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Jimmy Stewart: Bomber Pilot

Robert Whitten

Starr Smith

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Around sunrise the Japanese Center Fleet, twenty-three ships in all, transited through the San Bernardino Strait, passing between the southern end of Luzon and the northern part of Samar Island. They met with the thirteen ships of Taffy 3, comprising six small escort carriers, three destroyers, and four destroyer escorts. By rights, Taffy 3 should have been annihilated; however, the fog of war loomed large. The Japanese tactical picture was so confused and blurred by misinformation, inadequate reconnaissance, and poor communication that the Japanese broke off the attack late in the morning and left the battle to the north.

Hornfischer uses the majority of the book to describe, in amazing detail, events as the battle unfolded.

Hornfischer's detail is eerily precise. He thoroughly provides a play-by-play action including the formations and actual intentions of each commanding officer. However, Hornfischer carefully did his homework, interviewing countless survivors and reviewed hundreds of documents in order to piece together details of that morning off Samar.

The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors is a must read for anyone interested in naval history.

DAN DUSEK
Commander, U.S. Navy



Smith, Starr. *Jimmy Stewart: Bomber Pilot*. St. Paul, Minn.: Zenith, 2005. 287pp. \$21.95

The defining era of actor Jimmy Stewart's life was his service in the air force, according to his biographer, Starr Smith, who served with him in the Eighth Air Force during World War II. This biography deals mainly with that period of

Stewart's life. The theme of the story is how a man approaching middle age joined the armed forces at the lowest grade possible and in only four years rose to the rank of "bird colonel." This accomplishment was carried out not through favoritism but through hard work, technical competence, and leadership.

A famous actor at the beginning of 1941, Jimmy Stewart was about to take on the biggest challenge of his life: flying bombers in the U.S. Army Air Corps. He was born James Maitland Stewart in Indiana, Pennsylvania, in 1908. At an early age he developed an interest in aviation that stuck with him all his life. He was a student of Princeton University, where he found his other interest—acting.

When France fell to the Nazis in 1940 and Britain was battling for its life, Stewart concluded that the United States could no longer avoid the war. Not soon after, his draft notice arrived and he was sworn in as a private. He was already an accomplished pilot and so he was accepted for flight training.

Jimmy Stewart was assigned to a B-24 squadron slated for transfer to the Eighth Air Force to train in Iowa, where he excelled to become squadron commander and then was promoted to major. He flew twenty missions, many of them in hotly contested air space.

When the war in Europe ended, he was a wing commander whose job became one of deactivating the wing and bringing the men home.

There are a few minor quibbles that an editor would have caught. The early chapter on Eisenhower seems unnecessary, and much of the end material that deals with the careers of some of Stewart's

fellow Air Force officers detracts from the story. Nevertheless, this is an important book that would be of interest to many.

ROBERT WHITTEN
Cupertino, California



Fick, Nathaniel. *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. 384pp. \$25

Perhaps not since Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon served together in the 2nd Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers during World War I has so much literary talent been employed to recount the operations of a single unit as we find now in the case of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM I. In *Generation Kill* (reviewed by me in the Winter 2005 *Naval War College Review*), Evan Wright wrote about his experiences with 1st Recon as an embedded journalist. His perspective is that of an intelligent outsider who related most to the junior enlisted Marines of a single platoon. The commander of that platoon, Nathaniel Fick, has now written his own story. The military memoir written by a junior officer was a mainstay of war literature in the twentieth century, which saw such distinguished examples as Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That*, Ernst Junger's *Storm of Steel*, John Masters's *Bugles and a Tiger*, and Phillip Caputo's *A Rumor of War*. The authors of such works are in general well educated and intelligent, dedicated to their jobs, but also sensitive to the unaccustomed demands and horrific scenes of war. Fick's book

belongs to this tradition while eloquently speaking to our own time.

The best of the junior officer memoirs are both compelling as narrative and instructive in the broad sense. A lieutenant with a gift for writing brings an informed but open mind to his tale, and the reader is able to learn about war, about this war, along with the writer. In *One Bullet Away*, Fick moves from the Dartmouth College campus, to the training areas of Quantico, Virginia, to active service in Afghanistan and in Iraq. He develops from undergraduate to Marine infantry and reconnaissance officer in combat. The book contains some excellent battle pieces, but some of the best parts occur early and late, as Fick tries to adapt to his new circumstances and later to begin succinctly to sort out what he feels and thinks about his experiences. A classics major, he often sees events through a lens of ancient history. Like many other junior officers, his military service often appears as an effort to recapture a lost nobility and simplicity that he has found lacking in his previous surroundings. Hearing journalist Tom Ricks speak about the Marine Corps at Dartmouth before enlisting, Fick observes that, "Ricks used words like 'duty' and 'honor' without cynicism, something I'd not often heard at Dartmouth."

Of course, he also acquires the skills and outlook of an infantryman. An early scene in the book has him conducting a night attack while in training. By now, Fick has learned the rules, but he is also beginning to understand how to apply them imaginatively and effectively to changing and uncertain circumstances. Fick's first taste of war is in Afghanistan. He observes senior