

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

Tillman, Barrett. *TBD Devastator Units of the US Navy*. Osprey Publishing, Elm Court, Chapel Way, Botley, Oxford, OX2 9LP UK. 2000. 96 pp. Ill. \$17.95.

Written by an established authority on Naval Aviation, this volume is an excellent account of the much maligned Douglas TBD, which saw an almost immediate demise as a combat aircraft. It enjoyed some success in the Navy's first offensive strikes of the war in February and March 1942 and during May's Battle of the Coral Sea. But when the torpedo-bomber took on the main Japanese fleet at the Battle of Midway in June, its two-man crews (reduced from the normal three-man complement) were truly devastated, losing 42 of the 45 aircraft available in three carrier air groups and 68 pilots and aircrewmembers.

Tillman does a fine job of pulling together the actions and experiences of the crews who flew and fought "the big Douglas," the Navy's first monoplane carrier aircraft. A section on markings and various statistics adds to the book's interest and reference value. A folio of color profiles (including a section of color photos taken from an on-the-spot movie filmed during Midway), along with various tables and a cutaway drawing, round out the presentation.

Tillman's story of one of the Navy's most evocative but ultimately unsuccessful combat aircraft completes a highly detailed, six-book set on the Navy's most well-known carrier aircraft of WW II. A fine effort overall.

Holmes, Tony. *Aircraft of the Aces: Legends of World War 2*. Osprey Military and Aviation, P.O. Box 130, Sterling Heights, MI 48311-0130. 2000. 144 pp. Ill. \$29.95.

Representing one of today's best values in aviation publishing, this good-looking book is more than a distillation of this UK-based publisher's highly successful series on aerial aces. Holmes has included new pilot reports that were not available when the individual books appeared, and biographical and aircraft data tables enhance each chapter's discussion of that particular ace.

Irish artist Iain Wyllie's paintings are consistently among the best today in popular aviation history publishing. Nevertheless, he does seem to have trouble reproducing Army olive drab, because occasionally P-51s and P-47s are brown.

American and British aces are featured, but those of Japan, Germany, the Soviet Union, France and other air forces are also described. The only omission is the lack of Italian aces, which would have made a unique chapter.

The book's large format displays the photos in a way

that the smaller earlier series could not. Errors are few. The biography box in the chapter on Marine Corps ace Joe Foss says he never returned to combat after Guadalcanal. Actually, promoted to major, he did command an F4U squadron in the Pacific, although he didn't add to his score in the Solomons.

Three chapters deal with U.S. Navy and Marine Corps aviators: Foss, Walsh and McCampbell. And there is a chapter on Imperial Japanese Navy ace Nishizawa, although he was based ashore along with many of his high-scoring fellow *Zero* pilots.

A good reference as well as a visual treat, *Aircraft of the Aces* shows what can be done with great material and presentation.

Lawson, Robert L. *Carrier Air Group Commanders: The Men and Their Machines*. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 4880 Lower Valley Road, Atglen, PA 19310-9717. 2000. 216 pp. Ill. \$45.

An unusual piece of historical research and compilation, complemented with a great collection of photos, this book fills a void. There have been many books and articles on squadrons and overall organization in Naval Aviation, but little has appeared on one of the most important mid-level managerial positions—the leader of the carrier air wing. A retired senior chief photographer and founder of *The Hook* magazine, Lawson dug into archives to piece together the story.

The first designated senior aviator aboard carriers was the "senior air rep," who became the air group commander in 1938. Each carrier's squadrons were organized into a group. After WW II, the groups became wings, changing the group commander to the air wing commander, but the abbreviation "CAG" has remained part of the lexicon of carrier aviation.

This book is divided into sections on organization, biography and aircraft. There is also a fairly good folio of profiles of pre-Vietnam aircraft in CAG markings, and several color photos of Vietnam-period aircraft without profiles. The bio section has some surprising individual details. For example, a paragraph on LCDr. Dixwell Ketcham, CO of VF-6B in *Saratoga's* (CV 3) air group, discloses that he attained two-star rank, and lived to 103! A fine collection of trivia and historical data, the narrative carries through to the Super CAG program of the early 1980s, and "The Men" section contains reminiscences by selected CAGs, from WW II through Desert Storm.

Bob Lawson has given us a ready reference source and an enjoyable browse in a seldom-covered area of a favorite topic.