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Polmar, Norman. *Spyplane: The U-2 History Declassified*. MBI Publishing Company, 729 Prospect Ave., PO Box 1, Osceola, WI 54020-0001. 2001. 278 pages. Ill. \$21.95.

Following WW II, the emergence of the Soviet Union as a nuclear power and the rise of the communist People's Republic of China created the need for a high-altitude aerial reconnaissance aircraft. Existing aircraft like the PB4Y and P2V were heavily modified for reconnaissance and snoopier missions, but were too vulnerable. Only a plane flying above 50,000 feet would be immune to interception. Thus, the U-2 was born.

This is the first biography of this evocative Cold War warrior to cover the U-2's career from 1956 to 2000, describing world concerns and American programs that generated the spyplane. It is not just another history of an airplane, but rather of the idea and seminal concept with which to fight the Cold War—and win. Digging into previously classified CIA history, Polmar reveals heretofore hidden aspects of the U-2's relationship to the spy agency, where the plane's success or failure dictated the rise and fall of many careers.

Design and development of the U-2's all-important camera systems are well covered as is the aircraft's complex fuel system, showing how hard it was to bring designer Kelly Johnson's vision to flight status. The U-2's first flight over the USSR and the Soviet reaction are also well described, conveying the United States' somewhat desperate need for intelligence regarding Soviet ships and aircraft production programs. Flights over the Soviet Union became a regular occurrence. In May 1960, fear of a growing Soviet lead in intercontinental missiles led to a U-2 flight over the USSR just before an important summit meeting between President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. The U-2, flown by Francis Gary Powers, was destroyed by the Soviets.

The author details many of the U-2's international activities, including Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The last mission over the Middle East in the 1960s prompted Israeli defense minister Moshe Dyan to threaten to shoot down the offending U-2 using an American-supplied F-4.

The author's coverage of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis comes late in the narrative, but provides a cogent, detailed description of this tenuous time. The last chapter describes post-Cold War operations, including the 1991 Gulf War and environmental missions. With detailed endnotes and black-and-white photographs, this book is an impressive account of Lockheed's "Dragon Lady."

Lavell, Kit. *Flying Black Ponies: The Navy's Close Air Support Squadron in Vietnam*. Naval Institute Press, 291 Wood Rd., Annapolis, MD 21402. 2000. 376 pp. Ill. \$32.95.

Most historians divide the Vietnam War into the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign—which included Air Force F-105s and B-52s and the intense carrier-based war fought by Navy attack and fighter squadrons—and the long, bloody ground conflict fought by the grunts of the Army and Marine Corps. There's little written of the few, in-country squadrons of various aircraft that fought the communists in company with traditional infantry units. However, Naval Aviation established an important presence with two units: the Helicopter Attack Squadron (HAL) 3 *Seawolves* and the Light Attack Squadron (VAL) 4 *Black Ponies*.

These squadrons flew the H-1 "Huey" and the unique North American OV-10A *Bronco*, respectively. Although the *Seawolves* have received lengthy coverage over the years, the *Black Ponies* have usually been relegated to only a few sentences in supportive text. This well-written, personal memoir-history changes that.

With a great introduction that puts the reader in the cockpit, the author sets the stage with a short description of what became VAL-4's main arena: the water jungle of the Mekong delta in South Vietnam. The river flotillas reappear constantly in the narrative; after all, supporting their operations was at the heart of the *Black Ponies'* mission. Tough Viet Cong defense of the meandering waterways of the Rung Sat zone led to the need for close air support for the American and South Vietnamese patrol boats. The narrative is salted with untold stories of combat in the Rung Sat and various sites for the VAL-4 and HAL-3 detachments. It was a tough, unrelenting war over the flooded rice paddies, through which the Viet Cong slipped by at night and fought by day—a different conflict from the more glamorous, well chronicled war flown by carrier crews.

The author describes the design and development of the unique OV-10, at the time one of the so-called counterinsurgency aircraft. It was heavily armed, but underpowered and poorly ventilated (no air conditioning!). He also tells the interesting story of how the first pilots were chosen for one of the Navy's most unusual and short-lived squadrons. The actual aircraft were loaned by the Marine Corps to circumvent the Air Force's control of land-based attack assets.

The Naval Institute has put out several good volumes on the Vietnam War in the last few years—not the regular historical survey, but volumes that focus on a specific area or unusual topic. *Flying Black Ponies* is a fine addition to this growing list.