CLEAR PURPOSE, COMPREHENSIVE EXECUTION

Raymond Ames Spruance (1886–1969)

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As operational commander of hundreds of ships and aircraft, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance had the capacity to distill what he observed—and sometimes felt—into its essence and to focus on the important details by a mental synthesis. He would then charge his staff with comprehensive planning to achieve his purpose. Often the plan would be rent asunder, but it would retain its "tyranny of purpose"—roughly, the mission—as Spruance's staff and commanders adapted to the circumstances. Although this seems always to have been the case from the battle of Midway to the extended battle of Okinawa, his first test, fought over Midway Island, foreshadows his wartime leadership. In part this is because we see his strategic acumen in the critical year of 1942; in part because we see his grasp of the decisive factors in the battle; in part because we see him as a "lucky" admiral; and in part, and not least, because the battle is well known and oft-studied.

What did Rear Admiral Spruance see and feel as he arrived on the station that Admiral Chester W. Nimitz had selected for his tiny, two-carrier Task Force (TF) 16? How did he deal with the disorganized staff he had inherited from Admiral William F. Halsey? What ran through his mind when Rear Admiral Frank Fletcher joined on 2 June and assumed command to execute the explicit plan Nimitz had detailed for Fletcher and Spruance just six days before? How did he deal with the disparate and inconsistent scouting reports? How did he team with his inherited aviator chief of staff, the difficult and sometimes overwrought Captain Miles Browning? What ran through his mind as he watched the cumbersome effort to dispatch the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* air wings in a compact pulse of power, the goal of every carrier commander but unachievable at this early stage of carrier warfare?[1]

Imagine Spruance as he walks into Nimitz's office on 26 May 1942, only to be told that Halsey is hospitalized and Task Force 16 is his. Within minutes Spruance learns that in forty-eight hours he will sail to fight, with 100 percent certainty, the first naval battle of his life, outnumbered eighty ships to twenty-six, against an enemy who has not lost a battle since 7 December 1941. Nimitz says that his mission will be to take calculated risks to attack and punish the Japanese, yet without losing his own force.[2] Spruance learns that if *Yorktown*'s damage at the battle of the Coral Sea can be patched up, Fletcher will join on the very eve of battle and assume tactical command. It is a mission demanding exquisite responsibility and adaptability. "Elated," says one historian of Spruance's reaction to the news. If you think like Spruance, "sobered" is a better term.[3]

The intricacy of the battle is instructive. Regarding Spruance's leadership, historians have paid excessive attention to whether it was Spruance or Browning who selected the moment to launch TF 16's portion of the decisive strike. In truth, Spruance expected the two to be a team. More important, the American and Japanese navies both had to solve extraordinary problems of carrier-deck management, the weight, range, and geographic direction of their scouting efforts, and the execution of a concentrated air attack—problems imperfectly solved on both sides but in the case of the Japanese fatally so. Each problem was multifaceted, and each in its own way was decisive.

Most important at the operational level was the cooperation between Nimitz, Fletcher, and Spruance. Spruance was entirely justified in his trust of Fletcher as tactical commander of TFs 16 and 17. Fletcher, in turn, had no hesitation in turning over tactical command to Spruance at 1800 (that is, six o'clock in the evening) on 4 June after his single carrier, *Yorktown,* was attacked and crippled. The outcome cannot be properly understood without recognizing that Nimitz, the theater commander, was on this occasion in effect his own tactical commander.[4] Nimitz told his two subordinates where to position themselves northeast of Midway and passed on his best estimate of the timing of the Japanese attack. Nimitz specified the roles for TF 17 (to scout vigorously and act as a fighting reserve until it is clear that the Japanese carriers are not executing a two-pronged attack) and for TF 16 (be the cocked pistol, as a two-carrier striking force ready to dispatch an enormous pulse of power as soon as Admiral Chuichi Nagumo's carriers are within range). Nimitz directed the preliminaries because only his staff had the latest information from cryptanalysis; because he would have direct scouting reports from long-range PBY seaplanes and B-17 bombers; because he alone of the three could influence the attacks from, and defense of, Midway Island; and because TFs 16 and 17 had to keep radio silence until the Japanese discovered their presence.

