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Peattie, Mark R. *Sunburst: The Rise of Japanese Naval Air Power, 1909–1941*. Naval Institute Press, 291 Wood Rd., Annapolis, MD 21402. 2002. 392 pp. Ill. \$36.95.

Undoubtedly one of the most important books on WW II to appear in the last decade, this work fills a large gap in aviation historical literature. For an organization that played such a major part in mid-20th century military history, Japanese naval aviation has received little coverage outside Japan. Previous works usually describe specific aircraft, like the legendary Zero, or the Imperial Japanese Navy's (IJN) participation in major actions, like Midway or Leyte. Although behind in modern warfare in the early 1900s, Japan got in on the ground floor of naval aviation with the help of western countries, especially Great Britain. It was assistance the British and their allies would regret in 25 years.

The narrative is very much a scholarly treatise, not a popular history. The author is a vested academic, with teaching credentials at several colleges and a Ph.D. in Japanese history from Princeton. Thus, his language is often rigid and his subject knowledge obviously less than firsthand, such as having no apparent military or flight experience that would put him at ease in discussing his subject.

The author gives an excellent description of the evolution of naval aviation training in Japan, citing the differences between it and the training received by American Naval Aviators. He even mentions a reserve component, an area I have never seen described. Many of his sources appear to be Japanese-language references, so checking is difficult.

In an interesting note, the first combat involving Japanese naval aircraft occurred soon after the start of WW I in China in September 1914. After the war, Japan quickly began building aircraft carriers; in fact, the world's first ship built as a carrier from the start was the little *Hosho*, with only 8,000 tons displacement and a 75-foot flight deck, completed in 1922.

There's some truly fascinating information on early tactics and crew training, which formed the nucleus of the Imperial Navy's strike power in the coming war with the West. While Japan's army focused its attention on fighter development, its navy developed a bomber fleet, including a sizable number of land-based bombers that would have great impact in China and throughout the Pacific during WW II.

Under the book's striking cover design, the main text is only 200 pages, while the remaining 200 pages include informative appendices, biographies of important aviators, and endnotes. The photographs often show IJN carriers, which are not common in previously published histories

of the Pacific war's naval action. Besides aircraft drawings, there are also several unusual elevations of IJN flattops. Detailed maps round out the graphics portion.

As good as the book is overall, there are the inevitable glitches. A layout problem occurs in Appendix 6, which presents important IJN aircraft of the 1930s and 1940s. Using well-done general arrangement drawings and short descriptions and data tables, this section suffers from an occasional mismatch of text and drawings. On page 288, the aircraft is not a Mitsubishi F1M2, but an Aichi E13A1, which can be found elsewhere, also mistakenly placed.

Sunburst has so many aspects that it is impossible to cover them in this column. There are descriptions, never seen in English, of the bloody air war over China in the late 1930s, where the IJN tried out its theories and hardware, not always with success. Flying a vast menagerie of aircraft obtained from England, the Soviet Union, America and France, the Chinese evidently put up a stouter defense than is credited in most works on the subject. It was not until the 1940 arrival of the Zero, in limited numbers and operations, that the Japanese fielded a seemingly unbeatable aircraft.

The author also notes the frustration of the hard-pressed bomber crews beset by flak and interceptors as they watched their escorts charge off to duel with distant Chinese aircraft instead of remaining close to fend off opposing fighters. For a society known for placing the needs of the many ahead of the few, the author indicates that the young fighter pilots of the IJN were often more concerned with adding to their individual scores than defending their bombers.

While the United States had by the 1930s been formulating various campaigns against Japan, the Japanese had sketched out similar actions against American carrier forces, taking advantage of growing capabilities of IJN aircraft, particularly in range. The story of the development of the A6M Zero and its partners in carrier aviation—the Aichi D3A dive-bomber (Val) and the Nakajima B5N torpedo bomber (Kate)—is placed in the context of Japan's military operations and of other countries' related aircraft, such as Germany's Ju.87 Stuka and the U.S. SBD Dauntless.

Sunburst is a well-researched book and long-needed reference on an important, overlooked subject.

Cristol, A. Jay. *The Liberty Incident: The 1967 Israeli Attack on the U.S. Navy Spy Ship*. Brassey's, Inc., 22841 Quicksilver Dr., Dulles, VA 20166. 2002. 294 pp. Ill. \$27.50.

