



PROFESSIONAL READING

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

Reardon, Carol. *Launch the Intruders*. University Press of Kansas, 2502 Westbrooke Cir., Lawrence, KS 66045-4444. 2005. 419 pp. Ill. \$34.95.

This book describes the late-war experiences of Attack Squadron (VA) 75, serving with Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 3 aboard *Saratoga* (CV 60) in 1972. Not just another history, we get to know the A-6 crews and squadron members. There are the daily squadron hijinks, as well as the personal conflicts and relationships that are all part of putting 200 men in a confined area as they conduct combat operations. We revel in their successes, and sympathize when they fail. Even while describing the occasional political and professional infighting that naturally occurred in the squadron, the author avoids the potential pitfall of focusing on the negative.

Deploying in April 1972 in response to the North Vietnamese Easter invasion that threatened to overwhelm the South Vietnamese defenders, *Saratoga* and CVW-3 flew their first missions in May over South Vietnam after a hurried departure from Norfolk, Va. By June the squadron and air wing were flying into North Vietnam, with its massive assembly of air defenses, large and small. The main missions were originally interdiction of road traffic and mining the waterways, rivers and harbors, but by October, more difficult targets around Haiphong were being hit on a regular basis. Desire to get into the “real” war made competition for flight time fierce among air crews.

There are several poignant sections, but none as much as toward the end of the book and *Saratoga*'s cruise when VA-75 suffers the loss of its commanding officer in an operational mishap. How the squadron negotiates this tragic event is something all military groups and families try to prepare for and hope they never have to go through. Family stress is part of the narrative as the people back home struggle to get through the long deployment as they scan the news media for information about their loved ones, or glean facts and impressions

from letters often written right after a mission. The loss of fathers and husbands, and worries about their eventually turning up on the fluctuating lists of POW names, is also part of the story.

The author has done a credible job assimilating an impressive amount of research. Indeed, at times the chapters are overstuffed with stories and background, and are just too long. But the writing is very good, and the dedicated reader will be rewarded with a first-class narrative. By and large, the use of Navy and aviation terminology is accurate and properly employed, which is not always the case with overzealous writers who try to make the reader believe they know their rather exotic subject.

Without doubt, this is one of the best accounts of Naval Aviation in Vietnam I have read.

Amir, Amos, Brig. Gen., *Fire in the Sky: Flying in Defence of Israel*. Pen & Sword Ltd., Freeport SF5, 47 Church St., Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2BR, UK. 2005. 292 pp. Ill. \$39.90. Distributed in the U.S. by Casemate Books, 2114 Darby Rd., Havertown, PA 19083.

First-person accounts by Israeli military personalities are somewhat rare. There are just a handful of autobiographies or memoirs available in English by the pilots who formed the redoubtable Israel Air Force (IAF) and saw it through its many internal and external struggles. What makes this new book so attractive, besides the inside story it tells, is the fact that it is the first book-length account written by an Israeli ace. Israel names some 40 fighter aces from 1967 to 1982, and Amos Amir belongs to the first generation of these unique warriors. Flying Mirage IIICJs, he shot down seven Arab aircraft, including an IL-28 bomber (one of the few recorded kills of this aircraft type), during the 1967 Six-Day War and the 1968–1970 War of Attrition.



Fire in the Sky is an engagingly written, deeply personal story that moves back and forth from memory to memory, describing Amir's childhood in Israel, his flight training and first operational missions, and eventually his becoming commanding officer of No. 119 Squadron, taking the Bats through their transition in 1970 to F-4s. By 1980 Amir had left the cockpit and was in a senior staff position in the Kiryah (Israel's equivalent to the Pentagon). He repeatedly asked to be sent back to his Phantom squadron during the terrible first week of the 1973 Yom Kippur War when so many F-4 and A-4 crews were lost as they battled thickets of Arab missiles. But he was probably in too senior a position to risk being shot down and captured.

Whether writing about high-altitude reconnaissance in a Mirage or the legendary ambush of Soviet surrogates flying Egyptian MiGs in July 1970, Amir's combat descriptions are riveting and shed new light on IAF pilots and their missions. A small folio of photographs enhances the text, with a few views of the author during his career as well as several gun-camera strips showing strafing runs and an aerial engagement.

There are some items that are lost in translation. Knowledgeable readers will find some disparity in military terms relative to a specific service, particularly when the author describes his visit to *Kitty Hawk* (CV 64) in 1975. A few of these problems are understandable, such as referring to Navy backseaters as navigators instead of radar intercept officers. The IAF called the second crewman in its Phantoms navigators, and Amir would naturally call his American friends the same. An amusing translational misstep is the oft-used "peeper," which should be "pipper."

One fascinating aspect of Amir's narrative is his association with several other ace pilots. The regular mention of "Asher," "Oded," and "Giora," for example, is quite interesting. Although their names may not be well known outside Israel, Amir is writing about fellow

aces Asher Snir (one of the IAF's highest scoring and most respected aces), Oded Marom (who has written a great deal about the IAF's history), and Giora Epstein (the IAF's top ace) or Giora Romm (the first IAF ace), all of whom fought alongside him in his squadron and in other units.

Another unique element of the book is Amir's description of several romantic interludes with women friends, one of whom he married. Normally, military autobiographies limit their descriptions to aircraft, dogfights, and squadron personalities. The author's choice to open a window to his personal relationships makes for an unexpected and refreshing addition to the regular format of such works.

Throughout the narrative, Amir lets us in on his ambitions. He is skilled and confident, and knows what he wants: to command the IAF. He pulls no punches in describing his disappointment when he is not selected, and we go through this personal rejection with him. But we also share his pride when he writes about his children, including one son who follows him into the IAF and becomes an F-16 pilot, taking his proud father on a training hop at the close of the book—a great way to end this story of one man's journey through eventful and often turbulent times.

Franks, Norman. *Sopwith Pup Aces of World War I*.

Osprey Publishing, Midland House, West Way, Botley, Oxford, OX2 0PH. UK. 2005. 96 pp. Ill. \$19.95.

World War I specialist Norman Franks continues his authoritative accounts of England's early military aviation for Osprey using the established series format that includes narrative, great photos, and color profiles. The Sopwith Pup may not be as well known to American readers as its descendant, the Camel, but this elegantly simple little "scout" paved the way for most of Britain's subsequent land-based fighters.

Only eight squadrons flew the Pup during its year-and-a-half career in France. Four of these units belonged to the Royal Navy, as did half of the 29 aviators who scored five or more kills in the Pup. These airmen flew from shore bases, not from carriers, which were beginning to appear at this time. A few Pups flew from cruisers to intercept German bombers, with the British pilots ditching by their ships to hopefully be picked up quickly. This practice was repeated some 20 years later using Hawker Hurricanes and smaller ships.

Although armed with a single machine gun, and not possessing great speed, the agile Pup was a pleasant aircraft to fly—unlike the Camel, which quickly established itself as a killer for ham-fisted young pilots. The Pup served well and accounted for many of Britain's early aerial victories over the Western Front.

Number 67 in Osprey's Aircraft of the Aces series, this latest volume is highly recommended.