

# PROFESSIONAL READING

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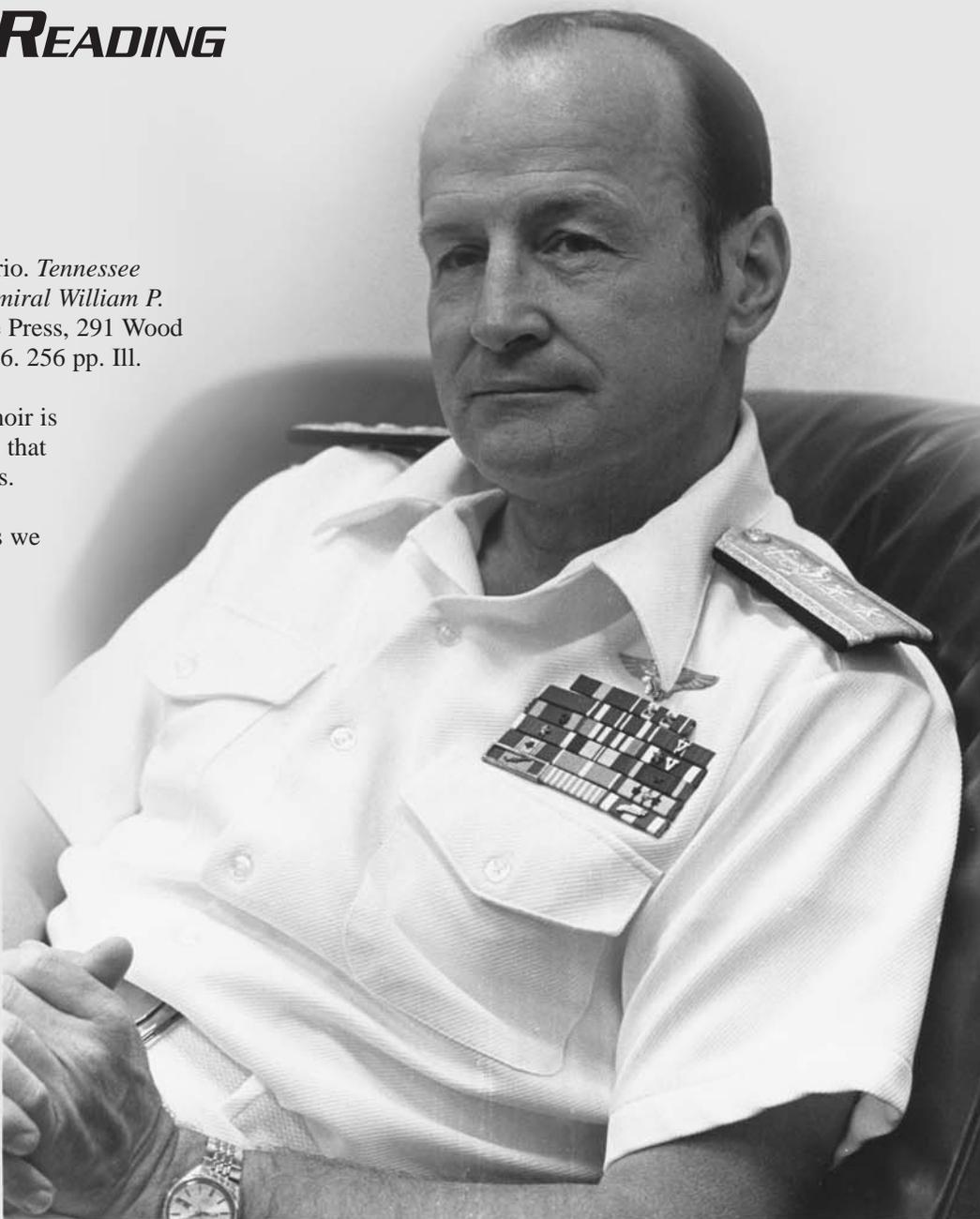
Lawrence, William P., and Rausa, Rosario. *Tennessee Patriot: the Naval Career of Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence*, U.S. Navy. Naval Institute Press, 291 Wood Rd, Annapolis, MD 21402-5034. 2006. 256 pp. Ill. \$28.95.

This excellent, highly readable memoir is devoid of the occasional stuffiness that characterizes these autobiographies.

These qualities come largely from the humanity of the man whose experiences we read and the skill with which he and his coauthor tell them. Captain Rausa is a former editor of *Naval Aviation News*, and a well-published author in his own right. His Vietnam tours occurred during the same period as that of Admiral Lawrence, right, and thus, he knows the background of Lawrence's combat service first hand. Together, these two senior aviators have created a fine account of one man's colorful career in the cockpit and ashore.

