



Samurai!

Saburo Sakai , Fred Saito , Martin Caidin

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Written by Martin Caidin from Saburo Sakai's own memoirs and journalist Fred Saito's extensive interviews with the fighter pilot, *Samurai!* vividly documents the chivalry and valor of Saburo Sakai, the combat aviator who time after time fought American fighter pilots and, with 64 kills, would survive the war as Japan's greatest living ace.

Here are the harrowing experiences of one of Japan's greatest aces: from fighter pilot school where the harsh training expelled over half of his class to the thrilling early Japanese victories; from his incredible six hundred mile fight for life from Guadalcanal to his base in Rabaul, to the poignant story of the now-handicapped veteran's return to the air during the final desperate months of World War II.

Samurai! Details

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Author : Saburo Sakai , Fred Saito , Martin Caidin

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From Reader Review Samurai! for online ebook

Jonathan Gillespie says

Piloting a Mitsubishi A6M "Zero" was hair-raising enough, with its notorious lack of armor and self-sealing fuel tanks, but flying one while bleeding to death, down one eye, and fading in and out of consciousness is the kind of experience Saburo Sakai, legendary Japanese fighter ace, places the reader in through his autobiography and memoir, *Samurai!* (with additional credit to Martin Caidin and Fred Saito), first published way back in 1957.

World War II is one of those conflicts shrouded in reverence, and almost mythic levels of regard, where larger-than-life change agents like Hitler, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin commanded implacable generals whose very names were given to colorful labels -- like "The Desert Fox", and "Old Blood and Guts". In the shadows of these titans were regular servicemen (and women), who were often pressed into circumstances far beyond their background or expectation. The leaders in this conflict gave us history -- but the soldiers gave us stories we would do well never to forget. And Saburo Sakai tells quite a story.

Continue reading the review on my website.

Colin Heaton says

This was always one of my favorite books as a younger reader. I finally met and came to know Saburo Sakai, and he was one of the most entertaining interviews I ever conducted and published. This book is 100% true, no embellishment, and if you want to see the mind of a young man who became a national hero, in a war he hated, read this book.

David says

There's a lot of air battles in this. And not much of anything else. I liked Saburo's honesty. There's a story where he and an allied pilot are locked in an exhausting dogfight. Eventually Saburo gets a couple of shots at the cockpit, glass shatters! He pulls up alongside and the badly wounded allied pilot raises his arm in a sort of salute. Saburo salutes back, two warriors reaching out across the sky ... before he falls behind to shoot the crippled plane out of the sky. Oh. Did he mean to tell us that he watched the crippled plane limp to safety?

But not so much fun as: *Kamikaze: A Japanese Pilot's Own Spectacular Story of the Famous Suicide Squadrons*

Al Sumrall says

Great semi-auto-biography of WWII Japanese fighter ace Saburo Sakai. Caidin's best. It's written as Saburo Sakai's auto-biography but Caidin adds quite a bit in a subtle manner so you get the impression it's all Sakai. There are times when Sakai's claims and memory seem suspect, just a little too detailed, but when you consider it is written from his perspective only, filtered through an interpreter, Fred Saito, and then written by a talented writer with extensive historical aviation knowledge, you can accept this book at face value for

what it is, the perceptions of a young fighter pilot in the fog of war yet written by a talented author. Combat claims on both sides were in good faith over claimed in all honesty and eyebrows might raise here and there, but you won't find yourself running to the history shelf or wikipedia as the book is written on a very solid foundation. It is a must read for any historian of the era, and it is quite fascinating, it is one you don't put down until you are through.

Richard Norman says

For a history buff this book is a must read. Just with in the first few pages you understand the military training that made the Japanese soldier into the type of fighting man he was. The honor code, the beatings until they passed out, and the control of their superiors had made them mindless in the attack, observing every command with exactness.

But this is a side note as to the fighter pilot Saburo Sakai who had downed 64 U.S. airplanes and was the top ace for Japan in WWII. The book is a compilation of firsthand information from interviews with people who were there, but it reads like a novel! Strap on your seat belt as you fly with him in his cockpit and as he survives limping his wounded plain home, hurt so badly (losing an eye) that he should never have flown again. Then bristling up, returning to the cockpit and the sky, again taking his Zero against multiple plains at the same time an impossible feat and returning his craft home without a bullet hole in it; it is a journey into WWII Japan, his finding love, and his conquering death by narrow escapes, his misery and degradation after the war and his rising to a position of success in life. What an adventure!

