

PROFESSIONAL READING

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

Holmes, Tony. *US Navy Hornet Units of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Part Two* (2005), and *US Marine Corps and RAAF Hornet Units of Operation Iraqi Freedom* (2006). Osprey Publishing, 443 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. 96 pp. Ill. \$20.95.

Tony Holmes has set himself quite a task, namely to record the experiences and histories of U.S. F/A-18 squadrons in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and he has succeeded admirably. These highly detailed narratives set new standards for this prolific UK-based publisher's products. One of the most knowledgeable foreign journalists on U.S. Naval Aviation, Holmes has visited the squadrons he writes about, sometimes actually wrangling a trip out to the carriers underway in the Arabian Gulf, which is no small feat. He has also interviewed flight crews in the U.S. after they returned from deployments. In short, the author knows of what he writes and has produced important reports of very current operations.

Holmes' first volume on Hornets in OIF dealt with carrier-based F/A-18 squadrons in the Arabian Gulf, including the first Super Hornet actions. His new work completes coverage of Navy units, this time describing five Hornet squadrons that operated from *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) and *Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75) off

the coast of Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean. It includes the presence of VFA-201 from Texas, the first Naval Air Reserve squadron mobilized and sent into combat since the Korean War.

Initially restricted from flying over Turkey, the VFA crews flew long missions, tanked several times, and struck Iraqi targets, often supporting teams of special operations forces that were scattered throughout the mountainous, rugged terrain. The book describes the challenges facing these squadrons, which flew older F/A-18A+s and F/A-18Cs. Although there were only five squadrons, Holmes' narrative documents their contributions to the overall allied effort. The work might not have caught the headlines, but these Hornet squadrons did their share.

Holmes' third book in this Hornet trilogy covers U.S. Marine Corps and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) operations. It focuses on the hard-charging Marine Corps Hornet squadrons, especially the dedicated airborne forward air controllers in their two-seat F/A-18Ds. The Marines' specialized war of coordination and skill is well described here, catching the immediate flavor the vital work these crews did to help the grunts do their jobs on the ground. The book also describes the experiences of the often ignored USMC carrier Hornets, specifically

Two VFA-201 Hornets prepare for a night launch from the flight deck of *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) in the Arabian Gulf while supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom on 22 March 2003. Photo by MCAN Brad Garner.



VMFA-115 and VMFA-323, and the details of the first Marine Corps Air Reserve squadron to be mobilized since Korea.

The final chapter deals with the Australian contingent of F/A-18As. For American readers, this glimpse into a strong ally's experience will be especially interesting and welcome. Eager to show their stuff, the Aussies even included an exchange U.S. Marine aviator when they went to war. This chapter follows one of the RAAF's oldest squadrons, No. 75, which was also augmented by four Hornets from No. 77 Squadron. It was the first time since 1970 that an Australian aircraft dropped ordnance in battle.

Both narratives are full of first-person accounts that bring the war into sharp focus. The folios of color profiles add to the graphic appeal as do the specially commissioned cover illustrations that have become one of the hallmarks of this open-ended series. Written so soon after the events, these books provide a detailed, action-filled account of the war.

Stout, Jay A. *To Be a U.S. Naval Aviator*.

Zenith Press, Galtier Plaza, Suite 200, St. Paul, MN 55101-3885. 2005. 160 pp. Ill. \$19.95.

A recent addition to the publisher's "To Be a..." series focusing on various specialties in U.S. military service, this medium-format book is unique because its author actually went through the process he describes, albeit more than 20 years ago. In contrast, a similar title published in 1990 was the product of a collaboration of two authors who had never experienced their subject and thus lacked the intimate knowledge this new volume carries. And, a lot has changed since the earlier book's publication.

Jay Stout has enjoyed some recent exposure with books on flying Hornets in Operation Desert Storm and on Marine Corps air in current operations in southwest Asia. His style is occasionally somewhat flippant, but there is no denying his experience (he is a retired Marine aviator), nor his intense pride and thrill for his time in the cockpit.

Beginning with a general description of the ways to gain a commission before entering flight training (e.g., the U.S. Naval Academy, ROTC, OCS), the author details the various academic and physiological programs today's student naval aviators endure before they even make their first flight. There is also brief mention of the recent incorporation of Air Force resources, something that may surprise some of us retired folks. The concept is not new, just more enhanced now.

A pilot assigned to VFA-192 waits on the flight deck aboard *Kitty Hawk* (CV 63) during flight operations in the Pacific Ocean on 12 July. Photo by MC3 Jarod Hodge.

The section on T-45 jet training is written as only an insider could, and the chapter on helicopter training is one of the best discussions of this subject I have seen. Multiengine and advanced jet and carrier qualifications round out the undergraduate topics, with the book finishing up with a short overview of the newly winged aviator's upcoming tour in the fleet. The author ends with a sobering assessment of today's opportunities, describing the reduced number of squadrons and varieties of aircraft in the fleet.

I would certainly suggest that anyone who knows a young man or woman contemplating applying for naval flight training should give them this book. It provides a great overview for the hopeful neophyte as well as giving some down-to-earth advice about what to expect.