

PROFESSIONAL READING

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

Hunt, Peter. *Angles of Attack: An A-6 Intruder Pilot's War*. Ballantine Books, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. 2002. 368 pp. Ill. \$6.99.

This newest Gulf War memoir really puts the reader in the cockpit. Like the A-7 Corsair, its stable mate in the Navy's attack community, the A-6 Intruder, above, made its final combat cruise in the six-week action that ousted the invading Iraqis from Kuwait. Intruder squadrons flew from all six carriers deployed during Desert Storm (as well as with two Marine Corps shore-based squadrons), and the former A-6 aviator tells the story in a well-written narrative that covers the buildup of Desert Shield and the nightly launches that destroyed Iraqi naval and land assets with consistent precision.

Peter Hunt's account is one of the best of the type I have read in recent years. The only negative comment I can make is the annoying use of quotes from the National Anthem for chapter headings and the book's innocuous title, explained as coming from the A-6 Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization manual.

The focal point of the book is Hunt's experience flying 45 combat missions with Attack Squadron 145, and the close bond with his bombardier-navigator (BN), which reinforces the team effort involved in flying the Intruder. The description of the prewar activities as the squadron, air wing and carrier prepare to deploy give a fine insider's view of carrier aviation. Hunt tells what it was like flying combat from one of the Navy's oldest carriers, *Ranger* (CV 61).

Peripheral areas like a port call in the Philippines, the loneliness of Christmas Eve at sea and thoughts of faraway family are described in some of the best writing that I have seen in this type of book.

Peter Hunt and his BN participated in the Battle of Bubiyan, which saw the destruction of several Iraqi navy PT boats and eliminated that enemy arm as a threat. They also flew during the last major attack on Iraqi units, the so-called "highway of death," as the invaders torched the Kuwaiti capital and tried to flee along a road.

There's a lot in this rather large paperback, but the writing flows well. Unfortunately, the book ends on a sour note because of the author's dissatisfaction with the postwar Navy, Tailhook scandal and the resulting "rot from within." Family separation also played a hand in his decision to leave the Navy, as well as the demise of the A-6 community.

Nonetheless, *Angles of Attack* is a fine effort that tells the story of one of the Navy's stalwart aviation communities during its last combat deployment.

Goodspeed, M. Hill, ed. *U.S. Navy: A Complete History*. Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc., 9 Burr Rd., Westport, CT 06880. 2003. 728 pp. Ill. \$75.

Advice to the prospective buyer: a few days of exercises are essential before trying to pick up this massive tome. The latest volume in Levin's series of U.S. military service histories, this chronology is the sixth of the naval line, preceded by U.S. Navy, Naval Aviation, Submarines and two Marine Corps books. Like the others, this is a fine book, and Hill Goodspeed has done a terrific job of guiding its creation.

Following the established format of previous titles using commissioned essays, artwork and evocative photos, this book gives the daily historical sequence of the Navy's development and activities. As in other volumes in the series, the editor's choice of paintings, contemporary studio and combat art, and modern postwar illustrations are welcome additions that perhaps show younger readers another side of military-oriented graphics.

The text, written by experts and participants, includes chapter introductions, an expansive chronology and sidebars that describe people, campaigns and hardware. These are enjoyable and important, and I would have liked to see a listing of the sidebars by subject along with the table of contents, as well as biographies and credits for their authors.

I must admit some ignorance of early naval history, and it was enlightening to browse the contents to learn just exactly how well endowed our Navy has been with brave sailors and happy circumstances.

There are other chronologies of recent publication, such as *Naval Aviation 1910-1995* (Roy Grossnick, Naval Historical Center) and *Naval History* (Jack Sweetman, U.S. Naval Institute), and they all have their merits. This new book's depth compares to Grossnick's compendium, but Goodspeed's work is of a much broader scope. *U.S. Navy: A Complete History* is a quality publication that can stand as an important reference as well as the right gift for anyone interested in the Navy.

McKinney, Major Mike and Mike Ryan. *Chariots of the Damned: Helicopter Special Operations from Vietnam to Kosovo*. Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010. 2001. 215 pp. Ill \$24.95.

This book is written on a welcome subject, but it could have been better—starting with the title, whose explanation is buried nearly halfway through the book. The narrative does shed light on several seldom-described actions, including Grenada, Vietnam and the Balkans. The photo folios are good, although there's no chronological order to their presentation. Chapters dealing with three rescues (and one unsuccessful effort) of allied flight crews over Bosnia are worth the price, because these efforts set the tone for future search-and-rescue missions and have received little press.