Chris says

I've always been fascinated by WWII in the South Pacific, but I haven't read as much about the Japanese perspective. A friend loaned this book to me after a discussion about WWII aviation, especially in the Pacific war.

I didn't think too much of the book, though I'm prepared to concede at least part of that is cultural, since he's telling the story from a perspective and an upbringing very different from mine. But there were a couple of things that just didn't resonate with me at all.

One of them is the simple fact that he is very clearly bragging, and that wouldn't bother me so much if it weren't for the fact that he is constantly pretending to be humble. The humility rings very false as he tells tales of his constant successes in arial combat, and keeps a running count throughout the book of how many planes he shot down. What's worse, I very much doubt his claims are true. He claims to have shot down 64 allied airplanes over the course of his career, which is significantly more than any allied pilot, and he is very clearly proud of that number. The problem is, it is almost certainly not true. Allied pilots followed a different and significantly stricter method of confirming claims from arial combat than the Japanese did - in order for allied pilots to receive credit for a claim, it had to be witnessed and corroborated by fellow pilots and to some extent had to be justified in separate allied assessments of the Japanese order of battle. The Japanese were not so strict, and several of this author's claims were unverified.

A larger problem with the story, in my opinion, was that the author seemed to think there was a very specific point where the tide turned against the Japanese, and if they had done a few things differently, they might have prevailed. For the first part of the book, he talks about continuous successes, both in the air and on the ground, and these seemed to indicate to him that the Japanese military was nearly invincible. And he may

even have believed that at the time. It's around halfway through the book where he recognizes that the allied equipment is becoming superior, and the allied pilots, as they gained experience, were becoming far more effective. To him, it's a sudden change, as if it were caused by a few incidental details, and if everyone had continued to push and succeed the way he had been, they could have prevailed.

The reality, I think, is fundamentally different. The Japanese were never going to prevail, and there was nothing they could have done to change that fact. What appeared to be victories for the Japanese in 1941 and 1942 were just essentially defensive actions on the part of the allies while they awaited the production of materiel and the training of sailors, soldiers and pilots. Once that happened, the appearance of Japanese invincibility was overwhelmed by the reality of the situation they had put themselves in. It was a fight they couldn't possibly win, and there were a few people in Japan, most famously Admiral Yamamoto, who knew that from the very beginning.

So the author tells a story with an arc that hinged on key moments, and even as he tells the story in retrospect, he seems surprised at the turning of the tide, the loss of his friends and the ultimate humiliation of their loss. And I can at least sympathize with people who might have felt that way at the time, in the situation. But with the benefit of hindsight, they should be able to see the futility of what they tried in the first place. And a story told in hindsight should acknowledge that there is no way it could possibly have turned out any differently than it did.

George K. says

Τον τελευταίο καιρό έχω φέρει να κ'λλημα με τα non-fiction βιβλία, κυρίως με αυτό που έχουν να κ'νουν με στρατιωτικό ιστορία, μαρτυρίες ανθρώπων από τα πεδία των μαχών, παιχνίδια αληθινών κατασκήπων κλπ, γ'αυτό και προμηθεύτηκα κ'μποσα και έχω σκοπό να προμηθευτώ περισσότερα στο μέσο μέλλον. Το συγκεκριμένο βιβλίο το βρισκά συνεχώς μπροστά μου στο Goodreads, σε λ'στες με τα καλύτερα βιβλία του έδους του, ξέρα όμως τι δεν είχε μεταφραστεί στα ελληνικά. Μ'χρι που πριν λίγες μέρες πήρα χαμπ'ρι την ελληνική έκδοση, που κυκλοφόρησε τ'λη Μάου. Ε, χ'ρηκα πολύ και άμ'σως το αγ'ρασα! Και, φυσικά, δεν ήρρησα να το πι'σω στα χ'ρια μου με σκοπό να το διαβ'σω.