Vice Admiral Raymond A. Spruance (center) ashore at Kwajalein, with Admiral Chester Nimitz (right), in February 1944
Photo courtesy of Naval Historical Center, Photo NH62233

Nimitz also told Fletcher not to combine in one formation but to keep two distinct dispositions. In 1942 this was wise. When *Enterprise* and *Hornet* launched their aircraft, Spruance's two carriers separated, the screen commander splitting his cruiser and destroyer escorts between them. Fletcher remained within visual communication of Spruance, but when the action started it was inevitable that the two formations would lose contact.

The great climax came just after the third wave of torpedo bombers, those under Lieutenant Commander L. E. Massey from *Yorktown,* sacrificed itself in another fruitless attack while *Yorktown* and *Enterprise* dive-bombers arrived overhead, simultaneously but inadvertently. At 1025 (10:25 AM) on 4 June, the American aircraft fatally damaged three Japanese carriers in ten minutes. It is well known that the three torpedo-bomber attacks brought the defending Japanese fighters down "on the deck" and so opened the door for the American SBD dive-bombers, but historian John B. Lundstrom's recent research uncovers the fact that the Imperial Japanese Navy's combat air patrol comprised *forty-one* fighters, *none* of which was in position to thwart the fatal dive-bomber attack.[5] Many have said, correctly, that to win the Americans needed intelligence from cryptanalysis, astute leadership, great courage among the aviators, and just plain

luck. Another factor, scarcely noted in the histories, was the American radar advantage.[6] Give Nagumo and his aviators the U.S. air-search radar, and most of the Japanese combat air patrol would have been at an altitude to break up the *Yorktown* (under Lieutenant Commander M. F. Leslie) and *Enterprise* (Lieutenant Commander C. W. McClusky) dive-bombers.

A final factor was also essential to the American victory. The island of Midway served like a fourth carrier. Because of code breaking, Midway Island's air element had been beefed up. The aircraft, about 125 of them, were a hodgepodge and did no damage whatsoever, but they occupied Nagumo's attention. The futile attacks kept the Japanese striking force busy while breeding overconfidence in its air defense. It was Midway Island and poor Japanese scouting that produced the chain of events that caught Nagumo's carriers loaded with armed and fueled aircraft. At 1020 on 4 June they were powder kegs waiting for the lighted American match. Midway, immobile but unsinkable, was the fatal attraction of the Japanese striking force.

Spruance emerged as the hero of Midway, and properly so. Yet later, when his authority grew—and he built his own team—so did his operational effectiveness, the comprehensiveness of his victories, and the swift pace his Fifth Fleet achieved as it drove through the Central Pacific. Strange to say, the sole decision at Midway that was unequivocally his and only his was one for which he was unjustly criticized at the time. That night, after finishing off Nagumo's fourth carrier in the afternoon, and against his staff's advice, Spruance withdrew to the east. He calculated that a Japanese surface force could reach him during the night if he headed west to chase the "withdrawing" enemy fleet. Critics immediately after the battle thought he had been too prudent. It wasn't until much later that it was discovered that Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commanding the Combined Fleet, had done just what Spruance feared he would do—try to compensate for Nagumo's dreadful defeat by sending a surface formation to meet the American fleet that everyone but Spruance thought should be driving west.

Immediately after Midway and for the next thirteen months, Spruance served as chief of staff to Nimitz, becoming conversant with Nimitz's campaign plan and watching the way he dealt with Admiral Ernest J. King and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, and with General Douglas MacArthur in the South West Pacific theater. Halsey had relieved Vice Admiral R. L. Ghormley, adding vigor to the Navy's support of the Guadalcanal operation. From afar, Spruance vicariously soaked up the tactical lessons of this pivotal campaign: the importance of reconnaissance, the rewards of coordinated land- and sea-based air operations, and the severe constraints imposed by operational logistics. As American industrial might took effect and King made his case that the primacy of Europe must

not preclude a vigorous offensive in the Pacific, Nimitz and King decided that Spruance was the leader best suited for the coming sweep across the Central Pacific. In August 1943 he was promoted to vice admiral, designated Commander, Central Pacific Force, and Commander, Fifth Fleet, charged with planning and executing the assault on the Gilberts in November 1943.