On 8 June 1967, in the middle of the Six Day War between Israel and a coalition of her Arab neighbors, a mysterious gray ship appeared off the

northern coast of the Sinai Peninsula. Its identity unknown, the arrival caused the Israelis great concern because they were about to start the final phase of their lightning war, an attack on Syria. After spending several hours investigating the contact without success, the Israelis launched an air and surface attack on the vessel, which was, in fact, *Liberty* (AGTR 5), a highly classified intelligence gatherer.

How *Liberty* came to be at this very dangerous geographical position, right in the middle of an intense shooting war, and why the Israelis attacked her has been the subject of books, articles and television exposés. However, these efforts vary greatly in accuracy and depth of research and understanding. This new book by a former Naval Aviator and a sitting federal judge, with long experience in naval and civil law, is an impressively researched and corroborated discussion. It goes a long way in trying to resolve the long-standing conflict of opinions on both sides of the question whether the Israelis attacked a ship they knew to be American, a representative of their country's staunchest ally.

There's enough room for blame on both U.S. and Israeli agencies. Five messages ostensibly were sent for *Liberty* to withdraw to a safer 100-mile point. Incredibly, none of these orders reached the captain in time, the fifth and final call not arriving until 2.5 hours after the attack. On the high seas, *Liberty's* crew was free to monitor radio communications and to gather available intelligence. The limits of available photographic intelligence and the vagaries of radio intelligence required the ship to take a close-in position to eavesdrop on the highly volatile situation on the Sinai battlefields.

Unfortunately, the Israelis had been shelled the previous day from the same general position, which made them extremely nervous about activity in the same area. Adding to the tension was the lieutenant commander head of *Liberty's* cryptological branch persuading the ship's captain to remain in harm's way, only 14 miles offshore, in full view of Israeli forces.

The author explains in minute detail the extreme measures the Israelis took to determine *Liberty's* identity. Indeed, the Israel Air Force (IAF) seemed to be in competition with the navy to find out to what country the ship belonged. A four-plane flight of Mirage IIIs was not sent, even though their iron bombs and experienced pilots would have probably sunk *Liberty*. Instead, a two-plane flight of Mirages, armed only with their internal cannon, eventually struck.

One of the areas of contention is whether the ship was flying the U.S. flag. There was a flag displayed, but it was likely shot away on the Mirages' first strafing run and could not have been seen by fast-flying jet pilots. One of the crew soon ran up a larger flag, and the IAF pilots did see its red colors. Confused—thinking it could be a Soviet flag—they halted their attack, but not before one of three Israeli torpedo boats that had appeared put a torpedo into the American ship. Twenty-five of the 34 crewmen in the

attack died when the torpedo hit.

The seventh chapter is one of the book's pivotal chapters; it categorically calls the attack blue on blue. The author bolsters this agonizingly obvious, but important and often overlooked aspect of the incident with historical examples from the U.S. Civil War and the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, as well as other conflicts.

The Liberty Incident is not a description of the action so much as the events leading up to the attack and their combination to create a fatal confusion that continues to strain veterans' memories and emotions on both sides. Despite the author's impressive research and release of classified tapes and documents, there will be many who will discount this latest explanation. Although convinced the attack was in error, the author does give a balance by airing the long-held opinions of some members of the ship's crew that the incident was a diabolical plot and that the true story lies in long-hidden findings by the American and Israeli governments.

The book's photos are of interest, although because many of the Israeli images come from gun cameras and long-distance vantage points, the pictures are often grainy and soft. There are several appendices, the most fascinating of which is a complete transcript of the communications between the attacking Mirage flight leader and his controllers.

This account of the incident is by far the best of any retelling. The author is well placed and had the long-lasting enthusiasm and dedication to see his project through.

Faltum, Andrew. *The Independence Light Aircraft Carriers*. The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1250 Fairmont Ave., Mount Pleasant, SC 29464. 2002. 160 pp. Ill. \$34.95.

Continuing this author's surveys of U.S. Navy WW II carriers—we reviewed his book on the *Essex*-class earlier—this latest effort focuses on the often overlooked CVL class, lost between the big CVs and the smaller, colorful CVEs. The *Independence*-class ships were commissioned in 1943 out of a need to complement the *Essex* types. The new class used light cruiser hulls, which were already under construction. The CVLs were fast, well-armed and could share the rigors of war with their larger sisters.

Using the chronological historical approach, the author details early CVL action—the Marcus, Wake and Gilberts campaigns of 1943—and continues through the late-war march across the Pacific. Postwar activities include service during the Korean War and in the French and Spanish navies. The French used American light carriers in Southeast Asia during the late 1940s.

Various appendices give technical details and short biographies of each CVL. Appendix C is a welcome reference with graphic details of hull camouflage patterns. Good photo coverage and maps complete this useful book's design package.