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Barrett Tillman, *Whirlwind: The Air War against Japan, 1942–1945*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010. Pp. xvii, 316. ISBN 978–1–4165–8440–7.

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Whirlwind is the first comprehensive history of air attacks on Japan in World War II. Barrett Tillman covers every phase of the war, from the famous Doolittle raid on Tokyo in April 1942, to a mission flown by B-32 Dominators over Tokyo on August 1945, four days after the atomic attack on Nagasaki. Not only does he tell the well known stories of the B-29 campaign that destroyed many Japanese cities and the carrier raids that sank much of the once-glorious Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN), he also describes attacks from Aleutian Island bases against the Japanese Kurile Islands. Unfortunately, the book is wildly uneven in both in its treatment of campaigns and its use of sources. Despite this, it will interest scholars and entertain military history buffs, without being well suited to either.

Tillman is a veteran military history writer, with forty books—over a dozen of them about American naval aviation in World War II—to his credit. The advantages and limitations of his methodology are evident already in the prologue—a quick narrative of the Doolittle raid, with no details about the planning of the raid or the damage it caused, beyond the report of bombs hitting a single warship. Tillman mentions that about fifty Japanese were killed, and that seven of the eighty airmen died, three in crashes, three by execution, and one during captivity. To punish the Chinese villagers who helped most of the crews to safety after their B-25s crash-landed, the Japanese scourged Chekiang and Kiangsu Provinces, killing “perhaps a quarter-million people” (7).

I credit Tillman for writing of the 250,000 Chinese who died indirectly because of one minor American raid, even if he does not give it much prominence. That number should be compared to the 330,000 Japanese civilians he estimates died from all Allied bombing during the war, and the handful of American civilians who lost their lives in World War II. But his sourcing of this figure is inadequate. Although Iris Chang’s controversial *The Rape of Nanking*¹ provides the same number and three recent books are devoted entirely to the raid,² Tillman cites only a single source, a 1200-word *American Heritage* magazine article that includes no references.³ It is especially disappointing that so few scholarly works have addressed the deaths of many millions of Chinese, civilians and soldiers, between 1937 and 1945.

This unfortunate paucity of source citations persists in the chapter on the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the most written-about bombings in history. Rather than using Richard Rhodes’ indispensable *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*,⁴ Tillman relies on Jennet Conant’s *109 East Palace: Robert Oppenheimer and the Secret City of Los Alamos*⁵ for information on the Manhattan Project. As in her other histories, Conant is mainly concerned with personalities—in this case those of the scientists and military men at Los Alamos; she has little to say about the actual development of the Bomb. Tillman, too, is more interested in people and their quirks than their creation of a fearsome new weapon. Hence we read that “Almost nobody got along with Edward Teller. His enormous talent was largely wasted during the war, as he could not be diverted from his obsession with ‘the super,’ the hydrogen bomb finally tested in 1952” (227). But there is no mention of Trinity, the first successful atomic bomb test, on 16 July 1945.

1. *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (NY: Basic Books, 1997).

2. See Carroll V. Glines, *The Doolittle Raid: America’s Daring First Strike against Japan* (NY: Orion, 1988), Craig Nelson, *The First Heroes: The Extraordinary Story of the Doolittle Raid—America’s First World War II Victory* (NY: Penguin, 2002), and Clayton Chun, *The Doolittle Raid 1942: America’s First Strike Back at Japan* (NY: Osprey, 2006).

3. John Grinspan, “April 18, 1942: Pearl Harbor Avenged,” *AmericanHeritage.com* (18 Apr 2007) <www.miwsr.com/rd/1011.htm>.

4. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1986.

5. NY: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

Whirlwind's chapters on the B-29 raids on Japan are better, covering the development of the bomber—a project as risky as and considerably more costly than the atomic bomb—and the missions they flew from China and then the Marianas. Although he implies it, Tillman never explicitly states that the long, high-altitude raids from Chinese bases were largely an expensive failure, nor does he adduce sufficient supporting statistics on losses and achievements. He does, however, insert a good short section on the dropping of mines at sea by the B-29s. These missions, often neglected by historians, effectively blocked shipping among Japan's home islands toward the end of the war.

Tillman is most impressive on the carrier raids the U.S. Navy, with some help from the British Pacific Fleet, carried out in July and August 1945, including the little-known attacks on northern Honshu and Hokkaido:

Far more importantly, the Navy destroyed seven of the dozen train ferries in the Aomori-Hakodate area. Twenty years previously Japan had produced four 3,400-ton ferries capable of carrying twenty-five railroad cars bearing a total of 375 tons of freight. The vessels were powered by steam turbines—rare for the period—yielding 17 knots speed. Other ferries were launched in the late 1920s, carrying forty-three cars at 14 knots. All were crucial to Japanese industry.

Dodging through the weather, flying low to keep visual reference, the pilots found their vital, unglamorous targets. Essex's air group contributed heavily to the operation: her fighters and bombers sank four ferries and hit another hard enough to force it ashore. The next day TF38 squadrons returned to sink a merchantman, four auxiliaries, and another invaluable ferry.

The result was astonishing. Literally overnight the amount of Hokkaido coal delivered to Honshu factories dropped more than 80 percent. Since Hokkaido typically produced one-fourth of Japan's indigenous coal, elimination of the ferries represented a crippling loss that was not replaced (202).

But most of these raids were aimed at the warships—battleships, carriers, cruisers, and smaller craft—bottled up in Kure and other ports. The ships were there, rather than at sea, because Japan had run out of oil: American submarine and air attacks on ships virtually eliminated the tankers that had once supplied the country, and its fleet, with fuel. But these sitting ducks were manned, and their own antiaircraft weapons were supplemented by guns sited around the harbors. Many American crew members died as a result: 102 were lost in three days of raids on Kure alone. All to destroy the immobile, impotent remnants of the once-powerful IJN. Tillman concludes this section by harshly blaming the admirals—William Halsey, Ernest King, and Chester Nimitz—for wasting lives. They intended to wipe out a force that had briefly humiliated the U.S. Navy in 1941 and early 1942. The navy brass believed their carriers had won the war against Japan, but now the Air Force, with its B-29s, would get the credit for it.

Typically, more space is dedicated to “The Saga of Oliver Rasmussen” than to the raids on the vital Hokkaido ferries. Lieutenant Rasmussen, shot down on a raid over Hokkaido, survived for over a month in the Japanese countryside, before turning himself in after the surrender. This is one of the dozens of colorful anecdotes that make *Whirlwind* more entertaining, yet less useful, than it might have been. All in all, though the book provides much information on specific episodes not mentioned in other works, that information is neither consistently presented, nor based on proper sources.