In Spruance we have an extraordinarily wide lens to study the rewards of sound leadership in a panoply of operational and strategic settings. Unlike at Midway, he could now assemble his own combat team. On one hand, Spruance was lucky in having had opportunities to identify promising subordinates well before the war. On the other, he did not hesitate to choose the talented, forceful, and opinionated ones, among them Carl Moore, Kelly Turner, and Holland Smith.[7] He could quickly take the measure of other flag officers assigned to him, such as Marc Mitscher and Harry Hill.[8] Also important, Spruance knew when to stay out of the often fierce confrontations of his subordinates, or when he had, usually with great reluctance, to intervene. Spruance's power to delegate effectively arose from his shrewd judgment of character.[9]

With his handpicked staff and volatile subordinates, Spruance and his Fifth Fleet began their rapid sweep across the Pacific. Each operation had its own characteristics: the first significant Marine assault, at Tarawa in the Gilberts in November 1943; the rapid seizure of the Marshalls in an efficiently run cakewalk; the neutralization with carrier air strikes and bypassing of the great Japanese bastion at Truk; and in June 1944 the difficult invasion of the well defended Marianas, along with the naval battle of the Philippine Sea. Halsey then took the fleet to Peleliu in September and the Philippines in October, after which Spruance returned to lead the cruel battle for Iwo Jima in February 1945 and the titanic two-month struggle for Okinawa two months later.

When Spruance took tactical command at Midway he never had more than twenty-six warships and 233 aircraft. Less than three years later, at Okinawa, he commanded over three hundred fighting ships with countless aircraft, 1,200 amphibious ships carrying 180,000 assault troops, and more than two hundred service-force vessels. Also present was a British contingent of twenty-two ships, including four carriers and two battleships.[10]

Raymond Ames Spruance was born on 3 July 1886 in Baltimore, Maryland. His maternal ancestors came from Maryland and New Jersey, but his father was from Indianapolis, Indiana. Thus, until he entered the Naval Academy in 1903, his early years were divided between the East and the Midwest. It is an indication of Spruance's aptitude that he had nominations to the academy from congressmen in both New Jersey and Indiana. The teenage Spruance wanted to accept the nomination from New Jersey, because he had placed first in a competitive

examination there, but to please his family he accepted the appointment from Indiana. One would have to interpret the influences of Spruance's childhood with too much hindsight to foresee his destiny in that episode, but it is fair to say that shyness, intelligence, and firmly held but thoroughly considered opinions were all evident from an early age.

The Naval Academy was expanding rapidly in those years to match the buildup of the Navy and accepted 266 plebes into his class of 1907. Spruance was to rank twenty-fifth among 209 surviving graduates. He would be one of the top third of his class who were graduated early, in July 1906, because the growing fleet needed career officers. Spruance reported first to *Iowa* but a year later was transferred to the new *Minnesota,* which was one of the sixteen ships of the Great White Fleet that circumnavigated the globe in 1907 and 1908.

What were the sources of Spruance's leadership? To begin with, his technical experience is understated by historians. In 1909, while still an ensign, he wangled a year at General Electric. His aptitude for electrical engineering having been recognized, he served in three engineer officer tours afloat and in three technical tours ashore, at Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock, the New York Navy Yard, and the Bureau of Engineering.[11] In fact, Spruance found himself in danger of becoming a de facto engineering duty officer. Almost too late, Spruance fought his way back toward his first love, command at sea. But his knowledge of engineering and technology—for instance, in appreciating the operational potential and limitations of radar, IFF (Identification Friend or Foe), homing beacons, and the central role of combat information centers—were to be vital ingredients of his future success.

A second cornerstone was experience gained in two Naval War College staff tours. He would remember in the second one resisting Rear Admiral Edward C. Kalbfus's approach to education as too ritualistic. He told Kalbfus that his pet doctrinal publication, *Sound Military Decision,* was an elaborate cookbook of form over substance, in which an orderly process was veritably an end in itself rather than an aid to apprehending in all their dimensions the fullness and essence of an operation. Kalbfus neither lost respect for Spruance nor changed his mind.

The third cornerstone of Spruance's greatness was his experience as a commanding officer. He commanded six ships—the first, *Bainbridge,* while still a lieutenant (junior grade), and the last, *Mississippi,* at the time he was promoted to rear admiral, in December 1940. Spruance never ran aground or suffered a collision. Meanwhile, he won the respect of his peers, seniors, and juniors for operational competence. That he learned high-speed shiphandling under Commander William F. Halsey, his destroyer squadron commander, dispels any notion that Spruance was being too cool, too sure of himself, when as

commanding officer he would retire to his sea cabin with what his best biographer, Thomas B. Buell, seems to have regarded as excessive sangfroid.

