

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

Gillcrist, Rear Admiral Paul T., USN (Ret.). *Vulture's Row: Thirty Years in Naval Aviation*. Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 77 Lower Valley Rd., Atglen, PA 19310. 1996. 256 pp. Ill. \$29.95.

I am not sure I agree with the title of the latest effort by RAdm. Gillcrist. *Vulture's Row* is where people watch the action, but I doubt that the author ever just watched the action; he seems to have always been in the thick of it. I thoroughly enjoyed this collection of short stories. It's easy to read and sure to bring a smile from former aviators.

This book is not another service biography, but more of an assemblage of fond memories. The author began as an F9F *Cougar* pilot, commanded an F-8 *Crusader* squadron in Southeast Asia, did a tour in the Pentagon and moved on, even managing to try wing walking while he was CO of NAS Cecil Field, Fla. One of the highlights of RAdm. Gillcrist's varied logbook has to be his stint as the "Zero squadron commander" during the filming of *Tora, Tora, Tora*, the 1970 depiction of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

Like all of Schiffer's products, this book is well made, with heavy, glossy paper and good photo reproduction. It's a shame that the publisher doesn't place more importance on editing. Its publications often contain omissions or examples of a lack of familiarity with the subject—such as incorrect aircraft designations.

This is RAdm. Gillcrist's fifth book, involving two publishers. His last two books, reviewed here, are on the F-14 *Tomcat* and F-8. Both are fine efforts, with the same editorial cautions.

Tillman, Barrett. *Hellcats, a Novel of War in the Pacific*. Brassey's, Inc., 1313 Dolly Madison Blvd., McLean, VA 22101. 1996. 338 pp. \$24.95.

When I reviewed this author's novel *Dauntless* in 1992, I noted that there was probably a sequel in the works, and here it is. *Hellcats* picks up the story of SBD pilot Ensign Phil Rogers. The narrative alternates between the stories of the two main protagonists, (now) LCdr. Rogers and Flying Chief Petty Officer Hiroyoshi Sakaida of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

While Rogers struggles through the trials of wartime action and progression through the Navy's command structure, Sakaida contends with his navy's rigid caste system, inadequate equipment and paranoid commanding officers.

Tillman salts his narrative with the names of real-life events and personalities, which only works if the reader knows these names. Oddly, there is no mention of kill tallies until the final pages—even though Rogers and Sakaida are aces.

Hellcats abounds in technical snippets regarding aircraft and combat operations. The author has done a lot of research and enjoyed the confidence of many veterans who contributed such details to his book, including the Japanese reliance on enlisted pilots.

Although the book starts slowly, it eventually moves into daily operations centering around the Okinawa campaign, with its terrifying kamikaze attacks, and ending with the Japanese surrender. *Hellcats* is an interesting work that should appeal to veterans and enthusiasts as a pleasant escape for a weekend.

Polmar, Norman. *The Naval Institute Guide to the Ships and Aircraft of the U.S. Fleet, 16th Edition*. Naval Institute Press, 118 Maryland Ave., Annapolis, MD 21402. 1996. 592 pp. Ill. \$79.95.

Compared with its many imitators, *Ships and Aircraft* remains the best survey of naval hardware, programs, orders of battle and people. This latest edition is arguably the most pivotal since Vietnam. It conveys today's tumultuous times in the naval services, which are struggling to do more with less amid political and social criticism and upheaval. However, the author's focus remains on aircraft and ships within the atmosphere of jointness, sexual integration, ongoing retirement of aircraft and squadrons and slowly advancing development programs for such types as the F/A-18E/F *Super Hornet* and V-22 *Osprey*.

As in any large work, the inevitable typos appear. There are plenty of good photos, although the halftones could be snappier to do justice to this admirable collection. At any rate, this is definitely the one-volume reference to have on your desk or library shelf.

Mutza, Wayne. *Grumman Albatross: A History of the Legendary Seaplane*. Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 77 Lower Valley Rd., Atglen, PA 19310. 1996. 107 pp. Ill. \$19.95.

Grumman's large twin-engine flying boat was one of the unsung stalwarts of military aviation for two decades. Little has been written about the "Goat" (one of its many nicknames), but that omission has been rectified by this well-illustrated paperback from a publisher fast becoming one of the most prolific producers of aviation literature in the last 10 years.

From its first flight in 1947, the *Albatross* established a reputation for tough dependability in keeping with its Grumman name. It took on any mission—antisubmarine warfare, search and rescue, transport and, at the end of its days, airline work—and performed with quiet, unheralded efficiency.

For most readers, I suspect that the main area of inter-

est will be Chapter 6, which discusses for the first time in detail the *Albatross*'s combat career in Korea and Vietnam. Flown by the Air Force, these planes and their dedicated crews quickly launched into the teeth of determined enemy opposition—even the occasional MiG—to retrieve downed airmen.

