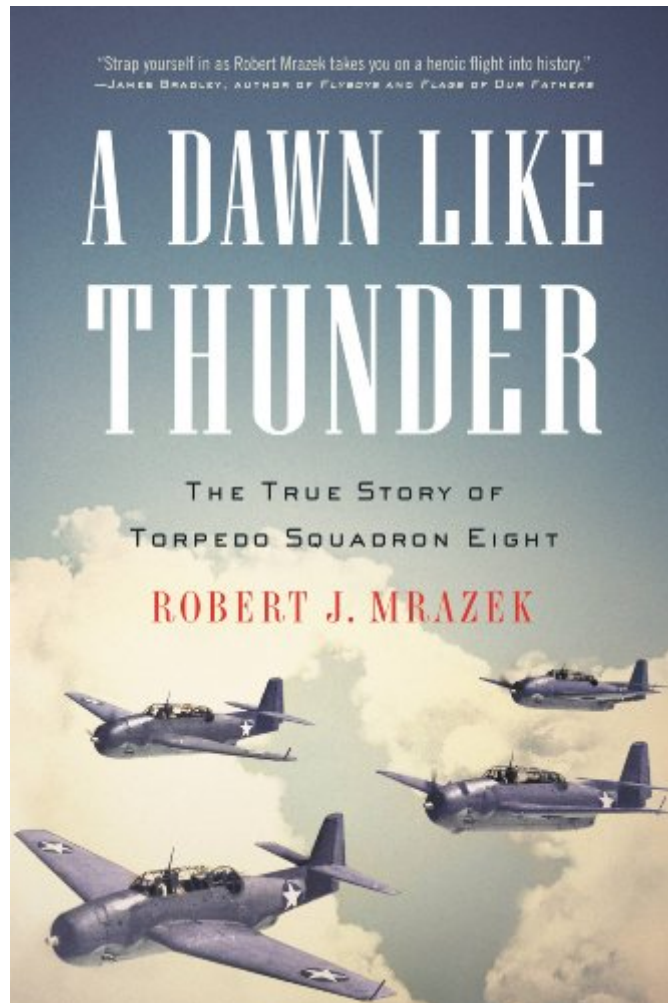




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A Dawn Like Thunder: The True Story Of Torpedo Squadron Eight



Synopsis

One of the great untold stories of World War II finally comes to light in this thrilling account of Torpedo Squadron Eight and their heroic efforts in helping an outmatched U.S. fleet win critical victories at Midway and Guadalcanal. These 35 American men--many flying outmoded aircraft--changed the course of history, going on to become the war's most decorated naval air squadron, while suffering the heaviest losses in U.S. naval aviation history. Mrazek paints moving portraits of the men in the squadron, and exposes a shocking cover-up that cost many lives. Filled with thrilling scenes of battle, betrayal, and sacrifice, *A DAWN LIKE THUNDER* is destined to become a classic in the literature of World War II.

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Customer Reviews

This is one of the best WWII histories that I have read. It is both well written and very informative. I knew of the ill-fated attack of the Torpedo 8 squadron at the battle of Midway, but this was only a small part of the story of Torpedo 8. This book tells the rest of the story. It begins with the men of Torpedo 8, then covers their attack at Midway and then their exploits in the battle for Guadalcanal. All of this is told from the perspective of the men of the squadron, and in telling the story the author

provides a human face to go with the often-told aspects of military history, and in the telling greatly added to my understanding of these events. The book goes into detail about the men and most of all about their commanders, one of whom (John C. Waldron) comes across as a great, and beloved, leader of men, while two others (Stanhope C. Ring and Harold "Swede" Larsen) are painted in much less than favorable terms. What is in the book -1) I had read that Avenger Torpedo planes flying from Midway were involved with the Midway Battle, but I did not realize that they were from the same squadron as the older Devastator Torpedo planes that flew from the aircraft carrier Hornet. This book explains why the squadron was divided up and why some of its members flew Avengers from Midway and others Devastators from Hornet. The newer Avengers did not fare any better than the older and obsolete Devastators, illustrating that it was the lack of fighter protection that led to the defeat of both parts of the squadron, and that the complete destruction of the Devastators was not solely due their being obsolete.2) Many books mention that the leader of the ill-fated Devastator attack, Lieutenant Commander John C. Waldron, deviated from the course led by his superior Stanhope C. Ring, the commander of the Hornet Air Group 8. While Waldron and all but one man under his command were killed while inflicting no damage on the Japanese fleet, their heroic actions have been cited as contributing greatly to the overall US victory at Midway. This book explains why Waldron did not follow Ring and that if Ring had followed Waldron's path, or responded to Waldron's call when he had located the Japanese fleet, the Midway Battle might have been an even greater US victory, possibly preventing the sinking of the US aircraft carrier Yorktown. Many at the time and since have faulted Ring for this, even to the extent of accusing him of incompetence or even cowardice. This book paints a somewhat more nuanced picture, laying much of the blame on Marc Mitscher the captain of the Hornet. According to a lengthy appendix provided in the book, Mitscher assumed that the Japanese had divided their fleet and accordingly directed Ring to fly in the wrong direction. Ring then stubbornly adhered to this course in spite of not finding the Japanese fleet and Waldron's signal that he had found them by following a different path. The book cites evidence that Mitscher then covered up his error by altering the Hornet's log, and then rewarded Ring for accepting the blame for the failure of all of the Hornet's air crews, except for those led by Waldron, to find the Japanese.3) This is not a complete history of the Battle of Midway. It focuses almost entirely on Torpedo 8, with brief discussions of other aspects of the battle.4) The Battle of Midway only forms half of the book. The latter half of the book is devoted to the exploits of Torpedo 8 in the battle for Guadalcanal. While the exploits of John Waldron and those who followed him are well known the subsequent actions of Torpedo 8 on Guadalcanal are not. This book provides a much-needed picture of them and the air war for Guadalcanal. In addition to telling the story of

