

PROFESSIONAL READING

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

O'Connor, Michael. *MiG Killers of Yankee Station*. New Past Press, Inc., 201 West Street, Box 558, Friendship, WI 53934. 2004. 272 pp. Ill. \$45.

This medium-format book is probably the most detailed account of naval aviation's fighter-to-fighter aerial campaign in Southeast Asia. It opens with a description of the last MiG kill by naval aviators, when the Fighter Squadron 161 crew of Lt. Victor Kovaleski and Ltjg. Jim Wise scored against a MiG-17 on 12 January 1973. The story of the first encounter between Navy fighters and MiGs in April 1965 is the most detailed I have seen. An impressive quantity of first-hand descriptions and detailed research fleshes out old and new stories of various engagements covering the long war from 1964 to 1973.

The photos take advantage of the book's larger size, and there is a 16-page folio of color pictures and artwork. A couple of the illustrations were done by former F-8 Crusader pilots. The best painting is the one also used for the dust jacket showing the final kill made by Lt. Randall Cunningham and Ltjg. William Driscoll of Fighter Squadron 96 on 10 May 1972.

While there are no real errors, there are a few slips. On page 50, the author declares that Richard Bellinger flew B-17s. Actually, the man who gained the first Navy MiG-21 kill in 1966 started out as a B-25 instructor in 1944. Also, the author has the disconcerting habit of identifying only the specific MiG killers in the photos that show squadron lineups. He even ignores ship captains and other senior members shaking the new shooters' hands immediately after their recovery back aboard ship. Most of these people's names would have been easy to discover, as they are usually found in the original captions on the back of the contemporary photo. He even "forgets" a visiting Air Force MiG



Lt. Steven C. Shoemaker, left, and Ltjg. Keith V. Crenshaw of VF-96 after downing a North Vietnamese MiG-17 on 10 May 1972.

killer. Photo captions sometimes incorrectly identify an aviator's rank, showing him at a more senior level but still giving the rank he held during the MiG engagement.

This book's main appeal is the amplification the author offers. I was occasionally surprised to learn additional details that he gleaned from the fabled Red Baron reports, the heretofore classified contemporary debriefs of the combat crews involved in the

engagements. The months of May 1967 and May 1972 were particularly busy, with MiGs out in force and actively engaging U.S. Navy and Air Force crews, sometimes giving as good as they got. The author takes full advantage of the recent disclosure of North Vietnamese pilot names and their scores, peppering them throughout the text and trying to match them up to the individual Navy crews they flew against.

The narrative describes the establishment of Topgun, the Navy's Fighter Weapons School at NAS Miramar, Calif. The book delves into the school's birth and contributions to the late-war encounters that eventually saw two F-4 crewmen achieve ace status. Stories of F-8 and F-4 Phantom II aviators going after the North Vietnamese MiGs make for exciting reading, even if you have read other accounts of the same fights.

"Big" personalities abound, and as some of these shooters are no longer with us, the author was fortunate to have interviewed them and taken advantage of their recollections.

I was interested to see O'Connor's take on the often described "final" F-8 kill in 1972, resulting from the MiG-17's pilot's ejection without a shot being fired. While the retelling of the story over the years has established that the MiG pilot was probably surprised that his oncoming quarry was a section of F-8s and not F-4s, this new book's explanation is probably more plausible: radio intercepts indicate the MiG pilot was experiencing control problems and was going to leave his aircraft anyway.

This book is required reading for students of the Vietnam War.

Isby, David. *C-47/R4D Units of the ETO and MTO*.

Osprey Publishing, 1st Floor Elms Court, Chapel Way, Botley, Oxford, OX2 9LP, UK 2005. 96 pp. Ill. \$19.95.

Number 54 of the Osprey Combat Aircraft series, this book is a labor of love and one of the more unusual subjects in this lineup. The author dedicates the book to his father who flew as an enlisted, then commissioned, member of Army C-47 crews during the war.

When we think of combat aircraft we naturally think of the bomb-droppers and the bullet-shooters, not cargo and personnel transports. However, the Douglas C-47 and its Navy and Marine Corps equivalent, the R4D, was actually a primary "weapon" in the Allies' arsenal. Thus, this new book is a particularly welcome change from traditional aircraft usually described and as such, it fills a long-standing gap in coverage.

The only real problem I have is the rather small space devoted to the Navy variants and their record. It is likely that the reason for this lack of coverage is that they operated in the European and Mediterranean theaters, where naval units played a relatively small part as compared to their Army counterparts. A volume dealing

with Pacific operations would provide much more coverage of Navy and Marine Corps R4Ds.

As expected, the C-47's role in the D-Day invasion of 6 June 1944, as well as other operations in Italy, southern France, and North Africa, are well described. There are also interesting details on special ops and American theater activities.

A striking cover and the usual folio of well-done color profiles provide great graphic support to the text. Those who have ever flown in either an R4D or a DC-3 will enjoy the photos and stories. For everyone else, this little volume will give an idea of what it was like.

Mikesh, Robert C. *Japanese Aircraft Equipment, 1940-1945*. Schiffer Publishing Ltd, 4880 Lower Valley Rd, Atglen, PA 19310. 2004. 198 pp. Ill. \$69.95.

There are two men who have become the seminal authorities on WW II Japanese aviation, Richard M. Bueschel (also an author in this prolific publisher's catalog) and the author of this book. Robert Mikesh has considerable hands-on experience as a 9,000-hour U.S. Air Force pilot, with combat tours in Korea and Vietnam, and was the Senior Curator for the National Air and Space Museum (NASM). With these impressive credentials, anything Mikesh writes is worth a look. This large-format, expensive book is no exception.

The book offers an incredibly specific, yet wide-ranging, focus on instrumentation, gun sights and bomb sights, and cockpit colors and interior designs that will bring a satisfied smile to readers. Modelers will be ecstatic at the photographic details and text descriptions of these vital areas. Many of the pictures are in color and there are several great views of various aircraft I have never seen.

Imperial Army and Navy fighters and bombers come under Mikesh's microscope. He also offers a fine narrative of the formation and work by the Technical Air Intelligence Unit-Southwest Pacific Area and its leader Frank T. McCoy—the same man responsible for creating the Allied codename system for Japanese aircraft, e.g., Zeke, Betty, Rufe.

Through his assignments in the Far East while serving with the USAF, and later his position with NASM, Robert Mikesh was able to delve into the little-known, shadowy communities of Japanese design and production. His contacts and experiences have helped him create a seminal work which, while not for the general reader, will certainly be of more than passing interest for those more knowledgeable consumers craving nuts-and-bolts details.