

Foreword

Former naval officer and prolific author Commander David Bruhn's *Turn into the Wind, Volume I*, provides detailed insights into an often-overlooked segment of the United States Navy's World War II Pacific Ocean operations: utilization of light aircraft carriers—CVLs. It is widely known that on December 7, 1941, all five Pacific Fleet aircraft carriers were absent from Pearl Harbor. Four of them—the USS *Lexington* (CV-2), USS *Yorktown* (CV-5), USS *Wasp* (CV-7), and USS *Hornet* (CV-8)—were lost at sea in 1942 to Japanese bombs and torpedoes. To fill the gap until the arrival of newly built *Essex*-class carriers, President Franklin Roosevelt, a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy (1913-1920), ordered nine light fleet carriers to be built on *Cleveland*-class light cruiser hulls already under construction. All nine of these *Independence*-class converted ships were commissioned in 1943, and *Turn into the Wind* describes their impact on Pacific Fleet operations through the end of the war.

The CVLs, at 622 feet in length and 14,750 tons, rode poorly in rough seas and heavy weather and were challenging platforms from which to fly—even more so for planes laden with bombs and fuel—due to their shorter decks. Likewise, these same short decks created, for the returning planes, an equal if not greater challenge. However, because they were constructed initially as light cruisers, their four propellers could achieve over 30 knots, making integration within naval task groups practical and effective. Because they carried significantly fewer aircraft—45 fighters and torpedo bombers compared to the 90-100 aircraft complement on *Essex*-class carriers—CVLs assigned to multi-carrier task groups were initially, often given combat air patrol and anti-submarine patrol duties. This arrangement freed up larger deck carriers' air assets to conduct strikes against sea and shore targets. However, as the proficiency of their pilots grew, CVLs were tasked with more strike missions.

As a former naval aviator and carrier pilot, I was taken with the depth and detail encompassed in Bruhn's work. Underlying the numerous naval actions, in Pacific and European theater operations during World War II, was the United States' extraordinary industrial and logistical might. That all nine *Independence*-class light carriers were commissioned in one year is nothing short of amazing. The critical role of the CVLs, in the United States' westward march across the Pacific to

ultimately secure land-based facilities from which to launch attacks on the Japanese mainland, is well documented and clearly explained. It is evident that aircraft carriers, with their innate flexibility and lethality, were critical to the success of Pacific Fleet operations during the war and remain a cornerstone of U.S. military and political decision making.

Light fleet carriers were an integral part of the overall World War II Pacific Ocean strategy designed and implemented by Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Admiral Chester Nimitz (later Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas and then Chief of Naval Operations). It is entirely fitting that a class of nuclear-powered aircraft carriers is named after him, and that the lead ship, the USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68), bears his name. As a former crewmember of *Nimitz*, I found *Turn into the Wind* to be an essential source regarding World War II light aircraft carrier operations. With its extensive collection of photos, illustrations, maps, diagrams, and appendices, the book illustrates the crucial role these assets played in defeating Japanese aggression in the Pacific.

The naval operations, described in Commander Bruhn's exceptional historical rendering, provide background on why the United States patrols the world's oceans. We can sleep at night knowing that—should diplomacy fail to keep peace—her naval capabilities, most especially her aircraft carriers, are ready.

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