Center for Military History) of the National Defense College (later renamed the National Institute for Defense Studies) of the Defense Agency, or the Ministry of Defense as we know it today. The series was published by Asagumo Shimbunsha [Asagumo Newspaper Inc.] between 1966 and 1980. Although the series is usually called an “official” war history, the fact that it was published by a private publisher and not the government shows the official stance of the government that, although the series contains the results of research conducted by a branch of a governmental institution (i.e. the War History Office of the National Defense College), it does not express the official view of the Japanese government on the Pacific War. As mentioned in the foreword, “the main purpose of the publication of this series is to serve as educational and research material for the Self-Defense Forces,” but that “its public use has been taken into consideration as well.”

A study of the history of the Pacific War and a compilation of the results by a Japanese governmental institution had been planned since the days of the occupation right after the defeat. However, it was not until 1955, after the end of the occupation, when the War History Office was established within the Defense Agency, that the plan was put into effect in earnest. At the War History Office, dozens of veterans were appointed to compile the materials. They held meeting after meeting to write materials for educational and research purposes, revised these materials based on the discussions in these study meetings, and prepared manuscripts. For the research, the War History Office gathered about 70,000 documents, which were scattered and lost after the defeat, interviewed about 15,000 veterans, and collected about 10,000 documents transferred from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, which had taken over the demobilization of the Army and the Navy, and about 30,000 documents that had been collected by the occupation forces and were subsequently returned from the United States.

In 1965, the Defense Agency set forth a plan to publish the research results of the War History Office as the *Senshi Sōsho* series. Publication was started the next year; the study meetings at the War History Office, as many as 3,500 in ten years, and the results of some 240,000 pages of prepared manuscripts provided the basis for the series. The number of authors and researchers who participated in the compilation was 134. The entire 102-volume series can be subdivided in various ways. In one way, they can be divided into seven volumes on the circumstances which led to the opening of hostilities, ten volumes on the Army Department of IGHQ, seven volumes on the Navy Department of IGHQ and the Combined

Fleet, ten volumes on the military preparations, nine volumes on the invasion operations, ten volumes on the operations in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea, five volumes on the operations in the central Pacific theater, three volumes on the defensive operations in the southwestern theater, four volumes on the operations in Burma, three volumes on the operations in the northeastern theater, three volumes on the operations in Manchuria, fifteen volumes on the operations in China, five volumes on the decisive battles in the Philippines, three volumes on the decisive battles on Okinawa, four volumes on the operations in the homeland, three volumes on the history of special operations (vessel escorting, submarine warfare, etc.) and one volume with a chronological table and a glossary of technical terms. The series can also be subdivided in a different way, e.g. twenty-four volumes on the general conduct of the war, ten volumes on military preparations, sixty-seven volumes on the operations themselves, and one volume on other matters. Finally, the series could be divided into sixty-nine volumes on the Army and thirty-two volumes on the Navy, and one volume common to both (the chronological table). The present book, Volume 26: *The Operations of the Navy in the Dutch East Indies and the Bay of Bengal*, would then fall into the category of invasion operations conducted by the Navy, whereas the previously published Volume 3, *The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies*, would belong to the category of invasion operations conducted by the Army.

The published *Senshi Sōsho* series was on the whole favorably received by historians of modern and contemporary Japan. It was because the series filled a gap at a time when objective data on the history of the Pacific War were scarce. Also, the attitude of the authors who strove to be objective and ideologically unbiased was well thought of.

Needless to say, there was harsh criticism as well. For example, from a historiographical point of view, the series was criticized that its academic level was not necessarily high, which was only natural, for it was written not by academically trained researchers but by veterans. However, I doubt whether there were more suitable persons at that point to write the war history series than these veterans. Even if it had been possible to commission university-level professional researchers to do the writing, without sufficient military knowledge they would not have had the competence to do the work. I should also add that even though there were more than 120,000 historical documents available at the time of publication, their number was limited compared to the current number of available documents.

