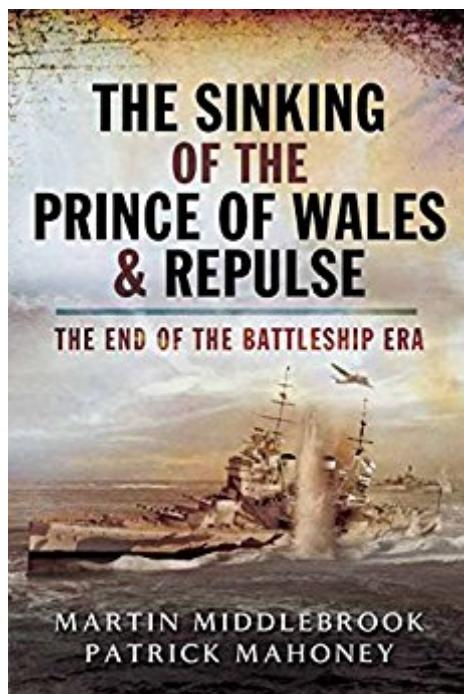


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The Sinking Of The Prince Of Wales & Repulse: The End Of The Battleship Era



Synopsis

On the third day of the war with Japan, two Royal Navy capital ships were sunk off Malaya by air torpedo attack. They had not requested the air support that could have saved them and 840 men died in the battleship HMS Prince of Wales and the battle cruiser HMS Repulse. The authors re-create for the reader not only what happened, but also what it was like for the men involved. They dispose of several myths to explain the events of those confused hours, and address the uncertainty, controversy and strong emotions that surrounded the militarily disastrous sinkings.

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Customer Reviews

This book was first published in 1977 under a different title and, in 1979, provided me with almost all the background information I required in order to plan an advanced diving expedition to visit the remains of these two great ships off the Malaysian coast. In the event that expedition never took place but, in later years, I made the mistake of lending that book to someone with the same idea. It is a measure of how outstanding this book "is" that I still regret having made that loan - simply because it was never returned. Three days after the infamous events of Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, HMS Prince of Wales (a 2 year old 35,000 ton Battleship) and HMS Repulse (a 25 year old Battlecruiser of 26,500 tons) with 4 Destroyer escorts sallied forth from Singapore as

"Force Z" without air support. Their Aircraft Carrier HMS Indomitable had run aground outside Kingston Harbour a short time before sailing to join and had to proceed to the USA for repairs to her hull. With the events of Pearl Harbour not yet analysed and understood - i.e. airpower vs. sea power, Force Z was still thought to be more than a match for anything the Japanese might throw at them. They were very wrong and when the attacks did commence it was all over rather quickly. Two valuable capital ships were sunk with the loss of 840 lives. What happened that day has led to many questions being asked about the conduct of those senior naval officers involved. In an overwhelmingly authoritative account, these authors have accessed not only British records from WW2 but also Japanese records from the same period and even those from the naval dockyards of Norfolk, Virginia where the repairs to HMS Indomitable were logged as task No S.139.

This is one of the best war books I've ever read (and I've probably read about 200, as a former history major with a deep interest in military history). I'd say it's a must read for anyone interested in the 20th century history of the British Empire, or the Pacific Campaign in World War II. It's serious history, grippingly told by a masterful writer. The research -- in British archives, Japanese archives, and seemingly hundreds of interviews from everyone from stokers to surgeons -- is impressive in itself, but the melding of it all into a compelling narrative is what makes this book really stand out. In addition to the tale of the battle itself, this book explains British strategy in the Far East in WWII better than I've ever seen before, and it also does a good job of explaining Japan's imperial goals in the Pacific Campaign. The conclusions about the affect of this battle on future naval strategy for all powers are spot on and profound, in my view. One thing I really appreciate is that the book waits to explain the author's conclusions on the cause of this disaster for the British in a later chapter -- it lets you put the pieces together and puzzle it out from the evidence well before the author tells you what he thinks. It's also written with real compassion for everyone involved -- even those who made the mistakes that led to so many deaths. Among tales of the sea, in my view it ranks with "The Perfect Storm"

The authors have written an excellent study of the loss of the British battleship Prince of Wales and the battle cruiser Repulse off the coast of Malaya at the outbreak of World War II in the Pacific. Much of their book focuses on the recollections of the two ships' survivors; their acknowledgements indicate a significant effort to locate and interview as many of these individuals as possible. The extensive quotations from these survivors give the work a sense of immediacy that more traditional historical reliance on printed records sometimes lacks. The authors also do an excellent job of

putting the two ships' loss in the context of British strategy in the Far East leading up to the outbreak of the war with Japan. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, well aware that British resources to that region, and to the fortress at Singapore, had been distributed in a niggardly fashion throughout the 1920's and 1930's, believed that sending the two fighting ships to the Far East would act as a major deterrent to anticipated Japanese aggression. In this he was tragically wrong; the authors show the racism that was the basis for this belief, and that the Japanese, while they feared the effect of the warships' presence on the actual Malaya invasion flotilla, did not change their attack plans in the slightest because the Prince of Wales and Repulse were in Singapore. Additionally, the authors are critical of the divided command structure in the Far East, with British Army and British Air Force under one command, while the Navy (at the insistence of the Admiralty) functioned independently.

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