The author includes several photos of *Albatrosses* in Southeast Asia in the opening years of the war. Details of the missions and also aircraft markings should make modelers happy, as well as the crews and rescued aviators who, until now, were probably the only people who truly knew the entire story. Certainly a worthwhile addition to your library.

Boyce, Col. J. Ward, USAF (Ret.), ed. ***American Fighter Aces Album***. American Fighter Aces Assn., 4636 Fighter Aces Dr., Mesa, AZ 85215. 1996. 550 pp. Ill. \$75.

The second edition of this tome is high on my list of reference books on American military aviation. Five years in preparation, this *massive* volume has it all, covering the 1,442 U.S. aces (pilots only) recognized by the association. There are interesting “aceology” articles and eight pages of color profiles of the aircraft flown by various aces.

The text includes biographies and career facts on the famous and the not-so-well-known aces of the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force. The time period spans WW I to Vietnam, with entries on aces in Spain, China and Israel.

As expected in such a huge work, there are typos and occasional misplacement of photos, and a few aces' entries do not have photographs. But this is a great book, well worth the money. It offers many hours of pleasant browsing as well as a ready source of information.

Sauter, Jack. ***Sailors in the Sky: Memoir of a Navy Aircrewman in the Korean War***. McFarland & Co., Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640. 1996. 312 pp. Ill. \$25.95.

This book is the best of a new crop of service memoirs. The writing has a scope and flavor that invite the reader into the world of the enlisted aircrewman of the immediate post-WW II era. The book takes a long time in coming to the focal point—the single war cruise the author made on board *Lake Champlain* (CVA 39)—but Sauter tells a good story. However, I wish he had described a few missions in more detail, especially since he flew a little-known, multiseat variant of the ubiquitous AD *Skyraider*.

The photos are familiar and disappointing. A few shots of the author on cruise would have sufficed.

Sailors in the Sky offers a good summary of late Korean War naval operations, including several truly humorous descriptions of life among ship's company and air group personnel. Jack Sauter's experiences are good reading. If Navy Korean War veterans want to offer their family a look at what they did, this book fills the bill.

Stanaway, John C. ***Vega Ventura: The Operational History of Lockheed's Lucky Star***. Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 77 Lower Valley Rd., Atglen, PA 19310. 1996. 112 pp. Ill. \$19.95.

This excellent effort offers good color and black-and-white photos and a detailed narrative covering the career of Lockheed's little-known, but oft-maligned, *Ventura/Harpoon* series. Derived from the successful commercial *Lodestar* and Lockheed's first military reconnaissance aircraft, the *Hudson*, the *Ventura/PV* series medium bombers served in many theaters and with Allied air forces. *PV-2 Harpoons* also saw postwar service with the Naval Air Reserve.

The *Ventura* did not find overwhelming favor with the Commonwealth airmen who flew it in Europe and the Pacific. The British lost several of the aircraft in operational mishaps and in combat. However, the *Ventura* was considered fast and maneuverable by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, who used it as an effective night fighter against the Japanese, scoring the Corps' first after-dark kills in 1943.

Besides the photos, which obviously came from the crews whose experiences fill the pages, there are also several good illustrations by artist Steve Ferguson.

This volume is probably the definitive work, at least for now, on Lockheed's twin-engine bomber.

Millstein, Jeff. ***U.S. Marine Corps Aviation Unit Insignia, 1941–1946***. Turner Publishing, Box 3101, Paducah, KY 42002-3101. 1996. 128 pp. Ill. \$39.95.

With a short introduction by retired Brigadier General Robert E. Galer, USMC, a Medal of Honor winner and Guadalcanal ace, this well-produced book stems from the author's love of the Marine Corps and its varied squadron and organizational insignia.

There are many rare designs in these pages, a real treasure trove for the enthusiast. Squadron entries also include unit data, as well as photos of people and aircraft.

Jeff Millstein's exhaustive research effort shows, and the publisher allowed a large format to take advantage of the unusual maritime designs and colors.

There is much interest in squadron patches and insignia. This book sheds light on Marine Corps emblems not normally presented in such a concentrated fashion.

Nicolaou, Stephane. ***Les Hydravions, des Origines a Nos Jours***. E.T.A.I., 96 rue de Paris, 92100 Boulogne Billancourt, France. 1996. 191 pp. Ill. \$60 (295 francs).

Although we seldom review books that are not in English, this new publication deserves consideration. It's worth buying a French-English dictionary and spending a few hours browsing through the informative text and the great selection of period photos.

The author is an authority on naval aircraft and works

at the Musee de l'Air et de l'Espace in Le Bourget, France's counterpart to the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

Besides well-known aircraft and people, there are entries and terrific photos of non-U.S. aircraft and personalities, including Japanese, German, Italian and Russian. The pre-WW I images show some strange-looking types.

