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Courtesy of Jerry Shore, Fleet Air Arm Museum

Thomas, Andrew. *Gloster Gladiator Aces*. Osprey (UK), distributed in the U.S. by MBI Publishing, 729 Prospect Ave., PO Box 1, Osceola, WI 54020, 800-826-6600. 2002. Ill. 96 pp. \$18.95.

The Gloster Gladiator is a fairly exotic aircraft that boasted a surprising number of aces and combat successes and flew for several countries, including Great Britain, China, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

This book's selection of photos is unusual, showing Gladiators and their pilots during the hectic days of early WW II and the war in China in the late 1930s. The folio of color profiles and accompanying captions are of equal interest.

The Gladiator saw combat from the Arctic to the Mediterranean to the Asian mainland, a truly worldwide spread of operations for such a relatively minor type. The photos show that this biplane was a surprisingly large aircraft, especially for a single-seat fighter.

The author, a serving officer in the Royal Air Force and RAF historian, tells the heroic saga of the RAF's No. 263 Squadron in Norway, outnumbered by the Luftwaffe and offered as "a token sacrifice," as one senior RAF officer told the squadron commander. The Royal Navy's Sea Gladiators also saw plenty of action in the Norwegian campaign of 1940—Nos. 802 and 804 Squadrons, Fleet Air Arm, flying from carriers to

augment the struggling RAF squadrons.

There is coverage, photos and interviews of many little-known RAF aces, as well as aces and other pilots from countries not associated with intense aerial combat. For instance, the first Gladiator ace was a Chinese pilot. Royal Navy Sea Gladiators saw considerable action over Malta and Africa against Italy's Regia Aeronautica. The most successful Sea Gladiator pilot accounted for 3.5 kills.

The combat log of the Gladiator is in theaters that may have grabbed the headlines for only a short time, and then only occasionally, but Gloster's last biplane fighter racked up an impressive record in several arduous climes. The pilots fought in obsolescent aircraft against well-equipped adversaries who had reinforcements available, while the Gladiator squadrons did not and could only fight delaying actions.

It was during one such action in Greece in the fall of 1940 that the RAF's greatest Gladiator exponent and its highest-scoring ace of the war achieved his incredible record of more than 50 kills before he was killed in action. Flight Lieutenant M. J. "Pat" St. John Pattle scored 15.5 kills in the Gladiator, gaining the rest of his tally in Hurricanes.

This book is definitely one of the best and most unusual in the highly successful Aircraft of the Aces

series.

Yarsinske, Amy Waters. *No One Left Behind: The Lt. Cmdr. Michael Scott Speicher Story*. Dutton, 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014. 2002. 292 pp. Ill. \$25.95.

The opinions and assertions in this book are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the views of *Naval Aviation News*, the Department of the Navy or the Department of Defense.

One of the promises American aviators take with them when they go into combat is that if shot down, their command will do anything and everything to bring them back. This tenet was given more substance in Vietnam and became an anthem espoused by several movies and books that reported the war and subsequent conflicts in which American flight crews saw action. Besides their own personal courage and beliefs, this oath of support is one of the few things that aviators can carry inside them as they head toward their target. The author poses some probing questions regarding the shootdown of Strike Fighter Squadron 81's Lieutenant Commander Scott Speicher.

Have we left someone out there for more than 11 years? What happened 17 January 1991 on one of the first missions over Iraq? Did one young F/A-18 Hornet driver lose the fight not only with the enemy but also the fight to stay alive until he was rescued? What conspired against him so that, according to the author, he may have languished somewhere in the bowels of an Iraqi prison longer than any other American prisoner of war (POW)?

This book may at times confuse and anger you as you read the writer's description of opportunities lost initially and in years following the shootdown to retrieve LCdr. Speicher or to determine whether he was alive.

Beginning with a description of the mission, Yarsinke quickly gets down to cases, listing reasons for the lack of a search and rescue effort to retrieve Speicher early on. There was uncertainty of the location of his loss, a delay in reporting eyewitness accounts, problems with the PRC-112 personal survival radios staying with crews who punched out, and the feeling by other crews that no one could have survived the huge flash they saw where they last spotted Speicher's fighter.

Although its inclusion smacks of sensationalism, the author suggests one chilling scenario supposedly supported by other Navy and Air Force aviators who were out there that dark night over Iraq: Speicher had been inadvertently shot down by another U.S. aircraft, a blue-on-blue incident. Later on, when reports of a downed aviator prisoner began trickling in from non-American observers and agents, disbelief and confusion only helped prolong delays in action to find out. Could

the U.S. government have simply forgotten the downed pilot?

It is fairly certain that instead of being downed by an Iraqi surface-to-air missile, as reported early in the war, he was struck by an air-to-air missile from a MiG-25 blasting its way through the American formation. "It was that MiG that shot Spike down," the book quotes squadron skipper Commander Michael Anderson saying. "I had him . . . and I could have taken him out." Frustrated, Anderson evidently had the MiG in his sights but couldn't get firing clearance from the orbiting AWACS controller. Confusion reigned throughout those heart-stopping minutes.

Speicher apparently ejected from his stricken Hornet, which far from having blown up actually pancaked in the desert, its engines, cockpit canopy and various other pieces creating a well-defined crash site discovered after the war. Satellite imagery revealed the ejection seat, indicating the pilot's successful escape. However, when investigation teams finally reached the site in December 1995, the seat was gone, with evidence that Bedouin nomads had dragged it—and probably its pilot—off for bartering purposes. The effect of Speicher's loss on his family and squadron was predictable, but the uncertainty of his exact status was even more heart-rending, especially when his status was changed from Killed in Action to Missing in Action by President Bill Clinton 10 days before he left office.

Other questions remain about Speicher's loss and possible survival. Why was there no signal from his emergency locator beacon? Yarsinske says that according to VFA-81's maintenance officer, the beacons were turned off before the mission at the request of the pilots, who feared the transmitters would help the Iraqis find them on the ground. In reality the decision to turn off the beacons in *all* aircraft came from much higher up and was not left to individual squadrons to choose.

This book is incredibly detailed, whether you choose to believe what's presented or can wade through the often-stifling amount of purported facts and evidence the author gives from interviews and documents. The last two chapters pad the book somewhat as the author restates what has already been discussed with an unnecessary call to rescue Speicher, who has been promoted *in absentia* to captain.

Unlike several recent authors of "inside" books on Naval Aviation, Amy Yarsinske, a former naval reserve intelligence officer married to a former Naval Aviator, seems knowledgeable and at ease with naval terminology and lore. She obviously believes that Scott Speicher has survived all these years.