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Nijboer, Donald. Photographs by Dan Patterson. *Cockpit: An Illustrated History of World War II Aircraft Interiors*. Boston Mills Press, 132 Main St., Erin, Ontario, Canada N0B 1T0. 2001. 176 pp. Ill. \$39.95.

Nijboer, Donald. Photographs by Dan Patterson. *Gunner: An Illustrated History of World War II Aircraft Turrets and Gun Positions*. Boston Mills Press, 132 Main St., Erin, Ontario, Canada. N0B 1T0. 2001. 160 pp. Ill. \$39.95.

Long, Eric F. and Mark A. Avino, photographers. Edited by Tom Alison and Dana Bell. *At the Controls: The Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum Book of Cockpits*. Boston Mills Press, 132 Main St., Erin, Ontario, Canada N0B 1T0. 2001. 144 pp. Ill. \$39.95.

We are reviewing these three books together because they appeared in relatively quick succession, using the same format and presentation. While obviously carrying a special appeal to modelers, the books' large format allows all readers to appreciate the development of the control areas of aircraft from the first successful powered type—the Wright Flyer of 1903—to today's space shuttle with myriad displays and panels.

The excellent layout permits the fine color photos to be displayed to full advantage, and we can marvel at the deceptively simple cockpits of the aircraft of the first decade of powered flight. The photos had to be obtained by some unique positioning and assistance from various museum staffs, and the authors and photographers describe the mechanics of their images.

The first book offers a capsule history of each aircraft, as well as the pilot's notes on what it was like to fly. There are times I wish I knew an individual pilot's qualifications, especially when there is no military rank indicated. For example, how was an RAF flight lieutenant (equal to a U.S. Navy O-3) able to fly a Grumman F4F?

There are a few historical errors, such as on page 55 which reports that USAAF ace Boyd Wagner scored kills in P-35s. In reality, all his eight victories came while flying P-40s. I'd also question the author's tally of some 60 Japanese aircraft shot down in the Philippines in December 1941. Some veterans and historians might take issue with the declaration on page 102 that the B-29, a latecomer to combat service, was the "most famous" bomber of the war. The crews of B-17s and Lancasters

would have something to say about that.

*Cockpit* has a black-and-white echo of the main color photo, with numbers to indicate specific controls and levers, a useful description that the third book omits. An odd display on pages 120–121 is an SBD Dauntless (actually a refurbished Army A-24) with a VOR dial, but no explanation of how this 1960s navigational aid got into a 1940 dive-bomber!

*Gunner* is the most unusual of the three and one of only a handful of works on this vital position in any multi-crewed combat aircraft from 1914 to 1960. The historical and current photos in this book are the highlight of the collection. The text occasionally uses some odd nicknames—such as referring to the Bristol F2B as "the king of the two-seaters." (I doubt that any pilot or gunner referred to this highly successful biplane in that way.) The first book also notes the Seversky P-35's sobriquet, "the Farmingdale Flash," but this was undoubtedly a public relations moniker noting the manufacturer's location on Long Island, N.Y., and not used by service pilots.

This volume also includes a few unexpected types, such as the Italian SM.79 bomber and the Soviet IL2M3, along with aircraft like the B-17, B-25, TBF and Lancaster. The first book would have also benefited from including less well-known types that are available in museums, such as French and Italian fighters of the period. The second book's text is slightly more expansive than the first volume's narrative, and occasionally gives facts and figures such as the service introduction, number built and a description of the type's career.

*At the Controls* surveys the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum (NASM) collection. This volume offers a much more general selection of aircraft—civilian, military, experimental and space. Its editing is also the best of the three. The aircraft are not all the expected "regulars" of WW II but include some early types, such as the 1903 Wright Flyer and Bleriot and Bellanca models. NASM has the only examples of several exotic and important aircraft, and their interior control areas are well shown, including Lindbergh's NYP *Spirit of St. Louis*, Douglas M-2 mail plane, Bell X-1 and the Lockheed SR-71A, to name a few.

These three excellent efforts on a central theme, using museum collections to show off the lovingly kept representatives of aviation, are unusual, beautifully presented volumes that most readers will

enjoy browsing.

Freeman, Gregory A. *Sailors to the End: The Deadly Fire on the USS Forrestal and the Heroes Who Fought It*. William Morrow, 10 East 53rd St., New York, NY 10022-5299. 2002. 307 pp. Ill. \$25.95.

