

Morning of the Rising Sun:
The Heroic Story of the Battles for Guadalcanal

by

Kenneth I. Friedman, PhD

Reader Group Discussion Guide

ISBN: 141968096X

Length: 702 Pages

Available Formats: Paperback and E-book

Publisher: BookSurge LLC

Author's Web Site: www.battlesforguadalcanal.com

Publisher's Web Site: <https://www.createspace.com/1000200443>

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Introduction

This guide can be used as a starting point for discussing Dr. Friedman's book about the Battles for Guadalcanal: *Morning of the Rising Sun*. If the group can think of other topics to discuss, that's perfectly satisfactory as well.

About the Book

This book is a comprehensive narrative of the battles for the island of Guadalcanal. Located in Solomon Islands east of Australia, the fight for Guadalcanal was America's first offensive operation in World War II. This is a story that entails every aspect of men at war. Written in a nonpartisan manner, the author writes about both sides and their roles in the large and smaller land, sea, and air battles that happened over the six-month period from August 7, 1942 until February 9, 1942.

About the Author

Since he was a boy, the author avidly read and absorbed all the books, movies, and stories about World War II he could get his hands on. Because of his enthusiasm for the war's causes, history, events, and its significance to our world and society, he can say with some modesty that he has accumulated a substantial body of knowledge on the subject. Although it may not be the most reliable indicator of my World War II expertise, he correctly answers without fail every question about World War II posed on television quiz shows like "Jeopardy," "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," and "Hollywood Squares." Therefore, he considers himself a "gifted amateur" when it comes to many details about World War II. After he retired from IBM in 1992, his enthusiasm for all topics about World War II turned into a more constructive activity by writing books about the war. His main reason was because of how that cataclysm permanently changed everyone's life in our world.

Dr. Friedman wrote his first book with the title *Afternoon of the Rising Sun: The Battle of Leyte Gulf* that Presidio Press published in October 2001. Although the book is out of print now and only available in the used book market, he learned much what it takes to write a book.

He has published my second book, *Morning of the Rising Sun: The Heroic Story of the Battles for Guadalcanal* that is available for purchase at retailers such as Amazon.com and BookSurge LLC. You can purchase autographed copies of his book on this web site: www.battlesforguadalcanal.com.

His long term objective is to write a series of books about naval warfare during World War II in the Pacific and then attempt a novel. Since retiring from IBM more than fifteen years ago, he believes he has found a new vocation as a writer. He finds the activity thought provoking and, in the long term, satisfying.

He is married and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. All his children are grown, and he is a proud grandparent.

Discussion Questions

1. Why was Guadalcanal Island so important during the early days of the Pacific War?
 - a. To the Japanese?
 - b. To the Allies?
2. The book introduces two relatively unknown American admirals: Vice Admiral Robert M. Ghormley and Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly “Terrible” Turner.
 - a. Why were these men important?
 - b. What were their contributions to the battles and American planning to the Guadalcanal campaign?
3. What was the importance of “CACTUS” to the American victory on Guadalcanal?
4. Discuss the roles of the Australian coastwatchers, and why they were a critical factor to the struggle?
5. When Halsey relieved Ghormley, what attributes did he bring to his ability to command the South Pacific forces?
6. What part did General MacArthur play in the Guadalcanal campaign?
7. Who was Lieutenant Colonel Merritt Edson? What did he do to hold back the Japanese from taking Henderson Field?
8. What were the most important obstacles both sides faced in waging war in Solomon Islands?
9. Who was Admiral Ernest J. King? What were some of the fights he had with his counterparts and America’s allies?
10. Why did the Guadalcanal campaign get the nickname “Operation Shoestring?”
11. What was the planned military operation in the European Theater that caused a supply constraint for the Americans in the Pacific? How did it affect the supply situation at Guadalcanal?
12. What was the U.S. Army’s role in these battles? How and why did it change over time?
13. What military and historical lessons did the Americans and Japanese learn after the battles ended in February 1942?

