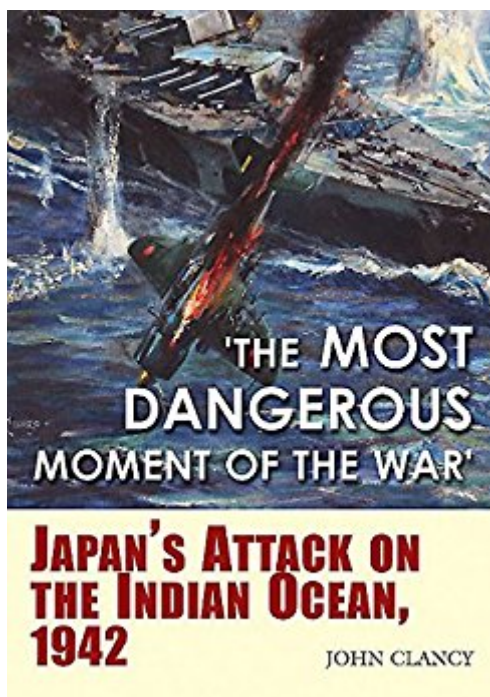




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# “The Most Dangerous Moment Of The War”: Japan’s Attack On The Indian Ocean, 1942



## Synopsis

In early April 1942, a little-known episode of World War II took place, said by Sir Winston Churchill to be “the most dangerous moment of the war, when the Japanese made their only major offensive westwards into the Indian Ocean. Historian Sir Arthur Bryant said, “A Japanese naval victory in April 1942 would have given Japan total control of the Indian Ocean, isolated the Middle East and brought down the Churchill government.” War in the Far East had erupted with the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, followed in succession by Japanese drives on the Philippines, Indochina, the Java Sea and Singapore. Seemingly unstoppable, the Japanese now had a vast new empire, and having crippled the American fleet at Pearl Harbor, turned their sights on the British Eastern Fleet based at Ceylon. Occupation of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) would not only provide the Japanese a springboard into India but control of the essential convoy routes to Europe and the Western Desert. And aside from the British Eastern Fleet, the Indian Ocean lay undefended. So far the Japanese had suffered no significant losses and the question on everyone’s lips was how soon the enemy would appear off India. In April 1942 a Japanese fleet led by six aircraft carriers, four battleships and 30 other ships sailed into the Bay of Bengal. After the war Churchill said that potential disaster was averted by the actions of one pilot, Squadron Leader L.J. Birchall, who in his Catalina flying boat spotted the Japanese warships massing some 350 miles from Ceylon. He was shot down by a Japanese Zero but not before sending a brief radio message back to his base. This gave the island’s defense forces time to prepare. In the ferocious battles that followed, the British lost a carrier, two heavy cruisers and many other ships; however, the Japanese eventually turned back, never to sail against India again. John Clancy, whose father survived the sinking of HMS Cornwall during the battle, tells the story of this dramatic but little known campaign in which a major Allied catastrophe was only narrowly averted.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I have a high level of interest in this seldom discussed, or written, part of WWII. For those sharing the interest this is certainly a 4 star rating. For others perhaps not. It is well written and well illustrated.

Really disappointing coverage of an interesting and strategically significant part of the war. Very anecdotal approach, any discussion of military operations above the most tactical level is superficial and poorly handled.

A brief history of the Japanese incursion into the Indian Ocean. Very focused on the individuals involved and how other events during that period of the war influenced everyone's actions. Good book.

Fast read, and very informative about a part of the war not mentioned to often. I have also just completed building the 1/700 scale models of the HMS Hermes and HMAS Vampire.

A very detailed and interesting account of a little known battle of WWII. It is well worth reading.

This was a barely adequate telling of an interesting piece of World War 2 history. The author seemed to stumble over some of the facts about the war, and he also made this out to be a hugely important occurrence. The Japanese fleet went into the Indian Ocean seeking to wipe out the British fleet in that area. The British fleet had no vessels that could have made the outcome of this be even contested, the Japanese bombed Sri Lanka, sunk several British naval and merchant vessels, and

turned around and went home. They had neither the oil or the oil carrying capacity to sustain a long campaign in the area, and the American Navy's aircraft carriers were much more a concern to the Japanese than a few outdated British ships without air cover. This is not to minimize the courage contributed by the British sailors and airmen who fought with antiquated weapons against state of the art Japanese planes and ships, but had more ships been sunk, the result would have still been that the Japanese ships still returned to Indonesia to refuel, and the American Navy was still their foe of the greatest focus. It may have frightened the British that the Imperial Japanese Navy was in the Indian Ocean, but Japan had no comprehensive plan to stay there and execute a war plan in the area. The only place that this was the "most dangerous moment of the war" was in Sri Lanka, as it was never bombed again.

I stopped halfway through the first chapter. Painful and confusing writing style and--what is worse to me--was elementary historical errors a simple Wikipedia search could have fixed. Page 12 has "...three battleships..." sunk at Pearl Harbor (it was four) and Page 14 said Fairey Albacores were used at Taranto (it was Fairey Swordfish). Having to fact-check as I read is just one of the disappointments. Especially after the author talks himself up in the introduction about how his training as an archaeologist will allow him to research, gather facts and figures, and piece it together coherently, (page viii) "...rather like a jigsaw puzzle." Like a jigsaw puzzle, the art on the box (and the picture on this book) attracts you to buy it, but the reader of this book should not have to scramble around looking for missing pieces or worry that precious time spent reading is being wasted by an author who did not spend precious time researching. Well, back to reading Samuel Eliot Morison's "History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II". Well written, well researched, well fact-checked, well worth your precious time reading. And to think I was using Clancy's book as a break between volumes! Makes you appreciate the work of a professional historian!

This book is a mess. The author's writing style is rambling and repetitive, making it painful to read. The cover has nothing to do with the book (no British battleships were attacked during the battle) and at 172 pages the book is far too long for the little that is said. In addition there are a number of editorial and factual errors which make it even difficult to enjoy. Boy am I glad I chanced across it for \$3 at a library book sale. Anyone interested in the Japanese attack into the Indian Ocean is advised to read Tomlinson's THE MOST DANGEROUS MOMENT, a far better and more complete account.

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