

PROFESSIONAL READING

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

Llinares, Rick. *Strike Beyond Top Gun*. Zenith Press, St. Paul, MN 55101-3885. 2006. 192 pp. Ill. \$34.95.

Rick Llinares' photos are well known in a wide variety of military and commercial publications. His latest collection focuses on the machines of NAS Fallon's Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center (NSAWC).

Older generations of Navy and Marine Corps flight and ground crews might remember Fallon from predeployment workups. But the base has come to mean much more and now incorporates the descendants of Topgun and other such groups that were formed several decades ago. Llinares' photos show F-5 Tigers, F-16 Fighting Falcons, F/A-18 Hornets, F-14 Tomcats, and SH-60 Seahawks over the Nevada terrain. The pictures are largely "portraits" of these aircraft, offering a wide variety of color schemes and markings that should keep modelers busy for a long time.

There is also an informative text that accompanies the captions to the photos. The reader should gain an in-depth knowledge of this rather unique group of squadrons tucked away at this high-desert base some 60 miles east of Reno.

Gillespie, Ric. *Finding Amelia: The True Story of the Earhart Disappearance*. Naval Institute Press, 291 Wood Rd, Annapolis, MD 21402. 2006. 320 pp. Ill. \$28.95.

Amelia Earhart remains the quintessential feminine icon of the 20th century, even though nearly 70 years have passed since she and navigator Fred Noonan disappeared 2 July 1937 on a trans-Pacific flight. There are hundreds of books on Earhart aimed at all levels from child to adult. The fascination with her final flight and the obsession of some people to finally solve the mystery of where and why she was lost and what became of her continues unabated.

This new book by a dedicated Earhart searcher does not give anything but a suggestion of her fate. Indeed, the title seems somewhat misleading, until you begin reading. "*Finding Amelia*" refers not so much to actually



Above, an F/A-18A Hornet flies over Pyramid Lake near NAS Fallon, Nev. Photo by Rick Llinares. Facing page, many countries employed the A-4 Skyhawk, as depicted in this poster from 1977.

discovering her final resting place, but rather it describes the great search that began immediately after she became overdue when tantalizing radio signals and calls for help started riding the air waves. To this day, the identity of most of those making the distress calls remains a mystery, too. The Navy and Coast Guard mounted what was for that day a Herculean effort to locate Earhart's silver Lockheed Electra, which was supposed to have landed at tiny Howland Island, barely a sliver of land that rose out of the huge ocean. A small landing strip had even been built to accommodate the twin-engine baby airliner. But it was not to be.

Using a trove of documents, letters, logs, and charts, the author puts together the sequence of the flight that seemed doomed from the beginning and the resulting search that, in the end, left the world to continue wondering what happened. A nice addition to the book is a fascinating DVD that allows the reader to more closely inspect these documents.

I was surprised as I came to understand how much Earhart herself had apparently contributed to her loss. Far from being the simple Kansas farm girl she is depicted to be in the history books, she was first and foremost a self-promoting, fearless competitor. Second, she was only an

average aviator, which, in those days of highly demanding navigational and flight-skill requirements, usually meant the difference between completing long-distance flights, or perishing along the way. This disconcerting discovery left me wondering just how lucky she must have been up to the time of her last flight.

With her husband, publisher George Putnam, behind the public relations and funding of her flights, Earhart comes across a little lower on the totem pole of heroes than I want to accept. She was demanding yet woefully unprepared for this long-distance flight, requiring a lot of help from the government. And in the end, she went down hundreds of miles from land or anyone who could help. The only things left from that flight are the theories of what truly happened. And they remain that, only theories.

Finding Amelia is an interesting teaser and will probably have to hold us until we can, if ever, finally discover what actually happened.

Winchester, Jim. Douglas *A-4 Skyhawk Attack & Close-Support Fighter Bomber*. Pen & Sword Books, Ltd, UK. 2005. 304 pp. Ill. \$50.

While this British publisher has a list of aviation titles well worth inspection by American readers seeking the esoteric or unusual topic, this title is

more mainstream. It is an excellent, one-volume overview that describes the A-4's complete development and its stellar career of more than 50 years of flying for several of the world's air forces. Although there have been many magazine articles and a few soft-cover publications aimed mainly at modelers, those less expensive books gave only snippets of the A-4 story.

Of special interest to U.S. readers will be the chapter on Vietnam. Covering both Navy and Marine Corps A-4s in Southeast Asia, the well-done Vietnam section is a detailed treatise on the Skyhawk's most extensive and costly combat experience. The author has packed many great, mostly color photos, tables, and nicely done color profiles by David Windle into an attractive collection of facts and narratives.

The book also highlights the service of export A-4s in combat for Argentina and Israel. A particularly poignant full-page color photo shows an Argentinean A-4P (A-4B) refueling shortly before it was shot down by British Sea Harriers with the loss of its pilot. Another section describes all the individual users of the Skyhawk by country and organization. Another valuable portion describes various areas of the Skyhawk itself, as well as what it took to fly the little jet bomber. All in all, this book is a fine effort that should prove to be the standard reference on the Scooter.

