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A Superb Narrative: The Liberation of the Philippines

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There are several misprints in Volume II, none of which, as far as I could judge, are of importance. One laudable change is made in the second volume. The notes are in Spanish, not Latin, thus putting them within the reach of a greater number of scholars interested in Spanish colonial affairs and their relation with the Society of Jesus.

NICHOLAS P. CUSHNER

A SUPERB NARRATIVE

THE LIBERATION OF THE PHILIPPINES: Luzon, Mindanao, the Visayas, 1944-45. The History of United States Naval Operations in World War II. Volume XIII. By Samuel Eliot Morison. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959. 338p., Illus. \$6.50.

The things lost in war are always precious ones. Among them are memories: the facts, the personal experiences, the many cross-threads and intangibles with which a historian, especially a naval one, must weave a fabric of solid cloth. Memories fade in their vividness and clarity; facts once known and recorded can be lost or forgotten; experiences suffer the fading fate of memories. And so when the time comes for someone to speak in print that "this is how it was, how it happened, and why", there must come a sense of frustration that somewhere, somehow, something is missing. A broken vase can never be put together whole; a tiny sliver is always missing, and cannot be found again. This is one of the minor but important tragedies of war, as it is of life itself. It is a particular tragedy to the painstaking historian, and I am sure Admiral Morison, who takes infinite pains, will say "amen" to that.

This latest volume, the thirteenth in Admiral Morison's *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, deals not only with the liberation of the Philippines following the operations in Leyte Gulf but also includes the operations in Borneo, the supporting (but always silent and separate) submarine operations of 1945, and the even more obscure doings of the U.S. Naval Group, China, known as the "Rice-Paddy Navy".

There is another frustration, I am sure, to a war historian and that is the fact that so many events are taking place at the same time that it becomes difficult to isolate one set of happenings from another and arrange the whole in neat categories. I have always felt that somehow or other Admiral Morison's series has suffered from that in some respects. Yet how could he have done otherwise if he wanted to make a good story? And all his historical writings are eminently good stories. Any other historian might have said:

"Well, now, I am going to tell what the U.S. Navy did in 1943, all over the world." That is one approach, but Admiral Morison would have none of it. He, more than most historians, is a consummate and engaging writer who insists upon focus, concentration of reader interest, the weaving of a credible and exciting story rather than a list of facts. Above all, he insists on the reading of one nautical chart at a time; as any seaman would, writer or no.

This reviewer had the privilege, in 1945, of attending the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, when Admiral (then Captain) Morison was engaged in the early stages of his monumental work. He lectured to us, and we saw him work. I can testify, therefore, to the thoroughness of his research and analysis.

Coming now to the details of this volume (two more to follow, the last an index and supplement), we face the situation existing immediately following the Leyte Gulf landings in October, 1944, which were accompanied by the vast and exceedingly complex naval battles, generally termed "Leyte", which is the title of Admiral Morison's volume preceding this one. It is somewhat of a pity that the two volumes could not be boxed as a set, because they are completely concurrent. It is impossible to disregard "Leyte" and concentrate only on "Liberation". What was happening at the focal point of the Philippines at that time was too tremendous in scope to be cut up into little pieces; Admiral Morison has recognized that and decided on two pieces only. Even so, both accounts should be read together, if that is possible.

Consider the situation. General MacArthur was finally back where he said he would be. The tempo of the war was reaching a screaming last-corner turning point. The *kamikazes* were flashing in like deadly darts in grim last-resort counterattacks. With so much happening at once any conscientious recorder of events would be hard-pressed to cover it all in one sweep. There can only be so many pages to a book if it is to be readable. And this one is eminently readable, as were all its predecessors.

MacArthur had told President Roosevelt that it should be "Leyte, then Luzon". And so it was, but first Mindoro had to be taken to guard the route from one to the other. Then came the typhoon of all typhoons, the typhoon which will be remembered for the remainder of our naval history. It was truly the "undivine wind" and to this reviewer (who has several times experienced these violent convulsions of nature) it must have been something to shake the stoutest man's soul. In the words of Morison, it was "wicked" and "worse than the foulest epithet can describe". It has been a source of interest and controversy in the U.S. Navy for many years now and will be for many more. It knocked Admiral Halsey's Task Force 38 for a veritable loop and inflicted more damage than the enemy ever did or could. Three destroyers capsized, six or seven other ships were

seriously damaged, and almost 800 officers and men were lost. Admiral Nimitz said this was the greatest uncompensated loss the Navy had suffered since the Battle of Savo Island.