Spruance believed his greatest value was as a strategist, though he never aspired to serve in Washington, D.C.[12] His leadership is significant both as a reminder that excellence in combat is the pinnacle of military achievement and in showing how a great leader grows quickly into each new role. No one transformed himself more *consciously* than Spruance, as he went from ship captain as late as December 1940; to flag officer subordinate to Halsey in the critical period immediately before and after Pearl Harbor; to task force commander, tactical commander, and chief of staff to Admiral Nimitz, all in June 1942; to vice admiral and Fifth Fleet commander in August 1943; and to admiral in February 1944, in command at the Marianas, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. His flag lieutenant describes his first and most critical transformation, just before the battle of Midway. Literally overnight Spruance changed from a detail man—who, for example, "watched the chief signalman like a hawk" when he was Halsey's screen commander—to a maker of major decisions, as Task Force 16 commander in *Enterprise,* where he "took himself out of the details completely."[13]

Buell called Spruance "the quiet warrior," but he was neither silent nor reticent. We know this because of a large and frank correspondence with his wife, Margaret, and with intimates like his former chief of staff and lifelong friend Captain Charles J. (Carl) Moore. We know it because Spruance communicated forcefully throughout his career, both in junior officer days and during his rapid wartime advancement. His views were esteemed by his juniors, his peers, and his seniors. With his staff he talked endlessly, often while walking back and forth on his flagship's forecastle. Talking, he said, was how he shaped his thinking. Then he would disappear while his staff responded with thorough, detailed plans.

In communicating with seniors, Spruance restricted his issues to the few he thought were critical. His clearly expressed positions were not always accepted, nor was he always right, but from ensign to admiral he was listened to for wisdom and objectivity. Spruance's unostentatious mode of communication compares well with that of the far more charismatic Horatio Nelson. Both leaders not only motivated their followers but instilled an extension of the mind of a master into what Nelson described as a "band of brothers."

Admiral Ernest J. King considered Spruance to be "the most intelligent officer in the Navy," but Spruance was not an intellectual.[14] Rear Admiral E. M. Eller, then Director of Naval History, called him "self-possessed," but Spruance was never self-sufficient.[15] He was relentless but not vicious in his unflagging determination to defeat his talented, unyielding, and resourceful Japanese enemy. Nimitz said of him, "Admiral Spruance fought the war with his entire being."

In response to those who said Spruance might have done better at Midway, at Tarawa, or in the battle of the Philippine Sea, Lundstrom says: "The constant was that every time Admiral Raymond A. Spruance commanded an operation against the Japanese, they lost."[16] He never let the Japanese navy, army, or kamikazes, or the weather, or logistics defeat him, even under the direst circumstances. Naval War College historian and strategist George Baer offers that Spruance "perfectly characterizes Clausewitz' notion of military genius."[17]

Illustrative is Spruance's execution as Fifth Fleet commander at the battle of the Philippine Sea. Some later thought he was too cautious because he protected the beachhead on Saipan. He had positioned his fighting fleet within easy reach of it, because he knew the Japanese propensity to split their forces in previous attacks. He believed they might draw the American fast carriers and battleships toward the west with one force while sneaking in with the other to crush the beachhead. Four months later, this was in fact the Imperial Japanese Navy's plan: it drew away the more impetuous Admiral Halsey and his Third Fleet (the same ships with a different commander) in the battle of Leyte Gulf.

Spruance hugged the beachhead, as Admiral Ozawa Jisaburo expected him to do. With a flank attack foreclosed, the Japanese admiral conceived a perfectly sound plan, which was to launch all his strike aircraft, 450 of them, from the west and well beyond the range of the Americans. He could do that because his aircraft would not have to return to their carriers, as an American strike would; instead, they would cripple the U.S. carriers and then fly on eastward to Japanese airfields in the Marianas, from which they would then reattack. Simultaneously, substantial land-based naval air forces would attack the Fifth Fleet from Guam and Saipan, in the Marianas, reminiscent of our own attacks on the Japanese carriers from Midway Island.

