

PROFESSIONAL READING

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An F/A-18 Hornet of VFA-94 traps aboard *Nimitz* (CVN 68) in April 2003. The *Mighty Shrikes* were one of many Hornet squadrons to participate in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Photo by PH3 Yesenia Rosas.

Holmes, Tony. *US Navy Hornet Units of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Part One*. Osprey Publishing, 1st Floor Elms Court, Chapel Way, Botley, Oxford, OX2 9LP, UK; Motorbooks International, 729 Prospect Ave., PO Box 1, Osceola, WI 54020. 2004. 96 pp. Ill. \$18.95.

This excellent book looks at the F/A-18 Hornet community during its post-1991 involvement in Iraq. From the start of Operation Southern Watch following Gulf War I, the author gives a first-class overview of Hornet operations. Besides the stalwart F/A-18C units that operated in the northern Arabian Gulf, this first volume of a planned trilogy on Hornet squadrons in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) also describes the squadrons that recently transitioned to the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and their first taste of combat. Seldom has a new aircraft entered combat so soon after entering fleet service.

The first Super Hornet squadron, VFA-115, gets its fair share of exposure, having dropped the Echo's first ordnance in combat on 6 November 2002. The F/A-18E's greatly increased size compared to the Alpha and Charlie versions is immediately apparent in the photos, especially when ground crew members are in the picture.

Holmes has written a quality, up-to-date account. Part of the story is the new weapons that saw their first

combat. The author gives due regard to these "smart" bombs and the highly trained crews who used them to such telling effect in OIF. In fact, the description of how the Hornet drivers used their munitions—bombs, laser-guided bombs, 20mm cannon—adds to the narrative, such as the unusual strike against Saddam Hussein's yacht that was thought to be providing battlefield communications with its suite of radios.

Holmes also describes the detailed planning that preceded the war—air plans and flight schedules encompassing all carrier-based Hornet squadrons. The immediacy of Holmes' reporting, with some events occurring barely a year before the book's publication, and the complexity of the overall operation make the narrative even more unusual. The intense experiences of the pilots as they plan and fly their missions, strike targets and wade through flak and surface-to-air missiles make the book a truly up-to-the-minute account. Coordination and weather played major roles and the details of these components give high marks to senior leaders for using their air assets to the fullest extent.

As the war progresses to the assault on Baghdad, known as "Thunder Run," the account gives the modern version of the now-traditional role of the forward air controller (FAC). Like their A-4 Skyhawk and A-7 Corsair II predecessors, Hornet crews worked

with these airborne controllers who flew all types of aircraft, including helicopters, F-14 Tomcats and A-10 Thunderbolts. Ground FACs also worked with the Hornets.

Note that this is one of three volumes devoted to the Hornet and its crews in OIF. The second and third books will describe F/A-18 squadrons of the Marine Corps and Royal Australian Air Force, and those in the eastern Mediterranean during the same period. These small paperbacks continue to offer great value for the money.

Wolf, William. *Victory Roll! The American Fighter Pilot and Aircraft in World War II*. Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 4880 Lower Valley Rd., Atglen, PA 19310-9717. 2001. 464 pp. Ill. \$59.95.

This huge, ambitious history has many good points that override its hefty price. The author describes not only the careers of American fighter pilots during the war, but also their training, aircraft development and production, squadron deployment practices and adversaries. The photos and text comprise a fascinating look at the fighter pilots of all U.S. services, with a focus on aces. The foreword is by Marine Major General Marion Carl, who died in 1998, and there are inputs from other aces who describe their aircraft and engagements.

The book begins with prewar Army training and a discussion on safety, including mishap rates. Dr. Wolf discusses developments in Japan but seems ignorant of the fact (page 19) that both the Imperial navy and army air arms had only a few flying officers. Most of the fighting and successes were contributed by enlisted pilots, including many junior ranks, such as seamen and corporals.

Besides the regular spelling errors and lack of style continuity typical of this publisher, there are occasional mistakes in the narrative's facts. On page 220 in a table labeled "F6F Hellcat Aces," he indicates that then-Lieutenant Edward "Whitey" Feightner got five kills with VF-10 when, in fact, this nine-kill ace shot down four Japanese aircraft in F4F Wildcats with VF-10, and five more in Hellcats while assigned to VF-8 aboard *Bunker Hill* (CV 17).

Dr. Wolf gives widespread discussion to the careers of Allied and German aces, noting that the top five Luftwaffe aces flew combat for five years and scored a combined total of 1,453 kills, while the top five American aces shot down only 167 enemy aircraft in total. Of course, the U.S. didn't fly its combat crews until they were either killed or the war ended.

Other unusual, interesting chapters include discussions of aces in other air forces flying American-built aircraft, such as the Chinese in P-26s and P-43s. There are sections describing first kills in specific types of fighters, scores by aces in different wars and American aviators flying for other countries. For

instance, the first kill for an American-flown P-51 came over Dieppe in 1942 when Hollis Hills scored against an FW-190 in an RAF Mustang. Hills later returned to the U.S. Navy and scored four more kills in Hellcats. One of the photos of Hills shows him as a commander, but the caption ranks him as a lieutenant.

This book is a truly amazing effort and is the best all-inclusive encyclopedia of American fighter aces I have seen.

Bishop, Farzad and Tom Cooper. *Iranian F-4 Phantom II Units in Combat*. Osprey Direct USA, MBI Publishing, 729 Prospect Ave., PO Box 1, Osceola, WI 54020. 2003. 96 pp. Ill. \$19.95.

There has been a lot published on McDonnell's masterpiece, much of it dealing with the F-4's service in Vietnam, while discussions sometimes include combat in the Middle East and peripheral experiences in various countries around the world. Recently, a few magazine articles and one book from Schiffer have described aerial operations during the bloody Iran-Iraq War of 1980–1988. This new book, No. 37 in Osprey's "Combat Aircraft" series, focuses on the F-4 and opens a window on the shadowy Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) and its large number of Phantom IIs and their flight crews.

The first F-4s arrived in the Shah's air force in 1968, with deliveries continuing up to the revolution that overthrew the "Peacock throne" in 1979. These were top-of-the-line purchases in concert with other armaments, including F-14 Tomcats. Imperial flight and ground crews had trained in the U.S. and, thus, were immediately under suspicion by the revolutionary government.

According to the authors, the reformed IRIAF's ranks were decimated by the new rulers, but after the first Iraqi attacks in September 1988 hundreds of imprisoned flight crews were released to defend their country. The incredible conditions that F-4 crews faced are part of the unusual text.

There are several interesting black-and-white and color photos of varying quality and Jim Laurier's profiles are well done, although there are very few distinguishing, and no personal, unit markings. Various tidbits include a brief account of an IRIAF Cobra pilot's involvement in a search and rescue effort, disclosure of French-trained mercenaries flying MiGs for the Iraqis, and occasional mention of other types such as the F-14.

A list of claimed Iranian kills shows that there is one six-kill F-4 Iranian ace. A list of IRIAF losses would have been helpful, but overall this book is a real treat for F-4 enthusiasts and a good value for the money.

I'd stack these Osprey products up against all comers.