

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

Michel, Marshall L., III. *Clashes: Air Combat Over North Vietnam, 1965–1972*. Naval Institute Press, 118 Maryland Ave., Annapolis, MD 21402. 1997. 352 pp. Ill. \$32.95.

Without a doubt, *Clashes* is one of the most important books to come from this publisher in 10 years—and one of the top half dozen books on the air war in Southeast Asia. The author, an Air Force F-4 *Phantom* pilot during the last three years of the war, is well qualified to write about the subject. His analyses of the tactics, history, equipment and people are right on the mark, and each chapter is chock-full of new insights and facts.

He discusses the American and North Vietnamese air forces in detail, taking advantage of recently declassified official sources such as the legendary “Red Baron” reports that described each MiG engagement by USN and USAF crews. The fascinating descriptions will generate much discussion among Navy and Air Force types, particularly as the author makes no secret of his appreciation of the Navy’s fighter crews—especially the F-8 pilots who enjoyed the best win-lose ratio of any single type.

There are a few items of concern. The photos are simply inadequate given the vast resources available. Specifically, photographs of aircraft prototypes are just not sufficient when there is such a wealth of coverage of operational aircraft and aircrew. Also, there are typos that make the reader shudder; for example, the Gulf War was fought in 1991, not 1993. The final chapter applies some lessons learned to the post-Vietnam period but credits the F-14 *Tomcat* with only two kills against Libyan fighters instead of the actual four. And the use of call signs throughout the book instead of crewmen’s names is annoying. I never got used to sorting out the individual participants by their handles.

Nevertheless, *Clashes* is an impressive *tour de force* and should be read by everyone with an interest in the Vietnam War. It takes the written history of the air war to the next level.

Wise, James E., Jr., and Anne Collier Rehill. *Stars in Blue: Movie Actors in America’s Sea Services*. Naval Institute Press, 118 Maryland Ave., Annapolis, MD 21402. 1997. 316 pp. Ill. \$29.95.

This book is a browser’s delight and a quick reference for movie buffs, although you will probably have a better appreciation for the information if you were born before 1950. These biographical essays, along with photos, contain nuggets of gossip, information and an occasional surprise.

Quite a few Hollywood stars have served in the naval service, especially during WW II. Several even saw their share of combat, winning medals and commendations. Perhaps the best-known “Tinsel Town” serviceman to readers of this column is Lt. Wayne Morris, a real fighter ace with seven kills in the Pacific while serving with top ace David McCampbell’s VF-15 aboard *Essex* (CV 9).

Other combat veterans were Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., who saw action in European waters during D-day; and Eddie Albert, who pulled wounded Marines from the water during the bloody invasion of Tarawa. Some of the well-known veterans featured include Ernest Borgnine, Robert Taylor, Henry Fonda and Humphrey Bogart. Officers and men, blackshoes and brownshoes, tough guys, smooth guys, musicians, aviators and frogmen, the celluloid heroes served in many capacities.

Hagedorn, Dan. *North American NA-16/AT-6/SNJ*. Specialty Press, 11481 Kost Dam Rd., North Branch, MN 55056. 1997. 100 pp. Ill. \$16.95.

The long-lived *Texan* did not burst full-blown onto American training fields. It went through a lengthy gestation period of designs and designations in the late 1930s. North American’s ubiquitous, full-throated two-seater finally became the AT-6 in 1939, by which time the first deliveries to the Army Air Corps (which became Army Air Forces in 1941) began at Bolling AFB outside Washington, D.C.

The Royal Canadian Air Force took 30, and the French put in an order for 230—but too late to receive the aircraft before their surrender to invading Nazi forces in 1940. Deliveries to the Navy began in 1939 with the first SNJ-1s, followed by SNJ-2s.

It’s quite a daunting task to sort out the *Texan*’s delivery schedule, but I think this book gets most of it right. The trainer’s lengthy, colorful career is well documented in a large format, although the greatest coverage is given to the U.S. Army Air Forces/U.S. Air Force, with Navy service a poor second. But the serial numbers and dates are here, amply supported by good photos and drawings. The four-page color folio is somewhat disappointing, including only one SNJ view which is repeated on the front cover.

The T-6’s combat service in Korea is well shown. Reference to foreign service is good, but if the author had delved a little deeper into the story he would have discovered the *Texan*’s combat career with the Israel Air Force in the 1950s.

For the money, this book is a handy reference on one of aviation’s most famous military trainers.