The era between world wars is well covered, detailing

the development and operation of ocean-spanning commercial flying boats—featuring French aircraft. There is also a section with unique color photos of Martin's P6M *Seamaster* and Convair's futuristic F2Y *Sea Dart*. The chapters on WW II and the postwar demise of the seaplane community round out this terrific book.

M. Nicolaou's book makes a nice two-volume reference on this romantic period of Naval Aviation. I hope the publisher offers an English edition.

FLIGHT BAG

Reunions, Symposiums, etc.

Colin Powell Joint Warfighting Essay Contest, 1 APR submission deadline. Original essays—not previously submitted or published—about combat readiness in a joint context are welcome from military, professionals and civilians. Cash prizes of \$2,500, \$2,000 and \$1,000 will be awarded to the three best essays. For submission details, contact the U.S. Naval Institute at 410-268-6110; fax 410-269-7940.

Mars (AFS 1) proposed reunion. Former crew members of air detachments, please submit name and address to: Duane Day, 7274 Wood St., Warren, MI 48091, 810-759-4195.

Niagara Falls (AFS 3) proposed reunion. Former crew members of air detachments, please submit name and address to: Phil Davidson, 1000 Fountain Ter. #206, Lewistown, MT 59457, 406-538-9517.

Guadalcanal Task Group 22.3 Assn. reunion, MAY, Ogden, UT. POC: Jack Dutton, 35 Graeler Dr., St. Louis, MO 63146-4938, 314-567-3919.

Breton (CVE 23) reunion, 1–4 MAY, Charleston, SC. POC: Arthur Thornbury, 5130 S. Dearborn, Indianapolis, IN 46227, 317-787-6494.

Albemarle (AV 5) Assn. reunion, 4–6 MAY, Gettysburg, PA. POC: USS *Albemarle* Assn., Box 1165, Mt. Pleasant, SC 29465.

Jupiter (AVS 8/AK 43) reunion, 6–8 MAY, Laughlin, NV. POC: Joe McKeever, 5 Woods End Dr., Doylestown, PA 18901, 215-297-8313.

Lexington (CV 2) Club reunion, 8–11 MAY, Ontario, CA. POC: Walt Kastner, 466 Ivy Glen Dr., Mira Loma, CA 91752, 909-681-1101.

Franklin D. Roosevelt (CVB/CVA/CV 42) reunion, 14–18 MAY, Rochester, NY. POC: Joseph Donahue, 5 W. Wright Ave., Waterloo, NY 13165, 800-437-0869.

VB/VPB-144 reunion, 15–17 MAY, Pensacola, FL. POC: Perry Ustick, 228 Pinetree Dr., Gulf Breeze, FL 32561, 904-932-6979.

Ticonderoga (CV/CVA/CVS 14) reunion, 15–18 MAY, Seattle, WA. POC: Charles Large, 31 Lowe Ave., Stoughton, MA 02072, 617-344-3461.

Bataan (CVL 29) reunion, 21–25 MAY, Louisville, KY. POC: Sando Cosenza, 507 Carsonia Ave., Reading, PA 19606-1520, 610-779-7175.

Carrier Air Group 11 reunion, 21–25 MAY, San Diego, CA. POC: John McDermott, 265 Lanchester Ct., Naples, FL 34112, 941-775-7972.

Corrections to Jan–Feb 97

Inside back cover: Dwight Shepler painting courtesy of the Navy Art Collection Branch of the Naval Historical Center. *George Washington* flight ops photo by PH3 Ray Connors. F-14 aboard *Forrestal* photo by PH1 David Olsen.

1997 Naval Aviation Ball

The 24th annual Washington area Naval Aviation Ball, sponsored by the Director, Air Warfare, RAdm. Dennis V. McGinn, in conjunction with the Association of Naval Aviation, will be held on Saturday, 26 April, at the Crystal Gateway Marriott, Arlington, Va.

This formal gathering is open to all active duty and retired Navy and Marine Corps aviators, Naval Flight Officers and other aviation-related officers, as well as supporting corporate personnel. The evening will commence with a reception at 1830. Dinner will be followed by dancing and entertainment. Cost: \$100 per couple. Attire: Navy—Dinner Dress White, USMC—Dress White “A” and Civilian—Evening Dress (Black Tie).

For information/reservations, contact Capt. Bill Garrett, N880G3, DSN 227-3559 or 703-697-3559; fax 703-693-2934; E-mail: garrett.william@hq.navy.mil. Reservations can be made by mailing a check (payable to “Naval Aviation Ball”) to: 1997 Naval Aviation Ball, P.O. Box 46412, Washington, DC 20050.