

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

Nicolaou, Stephane. *Flying Boats & Seaplanes, A History from 1905*. Bay View Books Ltd., The Red House, 25-26 Bridgeland St., Bideford, Devon EX39 2PZ, UK. 191 pp. Ill. \$39.95.

**W**e reviewed the original French edition (*Les Hydravions, des Origines a Nos Jours*) of this excellent book in 1996. At the time, I hoped there would be an English edition, and here it is.

The author is an authority on naval aircraft and works at France's Musée de l'Air et de l'Espace. His text and terrific collection of well-reproduced photos feature the development of waterborne aircraft from all nations. While we in the United States are used to seeing treatments on such types as PBY *Catalinas* and PBM *Mariners*, these stalwarts are only a small part of the overall coverage.

I highly recommend this volume, which goes a long way in providing a modern assessment of this rather forgotten form of aviation creativity.

O'Rourke, G. G., with E. T. Wooldridge. *Night Fighters Over Korea*. Naval Institute Press, 118 Maryland Ave., Annapolis, MD 21402. 1998. 232 pp. Ill. \$34.95.

**T**wo experienced Naval Aviators have pooled their talents and experiences to produce one of the best memoirs of the Korean War period that I have read. Admittedly, this is Gerry O'Rourke's colorful story. Unfortunately, this brassy, tough-talking, knowledgeable aviator died before he could complete his book, but his long-time compatriot and experienced author-historian Tim Wooldridge stepped in and finished the job. O'Rourke's flight log included many of Naval Aviation's most important types, but it is clear from this work that he counted his short, but intense period of combat operations with Composite Squadron (VC) 4 as one of the high points of his career.

While Marine Night Fighter Squadron 513's wartime record of achieving most of the night kills is well known, its association with Navy squadron VC-4 is less publicized. Capt. O'Rourke sets the matter straight with this readable account of his squadron's detachment at K-6, the base from which most of the Marine squadron's operations launched. Both squadrons flew the Douglas F3D-2 *Skyknight*, a rotund, twin-jet bus of a fighter armed with four 20mm cannon and equipped with state-of-the-art airborne radar.

*Night Fighters Over Korea* is one of a few books that describe the F3D and what the big, black jet was like to fly. The author's physical description of the *Skyknight* (p. 45) is particularly good, and his tribute (p. 130) to the hard-pressed Marines of the "Flying Nightmare"

squadron will evoke a patriotic tear from more than a few veterans.

It is natural that books like this, which rely on one man's memory of events 50 years past and involving historically significant milestones, will meet with occasional disparaging rebuttals. And one person's impression of an event can differ substantially from another's. But I think this book serves as an important short history of nighttime combat in second-generation jet fighters.

No book I've read brings the reader so close to such a little-known, but important portion of this conflict.

Sommers, Sam. *Combat Carriers and My Brushes with History*. Black Belt Press, P.O. Box 551, Montgomery, AL 36101. 1998. 192 pp. Ill. \$25.

**O**ne of the millions of young Americans who served in the faceless ranks during WW II, the author came from a southern town, knowing little of the world outside his home except for his time at Harvard. As a member of the university's ROTC unit, he received his commission as an ensign and an assignment to *Cowpens* (CVL 25). While a member of ship's company, he saw action in several of the Pacific war's definitive engagements, including the Marianas and Leyte. He was also part of the huge flotilla in Tokyo Bay at the Japanese surrender. As such, he was one of the first American sailors to go ashore on the conquered enemy homeland.

While not a typical account of aerial action—the author was a blackshoe in a brownshoe world—this memoir does have its moments as he describes the furious encounters with desperate Japanese bomber crews attacking the American fleet.

Sommers saw his share of death and destruction, and this book is perhaps a more representative account of the common man's experience instead of the oft-told tales of a well-known ace or high-ranking fleet leader.

Hopkins, Robert S., III. *Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker: More Than Just a Tanker*. Specialty Press, 11481 Kost Dam Rd., North Branch, MN 55056. 1997. 224 pp. Ill. \$39.95.

**T**his book about the most familiar tanker of all time is an important work. Published in the well-established Aerofax format incorporating many good photos, it is written by an experienced *Stratotanker* driver and, thus, has the authenticity and knowledge unobtainable from any other source. It also incorporates one of the "healthiest" glossaries I have ever seen.

The KC-135 is no stranger to Naval Aviators. Tales of encounters with the "Iron Maiden" are legion. Sliding up to the short-coupled basket trailing behind this large,



gray tanker was an experience not soon forgotten. The long-lived, versatile series featured many other variants, from transport to intelligence snooper and research-and-development platform.

