



Scott Waddle with Ken Abraham. *The Right Thing*. Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2002. x + 242 pp. \$21.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-59145-036-8.



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A Deadly Desire to Please

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On February 9, 2001, the nuclear submarine *Greeneville*, commanded by forty-one-year-old Commander Scott D. Waddle, performed a rapid surfacing maneuver to impress civilian dignitaries on board. In so doing, he blasted through the hull of a Japanese fishing school training vessel, the *Ehime Maru*, which was directly above the submarine. This “show-off” exercise cost the U.S. Navy \$11.47 million in settlement payments to the Ehime prefecture of Uwajima, Japan; cost Commander Waddle his career; and cost the lives of nine Japanese students, teachers, and crew members aboard the *Ehime Maru*, whose families were reportedly paid an additional \$13 million in compensation by the U.S. government.

The international furor caused by this incident prompted immediate, personal apologies to the Japanese government and people, and the victims’ families, by President George W. Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, and Ambassador to Japan Thomas Foley. The Navy’s second

highest officer, Vice Chief of Naval Operations Admiral William J. Fallon, personally delivered a letter of apology from President Bush to Japan’s Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori. Although he wanted to add his personal apologies to the victims’ families and the people of Japan, Waddle was prevented from doing so by his superiors, which is one of the many puzzling aspects of this tragic incident. It was not until February 27, over two weeks after the accident, that Waddle was allowed to visit the Japanese consulate in Honolulu to personally deliver his hand-written letters of apology to each of the victims’ families. In December 2002, Waddle traveled, at his own expense, to Japan to visit with the families personally.

With publication of *The Right Thing*, Waddle, now retired, is at last able to tell his story. A portion of the proceeds from this book are designated for the Japanese Club of Saint Louis High School, Honolulu, Hawaii, for the preservation of the *Ehime Maru* Memorial located there.

In Scott Waddle’s memoir, the reader learns of a little boy born, ironically, in Japan, while his father was stationed there as an Air Force pilot, and who spoke his

first words in Japanese, not English. We see a child who grew up anxious to please his parents, teachers, Scoutmasters, coaches, and, ultimately, Naval commanding officers. He was a natural leader as well as a cheerleader. Above all, Waddle's deep-rooted faith instilled in him a strong desire to do the right thing. In tracing Waddle's account of his growth to maturity, the reader senses the signs which seem to lead, inexorably, to the disaster that curtailed his fine career, and the anguish that his own convictions have caused him to suffer. This is truly a tale of ambition and deep remorse.

Through Waddle's narrative, the reader learns what it takes to become a Naval officer; the extraordinary steps such an officer must take to qualify as a submariner; and the intricacies as well as the astronomical cost of building and equipping the various classes of nuclear submarines. One can surely appreciate the striving and sense of accomplishment such an officer feels when finally he is given command of such a vessel, as well as the shattering blow he feels to be stripped of his command and career.

By the mid-1990s, the Naval command became deeply concerned with the cuts in defense spending which threatened the continuation and maintenance of nuclear submarines. They found in Waddle an ideal skipper to implement a program designed to increase public awareness of and appreciation for the vital role of submarines in America's defense. Influential civilians and politicians were invited as guests on outings aboard nuclear submarines, and Waddle found himself recruited to show off the unique features of his ship, which by his own admission, he enjoyed doing. He took pride in his crew's morale and professionalism, and was more than willing to showcase all of this for visitors, while pleasing his commanders at the same time.

Waddle chronicles the shortcomings of equipment and crew in a step-by-step manner on the day of the *Greeneville's* fateful showcase trip on February 9, 1991, noting the unusual haze that day, the inoperative piece of equipment which proved crucial, the crowded conditions aboard the submarine, and the goodwill gesture of allowing guests to sit at controls, all of which came back to haunt him, and clearly haunt him still. One of the many puzzling facts revealed in Waddle's narrative is that, despite much media attention to the cluster of civilians aboard the submarine, the naval court of inquiry found that the presence of these civilians was not a contributing factor to the disaster.

As Waddle describes the sequence of events leading up to the opening of the inquiry, it becomes clear that

the Navy intentionally placed him at a disadvantage by denying him permission to have the counsel of his choice, insisting that he be assigned someone stationed within a certain radius of the incident, while allowing other defendants to choose attorneys from as far away as Florida and Washington, D.C. Waddle wound up hiring his own attorney to augment the military attorney assigned to him by the Navy. Moreover, the Navy allowed a Japanese admiral, Isamu Ozawa, to sit on the court in an advisory role, as well as seating members of the *Ehime Maru* victims' families directly behind Waddle during the twelve days of proceedings. Waddle's account of the proceedings will be of interest to the reader wanting to learn more details than were covered in media reports at the time. Waddle was given a letter of reprimand, but was not court-martialed. Having been stripped of his command, he immediately put in for retirement, and retired in October 1991.

The absence of an immediate, public apology from Waddle infuriated many people in Japan, and it is puzzling why Navy and government officials did not understand, as Waddle did, that a display of public remorse on his part would have quelled some of that anger. At the same time, the public expressions of apology to the Japanese from the highest American officials stirred resentment among American veterans of the Pacific War and the families of those who died in combat or in Japanese custody, as well as among Asian victims of Japanese aggression and occupation. Many noted that neither the Japanese government nor Japanese corporations have compensated or apologized to American ex-prisoners of war who were used for slave labor by Japanese companies, to American civilians interned by Japanese forces, or to Asian victims of sexual slavery, chemical and biological warfare, or mass executions. Indeed, the contrast was palpable, and letters to the editor in the American press were blunt in articulating these contrasts.

On February 27, 2001, the same day that Waddle hand-delivered his letters of apology to the Japanese consulate in Honolulu, columnist Richard Cohen wrote a scathing piece in the *Washington Post* titled "We've Apologized Enough to Japan." [1] Cohen denounced the "hypocrisy" of Japan's recent gestures of compensation and remorse to some of its World War II victims, which he said were offered "grudgingly." He also noted that no official apologies have been made by Japan for deliberate acts of violence during World War II, whereas the American government has apologized profusely for an accident caused by Waddle's submarine. Cohen ended his screed

by observing, "We are the same guys who have provided Japan with a security shield ever since World War II, helped rebuild the country and have been its steadfast ally and best friend."

By mid-November 2001, when the U.S. government announced its agreement to pay \$13 million in compensation to the families of passengers on the *Ehime Maru*, the tragedy had been eclipsed by the terrorist attacks and aftermath of September 11. For those families, no com-

penensation in dollars will ever be enough. For Scott Waddle, no amends can ever be enough to assuage his conscience. Meanwhile, the government and corporations of Japan would do well to reflect on the sincerity of his apologies and those of his government, and examine the global benefits of doing the right thing.

Note

[1]. Richard Cohen, "We've Apologized Enough to Japan," *Washington Post* (February 27, 2001).

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