The Japanese plan might have been effective in June 1942, but it could not be in June 1944. Task Force 58 had already destroyed all Japanese airpower in the Marianas and established air supremacy. By thinking defensively—a scandalously poor strategy in 1942 but perfect for 1944—Spruance empowered Mitscher to assemble *all* his fighters for defense. Nor did Mitscher need to deal with decks cluttered with armed and fueled dive-bombers and torpedo bombers. Task Force 58 struck those aircraft below and concentrated on mounting a defense so formidable that it used more fighters on hand than the Japanese had in total aircraft for the attack. The American defense comprised fifteen fast carriers in four tight formations ringed by cruisers and destroyers carrying scores of antiaircraft weapons. The ships shot down or drove away the trickle of bombers not destroyed by the American combat air patrol. The few Japanese aircraft that survived and flew to the Marianas had no place to land and were destroyed. This was the famous "Marianas Turkey Shoot," in which 435 of 450 Japanese

aircraft were destroyed at the cost of thirty American fighters.[18] By 1944 the Pacific air war had been transformed from a battle to destroy air *bases* afloat and ashore into a battle to destroy *aircraft* in the air and on the ground.

In the Philippine Sea Spruance vacillated between staying close and steaming west in an attempt to attack effectively first, as Mitscher fervently begged him to do. Spruance chose the right course of action, and in so doing he won the most decisive battle in the history of naval air warfare, Midway not excepted. The Japanese carriers never recovered and were thereafter floating airfields without aircraft. The result was kamikaze attacks for the rest of the war.

Spruance had to an extraordinary degree the mental equivalent of peripheral vision. Not only did he visualize the situation he confronted in 360 degrees, but he did so in *n* dimensions—that is, in all aspects. When Spruance was in his sixth shipboard command, just before promotion to rear admiral, a lieutenant with whom he had once had theological discussions was officer of the deck (OOD), "conning *Mississippi* through complicated maneuvers in company with other battleships." Spruance calmly said, "Tell me more about reincarnation, evolution, and karma." The hapless OOD was sure that he had to safeguard the ship from an absentminded skipper. To the contrary, it is safe to say that Spruance was testing the young officer's mental capacity to address two problems at once. While grilling the OOD, Spruance, with his "peripheral vision," would not only have seen everything going on around them but anticipated anything that might happen.[19] On another occasion, in January 1939, a Panama Canal pilot gave a logical order, right rudder, but the idiosyncratic *Mississippi* swung left toward shoal water and a moored dredge. Spruance took the conn from the pilot and saved his ship.[20]

With the war over, after brief tours as Commander, Naval Forces Japan, and Pacific Fleet commander, in March 1946 Spruance returned to the Naval War College as President. He emphasized two things. First, he wanted to enhance officer *education* in operations and strategy. Spruance accepted that planning needs a process—something less tendentious than the one Kalbfus had espoused—but he thought that beyond process, and more important, come comprehensive thinking and clarity of purpose. For example, doctrine said you win command of the sea before exploiting it with an amphibious operation, but Spruance would have seen this as a trap of theory, because in his experience a practical enemy would not come and fight until the landing had taken place and the opposing fleet was tied to a beachhead.

Second, Spruance introduced operational logistics to the curriculum. He had first seen the dominance of logistics at Guadalcanal, lived logistics from Tarawa to Okinawa, and suffered its restraints in the summer of 1945 when he was planning, with profound reluctance, the invasion of Japan scheduled for November.

Spruance knew from personal experience that the prewar plan to construct advance bases across the Pacific had been a cumbersome failure and that a key to his bold sweep through the Central Pacific had been the act of collective genius embodied in the mobile logistics support force that followed on the heels of his fleet wherever it went. Indeed, the Pacific campaign had been governed by resource allocations, between the European and Pacific theaters and, in the Pacific, between Nimitz and MacArthur. Spruance could contrast from firsthand experience the extraordinary success of the U.S. Navy's logistical support with the ever more devastating logistical frustrations suffered by the Japanese army and navy from 1943 onward.

Spruance was only partially successful at the Naval War College. Educating military officers in how to shift from following orders to creating them proved to be no easy task. Persuading future leaders that logistics dominate operations—and even strategy—was a challenge that is still with us over sixty years later.

The best way to understand Spruance's leadership is not to show how he followed doctrine, principles, or an elaborate process, for as we have seen he did not. His four major attributes were luck, ambition, skills acquired from study and experience, and innate talent.

