

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

Carey, Alan C. *Leatherneck Bombers: Marine Corps B-25/PBJ Mitchell Squadrons in World War II*. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 4880 Lower Valley Rd., Atglen, PA 19310-9717. 2002. 112 pp. Ill. \$24.95.

Although we might question the need for a second book on the Marine Corps use of the North American Mitchell, this latest effort is welcome if only for its more in-depth treatment of the subject. Phalanx (now part of Specialty Press) published Jerry Scutt's *Marine Mitchells* in 1993, which we reviewed in this column.

The author devotes a chapter to each of the seven Marine Mitchell squadrons. There are details on aircraft assigned and lost, as well as an account of the crewmen lost in action and operationally. Carey takes full advantage of input from veterans, including personal recollections and photos, which add interest to the book. Graphics also include a series of color profiles of various aircraft.

The Marine Corps got its rather unusual bombers apparently because the Army had too many B-25s and the Navy didn't want them. The PBJ squadrons saw considerable action during the last two years of the war, losing 99 aircraft, including 44 in combat, as well as 195 men. The young crews flew their large, twin-engine bombers with élan and sometimes paid with their lives.

Carey describes VMB-423's mission to drop a scroll signed by 35,000 school children in Oklahoma in May 1944, but sadly does not include the photo showing squadron crewmen lined up with the lengthy roll of paper. Also, there was VMB-611, the only Marine Mitchell squadron in the Philippines in early 1945. Arriving in March, five months after the start of General Douglas MacArthur's campaign to return to his beloved islands, VMB-611 was led by Lieutenant Colonel Jack Cram, who had earned fame and the Navy Cross at Guadalcanal.

Unfortunately, there are a number of typos and inverted and dropped letters. One appears on page 75 where the author describes Lt. Col. Cram as "excepting a commission" when he obviously was *accepting* his second lieutenant's bars. However, overall, this is a good history of a group of obscure units operating a different aircraft than usually associated with the Marines.

Hoffman, Colonel Jon T., USMCR, ed. *USMC, A Complete History*. Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc., and the Marine Corps Association, Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134. 2002. 656 pp. Ill. \$75.

Easily the biggest in this publisher's continuing series on American service branches, this volume is the second work that focuses on the Corps. The

first was in the now-established format of a collection of essays, complemented by high-quality photography and art, describing various aspects of the Marine Corps. This new book is a daily account of the Marines from their formation in 1775 through the early stages of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2002. It's truly a Herculean effort that warrants the hefty price.

Resplendent in a padded, camouflaged cover with a cloth patch, this chronology takes full advantage of various contributors' skills and knowledge, as well as photos, paintings and illustrations from the Marine Corps Historical Center. The artwork comes from such luminaries as retired Colonel Charles H. Waterhouse and other Marine Corps combat artists.

The rich, colorful history of the early Corps fills the large pages with stories and details many people might not know. The Korean War sections contain great photos and artwork, along with interesting facts that are only now getting deserved attention on the conflict's 50th anniversary. There are detailed sidebars that describe battles, facilities, personalities and hardware, from rifles to aircraft. The last category includes such stalwarts as the F4F Wildcat and less familiar types like the PBJ (B-25) Mitchell, which saw a surprising amount of action in the last two years of the Pacific war (see *Leatherneck Bombers* in this column).

Unfortunately, there are the inevitable errors that crop up in such a massive work and many are related to aviation subjects. The photo on page 591 continues the misidentification of a VMF(AW)-235 F-8E Corsair as belonging to VMF(AW)-312. The red nose and white stars of 235 are too prominent to miss. The artwork on page 220 does not match up with the caption, and the painting on page 264 shows an F4F attacking a Nell bomber, not a Zero fighter. A few of the aviation photos would have been better served with more detailed captions, such as the picture on page 367 showing a lineup of VMF-214. The names of the pilots are available, and because the picture shows two of the *Black Sheep* aces, Chris Magee and John Bolt, more research would have added value. Surprisingly, there is no mention of the role Marine Corps aviators played in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, flying Blue Moon reconnaissance missions over Cuba during that tense, dangerous period.

Each historical period receives full treatment, resulting in a ready reference as well as many hours of good browsing. I say "ready" but the large book is a handful to hold in one's lap for a long time. These points noted, this terrific book deserves a place in the libraries of researchers, enthusiasts and, of course, former and current Marines.