14. Was Guadalcanal a major turning point in World War II? How does it compare to Battles of Midway, Stalingrad and El Alamein? If it is, why is it a turning point?
15. What was radar's role and its success during the various battles for Guadalcanal?
 - a. Ground battles
 - b. Air battles
 - c. Sea battles
16. Discuss the how each of the following naval battles affected the outcome at Guadalcanal. Is there a common thread? If so, discuss it and its importance.
 - a. Savo Island
 - b. Eastern Solomons
 - c. Cape Esperance
 - d. Santa Cruz Islands
 - e. Naval Battle of Guadalcanal
 - i. First night
 - ii. Second night
 - f. Tassafaronga
 - g. December 1942 ground offensive
17. The Americans launched a massive ground offensive that ended with the ejection of the Japanese from Guadalcanal.
 - a. Who was the corps commander?
 - b. What were some of the battles between the American and the Japanese?
 - c. What were some of the problems the Japanese had during this time?
18. Why did Halsey relieve Marine Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift? Who relieved Vandegrift?
19. What did Vice Admiral Frank (Jack) Fletcher do during the campaign?
 - a. Who relieved him?
 - b. Why was he relieved of his command?

Critical Praise

Editor's Review

When it comes to the Pacific theatre of the Second World War, *Morning of the Rising Sun: The Heroic Story of the Struggle for Guadalcanal* by author and historian Kenneth I. Friedman, Ph.D. is the quintessential guide to the epic and stirring tale of the six-month conflict between the United States and the Japanese Empire over the vital island of Guadalcanal. Located in the Southern Solomon Islands, Guadalcanal was in the direct path of the primary supply line between the continental United States and Australia-New Zealand; whoever possessed the island would control the direction of the war in the Pacific. Meticulously researched, the author uses a bipartisan approach to convey the great dedication and bravery of both the Allied and Japanese fighting men. His attention to detail provides an embracing journey through a series of the most ferocious land, air, and sea battles in the history of war.

Midwest Book Review

First, let me say...the writing of this book was a monumental undertaking and particularly well done considering its size and content. The book is 10"x7", 1 ½" thick, and weighs over 3 pounds – not light-weight bedtime reading for us gals, and that's the paperback edition. However, don't let its size intimidate you. This is a very personal, well-organized, thorough accounting of this lengthy battle.

Quoting from the back cover:

"Morning of the Rising Sun: The Heroic Story of the Battles for Guadalcanal by author and his historian Kenneth I. Friedman, Ph.D., provides a thorough and thought-provoking examination of this pivotal struggle fought between the US and the Japanese Empire during the early days of the Second World War. Like other earlier battles such as Verdun in World War I and Stalingrad in World War II, both sides sent every gun, airplane, and man they could spare to Guadalcanal to decide who would win. When the Americans evicted the last Japanese soldier from Guadalcanal in February 1943, the Japanese strategy shifted from the offensive to the defensive, and they began to lose territory. The Americans were now on the offensive and would not stop until they sailed into Tokyo Bay to accept Japan's surrender aboard the USS Missouri. Dr. Friedman is also the author of *Afternoon of the Rising Sun: The Battle of Leyte Gulf*."

"If you're a history buff or have a special interest in WORLD WAR II, I'm certain you will find this book worth your money and time. I particularly enjoyed the personal memoirs from that time period, the attack on Pearl Harbor and this lengthy struggle.

Kaye Trout- February 12, 2008

Rating: Excellent

Kirkus Reviews

A fastidious account of World War II's critical Battle of Guadalcanal.

Author and historian Friedman (*Afternoon of the Rising Sun: The Battle of Leyte Gulf*, 2001) pens an impressive, comprehensive treatise on what he views as the second World War's most pivotal battle. The island of Guadalcanal occupied a strategic position in the Pacific theatre, and military planners from both Japan and the United States believed it was key to controlling the region. When the confrontation began in August 1942, the outcome of the war in the Pacific was very much in question, if not entirely leaning in Japan's favor. The Japanese were clever and aggressive foes, the first to put significant numbers of men and a base on the island. But, as Friedman shows, they vastly underestimated the Americans' resolve and presence in the region. From their dominant position in the Pacific arena, the Japanese were eventually reduced to a defensive crouch, a mind-set that plagued them for the remainder of the war. A natural storyteller, Friedman's account of the conflict is told in a compelling, narrative fashion that deftly pulls the reader through the book's hefty page count.