Τα (πολλά) λ'για είναι φτ'χεια: Στο βιβλίο αυτό διαβ'ζουμε σε πρώτο πρόσωπο τα κατορθώματα ενός από τους καλύτερους και ηρωικότερους πιλότους που πολ'μησαν ποτέ στον Β' Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο, του θρυλικού Γιαπωνέζου πιλότου Σαμπούρο Σακ'ι. Από τις Φιλιππίνες μ'χρι την Ήβο Τζ'μα, ο Σακ'ι ήταν στο επ'κεντρο των σκληρών αερομαχών στο "Θάτρο του Ειρηνικού Ωκεάνου", πιλοτ'ροντας κυρίως να καταδιώκτικ' Zero της Μίτσουμπ'σι. Κατ'ρριψε κ'μποσα καταδιώκτικ' και βομβαρδιστικ', πολ'μησε στο πλευρό πολλών ηρωικών και εξαιρετικών πιλότων και βρ'θηκε αντιμέτωπος με επ'σης ηρωικούς και ικανούς πιλότους, καθώς και με εξαιρετικό πολεμικό αεροπλ'να της εποχής. Πολλές φορές βρ'θηκε κοντά στον θ'νατο, εν' δυο φορές τραυματ'στηκε σοβαρά (η δεύτερη φορά τον κρ'τησε στο δ'δαφος για πολλούς μένες). Τελικά, όμως, επ'ζησε του πολ'μου, και ζ'ησε μ'χρι το 2000, όπου και π'θανε σε ηλικία 84 ετών, την στιγμή που οι περισσότεροι συμπολεμιστές του π'θαναν σε ηλικία αρκετά κάτω των 30 ετών...

Λοιπόν, το βιβλίο είναι γεμ'το με περιγραφές από αερομαχίες, οι οποίες κ'ποιες φορές είναι σχετικ' σύντομες και περιεκτικές, κ'ποιες άλλες όμως με περισσότερες λεπτομέρειες και φανερ' πιο έντονες. Πώς και να χ'ει, οι περιγραφές αυτές με τάξ'δεσαν στους ουρανούς πάνω από τον

Ειρηνική, πρῶστα δῆσκολα χρῆνια του Β' Παγκοσμῶου Πολῆμου, ἀνῆμεσα στα ἀντιμαχῆμενα πολεμικῆ αεροπλῆνα. ῆμως δὲν ὑπῆρχουν μῆνο τῆτοιες περιγραφῆς. Γινῆμαστε μῆρτυρες και πολλῆν στιγμῆν του Σακῆι κῆτω στο ῆδαφος, ἔτε στις διῆφορες στρατιωτικῆς βῆσεις πριν και μετῆ τις αερομαχῆς του -σε στιγμῆς χαλῆρωσης ῆ κῆτω ἀπῆ βομβαρδισμοῆς εχθρικῆν πολεμικῆν αεροπλῆνων-, ἔτε στα νοσοκομεῆα που νοσηλῆτηκε για λῆγο καιρῆ, ἔτε στα σπῆτια συγγενικῆν του προσῆπων. Και, ἐπῆσης, διαβῆζουμε πολλῆς σκῆψεις του γῆρω ἀπῆ το πιλοτῆρισμα, το καθῆκον του σαν πατριῆτης, τῆν οικογῆνειῆ του, τους συμπολεμιστῆς και τους ἀντιπῆλους του, ἀλλῆ και για τον πῆλεμο και τον κῆσμο γῆρω του. Με το πῆρασμα των σελῆδων, βλῆπουμε και τῆν ἐξῆλιξη του πολῆμου και πῆως αὐτῆ ἐπηρῆασε τον Σακῆι, αρχικῆ ὑπῆρχει ἐνθουσιασμῆς και μεγῆλη αισιοδοξῆα, οι νῆκες ἔναι πολλῆς και μεγῆλες, ῆμως ῆταν τα πῆρηματα αρχῆζουν και ἀλλῆζουν, οι εχθροῆ γῆνονται πιο δυνατοῆ και οι ῆττες ἔναι συντριπτικῆ περισσῆτερες ἀπῆ τις νῆκες, τῆτε ῆρχεται ἠ κατῆφεια και ἠ ἀπαισιοδοξῆα...

