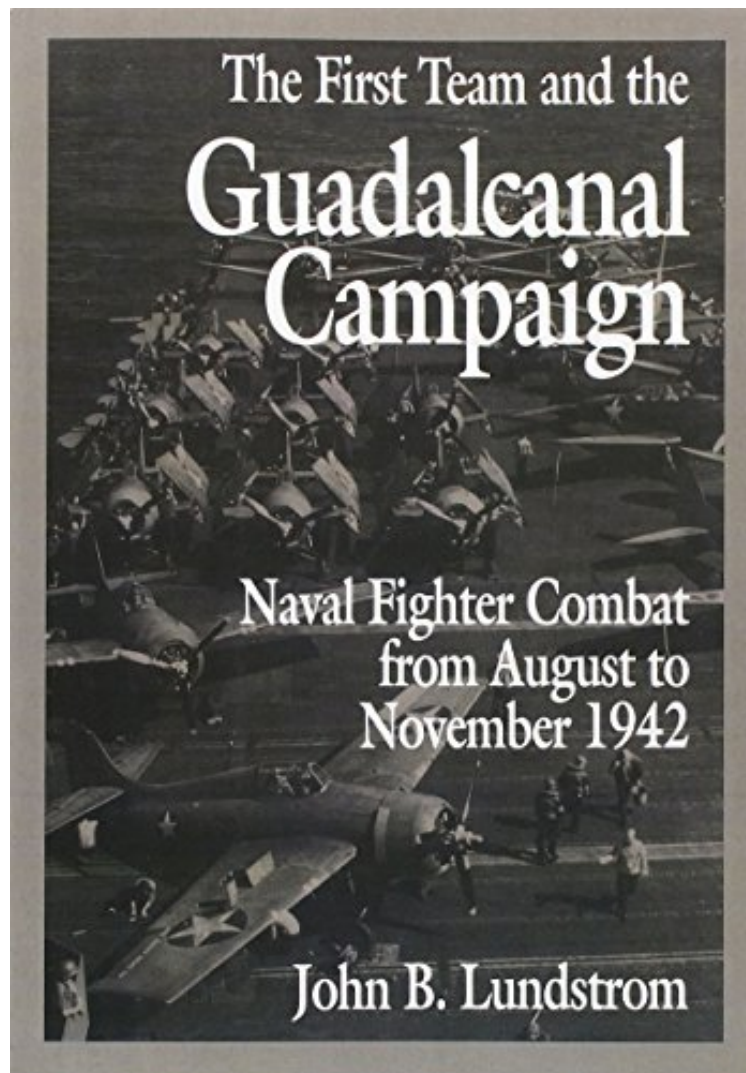


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## The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign: Naval Fighter Combat from August to November 1942

*John B. Lundstrom*

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**John B. Lundstrom : The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign: Naval Fighter Combat from August to November 1942** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign: Naval Fighter Combat from August to November 1942:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. If you want a good comprehensive book about the airBy WilliamThe First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign - Naval Fighter Combat form August to November 1942 by John Lundstrom. "Our few against their precious few." This is a continuation of The First Team part I. The first book

