

By Cdr. Peter B. Mersky, USNR (Ret.)

Mutza, Wayne. *Lockheed P2V Neptune: An Illustrated History*. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 4880 Lower Valley Rd., Atglen, PA 19310. 1996. 286 pp. Ill. \$49.95.

Lockheed's large, but graceful twin-engine patrol bomber has seldom received due recognition. A design that first flew in May 1945 before the end of WW II, and served in squadrons worldwide for the next four decades, the *Neptune* has most often been the subject of magazine articles and an occasional modeler's photographic compendium. This expensive, but worth-it biography of the P2V changes that situation.

Presented in the now-familiar Schiffer large format, with glossy pages and well-reproduced photographs, this book spans the plane's development and career in war and peace—detailing its service introduction, posting to Korea and cold war activities. Well supported with personal recollections and photos, this account has something for both the historian and the modeler.

The author also describes the *Neptune's* service in Vietnam, both in its traditional role of maritime patrol and in more clandestine missions of trail monitoring. Foreign service is also well covered, including wartime action in the Falklands with the Argentine navy in 1982. *Neptunes* of the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan and the Netherlands, as well as little-known service with the U.S. Air Force and Army, are detailed, too.

Wayne Mutza has written what is probably the definitive photographic history of one of the most important, but least-heralded aircraft of the post-WW II period.

Stone, Peter. *Hostages to Freedom: The Fall of Rabaul*. Oceans Enterprises, Yarram, Victoria, Australia. Distributed by Paul Gaudette Books, 2050 E. 17th St., Tucson, AZ 85719. 1994. 513 pp. Ill. \$75.

Heavily illustrated with photos and maps, and offering detailed indices and bibliographies, this book is huge in physical size, historical length and price. But if you want a major reference on one of the most important and longest campaigns of the Pacific war, this book is it.

Rabaul was an established outpost in the early 20th century, boasting a cosmopolitan society—European, Australian, German, Chinese and Japanese. As the international political situation deteriorated through December 1941, locals organized into militias. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) sent in a small detachment of Hudson bombers and Wirraway fighter-bombers, a hopeless gesture because the Wirraways were no match for the air forces of the Japanese navy and army.

The early stages of the Japanese occupation, beginning in January 1942, saw efforts by Royal Air Force and RAAF units to scout, then repel landings. The book features little-known stories of these events, including individual acts of heroism. The excellent maps show the action, while the text and photos describe incredible Japanese atrocities. The author includes copious end notes, which are well worth the reader's time.

There are the inevitable errors, especially when dealing with American subjects: B-25s are identified as B-24s, Butch O'Hare was definitely not the first *American* ace, and a rear gunner was incorrectly placed in an F4F *Wildcat*.

The New Britain campaign holds special meaning for Australians, and *Hostages to Freedom* naturally emphasizes Australian operations. The author notes that the Japanese considered their Aussie enemy to be generally braver than American crews, although this is a purely subjective judgment that fits well with the intended readership.

So, now the reader has two excellent choices for information on Rabaul: this volume and Henry Sakaida's *The Siege of Rabaul* (reviewed in Nov–Dec 96, p. 38).

Fry, John. *USS Saratoga, CV-3: An Illustrated History of the Legendary Aircraft Carrier, 1927–1946*. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 4880 Lower Valley Rd., Atglen, PA 19310. 1996. 176 pp. Ill. \$39.95.

This book offers a fine collection of evocative photos, printed with Schiffer's snappy black-and-white halftone reproduction. Individual chapters on *Sara* skippers include such luminaries as Kenneth Whiting, William Halsey and John Towers, each with their own claims to fame before and after their tours on board.

There's a funny anecdote about Adm. Halsey's son, who served as a supply officer in his father's old ship during WW II. Repeatedly asked to help support Adm. Halsey's aircraft with replacement hardware, the younger Halsey reportedly told his requester to tell the admiral to "shove it in his ear."

The text is good, but the photos are great. Many different types of naval aircraft round out the selection, from early biplanes to wartime bombers and fighters. Carrier aviation of the 1930s is well served by this large-format book. It is a "sweet" combination of historical reporting and nostalgic memories. (The author's father served as a seaman aboard *Sara* in the late thirties.) I highly recommend it.