

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

Elward, Brad. *McDonnell Douglas A-4 Skyhawk*. The Crowood Press Ltd., Ramsbury, Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 2HR, UK. 2000. 192 pp. Ill. \$52.95.

This latest account of the “Scooter” is a good overview of the A-4’s design and development, with good photo selection. The pictures are large and offer well-detailed views of the *Skyhawk*, an important source for modelers.

The main text is complemented by a variety of sidebars that discuss specific topics, including avionics, ordnance, nuclear mission, terminology and a few surprising revelations, such as the fact that TA-4Fs went to Southeast Asia aboard *Hancock* (CV 19) as early laser designators.

The Vietnam War period receives the lion’s share of wartime coverage, with Navy and Marine Corps operations being well described using several sources and good photos. The author also provides statistics on aircraft milestones and production history.

Other A-4 combat experiences include the Argentines in the Falklands War of 1982 and the hard-pressed Kuwaitis in 1990 and 1991. The material on the Falklands is especially interesting. Argentina lost nearly half of its deployed *Skyhawk* fleet to British *Sea Harriers*, flak and surface-to-air missiles, but it wasn’t until the wartime embargo was lifted in 1993 that replacements could be bought from the Israelis.

There are a few errors. Part of the preface is missing, and El Centro is in California, not Nevada (p. 94). VAQ-33 was not based at Norfolk, except perhaps on detachment (p. 99). A-4s did not fly in the Six Day War between the Arabs and Israelis in June 1967. *Skyhawks* did arrive by the end of the year and were quickly put into intense operations as the War of Attrition of 1968–1970 heated up; of course, the half-dozen Israeli A-4 squadrons bore the brunt of the terrible ground-attack losses in 1973.

Overall, Brad Elward has done a good job in telling the *Skyhawk’s* story, and I highly recommend his book to any A-4 buff.

Carroll, Ward. *Punk’s War*. Naval Institute Press, 291 Wood Rd., Annapolis, MD 21402-5034. 2001. 225 pp. \$24.95.

W seldom review fiction in this column, but we did note Stephen Coonts’ ground-breaking *Light of the Intruder* when it appeared in 1986. Historian Barrett Tillman has tried his hand at novels with some success and, of course, there’s Tom Clancy. Now comes another aspirant to the genre of Naval Aviation fiction—Commander Ward Carroll, a second-

generation Naval Aviator whose Marine father flew A-4s in Vietnam. A 1982 graduate of the Naval Academy, Carroll served as an F-14 *Tomcat* radar intercept officer (RIO) in five fleet squadrons, making several carrier deployments to the Arabian Gulf.

There’s no doubt that the author is writing directly to his peers. The parallels and circumstances are too sharply drawn to be anything but an insider’s description of today’s Navy. And whether you like his style or story, Carroll is eminently qualified to make judgments.

This short novel addresses many issues pertinent to the nonfiction Navy, namely: is the Navy, specifically the air Navy, bad enough to warrant leaving it, or just how tough and perhaps patriotic are you and how much do you really want to fly carrier jets? Carroll’s dedication answers, “For those on the Boat right now, never forget what motivated you to walk through the front door of Naval Aviation, and never allow your squadronmates to forget, either.”

Does the author give adequate justification for such a demanding challenge? It’s a good story, well written, but strongly colored with definitive opinions, especially in the never-ending saga of junior officers versus skippers and senior officers, and youth versus age and experience. For example, in separate scenarios, the main character Punk (a.k.a. Lt. Richard J. Reichert) has problems with the crusty maintenance chief, and the squadron’s newest Ltjg. RIO contends with two burly junior enlisted security men who attempt to intimidate the young officer they find alone below decks.

The source of action is, of course, flying F-14s from “the boat,” which is never named. The main focus is the cadre of junior officer aviators doing their best to stay sane and alive as they contend with mechanical and political problems that are the core of squadron life. The only aspect of today’s Navy that Carroll does not include, except in a passing mention of a female EA-6B *Prowler* pilot, is the arrival of women aviators. But everything else is there: the tough pilot-pals, the passed-over lieutenant commanders, the nearly maniacal squadron CO and milk-toast air wing commander. These collective personalities set the stage for the book’s last confrontation and nonresolution of the problems that will inevitably continue as long as the Navy flies from ships.

There are no errors here. The author knows the subject, and it’s a good read. A sequel, perhaps a movie, may be in the future. But for now, *Punk’s War* is the newest entry in the arena, and Ward Carroll has the field all to himself.