The authors of the *Senshi Sōsho* series were consistent in their attitude that they should just convey as faithfully as possible the facts based on the documents and the oral evidence from the interviews, and leave analyses and interpretation to the reader or the specialist, rather than on the basis of their research results publish their own analyses or interpretations. This is even reflected in the title of the series. By choosing the title “War History Series,” they consciously tried to steer clear of the political and ideological controversies that surrounded such titles as “History of the Greater East Asia War,” or “History of the Pacific War.” As a result, many researchers regarded the series as a kind of primary historical source and tried to utilize the information extracted from the series in their own research. In that sense, even if indices and notes were insufficient, it can be said that the authors successfully achieved in their own way their intention to just convey the facts and the evidence. Moreover, not all of the 102 volumes did necessarily fall short of the required academic level. Of the 102 volumes, quite a few did attain a considerably high research level.

Another criticism was that the authors, as veterans, might be biased towards the organization to which they once belonged and in their evaluation of the record might have become lenient with it or its members. As I mentioned above, the texts of each author were discussed at study meetings, attended by the whole group, and revised. We cannot tell whether in the reviews at the study meetings, any criticism of their fellow soldiers was toned down or actually reinforced. But at least it is clear that the reviews at the study meetings must have put as much restraint as possible on prejudices or feelings of favor or disapproval. In that sense, we may say that objectivity and impartiality were to a large extent guaranteed in the series.

The criticism that the series was written by a group of insiders was also leveled at the fact that the inter-service rivalry between the Army and the Navy sometimes resurfaced in this series. A typical example is the fact that different Army and Navy versions were written, with considerable differences in interpretation, about the circumstances that led to the opening of hostilities. The *Senshi Sōsho* series can be divided into those volumes of which the Army was in charge and those of which the Navy was in charge. In other words, the parallel tracks that the Army and the Navy had pursued from the time of their foundation in the early Meiji period onwards extended to the issue of who would take charge of certain volumes. However, the difference in interpretation and views between the Army and the Navy mainly occurred in the descriptions of the general conduct of the war; only a few cases show traces of this rivalry in the description of operations. Whereas Volume 3, of which the Army was in charge, mainly deals with the history of operations and engagements with a focus on land engagements, Volume 26, of which the Navy was in charge, describes the history of operations and engagements with a focus on naval and aerial engagements. We may say that in both volumes the influence of a Army-Navy rivalry is hardly seen.

Another criticism of the *Senshi Sōsho* series was that it focused on operations, and that the analysis and description of subjects such as the line of communication (logistics), intelligence, and medical matters were extremely few. Other criticism was that the descriptions were too flat and often offered nothing but a list of facts. Many parts of Volume 3 and 26 may fall under the latter criticism in particular. However, as I mentioned, this could be the result of the efforts of the authors to just convey the facts or the oral evidence, obtained in the process of their research and writing, while leaving out their subjective judgments as much as possible.

After publication, a considerable number of misprints and factual mistakes were found. Apart from the misprints, factual misunderstandings have been clarified by newly found material and through progress in research. The Military History Department (or the Center for Military History) is said to be working on an updated list of errata. However, at this stage much work still needs to be done.

Despite the above criticisms and shortcomings, there is no doubt that the *Senshi Sōsho* series is the first basic reference work to turn to when studying the history of the Pacific War; it is a rich and indispensable source for all future research. It is virtually impossible to examine how Japanese forces fought in the Pacific War without referring to the *Senshi Sōsho* series.

