

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

Carroll, Ward. *Punk's Wing*. Signet, 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014. 2003. 336 pp. \$6.99.

It's hard enough to write a highly successful debut novel, AND harder to follow it with one of equal or higher appeal, even when using the same main character and general venue. However, Ward Carroll has written what is arguably one of the best second military novels in recent memory. Lt. "Punk" Reichert has finished his tour with fleet F-14 Tomcat squadron VF-104 from the first book, *Punk's War* (USNIP 2001), in which he has confronted a mix of deployment craziness and personalities, including bombing an Iraqi missile site during Operation Southern Watch. Punk rotates to the F-14 fleet readiness squadron (FRS) as an instructor and immediately runs head-on into the problem of a struggling female student and her entourage of Congressional and Navy enforcers bent on making sure she completes the intense pre-fleet introduction to the F-14. Add to this Punk's own personal problems of a rather ill-advised engagement and the death of his best friend in a midair, and Carroll, a retired commander and F-14 radar intercept officer, has his hands full trying to keep the story progressing. But he does so in fine style.

Carroll's second effort shows a more mature writing style than his first novel, good as that was. He addresses many of today's ongoing concerns in the current air Navy: the pressure on student aviators, even after they get their wings; conflict between landing signal officers and senior officers; and the occasional presence of high-level civilian observers. Then there's the pressure, fear and disappointment that surround a volatile mix of people and situations. It's all here in a *tour de force* that will have experienced heads laughing, then nodding in tight-lipped "been there" agreement.

There are lots of golf references in this book (Carroll is an avid golfer), a ratcheting up of character flaws and foibles, and an usually detailed look at post-wing training in the FRS never addressed by other tech-fiction writers. An early chapter that will bring a knowing smile is the choosing of call signs by the FRS instructors. There are occasional historical references, such as the son of the Navy's only Vietnam ace Bellingham (of course, a fictional name) and a nod to the real-life mishap involving Lt. Kara Hultgreen of VF-213.

Perhaps the most important such reference is the one that signals the end of the book, namely the 9/11 attacks and their subsequent meaning to the members of Punk's FRS group. Carroll has to begin sewing up all of the loose threads for the characters and bring them out to the fleet and the first missions over Afghanistan—and he does it well. The final chapter of the book includes a

tension-filled sequence as Punk and his friends arrive in theater and fly a bombing mission deep into Afghanistan.

Like many of his predecessors, Carroll has left plenty of room for future stories involving Punk Reichert and his cohorts. In fact, the author is working on the third installment. Ward Carroll has certainly carved out a niche for himself in the highly competitive arena of fiction writers.

Nordeen, Lon O. *Air Warfare in the Missile Age, 2nd Ed.* Smithsonian Institution Press, 750 Ninth St. NW, Washington, DC 20560-0950. 2002. 337 pp. Ill. \$42.95.

First published in 1985, this well-researched book has been updated and expanded to include newly disclosed material and conflicts in the Balkans, Southeast Asia and Afghanistan. A foreword by retired Air Force colonel and best-selling author and historian Walter J. Boyne introduces this new edition. The chronological narrative describes the many world conflicts that have involved major air campaigns using aerial missiles beginning with Vietnam. Brief but knowledgeable descriptions of daily sequences and aircraft and systems follow.

Early Southeast Asia action includes North Vietnamese surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft artillery capabilities, which required development of defensive ECM and specialized aircraft like the USAF EB-66, F-100 and F-105 and the Navy's EKA-3B, EA-1F and EF-10. The new edition also gives the names of pilots and aces from less publicized groups, such as the North Vietnamese and Israelis. The author details action and developments in such exotic conflicts as the India-Pakistan war in 1965 and 1971, the Arab-Israeli confrontations and the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–1988.

The fact-filled chapters on the Arab-Israeli wars from 1967 to 1973 list each side's order of battle and operations. New material since the first edition includes the Soviet and American action in Afghanistan. Details on USSR operations in the 1980s and a preliminary description of the U.S. campaign after 11 September round out the coverage.

A short but well-done chapter on the Falklands War of 1982 between Great Britain and Argentina provides details on the first modern missile war of the late 20th century. There is also a detailed first-time account of the Iran-Iraq War. However, there is a conflict in this chapter between the text and the photograph of a Mirage F.1. The author says in the narrative that the aircraft that attacked *Stark* (FFG 31) in 1987 was a Falcon bizjet fitted with an F.1's radar, but the photo caption declares that a Mirage was the actual striker.