This reminds me of something I read years ago, and I wish Admiral Morison had included it in his account. Another noted seaman, Felix Reisenberg, once said: "No matter how important a man at sea may consider himself, unless he is fundamentally worthy the sea will some day find him out. If a move is made at sea, in a critical moment, death may be the penalty for the most simple failure—not only death to one but to many." Anyone reading Morison's description of the horrors of this incident will realize the truth of that statement. It is the same in life, which is really a vast unknown sea.

Morison's narrative moves swiftly on to the big landings in Lingayen Gulf, the sudden savage onslaughts of the kamikazes, the march into Manila, and the final liberation. Much of this concerned land operations and thus is not treated extensively in this book. It was of extreme interest to me, however, to learn that the fanatical and bloody defense of Manila was in the hands of a Japanese admiral whose forces were three-fourths naval personnel. My personal wish is that they could have been put to sea, there to be sunk, rather than to have brought upon the people of Manila the heart-rending and utterly unnecessary slaughter which accompanied their misconduct of a phase of warfare with which they were least familiar.

Luzon secured, MacArthur began the "mop-up". Not content with island-hopping in the country to which he had promised to return, all the rest had to be liberated—Palawan, Visayas, Mindanao, Sulu. This was done, as it should have been done. The remainder of the book relates the miscellaneous operations mentioned above, i.e., Borneo, sub operations, the Rice-Paddy Navy. As a consequence these pages of Morison's account also take on the quality of a literary "mop-up" unrelated to the liberation of the Philippines. I do not resent it, but I wish it could have been placed elsewhere since it is not germane to the theme or title of the book. But, again, realizing the aforesaid frustrations of an historian, we must not be too demanding on the Admiral.

I am puzzled, however, by Admiral Morison's leaving out of account altogether the clandestine submarine missions to the guerrilla forces in the Philippines. It may be that he has slipped them over on us in some other volume of the series, but I for one am not aware of it. For instance, in the January 30 number of the *Free Press* I read of Commander (now Captain) "Duke" Ferrara's secret missions in U.S.S. GAR in 1944 to bring supplies to guerrillas in Luzon. One scene sticks in my mind: Ferrara describes seeing a U.S. Army guerrilla officer, Barnett, eating in his submarine wardroom, and adds: "Barnett was visibly affected by the white bread and the butter, not having had them since the war started." What a vivid pic-

ture of the worst of war — the change in those who have somehow managed to live and must some day teach others to live! Alas, I find no mention of GAR in this or the preceding volume.

One other note. On p. 167 we have a wonderful account of Lt. Commander Flechsenhar's report of a U.S. destroyer trying to sink his precious submarine thinking it to be an enemy sailing vessel. Now "Flash" Flechsenhar's sub, the ROCK, was making 14 knots into the wind, and in any language, even Japanese, that is a very remarkable sailing vessel indeed. He records this in his log, and pointedly too. "Flash" was in Manila recently and told me he sent a follow-up signal to higher authorities that his "sail boat was unharmed and still proceeding into the wind at 14 knots." Here is a fine climax to a fine tale and it is regrettable that Admiral Morison was unable to get in touch with "Flash". The inevitable frustrations of the historian! The tiny sliver of the broken vase which always gets left out, no matter how closely and hard we look.

To sum up. This is an extremely well written book. The action comes alive and the research is superb. What is even better is the confident knowledge which the reader has that the story is written by a sailor, and one of the first water. The only real weakness of this series is that it is about to end. The next volume, *Liquidation of the Japanese Empire*, is the last volume planned. But the Navy is still out there, ploughing the seas day after day as it always has and always will. May we persuade Admiral Morison that all has not yet been told about naval operations in Korea? Or Indo-China? Or Suez? Or Lebanon? I hope we may, for if anyone can write these latest chapters of the Navy's history, the Admiral can. He is unquestionably the outstanding historian of the sea today, and will be for a long time to come.

CAPT. RUSSELL H. SMITH, USN

THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY

VIEW TO THE SOUTHEAST. By Santha Rama Rau. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957. 240p.

This book is definitely not a "must" for social science majors. Indeed, one of its most refreshing features is a sturdy repugnance for statistics. If figures and percentages occur they are the kind that one passes on over a leisurely gin-and-tonic while discoursing on "my recent experiences in the East." On the other hand, the book is more than merely a glorified travel brochure. It is a collection of feature articles published serially through several months of HOLIDAY, the slick-paper magazine for *bon-vivants*. As such it is