He does an excellent job analyzing both the micro—and macro—aspects of the battle, smoothly switching between the intimate conversations of military leaders and the historical and political implications of an American victory in the war. Friedman is also careful to present a balanced, non-nationalistic approach to the conflict; the Japanese military is frequently portrayed as a cunning foil to the Americans' more headstrong forces. Maps, charts and even diagrams of planes keep the pages moving and will wet the tongue of any amateur military strategist. It's a thoroughly, enthusiastically researched book that can only come from the desk of a true connoisseur of military history.

An impressive, meticulous and enjoyable must for any history buff's bookshelf.

Tin Can Sailors

At 702 pages, *Morning of the Rising Sun* is not the type of book you'd pick up casually but it is the kind of book that once you pick it up you'll find very hard to put back down. Ken Friedman has found a way of taking dry facts and figures and the myriad details of conducting warfare and making them come alive for the reader. His depth of research is astounding right down to the names of individual pilots of American and Japanese aircraft, often providing details of what they were thinking during combat actions. Friedman's bibliography and copious end notes show careful and painstaking research that will satisfy the most dedicated historian while the descriptions of the actions and the decisions behind them – on both sides – will please any reader of military non-fiction.”

The strategic importance of Guadalcanal to both the Japanese and to the Americans has seldom been so clearly detailed as in *Morning of the Rising Sun*. The Japanese, after strategic losses at Midway and Coral Sea, were desperate to find a way to cut off Allied supply lines from the U.S. West Coast to Australia. A military airfield on the island of Guadalcanal in the extreme Southern Solomon islands would serve that purpose well. For the Americans, taking and holding that airfield for our own use meant a forward base for launching attacks against Japanese-held

territory in the rest of the Solomons chain. It was a must win for both sides and for the Americans it was both far from any U.S. military assistance and the fighting came at a time when the Europe First assessment was depriving Nimitz and MacArthur of needed ships, planes, manpower and materials.”

Morning of the Rising Sun is the kind of book that students of WWII history will want to have on their libraries’ shelves for reference both because of the importance of the battles for the Southern Solomons and for Ken Friedman’s treatment of them.”

Terry Miller
Executive Director
Tin Can Sailors

Readers' Reviews

Tom Carlson - Long Prairie, Minnesota

I've had a fascination with the Guadalcanal Campaign since I was in high school and I read "Guadalcanal Diary". This was increased when I discovered that my 1st cousin had been a pilot flying SBD's out of Guadalcanal. Thus when I saw that another book had been written about my favorite campaign I had to have it. "Morning of the Rising Sun: The Heroic Story of the Battles for Guadalcanal" by Kenneth I. Friedman didn't disappoint me. The book contains a lot of information on the battles and it lays it out in easy to understand fashion. Using charts and maps he brings what order there can be to the battles fought mostly in the dark in thick jungles or on the seas in a narrow passage between islands called "The Slot". Although the editing gave me a few troubles I found that his style of writing entertaining and fast to read.

Richard Davis - Riverside, California

I really enjoyed your book. For me it was very easy reading, it gave a good prospective of both sides: the victories, defeats and the hardships. The way you spaced the story out on each page made it enjoyable/easy to read. I also enjoyed the way you spoke about the leaders on both sides giving some of their background and their decision making. The book made my year in Viet Nam look like a cake walk. Good job . . . I'm looking forward to your next one.

Casimiro Tadeo Ciupalski - Madrid, Spain

I enjoyed the book "Morning of Rising Sun: The Heroic Story of the Battles for Guadalcanal". The battles were the crucial turning point in Pacific War and the end of the Japanese initiative. The author Kenneth Friedman has done a superb job of describing the naval battles that took place between the Americans and Japanese off the Guadalcanal. This book was well written with detailed information and nice maps and charts which help to understand the naval battles.

Tom Hickox - Baton Rouge, Louisiana

This reader has had an interest in the campaign since reading Guadalcanal Diary as a lad and I have read any number of books since, but this is the first that ties everything together, dots the "i"s and crosses the "t"s. The naval action has always been something of a mystery to me, but Dr. Friedman had done a marvelous job by and large with charts depicting the various actions.

Additionally, both the Allied and Japanese perspectives are presented without the bias one often sees. Dr. Friedman does a remarkable job presenting the personalities of the Japanese commanders.