Napoleon said he wanted only lucky generals. Branch Rickey once said (of baseball), "Luck is nothing more than the residue of design."[21] In these terms, Spruance was lucky. We know the Midway story and why he was a "lucky general" in his first battle. Halsey insisted on Spruance as his replacement because he knew him intimately. Nimitz thought his calm demeanor and "peripheral vision" were what would be needed in the crucial battle. Luck played in the decisive dive-bomber attack at 1025 on 4 June, but mutual confidence between Nimitz, Fletcher, and Spruance had established the conditions fulfilled by the courageous American pilots. Good luck entered in when the Bureau of Navigation ordered fledgling Rear Admiral Spruance to the Pacific in mid-1941—and the bureau chief was Chester Nimitz. Nimitz gave Spruance a cruiser division. Spruance was keenly disappointed that he did not get a battleship division. As luck would have it, his cruiser division was assigned to Halsey. In this way Spruance had six months to understudy carrier operations in the direst circumstances, while escaping the inconsequentiality of battleships in 1942. Nimitz for his part had no way of knowing when he gave Spruance his vital assignment that he himself would soon replace Admiral Husband E. Kimmel as Pacific fleet commander and that Spruance would become his most valuable subordinate.

What of Spruance's desire to achieve? Self-serving ambition is characterized by forcefulness, even ruthlessness, in advancing one's own interest. Spruance

was just as forceful, and it is fair to say ruthless, in his prosecution of the war, but he prosecuted it selflessly. His ambition was for the success of his forces, his navy, and his country. Selfless ambition entails an extra measure of talent, both your own and that of the subordinates you choose. When Rear Admiral Arthur Davis, an aviator, took over as chief of staff from Carl Moore during the Fifth Fleet staff's brief respite in the last half of 1944, he made it his task to unburden Spruance of concern for the detailed planning both knew would be their recipe for success at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Buell said, "Davis was awed by Spruance's intellect and regarded the admiral as modest, shy, unassuming, and unconceited." Davis later wrote, "I made up my mind I would do all in my power to keep his mind free of all the deadening inconsequentialities that can waste time and take attention from the things that really matter."[22] The historian Samuel Eliot Morison thought "Spruance's leading characteristics were attention to detail, poise, and the power of intelligent decision." Yet Spruance appraised himself late in life differently: "When I look at myself objectively, I think that what success I may have achieved through life is largely due to the fact that I am a good judge of men, I am lazy, and I never have done things myself that I could get someone to do for me."[23] There is no contradiction between Morison's admiration of Spruance's "attention to detail" and the latter's self-evaluation "I am lazy"—keeping in mind Spruance's knack of propitious delegation, accompanied by his comprehensive, *n*-dimensional peripheral vision. Spruance was prudent but not cautious in formulating and executing operations.

Spruance's early education and experience have been addressed. A Naval Academy foundation, student and two staff tours at the Naval War College, and technical training at General Electric gave him a well rounded education. Six tours in engineering billets and six commands gave him well rounded operational experience. An indication of his professional temperament is that, serving under his fair share of good and mediocre leaders, he seems to have won the respect of them all.

As to Raymond Spruance's inherited characteristics, one must regard his famous reserve as innate, as well as his selfless desire for excellence. These characteristics were seen and remarked on even when he was an ensign and were the foundations of the universal respect in which he was to be held. Spruance embodied both shyness and stoicism. Probably in the early days shyness predominated, but as the war grew progressively bloodier, stoicism would help him keep focused on his command responsibilities. Those who knew him best say his eyes gave away his sense of humor and sensitivity but he kept those traits concealed under a grave demeanor. He was famous for preserving his energy. The emotionally draining two-month campaign for Okinawa exhausted his staff and ships'

companies, yet his flag secretary, Charles Barber, later insisted that Spruance looked as fresh at the end of the campaign as the day it started.[24]

His natural proclivities were not unerring. For example, after taking Tarawa in the Gilberts in November 1943, he did not want to go directly at Kwajalein in the heart of the Marshall Islands but argued for taking the outer atolls first. Nimitz, however, thought the Japanese would not have time to build up their defenses if he struck quickly. Two months later Nimitz was proved right when Spruance took Kwajalein against light opposition.