Το βιβλῆο δὲν το ῆγραψε ο Σαμποῆρο Σακῆι, ἀλλῆ ῆνας Ἀμερικῆνος δημοσιογῆρφος, ο Μῆρτιν Κάῆντῆν, σε συνεργασῆα με ῆναν ἀνταποκριτῆ του Associated Press, τον Φρεντ Σῆιτο. Το ῆλο κεῆμενο, ῆμως, βασῆστηκε ἀποκλειστικῆ στις προσωπικῆς σημειῆσεις του Σακῆι, ἀλλῆ και στις ἑκατοντῆδες ἀπαντῆσεις που ῆδῆσε ο θρυλικῆς αὐτῆς πιλῆτος στις ἐρωτῆσεις του Σῆιτο (σε συνδῆασμῆ με κῆποια ἐπῆσημα ῆγγραφα). ἠ γραφῆ ἔναι ἐξαιρετικῆ, ἐθιστικῆ και εὐκολοδιῆβαστη, με πολλῆ δυνατῆς περιγραφῆς των πολεμικῆν σκῆηνῆν, πραγματικῆ ῆγινα ῆνα με τον Σακῆι και το Zero του. Σε πολλῆ σημειῆα ἠ ῆνταση βαρῆει κῆκκίνο και ο ἐνθουσιασμῆς ἐνῆς λῆτηρῆ των πολεμικῆν/περιπετειῶδῆν ιστοριῆν ῆπως ἐγῆ ῆφτασε σε πολλῆ ὑψηλῆ ἐπῆπεδα. Βλῆπω ῆτι το ῆγραφα πῆλι το σεντονῆκι μου, κῆτι λογικῆ ῆμως γιατῆ το βιβλῆο με ἐνθουσῆασε. Σῆγουρα ἔναι ῆνα βιβλῆο που θα ξαναδιαβῆσω στο μῆλλον και που δυσκολεῆομαι να βῆλω στην ῆκρη, τῆρα που το τελειῆωσα.

Υ.Γ. ῆσον ἀφορῆ τῆν ἐλληνικῆ ῆκδοση, μου φῆνηκε πολλῆ ῆραῆα, με προσεγῆνη και γλαφυρῆ μετῆφραση, με δυο χῆρτες και λῆγες φωτογραφῆς να συνοδεῆουν το κεῆμενο. Στο τῆλος τῆς ἐλληνικῆς ῆκδοσης ὑπῆρχουν και δεκαπῆντε σελῆδες, που ῆγραψε ῆνας Ἀμερικῆνος συνταγματῆρχῆς ἐν ἀποστρατεῆα, του ὀποῆου ο πατῆρας σκοτῆθηκε στις 9 Ιουνῆου του 1942, ἀπῆ τα πυρῆ του Zero του Σαμποῆρο Σακῆι. Αὐτῆς ο τῆπος, λοιπῆν, συναντῆθηκε με τον Σακῆι και τον φιλοξῆνησε στο σπῆτι του. Τα λῆγια ἔναι περιττῆ...

Wurmo says

For someone who is perpetually intrigued by the combat that took place in the Pacific Theater of Operations during World War II, it was very interesting to read a book from the perspective of a Japanese fighter ace. I had previously read "Oba: The Last Samurai," but this was an entirely different reading experience for some reason. Overall, Saburo Sakai's story is a gripping one. He experienced some of the most intense aerial combat of the entire war, from his early days flying in China to the hairy combat over Lai and Rabaul to the final days of the war on the Japanese homeland. As with many pilot memoirs, the aerial accomplishments of Saburo and his fellow Japanese pilots seem over-exaggerated, but this is too be expected. Also, the multiple love interests he speaks of throughout the narrative, while adding a human element to the story, seem a bit forced. Overall, though, this book is a reflection of the man's life. And what life reads like a perfect story? Definitely a wonderful supplemental read for anyone interested in the air war over the Pacific -- or the Pacific War as a whole. It helps American readers understand that the enemy had a face.

Dave Roberts says

A very interesting biography of a WWII Japanese fighter pilot and his experiences during the war. He was one of Japan's leading aces.

At the outset of the war, the Japanese flew the Zero, a fighter that was superior to US fighters, and Sakai downed many US fighters. Later, as the US introduced superior planes, the Japanese new, faster planes came too late.

