

PROFESSIONAL READING

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

Polmar, Norman. *Historic Naval Aircraft*. Potomac Books, Inc., 22841 Quicksilver Drive, Dulles, VA 20166. 2004. 165 pp. Ill. \$34.95. (Note: Brassey's, Inc. changed its name to Potomac Books in 2004.)

This latest effort from Norman Polmar is a well-produced collection of his columns for the U.S. Naval Institute's *Naval History* magazine describing various Navy and Marine Corps aircraft since the 1920s. It's an enjoyable browse, whatever the reader's individual level of knowledge might be. And while the magazine column is usually limited to one or two photos, the book includes four or five views of the subject aircraft, shown in a large format.

Divided into six general sections by type, the text is a well-written collection of broadstroke history, seasoned



Above, an F8F Bearcat flies over Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 15 July 1945. Below, A-6A Intruders of VA-196 fly formation on a combat mission from *Constellation* (CV 64) during its 1968 WESTPAC/Vietnam deployment.

with interesting tidbits about each aircraft's developmental and operational history. Each entry also includes a box that gives dimensions and operational statistics. Subjects range from the well-known, such as the Grumman F4F Wildcat and the Douglas SBD



Dauntless, to the more esoteric, including the Martin AM-1 Mauler and Pitcairn OP-1.

This book is highly recommended for a quick reference addition to your library.

Westrop, Mike. *A History of No. 10 Squadron Royal Naval Air Service in World War I.*

Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 4880 Lower Valley Road, Atglen, PA 19310-9717. 2004. 194 pp. Ill. \$59.95.

Supporting a very nice dust-jacket illustration of No. 10's Sopwith Triplanes in action against red-painted German Albatross fighters, this latest large-format product from this prolific publisher is a fine treatment of the subject. It is also an excellent, lengthier complement to Osprey's recently released volume on Sopwith Triplane aces, which is reviewed later in this column. (The jacket is also duplicated on the book's hard covers, which is a nice touch.)

The record of Britain's Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) is somewhat murky for the general reader, and its accomplishments definitely play second fiddle to the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). However, RNAS pilots and their aircraft took a back seat to no one and fought against the best the Germans sent over the lines, including the redoubtable Red Baron and his Jastas. No. 10 Squadron helped initiate Sopwith's graceful little triplane to action, and also included several high-scoring aces on its roster, such as Canadian Ray Collishaw, who eventually tallied a grand total of 60 kills and saw service in WW II as an air commodore.

Largely composed of Canadians, No. 10 reformed in May 1917 with three flights (roughly equivalent to modern divisions), which included Collishaw's famous "Black Flight," so named because its triplanes had their forward fuselages painted black and carried names such as "Black Roger" and "Black Prince." This well-researched account gives a daily chronology of squadron activities, along with terrific photographic backup, showing the somewhat slap-dash organization of the RNAS units at the time.

Dissatisfied with the squadron's occasionally lackadaisical organization, the Navy gave control over to the Army, the better for the squadron to support the hard-pressed RFC, which was having trouble meeting its responsibilities over the front. Rain and fog made flying difficult during the spring of 1917, a critical time in the development of aerial warfare in Europe. The Allies and the Central Powers were constantly fielding new aircraft, many of which would become icons for historians. Other problems included cantankerous engines, faulty machine guns, and structural issues—most notably, the triplanes could break up in midair.

By August, No. 10 Squadron was down to less than half its complement through attrition, combat losses, and leave. There was also the embarrassing administrative shakeup caused by a young CO's refusal to accept a hazardous mission, resulting in the RNAS squadrons being brought under RFC control. Reinstitution as a Navy unit coincided with acquiring new aircraft, Sopwith Camels, and the squadron built an enviable record with this fabled little fighter.

Although pricey, this book is required reading for WW I aviation enthusiasts. Besides the text and excellent photos, there are pages of wonderful color profiles by Mark Miller, who uses a more traditional style than the slick air-brush-like examples we see in other books. The appendices include pilot biographies, individual aircraft records, and short essays on aircraft markings. All in all, a fine effort.

Franks, Norman. *Sopwith Triplane Aces of World War I.* Osprey Publishing, Midland House, West Way, Botley, Oxford OX2 0PH, UK 96 pp. Ill. \$19.95.

For many people, the Fokker DR.1 triplane is an icon of WW I aviation. Certainly, this pugnacious little fighter has its place, helped, no doubt, by its association with the equally legendary Baron von Richtofen, the war's top ace. However, it is not widely recognized that the DR.1 actually developed from German interest in a lesser-known British triplane fighter that first appeared in late 1916, the Sopwith triplane, or "Tripe," as it was often called.

An elegant little aircraft, whose lines harkened back to the earlier Pup single-seater from the same manufacturer, the Tripe offered splendid maneuverability and excellent cockpit visibility. It was somewhat underpowered, however, and carried only one Vickers .30-caliber machine gun, although a few were given an additional Vickers, as well as a more powerful engine.

An acknowledged authority on WW I aviation, Norman Franks has written a wonderful account of the Tripe's single year operating with the Royal Naval Air Service, and reveals that the French also operated the Sopwith, claiming several victories over their German opponents. Following the now-established format of the series, this book includes great photography and a folio of color profiles that show off the Tripe's lines and surprisingly varied markings.

This book is one of the best in Osprey's WW I ace lineup.