chronicled the Pacific Naval air combat from Pearl Harbor to Midway (see my review on Goodreads). As the title suggests, the second book covers the carrier wars through the Guadalcanal campaign. This includes the carrier battle of the Eastern Solomons early in the campaign, fighting alongside the CACTUS Air force on Guadalcanal, and the carrier battle of Santa Cruz late in the campaign. If you want a good comprehensive book about the air, land, and sea campaign I would first read Richard Frank's *Guadalcanal: The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle*. If you are interested in the entire naval campaign – both surface and the carrier battles – read John D. Hornfischer's *Neptune's Inferno*. But, if you want to read a gripping blow-by-blow account of the Navy and Marine fighter and bomber pilots that fought to secure the airstrip on Henderson Field to make the first allied offensive in the Pacific War a success than this book is for you. *The First Team Part II* is different than *Part I* because many of the Naval Aviators leave the carriers and relocate to Guadalcanal. This first happened after the carrier USS *Hornet* was sunk in the battle of the Eastern Solomons early in the campaign and continued through the battle of Santa Cruz and the showdown for Henderson Field shortly after Santa Cruz. What an advantage that strategic air strip was! American carrier pilots could make their bomb runs or fly their escort sorties and head for the static Henderson Field rather than try to find the dynamic carriers. Rear Admiral McCain considered Henderson field a carrier that can't be sunk. McCain also called Guadalcanal a "sink" for Japanese Airpower. The Japanese diverted resources from all points of the empire to fight the air war over Guadalcanal. The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor with pilots that had thousands upon thousands of hours of combat experience flying over China and Korea. Guadalcanal really whittled down Japan's experienced fighter pilots and bomber crews. Many Japanese pilots had to fly 500 miles one way from Rabaul to engage in combat over Guadalcanal. Japanese pilots shot down over Guadalcanal or who ditched shortly thereafter were much less likely to return to their units to fly again. Comparatively, many Marines and Naval aviators in shot-up F-4-Fs could dead-stick into Henderson field and fly again the same day. As mentioned above, the Guadalcanal campaign was especially hard on the Japanese naval air force. Meanwhile, the Navy and Marine pilots were gaining more and more experience. After each campaign, the United States Navy would rotate in entirely new fresh fighter, bomber, and torpedo squadrons (and rest the experienced crews) while their Japanese counterparts never had a break. The Nipon pilots flew until they were dead, maimed too badly to fly again, or marooned on some place akin to Gilligan's Island. Also, the Grumman F4F-4 was a dog compared to the Mitsubishi A6M. I think the difference was the simple tactics devised by the Marines and Navy such as the Thatch weave combined with features of the Wildcat such as the self-sealing gas tanks and the armor and 50 Caliber machine guns. The A6M zero required a highly skilled pilot to take advantage of the superior maneuverability and agility. These pilots were being attritted every day. Less skilled pilots were taking their place. At first the Naval aviators were being told to avoid dog fights with the zeros (Marines and Navy pilots are considered Naval Aviators). Halfway through the campaign the pilots at Henderson field were told to actively seek and engage the Zero in a dog fight. Because of the superior armor of the F-4-F the naval aviators also realized that safest place for the Zero pilot to be was right on the Wildcat's tail. It was a battle of our few verses their precious few and our few won. I was struck by how poorly communications were for both sides. Communications were poor for the US but they were atrocious for the Japanese. The Japanese Zero pilots removed their radios because their range was only 50 miles and they thought that this limited range was not worth the 18 KG that the radio and antenna weighed. The Zero pilots removed them and communicated by hand signals only. Also, the Japanese Navy and Army communicated with each other very poorly. An example of this is included on page 202. Halfway through the campaign the Naval air base in Rabaul had heard a rumor that Henderson Field was recaptured by the Japanese Army. Instead of communicating with the Imperial Army to confirm the Navy sent a reconnaissance in force to investigate. They were chewed to pieces by allied anti-aircraft. The Imperial Navy sent another force the next day and several more planes were shot down before they finally confirmed that Henderson Field was still in enemy hands! On a side note, the author is also very supportive of some of the decisions made by Admiral Fletcher early in the Guadalcanal campaign. These actions led to Fletcher's dismissal. Lundstrom indicates that Fletcher was left out of the planning stage for the campaign in the first place and communications were extremely poor during the campaign. The author believes that this led to some bad decisions. Fletcher was severely criticized when he removed the carriers prior to the Marines off-loading all their supply Armada on Guadalcanal. However, the author argues that Fletcher was informed by Admiral Kelly Turner that he was pulling up stakes of the supply armada anyway. Turner changed his mind and didn't communicate with Fletcher. Lundstrom seems to be a big fan of Fletcher. He wrote a biography of Jack Fletcher called *Black Shoe Carrier*. We also have to remember that Fletcher did do very well at Coral Sea and Midway. Lastly, I was amazed at how inaccurate and over inflated the battle reports were. Both sides over-reported aircraft combat victories and ships hit or sunk by at least 50%. What is great about this book is that Lundstrom compares the record reported by the pilots to the actual casualties in the official record of each adversary. Many times the Japanese would report shooting down more Grumman F-4-Fs than were engaged in the battle in the first place! The actual score of the venerable old Wildcat would be closer to zero (no pun intended). The Grumman Wildcat was a dog but it was a dog that could take a beating. This story requires some dedication and I do not consider it light reading. This is because there is so much detail in the day-to-day accounts and the battle lasted over 3 months. Some of the chapters in the middle of the campaign while flying from Henderson Field could feel a little monotonous but the devout reader will be rewarded

with a comprehensive understanding of the air campaign. If you are a history buff interested in more detail about the war in the Pacific or if you are an aviation fanatic this book is for you. Enjoy. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. He also does a good job of covering the big picture going on around ...By Eagletree Outstanding Detail. Lundstrom appears to have documented nearly every battle of these pilots in excruciating detail. I normally read naval and ground combat books, but this was worth it. He puts in enough anecdote and small people-oriented details of these pilots to break up the sometime heavy feeling of so much plane combat. He also does a good job of covering the big picture going on around them, without duplicating everything most of us have read many times before. Just a great book. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Outstanding book on early WWII Naval Aviation - one of the best ever By J. R. Stubbs This may be the best book on Naval Aviation ever written. Maybe the only downside is that it's so incredibly detailed. Lundstrom did an amazing job researching Japanese archives to understand the statistics (i.e., pilot claims) from both sides perspective. The US Naval Aviators were up against some of the best fighter pilots in the world - and they gave a good account of themselves. Outstanding Book!

From huddled command conferences to cramped cockpits, John Lundstrom guides readers through the maelstrom of air combat at Guadalcanal in this impressively researched sequel to his earlier study. Picking up the story after Midway, the author presents a scrupulously accurate account of what happened, describing in rich detail the actual planes and pilots pitted in the ferocious battles that helped turn the tide of war. Based on correspondence with 150 American and Japanese veterans, or their families, he reveals the thoughts, pressures, and fears of the airmen and their crews as he reconstructs the battles. These are the story of the Wildcat and Zero fighters, and the Dauntless, Avenger, Betty, Kate, and Val bombers. Lavishly illustrated with drawings, maps, and photographs, this fresh look at the campaign set a standard for aviation histories when first published in 1994.

About the Author John B. Lundstrom is Curator Emeritus of History at the Milwaukee Public Museum where he has worked since 1967. He is the author of five books, including *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, *The First Team* and the *Guadalcanal Campaign* and coauthor of *Fateful Rendezvous: The Life of Butch O'Hare*.