The chronology is seamless and one switches from ground action to naval to air with little effort on the reader's part. He is also adept at going from high level Allied conferences to the cockpit of an aircraft to the bridge of a ship giving a great sense of what it must have been like to be there.

Having served in the Field Artillery in the Cold War Army, I found Friedman's account of its use, supply, and effects right on. I got the feeling of being right there watching.

I particularly liked the charts of the naval actions and their position alongside the text describing the action. Dr. Friedman manages to keep these complex operations in perspective in a manner that facilitates understanding.

The book is massive as other readers have pointed out, about seven-hundred pages. Once I picked it up, I had a hard time putting it down. A first printing, I picked out four or five typos (Author's comments *corrected in latest version*), so the rate was less than one per hundred pages, excellent I would say.

This was a campaign that is often overlooked in favor of more glamorous actions. Friedman brings it to life and ties the various parts together particularly well.

Casimiro Tadeo Ciupalski - Madrid, Spain

I enjoyed the book "Morning of Rising Sun: The Heroic Story of the Battles for Guadalcanal". The battles were the crucial turning point in Pacific War and the end of the Japanese initiative. The author Kenneth Friedman has done a superb job of describing the naval battles that took place between the Americans and Japanese off the Guadalcanal. This book was well written with detailed information and nice maps and charts which help to understand the naval battles.

Dick Clark - Bella Vista, AR

Ken, what a great book. You should feel a very large degree of satisfaction. Tough reading but I'm hanging onto every word. It is good writing when the reader is anxious to see what is on the next page when he already knows what the results are.

Jeffrey Means - Simi Valley, CA

I want to commend (the author) for his book. I will recommend it to anyone I talk to.

He did (a fine job writing about) Guadalcanal and the memory of these kids who took on a military machine that hadn't been stopped (except by the Russians led by Zhukov at Nomonhan in 1939) and proved that we mean it when we say Don't Tread on Me! And the amazing thing, amongst all of it, is the small loss (of life among) US Marines . . . when you realize they were there for 4 months, with few supplies at times, against a cagey adversary whether from land, sea, or air or pestilence and disease. I salute Ken's effort.

I really have been wanting to know the real facts about this battle, and this book really helped me get to that point. Other books I have read just were bare bones, but one certainly can't call Ken's book bare in any detail. I have read many books on Guadalcanal, and Ken went the distance with research in this epic, which Guadalcanal was. He seemed to really do the sea battles well and . . . really did the land battles well. . . .

On a scale of one to five (stars), I would give this book a 6.

David McClure - San Francisco, CA

Morning of the Rising Sun is the compelling story of the first major Allied combined land, air and sea offensive in the war in the Pacific. Historian and author, Dr. Kenneth Friedman, spent six years extensively researching and painstakingly writing the first draft of this sweeping trip across the battlefields and into the minds and motivations of the combatants ... and it shows. It unflinchingly depicts the deadly details of the war in the jungles, waters and airspace that made up the struggle for control of Guadalcanal.

Dr. Friedman brilliantly lays out the political and cultural underpinnings of that bloody six month donnybrook with the meticulous clarity of an accomplished historian while at the same time taking the reader into the minds, motives and personal experiences of warriors from both sides with a novelist's sense of story. This is an eminently readable and thoroughly enjoyable delineation of the fascinating details of the conflict that changed the course of the war.

Guadalcanal stopped the advance of the Japanese across the Pacific and created momentum that would take the Allies from blood soaked island to blood soaked island all the way to Japan. Hastily organized, audaciously launched and uncompromisingly fought, its outcome was tenuous and uncertain until the very last days and, but for a few propitious moments that we euphemistically, in hindsight, call the fortunes of war, it could easily have turned out differently. And that would have dramatically altered the course of the war.

This book is a valuable addition to our understanding of the causes of conflict and the nature of both victory and defeat, a testament to the honor and courage of those who believed in their cause and fought on both sides. Anyone interested in military history, political history or the very personal nature of war without quarter will find Morning of the Rising Sun a productive investment of their time and a fascinating read.

John L. Willis, DDS - Yuba City, CA

Just a quick note to tell you how much I thoroughly enjoyed your book. I have read Frank, Leckie, Hammell, Feldt and others and rate yours at the top. Good work! Definitely a five-star rating. ---