Spruance's most important leadership trait seems to have been inherent rather than acquired. On one hand, he had very high standards of *effectiveness,* for himself and everyone he esteemed. On the other hand, he expected no one, including himself, to perform flawlessly. Spruance believed that a goal of perfection stifles timely decisions and inhibits the pace of action, whether in himself, his staff, his subordinates, or his peers. He had low regard for anyone who when judging effectiveness could not distinguish molehills from mountains. This trait shines like a beacon in everything he wrote, said, and did. Morison perhaps best summed up Raymond Ames Spruance: "He envied no man, regarded no one as rival, won the respect of all with whom he came in contact, and went ahead in his quiet way winning victories for his country."[25]

NOTES

1. Depending on your capacity for empathy you may approach an understanding of the battle after reading, say, the chapters on Midway in Herman Wouk's *War and Remembrance,* John Lundstrom's recent three-chapter account of the battle in *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral,* and the early but still masterful narrative in Samuel Eliot Morison's *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II.*
2. His flag lieutenant said Spruance told him after being briefed by Nimitz: "It appears . . . I have two sets of orders. [First] a written order to meet and defeat the Japs. [Second] My oral orders are not to lose my force. If things go badly I am to withdraw and let them have the place because they can't hold it and we will get it back." Robert J. Oliver, letter, 5 August 1971, Naval War College Historical Collection, Spruance Papers [hereafter Spruance Papers], MS 37, box 3, folder 12.
3. This despite correspondence with E. P. Forrestel, 19 December 1962, in which Spruance wrote, "Needless to say, I was very pleased." Spruance Papers, MS 37, box 3, folder 4.
4. For a more thorough treatment, see Hughes, "Naval Tactics and Their Influence on Strategy," *Naval War College Review* 39, no. 1 (January–February 1986), pp. 2–17.
5. J. B. Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral: Frank Jack Fletcher at Coral Sea, Midway, and Guadalcanal* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2007), p. 260.
6. A recent book does so very well, however, and in great detail: Jonathan Parshall and Anthony Tully, *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005), for example, pp. 137, 186.
7. Rear Adm. Carl Moore was Spruance's chief of staff in 1944; Vice Adm. Richmond Kelly Turner was to command Amphibious Force, South Pacific Force; Lt. Gen. Holland M.

Smith, USMC, commanded V Amphibious Corps in the Central Pacific.

8. Vice Adm. Marc Andrew Mitscher commanded the Fast Carrier Strike Force, and Rear Adm. Harry W. Hill amphibious forces, both in the Central Pacific campaign. Mitscher did not live up to Spruance's expectations as commanding officer of USS *Hornet* at Midway. Not until after Task Force 58's air strikes to neutralize Truk in early 1944 did Mitscher earn Spruance's full confidence.

9. Buell, Spruance's best biographer, reports only one instance in Spruance's six warship commands when a subordinate took advantage of his trust, and that was not an operational matter but an administrative one, involving the petty theft of provisions. Thomas B. Buell, *The Quiet Warrior* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1987), pp. 74–75.

10. Ibid., chap. 22. Also see E. P. Forrestel, *Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, USN: A Study in Command* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), chap. 15. Forrestel, who had served on Spruance's staff in the Pacific, takes a less personal approach than Buell.

11. His afloat engineer-officer tours were in USS *Connecticut,* USS *Cincinnati,* and USS *Pennsylvania*.

12. Spruance's two theses on command and policy, written when he was a student in 1927 and today in the archives at the Naval War College, are ample evidence that he had the talent of a great strategist. The first deserves to be republished today for its concise description of command responsibilities. He designed organizational relationships for a proper "Navy general staff" in a way that one might wish were in effect today. Both exemplify his crisp, clear, concise style of thinking.

13. Oliver letter.

14. Buell, *Quiet Warrior.* To ease his mind under pressure Spruance read detective stories and the like, but never the great classics.

15. E. M. Eller, introduction, in Forrestel, *Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, USN,* p. viii.

16. J. B. Lundstrom, introduction, in Buell, *Quiet Warrior,* p. xvii.

17. George Baer, personal correspondence to Hughes, 17 April 2007.

18. Late in the afternoon Mitscher persuaded Spruance to send a strike. The fleeing Japanese ships were at the extreme attack range of three hundred miles. Most of the American aircraft lost that day, a hundred of the 216 Mitscher dispatched, ran out of fuel and had to land in the water.

19. Buell, *Quiet Warrior,* p. 38.

20. Ibid., pp. 89–90. To stop the strange swing to port, Spruance dropped and held the starboard anchor while backing full the starboard engines.

21. Quoted in a review of *Rickey, Baseball's Ferocious Gentleman,* by Lee Lowenfish, *Weekly Standard,* 9 April 2007, p. 38.

22. Buell, *Quiet Warrior,* p. 338.

23. Ibid.

24. C. F. Barber, oral history, 1 March 1966, Spruance Papers, series II, box 17.

25. Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II,* vol. 3, *New Guinea and the Marianas: March 1944–August 1944* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), pp. 235–36.

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