

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

Berg, A. Scott. *Lindbergh*. Berkley Books, 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014. 1999. 628 pp. Ill. \$16.

It's easy to see why this well written and researched biography received the 1999 Pulitzer Prize. The author puts the transatlantic pioneer's complex personality right on the table, warts and all. The reader gets a true picture of Charles A. Lindbergh: courageous 25-year-old aviator; angry, bereaved parent of a murdered toddler; 40-year-old, world-weary isolationist preaching the gospel of America First to an angry public and president; an unsung war hero flying as a civilian in some of the most dangerous skies in the Pacific with Navy and Marine Corps F4U and USAAF P-38 squadrons; and as an older man, diseased but determined to die with dignity.

Granted unprecedented access to family archives by Lindbergh's widow and children, Berg strives to portray Lindbergh in lofty terms, but it's hard sometimes, especially when describing the difficult period of the late 1930s and early 1940s, when Lindbergh alienated himself from most of the country with his pronouncements against American involvement in what was then a European war, or his close association with Hitler's Nazi regime. It would have been easy for Lindbergh to return the medal the Germans gave him, but he steadfastly refused, saying it would anger them more than it was worth. His countrymen were, for the most part, incredulous, believing that their golden hero of the 1920s had turned into a bigot and toady.

Ill equipped to deal with the crazed adulation that followed his epic flight of 20–21 May 1927 from New York to Paris, Lindbergh struggled to maintain his emotional equilibrium. Even when he married the daughter of an American diplomat, the union never achieved the romantic or even structural strength many people believed it had. The kidnapping and brutal murder of their first child, Charles, Jr., traumatized the couple to such depths that they never truly recovered.

Scott Berg's narrative is a masterful blend of good writing and historical research, bringing Lindbergh and his family and times to life as no other book or article has. Only the wonderful 1957 film, "The Spirit of St. Louis," starring Jimmy Stewart in a brilliant tour de force, comes close, but even that deals mainly with the transoceanic flight.

Brown, Charles H. *Dark Sky, Black Sea: Aircraft Carrier Night and All-Weather Operations*. U.S. Naval Institute, 2062 Generals Highway, Annapolis, MD 21401. 1999. 252 pp. Ill. \$34.95.

It's always good to see a book written by someone who's been there, and retired Capt. Brown has certainly experienced what he writes about. I wish he had made this book more of a memoir instead of a history, as he occasionally struggles with combining the two.

However, the book is an interesting, useful account of the development of Navy carrier night and all-weather

capability. It also benefits from a foreword by Capt. Richard "Chick" Harmer, one of the Navy's night-fighter pioneers, who recently died.

The author's narrative covers early WW II programs and operations, and graduates to the postwar period where he begins a first-person account. As an AD-5N *Skyraider* driver with Composite Squadron 35 aboard *Lexington* (CVS 16), he saw a lot of the pre-Vietnam War development. By the time the A-4 *Skyhawk* and F-4 *Phantom II* were introduced, night carrier operations were a regular feature of any deployment and did not require a specially dedicated "night carrier" such as those in WW II.

The best portions of the book are the Vietnam chapters, which include good descriptions of alpha strikes on Haiphong and night trail missions. As the XO then CO of VA-112, one of the least-known "Scooter" squadrons to serve in Southeast Asia, Brown includes some fascinating details of the light-attack war in 1966.

The final portion describing modern capabilities is somewhat lacking. He even omits Lt. Nick Mongillo's MiG kill of 17 January 1991, although he gives adequate coverage to LCdr. Fox's kill on the same mission. Also, it was F-14 *Tomcats* from a *Nimitz* (CVN 68) squadron, not *Kennedy* (CV 67), that got two Libyan *Fitter* kills in 1981. However, two *JFK* F-14s scored two MiG kills in 1989.

These few errors or omissions aside, *Dark Sky, Black Sea* is a good treatise.

Peniston, Bradley. *Around the World with the U.S. Navy: A Reporter's Travels*. U.S. Naval Institute, 2062 Generals Highway, Annapolis, MD 21401. 1999. 248 pp. Ill. \$25.95.

Another diary of an extended visit with a military unit, the writing in this effort is better than most of the genre. The prose is crisp, and the author has crammed a lot of material into a relatively short book, visiting nearly every community in the Navy.

There are the obligatory descriptions of action on the flight deck, and what it takes to maintain a multimillion-dollar F-14 *Tomcat* at home and on cruise. The predictable interviews with the CO, the E-4 maintainer and the hot-shot jet aviator are also major portions of the narrative. And Peniston does fall into occasional inaccuracies. I wonder where he got the numbers for the P-3 chapter. I don't think *Orion* crews blast their way out to their op areas at 450 mph, covering 1,500 miles before starting their mission.

Besides the aviation squadrons, the author brings the reader aboard cruisers, minesweepers and even repair ships. Ongoing policy, both operational and social, comes in for scrutiny and comment by those most affected.

Although I've had my fill of each writing generation's brand of technical voyeurism, if this were the last example of I-spent-a-day-with-the-Navy books, I'd be glad to say it's a good way to end the series.