This book, the only full-length treatment of the devastating fire aboard CVA 59 in July 1967, is actually two different books from a style viewpoint. As the author struggles to set the stage in the first 100 pages, describing an aircraft carrier and who mans the ship, he makes errors in history and terminology. However, as he finally gets into telling the incredible story of the fire, its beginning and the heroic efforts of all the crew to save their ship, he settles down into a dramatic, flowing narrative that does, in fact, carry out his promise to the crew to tell their story first and foremost.

Freeman devotes several pages to describing the arrival of old bombs a few days before the fire, delivered by the ammunition ship *Diamond Head* (AE 19). It is difficult to determine the veracity of whether these supposedly pre-WW II bombs were actually there. According to his running account, the carrier's ammunition officer—whom he never names and interchangeably calls a Sailor, then officer—becomes incensed when he discovers that these old bombs are in crates with what appear to be manufacture dates in 1935. It is these bombs, loaded on several A-4s, that quickly drop off and explode after the initial flare-up started by the inadvertent firing of a Zuni rocket from an F-4 across the flight deck—setting in motion the terrible sequence of events that took 134 lives. More likely, the “1935” was part of a lot number, and the senior ordnance officer might have mistaken it for a manufacture date. Also, no bomb in use at that time would have withstood the tremendous heat of the initial flare-up caused by the Zuni hit, and would have exploded just as quickly.

Finally, it is hard to believe, and probably impossible to prove, that such ancient ordnance was still in the system. Bombs that old were probably made by the Army and would not fit on Navy aircraft without massive modification, which would have been completely uneconomical and logistically wasteful. Yet, the author does quote several people who were there, even a “20-year-old” A-4 pilot. At this point, the days of teenage Naval Aviators, like George Bush or Don Engen, were long gone. Perhaps as a NAVCAD (Naval Cadet) he might have been 22 or 23 after nearly two years of flight training, but not 20. He would have had to begin flight training when he was 18! We meet this individual again later in the book, and I am confused as to whether he was indeed a pilot or perhaps a Sailor, which makes his age more plausible.



Among other errors: no carrier ever had three deck-edge elevators; the portly G4M “Betty” bomber is described as not only a fighter, but as “beautiful”; and, there’s “night rats” for “midrats” and “ceiling” for “overhead.” Two photos of *Forrestal* come from well outside the period in the book. The back cover shows A-7s on the flight deck, but Corsair IIs didn’t join a *Forrestal* air wing until nearly four years after the fire; and one of the interior photos plainly shows such late 1950s types as Cougars, Furies and Skyraiders. This writer desperately needed a knowledgeable editor.

When Freeman begins weaving individual stories of survival and accomplishment into the main narrative, he does well. The crew first thought the fire and subsequent explosions were the result of a major enemy attack by MiGs or by surface craft. Since they had been involved in combat operations for four days, the assumption was understandable. Soon, however, they realized that the danger was from a shipboard fire and turned to fight it.

The story is heroic, as young, terribly injured Sailors stand by their stations and try to overcome the tragedy unfolding around them. Even now, 35 years later, we feel proud of *Forrestal*'s crew, the ship's company

and air wing.

Unfortunately, when he writes about the post-fire investigation, he has an arduous task, trying to bring all of the different facets of the fire and its cause together with the grueling months of rehabilitation and healing the crew faced. Then, there’s the captain, John Beling, who had received word before deploying that he would be promoted to rear admiral after the cruise. Through a series of twists and turns during the investigation, it seemed that his career might be saved by CNO Admiral Tom Moorer, who knew Beling and did his best to shield him from the system’s wrath. The author describes Beling’s eventual assignment to Iceland as a career-ending move. Actually, Capt. Beling did not fare as badly as the author would have us believe. He received a Legion of Merit for his work on the CNO’s staff, and he was also promoted to flag rank a year after the fire. His billet in Iceland was that of Commander, Iceland Defense Force and Commander, Fleet Air Keflavik. Given the tenor of the times at the height of the Cold War, this assignment was not the backwater job it might first appear.

There’s a lot in this book that should have been better, from both the author’s and the publisher’s standpoints. But the crew’s story deserves to be read and understood. No one has covered the fire in such detail. Until something better comes along in the manner of Wynn Foster’s story of the *Oriskany* (CV 34) fire—*Fire on the Hangar Deck*—Greg Freeman’s account of the *Forrestal* tragedy will do.