

## James D. Hornfischer

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To the Heroes of Taffy 3 and their Loving Families:

This is a personal note of thanks, first, for all you have done for your country in time of war, and second, for the faith you placed in me by allowing me to hear and then retell your story when I approached you as an unpublished writer nearly 20 years ago.

Those who have never been shot at except with a paintball gun cannot testify credibly on the subject of sailors at war. I've never had the experience of facing down a ship twenty times the size of my own in a broad-daylight surface action. And, in fact, no U.S. Navy sailor who's served since October 25, 1944, knows that ordeal either. On this 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle, it's important to remember, celebrate, and memorialize what you all did in service to the United States.

When I was growing up in Massachusetts in the 1970s, my interest in naval history was the product of watching the great documentary *Victory at Sea*; episodes of *Baa Baa Black Sheep* on television; playing naval wargames; and building plastic models of ships and aircraft. I was a teenaged subscriber to *Naval Institute Proceedings* and went with my parents to see the carrier *John F. Kennedy* and the missile cruiser *Richmond K. Turner* when the fleet visited Boston. Because of my reading, I had a reasonably clear idea of what I was looking at.



But reading was a gateway to exploring naval history in ever greater depth. I read about the Battle off Samar in a book titled *Tin Cans* by Edward Roscoe. The names of the ships that were lost—USS *Hoel*, *Samuel B. Roberts*, *Gambier Bay*, *Johnston*, and *St. Lo*—were emblems of never-quit gallantry, the indelible heroism of the hopelessly outgunned. My lifelong fascination with this history finally set me on the path to writing *The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors*.

The veterans of Taffy 3 were not always eager to talk about what they had seen. But those who managed to relive it for my benefit delivered yet another service to their country. In telling their story they enabled it to become immortal. Eyewitness testimony gives history its heartbeat, enables it to rise above the bland chronology of an after-action report and bring readers into the experience itself.

The Battle off Samar will go down as the greatest upset victory in the history of our navy. In it, we can find reason to criticize the conduct of most of the high command in this battle, from Admiral Halsey, who failed to communicate clearly with his colleagues as he went north in pursuit of the Japanese carriers, to Admiral Kinkaid, who hung his fate on the unverified assumption that Halsey was watching his back, to Admiral Nimitz who gave Halsey in the first instance excessively flexible operational orders that permitted him to abandon his “cover and support” mission in favor of offensive action. Underlying all of this was the unfortunate divided command structure that placed the Seventh Fleet under General MacArthur, who required all messages to and from the Third Fleet be relayed through his headquarters at Manus, thousands of miles away, causing critical delays. But the final legacy of the Battle off Samar should be one of appreciation and inspiration, not recrimination. The price you paid for these errors stand as a lesson to history.

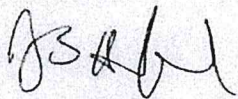


As the novelist Herman Wouk wrote, the sacrifices paid by the men of Taffy 3 "can endure as a picture of the way Americans fight when they don't have superiority. Our schoolchildren should know about that incident, and our enemies should ponder it."

Everyone I know who has learned the story of your exploits is humbled by the courage you demonstrated. Your legacy enriches all Americans as we prepare to face whatever the future has in store.

I hope you all enjoy an enriching weekend of remembrance and celebration in San Diego.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Hornfischer". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Jim Hornfischer