Sakai's heroism and dedication are impressive. Reading this book, I'm impressed that there are skilled, principled, heroic fighters on both sides of a war. It's such a tragedy that their skills are used just to attempt to kill one another.

The book provides interesting insight into the psychology of a fighter pilot as well as a small but interesting window into Japanese culture.

Philippe says

This is a nail-biting account of the aerial war in the Pacific theater as seen through the eyes of Saburo Sakai, the most redoubtable Japanese ace to survive WWII. Kudos to ghostwriter Martin Caidin, an aeronautics buff and deft pilot himself, who put together a gripping story based on long conversations with the fighter pilot, backed up by Sakai's meticulously kept diaries. It is the contrast between the narrator's very Japanese sounding stoicism and the utterly hair-raising events that kept me glued to these pages. It is somewhat disconcerting to learn from Wikipedia that *Samurai!* is factually not totally trustworthy. However, the key epics - wounded Sakai's escape from Guadalcanal, the Iwo Jima brawl with fifteen Hellcats, and a botched suicide mission late in the war - seem to be an indisputable part of the official biography. The book concludes with Japan's surrender and the end of Sakai's military career. Amazingly, he went on to live to the blessed age of 84.

David B says

This is the autobiography of Japan's greatest ace pilot to survive WWII. Saburo Sakai became a hero in his homeland and his account of his place in the Pacific War is even-handed and illuminating. In the early days of the war, victory seems to come relatively easy to him and the other pilots in his fighter group due to their superior training and the excellence of the Mitsubishi Zero fighter. As the war wears on, however, and the United States becomes more fully engaged on its Western front, the tide turns and the situation becomes increasingly desperate for Sakai and his compatriots, until the inevitable crushing defeat. Sakai, along with his co-authors Martin Caidin and Fred Saito, presents exciting accounts of air battles and Sakai's harrowing experience piloting his aircraft back to base after sustaining injuries that should have killed him. As good as this stuff is, I was glad that the home front wasn't neglected in his narrative. In addition to being a great air warrior, he also lived a wonderful love story with his future wife.

Allan Harle says

Without a doubt my favourite book about aviation in WW2.

Alfredo says

Emocionante, terrible, entretenida, desoladoramente bella, dolorosa, vengativa historia. Va de menos a más y ya después de que a Saburo Sakai le meten una bala en el cerebro volando su Zero se convierte una adicción.

PS: Es la autobiografía de Sakai. Lo de la bala va como en la mitad del libro. i.e. una bala en el cerebro volando un avión dañado a 1000 kms de su pista más cercana no era motivo para echarse a morir.

Carol Storm says

The first-person story of Japan's greatest flying ace in World War II. Explosive action! Excruciatingly painful wounds, and the stubborn pride of a man who refuses to be defeated.

One thing that makes this book fun is that if you have a lot of romantic illusions about Japan or the samurai class this book will cure them. Not that Saburo Sakai isn't a class act, and a gentleman, but that he grew up very poor in spite of his "samurai" ancestry. I mean like on the farm, dirt poor. It's also interesting that though he's a tough guy and a born fighter there's nothing "macho" about his outlook. Indeed, he makes it clear his role model for enduring agony is his mother. Last of all, the love story he tells about meeting his wife and surviving the last desperate weeks of the war is truly inspiring.

This is a great book for anyone who likes World War II, flying aces, history, and Japanese culture.

David Bonesteel says

This is the autobiography of Japan's greatest ace pilot to survive WWII. Saburo Sakai became a hero in his homeland and his account of his place in the Pacific War is even-handed and illuminating. In the early days of the war, victory seems to come relatively easy to him and the other pilots in his fighter group due to their superior training and the excellence of the Mitsubishi Zero fighter. As the war wears on, however, and the United States becomes more fully engaged on its Western front, the tide turns and the situation becomes increasingly desperate for Sakai and his compatriots, until the inevitable crushing defeat. Sakai, along with his co-authors Martin Caidin and Fred Saito, presents exciting accounts of air battles and Sakai's harrowing experience piloting his aircraft back to base after sustaining injuries that should have killed him. As good as this stuff is, I was glad that the home front wasn't neglected in his narrative. In addition to being a great air warrior, he also lived a wonderful love story with his future wife.