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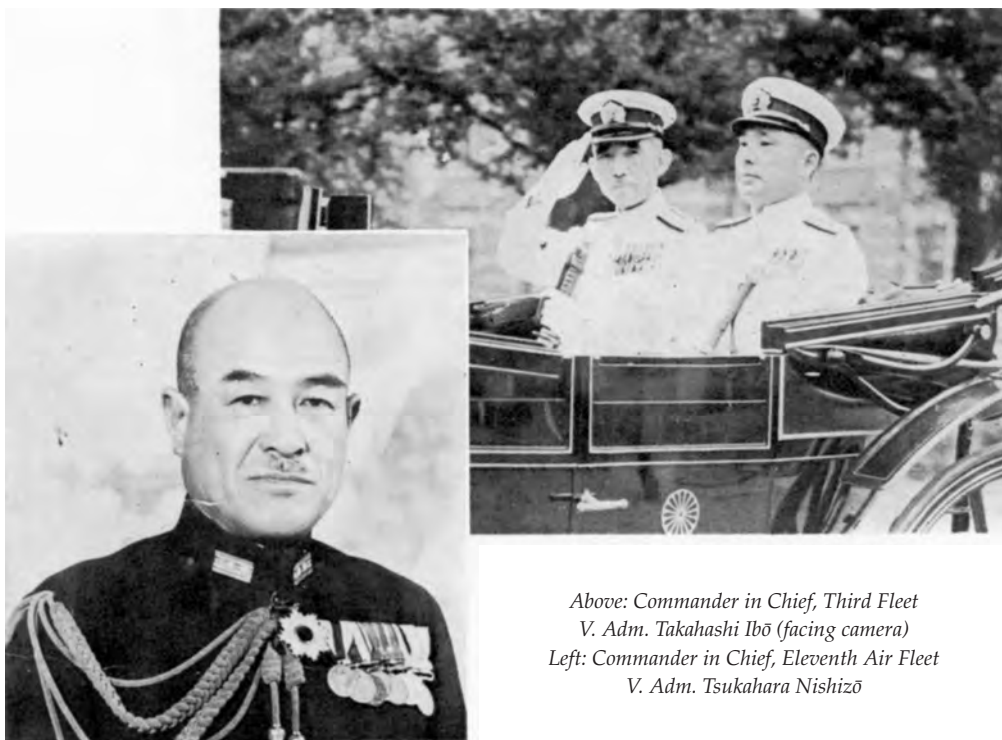
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*Commander in Chief, Combined Fleet
Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku*



*Commander in Chief, Second Fleet
V. Adm. Kondō Nobutake*



*Above: Commander in Chief, Third Fleet
V. Adm. Takahashi Ibō (facing camera)
Left: Commander in Chief, Eleventh Air Fleet
V. Adm. Tsukahara Nishizō*



*Commander in Chief, Southern Army
General Terauchi Hisaichi*



*Commander, Sixteenth Army
Lt. Gen. Imamura Hitoshi*



*Commander in Chief, First Air Fleet
V. Adm. Nagumo Chūichi*



*Commander in Chief, Southern Expeditionary Fleet
V. Adm. Ozawa Jisaburō*



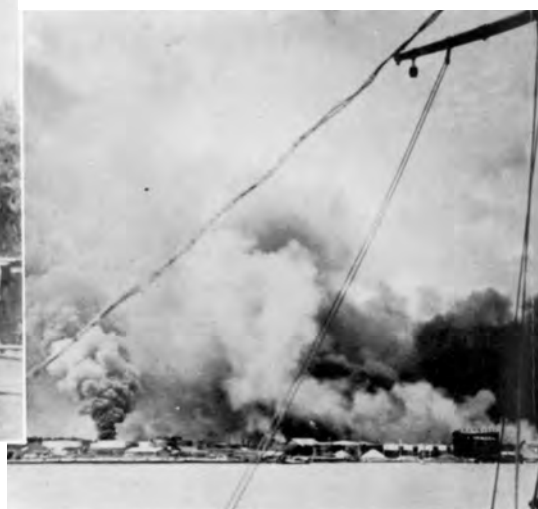
Naval Paratroop Unit's Drop on Manado



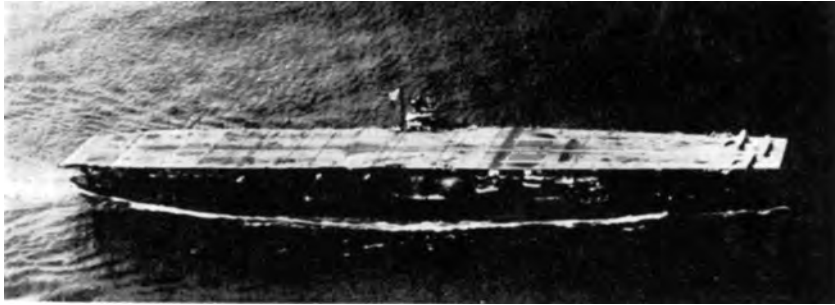
*The [Naval] Paratroop Unit Ready to Go into Action
Right After the Drop on Manado*



*Making Haste with the Restoration Work of the
Oil Fields in Balikpapan*



Palembang Ablaze As Seen from the Musi River



The Carrier Akagi



The Carrier Hiryū (the Same Class As Sōryū)



The Carrier Shōkaku (Zuikaku Is of the Same Class)



The British Carrier HMS Hermes About to Sink