The book's opening chapters provide a good capsule history of in-flight refueling, originally built around a nuclear bomber force of B-29s and B-50s, then B-36s and finally B-47s and B-52s. Text and serial numbers fill the large-format book, and there is probably little in a reference vein that has been left out. This is a fine effort and an important addition to one's aviation library.

Suid, Lawrence. *Sailing on the Silver Screen: Hollywood and the U.S. Navy*. Naval Institute Press, 118 Maryland Ave., Annapolis, MD 21402. 1996. 307 pp. Ill. \$24.95.

**E**ver since motion pictures were invented, the U.S. military has provided an endless collection of true and fictitious subjects. The Navy has had its share of this coverage, and this excellent book does a fine job of detailing these efforts. Besides recounting the plots and individual appeal, the author also details the problems that the Navy and film makers encountered during script writing or filming.

Mr. Suid's text is a fascinating, in-depth discussion that can be read beginning to end, or browsed in sections for an enjoyable bite-sized meal of knowledgeable fare. His descriptions of the work on *The Caine Mutiny* and *The Bridges at Toko-ri* are especially thorough.

This book is well written and edited; however, there are the occasional gaffes, including using the word "fliers" for Naval Aviators. Also, he writes on page 98 that Cdr. Marshall Beebe was "an ace in both World War II and the current conflict [Korea]." The Navy had one ace in Korea, and it was Lt. Guy P. Bordelon, Jr.

The photos accompanying the book are good, and there is a helpful appendix listing the films described and their dates, studios and directors. This is an interesting read.

Kelly, Daniel E. *Seawolves: First Choice*. The Ballantine Publishing Group, New York, NY. 1998. 304 pp. Ill. \$6.99.

**A**lthough it existed for only five years, Helicopter Attack Squadron Light (HAL) 3 saw a lot of action, and the 200 men who served in this unique gunship squadron were some of the most highly decorated Naval Aviators and aircrewmembers of the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, the decorations came at a heavy price: nearly 25 percent of those who flew with the unit didn't survive.

Dan Kelly served as an enlisted gunner and crew chief during the 1968-1969 period of intense operations. The narrative focuses on a young Sailor's in-country experience and the new-found maturity and insights that it brought. However, he occasionally describes emotions and observations generated by encounters with the South Vietnamese, as well as the Viet Cong insurgents and their

North Vietnamese sponsors. In one engagement, during which he was shot in the hand, he and his crew were in hand-to-hand combat as enemy troops charge, his shuddering "Huey," actually gaining handholds on the struggling chopper as the pilot desperately tried to escape. In his last fight Kelly sustained three separate hits from enemy bullets in the same leg, which ultimately resulted in amputation. He is justifiably proud of his service and the squadron brotherhood.

HAL-3 is not as unknown as the author apparently thinks; it has been described in several articles and at least one small paperback. But this is the first account by a squadron member, and thus offers both historical and operational material that only an insider can provide.

Wren, A. H. *Naval Fighter Pilot*. Heron Books, P.O. Box 1112, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS14 9FN, England. 1998. 244 pp. Ill. \$28.

**B**ritish aces of WW II are a relatively unknown group. Some, like Royal Air Force (RAF) pilots Sir Douglas Bader or Peter Townsend, enjoyed more fame than others, particularly since they were members of the "few" in 1940's Battle of Britain. The Navy aces are even more unknown. The Fleet Air Arm (FAA) just didn't believe in publicizing individuals, thus, this new book is a welcome look at a vital part of the British experience.

*Naval Fighter Pilot* is the biography of fighter ace LCdr. R. J. Cork, an FAA pilot who flew *Hurricanes* during an exchange tour with Bader's 242 Squadron in the Battle of Britain. The 22-year-old pilot gained 5.5 kills during that climactic summer and fall, ultimately returning to the Navy as one of two FAA aces during the battle. As a member of 880 Squadron, Cork then flew *Sea Hurricanes* during Operation Pedestal, the defense of the embattled Mediterranean island of Malta in 1942.

Sandwiched between his eventful combat tours, Cork endured instructor duty in training squadrons, helping to replenish the ranks of squadrons badly decimated by unrelenting combat. Eventually, Cork was to score as many as 14 kills, depending on the source. One authority says his total was 9, the other adds another 5 resulting from so-called "ground" kills.

By the time he was 27, "Dickie" Cork was a wing commander about to take his squadrons into Pacific combat with F4U *Corsairs*; however, fate intervened and he was killed in a midair collision with another *Corsair* flown by a junior pilot in his wing.

The author leans heavily on letters and interviews for his portrait of Cork, with quotes and notes from those who knew and flew with him. Cork comes through as a self-effacing, highly capable young aviator who shunned the limelight and dedicated himself to the cause of fighting the war.

Two photo folios round out the biography, which is an excellent view of the FAA at war, seldom seen, especially in the U.S.