Like most modern books on military subjects, the lack of a style-and-writing editor is obvious. Poor sentence construction and terminology and the lack of basic punctuation and grammar impede the reader's progress. The authors seem to believe that neither the Navy or Marine Corps can do anything right, which I guess is expected since the major is a serving Air Force officer with the aircraft and squadrons whose experiences he describes.

I cautiously recommend this book. I am surprised that a large publisher such as St. Martin's allowed a product to go to press without a closer look at the writing. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of the subject, missions and the brevity of the book make it an interesting read.

Lambert, John W. and Norman Polmar. *Defenseless: Command Failure at Pearl Harbor*. MBI Publishing, Co., Galtier Plaza, Suite 200, 380 Jackson St., St. Paul, MN 55101-3885. 2003. 256 pp. \$29.95.

For the last six decades, the surprise attack on American installations in Hawaii by the Japanese on Sunday, 7 December 1941, has generated many books and articles. Each effort touches on who was to blame for the Japanese operation's military success. The theories fall into two categories: the attack was a brilliant piece of offensive planning complemented by a fair share of luck and unprepared American forces; or the current thinking which says that although caught off guard, the Americans had ample warnings right up until the first Japanese bomb hit its target just before 0800 but ignored the signals and suffered the consequences.

After reading this latest examination, it is hard not to believe the latter explanation. Jack Lambert's area of expertise is the early Pacific war, and Norman Polmar has written extensively on the naval experiences of WW II. Thus, when these two individuals combine their considerable experience, the reader has to pay attention.

Lambert and Polmar examine the organization and equipment of U.S. forces in the islands in the week leading up to the attack. Appendices follow the rather short text, giving facts and figures of men and machines available to the leading commanders (particularly Army Lieutenant

General Walter Short and Navy Admiral Husband Kimmel) to mount standing patrols over the vulnerable target areas during the ongoing, political negotiations between Tokyo and Washington.

These patrols would have spotted the oncoming Japanese fleet and given warning in time for Army and Navy interceptors to launch and meet the invaders well before they reached their targets. But it was not to be, and Short and Kimmel were retired in disgrace shortly after the attack. In May 1999, however, the U.S. Senate voted by a close margin to rescind the findings of several boards of inquiry and basically recall the blame from these two senior officers.

The authors cry "Foul," and maintain that both men are to blame, along with others in Washington, and that no amount of historical distance can alter the facts. They note a list of near-misses and dismissals of intelligence information and events that should have told the American commanders in Washington and Hawaii that the Japanese were on their way.

A detailed description of the attack and the eventual American response shows that at least the defenders did what they could under the trying circumstances. Closing chapters examine the collective failure and culpability of the commanders, particularly Short and Kimmel. With the sufficient numbers of aircraft and other assets available during the last week in November 1941, it is hard to not place the blame squarely on their heads.

Nijboer, Donald. Photography by Dan Patterson. *Cockpits of the Cold War*. Boston Mills Press and Firefly Books, Ltd., 132 Main St., Erin, Ontario, Canada N0B 1T0. 2003. 192 pp. Ill. \$39.95.

The fourth in a well-produced series, this latest book has a unique collection of subject aircraft, especially for American readers. The first three volumes deal with WW II types—a unique collection describing aircraft gunner positions and aircraft in the collection of the National Air and Space Museum.

Using a large format that permits proper presentation of historic and current photography, these books feature a brief introduction describing each aircraft's career, including notes by pilots with experience in the aircraft alongside a full-page color photo of the cockpit. This is complemented by a black-and-white echo photo with numbers over important instruments and a key giving the designation of the instruments.

Cockpits of the Cold War offers a look at such types as the American SR-71, F-84, A-1, F-4 and F-8; Canadian Avro CF-100; British Gloster Meteor, Hawker Sea Hawk and De Havilland Sea Vixen; French Dassault Mystere; Swedish Saab J 29 and J 32; and Russian MiG-15, MiG-21 and Sukhoi Su-7. The flight characteristics and design of the cockpits of these aircraft are also detailed.

The book could have used an editor to catch typos, particularly in American aircraft and squadron designations, but this unusual and interesting presentation will appeal to historians and modelers alike.