

The Imperial Japanese Navy of the Russo-Japanese War

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Contents:

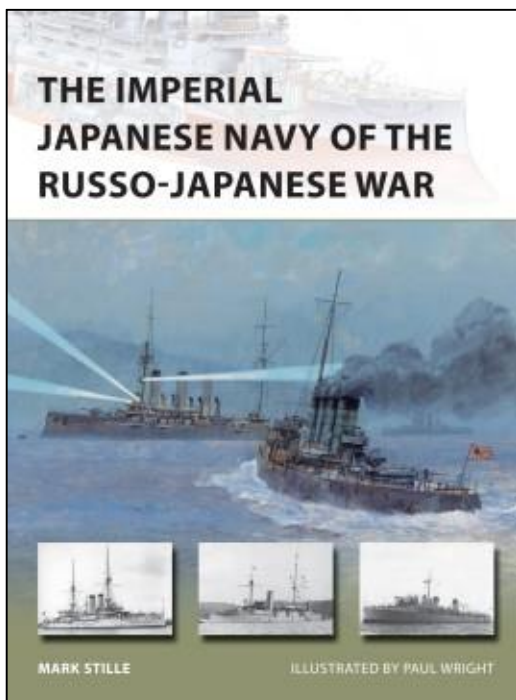
Introduction

The rise of the IJN

The IJN in the Russo-Japanese War

Ships of the Imperial Japanese Navy

Conclusion



Typically, a New Vanguard title will cover a single large weapon system ó such as a particular tank or a class of weapon systems, such as German flamethrower tanks or US aircraft carriers of a particular time period. This title, however, covers the complete equipage of the Imperial Japanese Navy of the Russo-Japanese war. Thus, it covers everything from the largest most modern pre-dreadnaughts down to the smallest torpedo boat, as well as some anachronisms in the form of wooden walled coastal defence ships. The scope is thus very broad, and the information on each vessel has to be, of necessity, kept quite brief.

The first third of the book sets the scene well, covering the initial formation of the Imperial Japanese Navy in 1868 and the early adoption of the British Royal Navy as a role model for its subsequent development. Early success against China paved the way for further development of the Japanese fleet, with the decision taken in 1895

to purchase 4 battleships, 8 cruisers, 23 destroyers and 63 torpedo boats. This led to Japan being viewed as a threat to Russia's local naval dominance and inevitably to war in 1905. The major incidents of the war ó the destruction of the Russian fleet stationed at Port Arthur and at Vladivostok, followed by the elimination of the Baltic fleet at the Battle of Tsushima -- are well summarised.

This leaves the remainder of the book to cover every ship in the Japanese fleet at a level of detail which could happily be labelled as 'what a wargamer needs to know.' There is a photograph of virtually every vessel, along with a tabulation of its 'vital statistics' ó overall dimensions, displacement, crew, level of armour and armament. For the more important ships, there are also potted histories of their involvement in the war, with less detail on the smaller ships which numbered many examples of their class ó for example torpedo boats. There are four colour plates of side views of some of the ships ó three to the page and covering Battleships, Armoured Cruisers, Protected & Unprotected Cruisers, and Destroyers and Torpedo Boats. As the Imperial Japanese Navy bought from many suppliers ó British, French

and Italian dockyards, alongside home-based ship builders ó there's a wonderful variety of design reflecting the different schools of thought of the best balance of speed, armour and weaponry.

Naturally, as this is an Osprey, there are also plenty of other illustrations -- the full plates of the attack on Port Arthur, and the ships in line at Tsushima are splendid: these would make for great framed prints! The two-page cutaway of Mikasa also makes it clear why this is such a fascinating period ó the offset main turrets, and the broadside of 6-inch guns making for a distinctive style of vessel ó impressive feats of naval architecture but not yet at the peak of Dreadnaught design. Overall, this is a perfect single volume for anyone contemplating wargaming this conflict ó for the Japanese side at least. It is to be earnestly hoped that a companion volume covering the Russian ships involved will not be too far away.