Throughout this expansive book the style of ranks and aircraft designations is inconsistent. The A-3 is called “a light bomber” (p. 37), but as one of the largest aircraft to ever operate from a carrier, the A-3 was definitely the Navy’s heavy bomber for more than a decade.

Most photos are generic, but a few from the author’s collection are very good and combine with the maps to complement the text.

The book’s new material moves to the 1991 Gulf War with a good assessment of the action and a few interesting pictures. This section describes the ongoing conflict with Iraq, including details of the four-day campaign in December 1998 known as Operation Desert Fox.

Several appendices detailing technical aspects and historical considerations finish this welcome account and ready reference.

Hobson, Chris. *Vietnam Air Losses: United States Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps Fixed-Wing Aircraft Losses in Southeast Asia 1961–1973*. Specialty Press, 39966 Grand Ave., North Branch, MN 55056. 2002. 192 pp. Ill. \$29.95.

Originally published in the UK by Midland Publishing, this highly detailed compendium should become a major reference. Only the study by the Center for Naval Analysis published in 1976 has presented such important information. This well-produced softcover book gives a daily account of aircraft losses throughout the American engagement in Southeast Asia (SEA), excluding helicopters.

The photos are well reproduced, although there are quite a few more USAF aircraft shown than Navy or Marine Corps types.

With the benefit of 30 years, the author takes advantage of postwar cooperation between U.S. and Vietnamese agencies in recovering the remains of missing servicemen, and can thus finish the individual stories of the crews in the losses described.

Various appendices give orders of battle, individual service organization and squadrons, and carrier deployments. The reader also gains a sense of the effort and sacrifice aircrews made, as well as the intensity of the air war. Sidebars discuss specific aircraft or weapons, or operational campaigns during the war.

As with any work of such large scope, errors and misconceptions are bound to appear. Navy enlisted ratings are seldom given except as “PO” for petty officer, and crewmen rates are never shown. Navy F-4 back-seaters are also listed as “navigator,” strictly an early Air Force designation. Occasionally, wrong designations appear in the photo captions, such as the picture on p. 18 that shows a postwar F-4J of VF-96, while the caption discusses the F-4B. Another error involves the entry for

26 October 1967 and then-Lieutenant Commander John S. McCain. He lost the presidential nomination race to Governor, not Senator, George Bush. And McCain was not aboard the carrier *Oriskany* during the terrible fire of October 1966.

Somewhat surprisingly, Chris Hobson also continues the now-defunct legend of the Cunningham-Driscoll confrontation with top North Vietnamese ace “Colonel Tomb.” This story of the nonexistent ace has been pretty well debunked by the North Vietnamese themselves.

The negative points aside, this new book is well worth the price and deserves a place on the shelf of anyone interested in America’s longest war.

Carey, Alan C. *PV Ventura/Harpoon Units of World War 2*. Osprey Publishing, Elms Court, Chapel Way, Botley, Oxford OX2 9LP, UK. 2002. 96 pp. Ill. \$18.95.

The Lockheed Ventura and PV Harpoon medium bombers were a somewhat shadowy family of combat aircraft derived from a prewar airliner that first saw fame as a record-breaker flown by millionaire industrialist Howard Hughes. Originally sent to the British as the A-29 Hudson, the design was then modified with more powerful engines and different armament suites, arriving in the UK as the Ventura I. The type’s service with allied air forces was disappointing, and although it flew with some 30 U.S. Navy squadrons and one Marine Corps unit, the aircraft has been relegated to no more than occasional footnote mention in overall histories.

This latest addition to Osprey’s Combat Aircraft series is welcome. The reader will find encapsulated histories of Navy and allied squadrons, as well as an expanded description of the PV’s night-fighter service with the Marines during which its crews scored 12 kills in the Pacific during an eight-month tour.

Harpoon aircrews saw a surprising amount of action against the Japanese from the Aleutians to the Philippines, and more than a few men were lost or wounded flying Lockheed’s ponderous, yet well-proportioned twin-engine bomber. PV crews also accounted for several kills against German submarines.

The book follows the series’ established format, and includes a folio of 30 color profiles as well as general arrangement line drawings. The profiles are supplemented by descriptive paragraphs detailing the individual aircraft’s record and special action seen by its crew. Taking advantage of several alumni groups and personal photo collections, the author has also assembled a fine selection of photographs.