



# Enterprise: America's Fightingest Ship and the Men Who Helped Win World War II

*Barrett Tillman*

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**Enterprise: America's Fightingest Ship and the Men Who Helped Win World War II** Barrett Tillman  
Offering a naval history of the entire Pacific Theater in World War II through the lens of its most famous ship, this is the epic and heroic story of the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise*, and of the men who fought and died on her from Pearl Harbor to the end of the conflict.

Pearl Harbor . . . Midway . . . Guadalcanal . . . The Marianas . . . Leyte Gulf . . . Iwo Jima . . . Okinawa. These are just seven of the twenty battles that the USS *Enterprise* took part in during World War II. No other American ship came close to matching her record. *Enterprise* is the epic, heroic story of this legendary aircraft carrier—nicknamed “the fightingest ship” in the U.S. Navy—and of the men who fought and died on her.

America’s most decorated warship, *Enterprise* was constantly engaged against the Japanese Empire from December 1941 until May 1945. Her career was eventful, vital, and short. She was commissioned in 1938, and her bombers sank a submarine just three days after the Pearl Harbor attack, claiming the first seagoing Japanese vessel lost in the war. It was the auspicious beginning of an odyssey that Tillman captures brilliantly, from escorting sister carrier *Hornet* as it launched the Doolittle Raiders against Tokyo in 1942, to playing leading roles in the pivotal battles of Midway and Guadalcanal, to undergoing the shattering nightmare of kamikaze strikes just three months before the end of the war.

Barrett Tillman has been called “the man who owns naval aviation history.” He’s mined official records and oral histories as well as his own interviews with the last surviving veterans who served on *Enterprise* to give us not only a stunning portrait of the ship’s unique contribution to winning the Pacific war, but also unforgettable portraits of the men who flew from her deck and worked behind the scenes to make success possible. *Enterprise* is credited with sinking or wrecking 71 Japanese ships and destroying 911 enemy aircraft. She sank two of the four Japanese carriers lost at Midway and contributed to sinking the third. Additionally, 41 men who served in *Enterprise* had ships named after them.

As with *Whirlwind*, Tillman’s book on the air war against Japan, *Enterprise* focuses on the lower ranks—the men who did the actual fighting. He puts us in the shoes of the teenage sailors and their captains and executive officers who ran the ship day-to-day. He puts us in the cockpits of dive bombers and other planes as they careen off *Enterprise*’s flight deck to attack enemy ships and defend her against Japanese attackers. We witness their numerous triumphs and many tragedies along the way. However, Tillman does not neglect the top brass—he takes us into the ward rooms and headquarters where larger-than-life flag officers such as Chester Nimitz and William Halsey set the broad strategy for each campaign.

But the main character in the book is the ship itself. “The Big E” was at once a warship and a human institution, vitally unique to her time and place. In this last-minute grab at a quickly fading history, Barrett Tillman preserves the *Enterprise* story even as her fliers and sailors are departing the scene.

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