

PROFESSIONAL READING

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

Holmes, Tony. *US Navy F-14 Tomcat Units in Operation Iraqi Freedom*. Midland House, West Way, Botley, Oxford OX2 0PH, UK. 2005. 96 pp. Ill. \$19.95.

Tony Holmes, the editor of Osprey's highly successful series, is also responsible for several individual volumes. He has made a special project of chronicling American Naval Aviators in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and he continues to do an excellent job. This latest book begins with a fine introduction that briefly describes the F-14's pre-9/11 combat in the first Gulf War, where its less-than-stellar record was not because of any fault of the aircraft or its crews. The opening also recounts the Tomcat's resuscitation as a bomber, which first saw use in the Balkans.

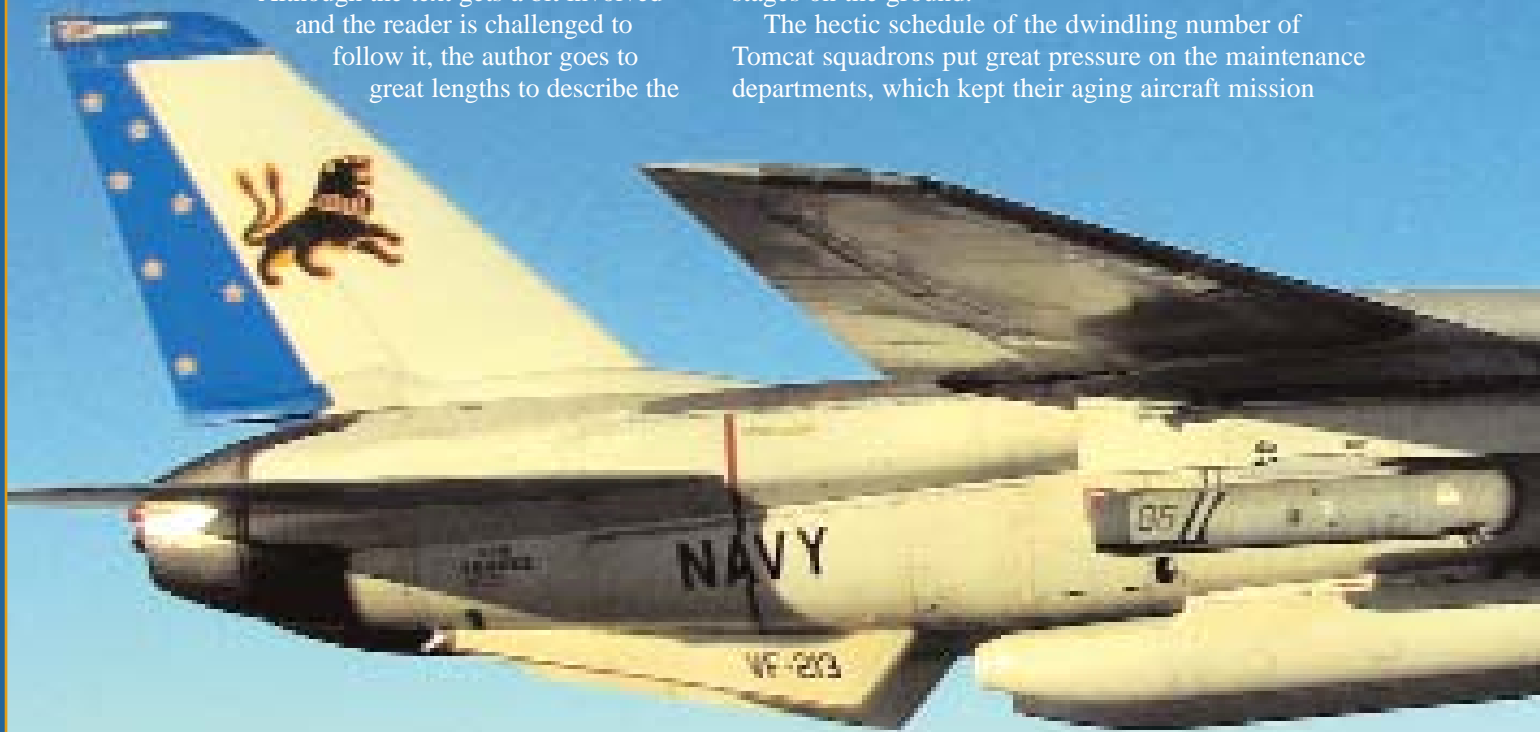
Early OIF accounts detail Tomcat crews' frustration with laser-guided weapons and Air Force tasking.

Although the text gets a bit involved and the reader is challenged to follow it, the author goes to great lengths to describe the

Tomcat's activities. The reader will be rewarded as he gains a greater understanding of the complicated aspects of OIF. Quotations from Holmes' many interviews of aircrews and senior air wing members complement the narrative. He has much to reveal, and he also includes highly detailed captions with the photos, many of which are in color. These color pictures are fully integrated in the text instead of in separate folios as in other series volumes.

The complexity of OIF flight operations is apparent as the F-14 crews design and modify new and existing tactics by which to best use their big fighters. The book details F-14 missions seldom, if ever, revealed to this degree in other accounts. It's amazing that the crews and their aircraft adapted so well to their new tasking, especially that of airborne forward air controller, which took pride of place during the close-in street-fighting stages on the ground.

The hectic schedule of the dwindling number of Tomcat squadrons put great pressure on the maintenance departments, which kept their aging aircraft mission



capable. OIF also marked the only time all three F-14D squadrons deployed together.

While Holmes describes the records of all involved F-14 squadrons, several units come in for more detailed focus, including VF-2, VF-31, and VF-154, the only squadron still flying F-14As. Activities in the northern Arabian Gulf are also described, with attention given to CVW-3 and CVW-8, embarked on *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) and *Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75), respectively. The daily routines of planning, squadron and air wing admin, and flying the missions make for full, rich days familiar to Naval Aviators. The reader will gain greater appreciation for these aggressive and skillful crews.

Winnefeld, Sr., RAdm. James A., USN (Ret). *Career Compass: Navigating the Navy Officer's Promotion and Assignment System*. Naval Institute Press, 291 Wood Rd, Annapolis, MD 21402. 2005. 191 pp. Ill. \$24.95.

This short, informative book should be part of every naval officer's professional reference library. The author, who received his wings in 1953 and flew S-2s, discusses all aspects of a naval career, ashore and afloat. (There's little on the Marine Corps, however.) He offers great advice for junior officers, but there are also many items of interest for those at mid- and senior levels. Using facts, his own experiences, and sea stories, the

author gives us a light but instructive overview of the Navy's often complicated system of promotion and assignments, adding his occasional considerations of what could be done to enhance an individual's career and promotability.

As part of the Naval Institute's Blue & Gold Professional Library, *Career Compass* joins other volumes that present background and instruction for naval officers interested in furthering themselves and getting the most out of their time in the Navy. Anyone who served as a naval officer, no matter the length of career, will nod in understanding or in the amusement of discovery, as in, "Boy! I wish I had known that!" Or, "Maybe I should have looked at that point in my career differently."

Sections that deal with areas such as deciding whether to accept an assignment when it is not what you initially wanted, keeping in contact with your detailer, duty in Washington, getting along with seniors, and dealing with your contemporaries are filled with nuggets that go a long way in helping you deal with your service experience.

All in all, this is a surprising little gem of a book that you can read for instructional pleasure and keep for future reference when you come to the proverbial fork in the road and can't decide which road to take.



An F-14D Tomcat from Fighter Squadron 213 of CVW-8 flies a mission over the Arabian Gulf from *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71). Photo by Ltjg. Scott Timmester.