

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

Smith, R. G., with Rosario "Zip" Rausa. *R. G. Smith: the Man and His Art, an Autobiography*. Schiffer Military History, 4880 Lower Valley Rd., Atglen, PA 19310. 1999. 112 pp. Ill. \$29.95.

Anyone with even a passing interest in Naval Aviation has seen examples of R. G. Smith's artwork. A prolific worker, even R. G. himself doesn't know how many finished pieces he has created over his 60-year professional career. A genius with a uniquely identifiable style, he has created hundreds, perhaps thousands, of scenes involving Navy and Marine Corps aircraft and their crews. He has also chronicled civilian and Air Force types. In fact, there's hardly a topic in aviation that the artist hasn't illustrated.

It was a true pleasure to see this long-awaited collaboration between the artist and a respected author and Naval Aviator who flew several of the aircraft the Douglas-employed artist has often painted, and who served two tours as the editor of this magazine.

An extraordinary compilation of this country's best-known aviation artist's experiences, it is the only first-person biography of R. G.'s life, and it was done with the full cooperation of the artist and his family. The autobiography is personal and light, allowing the reader to know this quiet, dedicated man and how he came to be who and what he is. The text also gives fascinating glimpses into the jobs of people working in the pre-WW II aircraft industry.

Early paintings show R. G.'s fascination with light and his particular method of showing entire aircraft in a specific setting. The reproduction of 140 examples of artwork is tops, and the book's medium-sized format shows off the larger pieces.

The only moderately negative thing I can say about this book is that it's too short. Perhaps a second volume should be considered to show more of R. G.'s considerable portfolio.

Sakaida, Henry. *Japanese Army Air Force Aces 1937-45*. 1997. 96 pp. Ill. \$16.95; and *Imperial Japanese Navy Aces 1937-45*. 1998. 112 pp. Ill. \$16.95. Both books published by Osprey, Michelin House, 81 Fulham Rd., London SW3 6RB, U.K.

We've reviewed other volumes in this open-ended series that highlights the aces and their mounts. The series has enjoyed much success, and the books can be easily ordered through catalogs or found in most bookstores. The price is right and every book is filled with facts, figures and experiences.

These two books about the WW II Japanese air forces are by an American author with unique entry into the closed-door societies of Japanese veterans' associations. Henry Sakaida has become the authority on this highly successful, but somewhat unknown group of fighter pilots. Several years ago we reviewed in this column a fine volume on Imperial Navy aces published by the Naval Institute, but a companion work on the army aces could be found only in Japanese. In the Osprey books the men and their aircraft are all chronicled; however,

their scores—still debatable due to loosely maintained records and an even looser system of crediting kills—will remain a source of disagreement.

The navy aces are better known thanks to such men as Saburo Sakai, whose classic autobiography, *Samurai*—published 40 years ago and made into an epic motion picture—has kept the warrior's name alive. But the army aces were no less successful, and as the Allied march inevitably arrived at Japan's doorstep in early 1945, it was the army that regularly confronted the B-29s and their P-51 escorts or the U.S. Navy F6F *Hellcats* as they ranged inland to attack vulnerable airfields.

Henry Sakaida and Osprey have produced great treatments on the subjects. Two fine cover illustrations by Iain Wyllie complement the color profiles by Tom Tullis, line drawings by Mark Styling and figure renderings by Mike Chappell, making these books a great value for the money. But it's the author's texts that are the meat, telling the little-known story of the aces of Imperial Japan.

Tillman, Barrett. *SBD Dauntless Units of World War 2*. Osprey Publishing, Oxford OX2 9LP, U.K. 1998. 96 pp. Ill. \$16.95.

Number 10 in the Combat Aircraft series, this slim volume is packed with facts, experiences, photos and marking information. Compiled by the acknowledged authority on the SBD, it includes some of the best historical analysis I have seen, especially regarding the complicated Midway and Guadalcanal campaigns. Tillman sorts out the Navy and Marine Corps squadrons' experiences and orders of battle during that sometimes disorganized period.

In a unique section he also details the careers of the A-24 *Banshee*, the Army version of the *Dauntless*, and the SBD's service with foreign air arms. Tables and the usual folio of color side views and figure drawings showing pilots in flight gear round out the presentation.

This is the author's fourth book for this publisher. He has written two volumes in the acclaimed aces series, detailing F4F *Wildcat* and F6F *Hellcat* aces. The third book covers SB2C *Helldiver* units. We have also reviewed the other three fine volumes in this column.

Holmes, Tony. *Jane's Historic Military Aircraft Recognition Guide*. Harper Collins Publishers, 77-85 Fulham Palace Rd., London W6 8JB, U.K. 1998. 448 pp. Ill. \$22.50.

Featuring color photography throughout, this offbeat book is a thoroughly enjoyable browse through the ranks of flying warbirds, spanning WW I to the near-present day. I emphasize the coverage of airworthy examples; gallery-bound types are not shown.

Tony Holmes has done a fine job of compiling fascinating facts and great photos. It's surprising and delightful to see just how many *rara avis* are still capable of flight.