Torpedo 8 on Guadalcanal, this part of the book discusses the relationship of the leader of Torpedo 8, Harold "Swede" Larsen, and those he commanded. He is pictured as being very brave, but driven, bigoted, imperious and disliked (even hated to the extent that on two occasions men pulled guns on him and had they not been wrestled to the ground might have killed him). As it is an interesting picture of a very brave man who drove his men, perhaps too maniacally, but was willing to place himself in as much even more danger than they, but sometimes for little more than an overarching thrust for vengeance, recognition. I recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of WWII and to anyone interested in a well-written book that describes how men arose to meet great challenges.

Though not an inveterate book reader or particular collector of war tales, I've reread this particular book 4 or 5 times! Although a fact based retelling of the adventures and tragedies of Torpedo Squadron Eight at the start of WWII in the Battle of Midway and later in Guadalcanal, this book flows like a good fictional novel. But... this one's for real. Obviously a labor of love and the well-honed product of years of painstaking research, this factual novel by Robert J. Mrazek is told in a series of intimate bios about the pilots of this doomed squadron of over 70 years ago, complete with pilot photographs, follow-ups on the survivors, and an extensive and informative appendix listing the author's historical research sources. A history of one of WWII's lesser known stories most poignantly told, highlighting bad guys and good guys on both sides, "A Dawn Like Thunder" is one of the most affecting books I have ever experienced. Author Mrazek is to be thanked and congratulated. This book is one of the great ones! Tom P. Bullock PS "Available in both hard bound & paperback, it was given to me by my niece, who also loved it. Pointedly, this is not just a "men-only" story.

This book should be required reading for anyone who has even a passing interest in the Pacific Theater of WWII. Mr. Mrazek presents a lucid account of the role of Torpedo Squadron 8 of the aircraft carrier Hornet in the battle for Midway Atoll; and of their later assignment in the battle for Guadalcanal -- both battles (1942) are the major pivotal points in the Pacific War. Mrazek's focus is upon telling the stories of the individuals making up Squadron 8: their backgrounds, training, their equipment and planes, interaction with one another (for better or worse!), and their commitment to duty and country. Mrazek also gives one of the clearest explanations I have seen as to why the Hornet's Midway attack on the Japanese carriers was so uncoordinated and seemingly haphazard. Do be aware that there are other well reasoned viewpoints which suggest that Torpedo 8's ill-fated attack had virtually no impact on the outcome of the Midway battle: that their attack did not draw

down Japanese carrier fighter cover to the point that American dive bombers had a clear run at the Japanese carriers -- due to the timeline of the different attacks and the climb rate of the Japanese Zero fighter plane. Similarly, the eyewitness account of Ensign Gay, the lone survivor of the torpedo attack, is held to be highly implausible due to the timeline of attacks and the Japanese carrier group speeding away from his crash site. In any case there is no argument about the courage and commitment to duty of the men of Torpedo 8. Less known, perhaps, than their role at Midway, is Squadron 8's contribution to the desperate struggle for Guadalcanal, as part of the Cactus Airforce at Henderson Field. I don't believe a better description of that place and time can be found. At first I must admit that I wondered about the accuracy of Mrazek's use of dialog and his commentary about the thoughts and feelings of squadron members. However, the last part of his book has an extensive discussion of his research methodology and resources which convinced me that this story is told as accurately as any history text. I highly recommend this very readable book as a way to gain an understanding of and appreciation for those who served this country at a turning point in its history.--J.B. Bannister

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