From his days at the Naval Academy and his first fleet deployments, the heady stuff of testing the Navy's new generation of jet fighters and an incredible change of direction that for a time put him in the black-shoe navy, the first half of the book is a window into Lawrence's pre-Vietnam service. Then we follow him as he returns to the cockpit to take command of a Phantom squadron headed for Vietnam. Shot down during a strike in 1967, Lawrence begins his torturous six-year incarceration at the hands of the North Vietnamese. He finds his inner self and also cements life-long friendships as he and his compatriots struggle to simply survive. The simple, dramatically worded vignettes on these pages are well worth rereading.

When eventually repatriated in 1973, the author had to quickly contend with another shock: his wife divorced him while he was a POW. He hadn't known that she had married the clergyman who had been supposedly helping her and her children deal with Lawrence's absence. Describing this additional hardship brought on by his internment, he is understandably bitter and very forthright in his condemnation of the minister who



seemed to take advantage of the delicate situation. It's an unusually strong section that may surprise the reader.

Admiral Lawrence served in several interesting assignments following his return, not the least of which was Superintendent of the Naval Academy. His account of this period makes entertaining and illuminating reading, especially when you consider that his youngest daughter was one of the first female midshipmen during his tenure.

*Tennessee Patriot* is a nice bit of personal history, made somewhat bittersweet by the fact that Adm. Lawrence passed away in December 2005 just as the book entered production. Thus, he never saw the finished product of his and "Zip" Rausa's collaboration. He would have been pleased.

Polmar, Norman. *Aircraft Carriers: A History of Carrier Aviation and its Influence on World Events. Vol. 1, 1909–1945*. Potomac Books, Inc. 22841 Quicksilver Dr., Dulles, VA 20166-2012. 2006. 576 pp. Ill. \$49.95.

Much more than a simple update of the original book published by Doubleday in 1969, this long-awaited opus takes advantage of the nearly 40 intervening years to present new information and photos that were not previously available. Now planned as a two-volume set, of which this book is the first, Norman Polmar's work will deservedly become the quintessential reference on carrier aviation.

Polmar has kept many of the photos from the 1969 edition but has also added new ones, especially of Japanese carriers and aircraft. Photos of Japanese carriers are somewhat rare, but he has pulled together an impressive collection. This new book has some truly marvelous views that greatly complement the text. Polmar has obviously gone to great lengths to seek out such illustrations.

The development and service of carrier aircraft are well shown and described, as are the specific contributions of individual personnel to their respective military services, especially during wartime. Polmar delights in defining moments, such as pointing out that the first multiengine aircraft to operate from a carrier was a little-known French type, a Potez 56E, which landed on the carrier *Bearn* in September 1936. Japanese leadership in carrier construction and use receives full coverage, not just merely in regards to Japan's impressive fleet, but also the differences in design philosophies, such as some ships having their islands on the port side, or having none at all.

The first volume of the *Aircraft Carriers* series highlights the development of various nations' carrier aviation capabilities. Above, *Langley* (CV 1), operating on 23 September 1931 with an XOP-1 autogyro on board, set the stage for the U.S. Navy's growing carrier fleet. The volume also examines the differences in carrier designs, such as the port-side island of Japanese carriers such as *Akagi*, right, shown here in 1941.



By WWII the battleship had given way to the carrier as the capital ship of most navies. The author tells the story in a highly readable style, which is not always accomplished in other books on the same subject. Although this first volume primarily focuses on the carrier fleets of Great Britain, the U.S., and Japan in WWII, other nations' attempts to develop a carrier fleet are also described.

The author also includes the escort carrier and the British merchant aircraft carriers (MACs), those terrifyingly small but valuable carriers that augmented the larger battle carriers. Accounts of the MACs are somewhat rare beyond England, but the experiences of their young crews, often flying aging types like the Fairey Swordfish and Grumman Wildcat, are legendary. (I emphasize this community in fond memory of John Lord Kilbracken, *nee* John Godley, author of the classic memoir *Bring Back My Stringbag* (Pen & Sword, UK), one of the last Swordfish squadron COs,

who became a lieutenant commander at age 24. He was a fine writer and intrepid aviator, a great representative of the "Greatest Generation" now recently "gone west.")

Students of carrier aviation will find the new edition an indispensable addition to their libraries. Polmar's penchant for scrupulous detail truly makes this large book—and no doubt the oncoming second volume—a major publishing event, especially considering the bargain price in today's market. I eagerly await the second volume in this seminal set.

